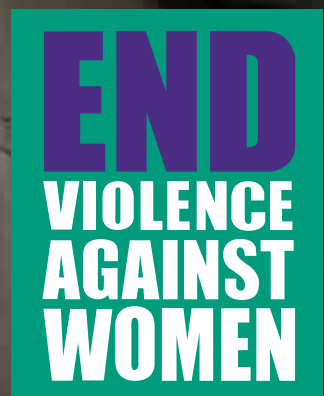


A close-up portrait of a woman with dark, curly hair, looking slightly to the left. She is wearing a white t-shirt under a grey jacket. The background is dark and out of focus.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Snapshot Report
2020/21



@EVAWuk www.evaw.org.uk



About EVAW

The End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) is a leading coalition of 100 specialist women's support services, researchers, activists, victim-survivors and NGOs working to end violence against women and girls in all its forms.

Established in 2005, we campaign for every level of government to adopt better, more joined up approaches to ending and preventing violence against women and girls, and we challenge the wider cultural attitudes that tolerate and condone this abuse.

www.evaw.org.uk

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the published research, expertise, knowledge and practice-based evidence of our coalition membership and others in the VAWG sector.

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LEFT: PICTURE OF A WOMAN LOOKING CONCERNED

FRONT AND BACK COVER: PICTURE OF A YOUNG WOMAN LOOKING AHEAD

Executive Summary

This report sets out the state of violence against women and girls (VAWG) as of January 2021 and what we know about prevalence and the policy landscape of this issue.

We have drawn on the latest Government statistics, research and insight from specialist VAWG sector organisations and researchers to highlight the extent of VAWG and pull together a snapshot of VAWG over the past year.

In order to properly understand the experiences of women and girls during this period it is vital to consider the impact of violence against women and girls alongside intersecting inequalities, and the global Coronavirus pandemic which has “landed on top of” and exacerbated these inequalities.

Ahead of the launch of a new VAWG Strategy, we aim to outline in this report, the extent of VAWG and the connections between different forms of violence that pervade women’s lives. Furthermore, we set out key recommendations for addressing this violence:

- **A single, joined-up Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy**

A holistic VAWG strategy and framework, which is a high Government priority, championed by Ministers, and well-funded.

- **A Strategic Investment to End Abuse**

In order to deliver the life-saving work that helps thousands of women and girls every day, the VAWG sector needs long-term, sustainable funding, including ring-fenced funding for “by and for” services.

- **Far-ranging reform to the Criminal Justice System’s approach to Sexual Violence**

Extensive reforms to the police, Criminal Prosecution Service (CPS) and courts, improved leadership and accountability, wrap-around support and advocacy for all victim-survivors and ensuring access to justice for all.

- **Effective Protection and Support from Domestic Abuse for All**

A Domestic Abuse Bill that addresses the barriers to support currently facing migrant women.

- **A comprehensive public health approach to tackling Online Abuse**

A comprehensive public health approach to tackling online abuse, including ensuring the Online Harms Bill adequately addresses the specific risks that Black and minoritised women face online.

- **Support for schools to implement RSE and “Whole School Approach”**

The Department for Education (DfE) should support schools so that there is no further delay to the compulsory rollout of RSE and so schools can implement a ‘Whole School Approach’.

- **A Perpetrators Strategy for all**

A national strategy on perpetrators that properly resources interventions to address abusive behaviour.



PICTURE OF A CHILD HOLDING HER FACE

Introduction

Almost one in three women aged 16-59 will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime;¹ two women a week in England and Wales are killed by a current or former partner² over half a million women are raped or sexually assaulted each year;³ there are more than 135,000 women and girls affected by FGM living in England and Wales;⁴ and a third of girls report having experienced sexual harassment at school.⁵ These and other forms of abuse stop hundreds of thousands of women and girls living the lives they would choose for themselves.

A different world is possible. It was this shared vision that brought a collection of frontline women's organisations, academics, lawyers and activists together over 15 years ago to form the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) to make the case that more action was needed from the Government to end violence against women and girls (VAWG). Violence against women and girls can be prevented and it must end.

Women and girls' very disproportionate experience of forms of gender-based violence is tied to their ongoing inequality, with many women facing multiple disadvantage due to race, disability, poverty, sexuality or immigration status. The Government introduced a joined up cross-departmental approach to tackling VAWG in 2010. Whilst there remains much more to do, the 2016, and 2019 refreshes of the VAWG Strategy, have helped transform some responses to abuse, and have been a leap forward in recognising the need for integrated and coordinated approaches to tackling the various and interconnected forms of VAWG that women and girls experience throughout their lives.

In 2021, ahead of the publication of a new Home Office led cross-government VAWG Strategy, and in the midst of a global Coronavirus pandemic that has wide-ranging impacts on women and girls, it is more important than ever to recognise the importance of centring discussions of VAWG in the actual reality of women and girls lives.

This report seeks to do just that and draws together the latest data on how many women's and girls' lives are affected by VAWG and the most recent policy developments from the past year on this issue.

In 2020 we witnessed the powerful global impact of the call for racial justice led by Black Lives Matter in the wake of George Floyd's murder in the US. It has inspired a great deal of reflection and led to reinvigorated efforts towards tackling structural racism and how it intersects with gender inequality by the VAWG Sector⁶. 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. Many EVAW members and the wider specialist VAWG sector with decades of expertise and experience working directly with victim-survivors have this year produced insightful research and policy briefings that spotlight the under-reported experiences of women otherwise minoritised and marginalised by society.



1. ONS (2019) Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2019 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2019>
2. ONS (2019) Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2018 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/homicideinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018#how-are-victims-and-suspects-related>
3. ONS (8 February 2018) Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/sexualoffencesinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017>
4. 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 <https://www.city.ac.uk/news/2014/jul/new-report-shows-137,000-women-and-girls-with-fgm-in-england-and-wales>
5. EVAW (2010) YouGov Poll Exposes High Levels Sexual Harassment in Schools <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/yougov-poll-exposes-high-levels-sexual-harassment-in-schools/>
6. See Anti-Racism Working Group (2020) Call for action to end racism in the VAWG Sector <https://www.endingracisminvawg.org/>

After the first national lockdown was announced in March, the National Domestic Abuse Helpline saw 40,000 calls from women, family members and professional in the first three months of lockdown, an 80% increase on pre-Covid figures.¹¹

In the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic that has left women more vulnerable to VAWG, it remains more vital than ever to understand VAWG as the cause and consequence of gender inequality, and as a continuum⁷ of violence and abuse which cannot be easily separated out. This intersecting continuum of oppression⁸ – 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 victim-survivors.

Recent trends

COVID-19

It was foreseeable and became evident very quickly that the Coronavirus pandemic was anything but a “leveller”. One of the clearest examples of Covid-19 “landing on top of” existing inequalities in society has been the disproportionate impact of the virus on Black and minoritised communities, most notably Black African, Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi communities.⁹ These pre-existing entrenched inequalities in our society have been further exacerbated by Covid-19 which has resulted in a conducive context for VAWG. It is however clear that, because of intersecting inequalities among other issues, we only have a limited understanding of the full extent of the rise in VAWG.

Before Covid-19 the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Crime Survey for England and Wales showed that an estimated 1.6 million women had been victim-survivors of domestic abuse in the year ending March 2020.¹⁰

After the first national lockdown was announced in March, the National Domestic Abuse Helpline saw 40,000 calls from women, family members and professional in the first three months of lockdown, an 80% increase on pre-Covid figures.¹¹ Respect, which runs a helpline for perpetrators worried about their behaviour, reported that the first month of lockdown alone saw an increase in:

- calls by 67%,
- emails by 185%,
- webchats by 2,200%
- and website visitors by 581% from the start of lockdown.¹²

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 pandemic.¹³ Safety4Sisters also reported a “deepening of complexity of cases”, in addition to an increase in demand.¹⁴

For disabled women, who are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled women, the paucity of appropriate refuge accommodation is even more sharply felt as less than 1% of refuges are wheelchair accessible

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

7. Kelly, L. (1988) Surviving sexual violence

8. Kanyeredzi, A. (2018) Race, Culture, and Gender: Black Female Experiences of Violence and Abuse

9. ONS (16 October 2020) Updating ethnic contrasts in deaths involving coronavirus COVID-19: England and Wales, deaths occurring 2 March to 28 July 2020 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/explainingethnicbackgroundcontrastsindeathsinvolved19englandandwalesoverview/november2020>

10. ONS (25 November 2020) Domestic Abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2020 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020>

11. BBC News (23 July 2020) Coronavirus: Domestic abuse helpline sees lockdown surge, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53498675>

12. Respect (April 2020) Respect’s Response to the Home Affairs Call for Evidence COVID-19 Preparedness https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/respect/redactor2_assets/files/136/Home_Affairs_Call_for_Evidence_Covid_19_Preparedness_April_2020_FINAL.pdf

13. Karma Nirvana (15 June 2020) Findings from Covid-19 Impact Survey on BAME services https://karmanirvana.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Impact-on-BAME-Services_COVID19.pdf

14. Safety4Sisters (19 October 2020) Locked in Abuse, Locked out of Safety: The pandemic experiences of migrant women

safeguarding professionals, including police, teachers, and social workers during lockdown compared with pre-pandemic levels.¹⁵

Recent research by FORWARD into the impact of FGM safeguarding in Bristol¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷

50% of Black and minoritised women’s specialist refuges having been forced to close or have been taken over by a larger provider due to lack of funding in the last decade, whilst others continue to operate without any local government support²¹

ACCESS TO REFUGE ACCOMMODATION

Lockdowns and changing restrictions resulted in surges and sustained high demand for VAWG support services which are likely to continue through 2021. Research by Women’s Aid showed a 40.6% reduction in refuge vacancies in England between 23 March and 31 May, compared to the same period in 2019. One reason for this was a chronic lack of suitable move-on accommodation and concerns regarding managing the spread of the virus.¹⁸

Being able to access refuge accommodation during Covid-19 has been a particularly acute problem for migrant women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Safety4Sisters reported that 100% of the women with NRPF that were referred to them and wanted a refuge space were refused due to their

NRPF conditions.¹⁹ Currently only 5% of refuge accommodation is available to migrant women with NRPF²⁰ because they do not have access to housing support. Refuges that are able to take in migrant women are typically refuges run “by and for” Black and minoritised women who can provide relevant specialisms and additional support. However, unequal commissioning practices have meant that these services are increasingly decommissioned. 50% of Black and minoritised women’s specialist refuges having been forced to close or have been taken over by a larger provider due to lack of funding in the last decade, whilst others continue to operate without any local government support.²¹

In 2019/20 reported rapes stood at 55,259 but there were only 2,102 prosecutions and 1,439 convictions.¹⁷ EAW believes that this level of system collapse amounts to the effective decriminalisation of rape.

For disabled women, who are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled women, the paucity of appropriate refuge accommodation is even more 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.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Changes to how Criminal Prosecution Service (CPS) data is presented, being now released on a quarterly rather than annual basis²², has made it more challenging to compare year on year data for rape prosecution rates. The number of rape prosecutions decreased by more than 50% in just two years, between 2016/17 and 2018/19 which was a record decline. Although there has been a very slight improvement since then, we are still seeing a worryingly low proportion of cases being charged. In 2019/20 reported rapes stood at 55,259 but there

15. Karma Nirvana, op. cit

16. FORWARD (February 2021) ‘Do No Harm’: Experiences and Impacts of FGM Safeguarding, Bristol Study <https://www.forwarduk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Forward-FGM-Safeguarding-Research-Report-Bristol-Study-2021.pdf>

17. P.83, Ibid.

18. Women’s Aid (18 August 2020) A Perfect Storm – The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on domestic abuse survivors and the services supporting them <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-Perfect-Storm-August-2020-1.pdf>

19. Safety4Sisters, op cit.

20. Women’s Aid (June 2020) The domestic abuse report 2020: The Hidden Housing Crisis,

21. Imkaan (2016). ‘Capital Losses’. London: Imkaan

22. CPS (July 2020) CPS data summary Quarter 4 2019-2020 <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-4-2019-2020>



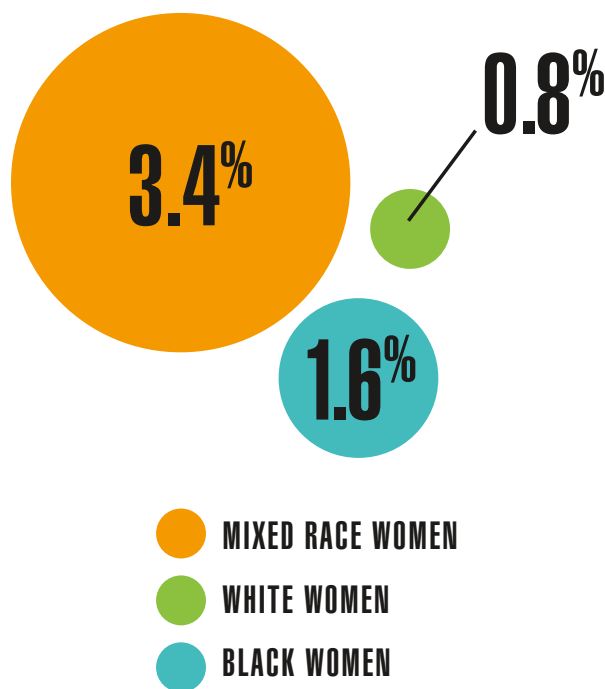
PICTURE OF A GIRL BEING RESTRAINED BY A MAN BY THE SHOULDERS

were only 2,102 prosecutions and 1,439 convictions.²³ EAW believes that this level of system collapse amounts to the effective decriminalisation of rape. In 2019/20 reported rapes stood at 55,259 but there were only 2,102 prosecutions and 1,439 convictions.²⁴ EAW believes that this level of system collapse amounts to the effective decriminalisation of rape.²⁵

The impact of Covid-19 will be felt by rape victim-survivors going through the criminal justice system for years to come as the pandemic has resulted in backlogs and delays in the system. In September 2020 the courts backlog was reported to be 43,676 cases and rising²⁶ sparking concerns amongst women’s groups that rape and other sexual violence crimes were becoming ever harder to prosecute. This also results in increased caseload volumes for specialist sexual violence and abuse services, who retain individual clients over longer periods of time whilst also having to manage new clients.

Disaggregated data by ethnicity is not available for rape prosecution rates so it is difficult to get a full picture of what is happening specifically with rape cases brought by Black and minoritised women who face additional hurdles in accessing justice but experience disproportionate rates of victimisation. Mixed race women experience the highest levels prevalence of rape of any ethnic group

COMPARATIVE LEVELS OF RAPE IN ETHNIC GROUPS



(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.²⁷

22. ONS (April 2020) Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2019 It is EAW’s position, as set out in their Judicial Review against the CPS for their failure to prosecute rape, that this disastrous collapse in cases proceeding to trial is a result of a covert policy change, meaning that in 2016-17 prosecutors were encouraged not to charge so called “weaker cases” with the aim of improving their conviction rate <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/26-27-january-court-of-appeal-rape-campaigners-face-cps-in-court/>

24. ONS (April 2020) Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2019

25. It is EAW’s position, as set out in their Judicial Review against the CPS for their failure to prosecute rape, that this disastrous collapse in cases proceeding to trial is a result of a covert policy change, meaning that in 2016-17 prosecutors were encouraged not to charge so called “weaker cases” with the aim of improving their conviction rate <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/26-27-january-court-of-appeal-rape-campaigners-face-cps-in-court/>

26. 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) <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/crime-and-reoffending/victims-of-crime/latest>

27. Ibid



PICTURE OF A WOMAN HUDDLED
IN BED HOLDING A MOBILE PHONE

50% of Black and minoritised women's specialist refuges having been forced to close or have been taken over by a larger provider due to lack of funding in the last decade, whilst others continue to operate without any local government support.¹⁵

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 since what the latest ONS research does show on prevalence of rape²⁸ shows that disabled women disproportionately experience sexual violence, with an average of 5.5% of victim-survivors with longstanding illness/disabilities, as compared with 2.7% of those with none.

Data showed that hospitals in England treated 1,012 female assault victim-survivors in the year 2019-20 where the cause of admission was a form of maltreatment including physical or sexual abuse, torture or mental cruelty. This is an increase of 31% from the year 2015-16, when 774 cases were recorded.³²

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.²⁹ 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.³⁰

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The impact of children being out of school for a significant part of the year due to measures taken to stop the spread of Covid-19, has meant a heightened risk of abuse at home for girls who are less able to disclose abuse to a trusted adult in school settings. The National Crime Agency found in April 2020 that 300,000 people posed a physical or online sexual abuse threat to children, more than double the estimated 140,000 from the year before.³¹ The Internet Watch Foundation reported 8.8m attempts to access child sexual abuse material had been made online in one month alone.³²

The Local Government Association found that social care referrals fell by nearly a fifth (18%).³³ This echoes

28. ONS (8 February 2018) Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017

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

30. 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, https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/inclusive_justice_a_system_designed_for_all_interim_report_0.pdf

31. The Guardian (8 July 2020) Sharp increase in UK child sexual abuse during pandemic <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jul/08/sharp-increase-in-uk-child-sexual-abuse-during-pandemic>

32. The Guardian (20 May 2020) Watchdog reveals 8.8m attempts to access online child abuse in April <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/20/watchdog-reveals-88m-attempts-to-access-online-child-abuse-in-april>

33. Local Government Association (7 September 2020) Children's social care referrals fell by a fifth during lockdown <https://www.local.gov.uk/childrens-social-care->

the Children's Commissioner's suggestion that children have become increasingly "invisible" and are not able to get the help they need.³⁴ A report by the National Youth Agency also draws specific attention to the particular risks to girls and young women being recruited into gangs as they could 'fall under the radar' and move around with less visibility than young men during lockdown.³⁵

Latest data on image-based abuse showed that 82% of prosecutions were flagged as being domestic abuse-related, further emphasising how online abuse is part of the continuum of VAWG.²⁹

ONLINE ABUSE

Covid-19 has thrown into sharp relief the fact our lives are increasingly lived online and that there can be no delineation between offline and online abuse against women. In the months preceding the Covid-19 pandemic, 38% women and non-binary people surveyed reported experiencing online abuse, with Black and minoritised 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.³⁶

Of respondents reporting online abuse, nearly half (48%) reported suffering from gender-based abuse which emphasises how online abuse against women exists as a form of VAWG. 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.³⁷ Latest data on image-based abuse showed that 82% of prosecutions were flagged as being domestic abuse-related, further emphasising how online abuse is part of the continuum of VAWG.³⁸

PERPETRATOR INTERVENTIONS

A key part of ending of VAWG is changing the abusive behaviour of perpetrators through safe, effective, survivor-focused interventions. 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 Advocate) reported a reduction in risk to victim-survivors in 82% of cases.³⁹

Research by the University of Suffolk and H.O.P.E. Training⁴⁰ into responses to family and intimate relationship harm (including FGM and forced marriage) within Black and minoritised communities aimed to diversify the current body of research on perpetrator interventions and to advise on the creation of an inclusive perpetrator strategy that is effective in ensuring all victims are protected. The research, surveyed nearly 140 individuals including practitioners, policy-makers, and activists, and 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.

Health systems and VAWG during Covid-19

During Covid-19 we saw a huge rise in hospital admissions for domestic and sexual violence, compared with previous years. Data showed that hospitals in

[referrals-fell-fifth-during-lockdown](#)

34. The Children's Commissioner (January 2021) Too many at-risk children are still invisible to social care <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/cco-too-many-at-risk-children-are-still-invisible-to-social-care.pdf>

35. National Youth Agency (2 June 2020) 'Hidden in Plain Sight' – A Youth Work Response to Gangs and Exploitation during COVID-19 <https://nya.org.uk/2020/06/hidden-in-plain-sight/>

36. Glitch and EAW (September 2020) The Ripple Effect: Covid-19 and the Epidemic of Online Abuse <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Glitch-and-EAW-The-Ripple-Effect-Online-abuse-during-COVID-19-Sept-2020.pdf>

37. Women's Aid Online and Digital abuse <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/online-safety/>

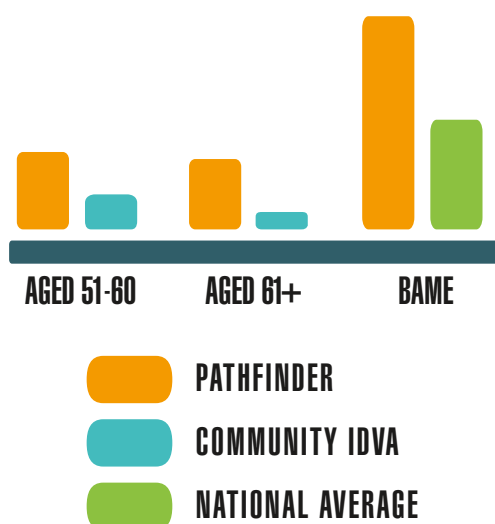
38. ONS (25 November 2020) Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2020 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseandthecriminaljusticesystemenglandandwales/november2020>

39. 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

40. 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. <https://www.uos.ac.uk/sites/www.uos.ac.uk/files/Family%20and%20intimate%20relationship%20harm%20within%20black%20and%20minority%20ethnic%20communitiesFINAL%20%281%29.pdf>

England treated 1,012 female assault victim-survivors in the year 2019-20 where the cause of admission was a form of maltreatment including physical or sexual abuse, torture or mental cruelty. This is an increase of 31% from the year 2015-16, when 774 cases were recorded.⁴¹ This year also saw the publication of key findings of the Pathfinder project, led by Standing Together, a 3-year pilot that brought together expertise and funding for specialist domestic abuse interventions to embed a 'Whole Health' approach to domestic abuse in 8 sites across England.⁴² The project, which ended in March 2020, joined up the efforts of local health partners from acute health, mental health and primary care with local domestic abuse specialist services.

COMPARISON VICTIM-SURVIVORS IDENTIFIED THROUGH PATHFINDER AND OTHER PATHWAYS



The pilot report found that victim-survivors identified through Pathfinder referral pathways were those likely to be otherwise missed by services. 13% of Pathfinder-identified victim-survivors were aged 51-60, compared with just 6% identified by community IDVAs; this disparity rose to 12% Pathfinder-identified and 3% by community IDVAs for over 61-year olds. Similarly,

for Black and minoritised victim-survivors, 36% of Pathfinder clients were Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic compared to the national average of 18.5%.⁴³

There was also a high level of disclosure of sexual abuse among Pathfinder clients. This was particularly high for Pathfinder clients under 30 where disclosure was recorded for over 23% of victim-survivors and for those supported by a Mental Health IDVA disclosure rates were 25% for victim-survivors.⁴⁴

For many victim-survivors, health care settings are a key location where they can safely and confidentially disclose and seek help for domestic and sexual abuse. Health settings have a critical role in providing information and signposting to specialist support for women. It is vital that learning from initiatives that are known to work such as IRIS programmes⁴⁵ in general practices and the Pathfinder programme are rolled out to ensure better training and a holistic response by professionals.

SUPPORT SERVICE SUSTAINABILITY

The pandemic has also served to highlight 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.⁴⁶

In addition to the £2.2bn that has been estimated as necessary to tackle domestic abuse alone in this spending period, further spending pledges are needed of at least £102.7m annually to ensure specialist sexual violence and abuse services are available for victim-survivors; and £57m annually to ensure that the existing highly specialist support services for Black and minoritised women are sustainable.³⁹

41. The Metro (September 2020) Huge rise in women and girls going to hospital for physical, mental or sexual abuse, <https://metro.co.uk/2020/09/23/huge-rise-in-women-and-girls-going-to-hospital-for-physical-mental-or-sexual-abuse-13313166/?ito=cbshare>

42. Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (June 2020) Pathfinder Key Findings Report, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/5ef35fc7d4c474437a774783/1593008073853/Pathfinder+Key+Findings+Report_Final.pdf

43. P.9, Ibid.

44. P.11, Ibid.

45. IRISi Interventions <https://irisi.org/>

46. Imkaan (17 December 2018) From Survival to Sustainability https://829ef90d-0745-49b2-b404-cbea85f15fda.filesusr.com/ugd/2f475d_9cab044d7d25404d85da289b70978237.pdf

In May 2020 the Government responded to concerns from the sector about the impact of the increased demand for support and cost of transforming services for remote provision by making available a number of crisis funding pots at the Home Office (HO), the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). While welcome, the short-term nature of this funding means that services can expect to face a “cliff-edge” in March 2021 when the funding comes to an end, combined with the fact that services do not expect to see any decrease in demand.

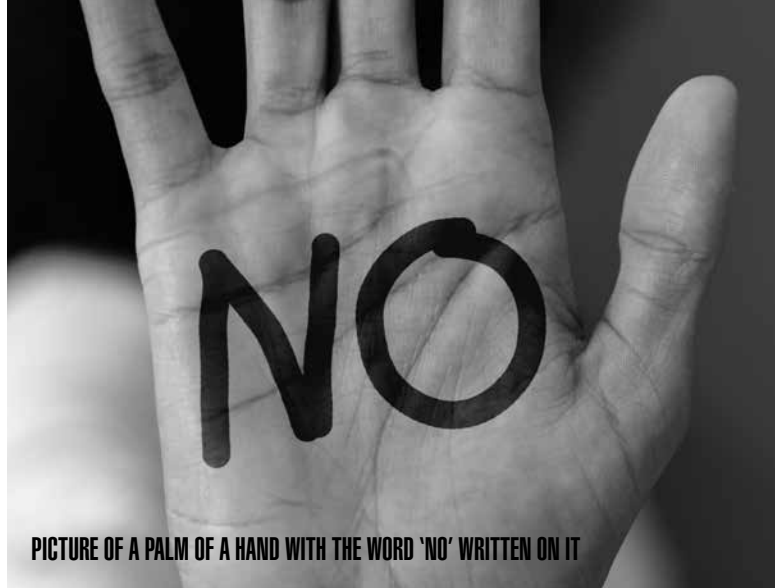
Black and minoritised women significantly value “seeing themselves” in support services.⁴⁷

The delay to a multi-year Comprehensive Spending Review means that VAWG services must continue to try and meet demand with piecemeal funding from various funding pots. What these lifesaving services desperately need instead is sustainable, long-term funding that addresses the structural inequality that the sector faces. In addition to the £2.2bn that has been estimated as necessary to tackle domestic abuse alone in this spending period,⁴⁸ further spending pledges are needed of at least £102.7m annually to ensure specialist sexual violence and abuse services are available for victim-survivors; and £57m annually to ensure that the existing highly specialist support services for Black and minoritised women are sustainable.⁴⁹

Key Policy Developments

ANTI-RACISM

The murder of George Floyd in Minnesota (USA) and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests over the summer across the globe, along with the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Black and minoritised communities has highlighted the importance of tackling VAWG within an anti-racist framework that centres



ending VAWG within a wider social justice agenda. This means understanding and acknowledging the importance of “by and for” specialist services that meet the needs of Black and minoritised women and enable them to see themselves in the services they are supported by.

BLACK AND MINORITISED WOMEN AND GIRLS’ EXPERIENCES OF HELP-SEEKING

2020 saw the publication of a substantive report highlighting the importance of specialist “by and for” services for Black and minoritised women who have experienced sexual violence. 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’.”⁵⁰

racist stereotypes can lead to failures in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse.⁴³

The report examines how ‘cultural framings’ and assumptions by agencies⁵¹ act as a barrier to effective responses to VAWG as the nuances of women’s contexts and experiences are not seen but instead assumptions regarding their “culture” and what types of VAWG are

47. Thiara, T., University of Warwick & Roy, S., Imkaan (2020) Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence Key Findings, p. 51 https://829ef90d-0745-49b2-b404cbea85f15fda.filesusr.com/ugd/f98049_a0f11db6395a48fbac0e40da899dcb8.pdf

48. SafeLives (2020) A Safe Fund: costing domestic abuse provision for the whole family https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/A%20Safe%20Fund%20costing%20domestic%20abuse%20provision%20for%20the%20whole%20family%20in%20England%20and%20Wales_0.pdf

49. EVAW et al. (29 September 2020) VAWG Sector call for strategic investment to end abuse <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/vawg-sector-call-for-strategic-investment-to-end-abuse/>

50. Thiara, T., University of Warwick & Roy, S., Imkaan (2020) Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence Key Findings, p. 51 https://829ef90d-0745-49b2-b404cbea85f15fda.filesusr.com/ugd/f98049_a0f11db6395a48fbac0e40da899dcb8.pdf

51. P.45, Ibid.

or are not experienced by certain women are used as a basis for non-intervention.⁵²

This was further confirmed with 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.⁵³

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 victim-survivors of child sexual abuse who fear reinforcing “negative stereotypes”.⁵⁴

An example of such negative stereotypes is the image of the “Asian grooming gangs”, following high profile child sexual exploitation cases in Rochdale and Rotherham. A recent Home Office paper into characteristics of “grooming gangs” found that “academic literature highlights significant limitations to what can be said about links between ethnicity and this form of offending”. Furthermore, contrary to pervading stereotypes that group-based child sexual exploitation (CSE) is particularly perpetrated by Asian men, such offenders were found to come from “diverse backgrounds” and that group-based CSE offenders were most commonly white.⁵⁵ Extensive, compulsory training into myths regarding child sexual abuse and Black and minoritised communities for statutory agencies is necessary so that child sexual abuse can be identified and responded to appropriately.

Participants in the research by IICSA, when discussing awareness and understanding of child sexual abuse in minoritised communities, cited the importance of sex education in schools as well as the media’s role in shaping attitudes to child sexual abuse. The delay to the rollout to compulsory Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), now expected July 2021, will be more vital than ever to the lives of young people in the context of the pandemic. Schools will therefore require significant

support from the Department of Education to ensure that RSE is not delayed further. Additionally, the DfE needs to commit to resourcing a ‘Whole School Approach’ to preventing VAWG in schools which incorporates a prioritisation of tackling abuse; teacher training; and making links with local, specialist abuse organisations.

ONLINE HARMS

2021 is widely expected to see the Online Harms Bill enter Parliament. As well as working closely with and consulting women’s organisations to ensure that the Online Harms Bill addresses gender-based and intersectional online abuse, the Government should commission research into the impact of online abuse on women and Black and minoritised communities and intersectional online abuse.⁵⁶

In the context of a sharp rise the threat of online child sexual abuse, the Government introduced an interim code of practice on online child sexual exploitation and abuse ahead of the Online Harms Bill’s passage through Parliament this year.⁵⁷ Given IICSA’s findings on how racist stereotypes can negatively impact on statutory agency response, and Glitch and EAW’s report on the disproportionate impact of online abuse on Black and minoritised women, it is necessary for the Online Harms Bill to take account of intersecting inequalities that inform the experience of online abuse of women and girls.

Imkaan’s Reclaiming Voice report details how statutory agencies can miss or dismiss online abuse, such as image-based abuse, experienced by minoritised women due to cultural assumptions about whether certain women, such as married Muslim women, are vulnerable to such abuse.⁵⁸ In one of the case studies it is clear that assumptions about who experiences image-based abuse and how it is perpetrated are also based on a misunderstanding that online abuse can be understood separately from other forms of VAWG, when image-based abuse, online stalking and various other forms of online abuse are often perpetrated within a context of sexual and domestic abuse.

52. 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

53. IICSA (June 2020) “People don’t talk about it: child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/19530/view/ethnic-minorities-june-2020.pdf>

54. Ibid, p3.

55. Home Office (December 2020) Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation Characteristics of Offending, p.8 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/944206/Group-based_CSE_Paper.pdf

56. Glitch and EAW, op cit.

57. UK Government (15 December 2020) Interim code of practice on online child sexual exploitation and abuse, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-harms-interim-codes-of-practice/interim-code-of-practice-on-online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-accessible-version>

58. Thiara and Roy (2020) op cit., p.46



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) were from Black and minoritised backgrounds – a stark demonstration of how structural inequalities faced by Black, minoritised and migrant women cause harm for women seeking refuge following violence or abuse.

PICTURE OF A WOMAN THINKING

RAPE REVIEW

The Government’s “end to end” review of the treatment of rape in the criminal justice system is set to conclude in 2021 following delays to the review which was due to be published in 2020.

Ensuring those who access the criminal justice system are treated with dignity and respect is vital; here it is critical to note that the vast majority of victim-survivors of sexual violence and assault never report to the police with latest ONS data showing only 17% doing so.⁵⁹ There can be many reasons for this, such fear that their information will be shared for immigration enforcement purposes for women with insecure immigration status (see below for more information), or as a result of negative engagement with the police as can arise for Black victim-survivors of VAWG. As stated by Ngozi Fulani, founder of “by and for” African heritage domestic abuse service Sistah Space, “Women want the abuse to stop but we know what happens to black men in police custody ... “These women do not want to risk their abusers being hurt or murdered.”⁶⁰

With this noted, the high prevalence and harm of sexual violence demand serious Ministerial attention to examine and address what is going wrong in the criminal justice system when prosecuting rape. Measures needed include the reintroduction of the merits-based approach in CPS guidance and in-depth training to address long-held, harmful rape myths relating to race/ethnicity, sexuality, disability and social class about minoritised and marginalised victim-survivors. Furthermore, in-depth, independent research is needed to examine who is and is not reporting to address these barriers, as well as victim-survivors’ priorities to understand what justice truly looks like for them.⁶¹

HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT AND VAWG

The Domestic Abuse Bill continued its passage through Parliament in 2020, still without measures that enable migrant women who are domestic abuse victim-survivors to equally access protection and support. Almost half of all the women that struggled to find a refuge space in the past year (identified through

59. ONS (8 February 2018) Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/sexualoffencesinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017>

60. The Guardian (22 September 2020) Ngozi Fulani: ‘Black women don’t want to risk their abusers being murdered’ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/sep/22/ngozi-fulani-black-women-domestic-violence-police>

61. EAW, Imkaan, Rape Crisis England and Wales and Centre for Women’s Justice (November 2020) The Decriminalisation of Rape: Why the justice system is failing rape survivors and what needs to change <https://www.endviolenceagainstawomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/C-Decriminalisation-of-Rape-Report-CWJ-EAW-IMKAAN-RCEW-NOV-2020.pdf>



PICTURE OF A WOMAN LOOKING OUT A WINDOW

Women's Aid No Woman Turned Away project)⁶² were from Black and minoritised backgrounds – a stark demonstration of how structural inequalities faced by Black, minoritised and migrant women cause harm for women seeking refuge following violence or abuse. And only 5% of refuge spaces were reported as being available to women with No Recourse for Public Funds.⁶³ 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)⁶⁴ were from Black and minoritised backgrounds – a stark demonstration of how structural inequalities faced by Black, minoritised and migrant women cause harm for women seeking refuge following violence or abuse.

Research has shown that women with insecure immigration status are deterred from reporting abuse

to the police. The Step Up Migrant Women Campaign⁶⁵ 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 reporting for migrant victim-survivors of domestic abuse are made clear in the recently published joint HMICFRS IOPC (HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and Independent Office for Police Conduct) and College of Policing report into the super-complaint submitted by Southall Black Sisters and Liberty.⁶⁶ This report found no evidence that the police sharing information with the Home Office supports the safeguarding of domestic abuse victim-survivors. Furthermore, it makes clear recommendations that police officers with concerns about a victim-survivor's immigration status should immediately stop sharing information on them with Immigration Enforcement and that a firewall between the police and Home Office should be considered. Protection for migrant women in the Domestic Abuse Bill would ensure that the Government meets the requirements of Article 4(3) of the Istanbul Convention which the UK signed over eight years ago but has since failed to ratify. Article 4(3) is clear that access to protection and support from VAWG shall be secured without discrimination on any ground including migrant or refugee status. Though the UK is compliant with most of the Istanbul Convention, the latest report⁶⁷ on its progress to ratify show that its failure to protect and support migrant victim-survivors of VAWG still prevents it from being fully compliant.

62. Women's Aid (2020) Nowhere To Turn 2020 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Nowhere-to-Turn-2020.pdf>

63. Women's Aid (2020) The Domestic Abuse Report 2020: The Annual Audit, Bristol: Women's Aid.

64. Women's Aid (2020) Nowhere To Turn 2020 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Nowhere-to-Turn-2020.pdf>

65. King's College London and Latin American Women's Rights Service (May 2019) <https://stepupmigrantwomenuk.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/the-right-to-be-believed-full-version-updated.pdf>

66. 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 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/945314/safe-to-share-liberty-southall-black-sisters-super-complaint-policing-immigration-status.pdf

67. Home Office (October 2020) Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Combating Violence Against Women and Girls and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) – 2020 Report on Progress https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928764/CCS001_CCS1020331858-003_Istanbul_Convention_Progress_Report_E-Laying.pdf

Recommendations

A single, joined-up Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

A holistic VAWG strategy and framework, which is a high Government priority, championed by Ministers, fully costed and funded. This is the best way to properly respond to women's and girls' real-life experiences of VAWG, which are deeply and frequently interconnected.

A Strategic Investment to End Abuse

In order to deliver the life-saving work that helps thousands of women and girls every day, the VAWG sector needs long-term, sustainable funding. This includes ring-fenced funding for specialist Black and minoritised "by and for" services which are chronically under-funded.

Effective Protection and Support for migrant women

A Domestic Abuse Bill that addresses the barriers to support currently facing migrant women. This would include a non-discrimination principle, in line with the Istanbul Convention, safe reporting mechanisms for migrant victim-survivors to report abuse without fear of their information being shared with immigration enforcement, and the extension the eligibility of the Domestic Violence Rule (DVR) and Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) to all migrant women experiencing or at risk of abuse for a minimum of six months.

A comprehensive public health approach to tackling Online Abuse

The Government needs to implement 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. This includes commissioning research into impact of online abuse on women and Black and minoritised communities and intersectional online abuse and ensuring the Online Harms Bill adequately addresses the specific risks that Black and minoritised women face online.

Support for schools to implement RSE and “Whole School Approach”

The Department for Education (DfE) needs to support schools so that there is no further delay to the compulsory rollout of RSE. Additionally, the DfE should commit to resourcing a ‘Whole School Approach’ which incorporates a prioritisation of tackling abuse; teacher training; making links with local, specialist abuse organisations; and peer working.

A Perpetrators Strategy for all

A national strategy on perpetrators that properly resources interventions; national quality assurance systems; and leadership on addressing abuse behaviour at all levels of Government.

This would include specific interventions for Black and minoritised individuals perpetrating harmful behaviour.

Far-ranging reform to the Criminal Justice System’s approach to Sexual Violence

Extensive reforms to the police, CPS and courts, improved leadership and accountability, wraparound support and advocacy for all victim-survivors and ensuring access to justice for all. This includes research into both the barriers to reporting and what rape victim-survivors want from the justice system. We also echo Imkaan’s Reclaiming Voice recommendation for the Home Office National Statement of Expectations to set out that commissioners making VAWG need assessments should proactively set out to enquire about Black and minoritised women and girls’ needs to ensure specialist support pathways are commissioned.



PICTURE OF A PENSIVE YOUNG WOMAN



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