

STATUS QUO OF NATIONAL DATA SOURCES CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACROSS EIGHT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Official police records and victimisation surveys are key sources of information on domestic violence. One of the first tasks in the international IMPRODOVA project¹, with an overall aim to improve frontline response to domestic violence, was to examine the properties and availability of these data provisions across eight partner countries. The established theoretical perspectives to examine domestic violence – feminist and family violence perspectives – accompanied by their methodological implications for data collection are reviewed. Project data are examined utilising enhanced analytical strategy. The results indicate substantial variation and deficiencies in national data provisions; the foremost problem being the lack of representative and regularly repeated victimisation surveys. Concerning police data, regionally separate information systems and the potential unreliability of the data present the biggest challenges for examining domestic violence and its frontline response. The differences in what is considered 'domestic' and 'violence', as well as the weight given to gender in defining these concepts, are evident, creating substantial obstacles for international cooperation in research, policy formation and innovations to prevent and mitigate domestic violence. The paper aims to spark conversation for further development of policy and practice on collecting appropriate and comparable data concerning domestic violence.

Keywords: domestic violence, police data, victimisation, survey, comparative research

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Introduction

The necessity to detect and prevent domestic violence is widely agreed upon, whereas the definition of it is more controversial. In order to understand the scale of the problem and to develop effective means to intervene, reliable information on the prevalence and characteristics of domestic violence are needed. Data has a key role in formulating, implementing and assessing strategy, policy and action plans for intervening in domestic violence. Article 11 of the Council of Europe (2011) Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) addresses the demand for both relevant statistical data and population-based surveys, as well as research on all forms of violence covered in the Convention, and the public availability of the aforementioned information. Still, obtaining knowledge on domestic violence is not straightforward. Two contesting approaches to define domestic violence and collect data can be summarised as gender-neutral and women-only strategies (Walby & Towers, 2017), and they entail differing research traditions and theoretical perspectives. These perspectives lead to divergent definitions and indicators of domestic violence, followed by incomparable data, complicating the debate concerning appropriate policy and frontline responses.

Two focal sources of information on domestic violence are official police records and victimisation surveys. Police data and crime data can be utilised to examine incidents that come to the attention of the police and to assess the criminal justice procedures, particularly on how these cases proceed, or do not proceed, in the system. Domestic violence is, however, a largely hidden crime, meaning that most of it never comes to the attention of authorities (e.g. Aaltonen et al., 2014). Therefore, surveying people is necessary to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon (Walby & Towers, 2017). Population-based surveys offer estimates on total prevalence of victimisation, its characteristics, and, complemented with police data, on official social control and the proportion of crime that remains hidden.

Mapping the availability and characteristics of the key data provisions was one of the first tasks in the international project *Improving Frontline Responses to High Impact Domestic Violence* (IMPRODOVA). The main goal of the research project is examining the human and social factors that shape the institutional responses to domestic violence, and to find ways of developing the frontline response to domestic violence in eight European countries that have cooperated for the project: Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Scotland and Slovenia. The national reports from these partner countries concerning the two key sources of data, police records and victimisation surveys, are utilised in the empirical section of this paper.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight both gaps and successes in data collection and eventually feed into recommendations that are relevant on a European level. We focus on three key concepts – ‘domestic’, ‘violence’ and ‘gender’ – that are central in defining the issue and understanding the possibilities, limitations and diversity of domestic violence data. We explore how these concepts are approached in the key data provisions on domestic violence based on material collected as part of the IMPRODOVA project. The intention is not to argue for or against a particular theoretical perspective, method or source of data, but rather to point out the degree the data is or is not commensurable both nationally and internationally. There are some prior assessments on domestic violence data provisions or, more specifically, concerning intimate partner violence (IPV) on the European level (EIGE 2019), but to our knowledge, no prior publications have examined how data provisions in several European countries connect to theoretical perspectives rather than only evaluating how they comply with one specific definition of domestic violence. This paper aims to address this shortcoming.

After reviewing literature analysing the theoretical perspectives to study domestic violence and the interlinked methodology for collecting data, we describe the methods and materials of this article. We then describe how the three key features of defining domestic violence appear in police data and victimisation surveys, with examples of data from the IMPRODOVA partner countries. We start with the definition of ‘domestic’, followed by the concept of ‘violence’, and how ‘gender’ is considered in different data sources. We also briefly discuss representativeness of the victimisation surveys, especially the situation of the most vulnerable groups. Finally, we conclude and discuss the implications of this review for the broader academic debate on collecting domestic violence data.

Theoretical perspectives to examine domestic violence and implications to collecting data

Domestic violence (DV), domestic abuse (DA), family violence (FV), IPV, are all terms that teem across the multidisciplinary research field concerning violence within family and other close relationships. The term used may indicate the theoretical stance of a particular study and its analytical strategy, but similar terminology is also used when referring to considerably differing definitions (Fagerlund et al., 2020). While the purpose in this paper is to examine definitions, rather than to predefine domestic violence, it is acknowledged that to operate under a title including ‘domestic violence’ is likewise not a neutral choice. Choosing to use the term domestic violence is supported by its considerably long span in violence studies across different theoretical perspectives; it was also chosen to comply with the terminology preferred in the project that this paper draws from (IMPRODOVA project website, 2020). Because of the breadth of literature on domestic violence from several decades, as well as our focus on concepts and definitions rather than causes,

mechanisms and prevalence of violence, a comprehensive meta-analysis falls outside the scope of this paper. Instead, we focus on utilising some of the relatively recent analyses on theoretical perspectives and their methodological implications, an approach supported by the observation that the groupings and conclusions on perspectives of these reviews tend to converge.

One way to understand theoretical perspectives of domestic violence is to differentiate between FV theories and feminist theory (e.g. Lawson 2012). The FV perspective is characterised by perceiving conflict between family members “as universal and inevitable, and violence between any family members (including violence between spouses) is viewed as one method utilized by those members to resolve this predictable conflict” (Lawson 2012, p. 575). While sociological theories, introduced as part of the FV paradigm as well as the feminist perspective, all tend to view violence as a function of social structures rather than individual pathology; in FV theorisations, gender is merely one of the potentially intertwined social disadvantages. By contrast, the feminist perspective recognises gender at the core of the problem so that IPV “cannot be adequately understood through any lens that does not include gender as the central component of the analysis” (Lawson 2012, p. 579). Domestic violence is argued to have more in common with sexual assault of women than elder abuse and violence between siblings, for instance; therefore violence against women (VAW) in an intimate partnership should not be studied as part of a larger phenomenon of FV (Lawson 2012).

Bonnet (2015) has described the incongruity between theoretical perspectives of FV and VAW, with focus on American literature. FV and VAW approaches are based on differing definitions of violence as well as on different studies. The overall empirical data shows FV being the most frequent type of violence in Western societies, including that between heterosexual and homosexual couples, between siblings, violence perpetrated by parents against their children and against elders. Owing to the general sociological and criminological theories on violence, the context of poverty and alcohol consumption are seen as relevant to understand violence within family (Bonnet 2015). On the contrary, similar to Lawson’s (2012) compilation on feminist perspectives, VAW approach is characterised as defining IPV separate from other violence in the family, in the context of gender inequality, male dominance and female subordination (Bonnet 2015).

Concerning the methodological choices entwined in theoretical perspectives and definitions, Bonnet (2015) notes three debates. First, the discrepancy of findings based on large-scale quantitative surveys and those conducted in women’s shelter services and hospitals. For researchers collecting data in support services, the victims of domestic violence have consisted almost entirely of women, contributing to the claim that surveys indicating a more gender-symmetrical victimisation and perpetration rates are misleading. Authors drawing on such surveys would, in turn, criticise studies carried out in support and health-

care services as biased because of their highly selective samples, and interpret the findings of gender-symmetry as proving the superiority of large-scale surveys. Second, following the first debate is the contrasting of two types of surveys: from the FV perspective, those utilising Straus' (1979) Conflict tactics scale (CTS), and VAW surveys by feminist scholars. Both of these camps around different choices of data collection will be discussed here. The third debate listed by Bonnet (2015) sparks from the findings of gender-differences in probability to report violence. Studies from several countries have found men being less likely to report their domestic violence victimisation to the police (e.g. Brown 2004; Danielsson & Salmi 2013; MacQueen & Norris 2016), which can be connected to gender differences in what is perceived as domestic violence, i.e. sensitivity to violence (Kivivuori 2014) as well as to prevailing gender norms and greater social stigma related to men as victims of domestic violence (Brown 2004; Douglas & Hines 2011; Arnocky & Vaillancourt 2014).

Owing to the FV perspective, CTS and its later modifications (CTS2) (e.g. Straus 1979; Straus et al., 1996) measure conflict and tactics to resolve it. As mentioned above, this approach has resulted in relatively symmetrical rates of victimisation between women and men, contributing to the criticism that such measures fail to depict the reality of power-relations and particularly women's experiences as victims of domestic violence (Bonnet 2015). Johnson, who has developed typologies to distinguish patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence, later revised into intimate terrorism and situational couple violence (Johnson 1995, Johnson & Ferraro 2000), sees the ostensible gender-symmetry produced by CTS-surveys as misleading particularly because of the failure to capture motivation. Motivation is in the very essence of Johnson's distinction between the subtypes of domestic violence; whereas for Straus, self-report surveys essentially measure actions and not motivations (Bonnet 2015). According to Walby and others (2017), the main deficiency with CTS and its modified versions is that asking about actions alone is not sufficient to define violence or crime, because seemingly similar violent acts may have different consequences for women and men, physically and mentally.

General crime victim surveys aiming for nationally representative samples introduce gender as a background or control variable, and not as a property of the definition of domestic violence (e.g. Walby & Towers 2017). Built on national legislation, with focus on acts defined as criminal, these surveys are understandably somewhat restricted to national contexts, because legislation related to domestic violence varies considerably. Survey and statistical research is preferred particularly among mainstream criminology, which according to its critics, due to counting victims and violent acts, is insensitive to the particular characteristics of domestic violence, context and consequences, and fails to recognise and measure the continuum of violence and controlling behaviour by men against their female partners as well as its underlying motivation (Bonnet 2015; Walby et al. 2014). Motivation, on the other hand, can be studied with qualitative methods without the possibility of generalising from those findings (Bonnet 2015).

Even though an emphasis on qualitative methods has been recognised among studies examining VAW specifically, the importance of also producing statistical knowledge from this perspective has been recognised (e.g. United Nations 2014). Thus far, perhaps one of the most ambitious attempts to internationally examine domestic violence among other forms of VAW is the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey, published in 2014 (FRA 2014a). Around 42,000 women across 28 EU Member States participated in the survey, and reported on their experiences of physical, sexual and psychological violence, including incidents of IPV. Only women as victims were surveyed, with focus on violence perpetrated by partners in addition to violence by strangers and in work contexts. The survey also featured a brief section asking to recall violent experiences in childhood, including those perpetrated by respondents' parents.

Walby and Towers (2017) focus on another survey in addition to the FRA Survey (FRA 2014a; 2014b), the Crime survey for England and Wales, but argue that both these representing contrasting theoretical perspectives on domestic violence fail to produce adequate data. Walby and Towers' (2017) criteria for mainstreaming gender in surveys on IPV includes their suggestions to operationalise 'violence' and 'gender', albeit they do not problematise the concept of 'domestic'. Their checklist developed for the purpose of mainstreaming gender into domestic violence research and utilised in our methods section also helps to assess, besides surveys, police data to examine national domestic violence data sources.

Definitions of domestic, violence and gender

The Council of Europe (2011) Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, so-called Istanbul Convention, fundamentally takes part in defining 'domestic', 'violence' and 'gender'. The first and foremost purpose stated in the Convention is to protect women against all forms of violence, and prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence. The definition of domestic violence in the Convention includes "all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim" (Council of Europe 2011). The Convention defines gender as "the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men".

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has assessed the role of data in understanding IPV in the EU (EIGE 2019). The assessment is outlined for gender-based violence (GBV) against women, with special focus on violence perpetrated by men against women within intimate partnerships. The definition of IPV by EIGE is largely congruent with domestic violence definition stated in the Istanbul Convention: "Any act of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occurs between current or former spouses or

partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence as the victim” (EIGE 2019, p. 12; 2017). It should be noted that the definition by EIGE excludes all other family and close relationships and equals domestic violence with IPV.

In the purpose of standardising violence surveys with other data sources and also across countries, Walby et al. (2017) recommend harmonising the definition of violence in surveys in accordance with the definitions of violence in law. Since jurisdictions vary considerably, it is unclear as to what extent this approach will help solve problems of comparability internationally. In terms of ‘gender’, Walby and Towers (2017) identify three approaches to collecting survey data. First, ignoring gender as unimportant to ostensible gender-neutrality. This approach is attributed to general crime surveys and creation of official crime statistics. Second, the women-only approach collects data only on women’s experiences of violence with the aim of highlighting the gendered nature of violence. And finally, the gender mainstreaming approach, which strives to make gender and experiences of both women and men visible in all surveys and official statistics. Rather than giving their definition of gender, Walby and Towers (2017) list five ‘gender dimensions’, four of which are described through biological sex: sex of the victim, sex of the perpetrator, relationship between perpetrator and victim (whether they are intimate partners, other family members, acquaintances or strangers), and a possible sexual aspect. Whether a gender-motivation can be identified is suggested as the fifth dimension of advanced gender mainstreaming.

Data and analytical approach

The data examined in this paper comes from the EU-funded Horizon 2020 project entitled Improving Frontline Responses to High Impact Domestic Violence (IMPRODOVA). One of the first tasks in the initial stages of the project was to map the availability and characteristics of domestic violence data provisions in eight partner countries of IMPRODOVA: Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Scotland and Slovenia. The data utilised in this article was initially collected for a deliverable report of IMPRODOVA (Fagerlund & Houtsonen, 2019) and country reports provided by the project partners. We focus on two main data sources on domestic violence: police data and survey data, and develop the analysis initially carried out for the purposes of the project reporting.

The policing process of domestic violence can produce at least three types of data: calls from the emergency response centres, defined as domestic violence tasks for the police, crime reports, and records of pre-trial investigations. Based on preliminary reports of IMPRODOVA partner countries, we decided to focus on crime report data, because it was deemed as most promising in terms of availability across the partner countries. Therefore, it could enable us to compare the data provisions internationally and, at best, the results attained with such data. Guided by the anticipation of preliminary findings and utilising criteria presented

by Walby, Towers and Francis (2014) and Walby and Towers (2017) we developed a template to examine data provisions on domestic violence in IMPRODOVA partner countries. The templates were similar for survey and police data, although the survey section also includes features distinctive to survey research, such as sampling method, representativeness, recurrence and regularity of data collection, and the instance responsible for collecting the data.

The availability of other quality data, which may provide means to assess nature, prevalence and response in relation to domestic violence, were also examined. A particular interest in other data sources concerns marginalised groups that may not be sufficiently represented in national victimisation surveys and could also have more barriers to seek police assistance, such as immigrant women (e.g. Wolf et al. 2003) and LGBT+ population, that may simultaneously be at a heightened risk to experience domestic violence (e.g. Edwards, Sylaska & Neal 2015; Messinger 2011).

For the purposes of this article, guided by studies reviewing theoretical perspectives to study domestic violence and adapting the criteria suggested by Walby, Towers and Francis (2014), we searched for the key indicators in data provisions to compare the relationships and acts or behaviour included in the definition of domestic violence, and indications of acknowledging gender (see also Walby & Towers, 2017). These premises for analytical strategy are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of theoretical perspectives to examine domestic violence and implications for collecting data.

	Feminist perspectives / women only -approach	Family violence perspectives, mainstream criminology
Relationship ('domestic')	Intimate partnerships	Family relations, other close and dependant relationships
Acts/behaviour ('violence')	Continuum of violence; broad spectrum of violence including physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence and coercive control	Criminal law definitions, counting crimes and victims, emphasis on physical violence
Gender	Gender-based violence against (heterosexual) women	Gender as a background variable
Implications to collecting data	Qualitative methods, surveying women as victims of violence	Representative population surveys, crime data

Results

The main findings of the data collection sorted by country are presented in Table 2. The results of the analysis for this paper are elaborated in the following in terms of what was found incorporating in 'domestic', 'violence' and 'gender' with examples from the data.

Table 2. Overview of data provisions in IMPRODOVA partner countries

Measures	IMPRODOVA Partner Countries							
	AU	FI	FR	GER	HU ⁴	PT ⁵	SCT	SLO
A) Victimization survey data provisions								
1. Definition of violence covered in the data source								
Broad definition (not only crimes)	y	n	n	y	y	y	y	y
Varied types (econ., physical, mental, sexual...)	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
2. Definition of relationship between the perpetrator and the victim								
Differentiate (domestic/relatives/family, acquaintance, strangers)	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	n
Inclusive (includes other than formal domestic relationships)	y	y	y	n	y	y	y	n
3. Indications of gender								
Victim	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Perpetrator	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
4. Indicators for repeated and serial offences								
5. Indicators for seriousness of harm								
6. Indicator for reporting to police								
7. General information about data source								
Representativeness (National or Regional)	y	y	y	n ³	n	n	y	n ⁶
Repetitiveness (not necessarily regularly)	n	y	y	n	n	n	y	n
Availability	n	y ¹	NA	n	y	y	y	y

¹ Since 2015, there has been an option for data availability through the Finnish Social Data Archive.

² No indicators of physical harm, but psychological trauma.

³ Only partly representative and no response rate was documented.

⁴ FRA 2014 only includes women as respondents and victims, and no nationally representative survey was identified.

⁵ Portugal did not report any national victimisation survey; therefore, the summary here is based on FRA 2014.

⁶ Only included women as respondents; response rate was 25 %.

B) Police data on domestic violence								
Measures	IMPRODOVA Partner Countries							
	AU	FI	FR	GER	HU	PT	SCT	SLO
1. Definition of violence covered in the data source								
Broad definition (scope not only crimes)	n	n	n ³	n	n	n	y	n
Varied types (econ, physical, mental, sexual...)	y ¹	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
2. Definition of relationship between the perpetrator and the victim								
	y	y ²	y	y	y	y	y	y
3. Indications of gender								
Victim	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Perpetrator	y	y	y	y ⁴	y	y	y	y
4. Indicators for repeated and serial offences								
	n	n	y	n	y	y	y	n
5. Indicators for seriousness of harm								
	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	n
6. Indicators of police actions/proceedings								
	NA	y	y	n	y	y	y	n
7. Availability (raw data with research permission)								
	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	y

¹ Including offences against physical integrity, offences against personal integrity, and offences against sexual integrity.

² Certain crimes can be categorised as family violence, although this categorisation is optional.

³ Other than crimes can be reported as informal claims, but the police crime report data only include reported crimes

⁴ Not consistent.

What is domestic?

In general, police data on crime reports in IMPRODOVA partner countries contain information about the relationship between the victim and the suspect. This information can be utilised to determine whether certain contexts would qualify as 'domestic'. This depends, however, on the way information systems are structured and how explicitly the relationships between different individuals are described in the reports. For research purposes the properties of relationships that are observed within the category of 'domestic' might have to be individually collected from each crime report. In some countries, domestic violence or FV can be flagged or categorised directly and explicitly in the crime report, but this categorisation may also be optional and not utilised consistently, as is the case in Finland. In Portugal, the police maintain a domestic violence database that is separate from other crimes and which allows an easier identification of the victim, suspect and the context, helping to more accurately define what is included in the 'domestic' sphere.

Offences recorded by the police and entered into a police information system could be used to link the victim and the suspect with other register data. For instance, in Finland the official statistical authority, Statistics Finland, combines offences recorded by the po-

lice with the information about domicile and family status to establish whether the victim and suspect are or have been cohabiting together, and concerning adults, whether they have children together (Statistics Finland 2020). While the FV categorisation of crime reports made by the police is optional, the statistical authority can produce and analyse refined data on police detected domestic violence for which the recognition of a 'domestic' setting is not dependent on police entries.

Crime victim surveys can quite flexibly comply with the identification of relationships between victim and perpetrator as suggested by Walby and Towers (2017); looking at IM-PRODOVA country data, the distinctions are commonly available. Most partners reported some type of nationwide crime victim surveys in their country that allows differentiating between at least family relationships and relationships between relatives from acquaintances and strangers. However, in Slovenia, the crime victim survey on domestic violence only covers the private sphere and partnerships therein, and 'domestic' is defined, as well as in Germany, in terms of formal relationships such as marriage. Furthermore, in Hungary and Portugal, VAW survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2014a, 2014b) seems to be the only nationwide survey covering the issue of domestic violence. Even though the survey examines VAW in a broad sense, it is limited with regard to the definition of 'domestic'. The questionnaire focuses on IPV and other forms and contexts of violence specifically relevant to women, with a few inquiries to prompt memories from childhood victimisation, including those perpetrated by parents. With the exceptions of FRA survey's few questions to recall women's childhood experiences and the Finnish Child Victim Survey (Fagerlund et al. 2014), no child victim surveys were appraised of. Non-recurring small-sample studies on violence against children and sexual abuse have been conducted in Hungary.

What is violence?

Intrinsically, in almost all partner countries, the data originating from the police documenting domestic violence incidents is limited to acts defined as criminal by law, reported to and recorded by the police. An exception is Scotland, where police also collect data on domestic abuse incidents that are not reported as crimes. Also, in France incidents other than crimes can be registered as informal claims. In all countries, a variety of forms of violence is captured through corresponding titles of crimes defined in criminal code. Portugal and Scotland have defined domestic violence or domestic abuse as a distinctive crime and Slovenia has adopted a law on preventing domestic violence. In general, domestic violence is investigated and prosecuted under a range of crime titles.

Even though crime reports indicate titles of crimes suspected in each case, they also include a description of events, which may cast more details about violent actions than a mere title of crime can capture. Crimes reported to the police can be classified into various categories, such as physical, psychological, sexual, and economic. If the descrip-

tion of events is available, it may be possible to get information about modus operandi and mediums being used. However, some project partners expressed doubts about the quality of police data stemming from filing incorrect information about the nature of the crime. Police data is not primarily gathered for research purposes, which results in limitations for its availability, use and interpretation. Internationally, there is also variation in criminal law, police proceedings, locality of data systems and access granted for research.

Crime data can also shed light on the repeated or serial offending and the seriousness of harm of violence. Indications of repeated and serial offending are part of crime data in France, Hungary, Portugal and Scotland, while not being as straightforwardly derivable from official records in Austria, Finland, Germany and Slovenia. In the latter four countries, serial and repeated offending could be gathered and analysed from police information systems, but it cannot be retrieved directly. In addition, seriousness of harm could be assessed in all of the countries' crime data except in Slovenia. Seriousness could be assessed using the crime title or the maximum sentence, but that does not necessarily disclose information about the seriousness of harm. On the other hand, police officers' written description of the incident may contain information about the harm caused by the suspect. Pre-trial investigation files typically contain the most detailed documentation of events and harm. Most countries, with the exceptions of Austria, Germany and Slovenia, reported that descriptions of police proceedings were part of the crime report data. The availability of data for research purposes is encouraging, since crime report data was reported to be available via research permission in all countries except Germany.

Official crime data has been assessed to most accurately illustrate the most serious forms of violence, which are less open to interpretation of whether 'violence' has occurred (e.g. Kivivuori 2014). However, as the grey area of violence definition grows in the milder end of the spectrum, so does the dark figure of violence that is not reported to the authorities. Therefore, to obtain a more reliable view of the prevalence of domestic violence, we need to look at surveys. Besides some established and widespread measures, such as the CTS, crime victim surveys across Europe have employed a variety of definitions of domestic violence. In addition, several sampling frames and methods to select survey participants and collect data have been used.

Within our project data, victimisation surveys that have broad definitions of violence, instead of focusing only on violence defined as crime in criminal law, were found in all countries except Finland and France. However, even in these two countries, secondary surveys and other types of data were found, which include a definition broader than that of the otherwise most distinguished crime victim survey. Indications of repeated and serial offences were available in all eight partner countries, even though most of them do not seem to meet the criteria of including all violent events as suggested by Walby and Towers (2017). Reporting domestic violence to the police was examined in all of the

main surveys, with the exception of Austria. Survey questions involving both action and harm could be more consistent with criminal law definitions and recognise that the consequences of similar acts are not always similar for different people, for example women and men (Walby & Towers, 2017). On the other hand, despite EU-level efforts for alignment in some areas of judicial decision-making, national legislation concerning domestic violence issues has considerable variation. Therefore, standardised questionnaires less directly tied into legislation, such as those based on the CTS, may be more easily translated into different societies and compared across countries.

How does domestic violence relate to gender?

As discussed in the review of theoretical perspectives to study domestic violence, theoretical stances differ in the terms of how they treat gender, and this is followed by methodological implications. Concerning data collection, it is inherently connected to what is being observed and collected. If domestic violence is defined predominantly as men's violence against women, incidents and experiences of victimised women are examined. For crime data, this would be accumulated in countries that have introduced domestic violence as a specific crime if the definition only includes women as victims. In research traditions leaning towards the FV perspective, gender is a control variable, and crime is understood in connection to sociological and criminological theories focusing on social disadvantage, such as poverty, unemployment and social disorganisation. From the feminist perspective, gender and gender-relations are a fundamental conceptual element in the theoretical system. The differences in theoretical approaches, particularly concerning survey methodology, have also been categorised as gender-neutral and gender-sensitive or women-only approaches. Data generated by applying these two different approaches cannot be compared in any simple manner. Gender-neutral studies have commonly included both women and men as respondents. In turn, the women-only studies, restricted to enquire about women's victimisation, cannot provide data on gender distribution of violence (Walby & Towers, 2017).

In most of the partner countries, at least some victimisation survey addressing the issue of domestic violence, and including both female and male respondents, was found; whereas, the inclusion of other genders and the existence of victimisation surveys for children across partner countries remains unclear. For two of the countries, Hungary and Portugal, the FRA survey on VAW (2014a) was reported as the only nationwide survey covering the issue of domestic violence, which is probably the most comprehensive international survey data collected on VAW, though it focuses on IPV and excludes other respondents except those identified as women. This is consistent with the feminist approach of examining domestic violence only as IPV and examining men's violence against their female partners as a separate phenomenon from other violence in close relationships.

Police data is commonly collected as incident-based or crime-based, not using gender as the determining factor. Recording GBV would, in principle, involve a gender-based crime title and a congruent recording system, which were not generally reported from the partner countries. However, gender of the victim and perpetrator are distinguished in all countries' police data; only in Germany was the gender of a perpetrator reported as inconsistently available. It is not possible to assess the gender-effects directly in police recordings, that is, whether the gender of the victim and perpetrator are considered by the police when dealing with domestic violence. However, there are research findings from Finland indicating that the FV task categorisation of the police is more likely to result in police actions, such as arrest and recording of crime in cases of a male perpetrator and female victim (Fagerlund, 2021; Fagerlund, Kääriäinen & Ellonen, 2018). This would seem to suggest emphasis of the VAW perspective in policing domestic violence even in a country with seemingly gender-neutral parlance in the police data systems and legislation.

Survey repetition and representativeness

With considerable variation in the assessed quality, all IMPRODOVA partner countries reported at least some type of victimisation survey that addresses domestic violence. Most of the deficiencies in cross-national survey data were found in representativeness and repetitiveness. The primary survey data was reported as comprising nationally representative samples in Austria, Finland, France and Scotland, whereas considerable limitations were found in Germany, Hungary, Portugal and Slovenia. Only in Finland, France and Scotland were the nationally representative surveys also conducted repeatedly. Linked to the federation structure in Germany, the survey efforts have mostly been regional, but they are also limited to certain groups of victims. Availability of survey data or results was deemed sufficient in Hungary, Portugal, Scotland and Slovenia, whereas limitations to access and utilise data were recognised in Austria, Finland, France and Germany.

As mentioned above, in Hungary and Portugal, the FRA survey on VAW (2014) was reported as the only nationwide survey covering the issue of domestic violence. The limitations of the FRA survey have been discussed in more detail in the technical report of the survey (FRA 2014b), by Walby and Towers (2017) and in the IMPRODOVA data provision report (Fagerlund & Houtsonen, 2019). In addition to the differences in sampling, response rates, and in the methods of data collection, the main limitation of the FRA survey is that it only surveyed women, therefore excluding at least half of the population and obstructing the examination of the gendered nature of violence. Even to draw conclusions from the data concerning women only, the national sample sizes are small for many forms of violence, particularly for comparisons at EU level (Walby & Towers, 2017).

Related to the representativeness and sampling is the question of vulnerable groups, which are not usually acknowledged in national crime victim surveys. The examination of other data sources resulted in a finding that quality datasets covering or focusing on

marginalised and particularly vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, sexual and gender minorities and immigrants, were not commonly available in IMPRODOVA partner countries. Germany and Hungary represent positive exceptions to this rule. This may suggest that, despite issues related to data sources covering domestic violence in the general population, research efforts in these countries have better succeeded in taking into account those in particularly vulnerable positions.

Discussion

The Istanbul Convention takes note of collecting “disaggregated relevant statistical data at regular intervals on cases of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention” (Council of Europe, 2011, p. 5). In this article, we focused on police crime data and victimisation survey data because they are complementary and have a central place in understanding the prevalence of domestic violence as well as in assessing the effectiveness of measures and policies to intervene and prevent domestic violence. We presented the divergent definitions of the three concepts – domestic, violence, and gender – linked to the conceptual approaches to and theoretical perspectives on domestic violence.

The mapping of data sources indicates considerable variation in the quality and availability of police data concerning domestic violence, and concerning measures and the mere existence of victimisation surveys. Overall, across IMPRODOVA partner countries, victimisation surveys are heterogeneous in their sampling and data collection methodology, representability, definitions of domestic violence, inclusion of questions about reporting violence to police and other authorities, consequences (seriousness and harm) of violence and in their relation to national legislation. Police data are more systematically connected to criminal legislations, even though a few countries stand out as the police also collect other data than the crime report data concerning domestic violence incidents. There are also deficiencies in the quality of police data, because, for instance, regional police forces have different data systems and guidelines, and systematic intervening accompanied by making domestic violence visible in recording data has not been rooted in working culture and practices. It can be concluded that police data may be more illustrative of police actions, such as police recording behaviour and use of data systems, and of the allocation of resources for policing domestic violence, than the actual phenomenon of domestic violence itself.

To be able to share good practices and to create European-level recommendations for measuring domestic violence, some level of comparativeness is necessary, starting from defining ‘domestic’, ‘violence’ and ‘gender’. Such contributions could also potentially be informative for European-level policy formation and guidelines, which are currently either internationally incompatible because of diverse legislative contexts in which they should

apply to, or take VAW as a starting point in defining domestic violence and therefore rule out a considerable amount of victims of violence who do not identify as cisgender, heterosexual women. The women-only principle in data collection does not enable examination of prevalence and characteristics of violence *by* gender and in relation to other genders. Furthermore, research knowledge on violence experienced in childhood has to rely on adult women's retrospective reporting when nationally representative child victim surveys do not commonly exist.

We found that data provisions for IMPRODOVA partner countries do not enable a direct or easy comparison of the results of national victimisation surveys, nor a sophisticated secondary analysis including such comparisons. Based on our analysis, the requirements presented in the Istanbul Convention concerning nationally representative data, gathered at regular intervals and including all forms of violence covered by the convention, are currently insufficiently met across IMPRODOVA partner countries. In many European countries, the form of official statistics and their information sources, as well as the national victimisation surveys covering domestic violence, have not been firmly established. Where a trajectory of comprehensive data sources exists, their cross-national comparison currently seems to be a mission impossible. Concerning the most extreme form of domestic violence, homicide within intimate partnerships and other family relations, cooperation already exists in the form of the European Homicide Monitor (e.g. Corradi & Stöckl, 2014), and research efforts in IMPRODOVA and beyond ought to examine the possibilities of their secondary analysis.

In addition to the academic debate and its consequences to obtaining reliable domestic violence data, it is noteworthy to consider the interlinkages between defining the concept of domestic violence and the frontline response to it. While measures across the globe undisputedly show that most victims of domestic violence coming to the attention of the police are women, it seems ethically unsustainable to dismiss the masses of child victims, victims identifying themselves as men, whether heterosexual or not, for example. International human rights organisations, as well as government policies in their definitions and action plans aiming to promote, not only women's, but also minority rights, should recognise the downsides in presenting domestic violence first and foremost as violence against (heterosexual, CIS-gender) women, targeted at them because of their gender. Findings from different countries have indicated that the police are better prepared to interact with children in other contexts than domestic violence (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012); most likely to criminalise male children for attacking their mothers than fathers, or female children victimising either of their parents, regardless of injury (Armstrong, Muftic & Bouffard, 2018); and less likely to intervene in domestic violence when the victim is male or the incident involves a homosexual couple (Lee, Zhang & Hoover, 2013). Furthermore, in Finland, recording an offence, arresting and informing about support services as police responses have been found least likely to occur when

the victim is male and the task undertaken by two male police officers (Fagerlund 2021). This is just to name one frontline responder and a few consequences, while it seems plausible to expect the naming and defining violence and credible victims have an effect among social and healthcare professionals too, if the normative control of their work and prevailing discourses in the society continue to foster a women-only approach to domestic violence victimisation.

As a limitation concerning our analysis, we acknowledge the possibility that relevant data may have been collected and come to the attention of the project partners only after the completion of their country reports in 2018. However, quick changes in police data systems are not likely, and establishing nationwide, representative and repeated surveys likewise takes time. Despite the considerable deficiencies in data sources across IMPRODOVA partner countries, the examination of data sources as such is valuable, and the summary of the findings may help to move forward in developing survey methodology and police data systems in detecting domestic violence. By mapping the data provisions concerning essential criteria, we are able to find good practices, lessons learned and national experts. Bringing all this information together can help in recognising the pitfalls of defining domestic violence, its implications to policy, data collection and practice, and at best to move towards European standards for better quality and comparativeness of data sources on domestic violence.

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