What Works in Reducing Domestic Violence?

A comprehensive guide for professionals

Edited by
Julie Taylor-Browne

Whiting & Birch Ltd
MMI

Assessing and managing risk

Sylvia Walby and Andrew Myhill

The prevalence of domestic violence varies along a number of dimensions. This chapter reviews the literature on this variation in risk factors associated with domestic violence. It finds firstly that the highest risk is among those who have suffered previous assaults. Secondly, those who are separating are or have been a high risk. There are further risk factors including gender, and especially marital inequality; poverty and social exclusion; and a man's criminal record. However, the data sources for the assessment of the risk of domestic violence (and sexual assault) need urgently to be improved. There is a need to develop surveys in this field so as to provide robust statistical data.

Introduction

Risk

The work reviewed in this chapter has focused on the risk factors associated with the onset of domestic violence. However, it is important also to consider the factors that are associated with desistance from domestic violence. While they are less frequently considered in the academic literature, they are of the essence when the focus is on the evaluation of interventions and programmes which aim to reduce domestic violence.

The identification of risk factors can aid both the identification of those who need special attention and long term thinking on the causes of domestic violence. The focus here is primarily on those risk factors that identify victims, but some mention will also be made of those that identify perpetrators.

It is important to distinguish between correlations and causes - not all things associated with domestic violence are actually causes of it. This is in order to ensure that programmes deal with the causes of crime, rather than with spurious or superficial correlations. While this chapter will review risk factors that are the empirically identifiable and measurable correlates of domestic violence, the causal structure linking these risk factors requires conceptual as well as empirical work (Tilley and Pawson, 1997).

Prevalence

In order to cost accurately domestic violence and the benefits of programmes to reduce it, it is necessary to have accurate estimates of its prevalence and incidence.

The methodology to estimate the extent and patterns of domestic violence is significantly less well developed than that in other areas of crime as a result of the previous lack of resources and research in this area. The further development of this methodology is a necessary early stage in the development of a capacity to evaluate programmes aimed at the reduction of domestic violence.

Sources

During the course of this review, over 300 items - articles, chapters, books - were obtained and reviewed.

Where appropriate, national random sample surveys have been given priority over small and special samples, quasi-experiments and qualitative studies. However, where these were not available, or where their reliability or validity has been questioned, then data derived from other research methods have been utilised in addition. Refuge and clinical/treatment samples are likely to address a slightly different population of the most heavily and recently abused. Meta-analyses are considered, but since these were generally of small and special samples, they are subject to limitations.

Material was initially sought of whatever national origin, but in this report priority is given to material on the UK. However, the overwhelming origin of the published material, especially that published in journals and in electronic abstracts was the US. There is some material available from other countries, in particular Canada, Australia, Finland, Iceland and the Netherlands, but it is relatively small by comparison. This US dominance creates a series of dilemmas since we do not know the extent to which these risk factors and the connections between them are similar in the US and the UK. This is particularly true because of:

- the lower rate of violent crime in the UK as compared with the US;
- differences in the criminal justice system;
- differences in the welfare system and provision of support;
- differences in the pattern of gender relations;
- differences in other social relations, such as patterns of employment, income distribution and social exclusion; and
- perhaps most crucially, the differences in the methodology between the survey which is the most important source of US risk factor analysis and that of the British Crime Survey.

If it is the only available evidence, then the US (or other overseas) material is cited, but these findings must be treated with caution before being applied to the UK.

Gathering data

In the estimation of the risk of domestic violence the nature of the methodology used is of overwhelming significance. Very considerable differences in the estimation of risk appear to result from differences in methodology. Hence it is imperative to assess these methodological issues before moving on to consider the data.

National random sample surveys are today a key data source underlying much of the current assessment of the risk of domestic violence overall, by gender, and for specific groups. They are the only way to reliably estimate the prevalence of domestic violence in the general population and the relative rates in different sub-groups. However, these surveys differ considerably in methodology and their reported rates of violence vary by factors of several times. Further, for some issues and for certain population groups findings from other research methods continue to be important. These include quasi-experimental designs and focused qualitative research.

National random sample surveys

National crime surveys were developed to measure all incidents perceived by victims as crimes, including those not reported to the police and not processed by the courts. There have been four types of survey, revealing different rates of domestic violence.

1. Generic national crime surveys

Generic crime surveys are now carried out in many countries (for example, UK British Crime Survey, the US National Crime Victimisation Survey, the Australian National Crime and Safety Survey) and reveal much crime that is not reported to the police. These surveys have been criticised for under-recording rates of violence against women. The criticisms were underpinned by findings from local surveys which found much higher rates of violence against women than that recorded in these national surveys (Mooney, 1994).

2. Revised crime surveys with special attention to domestic violence

The second generation of crime survey revised the wording of its enquiries, so as to try to ensure that more assaults would be reported to the survey, and contained more detailed questions on areas of concern.

The revision of the US National Crime Victimisation Survey led to a near doubling of the estimation of the proportion of women subject to domestic violence from 0.54% to 0.93% per annum and a larger increase in the estimation for men from 0.05% to 0.14% (Bachman and Saltzman, 1995: 8).

The UK revised its generic crime survey, both within the regular BCS, and also by carrying out in 1996 a special exercise with a specific set of questions on domestic violence (much more extensive than that in the US) which used a new computer based methodology that provided greater, though not absolute, privacy to the respondent. The 1996 special exercise also led to a near doubling of the rate of domestic violence reported against women (for detailed figures see below) (Mirrlees-Black, 1995, 1999).

However, there are still limitations to the survey design, including: a 'crime context' for recall of events which may not be conceptualised as crimes (Mirrlees-Black, 1995). These include difficulties over detail and sensitive probing as a result of the domestic violence questions being only a part of a broader survey (Mirrlees-Black, 1995), and confidentiality (32% of female BCS respondents had someone else present in the room) (Mirrlees-Black, 1999). Most important of all, some important marginalised populations are omitted from the sampling frame (Walby and Myhill, 1999).

3. Dedicated domestic violence surveys

A different type of survey was that which was dedicated to domestic violence. This freed the respondent from the 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) and also one in the Netherlands (Romkens, 1997). The US dedicated domestic violence 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% of currently married or cohabiting couples reported violence during the previous year, this being violence by the husband in 11.6% of couples, and violence by the wife in 12.4% of couples. This is compared with rates of 0.93% for women and 0.14% for men in the revised US generic crime survey (Bachman and Saltzman, 1995). These US Family Violence Surveys have been subject to very extensive secondary analysis as to risk factors and many detailed assessments are derived from them.

However, these surveys have been subject to very considerable controversy over their methodology and definitions. There is dispute over whether it is the act, or the impact of the act, which is important; and whether data on acts makes sense outside of an understanding of its meaning and context. The debates have addressed:

- whether a quantitative survey, in particular, one based around the 'Conflict Tactics Scale', a pre-coded list of specific types of violence with varying degrees of severity, can adequately capture the nature, meaning and context of violence;
- whether a year recall period is adequate as compared with recall based on the life of the relationship or whole life;
- whether a lead up which focuses on conflict in the relationship is the best introduction to questions about violence; and,
- whether explicit reference to sexual assault might not be merited (Dobash et al, 1992; Smith, 1994).

It is argued that the nature of any injurious outcome is important since men are much more likely to injure women than vice versa (Schwartz, 1987). In addition, women who hit men are likely to be responding in self-defence or retaliation rather than initiating violence (Saunders, D., 1988; Nazroo, 1995). Further, sexual violence against women in the home is not included, nor are other forms of violence against women, for instance, rape and sexual assault outside the home.

4. Violence against women surveys

The last type of survey is one which has attempted to locate domestic violence in a context so as to ascertain its meaning and impact, include sexual coercion, and broaden the range of violence to include that against women outside the home. This wave of surveys was initiated by the Statistics Canada Violence Against Women Survey (Johnson, 1996; Statistics Canada, 1993), which has proved a model for surveys in several other countries. With varying degrees of modification, similar surveys have now been carried out in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996), Finland (Heiskanen and Piipsa, 1998), and Iceland (Gislason, 1997), and are under development in Sweden and Germany. It has often been regarded as the current state-of-the-art survey (Dobash & Dobash, 1995).

The Statistics Canada Violence Against Women survey uncovered still higher rates of life-time experience of domestic violence against women - 29% of women who had ever lived with a partner had at some point experienced violence from him. When the definition of violence was broadened beyond domestic violence to include violence outside the home and various forms of sexual violence, the Survey found that 51% of Canadian women had at some point in their lives experienced violence from someone (16% from date/boyfriend, 23% by other known man, 23% by a stranger).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Women's Safety Survey, found more than three times as much physical assault against women as did the generic Crime and Safety Survey, 5.9% as compared with 1.8% of women reported physical violence in the previous 12 month period (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994, 1996: 3).

Each new generation of national survey has been an improvement on the previous one. The more recent generations have revealed higher rates of violence against women, provide richer data sources for the nature and interconnection of risk factors, and encompass a wider range of violent behaviour. A key remaining limitation is that of the sampling frame, which tends to exclude more marginalised groups, such as those living in refuges and hostels for the homeless, among whom rates of victimisation are higher (Straus, 1990; Okun, 1986). A fuller analysis of the methodology, findings and implications of these various national surveys can be found in Walby and Myhill (2001).

As these comparisons show, the regular BCS survey and the special BCS module in 1996 are likely to have underestimated the extent of domestic violence. Those surveys that are dedicated to the issue of violence within the family or against women have consistently reported significantly higher rates of violence than those which have asked the questions within the frame of a generic crime survey. Further, they are unable to address questions of detailed interest (such as comparing rates of violence before and after separation; and whether violence increases during pregnancy). However, with these caveats, the BCS findings will be reported as the best available data in the UK.

Small and special samples (e.g. from refuges and treatment populations)

While large random sample surveys might be expected to be able to address the distribution of risk across the whole population better than methods based on small scale samples drawn from special populations, there are reasons why they might not fully address the whole population. Research based on refuge samples has consistently shown more intense and more frequent abuse than those based on the sample surveys.

Unless and until such deficiencies in survey design can be remedied, it is important to utilise the information derived from small and special samples that target the most abused population. These include samples drawn from: refuges to which battered women have gone (Dobash & Dobash, 1979); and those reporting violence to the police (Kelly et al., 1999).

Quasi-experimental design

Experimental and quasi-experimental research designs are rare in this field at this stage, though see Dobash et al (2000) on men undergoing treatment. They may become more important later in assessing the impact of particular treatment regimes on the reduction of domestic violence.

Focused qualitative research

While qualitative research cannot be expected to provide estimates of risk, nonetheless it can be invaluable for investigating the validity and reliability of some of the concepts utilised in more quantitative research assessing

risk, and for assessing the meaning of terms in different contexts (see for instance, Kelly, 1989). Further, it is vital for initial exploratory stages of research.

Professional records and requests for information

Most agencies keep records of their client populations. While these are typically uneven, they have potential to assist the development of professional practice, if their very specific context is borne in mind.

Sources of the best estimates in the UK

The best estimates of the risk of domestic violence in the UK are to be found in the British Crime Survey 1996 that included a special section on domestic violence. However, it is likely to underestimate the risk of domestic violence.

Overall risk of domestic violence for women and men

The British Crime Survey found that 4.2% of both men and women aged 16-59 years old who had ever been married/had a partner or a boy/girl-friend had been a victim of domestic violence in the previous year (1995). This had involved an injury for 2.2% of the women and 1.1% of the men. When threats were included, 5.9% of women and 4.9% of men reported such an event. Over their life-time 22.7% of women and 14.9% of men reported being a victim of domestic assault (Mirrlees-Black, 1999).

Mooney's (1994) local survey in North London found the higher rate of lifetime violence against women of 30% and that for the previous year was 12%, but this was not a nationally representative sample.

The extent to which women are disproportionately the victims of violence is hotly contested with disputes engaging with issues of definition, methodology and context of the violence, as noted above. There is a question as to whether the focus is properly on the act of violence, which entails greater gender symmetry, or the outcome of the act, which entails greater gender asymmetry. While the 1996 BCS finds that equal percentages of women and men have been the subject of acts of domestic assault, in many respects women were significantly more severely affected than men were. This is because:

- women are twice as likely as men to have been injured in such attacks;
- women were much more likely to have been subject to frightening threats than men, 3.9% as compared with 1.2%;
- women were more likely to have suffered multiple assaults during the course of the previous year and over a lifetime; and

- women were much more likely than men to be have been upset and frightened at the time of the incident and to be still upset at the time of the interview.

Of all violent crime experienced by women, 43% is domestic (Mirrlees-Black, 1999). As noted above, it has been shown that the acts of violence by women are largely carried out in self-defence and in retaliation (Saunders, D., 1988; Schwartz, 1987).

Homicide in Britain is much more likely to entail men killing women than women killing men. Nearly half the women who are murdered are killed by their partners, and this pattern is not gender symmetrical. Of 224 female homicide victims, 47% were killed by their partners, while of 426 male homicide victims, 8% were killed by their partner (Criminal Statistics for England and Wales, 1997).

Previous assault

One of the most robust, simple and straightforward risk factors for domestic violence is that of previous assault.

The BCS found that women who had been victims of domestic assault in the previous year reported an average of 5.2 assaults, with 2.9 resulting in injury; while for men it was 5.0 assaults, with 1.5 resulting in injury. While half the women who had been assaulted in the previous year had experienced one or two incidents, half reported three or more incidents; among men, two thirds had experienced one or two incidents and one third three or more (Mirrlees-Black, 1999).

Lloyd, et al (1994) found high rates of repeat domestic violence in a small-scale study on Merseyside. They found that 62% of all police calls to domestic incidents were from households with one or more previous such calls in a two-year period; and that 35% of households suffered a second incident within five weeks of the first.

The extent and nature of violence among these victims of domestic violence varies. There is an important question as to whether it is possible to separate those who are most at risk of serious injury and death from those who are not. There are two main perspectives here, each drawing on different empirical evidence of risk factors: the first suggests that there are two quite different populations, one with low level and infrequent violence and the other with severe and frequent violence against women (Johnson, 1995). The second perspective suggests that there is a pattern of escalation, and that any level of violence is a risk factor for escalation to severe and frequent violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). This acknowledges that escalation may not be inevitable and desistance is possible (Feld and Straus, 1989, Woffordt et al, 1994).

Johnson (1995) suggests that it is possible to identify two distinct populations: first, 'common couple violence', in which partners engage in mutual combat; second, 'patriarchal terrorism', in which men ferociously subordinate and batter women. He suggests that the violent population reached in the national surveys (in particular the US National Family Violence Survey) is one in which quite a lot of men and women engage in relatively low impact fighting, 'common couple violence'. The population interviewed in shelter samples, among which there was very frequent severe violence from their partners, is described as suffering from 'patriarchal terrorism' and he regards this as a distinct group.

However, this analysis implies accepting the notion that much of the violence between women and men uncovered in the US National Family Violence Survey is symmetrical, while not denying the existence of a group of severely battered women. Yet, several studies provided reasons to doubt such a view of symmetry. Saunders (1988) argues on the basis of his study that women's domestic violence is primarily that of self-defence and retaliation. In this case, it is inappropriate to consider those couples where there is two-way violence as ones in which there is 'common couple violence', since the man is the aggressor in the overwhelming number of cases. Certainly, if reports to the police have any meaning, it must be noted that the overwhelming number of cases reported to the police involve violence from a man to a woman (Kelly, 1999), and thus are not appropriately conceptualised as 'mutual combat' nor 'common couple violence'.

Dobash & Dobash (1979) in a study of a sample of battered women from Scottish refuges described a process of escalation, in which, if there was no successful intervention, low levels of violence from a man would inexorably build into more severe violence. Their current research is investigating the circumstances in which there is homicide (Dobash et al, 1999). Feld & Straus (1989) find that while desistance is possible, nonetheless, minor violence is a risk factor for an escalation to major violence. Woffordt et al, (1994) found that though half their sample showed desistance over a three year period, a prior act of violence is one of the best predictors of future violence.

While it is difficult to predict in individual cases, previous assault is a risk factor for further assault. It is probable that assaults are likely to increase in severity unless there is a change of circumstances. The robustness and simplicity of this risk factor make it especially suitable for use in many professional contexts.

Separation

Women who are separated from their partners or husbands have a significantly higher risk of domestic violence than those in other marital

statuses. According to the BCS special report on domestic assault, 22% of those who are separated were assaulted in the previous year. Among men marital status is of little significance.

It is not possible to tell from this BCS data whether the separation was before or after the assault(s). However, other data suggests that post-separation is a dangerous period for women. Kelly et al (1999) found that a third of the assaults reported to the police in an Islington study were from ex-partners. Statistics Canada's Violence Against Women Survey found that among previously married women who reported violence in their relationship it occurred after separation for 19%. Among women for whom there was violence after separation, it began at separation for 8%, was a continuation of former violence for 92%, and showed an increase after separation for 35% (Statistics Canada, 1993: 26). Wilson and Daly (1994) show that in Canada the rate of husbands killing wives is elevated in the aftermath of separation. Thus, while for some women separation brings relief from violence from their partner, for others there is none, and for a significant minority it results in an escalation.

This finding of 'separation' as a very high risk factor for domestic violence is of particular relevance to those professionals who are engaged with women who are separating and/or divorcing. This includes those involved in family courts, child custody arrangements, child access, child support arrangements, and the allocation of emergency social housing.

Gender divisions and gender inequality

Patriarchal attitudes

The correlation between the holding of patriarchal attitudes and engaging in wife assault is often found. Sugarman and Frankel (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of 29 studies and showed that a majority found a correlation between a husband assaulting 'his' wife and his approving of the use of domestic violence. While some might argue that there can be some distance between holding patriarchal attitudes and actually beating a wife, this study found a clear correlation between the two phenomena.

Yllo and Straus (1990) show that there is more domestic violence against women in those US states which have strong patriarchal norms as compared with those which do not, using data from the first US National Family Violence Survey.

The significance of this risk factor is further supported by the findings from the Scottish male treatment programmes that targeted such patriarchal attitudes towards the use of violence against women. The results from this quasi-experiment showed a correlation between the reduction in such beliefs by the men on the programme and a reduction in the extent to which they used violence against their partners (Dobash et al, 2000).

Marital inequality

The two National Family Violence Surveys in the US found that inegalitarian family structures were a risk factor for violence, in that domestic violence was lowest in the most egalitarian families. Here the issue is the relative power of the partners, in which relative economic resources play a significant, but not solely determining role.

Coleman and Strauss (1986) found that when conflict occurs egalitarian households are the most resilient to the possibility of violence, that is less likely to resort to violence; that asymmetrical households were more likely to succumb to violence when conflicted than symmetrical ones. Drawing on the 1975 US National Family Violence Survey, Kalmuss and Straus (1982) found that women's dependency in marriage was a risk factor for violence, that violence was less likely where there was a more equal balance of resources between husbands and wives. Objective marital dependency was a sum of the scores of three dichotomous variables:

- whether the woman worked;
- whether she had children aged 5 or younger at home; and,
- whether her husband earned 75% or more of the couple's income.

The study found that the rate of severe violence was nearly three times higher among women in high objective dependency.

Poverty and social exclusion

Poverty is a risk factor for domestic violence. There are a number of partially separate, partially overlapping dimensions, including income, employment status and relative poverty. There are complex connections with other risk factors. There is an overlap with the issue of social isolation, in particular between non-employment and lack of social links. There is some mutual causation, with poverty partly being an outcome of domestic violence. Further, it is important to distinguish the risk factors for victims from those of perpetrators, since they entail different causal pathways, but the data is not always complete in this regard.

However, it should be remembered that domestic violence is not restricted to poor households and can be found across the economic spectrum.

Household income

People (men and women) in households that are poor are more likely to be assaulted by their partners than those that are in households which are better off. Evidence to support this can be found not only from the British Crime Survey, but also the US Family Violence Survey, and the Canadian Violence Against Women survey.

The 1996 special BCS module found that household income beneath £5,000 doubled the risk of domestic assault of the woman, but that the risk of assault of men was quite evenly spread across household income levels. Of women in households that earned less than £5,000 per year, 10% were assaulted in the previous year, while in households earning £5,000 to £20,000 3.7% were assaulted, and among households earning more than £20,000, 3.0%. However, while the risk increases significantly for poor households it does not disappear in better off households - domestic violence can be found across the income range.

Financial stress

Households in financial difficulties were two to three times more at risk of domestic violence than those that were financially secure. This was found among both sexes, with 12% of women and 10% of men being assaulted among households which were not managing (Mirrlees-Black, 1999).

Women's poverty

A low income level among women has been found to be a risk factor for domestic violence in several US studies.

Farmer and Tiefenthaler (1997) show that women's poverty is a risk factor for domestic violence. They estimate that a woman who receives an additional $100 in non-wage income per month experiences one less assault in a 6 month period; and that a woman with an additional $1,000 in monthly income has 6 fewer experiences of violence. They use data from small special samples in the US, including one from police call responses, so caution should be applied before generalising from the findings. They argue that the correlation exists because lack of income and other support decreases women's ability to threaten effectively to leave if they are subject to further domestic violence.

While the BCS does not report on women's income, it does report on related risk factors, such as access to housing, which is significantly related to household income. In the UK, housing tenure is a risk factor for women, with the BCS finding that women living as council or housing association tenants are more likely to be at risk, 8% reporting violence, as compared with owner occupiers, of whom 3% reported violence in the preceding year (Mirrlees-Black, 1999). However, it is hard to ascertain whether this is a cause or an effect of domestic violence.

Poverty and domestic violence may have mutually reinforcing impacts according to the work of the Taylor Institute in the US which is based on a series of small scale studies (Meier, 1997; Raphael, 1997; Lloyd, 1997). These studies found that the experience of domestic violence made it harder for women to hold down jobs as a result of lateness, increased ill health, and sabotage by the women's violent partners. Women receiving welfare are more likely to have been battered than other women, while

poverty increases women's vulnerability to violence. Thus while women's poverty may be associated with the risk of domestic violence, it is possible that the underlying causal pathways may, to some extent, go in both directions.

As shown above (Coleman and Straus, 1986), when marriages are more egalitarian people are less at risk of domestic violence. The lesser economic resources of women as compared with men is a structural feature of gender relations in most societies, systematically increasing women's vulnerability to domestic violence.

Employment status

Employment significantly affects the risk of domestic assault for women, according to data from the 1996 BCS (Mirrlees-Black, 1999). Women who were unemployed or housewives had the highest risk of domestic violence. Among women aged 16-29, 13.1% of those who were unemployed, and 11.5% of houseworkers were assaulted, as compared with 5.0% of those in full-time work, 9.6% of those in part-time work and 7.3% of students. Among women aged 30-59, 4.4% of houseworkers and 3.2% of unemployed were assaulted as compared with 1.9% of full-time workers and 2.0% of part-time workers. Employment status does not impact on the risk of men to domestic assault to the same extent that it does for women, according to BCS data.

There are various ways in which women's employment status could link to their varying vulnerability to domestic violence: for instance, the lack of financial resources to leave, bargain or threaten to leave; and greater social isolation and thus lesser access to informal and formal support networks. Employment status is also linked to the amount of household income, so it is not unexpected to see similarities in these two risk factors. A further overlapping risk factor is that of age, since younger people are more likely to be poor, unemployed and live as tenants.

The BCS does not report on the employment status of the perpetrator of the violence, only that of the victim, thus providing no evidence to assess the impact of employment status on the propensity to commit domestic violence. However, there is a report on the social class of the 'head of household'. This is correlated with the extent of violence against women, to some extent, since households where 'the head of household' has an occupation in the two least skilled categories report the highest rates of assault against women, 6%, as compared with 3% in the professional 'households'. However, the significance of the social class of the household is not overwhelming and domestic violence exists across the class spectrum.

The Finnish national survey reports on the employment status of male perpetrators. They found that the employment status of the male partner

was a risk factor in the assault of a woman. Of men who assaulted their partner in the previous 12 months, 16.1% were students, 13% unemployed or laid off, 12.6% working part-time, 9.6% working full-time, 8.8% were entrepreneurs, 5% were farming entrepreneurs, and 5% were retired (Heiskanen and Piispa, 1998).

Pregnancy

There is some correlation between pregnancy and domestic violence. However, there is a question in the literature as to whether pregnancy actually constitutes an underlying cause.

Statistics Canada found that among women who had ever been married, 21% recalled violence during pregnancy. Among this group the violence occurred for the first time in 40% of these women (1993: 27).

Mezey and Bewley (1997) have suggested that violence against women can start or intensify during pregnancy. This is the subject of ongoing research (Mezey, 1999). There are several small scale studies which appear to show a correlation between pregnancy and domestic abuse (e.g. Bohn, 1990), though at least one meta-analysis urges caution because many studies typically lack direct comparisons between pregnant and non-pregnant women (Gazmararian et al, 1996).

However, Gielen et al (1994) show that violence against women around the time of pregnancy is actually higher after the birth of the child than during the pregnancy. Their analysis is based on a longitudinal analysis of 275 women who were interviewed during pregnancy and six months after the birth.

The correlation between pregnancy and violence may exist because young women are a group at higher than average risk of domestic violence (see below) and pregnant women disproportionately fall into this group. Gelles (1988), using data from the second US National Family Violence Survey suggests that the correlation between pregnancy and domestic violence is spurious. He argues that it is not pregnancy per se which creates the higher risk, but rather age, the younger age of both the woman and the perpetrator, which is independently correlated with increased risk of domestic violence. When age is held constant the greater violence experienced by pregnant women as compared with non-pregnant women largely, but not completely, disappears.

However, violence during pregnancy can harm the foetus and ultimately have implications for the health of the new child (Bullock and McFarlane, 1989). Further, pregnancy is a time when women are subject to more regular and more intense medical scrutiny than average, so it may well be an opportune moment for intervention (Covington et al, 1997).

Ethnicity

There are no significant differences in risk of domestic violence by ethnicity reported in the BCS (Mirrlees-Black, 1999). However, Mama (1989) showed that minority ethnic women may have greater difficulties in accessing support services than white women. This is for a variety of reasons that include racism among service providers, language difficulties, and cultural differences. Specialist provision is under development in certain localities, for instance, the London Borough of Camden (Sen, 1997) as a consequence.

Ill health and disability

Various forms of physical vulnerability appear as risk markers for domestic violence. There are higher rates of victimisation by domestic and sexual violence for those who suffer from: ill health (Mirrlees-Black, 1999); bulimia (Kaner et al, 1993); and mental illness (Weinhardt et al, 1999). However, it is hard to fully disentangle cause from effect, since, while on the one hand, poor physical or mental health may be a result of physical injury or psychological harassment, on the other, physical or mental vulnerability may reduce the capacity for effective resistance to domestic violence.

Disabled women are at greater risk of victimisation from domestic and sexual violence (Chenoweth, 1997; Sobsey and Doe, 1991). The extent of the greater victimisation in the UK context would benefit from further research.

Violent family of origin

Being raised in a violent family is a risk factor associated with becoming a perpetrator that has one of the highest profiles in the literature. There is an extensive body of psychological literature that has tested this thesis and usually, but not always, found a correlation. However, a correlation is not a cause. Investigation of the causal processes which might lie behind this correlation has found that of greater importance are: beliefs in the legitimacy of beating wives and associating with other like-minded men; and an anti-social personality similar to that sometimes associated with a criminal career.

Drawing on data from the first US National Family Violence Survey, Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) found that men who as children witnessed violence between their parents as children are three times as likely to abuse their female partners in adulthood. Those who had

Witnessing abuse

Dutton, Starzomski & Ryan, 1996

Sample and Design: 140 men referred for wife assault and 45 matched controls
Findings: They found a correlation between abuse of a wife and an abusive personality. They show that paternal rejection (which included physical abuse) was the strongest predictor of abusive personality. The authors suggest that abusing men have personalities in which independence behaviours by partners could trigger extreme rage because such a loss would threaten the way their identities were constructed.

Downs, Smyth and Miller, 1996

Sample and Design: Extensive literature review on correlations between experiences of violence in childhood, partner abuse and alcohol abuse.
Findings: Although there are robust correlations between these three phenomena, mediating variables are very significant. These include both an 'anti-social personality' disorder and also 'depression'.

Simons, Wu, Johnson and Conger, 1995

Sample and Design: Analysed data from a sample of 451 white midwestern families who lived on farms or small towns.
Findings: If they controlled for anti-social behaviour trait, the relationship was eliminated between harsh treatment during childhood and adult family violence. Anti-social behaviour is here seen as the crucial mediating variable between harsh parenting and future abuse.

Silverman and Williamson, 1997

Sample and Design: A self-completion survey of a sample of 193 college men, of whom 21% admitted to abusing female partners.
Findings: There was an important mediating variable, that of associating with abusive men and holding beliefs that it was OK to beat women under certain circumstances, for instance, if they were sexually unfaithful. This latter association was more important than witnessing family violence as a child.

witnessed severe marital violence were ten times as likely to be abusive to their female partners in adulthood as those who had witnessed no such violence.

In a meta-analysis of case comparisons, Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) found an association between childhood witnessing of parental violence and husband to wife assault in 88% of the relevant empirical studies they considered.

While the correlation between violence in the family of origin and a man

using violence against his partner is well established, a causal link is not. Initially it appears that there are two competing underlying models: one, a social learning perspective in which men acquire a specific form of 'normal' masculinity; the second, a perspective in which psychologically damaged men are out of control and have 'impaired' masculinity. These models were modified and made more complex by the introduction of 'mediating variables', that is, factors which intervene between the witnessing and the later abusing. Finally, some of these 'mediating variables' have been shown to be more important than the initial presenting risk factor, that is, witnessing parental assault is found to be a spurious correlation with later wife assault. There is an enormous literature in this field, albeit largely US, so only selected articles are summarised opposite.

So, while there is extensive empirical support for a correlation between witnessing violence as a child and going on to being an abusive adult, many of these studies are arguing that the 'mediating' variables are actually key to the causal analysis. The two main variables here are: anti-social personality; and, associating with other abusive men who think that it is legitimate for men to beat their wives. On the one hand some studies suggest a convergence of the factors associated with abusive men with that of typical criminal careers, especially via the factor of 'anti-social personality'. On the other hand, some studies have shown that a sub-culture of patriarchal attitudes actually constitutes the underlying causal link.

Child abuse

There is robust evidence of some degree of co-occurrence of different forms of family violence, in particular that of assault of the wife (or female co-habitee) and child abuse. In this way, child abuse may be seen as a risk marker for domestic violence (as well as vice versa). Appel and Holden (1998) found 42 studies of some co-occurrence of spouse and physical child abuse, of which they review 31, overwhelmingly of US origin. As compared with a community base of co-occurrence of 6% found in the 1985 US National Family Violence Survey, they found that clinical samples of either battered women or physically abused children found an overlap ranging from 20% to 100%, with a median rate of 40%. They suggest that the differences between the studies may be a result of variations in the definition of abuse; in the characteristics of the samples, in particular that the samples derived from refuges tap into a different and more severely victimised group; the source of the report; and the definition of the relationships at stake. The underlying models include that of the single perpetrator, usually that of a man who abuses both wife and child; a sequential model in which the man abuses the women who abuses the child; and bi- and multi-directional models in which there is reciprocal

causation. They suggest that the studies they examined primarily support the identification of the man as the abuser of both spouse and child. Further reviews and studies that echo these findings include Kolbo et al (1996) and McKay (1994). Daly et al (1993) found evidence of co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse especially in stepfamilies where the man was not the father of the woman's child, using data from Canada, US and UK.

The UK literature on co-occurrence, though much more sparse, also provides some evidence, though less systematic, of co-occurrence of spousal assault and child abuse, and thus of child abuse as a risk marker for domestic violence. Kelly (1996), in her review primarily of the UK and Irish literature, finds that there is evidence of co-occurrence of domestic abuse of women by men and of child abuse. Browne and Hamilton (forthcoming) found that 46% of the 256 families referred for child abuse to the West Midlands police were found to experience domestic violence, making domestic violence the most common risk factor for child abuse. Further, 40% of the index children in families referred for domestic violence had previously been referred for child abuse. The figures may well be underestimates of the extent of the overlap between domestic violence and child abuse, since there appeared to be no systematic treatment of the reporting of the events between the child abuse and domestic violence units. Mullender and Morley (1994) likewise state that there is an overlap between domestic violence and child abuse in the UK.

Age

Youth is a risk factor for domestic violence. The BCS found that 10.1% of women aged 16-19 and 9.2% aged 20-24 reported that they had been assaulted in the previous year (as compared with an average of 4.2%), while 9.2% of men aged 20-24 said they had been assaulted. The risk declines steadily with age (though the survey has a cut off at age 59), with around 1% of 45-59 year olds reporting assault in the previous year.

This correlation with youth is also found in other national surveys: the Australian Women's Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996); the Statistics Finland survey (Statistics Finland, 1998); the Statistics Canada survey (Johnson, 1996), among others.

Though this is a very robust correlation, there is little attempt in the literature to explain why youth is such a highly correlated risk factor. It could be speculated that there are a number of causal pathways including:

- youth correlates with unemployment and lack of financial resources which are themselves risk factors;

- youth is related to less maturity and experience;
- youth is implicated in general theories of criminal career; or
- alternatively it may be that age has an independent correlation with criminal behaviour (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983).

Contexts

The literature so far considered has been comparing the risk of domestic violence between individuals within the same society. This pushes the analysis towards a consideration of individual attributes of risk. A different approach is to ask about the risk of domestic violence in different social and societal contexts. This would tend to address issues more relevant to desistance than to onset. This includes: the availability of formal and informal support services; the readiness and availability of kin and friends to provide assistance, especially sanctuary; the extent and effectiveness of sanctions, both informal and formal. The literature on many of the agencies that provide formal support and sanctions will be covered in other chapters, so the material addressed here will be limited.

Desistance is an important process in the determination of the risk of domestic violence. A far higher proportion of women have a lifetime experience of domestic violence than are currently subject to it (at least in the previous year). According to the BCS, 22.7% of women aged 16-59 who had had a partnership had experienced a domestic assault at some time in their lives, as compared with 4.2% in the previous year. Thus 18.5% of all partnered women and 81% of women who reported abuse sometime in their life had found some way of getting the violence to stop. This might involve either leaving the violent relationship or staying in the relationship and getting the man to change his behaviour.

Horton and Johnson (1993) studied women all of whom had ended abuse in order to ask what had made a difference to the outcome. They compared three groups of women: those who had left the abuser (the overwhelming majority); those who were still in a relationship with the man and were satisfied with their relationship; those who were still in a relationship with the man and were not satisfied with their relationship. The differential use of resources from outside the relationship was a major source of different outcome: those who did not use resources were more likely to have ended the relationship; those who did were more likely to have stayed. In particular, those women whose partners availed themselves of programmes, such as those treating alcoholism, were more likely to still be in a relationship. However, one of the most significant sources of different outcome was a non-treatment related variable, that of whether the man had ever forced the woman to have sex - where this was the case few women were still in a relationship. It would appear that in a few

circumstances certain men are treatable and the relationship can survive if the woman is able to access outside input for both herself and her partner, but not in others. The sample was a volunteer sample and this may of course affect findings.

The importance of 'sanctions' and 'sanctuary' are the conclusion of a comparative analysis of 14 societies using ethnographies (Counts et al, 1992). Brown (1992) and Campbell (1992) in their overviews of this material conclude that sanctions against wife battering, and the availability of a sanctuary to which women can retreat are the most important factors in predicting in which societies wife battering is widespread. The sanctions were of various kinds, ranging from informal interventions and protests by neighbours and kin, to the more formal legal sanctions found in more complex societies. Sanctions from kin were more likely to be available to women who had not moved far from their families of origin. Sanctions are less available if the woman is more socially isolated. For instance, in more complex societies the greater privacy afforded the nuclear family can increase the woman's social isolation, reduce the availability of informal social sanctions, and thus increase the risk of wife battering. Sanctuary is also of great importance. To be most effective this needs to be immediate, to be available for long as well as short periods, and to involve the safety of those who offer sanctuary as well as the abused wife, and to protect the woman from the removal of her children. Economic dependency is negatively correlated with both sanctions and sanctuary, since female economic work groups or women's paid labour can reduce social isolation, thus affecting the likelihood that sanctions can be invoked and women's capacity to seek sanctuary.

Professional assessments of risk

There are many public services, support agencies, and voluntary bodies which are of enormous assistance to those who have suffered from domestic violence, and in many diverse ways make important contributions to achieving desistance and thus to reducing the risk of domestic violence. The role of some bodies, such as Women's Aid, is so obvious that they need little mention (Harwin, 1997). The sections below concentrate on those agencies and services that are currently engaged in improving the assessment and management of risk of domestic violence among the groups that they serve. There are three main issues: the ways in which assessment of risk is being integrated into policies and procedures; the extent to which this assessment is able to draw upon appropriate evidence from the research community; the relevance and practicability of targeting.

Assessing risk

Is there a single piece of information which is easy to obtain, unambiguous in form, easy to measure, the obtaining of which does not have untoward side effects, which busy professionals can use to assess robustly and consistently, the likelihood that the person in front of them is at risk of domestic violence and, in particular, is at risk of severe injury?

From some of the data in the previous section it might be thought that the risk profile of a domestic violence victim needs to be built in complex and composite terms including:

- young age;
- female;
- poor household;
- housewife or unemployed; and
- unemployed partner, whose partner witnessed his father beating his mother, associates with other men who think that wife beating is legitimate, and lives in a part of the country where support services are hard to find.

Fortunately, this is an inappropriate conclusion to draw. It is not only that this is too complex for busy professionals. More importantly it may well be counter-productive. This is because while there is some clustering of domestic violence, it is nonetheless experienced by people from all backgrounds to some extent. Any development of stereotypes of typical victims may well be extremely problematic for the effective provision of services to those who do not fit within these pictures of typical victims.

The research literature suggests a simpler answer. The simplest risk marker is that of previous assault. The best evidence of this is if the client has told the professional of this. Records of any previous incidents, or any previous pleas for help, suggest an increased risk.

A second simple risk marker is that of separation. Indeed it is at the point of separation that many women who have been subject to domestic violence go to the agencies under discussion.

While, however, the markers themselves are straightforward, many agencies might find their effective use more complicated if it entails changes to established procedures.

This risk assessment procedure is of course heavily dependent upon the victim's own assessment of her situation and her decision that she needs help to avoid further violence. Her assessment may, of course, be wrong. But she does, after all, have considerably more detailed information to hand about her case than anyone else, such as the number, frequency and severity of previous assaults. What the victim often lacks, however, is comparative information as to the likelihood of her various strategies of containment and/or resolution being successful. It is here that information

and advice from agencies and meeting other women who are in or who have previously faced her predicament can be of great value (Davies, 1998). Potentially many agencies could deliver such information. Currently, the most important agency here is that of the Women's Aid refuge. Here she can reassess her own risk assessment with those who face her predicament, those who know how the system of support agencies works.

The public services

Police

The effect on crime levels of tackling repeat victimisation has led to this being set as a performance indicator for the police for 1999-2000, and domestic violence has been emphasised as a classic example of repeat victimisation. However, the information systems necessary to implement a policy prioritising repeat domestic violence victimisation by the police are often lacking. 41% of police interviewed in a Home Office study stated that their force did not even monitor the level of repeat victimisation let alone have procedures for reliably communicating this information to the responding officer (Plotnikoff and Woolfson, 1998). Recent pilot schemes may lead the way to improved practice (Hanmer and Griffiths, 1999). However, many practising officers continue to use their own risk assessments which involve criteria which are seriously at variance with policy, despite more than a decade of attempts at reform (Kelly, 1999).

Health services

In the US there is an extremely large literature about assessing the risk of domestic violence. This is focused around the extent to which health staff, especially those in front line situations such as Accident and Emergency Departments, can accurately identify those whose injuries result from domestic violence and what they should do with that information. (See for instance, Brown et al, 1993; Flitcraft et al, 1992; Furbee et al, 1998; Stark & Flitcraft, 1996). Indeed, the US Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organisations requires written policies and procedures on domestic violence in emergency departments (Stevens, 1997). There have been important recent developments in the UK NHS about the detection and response to domestic violence, as discussed in chapter 4 of this volume. However, it should be noted that the discussion of the issue of 'screening' by academics, doctors and Women's Aid at the seminar organised by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists raised important practical issues. In particular, that screening would make a positive contribution only in the context of appropriately trained staff, time and resources to take appropriate action, back up support systems, and links to other agencies for specific referrals, that is, a broad range of policy innovation (Bewley et al, 1997).

Civil court agency procedures

Civil court and agency (such as the Child Support Agency) procedures around separation, divorce, child custody and child support have given cause for concern for their tendency to underestimate the frequency and impact of domestic violence among those using their services.

Additionally, a survey by the Women's Aid Federation England found that women in refuges had experienced further abuse from partners as a result of contact insisted upon by contact orders made under the 1989 Children Act (WAFE, 1993).

The trend towards mediated rather than adversarial systems of conflict resolution of separating couples, especially in relation to child custody has raised questions as to its suitability in cases of domestic violence. Hart (1990) has suggested that US evidence shows that mediation between former partners in the aftermath of domestic violence is not suitable. A history of the violence, with its power imbalances, is considered to make it impossible to achieve the fairness and balance needed to make this procedure a success. Hester & Radford (1996), on the basis of a comparison of practice in England and Denmark, reach parallel conclusions and argue that where there has been a history of domestic violence it has been rare to find child contact arrangements which are able to guarantee the safety of the women involved.

The probation service, which may be involved in these processes as part of their family court welfare work, uses a set of guidelines derived from the Home Office and Association of Chief Officers of Probation. This states that women should be free to choose separate rather than joint interviews when there has been domestic violence in order to safeguard the woman's safety (Ashworth, 1995).

However, given the extremely high recorded prevalence of domestic violence in separating couples (which itself may well be an under-reporting), and the increased dangers around enforced contact, it has been be suggested that these guidelines do not go far enough in protecting abused women and need further revision. There are ongoing localised developments in policy here that are in need of evaluation.

Housing

Women on the point of separation, need access to housing. Housing is both a safety requirement and indeed necessary to enable women to leave a violent partner. Further, since it appears that poorer women suffer higher rates of domestic violence, and are less likely to be able to afford housing in the private sector, there is an increased need to consider the allocative practices for social housing.

Improving abused women's access to housing to facilitate their escape is an issue which has been high on the agenda of those who have direct contact with women who have suffered domestic violence, as illustrated in

the report of the National Inter-Agency Working Party on Domestic Violence (Victim Support, 1992). This has been recognised in the development of legislation to prioritise the needs of battered women.

There have been several examples of innovative policy development in local authorities in relation to housing. For instance, the London Borough of Camden has extensively developed innovative and comprehensive policy and procedure in relation to domestic violence over its full range of services (London Borough of Camden, 1996, 1999); while the London Borough of Newham has a proposed domestic violence strategy to co-ordinate its full range of services (Choo, 1999).

One example of an innovative policy development specifically in relation to housing which was not evaluated is that in the London Borough of Greenwich, 1993-7. This involved:

- identifying a need to improve policy in relation to domestic violence;
- arranging training courses; and
- recruiting a Housing Domestic Violence co-ordinator to oversee the new policy and procedures.

However, while the new policy remains in force, the co-ordinator's post ceased to exist in 1997, and with it systematic monitoring and consistent training (Bowstead, 1999).

Social work

Women seeing social workers appear to have a significantly higher than average rate of experience of domestic violence, for instance, one small scale study finding one in three social work client files contained reference to domestic violence (Maynard, 1985). Yet the systematic treatment of domestic violence by social work appears to be very uneven, despite its connection to other issues, in particular that a male abuser may be abusing his partner as well as the child (Mullender, 1996, 1997; Mullender and Morley, 1994). Farmer and Owen (1995) and Kelly (1996) make a strong case for the identification of domestic violence against women and support to be given to her in order to best protect children at risk of abuse, yet note that this is rarely forthcoming in child protection work.

The New Deal and leaving violent men

The combination of risk factors relating to poverty and social exclusion discussed earlier put lone parents at high risk from domestic violence. It follows therefore that clients participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents will be from a high risk group. Abused women have a worse economic position than average, being less likely to be in employment, more likely to be unemployed, and more likely to be in low income households; separating women, are a high risk group. Lone mothers are

more likely to be poor. Lone mothers have lower rates of employment than married women (Walby, 1997).

Over three quarters of individuals in lone parent families are in the bottom two fifths of the income distribution. (Bradshaw et al, 1996).

Women who are leaving violent men are thus at high risk of poverty and, as a consequence of approaching the Benefits Agency for income support, and to being (voluntary) participants of the New Deal for Lone Parents. This has consequences for the training programmes for New Deal Advisers.

US policy experience suggests that some women fleeing violent men may need time and assistance before they are able to participate effectively in training and labour market placements; indeed in light of this, battered women are exempted from the new welfare benefit cut-offs in the US (Murphy, 1997).

Conclusion

The simplest and most robust risk marker for domestic violence is a previous assault. The greater the frequency of previous assaults, the more likely will be further assaults. The evidence does not support a clear separation into two populations, one of which is at serious risk of minor violence and one which is at risk of major violence. Rather, there can be escalation from minor to severe violence, although escalation is not inevitable.

Women's active attempts to achieve desistance can be successful, though it would appear that it often entails ending the relationship. The process of leaving a violent man is high risk in itself, with separation being associated with an increased risk. Agencies need to have policies and procedures that take this risk into account.

While there are significant correlations between domestic violence and poverty, these are not extreme, and domestic violence can be found throughout the class spectrum. Nevertheless, lack of economic resources (more common in women's than men's lives) makes it harder for a woman to leave a violent man.

While there is a correlation between men's experience of a violent family and subsequent abuse, there is doubt as to whether this is more than a spurious correlation. The underlying causal pathways appear to involve either an anti-social personality and the attributes traditionally linked to the concept of a criminal career; or a belief system involving the approval of wife beating and other forms of gender inequality.

Gender inequality is a risk factor in domestic violence.

Most women who successfully achieve desistance do so with the active assistance of a large number and range of outside agencies, including

Women's Aid, the criminal justice system, and welfare and support agencies.

Much of the existing research has focused on the risks associated with the onset of domestic violence, and much less on the factors behind desistance. Research on desistance would be of especial use for programmes to reduce domestic violence.

Costs and knowledge

The costs of domestic violence are enormous. However, we cannot estimate these accurately without good data on the prevalence and incidence of domestic violence.

Without an accurate estimate of the prevalence of the risk of domestic violence in the population and particular groups it is hard to develop evidence based professional practice. Many professionals have commented on the need to have better evidence as to the risk of domestic violence in order to ensure that their policies and procedures are appropriate.

A dedicated random sample national survey is the only method that can adequately provide the knowledge of the full extent of this violence. In particular, such a survey could provide information on factors associated with desistance if it included lifetime patterns of violence.

The BCS does not collect data on a range of issues pertinent to the analysis of the risk of domestic violence, partly because in a generic crime survey there is insufficient time to focus on this particular set of issues. It does not contain sufficient information to adequately address many significant issues including:

- desistance and the factors associated with this, such as use of specific agencies;
- escalation, the changing frequency and severity of assaults, and the factors associated with this;
- the impact of women's income, since there is no question on this;
- the relationship of domestic violence to other victimisation, such as stalking which might follow on from prior domestic violence, since the questions are limited to domestic violence;
- the relative prevalence of domestic violence against pregnant women; and
- the relative prevalence of domestic violence before and after separation.

The majority of the work on the assessment of the risk of domestic violence is from the US. There have been new generations of national surveys on violence against women that have been carried out in the US, Canada, Australia, Finland, Iceland and the Netherlands and are under development in Sweden and Germany. We do not know to what extent

findings from other countries may be accurately applied to the UK, since there are significant differences, for instance in the nature and effect of the criminal justice system, welfare system, patterns of social exclusion and of gender relations.

Thus, there is need for a new generation survey of violence against women in the UK in order to estimate more fully the extent and nature of the risks of domestic violence. There is a need for data which can accurately assess the risks of different groups, so as to assist the public services and other agencies to tailor their policies and procedures more effectively to meet these needs. (Some, but far from all, of these additional data are being collected in the BCS2001 module on interpersonal violence.)

Many professions, services and agencies are quite rightly concerned to develop their policies and procedures in the light of new knowledge about domestic violence. There is a lot of new innovative practice, but developments are uneven. Policies need to be evaluated and the results disseminated so as to speed more widespread adoption of best practice. For many there will be costs to develop appropriate policies and protocols, which will need to be evaluated for their impact. While in many instances a type of quasi-experimental design may be an important tool in such an evaluation, it is unlikely to be sufficient in all cases, since many agencies will need an independent measure of the prevalence and incidence of domestic violence in their client populations.

The analysis of risk factors for domestic violence suggests that there are many places where new or enhanced interventions are possible to reduce domestic violence.