



Engender Parliamentary Briefing: 16 Days of Activism

This week marks the start of the 16 Days of Activism for the elimination of violence against women and girls. Started in 1991 by the Center for Women's Global Leadership Institute, the 16 Days of Activism is an international campaign seeking to raise awareness about gender-based violence as a human rights issue at the local, national and international level. This year's global theme for the campaign is 'Leave No One Behind: End Violence against Women and Girls'.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

What's the prevalence of violence against women and girls in Scotland?

As it is everywhere in the world, violence against women and girls is endemic in Scotland. **At least one in five women in Scotland will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime and an average of four rapes are reported every day.** Last year in Scotland, 58,810 incidents of domestic abuse were recorded by the police, which was an increase of 1 percent from the previous year.¹ And in 2015-16, over 10,000 sexual offences were reported, a figure which increased by 7 percent from 2014-15.²

Violence against women and girls is a systematic and widespread human rights violations. It cuts across age and socio-economic background and affects all of society. Whilst the figures on violence against women in Scotland are staggering, it is vital to recognise the different needs and experiences of women and girls who experience violence. For example, we know that older women are less likely to report domestic abuse; that disabled women are significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse and sexual violence than non-disabled women; and that ethnic minority women face additional barriers in accessing services. An intentional examination of these realities, and how women experience multiple forms of oppression and discrimination, will be central to eradicating and preventing violence against women.

Over the last few years, there has seen significant movement on the criminal justice and policy responses to men's violence against women. However, women's lives in Scotland remain constrained by the threat and experience of rape, domestic abuse, stalking, sexual harassment, and other forms of this violence.

¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/10/3700/346365>

² <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00506122.pdf>

What are the causes of violence against women and girls?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines violence against women as '*gender-based violence against women*', and stresses that **the social causes of violence against women and girls are rooted in male entitlement, privilege and the exercise of male control and power**. All of these factors – male privilege, entitlement and control – give license to acts of violence against women. Violence against women and girls is the outcome of unequal power relations between men and women, which has led to discrimination against women, domination and control over women, and to the prevention of women being able to fully participate in society. ³ **At its root, violence against women is both a cause and consequence of women's inequality.**

Access to resources is a fundamental aspect of gender inequality. **Economic inequality increases the risk of a woman being the victim of violence as it re-creates subordination within the home, at work and in wider society.** Women's participation in the labour market is often interrupted by caring responsibilities, which often fall to the woman within the household. The result is that women rely on part-time work, or insecure employment, to meet their caring responsibilities. As a result of the unpaid care provided by women, women in Scotland earn less than men, are twice as dependent on social security as men, and are more likely than men to be living without an income sufficient to meet basic needs. On average, women in Scotland earn £182.90 per week less than men due to both occupational segregation and 'the fact that jobs which are predominantly done by women tend to be lower paid'.⁴

In households where men are the primary or sole breadwinners, the partner often does not have equal access to the earnings coming into the home, leaving the partner to become economically dependent on the primary breadwinner. The connection between income disparity and power is not lost on women who experience violence and the men who perpetrate it. As evidence shows, domestic abuse is more likely to be found in households with a wider gap between male and female earnings. **Economic inequality restricts women's choices and, coupled with the threat of lethal violence, makes it impossible to 'just leave'.**

Male power and control are causes of violence against women, but so too are social norms that force girls and boys – and later men and women – to adopt and assume certain roles within society. **Schools reinforce gender and sex role stereotypes and attitudes that condone the use of violence, and contribute to socialisation that is conducive and supportive of violent behaviour.**⁵ Existing expectations that girls be more caring and passive, while boys be strong and unemotional, are stereotypes that encourage and normalise violence and abuse against women and girls. In 2016, research by Zero Tolerance found that over half of parents reported seeing a change in their child's attitude towards

³ UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

⁴ Bradshaw, J., Finch, N., Kemp, P., Mayhew, E. & Williams, J. (2003). *Gender and Poverty in Britain*. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.

⁵ Causes and Consequences of Violence Against Women. National Research Council. 1996. *Understanding Violence Against Women*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press

gender roles once they reached primary school, with most children adopting the view and attitude that boys are strong and dominant while girls are pretty and subservient.⁶

Sexist bullying and misogynistic behaviours are highly prevalent in education settings in Scotland, and undermine the dignity and safety of girls and young women, negatively impacting on their views of themselves and their experience of and attainment in education. Outdated and restrictive ideas and attitudes about boys and girls reinforce cultural assumptions and expectations, and contribute to the reality that girls and women hold a subordinate position in society compared to men.

ERADICATING AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

One of the strengths of the Scottish Government's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women, *Equally Safe*, has been the clear recognition of the gendered nature of issues such as childhood sexual abuse, sexual violence at all ages, and domestic abuse. Taking a gendered approach does not mean that boys and men do not experience violence or abuse, or that women never use violence. Rather, it acknowledges that women and girls suffer violence and abuse disproportionately, and that it is typically men who carry out such violence. In Scotland last year, women made up 80 percent of victims of domestic abuse, and a female victim and a male accused represented 79 percent of all domestic abuse incidents.⁷

A gendered approach also recognises the main cause of this violence as being gender inequality, and highlights the need to achieve broad social change to effectively end male violence. It provides a framework for planning and delivering services as well as allowing for the development of services that are tailored to suit the differing needs of women and men affected by violence and abuse. *Equally Safe* entrenches a feminist analysis of men's violence. Its boldness of analysis must now be matched by boldness of action to realise its ambitions.

What do we need to make change happen?

Eradicating violence against women in Scotland will require us to tackle entrenched gender inequalities. It will require rooting out segregation and gender stereotyping in education. It will mean increased women's participation and representation in politics and public life. It will necessitate the provision of flexible, high quality and affordable childcare to facilitate women's participation in the labour market. It will mean taking steps to narrowing the gender pay gap, and to developing social security policies in Scotland that promote women's safety and financial independence (e.g., automatic split payments of Universal Credit).

Preventing and eradicating violence against women demands that we have processes and institutions that can more effectively enable the progressive realisation of women's rights;

⁶ <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/healthy-relationships-early-primary-settings?destination=node%2F333>

⁷ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/10/2442/334224>

that we ensure that men cannot abuse and assault women with impunity; and that women who experience rape and domestic violence are provided with adequate support and services.

1. **Continued pressure on the UK Government to ratify the Istanbul Convention⁸**, which represents a comprehensive legal framework outlining minimum standards for a State's response to violence against women and girls. It addresses all forms of violence against women through measures aimed at preventing violence, protecting victims, and prosecuting perpetrators.
2. A crucial dimension of systemic violence against women is lack of equal access to justice as well as discrimination within the criminal justice system. It is vital that Scotland **ensure an appropriate criminal justice response to misogynistic harassment and abuse, whether perpetrated offline or online.**
3. Domestic abuse is the fourth most common reason given for a homeless application in Scotland, and it is wholly unacceptable that women and children who have experienced domestic abuse also face losing their home. **Housing policy should treat women with dignity and respect and enable women (where possible) to remain in their own homes.**
4. As a result of austerity and downward pressure on public budgets, rape crisis and women's aid services are experiencing unprecedented levels of demand from women with increasingly complex needs. **Ring- fenced funding to resource violence against women advocacy and support services is crucial.**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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ABOUT ENGENDER

Engender has a vision for a Scotland in which women and men have equal opportunities in life, equal access to resources and power, and are equally safe and secure from harm. We are a feminist organisation that has worked in Scotland for 20 years to advance equality between women and men.

⁸ Dr. Eilidh Whiteford MP introduced a Private Members Bill, passed in April 2017, which calls on the UK Government to ratify the Istanbul Convention.