Targeting Escalation in Reported Domestic Abuse:

Evidence From 36,000 Callouts

By Matthew Bland[1] and Barak Ariel[2]

Abstract

Practitioners dealing with domestic abuse often claim that the problem escalates over time in both seriousness and frequency. We tested those claims on 36,000 police records of domestic abuse between 2009 and 2014 reported to Suffolk Constabulary in the east of England. Using the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (Sherman, 2013) as the measure of harm severity, we found no escalation in the majority of cases; 76% of all unique victim and offender units ("dyads") had zero repeat calls. Among the cohort of 727 dyads who called police five or more times, there was no evidence for statistically significant escalating harm severity, but some evidence of increasing frequency. Less than 2% of dyads accounted for 80% of all domestic abuse harm, but in over half of these highest-harm dyads, there had been no prior contact with police regarding domestic abuse. These findings suggest the need for more engagement of non-police agencies in predicting serious harm.

Keywords

Domestic violence, targeting, recidivism, escalation, harm, severity, frequency, intermittency, victim-offender dyads

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Escalation of Severity and Frequency in Domestic Abuse

Despite the large body of research on domestic abuse, too little evidence is available about fundamental patterns of violence within couples. Until very recently, for example, Police Chief Officers in the UK told the public that victims of domestic abuse suffered 34 episodes prior to reporting to police. This figure was then exposed as lacking any credible evidence for contemporary cases of domestic abuse in the UK (Strang, Sherman & Neyroud, 2014). Similarly, unsupported assertions have long been made about "escalation" – the notion that over the life of a domestic relationship the severity and frequency of any violent events will increase with each further report. According to Pagelow (1981), escalation is something on which researchers can agree, yet a recent literature review found no consistent evidence to support that claim (Bland, 2015).

Indeed, in England & Wales, police and other organisations have put escalation at the centre of their efforts to assess risk of harm in future cases. All English and Welsh forces are required to complete a risk assessment form with the victim even if no crime has been proven. That risk assessment (known as 'DASH'), which to varying degrees is later validated by a specialist, asks specific questions designed to predict escalation in severity and frequency. Yet many questions remain about the extent of the empirical evidence that supports the validity or reliability of the DASH predictions.

This paper aims to add to the body of research on escalation and the patterns of harm in domestic abuse cases. We hope it will help to build an evidence-based strategy for targeting different patterns of domestic abuse for different types of interventions at different levels of cost. The research considers three key questions about the universe of

over 36,000 domestic abuse events that were reported to Suffolk Constabulary between 1st January 2009 and 31st March 2014. First we address the question of how much, if any, escalation in the severity of harm occurs in repeat cases. Second we examine whether repeat cases become more likely or frequent as cases become more chronic, independent of seriousness. Third, we examine individual dyads (couples of one offender and one victim as distinct, unique units) for the distribution and concentration of serious harm for evidence of a "power few" (Sherman, 2007). We find, in summary, little evidence of escalation in severity, some evidence of increasing frequency among the most chronic cases, and an enormous concentration (80%) of harm in less than 2% of the dyads.

Measuring Severity of Crime Harm

Research into escalation of severity depends on both conceptualization and measurement of that severity. Several approaches to these tasks have been used and are currently being developed. Perhaps the most widely used measure in survey research is the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), a three tiered index of violence with multiple levels in each tier sorted in a hierarchy. CTS was developed by Muray Straus in 1979 as a specific tool for measuring domestic abuse severity. Levels were established from face to face interviews by classifying the "tactics" respondents have used in family disputes. The three indices measure reasoning, verbal aggression and physical aggression and the system offers a number of potential analytic options as described by McClellan-Chambers (2002)in refs it says Chambers-McClellan. Other scholars have focused on the concept of harm as a measurement of severity. Sellin and Wolfgang (1964) were among the first scholars to attempt to develop a different system. They surveyed a range of groups

including students, police officers, judges and community members, asking them to rank 141 crimes on a scale of 1 (least serious) to 11 (most serious). Their methodology has been subject to considerable criticism of its sampling methodology but the work found a strong correlation between the rankings of each group. Wolfgang et al (1985) took this methodology further, opening up the ranking questions to 60,000 survey respondents. They amended the scoring system to a weighted range of 0.2 to 72.1 and again found general levels of agreement on severity rankings. All these approaches, however, depend on subjective views of various audiences. None of them employ an official consensus established by democratic governments.

In order to provide an accessible tool for police to classify the severity of harm from criminal events, Sherman (2007, 2011, 2013) proposed multiplying each crime type by the number of days of imprisonment each could attract under sentencing guidelines. In 2014 Sherman, Neyroud and Neyroud (2014) applied this principle to England and Wales to create the Cambridge Crime Harm Index. Sherman et al. (2014) challenge the notion that a single count of crime is a strong measure of harm as misleading because all crimes are not equal. As a scale for measuring harm, the Cambridge Crime Harm Index is robust, but to date no study of domestic abuse has utilised it as the primary instrument for the measurement of severity. Equally important, its external validity for police agencies not based in England and Wales offers a useful structure that can be applied with any local sentencing guidelines or statutory sentences.

Definitions

This section defines key terms for the data and methods of the study.

Domestic Abuse. At present, domestic abuse is not a crime classification in its own right in England & Wales; it can take any form of crime. As a consequence, this study will consider more types of crime than just violence. Where a vehicle is stolen or a house burgled as part of a domestic dispute, those crimes are included in this analysis. As an English police agency, Suffolk Constabulary works to the national definition of domestic abuse and audits is records to test for compliance with that definition

Dyads. Much previous research into domestic abuse has centred on either victims or offenders. Little research has been done on trends among dyads (Piquero et al., 2006), which allow analysis of domestic abuse patterns for victim and offender combinations regardless of the nature of their relationships.

Repeat Victimisation. Within this research repeat victimisation is taken to mean any victim or dyad that has been subject to two or more events within the dataset. The distinction between victims and dyads here is deliberate. There is the potential for victims to be party to more than one dyad, but the presence of a repeat victim within a dyad does not alone make that dyad subject to repeat victimisation. For the latter to be applicable, the dyad itself must be subject to more than one event within the dataset. The data have been organised so that victims and dyads can be identified as separate entities, as well as the third category of repeat offending by one offender regardless of victim identity.

Data Sources

The data for this analysis consists of the universe of 36,000 police records of domestic abuse between 2009 and 2014 recorded by Suffolk Constabulary in the east of England. Suffolk Constabulary records crime on a database known as Crime Information System (CIS). Emergency and non-emergency calls are recorded on a separate system. While it is the norm that only calls which are classified as crimes are entered onto both systems, in the case of domestic abuse every call is transferred to CIS. Crimes are referred to as crimes and calls which are not crimes are colloquially referred to as "domestic abuse non crimes". This practice allows Suffolk Constabulary to utilise CIS to manage and record its risk assessment (DASH) scores. The product is highly beneficial for this research because it means a large amount of data pertaining to individual cases is held on one system and therefore in one format. Other agencies and researchers seeking to replicate this research may need to link data from multiple systems. It is advantageous to this research that the structure of data for crimes and non-crimes is recorded in the same format with victims and suspects identified even where no crime has been committed. To be clear, this does not mean individuals are being incorrectly criminalised by Suffolk Constabulary; rather the force consciously assigns roles of "victim" and "suspect" based on the circumstances of the call.

As with all English & Welsh forces, crime in Suffolk is subject to audit against National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) principles. The "domestic" nature of offences is determined by the recording parties either in the Contact and Control Room (CCR) or by the investigating officer. A "flag" is marked on CIS to denote a crime as domestic. If this is falsely marked in the positive it is declassified by a "crime allocator" or by domestic abuse specialists in the Central Tasking and Referral Unit.

The latter also perform the role of identifying domestic cases which are falsely negative.

The original data extract from CIS provided 143 variables pertaining to items like crime classification, date and time, location of event, detection status, victim and offender and risk assessment. Variables were supplemented in the data cleaning and analysis phases of this research and the final number of variables is above 160.

As is common with many police datasets, the pool of domestic abuse data extracted from Suffolk Constabulary's CIS system had a wide range of issues and limitations associated to it.

No Crimes. Like all police forces in England & Wales, Suffolk Constabulary sometimes de-classifies crimes where there is evidence that no crime took place. These are colloquially referred to as "no crimes" which practitioners often use as a verb ("that has been no-crimed"). The original data extract which covered all crimes and "non-crimes" (not to be confused with "no-crimes"), contained 37,466 records between 1st January 2009 and 31st March 2014. 358 records were marked as "no crimes" and removed from the dataset. At just 0.01% of the original dataset this appears to be low, but the common practice is to reclassify domestic "no crimes" to "non-crimes". No further work has been undertaken to understand why in these 358 cases this did not happen.

Free text fields. Suffolk Constabulary's CIS contains a number of free text fields which make analysis difficult without extensive reading and coding. Most of these were excluded from this analysis with the exception of 'victim occupation'. With regard to this field searches were conducted on variations of the word "unemployed" to enable analysis of cases where the victim had at some time been unemployed. Caution should be used accordingly when interpreting those results.

Age. Analysis of the age profile of the dataset revealed two notable issues. Firstly, despite the domestic abuse definition not applying to victims below 16 years of age, a number of records appeared in the 0-16 age band. This was partially due to the inappropriateness of the database age bandings, partially due to input error of date of birth and partially due to incorrect application of the definition. In 40 % of the 609 events where the victim is marked as under 0-16, the victim was actually 16 at the time of offence, and therefore eligible under the definition of domestic abuse. Of the remaining 364 events, 298 relate

to repeat dyads and 66 to single event dyads. None were eligible for the study group of five or more events in a three year period. These 364 events were subsequently removed from the data set.

Victim URN. The most important obstacle to meaningful analysis of Suffolk Constabulary's data set was the absence of a victim unique reference number (URN). Offenders and suspects are classified by a unique "nominal" number beginning with "N" followed by a sequence of numbers. The force regularly audits these offender records to remove duplicates. Victim details are recorded, but no unique reference number is used. Because the dataset contains surname, forename, gender and data of birth as well some higher level address information relating to where the event took place, it was possible for the first author to use some of these variables to create an "artificial" URN for victims in the dataset. The process for this is described as follows.

1) For each record of data (n=36,742) a new variable was created concatenating the victim surname and date of birth. This was the basis of a victim URN but remained subject to errors, primarily in spelling or incorrect dates of birth.

2) Further cleaning was required to match different victim "URNs" which are in fact related to the same victim. To achieve this, each of the victim "URNs" was applied to a formula which created a code based on the letters that appeared in the victim forename and surname and the district and sector in which the event took place. (For example, John Smith, victim of crime in Newmarket, Forest Heath would generate a code of HIJMNOSTForestHeathNE.)

3) The component parts of this code are the letters which appear in the name, in ascending alphabetical order, the district in which the event took place (Forest Heath) and the sector in that district in which the event took place (in this case NE stands for Newmarket). These codes were then sorted in ascending order and used to aid a visual matching exercise of the database. Where codes matched the episodes were assigned a matching victim "URN" (based on the first URN that appeared in the sequence).

There were two inherent flaws in this process. Firstly, the coding system assumes that even when names are mistyped, they use the same letters. Secondly, it assumes that victims' offences take place in the same locality, which of course, they may not. However, both these flaws were partially mitigated by the manual nature of the matching exercise, whereby the author visually examined each record and was able to identify where these flaws yielded errors. This was done in short batches of around 1,000 records over a period of about two months to reduce the chances of human error. It is important to underline that this process is not without its limitations, but it represents a methodical and meticulous attempt at defining unique victims.

Missing Data

Other data variables besides DASH were subject to missing data in various degrees as denoted by Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Missing Data Values in Suffolk Constabulary Domestic Abuse Dataset

Variable	# Blank Records	Percent
Date reported	5	0.01
Finalisation date	2931	7.90
Victim age	3624	9.77
Suspect age	1703	4.59

With respect to victim age, the proportion appears problematic to analyses. However, of the 3,624 records with this data missing, 37% were for victims who had at least one other event attributed to them and in the majority of those cases, the age variable was not missing in all of the other events. This meant that the actual percentage of events with missing victim age is somewhat lower than 9.77%.

Analytic Procedures

This section describes the analytical methods for five specific research questions.

What is the Extent of Repeat Victimisation? The method of analysis to answer this question is a comparison of the counts of dyads, offenders and victims at each level of events (one event in the dataset, two events, three events and so on). The analysis is run three times to establish to what extent victims and offenders move between dyads.

What is the Conditional Probability Associated to Repeat Offending? This analysis asks if you call x number of times, how likely is it that you will call again, and with what degree of likelihood.

Does Severity Increase with Further Events? The instrument for measuring severity in this analysis is the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (CHI). To achieve this, a new variable has been added to the dataset and a LOOKUP formula applied to insert a CHI value based on the national classification of the event. The LOOKUP function identifies the relevant event classification in a cross-reference table which has been manually populated by the author based on the original work of Sherman, Neyroud & Neyroud (2014) and further research conducted using UK Sentencing Guidelines (Sentencing Guidelines Council, 2008; Sentencing Council, 2011; CPS.gov.uk, 2014). The resultant lookup table contains CHI values for 119 offence types and a substitute value (0.1) assigned to "non-crimes". 0.1 has been selected as a "non-crime" carries no sentence tariff or equivalent other than an investment of police time. As such this is the lowest value possible in this version of CHI, but as it is more than 0 it will influence mean harm scores. To track the trajectory of harm, a dyad study group of cases meeting a higher repeat threshold was identified. Eligibility for this group was determined as a minimum of five events (crime or non-crime) in a period of three years commencing from the date of the first event in the dataset. The three year period was determined to achieve consistency between the dyads. The number of events was set at five to enable an opportunity to see change over a range of data points. Again in this regard, this study goes further than many of its predecessors. The study group comprised of 727 dyads.

For each of these dyads, the CHI scores were mapped across each event in the sequence and the mean CHI score for each sequential event was then analysed using ANOVA to test for significant variance. This analysis was repeated on four further cohorts derived from the eligible dyads to determine if significant change in severity occurred within the eligible group. These cohorts were 1) those dyads which were among those

which caused the most cumulative harm, 2) those dyads where an arrest was made at first event, 3) those dyads which took place in an area classified among the highest quintile for deprivation and 4) those dyads which had a gap of less than 60 days between the first and second event.

Does Frequency Increase with Further Events? The other side of the escalation issue is frequency, defined here as the speed with which the next offence occurs after the last offence. A more precise name for this measure is intermittency, or the time between events. This research seeks to test the veracity of the claim that calls to police become more frequent with each passing call. As with the question concerning severity, ANOVA statistics were used to test a null hypothesis that there was no difference in the mean intermittency between any combination of events. These tests were run for the 727 dyads with five or more events in a three year period and two cohorts derived from this group. Firstly, chronic high harm cases which featured with those dyads contributing to 80% of CHI scores in the whole dataset. Secondly, those dyads in which events took place within the 20% most deprived wards in Suffolk. These cohorts were chosen to test if the null hypothesis was proven or disproven in the particular circumstances each cohort reflected.

The intermittency variable under scrutiny was the number of days that had elapsed between the reported date of each crime in the sequence. Using this variable does not control for so-called "historic reporting" (where victims report days, weeks and in some cases months and years after an event has happened) but it does reflect intermittency of reporting. Analysis showed that 82% of events were reported on the same day they were committed and 93% within seven days.

Where ANOVA tests led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, Tukey's Honestly Statistically Different (HSD) tests were used to identify between which particular events in the sequence that the differences were attributed to.

External Validity

While national statistics on domestic abuse are not available in England & Wales, HMIC report that domestic abuse represents 3% of Suffolk Constabulary's calls for assistance and 7% of all its recorded crime – comparable with the national position (HMIC, 2014). While Suffolk is predominantly a rural county, it has a number of urban areas and corresponding issues with high deprivation and comparative levels of some types of offending.

Table 2 shows a comparison of Suffolk against the overall figures for England & Wales for illustrative purposes:

Table 2: Summary of Key Demographic Statistics for Suffolk and England & Wales (Suffolk County Council, 2012)

Statistic	Suffolk	England & Wales
Age Groups		
0-19	24.4%	23.9%
18-64	59.4%	59.2%
65+	18.3%	16.5%
Gender		
Male	49.0%	49.2%
Female	51.0%	50.8%
Ethnicity		
White	97.2%	85.9%
Black and Minority Ethnic	2.8%	14.1%

Suffolk Constabulary's data should be comparable to other English and Welsh forces in many regards, but most particularly in the application of national crime counting rules. This alone should mean that all forces in England & Wales could derive some relevance from the findings detailed in the next chapter, as well as police in other countries with similar penal codes. What is less certain is the replicability of this study, which will be dependent on forces' individual circumstances relating to the recording of "non-crimes".

Results

The final cleaned dataset contained 36,742 domestic abuse event records that were recorded within Suffolk Constabulary's jurisdiction between 1st January 2009 and 31st March 2014. These data included 14,584 crimes under formal national definitions, 21,414 "non-crimes" (where a report had been made but no crime evidenced) and 742 non-notifiable crimes (ostensibly crimes, but where there is no statutory responsibility to report to the Home Office).

The majority of non-notifiable offences relate to malicious use of public communications networks to send indecent or obscene messages. Although non-notifiable for statutory statistical returns, the sentencing guidelines do enable a CHI value for this type of offending.

Figure 1: Numbers of crimes by classification (N = 14,584)
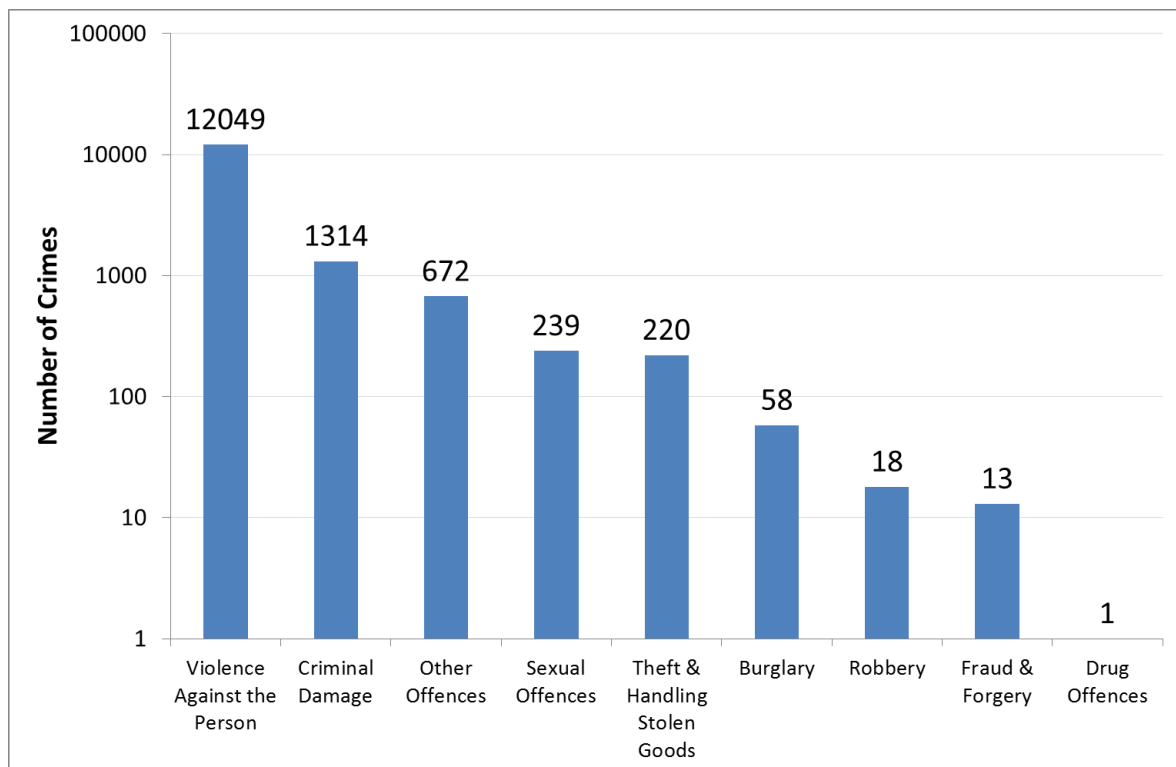
The majority (82%) of crimes within the dataset are classified as some form of violence, which includes threatening behaviour as well as contact violence. Violent and sexual offences have typically been the principal focus of domestic abuse research but in this instance they will form just 33% of the overall dataset on police callouts for domestic abuse. The majority of 'other offences' are public disorder, which are non-contact but can relate to threatening or intimidating behaviour.

**Figure 2: Breakdown of categories of violent crime (N =12,049)**
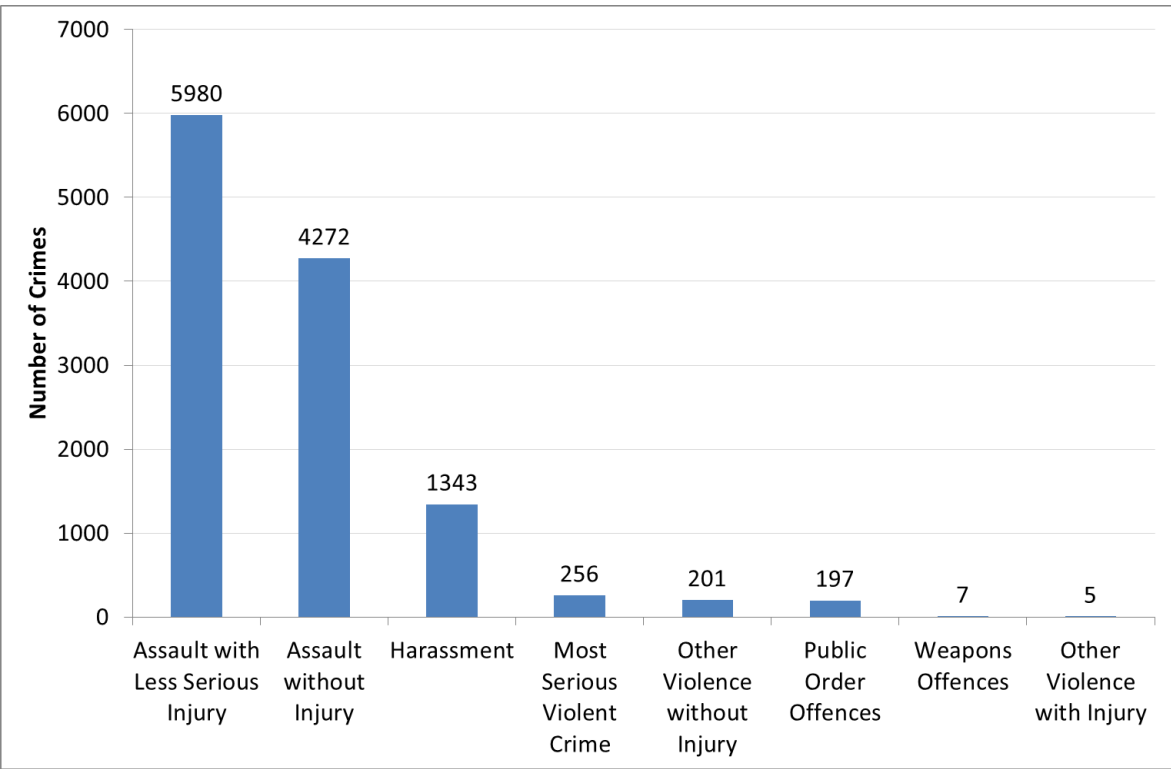
As Figure 2 shows, most violent crime is recorded with no injury or with less serious injury. The "most" serious injury based cases make up less than 1% of the entire dataset.

The key demographic breakdowns of the data are also worth consideration. In 77% of cases, victims of domestic abuse in Suffolk are female. The most frequent age

banding for both males and females is 18-29 year olds, who make up over a third of all domestic abuse events.

Figure 3 shows that most victims of domestic abuse in Suffolk were "White British" (as classified by the Home Office 16+1 ethnicity codes).

Figure 3: Breakdown of events by ethnicity
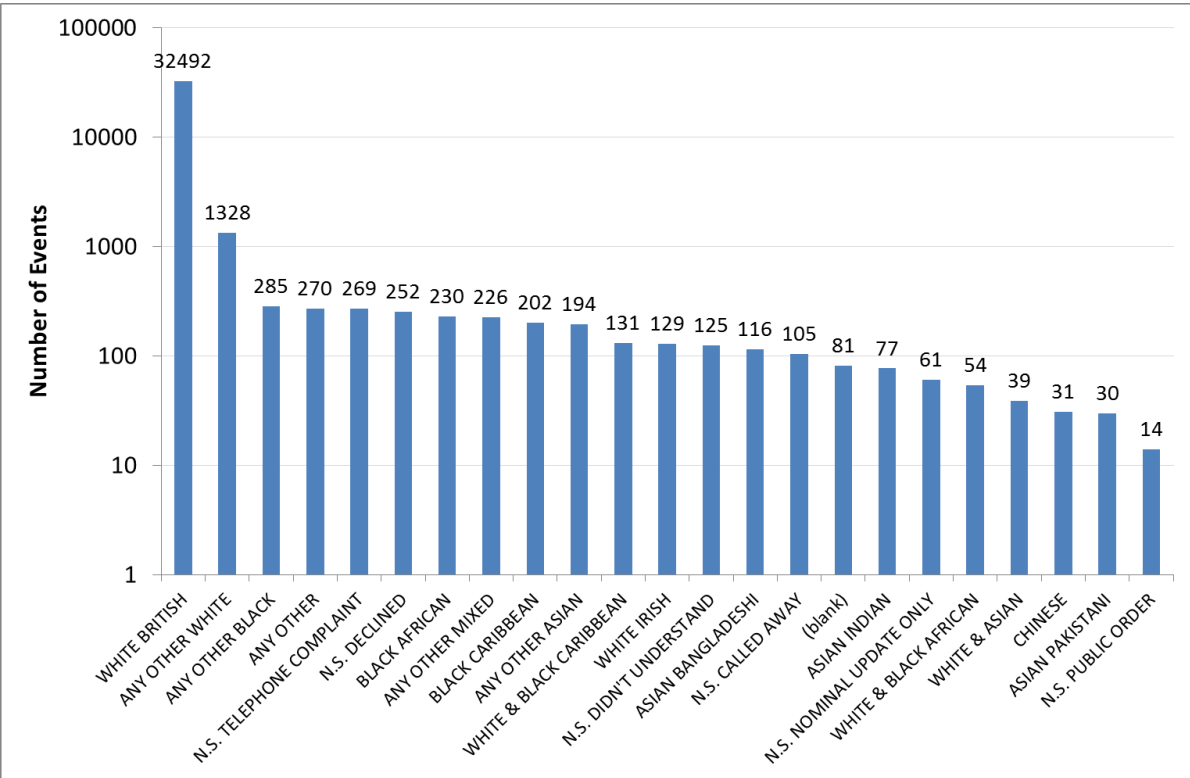
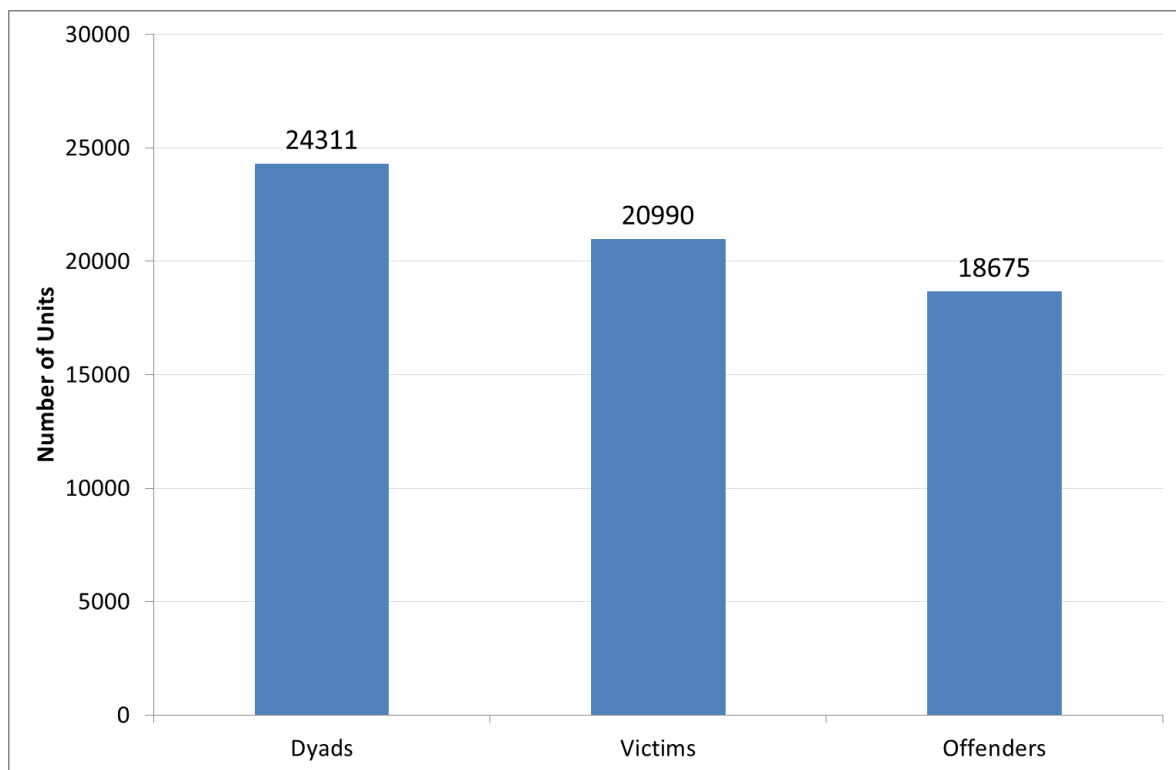**Figure 4: Number of unique dyads, victims and offenders**

Figure 4 gives a clear message regarding victim and offender movement in dyads. The ratio of unique victims to dyads is nearly 1:1. For offenders it is about 33% higher. This indicates that offenders in Suffolk had a greater tendency than victims to feature in multiple dyads. The victim ratio is also interesting as it indicates that at least 3,321 victims have reported more than one event.

Repeat Victimisation

Dyads

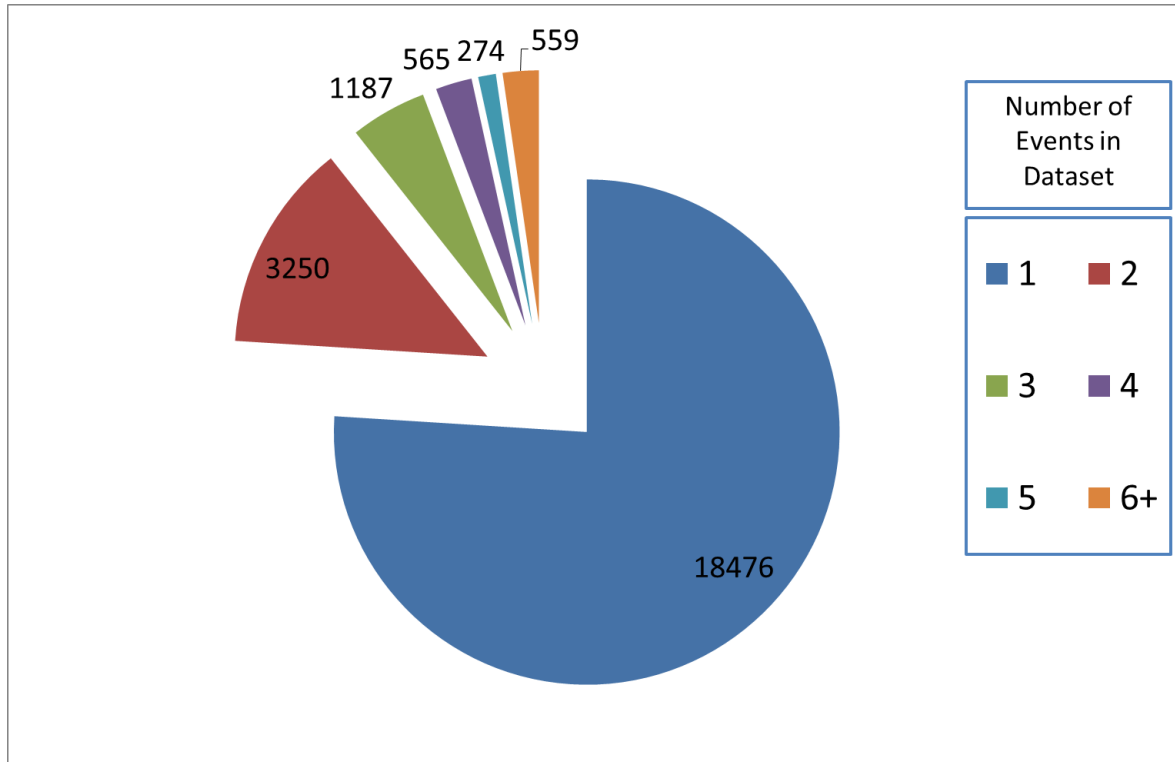**Figure 5: Number of dyads by level of events reported**

Figure 5 shows that most dyads presented to Suffolk Constabulary just once during the analysed period. Those 18,476 dyads represent 76% of all dyads that reported in the dataset, with a total prevalence of repeat victimisation among dyads of 24%. Similar distributions were found for victims and offenders. However, the prevalence of repeat calls among victims is higher than among dyads. 32% of victims reported more than one event to Suffolk in the 63 months analysed, a rate one third higher than the 24% rate for dyads. This indicates some movement of victims between dyads.

Repeat offending was more prevalent in the dataset than victimisation among either dyads or victims. 65% of offenders were linked to just a single event, lower than the 76% of dyads and 68% of victims already shown. This indicates that offenders are also

associated with multiple dyads. Offenders committed offences against multiple victims to a greater extent than victims were victimised by multiple offenders. 2,615 victims in the dataset were victimised by more than one offender. That represents 29.5% of all repeat victims. By comparison, 3,144 offenders offended against multiple victims – 47.6% of all repeat offenders.

Conditional Probability

Dyads

Figure 6: Conditional probability of further events reported at each cumulative total of dyad's events
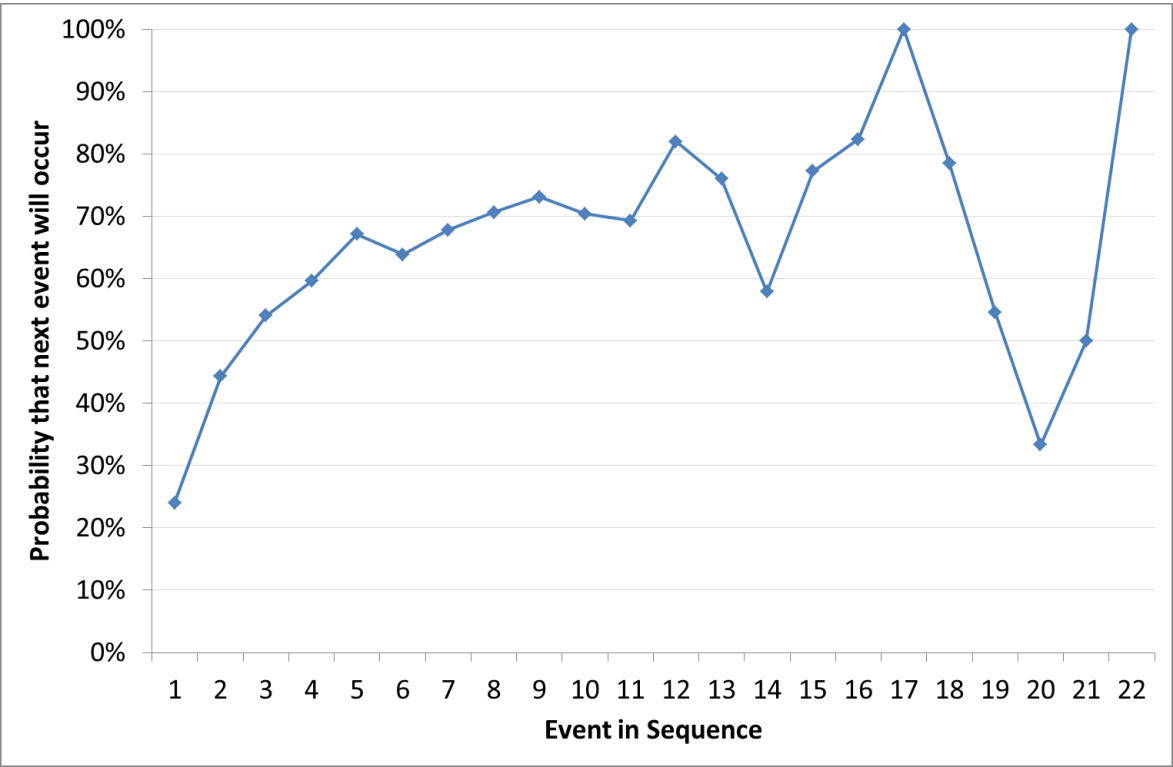

The initial probability that a dyad reporting once will report a second event is just 24%. This probability rises with each subsequent event reported. If a dyad is the subject of two events, then it is 44% likely to report a third. If it reports a third, it becomes 54% likely to report a fourth and so on. Similar patterns are found for victims and offenders.

Escalation in Severity

All Eligible Dyads

Figure 7: Average CHI scores in first 10 events for all eligible dyads
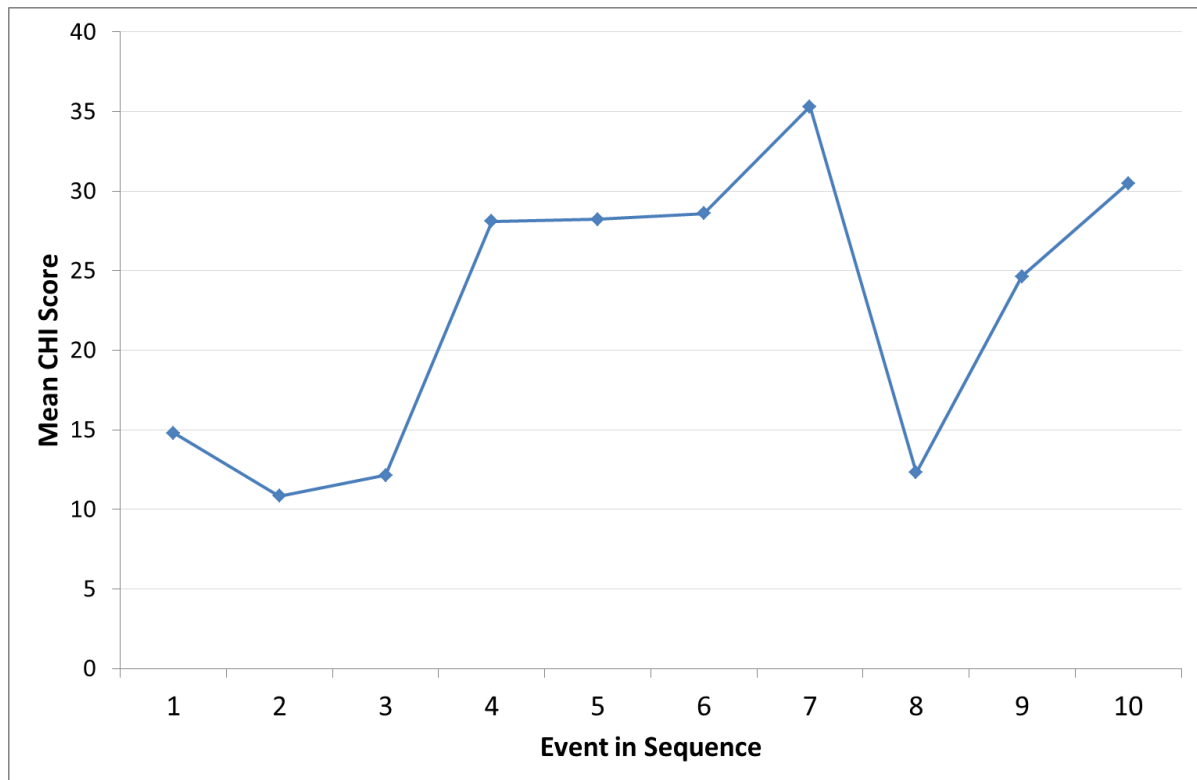
From event 1 to event 10, Figure 7indicates an upward trajectory in the mean CHI values (number of days in prison recommended by sentencing guidelines) for the first ten calls among all eligible dyads. (This analysis is restricted to the first ten calls because sample sizes drop away after this point.) A single factor ANOVA test determined borderline significance in escalation over time [$F(9, 4802) = 1.76$; p = .07]. That is entirely due, however, to the increase in CHI values after the first three events. Since most dyads never have one, let alone three repeat events, the importance of this finding of delayed escalation is highly precise, and inappropriate for most couples.

Chronic High Harm Dyads

Figure 8: Average CHI scores in first 10 events for all eligible dyads featuring with dyads causing 80% of cumulative CHI
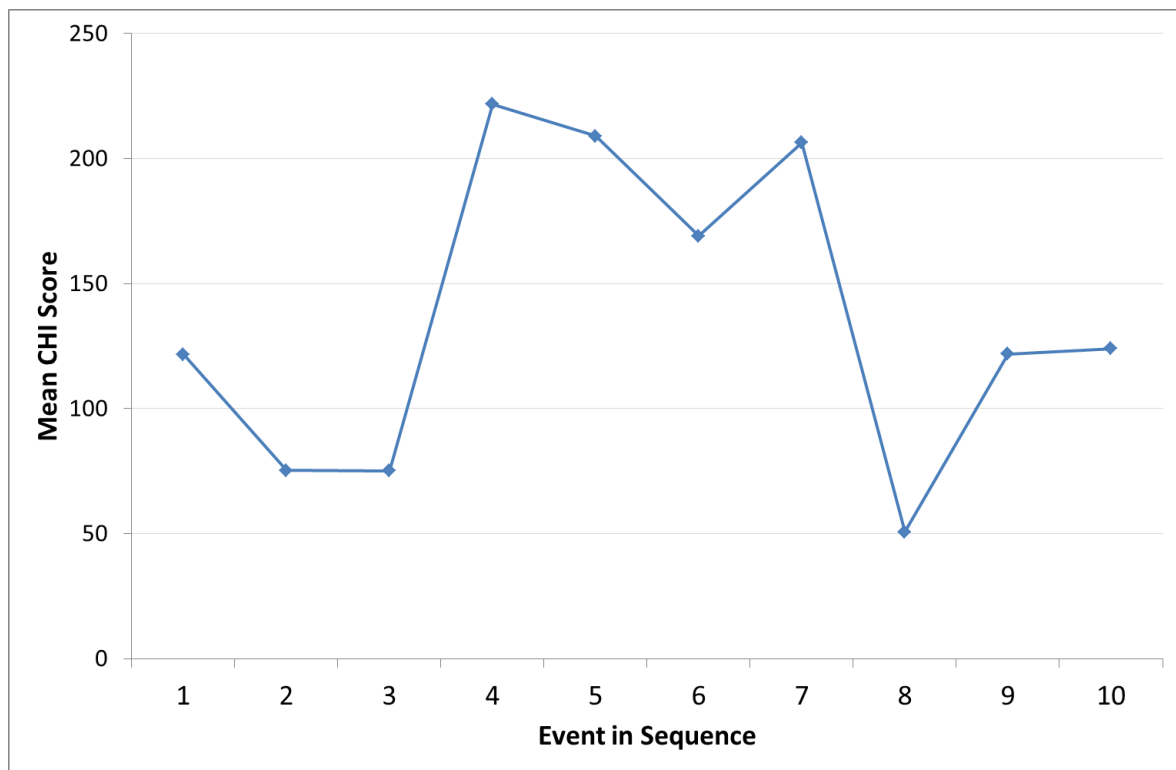

Figure 8 suggests no consistent upward trajectory in mean CHI scores from event 1 to event 10 among the group of dyads who contributed 80% of cumulative CHI in the whole data set. This group is referred to as "chronic high harm dyads" (n=76) and it should be noted that this is a very small proportion of the dyads, as well as a small sample for trajectory analysis. As would be expected given the criteria of this cohort, the average level of harm was far higher than for other cohorts. A single factor ANOVA test determined no statistical significant escalation over time, $F_{(9, 539)} = 1.29$, p=.24.

Arrest at First Event

Figure 9: Average CHI scores in first 10 events for all eligible dyads featuring with dyads where an arrest was made at the first event
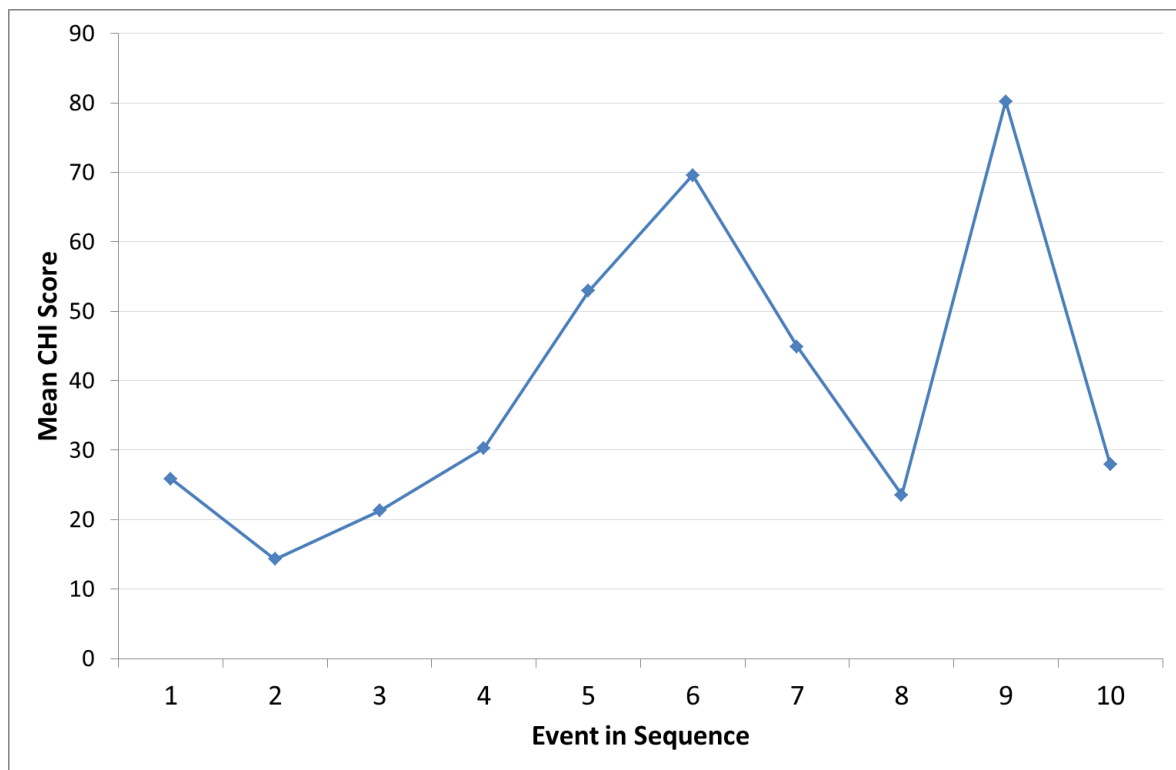

Figure 9 indicates an upward trajectory, but no statistically significant increase, in mean CHI scores between events 2 and 6 for the cohort in which there was an arrest at the first offence (n=189). At event 6 the sample size was 114 and after this it declined considerably to just 20 cases at event 10. A single factor ANOVA test determined no statistical significance, *F(9, 1200) = 1.24, p=.26.*

Decreasing Intermittency between Calls

All Eligible Dyads

Figure 10: Average intermittency between the first ten events in eligible dyads
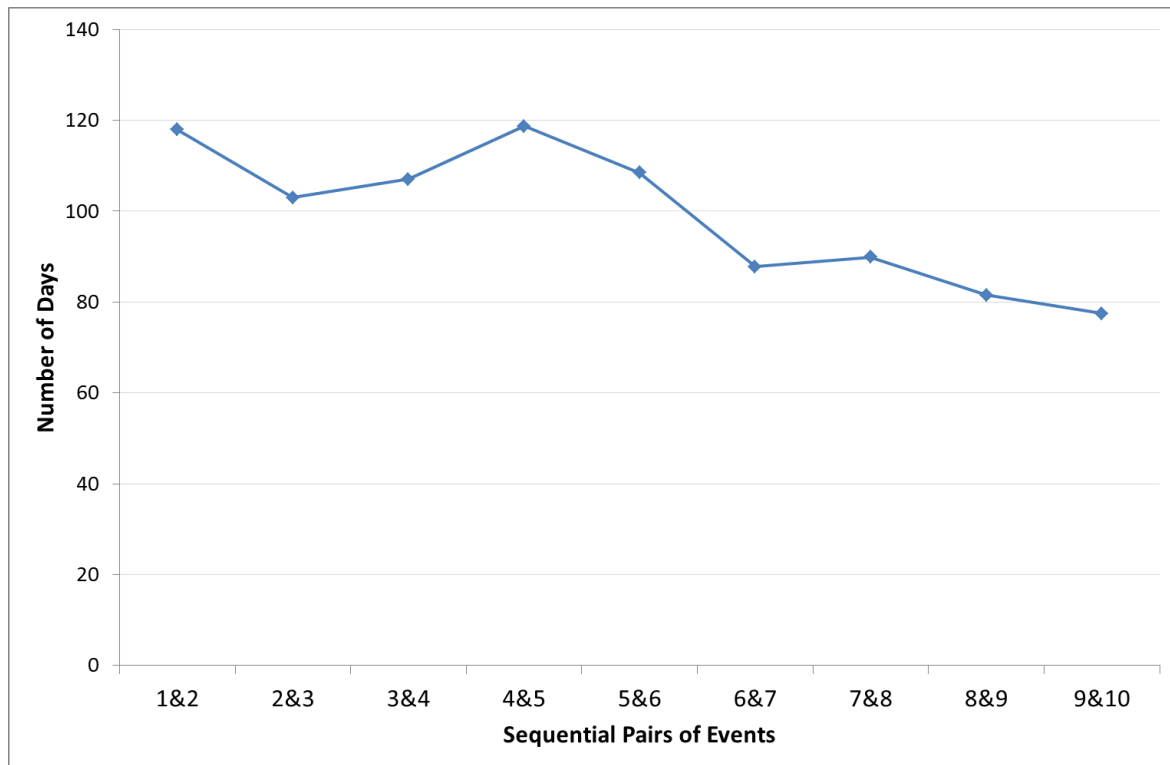
Figure 10 shows a general downward trajectory between events one and ten, with rises at three sequential points; events 3 & 4, events 4 & 5 and events 7 & 8. For all eligible dyads, the average number of days in between events is over 100 at every pair up to the sixth event. Thereafter the average falls to less than 90. Standard deviation is above 100 days for every pair of events. A single factor ANOVA test determined that at least one relationship between two of these pairs was statistically significant, $F(8,4076) = 3.68$, p<.001. This means the null hypothesis of no differences between means is rejected. ANOVA does not explain which groups have statistically significant differences, rather it just identifies that at least two groups do. A Tukey's HSD test identified significant differences between the means of 13 pairs of events (as shown in table 3).

Table 3: Tukey's HSD results for intermittency means at first 10 events for eligible dyads.

Event Pair	1&2	2&3	3&4	4&5	5&6	6&7	7&8	8&9	9&10
1&2	-								
2&3	14.94	-							
3&4	10.91	4.04	-						
4&5	0.79	15.73	11.70	-					
5&6	9.42	5.52	1.49	10.21	-				
6&7	30.12*	15.18	19.21	30.91*	20.70	-			
7&8	27.98*	13.04	17.07	28.77*	18.56	2.14	-		

8&9	36.35*	21.41	25.45*	37.14*	26.93*	6.24	8.37	-	
9&10	40.43*	25.48*	29.52*	41.22*	31.01*	10.31	12.45	4.07	-

Critical range = 22.44
*- significant to 0.05

These results indicate that there was significant difference (in this case a decrease in time, or an increase in speed) in the number of days between domestic abuse reports predominantly in the cases of earlier events compared to later events. For example, the difference in time (days) between events one and two was significantly higher than the difference between events six and seven, seven and eight and eight and nine. This supports the notion of escalating intermittency between initial and later events, and highlights specifically that there was a step change in intermittency from around event eight onward. These results should be considered in the context of unequal sample sizes which mean that Tukey's HSD results are more conservative.

Chronic High Harm Dyads

A single factor ANOVA test determined that there was no decline in intermittency—i.e., increase in frequency--for high-harm dyads. None of the relationships between any of the pairs of events was statistically significant, $F(8,464)$ = 1.05, p=.39.

Higher Deprivation

Figure 11: Average intermittency between the first ten events in eligible dyads where events took place in an area within the most deprived in Suffolk.
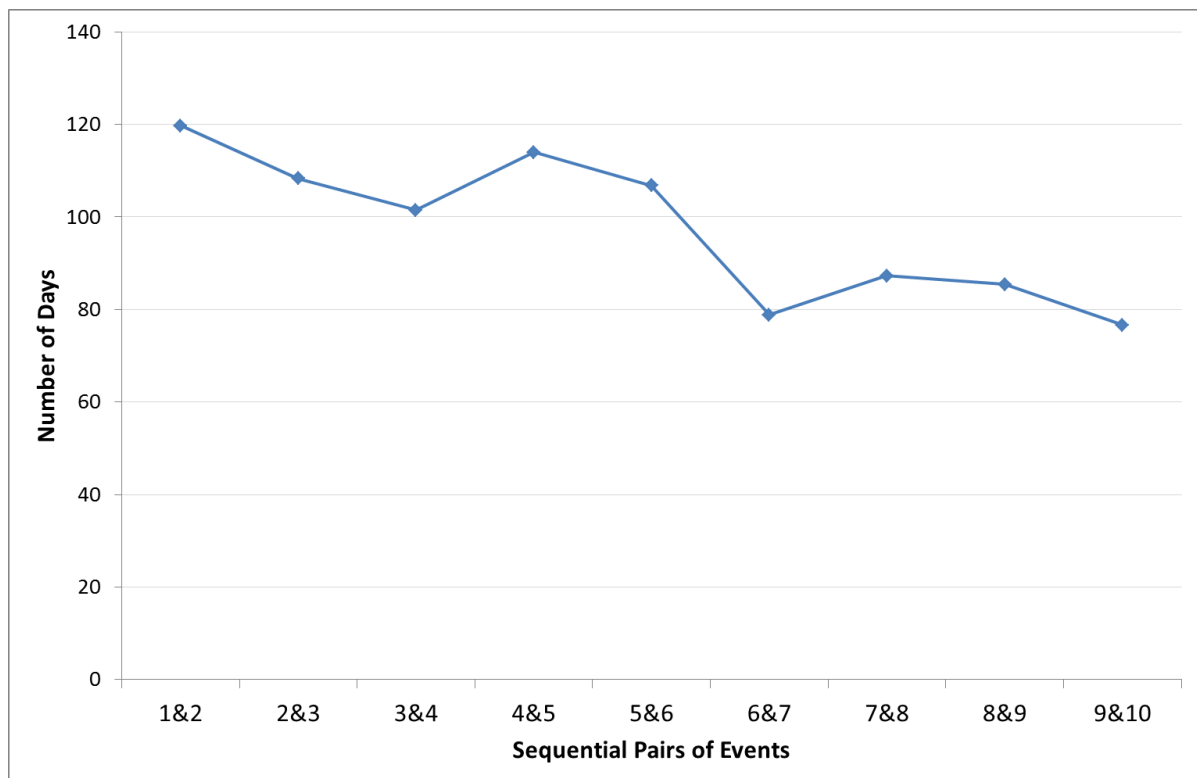

Figure 11 shows that where events took place within the 20% most deprived wards in Suffolk, there was a clear increase in the pace of calls to police. The downward trajectory of intermittency over time had sample sizes ranging from 450 for the first five events to 54 at the tenth. A single factor ANOVA indicated that the difference in mean intermittency between at least two events was statistically significant, $F(8,2525) = 2.70$, $p<0.01$.. Tukey's HSD test identified significant differences between 12 of the 36 possible combinations. These results indicated significant differences between the mean intermittency at event two and the mean intermittencies at events seven, eight, nine and ten. This supports the inference dyads based in more deprived areas of Suffolk experience decreasing numbers of days between offences after event seven.

"Power Few" Concentrations of Harm

Dyads

Table 4: Distribution of cumulative harm among dyads

Cumulative per cent of total CHI	Number of dyads	Cumulative per cent of dyads
1	2	0.01
5	10	0.04
10	20	0.08
20	59	0.24
50	192	0.79
80	412	1.70
100	24,311	100.0

CHI scores were highly concentrated among dyads, as indicated by Table . It is striking that 10% of all domestic abuse harm within five years and three months was attributable to just 20 dyads (out of 24,311 that reported in that time). It is equally notable that 80% of harm was attributable to just 1.7% of dyads – a much higher concentration than the theoretical "80-20" rule would suggest. These results strongly support the conclusion that a very small number of dyads account for a majority of harm. Conversely, this also suggests that a very high number of dyads report a very low amount of harm.

Figure 12 shows the proportion of total CHI attributed to dyads at each level of reporting. Those dyads which reported just one event (n=18,476) accounted for 53.6% of all harm, yet made up 76% of all dyads. This suggests two interesting issues. Firstly, police in Suffolk may have no prior records of domestic abuse in the cases which make up over half of all domestic abuse harm. Secondly, that there is uneven distribution of harm between the number of dyads at each level of event reporting.

Figure 12: Pareto chart for cumulative Crime Harm Index scores by number of events reported per dyad
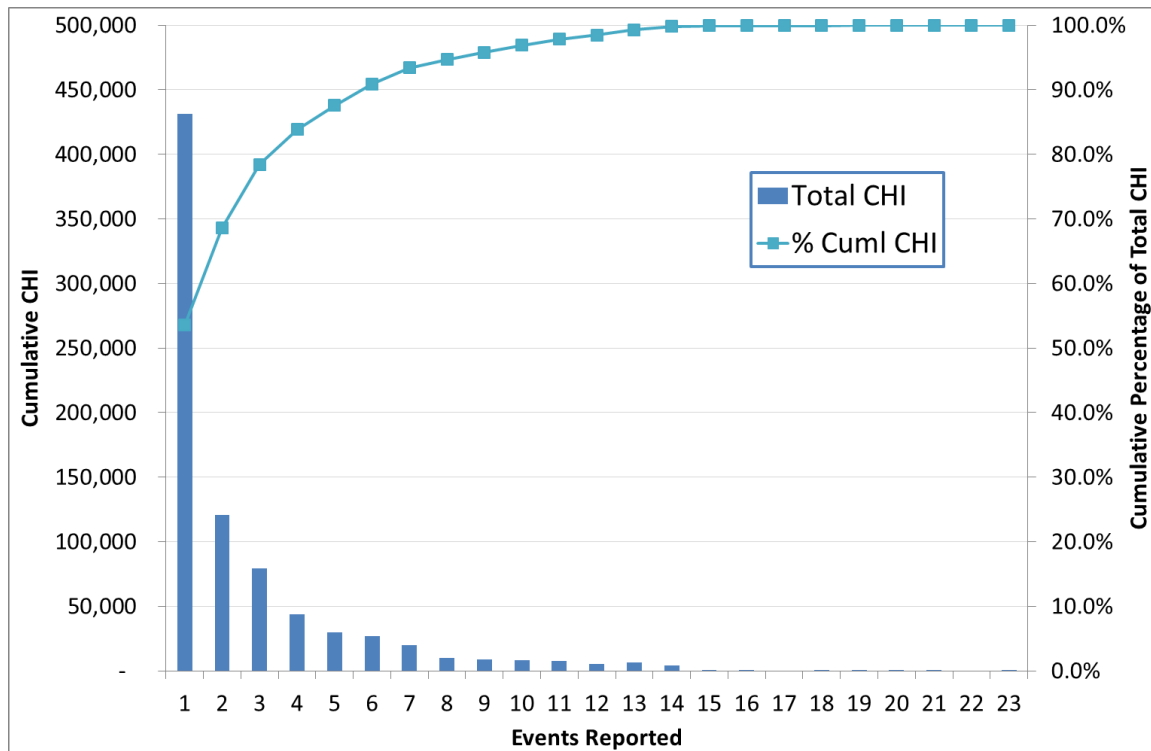
This finding is demonstrated in more detail by Table .

Table 5: Distribution of harm compared to proportion of overall sample by dyad reporting level

Number of Events Reported	Proportion of Overall Dyads	Proportion of Overall CHI
1	76.0%	53.6%
2	13.4%	15.0%
3	4.9%	9.9%
4	2.3%	5.4%
5	1.1%	3.7%
6	0.8%	3.4%
7	0.5%	2.5%
8	0.3%	1.3%
9	0.2%	1.1%
10	0.2%	1.1%
11+	0.4%	3.1%

Breakdown of the Power Few

Further analysis of the 412 dyads which accounted for 80% of cumulative CHI scores in the dataset identifies three sub-categories of dyad based upon event reporting history. 293 of the 412 dyads (53%) had only one reported event in the dataset. This implies that police had no prior record of domestic abuse in over half of the most harmful cases in a five year period. This cohort is henceforth referred to as "Never Called Before" or "NCB".

76 of the 412 dyads (18%) met the eligibility criteria for the CHI and intermittency analysis undertaken in this research. This is to say that just less than one in five of the most harmful dyads reported five or more events in a three year period. This cohort is henceforth referred to as "chronic".

The remaining 119 dyads (29%) reported more than one event, but less than five in a three year window from the first event. This cohort is henceforth referred to as "intermediate."

The data suggests differences in the demographic composition of the chronic and NCB cohorts in particular. NCB dyads tend less frequently to have unemployed, female and white British victims than was generally observed in the dataset. They also have children present in fewer cases. By contrast, the chronic dyads displayed the opposite trend; dyads were more frequently featuring unemployed, female or white British victims or where children were present. Similar results were found for both victims and offenders.

Discussion

These results demonstrate the broad diversity of risk and harm in the high-volume category of "domestic abuse," as well as a general lack of escalation in their seriousness. The majority of such events happen only once and cannot, by definition, escalate. Yet the findings also highlight areas where the police response is perhaps lacking at present. There are also practical implications among the findings which could influence how the police respond to domestic abuse calls for service.

"Theoretical" Implications

These findings pose further serious questions to Pagelow's (1981) assertion that escalation in domestic abuse is the "one thing that researchers can agree on". This study contributes what may be the largest sample size to the research that has failed to find evidence of escalation since Pagelow's claim, and the widespread "theory" of escalation it has generated (which does not pass standard requirements for a theory in science). Escalation is a complex issue; it can relate to severity or intermittency, it can be measured on different scales, using different units and over different timescales. This research offers new perspectives which may help to advance the debate around escalation in three principal ways.

Firstly, *there is no universal rule of escalation in severity of harm among domestic abuse cases*. It should not be an accepted fact that any domestic abuse case will progress from the non-severe to the severe unless intervention is made. This conclusion is based on two pieces of evidence: A) there are many dyads within the data who were reported to police many times but neither reached any level of "serious" offending or displayed any evidence of escalation in harm; B) a great deal of high harm cases showed no

evidence of escalation at all; indeed the majority showed no previous domestic abuse record at all.

Secondly, *the existence of chronic low harm dyads may be explained by the semi-normalisation of violence*. Reporting may be used by the victim as a retaliation tactic. Alternatively, the reporting may be generated by a third party, which could include Police proactively contacting victims and offenders through part of an ongoing risk management or investigation process. Indeed the completion of a DASH form itself often leads to the collection of information about further offences.

Thirdly, *NCB cases may point toward reluctance in victims to report if offending patterns were pre-existing*. This is potentially endorsed by theories of underreporting and the gap between the levels of violence reported to surveys and reported to police. If violence does exist in NCBs before the report to police, then police and partner efforts to identify it become crucial to any risk management strategies. Opportunities may exist in data mining, or referral networks such as the Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) which enable victims to approach agencies without the obligation of reporting to police. There is also a strong implication that agencies should not scale down efforts to encourage reporting. Alternatively the crime may represent an "explosion" of violence that is counter-normative to the relationship. If this were the case, it may run contrary to theories of underreporting.

Certainly, the existence of these 'sub-types' of domestic abuse dyads (NCB, chronic high harm, chronic low harm, one time low harm) lends credence to various taxonomies of domestic abuse. Johnson's (1995) is the most publicised; dividing dyads into those of "common couples" for whom violence is rare and not the norm and

"patriarchal terrorism" for whom males display continuing patterns of violence to control females. As discussed in the literature chapter, Piquero et al. (2005) theorised that Johnson's different classifications may be the reason that studies see different patterns of escalation. The results presented in this research do not directly evidence "patriarchal terrorists" or "common couples", but they do present a clear picture of distinctly different patterns among dyads which is worthy of further exploration to see if additional theories can be identified.

The results set out clearer evidence for decreasing intermittency among domestic abuse cases. This evidence too merits consideration of theoretical implications. Why do cases become more likely to report again and more quickly with each passing call? There have been no studies undertaken to substantiate this, so this point is speculative but merits further exploration.

The final theoretical implication concerns victims moving between dyads. The concept of serial offenders is well established and is at the heart of legislation such as "Claire's Law" where victims are able to make checks on partners to see if they have a history of violent offending. Less is known about serial victims, those who experience domestic abuse from more than one offender. While this research has not examined the nature of the relationships in each dyad, the inference is that victims end one abusive relationship and then enter another. Why this happens is an important question which merits theoretical consideration. Understanding this phenomenon could have interesting implications for prevention strategies.

Policy Implications

Preventing domestic abuse is a key priority for police forces in England and Wales (HMIC 2014) and at the heart of prevention is the DASH form – a tool used by officers and specialists to form judgements about the risk of harm. The tool, which grades cases as "standard", "medium" or "high" risk is a determinant of prevention strategy. Part of the form specifically questions the presence of escalation in severity and frequency; if a victim answers yes to these questions they are considered more likely to be at risk of harm. Yet this research has identified two pieces of evidence which contradict this process. Firstly, not all cases that escalate in intermittency become high harm. Secondly the majority of high harm cases, do not exhibit patterns of escalation in severity or intermittency. This second point, coupled with other research about DASH (Thornton, 2011), should lead to a major re-thinking of the role of escalation in domestic abuse risk assessment. Put simply, England and Wales police forces currently prioritise scarce preventative resources on criteria directly contradicted by the empirical evidence of this study.

The fact that more than half of the cases representing 80% of all harm were unknown to the police for domestic abuse has wider implications for policy than just rethinking the risk assessment process. It should also prompt examination of how police (and other domestic abuse stakeholders) identify victims. This examination should focus on two separate aspects of identification: victim-reported and agency generated.

For the former, agencies should continue to target efforts and evaluate tactics for increasing victim confidence. Importantly however, these efforts need to spread wider than just those victims with whom they already have contact. Indeed, a good proportion

of effort and resource should be expended on people who have never made contact with police before concerning domestic abuse. The data examined here suggests that police in Suffolk at least should increase engagement with higher employment areas, males and those in non-white British communities. The external validity of this research means this is a worthy consideration for other English and Welsh forces too.

Secondly, police and partners consider how they can leverage their data collectively to identify cases before they become NCB. This could begin with an exploration of police data and expand into partner databases. The advent of "troubled families", integrated offender management and multi-agency safeguarding hub programmes should be an enabler in this respect. This study does not offer an answer to the question of whether the NCB cases have truly never called before, but it does give Suffolk Constabulary and its partners a cohort of victims and offenders that it could examine for prior contacts of any kind. This could lead to a review of how police analysts and intelligence units proactively seek out risky cases and target engagement.

From this implication this discussion returns to risk assessment. At present a DASH form is generated upon report of a domestic incident or crime. The evidence presented here would suggest a fundamental change should be considered – that a domestic abuse risk assessment may need to be triggered by something other than a domestic abuse event. This evidence suggests police and partners may be wasting resources on cases where risk assessment adds little value, while missing opportunities to assess the risk of high harm cases not yet brought to police attention.

Finally, police agencies around the world should consider how data standards can be set to ensure that forces are able to identify repeat victims. The process of data

cleaning required to undertake this research precludes Suffolk Constabulary from being able to accurately and systematically identify repeat victims on an operational basis. This means that call operators or officers attending scenes may not have the full knowledge of the history of the dyad or victim. It may mean that serial victims go unnoticed. It certainly means that DASH assessments could be completed multiple times on the same victim, without ever being linked. If police agencies are serious about preventing domestic abuse and providing service to victims, these points need to be corrected.

Research Implications

While this research has reached some definite conclusions in relation to its research questions, those have in turn generated more questions.

Regarding escalation in general, this study is the first to use the Cambridge (or any) Crime Harm Index to measure escalation of harm, or dyad/victim based concentrations of harm. The Cambridge CHI proved a successful instrument and this research should mean that it can be used by other researchers with a degree of confidence. The CHI opens up a new paradigm of analytical opportunities ranging from geographical to temporal. Its use may expand beyond the academic and it would be interesting to see a force use CHI to track its performance in preventing domestic abuse.

Never Called Before Dyads. CHI has been used in this research to describe the existence of NCBs; a group of high harm dyads that have not come to police attention for domestic abuse prior to the high harm event. However, apart from some basic demographic analysis, this research has not examined NCBs in any detail. The first question of interest regarding further research should be whether the phenomenon exists in other force areas and to what extent. Part of this research may be whether NCBs have in fact never

called before. This study was limited to five years of data, so it is possible that some NCBs may have reported prior to the commencement of the data period. However, given the findings on intermittency, it is improbable that the majority of NCBs feature elsewhere in police data regarding domestic abuse. What is less clear is whether the victims or offenders were known to police for anything else.

If other police forces experience NCB, the ramifications for domestic abuse strategy are wide ranging and it will be important to learn even more about this group. In Suffolk, this group was more frequently employed, male or non-white British than high harm chronic or the general dataset. This analysis however, is based on a limited number of variables. Further analysis, perhaps based on interviews or surveys with NCB victims and offenders could prove invaluable to future prevention and identification strategies.

It would also be extremely useful to understand what happens to NCBs after the high harm event. Data in this study implies a high rate of desistance. Understanding this could help identify what works in preventing repeat offending.

Chronic Dyads. While further research of NCBs could prove valuable, further research of the chronic cases (both high harm and low harm) should not be ignored. Those chronic cases which have desisted could also help identify what works in preventing repeat offending and what role police intervention has in both desistance and further offending. For Suffolk Constabulary, the high harm chronic cases could become a cohort of dyads which represent the best short term return on investment in terms of traditional "performance" and harm reduction. Perhaps the most important question research could answer for this group is whether they are being managed at all and if so, how?

Limitations of this study

Like most pieces of research, particularly retrospective analysis, this study was subject to several restrictions. A universal limitation on this kind of "big data" analysis is unreported crime. It is a virtual certainty that police-recorded data do not represent all domestic abuse that takes place.

Another major limitation of this study has been reported as globally as Western Australia and Uruguay (Sherman, 2015 not in refs), as well as other UK agencies. None of them record unique reference numbers for victims. Identifying unique victims is highly manual and labour intensive. It is probable that a small number of cases have also been incorrectly included or excluded on this basis. Yet it is not so much a threat to the internal validity of the study as it is to the operational application of its findings.

The use of CHI at the level of definition required necessitated the author to supplement the research of Sherman, Neyroud and Neyroud (2014) by cross referencing a list of offences from the dataset with available online resources (Sentencing Council, 2011). In some cases the wording of crimes on Suffolk's system did not exactly match those in the reference material which required some interpretation. While it is highly unlikely this skewed the overall findings, researchers working with CHI in future should review their own systems against the reference material and the values shown in appendix I.

It should also be considered that it was not possible to control for variables that may have influenced severity or intermittency. The most prominent of these is police involvement. It was not possible to determine which cases had been assigned to the Suffolk Multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) or had been assigned an

Independent Domestic Violence Advocate. Either of these may have had an influence on mitigating violence or increasing the frequency of reports. Further studies or future iterations of this study should seek to identify these points at the outset.

Finally it should be considered that both ANOVA and Tukey's HSD are linear tests, which is to say they assume a linear relationship in the data they are applied to. Domestic abuse is of course highly complex and it is perhaps unlikely that escalation always assumes a directly linear pattern. Future studies may wish to consider whether a non-linear model can be applied.

Despite limitations, this study retains strong internal validity. As police recorded data, the classifications are subject to national standards and local audit. Data is linked to unique offender records by intelligence operatives and subject to rigorous local checks. The nature of the data also makes a wide number of variables available for analysis, many of which have been examined in this research. The data period extended over five years and cleaning made the analysis of dyads viable for the first time in an escalation study. This study has taken advantage of this to provide a longitudinal based analysis, something which previous escalation studies have cited the absence of as a weakness.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of escalation has been discussed by researchers for more than 30 years, yet evidence actually proving its existence has been thin. The fact that some domestic abuse presents as a repeat phenomenon does not mean that most or all dyads experience repeat offending, let alone rising severity. The absence of research may be in part due to the lack of a consistent instrument to measure crime severity. For England and Wales agencies, this is no longer the case, with the advent of the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (Sherman, 2013; Sherman et al, 2014).

This study examined over 36,000 cases of domestic abuse crimes and incidents reported to Suffolk Constabulary between 1st January 2009 and 31st March 2014. Through extensive cleaning of data, this research was able to compile findings by dyad, a longstanding gap in the research on escalation. The data showed that three quarters of dyads reported to police just once in the period analysed, but that harm was highly concentrated, with over 80% of cumulative harm for the whole period attributable to less than 2% of dyads. Furthermore this study identified that just over half this "high harm" group called the police for a domestic abuse incident or crime, just once in the period. It is inferred that this group of "never called before" (NCB) offered Suffolk Constabulary no opportunity for preventative measures by conventional domestic abuse means. In addition, these cases offered no opportunity for the observation of escalating patterns. The existence of the NCB group has implications for research, theory and policy. It is important that research examines whether the phenomenon exists in other police areas. If it does, research should be undertaken to examine the group in more detail to attach any relevant theoretical concepts and importantly to refine the way police identify cases

and engage with people who don't present as victims of domestic abuse. This study indicated that NCB victims were more often male, non-white British or from areas of lower deprivation than was typical. Examining the profile of NCBs further, perhaps with a random forest analysis, could generate a game changing approach to domestic abuse prevention in England and Wales.

This study also examined 727 dyads which met the eligibility criteria of five or more offences within a period of three years from the first case. The study concluded that there was no evidence of escalating severity among this group, but that events reported after the fifth call were reported significantly more frequently (i.e. fewer days between calls to police) than those before the fifth. Just 76 of the 727 dyads featured in the most harmful 80% indicating that most chronic repeat dyads were "low harm". More research into this "chronic" group should focus on the effect of police interventions, particularly on intermittency.

This evidence provides a direct contradiction to the notion of escalating violence in domestic abuse cases. Researchers may wish to further examine the notion of differing typologies of domestic abuse case, exploring the theoretical differences underpinning high and low harm, chronic and NCB cases, but the implication of this evidence regarding escalation is clear; at best it is not a universal phenomenon.

This study also found evidence that conditional probability of domestic abuse rises with each passing event. After a dyad has reported three times, it is more than 50% likely to report a fourth time. The probability of the next event being a crime or being a crime with a CHI value of over 30 also rises, but is at a much lower level. This evidence should influence forces to consider how they respond based purely on level of event reporting in

a case history. This may provide practical difficulties to forces in identifying dyads as entities, but the pattern of escalating probability is evident in offenders and victims too. Further research may consider sub-classifications of dyads to detect differing patterns in conditional probability.

Finally, the study concludes that both victims and offenders can become "serial" to differing extents when it comes to domestic abuse. Repeat victims were victimised by multiple offenders in almost 30% of cases, but almost half of all repeat offenders offended against more than one individual. This area is worthy of further exploration as it may assist with developing the understanding of victim vulnerabilities, theories concerning different "types" of offender, victim and dyad and the management of cases.

Furthermore, the conclusion that over half of the most harmful cases were not known to the police for domestic abuse should prompt a review of how forces and their partners engage with potential victims and how they use their data to proactively identify risk. The status quo of using a non-actuarial, non-evidence-based, reactive risk assessment is untenable. An alternative needs to be developed which takes into account that much of the harm caused to domestic abuse victims comes from cases which have never even been subject to risk assessment.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Appendices

Appendix I: List of Crime Harm Index Values

Arson endangering life   3825
Abduction of child by parent   84
Administer poison/noxious thing to injure/annoy   10
Aggravated burglary - dwelling   730
Aggravated taking - motor vehicle - twc 30
Arson   30
Assault occasioning ABH (s.47)   10
Attempted murder   4380
Attempted rape - female aged 16 or over   1825
Attempted robbery - personal property 10
Blackmail   10
Breach of Non-molestation Order   91
Breach of Restraining Order (Protection from Harassment)   91
Breach of the peace (common law)   10
Burglary - dwelling   15
Burglary - dwelling with intent   15
Burglary - dwelling with violence   730
Cause harassment/alarm/distress (s.5 POA)   10
Cause intentional harassment/alarm/distress (s.4A POA) 10
Cause/incite into sexual activity - offender aged under 18 - female aged under 13 - penetration
      730
Causing an affray   5
Common assault (no injury)   0.3
Community resolution - non crime   0.1
Controlling prostitution for gain 10
Criminal damage - dwelling - over £5000   84
Criminal damage - dwelling - racially/religiously aggravated   15
Criminal damage - dwelling - under £5000   15
Criminal damage - dwelling - value unknown   15
Criminal damage - other - over £5000   84
Criminal damage - other - under £5000 15
Criminal damage - other - value unknown   15
Criminal damage - other building - over £5000   84
Criminal damage - other building - under £5000 15
Criminal damage - other building - value unknown   15
Criminal damage - vehicle - over £5000 84
Criminal damage - vehicle - under £5000   15
Criminal damage - vehicle - value unknown   15
Criminal damage endangering life   3825
Cruelty to animals   0.96
Cruelty to or neglect of children 84
Dangerous driving   20
Domestic incident - non crime   0.1
Driving motor vehicle taken without consent   0.3
Driving motor vehicle with excess alcohol   0.96

Drunk and disorderly in a public place   0.3
False imprisonment   10
Fear or provocation of violence (s.4 POA)   5
Fraud by false representation - cheque/plastic card   0.6
Fraud by false representation - other fraud   0.6
GBH serious wound without intent (s.20)   15
Harassment - breach of injunction (s.3)   10
Harassment - breach of restraining order   91
Harassment - cause fear of violence (s.4)   10
Harassment - pursue course of conduct (s.2)   10
Harassment - pursue course of conduct (s.2) - non-crime 10
Harassment - racially/religiously aggravated   10
Harm/threaten juror/witness/person assisting in investigation   42
Having an article with a blade/point in public   0.3
Homophobic incident - non crime   0.1
Interference with motor vehicle (tampering)   1
Intimidate juror/witness/person assisting in investigation   10
Involuntary manslaughter   3825
Kidnapping   84
MALICIOUS COMMUNICATION - SEND LETTER ETC   0.6
Minor wound without intent (s.20)   15
Neglect illtreat person lacking capacity   84
NON COUNTING FRAUD INVESTIGATION   0.1
OBSTRUCT/RESIST A POLICE OFFICER   0.3
Obtaining services dishonestly   0.3
Other notifiable offences   5
Permitting premises to be used - Cannabis   0.3
Pervert the course of justice   1460
Possess air weapon/imitation with intent to cause fear of violence   0.3
Possess extreme pornographic images - sexual act with animal   10
Possess firearm/imitation to commit indictable offence   0.3
Possess offensive weapon without authority   0.3
RACIAL MINOR WOUND WITHOUT INTENT   15
Racial/religious agg assault - common/beating   10
Racial/religious aggravated har/alarm/distress   10
Racial/religious aggravated intent harassment/alarm/distress   10
Racial/religiously aggravated ABH   10
RACIALLY AGGRAVATED ASSAULT - COMMON/BEATING 10
RACIALLY AGGRAVATED ASSAULT/ABH   10
RACIALLY AGGRAVATED HARASSMENT   10
RACIALLY AGGRAVATED HARASSMENT,ALARM,DISTRESS   10
Racially motivated incident - non crime 0.1
Rape - female aged 16 or over   1825
Rape - female aged under 13 - by male   3650
Rape - female aged under 16   2920
Rape - male aged 16 or over   1825
Robbery - personal property   365
SEND OR TELEPHONE OFFENSIVE/INDECENT/OBSCENE   0.6
SERIOUS SEX OFFENCE - NON VALIDATED   0.1
Sexual activity - offender aged 18 or over - female aged 13-15 - penetration   1460
Sexual activity - offender aged under 18 - female aged under 13 - penetration   730

Sexual assault - female aged 13 or over 15
Sexual assault - female aged 13 or over - by penetration 730
Sexual assault - male aged 13 or over   15
Stalking - cause fear of violence 10
Stalking - cause serious alarm or distress   10
Stalking - pursue course of conduct   10
Take a conveyance - motor vehicle - twc 5
Take conveyance other than motor vehicle - twc 0.6
Take etc indecent photographs of children   182
Take or ride pedal cycle without consent etc   5
Theft - by employee   0.6
Theft - from motor vehicle   10
Theft - from the person 10
Theft - in dwelling   10
Theft - of mail   0.6
Theft - of motor vehicle 126
Theft - of pedal cycle   0.6
Theft - other   10
Threat to commit criminal damage   0.64
Threat to kill   10
Trespass with intent to commit sexual offence   730
Use public communications network to send indecent/obscene/threatening/false message
        1.5
Use violence to secure entry   10
Wasting police time   0.32
Wound with intent to cause GBH (s.18) 1460