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# Evidence and policy review: Domestic violence and poverty

*A Research Report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation*

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# Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

## *About this report*

In 2013/14, over 1.1 million women and 500,000 men in England and Wales experienced partner abuse in the last year. However, despite international recognition of the connections between women's poverty and increased vulnerability to domestic abuse, the connections between poverty and domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and the policies actions needed to tackle these problems remain poorly understood in a UK context.

This report summarises existing evidence on the connections between poverty and DVA and considers the potential anti-poverty implications of DVA and related policy responses. In doing so, we hope to raise awareness of the ways in which anti-poverty policies can also promote the prevention of violence against women. More specifically, the review was prepared to inform the development of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Whilst gender inequality is both a cause and consequence of women's vulnerability to poverty, robust evidence on the connections between poverty and DVA is limited. Addressing this knowledge gap is vital in ensuring both that anti-poverty initiatives are sensitive to their impacts for women's vulnerability to DVA, and that actions to tackle DVA acknowledge the socio-economic context within which abuse occurs.

## *Is there an association between DVA and poverty?*

Yes. Notwithstanding some significant methodological limitations, existing analyses in the UK and internationally have consistently found vulnerability to DVA to be associated with low income, economic strain, and benefit receipt.

Analysis of the 2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey presented here supports the conclusion that poverty is associated with heightened vulnerability to DVA. For almost every measure of poverty included within this study, the prevalence of experiencing both physical abuse and controlling behaviour are significantly higher for respondents experiencing poverty than for the non-poor group.

These findings confirm and extend earlier UK analyses using BCS/CSEW data, and are consistent with European and North American evidence on the connections between poverty and DVA drawn on the basis of analysis of practitioner caseloads, community-based samples, and random sample population studies.

## *How can we explain the relationship between poverty and DVA?*

Existing theory and evidence suggests a complex set of relationships and interdependencies underpin the observed association between poverty and DVA.

Gendered assumptions about the allocation of household resources and caring responsibilities are central in shaping women's vulnerability to DVA. These include:

- Gendered assumptions around shared access to household incomes and resources
- Situations of financial dependency which can put women at risk of poverty if they leave, including whether benefits are received as a dependent or in one's own right
- Gendered expectations regarding women's caring responsibilities which limit employment prospects
- Gendered expectations that benefits received by women are for the benefit of other family members
- Situations where male partners prevent women from working, claiming benefits, or leaving the house

The mechanisms linking poverty and DVA are not currently well understood and it is all too easy to rush to unwarranted conclusions. Whilst robust evidence on poverty and DVA is at best patchy, most studies emphasise on the one hand the effects of *financial strain* arising from poverty for relationship stress and relationship quality, and/or *status-based* models of interpersonal conflict arising from perceived diminished role-performance (e.g. in relation to the male breadwinner model) on the other.

However, the design and delivery of social welfare policies can also trap women in abusive relationships for example as a result of lack of court-ordered child support (reducing incomes), a lack of affordable child care (increasing reliance on the partner's family), and partner abuse which limits women's ability to work and other opportunities. Welfare reforms emphasising personal 'responsibility' and labour market activation increasingly put low-income victims of domestic abuse at greater risk of welfare sanctions due to noncompliance with work requirements. In doing so, welfare reforms which seek to reduce 'dependency' on public welfare may in the process be encouraging 'dangerous dependencies' on violent partners.

Moreover, domestic violence and abuse can also be a driver of poverty vulnerability for partners fleeing abuse. Women experiencing DVA often become single parents with limited capacity to earn independently, and are more likely to report both financial difficulties and ongoing financial abuse from abusive former partners (e.g. withholding child support contributions).

## *What are the implications for anti-poverty policy and practice?*

Interventions to tackle DVA span a wide range of statutory, non-statutory and civil society services including policing and criminal justice responses, health and mental health interventions, multi-agency approaches, and specialist support for abuse survivors. However, few UK interventions have focused on practical financial, employment or educational skills for survivors of domestic violence.

Helping women to better address the financial impacts of abuse, and to access debt services and future employment opportunities is essential. Offering victims advice about how to disentangle their financial arrangements from an abusive partner whilst remaining safe has been successfully used in the US might be of benefit to abuse victims in the UK. More training is also needed for DVA practitioners to fully understand how financial abuse can limit victim's ability to leave an abusive relationship

At the same time, the impacts of wider welfare reform in the UK may well exacerbate existing connections between poverty and DVA vulnerability by reinforcing financial dependence on abusive partners and reinforcing existing patterns of social vulnerability to DVA.

Social policies to redress gender inequalities are important in redressing the gendered experience of poverty *and* domestic abuse – for example, through:

- Making it easier for women to access well-paid work with access to affordable childcare
- Ensuring that any benefits payments do not reinforce financial dependence on male partners
- Ensuring that women are not penalised for non-contribution as a result of caring responsibilities
- Ensuring that financial abuse is more explicitly recognised in UK government's strategy to address violence against women
- Ensuring that welfare policies are assessed in relation to differential gender impacts especially for family members with limited autonomy

# 1. Introduction

In 2013/14 it is estimated that more than 1.1 million women and 500,000 men in England and Wales experienced partner abuse in the last year, with women more likely than men to have experienced all types of intimate violence during this period. Across their adult lives, more than one fifth (22%) of women reported non-sexual partner abuse in 2013/14, with more than one quarter (28%) reporting domestic abuse of any kind in this period. In England and Wales, an average of more than ninety women a year were killed by partners or former partners over the 2003-2014 period, or nearly two deaths per week (ONS, 2015). The impact of domestic violence and abuse on children is extensively documented in recent research revealing that one in seven (14%) children has been exposed to domestic violence between adults in their homes during childhood (Radford et al., 2011). In addition to the terrible human costs of domestic violence, the economic impacts of DVA are also substantial. In 2004, the total cost of domestic violence for the state, employers and victims was estimated at around £23 billion (Walby, 2004c). Although there has been a significant decline in the prevalence of DVA since then (ONS, 2015, Guy, 2014), in 2008 the total cost of domestic violence was still nearly £16 billion (Walby, 2009). Recent research (Walby et al, 2016) also suggests that taking into account repeat incidents demonstrates an increase in violence against women which goes against current trends in violence per se.

This report presents a narrative summary of existing empirical evidence on the connections between poverty and domestic violence and abuse (DVA). It summarises existing evidence drawn from social surveys conducted in the UK and elsewhere, and considers this evidence alongside qualitative evidence on domestic violence and its connections with socio-economic disadvantage and social welfare. The report also considers the potential implications of existing policy actions to address DVA from a gendered perspective in responding to poverty. In doing so, we consider how anti-poverty policies can be designed and delivered in ways which contribute to the prevention of violence against women including DVA.

The evidence reported here is based on an expert-led narrative review of more than 80 studies comprising peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and research reports reporting on domestic violence, its connections with socio-economic disadvantage, and subsequent policy and practice responses. Material cited in this report was identified on the basis of bibliographic database searches, citation tracking, and expert review, and focuses on studies reporting on evidence from the UK along with international evidence where relevant.

A recent study focusing on men suggested that “*unlike the national Crime Survey England and Wales (CSEW) data, where lower socioeconomic status groups had higher risk for experiencing DVA, our study [with men] found no consistent evidence of an association with socioeconomic status*” (Hester et al, 2015: 7). Given this finding, and a lack of research which focuses on poverty, DVA, and men (Bennett and Daly, 2015), this report focuses on the issue of poverty and domestic violence and abuse in relation to women as victims of abuse. Some of the issues raised will be relevant to male victims of negative relationship behaviours but we recognise that more research is needed to clarify how.

Firstly, it is also important to recognise, as do most international bodies who have looked at relationships between poverty and DVA, that whilst associations may exist between the two, potential causal mechanisms are currently poorly understood and this reflects the limitations of existing data sources in this area. This should of course warrant caution in interpreting this relationship and drawing inferences for policy and practice. Secondly, existing survey-based evidence on the associations between poverty and DVA is probabilistic in nature, that is, whilst it describes heightened vulnerability, domestic abuse remains very far from being an inevitable consequence of poverty. It is important to emphasise that DVA remains widespread throughout society in rich and poor countries, and therefore interventions targeted at specific populations (including people experiencing poverty) on their own will be inadequate in the absence of a wider understanding of the social drivers of violence against women associated with patriarchal norms.

We begin by outlining the policy and practice context of research in this area (Section 2), before going on the review existing evidence on poverty and DVA (Section 3). We conclude by considering potential policy and practice implications of these findings for the development of effective anti-poverty policies (Section 4).



## 2. Policy context

Internationally, policy on DVA is incorporated within the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). As part of its commitment to the elimination of violence against women, the United Nations General Assembly recognises that violence against women undermines women's capability to realise full human rights and freedoms. The report is also explicit in stating "*conversely, women's poverty, lack of empowerment and marginalization placed them at increased risk of violence*" (UN, 2010: 2).

Across Europe, the importance of disrupting attitudes and behaviours which perpetuate violence against women including domestic violence and abuse, is recognised through the 2011 Istanbul Convention which became a legally binding instrument in 2014 (e.g. Hester, 2015; CoE, 2014). Whilst not yet formally ratified in England and Wales, the Istanbul convention is a cornerstone of the UK Government's violence against women and girls strategy (Home Office, 2014). This strategy highlights the importance of addressing the needs of victims/survivors of DVA (i.e. including welfare needs) through inter-ministerial approaches across government. This agenda raises possible spaces for action within government policy to address the impact of existing policies on those experiencing DVA.

Underpinning this perspective is a general understanding that gender inequality is both a cause and consequence of the gendered experience of poverty – a perspective widely shared within global policies directed at combatting gender based violence (e.g. World Bank, 2012). Within a European context, the Women Against Violence, Europe (WAVE) studies report that across Europe "*social and economic rights should be guaranteed for all women victims of gender-based violence, so that they have a chance to live empowered and independent lives*" (Blank et al, 2015; 52). They provide a Europe-wide analysis of the actions taken by different countries to meet that obligation. The Istanbul Convention represents "*the first legally binding instrument to cover all forms of violence against women: physical, sexual, psychological, economic, as well as sexual harassment and stalking*" (Blank et al., 2015: 11). However, no concrete recommendations are made to consider Europe-wide actions on how financial relationships can exacerbate victims experiences of both abusive relationships and attempts to recover post-separation. This is certainly something that GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence), who monitor and evaluate the Convention, should consider in future.

Whilst Article 8 of the Istanbul Convention outlines the rights of victims to access victim support services, these recommendations fall short of addressing the longer term needs of women experiencing DVA who may be financially dependent on the offender on account of the gendered structure of families and society. The report recognizes that the serious effects of partner violence disproportionately affect women as a result of gendered patterns of economic and social 'dependency': "*Women are affected disproportionately by this type of violence and the situation can be worse if the woman is dependent on the offender economically, socially or as regards her right to residence*" (2015: 15).

Nevertheless, as discussed below, robust empirical evidence on the wider connections between poverty, deprivation and DVA is limited. Addressing this knowledge gap is vital in ensuring that anti-poverty initiatives are sensitive to their potential impacts regarding women's vulnerability to DVA. It is also crucial in ensuring that policy actions to tackle DVA are informed by an awareness of the wider socio-economic context and the ways in which this informs behaviour alongside other dimensions of social difference (e.g. including demographic, ethnic, and cultural differences).

## 2.1 Poverty, Gender and DVA

Government initiatives to address issues of poverty and disadvantage often fail to adequately consider the gendered dynamics of poverty and the role which gender plays in mediating family relations and transactions. As highlighted by Sen, "*to concentrate on family poverty irrespective of gender can be misleading in terms of both causation and consequences*" (1990: 124). This perspective would seem particularly important when considering how gendered roles impact on manifestations of DVA and coercive control in particular (Stark, 2007).

The discourses of poverty and DVA utilise a concept of gender inequality in attempting to understand both phenomenon. It is beyond the scope of this review to consider in depth the gendered implications of wider social policies to address poverty which are extensively reviewed by Bennett and Daly (2014). However, as these authors recognise in relation to poverty, "*gender inequalities do not necessarily map directly on to gendered poverty*" (2014:34) so a more sophisticated, intersectional analysis of gendered inequality is required when considering the relationship between poverty and DVA.

Bennett and Daly (2014) summarise their review as locating "*the gendered risks and nature of poverty in practices and relations associated with the family, the market and the welfare state and their combined effects*" (2014: 7). On the basis of an extensive review of research evidence they suggest two underlying policy issues of importance: "*access to an adequate independent income over the life course for women and men, and fairer sharing of caring and the costs of caring both between women and men in households and more widely*" (2014:9). Both of these key themes, when applied to examples of real policy and welfare reform, highlight the ways in which current policy can impact differently when applied to men and women within families. These issues become even more pronounced when considering the existence of violence and abuse.

Bennett and Daly (2014) illustrate circumstances in which gendered assumptions relating to the material distribution of household resources and opportunities may have potential DVA impacts, including:

- Gendered assumptions around shared access to household incomes and resources
- Situations of financial dependency which can put women at risk of poverty if they leave, including whether benefits are received as a dependent or in one's own right
- Gendered expectations regarding women's caring responsibilities which limit employment prospects

- Gendered expectations that benefits received by women are for the benefit of other family members

Although rarely mentioned in the poverty literature, we might add to this list situations where male partners (or other household members) prevent women from working, claiming benefits, or leaving the house.

The evidence reviewed by Bennett and Daly (2014) highlighted gendered differences in poverty vulnerability and recurrent poverty in particular. Women are more likely to suffer income loss and an increase in debts, which may become long term, following divorce or separation. They also report that women are more likely to perceive 'necessities' as items for the household as opposed to items for themselves. In discussing the impact of personal relations on poverty, Bennett and Daly (2014: 57) note the inclusion of financial abuse within the UK government definition of DVA, and are explicit that "*lack of financial independence can delay or prevent victims leaving their abusers*".

### 3. Reviewing the evidence on poverty and DVA

Studies of domestic violence prevalence in the UK and internationally have consistently found significant associations between DVA and low income, economic strain, and benefit receipt. Notwithstanding the significant methodological issues that this evidence raises (see *Section 3.1 below*), similar conclusions are reached in the UK and Europe, albeit on the basis of a more limited evidence base. In the UK, analysis of British Crime Survey (now the Crime Survey of England and Wales) data demonstrates a significant association between household income and DVA, with women (and men) living in poor and financially insecure households being more likely to experience domestic violence than better-off households (Towers, 2015; Walby & Allen, 2004). We review this existing evidence (including its shortcomings) documenting the association between DVA and poverty, financial insecurity and low income in Section 3.2 below.

However, whilst research shows a consistent association here, the explanations offered in support of these findings are more varied. Existing theory and evidence suggests a complex set of relationships and interdependencies underpinning the observed association between poverty and DVA. Clearly, financial strain and social and material deprivation can have strong negative effects for relationships (Stock et al., 2014; Ghate & Hazell, 2004), as well as exacerbating and compounding existing patterns of vulnerability to DVA (e.g. associated with employment status, availability of social support, etc.). At the same time, economic insecurity (and the patterns of interpersonal dependency it creates) can also trap people in abusive relationships, and levy a significant financial penalty on those escaping partner violence and abuse. A lack of court-mandated child-support, limited childcare options, and interference by abusive partners which limits women's ability to work, are just some of the barriers to labour market participation created by DVA cited as factors preventing women from escaping poverty (e.g. Bell, 2003; Swanberg & Logan, 2005). Moreover, the design and delivery of social assistance policies can have an important impact in shaping responses to DVA, and the impacts of welfare reform for DVA vulnerability has been an important focus of research both in the US (e.g. Scott et al., 2002) and in the UK (e.g. Howard & Skipp, 2015). In this evidence summary, we therefore focus on: the impacts of poverty for intimate partnerships; its effects on individual strategies for responding to DVA, and; the implications of wider reforms in the delivery for welfare (including DVA services) for DVA vulnerability.

#### *3.1 What are the limitations of the UK evidence base?*

In the UK, best estimates of the extent and distribution of vulnerability to domestic violence and abuse are drawn almost exclusively from analysis of the British Crime Survey (BCS) (now the Crime Survey of England and Wales, (CSEW)). These data address serious omissions in police recorded crime statistics arising as a result of under-reporting, the absence of a specific DVA crime code, and variations in police practice. Moreover, analyses based upon the BCS/CSEW series also have the advantage of drawing upon large-scale random samples in order to generate nationally representative findings on the basis of validated, reliable and longitudinally consistent instruments. For this reason the BCS/CSEW, and above all the

interpersonal violence module, is widely recognised as the best source of data on this topic. Nevertheless, the survey is known to substantially underestimate the extent of repeat victimisation because of the cap on the number of similar incidents recorded. This has a very considerable impact upon overall official estimates of DVA derived from the survey and is estimated to result in undercounting the true prevalence of both domestic violence and violence against women by around 60% (Walby et al., 2014; UK Statistics Authority, 2011).

The measurement problems and definitional challenges inherent in estimating vulnerability to DVA on the basis of survey data are well documented (e.g. Williamson, 2012; UK Statistics Authority, 2011). These issues are compounded when examining the relationship between poverty and DVA given the understandable limitations of the BCS/CSEW in measuring poverty and socio-economic disadvantage. Firstly, the measurement of income is neither consistent with best practice in income measurement, nor with official approaches which operationalise a relative median measure on the basis of equivalisation procedures which adjust raw incomes to household need based on composition and size (e.g. Canberra Group, 2001). Many studies reviewed here report upon essentially arbitrary income thresholds whose relationship to unmet need is unclear. Moreover, it is now widely recognised that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon resulting in social and material deprivation, and that direct observation of living standards and lifestyles (including subjective data) are needed to validate and supplement income-based estimates (Bradshaw and Finch, 2003; Gordon, 2006; Townsend, 1979).

The most up-to-date survey data on poverty and social exclusion in the UK is provided by the *2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (PSE)*<sup>1</sup>. In addition to providing nationally representative data on a range of measures of poverty including relative low income, material and social deprivation, and subjective poverty, the dataset also provides estimates of vulnerability to DVA based upon self-completion data on physical partner violence and controlling behaviours. In Section 3.3, we therefore supplement existing analyses of BCS/CSEW data with new empirical evidence on the connections between poverty and DVA derived from the PSE-UK study. It also considers how UK findings compare with relevant international data in comparable settings.

### *3.2 Is there an association between DVA and poverty?*

Based upon analysis of the 2001 BCS, Walby & Allen (2004) find that women living in households with an income of less than £10,000 were three and a half times more likely to report experiencing DVA in the previous 12 months than those living in households with an income of over £20,000, while men were one and a half times more likely. Based upon analysis of 2008/09 BCS, Towers (2015) examines connections between economic inequality and interpersonal violence against women, and concludes that access to economic resources is an important risk factor. This research demonstrates a significant bivariate association between low income and increased vulnerability to intimate partner violence, with women living in households with low incomes (less than £10,000 p.a.) having a 3.5 times higher odds of

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<sup>1</sup> The *2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey* is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (Ref: RES-060-25-0052). Ffi: <http://poverty.ac.uk/pse-research>

reporting intimate partner violence in the past 12 months compared to women living in high income households (more than £30,000 p.a.). Additional neighbourhood effects are evident with women living in income and employment deprived neighbourhoods (based on IMD LSOA data) being at greater risk of recent intimate partner violence.

A similar conclusion is reached on the basis of the most recent analysis of 2012/13 BCS data, with statistically significant variation in the prevalence of domestic abuse by reported household income for both men and women. In 2012-13, the CSEW (formerly BCS) reveals that 17% of women living in household with incomes of less than £10,000 reported domestic abuse in the last 12 months compared with 4% of women in the highest income category (more than £50,000 p.a.) (ONS, 2014; see also Smith et al., 2011). These findings are consistent with earlier analyses of the BCS conducted in the 1990s which demonstrate that both low household income and perceived financial strain are significant predictors of exposure to domestic violence both for men and especially for women in Britain (e.g. Mirrlees-Black, 1999). They are also consistent with recent descriptive analysis based upon the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) for England. Drawing upon APMS data for 2007, Scott and McManus (2016: 4) conclude that women experiencing physical and sexual violence are *“far more likely to experience disadvantage in many other areas of their lives, including disability and ill health, substance dependence, poverty and debt, poor living conditions, homelessness and discrimination”*.

### *3.3 Poverty and experience of DVA in the 2012 PSE-UK study*

The above data provide limited evidence on the connections between poverty and DVA vulnerability as a result of their limitations in measuring poverty itself in ways which go beyond (often questionable) data on incomes. The PSE-2012 dataset provides a range of different measures of poverty including income, deprivation and subjective poverty measures. These results are summarised in Figures 1 and 2 below which respectively report the prevalence of physical abuse and controlling partner behaviours in the last 12 months by poverty status (see also Table A1 in the Appendix for a full tabulation of results including significance estimates). Overall, these data do not suggest significant gender differences in the reporting of either physical abuse or controlling behaviour in the sample as a whole. The proportion of male and female respondents reporting controlling partner behaviour is very similar (at slightly less than 2%), and although a higher proportion of female respondents (3%) report physical abuse than men (1%), these differences are not statistically significant.

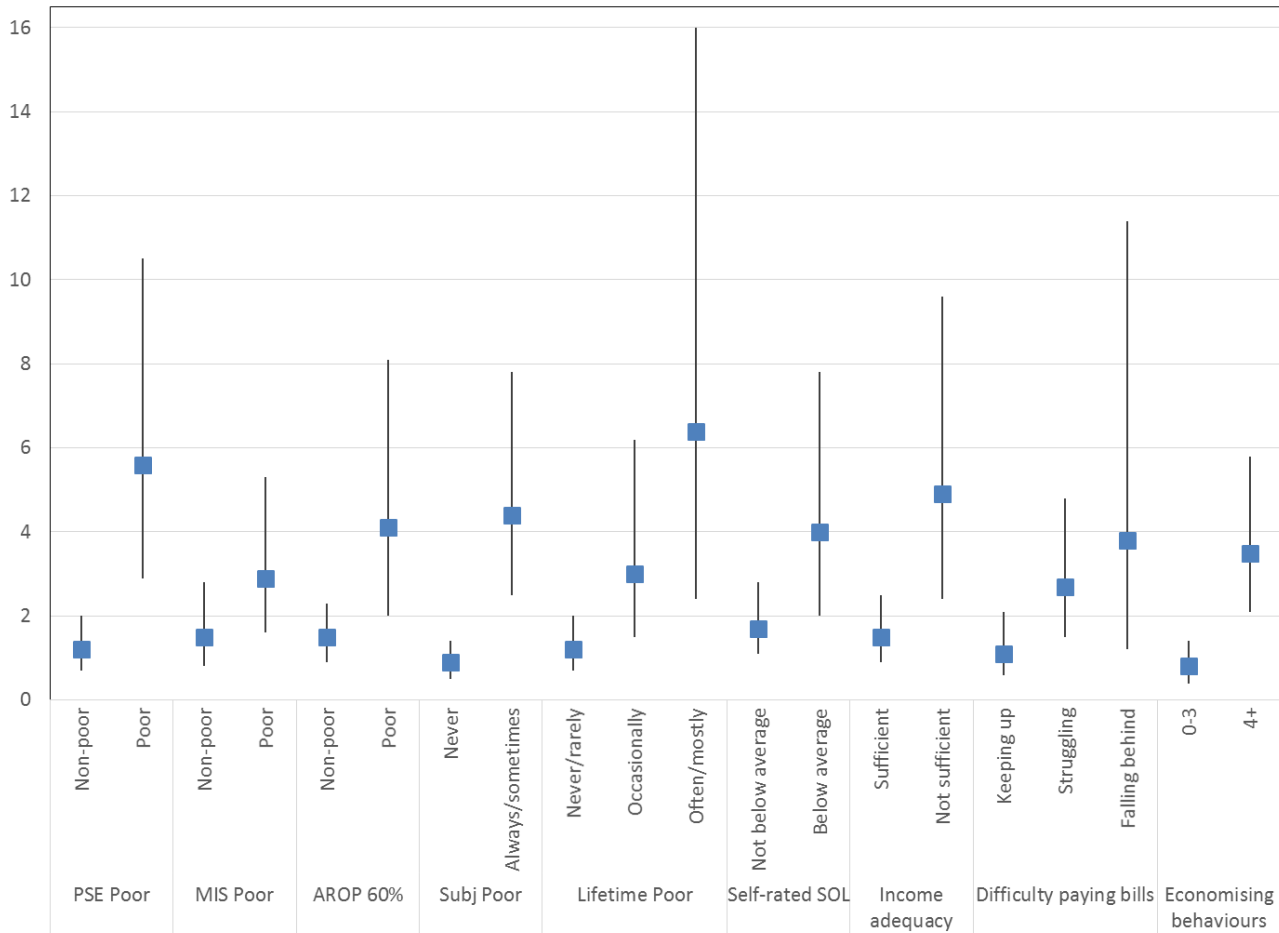
However, these data do generally provide a consistent picture of the relationship between poverty and DVA in the UK, namely that respondents currently experiencing poverty are more likely to report both recent physical abuse and coercive control from a current or former partner, and these findings are generalizable to the wider population. The preferred ‘PSE Poor’ measure describes individuals living in households with both low incomes and high levels of social and material deprivation, approximately 24% of individuals living in private households in the UK in 2012. Nearly 6% of poor respondents reported recent physical partner abuse compared with 1% of non-poor respondents according to this measure ( $X^2=50$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The association between recent physical abuse and low income is less striking, but

respondents living in households with incomes less than 60% of the equivalised household median (AROP 60%) are twice as likely to report physical abuse than non-income poor households ( $X^2=20$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

It is important to note that, in line with best practice in income measurement, income-based poverty measures (including in the PSE study) typically refer to household incomes on the assumption that incomes are shared within households. Whilst this is generally a plausible assumption, little is known about the intra-household distribution of incomes and expenditure including issues of equity between partners (though see Bennett & Daly, 2014; Pantazis & Dermott, 2014). There is some suggestion within the PSE-UK study that respondent dissatisfaction with household financial arrangements may be associated with recent physical partner abuse, though effects were not significant for coercive control. Five percent of respondents reporting dissatisfaction with finances (predominantly women) cited physical abuse in the last 12 months compared with less than 2% of those satisfied with financial arrangements ( $X^2=8$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Better research evidence is therefore needed on how material resources (principally income) are shared within households and with what effects for men women and children across the life-course.

Recent physical partner abuse is also strongly associated with subjective measures of poverty including life time measures. For example, whilst less than 1% of respondents describing themselves as 'never or rarely' poor across their lifetimes reported recent physical abuse, more than 4% of those describing themselves as 'always or sometimes' over their adult lives did so ( $X^2=42$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

**Figure 1. Respondent's reporting being hit, slapped, kicked or otherwise physically hurt by (ex)partner in last 12 months by poverty status, 2012 (% , 95%CI)**



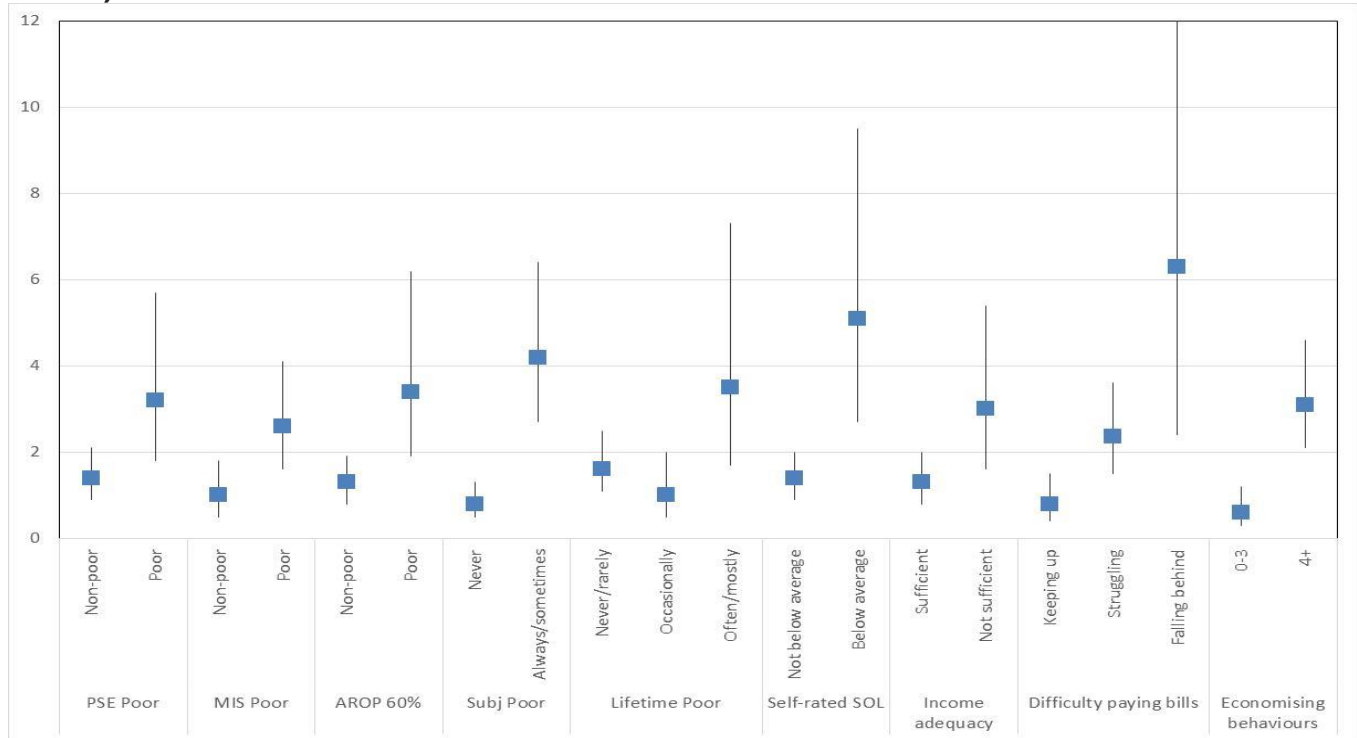
Source: 2012 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (UKDA SN) – authors’ estimates. Data weighted to adjust for complex sample design. See Table A2 (Appendix) for variable definitions

A broadly similar pattern of findings is evident in relation to the experience of controlling partner behaviours by PSE-UK respondents, as summarised in Figure 2 (*below*). These data suggest statistically significant differences in the reporting of controlling partner behaviours on the basis of overall poverty status (PSE Poor), relative low income (AROP 60%), minimum income poverty (MIS Poor), subjective poverty, lifetime poverty, self-rated standard of living, perceived income adequacy, indebtedness, and reporting of economising behaviours. (A full description of variable definitions is provided in Table A2 (Appendix).

In all cases, poor respondents are more likely to report experiencing physical partner abuse in the last 12 months compared with non-poor respondents, and these effects are significant at .05 level. Taken together, these findings confirm the picture presented in the earlier UK studies reviewed above of a consistent and significant cross-sectional association between poverty and experience of DVA.



**Figure 2. Respondent’s reporting needing (ex)partner’s permission to work, go shopping, visit relatives, or visit friends in last 12 months by poverty status, 2012 (% , 95%CI)**



Source: 2012 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (UKDA SN) – authors’ estimates. Data weighted to adjust for complex sample design. See Table A2 (Appendix) for variable definitions

### 3.4 International evidence on poverty and DVA

How do these findings compare with relevant international data and findings on DVA prevalence? European comparative data on domestic violence is relatively scarce, and EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey data provides the most comprehensive and internationally comparable data on violence against women in Europe. The 2012 FRA survey suggests that women reporting difficulty in managing on their current income (subjective poverty) are more likely to report experiencing physical, sexual and psychological partner violence recently and across their lifetimes (FRA, 2014). Overall, 30% of women reporting difficulty in managing on their current income experienced physical or sexual violence since the age 15 (and 7% in the past 12 months) compared with 18% of more financially secure women (3% in the past 12 months), and financial strain is also associated with psychological violence. Women who feel they do not have an equal say in the use of household income are also more likely to experience physical, sexual and psychological partner abuse.

The empirical evidence base on DVA and its correlates is most developed in the US and has tended to focus on benefit receipt rather than poverty or low income per se. The external validity of US findings in relation to the UK setting is uncertain given differences in welfare and criminal justice systems, socio-economic and demographic differences, and differences in

wider gender relations. Nevertheless, a consistent picture emerges on the basis of the US evidence, in which vulnerability to DVA is consistently greater for welfare recipients and people experiencing poverty. Tolman & Raphael (2000), for example, review 22 studies conducted in the US since 1997 and using a variety of methods and sample designs in order to investigate the incidence of domestic abuse amongst women on welfare (see also Raphael and Tolman, 1997). Despite variability in study design, target population, and definitions of domestic abuse (discussed below), these authors conclude that the prevalence, duration and severity of domestic abuse are all higher amongst women receiving public welfare assistance than amongst comparable national samples (including low-income women not receiving welfare). Lyon (1998) similarly reviews a range of studies examining the connections between women's experience of DVA and receipt of welfare assistance (US Aid to Families with Dependent Children). Although the reviewed studies differ in their methods and target samples, they concur that '*current or recent domestic violence is prevalent among poor women and especially among those receiving AFDC*' (Lyon, 1998: 2).

These estimates are generally drawn from social work caseloads and community-based studies of women living on low incomes which cannot provide nationally-representative population estimates of DVA prevalence. Benson and colleagues therefore examine data from the US Census and the National Survey of Families and Households in order to explore the connections between household income, neighbourhood, and intimate partner violence. These authors find that intimate partner violence is more prevalent and more severe in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and amongst households reporting financial strain (Benson and Fox, 2004; Benson et al., 2003).

### *3.5 How can we explain the relationship between poverty and DVA?*

As discussed above, social surveys conducted in the UK and elsewhere have consistently found that people living in poor and financially insecure households are more likely to report recent experiences of domestic violence. However, the mechanisms linking poverty and DVA are not currently well understood and it is all too easy to rush to unwarranted conclusions. A focus on behavioural explanations of poverty in terms of 'cultural' traits has increasingly characterised recent UK policy debate on poverty and there is certainly a danger that evidence of an association between poverty and DVA could be misconstrued in this context to offer support for cultural deficit theories of poverty, for example, as popularised by US authors such as Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead. The limitations of cultural explanations of poverty in the UK context have been extensively reviewed in relations to notions of a culture of poverty, transmitted deprivation, and underclass theories (e.g. Welshman, 2007, 2002; Such & Walker, 2002; Deacon, 2002; Bagguley & Mann, 1992; Dean & Taylor-Gooby, 1992; Macnicol, 1987).

Explanations of poverty in terms of cultural deficits associated *inter alia* with welfare 'dependency', poor parenting, and wider instances of social dysfunction continue to pervade policy debates in this area (see e.g. Wiggans, 2012). However, as Gordon (2012a) notes, despite almost 150 years of scientific investigation, these ideas remain unsupported by any substantial body of evidence documenting any significant population with behaviours that could be ascribed to a culture (or genetics) of poverty. This failure does not result from lack of

research or lack of resources. Indeed, the ten year Transmitted Deprivation programme initiated in the 1970s by the then Conservative government concluded on the basis of a comprehensive literature review and 37 empirical research projects that “*all the evidence suggests that cultural values are not important for the development and transmission of deprivation*” (Brown and Madge, 1982: 226). Nevertheless, the unproven assumption that the connections between poverty and domestic violence arise from the socially dysfunctional behaviours and lifestyles of ‘the poor’ continues to underpin contemporary responses multidimensional disadvantage, most notably in the Troubled Families program (see *below*).

In contrast, drawing upon the pioneering work of early poverty researchers such as Rowntree and Townsend, contemporary research has consistently identified the systemic and structural roots of poverty arising from the iniquitous distribution of resources and power in society (e.g. Coote et al., 2015; Knight, 2011). In the context of classed and gendered societies, the cumulative and additive nature of social disadvantage is such that we might expect the interaction of socioeconomic inequalities with patriarchal norms to result in heightened vulnerability to DVA for women experiencing poverty. Within this structurally oriented perspective, we might characterise the association between poverty and DVA as an interaction effect such that poverty heightens women’s existing vulnerability to DVA arising from patriarchal social relations.

However, addressing these complex questions concerning causal processes in ways which generate robust and replicable results allowing us to quantify potential effects is currently an unrealistic aspiration. Robust evidence concerning causal relationships between poverty and DVA is at best patchy, and empirical evidence in this area has for the most part therefore relied upon qualitative studies and small-scale quantitative studies (e.g. based upon casework and community samples). However, these studies emphasise the effects of straightened financial circumstances for relationship stress and role-performance on the one hand, and the potential financial impacts of DVA for partners fleeing abuse on the other. This section therefore provides a summary assessment of findings from relevant international studies in this area, whilst acknowledging the significant gaps in this existing evidence base in explaining the connections between poverty and domestic violence.

## ***Poverty, financial strain and relationship quality***

It is well established that financial hardship is associated with marital dissatisfaction and family conflict (Conger et al., 1990, 1994; Fox and Chancey, 1998), and similar processes may be at work in relation to DVA. Based upon analysis of the US National Longitudinal Study of Youth, Hardie and Lucas (2010) thus find that economic hardship is associated with more conflict among young couples and this confirms earlier findings (Fox et al., 2002; Benson et al., 2003). This evidence has been widely interpreted within the context of *strain* theory which points to the stress placed on relationships by constrained resources (e.g, resulting in arguments over money, additional stressors such as unpaid bills, competition for resources within the household, problems with childcare, etc.). International evidence cited by Jewkes (2002) supports the contention that poverty both exacerbates existing sources of stress, and limits the resources available to households to deal with its consequences.

Others refer to *status* models in order to understand the impacts of changes in status associated with economic hardship for partner violence, e.g. in the context of gendered power relations. Fagan and Browne (1994) thus hypothesise that specific life events associated with economic distress such as becoming unemployed are important precipitating factors in violence by men against women in intimate relationships. Indeed, MacMillan and Gartner (1999) find that the unemployed male partners of employed women exhibit greater coercive control and more physical aggression, compared with dual earner and dual unemployed couples, leading these authors to argue that it is the symbolic significance of differential statuses associated with gender inequality and gendered norms that precipitate violence rather than economic disadvantage per se. Changes within UK occupational structure associated with polarisation the labour market and the growth of insecure, low-paid work (e.g. Goos & Manning, 2007), may thus be exacerbating status conflict for men. Traditional assumptions concerning the male breadwinner role may no longer be tenable for many men in the context of industrial decline and associated economic restructuring which has had serious consequences in many traditionally 'male' industries. This status-based model of violence against women is also supported by international evidence in this area reviewed by Jewkes (2002).

## ***Poverty, DVA and labour market participation***

Domestic violence can also result in increased vulnerability to poverty as it can undermine labour market participation and can result in ill health which prevents work. Low income and economic insecurity (together with the patterns of interpersonal dependency this can create) can also trap people in abusive relationships, and levy a significant financial penalty on those escaping partner violence and abuse. Based on qualitative longitudinal interviews with 17 low-income battered women in the US, Bell (2003) examines 'cycling' in and out of work and abusive relationships. A lack of court-ordered child support (reducing incomes), a lack of formal child care (increasing reliance on the partner's family), and interference or abuse that limits women's ability to work were all identified as important factors preventing poor women from escaping abusive relationships. Using qualitative exploratory methods, Swanberg & Logan (2005) identify different job interference tactics used by abusers and their

consequences for women's job performance. Perpetrators exhibited job interference behaviours before, during, and after work, and these tactics reduced women's job performance and prospects of securing better paid work (see also Tolman and Rosen, 1999; Moore and Selkove, 1999 cited in Lyon: 2000). Moreover, poverty creates additional barriers to exiting abusive relationships. People experiencing low income may, for example, lack the social networks which can provide necessary financial support to help them leave their abusers (Abrams, 2010; Wilcox, 2006).

### **Poverty, DVA and welfare**

Much of the U.S. evidence base on this topic has focused on welfare receipt rather than poverty per se including considering the impacts of welfare reforms instituted in the late 1990s associated with increased conditionality and effected by the move from AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) to TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). These measures were introduced as part of wider 'workfare' reforms in the U.S. associated with the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act emphasising personal 'responsibility' and labour market activation through the imposition of specific behavioural requirement on welfare claimants. Some scholars have argued that low income victims of DVA may face additional barriers to employment associated with their abuse which may place them at greater risk of welfare sanctions due to noncompliance with work requirements. For example, based on longitudinal ethnographic research with female welfare recipients in the US state of Cleveland, Scott et al. (2002) examine the negative effects of an ideology of self-sufficiency which can put women at risk by encouraging 'dangerous dependencies' on violent partners. Raphael (2000) and Butler et al (2008) similarly argue that activation programs and increased welfare conditionality may reduce 'dependency' on the state only to replace this with increased dependence on abusive partners.

The impacts of domestic violence on poverty vulnerability for women and children is documented in the 2004 Child Poverty Review (HM Treasury, 2004: 77):

*Mothers experiencing domestic violence are more likely to become lone parents, less likely to be earning independently, and more likely to report their families getting into financial difficulties, with family incomes sometimes withheld from the victim and child as part of the pattern of abuse*

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that financial difficulties can contribute to abuse, primarily through patterns of abusive behaviours targeted at traditional gender roles (e.g. Stark, 2007). Poverty, including lack of access to an independent income, can trap women in violent relationships (e.g. Jewkes et al., 2002). These effects can be compounded by patterns of marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination on the basis of citizenship, ethnicity and religion (e.g. Anitha, 2008; Howard and Skipp, 2015).

Based upon qualitative interviews and focus groups with 27 women and a follow-up survey Howard and Skipp (2015) investigate financial abuse in the context of the disproportionate impacts of recession and austerity for women in the UK. Amongst many other findings, these authors document the ways in which paying benefit claims to abusers can exacerbate problems of financial control and exploitation, and highlight the potential negative impacts

associated with recent reforms including Universal Credit. It is also worth noting in this context that exemptions from current provision associated with experiences of DVA (e.g. sanctuary schemes exemptions from the 'bedroom tax', exemptions from Universal Credit for women in refuges, and acknowledgement within Universal Credit provision that woman in refuges may need to double claim housing benefits) appear to have been made on an *ad hoc* basis rather than as part of a coherent and comprehensive policy on DVA. Howard and Skipp conclude that recent welfare reforms may be increasing women's vulnerability to financial abuse as a result of the introduction of a single, monthly household payment. In their comprehensive review of gender and poverty, Bennett and Daly (2014: 12) similarly conclude that *'the proposed design and delivery of Universal Credit should be revised, to avoid risking giving too much financial power to one partner in couples'*.

Overall, these studies therefore suggest a complex relationship regarding the impact of DVA on vulnerability to and experience of poverty for women and dependent children both within abusive relationships (e.g. Wilcox, 2006; Swanberg et al., 2005; Women's Budget Group, 2005; Tolman & Raphael, 2000) and also post-separation (e.g. Abrahams, 2010; Bell & Kober, 2008).

## 4. Interventions and policy responses

Since the mid-late 1990's, the UK government has been proactive in its policy responses to various forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence and abuse. There have been significant and on-going legislative and policy changes in these areas in the UK and elsewhere, alongside a growing international acknowledgement of the importance of evidence on 'what works' in informing practice interventions. We begin by reviewing DVA interventions (Section 4.1), and policy responses relating to violence against women and domestic abuse (Section 4.2), before going on to consider the wider implications arising from this body of evidence including their connections with anti-poverty perspectives (Section 4.3).

### *4.1 DVA Interventions and poverty*

Since its inception in the early 1970s the domestic violence movement has worked to challenge societal responses to abuse and the gender inequalities which underpin it (see Stark, 2007). Early interventions challenged the inadequate response of statutory services including the police (Edwards, 1989), housing services (Binney et al, 1981), welfare agencies (Wilson, 1983), the criminal justice system (Dobash and Dobash, 1992), and health services (Pahl, 1995). These challenges were also directed at the wider social and cultural myths about victims of abuse and women's role within the family. As a result, in the UK we now have a wide array of interventions for people experiencing (and perpetrating) domestic violence and abuse. This provision is the result of developments initiated by the 1998 Crime Reduction Programme which included consideration of violence against women issues. In their subsequent 2005 review of the effectiveness of DVA interventions commissioned by the Home Office, Hester and Westmarland (2005) emphasised the need for: provision of integrated primary prevention work in schools; multi-agency referral systems to support victim disclosure; an increased focus on DVA awareness for all professionals; better support for victims within the criminal justice system; a focus on reducing repeat victimisation, and; more emotional support and group-work for victims and survivors.

Nevertheless, recently diminished by funding cuts (Walby et al, 2015). The UK specialist violence sector lost 31% of its funding between 2010 and 2012 amounting to £2.4 million of cuts in a relatively short space of time (Jones, 2015). Current interventions span different organisational areas and the commissioning of services also differs across the UK in terms of the configuration of services provided. This is increasingly concerning given the impact of cuts since 2010 in the funding of domestic violence services, and their relationship to aligned support services with which they previously dovetailed (e.g. adult social care, probation, children's and young people's services, community health services, etc.)

A comprehensive review of 'what works' in tackling the problem of domestic violence and abuse is therefore beyond the scope of this report (see e.g. NICE, 2013). However, there is an emerging evidence base which can inform understanding of effective interventions for addressing the impacts of DVA and its connections with poverty and socio-economic disadvantage. These interventions, like the impact of domestic violence and abuse itself, span

a wide range of statutory, non-statutory and civil society services including (but not limited to): policing responses; criminal justice interventions; health and mental health interventions; multi-agency approaches, and; specialist support for victims and survivors of abuse.

### ***Policing and criminal justice responses***

The police have a statutory responsibility to respond to DVA incidents reported to them. However, police officers have too often dismissed 'domestics' as difficult and frustrating cases to deal with (Edwards, 1989), and a range of interventions to better train police officers through multi-agency initiatives have been proposed to improve police response (Hague, et al, 1996). Evidence of police interventions can be found in a recent review commissioned by the National College of Policing (Westmarland et al, 2014). Work across Europe also explores the different ways in which perpetrator interventions function across different jurisdictions (Hester et al, 2014). In particular, developments in the UK legal framework and criminal sanctioning of DVA incidents has raised the profile of domestic violence as a crime and improved policing responses in some cases. Nevertheless, recent HMIC reports on the police response to domestic violence, suggests that the police response in England and Wales remains inadequate: *"The overall police response to victims of domestic abuse is not good enough...In too many forces there are weaknesses in the service provided to victims; some of these are serious and this means that victims are put at unnecessary risk. Many forces need to take action now"* (HMIC, 2014; 6).

Criminal justice responses include a range of different criminal, civil and family court interventions to tackle domestic violence and abuse. There have been vast changes to the legal framework over the past 30 years with the trialling and introduction of interventions intended to support complainants. These have included: the right for people to find out about their current partner's history of domestic violence – 'right to know' (Hester et al, 2009); the introduction of specialist domestic violence courts which received specialist training to address the barriers preventing victims from reporting abuse (Hester et al, 2008a); the testing of integrated domestic violence courts which attempt to deal with legal issues across different legal jurisdictions such as family and criminal court issues (Hester et al, 2008a); and new laws and statutes including the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act, 2008 (Hester et al, 2008b).

### ***Health and mental health interventions***

Whilst health professionals have responded positively to physical injuries caused by DVA, their response to DVA itself has often been flawed, and the absence of a supportive environment within which 'victims' can disclose their experiences of abuse in order to access both physical and emotional help has been an especial cause for concern (Williamson, 2000). Recognising the increasing body of research evidence on the health impacts of domestic violence, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence produced comprehensive guidance which recognises the importance of evidence-based interventions to prevent abuse, and to identify and document DVA (NICE, 2014). The NICE guidelines include 17 recommendations which include: assessing and mapping need; working with multi-agency partners; developing an



integrated commissioning strategy; ensuring staff are trained; adopting clear methods for information sharing; helping those who may find it hard to access services; identifying and referring, where appropriate, children who might be affected; providing specialist support for those children; providing specialist support as part of a comprehensive referral pathway; providing evidence based treatment for those experiencing dva who have mental health conditions; and commissioning and evaluating services for perpetrators.

Some recent health studies and interventions include: GP identification and referral pathways through the IRIS study (Feder et al, 2011); the Hermes studies concerned with helping men in GP practices (Williamson et al, 2015), as well as gay men in sexual health clinics (Bacchus et al, 2016); the lack of evidence relating to screening for domestic violence (Feder et al, 2013); as well as the positive belief by the majority of patients that health care is an appropriate setting to address DVA issues for women (Ferrari et al, 2014) and for male patients (Morgan et al, 2014). Feder et al. (2011) conclude that training to help GP staff to identify, document and refer female victims of DVA is effective and this approach has been subsequently rolled out across GP practices around the UK

Other interventions and studies have focused on the relationship between domestic violence offending and poor mental health (Trevillion et al, 2014; Oram et al, 2013; Howard, 2013). Trevillion et al (2014) conclude that developing better responses to domestic violence is vital in addressing the care needs of vulnerable service users. Drug and alcohol misuse and its DVA impacts (Gilchrist, 2012); health responses to children experiencing DVA (Howarth & Hester, 2015; Turner et al, 2015; Szilassy et al, 2015); and work outlining the needs of survivors with physical (Hague et al, 2008) and intellectual (McCarthy, 2015) disabilities.

## ***Multi-agency approaches***

In terms of children and family services, Gray (2002) evaluates the positive impacts of family support services in tackling social exclusion and addressing pressing welfare needs, including DVA. The evaluation documents effective strategies for working with families affected by domestic violence in the context of wider social disadvantage. A recent evaluation of the UK Families Pathfinders program similarly demonstrates that co-ordinated, multiagency interventions can be a cost-effective means of improving outcomes for families experiencing DVA in the context of wider socio-economic disadvantage and budgetary constraints (DCSF, 2010). The RESPONDS (Researching Education to Strengthen Primary care ON Domestic violence and Safeguarding) (Szilassy et al, 2015; Turner et al, 2015 ) and IMPROVE (Improving outcomes for children exposed to domestic violence) (Larkins et al, 2015) projects all reported successful outcomes in improving clinical practice in identifying and supporting victims and their children affected by domestic violence and abuse. A Europe-wide study of violence within teenage dating relationships also highlights the ways in which interventions for young people need to address their specific concerns (Barter et al, 2015).

In response to the recommendations of the 2005 Home Office evaluation of DVA interventions, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committees (MARAC) were developed in the early 2000s with the aim of identifying high risk cases and developing multi-agency responses for victims and their families. The evidence for the effectiveness of this approach has generally been positive. SafeLives' internal evaluation concludes that MARAC interventions result in *"up to 60% of domestic abuse victims report[ing] no further violence"*, and that *"71% of victims said they felt safer"*, and *"69% of victims said their quality of life had improved"* (see also Robinson, 2009). Nevertheless, concerns have been expressed about the high threshold of risk used which means that those not at high risk may slip through the statutory service net (Kelly & Coy, 2011).

In early 2000s, traditional advocate support was reframed in relation to Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) increasingly located within a wide range of specialist services, as well as police and court settings (Howarth et al, 2009; Robinson, 2009). Their specific objectives include promoting the reporting of DVA incidents and better support for DVA victims within the criminal justice system. This development came as a result of research which questioned the poor attrition rates within the court and police system (Hester et al, 2008).

## ***Specialist support for victims/survivors***

UK Refuges Online lists specialist service providers including for young people, lesbian women, BME communities, people with substance misuse and mental health issues, trafficked women, women within prostitution, disabled women, and women with no recourse to public funds. More specialist services have also developed to support those staying in their homes with outreach support workers, advocates both within and outside of safe houses, children's workers to support children affected by witnessing DVA, and more generic support programmes (e.g. Williamson & Abrahams, 2010, 2014).

In terms of more general support for victims of domestic abuse, the PATH trial tested whether specialist psychological advocacy worked in reducing negative mental health outcomes for victims using an RCT design and found that the intervention was successful when compared against normal specialist interventions (Sardinha et al, 2014 ). Finally, two Cochrane evidence reviews of advocacy interventions for victims/survivors of DVA (Ramsey et al, 2009) and those experiencing abuse during pregnancy (Jahanfar et al, 2014), both reported that there was a lack of research measuring the effectiveness of interventions for victims/survivors of DVA. One of the outcomes from the NICE guidelines is a focus on the commissioning of health research to address this problem. Recent calls have prioritised research in this area.

## ***Conclusions***

This section has highlighted a wide range of interventions relating to the support offered to victims of DVA. Whilst some interventions have undergone evaluations, these differ such that a more comprehensive overview of what constitutes success in this field is difficult and methodologically problematic (Williamson, 2012). This is made more difficult when considering the ideological differences which often exist in institutional practices and the differing standards of evidence collated within each.

However, in the UK few interventions for survivors of domestic violence have focused on practical financial, employment or educational skills. Victims are more likely to receive counselling intended to increase their confidence and self-esteem as a precursor to other types of training and intervention. Some of the advocacy included in traditional advocacy and IDVA roles include helping women to address the financial impacts of abuse, accessing debt services, and considering options for the future, including employment. However, these approaches are rarely formalised or subject to rigorous evaluation with regard to their impacts for DVA victims experiencing poverty and socio-economic disadvantage. The kinds of financial literacy work which has been successfully used in the US might be of potential benefit to victims of abuse in the UK. For example, as alluded to in the recent report by Women's Aid (Howard & Skipp, 2015), offering victims advice about how to disentangle their financial arrangements from an abusive partner whilst remaining safe. The Mirabal project (Kelly and Westmarland, 2015) found that despite improvements in the behaviour of perpetrators, only marginal improvements were observed in relation to issues of financial control and abuse. This suggests that much more needs to be done to ensure that victims are supported to regain control over their own finances.

More generally, whilst the intersections between policies on poverty and DVA have yet to be addressed directly, there is recognition of the impact of economic inequality on women and its connections with DVA in both national and international policy initiatives tackling VAWG. Bennett and Daly (2014) also reflect on the central position accorded to gendered perspectives in international development policy and practice – a central position too often ignored in considering poverty in rich countries. This contradiction is evident in UK policy and practice interventions to tackle global DVA as reflected in the *2014 International Development (Gender Equality) Act*. DFID's current 'theory of change' model thus focuses on the ability of women to be financially independent as a way to challenge fundamental gender inequalities based on the assumption that tackling these inequalities will improve the lives of women and girls, particularly in relation to experiences of DVA (DFID, 2012). The fundamental question arises therefore of why national policy does not also explicitly recognise the need to address wider gender inequality as a way to address both poverty and DVA? We consider this issue below in relation to policy responses to DVA and poverty in the context of welfare reform.

#### *4.2 Policy responses: DVA, poverty and welfare reform*

Howard and Skipp (2015) identify the different ways in which poverty can affect individual strategies for responding to DVA. The policy recommendations which emerge from their research recognise that welfare policies (addressed below), statutory services, and the financial and personnel services sector all need more training to fully understand how financial abuse can limit victim's ability to leave an abusive relationship. The wider gender and poverty research literature concurs that in separation women are likely to witness a fall in income and an increase in debts (Bennett and Daly, 2014), and survivors of domestic abuse are at especial risk of financial hardship post-separation (e.g. Abrahams, 2010; Bell & Kober, 2008).

Policies concerned with gender and poverty are complex and interwoven. As empirical research evidence on the issue attests, certain groups of women (e.g. single parents, women with children, the aged) as opposed to women per se, are more likely to experience poverty and risks of poverty can be exacerbated by recent policy reforms some of which also impact differentially on families where DVA is present. Underlying the literature in both the gendered poverty and DVA debates is a fear that recent welfare cuts in the UK since 2008 have and will continue to have disproportionate impacts for women in these higher risk groups (e.g. Fawcett Society, 2012; Browne, 2011; TUC, 2010). This vulnerability is created by: an increase in insecure contracts for those in part-time and low pay work; cuts to tax credits and other benefits within the Universal Credit system; cuts to wider health and social care services which disproportionately impact on women as the perceived carers in a 'care deficit'; and rigidity in Universal Credit in nominating a single person as 'lead carer' thus reinforcing such roles. All of these policies have the potential to impact differentially for women, and especially for women experiencing DVA.

This approach is very similar to the US policy of 'welfare works' and also inherits many of its problems, notably the need for exceptions which lead to discretionary decision-making in cases involving vulnerable clients and those at risk including those experiencing DVA. As part

of the drive to 'make work pay', current UK welfare reforms are also moving towards a two child maximum when calculating the benefits of certain claims, making the assumption that individual families should only have more than two children if they can afford to pay for them (Bennett and Daly, 2014: 77). This assumes that there is equal control amongst different families, and individuals within families, in making such decisions. We know from the literature that reproductive coercion, including sabotage/denial of access to contraception, pregnancy resulting from rape, and coerced pregnancy and/or terminations, are all part of the pattern of DVA (e.g. Williamson, 2014).

The current UK government's wide-ranging welfare reforms programme is premised on the assertion that public services can assist families to enable them to find routes out of poverty and disadvantage. As such, in reviewing the range of DWP services, the department states that: *'we identified the individuals and families who faced the most difficult personal circumstances. We gave them support and tools to help them turn their lives around by tackling the causes of their poverty and disadvantage'* (DWP, 2015: 15). In particular, addressing domestic abuse has been a major priority within the recently expanded Troubled Families programme (see below). An additional £3.2 million domestic abuse funding has been provided to local authorities as part of the July 2015 Budget and a wider review of services for victims of DVA. However, DVA services are not explicitly mentioned in the UK Government's 2015 Spending Review (HMT, 2015), and no specific reference is made to poverty and socio-economic disadvantage within the UK Government's current violence against women and girls action plan (Home Office, 2014).

Similarly, the UK Government's current guidance on the application of Discretionary Housing Payments recognises that there may be cases, including those of victims fleeing domestic violence, where changes in recent policy might impact more on certain claimants (DWP, 2015: 25-26). The guidance suggests that: *'it may not always be possible for the claimant to seek the most affordable accommodation, for example, when someone fleeing the home due to domestic violence needs to seek a place of safety such as a refuge service'* (p.8), or in relation to individuals moving area where collaboration may be needed with other local authorities (p.10). Further examples of reactive provision following welfare reform can be found in the 'Job Seeker's Allowance Domestic Violence Easement' and 'Destitute Domestic Violence Concession Policies' (DWP, 2013).

Howard and Skipp (2015) highlights some of the key impacts of welfare reform and other recent social policy changes on those experiencing domestic violence in the UK. These include: the introduction of fees for collecting child maintenance payments; an assumption that parents can safely make these arrangements; a focus on assessing new policies in relation to how they support 'strong families'; and an increase in discretionary adjuncts to policies, for example, through Job Centre Plus domestic violence champions and Child Maintenance Options agents. At the same time, the impacts of welfare reform often reinforce existing patterns of social vulnerability to DVA. In the context of current UK welfare retrenchment, May's (2006) analysis of the connections between poverty, disability and DVA is important given the impacts of welfare reforms which have disproportionately impacted disabled people.

The current VAWG government update also recognises that fundamental gender inequalities within the job market in terms of choice of education and employment can also affect women and therefore policies intended to address DVA. Actions 39-42 (Home Office, 2015) all address the need for women and girls to be encouraged to pursue non-traditional subjects and careers. This reflects the fundamental aims of international policy, as enshrined in the 2011 Istanbul Convention, of disrupting attitudes and behaviours which contribute to gender inequalities, DVA and other forms of violence against women and girls. However, beyond recognition of the issue, it is not clear how these will be translated into policy let alone practice for all women, and specifically for women experiencing DVA.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The existing gender and poverty perspectives are useful in addressing at least some of the fundamental problems facing women at risk of poverty as a result of DVA. In particular, social policies to redress gender inequalities can have important impacts on women's vulnerability to poverty *and* domestic abuse through:

- Making it easier for women to access paid work, at decent pay levels and with access to affordable childcare
- Ensuring that any benefits payments are made in such a way as to ensure that women do not become increasingly dependent on their male partners
- Ensuring that women are not penalised for non-contribution as a result of caring responsibilities
- Ensuring that the issue of financial abuse as part of a pattern of abusive behaviours is more explicitly recognised the context of UK government's strategy to address violence against women and girls
- Ensuring that welfare policies which are currently 'family tested' are also tested in relation to differential gender impacts in ways which consider those family members with limited autonomy such as in cases of DVA

Policy needs to recognise the explicit concerns disclosed by those with experience of abuse. This includes recognising that:

- Abusive partners often take control of finances directly or through manipulation
- Women are often left with financial debts when they attempt to leave an abusive situation
- Women may not have the financial resources to leave and/or set up a new home
- Women may be prevented from taking paid work or educational opportunities by abusive partners

Howard and Skipp (2015) identify key policy recommendations for government, financial institutions, and statutory services which involve recognising that DVA impacts on poverty both as a cause and consequence. One important area for future research therefore concerns the effects of low income in exacerbating gendered patterns of dependency in the context of wider welfare reform with obvious implications for vulnerability to DVA. The extent to which current UK welfare reforms associated with austerity and fiscal retrenchment contribute to changing patterns of dependency – and with what effects in terms of DVA vulnerability – clearly requires further research attention. Further research on the intra-household distribution of financial resources is therefore needed. Recognising internal family power dynamics is a step in the right direction, but instances of abuse, which may require specific forms of specialist intervention, need to be named as such within these wider policy debates.

In addition, despite the extent of in-work poverty (e.g. MacInnes et al., 2015) there remains an underlying assumption that 'work pays' and is the way to alleviate poverty in all situations. The current Violence Against Women and Girls strategy update (Home Office; 2015) includes reference to the number of women in employment (2015: 19) implying that employment is a protective factor, and also highlights the number of Jobcentre Plus domestic violence

champions who have been trained to counter employment and welfare policies which might disproportionately impact on those women fleeing DVA (2015: 24). This includes champions utilising a 13 week 'easement period' in relation to Job Seekers Allowance for DVA victims. The existence of these champions whose function appears to be to offer exemptions to recent policies for those women experiencing DVA, demonstrates that the policy itself has not been impact assessed for any potential disproportionate impact it might have on women, as more likely victims of abuse.

However, as this report has demonstrated, whilst there are recent attempts to identify the ways in which welfare reform might impact on those experiencing DVA, there remains a lack of robust evidence bringing the areas of gender, poverty and DVA together. The PSE survey data presented in Section 3.3 is a step in the right direction. It would be helpful for those engaged with research on gender and poverty more widely to include such measures in the analysis of their data in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the different ways in which some groups of women fall into the identified 'routes into poverty'. In particular, better measures of income and living standards are needed in the Crime Survey of England and Wales in order to advance understanding of the connections between socio-economic disadvantage and vulnerability to criminal incidents including social harm.

Given their shared concerns, it is important that research and policy action in the areas of poverty and DVA are situated within the context of wider debates around their intersectionality with gender. We would suggest therefore that policy recommendations addressing gender and poverty include the need to consider explicitly how such policies might be impacted by experiences of domestic violence and abuse. In the context of welfare reform Equality Impact Assessments, this means acknowledging the effects of DVA on women's vulnerability to poverty. These approaches are consistent with the basic principles of the Istanbul Convention in that they seek to disrupt abuse, financial and otherwise, in all of its manifestations at both individual and societal levels.



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# Appendices

**Table A1. Respondents reporting intimate (ex)partner violence in the last 12 months by poverty status, 2012**

		Hit, slapped, kicked or otherwise physically hurt by (ex)partner						Needed (ex)partner's permission to work, go shopping, or visit friends/relatives					
		%	95CI lo	95CI hi	SE	X2	Sig	Mean	95CI lo	95CI hi	SE	X2	Sig
PSE Poor	Non-poor	1.2	0.7	2.0	0.3	50.3	<.001	1.4	0.9	2.1	0.3	10.1	<.05
	Poor	5.6	2.9	10.5	1.9			3.2	1.8	5.7	1.0		
MIS Poor	Non-poor	1.5	0.8	2.8	0.5	8.3	ns	1.0	0.5	1.8	0.3	11.9	<.05
	Poor	2.9	1.6	5.3	0.9			2.6	1.6	4.1	0.6		
AROP 60%	Non-poor	1.5	0.9	2.3	0.4	19.8	<.01	1.3	0.8	1.9	0.3	15.3	<.01
	Poor	4.1	2.0	8.1	0.4			3.4	1.9	6.2	1.0		
Subj Poor	Never	0.9	0.5	1.4	0.2	51.1	<.001	0.8	0.5	1.3	0.2	50.7	<.001
	Always/sometimes	4.4	2.5	7.8	1.3			4.2	2.7	6.4	0.9		
Lifetime Poor	Never/rarely	1.2	0.7	2.0	0.3	42.0	<.01	1.6	1.1	2.5	0.4	8.0	<.05
	Occasionally	3.0	1.5	6.2	1.1			1.0	0.5	2.0	0.4		
	Often/mostly	6.4	2.4	16.0	3.2			3.5	1.7	7.3	1.3		
Self-rated SOL	Not below average	1.7	1.1	2.8	0.4	7.6	<.1	1.4	0.9	2.0	0.3	23.6	<.001
	Below average	4.0	2.0	7.8	1.4			5.1	2.7	9.5	1.6		
Income adequacy	Sufficient	1.5	0.9	2.5	0.4	27.1	<.01	1.3	0.8	2.0	0.3	8.4	<.05
	Not sufficient	4.9	2.4	9.6	1.7			3.0	1.6	5.4	0.9		
Difficulty paying bills	Keeping up	1.1	0.6	2.1	0.4			0.8	0.4	1.5	0.3	31.4	<.001
	Struggling	2.7	1.5	4.8	0.8			2.4	1.5	3.6	0.5		
	Falling behind	3.8	1.2	11.4	2.2			6.3	2.4	15.6	3.0		
Economising behaviours	0-3	0.8	0.4	1.4	0.2	36.9	<.001	0.6	0.3	1.2	0.2	33.0	<.001
	4+	3.5	2.1	5.8	0.9			3.1	2.1	4.6	0.6		
Gender	Male	1.3	0.7	2.4	0.4	6.1	ns	1.6	0.9	2.6	0.4	<.1	ns
	Female	2.5	1.4	4.5	0.4			1.8	1.1	2.9	0.4		

Source: 2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey – authors' estimates.

**Table A2: PSE-UK analyses – variable definitions**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Question wording [response categories]</b>
<b>Physical abuse</b>	'In the last 12 months, have you been hit, slapped, kicked or otherwise physically hurt by a partner or an ex-partner?' [ <i>Self-completion: Yes/No</i> ]
<b>Controlling behaviour</b>	'In the last 12 months, have you needed to ask your current partner or an ex-partner's permission to work, go shopping, visit relatives, or visit friends (beyond the usual being considerate to and checking with your partner)?' [ <i>Self-completion: Yes/No</i> ]
<b>PSE Poor</b>	Experiencing social and material deprivation <i>and</i> relative low income– see Gordon 2012 for definition [ <i>Derived variable</i> ]
<b>MIS Poor</b>	Respondent lives in household with equivalised income of less than 60% median [ <i>Derived variable</i> ]
	Minimum Income Standards poor – see Gordon 2012 for definition [ <i>Derived variable</i> ]
<b>SubjPoor</b>	'Do you think you could genuinely say you are poor now..?' [ <i>All the time/Sometimes/Never</i> ]
<b>Lifetime Poor</b>	'Looking back over your life, how often have there been times in your life when you think you have lived in poverty by the standards of that time?' [ <i>Never/Rarely/Occasionally/Often/Most of the time</i> ]
<b>SoLRate</b>	'Generally, how would you rate your standard of living?' [ <i>Well above average/above average/average/below average/well below average</i> ]
<b>Income adequacy</b>	'How many pounds a week, after tax, do you think are necessary to keep a household such as the one you live in, out of poverty? [...] How far above or below that level would you say your household is?' [ <i>A lot above/A little above/About the same/A little below/A lot below</i> ]
<b>Difficulty paying bills</b>	'Sometimes people are not able to pay every bill when it falls due. Have you (or your household) been in arrears on any of the things on this card during the last 12 months, due to a lack of money?' (SHOWCARD F4)