



## **Respect response to consultation on changes to British Crime Survey intimate personal violence questionnaire**

Respect is the UK association for work with domestic violence perpetrators. We provide training, resources, advice and technical support for our members; coordinate lobbying and policy making on work with perpetrators and male victims; run the Men's Advice Line for male victims and the Respect Phonenumber for perpetrators.

### **Overall comments**

We welcome the split-sample experiment and the findings as we believe that good data is essential, for planning adequate coverage of effective services, for monitoring the effectiveness of changes in the law and for identifying any further changes needed to both legislation and policy.

We have noted in the last ten years changes in the way data is analysed and presented which can be useful but can also sometimes lead to frustrating and unhelpful gaps in information. It can also lead to misleading interpretations of data by non-statisticians, which in turn leads to inappropriate decisions about policy and practice in responding to victims and perpetrators, both male and female.

We are pleased to be given this opportunity to comment on the BCS intimate personal violence questionnaire as we value this resource greatly and believe it provides and can provide an unequalled basis for estimating need for and value of services and legislation.

We also note and urge the government to consider that there is a considerable body of research on the methodology and content for research on IPV and to make use of this. In the first instance, we ask that the government consider the work of Sylvia Walby and Jonathan Myhill in an earlier edition of the BCS IPV report. This version had significant benefits over the analysis in subsequent years, particularly in relation to data about repeat victimisation and impact. It is important that analysis and presentation of the figures is clearly carried out, using prevalence (numbers) wherever possible, instead of using percentages of male and female victims, as has been commonly done in recent years. This leads to misleading impressions of the differences between men's and women's experiences of partner abuse in particular, but also other forms of IPV. Further comments on this topic are included below.

We have used our experience of reading and using the figures in the BCS IPV over many years to inform our response to this consultation, as well as careful reading of the report on the split-sample questionnaire experiment in the 2010/11 BCS self completion module on intimate personal violence (Hall and Smith, 2011).

## Amendments to questions

Whichever question set is favoured going forwards, the analysis published here may indicate that further amendments to questions are needed in future.

- *Specifically, if the alternative question set is favoured there is the issue of the inclusion of a filter question before the most explicit questions on serious sexual assault. This was intended to reduce offence to respondents which may have impacted on the parental refusal rate to the BCS extension to 10 to 15 year olds. Given that the addition of a filter question to the most explicit questions in serious sexual assault has not resulted in a reduction in the parental refusal rate to the 10 to 15 survey, should this filter be retained?*

### RESPECT RESPONSE:

It is not clear what other benefits there may be to retaining the filter question. The concern about causing offence appears, from the findings of the research, to be one raised by non victims rather than by victims. It also appears possible, from the research, that the filter question may have excluded some victims of sexual assault from answering about this. As there are no effects on the parental refusal rate for retaining the filter question and the screener question may be distorting the prevalence rates for sexual assault, we recommend that the filter question be dropped.

- *If the alternative question set is favoured then are further amendments needed to minimise the risk of reporting experiences that should not be classed as IPV? Should these be limited to the stalking questions, less serious sexual assault questions or to others?*

### RESPECT RESPONSE:

There are other ways of minimising this risk. For example, adding in “was this from a partner, ex-partner or someone who thought they had or wanted to have a relationship with you, even if you did not?” after each of the stalking and less serious sexual assault questions.

Stalking is a significant part of partner abuse post-separation and there is a need for good data on this. It is a risk indicator for future violence and there is a possibility that there are significant differences between victims in their experiences of stalking, such as differences by gender, age, marital status etc. It is important to keep in as many of the stalking questions as possible and amend them or add to them to be able to identify more clearly if this was partner abuse in particular, to aid our understanding of significant risk factors.

- *Are there any other amendments suggested for consideration in the module in future?*

#### **RESPECT RESPONSE:**

**Include clear numerical analysis of repeat victimisation given in numbers for male and female victims (prevalence) as was done in the Walby and Myhill version.** This should include number of male and female victims experiencing only 1, 1 – 4, 4 – 10 and more than 10 incidents (or similar) of partner abuse in particular, as this category of IPV is significantly associated with repeat victimisation. At the moment it is usually not possible to identify either the absolute numbers of chronic repeat victims or the proportions of male and female victims amongst the absolute number of all chronic repeat victims.

**Present figures for prevalence instead of solely as percentages of male and female victims,** as this can give a false impression of equivalence as proportions of total number of male and female victims for specific categories of IPV can be similar, whilst the actual number of male and female victims are not. Non-statisticians can and do confuse these figures and interpret them as gender parity.

**Present figures of prevalence for partner abuse causing injury.**

**Retain clear definitions** and make it much clearer in the text when departing from these. For instance, some figures are for partner abuse excluding sexual assault and stalking, others for partner abuse include these. It is important to be clear that partner abuse **INCLUDES** sexual assault and stalking. In some years it is not possible to identify the figures for partner abuse including these two forms of partner abuse. This gives a distorted picture of the prevalence of partner abuse and also a distorted impression of the differences between male and female victims.

**Include analysis, if possible, of partner abuse post-separation.** This is important as there are significant risk indicators for partner abuse post-separation, which it is important to monitor, particularly as these have implications for child contact and for domestic homicide.

**Include questions about gender (and if possible, sexuality) of perpetrators of partner abuse.** This would significantly aid planning of appropriate responses to both victims and perpetrators.

## **Publication of time-series data**

If the alternative question set is used from April 2012 onwards, there are additional issues around the publication of time-series data.

- *Is a full break in the BCS time series acceptable in exchange for the possibility of improved coverage of victimisation using the alternative question set?*



**RESPECT RESPONSE:** Yes, as the improved coverage gives a much clearer picture of IPV prevalence.

- *Should an attempt be made to adjust past estimates to make them comparable with estimates from the alternative question set using the split-sample data? Would this risk causing inaccurate comparisons to be made over time?*

**RESPECT RESPONSE:** Yes it is important to attempt to find a way to include data that can be compared pre- and post- changes. This can be done in two ways: attempting to analyse data post-change to identify comparable data for pre-change, and vice versa as suggested. There have already been other changes in the way data is analysed and presented which have meant that some things (such as levels of chronic partner abuse, for example) cannot be compared between reports. This has been unfortunate and every effort should be made to reduce such discrepancies, preferably by taking the most comprehensive and detailed ways of analysing and presenting data between years.

The gaps in data were unfortunate and led to misleading data, so it is important to correct these, but it is also important to be able to find a way to compare the time series data. Every effort should be made to find ways of estimating changes.

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