

How we must all play our part: a public health approach to halting the epidemic in gender- based violence

Summary report

Two women a week are killed by a former or current partner. One in three women will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. Violence and abuse against women is an epidemic. This is a summary of some of the key themes of [our report](#) on how we could end it.

Language in this report

It is well documented that there is a strong and consistent association between gender inequality and violence against women. Gender-based violence (GBV) is disproportionately perpetrated by men. Women and girls are disproportionately victimised. The term GBV acknowledges the power inequalities that exist in society and underpin multiple forms of violence against women. It also recognises that men and boys can be the targets. This report therefore refers to GBV throughout.

If you, or someone you know, is impacted by any of the issues raised, you can contact the Live Fear Free helpline for confidential information, advice or support: [Live Fear Free](#): 0808 80 10 800



What is a public health approach?

A public health approach to violence prevention is defined as “seeking to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that individuals will become victims or perpetrators of violence.”¹ Applying this approach to GBV involves addressing the issue as a public health concern rather than solely an individual problem. The ultimate aim is to deliver cultural change and therefore the approach often involves programmes for the population as a whole.²

Figure 1 selected policies and legal duties in relation to GBV in Wales



¹ [World Health Organisation. The VPA Approach](#)

² VAWDASV is an abbreviation which stands for Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, and Sexual Violence

Gender inequality

“The critical context for gender-based violence is gender inequality and cultural norms of men as powerholders, decision makers and leaders at societal level, in the work-place and in families.”³

In the context of gender-based violence, gender inequality was described as:

*“the root cause”.*⁴

*“a breeding ground for harmful attitudes and beliefs.”*⁵

*“not simply one among many factors contributing to gender-based violence – it is the central factor.”*⁶

Our view

The root cause of the gender-based violence epidemic is social inequality, the most important of which is gender inequality. Promoting gender equality and addressing underlying imbalances between men and women is key to preventing and ultimately eliminating GBV.

This will involve challenging cultural change. The Welsh Government will need to work with partners and adopt a vigorous ‘whole of government’ approach. The impact of decisions should also be subject to a new ‘gender equality test’. This test would look at the impact of policy decisions and legislative proposals on gender equality. **See Recommendation 1.**

Engaging men and boys

The need to engage men and boys was seen as crucial. One witness told us:

“If we start talking to boys and men more about the pressures that they face about masculinity, like, ‘Be tough, be strong, don’t show your emotions, don’t ask for help’, we can help to get to the roots of

³ National Advisers for VAWDASV, [written evidence](#)

⁴ Welsh Government [evidence paper](#)

⁵ Welsh Women’s Aid, [written evidence](#)

⁶ Dr Stephen Burrell, Durham University, [written evidence](#)

How we must all play our part: a public health approach to halting the epidemic in gender-based violence

different kinds of violence and abuse, which is predominantly being perpetrated by men and boys.”⁷

Conversations with boys and men about gender equality needed to happen from “as young an age as possible”.⁸

Our view

Any approach to preventing GBV which neglects men and boys is unlikely to succeed. Further investigation by the Welsh Government and its partners into successful interventions that have a long term effect on preventing GBV is needed. The Welsh Government should identify opportunities for researching interventions that engage men and boys specifically in order to add to the evidence base on this issue. **See Action 3.**

A trauma-informed approach

Adverse childhood experiences, trauma and the witnessing of domestic abuse can have a seriously damaging impact on children and young people.⁹

Witnesses told us of the “growing evidence that children who live in families where there is domestic abuse can suffer serious long-term emotional effects.”¹⁰

And that “a lot of the people who cause harm have themselves been victims of harm”.¹¹

Although the Welsh Government is committed to promoting a trauma-informed approach, there were concerns regarding some aspects how it delivers this. They included difficulties faced by families in obtaining therapeutic support which is vital for recovery and prevention efforts.¹²

⁷ Equality and Social Justice Committee, [12 June 2023, Record of Proceedings](#), paragraph 36

⁸ Equality and Social Justice Committee, [12 June 2023, Record of Proceedings](#), paragraph 34

⁹ See Notes from Advisory Group

¹⁰ Written evidence, [Barnardo's Cymru](#)

¹¹ Equality and Social Justice Committee, [22 May 2023, Record of Proceedings](#), paragraph 90

¹² Equality and Social Justice Committee, [22 May 2023, Record of Proceedings](#), paragraph 240
Barnardo's Cymru, [written evidence](#)

Our view

Fast-tracked access to specialised therapeutic care and support services is key, especially in breaking the cycle of violence for future generations. These services must be available to all babies, children and young people who experience or witness violence. The Welsh Government should review what therapeutic services currently exist and how well integrated child trauma and mental health services are within the broader healthcare and education systems. **See Recommendation 4.**

Education, early intervention and prevention

Education, early intervention and prevention all have a key role to play in a public health approach to tackling GBV. To bring about change at a population-wide level we were told that:

“Messages need to be reinforced everywhere...across all ages and across all of society.”¹³

We received evidence on how a public health approach could be implemented not only in frontline services such as schools and healthcare but in other settings such as the workplace and in sport. We were told that these other settings generally “do not identify themselves as contributors to a public health approach to GBV”.¹⁴ Yet the power, influence and reach that these settings have are too significant to ignore in the context of early intervention and prevention of GBV.

Our view

If we are all to play our part in preventing GBV then we must recognise the contribution that frontline services, business and workplaces and sporting role models can make. More detail on the type of contribution they could make to prevention are outlined in Figure 2. **See Recommendations 5, 8, 9 and 10 for full details.**

¹³ Equality and Social Justice Committee, [12 June 2023, Record of Proceedings](#), paragraph 106

¹⁴ Welsh Women’s Aid, [written evidence](#)

Figure 2 suggested areas for action and recommendation including education, healthcare, and sport settings and workplaces



Schools are at the forefront of early prevention efforts. The trajectory of the new Curriculum is promising, there were nevertheless some concerns about resources. We think the Chief Inspector of Schools should review whether sufficient resources are being allocated to embedding healthy relationships across all aspects of school life.



A lack of awareness and training among some healthcare professionals such as GPs means that the signs of GBV are not always being spotted effectively. We are calling on the government to issue revised guidance and look at extending the Ask and Act duty to other professionals so that they can better spot the signs, strengthening early intervention efforts.



Sport can powerfully influence social norms and culture. Recent campaigns to tackle misogyny and sexism are encouraging but we need to increase overall exposure to these messages. The Welsh Government should consider a nation-wide public awareness campaign with a top male, sporting role model who can inspire others to take a stand against GBV.



The Welsh Government should ask experts to bring forward ambitious recommendations on how to create safer and more equal workplaces. These should cover practical information on the policies, procedures and training necessary to support this aim. In a spirit of social partnership, employers and trade unions should be involved in this work.

List of recommendations and actions

This summary report is intended to give a flavour of some of the themes and recommendations of our report. A list of the recommendations and actions contained in the report are provided below in full. For further details including how the Committee gathered its evidence and who contributed to the inquiry please refer to [the full version of the report](#).

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should adopt a whole-of-government approach and work with partners across public services, the private and third sectors to promote gender equality and inclusivity in Wales. To help to achieve this it should implement a ‘gender equality test’ which assesses the impact of all policy decisions and legislative proposals on gender equality with the aim of reducing gender disparities. The gender equality test should be introduced as soon as feasibly possible and should be applied to all Welsh Government decisions from December 2024 onwards at the latest.

Action 1. The Welsh Government should ensure all equality plans address gender disparities, challenge stereotypes and foster a culture of respect and equality. It should work with partners on detailed actions it will take in the short, medium and longer-term to improve public awareness about gender issues, promote women in leadership, and enforce rights that guarantee equality and freedom from discrimination, harassment and violence. An update on these actions should be provided to the Senedd in Plenary within six months of the Senedd debate for this report and annually thereafter.

Recommendation 2: The Welsh Government should embrace its role as an innovator and leader in applying a public health approach to gender-based violence, by:

- identifying opportunities to raise awareness and generate shared understanding of the approach and Blueprint;
- contributing to the evidence base of what works by proactively publishing progress updates and resources used to underpin the Blueprint;
- continuing to prioritise work with the next generation through effective programmes aimed at children and young people.

Action 2. To further aid transparency, we look forward to seeing the workplans and membership details of each of the Blueprint workstreams published and that the Minister has committed to publishing. We will write to the Welsh Government in March 2024 to coincide with the end of the financial year to hold it to account for these commitments.

Action 3. The Welsh Government should set out the timelines for the creation of the Central Repository and how the repository will support collaboration, knowledge sharing and facilitate research. In particular, the Welsh Government should identify opportunities for researching interventions that engage men and boys specifically in order to add to the evidence base on this issue.

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should set out how the development and evaluation of policies which address the intersectionality of GBV will be informed by data, evidence, and analysis. In particular the Welsh Government should provide the Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units with clarity regarding their priorities and agree timescales for completion of key milestones by end of April 2024. The response should include details of:

- the target date for completing the work to establish baseline data and a summary of the baseline indicators it intends to use;
- the partners it will work with to gather baseline data and the target date by which data-gathering efforts will be mainstreamed; and
- when it anticipates the data gathered by the Units will be able to meaningfully contribute to policy development and evaluation.

Action 4. Some of the particular challenges faced by migrant women were set out in our report: 'Gender based violence: The needs of migrant women'. We will be requesting an update to the recommendations and conclusions of that report in Spring 2024.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should take urgent action to ensure that fast-tracked, specific and specialised therapeutic services are available for all babies, children and young people who experience or witness gender-based violence and provide details of these in response to this report. This action should include:

- details of how the Welsh Government is enforcing the rights of babies, children and young people who have experienced or witnessed violence to access fast-tracked, specialised therapeutic services;
- reviewing the availability of therapeutic services for children and young people who witness or experience violence, and how well these are integrated into the broader health and education system.

This work should involve all relevant stakeholders (including the police, CAFCASS and local authority social services) and be progressed at pace with an update provided to the Senedd in the autumn term of 2024.

Recommendation 5 The Welsh Government should request that Estyn’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales undertakes a national thematic review of healthy relationships in schools. The review should:

- include views and recommendations on the sufficiency of resources and training for teaching healthy relationships;
- seek to verify whether there is any link between a lack of provision and higher levels of deprivation; and
- identify best practice with regards to ‘whole school approaches’ to preventing GBV.

The review should be included in the next available programme of thematic reviews and completed within the usual timescales.

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government must take immediate action to ensure that teachers are reminded of the mandatory reporting duty placed on them in relation to FGM. Longer-term, the Welsh Government should work with Estyn on establishing monitoring arrangements and safeguards to provide assurance that teachers are aware of their legal duties in relation to preventing GBV. The work to establish these monitoring safeguards should be completed by September 2024.

Action 5. The Minister for Education should write to higher education institutions in Wales to remind them of the Welsh Government’s expectations and direct the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research to work with universities to agree actions which strengthen preventative approaches across the sector.

How we must all play our part: a public health approach to halting the epidemic in gender-based violence

Action 6. The Welsh Government should publish the results of its bystander intervention initiative as soon as possible after completion.

Recommendation 7 The Welsh Government should require its newly established Advisory Panel for Digital Resilience to agree its priorities and forward work programme at pace and publish these by the end of April 2024. The Panel should clarify which areas it will prioritise, estimated timescales for sequencing of its forward work programme and how it will address the significant areas of non-devolved policy and legislation relating to digital and online regulation.

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government should work with health bodies to enhance the ability of healthcare professionals to identify and respond to GBV. To give effect to this recommendation the Welsh Government should:

- extend the Ask and Act duty to other health and social care professionals and issue revised guidance to GPs in the first instance;
- track and publicly report statistics on the participation of staff in training programmes;
- collate and publish statistics on the timeliness of response times (between disclosure and being seen by a specialist) to Ask and Act referrals; and
- clearly outline the methodology for measuring the impact of training initiatives.

This work should be completed by March 2025.

Recommendation 9 The Welsh Government should establish a seventh workstream within the VAWDASV Blueprint whose mission will be to make ambitious recommendations on how businesses and organisations can create safer and more equal workplaces. The workstream should cover practical information on the policies, procedures and training necessary to support this aim. The group should operate in a spirit of social partnership with representation from employers and trade unions.

Action 7. The Welsh Government should report back on its work with Public Health Wales to consider whether a specific approach to alcohol abuse is necessary, and whether they intend to commission any research or data collection to better understand the relationship between alcohol and GBV given

the gap in the evidence base. An update should be provided to the Senedd in the autumn term of 2024.

Recommendation 10. The Welsh Government should consider funding a nationwide public awareness campaign with a top male, sporting role model who can inspire other men and boys to take a stand against violence and promote positive values and behaviours. It is important this person is well-informed about the issue and receives appropriate training to effectively communicate and advocate for change. An evaluation of impact should be undertaken at the end of the campaign.

Recommendation 11. The Welsh Government perpetrator workstream should undertake a rapid review of perpetrator programmes designed to prevent GBV that are available across Wales. The review should seek to provide assurance that each programme considers the safety of survivors and can evidence effective rehabilitation. It should also consider different cultural and contextual factors that can influence the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes and be completed by June 2024.

Recommendation 12. All Members of the Senedd should commit to completing training on GBV prevention by the end of 2024. Alongside this commitment, Senedd Member Support Staff and Senedd Commission staff should be encouraged via the appropriate channels to participate in such training. This should be sought from a best practice provider and seek to address cultural norms and practices that perpetuate GBV whilst respecting cultural diversity.

Action 8: The Welsh Government should work with local authorities and/or the Welsh Local Government Association to ensure that local councillors have access to similar training and resources aimed at tackling GBV and report back by the end of 2024.