

Combating Domestic Abuse – A New Approach

There were almost One Million reported cases to Police of Domestic Abuse in England and Wales in the year ending March 2015. This on any measure is an appalling figure. It is believed from research I have seen that the actual figure, which is not reported, is twice that figure.

Something very radical needs to be done to combat DA for the huge benefit of all the victims concerned. Complacency needs to go out of the window from wherever it is demonstrated. It is just not good enough to say that the Police and other agencies are having success in dealing with the problem because that assertion is patently not true. In 2007/08 there were 658,000 reported cases and seven years later another 342,000 cases a year.

In my research so far I have found people who are involved with trying to reduce DA but not finding a way through the huge problem. Some tell me that they are working together to make things better but that is not what I am finding. There does not appear to be any joined up or revolutionary thinking or action to combat DA. No ideas of how to turn the whole process on its head by taking initiatives similar to which I will outline.

I would like to say at this stage that if anybody disagrees with anything I have written so far, or subsequently, I would like to hear from them in writing with evidence to contradict me. In that way we might get to the truth of what is happening and what needs to happen to start the New Approach.

Recently I attended both Harrogate and York Magistrates Court and have listened to a number of DA cases and have seen enough to convince myself that the Court system for DA needs a lot of improvement. I could not believe for example the inefficient way the Harrogate Court dealt with cases. Huge time was wasted during each Hearing by not having a legally trained Judge or a recording system that did not hold up everybody in Court. It took ages while the 'Clerk' entered details of the case and its disposal into a computer. I was also unimpressed with one case where the abuser, albeit latterly being 'supported' by the abused, had to wait six months for a trial because the CPS decided that six witnesses were required to prove the case. I believe that if the CPS did proper homework on each case, as I will describe in the next paragraph, and streamlined the evidence sufficient for a conviction, the case could be heard much sooner for the benefit of everybody concerned.

In my visit to York Magistrates however I found a District Judge who was very impressive, and I should know, because I have been before hundreds of DJs

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when an Advocate in the County Courts for seven years. He knew the detail of every case before him because he had read the papers the night before. He was able consequently to inform the defendant that there was sufficient evidence for a guilty plea so to save the Court huge amounts of time. He did not use a computer to record any part of the hearing but used long hand which also surprisingly saved a lot of time.

It is therefore very obvious to me from the two examples above that all DA cases should come before a DJ and be dealt with expeditiously. The CPS should be better prepared by having read their papers overnight so that they are fully conversant with each case. Streamlining evidence where appropriate, would be a useful improvement to the process.

I understand and it has not been challenged that there is no Database of Abusers. How can a problem be resolved when it is not known who are the abusers? What type of people they are?

One CPS lawyer I spoke to say that she had never thought about who the people were she was prosecuting. She had never considered which background or social class they came from. I believe that is wrong, the CPS should know so that they can input information into the system in order that remedies can be put in place where they rightly belong.

To help with the New Approach I suggest that a Database of Abusers is started across the Country detailing the background of each Abuser including, education; private or State, good or bad education, from a single parent home with no male influence. Whether they have a high, medium, low or no income? What job do they have or are they unemployed. Have they been bullied as a child? Were they in care? Whether they are of a robust or feeble disposition? Any evidence to try and pin point the perpetrators would be extremely helpful.

Only with that sort of information can the Government create strategies to combat the abuse of women. If for example there is a preponderance of private educated men with high incomes or whatever combination of the above, who are mostly responsible then the authorities will know where to start the education in the short term. Everything in life comes down to education. Abusers need to know that abusing others is totally wrong and unacceptable and will not be tolerated in the 21st Century.

Further to a Database for Abusers we need a Database of victims. We need to know from the first interview onwards the predominate type of woman victim, her social class, her background, her education, if she has a job, what is her income, anything which will help in determining what work the authorities need to do to

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relieve those women of the torture of DA. It has been suggested to me for example that most abused women do not come from the lower classes but from medium to upper. I do not know whether that is true, but nor does anyone else it seems, because that information is not available.

In North Yorkshire of the one Million reported cases across England and Wales almost 30,000 DA cases were reported in the same period. Pro rata that is rather more than either neighbouring Counties Durham or Cleveland. Of the 30,000 cases I am told only 3,500 women are seen by the only women's DA charity in North Yorkshire. I must therefore ask where do the other 27,500 go to for help? Perhaps somebody will tell me if they know!

To make my research as complete as possible I contacted North Yorkshire Police on several occasions to obtain from them their prospective on Domestic Abuse. Unfortunately excuses have been made by them and a downright refusal to offer any assistance was received. I will leave the reader to consider why that is. Whether NYP have heard or not the speech by the Home Secretary at the recent Police Federation Conference during which she said 'Victims of DA are still being let down' 'Reports are not taken seriously enough' 'The right skills, training and commitment to protect the vulnerable are still not held by every single police officer' 'While new powers have been introduced and they are effective, they are not being used anywhere near as systematically as they could be'. If they did not hear the speech I am sure a transcript is available. On the contrary in Kent when Kent Police heard that I was doing the DA research they telephoned to offer their help. I now live in North Yorkshire so I consider North Yorkshire Police are the Force I should obtain my research from and not Kent.

To further my research I submitted a FOI request to the CPS asking the following question:- 'In 2014/15 in North Yorkshire there were just under 30,000 reported cases to the Police of Domestic Abuse. I would like to know please in North Yorkshire how many people were charged with DA and how many cases went before the Courts in that period?' The response from the CPS dated 30th June 2016 states '935 cases flagged as domestic abuse were referred by NYP to the CPS for a charging decision. 696 of these cases (74%) proceeded to prosecution: 743 defendants were prosecuted in cases flagged as domestic abuse by the CPS, 599 (80.6%) resulted in a conviction'.

There were certain caveats referred to by the CPS but leaving those aside but being sensible and realistic I believe that those figures speak for themselves indicating why there is so much DA. Presumably the perpetrators know how the system works and carry on knowing their chances of being convicted are around 2%. In my view there should be a more robust and vigorous approach by the

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Police and the CPS who would be wise to follow the recent advice of the Home Secretary.

During my research I was asked by a Magistrate why there were so few cases going through the Courts when there are at least 30,000 DA cases reported to Police in just one year. I think we now have the answer to that question!

Turning next to prevention rather than cure, as I was taught at MPS Hendon Training School in 1962, when I became a Metropolitan Police officer. I would like to see another initiative introduced, as soon as possible, to join the above initiatives and that is the introduction of 'Abuse Awareness Courses'. I have been an attendee of a 'Speed Awareness Course' and I value what was discussed at that Course. There is absolutely no reason why the Government cannot introduce 'Abuse Awareness Courses' which would be mandatory for Abusers to attend, as part of their punishment. Abusers need to be taught that DA is a hideous crime which will not be tolerated and which will bring major retribution if it continues.

Another prevention measure, which is far more important, is Education. Children as young as three years old need to know that they should respect not only their own bodies and minds but that of others around them. I have been told by a young teacher of three years olds that she goes home most nights crying about the poor behaviour of the children in her class. I have heard for myself grammar school girls aged around sixteen, on a train, discussing which boy in the class gave them the best sexual experience. I was shocked to hear how they had no respect for their own bodies.

DA will start in the minds of children as young as three it seems so education to combat DA needs to start at the age of three. There needs to be a Royal Commission/ Working Party, set up by Government, to include all educationists, relevant Government departments, Unions and relevant others to find the answers to why people seem to becoming far more badly behaved not only in a domestic situation but generally. Why do people now have less respect for others and consider assaulting people both verbally and physically without a thought or care?

As Tony Blair said many years ago, and he was right: Education, Education, Education We need a whole new strategy for educating our kids otherwise all we are achieving is a continuous cycle of DA and poor behaviour generally. We need complacency banished for ever with no-one sitting on their hands doing nothing to prevent this hideous behaviour of Domestic Abuse. We need proper leadership from people in Government and elsewhere who have the vision, integrity and intellect required. There is absolutely no point in delegating responsibility for Combating DA to each individual Police Force, School, local authority, the CPS,

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local Charities. They do not have the ideas, expertise or intellect to bring about the change urgently required.

A new education programme needs to start at the age of three to include everything to stop children becoming disaffected, going into crime and general bad behaviour. They should be taught to become useful citizens, respecting both themselves and others and when they are old enough to become parents understand what is required, to be a good parent and decent citizen, so that we can break the continuous cycle of DA and other bad behaviour.

I commend this Report to all those involved in the Domestic Abuse arena.

David Marriot Cooper

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Combating Domestic Abuse – Second Report

I have now received sufficient evidence to show that to combat Domestic Abuse we need to start the process from the age of three. There is already a provision from the Department for Education 'Early years foundation stage' for positive relationships and the development of respect for others and to understand appropriate behaviour to be taught. However it appears that the way this provision is being taught is not having the desired effect. There is still too much bad behaviour in schools even with children as young as three. According to one head teacher I have spoken to this particular education needs to be more robust and meaningful for children to really understand what is required of them.

My view is that once children are on the slippery slope to bad behaviour they will continue unless stopped and in due course will have to be subject to sanctions and even worse criminal proceedings. I believe that if you can teach children right or wrong before the age of seven they should be sufficiently indoctrinated to refuse to participate in bad behaviour or worse. They should be able to make up their own minds to proceed with their lives in a civilised way for the benefit of themselves and others around them.

Teaching the right programme in schools to combat bad behaviour in later life is only one part of the equation as for a good part of each day children are with their parent/s who may themselves be prone to bad behaviour including committing domestic abuse. When children see their parent/s acting in this way they might think that it is normal behaviour even though school has taught them differently. They may believe as the head teacher told me that their parents know best and they may even respect their parent/s over and above their respect for their teachers.

The second part of the equation will therefore need to be the education of the parent/s. The parent/s need to know if they did not before that bringing their children up to be badly behaved is not a clever thing. I would suggest that when it becomes apparent to head teachers that children are being badly influenced by their parent/s there should be a mechanism for those parent/s to be sanctioned by attending compulsory parenting classes. Apparently classes do exist at present but they are voluntary and consequently do not receive great attendance. Most parent/s seem to think that they know best when quite apparently they do not.

I accept that my Plan to educate children from the age of three in a new robust way so they avoid bad behaviour in later life will take up to twenty years to be successful across the board. That is not a reason not to start now. I would like to see from the Education Secretary downwards teachers, academics and teaching

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unions come together to put a robust plan of action into the system to educate children from the age of three to understand that Domestic Abuse in later life is not acceptable. Children need to understand very clearly that respect for themselves and others is a major benefit through life and which will make their lives and other lives far more enjoyable.

Turning to aspects of my first Report I would like the Home Office to bring about a change in the Police attitude to DA and to people generally. They need to understand that they are police officers whose job it is to serve the public and not treat the public as though they are a by product and/or a nuisance to their inward looking existence. In North Yorkshire in the year to March 2015 there were 30,000 reported cases to Police of DA. Of that figure 935 cases were sent to the CPS for a charging decision. Some 3.1%! What does that say about North Yorkshire Police? I do not know what they want to say because they will not communicate with me as an ordinary member of the Public. However on any calculation by any reasonable person that figure of 935 is derisory. They do really need to get their act together for DA to be reduced. It follows that all the while the Abusers know their chances of appearing before Court are slight they will continue with their appalling behaviour.

In turn there needs to be an Inquiry into the CPS to determine why the conviction rate for DA is as low as 2%, at least in Yorkshire. That figure is truly unacceptable and again the Abusers will note that their chances of being convicted are so low as not to matter. The Justice Department needs to act as soon as possible if they are interested in combating DA.

All DA cases before the Courts should be heard before a professional District Judge and not Magistrates so that proceedings are dealt with speedily and effectively. My research showed that District Judges read the paperwork the night before the Hearing so when the Abuser tries to make the Judge believe that he is innocent the Judge knows differently. The case can then be dealt with by the Judge suggesting to the Abuser that he should re-consider his position. This is another matter for the Justice Department to deal with and improve.

With all of the above in mind I would like to set up a first Meeting through my MP Kevin Hollinrake with the Education Secretary the Home Secretary and the Justice Secretary or their immediate Ministers who have the authority to bring about the changes required to combat Domestic Abuse.

David Cooper

30th September 2016