

## DUAL REPORTS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE MADE TO THE POLICE IN SCOTLAND: A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM A PILOT RESEARCH STUDY

Dr Oona Brooks and Deborah Kyle  
SCCJR, University of Glasgow  
E-mail: [oonabrooks@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:oonabrooks@glasgow.ac.uk)



**Summary:** This research summary highlights findings from a pilot study that used Scottish police data to undertake exploratory analysis of 'dual reports' of domestic abuse. Dual reports occur when both parties in a relationship are reported to the police as perpetrators of domestic abuse at the same time. This means that both partners are reported simultaneously as the perpetrator *and* the victim of domestic abuse. Dual reports present a particular challenge to both conventional understandings of domestic abuse and the police response to these offences. The pilot study examined the nature of dual report incidents, how common they are, and how the police respond to these incidents.

### INTRODUCTION

Domestic abuse is a serious and persistent social problem that is consistently recognised as having a detrimental impact on those who witness or experience it (Mullender, 2004; Pain, 2012). In contrast to other forms of violence, the number of domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police in Scotland has increased year on year over the past decade; rising by almost 50% from 41,235 recorded incidents in 2003/04 to 60,080 incidents in 2012/13.

The Scottish Policing Assessment 2011-15 highlights the need to improve understanding of violence, including "appreciating the changing profile of violence", as a means of allowing police responses to continually evolve. Existing research consistently confirms that domestic abuse is perpetrated primarily by men against women (Dobash and Dobash, 2004; Walby and Allen, 2004). However, Scottish police statistics over the past decade point to a rise in the proportion of incidents where women are recorded as the perpetrators and men are recorded as the victims (from 9% in 2002-03 to 17% in 2012-13). This trend has led to considerable debate about the apparent changing profile of domestic abuse recorded by the police, including the extent to which women may allegedly perpetrate domestic abuse. Dual reporting is one context in which women may be recorded as the perpetrators of domestic abuse, hence, the importance of a more detailed and contextual understanding of these incidents.

Dual reports also present a particular challenge to police responses to domestic abuse since they provide the police with conflicting accounts of an incident. These challenges may be heightened where children are also known to be present. There is a paucity of research evidence about this issue; while some research has examined dual-perpetration of domestic abuse in England over time (Hester, 2009; 2013), no research has specifically addressed dual report incidents that occur simultaneously in a UK context, or dual reporting specifically within a Scottish context. The pilot study therefore sought to address this issue using police data to examine dual report incidents entering the criminal justice system.

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## Study aims and methods

The specific objectives of the pilot study were:

- i. To establish the number and proportion domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police as dual reports of domestic abuse.
- ii. To gain an understanding of the nature and profile of dual report incidents.
- iii. To identify the police action taken in response to dual report incidents.
- iv. To explore the value and feasibility of further research on dual reporting.

With the assistance of a police analyst, a sample of 532 dual report incidents was selected from a police database by identifying all dual report incidents recorded across three police divisions within one legacy police force in 2012/13. The 532 incidents studied represent 266 dual report 'cases' where both a male and female partner were recorded simultaneously as the victim and the perpetrator in two corresponding domestic abuse incidents<sup>1</sup>. In this context, the term 'case' is used to refer to the two incidents that constitute a dual report.

Anonymised data for each of the 532 incidents was extracted from the police database for further analysis using SPSS. The three divisions were selected on the basis of having the largest, smallest and an average proportion of potential dual-report incidents within the legacy police force area studied for comparative purposes. These three Divisions also encompassed a range of urban and rural locations.

## MAIN FINDINGS TO DATE

### How common are dual reports?

Across the three police divisions studied, 9,913 domestic abuse incidents were recorded in 2012/13. In total, 5.4% (532) of these were dual report incidents that occurred in the context of a heterosexual relationship (2.7% with a male perpetrator, 2.7% with a female perpetrator). It should be noted that these figures refer specifically to dual report *incidents*; the level of dual reporting that has occurred at some point over the course of a relationship is likely to be higher (see Hester, 2009).

In the same year, 55,862 incidents of domestic abuse were known to be recorded in the context of heterosexual relationships across Scotland as a whole (Scottish Government, 2013). Based on the findings of the current study, which indicate that 5.4% of domestic abuse incidents are recorded within the context of a dual report, it is estimated that 3,017 dual-report incidents are recorded by the police in Scotland over a one-year period. This is a substantial number of incidents.

### The profile of dual reports

With regard to the types of crimes and offences recorded<sup>2</sup>, the dual report sample contains some similarities with domestic abuse recorded across Scotland as a whole over the same one-year period. The four most commonly recorded crimes are the same: threatening and abusive behaviour, common assault, breach of the peace and bail offences. However, in the dual report sample there is a lower proportion of assaults and a higher proportion of threatening and abusive behaviour, breach of the peace and bail offences (see *Figure 1*).

Compared to domestic abuse incidents recorded across Scotland as a whole, a far higher proportion of incidents in the dual report sample occurred within the context of a current relationship (73% compared to 56%). Further, children were known to be present in almost one in five (18%) of dual report incidents. Levels of repeat victimisation were lower in the dual report sample (55%) compared to all incidents across Scotland

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<sup>1</sup> 30 dual report incidents that occurred within the context of same-sex relationships were excluded from the main dataset (n=532) due to being small in number, and the impact that their inclusion would have in understanding gender dynamics.

<sup>2</sup> In Scotland, the term "crime" is generally used for the more serious criminal acts; the less serious are termed "offences", although the term "offence" may also be used in relation to serious breaches of criminal law. Not all incidents will be recorded as a crime or offence by the police.

(61%), although a slightly higher proportion of victims in the dual report sample were likely to report six or more instances of victimisation (16% compared to 14%)<sup>3</sup>.

## Gender differences

With regard to gender, given that 80% of domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police in Scotland have a male perpetrator and a female victim, and a much lower proportion (17%) have a female perpetrator and a male victim, this indicates that a higher proportion of domestic abuse incidents recorded with a female perpetrator occur within the context of dual reports than when the perpetrator is male. As an estimate drawing upon national statistics:

- 3% of incidents with a male perpetrator and female victim occur within context of a dual report
- 16% of incidents with female perpetrator and male victim occur within context of a dual report

There was little difference in the type of incident recorded by gender although male victims were more likely to have sustained an injury (33% of male victims compared to 28% of female victims). This may be connected to the higher use of weapons where women are recorded as the perpetrator (11% of female perpetrators compared to 2% of male perpetrators). Hester (2013) indicates that women's greater use of weapons is often linked to self-protection.

A higher proportion of female victims were repeat victims (67%) than male victims (43%). Thus, women were over 50% more likely to have experienced repeat victimisation than male victims and this gap grows as repeat victimisation increases: 26% of female victims had experienced six or more repeat victimisations compared to only 6% of male victims (see *Figure 2*).

## Divisional differences

Analysis of dual reports across the three divisions studied reveals notable differences in the level of dual report incidents recorded in each division: dual report incidents represented 11% of incidents in Division 1, 4% of incidents in Division 2, and 3% of incidents in Division 3. Further analysis of the data indicates that these differences are largely due to variations in the nature and location of the incidents recorded within different police divisions.

<sup>3</sup> These figures indicate repeat domestic abuse victimization over time, though this may not be in the context of the same relationship.

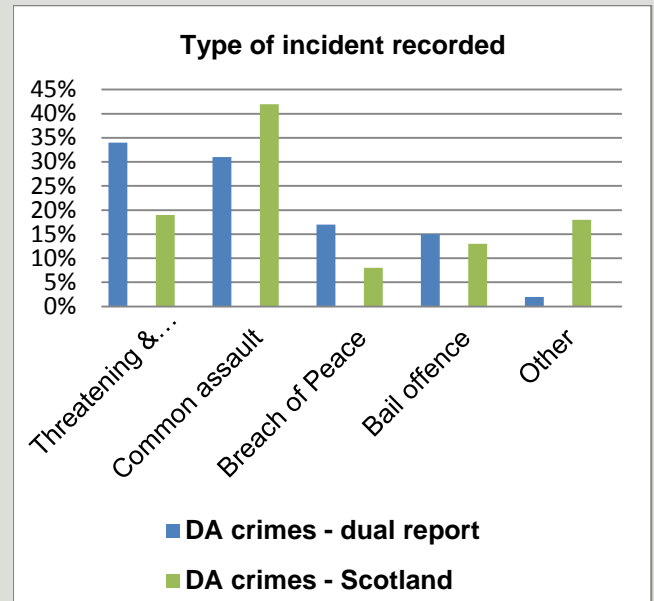


Fig.1 Type of incident recorded 2012-13

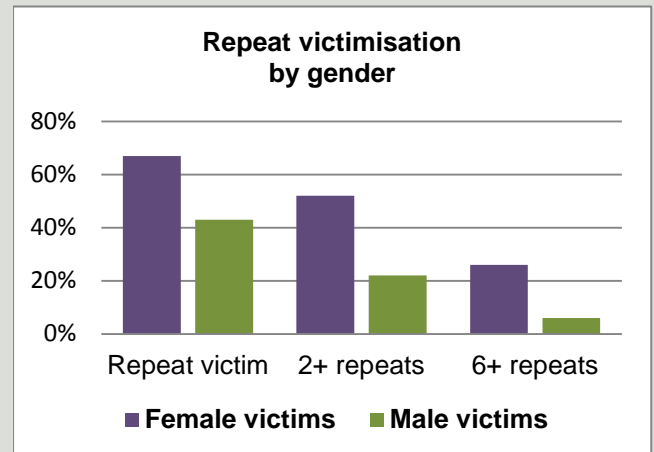


Fig.2 Repeat victimisation in dual reports by gender

	Div. 1	Div. 2	Div. 3
Public/'other' location	37%	13%	17%
3 <sup>rd</sup> party report	60%	51%	29%
Threatening/abusive beh.	37%	31%	28%
Breach of the peace	27%	11%	5%
Spouses	7%	15%	15%
Repeat victimisation	47%	62%	61%

Fig.3 Dual report sample by police division

As highlighted in *Figure 3*, compared to incidents in Divisions 2 and 3, those incidents occurring in Division 1 were more likely to occur in a public or other location (including licensed premises, the street or a business premise), and they were more likely to be reported by a third party. Further, Division 1 incidents were more likely to be public disturbance offences such as Breach of the Peace. Meanwhile, incidents in Division 1 were less likely to occur between spouses or be recorded as repeat victimisation compared to incidents in Divisions 2 or 3. Although variation in police practices between Divisions is possible, findings indicate that the differing profile of incidents in Division 1 can be attributed to the urban profile of this area, incorporating a busy city centre with a high density of licensed premises.

### Who are dual reports made by?

Figures relating to who reported the incident in the dual report sample are markedly different to figures from recent research on all types of domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police in Scotland over the same time period; McQueen (2014) reports that 71% of domestic abuse incidents are reported by victims, 27% are reported by a third party and 3% are reported by the accused. However, in the dual report sample, only 40% of incidents are reported by victims, while half (50%) are reported by a third party. The accused is the reporter in 10% of dual report incidents, although it is not clear from the available data how this is to be interpreted (see *Figure 4*).

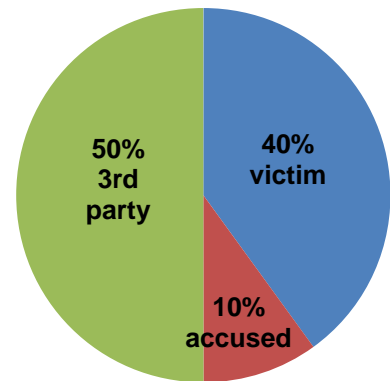
Further, in 42% of dual report cases (pairs of incidents) both reports have been reported by a third party and the victim is the reporter of both incidents in only 25% of cases (see *Figure 5*). It is not possible to ascertain from the data available which party (male or female victim), if any, has made the initial claim of victimisation.

### Police responses to dual reports

The vast majority of dual report incidents (97%) resulted in a crime or offence being recorded by the police. This figure is markedly higher than for other domestic abuse incidents; over the same period, 50% of domestic abuse incidents reported to the police in Scotland as a whole resulted in a crime or offence being recorded. The proportion of incidents recorded as a crime and subsequently reported to the Procurator Fiscal (PF) in the dual report sample (64%) is also greater than the equivalent proportion for Scotland as a whole (39%).

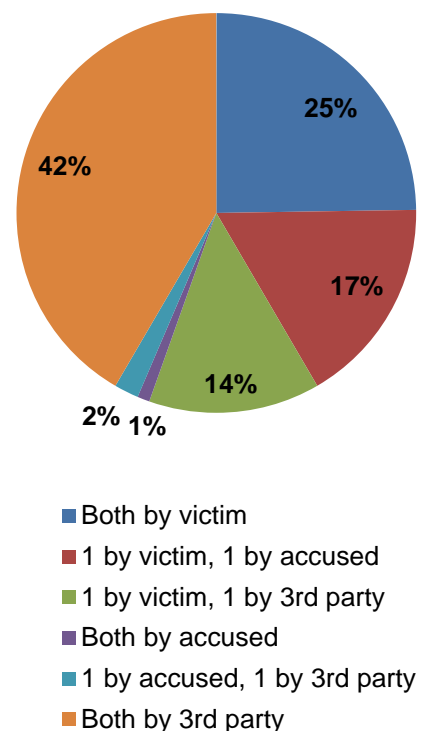
Further, in dual report cases where at least one report was made to the PF (n=200), the majority (69%) had a

**Who incident is reported by (n=532)**



*Fig.4 Reporter type in dual report incidents (n=532)*

**Reporter type in dual report cases (n=266)**



*Fig.5 Reporter type in dual report cases (n=266)*



report submitted in relation to both incidents. The *Joint Protocol on Domestic Abuse* agreed between Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (revised in 2013) suggests that submitting a report to the PF in respect of both parties should be avoided where there is reason to believe that a counter-allegation has been made:

*“... in cases where the perpetrator makes a counter allegation, it will **not always be necessary for a full report to be submitted to the Procurator Fiscal** in respect of that counter allegation. In particular, where the **circumstances of the offence, history of the relationship and criminal history of the parties** suggest that the counter allegation may be without substance it will be sufficient, following investigation for full details of the counter allegation to be contained within the report submitted against the alleged perpetrator... If it is required the Procurator Fiscal can then request a full report in respect of the counter allegation.”*

On the basis of the statistical data extracted from the police database for the pilot study, it is not possible to ascertain whether dual reports are being made in the context of a counter-allegation, the actual dual perpetration of domestic abuse or self-defence. Nonetheless, in a high proportion of dual report cases a report is being submitted to the PF for both parties. This may reflect the finding that a high proportion of dual report incidents are reported by a third party and therefore have a witness to support the case. However, it may also suggest that there are challenges in determining whether counter allegations are being made.

## FUTURE WORK

Further qualitative research is required to explore:

- the decision making processes and challenges encountered by the police in responding to dual reports of domestic abuse;
- the context that dual reports are occurring in (e.g. counter-allegations, dual perpetration of abuse, or self-defence);
- the reasons why a high proportion of dual report incidents are recorded as crimes or offences and reported to the Procurator Fiscal;
- what happens to domestic abuse crimes or offenses recorded in the context of a dual report when they are reported to the Procurator Fiscal;
- the antecedents and implications of dual report incidents from the perspective of practitioners and victims/survivors.

## SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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