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The Merseyside Domestic Violence Prevention Project: Some Costs and Benefits

By Graham Farrell, Wendy Buck and Ken Pease

Abstract

The paper has three objectives of equal priority. The first is a consideration of cost-benefit analysis as a means of evaluating crime prevention work. An alternative form of "costing" crime, based upon offence seriousness, and which might accommodate non-pecuniary crime such as domestic violence, is suggested. Within this context, the second objective is to describe an ongoing domestic violence prevention project funded by the Home Office, and to present some of the initial results. Technological prevention, in the form of quick response alarms, is combined with social support for victims of repeated violence. The third objective is to suggest that the technological aspects of the strategy might be used to prevent repeated instances of other crimes. (Studies on Crime and Crime Prevention Vol. 2 1993. National Council for Crime Prevention).

Keywords: crime prevention, domestic violence, repeat victimization, revictimization, multiple victimization, policing, alarms.

The measurement of Value for Money in crime prevention work is an onerous yet necessary task given budget constraints. Costs represent one major determinant of the fate of a crime prevention initiative; stillbirth, replication, further research and development, or termination. Formal cost-benefit analysis in crime prevention contexts is perhaps never wholly persuasive. For instance, are court and prison costs legitimately counted as costs when they may be offset by crimes prevented through offender incapacitation? Are costs in police time properly measured without considering what police officers would be doing with time saved? While the value of formal cost-benefit analysis can thus be called into question, those engaging in activities which have substantial costs are, and should be, obliged to present what are seen as the major benefits which offset the costs, thus enabling more informed decisions about the future of such activities to be made. This paper is an attempt to detail what are seen as the costs and benefits of an ongoing Home Office funded project which attempts to prevent domestic violence. The analysis suggests a number of factors which might be considered in the evaluation of crime prevention work more generally.

The next section outlines the package of measures introduced in an area of north Liverpool to try and prevent domestic violence. The presentation of some of the results to date takes the form of case histories of victims of domestic violence. This is followed by a step-by-step look at costs and benefits of the work. In conclusion, some of the implications of the project for further crime prevention work are outlined, together with thoughts about desirable developments in analyses such as the one undertaken here.
BACKGROUND AND THE PREVENTIVE MEASURES INTRODUCED

The initiative drew upon previous "best practice", combined with new, data-driven, proposals. The analysis of police incident logs (calls to the police from the public) for the area in question revealed a distinct pattern of domestic violence. A large proportion of calls occasioned by domestic violence came from a small proportion of households, to which police were repeatedly called. The prevention of repeated domestic violence incidence was the project objective, based upon previous research by the Manchester group. Some of the advantages of this approach have been outlined elsewhere (Pease, 1991). The research and experience upon which the measures described in the next section are based, can be reduced to three main conclusions.

First, there exists a "heightened risk period" for repeat domestic victimization – when a victim has called the police she is likely to call them again soon after. Of households making a call to the police for a "domestic" incident, 80% make at least one more within one year. The typical period between incidents is much less than a year. After a first incident, 35% of households report a second incident within five weeks of the first. After a second incident, 45% of households suffer a third incident within five weeks.

Second, a package of prevention measures is preferable, the approach to any crime by a single method being only a kind of token effort.

Third, "off-the-shelf" domestic violence programmes will fail, and safety plans must be individually developed for their victims.

THE PREVENTION MEASURES

The primary aims of the measures introduced were (a) to provide a "cocoon" of support for those experiencing domestic violence, (b) to improve the services to those who did not approach the police, in an attempt to address the problem of "hidden" violence, (c) to increase the ability of the police to respond effectively to domestic violence, and (d) to move preventive measures rapidly into place to prevent repeat attacks. The resulting package contains five major components.

Measure 1: Quick response pendant alarms. These alarms are offered to those holding a court injunction against ex-partners, and/or where a history of violence at an address indicates someone as vulnerable to attack. The option is also available to people who have not yet got injunctions, but whom police judge to be in danger. The alarm, located in the home, is connected to a portable telephone (or to a British Telecom-line) and can be activated either by a panic button on the alarm itself or by a pendant carried by the person at risk. (The equipment is produced by Tunstall Telecom and is essentially the same as that used by the elderly or frail living alone). Triggering the alarm activates the central alarm system in the police Divisional Control Room (DCR), automatically recalling the address history and information to the computer screen. These alarms receive a priority response from the police. They are issued for a limited period, offering time during which other means of ensuring personal safety can be developed. It is crucial that the loans are temporary. The pattern of repeated victimizations means that a limited number of alarms will suffice for the needs of a whole division and that the alarms will not develop into an ever-expanding commitment on police resources.

Measure 2: More complete transfer of injunction details from courts to police. This transfer of information is mutually beneficial – the court can issue injunctions or family protection orders which are enforceable by means

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1. An injunction is a court order restraining a person from a wrongful act.
of the scheme and the police can arrive at a household forewarned of the relevant history. Communication between a court officer and the police can ensure that a formal, systematic and reliable means of transfer of information (e.g. a facsimile sent at a given time each day) can be maintained. The benefits to both parties (and ultimately to victims) far outweighs the small investment of time taken to transfer the information. Indeed, it may well be regarded as scandalous that this did not happen long ago. Merseyside Police C Division is currently working to achieve the desired complete transfer of information.

**Measure 3: Support and information for victims of domestic violence, and work with those who have not directly approached the police.** A Domestic Violence Prevention Worker is based at a local community centre and works closely with the police Crime Prevention Officer who issues the alarms. She (the DVPW) provides support and information for victims, and provides a link with other agencies. Since a large proportion of domestic violence remains "hidden" from the police, she provides a means of access to quick response alarms for women who might not otherwise have turned to the police. She also runs a "drop-in" centre and creates links with a group of agencies through a local domestic violence forum.

**Measure 4: Heightened awareness of domestic violence.** To some extent this is implicit in the other measures described. In addition however, domestic violence "aide-memoires" were issued to police officers and information cards produced which officers can give to victims when they are called to a "domestic incident". The Domestic Violence Prevention Worker produces posters and information literature which are distributed in the local area – from shops, medical centres, libraries etc., reminding people of their rights and of the services available to them.

**Measure 5: An early warning database.** Based upon an existing system operated by West Yorkshire police, a separate police database of calls to a "domestic" incident has been established, which can be used to inform officers called to an address in response to a "999" call. It complements the computerized alarms system described above in that it alerts officers to the history of domestic violence at all the addresses which they are called to attend for such incidents. It can also periodically be used to identify households which should be considered for the issue of an alarm. This system bears the acronym DEWS (Domestic Early Warning System).

The measures described above together constitute a package which offers the realistic hope of making an impact on the rate and fear of domestic violence in the project area. The case histories appended to the present paper represent the first evidence of its success in doing so. It would be wrong to suggest that procedures in respect of all the elements have been perfected. The stage reached could perhaps be described as approaching the end of rough tuning and the start of fine tuning.

**ACCOUNTS OF VICTIMS RECEIVING ALARMS**

Case histories of recipients of the quick response pendant alarms, as they were related to the independent Domestic Violence Prevention Worker, are detailed as Appendix A. The case histories should be read at this point to obtain an understanding both of the nature and effects of domestic violence, and of the potential of the work under way. The intention is not to marginalize the case histories through appending (indeed, the views of the women form a crucial part of the evaluation), but is to make both them and by default the rest of the text more accessible. In the next section, the presentation of the cost of the project is followed by a presentation of some of the benefits.
COSTS

The domestic violence prevention project is funded by the Home Office as part of a project with the design of the prevention of violence. The expenditure on the domestic violence part of the project in Liverpool comprises;

- equipment costs of the alarm base station and computer, the cellulararm technology\(^2\) (which had not been previously adapted for this kind of work, comprising £18,000 for a system comprising 24 alarm units (capable of expansion at £159 per alarm unit – October 1992 prices.)
- phone costs, including Cellnet\(^4\) air-time costs (currently totalling £450 per month),
- the costs of employing the Domestic Violence Prevention Worker and running costs of the Centre Against Partner Assault in a local community centre, currently totalling £18,000 per year.
- the salaries and computing costs of the researchers working on the project, £40,000 per year for two years. Note that this is a temporary cost, to end in December 1992.

Thus the total capital outlay is £136,000 and recurrent cost £450 per month. What are the offsetting benefits?

BENEFITS

The measurable pecuniary benefits of crimes prevented (calculated by taking the average cost of the crime and multiplying by the number of crime prevented) would be the standard cost-benefit approach. This was the approach used in the Kirkholt burglary prevention project (see Forrester et al. 1991), and it may have been an appropriate framework given the nature of the crime prevented. Burglary results in financial loss, with subsequent insurance implications and higher premiums, and police time and effort in investigation. As noted earlier, although there are certainly pecuniary costs to domestic violence, there are many costs (e.g. in children’s peace of mind) on which it seems impossible, even distasteful, to put a price. However, considerations of benefits should be addressed.

Crimes prevented

At this stage it is difficult to put a figure on the number of crimes prevented, but this is clearly a core benefit, and the relevant calculations have been planned and will be made. There will always be difficulties involved in this measurement. As elsewhere, there are at least five kinds of preventive effect and these will be considered separately.

Direct incapacitation

Genuine alarms activations prevent crime when, for example, a man has been kicking down the door of a house but the priority response prevents him assaulting its occupants.

Indirect incapacitation

This would be achieved by the incarceration of those whose arrests have been effected by alarm activations.

Special deterrence

This would be prevention by a perpetrator knowing of the alarm arrangement and his resulting desistence from the offence. The case histories suggest that a man who knows that an alarm is in place may be less likely to repeat the assault, though the numbers are insufficient to state this with any certainty.

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2. A mobile communication service that offers sharply expanded mobile alarm service by dividing an area into many small districts or “cells”, each with its own transmitting stations.
3. See footnote 2.
General deterrence
This may be achieved through the scheme’s existence becoming known and other actual or potential offenders desisting on the basis of the possibility that their victim may be protected by an alarm.

Domino prevention
This term refers to the effects of the alarm option upon police practice and court process where changes might themselves have a preventive effect. Two specific ways in which this might work are detailed below but there may be other ways in which police and court practice demonstrate the unacceptability of such violence, where such demonstration may have effects of its own.

It is already evident to the crime prevention officer that there is a marked improvement in police response times. A comparison both of pre-project / post-project, and of alarmed / non-alarmed calls to domestic violence can be used as a substitute measure of crime prevention effectiveness. In most cases an alarm will be pressed at the outset of a potentially violent incident, and the elapsed time between the call and the arrival of police officers is the crucial element in determining whether a crime is prevented or takes place. Another example of “domino prevention” is that in addition to allocating the quick response alarms, the Domestic Violence Prevention Worker and the crime prevention officer have sometimes been instrumental in arranging rehousing. The alarms are used as an interim measure before rehousing to a place where (hopefully) the assailant cannot locate the victim. Assistance in rehousing is not a traditional crime prevention activity, but upon analysis is close to the ultimate in opportunity reduction. The repeated violence will be brought to an immediate halt if the assailant is unable to locate the victim (which unfortunately is not always the case) and a whole series of crimes is thereby prevented.

Enforceable injunctions
A standard court response to domestic violence is a County Court injunction. However, there is justified scepticism about the enforceability of such injunctions, both because of communication imperfections between courts and police and because the speed of police response is often insufficient to detect the breach of the injunction when it takes place. If the system we have in operation leads to a priority, informed police response, it is possible that the rigorous enforcement of the injunctions which they impose could give courts more confidence in them. The benefits of this are primarily to the victim who has not wasted time and money going to court, to the courts who may be able to issue an injunction and be confident of its enforcement (which could lead to a whole new interpretation of injunctions), and to the police who would be able to carry out rigorous enforcement of injunctions where previously it was not possible. This aspect is considered in more detail in Farrell, Clarke and Pease (1992).

Police safety and the “feel good factor”
One of the most attractive benefits of the project which was recognized at the outset by the police is the potential reduction in personal risk for individual officers called to domestic incidents. The database of past domestic incidents and the database of current alarm users which combine to make up the Domestic Early Warning System (DEWS) mean that officers have a much greater chance of being informed if they are entering a situation where they may be at risk. Where an individual has a history of violence against the police when they have tried to intervene in a “domestic” incident, or has a history of using a weapon, this will be recorded on the database and relayed to officers attending subsequent calls at the address. The knowledge this provides can help minimize the risk of personal injury as
well as helping to develop the most appropriate response.

Much criticism has been levelled at the police response to domestic violence, both by the public and by academic commentators. It is seldom that officers attending domestic violence have received praise from the “customers” who have called for their help. As elements of the case histories suggest however, empowering the police to prevent crime can produce positive feedback. The crime prevention officer notes the good feeling he gets when issuing the alarms, not something that police officers typically associate with dealing with domestic violence. The victims are eloquent in their appreciation of police help.

Fear of crime

That the victims of domestic violence live in perpetual fear of assault is one of the themes of research on the subject. The reduction of fear is now officially recognized as an important policy objective (Home Office Working Group, 1989). Even at this early stage in the project the case histories suggest there may be psychological benefits for both women and children. Again, further data are needed before these findings can be confirmed, but the probability that crime prevention alarms provide an opportunity for victims to regain some semblance of “ordinary life” (changes which some of the women have already recognized in the daily activities of their children), is a benefit which is priceless.

Few alarms, many beneficiaries

The alarms are customarily loaned for quite short periods. A relatively small number of alarms could therefore service a whole police division. This is desirable for several reasons. Total expenditure on alarms is relatively low since alarms are moved around according to victimization risk. Given that the alarms are a scarce resource, the “heightened risk period” for revictimization means that alarms are achieving maximum efficiency in preventive terms. A further advantage of using (1) a pool of portable alarms and (2) allocation according to priority, means they should not produce the inefficiency and extensive drain upon police resources that occurred with the proliferation of conventional intruder alarms. There will be fewer activations (due to small numbers), a lower rate of false alarms (due to the voice channel) and a greater likelihood of the crime which is prevented being a serious crime. This is because the alarms are allocated to high risk cases. Moreover, they are activated by women who will have received information literature on the use of the alarms, and understand that there is no need to press the alarm “just to test if it is still working”.

The “few alarms but many beneficiaries” approach derives from the notion of “drip-feeding”, developed by Forrester et al. (1991) and Pease (1991) to denote the relative constancy of effort over time which comes with a strategy of preventing repeated victimization. In the current project there are twenty-four alarms which can be reallocated according to risk. They are not an ever-expanding drain on resources. The labour input required is not intensive since it is roughly constant over time, and within the scope of the limited resources required by “drip-feeding” crime prevention. It is also, by definition, a resource which achieves continued use over time, and hence will achieve high cost-efficiency (as opposed to, for example, some burglar alarms which fall into disuse or disrepair – often increasing the ratio of false to genuine activations – after the victim perceives the heightened risk to have diminished).

“Hidden” benefits

Preventing domestic violence may result in a series of other benefits which need to be incorporated into any evaluation. These are the savings from the potential costs of refuge space and the time and effort of social ser-
VICES AND HOUSING, WHICH MIGHT BE SAVED TO SOME EXTENT BY THE CRIME PREVENTION APPROACH. AGAIN IT IS DIFFICULT TO INCORPORATE THESE COSTS INTO ANY ANALYSIS, BUT THIS DOES NOT WARRANT THEIR EXCLUSION — THEY MIGHT BE BUILT INTO A MORE ELABORATE ECONOMETRIC TYPE MODEL. WITH RESPECT TO SECONDARY EFFECTS, IT MAY NOT BE FANCIFUL TO SEE AN IMPROVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE POLICE AS ONE INCIDENTAL BUT VALUABLE BENEFIT. SINCE THEY HAVE SEEN THE POLICE AS HITHERTO UNABLE TO PROTECT THEIR MOTHER FROM ASSAULT, THE CHANGE IS SURELY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE. PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT IS THE BENEFIT TO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTHER AND CHILDREN WHO NO LONGER HAVE TO SEE HER SUBJECTED TO HUMILIATING VIOLENCE AND NO LONGER HAVE TO COME TO HER DEFENCE (AS IN, FOR EXAMPLE, HAMER, 1990, SEE ALSO THE CASE HISTORIES).

**REPLICATION AND COSTS IN RELATION TO SCALE**

The development of fresh approaches to crime prevention through a demonstration project is based upon the assumption that the initial investment may be recouped through replication. Obviously the initial investment entails a risk that it may not be repaid after the research is completed. In addition, even a successfully developed approach will only achieve wider usage through effective dissemination of information (see below). The initial research project will have a high unit cost per crime prevented. However, since the cost of the research and development is a one-off payment, the effective unit costs of the investment will fall with time and replication. Replication will not require the same investment in research and development, and hence the ratio of cost to crimes prevented will be substantially lower upon more widespread use of the strategy. The wider use a crime prevention strategy receives, the lower the unit cost of the initial investment per crime prevented. This is similar to a firm which lowers unit costs of production through increasing output. Whilst it can never reach zero, the cost per crime prevented can effectively fall close to zero through wider use, and prolonged usage. Each of these will generate an increased number of crimes prevented, all of which are based upon the initial (risky) investment.

The current project, although in its initial stages, is already achieving lower unit cost due to replication in a sister project in Sheffield. It is itself in part a product of a previous project headed by the fourth author, which was based on the idea of prevention of repeated victimization. The potential for development of the philosophy underlying the project (preventing repeated victimization) to different types of crime and of the specific preventive aspects of the project (preventing domestic violence, and the wider potential use of the technology developed for other crime, e.g. burglary — see Burquest et al. 1992, Fieldsend, 1992), will ensure that the unit cost of the initial investment, per crime prevented, falls close to zero.

**DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION**

Crime prevention practice, however effective, can only achieve wider use, and hence maximum efficiency, through dissemination of the correct information to the right readership. In the field of applied crime prevention this is an element which should be more directly accounted for in evaluation of a project. A list of publications to this end, which disseminate the practices and methods of the current project to a variety of different audiences, is given at appendix B.

**SOME IMPOUNDERABLES**

The alarm technology may not result in any reduction in the volume of incidents that the police are called to attend. If this is because more victims are calling upon the police for help in circumstances where previously the police were regarded as impotent, should that be viewed as failure (the costs produc-
ing no reduction in police work), or success (more victims seeking needed help)? Given the general view that the bulk of domestic violence remains hidden, the possibility that the scheme will increase calls for service to the police should not be discounted.

A second imponderable remains the domestic violence committed by current cohabitees. A plausible scenario is that the scheme will break up current relationships, insofar as victims will see new hope of safety when living alone. For example, a hindrance injunction will be a more realistic option when enforced with an alarm. Whether the termination of a violent relationship is ever worth grieving over is a moot point, but this kind of effect should not be neglected.

A third imponderable is displacement, the problem that arises with any crime prevention work. In evaluative terms, it is potentially the largest social cost to any project. However, the crucial issue of displacement is substitution — and there are few substitutes for domestic violence. It is unlikely to be displaced to another crime category — at least not to property crime or acquisitive violent crime. Other nonacquisitive violent crime, such as assaults in public houses, might occur, but this is unlikely to be true displacement — because at least the circumstances of guardianship make the targets less vulnerable. If there were total displacement to this type of crime it might be argued that it is a benign displacement, resulting in a form of dispersion or more egalitarian distribution of crime (see Barr & Pease, 1990). The likelihood of intervention by other persons, of arrest, and — most importantly — of the victimization being less focused upon a single individual or family, would be much greater than in many instances of ongoing domestic violence.

The biggest displacement risk, and that which previous research has suggested may occur, is long-term temporal displacement. The violent partner may continue to be an abuser in the next relationship. However, this “worst case scenario” is surely not sufficient reason to stop domestic violence pre-vvention work. Assuming (a) that all violent partners are able immediately to start a new relationship, and (b) make no effort to alter their behaviour, perhaps some will still have received a strong signal that an intimate relationship is not a licence to assault and that society will respond to “private” violence. This may be especially true if the triggering of a quick response alarm has resulted in arrest and/or further civil or criminal court action. Whilst an unlikely flagship for crime prevention theories of displacement, the elasticity of substitution suggested by the nature of domestic violence would appear to be lower than that of other crimes, and hence most likely to be an effective target for prevention work. Alternatively, an optimistic viewpoint might be that positive crime prevention action could result in [which Clarke (1992) calls a “diffusion of benefits”] other men being less inclined to violence when they know there is effective action which can be taken against them.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

It should be stressed that the discussion above concerns a scheme with several components. It will be obvious to the reader that the writers are excited by its potential. However, it cannot be stressed too strongly that, without an efficient procedural and support context, the DEWS alarm and database, which together in some ways represent the centrepiece of the scheme, must be placed in the context of an efficient procedural and support context. In some ways the worst fate which could befall the scheme would be its partial implementation with solely the technological aspects.

One concern is that, because the above analysis is not couched in currency values, it could be seen as weak and imprecise. It would have helped to have a metric of social values (like quality of life measures used in health care) which could be brought to bear. One measure of the social cost of crime which might be developed is crime
severity. As an extreme example, the cost of rape is greater than that of burglary if the measure used is monetary cost plus "social cost", rather than just a measure of monetary cost. This is because of the perceived relative severities of the two crimes. In the equation, "social cost" is a portmanteau variable which accounts for "all non-pecuniary considerations" such as morality and public attitude. Scales of the severity of crime have been developed (e.g. Pease, 1988) which could be used to generate proxy values for the relative costs of different crimes. A severity scale might be substituted for a cost scale, without putting what might be an unethical monetary value on certain crimes (such as rape). It is possible that a severity scale might be directly substituted in cost-benefit analysis as a measure of perceived monetary and social cost, but this would require further investigation. If such a scale could be developed, it would be of great use in the cost-benefit evaluation of crime prevention work. To follow this through, if Forrester et al. (1990) had calculated the savings from a domestic burglary prevented using the scales of offence seriousness which have been developed, then, using a combination of wounding and assault to measure repeated violent domestic assault, (though this may neglect the processual and psychological aspects to an extent) an estimation, however rough, of the value of preventing domestic violence might be ventured.

If similar sets of relational scales could be developed for different elements of crime prevention work, some of which have been suggested in the analysis of the present project (for example: detection, displacement, improved police-public relations, police feel-good factor, fear of crime), then a more coherent and generally applicable model might be developed. This framework, whilst it would be difficult to develop, and would never achieve perfection, might, once established, help the development of crime prevention responses to different crimes which were accountable to, and driven by public opinion, rather than the more ad hoc methods used at present.

The method of approach to crime prevention work described here, and the technology used, have wider crime prevention implications. The preventive approach which might be further developed (with or without the same technology) is the prevention of repeated victimization. Victimization is a good predictor of further victimization, and the likelihood of this repeated victimization declines with time. The prevention of many types of crime might benefit from research developed along these lines. On a less general level, the alarm technology used might be applied to the prevention of other types of crime. The use of portable burglar alarms for the prevention of repeated burglary is currently being developed in a sister project in Sheffield. This is based upon the existence of the "heightened risk period" which exists for repeated burglary as it exists for repeated domestic violence (see Poliv et al. 1991, Burquest et al. 1992). The portable alarm technology might be transferable for use in other situations where there is an identifiable high risk, such as juror and witness protection.

The possible use of these methods for the prevention of domestic violence elsewhere is perhaps the most obvious of the implications for future work. This potential will become more apparent upon publication of the final report with a more complete evaluation of the approach, since the list of costs and benefits detailed in the present paper is by no means exhaustive.

Two points must be added as cautionary notes. The first of these is that, in the view of the research team and the police officers involved with the work, the technology used in the present work (the alarms) should not be used in isolation from other means of assisting women experiencing violence to develop lives independent from the quick response alarms. Specifically, in this project, this is the role being developed by the independent Domestic Violence Prevention Worker, but it might be developed by dedi-
located police Domestic Violence Units working closely with other statutory and voluntary agencies. Secondly, whilst the initial indications of the work described here are positive, and warrant their being offered to a wider audience, the pace of events should not be overtaken by possible political considerations. The potential attractiveness of the approach from a variety of perspectives should not lead their application elsewhere to be undertaken without the necessary evaluation and larger scale replication.

APPENDIX A

Accounts of alarm recipients

The accounts were given to the Domestic Violence Worker employed by the project. Her appointment is an expression of the principle that the alarm, however potentially valuable, will only realize its value in the context of help offered to change the circumstances which led to its issue. It must be stressed that the alarms only make sense when located in a system of help and information. The alarm is useless if no-one comes when the victim activates it or if someone unhelpful comes or if no-one helps to generate a new life so that the alarm is no longer needed. The alarms, in the view of the authors, should be located within a framework of help. Within that framework they are an exciting resource. In the following accounts, some non-material facts have been changed to protect the anonymity of the people concerned, the need for which is particularly acute until the number of persons involved is very large.

Ms M

"Ms M was extremely impressed with the alarm. The violence has been going on for at least ten years. She left home with her four children aged eight to sixteen and spent two nights in the open, as she did not know where to go. Eventually she spent a few weeks with her two youngest children in a refuge and she returned home when the Housing Office put the house solely in her name. The house had been damaged by her husband and furniture and clothes destroyed – I have seen evidence of this damage. Ms M said that her husband has stated that he wishes to murder her, and that before the installation of the alarm he frequently used to arrive unexpectedly. He would smash his way into the house and usually become violent. The two eldest children are terrified of him. Since the installation of the alarm he has only called once (see below). He knows that Ms M has an alarm, as the letter offering the alarm arrived whilst Ms M was in the refuge and he was still living in the property. Ms M thinks this knowledge has deterred him from making any more visits. She says that the police response when she activated the alarm was excellent; two officers went after her husband who ran away, he did not have time to do any damage. Unfortunately they did not succeed in catching him. She said the police took only about two minutes to arrive and were sympathetic and helpful. Ms M believes that the alarm may have prevented her murder, for, as already stated her husband has threatened to kill her, and she feels that when defending either herself or the children she could kill him. Her son, aged thirteen, has stabbed the father once, in an effort to stop his father attacking his mother. Since this event the boy has become withdrawn and nervous. Ms M thinks that the alarm has given greater confidence to the children, as well as to herself, and says that they are no longer living under quite the same amount of pressure. She carries the alarm everywhere with her."

Ms Y

"Ms Y said that she felt the alarm was "a good thing", and that it had made her feel much more secure. She felt that it could help many more women in her situation. As she has three children she was glad of the protection for their sake. The eldest child (aged eleven) knew of the alarm’s presence and it helped the child’s sense of security. As Ms Y does not have a telephone, the alarm represented her only security whilst in the house."

Ms A

"For Ms A the most positive thing about the alarm is the fact that if necessary she can reach the police immediately. She is reassured by the knowledge that her details will show up on the
computer and that she will not have to waste valuable time giving details of herself and her situation.

On a previous occasion her ex-boyfriend hit through the telephone wire while she was dialling 999. On another occasion the baby was nearly hit by a brick thrown through the window by the ex-boyfriend. She says that she is still scared but that it is a great comfort to know that help is immediately available. Ms A's family have taken turns to stay with her. However, this situation is not satisfactory because they live some distance away. Ms A says that it was her mother who stayed most often before the alarm was installed and that this was not beneficial as the mother's anxiety was worse than her own and only increased the overall anxiety of the whole family.

She has contacted the police during previous episodes and says that they have never before been helpful. However, on the last occasion the officer attending said he would ask the Crime Prevention Officer to install an alarm, which accordingly happened. She is now pleased with the police involvement and the action which has been taken. She states that a week ago she believed that her ex-boyfriend was in the area and was frightened. She did not activate the alarm as she had no proof of this but telephoned the police to ask that patrols be aware of the situation. The response was excellent; two patrol cars arrived, one drove around the area looking for the man in question, the two officers from the other car came to the house and chatted to Ms A, giving her some reassurance.

Ms A also states that the alarm has been beneficial to her children. She has a baby girl and a girl aged eight. The older child has been aware of, and frightened by, the violence. Ms A says that the child is now more relaxed as she is aware of how the alarm can summon help. Before going to bed the child always asks her mother to check that the alarm is safe and in its usual place (by the mother's bed), in case it is needed during the night. Ms A sees the solution to her problems as moving to a different area where her ex-boyfriend will not be able to find her. The Housing Officer concerned has agreed to rehouse her as soon as a suitable property is available.

Ms H

"Ms H described the alarm as "like having a Guardian Angel". She said that it had made a vast difference to her life. Before the installation she said that she could not live a normal life; her husband has threatened to kill her and she believes that this threat is real and that he would carry it out given the opportunity. She says that her life consisted purely of being on constant guard and of constantly "looking over her shoulder" and expecting the next attack. Ms H says that she became depressed and lost interest in the everyday events of life. Much of her time was just spent sitting in a chair and worrying, she did not feel motivated enough to do the same amount of housework as usual, and her relationships with other people began to suffer. For instance, she used to have a close relationship with her two young nieces, and have them to stay with her. However she became frightened that her husband would arrive and become violent, so she ceased to invite them. Now, however, with the security that the alarm provides she is planning to have them stay overnight again and is looking forward to this greatly.

Ms H has two teenage sons, one of whom has learning difficulties. She states that before the alarm was installed he had become very nervous and withdrawn, he had witnessed violence being inflicted on his mother and was terrified of his father returning. Ms H says he is now much more relaxed and confident. The alarm then has had a positive effect on the family unit. Ms H has moved to her current address since divorcing her husband in the hope that he would not be able to find her. However, neighbours have reported that he has been seen in the area, and that he has been enquiring for her in the local pub, so the fear that he could find her seems to be real.

That Ms H has been subjected to extreme terror is obvious. For instance, when recording this evaluation we discussed the possibility of using a tape recorder. I explained that actual names and addresses would not be given to anybody outside the project, whereupon Ms H said that if her husband did succeed in murdering her we would please see that the police were given any records or recordings. The alarm then has not completely solved Ms H's problems - only the certain knowledge that her ex-husband could never find her or his death would do this. However, it has given her an element of security and
safety which she did not previously think was possible.

The alarm for Ms H has had wider implications; she told me that she used to feel very alone in her situation, that she was embarrassed to tell anyone, and who would care or be able to help anyway? She says that she first read about the alarms in the press, and that her initial reaction was to sit down and cry in relief at the idea “that there was somebody who cared and that there was help available at last”. She then wrote to the Crime Prevention Officer and described her situation – she “poured her heart out”. The next thing to happen was that the Crime Prevention Officer arrived to install an alarm. She was impressed with the police attitude and the speed with which they responded to her letter. Since then, as already described, she has been able to live a more usual life, and although she is still afraid, she now feels more in control, and less dominated by thoughts of her ex-husband. It seems unlikely that she has any other safety plans or coping mechanisms other than recourse to her telephone – I will discuss this with her at a future interview.”

Ms P

“Ms P first heard about the alarms through Victim Support. She says she was not given any detailed information, but that she thought it sounded a good idea. After meeting me (the Domestic Violence Prevention Worker), she decided that the alarm would give her some security. She was concerned about the police having to install the alarm, as she says that she is being victimized by local drug dealers and she was worried that the police presence might give them ammunition to say that she is a “grass”/(informant). Also, the dealers simply object to any police presence. On a personal level, she is happy to have the police monitoring her alarm. She says that the Crime Prevention Officer was helpful and friendly. Ms P said that the alarm has made a huge difference to herself and her two year old child. Before the installation she would often sit awake all night or she would sleep with the child on settees in the living room. She is still afraid to sleep in her own room as holes have been drilled in the ceiling by an intruder who gained access to the loft above her however, she uses another bedroom where she has installed the alarm. During the day the alarm hangs in the living room, so that she can reach it easily. She cannot wear it around her neck as the child might activate it. She said that, prior to the installation of the alarm, she was so frightened that her two year old son would become aware that she was agitated and attempt to cuddle her saying “it’s all right mummy”. Recently he has become more relaxed as a result of Ms P’s own increased confidence. I also spoke to Ms P’s mother who described how the whole family has been distressed about the pressures to which her daughter is subject. She said the alarm has lessened some of the pressures as she knows that her daughter can summon help when alone in the flat. The main priority is to get Ms P rehoused, and the situation will not be resolved until then. However, the alarm, provides temporary security.”

APPENDIX B

In the applied field of crime prevention, dissemination of information is an important part of research. The extent to which this takes place might be more directly considered by policy makers when evaluating crime prevention work than at present. Other publications are planned based upon aspects of the current project, and the final results of the work will be published in the Home Office Crime Prevention Unit series. Publications which are direct products of the project (as of September 1992):


References


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