

THE GUARDIAN (London)

March 20, 2004

Home Abusers ‘Likely to Commit Other Crimes’

By Rosie Cowan, Crime Correspondent

Domestic abusers are much more likely to commit other crimes but police are failing to make crucial connections, according to Metropolitan police research.

A study of 400 offences and perpetrators, mostly men, discovered that at least 70% of those who had physically assaulted partners had a criminal history. Around one in 12 had sexual convictions, or there was intelligence that they had been involved in other rapes or sexual assaults.

Of those who had sexually abused a partner, one in four were committing offences outside the home and one in eight were considered highly dangerous. Yet only 29% of those who had raped or sexually assaulted a partner were on the national DNA database.

Laura Richards, a senior behavioural consultant with the Met’s racial and violent crime taskforce, said officers often did not swab domestic abusers for DNA because consent rather than identification was at issue, and they were not considering the offender as a suspect for other crimes.

But she said it was vital for detectives to realise that men who beat up or raped wives or girlfriends were also “good candidates” for stranger rapes.

She pointed to a large number of murderers who had a history of physical, sexual or psychological domestic abuse - the Soham killer Ian Huntley; Graham Coutts, who strangled Brighton teacher Jane Longhurst; Barry George who shot Jill Dando; and serial killer, Fred West. There was also the recent case of M25 rapist, Antoni Imiela, who had previous convictions for burglary and assault, who raped at least eight women and girls and was eventually caught through DNA.

“If you’re violent in one context, you’re often violent in another,” said Ms Richards. “There is a definite link between domestic violence and stranger rape. Have the police really learned lessons from all these older cases?”

Such men, she said, were often serial perpetrators and skilled manipulators, who went from one abusive relationship to another, getting progressively more violent but also better at covering their tracks.

“Unfortunately, the more contact perpetrators have with police and the criminal justice system, the better they get at getting away with it,” she said.

Although reporting of rape continues to rise - by 20% in 2002, convictions in England and Wales are at a 30-year low.

There are two domestic murders a week in England and Wales, and two a month in London, accounting for a quarter of all homicides in the capital. The Met receive 104,000 calls a year about domestic violence, about one every six minutes.

In many cases, there has been a long history of abuse before a murder is committed, but domestic assault and rape cases are difficult to bring to court, with victims unwilling to testify or worried their children will be taken away from them. Ms Richards argued that for this reason a “stand-alone” register for domestic offenders would not work.

Even if domestic violence victims did not want to pursue a case, police should use the intelligence gained to investigate other crimes. Even the most dangerous domestic perpetrators were often not monitored.

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