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Children's Experiences of Domestic Violence: Developing an Integrated Response From Police and Child Protection Services

Nicky Stanley[1], Pam Miller[2], Helen Richardson Foster[1], and Gill Thomson[1]

Abstract

Police notifications of incidents of domestic violence to child protection services constitute an acknowledgement of the harm that domestic violence inflicts on children. However, these notifications represent a substantial demand on child welfare services and the outcomes for children and victims of domestic violence have been questioned. This paper presents findings from the first UK study to examine these notifications in depth and examines the interface between the police and child protection services in responding to domestic violence incidents. The research reports on police interventions in 251 incidents of domestic violence involving children; the communication of information to child protection services and the subsequent filtering and service response. Social workers found that notifications conveyed little information on children's experiences of domestic violence. Forty per cent of families notified had had no previous contact with child protection services in that area, but those cases most likely to receive social work assessment or intervention were those where the case was already open. Notifications triggered a new social work intervention in only 5% of cases. The study also

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identified a range of innovative approaches for improving the co-ordination of police and child protective services in relation to children's exposure to domestic violence. Arrangements that maximized opportunities for police and social workers to share agency information appeared to offer the best option for achieving informed decisions about the appropriate level of service response to children and families experiencing domestic violence.

Keywords

domestic violence, children, police, child protection

Well-developed systems for the police and child protective services to communicate information and coordinate responses to children and families experiencing domestic violence are essential if those children most in need of protective interventions are to receive them. The arrival of police officers at a domestic violence incident is often the first moment when family violence is exposed to the public gaze, and this instant represents an opportunity for public services to identify need and instigate the process of delivering interventions to support and protect victims and children. At the other end of the spectrum, child protective services provide targeted interventions to those children most at risk of harm and aim to reduce children's exposure to violence and ensure their safety. However, developing coordinated responses across criminal justice and child welfare systems requires considerable strategic planning as the evaluation of the Green Book initiative has shown (Banks, Landsverk, & Wang, 2008; Edleson & Malik, 2008; Janczewski, Dutch, & Wang, 2008).

The study reported here examined systems of collaboration between the police and children's social services (this term is used for statutory U.K. services equivalent to statutory child protective services in North America) in cases of domestic violence involving children in two local authorities in England. In England and Wales, legislation which defines exposure to domestic violence as a form of significant harm (Adoption and Children Act 2002, S 120), together with central government guidance on interagency collaboration, has resulted in the police "notifying" children's social services of all domestic violence incidents where there are children in the household. National guidance (HM Government, 2006) directs the police to refer to children's social services if they have concerns about the safety or welfare children at incidents of domestic violence but the guidance does provide any clearer definition concerning which incidents are to be notified and procedures and formats for notification of such incidents are developed at the local level. This has

resulted in a deluge of notifications which, as various commentators (Cleaver, Nicholson, Tarr & Cleaver, 2007; Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [Ofsted], 2008; Rivett & Kelly, 2006) have noted, has overwhelmed children's social services. Similar patterns are discernible in North America (Edleson, 2004; Jaffe, Crooks, & Wolfe, 2003) and Australia where mandatory reporting is described as acting as an additional factor contributing to the volume of notifications (Humphreys, 2008). In addition to the consequences for other aspects of children's social services' workload, it has been suggested that this high volume of notifications can result in too many resources being diverted to the task of filtering cases and that the subsequent response is diluted or flattened as social services seek to locate the high-risk "needle in the haystack" of notifications (Stanley and Humphreys, 2006).

Edleson (2004) argues that children's responses to domestic violence vary and that their exposure to domestic violence should not be automatically defined as maltreatment under the law. He argues for the development of criteria or screening tools that predict high risk and indicate the need for statutory intervention. Magen, Conroy, and Del Tufo's (2000) study offers an example of such a tool developed and successfully implemented by a preventive child welfare agency in New York. The study reported here approaches the question of screening from the starting point of the domestic violence incident.

Interagency Collaboration—Police and Child Protective Services

Although the interface between the police and child protective services provides a useful locus for studying coordination between a universal and a highly targeted service, there has been limited research interest in collaboration between the two services (Cross, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2005). In the United Kingdom, the issue was briefly controversial following the Cleveland Inquiry in 1987 (Butler-Sloss, 1988) which criticized the quality of collaboration between the police and children's social workers in cases of child sexual abuse; subsequently, the practice of collaboration has been structured by central government guidance. This has established structures for joint strategy meetings or discussions and joint investigation when criminal charges for physical or sexual abuse of children are likely as well as for joint interviewing of children (usually in cases of sexual abuse). Such joint approaches do not appear to be regularly utilized for investigations of domestic violence.

Hallett's (1995) study of interagency coordination in two English local authorities found that social workers' judgments about involving the police in

cases of physical injury were often based on the seriousness of the injury inflicted and she identifies the limitations of such an approach in a field where severe injuries are rare and seriousness may be mediated by chance. Cross et al.'s (2005) U.S. study which examined child protective services' interventions in cases with and without police involvement discovered that cases where the police were involved were more likely to have allegations of harm substantiated and to receive a service from child protective services. The authors suggest that police involvement may strengthen social work interventions by providing a better quality of investigation and more evidence as well as lending authority and safety to the process of assessment.

The study reported here offered an opportunity to study the interface between the police and child protective services in relation to incidents of domestic violence. The research was designed to identify the characteristics of incidents and of families notified to children's social services, to establish what information was conveyed to children's social services in the notification and which cases received what level of service. In addition to elucidating the operations of the notification system in England, the research aimed to identify some of the tools and approaches currently being developed for screening purposes in the United Kingdom and to identify the challenges of implementing them. This article focuses on findings concerning the interface between the police and child protective services, other findings are reported elsewhere (Stanley et al., 2010a).

Method

The research was undertaken between 2006 and 2009 and included retrospective analysis of police and social services' records for 251 incidents of domestic violence in two local authorities in the north and south of England. Although these sites were matched in terms of the size of the child population, one was an urban area on the edge of a major city whereas the other comprised a mix of both rural and urban areas. The use of two sites allowed the research to capture variations in local procedure and practice which were known to exist in relation to police notifications of domestic violence incidents. The sample was constructed by identifying all incidents notified to children's social services by the police in the two sites in January 2007. Selecting the sample at this point in time allowed the researchers to follow up children's social services' interventions with children and their families over a period of 21 months following the original notification. The sample incidents represented approximately a third of all domestic violence incidents in both sites and senior police officers commented that this was a lower

proportion than they would expect to be notified since they considered that children were in the household in approximately half of the incidents in their areas by 2009. It may therefore have been the case that there was an under-notification of incidents in 2007.

As the available records gave a limited picture of professionals' decision-making processes, the file data were supplemented by 58 individual inter-views with police officers (8 specialist and 10 frontline officers), domestic violence advocates (6), supervising officers (9), children's social workers (13), children's social services administrators (2), and managers (10) in the two sites. Whereas the children's social services staff interviewed were pre-dominantly female as were all the domestic violence advocates, only five police officers were female. Practitioners' length of time in post varied from 18 months to 30 years, but the majority of those interviewed had more than 10 years experience in their field.

Participants were asked to describe and comment on the processes for recording and transferring information between the police and children's social services and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current sys-tems for collaboration. To capture recent practice developments in relation to notifications, a short postal survey was distributed to the Chairs of all Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs)[1] in England and Wales which asked respondents to identify any innovative practice in relation to managing police notifications of domestic violence incidents involving children in their area.

Data recorded by the police included demographic information about the family, details of injuries sustained and weapons used and whether those involved appeared under the influence of substances. A limited amount of descriptive narrative data was available in the police's crime report database and also in the forms used to notify children's social services (although the extent of information included on these forms varied between the two sites since this was determined locally). Data were extracted from key police data-bases; however, it was not possible to access all police records, such as those used to track ongoing prosecutions. Children's social services data were gathered from electronic and paper files (one site had not yet fully automated its records) and key statutory documents such as initial assessments and child protection plans were reviewed.

Data from police and children's social services' records were initially entered into spreadsheets in situ and were then transferred into the project's databases which were designed to address the key research questions and to include both quantitative and qualitative data. Missing data were noted. Quantitative data were then coded and analyzed using SPSS. Separate data-bases were used for the police and children's social services data, with key

variables being merged to examine children's social services' interventions in relation to characteristics of the original domestic violence incident. Qualitative data extracted from the files were analyzed using both themes generated by the data and those drawn from the research questions and case studies were developed for those cases that received intervention from children's social services. Standard approaches to qualitative analysis (Silverman, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were employed for the interview data which were stored and sorted with the assistance of NVivo software while data from the LSCB survey were analyzed manually.

Ethical approval for the study was provided by the (University of Central Lancashire) Ethics Committee. All file data were anonymized before being removed from police or children's services offices and informed consent procedures were adopted for all those interviewed.

Limitations of the Research

Considerable variation was found in the amount of information available on the cases studied and this was true of both police and children's social services' records. The extent to which the sample is representative was affected by the attrition that characterized the transition across from police records to social services' files. This could be attributed in part to the shift from a focus on incidents of domestic violence in police records to a focus on family cases in social services' records; multiple notifications on 12 families also accounted for a 5% reduction in the size of the sample. However, 22% of the original sample was lost to the research in the journey across agency boundaries for other reasons including: the possibility that files had been transferred to other social services' departments; files being lost or unavailable (one of the sites had not yet fully automated its records); and because, in all likelihood, notifications had never been received. Beeman, Hagemeister, and Edelson (2001) describe similar problems in matching police and social services' records and these challenges for researchers reflect the difficulties practitioners experience in transferring and retrieving information on families. In the final event, the sample size was reduced from 251 incidents in police records to 184 cases in social services' files.

The time lag together with the mobility of the two workforces made it unfeasible to interview those practitioners who had made decisions on the specific cases included in the sample. Instead, practitioners and managers were asked to comment generally on practice and procedures in relation to notifications of domestic violence incidents. Any changes in local procedures in the period between January 2007 and 2009 when the interviews with practitioners were undertaken were therefore captured.

Table 1. Levels of Violence in Sample Incidents

Levels of Violence	No.	%
High	67	27
Medium	54	21
None/Low	130	52
Total	251	100

Findings

The Sample Incidents

The police records for the 251 incidents only provide a "snapshot" picture of a family's experience of domestic violence. The records contained little information on previous incidents and few details concerning children's involvement in incidents. The range of incidents included in the sample was wide. Injuries were recorded in 31% of incidents and weapons were used or displayed in 9% of incidents. Police officers were directed to complete risk assessments on victims of domestic violence. One site allowed officers to use their professional judgment to assign a level of risk, whereas in the other site scores on a number of factors such as pregnancy or injury were recorded and combined to assign victims to a high, medium, or low level of risk. However, as risk assessments were not recorded consistently on all sample cases and were not based on the same risk-assessment tool in the two sites, the researchers used the descriptive data in police records to allocate all incidents to one of three levels of violence. The three levels were defined as follows:

Level 1—None/low: Incident involved verbal argument only, no violence or aggression was seen or alleged.

Level 2—Medium: Incident involved verbal abuse with some physical abuse such as pushing or shoving, without any injuries being sustained.

Level 3—High: Incident involved verbal abuse with physical injury inflicted, a high level of violence or a verbal argument with threats to kill.

Using this classification, Table 1 shows that slightly more than half of the incidents were classified as Level 1, more than a fifth were classified at Level 2, and just above a quarter were allocated to Level 3.

The majority (87%) of incidents took place at the victim's home, and 54% of the couples involved were separated. In 48 incidents (26% of the 184 where brief narrative descriptions of incidents were provided), access to

Table 2. Ages of Children and Young People Involved in Domestic Violence Incidents

Age Range of Children	No.	%
0-2 years	133	29
3-6 years	128	28
7-10 years	75	16
11-14 years	73	16
15-18 years	28	6
No date of birth/age recorded	23	5
Total	460	100

either the children or the house was identified as a factor contributing to the incident. The incident described below in which alcohol was a contributing factor is typical of this group of cases:

> A mother had sent a text message to her partner from whom she was divorced to let him know he could see his 16-month-old daughter. She then heard from one of his friends that he had been drinking so sent him a message saying that he could not see the child if he had been drinking. Father later turned up at the house and started banging on door. Mother called police because she was unsure what he would do, as he had been violent in the past. He was found by police sitting outside her house. He was initially aggressive with the police but quickly calmed down. He was told he would not be allowed to see his child as he was drunk and he was sent home. (Incident no. 112)

In 35 cases (19% of the 184 where narrative descriptions were included in police records), incidents took place in the context of child visitation. Some of these assaults involved high levels of violence for both the victim and the children.

The police records provided details on 460 children in the incidents; Table 2 gives their ages and shows that 29% were below 2 years. Sixty-one percent of those children whose location was recorded directly witnessed the incident. Another 33% of those whose location was recorded were described as being in another room, asleep, or on the premises during the incident and may well have overheard or been aware of the abuse or violence.

Information Transfer

As noted above, the challenges faced by the research team in tracking the sample cases across the service divide replicated the problems experienced by practitioners. National guidance does not stipulate what information should be included in notification forms sent to children's social services, this is determined at the local level. It was notable that the amount of standard information conveyed to children's social services in the police notification forms varied considerably between the two sites with one site communicating information about family members' criminal records and providing the police's risk assessment rating for the victim, whereas in the other site this did not happen.

Inconsistencies were found between information included in notifications and that in the original police reports in 19% of notified incidents. In 25 cases, children were described as "present" at the incident in the original police files, but this information was not included in the notification to children's social services. Although information concerning the small number of cases (3) where children were injured was consistently conveyed to children's social services, some notifications, such as that below, did not convey the full extent to which children had been involved in incidents:

> The notification form included the information that *no* children had been present during the incident which was described on the form as an "altercation" following drinking by both adults, during which the man had bitten his partner. Information recorded on police files but not included in notification detailed that the victim's 13-year-old daughter had been physically caught up in the altercation and pushed out of the way by the perpetrator; the victim's daughter had made the call to the police who had been sufficiently concerned to try and organize refuge accommodation for the victim and her daughter. (Incident no. 123)

When the police notification forms were matched up with social work records on the other side of the service divide, discrepancies in the identifying details for children and families were found in 40% of notifications. Social workers described such discrepancies as creating additional work for them, but their main criticism concerning the information provided in the forms involved the lack of detail conveyed regarding children's experiences of the incident. This paucity of information concerning children's involvement in and response to the incident appeared to reflect police
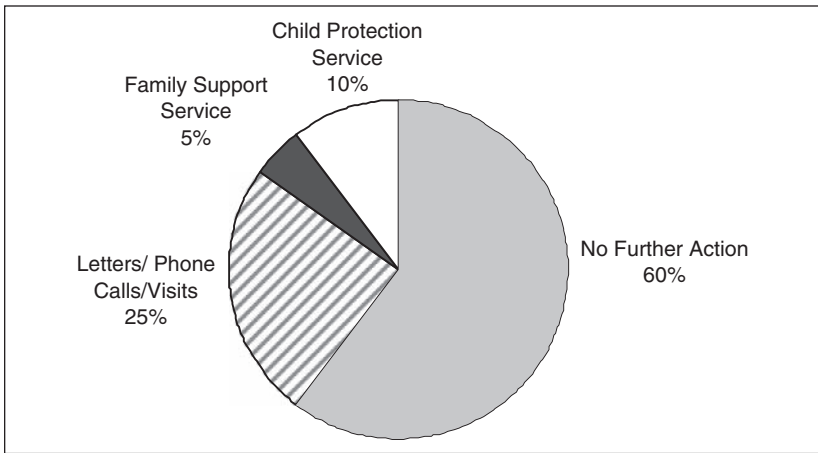
Figure 1. Social services' response to notified families

Table 3. Notified Families' Current/Previous Level of Involvement With Children's Services

Previous Involvement	No.	%
None	74	41
Low	47	26
Medium	33	17
High	10	5
Open case	19	10
History on case missing	1	1
Total	184	100

officers' limited levels of engagement with children at the scene of an incident (Stanley et al., 2010b).

Social Services' Intervention Levels

Only 15% of the families notified to children's social services received a social work assessment or intervention. In most of these cases, this assessment or intervention was classified at a child protection rather than a family support level. Ten percent of these cases were already open to social workers

so that the notification system can be said to have triggered a service response for only 5% of sample cases. Sixty percent of cases pursued a "no further action" pathway, whereas in 25% of cases (all in one site), families were sent a letter or were phoned or visited by a social worker (3 cases only) but no additional intervention was offered. Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic representation of this distribution between service pathways.

Table 3 shows that although the majority of the families in the sample had experienced some previous contact with social services, 40% of families in the sample had had no previous contact with social services in that area. The notification system therefore had the effect of drawing a substantial group of families not previously in contact with children's social services into the service's orbit.

The key characteristic distinguishing those notified cases that received a service from children's social workers from those that did not was whether the case was already open. All incidents where children were injured received an assessment but injuries to adults did not increase the likelihood of a family receiving a service, despite social workers saying that such information would be useful to them; nor did the victim's pregnancy, on its own, act to increase eligibility. However, families with infants below 12 months were more likely to leap over the service threshold by virtue of the child's perceived vulnerability.

Social workers were aware that very few notified cases received a service and a number commented that too many notified incidents involved verbal altercations that they did not consider warranted their service's attention: "we wouldn't accept a notification [or] referral from another agency on that basis" (Senior Manager 1). Managers also highlighted the amount of resources consumed by the process of screening notifications. In one site, social work managers suggested that this issue could be addressed by police taking on more of a role in filtering out "low-level" incidents:

> I would say the Police need to have a filtering process . . . Because they are just as capable of doing that as we are and they are, they are, their officers are supposed to be child protection trained. (Child Protection Manager 2)

However, in the other site, practitioners argued that police risk assessments were focused on the victim, not the child, and managers insisted that social work expertise was required for the task of filtering notifications:

> . . . we would have to be comfortable that the officer actually assessing the situation had a knowledge of degrees of domestic violence . . . I

wouldn't feel comfortable that police officers have that level of knowledge . . . (Senior Manager 2)

Ongoing Communication Between Police and Children's Services

Social services' records provided limited evidence of ongoing communication between social workers and the police on newly notified or ongoing cases. Social workers described difficulties in contacting both specialist domestic violence and frontline officers outside the setting of formal statutory meetings such as child protection case conferences. Unless a case was receiving a service at a statutory child protection level, it was considered unlikely that the police would inform social services about the outcome of any court proceedings involving perpetrators of domestic violence; similarly, social workers acknowledged that they were only likely to feed information back to the police if a family were receiving a statutory child protection intervention. Joint investigations with the police were only likely to take place when a criminal investigation into child abuse was occurring in parallel with social services' assessments or enquiries. Joint investigations did not appear to occur when the police investigation was focused on domestic violence.

Both police officers and social workers interviewed considered that interprofessional training on domestic violence could enhance understanding of each other's roles. Police officers commented that they had limited understanding of what social workers did with the information that they sent them and of social work roles and tasks generally:

. . . we need to be having joint training and things like that to improve it, to know each other's parts, what we do, because I still don't know what other agencies do properly, I know they do something but I don't know what. (Domestic Violence Specialist Officer 6)

Practitioners from both services suggested that shadowing might offer another means of developing knowledge of other professionals' procedures and practice:

. . . other agencies they don't actually understand what our role is, you know. . . what would be really, really good is people should shadow. . .and they should do some training on what the role, the roles of different agencies are and what different agencies can actually offer. (Child Protection Social Worker 4)

New Developments in Filtering and Risk Assessment Systems

The survey of LSCBs provided the opportunity to develop a picture of the various approaches which services across England and Wales had developed to try and address some of the problems of the notification system described above. The survey, undertaken between December 2007 and January 2008 produced 57 responses (a response rate of 35%); of these, 30 respondents identified innovative practice in relation to police notifications in their area with some providing examples of local policy statements or protocols. A number described these local innovations as a response to the high volume of notifications and to concerns that children and parents living with domestic violence were not receiving a service. Some respondents noted that domestic violence had been identified as a key feature in local reviews of child deaths and this is consistent with Brandon et al.'s (2009) overview of 40 serious case reviews in England which found that domestic violence was the most commonly occurring characteristic in the child deaths studied.

Survey respondents described the range of agencies contributing to innovative approaches to notifications in their area. Social services featured as a partner in all the models described and the police were identified as a partner in all but two examples. Health and education services were cited as participating partners in about half the approaches reported. Interestingly, voluntary sector agencies were involved in less than half the initiatives (13 responses). Analysis identified four key approaches to collaboration in the management of notifications. In some areas, these approaches were used in combination, whereas in others, a single approach was reported.

The first approach identified aimed to increase the possibility of early intervention by diverting families away from social services to either health or voluntary organizations. It was established practice in a number of the areas surveyed for police to provide victims with information about specialist domestic violence services and to make a referral to that agency on the victim's behalf with the victim's consent. A number of responses described copying health visitors, midwives, or school nurses into notifications to provide them with information that would inform their ongoing work with families.

The second approach involved regular interagency meetings or panels that undertook the task of screening notifications. In some areas, a specialist interagency domestic violence team assumed this function; in others, a social worker was seconded to the police domestic violence team to work alongside police officers screening notifications (see, for example, Thiara & Chung,

2008). These arrangements offered the potential for decisions about intervention to be made on the basis of information collected from two or more organizations' databases.

The third model entailed harnessing police risk-assessment procedures or protocols as tools for filtering and routing families to services following a domestic violence incident. Risk assessment tools used by the police with victims of domestic violence in England and Wales have been subject to evaluation (Humphreys et al., 2005) and refinement and one such model, the CAADA ACPO DASH Model 2009 (see Richards, Letchford, & Stratton, 2008), which used three response levels, was being used in one area to determine the level of children's social services' response to notifications. Incidents classified by the police at the highest "gold" level triggered a statutory protection response from children's services; the "silver" level evoked a family support response, and a "bronze" or low-risk incident was recorded on social services database as a "contact record" unless other information suggested a need for assessment of the child's situation.

The fourth model identified represents an attempt to develop a risk-assessment tool that, unlike those originating with the police, focuses on the child rather than the victim. Barnardo's Risk Matrix (Bell & McGoren, 2003) offers a framework for organizing the information on a child and classifies children's and family's needs at one of four levels indicating the appropriate service response level. This matrix has been adopted by social services in some London boroughs, and there is some early evidence that it has assisted in clarifying social workers' understandings of service thresholds (Calder, 2009). However, the matrix is quite lengthy and has not been systematically adopted by the police.

Discussion

Although more than half the incidents included in our sample were rated as low in severity and social workers complained about notifications of "verbal altercations," the severity of a particular incident is distinct from and may not be related to the impact of domestic violence on children in the family. While police records only rarely included accounts of children's distress, some of the descriptions of distressed children provided were evoked by what appeared to be incidents of verbal abuse. The impact of domestic violence on children and young people is mediated by a range of factors (Edleson, 2004; Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008), many of which are not immediately apparent to police officers at the scene of a domestic violence incident. It is also the case that a specific incident will not convey the extent or history of abuse

in a family. Nevertheless, although they provide only a snapshot picture, police reports on domestic violence incidents represent an opportunity for services to intervene to end abusive behavior and support children exposed to domestic violence.

In addition to information about the nature of the incident, witness statements, and information on such issues as age and disability which indicate children's vulnerability, the information most readily available to inform police and child protective services' decisions about intervention is that already contained in those organizations' records. This includes the history of previous incidents, criminal records, and social services' previous involvement with a family. However, this study found that mechanisms for bringing that historic information together to inform risk assessments were underdeveloped. The information conveyed to social services was limited and social workers did not appear to use it systematically.

It was particularly notable that only a very small proportion of families notified received any intervention from social workers. Although some of the "no further action" families may have been offered safety planning by specialist police officers or have been "signposted" to specialist domestic violence services, for many the opportunity for change offered by the police intervention in the domestic violence incident was lost. We noted above that for a substantial proportion of the families notified, this was their first contact with child protective services. The vast majority of these "first time" families were sucked into the system only to be spat out again—only two families receiving social work intervention had no previous contact with children's social services.

The survey of innovative practice proved helpful in suggesting some solutions to the problems identified in the notification system. However, we are wary of advocating the use of actuarial risk assessment tools to classify and route cases when such a small proportion of families notified to children's social services is receiving social work intervention. The likelihood of false positives and negatives associated with the use of such tools (Munro, 2004) is a particular concern when so many families are being classified as low risk. Moreover, as Humphreys (2007) points out, police risk-assessment tools rely on a checklist approach that demands one of a limited number of responses to set questions—they do not open up dialogues with victims who arguably possess the fullest information pertaining to risks. Although there is potential for using established police risk-assessment procedures to filter and route families to services, an overreliance on police assessments may result in a focus on the victim's rather than the child's needs and the two are not always commensurate. Interagency panels, teams, or co-location arrangements that maximize opportunities for organizations to share information and that seek to develop

workable procedures for sharing information have much to offer. Establishing structures that promote ongoing communication between services might also address the lack of feedback from social services to the police noted by this research.

Such interagency structures need to develop means of ensuring that families who do not meet children's social services' threshold for intervention or who receive an assessment but no service are offered other forms of support in relation to domestic violence. That support might be provided by preventive child welfare services, health services, or specialist domestic violence agencies, including those working with perpetrators. As visitation and access to children provided the context in which many of the domestic violence incidents in the sample occurred, supervised visitation appears to represent a relevant preventive service that might be more freely available. Currently, in England and Wales, such services are restricted to cases where families are receiving a child protective service or when ordered by the courts. Such services would need to employ appropriately trained staff to avoid the risk that supervised visitation can be a means of perpetuating abuse (Harrison et al., 2006; Radford & Hester, 2006).

Conclusion

This study provides evidence of the progress that both police and child protective services have made in developing their recognition of and response to children's exposure to domestic violence while identifying key shortcomings in the current level of response. It also focuses attention on the challenges that occur at the interface between universal and highly targeted public services. Defining children's exposure to domestic violence as a form of maltreatment under the law has brought children's involvement in the problem to agencies' attention but services appear to be struggling to provide a response that effectively discriminates between levels of need and offers varying levels of intervention.

These difficulties occur in part because both domestic violence and children's exposure to it are hidden experiences that families do not expose readily to the scrutiny of services. The information required to inform a calibrated response to the needs of families experiencing domestic violence is not easily accessed and has to be mined from a range of sources. This need to dig deep for information constitutes a strong argument for developing collaborative structures that promote effective information exchange between the police and child protective services.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Note

1. LSCBs are multiagency bodies that coordinate and monitor the work of all agencies involved in child protection and welfare within a local authority.

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Bios

Nicky Stanley, MA, MSc, CQSW, is a Professor of Social Work at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston, United Kingdom. She directed the U.K. study of police and children's social services responses to children and families experiencing domestic violence undertaken between 2007 and 2009. She researches in the fields of domestic violence, parental mental health and child welfare, young people's mental health, and interagency work. Research projects commissioned by central and local government as well as voluntary organizations include studies of domestic violence initiatives, the mental health of young people, teenage pregnancy, and student suicide. She is a trained social worker who practiced in a range of settings in England and Scotland. She has published books on domestic violence and child protection, mothers' mental health needs, and inquiries in health and social care. She is coeditor of *Child Abuse Review* and is currently heading up the national evaluation of social work practices in England.

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