



# Briefing: Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls

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# Violence against Women in Scotland

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is an intolerable injustice in Scotland, preventing our society from being as safe, healthy and successful as it could be.

VAWG remains:

- Prevalent within Scotland - reported sexual crimes have increased by 65% since 2007-08 and 5% in 2016-17, to 10,822 sexual offences in total in 2016-17.<sup>1</sup> There were 58,810 domestic abuse incidents reported to the police in 2016-17 – an increase of 1% from the previous year. In 2016-17, women made up the majority (79%) of the victims in incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police, where the gender of the victim is known.<sup>2</sup>
- Extremely harmful to women and children – VAWG can cause severe and long-lasting physical and mental health problems, lowered self-esteem, reduced participation in the workforce, substance abuse and death.
- Rooted in women's inequality - VAWG is caused by the unequal power relations between genders, patriarchal norms and toxic masculinity that damage all genders. This manifests as unequal economic, social and political power, objectification of women and unequal distribution of caring responsibilities.
- On a continuum – the phrase 'VAWG' reflects complex and interlinked experiences of harassment, violation, abuse and assault in the lives of women and girls.<sup>3</sup>
- Preventable - if social attitudes, values and structures are changed.

## What is Primary Prevention?

VAWG is caused by gender inequality. Primary prevention tackles this root cause of VAWG in order to eradicate it and can be described as a long term strategy preventing violence from ever happening by challenging attitudes, values and the structures that sustain inequality and violence.<sup>4</sup> In this way, it differs from secondary prevention, which intervenes once violence has already happened to prevent it from continuing, and tertiary prevention, which works to prevent and minimise the long-term, harmful impacts of violence. The line between these different forms of prevention may not always be clear, and many prevention programmes may cover more than one.

Primary prevention should take place on many different levels, working not only with individuals and small groups, but also with whole communities and governments, laws and policies.

## Five Actions

Five essential actions that address the drivers of VAWG have been outlined by the charity Our Watch<sup>5</sup> and are based on promoting and normalising gender equality in both public and personal relationships. They are to:

- challenge condoning of violence against women
- promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships
- foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles
- strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys
- promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.

It is important that people of all genders, including boys and men, must be involved in primary prevention. The overwhelming majority of VAWG is perpetrated by men and boys, so if this is to stop they must be challenged and supported to change their attitudes and behaviour. While the responsibility for ending VAWG ultimately lies with the men and boys who perpetrate it, every one of us lives in an unequal society that treats men and women differently and so we must all examine how we might contribute to continuing this inequality (however unintentionally).

## Why Primary Prevention?

All women and children have a right to a life without violence. There are parallels between primary prevention of VAWG and primary prevention of illnesses. We would not seek to prevent a medical epidemic by simply treating the symptoms. We instead take preventative measures to protect the whole population such as ensuring proper sanitation, healthy housing, vaccination programmes etc. Likewise, with VAWG, we must seek to change our culture and society to prevent it. We must always be ready to respond to VAWG when it happens, but we should also be working to make sure that it does not happen in the first place.

Primary prevention can also represent a major cost saving for public services. The Scottish Government has estimated the costs of domestic abuse to the Scottish public purse as £2.3 billion, while VAWG costs Scotland £4 billion<sup>6</sup>. These costs are born across an array of public budgets including justice, health, policy and charity sector funding. Preventing violence from happening in the first place is a much more efficient use of resources than dealing with the many serious, long-term consequences of violence. Eradicating VAWG requires a consistent, long-term approach and it is vital that primary prevention continues to work alongside services to support those who have suffered violence.

## What does Zero Tolerance Do?

Zero Tolerance is a national campaigning organisation working to prevent all forms of VAWG. We do this through raising public and political awareness of the causes of VAWG and promoting action on prevention. Our policy and campaign work focus on mainstreaming gender equality, specifically with children and young people and in the media. We also work directly with key sectors, organisations and individuals to develop their skills, capacity, and understanding regarding the prevention of VAWG.

## What can you do?

Building a Scotland where VAWG is no longer tolerated and where equal and respectful relationships become the new norm will involve us all working together to tackle women's inequality in our communities, schools, workplaces and government. This should be informed by and support women from marginalised groups and with diverse identities.

- **Individual:** We can all promote gender equality in our professional and personal relationships. We can be leaders in our workplace, communities and social circles by advocating for change and challenging gender stereotyping and inequality.
- **Organisational:** Greater resource and effort is also required from organisations and employers to ensure they are tackling gender inequality. Actions should include tackling occupational segregation and the pay gap; providing career development opportunities for women; and offering and promoting parental leave policies to both women and men. Our resource, Zero Tolerance at Work contains more information on how workplaces can champion gender equality and prevent VAWG.<sup>7</sup>
- **National:** Scottish leaders can speak publicly about the continuum of VAWG and drive greater public understanding of the links between all forms of VAWG and their cause - women's social, economic and political inequality. To prevent VAWG, Scotland needs to tackle the gender stereotyping and inequality which occurs from an early age and continues throughout our lives. This should be a priority within early years care and education. To achieve equality and safety for all women, it is vital that we address all forms of social, political and cultural discrimination, inequality and disadvantage.

1. Recorded Crime in Scotland: <https://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00525055.pdf>

2. Recorded Domestic Abuse: <https://beta.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics-publication/2017/10/domestic-abuse-recorded-police-scotland-2016-17/documents/00526358-pdf/00526358-pdf/govscot:document/>

3. Kelly, Liz (1988) Surviving Sexual Violence

4. Hester and Westermant, 2005, p15 cited in Ellis Jane Literature Review: Better outcomes for children and young People Experiencing Domestic Abuse – Directions for good Practice

5. Our Watch, Putting Prevention into Practice: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/a8d9dc3d-2291-48a6-82f8-68f1a955ce24/Putting-prevention-into-practice-AA-web.pdf.aspx>

6. Scottish Government, Safe Lives: <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2009/06/02153519/5>

7. Zero Tolerance, At Work: <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/work-workplace/>