

Who does what to whom? Gender and domestic violence perpetrators in English police records

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Abstract

The article discusses findings from first study in Europe to track domestic violence cases over six years through the criminal justice system and compare cases involving male and female perpetrators. Ninety-six cases involving men and women recorded by the police in England as intimate domestic violence perpetrators were tracked to provide detailed narratives and progression of cases, establishing samples with a single male or female perpetrator or where both partners were recorded as perpetrators. Domestic violence involves a pattern of abusive behaviour over time and the in-depth longitudinal approach allowed similarities and differences in violent and abusive behaviours used by men and women, as recorded by the police, to be explored. Gender differences were found relating to the nature of cases, forms of violence recorded, frequency of incidents and levels of arrest.

Keywords

Domestic violence perpetrators, gender, police, longitudinal narrative, England

Introduction

During the past 30 years there have been significant shifts towards seeing domestic violence as a social and public problem in the United Kingdom,¹ elsewhere in Europe and many other countries. Feminists have partly driven this agenda, within a ‘culture of control’ (Garland, 2001) that has been receptive to increasing criminalisation and recognition of domestic violence as a crime. Criminalisation of domestic violence has provided a symbolic and normative condemnation of domestic violence, and positioned the police in England as a ‘domestic violence service’. Using a criminal justice approach

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to tackling domestic violence is not, however, straightforward and is increasingly contested. There are potential problems at a number of levels. For instance, in England, the criminal justice system is incident focused, and decisions about arrest, charges and prosecutions are assessed in relation to an individual incident reported to the police. In contrast, domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour over time. An adversarial criminal justice system, such as that in England, has difficulty dealing with crimes where the victim and perpetrator know each other, as with domestic violence (Cretney and Davis, 1995). Feminists have also highlighted the tension between a focus on individualised criminal justice interventions and the potential detriment to women's empowerment and understandings of gender inequality that may result (Mills, 2003; Skinner et al., 2005).

At an operational level, questions may also be asked about the efficacy of using a criminal justice approach. Research in the 1980s in the United States indicated that use of arrest helped to reduce repeat offending in relation to domestic violence (Sherman et al., 1992). Later work was less clear cut, and increasingly showed that, while arrest may act as a deterrent for some domestic violence perpetrators, it does not appear to have such an effect on the more chronic domestic violence offenders (Buzawa and Buzawa, 2003; Hanmer et al., 1999). The limited research on court outcomes appears to indicate that conviction, particularly involving jail or probation rather than fines, may reduce repeat offending, but the proportion of domestic violence cases resulting in conviction tends to be very small (Hester et al., 2008; Ventura and Davis, 2005). Generally, criminal justice interventions are unlikely to be effective on their own, and are most effective when carried out in a context of wider support and advocacy for those victimised (Buzawa and Buzawa, 2003).

There are also important questions regarding gender and domestic violence that have a bearing on criminal justice approaches. There has been a long and often heated debate in the Western academic literature as to whether intimate domestic violence is gender symmetrical – used equally by men and women in heterosexual relationships, or whether it is asymmetrical – with men and women using violence in different ways and with different consequences. In reality, the distinctions are largely methodological, the product of using particular instruments and samples (Archer, 2002; Kimmel, 2002). Studies relying on the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) have tended to conclude that heterosexual women and men are equally violent and that this type of interpersonal violence can be conceptualised as 'mutual combat' (Straus, 1999). However, the emphasis on 'tactics' without contextual reference, and limitation of impact to physical injury (Straus, 1999), has meant that studies using the CTS have often found it difficult to differentiate experiences of victimisation by men and women, where controlling behaviours may play an important part (Archer, 2002). The national victimisation surveys from a number of countries, including the United States and United Kingdom (Slahinski et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2010; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000) suggest that while men and women in heterosexual relationships may use a similar range of domestic violence behaviours, there are also important differences. In particular, men administer a greater amount and more severe abuse to their female partners than the other way round. Female victims are consequently more likely to use services, including the police. The British Crime Survey has found, repeatedly, that men tend not to report partner abuse to the police because they consider the incident 'too trivial or not worth reporting' (Smith et al., 2010: 67).

Further differences have been highlighted in studies involving criminal justice and related samples. In a criminal justice sample in the United States, heterosexual men initiated significantly more violent episodes than did women and were more likely to start the overall pattern of relationship violence (Hamberger and Guse, 2002). The men reported less fear, anger, insult and more amusement when their partners were violent than did women. In contrast, qualitative evidence indicates that women are rarely the initiators of violence, are more likely to be acting in self-defence, and may be using a range of behaviours to do so (Downs et al., 2007; Miller and Meloy, 2006; Saunders, 2002).

However, whether or not an individual is perceived as a perpetrator or a victim can be complex, and also involves gendered perspectives and constructions by the professionals involved. Previous research in Britain has identified a range of gendered attitudes and approaches of the police to domestic violence (Hoyle, 1998; Stanko, 1989). Research on police interactions with domestic violence victims and suspects in the United States has shown that male domestic violence suspects were able to influence decisions made by officers at the scene of the crime, minimising their own role as primary aggressors and making women who were the victims appear as perpetrators (Anderson and Umberson, 2001; DeLeon-Granados et al., 2006). Violence by women may also be minimised by some professionals who do not perceive women as capable of 'doing such a thing' (Fitzroy, 2001), while others perceive violence by women as especially abhorrent and treat it more severely, also because it does not fit the female stereotype (Saunders, 2002).

In what follows, the policing of domestic violence in England and the methods for the study will be outlined, before exploring some of the key patterns and issues emerging.

Policing domestic violence in England

Since the 1990s there have been a number of initiatives in England aimed at developing criminal justice approaches to domestic violence. Echoing trends in the United States, this has involved a focus on pro-arrest and attempts to increase prosecution and conviction, although without the emphasis on mandatory arrest and prosecution that applies in some US states. Criminal justice and other agencies have also been encouraged to increase partnership working in order to support and provide safety for victims.

The pro-arrest policy in England was developed from the late 1980s and outlined in Home Office guidance, and more recently in Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance (NIAP, 2008). Pro-arrest is deemed to mean exercising any powers of arrest where they exist and where it is necessary and proportionate in order to carry out an effective investigation and/or prevent further offences. In the location where the current research was carried out, only 39 percent of incidents recorded by the police in 2007 were deemed to be potential crimes (Hester et al., 2008). In England there is no specific crime of domestic violence. Arrests and charges are for general assault and other relevant crimes, in particular violence against the person (Violence Against the Person Act 1861) and public order offences (Public Order Act 1986). The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 (PFHA) may also be applied in cases of domestic violence. The actual offences applied vary between police force areas (Hester et al., 2008). Most commonly used in domestic violence cases are common assault, assault, actual or grievous bodily harm

(ABH OR GBH), unlawful wounding, attempted murder, threats to kill, criminal damage, harassment and breach of the peace. All may lead to arrest.

It is recognised that the police in England may be faced with conflicting accounts and counter allegations of domestic violence from the two parties involved. Echoing the policy in some areas of the United States, police guidance in England urges police officers to identify the primary aggressor in such situations and to avoid arresting both parties. Dual arrest should not be made in instances of counter allegation where one party is acting in self-defence (Centrex, 2004).

The current study: method

This is the first study in Europe to look at patterns of domestic violence perpetration by tracking and analysing the incident narratives and progression of cases recorded by the police over a six-year period. This approach allowed a particularly detailed picture of patterns of violent and abusive behaviours, as recorded by the police, to be compiled and issues of gender identified. It should be noted that a 'case' is here defined as one or more incidents related to the same individuals. While the data is limited to what is reported to, and recorded by, the police, the use of a longitudinal narrative approach nonetheless provides a set of case 'stories' that could not be gleaned by using a snapshot approach.

The main data source for the study was a comprehensive computer-based system for recording and linking domestic violence incidents across police districts, introduced by the police in North East England from April 2001. The database was developed by the police for operational purposes, to help them determine risk more effectively and take into account any history of domestic violence in incidents reported to them. Police narrative reports for each domestic violence incident attended were added to the police database by an administrator. The domestic violence database was also linked to the police intelligence database, providing details of arrest, charges and court outcomes.

Two previous studies by the author, using the same data source, developed an overall sample of 692 intimate domestic violence perpetrators (Hester, 2006; Hester and Westmarland, 2007). The earlier work reflected practice across different times of the year and across the police force area over three years, between 2001 and 2004. In the current research the time frame for the sample was extended to a total of six years, to 2007. Tracking and compiling anonymised narratives is very resource intensive and thus only the cases (sets of incidents related to an individual perpetrator) that involved sole female perpetrators, and random samples of cases involving male perpetrators or dual (both a male and a female) perpetrators were tracked for this study. As will be explained more fully, this resulted in a total sample for the current study of 96 cases (32 sole male, 32 sole female and 32 dual).

Sole female perpetrators constituted the smallest group ($N = 58$, 8.4%), and dual perpetrator cases the next smallest ($N = 82$, 11.8%) among the 692 cases from the two previous studies. To generate samples of sole female, sole male and dual perpetrator cases that might be compared, the current study began by tracking re-offending in the 58 cases that appeared to involve only female perpetrators. All intimate domestic violence incident data related to these cases between April 2001 and June 2007 were downloaded and anonymised. Initial analysis of the six-year data indicated that 26 of the 58 women were

actually in dual perpetrator cases (i.e. their partners were also recorded as perpetrators in other incidents). Thus a final sub-sample of 32 sole female perpetrators in heterosexual relationships was identified for inclusion. One dual perpetrator case involved same-sex partners and was left out of the research as the remaining cases were heterosexual. To generate the dual perpetrator sub-sample it was assumed that the 82 cases identified in the earlier studies were representative, and a random sample of 32 dual perpetrator cases was established and tracked from April 2001 to June 2007. These data were downloaded and anonymised. A further sub-sample, of 32 sole male perpetrator cases, was generated randomly from the remaining 552 sole male perpetrator cases from the earlier studies, and these were again tracked for six years, between April 2001 and June 2007. Thus the final sample for the current study comprised 96 cases, with 128 individuals (64 male and 64 female) identified by the police as perpetrators, and with 581 domestic violence incidents between them.

Interviews with 51 victims had been carried out in relation to cases examined in one of the earlier studies. Five of these victim interviews (one male, four female) were directly related to the current samples and this data was therefore included in the analysis of the relevant cases.

The analysis involved reading and re-reading the incident narrative records and interviews in relation to each of the 96 cases, to identify general themes and build further categories. General themes included the following: police involvement; nature and impact of violence; presence of children; alcohol/drug misuse; health status; and age of victim/perpetrator. All the incident and interview data were coded using an NVivo8 database. Once coded, thematic data relating to individual cases was added to qualitative framework grids (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) so that cases (sets of incidents over time) could be analysed longitudinally, and case 'stories' compiled. Quantitative data relating to victim and perpetrator demographics (e.g. gender, age, relationship status, children), violence (number of incidents, forms of violence used, weapons, direction), and criminal justice progression and outcomes (frequencies and levels of arrests, charges, convictions) for the 96 cases were loaded on to an SPSS database to provide general patterns. Pearson's Chi-Square was used to test significance between sub-samples where possible. The findings presented in this article draw on the qualitative themes and 'stories', as well as quantitative patterns, that resulted.

Findings

Comparison of the 96 cases where men, women or both were recorded by police as domestic violence perpetrators revealed a number of clear patterns with differences by gender relating to nature of incidents, levels of repeat perpetration, arrest and conviction. There were also some differences between sole perpetrator and dual perpetrator cases.

Gender and incidents

Individuals were recorded by the police as being perpetrators in between one and 52 incidents of domestic violence over the six-year period. Men were significantly more likely to be repeat perpetrators (Chi-Square 43.619, $p < .000$). The vast majority of men

Table 1. Number of domestic violence incidents by gender of sole or dual perpetrators (%).

No. of incidents	Sole perpetrators			Dual perpetrators		
	a. Male	b. Female	(a-b)	a. Male	b. Female	(a-b)
1	22	78	-56	13	45	-32
2	25	19	6	22	29	-7
3-8	44	3	41	38	26	12
9-24	9	-	9	15	-	15
25-52	-	-	-	13	-	13

Note: Data refer to the percentage of respondents who have perpetrated domestic violence; $N = 128$.

had at least two repeat incidents recorded (83% of all male perpetrators), many a lot more than that, and one man had 52 repeat incidents recorded within the six-year tracking period. In contrast, nearly two-thirds of all women recorded as perpetrators had only one incident (62%), and the highest number of repeat incidents for any woman was eight. As expected from previous literature on service samples (Johnson, 2006), these data indicate that intensity and severity of violence and abusive behaviours from the men was much more extreme. This was also reflected in the nature of the violence used.

When we compare cases involving only a sole perpetrator with dual perpetrator cases, considerable differences in the patterns of repeat perpetration are apparent, including differences by gender. As Table 1 shows, in cases with only a sole perpetrator, half the cases (50%) involved only one domestic violence incident and virtually all (95%) involved between one and eight incidents. While most of the female sole perpetrators (78%) had only one incident recorded, the same proportion of the male sole perpetrators (78%) had between two and 24 incidents recorded. Men as sole perpetrators had a total of 137 incidents recorded and women as sole perpetrators only 44. In contrast, there were more than four times as many repeat incidents in the cases where both men and women were recorded as perpetrators than where they were sole perpetrators (Table 1). A total of 400 incidents were recorded across the 32 dual perpetrator cases, compared to only 181 across the 64 sole perpetrator cases. This was again gendered. As Table 1 indicates, in dual perpetrator cases less than half the women (45%) had only one incident recorded (compared to 13% of the men) and no more than eight incidents. However, over a quarter of the men had more than nine incidents recorded, and up to 52 repeat incidents. Overall the men in dual perpetration cases had 330 incidents recorded and the women only 70 incidents (see Figure 1).

Table 2 indicates the type of behaviour recorded by the police, by gender of the perpetrator. According to the police incident narratives, men were significantly more likely than women to use physical violence, threats and harassment. While verbal abuse was used in most incidents by both men and women, men were also slightly more likely to be verbally abusive. Men were more likely to damage the women's property, often as part of ongoing harassment, while the women appeared to damage their own belongings (Table 2). Men's violence tended to create a context of fear and, related to that, control. This was not similarly the case where women were perpetrators.

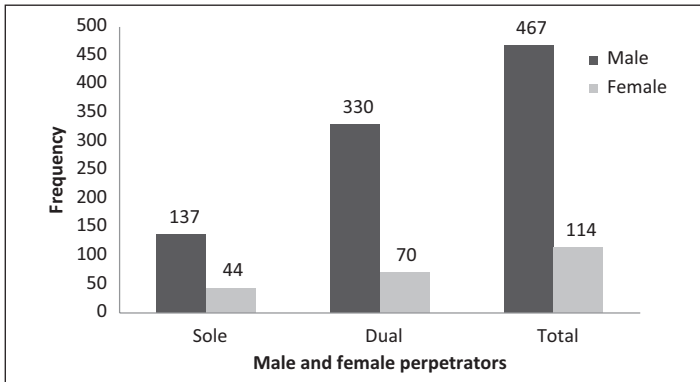


Figure 1. Gender differences in total number of incidents by sole or dual perpetrator.

Table 2. Types of abusive behaviour by gender (%).

	Male perpetrators	Female perpetrators	χ^2 (df = 1)
Verbal abuse	94	83	3.70
Physical violence	61	37	8.29*
Threat	29	13	4.83*
Harassment	29	11	6.01**
Damage to partner's property	30	16	3.61
Use of weapon	11	24	3.67
Damage to own property	6	11	.89

Note: Data refer to the percentage of respondents who have perpetrated domestic violence; $N = 128$.

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Incidents where women were recorded as perpetrators mainly involved verbal abuse against their partners, some physical violence, with only small numbers involving threat or harassment. However, women were much more likely than men to use a weapon (Table 2). Women were often described as using weapons in order to protect themselves, and consequently mainly used weapons in cases where the man was also recorded as perpetrator (77% of dual perpetrators using weapons were women). Men were more likely to use a weapon where they were recorded as the sole perpetrator (60% of sole perpetrators using weapons were men). The police descriptions also characterised female perpetrators as to a greater extent having mental health or other health issues (see also Henning et al., 2003).

Arrests

As might be expected from the nature and severity of the domestic violence incidents, there were more arrests overall of men than of women. However, women were arrested

to a disproportionate degree given the fewer incidents where they were perpetrators. Women were three times more likely to be arrested per incident. During the six-year tracking period, 47 men (73% of all male perpetrators) and 36 women (56% of all female perpetrators) were arrested, with men arrested once in every 10 incidents (in 11% of incidents) and women arrested every three incidents (in 32% of incidents).

A public order offence, breach of the peace, was the highest level of offence for which most men and women were arrested. Men were also likely to be arrested for ABH, criminal damage or other offences (including affray and drunk and disorderly), and threats to kill. In contrast (and reflecting women's use of weapons), violence by women resulted in arrests for a wider range of, and more serious, offences involving assault – from common assault, to GBH, to GBH with intent. Also in contrast to the men, but reflecting the lack of fear and coercion resulting from women's use of violence, women were not arrested for threats to kill.

There was a significantly higher likelihood of the assumed perpetrator being arrested if alcohol was also an issue (Chi-Square 19.70, $p = <.000$). While 80 percent of those recorded as abusing alcohol were arrested, this applied to only 41 percent of those not abusing alcohol. Men were more likely to be recorded as abusing alcohol in both sole and dual perpetrator cases (66% and 78% of men compared to 44% and 68% of women).

Sole perpetrators and gender

Cases involving men as sole perpetrators were those most likely to result in intense fear and control of partners. The following case, that of Mr and Mrs Purple,² is a typical example where the female partner was not able to disengage from the violent male partner due to extreme fear, and because intervention by the police and other agencies was not making her safe.

Mr Purple had 24 incidents of domestic violence against his female partner recorded by the police over two and half years. They lived together on and off, although he had been told by Mrs Purple and various agencies to live elsewhere. He assaulted Mrs Purple, threatened to kill her on a number of occasions, including threats with a hammer and a knife. There were four children, who were eventually removed by Social Services to live with the grandparents. Mrs Purple was also provided with an alarm by the public protection unit. The police record notes on one occasion that Mrs Purple was refraining from involving the police because 'Social Services have told her if she has more domestics she won't ever get her children back'. While Mr Purple was arrested for breach of the peace (on numerous occasions), for possession of a weapon, assaults, and was taken to court for common assault, he was never convicted. The reason appeared to be that Mrs Purple repeatedly retracted her statements and the evidence suggested they were continuing the relationship.³ Towards the end of the research period Mrs Purple was recorded by the police as saying that 'she is fearful of [Mr Purple] and only sleeps with him occasionally to stop him damaging her property or threatening her', indicating that it was fear of her partner that had stopped her from further engagement with the criminal justice system.

Only one of the women recorded as a sole perpetrator was similarly described by the police as creating a context of fear and control of the male victim. In this instance the woman was very ill. The case involved a couple in their 70s, Mr and Mrs Silver, where the woman had become increasingly ill from a terminal brain tumour and also drank

heavily as a result. When the police were contacted she had become very aggressive and physically violent, breaking Mr Silver's arm and making him sleep on the floor. She was arrested and charged for GBH with intent, a very serious assault. The male victim stayed with friends and relatives on a few occasions to remain safe, although his main concern appeared to be his wish to look after and obtain help for his wife with the police recording that he 'wants to help her'. The case was eventually closed by the police when Mrs Silver died as a result of the tumour.

In most cases, however, the male victims appeared not to fear women who were recorded as sole perpetrators, nor to be controlled by them, even where women were using weapons. In a number of cases the male victims appeared themselves to be actively containing and 'managing' the violence from their partners. For instance, in the example of Mr and Mrs Teal, there were seven incidents involving Mrs Teal recorded by the police over two and half years, linked to her heavy drinking and leading to verbal and at times physical abuse of her husband. Mrs Teal was arrested on a couple of occasions, and charged for common assault. Rather than any fear, however, Mr Teal is described as protecting himself by removing potential weapons (e.g. kitchen knives) from Mrs Teal's reach, removing himself from the vicinity, or actually restraining her.

Dual perpetrator cases and gender

Cases where both partners were recorded as perpetrator were more varied than those involving sole perpetrators, and ranged from low level to extreme domestic violence. They were more likely to involve post-separation violence (13 of the 32 dual perpetrator cases), with issues of divorce and child contact common in such cases. Dual perpetration cases also included the greatest number of instances where both partners were heavy drinkers or alcoholics and where the circumstances appeared quite chaotic, making it more difficult to determine who the perpetrator was. While the majority (63%) of all perpetrators in the current 96 cases appeared to abuse alcohol to some degree, more of these cases involved dual perpetrators (28 of 32 dual perpetrator cases, 88%, and 35 of the 64 sole perpetrator cases, 55%).

The case with the highest number of incidents recorded involved partners who were both alcoholics, with high levels of chaotic behaviour and violence. Mr Violet had 52 incidents recorded as perpetrator and Mrs Violet had two as perpetrator over the six-year tracking period, with a history of further incidents prior to the research period. The police narrative, perhaps not surprisingly, indicated that they considered Mr Violet to be the main perpetrator. The police attempted to get Mrs Violet referred to other support, but she usually declined.

One of the cases where both police and interview data was available provides an example of how women were managing their own safety with very violent male partners, including being forced to 'allow' access to the children. In this case, involving Mr Green and Ms Grey, there were 14 incidents with Mr Green recorded as the perpetrator and one with Ms Grey as perpetrator in a period of just under three years. During this period the police recorded extensive domestic violence against Ms Grey by Mr Green, largely threatening and aggressive behaviour. The police had power to arrest Mr Green in five instances, but he was arrested in only three because he had generally left the scene prior

to the police arriving. Most of the violence took place post-separation of the couple, and increasingly involved arguments about the children and child contact/access. In one incident, where Ms Grey was recorded as perpetrator, she stabbed Mr Green in the arm in what appeared to be defensive retaliation after she had managed to get him to move out. She told the police that she did it, and was arrested for GBH with intent, but was not prosecuted as Mr Green did not want to pursue the matter further. After this, the police indicate that Mr Green was using the children to get back at Ms Grey – for example ringing the police to say she was taking drugs in front of the children (although he was drunk when he rang). This eventually resulted in him getting the children on a staying visit, although the police later note his lack of parenting skills. Ms Grey is recorded by the police as saying that she only ‘allowed it to prevent a scene at the school’.

Over the six-year tracking period there was increasing evidence that the police were following the ACPO’s guidance on primary aggressors in apparent dual perpetrator cases. The records often provided indication of whom the police considered to be the primary aggressor, and how gender might be a part of such construction (see Hester, 2012). The police tended to identify just one perpetrator and one victim in relation to each incident, although in some cases it was not clear why both partners had been recorded at some time as perpetrators, as only domestically abusive activities by one of them (virtually always the man) had been recorded. Dual arrests (arresting both parties in the same incident) were made in only a couple of cases.

The case of Mr and Mrs Beige was one of the instances where the primary aggressor appeared somewhat unclear in the police records, although the police seemed to assume overall that the primary aggressor was the woman. Mr Beige had one incident as perpetrator recorded on the police database and Mrs Beige had two. In the first incident it was Mr Beige who was seen as the perpetrator. The police described the incident as involving a verbal argument when Mr Beige came home drunk, resulting in his arrest for a public order offence (breach of the peace). Mrs Beige, when interviewed as part of the research, said ‘he had actually hit us [sic]’, and made it clear that she was downplaying the incident to the police because of concerns about how the family might react and because she and Mr Beige were due to get married the following week. Three years later, Mrs Beige was recorded as the perpetrator in two further incidents on the police record. Overall, the three recorded incidents and the interview with Mrs Beige give the impression of a turbulent and conflictual relationship with bi-directional violence, although the violence from each spouse also appears somewhat different. In the police record the initial incident is presented as uni-directional – with Mr Beige as the perpetrator. The interview with Mrs Beige around that time also indicates a history of ongoing physical violence and abuse from Mr Beige, with him as the main perpetrator. The police record for the second incident, involving an ‘argument’, appears to assume that the individual who rang the police – Mr Beige – was also the victim. Apart from a statement that an ‘argument ensued’ no other information is provided in the police record that would explain the direction of any abuse. By contrast, in the third incident Mrs Beige is reported as having locked Mr Beige out of the house and having smashed his car windscreen, and that these actions led her to being recorded as the perpetrator, and to her arrest for criminal damage. However, given the earlier history, there may also be un-recorded gendered dynamics underpinning this case, and the locking out of Mr Beige might indicate that Mrs Beige

was again attempting to contain his abusive behaviour towards her. In this sense the damage might be an instance of what Johnson (2006) calls 'violent resistance', rather than Mrs Beige being the primary aggressor.

Discussion

The findings from the current study indicate that intimate domestic violence cases recorded by the police in (at least one area of) England show patterns of difference by gender and to some extent by whether there was a sole or dual perpetrator. It can be difficult at times to tell whether these patterns are also lodged in the experiences of the individuals concerned, or to what extent they are framed by police officers' perspectives and professional approaches. It is nonetheless possible to glean indications of decisions and actions taken by police, victims and perpetrators around the nature of the violence, keeping safe, curtailing and managing violence, and how these patterns may be gendered.

Johnson (2006) identifies four patterns of domestic violence, related to different contexts. 'Intimate terrorism' is the 'archetypal' domestic violence that we may expect to see reported to the police involving one partner as the primary aggressor, and frequent abuse that is likely to escalate and to result in serious injury. In the current study, such violence was perpetrated almost exclusively by men, particularly in sole but also in dual perpetrator cases (e.g. Mr Purple and Mr Violet), while women used 'violent retaliation' in such contexts (e.g. Ms Grey and Mrs Violet). Other patterns identified by Johnson are 'mutual violent control' and 'situational' or 'common couple' violence. 'Mutual violent control' is akin to 'intimate terrorism', as both partners are violent and vying for control, although Johnson suggests this pattern is rare. 'Situational' or 'common couple' violence is where both partners use violence in specific situations, but where this is of relatively low frequency, unconnected to control and unlikely to escalate or to involve serious injury. These patterns would be expected among the dual perpetrator cases, although many that were presented by the police in the current study as mutual appeared on further reflection more likely to have a primary (male) aggressor (e.g. Mr and Mrs Beige).

There were strong indications in the data of the 'gendered injustice' also found to result with positive arrest policies in the United States (Durfee, 2012; Miller, 2001). Despite the more extensive and severe use of violence by the male perpetrators, it was women who were targeted disproportionately with regard to arrest. As Miller has pointed out, 'Gender neutrality offered by arrest policies may become gendered injustice as women who are not batterers get arrested under laws designed for men who are' (Miller, 2001: 104). Even so, it appeared that at least some of the police were using a gender-sensitive approach to determining the primary aggressor. Such an approach relied on consideration of context and pattern of incidents over time, differentiating between initiator and retaliator, and thus pointing to a primary aggressor. The police narratives indicated that, while consideration of arrest and charges continued to be dealt with in relation to individual incidents, over time the police were moving from a merely incident-based to a more contextualised/pattern-based approach when considering the nature of a case – although with a continuing tension between the two. Cases with incidents recorded in the latter part of the tracking period were more likely to include evidence of the police

looking across incidents to assess overall risk, with a summary in the police record to this effect. As a result, some officers were identifying male primary aggressors in cases where women were also using severe violence for protection, were discussing safety plans with victims and involving other support agencies.

Domestic violence cases are assumed to be associated with adults. However, children were present in the majority of incidents, some incidents were related to child contact/access, and children were part of the abusive contexts in other ways. Other research has indicated that the potential impacts on children of domestic violence reported to the police needs carefully considered approaches and interventions (Stanley et al., 2010). Also, the current study provides evidence of the impact of domestic violence on parenting (e.g. Mr Green) that overlaps with other studies highlighting violent fathers' lack of parenting skills and tendency to focus on their own needs rather than those of the children in their care (see Harne, 2011).

The current research suggests that men and women were using different approaches to managing their own safety, which were linked to their different, and gendered, positions of power. The men were able more often to take an active approach, removing themselves from the vicinity of the violent partner, removing weapons or imposing restraints (e.g. Mr Teal). In contrast, women in fear of their partners had to negotiate safety by giving in to the demands of the violent men, in ways that often appeared to further compromise their safety in the longer term (e.g. Ms Grey; Mrs Purple). Women were perhaps more active in managing safety in some instances where the male partners were heavy drinkers and the women were able to call the police to remove the men.

The types of gendered dynamics described by DeLeon-Granados et al. (2006) and Miller (2001), whereby men in criminal justice settings may minimise their actions and consequently the blame on themselves, or women may take greater responsibility for violence from male partners, were also echoed to some extent in the current research. For instance, men were able to minimise their own violence by not providing a statement to the police in some cases where their partners had used violence in retaliation or self-defence, and/or they had themselves been extremely violent (as in the cases of Mr and Mrs Violet and Mr Green and Ms Grey). In contrast, women who were victimised, at times withdrew statements, minimised or denied that violence had taken place against them where male partners were also very threatening and controlling (as in the case of Mr and Mrs Purple). Moreover, women were often the first to ring the police if they had used protective or retaliatory violence against their male partners.

Conclusion

The current research in some respects echoes previous studies in showing that violent and abusive behaviour between heterosexual partners in contact with the police is gender asymmetrical. While cases were very varied, there were significant differences between male and female perpetrators of domestic violence in many respects. Men were the perpetrators in a much greater number of incidents; the violence used by men against female partners was much more severe than that used by women against men; violence by men was most likely to involve fear by and control of female victims; women were more

likely to use weapons, often in order to protect themselves; and female perpetrators were more likely to be alcoholic, or mentally ill, although alcohol misuse by men had a greater impact on severity on outcomes. Despite these patterns, however, women were three times as likely to be arrested per incident, indicating gendered injustice in the approach. There was little evidence that cases involving dual perpetration might generally be categorised as ‘mutual’ and men were in the main the primary aggressors. Cases with dual perpetrators were, however, more varied than those involving sole perpetrators, and included the largest number of repeat incidents. Overall, the research provided further evidence of the overriding importance of using a gender-sensitive analysis to heterosexual domestic violence; the importance for the police of identifying a primary aggressor and using a gender-sensitive approach to do so; and the inherent, and potentially gender-discriminatory, problem of using an incident-based approach to domestic violence. As the article was being written, the English Home Office definition for domestic violence was being extended to include a ‘pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour’ (Home Office, 2012), which begins to tackle this problem, although it will remain difficult to apply without underpinning legislation.

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Notes

1. With regard to legislation on domestic violence, the United Kingdom is divided into three jurisdictions: England and Wales; Scotland; and Northern Ireland. ‘England’ will be the term used when features of police or legislation that are specific to England and Wales are mentioned.
2. To ensure anonymity, all names used for perpetrators and victims/survivors throughout the report are fictitious.
3. Whether a couple appear to be resuming or continuing a relationship is used in assessing robustness by prosecutors in decisions of whether a case should proceed.

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