

Violence Against Women and Girls: background briefing

Briefing from the **UK Women's Budget Group**

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 **4.3 million women suffer domestic violence over their lifetime, 1.2 million women suffer domestic violence each year¹ and 450,000 women are victims of sexual violence 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 to supporting the VAWG strategy, with an additional £20m announced for domestic violence services in the 2017 Spring Budget** – a total of £100m over the life of the parliament, that is, five years.
- The total **costs of VAWG to society are estimated at £40bn annually.²**
- **WBG calls on the government to put in place ongoing funding for VAWG services that is adequate to meeting needs of victims and allows 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'.³ 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

- Around 2 women are killed every week in England and Wales by a current or former partner⁴
- VAWG costs society an estimated £40bn each year⁵

- Domestic violence and abuse alone cost the UK an estimated £15.7 billion in 2008. This included: more than £3.9 billion for the criminal justice system, civil legal services, healthcare, social services, housing and refuges, more than £1.9 billion for the economy (based on time off work because of injuries), and just over £9.9 billion in 'human and emotional' costs, for example, the cost of domestic murders and attempted murders, threatening behaviour and the subsequent pain, suffering and fear caused⁶

¹ House of Commons Library (June 2017) *Domestic Violence in England and Wales* (<http://bit.ly/2cupnr0>)

² New Philanthropy Capital (2008) *Hard Knock Life* (<http://bit.ly/2iHnitN>)

³ United Nations (1992) *CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19* (<http://bit.ly/1ple2Cz>)

⁴ Refuge (2015) *Domestic Violence – The Facts* (<http://bit.ly/WMSuLa>)

⁵ New Philanthropy Capital (2008) *Hard Knock Life* (<http://bit.ly/2iHnitN>)

⁶ Sylvia Walby (2009) *The Cost of Domestic Violence Up-date 2009* (<http://bit.ly/2m5VXGM>)

- 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 Sylvia 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 Transformation Fund to support local best practice (see below) which also supports men's services and excludes single purpose funding proposals for national helplines, rape support centres and refuges.

VAWG Service Transformation Fund⁸

The government strategy funds a £17m, 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 will be awarded to local commissioners across England and Wales. The Fund is expected to cover services for men in addition.

All 46 Rape Crisis Centres receive funding from the Ministry of Justice Rape Support Fund (RSF), however there is a wide variation in the proportion of total funding of a Centre this represents. There are two Centres where the RSF is contributing 90 per cent (4%

⁷ HM Government (2011) *The Government Response to the Stern Review: An independent review into how rape complaints are handled by public authorities in England and Wales* (<http://bit.ly/1Ybbper>)

⁸ Home Office (December 2016) *Violence Against Women and Girls Service Transformation Fund* (<http://bit.ly/2hg0dOX>)

of Centres) or more of total funding and a further two where the proportion is over 50 per cent (4%). Nine Centres receive between 30 and 50 per cent (20%). Those receiving 20 per cent or less represent 37 per cent of Centres (n=17).⁹

By comparison, the second phase of the Troubled Families Programme was launched in 2015, with £920 million allocated to help 400,000 families until 2020.¹⁰ This investment is closer to the level required to support all victims of VAWG to rebuild their lives.

Other funding for VAWG services

Health

The government Strategy 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.

There has been a slight increase in the number of Rape Crisis Centres in receipt of funding from their local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) up from 10 Centres in 2015-16 to 13 out of 46 Centres in the last year. The total amount received was £516,086. However, there is a very wide variation in the amount of funding received. One Centre received only £5,000 whilst another received over £200,000, and a third Centre over £100,000. Removing these three Centres from the analysis, the average received from a CCG by the remaining 10 Centres was £51,500.¹¹

Local government

A significant portion of funding for VAWG support services comes from local authorities' budgets.

⁹ Information provided by Rape Crisis England and Wales.

¹⁰ House of Commons Library (April 2017) *The Troubled Families programme (England)* (<http://bit.ly/1V5XbLH>)

¹¹ HM Government (2016) *Funding to help support victims of domestic abuse 2016/18* (<http://bit.ly/2mzptQc>)

Central government funding for local government has decreased dramatically since 2010, falling by over 50% between 2010/11 and 2015/16¹² and by a further 30.6% in 2017/18.¹³

Changes in the commissioning process pose a further threat to smaller organisations that might be squeezed out of the bidding process by bigger generic ones with larger capacity but without the specialised and local knowledge, with small organisations often having to make a choice about which specialised services to keep.¹⁴

Spring Budget 2017

In addition to the already committed funds, the Chancellor announced a further £20m over two years for services tackling domestic violence in the 2017 Spring Budget.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Moreover, the level of funding for VAWG services should be determined by the level of need 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.¹⁷ 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 this behaviour is unacceptable.

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. The Women's Budget Group supports the recommendations of the Committee.

Additional cuts affecting victims and survivors of violence

Police and Crown Prosecution Service

Cuts to public services such as the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, health, and legal aid have an impact on the ability of victims and survivors of violence and abuse to get support and access to justice. Cuts in the budget of police forces has reduced the number of cases pursued and the

¹² Institute for Fiscal Studies (November 2016) *Council-level figures on spending cuts and business rates income* (<http://bit.ly/2gy5BOy>)

¹³ Local Government Association (December 2017) *LGA responds to the Local Government Finance Settlement* (<http://bit.ly/2jdSJ2l>)

¹⁴ Coventry Women's Voices, CEMAP, Folleshill Women Training and the University of Warwick (2013) *Layers of Inequality* (<http://bit.ly/2iHyoip>)

¹⁵ HM Treasury (March 2017) *Policy paper Spring Budget 2017 – Policy Decisions* (<http://bit.ly/2mzhum6>)

¹⁶ Women's Budget Group (2016) *AFS 2016: Women's Budget Group Response* (<http://bit.ly/2mCa9mA>)

¹⁷ Women and Equalities Select Committee (September 2016) *Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools report* (<http://bit.ly/2cl5jVO>)

availability of specialist support services.¹⁸ Cuts to the Crown Prosecution Service have reduced the number of discussion centres, with women having to travel longer distances to have their cases heard.

Legal aid

Legal aid was cut for family law cases, although there is an exception for family law cases where there has been domestic violence. However, victims would have had to report the violence to the police or to a health practitioner, something which many women are not prepared to do. Additionally, victims often need legal advice on welfare benefits, debt or housing, which is no longer funded by legal aid.¹⁹

Health

Women victims of domestic violence require twice the level of general medical services and three to eight times the level of mental health services.²⁰ Health cuts have reduced the NHS's capacity to meet the needs of women experiencing violence, including referrals and interpretation services.

Benefits

The revamping of benefits through the introduction of Universal Credit brings worrying consequences. For couples, it is transferred in a single payment to one partner which makes it harder for women to have financial autonomy to leave an abusive relationship. Limits to housing benefits, including a change in entitlement of people under 35 to housing benefit that only meets the costs of renting a room in a shared house, poses considerable difficulties for survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse, who often struggle with mental health issues.

UK Women's Budget Group, November 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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¹⁸ The Independent (April 2017) *Thousands of domestic violence victims withdrawing from legal action after Government cuts, figures reveal* (<https://ind.pn/2nvZ0Zi>)

¹⁹ Coventry Women's Voices, CEMAP, Folleshill Women Training and the University of Warwick (2013) *Layers of Inequality* (<http://bit.ly/2iHyoip>)

²⁰ Women's National Commission (2010) *A Bitter Pill to Swallow* (<http://bit.ly/2jgt21S>)