

# **MIND** THE GAP!

**IMPROVING  
INTERVENTION IN  
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE  
AGAINST OLDER WOMEN**

## **UK Summary of Case File Analysis**



**Bridget Penhale and William Goreham**

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This document summarises the analysis of 150 police files (from 7 forces across England and Wales) and has been produced primarily for the information of the police and the Crown prosecution Service

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*Mind the Gap!*

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During the research and evidence-gathering phases, many organisations allowed us extensive access to case files, policy documents, training material and practitioners. The sensitive nature of the subject placed a significant burden on each organisation to ensure that the sharing of material was executed with due cognisance of legal and ethical issues. Without such cooperation, transparency and candour, the project could not have taken place.

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## Introduction

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This document briefly summarises the key findings from the analysis of 150 UK police case files as part of the *Mind the Gap!* project. This was a Europe-wide initiative involving institutions from Germany, Poland, Hungary, Portugal, Austria and the UK funded by the EC DAPHNE programme. The project pursued the following aims:

- Gain further insight into possible efficient, effective and adequate interventions and support by law enforcement agencies in respect of intimate partner violence (IPV).
- Raise awareness within law enforcement and social support agencies about older women as victims of IPV.
- Encourage agencies to tackle the problem and to improve outreach to this subgroup of victims.
- Build the capacity of law enforcement and social support agencies so that they can respond to and intervene successfully in these cases.

For the purpose of this document, the term 'older women' refers to women aged 60 years and over; 'IPV' includes sexual abuse and harassment, emotional, verbal & psychological abuse, financial abuse and exploitation, coercive control, stalking and neglect, as well as physical violence (assault). These definitions were established to ensure a consistent approach to research and common understanding across all participating partner countries.

It is acknowledged that the terms 'victim' and 'perpetrator' used in this document, could be considered somewhat prejudicial and judgmental, but these have been maintained to provide continuity with the previous *IPVoW* project.

In order to achieve the aims (as described above) the following objectives were pursued:

- Research law enforcement interventions into cases of IPV against older women
- Research social support organisations interventions into cases of IPV involving older women
- Develop guidance aimed at improving the capacity of social support agencies to intervene in situations of intimate partner violence against older women
- Develop guidance aimed at improving the capacity of police and CPS to intervene in situations of intimate partner violence against older women
- Develop training material aimed at improving the capacity of police and CPS to tackle intimate partner violence against older women
- Develop publicity and campaign materials aimed at increasing awareness of older women, professionals, practitioners and the general public about intimate partner violence against older women

## Methodology

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The primary means of UK-based research comprised a study of 150 police files; all of them were quantitatively analysed and 30 were subject to in-depth (qualitative) analysis.

Seven police forces, geographically spread across England and Wales, participated in the research by allowing access to relevant case files all of which were contained in electronic databases. The time frame for case retrieval was 2006 – 2012 (March).

All of the cases made available for analysis were classified as domestic violence (DV) or domestic abuse (DA) in accordance with the 2005 shared ACPO, CPS and UK Government definition:

*'any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults, aged 18 and over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender and sexuality.'*<sup>1</sup>

Relevant cases were pre-selected by participating police forces in accordance with the selection criteria provided by the research team. The sampling, however, was randomised in terms of type of IPV, outcome and performance of police practitioners. The files were then filtered further to identify cases involving intimate partners and female victims aged 60 years and older. Each file detailed a single investigation involving one couple.

The evidence identified by the file analysis was used in the development of the following products (all of which are available at [www.uea.ac.uk/mindthegap](http://www.uea.ac.uk/mindthegap)):

- Recommendations for Police and Crown Prosecution Service Guidance
- Training material for Police and Crown Prosecution Service
- Guidance for Social Support Organisations
- Information for Social Support practitioners
- Publicity and Campaign Materials

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<sup>1</sup> ACPO (2008). *Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse*. Wyboston: ACPO

## Summary of Case File Analysis

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The analysis of 150 (IPVOW) case files across England and Wales revealed much about the demographics of such behaviour including:

- Over 76% of victims, but only 48% of perpetrators, were aged between 60 and 69 years
- 81% of victims were cohabiting with perpetrators
- 54% of relationships exceeded 30 years duration
- All of the perpetrators were males
- 11% of victims were care-givers for perpetrators, while 20% of victims were recipients of care from perpetrators

It was also possible to identify common dynamics regarding the relationship between victims and perpetrators, for example:

- 41% of victims did not want to separate from perpetrators, but 30% indicated that they would do so
- 66% of victims reported no history of break-ups or attempted break-ups in their relationship with perpetrators
- 41% of perpetrators had a history of prior violent offences, and 13% had prior IPV convictions
- 35% of victims were either fully or mainly supportive of the criminal prosecution of the perpetrator

It would therefore appear that, while any incidents of IPV are likely to be challenging and difficult to resolve, those which involve older women may be further complicated by a number of accompanying age-related issues. For example, some relationships may have spanned many years, some victims may have experienced abuse over a long period of time, or the abuse might coincide with caring for - or being cared for by - their intimate partner, or relating to unfulfilled expectations of retirement and later life.

The analysis also facilitated insight into the circumstances of individual events which collectively revealed issues, such as:

- There were no discernible or specific patterns regarding potential triggers and the extent of violence
- 23% of victims appeared to be intoxicated at the time of the most recent incident
- 45% of perpetrators appeared to be intoxicated at the time of the most recent incident
- 13% of perpetrators reportedly had a substance misuse problem
- The majority (81%) of reported incidents involved physical violence being inflicted on victims
- 30% of victims were assessed as being at high risk of significant harm
- 7% of cases involved the murder (or attempted murder) of victims

The high volume of cases involving assault amply illustrates the fact that some very frail and elderly men have the capacity to inflict physical violence, but also suggests a difficulty by victims, practitioners and the general public in identifying



and intervening in other types of IPV, particularly coercion, intimidation, financial abuse and neglect.

Much was revealed within the analysis about law enforcement intervention (police, CPS and courts) and to a lesser extent that of social support organisations, for example:

- 30% of victims were receiving support from medical practitioners
- 7% of incidents were reported by health service practitioners
- 13% of victims were receiving support from social support agencies
- 3% of incidents were reported by social support practitioners
- 66% of perpetrators were arrested following the incident
- 77% of cases did not result in prosecution
- 18% of cases resulted in formal cautions (or warnings)
- 71% of a sample of 21 victims opposing prosecution fully cooperated with safeguarding enquiries
- Police officers frequently placed much significance on victims having the capacity, ability and desire to make a complaint
- Some legislation appeared to be either overlooked or not fully understood, such as:
  - The Mental Capacity Act 2005 (s1) (s44)
  - The Criminal Justice Act 2003 (s103)
  - The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 (s1)
- It was common for police officers to make their own (uncorroborated) diagnoses regarding the mental capacity of a victim, and for this to remain unchallenged by colleagues, supervisors and CPS
- There was much variation in the 'disposal' of apparently similar cases from force to force
- Intervention by specialist officers was highly effective
- High profile 'positive action' policies and initiatives were generally successful in raising officers' awareness and accountability in dealing with cases of IPVOW
- There was a tendency by some police officers to use adult safeguarding protocols as an alternative to undertaking a criminal investigation. In such circumstances, it is vital that elements of intimate partner abuse are not overlooked, but remain a significant aspect of any enquiries including crime-recording processes. Safeguarding and the investigation of domestic abuse are complementary actions

In conclusion, it is apparent that although effective intervention depends largely upon individual practitioner's knowledge and understanding of IPV, law, procedures, protocols, policies and so forth, there is a considerable obligation and need for them to fully discharge their duty of care.

This is supported by Rowson and Lindley (2012, p8) who, having researched police practices in general, argued that

*'it is possible police need more tools for self examination rather than more professional training. What is needful may not be instruction in how to do 'the job' as such, but more awareness of how to critically engage with that kind of instruction, and shape their approach to 'the job' accordingly. <sup>2</sup>*

There is much to suggest that this could be extended to police support staff, CPS lawyers and social support practitioners with resultant improvements in the way they intervene in cases of intimate partner violence against older women.

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<sup>2</sup> Rowson, J. & Lindley, E. (2012). Reflexive Coppers: Adaptive Challenges in Policing. RSA

