



AN OVERVIEW OF VAWG AND THE ROLE OF PUBLIC POLICY IN SCOTLAND IN PREVENTION



Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a form of gender-based violence (GBV) which is predominantly perpetrated by men and disproportionately affects women and girls because of their gender. In Scotland, this violence continues to occur at endemic levels with devastating consequences for the health, social and economic circumstances of women and girls as well as their families and communities.¹

This violence can take many different forms and is not limited to physical violence. For example, the Scottish Government and COSLA's definition² of VAWG covers:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence in the family, general community or institutions.
- Sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in public.
- Commercial sexual exploitation.
- Child sexual abuse, including familial sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and online abuse.
- So-called “honour-based” violence, including dowry-related violence, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriages and “honour” crimes.

The root cause of all forms of VAWG is gender inequality, discrimination and power imbalances between men and women; this is often referred to as the “causal story”.³ In addition, factors interact at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels of influence to increase the risk of VAWG occurring. These include harmful societal stereotypes and norms, inadequate justice responses and public policies which further entrench women’s inequality.⁴

In 2014, the Scottish Government and COSLA published Equally Safe, Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating all forms of VAWG. Equally Safe has been commended

¹ Scottish Government (2020) Scotland’s Gender Equality Index. Available at: <https://data.gov.scot/genderindex/about.html#:~:text=Scotland's%20Gender%20Equality%20Index%20measures,hundred%20indicating%20full%20gender%20equality>. [Accessed on: 30/01/2023]

² Scottish Government and COSLA (2018) Equally Safe: Scotland’s strategy to eradicate violence against women. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/>

³ Ibid.

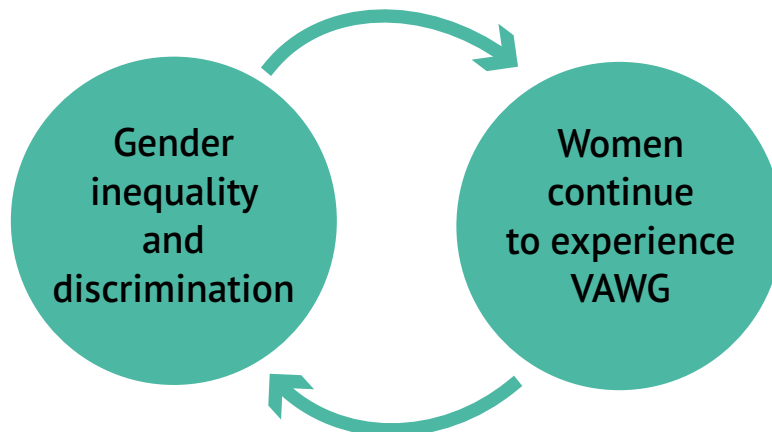
⁴ UN Women (2015) A Framework to Underpin Action to Prevent Violence against Women. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/11/prevention-framework>

for being one of the few VAWG strategies in the world to fully integrate a gendered analysis of men's violence and advocate for a primary prevention approach, which means that it aims to stop VAWG before it occurs by tackling the root cause: gender inequality.⁵

Evidence shows that primary prevention is most effective when a variety of coordinated actions are taken across the different levels of influence to promote gender equality.⁶ Although a wide range of primary prevention work is being delivered across Scotland in different settings in line with Equally Safe, there remains a critical implementation gap at the level of the national government.

In particular, opportunities continue to be missed across the Scottish Government to promote gender equality and prevent all forms of VAWG through key areas of public policy.

This paper examines the prevalence of VAWG and gender inequality in Scotland and highlights the urgent need for integration of a primary prevention approach within the Scottish policy landscape. VAWG is not only a justice or equalities policy issue, but one that all policymakers – regardless of their area of work – must play a role in preventing and ultimately eradicating.



⁵ Scottish Government & COSLA (2018) Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/>

⁶ UN Women (2010) Promoting primary prevention. Available at: <https://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/318-promoting-primary-prevention.html#:~:text=Primary%20prevention%20is%20most%20effective,at%20different%20levels%20of%20society>

Violence against women and girls in Scotland

To prevent VAWG it is important to first understand the extent of the problem and the groups of women and girls impacted by this violence. The available data in Scotland indicates that VAWG is occurring at endemic levels with lasting effects on physical and mental health.⁷

Domestic abuse and femicide

In 2021-22 Police Scotland recorded 64,807 incidents of domestic abuse. In cases where gender was recorded, 81% of incidents involved a male accused and a female victim, demonstrating the gendered nature of this violence.⁸

Women who have experienced a form of partner abuse in the past 12 months are more likely than men to experience anxiety and panic attacks, fear, and isolation from friends or family as a result of the abuse.⁹

Between 2013-14 and 2022-23, 90% of female victims in solved homicide cases were killed by a male accused; in almost half of these cases (46.27%) the male accused was their partner or ex-partner, while almost a sixth (15.67%) of these cases involved a male relative.¹⁰

Sexual violence

Reported sexual crimes are at the second highest level seen since 1971.¹¹

In 2022-23, there were 14,602 sexual crimes recorded, including rape and sexual assault, equating to 27 crimes per 10,000, population.

⁷ Scottish Government (2020) Scotland's Gender Equality Index. Available at: <https://data.gov.scot/genderindex/about.html#:~:text=Scotland's%20Gender%20Equality%20Index%20measures,hundred%20indicating%20full%20gender%20equality>.

⁸ Scottish Government (2022) Domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland, 2021-22. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/domestic-abuse-recorded-police-scotland-2021-22/documents/>

⁹ Scottish Government (2021) Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20: main findings. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2019-20-main-findings/>

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2023) Homicide in Scotland 2022-23. Data Tables: Table 10. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homicide-scotland-2022-23/documents/>

¹¹ Scottish Government (2023) Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2022-23. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2022-23/documents/>

The most commonly recorded sexual crime was sexual assault (36%) followed by rape and attempted rape (17%).

In 2022-23, 94% (2,103) of recorded rapes and attempted rapes committed after the introduction of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 (2,236) involved a female victim.¹²

In 2022-23, 86% (3,702) of sexual assaults committed after the introduction of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 (4,281) involved a female victim.

Online abuse

There has been a substantial increase in recorded cybercrime within sexual crimes; in 2013/14, 1,100 crimes of this nature were recorded compared to 3,830 in 2022-23.¹³

More than one in six (17%) women in Scotland have experienced online violence, while over a third (35%) have witnessed online violence.¹⁴

Honour-based abuse

So-called “honour-based abuse” disproportionately affects Black and minority ethnic (BME) women.¹⁵

Between 2015 and 2021, Police Scotland recorded a total of 955 incidents of honour-based abuse on their interim Vulnerable Persons Database (iVPD).¹⁶

¹² The implementation of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 changed the way sexual crimes are recorded and categorised, for example by widening the definition of rape.

¹³ Scottish Government (2023) Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2022-23. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2022-23/documents/>

¹⁴ Open University (2023) OU research reveals shocking level of online violence experienced by women and girls across Scotland. Available at: [https://www5.open.ac.uk/scotland/news/ou-research-reveals-shocking-online-violence#:~:text=girls%20across%20Scotland,OU%20research%20reveals%20shocking%20level%20of%20online%20violence%20experienced%20by,%25\)%20have%20witnessed%20online%20violence.](https://www5.open.ac.uk/scotland/news/ou-research-reveals-shocking-online-violence#:~:text=girls%20across%20Scotland,OU%20research%20reveals%20shocking%20level%20of%20online%20violence%20experienced%20by,%25)%20have%20witnessed%20online%20violence.)

¹⁵ Scottish Women's Aid (2021) Honour-Based Abuse: The impacts for young people and barriers seeking support. Available at: <https://womensaid.scot/honour-based-abuse-the-impacts-for-young-people-and-barriers-seeking-support/>

¹⁶ Police Scotland (2022) 22-0400 - Crime Stats - Honour Based Violence - 2015-21. Available at: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/access-to-information/freedom-of-information/disclosure-log/disclosure-log-2022/april/22-0400-crime-stats-honour-based-violence-2015-21/>

In 2022, the UK Government's Forced Marriage Unit dealt with 302 cases and 545 general enquiries in the UK related to a possible forced marriage and/or possible female genital mutilation (FGM). Of the 302 cases, 78% of victims were female, while 74% were British nationals (including dual nationals).¹⁷

Attitudes to VAWG

Harmful attitudes towards women and VAWG are driving these high levels of violence in Scotland. Data from the 2019 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey found a significant minority of people continue to hold problematic views on VAWG; these include rape myths, victim-blaming beliefs and misunderstandings about the root causes of VAWG.¹⁸

Research commissioned by Scottish Women's Aid in 2020 also found that less than half of people surveyed could identify gender inequality as the cause of VAWG: just 47% understood unequal power dynamics between men and women as a key cause and 51% could say the same about harmful gender norms.¹⁹

These attitudes and lack of knowledge about the issue are directly contributing to an environment in which VAWG is enabled and tolerated in Scotland. For example, there is evidence of problematic attitudes among juries in rape trials that are not being systematically challenged.²⁰ According to Rape Crisis Scotland, the presence of such views can make juries reluctant to convict in rape cases, resulting in fewer convictions and a perceived tolerance of VAWG.²¹ Indeed, rape and attempted rape have had the lowest conviction rate of all crimes for a decade despite reported cases of sexual violence being at an all-time high.²²

¹⁷ UK Government (2023) Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2022. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022#:~:text=In%202022%2C%2035%20cases%20\(78,victim%20has%20mental%20capacity%20concerns.](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022#:~:text=In%202022%2C%2035%20cases%20(78,victim%20has%20mental%20capacity%20concerns.)

¹⁸ Scottish Government (2020) Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2019: attitudes to violence against women. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-attitudes-survey-2019-attitudes-violence-against-women-scotland/documents/>

¹⁹ Scottish Women's Aid (2020) Shifting attitudes and changing the future for women and girls. Available at: <https://womensaid.scot/shifting-attitudes-and-changing-the-future-for-women-and-girls/>

²⁰ Vanessa Munro et al., (2020) The provenance of what is proven: exploring (mock) jury deliberation in Scottish rape trials. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jols.12287>

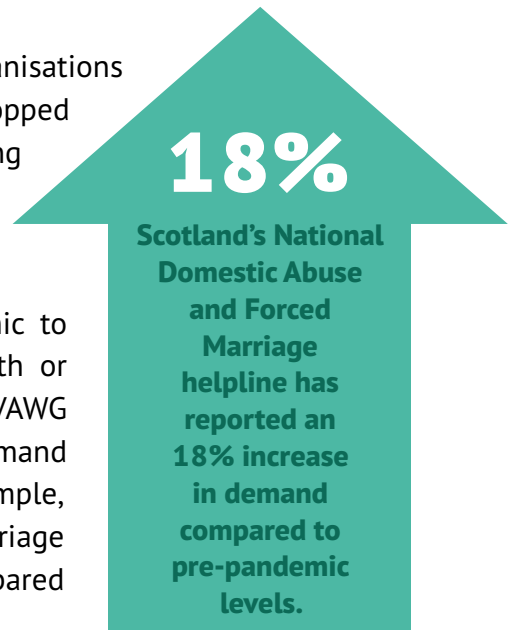
²¹ Rape Crisis Scotland (2022) Joint Briefing on the Scottish Government Consultation on the Not Proven Verdict and Related Reforms. Available at: <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/resources/1646144558-RCSNotProvenBriefingFeb2022-2.pdf>

²² Rape Crisis Scotland (2022) Rape Crisis Scotland calls for bold action as conviction rates for rape and attempted rape remain the lowest of all crimes for the last ten years. Available at: <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/news/news/rape-crisis-scotland-calls-for-bold-action-as-conviction-rates-for-rape-and-attempted-rape/#:~:text=New%20figures%20released%20by%20the,a%2091%25%20overall%20conviction%20rate.>

The impact of ongoing crises

VAWG thrives in times of crisis such as conflict, natural disasters, food insecurity and economic crashes. Indeed, all forms of VAWG intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic across the world due to lockdowns and stay-at-home orders, a greater reliance on digital technology increasing opportunities for online harassment and abuse, and pandemic-related pressures on household finances, all of which compounded existing structural inequalities while simultaneously preventing women and girls from accessing support.²³

In Scotland, referrals to frontline third sector organisations supporting people experiencing VAWG initially dropped during the first lockdown before gradually increasing again throughout Phases 1- 3 of Scotland's response to the pandemic.²⁴ Contrary to representing a decline in VAWG, this drop in referrals was the result of additional barriers created by the pandemic to accessing support, particularly for women living with or being monitored by their perpetrator(s). To be sure, VAWG services in Scotland are still dealing with increased demand for support which has followed the pandemic; for example, Scotland's National Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage helpline has reported an 18% increase in demand compared to pre-pandemic levels.²⁵



Two specialist support organisations for BME women reported a decrease in contact with women experiencing honour-based abuse and/or enforced servitude from their extended family.²⁶ Police data also shows that the number of recorded incidents of honour-based abuse fell from 156 in 2019 to 137 in 2020 and 118 in 2021.²⁷ Again, this is not because of a decline in this abuse, but rather because the pandemic restricted

²³ UN Women (2021) Measuring the shadow pandemic: Violence against Women during COVID-19. Available at: <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/vaw-rga>

²⁴ Scottish Government (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19): domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls during Phases 1,2 and 3 of Scotland's route map (22 May to 11 August 2020). Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-domestic-abuse-forms-violence-against-women-girls-during-phases-1-2-3-scotlands-route-map-22-11-august-2020/documents/>

²⁵ Scottish Women's Aid (2022) SWA Briefing the cost of living crisis the impact on women experiencing domestic abuse. Available at: <https://womensaid.scot/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/SWA-Briefing-the-cost-of-living-crisis-Sept-22.pdf>

²⁶ Scottish Government (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19): domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls during Phases 1,2 and 3 of Scotland's route map (22 May to 11 August 2020). Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-domestic-abuse-forms-violence-against-women-girls-during-phases-1-2-3-scotlands-route-map-22-11-august-2020/documents/>

²⁷ Police Scotland (2022) 22-0400 - Crime Stats - Honour Based Violence - 2015-21. Available at: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/access-to-information/freedom-of-information/disclosure-log/disclosure-log-2022/april/22-0400-crime-stats-honour-based-violence-2015-21/> [Accessed on: 31/01/2023]

opportunities for professionals, like healthcare workers and school staff, to detect it.²⁸ Limited data is available in relation to the post-pandemic impact, however, Amina, the Muslim Women's Resource Centre has reported an increase in demand for services as a result of the pandemic, especially from women experiencing domestic abuse.²⁹ According to their annual report, since the pandemic, demand for support for VAWG via their helpline has only continued to grow.³⁰

During Phase 3, there was also an increase in the number of women selling or exchanging sex for the first time, with the majority of women in one survey citing financial pressures for this.³¹ Furthermore, according to the housing charity Shelter, approximately 30,000 women were sexually harassed by landlords demanding sex in exchange for a place to live in 2020.³²

Online abuse also increased as internet usage in the UK more than doubled.³³ This abuse includes cyber-harassment, intimate image abuse and threats of rape, sexual assault or murder.

In one survey of women in the UK, almost half (46%) of respondents said they had experienced online abuse since the beginning of the pandemic; this increased to 50% amongst BME women and non-binary respondents, respectively.³⁴

For almost half (48%) of respondents, gender was the most commonly cited reason for the abuse, followed by gender identity and sexual orientation (21%), ethnic background (18%), religion (10%) and disability (7%). Young women and girls were also impacted

²⁸ The Times (2022) Honour-based abuse 'was given cover' by Covid restrictions. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/honour-based-abuse-was-given-cover-by-covid-restrictions-9tnjxctk6>

²⁹ AMINA The Muslim Women's Resource Centre (2022) Amina Submission to the Scottish Parliament Social Justice and Social Security Committee Inquiry into Violence against Women and Girls SJSS/S6/9/6. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/~media/committ/2563>

³⁰ AMINA The Muslim Women's Resource Centre (2023) Annual Report 2022-2023. Available at: <https://mwrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/amina-Annual-Report-2022-2023-compressed.pdf>

³¹ Scottish Government (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19): domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls during Phases 1,2 and 3 of Scotland's route map (22 May to 11 August 2020). Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-domestic-abuse-forms-violence-against-women-girls-during-phases-1-2-3-scotlands-route-map-22-11-august-2020/documents/>

³² The Independent (2021) We are in a housing emergence – from “sex for rent” to eviction-s, the government needs to act. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/eviction-ban-sex-for-rent-housing-tenants-landlords-b1785042.html>

³³ Openreach (2020) UK broadband usage more than doubled in 2020. <https://www.openreach.com/news/uk-broadband-usage-more-than-doubled-in-2020---driven-by-live-sport-online-gaming-and-home-working/>

³⁴ Glitch and EVAW Coalition (2021) The Ripple Effect: COVID-19 and the epidemic of online abuse. <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/online-abuse-during-covid-almost-half-of-women-have-experienced-online-abuse-during-pandemic/>

by online abuse with almost a quarter (23%) of girls aged 11 to 16 and a third (33%) of 17 to 21-year-old women reporting online harassment during the pandemic.³⁵

Along with the lasting effects from the pandemic, the ongoing cost of living crisis is further compounding structural inequality and exacerbating VAWG. For instance, in a survey for Women's Aid England, more than a fifth (21.1%) of respondents said their perpetrator had used the crisis to further control their access to money while almost three-quarters (73%) said it was preventing them from leaving their abusive partner altogether.³⁶ The Encompass Network has also raised concerns that the cost of living crisis is pushing more women into selling or exchanging sex due to the increased difficulty of paying bills, maintaining housing and avoiding destitution.³⁷

With the cost of living crisis deepening, and the effects of the pandemic persisting, this is a critical moment for addressing VAWG in Scotland. A primary prevention approach is urgently needed to mitigate the impact of these crises on gender inequality to prevent all forms of VAWG from being exacerbated and ultimately ever occurring at all.

Limitations in data on VAWG in Scotland

When determining the extent of VAWG in Scotland, it is important to note that the issue is commonly underreported and under-researched meaning there are significant gaps in our understanding. Therefore, the figures cited above likely underestimate the true scale of the problem in Scotland.

Global evidence shows that less than 40% of women who experience any form of VAWG seek support while less than 10% go to the police.³⁸

There are many reasons women and girls do not report an incident of violence including being blocked by their perpetrator, fearing shame or stigma, worrying about being blamed or not taken seriously, or choosing to rely on family and friends for informal support instead.

³⁵ Girlguiding UK (2021) Girls' Attitudes Survey 2021 Available at: <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2021-report.pdf>

³⁶ Women's Aid (2022) Cost of Living and the impact on survivors of domestic abuse. Available at: https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Womens_Aid_cost_of_living_survivor_survey_July_22.pdf

³⁷ Encompass Network (2023) The cost of living and the impact on women selling or exchanging sex or images. Available at: https://www.encompassnetwork.info/uploads/1/4/2/8/142838553/encompass_cost_of_living_crisis.pdf

³⁸ UN Women (2022) Fact and figures: Ending violence against women. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

Women and girls with multiple and intersecting inequalities also face many exacerbated and additional barriers to reporting VAWG. For example, migrant women in Scotland have described feeling additional cultural shame and stigma in their community which can prevent them from initially reporting their experience, while some also fear confidentiality breaches when an interpreter is needed to support their disclosure.³⁹ In 2018, research by Engender also found that disabled women in Scotland reporting sexual violence experience communication barriers and are impacted by a lack of specialist equipment and knowledge needed to support their disclosure.⁴⁰

Many women and girls lack trust in authorities and statutory services due to institutional misogyny.⁴¹ This distrust is further compounded for women and girls from marginalised communities due to experiences of institutional racism,⁴² ableism,⁴³ homophobia⁴⁴ and prejudice against sex workers in Scotland and the UK.⁴⁵

In May 2023, the Chief Constable of Police Scotland, Sir Ian Livingstone QPM, acknowledged that the organisation is institutionally misogynistic, racist and discriminatory.⁴⁶ This follows many high-profile individual incidents of systemic sexism and misogyny within Police Scotland⁴⁷ as well as the Casey Report⁴⁸ elsewhere in the UK, all of which have particularly damaged the ability of women and minoritised communities to trust that their concerns will be dealt with and understood by police.

³⁹ Phillimore, J., Jamal, Z., Noubani, A., Hourani, J. and Baillot, H. (2022) Forced migration and sexual and gender-based violence: findings from the SEREDA project in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2022/sereda-scotland-report.pdf>

⁴⁰ Engender (2018) Our Bodies, Our Rights: Identifying and removing barriers to disabled women's reproductive rights in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/files/our-bodies,-our-rights-identifying-and-removing-barriers-to-disabled-womens-reproductive-rights-in-scotland.pdf>

⁴¹ BBC News (2021) Police attitudes to sexual violence "problematic", report finds. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-59146409>

⁴² Hannana Siddiqui (2018) Counting the cost: BME women and gender-based violence in the UK. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/newe.12076>

⁴³ Engender (2018) Our Bodies, Our Rights: Identifying and removing barriers to disabled women's reproductive rights in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/files/our-bodies,-our-rights-identifying-and-removing-barriers-to-disabled-womens-reproductive-rights-in-scotland.pdf>

⁴⁴ Welsh Government (2014) Barriers Faced by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in Accessing Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment, and Sexual Violence Services. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/140604-barriers-faced-lgbt-accessing-domestic-abuse-services-en.pdf>

⁴⁵ Raven Bowen et al. (2021) Why Report? Sex Workers Who Use NUM Oft out of Sharing Victimisation with the Police. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8409698/pdf/13178_2021_Article_627.pdf

⁴⁶ Statement by Chief Constable Sir Iain Livingstone, May 2023.

⁴⁷ BBC News, (2023) Women Police Scotland 'boy's club' culture. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-65468868.amp>

⁴⁸ The Guardian (2023) Louise Casey's Report on the Met Police: the fall of a British Institution. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/21/louise-caseys-report-on-the-met-police-the-fall-of-a-british-institution>

Even when data is available, it is rarely intersectional. For example, the Scottish Government's official statistical bulletins on recorded crime provide little to no information about the protected characteristics of women who have experienced sexual and non-sexual crimes.

This means it is impossible to use these official statistics to identify the disproportionate impact of this violence on different groups of women and girls to allocate more protective measures and support towards them. While the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) attempts to provide some additional insight into men and women's differing experiences of these types of crimes, including those not reported to the police, this data is not fully intersectional or disaggregated. In addition, the SCJS does not assess all forms of VAWG covered by the Equally Safe definition.

These are significant data gaps that restrain our understanding of all forms of VAWG in Scotland and thus our ability to effectively tackle the issue. Nevertheless, from the data that is available, it is evident that levels of VAWG in this country remain stubbornly high.

Gender inequality in Scotland as a cause and consequence of VAWG

It is widely accepted that gender inequality is both a cause and consequence of violence against women and girls. Research shows that there are lower levels of all types of VAWG in societies where women's participation is valued and where there are fewer economic, social and political inequalities between men and women.⁴⁹ In order to prevent the high levels of VAWG, urgent and effective action is therefore needed to tackle persistent and pervasive gender inequality in Scotland.

The Scottish Government's Gender Equality Index provides an overall indicator of gender equality in this country by measuring equality in different domains such as work, money, time, knowledge, power and health. According to the most recent publication, gender equality is graded at 73 out of 100 (with a score of 0 indicating no equality and 100 indicating full equality).⁵⁰ However, not all of the data used within the Index

⁴⁹ UN Women (2012) Handbook for National Action Plans on Violence against Women. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2012/7/handbook-for-national-action-plans-on-violence-against-women>

⁵⁰ Scottish Government (2020) Scotland's Gender Equality Index. Available at: <https://data.gov.scot/genderindex/about.html#:~:text=Scotland's%20Gender%20Equality%20Index%20measures,hundred%20indicating%20full%20gender%20equality.> [Accessed on: 02/02/2023]

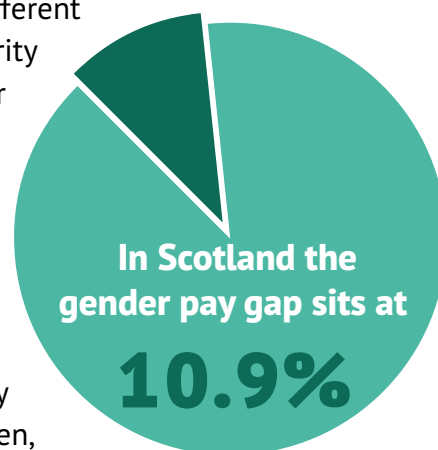
is gender-sensitive⁵¹ meaning that it likely underestimates gender inequality in some areas. Nevertheless, the evidence clearly shows that gender inequality continues to affect women's lives across social, economic, political and cultural spheres.

Women's unequal access to economic resources and opportunities

In Scotland, access to economic resources and opportunities continues to be unequally distributed between men and women. In particular, systemic gender inequality affects women's access to well-paid and secure work, causing proportionately greater reliance on social security payments which carries consequences for savings capacity and pensions throughout women's lives.

Labour market participation

Men and women experience the labour market in vastly different ways; for example, women consistently account for the majority of part-time and low-paid workers in Scotland. The gender pay gap is indicative of systemic, unequal experiences in employment, education, training, caring responsibilities and other unpaid work. In Scotland, the gender pay gap currently sits at 10.9%; behind this headline figure, women working full-time earn 7.9% less than their male counterparts, while women working part-time earn 26.3% less than men working full-time when comparing hourly rates.⁵² Disabled, BME women, lesbian and bisexual women, trans women, refugee women, young women and older women face additional barriers to labour market participation and progression opportunities which cause and exacerbate pay gaps.⁵³



A key driver of the gender pay gap in Scotland is the persistent occupational segregation of women into undervalued and lower-paid roles and sectors such as retail, admin, care and hospitality. Women are overrepresented in these industries, while men are overrepresented in male-dominated sectors where there are higher-paid jobs, such as engineering.⁵⁴ This occupational segregation continues despite girls routinely leaving school with higher levels of educational attainment on average. The prevalence of

⁵¹ Gender-sensitive data are statistics and other information that adequately reflect gendered differences and inequalities in the situation of women and men in all areas of life.

⁵² Close the Gap (2023) Gender Pay Gap Statistics. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Gender-pay-gap-statistics-paper-2023.pdf>

⁵³ Close the Gap (2018) The Gender Penalty Exploring the causes and solutions to Scotland's gender pay gap. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/The-Gender-Penalty-Feb-2018.pdf>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

gender norms and stereotypes coupled with the persistent undervaluing of “women’s work” underpin this occupational segregation and associated pay disparities.

Women’s participation and progression in the labour market are also more likely to be constrained by caring responsibilities imposed on them throughout their lives.⁵⁵ Often these caring responsibilities - combined with a lack of affordable childcare and/or social care - are incompatible with full-time work patterns. This leaves many women with no option but to find part-time work or leave the workforce altogether.

In Britain, only 27% of mothers return to full-time work three years after their child has been born compared to nine out of 10 fathers.⁵⁶

Furthermore, issues of affordability and accessibility, particularly when balanced with caring responsibilities, have been linked to some women leaving the workforce altogether in Scotland.⁵⁷ For instance, in the Scottish Women’s Budget Group’s (SWBG) 2022 Women’s Survey, a quarter of respondents had reduced their hours while 12% had given up paid employment due to the cost of childcare.⁵⁸

The lack of appropriate childcare is a particular issue for parents of disabled children, 86% of whom say it is difficult or impossible for them to find suitable childcare causing some to reduce their hours or exit the labour market.⁵⁹ Additionally, lone parents – 92% of whom are women – have reported in research by One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) that the lack of affordable and flexible day and out-of-school care available to them locally frequently prevents them from working.⁶⁰

Another major barrier to women’s participation and progression in the labour market is the prevalence of VAWG, particularly sexual and

Lack of affordable and flexible day and out-of-school care prevents women from working.

⁵⁵ Annabelle Williams (2022) *Why Women are Poorer than Men and What We Can Do About It*. Penguin: London.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Family and Childcare Trust (2022) *Childcare Survey 2022*. Available at: https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Resource%20Library/Final%20Version%20Coram%20Childcare%20Survey%202022_0.pdf

⁵⁸ Scottish Women’s Budget Group (SWBG) (2022) *Women’s Survey 2022 - all results report*. Available at: <https://www.swbg.org.uk/content/publications/Womens-Survey-Results-Report.pdf>

⁵⁹ Working Families (2018) *Off Balance - Parents of disabled children and paid work*. Available at: <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/WF-2018-Off-Balance-pages-FINAL.pdf>

⁶⁰ One Parent Families Scotland (2019) *Out of School Care in Scotland Draft Framework Consultation Response*. Available at: https://opfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/OSC_Scotgov_Consultation_OPFS_Submission_Dec2019.pdf

sexist harassment (SSH) in the workplace that is driven by structural inequalities. Research has shown that SSH is especially prevalent and tolerated in male-dominated work environments and is perpetrated most often by men in positions of power, such as line managers.⁶¹ In research by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), more than half (52%) of women consulted said they had experienced sexual harassment at work, demonstrating the widespread scale of the problem. The overwhelming majority of perpetrators in these cases were men (nine out of 10).⁶² The impact of this harassment on women's lives is insidious and far-reaching, with implications for women's earning potential, financial stability, income inequality with men, career progression and ultimately gender equality across all spheres.⁶³

Social security

Women are twice as dependent on social security as men, primarily due to their caring responsibilities and roles as second earners.⁶⁴ Consequently, women's incomes are disproportionately affected by historically inadequate payments and punitive social security systems in the UK. Furthermore, cuts to social security payments in the last decade have affected women's incomes the most, leaving many at a greater risk of poverty and destitution.

According to analysis by the House of Commons Library, 86% of the savings to the UK Treasury made by cutting benefits and changing taxes between 2010 and 2020 came from women's incomes.⁶⁵

In total, women in the UK have lost an estimated £80 billion in this period compared to £13 billion for men.⁶⁶ Lone parents who care for a disabled child have been amongst the hardest hit by welfare reforms, losing an average of £3 out of every £10.⁶⁷

In 2013, the UK Government introduced Universal Credit to replace six means-tested

⁶¹ Engender (2022) Enough is Enough: Tackling workplace sexual harassment in Scotland. <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Enough-is-Enough---tackling-workplace-sexual-harassment-policy-in-Scotland.pdf>

⁶² Trades Union Congress (TUC) (2016) Still Just a Bit of Banter? Sexual Harassment in the workplace. Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/still-just-bit-banter>

⁶³ Engender (2022) Enough is Enough: Tackling workplace sexual harassment in Scotland. <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Enough-is-Enough---tackling-workplace-sexual-harassment-policy-in-Scotland.pdf>

⁶⁴ Engender (2015) Securing Women's Futures: Using Scotland's New Social Security Powers to Close the Gap. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Securing-Womens-Futures---using-Scotlands-new-social-security-powers-to-close-the-gender-equality-gap.pdf>

⁶⁵ House of Commons Library (2017) Estimating the gender impact of tax and benefits changes. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06758/SN06758.pdf>

⁶⁶ Annabelle Williams (2022) Why Women are Poorer than Men and What We Can Do About It. Penguin: London.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

benefits and tax credits with a single monthly means-tested payment. It has been criticised for entrenching gender inequality and reducing women’s access to income and financial independence. Particular concerns have been raised about the automatic single-household payment, the unwarranted five-week wait, the benefit cap and the “rape clause”, all of which disproportionately affect women.⁶⁸

In 2018, Philip Alston, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights said of Universal Credit, “if you got a group of misogynists together in a room and said “how can we make a system that works for men but not women?” they wouldn’t have come up with too many other ideas than what’s in place.”⁶⁹

In addition, Alston shared the concerns of stakeholders in the UK women’s sector that Universal Credit put women at a greater risk of experiencing VAWG.⁷⁰ Research has linked the current system of Universal Credit to a greater risk of financial abuse⁷¹ and engaging in survival sex⁷² while also undermining a woman’s ability to leave an abusive partner.⁷³ It is clear that an unequal and unjust social security system is enabling men’s violence.

Pensions

Women’s unequal financial position persists into their old age due to the economic inequality they experience over the course of their lives. Pension policy in the UK does nothing to mitigate this inequality. In fact, historically, pension policy has been shaped around stereotypical gender norms to uphold a woman’s reliance on her partner or family for financial support in their retirement.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ CPAG (2018) Something needs saying about universal credit and women – it is discrimination by design. Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/news-blogs/news-listings/something-needs-saying-about-universal-credit-and-women-%E2%80%93-it-discrimination>

⁶⁹ The Telegraph (2018) UK’s welfare system is cruel and misogynistic, says UN expert after damning report on poverty. Available at: <https://archive.ph/MQh10>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ EAW Coalition et al. (2018) Universal Credit and Financial Abuse Exploring the Links. Available at: <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-full-report-financial-abuse-and-uc.pdf>

⁷² House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2019) Universal Credit and “survival sex”. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-Briefing-Recognising-the-Vital-Role-Men-Must-Play-in-Challenging-and-Eradicating-VAWG.pdf>

⁷³ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2021) Unequal impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact. Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4597/documents/46478/default/>

⁷⁴ Annabelle Williams (2022) Why Women are Poorer than Men and What We Can Do About It. Penguin: London.

For example, people in the UK can access the new State Pension after making National Insurance contributions for 35 years; women are less likely than men to accrue the required qualifying years because of time taken out of the labour market for caring responsibilities. In addition, women earn considerably less than men across their working lives, leaving them with lower levels of savings in their retirement. These factors, as well as women's concentration in low-paid and part-time employment, also affect their access to private pensions. On average, men in Britain retire with £315,000 saved in their workplace pensions compared to £157,000 for women. Black and minority ethnic women face more pronounced barriers and are less likely to have a private pension.⁷⁵



Unsurprisingly, pensioner poverty rates are consistently higher amongst older women. Over the last decade, there has been a 6% increase in pensioner poverty with one in five women pensioners now living in it - this figure rises to one in three women amongst Black and Asian women pensioners.⁷⁶ Pension policy, therefore, upholds women's unequal position in society into their old age. In addition to the harmful health and wellbeing impacts, this again leaves women vulnerable to violence and abuse, especially domestic abuse (including economic abuse) later in life. Similarly, pension policy forces them to be financially dependent on an abusive partner; a quarter (24.5%) of women who have experienced financial abuse from a partner in the UK are over 60 years of age.⁷⁷

Women's unequal access to power and influence

Women in Scotland do not have equal access to power and decision-making positions in the political and public spheres due to persistent multiple structural barriers which impede women's participation.

Of the 3,382 positions of power in Scotland's political institutions, public sector, media and cultural bodies, and corporate world, just 1,222 were held by women in 2023.

⁷⁵ The Sunday Times (2019) While a man retires with a £315,000 pension, a woman makes do with barely half that pot. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/while-a-man-retires-with-a-315-000-pension-a-woman-makes-do-with-barely-half-that-pot-7jw8mm3ts>

⁷⁶ Age UK (2021) New Age UK analysis finds one in five UK women pensioners now living in poverty. Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2021/new-age-uk-analysis-finds-one-in-five-uk-women-pensioners-now-living-in-poverty/>

⁷⁷ Surviving Economic Abuse (2021) Controlling Your Financial Future – 6 Moments That Matter for Girls & Women. Available at: <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Controlling-Your-Financial-Future-6-Moments-That-Matter.pdf>

This equates to just over a third of positions of power being held by women, despite women making up 51% of the population. Furthermore, within this figure, Black women and women of colour, visibly disabled women, young women and trans women are largely absent.⁷⁸

Politics

Within the political sphere, women currently make up almost 46% of members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs).⁷⁹ In 2021, Kaukab Stewart MSP and Pam Gosal MSP became the first women of colour elected to the Scottish Parliament, while Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP was the first permanent wheelchair user. This progress has been rightfully celebrated, however, it is important to recognise that many other groups of women and communities remain woefully underrepresented in Holyrood, such as Black women, trans women and disabled women. Moreover, at least three women MSPs that stood down at the last Scottish Parliament election cited difficulties balancing their job with caring responsibilities.⁸⁰

At the local level, women’s representation falls to just 35% of all councillors. While there is a dearth of data available on the diversity of local representatives, we do know that councils across Scotland remain overwhelmingly white.⁸¹

Barriers to women’s participation in politics are multiple and complex. There are significant additional intersecting barriers facing minoritised women, including BME women, disabled women, LGBTI women, as well as women who are carers.⁸² In 2019, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) published research on the barriers to participation in local government elections. Participants in this research, who had been candidates at the 2017 Scottish local elections, cited personal finances as the most common barrier to standing for election, followed by time commitments.⁸³ Research by the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) shows that these barriers are acute for women participating in politics across all levels of governance because they take

⁷⁸ Engender (2023) Sex and Power 2023. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/SP2023FINALPDF.pdf>

⁷⁹ Scottish Parliament (2022) Current female MSPs. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/spice/factsheets/msps/current-female-msps-updated-20-sept-22.pdf> [Accessed on: 03/02/2022]

⁸⁰ The Guardian (2022) Scotland launches women’s audit to look at barriers to entering Holyrood. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/feb/11/scotland-launches-womens-audit-to-look-at-barriers-to-holyrood-alison-johnstone>

⁸¹ Engender (2022) Making it Happen for 2027: Transforming Local Democracy for Women. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/news/blog/making-it-happen-for-2027-transforming-local-democracy-for-women/>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2019) Barriers to participation in standing for election to local government in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/barriers-participation-standing-election-local-government-scotland>

on more caring and household responsibilities and have less access to the finances required to stand for election when compared to men.⁸⁴

VAWG, especially abuse and harassment, is a further barrier for women participating or remaining in politics.

Almost half (48%) of women candidates who responded to the EHRC's survey said they had experienced "unwanted behaviour that they found to be humiliating", by contrast, 12% of men said the same.

This culture does not just affect women on the frontline of politics. In 2017, a survey of people working in the parliamentary estate at Westminster (including parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and assistants) found that almost half (45%) of women surveyed had experienced bullying or harassment. In the same survey, women were twice as likely to say they had experienced sexual harassment in the last year.⁸⁵ In research with female parliamentarians and political staff across Europe, respondents attributed sexism, harassment and other manifestations of VAWG in parliaments to men's dominance in the political sphere creating a gender hierarchy.⁸⁶

Similarly, women in politics experience more online abuse than men. Black, Asian and minority ethnic representatives are significantly more likely to experience this type of abuse. In 2017, Amnesty International found that 20 BME MPs received 41% of all abusive tweets analysed in the run-up to the 2017 general election. This was despite there being almost eight times as many white female MPs in the study.⁸⁷ According to the Scottish Parliament's Gender Sensitive Audit, there is evidence that online gendered harassment could be preventing some women from taking political roles.⁸⁸ This is something several female MSPs and MPs from across the political spectrum expressed concern about in the wake of Nicola Sturgeon's resignation as First Minister.⁸⁹ Indeed,

⁸⁴ Institute for Policy Research (IPR) (2018) Barriers to Women Entering Parliament and Local Government. Available at: <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/barriers-to-women-entering-parliament-and-local-government/attachments/barriers-to-women.pdf>

⁸⁵ The Independent (2018) Westminster scandal: Report shows one in five people in Parliament have experienced sexual harassment. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/westminster-sexual-harassment-one-five-report-leaked-mps-lords-staff-a8199401.html> [Accessed on 03/02/2023]

⁸⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2018) Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe. Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

⁸⁷ Amnesty International (2017) Black and Asian Women MPs are abused more online. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/online-violence-women-mps>

⁸⁸ Scottish Parliament (2023) A Parliament for All: Report of Parliament's Gender Sensitive Audit. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/spcb/gender-sensitive-audit.pdf>

⁸⁹ Daily Record (2023) Scotland's female politicians open up on toxic online abuse in wake of Sturgeon resignation. Available at: <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/scotlands-female-politicians-open-up-29245735>

upon resigning, the former First Minister stated that "social media provides a vehicle for the most awful abuse of women" adding that it makes it "much harder to encourage women that it [participating in politics] is something worth doing..."⁹⁰

Inequality and violence that women commonly experience in political spheres is deeply damaging to democracy and policymaking.

A third of women parliamentarians in the IPU's research reported that their experiences of violence had limited their freedom of expression and ability to do their job while in office.

Respondents to this question described policing their tone and trying to make themselves less visible at times, including by restricting or removing their social media use. Consequently, this limited their power and influence in the political sphere which has serious repercussions for the quality of public and political debates, parliamentary work and public development.⁹¹ Therefore, women's unequal access to political power is at once a consequence of this violence while also creating the conditions for it to continue relatively unchallenged.

Media

Women are also vastly underrepresented in the media and culture landscapes, particularly disabled women, BME women, older women and LGBTQ women.⁹²

Author Laura Bates, describes the UK media as "its own sexist ecosystem" through which systemic gender inequality is entrenched in society.⁹³

Media, including news, broadcasting, publishing, advertising and digital platforms, plays a primary role in reflecting and reinforcing harmful stereotypes, influencing cultural attitudes towards gender roles – and young people's aspirations.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ The Scotsman (2023) Nicola Sturgeon admits she is "deeply worried" social media abuse will put women off entering politics. Available at: <https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/nicola-sturgeon-admits-she-is-deeply-worried-social-media-abuse-will-put-women-off-entering-politics-4029051>

⁹¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2018) Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe. Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

⁹² Engender (2023) Sex and Power 2023. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/SP2023FINALPDF.pdf>

⁹³ Laura Bates (2022) Fix the System Not the Women. Simon & Schuster UK: London.

⁹⁴ Engender (2022) The Role of the Media and Cultural Industries in Change. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/1-Media-Role-in-Equality.pdf>

In 2023, three out of 17 national newspapers in Scotland have a female editor while the top director positions at Scotland's three main broadcasters are all held by men. Women are also more likely to be freelance journalists while men are more likely to be in salaried and named positions.⁹⁵ While data suggests that race and gender representation amongst journalists in the UK has improved in recent years, social class representation has worsened. In 2021, an estimated 80% of journalists in the UK were thought to be from professional and upper-class backgrounds, up from 72% in 2016.⁹⁶

Women's lack of representation means that women's stories are not equally represented in the news media. Research by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) found that in the six countries where they analysed news coverage (including the United Kingdom), less than 1% of stories covered gender equality issues. Furthermore, women accounted for just 29% of sources and subjects in the news in 2020; for every one woman in the news there are nearly three men, a statistic which has not changed in over 25 years.⁹⁷ Where women are the main story, this is most commonly in relation to a crime, violence or a celebrity story.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, in Scotland, women of colour make up only 0.7% of journalists, and 3.8% of people in the news.⁹⁹

In Scotland women of colour make up 0.7% of journalists & 3.8% of people in the news.

In a similar way to the political sphere, structural barriers continue to impact women's representation and progression in the media industry. These barriers include precarity of the job market for freelancers, industry policies on career progression and equal pay, masculine work cultures, inflexible working policies and online abuse.¹⁰⁰ According to the IWMF, patriarchal norms are the single biggest barrier to achieving gender equality in the news.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Engender (2023) Sex and Power 2023. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/SP2023FINALPDF.pdf>

⁹⁶ Press Gazette (2022) Working class representation in UK journalism hits record low, report says. Available at: <https://pressgazette.co.uk/journalists-class-backgrounds/>

⁹⁷ GMMP (2020) Who Makes the News? National Report. Available at: <https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GMMP2020-UK-RoI-report-GMMP.pdf>

⁹⁸ International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) (2020) The Missing Perspectives of Women in the News. Available at: <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020.11.19-The-Missing-Perspectives-of-Women-in-News-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

⁹⁹ Time to Pass the Mic (2022) Gender and race in Scotland's news. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/14648849221128212>

¹⁰⁰ Engender (2022) Obstacles to Women Journalists in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/8.-Sexism-In-Journalism-WIJ-Report.pdf>

¹⁰¹ International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) (2020) The Missing Perspectives of Women in the News. Available at: <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020.11.19-The-Missing-Perspectives-of-Women-in-News-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

Scotland's media industry is currently enabling sexism and harassment of women journalists.

In a survey by Women in Journalism Scotland, nearly a third of female journalists who responded said they had been sexually harassed at work; of these, half said it had happened more than three times. Furthermore, two-thirds of those who had experienced sexual harassment did not make a complaint, most commonly because they worried about the impact it would have on their career. In addition, a quarter (27%) said they had experienced unwanted sexual advances at least three times, while nearly one in ten had experienced sexual assault in the workplace. Sexist behaviour was also prevalent with almost half (48%) saying they had experienced this on more than three occasions.¹⁰²

As with politicians, women journalists also experience higher levels of online abuse than their male counterparts.¹⁰³ In 2020, a UNESCO survey found that almost three-quarters (73%) of women journalists globally had experienced online harassment linked to their work.¹⁰⁴ A quarter received threats of physical violence while a fifth had been subjected to offline violence which was connected to online abuse they had received. The study also reported that online attacks on women journalists are “increasing exponentially”. Female journalists reported making themselves less visible (38% of respondents), missing work (11%), and even quitting their jobs (4%) as a result of this violence.¹⁰⁵

Women's experiences of VAWG in the media, both within the workplace and from the wider public, have significant repercussions for diversity and gender representation in media content. The lack of visibility compounds gendered stereotypes and norms. Greater commitment is needed by media organisations towards equality in (i) leadership teams, (ii) workforces and (iii) output, to address structural gender inequality which continues to drive high levels of VAWG in Scotland.

This snapshot of gender inequality in Scotland confirms that there is still a long way to go before women in this country enjoy full equality with men. Moreover, the picture is much less equal for marginalised women, particularly those facing intersecting discrimination. The inequality in these key areas and institutions contributes to upholding an enabling environment for VAWG in this country, and the endemic high levels of this violence that persist.

¹⁰² Women in Journalism Scotland (n.d.) Our Mission and Goals. Available at: <https://www.wijscotland.com/our-mission-and-goals?rq=survey>

¹⁰³ Gender Equal Media Scotland and Engender (2022) Gendered online harassment of women journalists: a review of research, employment laws and gender equality policies for Scotland. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Gendered-online-harassment-of-women-journalists.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ UNESCO (2020) Online violence against journalists: a global snapshot of incidence and impacts. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Scotland's policy landscape

Gender inequality is entrenched in the lives of women and girls in Scotland, driving high levels of VAWG. Systemic change is required to tackle this inequality and prevent violence from occurring.

Public policy affects almost every area of our lives, from our healthcare and education to our public transport and housing. Indeed, in the simplest of terms, public policy is “whatever governments choose to do or not to do.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, public policy should be a critical tool for addressing gender inequality and preventing VAWG in Scotland.

Unfortunately, a primary prevention approach that brings about necessary systems change is not currently being achieved across the Scottish Government.

Despite various initiatives and duties to promote equality, the Scottish Government is still missing major opportunities to address inequality and truly tackle VAWG.

Gender and public policy development in Scotland

Since devolution it has been argued that there is a distinct “Scottish approach” to policymaking within the Scottish Government, which is characterised by inclusive consultation with “pressure participants” combined with the devolution of policy to public bodies and local authorities, and an increasing commitment to an outcomes-based approach. This is in contrast to the Westminster model which employs a more hierarchical command-and-control style of policymaking.¹⁰⁷

The Scottish Government’s National Performance Framework (NPF) is a clear example of work towards an outcomes-based approach. Introduced in 2007, the NPF outlines the Scottish Government’s vision for Scotland through a set of National Outcomes which act as areas of focus for government activities and spending decisions. Local authorities work towards these National Outcomes by reforming local public services and working in collaboration with other organisations and agencies through Community Planning Partnerships to produce local improvement plans.¹⁰⁸

Under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, the National Outcomes

¹⁰⁶ Thomas R Dye (1976). *Policy Analysis: What Governments Do, Why They Do it, and What Difference it Makes*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Cairney (2020) *The Scottish Approach to Policymaking*. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/34739/chapter-abstract/296547614?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

¹⁰⁸ Scottish Government (2018) *National Performance Framework*. Available at: <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>

must be produced following public consultation and reviewed every five years by Scottish Ministers. In line with this, the Scottish Government's 2022-23 Programme for Government committed to starting this review process which is currently underway.¹⁰⁹

The current version of the NPF sets out a total of 11 National Outcomes which are, in part, aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are measured by 81 statistical indicators.¹¹⁰ Unlike the SDGs however, the NPF has been criticised for not being sufficiently gendered on account of there being no National Outcomes on gender equality and just two statistical indicators related in to gender.

Furthermore, there is no National Outcome or indicator to measure VAWG or the gendered differences between men's and women's experiences of safety and crime, which is contrary to a primary prevention approach.

By comparison, SDG 5 commits to achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. This SDG contains targets relating to issues including gender-based violence, unpaid work and equal participation in political and public life, all of which are absent from the NPF. SDG 5's nine targets are also measured by a total of 14 statistical indicators. Conversely, the NPF does not have a comparative outcome on gender equality, targets or appropriate national indicators. The SDGs also adopt a twin-track approach meaning that gender is mainstreamed across all SDGs in addition to the targeted measures in SDG 5. This approach is recognised as a necessary and effective strategy for achieving systems change in gender equality, however this is yet to be replicated by the Scottish Government.

Beyond the NPF, the Scottish Government is committed to a variety of legal and human rights obligations which seek to promote gender mainstreaming in its policymaking activities. Gender mainstreaming is a strategic approach which seeks to overcome structural bias and tackle systemic gender inequality in policymaking and decision-making.¹¹¹ This follows research by feminist scholars and activists which has exposed how public policies have historically reproduced male norms and power advantages to the systematic disadvantage of women.¹¹² This is a consequence of women's exclusion

¹⁰⁹ Scottish Government (2022) A Stronger & More Resilient Scotland: The Programme for Government 2022-23. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2022/09/stronger-more-resilient-scotland-programme-government-2022-23/documents/stronger-more-resilient-scotland-programme-government-202223/stronger-more-resilient-scotland-programme-government-202223/govscot%3Adocument/stronger-more-resilient-scotland-programme-government-202223.pdf>

¹¹⁰ Scottish Government (2021) National Indicator Performance. Available at: <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/measuring-progress/national-indicator-performance>

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Emanuela Lombardo et al. (2016) Policymaking from a Gender+ Equality Perspective. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1554477X.2016.1198206>

from decision-making roles as well as embedded cultures of masculinity in politics and decision-making spaces more generally, as mentioned in the previous section.¹¹³

The UK is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW requires states to protect and promote the rights of women and girls and places a positive obligation on governments to take proactive steps to advance gender equality.¹¹⁴ Although UN Conventions are signed by the UK Government, many of the women's rights that CEDAW protects fall under legislation and policy areas devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Moreover, the Scottish Government has committed to incorporating CEDAW into Scots law through its Human Rights Bill which is currently under development.¹¹⁵

Within the same bill, the Scottish Government is planning to incorporate the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).¹¹⁶ Work is also underway on a separate bill to incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).¹¹⁷ These instruments have further positive implications for women's access to rights and for the Scottish Government to ensure their work advances equality.

In addition, the UK Government ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) in 2022. The Istanbul Convention covers a range of measures framed around the Four Pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution and co-ordinated policies.¹¹⁸ As with CEDAW, many areas covered within the Istanbul Convention fall under the devolved competencies of the Scottish Parliament, such as VAWG policy in general as well as justice policy.

The Scottish Government is also required under the Equality Act 2010 to consider equality in all of its work. The Act prohibits discrimination and harassment in employment and the provision of goods, facilities and services, covering nine protected characteristics.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Engender (2018) CEDAW How can women's rights be better realised in Scotland? Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/CEDAW-incorporation-paper.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Scottish Government (2021) New Human Rights Bill. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/news/new-human-rights-bill/>

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Scottish Government (2022) Children's Rights. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/human-rights/childrens-rights/>

¹¹⁸ Council of Europe (2023) The Convention in brief. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/the-convention-in-brief>

¹¹⁹ Scottish Government (2016) Mainstreaming equality: Scottish Government's equality duties. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-governments-equality-duties/>

The Equality Act's Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires all Scottish public authorities to have "due regard" to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups across the protected characteristics.¹²⁰ It also places a legal obligation on public authorities to report on how their policies and practices will affect people of different protected characteristics.

A key component of PSED's mandatory mainstreaming duties is the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) which is intended to assess and review policies and practices. Under the duties, EQIAs should inform the development of a strategy and policy. However, there is evidence that EQIAs are not being conducted for major policies within the Scottish Government, while those that are completed often fail to identify basic information on gender equality concerning the relevant policy area.¹²¹ Furthermore, the content of many EQIAs suggests that they have been completed post hoc or in parallel to policy design, often after key decisions have been made, therefore, undermining efforts to mainstream equality and secure systems change.¹²² The Scottish Government is currently reviewing PSED, however, equalities stakeholders have raised concerns that the government's current proposals are "light touch" and "will be insufficient to drive the change" that is required to address inequality in Scotland.¹²³

The Scottish Government is also developing an Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy which it states will be "underpinned by a comprehensive approach to improving data collection and analysis, and will ensure those impacted shape our approach and policies."¹²⁴ The stated aim of this new strategy will be to strengthen the mainstreaming of equality and human rights across policymaking in the Scottish Government as a single joint endeavour, something which the government describes as a "longstanding priority".¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Under the Equality Act 2020 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations.

¹²¹ Engender (2020) What Works for Women: Improving Gender Mainstreaming in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/WHAT-WORKS-FOR-WOMEN---improving-gender-mainstreaming-in-Scotland.pdf>

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Close the Gap (on behalf of equalities stakeholders) (2022) Scottish Government's PSED Review: Equality Stakeholders' Submission on Common Concerns. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/PSED-review-equality-stakeholders-common-concerns-April-2022.pdf>

¹²⁴ Scottish Government (2020) Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland: The Government's Programme for Scotland 2020-21. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2020/09/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland-governments-programme-scotland-2020-2021/documents/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland/govscot%3Adocument/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland.pdf>

¹²⁵ Scottish Government (2021) Equality outcomes and mainstreaming: report 2021. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2021/03/equality-outcomes-mainstreaming-report-2021-mainstreaming-report/documents/equality-outcomes-mainstreaming-report-2021-mainstreaming-report/equality-outcomes-mainstreaming-report-2021-mainstreaming-report/govscot%3Adocument/equality-outcomes-mainstreaming-report-2021-mainstreaming-report.pdf>

Another crucial component of the Scottish Government's work to mainstream gender into policy development is gender budgeting which "aims to integrate gender analysis into economic policy and government and revenue proposals". There have been various attempts to embed this type of analysis into the Scottish Government's budget process. While the Government publishes an annual Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement (EFSBS), this is not currently in accordance with the definition of gender budgeting or recommendations made by the Scottish Government's Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group (EHRBAG) on improving budgetary processes which are yet to be actioned by the Scottish Government.¹²⁶ This is because the statement sets out the impact the budget is expected to have on equality after spending decisions have been allocated, instead of informing the budgeting decisions throughout.¹²⁷ Indeed, there is little evidence that the EFSBS influences other budgeting decisions made outside of the budget period.¹²⁸ In 2020, the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (NACWG), which was set up in 2017 to drive action toward gender inequality in Scotland, called on the Scottish Government to integrate intersectional gender budget analysis into the budget process.¹²⁹ In response, the Scottish Government committed to engaging with the NACWG, EHRBAG and others to achieve this.¹³⁰ The NACWG is currently examining the government's progress on meeting this recommendation.¹³¹

Despite these commitments and obligations to gender and equalities mainstreaming, progress within the Scottish Government to overcome gendered bias and promote equality remains limited.

¹²⁶ Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group (EHRBAG) (2021) Recommendations for equality and human rights budgeting – 2021-2026 parliamentary session. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equality-budget-advisory-group-recommendations-for-equality-and-human-rights-budgeting---2021-2026-parliamentary-session/pages/executive-summary/>

¹²⁷ Angela O'Hagan (2017) Gender budgeting in Scotland: a work in progress. Available at: https://researchonline.gcu.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/25122396/_Administration_Gender_budgeting_in_Scotland_A_work_in_progress.pdf

¹²⁸ Equality Budget Advisory Group (2021) Recommendations for equality and human rights budgeting – 2021-2026 parliamentary session. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equality-budget-advisory-group-recommendations-for-equality-and-human-rights-budgeting---2021-2026-parliamentary-session/pages/introduction/>

¹²⁹ First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (2020) 2020 Report and Recommendations. Available at: https://www.generationequal.scot/app/uploads/2022/03/562006_SCT1120576152-002_NACWG.pdf

¹³⁰ Scottish Government (2021) Scottish Government Response to the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls 2020 Report and Recommendations. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2021/12/scottish-government-response-first-ministers-national-advisory-council-women-girls/documents/scottish-government-response-first-ministers-national-advisory-council-women-girls/scottish-government-response-first-ministers-national-advisory-council-women-girls/govscot%3Adocument/scottish-government-response-first-ministers-national-advisory-council-women-girls.pdf>

¹³¹ Engender et al. (2022) Joint letter to John Swinney MSP on Gender Budget Analysis Reviews. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/files/gender-budget-analysis-in-budgetary-reviews-letter-to-john-swinney.pdf>

One of the biggest barriers to achieving this is a lack of policy coherence. Policy coherence refers to how effectively different policies and parts of government work together. In their 2019 annual report, the NACWG concluded that policies in Scotland continue to be “inconsistently developed or work against each other to perpetuate inequalities” and that this lack of coherence is an obstacle to achieving gender equality.¹³² Therefore, not only is this lack of policy coherence blocking gender equality it also hinders primary prevention and as such contributes to ongoing levels of VAWG.

Policy responses to VAWG in Scotland

The Scottish Government’s policy responses to VAWG expose this policy incoherence, particularly in relation to its national VAWG strategy, Equally Safe. Originally published in 2014, Equally Safe is Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls in Scotland. It sets out four priority areas:

1. Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls;
2. Women and girls thrive as equal citizens – socially, economically and politically;
3. Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people;
4. Men desist from all forms of violence against and girls, and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response.

Equally Safe employs a gendered analysis of VAWG by recognising gender inequality as the root cause of this violence and acknowledging that women and girls are disproportionately affected because of their gender. Primary prevention is described as a “core objective” of the strategy and the government has pledged to achieve this by “changing behaviour, building the knowledge and skills of individuals, and ultimately delivering a progressive shift in the structural, cultural and societal contexts in which violence occurs”, all by challenging systemic gender inequality.¹³³ Such an approach

¹³² First Minister’s National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (2019) 2019 Report and Recommendations. Available at: <https://onescotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/NACWG-2019-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf>

¹³³ Scottish Government and COSLA (2018) Equally Safe Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2018/04/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/documents/00534791-pdf/00534791-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00534791.pdf>

requires coordinated action that challenges gender inequality and VAWG across all areas of public policy within the Scottish Government. However, policy incoherence concerning VAWG and Equally Safe means that this is not currently being meaningfully advanced or achieved.

A key example can be seen in the Scottish Government's approach to homelessness. The Ending Homelessness Together High-Level Action Plan failed to include a gendered analysis of housing and homelessness. Published in 2018, four years after the first version of Equally Safe, the action plan has been criticised as a missed opportunity to focus on preventing and addressing women's homelessness.^{134,135} Indeed, housing policy has historically centred around the male experience of homelessness, which is more commonly rough sleeping, while women are more likely to seek out temporary or unstable emergency accommodation. Women's homelessness is also strongly associated with experiences of VAWG. In particular, domestic abuse is the most common reason given by women on homeless applications in Scotland and other evidence shows there is a clear and reciprocal link between selling sex and homelessness.¹³⁶ And yet, the Ending Homelessness Together High-Level Action Plan failed to address these underlying causes and structural inequalities by failing to embed a primary prevention approach into the policy's development. Not only does this demonstrate a lack of policy coherence, but it also exposes the limitations of the government's gender mainstreaming activities and the NPF in making public policy that is inclusive, gender responsive and prevents VAWG.

Planning policy in Scotland has also been historically gender-blind despite the gendered differences in how men and women experience public space and its impact on VAWG. Indeed, the design of urban space and infrastructure is historically biased towards the needs and behaviours of men and has as such, contributed to the exclusion of women and girls. According to Sustrans, "if gender considerations are not systematically integrated into planning and governance, then cities and public spaces can become places of exclusion and marginalisation".¹³⁷ This exclusion of women, girls and other marginalised groups causes and is driven by the violence they experience in public spaces, which is still largely tolerated by society as an inevitability.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Scottish Women's Aid (2018) Briefing for Scottish Government Debate Ending Homelessness Together. Available at: <https://womensaid.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Ending-Homelessness-Together-1.pdf>

¹³⁵ Engender (2020) A Woman's Place: Gender, Housing and Homelessness in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/A-WOMANS-PLACE---GENDER-HOUSING-AND-HOMELESSNESS-IN-SCOTLAND.pdf>

¹³⁶ Engender (2020) Gender, Housing and Homelessness: A Literature Review. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/GENDER-HOUSING-AND-HOMELESSNESS---A-LITERATURE-REVIEW.pdf>

¹³⁷ Sustrans (2018) Are we nearly there yet? Available at: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/2879/2879.pdf>

¹³⁸ UN Women (2017) Safer Cities and Safe Spaces Global Results Report. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/Safe-Cities-and-Safe-Public-Spaces-Global-results-report-en.pdf>

Despite this, women are only mentioned five times in the Scottish Government’s latest National Planning Framework (NPF4) which spans 162 pages and sets out Scotland’s national planning policies and priorities until 2045.

Although Policy 14 of NPF4 commits to “prioritising aspects of women’s safety”, there is no detail on how it will tackle the gendered differences in how men and women navigate public spaces or how it will advance equality. Furthermore, the focus on women’s safety is inconsistent throughout NPF4 in its entirety; there is no mention of VAWG in the section dedicated to Health and Safety policy nor is Equally Safe referenced as one of the many key linked Scottish Government policies in the NPF4 Delivery Plan.¹³⁹ This means that VAWG considerations have not been systematically embedded into a key area of public policy which thus limits the NPF4 in its capacity to deliver primary prevention.

An additional challenge to the policymaking process in Scotland is when devolved and reserved responsibilities overlap. One such area is social security which is largely reserved to the UK Parliament but with key flexibilities devolved to the Scottish Parliament under the Scotland Act 2016. The overlap between multiple policy actors from different governments propagates policy incoherence in social security.

As previously outlined, social security is deeply gendered with women at a greater risk of poverty and more reliant on social security than men. Given the impact of Universal Credit on women’s experiences of VAWG caused by low level payments and punitive design features, it is clear that it is completely incompatible with the Scottish Government’s primary prevention objective in Equally Safe. To mitigate the impact of single household payments, the Scottish Government committed to developing proposals for delivering split payments in the Equally Safe Delivery Plan 2017-21. Following many years of advocacy from individuals and organisations in Scotland’s women’s sector, the government is now committed to providing split payments, although progress on this has been extremely slow. In June 2023, the Scottish Government confirmed its officials were working with the DWP to consider the feasibility of introducing split payments with a formal policy proposal being submitted to the DWP “soon”.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Scottish Government (2023) National Planning Framework 4 Delivery Programme. Available at: <https://www.transformingplanning.scot/media/3136/national-planning-framework-4-delivery-programme-for-publication-2-november-2022.pdf>

¹⁴⁰ Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, Shirley-Anne Sommerville MSP (2023) Written Answer S6W-19509. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-19509>

Conclusion


It has been almost ten years since the first iteration of Equally Safe was published, yet there remains a significant implementation gap in its objective for a primary prevention approach. Indeed, all forms of VAWG continue to occur at endemic levels as a result of pervasive inequality throughout the lives of women and girls. Despite clear commitments and policies to tackle this inequality, the Scottish Government is still missing major, potentially transformative opportunities to embed equalities and VAWG considerations into its systems and key areas of public policy, such as housing, planning and social security. This is in large part due to a lack of policy coherence in relation to VAWG policy across the Scottish Government, as well as inadequate resourcing for mainstreaming. To achieve Equally Safe's core objective, the Government must take urgent action to address this incoherence and integrate primary prevention into the development of all public policies. Only then will Scotland be able to truly stop VAWG before it happens and eradicate the issue once and for all.

Read Engender's previous work on gender mainstreaming and decision-making:

What Works for Women: Improving Gender Mainstreaming in Scotland (2020)

Engender's Response to the Call for Evidence on the National Performance Framework (2023)

Engender's Response to the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Inquiry into Effective Scottish Government Decision-Making (2023)



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