



Tower Hamlet's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Professionals Consultation

The VAWG strategy aims to understand and meet the needs of VAWG victims and this includes understanding the capabilities and views of the professionals that are working with them.

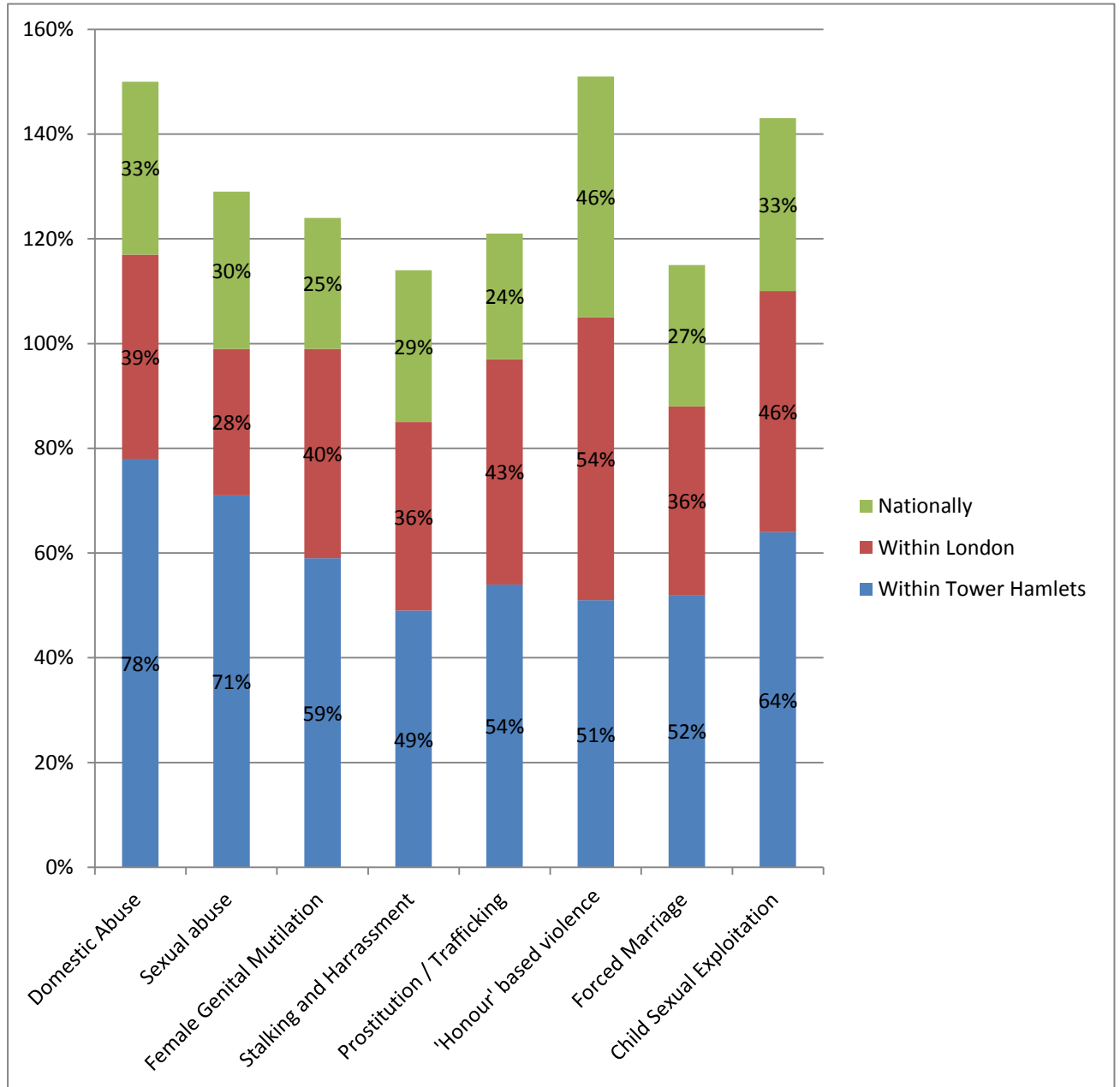
Professionals Consultation Process

Surveys were sent to a number of agencies, partnerships and boards within Tower Hamlets for example the Health, Adults and Community Services teams, External Providers Advisory Group (EPAG), Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Panel, Metropolitan Police LGBT Network, VAWG and Domestic Abuse Steering Group, Tower Hamlets Headteacher's bulletin, Children's Social Care and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference representatives.

138 people completed and returned the survey with an additional 26 professionals taking part in face to face consultations or forwarding their own responses to the consultation.

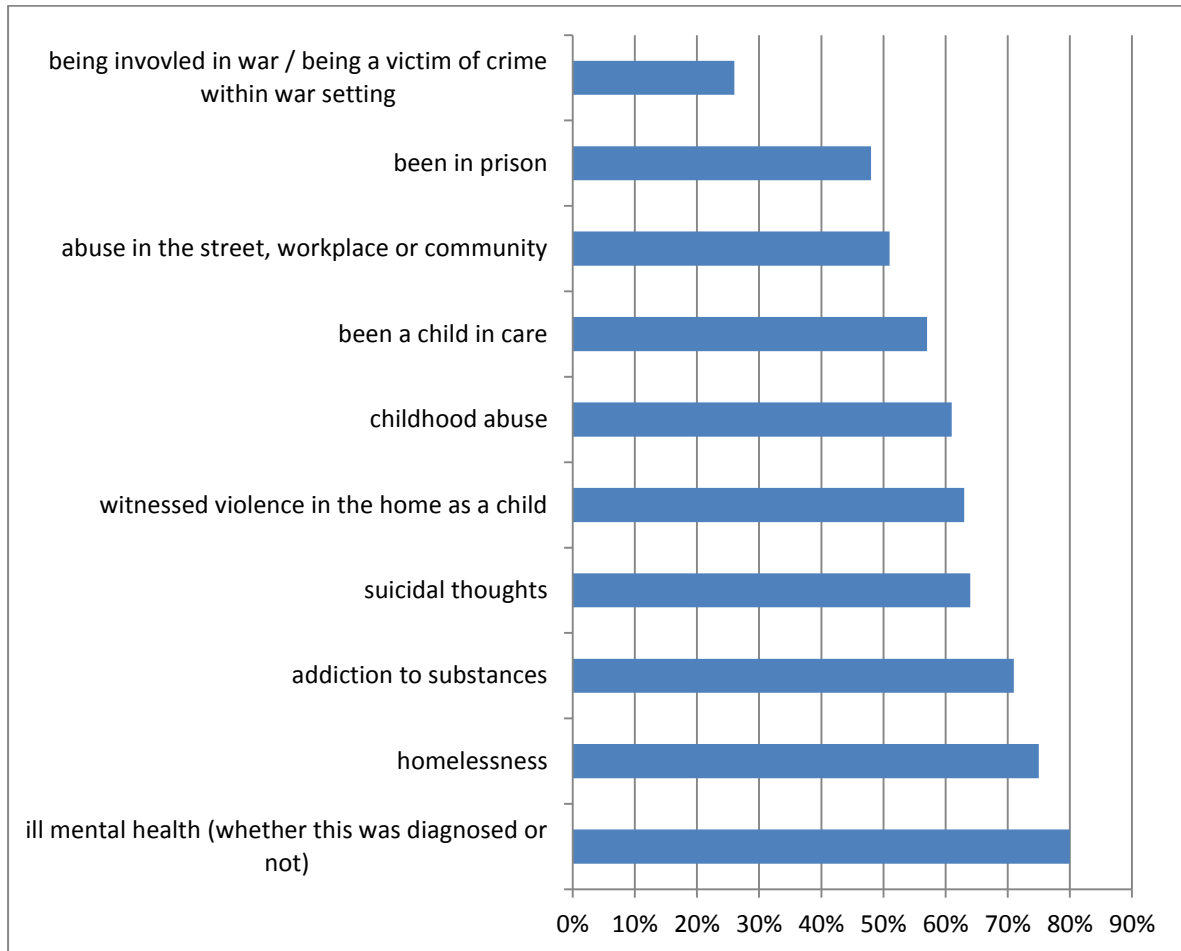
Consultation Questions and Responses

Q1. Do you know how to access support services for the VAWG strands listed below?



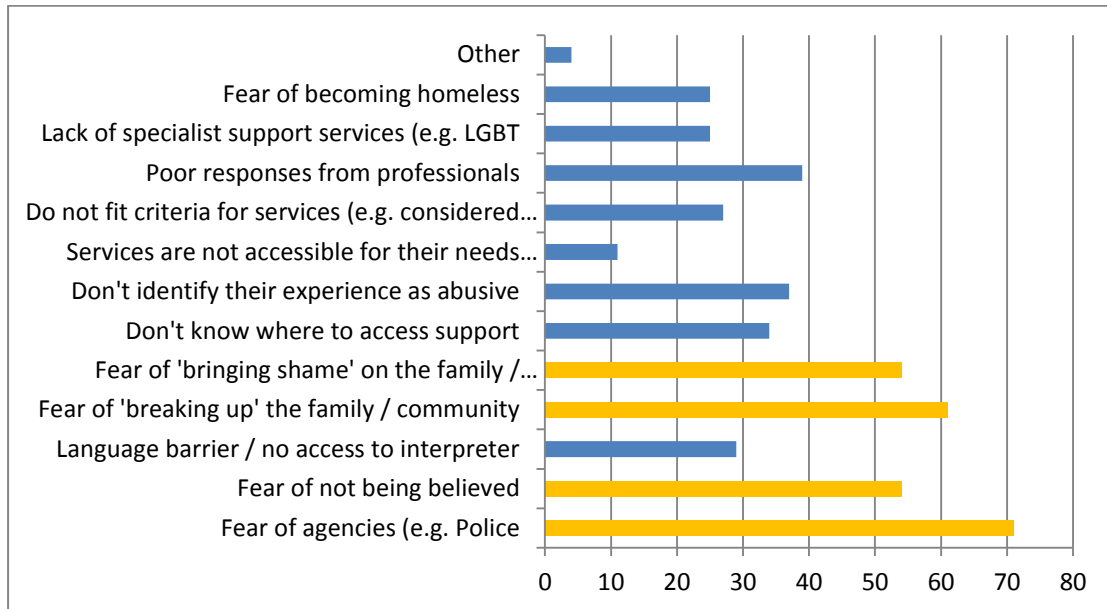
Professionals are most knowledgeable about signposting to VAWG services within Tower Hamlets. This is a positive example of the breadth of signposting, awareness raising of specialist services and provision available locally.

Q2. Are you confident supporting victims of VAWG who have also experienced:



Of the professionals asked, there was a fairly strong confidence in supporting victims who have had adverse experiences. The largest proportion of professionals (80%) are most confident with supporting victims with ill mental health. This bodes well, given that from our service user consultation we know that the second most adverse experience was suffering ill mental health. In joint second was abuse in the street, workplace or community, which just over half of professionals are confident in addressing. One of the Council's priorities is to make Tower Hamlets a borough our residents are proud of and love to live in. As a priority, we need to prevent abuse from taking place within our community but if abuse does occur, we need professionals to feel more confident in supporting someone. This could be achieved by offering further training around VAWG as well as trauma-informed training.

Q3. What are the 4 biggest barriers to reporting for victims of VAWG in Tower Hamlets?



Professionals in the borough believe that fear of agencies is the biggest barrier to disclosure. Professionals therefore could take more responsibility for how they are approaching victims and need to review their own presentation, policies and procedures in order to remove this barrier. Professionals can do this by including victims on any decisions that need to be made in regard to their family; holding service user consultations or utilising learning from research, Domestic Homicide Reviews or Serious Case Reviews to improve their agency response to victims of VAWG.

Please suggest how you think we could remove these barriers:

Professionals felt that more awareness raising and training around VAWG is required in the borough. The main reason cited for this is the requirement for an attitudinal or 'cultural' shift and this education needs to happen amongst professionals as well as the community. Suggestions were that this education should start from school age with the aim of reducing the stigma attached to discussing VAWG.

Q4. For VAWG victims in Tower Hamlets, what are the most beneficial aspects or offers from statutory and/or voluntary agencies in borough?

- Refuges and access to safe accommodation
- Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs)
- Multi-agency partnership working

- Having women-only spaces
- Counselling and therapeutic support

Specific services and processes were named by professionals as being beneficial in the borough: Beyond the Streets, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and the Domestic Violence One Stop Shop (DVOSS) were the services most frequently mentioned. The MARAC and DVOSS also fit into the governing principle of joined up working.

Q5. To improve the experiences of victims of VAWG in Tower Hamlets, what changes would you make to statutory and/or voluntary services in borough?

- I. Put the focus on the perpetrator to change their behaviour
- II. More resources for victims
- III. Women only services or allocated times allocated for women only
- IV. More VAWG training for Police to improve responses

These are the top four changes that professionals highlighted. Perpetrators being held accountable is a clear priority that professionals think Tower Hamlets need to be doing more of and this point is a strong theme throughout the professionals and service user consultation. Financial resources and wrap-around practical support for victims so that they can be independent and not need to return to the perpetrator was the second priority. Police training was specifically mentioned as needing to be improved as often the Police can be the first point of contact for the victim and it is this response that can affect the victim's future decisions.

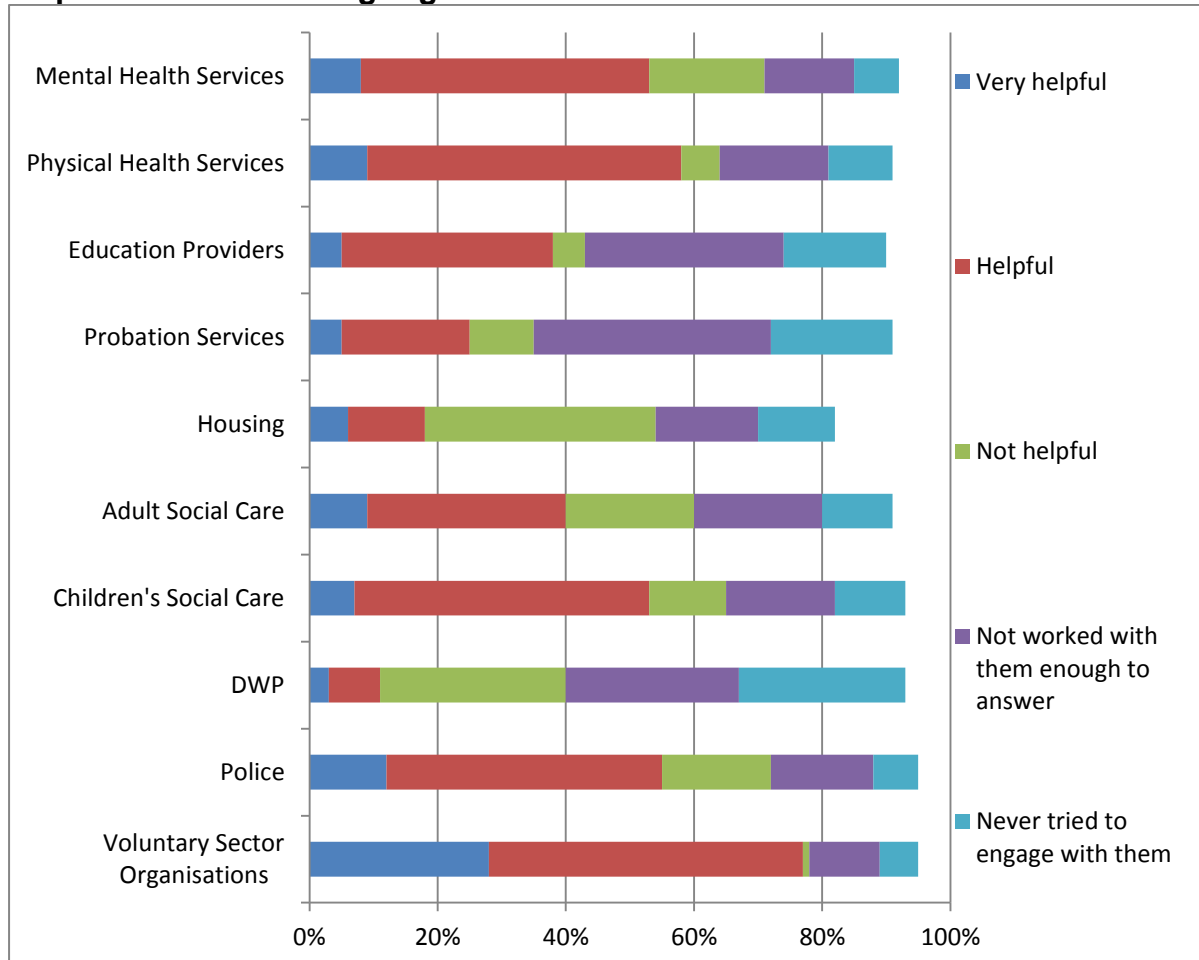
Q6. Tower Hamlets have an ambition to:

- 1) Support victims of VAWG**
- 2) Make perpetrators of VAWG accountable**
- 3) Engage the local community around VAWG**

To what extent do you agree that these 3 priorities should frame the Tower Hamlets VAWG strategy refresh?

Of those who answered this question, 81% agreed with the three priorities above. 9% thought that there should be more priorities and suggestions for additional priorities included partnership working and preventative work. 5% said that there should be different priorities, with two professionals mentioning that perpetrator accountability may take many forms, not always perpetrator programmes. It was also suggested that a priority should be around children. The remaining responders either stated that they didn't know or didn't mind the three listed priorities.

Q7. In regards to partnership working to assist VAWG victims, how helpful are the following organisations?



The majority of local agencies are considered to be 'helpful' or 'very helpful' around partnership working. Voluntary agencies are considered to be most helpful, this may be because some voluntary agencies may be advocating on behalf of victims to other agencies.

Housing received the most number of 'not helpful' votes, which needs to be addressed given that homelessness is the top adverse experience that service users have experienced.

There were a significant number of professionals who had 'not worked with other agencies enough to answer' or 'never tried to engage with other agencies', despite multi-agency working being named as a key benefit of working within the borough. In order to build a coordinated community response, agencies need to take accountability by increasing their contact with local partners so that victims are receiving a 'whole family approach' to address the victim's needs.

Q8. How could we improve partnership working in Tower Hamlets? Or what in particular works well in borough?

Professionals felt that more joined up working between different agencies was required including sharing information on the whole family to obtain full circumstances of a victim's situation. More multi-agency meetings were suggested as a way to work better together.

Q9. How can we ensure victims of VAWG feel safe in Tower Hamlets?

Professionals stated that more resources for victims of VAWG would help victims feel safer. Suggestions were around providing more long term support so that a victim can build a trusting relationship with their worker; more police presence on the streets and more housing options.

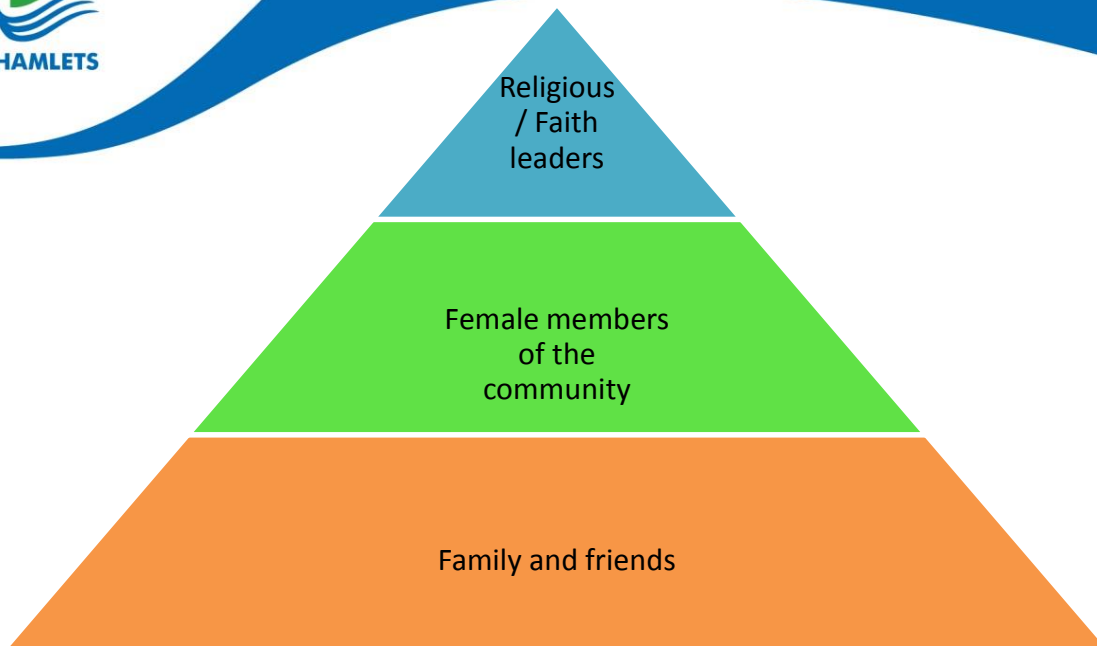
Agencies working with victims with complex needs and those who feel marginalised should be trained to know how to work with these victims directly but also know where to signpost for specialist support.

Prosecuting perpetrators of VAWG was mentioned frequently in this question, including targeting buyers of sex in the borough and publically highlighting the criminal justice consequences for perpetrators.

Q10. Please rank the top 4 below who locally you think has the strongest influence in raising awareness and challenging attitudes around VAWG?

Options given were:

- Male members of the community
- Female members of the community
- Statutory services (e.g. Police, Children's Social Services, etc.)
- Local media
- Family and friends
- Religious / Faith leaders
- Schools
- Healthcare providers (e.g. Doctors, Midwives, A&E staff etc.)
- Criminal Justice System (e.g. Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Judges)
- Specialist VAWG organisations
- Other



Professionals ranked the options in stark contrast to the service users. Where service users believe that statutory agencies and other professionals have the most influence, professionals believe that community members are the most influential. This could suggest that there is a disconnect between professionals and service users, with professionals not realising how influential they are and how valued they are by service users. It could also suggest a lack of accountability from professionals on their role in challenging attitudes around VAWG. Professionals need to understand the role they have in challenging attitudes and raising awareness of VAWG and be proactive in this.

Equally, more work needs to be done in the community around raising awareness of VAWG and empowering the community to feel able to challenge attitudes around misogyny and VAWG. This can be achieved by educating and raising awareness around what VAWG and misogyny is and that neither will be tolerated in this borough.

Appendix A: Key themes from professionals:

1. We need more training and awareness

"Issues can affect employees as well as community."

"Train staff and hold [them] to account so they are not so judgemental and stigmatising and victim blaming and suspicious of people trying to access public services and their rights."

"Constantly train staff - so often perpetrators are able to manipulate statutory sector and other professionals by appearing convincing, persuasive, charming and competent whilst at the same time discrediting their partner and making it harder for her to access help"

2. We need information on services need in accessible formats in various languages

"Posters with statutory logos "we do not tolerate abuse" (something along these lines) in various languages in idea stores, police stations, etc."

"[victims need to be] able to communicate in their own language"

"Don't leave it for a woman to hopefully look up something on the internet if she has access - publicise this - it should be in everyone's face all the time..."

3. We need specialist services and staff to support victims

"Providing more support to grassroots agencies to support women and girls ...to cope with demand."

"Recruit more staff specialising in [domestic abuse] support"

4. We need to challenge perpetrators more

"Challenge men's behaviours and attitudes as they are the perpetrators making the choice to abuse and society normalises it."

"Messages need to stigmatise perpetrators and show [VAWG victims] will be taken seriously"

"Put the onus and focus back onto the perpetrators"

"Make a point of perpetrators being convicted."

5. We need to educate young people about VAWG

“Work more with young males around their attitudes to women, which are worse in Tower Hamlets than some other parts of London”

“We meet far too many care leavers who are victims of VAWG - something's going wrong there.”

“[there should be] female only spaces in youth centres (to start the conversation around gangs and exploitation of girls/young women)”

Appendix B – Partners who were asked to share the consultation

Adult Social Care Teams	London Buddhist Centre
African Women’s Welfare Association	MARAC representatives
Art Pavillion	Maryam Centre
Ascent	Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel
Bangladeshi Youth Movement	Memory Clinic Team
Bengali Men’s Group	Mental Health Partnership Board
Bengali Women’s Group	Migrant project network
Beyond the Streets	Nia
Bromley by Bow centre	Permanence and Fostering Team
Children social care teams	Praxis
Children’s Centres	Prevent Team
Children’s Mental Health Team	Pritchard’s Road Day Centre
Compass	Protect and Respect
Child Sexual Exploitation team	Public Health
Substance Misuse Forum	Queen Mary University
DeafHope	Real
Designated School Safeguarding Leads Forum	Refuges
East End Citizen’s Advice Bureau	Reset Recovery
East London Mosque	Richmix
East London Out Project	Riverside Hostel
External Providers Advisory Group	Royal London Hospital
English for Speakers of Other Language learners	Safe East
Faith Regen Foundation	Sanation Association London
Galop	Saudha
Global Voices Theatre	Specialist Domestic Abuse Court Steering Group
GP surgeries	Sex and Relationships Forum representatives
Gurdwara Sikh Sangat	Stepney Jewish Community Centre
Hate Incidents Panel	LBTH Headteacher’s bulletin
	TOWER Pride
Health and Social Care Provider Forum	Tower Hamlets Prostitution Panel
Health and Wellbeing Forum	Tower Hamlets Voluntary Centre
Homeless Partnership Board	Tower Hamlets Community Church
Hostels Single Homeless Forum	Tower Hamlets Community Housing
Ideas stores	Tower hamlets Together
IRIS	Toynbee Hall
LBTH Children with Disabilities Team	VAWG Newsletter subscribers
LBTH Council via in-house screens, intranet and Yammer	VAWG and Domestic Abuse Steering Group
Learning disabilities services	VAWG training attendees
LGBT Domestic Abuse Partnership	Victim Support
LGBT Community Forum	Vulnerable Young People and Exploitation Subgroup
LGBT MPS Newsletter	Wapping Women’s Centre

