



Innovating during the Pandemic? Policing, Domestic Abuse and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARACs)

Journal:	<i>The Journal of Adult Protection</i>
Manuscript ID	JAP-11-2020-0047.R1
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	multi-agency risk assessment conferences, MARACs, policing, domestic abuse, covid 19, partnerships, victim survivors, rapid response research, innovative practice

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 **Title: Innovating during the Pandemic? Policing, Domestic Abuse and Multi-Agency**
8 **Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARACs)**
9

10
11 **Abstract** (175 words)
12

13 Purpose
14

15 The purpose of this paper is to reflect upon the challenges posed for the ongoing
16 implementation of multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) for police forces in
17 England and Wales during the 2020 pandemic.
18

19 Approach
20

21 This is rapid response research involving qualitative methods primarily online semi-
22 structured interviewing with a sample of police domestic abuse leads in England and Wales.
23

24 Findings
25

26 Our findings point to an increased use of virtual platforms particularly for MARACs and that
27 this has beneficial consequences both for the police and in their view also for victim-
28 survivors.
29

30 Practice Implications
31

32 The use of virtual platforms carries a range of practice implications for the future of
33 MARACs for the foreseeable future. These range from ensuring attendance of the appropriate
34 agencies to the range and frequency of meetings, to infrastructural support for all agencies to
35 engage.
36

37 Limitations
38

39 The findings reported here are from policing domestic abuse leads. More work needs to be
40 done to explore the value of engaging in virtual MARACs for all the agencies concerned but
41 also whether MARACs continue to be the best way to ensure the victim-survivor is kept in
42 view.
43
44
45

46 **Key words** (12 words)
47

48 Multi-agency risk assessment conferences, MARACs, policing, domestic abuse, COVID-19,
49 partnerships, victim-survivors, rapid response research, innovative practices
50
51

52 **Word length:** 5749
53

54 **Funding details:** This work is supported by the Economic and Social Research Council
55 (RCUK) grant number ES/V00476X/1
56

57 **Disclosure statement.** The authors declare that there is nothing to disclose.
58
59
60

Introduction

As one way of addressing the problem of crime, multi-agency partnerships have been around since the 1980s. In an early evaluation of their implementation in inner city areas in England and Wales, Sampson *et al* (1988) offered a nuanced understanding of their role, purpose, operation, and impact. They suggested a ‘more narrowly focused approach, with specific forms of inter-agency relationships, on specific themes and problems, provided that they seek to minimise the problematic consequences of the multi-agency approach’ (Sampson, 1988:491). Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) which focused on high-risk victims of domestic abuse were a specific form of inter-agency working with one specific focus (Westmarland, 2011). SafeLives define a MARAC as:

‘a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors.’ (www.safelives.org.uk)

The key purpose of a MARAC is: information sharing, co-ordinated safety and action planning linking with other relevant agencies (McLaughlin *et al*, 2018). SafeLives goes on to say:

‘At the heart of a MARAC is the working assumption that no single agency or individual can see the complete picture of the life of a victim, but all may have insights that are crucial to their safety. The victim does not attend the meeting but is represented by an IDVA who speaks on their behalf’. (www.safelives.org.uk)

Although partnership/multi-agency working has flourished within adult protection work generally (see inter alia Perkins *et al* 2007; Pinkney *et al* 2008) multi-agency partnerships have been seen as problematic within the area of domestic violence (see inter alia Hague and Malos,

1
2
3 1998; Harwin *et al* 1999). The focus of this paper is not the on the effectiveness of MARACS
4
5 or the decisions they take about individual cases, but on how the format of MARAC has
6
7 changed during the COVID emergency, and within a general context of policing innovation.
8
9
10 The data presented in this paper emanates from the ESRC funded project ES/V00476X/1. The
11
12 project, which ends in December 2021, focuses on criminal justice responses to domestic abuse
13
14 during the ‘lock-down’ (March to September 2020), particularly in the context of restrictions
15
16 on the reporting of domestic abuse (Mlambo-Ngcuke, 2020; Fraser, 2020; Williamson *et al*,
17
18 2020). In this paper we focus on one theme which was evident in interviews with police officers
19
20 during the first stage of our research, the changing format for the hosting of MARACs.
21
22
23
24
25
26
27

28 We first offer an overview of what is known about both the long-standing problems and the
29
30 possibilities embedded in MARACs. Then we provide a description of our methods followed
31
32 by a summary of our key research findings relating to MARACs during the lockdown period.
33
34 Next, we offer some recommendations for the future working of MARACs based on our
35
36 research. In the concluding part of this paper we discuss some of the limitations of the findings
37
38 presented here.
39
40
41

42 **MARACs: An Overview**

43
44

45 As Blagg *et al* (1988: 217) commented about the early developments of multi-agency working,
46
47 domestic abuse was relatively neglected. However, Home Office Circular 60 (1990) was
48
49 influential in reorientating multi-agency partnerships towards domestic abuse and brought the
50
51 UK much more into line with developments in North America. In the United States, there was
52
53 a view that positive policing policies worked most effectively alongside other community-
54
55 based initiatives, the most well-known of which is referred to as The Duluth Model (see
56
57 <https://www.theduluthmodel.org>). Following this line of thought, some areas in England and
58
59
60

1
2
3 Wales (for example Merseyside) introduced Domestic Violence Forums in which both
4 statutory and voluntary agencies met to co-ordinate policies. Other parts of England and Wales
5
6 (in areas of London and Leeds) community-based initiatives developed more closely informed
7
8 by the Duluth Model (Phillips, 2018). The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act added further impetus
9
10 to the development of multi-agency working. However, it was not until the 2004 Domestic
11
12 Violence, Crime and Victims Act that this way of working was implemented on a larger scale
13
14 (Cleaver *et al*, 2019). This legislation established Specialist Domestic Violence Courts, Multi-
15
16 Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs), and Independent Domestic Violence
17
18 Advocates (IDVAs). Taken together SafeLives (2016) suggested that this suite of proposals
19
20 provided the framework for close, cost effective inter-agency working in relation to particularly
21
22 high-risk victims of domestic abuse. In England and Wales, the MARAC model developed
23
24 primarily from an initiative introduced in 2003 in Cardiff. This initiative brought together a
25
26 wide range of agencies including police, probation, local authority, health, housing, refuge and
27
28 what was then the Women's Safety Unit. A process and outcome evaluation of its work pointed
29
30 to the positive effects that this kind of multi-agency working had for victims of domestic abuse,
31
32 particularly high-risk victims, and led to this multi-agency model being adopted elsewhere in
33
34 England and Wales (Robinson, 2006; Robinson and Tregidga, 2007) though questions
35
36 remained about MARACs concerning information sharing and the extent to which such
37
38 conferences facilitated victim empowerment and decision-making (Coy and Kelly, 2010;
39
40 Westmarland, 2011).

41
42
43 In the last five years the number of cases requiring MARACs to be held has been growing. In
44
45 2017-18, 88,461 cases were reviewed in England and Wales, this increased to 93,893 in 2018-
46
47 19, and to 105,883 in 2019-20 (data from Office of National Statistics). SafeLives collate
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

quarterly data from approximately 290 MARACs across the UK (October 2020). Their most recent figures are re-presented in the table below.

Table I: UK MARAC data: Downloaded from SafeLives, October 19th, 2020

Overview	Latest Quarter	Previous Quarter
	12 months 01/07/2019 to 30/06/2020	12 months 01/04/2019 to 31/03/2020
Total number of Maracs who submitted data	291	285
Number of cases seen at these Maracs	105,883	104,457
Year-on-year change in number of cases	+6%	+4%
Number of children	132,692	131,526
Number of cases per 10,000 adult females	41	41
% of repeat cases seen at these Maracs	31%	31%
% of partner agency referrals to these Maracs	35%	35%

(A further detailed breakdown of these statistics can be obtained from <https://safelives.org.uk/practice-support/resources-marac-meetings/latest-marac-data>).

Statistics such as these afford a useful overview of the essential work done by MARACs. Indeed, there is a remarkable consistency over time in the pattern of work captured in the quarterly figures presented above. Overall, some of the findings associated with MARACs echo the three questions asked by Bottoms (1990: 16) some time ago:

1. Do different agencies have different amounts of power in inter-agency working and does this matter?
2. How much autonomy does each agency need to lose in the interests of collective working and are they willing to do this?
3. To what extent is it possible to recognise that different agencies have different functions and do these different functions inhibit co-operation and, if they do, how?

1
2
3 These fundamental questions, and how the issues they raise are managed, are as pertinent today
4 as they were when Bottoms (1990) first asked them, as some of the more recent findings in
5 relation to the working of MARACs demonstrate. For example, Warmington *et al* (2004) have
6 pointed to the ‘feel good factors’ associated with multi-agency working and the ways in which
7 this rhetoric can belie a range of conflicts, tensions, and challenges. Cleaver *et al* (2019)
8 summarize these challenges in terms of funding (particularly for non-state agencies), resources
9 (availability of staff to participate), competing organisational priorities (including the problems
10 of working in professional ‘silos’), and the challenge of hierarchical inter-agency relationships
11 in which the police frequently feature as the lead agency. In a detailed study of MARACs,
12 Steele *et al* (2011) conclude from the available evidence that the jury was still out on the cost
13 effectiveness of this way of working. However, there were some perceived positives around
14 information sharing (though see McCulloch *et al* [2020] on information sharing and Pitt *et al*
15 [2020] on the challenges of information sharing for General Practitioners), having the relevant
16 agencies in the room, and ensuring IDVAs were also present. These benefits could be enhanced
17 and supported by strong partnerships and leadership. Steele *et al*’s (2011) empirical research
18 suggested that there remained some variation in practice from the recommended practice
19 principles as endorsed contemporarily by SafeLives but that such variation enabled flexibility.
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45

46 Nevertheless, from this overview of the available literature, four issues seem to present some
47 ongoing challenges. These are the appropriate identification of (high-risk) cases; the
48 representation of appropriate agencies at these conferences; managing the volume of work; and
49 appropriate action planning. Managing workload has also been commented on as a challenge
50 for the future in relation to policing in particular (see Her Majesty’s Chief Inspectorate of
51 Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services HMICFRS, 2019). Robbins *et al* (2014) add to these
52 challenges that of the potentially different ways in which agencies construct the victim, the
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 practice implications of this as well as the capacity of MARACs to recognise the complex lives
4
5 of service users. This is a finding echoed by Shorrocks *et al* (2020) in their work on the role of
6
7 MASH and response to repeat victimisation. The HMICFRS (2019) report found additional
8
9 areas of concern within a small number of forces. For example, a backlog of referrals awaiting
10
11 a further risk assessment in a MASH; lack of triaging of high-risk cases for MARAC
12
13 discussion, and different approaches to MARACs being adopted both within and between
14
15 police forces - all of which have the potential of different outcomes for victims. Our research
16
17 findings on policing responses in relation to MARACs during the pandemic need to be situated
18
19 in the context of this bigger picture.
20
21
22

23 24 **This study: methodological approach**

25
26
27 Our research project adopted a mixed methods strategy and is informed by the ‘rapid’ research
28
29 approach. Rapid research can take many forms and usually involves short timeframes, team-
30
31 based research and iterative data collection and analysis (Vindrola-Padros, 2019). For the
32
33 purposes of this project we have followed the recommendations of McNall and Foster-Fishman
34
35 (2007) in engaging in data collection and analysis simultaneously. We are particularly
36
37 committed to the early sharing of findings (Johnson and Vindrola-Padros, 2017), and paying
38
39 attention to ‘reflexive interpretation of findings’ (Vindrola-Padros and Vindrola-Padros, 2017)
40
41 as this project unfolds over time. As a first stage in the data gathering process an online
42
43 questionnaire was distributed to all policing leads for domestic abuse in England and Wales
44
45 [1]. These questionnaires were distributed through the office of the national police chief
46
47 domestic abuse lead. Respondents were asked to reflect on the initial lock-down period and, in
48
49 particular, whether their force was able to continue with normal practices? What changes did
50
51 they introduce in relation to responding to domestic abuse under social isolation and what was
52
53 the impact of these changes (with examples); and finally, which innovations would they keep
54
55 and why?
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 The respondents came from a heterogenous group of police forces: urban, rural, and semi-rural;
4 a mix of different demographic populations; several large metropolitan forces alongside other
5 organisationally smaller forces. Questionnaire respondents were asked whether they would be
6 willing to participate in a further interview. From the 25 forces who returned a completed
7 questionnaire (58% return rate), 21 agreed to be interviewed, and interviews with 20 forces
8 were conducted. We conducted these interviews using Microsoft Teams (the online platform
9 preferred by the police) during September and October 2020. Our interviewees were Domestic
10 Abuse Leads (Chief Inspectors, Superintendents and Chief Superintendents). These interviews
11 were semi-structured and lasted an average of 55 minutes.
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26

27 The interviews were transcribed, and an adapted form of Framework Analysis (Ritchie and
28 Spencer, 1994) was used to identify themes that had emerged in the interviews. These
29 themes were arrived at by each researcher familiarizing themselves with the body of
30 transcribed data, discussing the data together as a group, and identifying themes and sub-
31 themes, which were arranged in a framework (using Excel). The framework was populated
32 with summaries and quotations from each transcript. This meant that we could encompass an
33 overview of each theme across the whole data set but could also easily look at data from each
34 force in order to compare it against data from other forces (all data was made anonymous at
35 point of publication). The findings from the questionnaires and interviews, in relation to the
36 policing use and experience of MARACs, are presented below (numbers are included to
37 indicate how common a theme was, rather than statistical representativeness).
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52

53 **MARACs, Policing Responses, and the 2020 Pandemic**

54 Respondents commented (in interview or on the questionnaire) on the significance and value
55 of being able to maintain inter-agency working relationships virtually using online platforms.
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 They also thought that virtual meetings/video conferencing would remain the way they would
4 conduct this aspect of their domestic abuse work in the future. Two exceptions felt that there
5 was still more to be learned in a 'real' face-to-face meeting as opposed to a virtual one.
6
7
8
9

10
11
12
13 The overwhelming enthusiasm for maintaining virtual meetings ranged from the practical (it
14 was much easier to get everyone in the same room, at the same time, with no travelling issues
15 to negotiate), to perceived improvements in the quality and efficiency of the meetings. The
16 questionnaire responses also pointed to a range of other and varied uses of social media and
17 virtual contacts with domestic abuse victim-survivors. However, the resounding endorsement
18 given to the use of virtual MARACs led us to be particularly interested in gaining a more
19 nuanced appreciation of this aspect of their work (comparing their pre-COVID practices with
20 their COVID practices).
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

36 Prior to the changes in the working practices demanded by the pandemic, three of the police
37 forces had already moved to more frequent meetings in order to manage a rising workload or
38 to standardise arrangements. The frequency of MARAC meetings varied considerably in pre
39 and post-COVID practice from quarterly, monthly, fortnightly to daily. Whilst this echoes the
40 comments of HMICFRS (2019), it should also be noted that some of this difference in
41 frequency of meetings was the result of variations in levels of demand as well as the availability
42 of partner agencies to engage with this process. For example, in one mid-sized mixed force
43 (Force I), each area of the county had a different arrangement for MARAC in terms of
44 frequency and structure, so they were looking at how to improve this through a single daily
45 MARAC for one area. Another, mid-sized, rural, force (Force K) held daily MARACs, as many
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 of the agencies involved were co-located, and others joined remotely. The frequency of
4 meetings was linked to managing an increasing workload, as illustrated in this comment:
5
6

7
8 "We'd had to introduce anyway more frequent MARACs anyway just to simply deal with
9 those coming through, [...] In reality, we can't wait to move to put in a safeguarding plan to
10 make sure the victim and the wider family are properly protected. So really, if we do our
11 job properly by the time we come to MARAC, certainly from police perspective if we
12 haven't wrapped around the right safety measures round the victim, come that time, then I
13 think we're not doing very good." (Female respondent, mid-sized mixed force, C)
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22

23 In terms of meeting location, four forces reported that MARACs had already moved, or were
24 in the process of moving to, a virtual setting, due to the size or rural nature of the county. The
25 push given by the pandemic to embrace virtual working seems to have generated some benefits.
26 Echoing questionnaire responses, eight interviewees stated that MARACs were more efficient,
27 from both police and partnership organisation perspectives. Police and partner agency time
28 was being used more efficiently (no time spent travelling, sometimes long distances, to attend
29 meetings especially in rural areas).
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38

39 "But as we've moved on, I actually, I think now we've got better at managing skype meetings
40 or zoom meetings, and I actually quite like it and I think it probably saves so much time in
41 your day with the travelling" (Female respondent, large urban force, L).
42
43
44
45
46

47 One of the key benefits of virtual MARACs, from a police point of view, was the improved
48 participation from, and better inter-agency working with, partner organisations. Respondents
49 told us, for example, that agencies engaged better due to having more time and flexibility,
50 decisions were faster, and relationships improved, as illustrated here:
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 ' ... it improves the quality of relationships because you got the same faces able to go to the
4 meetings on a pretty regular basis. So you get to know them better.' (Female respondent,
5 large rural force, Y).
6
7
8

9
10
11 "We've reduced the bureaucracy, so that's increased capacity within police resources and
12 we've also found that the third sector organisations are much more much more supportive
13 of this 'cause it's less impactful on their resources, very, very tight resource." (Male
14 respondent, small rural force, V).
15
16
17
18

19
20 Respondents also commented on the improved quality of meetings, in terms of participants
21 being better prepared, other agencies playing more of a part (compared to being police-led),
22 and an increased willingness to engage inside and outside of the meetings:
23
24
25

26
27
28 "The quality of information is most definitely improved. And actually the input into each
29 meetings improve so, so that is a win". (Female respondent, mid-sized mixed force, P).
30
31

32
33 "And it was, I found that but very, very focused people would only have 2, 3, 4, 5 minutes
34 to talk about what was going on. They absolutely got straight to the to the crux of it. And
35 people listened as well. So what came out of that for me was understanding each other
36 better.." (Female respondent, mid-sized mixed force, Q).
37
38
39
40

41
42
43 "Just a simple benefit is that if you're sitting in a in a meeting like this that you have your
44 files available to you and you can just go and look something up, or you know or send that
45 action, do that that email then and then there's no there's no waiting for that because we have
46 so much more participation and better participation, people have more time, we get more
47 information." (Female respondent, mid-sized mixed force, O)
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Almost inevitably these perceived improvements in the way in which MARACs were being
4 conducted led respondents to comment on what they saw to be the ultimate advantages in these
5 developments for victims. Actions could be more responsive and flexible. For example,
6 information on a prisoner due to be released could be included in the daily MARAC meeting
7 and safety planning put into place quickly. Above all, responses were perceived to be quicker,
8 as illustrated by the following quotations:
9

10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18 “24 hours, max of 72 hours rather than 14 days, to deal with a case.” (Male respondent,
19 small rural force, T).

20
21
22
23 “But you know the feedback that we've had on it is that can respond much quicker to victims
24 in terms of putting support services in place” (Female respondent, large urban force, L).

25
26
27
28 “The advantages are massive especially to victims and families, so they're getting a much
29 quicker service. They're getting support quicker 'cause there's a requirement that actions will
30 be completed on a weekly basis rather than, you know. There's almost on the monthly side.
31 It was almost seven weeks before somebody might get some service, and by that point within
32 their own life, the cycle would have moved on and they might not be interested in receiving
33 that support.” (Male respondent, small rural force, V).
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41

42 Given that the focus of MARACs is high risk victims, the importance of the advantages
43 outlined above cannot be under-estimated. Speedier, better informed, more responsive
44 decision-making with all the relevant agencies in the room is something that has been
45 consistently referred to as an ideal outcome which is not always realised, particularly when it
46 comes to Domestic Homicide Reviews (see Dawson, 2017). As one respondent pointedly
47 stated:
48
49
50
51
52
53
54

55
56
57 “Any risk where we're sitting waiting for a huddle of people for a week is, well, frankly it's
58 it's outdated and well - I was going to say negligent - but it's certainly, it's not acceptable. If
59
60

1
2
3 you've got children and victims in a situation where they need support now, it should be
4 done in a timely fashion. We should be responding at pace." (Female respondent, large urban
5 force, B).
6
7
8
9

10 **Going forward: MARACs post-COVID**

11
12
13 Two of our respondents expressed reservations about the loss of face-to-face meetings, and
14 what they saw as the associated inability to build personal relationships, particularly as people
15 move out of roles and new people come in. However, the strongest theme emerging from our
16 interviews was that the future in relation to MARAC operations was virtual. Two respondents
17 from the same force stated:
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

26 "We were just muddling our way through in some aspects of it and getting used to having
27 meetings like this, but this is the future now. This is the way that it will stay." (Female
28 respondent, mid-sized mixed force, O1)
29
30
31
32

33 "There really aren't any benefits in going back to that relationship or going back to what we
34 had before, so I think very much that we will stay exactly as we are, and we're getting used
35 to it, you know it's very different to engage like this." (Female respondent, mid-sized mixed
36 force, O2).
37
38
39
40
41
42

43 Obviously these positive views need to be set against the context in which MARACs were
44 occurring pre-COVID, the regularity of meetings, the geography of the area each particular
45 force polices, the levels of high-risk domestic abuse in each area, the range and availability of
46 other agencies (one respondent commented, for example, that the introduction of virtual
47 meetings had brought one agency to the table who had never attended a meeting previously),
48 and the capacity of all partner agencies to be equipped with the appropriate digital
49 infrastructure (more of a problem in rural areas than urban ones). However, given the amount
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 of work conducted by MARACs (see the Safe Lives statistics presented above), the embrace
4
5 of the virtual and its related effectiveness led one respondent to observe:
6
7

8 “I just think we're never ever going to go back to the way we were in terms of like this. This
9
10 face-to-face to face side of things, there is no reason ...” (Male respondent, mid-sized mixed
11
12 force, U).
13
14

15
16 Clearly the responses reported above reflect important changes to practice in relation to the
17
18 conduct of MARAC meetings for these policing respondents and point to a desire and
19
20 commitment to maintaining this work in the best and most flexible way possible. It is to those
21
22 implications for practice that we now turn.
23
24

25 26 **MARACs post COVID-19: Practice Implications**

27

28
29 Winsor (2020) makes a sound case for the development of information and communication
30
31 infra-structure in relation to the modernisation of policing. From the findings reported here,
32
33 the move to digital platforms has assisted police forces to travel some way down this route in
34
35 relation to the work of MARACs. Our respondents suggest that this has resulted in benefits for
36
37 them, their partners, and importantly, in their view, for the people whose lives they are engaged
38
39 with. However, it is also important to be mindful that, in this practice arena, a one size fits all
40
41 approach does not often yield the same anticipated benefits for everyone (Parmar and Sampson,
42
43 2007). Nonetheless the findings reported here point to the potential for generalised working
44
45 practices that may be of benefit for all MARAC participants, but victim-survivors especially.
46
47
48
49
50
51
52

53 The practice implications of these findings suggest that where possible and practicable, moves
54
55 towards the use of MS Teams (or an equivalent secure platform) for MARAC business
56
57 continue; that appropriate infrastructural IT support is provided to enable this to happen where
58
59 it does not already exist for all partner agencies; importantly, where partner agencies are
60

1
2
3 inhibited through lack of infrastructural IT systems, that Police, Crime (and Fire)
4 Commissioners are encouraged as a matter of urgency to fund the developments of such
5 systems as appropriate; that depending on local force demands, MARACs meet at least weekly
6 to ensure a timely, informed, and targeted response to high risk victims; that as far as possible,
7 unless particular local situations prevent it, the same MARAC practices should be adopted
8 within each police force, and across all police forces, and finally, that ongoing efforts to ensure
9 the attendance of all relevant agencies are sustained.
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22

23 As far as the police are concerned, the practices they adopted during lockdown kept high risk
24 victim-survivors in the centre of concern. However, some of the deeper questions raised by
25 Bottoms (1990) about the role and sometimes conflicting function of multi-agency partnerships
26 and their membership remain under-explored. In the conclusion, we therefore turn to re-
27 examine some of the major issues, and to outline some of the limitation of our research findings.
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

35 **Conclusion: Limitations of these Findings and Looking to the Future**

36
37

38 The findings reported in this paper highlight the views of police domestic abuse leads and make
39 no claims as to the positive or negative experiences of the move to virtual platforms for the
40 conduct of MARAC work for any of the other agencies involved. However, there are
41 interesting potential avenues for further work both within the field of domestic abuse
42 (especially in exploring the views of victim-survivors and IDVAs) and comparatively (with
43 child and adult protection multi-agency meetings for example) which we would encourage
44 researchers to pursue in the future.
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57

58 Importantly, given some of the comments reported here, more work is needed on how the
59 content and conduct of MARACs is affected when the police take the lead, something which
60

1
2
3 seems to have become more of a routine feature since the move to digital online MARACs. It
4
5 is difficult to assess the extent to which this leadership role enhanced the work of MARACs
6
7 during the pandemic or inhibited the participation of other partners (on the importance of these
8
9 issues in respect of attendance, see also McLaughlin *et al*, 2018). The power and the function
10
11 of the lead agency is an issue referred to by Bottoms (1990) and to a large extent remains
12
13 unspoken. However, an additional issue is the question of whose interests lie at the heart of
14
15 these meetings: the agencies represented in the meeting, or the victim-survivor (in securing
16
17 appropriate planning for their safety)? These are not necessarily mutually exclusive concerns
18
19 but in the move to the virtual, they come to the fore. This issue is also raised by McLaughlin
20
21 *et al* (2018). Some of the responses we have reported situated their changing practices within
22
23 the context of timely and appropriate responses for victim-survivors, but more work is needed
24
25 to establish the extent to which these concerns are understood, operationalised, and realised. In
26
27 the light of such comments McLaughlin *et al* (2018: 303) suggest:

32
33
34 It is time for us to consider whether MARACs still represent the best possible response
35
36 to multi-agency coordination information sharing and planning in relation to domestic
37
38 violence.
39

40
41 This is particularly pertinent as the volume of work for MARACs steadily increases and under
42
43 circumstances in which virtual platforms may become the means of managing the workload of
44
45 the agencies concerned, over and above their public protection role. Importantly the findings
46
47 reported here cannot comment on the *quality* and *effectiveness* of information sharing practices
48
49 central to MARAC action planning. This is another lacuna in which more work needs to be
50
51 done (see also McCulloch *et al* 2020). It is possible that, given the responses reported here,
52
53 there is a need to both rethink pre-COVID processes, and the practices adopted during the
54
55 pandemic, to understand the extent to which online digital MARACs can achieve their aims.
56
57
58
59
60

End notes

[1] Ethical approval gained on 9th June 2020 (University of Liverpool ref. 7858) and a fuller discussion of our methods can be found at <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/law-and-social-justice/research/coronavirus-research/the-shadow-pandemic/working-papers/> Working Paper 3

References

- Blagg, H., Pearson, G. Sampson, A, Smith, D. and Stubbs, P. (1988), Inter-agency co-ordination: rhetoric and reality, Hope, T. and Shaw, M. (Ed.s), *Communities and Crime Reduction*, London, HMSO.
- Bogner, A., Littig, B. and Menz, W. (2018), Generating qualitative data with experts and elites, Flick, U. (Ed), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, London, SAGE Publications, pp. 652-665.
- Bottoms, A. (1990), Crime prevention facing the 1990s, *Policing and Society*, Vol 1 No 1, pp 5-22.
- Cleaver, K., Marasa, P., Oram, C. and McCallum, K. (2019), A review of UK based multi-agency approaches to early intervention in domestic abuse: lessons to be learnt from existing evaluation studies, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Vol 46, pp140-155.
- Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2010) *Islands in the Stream: An Evaluation Four Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Schemes in London*. London: Trust for London/Henry Smith Charity.
- Dawson, M. (Ed.) (2017), *Domestic Homicide and Death Reviews: An International Perspective*, London, Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Fraser, E. (2020), *Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Violence against Women and Girls*,

1
2
3 VAWG Helpdesk Research Report No. 284, London, UK: VAWG Helpdesk
4

5
6 Hague, G. and Malos, E. (1998) Inter Agency Approaches to Domestic Violence and the Role
7
8 of Social Services. *British Journal of Social Work* 28: 369-386
9

10
11 Harwin, N., Malos, E. and Hague, G. (eds) (1999) *The Multi-agency Approach to*
12
13 *Domestic Violence: New opportunities, old challenges*, London: Whiting and
14

15
16
17 Birch.
18

19
20 HMICFRS (2019), The police response to domestic abuse: an update report, London,
21
22 HMICFRS.
23

24
25 Johnson, G.A. and Vindrola-Padros, C. (2017), Rapid qualitative research methods during
26
27 complex health emergencies: a systematic review of the literature, *Social Science and*
28
29 *Medicine*, 189, pp 63-75.
30
31

32
33 McLaughlin, H., Robbins, R., Bellamy, C., Banks, C. and Thackray, D. (2018) Adult social
34
35 work and high-risk domestic violence cases, *Journal of Social Work*, 2018, Vol 18 No 3, pp
36
37 288-306.
38

39
40 McCulloch, J., Maher, JM., and Pfitzner, N. (2020), Family Violence Information Sharing
41
42 Schemes: Research Brief, Monash Family Violence Prevention Centre, Monash University,
43
44 Melbourne.
45
46

47
48 McNall, M. and Foster-Fishman, P. (2007), Methods of rapid evaluation, assessment, and
49
50 appraisal, *American Journal of Evaluation*, Vol 28 No 2, pp 151-168.
51

52
53 Mlambo-Ngcuke, P. (2020, 6 April), Violence against women and girls: the shadow
54
55 pandemic, UN Women, available at
56
57

1
2
3 [https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic)
4 [women-during-pandemic](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic) (accessed 2nd November 2020)
5
6
7

8 Morris, A. (2015), *A practical introduction to in-depth interviewing*, London, SAGE.

9
10
11 O'Connor, H. and Madge, C. (2008), Online Interviewing, Fielding, N.G., Lee, R.M. and
12 Blank, G. (Ed.s), *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods*, London, Sage.
13
14

15
16 Parmar, A. and Sampson, A. (2007,) Evaluating Domestic Violence Initiatives, *British*
17 *Journal of Criminology*, Vol 47, pp 671–691.
18
19

20
21
22 Perkins, N., Penhale, B., Reid, D. and Pinkney, L. (2007) Partnership means Protection
23 Perceptions of the effectiveness of multi -agency working and the regulatory framework
24 within adult protection in England and Wales. *Journal of Adult Protection*, 9 (3): 9-23
25
26

27
28 Pinkney, L., Penhale, B., Manthorpe, J., Perkins, N., Reid, D. and Hussein, S. (2008) Voices
29 from the frontline: social work practitioners' perceptions of multi-agency working in adult
30 protection in England and Wales. *Journal of Adult Protection*, 10 (4): 12-24.
31
32

33
34
35
36 Phillips, R. (2018), 'Not Everyone is Created Equal Under the MARAC Model': A Literature
37 Review of Domestic Violence Risk Management Process for High, Medium and Standard
38 Risk Cases in the UK. Available online at:
39
40

41
42
43 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328420872> (accessed 25th January 2021)
44
45

46
47 Pitt, K., Dheensa, S., Feder, G., Johnson, E.C., Man, M.-S., Roy, J. Williamson, E. and
48 Szilassy, E. (2020), Sharing reports about domestic violence and abuse with general
49 practitioners: a qualitative interview study, *BMC Family Practice*, Vol 21, p 117.
50
51

52
53
54 Ritchie, J. and Spencer, L. (1994), Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In
55 Bryman, A. and Burgess, B. (Eds) *Analysing Qualitative Data*. Abingdon: Routledge.
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Robbins, R. McLaughlin, H., Banks, C., Bellamy, C., and Thackray, D. (2014), Domestic
4 violence and multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs): a scoping review,
5
6
7
8 *Journal of Adult Protection*, Vol 16 No 6, pp 389-398.

9
10
11 Robinson, A L. (2006), Reducing Repeat Victimization Among High-Risk Victims of
12 Domestic Violence: The Benefits of a Coordinated Community Response in Cardiff,
13
14
15 Wales, *Violence Against Women*, Vol 12, No 8, pp 761-788.

16
17
18 Robinson, A. L. and Tregidga, J. (2007), The Perceptions of High-Risk Victims of Domestic
19 Violence to a Coordinated Community Response in Cardiff, Wales, *Violence Against Women*,
20
21
22 Vol 13 No 11, pp 1130-1148.

23
24
25 SafeLives (2016), Early intervention is key to reducing domestic abuse. Available online at:
26
27
28 http://www.safelives.org.uk/policy_blog/early-intervention-key-reducing-domestic-abuse
29
30 (accessed 20 October 2020)

31
32
33 Sampson, A., Stubbs, P., Smith, D. Pearson, G., and Blagg, H (1988), Crime, localities and
34 the multi-agency approach, *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol 28 No 4, pp 478-493.

35
36
37 Shorrock, S., McManus, M.A. and Kirby, S. (2020), Profile of repeat victimisation within
38 multi-agency referrals, *International Review of Victimology*, Vol 26 No 3, pp 332-343.

39
40
41 Steele, N., Blakeborough, N. and Nichols, S. (2011), Supporting high-risk victims of
42 domestic violence: a review of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)
43
44
45 Home Office Research Report 55, London, Home Office.

46
47
48 Vindrola-Padros, C. (2019), What is rapid research and why is it relevant for health
49 care? Nuffield Trust News, available at: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/what-is-rapid-research-and-why-is-it-relevant-for-health-care> (accessed 26 October 2020)
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Vindrola-Padros, C. and Vindrola-Padros, B. (2017), Quick and dirty? A systematic review of
4 the use of rapid ethnographies in healthcare organisation and delivery, *BMJ Quality and Safety*,
5
6 Vol 27, pp 321-330.
7
8

9
10 Warmington, P., Daniels, H., Edwards, A., Brown, S., Leadbetter, J., Martin, D., &
11
12 Middleton, D. (2004), *Interagency collaboration: a review of the literature*, Bath, Teaching
13
14 and Learning Research Council.
15
16

17
18 Westmarland, N. (2011) Co-ordinating Responses to Domestic Violence. In J. Brown and S.
19
20 Walklate (eds) *Handbook on Sexual Violence*. London: Routledge pp. 287-307
21
22

23
24 Williamson, E., Brooks-Hay, O., and Lombard, N. (June 2020), Domestic violence and
25
26 abuse in lockdown needs more accurate media reporting, available at
27
28 <http://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2020/06/15/domestic-violence-and-abuse-in-lockdown-needs->
29
30 [more-accurate-media-reporting](http://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2020/06/15/domestic-violence-and-abuse-in-lockdown-needs-) (accessed 15 June 2020)
31
32

33 Winsor, T. (2020), *The State of Policing 2019*, London, HMICFRS.
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60