

## **End Violence Against Women Coalition**

### **Response to Home Affairs Select Committee's Call for Evidence on Violence Against Women and Girls**

**May 2021**

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

The End Violence Against Women Coalition is a UK-wide coalition of over 100 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.

#### **Introduction**

The UK signed up to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2011 (Istanbul Convention) in 2012. The Istanbul Convention defines violence against women as follows:

*"Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all 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."*

The End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) has long campaigned for the UK to fully ratify the Istanbul Convention which is internationally considered to be the "gold standard" in responding to violence against women and girls (VAWG). However, in order to do this, the UK would need to address the areas that it still is not compliant with, namely Articles 4(3) and 59 relating to the rights of migrant women. The gaps in protection for migrant women were sharply highlighted throughout the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act, and still sadly remain. Additionally, the Domestic Abuse Act was intended to finally enable the UK to ratify the Istanbul Convention but these remaining gaps in protection mean that we are no closer to ratification. We would strongly encourage the Committee to explore steps towards ratification of the Istanbul Convention and how VAWG affects migrant women as part of its future programme of work.

We would strongly encourage the Committee to put intersectionality at the heart of its programme of work. Intersectionality is vital in understanding the forms and consequences of VAWG which intersect with other forms of oppression such as racism, homophobia, gender identity, classism, disability amongst others. Black feminist academics and activists

have pointed to the double oppression faced by black and minoritised women and the “othering” and eroticising of Black and minoritised women’s bodies and sexuality. The global Black Lives Matters protests last year have shone a light on the impact of racism, alongside the murder and disappearance of many Black women over the past year such as Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry. We would encourage particular consideration of the effectiveness of statutory responses to VAWG in relation to women with other protected characteristics and migrant status. Focused examination of the specific abuse experienced by Deaf and disabled women, for example at the hands of their carers, and abuse experienced by LGBT+ women is also necessary to understand the range of impacts of VAWG on different groups of survivors. In addition, the prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse experienced by girls at schools and other education settings, demonstrates the importance of looking at how to respond to and prevent VAWG experienced by young women and girls.

### **Executive Summary**

The following recommendations are a summary of the action we believe needs to be taken to respond to and prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) in all its forms. These are not exhaustive but highlight some key points for national, regional and devolved governments and statutory agencies tackling VAWG:

#### **VAWG and Modern Technology**

- A comprehensive public health approach to tackling online abuse, including providing clear recommendations to employers on how to help ensure their employees are safe online, and publishing national guidance on digital safety, including research into impact of online abuse on women and Black and minoritised communities.
- An acknowledgement of VAWG as a specific form of online harm in the definition of the Online Harms Bill.

#### **VAWG and Young Women and Girls**

- A resourced strategy and action plan at the DfE for wholesale improvement of the school response to sexual harassment and assault, developed in consultation with the specialist VAWG sector, including disaggregated data collection on sexual assault.
- A ‘whole school approach’ as an explicit expectation in addition to the full roll-out of compulsory RSE.

#### **VAWG and Migrant Women and Women with Protected Characteristics**

- Full ratification of the Istanbul Convention to ensure equal protection and support for all women and girls.
- A VAWG Strategy designed to tackle the systemic barriers facing Black and minoritised women, migrant women, Deaf and disabled women, LGBT+ survivors and women facing multiple forms of disadvantage.

#### **So-Called “Honour-Based Abuse”**

- Meaningful engagement with specialist Black and minoritised-led “by and for” VAWG services to ensure the needs and concerns of women and girls at risk of so-called “honour-based abuse” are centred.

#### **Influence of Extreme or Violent Pornography**

- Meaningful engagement with experts in pornography and VAWG to develop strong, proactive regulation of how porn companies enforce their terms and conditions within the Online Harms Bill.

#### Organisations that Women and Girls turn to for Support

- Fully ratify the Istanbul Convention so that the government and public bodies are legally obliged to sustainably fund specialist women’s support services, under Article 22, and ensure there are support services for all victims/survivors under Article 4(3).
- Ring-fenced funding for specialist VAWG services run “by and for” Black and minoritised and migrant women, Deaf, disabled and LGBT+ survivors, so that all victims/survivors can access appropriate support to help them cope and recover.

#### The Role of Information and Education in Protecting Women and Girls

- Accessible and effective communication campaigns that challenge myths and stereotypes across society and community responses that challenge perpetrator behaviour across all systems including schools, communities, health, welfare, social services as well as the criminal justice system (CJS).

#### Measures for Perpetrators

- Effective leadership and multi-agency arrangements to ensure public services are actively holding perpetrators accountable, that professionals are trained to identify and respond to perpetrators, and there are clear pathways into quality Respect accredited perpetrator interventions, including specific interventions for Black and minoritised perpetrators.

#### Steps towards Ratifying the Istanbul Convention

- Fully ratify the Istanbul Convention by enshrining a non-discrimination principle in the Victims Bill so that victims/survivors of VAWG can access equally effective protection and support, in line with Article 4(3) of the Istanbul Convention.
- Establish safe reporting mechanisms, so migrant victims can report domestic abuse safely without the fear of immigration control.
- Extend the eligibility for already existing provisions to protect migrant women, through the Domestic Violence Rule (DV Rule) and the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) so that migrant victims/survivors of abuse can apply to regularise their status separate to their abusers in line with Article 59.

For more information on recommendations for what is needed to tackle VAWG in the UK, we would also encourage the Committee to read the Joint VAWG Principles, developed by the specialist VAWG sector in response to the Government’s VAWG Strategy Call for Evidence: <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Joint-Principles-for-the-VAWG-Strategy-2021-2024-1.pdf>

#### **Information on different forms and experiences of VAWG**

Consistent and comparable data collection on VAWG remains poor across government departments and public sector agencies – resulting in a distorted picture of the scale of male violence against women and undermining an evidence-based understanding of VAWG. Below is a snapshot of what we do know about some forms of VAWG:

- Almost one in three women aged 16-59 will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime;<sup>1</sup>
- two women a week in England and Wales are killed by a current or former partner;<sup>2</sup>
- over half a million women are raped or sexually assaulted each year;<sup>3</sup>
- more than 135,000 women and girls affected by FGM living in England and Wales;<sup>4</sup>
- a third of girls report having experienced sexual harassment at school.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to recognise that official statistics are still woefully poor on who is experiencing VAWG in terms of race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and class, even though we know that various intersecting inequalities have a strong bearing on this.

For more information on the what we know about VAWG, please read EAW's Snapshot report on the state of VAWG 2020/21: <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Violence-Against-Women-and-Girls-Snapshot-Report-FINAL-1.pdf>

### **How VAWG has changed and how issues relating to VAWG are affected by modern technology**

Women and girls are subject to disproportionately high volumes of violence, sexualised abuse and hate online. This is known as 'online VAWG', but should be understood as part of a continuum of abuse which is often taking place offline too. 'Online VAWG' should be recognised as a wide and growing set of harms including image-based abuse, online harassment, the sending of unsolicited explicit images, coercive 'sexting', the creation and sharing of 'deepfake' pornography and much more.

Online violence against women and girls takes place in the context of gendered norms of popular culture that can reinforce harmful stereotypes and gender inequality. While data analysis in this area is still fairly underdeveloped, what is known is that women are 27 times more likely to be harassed online than men.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, a study of the experiences of 11 to 16 year-olds shows that girls are more likely than boys to experience pressure to look or behave in a particular way and in 2014, 87% of all reported child sexual abuse images depicted girls.<sup>7</sup>

Online abuse of women and girls is compounded with multiple forms of discrimination - intersecting with racism, homophobia and ableism, etc. [The Ripple Effect, Online abuse during COVID-19, Sept 2020](#) report by Glitch and EAW highlighted the extent of abuse women receive online and how Black and minoritised women are disproportionately victimised. In the months preceding the Covid-19 pandemic, 38% women and non-binary people surveyed reported experiencing online abuse, with Black and minoritised

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<sup>1</sup> ONS (2019) [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2019](#)

<sup>2</sup> ONS (2019) [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#)

<sup>3</sup> ONS (8 February 2018) [Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017](#)

<sup>4</sup> [City of London and Equality Now \(2014\) Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales: Updated statistical estimates of the numbers of affected women living in England and Wales and girls at risk](#)

<sup>5</sup> EAW (2010) [YouGov Poll Exposes High Levels Sexual Harassment in Schools](#)

<sup>6</sup> Her Net Her Rights – Mapping the state of online violence against women and girls in Europe

<sup>7</sup> Her Net Her Rights, [https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherrights\\_report\\_2017\\_for\\_web.pdf](https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherrights_report_2017_for_web.pdf),

respondents reporting 50%. This increased to 42% of white respondents who had experienced online abuse during Covid-19 and 52% of Black and minoritised respondents.<sup>8</sup>

Of respondents reporting online abuse, nearly half (48%) reported suffering from gender-based abuse. Further research by Women's Aid found that 85% of women who experienced online abuse from partner or ex-partner said that it was part of the pattern of abuse they also experienced offline.<sup>9</sup> Latest data on image-based abuse showed that 82% of prosecutions were flagged as being domestic abuse-related, further emphasising how online abuse operates as part of the continuum of VAWG.<sup>10</sup>

Another significant factor of online abuse for women is the frequent use of threats of rape and sexual violence and derogatory comments about women's appearance and bodies.<sup>11</sup> Government policies and justice agencies should tackle abuse of women and girls online as robustly as it should offences that occur offline. A rape threat via Twitter should be treated as seriously as a rape threat in the street. Studies have shown the impact of online abuse are no different to abuse experienced in the offline world. The nature of the harms that can result include not only psychological harms but also physical harms from incitements to violence or self-harm.<sup>12</sup> It also causes wider societal harms and can contribute to the withdrawal of certain groups from public life and create a significant risk that women and those from minoritised communities will be silenced by this abuse.

Although upskirting has been made an offence there are still significant gaps in the law when it comes to intimate image-based abuse which disproportionately affects women. This includes cyberflashing and altered images or "deep fakes" pornography.

For further information, please read <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Glitch-and-EVAW-The-Ripple-Effect-Online-abuse-during-COVID-19-Sept-2020.pdf>

#### Recommendations:

- A comprehensive public health approach to tackling online abuse, including providing clear recommendations to employers on how to help ensure their employees are safe online, and publishing national guidance on digital safety.
- Government-commissioned research into impact of online abuse on women and Black and minoritised communities and intersectional online abuse that is reflected in the Online Harms Bill.
- An acknowledgement of VAWG as a specific form of online harm within the definition of the Online Harms Bill.

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<sup>8</sup> Glitch and EVAW (September 2020) [The Ripple Effect: Covid-19 and the Epidemic of Online Abuse](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Women's Aid Online and Digital abuse](#)

<sup>10</sup> ONS (25 November 2020) [Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2020](#)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.stoponlineabuse.org.uk/sexism>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Report\\_New\\_Technology\\_Same\\_Old\\_Problems.pdf](https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Report_New_Technology_Same_Old_Problems.pdf)

## **How VAWG affects young women and girls including in school and education institutions, in public places and online**

### Schools peer on peer sexual harassment and violence

Although there has been recent media attention on the issue of sexual violence and harassment in schools – including image-based abuse and violence and harassment within the wider school community outside of school premises – we know that this is nothing new. A 2016 [Women and Equalities Committee inquiry](#) into sexual harassment and violence in schools found that there were 5,500 sexual offences were recorded in UK schools over a three-year period, including 600 rapes. These findings and recommendations were a key driver for the introduction of statutory Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in all schools. EVAW's research in 2010 found:<sup>13</sup>

- almost one in three (29%) 16–18-year-old girls had experienced 'groping' or other unwanted sexual touching at school
- 24% 16-18-year-olds said that their teachers had never said unwanted sexual touching, sharing of sexual pictures or sexual name calling is unacceptable
- 71% of 16-18-year-olds said they heard sexual name-calling such as "slut" or "slag" towards girls at school daily or a few times per week.

In 2016 we published a [briefing](#) setting out the legal obligations of schools under the Human Rights Act and Equality Act to ensure the safety of girls in their care which has led to [successful legal challenges](#) against schools where their response to serious sexual assault has fallen short. But we know that despite these duties, schools are failing girls in their care. Girls and boys are learning that sexual harassment and violence is not seen as important by adults, and that perpetrators of abuse are rarely challenged. We need schools to take its duty of care seriously and not look to a criminal justice system response to reports before acting.

### Child Sexual Abuse

It is also important to understand how girls with intersecting identities experience VAWG. Research by the Independent Inquiry in Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) with the Race Equality Foundation on how racist stereotypes can lead to failures in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse.<sup>14</sup> These stereotypes functioned in two broad categories according to the research: firstly, in having incorrect assumptions about what is "acceptable" or "normal" in certain communities; secondly, the broader context of racism in society acts as barrier to reporting for victims/survivors of child sexual abuse who fear reinforcing "negative stereotypes".<sup>15</sup>

### Recommendations:

- A resourced strategy and action plan at the DfE for wholesale improvement of the school response to sexual harassment and assault, including disaggregated data collection on sexual assault, developed in consultation with the specialist VAWG sector.
- A 'whole school approach' becomes an explicit expectation in addition to the full roll-out of compulsory RSE.

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<sup>13</sup> EVAW (2010) [YouGov Poll Exposes High Levels Sexual Harassment in Schools](#)

<sup>14</sup> IICSA (June 2020) ["People don't talk about it: child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities"](#)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p3.

- Close monitoring of sexual harassment and assault under school inspection frameworks by trained inspectors.

### **How VAWG affects particular groups, such as migrant women, sex workers or women with protected characteristics**

Women and girls' disproportionate experience of forms of VAWG is tied to their ongoing inequality, with many women facing multiple disadvantage due to race, disability, poverty, sexuality or immigration status. This intersecting continuum of oppression<sup>16</sup> – which is not experienced homogeneously – is a reality which needs specialist support services run by Black and minoritised, migrant, Deaf and disabled, LGBT+ women who understand different women's experiences and needs, as well as public sector workers across housing, health settings, schools, and the criminal justice system appropriately trained and resourced to provide an effective response to all victims/survivors.

#### Deaf and disabled women

Around 1 in 7 (14.3%) disabled people aged 16 to 59 years in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse in the last 12 months, compared with about 1 in 20 (5.1%) non-disabled people; disabled women (17.5%) were more than twice as likely to experience domestic abuse in the last year than non-disabled women (6.7%) (year ending March 2020).<sup>17</sup> Yet the paucity of appropriate refuge accommodation for many Deaf and disabled women is sharply felt as less than 1% of refuges are wheelchair accessible and Deaf women or women who face communication barriers have reported being refused access to refuge on account of health and safety concerns.

Official figures are limited as sexual violence experienced by older and disabled women in institutions and care homes are not included. This erasure of older and disabled women is particularly concerning given the latest ONS research on prevalence of rape<sup>18</sup> shows that disabled women disproportionately experience sexual violence, with an average of 5.5% of victims/survivors with longstanding illness/disabilities, as compared with 2.7% of those with none.

Disabled women also face greater barriers to protection and justice due to infantilising and discriminatory stereotypes regarding competency which then results in undermining perceptions regarding their credibility when giving evidence.<sup>19</sup> Changes to the criminal justice system during the pandemic could also result in disproportionately poorer outcomes for disabled people, as suggested by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) who have pointed out that the move to remote video-link court hearings could have disadvantaged disabled people.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Kanyeredzi, A. (2018) Race, Culture, and Gender: Black Female Experiences of Violence and Abuse

<sup>17</sup> ONS (18 February 2021) [Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2020](#)

<sup>18</sup> ONS (8 February 2018) Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017

<sup>19</sup> Manjoo, R. (2014) 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences' (A/HRC/26/38)

<sup>20</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission (22 April 2020) [Inclusive justice: a system designed for all - Interim evidence report: Video hearings and their impact on effective participation](#)



## LGBT+ Women

17% of bisexual women and 10.2% of lesbian/gay women experience domestic abuse compared with 7.3% of heterosexual women.<sup>21</sup> Whilst CSEW data is not available on trans people's experience of domestic abuse, third sector reports suggest a particularly high risk for trans people with over 28% of those in a relationship experiencing partner abuse.<sup>22</sup> LGBT+ victims/survivors may be reluctant to disclose same-sex relationships and explain LGBT+ identity within mainstream settings.<sup>23</sup> They "may have to 'come out' several times when accessing different layers of support"<sup>24</sup> at a time when they are in a vulnerable position.

## Black and minoritised and migrant women

There are disproportionate rates of domestic abuse related homicide for Black and minoritised women, who are also 3 times more likely to commit suicide than other women in the UK.<sup>25</sup> Mixed race women experience the highest levels prevalence of rape of any ethnic group (3.4%) and over four times the level of prevalence for white women (0.8%), and prevalence among Black women is double (1.6%) that for white women.<sup>26</sup> Imkaan's Reclaiming Voice report on minoritised women's experiences of sexual violence examines how 'cultural framings' and assumptions by agencies"<sup>27</sup> act as a barrier to effective responses to VAWG as the nuances of women's contexts and experiences are not seen; with assumptions regarding their "culture" and what types of VAWG are or are not experienced by certain women instead used as a basis for non-intervention.<sup>28</sup>

Almost half of all the women that struggled to find a refuge space in the past year (identified through Women's Aid No Woman Turned Away project)<sup>29</sup> were from Black and minoritised backgrounds. And only 5% of refuge spaces were reported as being available to women with No Recourse for Public Funds (NRPF).

Research has shown that women with insecure immigration status are deterred from reporting abuse to the police. The Step Up Migrant Women Campaign<sup>30</sup> led by the Latin American Women's Rights Service has found that some police officers can act as immigration enforcement agents rather than acting to protect and investigate crimes reported by women with immigration issues due to a lack of clear rules. These barriers to

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<sup>21</sup> Office for National Statistics ONS (2019) [Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics - Appendix tables](#).

<sup>22</sup> Stonewall (2018), [LGBT in Britain: Trans Report](#).

<sup>23</sup> Nathan Hudson-Sharp and Hilary Metcalf, National Institute of Economic and Social Research (July 2016), [Inequality among lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender groups in the UK: a review of evidence](#), 36-37.

<sup>24</sup> Magić, J. & Kelley, P. (October 2019), [Recognise & Respond](#), 23.

<sup>25</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. [Statement at the conclusion of a country mission to the United Kingdom \(2014\)](#)

<sup>26</sup> UK Government (December 2018) Victims of Crime ([Point 3 -Percentage of people aged 16 years and over who said they were victims of crime, by ethnicity and gender](#))

<sup>27</sup> Thiara, T., University of Warwick & Roy, S., Imkaan (2020) [Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence Key Findings](#), p. 51

<sup>28</sup> Burman, E., Smailes, S.L. and Chantler, K. (2004) "'Culture" as Barrier to Service Provision and Delivery: Domestic Violence Services for Minoritised Women', *Critical Social Policy*, Vol. 24 (3): 332-57

<sup>29</sup> Women's Aid (2020) [Nowhere To Turn 2020](#)

<sup>30</sup> King's College London and Latin American Women's Rights Service (May 2019), [The Right to be Believed](#)



reporting for migrant victims/survivors are made clear in the recently published joint HMICFRS IOPC and College of Policing report into the super-complaint submitted by Southall Black Sisters and Liberty.<sup>31</sup> This report recommends that police officers with concerns about a victim/survivor's immigration status should immediately stop sharing their information with Immigration Enforcement, and that a firewall between the police and Home Office should be considered.

The Government's New Plan for Immigration will have a disproportionate and catastrophic impact on migrant and asylum-seeking women, many of whom have experienced VAWG in their country of origin and/or on route to the UK. Furthermore, these damaging impacts would be compounded and further exacerbated for asylum-seeking women who are LGBT+, Deaf or disabled. The proposed changes that would render claims by those arriving in the UK via irregular routes inadmissible is not consistent with the Refugee Convention and would harm asylum-seeking women. VAWG-based asylum claims are already poorly assessed and understood so new "balance of probabilities" standard would be highly damaging for asylum-seeking women. Additionally, the proposed "one-stop" process does not take account of the barriers to disclosure for asylum-seeking victims/survivors of VAWG and how it might take them months, even years, to feel safe enough to speak about the abuse they have faced. The proposals under the New Plan for Immigration will make it even more difficult for migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking victims/survivors to access protection and support.

We also have profound concern regarding the proposed Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which would introduce draconian police powers that would have a disproportionate negative impact on Black and minoritised communities who routinely experience over-surveillance and are over-criminalised. This would include victims/survivors of VAWG within Gypsy and Traveller communities, whose nomadic way of life would be criminalised under the the proposed new trespass offence, making it harder for them to access support.

For further information on the experiences of VAWG among Black and minoritised women please see Imkaan's [Reclaiming Voice](#) report on minoritised women and sexual violence and Imkaan and [EVAW's joint briefing on Black women and domestic abuse](#).

#### Recommendations:

- Full ratification of the Istanbul Convention to ensure equal protection and support for all women and girls.
- A VAWG Strategy designed to centre women and girls who experience sexual violence, forced marriage, so called 'honour based' abuse, FGM and other culturally specific forms of abuse, and tackle the systemic barriers facing Black and minoritised women, migrant women, Deaf and disabled women, LGBT+ survivors and women facing multiple forms of disadvantage.
- Legal, policy and funding reform to deliver equal protection for all women – including:

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<sup>31</sup> HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (December 2020) [Safe to share? Report on Liberty and Southall Black Sisters' super-complaint on policing and immigration status](#)

- reversing the effective decriminalisation of rape and ensuring access to justice for all sexual violence survivors;<sup>32</sup>
- reforming law and practice to ensure survivors of VAWG are not unjustly criminalised, but instead receive equal access to support and protection;
- and ensuring migrant women can access the support, welfare systems and legal tools they need to escape abuse, and can report violence without fear of immigration enforcement.

### **The prevalence and effect of honour-based violence and other practices that may affect minority groups such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage**

When discussing so-called honour-based abuse it is important to recognise that all forms of abuse and violence against women are rooted in patriarchy and inequality and need to be addressed under a comprehensive approach to ending VAWG. It is critical when using the term honour-based abuse that violence is not racialised to specific communities.

For so-called honour-based abuse and forced marriage, Karma Nirvana reported a 162% average increase in caseloads by services surveyed during the first few months of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>33</sup> Safety4Sisters also reported a “deepening of complexity of cases”, in addition to an increase in demand.<sup>34</sup> This research found an increase in domestic abuse and a decrease in victim-survivors of so-called honour-based abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) coming forward. At the same time, their research also saw a reduction in so-called honour-based abuse, FGM and forced marriage referrals from safeguarding professionals, including police, teachers, and social workers during lockdown compared with pre-pandemic levels.<sup>35</sup>

Recent research by FORWARD into the impact of FGM safeguarding in Bristol<sup>36</sup> found that these policies could have inadvertently increased the scrutiny, suspicion and stigmatisation experienced by parents and families in many areas of their lives, from school, to healthcare, to overseas travel. Furthermore, the research suggested that these policies could be having “profound” impact on society, including “mental health and access to quality healthcare, to the racism experienced by the African diaspora communities.”<sup>37</sup>

Recommendations:

- Close consultation and meaningful engagement with specialist Black and minoritised-led “by and for” VAWG services, to ensure that national, regional and local government policies and practices on VAWG centre the needs of women and girls at risk of so-called honour-based abuse, so that they can access protection and support without fear of over-surveillance and stigmatisation of certain communities.

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<sup>32</sup> Rape Crisis England and Wales, End Violence Against Women Coalition, Imkaan and Centre for Women’s Justice (30 November 2020) *The Decriminalisation of Rape: Why the Justice System is Failing Rape Survivors and What Needs to Change*

<sup>33</sup> Karma Nirvana (15 June 2020) [Findings from Covid-19 Impact Survey on BAME services](#)

<sup>34</sup> Safety4Sisters (19 October 2020) *Locked in Abuse, Locked out of Safety: The pandemic experiences of migrant women*

<sup>35</sup> Karma Nirvana, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> FORWARD (February 2021) [‘Do No Harm’: Experiences and Impacts of FGM Safeguarding, Bristol Study](#)

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

## **How sexual violence is being normalised within relationships, including strangulation, and the influence of extreme or violent pornography**

Pornography plays a social function in setting expectations about sex. This is particularly important for young people who may have not had the opportunity to understand their own desires and boundaries and thus these expectations set by pornography hold significant impact on what they may feel they need to do, perform or be pressured to enjoy.

Research by academics Professor Fiona Vera-Gray and Professor Clare McGlynn have written about the poor self-regulation of major porn websites and their very limited commitment to upholding their own terms and conditions, when it comes to videos that depict or simulate acts of rape and abuse.

Vera-Gray and McGlynn found, over a period of six months, more than 10,000 videos on the landing pages of Pornhub, Xhamster, and XVideos depicting acts that their titles suggest explicitly contravene their terms and conditions. Analysis of the titles found that described sexual activity between family members was common, particularly sexual activity between immediate family members related by blood. There were titles for content that identified image-based sexual abuse, including upskirting videos and videos depicting voyeurism. Content depicting coercive and exploitative sexual activity was found to be a common theme of video titles.<sup>38</sup>

For more information on the impact of pornography on society and how violence is normalised in relationships, please read [Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography by Vera-Gray, McGlynn et al.](#)

Recommendations:

- Meaningful engagement with academic experts in pornography and VAWG to develop strong, proactive regulation of how porn companies enforce their terms and conditions within the Online Harms Bill.

## **How organisations that women and girls turn to for support and help engage with issues relating to VAWG and their role in tackling and preventing it; and whether there is sufficient and appropriate support available for victims**

The pandemic has highlighted the longstanding chronic underfunding and desperate need for long-term sustainable funding for VAWG services. This is particularly true of specialist services run “by and for” Black and minoritised women where a decade of local authority cuts under austerity has created a context of increasing and unequal competition in local commissioning processes, and these have impacted the Black and minoritised women’s sector the hardest.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/porn-website-tcs\\_uk\\_5d132febe4b09125ca466358?ncid](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/porn-website-tcs_uk_5d132febe4b09125ca466358?ncid)

<sup>39</sup> Imkaan (17 December 2018) [From Survival to Sustainability](#)

The following are core to the work of specialist ‘by and for’ VAWG services: responding to the needs and experiences of individual survivors; delivering gender-specific services and work with a gendered understanding of VAWG; upholding rights; providing holistic support that meets victims/survivors’ needs from safety, to their children, health, housing, finances and justice; and providing unique empowerment. They believe and listen to victims/survivors and respect their voices within service delivery.

Specialist services led ‘by and for’ Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women, LGBT+ victims/survivors and other groups are trusted by the survivors and communities they support due to their long-established reputations, their understanding of multiple forms of discrimination, their linguistic and cultural accessibility, and their intersectional practice. Findings from Imkaan’s ‘Reclaiming Voice’ underlines that Black and minoritised woman significantly value “seeing themselves” in support services and that this gave them “affirmation and removed the fear they would not be understood or viewed as ‘different’.”<sup>40</sup>

For more information on the importance of specialist “by and for” services for Black and minoritised women, please read Imkaan’s Reclaiming Voice report: [Reclaiming Voice](#)  
For more information on the value of “by and for” specialist services for victims/survivors of domestic abuse, please read the [Equality and Human Rights Commission’s briefing](#) on the importance of specialist “by and for” services.

For more information on the funding needed to ensure sufficient and appropriate support available for victims, please read the [VAWG sector’s joint letter to the Chancellor](#) on funding for VAWG in the multi-year Comprehensive Spending Review.

#### Recommendations:

- Fully ratify the Istanbul Convention so that the legal responsibilities of the government and public bodies to sustainably fund specialist support services, under Article 22, as well as ensure there are support services all survivors including migrant and refugee victims/survivors under Article 4(3) of the Istanbul Convention are clearly set out.
- A robust system of national accountability, based on established quality standards within the VAWG sector, to ensure survivors of all forms of VAWG can access the specialist support services they need – including services led ‘by and for’ victims/survivors with additional protected characteristics.
- Ring-fenced funding for “by and for” specialist VAWG services so that all victims/survivors can access appropriate support to help them cope and recover.

#### **The role information and education for both men and women play in protecting women and girls**

Research by EVAW in 2018 showed that many people are still uncertain about what rape is. Some of the findings from a survey of over 4,000 people found that:<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Thiara and Roy (2020), op. cit., p. 51

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/1-Attitudes-to-sexual-consent-Research-findings-FINAL.pdf>

- A third (33%) of people in Britain think it isn't usually rape if a woman is pressured into having sex but there is no physical violence
- A third of men think if a woman has flirted on a date it generally wouldn't be rape, even if she hasn't consented to sex (21% of women believe this).
- Almost a quarter (24%) don't think that, in most cases, sex without consent in long-term relationships is rape (despite laws against rape in marriage being in place since 1991)
- Over 65s have most troubling attitudes to rape, while younger people have opinions that are more closely aligned to the law
- Some people (11%) believe the more sexual partners a woman has, the less harm they experience from rape.
- 40% think it is never or usually not rape to remove a condom without a partner's consent (also known as "stealthing")
- 60% of people think that free counselling services are available to victims of rape.
- Around one in 10 are unsure or think it's usually not rape to have sex with a woman who is asleep or too drunk to consent

Such statistics show how pervasive myths and stereotypes can be throughout society and can have far-ranging implications for victims/survivors. For example, such research can explain why it's hard for juries to make fair decisions if they don't understand or agree with our laws on rape. It also shows that victims won't necessarily be given the support they need from their family and friends, if the rape they experience isn't understood as harmful or even as rape. Rape myths and stereotypes relating to race/ethnicity, immigration status, disability, sexual orientation and class play a particular role in compounding and exacerbating justice inequalities and barriers to support for marginalised and minoritised women.

Tackling such rape myths plays a crucial part in preventing VAWG in all aspects of life, including in schools and workplaces and should be accompanied by ensuring victims/survivors can have access to necessary protection and support.

Recommendations:

- Accessible and effective communication campaigns that challenge myths and stereotypes across society and community responses that challenge perpetrator behaviour, and delivering critical change across all systems including schools, communities, health, welfare, social services as well as the criminal justice system (CJS)
- Universal and accessible delivery of a 'whole school approach' across educational settings, which is supported by access to specialist support services for children and young people impacted by VAWG. This must be alongside resourced, ongoing comprehensive evidence-based prevention programming in higher education settings that reaches every university student in the UK.
- Monitoring of the prevalence and nature of sexual harassment, including racialised forms of sexual harassment to which Black and minoritised women are subjected, as well as a statutory Code of Practice for employers to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and victimisation at work.

**What measures should be in place for perpetrators**

A key part of ending of VAWG is changing the abusive behaviour of perpetrators through safe, effective, survivor-focused interventions. Yet it is estimated that only 1% of perpetrators of abuse get any kind of intervention to address their behaviour, and perpetrators continue to receive interventions that are neither quality assured nor safe.<sup>42</sup> The Drive Project, an intervention designed to address the needs of high-harm, repeat perpetrators of domestic abuse, published the evaluation of its three-year pilot. Key findings from this pilot found an 82% reduction in physical abuse, an 88% in sexual abuse and that IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advocates) reported a reduction in risk to victim-survivors in 82% of cases.<sup>43</sup>

Research by the University of Suffolk and H.O.P.E. Training<sup>44</sup> into responses to family and intimate relationship harm (including FGM and forced marriage) within Black and minoritised communities found that what is most needed for an effective community-based response from Black and minoritised people using harmful behaviour were: 1. facilitators from Black and minoritised communities 2. culturally sensitive interventions and 3. funding for specialist organisations.

Recommendations:

- Effective leadership and multi-agency arrangements ensuring public services are actively holding perpetrators accountable, that professionals are trained to identify and respond to perpetrators, and there are clear pathways into quality Respect accredited perpetrator interventions.
- Consistently available, quality-assured perpetrator interventions that address risks from primary prevention (like bystander responses and awareness raising communication campaigns) to behaviour change group work, to specialist responses for the most dangerous and serial perpetrators. This includes specific interventions for Black and minoritised individuals perpetrating harmful behaviour.

### **Steps towards ratification of the Istanbul Convention**

The UK signed the Istanbul Convention, the international “gold standard” for preventing violence against women and girls, nine years ago, yet we have still not been able to ratify it.

The Domestic Abuse Act was supposed to bring the UK into compliance, but the Government must take the necessary steps to address the remaining hurdle to ratification – having provisions for migrant women. ERAW proposed an amendment that would enshrine a non-discrimination principle in line with article 4(3). This would have meant all survivors of domestic abuse can access equally effective protection and support regardless of their immigration status and ensure the full ratification of the Convention. More information on

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<sup>42</sup> Drive Project (2019) Call to Action for a Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Strategy.

<sup>43</sup> Hester, M. et al. (February 2020) Evaluation of the Drive Project – A Three-year Pilot to Address High-risk, High-harm Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse [http://driveproject.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Executive-Summary\\_Final2020.pdf](http://driveproject.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Executive-Summary_Final2020.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Adisa O., and Allen K. (August 2020) [Increasing safety for those experiencing family and intimate relationship harm within black and minority ethnic communities by responding to those who harm: Survey findings. University of Suffolk.](#)

this amendment can be found here: [EVAW DA Bill Briefing: Effective Protection and Support for all Victims of Domestic Abuse](#)

A non-discrimination principle was endorsed by the [International Agreements Committee](#) as a way to enable swift ratification of the Istanbul Convention. It would have ensured all public authorities adopt a consistent and cohesive approach to making arrangements for victim protection. It would have addressed the risks of a post-code lottery approach to victim protection which is currently in place and enshrine the right of migrant victims to be treated first and foremost as victims. Although the Government made several necessary concessions and changes to the Domestic Abuse Act during its legislative passage, the lack of specific measures for migrant victims/survivors means that the legislation has missed the mark when it comes to transforming support for the most marginalised victims of abuse. Furthermore, we are no closer to ratifying the Istanbul Convention, nearly 10 years on from signing it.

The Government's latest progress report states that articles 4(3) and 59, those relating to migrant women's rights, are designated as "Under Review" pending the outcome of the Support for Migrant Victims pilot scheme. This pilot scheme was announced during the Second Reading of the Domestic Abuse Bill in the House of Commons, however it remains clear that this will create unnecessary delay. During the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Review and throughout the Bill's passage, specialist services led "by and for" Black and minoritised women have provided a wealth of evidence on the needs of migrant women survivors and the gaps in protection and support that the Domestic Abuse Bill should address.

In an evidence session with the International Agreements Committee, [Minister Atkins made comments](#) that suggested the Government could consider reserving IC articles which would mean these gaps in protection could be left unresolved for at least five years. Such delay in ensuring equal support for all, in addition to the 10 years already passed since the UK signed the Istanbul Convention, would be disastrous for migrant women and mean these important issues are effectively kicked into the long grass.

Recommendations:

- Fully ratify the Istanbul Convention by enshrining a non-discrimination principle in the Victims Bill so that victims/survivors of VAWG can access equally effective protection and support, in line with Article 4(3) of the Istanbul Convention.
- Establish safe reporting mechanisms, so victims can report domestic abuse safely without the fear of immigration control.
- Extend the eligibility for already existing provisions to protect migrant women, through the Domestic Violence Rule (DV Rule) and the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) so that migrant victims/survivors of abuse can apply to regularise their status separate to their abusers in line with Article 59.

**ENDS**

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