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Police-Perpetrated Domestic and Family Violence: A Scoping Review of Australian and International Scholarship

Briony Anderson,
Durham University, United Kingdom
Clare Farmer
Deakin University, Australia
Danielle Tyson
Deakin University, Australia

Abstract

The perpetration of domestic and family violence (DFV) by police officers is a serious abuse of power and has generated a growing body of scholarship in Australia and internationally. Police are uniquely positioned to draw on their expertise, training, and access to weapons to perpetrate DFV while often evading accountability and leaving victim-survivors with limited options to seek protection and redress. This paper sets out findings from a scoping review of 54 scholarly articles, chapters, theses, and other papers which address police-perpetrated DFV (PPDFV). The review generates insight into the methodological, theoretical, and critical implications of PPDFV scholarship across policing, criminology, psychology, sociology, and gender-based research. We identify gaps in jurisdictional coverage and understandings of the rates, prevalence, and nature of PPDFV. The importance of intersectional and critical research, which considers the impacts on PPDFV of gender, race, and sexuality, is also signposted.

Keywords: Police-perpetrated domestic and family violence; victims of police-perpetrated domestic and family violence; police responses; cultural biases; intersectional risk.

Introduction

In February 2024, a New South Wales police officer was arrested on suspicion of the murder of a Sydney couple. The accused is believed to have had, or aspired to have, a relationship with one of the victims (Roberts et al., 2024). In March 2023, ex-Deputy Marshall Ian Diaz was convicted, in California, of a range of offences related to his control of a former partner (Schapiro, 2023). Early in 2024, the Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ) launched a civil claim in the United Kingdom (UK) High Court against Devon and Cornwall Police on behalf of seven women in relation to "systemic failures" in their investigations of police-perpetrated domestic and family violence (PPDFV) (Jacques, 2024; Li, 2024).

Australia's National Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Counselling Service (NDFSVCS) frames domestic and family violence (DFV) as occurring when one person in a relationship hurts another and/or makes them feel unsafe and is a repeated pattern of behaviour. DFV can occur within any type of relationship or family context, and the behaviours can include physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and psychological harms (National Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Counselling



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Service [NDFSVCS], 2023). The nature and extent of DFV perpetrated by police and/or law enforcement officers is difficult to quantify (Gleeson, 2020). Research suggests that rates are higher than in the general population but, due to underreporting and a prevailing "code of silence" within law enforcement organisations, the actual prevalence may be much higher (Roslin, 2016). Partners and other affected family members of police officers may be fearful and/or reluctant to report DFV given that any investigation relies on police. In the case of Ian Diaz, his former partner was initially arrested and imprisoned before being fully exonerated; it then took five years to bring charges against Diaz himself (Schapiro, 2023). Victims who work in policing themselves, particularly those who serve in the same force as their perpetrator, face an additional set of barriers (Centre for Women's Justice [CWJ], 2022; Li, 2024).

Internationally, PPDFV has received some attention (CWJ, 2022; Marozzi, 2021; McKenzie & New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2017; Toser, 2020). In the United States (US), the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) established a Model Policy on domestic violence by police officers, embedding clear and robust procedures (International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 2003). In September 2020, an Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) review uncovered failings by Victoria Police in their handling of DFV allegations against its officers (McKenzie & Toser, 2020). In response, Victoria was the first Australian police force to create a standalone policy for dealing with DFV involving employees and a new unit was tasked with investigating "high risk matters" (Marozzi, 2021). However, the extent to which policing agencies embrace such informed and proactive policies remains unclear (Russell & Pappas, 2018). Responses by law enforcement are typically piecemeal and inconsistent (Gleeson, 2020), and can be exacerbated by institutional structures, such as Police Unions, that play a critical role in shielding "bad cops" from accountability (Freidersdorf, 2014).

This paper examines the nature and extent of existing PPDFV research, and sets out the findings of a scoping review at a national and international level. The paper considers where research is being conducted, in what ways (e.g., research scope, data collection methods, etc.), and maps the nature, range, and key focus of existing literature. The paper highlights notable gaps, with respect to research scope, approach, method, and focus, which inform suggested priorities for future research, particularly in Australia (Munn et al., 2018). There is clearly a need for more PPDFV research and for the development of stronger policies to protect victims, to ensure perpetrator accountability, and to address existing police and societal cultural impediments.

Scoping Review Method

This study undertook a scoping review of literature and scholarly research examining PPDFV, and which is available in English. The review was conducted using Covidence analytical software, a file management program facilitating systematic reviews and analyses. Drawing from relevant methodological frameworks, such as those developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and Levac et al. (2010), the review comprised five key phases: identify the research focus; locate and import references; title and abstract screening; full text review; and extraction of relevant themes, findings, and insights (including key quantitative data relating to the sources included within the review). A reflexive and iterative approach, involving all members of the research team, supported the generation and refinement of the scoping review and its findings.

The papers² reviewed for this study were located and collated initially using two electronic databases—Google Scholar and Web of Science. Specific search terms included: *police perpetrated domestic violence*, *police perpetrated family violence*, police perpetrated intimate partner violence, and officer involved domestic violence. Database entries were reviewed for up to 20 pages per search term, or until the search results were exhausted. Additional phases of snowball sampling (e.g., papers referenced within previously scoped sources) and deductive web searches using key terms were also performed. For the latter, in addition to the key terms used for the electronic database reviews, variations of the following search terms were applied: *police/officer misconduct*, *police/officer use of force*, and *police/officer inappropriate relationships*. Relevant literature and scholarly research from these searches were added to the initial scoping corpus.

Papers were accepted for consideration if their title and/or abstract included some reference to PPDFV. Where it was unclear if the paper related to police *responses to* or *investigations of* DFV, the paper was included in the reference corpus for further review. Upon completion of the initial scoping phases, 68 papers of interest from Google Scholar and Web of Science were identified. Ten further papers were included through snowball sampling and deductive web searches. The scoped materials included peer-reviewed academic journal papers, book chapters, government reports, independent corruption commission findings, and conference proceedings.

As the second phase of the review process, the research team reviewed all titles and abstracts collectively, voting by consensus to include or exclude the paper from the study. Papers were included on the basis that: their title and/or abstract explicitly discussed PPDFV; or their title and/or abstract discussed some form of police wrongdoing, violence, or harm that might be considered a type of DFV. Papers which did not explicitly or broadly discuss some form of police wrongdoing—

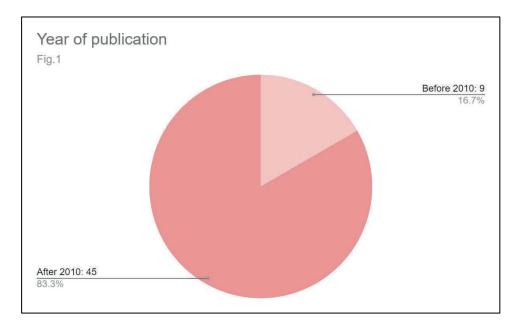
for example, papers which were clearly addressing police responses to civilian perpetration of DFV—were excluded. The inclusion criteria were intentionally broad to ensure that complex, intersecting, or niche forms of abuse perpetrated by police were not omitted. A total of 73 papers were voted by consensus to progress to the next stage, a full text review.

One researcher reviewed the 73 papers and undertook preliminary coding (Braun & Clarke, 2022), within the following framing themes: year of publication (before or after 2010), disciplinary focus (including criminology, law, psychology, social work, and policing studies), and jurisdiction (US, UK, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and Europe). Extensive notes were compiled into a spreadsheet for later analysis. A secondary round of voting was undertaken to determine the final relevance of each paper, drawing from the notes that had been collated. This resulted in 19 papers being excluded from the study on the grounds that they did not address PPDFV and therefore did not meet the inclusion criteria. The remaining 54 papers progressed to the final stage of the review and were analysed by two additional researchers.³ These papers focused on one or more of the following: police officer/s as perpetrators of DFV; victims of DFV perpetrated by police officer/s; and responses to PPDFV, for example, policy, training, police leadership, and internal management. These insights informed the content-based thematic coding approach, with the findings set out in this paper. All three researchers reviewed, extended, and verified notes relevant to each paper. Any differences in understanding and/or coding were highlighted and discussed to ensure consensus regarding the final coding decisions.

A numerical summary of key attributes relating to the final corpus of papers is represented in Figures 1–3. The papers and associated data are also set out within the supplementary table. As shown in Figure 1, 17% (n=9) of papers were published prior to 2010 and 83% (n=45) were published after 2010.

Figure 1

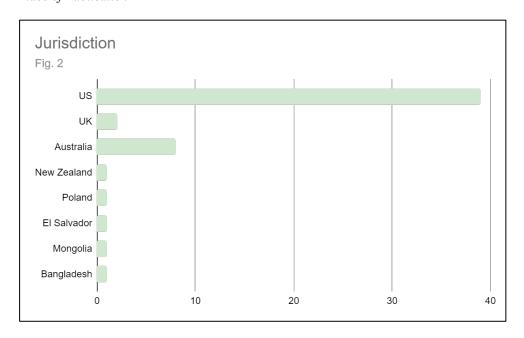
Year of Publication: Papers Published Prior to 2010 and After 2010



An overwhelming majority of the papers were published in the US (n=39, or 72% of the sample). Other jurisdictions included Australia (n=8, 15%); the UK (n=2, 4%); and New Zealand, Poland, El Salvador, Mongolia, and Bangladesh (each with n=1, or >2%), as shown in Figure 2.

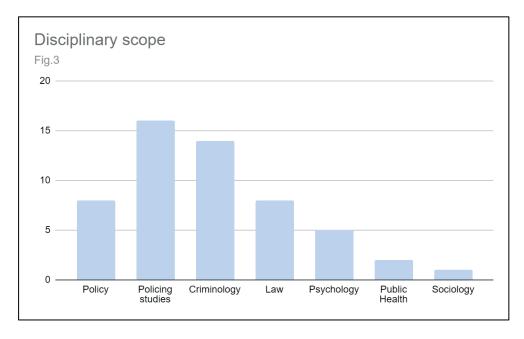
Figure 2

Place of Publication



A variety of disciplines were represented within the 54 papers (see Figure 3). A majority reflected either policing studies (n=16, or 30%) or criminology (n=14, 26%). Other disciplines included law (n=8, 15%), policy (n=8, 15%), psychology (n=5, 9%), public health (n=2, 4%), and sociology (n=1, >2%).

Figure 3Disciplinary Scope



The next section sets out and discusses key findings and insights with respect to the content, focus, themes, and theoretical approaches relating to the 54 papers. Drawing from these findings, implications for future research are then considered.

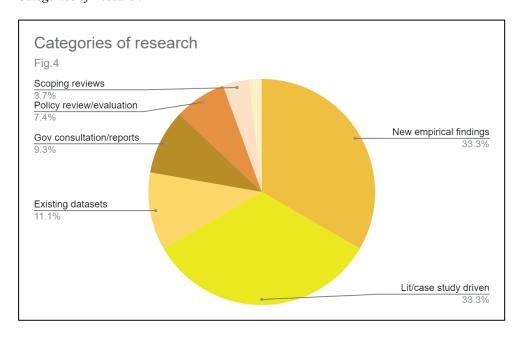
Scoping Review Findings

Types of Research

Thematic coding revealed seven key categories of research (represented in Figure 4): new empirical findings (n=18, 33%), literature and case study-driven papers (n=18, 33%), papers derived from existing datasets (n=6, 11%), government consultations and reports (n=5, 9%), policy review and evaluation (n=4, 7%), scoping reviews (n=2, 4%), and theory-driven papers (n=1, >2%).

Figure 4

Categories of Research



New Empirical Findings

The papers in this category were pitched to a diverse range of audiences in the US, the UK, Australia, and the Global South (including Mongolia and Bangladesh). Eight papers were published in policing journals, four in criminology and law journals, three in sociology and feminist journals, two in psychology journals, and one commission report was published in a policy recommendation format. The papers primarily drew from survey findings and training evaluations to provide an updated overview of attitudes within policing departments and agencies which may enable PPDFV (see Lonsway, 2006). Additionally, the papers addressed cultures of denigrating women, while also highlighting strengths within departmental leadership to create environments to challenge the cultural underpinnings of PPDFV and to respond more effectively (see Oehme et al., 2016). Survey methodologies were particularly insightful where they focused on what can be captured and understood about rates, prevalence, and attitudes of PPDFV within internal policing cultures (see Prost et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2016). This addresses some of the limitations evident within older survey methods (e.g., within papers drawing from existing datasets) which typically rely on officers to self-report perpetration of DFV (discussed further in the Methodological Approaches section below).

Papers by Lonsway (2006) and Oehme and colleagues (2011, 2016) foreground the benefits of equipping officers with DFV-focused education and training, both to challenge prevailing cultures which excuse or enable PPDFV, and to understand how training can empower officers to recognise and report the perpetration of DFV by colleagues and peers. Lonsway (2006, p. 417) appraised a sample of internal policies governing PPDFV and identified inconsistent requirements across states and jurisdictions for reports to be documented and investigated. Since the publication of this paper in 2006, some improvements have been made to standardise US agency policies and procedures for the investigation and management of officers who perpetrate DFV. For example, Oehme et al. (2016) researched the efficacy of The National Prevention Toolkit on Officer-Involved Domestic Violence, a web-based training resource which educates officers on DFV. Their findings challenged

"myths" about officer offending going unreported; 79% of officers reported that completing the training "would increase their or their colleagues' willingness to report other officers for domestic violence" to their superior (Oehme et al., 2016, p. 404).

While new empirical findings has been identified as a separate category of research, the findings and scope of some of these papers correlate with other categories from the review, such as the inquiries, commissions, and policy categories. This indicates that new empirical insights into PPDFV can cross over to applied research outputs. For example, the findings of the Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police Service Responses to Domestic and Family Violence (2022) identified workplace cultures of misogyny and the enabling of police violence and brutality in the line of duty as areas to address in the prevention of PPDFV.

Literature and Case Study-Driven Papers

Papers in this category were primarily published in the US and drew from the existing literature and/or high-profile case studies of PPDFV to contextualise the issue. Case studies, such as the murder of Crystal Brame and her children by Chief David Brame (Mazzola, 2014) and a case involving the abuse of a five-year-old child (Joseph, 2017), established the severity of PPDFV and the urgency of addressing it. These papers were predominantly legal in scope, with 12 published in law and criminology journals. Others were pitched to law enforcement and policing specialists, with four papers in this category published in policing journals or internal communications, and two published in policing psychology journals. The scope and focus of many of these papers contain a high correlation of citations to contextualise the issue. For example, Lonsway (2006) highlighted Johnson's (1991) estimate of DFV perpetration rates in police forces being as high as 40%. This may suggest that, while there is a growing sense of urgency within academic, policy, and political contexts to address this issue, there is an over-reliance on increasingly outdated empirical insights regarding the rates and prevalence of PPDFV. It may also reflect embedded and ongoing challenges circumventing the "thin blue line", which can prevent accurate and transparent reporting of PPDFV offending.

Papers Derived from Existing Databases

Papers in this category were almost entirely derived from pre-existing survey data from US law enforcement agencies. The papers were directed toward criminology, psychology, and policing audiences, with three papers published in criminology journals, and three published in policy, psychology, and policing journals. The limitations outlined within the previous category can be correlated to a smaller, yet still impactful, section of the corpus which draws from old and pre-existing data about PPDFV to produce "new" insights into the issue. This was particularly prevalent in papers using the Police Stress and Domestic Violence in Police Families in Baltimore, Maryland: 1997–1999. This study is now more than 24 years old and presents a host of interpretative and design flaws, including problematic question framing. The Baltimore data focuses on offending in heterosexual relationships, and its gender and race blindness illustrate key limitations of relying on self-report processes of data collection. It is notable that, where papers utilised the Baltimore dataset, they often did not discuss the limitations. For example, Williamson used the data in their 2021 paper without acknowledging potential issues associated with using a dataset that was, at the time, over 20 years old. The over-use of datasets of this nature is not reflected across the research from all jurisdictions captured in the scoping review. For example, more trauma-informed and rigorous analysis is being produced in the Global South, such as Gerelt-Od's (2023) recent scholarship with DFV support services in Mongolia who care for the victims of PPDFV. This indicates a need to examine more closely relevant methodological trends within policing studies and how these differ across jurisdictions and legal contexts.

Government Consultations and Reports

The scoping review included five government and independent commission reports into PPDFV in Australia. The five papers reviewed police misconduct, abuse, and violence in Queensland, New South Wales, and Victorian law enforcement agencies. Collectively, they highlight how systemic cultures of misogyny, racism, cultural biases, and abuses of power underscore the perpetration of DFV. The Australian consultations and report findings are particularly significant to methodological understandings of PPDFV as they contextualise these forms of violence as endemic to the force, requiring urgent policy reforms which centre victim-survivor perspectives. Highlighting key intersectional risks, the IBAC (2015a) *Predatory Behaviour* report found that "female victims of domestic and family violence are the most frequent targets of alleged predatory behaviour by police", illustrating the risk of being further victimised by police when reporting other forms of violence and abuse. The IBAC (2023) *Predatory Behaviour by Police: Thematic Review Summary* further supports these findings, examining a case study where a police officer began a predatory relationship with a victim of family violence after she made a complaint to police. These findings situate PPDFV not only as an abuse of power but as a form of abuse which plays out along gendered lines.

In a large-scale review of internal and professional abuse of power, the 2022 Commission of Inquiry spoke anonymously with members of the Queensland Police Service (QPS) to contextualise the nature and scope of police misconduct, including domestic, family, and intimate partner violence. Its findings suggest that their status and training as law enforcement officers

can embolden perpetrators in their use of coercive and abusive behaviours within intimate relationships. Cultures of hierarchical and systemic abuse were found to be rife, with many junior officers subjected to coercive and abusive power dynamics from superiors as a kind of "hazing" ritual, including "sexually suggestive" comments and exposure to inappropriate pornographic materials (Commission of Inquiry, 2022, p. 156). The Victorian Inspectorate's (2022) special report highlighted the unwillingness of Victoria Police to act against their own officers in cases of PPDFV, strongly critiqued IBAC's referral processes, and made key recommendations to improve oversight of police by IBAC. The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission's (LECC) (2023) review of the New South Wales police response to DFV also found evidence of the minimisation and/or mismanagement of internal complaints about police officers. The Commission found that in 54 out of 70 matters (77%), officers from the same command investigated officers accused of DFV (Law Enforcement Conduct Commission [LECC], 2023, p. 6).

In contrast to the critiques of papers which rely on increasingly obsolete datasets, the findings of the Australian commissions and reports into PPDFV represent a promising turn in methodological approaches to researching this issue. The reports engaged rigorous and independent reviews, centred the testimonies of many victim-survivors, and highlighted systemic and bureaucratic factors which enable the perpetration of DFV to be hidden or ignored. Further reviews of this type may offer deeper and more accurate insights.

Policy Review and Evaluation

Of the four papers which reviewed and evaluated existing policy responses to PPDFV, three were published in policing journals and one as a policy report. The papers primarily considered police agency policies in the US, although the National Police Chief's Council (2021) report discussed policy responses in the UK. The National Police Chief's Council report addressed the need for trust to be restored in police responses to violence against women and girls as a key opportunity for implementing change:

if anyone within the force – or a member of the public – raises any concerns about the conduct of officers or staff, they must be confident that they can report safely, be heard and have the issues that they raise investigated swiftly, thoroughly and fairly. (2021, p. 16)

Calls for national and unified policy frameworks to manage reporting and investigation protocols were also evident. For example, Pidel (2022) compared internal agency approaches to investigating PPDFV in Boston, Chicago, and New York, and found that centring victim perspectives is imperative to "provide lawmakers and law enforcement personnel with insight into the feelings that victims of domestic violence go through, specifically when the abuser is a member of law enforcement" (Pidel, 2022, p. 1). This builds upon the training and program appraisal scholarship of Oehme and colleagues (2011, 2016) in the US, which highlighted how humanising the context and impact of DFV improved the likelihood of officers reporting officer-involved DFV (OIDFV). Russell and Papas (2018) also critiqued the lack of uniformity in US internal agency policy which allows for discrepancies in managing officers who perpetrate DFV.

Scoping Reviews

The two scoping reviews included for analysis were both published in policing journals and considered PPDFV in the US. Mennicke and Ropes (2016) undertook a close reading of foundational scholarship on PPDFV, highlighting that the true extent of offending ranges widely, with estimations of 4–40% of officers perpetrating DFV. Oehme and Prost (2016) reviewed papers which offered a theoretical explanation of PPDFV, identifying the general strain, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), authoritarian "spillover" from the job, mental health, and alcohol abuse theories which are commonly discussed in PPDFV papers. While the scoping reviews formed a small part of the final corpus of our own review, they provide both a foundational summary of key scholarship and insights into this topic, as well as offering examples of scoping reviews similar to this paper.

Theory-Driven

Only one paper was coded as being theory-driven. DeVylder et al. (2020) included intimate partner violence in their broader theorisation of the impact of mental health upon police misconduct and other forms of violence. They identified police violence, misuse of force, deaths in custody, and racialised policing practices as evidence of the impact of internal policing cultures which valorise violence, as well as providing officers with easy access to service weapons.

Methodological Approaches

The range of methodological approaches to researching the causality, prevalence, and cultural underpinnings of PPDFV highlight that ongoing and critical scholarship is needed to fill knowledge gaps, alongside the next steps for meaningful prevention and reform. From a methodological perspective, the empirical papers utilised and drew from surveys/self-report data, police and training design data, interviews, and mixed methodological approaches. Only the integrity commission

outputs sought to articulate, in a more methodologically robust manner, specific and general victim-survivor experiences and perspectives.

Surveys/Self-Report Studies

For the studies that utilised survey research (n=19, 35%) there was an over-reliance on old datasets, such as Police Stress and Domestic Violence in Police Families in Baltimore, Maryland: 1997–1999, even within papers published more recently (e.g., Williamson, 2021; Zavala, 2013; Zavala & Melander, 2019; Zavala et al., 2015). The analyses indicated generally poor controls for extrapolating from this dataset, including uncritical definitions and explanations for gender, and racist generalisations about Black, Latin, and mixed-race officers. Hollingsworth (2017) also critiqued self-report methods and analysed arrest reports of offending officers to identify gender, race, and the nature of offending.

There were issues evident with the use of self-report research designs, with few control metrics implemented to ensure that responses were truthful and offered in good faith. Goodmark critiqued that self-reporting is:

likely to be flawed in some way (either through the necessity of using self-report or partner reports or because the research relies on official reports of intimate partner abuse made to law enforcement authorities) and that police officers and their partners are far more likely to underreport abuse. (2015, p. 147)

Self-reporting methods for investigating the prevalence and factors of PPDFV therefore pose significant barriers to robust empirical knowledge about the extent of abuse within police agencies and forces.

Another limitation of the survey designs outlined in the scoped papers reflected the language and framing of DFV. For example, Zavala et al. (2015) used questions such as "do you get physical with your spouse/significant other?", which could easily be misinterpreted for sexual innuendo, wrestling, and/or other forms of physical contact. There were some examples of more effective design, such as the survey used by Valentine et al. (2012) which asked respondents to reflect on their own early-life exposure to DFV, their awareness of the DFV perpetration of colleagues, and their own use of DFV. Other studies which used survey research were Brennan et al. (2023, p. 27), Blumenstein et al. (2012), Camarillo-Daley (2014), and Prost et al. (2020).

Policy and Training Design

Eight of the papers (15%) addressed specific policy and/or training design, with some also utilising survey research. Pidel (2022) reviewed internal policies for investigating PPDFV in Boston, Chicago, and New York. Oehme et al. (2011), Cheema (2016), and Saunders et al. (2016) appraised the efficacy of a training program developed in Florida for national use: the National Prevention Toolkit on Officer-Involved Domestic Violence. This internal training resource is designed to improve officer attitudes, knowledge, and responses to DFV (e.g., taking victim-survivor allegations seriously, and engaging with victims with care and respect). This training specifically educates officers about PPDFV and debunks key myths (e.g., that a police officer cannot be charged with crimes like DFV). Oehme and colleagues have published five papers which measure responses to the Toolkit. In contrast to survey-focused research measuring self-reported rates of DFV perpetration, most of the analyses involved self-report surveys from officers, taken after the Toolkit training.

Interviews

Interview research was evident within 9% (*n*=5) of papers, using a variety of structured, semi-structured, and narrative approaches. Gerelt-Od (2023) interviewed service providers in Mongolia to understand how they can provide support to victims in a context of a dismissive police culture. The study provides some insight into the prospective benefits of working with service providers where police agencies might be hesitant to report accurate rates of PPDFV. Davis et al. (2020) interviewed gay and bisexual men in El Salvador, noting that queer experiences of PPDFV are often silenced by discourses focusing on the experiences of women and heterosexual relationship dynamics. The study highlighted the need for broader, critical research into the experiences of victim-survivors of PPDFV. Bromfield et al. (2023) included some graphic and confronting excerpts from interviews with children about their experiences of sexual and physical abuse at the hands of police in Bangladesh. Participants were compensated with US\$2.00 and appear to have received no follow-up care or support after the interviews. This approach raises serious ethical concerns with the study design and its publication. In another study, Edwards (2006) conceptualised PPDFV as an issue of "mutual abuse". PPDFV was also framed narrowly using heteronormative language and presented as a form of violence occurring between married, cisgender male and female police officers.

Mixed Methodological Approaches

Seven of the papers (13%) utilised a range of methodological approaches and/or comprised different approaches to reviewing the PPDFV literature. DeVylder et al. (2020) present a broad review of literature on mental health and police violence, with a subsection addressing intimate partner violence. A typology covering police violence is linked to the prevalence of toxic

and masculinised internal cultures. Garvey (2015) set out a review of PPDFV literature. Waters and Ussery (2007) provided a review of "police stress", which included a brief connection to DFV. French and Fletcher's (2022) review considered PPDFV from a psychological and clinical perspective. The paper by Ginkowski (2006) is more of a commentary piece that presents snapshots of noteworthy PPDFV cases from the US, similar to Stinson and Liederbach's (2011, 2013) news media analyses of reported police family violence. Goodmark (2015) considered PPDFV scholarship in the context of critical masculinity theories. Goodmark (2019) continued this critique and connected PPDFV to the militarisation of policing. Kachynska (2018) conducted a preliminary review of PPDFV in Ukraine, covering reported cases from 2006–2010, with a particular focus on alcohol abuse, job stress, and authoritarianism.

Integrity Commission Outputs

Integrity commission reports/outputs comprised eight of the papers, all published within the last 10 years. Most, particularly the QPS Commission of Inquiry, evidence a strong trauma-informed approach and centre victim-survivor experiences as credible and valid forms of knowledge. This contrasts with some of the US-driven empirical approaches which tended to over-rely on self-report survey methods or recycle data from the late 1990s and missed important contexts to contemporary PPDFV.

Theoretical, Causal, and Critical Explanations of PPDFV

In addition to scoping, methodological, and jurisdictional differences, the papers in this review illustrate a variety of explanations for the prevalence of PPDFV. Systemic, individual, and intersectional framings of PPDFV include strain explanations, the "bad apple" theory, PTSD, and addiction theories of causation, in addition to critical approaches to police brutality and misconduct, gender, sexuality, and race (see Heib, n.d.; Jacobs, 2017; Larsen & Guggisberg, 2009). The array of theoretical, causal, and critical explanations of PPDFV are a significant finding and highlight trends in jurisdictional, disciplinary, and policy responses to PPDFV. Gaps in intersectional and critical accounts of the influence of gender, race, and sexuality on existing explanatory frameworks are evident, suggesting the need for future research grounded in these important areas.

Systemic Explanations of PPDFV

Some PPDFV scholarship has relied on strain theory to explain officer misconduct across a variety of jurisdictions (see Kachynska, 2018). The stress of the job has been highlighted as a significant reason for PPDFV (Oehme & Prost, 2016; Waters & Ussery, 2007), exacerbated by the effects of funding cuts, poor mental health and support services, and other resourcing limitations (Summerlin et al., 2010). Strain explanations were also used to highlight the challenges of "switching off" between the workplace and home. The "authoritarianism spill-over" from work to home life can sustain an "us-versus-them" mentality which is evident within the line of duty, but which can carry into family and intimate partner life (Blumenstein et al., 2012, p. 149). Zavala and Melander (2019) suggested that DFV may reflect the officer's desire to attain and maintain power and control over their partner's behaviour, which also underscores a variety of coercive and abusive behaviours, including officer-perpetrated homicide-suicides (Klinoff et al., 2015).

Strain explanations of PPDFV also draw connections between the stressful nature of police work and more complex forms of PTSD. Oehme and Prost (2016, p. 174) noted that military veteran use of DFV has a significant correlation with PTSD, arguing that law enforcement agencies can be considered "para-militarized" in similar ways to veterans. Other research noted connections between police PTSD and alcohol abuse, and the causal relation between alcoholism and increased rates of PPDFV (Kachynska, 2018). This presents serious implications for the ways that police work, and its resulting stresses, might translate into the risk of DFV for spouses and families of officers. Prost et al. (2020, p. 203) found that officers who had been victimised by DFV, but who had received trauma-informed support, "had a stronger tendency to aid victims than those with parallel experiences who did not resolve their trauma". This indicates the significant role that agency responses and support to officers with PTSD can play in mitigating PPDFV.

Individual Explanations of PPDFV

The bad apple theory conceptualises police misconduct as isolated incidents which reflect the wrongdoing of an individual, "thereby deflecting attention from systemic and institutional factors" which permit and cultivate harmful policing cultures (Gilles, 2000, p. 862). In the context of PPDFV, framing offenders as bad apples ignores what Lott and Trompetter (2000, p. 253) identified as the "rotten barrel" of law enforcement organisational cultures, which "can, and do create environments ... either promoting or inhibiting its members' involvement in domestic violence". Perpetuating the myth of the bad apple police officer ignores structural, bureaucratic, and cultural factors which permit and enable officer misconduct and abuse and is challenged by critical policy and criminology scholars (see Petersen, 2019). However, as Mazzola (2014, p. 360) noted, these framings are pervasive and internal management of DFV incidents give "officers little incentive to change their behaviour". Mazzola suggested that suing the "whole precinct" rather than an individual offending officer might counter the bad apple myth by placing responsibility on the culture of the department which sustains perpetration of DFV.

The impact of social learning and early childhood experiences have also been theorised to influence the likelihood of an officer perpetrating DFV. Zavala et al. (2015) hypothesised that early-life experiences of family violence, including witnessing family violence modelled in the home, correlate with PPDFV. This supports Zavala's (2013) earlier findings of a correlation between parental violence, child maltreatment, and negative emotions in predicting victimisation. Valentine et al. (2012, p. 22) found that "74.7% of officers who reported using physical violence also reported witnessing domestic violence as children, while 64.6% of officers who reported using physical violence had directly experienced domestic violence as children".

Strategies of Prevention

Theoretical approaches to PPDFV which frame it as an issue of individual wrong-doing – bad apples – posit that training is key to responding to instances of officer misconduct and abuse. This not only positions the responsibility on potential-abusers to "manage" their own learning and accountability, but similarly responsibilises administrators to identify and intervene in individual cases of officer-misconduct (see Lott, 1995) and/or to implement departmental policy condemning PPDFV as a "line-of-duty crime" (Ammons, 2005 p. 28). Training and better administrative responses are certainly an important part of the solution, but they still position PPDFV as an outlier which can be managed *individually*, rather than situating it within systemic and pervasive cultures which permit and excuse police brutality and violence.

Oehme et al. (2011) explored how a toolkit of online modules training officers to avoid perpetrating DFV has had some success in dispelling the "blue wall of silence". Later reviews of the toolkit showed an increase in officer confidence in identifying and reporting PPDFV (Oehme et al., 2016). Kruger and Valltos (2002) noted the need for supervisors to be trained in DFV identification; increased training of subordinates; and stronger protocols for hiring, training, and handling investigations. In the US, agency protocols and policies for the reporting of PPDFV are varied. Russell and Pappas (2018) called for a uniform, state-wide response to be mandated across the US to prevent gaps in agency responses to the perpetration of DFV. More recent scholarship has outlined the need for victim-survivor experiences and perspectives to be centred within police responses to PPDFV (Pidel, 2022). This connects with broader criminal justice initiatives to adopt trauma-informed and victim-centred approaches within reporting, investigations, and sentencing.

Critical Approaches to Police Brutality and Misconduct

Critical scholars have argued that police violence, including intimate partner violence, is tethered to internal police cultures which sustain toxic hierarchies with limited transparency, and is further enabled by access to firearms and other lethal weapons (DeVylder et al., 2020). Skills that are praised in the field can enable officers to perpetrate abuse effectively and covertly (Garvey, 2015). The dynamics of internal police culture function in various ways to silence victim-survivors and maintain the "blue code of silence" (Cheema, 2016 p. 494). Dowling et al. (2018, p. 38) found that "those whose approval of domestic violence was higher were significantly more likely to favour an "anti-victim" response", such as warning victims against reporting their perpetrators, or arresting the victims themselves. The internal "code of silence" that discourages identifying and reporting PPDFV has flow-on consequences and limits the ability of victim-survivors to make complaints. As Waxman (2021, p. 1) noted, "The Code places victims in a unique position, facing not only obstacles to reporting since their partner is a police officer, but inappropriate and biased complaint investigation".

The code of silence creates reluctance to cross the blue line and, more explicitly, it shapes internal policies and procedures which influence how agencies approach, investigate, and respond to offending officers. Issues with interdepartmental investigations and oversight can create a loop in responses to complaints. For example, in New South Wales, if the officer is no longer on the force, the complaint can be withdrawn.⁴ This can create a level of organisational complicity whereby credible complaints are dismissed due to an officer taking leave, retiring, or resigning after a complaint is made against them. Efforts to silence victim-survivors were outlined in Gerelt-Od's (2023) study in Mongolia which found "evidence of police suppressing DV reports in general population - warning respondents to 'solve the issue' within 24 hours so they don't have to enter it into the register" (Gerelt-Od, 2023, p. 56).

Other critical scholars considered the limitations of legal and institutional responses to PPDFV. Ávila (2014, p. 239) noted that the "lack of OIDV-focused legislation and reluctance by the courts to hold the police accountable through civil liability has further disincentivized departments from promulgating clear procedures for handling OIDV cases as line-of-duty crime". The limitations of internal procedures also include poor recruitment protocols, as reflected in the IBAC (2015b) report which found that inadequate vetting processes permitted prior offenders to enter Victoria Police and, in some circumstances, to obtain positions in higher-risk work areas. There are clearly many opportunities to overhaul reporting and internal management of personnel who perpetrate DFV. French and Fletcher (2022) argued that adopting a psychological ethics of care and commitment to beneficence is essential to counter agencies who cover up or harbour police perpetrators.

Gender and Sexuality

DFV are undeniably experienced as gendered forms of abuse. Larsen and Guggisberg (2009) framed intimate partner violence as a form of discrimination against women that is recognised in international law. In the UK, police misconduct has been explicitly framed as a form of violence against women and girls, with calls for renewed trust to be built between the police force and members of the public (National Police Chief's Council, 2021). Goodmark (2015, p. 101) argued that "policing is a male profession; it encourages and rewards many of the same notions of masculinity that underscore intimate partner abuse". This intersection between policing and masculinity made it nearly impossible to change the behaviour of abusive police officers, Goodmark (2015) noted. In stark contrast, scholars like Edwards (2006, p. 32) framed their research around an assertion that men and women are likely to use DFV at equal rates as a form of "mutual abuse". Other scholars presented counter arguments that female police officers are more likely to commit DFV than male officers (see Zavala et al., 2015). However, these arguments do not interrogate whether these rates of higher reporting correlate with actual rates of perpetration across the corpus. They also do not examine whether women are more likely than men to volunteer honest accounts in self-reporting surveys.

Speculation about DFV perpetration rates and prevalence among male and female officers represented only one approach to gender in the existing scholarship. Integrity commissions and independent reviews of police agencies in Australia have definitively identified that gender influences and shapes the perpetration of DFV by officers, as well as the procedures and policies that are used to investigate officer misconduct. The Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police Service Responses to Domestic and Family Violence (2022, p. 156) found that a nexus between cultures of misogyny, sexism, and racism informed responses. The Commission also identified that organisational hierarchy contextualised the abuse of junior officers by more senior officers. The IBAC report into predatory behaviour by Victoria Police (2023) also found evidence of officers who abused their position, including one case where an officer coerced an underage girl into a sexual relationship. This reflects what Bromfield et al. (2023) highlighted as the under-researched examples of DFV involving police officer sexual assault of children.

To date, there has been little engagement with queer victimisation experiences of PPDFV. In Australia, this is a timely concern following the February 2024 alleged double murder in New South Wales, for which a serving senior constable has been charged (Roberts et al., 2024). While Davis et al. (2020, p. 217) highlighted that gay and bisexual men do experience "some kind of emotional, sexual, physical or economic violence at the hands of police", there are many complex and presently under-researched intersections with queer experiences of DFV.

Conclusions, Implications, and Next Steps

This paper has identified diverse methodological, theoretical, and critical approaches within 54 papers examining PPDFV. While predominantly from the US and Australia, the papers highlight insights into policing strategies and accountability measures, through training and agency policy responses and independent mechanisms of oversight and critique, across multiple jurisdictions. More recent papers emphasise the importance of addressing PPDFV, but effective prevention is hampered by a paucity of empirical insights into the rates of, and responses to, DFV offending in police forces and agencies. Moreover, an over-reliance on out-of-date survey data and other methods of self-reporting limits understanding of prevalence, particularly when compared to interviews with victim-survivors of PPDFV and support service providers (Commission of Inquiry, 2022; Gerelt-Od, 2023). This finding is crucial, suggesting new agendas for meaningful victim-centred research methodologies into PPDFV. It is acknowledged that victim-centred approaches may not provide accurate data with respect to prevalence and trends in PPDFV. However, a better understanding of how PPDFV is experienced, and of the particular challenges faced by those affected, will offer deeper insights, and may help to demonstrate where more focused changes are needed – culturally and/or operationally. Victim-centred research approaches are also essential to support more careful analysis of the intersections between PPDFV and key identity attributes of those involved, particularly cultural and racial background.

This review has identified a gap in PPDFV scholarship concerning policing cultures that uphold the use of force and violence, misogyny, and racism. There is a need to provide an evidence base to challenge and counter the pervasive but, too often, reductive notion that police officers who commit DFV – indeed any type of crime, abuse of power, or misconduct – can be explained away as largely atypical "bad apples" rather than the consequence of what could be framed as "rotten institutional barrels". This individualisation of the issue removes any sense of collective responsibility from, or within, policing agencies, leadership, and/or prevailing cultural norms. There is clearly much work to be done within police agencies to ensure and support rigorous investigations of officers who perpetrate DFV. As Garvey (2015) noted, police officers are unique DFV offenders because their training in the field can equip them with skills to perpetrate and cover up their abuse. This includes manipulation techniques which "keep the victim off-balance and unsure of what is in the victim's best interest, and to convince the victim to submit to the abuser's wishes" (Garvey, 2015, p. 4). It is, therefore, imperative that police agencies are accountable for their complicity in training officers to become highly effective abusers, with independent oversight

mechanisms external to departmental decision-making and cultures. While policy evaluation and appraisal of existing agency responses to police misconduct and abuse are vital to identify the unique vulnerabilities in their response, there remains a gap in scholarship which proposes practical policy reforms. This is partly due to conflicting individual-focused, causal, and theoretical explanations of PPDFV. Exceptions include independent reviews undertaken by Commissions of Inquiry and other oversight bodies that have the potential to identify systemic and cultural issues within policing agencies. Addressing issues of self-report inaccuracy within policing departments and holding administrators and police leadership responsible for cultivating cultures of accountability and respect within their departments are crucial next steps. While the findings of the Australian commissions and reports into police misconduct are pioneering in this regard, it is important that recommendations arising from independent reviews are effectively implemented into policing practice and policies.

A further gap was identified in current research into PPDFV, which has largely considered violence in the context of cisgendered, heterosexual relationships. While acknowledging the gendered nature of DFV, it is important to better understand when and how PPDFV and other forms of officer misconduct intersect with police sanctioning, censorship, and violence experienced by queer communities - issues which are particularly active in jurisdictions which criminalise homosexuality. More broadly, there is a need for ongoing scholarship (particularly victim-centred and lived experience scholarship) that seeks to better understand the intersection of other identity attributes with PPDFV.

Adopting approaches similar to those taken by Australian Commissions of Inquiry, that have engaged with victim-survivors rather than police perpetrators, through anonymous and confidential reviews, may offer more effective ways to contextualise the prevalence, impacts, nature of, and responses to PPDFV.

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Correspondence: Associate Professor Clare Farmer, Deakin University, Australia. clare.farmer@deakin.edu.au

Also termed officer-involved domestic violence, police misconduct, police predatory relationships, and variations of intimate, domestic, family, and interpersonal violence.

The term paper is used as an umbrella term to refer to the materials examined as part of the scoping review. This includes empirical research papers, policy documents, inquiry findings, etc.

³ A supplementary table summarises key details relating to the 54 papers, attached as an Appendix.

⁴ Under section 132 of the *Police Act 1990* (NSW).

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Legislation Cited

Police Act 1990 (NSW)

Appendix
Supplementary Table: Papers Included in the Scoping Review (Listed by Year of Publication)

Article Title	Author/s	Journal/Publication	Year	Jurisdiction	Discipline
Deadly Secrets: Violence in the Police Family	Lonald Lott	FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin	1995	US	Policing studies
Bad Apples and Bad Barrels: Establishing Departmental Policy and Procedure to Combat Domestic Violence by Police Officers	Lonald Lott Philip Trompetter	Domestic Violence by Police Officers: A Compilation of Papers Submitted to the Domestic Violence by Police Officers Conference at the FBI Academy Quantico, VA	2000	US	Policing studies
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Politics, Safety, and Officer-involved Intimate Partner Violence	Leigh Goodmark Jane Stoever	The Politicization of Safety: Critical Perspectives on Domestic Violence Responses	2019	US	Criminology Law
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The Prevalence of Officer-involved Domestic Violence Cases in Mongolia: From the Perspective of Support Service Providers	Saranzaya Gerelt-Od	Asian Journal of Women's Studies	2023	Mongolia	Feminist studies Policing studies
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