



Griffith Criminology Institute

Report

Evaluation of the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Task Force

*Christine E W Bond
Harley Williamson*

Evaluation of the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Task Force: Progress at two years

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Project team:

Association Professor Christine Bond

Harley Williamson (research assistant)

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DFV	Domestic and Family Violence
DV	Domestic Violence
DVO	Domestic Violence Order
Taskforce	Gold Coast Domestic Violence Task Force
QPS	Queensland Police Service

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* * * * *

Executive Summary

On 15 January 2016, the Domestic Violence Taskforce (Taskforce) was established in the Gold Coast District, South Eastern Region (Queensland Police Service [QPS]). The creation of the Taskforce occurred in the context of a number of high profile domestic violence homicides on the Gold Coast, as well as the recommendations of the *Not Now, Not Ever* report into domestic and family violence (DFV). The Taskforce aims to provide an integrated policing response to DFV situated within a pro-investigative framework. It is particularly characterised by:

- specialist and dedicated officers (including detectives and an intelligence officer) to provide support to frontline officers, assist victims, and to identify and target the most at-risk perpetrators
- collaborative relationships with external stakeholders to develop a triage response to best practice service delivery
- routine checking of frontline responses to DFV incidents.

This report provides an evaluation of the progress of the Taskforce after two years of operation. The evaluation relied on: a survey of QPS police officers working in the South Eastern region; administrative data collected by the QPS; and qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with internal and external stakeholders. Additional consultations were undertaken with senior police personnel involved in the Taskforce.

What did the Taskforce achieve?

Overall, the Taskforce model has made strong positive progress in responding to DFV in the Gold Coast, but not perhaps in ways initially envisaged. In particular, the evaluation found:

1. There were **substantial increases in recorded domestic violence-related offences in the Gold Coast district**, over and above increases in the comparison location. In the Gold Coast, recorded domestic violence-related offending increased by 188% between 2014/2015 and 2016/2017 (after the introduction of the Taskforce). In contrast, the comparison location (Logan) had a much smaller increase (58%). Perhaps most striking are the trends in recorded domestic violence-related *physical* assaults. For all domestic violence-related assaults, there was an 862% increase in the Gold Coast between 2014/2015 (two years prior) and 2016/2017 (two years after), compared to 72% increase in Logan. These increases strongly support the conclusion that there

have been *changes in police practice* to respond to DFV with a *pro-investigative* approach (and in line with QPS policy).

2. There was **a clear consensus that collaboration and information-sharing between the police and external stakeholders had improved**. Enhanced interagency collaboration, information-sharing and communication were some of the most commonly impacts of the Taskforce discussed by stakeholders: *“We’ve got more than one avenue that we’re engaging with the police, which is all part of the Taskforce and we wouldn’t have had both those avenues before...”* (Interviewee).
3. There was evidence that the Taskforce had **positively assisted frontline officers** through the provision of advice, assisting with specialized knowledge, as well as equipping officers with a “better perspective on dealing with controlling type behavior” (survey participant). The Taskforce was seen, by both internal and external stakeholders, as raising the priority of DFV within policing in the district.
4. There were **early indications that victims may feel more empowered to contact police**. Based on interviews with internal and external stakeholders, as well as broader consultations, many felt that the police practices that had occurred in the Gold Coast were slowly having an impact on DFV victims’ feeling more comfortable in contacting, or at least talking, with police.
5. From external stakeholders’ perspective, there was **a perception that DFV was being treated more seriously** by the police: *“...they’ve really made efforts to show the community that they do take [DFV] seriously and that they will act upon the concerns of the aggrieved [victims]”* (Interviewee). In particular, the review of frontline responses to DFV incidents was seen as an important accountability mechanism for ensuring DFV was being responded to appropriately: *“...the Taskforce is pulling them up and getting them to go back and lay the charges appropriately. Historically that wouldn’t have happened.”* (Interviewee).

What next?

Although both internal and external assessments of the Taskforce’s impact have been largely appreciative and positive, there were some concerns expressed about:

- the staffing and resourcing of the Taskforce, especially with the turnover of detectives within the Taskforce
- the need to develop ways to engage stakeholders who do not see the value of the multi-agency collaboration

- the need for more tailored police training and support, particularly with its ability to support ongoing cultural change among officers
- the possible negative impact on frontline officers and their morale, through officer perceptions of increased workload and over-monitoring
- a broader need to continue to develop evidence-based practice, learning from what works in other jurisdictions.

In sum, after considering the results of the evaluation, we have identified five recommendations for consideration:

Recommendation 1.

That the Taskforce model continue to be a key response to DFV, with appropriate staffing and resourcing.

Recommendation 2.

That a more structured performance monitoring framework be developed, and a longer-term evaluation occur. Any impacts on domestic violence offending, including high risk perpetrators, require a longer timeframe for their assessment. Such an evaluation should also consider collecting information from victims and offenders about the impact of the Taskforce's strategies.

Recommendation 3.

That there remains a need for an ongoing review of the role of external stakeholders (including who to include and how to maintain engagement).

Recommendation 4.

That the Region and District develop and implement appropriate additional training and mentoring (as described in this report) for general duties officers.

Recommendation 5.

That, moving forward, the Region continues to proactively develop an evidence-based practice around responding to DFV, including ongoing assessment of empirical research (both existing and new) on policing strategies for responding to DFV.

1. Introduction

“You don’t know the impact of domestic violence until you actually work in an area like this. You don’t know the extent of the violence. It doesn’t have to be physical... Certainly, working in the domestic violence field has opened my eyes up even more.”

(Interviewee)

Currently, Australian law enforcement and government agencies are devoting significant resources to prevent and effectively respond to domestic and family violence (DFV). The need for enhanced policing responses has been recognised by a number of recent inquiries. For example, the national report of the Coalitional of Australian Government Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children (COAG 2015), the 2015 Luke Batty inquest findings (Coroners Court of Victoria 2015), and the 2016 state-led Royal Commission into Family Violence (Royal Commission into Family Violence 2016). In Queensland, the *Not Now, Not Ever* report (2015) made a range of recommendations about policing responses to DFV. These included:

- “increase criminal prosecutions of perpetrators through enhanced investigative and evidence gathering” (Recommendation 131; Queensland Special Taskforce, 2015, p. 41)
- “adopt a pro-active [sic] investigation and protection policy which requires consideration of safety of the victim as paramount when deciding the course of action to be taken against the perpetrator and prioritises arrest where risk assessment indicates this action is appropriate” (Recommendation 134; Queensland Special Taskforce, 2015, p. 42)
- “invest...in cultural change and strong leadership [to] remove any last vestiges of a culture that does not value women nor understand the costs to us all of allowing domestic and family violence to continue” (Queensland Special Taskforce, 2015, p. 14).

Within the Queensland Police Service (QPS), the regions have responded in different ways to the challenges of policing DFV. The Gold Coast Domestic Violence Taskforce (Taskforce) was established in January 2016 to more effectively to respond to, and reduce the prevalence of, domestic and family violence. In particular, the Taskforce focuses on a pro-investigative approach to DFV incidents, including emphasising the importance of a specialist detective role in identifying and assessing risk. In

mid-2017, the South Eastern region contracted with a project team from Griffith University to conduct an evaluation of the Taskforce to assess its progress.

1.1 Challenge of Policing Domestic and Family Violence

Domestic and family violence is a key component of policing work. While difficult to accurately quantify how much policing time is consumed by attending DFV incidents, one estimate suggests that DFV accounts for approximately 40% of police hours (Malone & Phillips, 2014). A study by the British Home Office estimated that police may attend repeat calls to service for approximately 90% of DFV incidents (Bridgeman & Hobbs, 1997). Despite the substantial impact of DFV on police workloads, and the role of the police as a first responder of DFV, recent reviews (see for example Queensland Special Taskforce, 2015; Royal Commission into Family Violence, 2016) highlight issues in policing approaches to DFV.

Inconsistencies in police responses to DFV are multifaceted. Most problematic is the tendency for police to treat DFV as a homogenous problem (Sherman & Strang, 1996). This approach has meant that police responses are often homogeneous and do not address the dynamic and unique risks and needs related to each case. Other common issues identified in these reviews include the lack of involving victims in DFV processes, such as around police-initiated Domestic Violence Order (DVO) applications, and inconsistencies in delivering information to victims around police decisions as well as the conditions of DVOs.

A large part of the difficulty is that there is no well-established, strong evidence base to assist police in developing strategies for responding to DFV, particularly in ways that are responsive to risk and context. Increasingly, policing strategies to address DFV have become more diverse; however, research on the impact of these strategies in different policing contexts is vital to build an understanding of what works to more effectively respond to DFV.

1.2 Types of Domestic and Family Violence Policing Approaches

1.2.1 Australian jurisdictions

Until recently, policing DFV in Australia has particularly focused on using the civil DVO application process (CMC, 2005). Due to the legislation allowing police officers to be applicants for a DVO, police

services relied on this civil option as their primary response to DFV. However, over the last decade or so, Australian policing approaches to DFV have been increasingly shaped by an integrated response framework, with a focus on high risk. This framework is centred on the role of inter-agency partnerships who seek to provide a holistic response to violence (Banks, Landsverk, & Wang, 2008; Stanley & Humphreys, 2006; 2014). Well-known examples of integrated response approaches within Australia include the Family Violence Intervention Program (in the ACT) and the Safe at Home program (in Tasmania). These programs were shaped by a pro-criminal justice strategy that combined the work of key agencies of the criminal justice system (police, prosecutions, courts, corrections), as well as relevant support agencies. More recent examples include the Safety Action Meetings in NSW, and the High Risk Teams currently being trialed in a number of Queensland sites. However, although police are integral parts of these integrated response frameworks, these models are not necessarily police-led, or focused on the day-to-day frontline police response to DFV.

1.2.2 International common law jurisdictions

Internationally, in other common law jurisdictions, policing DFV has borrowed from strategies more typically used in traditional policing approaches. (Critically, the police role in civil DVO applications did not exist in these jurisdictions.) In the United Kingdom, although integrated multi-agency partnerships are now developing, problem-orientated policing and repeat victimization strategies have been commonly identified. In contrast, in the United States, strategies have been largely shaped by the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment (Sherman & Berk, 1984), which reported arresting perpetrators as more effective in reducing future DV incidents than counselling the victim and perpetrator, or removing the alleged perpetrator from the household for several hours.¹ As a result, arrest (either mandatory or preferential) has become the most typical policing strategy in responding to domestic violence. More recently, especially in larger cities, specialist investigative DV units have been introduced, and there has been some emergence of approaches based on repeat victimization.

1.3 This Evaluation

The overall long-term goal of the Taskforce is to reduce DFV-related incidents, particularly serious violence DFV, on the Gold Coast. Despite increasing community awareness, DFV remains under-reported to police. For instance, in the 2016 national Personal Safety Survey, 17% of women, who

¹ More recent reviews suggest that this finding of a deterrent effect for arrest on DV reoffending is not clear-cut. Garner and Maxwell (2000) in their re-analysis found a modest effect of arrest on reoffending, but other factors (e.g. prior criminal history) were more important. Others have found that the impact of an arrest on future DV offending differs by perpetrator characteristics (see Maxwell, Garner and Fagan, 2002 for a summary of the different findings).

reported experiencing violence from a *current* partner, contacted police (ABS 2017); while a NSW study of victims accessing domestic violence services found that about half reported that they had contacted police about their most recent episode of violence (Birdsey & Snowball, 2013). As a result, we would expect that the early stages of any policing intervention around DFV will *increase* its visibility within the justice system (an important outcome in itself). Thus, this evaluation focuses on assessing the effect has the Taskforce has had during its two years of operation on:

- DFV-related (including serious violence) criminal incidents in the Gold Coast district
- partnerships between police and stakeholders in the Gold Coast district
- frontline policing of DFV incidents in the Gold Coast district.

To do this, the evaluation relies on data from a range of sources, both quantitative and qualitative. These include: an online officer survey, administrative data and interviews.

1.3.1 Online officer survey data

An online survey of QPS police officers within the South Eastern region was developed by the project team to provide a context of policing DFV in this region from the perspective of operational officers. The survey was administered online by the region in late November 2017. All operational officers in the region were emailed a weblink to the survey and invited to participate in the survey. The link was active for two months. A total of 127 officers responded. Although this is a very low response rate (just under 9%),² the survey does provide some understanding of the perceptions of operational police around responding to DFV incidents.

The characteristics of the participants are summarised in Table 1.1. About three-quarters (73.5%) of the sample were male (which is consistent with the expected gender profile of operational officers); the mean age of participants was 41.5 years, with the mean age of female participants higher (44.3 years) than that for the male participants (41.9 years). About six per cent of the sample did not identify their gender, or did not identify as male/female. Around three per cent of the sample identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The majority (79.6%) of participants had completed some form of post-secondary qualification, either trade/technical or university. In terms of their policing careers, well over half of the participants reported being at the rank of Constable (28.6%) or Senior

² As at June 2017, the region had 1,433 sworn officers at all ranks (QPS, 2017).

Constable (32.7%), with 42.9% of participants being at their current rank for 1 to 5 years. About 70% of participants reported that their primary role over the last 5 years has been in general duties.

Table 1.1. Summary of Survey Participant Characteristics (n=127)

Characteristics	Mean (SD)	%
Age (in years)	42.60 (9.99)	
Gender		
Male		73.5
Female		20.4
Other		6.1
Indigenous status		
Aboriginal		1.0
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander		2.0
Neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander		96.9
Educational attainment		
Completed high school or less		20.4
Trade/Technical certificate or diploma		41.8
University/College Degree		23.5
Post-Graduate Qualification		14.3
Rank		
Constable		28.6
Senior Constable		32.7
Sergeant/Senior Sergeant		28.5
Inspector and above		5.1
Unknown/refused		5.1
Tenure at current rank		
Less than 1 year		0.0
1 to 5 years		42.9
6 to 10 years		37.8
11 to 15 years		15.3
Greater than 15 years		4.1
Primary role over last 5 years		
General duties		70.4
Investigative		14.3
Other specialist		3.1
Other		12.2

Note:

For categorical variables, the percentage is reported; for continuous variables, the mean and standard deviation (SD) is reported.

1.3.2 Administrative data

Administrative data from the QPS was examined to identify trends in reported DFV crime. To identify the potential impact of the Taskforce, a pre/post intervention/comparison group design was used. Trends in reported DFV crime incidents for the Gold Coast district are examined over a four-year period (2 years before, and 2 years after, the establishment of the Taskforce). These trends were then compared to the trends in the Logan district for the same time period. Logan was selected as the comparison site, as it is within the same policing region, and thus has the same executive managerial context. Both districts are also largely urban, with growing populations.

1.3.3 Interview data

Semi-structured interviews were conducted (either face-to-face or by phone) with a range of stakeholders working with DFV victims and perpetrators, officers-in-charge of stations in the Gold Coast district, as well as officers working in the Taskforce. External stakeholders included: the Department of Child Safety, Youth, and Women (as it is now currently known); Probation and Parole (Queensland Corrective Services); the Gold Coast Housing Service (Department of Housing and Public Works); Centacare; the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre; Queensland Health; and the Magistrates Court Service (Department of Justice and the Attorney-General). Conducted over a 2 to 3 month period in late 2017, interviews were voluntary and confidential, and held at a location convenient to the interviewees. Interviews were recorded (with permission), transcribed and de-identified. The recordings were then destroyed. These interviews focused on the role of the Taskforce and its engagement with external stakeholders. In total, 20 interviews were conducted, drawing from officers who have worked or are working in the Taskforce (n=5), officers-in-charge of divisions within the Gold Coast district (n=3) and external stakeholders (n=12). Additional consultations were also held with senior officers.

1.4 The Taskforce Model

Within this context, the Taskforce can be characterised as an integrated police-led approach, within a pro-investigative framework. Since its establishment in early 2016, the Taskforce has evolved: it has shifted strategies, and broadened its purposes, over the past two years of operation. However, at the centre of the Taskforce sit four strategies³:

³ As this report has been prepared for the South Eastern region, a more detailed description of the Taskforce is not included here. For more details, see internal documentation.

- **Monitoring** compliance with organizational policy to investigate DFV incidents as criminal matters.⁴ Since the commencement of the Taskforce, a key strategy has been to review all DFV matters in the district. If there has been an insufficient investigation of the incident for possible criminal charges, files are forwarded back for reconsideration. Internal documentation shows that this strategy has been successfully implemented with very high levels of compliance (i.e. only small proportions of files are now being returned for reconsideration for possible criminal charges).
- **Embedding** the role of specialist detectives (including an intelligence officer) in identifying, monitoring and responding to the highest at-risk DFV offenders. A key task of the Taskforce's Serious Violence Team, staffed by specialist detectives, is to assess and respond to the most at-risk DFV perpetrators. Risk is assessed both through the use of the standardized risk assessment tool adopted by the QPS, as well as professional assessment by experienced detectives reading the case as a whole. The risk assessment process is also supported by a dedicated intelligence officer.
- **Enhancing** support for victims in referral to key services. Amongst other activities, two dedicated uniformed officers provide support to victims by connecting them with key services, visiting the safe room at the Southport specialist court, and liaising with DFV community events.
- **Engaging** with external stakeholders to ensure the broader context of high risk cases is recognized. Through regular meetings with relevant stakeholders, a triage response for best service delivery has developed. These meetings allow for information to be shared about cases of concern so that all stakeholders can respond more appropriately. This strategy is similar to the high risk team approach being trialed in Queensland, as well as the Safety Action Meetings used in NSW. However, it is important to note that the collaborative efforts and information sharing is one strategy of a broader approach to policing DFV in the Gold Coast district.

While these types of strategies are increasingly being identified as good practice (Russell & Light, 2006; Stanley & Humphreys, 2006; 2014), it is also increasingly important to assess their impact across different policing jurisdictions.

⁴ We recognise that a pro-investigative approach to DFV calls and incidents was a key recommendation of an earlier Crime and Misconduct Commission report on the policing of DFV (CMC, 2005).

1.5 Report Overview

This section has provided the context for the evaluation and described the data used in the evaluation.

Section 2 describes the key findings of the online officer survey, exploring officers' perceptions of the frontline policing of DFV in South Eastern region. Its purpose is to provide an understanding of the challenges of policing DFV.

Section 3 examines the key trends in DFV-related crime, comparing Gold Coast and Logan districts.

Section 4 explores the findings from the qualitative interviews with key stakeholders and those working within the Taskforce, as well as summarising the qualitative responses about the Taskforce reported in the online officer survey.

Section 5 provides a discussion of the key findings of this evaluation, as well as suggested future directions for the Taskforce model and the policing of DFV.

2. Officer Perceptions of Policing DFV in the South Eastern Region

The purpose of this section is to present an overview of the context of policing DFV in the South Eastern region from the perspective of officers. Using data from the online officer survey, this section describes how officers currently serving in this region understand and respond to DFV. Importantly, it provides the background for better understanding the effect of the Taskforce and its challenges.⁵

2.1 Officers' Perceptions of Domestic and Family Violence and its Frontline Challenges

2.1.1 Officers' attitudes to responding to domestic violence

Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed with a series of general statements about responding to DFV incidents (see Table 2.1). Higher values indicate stronger agreement.

Overall, the data suggests that participants felt capable of responding to DFV incidents, but that there is ambivalence around preparedness to handle these incidents. There was confidence in their skills in dealing with DFV victims, with strong agreement that they *"feel comfortable talking with women/men who have been a victim of domestic violence"* (means above 4.0 on a 1-5 scale). However, on average, participants were more ambivalent about whether it was *"hard to decide whether there is probable cause for arrest in DV cases"* (mean 2.8); *"often hard to know who to arrest in DV incidents"* (mean 2.8), or that more training was required *"to assess DV scenes"* (mean 2.7). Although there was some agreement that *"too many DV calls are for verbal family arguments"*, officers were *"more likely to be injured during a DV call than any other type of call"*, or that *"DV takes too much of officers' time and effort"*, there was also variation in officers' assessment of these issues. Similarly, although participants were more likely to agree (mean 3.7) that they needed *"more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls"*, there remained disagreement.

⁵ Due to the small sample size and need to maintain anonymity, comparisons between districts and divisions were not calculated.

With arrest being a key strategy that has dominated the international research on police responses to domestic violence, attitudes about the role of arrest in responding to DFV were also explored. As shown in Table 2.1, participants had clear ambivalence about the role of arrest. Participants disagreed that mandatory arrest was a good strategy for domestic violence incidents (mean 2.42). There was also clear ambivalence about the impact of arrest on future domestic violence incidents. The mean agreement to the statement “*arresting someone at a DV call seldom helps reduce future DV incidents*” was 3.04; similarly the mean level of agreement to “*DV offenders must be arrested even when the victims do not feel it is necessary*” was 3.12.

Table 2.1. Officers’ Attitudes to Responding Domestic Violence (n=127)

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Arrest as a response to DFV:		
It is often <u>hard</u> to decide whether there is probable cause for arrest in DV cases	2.76	0.85
It is often <u>hard</u> to know who to arrest in DV incidents	2.82	0.94
A mandatory arrest policy is the best approach to DV calls	2.42	1.20
Arresting someone at a DV call seldom helps reduce future DV incidents	3.04	1.19
DV offenders must be arrested even when the victims do not feel it is necessary	3.12	1.05
Ability to respond to DFV incidents:		
More training would help me assess DV scenes	2.71	1.03
Identifying the primary aggressor at a DV call is difficult	2.96	0.96
I need more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls	3.69	1.09
I am more likely to be injured during a DV call than any other type of call	3.22	0.97
DV calls take too much of officers’ time and effort	3.70	1.21
Too many DV calls are for verbal family arguments	3.72	1.02
I feel comfortable talking with women who have been a victim of domestic violence	4.05	0.54
I feel comfortable talking with men who have been a victim of domestic violence	4.07	0.5

Source: Online officer survey.

Note:

Response categories ranged from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating stronger agreement with the statement.

Differences by age, gender, rank and job role were explored. Overall, there were few statistically significant differences.⁶ Most of the attitudinal differences were found between those in general duties roles and those in all other functions. Those participants who had spent most of the past 5 years in general duties roles were more likely to agree (although means remained below 4.0) that with statements about the negative impact of DFV incidents on police workload (e.g. “*DV calls take too much officers’ time and effort*”; “*too many DV calls are for verbal family arguments*”) and to agree that they need “*more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls*”. Similarly, those at the rank

⁶ Comparisons were conducted using ANOVA. As appropriate, Bonferroni post-hoc tests, Welch post-hoc tests and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used for the variables that were not normally distributed. Conventional thresholds were used.

of Constable/Senior Constable (compared to other ranks) agreed more strongly with “*too many DV calls are for verbal family arguments*”. Participants who were Constables or Senior Constables also agreed more strongly that they needed “*more freedom in deciding how to handle situations at DV calls*” than participants at other ranks. This difference likely reflects the different priorities of officers in more managerial roles, as well as the frustrations of officers involved in front line responses.

To further explore the likely types of responses to DFV calls, participants were also asked the extent to which they would intervene to different types of domestic violence incidents. Response options were: low (informal); medium (complete a protection order application); or high (arrest and complete a protection order application). Higher values (on a 1-3 scale) indicate higher levels of formal intervention. The results suggest that when indicators of immediate physical violence are present, officers are on average more likely report intervening through both arrest and a protection order application (see Table 2.2). It is important to note that these results do not suggest that further investigation and later arrest will not occur in the types of incidents where there is no indication of physical violence. Regardless of the type of DFV incident, the mean type of intervention was to *at least* complete a protection order (i.e. all means were 2 or higher).

Table 2.2. Officers’ Reported Response to Types of DFV Incidents (n=127)

Type of incident	Mean	Standard Deviation
No indication of immediate physical violence:		
A couple is having a quarrel; he insults her and threatens to beat her up	2.00	0.57
A woman is often verbally abused and humiliated by her partner	2.01	0.58
A maltreated woman who has reported the aggression and has separated from her partner is still threatened by him	2.36	0.56
Some indication of immediate physical violence:		
While having a quarrel, the woman slaps her partner and he slaps her back	2.36	0.61
A couple is always having quarrels, insulting each other, and threatening the other one continuously. They often end up hitting each other	2.56	0.52
A woman is continuously threatened and verbally abused by her partner, who sometimes pushes or even beats her up	2.77	0.42
While having a quarrel, he hits his partner and afterwards he asks her for forgiveness	2.79	0.44
A woman is frequently beaten up by her partner causing sometimes small injuries and bruises, but still she does not want to report the maltreatment	2.86	0.38

Source: Online officer survey.

Note:

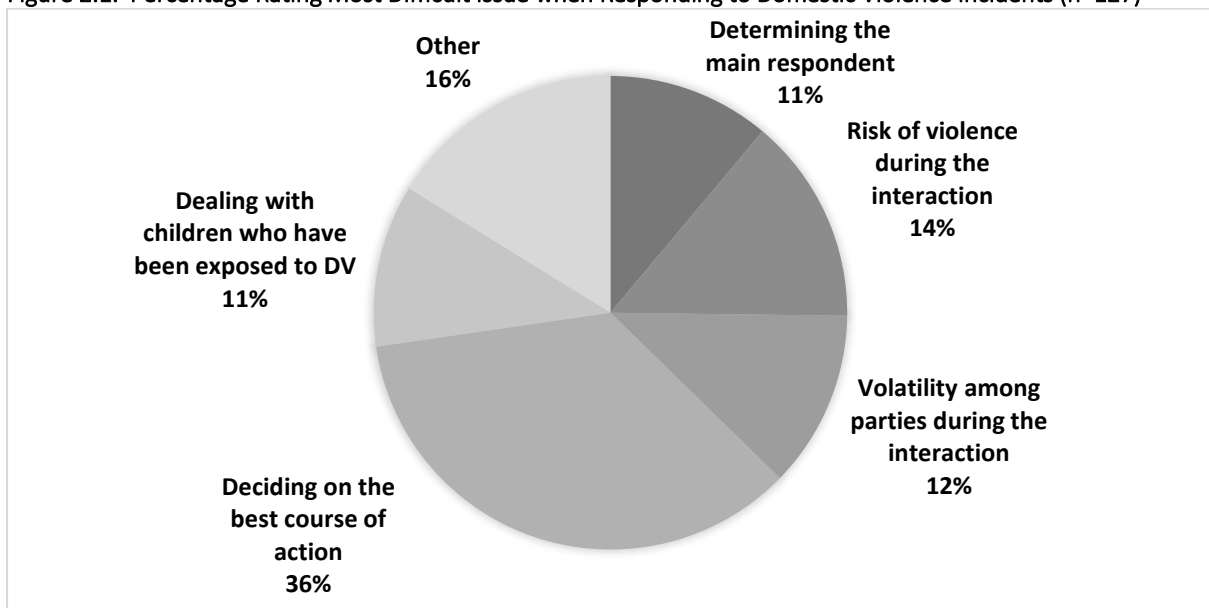
Response options ranged from 1 to 3, where 1 = low (informal response i.e., refer the parties to DFV services); 2 = medium (complete a protection order application); 3 = high police response (arrest the respondent and complete a protection order application).

There were no statistically significant differences in these responses by age group, gender, current rank or role (at conventional levels of test significance).⁷ Overall, these results indicate that similar attitudes are held by officers regardless of demographic group, rank or job role.

2.1.2 Most difficult issue when responding to domestic violence incidents

To identify current challenges for officers when responding to DFV incidents, participants were asked to identify the most difficult issue they might encounter when dealing with a police-citizen encounter where domestic violence had occurred (see Figure 2.1). Participants rated “*deciding on the best course of action*” as the most challenging (35.4%), followed by “*risk of violence during the interaction*” (14.1%) and “*volatility among parties during the interaction*” (12.1%).

Figure 2.1. Percentage Rating Most Difficult Issue when Responding to Domestic Violence Incidents (n=127)



Source: Online officer survey.

Just over 16% of participants selected “other” in response to this question, and qualitatively entered issues they felt to be most difficult in domestic violence situations. In addition to three participants indicating “all of the above”, two types of issues contained the most responses:

⁷ Again, comparisons were conducted using ANOVA. As appropriate, Bonferroni post-hoc tests, Welch post-hoc tests and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used for the variables that were not normally distributed. Conventional thresholds were used.

- **Administrative/legal issues.** Six participants outlined issues that can be categorised as administrative/legal challenges, such as the challenges in ensuring compliance with legislative and procedural requirements. Specifically, one participant highlighted the difficulty to “comply with the continuously changing laws and systems which leave most officers confused as to what is the correct procedure” while another suggested it was arduous “trying to keep pace with the ever changing expectations of the DV taskforce, the magistrates and the expectations of those that don’t pass down the latest requirements/expectations”.
- **Hostile or uncooperative parties.** The other major challenge emerging from the qualitative responses was the hostile or uncooperative nature of victims and perpetrators, both during and after an interaction with police. Participants primarily discussed challenges with the aggrieved party (i.e. victim). Specifically, they highlighted challenges in delivering an appropriate police response “with a hostile aggrieved” or with the “aggrieved not wanting to speak to police and report the incident.” One participant exemplified this point by suggesting that “preferring criminal charges without aggrieved consent sometimes makes the aggrieved go hostile with police, therefore less likely to contact police in the future.”

2.2 Officers’ Self-Assessment of Procedural Justice Orientation

Procedural justice is emerging as a key strategy for policing agencies to maintain community trust and confidence. Procedural justice occurs when decisions are made through a transparent and neutral process in which individuals are treated with respect and allowed the opportunity to “voice” their perspective (President’s Taskforce on 21st Century Policing, 2015). Although not limited to decisions and interactions within criminal justice agencies, research indicates that procedural justice policing is a primary antecedent of public cooperation and satisfaction with police (Bradford, 2014; Hinds & Murphy, 2007). Increasing the confidence of victims to report DFV to police is a critical issue that may be supported by procedural justice approaches to police-victim interactions (Hickman & Simpson, 2003; Paternoster, Brame, Bachman, & Sherman, 1997). Although enhancing procedural justice approaches in frontline responses to DFV was not an explicit strategy of the Taskforce, procedural justice is a useful way of measuring officers’ orientation to their interactions with the community. Participants were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement to a series of statements relating to

the dimensions of procedural justice (e.g. respect, voice, fair treatment), with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). As is shown in Table 2.3, participants agreed with all of the statements, suggesting that in general they report a procedurally just orientation towards interacting with members of the community.

Table 2.3. Participants' Procedural Justice Self-Assessment (n=127)

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I am always polite when dealing with people	4.06	0.91
I listen to people before making decisions	4.33	0.69
I respect people's rights when I make decisions	4.41	0.70
I make decisions based on fact, not my personal opinion	4.42	0.70
I treat people with dignity and respect	4.53	0.68
I treat people fairly	4.58	0.68
I try to be fair when making decisions	4.59	0.67

Source: Online officer survey.

Note:

Response categories ranged from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating stronger agreement with the statement.

2.3 Summary

Despite the low response rate, the demographic profile of the officers responding to this questionnaire is similar with the publicly available demographic profile of the QPS, suggesting that there is value in considering patterns of responses identified in the analyses. Overall, the analyses showed that:

- participants generally have a self-perception that their behavior complies with principles of procedural justice
- participants feel confident in their skills, but for frontline officers there is a belief that DFV call-outs are time-consuming and workload intense, and that more freedom is needed in deciding how to manage individual DFV situations
- participants typically report a willingness to use active interventions in instances of DFV, typically issuing a DVO at a minimum.
- the diversity of situations is the most challenging aspect of DFV call-outs: they represent complex, multi-faceted situations consisting of intersecting challenges.

3. Trends in Domestic Violence Offending

Addressing DFV-related crime is a key goal of the Taskforce. In this section, trends in DFV reported incidents and applications are examined for the Gold Coast and Logan districts from 2014 to 2017, using administrative data provided by the QPS. To account for seasonal and monthly variations in the data, a period of 4 years is used in these analyses (two years before the establishment of the Taskforce and two years after its establishment). This data describes the frequency of DFV-related reported crimes and police-initiated applications for domestic violence protection orders (DVOS) during that period. Through a comparison of the trends in the Gold Coast (the intervention location) with those in Logan (the comparison location), the analyses assesses the impact of the Taskforce's operations. Both the intervention and comparison location are districts in the same region, thus controlling for differences in regional policies and senior executive priorities.

Before presenting the trends, there are two key issues to note in interpreting these analyses.⁸ First, overall, most types of reported DVF-related offending have *increased* from 2014 to 2017 in *both* locations (Gold Coast and Logan), especially after the report of the Queensland Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence in 2015. Given that the introduction of the Taskforce coincides with a range of DFV awareness efforts by the Queensland Government, as well as an increased focus on DFV incidents within the QPS as a whole, increases in reported offences that occur at both locations may be attributable to broader changes. However, clear differences in the rate of change between the intervention location and comparison location provide evidence of the impact of the Taskforce.

Second, the data presented are *recorded* DFV offending and filed DVO applications, which are indications of the community's willingness to call the police, as well as policing practices. These are not measures of *actual* commission of DFV in these areas. Assuming that actual levels of DFV-related offending has remained relatively stable (and there is no reason to assume that the incidence of DFV has significantly increased), then we might expect initial *increases* in reported offending data to result from greater police attention to this issue, as well as changes in community (in)tolerance of DFV,

⁸ The analyses have not been adjusted for population for two reasons: first, the analyses focus on proportion of change within each location; second, only estimated population is available for census defined areas which do not align completely with other organisational boundaries. Based on 2017 estimated population figures, Gold Coast City is approximately 1.8 times larger than Logan City. (Gold Coast City has an estimated residential population of 591,356, while Logan City had 320,583 (ABS, 2017)). Finally as demonstrated in the reported results, the differences in DFV offending and DVO applications between the pre-Taskforce period and after the introduction of the Taskforce are far greater than the underlying increases in population.

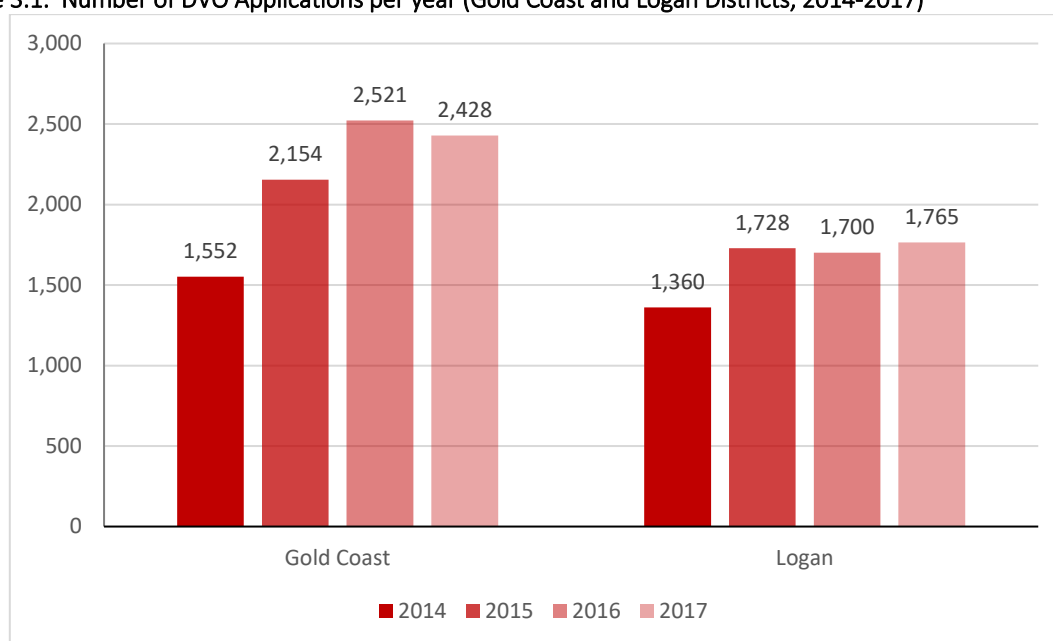
especially as DFV has traditionally been highly under-reported and charged (see Section 1). Indeed, reductions in levels of reported DFV offending is a long-term goal for any policing approach to DFV.

3.1 Domestic Violence Protection Order Trends

3.1.1 Domestic violence protection order applications

As shown in Figure 3.1, the number of police-initiated DVO applications had an upward trend before the commencement of the Taskforce in early 2016: from 2014 to 2015, there has been a sharp increase in the annual number of applications in both the intervention location (the Gold Coast) and the comparison location (Logan). (Historically, due to a larger population, the volume of applications is higher in the Gold Coast.) However, the annual number of applications in the Gold Coast continued to increase from 2015 to 2016 (the first year of the Taskforce), while the volume for Logan is similar to the preceding year.

Figure 3.1. Number of DVO Applications per year (Gold Coast and Logan Districts, 2014-2017)



Source: QPS administrative data.

Note:

The Taskforce commenced in January 2016 in the Gold Coast District. The DFV Specialist Court commenced in Southport in September 2015.

An alternative way of summarising these patterns is that the increase in the number of DVO applications at the Gold Coast was substantially higher since the establishment of the Taskforce than in the two years prior, but there has been no meaningful difference at the comparison location. Although both locations did experience an increase in DVO applications in the 2016/2017 period, the

Gold Coast District increased by 34%, while the increase at the comparison location (Logan) was about one-third of that (i.e. 12%) (see Table 3.1). The difference in the proportions is statistically significant.

Table 3.1. Number of DVO applications before and during the Taskforce (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014-2017)

	Gold Coast district	Logan district	Total
Before Taskforce was established (2014-2015)	3,706	3,088	6,794
After Taskforce was established (2016-2017)	4,949	3,465	8,414
Total (2014-2017)	8,655	6,553	15,208
% change from 2014/2015 to 2016/2017	34%	12%	24%
% applications after Taskforce established	57%	53%	55%

Source: QPS administrative data.

Notes:

1. Applications are by the calendar year of filing.
2. For pre/post cross-tab: Pearson's $X^2(1) = 27.955$, $p < 0.001$.

3.1.2 Breaches of domestic violence protection orders

Table 3.2 indicates that the number of reported breaches of DVOs increased both at the Gold Coast and Logan (comparison location): however, the rate of increase was larger at the Gold Coast. As noted earlier, a greater increase of *recorded* domestic violence breaches does not necessarily mean that there has been an increase in breach *activity*: rather, such an abrupt increase is more convincingly explained by changes in reporting practices by victims (and perhaps friends and family members) and/or changes in police responses to incidents in the Gold Coast since the introduction of the Taskforce.

Table 3.2. Number of DVO breaches before and during the Taskforce (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014-2017)

	Gold Coast district	Logan district	Total
Before Taskforce was established (2014-2015)	2,647	3,096	5,743
After Taskforce was established (2016-2017)	4,360	4,346	8,706
Total (2014-2017)	7,007	7,442	14,449
% change from 2014/2015 to 2016/2017	65%	40%	52%
% breaches after Taskforce established	62%	58%	60%

Source: QPS administrative data.

Notes:

1. Offences are by the calendar year of reporting.
2. Reports QPS offence group 'breach domestic violence protection order'.
3. For pre/post cross-tab: Pearson's $X^2(1) = 22.05$, $p < 0.001$.

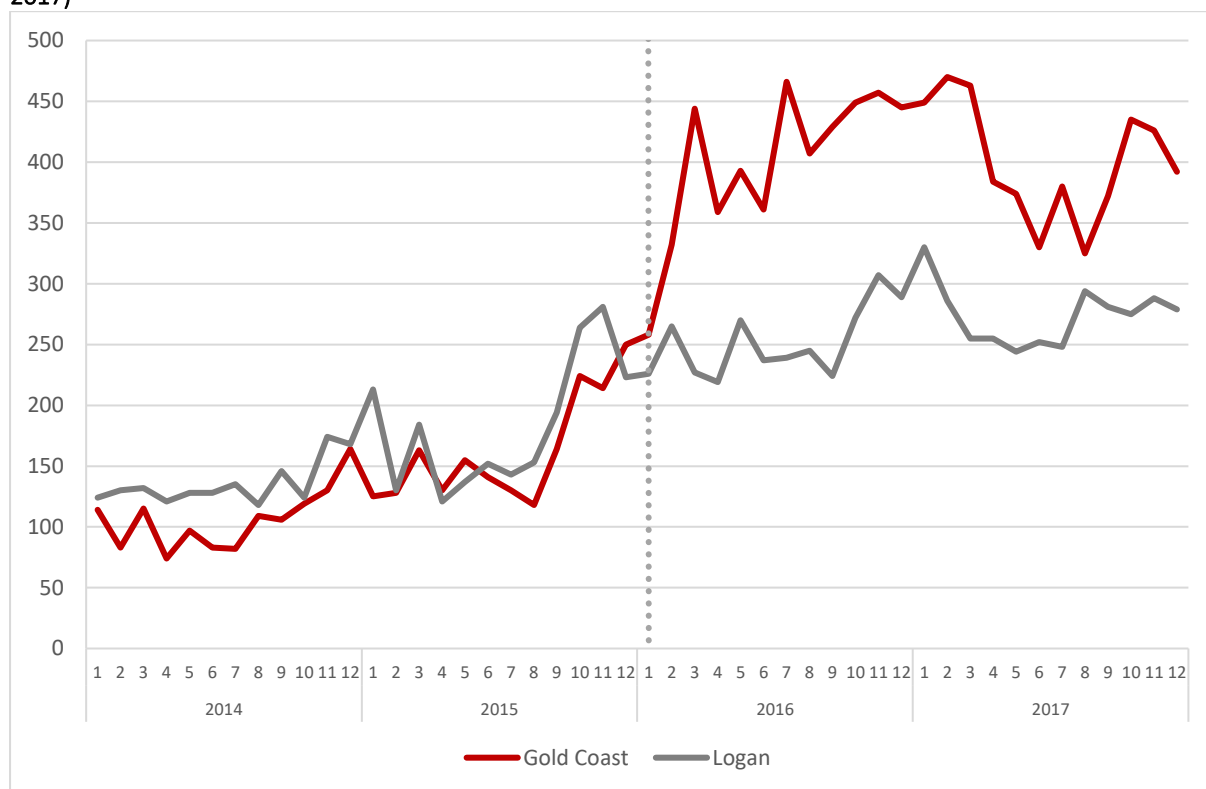
3.2 Reported Domestic and Family Violence Offending Trends

3.2.1 Total reported domestic violence-related offending

The monthly number of reported domestic violence-related offences in Gold Coast and Logan for the period 2014 to 2017 is shown in Figure 3.2. (The vertical dotted line represents the commencement of the Taskforce.) Overall, the volume of domestic violence-related crime recorded in the South Eastern region has increased significantly since 2014. With the increased prioritisation of DFV in Queensland, this is hardly surprising. With greater awareness, and changing response practices, we would expect that domestic violence-related crime reports would increase. For 2014 and the first half of 2015, the number of reported domestic violence-related offences was similar from month to month, across both locations. From late 2015, there was a particular increase in the number of reported domestic violence related offences—a period which saw the beginning of the introduction of a number of strategies based on the recommendations of the *Not Now Not Ever* report (Queensland Taskforce 2015)⁹. This pattern of a sharp increase was similar across the two locations. However, after the introduction of the DV Taskforce, the number of domestic violence-related offences *recorded* by the police continued to increase at the Gold Coast (intervention location), compared to the comparison location (Logan). In both locations, the volume of offences recorded appears to stabilise in mid-2017. This higher level of recording at the Gold Coast is evidence of the impact of Taskforce's role in facilitating a pro-investigative approach to responding to DFV incidents.

⁹ This includes the commencement of the Specialist DFV Court in Southport. Early 2016 saw the release of the Queensland Government DFV Prevention Strategy, as well as the continuing reporting of other DFV initiatives across the state.

Figure 3.2. Number of recorded domestic violence-related offences per month (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014-2017)



Source: QPS administrative data.

Notes:

1. Offences are by the calendar year of recording. Offences flagged as domestic violence. Excludes offences with incorrect dates.
2. Numbers are used to represent months (e.g. '1' is January; '2' is February).
3. The vertical dotted line represents the commencement of the DV Taskforce.

Table 3.3 summarises the overall changes in the volume of recorded domestic violence-related offending in Gold Coast and Logan districts for 2014 to 2017. The recording of domestic violence-related offending increased by 188% between 2014/2015 to 2016/2017 (i.e. after the introduction of the Taskforce). Although there was an increase in Logan, the size that increase was much smaller (58%). These results support the conclusion that the Gold Coast had a greater increase in *recorded* domestic violence-related offending, compared to Logan: the difference in proportions across the two locations (74% versus 61%) was statistically significant. In other words, there is evidence that the Taskforce had an effect on recorded domestic violence crime, *over and above* the impact of other broader shifts in the prioritisation of DFV in the QPS, and the state as a whole.

Table 3.3. Changes in the volume of recorded domestic violence-related offending (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014-2017)

	Gold Coast district	Logan district	Total
Before Taskforce was established (2014-2015)	3,338	4,039	7,377
After Taskforce was established (2016-2017)	9,600	6,307	15,907
Total (2014-2017)	12,938	10,346	23,284
% change from 2014/2015 to 2016/2017	188%	56%	116%
% offences after Taskforce established	74%	61%	68%

Source: QPS administrative data.

Notes:

1. Offences are by the calendar year of recording. Offences flagged as domestic violence.
2. For the pre/post cross-tab: Pearson's $X^2(1) = 465.54$, $p < 0.001$.

3.2.2 Specific types of domestic violence-related violent offences

Here we consider disaggregated trends for specific domestic-violence related offending. We are interested in assessing whether the changes in recorded domestic violence-related offending varies by particular offence groups. Based on QPS coding of offences, four particular categories of *domestic violence-related* offending were examined:

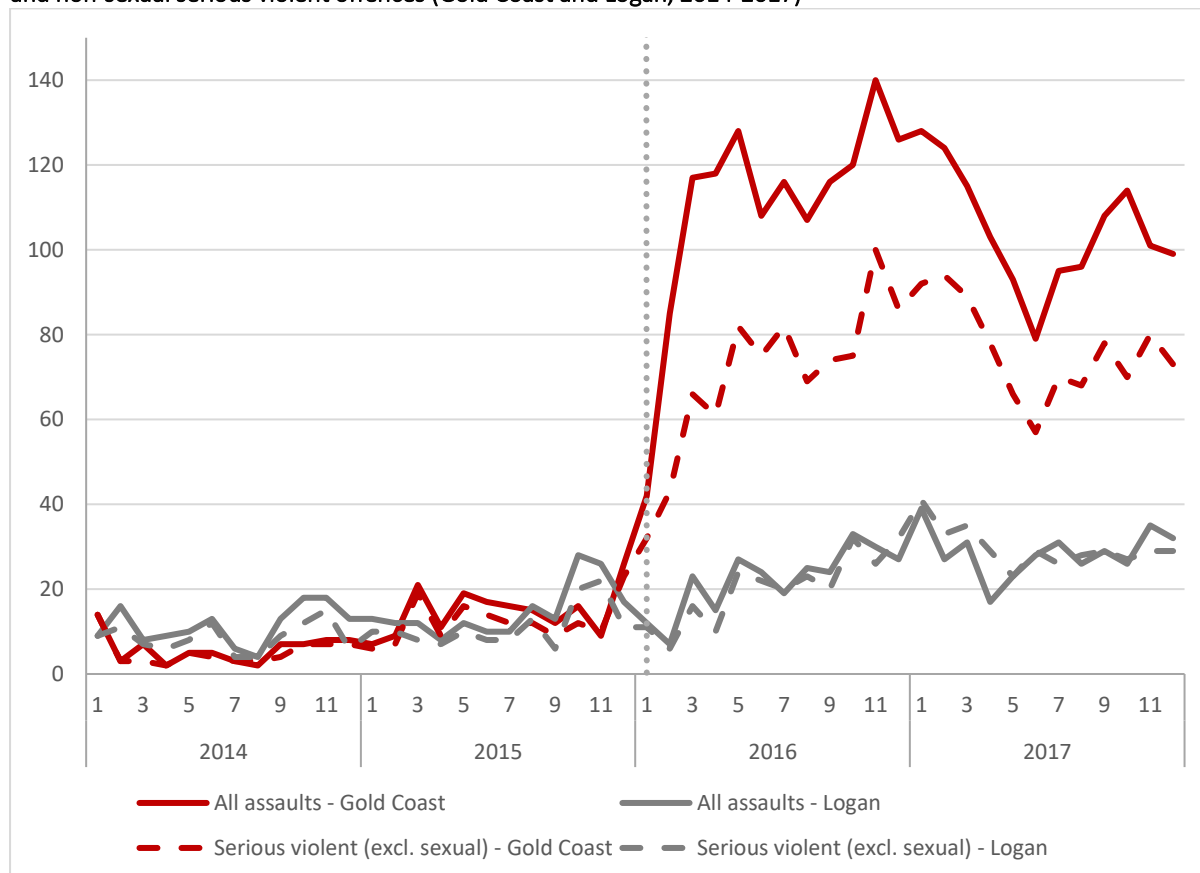
- *assault*. This includes assault occasioning bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, wounding, assault of a police officer, other serious assault, common assault, and minor assault (not elsewhere classified).
- *serious (non-sexual) violent offences*. This includes homicide (murder), homicide (attempted murder), grievous bodily harm, wounding, assault occasioning bodily harm, assault serious (other), strangulation in a domestic setting; robbery (armed), robbery (unarmed), and robbery (unarmed in company).
- *sexual offences*.¹⁰ This includes all offences classified by the QPS as “sexual offences”.

Through the examination of different offence categories, the evidence suggests that the overall trend in domestic violence-related offending after the establishment of the Taskforce reflects in large part changes in police practice around recording serious violent offences, particularly assaults. Figure 3.3 shows that number of recorded domestic violence-related assaults and serious violent offences (excluding sexual offences) for the Gold Coast and Logan districts for the four-year period (2014-2017). (Again, the vertical dotted line represents the introduction of the Taskforce.) The offence types

¹⁰ Although we examined trends in homicide, this analysis is not reported here. The very low numbers of domestic violence-related homicides between 2014 and 2017 make it difficult to determine a systematic pattern. There were a total of 12 recorded domestic violence-related homicides (homicide (murder); other homicide) during the period 2014-2017.

presented in this figure are not mutually exclusive. Some serious assaults (such as grievous bodily harm and assault occasioning bodily harm) are included in serious violent offence category.

Figure 3.3. Number of recorded domestic violence-related offences per month by type of offence, total assaults and non-sexual serious violent offences (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014-2017)



Source: QPS administrative data.

Notes:

1. Offences are by the calendar year of recording. Only domestic violence related offences included.
2. 'Serious violence offences' includes the following QPS offence codes: Homicide (murder); homicide (attempted murder); grievous bodily harm; wounding; assault occasioning bodily harm; assault serious (other); strangulation in a domestic setting; robbery (armed); robbery (unarmed) (robbery (unarmed in company)). Excludes 51 offences with incorrect dates (17 Gold Coast; 34 Logan). 'All assaults' (which includes assault occasioning bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, wounding, assault of a police officer, other serious assault, common assault, minor assault (not elsewhere classified)). Excludes 59 assaults with incorrect dates (19 Gold Coast; 40 Logan).
3. Numbers are used to represent months (e.g. '1' is January; '2' is February).
4. The vertical dotted line represents the commencement of the DV Taskforce.

Similar to the trends for total domestic violence-related offending, since the introduction of the Taskforce, the Gold Coast district had a significantly higher increase in recorded assaults and serious violent offences compared to Logan. (The trend was similar before the introduction of the Taskforce.) Interestingly, the differences in increases is larger for these types of offences than for domestic violence-related offending overall. As shown in Table 3.4, in the Gold Coast, there was a substantial increase in recorded domestic violence-related assaults in the two-year period after the introduction of the Taskforce: an increase of over 8 times (862%) the volume in the two-years prior to the Taskforce.

In contrast, although Logan (the comparison location) also experienced an increase in DV-related assaults over the four-year period, the increase is much more modest: 72% (less than double the volume in 2014/2015). The difference between the two locations is substantial: the difference in the proportion of offences occurring during the DV taskforce period (2016/2017) is statistically significant.

Table 3.4. Changes in the volume of recorded domestic violence-related assaults, non-sexual (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014-2017)

	Gold Coast district	Logan district	Total
Before Taskforce was established (2014-2015)	268	354	622
After Taskforce was established (2016-2017)	2,578	610	3,188
Total (2014-2017)	2,846	964	3,810
% change from 2014/2015 to 2016/2017	862%	72%	413%
% offences after Taskforce established	91%	63%	84%

Source: QPS administrative data.

Notes:

1. Offences are reported by the calendar year of recording. Table reports the QPS offence group 'assault' (which includes assault occasioning bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, wounding, assault of a police officer, other serious assault, common assault, minor assault (not elsewhere classified)). Excludes 59 assaults with incorrect dates (19 Gold Coast; 40 Logan).
2. For the pre/post cross-tab, Pearson's $X^2(1) = 393.03$, $p < 0.001$.

This pattern can also be seen for serious domestic violence-related violent offences (excluding sexual offences). Again, Gold Coast district has a greater increase than the comparison location (Logan); the differences in their proportions are statistically significant (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5. Changes in the volume of recorded serious domestic violence-related offences, non-sexual (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014-2017)

	Gold Coast district	Logan district	Total
Before Taskforce was established (2014-2015)	228	270	498
After Taskforce was established (2016-2017)	1,760	600	2,360
Total (2014-2017)	1,988	870	2,858
% change from 2014/2015 to 2016/2017	672%	122%	374%
% offences after Taskforce established	89%	69%	83%

Source: QPS administrative data.

Notes:

1. Offences are reported by the calendar year of recording. Table reports the following QPS offence codes: Homicide (murder); homicide (attempted murder); grievous bodily harm; wounding; assault occasioning bodily harm; assault serious (other); strangulation in a domestic setting; robbery (armed); robbery (unarmed) (robbery (unarmed in company)). Excludes 51 offences with incorrect dates (17 Gold Coast; 34 Logan).
2. For the pre/post cross-tab: Pearson's $X^2(1) = 161.01$, $p < 0.000$.

However, the differences in the changes in the volume of recorded domestic violence-related sexual offences is not as striking as the patterns found for non-sexual domestic violence-related violent offences (see Table 3.6). Although the percentage increase is larger for the intervention location (Gold Coast) than for the comparison location (Logan), both saw substantial increases from 2014/2015 to 2016/2017 (9 versus 84; 9 versus 58). Although the increase mirrors the patterns in serious violent offending and assaults, due to the relatively low numbers (n=93; n=67), there is not sufficient evidence that this is a robust difference between the Gold Coast and Logan districts. (That is, the difference in proportions between the districts is not statistically significant.)

Table 3.6. Changes in the volume of recorded domestic violence-related sexual offences (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014-2017)

	Gold Coast district	Logan district	Total
Before Taskforce was established (2014-2015)	9	9	18
After Taskforce was established (2016-2017)	84	58	142
Total (2014-2017)	93	67	160
% change from 2014/2015 to 2016/2017	833%	544%	689%
% offences after Taskforce established	90%	87%	89%

Source: QPS administrative data.

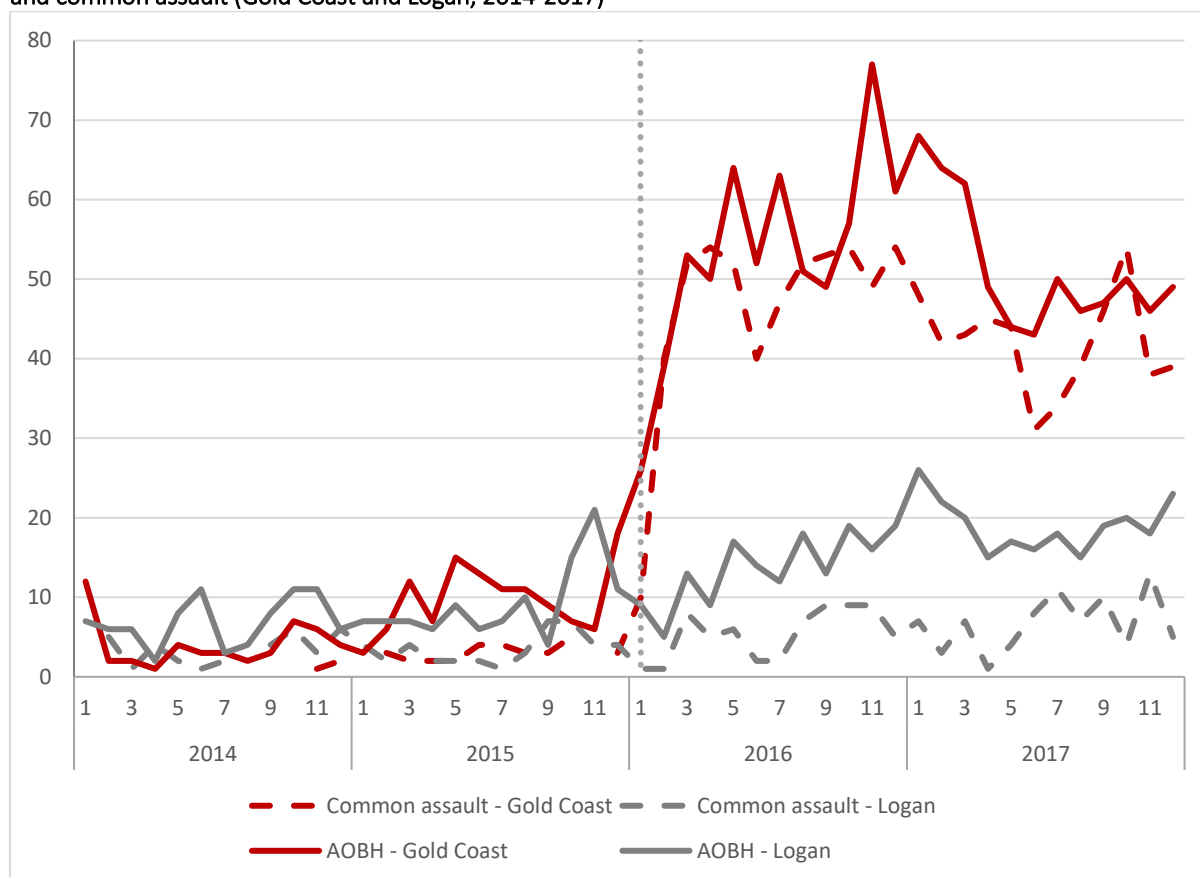
Notes:

1. Offences are reported by the calendar year of recording.
2. Table reports the QPS offence group 'sexual offences'.
3. For the cross-tab: Pearson's $X^2(1) = 0.550$, $p < 0.458$.

3.2.3 Domestic violence-related assaults

As one of the most striking patterns in the recorded crime data relates to assaults, the trends in two of the most common types of assault offences are explored further. Figure 3.4 shows the changes in recorded domestic violence-related *assaults occasioning bodily harm* and *common assault* across the two locations for 2014 to 2017. There has been considerable growth in the recorded in assault occasioning bodily harm and common assault (for domestic-violence related contexts) in the Gold Coast, compared to Logan. For instance, in the Gold Coast district, there were 44 recorded domestic violence-related common assaults recorded in the two years prior to the Taskforce. In the two years following the introduction of the Taskforce, there were 1,060 recorded common assaults related to a domestic violence incident. (For the Logan district, it was 82 in the prior period and 144 in the post period.)

Figure 3.4. Number of recorded domestic violence-related assaults per month, assaults occasioning bodily harm and common assault (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014-2017)



Source: QPS administrative data.

Notes:

1. Offences are reported by the calendar year of recording
2. 'AOBH' refers to assault occasioning bodily harm. Excludes 52 assaults with incorrect dates (for common assaults: 2; 6 Logan; for assault occasioning bodily harm; 15 Gold Coast; 31 Logan).
3. Numbers are used to represent months (e.g. '1' is January; '2' is February).
4. The vertical dotted line represents the commencement of the DV Taskforce.
5. For the pre/post cross-tab: Pearson's $\chi^2(1) = 228.18$, $p < 0.000$ (common assault).

These patterns demonstrate the increased focus on pro-investigative approach to domestic violence incidents in the Gold Coast district, and the success of the Taskforce's auditing strategy. Indeed, these data suggest that minor physical altercations (that could be subject to a charge of common assault) are now being responded to as a criminal matter more frequently in the Gold Coast district (compared to the past, and in the comparison location).

3.3 Repeat Offending

Table 3.7 reports the mean number of domestic violence-related offences per offender (i.e. where the offender is known).¹¹ Repeat offenders were identified from the single person identifier (SPI) listed

¹¹ A similar analysis of changes in repeat victimisation was not possible, as the data did not have sufficient information on victims across recorded offences. Among domestic violence-related offences recorded from 2014 to 2017, only 4,307 (out

against the offence. For the purposes of this analysis, multiple offences on the same date were treated as a single offence (i.e. as arising from a single incident). As shown in Table 3.8, there was minimal change in the mean number of domestic violence-related offences committed per offender for cleared offences: for both the intervention location (Gold Coast) and the comparison location (Logan), there was not a statistically significant difference in the mean number of domestic violence-related offences before and after the Taskforce.

Table 3.7. Average (mean) number of domestic violence-related offences per known offender (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014-2017)

	Gold Coast district	Logan district	Total
Before Taskforce was established (2014-2015)	1.656	1.744	1.702
After Taskforce was established (2016-2017)	1.671	1.735	1.699
Four-year mean	1.666	1.739	1.700
% change from 2014/2015 to 2016/2017	0.90%	-0.48%	-0.21%

Source: QPS administrative data.

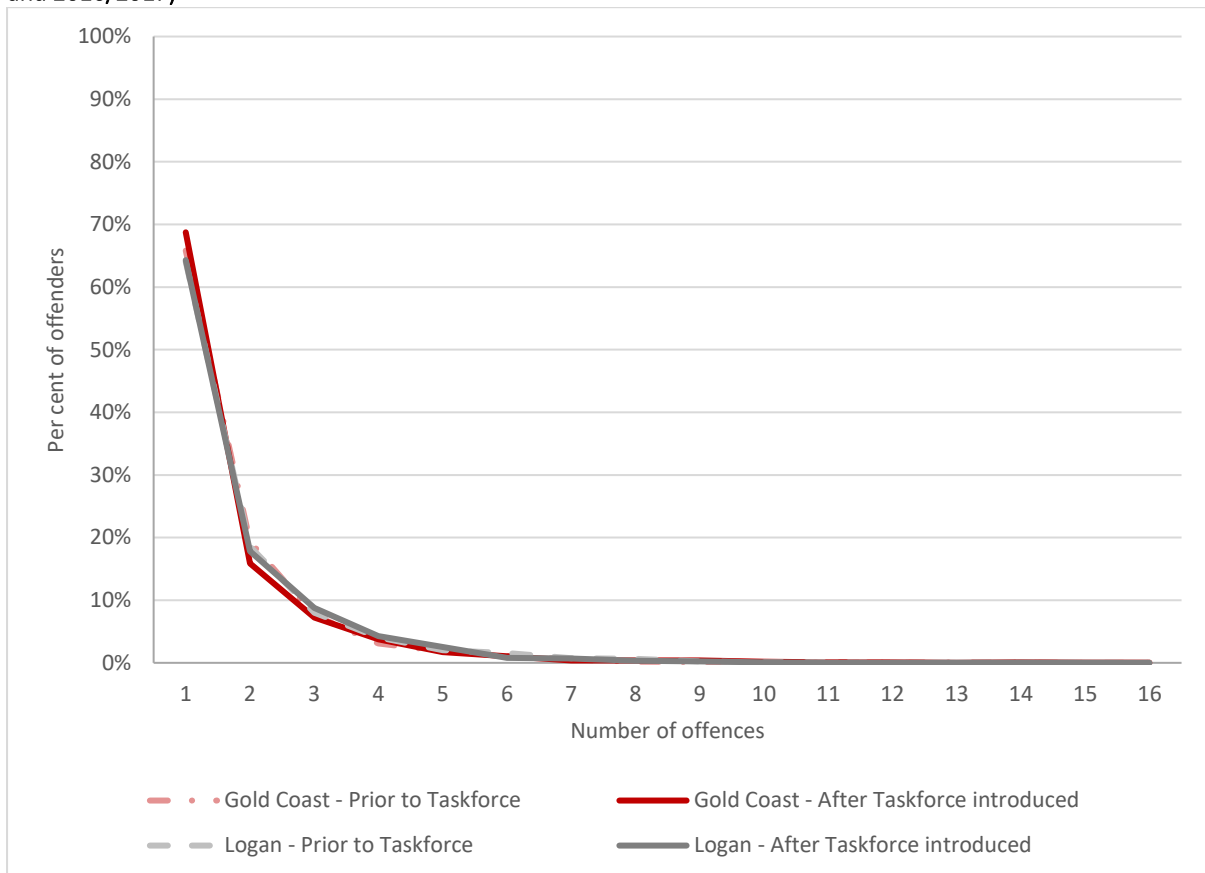
Notes:

1. Means have been rounded to three decimal places.
2. Offenders identified from the recorded single person identifier (SPI). The number of unique offenders identified is: 1,609 (Gold Coast prior to the Taskforce); 3,020 (Gold Coast after introduction of Taskforce); 1,775 (Logan prior to the Taskforce); 2,241 (Logan after introduction of Taskforce). Multiple offences on the same date counted as a single offence.
3. Test for the difference between means over two time periods (two-sample t-test with unequal variances): Gold Coast, $p = 0.694$; Logan, $p = 0.849$.

Figure 3.5 displays visually the distribution of the number of domestic violence-related offences per known offender, by location and time period (before versus during the Taskforce). For both time periods and locations, around 65 to 70% of offenders had one offence; around 15 to 20% had two offences; and around 7 to 9% had three or more. Therefore, there is not a substantial difference in the rate of reported domestic violence offences per offender by location or by time period. At this stage, this pattern indicates that, despite the increased recording of incidents as criminal matters, there are similar *proportion* of first time contact with the criminal justice system before and after the introduction of the Taskforce (at least for a two-year period). Further tracking of repeat offending over a longer time period is required in order to discern any impacts.

of 23,284) offences listed a victim single person identifier. Thus, 18.5% of the recorded offences had a victim SPI, meaning a valid analysis of repeat victimisation was not feasible.

Figure 3.5. Number of domestic violence-related offences per known offender (Gold Coast and Logan, 2014/2015 and 2016/2017)



Source: QPS administrative data.

Notes:

1. Each distribution sums to 100%.
2. Repeat offenders identified from listed single person identifier (SPI). Multiple offences on the same date counted as a single offence.

3.4 Summary

In this section, for Gold Coast and Logan districts, changes in DFV offending for the two years prior to the introduction of the Taskforce were compared to the two years after the introduction of the Taskforce. Overall, there were significant increases in recorded domestic violence-related offending from 2014/2015 (two-years before the Taskforce) to 2016/2017 (two-years after its introduction) in the Gold Coast district. This was particularly striking for the recording of domestic violence-related assault. The magnitude of these increases were not seen in Logan (the comparison location). Thus, the evidence indicates that the activities of the Taskforce has had an impact on recorded crime, *over and above* the impact of broader QPS policies, and other statewide DFV-related initiatives more generally in these locations. There are a few plausible explanations for these patterns. For example, there may have been a change in reporting behavior to the police (i.e. a greater willingness to call the police): external stakeholder interviews suggest that the activities of the Taskforce may be reflected in DFV

victims' being more willing to involve the police (see Section 4). However, the activity that is likely to have had the greatest influence on recorded crime is changes in operation police practices. A key strategy of the Taskforce from its inception has been to enforce a pro-investigative approach to responding to DFV incidents. As supported by the qualitative comments from the online survey (see Section 4), and internal monitoring statistics, frontline officers are now more likely to investigate DFV incidents as crimes, thus resulting in increased recoding of criminal offences.

These patterns are in apparent contradiction of the key goal of the Taskforce: to reduce domestic violence-related offences, especially for serious violence. However, given the under-reporting and under-charging of DFV offending before the introduction of the Taskforce, a reduction in DFV offences is pragmatically a long-term goal. In the short-term, increases in recorded domestic violence offences should be anticipated (see Section 1). Thus, an increase in *recorded* domestic violence-related offences may be interpreted as a strong indicator of *success*: an abrupt increase in the number of recorded offences is unlikely to be a result of increases in the rate of the *commission* of these offences. Longer-term assessment of trends is required to determine whether the other strategies of the Taskforce (support for victims and targeting of high risk offenders) can shift patterns in recorded DFV crime. Further, in any longer-term evaluation, victimisation surveys would also assist in disentangling the ongoing impact of the Taskforce on DFV crime (in terms of changes in victim reporting, as well as baseline offending behavior).

4. Stakeholder Assessment of the Taskforce Model

To assess the role of the Taskforce from those working within the organisation and those working with the Taskforce externally, a series of interviews were conducted with QPS officers as well as relevant external stakeholders (see Section 1 for further details). Through these interviews, several key themes about the operation and impact of the Taskforce were identified.¹²

4.1 Aims of Policing Domestic Violence

All interviewees were asked to describe the aims of policing domestic and family violence. There was some diversity in participants' views: stated aims included the prevention of violence, the need for risk assessment to ensure the safety of victims and children, and the aim linking victims to appropriate support services as part of the policing role. However, there were two themes to particularly note:

- preserving safety and raising awareness
- criminalising domestic and family violence.

4.1.1 *Preserving safety and raising awareness*

The most common response among all participants was that the aim for police was to preserve the safety of those affected by domestic violence as well as the community. For some participants, fostering safety was also seen to include raising community awareness “of what constitutes domestic violence. [This is] so people are more aware of what to look out for within the community as well, and aware of what options are available in terms of reporting that domestic violence and providing support to members who are experiencing that.” As one participant noted, a holistic understanding of domestic violence was essential to “changing not only the perception by the public of how domestic violence is being treated... but also the cultural change within the QPS and the troops that are attending these jobs.”

¹² The quotes provided are from the interviewees. To maintain confidentiality, no further identification is provided in this report to preserve confidentiality. Interview data was analysed using Nvivo.

4.1.2 Criminalising domestic violence

Dealing with domestic violence through a criminal lens was acknowledged by some stakeholders as an important shift in dealing with the problem. Some of the police participants specifically highlighted homicide prevention as a primary aim of policing domestic violence, “and then working down from that.” Other participants spoke of the need to deal with the “flow on effects from domestic violence situations” in terms of associated criminal offences (i.e. assault; wilful damage; strangulation). Central to the notion of criminalising domestic violence was making perpetrators accountable: the idea of accountability was a recurring theme throughout the interviews, not only for perpetrators but for police and stakeholders as well. This theme will be explored in more detail below.

4.2 Key Elements of the Taskforce

The primary objective of the interviews was to determine how each participant perceived the role and effectiveness of the Taskforce, and in particular, what key stakeholders (within police and other relevant agencies) identified as the important elements to the effective functioning of the Taskforce.

Four key elements were identified in the interviews:

- having the “right people”
- consistency and accountability
- balancing proactive and reactive responses
- enhanced communication.

4.2.1 Having ‘the right people’

All participants highlighted the need to have officers in the Taskforce who have a thorough understanding of domestic violence, who can work collaboratively with other officers and stakeholders, and who are passionate about targeting domestic violence. The triage meetings were identified as a crucial element of providing an integrated response. These meetings enabled all the stakeholders to discuss how best to address an aggrieved or respondent at risk, and to draw on multiple pieces of information to develop a collaborative plan. Such an approach is in stark contrast to “siloes plans” that were completed when police and stakeholders would work “in isolation” prior to the Taskforce, and unfortunately result in interventions that “contradict[ed] each other, or potentially place[d] a client further at risk.”

In addition to having the “right officers”, participants from both the QPS and external organisations noted the necessity to have an appropriate Taskforce leader. Descriptions of the required characteristics included:

- “the leader sets the tone of the entire thing, their ability to convey a really clear message around what they're doing, the fact that that is their specialty.”
- the ideal taskforce leader has a certain “personality...ability to influence...ability to make decisions, to make things happen...that’s the person that fits the job.”
- the importance of a leader who can collaboratively bring agencies together (“targeting all the right agencies to bring together”).

Overall, interviews with the external stakeholder emphasised that the way the Taskforce engaged with other agencies was crucial to a holistic domestic violence response.

4.2.2 Consistency and accountability

The second element that was vital to the effective functioning of the Taskforce was being accountable in responding to DFV. Several participants highlighted the need for officers and stakeholders to be accountable for taking action. For example, the ability for police officers to take out a DVO moves the responsibility from the victim (i.e. the aggrieved) to the police, which was described as “a huge shift” for reducing victim vulnerability. Another example refers to the Taskforce officers ensuring frontline police are accountable for their actions in responding to DFV incidents:

“If an officer on the ground goes out and sees that there potentially has been damage to property and they're not laying charges, the Taskforce is pulling them up and getting them to go back and lay the charges appropriately. Historically that wouldn't have happened. So, the Taskforce I think is doing a really good job of holding to account frontline police to do their duties well.”

The ability to ensure organisational accountability around responding to DFV arguably stems, in part, from the consistency of expectations that has been set by the Taskforce. As one participant noted, the Taskforce has clearly outlined what is and is not acceptable in police responses to DFV in this district. Through this, the current police response to DFV facilitated by the Taskforce has become a “business as usual” approach within the QPS as a whole:

“That is how successful the Taskforce has been, it's implemented a massive change of culture to the Gold Coast, and...it is now business as usual, and that's a big tick in my eyes.”

“One of the advantages I see through the Taskforce process is you know accountability and transparency, not just in that Taskforce but more broadly with police, about how you go about responding to the stuff, and what expectations are when you go to a domestic violence call out, they’ve really done a good job in terms of putting things in place, they’re accountable and reportable and the Taskforce are also reviewing that, so I think it’s changed a lot. Previously you know I think police when they were responding to these incidents there wouldn’t have been that consistency there, like they might go to a call out but there wouldn’t have been the question raised in terms of do we as police have an obligation to put a temporary order in place and put something before the court, whereas now it’s like second nature, which is pretty huge.”

4.2.3 Balancing proactive and reactive approaches

The third element that emerged consistently throughout the interviews was the proactive nature of the Taskforce. Participants noted the proactive approach the Taskforce took towards addressing identified risks and in “seeking responses from everyone else within the integrated response to strengthen what they’re doing” as essential to addressing domestic violence:

“it seems with the triage and the Taskforce, policing is trying to be proactive with the case management responses...I think that’s where policing needs to go is to prevention. And that’s what the taskforce seems to be helping facilitate, locally anyway.”

This sentiment was echoed in the interviews with police officers, with two participants suggesting taking a proactive approach may help to reduce incidences of domestic violence in the long-term:

“Since the Taskforce kicked off we’ve paid a lot more attention to being proactive and visiting respondents, making sure they’re complying with their orders, offering them support services that they feel that they needed or want to engage in that, even as far as door knocking neighbouring properties to say if you hear anything please don’t hesitate to contact police, just to maintain that I guess perception for a respondent that your whole domestic violence order doesn’t finish the minute you walk out of court with the order in your hand, but that it’s a constant monitoring.”

However, there was an identified need to continue to provide a frontline (reactive) responses to hold the perpetrator accountable and preserve the safety of all parties. Stakeholders who were interviewed noted that the Taskforce consistently reviewed issues raised at a variety of different meetings.

4.2.4 Enhanced communication with stakeholders

Finally, the fostering of open channels of communication between police and stakeholders was identified as important part of the Taskforce's role:

"We've got more than one avenue that we're engaging with the police, which is all part of the Taskforce, and we wouldn't have had both those avenues before, so we've got pathways to take those matters and we feel that we're being heard, people are reconsidering practice and we're all adjusting together."

Participants from both the police and external stakeholders discussed the open channels of communication (communication that most emerged initially out of the triage meetings) very positively. One external participant praised the changes the Taskforce had facilitated: "their interaction, their information, their openness and willingness to change from the top...the current police...attitude or perception of domestic violence has just been absolutely outstanding." Others stressed the way that the Taskforce considered the views and expertise of other stakeholders as necessary to ensuring the safety of all parties involved in domestic violence.

4.3 Impact of the Taskforce in Responding to Domestic and Family Violence

Participants were asked to identify what they saw as the impact of the Taskforce on responding to DFV. Analyses identified five common impacts or changes that interviewees attributed to the Taskforce:

- enhanced information sharing
- improved understanding of DFV

4.3.1 Enhanced information sharing

One of the most discussed changes that were deemed beneficial by participants was the ability for inter-agency information sharing. The stakeholders who were interviewed discussed a range of positive implications because of information sharing within the Taskforce, including "breaking down barriers" between agencies and "determin[ing] an appropriate response...to minimise risks." Moreover, participants highlighted the positive impacts information sharing had on their own jobs. Examples of this impact on their work include:

- increased information sharing “informs the way we engage the [perpetrators], the way that we deal with any breaches”, while another suggested information sharing “enables us to do our risk assessments much better because we are more informed.”
- having knowledge of a situation reduced the likelihood for repeat victimisation:

“Having more information when you first ring a woman up so she doesn’t have to retell a whole pile of stuff, or she doesn’t feel she has to relive the trauma of what happened on a given night...so we’re moving on from there, is she okay, looking at her safety, now looking at what her current needs are, and she hasn’t had to make that first phone call to us, so she doesn’t feel stigmatised by having to call...and tell them everything that’s happened – we already know and that really does assist her to tell her story and to feel comfortable.”

Across the interviews, these benefits of information sharing were seen for stakeholders and police, as well as clients.

4.3.2 Improved understanding of domestic and family violence

Participants consistently discussed the educational benefits of the Taskforce in enabling police officers to be better equipped to deal with DFV. Stakeholders noted the importance of “understanding the power and control aspect” of DFV as well as the need to respond to DFV through a “domestic violence lens.” Participants from the QPS spoke of the resource that the Taskforce provided in offering advice and support in domestic violence situations:

“If I’ve ever asked for any of them to come down and help us with training, help us with some DV incidents, get advice on DV, even police officers affected by domestic violence in their own lives, the Taskforce has been an excellent resource.”

Additionally, the “upskilling” and “advanced knowledge” of officers who had been seconded to the Taskforce was noted in some interviews. One noted the wider implications of being seconded to the Taskforce in terms of the seconded officer being able to transmit “a greater understanding of domestic violence back out into the divisions.”

4.3.3 Enhanced interagency collaboration

Participants from all organisations who were interviewed identified the enhanced interagency collaboration achieved due to the Taskforce. A range of benefits of this collaborative relationships

were identified. Stakeholders who were interviewed noted the importance of the Taskforce as a point of call. One stakeholder suggested that “knowing that I’ve got somewhere to go when there’s an urgent matter that they can deal with directly is really important” while another outlined the positive outcomes associated with collaborating with the Taskforce:

“The open transparent communication I think has led to enhanced referrals for clients between agencies, I’ve had police from the taskforce bring clients directly in to our service who are high risk clients, whereas I hadn’t had that happening before.”

In addition to improved communication between the police and stakeholders, some participants discussed how their own work practices had changed because of the Taskforce, and in particular the triage meetings:

“We’re all comfortable with if someone came to us and said hey when you’re doing this it’s creating this problem, we would look at how we can do it differently instead of becoming defensive – and that’s happening across the board.”

The changes in working behaviours perceived by participants was summarised by one participant as “work[ing] together to keep the victims safe and hold the offender accountable.”

4.3.4 Able to provide a rapid responses

Improved police responses to DFV was clearly identified. A common theme emerging from the interviews was “rapid response” not only to immediate DFV situations but also to issues identified by stakeholders, and providing support to aggrieved and respondent parties. Common descriptions included:

- the Taskforce as “rapidly responding when they’re following up with respondents or concerns or if they need to go out to an address or anything like that.”
- the Taskforce “can respond immediately”
- the Taskforce has “a great response rate in terms of following up with any claims or reports that they get”, and are “always willing to assist” to elicit “a tangible outcome.”

4.3.5 Able to provide an individualised approach to domestic and family violence

Another clear theme about the impact of the Taskforce that emerged from the interviews was the view that the Taskforce was able to provide an individualised approach to DFV that was responsive needs and risks in particular situations. For example:

“The Taskforce was brilliant in that time in terms of operating within what their guidelines were, but with consideration to individual needs and individual risks for particular men and women. So, there were lots of different creative strategies that we used within that forum to basically take into account what specific needs there were for particular people, whether that was people who had gone interstate and they were liaising with interstate authorities to try and figure out what their methods were that they could support the women more as well.”

This individualised approach may stem, in part, from the Taskforce structure: different teams of officers focused on aggrieved and respondent parties. One participant discussed the two teams as working well and being beneficial to addressing the needs and risks of both parties.

4.4 Barriers to Partnerships

Despite the assessment that collaboration between police and stakeholders had improved due to the Taskforce’s role, participants highlighted some continuing barriers to partnerships and potential solutions to these barriers. The two barriers that were most commonly discussed by participants relate to:

- information sharing protocols and processes within individual organisations
- staffing of the Taskforce.

4.4.1 Information sharing

The main barrier identified by participants related to information sharing protocols. While the new guidelines at the state level enabled police officers and stakeholders to share more information to manage risks associated with DFV, existing protocols and professional orientations across agencies can still hamper information sharing:

“There’s always going to be some level of barrier, and some of that’s about organisational philosophies and practice frameworks, we all come from different practice frameworks and we’ve got to work through the barriers of those.”

Information sharing was consistently raised as the most common conflict across agencies' organisational policies and procedures. This problem was described in a number of ways, including:

- different agencies “may be unable to provide as much information as they have available to them because they've got their own processes that they need to abide by”
- there may be a “fear factor that limits a lot of information sharing”
- officers not understand[ing] the “limitations of other agencies”.

However, while it was described as a continuing challenge, participants outlined the improvements to information sharing resulting from the implementation of the recommendations of *Not Now, Not Ever* report (Queensland Special Taskforce, 2015), and clearly felt that information sharing had been enhanced under the Taskforce model (see earlier). Moreover, participants suggested that the issues associated with information sharing can be overcome by “sharing the [individual] information provisions between agencies”.

4.4.2 Staffing

Another barrier related to staffing, especially the frequent turnover of officers in the Taskforce. One participant described the turnover as problematic for the smooth flow of information and rapid response to DFV:

“Sometimes the danger is when you're cycling through new people they might not be on the same page in terms of information sharing or practices that have been long established and so forth, so that can be a bit disruptive at times and you might not always get a consistent response.”

4.5 Benefits of the Taskforce for Clients

Participants recognised that the unwillingness of DFV victims to contact police limited the ability of the police to respond effectively:

sometimes victims are “not willing to make contact with police, and that's a big barrier that police have in terms of there's a lot of things that they can't do if things are unreported to them, while the aggrieveds [victims] unwilling to engage with them.”

Despite this, participants also consistently referred to the Taskforce's ability to engage clients affected by DFV and engender a sense of trust. By continuing to provide a timely response to violence, many participants felt that clients in the future may be more willing to contact police.

4.5.1 Victims and perpetrators feels supported

Overall, participants provided a range of examples of how the Taskforce had had an impact on both victims and perpetrators. In particular:

- the way the police have begun engaging support services to connect with victims.
- how police continued to follow up with aggrieved parties: "they'll come in and they will say yeah police did talk to me afterwards and offer me this referral and offer me support as well. So they're definitely noticing that difference as well, which is really positive to see."

There was a sense that victims' trust in the police had increased, and in turn, that there was more willingness to contact police.

Participants also felt that respondents' needs for support were recognised within the Taskforce model, although there was more ambivalence on this point due to the ongoing focus on assessing and targeting perpetrator risk. In responding to perpetrators, targeting risk while also providing support creates a tension that was implicit in some participants' responses.¹³ As noted by one participant, some perpetrators (respondents) perceived that police do not consider their concerns because "they think that the police only list to the aggrieveds [victims]". However, overall, participants were positive about the police response to perpetrator support. One stakeholder described the nature of the police approach towards respondents as:

"I've gone out with police on a number of occasions...and it certainly isn't done in a manner that can leave any doubt that they're there to support the [perpetrators] as well, whether that be offering cards and saying if you need any extra support give us a call."

4.5.2 Perpetrators are held accountable

For most, criminal justice responses to DFV perpetrators was seen as a key mechanism for perpetrator accountability. Overall, the participants felt that since the establishment of the Taskforce, there had been increased perpetrator accountability through the criminal justice system (i.e. recognizing the

¹³ This reflects broader tensions in the DFV sector. The push for perpetrator accountability and emphasis on managing risk, which does not always sit easily with responding to perpetrator needs for support.

criminal nature of DFV incidents through appropriate charging, and following through on the charging of breach offences). This theme is well summarised by one participant who noted that jail terms and breaches associated with domestic violence offences are some of the “consequences that [perpetrators] didn’t get before... [and it] is a thing that’s happening more.” A broader conception of perpetrator accountability was recognised by one participant who felt that there had been increased perpetrator accountability, describing it as “mak[ing] them own their own behaviour more, and enabl[ing] us to then say to them well if this is your behaviour what do you want to do to change that behaviour?”

4.6 Suggestions for Improvement

As has been described so far, the overall assessment of the Taskforce by all participants was positive, with expressions of enthusiasm for the continuation of the Taskforce. However, participants were asked in what way (if any) the Taskforce could be improved. Their suggestions fell into five categories:

- resourcing
- partnerships with mental health agencies
- police training
- culture change
- “what works” framework.

4.6.1 Increased resources

The most commonly referenced suggestion made by the interview participants was to increase resources (especially personnel) to the Taskforce. This included:

- increasing the number of staff members assigned to the Taskforce, and the creation of dedicated permanent positions.
- creating specialist divisional units to enable “ownership of domestic violence in your division...and management processes around that.”
- increasing involvement of police in community education programs (such as DFV prevention programs in schools).

4.6.2 Expanded partnerships through increased representation

While mental health agencies have been involved in the Taskforce triage meetings to some extent, some participants highlighted the need for consistent mental health representation. As one participant stated:

“we need mental health [services], that’s what we need, they’ve just recently come to triage, I will say that’s very sporadic, and I would say that that’s the gap what we’re identifying at the moment within the system, is both government and non-government mental health agencies to help. I think that would be really, really beneficial.”

4.6.3 Enhanced police training

Several participants felt that more police DFV training was required. (Interestingly, this was not the view of officers as reported in the online survey where there was ambivalence towards the need for more DFV training, see Section 2.1.1). There were a number of ways in which participants felt police DFV training could be enhanced:

- **The timing of training.** Training should occur at multiple intervals during a police officer’s career.
- **The need for training to better equip officers to identify the primary aggressor.** Additionally, the participant suggested that officers be “sure that they’re checking on the history of violence for both people at the site before they mak[e] a decision around who is the primary aggressor.” In line with identifying the primary aggressor, one participant stressed the need to more impartially determine the primary victim: “we need to change our mindset in regard to [who] are aggrieveds in domestic violence situations.” However, officers “seem to have a better understanding of who’s more likely to be the victim when they’re out there” than prior to the Taskforce.
- **The development of a “mentoring system.”** One participant suggested a mentoring system could provide officers with “the advantage of having an experienced peer already sitting beside guiding them through any processes and how we respond and interact with police and other stakeholders.” Another participant noted that supporting officers may enhance their confidence to deal with dynamic domestic violence situations.
- **Greater emphasis on the appropriate collection and substantiation of evidence in cases of DFV.** One participant described the necessity to substantiate evidence:

“I think there's too much emphasis placed at the present moment on an allegation of DV, and I think we need to go back to the objective view where we're actually investigating and collating evidence and taking appropriate actions related to that.”

Another participant spoke of the importance of ensuring evidence is collected in an environment comfortable for both parties: “listen really closely to both parties’ stories, because often the [victim] will be spoken to in a situation that’s not conducive to [them] actually telling the real story of what happened in any occasion.”

- ***The importance for police officers to increase their knowledge of DFV, and its implication for enforcing legislation associated with DFV.*** Some participants discussed the new strangulation laws as a good example of the training needs:

“If they don't understand it they may not understand why a victim is behaving in a certain way, not remembering what's going on, loss of consciousness often results in loss of memory – if they don't understand that potentially [their] retaliation in trying to take someone's hands away may result in scratches on [the perpetrator], which may then result in a cross order, which is inappropriate. So, it's helping them understand what actually potentially could be happening, what are the symptoms of things, so that they're not making a wrong assessment.”

4.6.4 Continued culture change

Despite the positive effects of the Taskforce noted by participants, there was a concern expressed about the need to continue cultural change around DFV within the QPS as a whole. Participants stressed the need to ensure all officers were aware current and emerging strategies to effectively address DFV. A number of participants felt that the work of the Taskforce was not necessarily filtering through to other officers. One participant noted that as a result, the work of the Taskforce is not reflected in the QPS as a whole, and subsequently “negating the impact of their great work” to support cultural change. In part, these concerns highlight the tension between consistent organisational strategies and being responsive to local contexts in the provision of policing services: policing DFV may need to look different in different locations.

4.6.5 Focus on “what works”

Finally, there was a broader suggestion that policing services needed to learn from what has and has not worked to address domestic violence in other jurisdictions. One participant encouraged further

research into Australian and international initiatives that have been effective in preventing and responding to domestic violence. Understanding efficacious responses will enable officers to feel informed and equipped with evidence-based knowledge to tackle this social problem.

4.7 Overall Impact of the Taskforce

A common theme among participants about the overall there was an *enhanced sense of trust* among victims and the wider community towards the Taskforce, and in turn, the QPS. One participant, referring to the Taskforce, said: “they’ve really made efforts to show the community that they do take [DFV] seriously and that they will act upon the concerns of the aggrieveds [victims].” Other participants discussed the effect of the Taskforce for victims in terms of “developing a degree of trust” and empowering victims to “feel safe calling the domestic violence taskforce” not only to report victimisation but also as a point of call. One participant elaborated on this point:

“Even if the victim’s not calling up to make a complaint and they just want to talk to somebody and make sure that someone’s there for them, the Taskforce is willing to do that, it’s not all about needing to arrest the offender for something or breach the offender. It could literally just mean them talking to someone, and I think that that’s a big thing and it shows the passion in the domestic violence Taskforce.”

The enhanced sense of trust participants spoke of was also attributable to the timeliness, consistency, and quality of the police response that the Taskforce has fostered.

4.8 Officer Perceptions of the Taskforce Model

To explore officer perceptions of the Taskforce model and its impact on frontline policing responses, the online survey asked two open-ended questions about their perceptions about how the Taskforce has responded to DFV, and how the Taskforce may have changed their own practices.¹⁴ In total, 93 survey participants (73.2% of the total sample) provided a useable response to the question about how the Taskforce has responded to DFV. Responses ranged from a single word to over 80 words. From these responses, 11 key themes emerged. (Some participants may have more than one theme identified in their responses.) Just under 30% of the sample (n=37) agreed that the Taskforce had changed the the way they themselves responded to DFV. Responses explaining how their own practices had changed ranged from one word to over 100 words. Six themes were identified from

¹⁴ The qualitative responses were analysed using NVivo.

these responses, with some participants having more than one theme in their responses. Not surprisingly, similar themes were found.

Despite the number of participants who provided responses to the open-ended questions, there was not strong consistency in their responses. Also, as can be seen below, the themes are a mix of positive and ambivalent assessments of responding to DFV using a pro-investigative approach, and, in turn changing charging practices.

Table 4.1. Top themes: How has the Taskforce responded to DFV (n=93)

Theme	No. of participants who mentioned
Reviews officers' responses at DFV incident	18 (19.4%)
Increased police workload	13 (14.0%)
Encouraged compliance with DFV policies	10 (10.8%)
Provides specialist knowledge and support to officers	8 (8.6%)
No change	8 (8.6%)
Created awareness of DFV	6 (6.5%)
Increased support for victims	6 (6.5%)
Developed and strengthened external partnerships	5 (5.4%)
Decreased autonomy to make decisions	4 (4.3%)
Reducing repeat calls for service	4 (4.3%)
Assists in holding perpetrators accountable	3 (3.2%)

Source: Online officer survey.

Note:

Participants may have mentioned more than one theme in their responses, so the percentages may not add up to 100%.

As reported in Table 4.1, officers' responses tended to fall into two categories:

- responses that focused on the Taskforce's activities (e.g. reviews officer's responses at DFV incidents, developed and strengthened external partnerships; provides specialist knowledge and support to officers; increased support for victims).
- responses that related to the impact on frontline policing of DFV (e.g. no change; increased police workload; decreased autonomy to make decisions).

4.8.1 Assessment of Taskforce's activities

Overall, the responses focusing on the role and activities of the Taskforce were positive. For example, some participants described the role of the Taskforce in reviewing officers' responses to DFV incidents as providing an opportunity for the Taskforce to:

- “offer their views and expertise on how police should have dealt with the matter to improve their future response”
- “ensure appropriate action is taken”
- “make recommendations”
- assist divisions by “providing a review of daily [DFV incidents].”

The role of the Taskforce was also seen contributing to increasing the priority to DFV in policing (e.g. “listed it as a priority in policing functions”). A number of responses highlighted the increasing criminalisation of DFV: the “treatment [of] DV as criminal complaints rather than civil.” However, there were a minority of less positive assessments around the Taskforce’s activities, such as: “policing police”, “reviewing other police whilst not at the scene of the incident”; and as having “blurred the line between acts of DV and criminal offences severely.”

4.8.2 Assessment of impact of the Taskforce on frontline responses

A key concern revealed in the analysis was the view that the Taskforce’s activities had increased the workload of operational officers in responding to DFV. In these responses, participants highlighted how the Taskforce “overviews everything and sends extra tasks to officers” and has “created onerous requirements of police.” Two participants specifically noted that the recording a complaint against the wishes of the complainant would not occur in other situations.

There were also some responses (n=4) that indicated that they felt that the Taskforce had reduced their own autonomy to make decisions when dealing with a DFV incident. This theme occurred four times in participants’ responses in terms such as that the Taskforce has “removed police officers’ discretion to take no further action” or as “making decisions on behalf of other police ... without full facts ... rather than the correct response to an incident that they were not at.”

4.8.3 Assessment of changed practice

Of the 37 officers (29% of the total sample) who reported that the Taskforce had had an impact on how they responded to DFV incidents, five types of changes (or themes) were identified.¹⁵ In descending order of frequency of being mentioned, these are:

- **Increased consideration of criminal charges.** The most recurring change noted was that officers reported that their responses now had a greater emphasis on considering criminal charges: “more likely to look at associated offences” and “arrest and charge all persons committing offences at [an] incident.” Although the Taskforce activities had changed their practice, not all felt that it was appropriate in all contexts. Some participants described this emphasis as putting “pressure [on police] to pursue criminal charges regardless of whether the evidence can prove the matter beyond reasonable doubt.” Several participants highlighted the issue of charging criminal offences when victims are not cooperative (“do not wish to provide a statement or pursue”), and the consequence impact on victims and their families:

“Through no fault of the DV Taskforce they identify this and want the offence investigated. However, this is felt by many officers to have a negative effect on the aggrieved’s likelihood to come forward to police again. As now in the case of an intimate relationship, their partner’s job is jeopardised, contact with the kids... This does not pertain to significant violence but for minor matters such as one off common assaults and abusive/harassing text messages.”

- **Improved understanding of the complexity of DFV.** In these responses, participants mentioned how that the Taskforce had equipped them with a “better perspective on dealing with controlling type behaviour”; the accessibility of the Taskforce (“if unsure of [the] situation, they are contactable 24 hours”); and “[t]he process of referring people and trying to put support services in place to prevent reoccurrence has changed my approach from looking at the current incident to looking at the future of the couple.” One participant suggested there had been an overall change in police culture: “It’s not necessarily the Taskforce which has changed the way I think about DV’s, it’s [sic] the whole police culture has changed for the better and we are now providing the service that is deserved.”

¹⁵ As noted earlier in this section, there were six themes identified in these open-ended responses. The final theme did not relate to changed practice of officers, but rather to the impact of the Taskforce around repeat calls for service.

- **Increased police workload.** Specifically, participants referred to an increase in paperwork and follow ups. One participant summarised this point by stating: “In today’s environment you must follow up on any assault complaints or wilful damage, whereas in the past, you had to ask the aggrieved [victim] if she wishes to make a complaint.”
- **Presence of increased oversight.** Mirroring responses to the earlier question, a number of participants referred to the oversight of the Taskforce as having an impact on their policing practice. While some participants were critical of this role as “micro-managing” and “another layer of risk management”, others spoke of how the Taskforce’s role meant that “actions will be reviewed.” However, some participants who referred to this role were more positive about its contribution to practice. For example, one participant reported that the Taskforce is an “amazing resource [that] has provided direction for dealing with DV on the Gold Coast.” Another suggested that the Taskforce provided a role built around “reinforcing options, reinforcing strategies/actions, [and] holding stations accountable.”
- **Feeling more informed.** Related to better knowledge about DFV, some participants highlighted how the Taskforce assisted them to feel more informed about policy and procedures around DFV: “ensuring frontline officers are equipped with information and ensuring they complete all required paperwork/charges.” Other participants spoke of how the Taskforce has facilitated their ability to “investigate matters and make decisions based on policy and procedure” and keep “abreast of the ever-changing environment and instructions/expectations coming out of the Magistrates Specialist Court.”

4.9 Summary

There was a consensus among the external and police stakeholders interviewed that the Taskforce had made a positive impact on the policing of DFV in the Gold Coast District, and strong support for its continued operation. In particular, key impacts of the Taskforce commonly identified by participants include:

- enhanced information sharing and collaboration among stakeholders, as well as improved relationships with external stakeholders
- ensuring consistency and accountability in police responses to DFV
- improved support to victims and perpetrators
- enhanced victim trust in police, and perpetrator accountability through consistent justice responses.

Although stakeholders' assessment of the Taskforce and its impact was highly positive, they did identify some ways in which its operations could be improved. There were two types of suggestions:

- the first focused on the capacity of the Taskforce (such as more resourcing and expanding partnerships).
- the second focused more broadly on what would support continuing to improved policing responses to DFV in the Gold Coast, and the QPS as a whole (such as enhanced police training and continued cultural change).

In contrast, officer assessments of the Taskforce and frontline policing operations was more mixed. Although mostly positive in their assessments, some responses suggest greater ambivalence to a pro-investigative approach, especially around the loss of autonomy in decisions (due to reviewing of files), increased workload, and emphasis on investigation of criminal charges (in the cases of minor DFV or victim non-cooperation). However, their responses also confirm that in general practices have changed, even if not all agree with the direction of this change.

5. Discussions and Future Directions

“[putting] the spotlight on incidents of domestic violence”

(Interviewee)

This section summarises the findings of the evaluation for the progress of the Taskforce after two years of operation, and considered some of the broader implications of the model for policing DFV. In particular, we review the evidence of the Taskforce’s progress, highlight strengths and proposed some areas for further exploration.

Our overall assessment is that the Taskforce model has made strong positive progress in responding to DFV in the Gold Coast, but not perhaps in ways initially envisaged. We emphasise that reducing the incidence of DFV is a long-term mission, which cannot be achieved within two years. We also recognise that the Taskforce has been implemented in a community in which there exists a well-developed DFV service sector. In considering the main findings of the evaluation, there are several characteristics that can be seen as keys to its success, particularly:

- its role of reviewing frontline responses to DFV incidents in support of a pro-investigative approach
- the development of strong collaborative relationships with external stakeholders involved in the provision of responses to DFV
- the embedding of specialist officers (including detectives) with a strong understanding of the context and dynamics of DFV and its impact
- the presence of committed leadership with a willingness to continue to develop and experiment with strategies to improve the policing response to DFV.

5.1 What did the Taskforce Model Achieve?

Overall, there are several key findings that emerged from the analyses presented in this report. First, there were abrupt and substantial increases in recorded domestic violence-related offences in the Gold Coast district, over and above increases in the comparison location. Particularly striking are the trends in recorded domestic violence-related physical assaults. (For example, for all domestic violence-related assaults, there was a 862% increase in the Gold Coast from 2014/2015 (two years prior) to 2016/2017 (two years after), compared to 72% increase in Logan.) Although reducing

domestic violence-related offending is a long-term goal of the Taskforce, in the shorter-term, the increases are a positive indicator of the success of the Taskforce. Given the known and considerable under-reporting of DFV incidents as a crime, these increases are clear evidence of *changes in police practice* to respond to DFV with a *pro-investigative approach* (and in line with QPS policy). For external stakeholders, these changes were also seen as a sign that DFV was being taken more seriously by QPS in its frontline response.

Second, increased collaboration and information-sharing¹⁶ around risk between the police and external stakeholders was also clearly documented. There was strong appreciation among external stakeholders of the improved communication that had been achieved, both in the context of the triage meetings for risky cases, as well as at other times. Although issues emerged due to different organisational policies and professional orientations, the open communication channels that had been established has helped mitigate any problems (or at least allow for problems to be recognised and addressed).

Third, there are early indications that victims may feel more empowered to contact police. Based on interviews with internal and external stakeholders, as well as broader consultations, many felt that the police practices that had occurred in the Gold Coast was slowly having an impact on DFV victims' feeling more comfortable in contacting, or at least talking, with police. There are a number of strategies that the Taskforce has implemented that may have helped improve police-victim relationships, including visits to the safe room at the DFV specialist court, as well as other victim and community outreach. In addition, some officers in the survey indicated that the support provided by specialists in the Taskforce (including increased information about referral pathways) had had an impact on their interactions with victims. Together, these types of activities may have a long-term positive impact on victim willingness to engage with the police.

Fourth, interestingly, 'risk' and risk assessment were not concepts that came up frequently in the stakeholder interviews. Risk assessment was subsumed into comments on information sharing (which, as already discussed, was reported as considerably strengthened). This likely reflects the contexts in which 'risk' was being encountered by stakeholders as a group. Risk assessment is core to a tailored response to DFV, and critical to the role of detectives in the Taskforce. Consultations during the

¹⁶ We recognise that there remains concerns for some around what and how information is shared that protect the interests of all parties, and the importance that information sharing continues within appropriate organisational and legal boundaries (Robinson, 2006).

evaluation identified how the experience of detectives, when combined with standardised risk assessment tools, can contribute to a more nuanced 'whole-of-case' assessment of risk.

Finally, as noted above, externally there was a perception that DFV was being treated more seriously by the police, which was important for reasons of offender accountability. Importantly, there was an *overwhelming consensus* among both internal and external stakeholders that the Taskforce was a *positive* strategy to respond to DFV incidents. Although stakeholders saw some areas for improvement, their assessment of the Taskforce was overall strongly positive. Further, some stakeholders felt that the work of the Taskforce had the potential to shift officer attitudes about DFV; for a few, there was a sense that this was already occurring within the Gold Coast district.

5.2 Suggested Future Directions

From the overall findings of the evaluation, there are several suggestions for the improvement of the Taskforce model, including:

- **Staffing and resourcing.** There was a strong view that the Taskforce should be staffed and resourced in ways to ensure its sustainability, and its ability to continue to take a dynamic approach to policing DFV. Leadership was also a consistent theme that emerged from the interviews as fundamental to the success of the Taskforce. In considering the staffing and resourcing of the Taskforce, the importance of maintaining effective leadership should not be overlooked.
- **Representation of external stakeholders and continuing their engagement.** In the interviews, there was some discussion about the stakeholders who might be missing from, or have limited involvement in, the triage meetings. It should also be noted that with staff turn-over in agencies, there may be an ongoing need to re-engage with stakeholders about the importance of their continued involvement.
- **Police training.** The evidence supports a conclusion that the auditing of frontline responses to DFV incidents was critical to the success of the Taskforce. However, there is some indications that over time, front line officers' understanding of the role of the Taskforce and the reasons for the audits may have weakened. There are hints in the analysis of concerns around the Taskforce decreasing frontline officers' autonomy to make decisions, and increasing workloads as a result of the

reviews. Thus, it may be advantageous to re-educate front line officers about the role and purpose of the Taskforce, and its relationship to front line policing.¹⁷

- **Consideration of other strategies that have been trialed in other locations.** Now that the Taskforce model has matured, it is timely to consider other types of strategies that are emerging in police practice, beyond the integrated responses. Although multi-agency integrated responses dominate our current responses to DFV, there are two other strategies that are worth exploring. The first falls within problem-oriented policing (POP)/situational crime prevention approaches are gaining increasing momentum in a number of international jurisdictions, with some promising outcomes (see e.g. Schmerler, Wartell & Weisel, 2018). The second strategy that research suggests may improve police-victim interactions, and victims' willingness to co-operate with police is procedural justice policing. Although limited, research on its implementation within DFV calls suggests positive outcomes (Hickman & Simpson, 2003).¹⁸
- **Performance monitoring and further evaluation.** Currently, a range of crime-related indicators are the key measures used to monitor the activities of the Taskforce, reflecting a reliance on routinely gathered administrative information. A compliance indicator is also used (i.e. proportion of DFV incident files that are sent back to the divisions for review). Interestingly, issues around performance monitoring did not emerge as a theme in our interviews and consultations. As a result, this suggests indicators of activities versus indicators of outcomes have not been fully explored.

The evaluation also identified a broader issue around the support and training for front line officers emerged during the evaluation. Although qualitative evidence showed that the Taskforce was a valuable source of advice and information for frontline officers, there was also evidence that there continues to be frustrations for officers in dealing with DFV, such as officers' lower levels of confidence in determining the most appropriate course of action, or in dealing with hostile and/or uncooperative parties. These issues point to an ongoing broader need for officers to have tools, mentoring or training to support them in responding to DFV jobs (beyond what perceived to be currently available).

¹⁷ At its implementation two years ago, Taskforce officers conducted a number of information sessions for general duties officers about the Taskforce and its role in the divisions.

¹⁸ We should recognise that there is a larger ongoing tension in responses to DFV (both police and non-police) between criminalisation and diversion. A pro-investigative approach has been critically important in the signals that it sends to other stakeholders and the community about our intolerance of, and the seriousness of, DFV. However, in thinking about how to reduce the incidence of DFV, it remains unclear whether strong formal criminal justice responses (vs diversionary responses) can achieve the desired outcome of reduced DFV.

Importantly, research suggests that specialised training can also elicit positive outcomes in terms of shaping attitudes to DFV (see Gover, et al., 2011 for a brief overview).

Recommendation 1.

That the Taskforce model continue to be a key response to DFV, with appropriate staffing and resourcing.

Recommendation 2.

That a more structured performance monitoring framework be developed, and a longer-term evaluation occur. Any impacts on domestic violence offending, including high risk perpetrators, require a longer timeframe for their assessment. Such an evaluation should also consider collecting information from victims and offenders about the impact of the Taskforce's strategies.

Recommendation 3.

That there remains a need for an ongoing review of the role of external stakeholders (including who to include and how to maintain engagement).

Recommendation 4.

That the Region and District develop and implement appropriate additional training and mentoring (as described above) for general duties officers.

Recommendation 5.

That, moving forward, the Region continues to proactively develop an evidence-based practice around responding to DFV, including ongoing assessment of empirical research (both existing and new) on policing strategies for responding to DFV.

5.4 Implications of the Taskforce Model for Policing Domestic and Family Violence

The Taskforce is best described as an integrated pro-investigative response to DFV. It encompasses a central unit of a team of specialist and dedicated police personnel (including detectives and an intelligence officer). These officers focus on the review frontline responses to DFV incidents, as well as the support of victims and targeting of perpetrators based in high risk contexts. This includes regular triage meetings that foster a cooperative effort by a range of stakeholders to provide an individualised and coordinated response for risky cases.

5.4.1 Does specialisation work?

Specialisation in policing functions has not always had a positive history. For instance, evaluations of specialised community policing officers have generally found that this has isolated community policing within police organisations, creating tension between specialists and frontline officers, rather than changing police practice (see e.g. Cordner, 2014). However, in some areas, specialisation has been identified as an effective strategy: specialist DFV responses have been identified as integral to an effective response to DFV. Specifically, specialist services facilitate victim engagement with the criminal justice system (Meyer, 2011) and provide a pathway to and from formal (including police) help (Meyer, 2010). When compared to informal sources of support, formal services are often accessed less frequently, but comprise an important component of seeking help and enhancing victim safety (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). The complexity of DFV, and the need to provide an individualized response to DFV incidents, highlights the need for a specialized approach to service delivery.

Relatedly, the nature of specialisation indicates a specific response to a social problem that also elicits cultural change. Underpinning the success of specialisation in the criminal justice system are a range of factors, including:

- a team of dedicated individuals with expertise in the nature and extent of the problem
- legal frameworks to address the problem
- tailored responses that are intended to give agency and voice to clients; provide appropriate support to victims; address the criminogenic needs and risks of offenders; and promote wider deterrence.

The interviews and survey data confirm the value of a specialized and tailored approach to addressing DFV. As it has matured, the Taskforce's structure provides a dedicated specialised officers with increased knowledge about DFV, and thus the ability to better support frontline officers. It focuses on victims and perpetrators at high risk, within an integrated approach involving external stakeholders. This specialisation sits within a broader frontline response strategy of pro-investigation.

5.4.2 What about high risk teams?

A question that has come up a few times during this evaluation is whether the Taskforce model truly differs from the high risk team approach being trialed in other Queensland locations. The short answer is "yes, it differs considerably". Certainly, there are similarities. Both approaches focus on developing and strengthening collaborative relationships between the different stakeholders involved in

responding to DFV, so that relevant information is available in a timely manner in high risk cases. Both approaches are strategies to ensure that victims (and perpetrators) do not fall through the cracks in the system that operates with a diverse group of justice and non-justice agencies, with differing professional training and orientations. Central to information sharing is the intended outcome that such a collaborative approach serve to enhance the safety of the victim (Douglas, Lilley, Kooper, & Diamond, 2004) and address the risks of the offender (Shepard, Falk, & Elliott, 2002).

However, the high risk teams approach still requires individual agencies to have frontline responses to DFV (be it providing counselling services, assisting with relocation, or responding to a call for service). What the Taskforce model does is situate a high risk collaborative approach within a broader framework for how frontline police in this district will response to DFV incidents, regardless of the risk of the case. The Taskforce is more than simply a “police-led high risk team” (and we should not discount the impact of these collaborations being police-led). It embeds a pro-investigative approach to responding to all DFV incidents (regardless of risk), provides advice to frontline police officers, as well as systematising the police response to high risk cases.

It is our view that, although communication and information-sharing among agencies is important, individual agencies cannot simply rely on multi-agency collaborative responses. Each agency also needs internal strategies for providing responses to the calls and clients that come to their organisation.

5.4.3 Where will it work?

The Taskforce model that has developed to deliver services to an urban community with a well-developed DFV service sector. It would be naïve to not recognize that the Taskforce model is a form of urban policing which is well-suited to locations with comparatively large police numbers (especially detectives) as well as a well-developed DFV service sector. The Gold Coast, in particular, has a history of a strong DFV service sector, with recent initiatives (such as the Southport DFV specialist court) further strengthening the support and services available.

The transferability of this approach to other locations requires careful thought about the local context and environment. This may mean preliminary work on strengthening relationships with disparate service agencies. Or it may mean adopting particular strategies (e.g. reviewing frontline responses to DFV incidents) that are more easily transferable to assess the extent to which broader specialized support is needed.

5.4.4 Inspiring attitudinal vs behavioural change?

Audits of police work relating to DFV incidences are a core Taskforce strategy. While most participants spoke positively of this function of the Taskforce, some perceived it as a micro-managing approach. It is therefore important that while audits continue, they are conducted in a constructive way so officers can apply such feedback without feeling scrutinised. Importantly, this approach uses the command structure of the organisation to gain behavioural change (regardless of the attitude of the officers). Indeed, some of the officer comments reflect the disjuncture between attitude and behaviour. However, longer-term, making criminal investigation of DFV incidents “routine business” may also prompt eventual attitudinal change.

5.5 Concluding Thoughts

Overall, the conclusion of this evaluation after two years of operation is that the Taskforce model is a promising strategy for improving policing processes and facilitating interagency collaboration. The Taskforce has made significant positive impacts, including:

- developing strong inter-agency relationships and collaboration between police and external stakeholders
- improving support and referrals for both victims and perpetrators in police responses
- balancing between reactive and targeted approaches to addressing DFV
- embedding of a pro-investigative approach as the primary response for frontline responses to DFV.

Overwhelmingly, participants (both internal and external) described the Taskforce as putting “the spotlight on incidents of domestic violence.” While there were identified gaps and areas for improvement, the evidence supports the continued resourcing and staffing of the Taskforce, as well as the importance of a pro-investigative approach to responding to DFV.

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