

SOAS COP Policy Briefings

To Inform Government and Parliamentary Debate



Violence against Women and Girls amidst COVID-19 (24th June 2020) by Katy Chadwick, Sophie Namy and Dr Maryyum Mehmood

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights deep-rooted social inequalities in the UK and has exacerbated violence against women and girls (VAWG), globally. Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, women's organisations have documented increasing rates, and severity, of VAWG—including a [25% increase](#) in the number of calls to the National Domestic Abuse helpline.

Whilst the root cause of VAWG is gendered inequalities, COVID-19 has escalated risks to women and girls due to several factors, including women becoming trapped with their abuser during lockdown, and increased household stress and conflict. The pandemic is also disrupting social support networks and reducing access to essential services. Due to structural inequalities, Black and minority ethnic women, especially women with insecure immigration status, are at [higher risk of COVID-19](#) and may face [additional barriers in accessing violence-related services](#) and/or avoid help-seeking altogether.

There is an urgent need for Parliament to act in order to **(1) mitigate COVID-19 specific risks of VAWG; (2) ensure women experiencing violence are able to quickly access and receive support, and (3) provide longer-term stability for chronically underfunded VAWG services, especially those for minoritized and marginalised women, girls and non-binary people.** Towards these critical objectives, the Government must:

- **Commit additional resources** for life-saving services (shelters, hotlines, trauma informed psychosocial support) – including following the [VAWG Sector recommendation](#) to repurpose £15 million raised through tampon tax.
- **Ensure specialist services** for Black and minoritized women, LGBTQI groups, homeless women, and accessible provision for women with disabilities are better resourced.
- Urgently provide **additional mechanisms and protections for migrant women and women with insecure immigration status to access free services** without fear of deportation.
- **Support innovation, and share information about safety schemes that take into account COVID-19 realities** e.g., the [pharmacy safety schemes](#), [apps](#) that provide support and phone-based counselling, etc.
- **Integrate information on the causes of VAWG and existing services** for women and girls within the 'test, trace and isolate' system.
- **Support (and resource) women's organisations to carry out long-term programs** aimed at preventing VAWG, such as interactive campaigns on abusive relationships and controlling behaviours.

Violence against women and girls is a serious social problem that often lies latent. Undoubtedly, it is worsened by COVID-19, and must be addressed by Government intervention as a matter of urgency.

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