Information Sheet 1
Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

What does the phrase 'violence against women' mean? The term violence against women includes lots of different forms of violent and abusive behaviour, including:

- Domestic abuse, rape, incest and child sexual abuse
- Sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in public
- Commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, pornography and trafficking
- Female genital mutilation
- Forced and child marriages
- So-called 'honour' crimes

These forms of abuse and violence are overwhelmingly experienced by women and children and are abuses of power and control. In Scotland, as is the case across the world, these types of acts are carried out predominantly by adult men. This does not mean that men do not experience some of the types of violence and abuse included on this list, but it does mean that overall they are less likely to. The vast majority of gender based violence is inflicted on women and girls, largely because they are women and girls.

Violence against women is a global, widespread human rights violation and is experienced by women and children in every country worldwide. It cuts across both the public and the private sphere and affects those within the Church of Scotland as it does within all walks of life.

In the Church of Scotland, we use the phrase violence against women, girls and children. We use this term because it includes violence against women as described above but also highlights violence that is targeted at girls and children. Using this phrase reflects that children of all genders experience disproportionate levels of gender based violence due to their vulnerable position in society. This includes childhood sexual abuse and the experiences of children growing up in households where domestic abuse is being perpetrated. We separate girls from children as some forms of VAWG, such as female genital mutilation, are carried out only on girls and young women, while other forms are targeted at children more generally.

What about men? They experience violence, too.

We know that men and boys worldwide, and in Scotland, experience forms of gender based violence. This can include intimate partner violence such as physical, psychological, emotional and sexual abuse within families and relationships and societal violence including homophobia, transphobia and rape. This is a real problem and male survivors need support that is tailored for their needs so the 'Get Help' section on our website includes information on services for men.

Regardless of the gender of the survivor, whether they are an adult or a child – the person who abused them is generally male. It is significantly less common for women to commit acts of violence against men than men are to perpetrate violence against women. When women do commit acts of violence against men – such as murdering their partners – this is unusual enough that there are often huge amounts of press interest. We don't often hear the names of the two women killed every week in the UK by a partner or ex-partner and we rarely see the same level of press coverage.

Why do you need to talk about gender at all? Surely violence is violence.

We believe it is vital to frame such violence as gender-based – that is, as violence that is mainly directed against a woman or girl because she is a woman or girl (such as female genital mutilation), or which affects women disproportionately (such as domestic abuse). This highlights the importance of placing violence within the context of gender inequality in our society.

We also believe that it is vital to focus not just on the survivors of gender based violence but on those who perpetrate it. Not only do men and women experience gender based violence differently and deserve support tailored to their needs, perpetrators need support and accountability programmes that take into account the gendered norms and attitudes that excuse and minimise violence against women, girls and children.

Taking a gender neutral approach not only hides the survivors but takes away the focus from perpetrators who are largely adult men. Violence against women is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality in our society. We can't work to fix the problem if we don't understand it fully in the first place.