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Police awareness and involvement in cases of domestic and partner abuse

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Abstract

The last decade has seen the number of incidents of domestic and partner abuse coming to the attention of the police increase by around 50%. Over the same period, new legislative measures have sought to criminalise and protect against abusive behaviour, while the Scottish Government's Violence Against Women team has developed a national strategy for tackling domestic abuse and guidance for practitioners in the field. In spite of this activity, victims of domestic and partner abuse remain among the least likely to report their victimization to the police. Moreover, research seeking to explore and understand this issue is scarce. Drawing on Scottish Crime and Justice Survey data, this paper presents an exploratory logistic regression analysis of the factors influencing whether or not the police become aware of victims' experience of abuse. Highlighting that a wide spectrum of individuals experience domestic and partner abuse, this analysis demonstrates clear disparity between key groups of victims in terms of police awareness and attention. Female victims, victims without employment, victims experiencing multiple abuse, and victims whose children witness abuse are the most likely to come to the attention of the police. Young victims, male victims and victims in employment are among the least likely. These findings highlight critical gaps in current national policy and guidance, and present an opportunity to reconsider strategies for police/ victim engagement.

Keywords: domestic abuse; police reporting

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the number of domestic abuse incidents coming to the attention of the police across Scotland has increased by around 50%, rising from 36,000 recorded incidents in 2000 to just under 52,000 in 2010 (Scottish Government, 2010a). Over the same period, national policy and legislation has sought to address the issues of domestic and partner abuse through criminalisation of abusive behaviour and provision of new civil measures (for example the Adult Support and Protection Scotland Act 2007, the Criminal Justice and Licensing Scotland Act 2010, and the Domestic Abuse Scotland Act 2011). The Scottish

Government's Violence Against Women team has also raised awareness amongst practitioners encountering women victims of domestic abuse, developing the 'Preventing Domestic Abuse: A National Strategy' and the 'Handling Domestic Abuse Cases: a toolkit to aid the development of specialist approaches to cases of domestic abuse' as key frameworks for action in the field.

However, in spite of this raft of activity victims of domestic and partner abuse remain among the least likely to report their victimisation to the police. Recent sweeps of the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) reveal only around one in five report any police involvement following an incident of abusive behaviour (Hamlyn and Brown, 2007; MacLeod et al., 2009a; MacLeod and Page, 2010), compared to a figure of around two in five victims of other violent crimes (MacLeod et al., 2009b; Page et al., 2010). Current national policing priorities outlined in the ACPOS Scottish Policing Assessment 2011-15 highlight the 'under-reporting' of domestic abuse as a key area for action, yet the available data provided by the SCJS on victim experience and responses to domestic and partner abuse have, as yet, been under-analysed. The aim of this paper is to use these data to explore patterns of police involvement and develop a better understanding of the experiences of victims of domestic and partner abuse. In doing so, this paper will demonstrate the limitations of current conceptualisations of domestic and partner abuse that need to be overcome in order that the needs of all victims can be met.

Literature Review

In the existing literature 'partner abuse' is often used to describe abusive behaviour in an intimate relationship occurring on a 'one-off' basis, while 'domestic abuse/violence' refers to more systematic and sustained abuse, acknowledging imbalances of power and control between men and women (Dobash and Dobash, 1979, 1992). In this paper 'partner abuse' will be used to reflect the approach adopted in the SCJS questionnaire. The definition of abuse utilised in the survey broadly mirrors that employed in the 'Joint Protocol between the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service' (2008, pg.1):

> Any form of physical, sexual or mental and emotional abuse which might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship. The relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse can be committed in the home or elsewhere.

> While available evidence suggests that the most prevalent instances of domestic abuse are male violence towards women, this definition acknowledges and includes female violence towards men and violence between partners or ex-partners in close, same-sex relationships.

This definition includes all survey respondents, regardless of gender, and the structure of the questionnaire is such that the survey can capture both one-off and on-going abuse.

There is a well established and growing literature examining the factors that influence whether victims of crime report their experiences to the police. It is argued that understanding the social processes leading to victim reporting of crime is a critical step to increasing reporting rates and addressing unequal police resource allocation (Baumer, 2002; Goudriaan et al., 2006). This is a particularly salient point with respect to domestic and partner abuse as a crime taking place within private settings not routinely visible to the police (Black, 1973). The existing literature demonstrates that the decision to report a crime is

nested within, and influenced by, a much wider context, and is the outcome of a complex interplay between a variety of structural, ecological, normative and situational factors, which both constrain and encourage or motivate the individual. There has been a recent proliferation in papers analysing the reporting of partner abuse to the police and an increasing focus on 'helpseeking' for women victims. However, the field remains underdeveloped. The focus of this paper is broader police awareness of partner abuse victims, as opposed to solely victim reporting of abuse, due to the wider focus of the data available in Scotland. Literature to inform the study has been gathered via academic databases and selected for inclusion here on the basis of its salience to the issue at hand. A critical question arising is whether or not the findings from the more general literature are applicable to victims of domestic and partner abuse. Do the same factors influencing wider crime reporting also influence the reporting, and more broadly defined 'police awareness', of partner abuse?

Structural factors

Black's (1973, 1976) sociology of law posits that structural forces determine legal involvement in a dispute or conflict between individuals, arguing that an individual's status within society, and their status position in relation to an offending party, acts to constrain the mobilisation and application of law. 'Vertical distance' between parties, wherein one party is of higher social status than the other, determines how conflicts are perceived and responded to, with the direction of action (upwards or downwards between two statuses) and the degree of difference between victim and offender shaping perceptions of seriousness. The more seriously an offence is regarded, the more likely the law is to be applied in response. While it is not possible with existing victimisation surveys to capture the differences in status between victim and offender, socio-economic effects on reporting have been found with analyses suggesting that victims of higher socio-economic status, indicated variously by social classification, household income, home ownership and employment status, are more likely to report both personal and property crime (Goudriaan et al., 2004; Goudriaan et al., 2006; MacDonald, 2001; Skogan, 1994). Studies focusing specifically on partner abuse also consider socio-economic status, but, contrastingly, analysis from England and Wales has shown that victims of partner abuse experiencing poor financial circumstances, i.e. of *low* socio-economic status, are more likely to have police know about their victimisation (Mirrlees-Black 1998).

An effect of ethnic background on crime reporting is also observed, with victims of ethnic minority status apparently less likely to report (Goudriaan et al., 2006; Skogan, 1994). However, it is argued it is difficult to separate this effect from the more general effect of socio-economic disadvantage (Block, 1974; Ingram 2007). Qualitative research in the UK with ethnic minority women who have been victims of partner, domestic and wider familial abuse suggests a similar pattern, with additional language and cultural barriers, for example such as honour and shame within Asian families, and the experience of discrimination in the wider community preventing reporting or disclosure beyond the immediate family (see Burman et al., 2004; Gill, 2004). Contrasting this however, US partner abuse literature suggests victims from ethnic minority backgrounds are *more* likely to report incidents of abuse to the police (Akers and Kaukinen, 2009; Bachman and Coker, 1995), although white women may be more likely to utilise greater levels of broader 'helpseeking', drawing on friends and family, and other professionals (Kaukinen, 2004). Age of the victim is a further important influence on crime reporting, the effect being that as age of victims' increases, so too does the likelihood of reporting (MacDonald, 2001; Skogan, 1994). An age effect is also observed for victims of partner abuse, with older victims more likely to draw on police help (Mirrlees-Black 1998; Tarling and Morris, 2010). However, Akers and Kaukinen's (2009)

analysis establishes a curvilinear relationship between age and reporting, with likelihood of reporting increasing until a critical age threshold is reached, at which point the likelihood begins to decrease again.

Gender effects have also been examined, with indications that a female victim of crime is more likely to report her victimisation to the police (Goudriaan et al. 2004; MacDonald, 2001). However, Goudriaan et al.'s (2004) analysis suggests that gender effects are eliminated when considering contact crime only. A large proportion of partner abuse and domestic violence literature focuses exclusively on female victims. Where gender effects are examined, again, female victims emerge as more likely than males to report their abuse (Felson et al 2002; Mirrlees-Black 1998; Walby and Allen 2004). Felson et al (2002) argue women victims of partner abuse and domestic violence are more likely than men to call police as they are more likely to regard the abuse as serious and to desire protection, and less likely to see partner violence as a private matter. This mirrors Johnson's (1995) assertion that violence experienced by men and women in intimate settings is fundamentally different. Debate as to whether violence and abuse perpetrated by men and women can be regarded in the same way is divisive. On one side, studies focusing on Johnson's (1995, 2001) category of 'intimate/ partner terrorism' resolutely argue that violence perpetrated by men against women is more serious through both the exertion of control and frequency, severity, and impact on the victim (Dobash and Dobash, 2004; Nazroo, 1995). On the other are those suggesting women's violence against men, rather than simply symptomatic of self-defence, can also be used as a mechanism of exerting and maintaining power and control within the relationship (Ross and Babcock, 2009). These differing and polarised perspectives suggest that an in-depth examination of gender effects on police awareness would be an important contribution to the field.

Ecological factors
Recent studies of victim reporting argue the importance of considering the community in which an individual is situated (typically defined geographically as neighbourhood, jurisdiction or nation state), as the social context influencing the decision making process. Previous analysis has found that the lowest rates of police notification for simple assault are observed for victims residing in the most affluent and most disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Baumer, 2002). Goudriaan et al. (2006) further demonstrate that increased social cohesion in an area leads to slight increases in probability of reporting amongst victims of crime, and increased levels of socio-economic disadvantage leads to decreased probability of reporting. Crucially, the sharpest reduction in probability of reporting was observed in those neighbourhoods experiencing the highest levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

An examination of the influence of ecological factors on police reporting is lacking in the domestic and partner abuse literature. Given the geographical emphasis it is understandable that these analytical questions and techniques have not been transferred to the more specific examinations of partner abuse and domestic violence. Arguably it is the connections that victims of partner abuse and domestic violence have to social and personal networks, rather than geographical context, that are important in determining reporting behaviour (Chang et al., 2010; Hoyle and Sanders, 2000; Patterson and Campbell, 2010), whether that reporting be to the police or medical or social service professionals, or to friends and family. Nevertheless, the interesting findings with respect to individual and neighbourhood socio-economic status cited above suggest that an analysis of the possible effect of neighbourhood socio-economic disadvantage would be a useful contribution to the field.

Normative factors

A growing area of research examines the impact of normative factors, such as the attitudes and beliefs individuals hold on crime, how criminal acts ought to be dealt with and by whom, and their perceptions of the police, on victims' reporting behaviour. These factors are argued to be shaped by (and inextricably linked to) structural and ecological context, and by resultant experiences. Moreover, it is emerging that concerns about community, neighbourhood, and wider social order also merit consideration. Again however, the influence of normative factors is another area neglected in the partner abuse and domestic violence literature.

Anderson's (1999) US-based analysis presents a possible explanation for neighbourhood effects, arguing that decreased likelihood of crime reporting may be especially pronounced in extremely disadvantaged central-city neighbourhoods, and particularly among young, black males. This is due to the inhibitive effects of a sense of alienation and lack of faith in the police and justice system, and the application of the 'code of the street' which prescribes the 'proper' way to respond to interpersonal violence. This rejection of the police as a means of recourse in cases of dispute and conflict feeds into Tyler's (2006a, 2006b) theory of US police legitimacy and its importance in securing cooperation between victims and the police. Tyler (2006a, 2006b) argues that legitimacy is earned through a model of procedural justice, whereby the police act in a neutral and non-discriminatory manner and treat individuals fairly, and that judgements on procedural justice have a stronger influence on opinion than the outcomes of interaction, and perceived performance and distributive justice (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2011 pp. 258). Recent UK-based analysis (Bradford et al., 2009) provides some support for the theory of legitimacy and the procedural justice model. Findings suggest that positive attitudes towards the police, or high levels of trust and confidence in police procedural justice and effectiveness, are associated with increased rates of victim reporting (Bradford and Jackson, 2011; MacDonald, 2001). Further analyses highlight that concerns about wider social order, beyond one's own personal experiences of disorder and policing, are also important in influencing opinion on, and trust in, the police (Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; Kaarianen and Siren, 2011). Bradford and Jackson (2011) found that perceptions of high 'social threat' (worry about crime and concerns of declining morality and authority) were associated with increased propensity to call upon the police, but that perceptions of low collective efficacy and cooperation in the local area have a negative effect on propensity.

Gracia and Herrero (2007) provide similar analysis, examining individual propensity to call on the police when witnessing or becoming aware of incidents of domestic violence. Findings are analogous in so far as individuals perceiving high levels of social disorder in their neighbourhood were less likely to suggest they would call the police in such a situation. However, no analyses testing these effects on actual reporting behaviour or police awareness exist. The omission of an examination of normative factors in domestic abuse analyses is understandable to an extent. Much of the literature examining the legitimacy of the police focuses on public disorder and encounters based on responses to this. Domestic and partner abuse are intimate crimes taking place within private contexts where, it might be argued, that concerns about the world 'out there' are irrelevant in victim decision making. Indeed, the view of partner and domestic abuse as a private matter may inhibit police reporting, as the police would not be regarded as having a legitimate role to play in such circumstances. Nevertheless, Felson et al. (2002) argue that believing the police will regard an incident of domestic violence as serious encourages victim reporting. Therefore it seems likely that a

positive view of the police is important in encouraging reporting and is an important factor to consider in analysis.

Situational factors

A number of studies show that situational, or incident-specific, factors influence reporting behaviour. Perceived severity of the incident is critical, with victims of crime more likely to report incidents where personal safety is threatened, physical injury or emotional harm are experienced, or loss is incurred (Gottfredson and Hindelang, 1979; Skogan, 1994; Tarling and Morris, 2010). Severity or seriousness of abuse is also frequently considered in analysis of partner abuse reporting behaviour. Reflecting the general literature, the physical effects of the abuse are critical, with both damage to property and injury to the victim found to increase the likelihood of reporting (Akers and Kaukinen, 2009; Bachman and Coker, 1995; Mirrlees-Black, 1998; Tarling and Morris, 2010; Walby and Allen, 2004). Victim perception and emotional impact (for instance regarding an incident as serious, experiencing high levels of emotional harm, or feeling very frightened), and the use of a weapon by an abuser also positively influence reporting behaviour (Akers and Kaukinen, 2009; Felson et al., 2002; Mirrlees-Black, 1998; Tarling and Morris 2010). Severity of an incident has also been demonstrated to influence the reporting behaviour of 'bystanders' who witness abuse. For example, drawing on Latanè and Darley (1970), Gracia et al. (2006) present analyses suggesting that perceived severity, when coupled with a strong sense of personal responsibility to 'do something' to address the abuse, has a positive effect on reported propensity to call the police.

Within this discussion of severity it must be remembered that for some victims, incidents of partner abuse represent a 'one-off' occurrence, while for others incidents are experienced within a continuum of abusive behaviour perpetrated by the same partner (or indeed multiple partners). From this perspective, it has been argued that escalation of abusive behaviour over time leads victims to call upon the police or to seek help to end the behaviour and, in some cases, the relationship with the abusive partner (Chang et al., 2010). Qualitative research (Patterson and Campbell, 2010; Hoyle and Sanders, 2000) reveals that survivors of sustained domestic violence and sexual assault, whose assault was one of a series of incidents of abuse, did not call upon the police to arrest their partners but as means of immediate protection or help in ending the relationship. This provides an interesting context in which to re-consider the application of the procedural justice model and the perceptions that partner abuse victims are likely to hold.

Black's (1973, 1976) theory of 'relational distance' states that the relationship between two parties determines the mobilisation of law and where that relationship is close, or the distance between victim and offender is 'short', law is less likely to be applied. This purported impact of victim-offender relationship finds consistent support in empirical studies of crime reporting behaviour (Block, 1974; Skogan, 1994; Tarling and Morris, 2010) and is of particular importance when considering domestic and partner abuse. A number of studies examining victim responses to violence consider incidents of domestic and partner abuse (Block 1974, Tarling and Morris 2010, Kaukinen 2004) and cite the relationship as the key factor explaining lower rates of reporting amongst victims when compared to victims of acquaintance or stranger violence. Victims who are emotionally attached to the offender are argued to be inhibited from reporting by social embarrassment and the desire for privacy, the want to protect the offender, fear of reprisal, and economic dependency (Felson et al., 2002; Tarling and Morris 2010). Some partner abuse and domestic violence victims *do* report their abuse to the police however, and research in this field examines the effect of the nature of the

relationship and ties between partners, highlighting that marriage and co-habitation (Akers and Kaukinen 2009; Mirrlees-Black 1998) decrease victim likelihood of reporting.

Increased levels of victim self blame have also been established as negatively impacting on the likelihood of victim reporting of both partner abuse and crime more generally (Mirrlees-Black, 1998; Tarling and Morris, 2010). Unique to analyses of domestic and partner abuse, the presence of children, and their witnessing of abuse, has been found to positively influence the likelihood of police reporting (Akers and Kaukinen, 2009; Bachman and Coker, 1995; Mirrlees-Black 1998). Chang et al. (2010) purport that when the safety or wellbeing of victims' children is threatened this acts to push the victim to take protective measures or action. However, the influence of children is qualified where threat of reprisal against the victim and the children is feared (Zink et al., 2003) or where strong cultural value is placed on the nuclear family unit (Kelly, 2009).

Research hypotheses
The growing literature highlights a number of similarities, and critical differences, between the factors influencing reporting behaviour of partner abuse victims and victims of crime more generally. A complex picture emerges, with a range of factors highlighted as potentially important. Clear gaps in the analysis remain and this study begins to address these gaps to further develop the discussion on police awareness of partner abuse by testing the following hypotheses:

H1:   Victims of lower socio-economic status are *more* likely to have the police know about their experience of abuse.

H2:   Female victims are *more* likely to have the police know about their experience of abuse.

H3:   There will be a curvilinear relationship between the age of the victim and the likelihood of police awareness of abuse.

H4:   The police are more likely to become aware of an incident of partner abuse if the victim holds a positive attitude towards the police.

H5:   Victims who are married to, or living with, their abuser are *less* likely to have the police know about their experience of abuse.

H6:   Victims whose children witnessed the abuse are *more* likely to have the police know about their experience.

H7:   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.

Moreover, this study seeks to explore the combined effect of these factors and to identify which may be the most salient in explaining police involvement in incidents of domestic and partner abuse.

Data and Methods

This paper analyses data from the 2008/09 sweep of the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS). Criticisms levelled at the use of survey methodology to explore the difficult issue of partner abuse are largely addressed in the SCJS. Issues of sensitivity (Thoresen and Overlien, 2009; Walby and Myhill, 2001) are dealt with by locating questions on partner abuse within a self-completion questionnaire, ensuring privacy of responses. Issues around how respondents perceive the 'fit' of their experiences with the information sought, the difficulty seeing themselves as a 'victim' or regarding their partner as an 'abuser' (Thoresen and Overlien, 2009) are accounted for by not introducing the term 'partner abuse' to respondents prior to asking questions on their experiences. However, the location of questions on partner abuse within a *crime* survey is potentially problematic, (Walby and Myhill, 2001) and it must be acknowledged that the identification of abusive behaviour may be coloured by this context and the respondent's not regarding their experiences as examples of 'criminal' behaviour. Moreover, the SCJS sampling frame, in line with other national surveys, excludes communal establishments and temporary accommodation (Scottish Government, 2010b), potentially omitting those victims who, at the point in time of the survey sample being drawn, are in the immediate aftermath of serious domestic assault by virtue of their having sought emergency temporary accommodation (Walby and Myhill, 2001). Therefore, it is possible that the experience of a small but distinct group of victims will not be captured using this standard sampling frame.

The SCJS dataset available for analysis includes 16,003 responses collected through a stratified random sample of adults aged 16 or over, living in private households. However, the majority of this sample was not included in the analysis because respondents had not experienced partner abuse or because their abuse occurred outside the survey reference period. Table 1 summarises the different reasons respondents were excluded from the analysis, illustrating the reasons why only a small subset of the original sample are eligible for analysis here.

[Insert Table 1 here[1]]

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable considered is whether the police came to know about a respondent's most recent experience of partner or domestic abuse. Just under one third of respondents (n=335) stated that the police had come to know. Of this group (n=100), 41% had reported the incident to the police themselves but a further 43% did not know how the police had come to know. Only two respondents cited other witnesses as the police informants and only four suggested that neighbours, friends or family had reported on their behalf.

Data Limitations

Secondary analysis of existing datasets necessarily involves compromise with regards to the variables available for analysis, and impacts on hypothesis development and testing. Comparing the variables in the SCJS 2008/09 dataset with the potentially important factors highlighted in the literature, questions pertaining to use of weapons during the most recent incident are not available, and questions regarding respondent perception of the police are not nuanced enough to allow full analysis of this effect at the time of the most recent incident of

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[1] Lower proportions of respondents aged over 60 and living in deprived areas participated in the self-completion questionnaire (Scottish Government, 2010b, p59), introducing potential bias to the analysis

abuse. Moreover, respondents were only asked for their current marital status, not their marital status at the time of the most recent incident, and thus the nature of the relationship between victim and abusive partner cannot fully be determined. Small sample size meant the number of respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds was so low it precluded inclusion of ethnicity in analyses. Finally, there were no questions examining whether the respondent had access to, or knowledge of, networks of support, nor were there variables indicating wider community attitudes or propensity to report, precluding full analysis of the possible effect of these factors on police awareness of abuse.

Explanatory Variables

In spite of the limitations outlined, a range of key explanatory variables were available, allowing the hypotheses above to be tested. Descriptive statistics for all variables are provided in Appendix 1. To test hypotheses 1 to 3, the SCJS provides a range of variables as relevant proxies for socio-economic status (income, employment status, home ownership, and social classification). These measures displayed high levels of multi-collinearity, and income exhibited high levels of non-response. As such, the NS-SEC based social classification was tested in the final analysis. A broad 5 occupational category version was employed, incorporating: managerial and professional, intermediate; routine and manual; never worked or long-term unemployed; and students. Gender was recorded as a binary variable with 'male' as the reference category. Age was treated as a continuous variable, although, reflecting the expectation that a curvi-linear relationship might be present, the squared value was entered as an additional indicator.

To test the impact of victims' attitudes towards the criminal justice system as per hypothesis 4, two indexes of confidence were constructed. The first concerned confidence in the criminal justice system as a whole, based on responses to six questions about how well a respondent expected the criminal justice system to accomplish different tasks[2]. An index ranging from zero to six was created by counting how many of these tasks a respondent was confident were being achieved (Cronbach's Alpha=0.77). Expressions of confidence relating to the ability of local police to undertake a further six tasks[3] were summed to create an index of confidence in local policing (Cronbach's Alpha=0.86).

To test hypotheses 5 and 6, two family environment variables were created. Firstly, a variable concerning the living arrangements of the respondent and abusive partner differentiated those respondents who had never lived with their abusive partner, those who did at the time of the incident but no longer did, and those who had continued to live with their partner after the most recent incident. The second variable captured the presence of children in the household, and their possible exposure to the most recent incident of abuse. This variable took three values: households without children; households where children were present but the respondent believed they had *not* witnessed the incident; and households

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[2] The six tasks considered were, 1) be effective in bringing people who commit crimes to justice, 2) deal with cases promptly and efficiently, 3) make sure everyone has access to the legal system if they need it, 4) make sure the system isn't different depending on where you live in Scotland, 5) provide a good standard of service for victims of crime, and 6) provides a good standard of service for witnesses.

[3] The six tasks considered were, 1) prevent crime, 2) respond quickly to appropriate calls and information from the public, 3) deal with incidents as they occur, 4) investigate incidents after they occur, 5) solve crimes, and 6) catch criminals

containing children where it was believed the children *had* seen or heard the most recent incident.

To test hypothesis 7, a series of variables indicating injury, repetition and impact were created. Respondents' identification of the abusive behaviours they had experienced was summed to create a basic measure of the extent of repetition of abuse experienced. Respondents also identify the physical and psychological effects suffered as a result of their most recent experience of abuse. Separate summative measures were created to capture the extent or number of physical and psychological effects, along with a variable which classified the incident as resulting in 'no effects', 'psychological effects only', 'physical effects only', or 'both psychical and psychological effects'.

Finally, the literature suggests that neighbourhood socio-economic disadvantage might be an important influential factor. Thus, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles attached to the SCJS dataset were included in the analysis to explore whether this may be important to consider in relation to police awareness of domestic and partner abuse.

Table 2[4] illustrates the proportion of victims whose most recent incident of abuse came to the attention of the police across these different explanatory variables.

[Insert Table 2 here]

This simple bivariate examination indicates that the seven hypotheses proposed are largely supported in the data, and attitudes to the local police and wider criminal justice system, and neighbourhood characteristics present interesting patterns that merit further exploration. A critical next step is to test for the combined effect of all the factors together and to ascertain the most pertinent factors in explaining police awareness of domestic and partner abuse.

Methods

To control for possible links between explanatory variables, a logistic regression model was used to identify which factors offer the most salient associations when multiple characteristics are considered simultaneously. A significance level of 0.05 was used to identify which variables should remain in the final model, and the results are presented as odds-ratios to aid interpretation. The model has been constructed to predict a positive outcome, i.e. the police coming to know about the most recent incident, so if the value of the odds ratio is greater than one this indicates that the variable increases the likelihood of the police coming to know. If the value is less than one, this indicates that the variable decreases the likelihood of the same outcome. Wald statistics are reported alongside the odd-ratios to indicate the relative significance of individual variables. Since the number of cases included in the final model only represents a small proportion of the full sample, survey weights were not employed and the results should be seen as indicative of possible relationship within those cases available for analysis.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 presents the results of the final logistic regression model.

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[4] Interval level explanatory variables are presented as ordinal variables here. Interval level measures are used in the logistic regression model.

[Insert Table 3 here]

The model presented provides support for H1 'partner abuse victims of lower socio-economic status will be *more* likely to have the police know about their experience of abuse'. Being a victim who had 'never worked' or being 'long term unemployed' was the single strongest effect observed in the model. While limited by the focus of the survey on the 'most recent incident', this finding raises a number of questions about the mechanisms by which police come to know about abuse and the mechanisms by which victims cope, or not, with their abusive experience. For example, is it possible to theorise that potentially increased levels of social capital (such as greater education levels, social and personal networks, and awareness of supports) for victims of higher socio-economic status lead to other mechanisms of coping with abuse? Do these victims have some other 'way out' from the relationship and a means of protection that does not necessitate the involvement of police? Or are victims of a higher socio-economic status more likely to be invested in their relationship (i.e. married and financially and socially 'tied' to their abuser) and therefore presented with greater barriers (whether perceived or actual) to accessing support and protection (Felson et al., 2002; Tarling and Morris, 2010)? Walby and Myhill (2001) argue an ideal survey of victim experience of domestic abuse would collect data on socio-economic status of *both* partners, rather than just a single household measure, to allow more precise measurement of available economic and social resources and greater understanding why and how victims of abuse come to leave the relationship.

A further possible explanation for the pattern observed is that for those experiencing relative deprivation, contact with other external agencies is likely to be higher. For example, households with children who have come to the attention of social work and other social services are, in effect, under the surveillance of such agencies, whose statutory duty of protection towards children affected by domestic abuse necessarily prompts staff to notify the police of incidents. Without more contextual information it is not possible to answer these questions. Further study, that could take into consideration whether a victim has ever experienced police involvement following an incident of abuse, and that examines the impact of socio-economic status and the mechanisms by which the police come to know about abuse, is clearly needed.

A strong positive effect is also observed where the victim is female (females having 3 times greater odds than males of their experience coming to the attention of the police), supporting H2. Following the arguments within a substantial body of the existing literature (Dobash and Dobash, 2004; Felson et al, 2002; Johnson, 1995, 2001; Nazroo, 1995), it may be speculated that the female respondents in the model have been subjected to more serious abuse and that this could explain the difference in the likelihood of police involvement. However, the data examined do not allow such conclusions to be drawn here. Given the substantial proportion of male victims in this sample, it is clear that further examination of the different experiences of men and women with regard to partner abuse, and perhaps wider attitudes towards male victims, is required to better understand and explain this differential pattern of police awareness.

Age of the victim is demonstrated to have a curvilinear relationship (shown through the opposite impacts of the terms relating to age and age squared) with the likelihood of police awareness rising until the mid-late forties and declining gradually thereafter, supporting H3. The finding that younger victims generally experience lower levels of police involvement is

also supported by the descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 (where the police involvement rate for respondents aged 16-24 is ten percentage points lower than that for respondents aged 25-34, and less than half of that for respondents aged over 45). This points to a clear need within this particular age group and further research into what means of protection, if any, these younger victims can and do access is required to assess what steps are needed to address this inequality.

Neither perceptions of the criminal justice system, nor the local police, emerge as having a significant effect on the likelihood of the police becoming aware of victimisation[5], suggesting that H4 can be rejected. Interpretation of this finding must be cautious, due to the potential for reverse causality. However, it does suggest that such normative concerns may not be as relevant in relation to domestic and partner abuse as they have been found to be in examinations of responses to other criminal behaviour. Previous qualitative research into female victims' responses to abuse suggests that women seek police involvement as a means of providing or facilitating a very specific outcome, that is immediate and longer term *protection* from abuse (Patterson and Campbell, 2010; Hoyle and Sanders, 2000). Therefore, the idea that 'procedural justice judgements have a stronger influence upon people's reactions to the police than do the outcomes of their experiences' (Tyler, 2011 pp.258) could stand to be tested further in this particular context.

A further issue for exploring the effect of police and criminal justice system perceptions is the focus on the 'most recent incident' of partner abuse. This limits the overall explanatory power of the model, as it is clear that a high proportion of respondents have experienced a series of incidences of domestic and partner abuse. Crucially for the issue of police perception, the survey does not allow identification of whether those victims who did not have the police come to know about the most recent incident had police involvement in any of the preceding incidents. Previous research suggests that it is highly likely that a proportion of respondents will fall into such a category (Hoyle and Sanders, 2000). Inclusion of a question about ever having experienced police involvement due to abusive behaviour with appropriate follow ups would allow better measurement and understanding of victim experience, outcomes and satisfaction, and would allow analysis to begin to address some of the questions raised in the consideration of police legitimacy, the procedural justice model and its relevance to partner abuse.

With regard to the situational factors or abuse characteristics examined in the model, the findings are broadly supportive of the proposed hypotheses. The lack of an applicable marital status variable prohibited a complete test of H5 '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', but the observed negative effect of the victim continuing to co-habit with their abusive partner suggests there is some link between police involvement and the alteration of the relationship between victim and abuser. The pattern observed provides some support for the assertion in previous research that female domestic abuse victims draw upon the police as a resource when seeking to end the relationship with the abusive partner (Patterson and Campbell, 2010). While it is clear that similar research involving the wider profile of victims is needed, this suggests there may be a window of opportunity for police encountering domestic and partner abuse cases to put in place supports to help women, and other victims, achieve such a goal.

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[5] Re-running the model with an additional interaction variable, combining the indices of confidence in local police and the criminal justice system, also failed to yield a significant result.

Far clearer support is found for H6 'partner abuse victims whose children witnessed the abuse will be *more* likely to have the police know about their experience' with a positive effect observed for those victims who believed children in the household had seen or heard the most recent incident. This broadly supports the literature, suggesting that the desire to protect children can encourage victims of abuse, or perhaps other witnesses to the abuse, to seek police attention. However, it is also possible that the effect is brought about by the potential involvement of external agencies, either through the universal services of health and education, or more targeted services for children and families needing greater support. Again, further research and contextualisation is required to facilitate full understanding of the pattern observed.

Support for H7 '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' is mixed. It is clear that those victims experiencing multiple abuse over the longer and shorter term, and an accumulation of injuries and other physical effects, are the most likely to come to the attention of the police. Looking back to the existing literature, there are a number of possible explanations for this finding. Heightened fear and a desire to seek protection amongst this particular group of victims, or indeed those around them, such as friends, family and other witnesses, may have a role to play, or it may be that victims suffering physical injury are more likely to come to the attention of other external agencies, such as health and social services. Given that such a large proportion of victims in the sample considered here were unaware of how the police had come to know about their abuse, further research examining how victims come to the attention of the police, and whether others had a role in the process, is clearly needed to elucidate this pattern. Crucially, the model also highlights the *inverse* effect of the victim experiencing an accumulation of psychological effects. It could be speculated that this is a result of the hidden nature of such effects and, where a victim only experiences psychological effects, the lack of 'evidence' of criminal behaviour on the part of the abusive partner. If such cases are not readily coming to the attention of the police, this finding is a clear message of the need to raise awareness of the impact of psychological abuse amongst practitioners, and the wider community more generally, in order that the root causes of poor mental health and wellbeing are better brought to the fore and appropriate supports for victims be put in place.

Finally, the inclusion of neighbourhood characteristics reveals a small, significant effect on police awareness. Those victims residing in an area within quintile two of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation have greater odds of having the police made aware of their abuse than those residing within an area in quintile one. The overall area effect is not clear and this is a finding that requires further exploration, ideally with a larger sample in order to control for other possible area level effects, before firm conclusions could be drawn.

Summing up the findings presented here, the analysis reveals that experience of domestic and partner abuse is not confined to one set or group of individuals, with individuals across the social, economic and age spectrums experiencing domestic and partner abuse. However, it emerges that, even when controlling for the effects of a range of variables, there is clear disparity between key groups of individuals experiencing domestic and partner abuse in terms of police awareness and attention. Those victims who are of lower socio-economic status, female, have experienced multiple abuse, and have children who witness abuse are the victims whose experiences of abuse are most likely to come to the attention of the police.

Conclusions and policy implications

National policing priorities, as outlined in the ACPOS Scottish Policing Assessment 2011-15, continue to emphasise domestic abuse as a key priority area within Public Protection, and make explicit commitment to addressing the issue of 'under-reporting' of domestic abuse to ensure protection of vulnerable individuals. Yet, in spite of increasing attention and investment, the analysis presented in this paper indicates that there is still a deficit in current knowledge, understanding and discourse around who the victims of domestic abuse are and how they interact with, or draw upon, the criminal justice (and other) supports in place. The analysis, while limited by the constraints of the data, demonstrates that a wide spectrum of individuals experience domestic abuse across Scotland, including males (around 41% of victims here), teenagers and young adults (around one third of victims in the sample were aged between 16 and 25 years), and that these particular groups of victims are among the least likely to come to the attention of the police.

These findings highlight critical gaps in understanding and evidence to inform current national policy and guidance on addressing domestic abuse. Without negating the importance of a specific focus on violence against women, the approach currently adopted does not account for variation within and across the gender categories, tending to speak in broad brush terms about a singular group of victims rather than addressing potential differences of age, socio-economic and family or relationship status. Perhaps a more nuanced approach, that considered multiple groups of victims and how their experiences might differ in very important ways, might be better placed to respond to the breadth and complexity of experience of domestic abuse. Given the systematic differences highlighted between victims who receive police attention and those who do not, it seems imperative to develop an understanding of the different experiences between key groups and establish whether a police response may be desirable and/ or appropriate for those not already accessing it. Doing so may better meet current Scottish national and local Community Policing priorities of understanding the needs of the whole community and providing accessible and effective policing for all within it.

National guidance highlights the problem of domestic abuse, and the neglect of victims within the justice system. Yet little, if any, insight into useful mechanisms of practice for better engagement between police and victims in order that cases of abuse actually come to the attention of the justice system in the first place is offered. Examination of advice offered to victims of domestic abuse prior to the creation of a single national police force for Scotland revealed a pattern of local variation and a lack of coherence in the interpretation and definition of domestic abuse for the purposes of developing and encouraging police victim interaction. Thus, victims' access to police information and assistance was determined by the police force area in which they happened to live. Some legacy police forces provided minimal and/ or 'hard to find' information to victims on how and where they can get help, whilst others appeared to target advice at women victims with children to co-habiting abusive partners. This does not reflect the spectrum of abuse experienced by, for example, younger victims, victims without children, or those for whom an ex-partner is the key abuser. Larger Scottish forces highlighted the provision of specially trained officers to respond to domestic abuse, but only one offered any information tailored for particular groups of victims such as teenagers and young people.

The development of the approach to partner and domestic abuse of the newly unified Police Scotland will be challenging if these local variations and resource constraints are to be

overcome. In order to move forward and address critical issues around under-reporting and victim protection a far clearer understanding of who is affected by domestic abuse, how their experiences of abuse may differ, and how they interact (or not) with the police and other agencies, is required. Space must be created to discuss those hidden victims and their needs, and why they do not come to the attention of the police and access a justice system response to their abuse. The findings from this analysis offer an opportunity to critically examine where police, and other agency, attention has been directed in the past in responding to domestic abuse, and to recognise those groups of victims who are *not* currently drawing on, or coming to the attention of, the police. Further examination of these groups and their experiences would build greater understanding around appropriate and desirable responses to abuse. In turn, this may facilitate a reconsideration of where police resource in future campaigning and awareness-raising amongst victims and the wider community may be usefully targeted; where alternative police actions and/ or link-ups to other agencies in response to reported abuse might be desirable; and whether alternative mechanisms and pathways for achieving contact with victims could be usefully explored.

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Table 1. Cases eligible for analysis.

Sample for analysis	No. of cases remaining for analysis	Percentage of full sample
Full SCJS 2008–09 sample	16,003	100.0
Completed self-completion questionnaire	10,974	68.8
Had a partner since age 16	10,110	63.1
Victim of partner abuse	1975	12.3
Most recent incident in reference period (12 months prior to the survey)	345	2.2
Excluding those who did not wish to reply to more detailed questions about the incident	335	2.1

Note: Lower proportions of respondents aged over 60 and living in deprived areas participated in the self-completion questionnaire (Scottish Government 2010b, p. 59), introducing potential bias to the analysis.

Table 2. Prevalence of police awareness of most recent incident of abuse across sample sub-groups (n = 335 unless stated).

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
NSSEC (social classification; n = 331)***		
Managerial and professional occupations	10	17.54
Intermediate occupations	9	18.00
Routine and manual occupations	23	22.33
Never worked and long-term unemployed	48	51.61
Full-time student	5	18.52
Age (in years)**		
16–24	17	18.68
25–34	19	27.14
35–44	29	31.87
45–54	16	39.02
55+	17	40.48
Gender***		
Male	17	12.50
Female	81	40.70
Respondent's confidence in local police		
0 (no confidence)	19	27.14
1	8	21.62
2	6	18.75
3	14	40.00
4	10	33.33
5	14	27.45
6 (most confidence)	27	33.75
Respondent's confidence in criminal justice system		
0 (no confidence)	10	29.41
1	15	27.27
2	18	28.57
3	9	28.13
4	14	26.42
5	10	24.39
6 (most confidence)	22	38.60
Variety of abuse suffered since age 16***		
1–4 types	44	20.18
5–8 types	30	42.25
9–12 types	16	45.71
13 or more types	8	72.73
Number of partner abuse incidents in last 12 months**		
One	32	22.38
More than one	40	39.60
Don't know	16	21.28
Refused to say	10	26.26
Type of effects suffered due to most recent incident***		
No effects reported in survey	32	25.20
Only physical effects	17	40.48
Only psychological effects	10	15.63
Both physical and psychological effects	39	38.24

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Number of physical effects (most recent incident)***		
Zero	14	21.99
One	23	33.33
More than one	61	49.02
Number of psychological effects (most recent incident)***		
Zero	3	28.99
One	20	22.35
More than one	75	37.04
Whether respondent was living with partner (*n* = 329)***		
Never lived with partner	59	28.17
Lived with partner but not anymore	35	46.67
Lived with partner and still do	3	6.38
Children's experience of most recent incident (*n* = 331)***		
No children in household	54	22.59
Children in household but didn't see or hear incident	39	23.81
Children in household and saw or heard incident	5	54.93
Scottish index of multiple deprivation (quintiles)*		
1 (most deprived)	27	27.84
2	26	37.68
3	28	35.00
4	10	20.41
5 (least deprived)	7	17.50

Note: Interval level explanatory variables are presented as ordinal variables here. Interval level measures are used in the logistic regression model.
***$p \leq .001$, **$p \leq .05$, *$p \leq .1$.

Table 3. Logistic regression: whether police informed of most recent incident of partner abuse.

	Odds ratio	SE	Wald statistic
Structural factors			
Social classification			
Managerial and professional occupations	*Reference*		
Intermediate occupations	1.27	0.82	0.14
Routine and manual occupations	1.41	0.77	0.38
Student	3.48	2.81	2.37
Never worked or long term unemployed	8.07	4.55	13.76**
Gender			
Male	*Reference*		
Female	3.27	1.27	9.30**
Age			
Years past 16th birthday	1.14	0.05	7.73*
Years past 16th birthday squared	0.99	<0.001	6.60*
Ecological factors			
SIMD quintile			
Quintile 1 (high deprivation)	*Reference*		
Quintile 2	2.77	1.31	4.67*
Quintile 3	1.56	0.73	0.90
Quintile 4	0.79	0.46	0.15
Quintile 5	1.13	0.77	0.03
Normative factors			
Confidence in local police			
Index of positive perceptions of local police (0–6)	1.12	0.17	0.53
Confidence in CJS			
Index of positive perceptions of CJS (0–6)	1.15	0.19	0.76
Situational factors			
Variety of abuse			
Variety of types of abuse suffered since 16 (maximum 19)	1.15	0.06	7.62*
Number of partner abuse incidents in last 12 months			
Single incident	*Reference*		
More than one incident	2.75	1.09	6.50*
Refused to say	1.16	0.60	0.09
Don't know	0.40	0.23	2.52
Physical effects of most recent incident			
Count of physical effects in most recent incident (maximum 8)	1.45	0.24	5.24*
Psychological effects of most recent incident			
Count of Psychological effects in most recent incident (maximum 9)	0.72	0.10	5.38*
Living with partner			
Never lived with partner	*Reference*		
Living with at time of most recent incident but not now	1.18	0.45	0.19
Living with at time of most recent incident and still is	0.10	0.07	9.55*

Children witness to most recent incident			
No children in household at time of most recent incident	*Reference*		
Children living in household at time of most recent incident but did not see or hear	0.94	0.62	0.01
Children living in household at time of most recent abuse and did see or hear	3.05	1.20	8.07*

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, N = 320. Fit statistics: Nagelkerke's adjusted R^2 0.37, Hosmer-Lemeshow (p = 0.54), -2LL 122.72 (p = 0.00).