

A blueprint for preventing Violence Against Women and Girls in Wales

Violence against women, including domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) is a major public health problem in Wales and globally. It violates women and children's human rights, constrains their choices and agency, limiting their ability to participate in society and pursue goals and aspirations which are meaningful to them. This harms the health of individuals, families, communities, and economies.

All forms of VAWDASV are preventable. The types of violence may differ, but they are all rooted in, and are expressions of, unequal gender relations in society. By effectively challenging the structures, practices, and norms which perpetuate gender inequality, the foundations for VAWDASV will be undermined. As tolerance of VAWDASV reduces, and women and girls' ability to exercise autonomy increases, VAWDASV will become less prevalent.



Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid

Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf
Putting Women & Children First

Our vision: A Wales in which all women and children live free from all forms of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and by doing so achieve independence, freedom, and liberation from oppression.

Our aspirations:

- All forms of VAWDASV are better understood, challenged, and prevented.
- Relationships between women, men, and children are healthy, safe, and equal; underpinned by respect for each other's human rights and dignity.
- All survivors of VAWDASV can access early support which builds on their strengths, meets their needs, and improves their well-being.

To achieve these aspirations, we must:

- Ensure a co-ordinated, 'whole-system' response, which recognises that successfully tackling VAWDASV is dependent on *all* prevention interventions - primary, secondary, and tertiary - being evidence-based, sustainably resourced, responsive to intersecting forms of oppression, and implemented across the life course.
- Agree upon a set of National Indicators for prevention interventions at all levels and regularly collect data on a local and national level to monitor progress against these indicators.
- Ensure multi-sector investment in the whole system, not just one or two elements. The health, education, and justice sectors, in addition to national and local governments, have a substantial financial (as well as moral) interest in seeing reductions in VAWDASV, and should invest in its prevention accordingly.

Primary prevention

This is concerned with reforming individual, relationship, community, organizational and societal structures, practices, attitudes and social norms which perpetuate gender inequality; condone, reinforce, and/or positively portray VAWDASV; and reinforce other forms of oppression. It aims to prevent VAWDASV before it occurs, but also increases the likelihood of earlier intervention with survivors.

- **Pre-natal / Infancy:** A voluntary programme for new parents should be available to help them negotiate gendered roles and practice equitable relationships.
- **Childhood / Adolescence (ages 3 to 16):** The Relationships and Sexuality Education Curriculum, delivered through a whole education approach, should enable learners to recognise VAWDASV and empower them to challenge its drivers.
- **Young People (16+):** Further education / sixth form colleges and universities, as well as other youth community settings (e.g. sports, leisure, arts) should implement Bystander Interventions with clear links to specialist support. Student training for public-facing roles such as social & health work, teacher training, law and policing, should incorporate teaching on gender equality, VAWDASV and anti-oppressive practice.
- **Adults:** Community/lifelong learning centres should offer workshops to improve women's agency and economic empowerment and raise awareness about VAWDASV.
- **Community Ambassadors** are crucial in raising awareness about, and challenging, VAWDASV and gender inequality. They can reach a diverse range of communities and challenge harmful traditions, norms and values from within.
- **Campaigns and community mobilisation initiatives,** including through Bystander Interventions, should bolster other efforts to prevent VAWDASV. They are most effective when community-driven and participatory, but can be strengthened / legitimized by concurrent government campaigns.
- **Mainstream and Social Media** heavily influence people's understanding of gender 'norms' and of VAWDASV. Regulators should establish human-rights-based standards for reporting on VAWDASV and training rolled out to all media companies. Degrading portrayals of women, and equally damaging portrayals of 'masculinity', should be limited. Social media should enforce robust policies on online abuse, including sexual harassment.
- **Workplaces** should operate a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of VAWDASV.

Secondary prevention

All survivors must be able to access specialist and appropriate support at the earliest opportunity, as should perpetrators who want to change their behaviour, and children who are exhibiting abusive behaviour. This requires those in public-facing roles to be able to recognise signs of VAWDASV and know where to signpost perpetrators and survivors.

- **IRIS** or a similar programme should be rolled out across all GP surgeries and all front-line health services. A similar model should be developed (or this one adapted) to include training on all forms of violence against women and girls as well as domestic abuse.
- **The National Training Framework (NTF)** is being rolled out across the public sector. It should cover all forms of VAWDASV and refresher and 'top up' courses made available.
- **'Trusted Professional'** training should be rolled out to those in public-facing roles who do not receive NTF.

Workplaces should operate a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of VAWDASV and should ensure they implement a compassionate paid leave policy which encompasses victims of VAWDASV.

Specialist and Generic Support Services: Local authorities should ensure provision of high quality specialist support services for survivors of all forms of VAWDASV, as well as effective early intervention programmes for perpetrators of domestic abuse and adolescents displaying abusive behaviour. They should ensure that all workers providing generic statutory support services are trained to give a trauma-informed, needs led and strengths-based response to survivors.

Tertiary prevention

Survivors of VAWDASV must be protected from re-victimization and further harm, and be able to access high-quality support services to aid their recovery. Perpetrators of VAWDASV must be held accountable for their behaviour and given opportunities to change.

- **The Justice System** must do better at holding perpetrators to account and improving the response to survivors. **The Welsh Government** should publicly support calls for the family courts to be reformed; for domestic abuse courts to be made mainstream; and for the CPS to commit to improving its prosecution decision-making in cases of sexual violence. **The Police and Crime Commissioners** in Wales should ensure that all four Welsh forces undertake regular training on VAWDASV.
- **Protective measures** for victims and those at risk of VAWDASV (e.g. Occupation Orders and Protection Orders) should be highlighted in the public domain.
- **Statutory service providers** should ensure that every decision made is in the best interests of survivors.