Female perpetrators of intimate partner violence

Stakeholder engagement research

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*The views reflected in this research are not necessarily those of the Home Office.
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Content warning

This report contains discussions on domestic abuse (specifically intimate partner violence), including accounts of physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse.
Executive summary

Funded by the Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Research Fund, this research sought to improve understanding of female perpetrators of intimate partner violence (IPV). The aims of the research were to:

- Consolidate knowledge of the drivers, contexts, methods, and impacts of female perpetrated IPV.
- Understand the narrative that informs the interactions and approach of professionals working with female IPV perpetrators.
- Develop recommendations for messaging that can be applied to developing education and awareness campaigns around female perpetrated IPV for professionals working in the IPV field.
- Develop recommendations for messaging that can be applied to public awareness and deterrence campaigns around female perpetrated IPV.

The study involved two complementary stages: a brief literature review of evidence on female IPV perpetrators, followed by qualitative research with expert stakeholders (including academics, practitioners, and third sector workers) with knowledge of female IPV perpetrators and/or victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV.

Terminology and focus

The focus of this report is violence and abuse that occurs specifically within intimate (i.e. romantic and/or sexual) relationships, rather than violence and abuse that can occur within wider domestic and family relationships.

The report also concentrates on female IPV within heterosexual relationships between cisgender partners only, in acknowledgement that research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) IPV warrants dedicated research.

Finally, within the IPV literature and stakeholder interviews, the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are often used interchangeably. Throughout the report we use the language and terminology presented within the literature and stakeholder interviews.

Research limitations

Due to the limited timeframe in which this research was conducted, a non-systematic review of literature was undertaken. As a result, the findings of the review should not be considered systematic or comprehensive. Rather, what the review provides is an overview of key themes present within literature focused on female perpetrated IPV, which have been used to provide context to the subsequent qualitative research.

In addition, the findings from the qualitative interviews contained in this report are based on the views of those who took part in this research. While stakeholder participants were selected on the basis of their experience and expertise on female IPV perpetrators and/or victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV, their views may not be generalisable to all those working within this space.

Findings from the literature review

- Whether IPV is predominantly an issue of men’s violence against women or is perpetrated at approximately equal rates by men and women is debated within the literature reviewed. However, regardless of the ratio of male and female IPV
perpetrators and victims/survivors, there is evidence that both males and females can be perpetrators and victims/survivors of IPV.

- The literature reviewed indicates the motivations, methods, and impacts of male and female perpetrated IPV are broadly similar.
- The literature indicates that both males and females tend to be more accepting of female-to-male than male-to-female IPV.
- The evidence suggests that a focus on male perpetrated IPV has resulted in a treatment gap for female IPV perpetrators, with a lack of statutory and non-statutory IPV perpetrator treatment programmes available for women.

Findings from the qualitative study

Motivations, methods, and impacts of female perpetrated IPV

- Interviews with stakeholders suggest that the motivations of male and female IPV perpetrators are largely similar. This includes an underlying desire for power and control. Stakeholders also suggested that the situational, psychological, and developmental factors that may contribute to the instigation of IPV are also similar across male and female perpetrators. This includes alcohol use, relationship conflict, and jealousy, as well as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).
- Stakeholders described a range of physical methods of abuse used by female IPV perpetrators, including biting, scratching, kicking, punching, slapping, pushing, and shoving. Stakeholders also described how female IPV perpetrators sometimes employ methods against male partners that can compensate for disparities in strength, such as using weapons or attacking the man while he sleeps.
- Stakeholders suggested that female IPV perpetrators tend to engage in more coercive and controlling behaviour than they do physical abuse. According to stakeholder accounts, the coercive and controlling behaviour used by women is largely similar to that used by men, including psychological and emotional abuse (such as gaslighting), monitoring of daily activities, isolation from friends and family, and financial abuse. However, the use of legal and/or administrative abuse was a type of coercive and controlling behaviour that stakeholders suggested is more prevalent among female IPV perpetrators.
- Although stakeholders identified the physical impacts of female perpetrated IPV, accounts largely focused on the psychological and emotional impacts on male victims/survivors. To this point, stakeholders also provided accounts of male victims/survivors feeling unable to speak to friends or family, or to seek professional support regarding their experiences of IPV, which in turn was described as increasing their psychological vulnerability.

Professional attitudes and policy messaging around the issue of female perpetrated IPV

- Stakeholders reported that from their experiences, a gendered view of IPV is the dominant view among professionals working in the field. This was thought to be reinforced by the gendered view of IPV reflected in the Government’s Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy. Stakeholders therefore suggested that while there is increasing recognition that men can be victims of IPV, there remains a reluctance to move towards fully acknowledging that women can and do perpetrate abuse against men.
- Stakeholders suggested that as a consequence of social norms and stereotypes around IPV, male victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV can be mistakenly viewed as the perpetrator, and often have negative experiences of seeking help.
from frontline services such as police officers, social workers, and medical professionals.

- Stakeholders described a lack of support for male victims/survivors and a lack of treatment provision for female IPV perpetrators.

**Suggestions for raising awareness of the issue of female perpetrated IPV**

- Stakeholders identified a need to raise professional and public awareness about female perpetrated IPV.

- Stakeholders suggested that improving professional awareness could be achieved through a gender inclusive approach to training, and awareness messaging that centres on supporting female IPV perpetrators to address their behaviour and to have safer, more positive relationships.

- Stakeholders also suggested that a key element of raising public awareness of female perpetrated IPV is to challenge societal norms and stereotypes around IPV and gender. Recommendations to achieve this included campaign content that reflects the range of relationships and age-groups that IPV occurs within. Stakeholders also suggested messaging that encourages violence-free lives regardless of gender should be part of a campaign strategy, as well as education for children and young people on healthy relationships.

- A lack of funding and a long-standing gendered perspective of IPV were identified by stakeholders as key barriers to raising both professional and public awareness of female perpetrated IPV.

- Overall, stakeholders advocated an awareness approach over a deterrence approach. Stakeholders expressed the view that a deterrence approach is less effective and detracts from the message of seeking help to address and change IPV behaviours.
1 Introduction

Since 2018 the Government has funded a range of approaches to working with perpetrators of domestic abuse via the Police Transformation Fund. In April 2020 the Government announced £10 million to continue this work. As part of this, £500,000 was allocated to the Home Office Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Research Fund. The research fund is focused on strengthening the evidence base for ‘what works’ in addressing perpetrator behaviour to support effective commissioning and delivery of perpetrator services and interventions.

In January 2021 the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) was awarded funding from the Home Office Domestic Abuse Perpetrators Research Fund to undertake research on the under-researched area of female perpetrators of intimate partner violence (IPV). The purpose of the research was to:

- Consolidate knowledge of the drivers, contexts, methods, and impacts of female perpetrated IPV.
- Understand the narrative that informs the interactions and approach of professionals working with female IPV perpetrators.
- Develop recommendations for messaging that can be applied to developing education and awareness campaigns around female perpetrated IPV for professionals working in the IPV field.
- Develop recommendations for messaging that can be applied to public awareness and deterrence campaigns around female perpetrated IPV.

1.1 Definitions and focus

At the time of conducting this research, the statutory guidance provided by the Home Office defined domestic abuse as:

“Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if— (a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and (b) the behaviour is abusive.” (Home Office, 2020, p. 7).

Within the guidance, abusive behaviour is further defined as physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, and/or psychological and emotional abuse (see further, Home Office, 2020).

The focus of this report is violence and abuse that occurs specifically within intimate (i.e. romantic and/or sexual) relationships. Accordingly, we use the term ‘intimate partner violence’ (IPV) rather than terms such as ‘domestic violence’ or ‘domestic abuse’. This is to distinguish the focus of this research from other forms of violence and abuse that can occur within wider domestic and family relationships. The report also focuses on female IPV within heterosexual relationships between cisgender partners only, in acknowledgement that research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) IPV warrants dedicated research.

Within the IPV literature and stakeholder interviews, the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are often used interchangeably. Throughout the report we use the language and terminology presented within the literature and stakeholder interviews.
1.2 Research approach

The study involved two complementary stages:

- **Stage 1:** A brief literature review of relevant evidence on female IPV perpetrators, approaches to behavioural intervention, and social attitudes towards female perpetrated IPV. The aim of the review was to provide context to Stage 2 of the research, and to ground findings and recommendations in the wider evidence base. Further detail on the review methodology is given in Section 2.1.

- **Stage 2:** Qualitative research (in-depth interviews) with 19 expert stakeholders (e.g. academics, practitioners, and third sector workers) who have knowledge and/or experience of working with female IPV perpetrators and/or victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV. Further detail on the methodology for the qualitative research is given in Chapter 3.

1.3 Report structure

- **Chapter 2:** A synthesis of evidence from the literature review.
- **Chapter 3:** Methodology for the qualitative component of the study.

The findings of the qualitative research are then presented in turn across four chapters, before conclusions and recommendations are set out in the final chapter:

- **Chapter 4:** Motivations, methods, and impacts of female perpetrated IPV.
- **Chapter 5:** Professional attitudes and policy messaging around female perpetrated IPV.
- **Chapter 6:** Treatment provision for female IPV perpetrators.
- **Chapter 7:** Suggestions for awareness and deterrence campaigns.
- **Chapter 8:** Conclusions and recommendations.
2 Context setting: A brief literature review

This chapter synthesises findings from the literature review. It begins with an outline of the review methodology before synthesising key findings relating to the motivations, methods, and impacts of female perpetrated IPV. The chapter then brings together evidence on norms and attitudes around IPV and gender and concludes with an overview of treatment provision for female perpetrators.

2.1 Review methodology

Due to the limited timeframe in which this research was conducted, a non-systematic review of literature was undertaken. This review was limited to approximately 15 pieces of literature, identified through the searching of key academic databases and supplemented by the research team’s existing knowledge of the evidence base. When selecting literature to be included, the following parameters were applied:

- Clear relevance to the research aims.
- Published within the last 15 years.
- Country of origin. The priority was to include studies from the United Kingdom (UK) where possible. However, where there was limited UK-based evidence, research from other countries, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, was also considered and included.
- The focus was on peer-reviewed academic literature, but relevant PhD theses were also considered.
- Systematic and meta-analytic reviews, as well as empirical studies using both qualitative and quantitative methods were included.

Once the literature was identified, key findings were extracted and synthesised. These findings were then supplemented by additional relevant literature and statistics on IPV perpetration and victimisation.

2.2 Review limitations

Given the approach undertaken and subsequent risk of selection and publication bias, the findings of this review should not be considered systematic or comprehensive. Rather, what this review provides is an overview of key themes present within literature focused on female perpetrated IPV, which also provides context for the qualitative research with stakeholders.

2.3 Key findings

This review identified a number of key themes present in the literature on female perpetrated IPV. The first of these themes refers to rates of IPV, and research related to who is primarily considered the perpetrator and the victim.

2.3.1 Rates of IPV perpetration and victimisation

Whether IPV is primarily male perpetrated (gender asymmetrical) or a behaviour that is perpetrated at approximately equal rates by males and females (gender symmetrical), is a longstanding issue within IPV research (for overviews, see e.g. Kimmel, 2002;
Straus, 1999). The evidence identified by this review suggests that crime victimisation and prosecution statistics tend to support the gender asymmetry position (i.e. primarily male perpetrators and female victims/survivors). The Crime Survey for England and Wales, for example, found that in the year ending March 2020, an estimated 513,000 men compared to 1,195,000 women had been the victim of abuse by a partner in the previous year (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2020a). Similarly, data from the Crown Prosecution Service reported by the ONS (2020b) shows that in the year ending March 2020, 76.9% of the victims/survivors in domestic abuse-related prosecutions were women, compared to 16.5% of victims/survivors who were men. With regard to defendants in domestic abuse-related prosecutions, in the year ending March 2020, 91.8% were men compared to 8.1% of defendants who were women (ONS, 2020b).

Evidence identified as part of this review, however, outlined a number of criticisms related to data that underpins support for the gender asymmetry perspective. Bates et al. (2019) and MacKay (2020), suggest that crime victimisation and prosecution statistics may not represent the true volume or proportions of IPV perpetration and victimisation; this is thought to be particularly the case for men as they are less likely to report their victimisation. Furthermore, using data from the longitudinal National Youth Survey, Mihalic and Elliott (1997) found that when a survey presented questions about IPV within the context of criminal behaviour, respondents underreported the number of assaults and victimisations compared to when the questions were framed within the context of (non-criminal) partner conflict.

In addition to concerns around accurate reporting within official statistics and survey research, some authors have suggested that much of the academic research that supports gender asymmetry in IPV perpetration comes from clinical samples comprised of violent men and female victims/survivors (i.e. samples selected from courts or women’s shelters/refuges, see e.g. Dobash et al., 1998), or non-clinical samples that are biased toward female victimisation and male perpetration (Dutton, 2012; Straus, 2010). Moreover, it has been stated that research findings based on these samples are not generalisable to the general population, and therefore do not allow for an accurate comparison of men’s and women’s rates of IPV victimisation and/or perpetration (Archer, 2000a).

This review also identified evidence in support of the gender symmetry approach (i.e. IPV perpetrated at roughly equal rates by males and females). For example, in 1980, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (2006 [1980]), published findings from the first National Family Violence Survey (NFVS), which was a large survey undertaken with a representative sample of adults in the United States. Straus et al. (2006 [1980]) found that 12.1% of men and 11.6% women reported using at least one act of violence against their intimate partner in the previous year. Nearly half of these incidences involved mutual violence, but 27% involved male-only violence while 24% involved female-only violence (ibid). More recently, Straus (2009, 2010) noted that over 200 studies have provided further evidence of gender symmetry in IPV perpetration rates. Archer (2000b), for example, in a meta-analysis of close to 100 studies, found that in heterosexual intimate relationships, women are slightly more likely to use physical violence against a partner and to use violence more frequently than men.

Research findings of gender symmetry in IPV perpetration, however, have also been subject to criticism (see e.g. Dekeseredy, 1999; Dobash et al., 1992; Dobash et al., 1998; Kimmel, 2002). This includes criticism of the use of quantitative act-based self-report measures of IPV, such as the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS; Straus, 1979), or the

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1 This refers to any partner abuse, which includes non-physical abuse, threats, force, sexual assault or stalking.
CTS2 (Straus et al., 1996), which, it has been argued, do not take the context (i.e. the circumstances and motive/s) and/or consequences of IPV into account (e.g. Dekeseredy, 1999; Dekeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007; Dekeseredy et al., 1997; Dobash et al. 1992; Kimmel, 2002). It follows that critics of gender symmetry findings have suggested that even if there are similar rates of IPV perpetration between men and women, there are qualitative differences in their use of partner violence. These include:

- The physical and psychological consequences of women’s IPV victimisation by men are more severe than the consequences of men’s IPV victimisation by women (Dobash et al., 1998; Kimmel, 2002).
- Equal numbers of acts do not equate to equal rates of initiation, and the majority of women’s use of IPV is in self-defence (Dekeseredy & Schwartz, 1998; Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Dobash et al., 1992).
- The acts that are listed in the CTS (or similar measures) do not capture the types of abuse that are associated with male perpetrators, such as financial abuse/restriction, humiliation, isolation, threats to remove children (White et al., 2000).

To reconcile the debate, Johnson (1995) argued that depending on the type of IPV under study, IPV perpetration can be both gender symmetric and asymmetric. To this point, Johnson (1995) set out a typology of relationship violence that organises IPV based on the context of the violence. Despite some variation in the number of IPV categories that have been identified and included in this typology (see e.g. Johnson, 1995, 2005; Kelly & Johnson, 2008) two forms of IPV have been consistently featured: situational couple violence (originally common couple violence) and intimate terrorism (originally patriarchal terrorism). Taking this approach, Johnson contends that findings of gender asymmetry in IPV perpetration reflect intimate terrorism, while findings of gender symmetry reflect situational couple violence (e.g. Johnson, 1995, 2005).

### 2.3.2 Motivations for IPV

The evidence identified by this review suggests that both men and women report various motivations for perpetrating IPV, and that the motivations reported by men and women are more similar than they are different. Elmquist et al. (2014) compared the self-reported motives for perpetrating physical IPV in a sample of men (n = 90) and women (n = 87) who had been arrested for IPV related offences, and found that self-defence was the most frequently reported motive for both men and women. This was followed by communication difficulties and expression of negative emotion. The only statistically significant difference between men and women identified by Elmquist et al. (2014) was that women were more likely to report being motivated by retaliation and expression of negative emotions than men. Similarly, a systematic review of research with data on both men’s and women’s motivations for IPV by Langhinrichsen-Rohling, McCullars, and Misra (2012) found a lack of evidence of gender-specific motivations for IPV perpetration. Rather, the evidence reviewed by the authors indicated that both men

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2 Both the CTS and CTS2 are comprised of several scales that measure how often different conflict resolution tactics were used in the previous year. The scales ask about the respondent’s behaviour and the behaviour of the respondent’s partner. The CTS (Straus, 1979) contains a reasoning scale, a verbal aggression scale, and a violence scale. The CTS2 (Straus et al., 1996) includes two additional scales: a sexual coercion and abuse scale, and a physical injury scale. The original scales from the CTS were also revised for the CTS2.

3 See Straus (2012) for a discussion of, and response to, key criticisms of the CTS and CTS2.

4 Situational couple violence corresponds to violence that results from relationship conflict and poor emotion regulation and conflict resolution skills (e.g. Kelly & Johnson, 2008).

5 Intimate terrorism is characterised by a pattern of controlling and coercive behaviour and more severe violence (e.g. Johnson & Leone, 2005).
and women use IPV for various reasons, such as self-defence, anger and retaliation, jealousy, and power and control. More recently, MacKay (2020) conducted interviews with a prison sample of men (n = 14) and women (n = 15), all of whom had a current or previous conviction for an offence related to IPV, and found that the main motivations for perpetrating IPV were the same across the male and female participants. These included expression of emotion (typically anger or jealousy), a response to their partner’s behaviour, revenge, and self-defence.

This review also identified some evidence on the role of external stressors in driving IPV. Capaldi et al. (2012), for example, carried out a systematic review of risk factors for IPV perpetration, and found that stress (such as work and/or financial stress) and conflict within relationships (e.g. arguments and disagreements) are predictive of both male and female IPV perpetration. The review also identified evidence that the combination of external stressors and emotion regulation difficulties can drive IPV perpetration in both men and women. Similarly, MacKay (2020), through a prison-based study, found that both male and female IPV perpetrators described broad difficulties with emotion regulation and interpersonal skills, particularly around periods of stress and conflict. Furthermore, using a representative sample of 24- and 25-year-olds in the UK (N = 541), Barton-Crosby (2018) found that an increased tendency to experience anger towards a partner significantly predicted increased levels of relationship conflict, which in turn predicted higher levels of IPV. Further analysis showed that the strength of the statistical relationship between these variables did not differ between males and females in the sample, indicating that relationship conflict (and the factors that influence the likelihood of conflict) is an important driver of IPV perpetration in both males and females.

2.3.3 Methods of female perpetrated IPV

This review identified a number of studies that have been carried out with samples of male victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV, which provide evidence of the methods of abuse used by women. Bates (2020a), using an online qualitative survey with 161 male victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV, and Hines, Brown, and Dunning (2007), through analysis of data from 190 callers to a domestic abuse helpline for men, found that men reported being subjected to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. Bates (2020a) also found evidence of female IPV perpetrators using methods of abuse that compensate for their generally smaller stature; this included the use of weapons, such as knives, hammers, and irons. Furthermore, in a meta-analysis of sex differences in the methods of physical violence used between heterosexual partners, Archer (2002) found that while men were more likely than women to ‘beat up’ or strangle a partner, women were more likely than men to use an object as a weapon or to throw an object. Hines et al. (2007) also reported that some men in their sample had been threatened with physical injury to their genitals, for example, the female partner holding a knife to the man’s groin and threatening injury.

Studies with men who have experienced violence and abuse from female partners have also found that some women engage in coercive and controlling behaviours. For

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6 Coercive and controlling behaviour is defined as “a purposeful pattern of behaviour which takes place over time in order for one individual to exert power, control or coercion over another” (Home Office, 2015, p. 3). The following is the Government’s description of controlling and coercive behaviours:

- “Controlling behaviour is: 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.”

- “Coercive behaviour 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, 2015, p.5).
example, Bates (2020a) reported evidence of female perpetrators using financial control tactics, such as men being provided with a restricted allowance or having to provide evidence of spending. While a study by Hines and Douglas (2010), in which questionnaire data from 302 men who had sustained severe IPV from a female partner was analysed, found that the partners of some male victims/survivors had incurred significant debt in the man’s name.

In addition, studies of men who have been in relationships with abusive women have reported evidence that some female perpetrators engage in isolation tactics. This includes gradually limiting the man’s contact with friends or family, monitoring of behaviour and communications (e.g. texts, emails, and phone calls), gaslighting,7 name calling, and humiliation (Bates, 2020a; Hines et al., 2007; Hines & Douglas, 2010). Studies with male victims/survivors also identified evidence of female perpetrators threatening to make false allegations of abuse (i.e. physical or sexual abuse of the partner or child/ren) to the police or courts (Bates, 2020a; Hines et al., 2007; Hines & Douglas, 2010; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, & Hirst-Winthrop, 2016). These studies also identified that threats to make false allegations of abuse are often made in conjunction with threats to restrict or prevent access to children.

2.3.4 Impacts of female perpetrated IPV

Research with male victims/survivors of female perpetrators indicates that men can experience severe psychological and physical harm as result of their female partner’s violence. Hines and Douglas (2010), in their study of 302 men who had experienced severe IPV from a female partner in the previous year, found that 80% had sustained an injury as a result of their partner’s physical violence. While the majority of the physical injuries were classed as being minor (i.e. resulting in a bruise, sprain, small cut and/or feeling pain the next day), 35.1% were classed as being severe (i.e. requiring medical attention, sustaining a broken bone, or experiencing loss of consciousness). Similarly, Bates (2020b), using the same sample as Bates (2020a), found that some of the men in the sample had suffered severe physical injury as a result of their partner’s abuse, including permanent loss of vision in one eye and traumatic brain injury. Several studies also identified the psychological impacts of female-to-male perpetrated IPV in male victims/survivors, including depression and anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptomology, sleep disturbances, and suicide attempts (Bates, 2020b; Hines & Douglas 2010; McCarrick et al. 2016).

2.4 Norms and attitudes around IPV and gender

The evidence suggests that within the context of heterosexual relationships, female perpetrated IPV tends to be judged as being less wrong and less abusive than male perpetrated IPV. Dardis et al. (2017), for example, via survey research using a version of the CTS2 with male and female college students (N = 703), found evidence of male-to-female IPV being rated as more abusive than female-to-male IPV. Similarly, Sorenson and Taylor (2005) used an experimental vignette method that presented varied victim and perpetrator characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity, and relationship status) and violence scenarios (e.g. motivation for abuse, presence of weapons, abuse type) to a community sample of male and female adults (N = 3,769). Sorenson and Taylor (2005) found that the gender of the perpetrator impacted participants’ judgements of IPV behaviour, with female perpetrated IPV being considered less wrong than male perpetrated IPV. This study also found participants were more likely

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7 Gaslighting is a form of coercive control whereby an individual seeks to manipulate their partner by causing them to question their sanity, memory, and perception (Bates, 2020a).
to judge abusive behaviours as illegal and think they should be punishable with a
criminal sanction when the perpetrator was male compared to when the perpetrator
was female. Sorenson and Taylor (2005) therefore suggest that stereotypes relating to
gender and IPV impact the development of norms around the acceptability of IPV in
heterosexual relationships depending on whether the perpetrator is male or female.8

Similarly, Bates et al. (2019) used an experimental vignette design in which participants
were primed with ‘gender congruent’ (i.e. more women are victims of IPV than men) or
‘gender incongruent’ (e.g. there are equal rates of male and female IPV victimisation)
information. The authors found that participants were significantly more likely to
categorise behaviour as IPV and to categorise IPV as wrong when the victim was
presented as a female compared to when the victim was presented as a male, and
when the perpetrator was presented as a male, compared to when the perpetrator was
presented as a female.9

2.4.1 The impact of social norms on male victim/survivor
experiences of help-seeking

This review also identified evidence on the impact of social norms around gender and
IPV on male victims/survivors. Based on analysis of qualitative survey data collected
from 161 male victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV, Bates (2020b) describes
how some victims/survivors had not been believed when disclosing their experiences of
abuse to friends and professionals, such as the police.10 Studies identified by this
review also found that some male victims/survivors are blamed for their victimisation,
and/or accused of being the perpetrator of abuse when they try to seek help (Bates,
2020b; Hines, et al. 2007; McCarrick et al. 2016). Hines et al. (2007), for example,
through an analysis of 190 male callers to a domestic abuse helpline for men, report a
number of qualitative accounts of men who had sought help but were referred to
treatment programmes for male perpetrators. It has been suggested that the
experience of being treated with suspicion and disbelief can re-traumatis men who are
seeking help and presents a barrier to help-seeking in the future (Bates, 2020b; Hines
et al., 2007). Similarly, McCarrick et al. (2016) conducted a small qualitative study with
six adult males who had been the victim/survivor of female perpetrated IPV and found
that awareness of social norms around gender and IPV had prevented some men from
seeking help.

2.4.2 The relationship between attitudes towards IPV and
behaviour

Earlier reviews have found that holding attitudes and beliefs that condone violence
against a partner is associated with heightened levels of IPV perpetration (Capaldi et
al. 2012; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997; Stith et al., 2004).11 Furthermore, Barton-
Crosby (2018), through a survey-based study with 541 male and female adults, found
that participants who had weaker ‘IPV morality’ (i.e. held personal moral rules more
accepting of IPV and were less likely to feel guilt or shame for perpetrating IPV), were

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8 Sorenson and Thomas (2009) carried out a similar study but with a focus on norms about IPV in same-

sex relationships. They found that with regard to social norms, IPV against a heterosexual man was less

likely to be viewed as illegal and respondents were less likely to think that it ought to be illegal compared to

when the victim was a gay man, lesbian woman, or heterosexual woman.

9 This was the case whether participants were primed with information that showed more women are

victims/survivors of IPV than men, or information showing equal rates of male and female IPV

victimisation.

10 It is important to note that not all male victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV within the cited

research reported negative experiences of help-seeking.

11 Due to a lack of research on female IPV perpetrators, these reviews predominantly report on the

association between attitudes that condone violence and IPV perpetration in males.
significantly more likely to have perpetrated at least one act of IPV in the previous year than those with stronger IPV morality. Additionally, weaker IPV morality was associated with more frequent IPV perpetration. Further gender specific analysis found that both males and females who were categorised as having weak IPV morality were more likely to perpetrate IPV than males and females with strong IPV morality.

Research with male victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV has also found that men have cited normative beliefs that violence against women is wrong to explain why they did not use retaliatory or self-defensive violence in response to their victimisation (Bates, 2020a; Hines & Douglas, 2010). Similarly, MacKay (2020) found that male IPV perpetrators reported feeling shame around their use of violence against a woman and tended to hold beliefs that were permissive of women’s use of violence against men.

2.5 A treatment gap

This review identified evidence that suggests a focus on male-to-female perpetrated IPV has resulted in a lack of research and understanding of the risk factors associated with female perpetrated IPV (MacKay et al., 2018), as well as a lack of suitably evidence-based behavioural intervention programmes for female perpetrators within the criminal justice system (MacKay, 2020). Bates et al. (2017), for example, through a survey of providers of domestic violence perpetrator treatment in the UK, found a lack of criminal justice and non-statutory treatment provision for female perpetrators and LGBTQ+ individuals. For female IPV perpetrators within the criminal justice system, IPV offending behaviour is typically addressed via general offending behaviour programmes, often employing a trauma-informed approach, rather than interventions developed to target IPV offence-specific risks and needs (MacKay, 2020). By contrast, there are a number of IPV treatment programmes for male IPV perpetrators in the UK.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^\text{12}\) For example, the programmes delivered by Her Majesty’s Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) for men convicted of IPV related offences are detailed here: [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/intimate-partner-violence-domestic-abuse-programmes#programmes-for-perpetrators-of-domestic-violence](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/intimate-partner-violence-domestic-abuse-programmes#programmes-for-perpetrators-of-domestic-violence)
3 Qualitative research with stakeholders

The second part of the report presents findings from the qualitative research (in-depth interviews) undertaken with stakeholders. It begins by outlining the research methodology, before findings from thematic analysis of the interview data are presented across four chapters.

3.1 Research aims and design

The aim of the qualitative strand of the research was two-fold:

1. To build on the knowledge identified by the literature review and to consolidate this with insights from UK-based experts who work with female IPV perpetrators and/or victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV.
2. To explore suggestions for messaging and strategy to increase professional and public awareness of female perpetrated IPV.

3.2 Recruitment and sampling

The qualitative research comprised a series of in-depth interviews with expert stakeholders (e.g. academics, practitioners, and third sector workers). Stakeholders were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball recruitment techniques. In the first instance, stakeholders with recognised expertise in the field of female IPV perpetrators and/or victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV were approached via an introductory email that provided an overview of the research, along with an information sheet (see Appendix A) and privacy information notice. Building on these initial contacts, some stakeholders were asked to recommend further experts to be invited to participate in an interview. Where individuals’ contact details were in the public domain, contact was made directly via email. Where contact details were not publicly available, we asked original participants/stakeholders to share the study’s information sheet, which provided full project information and contact details. If stakeholders were interested in participating in the research, they were invited to contact the NatCen research team.

In total, 19 individuals took part in this research (17 single in-depth interviews and one paired-depth interview). Stakeholders worked across a range of professions, including academia, the criminal justice system, therapeutic services, intervention provision, and third sector/victim support.\(^{13}\)

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Interviews were carried out across a three-week period in late March-mid-April 2021. All interviews took place over the phone or via Microsoft Teams. Interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length.

A topic guide (see Appendix B) was developed to ensure consistent coverage of topics, while allowing for a flexible approach to data collection that directly responded to the issues raised by stakeholders. The following key themes were addressed within the topic guide:

\(^{13}\) To preserve anonymity, we have not provided a breakdown of the numbers of participants/stakeholders working in each sector.
• The motivations, methods, and impacts of female perpetrated IPV.
• The provision of treatment for female IPV perpetrators and gaps in treatment provision.
• Social and professional attitudes to female IPV perpetrators and/or victims of female IPV perpetrators.
• Suggestions for messaging that could be applied to awareness and education campaigns for professionals to improve awareness of female perpetrated IPV.
• Suggestions for messaging that could be applied to public awareness and/or deterrence campaigns around the issue of female perpetrated IPV.

With stakeholders’ permission, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis purposes. Interview data was managed and analysed using Framework, a case and theme-based approach to qualitative data analysis developed by NatCen (Ritchie et al., 2013). Key topics emerging from the data were identified through familiarisation with the transcripts. An analytical framework was developed and matrices relating to the different thematic issues were produced. The columns in each matrix represented sub-themes or topics while rows represented individual participants/stakeholders. Data was summarised in the appropriate cell and ordered systematically. The final analytical stage involved working through the charted data, drawing out the range of experiences and views, and identifying similarities and differences.

Where applicable, verbatim interview quotations are provided in this report to highlight key findings in stakeholders’ own words. The value of qualitative research is in revealing the breadth and nature of the phenomena under study (Ritchie et al., 2013). Therefore, we do not quantify stakeholders’ views and experiences.

The findings of the qualitative research contained in this report are based on the views of those who took part in the research. Stakeholders were recruited on the basis of their experience and expertise on female IPV perpetrators and/or victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV, but their views may not be exhaustive of those working within the IPV field.

3.4 Ethics

Stakeholders were informed about the discussion topics at the recruitment stage, both in writing through an information sheet and verbally before the interview. At the beginning of each interview it was made clear to stakeholders that taking part was voluntary and their identity would be kept anonymous. The NatCen disclosure policy was also explained, including the circumstances in which confidentiality may be breached (i.e. a disclosure that the stakeholder or someone that the stakeholder identifies is at serious risk of harm). Ethical approval was obtained from the NatCen Research Ethics Committee ahead of recruitment and data collection.
4    Motivations, methods, and impacts of female perpetrated IPV

Drawing on their experiences of working with female IPV perpetrators and/or victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV, this chapter presents stakeholders’ views on the motivations, methods used, and impacts of female perpetrated IPV.

4.1    Motivations

When exploring the drivers of female perpetrated IPV, stakeholders reported that the motivations of male and female perpetrators are largely similar.

"The overall headline, […] for me, is the women and men were far more similar than they were different."

A need for power and control, self-defence, as well as situational factors that impact on emotion regulation and conflict, were all identified by stakeholders as key motivations for IPV in both male and female perpetrators.

4.1.1    Power and control

Stakeholders reported that despite power and control over a partner being traditionally associated with male-to-female IPV, it was also considered a key motivation for female-to-male IPV.

"So, what I have seen in the past has been that female perpetrators very much […] run along the same lines as male perpetrators in that perpetration of domestic abuse, at the end of the day, is an imbalance in power and control. One person either needs to or wants to have that power and control over another person."

However, stakeholders varied in their views on what underlies this need for power and control. One view was that for some IPV perpetrators, power and control is not the primary motivation; rather, there is a deeper issue that manifests as controlling and coercive behaviour. For example, some stakeholders suggested that controlling and coercive behaviours can be a way that people who have experienced childhood trauma cope with their distress (see Section 4.1.4). However, another view was that some IPV perpetrators – both male and female – simply want to control others and/or feel entitled to do so.

"There's this entitlement to control their new partner, you know, 'He belongs to me now,' sort of attitude."

4.1.2    Self-defence

Stakeholders agreed that self-defence drives some IPV; however, they reported that this is the case for both male and female perpetrators. Some stakeholders also noted that IPV can be bi-directional, with both partners being violent to each other within the relationship. In these cases, stakeholders suggested it can be challenging to identify who the primary aggressor is and who is using violence in self-defence.

It was also reported by stakeholders that some IPV (by both men and women) is perpetrated in anticipation of violence by their partner. As part of this, it was noted that
this anticipatory violence is not necessarily in response to the partner’s violence, but
rather a general view of the world as a hostile place.

"Sometimes it was that the partner had been violent, but sometimes the partner
was not violent to them; they were the sole perpetrator in the relationship. It
seems to come from a sense of viewing the world as a hostile place. Yes, 'The
world is hostile, and this is how people treat me, and I've been victimised
before, and therefore at this point I'm taking control. I'm anticipating that there's
violence, and I'm going to be the one that takes over here,' if you like."

4.1.3 Situational factors and emotion regulation

While some stakeholders reported viewing the motivation for both male and female
perpetrated IPV through the lens of power and control, another view was that 'emotions
drive behaviour' and that IPV tends to emerge from situational factors and challenges
around emotion regulation. In particular, alcohol, relationship conflict, and jealousy
were reported as key factors that can contribute to the instigation of IPV, regardless of
whether the primary perpetrator is male or female. For example, a stakeholder working
in the criminal justice system reported that alcohol is a prevalent facilitator of IPV
incidents.

"The number of domestic offences that I've dealt with where alcohol has played
a part either […], be they male or female or same sex couples, definitely alcohol
plays a big part."

Another view was that relationship dissatisfaction and conflict can cultivate an
environment for violence to occur.

"[…] if a female feels somehow like they've been let down, attacked
emotionally, say a relationship break-up, for example, that can be a huge trigger
for a significant reaction which can include intimate partner violence."

4.1.4 Psychological and developmental features of the
perpetrator

In discussing the drivers and motivations for female perpetrated IPV, stakeholders
referred to a number of psychological and developmental factors that may underlie
individuals’ use of partner violence. Childhood trauma was a recurring theme.
Stakeholders reported how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are often found
within the developmental histories of both male and female IPV perpetrators. Within the
context of female-to-male IPV, stakeholders reported how male victims/survivors have
described how their partner had been physically or sexually abused in the past.

"[…] the men talked about many of those women having had their own
childhood trauma in which there'd been physical or sexual violence against
them."

Similarly, stakeholders who had worked directly with female IPV perpetrators noted that
some women described experiences of childhood abuse, which impacted upon their
ability to have healthy relationships in adulthood.

"[…] she said she just can't help becoming violent and she loses partners, of
course, because of it. She said that as she grew up as a child, she described it,
she was the family punchbag. So she had a lot of childhood issues to deal with,
and she felt that was causing her to lose control with her partners, and she
wanted help."
These experiences of abuse during childhood can generate feelings of distrust and fear of others in adulthood. Moreover, it was suggested that some IPV behaviours, such as controlling and coercive behaviours, can be a way that people who have experienced childhood trauma cope with their distress in adulthood (see Section 4.1.1).

Stakeholders also reported that some female IPV perpetrators can present with other psychological features that may facilitate IPV behaviour, such as a positive or accepting attitude towards violence, personality disorders, post-natal depression, and other mental health and substance misuse issues.

### 4.2 Methods of abuse

Like motivations for IPV, stakeholders noted that the methods of IPV used by female perpetrators are broadly similar to those used by male perpetrators. This includes a variety of physical abuse, coercive and controlling behaviour, and sexual abuse.

#### 4.2.1 Physical violence

Methods of physical abuse were thought to be similar across both male and female perpetrators. Stakeholders described a range of physical violence tactics used by female IPV perpetrators against male victims, such as biting, scratching, kicking, punching, slapping, pushing, and shoving. Stakeholders also described how female IPV perpetrators tend to employ methods or tactics against male partners that can compensate for a disparity in height and/or weight, and therefore, strength. This included a view that women tend to use weapons more often than men, with stakeholders providing examples of female perpetrators stabbing their male partners and using household items such as a hammer, iron, or a wine bottle as a weapon.

"[...] I don’t know why, but frying pans and saucepans are fairly common. Definitely a lot of knife attacks. It's far more common for women to perpetrate those in my experience than men. Men tend to explode and react with their fists. Women perhaps because of physical stature will tend to use a weapon."

In addition to weapons, stakeholders reported a tendency for women to target male victims when they are physically vulnerable or to target a physically vulnerable area. Examples given by stakeholders include the targeting of the genitals or a wound (e.g. from a recent operation) and attacking a victim while he was asleep.

"One of the other things I noticed within the physical violence [...] was there was always physical violence and they were often using weapons or something to hit with, but there was also quite a lot of men talking about being attacked when they were vulnerable. So for example when they were asleep or when they were in the shower or something or when they were incapacitated in some way."

#### 4.2.2 Coercive and controlling behaviour

The use of coercive and controlling behaviour was pervasive within stakeholders’ accounts of the methods used by female perpetrators. As part of this, stakeholders reported that female IPV perpetrators tend to engage in more psychological and emotional abuse than they do physical abuse, particularly behaviours that are recognised as coercive and controlling.
Stakeholders identified how coercive and controlling behaviour can manifest in a number of ways for both male and female IPV perpetrators, including psychological and emotional abuse, monitoring and controlling of victims’ day to day activities, isolation, financial abuse, as well as legal and/or administrative abuse.

"It's the same with coercive and controlling behaviour. There are a lot of similar tactics used. Both men and women will gradually slowly try to isolate their partner, control who they spend time with. Those are all very common very similar experiences to men and women."

Psychological and emotional abuse

Stakeholders described a range of psychological and emotional abuse perpetrated by women that can gradually chip away at their partner’s sense of self. In particular, 'gaslighting' was a form of emotional abuse highlighted by stakeholders.

"[…] for example, it's quite common for perpetrators to say, 'I think you're going crazy, I think you need to go and see the doctor', undermining their mental health. Saying things like, 'I told you this last Tuesday. You don't remember, you don't listen to me', when the truth is, they didn't say anything, at all."

Other forms of emotional abuse reported by stakeholders included shouting and swearing, and making disparaging remarks, such as consistently telling the man that he is a bad father, or that he is 'bad in bed'. Some stakeholders also observed that emotional abuse can occur in front of others (such as children or friends) to humiliate the victim, as well as in private.

"During the day, it would tend to be just criticising, constant criticism and obvious dislike, unless there were people around, in which case, the abuser would pretend everything was fine […]"

Monitoring and control of day-to-day activities

Stakeholders identified monitoring and control of day-to-day activities as a tactic used by some female perpetrators. This was described as often happening gradually over time and developing into very serious and significant control. Stakeholders provided a range of examples of controlling behaviour, including control over employment, medication, and when victims can leave the house.

"[…] some of them described circumstances where they were on the receiving end of coercive controlling behaviour from women, from female partners. Not allowing them to go out, or even leave the house on their own, not even to the shops, being followed to places, and having their phones checked."

Isolation

The control of victims through isolation was also reported by stakeholders. Examples included female perpetrators making subtle remarks indicating disapproval of friends to discourage their partner's engagement with them and participation in activities or social events.

"It might be by just preventing them from going to meet them, or if there's a family gathering, at the last minute feeling unwell or saying they feel unwell, and this happens again and again and again, saying unpleasant things, or turning the guy against his family and friends […]"
Stakeholders suggested that isolation tactics can become more explicit over time. An example provided by a stakeholder was of a man whose female partner encouraged him to sell his car and then took away access to her car, thereby physically isolating him and removing a means of escape during violent episodes.

**Financial abuse**

Some stakeholders described how financial abuse can be a key method of abuse employed by women. This form of abuse centres on the perpetrator having control over the victim’s finances, with examples including the confiscation of salaries, removing funds from joint bank accounts, providing limited allowances, and accruing debt in the victim’s name. One example provided by a stakeholder was of a man whose partner would provide an allowance that was just short of the amount needed for weekly food and petrol.

"There was one gentleman who stood out. He was given something like £20 a week where the expectation was he would get food, he would have to put petrol in the car. Obviously that money was never going to fail. That money was never going to do what it was meant to do […]"

**Legal and/or administrative abuse**

Legal and administrative abuse was identified as a particular method of abuse used by female perpetrators against male victims. Examples provided by stakeholders included female perpetrators making threats and false accusations, including threatening to call the police and make false claims of physical or sexual abuse. Stakeholders also described female perpetrators making threats to restrict access to, or custody of, children.

"[…] they call it legal and administrative aggression. They’re really frightened of being arrested. They’re frightened of being accused of the sexual assault of children. They're very aware that their access to any children they share will be completely at the whim of their partner."

As part of the legal and administrative abuse perpetrated by women, stakeholders suggested that women are often aware that family courts tend to favour mothers in child custody disputes and will use this to threaten their male partner. Stakeholders also described how for other male victims these threats are used by women to prevent them from leaving the relationship.

"[…] women and mothers are in a position where they know that societally and institutionally, systems tend to be on their side as mothers when children are involved. So what they will do is they'll use children as a pattern of coercive controlling behaviour through false allegations or saying, ‘Okay if you do anything I’m going to take the children away’ or ‘I’m going to claim that you’ve abused them’ knowing that authorities, institutes and systems will automatically believe them because of their position as a mother."

In addition, stakeholders reported that in some instances, the female partner has threatened to harm the couple’s child/ren if the male partner leaves the relationship. As part of this, some stakeholders highlighted how the use of legal and administrative abuse, particularly where it involves children, can be extremely emotionally abusive.
Recognising coercive and controlling behaviour

While the use of coercive and controlling behaviour was a pervasive theme within stakeholders’ accounts of female perpetrated abuse, it was also noted that identifying coercive and controlling behaviour represents a significant challenge, both to authorities and to the victims/survivors themselves. Stakeholders described how men tend to find it difficult to label their experiences of coercive and controlling behaviour by a female partner as such. It was suggested that this is likely because coercive and controlling behaviours can be very subtle and occur over a period of time.

"Most women would start with psycho[logical] aggression, and the men described it as being the [...] frog in the boiling pot of water with the heat - slowly would heat up, and eventually, before they knew it, they were in this seriously hot water."

Likewise, stakeholders reported that because of a perception that IPV only refers to physical violence, men often do not recognise that the coercive and controlling behaviour they experience constitutes abuse. To this point, stakeholders noted that coercive control tends not to be the reason victims/survivors call the police. Rather, stakeholders suggested that the police will be called in response to physical violence and further investigation reveals the presence of coercive and controlling behaviour. However, the often-subtle nature of the abuse can mean that capturing evidence to prove that the behaviour meets the threshold to be considered criminal can be difficult.

"So I think it perhaps comes up less than physical violence, because physical violence is a lot easier to prove because it tends to leave a mark, whereas I think coercive control is very difficult to put across because I think a lot of the time the perpetrator is extremely clever. They will tend to do almost subtle things that if you were to tell someone most people would say, 'Well that's not bad' but it's almost like a drip feed [...] So it's not one thing. It's a hundred things that then lead to this whole dynamic where you're just completely powerless in a relationship."

4.2.3 Sexual violence

Some stakeholders provided descriptions of sexual abuse methods used by female perpetrators. This included examples of women penetrating male victims with an object, and men being tied down and sexually assaulted, such as being forced to penetrate the female partner. The emotional impact of such abuse was described as severe by stakeholders.

"[forced penetration is] crushing for a man because obviously it's a natural bodily response and them feeling they've got no control over it and yet it isn't deemed the same way that rape would be deemed."

Stakeholders also described some men’s experiences of sexual harassment and coercion after the abusive relationship had ended. For instance, an example provided by a stakeholder was of a female IPV perpetrator breaking into the home of her ex-partner with the aim of coercing him to have sex with her.
4.3 Impacts of abuse

Stakeholders who participated in this research explained how the impacts of female perpetrated IPV can be significant and long-lasting.

"[...] the impact is incredibly long term, and some of the men talk about never really being able to get over what happened, or never feeling they can move on."

This included accounts of not only physical injuries (such as stab wounds and bruised faces), but also non-physical impacts, such as emotional and psychological distress, and the loss/restriction of child custody. Although both physical and non-physical impacts of abuse were discussed by stakeholders, accounts centred on the non-physical impacts, and therefore form the focus of this section.

4.3.1 Emotional and psychological impacts

While men experience physical impacts of female perpetrated IPV, stakeholders indicated that men may be especially vulnerable to experiencing the emotional and psychological impacts of abuse. However, masculine gender roles may mean that men find it difficult to express how emotionally damaging their experiences of abuse are.

"I think men in some ways are physically less vulnerable but they're emotionally more vulnerable and coupled with women literally thinking [...] it doesn't hurt them [men]. It doesn't matter. It doesn't have any impact. Just because you're not crying doesn't mean it hasn't got an impact."

In line with this view, stakeholders described a tendency for men to feel unable to speak to friends or family, or to seek professional support regarding their experiences of IPV, which can increase their psychological vulnerability. In addition, because of the isolation experienced as part of coercive and controlling behaviour, some men are left without the support system of friends or family.

How IPV can damage the victim's/survivor's self-esteem, as well as cause depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and PTSD symptomology, were psychological impacts identified within stakeholders' accounts. It follows that for some men, the psychological and emotional consequences of the abuse impact their ability to work or to live a 'happy life'.

"If you're being told, 'You're a crap dad, you're rubbish, you can't do anything, you are nothing without me, I'm the best thing that's ever happened to you.' If you're being told things like that on a daily basis, that will erode on your wellbeing and your self-esteem [...]"

"Most of the men who've experienced domestic abuse, they don't recover, they don't bounce back and lead a happy life [...]"

Stakeholders described the impact of abuse on male victims' ability to live a happy life as wide ranging. Examples provided by stakeholders ranged from descriptions of men feeling unable to be have another intimate relationship to suicidal ideation and suicide.

"[...] a lot of men will feel really depressed and really down. There's an awful lot of men that you talk to about things and they will consider suicide and have thought about, 'The only way that I end this or escape from this is just to take my own life'."
4.3.2 Loss of child custody or restricted child custody

As reported in Section 4.2.2, stakeholders identified legal and administrative abuse as a significant method of coercive and controlling behaviour employed by female IPV perpetrators. As a result of this abuse, stakeholders described how some men have access to their children revoked, and in extreme cases, can become completely alienated from their child/ren.

"For the men who have not seen their children, the language that they've used where they've not seen them for a number of years, it's like […] grieving almost for a child that they know is still alive and well, but they don't get to see."

Indeed, it was suggested that alienation from children and the psychological toll of this is the most significant impact of female-to-male perpetrated IPV.

"For those again that are fathers, where it has impacted on their relationship with their children, that has been the most damaging bit."
5 Professional attitudes and policy messaging around female perpetrated IPV

This chapter presents stakeholders’ views of policy messaging around the issue of female perpetrated IPV and their experiences of how female perpetrated IPV is viewed among IPV professionals. Building on this, the chapter sets out stakeholders’ views on the impacts of professional attitudes and policy messaging in relation to IPV and gender.

5.1 Professional attitudes and policy messaging

Stakeholders reported that from their experiences, a gendered view of IPV is the dominant view among professionals working in the field. Stakeholder accounts suggested this to be the case across third sector/advocacy workers, practitioners, police officers and other criminal justice professionals, as well as academics and policy makers. As such, while stakeholders acknowledged that there are exceptions, there was broad agreement that IPV is considered to be behaviour that is predominantly perpetrated by men against women.

Furthermore, stakeholders observed that this gendered view of IPV is reflected in the Government’s Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy. Stakeholders recognised that a supplement to the VAWG Strategy that addresses the Government’s position on male victims/survivors has been published more recently (HM Government, 2019a) alongside an updated version of the VAWG Strategy document (HM Government, 2019b). However, stakeholders expressed the view that because Government policy is gendered, this communicates the message that the focus of the Government is on female victims/survivors. This, in turn, was thought to guide the focus of frontline services. For example, it was suggested that due to gendered messaging around IPV, women are rarely recognised as the primary aggressor by frontline professionals, while support services are tailored towards female victims/survivors.

Some stakeholders also questioned the appropriateness of including male victimisation within a strategy that is focused on violence against women and girls.

"I think one of the major policy developments we need to see is an intimate violence against men and boys’ policy because it’s not appropriate to just couch men and boys within VAWG, violence against women and girls, because it’s not appropriate for them. It doesn’t cater for them. There are also other areas of interpersonal violence that need to be specifically catered for by an intimate violence against men and boys’ strategy."

Despite the view that Government policy is focused on violence against women and girls, some stakeholders noted that there is increasing recognition that men can be victims of IPV. This was, however, caveated with a view that there remains a reluctance among third sector organisations and frontline professionals to move towards fully acknowledging that some women are the primary perpetrators of abuse against men. Stakeholders suggested this may be because female-to-male perpetrated
IPV is discordant with social norms and stereotypes around gender and violence; namely, the stereotype of a passive female and an aggressive male.

"While people can recognise that men can be victims now, they still don't want to believe that all women are not Mother Earth, and that women can be bad and can be just as bad as men. That's a mental shift that many of the powers that be that drive the sector are not willing to make that shift yet. It's a shame because we've had women who've phoned us and said, 'I'm the one. I'm the one that does all these things to him [...]"

As part of this, some stakeholders suggested that there is a certain professional peer pressure to conform to the gendered narrative around IPV, with some professionals feeling hesitant to speak up against the dominant view.

"Anybody who stands up and says, 'This isn't the case' is very much shot down, not taken seriously, so it makes it more and more difficult for people to actually speak up [...]"

5.1.1 Trained to take a gendered approach

Stakeholders suggested that professionals are typically trained to view IPV in a gendered way.

"They get training that says domestic violence is a problem that men commit towards women. That's what they get. They get training about the Duluth Model14 and the power and control wheel in a gendered way and it's just not helpful. So they are trained to ignore female violence and to excuse female violence as reactionary and as self-defence. So that's a major issue."

Likewise, stakeholders observed that the messaging of policy and training materials regarding IPV concentrates on the issue of male-to-female IPV; male victimisation is included, but as a side note. As such, some stakeholders expressed the view that policy documents and training materials propagate a gendered view of IPV that minimises male IPV victimisation and female IPV perpetration.

"[...] one of the things that we've noticed in all of our research to date is that all of the training that social workers, police officers, local authority staff, GP staff get talking about domestic abuse, you might get 30 or 40 pages of information, of text. There is one paragraph, if not less, in a little asterisk, that says something like, 'it can happen to men, as well, but it disproportionately affects women'. What they do is, they use the female pronoun in all of their training when they talk about the victim, and the male pronoun when they talk about the perpetrator."

Stakeholders also described how professionals are trained to view male victims/survivors with suspicion, and that a man who is seeking help may be the true perpetrator. One example provided by a stakeholder referred to police training during which messaging around suspicion of male victims/survivors was communicated.

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14 The Duluth Model is a group-based programme designed to re-educate men about their use of violence against women. The Duluth Model approach is described as believing “that battering is a pattern of actions used to intentionally control or dominate an intimate partner and actively works to change societal conditions that support men’s use of tactics of power and control over women” (see https://www.theduluthmodel.org/what-is-the-duluth-model/).
"What they said about male victims, the main message that came across was that you have to be a bit suspicious of male victims because they may well really be the abuser [...]"

5.2 Impacts of a gendered view of IPV

This section presents stakeholders’ views and experiences of the impact that a gendered view of IPV can have on how male victims/survivors are treated, whether male victims/survivors are able to recognise and seek help for their victimisation, and the tolerance of female perpetrated IPV in society.

5.2.1 Treatment of male victims/survivors

Stakeholders suggested that because of social norms and stereotypes around IPV and gender, male victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV can be mistakenly viewed as the perpetrator. For example, some stakeholders described how male victims are often arrested as the primary aggressor when they have been the primary victim and/or the one to call the police for help.

"What I tend to find is there’s a high number of cases where my client is male, but they’re the ones that actually rang the police to report an assault. The police have then attended and quite consistently arrested the male party as opposed to the female party or arrested both of them [...]"

However, one stakeholder, who had previously worked as a police officer, stated that in many cases, determining who is the victim and who is the perpetrator can be very challenging.

In addition to being mistakenly viewed as the perpetrator, stakeholders reported how male victims/survivors have experienced disbelief and ridicule when seeking help from frontline services such as police officers, social workers, and medical professionals.

"[...] the men that I’ve spoken to have experienced not being believed, or being humiliated and laughed at or assumed to be at fault, as in he must have done something to deserve it or to provoke it."

For individuals who are seeking help, it was argued that having the experience of abuse minimised or disregarded is an additional form of abuse.

"[...] that feeds into that sense of isolation that they already feel in being in a toxic relationship."

However, stakeholders also made clear that this is not the case for all male victims/survivors, and that not all frontline professionals working in the IPV space treat male victims/survivors this way.

5.2.2 The criminal justice system

It was suggested that the gendered narrative around IPV has resulted in a politicising of the law whereby IPV court cases are dealt with in a political way, regardless of the evidence. As such, IPV court cases have become about appeasing a political narrative rather than the pursuit of justice.

"[...] domestic violence and the way it’s dealt with by the whole of the justice system is a joke to be perfectly frank. As a practitioner, I’m loath to be part of
that [...] Evidence and justice – literally we have got to the point where it does not exist when it comes to domestic violence because it is so political."

The political narrative in question pertains to the gendered nature of Government policy, particularly regarding the VAWG Strategy. The view of stakeholders being that this narrative has contributed to a disparity in how the criminal justice system makes judgements about male and female IPV defendants.

"[...] if you conduct a trial with a male defendant against a female victim in a domestic setting, it is highly likely you will be convicted regardless of the evidence. Whereas if you are representing a female defendant with a male victim, it is probably ten times more likely on the same evidence that you'll be acquitted."

As a result, it was suggested that a number of convictions of male defendants in IPV cases have been unsafe. This is not only an injustice but can also have significant impacts on the lives of the men.

"[...] the knock-on effect is that that man doesn't see his children for three years or perhaps never sees his children again. That man loses his home. That man is then subject to a restraining order that prevents him seeing his children. That man has to spend £30,000 going to family law solicitors for child contact orders because of the result of a conviction that isn’t safe."

5.2.3 Victims/survivors not recognising their own abuse

Stakeholders expressed the view that the gendered policy narrative around IPV contributes to males not recognising that they are victims/survivors of abuse.

"[...] men themselves aren’t going to see themselves in a strategy that’s called violence against women and girls. Men are then going to think ‘well I can’t be a victim of domestic violence.’ They already struggle to identify their victimisation often because they see so much of how we talk about it still that it’s something that happens to women."

It was also reported that men often do not realise that what they are experiencing is IPV from a female partner, even if they are experiencing physical abuse with weapons. One stakeholder described a tendency for men to see themselves as a ‘protector’ of their partner, even if she is abusing him. It was suggested that the tendency for domestic abuse awareness campaigns to present the heteronormative view of IPV has contributed to this perception.

"If people are getting kicked, bitten, hit with objects, but they don't class it as domestic violence, is it because we’re advertising our prevention campaigns, we’re advertising it in a very specific way that doesn't help them understand their experiences as domestic violence."

5.2.4 Shame as a barrier to help seeking

The gendered narrative around IPV, as well as gender stereotypes around masculinity and femininity, was felt to contribute to male victims/survivors experiencing shame for being abused by a female partner.

"I think the shame for men perhaps, was that bit more elevated because again, I think society views men, and the men talked about this themselves, ‘Oh, you’re a big six-foot guy, there's your partner who's really tiny, how can that be possible?’"
Stakeholders therefore suggested that the feeling of shame or the experience of ridicule, along with social norms and professional attitudes around IPV and gender, can present a barrier to help seeking in male victims/survivors of female IPV perpetrators.

"Men are socialised into a position where they are told that they are the dominant, they are independent, they are strong. So when they are the victim of abuse, a) they don’t necessarily realise it and if they do realise it they have huge barriers to overcome in terms of disclosure and help seeking because they don’t feel like they can go to anybody. They don’t feel like anybody is going to believe them and it’s very difficult. The stress and the impact associated with that is an additional secondary victimisation that we have to acknowledge for men."

5.2.5 Support provision for victims/survivors of female perpetrators

Stakeholders suggested that the narrative within the current VAWG Strategy directs focus towards the need for treatment provision for male perpetrators and female victims/survivors, which has resulted in a lack of support for male victims/survivors.

"[...] I realised that not only was there nothing specifically for men, there seemed to be a kind of political view that only women really were real victims of domestic abuse anyway, and there really wasn't any need for men."

While stakeholders noted that support services are emerging for male victims/survivors, they were considered to be limited in number and over-subscribed. In addition, stakeholders reported that male victims/survivors often are not aware of the limited support that is available to them. Moreover, it was suggested that because so much of the support available is centred on female victims/survivors, the view that men cannot be, or are rarely, victims/survivors of IPV is further promulgated. Despite calling for improved provision for male victims/survivors, stakeholders made clear that this should not be mistaken for a call to reduce the already under-resourced and over-subscribed support available for female victims/survivors.

"I always feel like I need to be really clear. I don’t want to take anything away from women, God ever. It’s just that there also needs to be some provision there for men because the language and the overwhelming and the majority and all that sort of thing within the strategy, they don’t really represent the fact that one in three victims according to the ONS figures are male. The proportion of resources and funding and stuff is certainly not one in three for supporting men if that makes sense. So I do think the way that we frame it and the way that we talk about it still heavily influences how we work with it."

5.2.6 Tolerance of female perpetrated IPV

Stakeholders expressed the view that gendered messaging around IPV also contributes to a certain tolerance of female perpetrated IPV within society.

“The larger scale narrative is if violence is towards women and girls, they’re not the problem, they are the recipient of the problem. That filters down. It filters down into the general public and they mutually inform one another."

It was suggested that by focusing on male-to-female IPV, there is a lack of public awareness that women are abusive within intimate relationships.
"[...] I think people probably don't really understand how it [female perpetrated IPV] happens, what it looks like, how it features in somebody's life. It's just a bit difficult for people to contemplate maybe, so it's easier to say it doesn't happen [...]"

Some stakeholders noted that where women are abusive, it can sometimes be seen as 'funny' or that the man 'deserved' it. Likewise, in line with masculine and feminine gender norms and stereotypes, a woman's abuse of a male partner can be perceived as less harmful than a man's abuse of a female partner.

"[...] I think there's a general perception that women's violence isn't as 'bad' and that it's not as damaging. It's not as serious because women are smaller and physically not as strong as men. So how can a woman do that? How is it that a man can't cope with it because men are big and strong? So there are a lot of stereotypes that I think really relate to gender that do still probably influence actually how female perpetrators are perceived, because there's just this idea that women can't do that sort of damage, but the evidence would suggest that they can."

It was suggested that this gendered view of IPV propagates the notion of hegemonic masculinity and passive femininity, rather than a more progressive and inclusive understanding of gender. Furthermore, some stakeholders expressed the view that because men and woman are socialised to view IPV as an issue of men's violence against women, women may not recognise that their behaviour is abusive, and men may not recognise that they are, or can be, the victims of IPV.

"[...] it then creates this problematic position where it almost allows for women to maybe perpetrate behaviours, because they don't think they're going to be causing the same impacts or the same consequences [...]"
6 Treatment provision for female IPV perpetrators

This chapter presents stakeholders’ accounts of the treatment provision available for IPV perpetrators in general and female IPV perpetrators in particular. It also presents stakeholders’ suggestions for how the treatment gaps identified can be addressed.

6.1 General approach to treatment provision

A lack of treatment provision for IPV perpetrators in general was identified by stakeholders. Treatment provision for male perpetrators was described as ‘patchy’ and a ‘postcode lottery’, with some areas of the UK having a greater number of treatment programmes and more resources to deliver them than others.

Dedicated IPV perpetrator treatment programmes for men within the community and criminal justice system were reported to be largely group-based. Some stakeholders viewed the group-work format as an effective treatment approach because it allows for an element of peer support and accountability.

"They're able to hear someone else confess to something and go, ‘Yes, I have been a perpetrator. I am taking responsibility for this,’ and that might encourage them to do the same, take some responsibility."

For others, the group-work approach was considered too prescriptive and does not allow for a tailored approach to treatment that targets the individual perpetrator’s specific needs. It was also suggested that group-work can be anxiety-inducing for some individuals, which can negatively impact the level of engagement, and thus the effectiveness of the programme.

Treatment approaches that are applied to male perpetrator programmes in the UK were described as being rooted in the Duluth Model (often combined with elements of cognitive behavioural therapy), which was characterised by stakeholders as a psycho-educational model that takes a gendered view of IPV.15

"[...] the Duluth Model is very much about the power and control wheel and it’s got a curriculum that is about re-educating men about women and about gender equality and about not using male privilege and things like that. The evidence base that exists again in the literature certainly suggests that it’s not an effective approach to working with men."

Some stakeholders raised concerns around the effectiveness of Duluth-Model based programmes, reporting that they have shown limited effectiveness in reducing future IPV. These concerns are grounded in research evidence (for example, some stakeholders referred to the meta-analysis by Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004), as well as stakeholders’ own experiences with working with male IPV perpetrators. For these stakeholders, a move away from programmes that explain male perpetrated IPV within the context of patriarchy and a move towards a more evidence-based and trauma-informed approach that focuses on the specific risks and needs of the individual is needed. Stakeholders also raised ethical concerns regarding the continued use of a treatment approach that has shown little efficacy.

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15 Regarding the Duluth Model, see footnote 14.
"[...] I think we're in really dangerous territory actually, with continuing to provide those interventions, because what we're not doing is targeting the risk factors. We're not targeting the things that are potential causes of the IPV perpetration, and my worry is that actually, by not doing that, that then we're not breaking the cycle, if you like, and we're allowing perpetrators to actually probably just move between relationships."

6.2 Available treatment for female perpetrators

A lack of dedicated treatment provision for female IPV perpetrators in the UK was identified by stakeholders. For example, within the criminal justice system, stakeholders noted that while there are dedicated IPV programmes for men, similar provision does not exist for women. Rather, stakeholders reported that women convicted of IPV related offences tend to have their behaviour addressed within more general offending behaviour programmes. Similarly, within the community, there is a lack of non-statutory treatment options for female perpetrators who are seeking help for their abusive behaviour.

"We have also had female IPV perpetrators [make] contact […] in the past, because at the time there were very few, if any, services out there for them if they wanted to address their behaviour."

However, some stakeholders noted that there are some programmes that work with both male and female perpetrators.

Stakeholders suggested that the general lack of dedicated statutory and non-statutory treatment programmes for female IPV perpetrators is due to IPV being viewed as predominantly male-to-female abuse. In line with this view, a tendency for female perpetrators to be treated as victims and to be referred to groups for victims/survivors was observed by stakeholders.

"[…] I am concerned that often, women who are perpetrators are referred to victim groups such as The Freedom Programme. I know for a fact one of mine [clients] who by everybody’s account, absolutely everyone, social workers, their male victim, everybody agrees she is the perpetrator. There’s no disagreement, at all. Yet she's done The Freedom Programme now." 16

Stakeholders also noted that within the criminal justice system, a trauma-informed approach tends to be applied to treating women’s offending behaviour. By contrast, a trauma-informed approach to male offending is less common.

"I think what we're missing is that we're not appreciating the trauma that the men have been through. So we're really good at saying in the prison service, and wider than that, we're really good at saying, 'We need a trauma-informed approach with women. […] We need to tackle their victimisation, work with them on that; help them lead positive better lives, and in doing so, that's how we'll tackle that criminal need,' […] but we're not doing that with men."

Moreover, stakeholders suggested that in continuing to treat female perpetrators as victims/survivors, the needs of female perpetrators are not being met.

"[…] similarly to the way there is limited provision for male victims because we don’t acknowledge and recognise them – there is limited knowledge and provision for female perpetrators. This is a huge issue, because you are

16 https://www.freedomprogramme.co.uk/
denying female perpetrators the opportunity to change and to get better in terms of their behaviour and any underlying causes, which is an opportunity that you’re affording to violent men.”

6.3 Improving provision for female perpetrators

This section outlines stakeholders’ views on how to improve treatment provision for female perpetrators. Discussions centred on the need to recognise female IPV perpetrators and to develop an evidence-based and psychologically informed gender inclusive approach.

6.3.1 Recognising female perpetrators

Stakeholders suggested that the first step towards addressing the gap in treatment provision for female IPV perpetrators is recognising that women can and do engage in partner violence and abuse. It was noted that while men are increasingly recognised as victims/survivors of IPV, there is a resistance within the IPV support and treatment sector to acknowledge women as perpetrators of IPV against male partners.

"[...] so now it's widely recognised that men are victims of domestic abuse, however it takes another huge leap for people to recognise and then admit that women can perpetrate this violence."

Some stakeholders commented that within the field of IPV victim/survivor advocacy, male IPV victimisation tends to be framed within the context of same-sex relationships. This resistance to acknowledging the prevalence of female IPV perpetrators was felt to hinder development of treatment programmes for female perpetrators.

Finally, recognising women as IPV perpetrators should not be limited to heterosexual relationships. Stakeholders identified the need for greater acknowledgement that IPV can and does occur in intimate relationships regardless of sex, gender, and sexual orientation.

6.3.2 A gender inclusive, trauma-informed approach

Stakeholders suggested that treatment for both male and female IPV perpetrators should be evidence-based and psychologically informed. Across stakeholder accounts, a gender inclusive trauma-informed approach was advocated. The need for a trauma-informed approach is in line with the observation that ACEs are often found in the developmental histories of both male and female IPV perpetrators (see Section 4.1.4). A trauma-informed approach to perpetrator treatment works to recognise and address how earlier trauma and adversity can impact relationships and behaviour in adulthood. However, while a trauma-informed approach was suggested for both male and female IPV perpetrator treatment, the need to be gender sensitive (i.e. recognising that gender may contribute to how trauma is experienced and expressed) was highlighted by stakeholders.

"We need to be, I guess, gender-sensitive, in terms of then what we think about what people need, because both men and women were describing to me horrific trauma that they'd experienced [...] they [men and women] just may be triggered in a slightly different way within intimate relationships.”
7 Suggestions for awareness and deterrence campaigns

Within this chapter, stakeholders’ suggestions for messaging and strategy to increase professional and public awareness of female perpetrated IPV are presented. The chapter concludes by setting out stakeholders’ views on a deterrence approach to IPV campaign content.

7.1 Messaging for professionals

As discussed in Section 5.1, stakeholders expressed the view that professional IPV training tends to present a gendered view of IPV. It follows that stakeholder suggestions for messaging for professionals centred on training and policy.

7.1.1 Training and policy

Addressing bias

As reported in Section 5.1.1, stakeholders discussed how professionals who work in the IPV sector (including police and social services) tend to be trained to view IPV in a gendered way. In line with this view, stakeholders emphasised a need to move towards a more gender inclusive training curriculum for professionals.

"[...] practitioners just need better training. They need gender inclusive training because at the moment, practitioners that work in IPV, they get ideologically driven training. They get training that says domestic violence is a problem that men commit towards women."

Furthermore, the debate around the issue of gender and IPV was felt to detract from what is important: understanding, treating, and preventing IPV.

"[...] the field is split and they spend so much time arguing with each other about who's right. I find that really unhelpful. I think the thing is, it's not about being right or wrong, it's about understanding what the evidence base tells us about these people so we can carry out risk assessments to reduce the problem [...] To take any other approach is just dangerous."

Stakeholders therefore suggested that a lack of awareness of the similarities between men and women and their use of IPV contributes to professionals holding a gendered view of IPV. Knowledge of the evidence base was felt to be an important part of combating any bias within training of professionals on the issue of IPV.

"[...] there needs to be an awareness [...] of the research that says that men and women are not dissimilar in their use of aggression. Although there's disparity in homicides and serious injury, even that isn't as big as you would imagine."

Provision of large-scale training

There was agreement among stakeholders that there is a need to provide IPV professionals with an evidence-based gender inclusive training curriculum. However, in
order for this to generate significant change, it must be rolled out on a large scale rather than at the local level.

"There's no point training small groups of professionals or working with small groups of men. Great, that might do some work at a local level, but if you want to make a difference on a scale, you've got to do primary prevention work and public education"

**Messaging**

Stakeholders also suggested that Government policies should incorporate more of the evidence base on female perpetrators and male victims/survivors of IPV. Stakeholders identified the power of Government policy to influence the narrative around IPV and gender. As such, there was a call for greater parity in how the issue of IPV is presented for males and females within policy.

"I think there needs to be parity of community level messaging, but there also needs to be parity of institutional and government level messaging as well. The fact that we have a VAWG strategy – a violence against women and girls’ strategy – fundamentally alienates and excludes female perpetrators and male victims. No matter how many little sentences you put in there saying, ‘Men can be victims too’ it doesn’t matter. You’ve fundamentally lost people at the beginning. I think there needs to be a much stronger stance […]"

Some stakeholders suggested that messaging that focuses on how a gender inclusive approach may benefit women could facilitate professional buy-in. Neglecting the issue of female IPV perpetration may mean that women are not receiving help and support that they need to live happy lives and to have safe and positive relationships.

"[...] in denying women's violence, you are condemning them to difficult relationships. You're putting them more at risk of being harmed, as well."

Therefore, rather than the goal of awareness raising being the condemnation or vilification of female perpetrators, stakeholders suggested that a professional awareness campaign that centres messaging on providing help to female perpetrators may be more effective.

### 7.2 Barriers to professional buy-in

#### 7.2.1 Funding

Adequate funding for a campaign to raise awareness of female IPV perpetrators and to promote a gender inclusive approach for professionals working in the IPV sector was identified as a significant barrier by stakeholders. As part of this, they described organisations that support female victims/survivors expressing concern that funding to support male victims/survivors, or funding for female perpetrator services, will take funding away from female victims/survivors. Therefore, the funding barrier identified by stakeholders is two-fold: one, there is a lack of funding and two, the idea of funding for activities that are not focused on female victims/survivors is unpopular among professionals who work with them.

"It's interesting because the female victim charities are really pushing, we need the money for this, this and this, whereas the male victim charities are saying, we don't want to take anything away from the female charities. We recognise there's a need for that, however we've got a need as well."
7.2.2 Commitment to the narrative

A reluctance to change the professional mindset, despite an awareness of the empirical evidence that supports a gender inclusive approach, was noted by stakeholders. However, stakeholders were also mindful that many professionals working in the field have worked with female victims/survivors. Therefore, their commitment to the gendered narrative is arguably grounded in their dedication to helping female victims/survivors and the vicarious trauma that arises from doing so.

"[...] it's really difficult to get people on board because they're tied into this emotionally, especially if you've worked with one victim group, if I can use that phrase. If you've worked with women, for example, in shelters, it's hugely traumatic, and that's all you're being exposed to, and if you've been exposed to that yourself as well, it's very difficult to change that mindset."

7.2.3 Politics

Stakeholders also identified how the issue of gender and IPV is a heavily politicised area. Therefore, it was suggested that decision making around policy and treatment provision and approach tends to be influenced by politics.

"Unfortunately, domestic violence seems to be a different type of – there's a lot of politics around the gender aspect I think that you don't see in some of the other areas. You don't see it in the general violence offending areas where we talk about provision and treatment and stuff. [...] [this] seems to be a really heavily politicised area which I think is one of the things that is stopping it being more evident [...]"

Moreover, because of the delicate and political nature of the issue of IPV and gender, some stakeholders observed how politicians can be reluctant to support a gender inclusive narrative around IPV.

"I don't think there are any [politicians] who will be totally supportive, because it's not helpful for a political career to be seen to be pro-men. It doesn't do people any good at all."

7.3 Awareness messaging for the public

This section sets out stakeholders' suggestions for messaging and strategy for increasing awareness of the issue of female perpetrated IPV among the public.

7.3.1 Challenging societal norms and stereotypes

A tolerance of female perpetrated IPV within society was identified by stakeholders as an impact of a gendered view of IPV (see Section 5.2.6). Building on this observation, stakeholders expressed the view that challenging societal norms and stereotypes around IPV and gender needs to be a key element of raising awareness of female perpetrated IPV.

"I think the fundamental takeaway is that you need to challenge the broader ideas around IPV before we can make headway in this area. Fundamentally, women's violence is not recognised. When it is recognised it's excused or minimised. So you have multiple barriers that you need to overcome in order to be able to productively recognise and therefore help female perpetrators and male victims, and indeed people in same sex relationships as well."
However, it was also suggested that simply challenging gender norms and stereotypes that focus on IPV is not enough, and that there also needs to be a broader recognition of women's aggression in general.

"The problem with all of these things is that you're not just tackling domestic violence specific stereotypes, you're tackling stereotypes relating to gender which are much broader concepts. So you're tackling this idea about women’s violence in general, because a lot of people just fundamentally don't believe women are violent or even capable of violence."

To challenge norms and stereotypes around IPV and gender, and to present a more realistic picture of IPV, stakeholders suggested that a gender inclusive, rather than a gender neutral, approach to messaging is needed. Some stakeholders expressed the view that campaign messaging and content that is gender neutral may not be strong enough to challenge ingrained social norms and stereotypes.

"[...] I've seen a lot of posters that are neutral, so you might see - I don't know - a love heart or something, and there's no people in there. They're supposed to be gender-neutral, but that doesn't work because we're socially conditioned to understand partner violence is men hating women."

### 7.3.2 Presenting a realistic picture of IPV

Building on the notion of challenging social norms and stereotypes around gender, violence, and IPV, is the suggestion that campaign content should present a more realistic picture of what IPV looks like so that people are more likely to recognise IPV in their own lives. Stakeholders felt that current IPV campaign content tends to present images and messaging that centre on male-to-female violence and abuse. It was suggested that the impact of this approach is that people do not recognise women as perpetrators, men as victims/survivors, or that IPV can often be bi-directional (i.e. both partners use violence within the relationship). Similarly, images depicting IPV as severe violence may perpetuate the idea that IPV is only severe violence, when in reality, IPV can manifest in a variety of ways.

"[...] more realistic campaigns, more nuanced methods, would be really good. A lot of people don't probably even recognise, because they both hit each other, and shout and coerce and push and throw things. Because they're both doing it, maybe neither of them realise this is domestic abuse [...]"

It was suggested that more realistic campaign content is key to both male victims/survivors and female perpetrators recognising themselves in campaigns and taking steps to seek help. In line with this, stakeholders identified the need to produce campaign content that reflects the fact that IPV can occur across a range of relationship types and age-groups. Namely, IPV occurs in same sex and heterosexual relationships; it occurs in dating and marital relationships; and it can occur across a range of age-groups, from adolescent to older adult relationships. This diversity should be seen in IPV awareness campaigns.

"[...] we've got same-sex, we've got honour-based violence, you've got abuse with older married couples which is becoming a little bit more common, and there's real issues in terms of young people's healthy relationships and abuse. It's a real wide spectrum, and I think sometimes publicity campaigns or awareness raising doesn't maybe do enough to look at all the different components as to what constitutes domestic abuse."
7.3.3 The moral wrong of IPV regardless of gender or sexual orientation

For some stakeholders, part of a gender inclusive approach to IPV awareness campaigns is a non-gendered approach to messaging around the acceptability of violence in general. As such, some stakeholders suggested messaging that encourages violence-free lives regardless of gender should be part of a campaign strategy.

"[...] no violence is good. For me, it would be about taking a non-gendered approach, and the drive perhaps from government should be around reducing violence in whatever guise that is. It doesn't matter whether it's [a] woman or man perpetrating that, but how do we push for violence-free lives across the board, and wider than IPV, wider than violence within intimate relationships [...]"

In line with this view, a gender inclusive approach would make clear that violence and abuse within an intimate relationship is wrong and against the law, regardless of sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

"[...] even down to that message in schools, of things like, 'boys shouldn't hit girls', well, boys shouldn't hit anybody, and girls shouldn't hit anybody."

7.3.4 Target audience: Educating children and young people

Stakeholders agreed that children and young people need to be educated about healthy relationships and to understand that violence and abuse in any intimate relationship is wrong, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. To this point, stakeholders suggested informal education within the home and family context as well as a more formal approach within the school curriculum.

"[...] we need more education in school, but actually, genuinely, that is one thing that I think could probably be improved within schools. Again, in terms of there being a non-gendered approach to that, that violence is not a solution to any problem, regardless of whether you're a man or a woman [...]"

While educating children and young people that violence and abuse are unacceptable within intimate relationships, stakeholders also identified that an important element of healthy relationships is being able to appropriately cope with negative emotions and resolve conflict. Therefore, stakeholders suggested that focusing on teaching children and young people about healthy relationships in a gender inclusive way may be the best way to reduce IPV rates in the future.

"[...] we need to be talking about feelings of jealousy, loss of control, if you're feeling angry, if you're feeling upset. All teenagers feel obviously anxious don't they? It's a really good time to actually be talking to the children as they're developing but getting everybody to see really the corrosive effect of that jealousy and that control rather than thinking that it only needs to be told to the boys."

7.3.5 Focus on the impact on children

Some stakeholders noted that IPV perpetrators are often unaware that their behaviour affects their children and other family members. Stakeholders therefore suggested that content that draws on people’s roles as parents and reminds them that their children
are likely to be aware of the abuse that is occurring in the home, may provide a more salient message.

"People do care about their family. They do care about their children [...] You're continuing to be abusive to your partner, but you're also abusing your children. They're not aware of that. They think because these children are in bed, they're not being affected, there's no impact on those children, but we know there is. They might be in bed. They might not be actually seeing it but they're hearing it. They're hearing the banging of the doors, the shouting, the expletives."

It was also suggested that messaging around impacts to children should be combined with supportive messaging. Namely, that help is available, change is possible, and children can recover from trauma with the right support.

"I think the parental role [...] I would start with that idea that it's not just you it's impacting, it's your kids, right? That's a horrible message, that's a high-threat message for parents, so you've got to have the softener, and the softener to me is like, 'But you can change that now.' What we know from the ACE stuff is that one protective person, one good person in your life can alleviate, can stop you going, having all these negative outcomes. So, 'You can change this tomorrow by phoning this number, doing a course. We're not going to tell you off. We're going to help you be better partners and then better parents.' I think we could do that but it's a massive change in narrative."

7.3.6 Dissemination

In addition to campaign content and messaging, dissemination strategies were also explored with stakeholders. Some stakeholders suggested that the use of documentary style content, in which people’s own experiences of IPV are showcased, can be a powerful method of raising awareness of the issue. Similarly, an IPV storyline in a TV show can be a powerful platform for raising awareness. To this point, a stakeholder noted how a previous soap opera storyline about female-to-male IPV promoted an increase in help-seeking by male victims/survivors of IPV.

In addition to TV and radio, the use of social media as well as posters that are displayed in public toilets, GP surgeries, police stations, and public libraries were discussed. However, stakeholders felt that none of these tactics will be particularly effective without the support of the Government. Moreover, it was suggested that to be effective, messaging needs to be delivered consistently over time: a one-time programme or documentary is unlikely to have a sustained impact.

"These attitudinal changes take time and they need to be laced into society, but also there needs to be policy from the top [...]"

7.3.7 Professional and lived experience

When developing content for an awareness campaign around the issue of female perpetrated IPV, stakeholders noted that input from professionals with expertise in the field is important. Likewise, stakeholders suggested that bringing the lived experiences of both victims/survivors and perpetrators into the process would be beneficial.
7.4 Barriers to buy-in from the public

7.4.1 Incongruence with gender norms and stereotypes

Stakeholders suggested that a key barrier to public buy-in to messaging that raises awareness of female perpetrated IPV is likely to be the fact that the gendered view of IPV is pervasive and long-standing.

"I think there's much more to be done to just increase people's understanding of what domestic abuse is. I think it's been ingrained for so long that it's an issue that's affecting women, that's perpetrated by men [...]."

It follows that messaging around male victims/survivors and/or female perpetrators of IPV is incongruent with gender stereotypes, which may present a barrier to changing gendered social norms and attitudes to IPV. To mitigate this barrier, some stakeholders suggested that messaging should concentrate on raising awareness of male victimisation within a gender inclusive approach, rather than female perpetration.

"I think the way to get to it is through victimisation because that's where you garner the sympathy. I think the more we raise awareness of male victims and the more we raise awareness of their existence and the fact that 95 per cent of them are abused by women not men."

7.4.2 Funding

As with campaigns to address professional attitudes and awareness of female perpetrated IPV, stakeholders suggested that a lack of funding would likely be a barrier to developing and effectively disseminating a public awareness campaign.

7.5 Views on a deterrence approach

Overall, stakeholders advocated an awareness approach over a deterrence approach. For some stakeholders, the focus should be on help-seeking rather than fear of detection and criminal justice sanctions, and it was suggested that a deterrence message detracts from the message around seeking help to change IPV behaviours.

"[...] for the vast majority of people, I think a deterrent message is just something that says, 'If anyone finds out about this, you're going to be in trouble', which is the opposite of help-seeking."

Building on this point, some stakeholders expressed concern that deterrence messaging may serve to drive the issue further underground, thereby creating a barrier to help-seeking for both victims/survivors and perpetrators.

"I think a big deterrent campaign just drives it underground, and a lot of victims don't actually tell the police, men and women, because they don't want their partner getting in trouble. They don't want them to get in trouble, they don't want to lose their jobs, they don't want their neighbours to know. They don't want their kids' schoolfriends to know. This big deterrent thing I think is probably largely counterproductive. I think it just drives it underground, and it means people [...] can't try and get help."

However, this is not to say that deterrence messaging is without a place. Another view was that making the public aware that IPV behaviours can constitute criminal actions that can be prosecuted, may be effective in educating people about the seriousness of
IPV. However, stakeholders were doubtful that people engage in a deliberative process of considering the consequences of their actions before they engage in IPV behaviours.
8 Conclusion and recommendations

This research was undertaken with two key purposes: to better understand the nature and impacts of female perpetrated IPV, and to develop recommendations on how to help raise awareness of female perpetrated IPV among professionals and the public.

To meet these aims, a two-stage research project was undertaken. This included a brief literature review, followed by qualitative research with expert stakeholders with knowledge and experience of working with female perpetrators of IPV and/or victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV.

8.1 Key findings

Collectively, the findings of this research suggest that the motivations and methods of male and female perpetrated IPV are largely similar. This includes similarities in both male and female perpetrators’ desire for power and control, and IPV being influenced by situational, psychological, and developmental factors, such as alcohol use, relationship conflict, and jealousy, as well as ACEs. The findings of this research also show a focus within research and among stakeholders on the psychological and emotional impacts of female perpetrated IPV on male victims/survivors.

The stakeholders who took part in this research suggested that a gendered view of IPV is dominant within current Government policy and among professionals working in the field. This was described as resulting in a lack of support for male victims/survivors, and a lack of treatment provision for female IPV perpetrators. To address this, stakeholders identified a need to raise professional and public awareness about female perpetrated IPV. Stakeholders suggested that this could be achieved through a gender inclusive approach to training, and public awareness campaigns that challenge societal norms and stereotypes around gender and IPV, as well as gender and violence more broadly.

8.2 Recommendations

The findings of this research lend themselves to a wide range of recommendations. First and foremost, the issue of female perpetrated IPV remains highly under-researched. Further exploration of the nature of female perpetrated abuse and the impacts on male victims/survivors is therefore required. This is necessary not only to identify the ways in which male victims/survivors can be best supported to access and benefit from support services, but also to understand ‘what works’ in addressing female perpetrator behaviour. The findings of this research also suggest that further work is required to explore stakeholders’ perceptions of IPV in regard to gender.

Similarly, the findings of this research point to a need to consider how the experiences of male victims/survivors can be more appropriately included within Government strategy to tackle IPV (or domestic abuse more broadly). This will likely include work to explore how evidence on female IPV perpetrators and male victims/survivors of female perpetrated IPV can be better integrated into policy.

Regarding support for male victims/survivors, the findings of this research suggest that greater work needs to be undertaken to improve the number, availability, and visibility of services. However, despite calling for improved provision for male victims/survivors, stakeholders made clear that this should not be mistaken for a call to reduce the already under-resourced and over-subscribed support available for female victims/survivors.
Regarding treatment for IPV perpetrators, the findings of this research suggest more services and sources of support should be made available, both generally and specifically for female perpetrators. This should include consideration of the benefits of a gender inclusive trauma-informed approach, which should be evidence-based and psychologically informed. As part of this recommendation, stakeholders also identified that a trauma-informed treatment approach should be gender sensitive, whereby the ways in which gender may contribute to how trauma is experienced and expressed are recognised.

In terms of improving public understanding of female perpetrated IPV, this research suggests that the development of public awareness campaigns that challenge societal norms and stereotypes around IPV and gender, and present more gender inclusive accounts of IPV, should be considered. As part of this, the research findings highlight the need to educate children and young people on positive and healthy relationships.

Finally, this research identified several recommendations on how to improve the practice of professionals. These largely centred on training to address gendered views of IPV, which was thought to be needed on a national scale. A lack of funding, however, was identified as a key barrier, as was potential reticence among professionals to adopt a more gender inclusive approach to treatment provision for IPV perpetrators.
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Appendix A.  Information sheet

Stakeholder interview information sheet

What is the study about?
The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is an independent not-for-profit social research organisation, which has been funded by the Home Office to carry out research to develop a better understanding of female perpetrators of intimate partner violence (IPV). The aims of the research are as follows:

- Consolidate knowledge of the drivers, contexts, and methods of female perpetrated IPV.
- Understand the narrative that informs the interactions and approach of professionals working with female IPV perpetrators.
- Develop recommendations for messaging that can be applied to developing education and awareness campaigns around female perpetrated IPV for professionals working in the IPV field.
- Develop recommendations for messaging that can be applied to public awareness and deterrence campaigns around female perpetrated IPV.

The research is comprised of two complementary stages: a brief evidence review and interviews with expert stakeholders.

Why have we selected you?
You have been identified as a stakeholder who has expert knowledge of female IPV perpetrators and/or victims of female IPV perpetrators, and NatCen would like to invite you to participate in a telephone interview between mid-March and early-April 2021.

What will taking part involve?
NatCen will be conducting interviews with a range of expert stakeholders, and we are inviting you to take part in an interview with a NatCen researcher. The interview will be via telephone, will last up to 60 minutes, and can be arranged at a date and time convenient for you.

Key topics of the interview will broadly cover your views and experiences of:

- The motivations, contexts, and methods of female perpetrated IPV.
- The treatment gap/s in the provision of interventions for female IPV perpetrators.
- The narrative that informs the approach of professionals working with female IPV perpetrators.

And your suggestions for:

- Messaging that could be applied to awareness and education campaigns around female perpetrated IPV for professionals working in the IPV field, and how this could be most effective.
- Messaging that could be applied to public awareness and deterrence campaigns around female perpetrated IPV, and how this could be most effective.

There are no right or wrong answers. We are just interested in hearing about your views and experiences.
With your permission, discussions will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The audio and full transcribed version of the interview will be stored securely and only the research team at NatCen will have access.

We would also like to ask whether you have any recommendations of other expert stakeholders we might be able to interview for this study.

**Do I have to take part?**

**Participation in an interview is completely voluntary.**

If you decide to take part, **you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to.** You should only answer questions that you are comfortable answering.

If you change your mind about being involved, you can let the research team know using the contact details below or let us know on the day. **You can change your mind about taking part in the research, without giving a reason, at any point.**

You can withdraw your consent to participate in the research after taking part, and request that your contribution and any data collected be deleted up until the data has been used by NatCen and your contribution is no longer identifiable.

**What will happen with my information?**

**Participation in an interview is confidential and anonymous.**

A report and presentation of the findings from the study will be provided to the Home Office, which may be published. **No information that could identify any individual will be used when presenting findings from the study.**

All information shared during the study will be treated as confidential and all participant data will be fully anonymised before it is shared with the Home Office. Only the NatCen research team will see your information, and we will not share this with anyone else.

When we talk about the research and write-up the findings, we may include some quotes of what you have said, but we will not use your name or include any details that could identify you in any way.

You can find out more about how your information will be used and handled by reading the **privacy information notice**, which you have been provided with.

**Disclosure notice**

Information provided by you will be kept confidential except in exceptional circumstances. It is unlikely that identifiable information would be available to action any disclosure of threat, crime or harm. However, should NatCen be informed of an imminent threat to life or serious harm, this will be shared with the project lead who will raise the issue with the NatCen disclosure board. A decision will then be made as to whether the information needs to be shared with the local police. Given that some stakeholders will be working with vulnerable groups, it is important to also remind you not to disclose personal details about specific cases or individuals that you may be working with. Should an individual or an organisation report current criminal activity or a past crime during the course of this research and where individuals involved are identifiable, this will also be passed on to the NatCen disclosure board to assess whether the information should be shared with other authorities, such as the police.
What happens next?

The interviews will occur **between mid-March and early April**. If you are happy to be involved in the study, please contact the NatCen research team at IPV_research@natcen.ac.uk by **Thursday 1st April 2021**. In your email, please indicate which time/s and date/s you would be available to take part in an interview.

Please be aware that it may not be possible for everyone interested to take part.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about what taking part involves, you can contact the NatCen research team by emailing IPV_research@natcen.ac.uk

**Thank you for your interest in this study!**
Appendix B. Interview topic guide

Introduction

- Introduce self and NatCen (including NatCen’s independence)
- Introduce research, aims of study and interview
- Length (about 60 minutes)
- Voluntary participation
- Brief overview of topics to be covered in interview
- Confidentiality, anonymity and potential caveats
- Data use and security (including audio recording and data storage)
- Questions
- Verbal consent

Background

- Understand the participant’s background and role in relation to working with and/or researching female IPV perpetrators and/or victims/survivors of female IPV perpetrators.

Female perpetrated IPV: Consolidating knowledge

- Explore the reasons/motivations for female perpetrated IPV (how/why does violence/abuse occur?)
- Explore ways in which male and female motivations for IPV perpetration are similar/different
- Explore the methods/types and severity of IPV used by female perpetrators
- Impacts/consequences of female IPV perpetrated abuse to victims/survivors
- Ways in which male and female IPV perpetration is similar/different

The treatment provision for female IPV perpetrators

- Explore treatment provision for perpetrators, generally
- Explore the treatment provision for female IPV perpetrators (UK-focused)
- Differences between treatment provision for male vs. female IPV perpetrators
- Gaps in treatment/intervention provision for female IPV perpetrators

Understanding social and professional attitudes to female perpetrated IPV

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Note that the topic guide included here is an abridged version of the topic guide used in the qualitative research and only sets out the main themes and sub-themes of the interview.
• Explore the participant’s view/experience of how female perpetrated IPV is perceived by professionals working in the field (e.g. police officers, psychologists, victim/survivor advocacy organisations, academics).
• Explore how views of female IPV inform the approach professionals take to their work (participant’s own vs. others in the field)
• Views on the impact of current professional/policy narrative around female IPV

**Messaging for professionals**

• Explore participant’s views on whether campaigning on the issue of female perpetrated IPV is needed and/or necessary
• Explore suggestions for messaging to promote awareness and understanding of female perpetrated IPV for professionals working in the IPV field (if perceived to be needed and/or necessary)
• Explore participant’s views on the likely barriers to messaging being effective
• Suggestions for effective implementation (how can barriers be overcome?)

**Messaging for public awareness and deterrence campaigns**

• Views on and/or suggestions for messaging to increase public awareness of female perpetrated IPV
• Explore participant’s view of the potential barriers to effective messaging and/or an effective awareness campaign
• Views on how this type of awareness campaign could be most effective (how can barriers be overcome?)
• Views on and/or suggestions for deterrence messaging

**Conclusion and final reflections**