The independent strategic review of funding and commissioning of violence against women and girl's services

'What is the single most important thing that can be done to reduce/mitigate the impact of VAWG?' And 'Is there anything else you would like to tell us?'

To end violence against women and girls we must tackle the root cause: gender inequality. It is important to resource the primary prevention of VAWG, ending this violence before it starts, to meet Equally Safe's commitment to "prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls" (Scottish Government 2018: 7, 11, 54). We also have a legal obligation as part of the Istanbul Convention that hinges on the four Ps of prevention, protection, prosecution, and co-ordinated policies. Alongside prevention work, the provision of essential, crisis responses to violence against women and girls (VAWG) such as refuges, helplines, and other crisis work is vital and must be sufficiently funded and supported.

VAWG is both a symptom and a cause of gender inequality, it is a violation of human rights and extremely costly to society and deeply harms a substantial proportion of women. The number of sexual crimes reported to the police in Scotland is now at a 50 year high, the number of sexual crimes in 2021-22 rose 15% from 2020-21 (Scottish Government 2022). We also know that the majority of sexual crimes are not reported to the police, for example, The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) 2019 - 2020 showed that only 22% of victims/survivors of rape and 12% of women who were victim-survivors of other type of sexual offence reported it to the police (SCJS 2020: 188, Binder 1981, Lyons 2021).

As the Equally Safe strategy states "we need to eliminate the systemic gender inequality that lies at the root of violence against women and girls, and we need to be bold in how we do that through prioritising a relentless focus on prevention" (Scottish Government 2018: 7). However, it is not enough to pursue gender equality for women and girls and raising awareness without tackling and challenging the underlying social attitudes, practices and structures that excuse, justify, or perpetuate VAWG and create a more fair, safe, and inclusive society (Scottish Government 2018: 10, Powell and Henry 2014: 14). At the core of primary

prevention work is changing the social, cultural, political, and economic context that reinforces violence against women.

This is necessary as research shows there are strong links between dominant forms of masculinity that revere aggression, control, dominance, men's sexist attitudes and behaviours that lead to the perpetration of violence against women (Flood and Pease 2020, Fleming *et al.* 2015, Levtov et al. 2014, Heise 2011). Men who rigidly adhere to dominant norms and ideas about masculinity are more likely than other men to:

- commit violence against women, including sexual violence,
- demonstrate attitudes that are supportive of sexism and violence,
- perpetrate violence when their masculinity is questioned, challenged, or when they do not live up to the norms of masculinity they believe in,
- decide to use violence as a means of gaining and keeping control in their intimate relationships. (Our Watch 2021: 33)

As a result, prevention work has highlighted the critical importance of tackling socially constructed norms about gender and masculinity that reinforce and maintain gender inequality (Namy et al. 2017, Michau et al., 2014, Heise 2011). This social and structural transformation that is necessary requires a systematic and coordinated approach, that is resourced, and engages actors at multiple levels across different settings from all levels of government to non-government organisations, the private sector, the third sector, and communities.

Of course, the Equally Safe national strategy sets out what needs to be achieved about prevention, and the latest delivery plan gives a commitment to funding over the next three years. As this consultation is about funding it is important to highlight there is a consensus in the literature that effective prevention work requires a commitment to funding over a sustained period as short-term programmes have been widely evaluated and judged as ineffective in sustaining prolonged change (Kerr-Wilson *et al.* 2020, Jewkes *et al.* 2020, Jewkes *et al.* 2021). This requires long-term funding that is provided in extended cycles longer than one to three years.

While there is a consensus on funding there is less agreement in the literature on the most effective approach to prevention. Existing research highlights the difficulties of developing a rigorous evidence-base to guide practice which is worsened by "poor or limited evaluation techniques" (e.g., participant feedback forms) (Powell and Henry 2014: 12, Evans *et al.* 2009: 13). There are several issues that contribute to this such as duplicating existing or similar prevention approaches that have a short-term effect or mixed results (e.g., bystander programmes which are ineffective for marginalised people), as well as limited funds to embed and conduct long-term evaluation (Crooks *et al*. 2019). Effective approaches to prevention are also inclusive of underrepresented and marginalised groups making prevention successful for all women and helping to build their capacity to be more involved in policy work.

For example, Australia's national approach to end violence against women and girls involves population level surveys for monitoring social attitude change and prevention is a key part of their national research agenda. Australia has also invested significant funding for the infrastructure necessary to enable the "effective design, implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of prevention programs and activities often minimises or dilutes their impact." (Our Watch 2021: 109).

Effective long-term funding is needed to support the development and maintenance of prevention infrastructure that will allow us to design, monitor and evaluate the most effective methods to prevent violence against women in Scotland.

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