

How violence is constitutive of women's inequality and the implications for equalities work

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The Equalities Review is tasked with: exploring the social, economic, cultural and other factors that limit or deny people the opportunity to make the best of their abilities; providing an understanding of the long-term and underlying causes of disadvantage that need to be addressed by public policy; making practical recommendations on key policy priorities; and informing the modernisation of equalities legislation towards a single Equality Act and the development of a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights. This paper will argue that violence against women (VAW) is relevant to all four of these areas. This echoes the most recent report of Yakin Erturk, the UN Special Rapporteur on VAW, in which she notes that whilst this violence is now recognised as constituting a series of human rights violations, it also functions as a mechanism for enforcing and sustaining gender inequality. Whilst some forms of violence may have been eliminated¹, others persist, have transmuted or even emerged anew. An important theme in her report is the universality of women's human rights and the danger of approaches which use diversity to 'culturalise' violence in ways that set up a tension between women's human rights and cultural difference and tradition. Invariably such arguments rest on implicit support for traditions which rest on historic privileging of men and notions of culture as unchanging and unchallenged.

The key theme for this seminar is exploring different kinds of prejudice, a concept that is rarely used in relation to gender. In thinking why this might be the case I returned to the explicit meanings of the concept and the directions it encourages and delimits. Prejudice literally means making pre-judgements based on unwarranted bias, and is connected to notions of irrational fear implicit in concepts like homophobia and islamaphobia. Not only are all of these concepts related to *attitudes*, but there is no obvious corollary applicable to gender². The equalities project also draws on notions of discrimination and inequality³; discrimination refers to *actions* that treat people differently on the basis of perceived social differences; it does not require explicit or individual prejudice to take place, as we all know from the work on institutionalised racism, sexism, heterosexism, ablism and so on. Where discrimination is institutionalised and occurs over time the outcomes are patterns of inequality so embedded in social life that they affect choices, options and outcomes across generations. Prejudice, discrimination and inequality have linguistic opposites, which can also be seen as their resolutions: with respect to prejudice, whilst tolerance is desired, it does not create either fairness or equality. The welcome coupling by the government of equalities with human rights introduces further layers of conceptual framing, suggesting we may need to factor in notions of social, and in the case of this paper gender, justice and even freedom into intended outcomes. One useful route here is into the wider capability framework originating in Amartya Sen's work in the development field, which I will pick up on later. At this point the question to bear in mind is how concepts can extend or narrow how issues are framed, and language choice intentionally or unintentionally locate the equalities project within a matrix of meanings with implications for how causes are understood and priorities designated.

The next layer of conceptual clarification involves laying out the similarities and intersections of gender with other inequalities, alongside some of its specificities. Violence can be said to both link and differentiate gender from the other equality strands – violence plays a part in all inequalities, but its extensiveness across the life course, the range of forms it takes and who

¹ Foot binding that was common across China is often cited here, as is burning of women suspected of witchcraft in Europe.

² The closest is probably misogyny – woman hatred – but it has a different etymology and hatred is a different concept to fear.

³ The point was well made at the seminar where this paper was presented that an implicit theme in this paper is power, and that this concept needed to be made more central to contemporary equalities discourse.

perpetrates it are, arguably, distinct with respect to gender. Whilst gender inequality is frequently taken for granted in equalities debates, like other forms of domination it is naturalised and normalised. One clear, but often forgotten, point of distinction is that women are not a minority group and, as Angela Davis (1981) noted so eloquently in the 1980s, globally women of colour are a majority of a majority. Understanding and explaining the longevity of women's unequal position has required engagement with commonsense ideas, also reproduced by/finding support in science and/or religion, with the most recent social science perspectives highlighting the social construction and reproduction of gender and gender relations.

With respect to our exchange today, rather than contact with 'the other' being feared, constrained or limited, women grow up in households, and have intimate relations, with members of the group that they are not the equals of. Apart from during childhood, which is a time-bounded state, women are the only disadvantaged group expected to love – and preferably adore – their more powerful counterparts. The absence of space where contact between women and men was limited in western societies led some feminists to argue in the 1970s for 'separatism', whilst virtually all supported the less total creation of women's space and women-only groups/provision. That the latter position has been, and remains, contested tells us something about the expected content of gender relations. The complexities, contradictions and ambivalences that the most intimate oppression embodies have prompted intense debate within and outside feminism.

It is also worth noting that the structures and practices of feminism have contributed much, not only to equalities thinking, but also to theory and practice more widely: workshops and small group work are a relatively recent component of organisational processes with origins in the participatory impulses of second-wave feminism. Moreover, the gender lens is far more than a focus on women, requiring that we take a critical look at men and masculinity (ref Hearn et al) and ask profound questions about what constitutes a family, work, care, human rights and justice. Recent scholarship in the field of gender analysis reveals that gender orders are not static but adapt and change, and that the gender question is relevant to all public policy. With respect to migration, for example, gender analysis requires us to think about the connections between paying women from the south to undertake care work in the north, whilst care deficits emerge in their home countries, not only in public services but in the private sphere too – the consequences for global and localised gender relations are as yet unclear.

Feminism is the social movement that has most willingly and extensively embraced intersectionality – indeed the concept itself comes from within feminist theory on violence (Crenshaw, 1991) – having wrestled for over two decades with the questions of 'which women' and even whether one can use the category 'woman' at all. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that women's organisations have embraced the cross-cutting framework that underpins the proposed new equalities machinery. This position of principle means that there is a large constituency of women's groups and bodies such as the EOC and WNC with profound commitments to celebrating diversity and discovering how to work with intersectionality. Those charged with thinking strategically about the modernisation project carry a responsibility to be alert to unintended consequences: to guard against the best intentions of some groups becoming a space in which short-term sectional interests and the needs of other groups are asserted. For example, gender becoming an implicit backdrop, women an invisible majority, and the critical questions which need to be asked across all the strands about men and masculinity lost.

Halting progress

Recent research, and policy statements from the European Commission, highlight that progress towards gender equality has stalled despite extensive policies and national machinery (Commission of the European Communities, 2005). Similar patterns are evident in the USA (Katz et al., 2005). Documented positive trends in mobility for individual women, and awareness amongst men, have not eroded structural inequality. This persistence locates gender as an example of what Charles Tilly refers to as “durable inequalities” (Katz et al., 2005), resistant to straightforward social policy interventions.

A number of theorists offer us ways to address this durability. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, suggests we look more deeply at culture.

Male domination is so rooted in our collective unconscious that we no longer even see it. It is so in tune with our expectations that it becomes hard to challenge it. What are the mechanisms and institutions which make possible the continued reproduction of this age-old domination by men? ...[A]s an effect of what I would call symbolic violence, a violence that is hardly noticed, almost invisible for the victims on whom it is perpetrated; a violence which is exercised principally via the purely symbolic channels of communication and knowledge (or, to be accurate, mis-knowledge) of recognition and, in the final analysis, of feelings. (Bourdieu, 1998)

Sylvia Walby (1990) would agree, to a point, but in her theoretical framework culture is but one of the six structures (domestic labour, wage labour, sexuality, culture, violence and the role of the state) which determine women’s position in societies. Addressing all six systematically and simultaneously might have an impact on the durability question. In her first formulation in the early 1990s the framework was referred to as ‘theorising patriarchy’; in the new millennium reference is made more commonly to ‘gender orders’ or ‘gender regimes’. These concepts are preferred since they do not posit single unchanging social systems, rather they presume variation and change across space and time. They are also understood as operating at various levels, so one can examine gender orders at the level of the nation state, within institutions and even within the household. These concepts create space for more nuanced exploration of the durability of unequal gender orders across a range of economic and social contexts.

Violence as a key driver of gender inequality

...[E]quality is only achieved if women can enjoy and exercise all fundamental rights and freedoms such as mobility, freedom of speech, freedom to decide and organise, the right to sexual and reproductive autonomy, to personal security, to own assets, to work and earn income and to be recognised as full members of society (Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005, para 65, p17).

The view expressed in the quote above echoes Walby’s position, since it locates violence – or more specifically its absence – as a core requirement for the achievement of equality; so long as it persists at current levels, women are prevented from exercising many fundamental rights and freedoms. Whilst women’s movements have highlighted the critical importance of violence for many years, its relevance to equalities agendas has tended only to be recognised when it is designated a ‘hate crime’, a labelling most commonly used in relation to race/ethnicity and sexuality. In the remainder of the paper an argument is developed which suggests not only that VAW needs to be understood as an expression of inequality in itself, but that its prevalence

and consequences re-create and/or reinforce other aspects of gender inequality, and that both have significant implications for contemporary equalities agendas.

VAW as a practice of inequality

Women's movements, alongside those for civil and gay rights, highlighted how interpersonal violence and its threat are an expression of relations of dominance, whilst at the same time reproducing them. This understanding was adopted by the United Nations, which from 1993 has explicitly defined gender-based violence as a form of discrimination and a core concern with respect to women's human rights, since it jeopardises women's lives, bodies, psychological integrity and freedom (Kelly, 2005).

[VAW]... both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms... In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture. (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, paragraph 112)

Kofi Annan has said more recently:

Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace. (1999)

A major report on VAW by the Secretary General will be published in 2006, which will combine a human rights perspective with defining the issue as a form of 'systematic discrimination'.

Definitions and measurement?

VAW encompasses, but is not limited to: domestic violence; FGM; forced and child marriage; rape and sexual assault; sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of girls; sexual harassment (in the workplace and in the public sphere); trafficking in women and exploitation in the sex industry. All these forms of VAW occur within the UK, as the selected statistics below illustrate. Box 1 draws on the (limited) UK random sample prevalence studies which provide lifetime rates and, in some instances, estimates for the numbers experiencing violence in the previous year. Box 2 presents data on forms of violence where we have less reliable data, and which are often marginalised in policy and practice. It is the combination across all these forms of violence, alongside those for which we do not have recent data – like sexual harassment in public space and flashing – which comprise 'violence against women'. In this wide definition it affects at least one in two women over their lifetime (Walby and Allen, 2004), and the vast majority of perpetrators across all the categories are male⁴. Stalking is by definition a 'course of conduct' offence, but so is most domestic violence and sexual harassment and, given the extent of rape by current and ex-partners, a considerable proportion here also involves multiple incidents.

Box 1: Most recent prevalence and incidence findings⁵

Type of VAW	Prevalence rate	%*	Source
Domestic violence ¹	Since age 16	26	Walby & Allen (2004)

⁴ Whilst men and boys are also subjected to some, although not all, of the forms of violence addressed here, the scale of victimisation is far lower than for women, and a high proportion of perpetrators here are also male.

	Previous year	06	
Rape ²	Lifetime:	06	Walby & Allen (2004)
	Since age 16:	04	
	Previous year:	0.3	Myhill & Allen (2002)
	Since age 16:	05	
	Previous year:	0.4	
Sexual assault ³	Lifetime:	24	Walby & Allen (2004)
	Since age 16:	17	
	Previous year:	02	
Sexual harassment	During employment:	50	EOC (2000)
Stalking	Lifetime:	19	Walby & Allen (2004)
	Previous year:	08	

* % rounded up or down

¹ Defined as 'non-sexual' domestic abuse, threats and/or force.

² Sex Offences Act 2003 definition, includes attempts.

³ Includes attempts.

Box 2: Other indicators of the scale of VAW

Type of VAW	Estimates	Source
Trafficking for sexual exploitation	Up to 1,500 women per year	Kelly & Regan (2000)
	2,000 women per year	NCIS, (2003)
	81% of women in 730 off street prostitution sites in London were from outside the UK	Dickson (2004)
FGM	74,000 women in the UK have been circumcised 7,000 under 16s are at risk	Home Office (2004)
Forced/child marriage	Southall Black Sisters support 200 cases per year Bradford police deal with 70 cases per year FCO deal with 200 cases annually, 15% of which involve minors	Samad & Eade (2002)
Honour killings	At least 12 per year	Cowan (2004)

Table 1 illustrates how forms of violence thread through the life course of women and girls, whilst social contexts – such as conflict, dislocation or living in a residential institution – not only provide heightened opportunities for abuse, but also decrease the likelihood of detection and/or sanction. Women's much documented greater fear of crime (Scott, 2003) is directly connected to a perceived need to factor personal safety into routine decisions and activities. Fear of violence, including sexual harassment, remains a constraint on the mobility of women and limits their access to resources and basic activities. Although what was called 'the male protection racket' (Hanmer and Saunders, 1984) means that fear tends to focus on the public sphere, the greatest risks reside in the private. Whilst no woman is safe, disadvantage and patriarchal traditions can exacerbate patterns of assault⁶, simultaneously limiting access to support: protection and justice are all less available to women who are socially excluded for reasons of class, race, disability and age.

⁶ Whilst data is not strong here certain groups do appear to be differentially targeted, including disabled women, women in the sex industry, and women from the most marginalised groups, such as first nations, Roma and tribal women and undocumented workers.

Table 1: Violence and the female life cycle

Phase	Type of Violence
Prenatal	Prenatal sex selection, physical assault during pregnancy, coerced/forced pregnancy
Infancy	Female infanticide, sexual, emotional and physical abuse, living with domestic violence, neglect including differential access to food and medical care
Childhood	Sexual, physical and emotional abuse, prostitution, living with domestic violence, child/forced marriage, FGM, femicide, neglect including differential access to food, medical care, and education
Adolescence	FGM, prostitution and pornography, including trafficking, sexual harassment at school and in the street, femicide, forced marriage, crimes in the name of honour, intimate partner violence, rape and sexual assault by relatives, known and unknown men
Adulthood	Sexual harassment at work and in public space, intimate partner violence, rape and sexual assault, femicide, forced pregnancy, dowry and bride price abuse, crimes in the name of honour, sexual exploitation and trafficking, stalking
Old Age	Elder abuse, intimate partner violence, rape, abuse of widows, sexual harassment in public space, institutional abuse

Adapted from Heise, L, (1994)⁷.

What is unique about women's experiences of violence is that these acts are not perpetrated by strangers and/or state actors on the basis of prejudice, but rather by men women know, and are expected to trust and love: family members; intimate partners; work colleagues; professionals; friends. The ubiquity of violence – one in two British women experiences domestic violence, rape or stalking in her lifetime (Walby and Allen, 2004) – makes it neither a rare nor random event but, unfortunately, an all too frequent aspect of gender relations, stitched into the fabric of everyday life. Some incidents women experience as expressions of power and abuse are not classified as crimes, and the majority of those that are rarely result in successful prosecutions (Hester and Westmarland, 2005; Kelly et al., 2005), creating a context of virtual impunity. In addition, social attitudes serve to normalise and legitimise violence in specific circumstances, holding women responsible for their own victimisation, whilst excusing men's behaviour – as the well-reported recent Amnesty International poll illustrated (BBC, 2005). Western popular culture celebrates and glamourises men's acts of violence and violent aggression – against other men as well as women (Paul, 2005). A sense of entitlement and centuries of male privilege underpin the extent of violence and its normalisation (Lundgren, 2004). In all these ways VAW can be said to both express and reproduce unequal social relationships. We can speak of it as being constitutive of the gender order through practices that assert and reproduce inequality.

This argument has been rather abstract, although a few relevant examples will illustrate how violence and its consequences are connected to maintaining unequal gender relations.

- The man who assaults his wife because the children are not in bed and the house is not tidy when he comes home asserts that the household should be organised around

⁷ *Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden*. World Bank Discussion Paper. Washington. D.C. The World Bank.

his timetable and desires and that he is justified in responding to any failures on her part with violence.

- Men who stalk ex-girlfriends or throw acid in the face of women who have refused their attentions are acting on the basis of a perceived entitlement to choose with whom and for how long intimate relationships shall take place, practicing a jealous surveillance which is not only debilitating but also dangerous.
- Men who have sex with drunk and almost insensible women take advantage of a social context in which the woman, rather than they, will be held accountable for their behaviour.

Addressing impunity is one way to challenge both the sense of entitlement which underpins all such acts and the tacit permission which the absence of sanction communicates. Undertaking research on men who choose not use violence and especially those who challenge the entitlement and permission would open up new possibilities for intervention and prevention.

How does VAW contribute to other aspects of gender inequality?

There are simple and more complex answers to this question, depending where we begin. In terms of individual women and girls subjected to violence, the message they receive is that they are worth less than others, that they do not have control over their own lives and bodies. Both will have consequences with respect to health, employment and participation in civic life. At a wider social and community level the potential for violence contributes to women's heightened fear of crime. Sexual harassment is often used to undermine women in the workplace; extreme domestic violence and trafficking often result in women being confined to a household/flat/brothel with limited freedom of movement. Injury and harm – physical and mental – alongside the use of violence as a strategy to maintain male preserves and privileges, systematically disadvantage women in the public domain. In summary, therefore, VAW reduces women's ability to engage in productive employment, to successfully pursue education, to participate in public life and to contribute to decision-making processes. In each of these areas there are already established national and international targets for gender equality; the contention put forward in this paper is that violence reduces the likelihood of these targets being met. Living with the realities and legacies of violence has more profound impacts on many lives, even when considerable energy and finance is devoted to personal safety and dealing with the past. Not everyone succeeds – high proportions of women in prison and using mental health services have histories of violence. In short, failure to factor VAW into equalities strategies means that more generations of women and girls will have their opportunities curtailed and government policies will fall short of their potential to make a difference.

A recent study by Sylvia Walby (2004) has explored the costs of just one form of VAW – intimate partner violence – to the public purse, to employers and to the individuals themselves. Revealingly, the latter are far greater than the former, with the implication that women's life chances and choices are hugely affected by not just legacies of abuse, but also efforts to avoid being victimised in the present or future. The costs and consequences of VAW are as extensive as they are profound, threading through into willingness to stand for public office as well unequal access to and participation in sport and leisure⁸.

One way to explore this question further is through Ingrid Robeyns (2003) application of Amartya Sen's capability approach to gender equality: here what is at issue is access to

⁸ For more detail of the myriad ways that VAW connects to public policy priorities and Public Service Agreements see Kelly and Lovett (2004); Women's National Commission (2005).

resources but also freedom to live a valuable life – what one is able to do and be. The widespread use of the term ‘well-being’, rather than health and/or quality of life, draws from Sen’s framework. Robeyns, unlike Sen, is willing to risk outlining the range of areas which need to be addressed across contexts, and her paper explores these with respect to equality assessments. Below I sketch in the relevance of VAW to her framework.

- *Life and physical health*
In general men have higher mortality, women greater morbidity. Work by WHO and others has established that at least five of women’s lost healthy years of life can be attributed to violence (Heise, 1994; WHO, 2002), and many women lose their lives because of violence – directly or indirectly through harmful coping strategies, suicide, HIV and AIDS.
- *Mental well-being*
In 2005, for the first time in overall policy, the Department of Health policy document stated that violence and abuse were strongly implicated in mental health problems. International research has long demonstrated that the legacies of abuse are extensive and intensive.
- *Bodily integrity and safety*
Here protection from violence features as a core element underpinning well-being.
- *Social relations*
Often understood primarily in terms of men having more formal networks, and women more informal. With respect to VAW, however, the fact that perpetrators are invariably known means that the abuse of trust involved damages social relations (Herman, 1984). Furthermore actual and/or anticipated blame can lead women to not tell anyone, thus limiting access to social support.
- *Political empowerment*
Legacies of abuse and concerns for personal safety serve to limit women’s entry into public life, and the ways it is conducted often lessen the extent to which issues like violence are addressed.
- *Education and knowledge*
To be abused is to be treated as ‘worth less’ than others, and many perpetrators increase their own sense of self by diminishing others. The capacity to learn is limited by the experience of actual abuse and for children living with domestic violence. Certain forms of professionalisation disempower survivors by not recognising the importance of experiential knowledge.
- *Domestic work and non-market care*
Many abusive men have traditional attitudes, enforcing a sexual division of labour and gender roles in the household. Where the home is a place of danger this diminishes women’s capacities to care for their children in a relaxed way. There are also complex issues for women having to care for relatives who abused them in childhood, and with respect to the physical and sexual abuse of domestic/care workers.
- *Paid work and other projects*
Sexual harassment undoubtedly undermines women’s position and achievements in employment, but the legacies and realities of all forms of violence have implications here too. Examples range from the domestic violence perpetrator whose control means women leave jobs, or limit their aspirations, to undisclosed rapes affecting attendance and performance at critical stages in a career, to having a record for prostitution offences meaning women are denied access to certain forms of employment.
- *Shelter and environment*

Obviously safety within homes and space matter here, and limited attention has been paid recently to the built environment as a context in which women's safety can be increased or diminished. But a gender perspective extends far wider. Might we make more progress if we understood anti-social behaviour, as Beatrix Campbell (1993) documented in the early 1990s, as young men 'doing gender', creating a masculine identity in and through their use of public space, gaining strength through the diminishment of others.

- *Mobility*
The ways violence limits women's mobility, especially in contexts where they have limited resources, has long been a focus in feminist writing. In the Amnesty International exhibition 'Imagine a World without Violence Against Women' many women wrote poignant messages about the freedoms they and their daughters yearned for – to walk alone at night, on a deserted beach, to travel alone, to move around in the world without worrying about sexual assault.
- *Leisure activities*
The capacity to uptake leisure depends on having time, energy and resources: all three are less available to women. In addition other barriers limit women's participation, including that many sports facilities are in dark unlit spaces. We know that engagement in sport appears protective against VAW, but the most effective intervention – women's self defence – has limited availability and is not promoted within the leisure and sport agenda.
- *Time-autonomy*
The space women have to give to thinking about personal safety, to dealing with legacies from the past robs them of time they might use for creative and other projects.
- *Respect*
The respect agenda in its political and more academic framings (Sennett, 2002) also cries out for a gendered perspective. We know there is no community without safety; what would crime prevention and community safety strategies look like if women's safety in the public and private were at the centre rather than the periphery? To be treated with dignity is one of the foundations of human rights. Women's worth is not simply a matter of comparability with men in the labour market; rather there are a multitude of ways in which women's worth and dignity are diminished to the benefit of men. One obvious example here is attitudes to rape, and how these play out in investigations and trials. The same actions/histories increase men's space for action whilst narrowing women's – drinking makes him less culpable and her more so. Similarly to what extent can women claim respect in societies where there are extensive, and increasingly legitimised, sex industries: treating a human being as a 'thing', a commodity, means that they are denuded of humanity such that abuse becomes acceptable (Nussbaum, 2001, p218).
- *Religion*
The extent to which women are free to live or not live according to a religion partly depends upon how far the religion is implicated in the commission or legitimisation of violence. Too many religions have at the heart a gender ideology which constructs women, and especially women's sexuality, as dangerous, to be controlled.

Implications for UK equality policies

The previous argument has established that VAW is both a cause and an outcome of women's inequality, a means and a consequence, which has direct and indirect connections to continued disparities in employment, health, well-being and political representation. There has been an

implicit presumption that as inequality decreases on more traditional measures – in particular employment, pay and political participation - that VAW would diminish. The example of the Nordic countries is instructive here: they invariably occupy the top five places in most international gender equality indices, yet VAW, as measured by random sample community prevalence studies (Hagemann White, 2000; Heiskanen et al, 1998; Lundgren et al 2002) is as common – and some would argue more common – as in societies far further down the list. Nordic politicians and equality bodies are moving towards an understanding that violence is a driver of equality, and has relative independence from other aspects and must, therefore, be included as a specific element in gender equality indices. If the durability of gender equality is to be addressed at minimum VAW must be addressed seriously and specifically within equalities agendas, addressing deep rooted beliefs and practices and the gendered meanings and harms that constitute the micro-inequalities of everyday life. The implications for the UK are that VAW – not just domestic violence – must become a core element of equalities work, addressed in systematic and consistent ways by public bodies, through PSA targets⁹. Explicitly including VAW within the gender duty would be a simple route to establishing these foundations. This would provide a basis for building the kinds of comprehensive and multi-dimensional approaches which the Commission of the Status of Women report for 2005 noted:

Governments should accelerate their efforts towards implementation of comprehensive strategies against violence against women, adequately funded and with a clear time frame (para 238).

And...

National strategies of plans of action will be major instruments for combating violence against women (Para 753).

By way of a conclusion

Rania al Baz was a popular television presenter on Saudi television when her husband beat her within an inch of her life: that she lived in Saudi Arabia made her decision to allow the photographs of her battered face public remarkable, but no more brave than those made by countless women across the globe over three decades who refused to be silenced and a keep men's secrets. She, like many survivors, understands the intersections between violence and gender inequality.

The crucial thing is the structure of society – the fact that a woman cannot drive or travel without authorisation, for example – gives a special sense of strength to the man, and this strength is directly connected to the violence. It creates a sense of immunity, that he can do whatever he wants, without sanction.

The responsibility is now on government and public bodies to mainstream VAW to the extent that immunity and tolerance become things of the past and a belief and commitment to the possibilities of prevention can take root.

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⁹ For ideas on how this might be constituted see two publications from the Women's National Commission: *What a Waste*, 2004 and *Making the Grade*, 2005 (see www.thewnc.org.uk).

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