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Examining patterns of reporting amongst victims of partner abuse

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It is widely recognised that victims of partner abuse are among the least likely to report their victimisation to the police. While there has been an increased research interest in this issue in recent years, this has predominantly been focused in North America. Using data from the 2008/09 sweep of the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey this study employs logistic regression to examine the factors associated with the police coming to know about incidences of partner abuse in Scotland.

Drawing on a broad range of existing literature and theory on the reporting of partner abuse, domestic violence, and crime more generally, our analysis sought to test the following hypotheses:

1. Partner abuse victims of lower socio-economic status will be *more* likely to have the police know about their experience of abuse
2. There will be a curvilinear relationship between the age of the victim and the likelihood of police awareness of abuse, i.e. the likelihood of the police knowing about an incident will increase according to the age of the victim until an age threshold is reached, at which point likelihood will then begin to decrease again
3. Female victims of partner abuse will be *more* likely to have the police know about their experience of abuse
4. Partner abuse victims who are married to, or living with, their abuser are *less* likely to have the police know about their experience of abuse
5. The likelihood of the police knowing about an incident of partner abuse will increase as the severity of the incident (as indicated by injury, repetition, and psychological impact on victim) increases
6. Partner abuse victims whose children witnessed the abuse will be *more* likely to have the police know about their experience
7. The police are more likely to become aware of an incident if the victim holds a positive attitude towards the police

Initial analyses of the survey data indicate support for all of these hypotheses, with the exception of the impact of psychological abuse. While experiencing multiple incidences of abuse and suffering multiple physical effects increased the likelihood of the police coming to know about the most recent incident of partner abuse, the victim experiencing an accumulation of psychological effects appears to make it *less* likely that the police will come to know.

Those factors that appeared to have the strongest influence on the police coming to know about incidences of partner abuse are: the victim being of low socio-economic status (never worked or long term unemployed); the victim being female; and the victim having children in their household who saw or heard the incident.

The researchers are in the process of writing up this study and a complete paper will be available in due course.