Domestic Violence Legislation, Virtual Legal Methods and Researching One Female Teacher's Lived Experiences of Recovery from Intimate Partner Violence During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic.

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Abstract

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, the value of online qualitative research methodologies are increasingly being recognised within violence/abuse and legal research, but few academic papers explore the process of undertaking research wholly online which explores the intersect of both legal research methods and the exploration of the lived experiences of domestic abuse victims. For the potential of legal and domestic scholarly work to be fully recognised within academic publications and teaching, appropriate consideration of methodological issues surrounding qualitative online research methodologies is needed. This paper reflects on the experiences of one domestic abuse researcher undertaking online research during the UK's national COVID19 lockdown when government legislation meant most socio-legal academics were restricted to conducting all research from their homes. This paper highlights the process where choosing the data collection online method (Microsoft Teams) was carefully considered to provide rich data insights that would help explore the research question under investigation. Online Microsoft Teams interviews were a successful method of undertaking scholarship examining one victims' experience and its interconnectedness with the law. This was since they provided an in-depth understanding of the topic undertaken in a deeply private setting where a lack of face-to-face interaction seemed to enhance the richness of the data shared. The paper includes a total of five reflections are offered to help future researchers considering, and undertaking, online interviews within the field of domestic violence and legal research.

1. Introduction and the impact of COVID19 on legal and domestic violence research

The COVID19 worldwide pandemic and subsequent government enforced national lockdowns have led to increased cases of domestic violence against women, and this has been described as a crisis within a crisis (Kumar, 2020; United Nations, 2020). The purpose of this paper is to systematically reflect on the methodology employed for one research project which explored a single participant case study and their experience as a victim positioned within the legal domain of criminal law. The project specifically looked at one female victim's experiences of domestic violence which is an issue of paramount importance during this unprecedented global period in time. This paper considers some of the benefits, boundaries and restrictions of the online methodology adopted to explore legal concepts pertaining to interpersonal violence. This included intersecting criminal offences relating to domestic abuse, for example, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and Serious Crime Act 2015, and the experiences of researching this topic during the COVID-19 pandemic. These reflections may help socio-legal scholars in the future post-pandemic world who are considering alternative approaches to face-to-face data collection.

Domestic abuse studies which explore the lived experiences of victims of abuse and the law have historically focussed on understanding the nature of the execution of intimate partner violence, sequences of abuse led by perpetrators, and the experiences of unintended victims of domestic abuse. An example of one focus is researchers exploring the trauma domestic violence inflicts upon children who are forced to live in violent homes (Downes and others, 2014). More recent studies have concentrated instead on early interventions and the full continuum of victim services, such as police officers' processes and opinions on gender-based crimes (Bhavsar and others, 2021; Carrillo, 2021). Seeking information from the experiences of survivors going through court themselves is vitally important. Heywood and others' (2019) work highlight how there is much scholarship exploring how women survive trauma but significantly less on what happens afterwards. The original research project aimed to make an original contribution through exploring one woman's experiences of the long-term process of life after abuse when pursuing justice through the Crown Prosecution Service in court. An autobiographical narrative research approach was used to

understand the survivor's actions and how these related to the social context in which they occurred.

Methodologically, this kind of research requires very careful ethical consideration since poorly designed research has the potential to put individuals (primarily women) who are in violent relationships at considerable risk. Specific risks include compromising the safety of participants, for example, through protecting anonymity since moments of carelessness or error pertaining to confidentiality could lead to violent assaults from perpetrators, and/or also serious dangers may arise from perpetrators hearing/seeing their victims taking part in the research. Ensuring the interview process is conducted in a way that affirmatively questions the victim is also important, and that the research is executed without the threat of causing more grief or perpetuating further trauma. There was a risk that investigating this topic with the survivor may adversely affect her, as highlighted in Dunn's (2007) work on re-victimisation. Furthermore, there is a need for victims to be protected from the further victimisation (see Mawby, 1998) which could have occurred had she been approached for the research project and agreed to it whilst she was still living in a dangerous context. To counteract this, careful steps were taken to ensure she was sufficiently recovered and safe before beginning the research with her. It is generally thought that progressing with domestic violence research, despite these existing risks, is reasonable if the research has the potential to offer evidence-based conclusions on the victim's experiences, especially when pursuing justice through the courts, since the research of this kind can increase knowledge and awareness of the issue and understanding of, and advance services for, victims of interpersonal violence (Ellsberg and Heise, 2002).

Furthermore, methodological challenges often make domestic abuse research problematic, but research findings are necessary to aid the deterrence of abuse and aid the healing process following abuse, which can help improve outcomes for survivors (Bender, 2016). Additionally, many women are open to discussing their experiences of life after domestic abuse to highlight to other victims how healing is possible, and survivors can thrive and 'reclaim' themselves or reconstruct a new identity, re-take up new hobbies and help fill the void of silence that exists of victims sharing their own experiences (Heywood and others, 2019).

To try to counteract the ethical and methodological concerns about such sensitive research experienced domestic violence researchers have created guidance for researchers. One example of this is through encouraging researchers to view the participant as an active stakeholder in the study, who could help collaboratively work alongside the researcher to deliver social change via participation in the project, and not be seen as a hapless victim; guidance from these experienced scholars in the field was followed, and this approach to ethical considerations is called the Positive Empowerment approach (Downes, Kelly & Westmarland, 2014), and was adopted for this original research. Many of the principles of the World Health Organisation's (2016) recommendations for research on violence against women were followed to ensure the participant was put first. Examples of this included ensuring the research was methodologically sound and that it would help build on the current evidence base of interventions.

Combining sociological sensitive research topics like interpersonal violence with legal research scholarship can be challenging. This is since the research must combine the 'messy' and emotional lived experiences of domestic abuse victims living through the reality of the law. This is investigated through empirical means, alongside intersecting the topic academically with the formal legal doctrine which exists as its own normative, rigid discipline. There are often two contrasting methodological approaches to each discipline. For example, Kelsen (1990) argued that descriptive disciplines, such as social sciences, look for causal relations whereas legal research often uses 'imputation' as a method – meaning deciding there is a presence of some kind of responsibility from one person and/or a violation of it. This obligation stems from the legal system. As a result of this, intersecting one person's interpreted lived experience if approaching the research from a constructivist, critical paradigm, with legal research and its focus on direct interpretations of formal legislation, statutory texts and general principles of law, can therefore create a complicated and messy process.

To add to this already challenging research context, this research project was undertaken during the COVID19 pandemic, which led to unprecedented disruption and uncertainty around academic scholarly work (Wigginton and others, 2020). Researchers were forced to respond quickly and work under circumstances of widespread insecurity (Kligler-Vilenchik and others, 2020). To ensure the protection of

the health of all community members, in March 2020, many universities hastily revolved around online delivery of teaching with significant amounts of face-to-face sociological research temporarily stopping. This impact created significant challenges to the academic research community but provided new research innovation opportunities through the immediate changeover in teaching and research delivery that the coronavirus pandemic initiated. It provided a break to rethink digital challenge as a bright, new, and useful prospect that had the potential to aid research communication, clarity, and overall quality (Morrealle, Thorpe & Westwick, 2020).

To highlight the experiences of researching within this new and deeply challenging context, the aims of this paper are to:

1. Outline the methodological research process of a socio-legal scholar exploring domestic abuse laws in context through an empirical investigation.
2. Explore one researcher's first-time use of online qualitative research methodology via Microsoft Teams and offer five reflections to inform future researchers considering, and undertaking, online interviews within the field of domestic violence and legal research.

2. Online research methods

For over 20 years use of the internet as a tool for collecting primary research data has been discussed as highly effective (Hewson & Steward, 2016; Schleyer & Forrest, 2000). Many different methodological approaches can be adopted for online research. Some include undertaking focus groups via web-based video conferencing programmes, for example, Zoom (Greenspan and others, 2020), effective and rapid digital communication via Microsoft Teams (Henderson and others, 2020) and online surveys via platforms like Survey Monkey (Jain and others, 2020). Despite this, there are still very few research papers on the process of conducting research online, especially research that intersects domestic violence and legal scholarship. As a result of this topic void, adapting a research project that was previously planned to be face-to-face to recreate the approach via online means was difficult since there were few resources to explore for direction and clarification. No current published papers are reflecting on data collection for studies exploring the law and domestic abuse when collected entirely via online methods. Despite this void of literature, it was clear from

other disciplines, such as scholars researching counselling, that online methods can be a positive experience as a tool for data collection methods. Granello and Wheton (2011) argued online approaches to data collection include the following specific strengths: (1) reduced time (since there is often no travel time required if the researcher has a computer and internet at home); (2) cost-effectiveness (with no printing or travelling costs); and (3) it is easier to store data (since data is often automatically uploaded from internet software to an online storage cloud).

Despite these positives, technology-orientated data collection methods have also been criticised for the certain 'trade-offs' that these approaches can acquire. This may include related sustainability issues in the quest to secure faster, better computer devices, since many end up in landfills, severely damaging the earth and water, but, despite this, new devices continue to be purchased because of computer users knowing how with older devices can come increased user errors and decreased user satisfaction (Lazar and others, 2017).

Furthermore, as online research methods require electricity to work, there are also energy usage matters which can make usage costly both financially to the researcher but also costly regarding the impact it can have on the environment (Chetty and others, 2009), but it is important to note that this point could be counteracted by how online data collection methods have significantly less of a carbon footprint size than travelling to physically visit another person, in another town or city, for example. Other scholars have highlighted other weaknesses such as the increased online security risks where there is the danger of online surveillance from other people or other organisations when using the internet (Rainie and others, 2013). Furthermore, there is also the risk of online victimisation through cybercrime hacking when using computers (Wilsem, 2013). For example, throughout the COVID19 pandemic there were a significant number of 'zoombombings', a term which refers to aggressors join meetings to try and disrupt them and harass meeting participants (Brown, 2020). However, 'zoombombers' mostly targeted academic lectures during this period, but some scholarship noted that meetings happening in real-time were specifically targeted (Ling, 2020), and so this risk was present for this study.

Another problem associated with online data collection methods is the negative impact technology can have on researcher's mental health. This is also particularly important to the nature of this study since research on domestic violence, which is already a sensitive and emotionally distressing topic, where it is difficult for the researcher to not have an emotional reaction to what is being heard which can lead to a harmful impact on the researcher's mental wellbeing (Sikes & Hall, 2020). During the COVID19 worldwide pandemic, academic papers about the impact of social distancing and self-isolation as a burden to the population were written, exploring the psychosocial strain on the mental, physical, and behavioural costs of home confinement (Ammar and others, 2021; González-Sanguino and others, 2020), whilst the authors also recognised that these were required, and important interventions, needed to save lives. Furthermore, the nuanced blurring of work-life balance meant there was a lack of clear transition between work and leisure and therefore researchers drifted into working longer hours which can be associated with several mental health problems like depression and anxiety (Ganster and others, 2018). These studies highlight that there can be several mental health issues and unwanted side effects when undertaking online research methods since a heavy reliance on technology and the nuanced blurring of work-life balance appeared to be a requirement or by-product of online research work during the pandemic.

Next, it is important to consider other contemporary work on online research methods undertaken during the COVID19 pandemic. For instance Greenspan & others (2021) explored the experiences of undertaking focus groups via Zoom and it highlighted the risk of distractions and how these can disrupt the flow of conversation. These may include noises from outside the online meeting room, screen freezes, and other sound issues. These were also mentioned in other studies (Kite & Phongsavan, 2017; Tuttas, 2015). There was the risk of this happening and this is discussed later in the 'reflections' section of this paper. However, another study where 300 online and in-person interviews were analysed and demonstrated that there was little difference to some aspects of online interviews, such as the 'time spent interviewing, in minutes, subjective interviewer ratings and substantive coding', when comparing against in-person interviews (Johnson and others, 2019, p.1).

One final issue with ongoing online research is the risk of repetitive strain injuries which was highlighted as a serious issue for computer-based researchers during the COVID19 national lockdowns (Shariat and others, 2020). The Coronavirus Act 2020 was created as an extension of existing statutory powers, and this led to some tough restrictions (Pugh, 2020). This included limitations on physically exercising outside of a person's home, for example, limiting exercise outside of the home to one hour per day for an extended period of national lockdown from March to May 2020. This was something that the UK police appeared to use extreme measures to monitor, for example, during March 2020 Derbyshire Police used drone cameras to track and monitor individuals who they thought had travelled beyond thirty minutes of their house to exercise in the countryside (Pidd and Dodd, 2020). As a result of this, many individuals worked for long periods on computers, without leaving their homes, which led to musco-skeletal problems such as repetitive strain injury (RSI) and computer vision syndrome (CVS) and in one study of 255 participants, 69% of the study population confirmed they had CVS and 21.6% RSI because of the pandemic working-at-home (Kumari and others, 2021). The overuse of computers for research has the impact to take its toll on a researcher's body and this is another 'trade-off' in the transition from face-to-face interviews to wholly online interviews but the national travel restrictions, and those other restrictions pertaining to meeting other people face-to-face meant there was no other choice but to undertake this research via internet methods if it was to progress promptly.

3. The online research process

The original research project, which this paper is reflecting upon, was a systematic analysis of one victim's account and experiences of working-full time as a teacher whilst the Crown Prosecution Service lawyers proceeded with her domestic abuse case in court. It discussed the challenges this brought about, such as needing time off without wanting to share why, guilt from leaving the classroom and children to attend court, balancing motherhood with work and recovery from trauma. Inductive reasoning was used as an analysis tool to make generalised conclusions about the topics that help and hinder teachers who are victims of abuse and still working, and these are based on this victim and participant's scenario.

Due to the many complexities already discussed earlier in this paper, and due to the highly sensitive nature of the topic, the research design was very carefully considered and used as a strategic scaffold that, when put into action, would function as a connection between my research aims and the delivery of the research project (Durrheim, 2006). Purposive sampling was used as a means of informant selection since it is an approach extensively used for qualitative data purposes as a method of identifying and selecting detail-rich cases related to the subject of interest (Palinkas and others, 2015). Patton (2002) argued that the purpose of purposive sampling is to select issues where participants will have lots of information to share. Therefore, the data collected would illuminate the questions under study. Purposive sampling is sometimes contested as biased (Guarte and Barrios, 2006), but it could be argued that all individual knowledge and experiences, as spoken via verbal explanations, are biased. This is since all individuals view their lives and those around them, via frameworks of reference that arise due to their attributes and life trajectories are located in specific social contexts that create differing experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

After deciding on purposive sampling, considering the characteristics needed to capture the richness of the experience with sufficient detail was needed. After careful consideration, a criterion of features the participant needed was created. As a participant, they needed to be fluent in English, a qualified teacher (or had been employed as one) in England and be a person with domestic violence experience. They also needed to be available, open, and willing to participate (Bernard, 2002). Very importantly, it was required that the person was out of the dangerous domestic abuse situation now since there would be many safeguarding and ethical concerns that might occur if someone had been selected was still living in a dangerous home context, as mentioned above.

Some potential participants could have been approached, as they were already known to the researcher through community activism work and existing friendships. It has been argued that already having an emotional connection with participants can offer a powerful resource for explorations as opposed to presenting methodological issues (Hoffman, 2007). One such example could be through a friendship. However, since the story was examining almost two-thirds of one participant's life, the scholarship of

leading life history researchers Goodson and others (2016) was drawn upon. They argue it is better not to undertake life history research with colleagues, friends, acquaintances, or relatives. When this is the case, participants can be cautious about what they reveal when the study solicits information of a personal nature. Because of this, it was preferable that there was no prior relationship with the participant or have any kind of personal connection with them. A 'call for research' online social media post was posted on Twitter with these details included, and the participant responded to that post via email. Only one participant came forward and therefore no other potential participants were rejected. This may be due to teacher stress and workload issues during the pandemic, as had been an issue in other qualitative studies during the COVID19 pandemic (Zhu and Liu, 2020), but it is impossible to know with absolute certainty as to why this occurred.

Before organising the interview, ensuring all ethical paperwork was in place was an essential requirement. As already discussed, ethical approval is a vital part of the research process to ensure participants are treated fairly, sensitively and with dignity. Full ethical approval was granted by the ethics board at Leeds Beckett University in Summer 2020. British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2021) guidelines were followed since much of the discussion pertained to her lived experience of trauma as a teacher and with her own family, which included young children. Due to the nature of the topic, the discussion could be highly distressing or uncomfortable for the participant. In light of this, clear information was given on the information sheet of relevant supportive organisations to help her if she felt she needed access to further support following the interview. Informed consent was sought via an information letter and consent form to ensure it was explicitly clear what the research process would entail.

The interview was scheduled via a series of emails and organised via Microsoft Teams. The interview was recorded via its 'record meeting' feature. The meeting recording was securely stored on the researcher's university One Drive account and the Data Protection Act was followed at all times. For access to these files, an individual needed the required password and then two-factor authentication which helped it remain highly secure. Once the interviews were transcribed, the

transcriptions were also held in this account which is a typical method for qualitative researchers since OneDrive is considered well-protected (Torres and others, 2016).

Since anonymity for participants is a fundamental part of ethical scholarship (Grinyer, 2002), to protect the identities of all involved or mentioned, all names and locations in the narrative were allocated pseudonyms to ensure all identities would not be disclosed, aligning with accepted ethical practice (Grbich, 1999). The audio data was permanently deleted following transcription. The transcripts and emails were deleted from OneDrive (Microsoft Corporation, 2020) account immediately after the article was written up, as is in line with the university's Research Ethics Policy. As is the case with all socio-legal research, but is even more critical because of the sensitive and emotionally charged nature of this topic, maintaining the participant's confidentiality (and other people mentioned in the narrative) whilst still accurately presenting a rich, detailed account of her experiences was hugely important, as per most case study research (Kaiser, 2009). It was particularly imperative as the study potentially put at risk the unnecessary outing of the participant should the carefully constructed plans for complete confidentiality not be carefully and successfully executed.

This was also particularly significant given the research was a single-participant case study covering significant parts of the life of one person as my qualitative research method. Therefore, the narrative would contain a considerable amount of material about one person's past and present lived experiences (Goodson, 2001), which may have made her identifiable. Consequently, maintaining the highest ethical principles throughout my project, whilst detailing her and her families highly private accounts and memories regarding their lives, was carefully considered and planned for before the data collection began.

There were other methodological considerations specific to this project being a single-participant case study, such as generalisability issues. Therefore, it is important to state that the findings are limited as a result of this and academics who adopt a positivist paradigm may take issue with the size of the sample and therefore the reliability of the conclusions reached based on one participant's experiences, but it could be argued that the study still makes a useful contribution and insight into one survivor's experiences, despite this limitation.

The move towards a more grounded conversation when undertaking research that spans significant periods of an individual's life has been encouraged and a shift away from the more singular narrative of the initial life storytelling (Goodson and Gill, 2011). Furthermore, they reject a procedural approach to life history research but encourage a dialogic interchange and phased approach in interviews; it is discouraged by them to move away from a completely different 'life story' narration which stresses the agency of the teller instead. The interview enacted what Goodson (2003) referred to as a prefigurative practice – creating a microcosm of the encounter to make a pattern for relationships in an imagined ideal world. In this world, parts of what make up a life history exchange are present in the narrative encounter. Despite the distressing topic, it was an enjoyable process where there was even laughter at times and moments of light relief. There was a strong sense of what Goodson and Gill (2001) describe as a mutual exploration of meaning and selfhood. The interview was a one-to-one conversation, as is the most popularly employed approach for collecting data about a person's life history, and is often called a grounded conversation (Goodson, 2001), which began with the participant being asked a single brush question: 'Tell me your experiences with domestic abuse'. The participant was quite happy to take their cue from this question, and the conversation flowed effortlessly. It followed Goodson and Sikes (2001) approach since it was a relatively unstructured, informal, conversation-type encounter.

A phased approach was adopted for the analysis stage. When considering data management and deciding the best method for data analysis, there were multiple factors to consider. Firstly, due to the far-reaching method that was chosen, which spanned at least two decades of the participant's life, the data were always going to be significant in size. Furthermore, with it being a multi-faceted topic (regarding family life, employment, finances and the legal aspects) and rich in content with a requirement to stay in alignment with life history research, a way of analysing the data without losing critical parts of each of the mini-narratives shared was required (Goodson, 2001). Secondly, there was a possibility that information would be provided beyond the study's scope. This happened since the conversations resulted in a significant number of pages of words to manage and analyse. A way of refining what critical incidents should stay included was needed. When undertaking this kind of research into significant periods that span across a person's life, it is crucial to consider

time constraints and ensure the analysis approach was feasible within them (Goodson and Sikes, 2017). To address this concern, a small degree of editing was undertaken which entailed omitting parts of the narratives. This was to ensure that any data that were not linked to the research aims and objectives were not presented in the findings. This process is usual when considering presenting the data, according to Goodson and Sikes (2017).

To further address the above considerations, different qualitative data analysis approaches using computer software was considered. Feelings of reluctance towards this move were experienced, due to feeling like this was a highly emotive project. There was also concerns that using a digital strategy to ease the complex nature of the data management and analysis would mean part of the project's 'heart and soul' might be lost in the process. However, after careful consideration of the above factors, and after drawing on the scholarship of Bazeley (2006) who analysed various types of analysis software, including NU*DIST, ATLAS, XSIGHT, Weft QDA, it was decided that computer-aided analysis software was the best option to use due to the following considerations. According to Bazeley (2009), the use of computer operating systems for qualitative analysis has no impact on the research process's condition; conversely, it merely helps with managing the data and helps show the study has high levels of rigour. Additionally, NVivo12 was chosen due to its availability, lack of financial cost, tuition through the university library staff, and finally due to accessibility since other software was not available. Furthermore, NVivo is also recognised for providing a more rigorous approach than other digital processes (Hoover & Koerber, 2011). I NVivo12 'cases' were created for each different period of the participant's life and domestic violence experience, and 'nodes' to identify the themes of 'enabling' and 'barrier' factors in protecting the victim's wellbeing during her domestic violence experiences and subsequent court proceedings and experiences as a victim. Other than these two codes, there were no other pre-planned items that were being explored, and the coding process was not built upon any particular theoretical framework.

The first step in the data analysis process was to utilise the framework matrices option within NVivo12. This simply meant a table could be instantly created, which summarised or condensed the data elements in a grid that had rows for each critical memory that was analysed from the participant. This meant that each cell within the

grid represented that particular narrative's intersection and each of the two key items that were being looked for (barrier factors and enabling factors). Using the framework matrix grid, the option of quickly scanning down the columns to compare critical incidents/periods was utilised, and this meant exploring multiple factors at different stages of the participant's life could be undertaken. This meant the research questions could be investigated using the matrix framework by identifying the evidence of barriers or enabling factors in the columns whilst looking at the storyline of her life and the incidents chronologically in rows. The data were tabulated in this way to help identify patterns and themes. These could help draw up the conclusions and this was a really helpful part of the online research methods, through which appropriate discussion points could be identified for the original paper.

4. Reflections on one online research experience during the COVID19 pandemic

4.1 Strengths

In exploring the benefits and drawbacks of online research methodologies for socio-legal academic research exploring the lived experiences of domestic abuse victims, it is important to state that Microsoft Teams appeared to work very well for this highly sensitive research topic area. Neither the participant nor the researcher switched their cameras on for the interviews and this helped it feel relaxed and felt possibly like the participant felt like she was talking to herself when sharing her experiences because it was not face-to-face, and therefore she potentially opened up more as a result of fewer distractions. Johnson and others, (2019) highlighted the risk of missing out on vital visual cues from none face-to-face personal interactions when collecting data, but when considering the richness of the data provided, it did not feel like there were key things missing and key points could still get across. The process felt meaningful and engaging, despite the lack of face-to-face interaction. Mutual feelings of connection, trust, and professional and personal respect appeared to still be made, and the participant provided information-rich responses to any questions that were asked.

The lack of face-to-face interaction appeared to aid the process since perhaps some level of embarrassment or shame, that the participant did not need to feel anyway, did

not seem as intensified as perhaps it might have been in 'real-life'. The conversation and information shared were both richer and deeper than they had been expected to be. An online, camera-free two-hour-long conversation (with no breaks, despite this being offered) helped provide high-quality scholarly interviews and the confidentiality maintained through not having to physically appear at another person's workplace or home environment helped provide a safe space where significant life events that included private memories, cultural experiences, and problematic incidents, could be shared in secrecy. It still felt like an active exchange conversationally, and, despite Johnson and others (2019) research which suggest there can be a loss of intimacy, there did not appear to be any lack of understanding from not being able to observe nonverbal signals and the participant's verbal expressions were more than sufficient.

Secondly, some of the many positives of online-only research methods explored by other researchers were also judged as parallel strengths during this particular research project's process. These were discussed earlier in Granello and Wheaton's (2011) paper. The time saved from travel time felt like a strength of the methodological considerations. For example, due to there being no travel time, it meant the researcher could sit at the computer, with time to spare and refreshments to-hand and therefore in a much calmer mind-frame than that which may have come from travelling, finding a new location, requiring parking, and also the much-needed confidential and quiet space needed for research of such a sensitive topic and nature as this. Naturally, this led also to it being more cost-effective as no money was required for work car insurance, petrol, refreshments and other typical financial necessities.

Thirdly, there was potentially less risk to confidentiality being compromised via using an online-only method for data collection. Had the research been undertaken in person, the participant may have been spotted or questions from friends or colleagues or family members who saw the meet-up and may have asked her unwanted, probing questions. Additionally, had there been the conversation recorded via a voice recorder on the researcher's technological device (either iPad or laptop) and uploaded it onto the OneDrive account. By interviewing her via Microsoft Teams, the recording was automatically uploaded to the researchers OneDrive account and therefore was no physical file of it saved to any device, which there would have been had the data been collected in-person, which means there would be one less version of the recording to

protect. Despite it being a simple two-step approach to upload from a voice-recorder app to OneDrive, this online-only version meant it was one step less and therefore more efficient use of the researcher's time.

4.2 Limitations

After the interview, careful reflections were made upon the fact that no contingency plans of any kind had been made beforehand. One example of the issue that perhaps should have been considered was the risk of technological issues, such as Wi-Fi connection issues, and no university IT colleagues were there for technological support should anything have gone wrong. The work of Greenspan and others (2021) draws on the usefulness of having other research colleagues present when hosting focus groups on an electronic programme, such as Zoom, to help with troubleshooting audio, visual and connection issues or providing participants with an alternative phone number if needed. Reflecting on this point, it may act usefully as a 'safety net', but it is also important to remember that this was a relatively simple, one-to-one interview between two professionals, where both parties were heavily experienced in online meetings and therefore it may have felt a bit unnecessary.

When also considering Greenspan and others (2021) research regarding distractions during the data collection stage, such as noises from outside each participant's room, screen freezes or audio issues such as the participant and researcher talking simultaneously due to time delays, this did not occur in this research. This may be due to both having strong Wi-fi connections due to both parties being in otherwise empty houses or the fact the interview was scheduled for the middle of the day. This may not have been possible at different times during the national lockdowns. One illustration of this would be if the participants had children at home when there were nationwide school closures (as in mid-March to June 2020 and then January to February 2021), where there would have been a significant risk of the children overhearing the participant sharing traumatic events and therefore not fair to proceed. There could have been contingency planning for this situation, such as the children being looked after elsewhere by other adult family members or friends, but may be complex to organise and unfair to ask participants. These are important practical points to consider when undertaking any kind of online research, but perhaps particularly

important when researching sensitive topics where disruptions like noise or children nearby could have catastrophic effects on the process if it impacts the mood of the participant and their ability to reflect or make the process unsafe on others.

5. Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge that this study lacked diversity, as two white middle-class, women who both had quick and easy access to their empty houses and computer devices obtained through professional, well-paid careers in education. It is unlikely that others from less privileged contexts may have had the same seamless experience that we shared and important to note this level of privilege, when it comes to access, in this paper. Furthermore, the sample size of one participant was small and there were no language barriers, accent barriers, or anything regarding language that may have made online verbal interviews a challenging experience. Both these aspects, therefore, undoubtedly helped make the process easier and the benefits may not be as strong if undertaking online interviews with participant sample sizes of more than one or when working with participants with stronger accents or language challenges. It is also important to acknowledge that many of the benefits of online interviews for domestic abuse research listed here may not be as useful, such as the benefit of the confidentiality it provided, if using Microsoft Teams or another online platform for a data collection tool for a group interview or focus group. This is a methodological consideration that could be reflected upon further after more research has been undertaken using online interviews as a chosen method for domestic abuse research.

In light of the lack of research about the usefulness of online interviews as a data collection method for when conducting legal research into domestic violence victims lived experiences, this paper helps make a small contribution to this research gap and shows the usefulness of online methods provided as a data collection tool in one particular socio-legal research project. This helps make a useful contribution towards the existing body of contemporary work exploring online research methods (Brown, 2020; Ganster and others, 2018; Johnson and others, 2019), all of which are useful for legal methodologies in a post-pandemic era. These reflections show that in many ways online research methods for socio-legal scholarship can be argued to be a better

method than the in-person alternative approach, particularly in areas where confidentiality and anonymity are paramount for the care and wellbeing of particularly vulnerable participants and victims of crime.

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