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# The Cost of Domestic Violence:
# Up-date 2009

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**The Cost of Domestic Violence: Up-date 2009**

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**Executive summary**

While domestic violence is terrible enough in its own right to justify policy interventions, the scale of the costs aids the prioritisation of relevant policies. This report up-dates *The Cost of Domestic Violence* by Sylvia Walby published by the Women and Equality Unit, Department of Trade and Industry in 2004[1], from the year 2001 to 2008[2].

There are several reasons for changes to the estimates: a decrease in the rate of domestic violence[3]; greater use of public services by victims of domestic violence, as a result of their development; and technical adjustments due to inflation and to growth in GDP.

**Cost of Domestic Violence, 2001, 2008**

| | Costs 2001 £m | Costs 2008 £m |
|---|---|---|
| **Services** | 3111 | 3856 |
| **Economic Output** | 2672 | 1920 |
| **Human and emotional costs** | 17,086 | 9954 |
| **Total** | 22,869 | 15,730 |

There has been a reduction in the cost of lost economic output due to the decrease in the rate of domestic violence.

The cost of the lost economic output is restricted only to time off work due to injuries sustained as a result of domestic violence. While there are additional losses to productivity as a result of stress and reduced performance, such costs are additional to those included in this report.

The decrease in domestic violence has been achieved in part by the development of and increased utilisation of public services. For example, there are higher rates of reporting of domestic violence to the police and other services. This means that while the rate of domestic violence has been falling, the use and costs of public services have not declined. Indeed, as compared with 2001 these costs for 2008 are higher as a result of inflation. The costs for business and the wider society of domestic violence have declined as a result of the fall in the rate of domestic violence, due to better public services.

The investment in public services to reduce domestic violence has been cost effective for the country as a whole, reducing the extent of lost economic output as well as the human and emotional costs.

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[1] *The Cost of Domestic Violence* by Sylvia Walby published by Women and Equality Unit in 2004 is available at: http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/sociology/papers/walby-costdomesticviolence.pdf

[2] Thanks to Jo Armstrong and comments and help with data.

[3] Alison Walker, John Flatley, Chris Kershaw, and Debbie Moon (2009) *Crime in England and Wales 2008/09 Volume 1 Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*. http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109vol1.pdf

## Introduction

This report up-dates[4] the costs of domestic violence first published in *The Cost of Domestic Violence* in 2004 by the Women and Equality Unit of the Department of Trade and Industry[5]. The estimates in this report are centred on 2008, the most recent year for which data is available, while those in the original report were centred on 2001.

While domestic violence is terrible enough in its own right to justify policy interventions, the scale of the costs adds to these arguments. By demonstrating that the cost of domestic violence is borne by the wider economy and society, not only the victims, it is hoped to make a contribution to policy development to reduce and eliminate this violence.

## Methodology

The methodology of this report and its predecessor draws on governmental practice in measuring costs in adjacent fields, especially those developed by the Home Office in measuring the cost of crime[6], and those by the Department for Transport, on which the Home Office has drawn[7]. However, it considers in more detail than the Home Office the specific aspects of domestic violence that produce distinctive types of costs. The original report, whose methodology this report follows, was considered to meet National Statistics standards.

Following previous practice, the costs are divided into three types: the cost of (largely public) services to those who suffer domestic violence; the value of the lost economic output; and the human and emotional costs.

In order to estimate costs several types of data are used: the amount of domestic violence; the extent of use of services by those who suffer domestic violence; the cost (per unit) of these services; the extent of lost employment and economic output; the human and emotional cost associated with different levels of injury.

The amount of domestic violence is discovered from the British Crime Survey, an annual representative sample survey of over 40,000 people, which asks about the extent to which people have been victims of crimes. There are two parts here: the main part of the survey where questions have been asked 'face-to-face' for many years; and a self-completion section where questions are answered confidentially and in which rates of disclosure are in consequence much higher.

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[4] Thanks to Jo Armstrong for comments and help with data.

[5] *The Cost of Domestic Violence* by Sylvia Walby published by Women and Equality Unit in 2004 is available at: http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/sociology/papers/walby-costdomesticviolence.pdf

[6] Sam Brand and Richard Price (2000) *The Economic and Social Costs of Crime*. Home Office Research Study 217.

[7] Department for Transport (2009) *The Accidents Sub-Objective* TAG Unit 3.4.1.

The extent of use of services by those who suffer domestic violence. Not all victims use services. The report makes estimates, based on evidence, on the extent to which victims of domestic violence actually draw on services. For example, the British Crime Survey asks victims of domestic violence if they used police services. In addition, this drew on research by the Department for Transport, in turn used by the Home Office, on issues such as the extent of the use of health services following specific types of injury[8].

The cost (per unit) of the services used was estimated using information specific to each service, often developed by each service for its own monitoring purposes. For example, the estimate of the cost of housing those made homeless by domestic violence used data on Local Authority costs produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

The extent of lost economic output was limited solely to that due to time off work due to injuries. This used the estimates developed by research for the Department for Transport on the effects of injuries sustained in road traffic accidents. While there are likely to be additional detrimental consequences of domestic violence on work performance, the costs in this report (as in the previous report) are limited to those where robust measurements were possible, and therefore might be considered conservative.

The inclusion of human and emotional costs has been subject to debate. Their inclusion is based on the notion that people would pay something in order not to suffer the human and emotional costs of being injured. They are included following the practice of the Department for Transport and the Home Office. The Department of Transport developed its research programme to estimate the cost of injuries in order to identify the full cost of road traffic accidents as part of their cost-benefit analysis of whether building a new road was appropriate or not. The Home Office followed this methodology in estimating the cost of crime. It might be considered that if it is appropriate to include human and emotional costs in decisions on whether or not to fund the building of new roads, it is appropriate to include them in decisions on to whether or not to fund policies to reduce and eliminate domestic violence.

The findings in this report are limited to domestic violence and do not extend to all forms of gender based violence or violence against women, although they do include the cost of serious sexual assaults within relationships. If these wider forms of violence were to be included, the costs would rise. The costs in this report include only those that can be robustly estimated with verifiable data. This means that many costs (such as long-term effects on children) are not included, and thus that these estimates are conservative.

## The main areas of costs

*Services*

[8] Department for Transport (2009) *The Accidents Sub-Objective* TAG Unit 3.4.1.

Six major services are used by victims of domestic violence:

The criminal justice system: the police, prosecution services, courts, probation and prisons are included.

Health care (both physical and mental health): GPs and hospitals are the major costs included.

Social services: only the costs linked to children are included.

Housing and refuges: the cost of emergency Local Authority housing and refuges are included.

Civil legal services: the cost of solicitors and of injunctions are included.

*Lost Economic Output*

The estimated cost of the lost economic output was limited solely to that due to time off work due to injuries.

*Human and Emotional Costs*

These are estimates of what people would pay to avoid such injuries.

**Sources of changes in the estimates**

Four major changes are included in the revised estimates of cost: changes in the amount of domestic violence; changes in the use of public services by victims of domestic violence; inflation; and changes in GDP. Further research could improve the estimates further, but that is beyond the scope of the resources available for the current report.

**Changes in the amount of domestic violence**

The best measure of the amount of domestic violence is the British Crime Survey self-completion module. However, since it is new, and the 2001 questionnaire was changed significantly, it is available in consistent form only since 2004/5, so the time series is not long enough to be helpful for the present project. For this report, data on changes in the amount of domestic violence is needed between 2001 and 2008, but the BCS self-completion data is only available from 2004/5 to 2008/9.

The next best measure of the amount of domestic violence is the British Crime Survey main survey. It is widely accepted that this survey substantially undercounts the amount of domestic violence, since people are reluctant to answer such sensitive questions face to face with an interviewer. Indeed a comparison of the BCS main with the BCS self-completion in 2001 found that

the rate of disclosure of the prevalence of domestic violence was nearly five times higher in the self-completion module than in the main part.[9] In this comparison the figures from the main BCS were domestic violence excluding frightening threats, and in the self-completion BCS the figures were limited to a threshold of force. The 2001 self-completion found a prevalence of domestic violence of 2.8% as compared with 0.6% for the main. Nevertheless, the estimate of the rate of change in domestic violence using the main BCS findings is probably robust.

The main BCS finds the number of incidents of domestic violence to be 626,000 in 2001/2, falling to 293,000 in 2008/9[10]. This is a decline of 53%. This is proportionately greater than the decline in the number of all BCS violent crimes, which fell by 23% over the same period, declining from 2,728,000 in 2001/2 to 2,114,000 in 2008/9.

**Changes in the use of domestic violence services**

It might be thought that as the rate of domestic violence falls, the use of domestic violence services might also fall. This is not the case. Rather there appears to have been an increase in the propensity of those suffering domestic violence to use public services.

The British Crime Survey found that in 2001/2 only 35% of domestic violence incidents were reported to the police. By contrast, by 2008/9 this had risen to 47%[11].

The number of violent incidents reported to and recorded by the police, thus creating activity and work by the police and the rest of the criminal justice system, has been fairly stable, rising just slightly during the period under review. Consistent definitions in recorded violent crime are only available between 2002/3 and 2008/9 (and sometimes only 2007/8) because of changes in methods of recording. Of all violence against the person with injury, 372,124 were recorded by the police in 2002/3 as compared with 452,364 in 2007/8. Of violence against the person without injury, 472,954 were recorded by the police in 2002/3 as compared with 482,836 in 2008/9. (There is no nationally published data on the flagging of violent crime as domestic, so specific data on police recording of domestic violence cannot be provided here).

The best estimate is of a decline in the amount of domestic violence at the same time as an increase in the use of the services of the criminal justice

[9] Sylvia Walby and Jonathan Allen (2004) *Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*. Home Office Research Study 276. London: Home Office. Page 112. http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/sociology/papers/walby-hors.pdf

[10] Alison Walker, John Flatley, Chris Kershaw, and Debbie Moon (2009) *Crime in England and Wales 2008/09 Volume 1 Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*. http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109vol1.pdf

[11] Alison Walker, John Flatley, Chris Kershaw, and Debbie Moon (2009) *Crime in England and Wales 2008/09 Volume 1 Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*. http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109vol1.pdf

system. The police and the CJS are probably spending about the same level of time and resource on domestic violence in 2008/9 as they did in 2001/2 as a consequence of these contrary trends in 'real' rate of the violence and the propensity to report and use services.

Since there have been major policy developments encouraging victims of domestic violence to seek help and to develop the quality of the services that they may receive, this is not surprising. There have been major changes in many services. In health services, developments have include the introduction of more frequent enquiries as to the causes of injuries and new hospital based services, such as Sexual Assault Referral Centres. There has been the development and extension of injunctions and other civil legal remedies that might increase service use. There has been a significant change in the media portrayal of domestic violence. The conclusion drawn here is that the increased propensity to seek help that is robustly identified in the criminal justice system through the British Crime Survey is common to all major services. Further research would be needed to nuance this estimate.

The implications of the combination of these two trends of the decrease in the rate of domestic violence and the increased use of public services are, for public services, a roughly stable use of resources.

## Inflation

The costs of domestic violence are larger in 2008 than they are in 2001 as a consequence of inflation. It is the usual practice by the Home Office[12] and Department for Transport[13] to increase costs in line with inflation. This index is applied to all estimates.

The Bank of England provides an on-line 'inflation calculator'[14] which makes it possible to set the base year at 2001 and find out what the same goods and services would cost in 2008. If 2001 is taken as 100, then 2008 is 123.95. Between 2001 and 2008 the average annual inflation rate has been 3.1%.

## Changes in GDP

The value of lost economic output is affected by changes in the value of the economy as a whole, as measured by Gross Domestic Product. The cost of the time lost by workers unable to work is greater when the value of their average output is greater. This report thus follows the practice of both the Home Office[15] and Department for Transport[16] in increasing the value of the

[12] *The Economic and Social Costs of Crime Against Individuals and Households 2003/4* Home Office Online Report 30/05 http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/rdsolr3005.pdf
[13] Department for Transport Highways Economics Note 1 (2004).
[14] Bank of England *Inflation Calculator*.
http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/inflation/calculator/index1.htm
[15] Home Office 30/05 (2003/4)
[16] Department for Transport Highways economics note 1 (2004).

lost economic output in line with increases (or decreases) in GDP. This index is not applied to any area other than lost economic output.

The source of the index of changes in GDP used in these calculations is that of HM Treasury[17].

**Revised estimates by area**

*Public services*

Changes in the cost of public services due to:
Use of public services. This is estimated to be constant, since the decrease in the rate of domestic violence is approximately matched by the increased use of such services (see discussion above).
Inflation[18]: 3.1% per year; index 2001=100, 2008= 123

| Services | Cost 2001 £m | Cost 2008 £m |
|---|---|---|
| **Criminal justice system** | 1017 | 1261 |
| **Health care** | 1396 | 1730 |
| **Social services** | 228 | 283 |
| **Housing and refuges** | 158 | 196 |
| **Civil legal services** | 312 | 387 |
| **Total** | 3111 | 3856 |

*Economic Output*

Changes due to:
Decline in the rate of domestic violence[19]: 53% since 2001
Increase in GDP increases the potential value of the lost output. HM Treasury GDP deflator[20]: 2001/2 =81.1; 2008/9 =100
Inflation[21]: 3.1% per year; index 2001=100, 2008= 123

| | Cost 2001 £m | Cost 2008 £m |
|---|---|---|
| **Lost economic output** | 2672 | 1920 |

[17] HM Treasury *Gross Domestic Product (GDP) deflators: a user's guide*. http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/data_gdp_index.htm
[18] Bank of England Inflation Calculator http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/inflation/calculator/flash/index.htm
[19] Alison Walker, John Flatley, Chris Kershaw, and Debbie Moon (2009) *Crime in England and Wales 2008/09 Volume 1 Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*. http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109vol1.pdf
[20] HM Treasury *Gross Domestic Product (GDP) deflators: a user's guide*. http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/data_gdp_index.htm
[21] Bank of England Inflation Calculator http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/inflation/calculator/flash/index.htm

In 2001 lost economic output was worth £2672m; in 2008 this had fallen to £1920m.

*Human and emotional costs*

Changes due to
Decline in the rate of domestic violence[22]: 53% since 2001
Inflation[23]: 3.1% per year; index 2001=100, 2008= 123

| | Cost 2001 £m | Cost 2008 £m |
|---|---|---|
| **Human and emotional costs** | 17,086 | 9954 |

*Total*

| | Cost 2001 £m | Cost 2008 £m |
|---|---|---|
| **Services** | 3111 | 3856 |
| **Lost economic output** | 2672 | 1920 |
| **Human and emotional costs** | 17,086 | 9954 |
| **Total** | 22,869 | 15,730 |

## Conclusions

There has been a decrease in the cost of domestic violence from £23bn in 2001 to £16bn in 2008. This is the result of a small increase in the cost of services, which is far outweighed by the decrease in the cost of lost economic output and the decrease in the human and emotional costs.

There has been a decrease in the amount of domestic violence between 2001 and 2008. This has been achieved in part by the development of and increased utilisation of public services. An example is that of the substantially higher rates of reporting of domestic violence to the police and other services. This means that, while the rate of domestic violence has been falling, the costs of public services have not declined. Indeed, as compared with 2001 the costs for 2008 are higher as a result of inflation.

The costs for business and the wider society of domestic violence have declined as a result of the fall in the rate of domestic violence. This is at least in part due to the increased availability of and use of public services. The

[22] Alison Walker, John Flatley, Chris Kershaw, and Debbie Moon (2009) *Crime in England and Wales 2008/09 Volume 1 Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*. http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109vol1.pdf
[23] Bank of England Inflation Calculator http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/inflation/calculator/flash/index.htm

investment in public services to reduce domestic violence has been cost effective for the country as a whole.