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 and costs Scotland £4 billion.¹

VAWG remains:

**Prevalent within Scotland:** in 2017-18 there were 59,541 domestic abuse incidents reported to Police Scotland, women made up 82% of the victims. In the same year there were 12,487 sexual crimes, including rape and attempted rape, reported to Police Scotland, this represents a 97% increase over the last 10 years.²

**Caused by women’s inequality:** VAWG is caused by the unequal power relations, 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.

**Exacerbated by other forms of inequality:** disabled women are twice as likely to experience men’s violence as non-disabled women.³ 83% of trans women have experienced hate crime at some point in their lives.⁴ Black and minority ethnic (BME) and migrant women face higher levels of domestic homicide and abuse driven suicide.⁵

**On a continuum:** VAWG exists in a complex and interlinked range of experiences from harassment and abuse to violation and assault.⁶

**Preventable:** in challenging gender inequality by changing social attitudes, values and structures we can end VAWG.

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What is Primary Prevention?

VAWG is caused by gender inequality. Primary prevention tackles this root cause of VAWG in order to eradicate it. It is a long-term strategy preventing violence from ever happening by challenging attitudes, values and structures that sustain inequality and violence.7

Primary prevention should work on many levels: with individuals, small groups, schools, workplaces, whole communities, governments, laws and policies. Our Watch outline five essential actions to address the cause of VAWG by promoting and normalising gender equality in both public and personal relationships.8

They are to:

- challenge the 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.

Effective primary prevention needs to consider that violence against women with learning disabilities, women who sell sex, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LBT), and black and minority ethnic women is informed and exacerbated by other forms of oppression, which leaves these women more vulnerable to violence. It should recognise that gender inequality cannot be separated from other forms of inequality 9 and should work through partnerships and coalitions to build coordinated challenges to gender inequality, racism, ableism, ageism, classism, homophobia and transphobia.

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VAWG is extremely harmful to women and children. It can cause severe and long-lasting physical and mental health problems, reduced participation in the workforce, substance abuse and death.

We must be ready to respond to VAWG when it happens, but we should also be working to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Similarly to how we seek to prevent a medical epidemic through preventative measures such as vaccination programmes and sanitation plans, violence against women can be prevented by changing the attitudes and culture that permits violence to occur.

Primary prevention is a more efficient use of resources than dealing with the many serious, long-term consequences of violence which costs the Scottish public purse £4 billion.10

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.

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What Can You Do?

All of us can take action to build a Scotland where VAWG is no longer tolerated. To do this we need new social norms including equal and respectful relationships, elimination of all forms of oppression and discrimination, and collective action to tackle women’s inequality.

**Individual:**
Promote gender equality in our professional and personal relationships, workplaces and communities by advocating for change and challenging gender stereotyping and inequality. People of all genders, including boys and men, should be involved in primary prevention. See our resources, Talking Gender, for more information.

**Organisational:**
Organisations and Employers: Tackle occupational segregation and the pay gap. Provide career development opportunities for women. Offer and promote parental leave policies to both women and men. See our resource, Zero Tolerance at Work, for more information.

**National:**
Speak publicly about the continuum of VAWG and how to prevent it by driving greater public understanding of the links between gender inequality and VAWG. Work to make tackling gender stereotyping and inequality a priority within early years care and education. Commit to the long and continuous work to tackle all forms of social, political and cultural discrimination, inequality and disadvantage. Get in touch with Zero Tolerance for more information.

For further information please

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Zero Tolerance is a Scottish charity: SC023484