

We must repeat at every opportunity:

Violence against women is a cause and consequence of women's inequality.

We must:

- Explain the chicken AND the egg. Promote understanding of the relationship between women's inequality and violence against women.
- Make the links. Discuss the relationship plainly and without jargon or complex academic explanations.
- Engage everyone. Women and men, girls and boys – we have much to gain from living together as full members of society.

'Engender is a membership organisation working on an anti-sexist agenda in Scotland and Europe to increase women's power and influence and make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society.'

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chicken AND egg

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Women's inequality is a cause AND consequence of violence against women



CHICKEN & EGG

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women's inequality is a cause AND consequence of violence against women



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cause AND consequence



The silencing of debate about women's inequality is perhaps the biggest barrier to ending violence against women.

Violence against women flourishes in a social system that perpetuates men's expectation of entitlement and privilege.

Scotland has set the standard in the UK for violence against women work and yet, somehow, we cannot identify real progress in making women safer.

Our definition of violence against women is gendered - we make the links between domestic abuse, rape and commercial sexual exploitation. At the same time, we still have a cultural acceptance that violence against women is somehow inevitable, personal, and private rather than behaviour that would be pursued and punished vigorously (like kidnapping, torture, mugging, serious assault in the street).

How do we change our culture? First we must see that violence is a violation of women's human rights and is intrinsically linked with the inequality of women in our society. Then we must do something meaningful about both.

As a society we persist in the, usually implicit, understanding that somehow women are wholly or partly to blame for their own victimisation: "Why doesn't she just leave?" "Was she drinking?" "What was she wearing?" AND we persistently fail to hold to account, as we would offenders of other crimes, the perpetrators of violence against women: hence the dismally low conviction rates for rape, for domestic abuse, for trafficking of women for sexual exploitation, etc.

To understand and address both the Chicken and the Egg, we need to move away from the idea that violence against women is about some bad men, it is not.

Violence against women flourishes in a social system that perpetuates men's expectation of entitlement and privilege. This system allows some men to use coercion and violence to control women and deny them power, opportunity, and self-determination.

This system is woven into the social fabric of our everyday lives. We find it in our education, our work, our incomes, our career paths and our pensions; in our parenting roles, our expectations of our girls and boys and our undervaluing of caregivers; and in our use of public spaces and facilities, and our sense of safety. All these factors constrain and constrict the lives of women (and men), and violence against women (or the threat of it) is used to enforce women's compliance.

This system is so deeply entrenched in all societies that women's inequality becomes invisible. This invisibility, and the silencing of debate about women's inequality, are the biggest barriers to ending violence against women. As long as we continue to close our eyes to the pervasive nature and enormous cost of women's inequality, we provide a curtain of social acceptance that hides the pain and destruction that violence against women leaves in its wake.

Eliminating violence against women requires that we address BOTH the chicken AND the egg!