E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

Research Grants
Peer Review

ESRC Reference: ES/T008849/1

Document Status: With Council

SDAI open call

Applicant Details

Applicant	Dr Timothy L Mullett	Organisation	University of Warwick

Title of Research Project

The behavioural economics of domestic abuse

Review Information

Response Due Date	27/08/2019	Reviewer Reference:	199347314

Research Council Contact Details

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Application Assessment

Please select a grade to indicate your assessment according to the following criteria. Detailed comments in support of these grades should be provided in the free text overall assessment section. Refer to Help for further guidance.

Originality; potential contribution to knowledge

Outstanding	Excellent	Good	✔ Satisfactory	Fair / Some Weaknesses	Poor	Unable to Assess

Research design and methods

Outstanding	Excellent	✔ Good	Satisfactory	Fair / Some Weaknesses	Poor	Unable to Assess

Value for money

Outstanding	Excellent	✔ Good	Satisfactory	Fair / Some Weaknesses	Poor	Unable to Assess

Outputs, dissemination and impact

Outstanding	Excellent	✔ Good	Satisfactory	Fair / Some	Poor	Unable to

				Weaknesses		Assess

Overall Assessment

Feedback for Applicant

Please provide detailed comments in support of the grades you have given and on any other aspects of the proposal that you consider relevant. These comments will be passed on, unattributed, to the applicant(s) and also with notification of the outcome of the application, to other external reviewers if applicable. For further guidance please select Help.

Originality, innovation and potential contribution to knowledge + Research design and methods

The proposed research includes four different areas of research. Within each area several sub-research questions have been formulated. Strengths of the proposed research include the access to and use of different data sources: the CSEW, police data, and data from a large bank. Also, the fact that the researchers aim to analyse perpetrator data in addition to victimisation data is a strength.
Moreover, quantitative research on domestic abuse in the UK context is welcomed given that most research on domestic abuse in the UK context is qualitative in nature. The data management plan seems thorough.

The researchers propose to use different data sources to answer four overarching research questions. Especially research area 4 is an interesting and ambitious addition to existing research. However, there are a few issues and concerns with regard to the other research areas and the proposal in general.
1. The current research proposal seems primarily data driven rather than driven by theoretical considerations and/or questions left unanswered by prior research. Throughout the proposal, there seems limited awareness of prior research in the area of domestic abuse, more specifically on victim characteristics and risk factors for domestic abuse and consequences of domestic abuse. Importantly, the proposal is not grounded in theoretical work on domestic abuse at all. I appreciate that word limits for the proposal mean existing theory and research cannot be discussed in detail, but some recognition of earlier work in this area, and how the proposed research would build upon existing research, would have been useful. For example, there is a wealth of research from other countries, especially the US, but also from other European countries, on risk factors for domestic abuse victimisation (research area 1). However, references to these studies, or theoretical relevance, is missing. Similarly, it is stated that there is little in depth research on (un)willingness to report domestic abuse (research area 1), even though there is also quite a bit of research on this topic, albeit especially qualitative research. In addition, the link between experiencing and/or witnessing abuse and aggressive and violent behaviour has been well documented, as are the negative consequences of experiencing abuse in other life domains.
2. The researchers propose to address a wide range of research questions and mention a large number of factors that will be examined in relation to domestic abuse, including but not limited to socioeconomic factors, neighbourhood factors, effects of victimisation, effects of alcohol, gambling, and sporting events, willingness to report and police mis-recordings, estimated costs of domestic abuse, etc. Because of the lack of a theoretical or conceptual framework, the proposal at times lacks focus and is sometimes difficult to follow. The tables are helpful though, and the research questions are clearly stated. However, the research questions are not very innovative, given the body of research conducted in other countries. I agree that it is important to examine these kinds of research questions in the UK context, but it is unfortunate that the researchers do not discuss to what extent results from prior research conducted in other countries might or might not generalise to the UK context, or how the current research builds upon existing research.
3. Related to the issues mentioned above, there is no evidence of any expertise in the area of domestic abuse among any of the three researchers involved in the project, aside from one unpublished report on alcohol-related domestic abuse in relation to football. The researchers do seem qualified and experienced in working with large datasets, and using the data analysis techniques needed to prepare, clean, and analyse the datasets and answer the research questions.
4. It is unclear how police mis-recording is measured and examined (research area 2). Do respondents in the CSEW report whether their case was mis-recorded by the police? How would they know? 'We will explore whether the extent of crime

misrecording depends on victim characteristics. Using the CSEW, we will be able to tell whether the type of domestic abuse reported by the respondent is likely to amount to a crime according to the list of notifiable offences'. How is this evidence for police mis-recording? Also, this research question is not listed in table 2, so clarification of the dependent and independent variables is missing here as well.

5. I am not confident that the research question "Are young offenders from abusive households more violent?" can be accurately answered (research area 3). The researchers will use data on domestic abuse incidents recorded at the same address. How will they know since when the young person was living at that address, and whether the young person was present at the time of the incident?

Some minor issues include:
- It is unclear why different explanatory variables are used in answering the first two research questions in table 1 (predicting DA victimisation per se, and predicting serious harm from DA victimisation) (research area 1).
- The random forest method is not explained clearly. Also, the analysis methods generally are not explained in detail, but given the researchers' expertise with analysing large datasets, I'm assuming they are capable of preparing the datasets for analyses and analysing the data in such a way that they are able to answer the research questions.
- The researchers should be cautious when claiming they can identify causal effects (research area 3). Although they may be able to make causal inferences using propensity score matching approach, this method has its limitations as well, and is not able to examine true causal effects like an experimental design would be able to do.
- None of the target journals are journals in the area of violence and domestic abuse.
- One of the core objectives (objective 2) of the project is to improve our understanding of the costs of domestic abuse, but this is not specifically mentioned in any of the four research areas, there is only the focus on consequences of experiencing domestic abuse but without any estimation of the associated costs.

Value for money

The resources requested for this two-year project, including the budget for conference visits etc, and a computer, seem reasonable. However, the researchers seem to propose to write at least seven academic papers, addressing at least 13 research questions, all (as written in 'Staff duties') or the majority (according to the document 'Justification of Resources) lead by the postdoc. To me it seems perhaps a bit ambitious for a postdoc to do complex data analyses of different datasets for, and the majority of the writing of, seven papers in two years. In light of this, I would have expected a slightly larger contribution of the PI to the project.

Outputs, dissemination and potential for impact

The researchers have good links to and support from relevant stakeholders, in particular West Midlands Police, which is crucial for data access and also helpful for generating impact from the proposed research. The researchers propose a comprehensive programme of impact related activities. The proposed research therefore seems to yield the possibility to generate real impact on (police) practice. It is unclear to what extent the research would have impact on theory development, as the researchers have not framed their proposal in a theoretical framework.

Overall Grade

Please indicate your overall assessment of the proposal

Outstanding	Excellent	✔ Good	Satisfactory	Fair / Some Weaknesses	Poor