

Written evidence submitted by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (COR0103)

1. I am writing in relation to the Committee's Coronavirus inquiry and specifically its call for evidence in relation to domestic abuse matters. I have not made a formal submission to the inquiry as I appreciate that the information provided does not fit specifically within the agreed terms of reference. However, I thought that it may be helpful to provide the Committee with information on some of the work that the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) has done in this area and some of the continued work that we are doing in light of the current pandemic.

Investigations

2. Domestic abuse is unfortunately a common feature in our work and we investigated or are investigating the circumstances surrounding police contact in 23 domestic related fatalities from the year 2018/19. Thirteen of these relate to an alleged murder, and 12 of these victims were women.¹
3. The importance of this area within our work led to us establishing domestic abuse as the first of our thematic areas where we have chosen to select cases to maximise opportunities for learning with the aim of making improvements to policing practice following discussions with the police service, charities and interest groups about how we can maximise our impact.

IOPC Make Yourself Heard Campaign

4. In April last year, the IOPC launched a national 'Make Yourself Heard' campaign, supported by the National Police Chief's Council, Women's Aid and Welsh Women's Aid, to raise awareness of the Silent Solutions system.
5. The campaign was developed in response to a 2016 investigation where we looked at Devon and Cornwall Police's contact with Kerry Power, a woman who was tragically murdered by her partner. Kerry wrongly thought that police had her number and if she made a silent 999 call, they would know to come.
6. As you know, the Silent Solutions system helps people alert police when in imminent danger but unable to speak. It enables a 999 mobile caller who is too scared to make a noise, or speak, to press 55 when prompted – to inform police they are in a genuine emergency.
7. 20,000 silent 999 calls are made a day. Of those, around 5,000 are transferred to the Silent Solution system because doubt exists as to whether the call is genuine. In normal times, around 50 emergency calls from mobiles a day are transferred by a BT operator to police forces in the UK as a result of someone having pressed 55 when prompted, enabling the police to carry out urgent enquiries to respond. We expect this number will further increase during the current lockdown.

¹ IOPC Annual Deaths During or Following Police Contact report 2018/19. The 2019/20 statistics are currently being compiled and will be published later this year.

8. The campaign has reached over 16 million people via media and social media and now more than ever, we are keen to promote use of this service to people who may be at risk and need help.
9. We have recently updated our campaign clearly explaining the process and will be continuing to encourage police forces, domestic abuse charities and local councils to help share the important public information further.
10. The IOPC materials in support of this campaign can be accessed here:

<https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/news/national-campaign-raise-awareness-silentsolution-system>

11. I was pleased to see information regarding the Silent Solutions system has featured in the speech made by the Home Secretary on 11 April, and in the Committee's own call for evidence for this inquiry.

Subject Matter Network

12. In 2018, we established a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment Subject Matter Network (SMN) to guide our work in this key thematic area. This network is an internal group of people who provide technical expertise and knowledge on the police response to any matters related to domestic abuse. The network also supports IOPC investigations into the police response to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), honour-based violence (HBV) and coercive and controlling behaviour.
13. These technical advisors cover specific themes / specialisms based on previous experience, expertise and interest. Technical advisors attend external training events in line with their specialism area.
14. The SMN is notified of all new domestic abuse investigations and are guiding work to identify any trends or issues. Their work has already helped guide development of the 'Make Yourself Heard' campaign, and continues to strengthen internal practice and build cross-organisational expertise. Any issues emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic would be considered by this group.

Information regarding referrals

15. As you know, the IOPC receives referrals from the police when someone has been seriously injured or died following contact with them. Deaths or serious injuries occurring following contact with the police related to domestic violence or abuse are a significant feature in our work, and as I have set out above the IOPC has established a subject matter network to consider learning from thematic cases we investigate in this area.
16. In order to monitor the kinds of issues that are being referred to us, we assign referrals with case factors on our case management system. If it would be of interest to the Committee, we would be happy to examine the extent to which referrals to the IOPC

regarding domestic abuse related incidents in the “stay at home” period since 23 March 2020 differ from or align with any underlying trend, though I regret we will be unable to provide this within the window for submissions closing on the 21 April.

17. Clearly, for any independent investigations on this theme we take on, we will look closely at what lessons can be learned from them – particularly as the operating environment within which agencies are working has changed significantly since the beginning of the restrictions. However, as you would appreciate any learning would not be apparent until the incident has been properly investigated.
18. Please do let me know if this information would be of use to the Committee and of course, do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any other questions.

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