



PREVENTION ON THE SCHOOLS' AGENDA

SUMMARY REPORT OF KEY LEARNING

Working with secondary schools in England to prevent violence against women and girls

I think schools are crucial, in creating an ethos where violence isn't tolerated

(Lead teacher in one of the participating schools).



Comic Relief funded six grassroots expert organisations to develop a series of whole-school approaches that sought to prevent violence against women and girls. This summary report documents the key learning points from this prevention programme and makes suggestions for the development of good practice in England. The report aims to support policy makers and practitioners to appreciate more fully 'what works' in prevention education and to further understand how to create a world where women and girls are free from violence or the fear of violence.

This report is a summary of the broader final report that can be found at www.preventionplatform.org.uk

Comic Relief and AVA

In order to ensure wider learning was gained from the prevention programme, Comic Relief asked each organisation to evaluate their individual programme of work, as well as recruiting a research team to support the development of, and assess the impact of the collective initiatives. Thus, the funded organisations were encouraged to appoint a research team or a consultant to support them in evaluating their specific programme. Comic Relief also appointed AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) to support these individual evaluation processes, organise regular networking meetings for all six organisations to share good practice as well as capture key lessons learned across the prevention programme.

Details of the six expert organisations can be found in the appendices.

Each of the six organisations worked with schools in their local area to create change within school policies, with staff and young people (and where possible parents) to start to achieve the following objectives:

AWARENESS: To increase knowledge of violence against women and girls, including a shared understanding across the school of the experiences of girls and young women

ATTITUDES: To start to change attitudes that normalise and condone violence against women and girls.

ACTIONS: To develop the skills of young people and staff to build respectful relationships and start to challenge violence against women and girls

Key factors necessary to ensure the Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) agenda is embedded in the work of schools

Several key factors were identified as being key to the process of embedding the VAWG agenda within the work of schools. The data discussed comes from an analysis of the six evaluation reports that tracked the organisations' delivery of work in schools. The projects all worked directly with young people and school staff to engage them in talking, thinking and learning about violence against women and girls. These findings demonstrate how VAWG prevention work in schools can change the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of school staff and young people.

The first aspect of all the organisations work was to engage young people in activities to increase their knowledge, start to challenge their attitudes and change their behaviours to stop violence against women and girls. While there are some indications of attitudes shifting slightly and their own actions and those of others being challenged, it must be emphasized that, at least for the length of intervention and period of time the projects were evaluated, the strongest shift was in levels of awareness. Attitudes and actions driving violence against women and girls are more culturally engrained and therefore take longer to change.

A second fundamental aspect of all organisations' work on the programme was to train up and support staff in participating schools. While provision of training to staff was more challenging to organise, important steps were made in ensuring that staff teams become more aware of the need and more confident about leading change through schools in relation to work on violence against women and girls. As with young people, a key first step was to raise awareness among staff of the issues.

A third aspect was to raise the issue within the curriculum and policies of the school and to start to make a cultural change. This will take additional time and resources to evaluate, as things were only beginning to be embedded within the schools.

Engaging Young People

The projects used a diverse range of methods to engage young people with the issues. These included: Group discussions, drama based activities, posters, single and mixed sex classes, assemblies, social media campaigns and events. These methods were able to raise awareness and knowledge of abusive and unhealthy behaviours and how to access support. The methods for facilitating learning to which young people appeared more receptive appear to be through drama, testimonies, case studies, facts and statistics. Although PSHE was a key subject to deliver the work in it can be achieved through a range of curriculum subjects including, Drama, PE, Geography, and Maths.

Dedicated lessons and activities created opportunities and safe spaces for young people to discuss issues they needed guidance and support on. For instance sexual consent was an issue that, across all the projects, young people struggled with and needed space to understand. A focus on characteristics of unhealthy and disrespectful relationships was also found to be a useful approach to engaging young people in discussions. This was seen as relevant to the young person, leading them have a stronger understanding of abuse and relationships.

Specifically a focus on (un)healthy relationships and where to turn for support both in and out of school, and discussions on how individuals could challenge VAWG attitudes and behaviours were identified as good foci for the work.

The evaluations demonstrated some indications of change in young people's knowledge, attitudes and own behaviours. The strongest shift was in levels of knowledge as attitudes and behaviours driving violence against women and girls are more culturally engrained and therefore take longer to change. One organisation noted a 19% increase in knowledge of how to recognise signs of an unhealthy relationship after an intervention.

Before, I thought that domestic violence was 'out there' – something unfortunate that happens to a few couples. But I realize now how common it is. It is imprinted on my mind now. The early warning signs were a new thought to me. (young person)

Another sign of impact was a shift in young people across all participating programmes from responding 'unsure' to particular attitudinal and knowledge statements to a firmer 'yes' or 'no' in response to the same questions one year on. For instance, one project found an average of a 15-20% change to challenging particular attitudes.

The students have definitely sat up and thought more... You can see them really engaged in what is appropriate behaviours in relationships, really thinking about what they're doing and then the penny drops and their peers start to challenge views – it's amazing. (PSHE school lead)

The majority of young people, however, remained concerned about what might happen once they disclosed or mentioned any concerns they might have. Linked to concerns about disclosure, was a lack of awareness that many of their experiences were in fact abusive and a lack of vocabulary to talk about them. Thus raising awareness and developing student's confidence and eloquence in discussing such experiences will increase schools' abilities to stop significant harm when it occurs and start to be part of the process of prevention.

Young people's participation was also found to be a useful way to facilitate learning, by both the young people and the staff. The work of the various peer educators, ambassadors or Youth Involvement Team roles developed by the projects were another way in which young people began speak out to others about their experiences and challenge attitudes and behaviours.

Where young people were encouraged to 'take action' and push for change, they were more likely to demand that staff engage with the programme of work, as well as challenge attitudes and behaviours within their own peer groups.

The [youth involvement] group have been active in being part of changing our bullying policy and this has had a massive impact on the school, the students feel strongly about something and they make it happen and we have to

listen. This is a new cultural shift as we learn more about young people's involvement and leadership' (PSHE lead in a participating school)

Engaging School Staff

Although many teachers had some awareness of the range of issues related to violence against women and girls affecting their school communities; participating in training and being involved in the project led to a deeper understanding of the issues, especially around how violence against women and girls impacted at all levels of a young women's life.

For instance, in one project, 76% of teachers said that being part of the initiatives in their schools had taught them something that they did not know beforehand. Furthermore, 74% of teachers said they had noticed more unhealthy relationships across the school than beforehand.

[The training for our staff] has significantly raised awareness in groups of staff ... there is a belief that we need to do something about this. That it's such an important issue for young women and we need to make sure everyone in the school gets to know more (teacher in participating school).

Crucially, school staff interviewed in many of the schools seemed to have shifted the way they viewed the issue from understanding it as an individual child protection issue to appreciating how it affected the whole-person and the broader society. The engagement with the broader staff team was also crucial to tackle resistance to the need for the programme and the lack of awareness of the extent of the problem of violence against women and girls and the impact it can have on the school community. It was also found to be most beneficial to provide training across the whole staff team, but with dedicated specialist training for staff with a focused child protection responsibility.

The first event we did there were quite a lot of staff going, 'Oh what are we doing this for, this is a bit...', and I think over the two-years I think [the programme] has had an impact and I think it has become much more high profile and I think staff are seeing that it's actually quite an important thing to be doing with a student ... (teacher).

Staff started to take actions to challenge gender stereotypes, promote gender equality and respectful communication between sexes. In one London school a teacher reported that the staff had developed a strong understanding of their protective role particularly through advocating for the needs of a sexually exploited young woman to be met by social services. This had further increased the safety of the young women in the school.

An improved understanding of violence against women and girls among staff teams also began to be reflected in the broader actions that staff took within the participating schools. Some teachers reported that they now looked beyond the delivery of lessons to find way ways of facilitating more respectful group dynamics more broadly across the school. For example, a young man was removed from being head boy after he made a sexist comment.

Staff also appreciated having external experts available to work alongside them in delivering sessions initially in order to develop their confidence, to provide them with accessible resources, but also crucially, to encourage and support them in making VAWG prevention a priority for the school and maintaining the momentum for this. However, these very positive outcomes do need to be viewed in light of the fact that whole school staff training rarely occurred and even the extent to which smaller groups of staff could be involved in more in-depth training was limited. What appeared to have most impact was where teaching staff worked alongside project workers in the classroom – thereby deepening their knowledge of the issues, observing the facilitation skills of the project lead, accessing new activities and resources and modelling how the external project workers dealt with challenging questions and group interactions on the issues explored.

Curriculum and Policy

A comprehensive and strategic programme of delivery is necessary to embed and enhance the prevention of violence against women and girls across the school. The six organisation leads all attempted to develop a whole-school approach that worked with young people, staff, and across the institution. Different opportunities were used to develop the learning of young people and raise awareness of violence against women and girls across the schools. Where a focus on VAWG was incorporated into relevant policies across the school, broader school changes were noted. Most schools did not mention sexual bullying or other forms of VAWG in their policies prior to the interventions, and there was acknowledgement that the policies might not be as well-known about or as well implemented as they could be. Some respondents commented that Ofsted appeared concerned with seeing how policies were being actioned, so some schools were motivated to enact policy changes as well or use policy documents to capture changes in practices and culture within the school

Good school development, I believe, comes from sustained drip-feed education in the area or areas of the curriculum. It reaches every child and has a progression to it (champion teacher in one of the participating schools).

Across the programmes two key elements of success have been identified as creating a sustained drip-feed effect for the work. These were:

- The embedding of work within curriculum areas, which will be repeated year-on-year; and
- Actively demonstrating the priority of prevention work across the school.

Projects that did take the whole-school approach, moving beyond classroom delivery, managed to raise the profile of the prevention work by backing up the messages received during classroom work, with posters, campaigns and reiterating key points via Assemblies. This was also more likely to ensure clear and consistent messages were given to young people in relation to challenging incidences of violence against women and girls.

Understanding a whole school approach

The prevention programme built upon research by the Institute of Education and WOMANKIND Worldwide that explored how schools developed and began to deliver a whole-school approach to promote equality and challenge violence. This research was used as a baseline framework for the grassroots organisations to build upon and which the researchers then expanded on to create a new up to date model.

Via an analysis of the evaluation of the six projects and discussions during networking meetings, this report offers a new model of a whole-school approach to end violence against women and girls. This is based on the identification of minimum standards of delivery drawn up by the organisation leads. Whole-school approaches seek to strategically connect the key components of the school, which will increase the likelihood of prevention becoming embedded across the institution. A whole-school approach can be understood as working across the school community – with students, school staff, parents and the wider community, as well as integrating a focus on violence against women and girls within the following components of a school:

Figure 1 – A New Model of the Whole School Approach:



Figure two below provides an overview of the actions relating to each of these key components. It is developed from an analysis of key activities that the grass roots organisations delivered and is designed to help practitioners and policy makers to further understand how to implement a whole-school approach to stop violence against women and girls.

Figure 2 – A Whole School Approach to the Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls

Component	Action area	Actions
LEARNING:	Learning across the curriculum areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promoting gender equality and challenging stereotypes ○ Increase understanding of violence against women and girls ○ Building respectful relationships
	Staff development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specialist child protection training ○ Increase understanding of violence against women and girls ○ Facilitation training
	Learning what works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Evaluating the prevention approach ○ Reviewing the process and identifying promising practice to share
SAFEGUARDING:	Responding to disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Relevant child protection policy & procedures ○ Trained child protection lead ○ Aware staff to respond, refer, report
	Safe & Supportive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create safe & supportive spaces

	sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agree ground rules ○ Inform all participants of the lesson content
	Referring to local services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partnerships with support services ○ Following appropriate referral routes, including information sharing when necessary
CAMPAIGNING:	Raising awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Events – assemblies and campaign stunts ○ Informing others - leaflets and posters
	Engaging the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Running campaign events with parents or partners ○ Joining community campaigns
	Global movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Linking to global feminism and relevant issues
PARTICIPATING:	Children & young people as researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop research skills for young people ○ Develop tools such as the safe & equal gauge for young people to use and measure concerns and identify solutions
	Children & young people facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children & young people deliver training to staff and sharing findings of research ○ Children and young people deliver lessons, mentor and support peers ○ Lead campaigns
	Staff champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Key member of staff as a champion and co-ordinator for the work ○ Development of a working group to support and promote the whole school approach
INSTITUTIONALISING:	Cultural change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Modelling respectful relationships (staff and young people) ○ Promotion of gender equality
	Policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sexual bullying and harassment policy ○ Gender Equality action plan ○ Child protection policy with specific reference to VAWG ○ VAWG Strategy & Action Plan
	Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Governor engagement ○ Senior management leadership
LOCALISING:	Local context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Understanding and working with the local context ○ Identifying specific cases of VAWG
	Risk assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Completing a risk assessment ○ Developing safety plans ○ Deciding how to safely deliver a curriculum

	Local partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mapping local services ○ Identifying allies and resistance within local community ○ Building partners with local organisations & experts
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Emerging findings:

The evaluation reports from each organisation, together with the focus group data and staff interviews collected have shown that in all schools same changes have begun – from raising awareness of the issue, to instigating a sense of outrage and unfairness at the reality of violence against women and girls, to intermittent peer- and staff challenges of attitudes and behaviours related to VAWG and an interest in creating environments where more respectful, equal relationships were commonplace, as well as building a legacy within the school of on-going, embedded, cumulative programmes of work to challenge this issue.

Although more resources are needed to fund a longer-term programme seeking to embed a whole-school approach to violence against women and girls work, with accompanying research to follow what long-term outcomes can be achieved through such a focus – the emerging findings from this important and innovative prevention programme indicates the value and impact this work has on young people and school staff.

‘...the project has sort of saturated every element of the school, it’s not been one awareness raising activity then there’s been a spike in disclosures. But with it being steadily, adopted into different subjects and at different times... it’s pervaded the atmosphere of what’s happening here. so we have had at risk students, who have disclosed things that have happened to their friends, to their cousins in the past, picking up on historical issues, often anecdotally and they wouldn’t have done that, had that ability to open up about those situations had it not been for the project.’
(senior manager at a participating school)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Ensure that learning about and preventing Violence Against Women and Girls is within the education curriculum. Developing an age appropriate rolling curriculum from the early years to adult education. Focus on the following learning outcomes for children and young people:
 - a. **AWARENESS:** To increase knowledge of violence against women and girls, including a shared understanding across the school of the experiences of girls and young women
 - b. **ATTITUDES:** To start to change attitudes that normalise and condone violence against women and girls.
 - c. **ACTIONS:** To develop the skills of young people and staff to build respectful relationships and start to challenge violence against women and girls
2. Deliver a training programme to education staff so that they can keep children and young people safe from harm and deliver a prevention programme. Training programmes should have the following elements:
 - a. All school staff to be given basic awareness raising training to increase their knowledge of violence against women and girls, including how to spot warning signs and respond, refer and report disclosures.
 - b. Child protection leads to be given specialist training on supporting children and young people who experience all forms of violence against women and girls.
 - c. Local experts to co-facilitate lessons and activities with school staff to develop their facilitation skills and knowledge of the prevention of violence against women and girls.
3. Schools to have a dedicated violence against women and girls lead, this can be:
 - a. The child protection lead with specialist knowledge on supporting children and young people and keeping them safe from harm.
 - b. The PSHE lead who champions the prevention of violence against women and girls across the school.
4. Schools to have relevant policies and procedures that include Violence Against Women and Girls. This should be within the schools:
 - a. The child protection policy to define all forms of VAWG and include procedures for responding, referring and reporting disclosure.
 - b. The anti-bullying policy to define sexual bullying and how to challenge and respond to incidents within the school. This to include recording and reporting data.
 - c. A school strategy and action plan on VAWG.
5. OfSTED & Estyn to monitor the implementation of a prevention programme within schools across England and Wales, including checking for relevant policies and procedures and assessing the development of a whole-school approach.
6. National & Local Government to fund expert VAWG organisations to work in partnership with local schools to develop and deliver prevention programmes and support children and young people.

Appendices

1. The Six Expert Grassroots Projects

Nottingham Domestic Violence Project (NDVP)

NDVP led the development of VAWG work across Nottinghamshire. For the project they worked with two schools in Nottingham on a building blocks approach. Initiatives ranged from developing campaigns (for which one school won a White Ribbon Campaign award), one-off inputs via assemblies and smaller group work, a focus healthy relationships and domestic violence for a project with a Year group, as well as a series of lessons as part of the geography curriculum. Different groups of pupils were involved in one or more of these initiatives, and NDVP sought to evaluate whether participating in several initiatives appeared to embed learning further and have a greater impact on knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

Off the Record (OTR)

This West Country organisation (OTR) developed work around a Youth Involvement Model which focused on involving young people (through a Youth Involvement Group) in reviewing and developing teaching resources for Years 8,9 and 10 and identifying specific areas of school life that they could improve in order to increase awareness and skills in healthy relationships. The work's overall aim was to empower young people to work in partnership with school staff to develop a sustainable whole school approaches to VAWG and the promotion of gender equality. OTR worked with two mainstream schools and one special school.

Respond

Respond works with children and adults with learning disabilities who have experienced abuse or trauma, as well as those who have abused others, through psychotherapy, advocacy, campaigning and other support. They developed a programme of prevention and awareness-raising workshops for groups of young people with learning disabilities, educational staff and their parents in two special schools using a specifically-developed, innovative prevention and creative arts group work model.

Southall Black Sisters

SBS works to meet the needs of black (Asian and African-Caribbean) and minority ethnic women who have experienced abuse, focusing in particular on London. The aim of the project was to create long-term attitudinal and behavioural change among young people through challenging social, religious and cultural values and practices which justify violence against Black and Minority Ethnic Women. They focused their programme of work in two schools in one London borough where the school population was at least 98% BME and developed PSHE sessions, special workshop on misogyny in music videos as well as developing a peer mentoring/campaigning group.

Tender

Tender are a national organisation working on delivering VAWG prevention directly in schools as well as training practitioners to do this through using drama. For this project they worked in eight London secondary schools, explicitly taking a whole school approach. The aim was to embed violence prevention in the curriculum and in school policies, as well as providing staff and young people with the knowledge and confidence to tackle gender-based violence and promote healthy relationships. The main focus of the work was engaging young people through drama to create their own pieces about VAWG – either as part of their Drama GCSE course and/or to perform to the entire school. They also delivered some training to teachers and developed a Young Ambassador's programme (peer campaigning group).

Victim Support Cornwall (the SAFE Project)

Victim Support Cornwall have a long history of domestic violence prevention and healthy relationships

awareness-raising work across Cornwall. For the duration of this project they spent more concentrated time working in two of their local secondary schools. The project was delivered in one-hour lessons over a term. In the first year of the project, lessons were delivered to Year 7, 9 and 10 classes. In the second year of the project another set of sessions were run for the same classes in an attempt to further embed and expand the learning.

2. Defining Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

International definition of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

The internationally-agreed definition, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, defines violence against women and girls 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 [or girls], including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life¹.

Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- a) *Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, nonspousal violence and violence related to exploitation;*
- b) *Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;*
- c) *Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.*

Girls and young women under the age of 18 years are further subject to violence when they suffer the 'neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation'.

A national understanding of violence against women and girls

Such an internationally agreed definition is important to bear in mind, but through this report we would like to offer a more school-specific, UK-centric understanding, to help schools and third sector organisations work with an understanding that most closely fits with research in UK schools, and facilitates the prioritisation of the key aspects of violence against women and girls they might like to initially focus on.

It [experiences of violence against women and girls] robs them of their self-worth, of their self-esteem, of their confidence. It can damage current relationships, future relationships, sort of trust, all the sort of, things that we look to instil in our young people (senior leadership team member).

¹ Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, Article 1, 1993

