Introduction

The Government has taken significant steps to improve its response to domestic violence. Refuge has campaigned for and welcomed legislative developments such as the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004) and the Forced Marriage Civil Protection Act (2007). Refuge has also been a strong supporter of government initiatives including: the Specialist Domestic Violence Court (SDVC) programme; Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs); and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs).

Despite these positive initiatives, Refuge is concerned that the Government has not undertaken a planned and concerted effort to challenge the attitudes and behaviours that normalise and reinforce violence against women. Indeed, since the early 1990s, Refuge has been advocating for the Government to adopt a ‘three pronged’ approach to domestic violence through which legal protection for victims is reinforced by the provision of appropriate domestic violence services and is underpinned by effective preventative work.

The 2008 Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry into Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and ‘Honour’-Based Violence expressed similar concerns. In its report to Government, the Committee specifically referred to Refuge’s written evidence when it stated that:

‘The Government’s approach to all forms of domestic violence remains disproportionately focused on criminal justice responses at the expense of effective prevention and early intervention’  

Prevention starts with education

Refuge recognises that the Government has undertaken some early intervention work around domestic violence. For instance, the ‘Enough’ poster, press and radio campaign was launched alongside the rollout of the specialist domestic violence court programme.

Yet primary prevention work to stop domestic violence from happening in the first place is described as being: ‘the weakest part of the UK responses to violence against women’ (Coy et al. 2008). Evidence suggests that the deeply rooted attitudes that tolerate domestic violence continue to be held and it is generally agreed that schools are the ideal place to challenge these attitudes.

In fact the very first Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry into Violence in Marriage in 1975 recommended that:

‘Much more serious attention should be given within our school and further education system to the problems of domestic conflict’  

Despite the Government’s commitment to address domestic violence through ‘education and awareness-raising in schools’ in the Cabinet Office document Living without Fear (1999), little has

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1 House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee (2008:6) Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and ‘Honour’-Based Violence: Sixth Report of Session 2007-08, Volume 1
3 Report of the Select Committee on Violence in Marriage (1975:ix)

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been done to implement this recommendation. This led the Home Affairs Select Committee (2008:6) to conclude that:

‘Education on these issues’ seems to be at best variable and at worst non-existent’

YouGov survey

Given the lack of primary prevention work on domestic violence in schools, Refuge commissioned a survey by YouGov in order to explore:

- What young women understand about domestic violence
- Whether young women have experienced domestic violence in their own intimate relationships
- From where young women’s recognition of and knowledge about domestic violence comes
- Who young women talk to about domestic violence
- Of which domestic violence support services young women are aware

The survey was carried out online by YouGov. A total of 513 young women aged 18-21 responded to a series of questions related to the themes above. This report presents the findings of the YouGov survey, discusses the findings and makes recommendations to Government.

What do young women understand about domestic violence?

Over three quarters of the young women in the survey (76 per cent) recognised domestic violence is a human rights issue and agreed that women have the right to live free from violence.

Recognition of physical and sexual abuse as forms of domestic violence was high among the young women questioned, but far fewer young women recognised other forms of domestic violence such as financial and emotional abuse.

If your boyfriend, husband or partner behaved in any of the ways listed below, which do you think would be incidents of domestic violence?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slapping or hitting you</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making you take part in unwanted sexual acts</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making threats to harm you</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushing you</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being verbally abusive</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroying your possessions</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to stop you from seeing friends or family</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking your money</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring your movements</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridiculing you in front of other people</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shouting at you</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatening to expose a secret about you</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling you what to wear</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being jealous or possessive</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4 Domestic violence, forced marriage and honour based violence

5 The responding sample was weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample of women aged 18-21 across England
Where does young women’s knowledge about domestic violence come from?

Just 13 per cent of the young women questioned said they had learned about domestic violence when they were at school. Nearly 70 per cent of the young people said that they would have liked to have had lessons about domestic violence. Almost all those questioned said that domestic violence was as important, if not more important, than lessons on drugs and alcohol, sex and relationships education and the environment.

Given that almost 9/10 young women in the survey said they had not learned about domestic violence in school, Refuge was keen to find out where young women’s understanding of domestic violence came from.

High numbers of young women indicated that they picked up knowledge about domestic violence from the media. To a lesser extent, young people reported learning about domestic violence from friends and family.

**Which of the following do you think your knowledge and understanding about domestic violence comes from?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentaries</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV news</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV talk shows</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap operas</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Talking about domestic violence

Of the young women who reported experiencing at least one abusive incident, only 35 per cent said that they had talked to someone about what had happened, with the vast majority reporting talking to their friends or family.
However, when asked if – theoretically – they would speak to someone about experiencing domestic violence, 64 per cent of respondents said that would. Only 9 per cent said they wouldn’t and 27 per cent young women expressed feeling unsure.

### Awareness of support services

Only 41 per cent of the young women surveyed said that they would know where to go for help if they experienced domestic violence. 78 per cent of the young women questioned were aware of refuge provision; but only 57 per cent had heard of the Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline run in partnership between Women’s Aid and Refuge.

### Discussion of survey findings

The YouGov survey reveals that the majority of young women recognise that domestic violence is a human rights issue and that women have the right to live free from violence. But it also shows some confusion around recognising the different forms that domestic violence can take.

Although physical and sexual abuse were recognised as forms of violence by high numbers of young women, far fewer recognised other forms of violence such as financial and emotional abuse. This has important implications for young women; since the same survey also reported that over half of the young women had experienced at least one abusive incident indicating that they may be at risk.

It is clear that there are gaps in young women’s understanding of domestic violence. However what the findings do show is that young people currently gain their knowledge about this issue from the media and not from school. This finding led Refuge to design and launch a campaign to highlight to young women that domestic violence is a form of patterned behaviour which, far from being about losing control, is about the abuser using a number of tactics to gain control of a partner.

Refuge was overwhelmed with letters and e-mails from women – young and old – in support of the campaign. Taken together with the YouGov finding that 70 per cent of young people said they would have liked to have had lessons about domestic violence, this response indicates that young women WANT education on this issue.
Teaching about domestic violence in schools

Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), which includes Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), is widely recognised as providing scope to explore domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. The fact that PSHE has not been a statutory part of the school curriculum until recently may explain why 9/10 young women in the YouGov survey said they had not learned about domestic violence in school.

Yet even when PSHE is taught in schools, teachers may choose to ‘opt out’ of teaching about domestic violence. An evaluation undertaken by the organisation Womankind suggests that this may be due to a lack of training for teachers on gender and violence, resulting in them lacking confidence and feeling ill-equipped to handle the perceived ‘political nature’ of the teaching content. Furthermore, the former Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI 225) which required schools to have a resource pack on domestic violence (although there was no obligation to use it) has been replaced with a new set of National Performance Indicators which do not include any specific reference to domestic violence and children.

Schools cannot afford not to teach about domestic violence, especially when there is a strong likelihood that a number of students will be witnessing domestic violence at home. Indeed findings from a study undertaken by Refuge in 2001 suggested around 3-5 children in a class of 30 were exposed to domestic violence. The same study also revealed that more than half of all educational personnel reported that they either knew or suspected that children they knew were living with violence.

Similarly the YouGov survey findings demonstrate that young people may also be experiencing domestic violence in their own intimate relationships – with 24 per cent of the young women questioned experiencing jealously or possessiveness from a partner, 13 per cent of the young women experiencing verbal abuse, 11 per cent being pushed and 7 per cent reporting being slapped or hit by their partner.

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7 This reinforces Pat Kincaid’s original finding that between 3-5 children in a classroom may be exposed to domestic violence at home (The Omitted Reality: Husband-wife violence in Ontario and policy implications for Education,1982)
8 Aitken, R (2001) Domestic Violence and the impacts on children: results of a survey into the knowledge and experiences of educational personnel within two European countries, Refuge and Kings Fund
Ensuring safety

Young people need to feel confident and safe in order to learn effectively, but for those young people exposed to domestic violence at home or in their own intimate relationships then this is unlikely to be the case. Unless schools address social issues such as domestic violence then the ability of their students to succeed academically may be undermined.

Moreover the Education and Inspections Act (2006) places a duty on schools to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical well-being and development of pupils. Teachers therefore need to be equipped with the skills required to teach young people about domestic violence, identify young people that they suspect may be affected by domestic violence and create an environment that facilities and encourages young people to disclose abuse whilst also ensuring their safety.

Challenging attitudes

In addition to ensuring young people’s safety, teaching on domestic violence challenges the attitudes that allow violence against women to continue. The YouGov survey found that 61 per cent of the young women who had experienced at least one abusive incident chose not to disclose what had happened to anyone else for a variety of reasons, including because they believed that they had ‘provoked’ their partner’s behaviour.

Clearly many common myths continue to surround the issue of domestic violence underlining the importance that any teaching on violence against women must acknowledge that gender inequality (resulting in an imbalance of power) lies at the heart of the issue. Not only can discussion at school help dispel these myths, but it can play a pivotal role in providing supportive responses to young people through developing their personal, social and emotional capabilities, as noted by the interim report of the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum.9 Although this report concentrates mainly on secondary school responses to violence against women, it is very important to begin this work much younger, for example, incorporating work on empathy, respect and positive peer relationships into the primary curriculum. The important role of the family as a place where values, attitudes and beliefs are learned must also be recognised and so work with young parents, especially young mothers, is vital.

Challenging student’s attitudes will only work if schools address this issue on an ongoing basis, otherwise the impact of teaching can be short-lived. As such, schools need to be committed to tackling gender-based violence across the curriculum. As the National Union of Teachers (2005) notes, learning about domestic violence can spread beyond PSHE and can be integrated into lessons such as circle time, drama and English and potentially other areas of the curriculum such as citizenship education, history, economics, maths and geography.10 Womankind (2007) found that the impact of its programme of work in this area was greater when teachers were skilled in using participatory teaching methods such as discussion, drama, film and visual methods.

It is also important that schools reinforce learning in the classroom and avoid sending mixed messages which undermine what is learned in the classroom. This requires schools to adopt a ‘whole school’ approach, ensuring that the school’s own culture challenges gender based harassment, bullying and violence. In fact the new Gender Equality Duty emphasises how schools should be at the forefront of promoting gender equality across all aspects of school life and shaping the values and attitudes of young people.

10 National Union of Teachers (2005) Silence is Not Always Golden: Tackling Domestic Violence
Awareness of support services

Another reason why so many young women in the YouGov survey may have chosen not to disclose their experiences is because 59 per cent of those questioned did not know where to go for help. For example, 43 per cent had not heard of the National Domestic Violence Helpline run in partnership between Women’s Aid and Refuge. This may also explain why more young women said that they would talk to someone if they experienced domestic violence in theory, but less actually did so in practice.

Information on domestic violence is obviously a prerequisite for support, ensuring that students know that services are available. Since the YouGov findings showed that young people exposed to violence confide in their friends, making information available in schools ensures that young people’s peers also know how to respond to disclosures and may encourage more young people to turn to teachers and school counsellors if they are experiencing abuse.

A new perspective

By focusing primarily on the prosecution of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, Refuge and the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) campaign\(^\text{11}\) argues that the Government’s current approach to tackling domestic violence and all forms of violence against women lacks a gendered perspective and fails to recognise violence against women as a gender equality and human rights issue. This means that the Government’s response to violence against women has been fractured and piecemeal, as illustrated by the diagram below:

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\(^\text{11}\) Of which Refuge is a member

Coy et al. (2008) Realising Rights, Fulfilling Obligations

By encompassing Refuge’s three pronged approach into a ‘Six P’ model, the second diagram demonstrates the significance of making a gender equality perspective one of the drivers of an integrated strategy to tackle violence against women. This re-ordering means that prevention moves to the centre of the diagram where it belongs, rather than at the margins where it currently stands.
A ‘Violence Against Women’ strategy

Refuge welcomes the recent launch of the Government consultation paper ‘Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls’ and believes that it provides an important opportunity for the Government to make prevention work on violence against women central to its approach. Refuge hopes that the YouGov findings presented within this report contribute to the debate around what should be contained within a ‘Violence Against Women’ strategy and help inform ideas for action.

Refuge is particularly encouraged to see that the consultation paper recognises that schools and colleges have a crucial role to play in teaching young people about healthy relationships through education. In addition, Refuge welcomes the intention to set up a new Advisory Group with a specific focus on how schools can tackle the issue of violence against women. Refuge will be responding to the specific questions set out in the consultation document in more detail following consultation with the women who use its services.

Refuge’s initial recommendations to Government based on the learning from the YouGov survey and supported by partners are outlined below:

Refuge welcomes the Government’s decision to make PSHE a statutory part of the school curriculum and its intention to update guidance on Sex and Relationship Education. In line with the recommendations of the 2007-08 Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and ‘Honour’-Based Violence, Refuge strongly urges the Department for Children, Schools and Families to:

- Make education on domestic violence (and all forms of violence against women) an explicit part of the statutory school sex and relationships curriculum rather than being left to the discretion of individual schools
- Implement specific training modules on domestic violence in all PGCE and professional development training and ensure extensive training and appropriate supervision for all other school staff (such as school nurses)

Refuge further recommends that the Department for Children, Schools and Families:

- Instruct schools to undertake a ‘whole school’ approach to tackling the issue of domestic violence and all forms of violence against women, in line with the Gender Equality Duty