

Violence Against Women and Girls: Background briefing

Key points

- *Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) has multiple and lasting impacts on victims as well as society as whole. It is estimated that **up to 3 million experience domestic violence each year and 450,000 women are victims of sexual violence annually.***
- *The total **costs of VAWG to society are estimated at £40bn annually.***
- *The government's VAWG strategy recognises the scale of the problem, but **is not backed with sufficient funding for either victims' services or preventive interventions** to reduce the incidence of VAWG in the longer term.*
- *Government initially committed £80m by the end of the parliament to supporting the VAWG strategy, with an additional £20m announced for domestic violence services in the 2017 Spring Budget.*
- *WBG calls on the government to put in place **adequate, ongoing funding for VAWG services** that is adequate to meeting needs and for investment in preventive measures, such as Sex and Relationships Education in schools.*

The UN defines Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) as “violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”¹. The impact of VAWG on victims and society are multiple and often have both immediate and lasting consequences. VAWG services are struggling, and in many areas failing, to keep up with demand after successive rounds of funding cuts.

Scale of the problem

- Up to 3 million women experience domestic violence each year²
- Around 2 women are killed every week in England and Wales by a current or former partner³
- VAWG costs society an estimated £40bn each year⁴
- The direct cost to the economy of domestic violence alone in England & Wales in one year is £6bn⁵
- The human and emotional cost is estimated at £17bn per year⁶
- The cost of sexual offences in a year is estimated to be £8.46bn, with each rape costing an estimated £ 96,000⁷

Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2016 – 2020

The government published its updated VAWG strategy in March 2016. The strategy acknowledges the size of the problem, citing both the incidence figures above and Walby's research into the economic costs of VAWG. It also makes a welcome commitment to ensuring that “no victim is turned away from accessing critical support services delivered by refuges, rape support centres and FGM and forced marriage units”.

Yet the levels of spending committed in the Strategy do not match the investment required to deliver on this commitment. Central government has ring-fenced just £20m per year (£80m over the remainder of this spending review). This is to cover refuges and other accommodation-based services, provision for women from BME backgrounds, services for those with complex needs, a network of rape support centres, a network of national helplines and a VAWG Service

¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>

² <http://www.refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/what-is-domestic-violence/domestic-violence-the-facts/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/hard-knock-life/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97907/government-stern-review.pdf

Transformation Fund to support best local practice (see below).

VAWG Service Transformation Fund

The government strategy supports the launch of a £15m, three-year VAWG Service Transformation Fund which aims to aid, promote and embed the best local practice and ensure that early intervention and prevention become the norm. Grants under the Fund will be awarded to local commissioners across England and Wales and necessitate collaboration with organisations and other partners in delivering change within the commissioning area.

The Strategy further notes that the NHS budget for mental health amounts to £11.7bn, out of which mental health interventions to address domestic and sexual violence and abuse can be funded. It goes on to state that Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) play a “vital role in local commissioning of services to tackle VAWG including mental health”. However, the amounts that reach front-line specialist support services in reality, are small and, in most cases, inadequate:

- Only 12 out of 45 Rape Crisis Centres across England and Wales were funded by CCGs
- In 2015/16, they received between them a total of £414,399, with the largest payment being just over £100,000, and the lowest just £5,000

Responsibility for local service provision is also devolved to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and local authority commissioners. Both have seen their budgets frozen or cut. The PCC victims’ services budget has been frozen at the 2015/16 level of £63m, and this is to cover services for all victims, not just the victims of VAWG. Rape Crisis England and Wales centres’ specialist services received just over £3m of this. The amounts given were very variable. The average payment per centre was less than £100,000, while four got £10,000 or less, and eight received no funding at all.⁸

By comparison, the Troubled Families Programme has received £200m in funding already, and a further £720m is promised for the programme to 2020, for

400,000 families. VAWG is a significant feature in many of these families. This investment is closer to the level required to support all victims of VAWG to rebuild their lives.

Spring Budget 2017

In addition to the already committed funds, the Chancellor announced a further £20m over two years for domestic violence providers in the Spring 2017 Budget.⁹ While this funding is welcome, it is still not sufficient to address the high level of demand for services. Further, in restricting funding to two years, the government is creating a ‘cliff edge’ that threatens the ongoing sustainability of services. We are also concerned that sexual violence services have been excluded from this funding, despite their significant funding needs.

Tampon Tax funding for VAWG services

The Women’s Budget Group, alongside other women’s organisations, has previously expressed concern about the continued charging of VAT on sanitary products and the way in which the dispersal of funds to women’s organisations creates a dangerous slippage whereby women become responsible for funding their own safety.¹⁰ Moreover, the level of funding for VAWG services should be determined by the level of need for these rather than by the level of (unfair) tampon tax receipts.

Prevention measures in schools

Although support services are critically important, we hope to see greater commitment to prevention work, which would reduce the enormous costs to the state of violence against women and girls in the future. In 2016, the Women and Equalities Select Committee made a series of recommendations to tackle “widespread” sexual violence in schools.¹¹ If enacted, these recommendations would reduce the levels of violence against women and girls and equally importantly would begin to tackle the culture of condoning and excusing violence against women and girls by teaching boys from a young age that behaviour of this nature is unacceptable.

⁸https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/592695/Funding_to_help_support_victims_of_domestic_abuse_2016-18.pdf

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spring-budget-2017-documents/spring-budget-2017#policy-decisions>

¹⁰ http://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/AFS2016_WBGreport_13Dec_final2.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/news-parliament-2015/sexual-harassment-and-violence-in-schools-report-published-16-17/>

The Committee asked for statutory measures to ensure schools act to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and sexual violence, and for this to be included in schools' inspections. They called for sex and relationships education to be designated a statutory subject, and for investment in teacher training, and in local third sector specialist support. Justine Greening has announced that she plans to put 'Relationships and Sex Education' on a statutory footing, however, it is yet to pass through Parliament. As of Spring 2017, officials are starting to debate what the contents of the proposed curriculum will be, with a draft to be published in the Autumn. The Women's Budget Group supports the recommendations of the Committee.

UK Women's Budget Group, March 2017.

WBG is an independent, voluntary organisation made up of individuals from Academia, NGOs and trade unions. See www.wbg.org.uk

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