

## *Introduction*

According to official violent crime estimates produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), based on the CSEW, men are at greater risk of experiencing violence than women (Office for National Statistics, 2019a). However, the official statistics exclude measures of sexual offences and the more reliable domestic violence estimates from the self-completion part of the survey (Office for National Statistics, 2018a, 2018b). This not only underestimates overall levels of violence but also underestimates the forms of violence more commonly experienced by women. There is evidence that some forms of violence against women have worsened in recent years, as the latest available femicide census shows the number of women killed by men has increased (Long et al., 2018) and homicides from domestic violence have reached a five year high, with three quarters of the victims being female (Swann, 2019).

In this paper we build on a body of work by Walby and colleagues (Walby et al., 2014a, 2016a) and re-estimate the prevalence of violent crime experienced by adults in England and Wales by adding to the official ONS measure any experiences of sexual offences (as reported in the CSEW face-to face questionnaire). Additionally, we include experiences of sexual and domestic violence<sup>1</sup> reported in the self-completion module of CSEW. We analyse how this affects estimates of the prevalence of violence and trends in violence over time, both overall and by gender. Importantly, by using the self-completion questionnaire in addition to the face-to-face responses we are able to make use of the better reporting rates of sexual and domestic violence. Analysis by the ONS using 2017/18 data shows that of the respondents who reported being victims of use of force (domestic) in the self-completion module, only around 12% reported experiencing domestic violence within the face-to-face questionnaire (Office for National Statistics, 2018c). In our own analysis of the same data, we find similar trends for sexual violence: only 12% of those who reported sexual violence (perpetrated by anyone) in the self-completion questionnaire also reported experiencing sexual violence in the main face-to-face survey. We re-estimate violence based on this more inclusive definition in order to provide a more accurate picture of trends in violence in England and Wales which reveals who is really most at risk of violence. We make the case that sexual violence is a form of violence and therefore ought to be acknowledged as such and included in measures of overall violence. Excluding sexual offences as a measure of violence and failing to incorporate the experiences of violence disclosed in the self-completion questionnaire (sexual and domestic violence) constitutes a gendered data gap in violent crime statistics, as women are more likely to experience sexual and domestic violence and therefore in excluding these, women's experience of violence is undercounted. This has significant implications for the policy agenda and targeting of policy interventions aimed at reducing violence. Additionally, we argue researchers have an ethical obligation to make use of the sensitive information respondents have shared in the self-completion survey, the trends from which are currently reported on separately by the ONS (2019b, 2018b).

At the time of writing the Covid-19 pandemic had led to a UK-wide lockdown with most people forced to stay inside their homes<sup>2</sup> to slow the spread of the virus. Whilst the

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<sup>1</sup> In this article we focus on domestic violence, as in physical violence perpetrated by a current or ex-partner or family member, rather than 'domestic abuse' more broadly which includes coercive and controlling behaviour as well as threats of violence. We acknowledge the importance of measuring the prevalence of other forms of domestic abuse though this is beyond the remit of this particular paper.

<sup>2</sup> The UK lockdown began on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 and was gradually eased with fewer restrictions from May 2020, before a second lockdown began on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

restrictions on people's movements are likely to have led to a decline in some forms of crime, including some forms of violent crime (National Police Chiefs' Council, 2020), the risk of domestic violence, has increased. During this time calls to domestic abuse charity helplines have significantly increased as have visits to their websites. The organisation Counting Dead Women has calculated that between 23 March, when the lockdown began, and 12 April there were fourteen domestic abuse killings of women and two children which is the highest it has been for at least 11 years (Home Affairs Committee, 2020). These tragic cases highlight the pervasiveness of domestic violence and the necessity to ensure such violence is not discounted when estimating prevalence and risk of violence in the population.

### *Violent crime: trends and measurement*

#### *Measuring crime*

The two main sources<sup>3</sup> of data on crime are (1) police recorded crime and (2) the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). The CSEW is a victim-based survey with a sample designed to be representative of the population of households in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2019c). The survey includes a face-to-face questionnaire, where respondents report on their experiences in the last year and specially trained coders determine whether what has been reported was a crime and if so which type of criminal offence it should be coded under (Office for National Statistics, 2019d). The CSEW also has an anonymous self-completion survey. This is useful for collecting more reliable estimates and improving reporting rates, particularly when the information is sensitive.

There are strengths and weaknesses of both sources: police recorded crime statistics do not include crimes that are unreported or unrecorded and are also sensitive to changes in reporting and recording practices, as well as changes in police' priorities which make them problematic for estimating trends in crime over time (Office for National Statistics, 2019c). The CSEW is the ONS' preferred source for trends in most crimes as these have been measured consistently over time, and includes crimes that are not reported or recorded by police.<sup>4</sup> However, because the CSEW sample is based on households it does not include crimes committed against people living in institutions (Office for National Statistics, 2019c). This is a significant caveat in relation to measuring violence, as refuge accommodation where victim/survivors are housed to escape domestic abuse are excluded, as are university halls, where students are at high risk of sexual violence (Phillips and Smith, 2012; The Student Room and Revolt Sexual Assault, 2018), as well as other institutions including immigration centres and prisons, where refugees, asylum seekers and prisoners are all at increased risk of violence (Ministry of Justice, 2020; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2018). Which of the two sources offers a more reliable estimate depends on the type of crime in question, and the ONS draws on both sources to produce the quarterly statistical bulletins on crime in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2019c). Homicide, knife crime and gun crime are on the whole comparatively well reported to and well recorded by police,

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to these two main sources other sources of data are complementary in filling gaps or providing some triangulation, such as hospital admissions for knife-related wounds for knife crime, and data on the number of new or repeat clients of services providing support to those who have experienced domestic or sexual abuse provides another important method of measuring domestic and sexual violence.

<sup>4</sup> The ONS estimates that in the year ending March 2019 only around 42% of CSEW comparable crime was reported to the police, although there were large differences by offence type (Office for National Statistics, 2019c)

however for other types of violent crime the CSEW is the more reliable source (Office for National Statistics, 2019a).

### *Trends in violent crime in England and Wales*

Police recorded crime shows that over the last five years, offences involving knives or sharp instruments have increased significantly,<sup>5</sup> with the number of offences in the year ending December 2019 the highest recorded since comparable records began in 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2020a). The Homicide Index had also shown significant increases up until the year ending December 2019, before decreasing for the first time since 2015. This overall decline in homicides in the latest year was driven by a decrease in the number of male victims while over the same period the number of female victims increased (Office for National Statistics, 2020b). For overall violent crime, as measured by the CSEW, there had been a long-term decline in the number of violent incidents since 1995, though this has flattened out in the last five years and the latest available data shows there has been no significant change since 2015 (Office for National Statistics, 2020a). This overall measure of violent crime counts experiences of violent crime based on the following offences: serious wounding; other wounding; common assault; attempted assault; serious wounding with sexual motive; other wounding with sexual motive (Office for National Statistics, 2019c, p. 43).

### *The incompleteness of the overall violent crime measure*

Importantly there is CSEW data on violent crime which is not included in this ONS overall violent crime measure. There are two main exclusions from the ONS violence measure. Firstly, ‘rape’, ‘attempted rape’ and ‘indecent assault’ are not included. The ONS’ decision to exclude sexual offences is due to the “small numbers of sexual offences identified by face-to-face CSEW interviews” which render the numbers “too unreliable” (Office for National Statistics, 2019c, p. 116). However, our initial analysis suggests this reasoning does not hold, as the prevalence of these offences, at least for the recent period which this article focuses on, are actually higher than some of the other offence types that are included in the overall violent crime measure. This rule is therefore applied selectively to sexual offences and not to other types of offences. Whilst we agree low prevalence rates of any type of offence are problematic and bring into question the reliability of the data when analysed separately, we argue that when combining offences to analyse together in a broader measure, as in the violent crime measure, there is no undue emphasis placed on small numbers of individual offences and therefore all data on violent offences should be included. In addition to the methodological reasons for including data on sexual offences, we argue in line with Walby and colleagues (2014a, 2016a), that sexual offences should be included in the overall violence measure on conceptual grounds as well (as discussed further below).

Secondly, the ONS violent crime measure is based on the face-to-face survey of CSEW only; this means it is likely to also be under-estimating domestic and sexual violence. The ONS

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<sup>5</sup> In the latest available year the offences ‘assault with injury’ and ‘assault with intent to cause serious harm’ accounted for 44% of offences involving knives or sharp instruments and robberies accounted for a further 44%; the remaining categories of knife crime are threats to kill and ‘other selected offences’ which includes rape, attempted murder, homicide and sexual assault (Office for National Statistics, 2020a).

acknowledge that domestic violence estimates based on the face-to-face survey should be treated cautiously (Office for National Statistics, 2019c, p. 75) as the prevalence rates for domestic violence from the self-completion module are around four to five times higher for adults than those based on the face-to-face interviews (Walby et al., 2014a; Walby and Allen, 2004, p. 112). Though the self-completion module is the preferred source for estimates of domestic and sexual violence, the ONS are unable to produce incidence rates based on the self-completion module as respondents are asked whether they have experienced violence in the last year but, unlike in the main face-to-face survey, the self-completion survey does not collect information on the number of times this was experienced.<sup>6</sup>

We argue that excluding anonymously reported sexual and domestic violence from the violent crime measure is problematic and constitutes a gendered data gap. Women are at greater risk of experiencing both domestic abuse<sup>7</sup> (Office for National Statistics, 2019e) and sexual violence (Office for National Statistics, 2018b). These exclusions are made more significant as some types of violence against women have increased recently as described above (Long et al., 2018; Office for National Statistics, 2020b; Swann, 2019). There are also indications that this upward trend in violence against women is worsening further under the extraordinary circumstances of the UK-wide lockdown measures during the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020, which has made the already urgent issue of violence against women even more critical as most people are forced to spend more time in their homes (Home Affairs Committee, 2020). Including domestic and sexual violence may therefore alter the trend of overall violent crime, as well as the characteristics of who is most at risk of violence.

In addition to undercounting violence overall, and violence against women in particular, measuring these types of violence separately rather than including them in the mainstream measure, we argue treats sexual and domestic violence as a special case. We acknowledge that it is important to preserve specific definitions and strategies most suitable for addressing these forms of violence, and that alongside the analysis of overall violence, separate analyses specific to both sexual and domestic violence are essential. However, whilst protecting the necessarily distinct approaches to measuring and addressing sexual and domestic violence, it is also important that these forms of violence are not siloed from mainstream definitions and measures of violence, but are acknowledged and included. In excluding these types of violence from official measures it exacerbates the underreporting of violence against women in the media. This issue is clearly illustrated through the recent rise in knife crime which has sparked public concern about violence perpetuated between young men in public spaces, whilst knife crime in domestic violence, perpetuated by men against women, continues to be invisible or at best downplayed (Cook and Walklate, 2020).

#### *Existing research on gendered data gaps in violent crime*

Walby and colleagues have long been advocating for mainstreaming gender and domestic violence into approaches to violent crime on the grounds of its importance for theory, survey methodology, research, and policy; rather than treating them as a separate field of study and excluding them from conversations about overall violence (Walby et al., 2016b, 2016a, 2014b, 2014a; Walby and Towers, 2017). The authors find when gender and domestic

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<sup>6</sup> A question on frequency of abuse was added in 2017 but this was done using a range rather than recording a specific number of incidents and if more than one type of abuse was experienced then one incident could be reported multiple times (Office for National Statistics, 2019c, p. 16).

<sup>7</sup> Domestic abuse includes physical and non-physical abuse (Office for National Statistics, 2019b).

violence are incorporated into the analysis of violence the vast extent of violence experienced by women becomes much more apparent (Walby et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2014b, 2014a). Their work clearly illustrates some of the misconceptions about the risks of violence arising from the hidden gendered patterning of its experience and from not utilising all the available data.

In their empirical analysis of the 2011/12 CSEW, Walby and colleagues disprove the notion that violent crime is primarily a threat to men, and more specifically to men from other men unknown to them (Walby et al., 2014a), the perception which dominates traditional criminology, leaving gender invisible within it (e.g. see discussions in Walby et al. (2014a) and Walby and Towers (2017)). Walby and colleagues (2014a) show that, in fact, women were the victims in almost as many violent offences as men: 45% of violent offences were experienced by women while 55% were experienced by men. These findings are primarily the result of allowing all the reporting of violent offences to be used in the analysis as opposed to applying a cap to the number of incidents within the same 'series' i.e. where the same victim experiences the same type of violence from the same perpetrator under the same circumstances.<sup>8</sup> Walby and colleagues have repeatedly advocated for estimating the number of offences in CSEW using *all* the reported violent incidents, and without applying a cap on the number in the same 'series' of offences (e.g. in Walby et al. (2016a, 2014b)). This method reveals a more accurate picture of the *nature* of violent crime, particularly experienced by women as they are more likely to experience repeat victimization (Ibid.). Using the uncapped measure of violence Walby and colleagues show a significantly higher estimated number of violent incidents overall compared to the ONS capped measure used at the time (Walby et al., 2014a).

Additionally, Walby and colleagues demonstrate how taking all the incidents of violence into account and disaggregating by the type of perpetrator affects what we know about the trends in violent crime. Their findings using the CSEW show that between 2010 and 2013, the number of offences that were domestic in nature had actually increased at the time when overall violence continued to decline (Walby et al., 2014b). In the analysis that followed, disaggregating by gender, the authors also revealed that taking into account high frequency crime unveils that the increase in violence experienced by women was driven by an increase in domestic violence between 2008 and 2013, whilst violence against men was not increasing (Walby et al., 2016a). In their work, the authors were not able to utilise data from the self-completion module (which is known to more accurately measure sexual and domestic violence) because the frequency of intimate partner violence in CSEW data post-2001 does not distinguish between different categories of abusive acts (Walby et al., 2016a). It was therefore not possible for the authors to distinguish between the frequency of violent/physical abuse as opposed to, for example, emotional abuse. While there is certainly an argument to be made that emotional abuse should be viewed as being part of domestic violence, and indeed it is included in its definition within the specialised field of domestic violence, Walby and colleagues' focus is on the mainstream category of 'violent crime', using the 'violence against the person' definition, comparable to that used by ONS in CSEW.

Importantly, the authors' measure departs from the ONS's definition by including sexual

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<sup>8</sup> The publications by Walby and colleagues we refer to in this paragraph (Walby et al., 2016b, 2014a), were written at the time when the ONS capped the number of offences experienced by a person within the same 'series' of crimes at five. Following a public consultation, in November 2016 ONS revised its methodology of repeat victimisation (Office for National Statistics, 2019f), although not completely uncapping the number of offences as Walby and colleagues have been advocating. ONS currently limits the number of offences in their analysis using a crime-specific imputation method based on the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile value.

violence in their definition of violent crime. The authors assert that although sexual offences are not included within the legal category of ‘violence against the person’, conceptually it is important to include sexual violence in the overall measure of violent offences (Walby et al., 2014a) as this acknowledges it is a form of violence rather than side-lining it as a distinct type of violence. There may have been good reason for previously excluding sexual offences from the definition of violence against the person, as up until 2003 the category of sexual offences included some consensual homosexual practices, however these have since been decriminalised (completed by the Sexual Offences Act 2003) and what is now categorised as sexual offences are therefore appropriate to include in the definition of violence against the person (Walby et al., 2014a). While the inclusion of sexual offences (as measured in the main survey) does not significantly increase the estimates of violence against the person, Walby et al argue that it should still be included on conceptual grounds (Walby et al., 2014a). In-line with this argument we also include sexual offences within the overall measure of violence.

What we draw from the body of work by Walby and colleagues is that ignoring the gendered nature of violent crime means not only overlooking the fact that men and women experience different types and amounts of violence but it also results in less accurate estimates of the risk of violence overall. While Walby and colleagues argue that counting victims rather than the number of offences underestimates the extent of violence experienced by women, their analysis could not incorporate the more reliable data on domestic and sexual violence from the self-completion questionnaire (due to the methodological issues describe above) - the very types of violence which particularly affect women. We are in agreement with Walby and colleagues that utilizing the full number of criminal offence incidents importantly addresses the undercounting of violent crime experienced overall and particularly by women, however, the focus of the current work is on the number of people who experience violence rather than the total number of violent events. Although this means that we are not taking into account the gendered nature of multiple experiences of violence, it allows us to integrate the information provided in the self-completion module, and therefore increase the rate of identification of victims compared to only using the main victim file data from the face to face questionnaire. Our contribution therefore lies in addressing a different gendered data gap to that of Walby and colleagues – the potential under-counting of the number of women that experience violence as opposed to the under-counting of the number of violent incidents experienced by women.

#### *Aims and Research questions*

The aim of this research is to provide more accurate estimates of the prevalence of violent crime in England and Wales than the current ONS official statistics show, with particular focus on estimating the prevalence of violent crime by gender. We take the ‘violence against the person’ definition as a starting point - similarly to ONS and abovementioned work by Walby and colleagues – and add to this more reliable measures of sexual and domestic violence using CSEW. While we fully appreciate that non-physical abuse is an integral part of the wider definition of domestic violence, the focus of this work, is on physical acts of violence.

It is important to include the more reliable measures of sexual and domestic violence for three reasons. Firstly, when these types of violence are excluded we are not only

underestimating the true level of violence overall but in particular underestimating violence against women. Secondly, we argue that we have an ethical obligation to make use of the sensitive information that respondents have shared within the survey in relation to experiences of sexual and domestic violence. Finally, as police recorded crime does not have designated National Statistics status, the CSEW thereby provides the official measure of violent crime in England and Wales, which makes it a particularly important source of data. Estimates produced from this data (by ONS) therefore have the potential to influence policy.

This paper aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What happens to the level and trend in violent crime in England and Wales when sexual offences reported in the main CSEW survey and sexual and domestic violence reported in the CSEW self-completion module are included in the measure of violence?
- 2) When measuring violence in this way, who is most at risk of violent crime and how has this changed over time? Specifically, how does risk of violence vary by gender?

### *Methods*

#### *Data*

We use the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) - an annual victim-based survey of around 35,000 respondents, running from 1981. We use the secure version these data<sup>9</sup> for two years: for the year ending in March 2005 and the year ending March 2018. For simplicity of reporting we refer to years throughout the paper as simply 2005 and 2018. We start with 2005 because this is the first year domestic and sexual violence questions were asked in a self-completion questionnaire on a more or less comparable basis (see section on caveats below for more information on the consistency of this module). We take 2018 as the end year because at the time of the analysis it was the most recent data.

The CSEW questionnaire consists of multiple modules some of which are asked of the full sample while others are asked only of sub-samples. We use answers from the core victimisation module, which includes respondents who indicated any experience of crime, and not necessarily violent in nature, during the screener questionnaire asked of the whole sample of adult respondents. The victimisation module consists of a set of detailed face-to-face questions about each incident of personal (as opposed to household) crime experienced in the past 12 months. These crimes are categorised by the ONS into a series of “offences”, six of which the ONS considers to be “violent offences” (see next section for detail).

While some of the experiences of domestic and sexual violence would be captured within the victimisation data, because of its sensitive nature people are often not comfortable talking about such experiences with an interviewer. CSEW therefore collects extra data on these topic areas via the self-completion questionnaire, administered to those aged 16 to 59 up to 2016/17 data collection and 16 to 74 from 2017/18. We utilise data from the self-completion module to complement the information provided within the victimisation module. The self-

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<sup>9</sup> We use secure access data because the data for domestic violence and sexual violence from the self-completion questionnaire is held within the UK Data Service secure server.

completion data allows us to identify adults who experienced sexual violence or domestic violence in the last year, but who were not identified as having experienced violent crime by the main questionnaire (see details below). Since the self-completion module is not administered to the whole sample, our overall analysis is constrained by this age restriction as well (see below).

### *Measuring violence*

We compare three measures of violence. We first derive the ONS original measure of violence using data from the face-to-face questionnaire (referred to in the results as *ONS official measure*), which includes six types of violent offences:

- Serious wounding
- Other wounding
- Common assault
- Attempted assault
- Serious wounding with sexual motive
- Other wounding with sexual motive

Anyone who experienced *at least one* of these in the past 12 months would be counted as having experienced violence using the ONS official measure.

We next add to this measure the following sexual offences, data for which are collected within the same face-to-face module in CSEW but are not currently used within the measure of violence by the ONS:

- Rape
- Attempted rape
- Indecent assault

While some of the people who had experienced sexual offences listed above would have been identified by the ‘serious/other wounding with sexual motive’ questions, these do not capture all sexual offences. This second measure (referred to in our results as *ONS + sexual offences*) therefore provides a more inclusive definition of physical violence which includes all sexual offences reported in the main questionnaire.

Finally, we use data from the self-completion questionnaire to incorporate any extra information provided by individuals in relation to sexual violence perpetrated by anyone and domestic violence – i.e. use of force by a partner/ex-partner or family member (this measure is referred to as *all violence*). For the final, preferred measure anyone who has experienced any of the violent offences reported in the main questionnaire (and captured in the ONS original measure of violence and our second measure of violence) once or more in the past twelve months *or* reported experiencing sexual *or* domestic violence in the last year in the self-completion module would be counted as having experienced violence. Measures of physical force in the self-completion module include pushing, slapping and choking amongst others, where the perpetrator was a partner/ex-partner or a family member. Also from the

self-completion module, we include responses to sexual assault in the last year, which include ‘less serious’ (as categorised within the CSEW questionnaire) sexual assault - such as unwanted touching, and ‘more serious’ sexual assault - such as rape (see Table 1 for more details about the measures).

In terms of the consistency of measures over time it should be noted that there were some changes made to the question structure in the self-completion module between 2010/11 and 2012/13, with a new set of questions being asked from 2013/14 onwards. The impact of this change was an increase in the prevalence of experiencing certain types of violence. After undertaking a split-sample analysis of the 2013/14 data (Office for National Statistics, 2015), the ONS has been adjusting reported estimates of domestic abuse for the years preceding this change manually. Unfortunately it is not possible to apply these adjustments to the violence component of intimate personal violence (which includes both domestic violence and sexual assault by anyone), as the split sample analysis by the ONS did not analyse these types of violence separately. However, looking at the difference the question wording made in the ONS’ analysis of different categories of intimate personal violence (Office for National Statistics, 2015), we would expect our estimate of domestic violence for 2005 to be an underestimate.

[Table 1]

One issue that arises is how to treat invalid responses or refusals for the self-completion questionnaire. If somebody gives a valid response reporting violence in either the main face-to-face survey or the self-completion survey then the valid response is used to count their experience of violence. If someone reports no violence in the main survey and then refuses to answer or gives an invalid response in the self-completion survey they are coded as not having experienced violence.

Figure 1 outlines this process visually; a respondent is coded as having experienced violence if they report this in *either* survey, are recorded as having not experienced violence if they respond negatively in both surveys or in one survey with a missing or invalid response in the other, and are coded as missing from the violence measure if their responses are missing or invalid in *both* surveys.

[Figure 1]

### *Sample*

The sample in our analysis includes respondents aged 16 – 59 years, as this has been the age restriction for the self-completion module up until 2018. This therefore excludes the violence experienced by older people. From the 2018 survey, the upper age limit for the self-completion module was increased to 74 years,<sup>10</sup> and we provide analysis of prevalence of

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<sup>10</sup> From September 2016 the upper age limit of the self-completion module was removed for one quarter of the sample; though this showed that acceptance of the self-completion module declined with age and decreased

violence for this broader sample in the Appendix, though it is not possible to use this more inclusive sample in our analysis of trends in violence. We found that respondents aged 60-74 were less likely to report experiencing violence compared to 16 to 59 year olds and therefore the overall prevalence rates for 16 to 74 year olds are lower in this sample (see Table 1 in the Appendix). This mirrors findings in other research, including research focussed on sexual violence experienced by older women, finding lower prevalence rates compared to younger sections of the population (Bows, 2019, 2018; Bows and Westmerland, 2017).

It is worth noting how our analytical sample differs from that used by the ONS. Since we restrict our sample to 16 to 59 year olds, the prevalence rates of violence using our preferred measure of violence are not comparable to those reported by the ONS in published outputs (Office for National Statistics, 2019a). We therefore report on the estimates of violence using the ONS definition on the restricted sample (age 16-59 years). These rates are higher compared to the ONS reported estimates since our calculations exclude older respondents and younger people are more likely to experience violence including sexual and domestic violence.

### *Analysis*

We first estimate the proportion of people experiencing violence for all three violence measures (*ONS official*, *ONS & sexual offences*, and the *all violence* measure) for 16 to 59 year olds in 2005 and 2018 for the entire sample and also by gender.<sup>11</sup> We then separately analyse trends in domestic and sexual violence by gender to decipher to what extent these types of violence are driving differences in estimates of overall violence for men and women.

To produce these estimates, we use the STATA ‘Inequalities Programme’ developed by Eleni Karagiannaki (forthcoming). The programme estimates the proportion of people who experienced violence by given characteristics, in this case by gender, for each year and tests for differences between groups and changes over time for each group using the *lincom* post-estimation command. The programme also tests for differences in the change between groups using a linear probability model. We present the results in a series of charts and the full results are in Table 1 in the Appendix.

We use individual weights in the analyses, and report on weighted proportions and unweighted frequencies for all the analyses. As CSEW has a complex survey design we use appropriate survey corrections as recommended by ONS.

### *Caveats*

There are a few important caveats to note. Firstly, as mentioned above we are focusing on prevalence of violence (how many people experience violence once or more) rather than incidents (how many times violence was experienced). Taking this approach allows us to make the important contribution of including sexual and domestic violence reported in the self-completion questionnaire, which increases the reporting of these types of violence

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significantly for those aged 75 and over, therefore the age limit was increased to 74 but not removed (Office for National Statistics, 2019c, p. 10).

<sup>11</sup> Within CSEW, gender is identified through a binary-response question (male / female), so not all aspects of gender under the equality act are covered

(Office for National Statistics 2018b). However, whilst reducing the measurement error by incorporating the self-completion data we are at the same time undercounting violence against women by focussing on prevalence rather than incidents, as women are more likely to be repeat victims of violence, including domestic violence (Walby et al., 2016a). Though this approach enables us to make this important contribution and correct one form of undercounting, the under-counting of the amount of violence experienced in repeated incidents needs to be borne in mind.

Secondly, as mentioned above the sample is restricted to those aged 16 to 59 due to age restrictions on the self-completion module. This means we are not able to include the violence experienced by older people. Finally, the structure of the questions in the self-completion module has changed over time and it is not possible to adjust the earlier estimates in-line with ONS' manual adjustments; we therefore expect our earlier measure of violence in 2005 to be an under-estimate.

## *Findings*

### *Comparing the three measures of violence*

As can be seen in Figure 2 the prevalence of violence overall is higher in the two alternative measures compared to the ONS official measure, as expected, though the overall trend is the same showing a downward slope between 2005 and 2018. Including sexual offences reported in the main survey (*ONS + sexual offences* measure) does not make a big difference to the overall prevalence of violence compared with the ONS measure (with 4.2% compared to 4.1% experiencing violence in 2005 and 2.7% compared with 2.5% experiencing violence in 2018). The difference in overall prevalence of violence is much greater when the *ONS measure* is compared with the *all violence* measure which includes sexual and domestic violence reported in the self-completion module, also shown in Figure 2, with the prevalence of violence increasing from 4.1% to 6.8% in 2005 and more than doubling in 2018 from 2.5% to 5.2%. In answer to our first research question 'What happens to the level and trend in violent crime in England and Wales when sexual and domestic violence is included in the measure of violence?' we find that the prevalence of violence increases significantly in both years when sexual and domestic violence is included, compared to the *ONS official measure* of violence, though the trend is the same with both measures showing a decline in violence between 2005 and 2018.

[Figure 2]

When we compare the *ONS measure* with the *all violence* measure by gender, we find that not only do these measures produce different estimates of overall violence but also now produce different trends for men and women. As can be seen in

Figure 3 (and Appendix Table 1) estimates based on the *ONS official* measure of violence show that the risk of experiencing violence decreased significantly<sup>12</sup> between 2005 and 2018 for both men. At both time points men were significantly more likely to experience violence than women. However, when the *all violence* measure is used we see a dramatically different pattern. According to this measure, only men experienced a significant decrease in violence between 2005 and 2018 and by 2018 the prevalence of violence by gender is actually the opposite to that presented by the *ONS official* measure; women were significantly *more likely* than men to experience violence in the latest period.

[Figure 3]

#### *Estimating domestic and sexual violence separately by gender*

In order to unpick what is driving this different trend in the preferred overall violence measure— i.e. what type of violence is contributing to the diverging trends where violence decreases for men over the period, but not for women, we separately estimate domestic violence (including physical force and sexual assault) and sexual assault perpetrated by anyone, as reported in the self-completion survey. Figures 4 and 5 below (as well as Table 1 in Appendix) show that there was a significant fall in the proportion of both men and women experiencing domestic violence (including sexual violence) over the period, however there was a significant increase in sexual violence (perpetrated by anyone) experienced by women. Overall violence for women has not decreased because sexual violence experienced by women has increased over the period.

[Figure 4]

[Figure 5]

#### *Discussion and conclusion*

This paper addresses a gendered data gap in violent crime statistics reported by ONS which exclude data on sexual offences from the face to face questionnaire in CSEW as well as data on sexual and domestic violence from the self-completion module, which is known to have a much better disclosure rate. We argue it is important to address this gendered data gap for three reasons: first, to more accurately estimate the prevalence of overall violence and importantly who is most at risk of violence. Second, we have an ethical obligation to make use of the sensitive information respondents have shared in the self-completion survey. And finally, because as designated official statistics the CSEW and estimates derived from it have the potential to influence policy; it is therefore imperative this data source is used to provide the most accurate estimates possible.

To address this gendered data gap we re-estimate the prevalence of violent crime, incorporating sexual offences reported in the main questionnaire of the CSEW and sexual and domestic violence reported in the self-completion module. The findings show that overall violence is underestimated in the official measure of violent crime which omits this data on sexual and domestic violence, and that violence against women in particular is underestimated. Contrary to what official data suggests, we find women did *not* experience a significant reduction in violence between 2005 and 2018 whilst men did and in fact by 2018

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<sup>12</sup> We use  $p < 0.05$  as a cut-off for statistical significance, however, all results reported here are significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

women were more likely to experience violent crime than men, the opposite pattern to those shown in official figures. Upon closer examination it becomes clear that these divergent trends in violence for men and women are driven by an increase in sexual violence experienced by women between 2005 and 2018.

Of course one reason for the increase in the prevalence of sexual violence between 2005 and 2018 could be that reporting rates have improved as the topic of sexual violence has received more attention in mainstream media and the stigma of discussing sexual violence has been reduced. There is some evidence for example, that following the MeToo movement reporting of sexual crimes increased across multiple countries (Levy and Mattsson, 2020). However, we would expect the increased reporting of sexual violence to apply equally to both men and women so this would not explain why women experienced a larger increase in sexual violence over this period. Furthermore, better reporting rates would mean a welcome reduction in measurement error suggesting that the 2018 estimates of sexual violence would be more accurate than the 2005 estimates. It is the 2018 estimates which show the reversed trend for men and women, lending more confidence to the gendered pattern of these findings. These findings highlight an important and worrying trend; the increase in sexual violence experienced by women in recent years which requires an urgent policy response.

Based on this analysis we have four recommendations for the monitoring of violent crime going forward. First, we suggest that the sexual offences reported in the main CSEW survey be included in ONS' measure of overall violence. Though this increases prevalence by only a little, it still reduces measurement error and is important to include on conceptual grounds – to acknowledge that sexual violence is violence, in-line with the position of Walby et al (2014a).

Second, given that the self-completion survey is known to have much better reporting rates for domestic and sexual violence compared to the face to face survey we urge ONS to include these measures to provide estimates of the prevalence of violence alongside their estimates of violent incidents (for which the self-completion data cannot be used). Doing so would give a better indication of how many people are affected by violent crime and which groups are most at risk, which has important policy implications and may better inform where resources ought to be targeted.

Importantly, we do not argue that all violence including domestic and sexual violence should be treated as if all violence is homogenous; the different approaches necessary to understand and address different types of violence, including domestic and sexual violence (which are themselves distinct from each other) must be preserved. Measuring and researching violence against women separately to other types of violence serves the important goals of making violence against women 'more visible' ultimately with the view to 'harnessing that visibility and the weight of numbers produced towards the ultimate goal of ending violence against women' (Walklate et al., 2020, p. 94). Separate specialist research into violence against women is critical to understand more about the complex factors at play if policy interventions are to be successful. However, we argue that whilst domestic and sexual violence require a separate focused understanding, for the same reasons – to highlight and ultimately end violence against women – these types of violence must also be part of the broader mainstream definition of violence which currently discounts it. Reframing the definition of violence to include sexual violence is essential to ensure this type of violence provokes public

concern and moves up the policy agenda. These distinct types of violence should be acknowledged and counted when estimating overall violence and importantly who is most at risk, which is essential for allocating funding, and devising and targeting policy solutions aimed at protecting those most at risk of violence.

The importance of including domestic and sexual violence in the official measure of overall violence has been made more critical by the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, which has created a toxic combination of conditions leading to a disturbing increase in domestic violence, as measured by calls to support services and domestic violence killings (Home Affairs Committee, 2020), whilst at the same time other types of violence, such as knife crime committed outside of people's homes, had declined. The current official measure of overall violent crime would show from this a decline in violent crime despite the increase in domestic violence; it is critical that this increase in domestic violence is included in trends in overall violence.

Third, given higher disclosure rates of the self-completion module, we support Walby and Towers' (2017) advice for the victim file data of the CSEW to be collected confidentially – i.e. via self-completion for all respondents. This recommendation is compatible with plans for the CSEW to be administered online in future (Hamlyn et al., 2018). This has the potential to further increase the reporting rate of violence, and the reporting of sexual and domestic violence in particular, though as discussed below, steps also need to be taken to ensure respondents who are digitally excluded can still provide anonymous responses. The move to online surveys could have ensured that the CSEW continued to collect reliable data on sexual and domestic violence during the Covid-19 lockdown. Unfortunately because the survey had to be administered by telephone the crucial questions on sexual and domestic violence from the self-completion module were not included due to ethical concerns (Office for National Statistics, 2020c). Crucial data on sexual and domestic violence is therefore missing at a time when we know these types of violence have increased.

Finally, we welcome the extension of the self-completion survey to those aged up to 74 years and suggest efforts should be made to extend this further, as violence experienced by older people is currently excluded. This is particularly significant given the oldest age group we were able to analyse (aged 50-59 years) actually experienced an increase in violence between 2005 and 2018<sup>13</sup>. Although ONS found the self-completion module to have lower response rates for those aged over 74, we argue that efforts should be made to collect this information in another form that is more accessible to older respondents. There is still a dearth of evidence on the experiences of sexual violence of older people as age remains a 'forgotten category' of much intersectional research (Bows, 2019, p. 81) and is currently not well captured by the domestic violence literature nor the 'elder abuse' literature (Bows and Westmerland, 2017). Extending and making more accessible the self-completion questionnaire of the CSEW would therefore form an important contribution in facilitating much needed research on the violence experienced by older people. Again, ultimately better evidence leads to more effective policy.

This work has importantly shone a spotlight on the gendered inequalities of violent crime which are currently obscured in official measures. However, other protected characteristics are also important and risks of experiencing violence vary greatly among women with

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<sup>13</sup> These results are not published here but available from the authors upon request.

different characteristics. When we consider the risk of experiencing violence for those whose characteristics fall at specific intersections of gender, ethnicity, age and disability for example, other inequalities become clear. Analysing intersectionalities is vital to reveal the 'distinctive experiences of those at specific social locations' (Dean and Platt, 2016, p. 352). Future research using the more inclusive measure of violence developed here therefore must also include analysis of risks of violence by other characteristics as well as the risk of violence when these characteristics overlap.

## Appendix

Table 1 Table of results: Prevalence of violence shown in proportions, change in proportions and difference in change by gender, 2005 and 2018, England and Wales

	Unweighted sample size		Percent in 2005		Percent in 2018		Difference between groups in 2005 (a)			Difference between groups in 2018 (a)			Change for each group between 2005 and 2018 (b)			Difference in change between groups (c)		
	2005	2018	%	se	%	se	ppn	se	p-value	ppn	se	p-value	ppn	se	p-value	ppn	se	p-value
<b>1) ONS measure of violence, 16-59 year old sample</b>																		
All	29,686	21,802	4.080	0.002	2.480	0.001							-1.590	0.002	0.000			
Male	13,406	10,101	5.250	0.003	3.200	0.002							-2.050	0.003	0.000			
Female	16,280	11,701	2.930	0.002	1.770	0.001	-2.330	0.003	0.000	-1.430	0.003	0.000	-1.160	0.002	0.000	0.900	0.004	0.022
<b>2) ONS measure of violence &amp; sexual assault/rape, 16-59 year old sample</b>																		
All	29,686	21,802	4.190	0.002	0.027	0.001							-1.470	0.002	0.000			
<b>3) All violence, 16-59 year old sample</b>																		
All	29,686	21,802	6.780	0.002	5.220	0.002							-1.560	0.003	0.000			
Male	13,406	10,101	7.010	0.003	4.580	0.003							-2.420	0.004	0.000			
Female	16,280	11,701	6.550	0.002	5.850	0.003	-0.450	0.004	0.208	1.270	0.004	0.001	-0.700	0.004	<b>0.057</b>	1.720	0.005	0.001
<b>4) All violence, 16-74 year old sample</b>																		
All		30,100			4.370	0.002												
Male		14,155			3.880	0.002												
Female		15,945			4.860	0.002				0.980	0.003	0.001						
<b>5) Domestic violence (including sexual domestic assault), 16-59 year old sample</b>																		
All	22,062	18,971	3.640	0.002	2.020	0.001							-1.620	0.002	0.000			
Male	10,072	8,874	2.880	0.002	1.450	0.002							-1.440	0.003	0.000			
Female	11,990	10,097	4.380	0.002	2.590	0.002	1.500	0.003	0.000	1.140	0.003	0.000	-1.790	0.003	0.000	-0.360	0.004	0.374
<b>6) Sexual violence (by anyone), 16-59 year old sample</b>																		
All	23,463	19,536	1.290	0.001	1.980	0.001							0.690	0.002	0.000			
Male	10,703	9,129	0.400	0.001	0.710	0.001							0.310	0.001	0.030			
Female	12,760	10,407	2.160	0.002	3.260	0.002	1.760	0.002	0.000	2.550	0.003	0.000	1.100	0.003	0.000	0.800	0.003	0.014

*Source: Authors' analysis using ONS, Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (9<sup>th</sup> edition).*

Notes: 1. All percentages are weighted

2. The following abbreviations used: se – standard errors; p – p-value from testing the difference between proportions (or change in proportions); % - weighted percentage; ppn – percentage point.

3. Estimates by gender for the second measure of violence (ONS & sexual assault) not shown, to avoid secondary statistical disclosure

4. In 2005, data was not collected from 60-74 year olds, we therefore cannot report on 2005 figures for 16-74 year old respondents.

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## Data Reference

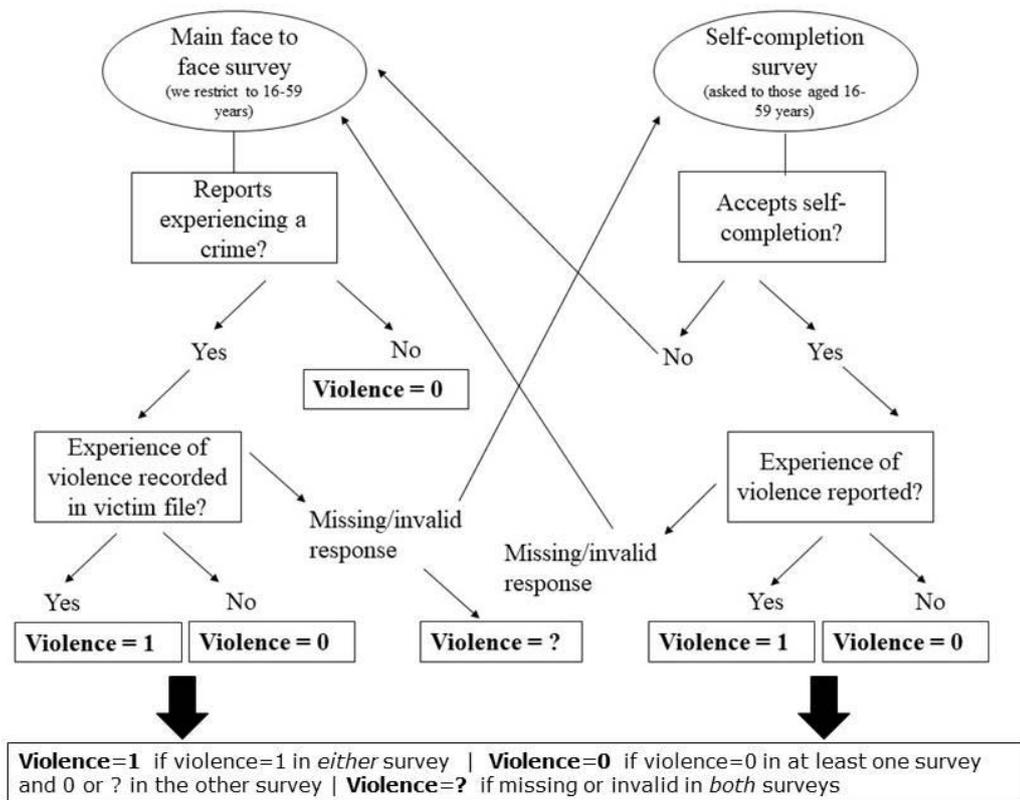
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<http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7280-9>.

## Tables and Figures

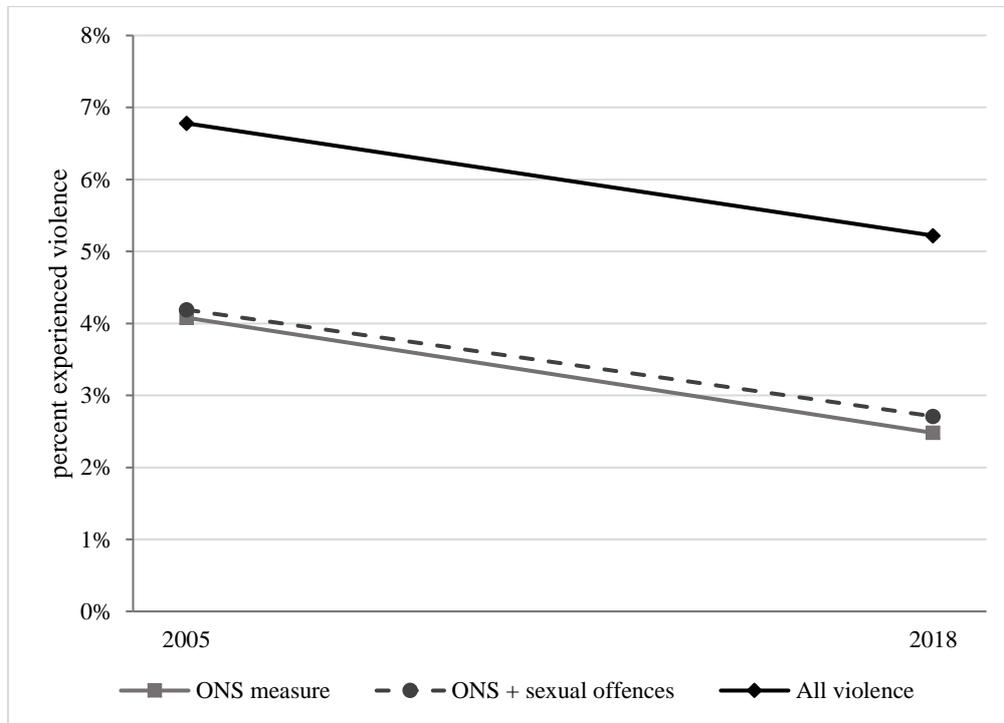
**Table 1 Measures of violence used in analyses**

ONS official measure	ONS+ sexual offences	All violence measure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious wounding</li> <li>• Other wounding</li> <li>• Common assault</li> <li>• Attempted assault</li> <li>• Serious wounding with sexual motive</li> <li>• Other wounding with sexual motive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious wounding</li> <li>• Other wounding</li> <li>• Common assault</li> <li>• Attempted assault</li> <li>• Serious wounding with sexual motive</li> <li>• Other wounding with sexual motive</li> </ul> <p><i>And sexual offences:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rape</li> <li>• Attempted rape</li> <li>• Indecent assault</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious wounding</li> <li>• Other wounding</li> <li>• Common assault</li> <li>• Attempted assault</li> <li>• Serious wounding with sexual motive</li> <li>• Other wounding with sexual motive</li> </ul> <p><i>And sexual offences:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rape</li> <li>• Attempted rape</li> <li>• Indecent assault</li> </ul> <p><i>And from the self-completion module, all in reference to the past 12 months:</i></p> <p><i>Domestic violence</i></p> <p>Whether a partner/ex-partner/family member used force against the respondent e.g. pushing/kicking/slapping</p> <p><i>Sexual violence, including sexual offences, e.g.</i> unwanted touching and penetration/attempted penetration</p>

**Figure 1 Diagram of responses included in measuring violence**

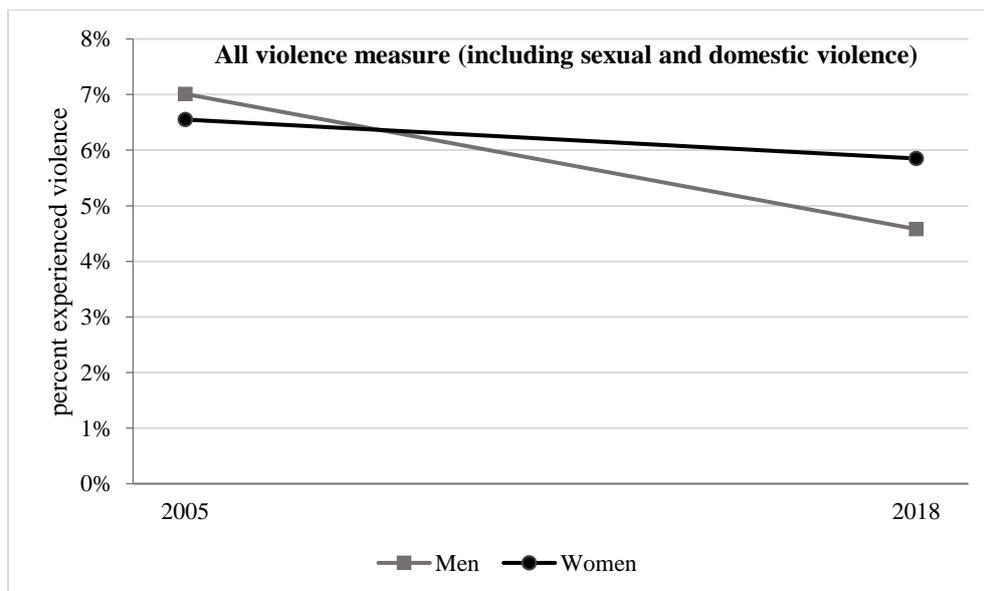
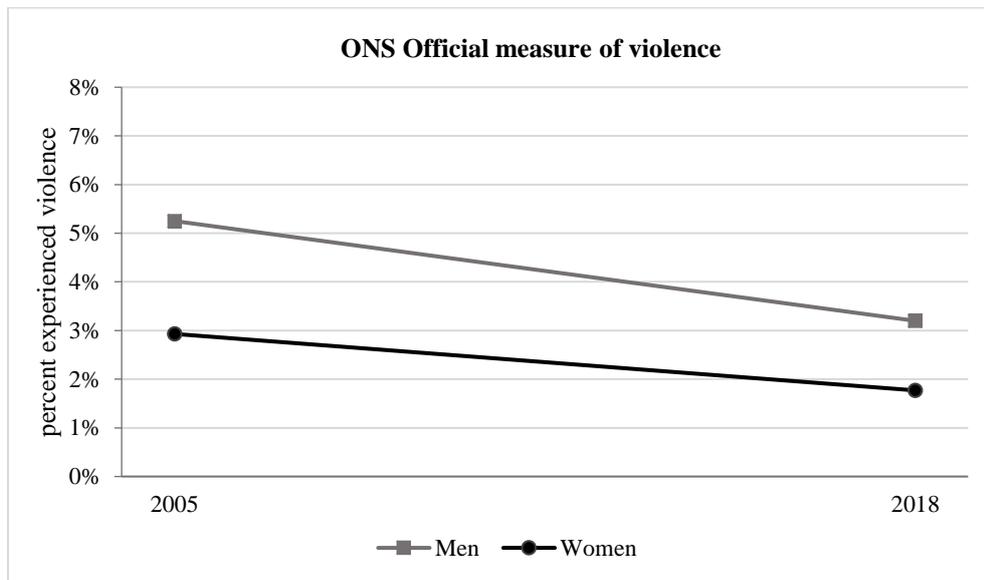


**Figure 2 Prevalence of violence, 2005 and 2018, ONS official measure; ONS & sexual offences; All violence including sexual offences and domestic/sexual violence, age 16-59 years, England and Wales**



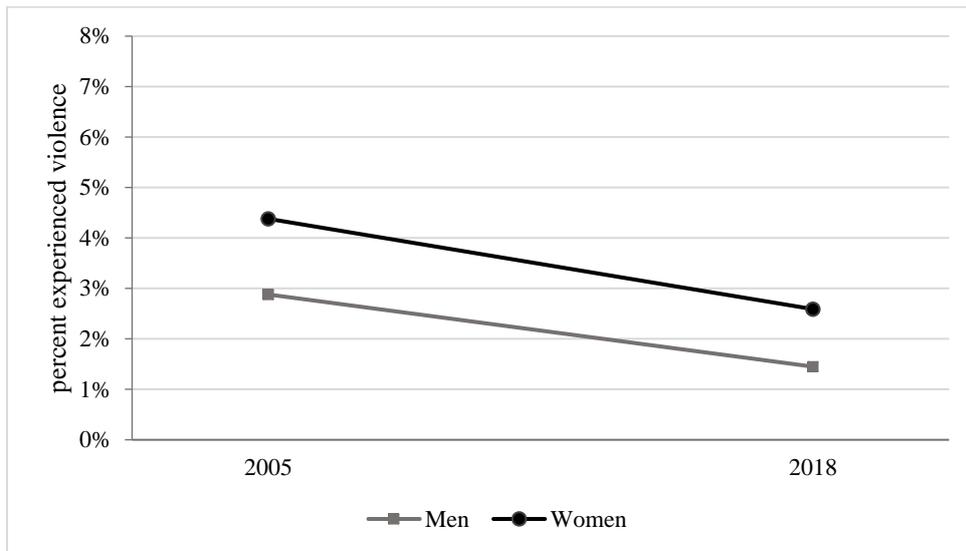
*Source: Authors' analysis using ONS, Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (9<sup>th</sup> edition). Notes: Sample size=51,488*

**Figure 3 Prevalence of violence by gender, 2005 and 2018 (ONS official measure and all violence measure) age 16-59 years, England and Wales**



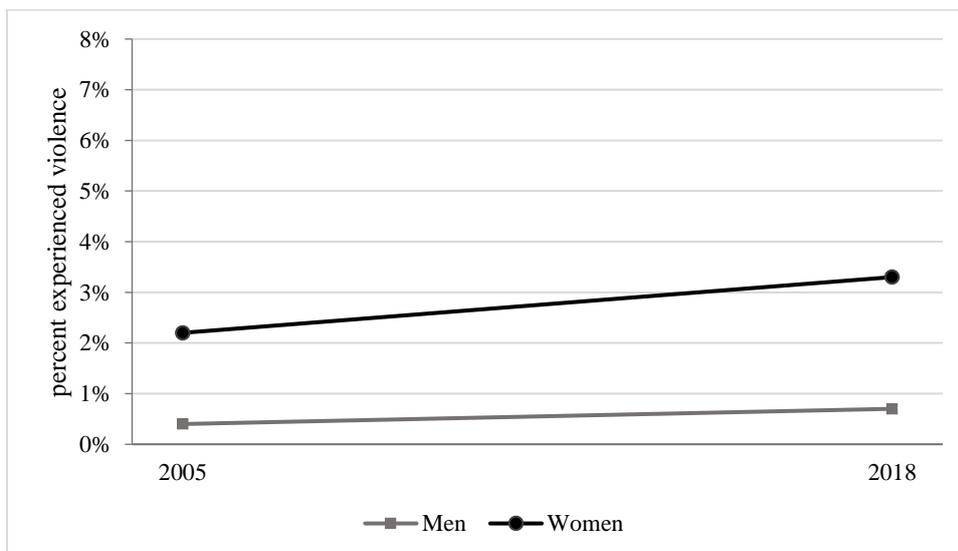
Source: Authors' analysis using ONS, Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (9<sup>th</sup> edition). Notes: sample size=51,488

**Figure 4 Proportion aged 16-59 who experienced domestic violence, England and Wales**



Source: Authors' analysis using ONS, Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (9<sup>th</sup> edition). Notes: sample size= 41,033

**Figure 5 Proportion age 16-59 who experienced sexual assault (by anyone), England and Wales**



Source: Authors' analysis using ONS, Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (9<sup>th</sup> edition). Notes: sample size= 42,999