



## **Consultation on the British Crime Survey - Intimate Personal Violence Questionnaire, October 2011**

### **Eaves Response**

#### **About Eaves**

Eaves is a London-based charity established in 1977, that provides high quality housing and support to vulnerable women. We also carry out research, advocacy and campaigning to prevent all forms of violence against women.

At Eaves, we put the needs of women first. We are determined to give a voice to the most excluded women in society and provide direct, innovative services to support and empower women to help themselves. There are different projects run by Eaves.

#### **The Lilith Project**

Lilith Research & Development have a wide remit ranging from research into various aspects of violence against women, to training and education for the women's sector, to lobbying for legislative change and to working directly with women who have experienced sexual violence.

#### **The Scarlet Centre**

The Scarlet Centre is an Eaves service providing advice and drop-in support to women who are affected by violence – including homelessness, rape or sexual abuse, prostitution or domestic violence – and the consequences of violence – including mental health and/or substance misuse problems.

#### **The Poppy Project**

The Poppy Project provides support, accommodation and advocacy for women trafficked into domestic slavery and sexual exploitation in the UK. We have 15 bed spaces and capacity for 50 outreach cases per year.

#### **The Serafina Project**

Formerly Eaves Women's Aid, The Serafina Project provides support and accommodation for women (and their children) fleeing domestic violence. We provide bed spaces in Westminster in comfortable and safe environments where a full range of support provided, including help accessing benefits and legal advice.

## **The Sojourner Project**

The Sojourner Project is a pilot scheme run by Eaves and funded by the Home Office. It is for women with no recourse to public funds, who entered the UK on a spousal or partner visa and are eligible to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) under the Domestic Violence Rule.

**To find out more about our work please visit our website on [www.eaves4women.co.uk](http://www.eaves4women.co.uk) Introduction**

## **Higher Estimates of IPV Victimization**

- As stated on the analysis of the two sets of questions, even though the alternative question set produced higher estimates of IPV victimisation than the current question set, it is difficult to determine which one showed a **valid result**. The details of the disclosed abuse are as important as the number of disclosures.
- With less explicit set of questions the alternative question set meant that all respondents, including non-victims, had to answer more questions in total. This might have increased the general number of responses but would be **concealing the true extent and nature of the IPV**.
- The findings also showed that victims were less offended when asked more explicit questions than non-victims. In a unique survey such as this on which strategies, policies and different prevention and interventions programmes rely on; it's very crucial that the **true experience of victims is captured**.

## **Screening Question**

- The screener question which is set in order not to offend respondents by explicit questions on 'serious sexual assault' seems a risky measure. As the analysis shows, actual victims of 'serious sexual assaults' are less offended by these questions than non-victims. The BCS is intended to measure trends in crime including 'serious sexual assault', provides a point of comparison for statistics and informs policy making on crime and punishment. This requires that the survey have accurate information from victims themselves which might be difficult to have due to the screener question.
- The screener question which asks the respondent if they have been victims of 'serious sexual assault' could highly distort the real extent of victimisation. Research has shown that many victims of 'serious sexual assault' such as rape might not define their experience as that. Besides,

as stated in the analysis the **legal definition** and **individuals' definition** of a 'serious sexual assault' might be actually different and what the BCS wants to capture would be offences which fall under the legal definition and not personal one. **Note that we don't think it's appropriate to label the individual's definition of rape and sexual assault as a 'cultural' definition which could have other implications.**

- The analysis of the two sets of questions also showed that though the alternative question set produced generally higher estimates of prevalence, it produced a lower estimate for 'serious sexual assault' which was due to the addition of the screener question; which would prompt a question on the **reliability of the results of the survey.**
- Though the screener question was also designed to reduce the number of respondents asked the most explicit questions and thereby avoid the **risk of parents refusing to allow their child to take part** in the survey of 10 to 15 year olds, the response rate for this age group or the parental refusal was no better in the alternative question set.
- Therefore, it might be better to explain in detail at the outset of the survey that some of the questions might be upsetting. It's also important to **explain to respondents how crucial their response is** in order to have a clear picture of the problem and ultimately put in place effective prevention strategies and also support services.
- It is also important to devise a way where respondents could **skip such questions** and come back to them when they are ready. Moreover, it is crucial to provide the necessary **support for respondents during and after taking part in the survey.**

### **Non-sexual abuse**

- Only prevalence is measured in the IPV module of the section on questions of non-sexual abuse and a respondent is classed as a victim to the overall category without any specification on the type of abuse. The **overall category and analysis has to be categorized into different forms of non-sexual abuse**, such as threats, or emotional or financial abuse, etc to have a clear representation on the nature of the abuse.

### **General Comments**

- According to the analysis of the two set of questions the alternative question set is said to have provided a better experience for respondents; in that it's **easier to answer.** This might be because of the simpler layout used for the alternative questions set and therefore it's worth exploring if the layout is an element needing improvement. It is not clear, however,

that it was a better experience for respondents in terms of detailing their experience or in providing the quality of information needed.

- We welcome that the Home Office would be launching a **public consultation** on changes to the BCS IPV module from April 2012. We believe that there needs to be a further discussion and investigation before choosing one set of questions over the other. We will also be responding in detail to the public consultation.
- We would suggest that it is not appropriate to mask the violence of an experience because it may be difficult reading for some – though notably not for the victims themselves. To understand the nature, trend and motivations of crimes it is necessary to have qualitative and detailed information of the crimes. It is particularly important for sexual assault where victims' experiences are often minimised and there is a low reporting and conviction rate. Victims need to know that their experiences are properly understood. Justice responses can only be appropriately targeted if based on the full information.
- We also endorse the consultation response by the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University.