



If we're serious about ending men's violence against women and girls, we need to listen to feminists

The UK's lack of "a consistent and coherent approach to tackling violence against women" has been criticised in an [official report by the UN special rapporteur, Rashida Manjoo](#). In addition, last week Professor Sylvia Walby, UNESCO chair of gender research at Lancaster University, criticised official statistics for drastically under-representing the scale of violent crime against women.

Whilst the UN report commends the "excellent policy framework" created by the Home Secretary, Theresa May, in the Government's [Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls](#), it notes that "isolated pockets of good practice" are compromised by the "lack of a consistent and coherent human-rights based approach in the government's response to violence against women and girls".

Walby explained, at a meeting at the UK Statistics Agency, that the Crime Survey of England and Wales fails to account for nearly half the attacks on women as it caps the number of separate crimes that can be reported by a single respondent at five. She found that if the cap is removed violent crime against women by partners and acquaintances, rise by 70% and 100% respectively, in other words men's violence against women is massively understated in official statistics. (I've also looked at the reality of sex differences in domestic violence before, [here](#), and specifically in relation to fatal intimate partner violence [here](#).)

The government doggedly hangs on to its 'gender neutral' definition of domestic violence:

"any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, financial [and] emotional."

The definition treats 'sex' and 'gender' as the same thing, it erases sex differences and it obscures the differences between intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic/family violence (the latter also repeated in the UN report).

The UN report also expresses concern about the shift from gender specificity to gender neutrality in our definitions of intimate partner violence, domestic violence and sexual violence (also with regards to service provision) which it refers to as a regressive measure. The fear of naming the agent of violence, men, is one of the most significant failings of the government's definition and has repercussions in national and local policy and ultimately in the lives – and deaths – of women. [Of the 249 women, who according to government statistics were killed in partner/ex-partner over the last 3 years, 247 were killed by a man, one by a woman \(in one case the primary suspect is listed as unknown\). Of 57 men killed in partner/ex-partner homicides, 21 of them, over a third, were killed by a man.](#) The numbers aren't the only difference, when men kill women partners or ex-partners, this usually follows months or years of them abusing her, when women kill male partners or ex-partners, it is usually after months or years of having been



abused by the man they have killed. The relationship between abuse of women and abused women killing men is such that the development of refuges has led to a greater decrease in men being killed by partners than women.

Yes, men can experience violence too and yes, men can experience violence perpetrated by women but most violence – whether against women or men is perpetrated by men; and when we talk about intimate-partner violence and sexual violence, it is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men upon women and girls Intimate partner violence and wider domestic violence certainly do not occur “regardless of gender”.

Coercive control has been included in the government’s definition of domestic violence, but as Liz Kelly and Nicole Westmarland explain, [intimate partner violence doesn’t just include coercive control, “it is a pattern of coercive control.”](#) Men’s violence against their partners and ex-partners isn’t a series of isolated and unlinked incidents. This is true on a societal level as well as within individuals’ relationships. Not all men are violent and violent men are not violent all the time; but all women are affected by men’s violence and women who are in relationships with violent men are affected even when they’re not being violent. Inequality between women and men is a cause and consequence of men’s violence against women. Men’s violence against women isn’t just a problem in some relationships, it is a social problem.

[An international study of the issues that relate to the different rates of intimate partner violence in 44 different countries and including 481,205](#) women found that the most significant factors are those which have been long identified by feminists: socially constructed gender-related norms that normalise men’s violence against and control of women partners and inequality between women and men. Last year Britain [fell to 26th place on the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index](#) – lower than most of the rest of Europe. It was the UK’s lowest overall score since 2008.

Until we understand the differences and overlaps between intimate partner violence, domestic and sexual violence and the huge sex differences therein, until the majority of us openly decry men’s rights activists who try to deny reality, we will not be taking one of the most fundamental steps necessary to solving any problem: namely defining the nature of that problem. If the government is serious about ending men’s violence against women it needs to look at the causes: sex inequality, the objectification of women and socially constructed gender roles that create toxic norms of masculinity and femininity.

Isn’t it time for us to get over the reluctance to actually name and condemn men’s violence? Isn’t it time that we worked with the causes of men’s violence and not just the results? Isn’t it time that we listened to feminists? Because feminists have been saying this for decades.

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