

## Information Sheet 2: Violence against Women

### What does 'violence against women' mean?

Violence against women is defined by the Scottish government as:

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.

The term violence against women, girls and children includes:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence including: domestic abuse, rape, incest and child sexual abuse
- Sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in public
- Commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, pornography and trafficking
- Dowry related violence
- Female genital mutilation
- Forced and child marriages
- So-called 'honour' crimes

These forms of abuse and violence are overwhelmingly experienced by women and children and are abuses of power and control. In Scotland, as is the case across the world, these types of violent acts are carried out predominantly by adult men. This does not mean that men do not experience some of the types of violence and abuse included on this list, but it does mean that overall they are less likely to. It also means that when they do experience any form of gendered violence, they are most likely to experience that at the hands of another man. The vast majority of gender based violence is inflicted on women and girls, largely because they are women and girls.

### How often does this happen?

Globally, more than 1 in 3 women experience some form of sexual or physical violence in their lifetime. In Scotland, at least 1 in 5 women will experience domestic abuse in their life and on average 5 rape cases are reported to the police every day. Violence against women is a global, widespread human rights violation and is experienced by women and children in every country worldwide. It cuts across both the public and the private sphere and affects those within the Church of Scotland as it does within all walks of life.

## **What about men? They experience violence, too.**

We know that men and boys worldwide, and in Scotland, experience forms of gender based violence. This can include intimate partner violence such as physical, psychological, emotional and sexual abuse within families and relationships and societal violence including homophobia and rape. This is a real problem and male survivors need support that is tailored for their needs.

Whether the survivor of gender based violence is a man or a woman, whether they are an adult or a child – the person who abused them is generally male. When women do perpetrate acts of gender based violence, they are most likely to target other women or children, not men.

It is significantly less common for women to commit acts of violence against men than men are to perpetrate violent acts against women and such acts rarely fit within the context of gender-based violence. When women do commit acts of violence against men – such as murdering their partners – this is unusual enough that there are often huge amounts of press interest. We don't often hear the names of the two women killed every week in the UK by a partner or ex-partner and we rarely see the same level of press coverage.

## **Why do you need to talk about gender at all? Surely violence is violence.**

We believe it is vital to frame such violence as gender-based – that is, as violence that is mainly directed against a woman because she is a woman (like female genital mutilation), or which affects women disproportionately (like domestic abuse). This highlights the importance of placing violence within the context of gender inequality and of women's lower status in society.

We also believe that it is vital to focus not just on the victims of gender based violence but on those who perpetrate it. Not only do men and women experience gender based violence differently and deserve support tailored to their needs, perpetrators need support and accountability programmes that take into account the gendered norms and attitudes that excuse and minimise violence against women, girls and children. Taking a gender neutral approach not only hides the victims but takes away the focus from perpetrators who are largely adult men.

Violence against women is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality in our society. We can't work to fix the problem if we don't acknowledge it in the first place.