



**Definition and measurement of violence in the Crime Survey
for England and Wales: implications for the amount and
gendering of violence**

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3 **Definition and measurement of violence in the Crime Survey for England and Wales: implications**
4 **for the amount and gendering of violence**
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Abstract

The definitions and the methodology used in surveys to measure violence have implications for its estimated volume and gendered distribution. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) uses quite a narrow definition of ‘violence against the person’ which excludes crimes which are arguably violent in nature. This paper expands the CSEW’s measurement of violence by regarding threats, robbery, sexual violence, and mixed violence/property crimes as violence. This results in the shift of the gender distribution of violence, with a higher proportion of violence against women (from 39% to 58%) and by domestic perpetrators (from 29% to 32%). Impacts of violence (injuries and emotional harm) are also affected by the change in definition and disproportionately so for women.

Keywords: Crime Survey for England and Wales, measurement, domestic violence, violence, gender

Introduction

The measurement and reporting of interpersonal violence are contested issues. There are varying definitions within research, policy, and practice. These range from definitions restricted to physical violence (Walby et al. 2017) to broader definitions that include non-physical threats and coercion (Stark 2007; Kelly 1988). National data on violence is used in the formation of policies to prevent and respond to violence, thus the accuracy of its measurement and reporting are important. The tools and methods used to collect and report on violence vary by jurisdiction. In England and Wales, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) refer to two sources of data to report on violent crime: a national victimisation survey – the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), and police recorded crime, with the former regarded as the most accurate national estimate of violent crime.

Victimisation surveys are considered to be the gold standard in measuring crime (Tilley and Tseloni 2016) and statistics from the CSEW have been designated as National Statistics by the UK Statistics Authority (ONS 2019). The CSEW (formerly known as British Crime Survey) started in 1982, running every two years until 2001, when it became annual. Crime is defined by CSEW crime categories, designed to align as closely as possible with police recorded crime. The units of measurement are victims as well as crimes. New questions have been added over time, to account for more types and new forms of crime, and some questions have been expanded to allow more detail in respondent answers, though the original questions and crime categories remain largely the same. This makes the CSEW “the most reliable source for populating indicators on the scale of different forms of violence, for cross-national comparisons and change over time” (Walby et al. 2017: 126). Additionally, in general, definitions of crime categories do not change over time.

In contrast, police recorded crime is widely regarded to underestimate violent crime, as much violence, particularly domestic and sexual violence, goes unreported to law enforcement agencies (Walby 2004; Felson and Paré 2005). Though police recorded crime provide a good measure of police activity, they are not a reliable measure of all crime (ONS 2019; Mayhew 2014). For example, using the 2019/20 CSEW (Table D10 in ONS 2021c), only 49% of violent crime came to the attention of the police in 2019. Even when crime is reported, it may be screened out by police recording practices (HMIC 2014; Myhill and Johnson 2016). Inconsistency in police recording practices led to police recorded crime data being undesignated as a National Statistic in 2014 (ONS 2020). Despite the underreporting and screening of police recorded crime, police recorded crime are important for capturing information on offences not included in the CSEW, such as homicide, and for crime against populations that are excluded by the CSEW, including those who are homeless, staying in

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3 shelters/refuges, student accommodation, hospitals, and prisons (Walby and Myhill 2001; Ariel and
4 Bland 2019). Statistics on violence in other countries faces similar issues. For example, in the United
5 States (US), police crime reporting has historically been carried out through the Uniform Crime
6 Reporting system using the summary reporting system (SRS) which is now being replaced by the
7 National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) (FBI, 2021). However, it is still based on law
8 enforcement reports, and suffers from the same issues of underreporting as police recorded crime in
9 England and Wales.
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12 The methods used by victimisation surveys to report on their data impact the accuracy of the reported
13 estimates of violence. In England and Wales, prior research has shown reporting methods used by the
14 ONS underestimate violence, and disproportionately affect estimates of violence against women and
15 domestic violence (Walby et al. 2014; 2016; Cooper and Obolenskaya 2021; Pullerits and Phoenix
16 2024). Furthermore, there are key differences in reporting methods and data collection used by
17 victimisation surveys across jurisdictions, hampering international comparability (Lynch, 2006). These
18 include (but are not limited to) question wording, sampling methods, mode of data collection, and
19 post-processing of data (such as weights and count capping). Furthermore, the definition of violence
20 and the methodology used to measure it have implications for the amount of violence and its
21 gendered distribution.
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25 In this paper, we adjust the reporting methodology of interpersonal violence in the CSEW used by the
26 ONS to more closely reflect those of another large-scale victimisation survey – the National Crime
27 Victimization Survey (NCVS) and to conceptualise violence broader, in line with the World Health
28 Organisation definition of violence. This has two main benefits. First, the definition is broader than
29 that used by the ONS in the CSEW giving a more comprehensive view of the burden of violence on
30 society. Second, reflecting on the methodological practices used to record offences in the NCVS, which
31 prioritises personal crimes over property offences, means that more violence can be captured (see
32 also Pullerits and Phoenix 2024). The crimes which we consider violence under discussion here are
33 assault, attempted assault, threat, robbery, sexual assault, and mixed violence/property events.
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36 We investigate the implications of using an expanded definition of violence on the subsequent
37 estimates of interpersonal violence and their distribution. Using CSEW data, the paper investigates
38 the implications of components of an expanded definition for the number of incidents of violence and
39 for the profile of violence, in particular the proportion of incidents of violence committed towards
40 women, and the proportion of incidents that are committed by domestic relations (rather than
41 acquaintances or strangers). Lastly, we investigate how the expanded definition of violence shows an
42 increased health burden of violence by investigating the number of injuries and the number and
43 proportion of victims that are strongly emotionally impacted. This entails treating the crimes of threat,
44 sexual violence, and robbery as violence, which are not currently included in the ONS definition of
45 violence in the CSEW.
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49 This paper proceeds as follows. In the next section we outline and discuss various definitions of
50 violence and specify our preferred measure. We then outline our methodology. The results section
51 shows the analyses of violence from the CSEW when applying a broader definition of violence. We
52 then compare estimated incidents and violence rates from CSEW based on the ONS and expanded
53 definitions. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results and suggested implications for policy
54 and reporting of violence in official statistics.
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Interpersonal violence: definitions, measurement, and prioritisation schemes

Definitions of violence

The debate over what constitutes violence is ongoing and multifaceted. Definitions of violence are contested and vary not only across fields, but even within them, with recent calls highlighting the need for a shared conceptualisation (Blom et al. 2023). Within the field of criminology, definitions of interpersonal violence range from those constrained to physical violence and threats only (e.g. Walby et al. 2017) to broader definitions which include coercion and control (Kelly 1988; Stark 2007); from definitions that are based on rigid crime categories, such as in police recorded crimes and crime victimisation surveys to those which are based on the characteristics of the act and its impact on the victim. Essentially, as Walby et al. (2017: 31) argue, “the definition of violence depends on the location of the boundary between violence and not violence”.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the World Health Organisation (WHO), places the act of violence and likely harm in the centre of the definition, and includes threatening behaviours and neglect, as well as physical force. The definition is the following:

“The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against [...] another person [...] that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (Krug et al., 2002:1084).

The WHO describes three broad types of violence: interpersonal violence, self-directed violence, and collective violence (Krug et al. 2002). We focus on interpersonal violence in this study, which consists of familial and intimate partner violence and community violence (ibid). Self-directed violence includes suicidal behaviour and self-abuse, while collective violence concerns violence by large groups or states and is often for advancing a social, political, or economic agenda (ibid). Walby et al. (2017) determined violence to consist of four components, an action which is intended, harmful and non-consensual, stating that forms of measurement which focus on only one component are partial and should be rejected. Uncompleted actions are also discussed. Walby et al. (2017) recommend that threats of violence, aiding, abetting, and other uncompleted acts of violence should be treated as violence following the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime recommendations (UNODC, 2015), but labelled as uncompleted. They also considered sexual crime to be violence, but there is no consideration of robbery.

Hamby (2017), taking a psychological viewpoint, puts forward a different list of components necessary to define violence, requiring violence to be intentional, unwanted, nonessential, and harmful. ‘Intentional’ and ‘harmful’ elements match with Walby et al.’s (2017) intent and harm; Hamby’s ‘unwanted’ matches with Walby et al.’s ‘consent’. ‘Action’ is taken by Hamby as an integral part of violence, as she distinguishes violence from other forms of action which are non-violent. The only difference between Walby et al.’s (2017) and Hamby’s (2017) definitions is the criteria of being ‘nonessential’ in the latter. An example of this is self-defence, which is considered as essential and therefore not violent. Essentiality might from a criminological point of view distinguish criminal violence from non-criminal violence, as reasonable self-defence will not be prosecuted. Hamby refers to power as one of several possible intentions and therefore not an essential component of violence. Thus, there is considerable agreement between Walby et al.’s definition and Hamby’s.

In this article, we aim to be as inclusive in defining interpersonal violence as possible on conceptual and theoretical bases. We therefore consider assault, robbery, threats and rape and other sexual

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3 offences to be violent acts, broadly in line with the definition by the WHO. Due to data limitations, we
4 are not able to capture all non-physical components of coercive control often argued to be forms of
5 violence, nor murder, manslaughter, and violence against children, which cannot be identified in an
6 adult population victimisation survey. The next section discusses the national reporting of violence
7 based on victimisation surveys, namely CSEW and NCVS, which determine the extent of violence that
8 is visible in the population. We then discuss how we could empirically re-define violence from that
9 used in the national reporting in England and Wales, using a broader definition of interpersonal
10 violence outlined above.
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13 ***Reporting of violence in national victimisation surveys***

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16 Most victimisation surveys use a similar structure and method of collecting information on
17 experiences of crime, by asking a representative sample of the population of their experience of crime
18 over the previous 12 months; this is true of the CSEW as well as other surveys, such as those in
19 Scotland, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Sweden (Mayhew and Van Dijk
20 2012). The NCVS asks about victimisations in the past 6 months. These victimisation surveys are often
21 used in the national reporting on crime in general and violent crime in particular. While the definitions
22 of what constitutes violent crime extracted from these surveys differ across countries, their utilisation
23 to define violence can also be characterised as the ‘exemplars approach’, whereby operationalised
24 violence consists of a list of specific criminal offences (Hamby, 2017). In this section we discuss the
25 limitation of the current ‘all violence’ measure used by the ONS in England and Wales and suggest
26 how it can be broadened to better reflect the amount of violence experienced by the population.
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30 The ONS definition of violence means that the reporting of violence from the CSEW is restricted to a
31 set of specific offence codes which are deemed to cross a criminal threshold, and which aim to align
32 with the Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) for police recorded crime in England and Wales (Home
33 Office, 2023). This definition includes physical acts of violence and attempted physical acts: serious
34 wounding, other wounding, common assault, and attempted assault. It also includes serious wounding
35 and other wounding where there was a sexual motive. There are, however, offences which are violent
36 in nature but are not part of the official ONS measure of violence.
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39 Despite the name ‘*all violence*’, the ONS measure, firstly, does not contain all components of ‘violence
40 against the person’ as categorised in the HOCR (such as homicides or death by dangerous driving) due
41 to the scope of a victimisation survey; and, secondly, it omits certain acts which are violent in nature,
42 such as rape and attempted rape, which are also outside the ‘violence against the person’ definition
43 of the HOCR (Walby et al 2014). This is also partly because of the face-to-face survey design of the
44 CSEW which means that offences such as rape are under-reported in the main face-to-face
45 questionnaire, therefore estimates for these offences from the main questionnaire are deemed
46 inaccurate and publishing these numbers could be misleading (ONS, 2021b). This has been critiqued
47 by Walby et al. (2014; 2016) and Cooper and Obolenskaya (2021), who argued that sexual violence
48 should be included, at least within the overall measure of violence, on a conceptual basis.
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52 Secondly, although robbery was included in the ONS violence definition until 2013, it was removed as
53 part of changes to the classification of CSEW offences (implemented in July 2014). Robbery is defined
54 in the CSEW as an incident of theft where “force or threats were used to further the theft; more force
55 than was necessary to snatch property away” (Kantar, 2021: 25). This is distinct from burglary or
56 snatch theft, for example, the definition of which does not presume force or threat used on an
57 individual. ONS removed robbery from the violence category due to the distinct nature of the offence
58 which could justify its inclusion as either a violent-type offence or a theft-type offence (ONS 2012;
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3 2014). Given that for some robberies the primary purpose for committing a robbery is to steal, it could
4 be argued that robbery should be classed as a theft-type offence (ONS, 2014). However, due to the
5 use (or threat) of force in robberies, we classify them as a violence-type offence. To capture a broader
6 range of violent offences, and to be more aligned with the WHO definition of violence, it is imperative
7 that we include all offences where physical violence, force or threats occur.
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10 The final omission from the ONS reporting on violence are threats. Threats could take on different
11 meanings and impact victims differently depending on the context in which they are experienced.
12 They could be a one-off event, deployed by a stranger, for example, or a partner in a context of
13 domestic abuse. Threats could also be part of the tactics of coercive behaviour employed by intimate
14 partners, and could occur repeatedly (Johnson, 2008; Graham-Kevan and Archer, 2003). The ability to
15 exert control over their victim by using threats was found to be a crucial component of coercive control
16 identified in the literature (Hamberger et al., 2017; Johnson and Kelly, 2008). In the absence of physical
17 violence, threats have been found to have similar consequences for victims of violence by intimate
18 partners, such as fear and perceived risk of future violence (Lammers et al, 2005; Crossman et al.
19 2015). However, coercion is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to measure within a survey. Myhill
20 (2015) attempted to measure coercive control in the CSEW and concluded that while some indicators
21 when occurring together (fear, emotional harm, and denigration) can be used as proxies for coercive
22 control, more comprehensive measures are needed in victimisation surveys that consider a broader
23 variety of controlling behaviours. More recently, Hester et al.(2023) have redesigned the self-
24 completion module on domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking within the CSEW to better reflect
25 lived experience, coercive control, and its impact on victim-survivors. This new module is currently in
26 its testing stages. Including threats in the overall measure of violence, therefore, partly captures
27 coercion. Given the significance of threats, especially in the context of domestic abuse, and in
28 alignment with the aforementioned WHO definition of violence which includes threats of physical
29 force or power (as well as Walby et al. 2017 and Hamby 2017), we incorporate offences of threat (to
30 kill/assault/sexual threats/other threats or intimidation) in our broad measure of violence.
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36 Violence reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in the US is also based on a crime-led
37 definition, using data from the NCVS. It consists of aggravated assault, simple assault, rape and sexual
38 assaults and robbery (BJS, 2017). These offence categories include attempted acts and threats (ibid).
39 The NCVS follows this definition of violence for data collection and its reporting. Although murder is
40 also included in the more general definition of violence by the BJS, it cannot be measured in a
41 victimisation survey and is therefore excluded from the measure based on NCVS data. This definition
42 of violence is far broader than the ONS measure and concurs more closely with the theoretical work
43 of Walby et al. (2017) and Hamby (2017), as well as the WHO definition.
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46 It is important to acknowledge that the CSEW captures threats in a different way to the NCVS. The
47 CSEW includes questions on threats made against the respondent, but not necessarily to the
48 respondent. Threats in the CSEW are also inclusive of threats made to damage property and threats
49 to publish personal information online (Kantar Public, 2020). This means that the CSEW can capture a
50 wider range of threats compared to the NCVS, which only counts verbal threats made to the
51 respondent such as, threats of death, rape, sexual assault, robbery, and assault (BJS, 2017). We
52 include in our analysis below all threats, which are likely to result in fear of violence, which is inclusive
53 of threats to kill/assault, sexual threats, other threats or intimidation and threats against others, as
54 well as threats made during another event.
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57 Given the different purposes of recording violence across policy and service areas, victimisation
58 surveys should be able to capture a broader experience of interpersonal violence in the population
59 than is currently reflected in national reporting. At the same time, victimisation surveys should also
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3 allow researchers to constrain the measure of violence for their purpose, such as by harms from
4 violence (with injury/without; with mental health impact/without), by intentionality of it
5 (intentional/accident, etc.) and/or by type of violence (physical/non-physical/sexual, etc.).
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8 ***Crime prioritisation schemes and prevalence of violence in national surveys***

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10 Research by Pullerits and Phoenix (2024) identified the impact of priority coding practices in
11 victimisation surveys on estimates of violence, showing that the prioritisation of some property
12 offences over some violence offences leads to underestimations of physical violence, with
13 disproportionate impacts on violence against women and domestic violence. In the CSEW, a single
14 offence code is assigned to a criminal event in complex instances where multiple offences occur during
15 that event. Certain offences have priority over others, which results in some violent offences being
16 categorised under non-violent offence codes. For example, Table 1 highlights the hierarchy of offences
17 used in the CSEW since 1982. It places both burglary and criminal damage above assault (specifically,
18 above both other wounding and common assault), which means that if the offender maliciously
19 damages or unlawfully (even partially) enters property with intent to commit theft, grievous bodily
20 harm or criminal damage at the same time as assaulting the victim, it is likely that this is coded as
21 criminal damage or burglary (unless the assault amounts to a serious wounding) (ONS 2021b). Given
22 this hierarchy, which in some cases means that violent offences are categorised as non-violent, relying
23 on the offence coding alone can potentially result in under-estimation of the amount of violence
24 experienced in the population. This paper therefore builds on and further extends the crime code
25 hierarchy work undertaken by Pullerits and Phoenix (2024) by re-classifying crimes coded as non-
26 violence (but which have an element of violence in them) as violence, and also examining co-
27 occurrence of threats with other offences. The prioritisation scheme used in the NCVS is rather
28 different and prioritises rape, robbery, assaults (including attempts and threats) above burglary and
29 theft. We prefer the NCVS prioritisation scheme for identifying violence over that used in the CSEW
30 as it prioritises acts of violence over property crime, and we seek to apply it to the CSEW.
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36 Table 1 here
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38 To conclude from the above discussions, assault, robbery, threats, rape and other sexual offences
39 could be considered to be violent acts. We aim to treat them as such in this paper, based both on the
40 conceptual/theoretical basis and the definition of violence used by the US BJS and the definition of
41 violence by the WHO. Further, we build on and extend the crime code hierarchy work undertaken by
42 Pullerits and Phoenix (2024), by re-classifying crimes coded as non-violence, but which have an
43 element of violence in them (either force or threats of force) into our violence measure. Furthermore,
44 we investigate how some dual character offences can be re-categorised as violence. In the results
45 section we explore the implications of these re-categorisations for the profile of victims, specifically
46 by gender and relationship to the perpetrator. Given the importance of the concept of harm in the
47 aforementioned definitions of violence, we also examine the implications of the re-categorisations on
48 extent of harm experienced by victims.
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54 **Method**

55 ***Data***

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3 We use the Crime Survey of England and Wales, a nationally representative, household victimisation
4 survey which collects data on around 35,000 respondents per year (ONS, 2019). This paper uses one
5 year of data from the 2019/20 survey year (ONS 2021a), which was the most recent data available at
6 the time of analysis.
7

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9 The CSEW consists of multiple modules which record respondent demographic information and
10 victimisation experiences. This paper focuses on the main victimisation module which includes adult
11 respondents (aged 16 and over) who report experiencing victimisation in the previous 12 months.
12 Detailed information is collected about each reported event through a face-to-face interview, which
13 ONS subsequently use to categorise the events into offence codes. Whether the events pass the
14 criminal threshold is decided after the interview by specialist trained coders. Respondents can record
15 up to six discrete criminal victimisation incidents in separate victimisation forms (also called “victim
16 forms”).
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19 It is important to note that there are some key populations and crimes which are not captured by the
20 survey. As previously mentioned, as a victimisation survey, the survey asks the victim for their own
21 account of the experience, therefore homicides cannot be included. Additionally, as the survey
22 samples households, populations living in group residences (for example, care homes, hospitals, or
23 student halls of residence) or other institutions are not captured by the survey. Walby and Myhill
24 (2001) explain how this exclusion is particularly significant when considering violence against women
25 as victims of domestic or sexual violence are more likely than the general population to be in
26 temporary accommodation (refuges, hostels, temporarily living with family/friends etc.).
27 Westmarland and Bows (2018) also argue that excluding people in care homes disproportionately
28 affects the inclusion of older people in the survey.
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32 The 2019/20 CSEW reached 33,735 respondents, with 6,900 recorded as a victim of at least one crime.
33 The survey contained 9,200 victim forms, and over 13,000 incidents (as one victim form may contain
34 information about multiple repeated incidents). When weighting to the population, this gave an
35 estimated 10.2 million victims, 13.8 million victim forms and 19 million incidents. This sample is
36 broadly representative of households in England and Wales.
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39 ***Measurement of violence***

40 In this article we expand the definition of violence used by ONS (shaded grey in Table 2) in two ways:
41 by including additional offences in our measure of violence and by supplementing offence code
42 classification altogether and use an indicator of force used and/or threatened.
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45 To achieve the first, we have derived three new measures of violence:

- 46 • Measure 1: Physical violence (including attempted, sexual violence, and robbery): ONS
47 published measure of violence (codes 11, 12, 13, 21, 32 and 33) expanded to include robbery
48 and sexual violence (codes 31, 34, 35, 41 and 42).
- 49 • Measure 2: Physical violence and threats (including attempted and sexual violence, robbery):
50 ONS published measure of violence expanded to include threats (codes 91, 92, 93 and 94) as
51 well as robbery and sexual violence (above).
- 52 • Measure 3: Physical violence and threats, also prioritising violent crime over property crime
53 and following the BJS prioritisation scheme (Pullerits and Phoenix 2024).
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59 Table 2 here
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5 Measure 3 includes secondary offences which involves a use of force or threat of force, even if the
6 event is recorded as a non-violent offence due to priority offence coding practices. This analysis thus
7 aims to identify violence that has been ignored by priority offence coding practices. This is achieved
8 by using a flag for experiencing force to identify incidents of violence. We use questions within the
9 survey which record whether “force” was either used (following Pullerits and Phoenix 2024) or
10 threatened during the event (to expand on Pullerits and Phoenix 2024). The question on use of force
11 is asked twice, once as initial screening and then in the victimisation form. ONS have then derived a
12 variable which indicates whether the event involved the use of force or a threat of force to the victim.
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15 ***Repeat victimisations***

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17 Each victim form can record either a ‘single’ or a ‘series’ event. A single event is a one-off occurrence,
18 but a series event is where “the same thing, is done under the same circumstances and probably by
19 the same people” (ONS, 2021b). When publishing on incident numbers, the ONS cap the maximum
20 number of incidents at the 98th percentile (Flatley, 2017). For the ONS measure of violence this is
21 around 10 incidents, 5 for sexual offences, 5 for robbery, 5, and 9 for threats (Kantar, 2020). For the
22 first analysis, both capped and uncapped incident counts are presented to show the full effect of
23 adjusting the violence measure. The second analysis uses uncapped incident counts, to ensure that
24 the gendered distribution of violence is not underestimated (as suggested by Walby et al. 2016).
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27 ***Type of perpetrator***

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29 This paper is interested in the gender dimension of violence. Violence by domestic relations is
30 considered to be gendered violence (Myhill, 2015; Kelly and Johnson, 2008; Stark, 2007 etc.).
31 Therefore, we disaggregate by victim-perpetrator relationship, categorised into three groups:
32 stranger, acquaintance and domestic. Stranger violence includes incidents of violence where the
33 victim did not have any information about the perpetrator(s). In this case, the victim does not know
34 or has never seen the perpetrator before the incident took place. Acquaintance violence is defined as
35 incidents of violence against the person where the victim knew the perpetrator (or at least one of the
36 perpetrators). This covers any person the victim knows by sight and includes but is not limited to;
37 colleagues and people met through work, neighbours, and friends of family members. Domestic
38 violence would include violence against the person that involves partners, ex-partners or any family
39 or household member.
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43 ***Sex of the victim and perpetrators***

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45 Victimisation events recorded in the victim form can have one perpetrator or multiple perpetrators.
46 The sex of the victim is recorded as binary: male or female. The sex of the perpetrator can be recorded
47 as male or female, meaning that the single perpetrator or all the multiple perpetrators were the same
48 sex. The ONS derived sex of the perpetrator variable also includes the category “both sexes”. This
49 category includes victim forms where there were multiple perpetrators but some of the perpetrators
50 were male and some were female.
51
52

53 We aim as far as possible to capture *all violence* experienced in the population as reported in 2019/20
54 in the CSEW. We used data from the CSEW main (face-to-face) questionnaire, which is a valuable
55 source of data on physical violence and threats. However, certain constraints of the data collected
56 restricted our ability to include all forms of violence within our measure. Non-physical abuse and
57 coercion, for example, are not captured by the face-to-face part of the survey and are therefore
58 excluded from our broad measure of violence. Cooper and Obolenskaya (2021) show an increased
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3 prevalence of violence, particularly among women, when data from the CSEW self-completion module
4 on domestic abuse and sexual violence is incorporated within face-to-face victimisation data. The self-
5 completion module has a higher disclosure rate (Walby et al. 2014; Cooper and Obolenskaya 2021), it
6 is not designed to capture 'crime' and it is therefore broader in scope, and data from the module are
7 not affected by prioritisation methods. Our estimates of violence against women and domestic
8 violence in particular will therefore likely be underestimates.
9

10 ***Indicators of harm***

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12 We used two indicators of harm from the CSEW. The first measures whether physical injury occurred
13 as a result of the event (yes/no). This is asked of any respondent who discloses that the perpetrator
14 used force against them. Respondents who did not experience force were coded as having no physical
15 injury.
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18 The second indicator of harm is whether the respondent experienced emotional reactions from the
19 event, and if so to what extent they were affected. Examples of an emotional reaction provided in the
20 questionnaire include anger, shock, fear, depression, anxiety/panic attacks, loss of confidence,
21 difficulty sleeping, crying, annoyance, and/or other. Next respondents are asked "how affected were
22 you by the incident?", which includes 'a little', 'quite a lot' and 'very much' as responses. We
23 categorised this into two groups; those who had no emotional reaction, or 'a little' affect (0), and
24 those respondents who were quite a lot or very much affected (1), the latter from here on referred to
25 as strongly emotionally affected. In additional analyses (available upon request) we differentiated
26 internalised from externalised emotional reactions (based on Iganski and Lagou, 2015). Previous
27 analysis of indicators of harm have included emotional reactions from the CSEW (Blom et al. 2023)
28 and both physical and emotional impacts (Blom et al. 2023). Both physical injury and emotional
29 reaction are recorded at the level of the victim form and could relate to multiple incidents of violence
30 if the victim form relates to a series event.
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34 **Analysis**

35
36 In this paper, we estimate incidents of violence using our expanded measures of violence and compare
37 them to estimates using the ONS official measure of violence. While violence can also be measured in
38 terms of the number of victims (prevalence of violence), in this work we focus on the incidence of
39 violence given the importance of repetition to measure gender difference in violence exposure
40 discussed earlier.
41
42

43 The analysis in this paper is divided into two parts. We first estimate the number and rate of incidents
44 of violence in England and Wales in 2019/20 using the ONS measure of violence alongside our
45 measures. We then estimate the number of incidents disaggregated by victim and perpetrator gender,
46 victim-perpetrator relationship (type of perpetrator), and extent of harm. The analysis for this paper
47 was undertaken using SPSS. All estimates of incidents are weighted to the general population using
48 individual weights provided by the ONS. The unweighted frequencies are provided for all analyses.
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50

51 **Findings**

52 ***Incidence rates when expanding the measure of violence***

53
54 We examine reported violence from the ONS and compare to our new violence measures. A published
55 ONS report shows that in 2019/20 (nine months of 2019 and three months of 2020) there was an
56 estimated 1,239,000 incidents of violence to victims aged 16 and over who are resident in households,
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3 and an estimated incident rate of 26 violent crimes per 1000 persons (ONS 2020, Appendix Tables A1
4 and A2; Table 3 below).
5

6 Our analysis of the CSEW shows that using a wider definition of violence, which includes sexual
7 offences, robbery, threats and force, there are estimated 3,704,184 violent incidents in England and
8 Wales (Table 3) for an estimated mid-year 2019 population of 48,059,326 aged 16 and over (ONS,
9 2019), a rate of 77 incidents per 1000 population. This rate is three times as high as the estimated
10 rate for the ONS measure of violence.
11
12

13 Table 3 here
14

15 As well as the estimated rate of violence increasing, the expanding definitions of violence showed that
16 a much higher proportion of criminal incidents were violent incidents in the CSEW for 2019/20. The
17 ONS estimates show that 5.8% (capped) to 6.8% (uncapped) of all criminal incidents were violence.
18 Measure 1 shows that by including all sexual offences and robbery as violence this increases to 8.8%
19 (uncapped). Including threats as non-physical violence results in the largest increase in the number of
20 violent incidents from 1.82m (measure 1, uncapped) to 4.91m (measure 2, uncapped) and over one
21 quarter of all criminal incidents reported to the survey that year. Our final measure of violence
22 (Measure 3) identifies 28.5% of all criminal incidents from 2019/20 as violence.
23
24

25 ***Gender inequalities when expanding the measure of violence***

26
27 We now turn our attention to the effect that using the expanded measures of violence has on the
28 CSEW estimates and the distribution of violence by sex of the victim and victim-perpetrator
29 relationship. To do this we use the uncapped values (totals presented in Table 3).
30

31 Our analysis of incidents using the ONS measure disaggregated by sex shows more violent incidents
32 experienced by men than women (Figure 1). In terms of the total share of incidents by sex, using the
33 ONS measure, there is a higher proportion of incidents experienced by male victims (61%) than female
34 victims (39%).
35

36
37 Comparing this to measure 1, with the additional inclusion of sexual offences and robbery, the gap in
38 the number of violent incidents between male and female victims decreases. For measure 1 there are
39 almost as many violent incidents against women (49%) as men (51%). However, for both measures 2
40 and 3 women experience more violent incidents than men. For measures 2 and 3, women experience
41 58% of violent incidents compared to 42% for men.
42

43 Overall, using the official ONS measure of violence we find that more violence is experienced by men
44 than women. However, as we have broadened the measure of violence to include additional offences
45 (robbery, sexual offences, and threats) we find that more violence is experienced by women than men.
46 Additionally, compared to the ONS measure, estimates of violence using measure 3 are up to 2.8 times
47 higher for men and up to 5.2 times higher for women.
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49

50 Disaggregating by victim-perpetrator relationship and sex of the victim (Figure 2), shows the
51 implications of changing the measurement of violence on the understanding of who perpetrates
52 violence. For the ONS measure, strangers and acquaintances perpetrated a similar number of violent
53 incidents against men (46%/48%), whereas violence by domestic perpetrators accounted for just 6%
54 of violent incidents. The proportions of incidents remain similar across all measures e.g., measure 2,
55 shows that male victims still experience the most violence by strangers (50%), and are not often
56 victimised by domestic relations (5%). However, while the proportion of violence against men
57 perpetrated by different perpetrators stays similar for each measure, the overall number of incidents
58 significantly increases.
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3 For female victims, the ONS measure shows that female victims are more commonly victimised by
4 acquaintances (48%), followed by domestic relations (29%). For measure 1, acquaintance violence
5 accounts for 45% of violent incidents towards women, domestic violence makes up 27% of incidents
6 and stranger violence makes up 29%. Including threats (measure 2) shows that 43% of incidents
7 against women are by acquaintances, the proportion of incidents by domestic relations increases to
8 32% and stranger violence makes up 25% of incidents. This is similar for measure 3.
9
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11 For women, using the broadest definition of violence (measure 3) shows that stranger violence
12 increased by as much as 5 times when compared with the amount estimated using the ONS measure,
13 the amount of violence perpetrated by acquaintances increased by 4.4 times and domestic violence
14 is 5.5 times higher.
15

16 Finally, Figure 3 shows the proportions of violent incidents by sex of the victim and sex of the
17 perpetrator(s). Using different measures of violence increases the amount of violence experienced
18 but does not change the patterns of who perpetrates the most violence. Both male and female victims
19 are most likely to be victimised by male perpetrators across all four measures of violence. Comparing
20 the ONS measure to measure 2, we can see that there are twice as many incidents by male
21 perpetrators against male victims and 3 times as many incidents by male perpetrators against female
22 victims. For measure 3, there are 4.7 times as many male perpetrated incidents against women and
23 twice as many against male victims.
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27 Interestingly, using measure 3, our analysis shows that there are around 6 times as many female-
28 perpetrated violent incidents against female victims as using the ONS measure, and only 1.2 times as
29 many incidents perpetrated by women against men. Violence perpetrated by perpetrators in the 'both
30 sexes' category was 8 times higher for measure 3 than the ONS measure for both male and female
31 victims.
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33 Figure 1 here

34 Figure 2 here

35 Figure 3 here

36 ***Injuries and emotional impact when expanding the measure of violence***

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38
39 Around half of ONS violent crime offences (ONS definition) result in physical injury to the respondent
40 (this is estimated to be around 400,000 injuries for 2019/20, shown in Table 4). Using our violence
41 measure 1, which includes sexual offences and robberies, the proportion of injuries decreases to 40%
42 However, the number of violent incidents that led to injuries increased by 13% to 465,000 injuries.
43 Adding threats to the measure of violence (measure 3), did not, unsurprisingly, pick up more violence-
44 related injuries, and the proportion of violent incidents resulting in injury decreased to 20% using this
45 measure. Crucially, the number of violent incidents that led to injuries increased to around 530,000
46 when we included whether force was used/threatened. Hence, our most expanded measurement of
47 violence led to an increase by 29% in the number of injuries compared to the ONS measure. Notably,
48 the number of injuries experienced by women rose more than by men, by 44% and 19%, respectively.
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54 Table 4 shows that using the ONS measure of violence there are 359,000 instances of strong emotional
55 impact as a result of violence, which amounts to 41% of all violent incidents. This number increases to
56 511,000 when sexual offences and robberies are included in the measure. It more than doubles when
57 threats are then added in - to 1,122,000, with a further increase to 1,302,000 when all crimes where
58 force was used or threatened are considered violence. As a result, 49% of all violent instances are
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3 associated with strong emotional impact. This is an increase of over 260% from the original ONS
4 measure, with strong gendered effects - a rise of 182% for men and 335% for women.¹
5

6 Table 4 here
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8 **Discussion** 9

10 There are varying measures of interpersonal violence within research, policy, and practice. Surveys
11 are considered a more reliable source of information on crime, and violence, than other sources (such
12 as, police data). And, while many victimisation surveys include relatively similar questions when asking
13 respondents about victimisation experiences, there are some key differences in the measurement and
14 reporting of violence within them. This paper demonstrates the impact of expanding the measure of
15 violence by aiming to align it more with the WHO definition of violence and using the measurements
16 of another victimisation survey (the NCVS). Specifically, the paper reveals the impact that this has on
17 the gendered distribution of violence captured in the CSEW.
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19

20 The CSEW uses a more restricted definition of violence compared to some other victimisation surveys,
21 including the NCVS (BJS, 2017; ONS, 2022). The measurement of violence reported by the ONS using
22 the CSEW excludes some key offences which have a conceptual basis for being included, which could
23 underestimate the prevalence and incidence of violence in England and Wales (Cooper and
24 Obolenskaya 2021, Walby et al., 2017). To arrive at the broadest measure of violence (measure 3 in
25 the results section above), we perform the following adjustments to the ONS measure of violence
26 using the CSEW. Firstly, in line with the BJS reporting from the NCVS and the WHO definition of
27 interpersonal violence, we include additional offence categories to the ONS' own measure of violent
28 crime. Namely, we include all sexual violence, robbery, and threats. Secondly, we adjust priority
29 coding practices, by reclassifying incidents which had an element of force in them but were coded by
30 ONS as non-violence. This was done in line with recent research by Pullerits and Phoenix (2024) which
31 highlights the importance of critically engaging with methodological decisions which impact the
32 measurement of violence. Specifically, here the issue of prioritising offences leads to some violent
33 offences not being recorded where priority is given to some property offences. We have expanded on
34 this research, by comparing these practices and including threats into the measurement.
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39 Our results based on the CSEW show that experience of violence in England and Wales is more
40 prevalent than ONS reported *violent crime* using their current methodology. By aligning the measure
41 of violence in the CSEW to that of the NCVS and definition of the WHO, we estimate that the total
42 number of capped incidents of violence in England and Wales was 2.9 times higher in 2019/20 than
43 officially reported by ONS. The uncapped difference is even higher. Crucially, not only the rate of
44 violence is higher using our broadest measure of violence, but the distribution of violence shifts,
45 especially violence against women. ONS published figures suggest that in 2019/20 men were more at
46 risk of violence than women (ONS, 2020). Our analysis of the ONS measure showed 830,000 violent
47 incidents against men and 580,000 against women. However, the ONS measure of violent crime is
48 likely to underestimate violence against women because the current definition excludes violent
49 offences which women are more often victims of, such as rape, attempted rape, and indecent assault
50 (Cooper and Obolenskaya 2021) as well as threats of violence (Hester, 2009). Indeed, our findings
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56 ¹ Previous research has separated emotional reactions into 'internalised' (e.g. depression, fear, anxiety) and
57 'externalised' (e.g. annoyance and anger) responses (Iganski and Lagou, 2015). Additional analyses (available
58 upon request) showed that the proportion of internalised emotions increases as the definition of violence
59 expands, whereas externalised emotions decrease. Women had a higher proportion of internalised emotions
60 than men and were more affected by this increase.

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3 show that using the broadest measure of violence, the uncapped number of incidents experienced by
4 women in 2019/20 was much higher than by men (2.8m and 2.3m, respectively).
5

6 Furthermore, our results show that as the volume of violent offences increases as does the volume of
7 harm experienced by victims of violence. Our broadest measure of violence identifies 29% more
8 injurious violent events than the ONS measure. Additionally, the level of emotional harm is often
9 higher for measures which include threats of violence and force. While the CSEW aims to prioritise
10 more serious events over less serious events (ONS, 2018), through both the ordering of the questions
11 and the priority ordering of offences, this demonstrates that some potentially serious violent events
12 can be coded as non-violence, supporting previous research (Pullerits and Phoenix, 2024). The lower
13 estimation of harmful consequences of violence could also mean that the burden of violence on
14 healthcare provisions are also underestimated. Therefore, not only is the ONS measure showing a
15 different gendered distribution of violence but also an under-estimation of the harmful consequences
16 of violence on victims, especially female victims. Further work on the components of emotional impact
17 are needed but this was out of the scope of this paper.
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21 We also consider the boundary between coercion and violence with the inclusion of threats. Some
22 definitions of violence are restricted to physical violence only (e.g. Walby et al. 2017). The ONS
23 measurement of violence is also restricted to physically violent acts (and attempted physically violent
24 acts) such as common assault and excludes threats. The inclusion of coercive acts within a broad
25 measure of violence is especially important when considering gender-based violence and domestic
26 violence, whereby tactics can be used to extend the abuse over time (Stark, 2007; Kelly, 1988).
27 Coercion in the CSEW is not inclusive of all possible coercive acts. The main victimisation data used in
28 this paper is limited to threats only, and a redeveloped self-completion module on domestic abuse,
29 sexual assault and stalking to better capture controlling and coercive behaviour is being trialled by the
30 ONS at the time of writing (Hester et al, 2023). This paper demonstrates the significance of adopting
31 a more comprehensive definition of violence. Including threats in the measurement of violence, drives
32 the largest change in estimates of violence, increasing the estimated number of incidents by over 3m
33 (from 1.82m to 4.91m). Additionally, counting threats as violence shifts the distribution of violence
34 showing that women are more often victims than men and that the estimated number of incidents
35 perpetrated by domestic partners is particularly impacted. Therefore, where the line is drawn
36 between violence and coercion matters for who is perceived to be the victims of violence
37 (men/women) and who is seen as the perpetrators (strangers or known perpetrators). Overall, we see
38 that including all sexual violence and threats into the measurement of violence has implications
39 specifically for the estimates of violence against women, violence by domestic perpetrators and
40 violence by acquaintances.
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46 There are other offences which could be included in the definition of interpersonal violence, for
47 example arson, criminal damage, environmental crimes, or corporate offences. These additional
48 offences are either captured in measure 3, if threat or force occurred alongside (criminal damage,
49 arson), or they are not captured in a victimisation survey (environmental crimes, corporate offences).
50 Additionally, the data does not allow identification of certain characteristics of incidents which would
51 enable us to apply a more nuanced criteria for identification and description of violent acts. For
52 example, we are not able to establish whether experience of force was a result of an act of crime or a
53 result of an essential act such as self-defence. However, our aim was to establish estimates of violence
54 using the CSEW by applying as broad definition of violence as possible. This work is the first to our
55 knowledge to capture such a range of violent experiences using the CSEW. Self-directed and collective
56 violence are outside the scope of this paper and further research could investigate how the definition
57 of these factors shapes our understanding of violence inequalities and harms arising from them.
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Conclusion

In this paper, we explore the different definitions of violence, by incorporating information on all forms of interpersonal violence using the Crime Survey for England and Wales. The ONS applies a more restricted definition of violent crime to their 'all violence' measure which, as we show, produces lower estimates of the extent of violence in England and Wales. This paper demonstrates that the measure of violence in CSEW used by ONS could be expanded by including offences which are not currently included within an 'all violence' measure (such as sexual offences, robberies, and threats), but which would fall under commonly used definitions of violence, such as by the WHO, and which are considered violence by other national victimisation surveys such as the NCVS. We also emphasise important methodological decisions which mean that some violent events are currently recorded as non-violent by the ONS. It is imperative to understand how widespread violence is, due to its extensive impact on both the physical and mental well-being of victims, as well as its economic costs to society. To be able to gain a comprehensive understanding of it, it is crucial to encompass all its manifestations, including sexual violence, threats, and offences where physical violence or threats of violence might not be the primary motivation behind an incident (e.g., robbery). Our estimates indicate that the number of violent incidents in 2019/20 could be up to four times higher when using expanded definitions of violence, compared to using more restricted measures. These findings carry significant implications for the provision of support services for victims, especially specialist support services for addressing violence against women.

Furthermore, the restricted ONS measure of violence presents a different distribution of violence between groups in the population. This paper specifically contradicts some of the ONS findings on the distribution of violence by sex of the victim, sex of the perpetrator and victim-perpetrator relationship (ONS, 2020). Walby (2014) show how capping repeated violent events impacts the gendering of violence. We show that the current narrow definition of violence used by ONS is also gendered. By including offences such as threats, which partly reflect acts of coercion, particularly against women, and including all sexual violence – again, predominantly experienced by women – increases the proportion of violence against adult women (from 39% of all violent incidents to 48%). The data used shapes the understanding of violence inequalities, therefore having a more inclusive measure shows the reality of gendered violence. It would be worth investigating in further research how the distribution of violence, defined in a broader sense, differs across other groups, such as by victim ethnicity or age.

It should be acknowledged that a narrower definition of violent crime is appropriate for ensuring consistency when looking at trends in violence over long periods of time (ONS, 2022) and greater consistency with police recorded data. While recategorisation of offences may not affect the overall volume of offences captured in the CSEW (they are recorded in the survey either way, even when categorised as a non-violent event), it does affect the volume and understanding of violence. The data and information recorded in the CSEW influences the understanding of violence inequalities in the UK. By broadening the definition of violence, we show that the chosen measure has implications for understandings who the victims and perpetrators of violence are and the gendered dynamics of violence. We would therefore recommend that as well as continuing to publish estimates of prevalence and incidents of 'violence against the person', which broadly align with the definition of violence used for police recorded crime, the ONS should also publish estimates for the broadest violence measure using the definition which we propose in this paper. This would allow for a fuller coverage of experiences of violence in the population by using a measure which includes more violent offences, and which is less affected by the priority ordering.

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For Peer Review

Table 1. Prioritisation of offences in descending order used in the CSEW and the NCVS when there are multiple crimes within a crime incident.

Rank	CSEW (England and Wales)	NCVS (USA)
1	Arson	Rape
2	Rape or Serious Wounding	Sexual assault
3	Robbery	Robbery
4	Burglary	Aggravated assault (including threat with weapon)
5	Theft	Simple assault (including threat without weapon)
6	Criminal Damage	Burglary
7	Assault (includes Other Wounding and Common Assault)	Theft
8	Threats	

Source: Bureau of Justice (2017) and Office for National Statistic (2021)

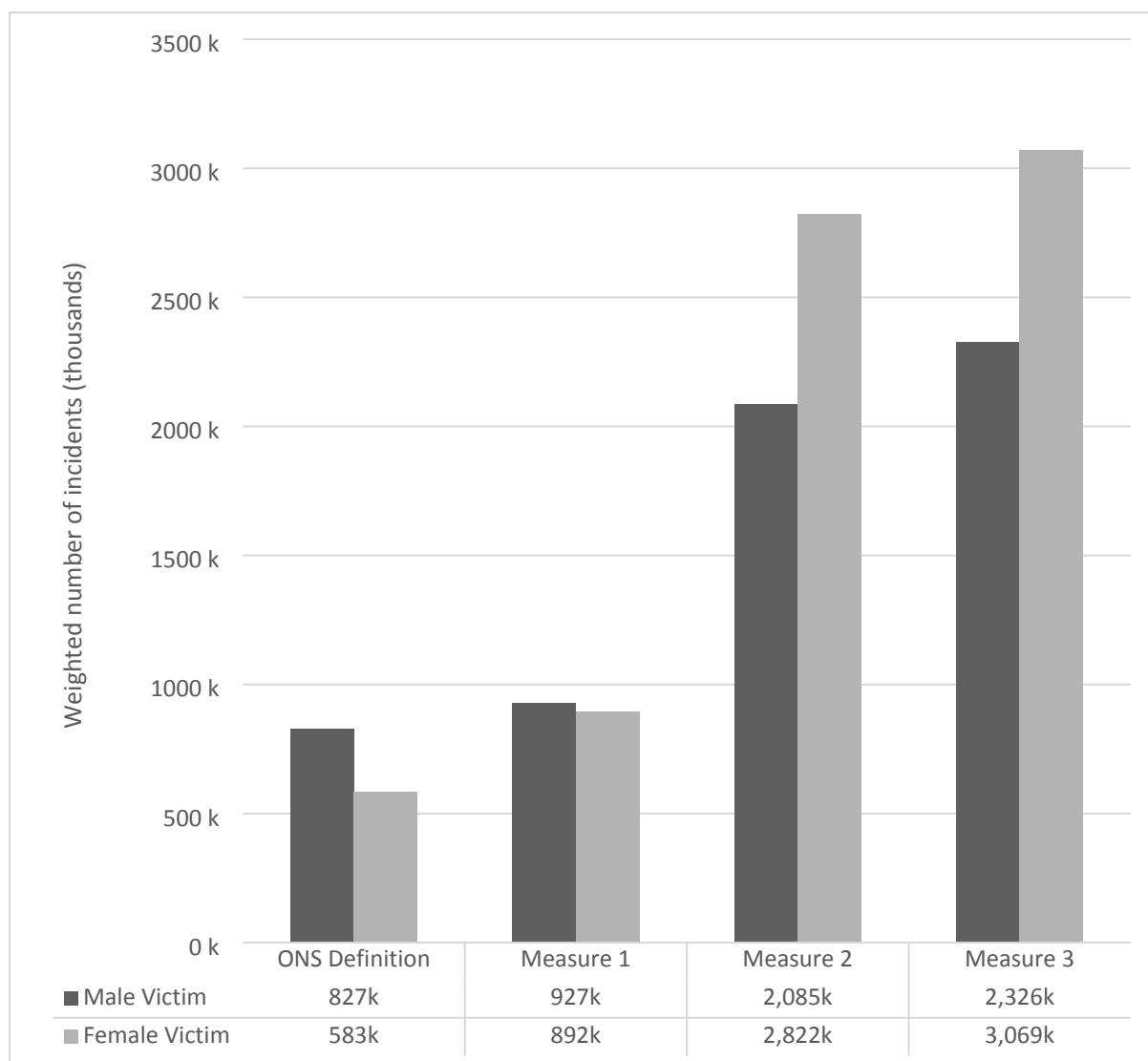
Table 2: Violent Offence Codes and Type of Offence, with the ONS classification of violence shaded grey

	Physical assault	Sexual violence	Robbery	Threats
Completed act with injury	11: Serious wounding, 12: Other wounding,	31: Rape, 32: Serious wounding with sexual motive, 33: Other wounding with sexual motive,	41: Robbery	
Completed act without injury	13: Common assault	31: Rape 35: Indecent assault	41: Robbery	91: Threat to kill/assault made against, but not necessarily to respondent 92: Sexual threat made against, but not necessarily to respondent 93: Other threat or intimidation made against, but not necessarily to respondent 94: Threats against others, made to the respondent
Attempt	21: Attempted assault	34: Attempted rape	42: Attempted robbery	

Table 3: Estimated number of incidents of violence comparing the ONS measure with our new measures of violence

	Definition of Violence			
	ONS measure	ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery (measure 1)	ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery + Threats (measure 2)	ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery + Threats + Force Used/Threatened (measure 3)
Uncapped Estimates				
Number of incidents 2019/20 (unweighted)	1.41m (891)	1.82m (1,150)	4.91m (3,559)	5.40m (3,912)
Percentage of all Incidents 2019/20 (unweighted)	7.5 (6.8)	9.6 (8.8)	26.0 (25.8)	28.5 (28.4)
Capped Estimates (98th Percentile)				
Number of incidents 2019/20 (unweighted)	1.24m (757)	1.54m (921)	3.39m (2,281)	3.70m (2,508)
Percentage of all Incidents 2019/20 (unweighted)	6.5 (5.8)	8.1 (7.0)	17.8 (17.3)	19.5 (19.1)

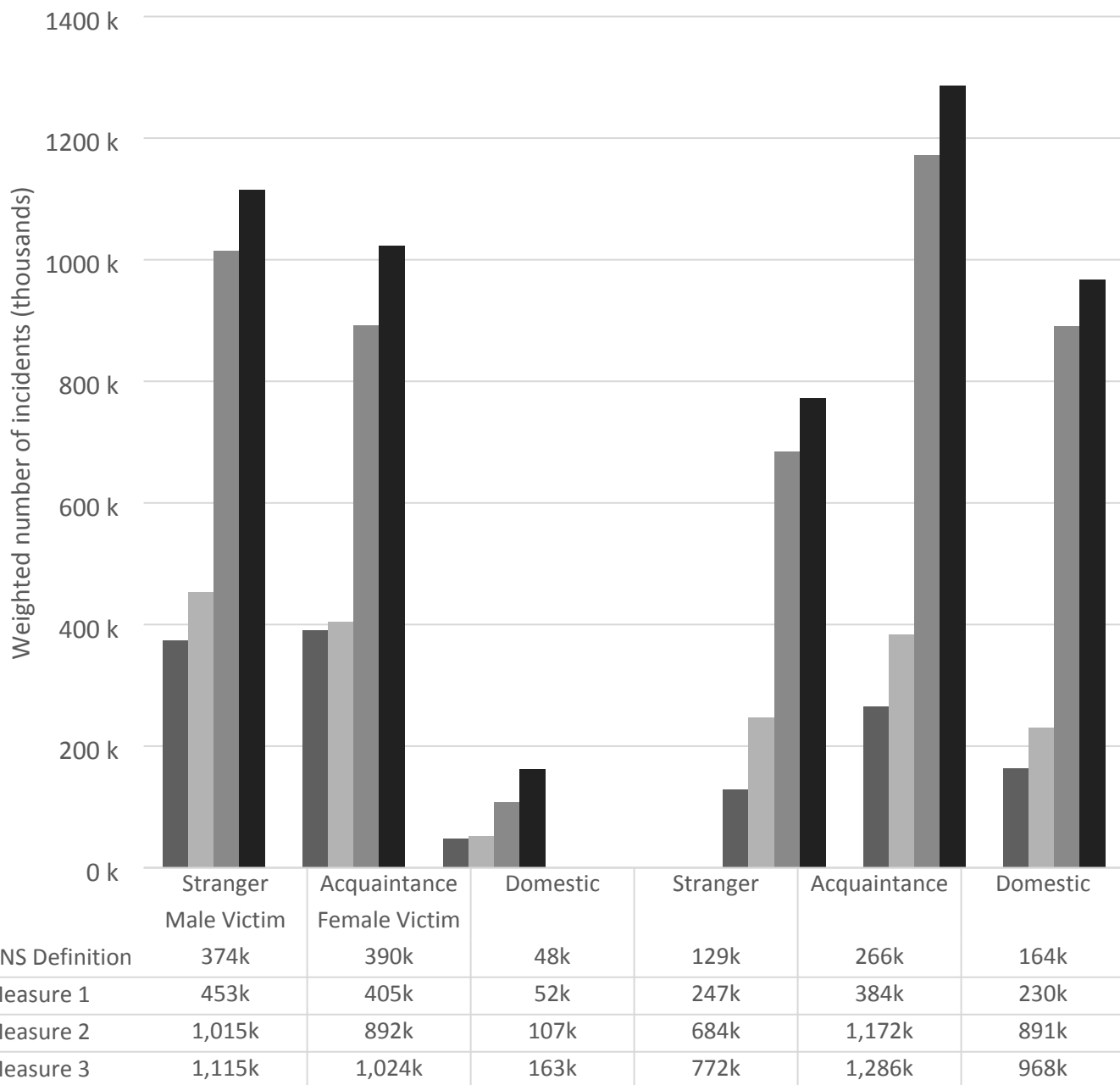
Figure 1 Number of incidents of violence by sex of victim, 2019/20



Source: Authors' analysis of Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS 2021a)

Notes: Total unweighted count of incidents of violence is 13,117. The number of incidents used here is uncapped. Measure 1: ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery; measure 2: ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery + Threats; measure 3: ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery + Threats + Force Used/Threatened

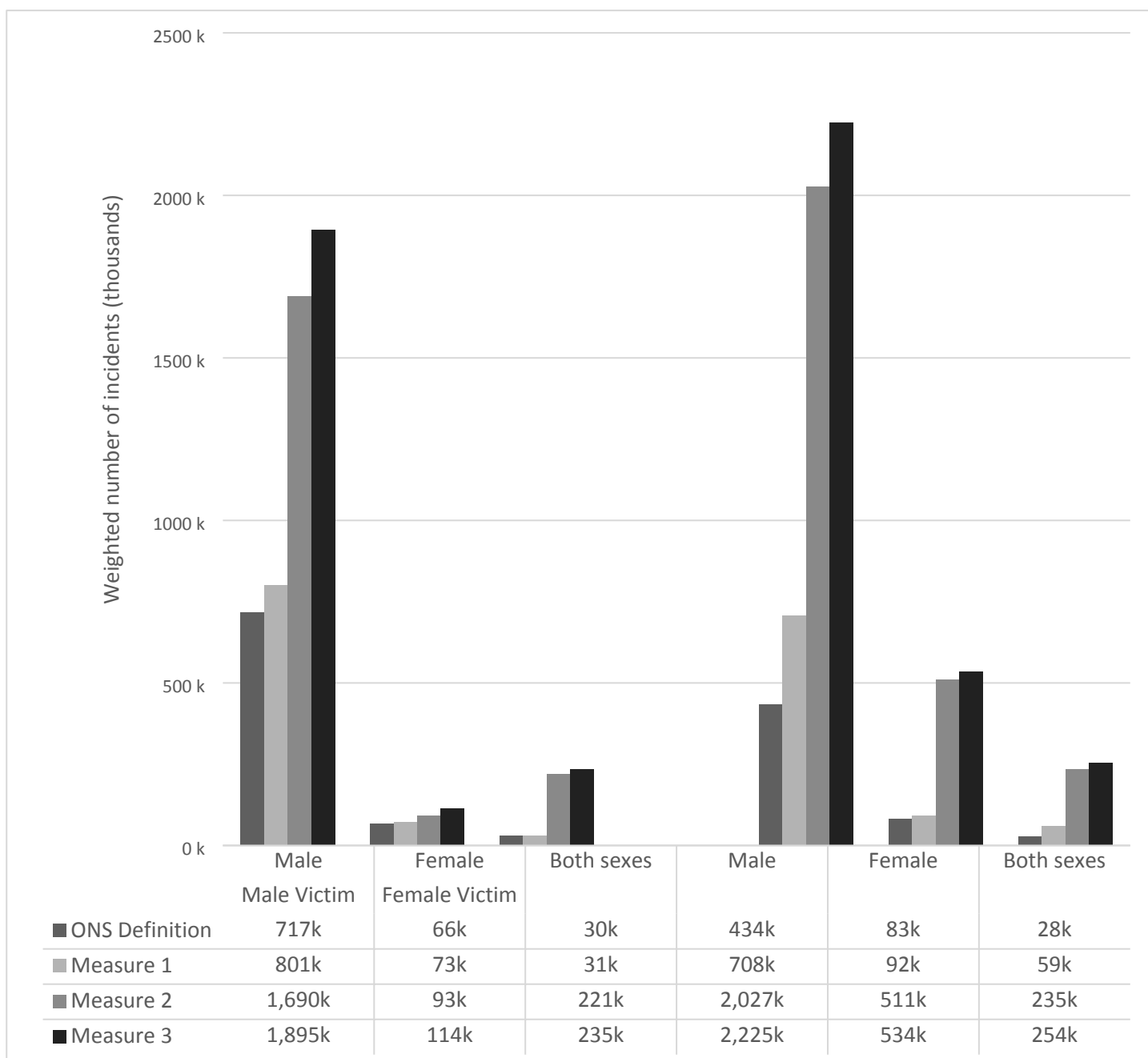
Figure 2 Number of incidents of violence by sex of victim and victim-perpetrator relationship, 2019/20



Source: Authors' analysis of Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS 2021a)

Notes: Total unweighted count of incidents of violence is 13,117. The number of incidents used here is uncapped. Measure 1: ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery; measure 2: ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery + Threats; measure 3: ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery + Threats + Force Used/Threatened

Figure 3 Number of incidents of violence by sex of victim and perpetrator, 2019/20



Source: Authors' analysis of Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS 2021a)

Notes: Total unweighted count of incidents of violence is 13,117. The number of incidents used here is uncapped.

Measure 1: ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery; measure 2: ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery + Threats; measure

3: ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery + Threats + Force Used/Threatened

Table 4: Estimated number of injuries and emotional reactions comparing the ONS measure with our new measures of violence, disaggregated by sex of the victim

Definition	Full sample		Male		Female	
	Injury	Strong emotional reaction	Injury	Strong emotional reaction	Injury	Strong emotional reaction
ONS measure	411,271	359,112	248,029	169,230	163,242	189,882
	47.10%	41.10%	47.20%	32.20%	46.80%	54.40%
ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery (measure 1)	464,693	511,516	258,767	209,849	205,926	301,668
	40%	44%	41.10%	33.30%	38.60%	56.60%
ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery + Threats (measure 2)	465,641	1,122,771	258,767	420,281	206,874	702,489
	19.10%	46%	21.80%	35.30%	16.60%	56.20%
ONS + Sexual Offences + Robbery + Threats + Force Used/Threatened (measure 3)	530,486	1,302,831	294,974	476,502	235,512	826,329
	19.70%	48.50%	22.80%	36.90%	16.90%	59.20%
Harms are recorded in the victimisation module and are counted at the event level rather than incident level. Therefore, totals will be smaller than Table 3.						