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Violence & Society

The decline in the rate of domestic violence has stopped: Removing the cap on repeat victimisation reveals more violence

By

Sylvia Walby, Jude Towers and Brian Francis

Findings from the ESRC project 'Is the rate of domestic violence decreasing or increasing? Analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales'

Key Points

- The decline in the rate of domestic violence since the mid-1990s has stopped, although violent crime by other perpetrators is still falling
- The most reliable data on domestic violence is from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), rather than police recorded crime since there is no statutory category of domestic violence
- Official published CSEW data 'caps' the maximum number of incidents in a series at 5, so further recorded incidents are not included in official estimates
- Analysis of CSEW finds that when the cap is removed there are 60% more violent crimes.
- The increase due to removing the cap is concentrated on violent crime against women (70% increase) rather than men (50% increase) and on violent crime by domestic relations (70% increase) and acquaintances (100% increase) rather than by strangers (20% increase).

Introduction

While the rate of most violent crime is falling, the fall in the rate of domestic violence has stopped. There has been a general reduction in many types of crime since the 1990s. But in violent crime where the perpetrator is a domestic relation, this fall has stopped, even though for other perpetrators the fall is continuing.

There is governmental as well as civil society support to develop innovations in the criminal justice system and in the provision of support services to victims in an effort to stop violence against women and

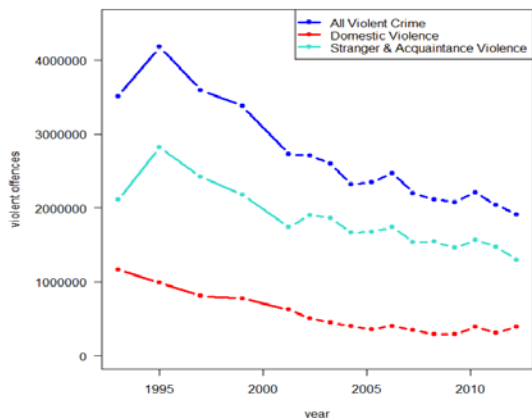
girls, so this is a disappointing finding. In order to find out the best places for future interventions, it is important to have accurate data on the pattern and extent of the violence.

Accurate data on domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, which reports on both the number of victims and the number of crimes, is hard to find. This Research Briefing reports on analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (see Walby, Towers and Francis 2014).

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Figure 1 - Changes in the rate of violent crime where the perpetrator is a domestic relation or is an acquaintance or stranger, 1993-2013



Year End	Domestic Violence	Acquaintance & stranger violence	All violent crime
1993	1,166,000	2,111,000	3,515,000
1995	989,000	2,820,000	4,176,000
1997	814,000	2,426,000	3,593,000
1999	775,000	2,181,000	3,382,000
2002	626,000	1,745,000	2,728,000
2003	506,000	1,905,000	2,714,000
2004	447,000	1,866,000	2,596,000
2005	402,000	1,666,000	2,322,000
2006	358,000	1,682,000	2,350,000
2007	407,000	1,739,000	2,473,000
2008	343,000	1,542,000	2,201,000
2009	293,000	1,543,000	2,113,000
2010	289,000	1,460,000	2,082,000
2011	391,000	1,567,000	2,206,000
2012	308,000	1,477,000	2,041,000
2013	398,000	1,301,000	1,915,000

Table 1 - Changes in the rate of violent crime where the perpetrator is a domestic relation or is an acquaintance or stranger, 1993-2013

Police Recorded Crime

It is challenging to measure the amount of domestic violence since it does not have a distinct 'crime code', so does not appear as a separate visible category in police recorded crime data. The only 'gender-based violence' that is visible in crime data is homicide, rape and other sexual offences.

The police have attempted to 'flag' domestic abuse in order to make it visible, but the data collection is not on a statutory footing and is not yet very accurate. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2014: 42) commented 'In view of the extreme variation in the information provided it is unlikely that some forces' data accurately reflects the number of repeat victims [of domestic violence]'. Without accurate data it is hard to assess 'what works' among the many innovations in policing in recent years.

	Number of recorded crimes	Percentage of all crime
Homicide	529	0.01%
<i>Of which: female victims</i>	171	<0.01%
<i>Of which: male victims</i>	358	<0.01%
Sexual offences ¹	52,760	1%
<i>Of which: Sexual offences against women and girls</i>	34,547	0.9%
<i>Of which: Sexual offences against men and boys</i>	3,548	<0.1%
Violence against the person ²	626,720	16%
Other crime	3,343,675	83%
All crimes	4,022,626	100%

¹There are additional sexual offences which are not gendered, thus the two subcategories presented in table 2 do not sum to the total of all sexual offences

²includes homicide

Table 2 Police recorded crimes, England and Wales, 2011/2

Crime Survey

The best data on domestic violence comes from the Crime Survey for England and Wales. This is a large representative national survey for England and Wales (Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own versions of the survey) reaching around 40,000 adults each year.

The survey asks questions about domestic violence in two ways: as part of the main questionnaire where detailed questions are asked 'face-to-face' (F2F); and as part of a self-completion (SC) module where the confidentiality of this methodology facilitates greater disclosure of these events. Table 3 shows that when the confidential methodology is used, the estimate of the number of victims of domestic violence that crosses the crime threshold is nearly four (3.8) times larger in the SC than the F2F (see Walby, Towers and Francis 2014 for methodological details).

The focus here is on the F2F since it provides greater detail on the incidents, including the extent to which an individual experiences repeat victimisation. Using the F2F means that only incidents that the expert coders think are crimes are examined; incidents that do not cross a crime threshold are not included in this Briefing.

The published data from the F2F on the CSEW finds that 17% of 'violence against the person' is by a domestic perpetrator, as shown in Table 4.

Digging into the Data

A close comparison of the raw data in the survey with the published findings found a difference in the number of incidents (which are all crimes). Not all of the crimes reported to the survey were included in the published statistics. This is due to the treatment of the high numbers of crimes reported by victims who reported 'series' of crimes that involved more than five crimes. Series of more than five crimes were capped at 5. So if the victim reported 6, 10 or 13 crimes, these all entered the official statistics as 5. Why?

The Office for National Statistics (2013) defends the practice thus 'The restriction to the first five incidents in a series has been applied since the

	Females	Males	All
VICTIMS: Domestic Violence	133,000	F2F Module *52,000	185,000
	458,000	SC Module 244,000	702,000
Ratio: F2F to SC	3.4	4.7	3.8

*N is greater than 10 but less than 50 thus caution should be exercised in considering these as national estimates

Table 3 CSEW Comparing face-to-face (F2F) and self-complete (SC) estimates of number of victims, 2011/2

	Estimated number of offences	Percentage of violent crime	Percentage of all crime
Domestic	308,000	17	3
Acquaintance	731,000	41	8
Stranger	753,000	42	8
All violence against the person ¹	1,792,000	100%	19
All offences	9,500,000		100%

¹ Violence against the person in table 4 excludes robbery and homicide

Table 4: Violence against the person, by domestic, acquaintance or stranger, CSEW 2011/2, published data.

CSEW began in order to ensure that the estimates are not affected by a very small number of respondents who report an extremely high number of incidents and which are highly variable between survey years.'

It is possible to agree that spurious volatility between years should be avoided, but not to accept that the appropriate solution to this issue is to exclude the incidents where a victim has been abused more than five times in a series. The experience of repeated abuse is too important to be treated in this way. In future outputs from this research project, alternative ways of addressing the problem of volatility between years due to small numbers of frequently abused victims are proposed for analyses that concern changes over time.

Tables 5 and 6 show the implications of removing the 'cap' and including all the crimes reported to the survey in 2011/12. Removing the cap that restricts the number of incidents to 5 per series leads to an increase in the estimated number of violent crimes by around 60%. This increase is not evenly distributed. It is lowest among violent crimes committed by strangers (which increases by 20%), and higher among violent crimes committed by people who are known to the victim, both acquaintances (which double) and domestic relations (which increase by 70%).

The increase in the estimates due to uncapping is slightly higher for violent crimes against women (an increase of 70%) than for violent crimes against men (an increase of 50%). This is linked to the higher proportion of violent crime committed against women by domestic relations and acquaintances, since violence from strangers less often follows a pattern of multiple repetitions.

Table 5 - Estimated numbers of violent and sexual crimes by domestic, acquaintance or stranger, CSEW, 2011/2: Comparing with and without 'cap'

	Estimated no. of offences 'capped' ¹	Estimated no. offences 'uncapped'	Ratio of uncapped to capped violence
Domestic	315,000	526,000	1.7
Acquaintance	777,000	1,529,000	2.0
Stranger	797,000	996,000	1.2
All violence against the person	1,889,000	3,051,000	1.6
All sexual offences	77,000	120,000	1.6
Violent and sexual offences	1,966,000	3,171,000	1.6

¹ Our capped estimates are slightly higher than ONS estimates due to methodology used (see Walby, Towers & Francis 2014)

² N is greater than 10 but less than 50 thus caution should be exercised in considering these as national estimates

Table 6: Estimated numbers of violent crimes (violence against the person and sexual offences) by domestic, acquaintance or stranger, by sex of victim, CSEW, 2011/2, capped and uncapped

	FEMALES			MALES		
	Est. no. offences 'capped'	Est. no. offences 'uncapped'	Ratio uncapped to capped	Est. no. offences 'capped'	Est. no. offences 'uncapped'	Ratio uncapped to capped
Domestic	246,000	419,000	1.7	103,000	170,000	1.6
Acquaintance	368,000	760,000	2.1	435,000	801,000	1.8
Stranger	225,000	238,000	1.0	606,000	782,000	1.3
Total	839,000	1,417,000	1.7	1,144,000	1,753,000	1.5

² N is greater than 10 but less than 50 thus caution should be exercised in considering these as national estimates

Conclusions

New analysis of the data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales enables a better understanding of the patterns in violent crime. Removing the cap on high numbers of repeated crimes shows that there is not only more violent crime, but also that this is unevenly distributed towards women and to those victimised by domestic relations and acquaintances rather than by strangers.

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The UNESCO Chair Group is a research group around the UNESCO Chair in Gender Research held by Professor Sylvia Walby at Lancaster University. It engages in research on gender inequality that has the potential to improve policy internationally.

This Research Briefing is one in a series on 'Violence and Society' at Lancaster University.