


Effective co-ordination between local agencies cuts repeat domestic violence by 60%

A large graphic with a pink background and a blue footer. It features two speech bubble icons in the top left and two teardrop icons in the bottom right. The main text is in white, bold, italicized font. The footer is a solid blue bar with white quotation marks and text.

I received so much support because of the MARAC. Without it, I'd still be in a violent relationship now.

- Debbie, 46 yrs old

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Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)

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In brief

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) are meetings which bring together public and private organisations concerned with domestic abuse to discuss high-risk cases and formulate co-ordinated action plans. There are some 260 MARACs across England and Wales, partially funded by the government as part of its *Call to End against Women and Girls strategy*. They process around 56,500 cases each year at a cost to the public purse of some £1.4 million (€1.7m).

The MARACs have been shown to reduce repeated abuse by 60%, and are extremely cost-effective, saving six euros of public spending for every euro they cost. They show that sharing information among agencies and following a simple action-planning system can speed things up and lead to more effective protection. An effective multi-agency response to high-risk domestic abuse is particularly effective in reducing repeat victimisation and potentially lethal violence.

They take a partnership approach, and bring statutory and voluntary agencies together around the same table, to discuss the cases of individual high-risk victims, and formulate an action plan for each of them.

A set of 10 good practice principles has been laid down. Key factors of their effectiveness are a strong chair, an efficient secretary, and committed and consistent attendance by the organisations involved.

Focus on high-risk victims

In the UK, 100 women die each year as a result of domestic violence. Gender-based abuse has traditionally been framed as a criminal justice issue and focused predominantly on domestic abuse. Since the 1990s the Home Office has promoted policies to enhance the protection of domestic abuse victims through pro-arrest policies, better evidence gathering, perpetrator programmes and multi-agency work. At the beginning of 2000 the Crown Prosecution Service introduced national policies to improve prosecution, including the introduction of specialist domestic violence courts (SDVCs) to improve sentencing. Within this general framework, action has also been taken to address the problem of high-risk victims of domestic abuse, i.e. victims in danger of being killed by their partner or ex-partner. The first initiatives emerged from civil society organisations, and were later embraced by the Home Office. The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) model was first developed in Cardiff in 2003, in response to the lack of systematic risk assessment among agencies responding to domestic abuse, and the need for a forum for local agencies to share information about victims experiencing extremely serious levels of abuse. MARACs show a partnership approach to tackling high-risk domestic abuse.

Bringing agencies together

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) are meetings where statutory and voluntary agency representatives share information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse in order to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase victim safety. They operate as one element of a wider infrastructure which includes Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVCs) and Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs). The agencies that attend MARACs will vary but are likely to include the police, probation service, IDVAs, children's, health and housing services as well as a range of other adult and child-focused services. Any agency may refer a case to a MARAC, based on its assessment of risk.

Referrals to a MARAC are made in cases a) that reach a threshold level of risk, determined through the use of a standard risk assessment tool; b) where there is serious concern about the victim's situation based on the professional judgement of the referrer; c) where there is evidence of escalation of abuse (i.e. a specified number of police call-outs in a certain time period); or d) there are repeat incidents within 12 months of the first referral. A typical MARAC meeting will last half a day and discuss 15 to 20 cases using a very brief and focused information-sharing process. This is followed by a simple multi-agency action plan being put in place to support the victim and to make links with other public protection procedures, in particular safeguarding children, vulnerable adults, and managing perpetrators. By working together, agencies are able to get a better picture of the risks victims face, including the frequency and severity of abuse. This enables them to develop an action plan to increase the safety of each victim and their children. It also gives victims the confidence that a number of different agencies are aware of the abuse and will offer support and protection.

Sharing information, independent advisers and action planning

The three core components of the MARAC model are enhanced information sharing, the Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) who represent and engage the victim in the process, and effective action planning. Apart from tackling high-risk domestic abuse cases, MARACs improve the understanding and identification of domestic abuse across agencies, improve information sharing and referral mechanisms between agencies, facilitate access to the services available to victims, and improve consistency and accountability across agencies, through shared policies and procedures.

There are approximately 260 MARACs currently in operation across England and Wales which, in the 12 months to June 2012, discussed around 56,500 cases (including repeat cases). On average 45% of cases result in a total cessation of abuse and an additional 20% of cases result in a reduction in the number of repeat police incidents. Multi-agency approaches may contribute to improving outcomes for victims, potentially saving lives.

Since 2008, the Home Office has provided MARACs with funding for administrator/co-ordinator posts, training and quality assurance (which has now been superseded by self-assessment for MARACs). In the financial year 2011/12, it provided funding of £1.4 million (£1.7m).

Ten principles

Ten principles have been identified for an effective MARAC:[1]

- 1 Identification** – All agencies and services identify high-risk victims through completing a risk assessment and/or referral to a specialist agency within safe timeframes once domestic abuse is disclosed.
- 2 Referral to the MARAC** – All high-risk victims who meet MARAC referral criteria are referred to the MARAC by a range of agencies within safe timeframes.
- 3 Multi-agency engagement** – All relevant agencies are appropriately and consistently represented at the MARAC.
- 4 Independent representation and support for victims** – All high-risk victims are consistently supported and represented by an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) or other independent representative who prioritises safety throughout the MARAC process.
- 5 Research and information sharing** – MARAC representatives research cases and share relevant and proportionate information that identifies risk and informs safety planning. Procedures are followed to ensure that safety and confidentiality are maintained at all times.
- 6 Action planning** – Action plans are developed which address the risks identified.
- 7 Number of cases and capacity** – The MARAC has the number of referrals and capacity to ensure that all high-risk victims who meet the MARAC threshold can receive support from their local MARAC.
- 8 Equality** – The MARAC is committed to delivering equality of outcome to all.
- 9 Operational support** – Consistent coordination and administration support the effective

functioning of the MARAC.

- 10 | **Governance** – Effective governance oversees the performance, sustainability and accountability of the MARAC.[2] Robinson & Tregidga, 2005[3])
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Strong leadership is needed

Successful MARACs rely on two key roles being carried out efficiently. The first is strong leadership by the chair. The chair's role is to ensure all agencies attend with the right information and that meetings are used for action planning and not just 'talking shop'. Having a chair who can keep discussions focused and within a time schedule is important in encouraging busy people to attend consistently. The second is good co-ordination. The co-ordinator's role is to ensure that the agenda goes out before the meeting in sufficient time so that agencies can prepare for meetings, to follow up on actions agreed at the meeting, and to ensure that bureaucracy is minimised (i.e. the right amount of information is shared) and that confidentiality is maintained.

They also depend on strong partnership links (including a commitment from agencies to tackle domestic violence in general) and the availability of training and induction procedures.

However MARACs do face some obstacles to improving their performance. There are no agreed protocols and systems for identifying and referring high-risk cases to a MARAC in a timely way, and there are difficulties in identifying the appropriate representation from statutory agencies, specialist domestic violence services and voluntary and community organisations. Overall, an inadequate number of cases is identified, considering the local populations covered.

A 60% reduction in repeated abuse

Findings from evaluation studies show that MARACs significantly reduce the risk of repeat victimisation and increase the chance of victims reporting and making a complaint about abuse to the police. A study looked at rates of revictimisation for cases heard at the first Cardiff MARAC, and found that approximately six in ten victims reported a complete cessation of abuse in the six months following a MARAC, and approximately four in ten victims remained free from abuse after 12 months. In addition, the agencies involved in the MARAC perceived the process as helping to improve awareness and to strengthen the links between key agencies (Robinson, 2004;[1] Robinson & Tregidga, 2005[2]).

CAADA's analysis^[4] suggests that MARACs can achieve up to a 60% reduction in abuse, reducing to 43% if adjusted to account for serial perpetrators and cases where the abuse would have stopped regardless of the MARAC intervention (CAADA, 2010). They also save six euros of public money for every euro they cost.

CAADA has recently launched a self-assessment process which enables MARACs to monitor and manage their performance for continuous improvement. It is felt that there is scope to increase the number of non-police referrals and the number of agencies represented, in particular organisations representing minority communities such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) organisations.

The Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy, published in November 2010, announced that a review of MARACs would be undertaken in order to improve understanding of how MARACs are working and potential areas of development, including considering the case for making MARACs statutory.

[1] http://www.caada.org.uk/marac/The%2010%20principles_Oct%202011%20v2_with...

[2] Robinson, A. (2004) Domestic Violence MARACs (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) for Very High-Risk Victims in Cardiff, Wales: A Process and Outcome Evaluation. Cardiff: Cardiff University. <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/resources/robinson-marac.pdf>

[3] Robinson, A & Tregidga, J. (2005) Domestic Violence MARACs (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) for Very High-Risk Victims in Cardiff, Wales: Views from the Victims. Cardiff: Cardiff University. <http://slb.cf.ac.uk/socsi/resources/robinson-tregidga.pdf>

[4] http://www.caada.org.uk/policy/Saving_lives_saving_money_FINAL_VERSION.pdf.

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Further information

Information about MARACs



Saving lives, saving money: MARACs and high risk domestic abuse



UK Home Office Research Report 55 – Supporting high-risk victims of domestic violence: a review of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)



Call to end violence against women and girls



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Image from CAADA leaflet at:

http://www.caada.org.uk/policy/Saving_lives_saving_money_FINAL_VERSION.pdf

Downloads



Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences MARAC - Support services - UK

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