

Report

Themes arising from the Violence Against Women and Girls Summit: March 2024

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The Organisations

Bournemouth University (BU) has more than 19,000 students and is ranked as one of the top 200 young universities in the world. Our research shapes and changes the world around us, providing solutions to real-world problems and informing the education we deliver. Our vision of Fusion brings together three key elements of education, research and practice, creating something which is greater than the sum of its parts. Through the impact of our research and education, and the contribution of our staff, students, and graduates, we can deliver the key aspect of our purpose, to enrich society. It is this focus on Fusion, which is reflected within this project, as we value the interaction between academic research and front-line professional practice.

Soroptimist International (SI) is a global voluntary women's organisation active in 132 countries worldwide and there has been a club in Bournemouth since 1938. The word **Soroptimist** comes from the Latin words soror (sister) and optima (best) – the best for women. Through awareness, advocacy and action at international, national and local levels, Soroptimists are committed to a world where women and girls achieve their individual and collective potential, realise aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong and peaceful communities. All SI's work is linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, whether local, national or international. All projects work towards ending poverty, eradicating hunger, providing education for all and preserving the environment.

The **BCP Safer Community Partnership** membership includes representatives from BCP Council, Dorset Police – BCP Local Policing Area, National Probation Service, Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Services, Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and community and voluntary sector agencies. Their mission is to provide a clear vision and leadership in improving safety for residents, businesses, and visitors. They work to address crime and anti-social behaviour, using data, insight, and a combination of communication, engagement, prevention, early intervention, and enforcement, working closely with the community to provide support to victims, especially those who are vulnerable.

Acts Fast is registered as a UK charity in 2014 and since then has been on an evolving journey to provide trauma support, counselling and group work for families. They support families for as long as the support is helpful; empowering parents, carers and family members who in turn support their children. Acts Fast provide support for non-abusive parents and carers of children who have suffered Child Sexual Abuse, Child Sexual Exploitation or sexual assault. They also provide support for adult family members and partners of individuals who have accessed Indecent Images of Children.

Dorset Women CIC would not exist without its predecessor Women's Action Network Dorset (WAND). WAND formed in 2006 after participants at a women's event expressed a need for a networking, campaigning and social group for women. A formal constitution was written and adopted at the first AGM in 2010. In its early years, WAND received support from West Dorset District Council and had strong links with Dorset Police through its founder members. WAND's role in the community included running events, campaigning, fundraising for women's causes and providing information on women's health and domestic abuse. Dorset Women CIC became a company in October 2023. Dorset Women CIC has taken the work that WAND started and bought it to a new level of ambition. It has continued the values of WAND and expanded them to create the 4 Cornerstones of the new strategy. It has taken the principles of the WAND strategy and combined them into the 3 Pillars for Dorset Women CIC which are the: Dorset Women's Charter, the Dorset Women's Empowerment Network and Education.

1. Introduction

This report draws together the information gathered in relation to tackling issues around violence against women and girls (VAWG), collected at the joint Soroptimist International Bournemouth (SIB) and Bournemouth University (BU) 'Creating a new culture to end Violence Against Women and Girls' Summit on March 24th 2024. The event was co-funded by BU and was a follow-on from the June 2023 conference (Harvey and Oliver, 2023). This was a multi-agency collaboration event, with key stakeholders invited to discuss culture change and commit to ensuring the safety of women and girls in Dorset. It brought together diverse professionals, including NGOs, charities, educators, academics, criminal justice and social workers, all of whom work with or have an interest in VAWG. This enabled everyone to share knowledge and best practice and to build a local network for collaboration.

2. Terminology

Although the project team acknowledges that there is a great deal of conversation and controversy around the language which professionals use to describe those who experience abuse and those who abuse others, particularly to avoid labelling and defining people by the abuse either given or received, in this report the term victims/survivors will be used to refer to those who experience abuse. Those who have been abusive will be referred to as perpetrators.

3. Background

The term [VAWG was adopted from the UN 1993 declaration on the elimination of violence against women](#). It defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

The UK Government's 'Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy' examines a range of abuses which are disproportionately gendered, including domestic violence and abuse, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, as well as related issues such as Female Genital

Mutilation (FGM), honour-based abuse, revenge pornography, modern slavery, and trafficking (UK Home Office, 2021).

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is an umbrella term used to cover a wide variety of abuses (ONS, 2023) against women and girls, including:

- domestic homicide
- domestic abuse
- sexual assault
- honour-based abuse (HBA)
- stalking

Abusive treatment also includes behaviour that is coercive and controlling (Domestic Abuse Act, 2021).

This report does not seek to reiterate data in detail that is available elsewhere in relation to VAWG in the UK, and a recent Focus Report for the House of Lords (Tudor, 2023) has a comprehensive summary [available [at this link](#)]. Instead it builds on the outcomes from the VAWG [Conference, Summer 2023](#). One such outcome was the establishment of a VAWG Task Force to instigate opportunities for the VAWG conversation to continue. [The Summit was the first event planned](#), with a desire to get key decision makers together in order to discuss and explore ways of working together to effect culture change. This report will focus on the findings from the activities and discussions that were held at the summit event.

4. Methods

The aim of the Summit was to explore the essentials for culture change and further collaboration towards reducing and challenging VAWG. To do this, delegates were offered the opportunity to engage in several different discussion groups that explored the following topics:

- The big issues
- Prevention of offenders
- Needs and offers
- Education as prevention for young people – how, who, where, and what?
- Education as prevention for men – putting research into action.

Full details of each activity are in Appendix 1.

Delegates: The Summit was attended by a variety of senior professionals and policy makers; the majority of delegates worked in southern England and came from non-governmental organisations, charities, social services, academia, education and the criminal justice system. It is impossible to break down the findings by profession or organisation, as delegates added their comments anonymously and not all delegates engaged in all the activities.

5. Findings and Discussion

The aim of the Summit was to consider what was needed to bring about social change that would positively impact on reducing and challenging VAWG. As a result of the activities, several key themes were extrapolated from the information gathered that should help to promote best practice in the whole county.

There is a need for more initiatives and campaigns that raise awareness of a wide range of gender issues:

1. The need for well-trained, committed professionals
2. The need for multi-agency working and collaboration
3. Interventions: more of them and at all stages, particularly early
4. Equality for all
5. Utilisation of the knowledge of professionals already doing good work in this field.

Theme 1: Initiatives and campaigns

It was very clear from the feedback that delegates believed this is a societal issue and there were several areas where it was felt that the raising of both public and political awareness was vital. This was aligned to reducing the stigma of experiencing all forms

of VAWG, creating allyship, increasing funding, addressing the misogynistic tropes on social media, and encouraging a positive dialogue around this issue. Ideas for campaigns are presented in Table 1.

Campaign Ideas	Rationale
Male allyship	The need to highlight that this is not just a women’s issue; we need men teaching men about VAWG, seeking positive male role models, addressing and challenging the ‘all men are bad’ narrative.
Listen to us	Offer a chance to bring into the foreground the voices of those who have experienced VAWG, how it has impacted them, and what has helped them, with a focus on what works.
Challenging social narrative	The narrative that it is ‘the responsibility of women and girls to drive and make the change’ needs to be addressed. This could be done by encouraging media outlets to follow VAWG reporting guidelines, to stop victim blaming, and talking about ‘safe spaces’ for women. The world should be free of abuse where we do not need ‘safe spaces’ for women and girls anymore.
Be kind	Create a focus for young people to learn about and understand what a relationship should look like: respect, tolerance, equal partnership.
Did you know? shout it out	The use of #MeToo is a very positive initiative, so starting to share and promote these ideas more widely will have a positive impact helping women and girls to identify what is meant by abuse, empowering them to speak out. We should build on and shout about what already exists.
Change can be bottom up or top down	This includes thinking about how we might influence policy makers and persuade politicians to lobby for change.

Table 1 - Campaigns

Theme 2: Well-trained professionals

It was acknowledged that all professionals who might meet someone who has been abused need to be aware of trauma-informed practice and able to signpost to relevant support services. To do this an easily accessible source of information, a ‘one stop shop’, is needed. The benefits of having those with lived experience involved in training was highlighted. Issues that were noted were aligned to limited resources, staff retention, and the need for volunteers, recruiting people who were passionate about addressing the issues. It was also noted that it would be beneficial to celebrate successes within and outside of organisations, but one of the key underlying challenges

is funding. Resources are limited, and budgets are tight. Identifying creative solutions, perhaps through more partnership working, could be an important consideration here, for example, joint training sessions and joint funding bids, which leads to theme 3.

Theme 3: Multi-agency working

This was an overriding theme that came up across all the activities. This was the need to share information, to work closely together, and come together for networking, knowledge sharing and support. Delegates felt that regular meetings would promote collaborative working, strengthen partnerships, offer opportunities to learn from each other and provide creative thinking spaces to address the challenges and change negative cultures. It would also lead to more joined-up campaigns that could have a wider reach.

Theme 4: Interventions

The delegates shared several of the positive interventions that were already in place and noted that these were currently meeting neither the needs of victim/survivors nor perpetrators. Early interventions were felt to be extremely important, for example the need for age-appropriate relationship skills education. Moreover, 'just in time' education around relationships (for example, should professionals or caregivers/parents become aware that someone may be in a relationship where the partnership is not equal or where they are subjecting someone to or being subjected to 'low-level' controlling behaviours) then having programmes which they could be referred to before an offence is committed would be beneficial. It was also felt that healthy relationship programmes could be offered within prisons, and also as part of early release conditions/probation. Educational interventions with young people in schools and other places, should be multi-agency, and perhaps there could be campaigns/interventions/preventions aligned to community activities, such as sports clubs, hobby groups, festivals etc. Other useful community intervention could be through mentors in the community to support people. There were also comments highlighting a need to have more effective legislation around this issue, especially aligned to social media as well as also better Intelligence/information sharing.

Theme 5: Equality

Delegates raised the point that the inherent inequalities within society contribute to VAWG. It was felt that there were still circumstances where women’s voices were silenced. For example, they are often not listened to or respected within the workplace. There was a call for more females to be in leadership roles, and for language to change; for example, women showing stereotypical leadership attributes not being labelled as ‘bossy’. It was noted that there is still a significant gender pay gap and that too often women are still being seen as and portrayed as ‘sexual objects’. Furthermore, delegates noted that women were still held responsible and accountable for their own safety, with advice to women being about how to behave to keep themselves safe, rather than trying to understand and challenge the abuse that women are experiencing at the hands of aggressive/abusive men. It was felt that raising awareness of the issues was an important part of changing the dominant social narratives around gender, as this can negatively impact both men and women. This would help to empower women but also to help men to explore a positive masculine identity and prevent the labelling all men as potentially abusive.

Theme 6: Utilising professional knowledge

Two of the activities highlighted the wealth of knowledge that professionals already have on this issue, and what actions need to happen to bring about the change. The first of these was one that asked professionals to identify how education could be utilised to start changing the narrative and the key points are summarised in Table 2.

How	What
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for teachers in positive relationships • In the curriculum • ‘Golden thread through all subjects’ including music and art • Education on bullying and action to prevent and deal with it • Safer relationship education in schools (primary) - start with healthy friendships • Provide a tool to help people challenge negative behaviour- bullying, violence e.g. ‘if this happens, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community support, coming together • Family role- boundaries, expectations, acceptance • Acknowledge child’s ability or right to say no • Respect individuals of all ages • Feeling good about being kind/ helping others • No phones in schools • Access to porn- how to remove it or make it about healthy relationships/sexual partners and not violence

I can do this' - lots of support for this idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge stereotypes of gender roles • More education for parents- how to talk about relationships with their children, social media • Healthy friendships- cards on table
Where	Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community youth groups • Home • Care settings • Nurseries • Primary school • Sure Start / Home Start • Chapels, churches, mosques etc • Young people 'in shed' (like men in sheds concept)- sharing positivity • Youth clubs • Scouts, guides, brownies, cubs • College 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole community response- neighbourhood, home, work, faith • People looking after children of all ages and stages (including parents) and all children of all ages and stages (promoting healthy relationships) • Postive male role models and influencers (antithesis to Andrew Tate) • People in social media talking about good not bad • Postive Mentors

Table 2 - Education

The second activity focussed on how to prevent someone from becoming an offender and utilised a timeline to do this. Figure 1 highlights what some professionals saw as a need to feel a sense of power as part of the problem.

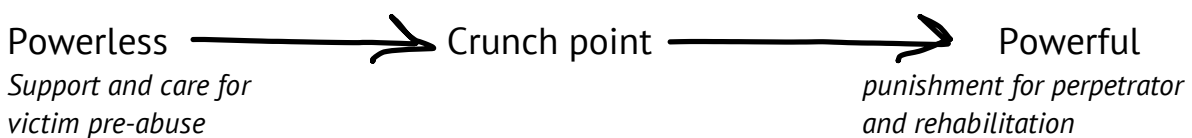


Figure 1 - the route to offending

The detailed summary of this timeline is in Appendix 2. The timeline highlights that there is a wide range of potential elements that could impact on whether someone might end up perpetrating VAWG. It suggests what is required is a wide range of different responses, including the need to change the social narrative, to understand the impact of adverse childhood experiences, to provide education about relationships as equal

partnership and the need for retribution for abusive behaviours and rehabilitation interventions.

Early prevention and/or intervention is required for those who might be more likely to be impacted by their childhood experiences. For example, understanding that boys who has witnessed abuse from an adult male, may need support from a positive male role model. Early intervention for first offenders, around rehabilitation and re-education as well as also support for the victim/survivors, is required. There is a need to address dependency (on substances) and mental health issues with effective rehabilitation in prisons with a restorative justice approach pre-release and post-release; that also includes access to continued prolonged appropriate support. The two biggest challenges in bringing about these changes are lack of resources and the dominant social narratives around gender, with limited political will to drive the necessary changes.

6. Next Steps

Following this Summit and compiling this report several key action points have arisen. The VAWG Task Force are going to review these at our meetings and:

- consider how best to create time and space for professionals to meet, continue networking and share information
- hold another knowledge exchange/conference for professionals and students
- engage with community voices about their experiences of VAWG, identifying both what worked well for them and areas of change
- work out who would be the drivers to take the suggested campaigns forward and develop an appropriate timeframe for doing this
- seek funding to create and keep updated a local VAWG directory.

7. Conclusion

This Summit invited a wide range of professionals to consider different aspects of tackling Violence Against Women and Girls. Delegates were invited to contribute to different workshops, each with a different focus. The overwhelming message that arose

out of these workshops was the continuing need to change the surrounding culture and dominant narratives held within our society about VAWG, including a need to shift the overwhelming responsibility from women, working in partnership with men on this matter. For example, this could be done via prevention and intervention for children, promoting positive role models and the effective use of social media to influence healthy relationships. Although this Summit is only a small drop in the ocean, through working together, sustaining this drive to make change, we will continue to challenge and find ways to tackle VAWGs.

References

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Appendix 1: Summit Meeting – Changing Culture of Violence Against Women & Girls: Interactive Workshop Brief

Each station requires at least one person to guide discussion and encourage general ‘chat’ to be captured on the board.

1. The BIG Issues

Set Up: 3 columns with headings (1) BIG PROBLEM (2) BIG SOLUTION (3) IMMEDIATE ACTIONS.

Action: Encourage people to come up with their own ideas and add to those already on the page

2. Prioritising the Priorities

Set Up: Write the words: Education, Rape Prevention, Safe Spaces, Rehab for Offenders, Support for Domestic Abuse Victims, Women’s Empowerment.

Action: Ask people to put THREE ticks on their absolute top three priorities – ask them to consider ALL words before they commit. Allow people to add new words ONLY if they really are not covered by others.

3. Prevention of Offenders

Set Up: Long sheet of single lining paper with one long arrow from one end to the other. At start write ‘BIRTH’ and $\frac{3}{4}$ along, ‘VIOLENT OFFENCE’.

Action: Encourage people to write down their ideas about what might have prevented an offender from offending with arrows pointing to what stage of their life. This could include reference to existing services but only really to enable post-event action planning.

4. Needs and Offers

Set Up: 2 big columns. (1) NEEDS – what does YOUR organisation need to change culture? and (2) OFFERS – what can your organisation OFFER that you are NOT ALREADY DOING that could change culture?

Action: Encourage people to write their ideas on a post-it note and post in each column

5. Education as Prevention for YOUNG PEOPLE – HOW, WHO, WHERE, and WHAT?

Set Up: Draw a big square divided into 4 quarters and label on the outside of each quarter 'How', 'Who', 'Where', 'What'.

Action: Encourage delegates to write their ideas on the relevant coloured post-it notes for each section.

6. Education as Prevention for MEN – Putting research into action.

Set Up: Draw 2 BIG triangles ($\triangle \nabla$). Draw a BIG circle around both. (1) Label the 1st "WHO & WHERE" and the 2nd "WHAT & HOW". (2) Divide the first horizontally into 4 sections. Clearly label these sections: Bottom of triangle 'all men', next section 'men with first offence', third section 'men with conviction of violence', and top pinnacle section 'serious offenders'. (3) In the first triangle, put at least one example of 'WHERE' in each section – bottom section 'at work', second section 'in-person training venue', third section 'on probation or remand, fourth section 'in prison'. (4) Divide the upside down second triangle similarly into 4 sections. (5) Inside the circle but outside the triangles write the heading 'Education Topics – what needs to be included.

Action: Encourage people to continue to put their ideas in the relevant sections. Try to get them to be creative.

Appendix 2: Prevention of Offending: when and how could it have been prevented?

