Concept note on measuring violence for the Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network (VAMHN)

**Developing the measurement of violence to improve analysis and evaluation of  
interventions to reduce and end violence with a focus on mental health**

**The purpose**

Violence and abuse has severe mental health consequences that have wider effects on individuals and society.

The purpose of improving the measurement of violence is to improve the evidence

base needed to build a theory of change and to evaluate interventions. This means

measuring violence in its context: both acts and harms; causal pathways in and out

of violence; and the mitigation of harms.

Many academic disciplines, professionals/practitioners, and public bodies are

seeking to cooperate. But they lack a common vocabulary for precision

measurement of increases and decreases in violence. Improving the measurement

of violence by building a shared framework would improve cooperation.

Academic disciplines include: health (mental and physical) and the medical sciences; and criminology and the social sciences. Professional/practitioner groups include: health (psychiatrists, GPs); criminal and civil justice (police, prosecutors, judiciary); specialised third sector services embedding knowledge from survivors (refuges,

advisors, help lines); and social services (social workers). Policy bodies include:

commissioners of services; local and national government.

**The challenges**

The mental aspects of violence are harder to measure than its physical aspects.

The measurement of violence varies between multiple academic disciplines,

between multiple professional/practitioner groups and between multiple policy

bodies, and can be a function of differences in the way that violence and abuse is

defined. Each has developed a measurement framework specific to its needs. Yet,

since a multi-agency response is widely recognised as needed to reduce violence

and to mitigate its harms, there is a need for a shared framework across these

multiple academic disciplines, professional/practitioner groups and policy bodies.

While not under-estimating the significance of the need for specialist requirements,

there is an unmet need for a measurement framework that facilitates cooperation

across the boundaries of multiple academic disciplines, professional/practitioner

groups and policy bodies.

**Developing the measurement framework**

Members of the Violence Abuse and Mental Health Network (the “Network”) have already offered the outline of such a shared measurement framework. This is presented in *The Concept and Measurement of Violence against Women and Men* by Walby and Towers et al (2017). This framework provides: thresholds for violence/not-violence and severity; the unit of measurement for frequency (victim, event, perpetrator); and the identification of its gender dimensions (relationship between perpetrator and victim).

The framework needs development to facilitate its application to meet the specific

needs of mental health academics, professionals/practitioners and policy bodies.

The issue of mental health offers a lens through which to address issues of the

measurement of violence in a focused manner.

**Key issues for future research**

Key issues for development include:

• the mental health aspects of thresholds of violence, abuse and severity;

• the translation of the measurement of harms between health, crime,

specialised services, social services, finance and other fields;

• the implications of mental health for the assessment of risk;

• evaluation of interventions to mitigate the harm to mental health of domestic

and sexual violence;

• developing the measurement of the ‘cost' of violence, including the mental health harms of domestic and sexual violence.

This list will develop during the life of the Network.

**Activities**

The following activities are planned within the Network to achieve the development and application of the measurement framework.

Three days of workshops to bring disparate parties together and develop the

research/policy agenda. These include: the concept and practice of measurement; engagement with a strategy to build consensus with respect to measurement of outcomes in the context of intervention; and reviewing progress in measurement.

A web-site to facilitate access to existing data across the disparate parties.

The provision of small grants to improve the knowledge base.

Further research and cooperation.

**Workshops**

The Network Measurement Workshop, to be held in June 2019, will have two strands: the measurement framework and associated research agenda; the development of an outcome set for evaluation of health and social care interventions aiming to improve family and child outcomes.

In the first day, sessions will include people from different disciplines or professional groups, in dialogue over the same issue. It will include discussion of the research agenda. This will include costing violence.

In the second day, sessions will specifically address; development of an outcome set to assist in the monitoring and evaluation of family and child focussed targeted interventions: it will include the definition of children's ‘exposure' to violence and abuse, an overview of current approaches to outcome measurement, discussion of what is a good outcome, for whom and in what context, and the implementation of a minimum standard for outcome measurement and reporting (including practical issues, risks and benefits).

The third day of workshop in late 2020 or early 2021 will review the findings of the

small grants and other developments.

**Website**

A website will be developed that contains links to information about relevant data,

especially quantitative data.

**Funding for small projects**

The Network has funds to support small projects to advance this agenda. A call will be launched at the Workshop.

The topics include those listed under ‘key issues for future research'. All

methodologies are acceptable, from systematic reviews of evidence to primary

analysis of quantitative data.

We anticipate funding 3-5 proposals of up to £25,000, each lasting up to a year. Those successful will be expected to publish their findings and make presentations to a future network meeting (the third day of workshop).

**Research**

Members of the Network will continue their research, deepening their cooperation,

drawing on Network resources.

**Links**

*Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network*:<https://www.vamhn.co.uk/>

*Violence and Society Centre*: [www.city.ac.uk/violence-society](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.city.ac.uk%2Fviolence-society&data=01%7C01%7Canjuli.1.kaul%40kcl.ac.uk%7C4db3fa7c2d0b42d8f33608d6ab9d6bc6%7C8370cf1416f34c16b83c724071654356%7C0&sdata=uAeF6U%2FoE9iVYSSbjjpYZqNu8C8qaqxAJPzBIzxl4VM%3D&reserved=0)

Walby, Sylvia, Jude Towers, Susie Balderston, Consuelo Corradi, Brian Francis,

Markku Heiskanen, Karin Helweg-Larsen, Lut Mergaert, Philippa Olive, Emma

Palmer, Heidi Stock! and Sofia Strid. 2017 [*The Concept and Measurement of*](http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/21685/)

[*Violence against Women and Men*.](http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/21685/) Bristol: Policy Press.

Sylvia Walby, City, University of London: VAMHN Lead on Measurement.