



Llinell Gymorth Live Fear
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Welsh Women's Aid

Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf
Putting Women & Children First

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These are the views of:	<i>Welsh Women's Aid (Third Sector) - the national charity in Wales working to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women.</i>

Public Accounts Committee – Call for evidence – Tackling Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women. We are a federation of specialist organisations in Wales that provide lifesaving services to survivors of violence and abuse, delivering a range of innovative preventative services in local communities.

We have been at the forefront of shaping a coordinated community response and practice in Wales since we were established in 1978. We do this by campaigning for change and providing advice, consultancy, support, and training to deliver policy and service improvements for survivors, families, and communities.

We deliver services including the Live Fear Free Helpline funded by Welsh Government, and a National Training Service. We also deliver the Wales National Quality Service Standards (NQSS), a national accreditation framework for domestic abuse specialist services in Wales (supported by the Welsh Government) and the Change That Lasts project; a strengths-based, needs-led approach that supports survivors of all forms of violence against women, and their children, to build resilience, and leads to independence.

Our success is founded on making sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do.

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We want a world in which women and children live free from domestic abuse, sexual violence and all forms of violence against women, and by doing so achieve independence, freedom and liberation from oppression.

The pledge to halve violence against women and girls is a commendable one, but without working with the specialist sector and taking a whole systems approach, this aim will be limited and unsustainable.

The Safer Streets mission acknowledges the lack of confidence in policing. It is important whilst looking at trust in policing, that we also acknowledge police perpetrated abuse. In 2023, it was reported that there were a total of 1,483 unique allegations of violence against women and girls where the perpetrator was a member of the police force¹. We also know that not all survivors come forward and disclose what has happened to them. More recently, a court ruling has made it difficult to remove police officers who fail vetting from the service². It is important that institutions, like the police, ensure that they are safe spaces for survivors. It becomes almost impossible for a survivor to disclose an instance of violence against women and girls, when staff within the police make up a percentage of the perpetrators.

Survivors also face never-ending waiting lists within the court systems. Not only does this cause additional trauma to survivors, but it also means that dangerous perpetrators are left outside of the legal system. It is vital that the UK Government address the court backlog that is particularly affecting survivors of violence against women and girls.

But tackling violence against women and girls cannot be limited to a legal response. For a sustainable end to violence against women and girls, we need to ensure that individuals in society feel confident in safely tackling violence against women and girls. Whether that is having positive conversations amongst friends, creating safe spaces or knowing how to intervene when witnessing violence against women and girls in a way that keeps everyone safe.

To halve violence against women and girls, we need to stop violence against women and girls drop happening in the first place. Prevention must be a priority. An informed society is an empowered society. We must break down barriers when it comes to discussing violence against women and girls. It is also important to ensure that early interventions are held with perpetrators to ensure that violence stops before it occurs.

¹ <https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/first-benchmark-of-police-performance-on-tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-published#:~:text=%E2%80%9COur%20publication%20today%20reinforces%20the,and%20more%20sanctions%20and%20dismissals.%E2%80%9D>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8r5nrzn4z0o>

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The violence against women and girls sector must be part of the aim to tackle violence against women and girls. Specialist organisations, like Welsh Women's Aid members, are on the frontline, supporting survivors. Without proper support, survivors will be left to deal with violence against women and girls alone. All governmental institutions need to ensure that the sector is properly consulted, resourced and supported.

Unfortunately, societal barriers mean that certain communities within society face a more difficult challenge and are more likely to experience violence against women and girls. The UK Government must ensure that all approaches to tackling violence against women and girls take into consideration every survivor's lived experience and how statutory institutions can better place themselves to support every single survivor.

Trust and confidence within the police and other statutory institutions, such as probation, courts and other emergency services, mean that survivors are becoming less and less likely to disclose an instance of violence against women and girls (VAWG)³ since the murder of Sarah Everard. When institutions and individuals set up to protect, instead become part of the perpetration, survivors are left with nowhere to turn. It is clear, that the UK Government's aim for safer streets has a focus around increased policing. But for some, this may result in increased fear until real, systematic change happens.

The UK Government must ensure that everyone in the police are fit for the job and the additional powers and trust that come with that job. Unfortunately, a recent ruling has made it even more difficult to remove perpetrators from the service⁴. A lack of action by the Home Office has also contributed to slow action, or worse inaction, on dangerous police officers⁵. Welsh Women's Aid urges the government to introduce the new rules to sack police officers swiftly to increase trust in policing. 53% of women said that the police 'had made not much or no progress in addressing problems of sexism and misogyny among police officers' in 2023⁶. It is clear that a lead from the Government is needed to ensure that all police forces take swift action in ensuring that VAWG is taken seriously. Worryingly, the same survey revealed a quarter of women said that their trust in the police to handle VAWG has gone down.

³ <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/almost-half-of-women-have-less-trust-in-police-following-sarah-everard-murder/>

⁴ <https://www.channel4.com/news/met-chief-its-absurd-we-cant-sack-police-officers>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/feb/12/met-police-chief-blames-home-office-failures-after-vetting-ruling-on-rogue-officers>

⁶ <https://refuge.org.uk/news/refuge-releases-new-data-revealing-concerningly-low-rates-of-womens-confidence-in-the-police-to-handle-vawg-crimes/>

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The police must also take decisive action when dealing with VAWG in order to build trust. The inquest held into Raneem Oudeh's and Khaola Saleem's death found that mistakes made by police contributed to their deaths⁷. The inquest heard that cases 'were not being investigated due to a lack of resources in the department'. This leaves survivors open to further perpetration and unfortunately, very serious and fatal consequences. The implementation of Raneem's Law which placed domestic abuse specialists in 999 emergency control rooms is a fantastic step into ensuring that survivors are heard and that appropriate action is taken. However, a 4% cut in victim's services undermines the aim's of positive action taken⁸. Further information will be provided within this evidence to discuss the cuts to services and the impact that this will have on tackling VAWG. Other services, such as probation, hold an important role in tackling VAWG. Probation services can ensure that survivors are kept safe from their perpetrators. However, the probation service is facing a number of challenges as a result of under resourcing. Prior to the UK Government's early release scheme, the Chief Inspector of the probation service warned that 97% of the service was failing⁹. A probation service that fails to keep survivors safe has seen to have devastating consequences. Rhiannon Bragg, a campaigner in Wales for safer gun laws and greater protections, was held at gunpoint by her perpetrator. Despite this, areas that her and her children regularly go to, are not included within current probationary conditions¹⁰. Staffing within probation remains 'dangerously low'¹¹ and the UK Government needs to take action to ensure that survivors are kept safe. The Live Fear Free Helpline have also experienced survivors calling about their concerns in relation to the police. A number of case studies are set out below:

"Police have been investigating- he is now on bail because he keeps following her. He is making out he is the victim and she is crazy. She has a DV officer assigned but he has done nothing. He is not supposed to contact her on enter her street. Any time she sees him now, it is a surprise. Someone was acting suspiciously outside her house. He was in her street. She has reported all this to the police- she was informed the DV officer would be in touch but has heard nothing. Has a DV support worker who offered to get in touch with the police officer but still heard nothing. Caller does not feel protected. Has been informed a supervisor will be reviewing the evidence to meet the criteria- she has not heard anything. She has called but had no response. She was told the supervisor had gone off sick. She is now waiting for another supervisor."

"Spoke to daughter initially and then mother – daughter was raped by ex-partner – reported to xxxx police in December – police nor other services being very supportive – although they had installed a

⁷ https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Raneem-Oudeh-and-Khaola-Saleem-Prevention-of-future-deaths-report-2022-0352_Published.pdf

⁸ <https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/news/victim-services-are-the-fabric-of-our-justice-system-they-cannot-be-taken-for-granted/#:~:text=Last%20week%2C%20the%20government%20announced,will%20face%20a%204.2%25%20cut.>

⁹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/prisons-early-release-probation-chief-martin-jones-b2581484.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c51y33dwyd2o>

¹¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-66431061>

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ring doorbell for her safety. Not getting any support – police are texting her saying they are off duty, no staff, too busy, change in staff etc very poor service. Gone on for 10 weeks. Can't go out on her own as scared of seeing perpetrator”.

“Police made her feel like it was too much effort, so she dropped the charges”.

“[Survivor] struggling with lack of justice for her police perpetrator and trauma caused through family courts where they placed her son with the perpetrator”.

Survivors of violence against women and girls, and particularly sexual violence, face record high waiting lists for their trial to go to the Crown Court¹². Rape Crisis' Breaking Point report lays out the stark traumatisation that is waiting for survivors who do manage to have their case sent before the Crown Court. To get to this stage alone is already incredibly difficult as the latest Crown Prosecution Service statistics state that on average, it takes 129.9 days to approve an adult rape charge. This is already after an average 346 days waiting for the police to make a charge.

Concerningly, there has been an increase of 21.6% of adult rape survivors withdrawing from the criminal justice process. The latest review by the House of Lords library highlights that the percentage of survivors of rape who no longer support police action is notably higher than other types of crimes¹³. Finally, 40.9% of all rape cases result in a non-conviction. This has resulted in a system that has all but legalised sexual violence.

To create safer streets across the UK, the government needs to prioritise prevention in order from stopping violence against women and girls from happening in the first place. It is important to be able to look at what are the causes of violence against women and girls. This includes gender inequality, which intersects with racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination. There are still attitudes within society that condone or normalise violence against women and girls, made worse through a 'wild west' social media and areas of the media that victim blame through inappropriate headlines and depictions of VAWG.

Welsh Women's Aid report on: A Blueprint for the prevention of Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence goes into more detail.

Overall, the UK Government's own evaluation of Safer Streets Funding is that “no evidence of statistically significant impacts from the delivery of SSF3 on improving perceptions and feelings of safety in public spaces”¹⁴ however the report does highlight positive and significant impacts on the training that has taken place across the country as a result of this funding.

Welsh Women's Aid have been a part of that effort in supporting organisations and communities in various locations across Wales. Particularly, in Bridgend, Welsh Women's Aid provided “Don't be a Bystander” training and interventions with students and workers in the night-time economy to reduce violence against women and girls at a community level. Bridgend were successful in receiving

¹² <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/breaking-point/>

¹³ <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/rape-levels-of-prosecutions/>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-safer-streets-fund-round-3-year-ending-march-2022/evaluation-of-the-safer-streets-fund-round-3-year-ending-march-2022#summary-of-key-findings-implications-and-recommendations>

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£749,215.50¹⁵. 47% of bids included bystander intervention training. Our member services were also able to deliver free practical training “to support and promote change for the women and girls in our communities... to stop street harassment, sexual violence, violence against women and girls and domestic violence”¹⁶.

CCTV was also included in 74% of applications. However, due to procurement challenges, there was a delay in getting these installed. Whilst some of the effectiveness of installed CCTV as a result of the Safer Street funding was praised, the College of Policing’s own data suggests that there is “no evidence” that CCTV is an effective deterrent of violent crime¹⁷. We feel that this funding might be more effectively used if applications were supported by expert organisations that can assist in advising how to best tackle violence against women and girls. Environmental protections can only go so far. The focus instead *needs* to be on prevention. Other organisations, like EAW are also sceptical on the benefits of CCTV over a preventative approach¹⁸.

Alternatively, Bystander Intervention Training has been shown to have positive impacts on crimes like sexual harassment and assault¹⁹. Data shows that people want to help when they witness sexual harassment towards women and girls but are unsure in how to safely assist²⁰. With more Bystander Intervention Training we can equip communities in making Wales a safer place for women.

¹⁵ <https://www.south-wales.police.uk/news/south-wales/news/2022/gor-jul/commissioner-and-local-partners-secure-almost-1.5m-for-safer-streets-across-south-wales/>

¹⁶ <https://www.carmdas.org/news/safer-streets-campaign>

¹⁷ <https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/interventions-reduce-violence-against-women-and-girls-vawg-public-spaces/physical-environment-interventions#:~:text=Strong%20evidence-,CCTV,a%20lesser%20extent%2C%20residential%20areas.>

¹⁸ <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/report-violence-against-women-and-girls-snapshot-report-2021-22/>

¹⁹ <https://www.breakingthesilence.cam.ac.uk/prevention-support/be-active-bystander#:~:text=Research%20shows%20that%20bystander%20intervention,in%2C%20try%20the%20ABC%20approach.>

²⁰ <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/a-majority-of-people-in-wales-would-attend-bystander-to-violence-training-if-offered/>

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