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Race on the Agenda

Female Voice In Violence Project

A study into the impact of serious youth and gang violence on women and girls

February 2010



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ABOUT US

Race on the Agenda (ROTA) is one of the UK's leading social policy think tanks focusing on issues that affect Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities.

Originally set up in 1984, ROTA aims to increase the capacity of BAME organisations and strengthen the voice of BAME communities through increased civic engagement and participation in society.

Author

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Carlene has co-ordinated ROTA's research into serious youth violence since 2006, first delivering their youth-led research into weapon carrying in London, *Building Bridges*, for which she received a London Peace Award in 2008, and then developing the Female Voice in Violence Project.

In her role as Senior Policy Officer at ROTA, Carlene influences decision makers through her position on a number of policy bodies including the MPS Rape and Sexual Violence Reference Group, the Women's National Commission's Violence Against Women Reference Group and UN Advisory Group, the Youth Justice Board's Regional Gangs Forum and the newly formed GLA London Violence Against Women and Girls Panel. She works directly with young people from across London to inform her policy work.

Carlene is committed to addressing inequality and is especially interested in policy and discrimination regarding mental health, education, criminal justice, gender and cross-equalities issues, preparing consultation responses and briefings on a range of social policy issues for both central and regional government.

She has an MSc in Social Policy and Planning from the London School of Economics and a degree in Philosophy from Cambridge University. Prior to working at ROTA, Carlene had articles published in the *Guardian*, *Pride* magazine, the *New Editor* and the *Voice* newspaper.

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FOREWORD BY ROTA'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE



Dr Theo Gavrielides
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Female involvement in serious youth and gang-associated violence is nothing new. For as long as there have been issues of ‘weapon-enabled crime’, drugs markets and gang conflict in the UK, women have played roles and been victimised. Hearing the voices of women on these issues, however, is new. Over the past 20 years, the limited research that has been conducted on female involvement in youth violence in the UK and the US has generally collected evidence from males or practitioners.

The Female Voice in Violence (FVV) project sought to explore female involvement in serious youth and gang violence, from a female perspective; and more importantly empower women, especially those from marginalised communities, such as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and refugee and asylum seeker women, to be heard, and for their needs to be understood.

ROTA’s expertise across social policy fields, and our history of work on serious youth violence, positions us to apply these voices to policy and hold government to account.

In addition to exploring the experiences of gang-associated females, the FVV report identifies a multitude of gaps in policy development in the areas of violence against women and serious youth violence, which are not only problematic in the eyes of the third sector, but which are in breach of the gender duty, and potentially increase risks to some of the most vulnerable in our society.

FVV does not seek to offer any justification for serious youth violence, or excuse women for any role they may play in youth homicide. Rather, it argues that the UK will fail in its attempts to address serious youth violence unless it meaningfully engages with ‘young people’ as a mixed gender group, with individual needs and varying levels of involvement and victimisation recognised. The fact that serious youth violence strategy and policy understands the issues as ‘masculine’, and only refers to women as a side issue, is one which cannot continue.

ROTA is pleased to publish this report at such a critical point in time and looks forward to working with all interested stakeholders in taking the recommendations forward.

On behalf of the organisation I would like to thank the funding bodies which supported this project and everyone involved – especially the 352 women and girls who took part in the research, and the team which engaged with them.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008, ROTA's award-winning Building Bridges Project report, a youth-led investigation into gangs and weapon use in London recommended that policymakers and practitioners 'consider the impact of the current situation on girls as well as boys, and develop research, policies and practices which reflect this consideration' (ROTA 2008).

Since 2008, there have been clear developments in practice and policy, as well as increased public awareness of female involvement in serious youth violence. Over the following 12 months we attended several meetings with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), the Greater London Authority (GLA), the Home Office Violent Crime Unit and Violence Against Women Team, the Youth Justice Board, Children's Commission and the Government Equalities Office.

In 2009, Trident launched an advertising campaign, warning girls of the legal consequences of carrying and storing firearms for their partners; Network Alliance ran an awareness-raising conference on Girls and Violence; the MPS published a report to the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) on Multiple Perpetrator Rape and Youth Violence; both the GLA and central government consulted on, and launched, 'End Violence Against Women and Girls' strategies which began to recognise serious youth violence as a violence against women issue. And 15 year old Samantha Joseph received a life sentence, with a minimum of 10 years, for the role she played in the murder of Shakilus Townsend.

Unfortunately, while female involvement in serious youth violence began to make the headlines and policymakers and practitioners have started to respond, much opinion has been based on a negligible evidence base, and a non-gendered consideration of interventions. While women are now most certainly on the agenda, the mismanagement of this, at times, has had the potential to increase the victimisation of gang-affected women and girls and further isolate them without appropriate services in place to negotiate the risks they face. Taking a non-gendered approach to tackling their behaviour thus fails to reduce re-offending.

The Female Voice in Violence (FVV) Project assesses the impact of serious youth violence, gangs and serious group offending on women and girls, and the role of the BAME women's, generic women's and wider third sector's role in responding to this impact. Like all ROTA-led research, this report seeks to influence changes in policy at a local, regional and national level, and make practices more effective and informed by communities.

Developing the findings on women and girls from its award winning 'Building Bridges Project', ROTA sought to generate a credible evidence base on female experiences of serious youth violence and meaningfully inform policy. Under the auspices of ROTA, the project brought together five female volunteers aged 17-42, co-ordinated by Carlene Firmin, to speak directly to 352 affected females and apply their experiences to policy.

This is the first report of the FVV Project and will be used by ROTA to inform the position of a national coalition that we will be forming over the coming year.

The recommendations made in this report to the third sector, local stakeholders, pan-London decision makers and central government policy makers, are based on the findings and analysis of the FVV fieldwork, and are framed within the commitments made by the UK to the Beijing Platform for Action (PfA) and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

TOP FIVE FINDINGS

Women and girls affected by serious youth, and gang related violence have been largely ignored in both policy and practice.

The serious youth violence agenda has been targeted at young men, and the violence against women agenda has been targeted at adult women. As a result the way in which young women experience and associate with violence has been overlooked. Serious youth violence strategy has been developed without due consideration given to females, leaving statutory practice, commissioning and policy in breach of the gender duty.

The FVV project identified five key findings:

1. There is a negligible amount of intelligence on the numbers of women and girls affected by gang violence, either as sisters, mothers and girlfriends, or as female gang members. Even services that have intelligence on male gang members struggle to identify females associated with those gang members, or to collect this information in a co-ordinated fashion.
 - This limits the ability of services to target interventions or assign resources to reduce female association.
 - It also means that specialist services designed to reduce female association and address female victimisation, in a gang context, are chronically under-resourced and over-stretched.
2. Sexual violence and exploitation are significant weapons used against females associated with, or involved in, gang violence. Rape has become a weapon of choice, and used against sisters, girlfriends and on occasion mothers, as it is the only weapon that cannot be detected during a stop and search.

This use of sexual violence takes place against a backdrop where girls have little peer support, where girls and boys are extremely confused about consent and their own motivations for engaging in sex, and where young people have little to no understanding of coercion.

3. Gang-associated women and girls rarely disclose any victimisation they experience due to fears over reprisals, and the belief that their criminal association means that they are not privy to the protection of the state.

Girls struggle to identify services that are independent of the state and have little or no confidence in claims of confidentiality by any service.

Given the lack of intelligence on these issues, statutory services are not clear how they should respond to gang-related sexual violence, and

cannot guarantee the safety of girls associated once they have disclosed exploitation or assault when using standard safeguarding models.

4. Girls who carry firearms and drugs for their boyfriends:
 - Often live in areas that are not perceived to have a 'gang-problem'
 - may attend grammar or private all-girls schools
 - will rarely be under any form of surveillance or be known to any specialist services such as children's or youth offending services
 - have their own bank account where their boyfriend can store his money.

These girls rarely receive interventions and struggle to identify routes of support.

5. Girls are being processed through systems such as youth justice, or alternative education (pupil referral units) which are designed to work with boys, and where they have to access to interventions in environments dominated by boys. This has a severe impact on their ability to address their offending behaviour and reduce their victimisation.

TOP FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

- A1 That all serious youth violence policy and practice be gender-proofed in accordance with the gender duty, including work conducted or commissioned by statutory agencies, and that a review of all serious youth violence-related policy is conducted in light of this.**
- A2 That serious youth violence be acknowledged and included as a violence against women issue in both the third and statutory sectors, and that this is reflected in policy development and resource allocation.**
- A3 That the Corston Review is replicated for females under the age of 18 who are under establishments or institutions that meet the needs of a predominantly male group of service users – including youth offending services, youth offending institutions, secure training centres and pupil referral units.**
- A4 That safeguarding and child protection strategies, guidance and procedures be reviewed in light of FVV to ensure that they consider the specific risks associated with gender and serious youth violence (SYV), and that they are fit for purpose to address SYV related sexual violence for under-18s.**
- A5 That when commissioning or delivering services to women and girls affected by serious youth violence, these services are gender-proofed, that the specialist needs of the service users are taken into account, and where required to allow meaningful engagement, culturally specific services are applied.**

Next steps

Following the launch of this report, ROTA will form the FVV Coalition made up of BAME women's, specialist women's and wider third sector stakeholders, and other stakeholders, to monitor progress of the FVV recommendations, and will undertake an annual review of the third sector, local, regional and national policy, and the commitments made to this agenda by policymakers.

In addition ROTA will complete the FVV National Research Programme (NRP) to add further weight to national recommendations following the completion of cross-regional fieldwork on the issues due for completion in 2011.

FVV will use the evidence in this report, ongoing evidence collected through the Coalition, and the cross-regional findings of the NRP to secure significant change of cross-department policy, and multi-agency practice, by 2013, to better meet the needs, navigate the risks and address the offending of females associated with serious youth and gang related violence.

INTRODUCTION

Project Overview

The Female Voice in Violence (FVV) Project assesses the impact of serious youth violence, gangs and serious group offending on women and girls; the role of the BAME women's, generic women's and wider third sector's role in responding to this impact; and seeks to influence changes in policy at a local, regional and national level to facilitate this response.

Developing the findings on women and girls from its award winning 'Building Bridges Project', ROTA sought to generate a credible evidence base on female experiences of serious youth violence and meaningfully inform policy. Under the auspices of ROTA, the project brought together five female volunteers aged 17-42, co-ordinated by Carlene Firmin, to speak directly to 352 affected females and apply their experiences to policy.

The project is delivered via two arms:

- The FVV Partnership/Coalition
A regional partnership between ROTA and the Women's Resource Centre, to collect the voices of gang-affected females in London, communicate key issues to the BAME women's sector, generic women's sector and wider third sector and collect their response, and scrutinise local, pan-London and national policy based on the evidence collected. Following the production of this report, the ROTA will develop the FVV Coalition, which will work with key partners in the third sector to take forward the recommendations for practice and hold policymakers to account.
- The FVV National Research Programme (NRP)
ROTA's NRP develops the work of the FVV Partnership by collecting female voices in Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham; gaining male opinion in those three regions and London on the female voice; develop a cross-regional evidence base of the experiences of gang-affected women; revisit national policy and the FVV partnership recommendations in light of the cross-regional evidence, making a national case for policy review.

This is the first report of the FVV Project and will be used by ROTA to develop the work of the NRP and to inform the position of the Coalition over the coming year.

Objectives and Deliverables

ROTA will:

- Build an evidence base and understanding of the needs and experiences of women in London via action research.
- Assess and engage in the Violence Against Women Policy agenda to identify gaps relating to serious youth violence, which will support BAME women's and generic women's third sector organisations.
- Engage BAME and generic women's organisations in the findings to assess their capacity to meet the identified need.
- Produce a report which documents the experiences of women in London in relation to gangs and serious youth violence, and the response of the women's sector to this need.

The FVV Coalition will:

- Annually review progress by statutory and third sector agencies on the recommendations made by the FVV Report.
- Work in partnership with the BAME, women's and wider sector to build recommendations that will support them.
- Support third sector stakeholders to engage in serious youth violence policy at a local, regional (pan-London) and national level, with the provision of a solid evidence base, guidance and capacity-building materials.
- Raise the profile of the impact to gangs and serious youth violence on women amongst those agencies and departments which have historically focused on men and boys.
- Build a sustainable relationship with the BAME and generic women's sector that enables both sides to engage in cross-equalities work (gender/race).

In brief this report will:

- Set the policy lens through which gang-associated women and girls are currently viewed.
- Offer a qualitative account of female experiences of serious youth and gang violence, using evidence from focus groups, one-on-one interviews and case studies.
- Analyse the female account, placing it within themes to be addressed.
- Depict the response to the female voice from local, pan-London and national stakeholders.

- Make recommendations for local, pan-London and national stakeholders.
- Identify signs of progress and concern at the point of publication.
- Outline the next steps for the FVV Partnership.

Funders and Partners

The FVV Partnership and Coalition is delivered under ROTA's 'Winning the Race' Project, funded by the BASIS Big Lottery Fund.

The FVV National Research Programme is delivered under ROTA's Tackling Race Inequality Project, and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Home Office is sponsoring the launch event for this report.

Following engagement with central, regional and local government, support 'in kind' such as venue, catering and event administration for the project meetings and roundtables, was provided by: Islington Community Safety Team, Southwark Community Safety Team, Hackney Youth Offending Services, Lewisham Youth Offending Services, Enfield Youth Offending Services, the Greater London Authority, and the Government Equalities Office.

ROTA has worked in partnership with the Women's Resource Centre, Imkaan and the wider BAME, women's and wider third sector to deliver this report.

Volunteers

The Female Voice in Violence project was delivered, under the auspices of ROTA, by a core team of female volunteers, co-ordinated by ROTA's Senior Policy Officer Carlene Firmin. Volunteer team members were Kathryn Baer, Rachelle Fisher, Sandra Sackey, Rita Serghis and Joanne Wilson.

RESEARCH STRATEGY, RESEARCH ETHICS AND CHALLENGES

Phase 1: Scoping Exercise and Desk Research

ROTA's youth-led research project into weapon use in London, *Building Bridges* (2006-2008), identified specific concerns and experiences for young women, with 44 per cent of research participants being self-referred females. The concerns raised by those participants, ranged from sexual violence, intimidation, weapon-enabling, and the experiences of female relatives and associates. It was clear to ROTA's team that more work was needed to:

- give voice to the experiences of women and girls affected by serious youth violence.
- identify services available to support them.
- understand the policy framework within which any services would be operating.

Hence recommendation 17 of the *Building Bridges* report stated:

“Consider the impact of the current situation on girls as well as boys, and develop research, policies and practices that reflect this consideration.”(ROTA 2008:60)

Following this, the Female Voice in Violence project began with a scoping exercise of serious youth violence and violence against women policy and research. This desk research illustrated a severe gap in both policy areas to the extent that:

- Serious Youth Violence policy failed to consider gender
- Violence Against Women policy failed to consider the serious youth violence as a form of violence experienced by women and girls.

In order to offer a holistic response to the issues, ROTA also reviewed relevant policy in the fields of sexual and mental health, education, criminal justice and equalities, as well as housing and employment strategies. *Building Bridges* had identified the need to make recommendations in a multi-agency fashion, and to seek solutions to serious youth violence that cut across the preventative, as well as responsive, policy areas. This broad review of relevant policy areas prepared ROTA to make these detailed, multi-agency, policy recommendations.

In addition to this analysis, the scoping exercise saw ROTA begin to represent and question the consideration of women and girls in serious youth violence and violence against women policy, and respond to a number of regional and national policy consultations, as well as presenting on the issue at the Mayor's Academic Seminar on Youth Violence in 2008. This consistent analysis of current policy enabled us to monitor the environment that we would be attempting to influence, and regular engagement with policy makers kept them aware of the work we were doing.

As well as understanding the policy context we also began to scope services in the third and statutory sectors that were available to women and girls affected by serious youth violence. Looking across BAME, women’s and youth violence organisations, in the first instance, we sought to identify **specialist** practice. This was alongside identifying broader services that may be accessed by women and girls who are affected by serious youth violence, but are not necessarily targeted at the specific service user group; for example, mental health, sexual health, domestic violence and other VAW services, BAME, youth, housing, employment, and education services.

Phase 2: Fieldwork Methodology

In order to conduct the fieldwork safely and appropriately ROTA devised detailed guidance regarding research ethics and client participation (Appendix A). Phase 2 of the project was carried out as detailed in Table 1:

Research Method	Sample Group
Face-to-face interviews	26
Focus groups x 25	326
Tracking/observation specialist provision	3 specialist services; 1 statutory model
Roundtables and surveys with BAME and generic women’s organisations x 2	26

Table 1: Research Methodology and Sample Groups for Phase 2

Four qualitative methodologies – interviews, focus groups, tracking/observation and roundtables – were used.

Fieldwork with Women and Girls

The broad aims of the research with our client group was to capture the experiences, needs, attitudes, risks and protective factors for women and girls affected by serious youth violence. We sought to collect these through one-on-one interviews, which would enable us to develop case studies, and focus groups would allow us to understand the attitudes within which these experiences exist.

The first challenge of the fieldwork was accessing women and girls who were affected by, or associated with, gang, group or serious youth, violence. A flier was produced and circulated, with an introductory letter, to a variety of agencies including: youth offending services; schools; pupil referral units; private companies (including hairdressers, radio stations and nursery schools/mother and baby groups); BAME groups, women’s groups, youth clubs, wider third sector organisations including sexual health, mental health, housing and

education services; probation and the secure estate including Youth Offending Institutions and Secure Training Centres.

We received a high level of interest from referral agencies. To an extent this was due to the one year scoping period where the team lead had built contacts with a number of gatekeepers for young people, as well as the contacts made during the Building Bridges project.

We did limited targeted recruitment, and attempted to ensure that there was a spread of different types of referral agencies rather than individual characteristics of participants. Those who took part did not need to have direct association with serious youth violence or gangs; they simply had to have an interest and want to take part. The age group that we actively sought was those aged over 35 who were mothers, although they did not have to be mothers of gang members. This was because there were a limited number of obvious referral agencies for mothers, and it was important to include their experiences in the report.

Participants defined their own ethnicity and gang association. The final sample covered, African, African-Caribbean, Asian, European and Irish BAME communities, as well as White British; associated with gangs as sisters, mothers, partners, friends, sexual partners (links), associates, other female relatives (cousins, aunties) and gang members, and were aged between 13 and 52.

The discussion tool used to guide the focus group and interviews was developed by the research team in partnership with women and girls from schools, the secure estate and mother and baby groups. It was suited to collecting attitudes and experiences. In the majority of cases focus groups collected attitudes of participants, limited personal experiences and experiences of their friends/family members. Interviews collected individual experiences in detail as well as attitudes to the experiences of others.

Responses were collected on flip charts in focus groups and note-taking in interviews, and in the majority of cases digital recorders were used in both interviews and focus groups. Disclosure regarding gang association was collected via an anonymous form. In addition, interviewers were able to ask further questions when responses were ambiguous or unclear.

The one-on-one interviews enabled the team to move away from the discussion tool to build case studies. The interviews took themes from the discussion tool, for example relationships, the roles of families or female offending, and developed the experiences that those individuals had of those themes. The development of case studies enabled the team to identify risk and protective factors, and similarities and differences between experiences of the females who took part.

The research team found that, when analysing findings, the focus groups were an ideal forum for establishing whether findings from interviews with individuals could be generalised to a wider audience, and enabled individual experiences to be placed within a wider attitudinal contexts. For example, group attitudes to multiple partners and consent were compared with individual experiences of multiple partners.

Fieldwork with third sector and specialist services

The aim of the research with third sector organisations, especially BAME women's organisations, generic women's organisations, wider third sector and specialist provision, was to identify what services currently existed to meet the needs of women and girls affected by serious youth violence.

Given the disproportionate number of BAME victims of serious youth violence in London, it was considered important to work directly with BAME women's organisations on their awareness of, and capacity to respond to, the needs of gang-affected women and girls.

Given the history of generic women's services work in the field of violence against women, and the services provided by wider stakeholder agencies such as those organisations that work with ex-offenders, young people or provide mental and sexual health services, it was considered important to consult a range of organisations in response to the FVV findings. This consultation took the form of roundtable discussions:

- One with organisations delivering services to women and girls (from the women's sector, children and young people's sector, BAME sector etc).
- One specifically with BAME women's organisations.

These meetings were arranged by the Women's Resource Centre (WRC) and led by ROTA. In addition to these meetings organisations were given the opportunity to respond to a questionnaire circulated by the WRC. Findings from the survey and the roundtable have been collated by the Women's Resource Centre (Appendix D).

The findings have also been analysed by ROTA in preparation for making recommendations. They will be used to develop the work of the FVV Partnership over the next three years to support BAME women's organisations to deliver services and influence policy in the serious youth violence agenda; as well as develop partnerships with wider third sector organisations to provide specialist provision necessary to meet the complex needs identified.

In addition to this fieldwork with the BAME and generic women's sector, ROTA made contact with the small range of services currently offering services to gang-affected women and girls. During the FVV scoping exercise, ROTA made contact with these organisations, and arranged to observe the development of this work over the fieldwork phase. On occasion ROTA attended group sessions, reviewed evaluation forms, sat on advisory groups and met practitioners. ROTA opted for this broad range of observing services, as the process sought to understand what was available, why it had been introduced and how it was being developed. This process also enabled ROTA to identify some examples of promising practice within the statutory sector, and partnership working between sectors.

Given the limited capacity of a number of organisations which took part, using outreach methods, email surveys, telephone calls, observing practice and arranging meetings offered stakeholders multiple methods of engagement. It was important to ROTA that we consulted as many third sector stakeholders as possible, both to inform the report, but also to support them to engage in the debate as we move forward.

CURRENT POLICY AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

When seeking to address the impact of serious youth violence on women and girls, and the roles that they play, it is crucial to understand the policy context within which services, commissioners and decision-makers operate. Given the remit of ROTA, the central aim of the FVV programme of work was to improve the response to the impacts of serious youth violence on females at a policy level.

This section explores the state of policy, prior to the FVV research, in the areas detailed below. This will enable the reader to understand the basis upon which the final recommendations to policy makers are made.

- Serious youth violence
- Violence against women
- Education – including curriculum, exclusion and school safety
- Child protection and safeguarding
- Criminal justice
- Equalities
- Health – including mental and sexual health
- Third sector provision

Central, regional and local decision-makers have all developed strategies in the above policy areas and, furthermore, have proposed structures in place to implement these strategies. However, their relevance to women and girls experiencing serious youth violence is highly questionable, and therein lies the problem. While policies have the potential to be drawn together and applied to women, serious youth, and gang violence, this process has not taken place.

A policy context exists where the women in question fall straight through the gaps at best, and at worst have their situations exacerbated, or their risk increased, due to a lack of consideration for their experiences.

Serious Youth Violence policy

Over the past three years rafts of policy and strategies to tackle serious youth and gang violence have been produced centrally, in the main, by the Home Office, and at a pan-London level. The main, central policy documents to consider are the Gang Injunction in the Policing and Crime Act (2009), Youth Crime Action Plan (2008), the Tackling Gangs Action Plan (TGAP) (2008), Saving Lives, Reducing Harm, Protecting the Public, An Action Plan for Tackling Violence (2008-2011), as well as the Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) (2009).

According to TGAP:

“There is little documented information about women and gangs in the UK, and there are few services designed specifically to support this group. Further work is needed to develop more comprehensive approaches to tackling the issue.

Women who are involved in gangs can occupy a number of roles, including as:

- Perpetrators: participating in gang violence alongside male gang members;
- Victims: partners, sisters and mothers can be targeted by gangs. For example, if a debt is owed to a gang, women who are associated with the debtor may be targeted to pressure the debtor to pay up. Women associated with rival gangs can also be targeted with violence (including rape);
- Associates: partners, sisters and mothers might be involved with hiding drugs and weapons, washing blood-covered clothing, etc. Even where they have no formal involvement, partners can serve to ‘glamorise’ gang members, and to put pressure on them to provide the material wealth associated with criminal behaviour.

However, women can also play a role in supporting gang members to leave gangs – peer and parental pressure can be a key tool in persuading gang members to change their lives.” (Home Office 2008:62)

The difficulty with documents such as TGAP is that while it acknowledges *roles* played by females, it fails to offer any direction for managing this in a holistic manner. Therefore, while other sections of the document pose questions to practitioners such as ‘Who are the women associates of gang members?’ (Home Office 2008:26) or ‘Are women associated with gangs being victimised (with the use of violence including rape) by members of rival gangs?’ (Home Office 2008:28), it does not relate these to key action points. As such there has been a systemic failure by centrally produced serious youth violence policy to deliver specific action points and risk assessments for women and girls who are associated with gang violence.

The same critique would also apply to pan-London policy. The Mayor’s Time for Action Plan launched in 2008 featured two references to women and girls, and failed to relate these back to the overall recommendations and commitments to action made by the document (GLA:2008a). To an extent this is due a lack of formal, rather than anecdotal, evidence of female involvement and limited police intelligence.

If females are not featuring in homicide cases as victims or offenders, then there is little pressure to secure evidence on their involvement. Recent high profile cases, such as the involvement of Samantha Joseph in the murder of Shakilus Townsend (discussed later), have begun to shift this focus. However, without direction at central government level to collect this evidence and to risk manage for female involvement, it is not clear how regional and local government can progress with this agenda. There is a risk that if we rely purely on cases such as that of Samantha, then a punitive response, without due consideration for victimisation, will be the result.

Such has been the case with the 2009 Trident campaign to raise awareness of female involvement in weapon carrying. The campaign entitled, “Hide his gun

and you help commit the crime” aimed to raise awareness amongst young women that those who stored weapons for their partners shared his guilt and if caught, would share his punishment. Poster and radio adverts used under this campaign ran with the strap-line ‘Get Caught. Get 5 Years’ (see right).

Awareness-raising campaigns such as these are highly problematic. Firstly, they assume that females in these situations are not under any coercion or being victimised in anyway; secondly, they fail to take into account any risks that women may face in coming forward; thirdly, they fail to provide any reference to support mechanisms that would be in place to aid women and girls who faced such risks should they come forward. In addition to these problems, the Trident campaign was specifically aimed at African-Caribbean girls, based on the understanding that these were the females engaged in this behaviour, to the exclusion of others.



Trident campaign poster 2009. Source: MPS

(http://cms.met.police.uk/news/publicity_campaigns/trident_warns_of_consequences_of_storing_guns).

Punitive strategies which fail to take into consideration the victimisation of women and girls in these situations will increase fear amongst them without support at best, and at worse scare them into coming forward without having put in place appropriate mechanisms to manage their increased risk.

In 2008 the Home Office proposed the inclusion of a Gang Injunction in the Crime and Policing Bill, which has since become an Act. The injunction creates a civil order to be placed upon individuals whose ‘past conduct included engaging, encouraging or assisting gang related violence and that the injunction is necessary to stop them from doing this’ (Home Office 2009:2). The equalities impact assessment for the proposal drew direct reference to the potential use of mothers to build cases against their sons, with the attraction that he would only receive a civil, rather than criminal, conviction:

“Some mothers of gang members even gave evidence in support of an injunction as this did not involve the criminal justice system in any way.” (Home Office 2009:13)

Such accounts fail to consider the risks to mothers, in this case, aside from the potential criminalisation of her child. It makes the assumption that:

a) testifying in a civil rather than criminal manner will not place informants at risk of reprisals; and that b) mothers are not seen as associates of SYV face as many risks as other female associates in the forms of threats, not only to themselves but their home and their other children.

Any proposal which would encourage females to come forward and testify against males they are associated with in an SYV setting requires significant risk assessment and protocol to be in place to ensure their safety during and following such an event. In many cases it may not be in the best interests that such females testify. The injunction did not take this into account, in the first instance as it failed to appreciate the risks faced by mothers, and other female associates, of those involved in SYV.

In a bid to address serious youth violence in more holistic terms, both the Department of Health (DH) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) have developed anti-violence strategies. For the latter, serious youth violence falls within their Every Child Matters Framework under 'stay safe', one of its five core outcomes. DCSF began to set a central policy standard by proposing the adoption of safeguarding legislation to manage risks caused by gang association (to be discussed later in this chapter.)

Furthermore, the department produced 'Gangs and Group Offending, A Guidance for Schools', which, like TGAP, sought to offer advice for practitioners, on this occasion in educational settings, who were faced with serious youth violence amongst their service users. However, like TGAP policy, the document only made reference to the role of females as a side consideration for practitioners, rather than one that was relevant throughout the guidance, such as the role of boys. As such, while the issue of gender was identified, this was carried out in isolation from the rest of the document, so was limited and focused purely on safeguarding, stating:

"More often girls are subservient in the male gangs and even submissive – sometimes used to carry weapons or drugs, sometimes using their sexuality as a passport or being sexually exploited eg. in initiation rituals in revenge by rival gangs or where a younger group of girls sexually services older male gang members. Safeguarding principles are a priority in such cases." (DCSF 2008:9)

For a number of years, practitioners have been calling for serious youth violence to be viewed as a public health issue. Following models such as those developed in Scotland, a case has been repeatedly made for the mental trauma experienced by young people involved in serious youth violence to be taken into account when developing interventions.

Risk factors associated with serious youth and gang offending such as drug and alcohol misuse, experiences of abuse, bereavement and the impact of exposure to extreme violence within communities, amongst others, has led to calls for primary care trusts to commission services and outline how they can support attempts to address the issues.

In 2008 the DH published a draft framework on violence and abuse entitled 'Healthier, Fairer and Safer Communities – Connecting People to Prevent Violence'. While this document was not focused purely on serious youth or gang violence, it did acknowledge it as one form of violence that they needed to address. Furthermore, the proposals made a strong case for health services

delivering preventative interventions, and counted the cost of victimisation when these interventions came too late or not at all.

However, like other central and regional policy on violence, the document failed to see the gendered issues within serious youth violence and illustrated the risks in a manner which explicitly distinguished between youth violence and sexual violence. This distinction would not have been problematic, were it not for the fact that it was used to imply that the latter did not occur within the former; and furthermore, that the former was a concern for males and the latter is an issue for women:

“Young men are most likely to be the victims and perpetrators of most youth violence. However, there are certain forms of violence and abuse including sexual abuse, domestic abuse and sexual assault that are associated with gender inequalities.” (DH 2008:33)

This separation of serious youth and sexual violence is not only problematic in policy to address the former. Violence against women policy, including sexual violence policy, has, to date, failed to fully address serious youth violence as a form of VAW. While this DH policy separates sexual and youth violence, it also makes the assumption that girls under the age of 18 do not experience sexual violence in the same way as adults.

Recommendations made on the impact of any form of violence on under-18 females are mainly confined to their experiences of exploitation and child abuse, or of witnessing domestic violence. The accumulation of these flawed distinctions fails to capture, and therefore make provisions for, the experiences of young women affected by serious youth violence.

End Violence Against Women policy

The distinctions made between SYV and VAW can also be found in Violence Against Women policy development. Developments made in the violence against women field regarding managing risk and understanding victimisation, are crucial to building a gendered understanding of serious youth violence. Furthermore, having the ability to manage these risks prior to running awareness-raising campaigns, for example in the domestic violence arena, are lessons to be learnt for those working in serious youth violence.

There has been significant development in violence against women policy both nationally and regionally (pan-London) over the past five years. The creation of a Cross Government Strategy to End Violence Against Women and its consultation document (HM Government: Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls Consultation (2009); the HM Government Cross Government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse (2007); and the Mayor of London’s The Way Forward Consultation (2009) are all products of the efforts made by practitioners, the women’s sector and wider stakeholders, to make violence against women a public priority.

It is encouraging that such policy seeks to consider violence as experienced by women of all ages and that due consideration is given to the role of multiple departments and agencies, especially investment in preventative interventions through education and health services.

However, women and girls affected by serious youth violence are yet to be properly accounted for in this policy field. The Mayor's 'The Way Forward' document does begin to highlight the role of sexual violence with SYV by making a commitment to address gang associated rape:

"We will work with the Metropolitan Police to ensure that as part of their youth gang strategy the issue of violence against women within gangs is given top priority." (GLA 2009:49)

However, this document was severely limited by the fact that its recommendations focused on the role of the police in addressing this issue. Given the fact that many of the females who experience sexual violence in an SYV context will themselves be criminally associated, it is not clear that they would seek support via the criminal justice system. In this case it seems that policy makers have placed sexual violence within an SYV response framework that is rooted in criminal justice agencies, rather than learn from other violence against women models that focus more on the ability to protect women through third sector provision, refuges and exit routes.

When scoping central government policy, it is clear that VAW strategies for girls have paid most attention to child exploitation, abuse and witnessing domestic violence, rather than the direct experiences of peer-to-peer sexual violence in under-18s. Aside from their action points on rape highlighted above, the Mayor's draft strategy makes the same error. At a policy level there is a predominant focus on how younger people witness, rather than experience VAW, with the exception of those experiences which fall within a traditional child abuse framework; the impact of SYV on girls who may experience violence, including sexual violence, amongst their peers, are not served by these traditional models.

Furthermore, the violence considered in the VAW policy field is narrowed to domestic violence, rape, sexual exploitation, prostitution, forced marriage, honour killings, and female genital mutilation. While females who associated with serious youth violence face some of these forms of violence such as rape, sexual violence and exploitation, the context within which this takes place is unique to an SYV setting and the needs generated from this specific setting cannot be met via generic responses.

For example, the needs of, and risks faced by, a girl of 15 who is routinely exploited by six of her peers who are in a gang and as such are criminally associated, and who claims to be consenting, are not the same as those of a girl being exploited by a paedophile and claims to be consenting. The issue is complicated both by the increased risks faced by the girl and the extent to which she herself, may be criminally associated.

It is important that we are able to learn lessons and transfer knowledge from other VAW responses; for example, the most dangerous request which can be made of a woman experiencing domestic violence is to ask her to leave her relationship without the appropriate support in place. The same can be said of females associated with SYV or gang violence. If we do not see these similarities then we run the risk of making errors such as the Mayor's recommendations for tackling gang-associated rape, or the Trident campaign – both highlighted above.

However, it would also be erroneous to simply transfer VAW policies to address female experiences of SYV, without taking into consideration the context within which these policies operate. As well as differences in the physical environments

that these women navigate, for those under the age of 18 safeguarding and child protection procedures also play a significant role, which VAW policy for over 18 year olds does not need to consider.

In addition, while it is crucial that the end violence against women movement begins to address violence experienced by girls under the age of 18, especially within serious youth violence and multiple perpetrator circumstances, policymakers also need to take into account the increased demands that this would place on the VAW sector; the importance of working across silos to develop specialist responses; the fact that a number of these girls will be, to varying extents, criminally associated; and the need this will create for their increased engagement in child protection and safeguarding strategies.

Child protection and safeguarding policy

Alongside the dominant policy agendas to tackle serious youth violence and violence against women, there are broader policy fields which play a significant role in tackling the impact of SYV on women and girls. The first of these is child protection and safeguarding. Given the age of some of the girls involved, and the level of risks that they face, safeguarding and child protection legislation must be understood and applied in this policy arena.

The DCSF have taken a lead on this issue, for central government, by running the 'Safeguarding Children and Young People who may be affected by Gang Activity' consultation in early 2009. This document served as recognition, by central government, that SYV was a safeguarding issue, and could not be confined to the realms of criminal justice. By broadening their understanding of SYV, DCSF were also able to consider individuals such as female siblings in the consultation, and the role of sexual violence in gang conflict; and begin to make recommendations for how to address the impact of SYV on women and girls. The DCSF document states that:

"Safeguarding principles should be a priority for girls who are sexually exploited and abused. This is a particular risk for girls associating with or targeted by gang members. This risk has been highlighted in particular areas and not others, but should be considered as a risk when assessing individuals and...should be considered when developing a local profile of gangs." (DCSF 2009:12)

However, the success of this consultation document was limited as the action points associated with women and girls were not extensive, and as females were not considered throughout the document, implied that females should be considered as a side issue in SYV, rather than being mainstreamed throughout any safeguarding response developed. As has been the case with SYV strategies outlined above, when thought is given to the role of females involved in, or associated with, SYV, it is viewed as an issue to be 'tagged on to' a document which focuses on the experiences of males.

By viewing females as a separate issue rather than as one integral to overall strategy development in this area, policymakers are creating an artificial divide between men and women that does not exist in real experiences of SYV. This fabricated divide in policy produces generic recommendations focused on males, without significant consideration for the impact of those action points on involved or associated females.

When we begin to make links between SYV and child protection policy, the implications for dealing with associated girls becomes clearer. For example, the disclosure from a 14 year old girl of gang-associated sexual violence is a matter for social services and LSCBs, as well as those traditionally involved in SYV responses. However, the fact that these procedures automatically fall into place means that for those disclosing under the age of 18, their disclosure cannot be necessarily confined to the trusted body, regardless of whether they are in the third sector or not.

This has the potential to reduce the confidence of under-18 females in seeking support to deal with the trauma of sexual violence; increase the risks to those who have experienced gang-associated sexual violence at the point of disclosure, without having developed appropriate and specific protocol to manage the risks associated with sexual violence in an SYV context.

It is also important to consider the role of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in identifying the risks and needs of SYV-affected girls. The current state of policy, resource, local intelligence and capacity across the statutory and third sector means that the needs of females associated with gangs often cannot be met without increasing unmanageable risk. This is yet to be addressed by safeguarding policy and it is imperative that it is in order, both at a national and regional level, that local strategies can confidently meet the needs of females affected by SYV within a safeguarding framework.

Criminal justice policy

As well as safeguarding policy, there are implications for broader criminal justice policy, when considering SYV and its impact on females. Not only is a gendered approach lacking in SYV-specific policy, but it is also missing from criminal justice in general, especially for females under the age of 18. Baroness Corston's review of the criminal justice system in 2007 identified a catalogue of errors which failed to take into account the specific vulnerabilities of female offenders. The Corston Report recommended that:

“Every agency within the criminal justice system must prioritise and accelerate preparations to implement the gender equality duty and radically transform the way that they deliver services to women.” (Corston 2007:3).

The report identified that as women constituted only five per cent of the prison population, they are often expected to navigate a criminal justice system that has been created for men. This expectation left them vulnerable to increased risk, victimisation and negative outcomes. Not only was the system designed to address the offending of males, but it failed to consider the difference between men and women in their routes to offending, their needs within the system, and approaches that had an effect in reducing their re-offending. A report published in 2009 by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) and the Ministry of Justice, ‘Short Study on Women Offenders’ (2009) also makes a similar case, arguing that:

“Most (women offenders) have multiple complex needs and many are caught in a damaging cycle of abuse, victimisation and offending...problems often begin long before women enter the criminal justice system, yet they have not been able to engage in or get the support they need.” (SEU 2009:3)

The study goes on to illustrate the disproportionate number of female offenders who suffer from mental health problems, and that many of their needs lie in their inability to form positive relationships and the state of their emotional well-being (Cabinet Office 2009:11). It also identifies broader risk and protective factors that are different for men and women, and need to be understood as different in order to meet their needs and reduce both their re-offending and their re-victimisation.

The SEU report also begins to analyse the experiences of younger females in the criminal justice system, and identifies patterns of risk-taking sexual behaviour, exclusion from school, unhappiness and drug-taking for those in the secure estate under the age of 18. Such a focus was missing from the Corston Report and therefore has also been absent from the important progress that has been made since its publication. While Corston did recommend the need for a:

‘...radical change in the way we treat women throughout the criminal justice system and **this must include not just those who offend but also those at risk of offending.**’ (Corston 2007:2) [author’s emphasis]

The report failed to follow through and make specific recommendations for the points at which those ‘at risk of offending’ needed to be supported, especially when those ‘at risk’ were under 18.

At present there is substantial evidence for a need to have a gendered approach to criminal justice practice and policy. However, a lack of thought across departments and a limited consideration for women under the age of 18 has resulted in those developing strategies to address gang or serious youth violence failing to take this into account. And yet, in order to avoid the unequal outcomes that Corston and others have identified, it is crucial that a gendered approach is taken to *all* criminal justice policy, including where it impacts on under-18s and in specific areas of criminal justice such as SYV.

However, in order to achieve this, more work is needed to understand the impact of the criminal justice system for females under the age of 18, and the needs, and experiences, of under-18 females who offend or are at risk of offending. While the 2009 SEU report began to make inroads with this, the majority of statistics are for women over the age of 18. As such, there is a need for the DCSF to work with the Home Office, NOMS, YJB and MoJ to ensure that this gap is addressed.

Furthermore, if we are to understand the experiences of those ‘at risk’ of offending, or entering the secure estate, more research is required on the experiences of young women in youth offending services, secure training centres and pupil referral units. Furthermore, it is important that once this research is conducted it is proactively applied to policy development in criminal justice generally, and in specific areas which will have greatest impact on girls at risk of, or involved directly in, offending.

Recently published research from the YJB ‘Girls and offending – patterns, perception and interventions’ states that:

“This research has highlighted a need for further research into gender-specific programmes. The potential need for such programmes is indicated by:

- Risk factors that show young women to be at increased risk of offending when they are in pro-criminal peer groups, mixed peer groups, or have friendships with risk-taking males
- Practitioners reported difficulties in working with young men and women in mixed gendered groups because of 'acting out' behaviours
- Research that suggests that young women and young men may have broadly similar risk factors and needs with regard to programme content aimed at reducing their offending behaviour, but that there is a requirement for this to be delivered in different ways." (YJB 2009:89)

Furthermore, the research recommends that girls who offend should not be seen as a single group requiring the same response, and that there are differences between girls and the types of offending that they commit which needs to be considered when seeking to meet their needs.

It is important that the YJB uses this information to work with the DCSF and Home Office to consider responses to girls associated with SYV or involved directly in it. While there may be some similarities between risk factors that lead them into SYV (although there may also be some differences) it is how services and policy respond to this issue that is of importance.

Beyond the criminal justice system, policymakers need to consider other routes that girls may take into SYV. This includes the experiences of females in other systems and institutions targeted towards men and boys, for example Pupil Referral Units. Therefore policy which considers exclusion both by the DCSF nationally, but also the 'Back on Track' alternative education programme developed by London Councils, needs to take a gendered approach to its provisions for girls in Pupil Referral Units, and at present this consideration is insufficient. A study by the National Children's Bureau published in 2002, 'Not a Problem? Girls and school exclusion', stated that:

"There is a concern that the particular emotional and developmental needs of girls are not being recognised in current exclusion prevention and support strategies." (NCB 2002:10)

The need to take a gendered approach to the criminal justice system is a crucial one, and has to be applied to all services which meet the needs of women as a minority group. In youth offender institutions, young women in pupil referral units, secure training centres, and other areas where they are in the minority, policy-makers must ensure equal outcomes by meeting their specific needs through research on, and the development of, gender specific services and policy.

When these broader strategies, research areas and policies are placed within a SYV context the need to do this increases, given the fact that serious youth violence itself is viewed as a masculine concept and policy developed to address it has been produced in the same manner.

Mental and sexual health policy

When attempting to meet the needs of females affected by SYV, it is imperative that their sexual and mental health needs are prioritised. Given the impact of SYV on the mental health of those associated with it including fear, anxiety, trauma, post-traumatic stress and the impact of bereavement, and the implications for the sexual health (both mental and physical) of females who

experience sexual violence and exploitation in an SYV context, it is important for central government to look at its broader policy development in these areas, and apply them the SYV policy agenda.

The Department for Health has prioritised both mental health and sexual health policy development. They recently published 'Moving Forward: Progress and priorities – working together for high quality sexual health', which identifies both the importance of cross government working to support women and girls who are victims of violence, as well as the ability to identify those at risk of sexual violence:

“The work of the response to sexual violence NST includes building partnerships across all sectors working with young people to ensure they are able to identify and address the needs of young people to ensure they are able to identify and address the needs of young people who have been victims of sexual violence. It includes improving pathways and provision of services for young people who have been victims of sexual violence or coercive sex.” (DH 2009:26)

However, the overall priorities of the programme are focused on the physical aspects of sexual health, rather than the mental aspects which come to the forefront when addressing sexual violence and coercive sex. Having a reduction of under-18 conception rates and a reduction in the prevalence of Chlamydia as priorities is indicative of the fact that the strategy is far more focused on physical, rather than emotional, outputs.

Given the evidence from Corston and the YJB, of the emotional needs of girls at risk of offending, it is crucial to prioritise how health services can lead on this engagement. For females 'at risk' of violence, or those in need of preventative interventions, their sexual behaviour may not yield teenage pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections, but may still have a negative impact and increase their emotional vulnerability; as well as any experience they may have of sexual violence or coercive sex.

Current sexual health strategies fail to sufficiently capture these more subtle areas of risk, many of which would apply to females involved in serious youth and gang violence. There is a clear role for DH to lead on this aspect of SYV, in order for work to be appropriately commissioned at a local level to meet the health needs of those affected by SYV, in both a preventative and responsive manner.

The DH has also developed extensive policy on mental health, most recently via a mental health consultation, 'New Horizons' (2009). In addition to this, they have developed specific work on the links between criminal justice and mental health, with the Bradley Review (2009) and prior to this, with a focus on BAME groups, the David 'Rocky' Bennett Inquiry.

These developments in mental health policy create an opening in which policy makers can apply generic mental health policy to specific areas of mental health need, in this case serious youth violence. Wider work on violence by DH, as outlined in the SYV section of this report, also makes the links between SYV and mental health.

“The consequences of youth violence are multiple, affecting the individual, the family and the wider community. Youth violence has negative impacts upon the individuals involved in the form of physical injuries received which may result in death or long term disability, especially if guns or knives are used as weapons.

Longer-term physical and mental health problems lead to poor educational and employment outcomes and add costs to social and health care systems.”
(DH 2008:26)

Research by NACRO (2007), amongst others, has indicated the disproportionate number of women in the criminal justice system who also have mental health needs. NACRO’s study also identified disproportionate numbers of BAME women with mental health needs in the criminal justice system.

The issue of disproportionality, especially in the context of London, is one that cannot be ignored for serious youth violence. When SYV, mental health and the criminal justice system are placed together we can see clear evidence of the potential for multiple disproportionality and an increased risk of unmet need for women affected by SYV. Women and girls fall within a number of areas of inequality that could compound their potential disadvantage in accessing support. The fact that age, gender and ethnicity can create multiple-disadvantage for girls at high risk is an issue that needs to be addressed centrally. In the case of serious youth violence it must be done as a matter of urgency.

Equalities policy

Given the issues of disproportionality raised above, and the insufficient consideration given to women and girls affected by SYV, equalities departments and bodies such as the Government Equalities Office (GEO) and the EHRC also have a role to play in SYV policy development.

Aside from their role in leading the development of violence against women policy, the GEO must lead on insisting that SYV policy is gender-proofed and work with the DCSF to ensure that they are meeting the needs of girls, as well as boys, affected by SYV, in the first instance, under one of the three Priorities for the Ministers for Women targeted at: ‘Tackling violence against women, and changing the way we treat women offenders’. It is important that the GEO develop the work under Corston to begin to apply this to women and girls, in line with the cross government consultation on violence against women and girls conducted in 2009.

At present it seems that while the GEO are clear on their position, their influence on other government departments such as the Home Office is less clear. Furthermore, while they are able to make generic comments about criminal justice policy, they are less able to make specific comment on individual pieces of policy development. Much of this is due to the limited resource and capacity of the GEO compared with other government departments. However it is important that much of their in-house policy and recommendations are more directly applied to specific SYV policy outlined in the above sections of this chapter.

As well as women, there are gaps in addressing the specific needs in SYV policy of young people and BAME groups, amongst the equalities groups. In addition to this there are also underlying and heavily under-researched issues for LGBT and refugee and asylum seeker groups which relate to SYV. The EHRC have a role in representing these groups to central government, and challenging policy which will disproportionately impact negatively on, or neglects to even consider, these equalities groups.

While the EHRC has begun to engage effectively in the VAW debate and made a case for the importance of specialist services being available for women who experience violence, they are yet to apply this to the SYV context. This is not surprising given that VAW policy in general does not draw reference to SYV. However, it is important to note that the EHRC are yet to apply their general approaches to race to address disproportionality in experiences of SYV in London, and in the case of this report identify the multiple victimisation of BAME women who experience SYV.

It is crucial that the EHRC work with the GEO to monitor the policy development of lead agencies such as the DH, DCSF and Home Office in the area of SYV to ensure that such groups are not opened up to increased risk. For example they should have engaged in the Home Office's Gang Injunction Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) consultation. It is crucial that the EHRC and GEO play an overarching partnership role to ensure that women and girls (especially those from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), refugees and asylum seekers, and BAME groups) are not placed at increased risk, when responses to SYV fail to consider them.

Education policy

A number of overarching themes outlined in the above sections of this chapter such as sexual health, sexual violence, coercive sex and exploitation and the impact of SYV on family and friends are also addressed through education policy.

While the DCSF has developed specific SYV policy in the form of guidance for schools and safeguarding, both discussed above, broader policy on school exclusion, the national curriculum (especially PSHE and SRE) and gender-specific provision are also relevant subject areas. It is insufficient for the DCSF to produce SYV specific policy and guidance, if other aspects of its policy work fail to consider the impact that it will have on young people affected by SYV, in this case females.

Key documents to consider under education, and its relation to SYV, would be: the Education White Paper, 'Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system' (2009); Government Response to the SRE Steering Group Report (2008); London Councils, Back on Track Programme from the DCSF 'Back on Track – a strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people' (2008); and the 'Independent Review of the proposal to make Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education statutory' (2009). These make up a snapshot of education-related policy which is relevant to SYV and women and girls, and has been developed over the past three years.

An increasing focus on the behaviour of pupils in school and the parental responsibility for this behaviour is illustrated in the Government's White Paper on Education produced in 2009. Running alongside this is its action plan on managing those in alternative education provision, Back on Track, which outlines the role of pupil referral units and other non-mainstream education provision.

The DCSF Back on Track report fails to make a single reference to girls, gender, females or women. Reflecting on the criminal justice section of this chapter it is clear why this should be concerning. The document acknowledges that of those in pupil referral units '69 per cent are boys' (DCSF 2008:18), but fails to consider what this imbalance may mean in practice. Given that the report seeks to improve

alternative provision it is concerning that it does not see any gendered needs that may require attention.

Likewise the document fails to address ethnicity, even though statistics demonstrate a clearly disproportionate number of BAME pupils excluded from school. The NCB review of the experiences of girls in pupil referral units, referenced above, made a case in 2002 for considering the impact of exclusion on girls. Aside from those who go through formal exclusion processes, the report argued that 'many of the difficulties experienced by girls in school are of a hidden nature and may lead to self-exclusion or unofficial exclusion'. These issues are yet to be addressed in policy, and need to be if preventative measures are to be taken against girls' involvement in SYV.

Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) and Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) have both been the subject of independent reviews over recent years. Both reviews identified a need for improved training of those who deliver PSHE and SRE education, and a need to clarify what it would hope to achieve, as well as many of its messages being mainstreamed through other aspects of teaching.

These reviews, and the pledge by government to make PSHE a statutory part of the national curriculum, presents schools and wider stakeholders with a window to inform the SYV agenda via PSHE and SRE, especially in relation to females. The proposed freedom to relate SRE to the context within which the school operates, and consultation with the young people about the reality of relationships for them, offers an opportunity to ensure relevance in education.

Finally, agreement on the use of external partners, where appropriate, also opens up potential for partnership working between the third sector and schools. However, in order to ensure this relevance significant awareness raising and training is needed for all schools to demonstrate the relevance of SRE and PSHE to SYV, and likewise the potential impact that SYV can have on females. Central government direction is needed on identifying these links in order for it to be valued locally.

Closing Remarks

This review of over-arching central and pan-London government policy in relation to SYV and females begins to offer examples of potential cross-over for government departments and policy agendas.

There is a need for those who develop SYV policy to consider all of these policy areas, and for the departments in charge of those broader areas to engage in SYV policy development using their existing policies and strategies. Any consideration of females and SYV forces policy makers to look beyond criminal justice responses, and seek true cross-departmental working. Further research and investigation may identify outstanding gaps.

It is hoped that the FVV fieldwork with service users and the third sector will build upon existing evidence bases and make a case for policy to be sewn together in the ways outlined above. The NRP will build again upon this partnership report to make a clearer case for national policy, based on cross-regional understandings of women and SYV.

In order for ROTA to ensure that FVV addresses some of the gaps in the evidence base it is important to review not only policy, but also the research and statistics behind the policy development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aside from insufficient consideration being given to females in the serious youth violence policy agenda, a severe lack of research and statistical evidence has hampered calls made by practitioners for a change in policy. While third sector organisations and other practitioners have been offering anecdotal examples of the ways in which serious youth, and gang, violence affects women and girls, there has been a lack of co-ordinated research conducted on the issue. This gap has allowed policy and decision makers to hold that they are unable to develop policy based on an anecdotal understanding of the issues.

Over the past 20-30 years, US literature on gangs has offered some, albeit limited, consideration of the role of females in serious youth and gang violence. Campbell's ethnographic study (1982) of three female gang members in the US offered a unique insight into the complex and dangerous climate that females involved in gang violence had to navigate.

The difficulty with relying on a US evidence base lies in the differences between the structures of gangs in the US and UK, their ethnic make-up, and the history of their development. Campbell, like other US authors who have sought to explore the roles played by females (Miranda 2003), focused studies on females who played an active role in gang activity, often as members of female gangs that existed alongside their male equivalent. Such a uniformed structure is scarcely found in the UK, and where anecdotal evidence has been offered of 'girl-gang' off-shoots to male gangs, they have been rare.

UK Serious Youth Violence and Gangs research

The UK has, in the vast majority of cases, favoured a male-dominated characterisation of gang violence, given that the majority of recorded offender and victim rates associated with this form of violence are in relation to males.

As a result much work has focused on the definition of gangs (Alexander 2008, Hallsworth 2006), the prevalence of guns and knives (Squires 2008, Hales 2005), territoriality (Kintrea 2008), the impact of discrimination and its links to gang violence (Pitts 2006, Sveinsson 2008), and policy and strategies (Youth Justice Board 2007, Street Weapons Commission 2008, Home Office 2008, GLA 2008).

A number of these studies make reference to the limited available evidence on gangs and girls. However, these have often been coloured with a priority to understand the level of female violent offending, rather than the complex ways in which females can both offend and be victimised in this setting, and how these experiences interplay.

Research by Jody Miller (2001), amongst others, has identified, but not always explored, the high rate at which young women associated with gang violence experience sexual assault. The Building Bridges Project identified that those females who associated with gangs as partners (as well as sisters) feared gang rape being used on them as a weapon against the male with whom they were associated.

Policy shifts to see gang affiliation as a 'safeguarding children' issue cite rape as a concern but also acknowledge the limited intelligence on this (LSCB 2009). Literature on reprisals by Richard Wright has made a start on this, but combining it with the youth violence argument is a further step that is yet to be taken substantially.

To an extent these considerations have been crucial in debates about how to address gangs and issues of serious youth violence. Wider research and academic literature has noted punitive policy trends in responses to crime (Garland 2001, Newburn 2002, Sparks 2003, Cavadino 2006); and given the potential damage punitive responses can have on young people in this case, and on society in general, it is crucial to raise the debates noted above.

However, any bid to adopt a more preventative approach to youth violence will require an understanding of it that reaches beyond the crime, the weapon or offenders. To elucidate, we need an evidence base that contextualises all of what we already know about gangs and youth violence. Understanding the role of women associated with, as well as directly involved in, the offences, is one way of achieving this.

Traditional Views of Women and Serious Youth Violence

Prior to investigations of violent females, women were given very little consideration at all in the literature, apart from as victims sexually exploited by male gang members. Not only were such accounts embedded within explorations of the male experience, but they described females mainly from a male perspective. This victim-centric, stereotypical view of the impact of gang violence on women removed any concept of agency that could be attributed to females and therefore did not consider any potential influence women had or perceived themselves as having.

In order to fully understand the victimisation of females, it is crucial that any exploration is framed within a language that genuinely considers the female perspective. Seeking to disentangle where such females are victims and where they are offenders, or opting to see them as one or the other, places an air of artificial clarity in an area which is, for the women concerned, extremely hazy.

Sanders' discussion of 'Mariasima' – the stereotypical distinction between the 'good girl' and the 'bad girl' by gangs, is one which is echoed in studies of US gangs by Anderson (1999) and Taylor (1993) amongst others, as well as literature on teenage pregnancy. Such discourses fail to clarify where we are employing the male perspective of women, the practitioner's view of women, or simply the voice of the women and girls themselves.

Therefore, what the literature offers, in the main, are two general understandings of the impact of gang violence on young females:

1. Women as victims of gang exploitation
2. Women who are violent either as gender-based gangs in the US, or as violent members of mixed gender gangs in the UK.

However, these fail to characterise the broader experiences and influences of young women who associate with gang members, for example as partners –

where such association does not require participation and yet still has consequences. It is clear that we must understand the roles and influence of partners in order to place the actions of males within a context, and from that point offer appropriate responses and intervention for all concerned.

Being able to garner an understanding of whether females perceive, or really receive, social and economic benefits from associating with male gang members, is crucial to developing meaningful interventions. Being able to challenge the perception that they receive benefits, and whether these are attractive to young women from a variety of backgrounds, are crucial questions for practitioners and researchers to explore. Such females may be exploited/victimised while at the same time not recognise this, and victimise others or contribute in some way to gang offending.

When literature fails to consider the complex nature of female involvement in, and association with, gang violence, it risks oversimplifying female experience and will influence the development of insufficient services.

UK research: Females, Serious Youth Violence and Offending

In recent years academics, statutory agencies and third sector organisations have begun to address this gap. Building upon the work by Archer (1998), which focused on women who actively and routinely took part in violence, and were associated with male gang members on such grounds, UK academics such as Tara Young and Susan Batchelor have begun to offer UK specific discourse around female involvement in, and association with, serious youth violence.

Batchelor has argued that, with regards to girls, the relationship between gangs and their own violence offending is not always clear (Batchelor 2009:3). While some of this may be related to the way in which we choose to define 'gang', it may also be due to the fact that female association with gangs may not manifest itself in violent activity.

Wider study is also required to explore the extent of girls' involvement in violent offending and gang activity; the age at which these activities begin and when they peak; on girls' experience of violence and gang activity; on the roles that girls play in gangs; on effective interventions; and on priorities for further investigation.

Wider literature on women and girls in the criminal justice system is also crucial to understanding the service environment. Recent research by Arnull and Eagle for the Youth Justice Board (2009) have outlined the gender-specific needs of female offenders who are under-18, and other studies have sought to identify potential risk and protective factors associated with girls' involvement in violent offending, and furthermore identify the extent to which these factors are gender-specific. At present, however, risk and protective factors have either been identified for:

- Young people (boys and girls) at risk of involvement in serious youth violence (for example, Howells 2007)
- Young women at risk of involvement in offending or delinquent behavior (YJB 2009).

As such, while we can learn from both of these, and attempt to combine them to understand risks and protective factors for women and girls involved in serious youth violence as an offence, we cannot necessarily use them to identify females who associate with serious youth violence, and who are both victims and offending. A need to identify girls who associate with serious youth violence, do not directly offend, but may be at risk of victimisation, is imperative, and yet to be captured sufficiently.

The fact that there is evidence (YJB 2009) of differences between male and female routes into offending, and the risk factors associated with these means there is a need to identify the differences for those who associate with, but are not directly involved in, serious youth violence. Home Office research from 2006 indicated evidence of gender-specific risk factors in the case of 'delinquent youth groups' stating:

"The Rochester Youth Study found that a much smaller number of risk factors concentrated in the school, peer relationships and prior problematic and delinquent behaviour domains were found to be significant for the girls compared with boys (nine out of a list of 40 risk factors in seven different domains as opposed to 25 out of 40 for the boys)." (Home Office 2006:14)

However given the limited number of those who took part in the study, it was not clear how significant these statistics were. Understanding gender-specific risk and preventative factors are crucial to developing appropriate intervention.

Statistics

Statistics from successive MORI youth surveys demonstrate little change in self-reported offending on young people (women and men) with a rise from 2003-2005 from 15 to 17 per cent (Phillips and Chamberlain 2006). While other statistics may indicate an increase in girls and young women receiving reprimands and other pre-court disposals for violent offences there is disagreement as to whether this can be correlated with an actual increase in females committing violence or simply due to an increase in services identifying female offences.

A recent Trident campaign about women carrying and storing weapons was launched following a total of 12 women being charged with possession of a firearm in the first 10 months of 2009, seven of whom were teenagers. This was compared with 13 women charged in 2008 and two in 2007 (http://cms.met.police.uk/news/publicity_campaigns/trident_warns_of_consequences_of_storing_guns).

It is not clear whether such increases are the result of increased police activity and awareness of the roles being played by females, rather than a change in the offending behaviour of girls. The number of girls and young women who receive convictions is still small in proportion to the secure-estate population taken as a whole, and young women are still more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence by peers.

In 2009 the MPS published a report on multiple-perpetrator rape and youth violence which stated that:

“Young people represent the largest group of victims for this type of offending. The average age of victims has fallen; 48% of victims were 19 years or younger in 1998/99, to 64% in that age group in 2008/9. Further analysis shows that 36% of victims for 2008/9 were aged 15 years or younger. The next largest age group for victims is between 20 and 29 years and the percentage of offences against persons in this age group has dropped from 25% to 21%.” (MPS 2009:3)

However, the report also acknowledged that:

“In the area of serious sexual violence, there is an appreciably high level of under-reporting. In offences involving multiple perpetrators, the pressures for not reporting to police are believed to be even higher. This could be through fear of reprisals from a wider network of suspects, or through social links to the victim if a known party initiated the offence and unknown offenders then took part. Because a significant proportion of these offences are committed against young people, there is further potential for under-reporting due to the victim’s age, additional vulnerabilities and the powerful effect of peer group pressures.” (MPS 2009:4)

Low levels of reporting mean that any officially recorded statistics will fail to capture the rate and nature of gang-related sexual violence. Furthermore, the MPS report has a focus on multiple-perpetrator rape. Whereas ‘gang-related’ sexual violence may have a single perpetrator, multiple-perpetrator rape may not be gang-related. Given this it is difficult to deduce meaningful conclusions from the MPS data. It is important to note that their statistics indicate a drop in age of victims, as this would tally with increased fears amongst Building Bridges participants regarding the use of rape and sexual violence. However, as the vast majority of victims do not report the offence to the police we cannot assume that current statistics depict the true age-group of victims.

Even when we seek to draw statistics through self-reporting on the number of girls ‘involved’ with gangs, there is a challenge in understanding what such involvement actually constitutes.

A study by Smith and Bradshaw (2005) on gang membership in Scotland, saw self-reporting figures demonstrate relatively equal participation in gangs between girls and boys. At age 13 a slightly higher proportion of girls were reporting gang members and this had reversed by age 16. Furthermore, the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey found similar levels of boys and girls aged 14-15 self-reporting gang involvement, especially as part of mixed groups.

Neither of these surveys, useful though they are as a starting position, offer any indication of the different experiences that come with ‘gang involvement’ or what risks are involved. If we take into account broader associations, such as partners of gang members, it is not surprising to see similar rates of female involvement, if not slightly higher.

If every young man who claims to be gang involved has a female partner, then it is permissible to conclude that those partners would also deem themselves to be gang-involved. If that boy has more than one partner, or sisters who have been drawn into his lifestyle, then there will be multiple females involved in gangs for every male member. Given the largely undisclosed experiences of women and girls, data will only demonstrate the level of engagement statutory services are having with young females, rather than their real involvement with serious youth violence.

If we are able to gauge an understanding of the numbers involved, it is equally important that we are able to illustrate what this means in real terms. Statistics from criminal justice agencies are, by default, focused on females involved directly in serious youth violence, and fails to capture any understanding of their levels of victimisation or any loose or informal associations they may have to such violence.

Closing Remarks

A literature review produced by Catch 22 for the 2009 Network Alliance conference on Girls and Serious Violence stated that:

“Much more evidence is needed to help us more fully understand the extent, nature and gender-specific dimensions of young women’s involvement in violent offending and gang activity, its causes, and the most effective interventions. Gathering this evidence is likely to require: more collection, and analysis of data disaggregated both by age and gender; development and evaluation of gender-specific programmes relevant to the UK context; and – critically – further work to capture and respond to young women’s own experiences.” (Catch 22 2009:7)

This statement by Catch 22 identifies some of the persistent gaps in research to date. To an extent the Female Voice in Violence research programme seeks to address some of these, especially the ability to ‘capture and respond to young women’s own experiences’ (Catch 22 2009:7).

However, a bid to achieve any meaningful data collection would require commitment by central, regional and local bodies to commission specific work to achieve this. Furthermore, this would need to be conducted using creative methods, working with those agencies which may be working with those young women, for example women’s shelters, youth clubs, schools, and the secure estate, to collect figures.

Given the minimal level of formal disclosure in this area, no other form of data collection will yield the desired results. Finally, once policy and decision makers engage with arguments that a gender-specific understanding on serious youth violence is imperative in order to address it, it is more likely the services will be supported to develop and evaluate potential responses to meet need. Without political steer, at a time when resources are scarce, it is unlikely that such services will be sufficiently supported on the ground.

FIELDWORK FINDINGS

Introduction

ROTA interviewed 352 women and girls from across London and from a variety of backgrounds. Participants were interviewed in focus groups and one-on-one interviews using the discussion tool designed by the FVV team.

The majority of the fieldwork took the form of focus groups. ROTA researchers developed some case studies from girls interviewed one-on-one, and this method allowed for more in-depth discussions outside of the discussion tool.

It is important to note that these findings represent the opinions and experiences of the women and girls whom ROTA interviewed. They should not be taken as the attitudes of all women and girls. Given the referral process, and the fact that we did not collect personal information from participants in tandem with their responses, we will not use these findings to make predictions about the number of women and girls affected by SYV and gang-related violence in London.

However, given that the vast majority of girls who did disclose gang association, did so in relation to male involvement, it is important for policy makers to consider the number of known male gang members, and then create an intelligence picture built upon the number of females associated with them. These FVV findings:

- set an attitudinal scenario within which such statistics would lie
- offer case studies from one-on-one interviews to identify points of potential intervention and any patterns of risk and protective factors
- identify appropriate services for women and girls affected by SYV
- highlight some of the experiences of women and girls associated with SYV
- collate the views and experiences of interview participants to identify any themes in issues or potential needs identified

A detailed breakdown of participants can be found in Appendix B.

Answers to Key Questions

Section 1: Roles of Women and Girls, Boys and Men

The opening section for all focus groups asked participants to explore how they thought about women and girls, as well as boys and men, whether they could be split into types, whether they could be placed in a hierarchy and whether they described individuals that participants knew. This enabled participants to have a general discussion about their peers, and framed the context for the remainder of the focus group.

There was a clear divide in responses received from girls under the age of 19 and women over the age of 35, namely mothers; the divide being less extreme for women in their twenties. Participants, regardless of age group, responded positively to being able to split women and girls, as well as men and boys, into types. On two occasions, older women were more resistant to do this, as they felt it restricted individuals and was a misguided approach to understanding their peers and others around them; this response was not offered amongst younger females.

In relation to women and girls, younger respondents were more inclined to typecast them in a derogatory fashion, using phrases such as ‘bitch’, ‘slut’ or ‘junge’ rather than words such as ‘ambitious’ or ‘independent’.

Age 14-15	Age 13-15	Age 16-28	Age 16
Slags	Bitches	Slut	Bitchy
Tomboys	Slags	Ho	Skaters
Girly-girls	Dumb	Girlfriend	Skets
Hood-Chicks	HoodChicks	Baby momma	Druggies
Set-up chicks	Easy	Pretty girl	Rude girls
Bate chicks	Babymothers	Ambitious	Chavs
Babymothers	Wifey	Stuck up girls	Violent girls
Wifey	Clever	Slack (easy)	Lippy girls
Bitches	Good Girls	Tomboys	Bum licker
Intelligent	Rude	Non-ambitious	Follower

Table 2: Examples of the first 10 ‘types’ related to women and girls given by four groups aged under 19

These responses can be compared with those received by mothers who described women and girls as follows in Table 3:

Over 35	Over 35	Over 35	Under 25
Rude	Leaders	Leaders	Bitch
Mean	Followers	Followers	Slag
Quiet	Boyish	Mothers	Ho
Hoodrat	Girly-girls	Friends	Jealous
Follower	Mothers	Sisters	Set-Up
Leader	Babymothers	Girly-Girls	Hoodchick
Good	Teenage mothers	Tomboys	Wifey
Bad	Easy	Bitchy	Ride or Die
Victim	Wives	Independent	Mother
Tomboy	Bitchy	Hard-Working	Clever/Geek

Table 3: Examples of the first 10 ‘types’ related to women and girls given by mothers

It is also important to note that responses for mothers under 25 were more in line with younger non-mothers than older mothers. Secondly, while responses from mothers were less malicious than younger participants, phrases such as ‘tomboy’ or ‘boyish’ as well as ‘girly’ or ‘good’ girls were used by them as well as by younger participants. There was also a strong inclination by participants to describe females in relation to men, for example, ‘wifey’, ‘babymother’, ‘slag’ or ‘sket’.

When asked to prioritise which were the best types of women and girls, groups generally made reference to ‘good-girls’, ‘wifey’, ‘independent’ and ‘ambitious’, even though the latter two were rarely referenced in the first 10 ‘types’ identified (see Table 2 above).

When asked about different ‘types’ of boys and men, the reactions from participants followed the same pattern, in the sense that all bar two, opted to split males into different types. Examples of responses from younger participants were:

Age 15	Age 14-15	Age 16-18	Age 19
Dirty	Wasteman	Gangsters	Alpha
Horny	Lazy	Wannabee gangsters	Waste
Safe	Gangsters	Snitches	Street boys
Sweet mates	Wannabee gangsters	Leaders	Ballers
Idiots	Snitches	Followers	Gangster; wannabees
Players	Pimps	Clever	Pimp
Bad boys	Right-hand man	Geeks/Nerds	Non ambitious
Batty boys	Leaders	Protective	City boys
Cute boys	Followers	Bad-boys	Gentleman
Real	Intelligent	Rude-Boys	Chav

Table 4: Examples of the first 10 ‘types’ related to men and boys given by four groups aged under 19

This can be compared with answers from mothers:

Over 35	Over 35	Over 35	Under 25
Angry	Good	Frustrated	Gangster
Misunderstood	Bad	Angry	Wannabe Gangster
Lazy	Geek	Good	Hoodrat/Street-rat
Hard-working	Nasty	Bad	Sweet boy
Intelligent	Patriarchal	Stifled	Protective
Lost	Old man boy	Creative	Intimidating
Confused	Father type	Loving	Violent
Gangsters	Gay	Player	Streetwise
Dominant	Imbalance of ying/yang	Jealous	Intelligent
Over-bearing	Stallion	Protective	Known

Table 5: Examples of the first 10 ‘types’ related to men and boys given by mothers

When describing men and boys, mothers used emotions and experiences such as ‘angry’, ‘lost’ and ‘frustrated’, which may drive types of behaviour; rather than describing their actual behaviour, as they did in the case of females, using terms such as ‘slags’. Young respondents placed boys within more of an SYV context, making reference to ‘snitches’, ‘right-hand man’ and ‘gangsters’. While both groups described men as ‘dominant’, ‘intimidating’ or ‘jealous’, mothers did this in their first 10 answers, where as girls considered this later.

When placing their answers in a hierarchy, mothers stated that they found males who were ‘spiritual’, ‘balanced’ and ‘dependable’ attractive, whereas younger respondents focused more on those who were ‘protective’, ‘had money’, were ‘confident’ or were ‘bad boys’. Younger respondents often stated that they did not know why they were attracted to bad boys, but they were. They also stated that they would rather be with a man who was confident and knew ‘bad boys’ but didn’t have to be really bad to be respected. It was the respect that he had, or commanded, which was most important.

Section 2: Attractions of Violence

Participants were asked to discuss why some girls entered into relationships with males involved in SYV, and asked them to debate the importance of boys being streetwise.

When asked how important it was for a boy/boyfriend to be streetwise answers were divided into two camps:

Some respondents stated that while in general it was seen as important, it was not crucial for them, as they felt they could look after themselves:

‘Girl might feel scared or feel like she needs protection’

‘Some boys might think that is what they need to do, but for me it’s not that important. Most of the time if you’re not around trouble it doesn’t always find you’

Participants were often divided between the importance of boys being able to protect their partners and them not being violent:

'Not true (that they need to be streetwise) Friends go out with a mix of boys - but do want boys who can protect them. Streetwise: doesn't mean you have to be violent or carry a gun; but most girls probably want a man who can stand up for himself'

'Guys are supposed to be protectors - not necessarily fighters, but be able to take care of you'

Those who stated that it was important for boys to be streetwise justified this with statements such as:

'If your man isn't streetwise what can he do for you really, how can you go out with him and feel ok, you know like feel safe?'

'He needs to understand my world and I need to think that he can be with me in that world'

'You also don't want everyone to think he is pushover – that would just be embarrassing – other people need to respect you'

Likewise, mothers acknowledged that for their sons, being streetwise was important for their confidence and self-esteem. It also made them feel more comfortable, as parents, if they knew that their son was not afraid when going out. However, this did not equate to them wanting their sons to be violent or purposefully look for trouble; they just wanted to be confident that they could keep themselves safe:

'I wouldn't want to be always worrying about him when he is out as well, I need to think he'll be okay and if he gets into any trouble he'll be able to handle it'

Aside from being streetwise, when girls discussed boys who were directly involved in gangs and serious youth violence, clear reasons were given as to why some found gang members attractive:

'Status; being known; money; the danger can be attractive to some people; the hype around those type of people; protection. If a lot of girls wanna be with them and they choose to be with you then it's like it makes you seem more important'

'Being known; cos they are the leaders – you don't wanna be with the ones at the bottom, but the leaders can get you places, like into clubs and stuff like that'

If girls were attracted to gang members, or boys involved in SYV, it was linked to status, protection, money, the need or desire to be 'known' locally, the excitement of taking a risk and a boost to self-esteem. Much was determined by whether or not gangs were formed of 'popular' people in an area. If they were then it was simply a case of wanting to be with the popular people.

Some girls made reference to wanting to be the one person to change a boy who was caught up in SYV, and others said a relationship with a gang member made you feel more important as he would love and trust only you, and hate everybody else. Some stated that gang members also demanded the attention of girls, and some stayed with them out of fear:

'Sometimes with these boys it's not like they are asking you, they're telling you, you will do this or that, or just do that or I'm gonna do this to you; you know how nuts they are, how are you gonna leave them?'

Section 3: Association with Violence

Participants were then asked to discuss what they perceived to be, the benefits and risks of associating with serious youth or gang violence. When asked whether there were any benefits to being gang associated, those identified were similar to the reasoning behind being attracted to gang members. Benefits identified in multiple focus groups were: status; protection; money; respect; excitement you get from taking risks. On occasion some girls made reference to good sex; being financially secure; retribution; having connections to a family/network of trust.

Having identified 'benefits' of gang-association, participants were asked whether females who benefitted 'via association' in these ways were 'guilty' of anything if they didn't directly offend. Groups were often split on responding to this question, and tended to make a distinction between being legally and morally guilty.

'It's like receiving stolen goods; or aiding an offender or whatever'

'Because you are going out with them, could try and get them to stop'

'You aren't the one doing anything wrong – it's his choice how he lives his life'

Much of this debate was framed within conversations about how much influence females had over the opinions and actions of their male peers; and how much choice females were considered as having once they were in relationships with gang members. If girls were seen as encouraging their boyfriends to engage in SYV, in order to attain the benefits listed above, then a level of guilt was attributed to them. However, for others it was not clear that explicit encouragement from females determined the behaviour of boys:

'What about (Gang X – name has been removed for anonymity reasons), it's in the name of their gang that they don't care about us, all they care about is money'

'Cos we are always around them and they like that, we might have some influence, but if it wasn't us it would be someone else. The boys love the attention but we aren't really in control of what they do'

'You have to be a really special girl for some boy to be doing these things just for you – that is so rare'

'At the end of the day, if a boy is bad and you ask him to do something bad he'll do it, but if you ask him to do something good he won't; it's not that they just do what you say but it is easy to wind them up or cause fights'

In relation to the risks of being gang-associated, girls stated that these often outweighed the benefits, as they were more likely to be put at risk than receive any real benefits. When asked what the specific risks of being gang-associated were, girls offered the following:

'It's a life and death thing – same as the boys – but sometimes girls are easy picking. Police can search for a gun or a knife, how can they search for rape, how can they search for kidnap?'

'Whatever his problems are they become your problems, it's as simple as that. Anyone who has a problem with him has a problem with you too'

'You could be arrested, especially if you are holding something for someone else, and then it's not like you are gonna snitch cos then you are gonna have everyone waiting for you and they'll know what you have said. You'll just have to take it.'

'You can't go to certain ends; or at least can't be seen with your man in certain ends'

'If someone is trying to get at someone you know they could do something to you – you know like attack you, rape you, kidnap you or whatever – or just use you to set something up'

'You're stuck relying on people who you can't turn against cos if you do they will see to you properly.'

'You never know where you stand. My friend was going out with one boy from X. when they broke up she started seeing a different boy from Y. When the boy from Y found it they all beat her up, she hasn't left her house two weeks and it's the summer, you know. And when her ex-boyfriend found out for happened all he said was 'oh well'. In his eyes she was just a link, but in her boyfriend's eyes she was a set-up chick and needed to be dealt with; it's madness'

On occasion, although it was rare, girls were either unaware of risks or were aware but didn't believe that they were in any direct danger:

'Just by going out with someone you're not doing anything wrong. Your relationship has nothing to do with the other people he hangs around with.'

'If you were to slip up you might get in trouble but not everyone does. If you don't live where he lives, and there aren't any gangs in your area, then as long as you stay there and keep your head down then you'll be fine. Girls shouldn't be trying to get involved in all of that, just leave it to the boys. I'm happy to stay out of it; as long as you keep them happy then I don't think there are really any risks'

Section 4: Relatives

During the 'relatives' section of the discussion, participants were asked to discuss the experiences of mothers and sisters of men and boys involved in serious youth and gang violence. Respondents considered options available to these groups, roles played, risks faced and services available if they wanted to access support.

Mothers were clear that the experiences of parents were often very different. Some were threatened or experienced domestic violence at the hands of their sons, others were involved in coercion. With regard to coercion some were afraid of what would happen to their son if they threatened to throw him out of the family home or inform the police.

Others admitted that the son had become a breadwinner and protector of the family and asking him to leave this lifestyle could place the whole family at risk.

Mothers also spoke about the state of their own mental health, as a result of anxiety, fear and depression, and the difficulties that they had in managing the safety of all their children when some were not gang-involved.

When mothers were asked what they considered their options to be, if their son was gang-related, they responded as follows:

'Would you throw them out – I don't know, surely that's just feeding them to the wolves so to speak'

'Move out of the area, sometimes that's the only thing; they may find a new gang in the new place, education is best'

'Old fashioned way: send him back home to West Indies or Africa'

'Accentuate the positive; Work with them to set goals'

'When my son came out of prison I moved us all out of London, but I had that option, not everyone does'

'Talk to your child, or get another member of the family to do it. Me and my sisters, we know when to call on one another for support'

'You wanna hope that you have done enough to stop him getting to that point or being able to work his way out of it. When it comes to us as parents prevention is the main role we can play, once he's gone down that road it's like a battle between him and the rest of your children.'

'At the end of the day if you're living in a certain place, gangs are running the thing, if he doesn't join he is out on his own – you can't control who they see on their way to and from school, then it's too late he gets thrown out of school and then where is he going? So he is making money, so he is leaving stuff for his mum, you aren't gonna be encouraging him, but what else can you do. At the end of the day you only guide them so far and then – you know that's their life. If he leaves will you be able to protect him?'

I know what you mean but if the mum can't help who can?

Exactly who can – that is the right question? Who is going to help him, how can you help him when he's gone that far? Who can deal with the fall out?'

Young mothers talked more in detail about prevention, and steps they were already taking in a bid to avoid their son becoming gang-associated or involved in SYV:

'Like as my son is growing up I am thinking I have to just keep him in, I can't send him to the local schools and he can't play out in the area cos the gangs are out there and I don't even want him getting involved. If he did I don't know what I'd do.'

'It's almost like I've been housed in a place just to challenge me to see if my son will get out of there alive – to see if I would have it in me. It's so hard but you have to work with what you've got, once they get hold of him, all you can do is pray while everyone else judges. I'm scared for him to grow.'

'As soon as he is old enough to go to school we're moving, if not before. Education is his only hope and the schools round here won't help at all'

Some younger non-mothers mirrored the ideas of older participants:

'Send him to the countryside'

'Show him he has people who care about him, build close links with family so he knows he has people who care about him'

'Some mums would rather have son and friends over so they could see what they are doing and know where their son is'

However, others were less enthusiastic about the options for mothers with gang-involved children:

'I don't think a mother can do anything'

'It's not worth her getting involved; he won't listen and she could get herself into even more trouble. When boys are really involved in these types of things it's like they just don't care anymore'

'She could beg him or say she is scared for her own safety cos boys are really protective of their mums sometimes; but he just might try and deal with that by stepping to other people who he thinks might threaten her rather than leave himself – it might make him do it more'

Having identified moving, wider family support and talking to their son as the main options for mothers once he was gang-involved and they wanted to intervene, respondents also considered the risks facing mothers.

Given that risks were already raised when considering options to intervene, they were often determined by the mother's level of involvement in what her son was doing (either through coercion or trying to intervene) and the extent to which she was known by other gang members and rivals of her children. Some of the risks discussed by mothers were:

'Massive risks – and other people don't really appreciate that. People coming to your house looking for your son; breaking down your door'

'Women I know, mums, have been raped. Raped. Just because people were looking for their sons and they wouldn't speak up. Cos they were trying to protect their children.'

'Losing her mind, losing her son'

'A mother risks losing everything: life; family; safety; home; everything; job; health – physical, emotional, mental, spiritual'

Younger respondents identified the same risks:

'Gang members could turn against her – especially if there is a tip off to police. Retaliation, if her son is sent away and her protection is gone'

'Threats to family; depression; She'll have to protect other family members, especially younger brothers'

The risks to the physical and mental health of mothers, and their ability to protect themselves and their wider family were of most concern to all respondents. Managing such risks coloured any potential intervention that mothers could make, once gang involvement had been established.

It also influenced what participants understood as being coercion and coercion under constraint, and some mothers also discussed the implications of risk when the gang involvement was linked to family ties, and intervention would require a mother to lose contact with her entire family as well as move home.

Respondents were also keen to emphasise that on occasion it is grandmothers who are looking after gang members, and it is their health and homes that are put at risk if their grandson becomes involved in SYV. Greater acknowledgement for the role of grandmothers was deemed as important by participants of all ages.

With regard to sisters, respondents were clear that many of the risks faced, and roles that could be played, were similar to that of mothers. However, there were a number of important differences that need to be noted.

Firstly, given the age of many sisters and the closeness they had with their brothers' friends, sometimes attending the same school etc, they were more of an accessible reprisal target than a mother.

Secondly, they also presented more of a threat to becoming directly involved in gang and serious youth violence themselves.

Thirdly, whether their brother/s was older or younger than them had an impact on the roles they could play.

Finally, sisters were less likely to be held responsible for the actions of their siblings, in comparison to mothers, even though some sister felt an increased responsibility as they often understood the experiences of their brothers better.

Participants thought that sisters were best placed to:

'Talk to their brothers; keep it real with them by letting them know that as a sister you know exactly what goes on'

'At least sisters can keep up to date with where their brother is and who he's hanging with – more than a mum can'

However, there was also an acknowledgement that sisters faced risks of more direct involvement in offending and violence, as well as being victimised:

'Other gang members might use her as a bargaining tool; rape; more at risk than mother – because she is young; sister's education and job may be affected; sister may be angry and depressed too'

'Sisters can help out with delivering drug deals and collecting money'

'Some sisters might want to protect their brothers. If my brother got into it, cos he's younger than me, I would wanna protect him. Pay off his debts, whatever it'

took to get people off his back. He is so stupid sometimes I could imagine him getting in deep and then not knowing where to turn. My ex use to look out for him quite a bit cos no-one would have messed with him, but now we're not together I'd have to step in – shit, hope I never have to'

'Some might end up seeing (be in a relationship with) an enemy and then get caught in the middle – that happened to my friend once and it was her brothers that mashed her up for disrespecting them, nuts'

On occasion sisters noted that they were not necessarily that close to their brothers; either because they didn't get on, did not live together or were far apart in age, and therefore did not seem themselves as playing much of a role facing any risks:

'My brother is doing time at the moment for knife crime, but like we didn't live in the same house as we were growing up so I'm not that close to him. There wouldn't have been anything that I could have said or done'

'Might depend on the brother too – brother may have more respect for mother than brother, may not have as much influence as mothers, more passive role; depends on the age difference too'

Having identified the various roles and risks that female relatives could experience, participants were asked if they were aware of any avenues of support available to females in these situations who needed advice or protection. They were also asked to describe what type of support services would be most useful to female relatives, if they required help and support.

Participants struggled to identify formal routes to support females in the situations outlined above. Some were able to reference generic support:

'Local support workers – local organisation, council or housing'

'Local GP may be someone to talk to'

'Family and friends may offer support and advice'

'I may talk to the worker who is in charge of this mother and baby group; although by the time my son is old enough to be in a gang this won't be available for me; it's not fair that once he is five I lose this support, I really need it'.

However, mothers were also sceptical about seeking support through the police, school or social services for fear that they would face prosecution or lose their other children. In general there was a sense of isolation. Participants did make suggestions about the type of support they may be comfortable accessing:

'An anonymous helpline'

'Phone number, someone to contact, to go to: for gang member—like a helpline to talk, not to necessarily tell anything, or someone they could meet outside the home, like with domestic violence'

'It should come from within our communities, through support networks of other people who are going through what we are going through'

'If it is based in our own community, I think especially for black or Asian mothers, and others who are new in this country, they may feel more comfortable speaking to someone who is from their background'

'Support without the pressure of having to testify against your son or hand him in to the police, especially if you don't know that he has done anything wrong necessarily and all you know is that he is in a gang.'

'Advice; but when you aren't being judged.'

Section 5: Healthy Relationships

The largest section in the discussion tool focused on what women and girls saw as important in relationships. This included what they expected to, and did not want to happen in a relationship, the place of sexual contact in a relationship, the roles of relationships in the context of SYV and the implications this had for safety, especially with regard to sexual violence.

When asked what was important to them in a relationship older and younger participants responded differently, with the latter struggling to identify the difference between qualities in relationships, and what types of men they found attractive. For example they may have found swagger, money, good sex and protection as important in a relationship, but also saw them as qualities that they sought in individuals.

Whereas older participants could distinguish between qualities found in an individual, such as confidence, and qualities found in relationships such as 'balance'. Examples of answers given to what they wanted in a relationship were:

Age 17 (mixed mothers and non-mothers)	Age 14 (non-mothers)	Mothers over 35	Mothers over 35
Trust	Good sex	Respect	Commitment
Money	Money	Empathy	Trust
Education	Trust	Partnership	Communication
Good in bed	Good looks	Love	Love
Swagger	For them to be faithful	Safety	Balance

Table 6: Examples of desired qualities in relationships

However, when asked what they did not want in relationships women and girls of all ages tended to give similar answers:

Age 17 (mothers and non-mothers)	Age 14 (non-mothers)	Mothers over 35	Mothers over 35
Violence	Violence	Disrespect	Dishonesty
Liars	Someone telling me what to do	Violence	Violence
To be told what to do	Someone who is always needing me around	Shouting	Controlling
To feel trapped	Ugly	Hate	Overbearing
	Broke	Too much moaning	Insecurity

Table 7: Examples of undesirable qualities in relationships

There was a preoccupation in many answers with the negative impact of violence within relationships or feeling controlled or trapped by a partner. Young females, on occasion, offered answers which negated what they had wanted in a relationship, for example, broke (rather than money), no swagger (rather than swagger). However younger participants were more able to say what they did not want in a relationship compared to what they did.

When discussing different types of relationships, participants were asked to define the terms ‘link’ and ‘wifey’ and to explain the differences, if any, between them. These phrases were chosen given the rate at which they were used during the scoping phase of FVV and in the Building Bridges project. Clear distinctions were given between the two types of relationships; although it is important to note that neither term is used exclusively in a serious youth violence context.

The term ‘link’ was defined by participants as:

‘Just a beat’

‘Boys will think link=fuck, a beat’

‘Boys view link differently than (some) girls’

‘Some boys (who have a baby with a link) might look after baby – but never the girl;’

‘Link: someone not serious with, call when you want to see them – not to just talk to you’

‘If you are a link you can’t expect to see him regularly all the time, you can’t expect daily contact; you can’t ask where he is or what he’s been doing’

‘I swear that term was invented by boys’

‘It’s just a sex thing, but it’s more for the boys than the girls, like girls don’t really boast about links. Even if you are a link you wouldn’t really say it like that. Well not like proud’

Some sought to describe it as a route into a relationship, but then often confused this when they used the term 'link' in a derogatory fashion. This confusion was based on disagreements, on occasion, as to whether being link required them to have sex. Furthermore, there was consensus around the idea that for boys links were not about relationships, whereas some girls would 'link' a boy in the hope that this would develop into a relationship. If the sex took place before that development then the derogatory comments about links were more prevalent.

The term 'wifey' was defined by participants as:

'The one at home, the one they trust and introduce to the family, the one they are more open with'

'Can tell other people, can walk down the road together'

'What do you want to do – (he) might ask what the girl wants'

The starkest distinction made between a 'wifey' and a 'link' came when participants made reference to pregnancy:

'If a link gets pregnant he will say – 'go to the clinic and sort it out', 'you will get rid of it cos he will only think you're a ho'

'It wouldn't be good to get pregnant if you were just linking someone, it's not okay'

'If you are his wifey and you get pregnant he would probably let you keep it; if you were a link he'd either say it wasn't his or beat you up til you lost it – especially if he uses violence to deal with issues'

'If girlfriend/wifey gets pregnant they might keep it or discuss it; if a link is pregnant 'it's a definite you're not keeping it' or 'it's not mine', even if she's only been with him'

Participants were asked about different occasions where girls may have sex, whether in or outside a relationship and at different ages. When asked whether there was a more appropriate age to have sex respondents either focused on the legal age 16 or thought that there wasn't necessarily a 'right' age and that it would be different for different people; others thought the age should be raised:

'If you have sex before 16 you aren't ready to have sex and not get emotionally attached to that person. You need to be able to have sex and not get emotionally attached. When you have sex too young you get too clingy to that person, then boys won't like you. You have to be able to have sex and walk away'

'21 (is the age that it is okay to have sex). I think it should be raised to 18'

'Over 16 and definitely 18, but you gotta do it before you're 20, otherwise there's just something wrong with you'

'The first time you do it it is always gonna hurt so it is kind of best to get it out of the way'

'Probably 16, cos that is what the law says; but at the same time no-one waits that long anymore.'

There was agreement amongst respondents that, regardless of what age they thought it was okay to have sex, people were having sex before they were physically or mentally ready:

"When I did it I was 13; I felt like I was broken in half"

'My body wasn't ready to endure that type of power; I was too young'

'(When you have sex at 13 or 14) you are getting yourself involved in something you are not ready for'

'That is what boys want so it's hard for girls to say no and then just be on their own – as long as some girls will do it, it makes it like we all need to be doing it'

Confusion around motivations for having sex, and different reasoning between boys and girls choosing to have sex was also a point of discussion; with distinct differences between the two.

Reasons for boys to have sex	Reasons for girls to have sex
Bust a nut/ejaculation/release	For the sake of it
Impress friends 'so they can sit and talk about girls they fucked' - 'Yea I beat that'; she's alright, I'll pass her to you', and then pass them around	So boy stays with them/to keep her boyfriend happy/for boys/because they meet a boy they like and that is what he wants to do
Cause that is what they want to do	To fit in with friends
What do you mean – that's what boys do	Pressure/cos they think they should
Pressure to impress	Boredom
To enjoy himself	Money
	Love
	To make you happy
	To trap your boyfriend by getting pregnant
	Euphoria
	Pleasure (after trying it a few times)
	Adrenaline/to release tension
	Curiosity
	To feel good
	To have children (mentioned once)

Table 8: Reasons for having sex as defined by women and girls

Pressures identified for boys and girls around sexual activity are clearly different, with pressures on males coming mainly from their peers and themselves, and females feeling pressurised by their partners. Girls identified more with meeting the needs of, and pleasing, their partners, in addition to any pleasure that they may receive, and on a number of occasions were not sure that the experience was pleasurable for them, whereas it was seen as a main driver for the behaviour of males. Other motivations such as gaining access to money, having children, or to keep their partner happy were only identified as motivations for females.

Participants also discussed different situations where they might engage in sex, for example whether or not they were in a relationship with that person, or occasions where multiple partners are involved. When asked whether or not they had to be in a relationship to have sex, participants gave a mixed response, stating that while that it was preferable, it was not always possible. There was a feeling by some that for younger women it was better to be in a relationship as they might be more in need of trust and support, rather than older women who had been in sexual relationships over a number of years.

'It would be better in a relationship; that's more appropriate'

'If you know he's a link that is gonna be a boyfriend then it is okay'

'It is different in a relationship, you feel safer'

These discussions led participants to consider different scenarios where they might have sex outside of relationships and the consequence of these. Younger respondents made reference to having sex in house parties or 'shubs', and occasions where drugs and alcohol may influence the decisions that girls made. They discussed girls engaging in group sex in front of other people and having sex in schools:

'House parties are the worst; especially when they are in your ends girls who are 13, 14, 15, 16 having sex; sometimes when they are all juiced up girls will just have sex with boys'

'Summer is the worst, when girls come into school everything all out. There is this building where people go behind for a quick fuck. Summer is like beating season'

'Once in my school, like a couple of months ago, this girl got caught having sex in the school on the CCTV and the teacher played it at assembly, at every year assembly for the week. They wanted to shame her and said to us that if any of us got caught doing that then the same thing would happen to them. The boy left but the girl is still there and she knows that we all know. At the end of the day her mum is a hooker anyway so no one really expected that much more from her either.' [please note: disclosure forwarded to referral agency]

There was debate amongst respondents about coercion, consent and choice. When discussing the use of alcohol and drugs, or wider pressures, some girls remained insistent that any sexual activity was their own choice and that it was within their control:

'Unless someone is holding a gun to your head or you think they're gonna hurt you or your child then it's your choice; everything else is an excuse'

Such confusion around coercion and consent meant that when asked if it was okay to have sex with two people from the same group of friends respondents stated:

'[Resounding] NO; reputation; talk about it; you can't; dirty; finished; no morals; people will rip her; pass her round; they (boys) love it; 'damaged goods'; I watched my male cousins talk about one girl and 'rip' her; called her a dirt; just sluing her; boys will still beat her and boys won't care'

'No! – no friends, no exes...you just become the 'gang's ho'

'As soon as you do that you will get calls from the whole group – when are you seeing me then, (laughter) yea you're just a dirt if you do that'

'If you do that then you will just work your way round them all. Yeah and they will start talking about you, if you're any good and all that, you'll start getting calls from the others cos that's all you are good for like'

'No one would be interested in you as a girlfriend after that – you would only ever be able to get boys for sex and that's it. And that's if you were good – otherwise they would just think you were dirty and that would be it.'

And when asked if it was okay to have sex or engage in sexual activity with more than one person at the same time respondents stated:

'No. That is real sick. Bare girls do line up, but you have to be having serious problems or be mad. Two men is just not okay. Two women is a boy's fantasy, so it might be ok in their eyes. Girls doing line ups have no self respect'

'Some girls think it's the way – but it's disgusting'

'Then you definitely have to be dirty, one of those line-up chicks, if you know that they all know what you are doing'

'If my friend ever did that I would have no respect for her. No one would'

One group of older mothers offered a response that was different:

'If you feel like it, why not? As long as you're safe...whatever turns you on. And as long as you're physically safe and prepared'

When discussing such scenarios, respondents drew upon gang and SYV related violence and pressures, and the impact of group dynamics. Such attitudes towards motivations for engaging in group sex, or sexual activity with partners who knew one another has wider implications for how we think about group dynamics in SYV; this will be discussed in the analysis section.

Following this, participants were directly asked about the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence in relation to SYV. In addition to earlier comments made by respondents about the risks of being gang-associated, participants were clear that females who associated with gangs and SYV risked being raped:

*'The closest thing to a man's heart is women
Mothers are attacked and raped
If they can't get you, they'll get the closer person; we know risks are there. You can't go out to another ends with someone from a different ends'*

'Sometimes sisters get hotted up, but not so common to be raped; more go to rape a wifey, baby mums and mums'

'It's below the radar, but a problem'

'Yea it's a problem for some people, but those out of ends girls have no idea; they think no one knows them and you wanna say to them – 'my space, course they know you, you better hope he don't slip cos you're not as safe as you think'

'If you are around them all the time then yea that is a way to get to you cos you're a girl, and that is gonna hurt him; just keep your head down and keep out of the beef; just being with them isn't the problem it's if you are one of them''

'With all the gun crime hype course you gonna use rape; how you gonna search for that, what do those arches do about that'

'Some of these boys are just on a different flex as well; it's like they are just mad, and if you are with them all the time you don't know if one day they are gonna turn on you. Like once I had been with this guy he was one of my boys, like just friends, and then he's looking at me in a different way, and it's like what they want they get, that is it with them. I sent another girl his way instead, she was easy anyway and she liked all the hype about him acting like he was in control and telling her what to do, I would have had to put up a fight and that would have caused too much problems'

'Yea it happens, but how do you prove it; and who cares, you know the risk you take the chance; it's like rolling with a gang and then coming crying when you get stabbed up – oh well'

Given the different discussions that were had regarding how rape and sexual violence could be used, as well as debates about exploitation, respondents differed on whom they placed responsibility when a rape occurred. When asked, 'if a girl is raped due to gang association whose fault is it' participants offered some of the following answers:

'Her fault'

'Boyfriend's fault and the guy who did it'

'If it's a whole group you have to have all of them. She shouldn't have put herself in that position. That's the deal'

'Both to blame'

'The girl's – she knows the risks and rolls with the crowd'

'The rapists'

'Probably hers', or maybe half and half'

'If you are IN the gang, it's your fault (same as getting shot), but maybe more grey area if you are associated. Girlfriends – same sort of thing, you know what comes with the territory'

'A bit of both. Yea it's like it is of course the person who did its fault, but if you put yourself in that situation. And if it's her boyfriend that they were looking for then it is his fault a bit as well cos it was his beef to begin with'

'The rapist, although some [others] might say her because she's in the gang'

*'[What if seven boys come over, but the girl only wanted sex with two?]
If you want two, you have to have all of them
[Would it be rape?] Shouldn't put herself in that position. Some blame on
boy...but not really'*

The final point of conversation, in the 'Healthy Relationships' section of the discussion tool, asked participants about support services that they could, or would like to, access in relation to any of the issues raised. Firstly, in relation to the police, respondents were not clear that the police service was a viable source of support in relation to sexual violence and SYV, with some adamant that it would only aggravate the situation:

'Yes, she can and should (report it) but would they help her? That's a different thing' – police are very sexist'

'She can (report it) but she shouldn't... it wouldn't be worth the comeback'

'She can't report it. The police aren't there for her she is a criminal or at least linked to do them'

*'It would make more trouble
[do you think she should go to the police?]
I think she should, but she wouldn't be able to'*

'Would be judged and they may not listen – police may know the gang and might judge'

'Some people within the gang might say she shouldn't because it would make things worse, but she definitely should'

'She can't really report it cos she was raped for being involved in something wrong in the first place'

Some respondents struggled to identify wider avenues of support beyond the family or the boyfriend. For those who could identify other services, there was confusion about which services were independent of the state and where support could be offered on a confidential basis. There was also scepticism, amongst some participants, about the benefits of accessing any help after the event. They could not see what difference it would make as it could not change what had happened.

Older participants were able to name more specific services than younger participants (even if they would not necessarily use those services), as well as respondents who were already receiving an intervention, either through a YOT, for example, or a third sector organisation, compared with those referred through universal services such as schools, which struggled to deal with the issue.

When asked what other support was available to victims of gang-related sexual violence respondents answered:

'There isn't – an NHS clinic, if the nurse wants to listen; connexions stop at a certain age. There must be helplines... yeah the NHS' and they will probably tell you to ring the police anyway'

'Go to police if raped: No

Go to boyfriend: Yes

Rape crisis: No, they are all the same. Snitches. informants. You can't trust people to keep what you say private'

'Getting help only makes things worse, especially when you are young no-one can promise that they won't tell'

'If you told someone it would get to your family and I would never want my mum to know, she would be ashamed'

'She could tell her boyfriend if she wanted him to do something about it, but that would be about it'

'Family maybe – depending on how close you are to them. Doctor'

'You don't really have anyone – unless you want your family to get involved. And if you have a girl that you can really trust – otherwise girls might just use it against you.'

'What is the point of talking to someone, people who don't know you, don't understand you. They are only gonna judge you and it's not safe to talk about these things anyway, cos they always want you to tell someone else. If it's done it's best to just get on with it and forget about it.'

Section 6: Female Offending

The final section of the discussion tool focused on females' direct involvement in offending, what roles girls could play and what risks they faced. Respondents listed a variety of offences that females could be involved in including: fraud/benefit fraud; honey traps or set ups; violence: ABH, GBH, assault; robbery; drugs; shoplifting; possession; public disorder; shooting (drug selling); kidnaps/rape – someone set-up; false imprisonment; just being there; sex with minors; firearms; murder.

Participants also discussed motivations for taking part in certain offences, with disagreement about occasions where females would be coerced into offending by male peers and partners:

'This friend of mine, she is facing charges for setting up this boy who was killed. But she told me that she did it cos her boyfriend said he'd get to her and her mum if she didn't. If my life was at risk I don't know what I would do'

'They might do it to help their boyfriend or whatever, or to impress other gang members, to show their worth'

'Things like gun running or bagging up drugs, you know you do that cos you can do it well and it's not gonna cause more problems. Some boys don't want you to get involved on road stuff cos you could end up being an easy target'

'If you wanna be seen as one of the boys then you are gonna do what they do too, you wanna make money, you wanna be respected, you do what you do'

'To teach other people a lesson, sometimes putting girls in their place'

'It gets real sometimes. to save themselves, girls might set up someone else to be raped, slapped about a bit or even kidnapped cos they don't wanna be in the line of fire'

'All I was interested in was making money, that's all I've ever wanted'

'Cos that is what you do; some people are your enemy and when you see them that it is just what you do. It's fun too; well not fun, fun, but when you have rushed someone and you are back with your boys you all catch joke about it and stuff, cos you know if you had been you on your own it would have happened to you. It's not wrong cos they're not strangers, this is a war'

'For me it was like that was my way to keep in with the boys without having to beat them. Like me, I'm this little Asian girl, what police is gonna think to stop me. I was running stuff from Birmingham to London and back again for time and never got caught, even though I had a record of my own'

'Women in the family might do it to protect the boy, you are trying to do the best by your son or your brother, you would rather try and sort it out yourself then leave it to the authorities, you don't know what they might do to him'

With regard to risks faced by female offenders, some were similar to those faced by boys, such as death/serious injury, threats to family, or prison/criminal record. Girls also discussed the risks of rape, sexual assault and kidnap and the emotional trauma and impact of being involved in serious youth and/or gang offending.

Female offenders talked specifically about the impact of criminal justice services on their health and well-being, and what they saw as being limited options available to them upon release from prison. Risks related to the relationships that they were in also dominated conversations, with exit strategies needing to consider relationships with partners, especially with whom the girls had children.

'Sometimes I feel like I shouldn't have handed myself in; I don't know what would be worse, a life on the run or my life in here and afterwards. On the run with a child is no good, so at least when she's with my mum she's ok'

'When you get involved you are a target to so many people; the people you are working against but even the people you are working with. Yea shit's happened, I've been raped, yea I've been kidnapped but it was always by the people I was working for not against. That's why I set up on my own – but at the same time that's not safe either unless you keep your head down'

'Of all the things I've gone through; being held at gun point, being passed around for drugs, been in prison, nothing is as bad as thinking you are on your own. But when you talk it through that is the worst thing about all of this; if you say ok I'm leaving this behind you're also saying ok I have nothing, no-one. And I'm not ready to do that'

'You risk not being ready for what's coming; I was there one day with my boyfriend getting on with things and the next day I'm here and I'm not built for this; I can't believe I'm here. I'm scared to live like this. But I'm scared to change so what can I do.'

'What's worse, being scared of someone killing you or thinking about killing yourself. I've done both and I don't know what's worse'

'I'm scared that I've forgotten how to feel things. I don't cry anymore. One of my boys got killed and I couldn't even cry at the funeral. You learn not to care cos there's no point. If you care too much it makes you weak and that's why most girls don't last in this way of life, cos they can't take it. Hold another girl down while your boys do stuff to her, gun-butt someone in the face with blood everywhere; you have to just think - whatever. If you care you're finished'

When participants explained why girls were violent towards one another, and why boys were violent towards them, answers were distinctly different. Girls were said to be violent towards one another out of jealousy, rumours being spread or arguments over men, as well as being rivals based on territory (if they were more organised and often associated with a male or mixed gender gang):

'Girls can be very jealous and bitchy. If someone is talking about you then you might want to prove a point, like 'don't think that you can go around talking about me like that and get away with it''

'When I did what I did it was because I had heard what she had been saying about me and I couldn't let it continue, or let people think she had been telling the truth. Ok so maybe I went a bit too far but I was so vexed as well that I didn't care; those times I hated her'

'If you know that your boyfriend has cheated on you most girls go after the girl, rather than just have it out with their man. Most times they stay with him anyway'

'I'm only violent with other girls if they have said something about one of my boys, then I might come in as the girl to deal with her first; they wouldn't jump in straight away unless she didn't learn her lesson'

With regard to boys being violent towards females, explanations focused on a perception that men wanted to demonstrate their power over girls, and that they did not really always have a *reason* to be violent towards them; they just were because they could. They might also be violent if a girl had said something about them, or had an argument with their girlfriend, or if the girl was associated with a male rival:

'This boy came to my school gates and sprayed an aerosol can in my face because I had had an argument with his girlfriend; she just stood back and watched'

'Every year I feel like it is getting worse – you can just watch videos of girls getting slapped about on facebook'

'Don't you just hate it when they get angry with you and grab you up like that, round your collar (demonstrates), and they get all in your face. They are so angry sometimes'

'I'm telling you it's the drugs they take as well, cos I've been hanging with boys who are all smoking and one minute they are fine and they next minute they are threatening to jook you up over something you don't even know what you did. They'll be like 'are you laughing at me though ra-tere-tere' and you're thinking 'shit he could actually mean it'

'It's a power thing, and also not everyone says anything to them anymore. Like I've seen a boy just punch this girl in the face on a bus and none of his boys have said anything. Or this one boy was coming at me in the chicken shop, going to take off his belt saying he was gonna lash me with it cos I wouldn't give him my number. And that makes girls think they need to be more violent so they can try and stand up to them; or just seem really girly so they look like a pussy for hitting you'

"Some girls like push and push boys until they hit them, it's like they are just testing them'

'If you are rolling with boys like that then you take the risk of getting caught up the violence; that's life. If you piss them off they will deal with you the same. They will wanna get to you, of course'

With regard to drug use, respondents disagreed on the extent to which it influenced female gang association or offending. For those who used drugs, some were adamant that this did not influence whether or not they were involved in serious youth violence, whereas others admitted that it did help them manage the impact of violence to the point where they struggled to feel any emotion.

Some girls disclosed in one-on-one interviews that they had engaged in line-ups or group sex with multiple gang members to fund drug habits. Some claimed to have been as young as 13 when this took place. Others however, who used drugs and were not gang-associated were clear that, if a girl was 'weak' or 'poor' and a drug user it made her an easy target for gangs. But if she could afford her drugs or could earn her keep through offending then she would not be victimised. Some who were involved in selling drugs stated that this was because they were involved in 'shotting' that they did not actually use any substances:

'I know this is gonna sound really dirty yea, but I did, you know, do things for them, when they were together or sometimes on their own to get my stuff, when I was taking coke. I was 13 so I couldn't get it any other way, I hate myself for it now, but I can't say I wouldn't do it again'

'Yea it's got to a point now where I feel nothing but that's the best way to be; it helps you deal with all of this shit. And it ain't like there is stuff in my life I should be really happy about for me to want to feel anything anyway'

'Yea you might do a ting for a boy now and then to get your food, but you would be jamming with them anyway, that's not the only reason why you are with gang members and that'

'The drugs is not why I'm in this. Yea a lot of people in it take drugs but some don't; and I've taken drugs the whole way through even though I haven't always been this bad. Smoking is just what I do'

'Busting a zoot, yea I love it, it helps me relax; but it's not the reason I am involved in this stuff, I'm involved cos that's my life; it's always been my life'

The one-on-one interviews also enabled the team to generate anonymised case studies (Appendix C). It is important to note that the analysis of the findings, and the recommendations developed, will draw upon lessons learnt from the case studies as well as the findings detailed above.

ANALYSIS OF FVV FIELDWORK FINDINGS

The answers given to the research team, and the case studies developed in one-on-one interviews, have enabled us to develop key themes for policymakers and practitioners to consider. These can crudely split into overarching concerns, target groups, and sexual violence and exploitation. Aside from specific needs and experiences of the females interviewed for FVV, consideration also needs to be given to existing strategies in place to tackle SYV and gang-related violence, and whether these gendered experiences have been accounted for in such policy. This analysis will make two broad requirements of current policy and practice:

- 1) Need to develop specific policy and interventions to meet the needs of females victimised by SYV and gang-related violence, as well as address and reduce the offending of females associated with or involved in SYV or gang-related violence.
- 2) Need to re-visit existing policy, strategy and practice in the area of SYV and gang-related violence, to assess whether it is sufficiently gender-proofed.

Overarching Concerns

Issues of universal concern do not necessarily apply to *all* women and girls, but would be the responsibility of universal services, and furthermore cut across the women and girls interviewed for the FVV fieldwork, regardless of gang association, class and ethnicity.

The attitudinal data captured during the fieldwork raised fundamental concerns about the opinions that younger females had regarding:

- themselves and one another
- men and relationships
- consent
- sexuality and gender stereotypes
- 'attraction' to gang violence
- value of support services

Attitudes to Females

Younger female participants in particular, displayed negative attitudes towards other females, did not trust their female peers and were highly judgmental of one another's actions, especially regarding relationships. In addition, a consistent lack of sympathy for those who experienced sexual violence in gang-related contexts and a tendency to blame females in sexually coercive situations creates an extremely isolating environment.

Arguably, for a number of females associated with gangs or SYV, their experience can be amongst the most lonely, whereas the males at least have the facade of brotherhood, females are pitted against each other and struggle to find a sense of camaraderie or peer support. Given that girlfriends often don't get on

with 'links' and 'links' are not respected by those females who directly offend, it was rare to find examples of female peer support, during the FVV fieldwork.

This isolation impacted on one-on-one participants' self-esteem and increased their vulnerability when associating with men and boys involved in SYV. Pressures around engaging in sexual activity, and the difficulties younger females faced in managing these under the judgment of their peers, also ran across girls from all backgrounds interviewed during the fieldwork.

In addition to the judgments they placed upon themselves, the struggle that younger participants had when distinguishing between qualities in a relationship and qualities in an individual reduced their ability to make informed choices around sexual activity. By defining a relationship on qualities that they looked for in an individual such as status, protection, money or sex, they lost sight of any support or respect required in a relationship and chased the image of a 'bad boy' without any real understanding about what this entailed; to the extent that some placed wealth above honesty as being important in relationships.

There was confusion amongst participants about why some females found gang members attractive, to the extent that they wanted to be with someone who could protect them and demand respect from others, but did not necessarily put them in danger that he was unable to handle.

Their delusions regarding the benefits of being gang-associated, such as being in receipt of money, status, and on occasion 'good sex', were, in reality, communicated more as perceived benefits than realised consequences of gang association. This was in comparison to the very real risks that they had to navigate on a daily basis, the bereavement and victimisation they experienced, and on occasion a criminal record and the loss of their freedom.

Attitudes to Men, Relationships and Consent

Wider concerns about the influence of females, and their ability to endorse violence, were also addressed through the fieldwork. Participants were clear that it was much easier for a female to encourage a gang member to partake in acts of violence than it was to encourage him to change his ways. In short, the influence of the female, on an individual basis, was determined by the broader context within which individual males operated.

However, this was placed against a more general backdrop which saw females prioritise a man's ability to protect and 'stand up for himself' above a number of other qualities. Participants stated that they would actively discourage a partner from acting as an informant due to the risk that it would place them in should he receive witness protection. In environments where gangs played an active role, these broader issues could facilitate pressures for males to be involved in SYV, even if this was not the only driver.

Aside from relationship qualities, respondents also struggled to understand the concept of consent, or to characterise the role of sex within relationships. Participants were clear that there were occasions where females gave up their rights to consent. For example, if they had already had sex with two gang members, then they had consented to having sex with the wider group.

Less specifically, the fact that, when identifying motivations for having sex, participants, regardless of gang association, stated clear differences in explaining why boys and girls engage in sex needs to be considered as a consent issue.

Female opinion in FVV would indicate that girls are engaging in sexual activity without really understanding why, without enjoyment and based often on pressures to maintain a relationship, while also trying to hide any multiple partners from peers due to a fear of rejection – this is in comparison to boys engaging in sex with multiple partners, for pleasure and bravado.

It is important to note that all answers offered by younger participants were coloured by a very stereotypical understanding of gender roles, and were devoid of references to sexuality. If one were to take answers on face value, the conclusion would be that all young people involved in, or associated with, SYV are heterosexual, with no room for manoeuvre.

The ways in which participants sought to explain female's roles often saw them pigeonhole 'types' of women within stereotypical understanding of gender roles, in hyper-masculine settings, presenting complex general challenges when seeking to address female victimisation.

Attitudes to Support Services

The final concern, which impacted on all participants across age, ethnicity or gang-association, and which is of universal concern to the VAW movement, is the clearly limited awareness that females have of support services available to them, should they be affected by gangs or serious youth violence. Aside from possible support from families or partners, participants were rarely able to reference specific women's or young people's projects. Some stated they could go to a GP, or a counsellor. At a lesser rate hospital staff, teachers and youth workers were suggested. Their struggle to identify or name services presents an initial barrier when seeking to support those most in need.

However, in addition to this, a large number of participants were sceptical about the ability of any service to offer confidential or anonymous support. This was especially true for girls under the age of 18 or those who were in the criminal justice system or who had been under social services at some point, and therefore were aware of various disclosure procedures.

Participants repeatedly raised the concern that seeking support could expose them to risk, as well as their family members, partners or other children, in the form of reprisals. Given this concern, the police were often seen as a potential risk factor, and not a support service generally open to those who were gang-affected.

While older participants were clear that in most cases, having an option of grass roots-based support from a group that understood individual circumstances and risk would be most appropriate. Younger participants remained sceptical that anyone could offer them a safe environment in which to disclose sexual violence, as it would have to be reported given that they were under-18.

The multiple complexities, outlined above, were entrenched within a context where younger participants struggled to see the attractions of female-only spaces, if they were yet to experience them. Participants who took part in focus groups felt that they would not have been able to engage in FVV if they had been

involved in a mixed gender focus group. However they also admitted that if it had been marketed as a 'girl-only' group they may have been resistant to attend. This was largely due to their general distrust of other females, outlined above.

These attitudes to seeking support, and understanding the value of support, present challenges for policy makers and practitioners alike. They are considered in more detail when analysing the experiences of target groups, and the specialist needs regarding sexual violence and risk later in this document.

Target Groups

Aside from universal concerns regarding the attitudes and beliefs of participants, the needs and experiences of key target groups, who presented complex and specific needs, also requires analysis. The target groups identified through one-on-one interviews and focus groups were:

- Female Relatives – Mothers/Sisters/Grandmothers
- Female Offenders
- Girlfriends of Gang members/Men involved in SYV

Analysis of their comments using the discussion tool, and the case studies that they generated, allows us to consider their priority needs, which services they come into contact with and what risk and protective factors may need to be considered when seeking to identify them and/or offer appropriate interventions.

Female Relatives

Mothers/Grandmothers

In addition to the opinions of non-mother participants, younger and older mothers who took part in FVV raised concerns and needs that were specific to their group. Key concerns and issues raised included their variety of experience, risk, awareness of, and access to, services, mental health needs and concerns for other children. Any service that sought to work with mothers would have to take these specialist needs into consideration.

Due to the offending nature of their son's behaviour, one of the main barriers to engagement amongst mothers was a sense of being judged by service providers, or concern at having other children removed from their care. Given these fears, they stated that there was a need for community- and grass roots-based projects that could encourage mothers to acknowledge, and address, their child's gang association, and prior to seeking other specific interventions.

The fear faced by mothers about confronting their child could stem from fear of reprisals from his peers and/or the child being violent towards her, or because that child has become the 'breadwinner' for the family. Their uncertainty about how to address such fears, while managing the safety of their other children, was a sticking point and severe barrier to seeking help.

Given these fears, mothers from BAME groups especially those of Black Caribbean, Somali, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Turkish Cypriot groups also asked for culturally-specific support that was rooted in their own communities and could take on board these pressures.

On occasion there was tension between seeking community-based support, and a fear of being judged by their community, which made some participants unsure about the safety of such a service. However, mothers were clear that if they were to feel confident about addressing their child's offending, they would have to be able to admit it without feeling ashamed or judged, and that such a service could facilitate this process.

The impact of gang association upon the mental health of mothers, and other female relative and carers such as grandmothers, was also crucial, with participants citing anxiety, depression and fear as daily emotional upheavals. None had disclosed the root of their anxiety to their GPs even though some had sought medical support to manage this.

Impaired mental health of carers reduced their confidence in addressing the offending behaviour of their son/grandson and increased their feelings of helplessness. Pressures to ensure the safety of other children, alongside such emotional stress, also created increased tension that they felt unable to manage.

Younger mothers were also concerned that a greater focus be placed on prevention work, to avoid mothers getting in to this situation in the first place. Without the support of a number of agencies such as health and education, this prevention work would not have the desired impact.

Young mothers who took part in the research were referred via third sector organisations which were working with them as young mothers, or young mothers who had experienced Domestic Violence (DV). However any gang associations they had were not the focus on this work, and some had wanted this to be addressed. They were concerned that had such a referral not been made by sexual health workers or social services then they would be receiving no support, and some found it to be the only source of peer-to-peer support that they could access.

Younger mothers were already concerned about the neighbourhoods in which they were raising their children, and could see few options apart from keeping their child indoors. Many stated a preference for moving away although were unable to resource this. Their experiences of police interventions in domestic violence coloured their attitudes to seeing them as an avenue of support, with participants failing to recognise them as a protective service.

As such, mothers were unable to identify avenues of support specific to their child's gang association, aside from informal networks and the family. Any formal support they received was not due to any fears regarding gang association. While some had had contact with the police or youth offending services, they did not necessarily see these as avenues of support, but more focused on interventions with their child.

They were unable to identify formal avenues to support or address risks regarding mental health and their personal safety, especially threats of violence, including sexual violence, towards them and their children. The impact of measures such as witness protection, when a whole family was moved, was described as being traumatic at best, and they were not sure that such interventions could allay fears. Yet they were unable to identify specific means of securing their safety while remaining in their own homes, describing their situation as a catch 22.

Sisters

Like mothers, sisters were identified as a high risk group by FVV participants. It was claimed that, to an extent, sisters were at more risk than mothers because they were more likely to be in areas where they could be attacked/raped, and could be identified more easily than mothers. Some girls stated that sisters would be approached by rival gang members as potential girlfriends as a way to create conflict. Sisters were also more likely than mothers to collude with their brothers; carrying and holding weapons for them out of a sense of loyalty.

When speaking directly to sisters of gang members, their initial thoughts were to protect their brothers, especially if their brothers were younger than them. Therefore they would be inclined to step in and take a fall for their brother, 'by whatever means necessary' if a situation arose. Such pressures, compounded by trust that brothers may have with their sisters, create situations where sisters are unable to disclose their fears, especially to their parents, and become increasingly isolated. They did not feel as if there was any support available to them, and given that a number of them are over the age of 18, they would not fall under the same safeguarding concerns as younger siblings, or be accessing any universal services such as schools.

In comparison younger sisters were split between those who looked up to their brothers, and those who were scared about what might happen to them, with some respondents straddling both positions. Those who were fearful experienced feelings of anxiety or stress and sometimes struggled to focus on tasks such as school work, if they were aware that a conflict was brewing. However they were unable to identify an avenue of support as they were afraid that talking about their fears would get their brother in trouble.

Some younger sisters who emulated the lives of their older brothers, sought association with a gang via a relationship with another gang member, even though this was often conducted in secret. There was evidence of sisters being targeted by rival gangs, as potential links or girlfriends, as a way of antagonising brothers, in some cases sharing indecent photos or video footage of sisters to further antagonise her siblings. Younger sisters appeared to be at greater risk of immediate victimisation from rivals, as well as being used by their siblings to provide alibis and hold drugs.

Participants were unable to identify support services for sisters who were experiencing any of the above issues; and some who were friends of females in such situations requested the use of a specific helpline so that they could seek practical advice for broaching the subject with their friends and offering support.

It was promising to see the potential for peer support in the case of sisters and this should be maximised. Participants were generally more supportive of sisters who were placed at risk, as their association, to an extent, was not through choice, compared with partners; and they felt less judged than mothers as they were perceived as being less responsible for the actions of their siblings, than their parents were.

Female Offenders

It is difficult to view female offenders as a 'group' given their varying levels of individual need, victimisation and offending history. For females who were directly involved in gangs via offending, there were some similarities in their experiences

as well as significant differences. All the females who disclosed being involved in violent gang offending had been excluded from mainstream education or had simply stopped attending school. However others were unknown to a service apart from school and were involved in mainstream education at the point of arrest.

Those with more serious levels of involvement in violence and sexual violence who took part in one-on-one interviews had all had contact with social services, youth offending teams and the police, and had received a variety of interventions. The case studies developed on females offenders, as well as the attitudinal responses collected during focus groups, signal the need for intensive, specialist and gender-specific interventions in order to reduce re-offending and/or to develop more robust early intervention strategies.

The variation in levels of offending is important, and needs to be recognised when attempting to develop blanket programmes for working with 'female offenders' without supplementary tailored support.

Some girls were involved in street robbery and inter-gang conflict; others were involved in preparing drugs, some in local drug selling (often on behalf of boys as girls were less likely to be caught). Some were involved in more serious offences, such as handling and smuggling firearms, kidnap, setting up attacks including rape, serious violence (including weapon use) and the sale of Class A drugs.

Some girls saw themselves as active gang members who were involved in recruiting other members, whereas others were involved via a relationship with a member and therefore committed offences for, or with, their partner or a family member, such as an uncle. The variation in levels of offending and differing extent to which respondents felt they had 'chosen' their situation or had been exploited, also has implications for any intervention or service developed to work with this 'group' and makes an even stronger case for specialist interventions that take into consideration individual needs.

Even though some participants were more directly involved in offending individually, compared with some who were only associated via a relationship, all participants had a relationship, either familial or romantic (even if this was casual), with a male involved in serious youth or gang violence. Such relationships are arguably the key characteristic for identifying females involved in SYV, and is distinct from males involved in such violence.

A number of the girls stated that their parent/s had sent them to 'good' schools, often outside of the area in which they lived, in a bid to reduce the impact of local gangs on the lives of their daughters. However, for those who became actively involved in serious youth violence, the lifestyle they witnessed, the area that they lived, and local influences negated those attempts to offer positive alternatives.

Attraction to a lifestyle based on money, status and the bonds that they formed in and around the gang were central to their outlook on life. Those who disclosed such involvement began associating with gangs between the ages of 10 and 12.

The roles of family were played out differently for all female offenders who took part in FVV. While some had taken active steps to protect their children, mainly through the education system, girls did not refer much to their parents as key protectors. Some girls drew reference to domestic violence or being beaten by their parents. However this was not the case for all respondents.

At the point they were in the criminal justice system, girls stated that they didn't see their parents as being able to help them – even though most remained in contact with their families. Some felt that they had brought shame upon their families, especially if they had experienced sexual violence.

Case studies demonstrate that those with entrenched involvement in SYV come into contact with multiple services and professionals including the police, youth offending services, social services, sexual health nurses, GPs, teachers, learning mentors, and college tutors. However, even when engaging services girls focused on simply completing their order, for example, rather than honestly engaging in the work.

Opinions on the interventions that they had received were mostly negative. Girls complained that they often did not see the relevance of the projects that they had been asked to take part in, and that those projects did not apply to their lifestyles.

They repeatedly highlighted the importance of culturally specific services and staff members who truly understood their experiences. They also stated the benefits of discussing some of their experiences in female-only spaces in one-on-one and group sessions, while they also acknowledged that they had not liked the idea of 'girl-only' work until they tried it.

Some remained adamant that they would rather complete one-on-one than group work. All stated that they would have benefitted from talking to women who had already been through similar experiences to them, and felt like they had benefitted simply by taking part in the FVV research.

Girlfriends of Gang Members

Girlfriends presented as a third target group and were the most difficult to identify. While some partners had multiple associations such as female offenders, or sisters, for others this was their only association to SYV. In addition to this, girlfriends, as is the case with female offenders, had a broad range of involvement with offending behaviour, or awareness of the risks they faced in their situation.

A number of girlfriends lived in non-gang affected wards or boroughs, and on occasion in the Home Counties. The only service that they were in contact with was their school or college. These girls often felt superior to those who lived in the same areas as male gang members, and were often kept away from gang activity by their boyfriends. The two main risks faced by these girls were 'rape as retaliation' or a criminal record/prison sentence for holding weapons, drugs or other illegal objects for their partner.

The awareness that such girlfriends had of the risks that they faced varied, often depending on how aware their partner had made them. Some stated that their movement was as restricted as their partner's as a means of protection; others lived so far away from their partner that this was not a consideration. However, others raised concerns about their identity being disclosed via social networking sites, or other video and photo sharing websites, and this did increase the possibility of them being targeted for reprisals.

Such girls were aware that given their lack of contact with services such as the police, they were attractive to boys involved in SYV; their homes could provide some respite for their boyfriends, a number had bank accounts for them to store money, and their homes could be used to store weapons.

For other females, who often lived in gang-affected areas, it was a struggle to maintain their girlfriend status and not be drawn into offending behaviour with the gang with which they were associated. These relationships often broke down, shifted and started up again with multiple gang members, placing these females at risk of exploitation.

A number of respondents who were female offenders, were also girlfriends of gang members, and they often became drawn into extreme levels of offending, including gun running, setting up other males and females, as well as violent offending. These girls were often in contact with multiple services, even though the relationships were not often questioned by practitioners.

For those who were directly involved in offending, and those who were associated with it, there was confusion as to why they found gang members attractive, and whether their relationships played a role in the behaviour of their boyfriends.

Girlfriends thought that, as a group, they had an influence on the behaviour of males; however, as individuals they questioned the extent to which they influenced their partners. In fact, there were concerns about being seen as property by their partners, being at risk if they asked to not hold weapons or drugs in their homes, and sometimes feeling vulnerable to violence.

While there was an attraction to the perceived 'lifestyle' of being a 'gang-member's girlfriend', few realised any benefits. However it was important to girls who lived in gang-affected areas that their boyfriends could look after them, and themselves, and this was something on which they were unwilling to compromise.

Sexual Violence and Exploitation

Sexual violence

The role and use of sexual violence in, and around, gang conflict was one of the most complicated issues discussed. Its complexity stems from the various ways in which it impacts on women and girls, and the fact that those at risk of sexual violence have a range of involvement in, or association with, gangs and come from a variety of backgrounds.

The FVV team spoke to women and girls from Black, Asian, Eastern European and Mediterranean backgrounds, as well as White British and Irish backgrounds, who had experienced some form of sexual violence as a result of gang association.

The most concerning aspects about sexual violence in this context were:

- the lack of awareness amongst females about available support
- the lack of recognition that they had experienced rape or sexual violence
- the reluctance amongst participants to report any such offence
- the little to non-existent peer support for young women in these scenarios.

- Line-Ups, Links and Battery Chicks

Evidence was gathered during the one-on-one interviews of girls being passed around gangs to conduct 'sexual favours', and attitudinal information from the focus groups on what females thought about these issues.

While there were different ways in which such exploitation took place, younger participants tended to place responsibility on the females involved rather than the males.

A 'link' was described by participants as 'someone who you just have sex with'; 'if you are a link you won't speak to him in between occasions when he wants to see you' and 'you can't really ask him what he has been doing and where he is going'. The power in these relationships mainly resided with the boys.

While some girls said that they themselves were happy 'linking' boys, openly linking more than boy at the same time would give a girl a bad reputation, whereas it was considered acceptable behaviour for boys.

There was a clear distinction made between girls who were 'links' and those who were 'wifeys', with risks regarding pregnancy and an increase in violence towards girls who were links and became pregnant.

To a more extreme extent, when girls were known to 'link' numerous boys, and ended up doing so with boys from the same group of friends, they gradually lost their right to say 'no' to sexual contact with anyone within that group. Girls felt it was not acceptable to have sex with more than one person from the same group as that would then mean they had to have sex with all of them, and were referred to as 'battery chicks'.

Furthermore, if a girl who had had sex with more than one member from the same group claimed she was raped, participants made it clear that no one would have sympathy for her and that she had 'brought it upon herself'. In its crudest form, 'line-up chicks' (who give oral sex to boys in a line, either in front of one another or one-to-one in a private room) were deemed by participants to be enjoying that behaviour and were described as 'dirts', a 'junge' or on occasion, 'girls that get on their knees'. Little consideration was paid to whether it was her 'choice' to engage in these activities or not.

Girls in one-on-one interviews did disclose incidents of being passed around a gang, especially if they were receiving either protection or drugs from the men in it. While 'line-up' situations could happen outside of a gang, when it occurred within a gang context the threat of violence seemed greater to girls. Exploited girls recounted situations in which they had been initially protected by gang members during situations in which they were held at gunpoint or kidnapped, but were then expected to engage in sex with them all as 'gratitude'.

- Rape as Retaliation/Warning

Rape was discussed as a threat in a number of contexts. Aside from the sexual violence/exploitation females experience in the previous situations, rape as a warning or retaliation is perceived to be an effective way to retaliate against or send a warning to rival gang members. For this reason, many gang members do not want people to know they had a wifey, who would often live outside of their borough and in a non-gang-affected area.

When initially asked to name unattractive types of boys, girls identified a 'snitch' as being one of the most unattractive types of boys to date. Their reasoning behind this was that if a boy acted as an informant and received witness protection his 'wifey' could be raped; either as an act of retaliation or to get him to come back to the area, defend her, and hence continue the conflict.

Furthermore, girls raised concerns about the use of stop and search as a policing tactic created a more favourable environment for the use of rape as retaliation. This was because boys believed they were less likely to be caught for such an offence.

Girls who were actively involved in gang violence also saw rape as threat. The only circumstances in which this was not the case was where they actively put themselves forward as boys, in terms of dress, and the way they carried themselves, to avoid rape.

Girls disclosed that in instances when they had been selling drugs and had their supply confiscated by the police or stolen by rivals, they had been raped and/or kidnapped as a punishment. Others had taken part in setting up girls to be raped or assaulted, either because the other girl had slighted one of their gang members, or to avoid themselves being targeted for an assault.

The use of rape and other forms of sexual violence in the context of serious youth and gang-related violence presents increased risks for victims, as well as practitioners. Girls repeatedly raised concerns about disclosing attacks and then this information being shared with other agencies and putting them at risk.

Furthermore, given the number of individuals who have an interest in non-disclosure in such cases, based on the intelligence that disclosure could open up on a wider group of people, the risks to practitioners and victims needs to be given due consideration. It is not clear, from the scenarios depicted during the fieldwork, that current protocols on sexual exploitation or child abuse would apply safely to girls in these circumstances.

In addition to managing risk in these situations, there are questions to be asked regarding how to engage with young women who have been victimised, and what type of service would be most appropriate. Blanket responses to these offences will fail to take into consideration, not only risk, but also the complex needs of girls in these situations and what has to be met as a priority.

Enabling girls to identify that they have been exploited or experienced sexual violence is a first step that a number of females in these situations will not have taken, and needs to be addressed before attempting to engage with them as a wider intervention or service.

Being able to work with females who have been victims of violence as well as perpetrators or enablers of violence is also a challenge for all practitioners across the sectors. Participants were well aware of this conflict of interest, and it informed their decision about coming forward to seek support.

Attraction to, and endorsement of, violence

The attraction of young women to the 'bad boy' image was repeatedly mentioned throughout the interviews and is an issue that needs to be

addressed. While not every young woman who was interviewed found men involved in gangs attractive, they could see what the attraction would be and did not think that it was ever questioned or discussed. The ultimate requirement that a boy or man they were seeing would be able to 'protect' them and himself was important to participants both young and old.

Those who were not so concerned were in the minority, always aged over 19 and stated that either they did not feel they were in situations that warranted a need for protection, or that they wanted to be able to protect themselves. Therefore, for girls who were in environments where violence was a reality, the boys that they chose to spend time with had to be able to navigate that context for their relationship to continue.

Girls who were actively involved in gangs, admitted that being able to phone a group of boys to come and support/protect them was very appealing and a main draw to being a lone female in an all-male gang. It made them feel important and loved, and they continued to be drawn to this set up even once they had served prison time for their 'crew'. Furthermore, if they had witnessed a gang inflicting extreme violence, it made the love that they would show a female associate all that more powerful:

'If your man loves everyone, his love for you means nothing. If he hates everyone but you his love means so much more.'

Some stated that while in prison they had not been visited or contacted by any of the men in that gang, and to an extent this had shown them that they were not as close to those men as they had perceived, but to admit this and move away from the gang was still too hard. For them it would mean they had no one left and they were not ready to accept this.

For other participants, it was not the violence that made the men or the relationship more appealing, rather it was the respect that the violence commanded. By being a gang member's 'wifey', girls benefitted from an increased level of status and respect. This respect came from what their boyfriend did and the fact that he had chosen them, and therefore they did not have to offend to reap the benefits.

Participants stated that they had not been given an opportunity to think about these issues before, and the focus groups had offered an opportunity for self-reflection.

RESPONSE OF STATUTORY SECTOR

In order to develop sound policy recommendations for both the NRP and the Partnership reports, ROTA held roundtables in five London boroughs, a pan-London roundtable hosted by the GLA, and a roundtable with central government departments hosted by the GEO.

These meetings enabled ROTA to develop potential partnerships across local agencies, as well as strategic responses at each stage. It also enabled us to consider points of similarity and difference between central, regional and local ideas about some of the key FVV findings. ROTA will aim to repeat this process in the other regions under NRP as the feedback we received provided us with a practical insight into multi-agency working and allowed us to apply the fieldwork findings to a raft of policy and practice across all key agencies and departments.

For the purposes of the FVV Partnership, the findings of the roundtables will be assessed with the role of the BAME women’s sector and wider third sector stakeholders in mind. Given the responses from the roundtables, the FVV Partnership needs to consider routes for third sector partners to meaningfully engage locally, regionally and nationally, in both services and policy, to meet the needs of the women and girls in question.

Representation

The borough roundtables had representation from a range of agencies and services including local police (safer schools teams, intelligence, Sapphire etc), youth offending services, head teachers and PRU heads, sexual health nurses, safeguarding and children’s services, youth service, primary care trust (PCT) and child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) representatives, local commissioners, housing and third sector representation. At a regional level, the MPS, MPA, YJB, GOL and the GLA were represented at the pan-London roundtable as well as third sector organisations from across the BAME, women’s and youth sectors.

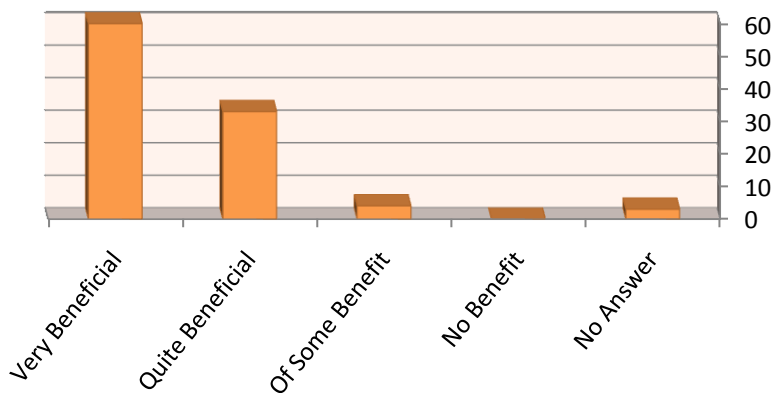


Figure 1: Top five words chosen to describe the borough roundtables

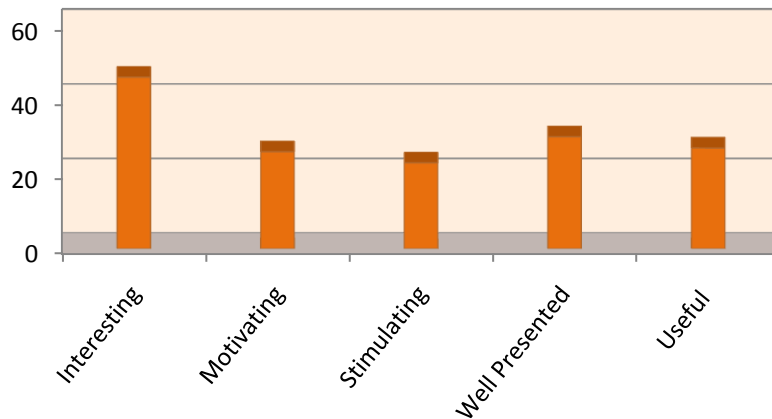


Figure 2: Top five words chosen to describe the pan-London roundtable

Roundtable Findings – Key Themes

The findings from the borough and pan-London roundtables are the focus of this report. Details of the national roundtable can be found in the introductory report to the FVV National Research Programme.

Roundtable meetings were held in Enfield, Hackney, Islington, Lewisham and Southwark, and a Pan-London meeting was held at City Hall. The boroughs were chosen to provide different locations across London, varied experiences of, and responses to, serious youth violence and violence against women, and differences in their resources and structures. It is important to note that the boroughs which took part all had an active interest in the issue, and were willing to engage openly and honestly in the roundtable process.

For ROTA it was imperative that any recommendations made for a borough level took into consideration the different ways that boroughs operate, the different communities they work with, their internal structures and varying budgets.

The general response we received from the participating boroughs was very positive, with high levels of engagement and consensus on solutions posed in response to specific themes. Boroughs also highlighted similar queries and areas of concern which they felt required strategic consideration at regional and national policy levels.

Participants were keen to make recommendations that could be built into a service delivery model, or minimum standards of working. There was a concern that most gender-specific specialist work offered by statutory services was the result of the goodwill or individual interest of staff members. As a result the success of the project, and the likelihood of it being sustained by a service, was determined solely by staff who ran it, and not by the standards set by that agency within which it sat. Boroughs held that a method of working at the local level was required enable all staff to consider the impact of their SYV programmes and strategies on both males and females.

Boroughs were also keen to consider responses at a number of levels. While they acknowledged a role for awareness-raising amongst girls and women about the risks that they faced and services available for them, they agreed on a need to prioritise:

- Awareness-raising aimed at services, agencies, departments and commissioners about the FVV findings and a need to develop and build upon these findings to map local issues and service provision, as well as the development of strategic local approach
- A review of local processes/strategies/practices to assess whether they have been gender-proofed
- The ability/capacity of boroughs to identify and target those at most risk, and have tailored responses in place for those individuals, because limited financial resources demand a targeted approach.

Until these responses are in place, boroughs were reluctant to conduct any generic awareness-raising campaign which could increase the risk of female victimisation. It was acknowledged that victimisation may increase by encouraging females to seek services that are not adequately prepared to meet their needs and waste borough resources by failing to capture those in greatest need of support.

At a pan-London level there was an identified need to support local work and seek to guide broad priorities, especially within the Youth Justice Service and the Metropolitan Police. There was also an acknowledgement that steer for such work can be conducted at a regional level through GOL and the GLA; for the latter driving recommendations through their two strategies – Time for Action (Youth Opportunity and Youth Violence) and The Way Forward (Violence Against Women).

There was concern raised from commissioners about the ability to work with the third sector and identify good practice, and concerns from the third sector that in-house provision was being developed rather than using the specialist expertise that already existed in the third sector.

There was a call for greater support to monitor and evaluate pilots and support smaller organisations to develop good practice and build capacity to compete in a commissioning environment. Those who attended the pan-London roundtable agreed that the evidence presented in the interim report was accurate and concurred with their own experiences of working with females who were associated with serious youth violence, and all agreed that there was a need to work in this area and address the currently unmet need identified during the FVV fieldwork.

Key Themes in detail

Information Sharing, Multi-Agency Working and Risk Management

Arguably the most important point of discussion from the borough roundtables was how risk should be managed locally, especially *across* boroughs and the various agencies involved in the lives of young people. Before any awareness raising or prevention work could take place to target young people themselves, boroughs were keen to assess their own structures, policies and processes to

ensure that they were fit to meet the needs of girls and young women identified through the FVV research.

Participants argued that while they have a variety of models, structures and referral pathways in place, either for SYV, sexual abuse, exploitation or domestic violence, none of these was necessarily directly transferable to working with a girl affected by serious youth violence. Without specific protocols or assessment tools for managing such situations, boroughs could not be assured that young women would be safer/make themselves safer by coming forward; in fact they could be putting themselves at increased risk.

A number of representatives raised and shared these concerns from social services, the police, community safety teams, the third sector, safeguarding boards, the youth service, youth offending services and CAMHS. Participants generally agreed on the need for a local strategy that identifies appropriate information sharing, risk assessment and referral pathways specific to the needs of this client group, and takes local services into consideration.

Given the evidence of girls travelling across boroughs, and the fact that a number of young people attend school in a different borough to where they live, it was important that protocol on information sharing and risk management, in relation to SYV, be built between neighbouring boroughs as a bare minimum.

Where there are known tensions between young people in neighbouring boroughs, developing organised working relationships with all relevant services has become even more crucial, and some boroughs have already begun this process. Boroughs cited problems with moving girls outside of their local authority following an incident, without being able to refer them into a local service. This was especially so if the borough in which they had been relocated was not able to offer relevant services, leaving those females without any support. Moreover, considering the evidence available on young people travelling to the Home Counties and other parts of England, a number of roundtable participants also discussed the importance of communication between regions.

It is also crucial for agencies to develop a means of information sharing between one another. Some boroughs called for greater consistency in the way that police share information amongst partner agencies. Furthermore, concerns were raised about the time it took for information to be shared, and the need to be able to identify which information was important and to whom. Within agencies, such as the police, there was also a need to work more consistently across departments; for example, police representatives sought closer relationships between those working on TKAP, ASBU, School Safety and Sapphire.

Some boroughs already had multi-agency structures in place to address serious youth violence. The majority of these took the form of monthly or bi-monthly multi-agency meetings to discuss key nominals in the area, assess risk to those individuals, risks posed by those individuals and which services were currently working with them.

Some boroughs had begun to use this structure to discuss girls associated with those nominals, or girls directly involved in serious youth violence. Others had set up separate multi-agency groups to look specifically at girls experiencing violence in the borough, with housing and education services playing a crucial role in identification of girls who were not necessarily known to youth offending service, probation or the police.

Other boroughs suggested using MARAC style meetings to share information, some already had youth MARACs in place to discuss specific individuals, or using the safeguarding guidance proposed by London Councils. Although all agreed that while these presented starting points, they did not necessarily apply to women and girls in these particular circumstances, and may need to be supplemented with specific guidance. There is also a need for the findings to feed into local strategy around VAW structures, such as VAW forums.

Understanding how risk and information sharing were managed at a local level was imperative when considering safeguarding procedures in relation to serious youth violence. There was a consensus amongst participants that more co-ordination between, awareness-raising amongst, and training for, agencies is needed when responding to cases of serious youth sexual violence related to 'gang-activity'. In such cases, more standard protocol is not necessarily appropriate. It is also important to manage the conflicting concerns of the safety of the young women involved and her disclosure if she is under the age of 18, as well as to create an intelligence base on local gang activity.

Current exploitation response models did not necessarily fit these scenarios and there was not enough awareness of any third sector provision or specialist services in every borough to make appropriate referrals safely. A number of boroughs wanted further clarification about when it is appropriate to share information, in this context specifically, and what this meant for third sector involvement in both prevention and reactive working.

Participants were also concerned that multi-agency working required buy-in from all relevant partners in a young person's life, and not only those who considered youth violence to be a priority. Boroughs were keen to engage with housing providers, social services, and PCTs, as well as criminal justice and education agencies, in order to develop wrap-around services and address multiple levels of risk.

Examples included the role of Supporting People staff in ensuring two girls in relationships with rival gang members were not housed in the same mother and baby unit, and furthermore, that the risk to those girls, while in those relationships, were taken into consideration while housing them. This avoids potential risks to the individuals in question, but also other residents, should a conflict develop.

While all services were represented at a minimum of one roundtable each, not all had representation from health, housing and social services, which illustrates why such concerns around multi-agency working were raised.

When these concerns were raised at a pan-London level, there was an agreement that the London Serious Youth Violence Board, the GLA and GOL had to seek the direction of the London Child Safeguarding Board in reviewing safeguarding procedures in the light of the FVV findings. There were lessons that could be learnt from work conducted in the third sector, but there was agreement that at present there were no clear answers for risk management, and clear referral processes and information sharing procedures across all agencies, in a way that all departments were clear on risk, and confident in applying the necessary processes.

Local Intelligence

Local roundtable participants also acknowledged that the FVV report, while it could be used as an indicator, could not adequately identify the specific risks and experiences of the women and girls living in their borough and surrounding areas. All boroughs were keen to take the evidence gathered through the FVV Partnership and use it to investigate both specific needs of service users and existing services in their local area. Specific attention was paid to the extent to which 'girl-only' services were commissioned in each borough and what services were available to BAME women and girls, especially with regard to sexual violence, mental health needs and networking/support.

There was also a need to review local policy and strategic frameworks, using a gender impact assessment, to identify the extent to which serious youth violence responses currently considered the experiences and needs of women and girls. A crucial area in which such an assessment is required is in mapping intelligence at a local level, and identifying girls who are spending regular time with known gang members locally, and whether these girls are from the named borough, or neighbouring ones.

While boroughs were keen to see rape and sexual violence reporting levels increase, they were also aware of the risks surrounding this, and in the short term were eager to investigate other ways of collecting data on sexual violence.

Boroughs wanted to work more closely with third sector organisations, health agencies (especially Accident and Emergency and sexual health agencies) to build up anonymous intelligence on sexual violence in their local area. Participants also suggested the possibility of third-party reporting as a way to understand offending locally. The SHARP system (School Help Advice and Reporting Page), introduced in schools, was also identified as a potential way to record the experiences and concerns of females, and alert schools to any issues that their students may be experiencing.

However, it was also noted, across the boroughs, that any proposed reporting process should take into consideration the risks faced by females who do report, especially those under 18, and whether appropriate procedures are in place to manage these cases. Given the 'duty to report' in accordance with child protection and safeguarding policies, it is important that all services are aware of how they can protect any girl who reports gang-related sexual violence and has to have that report followed up by statutory services because of her age.

The pan-London roundtable supported the idea that understanding local need, and cross-borough conflict was essential for local authorities to manage local risk. It was agreed that pan-London bodies, where possible, could identify and share best practice in working with gang-affected females, or offering gender-specific services, and that agencies such as the GLA should lobby for such work in their Time For Action youth strategy. Local authorities and statutory agencies can also be supported by the London Serious Youth Violence Board and London Safeguarding Children's Board.

Education and Prevention

Boroughs generally agreed that any preventative work conducted on this agenda would be best placed within education. Aside from developing work under PSHE, some boroughs are developing multi-agency work around the 'sexual harmful behaviour' agenda. Such programmes were developed via borough-based Children and Young People's services, and partnerships are being formed between these teams and local primary and secondary schools.

There was agreement that any prevention work should be conducted in primary, as well as secondary, school, with emphasis placed on the transition between the two.

Participants who discussed prevention in detail were able to identify pockets of good practice, but also stated that this was patchy and, to date, not as co-ordinated as it should be. Some boroughs had begun to conduct their own small research programmes into the views of girls in their local schools, and were engaging with health agencies on the sexual health agenda.

There is a concern across all boroughs that PSHE still focuses too heavily on physical health attached to sexual activity, rather than mental health and relationships. Some suggested that awareness-raising was needed for head teachers and those delivering PSHE work on serious youth violence and gender, and that agreement on key messages was needed across schools in the private, state, faith and academy sectors.

Some boroughs posed the possibility of a multi-tiered approach to prevention work. Given financial restrictions it was important for them to be able to target and conduct intensive prevention work with 'at-risk' individuals, in addition to offering standardised awareness-raising education amongst all pupils. Agencies working with 'at-risk' young people needed to be able to develop specific risk and protective indicators when working with a select number of females and to avoid their victimisation increasing. For some boroughs this was the most important concern, and needed to be prioritised over more universal awareness-raising amongst young people when working at a local level.

The importance of 'girl-only' spaces within educational settings was also discussed. Boroughs were able to identify some good work that took place in primary schools, but highlighted difficulties in attracting girls to girl-only sessions in mixed secondary schools. The provision of 'girl-only' spaces across all youth services was a recommendation made by a number of boroughs, with others raising the possibility of working within the anti-bullying agenda given the ability that schools have to develop work around sexual bullying.

Boroughs highlighted the importance of the third sector in providing prevention services, and stated that these often had a better uptake than statutory provision. Support for third sector organisations to work in partnership with one another, and statutory agencies, to deliver gender-specific prevention work is crucial.

Regarding the serious youth violence agenda, some boroughs stated that their main responsibility is to tackle behaviour and not necessarily attitudes. As such the attitudes, to violence, gender and relationships identified in FVV, generally go unchecked and need to be addressed within both a responsive and preventative

agenda. Boroughs were also keen to address the seemingly low levels of peer-to-peer support for women and girls, and wanted to explore different ways of creating networks for girls and young women, such as peer-mentoring schemes via the third sector, and working with female ex-offenders in educational settings.

Regarding exclusions, all boroughs raised concerns about the safety of girls in pupil referral units (PRUs), given that there are relatively few. Some boroughs discussed ratios of eight boys to one girl and the concerns that PRUs had about sexual bullying, and the wider risks that girls faced in becoming more directly involved in SYV. Boroughs commented on the struggle they faced when trying to offer 'girl-only' programmes in those spaces, and were keen to learn from any PRUs that had successfully engaged with girls and ensured their safety.

The pan-London roundtable identified the importance of education, and the difficulty of gaining regional representation on education, and this made co-ordinating work extremely difficult. The role of education bodies featured in the GLA Time for Action plan, as well as action points on truancy and exclusion, although this needed to be revisited to ensure that it took a gendered approach to the issue.

GOL suggested that concerns around education could be taken on by them and they could raise these issues with central government. Securing or gaining access to schools to deliver interventions was still patchy at a regional level, and third sector representatives raised frustrations at not being allowed to deliver VAW work in all schools.

Working with Families

Pan-London representatives discussed the most important aspects of working with the family, and framed this with the Time for Action targets for supporting and guiding families. Support for mothers remained a barrier, and while third sector attendees raised examples of working with parents, if they were working with the child, the need for independent support was recognised.

Engaging with parents was viewed as crucial in order to meet the needs of young people, and the YJB raised the potential for family intervention projects to begin to conduct this work. The need for specialist services to support mothers and female relatives was raised by the third sector, and the potential for a helpline to offer advice was called for.

With regard to current local work, boroughs offered examples of work they offer and what they would like to develop. In relation to mothers, to a large extent, the majority of the work was conducted via community safety teams, police, or youth offending services, and this was at the point that a son had become, or was at serious risk of becoming, involved in SYV.

Some services visited the homes of young people whom they had identified as being involved in serious youth or group offending, and would work with them to tackle their child's behaviour. Generally, practitioners identify 'at risk' families, rather than families self-identifying as 'at risk'. Other services include support for families when their children are involved with the YOS, or identifying siblings using safeguarding mechanisms when one sibling became involved with the YOS or police.

Boroughs were unable to state whether existing services took gender into consideration. There were some promising examples of working specifically with mothers, with one borough running a monthly Mothers and Police Forum and PRUs offering example of regular meetings, updates and supports for mothers or pupils. These interventions were generally offered as part of a broader intervention with young males associated with those females, for example mothers or sisters, rather than those females being the core focus of the intervention.

Specific programmes of work that considered risks to, and experiences of, female family members were hard to identify. There were cases where risk was considered and families had to be relocated, for example. However, beyond these one-off actions, on-going gender specific support to females in this group was hard to capture.

Services such as Family Intervention Programmes (FIP) and family centres also need to consider whether their approaches took into account gender-specific needs. Some boroughs also raised the need to work with mothers in relation to their daughters as well as their sons. Services felt that very often the primary concern of mothers was the safety of their sons, and they additionally needed to receive some awareness-raising and support regarding the safety and experiences of their daughters, especially if a family member was gang-involved.

Furthermore, boroughs expressed difficulties in engaging with families for a multitude of reasons, including lack of awareness amongst family members about risk, collusion amongst family members and lack of trust in statutory services (especially in the police and social services).

It was acknowledged that better partnership working between community groups and statutory services was the best way to begin to deliver more targeted and relevant support to families which took into consideration risk as well as offending. In addition to cross-sector working, the roundtables also identified the needs for better multi-agency working, with a role for PCTs and healthcare practitioners to address the impact of the mental health of family members, and identify those who may be experiencing anxiety or depression as a result of their child's involvement in SYV.

It is important for services such as the police, YOS and community safety to be able to also make such referrals, and be aware of community-based support available for female family members. Other boroughs also suggested the use of Supplementary Schools as gatekeepers to BAME parents, and that this may be an avenue to explore for local awareness-raising amongst BAME parents, and a means of capacity-building them to create community-based initiatives that support parents.

Serious Youth Violence and Gender-Specific Services

The need for gender-specific services and gender-proofing strategy was acknowledged by the pan-London meeting. The roundtable sought to understand this through the GLA VAW strategy's 6 Ps priorities: Perspective, Policy, Prevention, Provision, Protection and Prosecution.

The roundtable agreed that in order to work with a gendered understanding of SYV, the sexual violence that occurred within it, and the other risks faced by

females, this needed to be understood within the framework of gender inequality. Likewise, prevention work on SYV needed to identify risks and roles for females, and debate these with girls on a consistent basis. Gender-specific provision needed to be resourced, and there was agreement that strategies such as the MPS Youth Strategy or the GLA Time For Action Plan needed to be reviewed and gendered.

There was agreement that campaigns such as the awareness-raising campaign targeted at girls by Trident, was an example of premature regional action. It lacked a sufficient evidence base; has not been risk assessed in a gendered light and understanding of SYV; and demonstrated how blanket awareness-raising was not the form of gender-specific work around serious youth violence that could be conducted regionally until processes and strategies were in place at a local and regional level.

Local services that had been tasked with tackling SYV – youth offending, the police, safeguarding children’s boards, safer schools partnerships etc, have, to date, generally identified SYV as a boys’ issue. Even though this has not been explicitly stated, given the gender of those who are homicide victims, and those who are generally prosecuted for murder, weapon use and SYV, interventions and strategies have been developed with males in mind.

Furthermore, a number of services, for example YOS or the police, work primarily with males. At some roundtables participants were keen to emphasise that they were not convinced that such services were best placed to meet the needs of females. This bias, albeit unintended, has meant a lack of commissioned services for women and girls, and a general lack of awareness or consideration for how SYV may impact on females.

As a result, there were two main areas of concern for the boroughs, with regard to service suitability: firstly, whether the agencies themselves were well enough equipped and trained to take gender into consideration when meeting the needs of service-users; and secondly, whether any of the services these agencies offered, within the serious youth violence framework, were gender-specific.

The need to engage with relevant third sector partners to ensure the relevance of services, as well as consultation with service users, were proposed as means of beginning to develop appropriate referrals and programmes. Suggestions made included working with female ex-offenders and commissioning organisations or partnerships between organisations which were already delivering this specialist work.

Participants acknowledged that, to date, the majority of programmes, responses and strategies that they had developed to tackle serious youth violence, failed to consider women and girls sufficiently, in the sense that when they were discussed, it was as an additional issue and not one that ran throughout generic documents. As such, strategies in place had the potential to put girls and women at increased risk, given that the impact on them, as females, was not considered.

Any local strategy on youth violence would have to take all young people (boys and girls) into consideration, and assess impact based on a gendered understanding of the issues in question. SYV strategies need to reflect the fact that boroughs are already aware of the differences in the reasons that males and females become involved in offending, the variations in their mental and sexual health needs, and the different extents to which they are victimised.

RESPONSE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

“Violence diminishes women’s capacity to reach their potentials and damages families, neighbourhoods, friendship networks and communities. Costs are also incurred by public services, with the most documented in the justice system; however, there are undoubtedly significant, but as yet mainly hidden costs in health and social services.” (Coy, Kelly and Foord 2009:17)

Responding effectively to the complex issues described by the girls and young and adult women involved in this research will require creativity, adequate resources and the development and implementation of a range of gender-specific, needs-based support.

Collaboration across the public and third sectors will be essential, and the women’s third sector will be fundamental to the development and delivery of effective, quality assured and appropriate responses.

The women’s third sector

Women’s third sector organisations have been instrumental in bringing about positive (and often life saving) changes to women’s lives. They are key players in promoting women’s equality, and have made significant contributions to transforming legislation, policy and public perceptions.

The women’s third sector works with issues which others are reluctant or unable to address such as rape and rape convictions, the impact of childhood sexual abuse and incest, female genital mutilation (FGM), abortion rights, self-harming, women’s offending, and domestic violence.

Many women’s organisations were established out of sheer necessity, such as refuges which were set up to provide a means of escape (and often the only option for escape) for women in violent relationships. Furthermore, third sector organisations (particularly BAME women’s organisations) plug the gaps in mainstream services which cannot or will not address women’s complex needs, which often arise as a result of violence and abuse.

Over the past 40 years, the women’s third sector has amassed a wealth of expertise and experience in meeting the complex needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable women in our society. This is not easily duplicated by generic third sector organisations or statutory agencies that may struggle with or fail to understand the significance of women’s inequality to the service they are delivering.

For example, the violence against women (VAW) sector has led the field in developing successful prevention, protection and support models – models which have led to gender-specific ways of working with women and children and are acknowledged as best practice both within the VAW sector and further afield.

“Innovative forms of provision such as helplines, refuges, self-help groups and advocacy, now considered essential responses to a range of social problems, all

have their origins in 1970s grassroots responses to rape and domestic violence.” (Coy, Kelly and Foord 2009:16)

The women’s third sector, particularly BAME women’s organisations, take on the hardest cases, for example women with no recourse to public funds, so-called ‘honour’ violence, women and girls fleeing or at risk of forced marriage and women who kill their violent partners. They often work with women who cannot or will not, for a variety of reasons, engage with statutory agencies or report assaults against them to the police. Often, statutory agencies are unable to provide the support needed by women, particularly if their needs are complex.

“Generic statutory services – such as social services, housing departments and the police – have very specific remits and lack expertise in providing the support women need.” (Coy, Kelly and Foord 2009:8)

The women’s third sector has a track record in working with women with complex and multiple needs – the ‘hardest to reach’ – and in delivering effective violence against women services.

“In our experience young women that have been ‘written off by the system’, that are in care, seen as challenging, disruptive etc provide very positive feedback on [our] services. We believe this is because we work from a woman centred approach, using language that they feel comfortable with, they don’t feel judged. Often when these young women are referred from statutory services we are told that they’re ‘trouble makers’, they’re ‘aggressive’, they do this, they do that, they won’t turn up and they’ll muck you about. We have had none of these problems with any of the young women. It’s obviously linked to the way you actually work and the way you present yourself as a service.” (WRC 2006:56)

Unsurprisingly, London has the largest women’s third sector of all the English regions – one third of 1,348 third sector women’s organisations examined in recent research were based in the capital.

In recent research, over half of those mapped had a focus on, or specific service for, BAME women. However, the overwhelming majority of these organisations had annual incomes of £100,000 or less, and most usually £10,000 or less (WRC 2009).

London also has the largest number of VAW organisations (mostly domestic violence services) (WRC 2009). Research into the VAW sector in 2009 (found that almost 15 per cent of specialised VAW, and almost half (49 per cent) of specialised BAME VAW, support services in the English regions, Scotland and Wales were located in the capital (Coy, Kelly and Foord: 2009:15).

However the research also found that London is especially underserved in relation to sexual violence services with only three Sexual Assault Referral Centres, one Rape Crisis centre and seven other sexual violence services. London’s VAW sector has been highly successful in influencing regional and national VAW policy and the practices of front-line statutory and third sector services. However, despite the significance of London’s VAW sector, it is well documented that women’s organisations continue to turn women away or operate lengthy waiting lists because their resources and capacity cannot meet demand (WRC 2008).

Current provision of female-specific support services

For this research, a small survey of 26 third sector organisations was conducted. The survey asked about their current or potential activities, and the type of support needed by their organisations to develop or build on services for women and girls affected by gang and serious youth violence.

Half of all survey respondents had encountered gang and serious youth violence-affected females, but did not have specific gang or serious youth violence services. Twenty-three per cent were delivering specific gang and serious youth violence services, or were working specifically with young female offenders who were gang associated and over one quarter (27 per cent) were interested in delivering these types of support services in the future.

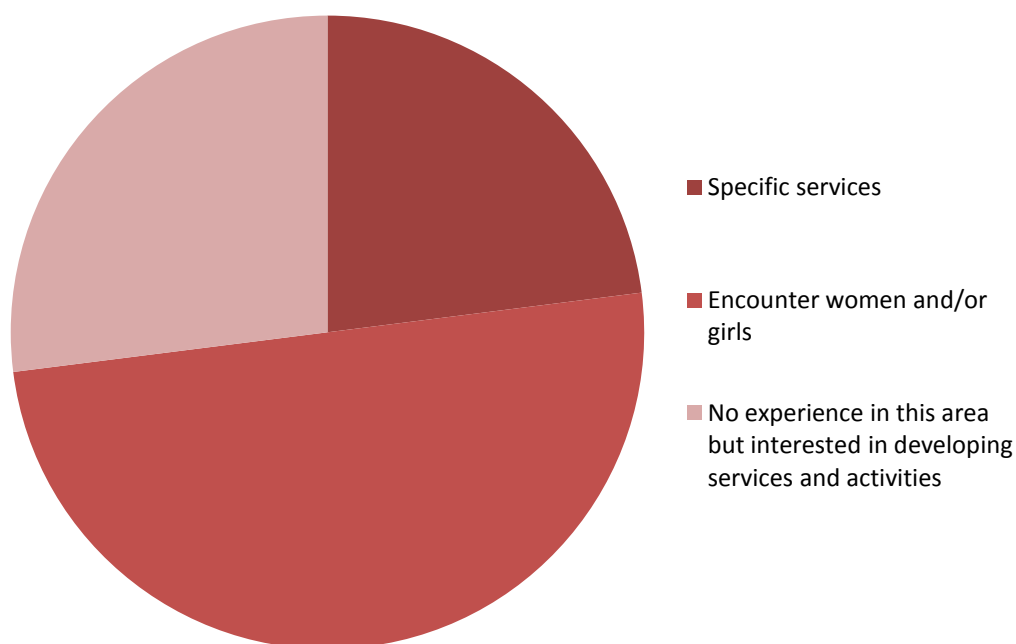


Figure 3: Percentage of survey respondents by status of services and activities

Specific services

Whilst London has the largest number of campaigning and front-line organisations with expertise in addressing complex VAW issues, including specialist BAME organisations tackling FGM, so-called ‘honour’ violence and forced marriage, there are extremely few organisations (women’s sector or otherwise) with female-specific gang or serious youth violence support services or expertise – a fact identified by ROTA in the Building Bridges research (http://www.rota.org.uk/Downloads/bbp_executive_summary.pdf).

Policy on serious youth and gang violence is focused on males, and initiatives on female offending (such as the Corston Report or Ministry of Justice funding for one-stop shop women’s centres) have tended to concentrate on adult women. Most VAW policies, such as the cross-government strategy, have not specifically

addressed gang and serious youth violence, or younger women in violent or exploitative partner relationships. Subsequently, resources for services have followed the policies and no specific funding streams are available for female-only gang and serious youth violence support.

Six respondents to the survey (27 per cent) had services specifically for women and/or girls affected by gang or serious youth violence, and/or young women offenders involved in gang-related activities.

Case studies (from FVV third sector meetings)

Women in Prison is a London-based, national women's organisation which supports and campaigns for women offenders and ex-offenders. It has recently begun a two year, young women's project, funded by the Ministry of Justice. The project focuses on young women who experience the 'revolving door' of prison (e.g. short sentences), and also specifically on young women who are gang-associated. The project provides 'at the gate support' and takes referrals through probation services, third sector organisations etc. Women in Prison also provide services for mothers in prisons, some of whom are gang-affected.

'Safe Choices' is an initiative delivered by **the nia project**, a VAW organisation which delivers a range of support including housing services, services for children, young people and parents, advice and advocacy, and training. Safe Choices, funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, aims to prevent and reduce young women's (13 to 18 years) use of violence, including gun, knife and gang-related crime, and to support young men to build safe, respectful relationships. The partnership-based project brings together the expertise of the nia project, The Children's Society and the Makeda Weaver Project (Shian Housing Association) to work in Hackney, Haringey, Lewisham, Islington and Greenwich, providing one-to-one support, group work and preventative work.

The project will also launch a toolkit and training package on working with young women involved in violence, as well as challenging young men's sexual violence, in spring 2010.

Organisations that encounter gang and serious youth violence-affected women and girls

However, the researchers were aware that organisations, particularly VAW organisations, were likely to have *encountered* women and girls affected by or involved in gang and serious youth violence.

In the survey, 13 organisations (50 per cent) had supported women and/or girls who were affected by or involved in gang or serious youth violence, but these organisations did not have any specific services for, or particular focus on, this population. This includes women receiving support from sexual violence organisations for sexual assault, sexual exploitation or rape by gang members.

Case studies (from FVV third sector meetings)

The Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC), based in Croydon, is currently the only Rape Crisis (England and Wales) affiliated centre in London. RASASC provides counselling, a helpline, advocacy and training to other VCOs and statutory agencies on sexual violence. Women and girls that use their advocacy and counselling services sometimes disclose gang- or group-related sexual violence and RASASC has noticed an increase in girls and women affected by gang and group sexual violence.

Eaves is a pan-London VAW organisation which provides a wide range of services including refuge accommodation; the Poppy Project which provides accommodation and support to women who have been trafficked into prostitution or domestic servitude; and the Scarlet Centre, an advice and drop-in resource for women affected by domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse; homelessness; prostitution; and mental health and/or substance misuse problems. They also run the Amina scheme for survivors of sexual violence and are currently running a pilot project supporting women with no recourse to public funds who have experienced domestic violence. The Scarlet Centre has a dedicated young women's worker with expertise in homelessness and violence against women, although the organisation doesn't specifically 'screen' for women who are gang-affected.

BAME women's third sector

The role of the BAME women's sector in meeting need identified in FVV cannot be overlooked. BAME women who took part in the fieldwork for this study often called for culturally-specific grass roots support. Zindaagi is **Newham Asian Women's Project's (NAWP)** youth work project, developed in 1998 around the ethos of preventative and early intervention work with young women. It was shortlisted for the Health Services Journal (HSJ) Award 2006 under the category for Mental Health Innovation. It was from this project that issues of sexual abuse and exploitation and rape were identified, prompting NAWP to develop a sexual health project in 2006.

'Towards the end of the project many of the young women who started to come forward had heard about the project for a number of months but they didn't initially approach us. They may have come to one of the outreach activities and taken away information but they didn't seek direct support from the project in the initial year. Towards the end of the project they did approach us and we began to provide services to women who identified that they were experiencing sexual abuse and violence including multiple partner rape. They required much more intensive one to one support for a longer period of time and a crucial part of the support was trust building with the project workers.'

(Evidence submission made to FVV from NAWP 2009)

The project is not currently funded, but given the nature of the work that had started, it is viewed as one of strategic importance and development work is ongoing.

Wider third sector

In addition to work in the women's sector, wider third sector services in the youth, BAME and ex-offender programmes have begun to develop gender specific gang-related work for women and girls.

Foundation 4 Life work with those at risk of, or involved in, offending and have developed two specialist projects for females. 'Girls Only' is a 12 week interactive participatory group work programme for young women at risk and runs on a referral basis.

The project works with active female gang members and young women at risk of involvement or affiliation with gangs or serious group violence, as well as young women who have been affected by serious group violence/offending, and prolific and persistent female offenders. Girls Only is delivered by a team of female facilitators (including ex-offenders and ex-gangs members), who between them have experienced many of the issues placing the young women at risk.

The programme is designed to challenge attitudes and beliefs, modify behaviour as well as build confidence and self esteem with a focus on exit strategies and developing sustainable support systems. Issues covered include:

- sexual exploitation
- sexual violence
- relationships
- image and understanding your identity
- crime and consequences

- drugs and alcohol
- domestic violence
- conflict resolution and assertiveness training

The programme has been delivered for a number of agencies including Hounslow Youth Offending Service, Sutton Safer Neighbourhood Team, Southwark Schools Inclusion Learning Service and a number of schools.

Third sector organisations interested in developing services in the future

FVV has identified that there is clear interest from the BAME women's sector and wider third sector to engage in developing work to meet the needs identified.

A further seven survey respondents (27 per cent) stated they were interested in developing services and activities in this area. Some respondents had already identified the need to develop work to support women and girls affected by gang and serious youth violence through feedback from their own service, and local statutory agencies such as Community Safety Units and schools.

"We are working with the community safety unit who have identified this as a need."

"We, as part of a borough initiative, help train [school] staff and children through a preventative schools project on having healthy relationships and what is domestic violence. They would like to see this imitative broadened to specifically outline gang violence and serious youth crime."

Types of services delivered

Survey respondents who delivered services specifically for women and/or girls affected by gang or serious youth violence, and/or young women offenders involved in gang-related activities *or* encountered these women and girls, provided a range of services.

Counselling/therapy was provided by three-quarters (75 per cent) of respondents, as was advice and information. Advocacy was provided by 68 per cent, as was referring/signposting people to other organisations. Group support was delivered by over half (58 per cent) of survey respondents, as was preventative work.

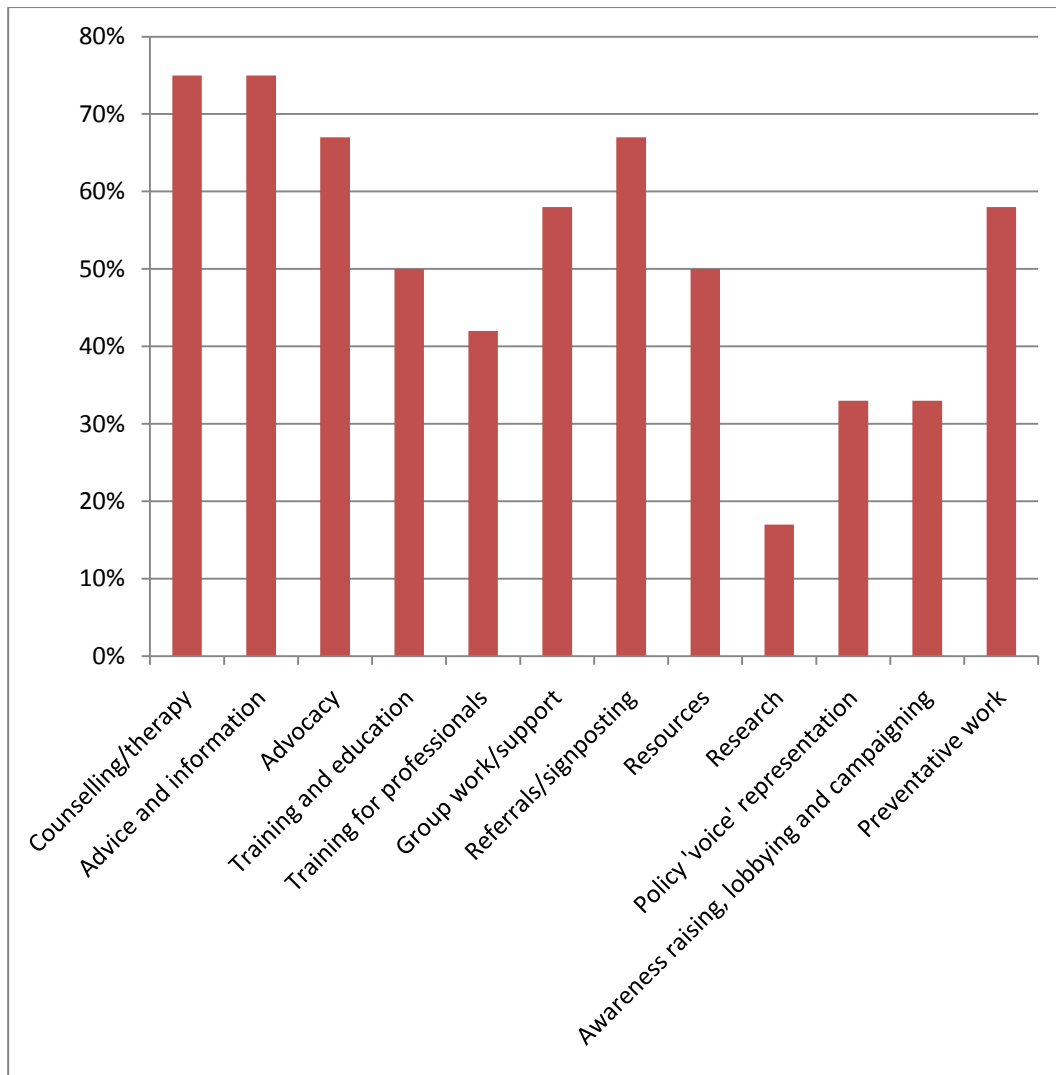


Figure 4: Percentage of survey respondents with specific services and those encountering women and girls affected by or involved in gang and serious youth violence by type of service/activity

Some of these organisations stated that they would like to build on and develop their *current* services in the future:

“We would like to be able to offer services to extend our work, e.g. to offer young women who go through the programme to become volunteers/facilitators, mentoring etc.”

“We are currently providing workshops on preventative work and have successfully delivered 10 workshops within two months that has been funded to be rolled out over a 12 month period. Our aim is to seek more funding, but more importantly work in partnerships with key organisations/individuals that wish to fund our work directly. Pre and post evaluations and references from the organisations that we have delivered too is evidence that this type of service is needed.”

“We would like to do more group work with survivors and expand our services to a larger geographic area.”

Survey respondents: types of organisations

Unsurprisingly, organisations working in the VAW field featured prominently in the survey, with two-thirds (67 per cent) providing rape and sexual violence services. Half delivered specific mental health services and over 40 per cent worked in the criminal justice field. Only two organisations (17 per cent) stated they worked specifically in the gang and serious youth violence sector.

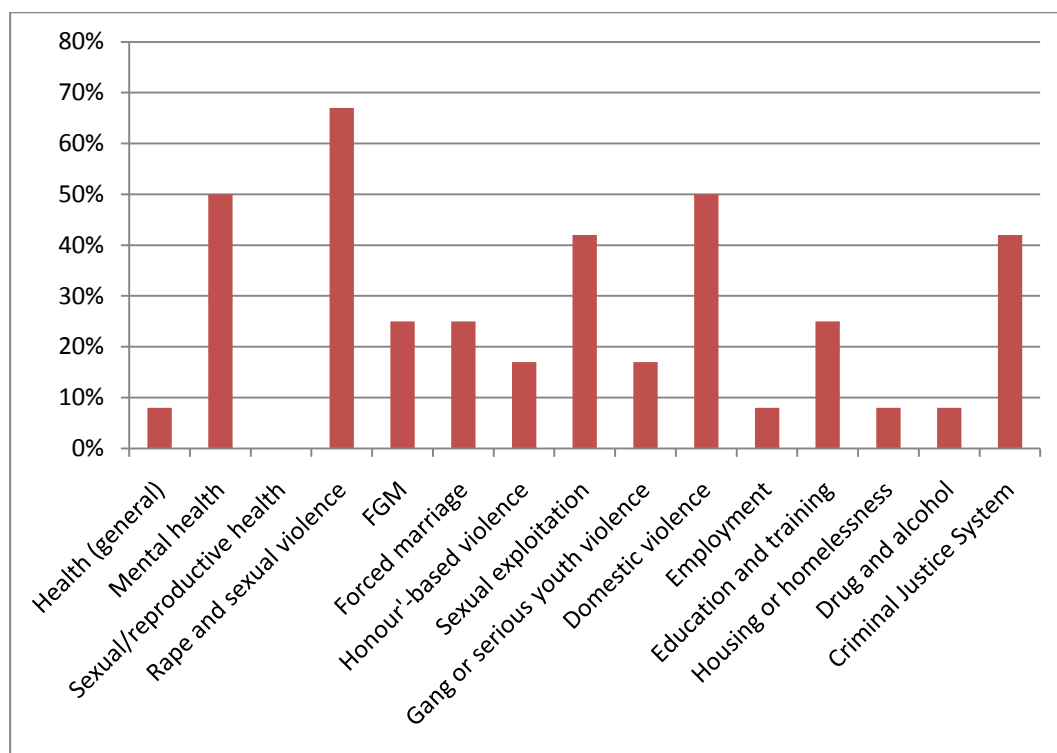


Figure 5: Percentage of survey respondents by field of work

Third sector responses: challenges to provision of services

Through consultations with women’s and other third sector organisations across London, FVV has identified many of the capacity building and other support needs of the sector. Meeting these challenges will be crucial in increasing effective and appropriate services and supporting the government to meet its VAW commitments.

The message from those consulted and surveyed in this research was clear: there is a commitment to delivering effective support services to women and girls affected by or involved in gang and serious youth violence. However, this will require capacity building and skill development of organisations, and adequate financial resources to develop and deliver support services. It will also involve changes in policy and the practice of public bodies, particularly front-line statutory agencies.

It is important to note that there is clear distinction to be made between the VAW sector generally and the women's VAW sector. Given that gender inequality and a misunderstanding of gendered need underpins many of the gaps in delivery at present, building on expertise from the women's VAW sector is crucial to offer a truly specialist response.

Furthermore, there are significant challenges for the VAW women's sector, such as the lack of refuge provision for women with male teenage children. This limits current capacity to support mothers of gang members who may need to seek refuge with their families.

The current women's VAW sector cannot put current service users at risk, and therefore meeting the needs of these women may lie in the development of new and separate services, with specific awareness-raising training so that the women's VAW sector as a whole can make appropriate referrals.

It cannot be assumed that there is nearly enough capacity in the sector at present to meet the complex needs of gang-affected women and girls, and a specific strategy to support the sector in developing services is required.

Without this there is the potential to over-burden services and increase the risk faced by women who are seeking support.

The full survey responses, along with recommendations developed from them, can be found in Appendix D.

PROGRESS AND CONCERNS

Over the course of the FVV project ROTA has submitted consultation responses to central and regional bodies and advised decision makers locally as well as from national and pan-London agencies. As a result we have begun to see progress in a number of areas of both policy and practice, especially following the roundtables held between September and November.

At the time of writing ROTA has noted significant changes to 'The Way Forward', the GLA strategy to end violence against women, with a re-think about how to engage partners beyond the MPS to address gang-associated rape, and a detailed acknowledgement of the difference between working with young people who witness, and those who directly experience VAW. Having gained a seat on the GLA VAW Panel we look forward to overseeing this progress being realised in practice over the next two years.

In addition to developments made at the GLA, ROTA has seen young people prioritised by the MPS Rape and Sexual Violence Reference group; been called to present to the CPS Violence Against Women Team, the YJB, the MoJ and have met with DCSF to assess how central government can engage in the work of FVV over the coming years. We have also informed current reviews and strategy being developed in the Home Office and the Department of Health.

ROTA has also been informed of changes in practice at a local level. For example the Enfield Youth Offending Service has commissioned gender-specific work related to serious youth violence, and both the police service and schools in the borough have contacted FVV for support in taking work on gender and SYV forward. Islington has begun to re-assess their intelligence on serious youth violence based on a gendered understanding of the issue; Southwark is reporting successful multi-agency work to safely disrupt the actions of girl-only gangs; Lewisham has set up a girls and gangs steering group, to build upon the work of a forum which they have been running for the past year, and Lambeth is seeking to gender-proof the work they conduct on serious youth violence in the coming year. These are just a few examples of pro-active responses to the evidence collected by FVV.

And yet ROTA remains concerned about policy and practice development. The recently published, cross-government, Violence Against Women and Healthy Children, Safer Communities strategies failed to fully appreciate the gendered nature of how young people directly experience violence, especially in a peer-to-peer context. The responses needed to young people who witness domestic violence, those who experience abuse by an adult, and those who experience domestic or sexual violence at the hands of their peers are all different. This is yet to be holistically accepted by decision makers.

In addition, policy to address serious youth violence continues to be developed without a gendered understanding of the issue, or any acknowledgment about the complexities that exist when taking a gendered approach. The London Safeguarding Children Board's recently published safeguarding guidance on gang activity assumes that generic approaches to grooming and exploitation can be applied in gang-associated cases. FVV would suggest that we cannot assume this and that a pilot of this process is required. The 'gang injunction' that was

recently included in the Policing and Crime Bill introduces the potential for injunctions to be used on young women without appropriate services being in place to ensure safe exit strategies and/or the offer gender-specific interventions to support this process.

The recommendations made in this report reflect the need to build upon this progress while also addressing the concerns that could undermine current successes. Responses to FVV need to be made in a holistic fashion, and awareness of FVV findings must be reflected in all policy and strategy which has implications for young women, especially those who are marginalised or 'at risk'.

CONCLUSIONS

Gender

Understanding the role of gender in the FVV findings, and how services respond to gendered-need, is central to any analysis of the evidence collected. The problem is not simply that services have not worked as much with females as males, or that policy has not referred to females as often as males. The concern is that, to date, policy makers in the serious youth violence field have only drawn reference to female experience in sentence or paragraph, and assumed that this is sufficient to take a gendered consideration of SYV policy. The impact of taking a gendered consideration to SYV questions services and the entire context within which services and interventions have been resourced to date.

At present, the decision to develop gender-specific services, or consider SYV in a gendered manner, has been the result of an agency's individual staff member's interest and ability to offer something different. It has not been the direct result of a central, or even regional, steer, and is very rarely sustained once individual staff members move on with their careers.

Positive accounts of interventions were given by FVV respondents when they were able to identify supportive staff, but not programmes or services, as means of addressing their needs and experiences. While it seems nonsensical to develop policies for 'young people' and actually only target understanding and any resources that follow at 'young men', this is the current overall structure that exists in the UK. When girls' experiences of violence are discussed, it is only as witnesses of domestic violence, or as victims of child abuse.

A failure to consider peer-to-peer violence amongst young people, boys and girls, has left them exposed to risk, without any clear and consistent routes of support. Likewise, understanding the experiences of families associated with SYV, and the gendered experiences of female relatives such as mothers, sisters and grandmothers, and how they relate to one another, has meant the development of much family intervention based on how boys relate to their parents and their relationships with their fathers. The relationships between mothers and their daughters is rarely discussed in the mainstream, and hardly considered in a gendered context even during specific interventions.

The complex experiences of the FVV participants clearly demonstrate that it is wholly insufficient to take women and girls as a homogenous group, and develop a 'one size fits all' response to their experiences. Rather, the different universal, targeted and specialist responses required to address the impact of serious youth violence on females means that should any policy not take into account these issues during an EIA of any strategy or service, they would be in breach of the gender duty.

In relation to sexual violence, the government is also signed up to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Annex B) and the Beijing Platform (Annex A). There is a clear role for bodies such as the EHRC and GEO, as well as the Women's National Commission (WNC), to scrutinise government-wide policy and ensure that it is gender-proof. At present this is not happening.

Ethnicity

This report does not attempt to draw conclusions about which ethnic groups are more likely to be involved in serious youth or gang-related violence. Respondents demonstrated that women of all ethnicities were involved in, and affected by, serious youth and gang violence. Their level of victimisation was often determined by the area in which they lived, and other services with which they came into contact.

Given that a disproportionate number of victims and perpetrators of serious youth violence in London are from BAME communities, it is reasonable to conclude that their female relatives are also disproportionately from BAME groups. It is less easy to draw this parallel for girlfriends, as they are identified in all London boroughs, and sometimes living in non gang-affected areas.

However, an analysis of findings does indicate specific needs for BAME women who are affected with a lack of appropriate services leaving them even further marginalised from mainstream support.

Participants' responses differed by ethnicity when describing the types of services and support they felt would be most beneficial. The fact that older women from BAME groups, especially those from Caribbean, African and South Asian communities requested grass roots-based support from other women in their local area is important.

In a response to the GLA's Violence Against Women draft strategy in 2009, ROTA stated that:

"For BAME communities, accessing appropriate services is a consistent barrier to them fully participating in society, increasing their exclusion and potential for victimisation. For BAME women who experience violence, inability to access services can be both a contributory cause of their initial victimisation as well as a reason why they continue to experience violence without support. Being able to access support from generic services such as sexual and mental health services, housing and education services is crucial as both preventative and responsive support for BAME women, as well as the role played by specialist third sector organisations that support them.

"The role of specialist services in bridging the gap between marginalised communities and generic services should not be underestimated. They are crucial in both ensuring that individuals are supported, but also in increasing inclusivity. Identifying sustainable funding for these services is imperative if BAME women are to continue to be supported in the way that they should be."

A study by Imkaan into the experiences of BAME refugees in 2008 raised concerns about 'the loss of specialist outreach and therapeutic services for BAME women and children which are key to helping them recover from the physical and emotional trauma of violence' (Imkaan 2008:2); and argued that attempts to mainstream provision in place of such services had seen commissioners make decisions which 'endanger the lives of BAME women and children (Imkaan 2008:2).

It is extremely concerning that women who had no knowledge of such policy debates were calling out for services which were simultaneously losing funding.

The EVAW Map of Gaps report in 2007 stated that fewer than one in 10 local authorities had a specialist BME service (EVAW: 2007). Both the direct provision that such services provide, and the trust they hold which enables them to bridge gaps between marginalised women and statutory services has been lost at a time when it is being requested.

This is not to say that every BAME woman who took part in FVV made such a request. Some younger girls and older women had fears of being judged by their own community regarding their gang association and therefore had concerns about seeking support from such groups. However, if these services are not available to women it removes the single line of communication they feel comfortable accessing, and further reduces the ability of statutory services to work with BAME women affected by gangs and serious youth violence.

Criminal Justice System

A lack of any gendered consideration of SYV is no starker than in criminal justice responses. Furthermore, when age and gender are taken as a cross-equality issue, the experiences of some FVV participants are even more concerning. In addition, when one attempts to take gender, age and ethnicity as a cross-equality issue in this context, the lack of consideration for any meaningful understanding of the issues, and therefore appropriate responses, is clear to see.

Referring to the Trident campaign discussed earlier in this report, the campaign targeted young, African Caribbean females, cutting across the three equalities areas being discussed. Compared with other strategies to address serious youth violence it could be taken as a sign of progress, given that it directly considers the role of women rather than see their experiences as a side issue. However, the campaign actually only served to display the clear lack of understanding Trident had to *how* women and girls experience serious youth violence.

While it was targeted at girls aged 15-19 it failed to appreciate:

- the risks faced by girls of that age
- wider pressures they may face regarding their safety and that of their families
- potential large age gaps in the relationships that they were in and positions of power that their male partners may be in
- most worryingly that, given their age, for those under 18 this could also be a child protection issue.

With regard to ethnicity, the campaign targets African Caribbean girls, while failing to address:

- which sorts of interventions or services are available to African Caribbean girls seeking to flee gang association
- the fact that girls from other ethnic groups, who are not under police surveillance, are subsequently targeted for weapon-minding.

While it was targeted at females it failed to consider:

- gendered aspects of victimisation girls holding weapons may be exposed to
- the lack of gender-specific exit strategies, interventions and risk assessments that have been conducted to manage risk to girls holding firearms
- the need to offer any helpline or alternative support to girls presently holding firearms for their partners.

By increasing male awareness of this police activity, and therefore the potential for males to further threaten females holding firearms, the poster campaign negated any impact it may have had.

In addition to specific examples where policy or strategy has attempted to address female involvement in SYV, wider criminal justice services are not fit for purpose in managing girls under the age of 18. Girls in youth offending institutions, secure training centres and youth offending services who were interviewed by the FVV team, experienced interventions that had either been designed for boys, or in the same building as males on a regular basis. The youth justice system has failed to apply the recommendations of Corston to girls accessing their services. Furthermore, attempts to address serious offending behaviour by females have to consider their gender, and take steps to reduce re-offending based on this understanding.

By gender-proofing criminal justice interventions with under-18 females, we are not seeking to excuse offending or ignore the fact that some women are perpetrators of serious crimes. Rather, the fact that girls interviewed during FVV did not see the relevance of services to their experiences or their offences, reduced the impact that that criminal justice interventions could have on their offending behaviour.

Being purely focused on getting early release or completing an order, without acknowledging that there are personal issues that need to be addressed, meant that FVV participants were not addressing the root causes of their offending and were likely to continue their offending behaviour.

In a broader sense, the DCSF has failed to consider all services that girls access where they are in the minority, for example Pupil Referral Units, and the impact that this has on their ability to engage in relevant services. In some cases PRUs of 80 pupils only have four girls and no girl-only space within which to work with them.

Girls in the criminal justice system and alternative education provision who were interviewed during FVV, were often the most victimised, exploited and disengaged of all participants, even though they had often been in contact with the highest number and largest variety of services. Addressing such failings is central to intervening with females most entrenched in serious youth violence.

Statutory services beyond the criminal justice system

While criminal justice services were found to be severely lacking in their capability to meet the needs of girls, wider statutory services which were more likely to be in contact with women and girls, also failed to identify risk or make appropriate referrals.

Given that the wider SYV discourse frames the issue as a masculine one, engaging with young women on issues of sexual health, mental health, education and housing services repeatedly fails to acknowledge the impact of SYV on them.

Assumptions are made regarding consent and issues of coercion are not always acknowledged, with a health focus on prevention of STIs and teenage pregnancy. The fact girls out-perform boys academically on average in the school system, overshadows those who were not engaging and stopped attending.

FVV participants had all come into contact with at least one 'universal' service, but very few had received any support for gang-association. By making gender-based assumptions, rather than evidence-based decisions about how services work with females, such engagement can become meaningless at best, and increase marginalisation or risk at worst.

Furthermore, some participants had concerns about confidentiality and protocol around information sharing, and were reluctant to actively seek support from statutory services based on these grounds. When it comes to supporting girls under the age of 18, and mothers who have children under the age of 18, the role of social services, local safeguarding children's boards and child protection procedures must be included when evaluating how wider services address the risks of female gang association.

Child protection

The risks identified by FVV participants regarding disclosure, sexual violence and retaliation, means that any intervention needs to account for risk management. However, participants were sceptical about confidentiality, and this scepticism increased when disclosing under the age of 18. Girls were fearful that disclosing sexual violence to any service, in any sector, under the age of 18 would mean that the information would be shared with other services, including the police; and that furthermore, no service could offer the amount of protection that they would need to manage the risks that came when disclosing the activities of multiple males involved in serious youth and/or gang related violence.

At present there are assumptions made in policy that if we see SYV as a safeguarding issue, and address it within that framework, this will ensure the safety of young people involved, and that key agencies are aware of referral pathways and information sharing procedures for all young people who could be involved.

Assessing current guidance and the evidence gathered from FVV participants, ROTA would argue that there can be no assurances that such processes would apply to women affected by SYV, and that they would need to be reviewed in light of this. When sexual violence is a factor, and multiple associates who have

an interest in non-disclosure also need to be managed as a risk, processes would have to be unique in their response and services would have to exist that could support that individual. At present it is not clear that such services exist.

The work of rape crisis centres and women's refuges for example would not necessarily have the capacity to manage such risks, and neither would statutory agencies. Being aware that there is a 'duty' to manage such disclosures is not the same as being confident in that management process. Until a sufficient gender-impact assessment of such procedures has been conducted, girls cannot be confident that coming forward will increase their safety.

In addition to this, third sector organisations who have primarily worked with women, and have been able to make assurances about confidentiality, would have to adopt their approach when working with girls, while still making their services appealing as independent and separate from the state. Current strategy and policy fails to take this into account sufficiently which has left a number of girls confused about whether or not they can ever be assured of confidentiality under the age of 18.

Risk and protective factors

When attempting to identify females who would be at risk of gang association, how to protect and reduce the likelihood of association, or reduce the risk that comes with association, it is important to consider whether any risk or protective factors can be identified in the findings.

The difficulty with female involvement in, or association with, SYV, is that it is so broad in its extremes, and girls can be associated or involved from a variety of backgrounds and with differing levels of engagement in services. However, there is also a need to support those who are most in need to receive appropriate interventions, at appropriate times, and that female risk is not ignored. As a result it is important to examine risk and protective factors on two levels.

In relation to risk indicators for girls most entrenched and participating in serious youth violence, many identifying factors will be similar to that of boys, for example:

- living in a gang-affected area
- having a family member or sibling involved in serious offending
- non-attendance at school – either through exclusion, truancy or simply non-attendance
- disengagement from family and services.

However, there are some differences between boys and girls that need to be considered. For a number of girls who were most entrenched and actively involved in SYV, to the point that they had entered the secure estate:

- social services and the police had been involved in their lives from the ages of 8-13 in relation to their behaviour
- while they were not attending school, not all had been excluded; some had simply stopped attending and disengaged
- they had early sexual experiences that they regretted and had either been victims of sexual violence or exploitation under the age of 18.

The sexual behaviour of girls and the context within which this took place was problematic, damaging to their mental health and to their attitudes towards sex.

However, for other girls we interviewed, who had an association but were not entrenched in regular violent offending, their only key indentifying risk factor was: **being in a relationship (familial, sexual or romantic) with a male involved in serious youth or gang violence.**

This cut across all extremes of involvement, and captured girls who did not live in gang-affected areas, were in mainstream education and were only known to universal services such as health and education. Given the level of intelligence on male involvement, compared with females, it would seem that the initial means by which to identify and work with those most at risk would be to identify females who associate with known males, and in turn the females with whom they associate with.

However, all risk factors, including those which are more specific, can also have protective factors in place to reduce their impact or the risks that come as a consequence of association. Key elements that enabled some females to associate with minimal risk, manage risk and seek support, or to avoid association altogether were:

- self-esteem and positive image of women, especially female peers
- engagement in education or having goals/ambitions that were individual and not based on a partner
- awareness, trust and value of support services
- honest dialogue about risk with credible individuals.

While the last two points could also apply to males, the types of individuals and services used would be different. Furthermore, the first two protective factors are more specific to females, and are in direct relation to how they see their own gender, their peers and their relationships. Routes maximising these protective factors via universal, targeted and specialist services, across the sectors, need to be assessed as possible means to minimise the impact of serious youth violence.

Local, regional and national priorities

ROTA is aware that any change in policy at a regional or national level has to consider the practicalities of implementation locally. Furthermore, the resources for local implementation are held by local commissioners, and it is the services that they fund which have the most direct impact on young people and their families. Therefore, when building recommendations for working locally we were keen to understand:

- the structures in place when working within and across boroughs
- how multi-agency working was realised locally
- the lead local agencies for SYV and sexual violence
- what were the barriers to policy implementation locally

Over the past two years ROTA has worked directly with London boroughs attending events, speaking at multi-agency meetings, regularly attending meetings where females and SYV are discussed and building relationships with a variety of local agencies, from the police and youth offending services to PCTs, schools and third sector groups. In addition the five borough-based roundtables

held under the NRP helped us to practically think across the key themes identified by the FVV fieldwork and address these using existing structures and practices, acknowledging gaps and seeking to fill them.

Taking into consideration the work that ROTA has conducted locally over the past two years, and the roundtable findings, the key areas of concern for local policymakers and practitioners are:

Information Sharing, Multi-Agency Working and Risk Management

Including: Concerns about managing risks for girls who disclose sexual violence; identification (risk and protective factors) and targeting across boroughs and regions; practicalities of information sharing; current multi-agency models of working; and the role of the third sector.

Local Intelligence

Including: The importance of building a local evidence base and different methods for collecting information; difficulties with intelligence gathering; gathering information while managing risk and collecting evidence; intelligence across boroughs/ regions.

Education and Prevention

Including: Role of schools/colleges and PRUs including the use of PSHE; Sexual Bullying and Sexual Harmful Behaviour Agendas; transition from primary to secondary school; co-ordination across different educational institutions and difficulties of gaining school access, 'girl-only' settings in education; partnerships between schools and the third sector; the impact of exclusions and non-attendance.

Importance of Working with Families

Current methods of engaging with families (including work of community safety teams and family intervention programmes); use of safeguarding when working with siblings, difficulties in engaging with families; work of third sector and community-based engagement.

Managing Serious Youth Violence with Gender Specific Services

Gender-proofing of local SYV strategies and programmes; role of criminal justice services when working with females; role and resourcing of gender-specific services; examples of best practice.

Furthermore these five areas of concern are held under the following overarching concern that:

Boroughs were also keen to consider responses at a number of levels. While they acknowledged a role for awareness-raising amongst girls and women about the risks that they faced and services available for them, they agreed on a need to prioritise:

- **Awareness-raising aimed at services, agencies, departments and commissioners about the FVV findings and a need to develop and build upon these findings to map local issues and service provision, as well as the development of strategic local approaches**
- **Reviewing local processes/strategies/practices to assess whether they have been gender-proofed**

- **The ability/capacity of boroughs to identify and target those at most risk, and have tailored responses in place for those individuals, because limited financial resources demand a targeted approach.**

As such, boroughs feel that much of what they can achieve, and what they choose to prioritise, is determined by regional and national priorities on serious youth violence. The range of resources in place locally is also a concern, with some boroughs in a much better position to hold cross-agency meetings and dedicate administrative staff as well as practitioners to SYV, thus stifling the ability of under-resourced boroughs to take forward recommendations.

At a pan-London level, a strategic approach to females and SYV must be prioritised. With local services and departments seeking guidance and regional intelligence, there are clear roles for agencies such as the YBJ, MPS and MPA, GLA, GOL, the London Safeguarding Children's Board and the LSYVB to review their strategy in relation to serious youth violence, violence against women and female offending, to ensure that they reflect the findings of FVV.

There is a role for bodies such as the Healthcare Commission and Healthcare for London to also raise these concerns with PCTs. The pan-London FVV roundtable identified a role for the GLA in drawing together key partners on this issue, and driving progress through their end violence against women and serious youth violence strategies.

Over the course of the past two years, numerous central government departments have engaged with the FVV project via positions on advisory groups, attending meetings and taking part in consultations; especially the Cross-Government Violence Against Women Strategy and various policy and strategy produced by the Home Office, DSCF and Department of Health regarding serious youth and gang-related violence. The central government roundtable hosted by the GEO was attended by all relevant central government stakeholders, and informed not only the direction of the FVV NRP, but also the overarching national recommendations made in this report.

While this report draws upon a regional evidence base, it is crucial to engage with central government policy given that:

- ROTA will be developing a cross-regional evidence base during 2010 which will have national implications
- the recommendations made for regional and local development have implications for national policy
- the regional picture identifies gaps in national policy that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Third sector priorities

In recent government consultations with over 300 victims/survivors of violence, women and girls consistently stated they want support services which:

- listens to and believes them
- treats them with dignity and respect
- helps them be safe
- are accessible and available when they need support. (HM Government: 2009)

In addition, the cross-government strategy on violence against women and girls goes on to state that:

“At a minimum every victim needs: a **voice** so her views can be taken into account; **support** to enable her to recover from violence; **information** to be able to make meaningful choices; and **protection** from a violent situation and redress through the criminal justice system. That means:

- easily accessible advice about where to go for help and support, available 24 hours a day
- frontline staff trained to ask about the early signs of violence and respond appropriately
- acute care in the immediate aftermath of violence
- independent, personalised advocacy and support to help each victim make the right choices about next steps
- follow-up and support for those needing longer-term help
- safe emergency accommodation for those who need to leave their homes to escape abuse.”(HM Government 2009:39)

Whilst the government’s strategy has not specifically addressed gang and serious youth violence, these principles must apply to women and girls whose lives are affected by this form of violence but whose experiences have largely been invisible or ignored in VAW, youth violence and offender policies.

With the vast majority of gang and serious youth violence services focused on young male perpetrators of criminal gang activity, anti-social behaviour and violence (with young women simply referred to in these male-based interventions), it is crucial that the women’s third sector is resourced and enabled to bring its gender- and VAW-specific expertise to the table. Without this expertise, services for women and girls, especially for those who have experienced sexual and other violence and exploitation, are at risk of failure and an important opportunity to address this largely hidden issue will be missed.

Tackling the issues raised in this research, such as the hostility towards female peers, the lack of positive identification with other young women, ideologies which normalise and dismiss sexual violence and exploitation, and significant safety concerns for women and girls who disclose violence and other criminal activities will require sustained, long-term and gender-specific approaches.

With the right assistance, and through working in partnership with third sector partners who specialise in serious youth violence or work with children and young people, the women’s third sector will be well placed to meet the complex and multiple support needs of women and girls affected by gang and serious youth violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In order to build recommendations for the FVV Partnership Report and to develop the direction of the FVV NRP, ROTA held a number of meetings with policy makers and practitioners at local, regional and national level, and across sectors. These meetings took the form of the following roundtables and meetings, including:

- Women's third sector meeting
- BAME women's third sector meeting
- Borough roundtables: Enfield, Lewisham, Southwark, Islington and Hackney
- Pan-London roundtable – hosted by the GLA
- Central government roundtable – hosted by the GEO

The findings of these meetings have been outlined in previous chapters, the detail from the Central Government roundtable meeting can be found in the NRP desk research paper, and references will be made to that report in this chapter.

The recommendations from this report will focus on pan-London and local statutory agencies and third sector organisations. Recommendations will be made within a framework which considers national policy, and where such policy impacts on the recommendations this will be highlighted. ROTA seeks to make more detailed recommendations to central government once cross-regional evidence has been gathered, in a final report to be produced in 2011.

The roundtables and meetings saw attendees make solid commitments to change policy and practice, and strongly inform the final recommendations based on current work that agencies are conducting. Recommendations have also been informed by best practice examples gathered over the past two years, and take into consideration the current direction of regional policy and practice.

As the FVV Partnership develops its work with the BAME and broader women's sector over the next three years, this report will be used to directly engage with, and lobby, policy makers at local, regional and national level, to ensure that they take on board the recommendations made. It will also be used to support the third sector to develop suitable practice and partnerships, and make a case to policy makers and commissioners to support this work at a grass roots level.

Key Recommendations

The Female Voice in Violence Partnership would make the following recommendations to *all* agencies and departments with a stake in either the Serious Youth Violence or Violence Against Women policy and practice fields:

- A1** That ALL serious youth violence policy and practice be gender-proofed in accordance with gender duty, including work conducted or commissioned by statutory agencies; and that a review of all SYV related policy is conducted in light of this.
- A2** That serious youth violence be acknowledged and included as a violence against women issue in both the third and statutory sectors, and that this is reflected in policy development and resource allocation.
- A3** That the Corston Review is replicated for females under the age of 18 who are under establishments or institutions that meet the needs of a predominantly male group of service users – including Youth Offending Services, Youth Offending Institutions, Secure Training Centres and Pupil Referral Units.
- A4** That safeguarding and child protection strategies, guidance and procedures be reviewed in light of FVV to ensure that they consider the specific risks associated with gender and SYV, and that they are fit for purpose to address SYV related sexual violence for under-18s.
- A5** That when commissioning or delivering services to women and girls affected by SYV, that these services are gender-proofed, that the specialist needs of the service-users are taken into account, and where required to allow meaningful engagement, culturally specific services are applied.

B) Recommendations relating to the third sector

In light of these findings and conclusions FVV makes the following recommendations for the women's BAME and generic third sector and wider third sector partners, and for those in a position to work with or support them:

- B1** Funding programmes for female-specific services delivered by the BAME women's and specialist women's sector in partnership with wider specialist third sector groups, established by central, regional and/or local government. Independent funders to include female-specific services and activities in their funding priorities.
- B2** Minimum of three year funding (Compact compliance). The practice of four and five year funding, such as the grant schemes of London Councils and the Big Lottery Fund, should be implemented by public bodies and independent funders.
- B3** Two-stage funding application processes (expression of interest only at stage one). Longer lead-in times for consortium-based applications for funding to enable organisations to develop partnerships.
- B4** Funding for training, capacity building (including partnership development) and campaigning, as well as service delivery.
- B5** Funding which accommodates and facilitates partnership and cross-borough working. Greater co-operation between public bodies across London boroughs and strategic approaches to funding services.
- B6** Consistent use of 'intelligent' commissioning practices across public bodies, retention of grant aid schemes, particularly at a local level, and needs-based funding where applicant organisations have a greater role in determining project scope and outcomes.
- B7** Strategic approach by funders to the sustainability of the women's VCS, particularly BAME women's organisations including ring-fenced VAW funding for the women's sector to deliver specialist support to gang-affected women and girls.
- B8** Development and delivery of training and other events by a partnership of organisations in the gang, youth and VAW sectors.
- B9** Capacity building support including:
 - Briefing templates providing evidence and key arguments for women's organisations to use in influencing funding for female-specific services
 - Template partnership agreements and terms of reference
 - Establishing partnership infrastructure including financial arrangements
 - Support with recruitment
 - Troubleshooting in partnerships
 - Obtaining appropriate quality assurance marks

- B10** Events and resources that enable organisations to network and identify potential partners, such as pre-application workshops on writing effective funding applications.
- B11** Improved relationships and information sharing between and within the third and public sectors, including networking and peer learning opportunities.
- B12** A coalition of third sector organisations established to ensure the needs of women and girls is progressed within policy agendas.
- B13** Evidence-based policy, practice and funding decisions based on the consistent collection and dissemination of appropriate data.
- B14** Pan-London guidelines endorsed by key statutory agencies and third sector organisations on addressing gang and serious youth violence and its impact on girls and women. The guidelines should include information on the importance and appropriateness of female-only services and Gender Equality Duty obligations.
- B15** Guidance from central government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services. Stronger guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government for LAAs on VAW indicators.
- B16** Reviews of VAW, gang, serious youth violence, and offender management policies with third sector organisations with expertise in supporting women and girls affected by gang and serious youth violence.
- B17** Gang and serious youth violence to be included in VAW policies. Implementation of the cross-government violence against women and girls strategy.
- B18** Support services which are not criminal justice-focused and clear communication of this to women and girls. These interventions should be focused on safety and empowerment and developed with the recognition that CJS interventions may not deliver the best outcomes. Helplines and other forms of support which can be anonymous in addition to face-to-face services.
- B19** Peer marketing approaches that publicise services through word-of-mouth and more creative approaches to publicity such as contact details on lip balm. This tactic has been successful in discreetly advertising domestic violence support for girls and young women.
- B20** Clear and agreed framework between organisations and agencies to implement a case management approach to child protection issues.

C) Recommendations for local statutory services

No universal awareness-raising can be conducted with girls until local authorities are clear on identification, referral procedures and risk management for the specific cases of girls and women affected by gang and serious youth violence:

2010-2011

STRATEGY

- C1** That all London boroughs develop a SYV strategy (as proposed under the London Serious Youth Violence Board) and that these strategies are gender-proofed in accordance with FVV and the Gender Duty.
- C2** That all boroughs produce a map of services and intelligence in relation to FVV, using a multi-agency approach to information gathering, identifying co-operating schools and other agencies, to ensure maximum engagement from the outset.
- C3** By 'multi-agency' this report recommends that each local authority collect evidence from criminal justice agencies (YOS, police, probation etc), educational establishments (including faith schools, colleges, PRUs, Connexions), housing providers, health agencies (including sexual and mental health), and safeguarding boards, and led by the community safety team and children's services, and in consultation with frontline practitioners and managers, to build local evidence of female association with gang and serious youth violence, and informal levels of sexual violence.
- C4** That under the guidance of the London Safeguarding Children's Board, Local Safeguarding Children's Boards develop protocols for managing risks faced by young women associated with serious youth violence.

INTELLIGENCE

- C5** That all boroughs which currently hold multi-agency meetings regarding SYV, ensure that females who are considered as associates of males are discussed, as well as females directly involved in offending.
- C6** That local police intelligence desks develop intelligence on females associating with SYV associated men and boys on whom they have information, and that this be taken to multi-agency meetings.
- C7** That local authorities map the generic and specialist provision in their area for young and older women who may experience VAW or SYV.

TRAINING

- C8** That all managers and practitioners working with young people generally, and young women specifically, receive awareness raising training on the key issues of FVV to inform their practice, including youth service, youth offending service, head teachers (mainstream and alternative provision), safeguarding, sexual and mental health practitioners and social service staff.
- C9** That local commissioners who are responsible for SYV services, as well as sexual and mental health services, attend awareness raising sessions on the issues raised under FVV, to inform their commissioning priorities.

2011-2012

PRACTICE

- C10** That neighbouring boroughs, in the first instance, develop information sharing protocols for identifying females associating with gangs across boroughs; this can be developed once local intelligence on gangs also features females associated to named male gang members.
- C11** That local commissioners consider the relevance of projects to girls, and ensure that they have taken a gendered consideration of need when commissioning services.
- C12** That family intervention projects being run in boroughs take into consideration the risks identified in FVV and develop work with parents in relation to their daughters, as well as their sons.
- C13** That family interventions be delivered by third sector organisations, where appropriate, to ensure trust and engagement between the service and the family.
- C14** That local police forces work across their Sapphire units and those working with SYV to build intelligence on women at risk of SYV related sexual violence.
- C15** That Pupil Referral Units provide girl-only space and gender-specific provision for female pupils, allocating time to raise the risks identified in FVV and signpost girls to appropriate support services.
- C16** That when conducted in school, awareness-raising on VAW services be delivered in gender-specific groups, to reduce potential risks of retaliation from participants.
- C17** That where available, the SHARP tool is used in schools to monitor sexual bullying and violence in relation to SYV, and monitors for gender, to build into local intelligence; and that this tool is risk assessed for handling sexual violence disclosures.

- C18** That schools use the PSHE and SRE curriculum to raise issues of FVV, and that boys and girls are facilitated to discuss this in gender-specific settings.
- C19** That the Sexual Harmful Behaviour Agenda is also used to raise the concerns of FVV in school; and that the wider school ethos explicitly revisit gender equality and addresses it through its community cohesion agenda.

D) Recommendations for Pan-London Services

2010-2011

STRATEGY

- D1** That a regional detailed response to FVV be developed by pan-London partners (on children and young people, SYV and VAW), led by the GLA under their VAW strategy, drawing together current policy and practice, identifying gaps, making commitments on delivery and policy change, and that this progress be monitored on an annual basis.
- D2** That the GLA must review the Time for Action Plan in light of the FVV findings to ensure that it is gender-proofed, and that it reports to the EHRC regional team with outcomes.
- D3** That the GLA 'Project Oracle' must consider gender-proofing in any evaluation tools which it generates.
- D4** That the London Serious Youth Violence Board explicitly acknowledge gender in their safeguarding workstream by gender-proofing all recommendations that come out of this.
- D5** That the GLA's 'Project Oracle' does not require small grass roots projects to conduct thorough evaluation without external support and resourcing.
- D6** That the GLA maintains its established commitment to FVV through 'The Way Forward Plan' and enhances this by recognising the importance of BAME and other specialist VAW services in meeting the needs of women and girls affected by gang-related and serious youth violence.
- D7** That the MPS reviews its youth strategy in light of FVV and ensure that it is gender-proofed; and that it reports to the EHRC regional team with outcomes.
- D8** That the MPS Sapphire Rape Reference Group identifies SYV as a priority and demonstrates to local forces the needs to work across SYV teams (such as ASB, Blunt and Trident) with Sapphire teams to prevent silo working.

INTELLIGENCE

- D9** That the MPS monitor gang-associated sexual violence as well as 'multiple perpetrator' rape on its intelligence systems.
- D10** That the London Councils 'Pan-London Back on Track' programme conduct a gendered review of alternative education provision to ensure that any improvements or recommendations made take into account the specific needs of girls, as a minority, in pupil referral units.
- D11** That the Greater London Authority commission an evidence gathering process to collect statistical information on females affected by SYV via a number of agencies including rape crisis centres, youth offending services, pupil referral units and schools; and that they work with ROTA to ensure all appropriate gate-keepers to young women have been targeted.
- D12** That, in accordance with the Every Child Matters agenda, GOL and the YJB review services available to girls in the criminal justice system and pupil referral units, reflecting the findings of the Corston Report.

PRACTICE

- D13** That the MPS Trident campaign targeted at women must be reviewed in light of FVV and that no further campaigns are generated until a thorough risk assessment has been completed, and Trident are able to clearly identify support services for young women who are being victimised or in danger as a result of gang association.

2011-2012

GUIDANCE, TRAINING AND SERVICES

- D14** That the YJB Regional Office must develop guidance for Youth Offending Teams for working with girls associated with SYV.
- D15** That the YJB Regional Office must clearly state the importance of gender-specific services to youth offending teams, and make a case for separate training and resourcing to enable sustained working with young women in the criminal justice system, working in partnership with specialist third sector agencies to ensure service relevance.
- D16** That the London Safeguarding Children's Board review its guidance for LSCB's working with gangs and/or serious youth violence by considering the need for separate and specialist protocol when responding to sexual violence in an SYV context, and exit routes which do not require moving home.
- D17** That all regional commissioners consider means of partnering and supporting third sector organisations to deliver specialist interventions, including costs for external evaluation of all projects, rather than attempt to develop specialist services in-house.

- D18** That the YJB work with relevant third sector partners to develop training to YOT managers, commissioners and practitioners on SYV and gender.

2012-2013

- D19** That a regional anonymous helpline be set up to enable young women and girls to access advice and support on sexual violence, without the consequences of disclosure if they were to disclose in person.
- D20** That a regional awareness-raising campaign be piloted in schools, allowing debate on the issues of FVV and signposting girls to appropriate support services.
- D21** That all future work conducted on the serious youth violence agenda is gender-proofed in accordance with the gender duty and based on evidence collected through FVV and other resources.

E) Recommendations for Central Government and National Stakeholders

2010-2011

- E1** All central government policy and strategy produced on serious youth violence, currently in use, must be gender-proofed as a matter of urgency, in light of FVV, and relevant departments need to report their outcomes to the EHRC.
- E2** The Cross-Government Violence Against Women Strategy must explicitly acknowledge SYV as VAW issue, and make a case for gender-specific services to be delivered in the SYV context.
- E3** The Youth Justice Board, DCSF and MoJ should review how the criminal justice system, and other services delivered for a male majority group (such as alternative education provision), deliver services to females under the age of 18, assessing whether they have been gender-proofed and taking into consideration the recommendations of the Corston Report.
- E4** The Home Office and other central government departments developing SYV strategy to map gender-specific services to women and girls, and assess whether such provision is adequately resourced to manage the needs of, and risks faced by, gang-affected females.
- E5** DCSF to review safeguarding procedures, via the National Safeguarding Unit, in light of the FVV findings to assess whether they can be safely applied to cases of female association with SYV, specifically in cases of sexual violence, and if necessary develop specialist guidance for this area of work.

- E6** The CPS to review all of their VAW strategies in light of the findings of FVV and ensure that SYV is viewed by their stakeholders as a VAW issue.
- E7** The Children's Commission to review their work on youth violence and youth opportunity, particularly in the areas of health and education, and develop gender-specific workstreams that account for specialist need.
- E8** The Department of Health to review developments in the Alberti Review in general, as well as Sexual Health and Mental Health policy specifically, in light of FVV, and ensure that the needs of girls in general, and BAME females specifically, who are affected by SYV can be met by these policies.

2011-2012

- E9** The Equality and Human Rights Commission to develop a specific stream of work on SYV, ensuring that the human rights of young people, and the specific needs of young women, are addressed by central government policy, in accordance with the race and gender duties.
- E10** ACPO to review policing approaches to SYV and VAW, identifying potential for cross-department working and make a case for this at a regional and local level.

It is the ambition of the FVV NRP to develop detailed national recommendations, and review actions of the above initial recommendations and commitments in its 2011 National Report. Based on the cross-regional evidence base that ROTA will generate, there may be a need for departments such as the YJB, ACPO and the EHRC to consider cross-regional structures, resources and experiences when making recommendations for regional action.

However, ROTA would argue that work can begin on the above recommendations and commitments prior to this cross-regional phase of work, and that they are central to ensuring that the regional and local recommendations made in this report can be actioned sufficiently.

NEXT STEPS

Following the publication of this report ROTA will develop the Female Voice in Violence project via a National Research Programme and Coalition.

The Female Voice in Coalition will be chaired by ROTA and made up of BAME women's, specialist women's and wider third sector. The Coalition will monitor the performance of statutory and third sector stakeholders against the FVV recommendations with an annual review for the next three years. The Coalition will also support the engagement of the third sector, especially the BAME women's sector, on this policy agenda. ROTA will seek to produce materials such as guidance and briefings on key aspects of the report, through the Coalition, to facilitate the delivery of the FVV recommendations.

In addition, the **FVV National Research Programme** will build upon the evidence base generated by this first report by interviewing females across the English regions. This programme will produce a cross-regional report on women and serious youth violence, due to be launched in 2011.

For further information on the FVV Project, the Coalition or the National Research Programme please contact Senior Policy Officer, Carlene Firmin on carlene@rota.org.uk or ROTA's CEO, Dr Theo Gavrielides, theo@rota.org.uk.

Appendix A : Research Ethics, Clients' Participation and Empowerment

Prior to engaging in the fieldwork phase, ROTA had to go through an intensive research ethics procedure to ensure the safety of the research team and research participants. In order to achieve this ROTA produced a Female Voice in Violence Team Safety Guidance document. This document was informed by the:

- British Society of Criminology Research Ethics Code
- Market Research Society Guidance on Interviewing Children and Young People
- Economic and Social Research Council Guidance on Ethical Research
- Social Research Association Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers

The Safety Guidance made a number of requirements including ensuring the safety of researchers and participants; securing consent and managing disclosure; and responding to risk situations. Following the development of this document the research team had to ensure certain research documents were in place to conduct the interviews and focus groups:

- Introductory letters
- Consent form under 18
- Consent form over 18
- Parental consent forms
- Anonymised evaluation forms
- Anonymised equalities monitoring forms
- List of referral agencies

Prior to referrals being made into focus groups or interviews, research lead, Carlene Firmin, had to meet with the referral agency, assess whether participants were better suited to interviews or focus groups, identify a secure location for the interviews to take place and identify a key worker to whom all disclosures would be reported and who participants from the agency could go to for support or further advice following participation in the research.

Referral agencies were also made aware of further referrals that they could make should they wish to offer support to any research participants. Research team members who were present at interviews had to be CRB checked, and team lead, Carlene Firmin, had to be present for all interviews and focus groups in order to manage all disclosures and report them back to the necessary referral agency or external body.

ROTA's process was reviewed by Lewisham's Community Services Research Governance Evaluation Board, who assisted us in making improvements to our fieldwork documents and ensure the safety of all involved in the project. ROTA successfully received approval from this Board to proceed with interviews, and wishes to note the good practice in the London Borough of Lewisham in going through this process with ROTA.

All participants took part in the interviews and focus groups on a voluntary basis. Participants were aware that they were entitled to withdraw from the research process at any stage and could refuse to answer any questions which made them

feel uncomfortable. They could end the interview/focus group at any point and terminate their participation following the interview prior to the launch of the research programme. At all stages of the fieldwork, participants were informed about ROTA, the aims of the research and how the findings would be presented and used.

As the anonymised nature of the documents listed above would suggest, measures were taken to ensure that participants could not be identified. In addition, no photographs or filming took place during interviews. The form used by participants to identify whether or not they were gang-associated, and in what way, was also completed anonymously. While this meant that information collected in focus groups could not be directly attributed to individuals (or any identifiable features such as their ethnicity), it was agreed that the need to ensure safety at this stage had to be prioritised over collecting this type of information.

Details were collected during case studies as any identifiable features were acquired during the one-on-one process and did not need to be collected via forms. Equalities monitoring enabled us to give overall accounts of the ethnicity, age, faith, disability and sexual orientation of the cohort. Quotes appearing in the final research report and interim reports have had identifiable features removed, apart from the age group of the participants who took part.

The research team only kept in contact with participants when requested on an individual level. Aside from this their contact with the research team was only during the fieldwork stage, to further ensure the safety of participants and their anonymity. Information was provided on independent support agencies that participants could contact, either independently or through the referral agency from which they took part in the project.

Further information on the FVV Ethics and Safety process can be provided upon request.

Appendix B: Participant Breakdown

Participants referred themselves and were also referred through a range of organisations. These included:

- Secondary schools (state, faith and private)
- Pupil Referral Units
- Churches
- Youth Offending Services
- Secure Estates (YOI and STC)
- Probation
- Third sector organisations (women's, gangs and youth projects)
- Private companies (including stage schools, mother and baby groups/nurseries, and hairdressing salons).

Of the **352** women and girls who were interviewed **57%** self-identified as being associated with, or affected by, gangs and serious youth violence as one of the following:

Mother of gang member	8%
Sister of gang member	9%
Girlfriend of gang member	13%
Link/Sexual Partner of gang member	16%
Friend of gang member	14%
Associate of gang member	6%
Aunty or other female relative of gang member	4%
Female gang member	7%
Affected but not associated	0.5%

*please note that:

- participants self-defined gang membership
- some females claimed to have multiple associations to gang members (ie. as both a sister and a girlfriend)

43% of women and girls interviewed claimed to have no association to, and were not affected by, gangs or serious youth violence.

Participants by age

Focus groups

Under 16	16-19	20-25	25-40	40+
21%	41%	11%	10%	17%

One-on-one

Under 16	16-19	20-25	25-40	40+
19%	54%	8%	4%	15%

Participants by ethnicity

Focus groups		One-on-one	
White UK	24 %	White UK	23%
Asian UK	14%	Asian UK	12%
Black UK	18%	Black UK	15%
White & Black	15%	White & Black	8%
Caribbean	6%	Caribbean	4%
Caribbean	2 %	Caribbean	0%
Chinese	8 %	Chinese	4%
Irish	2 %	Irish	4%
Indian	0.9%	Indian	4%
White & Black African	1%	White & Black African	4%
African	0.6%	African	0%
Latin American	2%	Latin American	8%
Pakistani	0.3%	Pakistani	0%
White & Asian	4%	White & Asian	12%
White European	3%	White European	4%
Bangladeshi	0.6%	Bangladeshi	0%
Mixed race other	0%	Mixed race other	0%
Prefer not to say	0%	Prefer not to say	0%
Other		Other	

Participants by faith

Focus groups (those stated)

No Faith	Christianity	Islam	Hinduism
55%	29%	9%	7%

One-on-one

No Faith	Christianity	Islam	Hinduism
23%	46%	31%	0%

Participants by sexual orientation

Focus groups

Bisexual	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Declined to answer
0%	100%	0%	0%

One-on-one

Bisexual	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Declined to answer
0%	100%	0%	0%

Participants by disability

Focus groups

No	Yes	Dyslexia
99.7%	0.3%	0.3%

One-on-one

No	Yes
100%	0%

Appendix D: Women’s Sector Survey

Funding

Challenges and needs	Recommendations
<p>No specific funding streams available for these types of services</p>	<p>Specific funding programmes for female-specific services established by central, regional and/or local government</p> <p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p> <p>Independent funders to include female-specific services and activities in their funding priorities</p>
<p>The short funding cycles (usually one to three years) make it extremely difficult to build trust and work with complex and often embedded issues. Longer-term work and funding is needed to effectively address these issues</p>	<p>As detailed in the Compact, statutory funding should be a minimum of three years</p> <p>The practice of four and five year funding, such as the grant schemes of London Councils and the Big Lottery Fund, should be implemented by government, local public bodies and independent funders</p>
<p>Services are tethered to funding criteria which often means they are restricted in relation to age group, geographical area etc</p>	<p>Needs-based funding where applicant organisations have a greater role in determining project scope and outcomes</p>
<p>Lack of funding generally for the women’s sector, and the BAME women’s sector in particular. The women’s third sector cannot be equal partners if it continues to experience gross under-funding, and organisations’ financial sustainability remains under threat</p>	<p>Strategic approach by funders to the sustainability of the women’s third sector, particularly BAME women’s organisations</p> <p>Two-stage funding application processes (expression of interest only at stage one)</p> <p>Longer lead-in times for consortium-based applications for funding to enable organisations to develop partnerships</p> <p>Ring-fenced VAW funding</p> <p>Consistent use of ‘intelligent’ commissioning practices across public bodies</p>

	Retention of grant aid schemes, particularly at a local level
The complex needs of girls and women who have experienced violence are not fully understood by many third sector organisations or statutory agencies. Making the case for female-specific services becomes even more difficult. Meetings with the women's sector have demonstrated a willingness and interest by the VAW women's sector to combine their existing expertise with new learning.	<p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p> <p>Evidence-based policy, practice and funding decisions based on the consistent collection and dissemination of appropriate data</p> <p>Improved relationships and information sharing between and within the third and public sectors</p> <p>Funding for training and campaigning by organisations with expertise in this field such as organisations working with women offenders and VAW organisations</p>
Organisations less willing to share information, ideas and learning because of competition for funding	<p>Strategic approach by funders to the sustainability of the women's third sector, particularly BAME women's organisations</p> <p>Retention of grant aid schemes, particularly at a local level</p> <p>Funding opportunities to enable partnership working</p> <p>Networking and peer learning opportunities, such as pre-application workshops on writing effective funding applications</p>

Collaboration

Challenges and needs	Recommendations
Need to develop relationships and increase partnership working between the gang, youth and women's sectors to develop and deliver effective services which draw on the different expertise of each sector	<p>Funding opportunities to enable partnership working</p> <p>Improved relationships and information sharing between and within the third and public sectors</p> <p>Development and delivery of training and other events by a partnership of organisations in the gang, youth and VAW sectors</p> <p>Two-stage funding application processes (expression of interest only at stage one)</p>

	<p>Longer lead-in times for consortium-based applications for funding to enable organisations to develop partnerships</p> <p>Events and resources that enable organisations to network and identify potential partners, such as pre-application workshops on writing effective funding applications</p> <p>Capacity building support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Briefing templates providing evidence and key arguments for women’s organisations to use in influencing funding for female-specific services ▪ Template partnership agreements and terms of reference ▪ Establishing partnership infrastructure including financial arrangements ▪ Support with recruitment ▪ Trouble shooting in partnerships ▪ Obtaining appropriate quality assurance marks
<p>Lack of collaboration between organisations and sectors across London borough`s</p>	<p>Greater co-operation of public bodies across London boroughs and strategic approaches to funding services</p> <p>Improved relationships and information sharing between and within the third and public sectors</p> <p>Funding opportunities to enable partnership working across boroughs</p> <p>Longer lead-in times for consortium-based applications for funding to enable organisations to develop partnerships</p> <p>Events and resources that enable organisations to network and identify potential partners, such as pre-application workshops on writing effective funding applications</p>

Capacity

Challenges and needs	Recommendations
<p>Organisations do not have the capacity to develop and deliver appropriate support services</p>	<p>Specific funding programmes for female-specific services established by central, regional and/or local government</p> <p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p> <p>Longer lead-in times for consortium-based applications for funding to enable organisations to develop partnerships</p> <p>Events and resources that enable organisations to network and identify potential partners, such as pre-application workshops on writing effective funding applications</p> <p>Improved relationships and information sharing between and within the third and public sectors</p> <p>Development and delivery of training and other events by a partnership of organisations in the gang, youth and VAW sectors</p> <p>Strategic approach by funders to the sustainability of the women's VCS, particularly BAME women's organisations</p> <p>Capacity building support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Briefing templates providing evidence and key arguments for women's organisations to use in influencing funding for female-specific services ▪ Template partnership agreements and terms of reference ▪ Establishing partnership infrastructure including financial arrangements ▪ Support with recruitment ▪ Trouble shooting in partnerships ▪ Obtaining appropriate quality assurance marks. It is important that this is not used in a restrictive way that would isolate many smaller, grassroots organisations to engage in service delivery.

Skills and knowledge

Challenges and needs	Recommendations
<p>Most organisations, even those with experience and expertise in VAW, do not understand the finer workings of how gangs operate, and the specific risks associated with gang and serious youth violence</p>	<p>Development and delivery of training and other events by a partnership of organisations in the gang, youth and VAW sectors</p> <p>Improved relationships and information sharing between and within the third and public sectors</p> <p>Funding for training and campaigning by organisations with expertise in this field such as organisations working with women offenders and VAW organisations</p> <p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p>
<p>Lack of knowledge about the risks facing mothers, sisters etc as a result of the involvement of males in their families who are involved in gang or serious youth violence. This has serious implications for services and staff delivering support</p>	<p>Development and delivery of training and other events by a partnership of organisations in the gang, youth and VAW sectors</p> <p>Improved relationships and information sharing between and within the third and public sectors</p> <p>Pan-London guidelines endorsed by key statutory agencies and third sector organisations on addressing gang and serious youth violence and its impact on girls and women. Include an exploration of appropriate models which address the broad range of needs including the need for safe accommodation</p>
<p>Statutory agencies need specialist training, especially those working in the health sector, in order to intervene and refer appropriately</p>	<p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p>
<p>Lack of understanding and knowledge by statutory agencies, such as police, about repercussions of reporting gang- and group-related sexual violence (eg. focus on girls and women reporting). The vast majority of sexual violence victims/survivors do not report to police</p>	<p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p>

If there have been previous allegations of rape, the Crown Prosecution Service and police do not take the allegation seriously

Services

Challenges and needs	Recommendations
Need parallel services for girls/women and boys/men in order to maximise women and girls safety and address the issue effectively	<p>Specific funding programmes for female-specific services established by central, regional and/or local government</p> <p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p>
Extremely difficult finding support to refer girls and women to because there are so few female-specific services. Those that do exist often have criteria (e.g. age, geographical etc) that can exclude some women or girls	<p>Needs-based funding where applicant organisations have a greater role in determining project scope and outcomes</p> <p>Development and delivery of training and other events by a partnership of organisations in the gang, youth and VAW sectors</p> <p>A coalition of third sector organisations established to ensure the needs of women and girls is progressed within policy agendas</p> <p>Briefing templates providing evidence and key arguments for women’s organisations to use in influencing funding for female-specific services</p>
Lack of support for mothers, sisters etc affected by the involvement of males in their family who are involved in gang or serious youth violence	<p>Specific funding programmes for female-specific services within the women’s VAW sector established by central, regional and/or local government</p> <p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p> <p>Development and delivery of training and other events by a partnership of organisations in the gang, youth and VAW sectors</p>
Male-focused services must challenge	Development and delivery of training and other events by a partnership of organisations in the gang, youth

<p>stereotypes and misogynistic attitudes towards females</p> <p>Support services need to be empowering and offer girls and women an alternative to the hostile and misogynistic messages and culture that surrounds them</p>	<p>and VAW sectors</p> <p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p> <p>Improved relationships and information sharing between and within the third and public sectors</p> <p>Pan-London guidelines endorsed by key statutory agencies and third sector organisations on addressing gang and serious youth violence and its impact on girls and women</p> <p>Needs-based funding where applicant organisations have a greater role in determining project scope and outcomes</p> <p>Funding for training and campaigning by organisations with expertise in this field such as organisations working with women offenders and VAW organisations</p>
<p>Need for bespoke women- and girl-only services which are delivered within appropriate settings</p>	<p>Specific funding programmes for female-specific services established by central, regional and/or local government</p> <p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p> <p>The importance of female-only services included in pan-London guidelines endorsed by key statutory agencies and third sector organisations on working with women and girls affected by and involved in gang and serious youth violence</p> <p>A coalition of third sector organisations established to ensure the needs of women and girls is progressed within policy agendas</p> <p>Briefing templates providing evidence and key arguments for women’s organisations to use in influencing funding for female-specific services</p>

Policy

Challenges and needs	Recommendations
<p>Violence against women not a priority in Local Area Agreements, particularly sexual violence (no London LAAs chose national indicator 26 as one of their key 35 targets). This has repercussions for service development in the area and motivation to tackle the issue</p>	<p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p> <p>Stronger guidance for LAAs on VAW indicators</p> <p>Evidence based policy, practice and funding decisions based on the consistent collection and dissemination of appropriate data</p> <p>Implementation of the cross-government violence against women and girls strategy</p> <p>A coalition of third sector organisations established to ensure the needs of women and girls is progressed within policy agendas</p> <p>Briefing templates providing evidence and key arguments for women’s organisations to use in influencing funding for female-specific services</p>
<p>Girls and women don’t show up in data collection of gang and serious youth violence so are invisible in the statistics (e.g. gang-related homicides or injuries). Gang work is male-focused and youth services are generally targeted at young men. Young women are not seen as a ‘problem’. It is assumed, therefore, that there is no need for female-specific services</p>	<p>A coalition of third sector organisations established to ensure the needs of women and girls is progressed within policy agendas</p> <p>Briefing templates providing evidence and key arguments for women’s organisations to use in influencing funding for female-specific services</p> <p>Evidence-based policy, practice and funding decisions based on the consistent collection and dissemination of appropriate data</p> <p>Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services</p>
<p>Need to challenge the idea that gang and serious youth violence does not affect affluent or middle class areas. This affects whether or not local agencies address the issue</p>	

The impacts of gang and serious youth violence on girls and women is absent in VAW, youth violence and anti-social behaviour, and offending policies

Guidance from central government to local government on gender-proofing serious youth violence services and resource allocation to ensure funding is made available for female-specific services

Gang and serious youth violence to be included in VAW policies

Funding for training and campaigning by organisations with expertise in this field such as organisations working with women offenders and VAW organisations

Development and delivery of training and other events by a partnership of organisations in the gang, youth and VAW sectors

Evidence based policy, practice and funding decisions based on the consistent collection and dissemination of appropriate data

Policy reviews with organisations with expertise in this area

A coalition of third sector organisations established to ensure the needs of women and girls is progressed within policy agendas

Briefing templates providing evidence and key arguments for women's organisations to use in influencing funding for female-specific services

Accessing and engaging young women and girls

Challenges and needs	Recommendations
<p>Identifying and engaging young women and girls affected by or involved in gang and serious youth violence in a service is really difficult, especially if they are not known to or engaged with other statutory or third sector services</p>	<p>Funding for training and campaigning by organisations with expertise in this field such as organisations working with women offenders and VAW organisations Peer marketing approaches that publicise services through word-of-mouth</p> <p>More creative approaches to publicity such as contact details on lip balm etc. This tactic has been successful in discreetly advertising domestic violence support for girls and young women</p> <p>Helplines and other forms of support which can be anonymous</p> <p>Support services which are not criminal justice-focused and clear communication of this to women and girls</p>
<p>It can be very difficult gaining access to schools and other forums, especially in areas where gang and serious youth violence are not considered to be issues for that area</p>	<p>Pan-London guidelines endorsed by key statutory agencies and third sector organisations on addressing gang and serious youth violence and its impact on girls and women</p>
<p>Addressing the perception that the women's organisations are not independent from the state and that any information disclosed will be forwarded to the police, social services etc. This is especially relevant when it may be necessary for services to work in partnership with statutory agencies. This has serious implications for a service's ability to build trust with young women in particular</p>	<p>Pan-London guidelines endorsed by key statutory agencies and third sector organisations on addressing gang and serious youth violence and its impact on girls and women</p> <p>Clear and agreed framework between organisations and agencies to implement a case management approach to child protection issues</p> <p>Support services which are not criminal justice focused and clear communication of this to women and girls</p> <p>Peer marketing approaches that publicise services through word-of-mouth</p>

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