



Violence against women, statistics and ignoring gender.

This post was triggered by a discussion on Twitter with a man to whom I gave the benefit of the doubt, but who turned out to be a troll.

I had tweeted about how [Clare's Law](#) – the new legislation that gives people the chance to find out if anyone has reported their partner for violent behaviour – could not really be effective when refuges are closing and the safety net for women leaving violent men is being slowly ripped apart. This was in light of a report from Women's Aid who had a 'snapshot' day to show the problems women seeking refuge face. They recorded that on one day, [155 women and 103 children](#) were turned away from refuges because there was no room.

This man on Twitter got in touch to remind me that 1 in 6 men are victims or survivors of domestic abuse too.

This is true, and it's a statistic from the [Walby and Allen](#) report which also found that 1 in 4 women experienced domestic violence and abuse in their lifetimes.

The Walby and Allen report – and these two stats in particular – are hugely important in shaping our understanding of how widespread domestic abuse is in our society. The fact that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience at least one incident of intimate partner violence should always be a wake up call to all of us.

What these two statistics on their own don't reveal is the gendered nature of *on-going* domestic abuse – and how women are more likely to experience repeat incidents of violence that can take place over many [years](#).

The 1 in 4 and 1 in 6 statistic covers all incidences of domestic abuse – including one-off incidents. When we look at the repeat incidences of domestic abuse however, we see that women are far, far more likely to experience on-going violence.

The Walby and Allen report reveals that 32% of women who had ever experienced domestic violence (1 in 4 women) did so four or five (or more) times, compared to 11% of men. Women constituted 89% of all those who had experienced 4 or more incidents of domestic violence. These stats from the report are helpfully summarised on the [Women's Aid website](#).

(Ironically, the Twitter troll called those stats 'Christmas Cracker Statistics' despite the fact that they came from the same report that he quoted the 1 in 6 number from. At that point I blocked and moved on with my day.)

We know that, according to the Dodd report from July 04, domestic abuse has the highest rate of [repeat victimisation](#). A woman will on average experience 35 incidents of violence before she calls the police, and still less than 40% of domestic abuse crime is reported to the police. We also know that 2 women a week will be killed by a violent partner – constituting nearly 40% of all female homicide victims (Povey, (ed.), 2005; Home Office, 1999; Dept of Health, 2005).



Bringing up the numbers around repeat incidences is not to diminish the horror and cruelty of one incident of violence. One incident is one too many. I just want to talk about repeat incidences because, on many occasions, I hear the 1 in 4 and 1 in 6 stat quoted in an effort to try and smudge our understanding of how domestic abuse is still an issue of gender-based violence. And this is really important.

Increasingly I feel there's a gender blindness going on when we talk about violence against women and girls. For example, last week I wrote an article for [Open Democracy](#) about sexual harassment in schools – a form of bullying overwhelmingly committed by boys, with girls the vast majority of victims. In response to my article, I was reminded on Twitter that girls take part in this kind of bullying too.

Now, of course girls bully too. But it is undeniable that sexual harassment in the classroom – from non-consensual upskirt shots to groping to sexually degrading name-calling – is a gendered issue. It simply is. If we try to deny the gender element, if we refuse to name the fact that sexual harassment in schools is overwhelmingly boys harassing girls, then we can never solve the problem. We can never take the action needed to reduce levels of harassment and sexual bullying.

In that article I quote research from the [NSPCC and Bristol University](#) regarding violence in teen relationships. Just as before, we see a real gendered difference when it comes to repeat offending. The study found that 25% of girls and 18% of boys reported physical violence, and 1 in 3 girls and 16% of boys reported some form of sexual partner violence. For severe physical violence the numbers were 1 in 9 girls and 4% of boys. Girls were more likely than boys to say that the violence was repeated, and that the repeated violence either remained at the same level of severity or worsened.

Another example of refusing to see gender was in the recent Children's Commissioner report on '[child on child abuse](#)'. Again, all the evidence in the report points to the fact that this is a crime where girls are overwhelmingly the victims and boys are overwhelmingly the perpetrators. Yet most of the reporting of the report talked about 'child on child' abuse. The gender of the majority of the perpetrators and the victims was not acknowledged.

Now, perhaps there is some sensitivity needed when we talk about crimes committed by children against other children. It runs the risk of generalising about young men in a culture that already demonises 'youth' so horribly. But if we ignore the gendered element, if we refuse to talk about how these are crimes committed against girls and women *because they are girls and women*, then again, how do we tackle it? How do we address the causes? How do we tackle the perpetrators, and how do we tackle the lack of accountability, when we refuse to acknowledge that the problem is *male* violence against *women and girls*?

If you go back to that report by the NSPCC and Bristol University – 1 in 3 girls report sexual violence from a partner. One third of 16-19 year olds have experienced sexual violence from a partner. This is not ok. We have to talk about how this is a gender-based violence issue.

This post started out as a chance to explore what domestic abuse stats look like when we



compare one-off and repeat incidents. It's ended with a plea to not deny the reality of gender-based violence – where women and girls are victimised because they are women and girls. If we don't look at gender, if we don't look at why gender-based violence happens, then we can't stop it. We can't pretend this isn't happening to women and girls because they are women and girls. It is. And as long as we ignore it, it will continue to.

This, by [Karen Ingala Smith](#), is a very important read on the statistics around gender and reporting domestic abuse.

This post was first published [here](#) - thanks to author for permission to cross post.