Gendered Approaches to Service Provision

GVAWP Workshop MST

28th October, 2022

Background & Context

The wide ranging impacts of gender inequality on the day to day lives of women has long been recognised, it is both a cause and a consequence of violence against women and girls.

A gendered approach to service provision has for the most part been delivered by front line women's organisations, in particular those who are responding to the specific needs of women who experience any form of male violence, including domestic abuse, rape, sexual violence, stalking, sexual harassment, commercial sexual exploitation, harmful cultural practices and adult survivors of child sexual abuse.

The Public Health restrictions imposed, as a consequence of the global pandemic highlighted the disproportionate impact that gender inequality had on the lives of women. They were more likely to have responsibility for childcare, including home schooling, more likely to be in employment with zero hours contracts, less likely to have employment that allowed for home working, less likely to be furloughed, more likely to experience poverty, more likely to remain in poverty for longer. As part of the commitment to social recovery a dedicated task force was established to explore what recovery meant to women and how generic services needed to review their service provision to ensure that services were fully accessible to women and recognised the multiple disadvantage that women experience.

The cost of living crisis is an area of concern for all services, similar to the pandemic we are acutely aware that the brunt of this will be borne by women, who make up the majority of groups who are: carers; older people; lone parents; caring for children in the home; or have disabilities. It is vital that services are gender informed, recognising the unique experiences of women in our society and the difficulties they will experience within their social context.

Gendered approaches to service provision must be visible within all our systems and processes including: health, mental health, criminal justice, substance use, housing, homelessness. Over and above direct service provision we must consider it within our more generic services including planning, street lighting, redesign of city centre and other such areas.

The Need for a Gendered Approach to Service Provision

The Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership (GVAWP) has long recognised the value of a gendered approach to service provision, this approach is supported by the Women's Social Recovery Task Force and the Alcohol and Drug Partnership.

The GVAWP agreed to host an event which would begin to explore what this approach would mean in practice, this took place 28th October, 2022.

Dundee Violence Against Women Partnership began this journey in 2018 and Sophie Gwyther, VAW Coordinator, DVAWP and Heather Wilkins, Gendered Services Project Manager, Dundee, were invited to share learning from Dundee to help inform next steps for key stakeholders across services in Glasgow.

Please see attached reports and slides from Dundee presentation for information.

Dundee Experience

In 2018, Dundee Violence Against Women Partnership began to review pathways for women affected by violence and multiple disadvantage in the city from a 'whole systems perspective – this focused on women affected by VAWG but also a wider focus on any woman who was vulnerable or disadvantaged in the city.

Some of the key issues identified were a lack of resources to provide consultation for wider non-specialist services, difficulty meeting the needs of women with multiple and complex needs, lack of structured VAW training and workforce development opportunities and all of these leading to increased pressure on specialist services and strain on their resources.

In 2019 Dundee Drugs Commission produced a report Responding to Drugs Use with Kindness, Compassion and Hope. As part of a suite of recommendations this was included: ***'Ensure that the needs of women who experience problems with drugs are assessed and addressed via adoption of gender-mainstreaming and gender-sensitive approaches to service planning'.***

In Dundee there was an, identified lack of understanding around gender and the specific needs that women may have that can prevent them from accessing appropriate care and support or where they do engage with services, engagement being successful.

Extensive collaborative work took place with women with lived/living experience and the following recommendations were put in place for action:

Mainstreaming gender informed practice

- Build capacity to understand GBV with the workforce, move away from the expectation that gendered services such as women's aid should provide all the support/ cover
- Fund a worker who specialises in gender informed practice to collaborate with statutory services
- Improve access to women only services
- Develop alternative approaches to temporary and rapid accommodation to existing hostels

Implement trauma informed practice

- Services to train staff in trauma informed practice
- Barriers to access to NHS mental health services addressed

Place the person at the centre

- Address a fragmented landscape of service provision
- More flexible opening hours
- Co-location of services in non-stigmatising buildings
- Foster multi agency responses, partnership working, joint ownership of risk

Support Staff and build capacity

- Staff training and support around GBV and trauma informed practice
- Reflective practice
- Listen to experiences of staff and service users and incorporate into practice

This led to the creation of the Gendered Services Group which reports directly to the VAWP and the ADP. The collective leadership flowing from the DVAWP and the ADP expanded their ability to tackle the issues faced by the most vulnerable women in our city and opened up huge possibilities for collaborative working at a strategic and operational level.

The main aim of the group was to lead the strategic and operational planning for gender sensitive and trauma informed services in Dundee (e.g. for women experiencing VAW, substance use, homelessness and a range of other complex issues) and this involves a strong focus on women with lived experience directing the work.

Key successes of the Gendered Services Group in Dundee are:

- Development of Women's Services directory
- Development of VAW Overview Training by a multi- agency consortium
- Successful funding bid to secure a 2 year post to develop a gendered approach across mainstream services in Dundee
- Gendered services communications for the workforce
- Inclusion of gendered approach in ADP Strategic Plan and Adult Support and Protection delivery Plan
- Strategic oversight of key gendered services in Dundee
- Successful funding bid for women's hub
- Collaborative approach to CORRA funding opportunities with a clear gendered approach

There is a strong motivation, commitment and drive to work together to improve the lives of the most vulnerable women in the city.

Embedding the Gendered Approach in Dundee

Front and centre of embedding the gendered approach in Dundee were the voices of women. A successful bid to CORRA fund allowed for the development of a specific post to support partners to shift preventative approaches, increase capacity and ability and involve women in collaborative work.

Women with lived experience co-produced an organisational self- assessment tool, training materials and resources. An animation and five short films were developed with the collaboration of local women. The resources are used to illustrate the barriers vulnerable women face in Dundee, and to highlight the importance of the 7 key elements of a gendered service.

Animation: https://youtu.be/emWgz_oEvrY

The aims of the role would seek to:

- improved quality of service is provided to women
- increased accessibility of services for women
- increased capacity and ability of services to respond to women

The project developed a training programme which focused on:

- why taking a gendered approach was important
- identifying barriers for women accessing services
- Introducing the key elements of a gendered service
    - the values and approaches that an organisation has,
    - recognising that how services are delivered is just as important as what is delivered. We also discuss the importance of relationships built on trust, an understanding across the staff teams of women's lives/ complexities and challenges, the importance of empowerment, providing a physically and emotionally safe space, a holistic service that recognised that the needs for each woman will be different and finally the importance of being culturally competent.

The training has been delivered to 150 members of staff in Dundee, across third sector organisations and the Health and Social Care Partnership. The Self-Assessment Tool consists of a set of 50 statements to help identify gaps and good practice. Services are supported to complete this tool. Outputs from training and self-assessment form will support the service to develop a plan.

Women with lived experience were very much involved in the development of the self-assessment tool, incorporating their experiences, barriers encountered and their ideas and proposals of what would have improved their access and continued connection with services.

Further plans are in development these include:

- Gendered walkthroughs: using volunteers to take part in walkthroughs of organisations, to assess how physically and emotionally safe these spaces are for women, and have the opportunity to recommend improvements
- Development of podcasts

Gendered Service Approach in action: ASSIST

ASSIST is a court advocacy project for victims of domestic abuse going through criminal justice processes, all referrals to ASSIST come from Police Scotland. The service is not a woman only service, but they are able to apply a gendered approach and deliver a service to both female and male victims of domestic abuse.

The application of a gendered approach allows ASSIST to address the totality of the risk and not focus on the incident which generated the referral. The gendered approach understands the tactics that are employed by perpetrators such as what she wears; who she meets; when she goes out; how much money she has access to.

ASSIST understand that on average a woman will experience 35 incidents of domestic abuse before reporting to Police Scotland or another service, that she frequently has to re-tell her story to multiple services; reporting to male police officers; COVID and cost of living crisis further isolated women within a context of domestic abuse.

Gendered expectations are played out in all our lives professional and personal:

- Role of men as parents: often mothers are contacted by schools for an unwell child
- Managing money: women often carry the burden of managing household budgets
- Making sure birthdays and Christmas happen: mothers are more likely to have this responsibility
- How do professionals reinforce these expectations:
    - She is in another abusive relationship
    - Why doesn't she just leave?
    - Why didn't you report?
    - No childcare to attend hearings civil or criminal
    - Transport to attend court
    - Timing of cases: Fiona provided an example when a woman was compelled to attend court despite her childcare challenges. The case was then adjourned by a Sheriff who had to leave court to collect their children from school.

Applying the Gendered Lens

There is strong evidence from the learning in Dundee, that the issues and challenges faced there, are replicated in Glasgow.

The application of a gendered lens gives insight into the unique experiences of women because they are women.

Attitudinal and cultural shift does not cost money but it does take leadership, commitment, expectation and accountability.

It is important to make visible the challenges women and men face, how the reasons for the challenges they face will differ and they will be more or less likely to experience certain challenges and issues just because they are a male or a female. If we can acknowledge that women and men experience different things, have different challenges, then it makes sense that different approaches are needed when providing support.

This learning report focuses on women, we are mindful of the specific issues faced by men and this could be widened to consider how other groups might experience life differently e.g. those who do not fit into the binary.

The introduction highlights some of the different and unique challenges that women face and this needs us to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges that women experience and how are they different?
- Women do not access services in the same way as men, how do we adjust/reconfigure our services in order that there is equality of access?
- What needs to happen strategically and operationally to be the difference?
- What leadership is needed to make this change?
- How are women's voices woven through service redesign and delivery?

Women need to be heard and listened to beyond the label. For many women there are layers of stigma attached to their experiences.

There are real challenges and opportunities, making the culture shift within mainstream services, so what next?

Kirsti Hay
VAW Coordinator October, 2022