

Written evidence from Dr Laura Walton-Williams, Associate Professor of Gender Based Violence, Sarah Page, Associate Professor of Social Justice and Social Learning, and Dr Samantha Spence, Course Director for Postgraduate Law at Staffordshire University. [EOV0041]

Inquiry Questions:

- 1. To what extent is there evidence that men who exhibit certain non-criminal behaviours, including online, go on to commit criminal offences against women and girls?**
- 2. To what extent is there evidence that men who commit certain crimes (such as non-contact sexual offences) go on to commit serious violent offences against women and girls?**
- 3. How effective is (a) the police service and (b) the criminal justice system at responding to these behaviours and offences and how might those responses be improved?**
- 4. What interventions are currently in place for perpetrators with different offending histories and how effective are they for different offender pathways?**
- 5. To what extent is there evidence that escalating behaviours is a particular problem within the emergency services and other public sector organisations?**

Executive Summary:

- Wider policy change is needed to reduce poverty due to the links between interpersonal violence and families experiencing financial challenges, which has been exacerbated through the cost-of-living crisis and insufficiency of welfare support. This includes better support for asylum seekers.
- National increases in addictions such as gambling, alcohol and drug use means that there is increased vulnerability to violent crime. Associated treatment interventions that provide education and therapeutic support for victims of domestic abuse are limited. A one-stop-shop would be welcomed that addresses addiction, mental health, debts and relationship issues.
- Crime prevention education on healthy relationships can be effective in helping people to identify relational 'red flags' and to know where to get support. However, longitudinal research into the impacts is needed.
- Groupwork in the community through third sector and probation services can be effective for peer challenge regarding perpetrator behaviour; however, such group work tends to be heteronormative and reliant of perpetrators having robust English spoken and written skills.

- Probation officers with high caseloads means that effective intervention is questionable.
- Male perpetrators of interpersonal violence experience challenges in accessing therapeutic support for their own unmet adverse childhood experiences. Better access to treatment is needed.
- Austerity measures to the police have impinged on the ability to swiftly respond to interpersonal violence reporting. Social media reporting opportunities are welcomed by the community to reduce barriers in reporting crime.
- Prisons that specialise in sexual violence rehabilitation have some successes pertaining to official desistance rates; however, detection and conviction of such crimes are more challenging and as such, more research is needed. The high levels of incarcerated sex offenders in denial that they have committed a crime is also problematic.

Full Response:

This response focuses predominantly on questions 1, 2, 4 and 5 and draws largely on primary research undertaken by academics at Staffordshire University. The Centre for Crime, Justice and Security at Staffordshire University aims for the promotion, development, and implementation of justice in various forms. Work primarily focuses on criminal justice and how social justice impacts, and is impacted by, criminal justice practices. The work we do with our communities aims to enrich and transform lives and to positively impact on policy and practice in wider social and criminal justice environments.

1. To what extent is there evidence that men who exhibit certain non-criminal behaviours, including online, go on to commit criminal offences against women and girls?

Research¹ indicates that escalation is typically observed from non-criminal to criminal behaviour, especially when boundaries of lawful behaviour are not reinforced within the individual's community. For example, when young people who are seeking acceptance/belonging from their community observe behaviours that are non-criminal but morally/ethically ambiguous, they will conform to these behavioural norms (i.e., misogynistic views and actions) to 'fit in' with their peers. This has also been observed in cases of so-called 'honour-based violence' where controlling behaviour is excused as a 'cultural norm' and the escalation into criminal offences is justified as the perception of 'honour' is defined by the perpetrator. Escalation to the point of a criminal offence can also be accompanied by other self-destructive behaviours such as alcohol/drug abuse, gambling additions, etc.

¹ Enander, V., Krantz, G., Lysell, H., and Örmon, K. (2021). Before the killing: intimate partner homicides in a process perspective, Part I. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence* 5, 1, 59-74, available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1332/239868020X15922355479497>>

Interpersonal violence occurs in school age children and evidence² suggests that 14 years of age is when direct victimisation is likely to occur. The perpetrators of violence towards girls may be peers with no previous criminal offence history. As such, healthy relationships education for the purpose of crime prevention is necessary in schools (ibid) and our primary research³ conducted by Page (2023) advocates healthy relationship education is also beneficial to further education and higher education students to enable young people to spot relational 'red-flags' to support safeguarding. The need for healthy relationship education to be addressed holistically in schools is further evidenced by published research by [Lunneblad & Johansson \(2017\)](#) who identify the gendered coding of violent behaviours in schools, and by research published by [Roberts & Price \(2019\)](#) who report that young females are more likely to know controlling domestic violence behaviours than young males.

In our research on gambling harms and the criminal justice system in conjunction with the Howard League for Penal Reform⁴ and more current research with HMPPS⁵ and GamCare, we found people who gamble, including online, can start to experience gambling harms that include becoming a victim of crime and/or a perpetrator of crime. Domestic abuse is associated with gambling harms at both the victimisation and perpetration levels⁶. National statistics⁷ from the Gambling Commission (2020) demonstrate that there is an increase in online and mobile phone gambling and as such, we assert that this increases the risks to women and girls in becoming victims of violence in the family home. Furthermore, Pointon's⁸ (2023) doctoral research highlights the links between gambling and financial abuse, that can contribute to interpersonal violence. Economic abuses were found to be part of a wider set of abusive behaviours that stem from gambling activity. Such abuse, including violence, is experienced at an intimate partner level and more broadly within the family. In Pointon's study, familial violence, including male parents towards children, was present in relationships that had

² Fox, C, Corr, M-L, Gadd, D and Butler, I. (2013) 'Young teenagers' experiences of domestic abuse', *Journal of Youth Studies*. Vol 17(4), pp. 510-526. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.780125>

³ Page, S. (2023) Reflective participatory crime prevention education and solution finding through World Café and Forum Theatre with young people and young adults, *Safer Communities*, Vol 22 (3), pp 156-171. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SC-08-2022-0034>

⁴ Page, S. (2021) *Sentencers' understanding and treatment of problem gamblers: The report of the Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling*. Howard League for Penal Reform, London ISBN 978-1-911114-59-8. <https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Sentencers-report-FINAL-Online.pdf>

⁵ Page, S., Turner, J., Plimley, S. (2022) Identifying gambling-related harms earlier to inform sentencing and treatment pathways. *Probation Quarterly*. Issue 26, ISSN 2752-6933 pp 55-60
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ec3ce97a1716758c54691b7/t/6392fdc3aca2e6275333f232/1670577604733/Identifying+gambling-related+harms+earlier+to+inform+sentencing+and+treatment+pathways.pdf>

⁶ Page, S. (2021) *Sentencers' understanding and treatment of problem gamblers: The report of the Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling*. Howard League for Penal Reform, London ISBN 978-1-911114-59-8. <https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Sentencers-report-FINAL-Online.pdf>

⁷ Gambling Commission (2020), *Gambling participation in 2019: Behaviour, awareness and attitudes*, available at: <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/PDF/survey-data/Gambling-participation-in-2019-behaviour-awareness-andattitudes.pdf> [accessed 11/06/2021].

⁸ Pointon, L. (2023) *Problem Gambling and Family Violence. A life course analysis* (PhD thesis)

problematic gambling activities. Whilst gambling is often perceived as a leisure activity, it can lead to gambling harms, inclusive of domestic abuse and the rise in gambling activity nationally is likely to be contributing to rises in domestic abuse.

2. To what extent is there evidence that men who commit certain crimes (such as non-contact sexual offences) go on to commit serious violent offences against women and girls?

Whilst there is some published research that evidences escalation of sexual offences in serial sex offenders (i.e., [Hewitt & Beauregard \(2013\)](#)) this is not an area in which the authors have undertaken specific research.

3. How effective is (a) the police service and (b) the criminal justice system at responding to these behaviours and offences and how might those responses be improved?

From our experiences of working with victims and survivors of gender-based violence, the key issues criminal justice professionals face in terms of providing an effective response relate to capacity, knowledge and legal powers. The current demand on all areas of the criminal justice system far outweighs the resources available to provide a holistic, joined up process that effectively serves those in need. Furthermore, the lack of specialist provision (i.e., for victims from ethnic minorities, those with disabilities, LGBTQ+, etc.) and the inability to provide a joined-up service for victims with complex needs (i.e., interdependencies) means victims and survivors often experience additional trauma. The myriad of complexities in the behaviours relating to violence against women and girls (exhibited both by the victim and victimisers) are not well understood by those outside the sector, and therefore victims are often met with ignorance, a lack of tolerance or a sense of helplessness or disillusionment. There is a need to improve the understanding of behaviours and risks within this area and a requirement for appropriate resources to be able to respond to these holistically and consistently (something that is very challenging given the inconsistent funding situation for third sector organisations who are vital in this sector).

Our research⁹ has found that austerity measures have directly impacted upon policing communities, which has meant that police response times to domestic violence and other crimes can be hindered. The public being able to report crime to the police via social media can be helpful in the context of neighbours hearing incidents of interpersonal violence and not wanting the violent neighbour to hear them phoning the police (ibid). In earlier research¹⁰, we

⁹ Page, S. and Griffin, S. (2023), "The informal tripart relationship between the state, neighbourhood police and community groups: community safety perceptions and practices in a Midlands neighbourhood in the UK", Safer Communities, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SC-03-2023-0009> accessed via <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/SC-03-2023-0009/full/html>

found that austerity measures had impacted the wider criminal justice service and that probation officers with exceptionally high caseloads are unable to provide effective intervention.

There are wider links between poverty and domestic abuse. Foodbanks have become an emergency service to many. Trussell Trust's recent national survey research¹¹ on food hunger demonstrates increase in the use of foodbanks and almost one in five women referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network had experienced domestic violence in the last 12 months. Many foodbank users are employed but are on low wage and the cost-of-living crisis is leading to food poverty. Insufficient funds to purchase essentials can aggravate arguments in the family home and interpersonal violence. Trussell Trust advocates for an essentials guarantee, personalised employment support programmes and increased Local Housing Allowance with acknowledgement of increasing rental charges.

Addictions can also lead to poverty challenges. In our recent unpublished research in partnership with the Centre for Justice Innovation¹², we found that women with addictions to alcohol and/or drugs who reported domestic abuse to the police felt they were not taken seriously. Furthermore, third sector women's centers were more likely to provide support and education pertaining to domestic abuse, than addiction treatment centers and criminal justice contexts such as in a prison setting. We have found that women with additions are also vulnerable to being exploited for sex and experience violence from the exploiters¹³. Vulnerability to violence for women also increases with homelessness and multiple disadvantage¹⁴. We¹⁵ note that women can experience increased stigma by the criminal justice system, which results in criminalisation inequality through harsher punishment than male counterparts.

¹⁰ Page, S. & Temple-Malt, E (2018) Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Violence:

Better Addressing Perpetrator Early

Childhood Experience. CHAD Symposium.

<https://www.chadresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/S-Page-and-E-Temple-Malt-CHAD-Symposium.pdf>

¹¹ Bull, R., Miles, C., Newbury, E., Nichols, A., Weekes, T. and Wylde, G (2023) Hunger in the UK. Trussell Trust.

Accessed online 19/09/2023 <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/08/2023-The-Trussell-Trust-Hunger-in-the-UK-report-web-updated-10Aug23.pdf>

¹² Whitehead, S., Page, S., Jeffery, H. and McCormack, F. (2023), Exploring women's experience of drug and alcohol treatment in the West Midlands. Centre for Justice Innovation, Creative Commons.

¹³ Page, S., Bratt, S. and Oldfield, S. (2023) Chapter 14 Drug and Alcohol Addictions, Sexual Exploitation and Poverty. IN Page, S., Coates, M., Tipping, J., Frangos, J. & Goldstraw, K. (eds) Action on Poverty in the UK. Palgrave Macmillan. PP. 249-271.

¹⁴ McCormack, F., & Fedorowicz, S. (2022). Women, homelessness and multiple disadvantage in Stoke-on-Trent: The need for safe places in the context of wider health and social inequalities. *Local Economy*, 37(8), 655–675. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02690942231175091>

¹⁵ Page, S., Bratt, S. and Oldfield, S. (2023) Chapter 14 Drug and Alcohol Addictions, Sexual Exploitation and Poverty. IN Page, S., Coates, M., Tipping, J., Frangos, J. & Goldstraw, K. (eds) Action on Poverty in the UK. Palgrave Macmillan. PP. 249-271.

State policy can exacerbate violence experienced by women and children. Our research¹⁶ identifies that asylum seeking populations based in the UK are seemingly reluctant to report crimes when a person experiences victimization due to fear that this will be detrimental to their asylum-seeking application. Asylum seekers can also be fearful towards the police and wider criminal justice services due to abuses in their home country (ibid). The inadequate government financial support to asylum seekers can lead to vulnerability in being exploited for sex and experiencing sexual violence and this is of particular concern when the Home Office have made an asylum seeker destitute and later the asylum seeker gains refugee status through appeal. Our secondary research¹⁷ notes that women and children are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and being trafficked and adults are more likely to be treated as a criminal when they come into contact with the criminal justice system, rather than being supported to access therapeutic interventions.

Prisons that specialize in the rehabilitation of sex offenders have seemingly made some progress in rehabilitation efforts¹⁸. However, detection of such crimes through to prosecution can be more challenging and longitudinal research into desistance post prison release is needed.

4. What interventions are currently in place for perpetrators with different offending histories and how effective are they for different offender pathways?

We¹⁹ have found that crime prevention work through healthy education can be effective in young people being able to identify relational ‘red-flags’ and to know where they can get support. This is particularly apparent in sessions where young people participate in forum theatre events. More longitudinal research is needed to determine whether such early interventions have reduced domestic violence.

Based on our unpublished research²⁰ on ‘breaking the cycle of domestic abuse’, there are probation-based groupwork courses for perpetrators of domestic violence, however, such

¹⁶ Page, S. (2023) Asylum seeker poverty and bail reporting change activism. *Local Economy*, Vol 37(8), pp 708–726. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02690942231175092>; Page, S. (2023) Chapter 17, Seeking Asylum and Refuge: Poverty, Destitution and Unemployment. IN Page, S., Coates, M., Tipping, J., Frangos, J. & Goldstraw, K. (eds) *Action on Poverty in the UK*. Palgrave Macmillan. PP. 303-327

¹⁷ Page, S. (2019) The number of suspected victims of trafficking and slavery in the UK increased by 35% in 2017; of the 5,145 suspected victims from 116 countries, 2,118 were minors. IN Lymes A & Treadwell J (eds) *50 facts about crime that everyone in Britain should know*. Polity Press, Bristol pp161-166

¹⁸ Page, S., Chamberlain, V. & Gratton, N. (2022) Performing well: Male prisoner experiences of drama, dance, singing and puppetry in England, *Journal of Incarceration*. Vol3(2), pp 1-21 doi: 10.1177/26326663221106162

¹⁹ Page, S. (2023) Reflective participatory crime prevention education and solution finding through World Café and Forum Theatre with young people and young adults, *Safer Communities*, Vol 22 (3), pp 156-171. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SC-08-2022-0034>

²⁰ Page, S. & Temple-Malt, E (2018) *Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Violence: Better Addressing Perpetrator Early*

courses typically require the perpetrator to have a good level of written and spoken English and are heteronormative in content. These programmes are mostly delivered in groups, which allow for perpetrators to challenge one another, which has been found to be effective. The course(s) are adapted to one-to-one delivery with a probation officer when they do not meet the criteria of the course, which reduces effectiveness based on a) the lack of peer challenge and b) the probation officer has less specialized knowledge on domestic abuse than the officers delivering the group course. There are examples of community programmes for those who are not on probation and whereby self-referral and police referral are viable. Our research findings identified that in both the probation and community programme offered in Stoke-on-Trent, the perpetrators' own adverse childhood experiences were rarely addressed and accessing therapeutic intervention to appropriate support services was challenging (ibid).

We are currently researching the impact of creative interventions on tackling gender-based violence and are collaborating with other research groups to explore the impact of immersive technologies on preventing violence. Initial findings indicate that impactful interventions are tailored to the individual's needs/circumstances, need to be supported by processes at a holistic/systemic level and that the messages need to be reinforced, not just 'one-off' interventions.

We²¹ found that in male sex offender prisons, some interventions can help prisoners towards desistance, however, many offenders do not acknowledge that they have committed a crime in the first place. Longitudinal research is needed to investigate whether desistance has been actualized in the community.

With consideration to several of our studies²², the links between addictions and interpersonal and sexual violence, those with addictions in the criminal justice system have limited support in holistically addressing trauma from adverse childhood experiences, trauma from interpersonal

Childhood Experience. CHAD Symposium. <https://www.chadresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/S-Page-and-E-Temple-Malt-CHAD-Symposium.pdf>

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²² Page, S. (2021) Sentencers' understanding and treatment of problem gamblers: The report of the Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling. Howard League for Penal Reform, London ISBN 978-1-911114-59-8.

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ec3ce97a1716758c54691b7/t/6392fdc3aca2e6275333f232/1670577604733/Identifying+gambling-related+harms+earlier+to+inform+sentencing+and+treatment+pathways.pdf>; Page, S., Bratt, S. and Oldfield, S. (2023) Chapter 14 Drug and Alcohol Addictions, Sexual Exploitation and Poverty. IN Page, S., Coates, M., Tipping, J., Frangos, J. & Goldstraw, K. (eds) *Action on Poverty in the UK*. Palgrave Macmillan. PP. 249-271; Whitehead, S., Page, S., Jeffery, H. and McCormack, F. (2023), *Exploring women's experience of drug and alcohol treatment in the West Midlands*. Centre for Justice Innovation, Creative Commons.

and sexual violence in adulthood, associated mental health challenges, debt issues and relational issues.

5. To what extent is there evidence that escalating behaviours is a particular problem within the emergency services and other public sector organisations?

In our unpublished research²³ in collaboration with the Centre for Justice Innovation, we found that emergency services do not always treat women with respect and dignity. A trauma informed approach is needed with acknowledgement that women presenting with addictions are highly likely to have experienced domestic violence and sexual violence. Furthermore, women were concerned about the possibility of child removal and did not have positive interactions with social services. For many women who are victims of violence and then have their children removed, the removal of the child can feel like an act of violence from the state.

In our research²⁴ on the 'tripart relationship between the state, the police and the community', austerity measures directly impacted on policing communities. Police response times to domestic violence and other crimes has been hindered. Public reporting of crime to the police via social media is perceived helpful when neighbours, upon hearing incidents of interpersonal violence, have not wanted the violent neighbour to hear them phoning the police (ibid). Austerity measures have impacted the wider criminal justice service and we have found through an earlier study²⁵ on 'breaking the cycle of domestic abuse' that probation officers with exceptionally high caseloads are unable to provide effective intervention.

There are wider links between poverty and domestic abuse and foodbanks have become an emergency service for many individuals and families. Trussell Trust's²⁶ national survey research on food hunger demonstrates increase in foodbank usage and almost one in five women referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network had experienced domestic violence in the last 12 months. Many foodbank users are in employment but are on low wage and the cost-of-living crisis is leading to food poverty. Insufficient funds to purchase essentials can aggravate arguments in the family home and interpersonal violence. Trussell Trust advocates for an essentials guarantee, personalised employment support programs and increased Local Housing

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²⁶ Bull, R., Miles, C., Newbury, E., Nichols, A., Weekes, T. and Wylde, G (2023) Hunger in the UK. Trussell Trust. Accessed online 19/09/2023 <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/08/2023-The-Trussell-Trust-Hunger-in-the-UK-report-web-updated-10Aug23.pdf>

Allowance with acknowledgement of increasing rental charges. Such wider policy objectives could have a substantial impact upon reducing violence to women and girls.

Addictions can also lead to poverty challenges. In our recent unpublished research in partnership with the Centre for Justice Innovation²⁷, we found that women with addictions to alcohol and/or drugs who reported domestic abuse to the police felt they were not taken seriously. Furthermore, third sector women's centers were more likely to provide support and education pertaining to domestic abuse, than addiction treatment centers and criminal justice contexts such as in a prison setting. Women with addictions are also vulnerable to being exploited for sex and experience violence from the exploiters²⁸. Vulnerability to violence for women also increases with homelessness and multiple disadvantage²⁹. Women can experience increased stigma by the criminal justice system, which results in criminalisation inequality through harsher punishment than male counterparts³⁰.

Asylum seeking populations based in the UK are seemingly reluctant to report crimes to the police due to fear that this will be detrimental to their asylum-seeking application³¹. Asylum seekers can also be fearful towards the police and wider criminal justice services due to abuses in their home country (ibid). The inadequate government financial support to asylum seekers can lead to vulnerability in being exploited for sex and experiencing sexual violence and this is of particular concern when the Home Office have made an asylum seeker destitute and later the asylum seeker gains refugee status through appeal. Our secondary research³² identifies that women and children are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and being trafficked, and they are more likely to be treated as a criminal when they come into contact with the criminal justice system, rather than being supported to access therapeutic interventions.

Prisons that specialize in the rehabilitation of sex offenders have made some progress in rehabilitation efforts³³. However, detection of such crimes through to prosecution can be more

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²⁹ McCormack, F., & Fedorowicz, S. (2022). Women, homelessness and multiple disadvantage in Stoke-on-Trent: The need for safe places in the context of wider health and social inequalities. *Local Economy*, 37(8), 655–675. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02690942231175091>

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³³ Page, S., Chamberlain, V. & Gratton, N. (2022) Performing well: Male prisoner experiences of drama, dance,

challenging and as such, longitudinal research is needed once the person is released into the community to determine whether desistance has been actualized.

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