

Final Evaluation Report of the Cardiff Women's Safety Unit

Executive Summary

The following are highlights from the research findings contained in this report:

- The CWSU was referred 1150 women and their 1482 children from mid December 2001 through to January 2003. The report is based on structured interviews with 222 clients coming to the CWSU during this time and official data from the South Wales Police and the Crown Prosecution Service on domestic violence in the Cardiff area.
- Most CWSU clients are white females who are less than 40 years old, have children in their households and receive benefits. Their partners tend to be white males who are less than 40 years old, employed, have previous domestic violence complaints and are still in relationships with CWSU clients.
- CWSU clients have serious and extensive abusive histories. The typical CWSU client has experienced about 6 years of physical abuse from her current partner. The average CWSU client reported that she experienced more than 5 violent acts from her current partner, and more than 7 violent acts from a partner in her lifetime.
- This violence has left CWSU clients with many injuries (eg from current partners more than 1 in 4 women have had bruised faces, more than 1 in 4 women have had bruised arms and legs, and more than 1 in 10 have received split lips and black eyes) and negative mental health outcomes (eg about 4 in 10 are currently experiencing depression and/or anxiety).
- Partners with drug problems inflicted significantly more violence and injuries on their CWSU partners. Substance abuse treatment needs to include screening for domestic violence, and batterer programs need to address the implications of substance abuse on the severity and propensity of offending.
- One fourth of CWSU clients report that they had been sexually abused by their current partners. Prior police contact was related to sexual abuse. Specifically, about 1 in 3 perpetrators who had previous domestic violence complaints sexually abused their partners, compared to 1 in 10 perpetrators without previous domestic violence complaints. As a potential risk indicator, prior police complaints should alert both police officers and victim advocates that there is a greater likelihood of sexual abuse present in these relationships compared to couples experiencing their first police intervention.
- Specific domestic violence protocols have been agreed between the CWSU and the South Wales Police and Crown Prosecution Service in Cardiff. Consequently there is improved co-ordination between these agencies and a more victim-oriented approach to case processing.
- The South Wales Police was the agency that most frequently referred women to the CWSU (62%). About three-quarters of CWSU clients received referrals to other agencies. The biggest source of referrals by the CWSU was to the Homesafe agency (for target hardening).
- Almost 1200 persons working in criminal justice and community agencies in the South Wales area have received domestic violence training sessions from the CWSU.

- Analysis of police data indicates that there is a positive, across the board trend in Cardiff as a result of the CWSU, the Police Watch programme and the pro-arrest police domestic violence policy. For example, the number of repeat victims has decreased by 36% (from 58 to 37 per month), the number of victims refusing to make a complaint has decreased by 18% (from 99 to 81 per month), and the amount of concern for children reports submitted by officers has increased by 139% (from 22 to 55 per month).
- CWSU clients were generally satisfied with how the police handled the incident. The majority of clients thought the police were courteous, respectful, appeared concerned, took the time to listen, and took the situation seriously. Victim satisfaction was related to both officer behaviour and officer demeanour, but the latter exhibited a stronger impact. Police training should impart to officers the power their attitudes have over victim satisfaction.
- Attitudinal surveys were completed by 12 prosecutors in the Cardiff office of the CPS. Prosecutors feel that the CPS promotes taking domestic violence seriously and that the CWSU allows them to more efficiently and effectively handle cases of domestic violence. When asked to think about who impacts their ability to effectively prosecute domestic violence cases, prosecutors were most likely to list someone from the CWSU. Relationships between prosecutors and CWSU staff are very positive, and relative to other agencies in the community, prosecutors ranked their relationships with the CWSU the highest in degree of contact, trust, understanding, co-operation and empathy.
- New court procedures have been implemented for Magistrates' Court and Crown Court in Cardiff. Now all domestic violence cases are flagged, sent to the same court, and reviewed pre-trial on the same day each week. As a result of having the Pre-Trial Review (PTR) and trial procedures streamlined and priority given to domestic violence cases, remarkable results have been achieved. For example, compared to the standard court procedure which typically lasts 14 weeks, the domestic violence procedure in Cardiff lasts approximately 7 weeks. All victims are supported by a member of the CWSU, and a member of the CWSU attends PTR each week to offer advice and information about domestic violence cases. All of these procedures allow for a timelier, more consistent approach to how cases of domestic violence are processed in Cardiff.
- Analysis of 77 CPS domestic violence case files showed that charging standards were used in 97% of cases and charges were maintained in 83% of cases. The percentage of cases where victims have retracted and subsequently been discontinued has been steadily decreasing, but is still substantial (over 60%). Victim participation (in the form of attending court and making a personal statement), more dangerous offenders, and cases going to PTR all reduce the likelihood of a case being discontinued.
- Clients' perceptions of CWSU service were overwhelmingly positive. The average response on a scale rating the CWSU from 1=not effective to 10=most effective in helping clients obtain a safe outcome was 9.2. Only one of the 222 clients interviewed thought that meeting with the CWSU increased the threat of or the actual violence they experienced. This means that, for the overwhelming majority of victims, the CWSU has been able to achieve the delicate balance of intervening in difficult situations without furthering risk to victims or their children. When asked how the CWSU service could be improved, all the respondents suggested more advertising (to alert more women to the helpful service provided by the CWSU), more workers and/or more funding.