ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFING NOTE

Tackling violence against women and girls: what about the men?

COSLA

National Violence Against Women Network

Elected Members Briefing Series

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About this briefing note

This briefing is one in a series raising awareness of the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls (VAWG) — otherwise known, and referred to, as gender-based violence — and highlighting some of the good practice around Scotland in tackling this issue.

Specifically, this briefing aims to:

- highlight the inequality of outcomes that both men and women may experience as a result of their gender

- raise awareness of what good practice looks like in terms of ensuring support services are available for both male victims of domestic abuse and perpetrators of abuse, and the role that professionals can play in ensuring people who want support are able to access it

- explore the key role that men can play in preventing and challenging VAW and identify key actions that professionals can undertake to help drive forward improved outcomes for both men and women within local communities.

The terms 'gender' and 'gender-based violence' are used throughout this briefing to align with *Equally Safe*, the Scottish Government and COSLA's joint strategy for preventing and eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls in Scotland. *Equally Safe* recognises that "violent and abusive behaviour (is) carried out predominantly by men directed at women and girls precisely because of their gender" and that "such violence cannot be understood… in isolation from the norms, social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women's vulnerability to violence."

A glossary of the key terms used in this briefing has been included as an appendix.

What is gender and why does it matter?

Gender describes those characteristics of women and men that are largely socially created, while sex encompasses those that are biologically determined. Gender refers to the attitudes and behaviour that society expects of men and women. These expectations are often subtle, seen as 'normal' and accepted as the 'way things are'. Gender stereotypes and gender inequality shape people's behaviours and experiences in society, with men and women being exposed to, and harmed by, harmful attitudes in different ways. While men might benefit from some aspects of gender norms they are also harmed by these norms. Gender stereotypes place expectations on men to meet unhealthy and impossible standards of masculinity, and these expectations are shown to be linked to men's experiences of mental health problems, and in particular men's disproportionate experiences of suicide, drug-related deaths and violence from other men. Despite the progress made around our expanding understanding of gender, stereotypes still exist around traditional gender roles and continue to impact and shape how we function in society. Gender-based approaches are important to establish an understanding of how men and women experience the world and what gendered expectations are placed on them. This approach is also important in the LGBTQ+ context as people express their gender in ways that differ from the normalised and dominant behaviours within society.

The absence of a gendered approach when designing systems and services within local communities can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of these services and their ability to adequately meet the needs of vulnerable people and communities. For example, some services may be more accessible to men than they are to women and vice versa. While this may be intentional – such as in the case of women-only safe spaces – it may also be a product of service being set-up in a way that was assumed to be 'gender neutral' but in practice is more geared towards one gender or group because it does not adequately consider the different needs of their service users. For example, two thirds of people accessing problem alcohol and drug use services in Scotland are male. While this may suggest that more men have problem alcohol and drug use issues than women, it may also be because the services are set up in a way that creates barriers to women accessing these services. Only through adopting a gendered analysis and consulting with both men and women to identify their specific support needs can we ensure the systems and services in place are fit for purpose.

Adopting a gendered analysis to violence and abuse

A gendered analysis can also help to explain the prevalence of gender-based violence and abuse in society, by recognising that the socially attributed norms, roles and expectations of masculinity and femininity affect intimate relationships and family

structures. By referring to violence as "gender-based", this definition highlights the need to understand violence within the context of women's and girl's vulnerability to violence in society. This definition of gender-based violence is based on the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993).

Gender-based violence includes domestic abuse, rape, sexual assault, commercial sexual exploitation (including prostitution), and so called 'honour based' violence like female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. Adopting a gendered analysis of violence and abuse does not deny the fact that men can also be victims of domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence, it merely recognises that men are like to experience and use violence differently as a result of their gender. For example research repeatedly shows that compared to women, men are more likely to:

- repeatedly perpetrate violence and abuse (in line with the long-term dynamic of intimate terrorism)

- use tactics of fear and control (consistent with domestic abuse)

- inflict serious injury

- call the police, and not drop charges

- categorise behaviour towards themselves as 'abuse'.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and other forms of violence committed mainly by men. In Scotland, at least four out of five incidents of domestic abuse recorded by police have a female victim and a male accused. Women's experiences of abuse usually indicate a pattern which typically includes tactics of control, humiliation and degradation and the abdication of responsibility of the man and the blame of the woman. Abuse also occurs in same sex relationships and can be experienced by transgender and non-binary people. Victims may fear being 'outed' by perpetrators or encountering transphobic or homophobic attitudes from support and statutory agencies.

These examples of heightened vulnerability demonstrate how gender inequality impacts women's experiences and risk of harm from violence and abuse. One of the main aims of a gendered analysis is to address gender inequality as a root cause of the prevalence of gender-based violence. Research shows there is a causal story between gender inequality and violence and abuse, with societies with fewer economic, social or political differences between men and women experiencing lower rates of gender-based violence. Alongside gender, factors which can also heighten vulnerability in relation to abuse include age, race, financial dependency, poverty, disability, homelessness and insecure immigration status.

However, while men may be at lower risk of experiencing gender-based violence than women, it is important to recognise that there will also be men within local communities across Scotland who are – or have - experienced domestic abuse and/or other forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse as an adult or a child. Gender stereotypes around 'masculinity' may prevent these men from recognising that they have experienced such abuse as well as stopping them from seeking support to

address the harm that this abuse has caused. Research suggests that many men who experience abuse will not report it or talk to anyone about it, and this can be linked to a belief in self-sufficiency and independence due to societal pressures around how 'real men' should behave. For example, men may fear experiencing stigma and ridicule for friends, family and professionals is they disclose their experiences of abuse with it being far less common to see men talk about abuse publicly, or share their experiences and encourage others to speak out. Men who experience abuse may not know how to access specialist support services and/ or may not know which services are open to them. A gendered approach is therefore required in ensuring systems understand the differing needs of men as victims, as men may experience abuse in different ways to women, and report different long-term impacts.

Gay, bisexual and trans men and boys in particular may require tailored support services. Research suggests that gay and bi-sexual men are significantly more likely than lesbian women to experience sexual violence and coercive control within their relationships and it is therefore key, that their specific needs are considered when designing systems and services for victims of domestic abuse.

Challenging the behaviour of male perpetrators

A gendered analysis of violence and abuse also helps recognise why men are more likely to perpetrate domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence against both women, children and other men. Gender stereotypes around masculinity may make some men believe they are entitled to use violence and abuse in order to feel powerful and in control. These men may be highly skilled at masking their abusive behaviours and present themselves entirely differently in public or social settings than they do in private. This may include portraying themselves as the victim – rather than the perpetrator - of such abuse. Men experiencing stress, financial difficulties and frustration with their lives may be more likely to perpetrate abuse. While there is never any excuse for perpetrating any forms of gender-based violence, it is important that systems and services are in place that recognise the relationship between gender and the perpetration of abuse and can ensure perpetrators are held to account for and supported to change these harmful behaviours. To support this to happen, Scotland's *Equally Safe* strategy is committed to increasing perpetrator accountability for their actions and challenge the behaviours and attitudes which have normalised the prevalence of this abuse. The development of this approach includes primary prevention work, such as education around healthy relationships and gender norms, and early intervention work with perpetrators to challenge behaviours and attitudes.

Engaging men as allies

It is important to stress that the vast majority of men are not perpetrators of abuse and instead have a key role to play in preventing and challenging domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence. Gender-based violence against women also occurs with such great prevalence, that most men will know someone who has been affected by violence and abuse. Acknowledging the link between gender inequality and gender-based violence can help to engage men to be active allies in challenging

the attitudes which contribute to the prevalence of gender-based violence. Men can also participate in changing attitudes by highlighting vulnerabilities that men may experience – such as racial inequality and homophobia – and encouraging a cultural shift in talking about mental health and the impact of gender expectations on men and boys. It is recommended that efforts to engage men as allies begins with preventative, awareness-raising work on gender inequality.

What does 'good practice' look like in this area?

Ensuring data is collected and analysed by gender

To help ensure systems and services are in place that respond to the different needs of men and women, it is important that robust and meaningful data collection processes are in place to support this shift. As discussed above, we know that men and women are likely to have different needs and experiences as a result of their genders and face different barriers to accessing specialist support, so it is key that data is collected and analysed by sex and gender wherever possible to ensure these differences are considered when designing systems and services. Wherever possible, data should also be collected on, and analysed by, age, race, disability, sexuality and socioeconomic status to support a better understanding of where there may be areas of unmet need. It is also crucial that this approach to data collection is taken in the recovery and renewal period of the COVID-19 pandemic, so that those who have been more at risk during this time can be identified and services are supported to meet potential increases in demand.

Highlighting the support available to both men and women in your local authority area

In order to ensure both men and women are able to access appropriate support for their needs at the earliest possible opportunity, it is important that professionals working within councils and other key organisations promote information about the range of support available locally and nationally for people affected by domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence. If services are targeted at a particular gender then it is important that this is highlighted in any communications, alongside any other criteria for engagement such as age, race, sexuality or geography. Where services are open to everyone, it is important that they are promoted in an open and inclusive way to help encourage as many people as possible to access them.

Encouraging investment in high quality, evidence-based systems and services, that respond to people's needs

It is important to engage with people with lived experience of gender-based violence and ensure that the systems and services put in place locally recognise and respond to their specific needs. Evidence suggests that best practice also involves ensuring that risk assessment processes are in place to identify perpetrators and safeguard service users. Decision makers can champion evidence-based service design and encourage investment in this at local and national level. This should also involve highlighting existing

good practice, such as accredited perpetrators interventions which help identify and ensure positive changes in behaviours are taking place.

In Scotland, The Caledonian System combines a court-ordered programme for perpetrators, aimed at changing their behaviour, alongside support services for survivors. Frameworks such as the Safe & Together model support professionals to effectively identify and record the full impact of perpetrators actions on their partner and children. A number of local authority areas are also exploring the development of high-quality, voluntary early intervention and behaviour change programmes for perpetrators and potential perpetrators to challenge and support people to take account for and work to change their abusive behaviours at the earliest possible stage. As Scotland looks towards COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation, it is vital that high quality services are in place to respond to the increased risk of gender-based violence during the pandemic and subsequent restrictive measures.

Supporting a shift towards early intervention and prevention

It is vital that policy-makers, practitioners and commissioners working across all areas of local government have a robust understanding of the links between gender inequality and gender-based violence and the role that they can play in effectively identifying, responding to and preventing it. Scotland's approach, outlined in the *Equally Safe* strategy, focuses on changing behaviour and challenging the structural, cultural and societal contexts in which violence occurs. Early intervention compliments a preventative approach. This may include:

- providing education on consent, healthy relationships and recognising abuse in order to empower people to challenge abusive behaviours and attitudes.

- changing aspirations and building confidence, through activities such as promoting gender equal play and education

Prevention and early intervention programmes need to be made available and sustainable with consistent funding, and this should be encouraged at local level.

Support men to be allies

Men should be part of recognising and demonstrating how gender-based violence and wider gender inequality impacts their lives. This means recognising how gender inequality contributes to male victims being unlikely to report abuse or seek support, and perpetuates the attitudes which allow abusive and violence behaviour to continue. Conversations engaging men as allies against gender-based violence should identify abusive behaviours and the prevalence of men's violence against women, but not condemn men by default. It is important to encourage men to speak up, engage with criticism of gender norms, and call out harmful attitudes and behaviours. It should be understood that while the vast majority of men are not perpetrators of abuse, they have a key role to play in taking forward actions that can help challenge gender-based violence.

Key actions for stakeholders to consider

In order to support the engagement of men in tackling gender-based violence, stakeholders can consider the following actions:

- Promote the dissemination of accessible and up to date information in your local area/organisation about the range of support available for both men and women affected by domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence.

- Explore opportunities to ensure that data is collected and analysed by gender (and other socioeconomic factors) wherever possible to ensure that different needs are considered when designing systems and services.

- Champion investment in evidence-based service design, informed by lived experience of gender-based violence, and highlight good practice such as accredited perpetrators interventions.

- Support a shift towards early intervention and prevention, including encouraging sustainable and consistent funding in programmes which support people to challenge abusive behaviours and attitudes.

- Those in leadership positions can help empower men to become allies by championing and supporting others to engage with criticism of gender norms, call out harmful attitudes and behaviours, and condemn all forms of gender-based violence.

- Make the White Ribbon Pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about men's violence against women in all its forms and identify opportunities for your local authority to work towards being awarded White Ribbon Status.

- Engage with the learning from the Equally Safe at Work programme, to help identify opportunities for your council to advance gender equality and prevent violence against women amongst its workforce.

Further support and contacts

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline

A national helpline to support anyone with experience of domestic abuse or forced marriage, as well as their family members, friends, colleagues and professionals who support them.

Respect Men's Advice Line

Non-judgmental emotional support, practical advice and information for men experiencing domestic abuse.

Fearfree

A 1:1 support service for any man, or LGBTI+ person experiencing domestic abuse.

White Ribbon Scotland

A national organisation working with men and boys to challenge culture and behaviour that leads to abuse or violence.

Safe & Together and Caledonian System

A briefing describing the connections between the Safe & Together Model and domestic abuse perpetrator behaviour change programs.

Equally Safe at Work

An innovative employer accreditation programme enabling employers to advance gender equality and prevent violence against women.

Special thanks to the local Violence Against Women Partnerships and elected members who shaped and informed this briefing at a participative workshop, chaired by COSLA's Vice-president Cllr Graham Houston, that took place as part of the 2020 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence programme of events.

Appendix A: Glossary

Domestic Abuse   Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner.

Early intervention   Used to describe approaches that identify and provide effective early support to children and women who are at risk of abuse and/or violence, or who have experienced abuse and/or violence. Early intervention might include secondary prevention work, for example, the work carried out by multiagency risk assessment conferences (MARACs to prevent the escalation of domestic abuse. Early intervention might also include tertiary prevention work, for example, Cedar (children experiencing domestic abuse recovery), a specialist recovery programme for children, which aims to mitigate the long-term effects of domestic abuse and works to improve children's outcomes.

Equality   Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration—recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men.

Gender   Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. We understand gender is not limited to only two identities but for the purposes of this briefing we will at times refer to a gender binary, not because we believe this to be a reflection of Scotland but because the systems in which we are working are structured in the binary.

Gender lens   Using a gender lens when analysing, planning, and making decisions means carefully and deliberately examining all the implications the work will have in terms of gender.

Gender sensitive/gender competence

Refers to the skills, knowledge and analytical capability to develop policy that is well gendered that takes into account of the socially constructed differences between men's and women's lives and experiences.

Gender stereotyping

Gender stereotyping refers to the practice of ascribing to an individual woman or man specific attributes, characteristics, or roles by reason only of her or his membership in the social group of women or men.

Occupational segregation

Refers to the clustering of women and men into different types of work (horizontal segregation) and into different levels of work (vertical segregation).

Primary prevention

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

Protected groups

Protected groups are identified in the Equality Act 2010 as sharing a particular characteristic against which is it illegal to discriminate. These groups are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

Sex

Sex refers to whether a person is assigned as a 'man' or 'women' at birth. This depends on the genitalia and/ or reproductive functions a person is born with.

Secondary prevention

Used to describe approaches that intervene once violence has already happened to prevent it from continuing. An example of secondary prevention is home visits from social workers for new mothers at risk of violence.

Structural inequality

A condition where one category of people is attributed an unequal status in relation to other categories of people. This relationship is perpetuated and reinforced by a convergence of unequal relations in roles, functions, decisions, rights, and opportunities. Combating structural inequality requires broad and holistic structural change.

Tertiary prevention

Used to describe approaches that work to prevent and minimise the long-term, harmful impacts of violence. Examples of tertiary prevention include emergency accommodation, counselling and advocacy, and criminal justice responses to the perpetrator.

Whole setting approach

A whole setting approach is one that understands how different elements within a setting are related and how they can influence one another within the whole. In the case of promoting gender equality this means that all elements of an environment, such as a child's experience of a nursery, support and reflect back gender positive messages and experiences.

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