

**End Violence Against Women Coalition**

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**Submission to WBG Commission on a  
Gender Equal Economy**

**March 2019**

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## **About the End Violence Against Women Coalition**

The End Violence Against Women Coalition is a UK-wide coalition of more than 85 women's organisations and others working to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) in all its forms, including: sexual violence, domestic violence, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, FGM, stalking and harassment. We campaign for improved national and local government policy and practice in response to all forms of violence against women and girls, and we challenge the wider cultural attitudes that tolerate violence against women and girls and make excuses for it. Our trustees include women who are globally renowned for their pioneering work in setting up the first domestic and sexual violence crisis services, for their academic research in this area, and for having successfully campaigned for considerable legislative and policy change in the UK to end and prevent abuse over the last four decades.

## **Summary**

Violence against women and girls, in all its forms, is experienced as both a "cause and a consequence" of women's inequality. VAWG is more likely because women do not have economic equality with men; and when women experience VAWG they face barriers to escape and change related to their economic inequality. Economic inequality is a conducive context for VAWG. Policy and practice which only treats the 'symptoms' of VAWG, for example by responding mainly through the criminal justice system, will never eradicate VAWG. Comprehensive policy change which addresses women's economic, material inequality with men is the foundation stone for truly aiming to end VAWG. Women facing additional inequality due to their ethnicity, age, disability or sexuality face higher levels of VAWG victimisation and higher barriers to protection and justice. Economic policy which addresses women's intersecting inequalities is therefore also essential to eradicating VAWG. Women and girls will not be able to envision real reduced likelihood of VAWG victimisation until they have equal access to work which pays fairly and is secure; equal ability to save and plan for their financial futures; and a social security system which truly recognises the real value of caring work.

## **About this Submission**

This submission has been put together very quickly, due to usual limits on capacity. It has also been done without wider EVAW membership consultation and as such is based only on staff team knowledge. EVAW felt strongly however that it must make a submission because the question asked, and the development of the case for a gender equal economy is so critically related to policy and push to end VAWG. EVAW is available to provide further comment, references and recommendations at any time.

## **Introduction – Background, VAWG prevalence, intersecting inequalities**

In the UK, as globally, there are catastrophic levels of violence against women and girls. It is estimated that:

- 85,000 adult women are raped in England and Wales every year and more than 400,000 sexually assaulted;
- the police are called to more than a million domestic violence incidents each year, and 149 women were murdered by men in 2014;
- around 130,000 women in the UK are living with FGM;
- tens of thousands of girls are at risk of child sexual exploitation all over the UK.

The UN treaties related to women's equality talk about VAWG as both "a cause and a consequence" of gender inequality, recognising that women's and girls' relative lack of political, economic and cultural power makes us more vulnerable to abuse, and that suffering VAWG often leads to further inequality. VAWG cannot be tackled at the individual level only, and nor by one part of the state only (eg the criminal justice system). It requires comprehensive action across different parts of the state and within civil society. The Hagemann-White model of VAWG perpetration (attached), developed in 2010 and published in EVAW's core policy report on preventing VAWG, '*A Different World is Possible*' (attached), is a strong summary of the different social levels at which VAWG must be considered and the policy implications of each.

Women are not a single social group and 'intersecting inequalities' including those related to ethnicity, age, disability and social background considerably effect rates of VAWG victimisation, access to justice, barriers to accessing support.

For example, age is a major risk factor in relation to VAWG – girls and young women are the group most vulnerable to sexual violence across the population. Girls and young women in some communities are subject to 'honour' codes and to harmful practices including FGM and forced marriage. Child sexual abuse is mostly experienced by girls, who are also targeted in the community for child sexual exploitation. The failure of statutory services to protect girls from sexual exploitation is related to sexist-class prejudice. Meanwhile, older women are arguably 'invisible' to those who might be expected to recognise and respond to domestic violence, and can find it particularly difficult to exit violent relationships.

Women in BME communities are subject to racism and misogyny at individual and structural levels, and often find it harder to access the criminal justice system, statutory services and the VCS. Women who are not British citizens, including asylum-seekers and foreign partners of British nationals, have less protection from VAWG under the law.

Disabled women and women with mental health problems are disproportionately subject to domestic and sexual violence, and find it very difficult to access the justice system and support services.

## **What are the causes of gender inequality in the economy?**

### **And, how does gender inequality interrelate to other forms of inequality in the economy, such as race inequality, disability and poverty?**

#### **VAWG victimisation**

Being a victim of VAWG, in childhood and/or as an adult woman, is significantly likely to reduce a woman's economic independence. When experienced in childhood, girls may not reach the level of educational attainment and then work opportunities that they might have. Victimization in adulthood may reduce and then end a woman's ability to get to work and receive and control her own income, if it has not prevented her starting work. If a woman subject to VAWG in her home or community manages to retain her job, she may however not attain or make good friendships or work networks as she might have done, and thus be prevented both from help-seeking and from advancement and greater economic security and independence.

Some forms of VAWG (including domestic and sexual violence, and forced marriage) may involve considerable control and determination by a partner, and sometimes others too (such as extended family members), over a woman's ability to work or access further/higher education at all. Not having control over her own fertility and bearing children at times not of her own choosing, as well as being expected to care for family members, may additionally effectively prevent a woman being able to work and earn independently. Or, women in controlling relationships who are in paid work may see their income and assets controlled by their partner, thus reducing their economic independence.

#### **Intersecting inequalities**

Intersecting inequalities related especially to social background, to ethnicity, to migration status and to disability, are known to create double and triple binds for women, confining BME, migrant, disabled and poorer women to the most insecure and most low paid work. There is very little recognition of this and no clear policy attempt to address it.

Disabled women may have an abusive partner who is also their carer. Or, there may be people in the community who are abusive towards them but whom others regard as friends/carers, for example "cuckooing" and the sexual abuse and exploitation of women with learning disabilities. Public services and individuals' tendency to look at disabled people as inherently needing of care which they should be grateful to receive (rather than truly receive as a right) contributes to a tendency to be unaware of and uncritical about the dynamics of care, when actually care in the context of disability is a conducive context for abuse.

Women living in poverty clearly face much higher barriers to leaving abusive relationships, or to challenging other forms of abuse in the home such as child sexual abuse and exploitation. A decision to challenge or leave will need planning and material contingencies

taking into account. Researchers have used a test to determine and highlight this which is “the £100 test”; if a woman is the kind of person who can quickly get hold of £100, she is likely to face less barriers to leaving abuse than a woman who cannot do this. Decision makers are commonly very unacquainted with the lives of those who live without this straightforward economic security.

### **Gender stereotypes**

Gender stereotypes continue to considerably affect the “choices” women and men make in relation to what education and work to pursue, and lead to considerable sectoral segregation of the workplace where women are much more often in lower paid and less secure employment even when educational and vocational requirements are taken into account. These stereotypes, about what is properly feminine and masculine, are deeply related to ideas about proper male/female behaviour and ultimately who causes VAWG, who needs to take steps to prevent VAWG, who is to blame for VAWG. A society which was truly trying to undermine attitudes which tolerate and make excuses for VAWG would be seeking to dislodge these ideas which are also contributing to women’s lesser economic power.

### **Caring roles**

Relatedly, the strong expectation that women should be more available to care for children, older people and other dependents, profoundly affects our ability to be economically independent and as such consequently put us in a position where VAWG victimisation is more likely.

### **Social security fail**

The abject failure of our tax and welfare systems to address in-work poverty, single parent poverty and women’s poverty is a national shame.

### **Women and girls in the ‘sex industry’**

Ongoing effective tolerance of prostitution and other forms of ‘sex work’ in England, Wales and Scotland is in itself a cause and consequence of women’s inequality and a deeply conducive context for VAWG. Despite fashionable arguments about “choice” and freedom to ‘buy and sell sex’, it remains the case that poorer women, single mothers, women with chronic addictions and women who already have histories of multiple forms of abuse, are disproportionately to be found effectively economically coerced into prostitution. As well as not being ‘real’ or ‘free’ choice, this is profoundly unsafe and can do great harm to the women and girls put there. The ‘practice’ is strongly demand-driven and based on some men’s strong sense of entitlement to ‘pay for sex’.

## **What issues are important to research and make proposals on in order to create policies for a gender-equal economy?**

### **Education and workplace policy and practice**

Educational settings and workplaces must be alert to VAWG, to its prevalence, to the fact that women and girls are very disproportionately victimised, and to its consequences. They should then develop specific and bespoke policy and practice which is ‘zero tolerant’ of abuse in school/college/workplace; which builds safe to disclose and seek help spaces; which provides support (such as paid leave) to women who need it.

### **‘Gold standard’ VAWG support services**

VAWG support services in every community, run ‘by and for’ women, including BME women by and for services, should be guaranteed sustainability and treated as the valued national assets they are. They have a critical role to play in helping women and girls be safe and recover, such that they can go on to economic independence. This vital role of VAWG support services should be understood and credited for its economic as well as social and rights-based value.

### **Financial measures**

We commend the work and recommendations of our member SEA on the dynamics of economic abuse in intimate relationships, and echo their recommendations for specific action to be taken by banks, creditors and other financial institutions, who must stop effectively facilitating abuse.

### **Comprehensive new ‘offer’ on social security**

The welfare system should be systematically reviewed for its impact on women’s economic inequality, including its impacts on women and girls who are subject to or at risk of abuse. In particular the ‘2 child limit’ should be completely removed; Universal Credit must be split payments; and in-work poverty must end. All new social security proposals must always be equality impact assessed and the specific consequences in relation to VAWG be considered.

### **New ‘regime’ on care**

It is time to be revolutionary in our approach to our entire social perception, description, expectations and then our planning for, financing and delivery of ‘care’ of children and young people, older people, sick people and people with other vulnerabilities. Currently, the ability of some people, men more than women, and already wealthy people more than poorer people, to earn money and to acquire valuable assets is predicated on other people, especially women (be they family members or paid working women) doing necessary caring work. And this caring work is commonly not accorded the respect and reward it deserves.

### **Proactive policy-making related to prostitution**

Women and girls abused in prostitution must finally receive the ‘policy attention’ they deserve after decades of ignoring the coercion and harm of this ‘practice’. Policies toward a gender equal economy should include attention to tackling the ‘demand’ for prostitution in order that women and girls who are vulnerable and sometimes controlled cannot be coerced into it.

## **What resources/publications are important for the Commission on a GEE to consider?**

Domestic violence – Women’s Aid, SEA and many others have in-depth research and writing on the deep connections between domestic violence and economic equality.

Sexual violence – is less examined in terms of the economic impacts of rape, but they are significant. We recommend: ‘Rape as an economic crime: the impact of sexual violence on survivors’ employment and economic wellbeing’ by Rebecca M Loya in the Journal of Interpersonal Violence (November 2014)

The Hagemann-White model of VAWG perpetration, as a strong model of levels of social intervention – has clear economic implications.

Imkaan's "Between the Lines" on BME women's experience and needs in relation to sexual violence

The Step Up Migrant Women campaign's work on migrant women's VAWG victimisation, destitution and needs:

<http://www.lawrs.org.uk/step-up-migrant-women/>

The "hostile environment" is a direct contributor to women's inability to be economically independent and increased risk of VAWG victimisation. Policy on gender equal economics must address this.

There is some international work on economic costs related to FGM and to forced marriage, eg:

<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/the-economic-and-human-costs-of-child-marriage-and-what-we-can-do-about-them/>

## **Ends**

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