



FEARLESS FUTURES LTD. REPOSE TO THE HOME OFFICE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS' STRATEGY: CALL FOR EVIDENCE.

26.03.2021

We are writing in response to the Home Secretary's call for evidence regarding the planned review of the Strategy on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). We welcome this commitment from the Government to review the VAWG strategy, and we aim to support you in the next steps by way of this response.

Fearless Futures serves daring organisations - across sectors - ready to actively challenge inequities by addressing their roots, intersections, and lived realities. We facilitate transformative equity and inclusion learning experiences, in-person and online, as well as partner with our clients through consultancy in service of designing equitable ecosystems for people and products.

Through this submission we aim to help you understand the root causes, intersections, pervasiveness and true scale of VAWG. We outline concepts that are essential both for understanding and building robust and effective measures to tackle, and eradicate, VAWG. We also highlight the extent to which current approaches to understanding and legislating are ineffective in tackling the issues and suggest alternatives, improvements and best practices.

PART 1: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS AS SYSTEMIC

Research has shown that violence is typically and routinely individualised, pathologized and compartmentalised in public perception, the media, legal constructions, within policy and legislation, and through public interventions and programmes. In policy responses, where they have existed, the emphasis on tackling VAWG has tended to be limited to responding to violence when it occurs, i.e., protecting the victims and punishing the perpetrators (Etrürk, 2012, 145). This response is grounded in a conceptualisation of acts of violence as ruptures; out-of-the-ordinary acts perpetrated by 'a few bad apples'. As academics, scholars, activists' and experts working in the VAWG sector and victims and survivors of VAWG have articulated, such individualising approaches which locate the problem of VAWG at the level of the individual (perpetrator/s), prevent the robust and systemic analysis needed to understand and ultimately eradicate VAWG.



In order to identify effective measures and practices to bring an end to VAWG, it is critical that the root causes of violence are accurately identified and understood. VAWG, including but not limited to sexual violence, domestic abuse, forced marriage, female genital cutting and stalking are some of the most covert and severe outcomes of an overarching *system* of sexism. The specific organisation of sexism that has existed throughout the world for hundreds of years is patriarchal; patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property and resources¹²³. To say that sexism is systemic is to highlight that the socio-economic stratification along gender lines in which power is held by men and withheld from women is informed by, and the outcome of, historical and ongoing *structures*; laws, policies, institutions. While it is important to direct resources and attention to outcomes, particularly supporting victims and survivors, in order to build strategies to tackle and *prevent* violence against VAWG it is vital to understand how systemic (patriarchal) sexism produces such outcomes and how and why it functions to do so.

UNDERSTANDING SEXISM THROUGH THE FEARLESS FUTURES SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Sexism, like all systems of power and oppression, ultimately functions (historically and in the present) to afford power and privilege to one group of people through the oppression and withholding of power of another group of people. A system of oppression targets and constructs certain groups negatively because of their identity and simultaneously targets and constructs positively those who are external to that group because of their identity/identities. In fact, being targeted positively by a system is made possible by, and at the expense of, the negative targeting of those oppressed by a system. In order to legitimate particular organisations of power, narratives about the identity groups constructed by and then targeted within a system are invoked. These narratives are commonly understood as prejudicial ideas, but can be more accurately understood as operating logics, on the basis that they serve a particular function – the distribution of power. The organising principle at the heart of sexism is gender. Sexism functions to construct and embed ideas of a natural sex binary from which a biologically pre-determined

¹ Statistics for 2020 show a 20% gender pay gap between men and women. The difference between men and women's median full-time hourly earnings amounted to 15.5 percent. The financial sector has the largest gender pay gap by sector at 33.2 percent. Statistics available at

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/685208/number-of-female-ceo-positions-in-ftse-companies-uk/>

² The Fawcett Society reports that 65% of councillors in the UK were men in 2019. Statistics available at <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/new-fawcett-data-reveals-that-womens-representation-in-local-government-at-a-standstill>

³ As of June 2019, only seven percent of FTSE 100 companies had a female chief executive officer at the helm of their organization. For FTSE 250 companies there were even fewer female CEOs with just five companies having a woman at the head of these businesses. Statistics available at

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/685208/number-of-female-ceo-positions-in-ftse-companies-uk/>



gender binary follows – the notion that there are two diametrically opposed sexes, male and female, and two corresponding, diametrically opposed genders, man and woman, each with distinctive and diametrically opposed gender roles, is part of the bedrock of sexism.

The operating logics at the root of sexism are operating logics specifically about men (as superior) and women (as inferior); core operating logics at the root of sexism are historical and universal and therefore extremely easy to isolate, surface and name. Ideas that women are (biologically predisposed to be) caregiving, weak, emotionally unstable and irrational and that men are (biologically predisposed to be) hyper rational, intellectually superior, physically stronger are held across societies around the world. These operating logics, though *socially constructed* and not rooted in science, are widely held across society as factually true. They are invoked in educational settings, media representations and courts of Law. As a result of widespread adherence to these operating logics as “true”, a series of responses emerge which are fundamentally concerned with the distribution of power and access to participation in areas of society; if we take for example the operating logics that women are intellectually inferior, weak and irrational, then the following responses become logical and *justified*; control access (to certain spaces, healthcare), punish (incarceration and exclusion), turn into property, deny participation (in institutions such as universities or leadership/decision-making) and reallocate resources away from.

Socio-political and economic *structures* – laws, policies, legislation and institutional practices - operate to give power to these operating logics and operationalise the conditional responses such as those mentioned above. It is through societal structures; laws, policies and institutional practice that sexism becomes structural and systemic.

For example; Apart from ‘necessary women’ or housekeepers, the UK government did not employ any women until 1869⁴. This historical structure (a policy) is rooted in, and has given power to the operating logics that women are intellectually inferior and naturally caregiving, and the associated conditional response that they should be limited to the ‘domestic sphere’, kept out of positions of power. Similarly The Marriage Bar required single women to resign from their job upon getting married and disqualified married women from applying for vacancies. They were in common use up until the 1970s, which means that there are women alive today with first-hand experience of the Bar⁵. This structure (a law) has given power to the idea that women and girls are intellectually inferior and exist primarily to act in service of men and boys, who are more suited to positions of socio-economic power for which they should be economically compensated. Contemporarily, 75% of England’s local authorities have slashed their spending on domestic violence refuges as a result of

⁴ Available at: <https://www.civilservant.org.uk/women-history.html>

⁵ Available at: <https://www.ictu.ie/blog/2019/10/14/the-marriage-bar-a-ban-on-employing-married-women/>



government budget cuts, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism⁶. This institutional practice gives power to the operating logic that women are irrational, exaggerate their articulations of the violence they experience, and the associated conditional response that they are to be disbelieved and have resources and support limited. Connecting the dots between historical and contemporary structures that produce sexist outcomes is vital; this allows for a robust understanding of the complexity of sexism and allows for targeted responses that seek to dismantle and disrupt it across all levels of society

To summarise, a systemic analysis of sexism reveals the interconnections between VAWG and seemingly unrelated structures, laws and policies. This analysis brings into focus an understanding of those acts of VAWG, understood as ‘extreme’, as in fact examples of some of the more ‘obvious’ outcomes among a series of sexist outcomes, resulting from systemic sexism. Recognising VAWG as systemic enables an approach which not only makes visible the everyday violence which is obscured by the tendency to focus on individual more recognisably extreme acts as “ruptures”, but also foregrounds the continuities between the everyday and those “ruptures”. Understanding the roots of VAWG as systemic is crucial for a strategy that “understand(s) the true scale of violence against women and girls’ crimes and their impact”. It also brings to the fore how the everyday actions of individuals within institutions which might be seemingly objective can serve to perpetuate sexism and facilitate VAWG

PART 2: WHO PERPETRATES VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS, AND WHY?

The majority of VAWG is perpetrated by men (and boys); data from the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime shows that 98% of perpetrators of recorded sexual offences in the UK between 2018 and 2019 were men, and for that same period 90% of perpetrators of recorded domestic abuse were men⁷. The data shows that 97% of the victims of sexual offences were women and 76% of domestic abuse victims were women. While the data does not disaggregate to show exact figures for these crimes committed by men *against* women, the victims are extremely disproportionately women and even more disproportional is the representation of men as perpetrators.

To understand VAWG it is necessary to understand patriarchal gender roles in a systemically sexist society. Scholars of gender define gender roles as “the models of

⁶ Available at : <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-10-16/a-system-at-breaking-point>

⁷ MOPAC crime data dashboard, CRIS data from April 18 – March 19 available at <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/crime-data-shboard>



masculinity and femininity under sexism (hooks, 1984) . The operating logics about men and women at the root of sexism are embedded in these rigid ideas about expected and acceptable ways of being and behaving, based on our gender. Men and boys are expected to be, and socialised towards being forceful and dominant, encouraged to express and use anger, aggression and force to achieve power and resolve conflict (Cahill, 1986). This model of patriarchal masculinity is not an innate or fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals but is sustained by ‘configurations of practice’ that are accomplished in social interactions (Butler, 1990; Connell, 2005). These ideas are communicated by parents, families, teachers. Behaviours in line with this model of masculinity are encouraged and rewarded – in homes, schools, places of work (and behaviour which does not align is policed and punished). For instance, there are well-defined patterns of managerial masculinity common in British corporations (Bloomberg, 2009; Roper, 1994; Wajcman, 1999).

The performance of patriarchal masculinity, including violence against women and girls – serves a function; ultimately it ensures the reproduction of sexism – the system which affords men and boys’ structural power (Butler, 1988; 1990). This is important because whilst not all men and boys perpetrate violence against women and girls, because VAWG is one of the mechanisms through which sexism and patriarchy is perpetuated and maintained, all men stand to benefit in seemingly indirect ways, from VAWG because it upholds the system which affords them power. Men’s positional power socially, politically and economically - in organisational settings, education, health care, politics and beyond – is an outcome of the same system that *produces VAWG and relies on it for its reproduction*.

To summarise; for a robust and effective VAWG strategy, it is necessary to understand violence against women and girls, as not (necessarily) indicative of a ‘breakdown of the (sexist/patriarchal) social order’ but as a constitutive part of the social order, and central to its *reproduction* (Marhia, 2012, 35). VAWG is a devastating but expected outcome of sexism. A meaningful strategy to tackle VAWG needs to focus on encouraging boys towards other models of masculinity. This is challenging because it requires men and boys to turn away from the source of their positional power as men and boys – the system of sexism. The government must allocate resources to this anti-sexism awareness raising and education, which is currently being left to a small number of charities.

UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE ON A CONTINUUM

The ways in which violence is categorised and conceptualized acts as a fulcrum for effective policy and practice on eliminating violence against women and girls and is therefore a crucial area of focus for the Governments strategy. Extreme acts of violence such as rape, domestic abuse, and femicide, exist on a continuum of sexist violence that



functions to perpetuate systemic sexism. For an effective strategy to tackle VAWG it is necessary to understand sexist violence on a continuum where in more extreme expressions of VAWG such as rape, domestic abuse and female genital cutting are recognised as the most extreme graduations of violence on a continuum that includes sexist ‘joke’s, “locker room chat” (wherein men and boys engage in derogatory language and descriptors about women and girls, and burdening women with “care giving” tasks in the work place (such as taking care of interns, making teas and coffees) with no financial compensation for their additional labour.

Understanding violence on a continuum of varying gradations it becomes clear that an exclusive focus on criminalisation and punitive criminal punishment to tackle VAWG is ineffective. The everyday violence’s by men and boys which are the status quo for women and girls cannot be addressed through the criminal justice route; whether we agree with or desire retribution through carceral punishment for acts of violence which are recognised as crimes or not, evidence shows that criminal justice approaches alone have not and will not tackle or eradicate VAWG; this is evidence by the fact that criminal justice has been the primary approach to tackle VAWG for decades, with little to no change in the levels of daily abuse experienced by women and girls. Carceral punishment focuses on outcomes rather than root causes of VAWG and are only able to respond to the most grievous forms of violence that are criminalised.

Binariated conceptions of criminal/ ‘innocent’ further perpetuates ideas that extreme VAWG are isolated incidents perpetrated by ‘a few bad apples’ and serves to absolve men of responsibility for interrogating the way they both benefit from the system that produces VAWG and may be complicit in perpetuating it through other mechanisms. A focus on individual retribution rather than societal reckoning and cultural rehabilitation may undo one of the most vital and welcomed effect of the #MeToo movement, which saw men reflecting on their behaviour and the ways in which they may have perpetuated VAWG, been complicit in the system which produces violence, and connected their societal advantage to the same system. For example, during #MeToo, scholars Newman and Haire (2019) identified a theme of men asking if their past behaviour may constitute sexual harassment and violence on advice platforms, which led them to suggest that #MeToo had created the conditions in which men had to reflect on their behaviour. This created opportunities for men to consider how they might be contributing to problematic cultures that enable sexual violence – one of the central common pleas of victims and survivors of sexual VAWG brought to the fore through the #MeToo movement, identified as fundamental for meaningful and systemic change. A singular focus or over emphasis on criminal justice may substantially reduce reflection and discussion of one’s own practice which is crucial for changing everyday manifestations of sexual violence (British Psychological Foundation, 2021).

To summarise, a VAWG strategy focused on criminal retribution for individual perpetrators of the most extreme forms of VAWG cannot be effective. Attention, and



resources must be directed towards socio-cultural and systemic change by disrupting and dismantling the root causes; disrupting operating logics and harmful patriarchal models of gender needs re-education. To disrupt the structures that give power to those operating logics we need legislative and policy reform that centres and prioritises anti-sexism.

PART 3: FOR A TACKLING VAWG STRATEGY TO BE EFFECTIVE, IT MUST BE INTERSECTIONAL

The former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women noted that a “lack of attention to intersectionality not only inhibits policymakers from assessing inequalities between women and men, but also inhibits their ability to assess how differently positioned women experience discrimination and violence” (Manjoo, 2015).

Historically, “women” have been conceptualised as a homogenous group which has served to erase and render invisible the unique struggles of women who experience multiple, intersecting and compounded structural inequities. As Black feminist Audre Lorde astutely put it, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (1984, 138).

Whilst forms of abuse across the continuum of sexist violence may be experienced by all women and girls, single-issue or “siloeed” approaches that focus exclusively on gender/sexism cannot effectively acknowledge or address the complex intersectional violence that is experienced by women who exist at the site of multiple, overlapping systems such as racism, Islamophobia, colonialism, cissexism, heterosexism, antisemitism, disablism and classism.

The common approaches to tackling VAWG have historically taken a siloeed approach despite the fact that in practice, a siloeed approach has been demonstrated to *exclude* those women who do not fit our default idea of who a woman is, by not accounting for or attending to their unique and specific needs. The default within this category are the women/girls who do not experience multiple, overlapping and intersecting forms of discrimination but who rather experience structural power and privilege because of other aspects to their identity in relation to other, intersecting, systems of power and oppression; White women, cis-gendered women, middle-class women, non-Muslim women, non-Jewish women. As such “interventions that do not take an intersectional approach are likely to perpetuate and exacerbate inequality, in that they will only be of benefit to women who already have some access to power or opportunity” (Amina 2020).

As domestic violence refuge Welwyn Hatfield Women's Refuge and Support Services articulate; “the death of Sarah Everard has sparked a national conversation and an



outpouring of grief and distress about the violence and abuse that women and girls experience daily. The level of attention we have seen to these issues in recent days is long overdue and could be described as a watershed moment. But it is a conversation that must also be widened to consider all women who have had their lives taken, including Wenjing Xu, Nicole Smallman, Bibaa Henry, Blessing Olusegun, Joy Morgan and Sian Blake and her children, Jillian Grant, Natasha Wild and Katy Sprague. It is important to reflect on why the deaths of Black and minoritised, migrant, LBT and disabled women and their treatment by the justice system rarely garners the same attention or response, and what this makes clear about issues of structural inequality and racism” (Welwyn Hatfield Women's Refuge and Support Services, 2021).

An effective VAWG strategy must be firmly rooted in and committed to intersectionality. Lawyer, activist, scholar and leading theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) has described intersectionality as a lense which reveals that *“women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society”*. An intersectional analysis brings into focus the ways in which multiple systems compound to produce unique and specific barriers, vulnerabilities and increased risk. As a lense through which to understand and tackle VAWG, it reveals how that the particular experience of intersecting discriminations is unique, not simply the sum of different discriminations, such that for example, the gendered and patriarchal violence experienced by Black women intersects with racism to produce gendered violence, which is racialized, as we exemplify in the data below.

To summarise, a VAWG which fails to account meaningfully for the complex and unique needs of women and girls experiencing multiple, intersecting structural barriers and violences, will be inadequate in tackling VAWG experienced by the most vulnerable women and girls in the UK.

USING AN INTERSECTION LENSE - AN EXAMPLE

Below we offer a brief, intersectional analysis of women who are victims of domestic abuse; making visible the intersections of race and racism, immigration status and socio-economic/class status exemplifies the compounded nature of intersecting oppressions for women and girls at the sharp end of multiple systems.

The Office for National Statistics (2019) data shows that in the year 2018-2019, the rates of domestic abuse for BAME women were higher than for white women, and rates of domestic abuse were highest amongst those of mixed ethnicity. White victims represented 5.6% of the victim population, Asian/Asian British people made up 3.8%, and Black victims made up 7.1%, whilst mixed race victims made up 12.9% (Office for National Statistics, 2019).



Furthermore, Gill (2017, 560) argues that *'black and native women are more likely to be murdered by an intimate partner.'* This is supported by statistics which show that, '59% of all homicides in London in 2005/6 were of BME women' (Thiara & Gill 2009, 43). These figures are not completely representative of the problem due to chronic underreporting of domestic abuse. Data shows us that underreporting is even more acute within minoritized communities and findings from Imkaan (2020) strongly suggest that BAME women were more likely to stay in abusive relationships due to the barriers associated with leaving. Safelives' (2020) dataset with 42000 clients showed that, *'BME clients suffered abuse for 1.5 times longer before seeking help compared to those from a white British or Irish background'*. Research shows that *'a woman facing domestic violence has to make 11 contacts with agencies before getting the help she needs, however, this rises to 17 if she is BME'* (Brittain et al, 2005).

The history of violence against BAME people by the police⁸ (rooted in institutional and structural racism) and the subsequent lack of basis for trust, makes it more likely that BAME women would seek informal sources of support before turning to the police (Imkaan, 2020). A further barrier to leaving domestic abuse faced by BAME women who are migrants is immigration status. According to Safelive (2020) 1 in 5 BAME women have no recourse to public funds and a proportion of these victims do not report domestic abuse due to their insecure immigration status. Following the Home Office' Hostile Environment policy under the Conservative Government and a wider political and cultural climate of hostility towards migrants and those perceive to be migrants, some migrant women do not come forward as some agencies turn them away due to their immigration status and many fear deportation, which is often used as a control tactic by the perpetrator (Imkaan, 2020). 92% of BAME migrant women surveyed by Imkaan (2020) reported that their perpetrator used their immigration status against them, which acted as a barrier to asking for help. Due to the limitations of the domestic violence rule (the immigration rule for migrants on a spouse visa), the threat of deportation is not only perceived but can be a real threat for migrant women (Belur, 2008) The structural disadvantage facing BAME victims has extended to domestic abuse refuges. As refuges are publicly funded institutions, access to these life-saving services has long been limited for BAME individuals with NRPF. 4 in 5 victims with insecure immigration status have been turned away from refuges due to their immigration status (Amnesty, 2020). Although some refuges do have funding for victims with NRPF, their funding is extremely limited and there is an expectation that the individual pays for their stay or has their stay funded through public funds. During the first months of the pandemic,

⁸ Figures from INQUEST , for example show a disproportionate number of people from BAME communities die in police custody; since 1990, they number 151. Its statistics, covering the period 2002–2012, are even more striking: of 380 deaths in police custody in England and Wales (or as a result of contact with the police), 69 were from BME communities – 18 percent. Further, no police officer has been successfully prosecuted in the last 20 years over a BAME death in custody. Statistics available at <https://www.inquest.org.uk/iopc-stats-2020>



although funding has been increased for domestic abuse services, no special provision has been made for BAME individuals – particularly those with no recourse to public funds.

Poverty is associated with domestic violence as both a cause and a consequence; it prolongs women's exposure to abuse by reducing their ability to leave and it makes women poorer on leaving the relationship (Reis, 2019). The Home Office (2004) reports that poorer households show higher rates of domestic abuse with women in households with low incomes 3.5 times more likely to experience domestic violence than women in slightly better-off households. Further to intersecting sexism and racism, poverty and classism can also compound the violence experienced by BAME women, who are also experiencing poverty. Data collected on poverty in the UK does not disaggregate for both race and gender such that BAME working-class women and BAME women in poverty are invisibilised across data sets.

Research has shown that BAME individuals are statistically more likely to experience poverty and economic disadvantage in the UK; The UK poverty rate is twice as high for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups as for white groups. (Joseph RoundTree Foundation, 2017). In 2015, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities were the most likely to be in 'persistent poverty', followed by Black African and Black Caribbean communities (ibid). Trade Union Conference analysis of official figures shows that one in six (16%) BME workers are employed on insecure terms and conditions, compared to one in ten (10%) white workers - "BME workers are hugely overrepresented in undervalued, low-paid and casualised jobs, with fewer rights and no sick pay" (TUC, 2020).

As the above example shows, using an intersectional lense reveals the increased and compounded risk and structural barriers faced by BAME women who are victims of domestic abuse.

To summarise, an effective strategy to end VAWG needs to understand, respond to and prioritize the unique and specific needs of women and girls experiencing multiple, intersecting and compounded inequities. Women and girls facing intersectional structural barriers face increased and compounded risks and are therefore some of the most marginalised women and girls.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

As we have emphasized here, violence against women is not merely about injury incurred by individual women. Rather it refers to a systematic abuse, which aims to sustain asymmetric gender relations and gendered organisations of power, to keep women in their place of subordination and sustain mens' positional power across society. Violence against



women and girls is sexist and patriarchal violence, and is as such about women/girls experiencing violence/being the target of violence *because they are women/girls*.

This is a historically rooted phenomenon, which is perpetuated through structures in our society - laws, policies and institutional practices - and finds social approval in notions of patriarchal masculinity, to which men and boys are socialised and encouraged. The continuum of violence against women, as a method of sustaining power and control, distinguishes it from “random” or ‘individual’ acts of violence.

A systemic approach which understands all forms of sexism violence on a continuum makes clear that a criminal justice approach which seeks to respond to violence *after* the fact, punishing only those violences which are criminalised, cannot effectively disrupt and tackle the root causes of VAWG. We suggest that the government VAWG strategy should focus attention and resources on education and awareness raising. We agree with the Government statement that “It is our collective responsibility to identify and tackle oppressive attitudes, patterns of behaviour and practices which try to achieve power and control over victims and survivors of these crimes” ; the government is uniquely positioned to embed education and awareness raising in policy and institutions, to this end.

While all women and girls may experience sexist and patriarchal violence, women who are also targeted by other intersecting systems, experience sexist and patriarchal violence that is compounded by intersecting systems. As a result these women who are the most marginalised face increased risk and should be prioritised in the governments VAWG strategy, with specific solutions/interventions drawn up that speak directly to this lived reality.



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