



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2018-01041

**Keyword:** Complaints/Discipline

**Subject:** Domestic Abuse

### Request and Answer:

Your request for information has now been considered. In respect of Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) I can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) does hold information to which your request relates.

### Request 1

I would please like to know the number of reports of domestic abuse-related incidents and domestic abuse-related offences (also known as domestic violence) that were dealt with (or are still being dealt with) by your force's Professional Standards Department (or otherwise named), annually, from 12th April 2015 to 11th April 2018.

### Clarification

I have just realised concerning my FOI dated 1 May that I did not specify that I was looking for domestic abuse allegedly perpetrated by police employees. This was an oversight. To clarify, I am not seeking all PSD reports about domestic abuse, only those where a police employee is an alleged perpetrator.

### Request 2

Whatever name/category your Professional Standards Dept. assigned to each report.

### Request 3

The specific incident(s) or offence(s) alleged in each report.

### Request 4

The outcome(s) of each report.

### Request 5

Whether each report was referred to the IPOC (formerly known as the IPCC).

### Answer

Professional Standards Department (PSD) recorded 32 reports of domestic abuse during the period requested relating to the off duty conduct of a police officer. Please see attached excel spreadsheet showing the nature of the incident and the outcome, broken down by year. None of these cases were referred to the Police Ombudsman, the Northern Ireland equivalent to IOPC. PSD do not record complaints against police staff.

## **Request 6**

Your policies and procedures relating to: domestic abuse in general, committed by any perpetrator and dealt with by the police/domestic abuse incidents/offences where the police are perpetrators or victims.

## **Answer**

Please find below a link to Service Instruction 1217 which provides guidance to officers on how PSNI should respond to, report and investigate domestic incidents.

<https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/advice--information/our-publications/policies-and-service-procedures/domestic-abuse-190418.pdf>

Further information is available at [www.psni.police.uk](http://www.psni.police.uk). Go to Advice and Information then Domestic Abuse.

The PSNI expects its officers and staff to behave professionally, ethically and with the utmost integrity at all times. We are committed to ensuring that where officers and staff fail to maintain the high standards expected of them they are dealt with robustly. Whilst the PSNI takes extremely seriously any allegation of wrongdoing, instances such as this must be put into context of the overall size of the organisation. The actions are not representative of the excellent work police officers carry out across Northern Ireland on a daily basis as we strive to keep people safe. The data provided in this response includes cases where no conviction was obtained, where a complaint was withdrawn or where no official statement of complaint was made, and the outcome of the cases should be viewed in the light of this fact.

Please see below advice issued to officers and staff.

Domestic violence is an abuse of power and control where an individual tries to assert domination over another and often includes physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse and occurs regardless of the victim's religion, ethnicity, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, political opinion, disability, with or without dependants.

Research suggests that previous domestic violence is the most effective indicator that further domestic violence will occur, with 35% of households having a second incident within five weeks of the first. As the time between incidents seems to decrease so the numbers of contacts escalate.

The impact of any domestic violence extends beyond the immediate victim, perpetrator and their children to include consequences for their extended families and the wider community. Domestic violence can manifest itself in its impact upon the workplace, resulting in deterioration in performance, increased absenteeism or poor timekeeping.

Whilst some victims may display no outward signs of violence or abuse, consideration should be given to the emotional and/or behavioural signs of domestic abuse. The following is not intended as a checklist, however, may provide assistance in identifying indicators of abuse:

### **Physical Indicators of Abuse –**

- Injury (often multiple), for instance, perforated eardrum, detached retina, neck injury, especially marks and/or burn/bruises. Repeated injuries, or unexplained bruising or explanations that do not fit the injuries displayed;
- Self-harm attempts;
- Multiple somatic complaints;
- Pelvic pain;
- Poor sleep pattern;

- Substance abuse, primarily alcohol.

### **Emotional Indicators of Abuse –**

- Depression;
- Self-harm;
- Tiredness;
- Mental health problems;
- Low self-esteem;
- Apathy.

### **Behavioural Indicators of Abuse –**

- Missed appointments;
- Late or high absenteeism rate without explanation;
- Uncharacteristic depression, anxiety, distraction or problems with concentration;
- Changes in the quality of work performance for no apparent reason;
- Lack of independent access to finances;
- The receipt of repeated upsetting calls/faxes/e-mails, or the individual being a victim of vandalism or threats;
- Obsession with time;
- Needing regular time off for appointments;
- Inappropriate or excessive clothing;
- Increased hours being worked for no apparent reason;
- Intense irrational jealousy or possessiveness expressed by partner or reported by the victim;
- Denial or minimisation of violence by the victim (or perpetrator) with an exaggerated sense of personal responsibility for the relationship, including self-blame for the violence.

### **Myths, Denials and Excuses**

- To view examples of the Myths, denials and excuses around Domestic Violence that need to be challenged click (link provided).

If uncomfortable talking to a line manager, callers may ring OH&W requesting assistance. OH&W can provide information on organisations that offer advice and support. For specific individual support a referral may be made by the line manager via SAP. By reporting domestic abuse in a relationship, this may allow both the person being subjected to domestic abuse to receive help and the perpetrator's behaviour to be challenged. Officers and staff may self refer to Carecall, available both during and outside office hours.

In addition, in every district command area, Domestic Abuse Officers, who are specialist officers trained in this area, are available to provide information on civil orders, answer queries in relation to the criminal justice process and signpost you to other agencies. By reporting domestic violence in a relationship, this may allow both you to receive help and the perpetrator's behaviour to be challenged.

Similarly, you may feel that a colleague is in an abusive situation at home and have concerns about their safety. In such cases you should be able to speak in confidence either to their line manager, personnel manager or to an Employee Support Officer. Whilst signs of violence should not be ignored, individuals should not be pressurised into disclosing any personal information that they do not feel comfortable sharing.

### **Requirements in Relation to Notification by Police Officers and Police Staff**

Police officers and members of police staff who commit domestic violence-related criminal offences

will not be seen or treated as distinct from any other perpetrator and should be investigated and held accountable through the criminal justice system in the same way as any other person. It is vital that the Service safeguards public confidence and reassurance whilst ensuring victim confidence in responding to domestic violence-related criminal offences committed by police officers and police staff.

Police officers and police staff must notify their District Commander/Head of Department of the following:

- Any child contact restrictions;
- Any domestic violence-related civil court orders issued relating to them (ie Non Molestation and/or Occupation Orders). This notification is applicable for both ex-parte and full orders.
- Likewise, where a police officer or member of police staff has been arrested, reported or charged with a domestic violence-related criminal offence, a report should be submitted to the employing District Commander/Head of Department as soon as possible after this event.

The following publicity materials supporting the campaign associated with the launch of this document. A 'Domestic Abuse' pack is available for officers and staff experiencing domestic violence below.

To view Posters and Leaflets relating to Domestic Violence click on links below (links provided).

- Domestic Violence
- Domestic Violence Pack
- Leaflet
- Poster

The PSNI supports the development of the '**Safe Place**' initiative and are Safe Place Platinum award holders.

### **Safe Place**

'Safe Place' initiative was developed by Onus and Women's Aid in Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey in October 2010. Safe Place was then launched by Onus on a regional basis in February 2011, and is supported by a wide range and variety of organisations, from sole traders through to Councils and organisations employing thousands. Safe Place is an initiative whereby business and organisations displaying the Safe Place logo (above) will provide information on the wide range of services available to all victims of domestic abuse. Safe Place cards are available for display in Enquiry Offices and publicly available places within the PSNI establishment.

### **Help is Available within the PSNI if you are experiencing Domestic Violence**

Domestic abuse is commonly associated with stalking/harassment. Taken in isolation behaviours might seem unremarkable, but in the particular circumstances and with repetition, they take on a more sinister meaning. Unwanted communications may include telephone calls, letter, faxes, text messages, sending/leaving unsolicited materials and gifts, or graffiti. Such behaviours include coercive control and jealous surveillance, not just physical violence, as well as ordering or cancelling goods/services; making vexatious complaints (to legitimate bodies); threats; property damage as well as cyber stalking. Cyber-stalking is the use of technologically based tactics used against victims. Examples of cyber stalking include sending manipulating or threatening emails; hacking into another's accounts and changing settings; posting messages and personal information on on-line

bulletin boards; creating false profiles and sending 'friend requests', etc.

Research has found that a prior intimate relationship is the most powerful predictor of violence in stalking cases and ex-intimate stalkers were the most aggressive of all stalkers. Ex-partners were overall found to be the most intrusive in their behaviour and were also the most likely to threaten and assault third parties, as well as their principal victim.

If you are being stalked/harassed, remember the mnemonic '**STOP**':

- **S**ay no: tell the person once that you do not want any contact, and then do not respond further.
- **T**ake notes: keep a diary of everything that happens and save evidence.
- **O**ptions: The National Stalking Helpline can assist in discussing your options. The telephone number is 0808 802 0300 or email [advice@stalkinghelpline.org](mailto:advice@stalkinghelpline.org).
- **P**olice: Harassment is illegal. Report it.

If you have any queries regarding your request or the decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing [foi@psni.pnn.police.uk](mailto:foi@psni.pnn.police.uk).

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ [www.psnipolice.uk](http://www.psnipolice.uk)

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.