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*The scourge of violence against women and girls could stop if more men are prepared to step up and play an active role in ending it, say **Patricia Murphy and Bea Carrington.***

# We cannot do this alone

Writing this article has at times felt overwhelming. Not just because of the sheer scale of the issue and its extensive history, but also because of what it churns up inside us as women with lived experience of being harmed by men. There's no doubt that the patriarchy harms women, but it is beyond time to recognise that it is harming us all.

Where to start? Well firstly, we would ask you to be sensitive to the fact that standing out front of an issue you've been directly affected by is painful. We need you to understand that it's unfair and unrealistic to expect women to carry the entire weight of a problem that does not originate with them, and demonstrably cannot be solved by them alone. We reject any organisational attitudes and conventions which place sole responsibility on those directly affected to do the work necessary to centre the issue. Although we have been prepared to take on activism work together with our colleagues in the Women & Gender Minorities Equality (WOMGENE) Special Interest Group and the Equality & Culture Special Interest Group, our hope is that this article will help others, and in particular men who are currently not actively engaged, to reflect on the ways in which they can stand alongside us and help to end violence against all women and girls (VAWG).

When we talk about VAWG, we include transwomen. 2021 is on track to be the deadliest for transgender and gender non-conforming people in the US and most victims were Black or Latina women. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) have reported that more trans people have been killed so far in 2021 than were killed in 2013 to 2016, 2018 and 2019.

In the UK, the latest Home Office figures report on average, one trans person a year is murdered. Police recorded 1,651 hate crime offences against trans people in England and Wales in 2017-18. 41% of trans men and trans women responding to a Stonewall survey said they had experienced a hate crime or incident because of their gender identity in the last 12 months. However, the true extent of trans hate crime is likely to be greater as four in five trans people who experience hate crime don't report it to the police.

We are also aware that not all women experience domestic violence in similar circumstances. Those who are most impacted by gender-based



violence, and by gender inequalities, are also the most impoverished and marginalized — black and brown women, indigenous women, women in rural areas, young girls, girls living with disabilities, trans youth and gender non-conforming youth.

There are countless ways in which VAWG is enacted. It takes many forms and includes domestic violence, femicide, sexual violence, human trafficking, female genital mutilation, child marriage and online/digital violence.

A recent review of our respective news feeds over several days provides a taster of the constant drip of violence, misogyny, and misogynoir. Lowlights included the Royal College of Obstetrics & Gynaecology in 2021 having to call on the government to ban virginity testing and hymenoplasty in the UK; hundreds of men in Pakistan being investigated over mass sexual assault of a woman who was making a tiktok video in a park; a Black woman having her hair likened to animal fur on national breakfast TV; female athletes being forced to wear bikini bottoms to compete in an Olympic sport; Simone Biles an African American gymnast and considered greatest of all time, pilloried by a high profile white male who described her as a selfish quitter for prioritising her psychological and physical health; Britney Spears continuing a court battle against her father in an attempt to regain autonomy over her legal and personal affairs; and the female driver who was raped after she stopped to check if a child was safe after spotting an empty car seat in a layby. As barrister at Goldsmith Chambers specialising in gender-based violence Dr Charlotte Proudman summarises: "In a country where one

woman is killed by a man every three days and 232 women are raped each day – it's interesting that misogyny is never seen as a 'threat'. It's an accepted part of the world. Something women need to 'get over'. Misogyny is violence and a constant threat"

The stories are so relentless, the themes so repetitive that it's possible you have been numbed to them, which tragically means that it often falls to the most sensational to break through into national consciousness, sparking fevered debates and increasing awareness of the scale of the problem - if only for a little while.

The murder of Sarah Everard in March 2021 by a Metropolitan Policeman with a history of indecent exposure was one such story. Deborah Francis-White, founder of @GuiltyFeminist took part in a Women of The World (WOW) event, 'Another Pandemic - Violence Against Women', hastily convened, for women to come together in their grief and anger not just for Sarah but also to honour Black sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman who were murdered the year before to more muted coverage.

Francis White put the case baldly: "96% of **all** murders are by men. Therefore, if men stopped killing, (most of) the killing would stop. Women cannot stop them and believe me we've tried."

Sadly, this tragedy has since been eclipsed by Britain's worst mass shooting in more than a decade, when in August 22-year-old Jake Davison

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# We cannot do this alone

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killed five people, including his own mother and a three-year-old child. Davison's social media footprint revealed an adherence to incel culture which led to a wider examination of the 'manosphere', online communities of men who hate women. For those of you unfamiliar with INCeLs, writer and activist Laura Bates did a deep dive into the culture in her book 'Men Who Hate Women':

*"Incels subscribe to a transnational ideology characterised by white male supremacy, oppression of women and the glorification and encouragement of male violence. Seeing themselves as perpetual victims oppressed by a 'feminist gynocracy', they believe that sex is their inherent birth right as men, and that rape and murder are appropriate punishments for a society they perceive as withholding sex from them."*

She argues that it is not possible to entirely separate incel extremism from the 'everyday' sexism which is part of a continuum of violence creating a climate of fear, intimidation, discrimination, exclusion, and insecurity. These conditions have historically created a silence around women's suffering, a silence which on October 15 2017, was decisively and spectacularly broken by the #MeToo movement.

The phrase Me Too coined in 2006 by Tarana Burke, aimed to empower women who had endured sexual violence by letting them know that they were not alone and to provide victims the opportunity to navigate their trauma and heal. It was then picked up by actress Alyssa Milano on Twitter who invited women who had been sexually assaulted or harassed to use the #MeToo at one point reaching 85 countries with 1.7 m tweets.

Since then, new platforms like [everyonesinvited.uk](https://www.everyonesinvited.uk) have been set up to expose how young people experience a 'normalised' culture of misogyny, molestation and sexual harassment while growing up in the UK. Since March 2021, over 51,000 anonymous testimonies have been submitted and shared, sparking a conversation about rape culture with millions of people. Earlier this year Victim Focus founded by Dr Jess Taylor, released a report 'I thought it was just a part of life' which sought to explore the experiences of violence and abuse that women and girls in the UK have been subjected to. More than 22,000 women in the UK took part and 99.7% of their sample reported having been repeatedly subjected to violence including

assaults, harassment, and rape. The perpetrators were overwhelmingly male.

In the year ending March 2020, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated that 4.9 million women had been victims of sexual assault in their lives. In the past decade, there were 4,493 male victims of killings and 2,075 female victims (31%) in England and Wales. More than nine out of 10 killers were men.

There's really no getting away from it, when it comes to violence against women it is undoubtedly the men who are the 'specialists' in its use. (Hearn J, *The Violences of Men*, 1998). As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, this number is likely to grow with multiple impacts on women's wellbeing, their sexual and reproductive health, their mental health, and their ability to participate and lead in the recovery of our societies and economy.

The persuasiveness of the data demands a paradigm shift to tackle this pandemic within a pandemic. A move away from victim blaming and a step toward accepting that violence against women is a 'men's issue' is critical. The Good Men Project agree:

*"It's a men's issue because, as community leaders and decision-makers, men can play a key role in helping stop violence against women. It's a men's issue because men can speak out and step in when male friends and relatives insult or attack women. And it's a men's issue because a minority of men treat women and girls with contempt and violence, and it is up to the majority of men to help create a culture in which this is unacceptable."*

If you are a man and you've made it this far, we thank you. We appreciate it. However, if you've got this far and your initial response has been 'hang on a minute'; '#notallmen'; 'I would never do such a thing'; 'don't tar all men with the same brush'; 'women are perpetrators too', I'm afraid we don't appreciate you quite as much. In the same way that the Black Lives Matter movement was countered with a direct push back using the hashtag #alllivesmatter (widely seen as a racist dog whistle) responding with #notallmen simply derails the conversation. It's exhausting for us and makes it all about you, which of course it is, but not in this self-serving way.

So, let's stop here. Take a breath. We know. Not all men hurt women, but the fact is that millions of

women are hurt by men. Gender-based violence exists in virtually every culture on earth and one in three women will experience violence in her lifetime. Her experience will deprive her of human rights, put her at risk of mental and physical health problems, and potentially trap her in poverty. The facts are incontrovertible.

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## A Call to Action

So rather than adopt a defensive posture we would encourage you in the first instance to investigate the work of men and gender non-conforming people some of whom we highlight below, who have chosen active engagement and are leading by example:

Anti-sexism educator, **Jackson Katz**

**Justin Baldoni**, actor, filmmaker, feminist and co-host of the ‘*Man Enough*’ podcast

**Nazir Afzal**, a British Solicitor and practising Muslim with extensive experience of working in the legal areas of violence against women. An outspoken advocate of women’s rights and against forced marriage, FGM and honour killings.

**Alok Vaid-Menon**, Nonbinary activist poet, author and humanitarian broke down the history of and problems with the gender binary and how people can fight against it in a video that has gone viral on social media. The concept of love is explained quite brilliantly as trying harder for each other.

### Five things you can do to help end violence against women and girls:

1. Acknowledge and understand how sexism, male dominance and male privilege lay the foundation for all forms of violence against women.
2. Examine and challenge individual sexism and the role that you play in supporting men who are abusive.
3. Recognise and stop colluding with other men by getting out of socially defined roles and take a stance to end violence against women.
4. Remember that silence is affirming. When you choose not to speak out against men’s violence you are supporting it.
5. Educate and re-educate sons and other young men about their responsibility to ending men’s violence against women.

Over the last 18 months WOMGENE SIG have prioritised this issue and received the support of BABCP President Andrew Beck who fully supported our recent statement on domestic abuse and violence. Andrew also agreed to present to the Board our recommendation that BABCP consider becoming a White Ribbon supporter organisation and this is currently being progressed. Whiteribbon-org.uk are a charity committed to ending male violence against women by engaging with men and boys to make a stand against violence. Their mission is for all men to fulfil the White Ribbon Promise to never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women.

We hope that these developments will begin to harness the currently untapped potential our male colleagues have to play an important role in helping to end VAWG. After all, if, as it has been argued, “violence against women is built upon social constructions of masculinity and on men’s structural dominance across the different levels of society, then surely it is only right that men now have an ethical responsibility to get involved” (Westmarland, Almqvist, Holmgren, Ruxton, Burrell, Valbuena, 2021).

We really do feel it’s the least, but also the most important thing you can do.

### Recommended resources:

- ‘*Men’s Activism To End Violence Against Women*’ Westmarland, Almqvist, Holmgren, Ruxton, Burrell, Valbuena Pub Policy Press
- <https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/research-violence-abuse/research-profile/geo-toolkit/>
- <https://www.podbean.com/site/EpisodeDownload/DIRB80C32ENABMN>
- <https://www.babcp.com/About/News-Press/Domestic-Abuse-and-Violence>

**Patricia Murphy and Bea Carrington are both co-founders of the WOMGENE Special Interest Group.**

**This article is also hosted at babcp.com and includes links to all of the resources referred to throughout.**

