

Joined Up Responses to Complicated Lives: Making Connections Across Recently Constructed Boundaries

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One challenge we all still face is how to make the voices and experiences of victims/survivors central in a respectful way, which neither 'uses' them only to support our existing perspective, nor neglects our responsibility to move beyond individual experience to encompass social context and ask why. How do we present findings which challenge some of the accepted ways of understanding or responding to violence against women, whilst also being respectful of those whose work created those previous perspectives? And can we all be humble and open enough to admit that we overlooked important things, that there were unintended consequences of our interventions that were not helpful? How do we challenge ourselves in ways that are respectful to each other and the history of the movement against violence against women and children? These questions inform this presentation, which does constitute a challenge, not just to policy makers and state agencies, but also to aspects of how women's services have evolved.

It is important to name and acknowledge the contribution of feminism and feminists in work on violence and abuse - without the work of thousands upon thousands of women, across time and location, the majority of whose names we will never know, we would not be here today. It has been the courage and conviction of feminists that has driven system change and legal reform. Nonetheless, some of issues we have brought into the public have not been easy to hear, and are still resisted: not always for reasons of ideology, but because the realities they describe are awful to contemplate. What I ask everyone to reflect on is that feminists have not found this easy either - we have not taken any kind of pleasure in bearing witness to the violations of women and children's dignity and integrity, bodies, minds and spirits. The unwillingness of others to pay careful attention, to provide the validation of belief and respect, and to understand the scale and consequences of violence against women, has meant that sometimes our voices have been angry and frustrated. It is worth spending a couple of minutes reflecting on what this tells us about the experiences of women and children who have been victimised; they know that many workers, whole institutions even - the Criminal Justice System being a case in point - do not want to hear their stories, and this resistance is even more stark when they do not fit into the narrow stereotype of proper - or as I now see it - 'deserving' victims.

Complicated lives

I want to begin with a story, a story some of you will recognise. It begins with a child who migrates from the UK to Canada with her mother and siblings¹. In Canada her household is dominated by the violent rages of her stepfather and her mother's descent into alcohol and despair. The family spent short periods of time in a number of shelters/refuges but none seemed able to deal with the damage the family had already sustained and they always returned home. As she grew older but was still a child, she began running away from home, to gain respite from the atmosphere of fear and chaos. She said:

'I was just looking for something better, I couldn't cope. I had nowhere to run to, nowhere to go, and there were men just stopping, picking me up...At first it was ok "I'll look after you, I'll take care of you", but all they wanted was sex...There was

always a side of me which was hoping this one would be different. At first I never asked for money or anything, I was just happy to have a roof over my head, to be fed, or whatever you know. Later on when I was about 14 it turned into proper for-cash prostitution.'

The response of state child protection agencies was to view our young woman as 'out of control' and take her into care; and she had 11 placements in 18 months. She continued to run away and continued to be sexually exploited. Like many who become entrapped in the sex industry, drugs - legal and illegal - became her survival tool and refuge. No one managed to reach this troubled young woman, and many of the professionals she encountered were all too happy to label her - as a 'juvenile prostitute'; as a 'juvenile delinquent'; as an 'impossible child'.

She was aware that her life was a mess, and dangerous, and decided that her only chance was to return 'home' to the UK and find her remaining family. However, the negative effects of her life experiences and her 'need' for alcohol and drugs prompted a return to prostitution. She meet a punter - an older man - who convinced her that he loved her, wanted to look after her. She moved in with him, and continued working in prostitution, but now she had to earn enough to maintain not just herself, but also him - he became her pimp. That this was not an equitable relationship is clear in the accounts she gave of his use of violence and threats on the occasions when she did not want to work. Some months after the relationship began, our young woman is gang raped. She bravely reports this to the police. In the months that follow the cumulative abuse she has sustained and survived - she is 16 at this point - begin to overwhelm her. Rather than supporting her the man she is involved with insists she continues to work, and takes sex with her whenever he wants it. She is close to suicide and her levels of self-harm have become more dangerous. One evening she uses the knife that she had used previously to cut her wrists, to defend herself from what she perceived as an attempted rape by her 'partner'. She is convicted of murder at 17, and spends the next ten years in prison, where she becomes addicted to the legal drugs - which were prescribed from the first night to dampen her distress - that will eventually kill her.

This summary encapsulates some of the life of Emma Humphreys, who died three years ago. She died having fought and won a historic appeal which changed case law in England and Wales for women who kill the men who have abused them. Her story exemplifies the kinds of connections which we need to be making, and her death illustrates the extreme price some women and children pay when we fail.

Emma's life makes clear the connections between a range of forms of gender violence. Whilst we may separate them in law, in the categories we use in research, and in how we organise institutional responses - in the state and NGO sectors - they were not separate in her experience. It is impossible to understand her life, still less imagine how it might have been different, if we fail to see that it involved repeat victimisation by the same and *different* men, that her attempts to cope with/escape one form of abuse made her vulnerable to others.

Whilst clear categories and definitions are important for statistical and research purposes, we must never forget that these are abstract analytic concepts developed for a specific purpose - to count the extent of violence. They do not reflect experiential reality, which is always more complex, as a colleague Begonia Aretexgna puts it: 'complicated categories are people's everyday lives'. What Emma needed, and did not encounter until late in her life, were people and responses that could

see the connections, cross bureaucratic and analytic borders - because she and her life were complex.

Emma Humphreys has become something of a feminist heroine/icon, but on a number of occasions I have pondered on what would have happened had events taken a different turn on that fateful evening. Lets imagine that she rang the police, and they came in time to prevent the lethal assault.

How would a police officer have responded to a young women who had been drinking earlier in the evening, who was known to be a prostitute? Lets give the police officer the benefit of the doubt - she and her need for safety are taken seriously and she is brought to hospital to have her bleeding wrists attended to and to attempt to make contact with the local refuge.

She arrives at the hospital - how would hard-pressed A&E staff respond to a young woman who has self-harmed and arrives with a police officer? Real life is not Casualty or ER, and unless she was very lucky the response is unlikely to have been respectful, and she would probably have been made to wait hours to see someone.

Then the contact with the refuge/shelter - would there have been anyone to speak to in the early hours of the morning? And even if there was, how many Women's Aid groups would have accepted a young, single woman known to be working in prostitution and who had problems with alcohol and drugs? And even if a refuge had been found what would the response have been when Emma wanted to talk not only about domestic violence but gang rape and surviving in prostitution? Women's Aid groups have been justly critical of a system that requires women to go to multiple agencies before their situation can be addressed in the round, but the same issues apply when NGOs begin thinking in terms of specialisms, seeing it as not their 'job', not their 'expertise' to deal with experiences of rape, child sexual abuse and exploitation in the sex industry. What messages are we giving women and children - that their experience is too complicated, their abuser too dangerous, the damage they have sustained too great?

The tragic irony here - and let us not pretend that Emma Humphreys is an exception - is that women who have been the most damaged by male violence are those for whom the least support and services exist. They, and their lives, are too complicated, too difficult, do not fit into the ways services have developed. Let me acknowledge here the honourable exceptions in all sectors - groups and individuals who, if she had been able to find them, would have found a way to work with Emma in the ways she needed. But they are honourable exceptions. I also know the difficulties, especially in the voluntary sector, of maintaining services. But most of all I know that women like Emma deserve access to the kinds of services, services that would have given her a chance to construct a life in which she could deal with her past and from there take control of her future. She and women like her will never get this if we continue to work with disconnections rather than connections.

A broader definition

Looking at Emma's life experience in a more conceptual way, it affirms the approach taken in research and policy which is based on linking forms of gender violence. Violence against women

is now defined in a number of international policy documents (see for example UN, 1995; Kelly 1997) in a broad and inclusive way. For example:

... the term 'violence against women' means any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Violence against women shall be understood to encompass but not be limited to, the following:

Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.

Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs. (UN,1995).

Until recently many of us who live in developed countries have harboured the illusion that there are forms of violence against women which happen only in 'other' places. But as globalisation and migration change the populations in nations, such boundaries are less meaningful - women and girls live amongst us who have suffered these violations before migrating, or who fled to escape them, or are vulnerable to them still. Honour crimes and forced marriages do not only take place on other continents, but here in the UK; Southall Black Sisters have over 200 calls a year from young women in these situations.

Thinking in terms of connections means we notice things which we might not otherwise. Julie Stubbs, an Australian feminist criminologist discovered that Filipino women had a far higher risk of being killed by their husband than white Australian women (Cunnen and Stubbs, 1998). In exploring an explanation she made a connection with the legalised trafficking in women made possible through marriage agencies which allow men to purchase wives. She discovered cases where some Australian men were 'serial sponsors' of mail order brides, discarding one and purchasing another with no monitoring of either this, or what happens to the women who are discarded by the state. That some women were murdered was the extreme end of a more common pattern. These are examples of organisations and individuals being open to the links between forms of gender violence, and ways in which they are deeply intertwined with wider issues of inequality and human rights.

What we know about connections

If we take the time to think, to bring together insights from diverse literature and practice, we know rather a lot about the connections between forms of violence against women and children.

women and children's experiences

Whilst the contexts in which violence occurs can vary considerably, the forms of physical and sexual assault, threats and harassment are remarkably similar. For example, rape can take place within an intimate relationship, in a range of other relationships including with family members, friends and professionals, it can be a stranger attack, or take place in the context of war or when confined to an institutional setting. Harassment may be by a current or ex-partner, a colleague or superior at work, an individual or group in a woman's neighbourhood, or a stranger. The tendency has been to focus on the distinctions based on the context, distracting from the equally significant connections and similarities of the forms of abuse.

relationship to perpetrators

For all forms of violence against women and children we know that the most danger comes from known men - not just family members and partners, but colleagues, neighbours, friends and those in positions of trust and/or authority. We also know that for children and adults, living in an institutional context and having additional vulnerabilities such as a disability or mental health problem increases the risk of sexual abuse and other forms of degradation and humiliation. But we must also not forget the role of strangers who have a variety of ways of making intimate intrusions into women's personal space; the sense of unsafety in the public sphere has multiple consequences in women's lives, decreasing both their quality of life and abilities to exercise their citizenship rights.

tactics of power and control

Work on domestic violence has highlighted that physical and sexual assaults are invariably accompanied by a range of tactics of power and control. We recently developed a safety planning tool for the Council of Europe Police and Human Rights Programme (Kelly, 2000), and our aim was to create an integrated model which could be used for a range of forms of violence against women. It was extraordinarily revealing how little we had to add or change to make the tool applicable more broadly, and how easy it was to construct power and control wheels for many other forms of gender violence. The tools abusive men use to limit women's resistance and to diminish their space for action are remarkably consistent.

impacts and consequences

It both fascinates and horrifies me to see how little dialogue there has been across research and practice in terms of the impacts and consequences of violence against women and children. Debilitating self-blame and guilt are virtually ubiquitous, as is a feeling of having had one's sense of

self and personal and bodily integrity invaded. There is clearly a range of physical injuries sustained - with the most extreme being death. Where women survive, what they talk about finding the most difficult across a range of forms of abuse is the sense of violation and destruction of self. We also know that the coping strategies women and children use are shared across many forms of abuse - ranging from resistance, avoidance and help-seeking through to misuse of alcohol, drugs and self-harm. These latter responses are often associated with strong self-blame, a sense of worthlessness and ineffective intervention which leaves the victim feeling even more powerless.

Women and children have to find ways to live with the legacies of abuse long after it has ended, and a recurrent theme in their accounts is the search for meaning - why me? How could he do it? Why did he do it? Moving on is not just a matter of physical safety and material resources but finding an explanation which shifts self-blame and is validating of both the pain and damage and the strengths and worth of the woman/child.

attrition and impunity

Attrition - the loss of cases through the Criminal Justice System processes - has been most highlighted in the UK with respect to rape, but it is a common factor across all forms of violence against women and with respect to childhood sexual abuse. This is true in virtually all jurisdictions, suggesting that there is a core problem here, but rarely are analyses of it, or interventions designed to address it, linked. Rather we have some measures being used with respect to children, some with respect to rape and still others for domestic violence. What an integrated response that combined all the elements which have had some degree of success might achieve has yet to be piloted anywhere in the western world. One direct outcome of attrition, and the failure of criminal justice systems to effectively prosecute men who abuse women and children, is a global culture of impunity in which sanctions are minimal. Whilst explicit permission for abuse of women has undoubtedly decreased, an implicit message is still being reproduced.

inadequate and inconsistent institutional responses

Again there are strong connections here beginning with under-reporting of all forms of gender violence, the persistent failure of institutions to accurately record the cases they do encounter, and a continuing tendency for the violence to be re-defined or hidden in ideological or bureaucratic categories. Despite over a quarter of a decade of activism and research, individuals and agencies are still hesitant about asking direct questions. It is now clear that the problem here is the professionals not wanting to know, rather than women and children not wanting to tell. Countless studies have noted that what women and children are looking for from professionals is the permission to tell and to talk. We have to shift our perspectives from talking about silence to thinking about an unwillingness to hear and/or act.

These are the barriers that women and children have to overcome before there is any possibility of support and intervention. In many countries now we have examples of good, innovative, creative and flexible practice. The problem is that except in relatively small geographic areas there is no consistency in policy or provision, and it is not an exaggeration to refer to this situation as a lottery: that the responses women and children encounter depend not on their needs and situation, but where they live, the individuals they encounter and who they are themselves.

These are some of the most obvious connections, others which could also be explored in more detail include: the barriers to disclosure; the excuses and justifications abusers deploy to deflect responsibility; the cultural mythologies which make women and children responsible for their victimisation. Whilst there are variations in how these are articulated across the globe, if looked at analytically there are powerful connecting roots of ideas that reflect the differential status accorded to women and men.

Another extremely important arena where connections are missed is that of the offenders themselves. Just as experiences of a range of forms of violence can occur in individual women's lives, so offenders may have multiple forms of abuse to their names. This has slowly begun to be recognised in the most progressive research and intervention with convicted sex offenders, but many policy makers, and undoubtedly the media, prefer to cling onto unhelpful and inaccurate terms like 'paedophile' which skew understanding and intervention (Kelly, 1996). There is now a substantial body of research (Humphreys and Mullender, 2000) that documents the links between domestic violence and child protection, not just the damage of being exposed to domestic violence, but also that a significant minority of men who abuse their adult partners also physically and sexually abuse their children. Yet managers, policy makers and practitioners in social services and health seem unable to think through these connections and the resulting obvious point that woman protection can be the best kind of child protection. It is easier to view the abused mothers as responsible for failing to protect their children.

This wish to oversimplify, to place offenders in discrete boxes - abusers of children or adults, abusers inside or outside the family, dangerous or not dangerous - has serious consequences for both detection of crime and protection of the community. Some men who, according to simplistic definitions, are nuisances have turned out to be extremely dangerous indeed. This year, for example, when Paul Hunt made 4,000 calls in six months to women threatening to rape or abuse them, he was seen as a nuisance rather than a predator. He was subsequently arrested for the murder of Jenny King (Jones, 2000).

I want now to look at some of the barriers to making connections, and some of the ways in which these have been overcome.

Putting our own houses in order

A significant disconnection occurs when institutions fail to see the connections between gender violence which happens within, and their responses to service users. Many police services now recognise that racism within severely undermines their ability to conduct policing in a non-discriminatory way. No similar recognition has been made with respect to sexism, yet we know that sexual harassment is rife within the police and other institutions. Sexual harassment is not 'trivial', it can be persistent and debilitating, and many women experience a powerful betrayal of trust when they report and their organisation and colleagues turn on them - they are the ones who are shunned, whose careers are destroyed. And no matter how many high profile cases, and

levels of damages are paid out, nothing structural seems to change. We could make the same point, perhaps even more powerfully, about the sexual abuse of children within children's homes.

There are less obvious forms of exploitation within institutions, whereby professionals - and we know of police officers, counsellors, therapists and priests - begin sexual relationships with women who have come to them for support in dealing with recent or historic violations.

Inter-agency approaches

Institutions have their own logics; and lived experience is often lost, fragmented or re-defined through institutional rules, procedures and interests. Co-ordination is now the guiding principle in the UK strategy on gender violence published last year (Women's Unit, 1999), and has been highlighted in many international policies; but we must be mindful of the fact that inter-agency work and co-ordination are tools, strategies, not an end in themselves.

When reform efforts focus on co-ordinating the system rather than on building safety considerations into the infrastructure, the system could actually become more harmful to victims than the previously unexamined system (Shepard and McDonnell, 1999, p41).

Living Without Fear made a nod in the direction of connections in urging 'integrated approaches', but the document itself betrays how poorly this is understood by policy makers since it slips and slides between violence against women and domestic violence. That so many commentators, researchers and students refer to it as a policy document on domestic violence shows that within the text itself integration was not achieved. This is also evident in the lack of projects submitted to the Crime Reduction Programme Violence Against Women initiative based on connections - even the simplest suggestion of addressing sexual violence more explicitly in domestic violence work was not developed by applicants. Equally, the Women's National Commission's response to the Beijing+5 (WNC, 1999), makes reference only to domestic violence in the section on progress with respect to violence against women, here there is not even the nod towards rape and sexual assault that was present in Living Without Fear, and the WNC are supposed to be the independent voice of women!

I worry that the focus on inter-agency has been at the cost of understanding connections and links that are so central to many women and children's lives, and I would argue are key if we are to do anything more than be the re-active sticking plaster. And a re-active sticking plaster only works for those women and children who are able to escape with levels of damage that are resolvable and who have access to resources. Sticking plaster responses mean we will continue to lose women like Emma, to lose women and children who are killed by their abusers, and the larger numbers for whom living with the unbearable, is itself unbearable. Rather than address these difficult and complex issues most inter-agency groups have opted for the easier options, and limited their activities to building networks, organising conferences and publishing leaflets. As a friend of mine recently commented: 'it's as if everyone thinks that women can protect themselves if they just have enough leaflets!'

Listening to women and children

We need to ask whether our responses and services have become more geared to bureaucratic categories than the realities of women and children's lives. From the outset a touchstone of feminist responses was to listen to women and children, but we seem to have forgotten how to do this, or become selective about who we listen to and when.

What is clear in all the recent research we have done is that women and children want several basic, simple things: to be believed, to be respected, to be told they are not at fault nor are they the only ones, and that they deserve to be treated better than this. These basic, simple messages were what mattered most to women, but they are seldom made the basis for best practice.

We also know other things which we seem unwilling or unable to pay attention to. Women and children resent losing their homes, communities and everything that is familiar to be safe. Yet where are we piloting projects that would remove danger from women rather than removing women from danger? The starkest example of the losses women sustain in order to be safe involves honour crimes. Here women who transgress gender rules and are seen as dishonouring the family could be legitimately killed by family members in order to restore their honour. Whilst laws have been passed in most countries to outlaw these practices they persist; currently 40% of residents in the women's prison in Amman, Jordan are there for their own protection. They have committed no crime other than to act in ways which challenge traditional gender roles, and the only way their safety can be guaranteed is for them to be locked up. Women want interventions that minimise the costs and disruptions in their own and their children's lives, such as not having to leave their homes and communities.

We also know from evaluations that the provision women and children say they benefit from the most are support groups, yet this is what is least likely to be on offer.

They also want and appreciate out-of-hours services, including in refuges. A recent small piece of research discovered that what women wanted was less to be part of the collective and more to have access to one-to-one contact, especially in the evening (Possingham, 2000).

Thinking about provision

If we think about provision of direct support services from the standpoint of women and children, rather than what currently exists, some rather interesting connections and disconnections emerge. Women and children want and need access to a range of resources at different points in their struggles to escape abuse and deal with its consequences. Initially what most want is someone to talk to, to explore their issues with, to be validated by, this may then develop into needs for advice, advocacy and safe accommodation and the possibility of support from others in the same situation.

These needs transcend the different forms of violence, but our provision is organised around them in the UK.

Helplines and advocacy have been primarily (but not absolutely) associated with rape and sexual abuse of children, safe housing with domestic violence. Whilst this reflects the history of response and development of the institutions, it does not reflect women and children's needs and lived experience. And thinking about provision differently is difficult when local groups and national organisations have struggled to establish themselves and their credibility. But there are other models which could inform a healthy debate about the future in the UK.

This issue about fragmentation and specialisation extends beyond direct support services to the state sector and to research; some of the examples of different models illustrate the challenges in these arenas too.

Crossing borders - finding routes to more effective strategies

To begin with research, whilst we have no national prevalence study of any form of violence against women in the UK, we know from other countries how powerful this data can be. The most powerful studies have undoubtedly been those that have addressed a range of forms of violence in women's lives, examples being the Statistics Canada study from the early 1990s (Statistics Canada, 1993) and one currently being analysed in Sweden. But qualitative studies can also take a more open perspective. One of the most recent to do this was conducted by a practitioner for an MA. It involved interviewing 20 women on probation, to explore connections between victimisation and offending (Rowse, 2000). The vast majority (95%) had suffered some form of violence or abuse, and most reported multiple experiences across childhood and adulthood. Many had also tried to tell about and resist the violence, but the interventions they encountered were poor and inadequate. As a consequence their own survival strategies resulted in both negative labelling, and their breaking of laws. These connections were clear for the women themselves, but had not been addressed explicitly by probation. Caroline Rowse makes the telling point that for this group of women it is the accumulation of victimisations that is the key feature in their lives, and focusing only or mainly on domestic violence, which much research and probation practice does currently, would have excluded much of their experience, and thus been unable to make the connections which made sense of their lives.

Integrated responses in terms of direct support services are more common than we might think. The Swedish shelter movement ROKS has always taken a violence against women approach, so women use their safe houses and helplines for a range of forms of violence. Spain is just developing an integrated response following both the Beijing Platform for Action and Council of Europe Plan of Action. Their choice is not to replicate services but to develop neighbourhood women's centres which will respond to all forms of violence against women and offer the range of support and advice services which anyone might need. And O-zona in Zagreb, the first support service to develop in Yugoslavia as the war began, provides services across all forms of violence against women.

Another form of integration which some women's groups in the developed and developing world have created has been building organically a holistic response to women and children's needs. Many of the NGOs in India work in this way, adding new parts as each new challenge emerges, and no group there would be considered complete without addressing economic issues through the

provision of training, education and micro credit schemes. One of my favourite women's organisations is Dublin Women's Aid, which began as a refuge/shelter group. Over the years they have grown into an umbrella organisation which now runs a helpline, a housing association, a community development project, new opportunities for women courses, a court accompaniment scheme, and a policy, research and campaigning section. They too make connections across many forms of violence against women and children.

If we look at the state sector there are several exciting projects that work with the connections between domestic violence and child protection:

The Area 8 social work team² in Dublin, Ireland works in one of the most deprived areas of the city. Three years ago an alliance was created between the team, the local women's services, a perpetrator programme and trainers. Over a period of six months all the social work team attended a series of training courses including one on the links between child abuse and domestic violence and one on what work with perpetrators tells us. The team then spent time debating what 'good practice' would be in light of this new knowledge. They concluded that the perspective they should work from was that woman protection can be the best form of child protection. The local women's services, which had been very critical of previous practice, now view the team as a vital local resource which works with women to enable them to create safety for themselves and their children. The process is continuing with the team now working with probation to ensure that perpetrators are responded to locally.

The AWAKE (Action for Women and Kids in Emergencies), project is based in the children's hospital in Boston, USA, linking domestic violence advocates and health workers. A skilled domestic violence advocate works in the hospital paediatric department; her responsibilities are to work directly with women and act as a trainer and consultant to the paediatric staff. Evaluation of the project by both women and medical personnel was extremely positive. The scheme was extended in 1994 to include outreach into deprived communities and work with pregnant adolescents. The forms of support offered include: crisis intervention; risk assessment and safety planning; individual and group support; legal advice and advocacy.

In terms of police and legal interventions the most interesting model we have encountered so far comes from Namibia, where specially trained and committed teams of women police and lawyers work across violence against women and child abuse. They have increased the numbers of prosecutions and convictions across the board, taking cases through the system in less than two weeks in some instances!

The challenges of joined up thinking

If we are to connect reform in what we know, and what we continue to learn, everyone has to be willing to re-think, to question some orthodoxies and remember where we began. This means avoiding the traps of thinking in terms of either/ors, paying attention to what we know and what we do not know, reflecting on how we got here and where this is, where we want and need to be, and daring to think beyond the confines of current practices and organisational structures. Thinking in terms of connections at local, national and international levels also makes clear that gender

inequality is a major factor in violence against women, not least because the less power and resources women have the more difficult it is to resist and/or escape - increasing women's space for independent action is a vital component in addressing gender violence.

Women in two evaluations we recently conducted (Burton, Regan and Kelly 1998; Kelly, 1999) were asked what, if anything, made a difference for them in the responses of the projects. What women talked about was not integrated responses or referrals, or advice, but the clear messages that they got: naming violence; being told it was not their fault; and especially that they deserved something better. What children have told us (Mullender et al 2000) is that they want to be noticed, told what is happening and listened to - none of which they currently think happen. It is very tempting to get caught up in the details and sophistication of research design, and design for system change, and in the process forget the basic, simple things which everyone can do, and which cost nothing apart from a little time and thoughtfulness. So a continuing challenge to us all is that, whilst we must explore the many complexities and dilemmas, we need at the same time to remember that there are some things which are very simple, and which make a difference.

In this paper I have tried to highlight the costs of disconnection to women and children, and that these fall disproportionately on those with the least material and emotional resources. My basic argument is that if we are committed - and I assume we all are - to the ambition of beginning to move towards policies that decrease and ultimately end gender violence, then we have to begin making more connections. In the short term in the UK this means more questions than answers, but asking the right questions is the first step to finding solutions that might work.

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Notes

1. This account is based on an interview with the author.
2. In the UK and Ireland, and other jurisdictions, social work focuses mostly on child protection, mental health and disability, income maintenance is dealt with by a separate institution.