



Consultation response

**'Together we can end violence against women
and girls'**

Submitted to HM Government

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About Children England

Children England is the leading membership organisation for the children, young people and families voluntary sector. With member organisations working in all parts of the country, ranging from small local groups to the largest household names in children's charities, Children England is in a unique position to use the collective voice of the voluntary sector to achieve positive change for children. Children England provides capacity building, support and information to its members and the wide range of voluntary sector organisations working with children, young people and families. It does this by building active networks, promoting good practice, stimulating policy debate and ensuring that the issues that matter most to its members are taken up with decision makers.

Introduction

1. This response into the Government's consultation on ending violence against women (VAW) has been produced by Children England. We have incorporated into our response key information and points from our member organisations as well as from the Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) coalition, the Women's Resource Centre and Newham Action Against Domestic Violence.
2. Our voluntary sector membership has considerable expertise in meeting the needs of children and young people affected by domestic violence, sexual bullying and wider victimisation. Many of our members run programmes aimed at supporting the victims of violence and deliver crucial advice, support and advocacy for those affected. Moreover, our member organisations play a crucial role in challenging violence against women and girls, and challenging policy makers to understand and take responsibility for how violence against women and their children affects multiple aspects of their lives, from success at school to mental and emotional well-being in adulthood.
3. This response does not attempt to answer every question in the consultation but instead focuses largely on preventing violence against girls and the support mothers needs to enable them to protect their children from violence,

How should schools encourage young men to treat women and girls with respect, and not to resort to violent behavior?

4. There is a compelling, three-fold rationale for directing violence prevention efforts at children and young people. Firstly, male and female adult relationships are shaped in important ways by the norms and practices they take on in childhood. Secondly, violence-supportive attitudes are already often well established in adolescence and patterns of physical and sexual violence are evident in some young people's intimate relations. Third, violence prevention education among children and young people has been shown to work.
5. Schools have an important role to play in supporting children and young people in forming respectful relationships with one another, and equally in challenging behaviours and attitudes that negatively affect pupils. Currently, much of this work takes place in personal/social education and/or citizenship lessons delivered by teachers. However, this tends not to analyse issues such as gender inequality and the promotion of negative constructs of femininity and masculinity in the wider media. The fact that these sessions are delivered by teaching staff who may feel uneasy about talking about such controversial topics, or who may not be well received by pupils, can also undermine the use of these lessons, and put young people off exploring these issues. When thinking about how schools can encourage young men to treat women and girls with respect, there is therefore a need to be aware of how work in schools can be enhanced by outside organisations including the voluntary sector, who may be able to relate to children in a different way to teachers because of their different role.

6. Prevention work in schools needs to be increased in scope and reach and emphasised as a priority. There are many ways to deliver programmes that look at domestic violence, gender stereotypes and supporting the development of relationships fostered on respect - many of which are already being delivered by the voluntary sector. The issue of violence against women is emotive and experienced voluntary sector practitioners are confident in creating safe spaces for students to discuss their experiences, opinions, and feelings. The voluntary sector is also able to give advice and information on support networks for students should they wish to talk to someone about how a particular issue has or might affect them. It is quite likely that the delivering agency runs support, advice and advocacy services themselves which removes the barriers to accessing help for the young people they are supporting in schools.
7. Educational interventions should focus not only on protection advice for girls but should also focus on ensuring that any harmful attitudes that boys have are effectively challenged. Moreover, programmes should deliver vital information and support to children and young people without frightening the youngest or alienating the oldest young people through adopting the use of non-threatening language.
8. Prevention work, as incorporated in a cross-government, integrated strategy, needs to learn from the expertise of the children, young people and families voluntary sector and the specialist women's sector in promoting change.
9. Particular attention needs to be paid to the issue of sexual bullying as if it is not firmly tackled or addressed in schools children may be afraid to attend school and inappropriate behavior will go unchallenged. There is also a need to tackle sexual bullying in other youth-centred settings including youth centres, leisure and sporting facilities and school transport. Several voluntary sector providers have already started to run programmes with older pupils in schools specifically on sexual bullying. As with any form of bullying, parents need to be involved with the school in rectifying these behaviours from the earliest instance. It would be useful for Government to develop specific guidelines and training for school leaders on best practice in tackling sexual bullying, and in general awareness raising of the problem amongst parents and young people themselves.
10. Any work with pupils needs to be preceded by adequate preparation for teaching staff. It is also essential to have active links in place with relevant women's groups and with voluntary and statutory organisations involved in child protection and child welfare since the work may well lead to disclosures from children currently living with direct and/or indirect abuse.

How do social attitudes towards girls and women affect the problem of violence against women?

11. To prevent, challenge and stop violence against women and girls, the Government, along with its partners, needs to lead the way in challenging

narrow, often negative, constructions of gender and societal attitudes towards women and girls.

12. The Government needs to recognise that violence against women has a relationship with gender inequality and that some social attitudes serve to perpetrate and justify the broader inequality between the sexes. Community and societal ideas of what it means to be a man and to be a woman contribute to the problem of violence by supporting the traditional gendered power-imbalance.
13. Attitudes and beliefs about gender are learned through the socialisation process, which makes the emphasis on preventative projects from the earliest ages so crucial.
14. There needs to be much greater investment in support services for both women and their children, available throughout the life cycle, to ensure that legacies of violence and abuse are dealt with sensitively and at a time which is best for the mother and child. Without greater investment in these specialised support services, many children and young people are likely to grow up with the legacies of violence never being fully addressed. We know from the evidence that this makes for very poor outcomes for children and young people including poor mental and emotional well-being, increased likelihood of offending, poor educational attainment and social exclusion.
15. Men also have a role to play in challenging VAW, and Government has a role in supporting men to do this. Promoting positive fatherhood practice is a way of not only supporting fathers to be 'good dads' but in promoting values of mutual respect, shared caring roles, and enabling men to play a crucial role as a role model for their sons and daughters. Government has a crucial role in ensuring services are 'father-friendly' regardless of whether the father is still in a relationship with the mother of their child. Government needs to equip all practitioners who work with children and families, including GPs, Sure Start Centre professionals and teachers, with the skills and understanding to support good fathering practice. Government also needs to further embed accessible and available fatherhood support, and parenting support programmes more widely across the country to give the best chance for children to grow up in happy, stable homes.
16. By promoting positive fatherhood and supporting engagement with their children, fathers impart a view of masculinity which is respectful of women and girls, and enables boys and young men to develop mirrored versions of these respectful relationships throughout adolescence and into adult life. Promoting positive fatherhood is one way of engaging men in ending violence against women, by supporting families and providing role models for boys and girls growing up. This crucial work, which undoubtedly requires long-term support, is currently being undertaken by several Children England members including the Fatherhood Institute, Families need Fathers, and work by the Fostering Network on promoting single male foster carers as a crucial support for adolescent boys in care.

17. The glamourising and normalising of violence and aggressive male stereotypes in the media and on the internet perpetuate negative attitudes and behaviour towards women. This is an area that the Government needs to address, working with a wide range of partners.

Are we doing enough to protect and support children affected by adult violence? Who's looking out for them and what do they need?

18. Not enough is being done to protect and support children and young people affected by adult violence – in particular those growing up in abusive and violent homes. Ending child abuse, including the witnessing of domestic violence, has to be a top Government priority. There is too much evidence on the hugely negative outcomes for children and young people who have grown up in violent homes for this issue to not be a predominant concern of Government. However, there are major problems, from effective safeguarding practices, to the availability of specialist support services for women and their children who have left abusive partners.
19. The collective failure of local authorities, local safeguarding children's boards, social workers, NHS practitioners and others to protect and support children growing up in violent homes has been strongly evidenced by the furore over the Baby P tragedy. The Lord Laming report, although welcome, will take time to become fully implemented and until that time more work needs to happen on the ground to ensure no more children and young people are forced to grow up surrounded by the threat and reality of violence. Although Baby P was the victim and target of abuse, children and young people who are growing up in the midst of domestic violence between their mother and her partner are equally at risk of a range of harms.
20. A central concern must be to promote a holistic approach, whereby the links between different forms of abuse are made. In particular, the unhelpful divide between violence and abuse towards women should not be separated from children's experiences of this abuse and other forms of child abuse. The separation in both policy and practice of child abuse from abuse of women has meant that the level and effects of domestic violence are consistently under-estimated, which in turn contributes to a massive under-supply of suitable housing for domestic violence victims as there is a lack of evidence base at the local level.
21. Government must ensure that child protection policies take into account the protection needs of the mother, whilst social workers working with mothers must look at and act upon the risks to the child. The link between domestic violence and child abuse is such that, where one is present, questions should always be asked about the other as a means of creating safer, more sensitive assessments and intervention strategies.
22. There also remains a challenge for Local Safeguarding Children Boards to engage with the voluntary and community sector in meaningful ways, beyond simple representation on the Board. The voluntary sector has expertise in supporting children and young people in coping with the legacies of violence,

providing independent advice and advocacy with a child-centred focus. LSCBs need to use this experience and expertise as a matter of course, rather than as an add-on.

23. It is essential that the Government shows leadership on behalf of those children who have been affected by adult violence. Part of this leadership is to ensure that the join is made between the crime route to safeguarding and the care route, between the DCSF, DH, the Home Office and other Government Departments, and that this is reflected at a local level. Part of this should also include joint planning across agencies to ensure that every locality across the country has appropriate, accessible and adequate support services in place to help the victims of domestic violence and that each agency and practitioner is aware of the range of support available.
24. There is a crisis in the availability of adequate services for victims of domestic violence which has a major negative impact on children and families. Victims of abuse may have multiple needs: help escaping abuse, a safe place to stay, counselling and psychological support to overcome trauma, legal advice and assistance through the courts. Many women do not find the support that they need. Some find that services are not available in their area. Others do not access support because they find the system confusing and difficult to navigate. If women do manage to access support, it is not always the specialist help they need.
25. Many of the solutions for tackling violence against women began with charities. Charities are at the frontline in providing specialist support to victims of violence against women. They provide counselling to help victims recover from the trauma of rape or physical abuse. They act as a voice for victims, advocating on their behalf so they can access all the services they need. However, these vital services are often run on a shoe-string with Government agencies breaking the Compact by only offering 12 month funding. The voluntary sector in this field is consistently under-funded and at risk of closure, this is despite the well-known effects of domestic violence on victims.
26. The flow-on effects from children's experiences of domestic violence involve the disruption of their community, family and friendship networks, moving schools, and often losing their home and possessions. Separation also frequently involves financial hardship which falls disproportionately on women when they leave any relationship. When taken together, the flow-on effects of domestic violence are considerable and often a key restraint to women leaving abusive situations. These points highlight the need for practical support and information on welfare and legal rights in social work intervention in situations of domestic violence. They also point to the absolute crucial availability of a range of support services including counselling, debt and housing advice, legal rights support and information on schools. Moreover, practitioners working in these fields need to be aware of these services and able to signpost women quickly in order to ensure their needs, and the needs of their children are met swiftly and appropriately.

27. Support services include the provision of fit-for-purpose refuges, group counselling for victims, the availability of one-to-one counselling, dedicated legal and financial advice and crucially the availability of good, secure, safe and child friendly permanent accommodation for women and their children leaving refuges. The lack of this permanent, good quality housing for victims of domestic abuse who have had the courage to leave their abuser is a national crisis.
28. The Baby P tragedy highlights the lack of awareness and responsibility in parts of the NHS around children and young people living in violent homes. The NHS needs to see child protection and safeguarding as a core part of the work they carry out. At a senior level this includes working with partners constructively in children's departments, sharing information and ensuring that local services are responsive to likely cases of child abuse and domestic violence. At the front line, practitioners need to be supported to ask the right questions, to have the information to appropriately sign post victims and to not pass the buck to social services or ignore any symptoms of concern.
29. A serious concern is now also arising in relation to attacks on women by their partners during pregnancy. Practically, it also raises issues for professionals about the need for screening for domestic violence in anti-natal and health visiting services and for particular attention to the exploration of the needs of women presenting with physical injuries and/or post-natal depression.
30. GPs need to be aware of the long-term effects of violence on children and young people and need to understand that those presenting with mental health problems and substance misuse in adulthood may have been victims of violence in childhood. Services need to be able to support victims throughout the life-cycle and to refer to counselling services to deal with the legacies of abuse.
31. It has become clear that violence does not necessarily cease on separation and that a particular danger for both women and children is the child contact arrangements which arise from separation and divorce. The incidence of post-separation violence has clear implications for children. Risks to children arise in a number of areas: continuing either to witness violence or to be the subject of direct abuse; continued flow-on effects of violence; and the interruption of their recovery from violence. This awareness needs to be taken into account when legal and social services plan for post-separation contact, and the arrangements made need to be under constant supervision and monitoring. It is imperative that contact decisions made include the feelings and needs of the child as well as the protection issues for the mother. Social workers need to be more aware that separation is not 'a panacea' for children's safety where domestic violence and child abuse have been a problem, given that within current rules child contact is denied under only the most extreme circumstances. Assessment and planning will need to tackle these issues much more directly to improve future practice. This includes making recommendations about child contact within child protection conferences, providing resources for high vigilance supervision or, if contact is considered

unsafe, ensuring that such recommendations inform court welfare reports and the courts.

32. Children and young people can talk about what they have lived through, and that they are willing to do so provided that the subject is approached sensitively and appropriately. This means that adults' attempts to protect children or to offer them help need to build on children's own understandings and coping strategies if they are to be effective. Children and young people often need support in vocalising their experiences and in coming to terms with what has happened to them and their mother – an independent advocate is crucial to this. Independent advocates are also of great use when it comes to ensuring that the child's needs and feelings are taken into account when deciding upon contact with the abusive adult and what supports whether emotional, educational or physical the child needs. The children and young people's voluntary sector has a great history of providing this support and any future strategy that stems from this consultation should take this into account.

How can we all better pick up on, and respond to, early signs of violence?

33. To effectively pick up on and respond to early signs of violence, the availability of specialist support services and the need for strong professional understanding of VAW is crucial. To mainstream effectively, adequate and sustainable resourcing of specialist VAW services is crucial - both in order to support women and children currently trying to leave abusive homes, and to continue the long-term work with women and children who are still dealing with the legacies of abuse, often for many years after leaving the violent partner. There is little point in professionals asking the right questions about domestic violence, if there are no local services or providers to refer to. Women and children affected by violence need safe spaces in which they feel able to talk about their experiences and to receive help in moving forward, since for some knowledge of what has happened may place them at risk of further violence. This requires Government at all levels to support those organisations which have created and provide such space, and these organisations lie predominantly in the voluntary sector.
34. Training is another crucial issue for children's practitioners across the workforce. Without adequate training on signs, interventions and support for victims of violence this agenda will not move forward. There also needs to be political will and leadership at every level of central, regional and local government to ensure practitioners are equipped to support victims of violence, and crucially not reinforce feelings of stigma and shame.

How can central government, local government and other service providers best work together to promote better consistency and quality of provision in services for victims of violence against women across England?

35. For this strategy to work, the Government must urgently address the funding crisis facing voluntary organisations, which have been, and continue to be, at the forefront of working with families and providing effective, quality support to survivors of violence. A central requirement of any strategy is developing a

sustainable funding framework for core services, for too long voluntary organisations supporting children and young people affected by VAW have had to fit into ill-fitting funding frameworks. Statutory agencies when commissioning voluntary sector organizations must make the process Compact compliant (3 year funding). For small organisations and the vulnerable children and young people they serve, such fragility is a major problem.

36. The Government needs to develop ring-fenced, sustainable resourcing for specialist women's VAW services, and voluntary sector partners who support the children and young people affected by violence. This would mean that access to Rape Crisis Centres, specialised domestic violence services, refuges, counselling and peer-support programmes are not dependent on a postcode lottery.
37. Current commissioning frameworks at local authority levels pose a further threat to voluntary organisations supporting children and young people affected by violence. There is a growing trend away from grant aid and towards contracts. This is despite the fact, and as described in government guidance, that grants are necessary to a healthy funding mix and provide greater scope for voluntary sector organisations to identify needs, be innovative in service design and delivery and support their core users.
38. Despite government guidance on 'intelligent' commissioning, a number of challenges face voluntary organisations in relation to the competitive tendering regime. Competitive tendering often favours big, rather than small organisations and national, rather than local organisations. It can also enable the growth of 'super' providers – larger organisations, including private sector companies that are well equipped to win multiple contracts, sometimes parachuting into geographical and service areas where they have no track record or experience.

Following completion of the consultation period, the Government will issue a strategy in order to ensure that coordinated activity is undertaken across government to reduce and prevent violence against women.

39. The need for a truly integrated strategy to tackle violence against women and girls is of great importance and has been a long time coming. For the strategy to be truly cross-governmental and integrated it must take into account the connections between VAW and a raft of social policy areas including child poverty, social exclusion, community cohesion, economic productivity, health, and education. A whole-Government approach is more than cross-departmental group meetings, it requires a detailed examination of how VAW and its effects on children and young people is relevant to core business, including current Public Service Agreements (PSA) and Local Area Agreements (LAA).
40. Until now, the key driver behind this agenda has been the criminal justice system, which has not done enough to protect women affected by violence. The Government's new impetus in looking at preventative methods and

provision is therefore welcome, but to truly have an impact these aspects much have sustained, adequate funding. Prevention has historically been the weakest part of UK responses to violence against women and girls, and the evidence presented here shows that not only can educational programmes work, but that young people actively want them.

41. With regard to provision, there appears to be limited understanding in generic statutory services of the dynamics of violence against women and girls, and crucially the support services required to support children and young people in dealing with the legacies of violence. While some information on domestic violence has been incorporated into vocational courses for teachers and social workers, there is a blind spot when it comes to the inclusion of training across all disciplines on all forms of VAW.
42. Where mothers are struggling with current experiences and/or past legacies of abuse, their capacity to parent, sustain and succeed in employment, are diminished and compromised. Many abused women are subjected to financial control and abuse, and inhibited from employment or education and training by perpetrators. Tackling this must be a key part of a strategy.
43. Protecting women from violence may result in women and children needing temporary accommodation in the short term and being dependent on income support and housing benefit over the longer term. The barriers faced by many single parents are not simply access to work or education, but the ways in which both their aspirations and sense of self-efficacy have been undermined through abuse. Similarly, children and young people who are living with domestic violence and/or child sexual abuse have less resources to devote to learning, and in some instances may fail to attend school, or be disruptive when there. There are multiple pathways, therefore, through which violence can reinforce and reproduce disadvantage. These connections are neither consistently recognised, nor addressed at central government or local levels. A whole-government integrated approach would ensure that the relevance of VAW to all policy areas was explored, and adaptations made to delivery plans to address it.
44. For any integrated strategy to work there must be a budget line. Much of the current work being carried out by the voluntary sector relies on grants for time-limited or piecemeal projects. In many cases statutory agencies are not fulfilling their obligations under the Compact to ensure three year funding cycles. This creates fragility and a lack of sustainability which will undermine any coordinated, cross-agency work on the ground.
45. In order to successfully address issues of equality and diversity, this strategy needs to contain specific targets (as well as guidance and training) on disaggregation of data. Without measuring the baseline, there will be insufficient knowledge of where the starting point is, and what needs to change. An equalities framework, allowing for an intersectional approach to focus on the diverse needs of all women, is essential. Women who are marginalised and experience high rates of VAW, such as women offenders,

women who misuse drugs or alcohol and women with mental health issues also need to be specifically addressed.

46. For Government to develop an integrated, joined up approach, across central and local government, it will require new ways of working and clarity on responsibility. It is crucial that all central government departments are committed to this strategy. In addition, central government needs to give VAW and its effects on young people a clear priority steer at local level.

The way forward

47. Children England believes that ending violence against women and girls must be an absolutely key priority for the Government. To make real progress we would urge the Government to work innovatively and in true partnership with the voluntary sector – in particular with the children, young people and families voluntary sector and the women’s voluntary sector. There will also be a need to ensure all local government truly embeds the strategy’s commitments into their work.

48. Key features of a future violence against women and girls strategy should include:

- A much greater focus on preventative work, drawing especially on the expertise of the voluntary sector.
- A particular focus on the issue of sexual bullying, including in schools and other youth-centred settings.
- Much greater investment in support services including housing, medical support, counseling and financial and legal advice for women who are affected by violence.
- Sustained support for work promoting positive fatherhood and engagement with voluntary sector organisations currently involved in such activities.
- A holistic approach which makes links between different types of abuse.
- Greater training and support for GPs and other health professionals, teachers, social workers, voluntary sector workers and other key professionals on identifying signs of violence against women and girls and to help them provide and signpost help.
- A commitment to addressing the funding crisis facing many voluntary organisations and a sustainable funding framework for core services including through grant funding.
- A commitment to revisiting commissioning guidance to ensure outcomes for women and children are key drivers when making decisions.
- Clear targets and a monitoring mechanism to assess performance.

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