



Home Office consultation

'Together we can tackle violence against women and girls'

DrugScope Response

DrugScope is the UK's leading independent centre of expertise on drugs and the national membership organisation for the drugs field.

DrugScope's objectives are:

- To provide a national voice for the drug sector
- To inform policy development drawing on the experience and expertise of our members
- To support drug services and promote good practice
- To improve public understanding of drugs and drug policy.

DrugScope believes in drug policy that:

- minimises drug-related harms
- promotes health, well-being, inclusion and integration
- recognises and protects individual rights
- recognises and respects diversity.

DrugScope is committed to:

- promoting rational drug policy debate that is informed by evidence
 - involving our membership in all our policy work
 - ensuring our policy interventions are informed by front-line experience
 - speaking independently, and free from any sectoral interests
 - highlighting the unique contribution of the voluntary and community sector.
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Introduction

1. DrugScope has long-standing concerns about the strong links between drug and alcohol use and violence against women. In 2005 we published a report on drugs and women prisoners – ‘Using Women’ – with a focus on the links between abuse and violence, drug and alcohol problems, women’s offending and paths to recovery and rehabilitation. The London Drug and Alcohol Network (LDAN) – which is now part of DrugScope – is currently being funded over four years by London Councils to provide second tier support to domestic violence perpetrator programmes. We are members of both the Criminal Justice Alliance and the Third Sector Forum on Mental Health and Criminal Justice, and DrugScope’s Chief Executive, Martin Barnes, sits on the Criminal Justice Council for the Home Office/Ministry of Justice.
2. Our key message for this review is that *any comprehensive programme to tackle violence against women and girls must recognise drug and alcohol misuse as core issues and develop policy and service provision accordingly*. There are at least three specific kinds of relationships between substance misuse and violence:
 - Drug and/or alcohol misuse can be a factor contributing to the perpetration of violence, both in the home and on the street. For example, the Government’s alcohol strategy – ‘Safe. Sensible. Social’ (2007) – reports that offenders were believed by victims to be under the influence of alcohol in nearly half of all incidents of domestic violence.
 - Drug and/or alcohol misuse can be a response to violent victimisation and can increase vulnerability to violence. For example, where alcohol or illicit drugs are a coping mechanism for people in violent relationships. Women’s Aid cites research that women experiencing domestic violence are up to fifteen times more likely to misuse alcohol and up to ten times more likely to misuse drugs than women generally.¹
 - Drug and/or alcohol misuse may affect someone’s ability to access and engage with domestic violence (and other victim support) services, and vice versa. At the time we published ‘Using Women’ only one in 10 of the 450 refuges in Britain for women fleeing domestic violence had a policy of automatically letting in women with drug problems. There is evidence that domestic violence issues may be overlooked by drug and alcohol treatment services.

¹ See Statistics: Domestic Violence and Substance Misuse at <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-violence-articles.asp?section=00010001002200280001&itemid=958> It also notes that 40% of Asian women who seek treatment for alcohol misuse are experiencing domestic violence.

The most marginalised

3. There is a strong relationship between drug and/or alcohol misuse and violent victimisation among some of the most marginalised and vulnerable women in society – notably, women involved in sex work and women offenders, particularly those who end up in prison. We are accustomed to making a clear and straightforward distinction between ‘victims’ and ‘offenders’, but the reality is that this line is blurred for many women whose drug use is linked to crime. DrugScope’s ‘Using Women’ report found that many women who end up in prison only start offending after entering into violent and exploitative relationships with men. Similarly, women are often recruited into sex work by men who encourage them to use hard drugs as a form of control. A Fawcett Society briefing on prostitution states that 93 per cent of women in street prostitution use illegal drugs. A Home Office assessment of an arrest referral scheme for sex workers in King’s Cross interviewed many women whose drug use was linked to past experiences of violent victimisation. A recent Irish study of sex workers highlights the fact that drug and alcohol misuse can affect ability to ‘negotiate’ with customers and to assess potential risks and dangers. Addiction can also lead vulnerable women into more dangerous situations by increasing their desperation for money to fund drug purchases.

Observations and recommendations

4. We would make a number of recommendations to the Home Office review that are relevant to some of the key objectives identified in ‘Together we can tackle violence against women and girls’, including, enabling women and girls:
 - To go about their lives free from harassment and violence
 - To know that other people will be able to pick up on the early signs of violence
 - To receive the help and support they need quickly
 - To access quality help and support
 - To feel confident that, if they are a victim of violence, police and the wider criminal justice system will treat them sensitively and fairly.

We note that the consultation document currently makes little reference to the links between violence and drugs and/or alcohol (for example, this is not identified as an issue in the passages that discuss the consequences of violence for women’s health or effective engagement of the NHS).

5. **Alcohol.** As the Consultation document acknowledges there is a well-evidenced relationship between alcohol misuse and violence against women, both in the home and on the streets. The Government’s Alcohol Strategy – Safe. Sensible. Social. (2007) – states that ‘The Government recognises that although alcohol is not a cause of domestic violence, it can exacerbate it. Drinking is common in incidents of partner violence and can

be a contributing factor.’ The alcohol strategy proceeds to cite further research on domestic violence offenders on probation or those referred for a pre-sentence report that found that alcohol use was a feature in the majority of offences (62 per cent) and almost half of the sample (48 per cent) were alcohol dependent.

A policy strategy to address violence against women and girls should make appropriate links to the alcohol strategy. Consideration should be given to public information campaigning on the risks associated with drinking that focus on its link to acts of violence – including violence against women – along the lines of previous campaigns on drink-driving. While links between violence and alcohol are often highlighted, there is a shortage of work looking at possible links between other forms of substance misuse and violence (including domestic abuse) – this should be further researched. We anticipate that LDAN’s work in support of domestic violence perpetrator programmes will contribute to this.

6. **Building the evidence-base.** There is a dearth of research evidence on the links between drug and alcohol use and violent victimisation – although what is available suggests these links are strong and significant. There is also a shortage of research to monitor the effectiveness with which drug and alcohol services currently address violent victimisation as an issue, or to establish ‘what works’ for people whose drug and/or alcohol problems are linked to experience of violence and abuse (including perpetrators).

We would welcome a research programme exploring the links between substance misuse and experience of violence, as well as on ‘what works’.

7. **Engagement and retention in drug treatment services.** Women are under-represented in treatment programmes. The National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) recognises that ‘men and women present to services with different problems and characteristics and, while in overall terms women do not appear to be under-represented, this is not to suggest that the problems women drug users face are adequately addressed in current treatment configurations’. These ‘problems and characteristics’ may include experience of abuse and violent victimisation (for example, domestic violence).²

There is a clear need to join up services, to develop treatment provision that is effective at working with people experiencing both substance misuse and violent victimisation and to ensure there is sufficient refuge provision to accommodate women fleeing domestic violence who also need help with drug and alcohol problems. There are many examples of good practice. Hope House in London – which recently expanded to a 23 bed residency in Clapham – provides an intensive, female-only environment in which to address not only women’s addictions, but also the

² Although the NTA report on ‘Women in drug treatment services’ (2005) does not discuss this.

issues underlying them.³ The Stella Project in London works across all 33 London boroughs for positive, sustained improvement in the way services are delivered to survivors, their children and perpetrators of domestic violence affected by problematic substance use.⁴

8. A more recent NTA report reviewed the research literature on ‘The impact of violence and abuse on engagement and retention rates for women in substance misuse treatment’. The key finding from this study was that there is a severe lack of research evidence on the impact of domestic abuse on the engagement and retention rates of women in substance misuse treatment. However, a number of issues were identified that appear to prevent women experiencing both substance abuse and domestic violence from accessing treatment including:

- Increased stigma
- A lack of resources to address dual issues
- Bad experiences of previous treatment seeking
- Denial of access to services by an abuser
- Fear of children being removed
- Inflexible service structures – for example, lack of gender specific provision
- Practical barriers – for example, male oriented services
- Lack of refuge access for women using substances
- Lack of fast-tracking into appropriate services.

This report concluded that there is a need for UK data on prevalence of domestic abuse among people in treatment for substance problems (both victim and perpetrator prevalence). It also identifies a need for research into the impact of domestic abuse on engagement and retention of women in substance treatment, which should identify characteristics of the treatment setting that are supportive of women who suffer domestic abuse.

9. **More effective ‘joining up’ of policy.** It is striking that the current drug strategy makes hardly any reference to violent victimisation – or to the links between substance misuse and perpetration of acts of violence. The UK Clinical Guidelines dealing with clinical management of drug misuse state that domestic violence should be covered as an issue in comprehensive assessment and care planning – but it is not clear how widely this is happening in practice and it would be useful to have more detailed guidance. It is notable that recent NTA briefings on women in drug treatment (2005) and treatment of sex workers (2006) do not directly address violence as an issue. Conversely, policy on reducing violent crime needs to make clear reference to drug and alcohol issues. We welcome the recognition in ‘Tackling the Demand for Prostitution’ (2008) that

³ More information on the Hope House project is at:
http://www.actiononaddiction.org.uk/news_and_campaigns/news/141_action-on-addiction-expands-women-s-treatment-service-to-meet-growing-demand

⁴ For more on the Stella Project go to:
http://www.gldvp.org.uk/C2B/document_tree/ViewACategory.asp?CategoryID=73

provision of drugs is a method of trapping women in sex work, and the message in good practice examples that services working with sex workers should establish links with local drug and alcohol services – with assessment protocols, clear referral pathways and so on.

It is important that the strategy on violence against women is joined up to other relevant policy areas. This should include, for example, appropriate involvement and engagement of the Drug and Alcohol Directorate in the Home Office.

10. **Access to justice.** The consultation document is concerned that women who experience violence should have confidence in the criminal justice system to deal sensitively and fairly with them. We are concerned that people from populations that are highly stigmatised and marginalised are encouraged to access the criminal justice system if they are being victimised. A report by Mind, 'Another Assault' (2007), suggests that people with mental health problems are not always dealt with appropriately when they are victims of crime. Sixty four per cent of victims of crime and harassment surveyed by Mind said they were dissatisfied with the response of the authorities to reporting the incident; 60 per cent said the appropriate authorities did not take them seriously; 36 per cent of those who didn't report a crime felt police wouldn't believe them; and many cases were dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service before they got to court without any consultation with the victim or support being offered.

It is likely that women and girls from other marginalised and stigmatised groups – such as women in drug treatment, sex workers and women with a history of offending – will have similar problems accessing justice. Yet they are among the most vulnerable to violent victimisation.

A programme to address violence against women and girls should ensure that the most vulnerable, stigmatised and marginalised women are able to access the criminal justice system when they are victims of violence and have confidence that they will be dealt with appropriately. There is a need for research into their current experiences and attitudes, a programme of training and support for people working in the police, courts and other criminal justice services, and pro-active engagement with groups – including women using drug treatment services – to improve their relationship with and confidence in the criminal justice system.

11. **Women in the criminal justice system and prison.** DrugScope's 'Using Women' report made a number of recommendations to improve the effectiveness with which the criminal justice system deals with women with a history of both drug and/or alcohol misuse and violent victimisation (and, in a minority of cases, violent offending). We would strongly support the full implementation of the recommendations of 'The Corston Report – A review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system' (2007). The 'Using Women' report also concluded that the law on the production, supply and trafficking of drugs does not sufficiently discriminate between big league criminals who run the drug trade for their

profit and people at the lower end of supply pyramids. It concluded that it was unjust to apply the drug laws in the same way to people recruited into low level drug dealing against a background of duress and to those people who recruit them, often through intimidation and violence.

The relationship between many women who supply drugs on the streets and the men who are higher up the supply pyramid is often analogous to that between a pimp and prostitute, and is often characterised by intimidation, violence and abuse. Consideration should be given to reforming the laws on drug supply to reflect this reality.

12. DrugScope is not able to examine all the issues linking substance misuse and violence against women and girls within the time constraints for this consultation. We hope, however, that our comments above are sufficient to make the case for a strong link between this programme of work and the development of drug and alcohol policy and service provision. We would welcome any future opportunities to feed into and support the Home Office's work to reduce violence against women and girls, and to work more effectively with its victims.

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