

What does gender have to do with violence against women?

This paper has been produced to help members of Multi-Agency Partnerships and Training Consortia explain the links between violence against women and equality between men and women.

The Scottish Government describes violence against women as:

- Caused by the fact that men and women are not equal, and in turn
- Causing inequality between women and men

This is often referred to as the “gendered analysis”.

See page 7 for the Scottish Government’s definition of violence against women.

Why has the Scottish Government adopted this analysis?

The Scottish Government has adopted this analysis because research shows that women and men use and experience violence differently.

Men are statistically more likely to use violence (especially severe violence) against other men and against women.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and other forms of violence committed mainly by men.

If something overwhelmingly affects one section of the population, we need to ask why and we need to do something about it.

The Scottish Government must, by law, promote equality and respect.¹

What is “gender”?

The words “sex” and “gender” are often used to mean the same thing. But they mean different things. When a baby is born, it is (usually) clear from the

¹ The Equality Act 2006 created a duty on public authorities to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and
- Promote equality of opportunity between men and women

All public authorities are now legally required to demonstrate that they treat men and women **fairly** (not the same).

genitals² whether it is male or female. That is sex difference. Dressing the baby boy in blue and the girl in pink is a choice³. That is gender difference.

“Sex” refers to the biological characteristics which distinguish people as male or female. These relate to the reproductive system, for example testicles or ovaries.

“Gender” refers to the quality of being male or female. It is about what we expect of women and men. This is not biology although some gender differences stem from biological differences. To put it simply, men and women are made (by the society they live in), not born.

Is this not just the way things are?

What we expect of men and women is often subtle, not noticed or seen as “normal” and accepted as the “way things are”. But what is “acceptable” can vary across time, different countries and different cultures. For example, in Scotland, we no longer think that drinking and driving is acceptable. So, what we think of as “normal” can change. This also applies to what we expect of women and men. For example, at one time, women were not considered intelligent enough to vote. A man giving up work to look after children would have been unthinkable.

We are all limited by expectations of what it is to be a man or a woman. But what is a “real” man or woman? If a man cries, is he less of a man? If a woman does not want children, is she less of a woman? If a man is out of work is he still a “real” man if he cannot “support his family”? Do “real” women look like page three models? We can question and reject assumptions about “masculinity” and “femininity”. These force us to live our lives in particular ways and, at worst, damage us and others.

What is wrong with difference?

In itself, there is nothing wrong with difference. But, as history shows, difference is sometimes used to favour certain people and discriminate against others. An example of this would be white people favoured over black. This discrimination is often seen as a ‘right’.

In the case of gender, difference sets women and men apart. It creates a damaging division, often from the minute a baby is born. This division causes discrimination.

What is a “gendered analysis”?

“Gendered analysis” is a way of looking at the world which takes account of the differences in men’s and women’s lives and how this affects them, for example health, employment, opportunities and so on. It does not just mean

² Some people are intersex. An individual may have both male and female sexual characteristics and organs; it may not be clear at birth whether they are male or female.

³ This example is chosen because it is likely to be obvious to (although not necessarily practised by) people living in Scotland.

“women”. It means looking at things from the perspective of men **and** women. It recognises that taking a “gender neutral” approach, that is assuming the same for everyone, can cause disadvantage to both men and women.

For example, analysing crime by gender shows that more men than women have a charge against them. Men are more likely than women to commit a crime of indecency. For indecency crimes, men are most often convicted of rape and sexual assault while women are most often convicted of prostitution⁴.

So, analysis by gender gives a particular insight which might otherwise be hidden. This insight means that services or policies can be designed so they are more likely to work for everybody.

Gender analysis acknowledges that there are differences and that these differences need to be understood to avoid discriminating against some people.

What does gender have to do with violence against women?

Seeing violence against women in the context of gender helps to make sense of the nature and the scale of it and to understand how we can stop it.

Gender has everything to do with violence against women:

- Prevalence statistics show that women and children are disproportionately affected by men’s violence
- In intimate relationships (for example marriage), domestic abuse (of the type described as “intimate terrorism”⁵) is perpetrated almost entirely by men
- Women’s descriptions of domestic abuse, rape and so on indicate a pattern which typically includes tactics of control, humiliation and degradation; the abdication of responsibility by the man; and blame of the woman: the violence is characterised by his power over and control of her
- Many women experience repeat victimisation from the same or different men and more than one type of violence over a lifetime
- Economic disadvantage, cultural and religious expectations, caring responsibilities and attitudes of institutions (enshrined in laws and procedures) combine to limit women’s options for even naming the violence (it may not even be recognised as such) never mind leaving or stopping it

Are the various forms of violence against women linked?

Domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, child abuse and other forms of violence are often seen as separate. But they are linked. They are all forms

⁴ *Gender Audit of Statistics*, Breitenbach, E. and Wasoff, F. Scottish Executive Social Research 2007, cited at www.engender.org.uk

⁵ *Domestic Violence: the intersection of gender and control*, Johnson P, Penn State, 2005

of control and an abuse of power. The same men often perpetrate more than one form. Many women experience more than one type of violence⁶.

There is a spectrum which links various forms of violence against women. And on the spectrum, some behaviour is accepted as “normal”. Research by Zero Tolerance⁷ found that up to half of young men and a third of young women believe that forced sex is justifiable in certain circumstances. Rape by a ‘stranger’ is the extreme end of a range of sexual violence which includes sexist jokes, sexual harassment, intimate intrusions and coercive sex by dates or partners.

Perpetrators and victims of such violence are not stereotypes or “dysfunctional” or “monsters” and different from “normal” people. They are ordinary men and women. Violence is a common human characteristic. But we can choose whether or not to use it, how we behave and how we treat other people.

What is the scale of men’s violence against women?

Worldwide, the scale is enormous. Overwhelmingly, women are the victims of men’s violence in the home. Women are also specifically targeted in war. For example⁸:

- At least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused by a man in her lifetime
- More than a fifth of women are reported to have been abused by men with whom they live
- Among women aged 15-44 years, gender-based violence accounts for more death and disability than the combined effects of cancer, malaria, traffic injuries and war
- During war and civil conflict, women and girls are often targeted for special forms of violence by men as a way of attacking the morale of the enemy. For example, in the 1994 Rwandan conflict, systematic and planned rape was used as a weapon of war. Almost every adolescent girl who survived the genocide had been raped
- It is estimated that 85 to 114 million women and girls in Africa, Middle East and Asia, have undergone female genital mutilation

Who does what to whom?

A gendered analysis of violence shows that in all countries, women and men experience violence differently. A recent UNIFEM report from Gaza indicated that the most dangerous place for women and girls was inside the home, while for men and boys it is outside. Worldwide:

⁶ *Violence Against Women: a literature review*, Greenan L, Scottish Executive, 2004

⁷ *Young People’s Attitudes to Sex, Violence and Relationships*, Zero Tolerance Charitable Trust, 1998 and follow up research, *Young People’s Attitudes on Gendered Violence*, Burman M and Cartmel F, NHS Health Scotland, 2005

⁸ Source: UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women)

- Young men are both the principal perpetrators and victims of murder⁹
- Young men are most at risk from other young men
- Women are most at risk from men who are known to them
- Most partner violence is perpetrated by men against women¹⁰
- Men are more likely to be perpetrators of violence within and outwith the home
- Women are more likely to be victims of men's violence
- In societies where there is less freedom and fewer rights for women, there are greater levels of violence against them

While women are, of course, also violent, there is no evidence of similarly wide scale and systematic atrocities perpetrated by women against men.

Why?

There are many contributory factors within individuals, their cultures, the law and so on which lead to violent behaviour and the attitudes which condone it. Most men are not violent to women. Individuals always have a choice about how they behave towards others.

But, the underlying reason for women being more likely to be victims of men's violence than the reverse is because women and men are not (yet) equal. It is the pecking order. It is about power. Men who abuse are violent to women **because they can be**. This is not simply about how men behave towards women. It goes far deeper. It is about notions of 'right' and 'entitlement' and how individuals are valued. It is about how a whole society is organised: how the law has treated men and women and how it has allowed men to behave. For example, it was considered legal for a man to rape his wife as recently as 1989. Laws change, but it can take generations for underlying attitudes to follow suit. A woman's sexual history is still used against her in rape trials, because defence lawyers know that deep-seated views of how women 'should' behave can affect how jury members cast their votes.

It is 100 years since women and men marched along Princes Street in Edinburgh demanding "votes for women". There has been great progress since then but there is some way to go. Women have the vote, but are underrepresented in parliament. Women have had the right to equal pay for 30 years. But they still earn much less than men¹¹.

Taking action to end violence against women is a vital way of promoting equality¹².

⁹ *World Report on violence and Health*, World Health Organization, 2002

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ There is a 14% gap between men's and women's full-time hourly rates, and a 33% gap between women's part time hourly rates and men's full time hourly rates *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings*, 2008 cited at www.closesthegap.org.uk

¹² Scottish Ministers are required to set priorities for the advancement of equality of opportunity between men and women as a "specific duty" of the Gender Equality Duty in Scotland. After a process of consultation and data analysis, Ministers decided in June 2009 that their two priorities would be violence against women and occupational segregation.

Does this mean that most men are violent?

Most men in Scotland are **not** violent to women and sympathise¹³ with those who experience it. We are all exposed to and harmed by violent attitudes. Although only some men abuse women, all men benefit, whether they like it or not, from the way society is set up: from being able to live their lives with less fear of violence (for example in their own homes), fewer barriers and more opportunities.

What about violence against men or violence in same sex relationships?

Whilst men are at much less risk from gender-based violence, some men are abused in similar ways by other men and, sometimes, by women (although rarely with the same patterns of fear, injury, time span or powerlessness).

Gender-based violence also occurs in same sex relationships¹⁴, perpetrated by both men and women.

Gender-based violence is not just about what happens privately between individuals. It reflects the fact that society, as a whole, is based on a set up which accords power and control to men, and has certain expectations of men and women, including their sexual orientation (a presumption that they will be straight rather than gay, lesbian or bisexual).

This means that it can be difficult for men to disclose abuse because of stigma. Men who are raped or sexually assaulted may feel silenced (only this year, has male rape been defined under the law) or that rape has made them “less of a man”.

Those abused within same sex relationships may assume they will get an unhelpful response because of their sexual orientation – again based on the prevailing views of what makes a “real” man or woman and what is seen as “normal” or “deviant”. Indeed, the threat of “outing” is sometimes used as part of same sex domestic abuse. Those affected may be very reluctant to come forward.

What can we do about this?

These issues are complicated. It can be difficult to know where to start because it is about our whole society and what is seen as ‘normal’. Questioning “how things are” is never easy. We can only start with ourselves, our own homes, workplaces and communities.

Through *Safer Lives: Changed Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland*, 2009, the Scottish Government and COSLA are working with partners and communities to tackle these issues.

¹³ See, for example, White Ribbon Campaign at www.whiteribbonScotland.org.uk

¹⁴ *What can contemporary gender theory contribute to understanding of abuse in same sex relationships*, Whiting N, Scottish Journal of Criminal Justice, 2008

What is violence against women?

Violence against women is defined by the Scottish Government¹⁵ as follows:

“Gender based violence is a function of gender inequality, and an abuse of male power and privilege. It takes the form of actions that result in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to women and children, or affront to their human dignity, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. It is men who predominantly carry out such violence, and women who are predominantly the victims of such violence. By referring to violence as 'gender based' this definition highlights the need to understand violence within the context of women's and girls' subordinate status in society. Such violence cannot be understood, therefore, in isolation from the norms, social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women's vulnerability to violence.

Accordingly, violence against women encompasses but is not limited to:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, within the general community or in institutions, including: domestic abuse, rape, incest and child sexual abuse;
- Sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in the public sphere; commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, pornography and trafficking;
- Dowry related violence;
- Female genital mutilation;
- Forced and child marriages;
- “Honour crimes.”

This definition does not deny that women use violence, including violence against a male or female partner. It does not deny that men use violence against other men, including male partners.

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¹⁵ *Safer Lives: Changed Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland*, The Scottish Government and COSLA, 2009