



**Domestic Violence MARACS
(Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences)
for Very High-Risk Victims
in Cardiff, Wales: Views from the Victims**

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Executive Summary

- The first MARAC was held in April 2003 and was attended by members of 16 agencies, including police, probation, local authority, health, housing, refuge and the Women's Safety Unit. The goal of these meetings is to provide a forum for sharing information and taking actions that will reduce future harm to very high-risk victims and their children.
- This report is the second phase of the evaluation of the MARACs, which focuses on identifying levels of recidivism 12-months on with police data and by interviewing victims. It should be read in tandem with the first phase of the evaluation.
- The literature review identified five key ways that the safety of women and children experiencing domestic violence may be increased: increased and on-going communication; conducting risk assessments; providing advocacy to victims; translating policy into action; and holding perpetrators to account. The MARACs improve the response provided to high-risk victims of domestic violence in each of these ways.
- The literature also points out that a multi-agency response needs to take into account the complex set of issues confronting women (e.g., emotional, financial, children, etc.) to ensure that they have the resources and support that they need to make the difficult decision to leave and ultimately to remain safe.
- The police incident data revealed that a substantial proportion of victims, more than 4 in 10, have had no further reported incidents of domestic violence one year after the MARAC. This is particularly notable given their extensive histories of domestic violence and identification as high-risk for repeat violence.
- The interviews with victims revealed several important findings:
 - Victims knew that agencies were working together on their behalf, namely because information was shared across agencies about their cases.
 - Holding participating agencies accountable for their attendance and performance in the MARACs is an on-going issue noted by some victims.
 - Many women specifically mentioned that the support they received was from many different agencies; however the WSU was often viewed as the primary source of information, support and assistance they received.
 - Practical assistance, such as having their locks changed, was very highly valued by the women.
 - Negative comments focused on poor evidence collection by the police and not being kept informed about decisions in their cases (bail, custody, adjournments, etc.).
 - The majority of women have regained a sense of freedom and a degree of control over their lives since the MARAC intervention, usually as a result of separating from their abusive partners.
 - A strong family support network played an important role in women's ability to manage the abusive situation, and ultimately to leave their abusive partners.
 - Child contact remains a problematic area in terms of fear, continued violence and being able to 'move on' following domestic violence.
 - Nearly all victims attributed responsibility for 'ending the violence' firstly to themselves and then secondly acknowledged the importance of having multi-agency support once they were ready to change their situations.
- The evidence from the evaluation of the MARACs makes it clear that taking a holistic multi-agency approach to domestic violence can reduce recidivism, even amongst the population most at risk.
- This research also revealed the difficulties of using risk factors to predict who will be revictimised as well as in accessing high-risk victims for research purposes.

1. Introduction¹

Evaluating the MARACs

Phase 1 Evaluation

The first phase of the MARAC evaluation period was 6-months in duration (Oct 2003-Mar 2004). The evaluation included two components: a process evaluation and an outcome evaluation. The process evaluation aimed to identify *how* the MARACs draw on the various abilities of the agency representatives to create harm reduction strategies for victims of domestic violence. Interviewing participants from the various agencies and observing six monthly MARACs provided the data necessary to reveal the strengths (and limitations) of multi-agency partnerships. The aim of the outcome evaluation was to document *what* the MARACs are able to accomplish. Of particular concern was to what extent these multi-agency meetings were able to reduce harm to high-risk victims and their children. To determine whether safety was increased and fear and/or violence had been reduced, several forms of data were collected including police call-out and incident data, and telephone interviews with a sub-sample of victims.

The first evaluation report is available online (<http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/whoswho/robinson.html>), however it is important to highlight here some key findings. First, both the police data and the victim interviews revealed that **the majority of victims (about 6 in 10) had not been re-victimized since the MARAC**. Second, respondents made it clear that MARACs facilitated the accomplishment of many key objectives including information-sharing between agencies, contributing to victims' safety, identifying key contacts within agencies, and raising awareness about the impact of domestic violence on children. Although preliminary, these were very positive results that revealed the **benefits of taking a multi-agency approach** to helping women (and their children) that are experiencing domestic violence.

Phase 2 Evaluation

This report details the findings from the second phase of the MARAC evaluation, which was conducted from Oct 2004-Apr 2005. The aim of this second phase of the evaluation was to follow-up with the same victims to determine how many were able to live free of violence over a longer period of time. In addition, we want to describe in more detail the experiences of the victims themselves with the MARAC process and their attitudes about a range of important issues such as the levels of support they received from agencies in Cardiff; their explanations for the abuse and attitudes about staying with or leaving their abusive partner; the ways they attempted to stay safe and how these worked; and the impact of these experiences on their children. To accomplish these goals we conducted in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of victims who had gone through the MARAC process. We also collected and analyzed police data to determine how many post-MARAC incidents of domestic violence were committed against these women. In this way we hope to provide a more longitudinal account of the impact of taking a multi-agency approach to domestic violence, as epitomised by the MARACs. We also hope to shed light on the perspectives held by high-risk domestic violence victims, an under-researched population and one which we believe hold many important insights about how the responses taken by criminal justice and community agencies can be improved.

Changes to the MARAC Process

Since the first evaluation report, some changes to the MARAC process are worth noting. First, they are now held fortnightly instead of monthly. This change was implemented to cope with the

¹ The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge Safer Cardiff for funding this research, and thank the victims for sharing their time and insights in order to improve the response to domestic violence.

workload and keep the MARAC meetings to a manageable length of time. Second, agency attendance at the MARAC meetings has increased. There is now regular attendance and input from both the areas of education and mental health. This is particularly encouraging as the presence of these sectors was deemed to vital by those interviewed for the first report, and was thus a key report recommendation. Finally, and arguably most importantly, a review mechanism has been incorporated into the MARAC process. An update on the implementation of actions arising from the cases of the previous meeting is provided by relevant agencies. This action follow-up takes place before attention turns to the current MARAC cases. The review process ensures that all agencies are accountable for their role in individual cases. Furthermore, it serves to provide all agencies with up to date information regarding the status of very high risk cases.

In the next section we review the relevant literature in order to locate the multi-agency work in Cardiff in the larger context of multi-agency working in general and in other jurisdictions. We also review the literature on victims' perceptions and beliefs about domestic violence, separating from abusive partners, the cyclical nature of domestic violence, and how they negotiate their own safety within these circumstances.

2. Literature Review

Benefits of Multi-Agency Approaches

The Challenge

The research conducted recently, both in the UK and the US, indicates that the challenge is to create and maintain coordinated efforts that effectively result in desirable and predictable outcomes for victims, such as greater access to civil and criminal court remedies that increase protection, more effective control of the abuser by the criminal justice system, and increased access to community resources that provide prompt and appropriate support for the victim, both in the present and as she plans for the future (Shepard and Pence, 1999).

Ways to Meet the Challenge

Existing international research has evaluated the various ways in which to meet those challenges. Studies conducted by organisations in the late 1990s recognised a need for "a systematic effort to raise the profile of violence against women must involve every sector of society – the judicial system, the media, educators, health care authorities, governmental and non-governmental agencies..." (UNICEF, 1997: 441). Similarly, research conducted in the UK has recommended more comprehensive, better-informed and co-ordinated, earlier and more proactive response across all relevant agencies. These include social services, the health services, the criminal justice system, housing and homelessness agencies and the police (Mullender and Hague, 2000).

Multi-agency responses to issues such as domestic violence have received significant governmental interest and support and, as a result, have proliferated in recent years. In addition, multi-agency operation has received considerable support from Women's Aid, one of the most fundamental and enduring providers of support for victims of domestic violence. There are notable case studies, both in the UK and the US that reinforce this support by highlighting the benefits that can be gleaned from a multi-agency response (Women's Aid Briefing, 2003).

It has been seen that a multi-agency approach can be a creative 'next-step'. Such responses offer the opportunity to enhance awareness, involve more agencies, and ultimately improve policy and practice by developing a domestic violence strategy that can be implemented consistently across a whole local area (Hague, 1998). **The MARACs epitomise these recommended methods of meeting the challenges faced by victims of domestic violence.**

Measuring Success

The MARACs retain the ability to turn the 'opportunity' into tangible success. Yet how do you effectively measure the potential impact of taking a multi-agency approach? As the Women's Aid's Safety and Justice Briefing paper states it is important to measure success in relation to increasing women and children's safety. The first evaluation of the MARACs and research conducted elsewhere has identified **five key ways that the safety of women and children experiencing domestic violence may be increased**. Each of these is detailed below.

1. Increased and Ongoing Communication

It has been noted that in order for multi-agency responses (or coordinated community responses as they are known in the US) to succeed "there must be ongoing communication between among officers, prosecutors, advocates, and probation officers that pertains to specific cases" (Uekert, 2003). Each practitioner is part of an organisational network. In order for this network to work effectively, each member must act consistently and be aware of what the other members are likely to do in response to the situations before them (Shepard and Pence, 1999). When agencies agree to exchange information, not only does the response to individual cases improve, but it also enables the collective response to be aware of actions taken so far; information sharing reduces fragmentation of knowledge (Shepard and Pence, 1999).

One of the key findings of the first phase of this MARAC evaluation revolved around the **importance of information-sharing** (Robinson, 2004). This theme was viewed by many of those interviewed as undoubtedly enabling agencies to help provide very high risk victims of domestic violence with the assistance that they need in order to remain safe. The communication of information within the meetings serves to fill the gaps in the knowledge of particular cases. Each agency can provide a different and thus crucial perspective. Their differing perspectives enable the jigsaw of individual situations to be pieced together and therefore provide a more accurate assessment of risks faced by women in question.

Furthermore, multi-agency interaction at the meeting enables key contacts within partner agencies to be identified. The importance of this development is highlighted within both US and UK research. Recent US based literature offers the opinion that "specialization tends to improve communication, as staff trained specifically on the dynamics associated with domestic violence cases often serve as key contacts within agencies" (Uekert, 2003: 133). **The MARAC participants exemplify this: their presence at the meetings, the information they provide, and the awareness they have of each other contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of the support provided to victims.**

2. Conducting Risk Assessment

Much of the work done within this area suggests that agencies must engage with women and help them to understand that their own perceptions of risk are vital, and that if they fear for their safety then they should not ignore that fear (Campbell, 2004). The organisations involved in a multi-agency response should pay attention to victim perceptions as legitimate signs of increased risk and include these concerns in safety planning and risk reduction strategies (re-housing, removal of the perpetrator in the form of strictly enforced bail conditions, high level probation, etc.).

The findings from the first MARAC report highlight the benefits of risk assessment within a multi-agency set-up. The use of risk assessment tools, particularly during the immediate aftermath of an incident, can help police officers to gather detailed information from victims. This information when passed to other agencies can ensure up front **identification of needs and services to meet those needs**. In addition the provision of timely, relevant information with regards to levels of risk can help identify those victims in exceptionally dangerous situations who will need increased assistance from police or other agencies (Robinson, 2004).

3. Providing Advocacy to Victims

A study conducted by Bybee and Sullivan (1999) examined the role of various predictors of re-victimisation for abused women. These included prior abuse and access to community resources. The study discovered that women will turn to a number of external agencies to protect them from violence. They were seen to include the police, welfare assistance, advocacy and housing programmes. The findings from this research highlight that access to resources and social support serve as protective factors against continued abuse whilst also increasing the quality of life for many participants. Studies such as this indicate that as the number of supportive people in a woman's life increases, so too do her options for protection and safety.

Subsequent work conducted by Sullivan and Bybee (2002) evaluated the effectiveness of community-based support and advocacy intervention for abused women and their children. The experimental intervention within this project involved advocacy for mothers and a 10-week support and education group for the children. The findings revealed significantly higher levels of self-competence in the children (in contrast to those in the control group), and caused improvement in women's depression and self-esteem over time.

Research conducted in the UK has also highlighted the importance of advocacy in innovative criminal justice responses to domestic violence, such as specialized domestic violence courts. The success of these courts depends on the strength of the multi-agency partnerships between criminal justice and voluntary support agencies that provide advocacy to victims (Cook, Burton, Robinson & Valley, 2004).

Interaction between health care professionals, advocacy support, and criminal justice system agencies is encouraged as a way to more effectively target resources to the needs of abused women. **The MARACs provide a venue for many agencies to both advocate and provide support for victims of domestic violence.**

4. Translating Policy into Action

Shepard and Pence (1999) examined the ways in which the effectiveness of coordinated community responses can be improved. One key aspect that they highlight is the role of middle managers and frontline workers within the meetings. They believe that a combination of staff who retain the power to change policy, and those that have day to day experiences of cases serve to maximise the impact that agencies can have at both the individual and collaborative level. Furthermore it has been shown that successful coordination efforts have been achieved through the involvement of individuals with exceptional leadership skills, and the ability to resolve issues with diverse groups of people. The ability to translate policies into action, in combination with a passionate commitment to the work, undoubtedly benefits collective efforts to achieve safety for women (Shephard and Pence, 1999).

The attendance at the MARAC meetings reflects the necessary combination of management and on the ground practitioners. Individual case workers will often attend meetings in addition to regular management attendees in order to provide up to the minute information and concerns. The middle management disseminate information and actions to the relevant case workers immediately after each MARAC. The ability to relay and enact actions quickly and effectively from management to frontline staff ensures that the **MARAC meetings are never merely 'talking shops'** between agency workers that do not have the authority to enact change and thus improve service to victims.

5. Holding Perpetrators to Account

As the Women's Aid Consultation Paper (2003) states programmes that prevent perpetrators re-offending are in their infancy in the U.K 'both in terms of their effectiveness and extent of provision'. It can be argued that UK schemes and initiatives to date have predominantly focused upon the victim. However, a review of US based research reveals a focus upon the perpetrator in terms of exploring effective ways in which to reduce repeat offending. As a result there is a large body of research dedicated to monitoring arrest and charge ratios, sentencing and rehabilitation (Gamache, Edleson and Schock, 1988).

Much US based research of the past focused on the impact of Community Intervention Projects (CIPs). These organisations are designed to change the responses by the criminal justice and social service systems to abused women and their perpetrators. One such study examined the findings from previous CIP evaluations and found that they had a significant impact on increasing the levels of perpetrator arrests, convictions and court mandates to treatment (Syers and Edleson, 1992).

Crucially for the purposes of this study, recent reviews of research conducted in the US have highlighted that police action, particularly arrest of the perpetrator, is more effective as a deterrent when it takes place in conjunction with additional criminal justice efforts or other interventions such as that of social services and other legal services. In addition, US findings reveal that a multi-agency approach to the prosecution of domestic violence cases appears to be effective, with one study discovering that there is a reduction in recidivism with the interaction between successful prosecution, probation and court ordered counselling (Jordan, 2004; Steinman, 1990).

Ultimately, research reveals that while the successes of individual components of a coordinated response have been modest, there is evidence to suggest a **coordinated approach reduces further incidents of violence** (Shepard and Pence, 1999). The very low rates of re-victimisation documented in the first evaluation of the MARACs supports this assertion. However, despite widespread acknowledgement of the importance of agency interaction, evaluation of its role should retain a degree of caution. There are those in the past that have debated as to whether perhaps multi-agency responses could be seen as a “face-saver at a time of resource shortage” (Hague, 1998: 445). In a more recent assessment of the contribution of multi-agency approaches to domestic violence, Hague et al concluded that although coordinated responses could sometimes take a creative approach to tackling domestic violence, they also ran the risk of merely becoming talking shops if not structured effectively (2003: 53).

In addition, concern has been expressed over the lack of involvement of victims and witnesses in the monitoring and intervention process. This leads some to highlight the potential absence of agency accountability to the subjects of any given response. Mullender and Hague's work (2000) with survivors reveals that they are often able to offer essential advice to agencies on what women need in terms of assistance, and in order to feel safer. Their research indicates that “**what works is a combination of practical assistance and empowering staff attitudes within a fundamental commitment to keeping women and children safe**” (2000: 1). This work revealed that uneven responses, obstacles and delays left women feeling unsafe. It is these concerns which have led us to access victims' views directly in this evaluation.

First however it is important to review the literature on victims' attitudes about why domestic violence occurs; the strategies they employ to try to keep their children and themselves safe; and the difficulty of leaving an abusive relationship. In the first phase of the MARAC evaluation respondents viewed victim unwillingness to leave an abusive partner as one of the key factors hindering the effectiveness of the MARACs. It is therefore important to understand in some detail why this is so difficult before proceeding to hear from the victims themselves.

Victims' Explanations for Abuse

An analysis of existing literature indicates that explanations for abuse are inherently linked to the impact that the abuse has upon a woman. It has been observed that women move through and between various 'stages' during an abusive relationship. These stages can include discounting early violence for the sake of the relationship, undertaking careful monitoring of the partner's behaviour through to defining the abuse as unacceptable, and ultimately moving out of the relationship (Barnish, 2004). However existing research observes that the movement between stages is not consistent, linear or progressive.

The effects of abuse can manifest in a number of ways. Studies into the psychological effects of domestic abuse suggest that women lose their self-esteem and identity over the time that they endure chronic abuse. It is common for women to seek rational explanations for the abuse. It has been noted that women will often perceive their situation to be a consequence of their own

shortcomings or failure to choose the right man. They may come to believe that the abuse is deserved or that they are to blame for the violence (Smith and Gittelman, 1994; Carderelli, 1997). Furthermore interviews with women reveal expressions of bewilderment concerning the incidents that have taken place. However it is noted that such comments are often accompanied with the belief that they must have done something to provoke the violence.

Women may doubt their perceptions of reality and come to trust their partner's definitions of the situation. It has been noted that they can be vulnerable to expressions of contrition and remorse, particularly during the early stages of the relationship (Carderelli, 1997). It is possible that women may come to normalise the abuse, and believe that it cannot be as bad as attempting to leave the relationship. Women may become adept at minimising the situation, excusing their partner's behaviour and hiding the extent of abuse from family and external agencies (Baker, 1997).

If the abuse becomes more frequent or harder to control it is likely that demoralisation and depression will develop. The negative effects of domestic violence on women's sociological and psychological well-being are widely documented. One such study focuses on the long-term trends in depression for those who have experienced domestic violence (Anderson et al., 2003). A major finding to emerge from this study is that depression can increase for some women "especially if there are few protective factors available to them" (2003: 2). Such protective factors could include a strong family network, access to advocacy support, and information regarding financial and housing concerns.

Negotiating Safety

It has been noted that once violence becomes an established pattern, there is little that a woman can do to prevent its occurrence. However there is a wealth of research that indicates that most women will certainly attempt to **implement strategies to control or minimise the abuse**. Such studies focus on women's implementation of certain 'survival strategies' in response to the abuse they endure (Lempert, 1996; Carderelli, 1997).

Developing Agency

Lempert (1996) examines the ways in which women develop **agency** within abusive relationships. The techniques employed by abused women incorporated face-saving strategies to keep the violence invisible, problem solving and self-preservation strategies. The techniques were implemented for a variety of reasons – to initially preserve the relationship, to figure out the reasons for the violence, and ultimately to keep it from reoccurring. Lempert acknowledges that distinctions between the various techniques that are implemented often become blurred as the abuse becomes more public or more violent.

It is thought that problem-solving strategies focus predominantly on managing the violence. The techniques often include rationalization, minimising the significance of the violence, and self-blame. One theme that frequently appears in literature within this specific area is that of passivity. Research into the forms of victim action as described above, show that they often do not reduce the levels of violence but they do substantially alter the ways that the women experience themselves, as they become excessively passive (1996: 281). However it is also possible to see that women will choose passive resistance as an active strategy of survival, as a way to preserve 'self'. The findings are often contradictory but this in itself highlights the complex nature of victim reaction to the abusive environment within which they find themselves.

Lempert's research indicated that when the women's strategies for managing the violence were unsuccessful, their senses of self were undermined. Moreover, as the violence continues or intensifies depression and isolation often hamper women's survival strategies. Studies suggest that by accommodating violence, or trying to do what is easier in an attempt to minimise the violence, women relinquish autonomy and support. Many women attempt to 'do everything right' within any given situation. It has been noted that this strategy is all-consuming and encourages women to abandon their own sense of self to meet the standards of the abusive partner.

Help-Seeking

There are additional studies that indicate that women will seek help, in the form of advocacy agencies for example, and do so with more frequency as the abuse in the relationship continues or escalates. Such research observes that when women find these agencies helpful they may be in a better position to end the abusive relationship (Bybee and Sullivan, 1999).

The conflicting results of previous studies effectively illustrate the complex nature of domestic violence. There is no one comprehensive explanation and thus no single solution to resolving individual situations. The discussion offers one particularly interesting question namely, **who is responsible for ending the abuse; the individual or external agencies?**

Some studies reveal that the abuser's control over the woman and the situation was so strong that the woman came to believe that no-one would be able to help. Some women revealed the often contradictory opinion that although they were the only ones that could anything to stop the abuse, they were also psychologically and socially powerless to mount an attempt to stop the violence or seek outside help (Lempert, 1996).

Conversely, it has also been seen that isolation has made outside input more important as it was perceived as 'objective information' (Lempert, 1996: 283). While some women would settle for whatever relief their managing techniques could bring, some women within this study articulated the need to look for something new that might provide them with respite or an explanation for the abuse they were suffering.

Furthermore, it is clear that the decision to remain with an abusive partner, the refusal to cooperate with police, or interact with support agencies stems from a multitude of complex, ongoing, inter-connected issues. Women have the **choice** and this reality often renders the action of any response, whether it be multi-agency or individual, powerless to enact change in a situation. For example, if a woman is unwilling to break up the abusive relationship then it is very difficult for any agency intervention to be effective.

Relationship Separation

It is evident from the literature that separation is an extremely difficult state to achieve (Humphreys et al, 2003). The process is highly complex involving overcoming both social and psychological obstacles. It has been argued that the complexity and difficulties of individual women's lives were rarely acknowledged in the past (Baker, 1997). Existing research stresses the importance of understanding the impact of issues such as lack of financial security, fears for children, and safety issues in a woman's decision to leave her abusive partner (Anderson et al., 2003). It is vital that agencies retain an understanding of the range of issues that confront a woman during this vulnerable period of her life. The ability to anticipate the emergence of these issues greatly enhances the effectiveness of any response.

Economic Dependence

There are numerous studies that highlight the role that financial hardship plays not only in a woman's decision to stay in the abusive situation, but also in the commonly made decision to return to the relationship (Baker, 1997; Martin et al., 2000; Anderson et al., 2003). Women who lack the financial resources to support themselves often have to make difficult decisions. The lack of economic independence may force the woman to question whether they can support themselves and often children, if they decide to leave. They may feel that they will be jeopardizing the well-being of children by leaving a financially secure environment. Further research shows that economic reliance on an abusive partner is an objective risk factor associated with a greater likelihood of returning to an abusive relationship (Martin et al., 2000: 110).

The Women's Aid *Safety and Justice Briefing* (2003) affirmed the need to provide financial guidance to help women rebuild their lives after leaving a violent relationship. The paper highlights the

importance of ensuring that women are informed about the range of welfare benefits that are available to them. The paper also proposes developing guidance for benefit staff on domestic violence issues to ensure that guidance can be properly implemented.

Child Contact

Studies show that having a child with the abusive partner is a crucial issue for women when making decisions concerning separation. The interests of the child are at the forefront of most women's minds. However, even if the decision to leave is reached, women may need to continue contact with abusive ex-partners due to custody and visitation rights. Importantly, the issue of **child contact is often shown as a vulnerable point for continued post-separation violence** and one which obviously has direct and negative consequences for children (Humphreys, 2003).

Fear of Retaliation

Existing literature also highlights the pervading fear of reprisals on the part of the victim (Hoyle, 1998). It is suggested by many that this concern is often a key factor both in a woman's decision to report an incident of abuse (Singer, 1988), and to ultimately leave an abusive relationship. Furthermore research findings reveal this fear and any consequential difficulty in making a decision to leave may well be wholly rational.

An understanding of these issues and challenges, and more importantly, the ability to effectively counter them is vital if support is going to be relevant and effective. The different choices made by individual women reflect the complex priorities of their lives. In addition any support network that is established must provide timely, relevant advice and support that not only helps a woman to leave, but also ensures that she is able to remain away from the abusive situation. Providing appropriate support to women is complicated by the fact that many who do successfully leave the relationship will continue to experience abuse from their ex-partners.

Post-Separation Violence

Much of the existing work on intimate violence against women focuses on the prevalence of abuse that takes place within ongoing relationships. However there are studies that address the issue of abuse that occurs after the victim has left the relationship (Fleury et al., 2000; Humphreys and Thiara, 2003; Kurtz, 1996). **It is commonly assumed that abused women should leave the relationships in order to stay safe but post-separation violence is a common fear, and very often a reality for women who attempt to leave abusive relationships.** For example, the findings from one study reveal that 76% of the 161 separated women initially suffered further abuse from their partner. Although much of the abuse ceased after 6-12 months, almost 36% of the women continued to suffer post separation abuse (Humphrey et al, 2003). This finding is corroborated by additional research that revealed that for more than one-third of women in the sample, ending the relationship did not mean an end to the violence against them (Fleury et al., 2000).

The work conducted by Fleury et al. (2000) discusses implications for improving the community response to women with abusive ex-partners. It is believed that community responses also need to address the needs of survivors who are not ending relationships. In such instances the question needs to be asked as to why individual women are remaining in abusive environments. Is it because they fear retaliation from their partner or his family? Is it the result of limited or no access to individual finances? **A multi-agency response needs to understand the complex set of issues confronting women to ensure that they have the resources and support that they need to make the difficult decision to leave and ultimately to remain safe.**

Returning to Abusive Relationships

The findings from recent studies suggest that women who experienced less violence during separation were more likely to be influenced by any change in the behaviour of an ex-partner. For

example the resolve of these women could potentially be weakened by the ex-partner undertaking a 'charm offensive' (Humphreys et al., 2002). This change in behaviour confused some women particularly if they were experiencing ambivalent feelings about returning to their ex-partners.

Other studies have linked the issues of risk and separation together through a discussion of victims' decisions to return to their abusive partners. Past research indicates that women who leave abusive relationships are at substantial risk of returning to those situations. Interestingly the work within this area indicates that women's perceptions of personal risk when deciding to return to the abusive partner were biased by unrealistic optimism. In addition the level of this bias was significantly greater among those women who expressed with some certainty their decisions for leaving in the beginning (Martin et al., 2000).

The research findings that reveal abused women often underestimate their likelihood of risk highlight the crucial need for support in order to help abused women learn how to assess their own risk more accurately, and help them to make more informed plans for their future safety. Campbell (2004) discusses ways in which the assessment of the dangers faced by abused women can ultimately help them to make more informed plans for their safety.

It is evident that key factors which feature in a woman's decision to stay in an abusive relation include fear of retaliation, economic dependence on their partner, lack of support and an enduring belief that their partner will change (Barnish, 2004). These same factors remain, and arguably take on more significance when a woman makes the decision to leave the abusive relationship. The decision to leave an abusive relationship is a highly involved, traumatic process. It is vital that there is immediate identification of needs, and efficient services in place to meet those needs in order to prevent a return to the relationship and possible re-victimisation.

In the next section we describe the methods we used to collect data for this second phase of the evaluation.

3. Methodology

Overview

The primary aim of the first phase of the evaluation was to ascertain both how the MARACs work in practice and to discover the extent to which these multi-agency meetings are able to reduce harm to very high-risk victims of domestic violence.

The work of this second phase of the evaluation firstly revisits the police data to assess **rates of revictimisation** but then proceeds to document the **perceptions of the victims** themselves. In order to effectively examine the impact of the MARAC meetings it is vital to document the experiences and perceptions of those they are trying to help.

For those victims who appear to be 'success stories' (i.e., they did not experience any repeat violence), we wanted to learn from them to what they attribute the cessation of violence:

- The MARAC process and support offered by multi-agency process; or
- The victim's determination to get herself out of the abusive situation (by leaving her partner, or establishing new parameters within the relationship that are successful at keeping her safe); or
- Some combination of the above.

In this way we hope to shed light on both the potential of the MARACs to assist very high-risk victims while at the same time learning from the victims themselves about the strengths and limitations of outside intervention.

In the sub-sections below we briefly describe the methodology used to collect the two forms of data used in this study: the police data and victim interviews.

Police Data

The files for each MARAC case of the 4 months under study (October 2004 – January 2005) were pulled from the Domestic Abuse Unit (DAU) in Cardiff Central police station in order to obtain up-to-date information for each. If the DAU file on an individual case could not be located then the information would be accessed from the Cardiff Women's Safety Unit (WSU)² if possible. This was deemed to be a viable option by the research team because a protocol has been set up whereby all domestic violence complaints are faxed to the WSU.

Sample

The sample of victims assessed in this evaluation includes 102 women from a 4-month period, followed-up one year after they were included in a MARAC. The proportion for each month is as follows:

▪ October 2003	29	28.4%
▪ November 2003	23	22.5%
▪ December 2003	24	23.5%
▪ <u>January 2004</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>25.5%</u>
▪ TOTAL	102	100%

Analytic Strategy

The primary purpose for collecting the police data was to determine rates of re-victimization during the 12-month period after the MARAC. Therefore the number of additional police complaints received by the police is documented for the sample of 102 women. We also describe the prevalence of each of the risk factors amongst the sample. Finally, bivariate statistical tests were conducted to determine whether any of the following was statistically associated with an increased likelihood of repeat victimization:

- The 15 risk factors used by the South Wales Police to assess victims at the scene
- Demographic characteristics of both the victim and perpetrator
- Features of the criminal justice response
- Relationship status and children

Interviews with Victims

Interview Schedule

In order to effectively examine the impact of the MARAC meetings it is vital to document the experiences and perceptions of the victims and survivors themselves. To that end, we devised a semi-structured interview which is contained in Appendix A. The aim of each interview was to **access the opinions of victims on a range of topics connected with both their experience of domestic violence, and the multi-agency structure that was in place to support them**. The areas discussed throughout the interview included perceptions of the various agencies women had encountered, relationships, additional physical or emotional abuse, children, and the effect that the abuse had on their general quality of life. The interview also gave victims the opportunity to voice their opinions as to why they were in their present situation. The length of each interview varied depending upon the individual; however the average duration of interviews was between 30 – 45 minutes.

The interviews were also an opportunity for the researchers to examine the contribution that survivors can make to the effectiveness of multi-agency responses to domestic violence. Mullender

² This is a 'one-stop-shop' for victims of domestic violence in Cardiff. See reports for more information available at <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/whoswho/robinson.html>

and Hague's work (2000) with survivors reveals that survivors themselves are often able to offer essential advice to agencies on what women need in terms of assistance, and in order to feel safer.

The interview schedule was scripted but in the majority of cases women would begin to relay past situations and experiences unprompted. As a result it was necessary to adopt a degree of flexibility in the structure of each interview, and a conversational style of interviewing would often develop. Women would embark upon a history of the violence. This was significant on a number of levels. It gave the interviewer an insight into how the women made sense of themselves and their situations. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the chance to relive and interpret past and present situations enabled the women take back a semblance of control. As one woman said after the interview:

It was good to be able to talk like that. I feel stronger now than I did, and see things that happened a little differently.

However for the purposes of the report, the use of structured questions was vital. These 'probes' were used if certain pre-devised topic areas were not mentioned spontaneously by the interviewees. The probes were thus necessary to ensure that all interviews were completed successfully and that all interviewees were asked the same questions.

Qualitative methods such as those implemented for this study can be seen to help understand the long-term, radiating effects of domestic violence. It is therefore also likely that they can assess the possible impact of interventions designed to support and protect the victims and survivors of abuse.

For those women who agreed to be interviewed, both WSU and DAU files were examined beforehand. This was done in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of each woman's situation and experiences. This in turn enabled the interviewer to empathise with each woman to a degree, and lessened the need for the woman to re-live painful memories.

It was very important to constantly keep in mind the nature of this study. The women interviewed for this report have undergone stringent risk assessment and have been classified as very high-risk victims of domestic violence. This reality initiated a number of crucial safety and ethical considerations both for the women themselves and the study as a whole. The interviewers were also very conscious that their conduct did not jeopardize the trust the women had built up with the WSU. Maintaining the safety of these women was the paramount consideration at all times. As a result, numerous strategies for minimising the risk to the women involved in the study were immediately implemented.

Safety Considerations

In keeping with a **sensitive and ethical approach** to contacting victims, first contact with women was initially made by WSU staff. However the evaluation team were always aware of the possibility that project requests may take staff time away from responsibilities to the Unit's clients. Therefore during the latter stages of data collection, initial approaches to women were also made by the interviewer. However this did not happen without seeking the prior permission of the director of WSU.

When initial contact was made by the interviewer, guidance on appropriate conduct was sought from the WSU staff. For example the need to always ask if it was safe to talk, or protocols to follow should a male answer the call. All initial calls that were carried out by the interviewer took place within the WSU offices to ensure confidentiality. This approach also enabled the women to seek verification of the call from a member of staff should they wish. Answer machine messages were never left by the interviewer.

It was never assumed that a woman was no longer with the perpetrator therefore all risk minimising strategies were applied to all of those women contacted.

All face-face interviews that were set up took place in WSU offices. In this way the women felt comfortable in a space with which they were familiar and knew to be safe. Each woman was asked whether she would feel comfortable if the interview was recorded. All telephone interviews that were arranged were either conducted in the WSU offices or in an alternative, confidential space that was occupied by the interviewer alone.

The background and aims of the study were discussed with each participant before the interview began, so that they were aware of their role and the overall intentions of the study. In addition every woman was assured of complete anonymity.

Sample

It was originally intended that 4-5 women would be interviewed from each of the 4 months of the study, for a total of about 20 women. We envisioned that our sample would contain about 10 women who did *not* experience any repeat violence after the MARAC (the 'success stories') and about 10 women who were still experiencing domestic violence.

For this second phase of evaluation, a total of 9 women were interviewed. The proportion for each month is as follows:

▪ October 2003	3	33.3%
▪ November 2003	3	33.3%
▪ December 2003	2	22.2%
▪ <u>January 2004</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>11.1%</u>
▪ TOTAL	9	100%

The WSU liaison would ascertain whether the woman was willing to partake in the study and then either arrange a convenient date and time for the interview, or gain permission for the evaluation team to contact the woman directly. The resulting interviews were either conducted over the telephone or face-to-face (at the WSU offices in Cardiff).

Difficulties Accessing High-Risk Victims

The fact that the women within this study were very high-risk victims of domestic violence not only raised significant safety considerations for the participants. It also raised fundamental and enduring issues for the methodological approach to the study itself. The lives of many of the women who participated in this study are complex, stressful, often dangerous and thus unpredictable. Therefore it was important to be patient, understanding, flexible, and acknowledge that many of the women would have difficulties maintaining commitments despite their genuine desire to be involved. It became immediately apparent that making initial contact, maintaining contact, and interviewing very high-risk participants would prove problematic and require extensive effort.

1. Initial contact

Each MARAC month included 20-25 cases. It was initially hoped that 4-5 women could be interviewed for each of the 4 MARAC months under examination. However initial attempts to contact those women on the lists revealed that this would be a very difficult task to achieve. In the overwhelming majority of cases telephone calls were not answered, landlines were out of service, or mobile telephones were switched off. On occasions a male would answer the call. Although the research team were unaware of the identity of the man, assumptions were never made, and efforts were always made not to arouse suspicion. Therefore messages were not left, and the number would not be called again.

2. Maintaining Contact

If successful contact was made then it was often hard to engage the woman, or to maintain the contact for a number of reasons. First, many of the women who were successfully contacted revealed that they were no longer with the perpetrator and attempting to move on with their lives.

For those women who were free of the violence, many were understandably reluctant to revisit the experiences of the past and were therefore unwilling to be interviewed.

In other cases, it was discovered that women were still with the perpetrator. In such situations it was common for some women to believe that assenting to an interview may have negative repercussions for themselves.

Another common scenario for the research team occurred when women agreed to be interviewed and then either did not turn up for a face-face interview at the WSU, or would state that it was not a good time to talk if a telephone interview has been arranged. On many occasions the call by the interviewer was simply not answered.

Of course, all the reasons for declining involvement are wholly understandable. Moreover individual preferences to continue moving forward having successfully left the abuse behind were seen as positive by both the research team and the WSU staff.

3. Conducting the Interview

It was unrealistic to assume that a structured script could be followed in its entirety for everyone, or that all interviews would take the same amount of time. Another issue was attempting to find the balance between obtaining quality 'empirical data' and providing women with the opportunity to talk about their experiences in a way that they had perhaps not been able to do before. Upon completion, some women felt the interview had allowed them to relive and interpret past and present situations and to gain a semblance of control over the abuse that they had suffered.

Analytic Strategy

The ultimate aim of the interviews was to talk with women about a range of experiences in an attempt to discover possible reasons for the success of the MARAC process.

It was originally intended that the interviews from each of the 4 MARAC months under examination would comprise wide-ranging experiences of abuse, multi-agency interaction and personal situations at the time of the interview. It was intended that half the sample would reflect positive outcomes (and thus MARAC success), and half would reveal negative experiences (e.g., revictimisation). As has been previously noted, the difficulty accessing the views of high-risk victims of domestic violence dictated that this could not be wholly achieved.

Nevertheless, the interviews were sub-divided into thematic areas. The presentation and analysis of the findings from the interviews have followed the thematic sub-divisions set-out in the interview schedule (see Appendix A). These sections summarise the salient themes that emerged from the interviews, and consequently, possible reasons for MARAC success have been highlighted.

In the next sections we present the findings from the police and interview data.

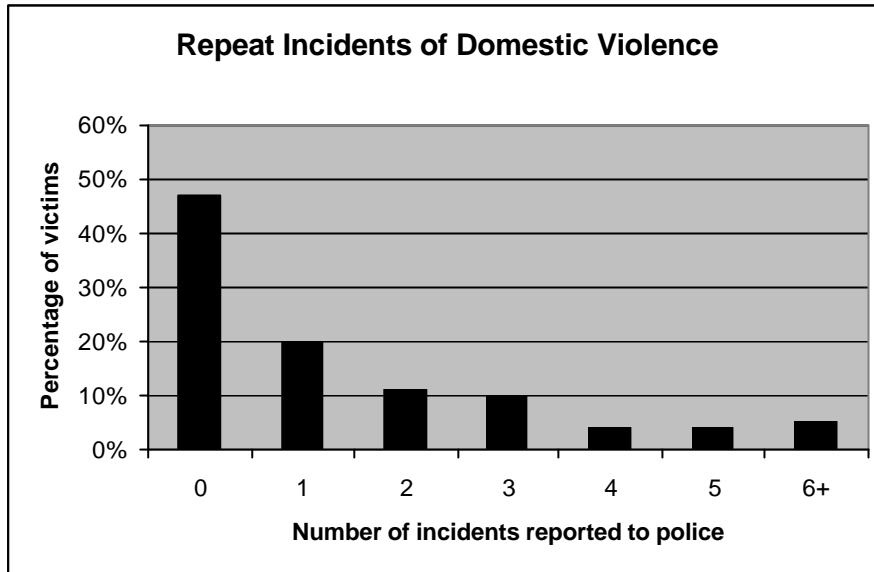
4. Findings from the Police Data

Repeat Violence Post-MARAC

Collecting the police data allowed us to determine which of the 102 victims referred to a MARAC over the 4-month data collection period experienced repeat violence that came to police attention.³ The

³ Official data such as police complaints are limited by the fact that not all crime comes to police attention. Domestic violence in particular is underreported. Therefore rates of re-victimization are likely to be larger in reality.

number of incidents reported to police by victims who went through a MARAC is depicted in the graph below.⁴



Firstly it is important to note that:

- **Nearly half of the victims (47%) did not experience any incidents of repeat violence during the 12-month period post-MARAC.**

This is a remarkable achievement because of their assessment as very high-risk and their histories of chronic domestic violence. For information, at the 6-month point nearly three-quarters (73%) of victims had not reported any incidents to police. This was reduced to 58% at the 12-month point. Therefore the figures in the table above reflect any incident coming to police attention at any time during the one-year period.

These data also illustrate the importance of following up with victims over the long-term⁵ to determine whether they are experiencing repeat incidents of domestic violence. For example, of the 74 women who had not reported any further incidents of violence at the 6-month point, 25 had police complaints on record by the 12-month point. Having said that, there was a trend whereby most of the women who were 'violence free' at the 12-month point had also been 'violence free' at the 6-month point (48 of 60 women; these 48 women are represented in the first bar of the chart above). Therefore for most women their experiences during the initial months post-MARAC can also represent their experiences over the longer-term. Obviously this finding should be monitored over more time, but it can also be inferred that **intervention needs to be targeted at women who experience repeat abuse shortly after a MARAC, as they remain high-risk for repeat violence over the coming months.**

The police files were also examined for any 'other evidence' of abuse that might be experienced by the women, but not necessarily reported or recorded in an official police complaint. Analysis revealed that 30% had other evidence of domestic violence in the file, but most of these women (25 of 30) also had additional police complaints. In other words, only 5 women might be considered to

⁴ It was noted that there were a considerable number of FSU9s yet to be added to files at the time of data collection. It is possible that this back-log may relate to individual cases within the sample, and thus may impact upon rates of re-victimisation.

⁵ A 12-month follow-up is not exactly 'long term' in someone's lifetime but few studies have been able to include a longer follow-up with domestic violence victims.

have experienced repeat violence that was not recorded in the official police data. Some examples are described below:

- NHS staff called police concerned for victim who in A&E with significant arm injury but had discharged herself. Victim refused to make complaint and states injury was self-inflicted. [different perp]
- Same perp, verbal incident. Police assured positive action. Health visitor contacted police regarding concerns for family as perp wants to move back in.
- Mother of victim is concerned about whereabouts of victim. Police enquiries disclose that victim has fled home because of domestic violence and is now in refuge.

Given this information it seems appropriate to **amend the number of women living 'violence free' one-year after the MARAC from 48 to 43, or 42%** of the 102 women in the sample.

The police incident data reveal that a substantial proportion of victims, more than 4 in 10, have had no further reported incidents of domestic violence. This is particularly notable given their extensive histories of domestic violence and identification as high-risk for repeat violence.

Risk Factors

The South Wales Police developed a risk indicator form for use by responding officers at the scene of incidents of domestic violence (see Robinson, 2004 for more detail). Fifteen risk factors are used to assess whether the victim is at low, medium, high or very-high risk for future victimization. The purpose of the risk indicator form is to structure officers' information-gathering at the scene, allow for more consistent and efficient evidence gathering, and also to identify those victims who are very high-risk and thus referred to a MARAC.

The risk indicator form is the third page to the standard 2-page domestic violence complaint form. The 15 risk factors are simple yes/no questions asked by the officer.⁶ Below we list the risk factors, note their prevalence in the sample,⁷ and give some text from the case file to exemplify what it means to be at 'very high risk' and therefore attempt to give some detail of these victims' experiences:

-
1. **Perpetrator has criminal record** (83%)
 - On scale of 1-10 the victim is frightened to level 10. Perp just released from prison having served 15 months for robbery.
 2. **Victim sustained injuries** (45%)
 - Victim is very frightened, fractured ankle will be in plaster 6 weeks. Her 7-year old heard incident and ran away in fear. She is not sure if she is pregnant, and was choked during the incident.
 3. **Use of weapons** (13%)
 - Perp smashed in the door, then assaulted her with a piece of the door, and also smashed the front window. She believes he is jealous because they are ex-partners and now she is seeing someone else.
 4. **Perpetrator experiencing financial problems** (24%)
 - Perp lost job, they got in fight he smashed up stuff in house, punched her to the face but not with full force (no injuries). But he did say he'd smash her teeth through her head.

⁶ Responding officers may not ask victims these questions directly, but may infer the existence of the risk factor from other sources.

⁷ The figures differ slightly from the first evaluation report as that sample comprised 6-months whereas this sample comprises 4-months.

5. **Perpetrator has aggravating problems** (74%)
 - Perp has history of mental health issues and has recently been released from hospital. Both had been drinking. Victim taken to hospital for injuries. Perp anti-police and was restrained.
6. **Victim is pregnant** (7%)
 - Pregnant victim chased into street by perp who wielded a knife and threatened to kill her. He also kicked her to her legs, and was restrained by a neighbour until police arrived.
7. **Perpetrator is jealous/controlling** (67%)
 - Perp touched victim in her crotch to "see if she had been with anyone" after a night out. He broke mirror and wrote "slut" on the wall in blood.
8. **Relationship separation** (80%)
 - Perp is manic depressive and alcoholic and does not want divorce, which is being instigated by the victim. He has threatened to kill her, their son and then himself. Victim feels isolated from friends and family, and is on anti-depressants herself due to DV.
9. **Conflict over child contact** (30%)
 - Victim being harassed and threatened by ex over child contact. He threatened to throw acid in her face. She is unsure how to proceed – believes that police involvement may make things worse. She is instigating civil proceedings over child contact.
10. **Perpetrator ever threatened to kill** (44%)
 - Officer writes that "perp capable of murder"; text indicated that the victim is terrified. Perp believes the victim had affair while he was in prison, threats to kill her and her entire family.
11. **Perpetrator ever attempted strangle/choke** (40%)
 - Perp very jealous and controlling; choked victim in front of their children, put hand over mouth to stop her screaming.
12. **Abuse becoming worse/more frequent** (57%)
 - After a night out, perp dragged victim home by her hair and punched her to face splitting her lip. She tried to run out but he dragged her back ripping her clothes. A passing taxi took her to station. She is fearful as jealousy and violence is getting worse.
13. **Perpetrator ever threatened/attempted suicide** (31%)
 - Officer states that victim is very scared of her husband, who tried to hang himself 6 years ago; in this incident he head-butted her and broke her nose.
14. **Sexual abuse** (14%)
 - For the past 6 years DV and sexual abuse including sticking his fist and other objects into her vagina, causing haemorrhaging in the past. Perp is HIV positive and told victim that she may be too, this caused suicide attempt 3 years ago.
15. **Victim has suicidal thoughts** (13%)
 - Victim depressed, after argument she slit wrist in front of child; later argument escalated she took pills, so did child; both rushed to hospital.

These findings show that the average victim going through a MARAC has a host of very serious risk factors present in her life. Typically the victim's partner already has a criminal record, aggravating

problems such as alcohol/drug abuse or mental health issues, is jealous or controlling, and the relationship is in the process of or has been terminated.

Correlates of Repeat Violence

Only two of the fifteen risk factors used on the SWP risk indicator form were correlated with repeat incidents of domestic violence over the 12-month period post-MARAC.⁸ Both were associated with *reductions* in repeat victimization:

- Relationship separation (of those women who reported having an imminent relationship separation 46% had repeat incidents of domestic violence, compared to 65% *not* in a relationship about to terminate)
- Perpetrator ever threatened/attempted suicide (of those women with suicidal perpetrators, 34% had repeat incidents of domestic violence, compared to 57% of women *not* in relationships with suicidal perpetrators)

Two other variables were identified that were significantly associated with an *increased* likelihood of additional incidents of domestic violence:

- Perpetrator age: younger perpetrators were associated with an increased likelihood that there would be additional incidents of domestic violence post-MARAC.
- Previous history of domestic violence: the greater the number of incidents reported to police before the MARAC, the greater the likelihood that there would be additional incidents after the MARAC.

It is important to note that the following variables were *not* associated with repeat domestic violence post-MARAC: ethnicity of either victim or perpetrator (although the overwhelming majority of each were white, making statistical comparisons more difficult); aggravating factors of either the victim or perpetrator (such as alcohol, drugs or mental health issues); whether an arrest or charge was made at the time of the incident; whether there were also referrals made to health or social services (although data were often missing for these variables); the number of children in the household; and the relationship status between the victim and perpetrator (ex- or current partners or spouses).

Generally, these findings illustrate the **difficulty of predicting which victims are at the greatest risk of repeated incidents of domestic violence**. Apart from the truism that 'the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour' exemplified by the prior history variable and the unsurprising finding that young perpetrators are more likely to commit more violence, there is little direction offered by the risk factors analyzed here.

5. Findings from the Victim Interviews

This section details the findings from the interviews conducted with nine women who had their cases referred to a MARAC, and who chose to share their experiences about their lives during the subsequent year. The findings about their perceptions of the MARAC process and multi-agency work in Cardiff are discussed first, followed by an examination of the personal factors believed to impact their quality of life and experiences of violence since the MARAC. Finally we describe how the women felt about their responsibility for the continuation or cessation of violence during the 12-months post-MARAC.

⁸ Logistic regression analysis revealed that these two risk factors were the only ones to significantly predict repeat incidents of domestic violence, when all 15 risk factors were entered into the model simultaneously. However the model itself was not statistically significant (chi-sq.=18.92, df=15, p=.22). These results echo those found in the first evaluation report, which revealed that the risk factors did not have significant predictive ability (Robinson, 2004). But this does not negate their usefulness as a structured information-gathering tool for use by those officers responding to incidents of domestic violence.

Victim Perceptions of the Multi-Agency Approach

Sharing Information

The first section of the interview instrument asked victims about the level of support they had received in relation to their case, and their perceptions of multi-agency work in Cardiff.⁹ It was immediately apparent from the interviews that they did realize that **agencies were working together on their behalf**. One of the most obvious ways that victim knew this was because agencies were sharing information. The victims were able to give examples of how this benefited them. As one woman who had experience of the criminal justice system both before and after the MARAC approach was implemented in Cardiff explained:

The WSU was able to pass on pieces of information to the CPS on my behalf; for example, his intention to humiliate me, that he would use the children as an excuse for his behaviour, etc. The WSU were able to let the CPS know that the perp can't be that concerned [about the children] because he never takes up access opportunities, etc. This couldn't happen for my first case. The judge did not have any of that information and came to his conclusion to throw the case out on completely the wrong evidence. I was in a limited position because I was just a witness for the state – I had nobody who could pass on information until I was in contact with WSU.

For another woman, it was the fact that many different agencies understood the 'big picture' of what was going on in her life. This means that she was able to talk to people who held **consistent information** about her case.

All the services know about the case history. The WSU talked to Social Services and welfare and they know everything that has happened. Everyone seems to be working together. The combination of WSU, SS and welfare has worked. They know about both our cases histories, they know that my husband has been violent in the past. They know it all and they are there. I can phone people if I am down whereas before I used to let it all get pent up inside me, and get angry...I was frustrated.

Another woman noted the importance of information being shared across agencies and in fact strongly believed that more agencies needed to be in attendance on a regular basis.

I am aware of the MARAC process and I think it is a very important thing, very beneficial. It is vital that all the agencies have as much information as possible. The only problem is that I asked my CAFCAS contact if they would be attending the MARAC meeting and they said no. I thought this was very bad. MARAC attendance should be enforced. Communication is vital.

Holding participating agencies accountable for their attendance and performance in the MARACs is an on-going issue and one that was raised by many key informants from the agencies, as detailed in the first report (Robinson, 2004). Multi-agency working in many different settings is constantly faced with the dual challenge of keeping participants motivated to be involved and take on what is usually additional (unpaid, often unrewarded) work while at the same time making sure that performance is monitored and agencies are held accountable for their action, or lack of it.

⁹ It is now procedure for all victims that come before the MARAC to be sent a letter informing them of this decision. This action was implemented after the sample for this evaluation was chosen. Therefore the majority of sample victims were referred to a MARAC without their knowing.

Providing Support

Not surprisingly, many of the women commented on the enormous amount of support they felt they had received as a result of having their case assessed at a multi-agency meeting. Many women made a specific point of noting that the **support they received was from many different agencies**, providing further evidence that a multi-agency approach is in place in Cardiff.

I've had good support from all the agencies. I've got a pad at home with loads of numbers. If I have to phone, I will phone and ask them for advice. I get emotional support and information. I can't believe that within a year I've had all this support. I've dealt with my husband for last 10 years and I coped all on my own with it. [But now] people seem to bend over backwards to help you.

There is no one agency that has helped above the others. They have all been great, I couldn't fault it. All I wanted to do was sit [around] and mope but they really took things on. I wanted to do the head-in-the-sand trick. It is good to know that different people can work to take things on for you when all you want to do is hide.

No one agency in particular [has offered me the most support]. To be honest I have been surprised at the amount of support that has been there for me. It is good that all people [in different agencies] know what is happening.

When women did make positive comments about one specific agency, it was more than likely to be the WSU. Not surprisingly, **victims were very impressed with the services available at the WSU and also the level of support, advice and empathy they received from staff working at the WSU.**¹⁰

The WSU came to court with me and were fantastic. They were also really useful in helping me deal with different situations. My ex's focus was always to embarrass me, to humiliate me. He wanted to get into court knowing that I would have to speak about my sex life in front of everybody. He knew that I would find that really hard, especially because my dad was there. The WSU were really good, they talked to me about it and said that it wouldn't be as bad as I thought, [encouraged me] to keep it in proportion.

I think that it is really good that the WSU phone you from time to time. They phone me every now and again because I was on the danger list. They phone me, and I let him know that they had phoned me. I think that has kept him on his toes – it makes him aware that people are still watching, and still looking out for me. I think that that has changed him. He has realised that I am not on my own coping with it, that I have got help. I cannot fault any of the system, any of the services.

Other women made a point of commenting on the fact that, although many agencies may have been involved in their cases, the WSU was the main port of call for finding out up-to-date information about their cases and receiving continued support.

¹⁰ The two published evaluations of the WSU have detailed enormously positive experiences and satisfaction from the women it serves (Robinson 2003, 2005). Both reports are available online at <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/whoswho/robinson.html>.

WSU have been my main point of contact. In the beginning I didn't know what to do for the best [outcome]. They helped me make decisions. WSU liaise with all [the other] agencies as far as I can see.

The importance of the WSU in Cardiff's multi-agency arena cannot be overstated. While all the agencies in the criminal justice and voluntary support sector have a key role to play in providing a holistic response to domestic violence victims, **the WSU is the only organization whose sole mission is to provide a range of services and assistance to victims of domestic violence.** It is also the organization that speaks on behalf of victims at the MARACs and therefore is both a necessary and required agency to have involved. It is difficult to imagine how the MARACs could function, let alone succeed in helping victims, without such an agency.

Practical Assistance

Several women noted their satisfaction with practical services they received as a result of having their cases referred to a MARAC. Probably the most often noted service was **having their locks changed** in a timely manner.

The police were very supportive when I first went there. They arranged for my locks to be changed and that was done on the same day so they were brilliant. I was really impressed.

The police offered to change my locks which made me feel a lot safer. I also know that a letter has been sent to housing to support my application.

These examples demonstrate the importance of not only providing emotional support but also practical assistance to victims of domestic violence.

Continuing Challenges

Despite the very positive outcomes that have been achieved as a result of having the MARACs in place in Cardiff, the comments of some victims made it clear that more work still must be done. Where there were negative perceptions, these were generally directed at one agency in particular rather than the work of the MARACs as a whole. A source of dissatisfaction with police tended to revolve around **evidence**:

I felt like when the police came they went into 'oh it's just a domestic' type thing. They didn't bother to do any follow-up, to take any witness statements, fingerprints etc...

When I eventually went to court over the harassment, I wrote a letter to the court and the WSU saying that I couldn't understand why, when I was just about to go court, no witness statements had been taken. I listed 11 people that I thought should have had witness statements take. The WSU spoke to the court and came back to me saying that those statements certainly should have been taken. I then wrote to the police telling them this and stating that I didn't want my file to be submitted to the CPS until these statements had been taken. They started to take the statements then but if I hadn't done that I would have gone to court yet again without any statements as evidence. He then pleaded guilty on the day, and the judge gave as much as was possible. There was no way he would have pleaded guilty unless all of my witnesses had turned up. I think I had to construct my own case.

As found in other research,¹¹ a major and understandable source of frustration, dissatisfaction and fear amongst victims is **not being kept informed** about pertinent issues such as adjournments, the release of the perpetrator from jail or prison, and bail conditions. For example:

The court case was adjourned but I had to wait around all day to find this out. They released him after a week because they believed he had served enough time. But they didn't notify me until two weeks after they released him. I became aware of his release because my manager at work called me up to say that he had been into the office. That was the first that I was aware. That was very frightening for me to know that he was out and nobody had informed me.

I needed to know about when he was going to be released from prison. Probation would not disclose any details to me about when he would be released. [I felt they were] very unprofessional, [this was] not handled at all properly. This has a massive impact on my feelings of safety. I wasn't worried about his release until I knew that. I assumed I would be told everything.

A few victims also perceived that agencies outside of the criminal justice system could have done more to help them.

Housing has been rubbish, no help at all. The only options they could offer me were to 'go homeless' or to go into a refuge. I didn't want to be put in a homeless situation. That feels unsafe to me, and I didn't want to leave my daughter who is agoraphobic. With all the problems that I am having from people in the estate, I couldn't be sure that my home wouldn't be vandalised. We own our own home. The housing people said that if my name is on the mortgage then I cannot be put on the housing list. I feel let down.

I feel that the Social Services are bullies. I thought that they were there to help people like me but they frightened and intimidated me. I have never hidden anything, but I think that people may clam up and then not tell people the whole truth about things.

It is vital that victims are provided with up to date information regarding cases going through the criminal justice system. It is also crucial that women feel that ongoing cases are being investigated as comprehensively as possible. It has often been seen that uneven responses, administrative obstacles and procedural delays leave women feeling unsafe and frustrated. The findings from this research indicate that **a combination of practical assistance, the provision of information, and an awareness of agency roles and responsibilities greatly increases victims' feelings of safety and confidence.**

Another aim of the interviews was to determine what type of personal factors also might be contributing to their quality of life in the year following the MARAC; for example, relationships, family support, retraction, children, economic factors and aggravating factors such as alcohol, drug use or mental health issues. In the next sub-sections we discuss findings in relation to these factors.

Personal Factors Impacting Violence

Relationships

Out of the nine women interviewed, seven stated that they were no longer with their abusive partner, while the other two remained in the relationship that had triggered the MARAC. The two

¹¹ For example, see recent evaluation of five specialist courts in England and Wales (Cook et al., 2004).

women who remained with their original partners stated that they were no longer experiencing abuse in any form.¹² One of the women had subsequently remarried her partner after a brief separation. The other stated that her personal situation had greatly improved since agency intervention took place.

The incident happened and I knew then that something had to be done – we're both trying so hard and it's really working. It was a wake-up call.

The majority of women believed that their **physical and mental well-being had improved since they had separated from their partners**, even if they were still experiencing some emotional abuse from their ex-partners or were having cases on-going through the criminal justice system. Responses included:

I feel much better, much stronger.

I am OK at the minute; I just want my life back.

My health has improved a hell of a lot.

The above responses demonstrate the impact that leaving an abusive relationship can have upon an individual's sense of physical and emotional well being. As documented above, the effects can be significant, long lasting and both negative and positive. Existing studies highlight the ways in which domestic violence can substantially alter the ways in which women experience themselves (Lempert, 1996). It can be seen that the above responses indicate ways in which successful separation or cessation of violence (however temporary) can also improve women's quality of life.

Of the seven women no longer in the abusive relationship, five remain single and two have entered into new relationships. The overwhelming majority of those who remain single are very happy with this situation.

I am just happy to have some peace. No one will ever live in my house [again].

[I just] don't want the hassle.

The two women who have entered into new relationships disclosed positive situations. Both women stated that the new relationship is with a totally different man in terms of personality, and they described their new partners as kind, considerate and supportive. They have both confided the previous abuse to the new partner. The women revealed similar reactions to the new relationships, with both admitting that it feels strange to be treated so differently.

It is strange not to have to worry about things like whether the gravy is lumpy. I don't have to justify everything anymore.

Once when we had an argument I said 'why don't you just hit me'. He said that he couldn't believe I would say that. It was what I was used to though – I am conditioned to act in a certain way.

The personal feelings disclosed by the women follow a similar pattern in further ways. They described feelings of caution in moving too fast, and the difficulties they have in building and maintaining trust with their new partner.

I am taking things slowly – it will take time to build up the trust, and also for the sake of my kids.

¹² It is important to note that in some instances the information disclosed in interviews was not as comprehensive as that contained within WSU files.

Although obviously a uniquely personal area, there are consistent themes that emerge when the relationship status of each woman is analysed. Existing studies highlight typical reactions and explanations for abuse including passivity, demoralisation and loss of identity (Barnish, 2004; Smith and Gittleman, 1994; Carderelli, 1997). The interview findings appear to show that when separation occurs, perspectives can change. For the majority of women it can be seen that the *power dynamic* within their lives has shifted since the MARAC, and this is the case whether the woman remains in the relationship, has a new partner, or remains single. It is clear from the interviews that **the majority of women have regained a sense of freedom and a degree of control over their lives since the MARAC intervention**. It is also apparent that they are very reluctant to relinquish the personal autonomy that they have achieved regardless of their current relationship status.

Family Support

Another significant theme running throughout the interviews was that of family support. For the majority of the women interviewed **a strong family support network played an important role in their ability to manage the abusive situation**. This was particularly the case when they were attempting to leave the relationship, remain separated and if they had a case going through the criminal justice system. It is clear that having a good support network often reduces feelings of isolation, and greatly increases feelings of safety. It is often the case that women will live with family members after separation from the abusive partner.

I do feel safe. I have a good support network – friends, work and I live with my parents.

I always worry but I live with my parents and feel well protected.

It can also be seen that family often play a crucial role in encouraging and supporting women with decisions to pursue a case through the criminal justice system.

No I didn't retract although I felt like it. My family persuaded me to continue.

Interestingly a large proportion of the women who had strong support revealed that they were not fearful for themselves but also for their friends and family. It can be seen that in some cases, the perpetrator threatened those closest to the victim in order to undermine and humiliate her.

The possibility of threats and intimidation to close friends and family was a considerable source of concern for some women. Although they often feel able to cope with personal abuse, the fear that a loved one may be harmed leaves them feeling anxious and vulnerable. This anxiety can often impact upon retraction decisions and increase fears once cases are finalised. In one instance a woman described how she got an **associated injunction** when she went to court.

He wasn't allowed to harass anyone else with a view to harassing me. The police and CPS argued about this before we went and asked for it. I was lucky this time to have a CPS lawyer that was up on things. Knowing about that makes a big difference when you are deciding whether or not to go ahead with your court case. The fact that he was able to get to my friends and family was what was getting to me the most and I thought 'what would it change if I did get an RO [restraining order]?' Sometimes it is more important to get things stopped for those around you. I felt in control of what is happening to me, but I was always worried what was going on with other people. My biggest worry about going to court was that I would get an RO and then it would be 100 times worse for everyone around me.

This injunction made an enormous difference to this woman. This action epitomises the positive results that can be achieved when agencies are aware of the complex nature of individual circumstances. The outcome systematically increased the confidence and feelings of safety for this woman.

As documented in the literature review, systematic abuse can often lead to social isolation and depression. These issues can be exacerbated if there are 'few protective factors around them' (Anderson et al., 2003). It is clear that a strong family support network play a crucial role in the lives of these women. **Family support greatly increases feelings of safety, and reduces isolation.** A support network can also help with childcare, a crucial consideration for the majority of women interviewed. The support is often seen to sustain a woman while she is attempting to separate, and while she is going through the criminal justice system. Moreover it can often provide the vital avenues of support that ultimately prevent some women from returning to an abusive relationship.

Retraction

Out of the nine interviews conducted, seven women stated that they had continued with the prosecution rather than retract their cases. It has already been shown that strong family support can positively contribute to a woman's decision to continue her participation with the criminal justice system. However many of the women also revealed significant **personal determination** when the issue of retraction was raised. It was very important that they were able to show the perpetrator that there were serious in their intentions, and no longer willing to put up with the abuse.

It was to prove to him [husband] that I am not putting up with it.

I had endured constant physical and emotional abuse. I think it had a lot to do with having enough.

The two women that disclosed retraction revealed that they had either been fearful of the possible repercussions of pursuing the case, or did not feel that they were mentally or physically strong enough to continue at the time.

I don't think that anything/ anyone could have dissuaded me by the time I had thought about the repercussions of going through with it. I regret retracting now – it may have prevented the second incident.

The personal strength and determination of the women interviewed manifest in a number of ways, and decisions to continue with a case are no exception. These findings challenge some existing studies that observe the enduring passivity of abused women. It was very important for some women to show their partners that they were **no longer willing to tolerate the abuse**. This section further highlights the pervading desire to regain strength and a degree of control over events that was previously unavailable to them.

Children

The issue of children was an abiding area of concern for the majority of women. Six of the women had children with the perpetrator, one woman had children but not with the perpetrator, and two women did not have children. The findings from the interviews undoubtedly indicate that domestic violence has a radiating effect on the entire family unit. The responses revealed that **children are significantly affected by the abuse in the home** albeit predominantly indirectly.

They have all been affected. In an abusive relationship you will do anything to keep them [partner] happy.

However, the majority of those women now free of the abuse stated that the welfare of their children has noticeably improved. All of the women indicated the change in atmosphere has been a

hugely contributing factor. In addition to the absence of abuse, many of the women also feel that they now have more time to devote to their children. These factors, in combination, have enhanced the child's environment and thus initiated changes in behaviour.

Things are definitely better now. It has improved because the atmosphere when he was constantly bombarding me with calls was horrible for them.

They are happy and in a loving environment. The sessions at the NSPCC group are working wonders.

Despite the positive correlation between absence of abuse and child welfare, the issue of child contact has been or remains a significant point of conflict, and an obstacle to achieving permanent freedom from the threat of abuse. In some cases access rights mean that contact with an abusive ex-partner is unavoidable.

He was using access to harass me. Part of my RO says that the only contact he can have with me and my address is when he collects the children. He must beep his horn at the gate but already he is walking up the front path. There isn't much I can do about that without making a fuss in front of my children.

In other cases, women may be powerless to prevent contact even if the children do not wish to see their father.

As a mother you have to make them happy to go with their father.

He forces the children to see him every week but they are frightened of him.

The responses within this area unequivocally show that the interests of children are at the forefront of most women's minds. There are numerous studies that show the issue of child contact is often as a vulnerable point for continued post-separation violence and one which obviously has direct and negative consequences for children (Humphreys, 2003). The findings within this section confirm this to some extent by highlight the reality that issues of child contact and access pose significant challenges on a number of levels. It can render domestic violence victims vulnerable through enforced contact with the perpetrator. It has also been disclosed that ex-partners will also use child access as an opportunity to threaten or harass women. In some cases children are made to see their father when perhaps it is not their wish to do so. At the very least it can be seen that **child contact forces women to relinquish a little of the power and control that they have fought hard to attain.**

Economic Issues

The interviews have revealed instances where the perpetrator has been awarded legal aid while the victim is the primary care-giver for the children, and receives no financial support from her ex-partner. In one case traditional notions of economic dependence on the part of the woman are undermined. While she left with the children and now lives with her parents, the perpetrator remains in *her* house. She feels that this situation is preventing her from being able to move forward.

All I need to do is get him out of my house so that I can move on properly. I want to get the rest of my possessions. I want to get things shifted, I can't get another mortgage. I don't want him to have that hold over me anymore.

Existing research shows that **limited access to independent finances is a huge source of concern for many women and often governs decisions to remain or return to abusive relationships**. Women often need to receive information regarding housing opportunities, and guidance on mortgage issues. It is vital that all agencies are aware of the dominating role that financial issues can play in women's lives. There needs to be sound understanding of personal circumstances (housing and financial issues) so that relevant and therefore effective support can be provided.

Mental Health/ Alcohol/ Drugs Issues

In some cases the presence of aggravating factors such as mental health issues, alcohol and drug abuse were mentioned by the women. These factors often served as obstacles to personal attempts to leave the abusive relationship behind despite the woman's desire to do so.

He was taking drugs which were making his personality really down. I had enough – either he got some help or that was it. He didn't have a criminal record though...it then got to the point when I thought that enough was enough.

In another instance the woman knew that she had to leave for her own safety and that of the children, but was initially frustrated that personal desire to leave was not supported by external intervention.

He has stabbed himself twice. He has had a psych assessment but they think that he is OK.

One interview revealed that both the victim and the perpetrator abused alcohol, and the victim also suffers from depression. The woman acknowledged that incidents are very often triggered by alcohol, and the incidents in turn exacerbate her depression. Perhaps significantly this woman is still with her partner, and states that, although the abuse has stopped, she consistently felt that she was not mentally or physically strong enough to pursue the complaints in the past.

Despite the adverse effect depression, and alcohol and drug abuse can have on an already abusive relationship, many of the women retained their determination to change the situation.

He suffers from depression and has had a breakdown... I'll put up with that but I am not a punch bag for anyone.

These findings suggest that the presence of factors such as depression, alcohol and drug abuse undoubtedly have a detrimental effect upon unstable relationships. Women often find that they are confined by the presence of such aggravating factors. It is important that agencies recognise this, and are equipped to provide **appropriate support to both victims and perpetrators**.

Given the complex web of personal factors and multi-agency support received by the women, it was also felt important to determine whether they felt it was their responsibility to end the violence or whether intervention from external agencies was required, or some combination of the two.

Responsibility for Ending the Violence

As previously discussed, one of the main aims of this study was to determine – when victims did not experience any additional violence – whether they attributed this 'success' to the multi-agency work done on their behalf, their own determination to change their circumstances, or some combination of the two. The interview data clearly showed that **nearly all victims felt that it was a combination of their own strength and determination (which they tended to discuss as the primary factor) which was necessary for the multi-agency support and assistance to work**. In other words, they needed the support and assistance provided by the WSU and many

other agencies, but felt that they first had to make the decision to 'not put up' with violence any longer. Only when they were clear in their own minds about what needed to happen could the multi-agency work really pay its dividends. This belief on the part of victims echoes that found from the interviews with agency representatives in the first evaluation, namely that the single greatest barrier to the effectiveness of the MARACs was victims being unwilling or unable to change their circumstances (i.e., end the abusive relationship). Examples from the victims are detailed below:

I think that it was my responsibility and nobody else's. Nobody else can do anything until you yourself have reached certain points. At the time of the first incident I just wasn't mentally strong enough to go through with the prosecution – no one could have dissuaded me. You cannot do anything until you are ready, and nobody can do anything to help until they are made aware. I had reached the point, I realised that I had done everything I could. I was satisfied that I could do no more. The support was great and I wasn't judged.

I had put up with so much. I think it is a lot to do with personal strength, being ready and then it is great to have the support to get you back on track. It is nice to have someone you approach you and say they can help. It's good to know that there are people who can offer a way out. At the end of the day though you are on your own so you carry a lot of the responsibility for what happens to you.

The woman needs to be ready to make that final break like I did. I think the agencies should be there to help with the emotional bit, for the aftermath when you are in delayed shock and the adrenalin overwhelms you.

I think it undoubtedly helps to have outside support but you have to be strong too. I am trying to fight the situation I am in now. I have to go to the citizen's advice bureau, and go to the immigration dept too. I don't think that anybody can do anything else. I am strong – If I had stayed I know that he would have killed me in the end. It was my responsibility to me and my children to leave.

[It's the combination of] the strength that I feel inside myself, and the knowing that I am supported. When you have no support and trying to deal with this it is hard, it really does affect you. You are on your own and you have to cope day in day out. Whereas now I think it is because I feel stronger in myself that we are where we are today.

Interviews with the victims corroborate existing studies that observe the 'agency' that abused women may develop over time (Lempert, 1996). Some of the responses also demonstrate the strength and resilience of many women. It has been observed that some women will choose passive resistance as an active strategy of survival as a way to preserve 'self' (ibid). Again many of the comments made by those interviewed challenge traditional notions of abused women. It is possible to see that many of the responses within the interviews reveal many ways in which women implement determined, pro-active strategies in order to achieve and preserve a 'sense of self' both during, and after separation. They are often resourceful, proactive and guided by a strong sense of responsibility, both to themselves and their children. However it is important to keep in mind that the majority of these women are now successfully separated from their abusive partners, and this is seen to have a significant impact upon victim interpretation of events and emotional well-being.

The interviews with victims revealed several important findings:

- Victims knew that agencies were working together on their behalf, namely because they shared information about their cases.
- Holding participating agencies accountable for their attendance and performance in the MARACs is an on-going issue noted by some victims.

- Many women specifically mentioned that the support they received was from many different agencies; however the WSU was often viewed as the primary source of information, support and assistance they received.
- Practical assistance, such as having their locks changed, was very highly valued by the women.
- Negative comments focused on poor evidence collection by the police and not being kept informed about decisions in their cases (bail, custody, adjournments, etc.).
- The majority of women have regained a sense of freedom and a degree of control over their lives since the MARAC intervention, usually as a result of separating from their abusive partners.
- A strong family support network played an important role in women's ability to manage the abusive situation, and ultimately to leave their abusive partners.
- Child contact remains a problematic area in terms of fear, continued violence and being able to 'move on' following domestic violence.
- Nearly all victims attributed responsibility for 'ending the violence' firstly to themselves and then secondly acknowledged the importance of having multi-agency support once they were ready to change their situations.

6. Conclusions

This second phase of the evaluation revealed that **much success can be attributed to the MARACs**. First, a substantial proportion of women – about 4 in 10 – had not been revictimized in the year following the MARAC. This is particularly noteworthy given that these victims had lengthy histories of domestic violence with their partners and were identified as being high-risk for repeat domestic violence. This evidence strongly suggests that **taking a holistic approach to domestic violence can reduce recidivism**, even amongst the population most at risk.

From the victims' perspectives, there are several benefits of taking a multi-agency approach when responding to domestic violence. For example, they were aware that agencies were sharing information about their circumstances, and were positive about the consistency of information held across different agencies. Women valued agencies having the 'big picture' about what was happening in their lives and subsequently the types of support they required from all types of agencies (criminal justice, voluntary sector, housing, health care, etc.). Furthermore, **victims felt that they needed the support and assistance they received as a result of the MARACs** before they could successfully move on following an often lengthy history of domestic violence; however they felt that the MARACs could only work once they had made up their own minds and felt strong enough to distance themselves from their abusive partners. In this way both the agency representatives (interviewed in the first report) and the victims corroborate the idea that **outside intervention works best in combination with victims who are motivated and determined to change their circumstances**.

The findings from this research serve to corroborate existing studies in a number of areas:

- MARACs successfully meet the 'challenge' of improving the response to domestic violence by
 - raising the profile of domestic violence;
 - increasing communication between agencies;
 - involving both criminal justice and other community agencies;
 - providing advocacy to victims; and
 - turning policy into action.
- Victims' perceptions of 'what works' is a combination of practical assistance and emotional support.
- Women's health is adversely affected by domestic violence but often discernibly improves upon successful separation from the abusive partner and receipt of support.
- Women experiencing domestic violence are usually proactive and 'help-seek' from family, friends and outside agencies.
- The issues of children, housing and financial factors are a source of significant concern for women experiencing domestic violence.

Our research also revealed the difficulty of assessing re-victimization amongst domestic violence victims. For example, police data are limited by the fact that not all domestic violence is reported to the police. Yet interviews with victims are not without their own problems. For example, there can be discrepancies between victims' perceptions and the evidence contained in files held by the DAU or WSU. Furthermore in such complex cases 'success' can be difficult to define. For example, some victims did have a repeat domestic violence complaint but when interviewed one year on they were very positive about their circumstances and living free of violence. Conversely, it is apparent that some 'success stories' in terms of the police data would not be so positive if the victims had been interviewed (as in the last report). These difficulties remind us of the limitations of accurately measuring 'success' and the factors with which success is correlated.

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Appendix A : Victim Interview Schedule

Name of Victim: _____

Date of interview: ____/____/____

MARAC month: _____

Introduction/Aims

Firstly, thank you very much for agreeing to talk with us. We are looking into the ways in which different services work together in Cardiff e.g. WSU work with health, police work with probation - taking action to better help women who have experienced or are currently experiencing DV. The questions that you have kindly agreed to answer will help to obtain the views of women who have experienced domestic violence.

We wanted to talk to the people who matter the most in this situation to see how you are feeling, get your opinions on different things and basically offer you the opportunity to talk about anything/raise any issues that you may feel you haven't had the chance to do before.

It may well be that all questions do not relate to you – if this is the case just let me know. We would like your answers to be as full and open as possible, but if there is a question that you do not feel comfortable answering or something that you are not happy to talk about then that's fine and we'll just move straight on.

If, at any time during our conversation you want to take a break or to stop, just tell me. Would you mind if the conversation was taped? Only because it helps me to make sure I have all the information, don't feel like I'm just sitting with my head down, not able to look at you etc...

We can reassure you that any answers you give will remain completely anonymous. They cannot be traced back to you.

Your experiences and views will help us to work towards improving services provided for women who have experienced domestic violence in this area, ensuring that they better meet women's needs.

SECTION 1 General Perceptions of 'holistic' approach in Cardiff

Which agencies have you had contact with? **[LIST]**

What have they done for you? **[SPECIFICS]**

Which agency do you feel has offered you the most support?

Can you think of any support/information that you needed but did not receive?

e.g. welfare/benefit/housing advice

Do you feel adequately supported/protected?

CJS

What do you think about the levels of support you received after you reported the incident?

Did you follow the case through (**retraction**). Any specific reasons why/why not?

Police, level of agency support etc.

Are you aware of the ways in which some services work together in Cardiff?

e.g. WSU work with health, probation with the police etc.

- What do you think of this? Do you think it could be helpful? Has it been helpful to you?
- Have you had any experience of any services working together?

e.g. joint visits, increased contact from any specific agency?

- If yes, in what ways have they impacted on your life?
- What do you think of the ways in which different services work together?
- Are you aware of any action that has been taken by an agency on your behalf?

SECTION 2 Relationships

- Are you still in a relationship with (**PERP**)? If so, how is the relationship?

If no DV, are you experiencing any emotional, sexual, financial abuse?

If still DV, is the violence towards different in any way (better/worse). Is it escalating?

- If not, are you in a new relationship? How is that going?

Are you with the same type of man? How so? How different?

If not in a new relationship, why not?

- Are you happy being single?

SECTION 3 Issues Around Additional Violence

- Have you experienced any additional violence or threats over the last 12 months?

NB any triggers such as summer, school holidays, info from WSU and DAU files.

If so, was it reported?

What happened?

Has the violence/threats had an impact upon your relationship (positive/negative)?

Did the threats come from original/new partner?

What has been the impact upon your children?

SECTION 4 Emotional Abuse

Are you experiencing any emotional abuse from him? If so, please describe.

Has the level of emotional abuse lessened or increased over the last year?

SECTION 5 Victim Quality of Life/Victim Intuition

How is your quality-of-life/emotional well-being generally? Has your health been affected?

Do you feel safe/secure?

Are you frightened?

Do you feel you are being well supported? Who are you in contact with?

Do you feel that you may be at risk of further violence. If yes, how so?

SECTION 6 Children

How are your children?

Would you say that the welfare of your children has improved? Can you think of any specific ways (yes, no).

Relationship separation – has it been difficult on the children? If yes, how so?

How is child contact arranged? Is it a point of conflict between you and your ex-partner?

SECTION 7 Significant Events

Any especially significant events over the past 12 months, either positive or negative?

e.g. events around relationships, work, children, health.

SECTION 8 Victim View of Circumstances

Why do you feel you are in this (positive/negative) situation?

Issues around: service support, getting rid of perp, divorce, counselling...etc.

NB is it the responsibility of the victim or an outside agency to stop the violence?

SECTION 9 Post Case Support (if relevant)

What do you think about the levels of support you received after your case was heard at court?

Can you think of any support/information that you needed but did not receive?
e.g. welfare/benefit/housing advice

Do you feel adequately supported/protected?

NB Issues of intimidation

SECTION 10 Open Feedback

Can you think of any changes you would like to see to improve the experience of women who have suffered domestic violence?