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# The Importance of Expectation Fulfillment on Domestic Violence Victims' Satisfaction with the Police in the UK

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# The importance of expectation fulfilment on domestic violence victims' satisfaction with the police in the UK

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## **Abstract:**

*Purpose* – This paper seeks to investigate what victims of domestic violence expect police to do for them, and how these expectations subsequently influence their levels of satisfaction.

*Design/methodology/approach* – Structured interviews with 222 victims of domestic violence were conducted by staff from an integrated community-based service delivery agency in Cardiff, Wales. Multivariate analyses were performed to reveal the factors that contribute to domestic violence victims' satisfaction with the police.

*Findings* – Consistent with the expectancy disconfirmation model, results indicate that the most important determinant of satisfaction is the extent to which victims' expectations about police behaviour and demeanour are fulfilled.

*Originality/value* – The results of this study and implications for police policy are discussed.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, Police, Wales

**Paper type:** Research paper

## **Introduction**

In the last several decades, there has been a dramatic shift in the legal response to domestic violence. While once treated as a private matter best dealt with in the home, in the 1980s a variety of forces

coalesced to result in legislative and policy changes that emphasised a criminal response to domestic violence (Buzawa and Buzawa, 2003). These forces include the women's rights movement, social science research, and a series of lawsuits that held police accountable for failure to protect. As a result, many jurisdictions adopted policies that aimed to reduce the discretion of criminal justice officials by specifying arrest and prosecution as the preferred (or even mandatory) response.

These formal approaches are heralded by many feminists, victim advocates and scholars as a great advance in the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence. A formal response is seen to send a message that domestic violence is a crime that will not be tolerated by society (Stanko, 1992). It can protect the victim from retaliatory violence from her abuser by taking the decision to arrest and/or prosecute out of her hands (Goolkasian, 1986). Finally, criminalising domestic violence encourages the legal system to treat violence between intimates in the same manner as violence between strangers (Stark, 1996).

Others argue that formalised interventions are problematic for several reasons. For example, victims who do not want to cooperate with police or prosecutors are assumed to not be capable of making decisions in their own best interests (Braun, 1996; Hanna, 1996). Furthermore, actions taken by police or prosecutors might ignore or even conflict with the goals of victims (Ford, 1991; Mills, 1998, 1999). Domestic violence victims use the criminal justice system to satisfy several different goals (e.g. protection, prevention, reform, and justice) and these goals may change over time (Lewis *et al.*, 2000). As Davis and Smith (1995, p. 542) articulated, there may be a variety of reasons that women might not want their abusers arrested and prosecuted, including: victims' fear of reprisal; hope that their relationship can be salvaged; financial dependence; lack of self-worth; concern for their children; or isolation from supporting family or friends. In Britain, Cretney and Davis (1997, p. 154) found that many victims interviewed said that "what they had really hoped for ... was that their assailants receive some kind of 'treatment' to help him control his behaviour." Similarly, Ford (1991) found that women use the criminal justice system to help them manage the violence rather than to punish or deter offenders. Given the uniqueness of each victim's experience, a desire for arrest or prosecution cannot be assumed to be universal.

Advocates have long cautioned that women's experiences with a criminal justice system that is insensitive to their needs and wishes may negatively impact their involvement with and future use of the system (Abel and Suh, 1987; Bowman, 1992; Hart, 1993; Mills, 1999; Pagelow, 1981). The response of police is particularly important, as they act as important gatekeepers to the criminal justice system. Domestic violence victims' satisfaction with the police response has several practical consequences in terms of effective criminal justice functioning. Some research suggests that victims who are satisfied with police are more likely to cooperate in the prosecution of their cases (Goldstein, 1982; Lurigio and Mechanic, 2000). They also may be more likely to seek criminal justice interventions in incidents of future violence (Brown, 1984), while the opposite situation exists when women are dissatisfied (Fleury *et al.*, 1998). This can have extensive and pronounced negative consequences for women (and their children) living in violent households.

As long as little is known about what domestic violence victims specifically expect or want out of the criminal justice response to their cases, debates about the merits of various policies or procedures will continue. As Lewis *et al.* (2000, p. 8) stated:

What is striking about much research concerning legal responses to domestic violence is the absence of the chief actors' voices.

In this study, we examine the determinants of satisfaction with the police among a sample of domestic violence victims by directly exploring their expectations of police and opinions about police performance. Other research that is relevant to the discussion is highlighted in the next section. We then go on to describe our theoretical framework and the current policy context within which our study is set.

### **What do victims expect of police?**

Although victim advocates have called greater attention to the plight of crime victims (e.g. Karmen, 1990) and have called for more research dedicated to understanding victims' experiences as their cases are processed through the criminal justice system (e.g. Lewis *et al.*, 2000), few studies exist on the topic of satisfaction with the police specifically for women experiencing domestic violence. Instead, the majority of studies have examined the satisfaction of crime victims generally, without much thought or

attention to differences in expectations that might exist among victims of different types of crimes. In the following paragraphs, we summarise the research on victims' expectations of police behaviour and police demeanour, and how these expectations in turn affect their satisfaction with the police, making note of studies of domestic violence victims where appropriate.

### *Police behaviour*

Several studies have examined police actions and their impact on victim satisfaction. Researchers have found that police activities that indicate a greater degree of investigative effort, such as completing a crime report or making an arrest, are positively correlated with victim satisfaction with the police (Brandl and Horvath, 1991; Chandek, 1999; Percy, 1980). Research also has demonstrated that the extent to which expectations are concordant with police officer actions were predictive of satisfaction levels. Brandl and Horvath (1991) and Percy (1980) found that victims' expectations of police response time, relative to actual response time, exerted a significant impact on the likelihood of satisfaction with the police. In particular, when the police responded in a fashion that exceeded expectations (i.e. faster than expected), victims were significantly more likely to be satisfied. Chandek and Porter (1998) demonstrated that the greater the concordance between victims' expectations of officer behaviour (e.g. making a report) and actual behaviour, the greater the likelihood of victim satisfaction with the police.

In the area of domestic violence research, arrest is police behaviour of particular interest. Early studies appeared to demonstrate that when women called the police, it was because they expected or wanted an arrest made on their behalf. A total of 60 per cent of the victims in Abel and Suh's (1987) ten-year study requested that an arrest be made, but police took this action in only 28 per cent of cases. The incongruity between what victims wanted (arrest) and actions taken by police (mediate, separate) also was noted by Saunders and Size (1986). Martin (1997, p. 519) found that "much dissatisfaction with police response to battering has been grounded in the police failure to act as social control agents." Research of this type makes clear that the discrepancy between what victims want and what police officers actually do constitutes a logical source of dissatisfaction (Yegidis and Renzy, 1994).

Subsequent studies suggested a more complex relationship between domestic violence victims' expectations of arrest and satisfaction, documenting rather high levels of satisfaction among domestic violence victims despite low rates of arrest. These studies have suggested police failure to arrest did not always result in victim dissatisfaction. Yegidis and Renzy (1994) found that three in four victims reported the police response as “helpful” despite the fact that arrests were made in one in four cases. The congruence between what victims wanted and what police did and the impact this had on satisfaction levels was analysed for 110 victims of domestic violence (Buzawa *et al.*, 1992). Findings revealed that the key factor in determining satisfaction levels among domestic violence victims was whether police action was in accordance with the victim's wishes – whether that was for an arrest or not. Women who neither expected nor received an arrest were no less likely to be satisfied than women who both expected and received an arrest. Research such as this highlights the importance of examining police action relative to domestic violence victims' expectations and wishes in order to understand their satisfaction with the police.

### *Police demeanour*

The research reviewed above has highlighted the importance of victims' expectations of arrest relative to actual police behaviour. Other research also has demonstrated the importance of police actions on the scene above and beyond the decision to arrest. All known studies on the determinants of crime victim satisfaction with the police highlight the importance of the way police officers treat victims, or their demeanour. Crime victims report being significantly more satisfied with the police when officers demonstrate concern, compassion, and respect (Brandl and Horvath, 1991; Chandek, 1999; Chandek and Porter, 1998; Reisig and Chandek, 2001; Shapland, 1983). In fact, most of these studies found that officer demeanour toward victims was the most significant determinant of satisfaction.

Historically, the police response to domestic violence and sexual assault has been depicted as one characterised by indifference and victim-blaming attitudes (Belknap, 1995; Hart, 1993). A recent study compared the satisfaction levels of victims of violent crimes perpetrated by intimate male partners to those committed by non-partners (Byrne *et al.*, 1999). This study revealed

that victims of intimate violence were significantly less likely to be satisfied with the police response to their crimes. A key factor differentiating these two groups of victims was the treatment that they received from the police. Women who experienced violence at the hands of intimate partners were less likely to report that officers had demonstrated an interest in their feelings, leading to lower satisfaction levels among this group of women. These accounts strongly suggest that officer demeanour at the scene is a central determinant of victim satisfaction.

Several additional studies provide at least *prima facie* support for this hypothesis. In Martin's (1997) study, 72 per cent of the domestic violence victims in her sample were either satisfied or very satisfied with the police response. A total of 58 per cent of the victims in this study described police as fair, 48 per cent described the police as very respectful, and 50 per cent reported that the police were very helpful. In Buzawa and Austin's (1993) study, instances of dissatisfaction with the police were examined in order to determine what differentiated these victims of domestic violence from those who were satisfied. One explanation provided was that the demeanour of the officers was "substantively less sympathetic" toward the victims who subsequently reported being dissatisfied with the police (Buzawa and Austin, 1993, p. 620).

The preceding discussion has highlighted two primary factors that influence victim satisfaction with the police. First, an important determinant of satisfaction is a victim's expectation of the police relative to what police actually do at the scene. For example, it is not making an arrest *per se* that is important, but whether this action is in accordance with the victim's wishes. Second, officers' demeanour toward victims wields a significant influence on their satisfaction. When the police encounter is one characterised by respect and understanding, and when victims perceive that the police are concerned about their welfare and take the time to listen to them, they are significantly more likely to be satisfied.

### **Improving our understanding of victim satisfaction: the expectancy disconfirmation model**

Several of the studies outlined above indicated that the congruence between victim expectations and actual police behaviour and demeanour at the scene influenced their levels of satisfaction with

the police. The expectancy disconfirmation model is a theoretical framework adopted from the consumer psychology literature that provides the rationale for these findings. Originally used to explain consumer satisfaction with products, this model has been extended to satisfaction with services. Several studies of crime victims have used this model with success in explaining satisfaction with police services (Chandek, 1999; Chandek and Porter, 1998; Reisig and Chandek, 2001).

Simply stated, the expectancy disconfirmation model proposes that satisfaction is a function of expectations of a product or service relative to the actual attributes of the product or service rendered (Cadotte *et al.*, 1987; Churchill and Surprenant, 1982; Oliver, 1977, 1980; Oliver and DeSarbo, 1988). In other words, satisfaction is determined by the extent to which products or services measure up to the expectations held by the consumer. In essence, expectations provide a baseline from which to compare perceptions of product performance or service delivery.

According to the expectancy disconfirmation model, products or services may measure up to expectations in one of three ways (Oliver, 1980). First, consumers may experience positive disconfirmation, where the product or services exceed expectations. Second, consumers may experience zero disconfirmation, when the product or service is exactly as expected. Finally, consumers may experience negative disconfirmation, when a product or service fails to meet up to expectations. Each type of disconfirmation relates to satisfaction in a different manner. In cases of positive or zero disconfirmation, when product performance is better than or equal to expectations, satisfaction is more likely. In cases of negative disconfirmation, when products/services are worse than expected, satisfaction is less likely.

As consumers of police services, crime victims are believed to possess certain expectation about the services police will provide. As the prior section indicated, crime victims hold expectations regarding what police will do on the scene. For example, victims may expect that police will (or will not) make an arrest, and will make evaluations of the police response based on this expectation. Victims also possess expectations about the manner in which they will be treated by police. For instance, domestic violence victims may expect that police will (or will not) treat them with courtesy and respect. The extent to which police live up to expectations of



demeanour is predicted to be an important determinant of satisfaction. In these ways, the expectancy disconfirmation model provides a promising framework to come to a more thorough appreciation of the factors that influence satisfaction with the police for victims of domestic violence.

Although empirical validation of this model comes from research solely conducted in the US, our study can test its applicability to crime victims in the UK. This research setting is particularly useful given the current policy climate in Britain. For example, the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Bill (2003) was passed with one of its central aims to encourage good practice in the treatment of victims and witnesses. This was partly in response to the government's white paper on criminal justice reform entitled *Safety and Justice* (2003) which implemented a three-pronged approach to “tackling domestic violence” including: prevention; protection and justice; and support to victims. “Protection and justice” includes recommendations specific to the police, including: ensuring an effective police response when victims report domestic violence; and ensuring that victims are not deterred by the way they are treated at any stage of the justice process. Additionally, national police training guidelines specify dealing “sensitively” with victims as part of the recommended approach. Given the current emphasis placed on providing both an effective and empathetic approach to domestic violence victims in England and Wales, our study is particularly useful in gauging whether these policies are impacting police practice.

## **Methodology**

### *Research setting*

The data for the current study were collected from women attending the Women's Safety Unit (WSU) in Cardiff, Wales. Cardiff is the capital city of Wales, with a population of approximately 350,000. The city is a seaport and the South Wales area has a history of coal mining and steelworks, although in recent times there has been an economic shift to tourism and hi-tech industry. Cardiff is home to the major campus of the University of Wales, the National Assembly Government for Wales, and the Millennium Stadium (the biggest sports arena in the UK). It is the fastest growing city in Britain, and was recently short-listed as one of eight cities contending to be Europe's cultural capital in 2008.

### *Data collection*

The source of data for this study comes from interviews with the women who came to the Women's Safety Unit (WSU) during its first year of operation. The WSU was created from a Home Office funding initiative to reduce violence against women. The WSU provided service to its first client in December 2001 and through January 2003 has been referred for service 1,150 women and their 1,482 children. Most referrals come from police or prosecutors, although many other community and criminal justice agencies also refer victims to the WSU.

The WSU provides a central point of access for women and their children experiencing domestic or sexual violence[1] by a former or current intimate partner in the Cardiff area. While the overriding aim of the WSU is to help victims gain safety, the WSU team also provides advice, advocacy, specialist counselling services, legal services, housing services, refuge provision, target hardening and collects evidence (one member of the WSU is a seconded police officer). Victims are provided with an effective, immediate, and consistent range of support services at one referral point. Through the provision of these services, the WSU hopes to restore women's faith in the criminal justice system in order to improve reporting rates to reduce levels of attrition.

Detailed information was gathered from the women as part of the initial interview/assessment process. This allowed WSU staff to facilitate the advocacy and counselling offered to the women as well as collecting information that could be used in this study. The primary interview instrument contains the following sections:

- client demographic information;
- abuse history;
- abusive incident report;
- perpetrator information;
- client perceptions of the police response;
- referral information;
- services offered to client; and
- client perceptions of WSU service.

The instrument gathered quantitative and qualitative information via closed and open-ended questions.

Due to the sensitive nature of the meetings between WSU staff and clientele, the completion of the data collection instruments

had to be a secondary consideration to making women feel comfortable, secure and safe. The WSU took great effort to insure the women knew that the information they provided would be held in the strictest confidence. Typically the WSU staff member would use the instruments to structure the interview and would fill in the forms along the way. Sometimes, however, the woman was too upset at the time so staff might gather information and then complete the form after the interview was completed. Finally, in other cases the woman would fill in parts of the form herself. It is not ideal, from a research point of view, to have different methods of gathering data. However, using these various data collection methods ensured that the primary goal and mission of the WSU (to help and support domestic violence) was not superseded by efforts to collect data.

### *Selection of the sample*

The current study is based on a sample of 222 women who came to the WSU for service. This sample of clients represents about 20 per cent of the 1,150 women referred to the WSU during its initial year of operation[2]. WSU staff attempt to make contact with all women referred to the WSU, but this is not always possible. At least six telephone calls are made to the woman at varying times in order to maximise the chance of making contact. If there is still no response, then the WSU asks the referring agency to check that the phone number is correct. If the referring agency is the police, then the attending officer also can re-visit the woman to insure that she does not require WSU assistance. About 200 women were either never successfully contacted or did not require WSU service.

The remaining women made contact with the WSU but it was not possible for all of them to have a completed data form. Often it was the case that the original contact with the WSU was very upsetting and, following the prescribed victim-centred methodology, the data form was not introduced if the WSU staff member felt it was not appropriate. Additionally sometimes the woman stated that she would return to the WSU to complete the data form, but never did. Several follow-up phone calls were made to these women but not all of them returned to complete the form. The sample of 222 women therefore represents the final product of a filtering process that includes: inability to make contact with

women; women not requiring or wanting WSU service; and/or data forms not being completed.

### *Measures*

#### *Dependent variable*

Victim satisfaction with the police was assessed by one general question "how satisfied were you with how the police handled the situation?" Victims were asked to respond on a five-point scale where 1=very satisfied and 5=very dissatisfied. Due to a lack of variability in the ordinal version of this variable (70 per cent of victims were satisfied or very satisfied), we collapsed it to a dummy version indicating the victim was satisfied with the police (yes/no). The dummy version is the dependent variable for all bivariate and multivariate analyses.

#### *Independent variables*

Victim characteristics were assessed by three types of variables. Demographic variables gathered information about the victims' age, race, and number of children in the home. Socioeconomic variables assessed whether victims received benefits (i.e. government aid), had access to a private income, and their current employment status. Victimization variables revealed whether the victim experienced sexual abuse as part of the violent relationship that brought them to the attention of the WSU, whether they had any previous police complaints for domestic violence from their current partner, and whether they called the police for help in the incident that brought them to the WSU.

Victims' experiences with the police were assessed in two ways: what victims expected from police and what victims reported police doing at the incident. Victims were asked for expectations and reports of five variables relating to the demeanour of the officer(s) that attended the incident:

1. Courteous or respectful.
2. Understanding.
3. Appear concerned.
4. Take time to listen.
5. Take situation seriously.

Victims were asked for expectations and reports of four variables relating to the behaviour of the officer(s) at the scene:

1. Speak to you separate from the perpetrator.

2. Question any witnesses present.
3. Search for or ask to see evidence.
4. Make an arrest.

All questions were answered yes/no by the victim. One final question about victims' experiences with police asked whether the response time was faster than expected, slower than expected, or about the same as expected.

Whether victims' expectations were fulfilled was determined by computing variables from the above nine questions. For each of the four police behaviours and five police demeanours, a variable was created that represents "expectation fulfilment." Expectation fulfilment was operationalised as the difference between victims having an expectation of a particular police demeanour or behaviour, and their reports of whether attending officers actually exhibited the particular demeanour or behaviour. For example, the "make an arrest" variable was computed by first selecting those victims that did have the expectation that an arrest would be made, and then determining the proportion of victims that reported that an arrest was made (expectation fulfilled) and those that reported that an arrest was not made (expectation unfulfilled).

*Statistical analyses.* Regression analyses were employed to assess the effects of expectation fulfilment on victims' satisfaction with the police while controlling their demographic and victimisation characteristics. The appropriate regression analysis for models with a binary dependent variable, such as satisfaction (yes/no), is logistic regression. Coefficients are interpreted by sign and significance, and represent the effect of an independent variable as the increase or decrease in the odds of the dependent variable occurring. Compared to linear regression models such as ordinary least squares, the logistic regression curve provides a better fit to the data when the dependent variable is dichotomous.

## **Results**

### *Univariate results*

#### *Demographic characteristics*

The victims are mostly white females who speak English and are less than 40 years old. More than four out of five victims have at least one child. Regarding employment, less than one in five WSU clients reported having a full-time job. Less than one-fourth are employed part-time and about half are currently unemployed. The

employment status of women has implications for the financial resources available to them should they need to live independently of a partner and/or raise children on their own. Only 45 per cent of clients report having a private income, but the average amount per month was under £700 (approximately \$1,050).

Given that most clients reported having more than two children at home, it would be difficult for most of the women in the sample to support themselves and their children on their private incomes alone.

*Abuse history.* Practically every woman in this study reported that they experienced physical abuse (94 per cent) or psychological abuse (98 per cent) from their current partners. For most women these forms of abuse have been on-going for several years. More than half of the women reported that the frequency and severity of the physical and emotional abuse had increased over the past 12 months. Additionally, 55 of the 222 women (25 per cent) reported experiencing sexual abuse from their current partners. About six in ten of the women had filed previous domestic violence complaints with the police on their current partners. In conclusion, the typical woman coming to the WSU has had an extensive history of domestic violence in her current relationship and has had previous contacts with the police as a result of these incidents.

*Victims' experiences with the police.* Table I provides information relevant to women's experiences with the police response. The first issue to note is that the women have high expectations of the police in terms of the demeanour they should exhibit when responding to domestic violence calls. More than 70 per cent of victims expected the police to be courteous or respectful, understanding, appear concerned, take the time to listen, and take the situation seriously. The victims had lower expectations with regard to police behaviour. Most victims thought that the police should speak to them separately, apart from the perpetrator (70 per cent). More than half of the victims expected the police to make an arrest (53 per cent) and to search for or ask to see evidence that domestic violence occurred (47 per cent). Smaller proportions of victims expected the police to question any witnesses present at the scene (43 per cent).

## **[\[Table I\]](#)**

Next it is apparent that, for the most part, police met victims' expectations. Only a very small percentage of victims expected, but did not report, a particular police behaviour or demeanour. The biggest discrepancy was for "question any witnesses present" and "search for or ask to see evidence." For both of these items, there was a discrepancy of about 10 per cent. For none of the variables did the police exceed victim expectations. However, the majority of victims (70 per cent) were satisfied or very satisfied with the police. Regarding response time, similar proportions of victims thought that the police arrived faster (26 per cent) or slower (21 per cent) than they expected.

### *Bivariate results*

Tables II and III report the results of the bivariate analyses conducted on victim expectations, victim reports, and victim satisfaction with the police. In Table II it is apparent that none of the victim expectation variables (five demeanour variables and four behaviour variables) were significantly related to victim satisfaction. However, all of the victim report variables significantly impacted levels of satisfaction in the expected direction. The percentage of victims who were satisfied with the police significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ) increased when the police were courteous or respectful, when they were understanding, when they appeared concerned, took time to listen, took their situation seriously, spoke to them separate from the perpetrator, questioned any witnesses present, searched for or asked to see evidence, or made an arrest.

These relationships are not only statistically significant, but also substantively significant (i.e. these impacts are large). For example, only 53 per cent of victims are satisfied when the police do not take time to listen to them, but 97 per cent of victims are satisfied when they do. This almost twice the amount of victims who end up feeling satisfied. The same can be said for the other demeanour variables that also show substantial impacts. Many women's comments about the police reveal the importance they place on the attitudes that the officers display towards them. For example, one woman said that officers "could have been more sympathetic and less judgmental," while another stated that police "could have been more understanding." Another woman said that responding officers were chauvinistic and "could have been more polite to the children ... they did not want to listen to the children."

The variable that shows the most dramatic impact is whether the officer took the situation seriously – when they did, 98 per cent of victims were satisfied, but when they did not only 42 per cent of victims were satisfied. As one woman stated, “they could have taken the incident more seriously and taken the statements more quickly.” This variable probably reflects whether victims feel respected by police who recognise how traumatic the incident was for them, and treat the situation as if a serious crime has occurred rather than a waste of time or “garbage work.”

Police behaviours that increase victim satisfaction include speaking to the victim separately from the perpetrator, questioning witnesses, searching for evidence, and making arrests. When officers engage in these behaviours, significantly greater proportions of victims are satisfied. These behaviours reflect police taking the situation seriously, and being proactive at the scene. Conversely, when officers do not engage in these behaviours, victims may take this as a sign that the incident is not being treated as a serious matter. Notably, the largest difference in satisfaction emanates from the police decision to arrest. A total of 64 per cent of victims were satisfied when police made an arrest, compared to 29 per cent of victims when police did not make an arrest. Another issue that arose from the comments women made was their dissatisfaction at not being kept informed about the status of the case. Many women expressed a desire for police to “be better at feeding back information” or to “follow up with a visit.” In conclusion, results from Table II would seem to indicate that it is the actual behaviour or demeanour exhibited, rather than the expectation of a particular demeanour or behaviour that is important in determining levels of victim satisfaction.

### **[\[Table II\]](#)**

Table III examines the relationship between expectation fulfilment and victim satisfaction. Expectation fulfilment represents the difference between victims having an expectation of a particular police demeanour or behaviour, and their reports of whether attending officers actually exhibited the particular demeanour or behaviour. While bivariate results examining behaviour and expectations individually demonstrated that behaviour is more important, Table III indicates that expectation fulfilment is more important. In other words, it is the extent to which behaviour



matches expectations, and not behaviour alone, that is important in determining satisfaction levels.

Not only are the results statistically significant, but they are also substantially significant. The percentage of victims who are satisfied more than doubles when expectations are fulfilled regarding police being understanding (from 33 per cent to 75 per cent), appearing concerned (from 33 per cent to 71 per cent), taking time to listen (from 37 per cent to 76 per cent) and taking the situation seriously (from 33 per cent to 76 per cent). The percentage of satisfied victims increases substantially when expectations are fulfilled with regard to police treating them with courtesy or respect (from 54 per cent to 80 per cent). For police behaviour, expectation fulfilment regarding evidence collection was significantly related to victim satisfaction, as was making an arrest. In conclusion, it is evident that unsatisfied victims had unfulfilled expectations.

### **[Table III]**

#### *Multivariate analyses*

Table IV presents the logistic regression results. The expectation fulfilment variables were used to create two scales[3]. The demeanour fulfilment scale was created by summing the five demeanour expectation fulfilment variables ( $\alpha=0.89$ ). The behaviour fulfilment scale was created by summing the four behaviour expectation fulfilment variables ( $\alpha=0.60$ ). The significant results are in accordance with our theoretically-informed hypotheses regarding the relationship between victim expectations and satisfaction with the police. Holding constant the effects of victim demographic characteristics (age, race, and employment status) and victimisation variables (previous domestic violence complaints and sexual violence), expectations significantly impacted levels of satisfaction. Satisfaction increased significantly as expectations regarding police behaviour and demeanour were fulfilled. Victims who had their expectations fulfilled regarding police demeanour were more than three times as likely to be satisfied with the police. The effect also was strong for the behaviour fulfilment scale; victims who had their expectations fulfilled were about two-and-a-half times as likely to report a satisfactory response from the police. Additionally, victims who called the police themselves (as opposed to a neighbour or family member) were significantly more satisfied with the police response.

## **[Table IV]**

The model as a whole was statistically significant and the pseudo R<sup>2</sup> estimates indicate that the model explained a high proportion of the variance in the victim satisfaction variable. In conclusion, the bivariate and multivariate results exhibit both statistical and substantive significance and are consistent with past research as well as our theoretical model. Expectation fulfilment is the strongest predictor of victim satisfaction – even taking into account demographic characteristics and the victimisation experiences of victims[4].

## **Discussion**

In this study, we used the expectancy disconfirmation model to frame domestic violence victims' satisfaction with the police as the congruence between expectations of police behaviour and demeanour and actual behaviour and demeanour. Several important findings emerged from our research. First, our study provides empirical evidence of the applicability of this model to studying crime victims outside of the US. Given the extensive body of research demonstrating the usefulness of this model to both different types of crime victims (e.g. burglary, robbery, assault and domestic violence) in different criminal justice systems (e.g. Michigan, Wisconsin and Wales), we feel confident that this model holds the key to understanding crime victim satisfaction with the police. One area fruitful for additional study would be whether the model also proves useful to studying satisfaction with other community and criminal justice service-providers working with victims.

Second, the current study yields findings in accordance with past research that satisfaction with the police is a function of the extent to which victims' expectations are fulfilled (Chandek, 1999; Chandek and Porter, 1998; Reisig and Chandek, 2001). When victims expected and received certain police behaviours (e.g. talking to the perpetrator separately, making an arrest) or expected and received a positive police demeanour (e.g. appearing concerned, taking the time to listen), victims were significantly more likely to be satisfied than when police failed to live up to these expectations. Our results confirm the contention that domestic violence victims' satisfaction is increased “... when victims have the opportunity to express their concerns and when they feel that their wishes are not

ignored” (Erez and Tontodonato, 1992, p. 395). As mentioned previously, victim satisfaction is particularly important to understand given its potential consequences for victims' participation with the criminal justice system and willingness to contact agencies for any assistance needed in the future.

Victims who called the police themselves also expressed much higher levels of satisfaction than those who had someone else call on their behalf. Victims may ally themselves with the criminal justice system in order to gain the power they lack in their relationships (Ford, 1991; Ford and Regoli, 1992). If the women in this study called the police as a means of empowering themselves and/or managing the abuse in their lives (whether to simply calm the situation or to have police make an arrest), then this might be a logical explanation for their increased levels of satisfaction.

What this and other research makes clear is that expectation fulfilment is more important than characteristics of victims (such as age, race, or gender) that were previously thought to be the most important determinants of satisfaction. This has important implications for how researchers should investigate citizen satisfaction with the police. Instead of focusing attention on characteristics of the victims, we should be drawn instead to look at what expectations they hold of police. After all, it is victims' expectations rather than their demographic characteristics that are amenable to change.

Additionally, our research provides some evidence for the argument that victims want and expect many different things from the criminal justice response to their cases. Whether police made an arrest was only one of many police actions that significantly impacted victims' satisfaction: speaking to victims separately from perpetrators, appearing courteous or respectful, being understanding, acting concerned, taking the time to listen, and taking the situation seriously were other important determinants of satisfaction. These findings have particular resonance given government policy drives in Britain. It is to the policy implications of our work that we now turn.

### *Policy implications*

The current policy context in Britain makes our study particularly salient. As mentioned previously, the government recently proposed a set of reforms designed to enhance the likelihood that

victims of domestic violence will receive both effective and sensitive treatment by criminal justice officials. Training and guidance issued by government bodies therefore recognizes police behaviour and attitudes towards victims as an important part of the preferred criminal justice response. Our study provides empirical support for these initiatives, as victims themselves have made clear that they not only require certain behaviours from officers, but also expect a certain level of treatment in terms of courtesy and respect.

In fact, our study found that expectations regarding police demeanour appear to be more important determinants of satisfaction than expectations regarding police behaviour. Other research has reached similar conclusions (Brandl and Horvath, 1991; Chandek, 1999; Chandek and Porter, 1998; Reisig and Chandek, 2001; Shapland, 1983). This finding could have potentially substantial implications for police confidence and ability to handle what is often perceived to be the tricky and frustrating crime of domestic violence. If officers are made more aware of the fact that treating victims with courtesy, respect, understanding, appearing concerned and taking the time to listen could have implications regarding victims' desire to cooperate and their evaluations of police performance, then perhaps officers will be more inclined to exhibit these demeanours at the scene. These are changes that are perhaps easier to achieve because demeanour is more within officer control than investigatory actions (such as questioning witnesses, collecting evidence, making an arrest) that are usually dependent on situational features of the incident. On the other hand, we must caution against encouraging officers to be nice to victims in the place of using their police powers to actually do something for victims. Sensitive and comprehensive training on the issue should increase the likelihood that officers can achieve the ideal balance.

Our research supports the recommendation put forward by the British government's *Safety and Justice* (2003) document that providing information and advice is necessary to help victims gain access to support services and legal protection. Information sharing between the police and the public also could lead to more realistic expectations on the part of victims if they are made aware of what can and cannot be routinely expected of the police response. Additionally, improved information sharing could lead to more responsive treatment of victims by police, if officers are educated

(via policies and procedures) as to what victims expect, and then strive to meet these expectations whenever possible. For these reasons, police should proactively engage in an education/media campaign in their local areas about what is realistic to expect from their response to domestic violence.

At the individual level, another component of improved information sharing is providing follow up contact with victims. One of the most common refrains from victims is a desire to know “what happened” as a result of police involvement in their lives. Because victims tend to expect this of police, not providing any type of after-care to victims can be considered a major source of their dissatisfaction. This is where community-based advocacy services working in partnership with the police, such as the Women's Safety Unit, can make a real difference in the level of service provided to victims, and their subsequent levels of satisfaction and participation in the criminal justice system.

Finally, our study should remind personnel working in community or criminal justice agencies not to assume they know what victims need or want. Women experiencing domestic violence are unique individuals, albeit sharing a similar type of problem in their lives. They have managed their circumstances in different ways in the past, and they will make different decisions about how to proceed with the future. Providing a service that can account for the myriad needs and abilities of women experiencing domestic violence should be the overarching goal of any approach to addressing domestic violence in the community.

Along those lines, a victim-centred model may be preferred (see Mills, 1998, 1999). Victim empowerment, or giving women experiencing domestic violence a say in the direction their cases take in the legal system, is a key component of this model. Our findings suggest that empowering women to make choices, and then having criminal justice actors support those choices, will lead to greater satisfaction among domestic violence victims.

## **Notes**

1. The definition of domestic violence adopted by the WSU is: “the misuse of power and the exercise of control by one adult person, usually a man, over another adult, usually a woman within the context of a close personal relationship. Such abuse may manifest itself in a variety of ways including physical violence, emotional or psychological abuse, sexual violence and abuse, financial control and abuse and the imposition of social isolation or movement deprivation.”

2. Unfortunately, referral information is not computerized so a statistical comparison between the sample and population is not possible. Anecdotal evidence, interviews with WSU staff, police data, and the demographic characteristics of Cardiff generally would suggest that the women interviewed do not differ significantly from those not able to be interviewed in terms of their race, age, status as mothers or socio-economic background. However, this is a weakness of the current study that should be kept in mind when interpreting the results.
3. A "total fulfilment scale" was created by summing all nine expectation fulfilment variables ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ). Substituting this scale did not affect the results; therefore, the two smaller scales were retained in the analyses as they provide more specific information regarding the impact of expectation fulfilment on satisfaction.
4. To check the veracity of this statement, we performed two additional analyses. First, we conducted a logistic regression analysis of the baseline model (including all variables except the two fulfilment scales). This was to reveal whether any of the non-theoretical variables might be significant predictors of victim satisfaction. Results indicated that none of the variables were significant predictors of satisfaction, nor was the model as a whole statistically significant. Second, we tested our model using multinomial logistic regression, where the dependent variable was coded into three levels (very satisfied/satisfied/not satisfied). This was to determine whether significant predictors changed according to different levels of satisfaction. Results were similar to those presented in Table IV, except that "victim called the police" was not significant. The two fulfilment scales were the only statistically significant predictors of victim satisfaction. These analyses further bolster our main finding that expectation fulfilment is the most important determinant of victim satisfaction.

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### **Further reading**

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**Table I.** Descriptive statistics for victim expectations and evaluations of the police

Variable	Value	Victim expectation		Victim report	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Police demeanour variables</i>					
Courteous or respectful	No	7	3.2	16	7.2
	Yes	172	77.5	170	76.6
	Missing	43	19.4	36	16.2
Understanding	No	13	5.9	21	9.5
	Yes	163	73.4	160	72.1
	Missing	46	20.7	41	18.5
Appear concerned	No	14	6.3	25	11.3
	Yes	157	70.7	153	68.9
	Missing	51	23.0	44	19.8
Take time to listen	No	12	5.4	24	10.8
	Yes	159	71.6	161	72.5
	Missing	51	23.0	37	16.7
Take situation seriously	No	11	5.0	27	12.2
	Yes	168	75.7	156	70.3
	Missing	43	19.4	39	17.6
<i>Police behaviour variables</i>					
Speak to victim separate from perpetrator	No	8	3.6	19	8.6
	Yes	156	70.3	157	70.7
	Missing	58	26.1	46	20.7
Question any witnesses present	No	37	16.7	85	38.3
	Yes	96	43.2	70	31.5
	Missing	89	40.1	67	30.2
Search for or ask to see evidence	No	49	22.1	81	36.5
	Yes	104	46.8	81	36.5
	Missing	69	31.1	60	27.0
Make an arrest	No	42	18.9	85	38.3
	Yes	118	53.2	105	47.3
	Missing	62	27.9	32	14.4
Overall satisfaction with police	Very satisfied			73	32.9
	Satisfied			83	37.4
	Neutral/do not know			12	5.4
	Dissatisfied			20	9.0
	Very dissatisfied			11	5.0
Police response time	Missing			23	10.4
	Faster than expected			58	26.1
	Slower than expected			46	20.7
	About the same as expected			45	20.3
	Missing			73	32.9

**Table II.** Bivariate results for victim expectations of and satisfaction with the police

Variable	Victim is satisfied		Chi-Sq.	Sig	
	No	Yes			
<i>Victim expectations of police demeanour</i>					
All variables non-significant					
<i>Victim expectations of police behaviour</i>					
All variables non-significant					
<i>Victim reports of police demeanour</i>					
Courteous or respectful	No	30.8	2.1	33.56	0.000
	Yes	69.2	97.9		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Understanding	No	47.1	2.8	53.69	0.000
	Yes	52.9	97.2		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Appear concerned	No	48.6	5.0	44.92	0.000
	Yes	51.4	95.0		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Take time to listen	No	47.4	2.8	55.86	0.000
	Yes	52.6	97.2		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Take situation seriously	No	57.9	2.1	77.47	0.000
	Yes	42.1	97.9		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
<i>Victim reports of police behaviour</i>					
Speak to victim separate from perpetrator	No	33.3	1.5	38.04	0.000
	Yes	66.7	98.5		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Question any witnesses present	No	73.0	47.8	7.13	0.006
	Yes	27.0	52.2		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Search for or ask to see evidence	No	73.2	40.7	12.86	0.000
	Yes	26.8	59.3		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Make an arrest	No	71.4	36.1	16.45	0.000
	Yes	28.6	63.9		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		

**Table III.** Bivariate results for expectation fulfilment and satisfaction with the police

Variable		Victim is satisfied		Chi-Sq.	Sig
		No	Yes		
<i>Expectation fulfilment from police demeanour</i>					
Courteous or respectful	Expectation unfulfilled	46.5	20.5	11.80	0.001
	Expectation fulfilled	53.5	79.5		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Understanding	Expectation unfulfilled	67.4	25.0	26.99	0.000
	Expectation fulfilled	32.6	75.0		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Appear concerned	Expectation unfulfilled	67.4	28.8	21.50	0.000
	Expectation fulfilled	32.6	71.2		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Take time to listen	Expectation unfulfilled	62.8	24.4	22.64	0.000
	Expectation fulfilled	37.2	75.6		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Take situation seriously	Expectation unfulfilled	67.4	23.7	29.07	0.000
	Expectation fulfilled	32.6	76.3		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
<i>Expectation fulfilment from police behaviour</i>					
Speak to victim separate from perpetrator	Expectation unfulfilled	41.9	26.9	3.57	0.046
	Expectation fulfilled	58.1	73.1		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Question any witnesses present	Expectation unfulfilled	76.7	72.4	0.32	0.361
	Expectation fulfilled	23.3	27.6		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Search for or ask to see evidence	Expectation unfulfilled	79.1	65.4	2.92	0.061
	Expectation fulfilled	20.9	34.6		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		
Make an arrest	Expectation unfulfilled	81.4	60.3	6.61	0.007
	Expectation fulfilled	18.6	39.7		
	Total %	100.0	100.0		

Note: \*Expectation fulfilment represents the difference between victims having an expectation of a particular police demeanour or behaviour, and their reports of whether attending officers actually exhibited the particular demeanour or behavior

**Table IV.** Logistic regression results predicting victim satisfaction with the police

Variable	B	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Constant	-8.26	2.58	10.279	1	0.001	0.000
<i>Independent variables</i>						
Age	0.05	0.04	1.799	1	0.180	1.050
White	0.84	1.00	0.712	1	0.399	2.316
Unemployed	1.16	0.73	2.524	1	0.112	3.187
Sexual violence	0.38	0.99	0.144	1	0.705	1.455
Previous DV complaints	0.43	0.70	0.378	1	0.539	1.541
Victim called the police	1.80	0.84	4.575	1	0.032	6.020
Response time*			5.155	2	0.076	
Faster than expected	1.00	0.84	1.429	1	0.232	2.729
Slower than expected	-1.06	0.83	1.617	1	0.204	0.347
Demeanour fulfilment scale**	1.19	0.27	20.015	1	0.000	3.278
Behaviour fulfilment scale***	0.90	0.35	6.529	1	0.011	2.470
<i>Model fit</i>						
- 2 Log likelihood	66.80					
Model chi-square	61.67					
df	10					
sig.	0.000					
Nagelkerke pseudo R-square	0.61					
Cox and Snell pseudo R-square	0.40					

Notes: \*The reference category is “the same as expected”; \*\*Created by summing the five demeanour variables (alpha = 0:89); \*\*\*Created by summing the four behaviour variables (alpha = 0:60); A total fulfilment scale was created with the nine variables (alpha = 0:83) but substituting this scale did not affect the results