



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

Scottish Women's Aid May 2019

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2017 Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) and Rape Crisis Scotland (RCS) were commissioned by the Scottish Government to consult with women¹ who have experienced violence against women (VAW)² about being involved in the work of Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to end violence against women and girls.

SWA and RCS have conducted this 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. The report which follows presents the findings of the phase two consultation. It summarises women's views of the Equally Safe priorities and how they might contribute to these. It also presents conclusions and recommendations relevant to meaningful and effective participation.



¹ This report uses the term 'women' to refer to women who have experienced some form of violence against women and girls. The survey used the term 'survivor'.

² Scottish Government definition of violence against women: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/>

2. NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

EQUALLY SAFE: SCOTLAND'S STRATEGY FOR PREVENTING AND ERADICATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Published in 2014 and updated in 2016, Equally Safe³ promotes a collaborative approach involving the Scottish Government, COSLA and partners in the public, private and third sectors in order to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls (VAWG). The associated Equally Safe Delivery Plan, published in November 2017, sets out 118 actions within four priority areas, to be achieved by 2020.⁴ These four priorities are:

1. Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls
2. Women and girls thrive as equal citizens: socially, culturally, economically and politically
3. Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people
4. 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 sets out a phased approach, including "the development of meaningful, effective and sustained participation of women, children and young people across all aspects of Equally Safe" because:

"We want to ensure that those affected by violence and abuse against women and girls, including children and young people, have greater opportunity to help shape the development of policy and practice. There are a number of positive examples where participation has directly benefited our approach, including the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People (2008), Safer Lives: Changed Lives (2009), and Voice against Violence. Participation should be meaningful, effective and sustainable, and it should ensure that participants understand their rights; they have a chance to be involved; engage on the basis that it is their choice to do so; that they are valued and supported; that everyone works together; and that there is regular communication."

SWA CONSULTATION

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

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-delivery-plan-scotlands-strategy-prevent-violence-against-women/>

3. CONSULTING WITH WOMEN: METHODOLOGY

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

- Four consultation events with women in Highland, including remote and rural areas (25 women)
- One event with young women involved in Stand Up! – a participation project for young people facilitated by Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland (RASASH) within its young people's prevention project (five women)
- Anonymous online survey (158 women who had experienced VAW)⁵

The 25 women who attended the four consultation events had experienced VAW. The 158 women who completed the online survey did so on that basis. The survey stipulated: "*we want to hear from self-identifying women in the Highlands and Islands who have experienced any form of harassment, abuse, or violence*". The young women attending Stand Up! did not necessarily identify as having experienced VAW, although their responses illustrated that they had been exposed to it in their accounts of seeing or experiencing harassment.

SWA facilitated and recorded the four consultation events in autumn 2018 using the creative engagement tool Ketso.⁶ A report of each event captured main themes and concerns and the words of participants. These themes and concerns were then used to develop an online survey which ran throughout February 2019.

This report includes some of the participants' words verbatim; and summarises the findings from the four consultation events; the views of Stand Up! participants; and the online survey. It also presents conclusions and recommendations.

We have demographic information for 66% of participants. The women were aged from 13 to 65+ and lived in Highland (69); Orkney (19); Shetland (11); Western Isles (8); and other (9).

The demographic profile of participants is in appendix 1.

FOUR CONSULTATION EVENTS

We ran four consultation events in Fort William, Inverness, Kirkwall and Helmsdale.

These gathered views from women living in a geographically vast region which is largely remote and rural. We asked women about VAW in the context of the Highlands

⁵ Assumed as information about sex of respondent was not requested.

⁶ <https://www.ketso.com>

and Islands, the service responses, and about participating in the local delivery of Equally Safe.

All those attending were current or former service users of Women's Aid and/or Rape Crisis and had been encouraged to attend by the respective service. For the most part, they did not know one another.

Each event comprised a four-hour facilitated discussion in three sessions:

Session 1: What is it like to survive here? Participants shared their views on the positive, negative and unique aspects of being a survivor in their area. They discussed their experiences with local organisations, access to services and community attitudes towards violence against women.

Session 2: What needs to change to end violence against women and girls here? Participants discussed the policies, legislation or resources they thought could help eradicate violence against women in their local areas.

Session 3: Participating in ending violence against women and girls. We gave participants hypothetical scenarios and asked them about these including the benefits, risks and any barriers to participation.

The Ketso workshop format allowed for relaxed, conversational discussion. It also allowed participants to write what they wanted to say on to a board if they did not want to speak to the whole group.

Women spoke about the challenges and opportunities they experienced in moving on from abuse; attitudes; agency responses; the

criminal justice process; transport; and living in the Highlands and Islands. They identified the challenges and barriers associated with living in small, remote and rural communities and how these might be overcome both to improve the response to women experiencing abuse and to eradicate violence against women and girls.

HOW WE ENCOURAGED WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THESE EVENTS

The events themselves modelled a participatory approach. Local Rape Crisis and Women's Aid services promoted the events to current and former service users and supported women to attend. Participants were told beforehand that lunch would be provided. Women's Aid provided childcare and transport, remunerated by SWA.

Many of the women lived at least 15 miles from the event venues. Women's Aid collected any women for whom travel would be a barrier to participating. At three out of the four consultation events, participants said that they would not have participated otherwise. Several women felt unsafe using public transport, which they described as infrequent, unreliable and expensive. They were frightened about seeing a perpetrator or supporters on public transport. The unreliability of public transport along with associated fears about being late or stranded, exacerbated trauma-related symptoms of anxiety and panic.

On-site childcare and being flexible and mindful about start and end times to reflect school drop-off and pick-up times were more effective in enabling women to participate in the consultation events than offering financial assistance for childcare.

Women received a gift voucher at the end of the event to acknowledge the time, knowledge and effort they had contributed. They did not know about this before the event. The survey responses and feedback from women attending events indicate that women's main priority in participating is to contribute towards preventing VAW; rated higher than being paid for their time.

ONLINE SURVEY

We ran an online survey in order to capture the views of women in the Highlands and Islands with experience of VAWG who might not be in touch with services; who might live in particularly remote areas; who work during the day; and others for whom events would not be desirable or manageable. We used the themes which emerged from the events to design the online survey. The survey explored women's views of the four priorities of the Equally Safe Delivery Plan and how women could participate in its implementation in their local areas.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

The main research questions were:

- Do women think that women with experience of abuse should be involved in eradicating violence against women and girls?
- Where do respondents think their participation would make most impact?
- What modes and methods of participation do they think would have most impact?
- How do they feel about getting involved?
- How can women who want to participate in local action to end violence against women and girls be enabled to do so?

SURVEY PRE-TESTING

We pre-tested the survey with seven women from Western Isles, Inverness, Orkney, and Lochaber. Two of them also attended a consultation event.

We invited testers to give general feedback about the survey; the clarity of the questions; and the personal information requested.

Because of the small population size of many communities in the Highlands and Islands, protecting women's anonymity was paramount; this was highlighted early on as a potential barrier to participating in this research. Testers said that they felt particularly uncomfortable disclosing where they lived.

*"I didn't want to identify the local area as it is too small and that made me feel vulnerable."
(Orkney)*

*"Because it just asked for a local authority area, I felt it was okay to put, I probably wouldn't have put the name of my town/village if asked because I would worry that I could be identified from that."
(Lochaber)*

In view of this, and to optimise the response rate, we explained in the survey why we were collecting demographic information and stressed that these were optional questions which respondents did not need to answer.

PROMOTING THE SURVEY

We promoted the survey by social media and email and through a local poster campaign. Posters contained a smartphone

QR code which led to the survey. Around 6% of respondents accessed the survey using this method. Although women could get a paper copy of the survey at their local Women's Aid or Rape Crisis service, nobody did so.

RESPONSE RATE

165 surveys were opened and, of those, 158 were completed sufficiently to enable us to analyse them. Five surveys were deleted because the respondent skipped Q1 plus most of the other questions; a further two were deleted because the respondent answered only Q1. This is a remarkable number given that we had hoped to receive around 30 responses.

STAND UP!

Stand Up! is a group which RASASH runs as part of its young people's prevention campaign. The RASASH sexual violence prevention worker facilitates the group. Her role is to educate young people and facilitate their participation. Five young women, aged 16 and under, from this group met with us to discuss their views about violence against women in the Highlands and how participating in Stand Up! was changing attitudes.

THIS REPORT

The report that follows gives an illustration of the main themes which emerged and presents our conclusions and recommendations.



4. WOMEN'S VIEWS OF EQUALLY SAFE PRIORITIES

In the context of the four Delivery Plan priorities (below) 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.

1. Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls

Two in five (40%) survey respondents said that changing public attitudes and raising public awareness could help reduce violence against women. The following emerged as barriers to equality and mutual respect, and aspects which women most wanted to change.

NEGATIVE ATTITUDES

Local (negative) attitudes are a major barrier to women accessing services, moving on from abuse, and participating in action. Such attitudes condone and enable abuse to occur, prevent women and girls from seeking help, and inhibit them from participating in their communities.

The 25 women who attended consultation events said that public attitudes were at best indifferent, and at worst, condemnatory and stigmatising. They described people in their communities as overly curious, asking invasive

questions while remaining largely disbelieving, and offering little sympathy or practical assistance. Examples included:

- Women's Aid being seen as being places where "some women" were scamming or pretending they needed help in order to receive money and housing, or to punish an ex-partner. Because participants were Women's Aid service users, this made them feel bad, and they worried about what other people thought of them. They said that this could affect other women too and could stop them asking for help
- "Gossip" and suspicion were described as potentially dangerous Informal surveillance of women: making it difficult to access support services in case neighbours reported women's movements to their partner
- Feeling judged and stigmatised. Some women were frightened about the power of local gossip but also, conversely, commented on the silence about abuse. Those who had reported abuse to the police said that the community had shamed them about "grassing"
- In discussing sexual harassment, some women noted the difficulty of "calling out" the behaviour of "upstanding members of the community" and how doing so results in women being tarred as "troublemakers"
- Violence against women – and related issues such as mental health and addiction – often seen as problems of "incomers" and "ferry loupers"

The young women involved in Stand Up! expressed the same sorts of concerns: for example, that the community is silent about abuse; that women and girls are not believed; and that sexual violence does not happen in the Highlands.

FEAR

The combination of negative attitudes, fear of exposure and lack of anonymity made women feel entrapped and hemmed in rather than free to challenge abuse (personal or otherwise) or be visible/active in their local communities. Social stigma and the sense of alienation and isolation are compounded by the stress and danger of continually bumping into the perpetrator and their supporters. Women's Aid or Rape Crisis workers were easily identifiable and women could be "outed" to neighbours if seen with an outreach worker. Although event participants had never met one another before, several knew personal details about one another such as addresses and partner's workplace.

ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Local and national media were described as perpetuating negative attitudes but also as potential for creating positive change. Issues included:

- Fear of reporting to the police as women didn't want the story to appear in the local paper, which publishes names and addresses
- While the local newspaper frequently reported domestic abuse, it was not named or condemned as such
- Local papers misrepresenting violence against women

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF SPEAKING OUT

Women said that the negative social consequences of challenging the status quo was one of the biggest barriers to women participating in local action to end violence

against women. Speaking out would not be safe unless anonymity was protected.

*"People don't want you to speak out.
They don't want you to be heard."
(Caithness)*

*"You are putting yourself on the line."
(Orkney)*

*"The general public's acceptance of domestic violence needs to change."
(Fort William)*

*"People just say it
doesn't happen here."
(Orkney)*

2. Women and girls thrive as equal citizens: socially, culturally, economically and politically

The consultation events revealed the extent to which women living in the Highlands and Islands are compromised in their access to social, cultural, economic and political structures. Over half (57%) of those consulted said that better access to support services would be the most effective way of empowering women to participate in their communities. The following emerged as barriers to thriving as equal citizens and areas for change.

TREATMENT OF YOUNG WOMEN

The young women involved in Stand Up! described how young women are treated, including that young women are objectified and sexualised, and that young men did not challenge their peers or recognise sexual violence. They described a school culture

involving dares and bets. Small financial rewards and social capital were given for harassing young women by for example, touching their bodies without consent. Girls are encouraged to “take it as a compliment”. The group said that harassment within school is very common, and also that young people tend to minimise the harm of harassment. One participant said, “A young woman has the potential to be a future First Minister or Prime Minister – what is she going to do with that potential if we tell her to take it as a compliment when someone abuses her?” They also described frequently receiving sexualised comments from adult men in public places, and that they feel uncomfortable by adult men leering at them.

SOCIAL SECURITY

At the consultation events, women described the negative impact of Universal Credit (UC) on their recovery because it “keeps people down”. The only women who did not mention UC were those living in Orkney, most likely because the transition to UC was very recent and its effect not fully felt. It was associated with:

- Increase in prostitution in Inverness
- Constant battle affecting mental health and wellbeing
- Limiting food and basic essentials such as sanitary products, travel costs, household costs such as heating and lighting, and broadband/phone/internet
- Shame and stigma
- Difficulty in recovering and moving on from the trauma associated with abuse
- Continued poor mental health made them feel less confident and, therefore, less able to participate in their communities

According to Which?, Orkney, Shetland and Highland have the worst internet connections in the UK.⁷ Given that access to UC is entirely online, this is seriously disadvantageous and debilitating to women living in the Highlands and Islands.

The impact of UC and difficulties with social security in general, are compounded by the high cost of living in remote and rural areas, with examples such as:

- Energy prices are extremely high
- In areas without natural gas, local authority or housing association accommodation tends to rely on storage heaters or coal fires which are expensive to run
- 50-mile round trip to the nearest supermarket for affordable food and household essentials is not untypical

At every event, women described lack of money and financial disempowerment as increasing women’s vulnerability to abuse and making it harder to get away from abuse. Women’s independence is hampered by lack of full-time, well-paid jobs for unskilled women and the cost of retraining.

In discussing helpful responses from services, several women described the help they received from local Citizens Advice Bureaux and jobcentres.

⁷ Which? Consumer-tested Broadband Speeds by Local Authority (Jan-Mar 2017) <https://consumerinsight.which.co.uk/articles/consumer-tested-broadband-speeds#localauthoritytable>

TRANSPORT AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Barriers to participating as equal citizens and accessing services included:

- High costs and lack of public transport
- Combination of costly public transport and the impact of poor weather on transport (cancellations of buses and ferries; road closures) preventing women from getting to essential services such as healthcare which is often many miles distant
- Location of services: in Fort William, the health centre is a 30-minute walk from the town; the local hospital has few specialist services, including maternity care; in Orkney, women often have to fly to Aberdeen and spend two weeks in hospital if there are even minor complications with a pregnancy; in Helmsdale and the outer isles of Orkney in particular, women reported a lack of access to healthcare, support services, emergency services and justice which would be unacceptable in some other parts of Scotland
- Postcode lottery for healthcare and other services across Scotland

Around one in five (20%) of online survey respondents said that improved access to public services, including healthcare, would empower them to take part in their communities.

*"How do women with young kids and no support do it [escape]?"
(Fort William)*

had attended the consultation event partly because she felt extremely lonely and isolated, and wanted to spend time with other people without having to spend money. Loneliness and isolation are typical consequences of violence against women, and associated financial exclusion. Maintaining friendships or creating new ones after abuse is challenging because of social stigma and living in areas where "everyone knows everyone":

- One in four (25%) survey respondents thought that more opportunities for women to build support networks for example, online, by joining a group, or in libraries and community centres could help women to be more active in their local communities
- Women said that specialist women's services, third sector and NHS-supported peer groups were important as they connect women with one another. Many of the women we consulted wondered why there were not more opportunities for groups and peer support at their local Women's Aid and Rape Crisis services. Clearly, such services are a gateway to women's participation and empowerment
- Contrary to expectations about the need for anonymity, women who attended events were positive about meeting other women who lived near them. They ended up sharing information with each other (for example about local resources) and offering each other emotional support. They saw these events, and this kind of participation as a positive method of reducing social isolation and shame

SUPPORT NETWORKS

Loneliness and isolation prevented women from thriving as equal citizens. One woman

"Being in a group makes me feel normal. In a small community I feel am I the only one? But there are so many of us and I know there are others."

(Caithness)

"I had no idea there were so many of us."

(Orkney)

[Telling another woman about an emergency fund] "Take my number and I'll send you the information – you can definitely get help for that."

(Inverness)

3. Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people

The following emerged as barriers to early and effective interventions and areas for change.

WHAT EDUCATION CAN DO

The young women involved in Stand Up! talked powerfully about the attitudes prevalent in their school and their experience of the education system. They thought that more education was crucial with teachers being less fearful and not approaching violence against women and girls as a taboo or controversial topic. They identified schools as places which could facilitate change by enabling young people to create action and promote their achievements and activities. Schools could show young people the range of ways they can create change

locally and globally. They mentioned the impact of gender inequality both locally in their communities but also across the world, and thought that more boys needed to get involved in standing up to VAWG.

Over half (54%) of survey respondents said that visiting schools to help educate young people or teachers was the most influential way in which women could help to create change; almost a third (32%) said that they personally would like to do this.

However, there were constraints associated with this, including social stigma and for women whose children attend the local school.

"Parents and services and teachers working together to teach respect."

(Fort William)

"I didn't know I was being abused until someone told me. If someone had just explained abuse to me when I was younger things might have been different."

(Lochaber)

"I didn't know what abuse was. I thought I was just in a bad marriage!"

(Fort William)

ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES FOR MAXIMISING SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Barriers to access and support, such as reporting to the police, include:

- Difficulties of getting support with mental health issues
- Poor responses from GPs and long waiting times for psychology and psychiatry
- Service poverty (notably Caithness and

Orkney): poor service provision, difficulty in staff retention and long waiting lists/times

- Need to travel long distances for help, and compromising anonymity in crisis situations
- Limited access to forensic services, and the loss of anonymity

*"North of Inverness, we don't exist."
(Caithness)*

"I waited from when I was 12 until I was 23 to receive support for my mental health. I missed five years of school because I was left hanging."

(Sutherland)

"I always shrug it off and minimise how ill I feel because going off-island to get support feels I'm like causing too much trouble. I always tell myself that my problems aren't important enough to justify such a big journey."

(Orkney)

In thinking about what might change, suggestions included:

- National approach to service provision to ensure consistency of approach
- More rape crisis provision needed across Highland
- More people need to know about the nature and range of services offered by Women's Aid and Rape Crisis. Many said that, before being referred, they either did not know or had misconceptions about these services. Women attending the consultation day in Inverness said that they had never heard of RASASH, which is based in Inverness

- Regular training of support staff. Women would like to be involved in such training and thought that their "leadership" in such training is vital. Training staff in frontline services was the single most popular area in which women said they would like to contribute their knowledge and skills, with 59% of survey respondents selecting the option of sharing knowledge and experience of violence or abuse to help with training of public service staff such as GPs, social work and teachers

AWARENESS AND VISIBILITY

In thinking about early and effective interventions, the young women consulted said that Stand Up! aims to be visible in the community and to raise awareness. As one participant said:

"People need to know that sexual violence is a serious problem in society which can take place anywhere even in places like the Highlands where it can be well hidden."

They thought that it was important for women's services to have a bigger presence in the community, like a "community hub". They suggested a drop-in, with services clearly explained and community groups well promoted. As one woman said:

***"We have
to be louder."***

4. Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response

The following emerged as barriers to effective responses and to men's desistence, and were highlighted as areas for change

POLICE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Women's perception of the Highlands and Islands Division of Police Scotland was generally positive. The majority of women who had experience of the police, commented positively about officers' attitudes and the support offered. However:

- They felt disappointed and let down by the justice system generally. This included a lack of police officers with appropriate powers to safeguard women and children
- Inconsistent police response (Helmsdale) because of a lack of officers and few police stations

Not feeling safe from perpetrators or their supporters was a significant barrier to women speaking out, recovering from the abuse, and participation.

Across the Highlands and Islands, women said that changing the justice system was the only change which could guarantee a significant shift in women's experiences of violence. Women at every consultation event asked:

"What is the point in reporting?"

Women queried the sentences being given for crimes relating to violence against women, including stalking. They thought that domestic abuse was treated more leniently than crimes involving strangers. Men convicted of violence against women-related offences were seen as receiving considerable help and support with, for example, anger, mental health and addictions, and very little punishment. Women consulted felt like prisoners in their own homes and waited years for support.

Ideas for improving the criminal justice response included:

- Expansion of Clare's Law;⁸ and police powers to properly enforce Non-Harassment Orders and to deal with stalking more effectively
- Perpetrators of abuse to receive mandatory education and rehabilitation, and parenting education if they were to have contact with their children
- Perpetrators of abuse should not have automatic access to their children, because of the harmful impact of this on children
- Perpetrators of abuse should be held in custody while an investigation was taking place

⁸ <https://www.scotland.police.uk/contact-us/disclosure-scheme-for-domestic-abuse-scotland/>

"Caithness and Sutherland is the size of Belgium – the amount of police we have can't possibly cover such a big area. I've seen traffic cops from Inverness up pitching in."

(Caithness)

"The police listened, they took me seriously, believed me, took action and didn't judge me. The police helped me see that what was happening was abuse."

(Caithness)

"We need specialist, family law-trained sheriffs in the Highlands – not criminal law-trained ones. We need reform in the law to move away from the protracted, high-conflict approach, the dogmatic insistence that shared parenting is the best approach (just to placate fathers' rights) and stop minimising the significant and traumatic effect of domestic abuse and/or violence. We urgently need this reform to prevent so much access and contact being given to abusive parents (usually fathers) who are using the child(ren) as weapons/pawns to coercively control the other parent. Ultimately this has terrible outcomes for the children."

(Highlands)

5. ENABLING WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE

Most women consulted want women and girls who have experienced violence against women to be involved in the Scottish Government's work to end it. The following section summarises what women said about how they would like to participate, what stops them and what would enable them to do so.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION AND ACTION AND LIKELY BARRIERS

Although most of women consulted had not previously been involved in local activities related to ending violence against women, all those who attended the four consultation events, and most of those completing the online survey would like to be.

- Many felt a sense of duty and obligation to help other women still experiencing abuse and to prevent future violence
- Several women felt haunted by the knowledge that, as one woman put it, "there is a woman right now, alone and scared, still living with abuse with no way out"
- Women saw participating in action to end violence against women and girls as something that would make them feel useful. Many said they would like to volunteer or retrain so that they could volunteer with Women's Aid because they had benefited from its support

Of the 36% of women who are currently involved in such activities, or had been in the past, most had said the experience was positive because it was good to make things

better for women and girls and to support organisations that had helped them.

Of the 12% of women who said their experience of involvement was negative, their comments included noting that practice among the Women's Aid groups in their areas was inconsistent and frustration about the Scottish Government not listening.

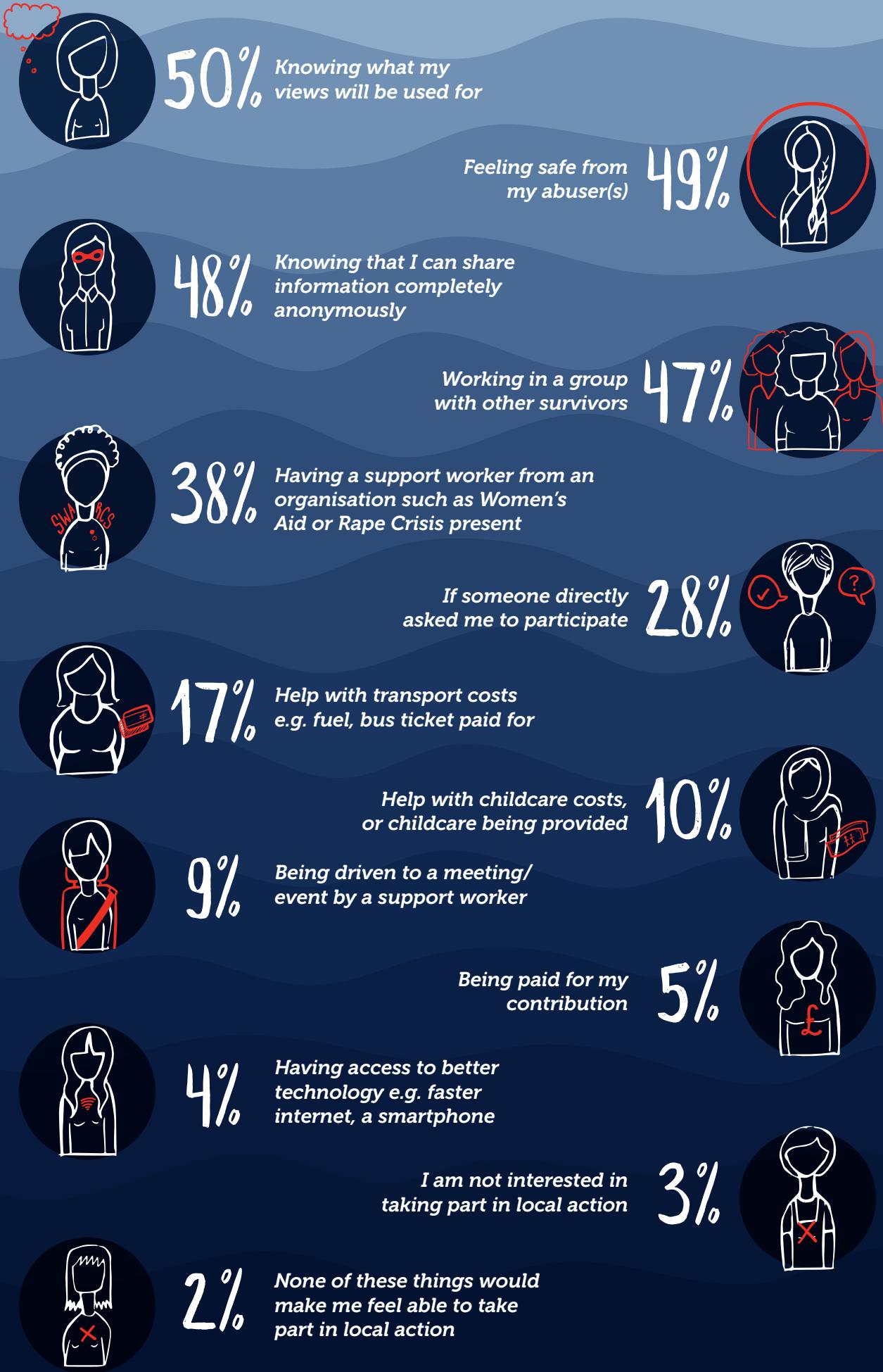
Concerns about participating in local action included:

- Triggering memories of abuse, causing them to re-live harmful experiences from which they'd worked hard to recover
- Harming their mental, emotional and physical health particularly if they have chronic conditions resulting from the abuse
- Exposure to further harm from a perpetrator and their family or friends
- Fear of perpetrators being able to identify them or finding out that they had spoken about the abuse publicly

Enablers included:

- Safety, emotional support, anonymity and transparency: identified as more important in encouraging women to participate than practical support such as financial reimbursement or help with childcare or transport
- Feeling knowledgeable or passionate about the topic under consultation: more significant than the consultation method

What would make you most likely to take part in local action to end violence against women and girls? (select up to 3)



HOW WOMEN WANT TO TAKE PART

If you were to get involved in ending violence against women, how would you like to take part?



68%

Taking part within a support organisation such as Women's Aid or Rape Crisis

61%

Taking part from home by writing, such as by post or online



60%

Go to something in person in my local area



39%

Go to something in person at a central hub in the Highlands or Islands e.g. Inverness, Kirkwall, Fort William, Nairn



35%

Go to something in person in Edinburgh or Glasgow



24%

Taking part from home by speaking via telephone call or video conferencing e.g. Skype, Facetime

SOMETHING ELSE...

8%

I would like to do something else (please tell us more)



5%

I would not do any of these things

4%

I would not like to be involved at all



From the online survey, more than two thirds of women said they would like to take part in ending violence against women from within a support organisation such as Women's Aid or Rape Crisis. More than half said they would like to take part from home by writing or by going to something in their local area. The proportion of women who would like to go to something in person dropped substantially (from 60% to 35%) when the location shifted from their local area to Edinburgh or Glasgow. Women also favoured writing over speaking by telephone or video conferencing (61% vs 24%).

This varied somewhat from the response of those attending consultation events where some women preferred to attend national rather than local activities for reasons of safety/anonymity. Positive experiences of participating nationally included:

- Orkney woman who met the Cabinet Secretary for Justice. She liked the fact that he travelled to Orkney and listened to her. This made her feel supported and that the Scottish Government cared about women who have experienced VAW
- Inverness woman who took part in an event at the Scottish Parliament. She said that seeing so many other women from different cultural backgrounds made her feel less alienated and alone
- Orkney woman who contributed to developing new domestic abuse legislation: made her feel proud of herself and that she had done something to help others
- Institutions which made an effort to travel and meet women in their local areas were considered as taking women's participation seriously

WHAT WOMEN WANT TO OFFER

The online survey found that the actions which women most commonly selected were:

- Sharing my knowledge and experience to help the training of public service staff (41%)
- Volunteering my time for a local organisation working to end violence against women (41%)

The action least likely to be selected was:

- Creating my own project or campaign to end violence against women and girls (4%)

A sizeable percentage (17%) would not like to take part in any of the actions suggested (see survey at appendix 2). A few commented to the effect that women's equality would never be achieved by sharing stories ("We need to move beyond this to talking about gender equality"), and others acknowledged the traumatic impact of their own experience as a barrier to participation.

WHAT WOULD ENABLE WOMEN TO TAKE PART IN ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The online survey indicated that two specific changes would enable women to participate:

- Easier access to services for women who have experienced abuse or violence (57%)
- Changing gender stereotypes such as "men should be in charge" and "a woman's place is in the home" (47%)

A quarter (25%) of women said that providing more free childcare, more opportunities to build support networks and for women to learn and develop skills could also help empower women to play a more active role in their local areas.

WHAT THEY THOUGHT THEY WOULD GAIN

94 (60%) survey respondents wrote about what they might gain by taking part in local action to end violence against women. This included personal gains such as feeling stronger/more confident, a sense of justice and altruistic statements about what others might gain from their involvement. They are summarised as:

Stronger: by taking action; building confidence, solidarity, a sense of community and strength from working with other women.

"It could help me feel empowered to be part of positive action to end abuse...it could actually help create the positive changes so urgently needed."

"A sense of achievement in supporting others and having something positive coming out of my own negative experiences."

Closure: on their own experiences by helping others.

"Help in my longlife battle to be open about abusers and rapes."

"Emotionally I would be a bit more at peace."

Helping others: satisfaction of "knowing that it could help even one person".

"To help people being put in that position through education or to build them back up again seems to me a pretty worthwhile thing to do."

Social and political change:

changing attitudes, raising awareness and understanding about violence against women and gender inequality.

"The knowledge that I'm leaving a better world for my children, especially my daughter."

"Sharing learning and experiences to improve service responses."

"To make it easier for women to get justice in an easier and less traumatic way."

VIEWS OF YOUNG WOMEN IN STAND UP!

The young women we met had no previous experience of participating in activism before being involved with Stand Up! They described an occasion when some of the group members presented Stand Up! work to their class in school. They said they were mocked by their peers, called "feminazis" and accused of "hating men". They found this frustrating but understood that their classmates were not used to hearing strong opinions challenging gender inequality and rape culture. None of the young women felt that these criticisms would prevent them from participating in the work of RASASH. Indeed, they described these criticisms as highlighting why their work in Stand Up! is so important: that is that few people in their local area are prepared to speak out about sexual violence. They went on to say that Stand Up! intends to challenge attitudes and "the false idea that things can't change in the Highlands".

[Showing others] 'that I survived and maybe help others speak out"

6. CONCLUSIONS

1. Women's contribution: general remarks

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. They suggested what could be improved, and what could be done to eradicate violence against women in their areas. We collected many testimonies which we were unable to include in this report.

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 consultation illustrates:

- Particular challenges of living in the Highlands and Islands/small and rural communities: poor infrastructure; distance and cost; shame and blame associated with VAW
- Compromises to women's ability to participate generally, and the extent to which they can make choices, leave or recover from abuse, and, in the case of domestic abuse, live independently
- The context in which women in the Highlands and Islands experience VAWG

and process trauma is important not only for shaping how services are designed to meet their needs, but also for shaping how they might participate in eradicating violence against women and girls

- In this context, specialist services, such as Women's Aid and Rape Crisis are vital for encouraging and supporting women to participate, and in giving them opportunities to do so
- Women want to be involved: they want to be listened to and for their contribution to result in action (for example changing public attitudes and government/organisational policies)
- Women differ as to how they want to participate: some women need opportunities to be involved in their community generally as a precursor to being actively/specifically involved in eradicating violence against women. The fact that we received around 160 responses to the online survey suggests that this is more accessible to more women than events are. However, poor internet access in the Highlands and Islands is likely to be a barrier to this being the case for all women. Some women prefer attending events
- Safety and emotional security are prerequisite
- The focus of their participation should not necessarily be on the experience of abuse/sharing stories
- Initiatives like Stand Up! are a good example of how the views of young

- women can be channelled into local action and what education can do
- Activity on violence against women needs to be more visible

2. The importance of context in encouraging participation

The extent to which women can participate at local and national levels in tackling violence against women is compromised by the impact of VAWG itself, and the tactics of perpetrators, but also by structural issues such as attitudes, infrastructure and inequalities (for example, financial, employment, political). Feeling unsafe, shamed and blamed makes it difficult for women to participate. Lack of money, transport and services adds to that. Trauma compounds it further. In order to avoid paying lip service only to the principle of "participation", government initiatives need to tackle the attitudes and inequalities which prevent women from participating in the first place.

3. Supporting intermediaries in encouraging participation

The women who took part in this consultation, whether at events or online, were encouraged to do so by Rape Crisis and Women's Aid. Indeed, workers were vital in making practical arrangements, transporting women who would not have felt safe travelling to consultation venues, and providing emotional support to participants. Some took part because of previous (positive) experiences of being in touch with services, such as peer support groups. 68% of survey respondents said that they would like to take part via a support organisation such as Women's Aid or Rape

Crisis. This suggests that intermediary organisations are pivotal for supporting participation. However, this is problematic as there are resource implications for the participatory approach, and because these organisations are already struggling financially to meet the demand for their services.

All four Highland Women's Aid (WA) groups had a 10% cut to their funding from Highland Council in 2018. Shetland WA had to close waiting lists for all its services from December to March because of insufficient funding to meet increasing demand. Increasing women's participation cannot happen without the involvement of such services, but they need sufficient funding to do this work.

4. What women want from participation

Women want to take part in actions to end violence against women either individually or as part of a group because of the benefits to themselves and others:

- It would make them feel stronger, boost confidence and gives a sense of agency
- It would enable them to come to terms with their own experiences
- By helping others, they can feel that what they have gone through has not been in vain
- It can bring about social and political change

5. Barriers to participation

LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE

- The high cost of living (relative to urban areas), poor and expensive transport links, lack of and difficulty in reaching support services and problems with the justice system prevent inclusion
- These barriers impede the extent to which women can recover and participate in their local communities, including the extent to which they can be consultees in local planning. The picture is of women left out on the edge

LACK OF AWARENESS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WORK

Even when women are keen to take part in action to eradicate violence against women, they are largely unaware of any opportunities to do so. Their knowledge of such work in their local area was restricted to Women's Aid or Rape Crisis.

Issues with infrastructure noted above contributes to this. Using social media is difficult if there is poor internet connection. Lack of, or expensive, transport means women may not be out and about and, therefore, are less likely to see posters/leaflets; similarly, lack of services including healthcare, third sector and other specialist services. Women need more opportunities to participate locally in a general sense, in order to know about opportunities for taking part in VAW-related work.

6. How women would like to participate: purpose and methods

The consultation highlights the importance of ensuring a variety of participation opportunities and methods. From the online survey, women would most like to participate by:

- Sharing their knowledge and experience to help train public service staff
- Volunteering their time for a local organisation working to end violence against women

They also rated highly:

- Visiting schools to talk to help educate young people or teachers
- Using experiences to help create information materials such as leaflets, posters, videos for other women and girls
- Sharing views and informing decisions about laws and policy at national level to the government or national organisations
- Sharing views and informing decisions at local level with local council, local MP or MSP or local organisations
- Producing something creative such as artwork, creative writing, poetry, a play, music

They are least likely to want to create their own project or campaign to end violence against women and girls. Sharing their story and recounting their experience is not something many women expressed as their preferred way of participating.

They want take part in the above:

- Within a support organisation such as Women's Aid or Rape Crisis
- From home by writing (not phone)
- By going to something in person in their local area

7. How to encourage participation

RESPONDING TO WOMEN'S NEEDS AND WANTS

Enabling women to play a more active role in local activity to eradicate violence against women is complex. More than half of the women surveyed thought that this would have a negative impact on their mental health and jeopardise their safety as well as their reputation in the community. Similarly, they said that mental health issues, work or care commitments, and local attitudes were the biggest challenges to taking part in local action to end violence against women.

Participation can be encouraged by:

- Taking account of the purpose and methods highlighted by women above
- Actively addressing barriers: mental health issues, work and care commitments, and local attitudes
- Challenging stigma and attitudes
- Ensuring basic needs are met: women who are living without their most basic needs met, and who feel unsafe, are unlikely to want to "participate". This is where intermediary services are vital: many agencies are responsible for helping women and children who have experienced VAW at local level. This recognition is fundamental to Scottish Government/other Equally Safe (ES) partner planning for participation opportunities
- Resourcing specialist women's services: these are vital in encouraging women's participation because they provide the prerequisite support to establish safety and recover from trauma. In order for women to take a more active role in their local areas, they need these services to help

them deal with the abuse and its after effects

- Designing participation around what women want:

- To know what their views will be used for
- Assurance that their views, actions are listened to, respected and actioned
- To know that they can share information without exposure
- To have assurance of safety
- Participation methods that respect need for safety/anonymity
- Participation methods that respect practical circumstances
- Options for participation in groups with other women

TAKING AN ETHICAL APPROACH TO PARTICIPATION

Over half of the women consulted felt that participation could negatively affect them:

- They were worried about community attitudes and the negative impact that (open) participation would have on their safety, their employment status and their inclusion within the community
- They were also concerned about the impact of having to remember abuse and talk about it

For many women, being involved in action to eradicate violence against women, should not be about recounting or reliving their experiences.

This suggests that more thought needs to be given to the principle of ethical participation which does not detriment the safety and wellbeing of those taking

part, and the role that specialist services can play in minimising harm.

Those who want to participate also want to see some positive result from what they are contributing: that they are being valued and taken seriously. This is important also given that many women said they wanted to participate in order to feel they had agency.

8. Contributing to Delivery Plan priorities

What women consulted want under each of the four priorities is noted below.

1. Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls

- Public awareness campaigns to raise awareness that violence against women exists in the Highlands and Islands
- Initiatives to change community attitudes towards, and public awareness of, violence against women and girls

2. Women and girls thrive as equal citizens: socially, culturally, economically and politically

- Attention from national and local government to the infrastructure issues which inhibit access to support and services and participation
- More training of judges, healthcare workers and other professional service providers; more involvement from education in promoting equality and respect and raising understanding of VAW; more information about where to get help if needed; places for women to share their experiences and get support safely

- These changes are necessary for them to participate in local communities, generally and in action to eradicate VAW

3. Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people

- Service responses which are knowledgeable about violence against women and helpful and supportive to those who have experienced it
- More specialist services both for responding to VAWG and for encouraging long-term peer and other support
- To share their knowledge and experience to help with training public service staff, educating young people and school staff, and informing decisions about local and national laws and policies
- More involvement from education in working with children and young people to prevent VAW

4. Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response

- Improved criminal justice response including more police officers, more training for judges and more effective sentencing

7. 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 should be part of any future planning relevant to Equally Safe.
2. The Scottish Government and ES partners should review what is meant by the 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 engaging 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 of 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 vcommunities. 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.

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.
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 the considerations below.

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

- Participating through specialist services
- 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
- Feeling listened to: views are taken into account, and 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.

8. PROJECT PARTNERS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PROJECT PARTNERS

SWA is the lead domestic abuse organisation in Scotland. SWA managed and commissioned the phase two research.

RCS is the national office for the rape crisis movement in Scotland. RCS managed and commissioned the phase one report produced by Wise Women.

For phase two, the following specialist organisations which support women and girls experiencing VAW in the Highland and Islands were essential in encouraging women to participate; in providing the requisite emotional and practical support to enable participation; and in assuring women that participation would be safe and confidential:

- Caithness and Sutherland Women's Aid
- Inverness Women's Aid
- Lochaber Women's Aid
- Orkney Rape and Sexual Assault Service
- Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland
- Western Isles Women's Aid
- Women's Aid Orkney

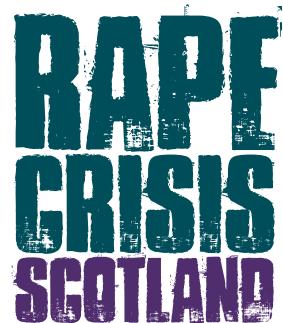
Participating Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Centres were remunerated to acknowledge the time and resources spent in supporting the research.

The research was also supported and promoted by members of the Highland Council Violence Against Women Partnership.

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



May 2019

APPENDIX 1

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

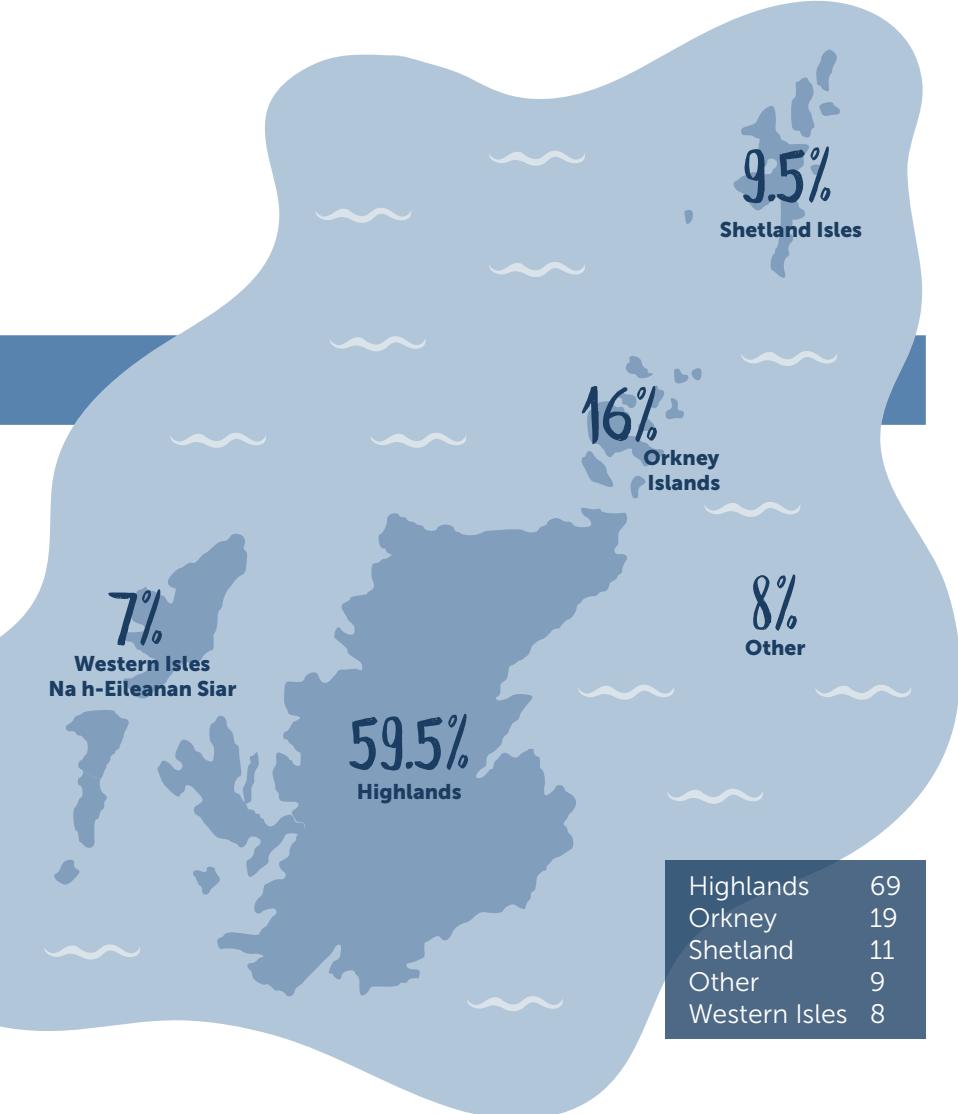
LOCATION OF PARTICIPANTS

From the four events and survey combined, there was representation from across the Highlands and Islands including from women living in very remote rural areas. This included 25 women living in Lochaber, Inverness-shire, Caithness and Sutherland, and Orkney who attended the four consultation events. Some of the 25 were local to the area, others had moved from other parts of Scotland, the UK, Europe and North America (often as a consequence of abuse).

AGE OF PARTICIPANTS

There was representation from across the age range, predominantly in the 18-65 age-group. The women who attended the four consultation events were all over 21. The young women at Stand Up! were 16 and under.

13-18	6
18-25	21
26-30	11
31-40	27
40-65	55
65+	5



DISABILITY

Most respondents (66%) did not have a disability or long-term health condition.

ETHNICITY

69% of participants identified as Scottish. All 25 women who attended consultation events were Caucasian.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

89% of participants identified as heterosexual.

GENDER IDENTITY

98% of participants had never identified as a trans person.

LIMITATIONS TO DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Because concern about safety and anonymity is a major barrier to women taking part in such consultations, we emphasised that providing any personal information was optional. The online survey was anonymous. Also, to further preserve women's anonymity, we have withheld or aggregated some demographic information.

We do not know whether women who attended consultation events or who pre-tested the online survey also completed the final survey. For the purposes of this report, each respondent is presented as a unique entry unless we know that she participated more than once. For the purposes of this consultation we assume that all respondents are women and all have experienced some form of VAWG.

APPENDIX 2

POSTER

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS WE NEED YOUR VIEWS

We're looking for survivors of violence or abuse living locally to anonymously share your thoughts on creating positive change in your communities.

Scan here or visit
womensaid.scot
to find out more



For support, call:

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline on 0800 027 1234 (24/7 | FREE)

Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline 08088 01 03 02

or if you are deaf or hard of hearing please call minicom number 0141 353 3091
(6pm-midnight | FREE)

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Survey closes 24th February 2019