

World Cup strikers

As World Cup fever strikes, so does domestic violence. Tina Orr-Munro looks at how forces are focusing on a crime which increases by as much as a third during football matches

In Greater Manchester, a poster displays a football shirt with the word 'strikeher' on the back. In West Yorkshire a photo of a woman's bruised back is accompanied with the words: 'Don't let the World Cup leave its mark on you.'

The publicity material may vary, but the sentiment is the same – the football World Cup can be a flashpoint for domestic violence. Figures suggest the incidence of domestic abuse rises by nearly 30 percent on England's match days. It's a shocking figure that has been widely quoted across the media, as well as by police forces and other agencies.

So powerful is this statistic that Carmel Napier, Gwent deputy chief constable and ACPO lead for domestic abuse, wrote to all forces in England and Wales asking them to highlight the issue and requesting their plans for dealing with such increases.

Among the range of recommendations, forces were asked to consider putting systems in place to ensure:

- each Borough Command Unit considers identifying their top ten offenders of domestic abuse, and visits them prior to the World Cup to reinforce the message that action will be taken following further reports of domestic abuse.
- domestic abuse specialists and investigators are on duty during England football matches, offering key support to those in need.
- victims of domestic abuse are referred to relevant support networks as soon as possible.

In addition some forces have launched campaigns to remind victims they should report crimes, while warning offenders that their behaviour will not be tolerated.

It's all about

Image © West Yorkshire Police



Don't let the World Cup

In short, the message is clear – when the referee blows the whistle, the police are ready to respond.

While any police initiative that targets domestic abuse is welcomed by women's charities such as Women's Aid, they argue domestic violence is a year-round issue. Deborah McIveen, policy manager for Women's Aid, also says that although the 30 percent figure has been bandied around, there has been no specific research on domestic violence during football tournaments.

to kick off...



“The truth of the matter is that we don’t really know what the real figure is,” explains Deborah. “While there have been studies that show a rise in trafficking and prostitution during sporting events, there are none that have focused on domestic violence.”

She believes the statistic may have been derived from the experience of 19 forces that took part in the Domestic Violence Enforcement Campaign during the 2006 World Cup: “Some police areas were given extra

17

Feature

money to provide a car to heighten awareness and give an enhanced response. In some of those areas, there was a 30 per cent increase in reporting, but that is not a national figure.”

Whatever the true figure is, the fact remains domestic violence is a hugely under-reported crime with just three percent of cases resulting in a conviction, according to the British Crime Survey. And while some forces have made considerable strides, police responses to a report of domestic abuse can still vary widely, not only from force to force, but from borough to borough, says Deborah.

“We’re still hearing of incidents where the victim has dialled 999 and the perpetrator opens the door and tells the police everything is all right, so they go away again.”

But one place Deborah feels is making good progress is Hull. Here a series of high-profile initiatives and campaigns have been launched by the partner agencies, including the police, working together under the banner of the Hull Domestic Abuse Partnership (DAP). Last year the partnership picked up a prestigious Tilley Award for its work.

“Victims need to know that when they dial three 9’s, they are going to get a decent response and there’s going to be further action.”

The initiatives have contributed to a conviction rate of 82 percent for domestic violence, with 1,143 offenders prosecuted last year. During this year’s World Cup, extra officers will be on call to investigate reported cases of abuse as part of the partnership’s World Cup Action Plan. This follows the success of a similar initiative, Operation Nightwing, run by Humberside Police over Christmas and the New Year. The plan ensures all the agencies are alerted to the possibility of an increase in reports and are ready to provide support.

On England match days, two plain-clothed officers are designated to attend incidents following the initial response teams, to offer support and complete investigations into the allegations. The following day specialist detectives will work on the cases where the offenders have been arrested.

Det Sgt Aidan Clarke of the force’s public protection unit says: “We work extremely hard in this area with our partner agencies to ensure we offer a joined up approach to supporting victims and tackling offending behaviour.

“It is also important that those suffering abuse have the confidence to engage with services to ensure they can access all the possible support available.” This is certainly something Women’s Aid would agree with. “The victims need to know that when they dial three 9’s, they are going to get a decent response and there’s going to be further action,” adds Deborah.