

Researchers call for true picture of domestic violent crime

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Violence against women could become significantly less visible in police-recorded crime figures when a new counting method comes into effect, warn researchers at Lancaster University.

Plans for Home Office Counting Rules to count coercive and controlling behaviour as 'non-injurious violent [crime](#)' capped at one crime per victim - even though statistics show one in 20 victims can experience more than 10 [domestic violence](#) crimes a year - will mask the true extent of the problem.

The warning comes in a new paper, 'Untangling the concept of coercive control: theorising domestic violent crime', just published in the journal, *Criminology and Criminal Justice*.

Authors Professor Sylvia Walby and Dr Jude Towers, from the Violence and Society UNESCO Centre at Lancaster University, say measurement really matters and that only by taking account of the repetitive nature of domestic [violence](#) will the full extent be made visible.

Currently, and under review, official estimation methods of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) 'cap' frequencies of [violent crimes](#) against the same victim at a maximum of five.

When the 'cap' is removed and all violent crimes reported to the survey are included in the estimates, gender imbalance in domestic violent crime significantly increases.

"Counting all crimes reported to a survey is the right thing to do," they say. "Making estimates of violent crime that includes all crimes rather than 'capping' produces better estimates of the extent and distribution of domestic violent crime."

The paper examines the traditional approach to domestic violence and a more recent approach which includes the new concept of 'coercive

control', designed to protect victims who experience extreme psychological and emotional abuse and bring their abusers to justice.

"But is domestic violence really so different from other forms of violence that it needs separate concepts?" ask the authors.

The authors advocate a third approach, devised by themselves and a colleague, that enables the strengths of the new and the old approaches to be synthesised to provide a better way to conceptualise and measure domestic violence, mainstreaming new insights about domestic violence into the analysis of violent crime.

The third approach focuses on the relationship between violence, economy and society, rather than on ideas and motives, suggests that the term 'domestic violent crime' is a more straightforward concept and 'clarifies' definitions of domestic violence.

"This is not to deny the existence of coercive control but, since all violence is coercive and controlling, the phrase has little, if anything, to add other than confusion," says Professor Walby.

In their approach, the researchers examined data from the CSEW, considered to be the best source of data on crime victimisation including domestic violent crime, covering a five-year period from 2008 to 2013 looking at variations in repetition and seriousness in domestic violent crime.

The survey collates data about experiences of crime victims as well as demographic and socio-economic data.

Professor Walby and Dr Towers identified and counted each criminal act to identify the scale and distribution of domestic violent crime.

They found:

- An estimated 300,000 domestic violent crime victims and 1.2 million violent crimes per year
- Almost three-quarters (74%) of domestic violent crime victims are female and 82% of domestic violent crimes are against women
- More than a million domestic violent crimes per year (on average) were committed against women compared to just over 200,000 per year against men
- Almost half (42%) of victims report more than one domestic crime within a 12-month period and 85% of domestic violent crimes are repeat crimes
- More than half (55%) of all domestic violent crimes are reported by 5% of victims. That is, on average, 40 domestic violent crimes per victim in one year

More information: *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, DOI: [10.1177/1748895817743541](https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895817743541)

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