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# Police and specialist services co-response approach to domestic abuse: Joint working to achieve victim focused outcomes

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## INTRODUCTION

3 out of 4 domestic abuse (DA) cases are closed with evidential difficulties or a victim withdrawing their support for police action (Crown Prosecution Service, 2024).

Concerns have been raised on the Police response to DA; including the standard of risk assessments completed by officers, and their skills to engage with victims effectively (HMICFRS, 2021; 2019).

The presence of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) working alongside police has been deemed as positive practice. Helping to build the capability and expertise of officers as well as providing better victim care and supervision (HMICFRS, 2021; 2019).

The components of an IDVAs role which are suggested to increase victim engagement in support include independence; non-judgemental and victim-led approach; and the ability to provide emotional support (Madoc-Jones & Roscoe, 2011; Taylor-Dunn & Erol, 2019; 2023).

## OPERATION PROVIDE

- Operation Provide has been recognised as 'smarter practice' by the National Police Chiefs Council and College of Policing in the National Homicide Prevention Framework (College of Policing, 2022).
- Op Provide is a holistic and joined-up response to DA which utilises the skillset of both the Police and IDVAs to achieve positive outcomes for victims.
- An evaluation of Op Provide in Lancashire West indicated that joint working between immediate response officers and IDVAs significantly increased engagement with DA victims, in terms of safeguarding support and cooperation in the investigative processes. Victim voice indicated they wanted to be DA free, but not have police involvement (McManus et al., under review).
- Op Provide has now been expanded across other areas in Lancashire, which now includes two further sites in East and South.

## KEY OBJECTIVES

- Is the Op Provide model a more *effective* and *efficient* way to respond to DA incidents?
- What *factors* maximise the *effectiveness* of Op Provide and increase victim *engagement*?

## METHODOLOGY

The evaluation took a mixed methods approach utilising data provided by Lancashire Constabulary, the Op Provide IDVA trackers and interviews with those working across the Op Provide sites.

### Quantitative data

- Lancashire Police DA data (2019/20 - 2022/23)
  - 124, 137 DA investigations
- Blackpool Teaching Hospitals (West) Op Provide IDVA tracker data (2022/23)
  - 1,288 observations accounting for 13.3% of 9,686 DA investigations
- Descriptive and statistical analysis conducted.

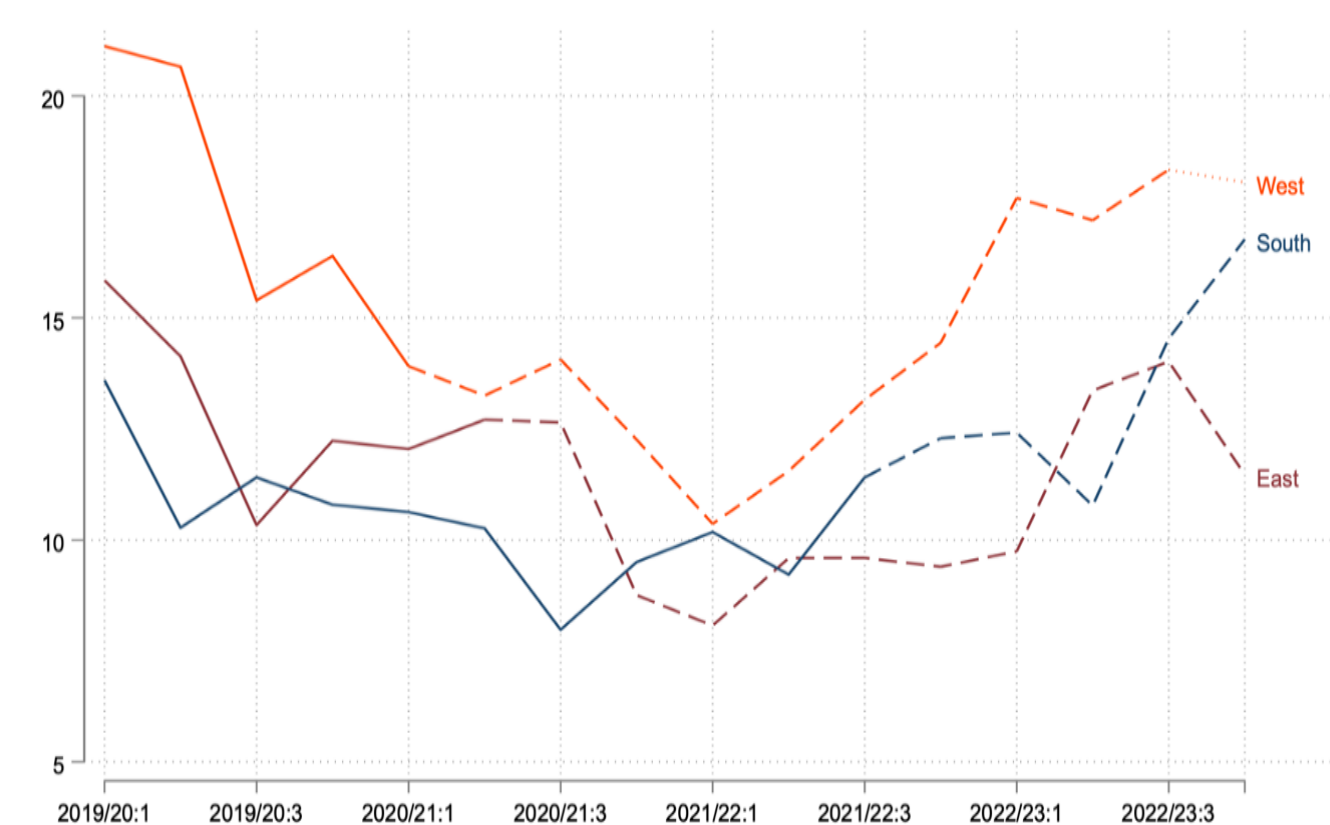
### Qualitative data

- 30 semi-structured interviews conducted across the West, South and East Op Provide sites.
- Participants were based within a range of roles across both sectors of the police and the IDVA service.
- Data was transcribed and thematically analysed.

## QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

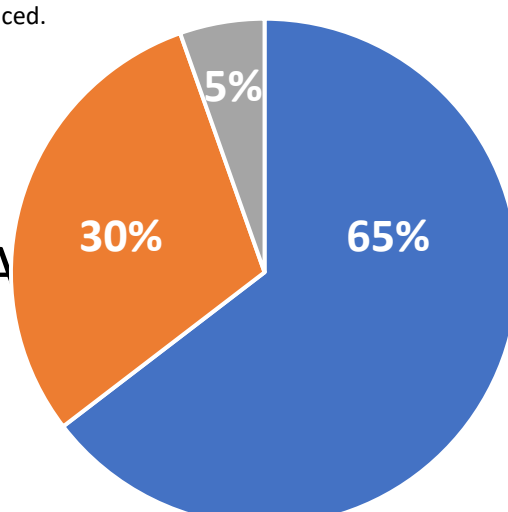
The West BCU recorded the highest rate of positive outcomes across the 4-year period, which has the largest IDVA resource as part of Operation Provide.

Quarterly average percentage positive cases by BCU.

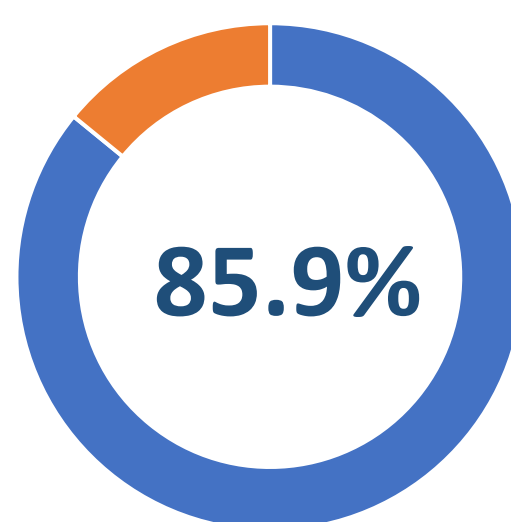


<sup>1</sup> Dotted lines indicate when Operation Provide commenced.

Most victims received a visit by an Op Provide IDVA **within 24 hours** of the initial police visit (65%).



■ 24 hours or less ■ 24 hours - 1 week ■ 1 week +



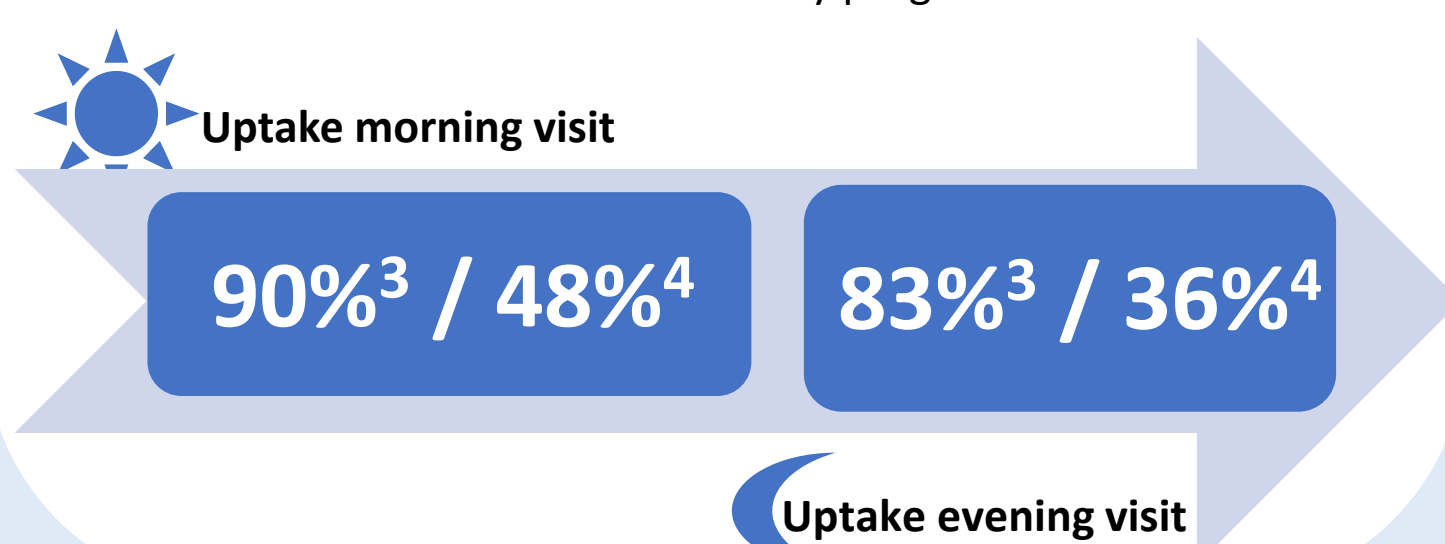
■ IDVA support ■ No uptake

The DA (West) tracker data indicated that 85.9% of victims **accepted the offer of support from an IDVA** at the Op Provide visit. This was lower (43.7%) for prosecution support.

Engagement with victims occurs when the time difference between the initial police visit and the IDVA visit is **within 24 hours**, with this reducing as time increases.

**91.3%** Under 24 hrs → **82.7%** 24 hrs – 1 week

Victim **acceptance of IDVA<sup>3</sup> and prosecution support<sup>4</sup>** significantly reduced as time-of-day progressed:



## QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

What do *professionals* perceive to be factors that contribute to the effectiveness of Op Provide in terms of improving victim engagement and increasing efficiency?

### Improved police understanding and response

Working closely with an IDVA on a joint visit was perceived to develop the police officers' understanding and confidence in supporting the needs of the victim. The officer has access to the IDVA's connections and resources enabling a response that would not be possible to achieve with the police attendance alone.

*"Seeing the IDVA get the victim on board and how the victim opens up has taught me some skills. The language and resources they use I didn't know about"*

### Timely collaborative working

Due to the IDVA being co-located at the police station conversations occurred organically which allowed a shared understanding to be reached and facilitated efficient information sharing across systems.

*"We've been able to do a proper job and he's been sent to prison and that would have never happened without the IDVA. Every day the IDVA would ask what is going on. I escalated it to the Chief Inspector Level, whereas the IDVA is not going to be able to do that"*

### Independent identity: victim focused

Speaking to an IDVA allowed the victim to engage with an independent professional. The IDVA works with the victim, at their level, and consequently often led to victim engagement.

*"I've been to jobs where they haven't wanted the police to come into the property because they've lost all faith in the police. They don't trust them. So sometimes when they'd not wanted to let the police in, they will let us in"*

### Specialist DA knowledge and expertise

The support and knowledge provided by the Op Provide IDVAs enabled victims to feel able to support a prosecution. Additionally, the expertise of the IDVAs enabled other positive outcomes to be achieved for example, securing refuge accommodation, referrals to specialist support for housing, mental health, drug and alcohol support.

*"She went to court; he got a conviction. Had I [the IDVA] not gone out with that Response Officer that day they would have hit a brick wall"*

## CONCLUSION / KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- A key factor to the success of Op Provide was the **collaborative working relationships which were established between professionals**.
- Engagement with the victim through the Op Provide IDVA increased engagement in safeguarding support. This resulted in increased positive outcomes and decreases in repeat victim and suspect DA incidents when sufficiently resourced. The figure below illustrates the elements of Op Provide that support victim focused outcomes being achieved.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Op Provide IDVA visit to the victim should aim to be conducted within 24 hours of the initial police visit. This was the most effective time point for victim engagement and uptake of safeguarding support.

The Op Provide IDVAs should be embedded into a designated police team so they can be integrated into police activity and build professional relationships. Additionally providing a base for which the IDVA activity is triaged and coordinated.

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For promotional video on Op Provide – see QR code.

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For College of Policing (2022) – see QR code.