

**United Nations Commission on the Status of Women  
Fifty-seventh session  
4 - 15 March 2013  
New York**

**INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL**

**Multisectoral Services and Responses for Women and Girls  
Subject to Violence**

**MAKING THE DIFFERENCE**

**by**

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Violence against women and girls (VAWG) describes a range of heinous crimes that are so much more than this acronym. It is a description that belies the consequences that affect individual women and girls limiting and compromising communities and humanity as a whole. It is a seamless procession of women and girls that stretches far back in generations and with an unwavering pace moves forwards in time. VAWG needs to be understood within a wider construct than individual acts of violence. It is a human rights violation and is a cause and consequence of inequality between men and women.

The global statistics on VAWG make stark reading, and indicate that whether it is developed countries or developing countries the forms that VAWG take may change but the prevalence rates are universal. The following are a selection of those statistics: India 22 women are killed daily in dowry related murders, 3 million girls a year are at risk of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and some 70% of women globally will experience violence in their lifetime. In the UK it is estimated that 3 million females a year will be affected by some form of VAWG. The financial burden to the state has been estimated to be in excess of £40 billion a year (New Philanthropy Capital 2008). However, the cost on women's lives is immeasurable, limiting autonomy, liberty, control of space, capacity and future potential. The effect and repercussions reverberates to those directly impacted by experiences of VAWG but crucially and importantly, extends to all women and girls living under the persistent threat of violence, collectively compromising female freedom and potential.

The UK continues to struggle to ensure due regard to women's equality and compliance with CEDAW obligations (EHRC 2012). In 2009 the Map of Gaps 2 (Coy, Kelly & Foord 2009) presented a worrying picture of specialist VAWG services in the UK described as unevenly distributed and chronically underfunded. The report detailed that over one in four local authorities in Britain were without specialist VAWG support services and identified those for Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) women as the most poorly resourced. Four years on, the picture has become even more bleak. The substantial reductions in the UK's national budget and austerity measures have generated a new low in specialist VAWG services. A recent report by Towers & Walby (2012) has evidenced a 31% cut to specialist VAWG services, creating an uneven and dramatic impact across the country. The authors conclude that this is likely to lead to an increase in VAWG incidences. The government's emphasis on localism means that funding is determined by local authorities and the removal of ring fenced funding aimed at domestic violence services adds to disparities in provision across the UK. Additionally, overall changes to funding of the VAWG sector and a move towards commissioning and competitive tendering process threaten to undermine the quality of provision with services prioritised based on cost effectiveness.

As a consequence of limited resources decisions on funding services tend to prioritise emergency and crisis provision. Although essential, it means that the consequence and deeper wounds of trauma are left in the main unheard and untreated. The opportunities for women to disclose and heal from experiences of VAWG are reverting, once more to silence. Survivors struggle to restore meaning and liberty, is in the main a singular effort and dependent on a postcode lottery of available services and not by need. For the BME

communities with the additional intersecting dynamics of oppression and disadvantage, the outsider margins have been pushed back even wider. The consequences mean an even more limited response to the complexity of their needs. Typically, therapeutic services are driven by funding restraints providing condensed short term interventions, dominated by Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and the management of symptoms. For most survivors, the complexity of VAWG trauma takes women and girls to the limits of human distress. It is a long way back and requires a sustained investment and commitment from both survivor and support services.

### **UK Standards in VAWG Provision**

Despite financial constraints and limited resources there are some remarkable examples of innovation and good practice in specialist VAWG services in the UK. Quality markers for standards in VAWG practice are derived from numerous guidelines, directing ethical practice and setting outcomes frameworks to ensure efficacy in service delivery. Standards are generated by professional bodies, local statutory services and central government departments. However, standards relating specially to VAWG and offering distinct guidelines on practice are virtually non-existent. Rape Crisis (England and Wales) have developed national service standards (RCNSS) for the 49 member organisations and specifically focuses on sexual violence. The RCNSS are underpinned by a set of core principles agreed by Women's Aid England and the Women's National Commission. They have also been mapped against other key quality assurance frameworks including the; Council of Europe Minimum Standards for VAW Support Services. The core principles underpinning the standards include:

- Understanding sexual and domestic violence and its impact
- Safety security and dignity
- Diversity and fair access to services
- Advocacy and support
- Empowerment and participation
- Confidentiality
- A coordinated, multi-agency response
- Challenging social tolerance of sexual and domestic violence and holding perpetrators accountable
- Accountability and governance

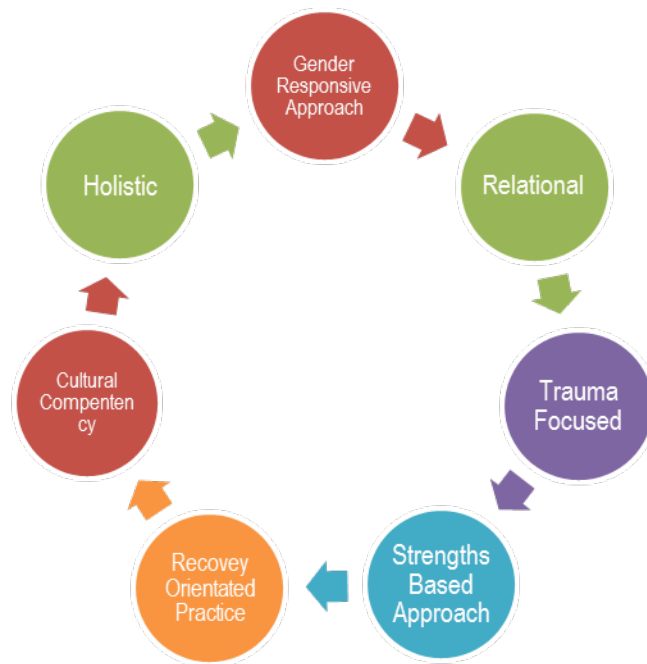
## **Women and Girls Network**

The above standards are enshrined within the ethos and implementation of service provision at Women and Girls Network (WGN). For 25 years WGN has provided an integrated therapeutic service for women and girls surviving the continuum of VAWG.

WGN's service delivery has evolved from listening and responding to women using the service, internal debate and external clinical developments. It has taken decades to develop into the holistic integrated provision that we have today. Therapeutic provision is delivered through a wraparound comprehensive range of services, to support and facilitate total and sustainable recovery for women and girls surviving violence. The therapeutic journey includes: individual counselling with variable long term contracts, access to a range of body therapies and group work. An Independent Sexual Violence Advocate, advice workers and a helpline provides practical support such as; negotiating through the criminal justice system, housing, advises on benefits, medical help and moving on opportunities such as accessing employment and training. We provide a specialist young women and girls project with an advocate whose remit includes case work and a preventative programme in schools. This work is partnered with a specialist young women's counselling service.

The experience of VAWG is devastating, described by Van der Kolk, B (1996) as 'injuries that bruise the soul' therefore therapeutic response and interventions require a similar level of complexity and depth formed around the uniqueness of the survivor's experience. The clinical model at WGN is a holistic approach following the unique impact of trauma, providing a multifocal series of interventions addressing co-occurring problems concurrently and comprehensively facilitating choice and control. The approach is underpinned by a "strengths and resilience" based model aimed at expanding capacities to achieve personal empowerment. The model consists of seven different domains worked at differing levels of intensity dependent on the type of provision.

## HOLISTIC EMPOWERMENT RECOVERY MODEL



### Gender responsive

- Women - centered ethos creating safe and accessible environments for delivery of services. Emphasis on a feminist approach to therapy rooted in empowerment and emancipation.
- A human rights framework recognising that VAWG is a manifestation of historical unequal power relations between women and men which have led to domination and discrimination against women and girls. A gendered analysis contextualises the continuum of violence against woman and girls in its many manifestations, contexts and global prevalence. It provides clarity about who is responsible for violence, challenges myths about why violence happens and breaks individual women's sense of responsibility for events and feelings of shame.

### Relational

VAWG often happens within relationships and represents extreme forms of traumatic stressors. VAWG trauma requires us to work at relational depth. To provide reparative and restorative spaces with interventions viewed as a vehicle for change providing; secure attachment, commitment, containment, continuity, consistency and compassion. The therapeutic work creates opportunities for women to develop skills, a capacity to manage their emotions and the confidence to develop healthy relationships.

### Trauma responsive services

WGN is intent on understanding, anticipating and responding to the issues, expectations and needs of a survivor ensuring a sustained focus on treating the consequences of VAWG

trauma. The work is informed by an understanding of the neuroscience of trauma responses, the impact on brain development and the link to the emergence of chronic conditions such as Developmental Trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Complex Traumatic Stress.

Clinical work is approached within the following series of phased multimodal interventions:

- Safety: recognition of internal and external threats
- Stabilisation: psycho-educational, self-soothing / care and resource development
- Integration of traumatic experiences: survivor testimony is a central task for liberation, by breaking the shame and blame cycle.
- Positive affect enhancement: building self-protective factors and cultivating self-esteem.
- Moving on strategies focused on mentoring to support training and employment opportunities.

### **Strengths Based Approach**

This ensures an intention to our work that is orientated towards a positive approach. There is an emphasis on building and expanding survivor's internal resources, capacity for strength and innate resilience.

### **Recovery Orientated Practice**

A clear objective of our work is creating and sustaining a culture of hope and optimism that supports, encourages and celebrates women's recovery. We are intent on promoting total and sustainable recovery and the transformation of women from survivor to thriver.

### **Cultural Competency**

WGN is an inclusive accessible resource, reflecting and celebrating the vibrancy of diversity. We recognise the complex intersects of diverse social locations and factors which contribute to survivor's unique political identity. It is vital that we are able to view women's lives through a contextual lens that recognises the complex and intersecting impact of various forms of oppression and discrimination. We proactively engage in exploration and challenge issues related to diversity. All interventions are grounded within a sensitive, respectful and responsive practice held within a cultural meaning and context.

### **Holistic Response**

The impact of VAWG is not only devastating but profound. The experiences of betrayal, humiliation, fear and horror creating a spiritual tear, an existential crisis where faith, meaning of life and humanity is questioned. The acts of violence associated with VAWG are directed physically, violating and undermining survivor's body integrity. Service delivery responds by providing a range of body therapies aiming to restore well-being. The range and depth of working holistically provides the momentum for survivors to reclaim,

re-integrate, restore, regain the reunification of a sense of self identity and wholeness to ensure autonomy and the realisation of their full potential.

### **Conclusion: Making the Difference**

It is not always and it need not be a story of absolute tragedy for women and girls recovery from VAWG. It also includes a narrative of triumph over adversity, it is survivor's tenacity, strength, courage, ability for resistance, an intention of rebellion and their capacity for resilience that ensures their recovery.

Survivors have told us as a minimum; they want to be heard, they want to be believed and they want services that provide long term support. Survivors have described the benefits of women only environments and the importance of trained sensitive staff who understand the issues. Survivors have referred to holistic and flexible services with real choices about what they can access and when.

Thus, responding to the needs of survivors of VAWG (and their families) involves a multi-faceted response that includes tackling negative social attitudes, ensuring a consistent and appropriate response from the criminal justice system, and providing support and resources to meet their health, social and economic needs. This should be underpinned by an acknowledgment that VAWG can have long lasting effects, but that these can be overcome and minimised with the right support.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on research, WGN's experience as a VAWG specialist agency and responses from survivors using our services:

- A national policy and VAWG strategy that provides consistency and continuity in its approach and is grounded in a human rights and equality framework. This includes a long term preventative action plan that aims to tackle the root causes of VAWG and its perpetuation by directing attention and efforts to creating equality and hence the empowerment of women.
- A strategy that includes leadership and accountability to provide direction and responsibility for monitoring of a seamless implementation of VAWG strategies. Multisectoral approach that includes the co-ordination of resources and initiatives across all sectors. This includes; infrastructure / capacity, adequate legislation, policies and best practice protocols for direct services interventions.
- Essential is the training of key professionals in health, education and criminal justice to ensure greater opportunity for women to overcome the stigma and barriers to disclosing their experiences. This will ensure an appropriate and sensitive response.
- Specific, specialised and gender responsive services to harness expertise and provide prompt, potent and appropriate interventions. Holistic and long term interventions are key to ensuring sustainable recovery and to minimise the life time negative trajectory of ill health. Innovative and creative services offering wrap around provision such as; para counselling/ therapy that can be flexibly delivered through; free helplines, drop-ins and outreach programmes. Self-help groups that

provide spaces for women to unite and gain in solidarity with creative remits, offering opportunities for self-empowerment. Action workshops focusing on the body and promoting health and wellbeing. Practical support to increase accessibility, informing survivors of their rights and addressing legal, medical and housing issues.

- Individualised multidimensional responses embedded within an equalities framework that considers and responds to differing complexities of needs.
- A programme of campaigns to gain grass roots activism that engages women and the community to raise the profile of the unacceptability of VAWG.
- Service initiatives and on-going development directed by survivor's proactive participation.
- National and international forums to establish best practice guidelines advising on minimum standards for VAWG service delivery. This would also include; research, review of clinical advancements and the development of a resources bank to share best practice internationally and capacity build expertise within the VAWG sector e.g. VAWG counselling training modules and e.training courses.
- To do nothing towards VAWG is costly for all countries national budgets. There is a moral imperative and a financial incentive to invest in providing long term sustainable gender responsive funding to support specialist VAWG provision. The investment is costly but the rewards are immense, providing the opportunity for radical action and the movement towards the elimination of VAWG.