

## THE GENDER DEBATE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: THE ROLE OF DATA

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### **Key points**

- The gender debate is one of the enduring controversies in domestic violence research. On the one hand, feminist researchers have long identified 'gender asymmetry' in domestic violence, arguing that women are the primary targets of abuse and that men comprise the large majority of perpetrators. On the other hand, family conflict researchers typically find 'gender symmetry', arguing that women and men experience and perpetrate violence at similar rates.
- Within the gender debate, two of the most contentious issues concern researchers' definitions of domestic violence and their methods of data collection.
- Feminist and family conflict researchers differ in how they conceptualise violence in relationships. Feminist researchers emphasise the wider dynamics of domestic violence: why it occurs, how it manifests and victim outcomes. Family conflict researchers define violence more narrowly, being primarily concerned with measuring incidents of violence between partners.
- Feminist and family conflict researchers also differ in their data collection methods. Feminist researchers tend to favour qualitative approaches commonly used in clinical studies, as well as quantitative information collected via officially reported data and community sample surveys. Family conflict researchers tend to favour quantitative approaches, relying predominantly on acts-based surveys (such as the Conflict Tactics Scale).
- These differences in turn influence feminist and family conflict researchers' findings about men's and women's experiences and perpetration of violence. In particular, their findings conflict in relation to perpetrator motivation for violence, forms and levels of abuse, severity of abuse, repetition of violence and impacts on victims.
- Certainly, all violence in intimate relationships is unacceptable. However, an accurate analysis of the relationship between gender and domestic violence is essential to develop effective prevention and responses.
- No single type of data collection method provides a complete picture of domestic violence. Furthermore, individual studies or data sets vary considerably in depth and quality of information. Researchers and practitioners, therefore, need to be mindful of the strengths and weaknesses of a chosen approach when drawing conclusions and making recommendations.
- From the real life examples presented in this paper and in many other studies canvassed, practitioners and advocates should have confidence in claims of gender asymmetry in domestic violence.

## INTRODUCTION

As our knowledge of domestic violence has deepened over the past forty years, considerable controversy has developed over exactly who is violent in relationships and who are the victims of violence. Feminist researchers, practitioners and advocates have long identified women as the primary targets of abuse, with male partners and ex-partners comprising the large majority of perpetrators. Yet, increasingly there have been counterclaims about 'gender symmetry' in domestic violence. Conflicting academic findings continue to mount, with Google Scholar retrieving nearly 4000 items at the time of writing for the combined search terms 'gender', '\*symmetry' and 'domestic violence'.

The scholarly debate has contributed to changing public perceptions about gender and domestic violence. Australian surveys show that community attitudes have shifted since the mid-1990s towards an increasing view of domestic violence as gender neutral (Australian Institute of Criminology, The Social Research Centre & VicHealth 2009, p. 34). Moves to implement gender neutral domestic violence policy, legislation and programs have become the subject of considerable contention in Australia and overseas (e.g. see DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz 2009; Hearn & McKie 2008; Johnson & Dawson 2011; Miller, Gregory & Iovanni 2005; Vincent & Eveline 2010). Good quality data on domestic violence is clearly critical to this debate, as recognised in Australian policy documents like the *National plan to reduce violence against women and their children: including the first three-year action plan* (Council of Australian Governments 2011) and *Conceptual framework for family and domestic violence* (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009). However, data collection itself is acknowledged as challenging, in terms of ensuring it is representative, accurate and broad enough to capture relevant factors, while being focused enough to be useful.

In this Issues Paper, we examine the role of data in the gender debate. We consider what different research approaches can and cannot tell us about gender and violence in intimate relationships. Key arguments about research methods and findings made by proponents of gender asymmetry (i.e. men are more likely to be violent and women more likely to be victims) and proponents of gender symmetry (i.e. men

and women are equally violent and equally likely to be victims) are compared. While this Issues Paper cannot be comprehensive in its coverage of the literature given the vast amount of published research and years of debate on this issue, we aim to guide readers through the critical issues being contested.

Certainly, all violence in intimate relationships is unacceptable. We do not suggest that violence perpetrated by one gender be condoned while the other is reviled. Rather, as Flood (2012) has argued, we consider that an accurate analysis of domestic violence – its pattern, risk factors and its social and structural causes – is essential to develop effective prevention and responses. If men's and women's perpetration and experience of violence are distinct, then targeted responses are required to address their different needs and experiences.

This Issues Paper begins with a discussion of definitions and data collection methods employed to investigate gender and violence in relationships, and how they might influence evidence gathered and conclusions drawn. We then examine four sources of data commonly relied on as evidence to support the cases for either gender asymmetry or symmetry: (i) officially reported violence statistics; (ii) community sample surveys; (iii) the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) and (iv) clinical studies. The paper concludes by looking at the implications for practice and research.

In consideration of these issues, our focus remains on violence between heterosexual intimate partners rather than violence between same sex couples or other family members. This is because it is the level of violence between women and men that remains most contested within the gender asymmetry/symmetry debate. Throughout the paper, we make reference to 'domestic violence' or 'partner violence' as perpetrated by someone against a current or previous intimate partner. The broader term, 'family violence', is used to refer to violence employed by any member of a family against another member, including violence against partners, children, parents and siblings. Data on family violence has only been included where disaggregated statistics on domestic violence are not available. Although the paper does not explicitly investigate violence in same-sex relationships, it is possible that data provided by studies cited in this paper did include some same sex couples in their samples.

## RESEARCHING GENDER IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Among those investigating issues of gender and violence in relationships, feminist researchers generally find gender asymmetry in its perpetration and experience. This research is characterised by the work of Dale Bagshaw, Donna Chung, Molly Dragiewicz, Walter DeKeseredy, Rebecca and Russell Dobash, Michael Flood, Marianne Hester, Holly Johnson, Michael Johnson, Michael Kimmel, Evan Stark, Julie Stubbs and Jane Wangmann. In contrast, family conflict researchers typically report gender symmetry, exemplified in research by Donald Dutton, Richard Gelles, Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rolling, JE Stets, Suzanne Steinmetz and, most prominently, Murray Straus. Both groups of researchers may draw on a range of data sources and methods to support their arguments although family conflict researchers tend to rely on acts-based approaches. In researching gender and domestic violence, some of the most contentious issues concern the definition of violence and methods used for data collection.

### DEFINING VIOLENCE

Feminist and family conflict researchers greatly differ in how they conceptualise violence in relationships which, we argue, in turn influences the evidence they gather. To understand domestic violence, feminist researchers investigate its wider dynamic within relationships: why it occurs, how it manifests and victim outcomes. Family conflict researchers focus their investigations more narrowly, being primarily concerned with measuring incidents of violence between partners. Importantly, feminist researchers see domestic violence as taking place in and contributing to a context of gender inequality (Reed et al. 2010; Stark 2010). They link men's use of violence in their relationships to wider social norms and structures that legitimise male aggression and privilege male dominance, noting that men's greater use of violence outside the home is replicated inside the home. While some gender symmetry proponents acknowledge violence can be a manifestation of gender inequality, they argue that this does not account for their findings of women's use of violence. They also point to a wide range of other causes of violence in relationships, such as poor anger management, conflict or, in severe cases, psychopathology (Dutton 2012; Straus 2009).

**Motivation:** A key point of difference between these researchers concerns a person's motivation to be violent. Feminist researchers direct their gaze to violent behaviour that is 'instrumental'; that is, where a person coerces and controls their partner in order to gain benefits and resources within the relationship (Johnson 2006; Kimmel 2002; Stark 2010). Some violent incidents would, therefore, be excluded from this definition, such as when a person is violent on a single occasion because they are angry, rather than in order to control their partner (Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy 2012; Hamberger 2005; Kimmel 2002; Osthoff 2002; Stark 2010). Similarly, a person who acts violently in self-defence, retaliation or frustration to years of abuse against them would not be considered a domestic violence perpetrator. Family conflict researchers do not generally draw this distinction and measure any violent incident between partners that falls within their parameters. This includes 'expressive' violent behaviour, such as conflict over disagreements, annoyances, bad mood or tiredness (Straus 1979), rather than necessarily a desire to control one's partner. Notably, Straus et al. (1996) initially argued that a person's motivation is unimportant to an examination of violence, although more recently he and other family conflict researchers have argued that women's and men's motivations for violence are the same (Carney, Buttell & Dutton 2007; Dutton & Nicholls 2005; Straus 2008).

**Forms of violence:** Perpetrators may use one or multiple forms of violence to hurt, intimidate and control their partner. Feminist researchers may consider some or all of the following in their studies of domestic violence: physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse; property damage; threats to kill or abuse; and post separation violence (such as stalking and homicide). Family conflict researchers tend to identify a smaller range of behaviours as aggressive or violent. These are typically limited to acts of physical assault (and sometimes sexual violence), psychological aggression and coercive negotiation. They also typically focus on violence between current partners, thereby excluding all post separation violence.

**Severity:** The perpetration of severe domestic violence can have major implications for victims. As well as the long term mental health consequences associated with violence-induced trauma, physical outcomes may include: serious injury; chronic pain; disability; miscarriage; and, at its most extreme, victim death. Feminist researchers see severity of domestic violence as particularly important to understanding this issue and observe a large gender gap in terms of severity of

men's and women's violence. While acknowledging the dangers posed by severe physical violence, they also recognise that many victims consider psychological abuse by partners to be worse than physical abuse, with longer lasting consequences. Family conflict researchers also consider severity, ranking violent acts as either minor or severe. However, these studies frequently exclude sexual assault and other serious forms of violence like stalking and homicide, the latter due to only considering violence by and against current partners.

**Repetition of violence:** Tracking repetition of violence in a relationship informs as to whether incidents form part of a pattern of behaviour, whether the violence is frequent and/or escalating, and whether the abuser represents an ongoing threat. As feminist analysis identifies domestic violence as a pattern of controlling behaviour, repetition is an important consideration. Consequently, they would not generally consider an isolated abusive episode as domestic violence, except where a perpetrator used that event to subsequently intimidate or threaten a victim. Family conflict researchers, in contrast, generally focus on violent acts taking place within a twelve month period. Thus, they are unable to consider longer histories and patterns of violence. Any violent episode taking place within that twelve month period would be considered evidence of a violent relationship.

**Outcomes:** Knowledge of outcomes of violence for victims allows for effective targeting of responses to their needs and acknowledgment domestic violence as a serious social issue requiring concerted action. Outcomes for victims are viewed by feminist researchers as critical to an understanding of domestic violence; in particular, victims' fear for their and others' safety, experience of physical and/or psychological injuries, homelessness or other financial deprivation. Fear is an important consideration given that fear for personal safety or for one's life is a critical outcome of violence and is inherently bound to forms of control and coercion (Kimmel 2002; Stark 2010). Family conflict researchers place less emphasis on victim outcomes, although injury is measured in some studies. Indeed, while acknowledging that women are likely to experience more harms than men as a consequence of partner violence, family conflict researchers accord this finding limited importance, particularly as they consider that it bears little impact on estimates of perpetration of violence by men and women (Dutton 2012; Frieze 2005; Robertson & Murachver 2007; Straus 2011).

## DATA COLLECTION

In addition to definitional differences, feminist and family conflict researchers can differ in their data collection methods.

Feminist researchers tend to favour qualitative approaches commonly used in clinical studies. Clinical studies rely on client groups of agencies or services or self-selected groups. Typically, they use interviews or focus groups with victims or perpetrators. They may also make use of detailed practitioner notes. Feminist researchers may additionally draw on quantitative information collected via officially reported data and community sample surveys.

Family conflict researchers tend to favour quantitative approaches, measuring the number of violent incidents taking place between partners. They rely predominantly on acts-based approaches employing lists of violent acts to measure conflict between intimate partners. The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) is the most widely used list of this kind, although they may also make use of other community sample surveys and official data.

As a result of their preferences for different research methods, researchers on both sides of the gender debate have controversially suggested that feminist and family conflict studies may in fact be sampling different groups of people or capturing different types of violence, accounting for their conflicting findings. For example, both Murray Straus (1990) and Michael Johnson (2010) have hypothesised that: (i) minor partner violence is prevalent in the general population and perpetrated by both genders equally and, thus, is likely to be captured in CTS-based studies; and (ii) more severe violence is rarer and asymmetrical in gender and, thus, dominates officially reported data and clinical studies because its seriousness prompts victims to seek help or services to intervene. Evan Stark (2010) has suggested a slightly different argument: that feminist researchers are more concerned with instrumental violence in relationships, which is controlling and coercive, while family conflict researchers are more concerned with expressive forms of violence. The two groups select their research tools accordingly and, thus, they generate different findings.

More recently, Straus (2011) and Dutton (2012) have disputed the argument of different samples. Straus (2011, pp. 285-286) now proposes that family conflict researchers assert gender symmetry on the basis of perpetration rates (finding that men and women are equally violent), whereas feminist researchers assert

gender asymmetry on the basis of victimisation (finding that female victims experience more injuries and more serious injuries, fear and homicide than do male victims). Without proper investigation, it is difficult to ascertain the truth to these claims. However, Stark's assertion is perhaps more likely given that even using the same sample, feminist and family conflict researchers might derive different findings due to who and what they include and exclude.

## DATA SOURCES

We argue that the variance in study findings is due in large part to framings of domestic violence and data collection methods used. To illustrate these differences, we examine four key sources of data to consider what they can and cannot tell us about gender and violence. Using examples from Australian and international literature, we present findings from officially reported data, community sample surveys, the CTS and clinical studies. The four data sources are discussed below and individual studies are detailed in Table 1.

### *Officially reported violence data*

Officially reported violence data are a primary source of information about gender and violent relationships. They typically capture information about incidents and demographics of those involved. Police and other agencies and support services routinely collect data, which are then compiled into statistical analyses. Collected across entire jurisdictions, they are especially useful in generating population level information about domestic violence. The collection of data on forms of violence, injury and homicide allows us to draw conclusions about the severity of abuse and impacts for victims. Notably, the Victorian Family Violence Database provides a particularly useful model for the compilation of officially reported data. The database tracks trends in family violence incidents reported in Victoria since 1999 and is now in its fifth volume. It draws on data from the police, courts, housing agencies, hospital emergency departments, victims' assistance services and legal aid services. The trend analysis presented in the database reports is attentive to the issue of gender.

What such data sets are less well designed to capture is repetition of violence or perpetrator motivations, being more focused on incidents rather than tracking individual relationships. We also know from population surveys that many incidents of partner violence are never reported to the police (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, p. 21) or other support services (Mouzos & Makkai 2004, p. 100). Consequently,

officially reported data are likely to underestimate (but not overestimate) actual violence prevalence. Victim reluctance to report in turn suggests that such data capture more serious domestic violence; that is, violence serious enough to prompt a victim to seek help or a service or an agency to intervene. Some family conflict researchers have also suggested that officially reported data are skewed towards female victimisation because of a greater reluctance of male victims to report due to shame (Dutton & Nicholls 2005; Steinmetz 1977/78). This theory is contested by studies indicating that men have a greater propensity to minimise their own perpetration of violence and disclose women's every aggressive act (Dobash et al. 1992; Kincaid 1982; Schwartz 1987; Taft, Hegarty & Flood 2001; Watson & Parsons 2005).

For this Issues Paper, we examine four widely cited Australian officially reported data sets: police crime, homicide, homelessness and health data (see Table 1).

### *Community sample surveys*

Community sample surveys also provide population level data about domestic violence. Surveys are administered to large representative samples of a (usually adult) population, generally using tick box questions about crime or violence. Questions may be asked about perpetration of violence but most often focus on victim experiences. Community sample surveys are highly valued for capturing both reported and unreported domestic violence. Importantly, administration of surveys nationally and internationally has generated comparative data about prevalence across jurisdictions and over time.

Surveys vary substantially in scope but in principle can provide wide-ranging information about: levels and forms of violence; severity; repetition; victim impacts and help-seeking; and the response of services and agencies. They are less able to capture motivation for violence. Moreover, their reliance on tick box responses restricts the amount of detail gathered. An emphasis on single incidents or acts of violence also detracts from considerations of coercive or controlling behaviour patterns. This is not necessarily a criticism, as capturing this type of data is not a goal of such instruments. Rather, it signals a need to complement survey data with qualitative information.

Community sample surveys rely on respondents' perception and recall, which may be subject to inaccuracies due to respondent bias and/or gaps in memory. Recall is likely to improve if diaries or calendars are used with respondents. As with all

studies, the breadth of information gathered is entirely dependent on the scope of questions asked.

We present findings from three Australian community sample surveys that examined both male and female experiences of violence: *Crime Victimisation, Australia 2010-11* (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012); *Personal Safety Survey (PSS)* (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006); and Dal Grande et al. (2003), 'Domestic violence in South Australia: a population survey of males and females' (see Table 1).

### **Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) studies**

The CTS is a specific community sample survey, which uses standardised quantitative questions to measure aggression and negotiation towards a partner in a marital, cohabitating or dating relationship (Straus et al. 1996). The CTS is usually applied to smaller samples than other forms of community sample surveys.

Standardised questions are administered to men and women, although typically to one partner in a relationship. Respondents are asked about their experience of violence from a current partner over the previous twelve months, as well as their own perpetration of violence. The scale measures discrete aggressive acts and events, which are then grouped into types of behaviour: negotiation; psychological aggression; and physical assault.

Following criticisms about factors the original scale excluded, it was revised in the 1990s as the CTS2 with additional scales to measure sexual coercion and victim injury. At the same time, the original CTS was significantly criticised for equating all violent acts as the same (so that a mild slap or push equated with a severe beating). In response, the revised version now classes physical assaults as either minor or severe.

As a subset of community sample surveys, CTS-based studies share the former's strengths and weaknesses. They are able to capture both reported and unreported incidents of violence. Limitations remain regarding the exclusion of some forms of violence (such as economic or social abuse) and impacts for victims (such as fear). Studies which do not use the sexual coercion scale are also compromised, as this form of violence is highly gendered and has serious outcomes for victims. The

scale only considers violence by or against current partners, does not ask about perpetrator motivations and also faces challenges of accuracy of respondent perception and recall.

In this Issues Paper, we examine findings from two CTS studies: the *International Dating Violence Study* (Straus 2004) and *Young People and Domestic Violence Survey* (National Crime Prevention 2001), a modified CTS study (see Table 1).

### **Clinical studies**

Clinical studies form another commonly used source of evidence. These rely on samples drawn from agency data sets, service client groups or self-selected groups, and usually include a qualitative component. While such studies have mostly focused on samples of female victims or male perpetrators, a growing number of studies have looked at male victims (e.g. Cook 2009; Douglas & Hines 2011) and female perpetrators (e.g. Leisring 2009; Swan & Snow 2003; Ward & Muldoon 2007). Some studies have also attempted to pair or match equal numbers of women and men as perpetrators and/or victims.

The capacity of clinical studies to draw on qualitative and quantitative data to provide insight into domestic violence from the perspectives of victims or perpetrators is immensely valuable (Leisring 2009). They are most suited to investigating: perpetrator motivation; levels and forms of violence for their sample; severity and repetition of violence; and victim outcomes. Their reliance on agency and service data or access to clients suggests that, like officially reported data, they are likely to capture more serious violence in relationships.

Two key limitations of clinical studies are that their smaller samples mean they have limited capacity to be generalised to a wider population and, like community sample surveys, they rely on perception and recall of respondents if the study uses interviews. Four studies are discussed in this Issues Paper: Dobash and Dobash (2004); Hester (2009); Melton and Belknap (2003); and Wangmann (2010) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Details of studies cited

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Officially Reported Data | <p><b>Police crime data:</b> Crimes reported to police are recorded as crime data. States and territories collect crime data and the information recorded depends on legislation operating in each jurisdiction. In this paper, data are provided for: domestic assaults incidents by a partner recorded by New South Wales (NSW) Police for 2010 (Grech &amp; Burgess 2011); offenders charged for domestic violence assault by NSW Police for 1999-2009 (Holmes 2010); assault and sexual offences by a partner or ex-partner reported to Queensland Police for 2010-11 (Queensland Police Service 2011); and finalised applications for protection orders for family violence in Victoria for 1999-2010 (Victims Support Agency 2012).</p>  |
|                          | <p><b>Homicide data:</b> Police in each jurisdiction record homicide data and the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) compiles this data from across the country into the National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP). Homicides are defined as including all cases where one or more people are charged with murder, all murder suicides and all other deaths classed by police as murder, whether or not an offender has been apprehended. Homicide data provided in this paper relate to victims of 'intimate partner homicide', where the victim and offender share a current or former intimate relationship, including homosexual and extramarital relationships, for the period 2008-10 (Chan &amp; Payne 2013).</p>  |
|                          | <p><b>Homelessness data:</b> The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) collects national data about homelessness, drawing on information about men, women and children accessing the government's Specialist Homelessness Services. When entering such services, clients are surveyed about the main reason they need assistance; domestic violence is listed as one of 23 options. Data are provided in the paper for the period 2009-10 and concern those clients for whom domestic violence was the main reason for seeking housing assistance (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011).</p>   |
|                          | <p><b>Health data:</b> The AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database (NHMD) collects data nationally on patients presenting to public and private hospitals with injuries and other medical problems. Each episode of care for an admitted patient is counted as a 'separation' when that care is finalised. Data cited in the paper is for the period 2009-10. During this time, there were 421 065 injury cases requiring hospitalisation, nationally (Tovell et al. 2012, p. v). This figure included 24 550 assaults, for which a perpetrator was identified in 46% (n=10 549) of cases (p. 106). The data indicate the gender of the perpetrator in cases of assault by a spouse or domestic partner (amounting to 27% of assault cases where the perpetrator was known, n=2847) (p. 106). Also cited in the paper are data collected in Victoria from patients presenting to public hospital emergency departments (VEMD) (Victims Support Agency 2012). Data are given on the number of patients who experienced injury related to family violence by gender, for the period 2004-10.</p> |
| Community Sample Surveys | <p><b>Crime Victimization, Australia 2010-11 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012):</b> This is a component of the <i>Multipurpose Household Survey (MPHS)</i>, conducted annually throughout Australia. For the crime victimisation component, telephone interviews were held with 26 405 people aged fifteen years and older, asking about their experience of personal and household crimes, with regard to physical assault, threatened assault and sexual assault. The survey glossary defines physical assault as physical force or violence against a person (including being pushed, grabbed, shoved, slapped, hit, kicked or bitten, hit with something that could hurt, beaten, choked/strangled, stabbed, shot, burnt, dragged or hit deliberately by a vehicle). Threatened assault includes any verbal and/or physical intent or threat to inflict physical harm. Sexual assault comprises a sexual act carried out against a person's will, through the use or attempt of physical force, intimidation or coercion (asked of people over 18 years of age).</p>                    |
|                          | <p><b>Personal Safety Survey (PSS) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006):</b> In this national survey, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 16 300 adult men and women, asking about their experiences of physical or sexual violence, stalking, whether they had taken out a protection order, whether violence was repeated and whether they experienced fear for their safety (p. 43). The survey glossary defines physical violence as the use of force intended to harm or frighten a person (p. 59) and includes the same examples as given in the <i>Crime Victimization, Australia 2010-11</i> survey cited above. The definition given for sexual violence also reflects the definition used in the <i>Crime Victimization</i> survey (p. 61). The PSS defines stalking as activities intended to harm or frighten a person, including loitering outside premises that a person frequents, following or watching a person, interfering with their property, giving or leaving offensive material, and making phone or electronic contact (pp. 61-62).</p>                       |
|                          | <p><b>Dal Grande et al. (2003):</b> Computer-aided telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of 6004 South Australian adults, aged eighteen years and over in this domestic violence study. Respondents were asked about their experiences of a wide range of forms of domestic violence by current and ex-partners. They were asked if they had experienced physical abuse, such as being kicked, choked, pushed or hit with a fist or anything else that could hurt them, were threatened with or had a gun or knife used against them, or were forced into any sexual activity when they did not want to. They were asked about a range of emotional abuses such as: being prevented from practising their religion; having their social freedom restricted or being isolated from friends and family; being restricted in their access to household funds; or experiencing threats or intimidation, name calling or humiliation (p. 545).</p>   |

Table 1 continued over page

**Table 1:** Details of studies cited (continued)

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>CTS Studies</b>      | <p><b>International Dating Violence Study (Straus 2004):</b> This multi-site investigation of male and female students at 31 universities across 16 countries used the CTS2 to measure rates of violence against dating partners. Respondents numbered between 132 and 741 cases at each site, giving a total of 8666 cases. The CTS2 defines minor physical assault as push or shove, grab, slap, throw something at partner and twist arm or hair (pp. 795-6). Severe physical assault includes to punch or hit a partner, kick, choke, slam against a wall, beat up, burn or scald, and use a knife or gun on a partner (p. 796). Minor injury included sprain, bruise or small cut, or physical pain that still hurt the next day (p. 796). Severe injury included broken bone, passed out from being hit on the head, went to or needed to see a doctor because of a fight with one's partner. Sexual coercion was not included in this study.</p>          |
|                         | <p><b>Young People and Domestic Violence survey (National Crime Prevention 2001):</b> This Australian national study of 5000 young people, aged twelve to twenty, asked quantitative and qualitative questions (including attitude scales, victimisation measures and a modified version of the CTS) about the extent of violence in relationships that young people had experienced either as victims, perpetrators or as witnesses of parental domestic violence. Partner violence in the survey was defined as: yelling loudly at a partner; put downs or humiliation; not letting a partner see family or friends; not letting a partner have money for their own use; throw something at a partner; threaten to hit them; try to hit them; actually hit them; hit them because they were hitting you (defined as self-defence); threaten with a knife or gun; and use a knife or fire a gun (p. 96). Respondents were also asked about sexual coercion.</p> |
| <b>Clinical Studies</b> | <p><b>Dobash and Dobash (2004):</b> This comparative study from the United Kingdom (UK) applied qualitative and quantitative methods through in-depth interviews with 95 couples, in which men and women reported separately on their own violence and that of their partner (i.e. 190 interviews). The sample was drawn from only men convicted of violence against their partner, given too few numbers of women convicted of violence against their partner for comparison. Comparisons were made of men's and women's violence in terms of the forms of violence, frequency, severity and physical and emotional consequences, reasons for violence and the context in which it occurred.</p>  |
|                         | <p><b>Hester (2009):</b> This UK study analysed 96 cases of domestic violence from the Northumbria Police database: 32 cases involving a male sole perpetrator (random selection); 32 cases involving a female sole perpetrator (all cases); and 32 cases involving dual perpetrators (i.e. 64 arrestees, random selection). Each case was tracked from 2001 to 2007. The study had both qualitative and quantitative elements. It drew on: narratives of incidents (including a description of incidents related by the parties, summaries by police, actions taken by police and sometimes a comment and/or history of cases); interview data relating to four women victims and one male victim; demographic data; and data regarding criminal justice progression over time. The study compared the cases by gender.</p>   |
|                         | <p><b>Melton and Belknap (2003):</b> This study compared violence experienced and perpetrated by men and women arrested for domestic violence offences in a Midwestern city of the United States (US). The study authors analysed 2670 misdemeanor domestic violence police cases during 1997, of which women comprised 14%. The researchers employed qualitative and quantitative methodologies, collecting data through pre-trial services, police-completed forms and prosecutor information. They examined forms of violence, repetition and frequency, severity, motivations for violence and outcomes for victims, including fear.</p>   |
|                         | <p><b>Wangmann (2010):</b> This Australian study examined differences in men's and women's complaints for civil protection orders (known as apprehended domestic violence orders or ADVOs) in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. The study focused on cross applications (i.e. where both parties take out an ADVO) in heterosexual relationships. The researcher used a mixed-method approach, drawing on: in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 women (the study was unsuccessful in recruiting men for interview) and 27 professionals in the legal system; a documentary analysis of 12 months of court files from three large metropolitan courts (78 cross applications or 156 single applications); and court observations (73 ADVO mentions and two contested hearings).</p>   |



## PERPETRATOR MOTIVATION FOR VIOLENCE

Of the four primary data sources, clinical studies are the most valuable in investigating perpetrator motivation for violence prevention. Use of qualitative methods in clinical studies can provide a detailed picture of relevant factors, such as who initiated the violence, whether this was part of a pattern of ongoing violence and whether it involved elements of control or was intended to create fear in the victim. Researchers can ask whether violence by one partner was initiated in self-defence, in retaliation to or anticipation of violence by the other partner, out of frustration and so

on. Qualitative data may also enable an understanding of the perpetrator's own history of victimisation and related issues (such as mental illness or drug or alcohol use). Table 2.1 presents data on motivation gathered from the four selected clinical studies that looked at both male and female violence against partners.

The other sources of data are much less likely than clinical studies to document a person's motivation for violence against a partner. This is because quantitative methods typically employed for data gathering by these types of studies or data sets are not well designed for capturing the context in which violence takes place. They often focus on single violent acts

**Table 2.1:** Motivation in clinical studies

| Dobash and Dobash (2004)  | Hester (2009)   | Melton and Belknap (2003)   | Wangmann (2010)   |
|---|---|---|---|
| This study included examination of self-defence as a motivation for violence. Only six of the 95 men in the sample said they hit their partner because she hit him first but did not describe this as self-defence (p. 341). 'Self-defence' or 'self protection' were terms often used by women to describe their violence towards men. Of those women who admitted to violence, 75% said this was 'always' in self-defence and 54% of men agreed with women's claims (p. 341). | This study did not report on motivation of offenders aside from generally acknowledging the inducement of fear in victims through controlling behaviour by perpetrators in some cases. Other contextual issues for violence raised include perpetrator mental illness and alcohol use, and post separation violence and child contact issues. | Findings of this study suggested that when women are violent, it may be in self-defence or to fight back. Female defendants were significantly more likely than males to be involved in cross applications for protection orders or dual arrests (32.8% women and 5.6% men) – implying that they were also victims of violence (p. 339). Additionally, male victims (i.e. applied for protection orders) were more likely than female victims to be also classed as defendants in protection order cases. | Some acts that men complained that women did appeared to be defensive in nature (p. 959). Two cases are detailed at length. In one case, a woman was charged although her violence appeared to be in response to extreme violence by her partner. In the second case, a woman's violence appeared to be a response to her partner's attempt to prevent her ending the relationship by assaulting her and chasing her with a knife (p. 962). 'Control' was only mentioned to a 'limited degree' in the court sample. However, five women interviewees specifically spoke about their partner's attempt to 'control' them. The remaining five mentioned experiencing restrictive behaviours (p. 964). |

**Table 2.2:** Motivation in CTS studies

| Straus (2004), <i>International Dating Violence Study</i>  | National Crime Prevention (2001), <i>Young People and Domestic Violence Survey</i>  |
|--|---|
| In a more recent paper on this study, Straus (2008, pp. 263-68) concluded that dominance in the relationship by either the male or female partner is associated with an increased probability of violence. | The survey did not specifically ask about motivation for violence but two measures provide insight into this aspect of violence. The first, relating to use of unprovoked hitting, showed a gender bias, with 14% of young people reporting unprovoked hitting against their mothers/stepmothers, compared to 9% who reported unprovoked hitting against their fathers/stepfathers (p. 97). The second measure, relating to the use of hitting in response to being hit themselves (i.e. in retaliation or self-defence), found no gender differences (pp. 96, 98). |

rather than trying to discern patterns of coercion and control. Unsurprisingly, none of the officially reported data or community sample surveys considered for this paper discussed motivation issues. Indeed, the CTS is explicitly not designed to capture motivations for violence or its context and has been criticised for focusing on conflict tactics rather than coercion as a motivation (Dobash & Dobash 2004; Flood 2012; Kernsmith 2005; Kimmel 2002). However, Straus et al. (1996, p. 285) have argued that the survey can be used in conjunction with measures of these variables relevant for the particular study or clinical situation in question. For example, the *Young People and Domestic Violence Survey* looked at unprovoked hitting and retaliation or self-defence, finding women more likely to be victims of unprovoked hitting (see Table 2.2). In the *International Dating Violence Study*, Straus identified dominance in relationships as significantly associated with perpetration of violence, which is not necessarily the same as coercive control.

Findings of clinical studies have led feminists to conclude that women's and men's violence differ in motivation. While they acknowledge that some women use violence to control their partner, this is not a primary motivation or not a motivation for most women who use violence. Two reviews of studies examining women's use of violence against partners identified primarily expressive and protective motivations: anger and not being able to gain a partner's attention; self-defence; retaliation for their partner's violence (sometimes pre-emptive to ward off a partner's violence); fear; defence of children; and retribution for real or perceived wrongdoing (Bair-Merritt et al. 2010; Swan et al. 2008). Some family conflict researchers have adamantly rejected such claims, arguing that women's motivations for violence reflect men's and include similar psycho-social characteristics, such as prior aggression, substance use, personality disturbance and so on (Carney, Buttell & Dutton 2007; Dutton & Nicholls 2005; Stets & Straus 1990).

## LEVELS AND FORMS OF VIOLENCE PERPETRATION/VICTIMISATION

Central to discussions of gender and domestic violence are measures of the level of perpetration and victimisation of violence across populations or communities. In these debates, both officially reported violence data and community sample surveys have important contributions to make.

Officially reported violence data allow us to measure trends across a population in levels of domestic violence perpetration and victimisation that have been disclosed to services and agencies. It should be noted that when fluctuations in numbers of reports to agencies and services are observed, caution is needed in their interpretation. Rather than recording actual violence trends, fluctuations may instead reflect reporting trends, which can be influenced by changes in legislation, increased community awareness of partner violence and services available, and the recording practices of services or individuals (Gulliver & Fanslow 2012; Weatherburn 2011). For example, the likelihood of disclosure at health services will be influenced by screening practices for partner violence conducted at point of intake and the questions asked.

Officially reported data will often be presented in terms of different forms of violence (such as physical, sexual or other abuses). What information is recorded will reflect the definition of violence held by that service or agency and what is feasible for workers to record. To illustrate, police across Australian jurisdictions may differ in the details they record about violent incidents because, although all jurisdictions include physical assault in their legal definition of domestic/family violence, they vary as to whether they include other violent and threatening behaviours (for example, sexual assault, economic abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, stalking, intimidation, harassment, property damage, kidnapping, harm to animals, or exposing a child to violence (Australian Law Reform Commission & NSW Law Reform Commission 2010, pp. 191-192). Table 3.1 presents information on levels and forms of violence by gender, as documented in the selected officially reported data sets.

Community sample surveys are especially important in informing about levels of partner violence because they measure reported, as well as unreported, violence. Surveys' typically large sample sizes allow findings to be generalised to a wider population. Moreover, nationally conducted surveys allow for comparisons across different jurisdictions with different crime laws. Table 3.2 reports on levels and forms of violence in the selected community sample surveys.

The principal purpose of the CTS is to capture information about levels of partner violence perpetrated and experienced by men and women. One of its key strengths is that, as with community sample surveys, it gathers reported and unreported incidents of violence by both genders. Again, the restricted focus of the CTS to one year, current partners and

**Table 3.1:** Levels and forms in officially reported data

| Grech & Burgess (2011)   | Holmes (2010)   | Queensland Police Service (2011)   | Victims Support Agency (2012)  | Chan & Payne (2013)  |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Physical violence:</b> Of assaults between all heterosexual partners in NSW in 2010, the large majority (84.8%; n=12 010) involved a male perpetrator and female victim (Table 7, p. 7).</p> | <p><b>Physical violence:</b> In NSW, domestic violence assaults by men (13 523 for 2008-09) greatly outnumber those by women (2552 for 2008-09).<br/><br/>On average, there has been an annual increase in domestic violence assaults by women of 11.7% between July 1999 and June 2009 (Table 2, p. 4). During the same period, domestic violence assaults by males also increased but to a lesser degree, showing an average annual increase of 3.8%.</p> | <p><b>Physical violence:</b> In Queensland, women comprised 89.5% (n=1015) of victims of assault by a partner or ex-partner in the year 2010-11 (p. 81).<br/><br/><b>Sexual violence:</b> Women represented 92.3% (n=120) of victims of a sexual offence by a partner or ex-partner in the year 2010-11 (p. 81).</p> | <p>In Victoria, between 1999 and 2000, women made up nearly 80% and men 20% of adult victims of family violence incidents and affected family members, included in finalised applications for an intervention order (p. 76).<br/><br/>This gender ratio in the court data is also reflected in police data over the same period.</p> | <p><b>Homicide:</b> From 2008-10, women made up the majority of intimate partner homicide victims in Australia (73%; n=89) (p. 19).<br/><br/>Men also accounted for all 16 domestic homicide murder suicides; of these 12 male offenders committed suicide after an intimate partner homicide (p. 29).</p> |

**Table 3.2:** Levels and forms in community sample surveys

| Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), <i>Crime Victimization, Australia 2010-11</i>   | Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006), <i>Personal Safety Survey</i>  | Dal Grande et al. (2003)  |
|---|--|---|
| <p><b>Physical violence:</b> Women were much more likely than men to be victims of partner physical assault. Women comprised 87.0% (n=55 300) of partner assault victims (Table 6) and 86.9% (n=31 800) of all face-to-face threatened partner assault victims (Table 9).</p> | <p><b>Physical violence:</b> Women were more likely than men to report experiencing physical violence, with 10.1% of all women (n=780 500) and 4.4% of all men (n=325 700) reporting physical assault by a current or ex-partner since the age of fifteen (pp. 5-6, Table 16, p. 30).</p>  | <p><b>Physical violence:</b> Women (14.2%, n=411) were over twice as likely as men (7.1%, n=184) to have experienced physical abuse by a current or ex-partner (Table 1, p. 545).</p>   |
| <p><b>Sexual violence:</b> This survey did not report on sexual violence.</p>   | <p><b>Sexual violence:</b> Women were also more likely to report experiencing sexual violence. The survey estimated that 1 293 100 women had experienced sexual assault since the age of fifteen, of whom 23.2% (n=299 700) reported being assaulted by a current or ex-partner in the most recent incident (Table 19, p. 33). By comparison, 362 400 men had experienced sexual assault, of whom too few reported being assaulted by a current partner to be included in the survey results and 5.7% (n=20 700) reported being assaulted by a previous partner in the most recent incident (Table 19, p. 33).</p> | <p><b>Sexual violence:</b> Women (6.2%, n=179) were six times more likely than men (1.0%, n=26%) to have been forced into any sexual activity when they did not want to by a current or ex-partner (Table 1, p. 545).</p>   |
| <p><b>Other forms of abuse:</b> This survey did not report on other forms of abuse</p>  | <p><b>Other forms of abuse:</b> More women than men had been stalked since the age of fifteen. Of the 1 472 300 women who had been stalked, 11.8% had been stalked by a boyfriend/girlfriend/date and 20.1% by a previous partner in the most recent incident (p. 26). Of men who had been stalked (n=681 700), 12.4% had been stalked by a boyfriend/girlfriend/date and 11.1% by a previous partner in the most recent incident (Table 12, p. 26).</p>   | <p><b>Other forms of abuse:</b> Women (19.0%, n=548) were over twice as likely as men (8.7%, n=227) to have experienced some form of economic/emotional/spiritual/social abuse (Table 1, p. 545). The disparity between women and men's experiences of economic abuse was particularly high, reported by 8.8% of women compared to 2.6% of men (Table 1, p. 545).</p> |

**Table 3.3: Levels and forms in CTS studies**

| <b>Straus (2004), <i>International Dating Violence Survey</i></b>  | <b>National Crime Prevention (2001), <i>Young People and Domestic Violence Survey</i></b>  |
|--|--|
| <b>Physical violence:</b> At 21 of the 31 universities surveyed, a larger percentage overall of women than men assaulted a dating partner (p. 799). Most of the assaults by both genders were relatively minor attacks, such as slapping or throwing things at a partner (p. 801). | <b>Physical violence:</b> Young people had witnessed similar levels of physical violence against both their parents, with 23.4% of respondents reporting at least one act of physical violence against their mother/stepmother and 22.1% against their father/stepfather (pp. 96-97). This pattern was reflected in young people's own relationships, with 36% of young women and 37% of young men having experienced physical violence from a dating partner (pp. 118-19).  |
| <b>Sexual violence:</b> This study did not report on sexual forms of violence.   | <b>Sexual violence:</b> Of respondents who had been in a 'dating' relationship, 14% of young women and 7% of young men said a partner had tried to force them to have sex; 6% of young women and 5% of young men said that they had been physically forced to have sex (Tables 4.34 & 4.35, pp. 115-16). Of participants who had been in a dating relationship, 1% of young women and 3% of young men said they had tried to force a partner to have sex; 1% of young women and 2% of young men said that they had physically forced a partner to have sex (Tables 4.34 & 4.35, pp. 115-16). |
| <b>Other forms of violence:</b> This study did not report on other forms of violence.  | <b>Other forms of abuse:</b> Survey respondents reported higher rates of other forms of abuse against female parents than against male parents. Rates of violence against mothers/stepmothers were: verbal abuse (58%), emotional abuse (30%), social isolation (11%) and economic abuse (11%) (pp. 96-97). Rates of violence against fathers/stepfathers were: verbal abuse (55%), emotional abuse (22%), social isolation (6%) and economic abuse (4%) (pp. 96-97).  |

exclusions of other forms of abuse like economic and social abuse (and for many studies, sexual coercion) affects information gathered about levels and forms of violence. However, modified CTS-based studies, like the *Young People and Domestic Violence Survey*, may include these variables in their design. Table 3.3 presents data on the two selected CTS studies regarding levels and forms of violence.

Clinical studies are not designed to indicate overall levels of violence across a population, although can be used as an indicator of prevalence in a specified population (e.g. of arrestees). This is because clinical studies use smaller samples than quantitative studies and, so, are not able to be generalised to an entire population. The picture presented from clinical studies about levels of violence is further complicated in that, by definition, these samples differ from the general population by over-representing those who have disclosed or reported a violent relationship. Additionally, some studies comprise a sample of equal numbers of men and women offenders, precluding assessment of gender disparity in levels of violence.

A strength of clinical studies is that they can ask about violence perpetrated by both partners and ex-partners, providing a more comprehensive picture than studies focusing on violence by and against current partners only. They can also investigate a wide range of abuses, including economic or social abuse, property damage, threats and other forms. They can even allow for a deeper examination of perpetrator tactics that fall outside of standard definitions of domestic violence. For example, a perpetrator might buy flowers for their partner which, in their relationship, is a frequent precursor to sexual violence. How detailed information is will depend on each individual study. Table 3.4 indicates the levels and forms of violence by gender recorded in the selected clinical studies

Officially recorded data, community sample surveys and clinical studies data cited indicate that male perpetration of domestic violence occurs several orders of magnitude more often than female perpetration. These findings are strongly contrasted by the selected CTS studies which found greater gender symmetry and, in the case of the *International Dating Violence Survey*, more violence by female partners.

**Table 3.4:** Levels and forms in clinical studies

| Dobash and Dobash (2004)  | Hester (2009)  | Melton and Belknap (2003)   | Wangmann (2010)  |
|---|--|---|--|
| This study did not compare numbers of men and women convicted of violent offences against their partner as the sample was drawn from only convicted men and their partners.   | As this study examined equal numbers of male and female arrestees, it did not compare numbers of men's and women's arrests. However, a minor increase was noted in the proportion of women arrested as domestic violence perpetrators from 9% in 2001-02 to 11% in 2004 (p. 10).   | In this sample of 2670 defendants for domestic violence offences, there were many more male (86%) than female defendants (14%) (p. 344).  | In this sample, women were overwhelmingly the first to apply for protection orders (76.5% of court file data, 9 of 10 women interviewed) (p. 957). More men (17) than women (5) were charged with criminal offences (court file data, p. 961).   |
| <b>Physical violence:</b> Both men and women reported that men committed a much wider range of physically violent acts against women than vice versa (p. 336). Some acts were perpetrated by a large percentage of men but rarely by women (e.g. strangulation) and, in some cases, never by women (e.g. kick face).              | <b>Physical violence:</b> Among arrestees, more men (61%) than women (37%) used physical violence against their partner (p. 8).  | <b>Physical violence:</b> Among arrestees, men were significantly more likely than women to shove or push their partner, grab or drag their partner, pull the victim's hair, physically restrain or strangle their partner (p. 339). Women were more likely to hit their partner with an object, throw an object at their partner, strike their partner with a vehicle or bite them (p. 339).             | <b>Physical violence:</b> While there were no significant differences between male and female first applicants for a protection order in terms of violence alleged, female second applicants (75%) were significantly more likely to allege physical violence than male second applicants (42.3%) (Table 1, p. 958).<br>Only men said they had been kneed in the groin or scratched. Only women alleged being spat at, burnt, dragged on the ground or held against a wall or door (p. 959). Women were also more likely to allege strangulation by their partner. |
| <b>Sexual violence:</b> Both men and women reported a wider range of sexually abusive acts committed by men than women. Among women, 40% reported their partner had demanded sex and 20% reported their partner had forced them to have sex on at least one occasion (p. 336). Coerced or forced sex was only perpetrated by men. | <b>Sexual violence:</b> The study did not report on sexual violence.   | <b>Sexual violence:</b> The study did not report on sexual violence.  | <b>Sexual violence:</b> Sexual violence was rarely mentioned, with only two women and one man making such allegations (p. 958).  |
| <b>Other forms of violence:</b> This study did not report on other forms of violence.   | <b>Other forms of violence:</b> Men were significantly more likely than women to engage in other forms of violence: 29% of men and 13% of women used threats; 29% of men and 11% of women harassed their partner; and 94% of men and 83% of women were verbally abusive (Table 2, p. 8). More men (30%) than women (16%) damaged a partner's property (Table 2, p. 8). | <b>Other forms of violence:</b> More male (30.8%) than female offenders (22.2%) made threats (Table 3, p. 340). Men's threats were also more detailed and hostile; and more likely to relate to the victim's cooperation with police or courts (p. 341). There was only a small number of offenders who stalked their partner, comprising more male (2.5%) than female (1.1%) stalkers (Table 3, p. 340). | <b>Other forms of violence:</b> Female second applicants were significantly more likely than male second applicants to allege other forms of abuse (81.3% of women, 25% of men) (pp. 958-59).<br>Among the small number of people who alleged threats and provided detail about these, women experienced more threats that could be described as coercive (e.g. threats of violence if they sought assistance from the police), while men reported women 'threatening' to use their legal rights (e.g. by obtaining an ADVO) (p. 960).                             |

## SEVERITY

Severity remains a contested issue between feminist and family conflict researchers. All four data sources speak to the issue of severity of violence by gender, providing different levels of detail about this factor.

Clinical studies that adopt a qualitative approach may ask participants about their perceptions of the seriousness of the violence or examine other indicators of severity, such as the use of force or weapons used. Interestingly, in their study Melton and Belknap (2003, p. 343) observe that qualitative and quantitative data can provide quite different information about severity of an incident. They identified a qualitative difference between hitting someone on the cheek and hitting someone hard with a closed fist to the side of the head – a distinction that might not be made in quantitative studies using check boxes for hit, slap or punch. While women are often found to be more likely than men to use weapons, some researchers have suggested that this is to compensate for their comparatively smaller stature so as to ‘even the odds’ (Hester 2009; Swan et al. 2008; Wangmann 2010). Table 4.1 provides data from the selected clinical studies regarding severity of men and women’s violence.

Community sample surveys can also allow researchers to identify gender differences in severity of violence experienced, depending on the questions asked (for example, asking about the forms of violence experienced, whether weapons were used and injuries). However, a reliance on use of check boxes

constrains the level of detail derived from victim and perpetrator accounts of violent incidents. Table 4.2 sets out findings of the selected community sample surveys with regards to severity.

The CTS2 distinguishes between ‘minor’ and ‘severe’ assaults, providing some information about severity of violence. Again, however, the exclusion of ex-partners precludes consideration of stalking, sexual assault or homicide, all serious behaviours. Limitations of quantitative approaches concerning the level of detail provided by check boxes also apply to the CTS. Table 4.3 indicates the findings of the selected CTS studies with regards to severity.

Officially reported data and police crime data, in particular, can be useful in capturing evidence of partner violence in its most severe forms, although it would be rare for such data to be presented in terms of ‘severity’ per se. Rather, information would most likely be presented in terms of physical or sexual abuse, violence involving use of weapons, severe injuries for victims, or homicide or homicide/suicide. Such information is provided in the previous section on levels and forms of violence (see Table 3.1).

It is clear from these selected data sources that there is considerable disparity between findings of clinical studies, officially reported data and community sample surveys and those of the standard CTS study. All the data presented here, excepting that from the *International Dating Violence Study*, indicates a greater severity associated with men’s violence.

**Table 4.1: Severity in clinical studies**

| Dobash and Dobash (2004)   | Hester (2009)   | Melton and Belknap (2003)   | Wangmann (2010)  |
|--|---|---|--|
| Most women (82%) and men (66%) described men’s violence as ‘serious’ or ‘very serious’ (p. 338). Smaller percentages of women (36%) and of men (28%) described women’s violence as such. | Based on the types of violence and its frequency, the researcher concluded that the severity of men’s violence was more extreme than women’s violence (p. 8).   | Although the quantitative data did not indicate major differences in severity between men and women’s violence, the qualitative data showed men’s violence as ‘more serious and severe’ (p. 343), including acts of strangulation | First applications for protection orders (most of which were by women) were more likely to be made by police than second applications (p. 957), suggesting these first incidents may have involved more serious violence (p. 958). |
| <b>Weapons:</b> This study did not ask about weapons.  | <b>Weapons:</b> Overall, women (24%) were more likely than men (11%) to use weapons, although in some cases this was to prevent further violence from their partner (Table 2, p. 8). Women were more likely to use a weapon where the man was also recorded as a perpetrator (p. 18). Men were more likely to use a weapon where they were recorded as a sole perpetrator (60% of sole perpetrators). | <b>Weapons:</b> Women were significantly more likely than men to use weapons against their partner but there were no significant differences in the use of more dangerous weapons like knives or guns (p. 344).                   | <b>Weapons:</b> Women were more likely than men to use weapons against their partner (p. 960). In two cases, the weapons used were ‘conventional’, in others they were objects ‘at hand’.  |

**Table 4.2:** Severity in community sample surveys

| Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), <i>Crime Victimization, Australia 2010-11</i>    | Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006), <i>Personal Safety Survey</i>   | Dal Grande et al. (2003)  |
|--|---|---|
| This survey did not collect information about severity of violence by intimate partners. | Protection orders can serve as a proxy for severity of violence; i.e. severe enough to seek protection via the courts. In this survey, more women than men had a violence order issued for their protection. Among those who experienced violence by a previous partner since the age of 15, 25.3% (n=286 800) of women compared to 5.9% (n=21 800) of men had a violence order issued (Table 23, p. 37). While 10% (n=16 100) of women who experienced violence by a current partner since the age of 15 had an order issued, comparative figures are not available for men (Table 23, p. 37). | <b>Weapons:</b> Women (3.8%, n=111) were more likely than men (1.6%, n=41) to report experiencing violence or the threat of violence involving a gun or knife by a current or ex-partner (Table 1, p. 545). |

**Table 4.3:** Severity in CTS studies

| Straus (2004), <i>International Dating Violence Study</i>   | National Crime Prevention (2001), <i>Young People and Domestic Violence Survey</i>   |
|---|--|
| Women were more likely than men to be perpetrators of severe assaults at 18 of the 31 sites (p. 801). | Respondents were more likely to report witnessing more serious forms of male violence towards women than vice versa. For example, in the case of parental violence, 19% of young people witnessed their father/stepfather use threats to hit compared to 11% who witnessed their mother/stepmother use threats to hit (p. 97). There was also a gender gap in the use of hitting: 22% by males (Table 4.22, p. 96) and 17% by females (Table 4.23, p. 98). |

## REPETITION OF VIOLENCE

Repetition of violent behaviour constitutes a key aspect of a feminist definition of domestic violence. This is because it is the pattern of a perpetrator's behaviour that continues to have a coercive and controlling effect on a victim. While all four data sources can collect information on repetition of violence, it is most likely to be collected by clinical studies.

Of the four data sources, clinical studies are best placed to ask detailed questions of either or both partners about trends in repetition and frequency of violent behaviour. Researchers may ask whether abuse has occurred before and how often, going back over long periods. Some studies use calendars or diaries to assist respondents to recall how often violence has occurred over a specified period of time. Table 5.1 indicates findings of the four selected clinical studies with regards to repetition of violence.

Community sample surveys can ask about repetition of violence, such as questions about whether violence has been experienced or perpetrated in the past

month, year or lifetime, and whether there has been more than one violent incident by the same partner. Not all surveys ask such questions. Some surveys are limited to short time periods (e.g. of the last month or year) and so are less likely to detect a history of violence. Of the three surveys selected, the *PSS* and Dal Grande et al. surveys asked about repetition of violence, the findings of which are presented in Table 5.2.

Like the *Crime Victimization Survey*, the CTS is constrained in its examination of repetition of violent incidents. Its focus on the twelve months prior to the survey means that it can only canvass recidivism within that time period. Again, the CTS has been criticised for deeming violent any person who commits at least one violent act within the past year, without considering whether this is part of a pattern or if there has been a long history of violence, and whether the behaviour has escalated (Allen 2011; Kimmel 2002). Additionally, continued violence by ex-partners is excluded. However, modified CTS-based studies can include additional questions about repetition. The *Young People and Domestic Violence Survey*, for example, asked respondents about whether measures of abuse

**Table 5.1: Repetition in clinical studies**

| Dobash and Dobash (2004)  | Hester (2009)  | Melton and Belknap (2003)   | Wangmann (2010)  |
|---|--|---|--|
| Both men and women reported more frequent violence by men. However, they differed in estimation of how often men were violent. For example, 47% of women compared with 56% of men reported male violence in the relationship numbering 1-4 events; and 32% of women compared with 14% of men reported 5+ violent events. With respect to female violence there was greater similarity in accounts. For example, 44% of women and 51% of men reported 1-4 events and 10% of women and 10% of men reported 5+ events (p. 335). Less than half of men (46%) and women (40%) reported no violence by women in the relationship (p. 335) | More men than women engaged in repeated violence. The vast majority of men (83%) had two or more incidents of violence recorded against them, as did a large proportion of women (62%) (p. 8). One man had 52 incidents recorded, whereas the most number of incidents recorded against a woman was eight (p. 8). Among sole perpetrators, most women (78%) had only one incident recorded, while most men (78%) had between two and 24 incidents recorded (p. 12). In cases where both parties had been arrested (dual arrest), 45% of women had only one incident, compared to 13% of men (p. 12). | Men were significantly more likely than women to have committed more than one act of domestic violence in the study year (10% of men, 7% of women) (Table 2, p. 338). | A history of violence was mentioned by 61.5% of female first applicants and 62.5% of male first applicants; as well as 50% of second female applicants and 26.9% of male second applicants (Table 1, p. 958). Seven men and four women were charged with multiple offences (pp. 961-962). Eight male second applicants were charged for a breach of an ADVO, including three who had committed multiple breaches. No women were charged for breaches (p. 962). |

**Table 5.2: Repetition in community sample surveys**

| Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), <i>Crime Victimization, Australia 2010-11</i>      | Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006), <i>Personal Safety Survey</i>  | Dal Grande et al. (2003)   |
|--|--|--|
| This survey did not collect information about repetition of violence by intimate partners. | Women were more likely than men to report repeated violence, especially where the violence was perpetrated by a current partner (Table 23, p. 37). Of those who had experienced current partner violence, women were almost twice as likely as men to report more than one incident of abuse: 45.8% (n=73 400) of females, 25.7% (n=17 500 of males) <sup>ii</sup> . The pattern of previous partner violence also revealed a small gender gap, with 67.6% (n=767 200) of women and 60.1% (n=220 800) of men reporting more than one incident of violence (Table 23, p. 37). | Women were more likely than men to experience multiple forms of abuse. Of the 660 women who reported experiencing some form of domestic violence or abuse, more than half (55%; n=363) had experienced both physical and emotional abuse (Table 1, p. 545). By comparison, of the 316 men who reported experiencing some form of domestic violence or abuse, just under two fifths (39.6%; n=125) had experienced both physical and emotional abuse (Table 1, p. 545). |

**Table 5.3: Repetition in CTS studies**

| Straus (2004), <i>International Dating Violence Study</i> | National Crime Prevention (2001), <i>Young People and Domestic Violence Survey</i>   |
|---|--|
| Repetition was not discussed in this study.               | The data gathered for measures of verbal, emotional, social, financial physical and sexual abuse, and threats all suggest that men used violence against their partner more often (i.e. more than once or twice) than women did (pp. 96, 98, 115-116). |

were used more often than once or twice, as detailed in Table 5.3.

Officially reported violence data are unlikely to monitor individual relationships over time and capture repeated violence in a single relationship, as their

purpose is generally to document the collective number of incidents and forms of violence, impacts and some demographic data. Some officially recorded data sets are able to detect repetition of violence if they track offenders or victims (for example, police may track arrests of individual perpetrators for recidivism or track



breaches of protection orders or parole violations). Overall, however, such data by gender are not easily obtained. Researchers may request officially reported data for analysis in clinical studies, as was the case in the Hester (2009) and Melton and Belknap (2003) studies cited here. None of publically available officially reported data considered for this Issues Paper provide this level of detail.

In examining the data from the selected studies and data sets which comment on recidivism, it would appear that men are more likely than women to perpetrate multiple acts of violence against partners. The Dobash and Dobash (2004) study highlights differences in accounts of repetition of violence by male and female partners of a relationship. This factor may well affect findings of studies where responses are sought from only one partner in a couple.

## IMPACTS FOR VICTIMS

Documenting domestic violence impacts for victims is fundamental to understanding its multi-faceted and long term effect. All four data sources are able to inform about the consequences of partner violence for victims. The depth of information, however, is wholly dependent on the inclusion of relevant questions in individual studies or specific data sets.

Clinical studies are able to provide the most detailed and thorough documentation of violence impacts for victims, given their capacity to ask about a broad range of consequences and about how victims perceive these impacts. The breadth and depth of information gathered will depend on the focus of the study and questions included. Table 6.1 provides information from the four clinical studies about impacts for victims in their samples relating to injury or fear.

While clinical studies can provide rich information about the experience of relatively small samples of victims, officially reported data from support services are useful in highlighting specific impacts of violence across a population, such as consequences for victims' health or housing. They are rarely able to capture subjective

**Table 6.1:** *Impacts in clinical studies*

| Dobash and Dobash (2004)   | Hester (2009)   | Melton and Belknap (2003)   | Wangmann (2010)  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Injuries:</b> Many more men than women inflicted every type of injury against their partner. Some injuries were inflicted by a 'fair' percentage of men (e.g. split lip, fractured teeth and bones, black-out or unconsciousness) or by a 'considerable' percentage of men, (e.g. bruises or black eye), but rarely by women (p. 337). Miscarriage and vomiting caused by physical assault were only inflicted by men (p. 338).</p>                              | <p><b>Injuries:</b> This study did not report on victim injuries.</p>   | <p><b>Injuries:</b> There were no significant differences between men's and women's experiences for most injuries (including cuts bleeding or broken bones or teeth). However, women were significantly more likely to cause scratches and males more likely to cause bruises (p. 344).</p> | <p><b>Injuries:</b> This study did not report on victim injuries.</p>  |
| <p><b>Fear:</b> Most women (79%) indicated they were usually frightened by their partners' violence, expressing other feelings of helplessness, isolation and being trapped (p. 340). They also felt abused, bitter and angry. The largest proportion of men (26%) said they were 'not bothered' by their partner's violence; other reactions were feeling the woman was justified, ridicule, anger or surprise. Relatively few men (6%) felt victimised (p. 340).</p> | <p><b>Fear:</b> Men's violence tended to create a context of fear and, relatedly, control of female victims (p. 8). Male victims of violence did not appear to fear their partner or to be controlled by her (p. 11).</p> | <p><b>Fear:</b> This study did not report on victim fear.</p>   | <p><b>Fear:</b> Female second applicants for protection orders were significantly more likely (68%) to mention 'fear' than male second applicants (34%) (p. 963). The difference for female and male first applicants was not statistically significant (55% women and 37% men).</p> |

impacts, such as victims' degree of fear. Table 6.2 presents findings of selected officially reported data for homelessness and injuries requiring hospitalisation.

Community sample surveys can assess impacts of violence for victims in terms of the presence of injury, fear or other factors, again depending on questions asked. Broader impacts may be canvassed in some surveys regarding socio-economic and other outcomes. As information will be gathered principally through tick box or scale questions, it will not be detailed. Of the three community sample surveys, only the PSS and Dal Grande et al. studies collected information on impacts for victims, outlined in Table 6.3.

The CTS2 includes a separate scale for injury, canvassing: cuts and bleeding; sprains or bruising; pain; and needing to see a doctor. Tellingly, CTS-based studies collecting information on injuries tend to indicate that women experience more severe injuries resulting from men's violence than vice versa. Other outcomes for victims, such as socio-economic or psychological consequences are not considered by the CTS. The exclusion of fear from the CTS, in particular, continues to be as a limitation by feminist researchers. The *International Dating Violence Study* and *Young People and Domestic Violence Survey*

both asked about injuries and the latter also asked about fear, as detailed in Table 6.4.

There is consensus across all four data sources that women are more likely to experience worse outcomes of men's violence, than men do of women's violence. This includes women's greater likelihood to experience physical injury and serious injury, other impacts such as homelessness, poor socio-economic outcomes, and fear of their partner and for their own safety. Interestingly, while Straus (2011) and others (Frieze 2005; Robertson & Murachver 2007) have acknowledged gender disparities in injuries sustained, they play down the significance of this finding. They suggest that men's greater size and strength relative to women's mean that men are more likely to injure their partners through low level violence (Robertson & Murachver 2007; Straus 1995). Their argument is that women's experience of serious injuries is due to men's greater relative strength rather than the latter's propensity to be violent. We would argue that the degree of harm inflicted is, in fact, an important measure which should be factored into assessments of gender and domestic violence. Diminishing the impacts of violence trivialises the experiences of female victims and the fear that many women have about the potential for future exposure.

**Table 6.2:** Impacts in officially reported data

| Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011)  | Tovell et al. (2012)  | Victims Support Agency (2012)  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Homelessness:</b> In 2009-10, women constituted the overwhelming majority (96%, n=31 800) of clients nationally, for whom domestic violence was identified as the main pathway into homelessness (p. 256) | <b>Injuries:</b> For the period 2009-10, there were 2847 hospital separations recorded nationally as assaults by a spouse or domestic partner (p. 106). Of these, 83% (n=2364) were women and 17% (n=483) were men assaulted by a spouse or domestic partner. | <b>Injuries:</b> From 2004 to 2010, a greater proportion of female patients (68.5%) presented to Victorian hospitals with family violence injuries than male patients (31.5%) (Table 15, p. 77). Female family violence patients were more than twice as likely as male family violence patients to be injured by being struck by another person, and more than twice as likely as males to sustain multiple injuries (p. 19). |

**Table 6.3:** Impacts in community sample surveys

| Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), <i>Crime Victimisation, Australia 2010-11</i>   | Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006), <i>Personal Safety Survey</i>   | Dal Grande et al. (2003)   |
|---|---|--|
| This survey did not collect information about impacts of violence by intimate partners. | <b>Fear:</b> There was a gender difference in reports of anxiety or fear resulting from exposure to violence. Of respondents who had experienced violence by a current partner, 19.7% (n=31 500) of women and 8.4% (n=5700) of men felt anxious or fearful in the twelve months prior to the survey; of those who had ever experienced violence by a previous partner, 18.3% (n=207 500) of women and 5.5% (n=20 200) of men felt anxious or fearful (Table 23, p. 37). | <b>Injuries:</b> Of respondents who reported forms of domestic violence, 44.9% of women experienced physical hurt as a result of the violence, compared with 23.8% of men (p. 547). While women and men mainly reported similar kinds of injuries, many more women (19.9%) than men (0.8%) suffered fractures/broken bones (p. 547). |

**Table 6.4:** Impacts in CTS studies

| <b>Straus (2004), <i>International Dating Violence Study</i></b>  | <b>National Crime Prevention (2001), <i>Young People and Domestic Violence Survey</i></b>   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Injuries:</b> Rates of injury caused by males were higher than for females in 18 of the 31 sites (p. 802). For severe injuries, rates of male perpetration exceeded female rates in 21 of the 31 sites (at a rate that was 2.6 times greater than by women) (p. 806).</p> | <p><b>Injuries:</b> Participants who had witnessed one or both of their parents hitting the other parent were asked what effect it had, including whether either parent had to go to hospital. This was the case for 7% of young people who had witnessed male to female violence only, in comparison to 3% of young people who had witnessed female to male violence only (p. 126). Young people who had witnessed violence between both parents were the most likely to report that hitting had led to a parent attending hospital (15%) (p. 126).</p> <p><b>Fear:</b> There was a significant gender difference in experience of fear. Of all participants who had experienced threats or violence in a dating relationship, 13% of young women compared to 3% of young men had been 'really frightened' (p. 122).</p> |

## CONCLUSION

Having an accurate picture of the role gender plays in violent intimate relationships is not solely an academic or ideological pursuit. Theory grounded in the lived experience of partners in violent relationships must underpin practice responses or risk putting more lives in jeopardy. Practitioners need to be attuned to available evidence, its scope and limitations.

In examining evidence for this Issues Paper, we have attempted to show that feminist and family conflict researchers differ substantially in their characterisation of the links between gender and violence in relationships. Feminist researchers are concerned with violence as a reflection of power and control in relationships, while family conflict researchers are more concerned with measuring all violence that occurs within certain parameters, regardless of the perpetrator's intent.

Aside from how they conceptualise domestic violence, feminist and family conflict researchers generally draw on different methods to extract data to support their arguments. We and others have argued that this will fundamentally determine what data are generated. Each of the four types of data sources discussed – officially reported data, clinical studies, community sample surveys and the CTS – offer part of the picture of violence in intimate relationships. Clinical and other studies drawing on qualitative data provide deep insights into the reasons for violence, how it manifests and what the experience is like for victims. At the same time, quantitative data used in community sample surveys, the CTS and official reports from agencies

and services have produced valuable information about prevalence of domestic violence within populations, as well as measures of the forms, severity and repetition of violence across communities. Both feminist and family conflict researchers have used this kind of information to sensitise governments and the community to domestic violence as a serious social policy issue.

We have tried to express through real examples that each individual study or data set itself varies considerably in depth and quality of information. For example, data from hospital emergency departments that actively screen all patients for domestic violence are likely to produce more accurate information about prevalence and detail about cases than departments that do not screen. Similarly, studies employing the sexual coercion scale of the CTS2 and including qualitative questions will provide more information than studies which exclude them. Researchers and practitioners, therefore, need to be mindful of the strengths and weaknesses of a chosen approach or individual study when drawing conclusions and making recommendations. All questions cannot be answered through a single data point. Consequently, we welcome the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (2013) recent report, *Defining the data challenge for family, domestic and sexual violence, Australia*. This document sets out the national data agenda for understanding and responding to domestic violence, including sourcing information about not just violent incidents but also about the context for violence, contributing risk factors, impacts for victims and responses of services and agencies.

Returning to the topic of this paper, the gender asymmetry/symmetry debate does raise some legitimate questions that are worth consideration for future investigation. While making claims that men's experience of violence differs from women's experiences, there are few studies that examine men's experience as victims of domestic violence from a feminist perspective. We need quality research in this area to inform theory and responses, while remaining alert to the propensity of perpetrators to recast their own actions and experience from a perspective of victimhood.

As a final point, we stress that while the number of studies finding gender symmetry is ever growing, we consider their reliance on the CTS inherently limits the robustness of information produced. We argue that practitioners should have confidence that data available from multiple sources support claims of gender asymmetry in domestic violence. What the data presented here demonstrate is that both men and women perpetrate a range of different forms of aggression in relationships but may have different motivations, including self-defence. Both men and women can experience violence by an intimate partner but their experience of this is likely to be different in terms of the forms of violence experienced, its severity and impact. The severity of physical injury and levels of coercion from all forms of violence in relationships appear to be greater for women than for men.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are indebted to paper's reviewers, Dr Jane Wangmann, Lecturer at University of Technology, Sydney Faculty of Law, and Ms Kim Webster, Manager of the Program to reduce race based discrimination and support diversity, at the Victorian Health and Promotion Foundation, for their insightful and helpful comments and suggestions. The authors also wish to thank Dr Michael Flood at the University of Wollongong for his presentation alongside Dr Wangmann at the Clearinghouse symposium, 'Damned lies and statistics: understanding gender and partner violence', held in Sydney in December 2012, which helped inform this paper.

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## ENDNOTES

- i 'Partner' in this case includes current and previous partner, boyfriend/girlfriend/ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend or date.
- ii The ABS suggests using this figure with caution due to its relative standard error rate.

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### Publication information

**ISSN: 1443 – 8496**

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This is a refereed publication. The views expressed in this Issues Paper do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government or the Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse. While all reasonable care has been taken in the preparation of this publication, no liability is assumed for any errors or omissions.

The Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse is linked to the Centre for Gender- Related Violence Studies, based in the University of New South Wales, School of Social Sciences. The Clearinghouse is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.



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