

VAWG Strategy Commentary: Evidence Highlights and Broad Directions for Action

The UK VAWG Strategy and action plan *Freedom from Violence and Abuse: A Cross-government Strategy to Build a Safer Society for Women and Girls* was published in December 2025 by the Home Office. The strategy represents the government's renewed and long-term commitment to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) through a 'transformational' approach that: a) prioritises prevention and tackling the root causes of VAWG, b) relentlessly pursues perpetrators, and c) supports victims and survivors of violence and abuse.

In the current brief, we highlight evidence that responds to the thematic areas and priorities identified in the Strategy. The studies highlighted were featured as part of IDVRM's series for impact 'Evidence Bits' and were conducted by organisations that we have in our network, members of our Team of Experts or our team in previous years. Some of the evidence is international and some UK-specific in line with IDVRM's commitment to foster transboundary knowledge exchange and learning in VAWG responses, acknowledging increased mobilities in the world, the diverse demographic of the UK and the complex nature of violence and abuse, intersecting with conflict, displacement and migration.

These highlights are intended as early directions and points of caution to guide the Strategy's implementation, which we propose should be based a thorough scoping of the existing evidence and be fully attuned to the lived experience of diverse communities affected by VAWG.

You are invited to subscribe to our [Newsletter](#) to become part of our community, access new evidence and share experience.

If you are interested in exploring new research collaborations or seek advisory services, contact our Executive Director, Dr Romina Istratii, at romina.istratii@idvrm.org

If you'd like to join our network of partners, contact us at idvrm.info@gmail.com

ON ONLINE ABUSE



Evidence produced by Dr Gulbakhor Makhkamova and Victoria Fletcher at the Women's Refuge 'Gulrukhsor' in Tajikistan found that technology-facilitated GBV (TFGBV) is not a separate phenomenon, but is deeply intertwined with offline gender-based violence (GBV) and patriarchal norms, serving to reinforce, magnify and extend threats into the digital realm. In the context of Tajikistan, TFGBV included hate speech, defamation, doxing (sharing private/personal information), sexualised insults, threats of violence or "moral punishment," and was often motivated by control over women's behaviour or reputation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Responses to online violence should consider the specific contexts of groups targeted by such interventions. They must be based on a thorough understanding of the societal, cultural, normative, religious or other societal factors that influence experiences of GBV and how specific forms of GBV intersect with gender standards, ideals of masculinity/femininity and other aspects of life in a specific population.

RESOURCES

Read the Evidence Bits summary: <https://idvrm.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/IDVRM-Evidence-Bits-December.pdf>

Read the original study: <https://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/i-am-drowning-under-weight-hatred-scope-and-nature-tfgbv-tajikistan>

ON SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS



A study Dr Emily Setty at the University of Surrey that explored teenage boys' perspectives on sexual consent through qualitative research conducted in three English schools and a follow-up workshop found limitations in risk-based, procedural consent education, which boys can experience as accusatory or reductive. Participants described consent as emotionally complex and shaped by peer cultures, reputational anxieties and conflicting gender norms. While some echoed widely circulated narratives, such as fears of false accusations, these were often expressed with ambivalence and used to navigate uncertainty and vulnerability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interventions engaging schoolboys that aim to promote awareness around consent, intimacy and healthy romantic relationships should be based on pedagogical principles that foster self-awareness, critical reflection and ethical decision-making. Schoolboys should not be told 'what to think', but shown 'how to think' so that they build confidence and cognitive-emotive skills to navigate different situations not by blueprint approaches but by cultivating reasoning grounded in critical thinking, strong ethics and a deep understanding of appropriate behaviour.

RESOURCES

Read the Evidence Bits summary: https://idvrm.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/IDVRM_Evidence_Bits_11.pdf

Read the original study: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09540253.2025.2568415>

ON VAWG AND HOMELESSNESS



Evidence gained after five years of continued work of the Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) initiative funded by Trust for London and run by the Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA) showed that safe, stable housing is central to recovery from abuse. Survivors' testimonies show how unsafe or unsuitable housing—from collapsing ceilings to rodent infestations—can retraumatise women and children. Healing cannot occur in spaces of neglect. For migrant women, immigration status often determines whether they can be safe. Those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) or pre-settled status are locked out of public housing and benefits. Abusers exploit this dependency, while councils frequently misunderstand or misapply immigration law.

RECOMMENDATIONS

VAWG responses should recognise safe, stable and good-quality housing as a core element of recovery from abuse, not a secondary or crisis-only intervention, ensuring survivors are not retraumatised by unsafe or unsuitable living conditions. Housing provision within VAWG frameworks should prioritise long-term, secure accommodation with enforceable quality standards, alongside clear move-on pathways from temporary placements. Responses should consider the needs and conditions of migrant women, integrating specialist immigration-informed housing support, addressing insecure status and preventing the misapplication of immigration law.

RESOURCES

Read the Evidence Bits summary: <https://idvrm.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Evidence-Bits-8-October.pdf>

Read the original study: <https://lawadv.org.uk/research-and-policy/>

ON COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT



Research conducted by our team with ethnic minority faith communities in the UK, including Christian and Muslim Ethiopian, Eritrean and Bangladeshi participants, showed that religious and cultural norms play a critical but complex role in shaping how domestic violence is understood and addressed in UK ethnic minority and migrant communities. While faith and cultural institutions are often the first point of help, they remain largely unprepared to respond effectively—yet they could be key partners in solutions if appropriately integrated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study demonstrates the importance of integrating religious parameters in providing culturally resonant domestic violence and abuse (DVA) services. The findings pointed to the limited preparedness of most clerics, regardless of faith tradition, to respond effectively to DVA, and the need to raise greater awareness about DVA within religious institutions and communities. Such work requires broad community engagement to address the gendered and patriarchal foundations of norms surrounding marriage and family. Recognising the intersections between religious traditions and individual interpretations could help identify effective strategies for improving DVA responses.

RESOURCES

Read the Evidence Bits summary: <https://idvrm.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Evidence-Bit-01.pdf>

Read the original research: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/26330024251391813?int.sj-full-text.similar-articles.1>

ON ENGAGING THE 'BY AND FOR' SECTOR



Evidence summarised in the Project dldl/ጅልጅል 2024 Annual Conference report “Domestic Violence, Religion, and Migration: Integrating Cultural and Religious Diversity in UK Domestic Violence and Abuse Services and Developing a Future Roadmap for the Sector” showed that many generalist services lack cultural and religious competence to cater to the diverse needs of ethnic minority faith communities, stressing the need for religious mediators and faith-based resources to be integrated in responses against DVA. ‘By and for’ organisations are well-placed to provide such services, but are often marginalised due to structural and funding inequalities, resource constraint and racial bias in VAWG services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

VAWG responses should work with community-based social workers and ‘by and for’ providers. They should aim to integrate cultural and religious leaders and mediators to ensure cultural and religious sensitivity and inclusion in DVA services leverage faith-based resources productively to respond to gender inequalities and abuses, and incorporate spiritual understandings of trauma and healing.

RESOURCES

Read the Evidence Bits summary: <https://idvrm.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Evidence-Bits-03.pdf>

Read the original report: https://projectdldl.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Conference-Brief_Roadmap-for-DVA-sector.pdf

ON VAWG IN THE ARMED FORCES



A literature review led by Dr Romina Istratii in the context of Project dIdl/ድልድል that explored how conflict-related violence influences levels of domestic and intimate partner violence and the mechanisms connecting the two found that GBV can be exacerbated as a result of conflict through numerous mechanisms that include: war trauma affecting civilians, the behaviour of ex-combatants, disrupted support systems, community stigma and shifts in cultural and religious norms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The reviewed studies suggested that standard treatment programmes for domestic violence perpetrators may be ineffective for military populations if they do not take into account and address war trauma. Moreover, there may be need for pre-deployment and post-deployment specific programmes to support service personnel with stage-specific stressors and prevent relationship problems that can foster domestic violence. Interventions on VAWG in the armed forces should integrate both preventative measures that anticipate war trauma and psychosocial services that address its management and soldiers' reintegration in society.

RESOURCES

Read the Evidence Bits summary: <https://idvrm.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Evidence-Bits-June.pdf>

Read the original study: https://projectdIdl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Working-paper-2_Project-dIdl-1.pdf

Leveraging Existing Evidence

The VAWG Strategy suggests in numerous instances the need for curating research to achieve evidence-based responses. As this brief helps to illustrate, there is extensive evidence already produced that is robust and relevant and that can inform the VAWG Strategy's implementation. Below we make several recommendations in relation to research and evidence collection.

Recommendation 1

Identify current research specialists in the relevant areas and create an internal library of available evidence to tap in *ab initio*. Put together a committee to identify evidence gaps where these exist to avoid duplication of research and rather focus on evidence synthesis, communication and uptake. The scoping of evidence should be international and not limited to the UK, but should include evidence on VAWG from countries represented in the UK's demographic.

Recommendation 2

Involve researchers from higher education institutions, research institutes, non-profit and charity organisations where research is conducted to ensure that the evidence consulted is diverse and is not dominated, framed or conducted by the 'usual suspects' who may be disconnected from the realities of VAWG survivors and communities.

Recommendation 3

Engage 'by and for' organisations and community-based researchers in research and evidence collection to overcome epistemic biases and to acknowledge and integrate evidence based on lived experience that such organisations hold, which is often missing from or underreported in formal academic literature.