Home Office

Respondents to the consultation on experimental statistics from the BCS Intimate Personal Violence questionnaire

January 2012

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Against Violence and Abuse

AVA (Against Violence & Abuse) & Rights of Women response to consultation on changes to British Crime Survey intimate personal violence questionnaire

Introduction

AVA (Against Violence & Abuse)

AVA is a national second tier service working to end all forms of violence against women and girls. The key aims of AVA are:

· To challenge, enable, encourage and support all agencies and communities to contribute to achieving our vision of a world free from violence against women and girls.
· To offer a range of high quality and expert services to facilitate specialist and generic agencies to contribute towards our vision.
· To identify and fill gaps in the field, find innovative solutions to current and emerging situations and inspire an effective strategic approach to reducing and preventing violence against women and girls.

Rights of Women

Rights of Women aims to achieve equality, justice and respect for all women. Rights of Women advises, educates and empowers women by:

• Providing women with free, confidential legal advice by specialist women solicitors and barristers .
• Enabling women to understand and benefit from their legal rights through accessible and timely publications and training.
• Campaigning to ensure that women's voices are heard and law and policy meets all women's needs.

Rights of Women is a not-for-profit organisation that provides free legal advice to women and engages on a policy level with issues including access to justice and violence against women. We provide training on legal issues to statutory and third sector professionals, write legal publications designed to assist individual women, and those supporting them, through the law, and provide three legal advice lines offering legal advice to women on immigration and asylum issues, sexual violence and criminal law, and family law (including domestic violence, divorce, contact disputes). Our advice lines are staffed by qualified practising women solicitors and barristers.

Overall comments

We welcome the split-sample experiment and the findings as we believe that good data is essential to planning adequate coverage of effective services and to monitoring the effectiveness of changes in the law. It is also useful for identifying any further changes needed to both legislation and policy.

We have noted in the last ten years changes in the way data is analysed and presented which can be useful but can also sometimes lead to frustrating and unhelpful gaps in information. It can also lead to misleading interpretations of data by non-statisticians, which in turn leads to inappropriate decisions about policy and practice in responding to victims and perpetrators, both male and female.

We are pleased to be given this opportunity to comment on the BCS intimate personal violence questionnaire as we value this resource greatly and believe it provides and can

provide an unequalled basis for estimating need for and value of services and legislation.

We also note and urge the government to consider that there is a considerable body of research on the methodology and content for research on IPV and to make use of this. In the first instance, we ask that the government consider the work of Sylvia Walby and Jonathan Myhill in an earlier edition of the BCS IPV report. This version had significant benefits over the analysis in subsequent years, particularly in relation to data about repeat victimisation and impact. It is important that analysis and presentation of the figures is clearly carried out, using prevalence (numbers) wherever possible, instead of using percentages of male and female victims, as has been commonly done in recent years. This leads to misleading impressions of the differences between men's and women's experiences of partner abuse in particular, but also other forms of IPV. Further comments on this topic are included below.

We have used our experience of reading and using the figures in the BCS IPV over many years to inform our response to this consultation, as well as careful reading of the report on the split-sample questionnaire experiment in the 2010/11 BCS self completion module on intimate personal violence (Hall and Smith, 2011).

Amendments to questions

Whichever question set is favoured going forwards, the analysis published here may indicate that further amendments to questions are needed in future.

• Specifically, if the alternative question set is favoured there is the issue of the inclusion of a filter question before the most explicit questions on serious sexual assault. This was intended to reduce offence to respondents which may have impacted on the parental refusal rate to the BCS extension to 10 to 15 year olds. Given that the addition of a filter question to the most explicit questions in serious sexual assault has not resulted in a reduction in the parental refusal rate to the 10 to 15 survey, should this filter be retained?

OUR RESPONSE:
It is not clear what other benefits there may be to retaining the filter question. The concern about causing offence appears, from the findings of the research, to be one raised by non victims rather than by victims. It also appears possible, from the research, that the filter question may have excluded some victims of sexual assault from answering about this. As there are no effects on the parental refusal rate for retaining the filter question and the screener question may be distorting the prevalence rates for sexual assault, we recommend that the filter question be dropped.

• If the alternative question set is favoured then are further amendments needed to minimise the risk of reporting experiences that should not be classed as IPV? Should these be limited to the stalking questions, less serious sexual assault questions or to others?

OUR RESPONSE:
There are other ways of minimising this risk. For example, adding in "was this from a partner, ex-partner or someone who thought they had a relationship with you, even if you did not?" after each of the stalking and less serious sexual assault questions. Stalking is a significant part of partner abuse post-separation and there is a need for good data on this. It is a risk indicator for future violence and there is a possibility that there are significant differences between victims in their experiences of stalking, such as differences by gender, age, marital status etc. It is important to keep in as many of the stalking questions as possible and amend them or add to them to be able to identify more clearly if this was partner abuse in particular, to aid our understanding of significant risk factors.

• Are there any other amendments suggested for consideration in the module in future?

OUR RESPONSE:
Include clear numerical analysis of repeat victimisation given in numbers for male and female victims (prevalence) as was done in the Walby and Myhill version. This should include number of male and female victims experiencing only 1, 1 – 4, 4 – 10 and more than 10 incidents (or similar) of partner abuse in particular, as this category of IPV is significantly associated with repeat victimisation. At the moment it is usually not possible to identify either the absolute numbers of chronic repeat victims or the proportions of male and female victims amongst the absolute number of all chronic repeat victims.

Present figures for prevalence instead of solely as percentages of male and female victims, as this can give a false impression of equivalence as proportions of total number of male and female victims for specific categories of IPV can be similar, whilst the actual number of male and female victims are not. Non-statisticians can and do confuse these figures and interpret them as gender parity.

Present figures of prevalence for partner abuse causing injury.

Retain clear definitions and make it much clearer in the text when departing from these. For instance, some figures are for partner abuse excluding sexual assault and stalking, others for partner abuse include these. It is important to be clear that partner abuse INCLUDES sexual assault and stalking. In some years it is not possible to identify the figures for partner abuse including these two forms of partner abuse. This gives a distorted picture of the prevalence of partner abuse and also a distorted impression of the differences between male and female victims.

Include analysis, if possible, of partner abuse post-separation. This is important as there are significant risk indicators for partner abuse post-separation, which it is important to monitor, particularly as these have implications for child contact and for domestic homicide.

Include questions about gender (and if possible, sexuality) of perpetrators of partner abuse. This would significantly aid planning of appropriate responses to perpetrators.

Ensure clarity in the wording of the new questions: The original set of questions asks someone to highlight what has happened to them out of a list of abusive behaviours and they can choose more than one. The new set of questions divides up the list of abusive behaviours but by doing so lumps some completely different types of abuse together e.g. has someone ever: “prevented you from having your fair share of the household money; stopped you from seeing friends or relatives; repeatedly belittled you to the extent that you felt worthless”. You can only answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ so if you put ‘yes’ it is not going to be known whether the response is yes to financial or emotional abuse, or to two or all three. This is not going to give as detailed a response to questions on inter personal violence. However, this needs to be balanced against the need to not make the form overly lengthy which may lead respondents to give up before completing.

Great sensitivity in wording questions: For example, the introduction to sexual offences questions states “Although the questions may seem quite intrusive, they are important…”. We are not convinced that ‘intrusive’ is the most sensitive word to be using in this context.

Publication of time-series data

If the alternative question set is used from April 2012 onwards, there are additional issues around the publication of time-series data.

• Is a full break in the BCS time series acceptable in exchange for the possibility of improved coverage of victimisation using the alternative question set?

OUR RESPONSE: Yes, as the improved coverage gives a much clearer picture of IPV prevalence.

• Should an attempt be made to adjust past estimates to make them comparable with estimates from the alternative question set using the split-sample data? Would this risk causing inaccurate comparisons to be made over time?

OUR RESPONSE: Yes it is important to attempt to find a way to include data that can be compared pre- and post- changes. This can be done in two ways: attempting to analyse data post-change to identify comparable data for pre-change, and vice versa as suggested. There have already been other changes in the way data is analysed and presented which have meant that some things (such as levels of chronic partner abuse, for example) cannot be compared between reports. This has been unfortunate and every effort should be made to reduce such discrepancies, preferably by taking the most comprehensive and detailed ways of analysing and presenting data between years.

The gaps in data were unfortunate and led to misleading data, so it is important to correct these, but it is also important to be able to find a way to compare the time series data. Every effort should be made to find ways of estimating changes.

Davina James- Hanman
Director
AVA (Against Violence & Abuse)

Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, Metropolitan University

Response to consultation on the BCS Interpersonal violence module

In principle we welcome re-visiting this module and its re-vision in the light of new knowledge, issues and improving research practice. That said there needs to be careful consideration of the issues at stake, since they have implications for the validity of findings and how data is used within public policy and wider debates.

We note our concerns under the questions which we have been asked to respond to, but begin with a reflection on the context for this pilot.

We have a range of interests in this consultation.

- We teach on our MA using the BCS findings and methodology, in comparison with specialist violence against women surveys.
- We have used the BCS data ourselves in several recent research projects, undertaking secondary analysis.
- We draw on the Home Office publications reporting the findings in our policy based research projects as context setting data.

The context for the pilot

We have never had a specialised national violence against women survey in England and Wales, as commended by the UN. Data from the BCS, therefore, has been critical in the underpinning evidence base for policy developments in this field. A number of issues have been raised as to the limitations of the data itself – the small number of questions on sexual violence; their location after questions after IPV, which may prompt recall of SV in this context; and the lack/limited data on SV in childhood.

Critical issues about definitions and data analysis have also been raised – particularly that the headline figures for partner abuse are based on 'any incident' when this can be as little as a push or slap, which leads to a spurious gender symmetry in findings which has had deleterious impacts on both policy and public debates. We note this because, in our view, politicians, policy makers and the general public do not understand domestic violence/intimate partner violence as 'any incident', but rather as a course of conduct. Indeed, much contemporary social research, and all specialised support services work with a definition of 'a pattern of coercive control'. These matters have not been addressed in the consultation – perhaps because the issues relate to the wording of questions and the implications of changes for trend analysis – but they are relevant to any re-design and to our responses below.

We also note that in reporting BCS findings IPV is used as an acronym for interpersonal violence; this is extremely unfortunate since there is an extensive international knowledge on IPV as an acronym intimate partner violence. The potential for confusion here is significant – indeed we ourselves read one of the sections wrongly because of it, as we highlight below.

The issues which did inform the pilot were:

- concerns about the explicit language used, particularly with respect to sexual violence, which is viewed as a barrier to responses especially given the inclusion of 11-15 year olds;
- that the preamble to the module was inadequate in preparing respondents for what they were being asked;
- that as the module is self- completion it needs a simpler format (y/n) and reduced multiple response formats.

1. Which of the question sets should be used in the BCS from April 2012 onwards?
Given that respondents found the new set of questions easier to understand, there are strong arguments for using them. We do, however, have a number of caveats to this, since ease of completion should not trump accuracy and usefulness of data.

If in the partner abuse questions each item is asked separately this will enable separation of acts which vary considerably in their seriousness – to ask for example "they may have pushed you, slapped you, hit, punched or kicked you, choked you or used a weapon against you" conflates life threatening events and what some have termed 'common couple violence'. Questions need to be able to distinguish not only low level events (a push/slap) from more serious ones (choking and use of weapon), but also their frequency, are they single events or located in a pattern of repeated behaviour.

Whilst the consultation document states that each item had a yes/no response the more detailed documentation suggests otherwise. For example:

> Revised question (NIPV1) three items (prevented you from having your fair share of the household money; stopped you from seeing friends and relatives and repeatedly belittled you to the extent that you felt worthless) now **seem** to be combined together rather than asked about separately.
>
> NIPV3 – asks if a 'partner or ex-partner has ever frightened or threatened you in any way. For example, they may have threatened to hurt you, to kill you, to use a weapon on you, or to hurt someone close to you [such as your children]' – this conflates acts of varying severity – threatening to hurt is very different from threatening to kill, with the later a serious criminal offence.
>
> NIPV5 – asks 'has a partner or ex-partner ever used force on you? For example, they may have pushed you, slapped you, hit, punched or kicked you, choked you or used a weapon against you'

Previous versions of the BCS permitted analysis of responses to each individual item. Reducing the number of 'response lists', whilst an admirable endeavour, should be undertaken with care and with full attention to the impact of what types of analysis would be no longer possible from the resulting dataset. A fundamental principle of survey research is to collect data at the most detailed level possible (all other things considered). Whilst aggregation of individual items can be performed when necessary during analysis, it is impossible to disaggregate, resulting in a significant loss of important detail. This is a very important consideration, given that there is no other comparable national survey from which to obtain the detail that would be lost if the alternative questions/responses were incorporated into the BCS.

What constitutes domestic violence/intimate partner violence is a profound and complex question which the data from and analysis of the BCS has played a part in confounding. This cannot, however, be resolved by manipulating questions – it requires a wider and more focused discussion between researchers, policy makers and practitioners to reach some form of consensus definition

We regard it as crucial that acts of low level violence (push/slap) are not combined with those which in and of themselves are likely to constitute a serious criminal offence. Here the validity of data is more important than reducing the number of questions by one or two. We would argue for retaining differentiation. This also applies to asking these questions about family members, since it will be impossible to ascertain the potential harm – slapping a child is a fundamental different thing from punching or kicking them.

In addition, the consultation paper fails to clarify whether for all categories where the perpetrator is covered by a generic category, 'family member' for example, there are questions which clarify who this is. It seems bizarre to have this information with respect to flashing but not for violence in family. There may be concerns here with respect to the inclusion of 11-15 year olds, but we ask why do this if some of the most critical questions with respect to this age group are not going to be asked.

2. Specifically, if the alternative question set is favoured there is the issue of the inclusion of a filter question before the most explicit questions on serious sexual assault.

Since the filter question did not have the effect anticipated it should not be included. Moreover, excluding the filter question makes the methodological approach to the different forms of violence similar.

3. If the alternative question set is favoured then are further amendments needed to minimise the risk of reporting experiences that should not be classed as IPV? Should these be limited to the stalking questions, less serious sexual assault questions or to others?

Initially we read this as referring to intimate partner violence, and it was only by reading the more detailed reports that it became clear that this referred to interpersonal violence. the concern here is clearly that irritating events, such as cold calling, are being picked up that do not constitute violence/abuse/harassment as intended – although it is interesting that respondents experience them as harassing.

This set of questions clearly do not allow for the differentiation necessary, and require further questions to clarify, including who the harasser was. We would encourage this anyway since with the new set we only know if the person is an ex/partner or family member. Friends/colleagues etc and strangers are now all in the same category, which is unsatisfactory for analysis which seeks to distinguish between known and stranger violence.

Are there any other amendments suggested for consideration in the module in future?

We have noted our wider concerns in both the introduction and the response to question 1.

The new preamble to the sexual violence questions is problematic. It states *'The next questions are about sexual assaults such as rape and attempted rape or being forced into some other sexual act when you were not capable of consent or when you made it clear you did not want to'* – this reinforces the crime based framing and is likely to deter respondents from including experiences they do not categorise as rape/criminal assaults and perhaps most critically conflates force and lack of consent, which are two conceptually different approaches in law and research. Lack of consent is the legal framing in England and Wales and a wider concept than force, it should not be narrowed in this way. Moreover 'when you made clear that you did not want to' reinforces an onus on victims to 'say no', which is not what the law itself says. In our view these ways of framing sexual violence, alongside the explicit use of 'rape and attempted rape' and placing it first in the list are likely to have unintended impacts on reporting rates.

If the alternative question set is used from April 2012 onwards, there are additional issues around the publication of time-series data.

• *Is a full break in the BCS time series acceptable in exchange for the possibility of improved coverage of victimisation using the alternative question set?*

If it is agreed that the alternative question produce more valid results this is entirely acceptable, and happens regularly with surveys. It would also provide an opportunity to introduce more sophisticated and accurate approaches to calculating prevalence based, at least in the case of IPV on course of conduct, as with the current stalking rates.

• *Should an attempt be made to adjust past estimates to make them comparable with estimates from the alternative question set using the split-sample data? Would this risk causing inaccurate comparisons to be made over time?*

This is undoubtedly possible, and if reported on in a separate section of the report on findings can be contextualised through appropriate caveats and explanations.

Conclusions

Since some of the alternative questions were only answered by 20 individuals, we suggest that a further round of testing, taking on board lessons learnt in this exercise and responses to the consultation, is undertaken with a larger sample size. In this way any new set of questions can be rigorously tested, and their superiority to the existing ones more clearly established.

Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit
London Metropolitan University

October 2011

Department of Applied Social Sciences,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to take part in this interesting consultation. Please find comments below

- Which of the question sets should be used in the BCS from April 2012 onwards?

It is my opinion that the alternative set of questions are much clearer and allows the respondent to be more focused.

Amendments to questions

- The issue of the inclusion of a filter question before the most explicit questions on serious sexual assault.

The filter questions in serious sexual assault should be retained given that it has not resulted in a reduction in the parental refusal rate to the 10 to 15 year old survey

- If the alternative question set is favoured then are further amendments needed to minimise the risk of reporting experiences that should not be classed as IPV? Should these be limited to the stalking questions, less serious sexual assault questions or to others?

It is very difficult to minimise the risk of this without further clarification of comments i.e. qualitative research which is outside the bounds of this survey. For example, it would be difficult to interpret what respondents mean if they say they have been 'prevented from having their fair share of the household money'. While essential for gaining data on financial abuse, it is hard to interpret what is meant by 'fair share'. Possible equal share may be an alternative but this still has its limitations. I'm wondering if something could be done to this question in terms of the extent to which members earn and then contribute to the household. Or perhaps something about who 'controls' the household money regardless of who earns it. This one for me it problematic.

- Are there any other amendments suggested for consideration in the module in future?

None evident

Publication of time-series data

- Is a full break in the BCS time series acceptable in exchange for the possibility of improved coverage of victimisation using the alternative question set?

Yes. Previous data is still important and will not be wasted but yes, I think the most accurate data has to be the most important issue.

- Should an attempt be made to adjust past estimates to make them comparable with estimates from the alternative question set using the split-sample data? Would this risk causing inaccurate comparisons to be made over time?

No, I think this would confuse matters. The former could be a historical record

Senior Lecturer, Researcher and Consultant

Specialising in domestic and sexual violence

Department of Applied Social Sciences

Institute of Health and Society

University of Worcester

End Violence Against Women Coalition

The End Violence Against Women Coalition endorses the responses to the consultation from the Child & Women Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU) and Sylvia Walby and colleagues at Lancaster University, both of which are attached below.

Regards,

Holly Shepherd
Prevention Coordinator
End Violence Against Women Coalition

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IMKAAN

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to nurture growth
through support and empowerment...

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London EC1Y 8RT

BY POST AND BY EMAIL

14 October 2011

Crime Statistics Programme
Home Office Statisitcs
5th Floor Peel
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 7DF

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: Consultation on British Crime Survey on Intimiate Personal Violence Questionnaire

We write to inform you that Imkaan fully endorses the following responses to the above consultation: Respect, London Metropolitan University (CWASU) and the University of Lancaster.

Imkaan is the only national BMER second-tier organisation dedicated to working on violence against women and girls. We have over 13 years of experience of working in the area of gender-based violence, which includes domestic and sexual violence, forced marriage and 'honour'-based violence. Imkaan's history, development and experience is grounded in the grassroots experiences and needs of services and the views and voices of the women and children they support. Imkaan works to ensure that the needs and views of the sector are highlighted to policy makers and other stakeholders, whilst also supporting the development of good practice and sustainability within the sector. Imkaan's work includes strategic advocacy, training, capacity building and research. Imkaan recently completed a piece of work for the Greater London Authority on HPs, which is due to be formally launched at the end of this month to the House of Lords.

In addition, we wish to add the following comments:

1. **Post-separation violence**: Black, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BMER) women are particularly vulnerable to post-separation violence and it is important that this violence is captured in the questions because they are inextricably linked

to post-separation. Findings from recent research that we carried out indicate that BMER women are more prone to ongoing violence after they leave an abusive siuation. Harassment or violence from extended family members was the most common form of post-separation abuse (56%), followed by pressure from the wider community (41%). Over a third of women had experienced on-going harassment or violence from their partners, which included stalking, threats and actual violence. A smaller proportion (13%) had experienced attempted child abduction, 8% faced racism from neighbours or the local community, and 7% had been placed under pressure to withdraw from a prosecution.[1]

2. **Forced marriage**: Young women who are at risk of a forced marrriage need to be able to self-identify. In relation to this point, first, we would suggest that the definition of IPV is broadened to include forced marriage. Second, the questions need to capture the nature of violence that these women experience, in relation to forced marriage, from their family members, which could also include extended family members. For example, have you been or are being coerced into a relationship that you did not want?
3. **Language**: The self completion module appears to make assumptions in terms of the degree of literacy, as well as computer literacy, of the respondents. For example, if respondents who are professionals find it difficult to complete the questionnaire, those whose first language is not English would struggle.
4. **Making available information on support agencies for respondents:** Respondents who complete the questionnaire might well be in need of some sort of support, and we suggest that they should be given information on support agencies. Respondents would benefit from being given a leaflet that contains standard information about support agencies, including specialist domestic violence and sexual violence agencies, and also any local BMER services.
5. **Interview administration, the questionnaire answering process and confidentiality**: We have concerns about the questionnaire remaining confidential. Even though the data on the screen is saved as the respondent answers each question in turn, and therefore is not viewable on screen after it has been saved, overall, we are concerned that the staff member who supervises the session might still be able to access the information after the session has ended.
6. **Differentiation between the perpetrator and victim**: the questionnaire does not appear to differentiate between a perpetrator and victim. For example, when the victim retaliates and the perpetrator starts viewing him or herself as a victim, how would this situation be distinguished from a clearer perpetrator/ victim definition? Could a question, such as the one that follows be included in the questionnaire? Did you hit the person first?

[1] Imkaan (2010) *Vital Statistics: The Experiences of Black, Minority Ethnic and Refugee Women and Children Facing Violence and Abuse*, London: Imkaan (Authors: Ravi K. Thiara & Sumanta Roy), available at http://www.imkaan.org.uk/resources.htm (viewed 13/10/11). A total of 124 women took part in the research.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information. My contact details are as follows: Telephone 020 7250 3933; email patriciang@imkaan.org.uk .

Yours faithfully,

Patricia Ng
Researcher

cc Respect

Institute of Criminal Justice Studies, University of Portsmouth

The Home Office is seeking any comments and views from users of these statistics on the following specific issues.

Choice of question set used for intimate personal violence module in future
Estimates from both the 'current' and 'alternative' question sets have been published here alongside analysis of the differences between the two sets of questions.

- Which of the question sets should be used in the BCS from April 2012 onwards?

The alternative set

Amendments to questions

Whichever question set is favoured going forwards, the analysis published here may indicate that further amendments to questions are needed in future.

- Specifically, if the alternative question set is favoured there is the issue of the inclusion of a filter

question before the most explicit questions on serious sexual assault. This was intended to reduce offence to respondents, which may have impacted on the parental refusal rate to the BCS extension to 10 to 15 year olds. Given that the addition of a filter question to the most explicit questions in serious sexual assault has not resulted in a reduction in the parental refusal rate to the 10 to 15 year old survey, should this filter be retained?

No. Do not retain the filter question

- If the alternative question set is favoured then are further amendments needed to minimise the

risk of reporting experiences that should not be classed as IPV? Should these be limited to the stalking questions, less serious sexual assault questions or to others?

The further amendments should be confined to the stalking questions

- Are there any other amendments suggested for consideration in the module in future?

No

Publication of time-series data

If the alternative question set is used from April 2012 onwards, there are additional issues around the publication of time-series data.

- Is a full break in the BCS time series acceptable in exchange for the possibility of improved

coverage of victimisation using the alternative question set?

I would prefer not to have a full break

- Should an attempt be made to adjust past estimates to make them comparable with estimates

from the alternative question set using the split-sample data? Would this risk causing inaccurate comparisons to be made over time?

People will make comparisons anyway. Home Office should try as hard as possible to make its own adjustments rather than people each making their own guesses.

Chris Lewis

Institute of Criminal Justice Studies

University of Portsmouth

Lilith Research and Development, Eaves

Consultation on the British Crime Survey - Intimate Personal Violence Questionnaire, October 2011, Eaves Response

About Eaves
Eaves is a London-based charity established in 1977, that provides high quality housing and support to vulnerable women. We also carry out research, advocacy and campaigning to prevent all forms of violence against women.
At Eaves, we put the needs of women first. We are determined to give a voice to the most excluded women in society and provide direct, innovative services to support and empower women to help themselves. There are different projects run by Eaves.

The Lilith Project
Lilith Research & Development have a wide remit ranging from research into various aspects of violence against women, to training and education for the women's sector, to lobbying for legislative change and to working directly with women who have experienced sexual violence.

The Scarlet Centre
The Scarlet Centre is an Eaves service providing advice and drop-in support to women who are affected by violence – including homelessness, rape or sexual abuse, prostitution or domestic violence – and the consequences of violence – including mental health and/or substance misuse problems.

The Poppy Project
The Poppy Project provides support, accommodation and advocacy for women trafficked into domestic slavery and sexual exploitation in the UK. We have 15 bed spaces and capacity for 50 outreach cases per year.

The Serafina Project
Formerly Eaves Women's Aid, The Serafina Project provides support and accommodation for women (and their children) fleeing domestic violence. We provide bed spaces in Westminster in comfortable and safe environments where a full range of support provided, including help accessing benefits and legal advice.

The Sojourner Project
The Sojourner Project is a pilot scheme run by Eaves and funded by the Home Office. It is for women with no recourse to public funds, who entered the UK on a spousal or partner visa and are eligible to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) under the Domestic Violence Rule.

To find out more about our work please visit our website on www.eaves4women.co.uk

Introduction

Higher Estimates of IPV Victimisation

- As stated on the analysis of the two sets of questions, even though the alternative question set produced higher estimates of IPV victimisation than the current question set, it is difficult to determine which one showed a ***valid result***. The details of the disclosed abuse are as important as the number of disclosures.

- With less explicit set of questions the alternative question set meant that all respondents, including non-victims, had to answer more questions in total. This might have increased the general number of responses but would be ***concealing the true extent and nature of the IPV***.

- The findings also showed that victims were less offended when asked more explicit questions than non-victims. In a unique survey such as this on which strategies, policies and

different prevention and interventions programmes rely on; it's very crucial that the ***true experience of victims is captured***.

Screener Question

- The screener question which is set in order not to offend respondents by explicit questions on 'serious sexual assault' seems a risky measure. As the analysis shows, actual victims of 'serious sexual assaults' are less offended by these questions than non-victims. The BCS is intended to measure trends in crime including 'serious sexual assault', provides a point of comparison for statistics and informs policy making on crime and punishment. This requires that the survey have accurate information from victims themselves which might be difficult to have due to the screener question.

- The screener question which asks the respondent if they have been victims of 'serious sexual assault' could highly distort the real extent of victimisation. Research has shown that many victims of 'serious sexual assault' such as rape might not define their experience as that. Besides, as stated in the analysis the ***legal definition*** and ***individuals' definition*** of a 'serious sexual assault' might be actually different and what the BCS wants to capture would be offences which fall under the legal definition and not personal one. ***Note that we don't think it's appropriate to label the individual's definition of rape and sexual assault as a 'cultural' definition which could have other implications.***

- The analysis of the two sets of questions also showed that though the alternative question set produced generally higher estimates of prevalence, it produced a lower estimate for 'serious sexual assault' which was due to the addition of the screener question; which would prompt a question on the ***reliability of the results of the survey***.

- Though the screener question was also designed to reduce the number of respondents asked the most explicit questions and thereby avoid the ***risk of parents refusing to allow their child to take part*** in the survey of 10 to 15 year olds, the response rate for this age group or the parental refusal was no better in the alternative question set.

- Therefore, it might be better to explain in detail at the outset of the survey that some of the questions might be upsetting. It's also important to ***explain to respondents how crucial their response is*** in order to have a clear picture of the problem and ultimately put in place effective prevention strategies and also support services.

- It is also important to devise a way where respondents could ***skip such questions*** and come back to them when they are ready. Moreover, it is crucial to provide the necessary ***support for respondents during and after taking part in the survey.***

Non-sexual abuse

- Only prevalence is measured in the IPV module of the section on questions of non-sexual abuse and a respondent is classed as a victim to the overall category without any specification on the type of abuse. The **overall category and analysis has to be categorized into different forms of non-sexual abuse**, such as threats, or emotional or financial abuse, etc to have a clear representation on the nature of the abuse.

General Comments

- According to the analysis of the two set of questions the alternative question set is said to have provided a better experience for respondents; in that it's ***easier to answer.*** This might be because of the simpler layout used for the alternative questions set and therefore it's worth exploring if the layout is an element needing improvement. It is not clear, however, that it was a better experience for respondents in terms of detailing their experience or in providing the quality of information needed.

- We welcome that the Home Office would be launching a *public consultation* on changes to the BCS IPV module from April 2012. We believe that there needs to be a further discussion

and investigation before choosing one set of questions over the other. We will also be responding in detail to the public consultation.

- We would suggest that it is not appropriate to mask the violence of an experience because it may be difficult reading for some – though notably not for the victims themselves. To understand the nature, trend and motivations of crimes it is necessary to have qualitative and detailed information of the crimes. It is particularly important for sexual assault where victims' experiences are often minimised and there is a low reporting and conviction rate. Victims need to know that their experiences are properly understood. Justice responses can only be appropriately targeted if based on the full information.

- We also endorse the consultation response by the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University.

Nisan Z. Kesete

Best Practice Development Officer

Lancaster University

Response to the Consultation on the British Crime Survey intimate personal violence questionnaire

We welcome the consultation on improving the data collection on BCS. Professor Brian Francis, Professor Sylvia Walby and Jude Towers are current users of the British Crime Survey, while Professor Walby was one of the people responsible for the devising of the 2001 BCS special module on 'Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking'.

We recommend the use of the 'alternative' rather than 'current' question, if there are further additional changes, as below.

We thought that the separation of the questions and the grouping of types of violence constituted an improvement on the old format. Since the test found that the respondents found the revised set easier to use, the new questions are thus highly recommended.

We are strongly in agreement with the proposal to delete the newly introduced screener before serious sexual assault. This is because its addition has not resulted in a reduction in the parental refusal rate to the 10-15 survey, while it does result in a diminished disclosure rate for adult serious sexual assault.

It is important that a screener is not unintentionally introduced in the preambles. For example, in the preambles it is better to avoid the highly stigmatised term rape and to use instead softer terms such as sexual abuse, and not to use the notion of 'force' when the legal threshold for rape is actually lower, in the concept of lack of consent.

Upon investigation we found that the categories 'sexually threatened' and 'deliberate damage' were very small and their elimination is not a cause for concern.

The elimination of the qualifier 'fear, distress and alarm' does indeed appear to have led to the inclusion of a wider range of minor incidents. We think that the BCS should follow the legal definitions exactly. We examined the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and found that 'exposure' is legally subject to the qualifier 'he intends that someone will see them and be caused alarm or distress', though this does not apply to other acts of minor sexual abuse. While we think the continued inclusion of some such phrase in the wording in relation to minor sexual offences would have merit, we nevertheless feel that it is important that the BCS follows the legal definitions exactly.

We think that a break in the time series is acceptable if it leads to a significant improvement in the quality of the data, as recommended here. We recommend that retrospective revisions are offered, but as an addition, not an alternative. We further recommend that this is done so as to include the 2001 survey as well, so as to provide a longer time series.

We suggest that the BCS takes advantages of the occasion of this revision to make some further minor improvements.

The addition of questions on the number of incidents would be a major improvement in the module. The findings from the BCS self-completion module should be presented in such a way as to report on both the number of incidents as well as the prevalence of the violence. This would help to make it more comparable to the way that other crime statistics are collected, in both the main/face-to-face part of the BCS and in police recorded crime. There

are significant debates in the field about the relationship between these two measures and this would provide the evidence base needed for its assessment. In particular, there is a sustained and ongoing discussion in the academic and policy oriented literature over the extent to which the concept of 'course of conduct' (made up of several incidents) or 'incidents' (each separately counted) is the way forward. It would be highly pertinent to furthering this important debate if the data were collected so as to provide a robust evidence base for the debate. This means collecting data on how many incidents (parallel to the main face-to-face part of the BCS), so that it is possible to count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and more incidents as well as to measure prevalence.

The separation of the questions, while grouping together some of the different levels of severity, in the manner proposed, makes it much simpler to add information on the number of incidents than the previous method of asking the question.

The inclusion of injury in relation to each set of actions is welcomed. We recommend further that there is a differentiation by minor and severe injury, so as to parallel the traditional distinction between actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm. We recommend the use of three injury levels for each of the assaults which map onto the relevant legal category: assaults with no physical injury; assaults with minor injury; assaults with major injury.

There are a few presentational issues, where minor work could improve the usefulness of the published tables.

The method of reporting on the findings on sexual assault contains a potential ambiguity that we recommend be removed. If someone were to add up family and partner and subtract it from the total, one could arrive at a possible figure for stranger/acquaintance. It is not clear if such a figure would be correct. We recommend that such a calculation be performed and presented in the published table. Further, in the policy field the distinction between stranger and acquaintance is relevant. While it can be recognised that 14 categories is too many to produce statistically significant figures, this one might be possible to accommodate. We recommend that the presentation of this table be revised so that, data is disaggregated into four categories of partner, other family member, acquaintance and stranger.

Further, we recommend that the presentation of the findings on sexual assault be provided separately for more serious and less serious sexual assault. In the 2001 module, published as Walby and Allen (2004) it was found that nearly half the rapes were by current or former intimate partners. This information as to the significance of partners in serious sexual assault is important for policy purposes, but is lost by the summing of more and less serious, since partners are a much smaller proportion of those committing less serious offences. Further, the presentation of the table might more obviously clarify the meaning of 'serious' sexual assault as the sum of rape and assaults by penetration.

Brian Francis, Professor of Applied Statistics
Sylvia Walby OBE, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and UNESCO Chair in Gender Research
Jude Towers, ESRC funded PhD student, Department of Applied Statistics

4 October 2011

Research, Analysis and Information

National Policing Improvement Agency

BCS IPV module consultation

Comments on alternative questions

- We would support the lists of abusive behaviours being asked in turn. We think this approach will produce more accurate estimates for **basic prevalence** for the reasons you cite concerning the problems people sometimes have with choosing from lists of possible responses. (See below though for a discussion of how this approach will limit further estimates of prevalence for different types of abuse).
    - It would be important to keep emphasising that the context is e.g. abuse from a partner. In-depth re-contact work commissioned for the Scottish Crime Survey found that men were sometimes drawing in incidents that were not partner related (e.g. a fight with somebody that happened to be in their house).

- When modified versions of the CTS are used, researchers often identify different levels of violence in secondary analysis. By not asking about each of the behaviours on the original list in turn, you will shut off the possibility of identifying a sub-set of severe violence (e.g. item six onwards).
    - Also, it will not be possible to know if somebody has experienced e.g. only one form of controlling behaviour, or a range. Again, this makes it extremely difficult to know anything about the severity of abuse. There is a lot of difference between, say, being prevented from attending one family event and being constantly belittled and made to feel worthless.

- We agree that the use of a screener question risks underreporting of serious sexual assault. As I recall, this was the reason we didn't include such a screener question in the original module.

Nature of partner abuse

The structure of the module as it stands severely limits the analysis that can be done on the nature of intimate partner abuse. When questions on the nature of intimate partner abuse are asked, respondents are not requested to think about a specific incident. Consequently, it is not possible to know whether they are recalling and referencing the most serious incident, the last incident, or a series of abusive incidents. This makes the questions on e.g. police response fairly meaningless unless you just want to make a basic statement like 'X% of incidents in the last 12 months came to the attention of the police'.

Also, there is no obvious way of isolating specific relationships in relation to the 'nature' questions (unless you select only people who have had one abusive relationship thereby introducing bias to your sub-sample). In relation to frequency of abuse and type of injuries sustained, for example, respondents may be drawing in incidents from more than one relationship, and these relationships may have been very different in terms of the nature and frequency of abuse.

'Differentiation' and measuring coercive control

There is a crucial debate in the DV literature around symmetry and types of intimate partner abuse (centring on the works of Michael P. Johnson and Murray Straus). The basic argument is that there are different types of violence – principally 'situational' and 'coercive controlling' – and that these types of violence have different dynamics and may require different agency responses. Data on this issue, and the issue of whether violence is more or less mutual in different types of violent relationship, is potentially of huge value to criminal justice agencies and domestic violence support services. If

enhanced questions were asked in a future module exploring the nature of domestic violence, the BCS could make a huge contribution to this debate.

The original 2001 module (I think) asked how often respondents had experienced each abusive behaviour. Without this information, it is impossible to distinguish between relationships with infrequent violence and those with very frequent and very severe violence. Additionally, the current questions (and in particular the proposed new question set) are not sufficient to accurately measure controlling behaviour.

A one-off alteration to the IPV module could include more detailed questions on the nature of domestic violence. This module could include a battery of questions on controlling behaviour. Such measurement scales already exist and have been used successfully in numerous other surveys. It could also ask respondents, with reference to a specific relationship, to say in turn how often they had experienced each form of abusive behaviour. This data would allow the first properly detailed examination, anywhere in the world, of the dynamics of violence in intimate partner relationships with a robust sample at a national level.

Key omissions in the current question set

The current questions on the nature of domestic violence ask about the perpetrators income. Of far more interest (and again included in the original module) would be questions relating to the victims' income and whether they would have the resources to leave a violent relationship if they wanted to.

Some people argue though that socio-demographics are crude proxies for wider sociological factors like social isolation. A module designed to really explore the dynamics of coercive controlling relationships in particular would benefit hugely from a small battery of questions on social isolation.

National Policing Improvement Agency

Research, Analysis and Information

14/10/11

NSPCC

Consultation on the British Crime Survey intimate personal violence questionnaire

Thank you for the opportunity to respond on behalf of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) to the three specific issues identified in appendix 1 of the analysis of the split-sample experiment. I'm happy for these comments to be published alongside a statement setting out your future approach early next year.

1. Choice of question set used for intimate personal violence module in future

The alternative question set should be used from April 2012 onwards. It provides a more likely accurate measure of prevalence. The increase in reporting of some aspects of intimate personal violence found in responses to the alternative question set appears, at least in part, to be due to participants being asked to respond to each type of violent act individually; and to them being provided with more choice in their responses. This is consistent with our experience of the pilot stage of a survey of teenage partner violence;[1] here participants were more forthcoming when asked about each act individually as opposed to being given a long list to choose from. It may be that participants only report the most severe forms of behaviours from a long list or fail to read the entire list properly.

2. Amendments to questions

There is no justification for including the filter question on sexual assault - it acts as a barrier to participants recognising their experience as serious. It has not fulfilled its purpose – that of reducing the parental refusal rate to the 10-15 year old survey.

If the alternative question set is to be used further amendments will be necessary to reduce the risk of reporting experiences that should not be classed as intimate personal violence. The significant increase of questions above those of the current question set, especially, with respect to stalking the questions that elicit information on nuisance and silent callers, and with regard to sexual assaults the questions concerning indecent exposure, need to be given more and better context. Both need to state that the act must itself have caused discomfort or distress.

As to future amendments to the module:

- the main British Crime Survey should include questions regarding intimate personal violence experienced by those under the age of 16
- or the 10-15 age survey should include partner as a category in relation to violent and threatening behaviour.

At present all questions on intimate personal violence focus exclusively on the experiences of respondents since they were aged 16. Given the prevalence and severity of teenage experiences of intimate violence, and the youth of the victims, demonstrated by recent NSPCC research[2] it seems that this age restriction now needs reconsideration. As intimate personal violence questions are not included in the 10-15 year old survey there is no data on this aspect of intimate violence. Given, as the research cited above shows, young people rarely approach adults, including professionals, for assistance in relation to their victimisation, these experiences of intimate personal violence will also

[1] Barter, Christine, McCarry, Melanie, Berridge, David and Evans, Kathy (2009) Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships. London: NSPCC. Available at: http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/partner_exploitation_and_violence_wda68092.html

[2] Wood, Marsha, Barter, Christine and Berridge, David (2011) 'Standing on my own two feet': disadvantaged teenagers, intimate partner violence and coercive control. London: NSPCC. Available at: http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/standing_own_two_feet_wda84543.html

not be included in official crime figures. Even then, if young people do report intimate violence, the police are not obliged to record domestic violence incidents for under 17's.

A range of questions in the 10-15 year old survey do focus on violent and threatening behaviours. However, no questions specifically ask if these were undertaken by a partner. The NSPCC's research (Barter et al) shows that unless young people are directly asked about intimate personal violence they will not report their experiences under general victimisation questions.

Without either questions regarding the experiences of under 16s in the main BCS, or the inclusion of partner as a category in the 10 -15 age survey, the BCS adds to the invisibility of these experiences in official statistics, effectively excluding young people's intimate, personal and violent victimisation from all official data sources.

3. Publication of time-series data

A full break in the BCS time series is acceptable in exchange for the improved coverage of victimisation that would be achieved through either of the amendments regarding the age of victims proposed above. This also holds for the more immediate adoption of the alternative question set.

Lisa Harker,

Head of Strategy and Development: child protection, policy and practice

Respect

Respect response to consultation on changes to British Crime Survey intimate personal violence questionnaire

Respect is the UK association for work with domestic violence perpetrators. We provide training, resources, advice and technical support for our members; coordinate lobbying and policy making on work with perpetrators and male victims; run the Men's Advice Line for male victims and the Respect Phoneline for perpetrators.

Overall comments

We welcome the split-sample experiment and the findings as we believe that good data is essential, for planning adequate coverage of effective services, for monitoring the effectiveness of changes in the law and for identifying any further changes needed to both legislation and policy.

We have noted in the last ten years changes in the way data is analysed and presented which can be useful but can also sometimes lead to frustrating and unhelpful gaps in information. It can also lead to misleading interpretations of data by non-statisticians, which in turn leads to inappropriate decisions about policy and practice in responding to victims and perpetrators, both male and female.

We are pleased to be given this opportunity to comment on the BCS intimate personal violence questionnaire as we value this resource greatly and believe it provides and can provide an unequalled basis for estimating need for and value of services and legislation.

We also note and urge the government to consider that there is a considerable body of research on the methodology and content for research on IPV and to make use of this. In the first instance, we ask that the government consider the work of Sylvia Walby and Jonathan Myhill in an earlier edition of the BCS IPV report. This version had significant benefits over the analysis in subsequent years, particularly in relation to data about repeat victimisation and impact. It is important that analysis and presentation of the figures is clearly carried out, using prevalence (numbers) wherever possible, instead of using percentages of male and female victims, as has been commonly done in recent years. This leads to misleading impressions of the differences between men's and women's experiences of partner abuse in particular, but also other forms of IPV. Further comments on this topic are included below.

We have used our experience of reading and using the figures in the BCS IPV over many years to inform our response to this consultation, as well as careful reading of the report on the split-sample questionnaire experiment in the 2010/11 BCS self completion module on intimate personal violence (Hall and Smith, 2011).

Amendments to questions

Whichever question set is favoured going forwards, the analysis published here may indicate that further amendments to questions are needed in future.
• *Specifically, if the alternative question set is favoured there is the issue of the inclusion of a filter question before the most explicit questions on serious sexual assault. This was intended to reduce offence to respondents which may have impacted on the parental refusal rate to the BCS extension to 10 to 15 year olds. Given that the addition of a filter question to the most explicit questions in serious sexual assault has not resulted in a reduction in the parental refusal rate to the 10 to 15 survey, should this filter be retained?*

RESPECT RESPONSE:
It is not clear what other benefits there may be to retaining the filter question. The concern about causing offence appears, from the findings of the research, to be one raised by non victims rather than by victims. It also appears possible, from the research, that the filter question may have excluded some victims of sexual assault from answering about this. As there are no effects on the parental

refusal rate for retaining the filter question and the screener question may be distorting the prevalence rates for sexual assault, we recommend that the filter question be dropped.

• *If the alternative question set is favoured then are further amendments needed to minimise the risk of reporting experiences that should not be classed as IPV? Should these be limited to the stalking questions, less serious sexual assault questions or to others?*

RESPECT RESPONSE:
There are other ways of minimising this risk. For example, adding in "was this from a partner, ex-partner or someone who thought they had or wanted to have a relationship with you, even if you did not?" after each of the stalking and less serious sexual assault questions.

Stalking is a significant part of partner abuse post-separation and there is a need for good data on this. It is a risk indicator for future violence and there is a possibility that there are significant differences between victims in their experiences of stalking, such as differences by gender, age, marital status etc. It is important to keep in as many of the stalking questions as possible and amend them or add to them to be able to identify more clearly if this was partner abuse in particular, to aid our understanding of significant risk factors.

• *Are there any other amendments suggested for consideration in the module in future?*

RESPECT RESPONSE:
Include clear numerical analysis of repeat victimisation given in numbers for male and female victims (prevalence) as was done in the Walby and Myhill version. This should include number of male and female victims experiencing only 1, 1 – 4, 4 – 10 and more than 10 incidents (or similar) of partner abuse in particular, as this category of IPV is significantly associated with repeat victimisation. At the moment it is usually not possible to identify either the absolute numbers of chronic repeat victims or the proportions of male and female victims amongst the absolute number of all chronic repeat victims.

Present figures for prevalence instead of solely as percentages of male and female victims, as this can give a false impression of equivalence as proportions of total number of male and female victims for specific categories of IPV can be similar, whilst the actual number of male and female victims are not. Non-statisticians can and do confuse these figures and interpret them as gender parity.

Present figures of prevalence for partner abuse causing injury.
Retain clear definitions and make it much clearer in the text when departing from these. For instance, some figures are for partner abuse excluding sexual assault and stalking, others for partner abuse include these. It is important to be clear that partner abuse INCLUDES sexual assault and stalking. In some years it is not possible to identify the figures for partner abuse including these two forms of partner abuse. This gives a distorted picture of the prevalence of partner abuse and also a distorted impression of the differences between male and female victims.

Include analysis, if possible, of partner abuse post-separation. This is important as there are significant risk indicators for partner abuse post-separation, which it is important to monitor, particularly as these have implications for child contact and for domestic homicide.

Include questions about gender (and if possible, sexuality) of perpetrators of partner abuse. This would significantly aid planning of appropriate responses to both victims and perpetrators.

Publication of time-series data
If the alternative question set is used from April 2012 onwards, there are additional issues around the publication of time-series data.
• *Is a full break in the BCS time series acceptable in exchange for the possibility of improved coverage of victimisation using the alternative question set?*

RESPECT RESPONSE: Yes, as the improved coverage gives a much clearer picture of IPV prevalence.

• *Should an attempt be made to adjust past estimates to make them comparable with estimates from the alternative question set using the split-sample data? Would this risk causing inaccurate comparisons to be made over time?*

RESPECT RESPONSE: Yes it is important to attempt to find a way to include data that can be compared pre- and post- changes. This can be done in two ways: attempting to analyse data post-change to identify comparable data for pre-change, and vice versa as suggested. There have already been other changes in the way data is analysed and presented which have meant that some things (such as levels of chronic partner abuse, for example) cannot be compared between reports. This has been unfortunate and every effort should be made to reduce such discrepancies, preferably by taking the most comprehensive and detailed ways of analysing and presenting data between years.
The gaps in data were unfortunate and led to misleading data, so it is important to correct these, but it is also important to be able to find a way to compare the time series data. Every effort should be made to find ways of estimating changes.

Thangam Debbonaire

Respect Research Manager

Robert McMaster

From: Robert McMaster [mailto:crimestats@mcm.me.uk]

Sent: 30 September 2011 12:49

To: Crime Stats

Subject: Amendments to questions

Can I suggest for consideration that you include a question to differentiate the sex of the perpetrator?

I understand that the reporting of sexual assaults by women on other women and even more so on men is significantly more underreported than that of men on women and men on men.

However, there is no way from the current or alternative questionnaire to gauge this in any way.

I understand that one survey http://www.springerlink.com/content/x577347318g146w1/ (although admittedly small) found that 30% of men had received coercive sexual contact from women.

Regards

Robert

University College London

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am an academic psychiatrist, carrying out research on victimisation in people with mental illness. I have piloted the use of the British Crime Survey Questionnaire in people under the care of mental health services. I piloted the current and alternative question set, and found the former more user friendly. I think it is important to retain the current set, as there doesn't seem to by any significant advantages to the alternative set (same time, same rate of asking for help), but changing would have the significant disadvantage of making comparisons with past surveys difficult. The BCS questions have been used in other surveys- including the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey- with the hope of making data comparable to the general population. Again, comparison across surveys that have adapted BCS methodology would become more difficult.

I hope the above comments are useful.

Best wishes.

Dr Khalifeh

MRC Training Fellow and Hon SpR in General Adult Psychiatry

Welsh Women's Aid

Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid
Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf
Putting Women & Children First

Response to Home Office consultation on British Crime Survey (BCS) Intimate Personal Violence questionnaire

1. About Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid (WWA) is one of four UK Women's Aid Federations and was founded in 1978 to campaign and lobby for improvements in public policy and government legislation in relation to women and children experiencing domestic abuse in Wales.

WWA is the national umbrella organisation for 31 autonomous Women's Aid groups and other organisations providing support to those affected by domestic abuse across Wales. The unique relationship between WWA and our member groups forms the Women's Aid Movement in Wales, delivering a combined total of 262 refuge bed spaces, more than 300 floating support bed spaces and a variety of community-based domestic abuse services.

Our 31 member groups provide emergency temporary accommodation, outreach and floating support, information and practical support on legal issues, benefits, housing, children's issues and other matters related to the experience of domestic abuse. In 2010/11, Women's Aid groups across Wales supported nearly 2000 women and over 1500 children and young people.

As the national umbrella organisation, WWA provides infrastructure support to our network of member groups, and informs national policy on their behalf. WWA manages the All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline and the Children Matter project, which delivers regional preventative programmes and support services to children and young people. WWA is also a national Open College Network centre and delivers accredited qualifications to member groups and external agencies.

2. Introduction

Welsh Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to respond to this important consultation. The British Crime Survey (BCS) Intimate Personal Violence (IPV) questionnaire is a very highly-regarded resource on IPV and we use its findings extensively in our work, including for making policy recommendations, analysing trends, raising awareness and monitoring the effectiveness of changes in legislation. Good-quality data is essential both in terms of planning service provision and monitoring efficacy of policy and legislation, and as such we welcome the split-sample experiment and findings.

We would urge the Home Office to consider the existing research on methodology for IPV in this consultation process, including the work of Walby and Myhill in an earlier addition of the BCS IPV report.. This version had significant benefits over the analysis in subsequent years, particularly in relation to data about repeat victimisation and impact. It is important that analysis and presentation of the figures is clearly carried out, using prevalence (numbers) wherever possible, instead of using percentages of male and female victims, as has been commonly done in recent years. Welsh Women's Aid is particularly concerned that assumptions and misinterpretations are regularly made regarding gender parity of victims/survivors, and that these misinterpretations may be used to guide policy and service decisions, which is at best unhelpful and at the worst damaging.

3. Answers to Consultation Questions

Specifically, if the alternative question set is favoured there is the issue of the inclusion of a filter question before the most explicit questions on serious sexual assault. This was intended to reduce offence to respondents which may have impacted on the parental refusal rate to the BCS extension to 10 to 15 year olds. Given that the addition of a filter question to the most explicit questions in serious sexual assault has not resulted in a reduction in the parental refusal rate to the 10 to 15 survey, should this filter be retained?

Given that there are no effects on the parental refusal rate for retaining the filter question, and that the screener question may be resulting in a distortion of sexual assault prevalence rates (the research suggests that the filter question may have excluded some victims of sexual assault from answering about this), Welsh Women's Aid recommends that the filter question should be dropped.

If the alternative question set is favoured then are further amendments needed to minimise the risk of reporting experiences that should not be classed as IPV? Should these be limited to the stalking questions, less serious sexual assault questions or to others?

Stalking is a significant part of partner abuse post-separation and a risk indicator for future violence, so it is important to retain as many of the stalking questions as possible in the questionnaire. They should also be amended to enable clearer identification of whether this was partner abuse in particular, to aid our understanding of significant risk factors.

There are other ways of minimising this risk. For example, adding in "was this from a partner, ex-partner or someone who thought they had a relationship with you, even if you did not?" after each of the stalking and less serious sexual assault questions.

Are there any other amendments suggested for consideration in the module in future?

1. Include clear numerical analysis of **repeat victimisation** given in numbers for male and female victims (prevalence) as was done in the Walby and Myhill version. At the moment it is usually not possible to identify either the absolute numbers of chronic repeat victims or the proportions of male and female victims amongst the absolute number of all chronic repeat victims.

2. Present figures for **prevalence** instead of solely as percentages of male and female victims, as this can give a false impression of gender parity because *proportions* of total number of male and female victims for specific categories of IPV can be similar, whilst the actual *number* of male and female victims is not. Non-statisticians can and do confuse these figures and interpret them as gender parity, which has knock-on implications for both policy and resource allocation.

3. Present figures of prevalence for **partner abuse causing injury**.

4. Retain **clear definitions**. For instance, some figures are for partner abuse excluding sexual assault and stalking, others for partner abuse include these. It is important to be clear that partner abuse INCLUDES sexual assault and stalking. In some years it is not possible to identify the figures for partner abuse including these two forms of partner abuse. This gives a distorted picture of the prevalence of partner abuse.

5. Include analysis of **partner abuse post-separation**. This is important as there are significant risk indicators for partner abuse post-separation, which it is important to monitor, as these have implications for child contact and for domestic homicide.

6. Include questions about **gender and sexuality of perpetrators** of partner abuse. This would significantly aid planning of appropriate responses to perpetrators.

Is a full break in the BCS time series acceptable in exchange for the possibility of improved coverage of victimisation using the alternative question set?

Given that the improved coverage will provide a much clearer picture of IPV prevalence, Welsh Women's Aid would agree that a full break in the BCS time series is acceptable.

Should an attempt be made to adjust past estimates to make them comparable with estimates from the alternative question set using the split-sample data? Would this risk causing inaccurate comparisons to be made over time?

Previous changes in the way data is analysed and presented has resulted in the inability to compare certain aspects of IPV between reports (e.g. levels of chronic partner abuse). Gaps in data lead to misleading data, which it important to correct, but it is equally important to establish a method of comparing the time series data. Every effort should be made to reduce discrepancies between reports, by taking the most comprehensive and detailed ways of analysing and presenting data between years.

For more information please contact Hannah Austin (Policy & Campaigns Officer):
HannahAustin@welshwomensaid.org.uk / 02920 390874

www.welshwomensaid.org

Women's Aid

Women's Aid, England consultation response to: intimate personal violence questionnaire

Choice of question set used for intimate personal violence module in future

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Introduction

Women's Aid was established in 1974 and is the national charity working to end domestic and sexual violence through:

- Protection - by influencing policy and legal changes and key decision makers
- Prevention - through raising awareness and education
- Provision of the services needed to help abused women and children

Women's Aid coordinates and supports a network of over 340 local specialist domestic and sexual violence organisations, providing over 500 refuges, helplines, outreach services and advice centres, as well as national help line services. Last year, these services supported over 330,000 adults and children by providing advocacy, shelter, and safety and over one million people used our online help services

Appendix 1: Consultation on intimate personal violence questionnaire

Choice of question set used for intimate personal violence module in future

Question: Which of the question sets should be used in the BCS from April 2012 onwards?

Women's Aid response

The amended question set should be used for non-sexual partner abuse – i.e. NIPV1 up to and including NIPV16.

The original questions should be used for sexual threats and assaults – i.e. PV5 to PV12 inclusive – preferably with the screening question prior to the questions about forced intercourse.

The reason for making this distinction is that there appears to be a qualitative difference (in the current version) between the questions on non-sexual IPV - which group together a lot of different kinds of abuse in one composite question; and those on sexual threat/assault, which already separate out different kinds of sexual threats from serious sexual assaults.

It would therefore be preferable – for reasons of clarity - that separate questions are asked (as in the alternative version) for IPV[3]. However, any further breakdown of the sexual threat/assault questions seems to make this section very repetitive and could result in a degree of "respondent exhaustion"[4]. (The revised version as a whole has more than twice as many separate questions: a maximum of 76 as opposed to a maximum of 38 in the original.)

Amendments to questions

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[3] Even in the new version, the specific kinds of abuse are not separated as much as might be desirable; e.g. they all kinds of "force" (jncluding use of weapons) are put together in one question, whereas they might be better separated to some extent.

[4] This which could lead to under-reporting and might possibly be the reason for the somewhat lower estimate for serious sexual assault, using the alternative questions.

Whichever question set is favoured going forwards, the analysis published here may indicate that further amendments to questions are needed in future.

Specifically, if the alternative question set is favoured there is the issue of the inclusion of a filter question before the most explicit questions on serious sexual assault. This was intended to reduce offence to respondents, which may have impacted on the parental refusal rate to the BCS extension to 10 to 15 year olds. Given that the addition of a filter question to the most explicit questions in serious sexual assault has not resulted in a reduction in the parental refusal rate to the 10 to 15 year old survey, should this filter be retained?

Women's Aid response

This filter question should be retained, in order to prepare respondents for these explicit questions.

If the alternative question set is favoured then are further amendments needed to minimise the risk of reporting experiences that should not be classed as IPV? Should these be limited to the stalking questions, less serious sexual assault questions or to others?

Women's Aid response

Separating out the IPV experiences into 3 separate groups of questions is unlikely to result in respondents reporting incidents that might not generally be considered to be IPV.

The reasons for a slightly higher number of reports of incidents of non-sexual abuse could be a result of the increased clarity and simpler layout; consequently, particular kinds of abuse are less likely to get "lost" and thus ignored in the long list given in the original composite question. (It is acknowledged that respondents found the on the whole found the revised questions easier to answer[5].)

There is only one question in the set on non-sexual IPV that has any potential at all for being misunderstood in any way. This is NIPV1, which includes three types of potentially abusive behaviour:

- Preventing you from having your fair share of household money
- Stopped you from seeing friends or relatives
- Repeatedly belittled you so you felt worthless

Women's Aid regards all the above as forms of emotional abuse – which victims often find more damaging than more overtly "violent" forms of behaviour. If, however, it is thought that there could be a very slight possibility of misinterpretation, one way of avoiding this might be to preface the question with "… has a partner or ex-partner ever abused you emotionally or financially; for example, has s/he…." This would have the added advantage that it is analogous to the next two questions on (respectively) "frightened or threatened you….", and "… used force on you…"

The questions on stalking could be more problematic. Stalking and harassment are defined (in the legislation) as a "course of conduct"[6], and it is this that is in some cases seems to be missing in these questions. Possibly the addition of the word "repeated/ly" could remedy this; for example, NIPV60: "Since you were 16, has any partner or ex-partner ever made obscene or threatening phone calls, or *repeated* nuisance or silent calls, to you?" NIP65 "… has anyone ever *repeatedly* waited or loitered outside your home or workplace?" etc.

Are there any other amendments suggested for consideration in the module in future?

We would like the following general points to be considered:

[5] Hall and Smith (2011) *ibid.* p.14
[6] Protection from Harassment Act 1997

- The BCS IPV module is currently restricted to those between the ages of 16 and 59 years inclusive. This does to some extent limit its use. Abuse does not stop at age 59; and omitting older people means that life-time rates could be skewed.
- The questions under consideration are all on **prevalence**; i.e. whether or not someone has experienced the listed forms of abuse in the last year, or ever during their lifetime. Questions about the repeated perpetration of abuse are not included here. If such questions are not included in the BCS, this is likely to under-estimate the gender gap on experience of abuse: Sylvia Walby has pointed out[7] that women who are subject to domestic violence experience far more incidents (usually from the same perpetrator) than do men; so while the prevalence rate shows a ratio of 2 women to 1 man, the ratio of **incidents** is more than 5 to 1. In other words, the choice of indicator has implications for understanding of gender asymmetry of IPV.

Publication of time-series data

If the alternative question set is used from April 2012 onwards, there are additional issues around the publication of time-series data.

Is a full break in the BCS time series acceptable in exchange for the possibility of improved coverage of victimisation using the alternative question set?

Women's Aid response

Yes. While it would be desirable to have unbroken time series data, if taken to extremes, this would mean that questions would never be revised – which is clearly unreasonable.

Should an attempt be made to adjust past estimates to make them comparable with estimates from the alternative question set using the split-sample data? Would this risk causing inaccurate comparisons to be made over time?

Women's Aid response

The possibility of such adjustments should be explored – but the limitations should be made clear.

Responses to this consultation should be sent to the address below (by post or email) by 7 October 2011. Individual responses will be published unless respondents request anonymity. These will be published together with a statement setting out the future approach alongside *Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2010/11* in January 2012.

For more information about the content of this consultation response contact Jackie Barron, Research & Policy Officer for Women's Aid, England.

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[7] Walby, Sylvia (2004) "Domestic violence: developments in survey methodology" paper presented to European conference on "everyday violence and human rights" Osnabrueck, Germany, 23/9/2004