

Paper for the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy

Violence against Women and Girls and women's economic inequality

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Executive summary

Violence against women and girls (VAWG), in all its forms, is both a cause and a consequence of women's inequality. Economic inequality makes VAWG more likely and creates additional barriers to leaving violent or abusive relationships. At the same time, violence and abuse can affect women's ability to work or study, and thus their economic wellbeing. Women facing additional inequality due to their ethnicity, age, disability, gender identity or sexuality may face higher levels of VAWG victimisation and higher barriers to protection and justice.

This means that comprehensive policy change which addresses both women's economic inequality with men and women's intersecting inequalities are essential to eradicating VAWG. It also means that policies to address the causes and consequences of VAWG are central to achieving a gender-equal economy.

Definition

The UN defines violence against women and girls as "violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately"². Such violence includes (but is not limited to): sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking and harassment, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and so-called 'honour-based violence', trafficking and forced prostitution, and abuse of women and girls in online spaces. The perpetrators of these forms of violence are nearly always men.

The focus of this paper is primarily on domestic abuse.

Prevalence

In the UK and globally, VAWG remains widespread and under-reported, with devastating impacts on victims, survivors and their families. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) found that 20% of women and 4% of men have suffered sexual assault, including attempts, since age 16, equivalent to an estimated 3.4 million women and 631,000 men.³ More than 1 in 4 women will experience domestic abuse during her lifetime⁴ – which equates to 1.3 million women under 60 in England and Wales in the last year alone⁵. Much of this violence is invisible, with 83% of victims of partner abuse not reporting it to the police.⁶ Even instruments such as the CSEW under-represent the scale of

¹ With thanks to Emma Williams

² United Nations (2006) *Ending violence against women: From words to action* (<https://bit.ly/2PjB5XJ>)

³ ONS (2018) *Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017* (<https://bit.ly/2C0Y83v>)

⁴ ONS (2018) *Domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018* (<https://bit.ly/34cTZp8>)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ ONS (2018) *Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2018* (<https://bit.ly/2BYEC7V>)

violence against women in their official reporting. Official estimation methods used with the CSEW cap the number of incidents at 5 per individual (after this no further incidents are included in official reporting even though they are collected on the Victim Form Module). Analysis found that removing the cap resulted in a 70% increase in violent crimes against women.⁷

While both men and women can experience partner violence, there are important differences between male violence against women and female violence against men in terms of amount, severity and impact.⁸ Women are more likely to be seriously hurt or killed and to experience higher rates of repeat victimisation. Between 2014 and 2017, 73% of domestic homicide victims were women,⁹ and original analysis by Walby and Towers of CSEW data (without the incident cap) between 2008/9 and 2012/13 found that 80% of high frequency victims (more than 10 crimes) were women.¹⁰ Women are also more likely to experience higher levels of fear and are more likely to be subjected to controlling and coercive behaviours.¹¹ An interview study found that most male victims of domestic abuse by female perpetrators tended to report it as 'relatively inconsequential and of no lasting effect,' while female victims of domestic abuse by male perpetrators were more likely to report 'fear, bewilderment and helplessness'.¹²

Incidences of VAWG are higher among poorer households¹³ and for disabled women, with the latter twice as likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled women.¹⁴ Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women may face additional challenges, particularly around reporting, due to heightened forms of shame, stigma, cultural and religious constraints, racism from authorities, immigration insecurities and lack of awareness of their rights.¹⁵ Survivors with 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) – such as undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and EEA nationals – can struggle to access refuge spaces and support services.¹⁶ This can leave them trapped in abusive relationships or forced to return to their countries of origin, if they have the funds to do so.

There are indications that trans and non-binary people are at greater risk of intimate partner violence, and that it may take specific forms related to their gender identity, such as ridiculing their gender identity and/or withholding medication related to the victim's transition.¹⁷ A survey of 5,000 LGBT individuals by Stonewall found that 19% of trans and non-binary people (21% of trans men and

⁷ Walby, S., Towers, J. and B. Francis (2014) 'The decline in the rate of domestic violence has stopped: Removing the cap on repeat victimisation reveals more violence' (<https://bit.ly/32JHvps>)

⁸ Myhill, A. (2017) Measuring domestic violence: context is everything. *Journal of Gender-based Violence*, 1(1):33-44.

⁹ ONS (2017) *Domestic abuse in England and Wales, year ending March 2017* (<https://bit.ly/2PK6r1b>)

¹⁰ Walby, S. and Towers, J. (2018) 'Untangling the concept of coercive control: Theorizing domestic violent crime,' *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 18(1): 7-28.

¹¹ Myhill, A. (2017) Measuring domestic violence: context is everything. *Journal of Gender-based Violence*, 1(1):33-44.

¹² Dobash, R. P. and Dobash, R. E. (2004) 'Women's violence to men in intimate relationships,' *British Journal of Criminology*, 44(3): 324-349.

¹³ ONS (2018) *Domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018* (<https://bit.ly/34cTZp8>)

¹⁴ Women's Aid (n.d.) *Survivors Handbook* (<https://bit.ly/32SSfCc>)

¹⁵ EAW (2011) *Another World is Possible: A call for long-term and targeted action to prevent violence against women and girls* (<https://bit.ly/2OT0jxq>); Women's Aid (2020) *The Domestic Abuse Report 2020: The Annual Audit*. Bristol. Women's Aid (<https://bit.ly/39kdPBV>)

¹⁶ Women's Aid (2017) *Nowhere to Turn: Findings from the first year of the No Woman Turned Away Project* (<https://bit.ly/3crVvIX>)

¹⁷ Stonewall (2018) *LGBT in Britain: Home and communities* (<https://bit.ly/2TJOFqX>)

16% of trans women) experienced domestic abuse in the past year.¹⁸ While this is higher than the CSEW percentage of women experiencing domestic abuse in the past year, the figures are not directly comparable as dedicated domestic abuse surveys tend to show higher rates of violence among women than generic crime surveys, such as the CSEW.¹⁹

Factors contributing to VAWG

A complex interplay of gendered social norms, women's relative economic disadvantage and inadequate public services makes violence against women more likely and makes it harder for women to leave abusive relationships. Note that these 'factors' are not causal explanations for individual acts of violence against women.²⁰ Every perpetrator makes a choice to use violence and must be held responsible for that choice. However, these factors create a context which increases the likelihood of such violence taking place.

Social norms around gender constitute deep-rooted cultural ideas about who women and men are, and the types of behaviours and activities that they should engage in. Harmful gender norms can create fertile ground for violence towards women, giving men a sense that they have control over women and are entitled to exercise violence.

Gendered social norms also restrict and limit women's roles in the economy, thereby contributing to women's economic disadvantage relative to men. Lack of economic independence can make women vulnerable to abusive relationships. Poverty and domestic violence are strongly intertwined. Women living in households with an income of less than £10,000 per annum were four times more likely to experience intimate partner violence in the last 12 months than women living in households with an income exceeding £50,000 per annum.²¹

The erosion of the state's welfare system and increasingly stringent eligibility criteria compounds the economic hardship women already face as a result of their disadvantaged position in the economy.²² Being unable to afford to leave due to poverty and a social security system that is failing them, victims/survivors may stay longer, thereby increasing the risk of abuse.

Note that there is something of a vicious cycle in operation: some of the factors that make VAWG more likely are themselves also, in part, consequences of VAWG. For instance, economic inequality between men and women makes VAWG more likely and, at the same time, violence against women perpetuates economic inequality by negatively impacting on women's earnings and long-term employment prospects.²³

Impact of VAWG

The impact of VAWG on victims and society are multiple and often have both immediate and lasting consequences. Women who have experienced violence and abuse have higher rates of poor physical and mental health, self-harm and suicide, substance misuse, homelessness, offending behaviour,

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Walby, S. (2005) 'Improving the statistics on violence against women,' *Statistics Journal of the United Nations* ECE 22: 193-216 (<https://bit.ly/33gJJw>)

²⁰ See also EAW (2011) *A Different World is Possible: A call for long-term and targeted action to prevent violence against women and girls* (<https://bit.ly/2vqf580>)

²¹ ONS (2018) *Women most at risk of experiencing partner abuse in England and Wales: years ending March 2015 to 2017* (<https://bit.ly/38FIYzG>)

²² WBG (2019) *Benefits or Barriers? Making social security work for survivors of violence and abuse across the UK's four nations* (<https://bit.ly/343m81p>)

²³ Ibid.

gang involvement and sex work/prostitution.²⁴ Survey research by Scott and McManus (2016) found that 36% of the women in their sample who had experienced ‘extensive physical and sexual violence’ had made at least one suicide attempt, as had 18% of those experiencing ‘extensive physical/coercive violence’.²⁵ There is an intergenerational element, with victimisation rates higher among women that experienced abuse as children. Data from the CSEW shows that 51% of women who experienced abuse as children go on to experience domestic abuse after the age of 16 (this compares with 12% for women that were not abused as children).²⁶ Moreover, research by the Prison Reform Trust found that 57% of women in prison have been victims of domestic abuse as adults and 53% experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse as children.²⁷

The cost of VAWG to the economy is considerable. A report by the UK Home Office estimated that the economic and social costs of domestic abuse – including the cost of providing public services to victims/survivors of domestic violence and the lost economic output of women affected – was £66 billion annually in England and Wales alone.²⁸ The costs of sexual offending (including rape) are calculated to be £12.2 billion per year²⁹ and domestic homicide has an estimated cost of £2.2 million per death as a result of harms, health services and lost productivity³⁰. These figures stand in sharp contrast to the Government’s commitment of £20m annually towards supporting its *End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy* published in 2016.³¹ Government funding in this area is clearly not sufficient to tackle the scale of the problem, and many VAWG services are struggling – if not failing – to keep up with demand.

Addressing VAWG: Eradicating violence, supporting victims, and pursuing perpetrators

The existence of VAWG is not inevitable, and there is concrete action that can be taken to prevent it and to end it. To achieve a reduction in VAWG – and ultimately to eradicate it – will require a comprehensive set of actions by a range of institutions. With women’s disadvantage a key factor, action needs to be taken to ensure that women are put on an equal footing with men economically, socially and culturally. This will require socio-cultural change to address harmful social norms, policy

²⁴ Scott, S., and S. McManus (2016) *Hidden Hurt: Violence, abuse and disadvantage in the lives of women* (<https://bit.ly/2TgroN0>); ONS (2017) ‘People who were abused as children are more likely to be abused as an adult: Exploring the impact of what can sometimes be hidden crimes’ (<https://bit.ly/2VJWqhZ>); Taskforce on the Health Aspects of Violence Against Women and Children (2010) *Responding to violence against women and children – the role of the NHS* (2010) (<https://bit.ly/3crkvQu>). NB: feminists disagree about whether prostitution/sex work is itself a form of violence against women, but there is broad agreement that it is associated with higher levels of violence.

²⁵ Scott, S., and S. McManus (2016) *Hidden Hurt: Violence, abuse and disadvantage in the lives of women* (<https://bit.ly/2TgroN0>); ONS (2017) ‘People who were abused as children are more likely to be abused as an adult: Exploring the impact of what can sometimes be hidden crimes’ (<https://bit.ly/2VJWqhZ>)

²⁶ ONS (2017) ‘People who were abused as children are more likely to be abused as an adult: Exploring the impact of what can sometimes be hidden crimes’ (<https://bit.ly/2VJWqhZ>)

²⁷ Prison Reform Trust (2017) *“There’s a reason we’re in trouble”: Domestic abuse as a driver to women’s offending* (<https://bit.ly/32KIZRD>)

²⁸ UK Home Office (January 2019) *The economic and social costs of domestic abuse: Research Report 107* (<https://bit.ly/2YuAAP7>) Note this figure is for the year-end 31 March 2017, using the methodology in *The Economic and Social costs of Crime* (Heeks et al., 2018), and the information gathered from CSEW.

²⁹ UK Home Office (July 2018) *The economic and social costs of crime, Second edition: Research Report 99* (<https://bit.ly/3220wlb>)

³⁰ UK Home Office (January 2019) *The economic and social costs of domestic abuse: Research Report 107* (<https://bit.ly/2YuAAP7>)

³¹ HM Government (2019) *Ending Violence against Women and Girls, 2016-2020* (<https://bit.ly/2ThU740>)

changes to reduce women's economic disadvantage and the implementation of a functioning social security system and quality public services.

While the ultimate goal is eradication of VAWG, urgent action is required to ensure that there are adequate support services for victims and that the criminal justice system is able to effectively deal with perpetrators of VAWG. For this reason, we set out actions that are required across the following three areas³²:

1. Prevention and eradication
2. Pursuing perpetrators
3. Providing support to survivors

The UK Government signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (often known as the 'Istanbul Convention') in 2012 and has set out steps towards its ratification.³³ The Istanbul Convention sets out minimum requirements that the government needs to take in each of the three areas above.³⁴ It includes many of the recommendations made in this paper, including ensuring that domestic violence support services are provided to all women survivors, including migrants and refugees. Ratification of the Convention would provide a monitoring framework and legal mechanism for holding the government to account. Therefore, it is vital that pressure is maintained on the government to ensure full ratification.

1) Prevention and eradication

Given the multiple, intertwined factors that make VAWG more likely, action to reduce VAWG needs to adopt a multi-faceted approach. Key to prevention is addressing women's economic disadvantage, tackling harmful social norms and intervening early.

Tackling women's economic disadvantage

Women's economic disadvantage due to lower earnings and higher rates of economic inactivity means they are more likely to be dependent on men or the State. With the State increasingly not providing a reliable safety net, women's vulnerability to violence is heightened.

Addressing women's disadvantage in the economy requires action to ensure that women are able to be economically independent. The measures considered by the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy in relation to paid and unpaid work are relevant here. These include:

- Reducing the uneven gender distribution of paid and unpaid work through measures such as designated 'fathers' leave' and flexible working by default so that women and men have the same opportunities to pursue paid work;
- Reducing occupational segregation by encouraging women into sectors such as STEM and construction;

³² These three areas overlap with the four areas – preventing violence and abuse, provision of services, partnership working, and pursuing perpetrators – identified in the Government's (2016) *End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy* (<https://bit.ly/33f5WLD>)

³³ Home Office (2019) *Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Combating Violence Against Women and Girls and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) – 2019 Report on Progress* (<https://bit.ly/32NByrS>)

³⁴ IC Change (n.d.) 'What is the Istanbul Convention,' (<https://bit.ly/2PJG9pA>)

- Ensuring that work in sectors of the economy where women are over-represented, such as care work, are valued and remunerated on a par with sectors where men dominate;
- Tackling sexual harassment and discrimination, particularly around maternity, in the workplace which can act as a barrier to women working and to their career progression;
- Eradicating in-work poverty by ensuring that all workers are paid a genuine “living wage”.

In addition to these measures that aim to ensure women are able to achieve economic independence through paid work, a functioning social security system is required to ensure that caring work does not lead to poverty and to provide a ‘safety net’ for when individuals are not able to work. A social security system that works for women is both about the *amount* that is paid and *how* the system is administered. Measures already considered by the Commission that are relevant here include:

- Ensuring that benefits are set a level that enables individuals and families to live out of poverty (e.g. reversing benefit cuts, removing the Benefits cap and 2-child limit) because poverty is one of the main risk factors for VAWG;
- Reducing women’s economic dependence on their partners by allowing benefits to be split between partners as default and/or to be paid to the main carer (particularly relevant for Universal Credit);
- Removing the ‘No Recourse to Public Funds’ rule to ensure there is a safety net for all;
- Reforming eligibility criteria and conditions (e.g. job-seeking requirements, benefit waiting times) to ensure that they do not disproportionately affect women.

With nearly 1 in 4 women experiencing domestic abuse at some point in their lives, reform of the social security system should not focus on designing “special measures” that can be accessed by survivors of domestic abuse but rather “business as usual” should be designed to reduce vulnerability to VAWG and support survivors of VAWG (further information on this under ‘Supporting survivors’ below).

Addressing harmful gendered social norms

Gendered social norms that devalue women and create a sense of entitlement among men continue to persist. Action must be taken to challenge such norms through the media, schools and other public and private bodies. Leading organisations in the VAWG field, such as the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW), have recommended the following measures:

- Ensuring that the Personal, Social and Health (PHSE) curriculum in schools challenges harmful gender norms and provides adequate guidance on healthy relationships and raises awareness of VAWG;
- Zero tolerance approach to harassment and VAWG in schools and better awareness around these subjects, including addressing gendered forms of bullying;
- Enforceable guidelines on the portrayal of violence against women and girls in the media and advertising as well as guidelines around the sexualisation and objectification of women and girls;
- Initiatives that work with young men to develop healthier concepts of masculinity and that challenge harmful attitudes towards women/girls, pornography and prostitution/sex work.

Social norms are also reciprocally related to women’s roles within society. If women are able to more equally participate in a wider range of occupations and industrial sectors, perceptions of what it means to be a ‘woman’ will also shift. However, such participation in a broader range of occupations and sectors is itself dependent on norm change.

2) Pursuing perpetrators

The significant under-reporting of VAWG to police and the low conviction rates, particularly for sexual offences, point to the fact that the criminal justice system – from the police through to the courts – is failing victims/survivors.³⁵ In September 2019, EAW applied for a Judicial Review of the CPS for their failure to prosecute rape, noting that in the prior three years reporting of rape to the police had increased by 42.5% but rape cases brought by the CPS had declined by 22.6%.³⁶ The five-year (to October 2019) conviction rate for cases brought by the CPS against defendants aged 18-24 was just 30%.³⁷

While the pursuit of perpetrators on its own does not eradicate VAWG and can be only one part of a holistic strategy to tackle VAWG, it is nonetheless vital to ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions, women are kept safe and to establishing broader social norms that deem VAWG unacceptable.³⁸

The criminal justice system has, like the rest of the public sector, suffered cutbacks during the past decade. Adequate funding is required to ensure that all aspects of the criminal justice system are able to coherently respond to VAWG, but this must come alongside the adoption of a zero tolerance approach to VAWG and the establishment of a consistent and coherent approach to tackling it. Measures that improve the criminal justice system would likely lead to increased confidence in the system and higher rates of reporting.

Key measures should focus on the areas identified in Table 1.³⁹

Table 1

Area	Recommendations
Improving the police response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All frontline police officers should receive domestic violence awareness training, including on the different forms of abuse (physical, sexual, coercive, economic etc.) and how to deal with the initial disclosure; • Every police force should have a dedicated Domestic Violence Unit that supports victims, provides advice to frontline staff and ensures effective investigations into abuse; • Police should be mandated to refer survivors to local specialist support providers; • Police should collect all possible evidence (e.g. recording of 999 calls, videos, body camera evidence) to enable a prosecution where the victim is not participating;

³⁵ Hawkins, S. and C. Laxton (2015) *Women’s Access to Justice: From reporting to sentencing* (<https://bit.ly/2vooJrH>); EAW (2019) ‘Rape Justice fail’ (<https://bit.ly/3cuz2ea>)

³⁶ EAW (2019) ‘Women’s groups “hugely disappointed” at HMCPSI rape prosecution report,’ (<https://bit.ly/2wsyJA1>)

³⁷ EAW (n.d.) ‘Rape Justice Fail’ (<https://bit.ly/33bA3Uo>)

³⁸ EAW (2019) ‘Submission to WBG Commission on a Gender Equal Economy’ (<https://bit.ly/2uTdgjA>)

³⁹ See comprehensive recommendations in Hawkins, S. and C. Laxton (2015) *Women’s Access to Justice: From reporting to sentencing* (<https://bit.ly/2PJFNz7>)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring all police are adequately trained in Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) and the Domestic Violence Disclosure (DVD) scheme.
Improving prosecutions for VAWG and the victim experience of the criminal justice system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every frontline staff member in the criminal, civil, and family justice system should have domestic violence awareness training, including on coercive and psychological control; • CPS must base decision to prosecute on the facts of the case rather than judgements about the potential prejudices of a jury; • Speed of referral from the police to CPS and CPS decision-making should improve as delays can compromise the safety of women; • Safety facilities (e.g. separate entrances; video-linked testimony etc.) should be available wherever necessary; • Discriminatory attitudes to women victims among criminal justice system – particularly in relation to the ‘perfect witness and perfect victim’ – need to be addressed to ensure every woman has access to justice; • Women should feel safe and supported when providing evidence in VAWG cases.
Rehabilitating perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing perpetrators to justice provides an opportunity for rehabilitation and there should be a comprehensive rehabilitation-focused offender strategy.

3) Providing support

Support for those that have experienced violence, in any of its forms, is key to improving outcomes for survivors as well as tackling VAWG in the longer term and reducing a range of preventable, costly social problems. For instance, it has been estimated that female offending cost the Government around £1.7bn in 2015/16.⁴⁰ Yet local women’s centres estimate that it costs them just over £4,000 to support women with the most complex needs – many of which stem from violence⁴¹ – away from the criminal justice system.⁴²

There are three key elements to support: specialist VAWG support services, quality public services, and a social security system that is fit for purpose. Services must be available to all those that experience violence, irrespective of refugee and migrant status (as set out in the Istanbul Convention). Currently, survivors with ‘No Recourse to Public Funds’ often face insurmountable barriers to accessing support, thereby jeopardising their safety, and it is vital that this ceases immediately.⁴³ Extending the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC), which since 2010 has provided migrant women that entered the UK on a spousal visa with 3 months of social security to apply for indefinite leave to remain (ILR), to all migrant women, including EEA nationals, is a key first step in addressing NRPF.

Specialist support providers

VAWG support services run ‘by and for’ women, including specialist services for BAME women, have historically struggled to find adequate funding and were placed under further pressure by

⁴⁰ Ministry of Justice (2018) *Female Offender Strategy* (<https://bit.ly/2lcY6IU>)

⁴¹ The charity Women in Prison report that 79% of the women who use their services have experienced domestic violence and/or sexual abuse: Prison Reform Trust (2017) *There’s a reason we’re in trouble: Domestic abuse as a driver to women’s offending* (<https://bit.ly/3chcvAL>)

⁴² A Sustainable Funding Model for Women’s Centres, UK Women’s Budget Group, forthcoming

⁴³ Women’s Aid (2019) *Nowhere to Turn: Findings from the third year of the No Woman Turned Away project* (<https://bit.ly/3csqsNe>)

austerity.⁴⁴ The pressure stemmed in part from the cuts by central government to the local government grant, which have not been sufficiently ameliorated by the £20m committed annually to delivering the *End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy* published in 2016.⁴⁵ Figures from 178 local councils in Scotland, England and Wales show that 65% of councils cut funding in real terms for refuges between 2010 and 2018.⁴⁶ In the 12 months to March 2018 alone, spending on refuges fell by nearly £1m in total, with 125 authorities cutting spending in real terms. A separate survey of 84 local authorities in 2017 found council funding for refuges across England had dropped from £31.2m in 2010/11 to £23.9m in 2016/17.¹⁷ Funding pressures have been particularly severe for specialist services assisting BAME women, women with a disability and survivors with NRPF.⁴⁷

Women's Aid and others have argued against the provision of "gender neutral" services.⁴⁸ They argue that, while all victims/survivors, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, must be able to access the support they need, this does not mean that they should all be treated the same and in receipt of the same service. Access to women-only safe spaces can be crucial to recovery for some women upon exiting abusive relationships, given the trauma of the violence they have experienced. At the same time, services that meet the needs of trans and non-binary people, including specialist services, are vital. Women's Aid further note that the move to commission "gender neutral" services is also exacerbating financial pressures on services for women in some areas, with funding cuts to women's services in order to support men.

Quality public services and a social security system that is fit for purpose

Physical health, mental health, drug and alcohol and social services are all important for survivors and need to be adequately funded to ensure they are able to meet needs and improve outcomes. In addition to being adequately funded, these services must also ensure that their policies are informed by VAWG and that staff, particularly those on the frontline, have been provided with VAWG awareness training. The health service in particular can play a key role in early intervention through routine screening, detecting signs of abuse and by making effective referrals to support services. There has also been an argument for investing in hospital-based domestic abuse services, with research suggesting that this can be effective at assisting some of the most at risk.⁴⁹

The role of the social security system in reducing VAWG has already been addressed in the section on 'Eradication and Prevention'. The measures suggested in that section to reduce women's economic dependence on men – such as allowing benefits to be split across accounts as default, removing the benefit cap and the two-child limit – are also vital to survivors as they can facilitate exit from an abusive relationship. In addition, the social security system should introduce further easements specifically for those exiting abusive relationships. In particular, the minimum five-week wait for UC can be a considerable barrier to exiting a relationship. Cuts to local welfare assistance schemes (formerly the Social Fund) mean that there can be few, if any, options for covering the

⁴⁴ WBG (2018) Violence against Women and Girls: Briefing from the Women's Budget Group (<https://bit.ly/2PlnYk5>); see also The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (2017) 'Thousands of vulnerable women turned away as refuge funding is cut' (<https://bit.ly/2yPBRpV>)

⁴⁵ Women's Budget Group (2017) *Violence Against Women and Girls: Background briefing* (<https://bit.ly/2vPICJz>)

⁴⁶ Grierson, J (2018) Council funding for women's refuges cut by nearly £7m since 2010, Guardian 23 March 2018 (<https://bit.ly/2pDVzib>)

⁴⁷ Davidge, S. and L. Magnusson (2018) *Survival and Beyond: The Domestic Abuse Report* (<https://bit.ly/32NyaNi>)

⁴⁸ Women's Aid (2019) *The Gendered Nature of Domestic Abuse: Women's Aid Briefing*

⁴⁹ SaferLives (2016) *A Cry for Health: Why we must invest in domestic abuse services in hospitals* (<https://bit.ly/3crHV8x>)

immediate cost of leaving a relationship. The Women's Budget Group has previously called for a benefit advance to be paid to survivors making a new UC claim and this remains a key recommendation.⁵⁰

There is also evidence that existing measures, such as the Domestic Violence Easement (DVE) which removes job search or work preparation requirements temporarily after leaving an abusive partner, are not sufficient and also not always known about or correctly applied.⁵¹ Currently, the DVE can be used initially for four weeks and extended up to 13 weeks. Abuse must have occurred within the last six months and the DVE can only be used once in 12 months. Women's Aid has recommended removing the 6-month time limit, lifting the once-a-year limit, and extending the 13-week exemption to 12 months.⁵² In addition, training is required for Job Centre staff to ensure they are aware of the DVE and can apply it appropriately. There is evidence that some Job Centre staff currently feel the DVE is overly bureaucratic and that they feel ill-equipped to deal with disclosures.⁵³

Beyond the social security system, additional workplace protections could also support survivors. In 2018, New Zealand became the second country, following the Philippines in 2004, to introduce paid domestic violence leave.⁵⁴ The provisions allow for up to 10 days of paid leave from work for individuals experiencing domestic violence as well as access to temporary flexible working arrangements.

VAWG across the four nations of the UK

There are differences in social security policies and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategies across the four nations of the UK, meaning that women in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different experiences. Moreover, there are different legal settlements with each of the devolved authorities. England and Wales share a legal system, while Scotland has its own system. Women in Northern Ireland are particularly disadvantaged as their rights and protections are lower than elsewhere in the UK. There is also a legal duty in Northern Ireland to report a criminal offence, leading to concerns from survivors about confidentiality if they disclose abuse. This is relevant to the 'rape clause' exemption to the two-child limit, which can place women and those to whom they disclose at risk of committing a crime if not then reporting this to the police. Note also that in Northern Ireland the conviction rate for rape charges is extremely low, with only 1.6% of cases which were brought for rape in 2018/19 resulting in conviction.⁵⁵

In Scotland, on the other hand, protections are considerably stronger. The *Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018* created a criminal offence which includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse within a coercive control framework, and the *Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016* includes the introduction of a 'statutory domestic abuse aggravator' to ensure courts take domestic abuse into account when sentencing offenders.⁵⁶ The Women's Budget Group has

⁵⁰ WBG (2019) *Benefits or Barriers? Making social security work for survivors of violence and abuse across the UK's four nations* (<https://bit.ly/343m81p>)

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Women's Aid (2019) *The Domestic Abuse Report 2019: The Economics of Abuse* (<https://bit.ly/2VF0mk1>)

⁵³ Mark Serwotka, 2019, Letter to Rt Hon Frank Field, Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, Public and Commercial Services Union (<https://bit.ly/2uQ8CTt>)

⁵⁴ Roy, E. A. (2018) "'A huge win": New Zealand brings in paid domestic violence leave,' (<https://bit.ly/3cQY9YY>)

⁵⁵ Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland (2019) *Annual Report 2018-19* (<https://bit.ly/2ThWeos>)

⁵⁶ WBG (2019) *Benefits or Barriers? Making social security work for survivors of violence and abuse across the UK's four nations* (<https://bit.ly/343m81p>)

previously recommended that women's rights, including those around VAWG, are equally protected across all four nations of the UK.⁵⁷

Across all four nations, support services are underfunded while demand is increasing. In Wales, 41% of Women's Aid members were not fully funded for 2018/19 and funding has remained static, representing a real terms cut.⁵⁸ In Scotland, figures from 2017/18 show that 89% of Scottish Women's Aid branches were operating with reduced or standstill budgets and 22% reported having to make changes to services as a result of reduced budgets.⁵⁹ In Northern Ireland, 381 women could not access refuge provision during 2018/19 due to lack of capacity.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Building a gender-equal economy is vital to reducing – and eventually eradicating – VAWG and, only with a reduction in VAWG, will women and girls be able to fully participate in the economy and society. Achieving meaningful change will require action that extends beyond pursuing perpetrators and supporting survivors, although both are vital components of any VAWG strategy, to intervene in the economy, media, our public services and social security system.

The full set of recommendations made for the Commission to consider are listed in Appendix 1.

⁵⁷ WBG (2019) *Benefits or Barriers? Making social security work for survivors of violence and abuse across the UK's four nations* (<https://bit.ly/343m81p>)

⁵⁸ Crouch-Puzey, E. (2018) *State of the Sector: Building sustainable specialist services in Wales* (Welsh Women's Aid) (<https://bit.ly/2Tk3tfR>)

⁵⁹ Scottish Women's Aid (2017) *Funding Survey 2017/18: Measuring the impact of funding cuts on domestic abuse services for women and children in Scotland in 2017/18* (<https://bit.ly/2TiBmxp>)

⁶⁰ Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland (2019) *Annual Report 2018-19* (<https://bit.ly/2ThWeos>)

Appendix 1: Summary of recommendations

This Appendix summarises the recommendations set out in this paper for consideration by the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy.

Area	Subdomain	Recommendations
Data and statistics	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve data collection, particularly around LGBT+ individuals experiencing violence/abuse and around repeat victimisation (e.g. removing the five incident cap in the CSEW)
Prevention	Tackling women's economic disadvantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the uneven gender distribution of paid and unpaid work through measures such as designated 'fathers' leave' and flexible working by default so that women and men have the same opportunities to pursue paid work • Reducing occupational segregation by encouraging women into sectors such as STEM and construction • Ensuring that work in sectors of the economy where women are over-represented, such as care work, is valued and remunerated on a par with sectors where men dominate • Tackling sexual harassment and discrimination, particularly around maternity, in the workplace which can act as a barrier to women doing paid working and to their career progression • Eradicating in-work poverty by ensuring that all workers are paid a genuine "living wage" • Ensure that the social security system promotes women's economic independence and enables exit from abusive relationships (see separate section on recommendations relating to Social security)
	Addressing harmful gendered social norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that the Personal, Social and Health (PHSE) curriculum in schools challenges harmful gender norms and provides adequate guidance on healthy relationships and raises awareness of VAWG • Zero tolerance approach to harassment and VAWG in schools and better awareness around these subjects, including addressing gendered forms of bullying • Enforceable guidelines on the portrayal of violence against women and girls in the media and advertising as well as guidelines around the sexualisation and objectification of women and girls • Initiatives that work with young men to develop healthier concepts of masculinity and that challenge harmful attitudes towards women/girls, pornography and prostitution/sex work.
Supporting survivors	Specialist providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all survivors, including migrants and refugees, have access to social security and support services by removing the NRPF rule • Increase funding to specialist VAWG support providers, including BAME providers and services for trans and non-binary individuals experiencing violence, so that they are able to meet needs

	Public services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all frontline staff in public services have been provided with VAWG awareness training and are able to appropriately respond • Ensure that mental health, physical health and other services are adequately funded to support the ongoing needs of VAWG survivors
	Social security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key area for reform - see separate section below as social security plays both a role in prevention and in supporting survivors
	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider introducing paid domestic leave (as has been introduced in New Zealand and the Philippines) to support survivors
Social security	Prevention and supporting survivors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that benefits are set a level that enables individuals and families to live out of poverty (e.g. reversing benefit cuts, removing the Benefits cap and 2-child limit) as poverty is one of the main risk factors for VAWG • Reduce women's economic dependence on their partners by allowing benefits to be split between partners as default and/or to be paid to the main carer (particularly relevant for Universal Credit and already the case in Scotland) • Remove the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' rule to ensure there is a safety net for all • Reform eligibility criteria and conditions (e.g. job-seeking requirements, benefit waiting times) to ensure that they do not disproportionately affect women and present barriers to leaving abusive relationship. Specifically, reform the Domestic Violence Easement (DVE) to remove the once a year limit and extend the easement from 13 weeks to 12 months. • Ensure that there is adequate local welfare assistance (formerly the Social Fund in England) to cover the immediate cost of leaving an abusive relationship.
Pursuing perpetrators	Improving the police response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All frontline police officers should receive domestic violence awareness training, including on the different forms of abuse (physical, sexual, coercive, economic etc.) and how to deal with the initial disclosure • Every police force should have a dedicated Domestic Violence Unit that supports victims, provides advice to frontline staff and ensures effective investigations into abuse • Police should be mandated to refer survivors to local specialist support providers • Police should collect all possible evidence (e.g. recording of 999 calls, videos, body camera evidence) to enable a prosecution where the victim is not participating • Ensuring all police are adequately trained in Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) and the Domestic Violence Disclosure (DVD) scheme
	Improving prosecutions for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every frontline staff member in the criminal, civil, and family justice system should have domestic violence awareness training, including on the coercive and psychological control

	VAWG and the victim experience of the criminal justice system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPS must base decision to prosecute on the facts of the case rather than judgements about the potential prejudices of a jury • Speed of referral from the police to CPS and CPS decision-making should improve as delays can compromise the safety of women • Safety facilities (e.g. separate entrances; video-linked testimony etc.) should be available wherever necessary • Discriminatory attitudes to women victims among criminal justice system – particularly in relation to the ‘perfect witness and perfect victim’ – need to be addressed to ensure every woman has access to justice • Women should feel safe and supported when providing evidence in VAWG cases.
	Rehabilitating perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing perpetrators to justice provides an opportunity for rehabilitation and there should be a comprehensive rehabilitation-focused offender strategy.