Article

Violence against women and girls: research update November 2022

An update of our current and future research and publications relating to violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Contact:
Meghan Elkin
crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk
+44 20 7592 8695

Release date:
25 November 2022

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1. Overview

2. Latest research

3. Future developments

4. Related links

5. Cite this article

1 . Overview

An important part of the government's 2021 Tackling violence against women and girls strategy is to work across government to improve data, and in turn improve understanding, of these crimes. In line with this, over the last year we have:

- updated our VAWG data landscape
- published a prototype VAWG dashboard
- explored the availability of health data to measure VAWG
- developed questions to measure harassment in the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)
- continued research to redevelop questions on domestic abuse in the CSEW
- continued exploring the feasibility of developing a survey to measure child abuse

Our next priorities are to:

- improve the CSEW questions on sexual assault
- explore the experiences of VAWG for girls under 18
- conduct research into young people's attitudes to VAWG

The term “violence against women and girls” covers a range of abuse types which, although men and boys also suffer from, disproportionately affects women and girls. The terminology we are using for statistical purposes follows the United Nations 1993 declaration, which defines VAWG as:

"Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life".

Crime types such as domestic abuse including homicide, sexual assault, stalking, sexual exploitation, child abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and harassment in work and public life are all forms of abuse covered by our VAWG terminology. Our statistical terminology includes a wider range of abuses than covered by the Tackling violence against women and girls strategy in order to provide a more holistic view.

We will continue to work with stakeholders and may adapt our terminology in future to reflect changes in offences, the nature of crime and user feedback.

2 . Latest research

Data landscape

We have updated and improved our Violence against women and girls: Data landscape, which was first published in November 2021. The data landscape is a single comprehensive list of data and evidence relating to violence against women and girls (VAWG) from a range of different sources from across government, academia and the voluntary sector. As part of this update, we have added new sources, a keyword search, and a "strategies" tab to allow users to see a selection of work going on in the wider VAWG space.

Data dashboard

Alongside improvements to our data landscape, we have been transforming this into an interactive data dashboard, powered by the Integrated Data Service (IDS). The aim of the dashboard is to visually display the main data relating to violence against woman and girls in a single place, providing a comprehensive picture of VAWG, which is easy to access.

A prototype of the violence against women and girls dashboard was released in September on the GOV.UK website and currently contains ONS data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN). It provides data on five abuse types:

- domestic abuse
- partner abuse
- sexual offences
- harassment
- child abuse

The purpose of the prototype is to demonstrate what is possible within the dashboard, and to gather feedback, which will shape future iterations.

From the initial feedback, we know that there is demand for such a dashboard and that the prototype has been received well. Users found the dashboard clear and simple, making it easy to read and navigate. Users also commented on the benefit of having "information on different types of violence women and girls experience in one space to see the bigger picture".

We received many helpful suggestions of how the dashboard could be improved, such as further demographic breakdowns, additional data on helplines supporting victims, reworking the data on the home page, and including definitions of the different crime types. Users also suggested additional crime types and data sources to include in future iterations, which will be discussed and prioritised for the next iteration, which is due to be released in 2023.

Health data

While creating our data landscape in 2021, one of the key evidence gaps highlighted by the work, as explained in our blog post Violence against women and girls: Helping to understand the scale and impact of the problem, was the availability of data through the health system. Over the last year we have undertaken several projects, including collaborating with others, with the aim of filling this gap.

We conducted analysis on NHS Digital's Emergency Care Data Set (ECDS), the national dataset for urgent and emergency care in England. Information is collected about why people attend emergency departments and the treatment they receive. Our analysis assessed whether the data could be used to provide a proxy measure for VAWG-related abuses.

Although the dataset contained a large amount of information, certain variables, such as the likely cause of injury, had high levels of missingness because they were not completed. In the version of the dataset to which we had access, the safeguarding variable, which if completed indicates suspected abuse, was absent. With the absence of this variable, and high levels of missingness in other important variables, we were unable to produce a proxy measure of VAWG-related abuses.

We have also been working with the Office for Health Improvements and Disparities (OHID) within the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to further explore how insights from health data can improve our understanding of VAWG. The Women's Health Strategy for England, recently published on GOV.UK included a public commitment to this project.

Our work began by exploring healthcare settings, including GP practices, Accident and Emergency departments, district nurse care and opticians, where victims of VAWG may be identified. We examined the data collected in these settings to identify variables within the datasets, which could indicate violence and abuse. We identified two datasets, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) and the Community Services Data Set (CSDS), which contained variables that could be useful for understanding incidence of VAWG. For example, through HES we will be able to calculate the rate of hospital admissions for assault where the perpetrator was indicated to be a partner or spouse.

In addition to exploring available data, we also researched the barriers faced by healthcare professionals to recording VAWG. We did this through engagement with local practitioners and academics as well as reviewing published research. The initial findings from this work showed:

- a large proportion of health datasets do not currently contain information that would help in identifying types of VAWG
- codes that do exist within health datasets are insufficient and are not mandatory fields
- additional guidance could be beneficial for healthcare settings that do not currently have systems in place for recognising and recording VAWG
- frontline healthcare staff could benefit from additional training in recognising and recording types of violence against women and girls

The next steps for this project, which will be led by DHSC, include plans to analyse health datasets where codes have been found (for example HES and CSDS) to see how incidence of VAWG may vary by age, ethnicity, deprivation and over time. The datasets will also be used to better understand barriers to reporting for both healthcare staff and victims. Options for improvements in recognising and recording VAWG in healthcare settings will also continue to be explored.

We will continue to share insights from our work on health data with the aim of improving our understanding of VAWG and filling the evidence gap.

Harassment development work

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) has not historically included a comprehensive measure of harassment. The need for these statistics was identified as a key evidence gap, as explained in our blog post Violence against women and girls: Helping to understand the scale and impact of the problem.

Over the last year, we have been working to improve data collection in this area and have developed a short module of questions to measure the prevalence and nature of harassment in the CSEW.

Harassment is a complex topic which cuts across a number of different crime types. Feedback from stakeholders highlighted the need for a measure that covered the broad nature of harassment. Our new module, which was launched into the survey in April 2022, covers the breadth of harassment by focusing on behaviour experienced, rather than through narrow definitions of harassment. The module covers sexual and non-sexual harassment experienced in any setting.

Harassment is usually described as a repeated pattern of behaviour. However, this can exclude certain experiences such as harassment experienced from strangers on the street or on public transport. The CSEW captures both single incidents of harassment and those that form part of a course of behaviour. For this reason, it will not produce an estimate of the number of incidents of harassment at this stage, but we hope to produce prevalence estimates of our new harassment measure including characteristics breakdowns in summer 2023.

Further development work, based on the year ending March 2023 survey data, is planned to explore whether it will be possible to develop the measures further to produce an incidence measure. There are no plans at present to incorporate measures of harassment into the core estimates of crime.

As this work is still in development, in May we published an update to our Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 16 February to 13 March 2022 article. This article used questions included on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN), which asked people about their experiences of harassment in the last 12 months. The findings were compared with those from our Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 2 to 27 June 2021 publication to identify whether there were any differences in experiences. The articles also included information about respondents' current perceptions of safety and, for the first time, the latest article included data on how safe respondents felt using public transport.

Questionnaire development

As well as including questions on harassment in the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), we have been continuing our ongoing work to improve the collection of data on domestic abuse. The questions on domestic abuse have largely remained the same since they were introduced to the CSEW in April 2004. However, over time the definition has changed, and the questions now do not align with the definition of domestic abuse introduced in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and excludethe offence ofcontrolling or coercive behaviour.

Over the last few years, we have been undertaking a user engagement and research program to improve the collection of data on domestic abuse. Our Redevelopment of domestic abuse statistics: research update November 2022 article explains this research in detail and we plan to trial the new questions from April 2023 as a split sample.

Child abuse

We have been conducting a feasibility study into whether a national survey could provide an effective source of data on the current scale and nature of child abuse. A survey would provide valuable data, which would help fill the current evidence gaps on the prevalence of VAWG experiences of those under the age of 18.

In April 2022, we published a progress update, Exploring the feasibility of a survey measuring child abuse in the UK: April 2022, which concluded phase one of this research. We found there was no fundamental reason not to conduct the proposed survey. We are now proceeding with phase two, which includes conducting a pilot. The first step in this phase is to develop an appropriate questionnaire and safeguarding procedure. Following a tender exercise in the autumn, Edinburgh Innovations in collaboration with the University of Greenwich, was identified as the successful supplier to take this element forward.

3 . Future developments

Over the next year we will continue to work with stakeholders to improve our measures of violence against women and girls (VAWG) as well as address the key evidence gaps. We will continue work in the following areas:

- reviewing our VAWG terminology to ensure it covers new offences and reflects our users' needs
- developing the VAWG data dashboard by adding new data sources and taking on board the feedback from the prototype
- adding new sources and update reports to the VAWG data landscape
- collaborating with the Department of Health and Social Care and others across government and academia to take forward work to address gaps and barriers in identifying VAWG in health data
- analysing data on harassment from the year ending March 2023 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) dataset and publishing initial findings
- developing the harassment questions on the CSEW to explore whether it is possible to produce a harassment incidence measure
- improving our collection of data on domestic abuse through inclusion of a new set of questions on the CSEW on a split-sample basis
- developing a child abuse questionnaire and safeguarding procedure ready to pilot as part of phase two of our feasibility study

During the next year we also plan to begin work to look into some of the other evidence gaps we identified including:

- improving the CSEW questions on sexual assault
- exploring the experiences of VAWG for girls under 18 using the Education and Child Health Insights from Linked Data (ECHILD)
- conducting research into young people's attitudes to VAWG

4 . Related links

[The lasting impact of violence against women and girls]
Article | Released 24 November 2021
Violence against women and girls is prevalent across England and Wales and can lead to mental health issues, suicide attempts and homelessness.

[Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2022]
Bulletin | Released 25 November 2022
Figures on domestic abuse from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, police recorded crime and a number of different organisations.

[Sexual offences in England and Wales overview: year ending March 2020]
Bulletin | Released 18 March 2021
Figures on sexual offences from the year ending March 2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales and crimes recorded by police.

[Child abuse in England and Wales: March 2020]
Bulletin | Released 5 March 2020
Statistics and research on child abuse in England and Wales, bringing together a range of different data sources from across government and the voluntary sector.

[Stalking: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales]
Dataset | Released 25 November 2022
Stalking experienced by women and men, including numbers, type and personal characteristics, based upon annual findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

[Modern slavery in the UK: March 2020]
Article | 26 March 2020
The hidden nature of modern slavery makes producing an accurate prevalence measure difficult. This article explores the issue and brings together data sources linked to modern slavery from a range of organisations.

[Child victims of modern slavery in the UK: March 2022]
Bulletin | Released on 29 March 2022
The hidden nature of modern slavery makes measuring victim numbers difficult. We have brought together data sources on child victims in the UK from a range of organisations to explore the issue.

[Exploring the feasibility of a survey measuring child abuse in the UK: April 2022]
Article | Released on 6 April 2022
Update on the first phase of research to understand whether a new survey to measure the current extent and nature of child abuse in the UK is viable.

5 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 25 November 2022, ONS website, article, [Violence against women and girls research update: November 2022]