

Article

Violence against women and girls: research update November 2023

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

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1 . Overview of violence against women and girls research

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is an umbrella term used to cover a wide range of abuse types that affect more women and girls than men and boys. These include domestic homicide, domestic abuse, sexual assault, abuse experienced as a child, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and harassment in work and public life.

In line with the government's 2021 [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#), over the last year, we have continued to improve our measures of VAWG as well as address the major evidence gaps. We have:

- updated our VAWG data landscape
- updated the VAWG data dashboard prototype
- published our latest estimates of domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking
- launched new questions on the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) to measure domestic abuse
- begun research to redevelop questions to measure sexual victimisation on the CSEW
- published our first measure of harassment
- piloted the Young People's Safety Survey (YPSS) with a view to replacing the Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales (CCSEW)
- conducted research to explore how to measure young people's attitudes to VAWG
- continued exploring the feasibility of developing a survey to measure child abuse

2 . Latest research

Data landscape

We have updated our [Violence against women and girls: Data landscape dataset](#), 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.

Data dashboard

Following the launch of the VAWG prototype dashboard in September 2022, we addressed user feedback to improve and refine the dashboard. This led to the launch of GOV.UK's [Prototype 1.1](#) on [International Women's Day](#) (8 March 2023). This update included additional crime types, data sources and charts, and improvements to the landing and helplines page.

Domestic abuse

On 24 November 2023, we released our annual [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview bulletin](#), which brings together data on domestic abuse from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), police recorded crime and a number of different organisations.

During the first quarter of 2024, we plan to publish qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of women survivors of domestic abuse who have current or previous (within the last five years) experience of temporary "safe" accommodation (TSA) in England. Through in-depth interviews carried out in partnership with a team of trauma-informed experts, the research captures the experiences of 40 participants, sampled to include a diverse range of characteristics and circumstances. It focuses on survivors' experiences of accessing, living in and moving on from different types of TSA, which include hostels, hotels, refuges, and local authority provided self-contained and shared temporary accommodation. The research also presents survivors' thoughts on safety and best practice within TSA.

To improve the collection of data on domestic abuse, a new set of questions were included on the CSEW through a split sample trial on 1 April 2023. This follows the research outlined in our [Redevelopment of domestic abuse statistics: research update November 2022 article](#) and [Developing a new measure of domestic abuse: April 2023 methodology](#). The new questions are presented in our article alongside our strategy for evaluation.

Sexual offences

We published our latest data on [Sexual offences in England and Wales for the year ending March 2022](#) in a bulletin on 23 March 2023. This was the first publication of the CSEW data on sexual victimisation since the pause in data collection during the pandemic.

We have also begun work to improve the collection of data on sexual victimisation within the CSEW. The questions have largely remained the same since they were introduced to the CSEW in April 2004. However, over time the nature of sexual crimes has evolved, and we want to ensure the survey accurately captures all victims' lived experiences. Earlier this year, we conducted a user survey, and we will continue to engage with users as we undertake question development and testing over the coming year.

Harassment

Harassment is a complex topic which cuts across various crime types. However, it is not currently captured on the CSEW as part of its main estimates of crime. Feedback from stakeholders highlighted a need to measure the broad nature of harassment on the survey. In April 2022, we launched a module to half the CSEW sample to capture experiences of harassment, which was then revised in October 2022.

The module attempts to cover the breadth of harassment by focusing on behaviours experienced, rather than through narrow definitions imposed by the survey. The estimates it produces includes experiences of sexual and non-sexual harassment in any setting. Although harassment is usually described as a repeated pattern of behaviour, this can exclude certain experiences, such as harassment experienced from strangers on the street or on public transport. Therefore, the CSEW captures both single incidents of harassment as well as those part of a course of behaviour. For this reason, the module cannot produce an estimate of the number of incidents of harassment.

Our development work indicates that the full scope of harassment is wider than can be measured through the current survey within the space available. While it does go some way to fill some of the major evidence gaps around the experience of harassment, the module is subject to further development work and review.

Interim prevalence estimates based on the first six months of data collection are available in our [Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2022 bulletin](#). A further update on the six months ending March 2023 will be published on 7 December 2023.

Children's crime survey developments

As outlined in our progress update article, [Transforming children's crime statistics for England and Wales](#), a new online Young People's Safety Survey (YPSS) is being piloted with a view to replacing the Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales (CCSEW). A large-scale pilot is planned for spring 2024, which will shape the design for the future online transformed survey. By transforming the survey, we aim to improve the quality and timeliness of statistics on crimes against children which will help to improve understanding of girls' experience of VAWG.

We have also redeveloped the questions in the CSEW that aim to measure adults' experiences of abuse during childhood. These questions are collecting data in the field from April 2023 until March 2024, and from summer 2024 we will explore how we can publish these data. The redeveloped questions aim to collect experiences of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and neglect experienced before the age of 18 years and information on perpetrators of sexual abuse and disclosure of sexual abuse. These data can be used in the future to understand the number of women who experienced these different types of abuse as a child and provide insight into some of the circumstances around their experiences.

Children's attitudes to violence against women and girls

Prevention is the best way to reduce VAWG. While the factors that contribute to VAWG are complex, the risk of it occurring in the first place has been linked to attitudes towards gender roles, both at an individual and societal level, according to an [article from 'The National Library of Medicine'](#). Attitudes to VAWG was one of the main evidence gaps highlighted 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 conducted research to further understand this evidence gap and how data could be collected. Similar research has been carried out in other countries. For example, in Northern Ireland, questions on perceived acceptability of violent acts and behaviours were included on the 2022 Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey (see [The Executive Office report on the subject](#) for more information). Meanwhile, Scotland ran a survey in 2014 looking at young people's attitudes to domestic abuse and stalking (see findings on the [Scottish Government website](#)). However, research and data available for England and Wales was limited, covering only certain aspects of VAWG or not being representative of the population.

We have explored the possibility of carrying out a nationally representative survey and researched different sampling methods and questionnaire designs. Our research concluded that surveying secondary school-aged children would be most useful. Understanding young people's attitudes can help inform educational interventions, which the [From Boys to Men Project \(PDF, 1.15MB\)](#) has shown to have promising effects on changing attitudes relating to VAWG. Balancing data quality, resource and budget requirements, and likely feasibility, we recommend the best approach to collect this information would be through an online survey sent to the child's home. This is a similar methodology to that being tested for the Young People's Safety Survey (YPSS) and the results of that work will inform any future work on data collection.

Child abuse prevalence survey feasibility study

Phase two of the child abuse prevalence survey feasibility study is underway (see our [Exploring the feasibility of a survey measuring child abuse article](#)). We commissioned the University of Edinburgh in collaboration with the University of Greenwich to develop the child abuse prevalence survey questionnaire and associated safeguarding procedure. We are also designing the operational and methodological elements for the pilot, such as the sampling frames, sample sizes and school engagement strategy. The ambition is to pilot the survey in 2024 to 2025 and publish a progress update in summer 2024.

3 . Future developments

To enable the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to take on new activities and maintain our focus on quality, the office reviews both our statistical development programme and our schedule of statistics and analysis. Following the most recent review in summer 2023, we will be slowing down or pausing some aspects of our work on violence against women and girls (VAWG). However, we remain committed to producing statistics on VAWG and will be continuing with many strands of our VAWG programme of work.

Over the next year, we will continue work in the following areas:

- evaluating the new set of questions added to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) to measure domestic abuse
- improving our collection of data on sexual victimisation through developing and testing a new set of survey questions
- further developing the harassment questions on the CSEW
- piloting a new online Young People's Safety Survey (YPSS)
- phase two of the child abuse prevalence survey feasibility study, including developing a child abuse questionnaire, safeguarding procedure, sampling procedures and operational plans ready to pilot

Work in the following areas will be paused:

- development of the VAWG data dashboard and no official launch in November 2023 as originally planned; the current dashboard will remain live in the immediate future, but will be taken down as the data becomes increasingly out of date
- further identification and exploration of data sources to fill VAWG evidence gaps with no further planned updates to the VAWG data landscape
- research and recommendations on collecting data on children'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 can lead to significant and long-lasting impacts such as mental health issues, suicide attempts and homelessness, ONS analysis shows.

[Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 24 November 2023

Figures on domestic abuse from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, police recorded crime, and other organisations.

[Sexual offences in England and Wales overview: year ending March 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 23 March 2023

Data on sexual offences from the year ending March 2022 Crime Survey for England and Wales, police recorded crime, and victim services.

[Stalking: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released November 2023

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 | Released on 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.

[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

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