



SafeLives

Effective policy-making to tackle gender-based violence and abuse

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for Democracy by SafeLives

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Defining gender-based violence

The United Nations defines violence against women as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental 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

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a major public health, equality and human rights issue and remains one of the most horrific expressions of gender inequality and violation in the world today. Different forms of violence affect women and girls throughout each phase of their lives, starting at pregnancy, through childhood, adolescence, reproductive age, and later in life. Therefore, services adopting a life cycle approach to addressing violence both in the home and in the community is an important strategy for VAWG prevention and for meeting the needs of women and girls at all life phases.

VAWG crime describes a spectrum of violent and abusive behaviours which are committed primarily (although not exclusively) by men against women. It is this manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to the domination over and discrimination against women by men. It is also thought to have prevented the full advancement of women, with violence against them being one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into subordinate positions compared with men.²

VAWG crimes include incidents related to:

- domestic abuse including controlling or coercive behaviour (see case study)
- rape and other sexual offences
- stalking and harassment
- so-called 'honour based' abuse
- forced marriage
- breast ironing and female genital mutilation
- modern slavery and human exploitation³
- prostitution
- pornography and obscenity
- child marriage⁴
- misogyny⁵

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The UNFPA estimates that at least 59 countries have passed laws against FGM, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Denmark, Spain, Norway, Sweden and New Zealand. Of the 29 countries in Africa where FGM is traditionally practised, 26 now have laws prohibiting it. Sudan is the latest country (April 2020) to criminalise FGM, making it punishable by three years in jail.

Source: *Equality Now: FGM And The Law Around The World*⁶

1. United Nations. Declaration on the elimination of violence against women. New York : UN, 1993 https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/48/104

2. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/15YearReviewofVAWMandate.pdf>

3. Modern slavery is the umbrella term for human exploitation, including forced labour, human trafficking, institutions and practices similar to slavery, servitude, the slave trade, and slavery itself. It has long been thought that slavery is illegal, yet research reveals that almost half of all countries in the world have yet to actually make it a crime to enslave another human being. <https://theconversation.com/slavery-is-not-a-crime-in-almost-half-the-countries-of-the-world-new-research-115596>

4. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

5. Misogyny is hatred against women. A group of female MPs and charities in the UK are urging the government to treat misogyny as a hate crime within the government's new domestic abuse laws. Their amendment to the Domestic Abuse Bill would require police to record and track crimes motivated by misogyny. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-53012585>

6. <https://www.equalitynow.org/the-law-and-fgm#:~:text=The%20UNFPA%20estimates%20that%20at,26%20have%20laws%20prohibiting%20FGM>

Child Marriage

Each year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18 and if current trends continue, 150 million more girls will be married in childhood by 2030, with devastating consequences for the whole world.⁷

International human rights agreements compel governments to take action to end VAWG. At least 144 countries have passed laws on domestic violence, and 154 have laws on sexual harassment. However, even when laws exist, this does not mean they are always compliant with international standards and recommendations or implemented.⁸ Whether criminal or civil in nature, these laws send the message that VAWG is not acceptable and lay out both punishments for perpetrators and commit governments to provide services for women and girls who experience violence. Despite these laws, the global prevalence of VAWG remains disturbingly high and many countries have limited services supporting victims. Special attention must also be paid to groups of women who are part of excluded populations or in vulnerable situations, such as indigenous women, migrants, domestic workers, LB&T, among others. Evidence shows that women in these situations face more violence.

Case Study: Coercive and Controlling Behaviour (CCB)

In 2015, England and Wales became the first nations in the world to criminalise coercive and controlling behaviour within relationships, making it punishable by up to five years in jail. Since then Ireland and France have also made CCB a criminal offence. The offence is constituted by behaviour on the part of the perpetrator which takes place repeatedly or continuously. The victim and alleged perpetrator must be personally connected at the time the behaviour takes place. The behaviour must have had a serious effect on the victim, meaning that it has caused the victim to fear violence will be used against them on at least two occasions, or it has had a substantial adverse effect on the victim's day to day activities. The alleged perpetrator must have known that their behaviour would have a serious effect on the victim, or the behaviour must have been such that he or she ought to have known it would have that effect.⁹

Data from SafeLives' Insights service found that patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour were present in around 80 per cent of cases. Among victims who experienced no physical abuse, only 17 per cent made a report to the police.¹⁰

Source: [Safelives.org.uk](https://safelives.org.uk)

7. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

8. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

9. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482528/Controlling_or_coercive_behaviour_-_statutory_guidance.pdf

10. See also: <https://time.com/5610016/coercive-control-domestic-violence/> and <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/controlling-or-coercive-behaviour-intimate-or-family-relationship>

Elements of effective services to support victims and survivors of gender-based violence

Services to support victims and survivors of gender-based violence (GBV)¹¹ are more likely to be effective if they are underpinned by a legal right to equality between women and men. Steps to enshrine rights in law such as banning domestic abuse and sexual violence, including in married and intimate partnerships, alongside the recognition of women's right to access safe contraception and abortion, should be taken alongside service provision.

1. Services located in health and the community

Around the world most women who experience violence never seek help or tell anyone about the violence. The World Bank found that on average, only four in ten survivors of VAWG had ever sought help from any formal or informal source of support.¹² There are many reasons for this including women not recognising their experiences as being wrong, feeling shame and worries about not being believed, not knowing that they have rights and legal protections, but location and accessibility of services are also reasons.

Research suggests that locating services within a health setting creates better results than services within the criminal justice or children's services settings. SafeLives' 'Cry for Health'¹³ evaluation identified that hospital-based domestic abuse advocates were more likely to reach hidden victims compared to local community-based services. This included victims who disclosed high levels of complex or multiple needs related to mental health, drugs and alcohol, were aged 55 or over, victims who do not have children living with them, victims from high income households and victims who remain in a relationship with their abuser.

The World Health Organization suggests that women who have been subjected to violence seek health care more often than non-abused women, even if they do not disclose the associated violence. They also identify healthcare providers as the professionals that victims would most trust with a disclosure of abuse.

2. A multi-agency coordinated response

It is recognised that preventing violence against women and girls is everybody's business and cannot be addressed by any single agency. A multi-agency (government, voluntary and communities) coordinated approach is crucial for identifying victims, successful referral and service delivery, as well as for implementing effective initiatives to prevent VAWG and increasing opportunities for victims to seek and access support.

In the UK, multi-agency partnership working at both an operational and strategic level is an effective approach for addressing domestic violence and abuse. The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Marac)¹⁴ process is a great example of this. A Marac is a regular local meeting to discuss how to help victims at high risk of murder or serious harm. A domestic abuse specialist called an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA), police, children's social services, health and other relevant agencies all sit around the same table. They talk about the victim, the family and perpetrator, and share information. The meeting is confidential. After sharing all relevant information that they have about a victim, the representatives discuss options for increasing the safety of the victim and turn these into a co-ordinated action plan.

11. Gender-based violence is a general term used to capture any type of violence that is rooted in exploiting unequal power relationships between genders. This can include gender norms and role expectations specific to a society as well as situational power imbalances and inequities. Gender-based violence can impact anyone, and can include intimate partner and family violence, elder abuse, sexual violence, stalking and human trafficking. Source: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/ocdv/services/introduction-to-domestic-violence-and-gender-based-violence.page>

12. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

13. https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/SAFJ4993_Themis_report_WEBcorrect.pdf

14. <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/MARAC%20FAQs%20General%20FINAL.pdf>

At the heart of a Marac is the working assumption that no single agency or individual can see the complete picture of the life of a victim, but all may have insights that are crucial to their safety. In Australia they use a similar model. The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework¹⁵ aims to establish a system-wide shared understanding of family violence. It guides professionals across the continuum of service responses, across the range of presentations and spectrum of risk. It will provide information and resources that professionals need to keep victim survivors safe, and to keep perpetrators in view and hold them accountable for their actions.

3. Qualified independent advocates located within specialist organisations

In the UK, support services for victims of domestic abuse first developed with the refuge/shelter movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Today, there are more than 500 domestic and sexual violence services nationwide. In recent years, important changes have been made to the way in which victims of domestic abuse are supported to live in safety, in particular through developing interventions which aim to enable victims to stay safely in their homes rather than being obliged to move to temporary accommodation such as a refuge. A key part of this process has been the introduction of the Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA).¹⁶ IDVAs are specialist case workers who work with victims at the highest risk of serious harm or murder ensuring that the victim's voice is paramount in the creation of safety plans by state agencies. Within the UK there are also specialist roles for working with victims of sexual violence, Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs); and specialist roles for working with younger and older victims of domestic abuse as well as specialist advocates that support victims of female genital mutilation, forced marriage and stalking and harassment. Many other developed countries such as New Zealand, Canada and Australia have specialist roles in supporting victims of VAWG. Funding for these positions should be provided by the state in a long-term and sustainable way with advocates located in independent women's organisations.

Recruiting and training Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs)

Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) support victims of domestic abuse to become safer, sooner. They work tirelessly to be an advocate for victims at their most vulnerable.

When someone discloses about an abusive partner/ex-partner/family member - they may need to engage with a whole host of confusing and sometimes conflicting services: the courts, probation, housing, mental health, children services, substance misuse. It is never as simple as 'just leave'.

IDVAs are their rock; they navigate these services. They work with local specialist services to provide longer-term support for women. They don't talk for victims of domestic abuse, but in partnership with them.

More information at: <https://safelives.org.uk/news-views/16days/why-idvas-are-so-important>

4. Programmes to improve public sector professionals' response

Ensuring victims receive a supportive and effective response from public sector professionals is key if they are going to feel confident disclosing violence against them. Specialist services are key in delivering such training; for example, SafeLives are licensed to deliver Domestic Abuse Matters,¹⁷ a programme for the UK police which aims to change the attitude, culture and behaviour of the police frontline response to domestic abuse.

15. <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-02/MARAM-policy-framework-24-09-2018.pdf>

16. <https://safelives.org.uk/news-views/16days/why-idvas-are-so-important>

17. <https://safelives.org.uk/training/police>

Case study: Domestic Abuse Matters (DA Matters) Responding Well programme for police

Our Domestic Abuse Matters (DA Matters) Responding Well programme for police aims to change the attitudes, culture and behaviour of the police frontline response to domestic abuse. It was written by SafeLives DA Matters Lead Melani Morgan, who is a retired police officer and survivor of domestic abuse, in partnership with the College of Policing.

The work stemmed from the 2014 HMIC report, 'Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse', which highlighted the need for improvements in how police forces and officers understood and responded to coercive control. DA Matters was born from this gap.

DA Matters is much more than a training course - it is a cultural change programme designed to create long-term, sustainable improvements and consistency in the response to domestic abuse across the country. It helps police understand what is meant by the term coercive control, challenges victim blaming, and prompts them to recognise the high levels of manipulation used by those perpetrating it, including in interactions with law enforcement.

For more information, see: <https://safelives.org.uk/training/police>

For the Domestic Abuse Matters evaluation, see: https://whatworks.college.police.uk/Research/Documents/Domestic_Abuse_Matters_2.0.pdf

In Sweden, the teacher's guide 'Dags att prata om' [Time to talk about]¹⁸ was implemented to include and improve the ability to talk to children about sexual abuse. The Rethinking Power Programme was a successful community-based programme aimed at preventing violence against women and girls and reducing the incidence of HIV in Haiti.¹⁹ The programme included a film, radio and TV campaign, training of community activists and community meetings.

5. Women-only spaces

Consideration of the environment that is created to support victims of VAWG is essential. Women's centres²⁰ are one such approach that is being adopted worldwide, the most basic feature being that it is a women-only space. Women say that they want women-only spaces²¹ because they are made to feel inferior, irrelevant or invisible within male dominated spaces as well as at risk from VAWG.

6. Do no harm principle and the one chance rule

All services need to be mindful of the 'Do no harm' principle. This is to avoid exposing people to additional risks through their actions. It means taking a step back from an intervention to look at the broader context and mitigate potential negative effects. Any intervention must be guided by the principal to 'do no harm', ensuring the balance between benefits and harms, and prioritising the safety of women and their children as the uppermost concern.²² The idea behind the 'One Chance Rule' is that you might only have one chance

18. <https://www.government.se/articles/2018/01/the-government-of-swedens-measures-against-sexual-violence-and-harassment/>

19. <https://beyondborders.net/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women-girls/rethinking-power/#:~:text=Rethinking%20Power%20demonstrates%20how%20understanding,against%20women%20and%20HIV%20FAIDS.&text=The%20program%20runs%20on%20the,means%20healthier%20lives%20for%20everyone>

20. <https://www.tavinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Women-and-Girls-Briefing-Report-Final- web.pdf>

21. <https://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Mapping-the-Maze-final-report-for-publication.pdf>

22. See: <https://www.donoharm.info/desktop/content/welcome/olds.php>;

also https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/645636/PSVI_Principles_for_Global_Action.pdf

to speak to a potential victim and, therefore, have only one chance to save a life. The Welsh Government have introduced an organisational duty to encourage relevant professionals to 'Ask' potential victims in certain circumstances (targeted enquiry); and to 'Act' so that harm as a result of the violence and abuse is reduced. In England the Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS) intervention within primary care encourages professionals to communicate about domestic abuse.²³

7. Focus on stopping the perpetration, alongside services for victims

There are many projects worldwide that support perpetrators in changing their behaviour and support victims to have a voice. In Burundi the Economic And Social Empowerment (EASE) programme,²⁴ for instance, helped to improve women's decision-making and negotiation skills within the household, increasing women's capacity to make spending decisions and decide the number of children the household should have. In the UK the DRIVE project²⁵ is an intensive intervention that works with high-harm and serial perpetrators of domestic abuse to challenge behaviour and prevent abuse.

Canada recognises that violence prevention works, and research demonstrates that high school violence prevention programmes are highly effective. Students experienced long-term benefits such as better dating relationships, the ability to recognise and leave an unhealthy relationship, and increased self-confidence, assertiveness, and leadership.²⁶

Responses to gender-based violence during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating existing gender inequalities as lockdowns lead to higher rates of gender-based violence,²⁷ less access to sexual and reproductive health services, increased unpaid care work, and potential impact on women's economic development. Not all women, girls, and gender diverse people are experiencing the pandemic in the same way. Women with disabilities, refugee and migrant women, Indigenous and minority women, LB&T women, women experiencing discrimination based on work and women living in poverty face heightened risks of discrimination, violence, and other rights violations.²⁸

Many countries and services are adapting how they respond; some such initiatives include increasing public awareness against VAWG, and how to seek help.²⁹ In the UK, the Government has pledged to introduce a national code word scheme in supermarkets and pharmacies.³⁰ Helplines and web chat facilities are being set up or hours of operation increased to meet the demands of victims. In the USA and Canada they have launched the 'Signal for Help' campaign.³¹ This is a one-handed gesture that women and children can use on a video call or in person to communicate that they feel threatened. Available information online on how to keep safe, how to seek help and report abuse has multiplied.³² For those countries where citizens have access, technology has become the norm with face-to-face contact being reduced or stopped, except in emergency situations.

Information for perpetrators has also increased; one example in Spain is the Catalan Health Department, Conexus, which has developed recommendations for men to avoid using gender-based violence in situations

and https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/donoharm_pe07_synthesis.pdf

23. <https://irisi.org/iris/about-the-iris-programme/>

24. <https://www.rescue-uk.org/sites/default/files/document/988/ircuk-womengirls.pdf>

25. <http://driveproject.org.uk/about/research-evaluation>

26. http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/our-work/our-projects-resources/safe_school_resources/evaluation_prevention_programs.pdf

27. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

28. <https://www.amnesty.ca/blog/womens-rights-and-covid-19>

29. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-announces-support-for-domestic-abuse-victims>

30. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/women/domestic-violence-victims-codeword-lockdown-coronavirus-a9526321.html>

31. <https://canadianwomen.org/signal-for-help/>

32. <https://safelives.org.uk/news-views/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19>

of lockdown due to COVID-19.³³ The recommendations are based on and adapted or translated from the Corona-Crisis-Survival-Kit from the Swiss intervention and 'Take a time out!' from the Respect phoneline.³⁴ During the coronavirus crisis, many men in lockdown are feeling isolated, stressed out and under pressure.³⁵ There is no excuse for abuse. A survival kit has been developed to help men who are feeling under pressure.

The corporate sector is stepping up too with some hotels offering safe accommodation,³⁶ public transport organisations³⁷ have been offering free travel to those feeling violence and mobile phone companies crowdsourced mobile phones and tablets to give to victims.³⁸

Some governments have recognised the impact that COVID-19 has had on VAWG and have pledged emergency funding packages.

New Zealand

Case study: funding of domestic and sexual violence services in New Zealand

Domestic and sexual violence services in New Zealand for example will receive more than NZ\$200m in this year's budget. Services to rehabilitate perpetrators of violence will also receive NZ\$16m, to help break the cycle of lifetimes of violence. The government is investing an extra \$202 million over the next four years to strengthen family and sexual violence services.

Breakdown of funding:

An extra \$183m will be spent over the next four years for the Ministry of Social Development to ensure continued access to specialist family violence services, including:

- \$142m on services supporting victims of family violence
- \$16m on services to help perpetrators to stop inflicting family violence
- \$25m to support for victims of elder abuse

As well, an extra \$19.9m will be spent on a cross-agency initiative with police, justice and health to ensure victims of non-fatal strangulation can access highly trained medical practitioners, trained to deal with the trauma.

The money will also cover forensic services necessary to gather the robust evidence needed to prosecute offenders.

Source: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/416311/government-to-invest-millions-into-family-violence-services>

New Zealand has recently introduced legislation that requires employers to provide up to 10 days paid leave from work for victims of domestic violence, separate from annual leave and sick leave entitlements. New Zealand was the second country in the world to offer this type of leave as a universal entitlement, after the Philippines. If the employer asks for proof, the employer and employee should both act in good faith. That means being open, honest and quick to respond. The law does not state what kind of proof an employer can accept. Employers can accept any type of proof that an employee is affected by domestic violence. Getting proof may not be simple, given the nature of domestic violence.

33. <http://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/covid-19>

34. <http://respectphoneline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Respect-Phoneline-Spot-the-warning-signs-Time-out.pdf>

35. <https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/news/2020/3/31/corona-crisis-survival-kit-for-men-under-pressure>

36. <https://time.com/5812990/france-domestic-violence-hotel-coronavirus/>

37. <https://media.raildeliverygroup.com/news/train-companies-to-offer-free-travel-to-those-fleeing-domestic-abuse-during-coronavirus-lockdown>

38. <https://newscentre.vodafone.co.uk/press-release/vodafone-and-barnardos-launch-the-great-british-tech-appeal/>

Examples of proof include letter or email about what's going on and how it affects the employee from either a:

- support organisation - for example, a domestic violence support service or Oranga Tamarik
- support person
- report from a doctor or nurse
- report from a school
- a declaration - a letter of evidence witnessed by an authorised person like a justice of the peace
- any court or police documents about the domestic violence

What the employer must do when asking the employee for proof depends on whether the employee is taking domestic violence leave or asking for short-term flexible working arrangements.

More information is available at: <https://www.employment.govt.nz/leave-and-holidays/domestic-violence-leave/proof-domestic-violence/>

UK

In the UK, the Government is seeking to introduce new legislation including creating a statutory definition of domestic abuse which includes economic abuse, new protective orders and would establish a Domestic Abuse Commissioner. Campaigners are seeking to include more measures in the bill including making non-fatal strangulation a specific criminal offence. The UK would then join the USA, Australia and New Zealand, which have introduced specific laws on non-fatal strangulation. Research has found that a history of strangulation presents an eight-fold increase in the risk of death. Strangulation and asphyxiation are the second most common methods of killing in female homicides, after stabbing. 29 per cent were killed by this method in 2018,³⁹ 43 women, as compared to only 3 per cent of male homicides.⁴⁰ The UK Government has also committed to outlaw the so-called 'rough sex gone wrong' defence.⁴¹



The European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) are embarking on a new, global, multi-year initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. The Spotlight Initiative⁴² has a particular focus on domestic and family violence, sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, femicide, trafficking in human beings and sexual and economic (labour) exploitation. In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Initiative will fully integrate the principle of 'leaving no one behind'.

39. <https://femicidescensus.org/reports/>

40. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/homicideinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>

41. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-53064086>

42. <https://www.un.org/en/spotlight-initiative/>



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