



Commentary

Respect response to Dixon *et al.* (2012) ‘Perpetrator programmes for partner violence: Are they based on ideology or evidence?’

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Purpose. This article is a commentary on Dixon, Archer, & Graham-Kevan’s (2012) critique of the Respect position statement on gender, which concluded by calling for abandoning either Respect or the Respect accreditation system.

Methods. The article starts by providing some factual information about Respect and about the accreditation system mentioned in Dixon *et al.* It then picks up on five specific aspects of the discussion: research notions, prevalence, homicide, the relevance of gender to work on intimate partner violence, and our work to support male victims.

Results. Dixon *et al.* critique one document in order to call for the abandonment of a system of accreditation which is not connected to that document. Dixon *et al.* ignored other relevant research (such as that on partner homicide) and practice evidence that contradicts their assertions. This includes ignoring the existence of Respect’s work with male victims, including running the male victims helpline.

Conclusions. Respect work is informed by knowledge and experience from research and practice. There is substantial evidence from research to support the position statement on gender. The accreditation standard and system of accreditation was established before the position statement was written and is not included. Respect provides valuable services for male victims and for male and female perpetrators.

This article responds to Dixon *et al.*’s critique of the Respect position statement on gender, which concluded by recommending the end of either the Respect Accreditation System (for domestic violence perpetrator programmes [DVPPs]) or of Respect itself – the text had some ambiguities on this point.

The article contains so much information which was factually incorrect or misleading, that we asked for and have been granted permission to respond. We will start by providing some factual information about Respect and about the accreditation system mentioned in the article. We will then pick up on five specific aspects of the discussion raised by the Dixon *et al.* article: research notions, prevalence, homicide, the relevance of gender to work on intimate partner violence (IPV), our work to support male

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victims. We conclude by noting that Dixon *et al.* have critiqued one document (the Respect position statement on gender, Respect, 2009) and used this to argue that another document (the Respect Accreditation Standard, Respect, 2008) and the resulting accreditation system are both flawed, without having analysed either the standard or the system of accreditation. We note that they have ignored other evidence, including Respect's substantial work to protect male victims and respond to female perpetrators. We therefore reject their call for the organization or accreditation system of Respect to be disbanded.

Introduction: Some information about Respect

Respect is the national organization for DVPPs and associated support services. The organization supports work with female, male, and young perpetrators. The national Respect Phoneline, helpline for domestic violence perpetrators, responds to thousands of male and female callers, and e-mail enquirers each year, helping them to make decisions to change and referring them to local specialist services. The young people's project supports work across the country with young men and women using violence against a partner, parent, or sibling, training practitioners, providing a full toolkit of activities and carrying out networking.

Respect also runs the Men's Advice Line, the national helpline for male victims of domestic violence, advising, supporting, and referring thousands of men each year. It developed the highly popular toolkit for work with male victims and the training course on this work is much in demand. Respect staff support, advise, and train practitioners across the United Kingdom and beyond to identify, assess, and work with adults who use IPV. Both helplines take many calls from professionals seeking advice and guidance about how to support or work with a female or male perpetrator or a male victim.

Respect accreditation

The Respect accreditation system was developed over several years, funded by the Home Office and Lankelly Chase Foundation. It is based on assessment against the Respect Accreditation Standard (Respect, 2008). This is a publicly available document which was written, tested, and revised over 2 years, supervised by a multi-agency advisory group containing academics, policy makers, and practitioners from domestic violence, therapy, and child protection work. Assessment includes watching hours of recordings of group work, checking case files, interviews with staff and desktop review. All 105 requirements must be passed before a programme is accredited.

Accreditation currently assesses programmes for their delivery of group work programmes for men who use IPV. This was the chosen starting point for accreditation as it is currently the category of perpetrator work with the greatest level of provision, practice experience, research evidence, and policy to draw on.

Respect is currently expanding it to include individual work with men using IPV. As evidence develops, Respect will be expanding it to cover work with women using IPV and young people using violence. The organization is also exploring the possibility of developing standards for work with male victims of domestic violence. Respect accredited members and those going through accreditation at the moment use a wide range of ways of working, including therapeutic, psychological-based work, cognitive behavioural techniques, educational/didactic activities, psychodrama, and others.

Dixon *et al.* confuse two very separate Respect documents throughout the course of their article. We would like to clarify the differences to avoid any further confusion. Respect's accreditation standard (Respect, 2008) is a nationally agreed set of standards for accrediting DVPPs. Respect's position statement on gender and domestic violence (Respect, 2009), written after the standard, is a briefing paper giving a short overview of our position on the links and tensions between IPV and gender, based on evidence from practice and from research. It is not mentioned in the accreditation standard.

Confusingly, the authors undertake a detailed critique of the gender statement, but then call for the abandonment of the standard or the abandonment of Respect itself. The wording is unclear enough to leave their actual meaning ambiguous: '*The government-backed Respect (2008a), which accredits and deems programmes that meet their standards to be "high quality" and "effective" should therefore be abandoned*' (Dixon *et al.*, 2012).

Given such a strong position, we would expect a critique of the Respect standard (the Respect 2008a document they reference at this point). In fact, they present no critique of this whatsoever and provide no evidence to back up their position. If they were calling for the abolition of Respect, this is a curious conclusion to draw from a critical analysis of just one briefing paper.

Research notions: Feminism

The reduction of feminism and gender theory to 'the patriarchal view' is both inaccurate and careless. To dismiss a feminist or gendered understanding (which is what we presume they mean) as 'ideological' is ignoring vast bodies of academic work across many academic disciplines including the sciences. To term this 'ideology' ignores not only the dynamic approach to knowledge, ideas, and concepts in feminist perspectives but also the contributions that feminist ideas have made, and continue to make, within all the disciplines of social science and beyond. The way the concept of gender is used by Dixon *et al.* is also revealing – that to take a gendered perspective is to take the side of women. This is not our understanding of what it means to take a gender perspective or use a gender lens. Some of the most important work on gender in the last decade for Respect has focused on masculinity and men. Critical men's studies have taken men's comfort with and use of violence, and the choice to disavow it, as a core theme (see, e.g., www.xyonline.net; www.cromenet.org). We draw on this type of engagement with gender to inform our work, as well as careful examination of the research evidence about the connections and tensions between gender and IPV.

Research notions continued: Prevalence debates

One of the most significant debates in research about IPV is about the choice of data to examine and the ways in which it can be analysed. Debates about prevalence, for example, have raised questions about whether to take an incident-based definition of IPV as the sole basis for estimating prevalence, or to use one based on patterns of coercive control (Stark, 2006). A definition based on coercive control is the one more reflected in practice in social work, in perpetrator work, and in mental health. Incident-based definitions lead to counting an incident of physical violence as an incident of domestic violence, regardless of meaning, context, and consequence. As a result, an incident-based definition would count someone as a victim if their own abusive behaviour, violence, and

threats had led their victim to push them away from them in self-defence, or resistance, for example, after a rape or physical attack.

Incident-based definitions frequently distort statistics about the prevalence of IPV. This occurs regularly when people quote the British Crime Survey (BCS) on prevalence without analysing the figures carefully. The BCS shows that nearly equal numbers of men and women report experiencing 'one or more' 'incidents' in their adult lives. The BCS does not currently attempt to analyse cause, context, and impact, so we cannot know how many of these were incidents carried out in self-defence. However, close reading of the BCS each year allows us to note that the majority of victims of six or more 'incidents' are women. Failure to note these important distinctions leads to lumping together people who have experienced multiple incidents, fear and injury, with those who have been pushed away once, possibly in self-defence (see, for example, DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998). This in turn leads to grave errors in estimating the needs for protection services.

People do not tend to seek help from support agencies about an individual incident, although it is frequently one incident which has finally prompted them to seek that help. They describe patterns of fear, intimidation, and control. They employ protection strategies including modifying their own behaviour to try to prevent violence as well as making attempts to resist the control, often with a consequence of facing further threats or violence.

We therefore reject the assertion that research demonstrates gender parity in IPV. We know that there are many researchers, perhaps the majority, who share this conclusion based on their own and others' research. Clearly, Dixon *et al.* are either ignoring this evidence or are interpreting it differently.

(Selective) use of data: Domestic homicide

Dixon *et al.* acknowledge that 'it is clear that women are more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than are men' (p. 204). However, they then immediately present us with inaccurate data, saying '*approximately two-thirds of partner homicides in the UK involve female victims*' (Dixon *et al.*, 2012), a proportion that does not tally with the data on partner homicide from the Home Office (see Table 1; source, Smith, Coleman, Eder, & Hall, 2011). These statistics show that between three quarters and four-fifths of victims of homicide by partner or ex-partner are women, not two-thirds. This is a significant difference. This is a significant difference to the figure provided by Dixon *et al.*

Table 1. Victims of homicide by partner or ex-partner (source, Smith *et al.*, 2011, for the Home Office)

Year	2009– 2010	2008– 2009	2007– 2008	2006– 2007	2005– 2006	2004– 2005	2003– 2004	2002– 2003	2001– 2002	2000– 2001	Total
N female	94	101	72	87	89	105	96	106	117	101	968
N male	21	31	34	29	22	39	26	30	29	26	287
N total	115	132	106	116	111	144	122	136	146	127	1,255
%F*	81.7	76.5	67.9	75	80.2	72.9	78.7	77.9	80.1	79.5	77.1
%M*	18.3	23.5	32.1	25	19.8	27.1	21.3	22.1	19.9	20.5	22.9

*Rounded to one decimal point.

Female victims of partner/ex-partner homicide make up between three quarters (75%) and four-fifths (80%) of all partner/ex-partner homicide victims. The Home Office statistics also show that year after year, except in the year Harold Shipman's murders were recorded (2002–2003), male partners or ex-partners make up about or just under 50% of all those who kill women (Smith *et al.*, 2011, Table 1.05, p. 32). There is simply no other single category of person anywhere near as large as male partner/ex-partner from whom women are at risk of being killed. Women are very rarely killed by their friends (unlike men) or strangers.

Dixon *et al.* also, inaccurately, state that 'most of the citations provided in support of this Respect statement are from a single source, a book chapter, despite there being many analyses of homicide resulting from IPV that are published in refereed journal articles' (Dixon *et al.*, 2012). To be clear, the Respect Gender Position Statement Dixon *et al.* are critiquing (Respect, 2009) is a briefing paper not an academic paper. However, it is very far from being based on a single source, as our bibliography shows, with references to 25 publications, including two papers written by two of them (Archer, 2000 and Graham-Kevan and Archer, 2003). We have used the most reliable statistics on domestic homicide (Smith *et al.*, 2011) and consulted various analyses of these.

In fact, it is Dixon *et al.* who appear to be using selective data on homicide, seemingly ignoring the Home Office data and its analysis and using only two sources, Wilson and Daly (1992) and Felson (2002, 2010). As a consequence, they appear to be doing the very thing they accuse us of and ignoring evidence when it does not suit their argument.

The relevance of gender to IPV

Archer's own research confirms that the majority of victims of physical injury in domestic violence are female (Archer, 2000; Dixon *et al.*, 2012). The Home Office data show year after year that the vast majority of victims of domestic homicide are female (Coleman, Jansson, Kaiza, & Reed, 2007; Coleman, Hird, & Povey, 2006; Povey, Coleman, Kaiza, & Roe, 2009; Povey, Coleman, Kaiza, Hoare, & Jansson, 2008; Smith *et al.*, 2011; Walby & Allen, 2004). The BCS, year after year, shows that the majority of partner sexual assault, on-going domestic violence (more than six incidents), violence causing injury, post-separation violence, and partner stalking are against female victims (Coleman *et al.*, 2007, 2006; Povey *et al.*, 2009, 2008; Smith *et al.*, 2011; Walby & Allen, 2004).

Homicide, sexual assault, physical injury, stalking by a partner and post-separation violence from an ex-partner all affect women more than men. This is not an ideological statement, but based on good evidence from research, including from the national prevalence study the BCS (with the caveats expressed above). As such, gender is clearly connected to the risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence.

It is unclear to us why Dixon *et al.* ignore this evidence. They repeatedly dismiss the strong connections between gender and domestic homicide, rape, sexual assault, injury, ongoing violence, and post-separation violence as irrelevant and ignore the only national prevalence study on people's actual experience of crime. This is not scientific and it certainly is not objective. But more importantly, it is not *useful*. Promoting the idea that gender is unimportant leads to a one size fits all approach, which helps no-one, least of all minority groups such as male victims, who need specialist support tailored to their specific needs.

In saying that women are more affected than men by all of these things, we are not saying that men are not affected. Individual men suffer and sometimes die at the hands

of female partners, and the suffering of those men matters to us and to Respect. That is why Respect runs the Men's Advice Line.

Talking about gender is not just something that feminists do. Men and women using and experiencing IPV talk about it too. If you ask most men who have hit their partners 'is it right to hit a woman?' they will answer 'no', just as the authors suggest. But when practitioners explore with them the complexity of their lives, they list exceptions to that rule. Their examples are frequently about gender, about their expectations of how their female partner should behave, beliefs about men and women's roles, feelings about themselves as men, assumptions that underpin their use of violence and abuse. Practitioners could not avoid discussions about gender and relationships and assumptions about roles in relationships if they tried. To ignore it would be to ignore the elephant in the room and would leave the men struggling to make practical sense of how to make changes in their lives if these assumptions remain unexplored.

Where IPV is concerned, gender *means* something. Unpicking this helps those working at the frontline to respond more effectively, which in this field can mean saving lives and preventing harm.

Dixon *et al.* simplify and misinterpret Respect's statement on gender, presenting it as if Respect are saying that gender is the only risk factor in cases of domestic violence. In reality there are many complex risk factors involved in domestic violence: Respect's register of highly trained, specialist court risk assessors would not get very far if they simply stood up in court and said 'he's a man, that's it'. Respect's gender statement is not attempting to give an in-depth exploration of risk. We have other papers covering this, for example, our paper on Expert Domestic Violence Risk Assessments in the Family Courts (Respect, 2010).

The gender position statement says that: 'Gender is the most significant factor for being a perpetrator or victim of domestic violence in particular' (Respect, 2009). It definitely does not say that it is the *only* factor. We appreciate that using the word 'factor' may mean different things to different professions. As detailed in the position statement, Respect uses it to mean both as a risk factor for becoming a perpetrator or victim of IPV and as a part (factor) of the very experience of being abused and the ways the perpetrator and others justify it. This is a range of meanings packed into a short summary sentence in a practice guidance document. Reading the full position statement will further clarify the reasons for this assertion.

Services for male victims

Dixon *et al.* clearly suggest that Respect '*argue(s) against researching or providing aid for male victims*' (Dixon *et al.*, 2012, p. 203, para 3). Respect is totally committed to meeting the needs of male victims. For the last 5 years, Respect has been running the Men's Advice Line, a helpline specifically for male victims of domestic violence that takes thousands of calls and e-mails each year. It also developed a highly popular toolkit for work with male victims and our training course on this work is much in demand. Finally, Respect has worked with three major UK universities on research on male victims, providing them with data from our male victims' services.

Our daily work with male victims informs our understanding of men's real experiences. This combines with our reading of research to inform our practice and what members of the organization, in turn, disseminate to others.

Many academic authors have done excellent work exploring the nature of female perpetration and male victimization which we have used to inform our practice guidance (Belknap & Melton, 2005; Das Dasgupta, 2002; Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Hines & Douglas, 2010; Kimmel, 2002; Stark, 2006; Swan & Snow, 2003; Walsh *et al.*, 2010;

Worcester, 2002). Calvin Bell has provided a thorough academic review of the research on this topic in our male victims' toolkit (Bell, 2009). The toolkit drew strongly on the lessons from all of these pieces of research as well as from practice experience.

We agree that practitioners, researchers, and policy makers do not know enough about what happens in families where both adults are apparently using violence or force. We are working with many policy makers, researchers, and practitioners to develop understanding and knowledge about this. Clearly, our track record of work with and for male victims is not as implied by the Dixon *et al.* article.

Research, practice, and policy work best when they work together

Respect has a strong commitment to research, and to sharing knowledge and experience between researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. Research is not an end in itself - it both relies on and influences the development of practice and policy. While independence in the research process is obviously critical, dialogue between practitioners and researchers is invaluable.

Respect and our members have a wealth of experience in how to listen to, work with, and help to change the behaviour of people using IPV or other forms of domestic violence. Working with these men, week after week, listening to them, working respectfully and empathetically with them, helping them to make the changes in their lives which they want to make, to stop using IPV, we have learnt a great deal about how to engage and motivate them. We are more than happy to - and often do - share this with researchers to help them to get the most from their interviews with research participants.

Respect is piloting a new training course on working with women using violence and abuse in intimate relationships (February and July 2012). This was developed drawing on the experience of working with women using violence calling the Respect Phoneline as well as relevant research. Similarly, Respect has always encouraged debate and actively attempted to engage with those holding differing views. Indeed in 2008, we welcomed one of the authors of the article to present at our conference, Does Gender Matter?

Respect has been instrumental in establishing the Mirabal project, the first ever UK multi-site research into the outcomes of DVPPs. We are supporting our accredited members to become research-ready and we supported applications for funding so that this research can be carried out independently from Respect. We hope what the researchers will find will help to inform all practitioners, researchers and policy-makers about what helps men using IPV to change and what else DVPPs contribute to coordinated community responses (CCRs) to protect victims and their children. The work started with exploration of what 'success' means for men, women, practitioners, and funders involved in DVPPs (Westmarland *et al.*, 2010). This has helped the research team to develop a more nuanced approach to the research on DVPP outcomes.

The development of this research is being guided by a panel that includes representation from those who carried out the largest longitudinal study worldwide, of over 700 men who participated in batterer intervention programmes in the United States, and their partners, ex-partners, and new partners. This study (Gondolf, 2002) showed that the overwhelming majority of men stopped using violence and stayed stopped 4 years after they finished the programme, as part of a CCR. There are differences between US and UK programmes, so although Gondolf's research tells us useful things, Respect is committed to supporting rigorous, independent research on UK programmes.

We believe Respect's tradition of bringing together researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and commissioners is invaluable for developing the most effective responses to IPV, the best ways of preventing it, and also contributes to better research about IPV.

Conclusion

We are disappointed that Dixon *et al.* chose to write a misleading and inaccurate article about Respect rather than talk to its members directly and engage in debate on points of difference. However, given they did choose to write, we would have expected that they apply the same standards to themselves that they attempt to apply to the Respect statement. It is not good enough to accuse Respect of being subjective, unscientific, and ideologically driven and then write an article which is all of those things.

We are unsure why Dixon *et al.* have ignored such a vast body of research on the connections between gender and IPV. We are not sure why they have ignored available evidence about the range of work we and others do to respond to female violence and male victimization. We are not sure why they have used a critique of one document to lead to the conclusion that another (the Accreditation Standard), written before it, is therefore invalid, without any analysis whatsoever of the Accreditation Standard. We reject entirely their call to abandon the work of Respect and of our accreditation system. We assert strongly that Respect is carrying out work which deals with female violence as well as male violence, but have clarified that there is insufficient practice evidence as yet to create a standard for work with female perpetrators. We hope we have made it clear that writing a Standard for work with male perpetrators in no way implies that there is no work to be done with female perpetrators. We hope that readers are now aware that Respect does in fact respond to women using IPV too.

Respect will continue to provide and develop services to male victims – and to men and women using IPV. It will continue to monitor, review, and where necessary amend our system of accreditation, taking account of developments in both research and practice. We are acutely aware that there is still much to learn and much to do and we are committed to working in meaningful partnership with all those researchers, practitioners, and policy makers who have the same goal that we do – ending violence and abuse.

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