

Exploring ‘positive policing’: creating a space for (contextual) safeguarding

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to develop an understanding of positive policing in relation to domestic abuse by opening up what is meant by this approach through an examination of what is taken for granted about it within much of the academic literature. Using data from a small-scale study involving case file analysis and interviews with police officers, the paper suggests in practice, positive policing involves a wide range of actions on the part of police officers. In exploring this data, the paper introduces the concept of ‘contextual safeguarding’ as a key feature of ‘positive policing’ in relation to domestic abuse. The paper makes the case for understanding ‘positive policing’ in the context of domestic abuse through the lens of ‘contextual safeguarding’ and that this would have beneficial consequences for wider debates on this issue.

INTRODUCTION

In relation to police responses to domestic abuse, [Johnson and Hohl \(2023: 12\)](#) have observed:

Positive action as a holistic concept remains under-developed and under-explored in evidence-based policing research and policy-making – despite it comprising a significant component, if not the majority, of police domestic action.

The demand for positive policing action in relation to domestic abuse has made its presence felt across the globe since the seminal work of [Sherman and Berk \(1984\)](#) in the USA. Despite the subsequent and well-recognized problems with the prioritization given to arrest (noted by [Sherman et al., 1991](#)), this version of positive intervention travelled the globe ([Goodmark 2015](#)), was picked up in the Home Office Circular 60/1990 and has had a strong presence in academic and policy debates since that time (e.g. in England and Wales, see *inter alia* the reports produced by [HMIC Everybody’s Business \[2014\]](#), [Johnson and Hohl \[2023\]](#), [Pearson and Rowe \[2020\]](#), [Still Everybody’s Business \[2015\]](#), [Walklate \[2020\]](#); and for New Zealand, see [Jordan \[2011\]](#), and for Australia, see [Segrave et al. \[2016\]](#)). Thus, focusing attention on what it is police ‘first responders’ do, or fail to do, in relation to domestic abuse has continued unabated ([Davies and Barlow 2024](#)). This ‘positive’ policing story ([Walklate 2020](#)), as [Pearson and Rowe \(2020\)](#) have observed, has morphed into focusing attention on the use of arrest in England and Wales, an approach endorsed with

caution, by the [College of Policing \(2015\)](#). Interestingly, this endorsement by the [College of Policing \(2015\)](#) situates ‘pre-arrest’ within a broader appreciation of what might be included under the heading of positive policing/positive action. Enter the concept of safeguarding.

If, as the quote from [Johnson and Hohl \(2023\)](#) used at the start of this paper implies, what is meant by positive action/positive policing in practice remains rather opaque, what is meant by safeguarding in this context remains even more so. Whilst much has been written about adult and child safeguarding in the wider context of social welfare, its use in policing, whilst invoked (as it is by the [College of Policing 2015](#)), is under-explored. The purpose of this paper is to offer some empirically informed broader appreciation of what might come under the heading of positive action by opening up what has been taken for granted by much of the academic literature in the positive policing story in relation to domestic abuse.

The paper falls into four parts. The first briefly introduces [Latour’s \(1987\)](#) concept of the ‘black box’ as one way of making sense of what is known and unknown in the wider debates about positive action in relation to domestic abuse. By way of extending how such positive action might be better understood, the second part of the paper offers some empirical findings from a project conducted during 2022–23 in partnership with a northern police force in England and Wales. This work is used as an illustration of a potentially different way of framing positive action. The third section of this paper introduces the concept of ‘contextual safeguarding’, developed by [Firmin \(2020\)](#) in the

context of child protection, and considers its value in making sense of the data presented here. In conclusion, the fourth and final part of the paper considers the value of extending understandings of positive policing through the lens of contextual safeguarding for policy and practice.

UNPACKING THE POSITIVE POLICING STORY

Latour (1987) uses the term ‘black box’ to capture what is often taken for granted within the world of social science. He argues that much social scientific work deploys their black boxes as if this knowledge can be built upon without examining the assumptions on which it is based. As has already been indicated, this has been the case with the dominant narratives within the positive policing story since the early 1980s, often to the detriment of taking account of the limitations inherent in that narrative. A recognition of these limitations started with the reconsideration of the value of a pro-arrest stance in follow-up work on the Minneapolis Experiment (Sherman and Berk 1984) by that same research team (Sherman et al., 1991). Yet the focus on the positive power of arrest (as opposed to its negative consequences) in cases of domestic abuse has persisted arguably and strengthened as the concern to criminalize coercive control has risen up policy agendas (see Barlow and Walklate 2022; Douglas et al., 2024). Coercive and controlling behaviour was criminalized in England and Wales in 2015 and as some of the work already referenced above has indicated, this has rendered the policing response to such behaviour not only increasingly demanding, but has also leant further support to the power of arrest as a constituent element of a positive policing response (see *inter alia* Barlow et al., 2020; Barlow and Walklate 2021; Brennan et al., 2021; Myhill et al., 2023).

Thus, as Davies and Barlow (2024: 11) have recently observed, against this backcloth of ongoing and changing policy and practice demands, the response of the frontline officer to domestic abuse is a ‘high-stakes’ opportunity. Rooted in empirical evidence, they point out, that the response of the frontline officer can be highly complex driven by a wide range of factors including the expectations of the victim-survivor, the need to assess risk, to gather evidence, to have an eye on where the case might go in terms of prosecution, and so on. All this can often be set in the context of an inexperienced officer working with cultural legacies and assumptions in relation to policing domestic abuse. These complexities constitute the black box of positive policing for domestic abuse. It is a complex moment and, as Johnson and Hohl (2023) quoted above observed, has rarely been subject to critical scrutiny, with much work preferring the more objective indicator of arrest rates as a marker of positive action.

Expressed in terms of the inputs and outputs of Latour’s black box, since the 1980s, much policing research work has paid detailed attention to arrest and/or pro-arrest as the input through which to understand this complex moment, with the output focusing on the prosecution of the offender. It is an approach which has also been frequently endorsed by police performance indicators, has continued apace, and is an observation particularly pertinent to those jurisdictions in which coercive control has been criminalized, wherein responses can

be especially complex (Barlow et al., 2023). The data discussed below offers some insights as to how it might be possible to explore this black box and at the same time, support improved practice responses.

OVERVIEW OF THIS STUDY

The data presented here was gathered as part of an N8PRP-funded study completed with the support of a policing partner in the North of England. This study was concerned to explore the extent to which the misidentification of the predominant aggressor in cases of coercive and controlling behaviour was evident within frontline officer responses to such cases within this police force. The project as a whole had three stages of data: high-level quantitative data analysis of the partner force’s domestic abuse data, a deep dive into a random sample analysis of fifty-eight coercive control case files, and semi-structured interviews with police officers and victim-survivors of domestic abuse. The report from this project can be found in Barlow et al. (2023). This paper draws on two elements of this larger study, the case file analysis and the interviews with police officers, in order to examine in greater detail the specificities of the frontline response. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Liverpool Ethics Committee prior to data collection. Each of the data-gathering processes relevant to this paper is discussed below.

A random sample of fifty-eight arrest and non-arrest case files was selected for deeper analysis from anonymized force-level data of all recorded incidents for coercive control from 2019 to 2022. These fifty-eight cases comprise twenty-nine in which arrest had occurred and twenty-nine in which no arrest was made. This case file data provided a more nuanced understanding concerning the contexts in which the arrest/non-arrest decision was taken in these cases. Following the reflective analysis approach recommended by Braun and Clarke (2019), the research team engaged in primary coding of this data, arriving at a set of high-level codes and sub-codes, before defining key themes from this data. It was double coded by two researchers for consistency. Following on from this case file work, fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with police officers with a view to understanding what informed their decision-making process in relation to cases of coercive and controlling behaviour. Thirteen of these officers were frontline response officers, with two interviews conducted with officers in lead roles in relation to domestic abuse. Participants were recruited for these interviews through an email being sent to all frontline officers, followed by an invitation to a face-to-face briefing session for those who sought further information. Those who wanted to take part in the research contacted the researchers directly.

All interview data were coded and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019) allowing the identification of overarching themes, with a view to being able to identify ‘patterns of shared meaning, unpinned or united by a core concept’ (Braun and Clarke 2019: 11). Two researchers engaged in this process to enhance reliability and reach a thematic consensus. In what follows, we discuss the key findings from each stage of this data-gathering process.

POSITIVE POLICING — COERCIVE CONTROL: CASE FILE ANALYSIS

Of the fifty-eight cases analysed, most (fifty-five) included some form of positive action on the part of the police officer(s) involved in the case. Examples of 'positive action' included the suspect being charged (thirty-two), the suspect being placed in police custody (three), a non-molestation order put in place (three), supporting the victim-survivor in changing the locks to their home (four), a vulnerable domestic violence marker added to the address (six), and panic alarm installation (two). There were also referrals to Independent Domestic Violence Advisor services (twenty-seven), Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (thirteen), health services (fourteen), and education services when children were present (nine). In forty-three cases, more than one type of positive action was put into place. When victim-survivors did not want to pursue a prosecution, non-criminal justice positive action, such as applying for restraining orders or Domestic Violence Protection Orders, was called upon. In five cases, aggravating factors were identified (e.g. the presence of drugs and/or alcohol in relation to the suspect). These cases were less likely to result in positive police action. There were five examples of cases where the male called the police, complaining that the woman had harmed them or committed criminal damage. In all these cases, after further investigation, the female was still recorded as the victim and the male as the perpetrator, with appropriate safeguarding put in place for the victim-survivor. Thus, given that these fifty-eight cases included an equal number of arrest and non-arrest cases, it is interesting to note the range of alternative and sometimes additional responses recorded in these files. This points to several issues worthy of further comment.

First, these data clearly suggest the frontline officers in this force were engaging in what might be understood as safeguarding actions as positive responses in these cases. Second, these data illustrate the wide range of different actions (and sometimes more than one action) put in place. This points to not only the embrace of an understanding of positive action broader than arrest on the part of the officers in the partner force, but also what they felt should be included and recorded under this umbrella. This is in line with the approach articulated by the [College of Policing \(2015\)](#) referenced above. Following on from the observations made by [Johnson and Hohl \(2023\)](#), some of this action was formal, some of it was informal. Importantly, without the deep dive into the case files, much of this action would have remained invisible in this study. It is an action that goes on under the radar, as it were, potentially meaningful for victim-survivors, but arguably unnoticed and unacknowledged in much of the available literature. Perhaps a third point worth making explicit is that not only were there a wide range of actions taken, but a significant proportion of these actions also involved referrals to other agencies that were not always implicated in criminal justice responses. This case file analysis affords a valuable frame in which to sense of the responses received from the police officers interviewed.

SAFEGUARDING AND POSITIVE ACTION: RESPONSES FROM POLICE OFFICERS

Out of the thirteen interviews conducted with frontline officers, twelve mentioned safeguarding and providing positive action as

important in their response to domestic abuse cases generally, as well as how they might respond to cases involving coercive control. Positive action included a range of possibilities for these officers, from temporarily separating parties in dispute, to referring people on to domestic abuse services, to securing the support of an IDVA (independent domestic violence advisor/advocate). These responses echo the data from the case file analysis discussed above. Indeed, for our interviewees, taking safeguarding action was even prioritized in cases which did not lead to an arrest, as expressed in the following quote:

The priority is safeguarding, so this usually involves separating the parties, making sure kids are safe if there are any in the house. If appropriate, we will signpost the victim onto other services, maybe allocate them to an IDVA there and then. In coercive controlling behaviour cases, the suspect is usually asked to come in for a voluntary interview as there isn't always the evidence to arrest, so it's much more about safeguarding really. Because we all hear of those domestic homicide reviews in cases like this where proper safeguarding hasn't been put in place, so it's important to cover ourselves really and keep everyone safe (Police participant 10).

The use of voluntary interviews is explained further by this participant:

9 times out of 10 with coercive control it will be a voluntary interview. Unless the victim has loads of evidence there and then and it's clear there is a safeguarding risk, it's hard to justify arresting in that moment for coercive control. It isn't usually that there is an immediate threat or risk with these cases. Because if we are at a job for an hour or so, there is only so much we are going to get to be able to make an arrest if there isn't that evidence there to justify why we're arresting.

As Police participants 7 and 8 go on to explain:

Sometimes there's no necessity to arrest if it's a case of them living at separate addresses and the victim reports coercive and controlling behaviour. If the suspect has no previous offences and was on board with the police and happy to speak to us, there's no reason for us to arrest if the victim is safeguarded and they are in separate addresses. (Police participant 7)

For me with coercive control, it's usually about engaging individually with both parties in separate rooms. Our main interest is safeguarding at that point and it would basically be a case of if someone was saying I am being quite controlled, we think about what we can do. Could we provide alternative accommodation etc. so it isn't always about arrest at that stage. Arrest would kick in if there is an immediate physical risk to that person. So it's about making sure the person is safe with coercive control, maybe bringing them in for a voluntary interview. (Participant 8)

These quotes reflect the broad understanding that the police participants in this study had of what constitutes positive action in

coercive control cases, with arrest not always being favoured or considered possible during the frontline response. At face value, this may suggest police officers do not understand the risks associated with coercive control (Barlow and Walklate 2021). However, the data here suggest that the action/inaction of arrest/non-arrest is informed by officers taking what was, in their view, the *appropriate* course of action based on the information available to them during the frontline response. For the participant quoted below, the rationale for not arresting in coercive control cases was reinforced by the difficulties in detecting this behaviour during the frontline response:

Coercive control is underhand, lower frequency, much harder to detect. So it's difficult to arrest and police properly. We run checks, gather evidence from others but this takes time. So it's slower. Safeguarding is also paramount, so if with that one, if we felt that she was gonna be in immediate danger, then we will take further steps. We basically offered her to go around to her mum's to make sure that she's removed from the house. (Police participant 9)

When contacting the police about experiences of domestic abuse, victim-survivors are unlikely to report coercive control and will rather report instances of, for example, physical violence or criminal damage, with coercive control becoming more apparent on further investigation by specialist officers (Barlow et al., 2020). The response from the participant above, therefore, captures some of the complexity of this policing moment, also alluded to in the work of Davies and Barlow (2024). This is further illustrated in the response offered below, with this participant discussing a case example where the complexities of identifying coercive control and engaging in appropriate 'positive action' are clear to see:

I had this one case a few months ago where I turned up, it was a neighbour who rang it in because they heard shouting and smashing next door. We got there, the woman had marks on her arms, something had clearly been thrown at him and he had a mark on his head. He looked fuming and she was just so difficult to understand as she didn't speak very good English, but she was clearly not wanting us there. And at face value there and then, we thought they had a fight, and the evidence that we had at our disposal all pointed in that direction. We put the safeguarding in place for both of them, he left the premises for the night. We didn't make any arrests as it was all very up in the air. But actually the more digging that was done by specialist officers, it was clear he was incredibly controlling, she had moved here from Poland and was incredibly isolated and he was using this to his advantage. It was really sad. But for us as first response, we can just go with the information that we have in front of us or what they tell us. And in this case because of all of these complexities, it meant that it was all a bit cloudy I guess. (Police Participant 4)

There are several issues at play in this case example. First, the notion that frontline police officers usually respond to what they see 'in front of them' highlights the incident-focussed approach to policing domestic abuse (Barlow and Walklate 2021). Importantly, coercive control cases may not

have visible evidence available during the frontline response. In this case, even though there were visible signs of injury, *both* parties were injured, leading this officer to perceive there were ambiguities concerning what had happened. This was complicated further for this victim-survivor as English was not her first language, meaning that sharing her experiences without a translator was difficult. Although this police officer still prioritized safeguarding, by separating the parties, the ability to put in place any wider safeguarding interventions was hindered by all the above. Thus, the constraints of engaging in a broader range of positive policing approaches in coercive control cases, where there can be ambiguous circumstances, become evident. Such complex circumstances and their potential unintended consequences are illustrated below:

Sometimes if we're unsure of what's happening, there may be alcohol, drugs or other safeguarding concerns and the priority is keeping people safe, sometimes arresting both parties is the best thing to do in that moment. Especially when we have limited time to get to the bottom of what is happening. Then when everyone has sobered up for instance the next day, it's easier to get to the bottom of it. We had a case recently like this where we went to a job, it called in by a neighbour. But when we got there she had blood on her, and had clearly been hit, but he also had a mark on his head where it looked like something had been thrown at him. They were both incoherent, couldn't get to the bottom of what was happening as they had been drinking. They were both very angry as well, shouting, really aggressive to us. So we pulled them both in and when we were able to ask them more questions, it was clear that he was the primary aggressor. She didn't want to engage with us by this point though. So there are times we don't get it right, but it's hard making those decisions in the moment without getting it wrong sometimes. (Police participant 5)

There are several messages to be taken from the police responses discussed above. First, they all endorse the complexities facing frontline officers as first responders to domestic abuse. Making sense of these complexities in the light of what they are permitted to do (in law) and what they might choose to do (using their discretion) is neither simple nor straightforward. Second, this process is not, and arguably never has been, a 'simple' arrest/non-arrest decision (see also Johnson and Hohl 2023). Third, safeguarding, in a wide range of forms, is a prescient feature in responding to domestic abuse for these officers (not solely cases of coercive control) and in the case files analysed as part of this project. The question remains as to how to shift the dial on the debates surrounding policing responses to domestic abuse in recognition of the presence of safeguarding articulated here.

FINDING A SPACE FOR SAFEGUARDING

At this juncture, it is important to note that it is not difficult to find discussions of safeguarding in connection with policing in general. Often linked with the concept of vulnerability, safeguarding protocols surrounding people detained as suspects is just one example where safeguarding features in policy and practice (see e.g., Dehaghani 2017). Indeed in relation to child protection and

adults in need of protection, there is a well-evidenced body of work relating to the role of the police (Crawford and L'Hoiry 2017; Trebilcock and Weston 2019; Weston 2020). Moreover, it is possible that the language of safeguarding present in the police officer responses documented here may well have been carried over from their experiences of these different though related areas of work. As Crawford and L'Hoiry (2017) have suggested, there are all kinds of possibilities for learning emanating from this kind of boundary work where organizations come together to engage in co-ordinated practice. As they say:

The study of 'boundary work', we contend, should prompt novel explorations of the possibilities for organisational learning, reflexivity and innovation that arise among 'communities of practice' and their implications for trans-disciplinary knowledge creation and its application. (Crawford and L'Hoiry 2017: 652).

There has undoubtedly been the space and capacity for this kind of boundary work to occur, given the rising presence and commitment to multi-agency responses to domestic abuse in England and Wales during the twenty-first century. The presence of this kind of work, alongside the increasing emphasis placed on the police to respond positively to domestic abuse, is endorsed in the raising of violence against women and girls to the status of a policing strategic priority in 2023 (Home Office 2023) and the ongoing focus afforded to such violence in reviews of policing (HMICFRS 2021). Taken together, these changes have added to the already existing impetus and requirements for police officers to 'do something', especially in circumstances involving children (see e.g. Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel 2022) and domestic abuse (Domestic Abuse Act 2021). Against this bigger picture, it is perhaps no surprise that the language of safeguarding has infiltrated how frontline officers talk about 'doing something' in responding to coercive control. However, there is more to say here.

The actions documented in the case file analysis and the responses recorded from the officers interviewed imply a more holistic understanding and embrace of safeguarding, and what this might mean, in terms of positive policing action in relation to domestic abuse more generally. In other words, safeguarding as a course of action was taken by the officers interviewed for this project in a wide range of circumstances above and beyond those normally dictated by child protection and/or adult safeguarding protocols, which usually focus particular attention on those deemed vulnerable. The data presented here are illustrative of a concern to 'do something' through the lens of safeguarding, even in those circumstances when other responses might have been taken (like arresting one/other of the parties present). In some circumstances, safeguarding measures were taken in conjunction with the victim-survivor, that is, by listening to her. When and what kind of positive actions were taken were influenced by factors including the presence of physical injury, the presence of alcohol or drugs, and how easily the police officer could communicate with the victim-survivor (influenced by her having English as a first language or her demeanour, for example). Interestingly, examining these police officer responses in the round, their actions, and testimonies not only speak positively to the use and deployment of safeguarding as an important element of

their work but also carry traces of what Firmin (2020) has called 'contextual' safeguarding.

FINDING A SPACE FOR CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING

There is evidence to suggest that contextual safeguarding has been constructively and meaningfully embraced in relation to child protection. This approach demands that such protection looks at the child and their relationships in the round, and it is a concept which has shifted the focus of child protection significantly. Firmin's (2020) framework emphasizes the need to assess the social conditions of abuse for young people (i.e. the context of abuse not just the individuals affected by it), consider extra familial contexts in safeguarding processes, build partnerships with sectors who have reach into settings where young people spend their time, and measure this impact in those situations where young people are vulnerable to harm and abuse. Thus, the adoption of contextual safeguarding demands, as Firmin et al. (2024) argue, a change from focusing attention on the performance of a service to paying attention to the purpose of the system. Such a re-orientation brings welfare-oriented responses and criminal justice-oriented responses into fundamental conflict. The purposes of their respective systems are differently emphasized (see e.g. Wroe and Lloyd 2020). Moreover, as Firmin et al. (2024) have documented, whilst these kinds of tensions bring to the fore the different priorities given to risk versus safety, criminal justice outcomes versus outcomes in the interests of children, their implicit adoption of individualism leaves the structural and/or institutional drivers of harm (in this case to children) invisible and unchallenged. As Firmin (2024: 419) goes on to discuss in relation to risks outside of the family home as a place where the binaries of welfare/justice, victim/perpetrator, individual/context, parent/state meet. The data presented in this paper suggest that very similar binaries become apparent when applying the concept of contextual safeguarding to the frontline policing moment in responding to cases of coercive control.

It is important to note that the police are only one part of the wider contextual safeguarding solution to the problem of violence(s) against women and girls generally and coercive and controlling behaviour more specifically. In the UK, for example, only one in five victims will contact the police about their experiences of abuse (ONS 2023) and there remains a wider public lack of recognition of the challenges for women in reporting their experiences to the police (Davidge 2022). However, the data in this paper highlight that if the positive policing narrative centralized the more positive practices of safeguarding highlighted here, rather than the more negative narrative of arrest/non-arrest, it would open an opportunity to assess the broader social and cultural conditions of such abuse (Firmin 2020). Such a shift would, of course, require some cultural changes in policing responses, including addressing the ways in which the widely documented conceptions of 'ideal victimhood', racism, and sexism influence policing responses to domestic abuse more broadly. However, the data presented here suggest that paying increasing attention to what it is that police officers actually do in relation to domestic abuse 'in the round' might shift the narrative and thereby contribute to shifting the focus of how policework in this arena is considered. The question remains: why might this matter? There are several answers to this question.

First, in unpacking the black box of positive policing, it is possible to suggest that adherence to the arrest/non-arrest feature of this black box has constrained policing research of what might count as ‘doing something’ positive in relation to domestic abuse. The stranglehold that this view of what counts as positive action has arguably fuelled the view of police culture’s resistance to change (Chan 1997; Loftus 2010; Reiner 2010). Some of which may still have some resonance, but equally, it may not have captured all the changes occurring in practice on the ground. The challenges of policing in responding to violence against women and girls are well documented (Casey Report 2023; NPCC 2024), and whilst, as the findings reported on here, suggest, discretion in the actions or inactions taken in police responses still persists, these same finding also point to the importance of thinking about positive policing in the round. Importantly, these data also allude to the fact that the police cannot, on their own, engage in effective contextual safeguarding. The case file data is clearly illustrative of this and lends support to Firmin’s (2020) argument that contextual safeguarding requires a multi-agency approach.

Second, the work reported on here has benefitted from being able to engage in multi-layered data collection, and this approach has certainly assisted in making visible the practices identified above. In this regard, the case file analysis afforded a depth to the findings which would not otherwise have been available. This depth enabled the research team to approach the interviews with the frontline officers with a better understanding of the range of work done. Finally, in terms of policing practice, the findings of this work speak strongly to the capacity of these frontline officers to engage in reflective practice: that is, to take forward learning from other aspects of their work and bring that learning into their responses to domestic abuse. It is certainly the case that, following Davies and Barlow (2024), the complexities of the frontline moment in cases of domestic abuse generally, and coercive control in particular, do not easily lend themselves to arresting the perpetrator. Finally the work reported on here points to the need for a bigger conversation in relation to police responses to domestic abuse, what the systemic purpose of the police is in relation to such responses, and the potential for framing such responses within an understanding of (contextual) safeguarding in which arrest is not seen as the main goal of what might constitute a positive policing response such problems.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT

There is much to challenge conventional thinking in both research and practice in the findings presented in this paper. Whilst these findings have emanated from a small-scale project, there is much to reflect upon in terms of how academic researchers and police forces move forward in facing the demands of violence against women and girls. Christopher (2015: 335–36) has observed:

Legislation and policy are relatively static phenomena while the enigmatic sands of social challenge, opaqueness, and perplexity faced by police officers are perpetually dynamic and, consequently, emphasis must be placed on understanding and rationalizing the milieu of the moment.

More work which understands the ‘milieu of the moment’ in relation to domestic abuse and work which steps outside of the black box of policing will do much to enhance the value of understanding this moment in making sense of who does what, what it is that they do and do not do, and where the victim-survivor features in all of this, and how policy and practice might be better informed as a consequence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the research support of Dr Emma Finnegan during the course of the project on which this work is based, and the very helpful and supportive comments from the reviewers of this paper. As ever, the faults that remain are our own.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

FUNDING.

This work was funded by the N8PRP Small Grants Fund.

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