ORIGINAL ARTICLE

'Understanding Domestic Violence and Abuse: Victim, Suspect and Crime Predictors of Police Outcomes'

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Abstract

Purpose Domestic violence and abuse (DVA) cases remain under-reported and under-prosecuted in the criminal justice system (CJS), with researchers frequently having limited access to raw police data. Here, a range of factors relating to DVA offences occurring between 2018 and 2020 in one large English police force were described and measured. As part of the research, it was investigated if victim, suspect and crime characteristics predicted outcome decisions, specifically charge rate, case attrition, and evidential difficulties despite victims' support in pursuing the allegations. The number of offences meeting the DVA legal definition, and those falling outside that definition, were also explored.

Methods Univariate and multivariate logistic regressions were performed to predict the relationship between demographic information and criminal history on three coded crime outcome categories (namely, 'charge', 'victim does not proceed', and 'law does not pursue').

Results The dataset included 198,617 crimes, and for 94.1% of them, the suspect was not charged. Relationship type, age, crime type, and the number of victim allegations predicted all three outcomes. For instance, being partners of the victim significantly decreased the chances of a charge compared to suspects who were not partners.

Conclusions The findings are in line with evidence from the literature which highlights all-time low charge rates for DVA and high levels of victim attrition. We argue that the influence of victim/suspect characteristics and DVA-related dynamics should be considered by police personnel and members of the CJS when assessing crime reports.

Keywords Domestic abuse · Domestic violence · Police outcomes · Predictors · Intimate partner violence · Policing

Introduction

Current England and Wales legislation defines domestic violence (DVA) as any abusive behavior committed by perpetrators who are personally connected with a victim[1] who is 16 years of age or older (Domestic Abuse Act, 2021). DVA is varied and encompasses a wide range of crimes that include, but are not limited to, physical and/or sexual violence, stalking, harassment, coercive control, as well as psychological and/or emotional abuse and other types of offences, like robbery and criminal damage (Crown Prosecution Service [CPS], 2022).

Prior to a legal amendment in 2021, DVA was also only classified as such if occurring between two adults (Deputy Prime Minister's Office & Clegg, 2012). However, a change in legislation was triggered by findings from a Home Office (2013) survey which highlighted that teenagers between the age of 16 and 18 were becoming exponentially affected by DVA (Home Office, 2016). More recent policy-based investigations on this topic also show a substantial increase in abuse incidents in individuals aged 13 to 19, suggesting this specific age group has a greater propensity to be involved in DVA than the law would imply (Home Office & Department of Health, 2011; National Society for the Prevention of

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[1] We recognize that the term victim is only one of the terms that can be used to identify individuals affected by DV. The term survivor, for instance, is frequently used when referring to victims of DVA. We used "victim" for consistency across the document. This stylistic choice does not want to undermine the importance of other terms and definitions.

Cruelty to Children, 2022) - a factor which is also mentioned in *Sect. 3* of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021, paragraph 85)[2]. In more recent years, the definition of DVA has expanded to also include children actively or indirectly involved in DVA incidents (Domestic Abuse Act, 2021, Sect. 3). Notable, in this regard, was the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 (part 1), with Operation Encompass posing as an early safeguarding partnership between the police and the education sector, advocating for children to be seen as DVA victims in their own right – something that was not directly nor adequately captured by the past England and Wales legislation (pre January 2022). While this is a legal milestone, for child, teenage, and/or child-to-parent DVA, it is still difficult to estimate how many minors are effectively involved in DVA incidents in England and Wales (Herbert et al., 2023).

Relatedly, while reading the Act, it appears that, at least legally, DVA suspect-victim relationships can only include partners or ex-partners, individuals who have or had shared custody of a child, are or have been intimate, or are related (Domestic Abuse Act, 2021). Despite this, the inconsistent ways in which DVA offences are recorded by police suggest that in practice, a broader range of relationships, such as acquaintances[3] are being routinely included in police reports in England and Wales, in ways that go beyond the law criteria (Walby et al., 2014). Similarly, as far as police reporting goes, *any* crime can currently be labelled as DVA by police personnel and can occur within several suspect-victim relationship types, beyond the sole intimate partner violence (IPV) (Crivatu et al., under review)[4].

Worldwide, a third of women have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse by either a partner or a known individual at some point in their lives (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021) and recent data in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2021) showed that over 5% of all individuals aged between 16 and 74 had experienced DVA in the year ending March 2020. Furthermore, surges in the number of reported DVA cases have persistently been noted since the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 (Hester, 2022; Spence et al., 2022; Usta et al., 2021) with police records indicating increases of 41.1% reports across England and Wales between March 2018 and March 2021 (ONS, 2021). DVA victims account for almost 16% of all crime victims each year, with most of them being female (ONS, 2021). However, this percentage is likely to be an underestimation of the actual number of DVA cases (Gracia, 2004), as most forms of domestic abuse are perpetrated behind closed doors and, therefore, are likely to go unreported (Home Office, 2017). Being a victim of DVA can include sustaining physical (e.g., injuries), sexual (e.g., increased prevalence of sexually transmitted infections), emotional and spiritual (e.g., questioning faith, feeling unworthy), as well as reproductive damages (e.g., induced abortions) (Dillon et al., 2013; Grose et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2014; WHO, 2021). The negative effects on survivors' mental health have also been extensively reported. For instance, a thirteen-year longitudinal study found a correlation between DVA and both psychological distress and unemployment, highlighting that repeat victims of DVA were displaying severe long-term mental health issues but also struggled to achieve financial independence and economic capacity for a decade after the abuse took place (Lindhorst et al., 2007). Despite the increase in reports, and greater overall awareness of what counts as abuse, the charge rate for crimes flagged as DVA has seen a constant year-on-year decrease (ONS, 2021). For instance, in the year ending 2021, only 8% of all DVA crimes resulted in the suspect receiving a charge or summons for the crime committed (Home Office, 2022). These findings seem to highlight that DVA is not only widespread and its consequences far-reaching, but also that there is a systematic failure to progress DVA cases through to court.

Despite the prevalence of DVA and the damaging impact it has on victims, academic research has primarily focused on investigating the socio-psychological aspects and consequences of DVA, with only a handful of studies revolving around case attrition, but most specifically, *victim attrition*[5] (Barrow-Grint, 2016). Recent research using police DVA case files showed that "victim withdrawal from the criminal justice process was a significant factor in case attrition, with

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[2] Legal amendments to the official definition have been implemented to enforce Sect. 3 of the DA Act and include some children witnesses as DA victims. At the time of analysis, these had not yet been implemented.

[3] Walby et al. (2014, p. 201) define an acquaintance as "someone known to the victim, at least by sight, including: workmates/colleagues; clients/members of the public met through work; friends/acquaintances; neighbours; youths from the local area; tradesmen/builders/contactors; and (ex) husband/wife/partner of a household member".

[4] This paper gives a detailed overview of crime types included in the same DVA dataset (e.g., rape and other contact and non-contact sexual offences, violence against the person, stalking and harassment, theft, vehicle offences) and their relationship with demographic characteristics (e.g., age, victim-suspect relationship) that might have influenced police case outcomes.

[5] The general term 'attrition' is used in criminological literature to indicate all those instances where criminal cases fail to reach, or progress through further steps in the criminal justice system. This can indicate for instance, that a reported allegation does not reach the threshold to be trialed. Victim attrition, on the other hand, refers to cases where the victim decides that it is not worth continuing with the investigation after having reported and identified the suspect. In this regard, Sinclair (2022), highlighted how police officers can directly and indirectly influence victims' decision not to pursue the case if they believe that, based on the available evidence, the case is not very likely to reach a 'guilty' outcome in court.

withdrawal occurring in 52.4% of crimed cases, and almost all withdrawals (92.4%) occurring at the pre-charge stage" (McPhee et al., 2021, p. 971). Victim withdrawal is, therefore, a significant contributor to the overall pervasive challenges in prosecuting and charging suspects (Brown, n.d.) – a factor which needs to be investigated and understood if charge and prosecution rates of DVA are to be improved. In addition to this, data collected by the ONS (2021) showed that almost a third of DVA cases result in legal decisions not to take the case to court, even if the victim was supportive of the investigation. These cases normally receive an outcome of No Further Action (NFA). As a result of attrition, and especially when the DVA offences are sexual in nature, less than a third of all triable offences eventually proceed to the hearing stage (Home Affairs Committee, 2022).

To achieve better charge rates, the variables that influence legal decisions need to be better understood. For instance, there is a lack of research around how factors such as suspects' and victims' individual characteristics could impact police outcomes and influence charge rates. Additionally, there are inconsistent findings in relation to age, with either no differences highlighted across age groups (Hirschel & Hutchison, 2001; Worrall et al., 2006) or with younger suspects being reportedly more likely to be prosecuted and charged (Dawson & Dinovitzer, 2001; Henning & Feder, 2005). Research into the effects of ethnicity has also produced mixed results; for example, Henning and Feder (2005) found that suspects belonging to ethnic minorities were more likely to be charged. On the other hand, data collected from United States (US) prosecutors showed that contrary to expectations, Black and Hispanic defendants were more likely than White defendants to have their cases dismissed (Romain & Freiburger, 2012). Additionally, evidence shows that police attitudes[6] can lead to both negligent practice, low charge rates for DVA suspects and different approaches to DVA complaints based on specific suspect-victim relationship characteristics. In the first instance, a recent government review (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services [HMICFRS] et al., 2022) highlighted how police forces in England and Wales repeatedly failed to adequately respond to DVA cases. More specifically, widespread concerns revolved around but were not limited to, abuse of police power, improper manipulation of DVA-specific policing processes and wrongful apprehension of abused victims. According to DeJong et al. (2008), police officers were also more likely to simplify and dismiss the

dynamics of intimate partner violence (IPV; a subset of DVA relating to intimate partners only), re-traumatize victims, or display rape myth bias when DVA was perpetrated by a partner, as opposed to non-partners. Police have also been found in some circumstances to minimize the seriousness of same-sex IPV and conduct arrests differently if the victim and suspect were heterosexual versus same-sex partners (Pattavina et al., 2007). In support of this, a longitudinal study also found that IPV in same-sex couples was less likely to result in an arrest compared to heterosexual couples, but that when arrests were made it was more likely that both parties were arrested as 'suspects', rather than just one (Hirschel & McCormack, 2021).

Victim characteristics have also been found to affect case outcomes. For example, when victims came from an ethnic minority background or were involved in sex work, investigations were less likely to end in a charge (Bowen et al., 2021; Hulley et al., 2022). This concept is frequently flagged as criminalization of specific categories of victims and shows a double standard – or double disadvantage – for BAME [Black, Asian, and minority ethnic] victims of crime (Cox & Sacks-Jones, 2017; Lipscombe et al., 2023; Lammy, 2017).

To mitigate the impact of biased police attitudes on DVA case investigations, the College of Policing (2022), in collaboration with the charities SafeLives and Women's Aid, recently introduced a training program for police personnel: *Domestic Abuse Matters*[7]. Early evaluations suggest that officers felt more upskilled in identifying elements of DVA usually overlooked, like coercive control when dealing with a DVA investigation (Brennan et al., 2021). Benefits were also registered around officers improved understanding of the impact of DVA on children as well as specific dynamics like coercive control and perpetrators tactics involving minors (SafeLives, 2020). Despite this, arrests declined eight months post-delivery, highlighting the need for continued training and development of police officers alongside organizational and structural changes to aid officers in better responding to DVA (Waddington, 2012).

Lastly, Hester (2006) found that attrition, and consequently an outcome other than 'charged', seemed to be both positive and negative for victims based on how the Criminal Justice System (CJS) personnel managed victims' safety after the crime was reported. Despite promising findings, Bland and Ariel (2015) reported there is still not enough conclusive information on which mechanisms are directly involved in DVA patterns or which dynamics between suspects and victims might force the latter to drop the charges.

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[6] In a policing context, attitudes are psychological predispositions that can be unconsciously and routinely used to make a judgment of victims, perpetrators and offences (Garner, 2005). These are the byproducts of personal experiences, culture, organizational contexts and training received and have been shown to negatively influence the course of DA investigations (Serrano-Montilla et al., 2023).

[7] Only 26/43 forces are presently licensed to deliver the program to their police offices (College of Policing, 2022).

The Current Study

A range of research and recent practitioner documentation published suggests that DVA is diverse in nature; perhaps more diverse than the current legal definition allows (CPS, 2024; Walby et al., 2014). It is also clear that, while some findings suggest that victim and suspect characteristics are associated with different policing outcomes, further research on the topic is required. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to provide an overview of DVA incidents reported to one English police force and to explore:

1. The demographic characteristics of DVA suspects and victims as flagged by the police officers themselves, to show the types of offences being categorized as DVA, and whether and how they do or do not meet the legal definition outlined in the Domestic Abuse Act (2021).
2. The range of outcomes associated with DVA offences.
3. Predictors of DVA outcomes for charge rate, case attrition, and the law not pursuing cases.

The research aims to contribute to the knowledge of DVA cases reported to the police through a quantitative approach to raw police datasets, whose access for researchers and academics is frequently limited (Phythian & Kirby, 2022). The uniqueness of the study is even more so highlighted by the fact that in recent scandals around DVA reporting in England and Wales, police officers were allegedly asked to underplay the severity and number of actual DVA cases reported through official policing-only reporting outlets (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2024).

Method

Sample

The initial dataset consisted of all DVA crimes reported to an English police force during a three-year period from January 1st 2018 to December 31st 2020. Offences that had been flagged as DVA by police personnel were anonymized and collected as part of a quantitative data request submitted through Operation Soteria Bluestone, a Home Office-funded program designed to improve the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) in England and Wales[8].

The data was extracted from records held by the police force in the crime recording database which contains details of all offences committed in the jurisdiction of the sampled police force and a breakdown of crime categories and sub-categories. The variables the researchers were interested in exploring were requested beforehand and the data was then collated by police personnel, who ensured full anonymization before securely transferring the dataset to the research team. The raw dataset provided by the police contained 29 variables relating to the suspects, victims, and offences (Appendix A). Full case studies were not available to the researchers. For 981 incidents (.5%), the suspect was unidentified and therefore excluded from the analysis. The sample consisted of 175,538 victims and 161,203 suspects, involved in a total of 205,736 DVA reports covering 232,870 crimes[9].

Procedure

There were 21 suspects aged between 1 and 9 and a further 12,806 where the age was recorded as 0. Additionally, there were 945 victims whose age was recorded as 0. Cases where the suspect was younger than 10 were excluded because the age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is 10 years old and any age value below that threshold is likely to indicate an error. The large number of suspects and victims with an age of 0 suggests this is a data input strategy of officers, however, these were removed because actual age could not be determined. Although according to the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) DVA needs both victim and suspect to be 16 or older, this age cap was not applied to this dataset. This choice was made for two reasons. First, *Sect. 3* of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021, para 81), acknowledges that exceptions and broadening the legal definition can be applied by public authorities such as police in relation to the direct or indirect involvement of younger individuals and children as victims of DVA. Secondly, emerging research suggests an increase in the prevalence of DVA among teenagers. An integral part of the study, therefore, was to review flagged DVA incidents that do not meet the legal definition. When crime incidents were considered, DVA relating to murder ($N = 50$), arson ($N = 170$) and m/v interferences ($N = 17$) were removed due to their low frequency. Lastly, there were 2,000 (.8%) cases where the investigative outcome was still pending when the data was sent to the researchers, meaning analysis relating to policing outcomes could not be conducted. Cases with this outcome were removed. Overall,

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[8] In England and Wales DVA incidents do not count as a separate offence but rather added as a 'flag' applied to existing offences by police officers when inputting case details. Therefore, despite legal guidance on what should count as DVA, it is down to the recording officer's judgement whether an offence should be flagged as DVA. In England and Wales, to prevent flagging errors, multiple individuals are involved in double-checking flagging accuracy. These range from the initial investigative officer to uniformed police sergeants, detective sergeants and specialist crime management units.

[9] The difference in these numbers lies in the fact a report, or incident, can contain more than one crime. For instance, in one single report, a given suspect may be investigated for violence against the person and theft. Throughout this article, reports, cases and offences are used interchangeably.

Fig. 1 Distribution of suspects' and victims' ages across reported DVA cases
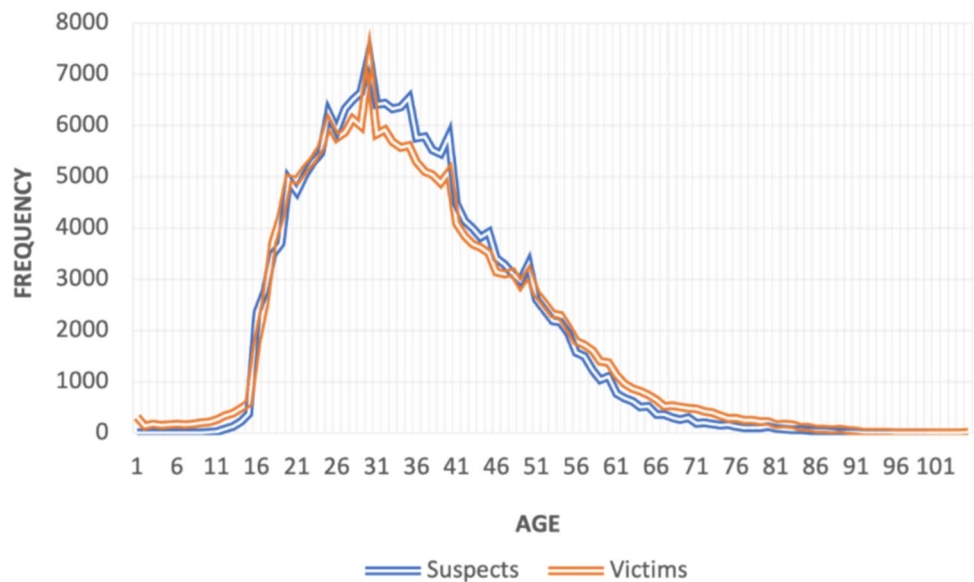
the researchers focused on three categories of outcomes[10] that were specifically created for this analysis: *charge*, *victim does not support*[11] and *law does not pursue*[12]. The final dataset included a total of 175,200 DVA reports, involving 145,996 suspects, and 155,738 victims. More details on the coding processes for relationships and outcomes are available in Appendix B and C.

Analysis

Descriptive data for victims and suspects was included to investigate the main characteristics of DVA reports. To establish relationships between victim and suspect demographics and the police outcome categories, a series of univariate and multivariate binary logistic regressions were conducted. Victim-suspect relationship, sex, age, number of allegations reported per victim, number of crimes committed per suspect, and crime type were entered as predictors and either 'charged yes/no', 'victim does not want to proceed yes/no,' or 'law does not want to pursue yes/no' were entered each time as the dependent variable. Results are presented separately as odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals

(95% CI). Being a male partner/ex-partner suspect, a female victim, and reporting DVA in association with violence against the person were the largest categories among the variables and were therefore used as the reference groups for the regression analyses. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 28 (IBM Corp, 2021).

Results

Victim and Suspect Descriptives

Data on sex were missing for 7.2% ($N = 10,460$) of suspects and .1% ($N = 171$) of victims. Where sex was known, most suspects were male (70.8%), and almost three-quarters of victims were female (73.1%). The suspects' mean age was 35.56 (SD = 12.24, range: 10–100), while the victims' was 36.21 (SD = 14.06, range: 1–110). Over a third of all crimes (32.6%) were committed by suspects that were between 26 and 35 years old against victims of the same age group (Fig. 1).

With all exclusions applied, 806 suspects and 3,900 DVA victims were younger than 16 years old when the offence occurred. Although incidents involving minors represent a minority of the sample, the consistency of its occurrence at a recording stage - just over 4,700 individuals - is too high to be explained by human error. The data also supports the hypothesis that some of the incidents are flagged by the police without strictly adhering to DVA-specific legal criteria, meaning that individuals younger than 16, including children, were also flagged as either DVA victims or suspects. Moreover, 15.9% of victims included in the dataset reported more than one DVA incident to the police and a fifth (20.6%) of suspects

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[10] Under UK regulations, regardless of the number of crimes committed within the same incident, the suspect receives only one investigative outcome, which relates to the most severe crime committed.

[11] This category includes instances where for example the victim decided not to proceed beyond making the initial allegation This does **not** mean that the crime did not happen.

[12] This outcome refers to police outcome codes where either the police or the CPS decided not to proceed despite the victim continuing to be supportive of the case and might be due to external difficulties like the investigation not being in the public interest or the suspect not being identified.

were involved in multiple DVA offences, either against the same victim or different ones across the three years of data collection (January 1st 2018 - December 31st 2020). Although this is an estimate, purely based on the police's ability to adequately record historical data, this information was useful to gauge how many repeat DVA victims and repeat suspects were flagged. Most suspects were either partners/ex-partners (67.6%) of the victim or family members (25.6%). This is in line with the legal definition of DVA, for which suspects were normally personally connected (by blood, marriage or shared custody of a child) to the victim when the offence took place. Despite this, 7,728 cases involved further relationship types flagged as DVA by police personnel, which would normally not meet the legal definition of DVA. These included but were not limited to, suspects known to the victim that were either friends, acquaintances, neighbors, employers, or individuals in a position of authority. The finding supports the idea that DVA is a complex crime that is more varied than what is routinely described in terms of suspect-victim relationships. Table 1 shows an overview of the descriptives of both suspects and victims.

Outcomes

Half of the case outcomes were *victim does not support* (50.2%). Meaning that in half of the cases victims did not want to proceed with the investigation after reporting the crime to the police, despite having identified the suspect. The second most common outcome was *law does not pursue*, which accounted for over one-third of the outcomes (34.8%). In these cases, charges were dropped by the police or the CPS even if the victims wanted to continue with the investigation, and the suspect was either identified or not identified. Lastly, only 5.9% of the cases were closed with a charge, meaning the suspect was prosecuted for the DVA offence. For DVA incidents flagged by police officers, that had an outcome at the time of analysis, a range of crime types were linked, ranging from theft to violence against the person. A full breakdown of all outcomes and crime type is available in Table 2.

Factors Predicting Police Outcomes

Univariate and multiple logistic regressions were conducted to investigate which descriptive variables of suspects, victims, and crime type predicted the coded outcomes of *charged/summoned*, *victim does not support*, and *law does not pursue*.

Table 1 Descriptive characteristics of the suspects and victims

$N =$	Suspects $N = 145,996$ (%)	Victims $N = 155,567$ (%)
Sex		
Male	*103,392 (70.8)*	41,729 (26.8)
Female	32,144 (22.0)	*113,838 (73.1)*
Missing/Undisclosed	10,460 (7.2)	171 (0.1)
Age		
1–15	---*	3,900 (2.0)
10–15	806 (0.4)	---*
16–25	43,984 (22.1)	44,260 (22.3)
26–35	*64,823 (32.6)*	*59,551 (30.0)*
36–45	48,633 (24.5)	44,143 (22.2)
46–59	32,662 (16.4)	33,849 (17.0)
60 and over	7,709 (3.9)	12,914 (6.5)
Total (crimes)	198,617 (100.0)	
Relationship Type		
Relative	50,855 (25.6)	
Partner/Ex-Partner	*134,218 (67.6)*	
Close relationship (e.g., friend, neighbor)	1,961 (1.0)	
Acquaintance	5,669 (2.9)	
Position of Authority	92 (0.0)	
Missing	5,822 (2.9)	
Repeat Victim/Suspect		
Yes	30,057 (20.6)	24,774 (15.9)
No	*115,939 (79.4)*	*130,964 (84.1)*

*-- no data for this category. Sex and repeats are calculated by unique suspect or unique victim, age and relationship are calculated by unique crime

Charged/summoned' Outcome

The outcome *charge/summons* was significantly predicted by victim-suspect relationship, suspect and victims' sex, as well as both ages, the number of crimes the suspect had been named in, the number of allegations reported by the victim and crime type (see Table 3). More specifically, close relationships were associated with odds of a charge that was 49.3% greater than partners (OR = 1.493, 95% CI 1.219–1.828), and acquaintances with odds of a charge 19.8% greater than for partners (OR = 1.198, 95% CI 1.037–1.284). Relatives had 16.0% lower odds of being charged than the victim's partner (OR = .840, 95% CI .793–890). Incidents with female suspects were associated with odds of a charge/summons 61.5% lower than male suspects (OR = .385, 95% CI .356–.416). On the other hand, cases with female victims had 23.7% greater odds (OR = 1.237, 95% CI 1.159–1.320) of seeing their suspect charged with the DVA offence. For every year the victim aged, the odds of a charge outcome increased

Table 2 Frequencies of crime outcomes

Outcome	N	%
Victim does not support	87,813	50.2
Law does not pursue	61,028	34.8
Closed without charge	13,868	7.9
Charged/summoned	10,373	5.9
Logistical	2,118	1.2
Total	**175,200**	**100**
Crime Type		
Violence Against the Person	109,217	62.4
Criminal Damage	11,993	6.9
Theft	8,430	4.8
Burglary	1,540	.9
RASSO	6,986	4.0
Harassment	35,390	20.2
Other Notifiable	1,424	.8
Total	**174,980**	**100**

Crime outcomes are calculated by unique incident instead of unique crime. Pending cases were excluded. Crime type labels were added by the police officers when the data was handed over. 'Violence against the person' is used interchangeably with 'violence' in the following sections

by .9% (OR = 1.009, 95% CI 1.007–1.011); conversely, for every year the suspect aged, the odds of a charged outcome decreased by .8% (OR = .992, 95% CI .990–.994). For every additional crime the suspect was named in, the odds of a charged outcome decreased by .2% (OR = .998, 95% CI .997–.999). For every extra allegation that the victim made, on the other hand, the odds of a charge increased by 1.7% (OR = 1.017, 95% CI 1.011–1.023). When crime type was considered, DVA related to criminal damage it was twice as likely to lead to a charge, compared with DVA with violence (OR = 2.164, 95% CI 2.028–2.310). DVA flagged in RASSO incidents had 57.9% lower odds of a charge (OR = .421, 95% CI .364–.488), and DVA harassment cases had 17.3% lower odds of the same outcome (OR = .827, 95% CI .780–.877) than DVA with violence against the person. Similarly, DVA flagged for theft was associated with 20.8% lower odds of a charge outcome (OR = .792, 95% CI .708–.886). Comparatively, DVA within burglaries or other notifiable offences had 26.7% and 49.3% higher charge odds (OR = 1.267, 95% CI 1.034–1.554; OR = 1.493, 95% CI 1.227–1.816, respectively) than DVA with violence against the person.

Table 3 Univariate and multivariate logistic regression predicting an outcome of 'charged/summonsed'

Factor	Univariate logistic regression analysis			Multiple logistic regression analysis		
	OR	(95% CIs)	P value	OR	(95% CIs)	P value
Relationship						
Partner	1			1		
Close Relationship	1.519	1.255–1.839	<.001	1.493	1.219–1.828	<.001
Acquaintance	1.086	.949–1.243	.231	1.198	1.037–1.284	.014
Position of Authority	1.432	.621–3.303	.399	1.486	.591 – 3.740	.400
Relative	.947	.903–994	.027	.840	.793–.890	<.001
Victim sex						
Male	1			1		
Female	1.693	1.606–1.708	<.001	1.237	1.159–1.320	<.001
Suspect sex						
Male	1			1		
Female	.362	.338–.387	<.001	.385	.356–416	<.001
Victim age	1.005	1.004–1.006	<.001	1.009	1.007–1.011	<.001
Suspect age	.995	.994–.997	<.001	.992	.990–.994	<.001
Crimes suspect was named in	.998	.997–.999	<.001	.998	.997–.999	<.001
Allegations by victim	1.014	1.009–1.018	<.001	1.017	1.011–1.023	<.001
Crime Type						
Violence	1					
Criminal Damage	2.248	2.116–2.388	<.001	2.164	2.028–2.310	<.001
Theft	.798	.719–.886	<.001	.792	.708–.886	<.001
Burglary	1.422	1.181–1.713	<.001	1.267	1.034–1.554	.023
RASSO	.488	.423–.562	<.001	.421	.364–.488	<.001
Harassment	.822	.778–.869	<.001	.827	.780–.877	<.001
Other Notifiable	1.575	1.309–1.896	<.001	1.493	1.227–1.816	<.001

Crime categories are labelled by police officers. 'Violence' does not include murder (<50 cases)

Victim Does Not support' Outcome

The outcome *victim does not support* was also significantly predicted by all variables other than repeat crime (see Table 4). Relatives were associated with odds of a victim not supporting the case 14.8% greater than partners (OR = 1.148, 95% CI 1.120–1.177). Acquaintances were associated with odds of the same outcome 17.1% lower than partners (OR = .829, 95% CI .773–.889), and for close relationships, the odds were 14.2% lower (OR = .858, 95% CI .767–960). Female victims had 6.70% lower odds of not supporting the case than male victims (OR − .933, 95% CI .908–.959). Cases with female suspects had 31.6% greater odds than male suspects of not supporting the allegations (OR = 1.316, 95% CI 1.279–1.354). For every year the victim aged, the odds of this outcome increased by .2% (OR = 1.002, 95% CI 1.001–1.003). For every year older the suspect was, the odds of a *victim does not support* outcome decreased by .8% (OR = .992, 95% CI .991–.993). When the number of allegations made by the victim increased, the likelihood of the victim not supporting the case decreased by 1.8% (OR = .982, 95% CI .978–.986). RASSO DVA had 88.7% higher odds of the victim not pursuing the allegations compared with violence in contexts of DVA (OR = 1.887, 95% CI 1.789–1.990). For all the other crime types the odds of 'victim does not support' outcome decreased.

Law Does Not Pursue' Outcome

The outcome *law does not pursue* was significantly predicted by all variables aside from victim and suspect sex (see Table 5). Acquaintances were associated with odds of the case not being pursued 16.5% greater than when partners were involved (OR = 1.165, 95% CI 1.085–1.251), and relatives were associated with odds of the same outcome 14.6% lower than partners (OR = .854, 95% CI .832–.877). For each year the victim grew older, the odds of the law not pursuing the case decreased by .1% (OR = .999, 95% CI .998–1.000). The older the suspect the more the odds of *law does not pursue* increased by 1.0% (OR = 1.010, 95% CI 1.009–1.011). Every additional allegation made by the victim increased the odds of the same outcome by 1.3% (OR = 1.013, 95% CI 1.009–1.017). When crime type was considered, the odds of the outcome more than doubled in DVA cases that involved a burglary (OR = 2.125, 95% CI 1.907–2.368), when compared to DVA with violence. The

Table 4 Univariate and multivariate logistic regression predicting an outcome of 'victim does not support' the investigation

Factor	Univariate logistic regression analysis			Multiple logistic regression analysis[a]		
	OR	(95% CIs)	*P* value	OR	(95% CIs)	*P* value
Relationship						
Partner	1			1		
Close Relationship	.906	.813–1.009	.071	.858	.767–.960	.008
Acquaintance	.831	.778–.888	<.001	.829	.773–.889	<.001
Position of Authority	.860	.543–1.364	.523	.740	.456-.1199	.221
Relative	1.257	1.229–1.285	<.001	1.148	1.120–1.177	<.001
Victim sex						
Male	1			1		
Female	.817	.800–.835	<.001	.933	.908–.959	<.001
Suspect sex						
Male	1			1		
Female	1.351	1.139–1.383	<.001	1.316	1.279–1.354	<.001
Victim age	1.001	1.001–1.002	.009	1.002	1.001–1.003	<.001
Suspect age	.993	.992–.994	<.001	.992	.991–.993	<.001
Crimes suspect was named in	1.000	1.000–1.000	.009	1.000	1.000–1.000	.831
Allegations by victim	.980	.976–.984	<.001	.982	.978–.986	<.001
Crime Type						
Violence	1					
Criminal Damage	1.005	.968–1.044	.786	.929	.892–.967	<.001
Theft	.827	.791–.865	<.001	.801	.763–.840	<.001
Burglary	.522	.470–.580	<.001	.544	.486–.609	<.001
RASSO	1.656	1.575–1.741	<.001	1.887	1.789–1.990	<.001
Harassment	.705	.688–.722	<.001	.717	.699–.736	<.001
Other Notifiable	.736	.663–.818	<.001	.755	.675–.845	<.001

Table 5 Univariate and multivariate logistic regression predicting an outcome of 'law does not pursue'

Factor	Univariate logistic regression analysis			Multiple logistic regression analysis[a]		
	OR	(95% CIs)	*P* value	OR	(95% CIs)	*P* value
Relationship						
Partner	1			1		
Close Relationship	.902	.805 – 1.010	.073	.951	.845 – 1.070	.405
Acquaintance	1.268	1.186–1.355	<.001	1.165	1.085–1.251	<.001
Position of Authority	1.235	.774–1.968	.376	1.359	.833–2.217	.219
Relative	.776	.758–.795	<.001	.854	.832–.877	<.001
Victim sex						
Male	1			1		
Female	1.021	.998–1.045	.070	1.006	.977–1.036	.681
Suspect sex						
Male	1			1		
Female	1.009	.984–1.034	.502	1.002	.972–1.033	.908
Victim age	1.001	1.000–1.002	.008	.999	.998–1.000	.040
Suspect age	1.009	1.008–1.010	<.001	1.010	1.009–1.011	<.001
Crimes suspect was named in	1.001	1.000–1.001	<.001	1.000	1.000–1.001	<.001
Allegations by victim	1.015	1.011–1.018	<.001	1.013	1.009–1.017	<.001
Crime Type						
Violence	1					
Criminal Damage	.805	.772–.840	<.001	.866	.828–.906	<.001
Theft	1.678	1.604–1.755	<.001	1.713	1.633–1.798	<.001
Burglary	2.156	1.949–2.384	<.001	2.125	1.907–2.368	<.001
RASSO	.748	.707–.790	<.001	.706	.666–.749	<.001
Harassment	1.868	1.823–1.915	<.001	1.838	1.790–1.887	<.001
Other Notifiable	1.555	1.399–1.729	<.001	1.536	1.372–1.719	<.001

odds of this outcome were 13.4% and 29.4% lower for DVA criminal damage and RASSO (OR = 866, 95% CI .828–906; and OR = .706, 95% CI .666–.749, respectively) than DVA with violence. Instances of DVA within theft, harassment and other notifiable offences increased the odds of this outcome compared with DVA and violence by 71.3%, 83.8% and 53.6%, respectively.

Discussion

Descriptives of Suspects and Victims of DVA

This study described the demographic characteristics of suspects and victims in DVA reports recorded by one English police force over three consecutive years. Results showed that most suspects were male, and most victims were females. These findings are in line with conceptualizations of DVA as a gendered crime, mostly perpetrated against women at the hands of men (Hester, 2013; Women's Aid, 2016). The two most common relationship types between suspects and victims were partner/ex-partner and family members. Past literature has acknowledged that the close relationship

between victim and suspect is one of the main contributors to the barriers and challenges of reporting DVA to the police and, subsequently, having the suspect charged with the crime (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013). On average, in fact, only 40 to 60% of DVA victims seek help after a DVA offence has been perpetrated (Buttell & Ferreira, 2020; Cooper & Obolenskaya, 2021; HMICFRS, 2019). This percentage further decreases if the victim is expecting a child, is isolated from friends and family, or has previously been a victim of DVA (Birdsey & Snowball, 2013; National Institute of Justice, 2009). Victims can also refrain from reporting DVA because of fear of repercussions towards their partner, internalized guilt, and difficulties in calling out behaviors as abusive (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013). Bias, stigma, or prior negative experiences with the police can influence the likelihood of reporting DVA (Yamawaki et al., 2012). These phenomena are not only influencing reporting rates but also the likelihood and capacity of victims to support their allegations in court against DVA perpetrators. Paying attention to the characteristics of suspect-victim dynamics - including the DVA crime perpetrated - and effectively training police officers to identify them, is essential to understanding the underpinnings of high rates of victim attrition and low charge rates

for DVA cases. We argue that the influence of the variable measured should not be overlooked by police personnel, especially for cases that are closed by request of the victim after the suspect identification.

When age was considered, over 50% of the suspects were younger than 35 years old, with a peak for reporting DVA around 31 years of age. The findings from this paper also suggest that DVA suspects are substantially more likely to offend against victims of the same age range. It can be hypothesized that, outliers aside, it is easier for suspects to be personally connected and, more generally speaking, to have access to victims that are roughly the same age (Canter, 2014; Hester & Westmarland, 2006). The fact that most offenders (55.1%) were 35 or younger raises important questions about the internalization and normalization of DVA during adolescence and early adulthood (ONS, 2021). Additional work is required on two fronts: *prevention*, so that children and young individuals can be educated on what healthy and abusive relationships look like; and *support*, so that survivors can understand where they can go to receive help (Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, 2022; SafeLives, 2019). 2% of DVA victims in this sample were younger than 15 years of age. This is consistent with recently published findings from a SafeLives (2019) survey showing rising trends of DVA incidents among adolescents, as they increasingly become targets of gender-based violence. At the time of analysis, this age range was disregarded by the law, as only individuals who were 16 or older met the threshold for DVA inclusion. It seems that officers may be deliberately recording offences that they consider to be DVA based on age and relationship criteria, although they do not technically meet the legal definition for inclusion. We believe that police officers flagging choices for the DVA cases considered are more in line with what recent literature on DVA suggests: that the legal definition of DVA in England and Wales is limited and fails to entirely capture the complexity of crimes, ages and relationship types that should be otherwise included. In line with this, even if the recent amendment of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) acknowledges, for the first time, children as victims if they experienced DVA in their homes, this inclusion was not extended to minors experiencing DVA as part of their personal relationships - a phenomenon of rising concerns (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021). The researchers argue that the current definition is not inclusive of all types of DVA recorded in practice by police officers and it is not considering emerging evidence published on teenage DVA (Cheung & Huang, 2022). These elements should both be addressed by policymakers, and the legal definition of what counts as DVA in England and Wales amended accordingly. Lastly, a number of suspects (20.6%) and victims (15.9%) were accused of or reported more than one DVA incident. Recent policy guidance advises police officers to use *repeat markers* for victims

who have reported the same crime more than four times across 12 months (College of Policing, 2023). However, this was not available at the time the study was conducted. It is not clear, as a result, how repeated incidents of historical DVA were recorded by the police (e.g., as separate crimes or as a single crime entry), nor if police officers have adequate tools to identify repeats within their dataset. Both these issues might have influenced the number of repeat suspects and victims identified in the study.

Predictors of Crime Outcomes

This study explored whether suspect, victim, and crime characteristics predicted outcomes in DVA crimes. Overall, the suspect was more likely to be *charged* if the victim was older and reported more than one DVA allegation against the same suspect. It could be that older victims were taken more seriously by police officers than younger ones. It can also be that victims were subjected to subsequent DVA before reaching out to the police. It is known that in contexts of repeated IPV, the victim is less likely to press charges, even more so when the abuse is perpetrated by their first partner (Bowen et al., 2021; Hirschel & McCormack, 2021).

Similarly, if the victim made prior allegations of DVA against the same suspect, their reports might have been taken more seriously and might have more evidence to support their case (e.g., due to their experience with previous reporting processes). On the other hand, when suspects were repeatedly named in prior DVA cases by different victims, the likelihood of a charge slightly decreased. This disheartening discrepancy might be related to practical challenges police officers have in identifying repeat suspects. Although not specific to DVA only, evidence published as part of Operation Soteria Bluestone Year One Report highlighted that police forces are presently struggling to isolate repeats specifically (Stanko, 2022). The reasons for this were multifaceted but included a lack of intelligence gathering to establish repeat suspect status and little understanding of how this information could be used to direct the investigation (see Appendix 8 in Stanko, 2022, for further details). The result contrasts with prior evidence from the US which found that repeat suspects were allegedly more likely to be identified and convicted (Henning & Feder, 2005; Romain & Freiburger, 2012). This difference might however be related to socio-juridic characteristics of English versus US samples regardless of the specific crime committed.

Regardless of the type of DVA (repeat versus non-repeat), suspects were more likely to be charged when they were male and/or younger. The associations with suspect sex may be due to police and courts being more sensitized to male-on-female DVA, especially given that most suspects involved in DVA incidents are normally male (Henning & Feder, 2005). Similarly, the association with younger suspects may

reflect a tendency to think younger suspects are more dangerous and 'need to be taught a lesson' (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2018) when compared to older men, which might receive a more lenient treatment (Massie, 2023; Steffensmeier & Motivans, 2000). Equally, it could also be related to police forces being exposed to more DVA cases committed by young individuals (ONS, 2021). Interestingly, partners were less likely to be charged than acquaintances or suspects in a close relationship with the victim. This might be because it is evidentially more complicated and time-consuming to build a case against a partner, especially if everything happens behind closed doors; as opposed to a case involving an acquaintance of the victim committing DVA offences in places (e.g., workplace, during a night out, etc.), where witnesses are more likely to be present. On the other hand, Rakovec-Felser (2014) suggested that DVA cases where a partner is involved are sometimes investigated with a layer of skepticism and prejudice by police officers, and this might dissuade the victims from continuing with the investigation. Unfortunately, the data available failed to help the researchers understand to what extent DVA offences committed by acquaintances of the victim were meaningfully flagged by officers as DVA, but also to what extent and why they were taken more seriously. Suspects who were relatives of the victim were less likely than partners to be charged. Bancroft et al. (2012) explored the devastating implications of having relatives as perpetrators of family violence. Added layers related to family dynamics (e.g., the victim deciding not to prosecute the relative) might have had a role in the lower charge rates odds.

Further case information, capable of shedding light on the rationale for a charge over a non-prosecution decision, was not available to the researchers. Lastly, the influence of crime type on charge outcome was measured. For DVA cases relating to criminal damage, burglary and other notifiable offences, the chances of closing the case with the suspect being charged substantially increased compared to DVA cases of violence against the person. Most concerningly, even if RASSO cases constituted only 4% of the total DVA-flagged incidents, they had almost 60% lower odds than DVA with violence to be closed with a charge. The findings, although concerning, align with a vast body of evidence showing ongoing investigation and prosecution challenges for RASSO victims (Dalton et al., 2022; Proudman & Metzer, 2022; Stanko, 2022). This also suggests, more broadly, that the difference in offence types can influence DVA charge rates, and the other two outcomes considered - victim withdrawal and law does not pursue.

The predictors for the latter were being an older individual, a repeat suspect, or there being multiple DVA allegations from different victims. This outcome seemed more prevalent when the suspects were acquaintances and relatives of the victim rather than partners. Offences involving

young DVA suspects might be taken more seriously, with cases involving older suspects or women being more likely to be dismissed (Goulette et al., 2015). When looking at crime type, theft, harassment and other notifiable offences had higher odds of receiving this outcome when compared with violence against the person – which was the most common crime with a DVA flag. In all these circumstances, the case was closed with either an NFA, not in the public interest to prosecute, or with a sentence other than a charge (e.g., repayment or community work). Concerningly, this was the second most common outcome in the dataset and suggests that a vast number of DVA victims are not seeing justice despite being willing to continue with suspect prosecution. More research is needed to understand why so many reported cases are dismissed during the investigation, even if the victims were willing to take the case to court and the suspects were identified. The findings are not encouraging and support evidence from the literature showing how young witnesses or victims of DVA internalized negative perceptions of police officers following their first encounter and felt a "great deal of fear, intimidation and uncertainty and concern about what they expected from the police", rather than support and understanding, which resulted in overall disengagement with the case (Millar et al., 2021, p. 9). In addition to this, Crowe and Murray (2015, p. 1) pinpointed how DVA victims often felt "dismissed, denied, and blamed" following "interactions with professionals in the court system and law enforcement officers." The fact that having reported multiple allegations predicted the outcome *law does not pursue* supports the idea that victims of repeated abuse might feel unheard and not validated after reporting DVA incidents to the police, to the extent that they might not want to reach out for help again in the future (Crowe & Murray, 2015; DeJong et al., 2008). Working to improve the investigation of cases that were closed with this outcome should be of primary importance to police officers, as collaboration and cooperation from the public are essential to the CJS (Huq et al., 2011).

Lastly, some of the characteristics that predicted a greater likelihood of *victim's withdrawal* include the suspect being female and a younger individual. In both instances, the victims might have felt that the case would not have stood a chance in court (Goulette et al., 2015; Sinclair, 2022) or that the timeline required to get a conviction was longer than expected. Moreover, compared to acquaintances and other relationship types, the involvement of partners and relatives in the DVA offence substantially increased the likelihood of victim withdrawal, suggesting an influence of familial and/or physical proximity in the victim's decision to not continue with the case. This is in line with evidence showing that victims reporting DVA might fear repercussions, threats, and further violence from direct relatives after disclosing the

incident to the police, as they might all co-habit or live near one another (Bowen et al., 2021; Hirschel & McCormack, 2021; Hulley et al., 2022). Interestingly, the odds of this outcome increased for female suspects compared with males. It is possible that DVA cases that do not align with the stereotypical demographic characteristics (e.g., male-on-female violence), might bring even higher prosecution challenges that might influence victims' decision to withdraw the allegations. Conversely, having reported more than one DVA incident decreased the likelihood of victim withdrawal. This might suggest that repeat victims could be more confident and aware of the damage inflicted on them, making them less likely to retract the allegations once the DVA crime has been reported. Despite this, multiple reports associated with a different victim increased the likelihood of having a case outcome of *law does not pursue* by 1.6% for every additional allegation. As a result, despite the victim's intentions to prosecute the suspect, the case might still be closed before it reaches trial. A connection between the law not pursuing the case and victims deciding not to proceed with the charges has been explored in the literature, suggesting a possible influence of CJS regulations and restrictions on police personnel's ability to take the case to court even if the victim is supportive of it (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2015; Ellison, 2002). For instance, the police only had six months from when the DVA incident was reported to carry out the investigation and gather evidence for trial until a recent amendment that extended the timeframe to a maximum of two years (Ministry of Justice et al., 2022) Possibly, victims might be more likely to retract their accusations following unsatisfactory encounters with police (McPhee et al., 2021), even more so for DVA incidents with RASSO, for which the odds of the victims not pursuing the case were exponentially higher (80%) than violence against the person occurring in DVA contexts. The findings suggest that specialist and non-specialist police officers dealing with overlaps between DVA and sex offences might benefit from tailored training on the underpinning dynamics that link these crimes (Barbin et al., 2024).

When looking at the complexity of DVA incidents, we acknowledge that justice is not necessarily just about a given suspect being charged, but also about prevention and giving DVA victims adequate support and validation, regardless of the case outcome, their age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and/or profession. It is also clear that DVA comes in different shapes and forms that go beyond IPV, which should all be equally investigated, and that crime type can influence DVA outcomes. Further considerations based on crime type were also highlighted in Author [under review]. In this context, future research

may want to look at the broader access to justice for DVA victims and additional factors associated with this in addition to the flagged policing concerns.

Limitations and Future Work

The current dataset refers to identified suspects only, where the victim has named the individual that allegedly perpetrated the DVA offence and suspect details (e.g., description, name, phone number) have been given to the police. As a result, the findings cannot account for unidentified suspects or unreported crimes, which, unfortunately, constitute a great portion of DVA incidents (Home Office, 2017). It is also worth noting that the sample refers to one police force and may not be generalizable to other forces across England and Wales (Sharfman, 2019). Further research should investigate how police officers record DVA offences, as it is not clear from the dataset if there are any national and/or force-specific criteria to use DVA flags that go beyond the legal definition. The data format also did not make it possible to highlight when and how the outcome decisions were made in terms of outcomes. Having these details would elucidate why there is a gap between the regulations provided by the law and the practical, day-to-day necessities of police officers recording DVA offences. It was also not possible to explore how many cases which should have been flagged as DVA were missing from the sample. This means that, when the study was conducted, the researchers could not unpick whether this DVA flagging was in error or intentional. It follows that if data entry errors are so widespread within the police force, substantial concerns arise regarding the quality of their data recording system. We argue that these challenges related to data collection do not substantially differ from similar concerns that might characterize police data. In fact, up until this research project, researchers have relied on nationally published data which might also not accurately represent DVA incidents in their entirety (Elkin, 2018). As the current analyses are based on crime reports rather than convictions, despite the limitations, they are likely to provide a fuller picture of the victim and suspect demographics and outcomes. More direct measures, including access to full case files, contact with witnesses, and data on the involvement of children (both direct and indirect) when the DVA incident occurred were not available to the researchers. Thus, adding more contextual information on some of the variables that may have influenced police decisions to prosecute or dismiss the investigations was not possible. For example, case files could have supplied greater details around suspect and victim ethnicity, which has been linked to both increased charge rates and

increased dismissals (Henning & Feder, 2005; Romain & Freiburger, 2012). Similarly, victim vulnerabilities such as mental health and learning difficulties – predictors not available for analysis in the present research – are also known to increase attrition and essentially stop the case's progression through the system (Hester & Lilley, 2017; Hohl & Stanko, 2015) Additionally, whereas the presence of a child victims typically includes the involvement of social services, police officers were less likely to contact social services if children aged 13–18 were directly victimized (Buzawa & Hotaling, 2006). In cases of child abuse in a domestic context, who contacted the authorities and whether drugs or alcohol were used in the crime commission can also be variables affecting whether the case receives a charge (Roark et al., 2017). Future studies should measure the contribution of these variables to charge and attrition rates. Altogether, the predictive models of the three coded outcomes built for the study, only explained around 10% of the variance in crime outcome, suggesting that more research is needed to fully understand the elements that influence outcomes in DVA cases. This included some variables showing low ODD ratios. While this is a limitation that is worth acknowledging, we do not think that it affected the quality of the study; even more so as the real-life context of DVA police data collection cannot be compared with the ODD ratios shown in control case studies, where the researchers have more margin of control over predictors. We argue these elements are still informative and their influence should be considered by policymakers aiming to improve forces' DVA training and response in England and Wales.

Conclusion

In line with previous publications, DVA incidents were characterized by low conviction rates alongside high cases of victim attrition following interaction with the police. In addition to this, the findings suggest how police officers' bias around DVA dynamics and lack of training can influence case decision-making and encourage victim attrition. We argue that the potential influence of extra-legal factors (e.g., knowledge of coercive control in DVA contexts paired with an understanding of how the closeness of victim-suspect relationships might affect victims' support of the investigations) should be considered by police personnel and members of the CJS when assessing DVA, specifically in light of the newly drafted *Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan* (Home Office, 2022), which focuses on increasing the percentage of charge rates for DVA incidents by reconsidering cases closed with an evidential difficulty outcome as a result of victim attrition.

Appendices

Appendix A – Suspect and Victim Variables Included in the DVA Sample

Suspect Variables:
1. Suspect identification number
2. Suspect age
3. Suspect gender
4. Suspect self-defined ethnicity
5. Suspect police-defined ethnicity
6. Suspect-victim relationship
7. Suspect warning signals (e.g., may carry drugs)
8. Whether the suspect was arrested or not
9. Number of suspects arrested regarding the report
10. Date of arrest
11. Investigation outcome (e.g., released NFA)

Victim Variables:
1. Victim identification number
2. Victim age
3. Victim gender
4. Victim self-defined ethnicity
5. Victim police-defined ethnicity
6. Victim disability type (e.g., speech impediment)
7. Whether the report is regarding a partner
8. Whether the report is regarding a family member

Appendix B - Suspect-victim Relationship Type Coding

Acquaintance Acquaintance, Attends the Same School, Business Associate, Client, Colleague, Criminal Associate, Employee, Ex-Employee, Student/Pupil, Non-Residential Social Worker, Tradesman, Suspect/Accused known by victim in another way, Patient.

Relative Aunt, Brother-in-law, Brother, Cousin, Daughter, Ex-Foster Father, Ex-Foster Mother, Father-in-Law, Father, Foster Father, Foster Mother, Granddaughter, Grandfather, Grandmother, Grandson, Guardian, Half-brother, Half-Sister, Mother-in-Law, Nephew, Niece, Mother, Sister-in-law, Sister, Son-In-Law, Son, Stepbrother, Stepdaughter, Stepfather, Stepmother, Stepsister, Uncle, Stepson.

Partner/Ex-Partner Boyfriend, Same Sex Civil Partner, Common-Law Husband, Common-Law Wife, Ex-Boyfriend, Same Sex Ex-Civil Partner, Ex-Common Law Husband, Ex-Girlfriend, Ex-Husband, Girlfriend, Husband, Same Sex Ex-Intimate Partner, Same Sex Intimate Partner, Wife, Ex-Wife.

Close Relationship Friend, Neighbour, Person living in the same premises (e.g., flat/house mate), Care Provider, Residential Social Worker.

Position of Authority Au Pair, Babysitter, Child Minder, Dentist, Doctor, Employer, Ex-Employer, Lecturer, Nanny, School Worker, Solicitor, Teacher, Trainer.

Appendix C - Police Outcome Codes Description and Coded Categories

Outcome Codes	Outcome Text (Home Office)	Outcome Group (Home Office)	Coded Category
1	Charged/Summonsed	Charged/Summonsed	4. Charged
2	Caution - youths	Out-of-court (formal)	3. Closed without charge
3	Caution - adults	Out-of-court (formal)	3. Closed without charge
4	Taken into consideration (TIC)	Taken into consideration	3. Closed without charge
5	Offender died	Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	1. Logistical
6	Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND)	Out-of-court (formal)	3. Closed without charge
7	Cannabis/Khat warning	Out-of-court (informal)	3. Closed without charge
8	Community Resolution	Out-of-court (informal)	3. Closed without charge
9	Not in public interest (CPS)	Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	2. Law doesn't pursue
10	Not in public interest (Police)	Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	2. Law doesn't pursue
11	Prosecution prevented – suspect underage	Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	1. Logistical
12	Prosecution prevented: suspect too ill	Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	1. Logistical
13	Prosecution prevented: victim/key witness dead/too ill	Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	1. Logistical
14	Evidential difficulties: suspect not identified; victim does not support further action	Evidential difficulties (victim does not support action)	5. Victim doesn't proceed
15	Evidential difficulties: suspect identified; victim supports action	Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports action)	2. Law doesn't pursue
16	Evidential difficulties: suspect identified; victim does not support further action	Evidential difficulties (victim does not support action)	5. Victim doesn't proceed
17	Prosecution time limit expired	Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	2. Law doesn't pursue
18	Investigation complete: no suspect identified	Investigation complete: no suspect identified	2. Law doesn't pursue
20	Action undertaken by another body/agency	Action undertaken by another body/agency	3. Closed without charge
21	Further investigation to support formal action not in the public interest	Further investigation to support formal action not in the public interest	2. Law doesn't pursue
22	Diversionary, educational or intervention activity, resulting from the crime report, has been undertaken and it is not in the public interest to take any further action *introduced on the 1st of April 2019*	Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	3. Closed without charge

Outcome Codes	Outcome Text (Home Office)	Outcome Group (Home Office)	Coded Category
1 A	Charged/Summonsed for Alternate Offence	Charged or cautioned for alternative offence	3. Closed without charge
2 A	Youth Caution for Alternate Offence	Charged or cautioned for alternative offence	3. Closed without charge
3 A	Adult Caution for Alternate Offence	Charged or cautioned for alternative offence	3. Closed without charge
66	Admin	Admin	1. Logistical
99	No crime	No crime	1. Logistical
0	Outcome pending	Outcome pending	6. Outcome pending

Data Availability Due to the nature of the original project and privacy requirements, the dataset cannot be shared. For further details on the project and the data used, please email the corresponding author. More information on the project is available in Stanko (2022): *Operation Soteria Bluestone Year 1 Report 2021–2022*. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operation-soteria-year-one-report.

Declarations

Ethical Approval The study stems from a wider Operation Soteria Bluestone [OSB] project, approved by the Research Ethics Committees of University of Suffolk [RETH21/006] and Bournemouth University [ID 39633]. Police forces consented that the redacted version of the data could be used for publication purposes during and after the project terminated. No identifying information about the police force involved was included in this manuscript.

Competing Interests The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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