



The Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) and domestic violence thematic session

**Written briefing on behalf of White Ribbon Scotland (SCIO SC051163)
submitted by
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*President Biden, during his election campaign said
'When violence against women is no longer socially accepted, that's when it will change.'*

WRS works to make VAWG no longer socially tolerated and to make the attitudes and behaviour which condone it socially unacceptable.

The need to engage men has been understood for some time as this is a societal issue, a Human Rights issue, and needs to be addressed by society as a whole. Men are responsible for most violence against women and it is understood that changing attitudes and behaviour is an essential element on the road to eliminate it. The argument is that gender inequality leads to gender violence as it is both a cause and consequence of it. Most men don't commit VAW, which means the majority have the potential to bring about change and the patriarchal nature of society puts many men in positions where they can be influential. We suggest that it is at a community level that men can alter attitudes by choosing to portray and demonstrate changed behaviours.

*Norwegian Psychologist Per Espen Stoknes says,
'Humans are social animals. We are evolved to look at what other people are doing. For change to be normal we have to see it in what other people are doing. If it becomes normal to take action then you have succeeded in changing social norms.'*

The need to involve men and boys has been endorsed by The First Minister, many members of her Cabinet, MSPs, numerous leaders working in the field of VAWG and an endless number of survivors who are crying out for men to play their part by ending victim blaming and challenging their peers instead. Reactions to the murder of Sarah Everard heightened this call, but it needs to be further embedded in communities as many people are astounded to hear that some 90 women across the UK have been murdered since the horrific attack on Sarah.

During a recent interview Sandy Brindley, CEO of Rape Crisis Scotland said,

'We need men to step up and be part of this culture change, because unless we have men taking ownership of this issue I don't think we are ever going to make a significant impact given the scale of violence against women.'

WRS are not saying men bear responsibility for the perpetrators in our midst, but they do have a responsibility as members of a society blighted by VAW to try to do something about it.

We work with non-perpetrating men to educate them about what is happening, why men need to be involved and what they can do to change things. Whilst staff members themselves deliver inputs; we mainly do this via the work of our WRS Status Projects, through which we take the opportunity to train diverse groups of local volunteers to reach out to men in their community. This approach creates role models within the communities rather than simply delivering a workshop; local role models including parents, family members, neighbours, friends, sport coaches, peers and more, who can make a difference by understanding the affect they can have by speaking out against VAW, changing conversations, exemplifying active bystander interventions, showing respect, promoting gender equality, etc

WRS Status Projects are our main tool in changing attitudes across Scotland regarding gender equality, sexist and misogynistic behaviour, respect, peer pressure and how to break away from gender stereotyping. Through the work of volunteer Speakers we will improve the nation's buy-in, in line with Equally Safe and the National Performance Framework, to become informed active bystanders, creating a society in which challenging behaviour which condones abuse is the norm rather than a rarity. This happens when men are motivated and confident they will be supported by others. Speakers are trained to deliver inputs and workshops to pass on these aims.

On-going assessment and innovation informed by our volunteers has developed the WRS Status Project Toolkit to an extent whereby we are confident they are well structured with systems in place for governance by the Steering Groups. There is an enhanced community feel with items such as a local white ribbon brand. Levels of participation as members of the steering groups and trained Speakers will be maintained in collaboration with the Community Project Workers to assist longevity.

Local white ribbon branding across Scotland includes



Projects currently in progress and others under development, coupled with on-going work to rejuvenate the older Projects which were not built with the same level of sustainability, have taught us what needs to be done to continue, on a larger scale, providing opportunities to link Projects across Scotland. When we manage to obtain the necessary level of funding to be properly staffed the result will be a network of social change, with the staff and resources to crucially reach out to men and boys who are not inclined to reach out to VAW organisations. It is this aspect which is the best way of truly influencing different attitudes and behaviour at a level which will improve

our society. Effective prevention will not come from limiting discussions to those already in agreement.

In summary WRS Status Projects proceed as follows.

1. Consider necessary requisites of obtaining White Ribbon Status and decide if this is for your area/organisation/club.
2. Obtain Executive (or equivalent) support for commencement of a Project.
3. Contact WRS to discuss your proposal.
4. Once agreed, form a Steering Group and an Action Plan which will record agreed targets for the award to be granted. This will include creating a local brand, identifying Speakers for training and opportunities for Speaker events through which local men will be engaged and learn about how to help end VAW.
5. Arrange a launch event to raise awareness of the Project.
6. Implement the Action Plan, developing Speaker events across your community which will build towards qualification for the award of White Ribbon Status. Importantly hold some events which reach out-with your own community to develop the WRS campaign in the grassroots manner in which it began. Plan for the future longevity of White Ribbon work. In short, how will they make sure that someone joining their community in five years' time will know they have arrived in a community where men do not accept VAWG is inevitable?
7. Receive the award of White Ribbon Status recognising the work your community has undertaken to engage men in opposing VAW.
8. Move from a Project to a sustainable Campaign and put in place procedures to ensure that when others interact with your community in future they will understand it is a White Ribbon community contributing to an improved society.

A recent study

<https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/gender-institute/>

undertaken by Kate Nevens, Talat Yaqoob and Ellie Hutchinson from 'The Collective' and published by Zero Tolerance outlines aspects considered to be conducive to changing attitudes which should be studied and developed further to give public bodies, the Third Sector and business the tools to act to change the culture on women's equality . We are heartened by the study and would argue that the following extracts from it fit closely with the theory, organisation, activities, community nature and desired results of our Status Projects with the added factor that we specifically want to concentrate on getting right to the heart of the problem i.e. the attitudes of men.

- Single one-off interventions do not work on their own (*SPs hold many events and aim to achieve recognition that it belongs to the community*)
- An individual's actions are impacted by the actions of teachers, family members, friends or other community members around them
- Projects need to be tailored and include working with multiple stakeholders e.g. on the ground community projects (*a diverse assembly of stakeholders are represented on SP steering groups*)
- Approaches at community level to encourage modelling of desired behaviours are considered effective
- Material and social benefits support attitude and behaviour change
- Communication campaigns need to be accessible, relatable and positive
- Centre the experiences of women (*we involve survivors*)

- Relationship building is central to sustainability (*our staff maintain a relationship with the SPs they link with*)

Funding.

White Ribbon Scotland wholeheartedly supports the announcement of £100 million pounds to help address VAWG. We note that this is being spent on the provision of services offering support to survivors of VAWG, and absolutely agree that is required due to the increased and increasing demand for services. As a primary prevention campaign, we do not want to receive funding made available by neglecting such services.

However, prevention work, by ourselves and other organisations is an important part of ensuring that the need for services begins to diminish in future years. This is the undoubted dilemma; how does Government continue to fund high level services, whilst ensuring there is sufficient funding to maintain and increase the effectiveness of prevention campaigns whose success could help reduce and ultimately eliminate the need for those services?

Should there be a designated fund for prevention initiatives?

White ribbon Scotland consider that we are currently in receipt of funding which is approximately 36% of that required to be operating at a desirable level; one which would allow us to accelerate our effectiveness. When we are fully funded, we will move from having a core team of 2 members of staff to having a team of 6. We have no shortage of organisations who want to work with us. Success in prevention would produce substantial savings across all fields. It is estimated that 20% of Police Scotland's time (and budget) is dedicated to addressing domestic abuse alone. That is repeated across other major services such as Health, Custody Services and Criminal Justice.

Increasing our funding to the level suggested would take our annual funding to about £250,000.

Measures Required

We firmly believe that the most effective measure is to develop attitudinal change at community level; 'community' being defined as any body of people who see themselves as grouped together by geographical area, organisation, sport club, company, education establishment, or any other similar categories. It requires education, peer influence, gender equality, abandoning gender stereotyping, effective local role models, a realisation that people working together can tackle big issues one step at a time and still see significant results at the early stages. (One of the major drawbacks to engaging people in preventing VAWG is helping them realise that although the task is huge it is achievable. VAWG is not inevitable.)

It requires the majority of people to understand they have a role to play in ending VAWG.

We need men to stop seeing VAWG as a women's issue and accept it as a societal issue, something adversely affecting the society they live in and that addressing it will have positives for everyone, including them.

The positive masculinity is there; it is the negative aspects of existing masculinity that we need to remove, not masculinity itself. We need to abandon the thought that men need to have power and control and we need to address feelings of entitlement.

The more people who become active bystanders in their communities, the less space there is for perpetrators of violence to operate with impunity.

As perpetrators feel society is applying pressure to bring about changes which directly influence their ability to operate in the manner they have previously felt free to do, there is likely to be a growing need for services to address and amend that behaviour.