

In June 2014 the Scottish Government and COSLA launched '**Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls**'. This statement to welcome 'Equally Safe' has been jointly produced by key voluntary sector organisations working across Scotland to tackle gender inequality and male violence against women and girls. These organisations are Engender, Rape Crisis Scotland, Scottish Women's Aid, Scottish Women's Convention, White Ribbon Scotland, Women's Support Project and Zero Tolerance.

The launch of 'Equally Safe' is an important step in taking forward work to tackle violence and abuse. We welcome the continued commitment to support interventions, as well as the explicit acknowledgement that preventing violence against women is dependent upon reducing gender inequality in the broadest sense. This strategy makes it clear that all sectors of society have a responsibility to actively work towards preventing male violence and that prevention and equality measures must be embedded across all sectors.

We welcome the continued commitment from the Scottish Government and COSLA to take action on *all* forms of violence against women and girls. We know from experience of frontline work that violence can impact on women's lives in multiple and complex ways. Naming the spectrum of violence, and understanding the links between different forms, is essential to both prevention work and to developing effective service responses. It is important that the strategy acknowledges that emerging areas of concern require to be addressed, for example the growth of online abuse including 'revenge porn', and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation.

It is also important that the strategy explicitly acknowledges the impact of violence on *all* women and girls in Scotland and the different risk factors that may affect diverse groups of women and girls and their experiences of and vulnerability to violence. We look forward to the detail of this in the forthcoming action plan. In particular, we feel that refugee and asylum seeking women, and women with insecure immigration status more broadly, should be explicitly recognised in strategic work to tackle and prevent violence against women and girls in Scotland. It is also important that the particular needs of disabled women, lesbian and bisexual women, trans and intersex women, black and minority ethnic women, and older women will also be recognised and included.

We also welcome the inclusion of girls in the strategy, since for females the risk of male violence is indeed present throughout life and, again, effective prevention work and service responses require an understanding as to how experiences of violence at one age can increase vulnerability to further forms of violence, abuse or exploitation. We are hopeful that the inclusion of girls will provide opportunities to support more gendered approaches in child protection work, and to build stronger links between child protection and 'violence against women' initiatives.

One of the strengths of the Scottish Governments approach has been, and continues to be, a clear recognition of the *gendered* nature of issues such as childhood sexual abuse, sexual violence at all ages, commercial sexual exploitation such as prostitution, harmful traditional practices and domestic abuse. (See, for example, 'The case for a gendered analysis of violence against women' www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/925/0063070.pdf and 'What does gender have to do with violence against women' www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/05102715/0)

Taking a gendered approach doesn't mean, of course, that boys and men do not experience violence or abuse, or that women never use violence. Violence against boys and men, and violence committed by women, may be less common but it is no less serious when it occurs. Instead a gendered approach acknowledges that females suffer violence and abuse disproportionately, and that it is predominantly males who carry out such violence. A gendered approach recognises the main cause of such violence as being gender inequality, and highlights the need to achieve broad social change in order to effectively end male violence. Lastly a gendered approach provides a framework for planning and delivering services and allows for the development of services that are tailored to suit the differing needs of women and men affected by violence and abuse.

We hope that the strategy will serve to drive forward work to reduce male violence, provide an impetus for mainstreaming of this work, and support new and innovative prevention efforts. We look forward to working with the Scottish Government, COSLA, and other partners in implementing the strategy and achieving these aims.



July 2014