



SUMMARY

PARTICIPATING IN EQUALLY SAFE IN
THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS:
CONSULTING WOMEN

Scottish Women's Aid May 2019

1. BACKGROUND

In 2017 Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) and Rape Crisis Scotland (RCS) were commissioned by the Scottish Government to consult with women who had experienced violence against women (VAW) about being involved in the work of Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to end violence against women and girls.¹

SWA and RCS conducted the consultation in two phases. In phase one (2017) RCS consulted with 112 women in Glasgow through events and by phone. The report of this phase has been submitted to the Scottish Government.

SWA conducted phase two during 2018/19, consulting with 188 women in the Highlands and Islands. We asked them about the Equally Safe Delivery Plan² priorities and how they might contribute to these. We also asked them about their participation in eradicating VAW: whether they wanted to, would be able to, and what would help them contribute, locally and/or nationally.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/>

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-delivery-plan-scotlands-strategy-prevent-violence-against-women/>

2. CONTEXT

This consultation was undertaken to support the meaningful, effective and sustained participation of women, children and young people who have experienced VAW.

The Equally Safe Delivery Plan has four priority areas for action:

- 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

Within these priorities, a key objective is ***"women, children and young people's voices are heard and their rights respected"***.

The Equally Safe strategy approach includes ***"the development of meaningful, effective and sustained participation of women, children and young people across all aspects of Equally Safe"***.

3. METHODOLOGY

SWA use a mixed-methods approach to consulting with women who had experienced VAW and who were living in the Highlands and Islands. This involved:

- Four consultation events with current or former service users of Women's Aid and/or Rape Crisis in Fort William, Inverness, Kirkwall and Helmsdale (25 women)
- Anonymous online survey (158 women)
- One event with five young women involved in Stand Up! – a participation project for young people facilitated by Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland (RASASH)

In total, we consulted with 188 women who had experienced VAW. We have demographic details for two-thirds of participants (66%). This indicates that they were aged between 13 and 65+; and that they lived in Highland (69); Orkney (19); Shetland (11); Western Isles (8); and other (9). A more detailed breakdown of the demographic of participants is included in the full report.



4. FINDINGS

Views of Equally Safe Delivery Plan priorities

In the context of the four Delivery Plan priorities, women suggested what needed to change in their local areas; how this could be achieved; and where contributing their knowledge and experience would make the most impact:

- They saw local attitudes to VAW and the infrastructure of the Highlands and Islands as significant areas for change
- They thought that that schools, the media, and agencies (such as Women's Aid and Rape Crisis) were important for changing local attitudes; also that they themselves could actively contribute in these areas
- They highlighted the negative effect of poor transport, poor internet/mobile connections, and Universal Credit on their lives generally, and on their experience of violence, abuse and harassment
- They thought that the Scottish Government needed to pay more attention to the experiences of women who live in rural and remote areas

Women are keen to participate on a local level with the Equally Safe Delivery Plan, but social and practical barriers often make this difficult, dangerous or impossible.

VIEWS OF PARTICIPATION

- Most women said that it was important for women and girls who have experienced VAW to be involved in the Scottish Government's work to eradicate it. Although most women consulted had not

previously been involved in local activities related to ending VAW, the majority consulted would like to be

- In order for women to attend events, or to find out about participation activity, the support of specialist women's services is vital. Many would not have attended our consultation events without this
- Participation is affected by lack of infrastructure, negative public attitudes, the impact of VAW on health, wellbeing, confidence, fear, finances, not knowing about services, and the lack of these
- Women want to participate in ways which value their experience of VAW (for example training and education), rather than sharing stories about their experiences
- Safety (both physical and emotional) was a prime consideration for any method of participation, particularly when sharing personal information

Women want to take part in actions to end VAW, either individually or as part of a group, because of the benefits to themselves and others. Reasons that women gave for wanting to participate included:

- They think that taking part in actions to end VAW could make them feel stronger, boost confidence and give them agency
- They think that taking part in actions to end VAW could enable them to come to terms with their own experiences
- They think that, by helping others, what they have gone through has not been in vain
- They think that their contribution could bring about social and political change

HOW WOMEN WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE

The consultation highlights the importance of ensuring a variety of participation opportunities and methods. More than two-thirds of survey respondents would prefer to take part within a support organisation such as Women's Aid or Rape Crisis. From the online survey, women would most like to participate by sharing their knowledge and experience to help train public service staff and volunteering their time for a local organisation working to end VAW. They also rated various other activities highly such as visiting schools to help educate young people or teachers, and sharing views and informing decisions about laws and policy at national level to the government or national organisations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

SWA's consultation demonstrates the unique and significant contribution that women who have experienced abuse make, and why it is essential that they are given the chance to contribute in a meaningful way. Women suggested what could be improved, and what could be done to eradicate violence against women in their areas.

The barriers which women face in accessing services and getting justice are the same ones which prevent them from participating in their local communities. The inequalities and attitudes which increase women's vulnerability to abuse are the same ones that inhibit their participation. The specific constraints associated with living in remote, rural and island areas add an extra layer of difficulty.

The report concludes that various elements are vital for overcoming the barriers to women's participation including:

- The context: tackling the attitudes and inequalities which prevent women from participating in the first place
- Supporting the intermediaries such as Women's Aid and Rape Crisis who encourage women's participation but who are already stretched
- Improving infrastructure limitations such as broadband, mobile and transport systems
- Designing participation around what women need, want and expect if they are to be meaningfully involved

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

ENSURING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

1. It is not clear to what extent the Delivery Plan was designed with women's participation in mind. Forward planning is essential for meaningful participation, and facilitating meaningful participation should be part of any future planning relevant to Equally Safe.
2. The Scottish Government and ES partners should review what is meant by its statement: "the development of meaningful, effective and sustained participation of women, children and young people across all aspects of Equally Safe" taking account of:
 - The associated resource implications
 - The need for a range of approaches to engage women in participation
 - The need to ensure equal participation in areas such as the Highlands and Islands given the geography and (lack of) infrastructure

REDUCING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

3. The Scottish Government and ES partners should improve the infrastructural issues that impede women's participation in the Highlands and Islands, with particular consideration to mobile and internet access, childcare and transport.
4. The Scottish Government and ES partners should develop a national campaign, co-produced with women across Scotland, to address the negative attitudes and stigma which are the backdrop to VAW and which prevent women both from seeking help and

- participating in their communities. This campaign should pay particular attention to how stigma and negative attitudes may vary across urban, rural and remote areas.
5. The Scottish Government and ES partners should ensure that the safety of women and children is paramount when planning and promoting participation. Women in the Highlands and Islands who have experienced VAW face particular threats to their safety when participating. These are related to the lack of anonymity in small, close-knit communities, vulnerabilities associated with geographical isolation and distance from services, and the fact that many women and children affected by VAW are living in communities alongside their perpetrator's supporters.
 6. The Scottish Government should provide private transport and childcare for participation activities, remuneration for women's time, and ensure the timings of participation opportunities are flexible. The Scottish Government should recommend that all partners seeking women's participation do likewise.
 9. As Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWPs) are the mechanism for delivering Equally Safe in local areas, the Scottish Government should develop guidance for VAWPs on how best to facilitate meaningful participation of women with experience of VAW in their work.
 10. Participation needs to be targeted: women respond differently and to different methods. They are not a homogenous group. Active participation in the Delivery Plan means taking a nuanced approach about what will work and with whom.
 11. Planning of opportunities to participate should be based on what women told us they want and need:
 - Information about opportunities available and how they might participate
 - Variety of participation methods to appeal across the population of women whether through services, communities, online, paper-based
 - Facilitated in a way that ensures safety and accessibility – both for in-person and online/written participation opportunities
 - Initial opportunities for community building not necessarily linked to work to end VAW, such as peer support groups to involve women generally and connect them with others who have experienced VAW
 - Participation through specialist services, campaigns
 - Value placed on their experience: option to contribute, for example to professional training and education, rather than a focus on sharing personal stories
 - Opportunities to engage with Scottish Government staff/elected members
 - Trauma-informed approaches which reduce the likelihood of traumatisation with follow-on support provided if necessary

FACILITATING AND RESOURCING PARTICIPATION

7. The Scottish Government should consider the vital role of specialist services in enabling women's participation, and the resource required for this, in their review of the funding and commissioning of national and local specialist services for women and children experiencing gender-based violence.
8. The Scottish Government and other funders should ensure that all ES partners are resourced and trained to facilitate meaningful participation of women with experience of VAW.

- Feeling listened to: views are taken into account, and that participation results in action (or explanation if not)
- Methods and the targets should reflect the purpose of the participation, intended participants, and also eliminate unconscious bias about who they are and what they are being encouraged to participate in

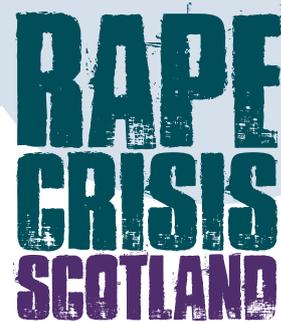
FOLLOWING ON FROM WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

12. The Scottish Government and ES partners should endeavour to communicate what has happened as a result of women's participation with the women involved. If nothing has changed as a result of the women's participation, the reasons for this should also be communicated. This is vital for building trust and confidence and creating a feedback loop for change; all the more so given that some participants thought that the Scottish Government does not listen to them.
13. The Scottish Government should consider the views put forward by women in this consultation and provide information, through public updates and the services involved, on what has changed as a result of their involvement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SWA WOULD LIKE TO THANK:

- The many women who generously and courageously raised their voices by taking part in this project
- Rape Crisis and Women's Aid workers who went above and beyond to enable women to attend events
- Gina Ramsay for creating such powerful illustrations
- The inspirational young women of Stand Up! who are fearlessly creating a more equal, safe and compassionate Scotland



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