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## Working Paper No. 5

# **Gendered Perceptions of Domestic Violence: how young females are more likely than young males to know controlling domestic violence behaviours**

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## **Abstract**

Research shows that young people hold narrow views about what is domestic violence. As such, some of their views indicate support for the use of violence in intimate relationships. Gender seems to impact upon such views. We sought to assess the impact of gender on students' perceptions of domestic violence at a university in the North of England, using a survey. Our findings show that females considered a broader range of behaviours as domestic violence, particularly the psychological/emotional and financial violences, compared to males. Whilst most of the sample constructed domestic violence behaviours as committed by male perpetrators against female victims, females were more likely to strongly disagree that males and females are equally violent in relationships. Our argument is that females were more likely to know about controlling domestic violence behaviours because they are more likely victims of domestic violence. The research has important ramifications for challenging stereotypes of gender roles and expectations about gendered behaviours.

Key Words: gender / gender roles / gendered behaviours / perceptions of domestic violence / controlling behaviours

## **Introduction**

The range of behaviours now considered as domestic violence has expanded. This has led to multiple understandings of the violence (see Johnson, 2011). Whilst this may be positive because more individuals are now recognised as either perpetrators or victims of domestic violence, the expansion of the behaviours may obscure the essence of what is domestic violence. This article begins by unpacking the essence of domestic violence. For this paper, and the respondents in this research, perpetrators are predominantly viewed as male and victims are predominantly viewed as female. The paper progresses into a review of the literature about how young people view domestic violence and the challenges this presents. We then discuss our methodology to assess the impact of gender on perceptions of domestic violence. Following this, we present the findings of our research and the implications for policy and practice.

## **Domestic Violence: a pattern of controlling behaviours**

Over the years, the need to contextualise domestic violence as a pattern of behaviours rather than incidents has been evidenced in radical and pro-feminist research (see for example Dobash and Dobash, 1984; Harne and Radford, 2008; Hester, 2013; Kelly and Westmarland, 2016). By 2013, the government's definition of domestic violence was implemented to reflect this pattern:

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, emotional (GOV.UK, 2012: unpaginated).

Whilst the definition of domestic violence still incorporates the term 'any incident', for the radical and pro-feminist writers, it is the 'pattern of incidents' of behaviours which are the defining features of domestic

violence. Through their research, activism and an ensuing public government consultation, the official definition of domestic violence heeded this pattern of behaviours as controlling behaviours, which are defined as:

a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour (GOV.UK, 2012: unpaginated).

Stark (2007:276) has argued that not only is the need for a perpetrator to control a victim as 'the most common context in which women are abused' in domestic violence relationships, 'it is also the most dangerous'. In England and Wales, evidence for this is found in the homicide statistics where 82 adult females were killed by partners or ex-partners compared to 13 adult males who were killed by partners or ex-partners, in the year 2016/2017 (ONS, 2018a). Drawing on Tolman's (1998), Agnew-Davies (2006) and Agnew-Davies and Barkham's (2006) studies, examples of controlling behaviours include: 'monitored time', 'kept from seeing family', 'did not allow to work', 'did not allow to leave house', and 'acted stingy with money' (cited in Stark, 2007:277). Stark (2016:0:57-0:59) argues that coercive control is 'a crime against women's liberties and rights' because:

[...] the major focus of regulation in coercive control is on those roles that women enact simply because they're women by default: how they clean, how they cook, how they care for their children, [...] so that he imposes on her the very gender stereotypes that we've spent 50 years, [...] emancipating women from [...] (ibid:14:02-14:35).

Hearn's (1998:126) research supports this by outlining some of the key justifications of why men say they are violent to women in intimate relationships because of: 'not doing housework', 'not doing childcare', 'not

maintaining her appearance'. The more recent focus on controlling behaviours as indicators of risk factors of serious harm and fatality in domestic violence relationships (see Coy and Kelly, 2011) has led to the criminalisation of such behaviours in 2015. For example, monitoring an individual's time is criminal when it is 'a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim' (Home Office, 2015a:3). Piecing together this pattern of controlling behaviours is crucial in identifying domestic violence relationships (Stark, 2007; Myhill and Johnson, 2016) but it is incredibly difficult because of the normalisation of such behaviours in intimate relationships.

### **Normalising Domestic Violence: gender matters**

Research has shown how individuals normalise domestic violence behaviours. McCarry's (2010) research shows how young males and females, aged between 15 and 18, justify the use of men's violence against women in intimate relationships, particularly when the woman is 'not doing what they are supposed to be doing', for example, her 'wifely' duties (Scott, participant, cited in McCarry, 2010:27). In a similar vein, Burman and Cartmel's (2005:42) research of young people's views aged 14 to 18, found that women were blamed for men's violence when she had 'transgressed rigid and stereotypical gender roles' (ibid:45). Similarly, Burton and Kitzinger (1998) in their research with young people aged between 14 and 21, found that young men were generally more accepting of the following behaviours than young women: hitting a woman because she had slept with someone else; she was nagging; and forcing a woman to have sex because she was his wife. As such, the study found that women were blamed for provoking violence. Hearn (1998) argues that violent men similarly justify their use of violence blaming women for something they may not have done, such as the housework, or something they did do, such as provoke an argument. Men's justifications of violence can be seen to be 'influenced by their

gendered expectations of behaviours within a given situation' (Sundaram, 2018:27). Sundaram (2018:24) argues that young people's views about the use of violence 'exist on a continuum of acceptability': binary positions are rare. Young people's positioning along this continuum in justifying violence are 'shaped by their understandings of normal and appropriate gender behaviour' (ibid:24). For example, Mullender, Hague, Imam, Kelly, Malos and Regan (2002) asked school children about their thoughts of domestic violence. Boys were more likely to agree with the statement that 'women get hit if they have done something to make men angry', than girls were (ibid:65). Burman and Cartmel (2005:24) found females (81%) were significantly more likely to view domestic violence in terms of 'fights between husband and wife in the home as "very serious"', compared to males (72%). Given these views, it is not surprising to find that domestic violence happens in young people's relationships (Burton and Kitzinger, 1998; Burman and Cartmel, 2005; Barter, McCarry, Berridge, and Evans, 2009; Fox, Corr, Gadd and Butler, 2013) because young people's justifications serve to normalise the violence.

In Wilcock's (2015) interviews with 20 women, she found that all understood domestic violence to involve physical violence. They viewed domestic violence largely as what Donovan and Hester (2014:9) refer to as the public story of domestic violence that locates the problem in 'heterosexual relationships within a gendered victim/perpetrator dynamic (the stronger/bigger man controlling the weaker/smaller women), and forefronts the physical nature of the violence'. For many women in Wilcock's (2015) research, there was less recognition of domestic violence as emotional/psychological, financial and sexual violence. Burman and Cartmel (2005) found that older participants were more likely than younger participants to view domestic violence as not just physical in nature, but involving other types of behaviours as violence. This is also supported by Girlguiding (2013) research and from the Girls' Attitudes Survey 2012 (cited in Girlguiding, 2013) from girls aged 11 to 21.

However, the controlling behaviours as implicated in the government definition, such as a partner asking where you are, telling you what to wear, who you can spend time with, and sending photos to a friend without your permission, were viewed by some of the girls as acceptable behaviours in intimate relationships. The Girlguiding (2013:4) research concluded that many young 'girls regularly tolerate behaviour rooted in jealousy and lack of trust, and have a tendency to reframe it as genuine care and concern for their welfare'. In a similar vein, in Burman and Cartmel's (2005:40) research, they found 'there was a tendency to disregard verbal and forms of emotional abuse' from their definition of domestic violence. Male and female participants did not know if the following behaviours were domestic violence: 'not allowing partner money for their own use' (males 13%, females 14%) and 'not letting partner see family or friends' (males 10%, females 9%) (ibid:30). Previous research has documented the difficulties practitioners also have of naming such controlling behaviours as domestic violence (Myhill and Johnson, 2016; Robinson, Myhill and Wire, 2018). Both male and female participants, in Burman and Cartmel's (2005) research, were clear about which behaviours were domestic violence: 'not letting partner leave the house' (males 87%, females 88%); 'threatening to hit partner' (males 86%, females 93%); 'throwing things at partner' (males 88%, females 94%); 'slapping/punching regularly' (males 91%, females 96%); and 'forcing partner to have sex' (87% males, 95% females) (ibid:32). This confirms to the public story of domestic violence as physical violence. Still, higher per cents of young women were more likely to view these behaviours as domestic violence compared to young men (ibid).

In Burman and Cartmel's (2005) research, participants underestimated the extent of domestic violence, with young women's estimates higher than young men's estimates. Most of the young people in the study said that stress was the major cause of domestic violence. Alcohol was also

viewed as a catalyst for domestic violence behaviours by many young people. Young people in Burton and Kitzinger's (1998) research, both males (85%) and females (89%), also believed that men use violence against women because of alcohol and drugs (Burton and Kitzinger, 1998). Existing literature has shown how female victims (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1984; Pahl, 1985; Wood, 2001; Wilcock, 2015), violent males (Ptacek, 1988; Hearn, 1998; Gilchrist, Johnson, Takriti, Weston, Beech and Kebbell, 2004) and practitioners believe domestic violence is caused by men who are under the influence of alcohol (Borkowski, Murch and Walker, 1983; Gilchrist and Blissett, 2002). This is problematic, as Wilcock (2015) argues this can prevent the naming of the violence as domestic violence, because the abuse is perceived as happening only when the man is drunk. If domestic violence is viewed in this way as incident-based, violence is more akin to what Johnson (1995:285) terms 'common couple violence' where conflicts 'get out of hand', rather than the outcome of a pattern of controlling behaviours. Mental health issues were also seen as the cause of domestic violence by participants in Burman and Cartmel's (2005) research. More young females, compared to young males, in their research, advanced structural explanations such as 'patriarchal society' and 'gender relations' as the reasons for violence against women (ibid:iv). Despite this, '82% of females disagreed with the statement that 'men should be responsible for raising children and doing the housework'', yet '61% of males disagreed that women should be responsible' for this (ibid:14). By contrast, '42% of males and 12% of females agreed that men should take control of relationships and be the head of the household' (ibid:14), which suggests that both males' and females' attitudes are supportive of traditional gender roles of domesticity and intimacy, the very roles, which Stark (2016) argues, serve to regulate women's behaviour and create the unequal contexts ripe for domestic violence relationships.

These views continue into adulthood. Wilcock (2015) found that women in her research did not recognise behaviours as domestic violence because of cultural expectations about heterosexual relationships. For example, physical violence in a relationship is not defined as domestic violence if the man had been drinking alcohol because of cultural expectations of the acceptability that men get drunk and are violent (see also Wood, 2001). Violent men narrowly define domestic violence (Hearn, 1998) because they have been prepared for physical violence as a normalised aspect of their masculinity (Connell, 2009:4; Connell and Pearse, 2015). Any violence that is not physical in nature is not violence (Hearn, 1998) hence the perpetuation of the public story of domestic violence. Such justifications for violence are culturally embedded (Wood, 2001), often reinforced by media (Harne and Radford, 2008; Wilcock, 2015), pornography and advertising (Connell and Pearse, 2015) and serve to maintain a patriarchal social order where violence against women is accepted (Walby, 1990; Radford and Stanko, 1996). Both Wilcock (2015) and Wood (2001:248) highlight how many domestic violence behaviours such as telling a woman how to behave, what to wear, who to see and when, are normalised behaviours because they are 'part of routine within a [heterosexual] relationship' (Wilcock, 2015:196) where males make decisions and women defer (Fenton and Jones, 2017). Yet, as Stark (2016, see also Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Connell, 2005; Connell and Pearse, 2015) warns, these gender roles of women serve as platforms for men to regulate women's behaviour thereby normalising and perpetuating harmful controlling behaviours. Women are controlled in heterosexual relationships by men who are culturally afforded male entitlement to do so including having ownership over women's bodies (Wilcock, 2015). For example, some women in Wilcock's (2015) research did not name sexual violence as part of domestic violence, similar to the young people in Burton and Kitzinger's (1998) research. Rather, women in Wilcock's (2015) research justified having sex when they did not want to and dressed the way men wanted, to appease men and to keep men's

jealous tendencies in check. In doing this, women confirmed their belonging to men, and inadvertently, men's ownership of them. Such behaviours were not viewed as controlling by women but normal aspects of heterosexual intimate relationships because women wanted to be what men wanted them to be. This places women in a vulnerable and subservient position. It seems then that these beliefs about the gender roles of women and men in heterosexual relationships can foster domestic violence. For this reason, Sundaram (2018) argues that prevention programmes must teach more than violence is wrong, to challenging gender norms and the cultures in which they are embedded.

### **Young People and Domestic Violence: early prevention**

Challenging the status quo that upholds stereotypes of gender roles is therefore important. Part of the Government's *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action plan* focuses on educating young people about healthy relationships by challenging attitudes that view violence as acceptable. Increasing public awareness of domestic violence including its hidden nature and the root causes are also key to the strategy. Previous examples of raising awareness about domestic violence include the 'This is Abuse' campaign, which was aimed at young boys and men to identify and challenge domestic violence behaviours. The campaign seemed to have some success, according to the government website (Home Office, 2015b). However, research carried out on the views of young men about this campaign illustrate the complexities of the impact of such interventions. Young men both condemned and justified the violent behaviours navigating their way through their explanations, which were based on their own subject positions of young violent and marginalised men. Strategies thus need to be implemented to support the key message that domestic violence is wrong (Gadd, Corr, Fox and Butler, 2014) *and* that also challenge gender norms and gendered expectations of behaviours and the local cultures in which they thrive, such as schools and universities (Sundaram, 2018). Whilst there have

been pilot domestic violence prevention programmes delivered in schools to educate young people about domestic violence, studies show that there are problems engaging young people with such interventions. Young people struggle with understanding the complexities of domestic violence particularly controlling behaviours and psychological abuse; educators struggle with engaging boys with the content (Barter and Berridge, 2011); teaching about women's autonomy in relationships (Bell and Stanley, 2006); and challenging sexism (Fox, Hale and Gadd, 2014). One of the recommendations to address a culture change around challenging sexism and other inappropriate behaviours, advanced by Universities UK (2016), is the adoption of bystander interventions in universities. Such interventions are thought to work by enhancing skills and altering attitudes in participants so that they learn to be an active bystander who 'simultaneously sends a powerful message to the wrongdoer and to other bystanders about the social unacceptability of the behavior and the social acceptability of challenging it' (Fenton and Mott, 2017:451). By effectively challenging low-level incidents of negative behaviours such as sexual harassment, it can begin to generate a culture change in the institution (Universities UK, 2016).

Given the focus of bystander interventions in UK universities to address sexual violence in particular, it is important to explore whether these interventions should and could address domestic violence, in light of young people's views about domestic violence. The review of the existing literature suggested that young people held views that supported the use of violence in intimate relationships. Such views were predicated upon stereotypical gender roles of how males and females are supposed to behave in intimate relationships. Whilst both males and females normalised the use of violence, slightly higher numbers of females were more likely to recognise the behaviours as violence in intimate relationships than males. Both genders primarily defined domestic violence as physical violence. For these reasons, and given most of the

existing studies did not report findings with statistical significance, we asked of our data: does gender impact upon young people's perceptions of domestic violence? The following section details our methodology.

## **Methodology**

Feminist methodology often contests the scientific method because the production of knowledge is viewed as a social process. Any methodology claiming to make connections between knowledge and reality does so without a recognition of the power relations inherent in knowledge production (Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2002). Whilst this paper does not seek to explore why perceptions of domestic violence are gendered in terms of the power relations that enable them, for that is the goal of other and further research, it is important for this paper to test for a statistical relationship between gender and perceptions of domestic violence for further qualitative research upon which to expand. We are not claiming either to carry out an objective scientific method, because we recognise that feminist theoretical perspectives have influenced the design of the research in terms of how we define domestic violence and the ensuing types of questions we ask participants for our goal is to test if gender impacts upon perceptions of domestic violence, given the review of the existing literature. Our epistemological stance therefore is more post-positivist (limitations of the research are detailed at the end of this paper).

With all this in mind, a survey was distributed to students attending a university in the North of England. Both online and hard-copy surveys were used: the latter particularly to increase the response rate from males.<sup>i</sup> Males comprised 50.8% (n=202) of the sample and females comprised 49.2% (n=196) of the sample, totalling 398 students completing the survey. Students were accessed because they often comprise the age-group most at risk of domestic violence (Universities UK, 2016; ONS, 2016). Of our sample, 80.9% were aged between 18

and 24. Given the nature of the questions asked, ethical approval was sought and granted. The survey was designed to test the variable gender against a range of variables about perceptions of domestic violence. It consisted of mainly closed questions, providing a range of responses that could be selected. Likert Scales were also used. Questions asked about participant's views of domestic violence: about the different types of behaviours and the seriousness of these, the extent, including who perpetrates it and who experiences it as victims, what influences domestic violence and how to deal with it. The data was analysed using SPSS running cross-tabulations to find significant relationships, using Pearson Chi-Square as the measure of confidence in the data between gender and perceptions of domestic violence in the sample.<sup>ii</sup> This paper presents significant relationships between gender and perceptions of domestic violence, but where cell counts are less than 5, data is not presented. Findings are further analysed drawing on the research and theoretical perspectives of radical and pro-feminist writers.

### **Analysis of the Findings**

#### *Gendered Perceptions of Domestic Violence: violence in heterosexual relationships*

From the frequency data, all of the sample (n=398) said that they knew what domestic violence is, and 74.9% (n=298) of the sample thought that whilst both men and women commit domestic violence, they thought that men do so more often. Only 1% (n=4) of the sample thought that whilst both men and women commit domestic violence, women commit it more often. In terms of victimisation, 66.3% (n=264) of the sample thought that whilst both men and women could be victims, women were more often the victim. Only 0.5% (n=2) of the sample thought that whilst both men and women could be victims, men were more often the victim. Respondents therefore perceive domestic violence as predominantly committed by a male perpetrator against a female victim: a predominantly radical feminist point of view (see Harne and Radford,

2008). In doing so, respondents in this research, largely view violence as happening in heterosexual relationships.

When respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a range of beliefs about domestic violence, gender did not impact upon the belief that a relationship can be abusive even if there is no physical harm or injury. Gender did impact upon the belief that most domestic violence relationships involve mutual violence where both male and female partners are as violent as one another (see Table 1).<sup>iii</sup>

**Table 1:** Beliefs about Domestic Violence

<b>Beliefs about Domestic Violence</b>		<b>Male (%)</b>		<b>Female (%)</b>		<b>Sig</b>
<b>Most domestic violence relationships involve mutual violence where both male and female partners are as violent as one another</b>	Agree	18.8	(n=38)	11.2	(n=22)	p=0.000
	Neither agree nor disagree	43.6	(n=88)	20.4	(n=40)	
	Disagree	34.7	(n=70)	33.7	(n=66)	
	Strongly Disagree	3.0	(n=6)	34.7	(n=68)	

Females were more likely than males to strongly disagree that domestic violence is mutually committed by both men and women. Walby and Towers (2018) argue that when ‘capping’ (i.e., not counting all incidents reported) is removed from victimisation surveys, such as the *Crime Survey for England and Wales*, the statistics show gender asymmetry, particularly highlighting the frequency and impact of domestic violence on individual victims. One of Johnson’s (1995) typologies of violence in relationships is ‘common couple violence’, which is thought to be symmetrically gendered, less about patriarchy and gendered expectations about domesticity and intimacy in intimate relationships. As such, gender

does not explain why the violence happens. The focus is on occasional conflict that got 'out of hand', that leads to minor forms of violence, which very rarely escalate to more life-threatening violence (Johnson, 1995:285). As such, the violence is incident-based. As the review of the literature in this paper has argued this is *not* domestic violence, according to the radical and pro-feminist research (see for example Dobash and Dobash, 1984; Harne and Radford, 2008; Hester, 2013; Kelly and Westmarland, 2016), because it does not take account of a pattern of behaviours that can escalate in severity and frequency over time, culminating in, sometimes, domestic homicide and the killing of collaterals (Dobash and Dobash, 2012); nor does it take into account the gendered power relations between men and women in intimate relationships (Dobash and Dobash, 1998), which according to these radical and pro-feminist writers, is fundamental to understanding the violence as domestic violence. The following sections on gendered perceptions of domestic violence serve to add weight to these radical and pro-feminist perspectives.

#### *Gendered Perceptions of the Controlling Behaviours of Domestic Violence*

Respondents were asked about twenty-four different kinds of domestic violence behaviours covering physical, sexual, psychological/emotional and financial violence. Twelve significant relationships were found in the data where gender impacted upon respondents' perceptions of domestic violence.<sup>iv</sup> Gender did not impact upon: hitting, punching, threatening to kill a partner/ex-partner, lying to friends about partner/ex-partner, lying to family about partner/ex-partner, taking money from their partner/ex-partner's purse/bank account without asking. Gender did impact upon perceptions about: shouting, refusing to use safe sex practices, taking the money their partner/ex-partner earns where more males than females considered the behaviours as domestic violence (see Table 2).

**Table 2** Behaviours Considered as Domestic Violence More by Males than Females

<b><i>Behaviours Considered as Domestic Violence More by Males than Females</i></b>	<b><i>Male (%)</i></b>		<b><i>Female (%)</i></b>		<b><i>Sig</i></b>
<b>Shouting</b>	97.0	(n=196)	90.8	(n=178)	p=0.009
<b>Refusing to use safe sex practices</b>	100.0	(n=202)	87.8	(n=172)	p=0.000
<b>Taking the money their partner/ex-partner earns</b>	99.0	(n=200)	87.8	(n=172)	p=0.000

The above Table 2 illustrates the behaviours males were more likely to consider as domestic violence compared to females. Gender did impact upon perceptions about: name calling, bullying by text, monitoring partner/ex-partner's movement/location, checking partner/ex-partner's phone, monitoring partner/ex-partner's messages, posting intimate photos of their partner/ex-partner onto social media, withholding sex, withholding money from a partner/ex-partner, making important financial decisions without a partner/ex-partner where more females than males considered the behaviours as domestic violence (see Table 3).

**Table 3** Behaviours Considered as Domestic Violence More by Females than Males

<b><i>Behaviours Considered as Domestic Violence More by Females than Males</i></b>	<b><i>Male (%)</i></b>		<b><i>Female (%)</i></b>		<b><i>Sig</i></b>
<b>Name Calling</b>	74.3	(n=150)	95.9	(n=188)	p=0.000
<b>Bullying by Text</b>	80.2	(n=162)	98.0	(n=192)	p=0.000
<b>Monitoring partner/ex-partner's movement/location</b>	69.3	(n=140)	94.9	(n=186)	p=0.000
<b>Checking partner/ex-partner's phone</b>	58.4	(n=118)	77.6	(n=152)	p=0.000
<b>Monitoring partner/ex-partner's messages</b>	69.3	(n=140)	84.7	(n=166)	p=0.000
<b>Posting intimate photos of their partner/ex-partner onto social media</b>	65.3	(n=132)	93.9	(n=184)	p=0.000
<b>Withholding sex</b>	19.8	(n=40)	46.9	(n=92)	p=0.000
<b>Withholding money from a partner/ex-partner</b>	53.5	(n=108)	81.6	(n=160)	p=0.000
<b>Making important financial decisions without a partner/ex-partner</b>	19.8	(n=40)	55.1	(n=108)	p=0.000

Women were more likely than men to consider a wider range of behaviours as domestic violence, particularly the controlling behaviours. Drawing on radical and pro-feminist perspectives reviewed in the literature, this can be explained by men's perceived rights to control women's behaviour and bodies because of stereotypes of gender roles and expectations about gendered behaviours in intimacy (see for example Stark, 2007). Young boys and girls are socialised from a young age into a culture of patriarchy (see Walby, 1990; Connell, 2009). As such, the behaviours listed in Tables 2 and 3 are normalised varying by gender because they are symbolic of modern-day heterosexual relationships, according to Wood (2001) and Wilcock (2015). The finding about withholding sex is interesting. It could be perceived that males withholding sex is a tactic to control women (see Pence and Paymar, 1993); or women withholding sex is perceived as domestic violence because the sex is harmful (see Russell, 1982); or that women believe sex is a normal part of heterosexual relationships. For example, women in Wilcock's (2015) research did not name sexual violence as part of domestic violence. Therefore, the controlling behaviours listed in Table 3 are more likely to be normalised in intimate relationships by males, in this research, whereas females are more likely to view such behaviours as comprising domestic violence.

#### *Gendered Perceptions of the Seriousness of Domestic Violence: the controlling behaviours*

Females were more likely than males to rank the following behaviours as most serious on a scale of less serious to most serious than others: breaking a partner/ex-partner's belongings, shouting, lying to friends about a partner/ex-partner, lying to family about a partner/ex-partner, monitoring partner/ex-partner's messages, posting intimate photos of their partner/ex-partner onto social media (see also Reid, McConville, Wild, Burman and Curtice, 2015), withholding sex, withholding money

from a partner/ex-partner, and making important financial decisions without a partner/ex-partner (see Table 4).<sup>v</sup>

**Table 4:** Behaviours Considered as Most Serious Domestic Violence More by Females than Males

<b><i>Behaviours Considered as Most Serious Domestic Violence More by Females than Males</i></b>	<b><i>Male (%)</i></b>		<b><i>Female (%)</i></b>		<b><i>Sig</i></b>
<b>Breaking a partner/ex-partner's belongings</b>	2.0	(n=4)	33.7	(n=66)	p=0.000
<b>Shouting</b>	0.0	(n=0)	29.6	(n=58)	p=0.000
<b>Lying to friends about a partner/ex-partner</b>	0.0	(n=0)	21.4	(n=42)	p=0.000
<b>Lying to family about a partner/ex-partner</b>	0.0	(n=0)	22.4	(n=44)	p=0.000
<b>Monitoring partner/ex-partner's messages</b>	1.0	(n=2)	29.6	(n=58)	p=0.000
<b>Posting intimate photos of their partner/ex-partner onto social media</b>	1.0	(n=2)	74.5	(n=146)	p=0.000
<b>Withholding sex</b>	0.0	(n=0)	26.5	(n=52)	p=0.000
<b>Withholding money from a partner/ex-partner</b>	1.0	(n=2)	29.6	(n=58)	p=0.000
<b>Making important financial decisions without a partner/ex-partner</b>	0.0	(n=0)	31.6	(n=62)	p=0.000

Many of the behaviours in Table 4 are controlling, according to radical and pro-feminist research (see for example Dobash and Dobash, 1984; Pence and Paymar, 1993; Harne and Radford, 2008; Kelly and Westmarland,

2016): making financial decisions alone and withholding money serves to keep women dependant on men; the checking of messages serves to regulate women's behaviour; the posting of intimate photos on social media claims ownership over women's bodies; lying to friends and family serves to hide abusive behaviours; breaking belongings and shouting scares women into submission. Women are likely more aware of the impact of such behaviours as domestic violence due to their higher levels of victimisation, compared to men (see ONS, 2018b). Yet the acceptance and normalisation of some of these behaviours as part of intimate relationships are cemented in adolescence (Burman and Cartmel, 2005; Girlguiding, 2013). The findings in Table 4 help to explain why some of these behaviours - monitoring a partner/ex-partner's messages, posting intimate photos of their partner/ex-partner onto social media, withholding sex, withholding money from a partner/ex-partner, and making important financial decisions without a partner/ex-partner - are more likely viewed by females than males as domestic violence, in this research (see Table 3). Given the narrow definitions of domestic violence held by males, it was surprising to find that they were significantly more likely to view domestic violence as increasing in the past 10 years, compared to females, in this research.

#### *Gendered Perceptions of What Influences Domestic Violence: individual factors*

Respondents were asked what factors they thought most influences a perpetrator to commit domestic violence. There was no impact of gender on the following factors as influencing domestic violence: anger/frustration and society believing that violence against women is acceptable.<sup>vi</sup> Females were more likely than males to consider the following factors as influencing a perpetrator to commit domestic violence: alcohol/drugs misuse, sexist and misogynistic attitudes, and the legal system failing to prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence. Males were more likely than females to consider the following factors as

influencing a perpetrator to commit domestic violence: witnessing domestic violence at a young age, mental health, and gender stereotypes in society (see Table 5).

**Table 5:** Gendered Perceptions of the Influences of Domestic Violence

<b><i>Gendered Perceptions of the Influences of Domestic Violence</i></b>	<b><i>Male (%)</i></b>		<b><i>Female (%)</i></b>		<b><i>Sig</i></b>
<b>Alcohol/drugs misuse</b>	36.6	(n=74)	62.2	(n=122)	p=0.000
<b>Sexist and misogynistic attitudes</b>	21.8	(n=44)	35.7	(n=70)	p=0.002
<b>Legal system failing to prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence</b>	1.0	(n=2)	31.6	(n=62)	p=0.000
<b>Witnessing domestic violence at a young age</b>	57.4	(n=116)	46.9	(n=92)	p=0.036
<b>Mental health</b>	62.4	(n=126)	32.7	(n=64)	p=0.000
<b>Gender stereotypes in society</b>	39.6	(n=80)	18.4	(n=36)	p=0.000

There is still a large minority of men (36.6%) in this research who agree that alcohol/drugs misuse influences perpetrators to commit domestic violence, supporting research that shows other (violent) men also link domestic violence with alcohol (Ptacek, 1988; Hearn, 1998; Gilchrist et al., 2004). Such perceptions of individualistic explanations for domestic violence are thus culturally embedded as popular discourse. So too are other perceptions, often cited by (violent) men, that domestic violence is caused by witnessing domestic violence as a child (Dobash et al., 2000; Gilchrist et al., 2004) and mental health problems (Gilchrist et al., 2004). Yet despite these individualistic perceptions of what influences domestic violence, frequency data shows that 43.2% (n=172) and 35.2% (n=140)

of the sample believe that the best way to tackle domestic violence is by early intervention, of education in schools and campaigns raising awareness of domestic violence, and culture change, such as altering perceptions of gendered stereotypical roles, respectively. The literature review in this paper also points to support for such strategies. Fenton and Mott (2017:451) argue that bystander interventions are important because the more active bystanders challenge the inappropriateness of violent behaviours 'the more the social norms that condition behavior will shift'. Similarly, domestic violence programmes in schools work to educate children and young people about the inappropriateness of sexism; what defines a healthy relationship (Fox et al., 2014); and how to empower women (Bell and Stanley, 2006). As such, these interventions might address some of the perceived influences of domestic violence highlighted in Table 5, such as sexist and misogynistic attitudes and gender stereotypes in society.

## **Conclusion**

Our findings show that some perceptions about domestic violence are gendered. Females were more likely to strongly disagree than males that males and females are equally violent to one another in intimate relationships. Females are more likely to view the controlling behaviours: the psychological/emotional and financial violences, as domestic violence, compared to males. As such, females were more likely to consider these behaviours as most serious domestic violence, compared to males. We argue that these findings are because women are more likely victims of domestic violence compared to men (see ONS, 2018b): women are thus more aware of the impact of controlling behaviours. Whilst there were some differences in the gendered perceptions about what influences perpetrators to commit domestic violence, large numbers of males and females thought that domestic violence was caused by individual factors, such as alcohol/drugs misuse, mental health, and witnessing violence at a young age, supporting arguments that such explanations are widespread.

Yet many of the respondents in the survey believed that the best way to tackle domestic violence is by early intervention and culture change. Such strategies were supported by the review of the literature in this paper. This paper argues for three interconnected ways to address domestic violence through education: re-thinking the design, delivery and implementation of early domestic violence prevention programmes and bystander interventions.

More research needs to be carried out into domestic violence prevention programmes in schools to find a way to overcome the challenges of delivering such interventions (see Bell and Stanley, 2006; Barter and Berridge, 2011; Fox et al., 2014). Existing research has found that young people struggle to understand the complexities of domestic violence particularly controlling behaviours and psychological abuse (Fox et al., 2014). There is a pressing need to focus on the design, delivery and implementation of such interventions, as more attention needs to be focused on such behaviours (see also Wilcock, 2015) given the findings of this research paper that shows females are more likely to know about these forms of domestic violence behaviours compared to males. As this paper has illustrated, domestic violence behaviours are socially constructed and shift over time. As such, education must keep pace with these shifting definitions to raise public awareness of what is domestic violence contemporarily. This is important to do as we now know that controlling behaviours are dangerous, serving to trap women in violent relationships (Stark, 2007), potentially leading to their homicide (see Coy and Kelly, 2011). Whilst criminalising coercive and controlling behaviours now reflects the seriousness of these behaviours, early domestic violence education must alter to reflect these changes.

We have argued in this paper that females know more about the controlling behaviours as domestic violence because they are predominantly the victims of such domestic violence. They are the

victims of these domestic violence behaviours because of gender roles and expectations about gendered behaviours. The research reviewed in the literature in this paper shows that young people, by the time they are in early adolescence, have developed particular views about gender roles and gendered expectations of behaviour, particularly in intimacy. If the premise of Stark's (2007, 2016) arguments is that the catalyst for controlling behaviours are the stereotypical gendered roles of domesticity and intimacy that women enact because they are women, then challenging these stereotypes are fundamental to ending violence against women. This must begin at an early age in a child's life through the way they are socialised and educated (see Connell, 2009). As Bell and Stanley (2006:249) argue, future programmes must be designed and delivered to 'take account of the wider social context and the different patterns of socialisation for boys and girls'. Altering attitudes and raising awareness about domestic violence is crucial to stop domestic violence before it starts (see Home Office, 2015b). Once such behaviours begin, perpetrators espouse 'a normalisation and minimisation [for domestic violence] that goes unchallenged through male entitlement' (Wilcock, 2015:359). Wilcock (2015) argues and we do too, that male entitlement needs to be challenged through early education because such justifications for domestic violence behaviours hinder the process of change in violent men because they do not hold themselves accountable (Dobash et al., 2000), which is evidenced in our research by men's individualistic explanations for what factors influence domestic violence. This re-emphasises the importance of challenging such perceptions from an early age. As such, there is a pressing need for domestic violence prevention programmes in primary schools for young children. Failure to challenge such views about gender early will likely continue the trend that females will be the predominant victims of domestic violence and males will be the predominant unknowing perpetrators of domestic violence. Challenging gender roles and gendered expectations about behaviour should create more equal intimate relationships, and in doing so, less

domestic violence. Furthermore, given that our research is carried out on young people who are at an increased risk of domestic violence (see Universities UK, 2016; ONS, 2016) and who study in a higher education (HE) institution, Sundaram (2018) argues that prevention programmes must challenge gender norms and the cultures in which they are embedded. There is, then, an equally pressing need for universities to adopt bystander interventions in HE that focus on domestic violence. Whilst the focus of the current drive to implement such interventions in HE is focused around altering participants' attitudes about sexual violence and harassment and enhancing their skills to be an active bystander in such incidents, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of such interventions (Fenton and Mott, 2017), the content should expand to domestic violence to also enhance participants' attitudes about such violence and enhance their skills to be an active bystander in such incidents. Dobash and Dobash (1984), in their research, found bystanders responding before the physical attack happened. Being an active bystander sends out a strong message about the inappropriateness of the violent behaviours and the appropriateness of challenging such violent behaviours (Fenton and Mott, 2017). Incorporating domestic violence into current bystander interventions should not be too onerous given that it will be same underlying stereotypes of gender roles and gendered expectations of behaviours that the interventions will be seeking to challenge to prevent gender based violence (see Fenton and Jones, 2017).

## **Limitations**

The research has some key limitations, which should be noted when reading the findings. Firstly, the design of the research is a non-experimental design that seeks to find a relationship between two categorical variables using a nonparametric test of chi-square. Whilst this paper has found significant relationships between gender and some perceptions of domestic violence, due to the design of the research, we

cannot provide an explanation about what caused the relationship from our own research. Instead, we make sense of the findings drawing on theory and empiricism from the wider research and literature. Further qualitative research might seek to explore why such relationships exist in our data. Secondly, as the sample is a convenience sample rather than a random sample, we cannot infer from the findings to the wider student population from which the respondents were drawn from. Instead, the findings presented in this paper refer to the respondents who completed the survey. Further quantitative statistical research that uses a random sample might be able to draw inferences from the findings to a wider population from which the sample was drawn.

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<sup>i</sup> Given the online platforms that were used, as well as the selective nature of the hard-copy survey distribution, it is not possible to ascertain the response rate, exactly. As such, the findings are drawn from a convenience sample, and they should not be viewed as representative of students attending the university.

<sup>ii</sup> Given that the sample is a convenience sample rather than a random sample, descriptive statistics are used to refer to the respondents in the survey, rather than infer to the wider population from which the sample was drawn.

<sup>iii</sup> Most of the cross-tabulations were significant, but due to the small sample size, they had low cell counts, even after re-coding the five-point Likert scale into 'agree', 'neither agree or disagree' and 'disagree'. As such, these findings are not presented.

<sup>iv</sup> Six other relationships were found but they had low cell counts so they are not presented.

<sup>v</sup> All of the cross-tabulations were significant, but many had low cell counts, so are not presented.

<sup>vi</sup> There were other non-significant relationships but these are not stated due to low cell counts.