



DELIVERING JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Overview

1977

minute decrease
in waiting time
for victims

83

minutes saved for
officers per
incident case

50%

increase in arrests
compared
to traditional
response



Stacey Rothwell

Network Director, Eastern
Region Innovation Network

Call volumes to the police are increasing in volume and complexity - presenting a challenge for forces struggling to keep up with the demand, respond to calls, and investigate crimes effectively. Non-urgent domestic abuse calls were an area of particular concern. We spoke to Stacey Rothwell about how she leveraged a new approach, through science and technology, to tackle the issue.

Stacey's career path has been, in her own words, 'unconventional'. Stacey started on the frontline of policing at the age of 18 and quickly progressed to Detective Sergeant. After a career-break to start a family, Stacey returned to the police force in a civilian role

– "I did it differently," she says. "If there is a transition across roles then usually people start in a civilian staff role before becoming a police officer."

In her new civilian role, Stacey headed up the financial investigation unit and helped Kent Police become the fifth highest performing financial investigation unit in the country. She then became a continuous improvement consultant within Kent's Innovation Task Force, implementing evidence based innovation projects. Later, she became the Network Director of the Eastern Region Innovation Network (ERIN), and it is in this current role that she's spearheading roll-out of the successful Rapid Video Response technology in forces across the region.

Rapid Video Response (RVR) Technology: its impact and origins

Rothwell's current project focuses on Rapid Video Response (RVR) technology and its impact on tackling violence against women. Thorough analysis of RVR technology found that victims of domestic abuse who received RVR reported satisfaction levels that were 11% higher than those who received the delayed in-person service offering. The time taken to speak to an officer was also drastically reduced, from approximately 33 hours to just three minutes. Additionally, using RVR saved one hour and 23 minutes of officer time per incident case compared to traditional physical responses. The idea for RVR came about due to the increasing complexity and volume of calls being received by the police force in Kent. Domestic abuse calls were of particular concern, with around 3,100 such calls being received across England and Wales on an average day.

The question was, “Could we increase victim satisfaction and improve efficiency by providing an optional immediate video response from a specially trained police officer to domestic abuse victims, when their offenders are not present, rather than scheduling a delayed face-to-face police visit?”

Rothwell applied for Police Science, Technology, Analysis and Research (STAR) funding and received £165k. She also applied knowledge from her time at the University of Cambridge, where she learned about evidence-based policing and randomised control trials (RCTs), to apply the RCT methodology to the problem. In partnership with the Cambridge Centre for Evidence Based Policing, RCTs for RVR technology were up and running in Kent in just three weeks.

Rapid Video Response (RVR) Technology: research trials

The participants in the trial were split into two groups, and given the option to choose between RVR and traditional physical delayed responses to their calls. If there was no immediate threat, victims were offered a video call and a risk assessment was conducted to send them the necessary video link. Victims were spoken to immediately by a police officer, given a first response service, safeguarded, and referred to partner agencies if necessary.

One of the benefits of RVR is that it puts a police officer right at the front of the operation, which is crucial given the courage it takes to make that call if you are a domestic abuse victim. It is also more discreet compared to traditional delayed physical responses, which often involves two officers attending in a marked police vehicle. Following the RCT trial, female victims of intimate domestic abuse (who made up 69% of callers) reported a statistically significant increased level of satisfaction at 89%, compared to 78% for the standard delayed in-person offering. On delivering fairer justice, there were 50% more arrests during the life of an RVR investigation, compared to the traditional response group.

A global roll-out

The success of RVR technology is scientifically proven, thanks to a small dedicated team and the Chief Officers of Kent Police who supported the testing and subsequent implementation of RVR, in order to improve service to victims of domestic abuse.

Rothwell, as part of the Eastern Region Innovation Network, has developed a 30 page blueprint, a “recipe book”, so that other forces can learn how to implement RVR for domestic abuse victims effectively -as she knows through a tried-and-tested approach what works, and what doesn't. The team has now rolled RVR out across 7 forces, and have briefed India, France, Canada, Australia, and the US, on the potential benefits of RVR. She is passionate about spreading the innovation as widely as possible because it has been shown to work in Kent and can be carefully adapted to a range of scenarios outside of domestic violence cases too.

Looking ahead

Rothwell is excited about the future, she thinks the Office of the Police Chief Scientific Adviser is in a great position to promote collaborations between academia and policing like hers, but believes police forces must be receptive to the power of science and technology. Rothwell says, “Ideally, we will have people embedded into our teams – data scientists and specialists in the force - who work closely with the team. We need to find more of this talent and grow it from within – people who ‘get’ the science and data and are resilient, energetic and passionate enough to push through the barriers and make a good idea come to life!” Thanks to Rothwell's passion, there is hope that RVR technology can be used to improve the safety and wellbeing of victims of domestic abuse and other crimes, both here and abroad.

