

About Agenda

Agenda is a growing alliance of over 70 organisations who have come together to campaign for change for women and girls at risk.

We believe society is failing to adequately protect and support women and girls who face the most extensive trauma, violence and abuse.

We are calling for systems and services to be redesigned with women and girls at their heart so that they can access the support they need to rebuild their lives and reach their full potential.

We campaign, carry out research, work with policy makers, provide briefings and responses to parliamentary committees and consultations and bring together others to share learning and best practice. We ensure that women with complex needs and the projects that work with them are at the heart of all our campaigning and policy work.

Women and girls at risk-the evidence

Too many women and girls who have suffered violence and abuse are deeply traumatised and go on to face multiple problems like very low self-esteem, poor mental and physical health and turning to drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms.

For these women, sexual and physical abuse often starts in childhood and its impact continues to weave in and out of their lives. Many face lifelong problems and end up trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and abuse and many end up homeless or in prison.

Our Hidden Hurt report revealed that one in 20 women have experienced extensive physical and sexual violence as both a child and an adult: that's 1.2million women in England alone. Of these women;

- More than half have a common mental health condition
- More than half have a disability
- Nearly half are in the lowest income tertile
- One in three have attempted suicide
- One in five have been homeless
- One in three have an alcohol problem

Additionally our Joining the Dots research on the links between poverty, violence and abuse found that one in seven of all women in poverty (14%), which is one million women, have faced the most extensive violence and abuse.

The impact

Women who have experienced violence and abuse are much more likely than those without these experiences to have multiple mental disorders; be dependent on drugs or alcohol and face homelessness.

For some of these women abuse, violence, and disadvantage combine meaning they have very complex, overlapping needs. Many end up in crisis situations, including

- Approximately 11,000 women in hostels
- Nearly 7000 women sent to prison each year
- 80,000 women involved in prostitution

But we know this is just the tip of the iceberg. There are likely to be thousands more not showing up in statistics.

Failing these women is costly not just on a personal level to the women and their children but also to the public purse. This is because it results in a range of knock on costs including children being taken into care, costs to NHS emergency services and other health and social care services, interactions with the police, with the criminal justice system and crisis housing support.

Our Women in Mind campaign

Women with mental health problems, especially those with experience of violence, abuse and trauma, struggle to get the vital support they need from mental health services. Our campaign, Women in Mind, calls for women's needs, and in particular their experience of abuse and violence, to be prioritised and taken seriously in policy, strategy and delivery.

Why do we need to keep women in mind?

- Women and men have different mental health needs and experience mental health issues in different ways. Women are more likely to face conditions like eating disorders, anxiety and self-harm whilst men often externalize their feelings and face higher rates of addiction and suicide
- Young women are at particular risk of mental health problems. Recent research for NHS Digital showed that 1 in 5 16-to-24-year-olds have self-harmed and post-traumatic stress disorder in young women has trebled to 13% in the last 7 years.
- Sexual exploitation, abuse and violence are huge drivers of trauma and poor mental health in women. Over half of women who have mental health problems have experienced abuse.
- We are especially concerned about women who face the most severe and enduring mental health problems where the links between abuse, trauma and poor mental health are particularly pronounced.
- Women who have such experiences need holistic support to tackle the underlying issues they face and the choice of female practitioners and women only services

Without the right support these women can spiral from crisis to crisis, with huge resulting costs to them, their families and society as a whole.

A recent Freedom of Information request by Agenda to Mental Health Trusts in England found that trusts were not adequately considering the needs of female mental health patients:

- Only one NHS Mental Health Trust, out of 35 who responded, had a women's mental health strategy. In every other trust, there was no strategy explicitly recognising women's mental health needs.
- Just over half of responding trusts (18) had no policy on 'routine enquiry' (the practice of routinely asking female patients about experience of abuse), which is contrary to NICE guidelines.

- The vast majority of trusts had no policies on offering proactive support to patients who disclose abuse beyond meeting their safeguarding responsibilities.
- Only five services reported having a policy on actively offering female patients a choice of female care worker.

What is Women in Mind calling for?

We want women's needs to be explicitly considered in national mental health policy and strategy. Ten years ago there was a strong Government focus on the need for gender specific services but the impetus needs to be regained.

1. The soon to be appointed Mental Health Equalities Champion needs to have a focus on women's mental health and to champion a gender-informed approach across the treatment spectrum.
2. Every mental health trust should have a clinical lead for women's mental health and a strategy to take into account women's needs including the availability of gender-specific services and female care co-ordinators.
3. 'Routine enquiry' about women's experiences of violence and abuse should be standard practice across mental health services and be accompanied by proper support and pathways into care.
4. Frontline NHS workers should receive training to understand that women's mental health, trauma and abuse are strongly linked, and services need to work in a trauma-informed way.
5. Dedicated, holistic women-only services for women with complex needs should be available in every area to provide a safe, therapeutic space for women to address their mental health needs and to open up about their experiences.

To support our Women in Mind campaign or to find out more about our work please contact azaan.akbar@weareagenda.org, go to www.weareagenda.org or follow us on Twitter @agenda_alliance