



99-12

## Devon & Cornwall Constabulary

*Philip Burton BA MSt (Cantab)*  
**Assistant Chief Constable**  
**Police Headquarters Middlemoor**  
**Devon Exeter EX2 7HQ**  
**Telephone 01392 452013**  
**Fax No 01392 452959**

My ref: ACC(OS)/X/atOl/rp

16 July 1999

The Tilley Award  
Police Review Publishing Company  
Falcon House  
5 Floor  
289-293 High Holborn  
London  
WC1V 7HZ

## 5irli'ika-'

Please find attached the paper entitled "Increasing Reporting of Domestic Violence".

I endorse this as the entry for the Tilley Award from the Devon & Cornwall Constabulary and commend it to you for your consideration.

1.t.4,

( (iVi.vt-

**Philip Burton**  
**Assistant Chief Constable**  
**Operations Support**

Enc.

**THE TILLEY AWARD**

**INCREASING REPORTING OF  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**PLYMOUTH  
2 AREA  
DEVON AND CORNWALL  
CONSTABULARY**

**By PS 2973 NAISMITH**

# ABSTRACT

## Introduction

National studies into domestic violence have produced shocking results.

- A victim is assaulted on an average of thirty-five occasions before they report it.
- Domestic violence increases in frequency and severity over time.
- In England and Wales, one woman is killed every three days as a result of domestic violence.

Although it is recognised that domestic violence is a serious problem, the issue which this project seeks to address is the under reporting of such offences.

## Defining the problem

The belief that such offences are under reported is based on national survey findings. These findings have been confirmed as valid by using a locally initiated, questionnaire-based study.

The problem has been identified, as a priority in Plymouth as it is an area of policing in which the quality of service historically, is of a lesser standard than for other offences. As such the problem solving style applied to dealing with other offences has been lacking in this field. This offence is seen as having a significant impact on the quality of life for the victims and other family members, as well as resource implications for the public services.

## Method

The methods devised to address the problem are based on raising the profile and public awareness in relation to domestic violence and as a result changing complacent attitudes and giving victims the confidence to seek support.

Attitudes of front line Police Officers have been addressed by the use of more impactful training methods.

A partnership approach has been set up to offer a wide range of support and alternative sources of information to victims.

Varied and innovative methods have been utilised to bring the issue of domestic violence to the attention of the public.

## Measurement

The success of the initiative will be measured in the increase in number of reports of domestic violence. Following a stable level of reporting in 1996/7 and 1997/8 reports in 1998/9 showed an increase of 22% from 2695 to 3288. The current target is to increase this further and at present the first month shows an increase, over last years figure, of 30%.



# INCREASING REPORTING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

## Background

*"For the most part these (domestic) disputes are personal matters requiring no direct police action. Once inside the home, the officer's sole role is to preserve the peace... In dealing with family disputes the power of arrest should be exercised as a last resort. The officer should never create a police problem when there is only a family problem existing."*

The above quote comes from a training manual issued by the international Association of Police Chiefs proposing means of dealing with domestic incidents, highlighted by R.E.Dobash and R.Dobash (Violence Against Wives, 1979).

This one paragraph sums up the failure of the Police Service over many years to offer the same level of service to those suffering violence in the home as to the victims of any other: crime.

## The Problem

National research indicates that a significant number of domestic incidents are not reported. However the very nature of the problem, under reporting, makes this difficult to quantify.

There are many reasons why victims do not report domestic violence, including:

- The victim being in such fear of their abuser, that they are physically unable to ask for help.
- A lack of awareness by victims of the help and support which is available to them.
- The previous experience of the victim where a report of domestic violence resulted in an inappropriate response and possibly further violence, leaving them with little or no confidence in the services available to support them.
- Embarrassment and the perceived social stigma of being the victim of this kind of offence.

As a result of the inappropriate guidance historically given to Police Officers, and their own frustrations when domestic violence complaints are repeatedly withdraw, some officers appear to victims to show a lack of commitment to deal with these incidents. When combined with one or more of the reasons for not reporting listed above, any sign of a lack of total commitment by an officer to deal with the offence effectively may result in a vulnerable victim choosing not to pursue this line.

Following the circulation of Home Office Circular 60/1990 Police attitudes to domestic violence began to change.

Guidance emphasised:

- The over-riding duty to protect victims and children from further attack.
- The need to treat domestic violence as seriously as other forms of violence.
- The use and value of powers of arrest.
- The dangers of seeking reconciliation between assailant and victim.
- The importance of record keeping to monitor the policy in practice.

In order to comply with this guidance many Forces set up dedicated Domestic Violence Units.

Despite the huge steps forward made by the Police, studies suggest reporting rates for incidents of domestic violence remain as low as 20%.

### **Objectives**

- To further improve the Police response to incidents of domestic violence.
- To change the attitude of the public on the issue of domestic violence, creating an environment in which it is easier to talk about and report such incidents.  
To raise victims awareness of the support available to them following a report of domestic violence.
- By achieving the above three objectives, to increase the number of incidents of domestic violence reported to the partnership agencies.

Home Office circular 6011990 recognised that incidents of domestic had several common characteristics. *"They are rarely isolated occurrences. They tend to be repeated over a period of time, often **increasing in their severity, and are particularly common during the woman 's pregnancy.**"*

Home Office statistics also show that in 1991, 120 women and 30 men were killed by their partners or ex-partners.

The reason for setting the target of increasing the number of reports of domestic violence in Plymouth is that an increase in the number of reports will result in an increase in the number of those being helped to stop the violence. By encouraging reporting at an early stage of the offending pattern it will stop further assaults which may be of a more serious nature.

Of the four objectives it was recognised that while the first could be addressed by relatively conventional means; the second and third would be more difficult and would require a more imaginative approach.

### **Methods**

The Domestic Violence Unit has been established within the city of Plymouth for some years, following on from Home Office circular 6011990. The current establishment of the unit is one Sergeant and four Constables, with a Constable from the Ministry of Defence Police also seconded to the unit. This secondment is due to the significant number of military estates in the city of Plymouth. The basic framework of inter-agency liaison has been in place for some time through the

Domestic Violence Strategy Group and the Domestic Violence Forum. The work of the unit is in line with the Home Office Circular. That being, the care of victims and help through contacts with other agencies.

As a result of the work of the unit all officers have become aware of the policy of positive intervention at domestic incidents, although not necessarily the reason for that policy. This was considered to be the first area that needed to be addressed.

In Plymouth the Response Teams based at Crownhill provide the immediate response to incidents, throughout the city. These teams had received repeated input on the organisations requirements in relation to the reporting of domestic incidents. It was felt that in order to drive the message home the delivery of the message would have to be more impactful.

In the autumn of 1998, a presentation was given to the members of the five Response Teams covering Plymouth. The presentation included input from the Domestic Violence Unit, the co-ordinator of the Plymouth Woman's Refuge, and most effectively from a woman who had been the victim of domestic violence for many years.

Hearing at first hand the feelings, emotions and fears from a long-term victim of domestic violence has had a profound effect on the response officers. They now have a greater understanding of the problem and the reasons why victims withdraw their complaints or refuse to co-operate with police. This has led to a greater commitment to dealing with the problem.

The change in personnel is so great that the training has to be ongoing and the Domestic Violence Unit is committed to repeating the training on an annual basis. The need for such input is perhaps best illustrated by the response of one officer who after hearing the victims account of her ordeal, told her. *"I've **been a police officer for twenty five years and had no idea that that sort of thing was going on."***

A further Police based response was the introduction in November 1998 of Polaroid cameras for the purpose of immediate evidence gathering. These are used at the scene to capture images of injuries and damage to property. Although the results lack the quality of studio based photographs they have proved invaluable. The taking of a photograph at the scene reinforces the message to the victim that this incident is being dealt with properly. In addition the availability of these photographs has been found to assist in interviewing offenders and in making representations to custody officers with regard to charging and bail considerations. The use of this form of evidence gathering is now fully supported by the Crown Prosecution Service. To further enhance the effectiveness of this initiative the use of these cameras has been featured in the local press to highlight the Police commitment to assisting the victims of domestic violence.

There has been liaison between the Police and Courts. Speaking to victims identified that a common cause of complaints being withdrawn was the length of time it took for a case to come to court. To counter this a fast track system has been put in place. Summary only cases where a guilty pleads anticipated have been dealt with at the next available court. Other cases are having a first hearing within three weeks, with a framework aimed at speeding the cases through to conclusion. Officers are now able

to explain to victims that their case is treated so seriously that special procedure is put in place to deal with it.

While these changes in Police practice have a positive effect on the means of dealing with domestic violence the message still required something a little different to make positive inroads into the second and third objectives.

In 1998 a major Plymouth company was targeted with the co-operation of the management. For a period of a week literature relating to domestic violence was made available in the staff canteen. This included leaflets for staff to read and take away. In addition the staff were made aware of the availability of domestic violence support facilities, via the company's personnel office, the Police Domestic Violence Unit and Plymouth Mediation (a local counselling support service). At the end of the week an introductory letter and questionnaire were circulated to all staff in their pay slip envelopes. The analysed results from the returned questionnaires broadly supported national research into the levels of domestic violence and comments from the staff were in general very supportive of the initiative, welcoming the debate it had raised.

The strength of the partnership approach is being developed in a number of ways. A directory for practitioners relating to domestic violence is being prepared. This will advise on routes individuals should consider when preparing referrals and the type of questions that should be considered when domestic violence is suspected. The intended message from this directory is that reporting domestic violence to the Police or any other agency will result in support from a partnership of agencies across the city.

It has been identified that about 22% of those reporting domestic violence for the first time will do so to their GP. Local Ward Officers have been tasked with making contact with surgeries in their areas to publicise this issue utilising posters and leaflets from the current Home Office, "Break the Chain" campaign, displayed in waiting rooms. In addition Health Visitors have now become more aware of the issues and as well as utilising the leaflets and posters, have recently appointed a representative to the Domestic Violence Forum.

The strongest drive from the Domestic Violence Unit in relation to under reporting has been in the area of publicity for the subject and available support.

The directory, already referred to, although not for public consumption, will receive a high profile press launch with the assistance of a nationally recognised celebrity. This message will be reinforced by the public re-opening of the Plymouth Women's Refuge, on completion of a major refurbishment, and at a later stage the Way Ahead Domestic Violence Project, when it is moved to newer premises. Each of these public openings will be supported by all of the partnership agencies.

The Domestic Violence Unit identified a song by Roger Taylor, the former drummer with the rock group Queen. The single **titled *Surrender!* Included** references to a violent husband wanting a "punch bag not a wife" and perhaps the most powerful line "scared kids with scarred minds."

The Unit adopted this and the local media ran stories about the unit and the message contained within the single. The use of the record had exposure across the Southwest

region via television, local radio and papers. After that particular avenue was felt to have been exhausted the use of the song was publicised nationally on the BBC Breakfast News, utilising the association with the high profile of the artist involved. An officer from the Plymouth Domestic Violence Unit was interviewed alongside Roger Taylor, who described his experiences as a child in a home in which there was domestic violence. The opportunity was used to compare the attitude of the Criminal Justice system then to that of today.

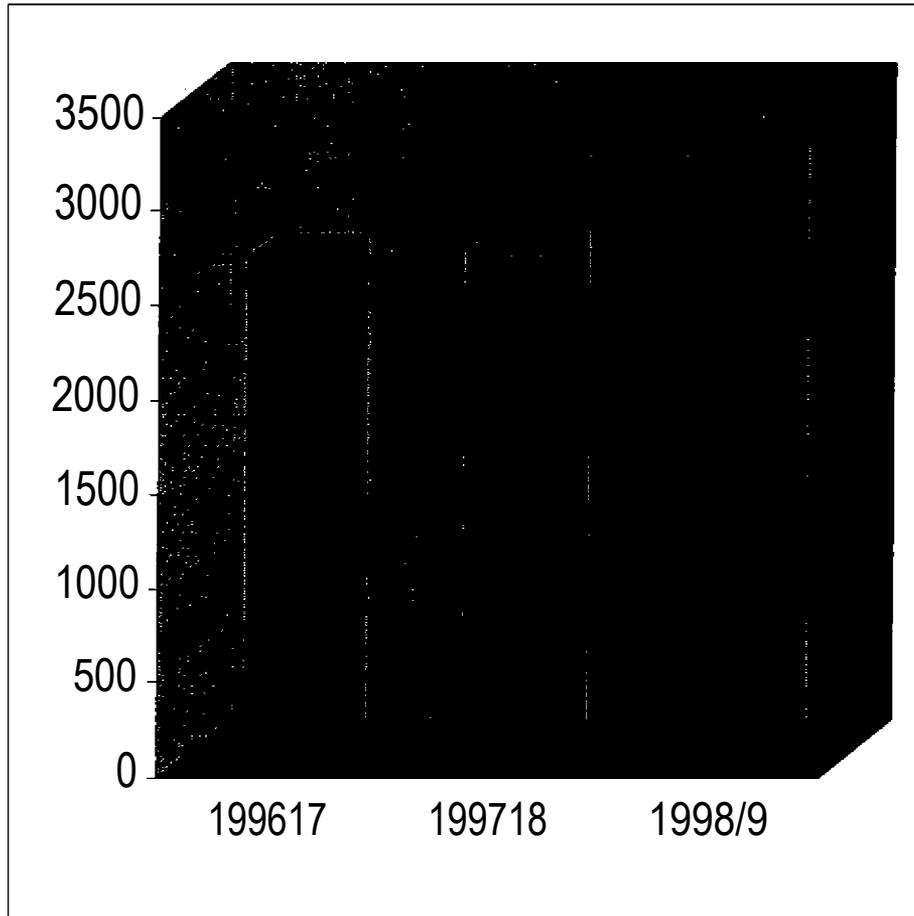
As a result of this publicity the unit received feedback from many parts of the country. This included representatives from Women's Aid and Victim Support, as well as individuals who had experienced domestic violence, and others, including a London playwright, offering their services.

Recently an approach has been made to Plymouth City Council to assist in the publicising of the work of the Domestic Violence Unit and its partners. There has been an extremely positive response to this request. The reporting of domestic violence will now become a standing item in the Community Quarterly Newspaper prepared by the Council and delivered to all homes in the city. A logo has been designed by the Council and will be used on displays on Supermarket notice boards. In addition, at the beginning of the new financial year the City Council have stated their intention to publicise the work by addressing the issue of domestic violence in all Council rent books and Council tax payment books. It is anticipated that these initiatives alone will have a tremendous impact on the reporting of domestic violence.

### **Measuring the Success of the Campaign**

The simplest means of measuring the success of the campaign is by the comparison of the numbers of domestic incidents being reported to the police in Plymouth.

The figures show a dramatic increase in the reports over the past year from what was a fairly stable previous two years. From 1996/7 to 1997/8 there was the marginal increase from 2657 to 2695 reports of domestic incidents in Plymouth. The chart illustrates the dramatic increase the following year, the outset of these actions, to 3288 reports.



The main impact upon the figures will have been the training of the Response Officers, as the majority of the initiatives aimed at bringing the work with the Police and other agencies to the public's attention will not have had chance to reflect in yearly figures.

An Area goal has been set to show an increase of reports of domestic violence. The figures for 1998/9 show an increase of 22% over the previous year. When one considers that studies suggest that only twenty per cent of domestic incidents are reported there are potentially 12000 further incidents within the City of Plymouth each year.

With heightened awareness being encouraged there is a confidence that the Area goal will be achieved, and in the first reporting month of 1999 reports were up 30% over the same month in the previous year.

### Summary

The initiatives listed in this paper are already having an impact on the reporting of domestic violence. This is largely due to the change in attitude of officers attending incidents. However it must be recognised that there is a limit to how much success this alone can achieve. With this in mind a much broader approach has been utilised and by doing this for the first time the actual problems of domestic violence are being

addressed and confronted, rather than just the issue of Police response to the consequences.

Greatly increased reporting figures will not show Plymouth as being the city of increasing domestic violence. It will show Plymouth as the place where victims of domestic violence have been given the courage and support to come forward and ask for help. The city where the dark figure of unreported domestic violence is being reduced.

At this time the public's awareness of the menace of domestic violence, although on the increase, has some way to go before it reaches the level of, for example, child abuse awareness. It was a celebrity, Esther Rantzen who brought the horrors of child abuse into the public domain. The intention this time is that not only will a celebrity be associated with this problem but also the City of Plymouth will be considered to have had a major impact.

With the continued use of the media and other initiatives the message that domestic violence victims will be treated sympathetically by the police, in **partnership** with specialists in the field, will help to give people the confidence to come forward in order that they can be helped to reach that for which they all wish. For the violence to stop.

**Contact**

**Name** John Naismith  
Police Sergeant 2973

**Address** Devon and Cornwall Constabulary  
Domestic Violence Unit  
Crownhill Police Station  
Budshead Way  
Plymouth

**Telephone** 01752 720501

**Fax** 01752 720467

**E-mail** [jnaismith@looe.swinternet.co.uk](mailto:jnaismith@looe.swinternet.co.uk)