

**END**

**VIOLENCE**

**AGAINST**

**WOMEN**

**PRIORITIES FOR  
GOVERNMENT**

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE UK

Around 85,000 women are raped and more than 400,000 women are sexually assaulted each year (ONS)

A third of the victims of rape recorded by police are under 16 years old, and an average of 200 rapes have been recorded by police as having taken place in schools each year (ONS and BBC)

More than a million women were victims of domestic violence last year (ONS), and around two women are killed every week by a current or ex-partner (Femicide Census)

Legal aid has shrunk and abused women are often unable to obtain legal advice and representation which has meant that some women find themselves face to face with the perpetrator in court

Violence against women and girls is very under reported to the police – only 15% of serious sexual offences and around a fifth of domestic violence incidents are reported (ONS); reporting of violence against Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women, as well as women with disabilities, women with mental health problems and others who are vulnerable is even lower

11,744 cases of so-called “honour-based violence” were recorded by UK police forces from 2010-14 (IKWRO)

A large majority of women in prostitution became involved in it under the age of 21 and a significant number before the age of 18 (CWASU); the UK is a significant site of international and internal trafficking for prostitution

A third of girls report having experienced sexual harassment at school (YouGov for EAW, 2010) but school policies and practice remain unable to respond adequately to this

85% of young women in the UK have been sexually harassed in public places (YouGov for EAW, 2016)

Women-led, local support services are closing in the wake of radical changes to commissioning and funding, leading to women and girls falling through the safety net, being turned away from refuges, and waiting ever longer for Rape Crisis support

It is estimated that more than 135,000 women and girls affected by FGM live in England and Wales (City University, 2014)

**Violence against women and girls is directed at women and girls because they are women and girls.** It includes sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking and harassment, FGM (female genital mutilation), forced marriage and so-called 'honour-based violence', trafficking and prostitution, and abuse of women and girls in online spaces. All these forms of abuse are committed disproportionately against women and girls, and the perpetrators are usually men.

**The widespread experience of violence limits women's freedom and choices,** and forces them to make calculations about what it is and is not safe for them to do. For many women, this inequality intersects with other forms of inequality, including wealth and social class, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, mental health and age, which compounds their experience of violence, and also makes it harder for them to access justice and support.

---

## Violence against women and girls is not inevitable

---

**Violence against women is deeply related to women's inequality, it is about power and control** over women's lives, their sexuality and their futures. However violence manifests, whether it's as female genital mutilation, domestic or sexual violence, the solutions are found in increasing women's autonomy and their power to live independently. By improving women's economic and social equality, giving children and young people the information they need about sexual consent and respectful relationships, and by challenging harassment and abuse in public spaces, as well as the excuses that are made for abuse, we can prevent violence against women.

**We therefore call on all party leaders, and all those standing for election, to make a clear pledge that if elected they will:**

**1.  
PRIORITISE  
DEDICATED WORK  
TO END ALL FORMS  
OF VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN  
AND GIRLS**

**2.  
ENSURE THAT  
ALL WOMEN  
HAVE ACCESS  
TO LIFE-SAVING  
SERVICES  
WHEREVER  
THEY LIVE**

**3.  
MAKE ENDING  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN  
AND GIRLS A  
PRIORITY ACROSS  
ALL PUBLIC  
SERVICES**

**4.  
RECOGNISE  
THAT VIOLENCE  
DISPROPORTIONATELY  
AFFECTS WOMEN  
WHO EXPERIENCE  
MULTIPLE FORMS OF  
DISCRIMINATION,  
AND DEVELOP POLICY  
AND SUPPORT  
SERVICES TO  
ADDRESS THIS**



**5.  
DEMONSTRATE  
STRONG AND  
VISIBLE PUBLIC  
LEADERSHIP IN  
THIS AREA –  
CHALLENGE THE  
MYTHS AND  
EXCUSES**

# PRIORITIES FOR GOVERNMENT

## 1. PRIORITISE DEDICATED WORK TO END ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

### What's the problem?

There are almost half a million sexual assaults, including 85,000 rapes, in England and Wales every year, and there are more than a million calls to the police related to domestic violence. Many more incidents are unreported. Around a hundred women are killed in the UK every year by a partner or former partner. Further hidden abuse including child sexual exploitation, forced marriage, FGM, trafficking and abuse of women in prostitution affect women and girls in every part of the UK.

This violence is fed by impunity and inequality. The men who do it feel entitled to commit violence and confident that they will get away with it, while women worry that they may not be believed if they report abuse, or face homelessness, poverty and further risks if they try to seek support.



### What can the next Government do about this?

**The next Prime Minister should reaffirm the Government's commitment to the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy**, and to ensuring that every area of Government plays its part in ending and preventing abuse – including police and courts, the health service, schools, housing, welfare, transport.

**Ensure new law in this area takes a joined up violence against women and girls approach.** New law might aim to improve family as well as criminal law, and could improve the accountability of commissioning of support services, policy and practice related to work with perpetrators, and expectations of public services in this area.

**Create an independent Violence Against Women and Girls Commissioner** with the resource to hold to account all those with decision-making and funding responsibilities related to violence against women and girls.

**Ratify the Istanbul Convention** without delay.



## 2. ENSURE THAT ALL WOMEN HAVE ACCESS TO LIFE-SAVING SERVICES WHEREVER THEY LIVE

### What's the problem?

Over decades women in the UK have built life-saving support services tailored to the specific needs of women and their families at risk of and dealing with violence. These refuges, helplines, rape crisis centres, Black women led services, outreach workers, perpetrator programmes and legal advocacy, have named emerging forms of abuse, developed holistic responses and acquired rich expertise in the dynamics of abuse and what needs to be done to end and prevent it. They are often the local people best able to train police, school workers, social workers, doctors and others in understanding and responding to gender based violence.

In recent years these services have faced unprecedented threats from competition with non-specialist providers, combined with commissioners in local authorities, health and policing who are dealing with budget cuts. Each year more women are unable to access support as these women-led services face cuts and closure. More worryingly, the current systems for holding to account and ensuring non-specialist providers are doing the best job for women at risk are very weak.

Women need women-led, and BME women-led, local support services to access long-term safety and recovery. If significant numbers of these services continue to close, not only will this cost lives, but the local expertise which police, schools and health providers currently regularly draw on will also disappear.



### What can the next Government do about this?

**Take immediate steps to end the postcode lottery and ensure support services – including Rape Crisis Centres and independent BME women-led services - are sustainable and available to women and girls across the country.** The Rape Support Fund (Ministry of Justice) must continue to operate from national government level, ensuring the possibility of support for all survivors of sexual violence, whose needs and experiences are often not understood by local commissioners (the needs of adult survivors of child sexual abuse are among the most neglected).

**BME women-led services** similarly need recognition for the unique expertise and position they hold, with nationally ring-fenced support to ensure they stay open and sustainable. These services save countless lives and provide invaluable expertise and training to public service workers in identifying and responding to violence experienced by BME women and girls.

**Recognise the expertise of these services** – which is commonly called on by public services - in commissioning processes. Local authorities, police and crime commissioners and health bodies should have regard to the long-term consequences of this expertise becoming unavailable.

**Commission an independent inquiry this year** on how commissioning of different violence against women and girls support services is happening; how many remain in relation to demand; the known impact of this on women and their families; the ability of local public service workers to find expertise on violence against women and girls when they need it; and make recommendations on what regime is needed to ensure survival of the kind of support known to lead to the best long-term outcomes for women and girls.

**Increase scrutiny and accountability of non-specialist organisations** that are providing support services to survivors of abuse and those which are working with perpetrators.

## 3. MAKE ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS A PRIORITY ACROSS ALL PUBLIC SERVICES

### What's the problem?

For many years rape, domestic violence and other forms of violence against women and girls have been seen as primarily matters for the police and courts – who are charged simply with detaining offenders and prosecuting after offences have occurred.

There remains a 'postcode lottery' in the quality of response for women reporting violence to the police – some will encounter well trained police officers, specialist prosecutors and a court system designed to make it easier for them to give evidence, while others will not. Many women who want to pursue justice are still deterred from reporting because they fear they won't be believed. There is still serious prejudice and abuses within the system, some women find it much more difficult to access justice than others. Much remains much to be done to improve the criminal justice response to women affected by violence.

---

### Many women who want to pursue justice are still deterred from reporting

---

But it is also time for other public services to step up and play a greater role in detecting, responding to and preventing violence against women and girls. Reviews of domestic violence murders have shown that women who are murdered often have much more interaction with health services than the police before they are killed. Housing providers have a unique opportunity to detect, reach out and protect in cases of domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation for example. Social workers encounter many women experiencing domestic violence but are not provided adequate training or resources to respond appropriately to the needs of the abused parent, focusing instead on the short term safety of the child.

Other areas of government, including the immigration and asylum system and welfare, have policies and procedures that are actively working counter to the aim of ending violence against women and girls.

### What can the next Government do about this?

#### *In the Criminal Justice System:*

**Sexual history evidence** – Review the law and improve the protection from the prejudicial use of sexual history and medical evidence in rape trials.

**Advocacy** – Ensure all women have access to an domestic violence advocates and to an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) when they report these offences for as long as they need one.

**Legal aid** – Ensure survivors of all forms of violence against women and girls can access legal aid for all the forms of legal support they may need (criminal, immigration, family, welfare) without the need for third party verification checks on their experience of violence.

**Restorative Justice** – Should not be rolled out until women's organisations are confident it will not do harm.

#### *Across other public services:*

**For all public services**, mandatory training from women-led and BME-women led services on all forms of violence against women and girls should form part of every front line worker's basic training and continuous professional development. Training must cover identification, response and how to respond, to support earlier identification and promote shared responsibility for ending violence against women and girls.

**For schools**, legislation was recently passed which says every child in England must receive relationships and sex education (RSE). The next government should ensure this leads to dedicated teaching time in all educational institutions, including the law on sexual consent and information about all forms of violence against women and girls. The implementation of good RSE should be accompanied by improved school policies on sexual harassment, child protection and safeguarding; and better teacher training and practices on responding to disclosures of abuse.

# We need to urgently separate forced marriage and ending FGM work from 'Prevent' and anti-extremism



**In health** – Train all frontline health service workers, across hospitals, general practice and mental health services, to identify and respond to violence against women and girls. Roll out the training of GPs, place advocates in Emergency Departments – both are known to be effective. Act urgently to train mental health workers in violence against women and girls.

**In social work** – Review the Troubled Families programme's guidance to local authorities, and ensure its workers are responsive to violence against women and girls in all its forms.

**In welfare** - Scrap the 'rape clause' by removing the child tax credit two child cap; housing benefit and entitlement to tenancies should be reviewed so that women who flee violent men are not left more insecure than they were before. Welfare policy making should factor in the experiences and needs of abuse survivors at an early stage, not as afterthought.

**Separate forced marriage and ending FGM work from 'Prevent' and anti-extremism.** These areas of work are now commonly conflated by local authorities and by schools. This leads to school governors for example, who are lay volunteers, being told that they should be vigilant over children from particular communities for FGM and for 'radicalisation' as if they are related, and women within practising communities who are trying to challenge FGM and forced marriage feeling they are themselves under scrutiny. We need to urgently separate these issues, and put the focus on safeguarding all girls and young women who are at risk of harm, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, class or other such social factors.

**In the asylum system** – the decision-making system should be sensitive to applications made on grounds of gender based violence, and women making such applications should not be detained while their applications are considered.

**In the immigration system** – Women who are experiencing or at risk of violence, whatever their immigration status, must be able to seek support and justice. Immigration enforcement practices should not deter women from seeking protection for fear of the immigration related consequences for them and their families. Women's groups working with women subject to immigration controls should be consulted on the changes needed in this area.

---

**Women who are experiencing or at risk of violence, whatever their immigration status, must be able to seek support**

---

**Learn from international best practice** – the UK is a major donor internationally and has long had ending violence against women and girls as a strategic priority in its international development initiatives. The UK government should ensure policy at home and overseas is evidence based, and that we take every opportunity to share learning about what works abroad, while also learning from, respecting and supporting local women's activism, innovation and approaches to ending VAWG overseas.

## 4. RECOGNISE THAT VIOLENCE DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTS WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCE MULTIPLE FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION, AND DEVELOP POLICY AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO ADDRESS THIS

### What's the problem?

Law, policy and spending in this area needs to take account of different women's lives. Black and minority ethnic women, LGBT women, older women, young women, disabled women, trafficked women, homeless women, women exploited in prostitution, women with learning disabilities and women with mental health problems, women offenders and women living in poverty all experience disproportionately high levels of violence and significant barriers to seeking help and justice.

Policy development in relation to violence against women and girls often fails to take account of the diversity of women's needs and experiences. The crisis facing BME women-led specialist support services is particularly devastating for some women who need support provided by women who understand and offered a tailored response to their needs.

### What can the next Government do about this?

**Ring fence funding for specialist BME women-led support services** and other services 'by and for' women with protected characteristics.

**Separate initiatives to tackle forced marriage and FGM from 'counter terrorism'** and extremism programmes.

**Change the law to decriminalise women in prostitution** and instead sanction the men who exploit them and ensure the provision of services to support women to exit.

**Pledge to maintain the Human Rights Act and the Equality Act**, as withdrawal from the EU is conducted, because these form the critical safety net which many women need to uphold our rights to safety and protection.

**Support innovation and development** in specialist women-led services to enable them not just to continue surviving, but also to continue building knowledge and expertise around the needs of different groups of women and appropriate responses, for example in the area of young women's advocacy and anti-trafficking advocacy.





## 5. DEMONSTRATE STRONG AND VISIBLE PUBLIC LEADERSHIP IN THIS AREA – CHALLENGE THE MYTHS AND EXCUSES



### What's the problem?

Perpetrators of violence against women and girls know they can rely on others to ignore or minimise the abuse. This reality is found in serious case reviews into child sexual abuse, in domestic homicide reviews, in the casual way rape victims are blamed for the violence they experience, and the abuse women experience when they achieve any kind of profile online.

Street harassment and 'everyday sexism' – which for many women is combined with everyday racism and other prejudice and discrimination – reinforce the 'social norms' which to some extent help indicate that violence is sometimes women's fault and should not be taken seriously. Recent years have seen considerable changes in media portrayals of women, and the wide recognition that the free and easy availability of online pornography is harmful to children and adults.

Government, public bodies and media companies have a role in tackling these 'norms' so that ultimately the excuses can be diminished. It is also critical that all those holding public office, and others in public life, take these issues on, become champions and help move the question from 'what did she do' to 'why did he feel entitled to'.

### What can MPs and the next Government do about this?

**Visible public leadership & calling out 'everyday sexism'** – All those holding public office should increase their knowledge about the prevalence and causes of violence against women and girls and what needs to be done to end it. They should challenge the deep seated assumptions about why violence happens whenever they have the chance to influence public opinion.

---

Move the question from 'what did she do' to 'why did he feel entitled to'

---

**Tackle harmful media portrayals of women** – The next Government should continue to assess the impact of harmful portrayals of women and girls in all media, by ensuring that culture and media strategy is informed by the violence against women and girls strategy. New legislation on creating age verification requirements for access to online pornography must be fully implemented with regulators and the justice system given the powers and resources to do so.

**WRITE TO  
CANDIDATES**



**AND  
TWEET THEM...**



**SHARE**



**WHAT  
YOU  
CAN DO?**



**END  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
WOMEN**

EVAW is a leading coalition of specialist women's support services, researchers, activists, survivors and NGOs working to end violence against women and girls in all its forms. Established in 2005, we campaign with our members for every level of government to adopt better, more joined up approaches to ending and preventing violence against women and girls, and we challenge the wider cultural attitudes that tolerate and condone this abuse. The EVAW Coalition is a company limited by guarantee (no. 7317881) and a registered charity (no. 1161132).