

GENDER DISPARITY REPORT
TV Licensing

December 2017

Gender Disparity

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The Government Review of TV Licence Fee Enforcement conducted by David Perry¹ found that the current system of criminal enforcement should be maintained while the method of licence fee collection remains in its current form. It also found that the current system is broadly fair, proportionate and provides good value for both licence fee payers and taxpayers. The Review made a number of recommendations including that: *“The BBC and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport should explore ways to investigate and consider the gender disparity in TV licence prosecutions.”* It observed a disparity in the proportion of men and women being prosecuted for licence fee evasion offences where 70% of all those prosecuted are women (2012 figures). The review further found, however, that there is *“no evidence to suggest that enforcement activity is unfairly and intentionally targeted at women”* and that *“There is no evidence of any discriminatory enforcement practices on the part of TV Licensing”*.

1.2 This report sets out the findings of the work carried out to meet this recommendation, describes the approach taken to exploring the disparity and identifies the actions to be taken following completion of this work. The BBC is committed to ensuring TV Licensing services meet the obligations of the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty, and minimising the risk that the way we exercise our duties impacts gender disparity.

1.3 In summary, there is strong evidence demonstrating that the majority of the factors contributing to this disparity are driven by circumstances which are outside TV Licensing’s control, such as the underlying difference in the make-up of households (which shows a gender skew towards female-only² households), the greater availability of females in the home at all times of the day to answer the door to a TV Licensing Enquiry Officer (referred to as ‘EO’ throughout the remainder of this document) and the increased likelihood of a female to engage positively with an EO, especially in circumstances where that EO is also female. This conclusion has been reached following analysis which included:

1. Analysis of household composition – including the use of household composition data from the ONS to match against TV Licensing data to understand the impact of the gender of the head of the household on visit outcomes.
2. Analysis of TV Licensing transactional data – examining by reference to gender all relevant existing data held by TV Licensing in relation to visit eligibility, visit selection, and visit outcomes.
3. Primary research – working with a research agency to explore through four strands of research the experience or behaviour of the general population, individuals who have had a Record of Interview³ taken, and EOs themselves.

¹ Published July 2015.

² ‘Female-only’ households refers to households where there is only one adult female in the household and no adult male in the household. This figure does not include same sex households for the reason detailed in the explanation at Figure 2.

³ Where contact is made, and the occupant is found to require a licence, a Record of Interview is taken by the EO on the doorstep. The documentation is submitted to a central team where it is reviewed against evidential and public interest tests for possible prosecution. Section 2.3.7 gives further detail.

2. Background

2.1 Recommendation 3 of the 2015 Perry Review stated:

*The BBC and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport should explore ways to investigate and consider the **gender disparity** in TV licence prosecutions.*

2.2 This recommendation was made as a result of information provided to the Perry Review, which showed that 67% of all TV Licensing Records of Interview taken are from women and 70% of those prosecuted are women, indicating that women are significantly more at risk of prosecution than men.

2.3 By way of background and for framing of the analysis described in this report, the TV Licensing enforcement process is summarised as follows (also illustrated at **Figure 1** below). It is perhaps helpful to note that TV Licence evasion, by its very nature, takes place within the household and therefore can be difficult to detect. The Perry Review notes, "...enquiry officers, with only limited powers of investigation, have to rely to a very great extent on evidence obtained as a result of their household visits" and states that the offence must then be proved "beyond reasonable doubt".

- 2.3.1 Addresses that are unlicensed and have not responded to previous campaigns encouraging them to become licensed (for example letters sent to the address or outbound calls) become 'eligible for a visit'.
- 2.3.2 Addresses which are eligible for a visit then go through checks (to screen out addresses that cannot be visited for a known reason⁴) before they end up in the 'visit pot'. These addresses, known as "suppressions" are a subset of those sites originally eligible for a visit.
- 2.3.3 Visits are then scored in the visit pot (based on likelihood of selling a licence) and allocated to EOs taking into account coverage and availability.
- 2.3.4 EOs are allocated slightly more visits than they are able to complete to ensure they have enough visits before the next round of visit allocations.
- 2.3.5 After receiving the visits allocated to them, the EO will go to the address and attempt to make contact. Where the EO is unable to speak with anyone at the address, a calling card is left and the visit is closed. If no response is received from the calling card, the address will return to the visit pot.
- 2.3.6 Where contact is made, and the occupant is found to be watching licensable content⁵ without a valid TV Licence, a Record of Interview is taken by the EO on the doorstep.
- 2.3.7 Following a Record of Interview being taken, the documentation is submitted to a central team where it is reviewed. Subject to certain evidential checks (and consideration of the case in line with the TV Licensing Prosecution Policy, including the public interest test) if the interviewee is a first time offender, they will usually be dealt with under a process called

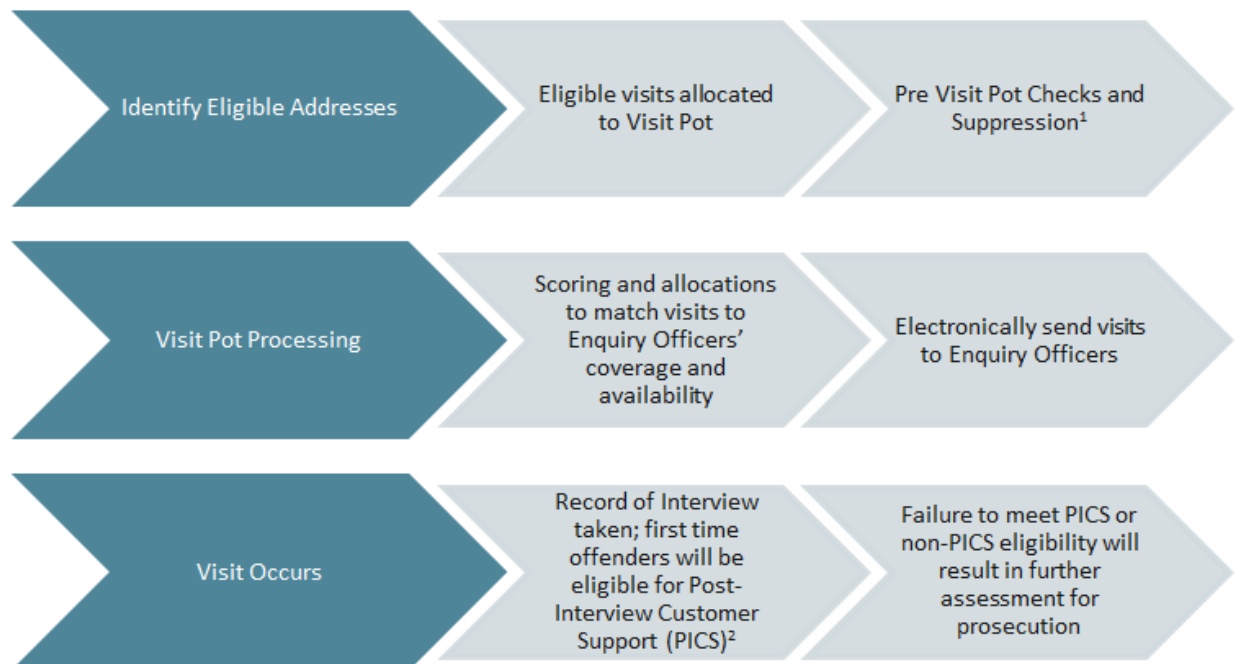
⁴ An example of a reason not to visit would be the occupant being vulnerable.

⁵ Licensable activity means using or installing any device to: a) watch or record any television programme service; b) watch or record any television programme at the same time (or virtually at the same time) as it is being shown on any television programme service; or c) (as of 1st September 2016) watch or download any BBC programme on demand on BBC iPlayer, even if it is accessed through another provider, such as Sky, Virgin Media, Freeview or BT.

Post Interview Customer Support (known as 'PICS'). This allows the individual who was interviewed to avoid prosecution if they buy a licence and make the necessary payments within defined timeframes. This process is outlined in TV Licensing's Prosecution Policy and code and is available on the TV Licensing website.

- 2.3.8 If they are a repeat offender, or they fail to buy a licence or maintain payments their case may proceed to court.
- 2.3.9. Almost two thirds (64%) of the cases withdrawn from prosecution by TV Licensing on public interest grounds were female cases (2016/17 figures).
- 2.3.10 99% of TV Licensing cases reviewed by a magistrate - with the exception of cases withdrawn by TV Licensing - result in a conviction.

FIGURE 1 – TV Licensing enforcement process



¹ "Suppressions" are where addresses are guarded from a visit for various reasons e.g. An example of a reason not to visit would be the occupant being vulnerable.

² The majority of first time offenders will have their case withdrawn if they buy a Licence or maintain payments on an instalment scheme before their case comes to Court.

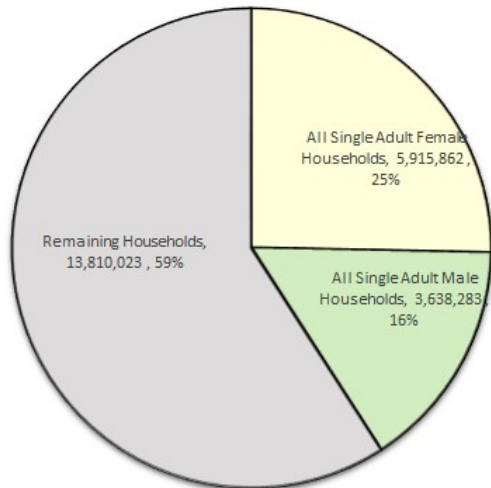
3. Analysis of household composition

3.1 A key starting point for our analysis was the fact that when examining 2011 census data, it can be seen that 25% of households contain either one single adult female, or a single female adult parent, versus 16% of households which contain either a single adult male, or single male adult parent. There are therefore 9% more single female households (including lone parent households) than the male equivalent. This is shown in the pie chart at **Figure 2** below. This means that all other things being equal, we would expect to take statements from 10% more females than males.

3.2 There were 5.91m female-led households (made up of single female and lone female parent households) and of these the lone parent households are disproportionately female. The graph at **Figure 3** below, shows the household composition of households in England and Wales.

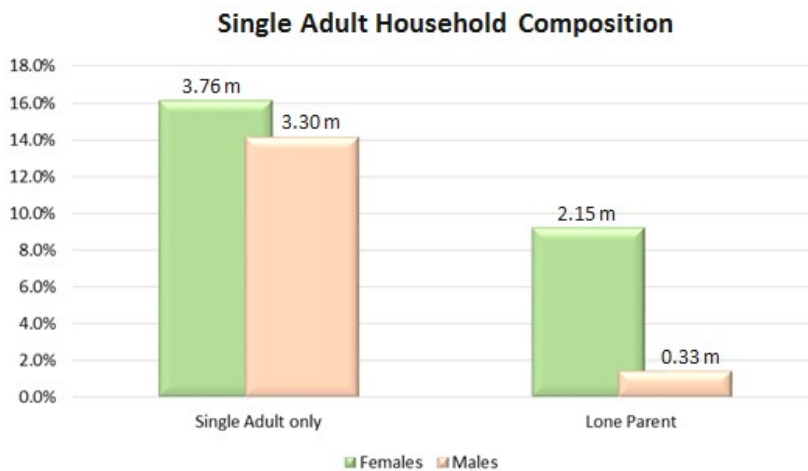
FIGURE 2

Household Composition England & Wales - 2011 Census Data



Remaining households means every other household that is neither a single female adult, a female lone parent, a single male adult nor a male lone parent. The majority of the remaining households are couples (with or without children). Remaining households would also include same sex couples (although this number will be relatively small) as well as all-female and all-male multi-occupancy households. However these types of households do not exist as ONS variables therefore cannot be split out from remaining households.

FIGURE 3



4. Analysis of TV Licensing transactional data

4.1 To address some basic questions around where we see the gender disparity appearing within visiting activity, historic visit campaign data was examined. This Historic Visit Data Analysis showed:

- The gender disparity in both Records of Interview taken and in convictions has remained at a consistent level over the last 5 years. See **Figure 4** below.

- Gender disparity at the point of conviction⁶ is more apparent in the younger age bands. See **Figure 5** below.
- During prime time periods, particularly weekends, there is a notable increase in the percentage of men having a Record of Interview taken, but it is still significantly less than the percentage of Records of Interview taken from a female (Monday to Friday until 5pm 69% of statements are taken from females versus 31% from males, while at weekends 65% are taken from females versus 35% from males). The specific differences by visiting time are shown in **Figure 6** below.

FIGURE 4 - Gender split in Records of Interview taken

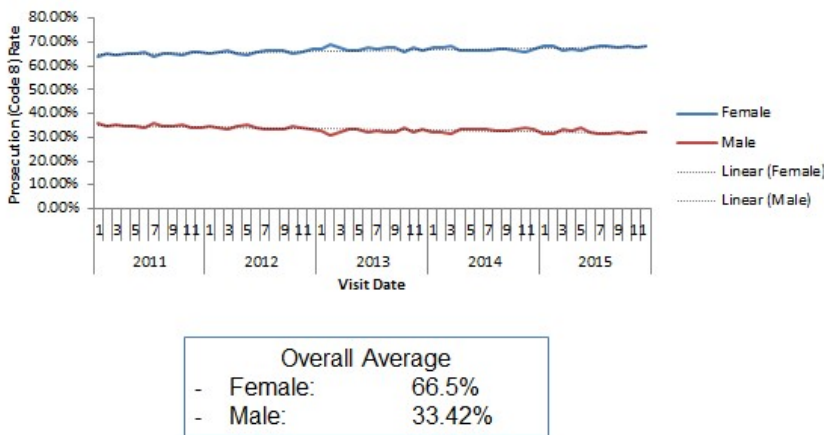


FIGURE 5 – Gender split by age

Gender disparity at the point of Conviction is more apparent in the younger age bands

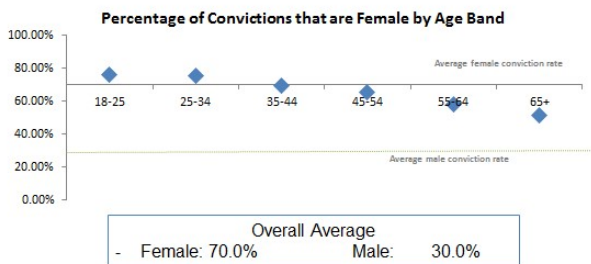
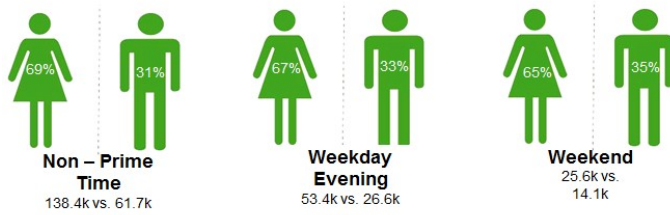


FIGURE 6 - Gender split by time of visit

⁶ We do not collate date of birth at point of a Record of Interview being taken.

Prime time visits see a rise in the proportion of Statements taken from Males

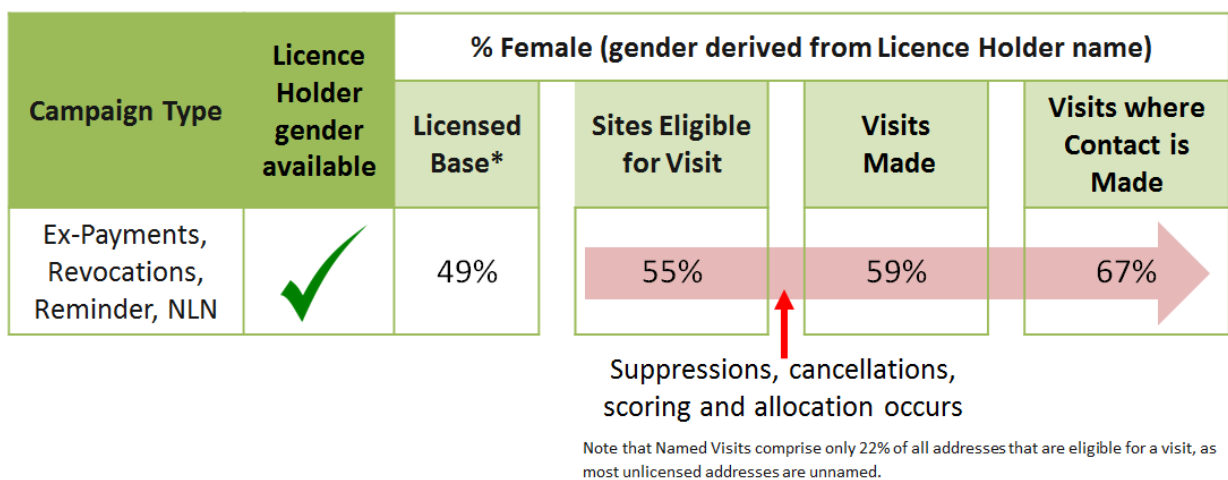
For this analysis Prime Time has been defined as weekend visits and weekday visits after 5pm



4.2 The core question for the analysis to answer was “Where in the contact and field strategy process do we see a gender disparity appearing, what is the disparity at each stage, and can we see any trend appearing?” To answer this question, we completed a ‘Named Visits Analysis’.

- TV Licensing holds gender information for around 22% of visits, referred to as ‘named visits’. These are visits where the address has previously been licensed and the visit is aiming to make contact with the previous named licence holder. For such visits gender can in most cases be deduced from the title of the licence holder⁷. The analysis described below focused on the data held for this subset of visits.
- There is no evidence of gender disparity on the licence base as a whole, with 49% of licence holders being female. However, analysis of the data on named visits (‘Named Visits Analysis’) made it possible to track the gender disparity through the enforcement process. This showed there is a slight female bias of 55% where the site is eligible for visit selection due to non-payment of their licence. Further, analysis showed that when contact is made on the doorstep the gender disparity increases to 67%. This is shown visually in **Figure 7** below.

FIGURE 7 - Gender disparity for Named Visits



⁷ Except where gender cannot be inferred from the title, e.g. Dr or Reverend.

- Analysis by payment scheme shows a significant gender disparity; 60% of customers on a TV Licensing cash scheme are female. This is relevant as cash customers are those customers most likely to fail to keep up their payments and become unlicensed as a result.
- However the Named Visits Analysis, whilst useful in providing a picture of where the gender disparity appears for 22% of sites eligible for a visit, did not provide insight for the remaining 78% of visits which relate to addresses where we have no gender information for the household. This is because TV Licensing does not hold named data (from which we can infer gender) for unlicensed properties, which make up the largest proportion of visit campaigns.
- To determine whether there is a difference between 'named' visits and unlicensed visits we carried out an analysis of Records of Interview taken. The findings were broadly consistent with the Named Visits Analysis in that 63% of Records of Interview completed for unnamed visits were with women. It should be noted that this does not reflect all visits made by TV Licensing to unnamed households but just those where a Record of Interview was taken.

4.3 To further explore this, postcode sector level data from the 2011 Census (for around 95% of postcodes) was matched by the ONS to TV Licensing data on Records of Interview data from 2015. The key finding of this matching exercise was that while there is an overall gender bias towards females in household composition in the majority of postal sectors, some postal sectors (11%) do not show gender bias. In these postal sectors, 48% show a bias of Records of Interview taken from females, 50% show no gender bias but only 2% of Postal Codes show a bias towards males. This suggests that the composition of single adult households is not the only cause of gender disparity in Records of Interview taken, because a female gender disparity can be seen in postal sectors that have no bias towards single female adult households

4.4 The analysis also identified that repeat offenders are more likely to be female (26% of females who had a Record of Interview taken in 2015 are considered a 'repeat offender' versus 15% of males). The opportunity to buy a licence and avoid prosecution (PICS⁸) is not offered to repeat offenders, which could lead to an increase in the volume of women being convicted over time.

4.5 Finally, we explored what impact, if any, the gender of the EO had on the outcome of the visit. The analysis showed that female officers appear to be more likely to complete a Record of Interview from a female evader than male officers, though there were only ~60 female officers in 2015 out of the total ~500 officers with available information.

5 Primary Research

5.1 As part of our work we conducted research, with three groups of individuals; the general public, individuals who have had a Record of Interview taken and TV Licensing EOs who are employed to carry out visits. A specialist research agency (Harris Interactive) was engaged which has previously

⁸ PICS means Post Interview Customer Support

conducted research on behalf of TV Licensing. The four strands of research were structured to test various hypotheses:

- Strand 1 – Desk research review of existing TV Licensing research data.
- Strand 2 – National online quantitative survey on ‘doorstep culture and behaviours’ and home administration management.
- Strand 3 – Telephone depth interviews with EOs and a self-completion form filled out by officers themselves⁹ for all visits carried out over a set period.
- Strand 4 – Telephone interviews with people who had a Record of Interview taken by TV Licensing.

5.2 The results of the research provided strong supporting evidence for the following three hypotheses:

- Females are more likely to be available when the doorbell rings, despite the efforts made by EOs to call in prime-time, weekends etc. On average, females are at home more than males for every time period across weekdays and weekends.
- Females are more likely than males to answer the door. In addition, females are more likely to engage with a caller and less likely to be dismissive than males.
- National household composition; specifically a large proportion of single parent households drives an inherent skew in bias towards females (because these households are hugely disproportionately female).

6. Overall conclusions

6.1 The analysis and research carried out identified that there a number of different factors which contribute to the gender disparity. However, it was not possible to determine the relative impact that each factor has.

6.2 Household composition is certainly a significant contributing factor as there is an underlying gender disparity in households which means that if all other factors were equal TV Licensing would make contact with more women than men, purely by virtue of the fact there are more households with only one adult female (female-only households) than households with only one adult male. However, our analysis showed that it is certainly not the sole cause and that the factors mentioned in 5.2 above were significant.

Actions

6.3 Our findings confirm that the gender disparity is driven by factors outside of the control of TV Licensing (in particular, the higher number of female-only households, the increased availability of women to answer the door whenever we visit, and the increased likelihood of women to open the door and engage positively). However, as previously stated, the BBC is committed to ensuring TV Licensing

⁹ 50 EOs were selected at random by Capita for the telephone interviews and 26 different EOs were selected at random by Capita for the self-completion questionnaires.

services meet the obligations of the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty, and minimising the risk that the way in which we exercise our duties negatively impacts gender disparity. The BBC's Revenue Management team has identified and will pursue a number of actions (listed below) which will further safeguard the transparency and understanding of the TV Licensing Prosecution Policy, as well as enhance our monitoring of the gender disparity and the tools used to ensure the public interest test is consistently applied:

- We will update the TV Licensing Prosecution Policy to make more explicit the factors which are taken into account when applying the public interest test in consideration of a prosecution. These factors provide safeguarding for those who are most vulnerable as the result of their circumstances. While this update will not change the factors themselves which are already in use, it will help provide further support to processes and work instructions already in place to ensure that public interest tests are applied consistently. As mentioned in 2.3.9, our analysis shows that almost two thirds (64%) of the cases withdrawn from prosecution by TV Licensing on public interest grounds were female cases (2016/17 figures).
- Currently, where an individual is resident in a women's refuge, TV Licensing will, of course, not proceed with a prosecution if a licence is not held, if we are aware that the address is a refuge¹⁰. However, we wished to further support this group by changing our approach so that refuges which already have a television licence for communal areas no longer require licences for individual rooms. This change has now been completed and communicated to relevant stakeholders.
- We will extend our stakeholder engagement programme by developing relationships with organisations specifically representing women. This will provide further support to women in understanding when a licence is needed, the different ways to pay that are available and what to do should there be a risk of prosecution following completion of a Record of Interview by TV Licensing.
- We will put in place comprehensive management information to support ongoing monitoring and assessment of the gender disparity.
- In addition, we'll be launching a Simple Payment Plan trial in April 2018 (subject to the necessary Regulations being in place) where eligible customers will be able to pay for a TV Licence in 12 equal monthly payments – or 26 fortnightly ones. This will be available to those most in need. The initiative follows David Perry's recommendation, in the Government's independent view of licence fee collection, that the DCMS and the BBC should explore ways of amending the current Regulations to offer simple and flexible plans for those facing difficulty in paying the licence fee. As a greater proportion of women are prosecuted for TV Licence evasion, so a greater proportion of women will be assisted by the Simple Payment Plan trial.
- We're also trialling a helpline especially for organisations such as debt charities and Citizens Advice bureaux which allows staff to speak directly to a TV Licensing specialist adviser who can discuss individual customer circumstances and assist the organisation's clients in becoming licensed.

¹⁰ Clearly this would not always be apparent from an address or a visit due to the security requirements of the occupants.