

Introduction

In partnership with the West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership, the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit conducted a narrative literature review which explored the current evidence base for Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The review supports and informs the Mayor of West Yorkshire's pledge of keeping women and girls safe at the heart of the policing plan.

Aims

1. To provide an insight into the causes and impacts of Violence Against Women and Girls as understood in current literature and service provision.
2. To identify the needs of women and girls in West Yorkshire to support the development and introduction of evidence-based intervention and provision.
3. To provide an overview of current knowledge whilst identifying research gaps and providing recommendations to prompt engagement and localised research.

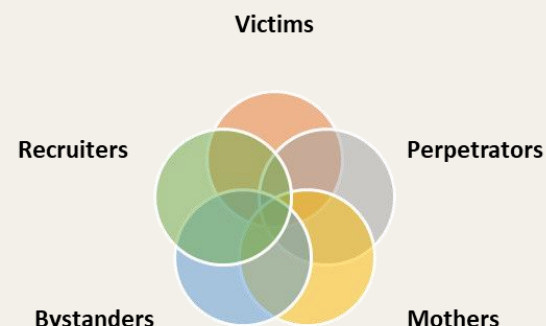
Methods

The review takes a narrative form which aimed to provide an objective summary of the current knowledge

The review was completed between July and August 2021 and includes literature which was available at this time.

Key findings

Women and girls can be presented as victims, perpetrators, mothers, bystanders, and recruiters. These categories appear to not be mutually exclusive, and can occur simultaneously or sequentially. Experience of trauma is key to understanding each of these categories.



Victims: Risk of exploitation is greater when a girl is younger, and when a woman is older due to their trusting nature, reduced defence skills, and naivety. Women with disabilities have a similar vulnerability level and are 10% more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than non-disabled women. Women are more likely to be victims by their partner, former partner, or someone they know. There is a hyperawareness of risk, women and girls will often change their behaviours to minimise vulnerability.

Perpetrator: There has been a rise in literature which looks beyond the gendered stereotype of women as victims and actively analyses their role in orchestrating and perpetuating violence. Female criminality should be considered with recognition that the perpetrator may have experienced trauma and/or have been a victim. Evidence suggests prison is rarely an appropriate or proportionate response for women as many women commonly share the same needs: substance misuse, education, experience of abuse/trauma, and accommodation.

Mothers: Women are involved in raising children who may become involved in violence or crime. This can perpetuate an intergenerational cycle of violence, crime, or vulnerability. Mothers in prison require additional support for their mental health and opportunities to maintain familial bonds with their children. Accessible and inclusive maternity services, for all communities members, are needed to inform and support women and families.

Bystander: Bystanders can be either prosocial or passive. Women and girls are more likely to be prosocial bystanders in events which involve their children, peers or family. However, this cannot be assumed for every situation due to the presence of additional factors. Women can remain hesitant to prevent any changes or risks to their position or safety.

Recruiter: A common theme which occurs in female perpetrator literature, is the emphasis on female victimisation and the patriarchal bargain whereby women become participants' with a vested interest in the system which oppresses them to resist male control. To regain some agency and freedom, women have become recruiters to lower their personal risk.

Key recommendations

1. Further research into the intersectionality's of women in West Yorkshire's local communities. This includes robust data to identify the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community.
2. Development of age-informed, gender-sensitive diversion services are required to avoid prosecutions for low-level and non-violent crimes.
3. Introduction of early intervention and prevention-focused interventions in school, focusing on signs of abuse, teenage pregnancy, healthy relationships, sex education, consent, available services.
4. Adoption of a holistic approach to VAWG which is women-centred and trauma informed, with integrated services.
5. Partners should be working together to prevent duplication, support funding processes and promote evidence-based working.

Conclusion

- Structural inequalities and gender norms perpetuate VAWG and its impacts cannot be underestimated as it can take many forms and has damaging consequences.
- Emphasis on perpetrator culpability needs to replace victim blaming.
- Current evidence is fragmented and appears one dimensional. Age, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and identity can significantly influence an individual's needs meaning services need to reflect these.
- Deprivation, addiction, insecure housing and previous trauma were noted as key risk factors for VAWG. Risk and protective factors should be used to structure interventions and start conversations about why women are prone to victimisation or offending.
- Covid 19 will have a significant and lasting impact on VAWG through an increase in reports of DA and significant court delays.
- There is a need for a holistic, women-centred approach to supporting women and girls. This means research and interventions should aim to address all the needs of women.

References

Revolving Doors Agency., 2021. Evidence review: diverting young adults away from the cycle of crisis and crime

