

# Scottish Graduate School of Social Science

## Scottish Government Violence Against Women and Girls Event

### Report

#### Introduction

To reflect the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science's (SGSSS) increased focus on demonstrating how social science PhD research can influence and impact policymaking SGSSS arranged a knowledge exchange event in conjunction with the Scottish Government Justice Directorate in November 2023. The event focused on research addressing the issue of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and was based on Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls.

The Scottish Government were keen to learn from the best available evidence and practice in order to develop the most effective policy responses to addressing and preventing VAWG.

#### Event details

Three PhD researchers presented their emerging work to an audience of 50, comprising academics working in related fields and Scottish Government policymakers. The presenters and their topics were:

- Lucy Mackay (Glasgow Caledonian University): "Will proposals to reform criminal law to address misogynistic harassment be an effective response to the harassment young women in Scotland experience in public?"
- Niall Buchanan (Edinburgh Napier University): "An investigation into perpetrators of online sexual harassment: who are the perpetrators, and what are the predictors of online sexual harassment perpetration?"
- Ülkü Baturoğlu-Balcı (University of Glasgow): "Hard to reach but easy to ignore: victim-survivors' experiences of accessing support in rural communities."

The presentations were followed by round table discussions reflecting on the emerging research findings, offering insight into how officials currently utilise and apply research as part of policy development, and highlighting areas of interest relating to VAWG where further evidence may be helpful.

#### Discussion outcomes

Delegates were asked in groups to consider the three presentations and discuss how they would inform future policy and/or research considerations. Delegates were also asked to highlight the evidence gaps or priorities are in VAWG research.

The groups were then asked to discuss more generally, the impact of PhD research on policymaking in the context of the presentations and the relevance of PhD research to policy decision making. Delegates welcomed the chance to come together in a mixed group of researchers and policymakers to share experiences and learn from peers. They appreciated the opportunity to use SGSSS as a platform to connect academics, students and policymakers.

Another outcome from the discussion was the suggestion that researchers consider many different ways of sharing their research including in short film, podcast and via a database that could be

accessed by policymakers. Policymakers highlighted the importance of clear and relevant policy recommendations in academic writing and reports.

There was also a suggestion that policymakers could provide training for researchers to support research in practice. This would help researchers communicate their research more succinctly by highlighting key relevant points to policymakers particularly in the case of a lengthier piece of research.

Delegates agreed that some of the barriers to be overcome in order for policymakers and researchers to work together included the timescales of academic research versus the shorter policy windows, time and resources.

It was also agreed more of these events would be helpful and delegates suggested that it could work both ways. Policymakers could put forward policy considerations and problems to be addressed with evidence from research and researchers could also bring their evidence to inform larger Scottish Government and other research priorities as appropriate.

### **VAWG research one year on**

All three PhD students who presented their research are close to submitting their thesis. They all reported that the event had helped shape their thinking particularly in relation to the policy implications of their work. The students appreciated the informal feedback on the day and gained contacts from attendees which they plan to use to share the final outcomes of their submitted thesis.

Since the VAWG event Justice Analytical Services has continued to work closely with policy to develop the evidence base around many of the themes discussed at the event, including intersectionality, technology-facilitated VAWG and misogyny. Work is currently progressing to develop a guide/ toolkit which will seek to improve understandings of gender and intersectionality in the justice context; defining what it means for justice practitioners, explaining how it can be applied, and highlighting the impact.

The Scottish Government has established an internal policy/research group looking at technology facilitated VAWG and how they can better support service providers in this area. The Group will have an early focus on terminology and definitions. In addition, the Programme for Government announced on 4 September 2024 included a commitment within the legislative programme to a Bill to implement recommendations of the Working Group chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy, informed by the subsequent Scottish Government consultation, to create new offences related to misogynistic conduct. This aims to provide new powers to hold to account perpetrators who harm women and reinforce barriers to an equal society.

Justice Analytical Services have hosted four SGSSS internships which have covered some of these topics and produced and/or contributed to valuable analytical insights to address evidence gaps and to help understand complex societal issues. This has included experimental intersectional analysis of the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, an evidence review on minoritised ethnic women's experiences of domestic abuse, evidence briefings on image based sexual abuse, and work that has contributed to the development of Scotland's Domestic Homicide and Suicide Review model.

The contribution that early career researchers can make to policy development, has continued to be valued at Scottish Government, bringing in fresh approaches and technical expertise in new methods. Two further internships are planned.

There has also been a series of internal seminars in partnership with SIPR (Scottish Institute for Policing Research), bringing new research from PhD students to policymakers on themes such as county lines exploitation and image based sexual abuse. Going forward Justice Analytical Services are keen to explore how they can build on events like this and find new ways to engage with the wider academic community in a way that is meaningful and impactful for all.

SGSSS have taken on board all the learnings from running this event and are working with partners in Scottish Government and beyond to organise similar events. Developing topics include Mental Health and Wellbeing and Ageing and Social Policy.

### **Further contacts**

If you are researching a VAWG related theme relevant to Justice and would like to discuss this with someone in Scottish Government, please contact [tamsyn.wilson@gov.scot](mailto:tamsyn.wilson@gov.scot). Research around technology-facilitated VAWG, human trafficking and exploitation, and intersectionality/marginalised groups is of particular interest.

If you are interested in connecting with PhD researchers on this or another topic or collaborating to organise another event as outlined in this report, please contact [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk) to discuss this further.

### **Further reading**

The Delivery Plan for Equally Safe was published on 13 August -  
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-delivery-plan/documents/>

For more information on the work of Scottish Government please visit:

[SG VAWG webpage](#)