Key Research Findings:

1. From FOI responses, we identified that every police force in England, Wales and Northern Ireland used restorative justice/community resolutions to respond to domestic abuse in 2014, in both family and intimate partner contexts.
2. On paper and in practice, many forces treat restorative justice synonymously with community resolutions (which are a police response aimed at addressing low-level crime within the community, without resulting in prosecution).
3. As a minimum, we found the police used restorative justice/community resolutions to respond to 5,625 cases flagged as domestic violence during 2014.
4. Restorative justice/community resolutions were used mostly by officers ‘on the street,’ immediately and informally, as an alternative to prosecution. This was not only in the context of ‘low-level offences’ but also for serious crimes.
5. The police response included actions such as ‘words of advice given’ and ‘note signed to effect that offender will behave’.
6. We identified few examples of properly planned, risk-assessed and supported restorative justice conferences or similar RJ processes (‘level 2’ restorative justice). In other research with one police force, we found 11 restorative justice conferences in domestic abuse cases over a nine-month period.

Key themes and lessons:

7. Restorative justice/community resolutions are already being used to deal with reported cases of domestic abuse, but are being carried out ‘under the radar’.
8. Until we acknowledge that these practices are on-going and respond accordingly, we cannot have a properly informed discussion about the appropriateness or otherwise of using restorative justice in cases of domestic abuse.
9. Given that official guidance from the National Police Chief’s Council (formerly ACPO) and the College of Policing caution against the use of restorative justice/community resolutions for domestic abuse, it is concerning that these practices are continuing.
10. In the context of domestic abuse, we found the informality of some of the practices identified of considerable concern. We question whether they reflect the victim-centred ethos of restorative justice, or hold the offender to account.
11. We recommend that community resolutions and street-level restorative justice (‘level 1’) are not used in cases of domestic abuse.
12. Debate and research should continue into the potential of restorative justice to meet the diverse justice interests and needs of victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

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