

# Thousands of domestic violence victims withdraw prosecutions

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Thousands of domestic violence victims withdraw prosecutions

- One third of victims refuse to press charges
- Lack of evidence sees over 100,000 cases dropped

\*Emma Pearmaine is available for interviews all day Monday and Tuesday. Email [christina@rtsmedia.co.uk](mailto:christina@rtsmedia.co.uk) for a full copy of the data, including a regional breakdown, and to arrange interviews.

Over a third of domestic violence cases are discontinued because the victim has withdrawn their support for a prosecution, new figures reveal.

In 2014, the Home Office launched a new crime statistics framework with 18 and later 21 potential outcomes for recorded crimes. The aim was to replace the high number of cases recorded as 'undetected' (see table).

Through Freedom of Information, law firm Simpson Millar has obtained figures from 38 Police forces regarding instances where domestic violence crimes were recorded with the following two outcomes:

- Named suspect identified: victim supports police action but evidential difficulties prevent further action
- Named suspect identified: evidential difficulties prevent further action; victim does not support (or has withdrawn support from) police action

## HEADLINE DATA

Recorded domestic violence crimes 2016: 438,349

Recorded domestic violence crimes 2015: 393,551

Named suspect identified: Victim supports police action but evidential difficulties prevent further action:

2016: 102,295

2015: 90,204\*

\*Figures were not provided by Suffolk Constabulary and Nottinghamshire Police for 2015

Named suspect identified: Evidential difficulties prevent further action; victim does not support (or has withdrawn support from) police action:

2016: 164,510

2015: 117,196\*

\*Figures were not provided by Suffolk Constabulary and Nottinghamshire Police for 2015

The research brings to light how frequently women especially find themselves unable to provide evidence, or to support a charge and prosecution due to very real fears about their personal safety, and that of their children.

Emma Pearmaine, Director of Family Services at Simpson Millar comments: "We appreciate that there may be variations in how crimes are recorded and processed across regions and that a crime recorded as taking place one year, might be recorded as having concluded another. However, we cannot ignore the fact that a significant number of domestic violence crimes do not result in a charge; often due to a lack of evidence or a lack of support from the victim who may feel unable to provide this kind of support.

"Victims, and women especially, are often either unable to provide evidence about their abuse or decide to withdraw what evidence they have presented, because they feel coming forward will put themselves, their children and family members at significant risk of serious harm.

"More resources are needed to identify alternative avenues of collecting evidence and building a case against abusers without putting the victim at risk. This is a challenge, I know, but one which must be addressed in the face of these latest figures."

Emma Pearmaine has been campaigning on behalf of domestic violence victims for five years. She adds: "Victims of domestic violence live in an intricate and harrowing matrix of lies and fear, which they often cannot escape from without help from the Police and other professionals.

"Officers who deal with domestic abuse have a challenging job; these crimes are complex, sometimes subtle and often difficult to identify. Domestic violence crimes come in many shades of grey and these figures tell us that more resources and more training for officers is required so that additional crimes result in a formal charge."

Emma adds: "The first formal accusation of domestic violence is rarely the first incidence. Victims of domestic abuse may have found the courage to come forward in a moment of confidence, but their fears about their on-going safety may leave them in a position where they no longer want to support a complaint. It requires a professional and targeted effort to help them through the days, weeks and months that follow.

"Victims who live with their abuser are particularly vulnerable and at risk of further harm after they have reported the violence. All victims need a huge amount of practical and emotional support to maintain the accusation through to a prosecution."

Emma points out that it can be difficult for the victim to leave the relationship safely. She says: "Victims need help and support to ensure they are able to see a way forward, but also to guarantee their personal safety and that of their children. All too often, women simply do not feel safe enough to leave despite having had the courage to make a true and recognised accusation to the Police. In the very worst cases, they lose their life to their abuser."

Polly Neate, Chief Executive of Women's Aid, said: "We know that not all survivors of domestic abuse want a criminal justice outcome. However, what these figures show is that, for those who do, there is still a very real culture of victim-blaming and fear that stops survivors from accessing justice. We also know that there is a significantly heightened risk for women in the first year after separation from a perpetrator – therefore, robust support and protection is needed during that time. With two women a week on average being killed by a partner or ex-partner in England and Wales, it is vital that we take these findings seriously."

ENDS

Notes to editors

The data provided under Freedom of Information is taken from the Police crime recording system, which is a dynamic system. Additional information identified during an investigation may lead to a reassessment of the crime classification. Information held on the system is also subject to review to ensure compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules for Recording Crime and the National Crime Recording Standard. As a result, crime levels and classifications may change over time and this data may not match data previously published or data published in the future. For this reason, the data should only be used as an indicator of crime trends.

Implementation of the Government's revised recorded crime outcomes framework began in April 2014, with all forces required to have implemented it by April 2015. For a copy of the old and new framework, contact Christina Savage on the details below.

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