

Home Affairs Committee 2025

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls: Funding

Written evidence submitted by Professor Sylvia Walby (Royal Holloway, University of London) and Professor Brian Francis (Lancaster University) (TVF0033)

Introduction

The aim of halving violence against women and girls in a decade is welcome¹. The appropriate allocation of funding to the services is important. The data to underpin the strategy and funding decisions is currently insufficient and fragmented². This note offers a contribution to two of the key issues and concludes with a third on future data strategy. The first concerns how VAWG should be measured. The second concerns the improvement of the data to support the process of prioritisation of government funding. The third concerns how the relevant data might be improved.

How should VAWG be measured?

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) needs definition and measurement³. There is a need for both a single headline figure, and also for the measurement of the multiple facets of the violence relevant to specific interventions by services. The government currently uses the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) self-completion module for its headline data. While useful, this is insufficient and needs to be supplemented by data from the main module asked face-to-face (F2F) and from the police (police recorded crime). While there has been much progress in improving the CSEW, formerly the British Crime Survey, by ONS and by academics, there are remaining challenges⁴.

¹ Home Office (2024) [New measures set out to combat violence against women and girls - GOV.UK](#)

² National Audit Office (2025) [Tackling violence against women and girls](#)

³ Walby, Sylvia, Jude Towers, Susie Balderston, Consuelo Corradi, Brian Francis, Markku Heiskanen, Karin Helweg-Larsen, Lut Mergaert, Philippa Olive, Emma Palmer, Heidi Stöckl and Sofia Strid. (2017) *The Concept and Measurement of Violence against Women and Men*. Bristol: Policy Press.
doi.org/10.51952/9781447332640_623150.pdf (open.org)

⁴ Walby, Sylvia, Jude Towers and Brian Francis (2014) 'Mainstreaming domestic and gender-based violence into sociology and the criminology of violence', *The Sociological Review*, 62(S2): 187-214.

Walby, Sylvia, Jude Towers and Brian Francis (2016) 'Is violent crime increasing or decreasing? A new methodology to measure repeat attacks making visible the significance of gender and domestic relations', *British Journal of Criminology*, 56(6): 1203-1234. doi: [10.1093/bjc/azv131](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azv131)

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Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2016) Response to the ONS Consultation on the Methodology for Addressing High-frequency Repeat Victimization in Crime Survey for England and Wales Estimates. ONS.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/statistics/consultationsandsurveys/allconsultationsandsurveys/reviewofmethodologyforaddressinghighfrequencyrepeatvictimisationincrimesurveyforenglandandwalesestimate>

ONS (2023) [Developing a new measure of domestic abuse: April 2023 - Office for National Statistics](#)

ONS (2024a) [Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables - Office for National Statistics](#).

ONS (2024b) [Redevelopment of domestic abuse statistics - Office for National Statistics](#)

All violence or only violence where the majority of the victims are female?

The definition the public probably expects is one that includes all forms of violence against all women and girls. However, in the strategy document *Tackling violence against Women and Girls*, the Government limits the definition to those forms of violence against women and girls in which women and girls are the majority of the victims⁵.

This is odd. It is most unlikely that the public, if asked, would seek to exclude some forms of violence against women and girls just because these forms are more common among men. Further, the UN definition in its Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women has the less restrictive definition⁶. Data using the wider and more inclusive definition is not collected in the CSEW SC, which collects data only on domestic abuse, sexual assault, and harassment and stalking (and is the government's preferred data source). But wider data on all violence against the person disaggregated by the sex of the victim is available in the CSEW main module (F2F).

We recommend the wider definition of VAWG that includes all violence against women and girls and that it should not be restricted to domestic abuse and sexual assault against women and girls, or to those forms of violence where females are the majority of the victims.

CSEW F2F and CSEW SC

The CSEW asks questions about violence in two ways, one face to face (F2F), and the other confidentially by self-completion (SC). They have different strengths and weaknesses. A strength of the SC as compared with the F2F is the higher level of disclosure of domestic abuse and sexual assault in the SC than F2F, which is unsurprising given the sensitive nature of the issue. A weakness of the SC is that it does not count frequency of repetitions well, which is a problem since domestic violence is often a repeat crime. This means that the SC generates a different gender profile of domestic violence than the F2F. Reporting on the gender ratio in incidents (F2F) generates a picture in which the large majority of domestic violence crimes are against women, while reporting on the gender ratio of victims generates a picture of a small majority of domestic violence victims being female. This difference in gender ratio matters for service provision and the extent to which this is tailored to the needs of male or female victims. A further weakness of the SC is that it does not ask questions about all forms of violence, only domestic abuse and sexual assault (and sometimes sexual

Walby, Sylvia, Jude Towers and Brian Francis (2016) 'Is violent crime increasing or decreasing? A new methodology to measure repeat attacks making visible the significance of gender and domestic relations', *British Journal of Criminology*, 56(6): 1203-1234. doi: [10.1093/bjc/azv131](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azv131)

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Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2016) Response to the ONS Consultation on the Methodology for Addressing High-frequency Repeat Victimization in Crime Survey for England and Wales Estimates. ONS. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/statistics/consultationsandsurveys/allconsultationsandsurveys/reviewofmethodologyforaddressinghighfrequencyrepeatvictimisationincrimesurveyforenglandandwalesestimate>

⁵ HM Government (2021) [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy - GOV.UK](#) page 8.

⁶ UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Articles 1 and 2 [nr071188.pdf](#)

harassment and stalking), unlike the F2F which asks questions about the full range of violence known as 'violence against the person'⁷.

The best approach is to use both sources of data, since they offer different facets of understanding of violence against women and girls. Currently the Office for National Statistics (ONS) prioritises the SC in its summary statements, even though it makes both sets of data available. We recommend that both CSEW SC and F2F datasets be presented simultaneously.

CSEW and Police Recorded Crime

The CSEW is a survey of a sample of the population in England and Wales. It does not include people outside its sampling frame so omits those who are homeless, in hostels, or staying with family or friends, who are probably more vulnerable to violence than the sample population who are living in settled residential households. It has recently experienced a significant decline in its response rate, including disproportionately in areas of minoritised populations. It does not include those forms of violence that are located in small categories, including FGM, honour-based crime, and forced marriage, which might be disproportionately found among minoritised women and girls.

The police record all the crimes against people in England and Wales that are reported to them and recorded. It does include the crimes in specialised categories that are not included in the CSEW, such as FGM, honour-based crime, modern slavery, and homicide. But it does not include crimes not reported to them or recorded by them. The police recorded crime statistics lost their quality ‘kite mark’ over concerns about the police recording of crime; and have been engaged in a programme of improvement.

Both the survey (CSEW) and the police (police recorded crime) underestimate the amount of violence against women and girls, but for different reasons. Traditionally, the CSEW was thought to provide a better estimate than the police. But recently, the police have been recorded more violent crimes than the survey.

The best approach is to use both sources of data, since they offer different partial pictures of the nature of the violence. Both should be presented simultaneously by the ONS.

How should the government prioritise funding in a VAWG strategy?

It is possible to estimate the cost of violence to economy and society. There is a history of cumulative development of the methodology in universities, the Home Office and other agencies to continually improve these estimates⁸. The most recent estimate by the Home Office of the annual cost of domestic abuse was £66bn⁹. The National Audit Office has updated the cost of domestic

⁷ Walby, Sylvia and Andy Myhill (2001) 'New survey methodologies in researching violence against women', *British Journal of Criminology*, 41(3): 502-522.

Walby, Sylvia and Jonathan Allen (2004) *Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*. Home Office Research Study 276. London: Home Office. [Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey \(lancs.ac.uk\)](#)

⁸ Brand, S., Price, R. (2000) *The Economic and Social Costs of Crime*. London: Home Office, Home Office Research Study 217.

Walby, Sylvia (2004) *The Cost of Domestic Violence*. London: Department of Trade and Industry Women and Equality Unit. [Layout 1 \(lancaster.ac.uk\)](http://lancaster.ac.uk)

⁹ Oliver, Rhys, Barnaby Alexander, Stephen Roe and Miriam Wlasny (2019) *The Economic and Social Costs of Domestic Abuse*. Home Office Research Study 107.

[The economic and social costs of domestic abuse - GOV.UK](#)

abuse to £84bn¹⁰. These are still underestimates, under improvement. For example, there is new methodology to estimate the cost of the mental health harms of sexual violence and abuse¹¹.

The data on the cost of services needs much more development. There are partial maps of the actual services, but these do not cover all services, provided by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and the directories of domestic abuse services available to Women's Aid¹². There are partial accounts of the cost of these services, but these are not comprehensive, including the Home Office graphic of different types of costs but no numbers in its document on funding services¹³, the figures used in the cost of domestic abuse by the Home Office¹⁴, by Walby on the cost of domestic violence for the Department of Trade and Industry¹⁵, on the measurement of cuts to services¹⁶, and on the cost of gender-based violence for the European Institute for Gender Equality¹⁷, and the estimates in the costing of domestic abuse by Women's Aid¹⁸.

The costing methodology includes estimates of the use of services as one of the costs of violence to society. This information can be deployed as a contribution to the discussions of the best allocation of resources.

The HO¹⁹ estimates the cost of domestic abuse to total £66,192m, of which £724m is attributed to victim services of which £550m is for housing (temporary housing, homelessness services and repairs and maintenance), leaving £174m for other victim services (which include expenditure by charities and the time given up by volunteers). The other components are: lost economic output £14,098m,

¹⁰ National Audit Office (2025) [Tackling violence against women and girls](#)

¹¹ Walby, Sylvia, Estela Capelas Barbosa, Sally McManus (2022) 'Costing the long-term health harms of trafficking: why a gender-neutral approach discounts the future of women', *Frontiers in Sociology*, 7, 858337. doi: [10.3389/fsoc.2022.858337](https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2022.858337)

Walby, Sylvia, Patricia Bell, Janet Bowstead, Gene Feder, Abigail Fraser, Annie Herbert, Stuart Kirby, Sally McManus, Stephen Morris, Sian Oram, Jess Phoenix, Merili Pullerits, and Rachel Verrall (2020) *The Cost of Trafficking in Human Beings*. Brussels: European Commission. [Study on the economic, social and human costs of trafficking in human beings within the EU - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹² Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2022) *A Patchwork of Provision: How to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales: Policy Report*. [A-Patchwork-of-Provision_Technical-Report_Nov-2022_Final.pdf](#)

Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2022) *A Patchwork of Provision: How to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales: Technical Report*. [A-Patchwork-of-Provision_Technical-Report_Nov-2022_Final.pdf](#)

¹³ HM Government (2022) [Victims Funding Strategy](#)

¹⁴ Oliver, Rhys, Barnaby Alexander, Stephen Roe and Miriam Wlasny (2019) *The Economic and Social Costs of Domestic Abuse*. Home Office Research Study 107. [The economic and social costs of domestic abuse - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁵ Walby, Sylvia (2004) *The Cost of Domestic Violence*. London: Department of Trade and Industry Women and Equality Unit. [Layout 1 \(lancaster.ac.uk\)](#)

¹⁶ Towers Jude and Sylvia Walby (2012) *Measuring the impact of cuts in public expenditure on the provision of services to prevent violence against women*. Trust for London/Northern Rock Foundation. [VAWG Cuts Full Report \(fra1.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com\)](#)

¹⁷ Walby, Sylvia and Philippa Olive (2014) *Estimating the Costs of Gender-Based Violence in the European Union*. Vilnius, Lithuania: European Institute for Gender Equality. Doi:10.2839/79629 <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/MH0414745ENC.pdf>

¹⁸ Women's Aid (2023) *Investing to Save: The Economic Case for Funding Specialist Domestic Abuse Support*. [Respublica web.pdf](#)

Women's Aid (2024) *Funding Safer Futures: A Government Pathway for the Quantity and Quality of Funding Required to Help Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse* [Womens-Aid-Funding-Safer-Futures-Report-May-2024.pdf](#)

¹⁹ Oliver, Rhys, Barnaby Alexander, Stephen Roe and Miriam Wlasny (2019) *The Economic and Social Costs of Domestic Abuse*. Home Office Research Study 107. [The economic and social costs of domestic abuse - GOV.UK](#)

health services £2,333m, police costs £1,257m, criminal legal £336m, civil legal £140m, physical and emotional £47,287, and other £17m. This means that expenditure on specialised victim services (£174m) is estimated to be 0.3% of the cost of domestic abuse in England and Wales in 2016/7. If housing costs were included as a victim service cost, then this is 1.1% of the total. The cost of services (health, victim services, police, criminal legal, civil legal, other) is £4,801m. Specialised victim services (not including housing) is 3.6% of the cost of all the services. It appears that seven times as much is spent on the police as on specialised victim services.

This raises the question as to whether the amount spent on (non-housing) specialised victim services is appropriate. What figure would be appropriate? If it were to be the same as the police, it would need to be seven times higher.

There has been considerable effort placed on the process of commissioning of specialised victim services, to ensure that they are value for money as compared with each other²⁰. The question raised here is whether there might be more effort to estimate the relative cost effectiveness of specialised victim services as compared with the police. Both are needed of course. But whether the balance of public expenditure is appropriate is a question.

The development of a strategy to halve violence against women and girls requires an understanding of the causal relations between the systems that generate violence. The concept of 'reduction' is of importance, not only 'prevention', especially since domestic violence, which is a considerable part of violence against women and girls is usually a repeat offence over a duration of time. Reducing the repetitions and duration of domestic abuse would reduce violent crime. The specialised victim services contribute to violence reduction not only to the mitigation of the harms of the victim/survivors.

Improving data

Most of the questions being asked by the Home Affairs Select Committee on the funding of services on violence against women and girls are hard to answer using currently available data. There is a wider call for more and better data to support policy development²¹. This could be achieved by a programme of research to improve the data to be identified and funded.

Better data is needed on the extent and nature of violence against women and girls. Each of the existing data sources has something to contribute but none is sufficient. This includes the Crime Survey for England and Wales main questionnaire (F2F), the CSEW specialised self-completion module (SC), and police recorded crime data. There needs to be improvement in each data source and more effort at the alignment of data so that it can be more effectively combined to produce a multi-faceted picture of changes in different aspects of the violence. The current preference for using only the CSEW SC leads to an underestimation of the extent to which domestic violent crime is against women rather than men, makes it hard to align data on violent crime against women with violent crime in general, omits significant forms of violence against women and girls which are from acquaintances and strangers rather than domestic relations, and underestimates the volume of

²⁰ Simmonds, Lesley (2019) 'The impact of local commissioning on victim services in England and Wales: An empirical study' *International Review of Victimology*, 25(2), 181-199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269758018787938>

²¹ National Audit Office (2025) [Tackling violence against women and girls](#)
EVAW (2024) *A Government Framework for Delivery and Accountability*. [Report template](#)
Joint VAWG Sector (2023) *A Whole-Society Approach to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: VAWG Sector Manifesto* [Full-VAWG-Manifesto-150923.pdf](#)

violence. There is currently no perfect single number. So, several statistics should be presented simultaneously.

Considerably better data is needed on the extent and cost of the services. This should include data on specialised by and for services²², and on services at a local level since this is where services are commissioned²³. The services should not be confined to specialised victim services, but extend to include all relevant services, interventions, and policies, including police, other criminal justice, civil justice, health, employment services, among others. The comparative cost-benefit analysis should extend to all services, not only specialised services subject to competitive tendering. This would support the strategic development of the most effective services. It is needed for impact assessments for policy and legislative developments.

Conclusion

There has been considerable progress in the development of data on violence against women and girls to support the development of a strategy. But much remains to be done to be able to accurately assess the most appropriate resourcing of the services to reduce violence.

On the basis of the current evidence available, it would appear that the resources allocated to victim services is less than one per cent of the cost of violence against women and girls. On one measure, seven times as much is being spent on the police as on specialised victim services.

Better data is needed to measure the amount of violence and to measure the services to reduce this violence against women and girls.

²² Thiara, Ravi and Roy, Sumanta (2022) 'The disparity is evident': COVID-19, violence against women and support for Black and minoritised survivors', *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 6(2): 315-330, [10.1332/239868021X16425822144020](https://doi.org/10.1332/239868021X16425822144020)

Gill, Aisha K., and Anitha, Sundari (2023) 'The nature of domestic violence experienced by Black and minoritised women and specialist service provision during the COVID-19 pandemic: practitioner perspectives in England and Wales', *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 7(2): 252-270.
<https://doi.org/10.1332/239868021X16661761362132>

Bridge, Maggie (2020) 'Contemporary feminist imaginings of the refuge-space: implications for Black and 'minority ethnic', migrant survivors in the UK', *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 4(3): 393-409.
<https://doi.org/10.1332/239868020X15982606030570>

²³ Ogden, Kate, Phillips, David and Warner, Max (2023) *How Much Spending Does Each Area Receive? Local Authority Level Estimates of Health, Police, School and Local Government Spending*. Institute for Fiscal Studies.
[How much public spending does each area receive? Local authority level estimates of health, police, school and local government spending](https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/12345)