

## NEW SURVEY METHODOLOGIES IN RESEARCHING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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*This paper assesses the methodologies of the new national surveys of violence against women, including those in the US, Canada, Australia, Finland and the Netherlands, as well as the British Crime Survey. The development of large-scale quantitative survey methodology so as to be suitable for such a sensitive subject has involved many innovations. The paper concludes with recommendations for further improvements including: the sampling frame, the scaling of both sexual assaults and range of impacts, the recording of series rather than merely single events, the collection of disaggregated socio-economic data and criminal history.*

Violent crime against women has given rise to concern, but to far less data collection than that for property crime. Rape is the crime women are more worried about than any other, yet there is little data about its extent in the UK. Thirty-one per cent of women are very worried about rape, according to the British Crime Survey (BCS) in 1997, more than any other crime. Yet there are no reliable national estimates of the extent of rape or indeed any other form of sexual assault. Women are much more likely to be assaulted by people that they know, while assaults by known assailants are much less likely to be reported to the police than those by strangers (Gartner and Macmillan 1995). Nearly half of women who are murdered are killed by their partners—47 per cent of 224 (Criminal Statistics for England and Wales 1997). Yet, despite most assault on women taking place domestically, the police do not routinely collect statistics on domestic violence as a category.

New research methods, especially the use of dedicated surveys in other countries, have been uncovering ever higher rates of violence against women. For instance, Statistics Canada found that 51 per cent of women had experienced violence at some point in their lifetime (39 per cent sexual assault, 34 per cent physical violence and 29 per cent spousal assaults) and 10 per cent in the previous year (Statistics Canada 1993). The methodology of the Statistics Canada survey has now been replicated in Australia, Finland and Iceland and is under development in Sweden, Germany and Ireland. The UK lags behind in these developments, making reliable estimates of the extent and patterns of rape and domestic violence difficult to obtain. The British Crime Survey, when introduced, was a state of the art generic crime survey, however, it does not utilize state of the art methods on issues of violence against women. Elsewhere specialized methodologies have been developed to provide information on crimes of violence against women.

Estimates derived from the BCS suggest that less than 1 per cent of women are subjected to rape or other sexual assault each year, but such figures are usually unpublished because even the Home Office felt them to be unreliably low (Percy and Mayhew 1997). The first generation methodology of the 1998 British Crime Survey

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found 1 per cent of women had been subject to domestic violence in 1997. However, a one-off special module in 1996 found that 23 per cent of women had suffered domestic violence at some point in their lives and 4 per cent in the previous year (Mirrlees-Black 1999). Would the utilization of the methods of the new generation of dedicated national surveys of violence against women developed in North America lead to the uncovering of higher rates of domestic violence and to the uncovering of a greater extent of sexual crimes against women in the UK as they have in other countries?

New types of national survey have sparked ferocious theoretical as well as methodological debates as to the meaning of the pattern of violence uncovered, not least the meaning of the higher than previously expected rates of violence uncovered against men by women. The depth and range of the data in the dedicated surveys have been deployed to argue with vigour and vitriol about the meaning and nature of interpersonal gendered violence in modern societies. By contrast, the BCS is largely a survey about prevalence, and the data, even from the one-off special module on domestic violence, are limited in range, especially in relation to co-occurring social characteristics. Should we assume that the patterns found in North America are the same in the UK? Or are there sufficient differences to make this inappropriate, such as in the criminal justice system, support agencies, and gender and other social relations?

This paper is an attempt to assess the methodologies of the new national surveys of violence against women. What is the current state of the art? Is it that of Statistics Canada or can this be improved? How close does the BCS come to this? What revisions to the methodology would it be useful to make in the UK?

### *Three Types of National Survey of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*

National crime surveys were developed to measure the crime that was not reported to the police and not processed by the courts. They collected data based on the perceptions of victims rather than official agencies. There have been three types of surveys, reporting very different rates of violence against women.

#### *Generic national crime survey*

Generic crime surveys are now carried out in many countries (for example, the British Crime Survey, the US National Crime Victimization Survey, the Australian National Crime and Safety Survey) and report much crime that is not reported to the police. These surveys were not originally designed with the specific issues in recording violence against women in mind.

A second generation of generic crime surveys revised the wording of its enquiries, so as to try to ensure that more assaults against women would be reported to the survey, and contained more detailed questions on areas of concern (Bachman and Taylor 1994). Major revisions of the national generic crime surveys took place in the US and the UK. Both the US and British revised surveys report at least double the rates of violence to women reported to first generation US and British surveys. For instance, the revision of the US National Crime Victimization Survey led to a near doubling of the estimation of the proportion of women subject to violence from an intimate from 0.54 per cent to 0.93 per cent per annum, and for men from 0.05 per cent to 0.14 per cent; while the rate

TABLE 1 *Three types of survey*

Country, Agency	Title	Year
<i>Generic crime surveys</i>		
US, Bureau of Justice	US National Crime Victimization Survey	annual
Britain, Home Office	British Crime Survey	biannual
Australia, Bureau of Statistics	Crime and Safety	annual
<i>Revisions</i>		
US, Bureau of Justice	US National Crime Victimization Survey	from 1992
Britain, Home Office	British Crime Survey	1996
<i>Dedicated domestic violence surveys</i>		
US, Straus and Gelles	US National Family Violence Survey	1975
US, Straus and Gelles	US National Family Violence Survey	1985
Netherlands, Romkens	National Survey of Wife Abuse	1986
<i>Dedicated violence against women surveys</i>		
Canada, Statistics Canada	Violence against Women Survey	1993
Australia, Bureau of Statistics	Women's Safety	1996
Iceland, Ministry of Justice	Violence against Women in Iceland	1996
US, Tjaden	National Violence against Women Survey	1996
Finland, Statistics Finland	Men's Violence against Women in Finland	1997

of recorded sexual assault against women rose from 0.1 per cent to 0.5 per cent per annum (Bachman and Saltzman 1995: 8). (It should be noted that the figures for the BCS are actually for England and Wales, since Scotland and Northern Ireland carry out their own surveys.)

Britain also revised its generic crime survey and in 1996 introduced both a special set of questions on domestic violence (more extensive than that in the US) and also a new computer-based methodology that provided greater, though not absolute, privacy to the respondent. This led to more than a doubling of the rate of domestic violence reported against women, from 1 per cent to 4 per cent over the previous 12 months and from 11 per cent to 23 per cent over a lifetime, when comparing the 1992 survey with that in 1996 (Mirrlees-Black 1999).

There have been attempts by the BCS to use this 'special module' approach on sexual attacks, but this has not yet been considered to produce reliable results, at least partly because of difficulties in definitions (see below) (Percy and Mayhew 1997; Mirrlees-Black *et al.* 1998).

#### *Dedicated domestic violence surveys*

The second type of survey is that which is dedicated to the issue of domestic violence. This freed the interview from the constraining context of a crime survey and gave time for detailed questioning and probing on domestic violence alone. There were two main examples of this type of survey in the US, the 1975 and 1985 US National Family Violence Surveys (Straus and Gelles 1990). These surveys found much higher rates of domestic violence than the revised US generic survey, indeed 12 times as high.

The 1985 National Family Violence Resurvey found that 16.1 per cent of currently married or cohabiting couples reported violence from either or both of the partners during the previous year. This was violence by the husband in 11.6 per cent of couples, and violence by the wife in 12.4 per cent of couples (some couples experiencing violence from both partners, some from just one). This compared with rates of 0.93 per cent for women and 0.14 per cent for men in the revised US generic crime survey. These US Family Violence Surveys have been subject to very extensive secondary analysis as to the risk factors associated with the violence and many detailed assessments and theories are derived from them.

A survey in the Netherlands was also dedicated to the investigation of domestic violence. This drew simultaneously on both qualitative and quantitative methods, using in depth interviewing, and was able to overcome the problem of the neglect of context for which some other studies had been criticized (Romkens 1997).

#### *Violence against women surveys*

The third type of survey was dedicated to a range of violence against women. This attempted to locate domestic violence in a context so as to ascertain its meaning and impact. It investigated the range of violence against women including rape and other forms of sexual assault, stalking and other forms of harassment. This wave of national surveys drew on a series of non-national surveys and studies (e.g. Russell 1982). It originated in Canada in the Statistics Canada Violence against Women Survey (Johnson 1996; Johnson and Sacco 1995; Statistics Canada 1993), and has constituted a model for surveys in several other countries. With varying degrees of modification, similar surveys have now been carried out in Australia, Finland, Iceland and the US and are under development in Sweden, Germany and Ireland. It is widely considered to be the state-of-the-art survey (Dobash and Dobash 1995). This survey reported still higher rates of violence against women: 51 per cent of Canadian women had at some point in their lives experienced violence from someone (Statistics Canada 1993).

#### *Comparative data*

Tables 2 and 3 below list the diverse findings from these different kinds of surveys. There are three kinds of reasons for the differences: methodological, definitional and country specific factors. However, it is difficult, with current data, to ascertain exactly how much of the difference is due to methodology, to differing definitions, and to country specific factors.

#### *Small and local surveys*

In addition to these national surveys there are a number of studies that are smaller in scope or use less sophisticated sampling methods. There are many of these in the US (e.g. Russell 1982), and a few in the UK (Hall 1985; Hanmer and Saunders 1984; Mooney 1994; Painter 1991). They have been important in developing innovative ways of asking relevant questions about the nature of violence against women. Their estimates have

TABLE 2 *Domestic violence: prevalence over lifetime and previous year\**

	Lifetime	Last year
<i>Generic crime survey</i>		
US: Crime Victimization BCS	11	0.5 1
<i>Revised</i>		
US: Crime Victimization BCS Special Module	23	0.9 4
<i>Dedicated domestic violence survey</i>		
US: National Family Violence Netherlands	29	12
<i>Violence against women surveys</i>		
Statistics Canada	29	3
Iceland	14	1
US: Violence Against Women	25	2
Statistics Finland	33	9

\* Figures are percentages.

TABLE 3 *Violence against women: prevalence over lifetime and previous year; physical, sexual and any violence\**

	Physical		Sexual		Any	
	Lifetime	Last year	Lifetime	Last year	Lifetime	Last year
<i>Generic crime survey</i>						
US: Crime Victimization BCS		4		0.1 0.7		
Australia: Crime and Safety		2		0.6		
<i>Revised</i>						
US: Crime Victimization		5		0.5		
<i>Violence against women survey</i>						
Statistics Canada	34	3	39	5	51	10
Australia: Women's Safety		6		2		
Iceland	25	3	5			
US: Violence against Women	52	2	18	0.3	55	2
Statistics Finland**	30	12	14	2	40	14

\* Figures are percentages.

\*\* Finnish figures for sexually threatening behaviour; if limited to forced sex: 4% for lifetime, 0.7% last year; if extended to harassment: 52% for lifetime, 20% last year.

consistently been higher than those of the UK government-sponsored survey. Painter (1991) in her study of rape in marriage found that at some point in their lives 24 per cent of women had been raped: 14 per cent by their husbands and 13 per cent by other men (some more than once). Her findings are based on a quota sample of 1,007 women in the UK. Mooney (1994) found that 30 per cent of women had been subject to domestic violence at some point in their lives. Her study was based on a sample of 535 women in Islington, North London. In both these two surveys it is likely that the higher rates are a result of the specialized methodology that has more detailed questioning of the nature of the violence and a non-crime context for the survey. However, it is hard to be confident that the estimates are generalizable to a national level given the small and special nature of the sampling techniques. In this paper, the focus is on the national rather than local surveys.

### *State of the Art Methodology*

The issues to consider in the determination of the state of the art methodology include:

- the context of the survey—whether it is within a generic crime survey or dedicated to the issue;
- interviewing practices e.g. confidentiality;
- the training and matching of the characteristics of the interviewer and interviewee;
- sampling frame;
- mode of enquiry (postal/face-to-face/telephone);
- operationalizing the definitions;
- situating the event in relation to others.

#### *Generic or dedicated survey?*

There are significant differences between surveys that have included questions about violence against women within a wider survey and those which are dedicated to the issue. The framework of a general crime survey has tended to restrict the way in which questions about violence against women are asked in three ways. First, there are tighter limits to the amount of the time that can be spent in asking nuanced questions about the nature of the violence and its ramifications. Secondly, there tend to be different methodological priorities in general surveys from those in a dedicated survey, especially in the extent to which time and effort can be devoted to make victims of violence sufficiently at ease to disclose personal and potentially distressing events. Thirdly, more controversially, the context of a crime survey might affect the extent to which people are prepared to report incidents that might not be regarded as criminal.

First, the generic crime surveys, including the main British Crime Survey, may be limited by the perceived requirements of the wider survey. A survey that covers so many subjects is inevitably restricted in the amount of time and special effort that can be devoted to the investigation of one crime among others. There is little time to ask detailed questions about the full range of violence against women (or domestic and sexual violence against men). They are either simply missing, or asked in such abrupt

and truncated manner as to be likely to elicit less response. There is a limit to the number of questions and time in the interview that can be devoted to gently teasing out the details of potentially disturbing and traumatic events ('there is little time to approach this sensitive topic "gently"' (Mirrlees-Black 1995: 8)). The BCS currently has a relatively limited list of forms of violence against women that can be identified and recorded within the scope of the survey. Even the innovative module included in the 1996 BCS is restricted in scope to domestic violence thus omitting many violent acts against women (Mirrlees-Black *et al.* 1996). In particular, various forms of sexual assault are under-recorded, as well as those for which official categories are still in the process of development, such as stalking.

Secondly, there are a number of issues about interviewing where the priorities of a generic and a dedicated survey may diverge. For instance, as will be discussed below, an interviewer who is both female and specially trained has an advantage in eliciting responses in such sensitive areas. However, the prioritization of such practices in interviewing is less likely to be achieved when there is a generic rather than dedicated survey. Further, the achievement of a private context for interview may be more likely to be prioritized in the context of a dedicated than a generic survey.

Thirdly, a survey that is framed by the concept of 'crime' may under-record those acts of violence whose legality may be considered by respondents as ambiguous. For instance, rape within marriage and stalking have only recently been criminalized in Britain, and even domestic violence is usually dealt with by civil rather than criminal courts. This has been widely perceived to be a problem. 'One disadvantage of the survey is that domestic violence is measured in the context of a crime survey, and some women may not see what happened to them as a "crime", or be reluctant to do so' (Mirrlees-Black 1995: 8). However, evidence on the effect of the crime context of the questioning is less certain of its impact. This issue was addressed in the BCS special module on domestic violence within the generic crime survey by careful framing of the section, and significant numbers of people did in fact report domestic violence even when they said that they did not consider it a crime, suggesting that this may not be as large a problem as had been previously assumed (Mirrlees-Black 1999). However, it may continue to be a problem in the main survey which does not have the careful framing of the special module.

The dedicated surveys attempt to overcome these methodological problems by focusing solely on the issue of violence against women, thus removing the potentially restrictive crime context, reducing the constraints on the time spent on such questions, and facilitating a further number of methodological adjustments, for example the use of specialized interviewers. This may be a factor in the larger amount of violence against women reported to the dedicated as compared with generic surveys.

The impact of this methodological change is likely to be one of the factors contributing to the difference in reporting rates of violence between two generations of surveys in Australia, although there are other sources of difference as well. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Women's Safety Survey, which was dedicated to the issue of violence against women, found more than three times as much physical assault against women as did the generic Australian Crime and Safety Survey, 5.9 per cent as compared with 1.8 per cent of women reported physical violence in the previous 12 month period (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1994, 1996: 3).



*Interviewing*

The way that interviewing is conducted affects the likelihood of respondents reporting on potentially distressing incidents. There are several aspects to this including: privacy during the interview; special training in sensitive interviewing; the gender of the interviewer.

First, the presence of a violent partner or husband in the room where the woman is being interviewed may be expected to reduce the reporting of violence. The dedicated survey by Statistics Canada went to some trouble to ensure that the respondent was alone at the time of the interview, although we cannot be sure of the extent to which they were successful (Johnson 1996). This is less often the case for the generic crime surveys. We know that a very significant proportion of women have never reported sexual attacks to anyone. The presence of a household member in the room when being interviewed must be expected to lower the rates of those reporting such attacks, whether the person present is their assailant or not.

In 35 per cent of cases of women answering the BCS special module on domestic violence there was someone else present in the room. When the partner of a woman aged 30–59 was involved in the completion of the questionnaire the rate of reporting of lifetime domestic violence dropped to less than half the rate reported when no one else was present, that is 10 per cent instead of 23 per cent. The rate of reported violence was slightly lower if the spouse/partner was present but not involved (19 per cent), and was significantly lower when any other person was involved, 15 per cent as compared with 23 per cent (Mirrlees-Black 1999). The figures for its effect on reporting of current violence are not given, but might reasonably be expected also to show reduction since this is likely to be even more sensitive than violence in the past. While it can be argued that the number of those involved is small, it might be reasonably expected that it is the more controlling and more violent partners who were so involved. So we know that the BCS figures are reduced as a consequence of the presence of others, but we do not know exactly by how much.

Dedicated surveys, such as Statistics Canada, take greater steps to ensure privacy for the respondent, training the interviewers to seek this out, although it is not possible to report on the extent to which they were successful. Johnson (1996) reports on the special training of interviewers to ensure that respondents were alone and procedures devised to ensure that, if intruded upon during the interview, the respondent could reconvene the interview at a time of her choosing. Interviews conducted under these conditions may be expected to record a more accurate rate, which is likely to be higher than those from generic surveys where such privacy tends not to be granted such priority.

Second, since questions on violence are sensitive, and may raise difficult emotions for the respondents as they recall possibly traumatic and certainly unpleasant events, the building of rapport or at least ease with the interviewer in such sensitive circumstances may be assisted if the interviewers are specially selected and trained. Dedicated surveys, such as that of Statistics Canada, spent extra time selecting and training the interviewers to ensure that they are able to respond appropriately in these circumstances (Johnson 1996). Generic crime surveys usually spend less time on this since it is only one component of their work.

Third, the use of female interviewers is relevant in relation to the disclosure of sexual abuse, which can be particularly sensitive. This can help facilitate the building of rapport



with those who have been abused. Sorenson *et al.* (1987) found that women and men interviewed about sexual assault were 1.27 times more likely to reveal a sexual assault if they were interviewed by a woman than by a man. While generic crime surveys use both female and male interviewers, dedicated surveys usually use women interviewers. Statistics Canada hired only women as interviewers and gave them special training for the survey. The British Crime Survey uses interviewers of both sexes.

These are three examples of the way that specialized interviewing may lead to greater reporting of violence against women. These interviewing practices are found more frequently in the dedicated surveys than in the generic surveys. These practices could, theoretically, be utilized in the generic surveys, but this does not appear to be current practice. This is likely to be because these methods are a little more expensive and are perhaps more easy to justify for surveys where violence against women is the sole issue, than in the case where this is merely one among several crimes being investigated.

### *Sampling frame*

All the surveys described so far, whether dedicated or generic, suffer from limitations of the sampling frame. The limitation is a result of the use of sampling frames that include only those living permanently in a domestic residence. This excludes those in temporary accommodation or in hostels or who are homeless. While for many surveys the omission of this section of the population from the sampling frame may not be considered sufficiently important to be worth the expense and effort to include them, for surveys on violence against women this is a potentially significant omission. This is because this group could include those women who have fled to refuges, to temporary residence with friends and kin, to emergency bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation, or who are homeless. It is precisely women who are in the immediate aftermath of a domestic assault who are more likely than the average woman to be living in such temporary accommodation. Samples based on women who have gone to refuges and shelters have consistently shown much higher rates of frequency of abuse than those from national surveys (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Okun 1986; Straus 1990a). The 1985 US National Family Violence Survey found that those women who had been beaten by their partner in the preceding year were assaulted an average of six times (Straus 1990a), while Okun (1986) found that women staying in shelters for battered women had been abused on average 65 times in the preceding year. The omission of the most heavily abused section of the population is a problem for a survey attempting comprehensive coverage and accurate estimates. This is a significant omission for the measurement of domestic violence in the last 12 months, although it may have less impact on the lifetime rate of domestic violence since some women may now be living in settled violence free homes. This means that the 12-month rate is likely to underestimate those who are subject to the most severe and frequent domestic violence. It might be argued that the proportion of women not living at a permanent residential address as a result of violence is small. However, without a national survey using a sampling frame that includes such women it is not possible to estimate the size of this population.

This methodological issue can have major implications for theoretical understanding if both the most abused and most recently abused group of women are significantly under-represented in the national surveys. The different profiles of the abused population derived from sample surveys and from surveys of refuge samples has given

rise to much debate, leading some to suggest that there do indeed exist two quite distinct patterns of violence, one 'common couple violence' where there is low level mutual combat, the other 'patriarchal terrorism' where men terrorize their battered wives (Johnson 1995). However, this perceived bifurcation may well be non-existent, and be merely a methodological artefact of the undercounting of the most abused women in the sample surveys as a consequence of their lesser likelihood to be living at their permanent home. A more adequate sampling frame would help to test this thesis.

Thus all existing surveys, even Statistics Canada, may well produce not only an undercount as a result of the restriction of their sampling frame to permanent residents in domestic residences, but, even more importantly, undercount the most abused section of the population. There are ways of supplementing the sampling frame to include these populations, which could enhance future surveys. These include drawing up additional sampling frames based on lists of hostels, refuges, and other temporary accommodation that could be provided by those who fund and run such accommodation. In addition, the procedure for sampling the person in residential households could include all who are actually staying there, not merely those who are permanently resident.

*Mode of enquiry: postal, telephone, face-to-face, self-completion*

Surveys have been carried out using postal questionnaires, telephone, face-to-face interviewing, and by self-completion on a computer. While some, such as de Leeuw (1992), suggest that there is little evidence that it makes much difference, others have argued for particular methods, especially either telephones (Smith 1994), or telephone or face-to-face (Koss 1993), or for self-completion by computer (Percy and Mayhew 1997). On the one hand there is the possibility that face-to-face interviewing can build up more rapport, while on the other hand, confidentiality engendered by strategies such as self-completion by computer or by questionnaire may increase the likelihood of respondents divulging sensitive information. However, perhaps of greater significance are the implications of each of these for the sampling frame and the response rate.

Postal questionnaires usually have the lowest response rate of all methods, so are usually considered inappropriate for those surveys where this is important. However, Statistics Finland used a postal questionnaire and obtained a surprisingly high response rate of 70 per cent (Heiskanen and Piispa 1998). This might be explained in terms of the unique features of Nordic society.

Statistics Canada used the telephone to make contact with respondents. They suggest that since almost all Canadians have a phone this gives good coverage. However, this may well be country specific, since not all countries have such wide phone coverage. Telephone ownership rates in private households in Britain are not as high as in Canada, and are particularly low among poor heads of lone adult households who are likely to include disproportionate numbers of women who have fled a violent home. A survey of phone ownership by the Social Survey Division of ONS found that 96 per cent of British households had a private telephone (Beerton and Martin 1999). However, the distribution of phones was significantly skewed by class and household composition. Among those unskilled workers in social class V, only 88 per cent had phones as compared with 99 per cent among the professionals of class I. Further, among households with only one adult, only 91 per cent had phones as compared with 98 per cent of those with two or

more adults. On the basis of this evidence, Beerton and Martin (1999: 5) endorse 'the caution about the use of telephone surveys for government surveys which are particularly likely to be interested in the social and economically disadvantaged groups in society'. Thus the use of phones is probably inappropriate in the UK since the poorest one adult households are probably the most likely to have been recently subject to domestic violence and are likely to be the most excluded from telephone surveys. Further, the technical information for fully random digit dialling is not as available in the UK as in North America, not least because of lack of information of the structure numbering system and numbers actually allocated, although methods are under development here (Noble *et al.* 1998, as cited in Beerton and Martin 1999).

While the different methods may have implications for the survey, we do not know what differences might result. Probably of greater importance is the response rate, and it appears that the method of enquiry might have country specific implications here.

### *Operationalizing the definitions of the violence*

Perhaps the most difficult and most contentious issue in surveys in this area is the operationalization of the definition of violence. The issue is especially problematic because there is no commonly available unstigmatized vocabulary, let alone one that maps easily onto legal categories of crime.

There has been very considerable controversy over the terms and concepts used to capture domestic violence in the various generations of surveys. There are three main terms here: 'conflict tactics', 'violence', and 'force'. 'Conflict tactics' was used by Straus and Gelles (1990) in the US Family Violence Surveys; 'violence' is the lead concept used in the survey by Statistics Canada (Johnson 1996) and its followers, although its detailed list draws on a modified form of the conflict tactics scale; 'force' is used by the BCS (Mirrlees-Black 1999).

Straus and Gelles (1990) developed an elaborate scale, the Conflict Tactics Scale, which listed a series of methods of dealing with conflict ranging from verbal reasoning to serious violence. The question is introduced by a comment about ways that couples try to 'settle their differences':

No matter how well a couple get along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats of fights because they are in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They may use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. I'm going to read you some things that you and your (spouse/partner) might do when you have an argument. I would like you to tell me how many times [. . .] in the past 12 months you:

- A Discussed an issue calmly;
- B Got information to back up your/his/her side of things;
- C Brought in, or tried to bring in, someone to help settle things;
- D Insulted or swore at him/her/you;
- E Sulked or refused to talk about an issue;
- F Stomped out of the room or house or yard;
- G Cried;
- H Did or said something to spite him/her/you;
- I Threatened to hit or throw something at him/her/you;
- J Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something;

- K Threw something *at* him/her/you;
- L Pushed, grabbed, or shoved him/her/you;
- M Slapped him/her/you;
- N Kicked, bit, or hit him/her/you with a fist;
- O Hit or tried to hit him/her/you with something;
- P Beat him/her/you up;
- Q Choked him/her/you;
- R *Threatened* him/her/you with a knife or gun;
- S Used a knife or fired a gun.

It should be noted not all these incidents are regarded as violent, only those K to S, while A to C are regarded as reasoning and D to J are verbal aggression. Within the types of violence, N to S form a sub-category of severe violence.

The scale has been widely used in recognition of its usefulness in distinguishing between different kinds and levels of violence. However, there has been a dispute over whether it is the act, or the impact of the act, which is important; and whether data on acts make sense outside of an understanding of its meaning and context (Brush 1990; Dobash *et al.* 1992; Smith 1994). The Straus survey found, controversially, that men were as likely to be the victim of domestic violence as were women, a finding replicated by the BCS. It was argued vehemently that the impact of this violence on women was much greater than that on men (e.g. Dobash *et al.* 1992). Indeed it is argued, in particular, that the nature of any injurious outcome is important since men are much more likely to injure women than vice versa (Schwartz 1987); that women are much more likely to be frightened and stay frightened than men (Mirrlees-Black 1999); and, on the basis of further studies, that women who hit men are likely to be responding in self-defence or retaliation rather than initiating violence (Saunders 1988; Nazroo 1995).

Since this controversy, many subsequent surveys, starting with Statistics Canada, have routinely included questions on the impact of the violence and on the context of meaning in which it took place, even while they have continued to use part of the Straus ranking scale of violence. Statistics Canada and violence against women-type surveys introduce the questions on domestic violence as questions about 'violence', rather than about tactics used in domestic conflict, 'conflict tactics'. The Statistics Canada (1993) survey overall is introduced as being about women's safety and the specific sequence of questions on domestic violence follows a series of questions about the possible controlling nature of a partner's behaviour. The immediate lead in to the sequence of questions on domestic violence states: 'We are particularly interested in learning more about women's experiences of violence in their homes. I'd like you to tell me if your husband/partner has ever done any of the following to you. This includes incidents that may have happened while you were dating.' The questions on domestic violence then more or less replicate the conflict tactics scale developed by Straus (1990b) from item I to R. It includes an additional question on sexual violence 'Has he ever forced you into any sexual activity when you did not want to, by threatening you, holding you down, or hurting you in some way?' which is located after the most extreme violence question. It omits the questions on verbal reasoning and most of those on verbal aggression.

However, despite the well-rehearsed problems with the US Family Violence Surveys, it is worth noting that more domestic violence against women in a 12-month period was reported in this survey using the conflict tactics scale and a lead in via the notion of

conflict resolution in families than was found in Statistics Canada using the concept of violence and a framing in terms of women's safety. It might be that the differences in findings between the US and Canada are due to issues other than this terminology, such as, perhaps, higher rates of domestic violence in the US. However, the recent US Violence Against Women Survey (a fourth generation survey with similarities to that of Statistics Canada and that uses the term 'violence'), finds considerably lower rates of domestic violence for the previous year in the US than does Straus's survey. This suggests that the explanation of the difference does not wholly lie in the uniqueness of the rate of US domestic violence. Indeed it might mean that Straus had tapped into an easier route for the disclosure of domestic violence by the very closeness of his terminology to that of popular discourse.

Certainly the term 'violence' is a stigmatized word that some respondents may not wish to embrace. Mooney (1994) in her North London study found a reluctance to name actions as domestic violence. While 92 per cent of her respondents were prepared to label as domestic violence physical violence that results in actual bodily harm such as bruising, black eyes and broken bones, only 76 per cent were prepared to so label physical violence of the form of grabbing, pushing and shaking, and only 68 per cent when it referred only to threatened force. This also varied by age—among women aged 55–64 only 60 per cent were prepared to name as domestic violence that which resulted in actual bodily harm, and 51 per cent that which involved grabbing, pushing and shaking.

The issue of definition for sexual attack is, if anything, even more contentious than that for domestic violence. Most of the terms for the more severe forms of violence are highly stigmatized and even when people appear prepared to accept behavioural descriptions as fitting what happened to them they are reluctant to embrace such terms, especially that of rape. The legal issue in most countries is whether women gave or did not give their consent to various forms of sexual contact. In practice many other moral and social issues emerge to interfere with such a judgment.

Koss (1988) found that only 25 per cent of a group of US undergraduates described themselves as raped even though they described being subjected to actions that fitted such a concept. In the UK, Painter (1991) found that only 60 per cent of married women who were forced to have sex through the use of violence were prepared to say they were raped at the time, rising to 74 per cent with hindsight; of those who were forced to have sex by threat of violence the figure dropped to 51 per cent at the time and 73 per cent with hindsight; while among those who had clearly indicated that they did not consent, but against whom violence was not used, only 43 per cent were prepared to label it as rape at the time and 56 per cent with hindsight. This also varied by social location, with women from higher social classes being less prepared to label such actions as rape than women from lower social classes. This is perhaps not surprising given the popular imagery of rape as represented in the newspapers, where it typically involves strangers, madmen, multiple attacks and reckless women, some of whom brought it on themselves (Soothill and Walby 1991). It would be hard for a woman who has been raped to identify with the images presented to her in popular culture as representing rape. A raped woman is a degraded status.

The second generation of generic crime surveys worded the questions in more detail than the first generation and doubled the reported rates of domestic violence, but are still very limited. The dedicated surveys increased the number of probes, albeit perhaps



unevenly, and are associated with higher reported rates of violence against women. In this context of lack of social agreement on the terms to use as shorthand for diverse forms of violence, the advice frequently offered, if not always followed, is that surveys must describe the specific forms of behaviour, and not rely upon shorthand (Koss 1993; Smith 1994). Shorthands simply do not communicate that which survey designers intend. Language is too fluid in this area, too open to different interpretations and understandings, for one simple vocabulary of terms to mean the same to all people.

The procedure then might be to utilize multiple probes, not single questions; a series of descriptions of acts rather than a single screening question leading to detailed questions only for those who pass through this gate. Indeed both the US Family Violence Surveys and the Canada Statistics violence against women survey use scales that allow the opportunity for respondents to be asked many times whether there has been experience of a variety of forms of violence. This removes the need for a one-off 'gate' or 'screening' question that might contain a word that the respondent does not wish to identify with. However, the use of screening questions does have the advantage of saving time in a long and complex interview schedule, since an early negative would preclude the need for further questions. But such a strategy has the disadvantage of removing from further questioning anyone who did not identify with one of these limited questions. In an area where terminology is sensitive, contested and ambiguous, as is the case in violence against women, especially sexual and domestic violence, there is a strong case for not using such a short cut.

The main part of the British Crime Survey has simple screening questions and a 'victim form' for those who answer any gate question in the affirmative. This has been: 'Apart from anything you may have already mentioned, in the time since the first of January 1995, has any member of your household (aged 16 or over) deliberately hit you with their fists or with a weapon of any sort, or kicked you, or used force or violence on you in any other way' (Hales and Stratford 1996). This is likely to omit those women who do not think of their experiences using the same terminology as the survey designers. The BCS special module on domestic violence in the same year was an improvement, since it did not depend upon going through this gateway. In the context of the two parts of the same survey, the reported rates of domestic violence in the victim form that followed the screener were ten times lower than those in the second part of the survey that did not use a screener question (Mirrlees-Black 1999). Of course, there are further differences between the methods for the two sections that also contribute to the differences in the reported rates, not least that the special module had greater confidentiality as a result of the computer based self-completion technique.

The BCS analysis of their 1994 special module on sexual attack needs consideration in this context. At the start of this module there were three screener questions (as there are in the sexual victimization module in BCS 2000). These cue questions avoided the most stigmatized language of 'rape' and instead used terms including: coercion, force, sex, against your will, and unwanted sexual contact in order to generate categories of coerced sex, attempted coerced sex and unwanted sexual touching. It was still possible to directly translate these into legal categories. Among the survey respondents 1.9 per cent reported coerced sex, 1.8 per cent, attempted coerced sex, and 5.7 per cent unwanted sexual contact during the previous 12 months and 6.3 per cent reported coerced sex, 6.4 per cent attempted coerced sex, and 16.2 per cent unwanted sexual contact over their lifetime since 16. When these respondents were asked whether they had been subjected

to rape, attempted rape, indecent assault or offensive behaviour over their lifetime only 2.2 per cent said they had been raped, 2.3 per cent subjected to attempted rape, 3.4 per cent to indecent assault, 9.1 per cent to offensive behaviour and 3.1 per cent other. To many this apparent lack of concordance will come as little surprise. Rape is highly stigmatized and few would wish to recognize themselves as raped. However, the authors of the report (Percy and Mayhew 1997) appear surprised at the extent to which those who responded in the affirmative to being subjected to coerced sex, attempts at coerced sex and unwanted sexual contact, were reluctant to re-describe these in terms of the ostensibly parallel concepts of rape, attempted rape and indecent assault. After carefully debating the nuances in the relationship between the two categories, the authors focus on the 'best estimate' of 'being a victim of a sexual incident which they considered a crime'. This is seen to refer to the (lower) rate when women are using the concepts of rape, attempted rape, and indecent assault, rather than the (higher) rate derived from using the concepts of coerced sex, attempted coerced sex and unwanted sexual contact. They appear to prioritize the moral interpretation of events by victims as to whether the act deserved criminal punishment over the actual legal definitions. Their 'best estimate' is then that since 16 years old, 2 per cent of women were raped, 2 per cent subjected to attempted rape and 7 per cent to indecent assault. The apparent move from legally based definitions (coerced sex, etc.), to the morally based judgments of victims on what should be punishable, for the primary category for use seems, at best, unwarranted. The apparent discrepancies are interesting in their own right. If we want to know how many women were forced to have sex against their will (the legal definition of rape) then we should use the figure on coerced sex; if we want to know whether women have experiences conceptualized as rape (a socially specific construction different from the legal definition of rape), then the other figure can be used. 'Rape' here is not acting as a signifier of the legal category 'rape', rather 'coerced sex' is acting as that. In order to understand coerced sex and rape and the response by victims and the public to it, we need to collect data on both categories rather than be forced to choose between them at the stage of collecting and presenting data. Clearly, we need more empirical detail about such incidents, about the differing content of labels 'coerced sex' and 'rape' and how women are using them. But the new module for 2000 will not collect this.

There are clearly different kinds of sexual assault which require a range of terms to describe them. This is difficult, given the area is so contested in popular culture. The dedicated violence against women surveys make an attempt to separate the different kinds of assault. Statistics Canada and its successors introduce questions around sexual harassment; sexual threats and attacks by strangers, dates and others; sexual assault in marriage. This inclusion of a range of sexual violence and harassment within one survey is a significant development. However, there are places where further improvement could take place. The questions are a little vague, for instance, it is not possible, given the question is whether someone 'sexually attacked you' or 'sexually touched you against your will', to identify a sub-category of coerced intercourse or rape; the degrees of force or the nature of the pressure utilized are not particularly clearly distinguished. The nuances of rape in marriage are unlikely to be obtained by a single question located after the most extreme forms of physical violence which asks for a yes or no answer to 'Has he ever forced you into any sexual activity when you did not want to, by threatening you, holding you down, or hurting you in some way?'. Stalking is not included in Statistics Canada. However, later surveys that modify this survey, such as that in Australia, do



usefully distinguish stalking as a separate category. The questions about injuries need to be modified so that victims of sexual assault are not asked whether or not they were physically hurt in any way, and a more appropriate list of harms is included. We need a more developed, more nuanced, list of the categories through which to collect data on sexual assault for the next generation of surveys.

*The location of the violent incident among others*

Most surveys are oriented to discrete events, but domestic violence and sexual violence within a partnership is more frequently characterized by a series of events rather than a one-off event. This means that enquiries as to domestic violence within a survey usually miss important features of the pattern of domestic violence: its onset, frequency, repetition, variation, periods of respite, and possible desistance. This has been a limiting feature of many surveys, both generic and dedicated.

In the focus on the single event, or the events of the last 12 months, the possibilities of analysing the frequency of the attacks is limited, for instance by low upper limits for reported crimes. Some surveys ask about lifetime experience of violence, but there is usually very little asked about the then contexts of such violence. The violence against women surveys are alone in asking significantly about lifetime experience of violence, but further information, especially to the pattern over time, is limited.

It is hard to ascertain from Statistics Canada surveys how long domestic violence has been occurring and with what frequency, even though there are some questions on this matter. However, a question as to when the first event was and when the most recent, and a frequency count in which the top is 'more than ten' is not sufficient to capture adequately the typical history of domestic violence that is uncovered in some of the refuge-based samples. We know from refuge samples that women who have gone to refuges will typically have higher frequencies of abuse, indeed Okun (1986) found an average of 65 times a year. The BCS does not have a question as to when the first event took place, and the top of its frequency count is only 'more than 20 times'. The focus is very much on the most recent event, and the starting, escalation, and correlates of any desistance, is out of its scope.

The lifetime data are very important in investigating patterns of escalation and of possible desistance, and in a 12-month focus such patterns are almost necessarily missed. We know that there is desistance, since many more women report domestic violence in their lifetimes than report that it is currently ongoing. However, even the violence against women surveys are very limited in the data they gather over the lifetime. For instance, we do not even know the proportion of instances of desistance that stem from divorce, though we can guess that it is significant. Of the instances of desistance when the couple stays together we know very little indeed (though see Horton and Johnson 1993), even though many women say that this would be their preferred option if it were possible. We do not know how important outside agencies are in such a process, nor which ones. A survey that asks about lifetime patterns in some detail is the best way to reach that population where desistance has occurred, but data on lifetime escalation and desistance are as yet very limited indeed.

The focus on an incident is probably appropriate for a generic crime survey where the majority of incidents are one off thefts of some kind. But it is very limiting for the analysis of domestic violence where the series of events, rather than a specific event, is the key

issue. Indeed, if there is to be any analysis of desistance of domestic violence, then there needs to be data on the starting and stopping of a series of events. There are obviously limits to the extent of recall, to the accuracy of people's memories, especially over long periods of time, which will restrict the value of the reported data. However, these are important events, which are not so trivial as to be easily forgotten. These data of the life history of violence are not yet collected, even in the Statistics Canada led series of surveys. Yet without such data analysis of desistance will be severely restricted.

### *Explaining Violence against Women*

Most of the effort expended on surveys of violence against women has been concerned primarily with the issue of the prevalence of such violence. Yet there are many important theoretical questions that could be more fully addressed if the data from the surveys were just a little deeper, just a little richer. The crime surveys are inherently not much more than prevalence surveys because of their limited scope for further questions. There are a number of theories that enhanced data could help to assess. They include questions as to the nature, if any, of links with poverty and social exclusion; with gender inequality; with 'criminal careers'; and the possible efficacy of the criminal justice system. In order to do this then data on correlates of violence would need to be collected more extensively, including the following.

Separate data on the income and socio-economic position of the man and woman in a household, not only that of the household as a whole, are needed in order to assess different possible causal pathways linking poverty and social exclusion to domestic violence. While some socio-economic data are available on an individual basis, others, for instance, income, is not. While for the purposes of the BCS as a generic crime survey primarily interested in property theft, treating the household as a single economic unit makes some sense, it is unhelpful when it comes to analysing intra-household power and violence. We need to be able to analyse separately any correlation between the possible economic stressing of a perpetrator from that of the economic dependency and entrapment of a victim. Are poor households at greater risk of domestic violence because men do not have the economic resources to perform masculinity to their satisfaction, or because women lack the economic resources and social networks to leave? To what extent is the US finding on the protective effect of women's income (Farmer and Tiefenthaler 1997) transferable to the UK? To what extent would increases in women's employment and other changes in women's position in society (Walby 1997) reduce domestic violence, as is argued in Iceland (Gislason 1997)? To what extent is the US finding that marital equality protects against domestic violence even in conflictual situations (Coleman and Straus 1986) transferable to the UK?

Are men who are violent to women criminals just like any other criminals, or are they distinctive because of their targets? Despite the development of the literature on criminal careers (Blumstein *et al.* 1988), and the empirical noting that these are largely men, there is little investigation as to the extent to which men's violence against women is part of this complex.

What produces desistance (cf. Farrall and Bowling 1999)? Is the intervention of a range of outside agencies as central to desistance in the UK as it appears to be in the US (Horton and Johnson 1993), or is the range of support services and the nature of the

criminal justice system too different to support such an analysis? Is desistance due to the integration of deviant men back into the mainstream of society, or to their exclusion from the home? To what extent is a change in women's employment status from housewife to employed a factor in desistance? There are many theories that could be explored if reliable data on the distribution of violence against women were known (cf. Walby and Myhill, 2000).

### *Future Surveys*

Surveys have proved an indispensable tool for the analysis of violence against women and domestic violence, despite the hesitation of some (Brush 1990). There has been wave after wave of new survey designs in recent years. There have been many methodological improvements. This paper has argued for further revisions.

The British Crime Survey, while carried out with exemplary professionalism, and with much innovation, is no longer state of the art on violence against women. It does not provide the complex data needed to test emergent explanations of violence against women, whether it is domestic violence, rape or other forms of abuse. The one-off special modules have been very significant improvements, but they have been insufficiently specialized to spend the time on the detailed questions and to permit the development of an interview context sufficiently sensitive to facilitate maximum disclosure. They are likely to provide an underestimation of the extent of violence against women, even in those forms of violence for which estimates are provided at all. The continuing lack of reliable data on sexual assault and rape is a serious omission.<sup>1</sup>

The surveys dedicated to violence against women, as initiated by Statistics Canada, have provided a much improved vehicle for the collection of data on the range of violence against women. In particular, they have prioritized the development of interviewing practices that facilitate disclosure, such as special training, privacy, and the use of female interviewers. Further improvements by, for instance the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) and Tjaden and Boyle's (1998) US survey, in the inclusion of explicit questions on stalking, constitute additional important developments.

Even the violence against women surveys can be still further developed in several ways. First, the sampling frame needs to be enhanced so as to include the marginalized population who do not currently occupy permanent domestic residences, especially since this is likely to include disproportionate numbers of women who have fled violent homes to seek sanctuary in a refuge, with friends or relatives, or in hostel or homeless accommodation. Second, there needs to be development of a longer and broader standard list for recording more of the different types of sexual attack in recognition of the complexities and variations in experience and definitions, rather than the funnelling of respondents through a narrow set of screening questions with which they might not identify. Third, a more systematic and comprehensive way of recording the various impacts of violence, especially that of sexual violence, so as to capture the range of these

<sup>1</sup> While this paper was accurate at the time of its writing, the British Crime Survey has since undergone further development, with which the authors of this paper have been involved. The new module on interpersonal violence in the 2001 BCS has more developed scaling of types of sexual assault and of the impacts of interpersonal violence, a better way of recording series of events over time, more disaggregated socio-economic data, and some data on criminal history.

in meaningful ways. Fourth, a better way of recording series of events over time, so as to capture their escalation and, perhaps, their desistance, and to do so in tandem with other social information so as to begin to provide an evidential basis for understanding desistance. Fifth, the collection of more disaggregated socio-economic data, such as income, on women and the perpetrator, so that the woman is not hidden in the household, and so that theories as to the role of poverty and social exclusion for both victim and perpetrator can each be addressed. Sixth, it should be asked whether the perpetrator has a criminal history, so as to help assess whether theories of criminal career are relevant in this area.

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