

### **Extract from “Equally Safe” - Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls**

#### **Developing a shared understanding**

It is important that everyone involved has a shared understanding of violence against women and girls: the impact on women and girls who experience it, as well as children and young people who are affected; its causes, the scale of the problem in Scotland, and the risk factors which increase vulnerability to abuse of women and girls. Whilst violence against women and girls occurs across all sections of society, not all women and girls are at equal risk. Some factors can increase vulnerability to abuse and keep women and girls trapped. These include age, looked after status (current and former), financial dependence, experience of child abuse and neglect, poverty, disability, homelessness, insecure immigration status and ethnicity.

#### **Violence against girls and young women**

Equally Safe recognises that, as well as adult women, girls and young women are at risk of violence and abuse precisely because they are female. Some girls are victims of child sexual abuse, including child sexual exploitation. There are a number of specific issues prevalent in the lives of girls and young women; for example, sexting and non-consensual sharing of intimate images (also known as ‘revenge porn’) can also particularly affect young people. Young women disproportionately experience intimate partner violence in relation to young men, and report much greater negative impacts as a result. The prevalence of and easy access to pornography is a constant presence in the lives of young women and men that ultimately contributes to reinforcing the gender norms that play a key role in perpetuating violence against women and girls.

#### **Intersectionality between gender and other characteristics**

Along with their gender, women and girls have other protected characteristics that increases their level of risk of experiencing violence and abuse. Drivers for this are often the continuing prejudice and structural barriers in society which cause inequality. There are challenges in relation to some minority ethnic communities, where traditional gender roles can be stronger and where cultural practices involving violence such as Female Genital Mutilation and forced marriage are more prevalent. Disabled women and girls are more vulnerable to exploitation and coercion, whilst older women may be either caring for, or being cared for by, their abuser. Refugee and asylum seeking women and girls may have experienced particular trauma before or during their journey to Scotland. We are proactive in relation to ending Female Genital Mutilation and forced marriage, and will seek to ensure that issues of intersectionality are reflected in the implementation of Equally Safe. We also recognise that forms of abuse, including abuse perpetrated by adults against children, can take place in situations where there are balances of power that go beyond gender and beyond minority status. These include (but are not limited to) age, physical strength, position of trust and socio-economic status, and addressing violence and abuse in the context of these risk factors will be a key requirement in our future work to prevent violence against women and girls. With all this in mind, equality and child rights analysis and assessment will be an integral part of the process around the development of outcomes and interventions.

## Violence against men

The particular approach we are taking through Equally Safe brings a strategic focus to the issue of men's violence against women and girls, as underpinned by the definition we have adopted, which is in turn based on the principles of international law. A gendered analysis does not exclude men, but rather recognises that women and girls are disproportionately affected by particular forms of violence that they experience because they are women and girls. Many men and boys are victims of violence and abuse. Some boys experience the forms of abuse outlined already in relation to children and young people, whilst some men are victims of domestic abuse, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and forced marriage. The prevailing societal view of what constitutes masculinity makes it difficult for men to identify themselves as experiencing abuse and can prevent them from seeking help. More fundamentally, masculinity and femininity are part of the underlying social construct of gender that contributes to the continuing prevalence of violence against women and girls in society. We condemn all forms of violence and abuse, whilst recognising that particular forms of violence are disproportionately experienced by one gender and require a strong strategic focus. Men have a critical role in challenging violence, breaking down gender norms and in helping to ensure greater gender equality in society – they are also entitled to support when they experience violence and abuse.

## Prioritising prevention

Primary prevention is about preventing violence before it occurs. Our approach focuses on changing behaviour, building the knowledge and skills of individuals, and ultimately delivering a progressive shift in the structural, cultural and societal contexts in which violence occurs. This is complemented by our ambitions in achieving gender equality and eradicating poverty, which will make a critical contribution to ultimately preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls for good. Adopting this approach challenges the notion that violence against women and girls is inevitable and suggest an approach which can contribute to realising our ultimate vision. It aims to change societal attitudes, values and the structures which produce inequality. In particular, it requires a step change in the attitudes which condone and excuse violence against women and girls, which enable perpetrators to deny the reality of what they are doing and place the blame on their victims. It raises fundamental questions about the way our society is currently organised. Although this is a long-term approach, it is not a soft option. By adopting Primary prevention as a core objective in relation to Equally Safe, we recognise that violence against women and girls is not 'caused' by a single factor. Rather it is driven by a complex interaction between a range of underlying or contributing factors, at different levels of influence – individual, relationship, community and societal. This is what we call the 'causal story' of violence against women and girls. In the drive to achieve our long-term aim we are clear about the importance of focusing on primary prevention but we must also be realistic and recognise that women and girls will continue to experience gender based violence in all its forms for some time to come, and children and young people will continue to be affected by violence and the consequences of witnessing and experiencing violence. There are other forms of prevention too, and we will have to employ them all – these include preventing violence from recurring (secondary prevention) and reducing the impact of violence and abuse after it occurs (tertiary prevention). Early intervention and the provision of effective mainstream and specialist services will remain fundamentally important in our future work. The provision of high quality services for those at risk will continue to be important – we must ensure that women and girls are kept safe and that victims and survivors have the support they need to recover. However, we are clear that, by working towards ultimately eradicating the problem altogether we can deliver better outcomes. This is better for the individuals and communities we help keep safe from harm, and for society as women and men enjoy greater equality.

Prioritising primary prevention challenges the notion that violence is inevitable or acceptable. It demands a fundamental change in the societal attitudes, values and structures that give rise to and sustain the problem. It is the most ambitious approach we can take, demanding a determined effort over the long term. It may take some years for this approach to deliver noticeable benefits at a time when public resources are reducing and demand for measurable results is heightened – but prioritising primary prevention is the right approach if we are to achieve our aim of a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals, regardless of gender, live Equally Safe.

### Vision

A strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected, and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it
--

### Aim of Equally Safe

To work collaboratively with key partners in the public, private and third sectors to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls
---

### Priorities

Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls	Women and girls thrive as equal citizens – socially, culturally, economically and politically	Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people	Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls, and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response
--	---	--	--

### Objectives

Positive gender roles are promoted	Women and girls are safe, respected and equal in our communities
People enjoy healthy, positive relationships and children develop an understanding of safe, healthy, and positive relationships from an early age	Individuals and communities recognise and challenge violent and abusive behaviour
Women and men have equal access to power and resources	Justice responses are robust, swift, consistent and coordinated
Women, children and young people access relevant, effective and integrated services	Men who carry out violence against women and girls are identified early and held to account by the justice system
Service providers competently identify violence against women and girls, and respond effectively to women, children and young people affected	Men who carry out violence against women and girls change their behaviour, and are supported to do so
Women, children and young people's voices are heard and their rights respected	

### National Outcomes

We live our lives free from crime, disorder and danger	We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society	We have strong resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others	Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed
We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk	Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to people's needs	We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people	We live longer healthier lives

