



Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) / Rapid Read

DEFINITION

Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines violence against women as:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

'Gender-based violence and abuse' is an umbrella term for harm perpetrated against a person's will and based on power inequalities based on gender roles. Violence against women is an expression of power inequalities between women and men.

WHAT FORMS DOES VAWG TAKE?

Violence against women and girls can take many varying forms, and is not confined to physical or sexual violence. It can include:

- domestic abuse and violence
- coercive and controlling behaviour
- sexual violence, abuse and exploitation
- sexual harassment and bullying
- stalking
- 'honour-based abuse and violence'
- forced marriage, female genital mutilation and virginity testing
- modern slavery and human trafficking
- gendered gang violence (the exploitation of girls in gangs)

DOMESTIC ABUSE ACT

The Domestic Abuse Act became law on 29 April 2021, and provides the first ever cross-Government statutory definition of Domestic Abuse. Amongst other features, it will recognise children as victims in their own right, if they have witnessed such abuse, put in place new protections for victims and survivors, and create a much more powerful response to perpetrators.

The Act creates new offences, such as non-fatal strangulation, and extends the definition of others, including controlling and coercive behaviour, and so-called 'revenge porn'. It also places new duties and responsibilities on local authorities, the justice system, and healthcare, in their treatment of domestic abuse victims.

In addition, the Act strengthens measures to tackle perpetrators. For example, it will prohibit them from cross-examining their victims in court, and invalidate a defence of consent where a victim has been seriously injured or harmed. It also introduces a statutory duty on the Secretary of State to publish a domestic abuse perpetrator strategy.

VAWG STRATEGY

The Government's Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy has been shaped by a Home Office call for evidence, which received over 180,000 responses.

The Strategy recognises the need for a greatly increase effort to reduce the of prevalence of VAGW, and improve support for victims and survivors. It is made up of the following four 'pillars':

- prioritising prevention
- supporting victims
- pursuing perpetrators
- delivering a stronger system

It is recognised that the successful implementation of the Strategy will require close co-operation between government departments, devolved administrations, policing and the wider criminal justice system, and health and social care agencies, as well as the private sector, voluntary organisations, community groups and the general public.

The VAWG Strategy document was published in July 2021.

WHAT DOES THE STRATEGY MEAN FOR THE NHS?

Under the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSC) will work in partnership with NHSE/I to develop guidance to promote an evidence-based approach to VAWG through the Integrated Case Systems (ICSs) created by the new Health and Care Bill.

The DHSC's new Office for Health (OHID) will work with NHSE/I to improve workforce policies to ensure that safe and effective processes are in place to support staff affected by VAWG.



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