

Frontline Responses to Domestic Abuse in Scotland: Managing risk through MARACs and MATACs

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Aim and method

Examination of two practices used in Scotland to manage 'high risk' domestic abuse - Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordinating (**MATAC**) & Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (**MARAC**) – using a comparative case study approach comprising qualitative interviews (n=25) with police officers and NGO practitioners; observations (n=8) of 4 MARAC and 4 MATAC meetings.

MARAC is a multi-agency initiative designed to assess and manage risk amongst victims of DA who are considered to be at very high risk.

MATAC is a police led, multi-agency, initiative designed to reduce DA re-offending through investigation and proactive targeting of perpetrators.

MARACs and MATACs in Scotland

MARACs operate in 28 local authorities in Scotland and are in development in the remaining four.

Fourteen police-led MATACs have been rolled out across Scotland as a means of targeting repeat domestic abuse perpetrators.

MARAC	Case Study I (pop.: 368,080)	Case Study II (pop.: 51,360)
Location	Local authority offices	Police station
Duration and frequency	3.5 hours +, every two weeks.	30-45 minutes, monthly
Attendees	Around 15 attendees per meeting; 20/80 % police/non-police; good inter-agency representation from statutory and NGO actors.	Around 10 attendees per meeting; 50/50 %, police/non-police; representatives from housing notably absent.
Number of cases	18-22 per meeting	3-5 per meeting
Tasking approach	Collaborative	Varied: led by DALO in one meeting, collaborative in another
Coordinator	Dedicated MARAC Co-ordinator	Police Scotland DALO

Emerging findings

- **MARACs** and **MATACs** are widespread across police and local authority areas in Scotland, but vary in terms of their membership and operation. This is more so the case with **MARACs** (see table) which exist as an inter-agency collaboration, and are non-statutory. The non-statutory basis of **MARAC** impacts upon sign-up and function.
- **MATACs** are police-led and are more homogenous in their operation across police divisions, however, variation exists in terms of representation at meetings from non-police actors.
- **MARAC** and **MATAC** as processes, *necessitates* and *engenders* inter-agency collaboration.
- Preparing cases for **MATAC** is resource intensive; much of this falls to police at divisional level, with implications for other work tasks, as well as the extent to which they can effectively progress **MATAC** investigations.
- Disruption of perpetrator activities led the tone of **MATAC** discussions, including **MATAC** attendees proactively seeking out avenues to *find* criminal activity.
- Though **MATAC** is perpetrator orientated, there was a high level of attentiveness to victims' safety.
- There is a lack of dedicated infrastructure and resourcing for **MARACs**, including in the form of dedicated **MARAC** coordinators. This has the potential to undermine the effective and sustainable operation of the process.
- **MARAC** doesn't reach the entirety of high-risk victims, particularly those from affluent families where agency involvement is less likely, or where coercive control rather than physical violence is apparent.

local units get absolutely hammered with what comes in on a daily basis. [...] We have got loads ongoing. You can imagine on every day something else might come in that's immediate risk so our MATAC targets will get pushed back. [police officer]

Also we get feed in from MARAC [...] Women's Aid have phoned us up before and said, I'm working with the victim who's in a relationship with this individual, I know from my experience working in this area of business that that person has got at least five previous partners and they are boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, can you consider him for MATAC? Yes, absolutely. So all the agencies know about MATAC and they know they can feed in names. [police officer]

... we should have MARAC coordinators, but there's no financial commitment. And unless there's financial commitment it's going to be really difficult. [police officer]

[...] we do referrals for families who are the more affluent families [...] sometimes because we're the only ones who are working with them. So social work are not involved, the schools obviously are there but the kids are doing well [...] financially they're doing fine, everything looks fine. So that is really challenging so in terms of actually getting good actions back from those MARAC referrals [...] because there is no involvement by anyone else. [Women's Aid Worker]

Looking to the future

Scotland has recently introduced a statutory legal definition of domestic abuse, incorporating emotional and psychological control. Going forward, questions remain about how MATAC and MARAC processes may evolve to reflect this shift in understandings and responses to domestic abuse as an ongoing pattern of controlling behaviour, which can be challenging to detect.