

Chapter 2 Literature Review

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2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1; placed this research study into context and identified the aim of this dissertation and the three objectives as follows.

1: Critically evaluate current literature in relation to the impact of covid –19 upon domestic abuse incidents in the United Kingdom.

2: Evaluate the public perception of the police response to domestic abuse incidents in the South Wales area.

3: Formulate recommendations in relation to the police response to domestic abuse incidents in the South Wales area.

This literature review will focus upon objective 1, through the critical evaluation of current literature in relation to the impact of covid-19 upon domestic abuse incidents. Focus will be placed upon the impact of covid-19 upon risk factors associated with domestic abuse, namely alcohol consumption and financial strain. The impact upon support service provision will be

explored. This chapter will also explore the police response to domestic abuse incidents during the covid-19 pandemic. Objective 2 will be addressed through the collection and examination of empirical data. To fully understand the impact of covid-19 upon domestic abuse, the concept of domestic abuse must first be explored.

2.2 Defining Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse cannot be classified as new phenomenon within society, abusive behaviour has always been present within households. However, the way in which society now regards and then responds to this behaviour has changed (Barrow-Grint *et al.*, 2022, p. 4). Historically, society viewed abuse within the family home as a private matter, a standpoint also taken by the government and other agencies including the police. The nature of the behaviour itself goes against the traditional society ideals of the home being a place of emotional and physical safety. Therefore, society struggles to understand that the behaviour is taking place, which has created a barrier to acceptance (McCarthy and Edwards, 2011, p. 54).

Slowly, the way in which society perceives domestic abuse has changed. The 1970's saw a rise in domestic violence awareness, as terminology such as "wife battering" allowed for open conversations on the subject. The changing nature of awareness saw the emergence of refuge spaces, as society recognised the need for intervention (Mcarthy and Edwards, 2011, p. 54). The 1990's saw the positive development of professional partnership working. Networks of supportive agencies focusing upon protection and intervention, aiming to provide effective victim focused responses (Hilder and Bettinson, 2016, p. 2). However, the process of change was slow, this is highlighted by the fact that, marital rape did not become illegal until 1992 in the UK. The legalisation changed following the removal of "marital immunity," when the House of Lords, heard the case of *R vs R* (House of Commons, 1992). The fact that this change is

legalisation, has only recently taken place, confirms that the process of change in terms of domestic abuse has been painfully slow.

The first specific domestic abuse offence was not introduced until 2015, which saw the introduction of the offence of “Coercive Control” in the Serious Crime Act (2015). This piece of legalisation finally criminalised coercive and controlling behaviour and acted as another step in the journey of domestic abuse from being seen as a private matter to one of a societal issue (McPhee *et al.*, 2022, p. 963).

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (*Domestic Abuse Act*, 2021) defines domestic abuse in two parts. The first part relates to the relationship between parties who would need to be personally connected and all over sixteen years of age. The second part of the definition outlines different behaviours that fall under the umbrella term of abuse. These behaviours consist of any of the following, physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, and any other psychological abuse.

The definition is extremely broad, this ensures that a range of different relationship types are captured and that all statutory agencies can recognise the different behaviour categories and respond positively (Home Office, 2022). The broad nature of the definition has helped to ensure a diversified view of domestic abuse, and the full spectrum of behaviours it includes. This addresses past criticism of the legal response to domestic abuse which failed to recognise abuse beyond the physical (Robinson *et al.*, 2016, p. 195).

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) provided an estimate of 7.3% of women (1.6 million) and 3.6% of men (757,000), had experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2020 (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Although these statistics highlight a clear imbalance between those who experience domestic abuse and gender, it would suggest that anyone can become a victim. In contrast Women’s Aid (2022), has suggested that domestic abuse is a gendered crime. The charity does recognise that both males and females can experience interpersonal abuse, however the differences between the nature of the violence

experienced is used to suggest that women's unequal status within society is the reason for the violence. Women's Aid is a charity for women; therefore, this theory could be called into question, based on bias. Throughout this study all references to victims and perpetrators will remain non-gender specific.

The impact of domestic abuse upon the victim has been widely discussed. The physical and psychological distress that this behaviour causes victims led Litherland (2012, p. 20) to describe domestic abuse as a "significant public health issue", linking exposure to abuse to a range of consequences including physical injury and poor psychological health through to neglectful parenting, placing children at risk.

The economic impact domestic abuse has upon society can be examined in reference to healthcare, criminal justice proceedings costs and police resources. The estimated cost of domestic abuse in England and Wales for the year ending March 2017 was approximately £66 billion. This number can be broken down further in terms of the physical and emotional impact on the victim, the cost of which is £47 billion, with the government itself incurring costs such as £1.3 billion for police resources (Oliver *et al.*, 2019). The impact that domestic abuse has upon all areas of society, strengthens the need for continued research in this area, to ensure continued improvement in addressing the issue.

However, the secretive nature of domestic abuse should be considered when examining any statistics. There are a multitude of barriers preventing disclosure therefore police and support services will never fully know the true level of abuse taking place, it remains a hidden crime. With many incidents remaining unreported (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

2.3 Critical evaluation of the impact of covid-19 upon domestic abuse in the United Kingdom.

Chapter 1 introduced the significance of the government-imposed restrictions and how these related to the changes in domestic abuse characteristics during the pandemic. The restrictions that limited the mobility of the population in March 2020 as a means of combating the virus, inadvertently increased the risk of victims being subjected to abuse in the home. This theory is supported Brodie (*et al.*, 2022) who highlight that the stay-at-home restrictions, increased victim isolation from key avenues of safety and support. Phumzile Miambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women (2020) described the consequences of government-imposed restrictions upon domestic abuse as “the shadow pandemic”. Increased tensions within households, such as financial strain ran alongside reduced support service provision to create the perfect environment in which abuse could take place (Miambo-Ngcuka, 2020).

The UK government response to the coronavirus pandemic, included the introduction of new legalisation aimed at mitigating the impact of the virus. This included lockdown laws which placed restrictions on the public and limited movement and social interaction. The first national lockdown, which saw non-essential businesses close, and people told to stay at home begin in March 2020 (Brown and Kirk-Wade, 2021, p. 5). The lockdown restrictions created a feeling of instability within society, as various levels of restrictions were introduced several economic and social stress factors were placed upon the population (Douglas *et al.*, 2020, p.1557). The covid-19 restrictions strengthened the hidden nature of domestic abuse, magnifying risk factors such as isolation which is conducive to abuse taking place.

Some academic sources suggest that there is a link between the impact of covid-19 and an increase in both the number and the severity level of domestic incidents taking place. The ‘Counting Dead Women’ project estimated that there had been sixteen domestic abuse murders of women and children in the UK, during the first lockdown period (Ingala-Smith, 2020). The concerns raised by Ingala-Smith (2020) were further supported by the Home Affairs Committee (2020) who recognised that the UK was following a pattern seen across the globe, as domestic abuse incidents escalated in severity and number. The Hubei province in China, saw domestic abuse reports triple during the lockdown in February 2020. The pattern

was mirrored in Catalonia and Cyprus as calls to help lines surged by 20% and 30% in the week after covid-19 restrictions were introduced (Home Affairs Committee, 2020). As UK support service charities saw a 200% rise in calls from victims of rape and domestic abuse, the government responded by providing a £40m investment, to help charities and support organisations cope with increased demand (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Research into the impact of major events such as pandemics can help shed light on the forces that cause such dramatic changes in domestic abuse patterns. There is evidence that suggests changes to economic environments and social stability following a natural disaster will result in an increased level of domestic abuse. This evidence can be drawn upon when thinking about the impact of covid-19 upon domestic abuse. Rezaeian (2013, p. 1103) contributes an increase in domestic abuse following a disaster to the increase in mental stress placed upon the population. Furthermore, Grey and Hansen (2021, p. 9) suggest that any event that puts a restriction on the population can be associated with an increase in domestic abuse. These theories, combined with that of Douglas (et al., 2020, p. 1557) strengthen the idea that the restrictions implemented to combat covid-19, increased mental stress levels which in turn manifested into abusive behaviour.

The population was hit by two major impacts from covid-19, firstly the threat of the new virus itself upon health and wellbeing, secondly the indirect impact of negative socioeconomic changes faced by the nation (Chandola et al., 2022, p. 2997). Domestic abuse is heavily influenced by crisis. Golden (et al., 2013, p. 3) linked economic hardship and an increase in domestic violence risk factors. Economic hardship is one of the risk factors associated with domestic abuse.

The causes of domestic abuse are complex, there are several risk factors associated with an increased likelihood of abuse taking place within a relationship. These factors are often linked and although they might not cause the abuse, they should be classified as potential contributing factors. Hisham (et al., 2021, p. 317) identify changes in societal factors, such as

reduced access to support or the removal of coping mechanisms as risk factors that increased domestic abuse during the pandemic.

The UK fell into recession during 2020, with the government painting a bleak financial future for the country in the years to follow. This is supported by a decrease in the employment rate during the first year of covid-19 and a period of economic inactivity (Watson, 2023). This period saw families experience financial instability and stress. Studies have consistently found associations between economic strain and domestic violence vulnerability. As restrictions saw businesses close, the UK saw changes to employment rates, with 7.5 million people taken out of the workplace during the summer months in 2020 (Office for National Statistics, 2020). The UK government saw an increased reliance upon the social security system during the pandemic, with Universal Credit seeing a significant increase in applications. For the four-week period ending April 2020, there were an additional 1 million benefit claims submitted, with 1.2 million people applying for financial support (Mackley and McInnes, 2021). These statistics suggest that many individuals were impacted by the downward trajectory of the economy during this period, this additional financial pressure may have increased the possibility of abuse taking place within the home. Drawing upon the 2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey, Fahmy and Williamson (2018, p. 482) concluded that females in poverty were more vulnerable to domestic abuse.

However, their study advised caution, highlighting that although there is a clear link between poverty and domestic violence there needs to be a wider understanding of the drivers behind the behaviour and that domestic abuse occurs across all aspects of society regardless of income.

Public Health England (2020, p. 75) highlighted the changes in alcohol consumption during the pandemic, noting that as expected there was a large growth in off-trade sales, which reflected the changes in consumer behaviour as the public began drinking more at home. The consumption of alcohol and the increase likelihood of domestic abuse taking place has long been identified as a risk factor. Evidence suggests that the severity of assault increases

because of intoxication (Graham *et al.*, 2011, p. 1504). Substance misuse has been linked to around half of all domestic violence deaths in the United Kingdom (Home Office, 2016). This would suggest that alcohol consumption although not the root cause of the violence can significantly increase the risk of violence taking place.

The relationship between alcohol and domestic abuse during the pandemic has been explored by Fox and Galvani (2020) working in collaboration with Alcohol Change UK. The study found that social isolation increased the risk of domestic abuse taking place in homes where alcohol consumption was already an issue. The normalisation of home drinking because of lockdown closures exasperated the issue.

Fox and Galvani (2020) identified that perpetrators used alcohol restriction during the pandemic as a new control method over victims with alcohol dependency, as the ability to purchase alcohol became restricted. This further supports the theory that lockdown restrictions were in fact weaponised by perpetrators. Hisham (*et al.*, 2021, p. 318) explains that increased levels of alcohol-related domestic abuse during the pandemic, were a result of increased home drinking and the removal of support services. This can be linked back to support Brodie (*et al.*, 2022) and the idea that covid-19 restrictions removed vital avenues of support for victims.

The restrictions which were designed to save lives, were exploited by domestic abuse perpetrators who were able to add a new element of control to the relationship. The general population's ability to move freely, were removed by the lock-down laws, this helped to create and enhance an environment conducive to familial abuse (Womens Aid, 2020). Peterman, *et al* (2020) go a step further suggesting that perpetrators used covid-19 as a scare tactic. This would suggest that covid-19 was in fact utilised as a weapon, controlling victims through fear of both contracting the virus and or breaking the laws which were designed to protect them. In addition, Hisham (*et al.*, 2022, p 317) argue that the stay-at-home instructions during covid-19 allowed perpetrator tactics such as job-interference to be undertaken with ease, as victims were unable to leave the home to attend work. This strengthens the theory that the pandemic exasperated the conditions associated with abuse taking place.

A research study conducted by the Women's Aid Charity found that 66.7% of respondents had confirmed that the lockdown restrictions and the possible consequences of breaking the rules, were in fact used by perpetrators as a means of control (Davidge, 2020, p. 8). The findings of this survey, which was conducted between March 2020 and July 2020, further support the theory that the covid-19 lockdown restrictions were exploited by perpetrators.

Data collected by Gray and Hansen (2021) during a study conducted working alongside the Metropolitan Police, has shown that domestic abuse incidents in the London area increased during the pandemic. Comparing data from before, during and after lockdown restrictions were in place, the study showed that the probability of becoming a victim of abuse had increased from 11.1% to 17.9 % during lockdown. The use of the before and after methodological approach, strengthened the validity of the results produced. Further analysis of the results showed that there had been an increase in the most violent categories of abuse, this data supports the theory that the severity of abuse increased during the pandemic. The study also concluded that different demographic groups, were more vulnerable to abuse during this period. Victim ethnicity for example, showed that Asians and those from a Middle Eastern background were 6% more likely to suffer abuse compared to the 3.7% increase in seen for Black victims (Gray and Hansen, 2020, p 27). This study is limited by the fact that it is focused upon one area, comparisons with results from other forces would need to be undertaken to provide a more in-depth understanding of the impact covid-19 had upon domestic abuse incidents in the UK.

In comparison, the theory that domestic abuse incidents increased during the pandemic have been undermined by data collected from the University Hospital of Wales emergency department. The study which examined the number of violence- related injury presentations at the emergency department between January 2019 and June 2020, concluded that there was no significant increase in patients presenting with injuries from violence at home (Shepherd *et al.*, 2021, p. 885).

The study does have limitations, the data is limited to one city and lacks information about violent injury that did not warrant emergency department treatment. Further limitations are identified by Moore *et al.*, (2022) who question if victims of domestic abuse would attend hospital at that time because of covid-19.

Analysis of data from the domestic abuse support service RISE in Cardiff, Wales further suggests that there was not an increase in domestic abuse incidents during the pandemic. The study conducted across an 8-month period comprising of time prior to lockdown examined the number of police referral numbers made to RISE following an incident. The study concluded that referrals did not increase, however the level of risk associated with the referral increased with a larger portion classified as “high” risk and the person reporting changed, with children becoming the primary source of contact during lockdown (Moore *et al.*, 2022, p. 254).

These findings would suggest that the nature of the domestic abuse incidents during this time became more severe and that children were being exposed to more domestic abuse incidents. The theory that child survivors of domestic abuse experienced worsening abuse during lockdown was supported by the Women’s Aid April Survivor Survey (2020) of the 32 participant’s spoken to during the study, 37.5% said that there had been an increase in abuse directed at the children and 53.1% participant’s said that the children had witnessed the abuse taking place (Davidge, 2020, p. 8).

This is a great cause for concern, in relation to the impact upon the children themselves and the wider society. Children who are exposed to domestic violence, can experience a negative impact upon their mental and physical wellbeing into adulthood. This in turn will have a long-term impact upon society as it addresses the complex consequences of domestic abuse across a generation of people (Home Affairs Committee, 2020).

Analysis of results from the different studies discussed paints a complex picture that faced domestic abuse services during the pandemic. The risk factors and causes of domestic abuse are multifactorial, they overlap and are influenced by changes in society. The significant impact

of covid-19 upon support services and the way in which individuals were able to access support highlights the changing nature of domestic abuse during the pandemic.

2.3.1 The impact upon domestic abuse support services

The impact of covid-19 upon domestic abuse in the UK, is reflected within changes to the use of support services during the pandemic. The restrictions implemented by the UK government, outlined the necessity for the population to stay at home, however home to some was not a place of safety. Domestic abuse helpline services saw demand increase as victims sought out support, via online and call and text services, this in turn placed pressure upon service provision during this time (Brodie *et al*, 2020). The UK Home Affairs Committee (2020, p. 8) documented an increase of 16.6% in contacts made to Men's Advice Line for male victims of abuse in March 2020. In parallel the women's shelter organisation, Refuge saw an increase of 49% as victims sought help via the helpline in April 2020, this is in comparison to pre-lockdown figures (Refuge, 2020). Interestingly, services designed to support domestic abuse perpetrators, also saw an increase in service demand, with the Respect phone line, which supports perpetrators who reach out seeing an increase of 26.86% in calls during the same period (Home Affairs Committee, 2020, p8). These statistics, support the theory, that domestic abuse increased during the pandemic having been exasperated by government restrictions.

The difficulties faced by victims trying to access support during the lockdown period, is reflected in the 12% increase in the number of cases, dealt with by Victim Support during the week following the easing of restrictions. This is in comparison to the week prior when restrictions were still in place (Office for National Statistics, 2020). These statistics support the theory that some cases of abuse may have been missed during the pandemic as victims had limited access to support services in the UK, which prevented disclosure taking place (Caron *et al.*, 2020, p. 399).

Government restrictions inadvertently impacted the provision of refuge spaces. Social distancing guidelines reduced the capacity of refuges, amid concerns over managing spread of the virus. Reduced access to interpreters negatively impacted the access to refuge for victims that needed them, and the process for moving victims on to new accommodation slowed, which resulted in a backlog of spaces (Davidge, 2020, p. 8). The issues highlighted with support service provision during the pandemic, would suggest that urgent attention needs to be given to ensuring that adequate resources and processes are in place.

The lack of interpreters in a refuge setting, would suggest that some black and minority ethnic (BME) and marginalised groups were disproportionately affected by the impact of covid-19. This is supported by Galea *et al.*, (2020) who note that victims from non-English speaking households and women of colour, will have the negative impacts of restrictions magnified. Therefore, there is a need to review current support services and look to ensure that they are directed towards minority groups.

2.4 The evolution of the police response to domestic incidents.

The police response towards domestic abuse is no longer one of acceptance and labelling the issue as a private matter within families, it is now one of the highest priorities within the policing agenda (Shovel, 2023). The evolution of the police response has seen a move away from cautious avoidance, where prosecution and positive action were not deemed inappropriate responses to a response that is more proactive in nature (Burton, 2016, p. 38).

There has been considerable progress made regarding investigative procedures, the introduction of processes such as Operation Encompass, which ensures that schools are informed of domestic abuse incidents in the home. This highlights innovation in terms of addressing safeguarding, with 33 using the process (Walklate *et al.*, p. 223).

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report which examined the police response to domestic abuse in 2018, highlighted practices such as multi agency partnership working using MASH units (multi-agency safeguarding hubs) as positive developments. Alongside the use of basic yet effective processes such as using police systems to flag victims show the changing nature of police responses to domestic violence. However, the report does suggest that there is still an element of stagnation present, in terms of response. The system of flagging victims has been in place since the 1990's, yet 28 forces still do not use this system. This suggests that there is an inconsistent approach to policing domestic abuse. Although praise is given to improved control room responses, improvement still needs to be made with the identification of specific offences such as coercive control (HMICFRS, 2018).

Chapter 1 highlighted the praise given to the police service by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, for addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic to policing. Nouri and Kochel (2022, p.139) outline some of the unique challenges faced by the service, which included social distancing restrictions and reductions in resources because of illness. The study conducted by Walkate (et al., 2020, p. 226) sought to analyse the impact of lock-down upon the police response to domestic abuse. Through an online questionnaire directed to all policing leads for domestic abuse in England and Wales, the study received responses from 25 forces (43 forces were approached). Results showed that forces adopted a "business as usual" approach initially to domestic abuse calls, with the added risk assessment considered due to the contagious nature of covid-19.

The study indicated that some forces, took advantage of additional resources, which had become available as crime rates fell in relation to other offences, and redirect these resources to focus on addressing domestic abuse. This is evident by one respondent reporting an 8% increase in domestic referrals to the Crown Prosecution Service (Walkate, et al., 2020, p. 227). This supports the theory that lockdown measures, afforded the police service time to focus upon domestic abuse. However, consequently it also highlights that this focus has been

lacking prior to the pandemic and that lack of resources may have negatively impacted policing of domestic abuse previously. In contrast, when referring to the study conducted by Gray and Hansen (2021) they confirmed that the Metropolitan Police, did not make any changes to the way in which domestic abuse was investigated during the pandemic, with no shift in policy being undertaken by the force. Therefore, any increase in domestic abuse incidents cannot be attributed in their study to changes in police resource focus.

The redirection of resources, during the pandemic has brought the issue of policing numbers to the forefront of the discussion. The pandemic took place at a time when the number of police officers and staff, where at the lowest, there were 20,564 fewer officers in March 2019. When this number is combined with 15,185 fewer police staff at the same point in March 2010, there has been a 17% reduction in the police workforce since 2010 (Windsor, 2020). In his annual assessment of policing in England and Wales report (2020) His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary Tom Windsor, confirmed that the police service needs reform and an injection of resources, however conceded that the service was facing an unprecedented public health emergency with a reduced capacity. Moving forward, addressing the issue of resourcing may become a necessary focus for the service effectively combat domestic abuse.

Walkate (*et al.*, 2020, p. 227) attributed changes in policing practices to the context of Covid-19, which saw the use of a variety of communication technologies utilised by forces to communicate with victims of abuse. Three forces reported using local radio as a way of communicating their availability for example. However, the use of social media was highlighted within the study, as an area of considerable importance to all respondents. Forces were seen to use social media as a way of maintaining a presence within the community and providing information to victims. Respondents recognised ability to preserve links with partner agencies, via online platforms such as teams. Which allowed for continued partnership working during this challenging period. Windsor (2020) stresses the importance of the need for further modernisation within the police service, with the improved use of technology as a means of providing an enhanced service playing a key part in the report. As many forces now use a

“single online home,” which provides a consistent online point of access for the public being documented a positive step forward, Windsor (2020) is also clear in the fact that further improvements are needed in this area.

In response to the rising concern about the potential increase in domestic abuse, the police working alongside the government in England and Wales established the Domestic Homicides Project in 2020. The aim of the project was to identify points of learning from all police recorded domestic homicides and to examine the impact of the pandemic upon domestic abuse. The project concluded that in the 12th months between April 2020 and March 2021, there were 163 domestic homicides. When put into context this is higher than the previous year which amounted to 152 deaths, however it was concluded that the difference was not statistically significant which suggests that domestic deaths did not increase significantly during the pandemic (Bates *et al.*, 2021, p. 7).

When compared to the concerns raised by Ingula-Smith (2020) within the “Counting Dead Women Project”, the Domestic Homicides Project did not find that there was a substantial increase in deaths during the pandemic, the concern raised was in fact that domestic homicides in England and Wales are long-lasting deeply engrained issue, before the pandemic. The project did provide recommendations for the police service which included the need for improved training for officers in respect of the identification of coercive control (Bates *et al.*, 2021, p. 15).

2.5 Conclusion.

In conclusion, the detrimental impact of domestic violence upon the parties involved and the wide-ranging socio-economic implications coupled with the secretive nature of the abuse make it a complex and complicated issue to address. The extremely broad definition of domestic abuse has highlighted the far-reaching impact this issue has upon all areas of society, although some feel that it is a gendered issue, there is evidence to the contrary.

The review of relevant literature has revealed that covid-19 impacted the risk factors associated with environments conducive to abuse taking place and has exasperated the problem. Increased stress, because of economic uncertainty, and increased reliance upon alcohol were two risk factors discussed, which led to an increase in abuse taking place. When compared to increased levels of domestic abuse following a natural disaster, the pandemic saw the same pattern being followed. As society felt the strain of support services being restricted.

Examination of the impact of government-imposed restrictions, suggest that victims of domestic abuse were further isolated during the pandemic and were unable to remove themselves easily from their domestic situations. Furthermore, perpetrators went onto manipulate the situation and weaponised the restrictions, further increasing control held over the victims during this time.

The review of literature did however produce conflicting evidence as to whether domestic abuse incidents increased because of the pandemic. Studies such as that conducted by Gray and Hansen (2021) support the theory that incident numbers have increased, providing supporting evidence from the Metropolitan Police area, the study also undermines the idea that changes in police resource focus may account for increased statistics, however the study is limited to one area and further comparisons with other force areas would need to be undertaken.

In comparison, the data provided by RISE the domestic abuse support charity in Cardiff, did not support that theory that domestic incidents increased, as police referrals made to the charity did not increase in number. However, risk level associated with the referrals made during the pandemic did change, with high-risk incidents increasing in number (Moore *et al.*, 2022, p. 254). There are many variables, that influence however covid-19 impacted domestic abuse incidents, data differs between demographic groups, areas and the services providing the data, this once again highlights the complex nature of domestic abuse and suggests that

further research is needed to fully understand how the pandemic impacted the issue within the UK.

There is a continuing need for empirical data in relation to how the public perceives the police response to domestic abuse during the pandemic. Chapter 1 introduced the general views of the public towards policing during this time. Empirical research will now be carried out to find to evaluate public perception, specifically in relation to the police response to domestic abuse during the pandemic. Detailed review of the research methods that will be undertaken will be the next step of this research study, with focus placed upon data collection techniques and the processes that will be followed.

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