

**THE TILLEY AWARD 2000**

***'AIMING TO REDUCE REPEAT  
VICTIMISATION FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE'***

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## **'AIMING TO REDUCE REPEAT VICTIMISATION FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE' - Summary:**

As the Domestic Violence Liaison Officer for the South Ribbk area, I identified a number of families who were repeatedly coming to Police attention for a high number of domestic violence calls.

Initially, I collated as much information about the families as possible to ensure I understood their problems fully. I learned that intervention on a multi-agency level was the only way to address the problems.

As one worker in the field of domestic violence, I would be ineffective, therefore, I had to • forge partnerships with the other agencies. These agencies were Social Services, Health Visitors, Schools, Local Day Nurseries and anyone else who had concerns about the family.

The root cause of the problem in many cases was the victims dependency on the perpetrator without there being any support systems in place. A fragmented approach was taken by each agency when what was needed was a co-ordinated plan.

Many people think women choose to stay with violent partners, but often they genuinely believe they have no choice. This, may be because they do not have the confidence to leave, have nowhere to go or think they have to stay for the children's sake.

I soon learnt that intervention must be based on individual needs. There are no blanket answers, even when the problems appear similar on the surface. In particular I learned that every victim needed to be properly consulted and be allowed to go at her own pace.

It became apparent that what these families needed was in depth, continued support from several agencies if they were to overcome the relationship difficulties, housing problems and child-care needs that were probably contributing to the Domestic Violence incidents.

In most cases, I involved a range of other agencies. This allowed us to take a partnership approach in identifying short and long-term measures for the good of the entire family. In one case, we arranged for the offender to go on an Anger Management course, returning to live with the family only after completing it. I asked schools to monitor how children were coping to help us all to understand their needs and feelings. In serious cases, Child Protection Case Conferences were held to determine if the children should be placed on the Child Protection Register.

Assessments of some of the families who received help has shown a marked reduction in the number of repeat calls. On average, they have fallen by 83 per cent whilst in one notable case the police have not been called back at all.

## **SCANNING**

### **What is the apparent problem?**

I identified families within my division who were coming to the attention of the Police for having a high number of domestic violence incidents. Neighbours would ring up concerned about trouble within the home or more worryingly, the children themselves would ring in asking for assistance on behalf of their mother. I scanned the figures from Incident logging, message pads and from domestic violence Incident Report Forms. I could see how the violence was worsening and that even when arrests had been made,, the problems and the violence continued. It is correct to say that arresting offenders may deter them in the short term, but far more in-depth work is required with the family to look at why the calls are continuing. I have concentrated on four families living within my area. These families had the highest number of domestic violence calls made to the police and therefore I had already highlighted them as a priority.

The problem of domestic violence within the families is not just one for Domestic Violence Liaison Officers it affects others both within the Police and other agencies have made many enquiries with other agencies and as a result have formed close and valuable partnerships. These in the main are Social Services, Health Visitors, Schools, Day Nurseries, local Women's Refuges and Doctors.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **The victim/caller**

The victims in each of these families are female with young children dependent upon them. The children are also victims. Analysis shows that it is the female who has the greater responsibility for the children, she has pre-school children and her only dealing with outside agencies was with Health Visitors. From studying message pads I was aware that the violence was increasing and it was the children who were requesting assistance from the Police. I realised that the families had problems that were unique to them. Domestic violence was only part of many other problems but they were only coming to the attention of the Police when the domestic violence was getting out of hand. This showed that the situation was out of control as the mother was no longer able to protect her children. It is disturbing to think of vulnerable children placed in that situation and when I became aware that things were reaching this serious level, there was no option but to intervene on a multi-agency level. A great deal of research has been undertaken in the U.S.A, concentrating on children's experiences of domestic violence. The picture of children being passive victims or unintentional victims of domestic violence is becoming increasingly challenged. Research indicates indisputable correlation's between domestic abuse and the active abuse of children. Child Protection Systems recognise and respond to concerns relating to sexual abuse. However, the unseen emotional abuse that all children living with domestic violence do experience, very rarely triggers child protection systems.

There is substantial evidence that domestic violence can produce reactions in both children and their non-perpetrating parent identical to those seen as a result of war or major disaster. The overriding difference is that the perpetration is committed within the home by someone close to the child. (Dora Black et al. 1995)

### **What children could witness?**

- The death of their mother. This can result in children losing both their carers as their fathers/male carers, enter the criminal justice system.
- On occasions, women murder their violent partner to escape the violence e.g. Sarah Thornton
- The death of their mother through suicide. It is estimated that one in four women commit suicide in the USA as a result of domestic violence.
- Overseeing or being made to watch their mother being physically assaulted.
- Overseeing or being made to watch their mother being raped/sexually assaulted.
- Overhearing incidents; many mothers feel they have hidden the violence from their children, only to be surprised when their children can recall in great detail much of the violence.
- Seeing the effects of violence, their mother bruised, cut and bleeding, their home being smashed up.
- Seeing their mother upset or crying.
- Being forced to participate in the abuse and degradation of their mother.
- Being blamed for being unruly or disobedient which caused the violent man to lose his temper and assault their mother.
- Being denigrated and belittled by the violent man in order to hurt their mother - being "shamed". The violent man as part of this process, constantly belittles their gender, intellectual ability and achievements.
- Being deprived of social contacts that reduce the likelihood of disclosure.

Children can also experience additional emotional distress as a result of:

- The loss of security and predictability in their lives having no faith in their future.
- A lack of regular routine.
- Changing schools when their mothers try and escape violence.

- Having to constantly adapt to new school friends/peers. Having to make up stories about why they have moved home. Why they live in a refuge.
- Constantly having to adapt to new settings, new people, teachers, family's etc, losing their identity and spontaneity.
- The loss of grandparents, extended family and friends.
- The loss of possessions, favourite toys, clothes and pets.

*These are taken from the findings of an NCH Study "The Hidden Victims"; a study of 108 mothers and 246 children.*

On speaking with the victims, I identified that a fragmented approach had been taken by agencies, but no agency took the lead in resolving the problem. The victims were often depressed and had lost all confidence, they were unable to see how their situation could be improved. The victims seem relieved when they could share their problems and I found that I was able to open up a whole network of caring agencies that they had previously felt would not be able to help them.

### **The Offenders/Participants**

The offenders in the families are male who have children with the female partner. In two of the families, there were stepchildren involved, it is interesting to note that the natural fathers of these children had little or no involvement, this in itself caused problems. In these families the stepchildren are on the verge of delinquency and there has been Police involvement already for matters other than domestic violence. It is more than obvious that problems between their parents are contributing to this.

In all of the four families the male perpetrator had previously been arrested for domestic violence incidents. All four of the men have said they have mental health issues made worse for three of them by alcohol and drug abuse. When the offenders were met by professionals, offering them help, they were willing to take it. It became clear that these men had deep rooted problems of their own which had never previously been addressed and had caused *them* problems in previous relationships. Their ability to manage their anger was lacking and their own self-esteem was badly damaged.

These families I identified have now got support systems in place but other families continue to come to our attention for their domestic problems and they too will need to have support at a multi-agency level. Repeat victimisation in domestic violence will not stop. When one family has been assisted and their problems solved, another family will then need our support.

I was aware that all the four families had young children. Research has shown that for young children living in a household where domestic violence is prevalent they do suffer significant emotional harm. Many other issues around parenting are also highlighted with neglect being a significant one. The impact of domestic violence on children can lead to many problems in the future i.e. poor school performance, going missing from home, being drawn into a criminal lifestyle or turning to drug and

alcohol abuse. Violence within a family needs addressing while the children are still young: in order to let children know it is not the way to deal with problems in their relationships. Long term this will reduce the workload of other agencies.

### **The Location**

In domestic violence there are no boundaries in relation to class or social status. The location of the families within the analysis is unimportant as each family has similar problems, regardless of location. One factor I was aware of was that the mothers within the families were some distance away from their own parents thus creating a lack of a support network within the family. From the four families I analysed, two owned their own properties, one lived in council owned property and one in private rented accommodation.

### **What are the root causes of the problem?**

From a police point of view, the root cause of the problem was seen as, a woman remaining with a violent partner and appearing not to want to make the break. For many professionals, police included, the ideal solution is for the relationship to end and the victim to walk away. For repeat victimisation to be stopped, it is important to understand that problem solving in domestic violence situations will not happen overnight.

In the four families I analysed the parents were all looking after young children with minimal parenting skills. They had a variety of health issues to confront, for which they were not seeking help. In one of the families, the offender was a prolific thief supplementing his drug addiction. To add to his problems, he had a deep mistrust of the Police so he was initially reluctant to accept help.

Domestic violence is not the root cause of the problem for these families but one of many other problems. When someone is withdrawing from drugs or alcohol or money is short, then pressures surface and the perpetrators may resort to violence. It is apparent early on that for the victim she does not want the relationship to end but does want the violence to stop. At the time of the first call to the police, the woman may not have had the confidence to end the relationship, thus appearing to not wanting to help herself. She has many pressures placed upon her and she may have very deep feelings still for her partner. It is important always to work at the pace of the victim and not to rush or make decisions without consulting her. If a family does separate, there are other problems to then consider i.e. access visits to the children, possible harassment and even more violence. Other agencies also had concerns about how the children were being presented i.e. poor attendance at school, appearance, and general wellbeing. With the information I was able to share about ongoing Domestic disputes at home, a much bigger picture could be seen.

## **RESPONSE**

### **What is the planned response from the Police?**

My response is to gather all the information I have on the families and to send it to all other agencies that have an interest. If I feel that the violence is becoming worse or there are concerns for the welfare of the children and the calls are still as frequent, I ask that a meeting is held as soon as possible. At the meeting, a plan is formed and each agency agrees to enforce it. These meetings are called Strategy Meetings in Child Protection Terms.

The parents are then consulted and either visited at home or invited to attend the Social Services office. It is then pointed out to the parents that there are serious concerns for the children's well being and that action will be taken to put support strategies in place. If it was felt serious enough a Child Protection Conference would be held and a decision would be reached at the conference whether the child should be placed on the At Risk register. The meetings are useful in that specific problems can be addressed. In one of the families, the perpetrator was sent on an Anger Management course. The perpetrator was not allowed to return to the family home until the course was completed and it was felt that he could manage his anger. The perpetrator, his partner and the course organisers feed back to the group on his progress. What they tell the group, is then confirmed by any police information i.e. if he has been arrested or if they have been any calls to the address. Schools also report to the group on how the children are doing and counselling can be offered to the children to help them address and understand their feelings. These action plans build up good multi-agency networks, share the workload of each agency and offer support to the workers involved with the family.

## **TIME SCALE**

The project has run over a twelve-month period.

## **PLANNED POLICE RESOURCES/COST**

There have been no extra costs or resources needed to implement this project.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The results have been extremely positive:

- Reporting of domestic violence within the Division has increased, showing the increase of public confidence in the police.
- Repeat victimisation has been greatly reduced for domestic violence

- All four of the force objectives have been achieved;

Reduction in the levels of violent crime;

Increasing public satisfaction with the services we provide;

Increasing public satisfaction with the Lancashire Constabulary;

Reducing disorder and anti social behaviour.

At each intervention, problems were highlighted specific to the individual family. Childcare assistance was identified, anger management and help for mental illness was also sought. The whole way in which the families sought to solve their problems was looked at in detail and help and support was offered all the way. In two of the four families, the couples split up as a direct result of the intervention. Two of the families have had their children placed on the child protection register, which requires constant monitoring from Social Services. In each of the four cases I have looked at, I have looked at the time period before and after intervention and counted the number of calls to the police. There has been a reduction in each of the four families, a copy of this data is attached. I could see that the calls made to the police after intervention were not as serious in nature as the ones made previously. For me, this was proof that the support systems were effective. There has been a definite reduction in the time uniformed patrol officers spend at the addresses because the problems are now being addressed in a multi-agency setting and not left to the individual officer who attends the call out.

I realised very early on in my post as a Domestic Violence Liaison Officer that the impact of domestic violence had far reaching implications for children. Almost immediately I began referring families to Social Services so that concerns were shared. I felt initial resistance from Social Services to actually act upon the information I was giving them. I knew that the families were coming to our attention very frequently and the problems would continue if they were not tackled in a multi-agency setting.

Social Services are major players in solving these problems and I knew it was important to raise my credibility with them by contacting them regularly and highlighting the problem families to them. I never gave up sending referrals through to Social Services each time I told them that the violence was getting worse and very dangerous situations were building up. I refused to take all the responsibility for looking after these families. I knew I could not effectively solve these people's problems on my own. By constantly raising the profile of domestic violence in Social Services, I was becoming well known to the individual social workers. Before long I was being contacted regularly and asked to do joint visits to families so that we could offer help and support. I am now getting into a position where the profile of my reports have been raised and action is taken far quicker than it used to be.

I feel that management within both the police and Social Services need to have a joint protocol for domestic violence cases and the positive results that we have seen should be shared with the other Partnerships.

<b>Family one</b>			<b>No Weeks</b>	<b>No Calls</b>	<b>Calls/Week</b>	<b>% Reduction</b>
Before Intervention	06.05.99	16.09.99	19	6	0.3158	
After Intervention	17.09.99	31.01.00	19	2	0.1029	-66.67%

<b>Family two</b>			<b>No Weeks</b>	<b>No Calls</b>	<b>Calls/Week</b>	<b>% Reduction</b>
Before Intervention	25.09.98	31.01.99	18	22	1.2031	
After Intervention	01.02.99	07.06.99	18	2	0.1111	-90.91%

<b>Family three</b>			<b>No Weeks</b>	<b>No Calls</b>	<b>Calls/Week</b>	<b>% Reduction</b>
Before Intervention	14.01.98	21.01.99	53	8	0.1505	
After Intervention	22.01.99	31.01.00	53	2	0.0374	-75%

<b>Family four</b>			<b>No Weeks</b>	<b>No Calls</b>	<b>Calls/Week</b>	<b>% Reduction</b>
Before Intervention	20.05.99	23.09.99	18	3	0.1667	
After Intervention	24.09.99	31.01.00	18	0	0.0000	-100%