

# Stop Violence Against Women: Involving Men

Violence against women won't stop unless men are part of the campaign to stop it.

Thursday 30th March 2006  
West Park Conference Centre, Dundee

CONFERENCE REPORT



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In March and April 2006 four conferences took place in Dundee, London, Belfast and Cardiff.

Hosted by Amnesty International, in association with Men's Health Forum Scotland in Scotland, Womankind in England, and the British Association of Social Workers in Northern Ireland and Wales, the conferences headed a new approach to campaigning to end violence against women: involving men.

This initiative is being led by Scotland for a number of reasons. Scotland leads the UK by rooting its understanding of violence against women in inequality. This has involved developing a national strategy across government departments for tackling violence against women, placing domestic abuse on a continuum of violence against women that includes everything from workplace harassment to rape and sexual assault.

Scotland is already a best practice example for the End Violence Against Women Coalition. This is a UK wide coalition of organisations calling for government action to tackle the continuum of violence against women. Scottish involvement in the coalition allows gaps in the current national strategy, such as the conditions for women under immigration control, to be brought to light.

We would like to thank the Scottish Executive Equalities Unit for providing funding for this conference and we hope to work together in future on the development of the ideas in this report. We would also like to thank:

### Members of Advisory Group

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Patrick Lemmon, **Men Can Stop Rape, USA**  
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365 West Park Conference Centre



# introduction

Those who had previously attended conferences on the subject of violence against women noticed something unusual immediately: at least 60% of the audience at the Stop Violence Against Women: Involving Men conference, hosted by Amnesty International Scotland and Men's Health Forum Scotland, were men. Held on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2006 in Dundee, the conference was the first of its kind in Scotland. Its key objective was to involve men in campaigning to end violence against women. It was aimed at men and boys who are concerned about issues of violence against women and masculinities; who are committed to taking forward a programme of work to support the involvement of men; and professionals with an opportunity to influence other men.

The philosophy behind the conference was that violence against women will not end unless men are part of the campaign to stop it. Although most men are not violent toward women, they do not speak out or campaign to end the violence. Many do not recognise their own responsibility and ability to help. They are not offered the opportunity to help. And men may not realise that ending gender-based violence will have direct benefits for them, their families, and their communities. This needs to change. Men's participation is essential if we are to end violence against women altogether, rather than help to protect some women from it.

Speakers were invited from four different countries to share their experiences of involving men in campaigns to end violence against women. All have used creative and innovative approaches to challenge dominant myths of masculinity and to involve men in campaigning. All recognise that violence against women is rooted in gender inequality, and stress the importance of men's campaigns complementing campaigns run by women's organisations. It was hoped that hearing about a wide array of successful techniques from diverse contexts and cultures would be an exciting and thought provoking way to inform and inspire men to action in Scotland.

The Scottish context is arguably one where important strides have been made in legislation

and policy. However, less impact has been made in terms of changing the attitudes that perpetuate violence against women. In many ways, Scotland leads the rest of the UK in its response to violence against women with several important legislative advances and the establishment of a National Strategy (to address domestic abuse initially, but since broadened out to include all forms of violence against women),<sup>1</sup> which understands violence against women in terms of gender inequality. Some progress has been made with regards to changing attitudes - including the successful Zero Tolerance poster campaign and the introduction of Zero Tolerance's education pack, "Respect", into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools across Scotland. However, there is still strategic work to be done to engage effectively with the wider male population around the issues. Evidence indicates that many men in Scotland are reluctant to recognise violence against women as a serious societal problem, and are resistant to discussing it.<sup>2</sup> As a result, people's attitudes that ignore, excuse and even justify male violence against women too often remain unchallenged.

In order to ensure that the conference fitted within the National Strategy to Address Violence Against Women in Scotland, representatives of women's organisations, as well as those working with abusing men, were asked onto the conference Advisory Group. This group also contained men from a variety of backgrounds, including health, education and the police, who could inform the attempt to achieve the highest possible number of male attendees.

This conference report is not an attempt to record everything that was said at the conference, but rather to give a flavour of the event in the hope that it will inspire readers to take things forward.

1. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/law/stra-01.asp>

2. Research commissioned by Amnesty International UK revealed that men were ignorant about violence against women, very resistant to discussing it with peers, and, when informed, felt helpless and powerless, with no idea about how to get involved

We hope that Scotland's political response to violence against women will serve as an example to the rest of the UK. At the same time, we recognise that there is still much work to be done in Scotland in challenging attitudes and demonstrating men's role in standing up against this hidden problem.



Chair, Richard Holloway

Richard Holloway, Chair of the Conference, introduced the day by outlining the main aim – for men to think about how they could work with other men in Scotland to campaign for an end to violence against women. First, he addressed the concerns of many men at the conference that the issue of women's violence against men, or violence in same-sex relationships, was being ignored:

"Domestic abuse is most commonly perpetrated by men against women and takes a number of specific and identifiable forms. The existence of violence against men is not denied, nor is the existence of violence in same sex relationships, nor other forms of abuse, but domestic abuse requires a response which takes account of the gender specific elements and the broader gender inequalities which women face. In this context, the definition adopted is as follows:

**Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse), can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family or friends).**

In accepting this definition, it must be recognised that children witness, and are subjected to, much of this abuse and there is some correlation between domestic abuse and the mental, physical and sexual abuse of children. Domestic abuse is associated with broader gender inequality, and should be understood in its historical context, whereby societies have given greater status, wealth, influence, control and power to men. It is part of a range of behaviours constituting male abuse of this power, and is linked to other forms of male violence. Domestic abuse occurs in all social groups, is not caused by stress, unemployment, poverty, alcohol or mental illness, nor by the women who experience the abuse."<sup>3</sup>

Amnesty's Stop Violence Against Women Campaign takes into account all forms of violence experienced by women around the world including forced marriage, female genital mutilation, stalking, rape as a weapon of war, domestic abuse, sexual assault and rape.

3. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/law/stra-01.asp>

# white ribbon campaign

# men can stop rape

## Presentations



**Michael Kaufman**  
White Ribbon Campaign, Canada

The **White Ribbon Campaign** is the largest effort in the world of men working to end men's violence against women. It relies on volunteer support and financial contributions from individuals and organisations.

The White Ribbon Campaign is based on the belief that while most men in most countries do not commit acts of violence against women, virtually all men have been silent about this violence. Through that silence, men allow the violence to continue. The White Ribbon Campaign, therefore, though not an act of collective guilt by men, is a statement of collective responsibility for working alongside women to create a world without violence against women. The white ribbon itself acts as a pledge not to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. It also acts as a call to governments to adopt and enforce laws on all forms of violence against women, and as a catalyst for discussion, soul-searching and change.

The campaign is decentralized, politically non-partisan and diverse. A key principle is that of partnership with women. Women are the pioneers, experts and leaders in work to end violence against women. Men, however, have an unique contribution to make. Men not only have a responsibility to speak out but have

perspectives that can make them effective in reaching their peers. The key way to working through the resistance and fear that the campaign message often receives is to present a positive message: "Our future has no violence against women." Activities of the campaign include education in schools, recruiting influential people to wear the white ribbon, and the creation of posters and merchandise with the campaign message.



**White Ribbon Campaign, Brazil**



**White Ribbon Campaign, Namibia**

The origin of the campaign was three men sitting round a table, and it has taken different forms in the fifty plus countries in which it has been taken up; as such. There is no blueprint for what could happen in Scotland, but we are all experts in our own communities, and we can use that expertise to take forward any of the ideas of the White Ribbon Campaign to good effect here.



**Patrick Lemmon**  
Men Can Stop Rape

**Men Can Stop Rape**, using education and community work empowers male youth and the institutions that serve them to work as allies with women in preventing rape and other forms of men's violence.

Dominant stories are told in our societies about what it means to be a man. There are also counter-stories, which despite being abundant, fail to subvert the dominant tales. Men Can Stop Rape aims to give these counter-stories power and strength. This way, a variety of positive ways of being a man are open to men and boys.

Using famous figures in American culture, the young male participants in Men Can Stop Rape workshops are shown pictures of prominent men in US culture, and asked who is the most manly:

- Successful rap artist Fifty Cent, because he has muscles and was shot nine times?
- President George W. Bush, because he has so much power?
- Software billionaire Bill Gates, because he became rich after inventing something?
- Professional golfer Tiger Woods, because he's an amazing sportsman?

The young men are then asked, "Who is the strongest man you know, and why?" Qualities possessed by such men invariably include compassion, empathy and perseverance. The qualities of the celebrity "Real Men" and the personal "Strongest Men" are compared, and the young men are asked:

- Which of these two would you go to if you needed advice?
- Which of these two do you feel is more like you?
- Which of these two do you feel the need to imitate?

## Real Man

## Strongest Man

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rebellious</li><li>• Tough</li><li>• Breaks barriers</li><li>• Respected</li><li>• Attractive to women</li><li>• Heterosexual</li><li>• Feared and fearless</li><li>• Has staying power</li><li>• Powerful, dominates</li><li>• Money and fame</li><li>• Has survived violence</li><li>• Violent</li><li>• Confident leader</li><li>• Wise, smart, witty</li><li>• Big, deep voice</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Considerate</li><li>• Caring</li><li>• Good father</li><li>• Took care of us</li><li>• Good listener</li><li>• Empathetic</li><li>• Provided for us</li><li>• Overcame hardship</li><li>• Generous</li><li>• Able to change</li><li>• Able to admit mistakes</li><li>• Stands up for what he believes</li></ul> |
|--|---|

This may not be a subtle exercise, but the impact on young men as they answer the questions is very powerful each and every time the workshop is run.

This is the starting point for addressing many other counter-stories, such as subverting the dominant story of rape prevention. If the dominant story focuses on women's behaviour and what they should do in order to be safe, the counter story focuses on the cultural underpinnings of men's violence, the potential for men to be allies in challenging men's violence towards women, and men's "response-ability." Response-ability, implies a more empowering approach, where the emphasis is on men's positive ability to respond to incidents of violence against women as well as their obligation to act.

In conclusion:

- What can happen in your community?
- How can we engage more men to participate in speaking out against violence and sexism and working for institutional change?
- How can we break down some of the divisions and stereotypes that keep people away from this work?

# What can men do?

# acid survivors foundation

## “What can men do?” Michael and Patrick respond to questions from the conference audience.

**Q:** Men attending this conference are already open to the idea of becoming involved in VAW campaigning. How can we convince those who are not here?

**MK:** There are a variety of strategies. Men can talk about the women in their lives whenever they have conversations. Mentioning their daughters, mothers and sisters makes the category of women personal.

When violence against women is debated in public, as it currently is in Scotland in the context of the review of legislation on rape, men have to get involved in the debate and make themselves heard.

You can appeal to the fact that no man wants to think that there's any doubt that when a woman sleeps with him that she's under any kind of duress. We all therefore have a stake in ending violence against women.

We need to let go of the myths of manliness, but that's not done by telling men how awful they are. Rather, when addressing male audiences, I focus on telling stories, making them laugh and avoiding blame; then you can see in their body language how they start to warm to the message.

The things I mentioned in the presentation are not just important analytically, but strategically. It's the realisation that violent masculinities are socially constructed that gives us strategies for change.

**PL:** Men know the pain of living up to myths of masculinity, so they often find the counter-stories freeing, once they've been introduced to them.

**MK:** Men listen to other men, so it's crucial to mobilise the voices of prominent men – a wide range of prominent men.

**Q:** How do we engage with men who have been abused? Men who are terrified of other men?

**Q:** How do you work with teachers and other professionals and how do they respond?

**PL:** Many men are terrified of other men. Again, it's about dismantling the dominant myth of masculinity and highlighting the counter-stories.

**MK:** The role of fathers is key. Part of transforming masculinities is about transforming the role of fatherhood. The practice of empathy arguably comes more naturally to women through the practice of being mothers, but it is vital for men to develop empathy – it just needs to be more actively encouraged in men. If fathers take more responsibility for caring work, young men would grow up seeing that part of what it is to be a man is to be caring.

**Q:** Teachers always argue that the curriculum is too full as it is. How do you persuade schools to get involved in your programmes?

**Q:** As a youth worker, how can I get young men involved in a self-esteem programme which would challenge the myths of masculinity, as labelling it as such will probably have them running a mile!? Also, how do you deal with the potential backlash the boys may receive on returning to their day-to-day environment during such a programme?

**PL:** The participants need to be aware that it's a long process, and that they will have long term contact with you in order to be able to discuss the issues they face as they take on board new ideas about masculinity.

In terms of recruitment to programmes and permission from schools, the concept of “perceived scarcity” has prevailed. When we first started, we would take anything schools offered, 20 minutes in a gym hall for 400 kids whilst a basketball game was being played! It wasn't working so we tried a new tack, saying to schools, “If you want to work with us, this is what we require.” We also said to schools, we only have 3 slots this year. Because we were

taking ourselves seriously, being clear about what we needed, and letting them know it was a “scarce product”, schools took us more seriously and suddenly there was a demand for us.

It was the same with the boys. When we started out, we tried an open invite, which didn't work. So we started a) offering pizza and b) writing to boys telling them they had been selected for this programme because they had leadership potential, but that they would need to fulfil certain expectations to be able to join the programme. The list of expectations was long and demanding enough to make it seem challenging and attractive, and so we received way more applications than places.



Lesley Ann Foster (Left) and Monira Rahman (Right)

## Monira Rahman Acid Survivors Foundation

Acid throwing is a form of violence against women that is common in Bangladesh and other parts of South Asia. The acid is of industrial strength and can corrode wood and metal. When thrown at someone, it causes permanent disfigurement to skin and can even dissolve bones. Acid throwing is a gender-based crime. Men throw acid at women and girls when they feel their masculinity has been challenged. It is thrown at their faces because beauty is a key asset of women in South Asian society – a problem in itself – it is an effective way to ensure the ruination of a woman's life.

The Acid Survivor's Foundation has four objectives:

1. To reduce and eventually eliminate acid attacks
2. To ensure survivors have the best available medical treatment
3. To offer legal support and advice to survivors and their families
4. To assist in the rehabilitation, education and training of survivors

Alongside many other notable successes, one of the key things that the Foundation has achieved has been to mobilize men and boys to work with them to end this violence. Stars Against Acid Violence was formed with pop stars and other celebrities lending their support through media work and creating a song and music video. Students Against Acid Throwing involved young men in standing up against this form of violence. Most impressive was the Men Only Rally on International Women's Day 2002 when 5,000 men marched on the streets under banners calling for an end to acid violence. This attracted huge media attention, which helped put pressure on the Government to enact a new law on acid violence. Men and boys are involved at all levels, in the community, through youth clubs, and through partnerships with journalists.



Acid Survivors Foundation, male only march

All this has been achieved without losing sight of one of the key messages of the foundation: that acid throwing must be seen as one aspect of gender-based violence against women and girls, and tackled alongside other forms of violence against women.

# woman's support centre

# morning workshops

## Lesley Ann Foster Masimanyane Women's Support Centre

The position of women in South Africa must be understood in the context of that country's history of colonialism, apartheid, social destruction and armed struggle. In the legal and political spheres, the position of women has drastically improved. For example, women make up half of South Africa's national and local government. However, violence against women remains a massive problem:

- A woman is killed every 6 hours as a result of "intimate femicide"
- It is estimated that 1 in 4 South African women will be raped in their lifetime

While HIV/AIDs is a serious problem for everyone in South Africa, women are disproportionately affected:

- 56% of people living with HIV/AIDS are women and girls. More young women (15.5%) are infected as opposed to young men (4.8%)The highest HIV infection rate is amongst girls aged 15-24

Masimanyane decided early in their work that these problems could not be solved without the support and education of men. However, the support and involvement of existing women's groups was also ensured.

They involved religious, traditional and cultural leaders; trade unions; police and correctional bodies; and national and local government. Using this network, they aimed to increase awareness about HIV/AIDs; to include men and boys in campaigning to end violence against women; and to challenge and replace traditional ideas of masculinity.

This was achieved using two parallel strategies:

First, a national awareness campaign was launched, aimed at South African men. Second, men were recruited to participate in year-long programmes of "self-reflection". Groups,

facilitated by one man and one woman, encouraged participants to analyse their past behaviour for violent tendencies, using a combination of education, discussion, and drama and art workshops.

Upon completing the programme, Masimanyane requested participants conduct similar workshops in their own communities, based on the training they had received in gender-sensitivity, human rights and HIV/AIDs.

The programme has achieved a number of successes:

- More than 10,000 men and boys have participated in the programme
- Masimanyane has guided the development of a men's campaigning movement at the national level
- Based on this work, Masimanyane has made recommendations to the national government and the UN

### "How to involve men?" Questions for Monira and Lesley-Ann

**Q:** At what stage do you bring men and women together?

**L-AF:** We work with the men and women separately and then ask them when they feel comfortable about working together. It is crucial that it only happens when they feel comfortable with it. This takes longer for some people and in some situations than in others. In many ways, the way that you manage it is more important than the timing.

The purpose of the morning workshops was to respond to the presentations about the White Ribbon Campaign and Men Can Stop Rape, and to explore the issue of violence against women in single sex groups.

Opportunities for men to talk seriously with other men about violence against women are rare. In mixed groups men may feel defensive or ignorant or fear being blamed or 'saying the wrong thing'. It was felt important that there was space at the conference in facilitated single sex groups, which would encourage men to speak seriously about violence against women, to raise questions or express anxieties, without either defensiveness or collusion with male abusive behaviour. The following pages contain a summary of the points that were raised in the workshops and should be read in that context. They do not represent the official outcomes or views of the conference or any of the conference organisers.

Women also had the opportunity to be frank about their expectations, hopes and fears surrounding involving men in campaigning to end violence against women.

The opinions below do not represent those of the conference as a whole, and should be understood in context. However, it is important that the opinions of the men and women already working in the field be heard and addressed, in order to progress towards the common goal of involving men in campaigning to end violence against women.

## Feedback from men's workshops<sup>4</sup>

### Why men use violence – myths and reality

There was discussion in all the groups about whether violence is a product of certain types of community. One group cited alcohol and poverty as an explanation for violence against women, making reference to 'West of Scotland Man'. However, other men pointed to the strong condemnations of violence found in the 'deprived' areas they came from. The same group discussed whether violence did cover all sectors and classes of society or whether structural factors such as poverty increased the potential for community breakdown and violence. A male member of the clergy spoke of people within organised religion who seem equally as capable of using violence and abuse in their relationships as others.

One group concluded that while "there was a context created by a variety of aspects of social conditioning, this in no way was to be regarded as an excuse." Many of this group also dismissed the 'pathologising' of violence; the claim that it is 'in the blood' of men and therefore cannot be helped, by pointing out that in fact that most men are not violent. This resulted in a debate over the extent to which violence is socially constructed or biologically determined.

Another group noted that the culture that we live in sends mixed messages to men. Sometimes violence is abhorred, but at other times it is condoned, as when violence (e.g. military violence) has strong official approval. Culture can reinforce both sets of attitudes. Also there can be a tendency for men to condemn violence but to have double standards, excusing violence in a variety of situations as "understandable".

<sup>4</sup> This is a summary from the facilitators' notes from all three men's workshops. There were about 20 men in each, divided randomly.

# feedback

## Masculinity and Violence

One group addressed Patrick Lemmon's speech, and agreed that there are not just dominant stories and counter-stories, but many interacting stories of masculinity that are dominant in different times and in different contexts. This group pointed to the "mixed messages about dominant masculinity in our society, in the media, amongst celebrities and also in day-to-day male culture. Violence against women is not 'cool' or acceptable to acknowledge in public, although many other aspects of masculinity which legitimate male domination are." This raised questions of how to promote non-violent and non-misogynist masculinities, and how to suppress the harmful ones.

The same group highlighted the absence of caring, nurturing male role models. They noted that men report being able to express tender emotions only in private (i.e. not in front of their friends), whereas aggressive emotions can be expressed in front of peers. The group agreed that caring for young children encourages or legitimates public demonstration of nurturing emotions.

There was also discussion across the groups of the way violence emerges when men don't have the skills to deal with situations. One group argued that while violence is about power it also reflects powerlessness. For example, fighting in public can be a sign of lack of power in the eyes of other men. There was agreement that learning emotional skills can help to prevent violence in some circumstances.

Another group discussed the difficulties of talking about and reconstructing masculinity. It was pointed out that it is easier to talk about the experience of being a professional who *works with* men than to talk about the experience of *being* a man. Moreover, it is difficult enough for men to talk about overcoming the emotional constraints ('pain') of masculinity; it is even more difficult – but more important – to consider relinquishing the power of masculinity, as that involves acknowledging privileges and thinking about giving them up. Becoming a (dominant)

man is a process that many men have been involved in since birth. A process of deconstruction and reconstruction of different forms of masculinity will take a long time.

## A Scottish campaign

There were questions raised in all three groups about how the approach of Men Can Stop Rape and the White Ribbon campaign would appeal to a Scottish audience. It was generally agreed that some work would be needed to translate their messages for a Scottish context.

One group argued that for a campaign to work in Scotland it would need to be embedded in local culture and supported by a ground-level 'community education' approach that got beyond stereotypes and reinforced the positives. The 'Real Man/Strong Man' approach of Men Can Stop Rape was considered by this group to be very helpful, and particularly adaptable to Scottish circumstances.

One group discussed the use of 'bait' in order to attract men into addressing other aspects of their emotional life. Football, for example, is a space in which it is safe to express emotions of camaraderie and affection with other men, although it was also pointed out that this outlet has not prevented violence against women, either in public or in the home. A debate then took place about spaces which legitimate emotional expression. This raised the question of whether such limited spaces are a positive step, enabling men to express feelings, or whether they legitimate the compartmentalisation of emotional life, preventing men from expressing feelings in all areas of their lives.

On a related issue, it was agreed that there would be difficulty in engaging with the 'front' which men put up (in line with the dominant story of masculinity) in order to be accepted, whilst simultaneously challenging this with counter stories. The problem lies in being 'typecast' as an anti-sexist man. It can mean being a positive role model but it can also mean that you are no longer taken seriously as

masculine, and are therefore rejected. In addition to losing any influence, such rejection could be difficult for men involved in campaigning.

This group also noted that challenging other men's expression of violent or misogynistic masculinity raises problems, because the act of challenging or confrontation is conventionally masculine. A campaign in Scotland would need to raise the question of how to challenge appropriately. This group asked whether white ribbons or an alternative public identification of non-violent masculinity would resolve this problem.

Another group discussed how far things had changed. They concluded that while Scottish society had in fact come a long way in terms of opposition to violence against women, this had come about not because of men's efforts, but because of women's campaigns and publicity over the years.

"Men need to think of themselves not as the norm but as conditioned by our backgrounds, cultures and faiths which all too often we take for granted and don't question. When we concluded the workshop we noted deliberately and 'self-consciously' that we were twenty-two men in a room. When was the last time we had spoken in a group of only men about what being a man was about? The answer was: 'never'."

## Feedback from Women's Workshops <sup>5</sup>

### Hopes and expectations

In all three groups there was support for involving men in campaigning to stop violence against women, but with considerable reservations. Many argued that men's campaigning needed to complement the work with female survivors of violence. The point was made that "Men and women must work together to effectively address violence against women. We can't do it in isolation." Some were excited

by the potential impact that men, especially prominent men, can have as role models for other men and boys. It was agreed that men should not only be campaigning but challenging male violence wherever they see it.

The presentations from the morning's speakers led to hope that the activities of the White Ribbon Campaign and Men Can Stop Rape could be replicated in Scotland. The grassroots origin of the White Ribbon Campaign – three men in a room asking what they could do – was seen as an inspiration. Some were motivated by considering the tangible improvement that deconstructing violent masculinities would have on the lives of men and boys.

### Fears

There was some resistance from the participants in one group to involving men. This concerned anxiety about the possible resource implications such a change would have on work with women. There was strong agreement that such work should not detract funding from women's services.

There were some doubts expressed in all three groups about men's willingness to be involved. There was a belief that there is a lack of male role models to take the agenda forward. Also, there was agreement that more men need to be encouraged into caring and supportive roles, particularly in male dominated organisations such as the police.

However, there was some awareness that as professionals working in this field women can be guilty of stereotyping; that the belief that Scottish men would be resistant to getting involved could be an unfair stereotype. One group concluded: "We as professionals need to be aware of how our stereotypes limit our thinking and can impact upon the work that we do."

5. This is a summary of the feedback from the facilitators from the women's groups. The women participating in the conference had a wealth of experience working in the violence against women field, and so, perhaps inevitably, the discussion strayed to wider issues to do with this issue. The notes here have been edited to include only those points directly relevant to involving men in campaigning to end violence against women.

# afternoon workshops

Other women expressed concern about some of the messages used by Men Can Stop Rape. The “My strength is not for hurting” message could be interpreted as men taking on a protective role. This can have negative connotations as it may perpetuate a view of women and girls as needing protection; of being rather weak and feeble creatures. A “men as protectors” model of engaging with men and boys may be inconsistent with trying to develop new constructs of masculinity.

Also, concern was expressed that there was too much focus on certain forms of physical violence and not enough emphasis on the continuum of violence, including emotional abuse. Similarly, there was a risk of focusing too narrowly on women and not including girls.

There was some debate around the degree to which men “suffer” from the dominant stories of masculinity, as the speakers had claimed. As one participant put it: “Where is the pain in the power that men hold?” There was a concern that we do not lose sight of the fact that men need to be held accountable for their actions. One group believed that this accountability should not just be on an individual level. Men must also take responsibility for perpetuating and perpetrating violence against women through the male-dominated structures in society that they develop and sustain. This group believed that the speakers could do more in their work to campaign for broader political and social change.

## Challenges <sup>6</sup>

Some participants were concerned that the conference was “preaching to the converted” in that the people attending were likely to be those already open to the campaign to stop violence against women. There was agreement that the work needs to be targeted where it will have its biggest impact. This in turn raised questions about how will we take this forward to reach the target audience male audience.

All the groups agreed that there needs to be a strategic, holistic, co-ordinated approach to involving men in campaigning to end violence against women. There needs to be political leadership and strong public sector involvement. There also needs to be partnerships between those agencies that work with men and those working with women, with men and boys actively engaging and consulting women and girls. Another group argued that if women’s organisations need to change to involve men in campaigning, that change would need to be incremental and planned.

There was also support across the groups for public awareness and education initiatives. One group raised the issue that education is a process, not an intervention and asked, “How do you ensure boys are able to sustain positive attitudinal changes in their community?” The Zero Tolerance Respect pack was recognised as a valuable resource in this regard, one that should be used more widely.

6. Perhaps because of the familiarity of discussing the issue of violence against women, the women’s groups moved on to discussing what needs to be done. As this was the aim of the second round of workshops and the plenary, only a few brief points are recorded here, and the detail saved for the reporting of the second round of workshops and the plenary.

## Afternoon Workshops and Plenary

The afternoon workshops were mixed, to enable an exchange of views between men and women, and to create networking opportunities. They focussed on action – what did participants think they could do to involve men in campaigning to end violence against women?

Instead of the traditional discussion found in the workshops, the plenary session was designed to be a more dynamic way of recording what participants were thinking and saying in the afternoon workshops and throughout the day. A number of large whiteboards were placed around the main hall, with the following headings:

- What have I learned?
- What needs to change?
- What can I do?
- What campaigns would I support?
- What am I doing now?
- What resources do I need?
- What do I still need to know?
- Men and Feminism – discuss
- How can men overcome holding onto power?
- Imagine a world without violence against women...

Conference participants were invited to walk round the hall and write up their responses, whilst using the opportunity to further discuss ideas with other participants and the facilitators. In order to record differences in responses, men were asked to write in one colour and women in another. This was felt to be important for several reasons:

- As one of the conference aims was to inspire and motivate men to action, it was important to know if men were responding positively to the idea of campaigning
- As another aim was to facilitate the meeting of men who might want to initiate a campaign in a shared profession, location or area of interest, we needed the white boards to record men’s ideas for campaigns
- As this conference was the first of its kind in Scotland, it would be useful to have a record of men’s initial attitudes as a benchmark by which to measure any future change

The following pages report the statements written under the white board headings, supplemented by additional detail from the second round of workshops.<sup>7</sup>

7. The lists here are summaries, intended to give a flavour of the responses and limit repetition. Moreover, in various places, points have been translated from white board responses, flip chart sheets and facilitators’ notes into sentences. In so doing, every effort has been made to avoid altering the substance of the points and the main concerns of the conference participants.



# what was learned?

# what can i do?

## What Have I Learned?

### Men's comments

#### I have learned...

- There are a multitude of issues that lead up to a man hitting a woman
- As individuals and as a society, we must be prepared to address this issue on many levels
- A major attitude change is required, and change must begin with me: I need to reflect on my own attitudes that promote violence
- Change comes slowly and incrementally, but it still comes
- The necessity of men meeting, talking and organising to oppose violence by men on women
- We need to re-emphasise the value of listening
- Despite the scale of the problem, it is important to recognise the value of small scale activities – talking to male friends, ensuring violence is unacceptable to male peers
- The many and various difficulties of raising issues of violence against women with men

### Women's Comments

#### I have learned...

- Violence is cultural and begins at an early age – it is not the result of 'problem families', focusing on 'problem families' can be dangerous and violence is culturally part of masculinity across the board
- How much still has to be done
- The reasons why I resist men's involvement
- The value of dominant story/counter story model as tool
- Young men can learn to give up the dominant real man story!
- Men will come to conferences and hopefully if we organise other forums/events, we can all move forward
- Men's attempts to tackle violence against women need to have alliances with women

## What Needs to Change? <sup>8</sup>

### Men's comments

- Validation of the myths of manhood (e.g. that men have to be tough and violent)
- The inactivity of men in general
- Irresponsible, knee-jerk journalism
- Unequal pay
- Negative attitudes towards women
- Relationships between men and women
- Our understanding of power – at the moment it is understood as power over women, when power can be positive, and can belong to women
- Bureaucracy and inconsistency within agencies in the field

### Women's Comments

- Attitudes
- Blaming women
- The focus on women and relationships
- Media depictions of men, women and violence issues
- Dehumanising imagery via World Wide Web
- Global capitalism
- The invisibility of men challenging violence in public and private
- Lack of connections in policy making - ministers and officials in Scottish executive need to be active (in all departments) in making connections between policy agendas that will help tackle male violence e.g. mental health, children, sexual health, justice, and violence against women — we are all fed up seeing this!
- The 'real man' trap integral to the way we work – competitive, long hours, putting achievement higher than family etc.
- Cultural attitudes: collective denial in society that there is a problem
- Lack of funding/resources

<sup>8</sup> This section also contains many of the answers to the white board headed "How to overcome men holding onto power." This more specific question enabled participants to reflect and respond more easily than the broader question what needs to change, as the answers were more often more detailed and explicit. Yet, they were so similar in substance to the answers to the question "What needs to change?" it seemed sensible to group them together.

## What can I do?

### Men's Comments

- I can acknowledge my own thoughts and attitudes of dehumanising women and begin to be reflective and admit when I need to change and change
- Lead by example – to others and our own kids
- Raise awareness among men and challenge negative attitudes peacefully
- Challenge casual attitudes to violence
- Talk to my team, the guys in the pub, colleagues
- Start a white ribbon group locally or nationally
- Go into local schools to talk with boys rather than waiting for them to come to me
- Build up local initiatives that involve boys, youths and men
- Stop the demonising of men and engage with men in a meaningful way
- Push for political change and action on this issue
- Ask MPs, MSPs, etc what their policy is on violence against women and vote accordingly
- Celebrate the positive aspects of masculinities and highlight that all men have the capacity to change or behave differently by encouraging them to accept responsibility rather than blame
- Ask local high profile figures to support local initiatives
- Use my new knowledge about what has been done in other countries to overcome reluctance to starting a campaign in Scotland

### Women's Comments

- Speak to my male friends and colleagues
- Challenge my friends and family – even on the little things
- Create an environment where people feel able to disclose domestic abuse i.e. non-judgemental, respectful, empathetic.
- Ensure men at work are involved in plans and actions
- Organise a round table discussion under our partnership to kick start attempts to concerted action by men in Glasgow and

- build on interest of some men/agencies
- Continue to raise the issue of men's involvement politically and use political networks
- Don't collude – call a spade a spade when I'm training people
- Encourage partnership working and consistency between agencies i.e. protocols, policies & procedures, local forums, etc.
- Work with men to show them the benefits of equality. Talk about it in terms of benefits for them as well as women and if possible, short-term gain – don't be po-faced!
- Influence the development of domestic abuse policies and procedures within the workplace and the development of core training of staff

One mixed group also discussed the importance of using the skills already found within the group:

## Use the skills we have already:

- Communication skills: that will help us to get the message across and engage with men and work in partnership with other agencies
- Interpersonal skills: the ability to form professional working relationships and engage with men i.e. rapport-building skills
- Negotiation Skills: the ability to present a well-formed argument and to negotiate with the decision and policy-makers
- Challenging skills: the ability to appropriately and respectfully challenge attitudes that support, or perpetuate gender inequalities and men's power over and use of violence towards women
- Be direct & open: be focussed and consistent in our approach
- Empathy: the ability to empathise with men and to understand things from a different perspective, which helps to engage men
- Motivation: the skills to motivate men to be involved and to see the benefits for men of being involved in the campaign to stop violence towards women

## What campaigns and initiatives would I support?

### Men's comments

- The White Ribbon campaign
- A focused national message
- A positive message e.g. Men have the capacity to change – “We got it wrong but we don't want to keep getting it wrong.”
- Campaigns that work with role models for young men speaking out against the violence and that promote the message that real men can be emotional
- Listening groups
- Amnesty campaigns
- Petition to support/fund education for young people/other groups
- Men's forums looking at this issue that sit alongside women's campaigns
- Parenting skills, educative approach
- Support for men who are committing violent acts; not just punishment
- 'Pledges' in individual workplaces
- Employer – trade union collaboration against violence against women
- Poster campaign within working environment
- Committed democratic group
- The use of theatre as a tool for teaching / challenging attitudes and behaviour

### Women's Comments

- Anything that would make a difference!
- White ribbon campaign – encourage prominent men to lead on it in Glasgow
- A national campaign with funding allocated to local media campaigns
- Multi-agency partnerships to develop work in own area
- Community initiatives to raise awareness and action in smaller/local
- Other days like this
- National rally
- Petition to Parliament
- Campaigns in large organisations as well as small for example, in Asda/Tescos/large

- workplaces
- Prevention education at earliest age and re enforced by progressive approaches at different stages e.g. pre 5, Primary School, Secondary School, Young Adult etc
- Amnesty campaigns
- More learning about what has been done in other areas
- A public rally of thousands (even hundreds) of men in Scotland
- A strategic multi layered and multi levelled approach, with different messages for different target groups and environments

## What Resources Do I Need?

### Men

- Contact lists of useful organisations
- Promotional material that won't have to be paid for from existing dwindling funds
- Not government funding - will, coordination and a national focused message to deliver
- Therapy and for men's health to see this as a man's issue and find some resources for men who use violence
- Commitment
- Time!
- Contexts to meet with other males not dominated by money, booze or ideology (political or religious)

### Women

- Patience
- Sustained funding for our work with women and men
- Proper funding for men's work and partner support services
- Permanent mainstream funding for support/prevention in school/campaigns
- Support from Scottish Executive to devise policy similar to SOPA “child protection”
- Information/toolkit to enable people to discuss this issue with male colleagues and develop more work on/with men

## What Am I Doing Now?

### Men's Comments

- Challenging attitudes in conversations (constructively!)
- Encouraging men to take responsibility for their violence
- Working with men who use violence – facilitating behaviour change and modelling another ways to be a man
- Working with men on probation for assaulting their partners
- Working to engage men in sexual and reproductive health, and in achieving gender equality
- Conducting research on domestic abuse and employment; this will hopefully develop our understanding of the complexity of domestic abuse
- Policy development for the Scottish Socialist Party

### Women's Comments

- Working hard at trying to engage with men
- Working with men and challenging colleagues who should know better!
- Trying to link issue with other strategies within the Scottish Executive
- Conducting public education and life skills training for youth - males and females
- Supporting fathers, awareness raising, parenting support, alternatives to violence,
- Providing training for a range of professionals on sexual health with gender as constant thread getting them to debunk gender socialisation and figure out how to incorporate that into their daily work
- Trying to join up existing action and use gender equality as a lever to build alliances and coalitions across a number of issues that impact on male violence
- Asking police to link violent crime and male violence

## What do I still want to know? Unresolved Issues <sup>10</sup>

### Men's comments

- How can we get a better sense of what the benefits would be to men (particularly non-perpetrating) of getting involved in campaigning on violence against women?
- What sort of campaigns work?
- How do we challenge violence against women in a society where violence has become such a prevalent hallmark?
- Do all men who have been involved in violence against women know about this conference?
- This event feels like the start of something: how/who will maintain the momentum?
- How do men feel about themselves in the aftermath of violence against their loved ones?
- Do men need to become feminists as part of constructing a positive masculinity?
- Is a men's movement which doesn't accept/account to feminism dangerous?
- Can men be feminists?
- Men aren't a “them” as is written on this board. We need to realise the limiting of men's lives by this misconceived and misplaced power, but also recognise that not all men have power to the same degree. How to mount an effective campaign which recognises the power differentials between men?

### Women's comments

- Where does the violence originate? What are the real roots? What makes men tick?
- How do we help to support men to be involved?
- Where is the evidence that work with men works?
- How to engage people who do not believe violence against women happens in Scotland
- How men can challenge other men in a non-confrontational way

# conclusion & next steps

- How we can all keep this on the agenda after today is over
- Do men need women to help work through issues?
- What is feminism now? It means different things to different generations of women
- Why have discussions at the conference tended to focus on 'what could be done to change things?' or 'what could others do?' rather than offering a personal answer?
- How can a common ground be found upon which behaviour can be challenged without the use of this common ground being seen as collusion? For example, the adverts in 'Nuts' magazine (a 'lad' magazine) which aim to challenge male violence by the use of semi-pornographic pictures of women. Surely this is colluding with violence in order to reach a male audience?
- What of minority ethnic communities? Cultural norms can be different, violence can be hidden away.
- How do we avoid concluding that violence over women is worse elsewhere, with the example of acid attacks, and therefore not that big a problem in Scotland?

10. These issues are complex and we were aware that this was the first event of its kind in Scotland. Participants would no doubt have questions and issues that they felt had not yet been fully answered for them. This was indeed borne out by the white board headed "what do I still want to know?" which elicited multifarious responses. Some of the comments from the graffiti board, the evaluations and the white boards headed "Men and Feminism: Discuss" and "Imagine a World Without Violence Against Women" have also been presented here. This section thus encompasses all the "unresolved issues" in participants' minds on the day.

Michael Kaufman closed the conference by reminding everyone that we all have the capacity to make changes, both personally and in our society.

## MEN WANTED!

The success of the conference depends on you, the reader of this report, taking things forward. As this conference report makes clear, there is overwhelming support for men in Scotland to get involved in campaigning to end violence against women. What is less clear is exactly who will make this happen. The field is wide open, therefore, for creative and innovative ideas and initiatives.

## TAKING PART IS EASY!

**Step One: REGISTER YOUR INTEREST AND SUPPORT OF THIS CAMPAIGN AT OUR NEW WEBSITE THAT WILL BE LAUNCHED IN SEPTEMBER**

[www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk](http://www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk)

By visiting [www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk](http://www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk) and registering your interest, you will be ending men's silence about violence against women. You will also be able to:

- read about events, activities and initiatives to involve men in campaigning to end violence against women in Scotland
- post up information about events, activities or initiatives you know about or are keen to set up
- discuss any of the issues surrounding involving men in campaigning to end violence against women
- download information about applying for funding to facilitate events, activities or initiatives?

## Step Two: BEGIN TO ACT NOW!

**Follow up some of the ideas of the conference right now**

Talk to your male friends, colleagues and teammates about violence against women

Challenge casual attitudes to violence against women

Set a good example to other men and children

See <http://www.amnesty.org.uk> for 10 things you can do right now

## Set up a White Ribbon Campaign in Scotland

In Canada, the campaign focuses on public awareness raising and education but the campaign could take any shape or form in Scotland

It could involve identifying celebrities who could be champions of a Scottish White Ribbon Campaign, designing merchandise, producing posters, working with football teams... the possibilities are endless!

A UK based White Ribbon Campaign has recently been set up and is always looking to co-operate with other groups and individuals and expand its year round educational work and campaigning. They offer specific support, advice and campaigning materials to those seeking to run local campaigns around November 25th, the International Day to Eradicate Violence Against Women.

For more information please contact:  
[info@whiteribboncampaign.co.uk](mailto:info@whiteribboncampaign.co.uk)  
[www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk](http://www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk)  
Tel: 07941 597584

Also see <http://www.whiteribbon.ca/> and <http://www.michaelkaufman.com/>

## Educate

If you are a teacher or youth worker, order the Zero Tolerance Respect pack for your school or youth club

Use the websites below for further resources to use in the classroom or youth club

If you are a parent, find out if violence against women is included in the curriculum of your child's school

<http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/>  
<http://www.mencanstoprape.org/>

This web site is a comprehensive tool kit designed to help you work with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence. It provides readings, case studies, handouts, exercises, and other resources as well as community-building tools:

<http://toolkit.endabuse.org/Home>

One of the most popular items at the conference was an exhibition of VAW posters from around the world. You can organise a similar exhibition by visiting:

<http://www.dvposters365.net>

## In the workplace

Identify if your workplace and/or your Trade Union have a "Violence Against Women" policy

Find out if you could put up posters, set up a system of pledges, etc.

## Get political

Lobby your MSP and MP to do more to address violence against women

Find out what your local women's organisation needs and back their lobbying efforts

Plan an activity involving men for the next 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence (from International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November) to International Human Rights Day (10 December).

Contact your local multi-agency partnership on violence against women to find out what they are doing and how you can support them

## Support Amnesty International's Stop Violence Against Women Campaign

On 5 March 2004 - in the lead up to International Women's Day - Amnesty launched a global campaign to stop violence against women.

The Stop Violence Against Women campaign focuses on ending violence against women in the family and in conflict/post conflict situations: two of the most dangerous environments for millions of women throughout the world. The creation of a world in which women and girls are afforded their basic human rights is our ultimate goal.

There are lots of cases and campaigns for you to take action on at:

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryId=10220>

## For more ideas, have a look at this report which is a Call for Global Action to Involve Men in Ending Gender Based Violence:

<http://www.sida.se/shared/jsp/download.jsp?f=SVI34602.pdf&a=3108>

# appendices

## LONDON

The London conference was held in central London on April 1st 2006. On the day we achieved an attendance of just over one third men; significantly more men than events on violence against women usually attract.

The discussions in the main debate and in the workshops highlighted some key areas for activists, campaigners and policy makers to think about when taking work forward to engage men in working to prevent violence against women. These are outlined below.

### Role of media and popular culture – rise of “raunch” and backlash against feminism

Many participants felt that the media, commerce and popular culture perpetuate the degradation of women. This widespread objectification of women and their bodies encourages a culture that dehumanises women, enabling at least disrespect, and at worst violence, to flourish against them. Related to this, some delegates pointed to the “double standards” prevalent amongst men, enjoying the objectification of women, but condemning it when it is targeted at women close to them. It was widely agreed that the mass media is key in halting this downward slide on attitudes to women.

### Challenging attitudes

Challenging such attitudes involves working within all areas of our lives, including our upbringing, schools, and parental and societal stereotypes. In reaction to the rise in violence amongst school-age girls, it was felt that in addition to targeting violence against women, violence of any kind, as a reaction or a solution, must also be condemned. However, it was suggested that the use of violence as a solution stems from a male-dominated society where violence is equated with power, strength, courage and desirable male characteristics.

In order to address violence in any form, then, men need to take responsibility for both recognising and rejecting their own stereotypes.

### Involving men

Male involvement in campaigning against violence against women is rare, though the majority of those attending the conference agreed it was crucial to tackling the problem.

Suggested reasons why men are not involved:

- Men lack understanding of the reality, scale, extent and wider effects of violence against women
- Non-perpetrating men feel defensive when confronted with the issue
- Non-perpetrating men feel shame when confronted with the issue, causing them to avoid engaging with the problem
- Men are afraid of compromising their perceived masculinity or social status by campaigning
- There is no available platform for men to voice their concerns or condemnation of violence against women
- Some men feel that the women’s sector is hostile to or suspicious of any contribution they could make.
- There is no real language, script or methodology for men to engage with this debate, because women have led on the issue for so long
- Men are unaware of the pressures and constraints imposed by dominant masculinities, that perpetuate violence against women and prevent them from combating it

### Attitudes of the women’s sector

Many participants had experience of hostility to working with men from within parts of the women’s sector. Some participants said they had not been allowed to attend the event in the name of their organisation, as the organisation did not agree with the approach that involved men. This attitude stems from concerns that men may try to “take over”, or that, in an

environment competing for scarce resources, involving men could take resources away from organisations already delivering much needed services. In response, it was pointed out that resources going to help tackle men’s violence were working towards the same end of reducing violence against women, and so should not be viewed as “competing”. However, it was agreed that men should be self-reliant in their involvement, in order to not undermine existing strategies.

Some participants questioned the assumption that only men could engage with men and boys on issues relating to violence against women. Also, some participants felt that women campaigners who themselves are survivors of male violence may feel threatened or uncomfortable with male involvement.

### Language and aim

Some delegates questioned whether most men would accept the key principle of gender inequality as a cause of gender-based violence. Would it be possible to encourage male participation without using such potentially alienating language? There was some debate about the necessity of using this approach, leading to a general consensus that perhaps a different sort of language and approach may be required, though the underlying premise and rationale must remain the same. It was agreed that any new approach must be developed by men themselves, and must address issues of masculinity, power and violence.

### Strategies

Utilising a new language and new techniques that will appeal to men, implement new education and awareness strategies. The issue is relevant to a variety of social problems, and so there is the potential for government involvement. However, government interest and promotion of the campaign must be sustained.

- Raise awareness of existing work and strategies involving men, learning from and expanding their activities. This includes working with such campaigns abroad
- Provide training within public sector services on violence against women and its causes
- Organise other conferences and events to further discuss and organise the involvement of men
- Identify male role models that typify an alternative concept of masculinity to front the campaign. As a new and innovative campaign, this could easily attract significant media attention
- Develop educational materials, aimed primarily at boys and young men, that can be used in schools and colleges
- Encourage debate within the women’s sector regarding the involvement of men, in order to clarify, address and reassure any misgivings
- Ensuring continuing levels of support for women’s organisations, secure government funding for a campaign that involves men

### Barriers and risks

While a variety of opportunities exist to create a national campaign to involve men in working to end violence against women, certain barriers to progress need to be recognised and addressed:

- It will be difficult to counter the current media portrayals of women
- Resistance is likely to come from cultural or religious interpretations that attempt to justify discrimination and violence
- There still exists a great degree of ignorance and misinformation among the public regarding violence against women
- There is widespread complacency regarding the position of women’s rights, often based upon the false belief that women’s equality has been achieved in the UK

## Action commitment cards from participants

Participants in the workshops were asked to think about what action they could take personally or professionally to take this work forward. Below are some of their responses:

- I will think of creative ways to appeal to men for their involvement
- I will join a campaign, like the White Ribbon Campaign, that pledges to condemn, combat and prevent violence against women
- I will establish a network of interested parties through those attending the conference
- I will promote these issues at work, through events, presentations, and discussing violence against women with my colleagues
- I will encourage religious leaders to speak out on this subject
- I will write to male MPs to encourage them to participate
- I will promote these issues in my personal life
- I will contact businesses and community organisations, particularly those that attract men, asking them to advertise, promote or support campaigns against gender-based violence
- Many of those who work in education or youth community projects committed themselves to raising these issues in their work

## Conclusion

Amnesty International UK and WOMANKIND Worldwide are keen to continue to develop work in this area and in sending out this report we hope that participants and interested parties will also be motivated to take action and that they will share their ideas with us.

The WOMANKIND Worldwide UK Schools' programme 'Challenging Violence, Changing Lives' continues to work to prevent violence against women through an education programme that engages schools and communities to change attitudes, raise awareness and take action.

If you would like to be involved, or receive further information, contact:  
Hannah@womankind.org.uk

If you would like to offer your help, provide us with relevant contacts, or would like more information on the progress of the Involving Men campaign, please email:  
involvingmen@amnesty.org.uk

## BELFAST

The Northern Ireland event took place in Belfast Castle on 3rd April. The event hosted 140 people including speakers and facilitators, twice as many as had been originally envisaged. Like London, men made up a third of those attending, a significant achievement for an event on violence against women.

This was the first major event of its kind to be held in Northern Ireland, though there was a general consensus, among both men and women, that this problem will not be solved until men begin to engage with these issues. Importantly, men attending the event provided the most coherent explanation of our rationale, and a robust outline of how important it was that men began to take responsibility for the patterns of violence in our society.

This report provides a summary of the presentation given by Professor Monica McWilliams, a founding member of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, politician and respected academic. Though it is not included here, Seamus Davies, from the Spring Farm Community Association, gave a very graphic and affecting presentation on the long-term impact of experiencing and witnessing violence in intimate relationships. Included in this report is a poem used by another of our Northern Irish speakers, Michael Lynch of the Men's Action Network, which describes some of the challenges posed by stereotypes about masculinity from a man's point of view. This report also provides a summary of the numerous questions, discussions and ideas raised during the plenary session.

## Summary of Speech by Monica McWilliams

In Northern Ireland, attitudes towards violence against women have changed, though the stigma with which the subject has traditionally been associated has created numerous boundaries and barriers for women. At certain

points in the past women had been told that their struggle for equality would have to wait until other 'more important' national and political injustices had been resolved. Furthermore, a pathological approach to violence against women has been favoured; that violence in intimate relationships is restricted to deprived and marginalized communities and classes. Too many people still have not registered the message that violence against women is unacceptable.

It is important to contextualise women's use of violence, to recognise that they are acting out or defending themselves. In understanding the differences between men and women in this area, it is vital to ask the correct questions. There is no symmetry between men and women in the use of violence in personal relationships, and so a properly gendered analysis of the subject is necessary. It is also necessary to consider why some men raised in abusive homes go on to replicate that violence against women, and why some do not.

Domestic violence is unlike any other crime or form of violence, as it stems from multiple factors, including male permission and entitlements, male behaviours, and a pattern of cohesive control. Cultural differences are also significant. Some people in Northern Ireland claim that alcohol misuse is a factor in domestic violence, though this obviously cannot be a factor in societies such as Iraq's. Such cultural differences mean it is important to always be aware of a gendered analysis of the issue.

At a time when issues of truth recovery are coming to the fore in Northern Ireland, it is important that we face the truth about violence against women. We must stop denying the truth, minimising and trivialising the extent of the problem. We need to validate the victim's experience, and ensure that it is never repeated. Just as we in Northern Ireland are concerned with the issue of restoring society, so too we must take responsibility to restore the lives of survivors of gender-based violence. In order for this to happen, male clerics in our society must

face up to their responsibility to engage with this issue, because leaders in society tend to hold strong views that the public often internalise. Too often, though, they fail to take account of victims' experiences. In the proposed Bill of Rights, Irish political, religious and cultural leaders have the potential to change societal structures and also people's attitudes. It is important to bear this in mind in our future activities.

### General Summary of Points Raised in Plenary Discussion

There was agreement amongst those in attendance that simply by voicing these issues, the conference was making a significant contribution that could encourage others to do the same. Below are summarised some of the issues raised in the plenary discussion:

- What are the consequences for men who "break rank" from the accepted masculine position?
- What are the true causes of gender-based violence? Why do men feel the need to control women? Why are some men more susceptible to resort to violence than others?
- Women's organisations are often hostile to working with men
- Men's groups often feel that men should be working on men's issues, rather than giving an additional voice to women's concerns
- There was a perceived failure to acknowledge women's violence against men
- Despite the legal improvements in recognising and enforcing women's rights, the rate of violence against women in Northern Ireland remains high. How is the system failing?
- Considering the general lack of vigour and passion among men for addressing violence against women, who can be expected to lead male involvement in campaigning?

- There was agreement that prevention through education is key in tackling violence against women. Concerns were expressed that so little is being done to educate Northern Irish children on the subject. Furthermore, the Department of Education for Northern Ireland is not active enough in tackling violence against women, and is unrepresented on the national Domestic Violence Steering Group
- There is an over-emphasis on women who suffer abuse being simply carers for their children, rather than victims of violence in their own right
- Similarly to England and Scotland, there is a general complacency amongst the public regarding women's rights. Many believe, falsely, that equality for women has been achieved. This makes it difficult to portray violence against women as being rooted in pervasive gender inequalities

### Points raised in workshops

Many of the points and ideas raised in these workshops repeated those highlighted in other regions. Below is a list of the points that were exclusive to the work in N. Ireland.

### Myths and stereotypes about VAW

- Male victims of abuse go on to become abusers
- Women are weak
- Witnesses become perpetrators
- All women speak out against domestic violence
- Children don't see or aren't affected by it
- It's because he loves her
- Man's right to keep his wife in check
- Abuse can be forgotten
- Male sexuality is more powerful than female sexuality

### Importance of Education

- Prevention programmes
- Reaching out to young people
- Research into impact on children
- Domestic violence as human rights issue

### Priorities for the Way Ahead

- Help men find alternatives to violence
- Work-based and hospital-based policies and procedures
- Domestic violence courts leading to more prosecutions and more appropriate punishments



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