

# LONDONASSEMBLY

April 2025

## Police and Crime Committee

This document contains the written evidence received by the Committee in response to its targeted call for evidence, which formed part of its investigation into violence against women and girls and the impact on young people.

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## Questions asked by the Committee

- How is VAWG affecting young people in London?
- How well do the VAWG-related support services available in London meet the needs of young victims and survivors of VAWG?
- How should the Mayor's refreshed VAWG Strategy address the issues affecting young people, including protecting women and girls from criminal and sexual exploitation?
- Could you share your views on the specific experiences of marginalised young women related to VAWG, for example the additional challenges faced by disabled young women facing violence?
- How should the Mayor's refreshed VAWG Strategy support young women and girls from ethnic minority and migrant communities who may be more reluctant to involve the police?
- How well are the Mayor's educational programmes aimed at young men and boys helping to prevent VAWG and address harmful and misogynistic attitudes?
- What more is needed in London to prevent and address VAWG amongst young people?

Additional questions asked to London Youth Assembly only:

- What are the LYA's views on what the Mayor is doing to tackle violence against women and girls in London?
- Is there anything more the LYA would like to see the Mayor do to tackle VAWG amongst young people in London?
- How can harmful and sexist attitudes towards girls and women developing in boys and young men be prevented and tackled? Are schools doing enough to challenge these attitudes?
- What impact do the LYA believe online communities and harmful influencers (often espousing sexist view towards women), are having on VAWG in London, particularly around how these influencers can impact boys and young men?
- What are the experiences of marginalised young women related to VAWG, for example those who are disabled, from the LGBTQ+ community, and those from ethnic minority communities?

# London Assembly Consultation: How is VAWG affecting young people in London?

*Advance, March 2025*

## About Advance

**Advance is an innovative charity that supports women and girls to lead safe and equal lives.** We help women and girls who have experienced trauma through domestic abuse and the criminal justice system. We do this by providing practical and emotional support in their communities, in our women's centres, and in collaboration with a variety of specialist partners, including the Metropolitan Police, London Probation, and MOPAC. We use our expertise from 25 years of frontline work to advocate for women and girls.

Advance has a range of specialist services for girls and young women (GYW) under the age of 25. These include:

- **Maia** – a holistic service focused on prevention and early intervention which addresses the intersecting experiences of domestic abuse and criminal justice contact and other vulnerabilities, including mental health.
- **Young Londoner's Victim and Witnesses Service (YLVWS)** – gender-specific support to girls and young women in London who have been the victim of any type of crime
- **Courageous & Angelou Young Person's IDVAs** - dedicated domestic abuse support services for GYW under the age of 25.
- **Minerva Young Women's Keyworkers** (including the Newham Y2A Hub) - supporting GYW on probation, including addressing experiences of domestic, sexual, or childhood abuse, mental health, substance use, housing, children and families, and finance and debt.

Advance strongly advocates for the need for **specialist services for girls and young women**. By this, we mean services that are led by-and-for women, as well as those that are led-by-and-for marginalised and minoritised women, including Black and migrant women. We believe that these services are absolutely essential in the effective provision of support to girls and young women. These services offer a safe, women-only space, which is particularly pertinent for girls and young women who have experienced domestic abuse, sexual violence, and other forms of gender-based harm. They also mean that the experiences of girls and young women are inherently understood and that service users feel confident that they will be represented by those with similar lived experience.

## **How well do the VAWG-related support services available in London meet the needs of young victims and survivors of VAWG?**

### ***Needs of girls and young women***

Girls and young women under the age of 25 (GYW) have specific and intersecting needs shaped by their gender and age. These needs can include mental health issues and low self-esteem, limited access to reliable information and a lack of trusted mentors. Some grapple with complex needs arising from recent experiences of abuse or trauma, while adverse childhood experiences can also have a substantial impact on a person's health throughout their life.

Young women and girls disproportionately experience VAWG, for example girls and young women aged 16 to 24 report the highest rates of domestic abuse.<sup>1</sup> A higher proportion of women aged 16 to 24 are victims of sexual assault compared with those aged 25 years and over.<sup>2</sup>

Advance's 2021 report, 'A space to learn about relationships', found that 91% of the women interviewed believed that their previous relationships had an impact on their mental health; in the focus group this was attributed to controlling and unhealthy relationships.<sup>3</sup>

With nowhere to turn for support, GYW can be left traumatised by their experiences and can go on to experience further harm, including being excluded from school or getting caught up in the criminal justice system.

There is a high prevalence of VAWG experienced by GYW in London. In the first four months since the launch of Advance's support for girls through the Young Londoner's Victims and Witnesses Service (Oct 2024-Jan 2025), we have supported over 1100 GYW:

- 33% of girls referred to the service had been a victim of a sexual offence
- 32% had been a victim of violent crime
- 20% had been a victim of stalking and harassment

### ***Victim services***

Mainstream victims' services do not always cater for the needs of girls under the age of 18 who are experiencing abuse. Because the law does not recognise domestic abuse within teenage relationships (as the statutory definition of interpersonal domestic

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<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics (2024) [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, year ending March 2024](#). Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics (2023) [Sexual offences victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2022](#). Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Advance (2021) ["A Safe Space to Learn about Relationships": The social factors influencing early sexual relationships among young women who have been involved in the criminal justice system and the health impacts](#). Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

abuse begins from the age of 16), many service providers are contractually limited to providing support to adults only.

Children who witness or live in homes where there is domestic abuse between adults are recognised as victims in their own right. There continues to be a significant lack of service provision for child victims of domestic abuse – the Domestic Abuse Commissioner found that only 29% of adult victim/survivors who wanted support for their children were able to access it.

The Women's Aid Federation of England directory lists at least **27 different service providers** which support CYP experiencing domestic abuse. There is however no data which disaggregates those who provide support to children living in families where there is domestic abuse from those support CYP experiencing domestic abuse in their own relationships.

There are a limited number of services which provide dedicated support to girls and young women experiencing domestic abuse in their own relationship. We have identified **six providers** across London, although this is unlikely to be an exhaustive list.

Contractual limitations can also mean that support for victims is limited to a crisis-driven response. This does not enable girls and young women to access the long-term support that is often needed to address previous experiences of abuse or other trauma. It also limits the opportunities for prevention and early intervention which are so important to de-escalate risk and minimise future harm.

### ***VAWG-related prevention and early intervention***

Many organisations in London have a broad interest in prevention and early intervention work with young people. These could include, for example, healthy relationship education provision or services dedicated to reducing youth violence.

These 'lenses' also overlap in some ways, and that girls and young women who are gang-involved are highly likely to also experience VAWG, as well as other forms of harm such as criminal exploitation. There are hundreds of youth service providers in London, many of whom will deliver this work in some form.

There is however limited dedicated provision for GYW delivered by specialist services which are led by and for women. We have identified just **three providers** with a specific objective to provide harm reduction and prevention for GYW, although there may well be other grassroots providers delivering this work in communities across London.

Advance's Maia service offers support which is:

- non-judgmental, holistic, individualised, person-centred and gender-informed support;
- trauma-informed, strengths-based and solutions-focused;
- based in safe spaces and trusting environments;
- backed-up by peer support from young women with similar lived experience;
- challenges GYW's lack of self-belief and express belief in them;

This type of support, provided by dedicated and specialist services, is vanishingly rare in London and we strongly advocate for the increased provision so that all GYW can access the support they need.

### ***Support for GYW who are criminalised***

We reject the binary narratives of 'victim' and 'offender', recognising that the vast majority of GYW who are in contact with the criminal justice system (CJS) will be victims of serious crimes themselves. At least 70% of the women that Advance supports who have been in contact with the CJS have experiences of domestic, sexual or childhood abuse.

Advance's **Minerva Young Women's services** provide support to young women aged 15+ who have been caught up in the CJS. This service recognises that experiences of gender-based abuse may well be a driving factor in a young woman's offending behaviour – either through direct coerced offending (e.g. holding drugs or a weapon for an abusive partner) or more insidious forms (e.g. shoplifting to support substance misuse triggered by trauma).

The [MoJ evaluation of the Newham Y2A Hub](#), funded by MOPAC and for which Advance provides gender-specific support to young women, found that having the choice of attending the dedicated support, delivered within Advance's East London women's centre, was highly valued by the young women in the service.

Again, this support is limited, and we are grateful to MOPAC for the funding they provide for these services.

### **How should the Mayor's refreshed VAWG Strategy address the issues affecting young people, including protecting women and girls from criminal and sexual exploitation?**

We welcome the range of commitments on VAWG, both within the Mayor's draft Police and Crime Plan and those made during the consultation process on the VAWG strategy.

The new strategy offers the opportunity to build on the pioneering work of the London VRU in resourcing specialist services which support GYW experiencing VAWG.

We have strongly encouraged the Mayor to commit to widespread, age-appropriate, gender-specific and culturally sensitive support for GYW to reduce violence and exploitation. As seen in the previous answer, the current provision is patchy and could be much strengthened to meet the high demand for services.

This is particularly pertinent for GYW at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation; we strongly recommend that services designed for GYW experiencing harm are delivered by specialist organisations with a deep understanding of GYW's needs and which offer a safe, women-only space where GYW can recover from harm.

As well as gender-specific services which respond to GYW's exploitation such as the **Minerva YW Keyworkers**, there are other opportunities to intervene early when GYW have been drawn into the criminal justice system, either through criminal and sexual exploitation, or through more insidious forms of offending which is linked to domestic abuse.

Advance leads the **London Women's Diversion Service (LWDS)**, funded by MOPAC, which provides holistic support to women aged 18+ who are given a conditional caution in four boroughs or any woman in London who has had recent (<6 months) contact with the CJS. This service recognises women's experiences of domestic abuse and other VAWG can drive low-level offending, as described in the previous answer.

The outcomes from this service indicate how it can protect women and girls from VAWG, including criminal and sexual exploitation:

- 89% of women receiving support who had experienced domestic abuse, or felt at risk from harm, felt safer since engaging with the LWDS
- 99% of women receiving support felt more confident to make alternative choices and engage with their community
- 99% of the women receiving support from LWDS felt better prepared to have a positive relationship with professionals

Again though, there is a distinct lack of dedicated, specialist services for girls under the age of 18 who are at risk of criminal and/ or sexual exploitation.

We expect the new VAWG strategy to recognise the harm posed by online VAWG. In particular, we have noted some highly worrying trends amongst the GYW supported by our Maia service, including that at least 12% are engaging in fansites, such as OnlyFans. Whilst we support women's rights to support themselves financially in whichever way they choose, we are concerned that in many of these cases, the young women are being

sexually exploited by partners and other perpetrators of harm. This is particularly true for those girls under the age of 16, as this constitutes child sexual abuse material. We are working with those GYW to exit the use of fansites where there is exploitation and risk of further harm, through person-centred and non-judgemental support.

### Could you share your views on the specific experiences of marginalised young women related to VAWG, for example the additional challenges faced by disabled young women facing violence?

There is wide-ranging evidence that marginalised young women face additional challenges when seeking support if facing violence.

There is evidence that suggests that women from marginalised communities will often experience domestic abuse for longer before receiving support and will face additional barriers to that support. <sup>4</sup> Black girls are likely to face adultification bias, which is a societal perception that they are older, or more responsible and mature than they are.

This can lead to them experiencing harsher disciplinary action from authority figures, such as schools. Agenda Alliance found that in the 2021/22 academic year, girls from a Black Caribbean background were excluded at double the rate of white British girls.<sup>5</sup>

It can also lead to them experiencing disproportionate experiences from police. Black female children are 2.7 times more likely than their white counterparts to be subjected by the Met Police to the most invasive form of strip-search. <sup>6</sup>

Racial prejudice or misunderstanding by the authorities of the victim/survivor's cultural context can lead to reports not being taken seriously or followed up effectively.

Research by Refuge showed that Black women were 3% more likely than white women to report abuse to the police, but that the police were 14% less likely to refer them for support.

Young women under the age of 25 who have arrived in the UK on a spousal visa might experience heightened vulnerability due to isolation, financial dependency, and limited

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<sup>4</sup> Hulley J, et al. (2023) Intimate Partner Violence and Barriers to Help-Seeking Among Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Immigrant Women: A Qualitative Metasynthesis of Global Research. *Trauma Violence Abuse*. 2023 Apr;24(2):1001-1015. doi: 10.1177/15248380211050590. Epub 2022 Feb 2. PMID: 35107333; PMCID: PMC10012394.

<sup>5</sup> Agenda Alliance (2024) [New figures show school exclusions for Black Caribbean girls are rising again](#). Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Liberty Investigates (2023) [Black girls nearly three times more likely to be subjected to most invasive strip-search](#). Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

social support. This is all in the context of limited understanding of the UK legal and immigration system.

Fear and mistrust of police is often felt by young girls from an immigrant background as many growing up with a parent or parents in fear of deportation. For many young girls, their childhoods were amongst a backdrop the hostile environment which describes a set of government policies which work together to make life in the UK for those without regular immigration status difficult to live. Children growing up in this environment will undoubtedly compound this fear amongst towards authorities, as well as create barriers to accessible support in statutory agencies like housing or in health settings.

More adults with autism experience intimate partner violence than adults without autism.<sup>7</sup> Research from France found that as many as 9 in 10 women with autism have experienced sexual violence.<sup>8</sup>

Girls with undiagnosed autism spectrum conditions might feel a lack of understanding or compassion, difficulty with members of staff, and even exclusion.<sup>9</sup> This might therefore result in barriers to building trusted relationships will be difficult and therefore create a barrier when disclosing abuse.

Disabled women are twice as likely than non-disabled women to experience abuse in their lifetime and often their abuse continues for longer.<sup>10</sup>

Communication barriers can increase barriers to support. However, access to interpreters for individuals who use sign language or speak another language can be inconsistent and is often dependent on police resources.<sup>11</sup>

## How should the Mayor's refreshed VAWG Strategy support young women and girls from ethnic minority and migrant communities who may be more reluctant to involve the police?

Tackling VAWG requires an intersectional approach where an understanding of how Black and migrant young women's experiences of abuse can make them more vulnerable. The Mayor's new VAWG Strategy must respond to this by ensuring there is adequate provision of specialist, gender- and age-appropriate, and culturally responsive

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<sup>7</sup> Douglas, S., & Sedgewick, F. (2023). Experiences of interpersonal victimization and abuse among autistic people. *Autism*, 28(7), 1732-1745. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613231205630>

<sup>8</sup> Cazalis, F (2022) Evidence That Nine Autistic Women Out of Ten Have Been Victims of Sexual Violence. *Front. Behav. Neuroscience*. 26 April 2022. Volume 16 – 2022. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2022.852203>

<sup>9</sup> Nasen (2016) [Girls and Autism: Flying Under the Radar](#). Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

<sup>10</sup> SafeLives (2019) [Disabled people and domestic abuse spotlight](#). Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

<sup>11</sup> Victim Support (2021) [Language barriers in the criminal justice system Initial research findings relating to victims and witnesses](#). Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

services available for all GYW in London. As previously demonstrated, the service offer of this specialist support for GYW in London is patchy. Services are not fully available everywhere, and often culturally relevant services are underfunded and not available to many of those that need it.

All agencies, statutory or otherwise, should improve their understanding of GYW's intersectional experience of abuse, exploitation and coercion in order to develop an effective, specialist response. This must also take into account the specific cultural, and developmental experiences of varying groups. Expertise of GYW's specific needs must be also shared between specialist and mainstream agencies.

Agencies working with GYW, including schools and colleges and the voluntary sector, should work together to build consistent referral pathways and volumes, to ensure that all GYW get the right support at the right time. We expect the Mayor's strategy to reiterate these points and ensure that these services are fully resourced.

### How well are the Mayor's educational programmes aimed at young men and boys helping to prevent VAWG and address harmful and misogynistic attitudes?

We are aware that there is a limited number of services of this nature. We recognise the Mayor's campaign ("Say maaate") to encourage men and boys to challenge misogynistic views amongst their friends and peers. We also recognise the London VRU's inclusion charter for schools. External providers, such as Beyond Equality, are doing much-needed work in this area, but provision is limited. We also note that there are no Respect-accredited perpetrator programmes in London specifically for children and young people.

As we do not work with young men and boys, we cannot comment directly on the effectiveness of these services. We hope to see more programmes of this nature being commissioned under the next strategic period.

### What more is needed in London to prevent and address VAWG amongst young people?

As detailed throughout this response, we strongly advocate for more specialist services for GYW experiencing or at risk of experiencing VAWG. We recognise that this is one part of the system, and that boys and young men must also receive the education and support needed to prevent and address VAWG.

Schools must be empowered to challenge misogynistic and harmful views, through training for school staff and strong referral pathways into dedicated specialist services

for children and young people. Clearly though, there is a significant gap in this provision for CYP perpetrators of VAWG, and we hope to see more services commissioned to tackle harmful behaviour amongst CYP.



## Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse

A Centre of Excellence for reviews into fatal domestic abuse and for specialist peer support.

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Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse Ltd is a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee registered in England and Wales.

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Thursday, 13 March 2025

Susan Hall AM  
Chairman of the Police and Crime Committee  
(sent by email)

### **Re: AAFDA response to the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee investigation into Violence against women and girls and the impact on young people in London, March 2025**

Dear Madam Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity to input into the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee's (the Committee) investigation into Violence against women and girls (VAWG), and how this impacts young people in London. We are pleased to share our expertise and the experiences of the families we support regarding the impact of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) on young people, work to prevent VAWG among young people, and the support available to them.

#### About Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA)

Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA) is the only charity dedicated to supporting families bereaved by all forms of fatal domestic abuse, encompassing homicide, suicide where domestic abuse was a contributing factor, and sudden or unexplained deaths. Established in 2008, we provide specialist individual and peer support, complemented by expert advocacy to navigate complex statutory review processes. This comprehensive approach enables families to cope with and recover from the impact of criminal conduct, facilitates criminal justice outcomes, provides opportunities to respond to perpetrator behaviour and contributes to systemic improvements in responding to and preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG). Through our work we have helped establish non-fatal strangulation and coercive control as stand-alone crimes and continue to amplify the voices of victims of VAWG to effect positive system change.

AAFDA's work aligns with statutory duties to support victims of criminal conduct under the Victim and Prisoners Act (2024) and the Victims' Code (2020), as well as the Domestic Abuse Act (2021), which recognises domestic abuse-related suicide and strengthens review processes.

AAFDA currently has 36 active cases in London, with two additional inactive cases that may re-engage for support and advice. Our efforts to secure funding from MOPAC since 2018 have been unsuccessful, despite the acknowledged value of our work by key stakeholders and evidence of VAWG victim needs in London.

#### Summary of Feedback

We are concerned that prevention work facilitated through the domestic abuse fatality review process, supported by AAFDA, is not currently recognised in MOPAC's VAWG Strategy or Police and Crime Plan. This is both in relation to dedicated and direct support for children and young people bereaved by domestic abuse and our work with bereaved family members – who often become carers for these children. AAFDA's work aligns with all of the priorities of the current VAWG Strategy, which are preventing and reducing VAWG;

supporting all victims and survivors; holding perpetrators accountable; and building trust and confidence<sup>1</sup>. We note that the themes are not likely to change significantly in the new VAWG Strategy due out in June.

The current VAWG Strategy mentioned domestic homicides once with an action aimed at improving understanding of VAWG. However, AAFDA has not observed tangible evidence of this action being implemented. We also noted an action in the minutes of the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee's meeting December for the Deputy Mayor of Policing and Crime to *"provide an explanation as to why data on domestic, non-domestic and teen homicide on the MPS's Homicide Victims dashboard and the MOPAC Police and Crime Plan dashboard have not been updated since early 2024"*. We note that this action is outstanding and are concerned that these significant data metrics are being missed.

Within the cases we are currently supporting in London, there are 11 (eleven) children. We offer these children specialist and dedicated support and advocacy to input into the statutory review and access the support and services to which they are entitled. In several cases, there is no criminal justice outcome. This is complex multi-agency support work, which uncovers additional vulnerabilities to online exploitation (including sexual and criminal such as county-lines) or exposure to extreme and misogynist views, which are harming young people affected by VAWG.

We watched the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March which explored the levels of VAWG amongst young people, what services are available for survivors, as well as the Mayor's VAWG strategy and prevention principles. We were pleased to hear that a reduction in femicide was noted as a useful measure of VAWG prevention, however, femicides/domestic abuse fatalities were not mentioned again. We ask that the Committee considers the value of services supporting these victims of VAWG within the refreshed VAWG strategy and Police and Crime Plan.

#### Detailed responses to questions posed by the Committee

Thank you to the Committee for sharing the following questions for stakeholder consideration. We have consulted with our specialist advocacy team to share current experiences of the impact of VAWG on young people in London, work to prevent VAWG among young people, and the support available to them.

### **1. How is VAWG affecting young people in London?**

VAWG has a profound impact on young people in London. Research and information provided by the VAWG sector over several years has evidenced that children exposed to domestic abuse often suffer long-term consequences, including effects on brain development, health, behaviour, emotional regulation, and academic achievement. The trauma can be exacerbated by the lack of specialist support services tailored to their needs. Research indicates that children living with domestic violence are at a higher risk of experiencing neglect, physical, and/or sexual abuse. For example, studies have shown that exposure to domestic violence is associated with a range of emotional, behavioural, and social problems in children (Kitzmann et al., 2003; Wolfe et al., 2003).

Children bereaved by domestic abuse face unique challenges. They may struggle with complex grief, guilt, and trauma, which can affect their mental health and well-being. The lack of support for these children can exacerbate their vulnerability, leading to long-term psychological and emotional issues. Our advocates noted that these children are also vulnerable to online exploitation – both sexual and criminal (such as county-lines). It is crucial that support services acknowledge the specific needs of these children and provide them with safe, trauma-informed support.

There is also recent research which emphasises the importance of understanding the complex impacts of domestic homicide on children, including the need for comprehensive support systems that address the long-term effects of trauma and bereavement on children's lives (Haines et al., 2022).

Additionally, caregivers play a critical role in supporting children bereaved by domestic homicide. Research shows that caregivers often face significant challenges in providing the necessary support, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to help them navigate these complex situations (Alisic et al., 2025). This is our experience at AAFDA, where family-members take on caring responsibilities for children bereaved by

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<sup>1</sup> [The Mayor's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2022-25 | London City Hall](#)

domestic abuse. These families and children are victims of fatal VAWG. For children and young victim-survivors of VAWG, their voices are not being adequately heard in the statutory reviews that follow a fatality.

## **2. How well do the VAWG-related support services available in London meet the needs of young victims and survivors of VAWG?**

Currently, support services for young victims and survivors bereaved by fatal domestic abuse in London are insufficient. AAFDA is the only specialist funded services for children bereaved by all forms of fatal domestic abuse. We receive no dedicated statutory funding for this service for children, which leaves a significant gap in addressing their unique needs during the recovery process and feeling welcome and listened to within the statutory reviews that follow a fatality. The learning that their experiences uncover is being missed and they are being denied an opportunity to be heard, which may lead to secondary trauma later in life. More comprehensive and accessible services are required to ensure that young victims and survivors of VAWG receive the support they need.

The HALT project at Manchester Metropolitan University highlights the challenges faced by children affected by domestic homicide, emphasising the need for better support systems that consider their voices and experiences. For instance, HALT's work shows that children often struggle with the aftermath of domestic homicide due to inadequate support, underscoring the need for specialist services that address their trauma and recovery needs.

Caregivers also face challenges in supporting children bereaved by domestic homicide, as they often lack the necessary resources and guidance to provide effective care (Alisic et al., 2025). This highlights the need for support services that not only address the needs of children but also provide caregivers with the tools and support they require to help these children heal.

In practice, without AAFDA's support, professionals often struggle with incorporating children's voices into reports and ensuring their access to these reports when they are ready. This is partly due to concerns about traumatising children by discussing their experiences, despite evidence suggesting that silence can be more harmful. It is essential to shift this narrative and ensure that children's voices are heard and valued in support processes post fatal domestic abuse.

## **3. How should the Mayor's refreshed VAWG Strategy address the issues affecting young people, including protecting women and girls from criminal and sexual exploitation?**

The Mayor's refreshed VAWG Strategy should include the following:

- **Early Intervention and Prevention:** Implement more effective early intervention programs to prevent VAWG, focusing on education and community engagement.
- **Specialist Support Services:** Develop and fund specialist services for young victims, particularly those affected by fatal domestic abuse.
- **Protection from Exploitation:** Strengthen measures to protect women and girls from criminal and sexual exploitation, including enhanced collaboration with law enforcement and community organisations.
- **Inclusive Approach:** Ensure that the strategy is inclusive of all communities, addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalised groups.

## **4. Could you share your views on the specific experiences of marginalised young women related to VAWG, for example the additional challenges faced by disabled young women facing violence?**

We advocate for the continued communication with specialist by-and-for support organisations to ensure that the voices and experiences of marginalised young women are considered to ensure accessibility and sensitivity to their specific needs.

Through our work, we know that marginalised young women, including those with disabilities, face additional barriers when experiencing VAWG. Disabled young women may encounter increased vulnerability due to lack of accessible support services, and dependency on caregivers who may also be perpetrators. Migrant women also face additional barriers including institutional racism, language barriers and trust in the system.

The Committee discussed the potential of a firewall as recommended by SBS and Liberty following their Super Complaint in 2018 in relation to the police sharing immigration data.

AAFDA works with numerous external agencies and research organisations, including MMU Halt, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office, the Victims Commissioner and National Policing Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) to compile and share learning and data to identify and remove barriers faced by marginalised young women and children in relation to VAWG, and recommend these research outputs in relation to this question:

- [Reports - Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#)
- [Domestic Homicide Project - VKPP Work](#)

## **5. How should the Mayor's refreshed VAWG Strategy support young women and girls from ethnic minority and migrant communities who may be more reluctant to involve the police?**

AAFDA advocates for respect, recognition and continued communication with specialist and dedicated by-and-for services in relation to shaping the VAWG strategy to best reach and support young women and girls from ethnic minority and migrant communities who may be more reluctant to involve the police.

From the issues arising within our work, the strategy should include:

- **Community-Led Initiatives:** Support community-led/by-and-for initiatives that provide safe spaces for reporting and seeking help.
- **Language Access:** Ensure that all support services are linguistically accessible to reduce barriers to seeking help.
- **Build Trust:** Foster trust through culturally sensitive outreach and education programs that address the concerns and fears of these communities.

## **6. How well are the Mayor's educational programmes aimed at young men and boys helping to prevent VAWG and address harmful and misogynistic attitudes?**

Most recently, we have seen of the level of harm produced by misogynistic attitudes in the case of triple murderer Kyle Clifford, who of killed his ex-girlfriend Louise Hunt, her sister Hannah and their mother Carol at the family home in Hertfordshire. Paying tribute to his daughter Louise Hunt, and the way she had shown grace and empathy when breaking up with Clifford, John Hunt used an emotionally charged victim impact statement to describe how the love of his family sustained him. "*I hope women round the world will take Louise's bravery as a shining beacon for their lives,*" he said, citing his daughter's disgust at Clifford's racism and belittling language. "*If you feel enough is enough, then it is.*"

While the Mayor's educational programs are a step in the right direction, many recognise that more needs to be done to effectively prevent VAWG and address harmful attitudes among young men and boys, particularly fuelled by behaviours and attitudes demonstrated online by so called "influencers".

These educational programs should be evaluated for their impact and expanded to include more comprehensive education on consent, respect, and healthy relationships. Additionally, engaging with community leaders and positive role models can help reinforce positive messages.

## **7. What more is needed in London to prevent and address VAWG amongst young people?**

To further prevent and address VAWG among young people in London, we recommend:

- **Increased Funding:** Allocate more resources to support services specifically for young victims and survivors. *We acknowledge the reduction in budgets experienced by MOPAC as noted at the Committee meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March, and their representations to the Government for increased funding.*
- **Collaborative Approach:** Encourage collaboration across statutory and non-statutory organisations, in particular those set up by-and-for the communities that they serve, to create a cohesive support network.

- **Awareness and Education:** Implement and maintain awareness campaigns and educational programs to challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours.
  - **Policy Reforms:** Advocate for policy changes that prioritise the safety and well-being of young people affected by VAWG.
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## Additional Notes:

- The HALT project at Manchester Metropolitan University provides insights into the challenges faced by children affected by domestic homicide, emphasising the need for better support systems.
- Discussions with professionals involved in DHRs/Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews highlight the importance of incorporating children's voices into reports and ensuring their access to these reports when they are ready.

## APPENDIX A

### CURRENT MOPAC VAWG STRATEGY

The [MOPAC VAWG Strategy 2022-25](#) (ends March 2025):

Key point in common is PREVENTION.

In the introduction to the current VAWG strategy, Sadiq says “*As Mayor I am clear that we must not simply respond to VAWG, or police our way out of it – we must prevent it...*”

Sophie Linden (Deputy Mayor) continues “*This Strategy is about working together with the specialist VAWG sector, and all our partners, to tackle and prevent VAWG...greater investment in services for victims and survivors of VAWG; strengthening our programmes to intervene and address the behaviour of perpetrators...*”

One of the key pledges is “*Taking action to rebuild confidence and trust in the police and criminal justice system to ensure victims are supported and empowered to get the justice they deserve.*”

[AAFDA's mission is VAWG prevention: \*Illuminating the past to make the future safer.\*](#)

### CURRENT POLICE & CRIME PLAN

[MOPAC Police and Crime Plan](#) (ends March 2025):

Key point is BETTER SUPPORTING VICTIMS AND IMPROVING CRIMINAL JUSTICE OUTCOMES.

- One of the principal priorities is “*Better supporting victims – improving the service and support that victims receive from the MPS and the criminal justice service; working to ensure victims receive a better criminal justice response and outcome; and reducing the number of repeat victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence.*”

[AAFDA is currently providing this service to victims in London.](#)

[AAFDA mapped its work to the MOPAC's 2022-25 VAWG Strategy's four strands and shared with MOPAC in 2022. This information is available on request and it will shortly be revised in line with the new strategy.](#)

March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025

*Dear Lusan,*

I trust this letter finds you well.

I am writing to you on behalf of the London Youth Assembly (LYA) to provide a comprehensive account of the discussions and conclusions reached during our meeting held on Thursday, 6th March, where we considered the questions, you put forward on behalf of the Police and Crime Committee.

Our deliberations were robust and insightful, and we are grateful for the opportunity to share the perspectives and recommendations of young people across London. Below, I have outlined the LYA's collective views on the Mayor's initiatives and the broader issues surrounding violence against women and girls (VAWG), which we trust will be of value as you continue to address these matters.

**1. What are the LYA's views on what the Mayor is doing to tackle violence against women and girls in London?**

- The 'Take a Look at Yourself' campaign has been widely praised as an excellent initiative, encouraging boys and young men to reflect on their behaviour and consider its potential consequences before it escalates into violence. It acknowledges that such attitudes often take root in school environments and works proactively to prevent them.
- The members of the LYA strongly support the continuation of this campaign and advocate for its expansion. They are particularly keen to see greater involvement from schools across London, with consistent and widespread publicity to ensure that the message reaches as many young people as possible.
- However, there are concerns regarding the overall lack of publicity for the Mayor's youth-focused campaigns. The LYA feels that the visibility of these initiatives is disproportionately low, particularly when compared to other campaigns such as those run by TFL. It is the Assembly's view that a more balanced approach is needed to ensure that youth issues are given the same level of prominence.
- The Mayor's youth-oriented programmes are perceived as somewhat sidelined, and this leads to a sense that such issues are not receiving the attention they deserve.
- With regard to VAWG, members expressed their alarm at the growing prevalence of physical violence, harassment, and stalking, suggesting that the current response is insufficient to stem the tide of this ongoing crisis.

## **2. Is there anything more the LYA would like to see the Mayor do to tackle VAWG amongst young people in London?**

- The Mayor must strengthen his collaboration with schools and young people. Teachers need to be better equipped to engage with the issue of VAWG, and the development of frameworks that enable older students to mentor and support their younger peers would be a valuable step forward.
- It is essential that schools work in partnership to ensure that girls and boys are both included in conversations around VAWG, ideally within the same spaces, to foster mutual understanding and respect.
- The LYA also advocates for improved street lighting and enhanced CCTV coverage on public transport and public spaces and urges local councils to prioritise funding for these initiatives.
- There is a pressing need for more investment in support services for victims of violence, ensuring that adequate resources are available to help those who have been affected by abuse.
- The Mayor should use his influence to advocate for a standardised PSHE curriculum, so that young people across London receive consistent education on VAWG, healthy relationships, and respectful behaviour.
- A significant focus must also be placed on rebuilding trust between young people, particularly young women and girls, and the Metropolitan Police, to ensure that they feel comfortable and confident in reporting cases of violence.
- Finally, the Assembly highlighted the need for a more nuanced and balanced approach to addressing the fear young girls feel in relation to men, to avoid creating an atmosphere of unnecessary distrust and fear.

## **3. How can harmful and sexist attitudes towards girls and women developing in boys and young men be prevented and tackled? Are schools doing enough to challenge these attitudes?**

- Early intervention, through the integration of mixed schools and the implementation of workshops that highlight the commonalities between boys and girls, is seen as a key strategy in tackling gender stereotypes from an early age.
- It is crucial that boys are included in discussions surrounding sexism, not only to educate girls on how to protect themselves but also to encourage boys to reflect on their attitudes and behaviours.
- For single-sex schools, the LYA recommends the establishment of peaceful transitions, which would allow boys to gain a better understanding of how to interact respectfully with girls, thereby preventing problematic behaviours from emerging.

- Empowering girls is also essential. The Assembly suggests that older students be trained to mentor and support younger girls, giving them the confidence to speak out against inappropriate behaviour and call out sexism when they encounter it.
- There were concerns that schools are overly reliant on individual teachers, whose personal values may influence the quality and consistency of education on these matters. There is an ardent desire for teachers to be better trained and empowered to address sexism effectively, and for boys to be involved in supporting and mentoring girls.
- The creation of ambassadors in every school to challenge misogynistic ideologies is seen as an important and necessary step.

**4. What impact do the LYA believe online communities and harmful influencers (often espousing sexist views towards women), are having on VAWG in London, particularly around how these influencers can impact boys and young men?**

- The influence of harmful online communities and influencers is viewed as contributing to the growing gender divide, fostering an environment where boys perceive dominance over girls as a form of power, and where girls are seen as the “enemy.” This deepens toxic attitudes and creates barriers to meaningful change.
- The prevalence of anti-women content online is particularly concerning, as young people, still in the process of developing their own identities, may struggle to navigate these harmful influences and form balanced perspectives.
- Algorithms and online communities are also seen as reinforcing biased beliefs, making it difficult to expose young people to a more nuanced or balanced view of gender dynamics. These platforms often serve to justify and normalise harmful behaviours, particularly among boys.

**5. What are the experiences of marginalised young women related to VAWG, for example, those who are disabled, from the LGBTQ+ community, and those from ethnic minority communities?**

- Women of colour are often unfairly perceived as more aggressive and less feminine, which contributes to the justification of harmful and violent attitudes towards them.
- Within certain cultural communities, attitudes that justify violence or discrimination against women may still persist. The LYA advocates for open, frank discussions on these issues, including addressing religious attitudes where relevant.
- LGBTQ+ women, particularly those who present in a “masculine way,” often face objectification and sexualisation, and violence against them may be underreported or dismissed. There is a significant need to ensure that the experiences of LGBTQ+ women are properly recognised and addressed.

- Young women with disabilities often lack the confidence to speak out about violence they experience, due to stigma and the fear of not being believed.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation for your ongoing collaboration with the London Youth Assembly. Your willingness to listen to the voices of young people is invaluable, and I look forward to working closely with you to tackle these pressing issues in the future.

*Yours sincerely,*  
*Ashra.*

Ashan S. Khehra LYAM  
Chair of the London Youth Assembly

Cllr Susan Hall AM