

## Crime prevention approaches to repeated victimisation

*Section 5 examines the concept of repeat victimisation drawing on work begun in Britain. While initially focusing on property crime, there are no crimes more likely to be repeated than those that are located in a domestic setting. This makes the concept of repeat victimisation particularly important for new approaches to policing violence against women and children. The section begins with the research data that enabled repeat victimisation to become a focus for police work. It describes how key performance indicators can be used to develop a focus on the repeat victimisation of the same woman or child by the same man. The challenges that are involved for policing in developing a repeat victimisation model are described next. Then an example is provided and the implications for training explained.*

### What is repeat victimisation?

As experience in obtaining information and undertaking surveys of victimisation has grown, so has the distinction between prevalence, the number of victims per head of population and incidence, and the number of crimes per head of population. Prevalence is always lower than incidence as women and children are often victimised more than once over time. This is true of all types of crime, and particularly so with violence in domestic settings whether against women or children. Information gathered by survey is often limited to the previous year and very different statistics are produced when there is no time limit, but whatever the time limit, prevalence is always lower than incidence.

This understanding has begun to be incorporated into operational policing and it reflects a growing acceptance that crime is not spread evenly; certain people and places are repeatedly victimised. Once victimised, a person or place is more likely to be victimised again than one that has not been, and the risk of re-victimisation continues to increase the more a person or place has been victimised. Patterns of repeat victimisation have been identified across a range of crime types including domestic violence, racial crime, burglary and car crime (Bridgeman and Hobbs 1997).

The Home Office for England and Wales defines repeat victimisation as occurring when the same person or place suffers from more than one incident over a specified period of time. Identification of repeat victimisation in terms of domestic violence needs further clarification, however, as there are three possible indicators of repetition: firstly, the woman's or child's account of previous incidents not reported to the police as well as those that were; secondly, the same woman or child/man incidents of violence reported to the police; and third, the man's previous violence to more than one woman or child as recorded by the police. The first indicator relates to incidents that are **personal** biographies whilst the second and third are **officially recorded** biographies.

When information on police attendance to domestic calls and/or responses to persons attending the station for assistance is collected then the amount of time officers spend on the same situations can be analysed and officers can be informed on how this is affecting their workload. Repeat victimisation has implications for the way resources are utilised and distributed. Diminishing the amount of repeat victimisation through more efficient policing can be a major contribution to the more effective use of finite resources.

## **Repeat victimisation: A British Home Office key performance indicator**

Repeat victimisation is a British Home Office key performance indicator and police forces are required to develop strategy to address repeat victimisation demonstrating:

- how they identify or intend to identify repeat victimisation
- how they intend to reduce repeat victimisation where it is significant
- how they propose to evaluate their intervention.

The activities of identifying and evaluating require efficient record keeping while reducing repeat victimisation requires specific programmes of action.

Repeat victimisation models of intervention require consistency in the approach of officers as they are based on incremental increases in the type and amount of police intervention with repeat police attendances or reports of victimisation. When the aim is to affect change through cumulative approaches, every officer-victim/offender contact must follow policy that eliminates the disparities between good, indifferent and bad practice. Achieving this re-orientation, however, is not a simple step. In West Yorkshire, for example, this was aided by research that presented police response to violence against women as a crime prevention issue (Hanmer and Saunders 1993). This paved the way for the reconsideration of policy and action by challenging commonly held views on who is in danger and how large the problem is, and by theoretically recasting violence in the home as an issue of crime prevention. The theory is that as violence against women and children in their homes is always repeated, effective intervention can help to prevent another crime.

Major themes are fighting crime, protecting women and children and preventing crime:

- to fight crime it is necessary to focus on who commits crime against women and children and how they can be controlled
- to protect women is to consider how the rhetoric of protection can be turned into reality
- to prevent crime is to consider what needs to change in order to reduce the amount of violent and sexual crime against women and children. It also means considering what has to change in order to increase the range of strategies open to women and their children to ensure their personal safety in every aspect of life
- preventing crime is a way of fighting crime and protecting women and children.

## **Challenges involved for the criminal justice system**

There are three major challenges for policing in responding effectively to repeat victimisation.

The first challenge in responding to repeat victimisation is effective leadership within the police force. This can only be obtained if senior officers understand the relevance of repeat victimisation to accomplishing the policing task:

- for the police to respond pro-actively to violence against women and children, violence must be seen as criminal behaviour and not private marital or family discord of little interest or relevance to policy or action.

Research shows that officers often think of marital violence as an argument that has 'gone over the top' and if the law is to be involved it is a civil rather than a criminal matter. The onus is seen to be on the woman to deal with the situation either by leaving the man and finding accommodation elsewhere, by using her common sense to avoid repetition, or to do something for herself – 'the action is hers'. Without training, officers are most likely to understand intervention in domestic settings as outside the realm of policing – more like social work. This may also apply to their views on child abuse.

When officers attend women victimised by violence more than once, they say it makes them annoyed, exasperated, impatient and gives rise to feelings of anger. Women are seen to have chosen their situation and therefore it is up to them to sort it out. A distinction may be drawn between children and adult women on the basis of 'choice', thereby creating more favourable attitudes towards assisting abused children. Even though women facing repeated violence are in the most dangerous situations, this is unrecognised by many officers.

This is the starting point senior officers may confront when attempting to introduce new policy and working practices in response to family-based violence. Meeting this challenge requires senior officers to take responsibility for adopting policy and promoting practice that recognise domestically located violence as crime and to provide effective leadership to the men and women who make up the force to enable them to correctly implement new ways of working. Effective leadership entails close attention to the behaviour of junior officers in relation to policy and law, and providing direction, including confrontation when bad practice occurs. It includes education on violence and instruction on good practice. Good practice means responding promptly and courteously to all requests for assistance, adopting appropriate investigative techniques, and consistent record keeping practices.

From experience in force areas, change in working practice is slow, although a strong lead from senior officers reinforces those below them who want to respond more appropriately and removes, however implicit, the support junior officers may feel they have when doing nothing, or very little, to assist women or child victims. Research demonstrates that after the introduction of new working practices, initial results are uneven, but some women begin to receive a better service. With consistent effort to improve practice, their numbers increase.

The second challenge is to achieve the re-education of officers:

- officer re-education requires acceptance that violence against women in their homes is often repeated over as many years as the woman remains, and early pro-active police intervention can prevent further crime from occurring
- women who are killed by their husbands and partners may have turned to the police for help before their deaths. Early effective intervention may not only prevent a further crime, it may prevent a homicide
- early effective intervention can also protect children in the household who are victimised as well, ie, sexually and physically as well as emotionally
- training sequences need to include what forms violence takes and why it is serious along with specific inputs on how to respond.

The third challenge is to systematically maintain records of attendances and their outcomes. The aim is to ultimately achieve completely reliable records:

- it is essential to record every request for assistance when the focus is on repeat victimisation. This is the only way the police will know if it is a repeat request.

In addition, under-reporting of child abuse and domestic violence is a major issue as it can encourage crimes of violence against women and children and can lead to repeated unchecked attacks on the same victims. Greater understanding of what it is that influences under-reporting can be used to improve the access of women and children to the criminal justice system. Decisions to report or to not report crimes to the police are rationally based on how women and others think officers will respond. If under-reporting is mirrored by under-recording, then forces will have a very inadequate understanding of how much domestically located crime against women and children there is. Believing crime volume of any specific crime to be small can further devalue it as an area appropriate for the devotion of resources, time and energy.

## An example of a repeat victimisation domestic violence operational programme

In 1995 the Killingbeck Division of the West Yorkshire Police agreed to participate in a pilot project on repeat victimisation (Hanmer and Griffiths 1995; 1998).

- the rationale included developing approaches that improve responses to victims while gaining a more concerted focus on the offender
- gathering data on repeat victimisation directs attention to the victim and the possible perpetrator of a likely future crime. This helps to target scarce resources cost-effectively, both for the police and other agencies
- this pilot project was possible in West Yorkshire because of the previously established computer programme to record attendance to domestic violence, the Domestic Violence Index, as it provides information on previous calls for assistance. The pilot project is extending this data base by creating base-line data for the police against which subsequent years can be measured.

**Figure 2: Repeat victimisation model**

### Level 1

At level 1, separate letters are sent to the victim and to the perpetrator. These draw attention to the Chief Constable's policy and the actions that can be taken. Women are told about other organisations that may be of assistance and how to contact the Domestic Violence Officer. They are also informed that a copy of the letter sent to the perpetrator can be obtained, which may be helpful if undertaking any civil law actions. The offender is warned that wherever possible it is police policy to make an arrest, which may result in charges, court appearance and imprisonment. If arrested and bailed, the letter informs the offender that regular checks will be made to ensure that conditions are not breached and the possible outcomes if they are.

### Level 2

At level 2, letters are sent to the victim and to the perpetrator with additional information. The Beat Manager visits the victim and, with her consent, a cocoon watch is implemented amongst neighbours, family, friends. The cocoon watch consists of people willing to assist the woman by contacting the police if they see or hear anything of concern. The Beat Manager analyses need and seeks consent for other agency contact. A police watch consisting of two patrols per week for six weeks is implemented. If separated and there is property damage, improved security is addressed. The perpetrator is informed of these police actions.

### Level 3

At level 3, letters are sent to the victim and to the perpetrator with additional information. The Domestic Violence Coordinator visits the woman to seek permission to implement the cocoon watch if not already in place, to discuss other organisations that may be able to help, to provide information on the offender if arrested and bailed, and the progress of any court case. Police watch is intensified and Voda phones (direct line to the station) are available if required.

Figure 2 (above) describes the actions taken by the police at each level of intervention. The model recognises the different situations of women who are living with or separated from the perpetrator, and the nature of the crime committed. These are divided into common law offences, where arrest is for the purpose of ensuring future breaches of the peace do not occur, and criminal offences where arrest and evidence gathering are mandatory police procedures. It is recognised that the first police attendance is likely to be to an already repeated incident. For the purposes of this model, repetitions are calculated in relation to police attendance in the previous 12 months. However, in assessing the

initial level of intervention the full police record of the domestic violence history of the man is reviewed along with information from the woman on previous unreported assaults, as individual cases may fall outside the three-stage progression. A first police attendance may warrant intervention at the second or third level.

The model involves input from all officers. As in the past, attending officers and others who may be involved as a result of arrest or supervision carry out the Chief Constable's policy. The only new tasks concern the work of the Domestic Violence Coordinator and, in a limited way, the Beat Managers (community constables). The Coordinator has overall responsibility for implementing the specific aspects of the model. She assigns the level of intervention, liaises with Best Managers (who visit victims when incidents are repeated for the first time), and liaises with other agencies that become involved. After a second repeat the Domestic Violence Coordinator contacts the woman to explore what else can be done to assist her. With repeat attendance the level of intervention moves from levels 1 to 2 to 3.

At all levels of response there is no longer a category of intervention called 'no further action'. Police respond in a pro-active way through the provision of information to both the victim and the perpetrator, and arrest where possible. If men are present and arrest is not possible, they are warned that their behaviour could lead to arrest. With common law offences the perpetrator is arrested and removed from the home. When arrest is possible for criminal offences police respond pro-actively to the perpetrator and involve the other criminal justice agencies. Additional responses are possible when a woman is living independently as the man has no automatic right of entry to her home. This allows interventions identical or similar to those undertaken for burglary and other property offences when there is an attempted or forced entry.

The model involves increased inter-agency cooperation. It includes improved coordination between the police, probation services, Crown Prosecution Service and the courts in identifying and processing incidents. Repeat offence histories and pre-sentence probation reports are provided by the police to the Crown Prosecution Service, and the courts are informed of the intervention level and actions taken. Information on social and welfare agencies are given systematically to women by letter and by officers, and the Domestic Violence Coordinator liaises directly with specific agencies as appropriate.

The information sent out in letters at all three levels should emphasise that the victim (woman or child) has a fundamental right not to be subjected to violence and that it is the duty of the state to ensure that she enjoys this right.

## Implications for training

The implications for training are more complex as repeat victimisation programmes involves all officers and other agencies in the statutory and voluntary sectors taking part in the process. Furthermore, a repeat victimisation programme relies on earlier developments in policing domestic crime and in gaining working relationships with other agencies. These agencies are in the criminal justice, the civil law and the social and welfare systems. They include non-governmental organisations providing direct services to women and children, such as refuges offering immediate, temporary accommodation, advice, assistance and counselling.

Training consists of:

- group meetings with agencies to explain the programme and allow for comment
- attitudinal and sensitisation training combined with training in the specifics of the repeat victimisation programme for every officer; training to be organised over a limited period to maximise the input. Through the training officers must be helped to understand how gender, socialisation and stereotypes of men, women and their relationships contribute to making repeat

victimisation highly probable. It is only then that they will understand why, for example, the victim finds it difficult to move out, even when options are available

- separate sessions for specialised officers, for example, in the Area Control Room
- additional training aimed at new officers which also offers refresher training for existing officers, incorporating earlier items with time for feedback on how well the programme is developing
- feedback meetings as the programme develops with Beat Managers and others as required

## Conclusion

Responding to violence against women in Britain is now in its 27th year. Progress has been made but much more progress is needed to achieve the aim of ending violence against women and their children. Because violence against women is deeply embedded in cultural practices and because of values concerning the family and hierarchical social relations between women, children and men, progress is slow. But progress can be made, as Britain research, policy, governmental, community and professional interventions demonstrate. Each improvement in response to victimised women and their children lays the basis for the next. This is an incremental approach in which direct and indirect training are vital elements. Although it requires a solid foundation of policy, organisation, and record keeping, as an approach it is practical, achievable and it delivers results\*.

\* For further details: Hanmer, J. and Griffiths, S. (April 1998) *Domestic Violence and Repeat Victimisation*, Home Office Police Research Group Briefing Note No 1/98, Britain.

Hanmer, J. Griffiths, S. and Jerwood, D. (1999) *Arresting Evidence: Domestic Violence and Repeat Victimisation*, Police Research Series, paper 104, Policing and Reducing Crime Unit, Home Office, Britain.