

# **WOMEN AND GIRLS' SAFETY MANIFESTO: PRIORITIES FOR THE GENERAL ELECTION 2015**



**End Violence Against Women Coalition**

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# **The EVAW Coalition is calling for all Political Parties to make the following commitments to ensuring the safety of women and girls in our communities:**

## **1. A NEW LAW ON WOMEN'S SUPPORT SERVICES**

We are calling for a law to ensure that women and girls who experience sexual, domestic or other violence - including BME women, those with uncertain immigration status and refugee women - have access to specialist support and advocacy services in their community, as required by the EU Victims Directive and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women.

## **2. INFORM YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

There is now overwhelming support for compulsory Sex and Relationships Education, as part of Personal Social Health and Economic education, in all schools as part of a broader plan to reduce violence against women and girls through challenging abusive attitudes and behaviours amongst boys and men and empowering girls and young women.

## **3. ADDRESS HARMFUL MEDIA IMAGES**

We want to see a consistent approach to regulation of harmful images across television, film, music video, advertising and print media, based on harm-based criteria.

We also want to see a comprehensive response to the harms of pornography, to include ensuring young people are taught about the issues around pornography, such as sexual consent and respectful relationships; public campaigns targeted at young people and others, together with measures to work with boys exhibiting harmful behaviours.

## **4. PROTECT MARGINALISED WOMEN**

We also want to see an end to the detention of survivors of gender-based violence if they come to this country to seek asylum.

We support the 'Nordic model' approach to prostitution so that those selling sex are not criminalised, whilst those purchasing sex are prosecuted.

Marginalised women such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women, those with mental health needs, women with disabilities, and women with insecure immigration status must have access to specialist support services that meet their needs.

## **5. NATIONAL AND LOCAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS PLANS**

A new law requiring national and local governments to work with the women's sector to develop violence against women and girls strategies and plans, and ensure resources for frontline services. This should cover all forms of violence against women and girls, according to the UN definition, including those experienced by women with uncertain immigration status and refugee women.

# **WOMEN AND GIRLS' SAFETY MANIFESTO: PRIORITIES FOR THE GENERAL ELECTION 2015**

Violence, harassment and abuse scandals are rarely out of the news; from Savile and Stuart Hall, from Rotherham to the corridors of power in Westminster and on social media. Politicians recognise that this is a major issue and the May 2015 General Election is fast approaching. **It is now time for all Parties to pledge to comprehensive action to end violence, abuse and harassment of women and girls wherever it takes place.**

This means tackling the toxic sexism that runs throughout our society and challenging serious and harmful male attitudes and behaviours. There is overwhelming public support for this, especially from women.<sup>1</sup>

There is lots of good work already, but the fact is that we need to transform our whole approach if we want to see real change. Let's make women and girls' safety a priority and a reality in all our communities.

## **Why?**

In a 2014 Europe-wide survey on violence against women, 44% of UK women surveyed reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence.<sup>2</sup> Violence against women and girls is underpinned by a culture that condones, and even promotes it, including a sexualised media that depicts women as sex objects, and men as sexual aggressors. The UK has many obligations under international and domestic law to change this culture and prevent abuse.

## **A daily human rights abuse on our own doorstep**

The United Nations state that "*Gender-based violence is violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.*"<sup>3</sup> States have clear obligations under international law to address both the causes and consequences of violence against women.

It is an issue that cuts across all policy areas; affecting women and girls in their families, at school and University, at work, in health and in other institutions, and in their social lives and community. It is a stain on the fabric of our society, and limits the potential of all girls and women.

<sup>1</sup> A YouGov Poll for EVAW in 2013 found that 86% of UK adults believe that sex and relationships education should be compulsory in school.

<sup>2</sup> <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/vaw-survey-main-results>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations (1992): General Recommendation No. 19 on Violence against Women, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 11th session, 1992, New York.

There have been a plethora of cases, surveys, reports and Inquiries in recent years lifting the lid on the scale of abuse and the all-too-often inadequate response by public bodies. A report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary exposed systemic failings in police handling of domestic violence. There is an unacceptable lack of access to justice for survivors of violence and abuse with real concern that reforms to the Legal Aid system will exacerbate this.

On-going trials highlight the rape and sexual assault of girls and young women by groups of their peers, and by older men, and a two-year Inquiry by the Office of the Children's Commissioner exposed persistent failings in the child protection system. We have also witnessed the failure of public bodies at all levels of government to ensure that survivors have access to specialist independent support and advocacy services to help them to flee violence, to provide essential support to cope with the aftermaths of violence, to access justice and rebuild their lives.<sup>4</sup> Existing women's services are severely stretched and under chronic pressure because of changes in how they are funded, at a time when services are reporting significant increases in disclosures post Savile. Cases in the media illustrate how essential these services are, regardless of when the abuse occurred. In 2013 Frances Andrade took her own life during the trial of Michael Brewer, later convicted of sexually assaulting her years earlier when she was a pupil at Chetham School of Music. **We are calling for a new law to ensure that women and girls have access to specialist support and advocacy services in their communities in line with the EU Victims Directive.**<sup>5</sup>

Whilst the perpetrators of violence against women and girls are overwhelmingly men and boys, there is a historic and chronic lack of investment or resources focused on changing harmful, coercive and abusive attitudes and behaviours. Whilst schools and Universities should be places where young people feel and are safe to grow and learn, there are worryingly high levels of sexual violence, harassment and intimidation of girls and young women, mostly carried out by boys and young men they know.<sup>6</sup>

Studies have found high levels of exposure to harmful behaviours online and concerns around 'sexting' amongst children, including abusive and coercive behaviour by boys.<sup>7</sup> The sexualisation of women and girls in popular culture and the media creates a 'conducive context' in which violence against women and girls flourishes. Research has shown that pornography is linked to boys' negative attitudes to women and to equality.<sup>8</sup> Studies by the UCLA have found that men who have

4 Specialist support services' primary purpose is to support victim/survivors to ensure their protection and enable them to deal with the legacies of abuse alongside engaging in prevention work to end violence against women and girls (VAWG). They include Rape Crisis Centres, refuges and specialist domestic violence services, and services designed for and run by black and minority ethnic women. Their independence is particularly important while women lack the trust in the criminal justice system to report to statutory agencies.

5 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32012L0029>

6 End Violence Against Women and Yougov poll of 16-18 year olds (October 2010).

7 [http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/sexting-research\\_wda89260.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/sexting-research_wda89260.html)

8 [http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content\\_667](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_667)

higher consumption of pornography are more likely to have attitudes that support sexual violence against women. There is also particular concern for young people who have unprecedented exposure to pornographic media.<sup>9</sup> In 2013, Rape Crisis South London's change.org petition attracted over 73,000 signatories in weeks showing the huge public support for stronger legislation on pornography that endorses violence against women.<sup>10</sup>

Prostitution continues to damage the lives of many women and girls and ERAW welcomed the recent resolution adopted by the European Parliament<sup>11</sup> which calls on member states to recognise prostitution as both a cause and consequence of gender inequality and a violation of women's human rights.

The rapidly evolving environment of social media provides further challenges. Whilst undoubtedly a positive tool for all to engage in social, community, political and other activities, it has also become an arena where violence, abuse and threats are targeted at women and girls. The Government, schools, criminal justice system and social media providers are on the backfoot when it comes to addressing abuse of women and girls via social media, whereas it should be treated as robustly as comparable offences offline. There is an urgent task ahead for all these agencies to ensure women and girls safety on social media platforms.

We are calling for action in all schools and Universities to inform young people about abuse, to challenge abusive practices, and to ensure there are appropriate policies and procedures. This should be part of a broader **programme of work to prevent violence against women and girls** which includes a consistent approach to tackling harmful media images, and public campaigns, such as the Home Office's This is Abuse campaign which is aimed at boys and men, as well as bystander programmes which give the whole community responsibility for addressing and preventing violence against women and girls.

There are particular groups of women and girls who are marginalised and discriminated against in our communities including BME women and girls, women with mental health needs, those in the criminal justice system, women with insecure immigration status, older women, women with disabilities including learning disabilities, and girls especially those in or leaving care. **We are calling for action to protect marginalised women.**

We want politicians to commit to an end to the detention of those who are survivors of rape, other torture and sexual violence if they come to this country to seek asylum. This would require a change to the Enforcement Instructions and Guidance issued

9 Recent polls have shown that in the UK, 60% of young people are first exposed to pornography aged 14 years or younger (BBC/ICM poll, 2014) and that 28% of young people aged 11 to 18 think porn definitely "influences how young people have to behave in a relationship" (NSPCC, 2013).

10 A YouGov/Sunday Times poll also indicated that 85% of women and 63% of men believe that children seeing pornography on the internet is damaging to them.

11 European Parliament resolution of 26 February 2014 on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality (2013/2103(INI)).

to Home Office employees, with the inclusion of a statement that those who say that they have experienced any form of violence against women as part of their asylum claim should not be considered suitable for detention at any stage during their asylum claim. We also support the growing call for our prostitution laws to be modernised to follow the 'Nordic model' so that those selling sex are not criminalised, whilst those purchasing sex are.

There have been many positive developments, not least the ongoing commitment to the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and Action Plans, which have made a difference. It is crucial that there is cross-party support for such an approach to build on good work. The Strategy needs further investment and development, and a legal obligation for all local areas to work with local women's groups to develop such an approach. Preventing and responding to violence against women and girls requires a pro-active, multi-layered, transformative approach by government at all levels. Strategic and effective cross-government working to ensure consistent approaches to policy and practice, together with resources specifically for frontline provision is needed, now more than ever.

**We are calling for a law on National and Local Violence Against Women and Girls Plans including resources for specialist frontline services.**

EVAW relies on the generous support of individuals and donors including Comic Relief, Esmée Fairbairn, Sigrid Rausing, Rosa, JMG, Trust for London and Amnesty International UK, to fulfil our objectives to achieve a vision of a world without violence against women and girls. If you share our vision and would like to support our important work, then please make a donation by visiting: [www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk)

## Believing women and girls and holding perpetrators to account

**Rotherham Inquiry** - Professor Alexis Jay's report on the rape and sexual exploitation of at least 1,400 children, mostly girls, in Rotherham between 1997 and 2013 revealed that children were *"raped by multiple perpetrators, trafficked to other towns... abducted, beaten, and intimidated... doused in petrol and threatened with being set alight... made to witness brutally violent rapes and threatened they would be next if they told anyone."*

The police, schools, social workers and health workers all failed to intervene to stop the abuse – because they disregarded the law on sexual consent and child protection policies, and they made extremely prejudiced judgements about working-class girls. Over time the perpetrators realised they were not going to be stopped and the abuse escalated.

The Children's Commissioner's 2013 Inquiry into organised sexual exploitation found that it is happening all over England, in large and small towns, and that more than 16,000 children, mostly girls, were at risk in one year alone

**Girls at school** - *"I am 13 and I am so scared to have sex it makes me cry nearly every day. We had sex education in year six and I felt fine about it but now some of the boys at school keep sending us these videos of sex which are much worse than what we learnt about and it looks so horrible and like it hurts and it keeps coming in to my mind and at night I get really scared that one day i will have to do it."*

*"I am a secondary science teacher. I witness on a daily basis the girls in my classes being called 'whore' 'bitch' 'slag' 'slut' as a matter of course, heckled if they dare to speak in class, their shirts being forcibly undone and their skirts being lifted and held by groups of boys, (I WANT TO EMPHASISE THAT THIS IS MORE OFTEN THAN NOT A DAILY EVENT, AND OFTEN BORDERS ON ASSAULT). On a daily basis I am forced to confiscate mobile phones as boys are watching hardcore pornography videos in lessons."*

Testimonies from The Everyday Sexism Project - many thanks to Laura Bates for permission to reprint.

**Female genital mutilation** - In early 2014 a campaign by Bristol schoolgirl Fahma Mohamed gathered more than 200,000 signatures in weeks and persuaded the Government to write to all schools in England to remind them of their duties to prevent FGM (female genital mutilation) as part of their child protection policies. FGM has been illegal in the UK since 1986. Part of the problem has been a failure by frontline workers in schools, local councils and criminal justice to implement the law and policies on violence against women and girls as they exist.

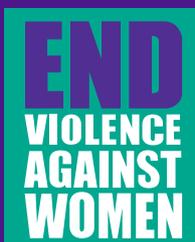
- In 2012 around 1.2 million women suffered domestic abuse, over 400,000 women were sexually assaulted, 85,000 women were raped and thousands more were stalked.<sup>12</sup>
- 18,915 sexual crimes against children under 16 were recorded in England and Wales in 2012/13.<sup>13</sup>
- In 2013, the Government's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) gave advice or support related to a possible forced marriage in 1302 cases. 82% of cases involved female victims.<sup>14</sup>
- At least 66,000 women in England and Wales have been subject to female genital mutilation.<sup>15</sup>
- Sexual bullying and harassment are routine in UK schools. Almost one in three 16-18 year-old girls have experienced 'groping' or other unwanted sexual touching at school (EVAW 2010).
- An FOI request by the The Independent published in August 2014 showed that more than 320 rapes were reported in UK schools over the past three years.
- 60% of young people are first exposed to pornography aged 14 years or younger (BBC/ICM poll, 2014) and research by the Children's Commissioner in 2013 found that young people's exposure to pornography is linked to sexist attitudes, beliefs that women are sex objects and negative attitudes towards sex.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-uk>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/statistics\\_wda87833.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/sexualabuse/statistics_wda87833.html)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage> Statistics on Forced Marriage for 2013

<sup>15</sup> Dorkenoo et al, 2007



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