



IMPROVING RESPONSE TO VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



A report by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services in 2020 found that emergency calls to police forces are increasing and becoming more complex¹. They identified a concern that not all forces have specific processes or flags to help call handlers identify victims of domestic abuse. The report urged forces to utilise technology to protect vulnerable people and to assist in reducing demand.

In response, Kent Police sought to tackle the rise in demand of domestic abuse-related calls and to improve witness and victim satisfaction, which they recognised as a key requirement for improvement. Their pioneering response to the rise in cases provides an excellent example from which to learn important lessons.

Kent Police developed the Rapid Video Response (RVR) tool, in order to provide victims an immediate (and optional) video first response, for when the offender was not present, and they were in a safe, secure place. This is an alternative to a delayed face-to-face meeting or police attendance. As calls are received by Kent Police, they carry out an immediate risk assessment to understand the threat and risk level, which is followed by offering RVR if the circumstances are appropriate. When RVR is deployed,

victims are sent a secure video link and a trained officer completes a 'first response', as defined by the College of Policing. This involves undertaking assessments and other tasks, which include safeguarding and referrals, as well as a Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment questionnaire.

In order to evaluate the tool, Kent Police ran a Randomised Control Trial in partnership with the Cambridge Centre for Evidence Based Policing. This utilised Police Science, Technology, Analysis and Research funding to understand ways to increase victim protection and to assess the tool, as opposed to a delayed face-to-face response.

The trial looked at 517 domestic abuse victims who called into the force control room and consented to be part of the trial. Half of the callers were randomly assigned to either a business as usual (BAU) response, or an RVR response, through an immediate transfer of their call to a specialist domestic abuse police officer over video link.

The trial included a victim satisfaction survey, conducted 10 days after their call, which captured levels of satisfaction, trust and confidence in Kent Police. Officers' journey times to victims were also tracked to capture efficiency, and all trial cases were reviewed to compare action and outcomes from RVR as opposed to BAU.

The results of the trial demonstrated that:

- RVR was an average of **656 times faster in responding to victims than a BAU response**—around 3 minutes compared to 1969 minutes. This is an incredible decrease in response time, fitting perfectly with the stated goals of the trial.
- RVR officers were able to be more efficient and spend less time on each incident with better outcomes, whilst undertaking the same sorts of tasks as a physical response.
- **Arrest rates increased by 50% in the RVR group compared to BAU.**
- **There was an overall increase in victim satisfaction**, with 89% of female victims of intimate domestic abuse indicating they were satisfied with their received support, compared to 78% prior to the introduction of RVR.

Based on this trial, RVR has now rolled out across 6 forces in the eastern region as an optional tool and is resourced by specialist domestic abuse hubs. These fantastic results demonstrate the importance of trialling and robustly evaluating the innovative use of technology, which can help improve the service provides to victims.

¹ His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, A call for help: Police contact management through call handling and control rooms in 2018/19
Link: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/a-call-for-help-police-contact-management-call-handling-control-rooms-2018-19.pdf>

