

Joint Principles for the Home Office Safer Streets Funding

June 2021

Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is not inevitable, yet it is still one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the UK. The Istanbul Convention defines VAWG as “*any acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.*”¹ This includes sexual violence, domestic abuse, forced marriage, so-called ‘honour based’ abuse, FGM, child sexual abuse, exploitation, prostitution, modern slavery and online abuse.

We cannot eradicate VAWG without preventing it from happening in the first place by tackling the structures, institutions and attitudes that perpetuate and enable male violence. Action to tackle the root causes of VAWG – gender inequality, discrimination, harmful gender norms and attitudes, and sexism and misogyny in public spaces – is essential.

In March 2021 the government announced that a further £25 million would be invested into the Home Office’s Safer Streets Fund during the 2021/22 financial year, following the tragic killing of Sarah Everard. The Prime Minister’s announcement focused on how “*better lighting and greater use of CCTV in parks and routes women may take on their walks home*” would provide more reassurance for women. Over 100 specialist VAWG organisations raised significant concerns that such approaches fail to tackle the root causes of men’s violence, and called for systemic reforms in the government’s response to VAWG.²

Round Three of the Safer Streets Fund was launched on 3 June 2021. The objective of this third round of funding will be to improve the safety of public places, with a particular focus on reducing VAWG crimes. Police and Crime Commissioners, Local Authorities and the British Transport Police are invited to bid for funding to: reduce VAWG and increase women and girls’ feelings of safety in public spaces; build the evidence base for ‘what works’ on reducing VAWG crimes; and improve national and local data on VAWG crimes.

Our organisations are raising serious concerns with government about the scope of the funding, namely:

- The definition of VAWG used for the funding does not adhere to international or the government’s own definitions of VAWG and ignores the realities of women’s complex and interlinked experiences of abuse, assault and harassment;
- The ‘public spaces’ defined in the funding guidance are extremely limited and again disregard women and girls’ lived experiences of VAWG – which can take place online, at work, in schools, bars, cafés, shops and across the ‘divide’ between public and private spaces;
- The funding will fail to target the vast majority of perpetrators who are known to the women and girls they are abusing - intimate partners and family members, work colleagues, teachers, police officers, others in positions of authority, neighbours and community members.

We are urging the government to expand the definitions and scope of the funding to ensure that it adequately tackles male violence. Notwithstanding our concerns about the scope of this funding, this document sets out the specialist VAWG sector’s key principles for PCCs, local authorities and the BTP when bidding and notes areas of potential concern.

¹ Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

² <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Letter-to-Prime-Minister-VAWG-Response-2021.pdf>

Key principles

1. Specialist VAWG sector at the centre

The specialist VAWG sector³ must be central to bids to ensure they are effective in supporting the safety of women and girls. Specialist VAWG organisations are embedded in communities, and have expert understanding of local needs and women's experiences of safety. Their insight, understanding and experience will be critical to leading responses that tackle male violence, support women's safety, and empower women and girls. The funding guidance states that bids "*that fail to demonstrate engagement with VAWG stakeholders will be rejected*", and "*it is of paramount importance this funding is delivered with the first-hand experiences and voices of women and girls at the forefront.*" It is critical to recognise that any approach or intervention that seeks to deliver behaviour change will be unsafe and ineffective unless it's led with the expertise of specialist VAWG organisations. Across the country, the specialist VAWG sector is delivering innovative preventative work which should be the basis of funding bids. This work is often unfunded and requires significant resources to sustain – so ensuring that bids provide cost-recovery for the expertise, advice and input of specialist organisations is critical.

In particular, it will be vital for bidders to work in partnership with specialist organisations led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors. 'By and for' organisations⁴ are trusted and able to reach women facing intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality. These services are essential for fulfilling duties under the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty and they receive high rates of self-referral due to the position and long-established reputations held within communities, and have unique recognition and understanding of intersectionality and the multiple forms of discrimination and additional barriers faced by women from marginalised groups. However, 'by and for' organisations continue to face acute funding pressures and exclusion within current funding and commissioning structures, which must be addressed when establishing partnership arrangements for funding bids.

PCCs, Local Authorities and the British Transport Police should approach and engage local specialist VAWG organisations - including those that are not currently commissioned but deliver vital services to marginalised communities - at the earliest possible stage of the bid process, ensuring they are sufficiently resourced to input and steer the approach taken locally.

2. Tackling the problem

Bids submitted must focus on tackling the problem – male violence. The evidence is clear that male violence and abuse is the biggest threat to women's safety, and bids must focus squarely on addressing perpetrator behaviour. Approaches which aim to improve 'safety' for women and girls without targeting the problem will be ineffective and potentially 'victim blaming' – holding women and girls accountable for managing their safety rather than tackling the men who are threatening it. Approaches and interventions should be focused on delivering attitudinal change, challenging persistent victim-blaming myths, holding men accountable and empowering women and girls.

3. Intersectionality

Approaches must be designed to reach all women and girls - including Black and minoritised women, migrant women and those with insecure status, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT survivors. Any communications, information and awareness activities must be fully accessible to all communities – including translation into a range of languages, including BSL. Partnership with specialist 'by and for' VAWG organisations will be essential for shaping effective responses that reach marginalised women and girls. Their input will be critical to address stereotyping, stigma and discrimination with community prevention and awareness activities. In addition, without their involvement there is a serious risk that approaches will result in discriminatory responses to marginalised communities – including over-policing and surveillance which criminalise Black and minoritised communities, do nothing to improve the safety of women and girls, and can even further undermine Black and minoritised women and girls' already low confidence in reporting to the police.

³ These are organisations whose purpose it is to support survivors and/or children and young people affected by any form of VAWG, or to respond to perpetrators. These services are unique and different from general support services that may provide support or interventions for survivors or perpetrators of not only VAWG, but other crimes as well.

⁴ Imkaan defines by and for organisations as specialist services that are designed and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve. For example, a service for Black, minoritised women affected by gender based violence which is staffed by a board, Director and frontline staff who are themselves representative of Black, minoritised groups. Imkaan, Alternative Bill, October 2018.

4. Safety

Women and girls are at continued risk of violence and abuse in public spaces, including from professionals that they may rely on to protect them – including the police, colleagues, teachers and hospitality staff. Approaches and interventions that seek to improve responses from professionals or members of the public within public spaces need to recognise these inherent risks, and manage them appropriately. Understanding the potential risks and scenarios that will arise as part of interventions to improve women's safety, and ensuring that steps to mitigate these – including through adequate training, guidance and support – are in place is essential. These should be informed by the expertise of the specialist VAWG sector.

5. Evidence and Quality

As the funding prospectus states, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of physical and community based interventions on tackling VAWG. Creating a robust evidence base for 'what works' in behaviour and attitude change and long-term prevention is challenging and it is critical to assess how evidence is defined and measured in this regard. The literature review cited in the prospectus ignores prevention projects, interventions and approaches led within the specialist VAWG sector, including those which have been effective in delivering attitudinal change and improving community responses to VAWG.

Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention sets out clear provisions for the prevention of VAWG, based on knowledge of what works, existing research on the causes and consequences of VAWG, as well as proven approaches tested through international practice. Guidance supporting Article 12 states that to fulfil obligations under the convention, prevention approaches need to challenge gender stereotypes, take an inclusive and intersectional approach, involve men and boys and empower women. It also provides a checklist to ensure that prevention interventions work effectively to tackle male violence, which should be used in developing bids.⁵ Welsh Women's Aid have also articulated key principles, as well as actions and settings for prevention interventions, which can guide local approaches.⁶ Bidders can also learn from international best practice on prevention, such as the detailed monitoring frameworks and indicators developed by the state of Victorian Government in Australia in their prevention action plan.⁷

Given the limited evidence base in this area, it is important that all funding bids ensure that quality and outcomes are central to developing interventions and approaches. The specialist VAWG sector has defined shared core standards which provide benchmarks for the quality of service providers⁸, and has led extensive work on outcomes measurement and monitoring within VAWG services. Ensuring that the specialist VAWG sector are central to the development of funding bids is essential to ensure that creative and inventive approaches to prevention are safe and quality assured.

Areas of concern

Over-policing

The over-policing of Black, minoritised and marginalised communities remains an urgent concern and significant risk when implementing new physical and community interventions to improve public safety. Black and minoritised communities are disproportionately likely to be charged, tried and punished within the criminal justice system⁹ and racial disparities in the use of stop and search are at their highest in over 20 years.¹⁰ In particular, we fear that interventions targeting 'hotspot areas' are likely to fuel discrimination on the basis of race and class, and fuel stereotypes and stigma rather than tackling the inequalities driving male violence. It is critical to recognise that the over-policing of minoritised communities sits alongside under-protection for Black and minoritised women and girls, and undermines their confidence in the police to protect them.

⁵ Marianne Hester and Sarah-Jane Lilley, Preventing Violence Against Women: Article 12 Of The Istanbul Convention, A collection of papers on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2014

⁶ Welsh Women's Aid, A Blueprint for the Prevention of Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Wales, 2020

⁷ Victoria Government, First action plan 2018–2021 to support delivery of Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women

⁸ Imkaan, Rape Crisis England & Wales, Respect, SafeLives and Women's Aid Federation of England, Shared Core Standards, 2016

⁹ The Lammy Review, 2017

¹⁰ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/policing/stop-and-search/latest>

Bystander interventions

There remains a significant lack of evidence on the safety and efficacy of community based interventions, such as 'bystander' approaches, particularly in respect of what outcomes they have for women and girls. Whilst work to tackle gendered norms and harmful attitudes in communities is vital, there are significant concerns that 'bystander interventions' can encourage the involvement of community members in situations in which there is very high risk to women and girls.¹¹ Community based interventions funded through this scheme must build on best practice within the specialist VAWG sector, hold safety and quality paramount, and should be monitored and evaluated on the basis of their outcomes for women and girls.

Effective programmes led by the specialist sector focus on enabling people to understand VAWG as rooted in gender inequality and other forms of discrimination. They empower individuals and communities through providing knowledge and skills to recognise and challenge sexism, controlling behaviour, victim-blaming, and other attitudes and behaviour which condone or justify violence. These reduce the space for perpetration; increase survivors' confidence in seeking support; and enable earlier intervention with both survivors and perpetrators. The success of schemes is reliant on strong connections to the provision of high-quality specialist services to support those who need it and ensure they are informed from the experiences of women and girls.¹²

Target hardening

Funding bids that focus on target hardening measures, including street lighting, CCTV and alley gating, will have very limited impact or effectiveness in tackling VAWG. The UK has one of the highest rates of CCTV per capita in the world, and this has done nothing to deter the prevalence of male violence or impact on the safety of women and girls. In contrast, there are significant concerns about the disproportionate targeting of surveillance on racial, class, age and other lines. The rise of Artificial Intelligence surveillance technology – such as facial recognition software – is a particular concern in this regard.

¹¹ Fenton, RA; Jones, C; Moss, S; et al, The challenges of developing and implementing a bystander intervention for the prevention of domestic violence and abuse in communities, Open Research Exeter, 2019

¹² <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-Blueprint-for-the-Prevention-of-VAWDASV27918.pdf>