



## **Reviewing the evidence of hate** *Lessons from a project under the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme*

ELIZABETH A. STANKO

*The Metropolitan Police and Royal Holloway,  
University of London, UK*

### **Abstract** \_\_\_\_\_

This article outlines the lessons from one of the projects from the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme, which focused on hate crime and domestic violence. Funded near the end of the initiative, the project differed from many of the interventions. Rather than proposing to test an intervention to see 'what worked', it set out to produce the evidence upon which decisions about intervention could be made. Led by a senior academic criminologist (Stanko), housed within the largest police service in the UK – the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) – the project had sponsorship from influential members of the uniformed management team. The project further employed a team of social science researchers – some of whom had worked within the MPS and others who had no experience of working inside the police organization – to work on transforming routine police crime records into evidence to inform policy and strategy. The article argues that the project achieved its aims: police crime records can and do provide evidence sufficiently robust for the driving policy, strategy and police practice.

### **Key Words** \_\_\_\_\_

Crime Reduction Programme • domestic violence • evidence-based policy • hate crime

## **Introduction**

I was a recipient of one of the Home Office's Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) grants in partnership with the Metropolitan Police (MPS) in late 2000. The project proposal set out a programme of work that enabled the MPS to identify the information on hate crime they held in their own data systems. Analysis of this data created a problem profile<sup>1</sup> of hate crime<sup>2</sup> and domestic violence in London as it was recorded by the MPS. This analysis became the basis for creating new strategies, in particular for the policing of domestic violence and its links to the prevention of domestic homicides.

For me, this project was a prototype, an experiment in the use of routinely collected police data for the purposes of social science analysis that drives strategic thinking and policy. As a university professor and director of the ESRC<sup>3</sup> Violence Research Programme (VRP), I managed the project in its first 14 months, joining the Prime Minister's Office of Public Services Reform to work on public sector innovation. In September 2003 I returned to the MPS to put into practice across the whole of the organization the results of the work that I began in 2001. My reflections here draw on what I learned especially from the Home Office Crime Reduction Project. I add additional insight gained as a knowledgeable insider in government – that is, I learned first hand the way in which evidence is balanced with political imperatives to reduce crime. But I will not be registering the same levels of frustration as many of my colleagues who have contributed to this collection of articles. My experience is much different. I draw upon the lessons from the Home Office project on a daily basis in my role as Senior Advisor for Strategic Analysis in the MPS. Evidence-based advice can be generated from the rich source of data available within the police service. Such information informs policy, strategy and police practice. Moreover, creatively designed, such information now forms the basis for innovative performance management, informed by criminological insight.

The idea for the project arose from discussions between the Diversity Directorate (MPS) and myself in early 2000. One of the many lessons flowing out of the ESRC VRP was that evidence about violence was held in many public sector organizations. Little of this information was analysed for the purposes of setting out the way in which an organization confronted violence. Much of the data was held in client records or files, whose purpose was biased towards the need to record what was relevant to the audit trail for the organizations. Names, events, locations, relationships, circumstances and so forth are, however, critical elements of knowing what the problem is that requires support, intervention and advice. I simply asked for the data held by the MPS to be supplied to meetings set up to discuss strategy and policy around hate crime and domestic violence. The problem was made clear at the first meeting. The information that was presented to the meeting as 'data' was a series of numbers, broken down by

borough, but with no analysis. The MPS was hosting a high profile, international conference on domestic violence in October 2000. For that conference, I designed and implemented the first 'Day to Count' for domestic violence across all UK police service, alongside three other key providers of support to victims of domestic violence (Stanko, 2001). This project's funding was announced immediately prior to my presentation of the findings of the day count to the international audience.<sup>4</sup>

### Knowing more about hate crime: a methodology for asking better questions

The project began with a simple premise. Too often crime prevention programmes take for granted the problem of crime. Geographic analysis of crime in local areas or counts of crime classifications are presumed to tell a story about a problem. The information offered by those who contact the police for help and recorded by the police as criminal incidents is an invaluable source of information. The MPS crime recording system includes information on the victim, offender, description of the event, location, time of day and many other pieces of data. People's experiences of intimidation, threat and bodily harm tell us a great deal about the way social relations, social privilege and social power converge in a request for help from a public body, such as the police. Understanding why people use the police – and why they might not – is a critical tool for strategic thinking about the problems coming to police attention.

Public services are now expected to take a proactive approach to solving the public problems brought to their attention. Health services manage the inequities of sickness and death day in and day out. So too the education system not only teaches students, but also manages the learning environments of a wide diversity of 'learners'. The diversity of those receiving health and education benefits make the delivery of these services dependent on better information about 'who uses these services', and where the gaps in provision are. In many ways, information about police service provision is much cruder and less developed than other public sectors such as health and education. The promise of improvement in policing is underpinned by the adoption across the country of the National Intelligence Model, an *evidence-based* approach to setting priorities, devising appropriate tactics to reduce crime problems, which draw on intelligence, enforcement and crime prevention as the trilogy of good practice for better policing services.

Initially, the project team met the same scepticism about data on violence that earlier ESRC studies had encountered (Lee and Stanko, 2003). By and large, there was an acceptance that violence is often hidden and, therefore, police information – the argument was – would only present a partial picture of domestic violence and hate crime in London. While this observation is largely true about violence in general, the project set out to

change current police strategy and policy through an informed picture of what the police are currently recording as the problem of hate crime and domestic violence through the reports of victims. Violence *is* reported, day in and day out. Official police crime reports were not being explored for clues to what kind of action (or inaction) leads to successful or helpful interventions. Official police crime records were not being used to paint a picture of what kind of hate crime and domestic violence was coming to the attention of the police.

Acutely aware that not all domestic and hate crimes are reported to the police, this project began with setting out to grasp what the MPS knows about the hate crime and domestic violence it records. As such, police documentation became a rich repository of the public's need for protection against private and public violence. We began to interrogate crime data to tell us about the circumstances that led to people contacting the police. We explored why, when and where violence happened. The MPS crime records hold robust data on:

- Profiles of victims who contact the police (age, race, gender and so forth);
- Profiles of offenders (single, two or more, age, race);
- Profiles of places where offences occur;
- Profiles of what happened and the range of crime classifications used to record such incidents;
- Whether and what type of weapons are involved;
- Repeat victimization/seriousness of incidents;
- Whether an arrest resulted;
- Post-arrest decisions and criminal justice outcomes (although these are not always routinely recorded).

The CRP project set out to understand the nature of hate crime and domestic violence through knowledge about its victims, the nature of the victimization, the dimensions of offending behaviours, and its variation across local areas (boroughs). This understanding could be used to shed light on the current capacity of the MPS Community Safety Units (CSU), located in each of its 32 boroughs. The CSUs had responsibility for the follow up response to victims of hate crime and domestic violence across the MPS. Assessments of the training needs, resources and other support would then be informed by an analysis of the nature of the problem as presented by Londoners to the MPS. The MPS could then consider whether it is responding appropriately to the needs of users who do contact them; monitor the changes in the patterns of need; and explore whether they have the appropriate resources in place to provide the most efficient and effective assistance. In effect, the project was setting up the evidence to create the capacity in the MPS to ground their policy and strategy.

The project developed a number of methodologies to examine common themes and patterns in the crime data. These included:

- A quantitative analysis of the MPS 'flagged' offences for domestic violence and hate crime;<sup>5</sup>

- An in-depth qualitative analysis of events occurring over a random 24-hour time period ('Snapshot Day') to provide context and richness to the overall patterns identified in the quantitative analysis;
- Qualitative analysis of the 'more' serious incidents (such as domestic sexual assaults, GBH, ABH and homicides), to explore the commonalities and differences in the patterns of 'seriousness' to inform assessments of the dangerousness of offenders and the risk of lethal danger.

Hate crime – in the way in which the MPS approaches the problem – includes several different things. It involves a variety of criminal and anti-social behaviour – ranging from serious personal attacks, criminal damage, graffiti and other abusive acts. There is an assumption that racist violence, faith violence, and homophobic violence seem to have similar motivation. Many presume that distance, dissimilarity, and unfamiliarity motivates hatred. In terms of racist and homophobic violence, people call the MPS most *often* about the behaviour of their neighbours, business associates and other acquaintances. The kinds of incidents that come to police attention – be they threat, attack and abuse – are the kinds of encounters that are often difficult to avoid. People live and work, day in and day out, within the contexts of threat and danger. In some respects, homophobic and racist violence overlaps with domestic violence because of the common ground of familiarity between the victim and the offender. Domestic violence has many different patterns – proximity and familiarity provides the overarching context. Gender, intimacy, power, sometimes mixed problems associated with mental health, substance abuse, financial difficulties and cultural factors, combine to require people to reach out for assistance in 'private matters'.

The findings about the routine nature of so much of the racist and homophobic violence in London demonstrated that intervention strategies that addressed the actions of neighbours and school children are likely to reach many of the problems of abuse people bring to police attention. Such strategies should lead to considerations about the use of police resources and those of the communities within which violence is challenged or thrives. We also discovered an important pattern while analysing the reporting of domestic sexual assault. While few of those who reported these incidents ever saw their assailants prosecuted, we uncovered the clues to acute and potentially lethal danger. Domestic sexual assault became a crime classification that held a critical key to intervention in the prevention of homicide.<sup>6</sup>

### **Problems lodged in familiarity: the challenge of crime prevention**

The CRP project enabled us to focus on the problem of hate crime and domestic violence in London. Responding to racist violence, homophobic violence and domestic violence are regular features of policing duties in the

MPS. In 2003–4, over 105,000 reported incidents were recorded for domestic violence, nearly 15,000 incidents of racist violence, and over 1500 for homophobic violence. There is still no guarantee of consistency in applying the label ‘domestic’, ‘race’ and ‘homophobic’ violence to police crime recording. We must treat the above as an undercount. For broad-brush analyses – and for the purposes of evidence-led policy – I suggest that these data are capable of providing robust pictures of the kinds of hate crime and domestic violence people face in London.

Three years following the launch of the project, the MPS data on hate crime and domestic violence suggest the following high level findings:

- Recorded numbers of murder, rape, GBH and ABH have increased by 2 per cent over the past year;
- The rise in other forms of recorded violence shows the influence of police willingness to record hate crime and domestic violence or are led by police activity (such as the increase in the number of people charged for carrying offensive weapons);
- One in three recorded common assaults are domestic violence; one in four of all violence is domestic violence.

According to the British Crime Survey (for the years 2002–3), the MPS has the second lowest *reported* violent crime level in England. However, more violence – as a crime type – is *recorded* by the MPS than all but one other police region in England.

Evidence does not in itself frame strategic police responses but it does facilitate the framing of arguments for changes in policy and practice. As a result of our project, the detailed analysis of incidents of domestic violence challenged the MPS strategy and drove it in an innovative direction. The CRP project developed a methodology to link up routine police responses – more intensive intervention in some incidents coming to police attention – aimed to the prevention of lethal violence in domestic violence. The process was labour intensive, largely due to the cumbersome way in which information is divided among separate data systems. Intelligence, crime reports, national information systems on offenders and so forth are held in discrete databases (although we are currently working on a project that enables these to be joined up, at the time of writing such systems are not available). One of the project’s analysts<sup>7</sup> scrutinized five databases to explore what the MPS ‘knows’ about domestic violence sexual assailants. The findings showed that almost half of the offenders had criminal records, ranging from sale of illegal drugs, burglary or robbery. Some of the assailants had convictions for sexual assaults to other women (including women who were not known to them). There were suspects named or wanted in murder inquiries. Using her skills as a behaviour analyst, the analyst judged one in 12 offenders (out of a pool of 175 offenders) as being very high risk and potentially very dangerous. Her analysis also told us about the women who reported domestic sexual assault. Nearly half of them were already separated or separating from the offender at the time

of the assault. A handful of the women were pregnant at the time. Children were present in over one in five of the sexual assaults, with one in 20 witnessing the offence.

The project paved the way for a more robust response in the MPS to potentially lethal domestic violence. It demonstrated through laborious analysis the possible ways to connect offenders' heightened dangerousness and victim safety. Police intelligence systems are not yet capable of automatic alerts on dangerous offenders.<sup>8</sup> Yet the police response to domestic sexual assault and other serious assaults in a domestic violence context is capable of providing more proactive intervention. Of the 175 domestic assaults reviewed, in 101 there was evidence that victims had reported domestic violence previously to police. The results of homicide reviews of domestic violence however suggests that police action alone will not be sufficient to put into action all the support necessary to prevent homicides. However, we do know that police are a critical part of the public sector provision of help.

The project was never far away from the local politics of the provision of policing in London. Diversity at its core, the MPS is clearly now embracing policing in a lively, heterogeneous city. The politics of the debates around the intersection of policing 'hate' and domestic violence take place 'in real time', in public and with tricky and murky assumptions on all sides about how to actualize the aspirations for policing a safer London and prevent hate crime and domestic violence. As part of managing the acute political context of policing, the MPS engages with permanent advisory groups for all three of the above issues. Such advisory groups sharpen the police understanding of 'hidden' aspects of these forms of offences. The dialogue about appropriate policing strategies is never ending; events and incidents of victimization frame policy and media scrutiny. Information is critical to keeping these debates informed.

The provision of information has challenged the way a number of key stakeholders view the problem of hate crime, domestic violence and policing in London. For example, the finding that much of homophobic violence reported to the MPS was the outcome of neighbour disputes and harassment by local young people led to great debate in the Advisory Group. This finding, reproduced by other analysis of later data, underscores the importance of sharing data with crime prevention partners. MPS strategy and practice is now informed by evidence on the way people use the MPS for assistance. Crime solving and intelligence gathering is also informed by knowing that victims who report racist and homophobic violence to police are most likely to be threatened by 'locals' – neighbours and school children are the commonest offenders for these forms of violence. Links with schools and dispute mediation projects are critical as part of any crime prevention efforts to reduce racist and homophobic violence. The CRP project demonstrates that multi-agency partnerships are ultimately the most comprehensive means of providing the broadest intervention strategies possible. It is virtually impossible to challenge hate crime

and domestic violence without the participation of health, education, housing and social services. These public sector bodies, however, are not seamless providers addressing people's needs. The MPS information continues to be challenged by the need to know more: the gaps in good public protection against hate crime and domestic violence must be able to be sensitive to analysis that shows the different needs of vulnerable groups. For this we are often hampered, due to the limitations of the crime recording system.

### **Performance management, crime analysis and accountability to change**

The Home Office CRP should be judged on whether it has made a difference – from crime reduction to the kinds of service people receive from the police. The routine capture of information does not in itself guarantee that the practice of or policy in policing changes as a result. Challenging police practice requires strategic thinking and motivation to improve police performance in the delivery of policing services to the public.

Today's discourse within the Home Office in 2004 is that of crime reduction and the targeting of prolific offenders and offending. The impact of the Treasury's Public Service Agreements over the past five years is to move away from a debate about 'what works' to a debate about 'delivering' what works. What is missing from the CRP is a framework for monitoring a sustained change in police performance. The Police Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) monitors changes in overall numbers and rates of some forms of crime. PPAF does not have any way of exploring the detail of what is driving the change. Police services are expected to capture good practice, and compare its own practice with those police services that are achieving best results in the reduction of crime. We know that, for instance, burglary is declining across the country. But on a day-to-day basis, we have no way of examining – in a robust and routine way – what is contributing to this decline to encourage best practice. Can we answer the question: are the burglars changing or is it the crime of burglary itself no longer a viable way of acquiring money for many offenders? It may be that the market for stolen goods has changed (most household goods are more affordable); household protection may have improved (with double glazing and lever locks); and the offenders may be choosing other ways of acquiring money illegally (robbery and shop theft might be less risky). We must be able to harness our own information to evidence crime reduction, and what drives reduction in order to embrace continuous improvement in policing services.

The CRP project set out an approach to facilitate the linking of crime analysis with performance management. The approach devised for the hate crime and domestic violence project can be used across all crime types on a regular



basis. The MPS explores its crime records to see if the MPS is making an impact on the victimization of vulnerable groups, for example. If we know that victims of serious hate crime and domestic violence are often and repeatedly victims, the MPS can document whether these repeat victims continue to ask for police assistance. Further, police data can examine whether those who ask for police assistance can be better supported, helped or provided with competent, sympathetic advice. The MPS can challenge why official knowledge about violence is not often translated into action that supports, helps or creates policy to reduce violence.

From my experience of working on the 'inside', police managers need information that enables the best guidance towards tactics that challenge the way crime happens. Problem-oriented policing has been around for nearly three decades. What has changed in these decades is our capability to analyse large sets of data. This opens the opportunity to ask better questions and use the recorded information we have available as the result of routine use of public services by the public.

## Conclusion

In many respects, my experience as a recipient of a CRP grant has been a positive one. Perhaps it is because it began as a true partnership with the police, albeit one that successfully challenged and continues to challenge the everyday practices of policing. Perhaps because as a civilian and an academic expert in my field, I raised questions and broke through barriers those 'inside' the police service could not. I was able to direct questions, search and interrogate the evidence, and challenge current practice. Although there are many parts of the MPS that have not yet benefited from this project directly, there are signs that business as usual is beginning to change across the board. Colleagues speak of 'evidence' and the need for 'data' to inform their policies and strategies to fulfil the expectations that police strategy be informed through the National Intelligence Model.

## Notes

- 1 Under the National Intelligence Model, a problem profile describes an analysis of a problem facing policing. The information enables the police to design strategy to address the problem that is led by evidence. The National Intelligence Model is being adopted across the police service in England and Wales.
- 2 Hate crime in London included racist and faith motivated violence as well as homophobic violence.
- 3 Economic and Social Research Council, the largest funder of social science research in the UK, sponsored the Violence Research Programme from 1997 to 2002.

- 4 This project is one of those 'windows of opportunity' in its timing, particularly in respect to the growing recognition of domestic violence as a major crime problem.
- 5 The MPS identifies, through flagging, domestic violence and hate crime in particular, so that it can be recognized as a 'special' kind of violence or other crime type.
- 6 See Stanko et al. (2003)
- 7 Laura Richards is now leading the MPS Homicide Prevention Unit, folding this methodology across 13 different types of homicide.
- 8 See the findings of the Bichard Inquiry, published June 2004.

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ELIZABETH A. STANKO has joined the Metropolitan Police, London, as its Senior Advisor for Strategic Analysis after over 25 years of university life. As an academic, she has contributed to rethinking domestic and other violence in order to change social policy and police practice. Formerly the Director of the ESRC Violence Research Programme, she is still affiliated with Royal Holloway, University of London, UK.

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