

Addressing Gender-Based Violence

Carceral Reforms vs
Abolitionist Strategies

Abolition is a political vision
and a practical project
for building collective safety
and wellbeing for all
without relying on
punishment, violence,
and oppression.

Introduction to this resource

What is this document?

This document is a resource to help people better understand how we can respond to gender-based violence with abolitionist strategies and tactics.

What is abolition?

Abolition is a political vision and a practical project for building collective safety and wellbeing for all without relying on punishment, violence and oppression. Abolitionists recognise that the criminal legal system is highly discriminatory, does not address the root causes of harm, and ultimately does not keep us safe. Abolition seeks to create alternatives to policing, prisons and punishment, and to build structures in society that meet everyone's needs.

Why 'gender-based violence'?

All terms are imperfect; we use 'gender-based violence' because it is inclusive of many categories of victims and survivors, and many types of violence such as sexual harassment, intimate partner and domestic violence, sexual assault and rape. The abolitionist concept of violence is expansive, and includes state and community violence, the violence of borders, poverty, and violence against the planet. Prison is also a form of violence which exposes people to sexual and physical harm, and mental distress.

Why this resource?

Following the Black Lives Matters protests in 2020 there has been growing interest in abolitionist practices in the UK. There is a long history of abolitionist thinking and activism here, and this moment has brought abolitionist ideas more into the mainstream. A common question when people first learn about abolition is: what about gender-

based violence? We wanted to share thinking on the practical answers to that question.

Who is this resource for?

This resource is for people who are newly engaging with abolitionist practices and want to understand what abolitionist strategy can look like in practice. We also want to provide a useful tool for people working in and around gender-based violence.

How to use this resource

The chart offers a visual reference to compare criminal legal responses and abolitionist strategies to address gender-based violence.

In the chart:

The left column lists different interventions to address gender-based violence; the top row lists questions we can ask to evaluate whether each intervention dismantles harmful systems and builds greater safety.

The **booklet** provides more detail about each strategy, comparing carceral strategies (which rely on prisons and police) with abolitionist ones (alternatives to prisons and police). The booklet explains why each carceral response gives the police and criminal legal system more power and takes power away from communities. Conversely, it explains how abolitionist strategies reduce the power of police and prisons, and gives power to communities to build alternatives.

There will be other interventions not listed here, but you could apply the same questions listed in the chart to assess them.

Frequently asked questions on abolition and gender-based violence

Why should we stop relying on the police and prisons to address gender based violence?

Significant harms come from gender-based violence, and we must take these seriously. For some, this may mean wanting to involve the police. However, the police do not provide the vast majority of people with the things they need and want after gender-based violence. In fact, police and prisons often make things worse. We understand that for some survivors the police may be - or feel like - the only option, but to quote INCITE! - 'the question is not, should she call the police. The questions are, why is that her only option, and can we provide other options that will keep her truly safe?' This document aims to encourage a wider set of responses so that, one day, no one will need the police.

But how do we get justice if we don't use the police and prison system?

Well, first of all, the criminal legal system isn't just. If a key goal in seeking justice is that harm and violence is reduced and accountability occurs to ensure harm doesn't happen again, then it is clear that the criminal legal system isn't working. If a key goal in seeking justice is that accountability occurs and harm doesn't happen again, then it is clear that the criminal justice system isn't working. For example, most law enforcement occurs after a harm has already occurred and rarely leads to outcomes that reduce future violence or harm.

For this reason, we use the term 'criminal legal system' instead of 'criminal justice system' to refer to the formal system of criminal laws, policing, courts, prisons and probation.

This is because we don't see 'justice' in that system; 'criminal legal system' is more accurate. Similarly we try to avoid using terms from the criminal legal system that reinforce stigma and labelling or suggest that people can't change. For example, we refer to 'people who have done harm' rather than 'perpetrators', 'offenders' or 'criminals.' One way that legal systems hold our communities in cycles of violence is by fixing people in categories like 'abuser'. By contrast, talking about people's behaviour, such as 'a person who has been abusive', acknowledges people's potential to change.

Why should we care about people who enact gender-based violence?

We are all capable of causing harm, perhaps especially if we have been harmed ourselves. If we want to end violence we need to address root causes and support processes of change. Whereas police usually intervene after violence has already occurred, an abolitionist framework asks us to intervene before harm occurs. This means offering support to people at risk of harming themselves or others. It also means that when we talk about increasing safety and wellbeing for all, we really do mean everybody. Nobody is disposable, even if they have done terrible things. Everyone has the capacity to change.

But if we don't get justice through the criminal legal system how do we get it?

Abolitionists tend to respond to harm using a model of justice called Transformative Justice (TJ). TJ is about radically altering the ways we respond to harm and violence by focusing on the root causes. Transformative justice work is focused on healing,

restoration and transformation for survivors while also facilitating collective accountability outside of retribution and punishment. It goes beyond individual survivors, and focuses on the broader social conditions and ongoing legacies of oppression that facilitate harm. For example, making sure people have basic needs met (like food, shelter, health care) can help reduce the conditions that lead to harm. Likewise using community mediators to address conflict is often more effective than threats of punishment. In thinking about whether a solution is rooted in the values of transformative justice, a good question to ask, taken from Mia Mingus, is: does this strategy respond to violence and harm without creating more violence and harm?

That sounds like a lot of work.

Why not focus on reforming the police?

To answer this question, it is important to understand what the police are for. The institution of the police emerged out of colonial law enforcement, slave patrols (designed to catch runaways and enforce obedience) and control of working-class uprisings and strikes. Present-day policing reflects this history - it mainly focuses on upholding 'social order', national security and protecting private property, not keeping the majority of us safe. There is a long history of police harassing and brutalising minoritised/marginalised communities (including survivors of violence). This institution is not reformable, because it is doing the very thing it was set up to do; control people and maintain the status quo - including wealth and power inequalities.

Why do you talk about communities so much?

We talk about communities because violence and harm are collective problems, and therefore need collective responses. While individuals need to be supported and held accountable, harm between individuals impacts communities more widely, whether that be families, neighbourhoods, identity-based communities or faith-based communities. Repair, prevention and accountability all happen most effectively when held by the people connected to the lives of those who have done harm and those who are harmed. Social problems are often best tackled locally, and therefore building connections and support between individuals and groups is key.

That said, we recognise that 'community' can easily be romanticised, and communities themselves are often sites of violence. We recommend 'community-based' strategies, but these must be practised with care. This means being attentive to how power relations such as racism, classism, ableism, xenophobia and transphobia shape our communities and constantly working to confront and address these power dynamics.

Reducing harm sounds great. How do we do it?

So what's the answer?

There are no single answers. There are many strategies we can use to reduce harm and increase safety and wellbeing for all, such as transformative justice. These may look different in different cultures and communities, and may be more appropriate to some contexts than others.

To prevent violence, we need everybody

Abolitionist approaches are about building new ways of doing things. The Ayni Institute developed a model called the Movement Ecology which helps us understand different approaches to change in a social movement. This model outlines three approaches: (1) personal transformation; (2) changing dominant institutions; and (3) building alternatives. Social movements are most successful when there are people using all three approaches.




However, it can be overwhelming when we feel we have to do them all ourselves! This document includes all three approaches, but to help people not get overwhelmed, we use the icons below (butterfly, mushroom and flower) to highlight the key focus of each approach. Not everyone needs to do everything, but to prevent violence we need everyone.

I have an idea about a strategy to use, but I'm not sure if it's abolitionist or not.

Should I pursue it?

In addition to the questions listed in the chart, here are some other questions to ask when considering strategies:

1. Does this intervention remove power from the police, prisons and/or criminal legal system?
2. Does it give power to communities?
3. Does this intervention help address the root causes of gender-based violence?
4. Who is most impacted by this approach? Does this intervention help some people, but at the expense (or stigmatising) of others?
5. Are there possible unintended consequences to consider?
6. Is this strategy likely to be co-opted by the criminal legal system?
7. Is this strategy at risk of turning community into its own version of policing?

	personal transformation
	changing dominant institutions
	building alternatives

Carceral Reforms VS Abolitionist Strategies

Carceral Reform 1

More police in public spaces

Examples

More police on the streets, at public events, in night clubs, in schools etc.

Why and how it's harmful

Direct harm: More police in public spaces gives a false illusion of safety and wellbeing while increasing the harassment and criminalisation of racialised and marginalised communities.

Wider impact: Increased police presence in public spaces means that other services defer to the police or partner with them, for example in entertainment venues or in health and education institutions. This can increase punitive responses and criminalisation from wider organisations. Sometimes police will put

pressure on those organisations to adopt punitive approaches to address gender-based violence, such as in clubs, schools, social or other public venues. This means that wider social institutions become police-like themselves and are less likely to seek more effective and proactive ways of preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

Who is most affected

Police frequently target marginalised communities. More police in public spaces means that Black and Brown people, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers, LGBT+ people, sex workers and disabled people are likely to feel less safe in those spaces and are more likely to be policed, harassed and criminalised.

Abolitionist Strategy 1

Community-based night-time safety programmes ✿

Examples

Walk home programmes; training for bars, clubs and social venues to provide safety and support; wellbeing staff at clubs; safer party toolkits.

Purpose

Creates possibility: Community-based programmes encourage us to consider how we can collectively prevent and address gender-based harm.

Gives power to communities: Resources and funding that would have been used for policing can be diverted back to the community, to increase capacity to prevent and address gender-based violence.

Removes power from policing: Building alternatives reduces the need to call on the police and challenges the notion that we need police to keep us safe. Less contact with police means less opportunities for the police to inflict harm. Increasing everyday skills and capacities to intervene in and prevent harm can also reduce reliance on institutions that may be entangled in criminal legal partnerships, such as universities, schools and social services.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

Community-based programmes must also be careful not to replicate police-like or punitive approaches (e.g. vigilantism) or get caught up in police partnerships or cooptation.

Abolitionist Strategy 2

Violence de-escalation skills training ✿

Examples

Non-violent, race- and trauma- informed bystander intervention training and violence de-escalation skills training, for individuals as well as organisations, service providers and social venues.

Purpose

Gives power to communities: Violence de-escalation training can empower communities to safely intervene in and prevent gender-based violence - both online and offline. If using an approach that actively recognises how oppressions intersect across race, class, disability, gender and sexuality, bystander interventions can prevent potentially violent situations from escalating.

Removes power from policing: Increasing people's everyday skills and capacities to intervene reduces the need to call on the police, and lowers the likelihood of violent police responses (such as arrest, physical restraint or lethal use of force). Resources and funding that would have been used for policing can be used to develop and implement non-violent, anti-racist and trauma-informed training programmes.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

Care is needed to ensure these alternatives do not become punitive and imitative of policing. Training must be anti-racist and trauma-informed. Violence de-escalation efforts should not focus on individual action only, but need to be embedded culturally and organisationally, to be most effective.

Police reforms

Examples

Police internal and external reviews; police training on sexism and gender-based violence; specialist police and police-based helplines for gender-based violence.

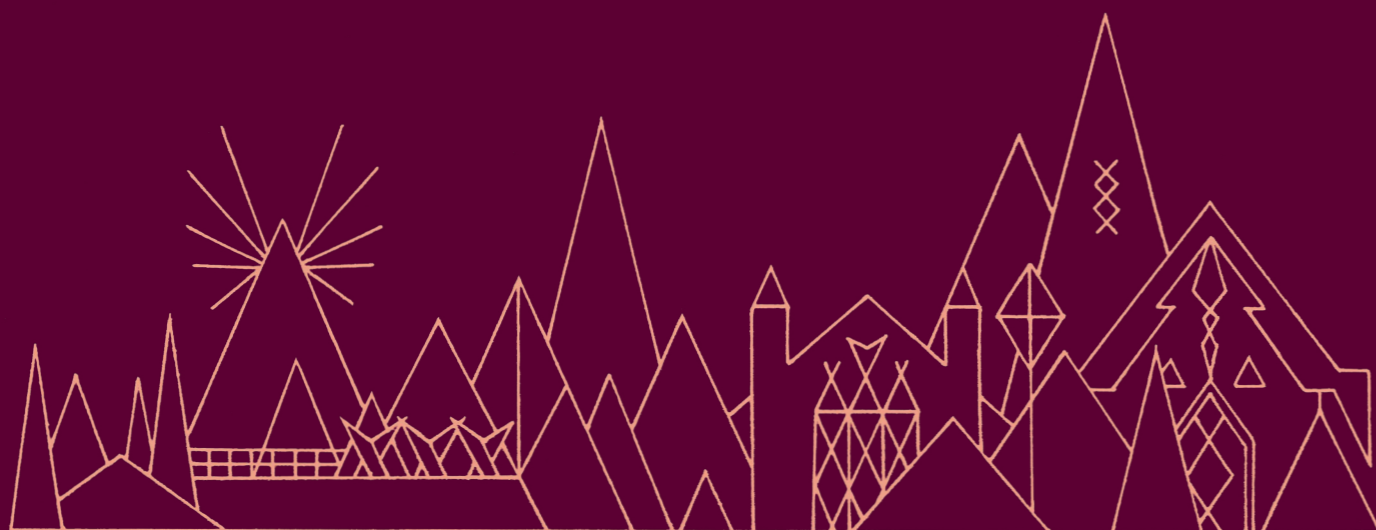
Why and how it's harmful

Direct Harm: Decades of police training and reform have done little to increase community safety, particularly for survivors of gender-based violence. Reviews of police 'failures' tend to conclude, erroneously, that the problem is 'bad apples' or at most poor training or culture, when these problems are systemic and are rooted in the nature of police as an institution. Review and reforms tend to expand police powers via calls for additional funding and resources, such as consultants, specialist groups and training. Pushes for reform falsely suggest that police can deliver adequate support to victims of gender-based violence, which expands police power and carceral systems into other areas of society such as health and social care.

Wider impact: Other institutions and organisations are often co-opted into co-delivery of training and other reform activities, which drains time and resources away from education, health and welfare-based prevention and support.

Who is most affected

Pushes for police reform tend to legitimise and stabilise the police as an institution, which directly impacts those at the sharp end of policing (racialised groups and those whose survival is criminalised, such as drug users, sex workers, and those deemed 'illegal'). Gender-based violence services can also find their work and resources shifted away from a direct focus on survivors and channelled into work focussed on police reform. Police reforms can give false hope to survivors that the police can and will change (when decades of reform efforts show this is very unlikely).



Non-police-based crisis intervention teams 🌸

Examples

Emergency help for people in acute mental distress or domestic violence situations provided by community-based groups and organisations that are not affiliated with or connected to police; well-resourced and fully-trained emergency healthcare staff and crisis teams; mutual aid groups; emergency support phone and peer-support crisis lines.

Purpose

Removes power from policing: Expanding the available range of community-based crisis interventions reduces the need to call on the police to respond to crisis. This means that situations which might otherwise result in an arrest, restraint or lethal force can be managed in different ways. This is essential because violent and lethal interactions with police routinely occur under the guise of responding to mental health crises.

Gives power to communities: Prioritising alternative crisis-interventions requires wider institutions such as healthcare and education to develop prevention based strategies to intervene with support before things escalate and ensure that mental health needs are met.

Creates possibility: Creating crisis care support in communities builds skills and capacities to increase safety. Emergency support also must be accompanied by non-crisis interventions as well. For example, meeting basic needs such as housing, food, income support and health care are essential components for preventing domestic violence and mental health crisis.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

Care must be taken to ensure community based crisis interventions do not become punitive or police-like, especially if they are implemented through institutions such as schools, local authorities and hospitals. These interventions also need to be properly resourced (in order to provide adequate personnel, training, supervision, and transport for example). Co-response interventions that involve the police (for instance, police accompanied by a mental health worker) are not real alternatives, as they continue to centre the police in crisis response.

New criminal offences

Examples

Any new criminal offences claiming to address gender-based violence. This includes new criminal offences for 'upskirting', street-based sexual harassment, coercive control, Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting (FGM/C) and associated offences; breaching civil protection orders, cyber-flashing; the threat or act of non-consensually sharing intimate images, additional hate crime laws including making misogyny a hate crime.

Why & how it's harmful

Direct harm: Existing criminal offences do not prevent gender-based violence, and new ones won't either.

While it is often assumed that criminal laws prevent and deter harm, actual evidence shows otherwise. Instead, new offences expand the power and scope of police, and hate crime data in particular is used and shared by police to intensify action against marginalised groups. Criminal offences focus on punishing individuals rather than addressing social inequalities and root causes of violence. For example, hate crime legislation reinforces the idea that harm is caused by individuals, while ignoring the role that institutions, systems and social norms play in enabling discrimination at a social level. Criminal laws can place survivors under pressure to engage with police even when they do not feel safe doing so, or simply do not wish to.

Wider impact: Creating new offences can absolve communities and institutions from taking action to address social and structural causes of gender-based harm and violence, by treating violence as a police matter rather than a collective social responsibility. The creation of new criminal offences often encourages us to fear 'stranger danger' (abuse and violence from people we don't know) rather than being alert to harmful dynamics in our relationships and communities which are far more common and widespread. New criminal offences can also lead to funding being cut from crucial violence prevention and education work and redirected to law enforcement.

Who is most affected

New criminal offences give police greater powers to target marginalised communities. Survivors among these communities are more likely to be criminalised under both existing and new laws, which deters marginalised survivors from seeking support.

Repeal laws that criminalise and punish survival 📌

Examples

Repealing laws, criminal offences and prison sentences related to drugs, sex work, and poverty, particularly those relating to sustaining day-to-day life such as 'shoplifting', fare evasion, homelessness, council tax arrears and court fines related to non-payment of TV licences, etc. In addition, repealing anti-migrant and hostile environment laws and policies, such as 'Right to Rent', healthcare charging, and the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition which blocks access to essential services and mainstream welfare support and therefore increases vulnerability to violence and exploitation, as part of the wider struggle for border abolition.

Purpose

Gives power to communities: Decriminalising survival strategies creates space to respond with care and encourages individuals and institutions to address welfare issues instead of punishing people for poverty. Repealing laws that criminalise and punish survival is essential for improving the safety of people who experience poverty and precariousness, including survivors of violence.

Removes power from policing: Repealing laws that target survival decreases the channels through which marginalised people come into contact with the police. Repealing these laws also reduces the ways that the criminal legal system reaches into welfare, social care, healthcare systems to trap working-class and marginalised people in cycles of poverty, criminalisation and harm.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

Repealing laws alone will not eliminate harm. We know that police already act violently, with impunity, above and beyond the remit of the law, and that the institution of the police is designed to maintain a status quo of inequality. Ending harmful laws must be done alongside broader work to address structural inequality and gender based violence. It also must be done alongside broader strategies to shrink, defund and eventually abolish the police and its connected agents such as the border force. Repealing laws must also be accompanied with greater efforts to change wider institutions and cultures to prevent violence in the first place and to provide healing, support and meaningful accountability /reparations when it does occur.



Abolitionist Strategy 5

Mutual aid & community support 🌸

Examples

Care collectives; neighbourhood safety support; local cop watch; community funding schemes; food shares; community gardens; child care collectives; peer-to-peer mental health support; know your rights collectives.

Purpose

Removes power from policing: Resourcing and developing community-based support mechanisms challenges the notion that we need police to keep us safe. This is especially the case when when we also reduce the power of regulatory and punitive agendas in healthcare, education and housing.

Gives power to communities: When we enhance community support, there is less psychological reliance on, and practical use of, policing. Funds can also be redirected away from the criminal legal system and into communities. By developing more connected communities, we can provide support to survivors of violence and potentially shift the attitudes, conditions and behaviour of people at risk of harming others.

Creates possibility: Relying on communities rather than police encourages us to be more creative in preventing and addressing gender-based violence and other forms of harm.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

Community-based support networks have the potential to replicate harmful and punitive structures, hierarchies, and exclusionary practices - particularly if they are not rooted in a radical politics of anti-oppression, solidarity and care.



Harsher punishments for gender-based violence

Examples

Longer sentences, mandatory minimum sentences, sex offender registries

Why & how it's harmful

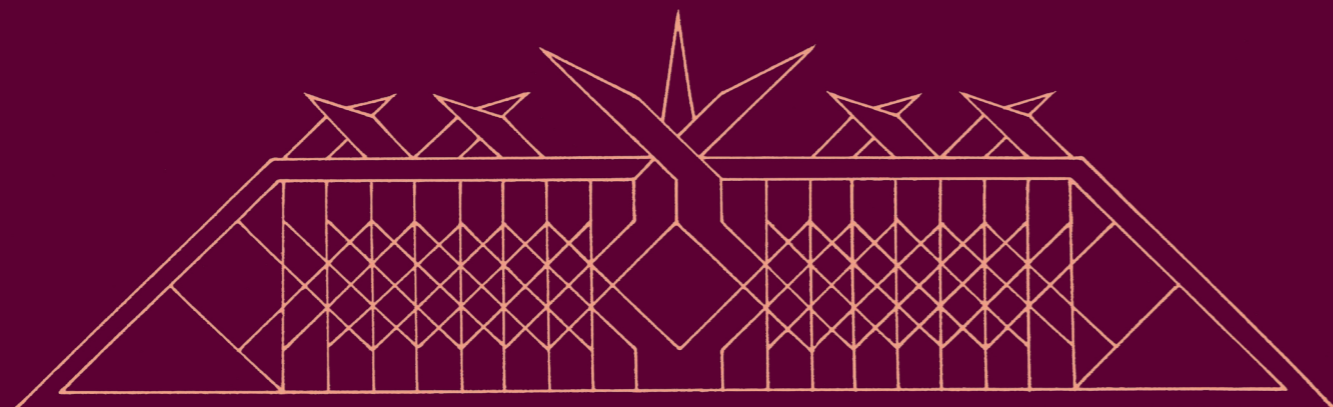
Direct Harm: Calls for harsher sentences are often made in the hope that increased punishment will prevent future harm. However, there is no credible evidence to justify this; longer sentences simply do not work as deterrents. Locking people away for longer periods of time does not actually address harm or make people accountable to the people they harmed. People who commit violence can change and should be supported to do so.

While longer sentences have done little to reduce violence, they have worked to dramatically increase prison populations and exacerbate inequalities. Prisons expose people to sexual violence, mental distress, and poor health outcomes. Prisons also make people vulnerable to destitution and deportation if they have immigrant status.

Wider impact: Prisons often sever community ties, which cuts off vital supports and breaks up families and communities, particularly those subject to deportation. Likewise, research has repeatedly found that strategies like sex offender registries do not reduce violence and harm and instead create barriers to basic needs such as health, housing and welfare, which in turn limit people's access to support for changing harmful behaviours.

Who is most affected

Harsher sentences disproportionately affect marginalised groups who are already more likely to be targeted by the criminal legal system. This includes people of colour, particularly black and brown people; Muslim communities, migrants, those with limited economic resources; disabled people, especially those with learning difficulties; Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and LGBTQ+ people. Many people in prison, particularly in women's prisons, are also survivors of gender-based violence.



Support for communities to build transformative justice ✨

Examples

Community accountability processes for those who have committed harm and support teams for survivors; safety and accountability 'pod-mapping'; community accountability agreements.

Purpose

Gives power to communities: Transformative justice initiatives require communities to build skills and capacity for violence prevention, safety planning, healing and support - both for those who have been harmed and those who have done harm. Transformative justice seeks not only to address immediate harms but also change the conditions that create harm in the first place. It therefore increases safety and wellbeing over the long term. Building models for safety and accountability at the community level helps to reduce isolation of those who have experienced harm as well as those who have done harm.

Removes power from policing: Transformative justice initiatives do not involve police or the criminal legal system. Expanding our use of transformative justice means less reliance on police and the criminal legal system and less demand to fund that system.

Creates possibility: Transformative justice initiatives challenge the notion that police and prisons are needed for safety.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

Transformative justice processes require a lot of time, energy and patience and can generate burnout, so building sustainability into processes is essential. The language of transformative justice is prone to cooptation and is sometimes used to describe processes that are actually punitive and stigmatising. Transformative justice processes are not defined by the language that is used, but by the practices and principles of care, support and healing for both the person/people harmed as well as those who have done harm. If not carefully navigated with an attention to how oppressions related to race, class, gender (and more) intersect, transformative justice processes can become sites of conflict which exacerbate existing hierarchies and unequal power dynamics.

Zero tolerance policies

Examples

Zero tolerance policies around harassment, abuse, and bullying, particularly in schools, workplaces and public services (e.g. zero tolerance of sexual harassment or verbal abuse of staff); policies that require strict enforcement of rules by imposing immediate punishments for particular behaviour and eliminate discretionary responses.

Why and how it's harmful

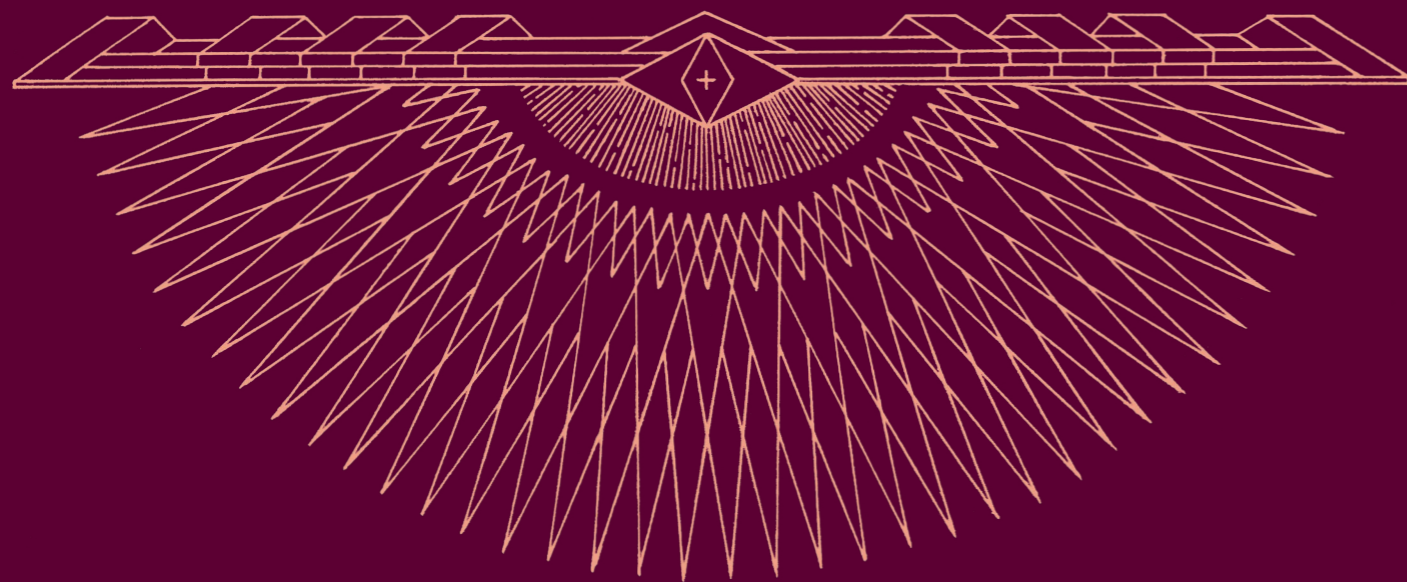
Direct harm: Zero tolerance policies are meant to stop harmful behaviour, but in practice they simply enact strict punishments in response to such behaviour. There is little evidence to support their use as they have not been shown to improve safety and well being. Because zero tolerance policies remove discretion in responding to harm, they restrict opportunities to understand why a harm has occurred or what underlying causes need to be addressed.

Because zero tolerance policies require enforced penalties, regardless of a survivor's wishes, they can deter survivors, particularly those from marginalised groups from reporting / seeking support. These policies can also increase risks to survivors if complex situations are escalated in inappropriate ways (e.g. harassers may retaliate, survivors may be shamed or targeted).

Wider impact: Zero tolerance policies target individuals as problems to be punished or expelled, rather than identifying and shifting wider cultural norms and institutional practices that enable harmful behaviour.

Who is most affected

Zero tolerance strategies are often interpreted in ways that act more punitively to groups that already face stereotyping and discrimination.



Mental health support for all 🦋🌸

Examples

Mental health support for all who need it, irrespective of immigration status; short and long term counselling; emergency mental health crisis support; trauma healing; group therapy; training for educators, health workers and service providers around mental health wellbeing support; shifting institutional environments to foster cultures of care and support.

Purpose

Gives power to communities: Mental health support for all requires that health and wellbeing issues are addressed outside of policing. This means resources are focused on preventing crisis and support is provided to both those who have experienced violence and those at risk of perpetrating violence (including gender-based violence).

Removes power from policing: Properly resourced mental health support means less reliance on police in times of crisis. Police are not properly equipped or skilled to assist people who are in crisis or to deal with ongoing mental health issues. Therefore, long term, holistic, mental health support can reduce harm by preventing crisis incidents (including gender-based violence) that occur when mental health needs are not met.

Creates possibility: When we prioritise mental health, wellbeing and healing services, we create space to imagine more ways to ensure our wellbeing without relying on police. Such work can refocus institutions on support and healing rather than punishment and control. Trauma healing is vital for reducing harm - both for survivors of sexual violence and for those at risk of perpetrating violence.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

Mainstream mental health services and organisations are often entangled with longstanding patterns of racial, class, gender, disability and sexuality-based discrimination. Mental health services also have a long history of deploying punishment, surveillance and control through the guise of 'care' (e.g. making support conditional upon particular behaviours, restricting support to those deemed deserving enough, pathologising marginalised communities). Truly liberatory mental health support requires decoupling mental health from punitive, coercive and/or criminalising agendas.

Institution-centred safeguarding and mandatory reporting policies

Examples

'Prevent' and other counter-terrorism programmes; the Gangs Matrix; police presence in schools; policies which require mandatory reporting of violence, harassment, sexual abuse to police; duties requiring medical professionals to report to police (e.g. child abuse, FGM etc).

Why and how it's harmful

Direct harm: When institutions enact safeguarding and mandatory reporting policies, they are often designed to minimise risk to the institution (including reputational damage) and comply with government-mandated policing rather than ensure safety and wellbeing of communities. These policies require teachers, youth workers, doctors, nurses and other service providers to identify and report potential risks, but perceptions of risk are often shaped by discriminatory and racist assumptions. In practice, this means that 'safeguarding' and mandatory reporting become tools to exert racial profiling, policing, and surveillance over marginalised communities. For example, the state uses safeguarding programmes for specific types of gender-based violence as an excuse to police racialised communities without actually addressing harm. These instead serve other political agendas, e.g. rhetoric around FGM, modern slavery, and human trafficking are used to justify border controls and violent interventions around the world.

Institutional responses to risk often translate 'concern' into control and punishment rather than care and support. As Maslaha describes in their radical safeguarding guide, 'Identifying individuals as "risks" means that steps to safety require "correcting" those individuals, an approach which is pathologizing and can lead to criminalisation.' These policies make people fearful of disclosing harm or seeking support (particularly if they fear that reporting will put their family or community at risk of criminalisation or punishment).

Wider impact: These policies create climates of suspicion and surveillance rather than cultures of care and support. Punitive safeguarding often channels resources away from support and towards policing, or makes resource access conditional upon reporting to police.

Who is most affected

It is well documented that government and institutionally-driven safeguarding policies like the 'Prevent duty' are highly discriminatory and racist. Such policies have a particularly negative impact on communities of colour, especially Black and brown people; Muslim communities, migrants and people with disabilities. These policies also negatively impact educators and service workers, who become implicated in policing and surveillance as part of their jobs.



Prevention-focused education 🦋🌸

Examples

Education around sex and relationships; community-based violence prevention work; anti-violence support skills; liberatory education that identifies and challenges root causes of harm and violence; education challenging cultural norms that reinforce misogyny, racism, islamophobia, ableism, heterosexism, transphobia.

Purpose

Creates possibility: Education is important because it works to prevent and address harm (including gender-based violence) before it happens, rather than relying on police and prisons to criminalise and punish individuals after the fact. Educational initiatives can prevent harm and violence in the broadest sense and from the very earliest stages of life. When approached in a holistic way, education can help shift social harms, support skills development and empower communities to recognise and address underlying causes of violence.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

If not approached in a holistic way that is oriented towards social and structural change, education initiatives can lose their radical potential. For example, when education is focused narrowly on individual attitudes or prejudices (or uses a deficit model where individuals are seen as deficient and in need of correction through education), systemic roots of harm can be obscured, and education can end up working to discipline individuals rather than transforming social conditions.

More funding for criminal ‘justice’ related services for survivors

Examples

Gender-based violence organisations, services and programmes which (i) rely on funds via the criminal legal system; (ii) engage with - and report to - police, probation, courts and prisons; (iii) focus on the criminal legal system in their work, including work that supports survivors through and around these systems.

Why and how it’s harmful

Direct harm: Funding for criminal ‘justice’ related support services, and funding from the criminal legal system, often come with prerequisites that expand the powers of that system. These include, but are not limited to: (i) data-sharing agreements which can be used by police to criminalise survivors, communities and deport marginalised individuals; (ii) agreements to reach specific targets that do not always benefit survivors, such as those around case completion to ensure survivors stay within the criminal legal system; and (iii) services being unable or unwilling to openly critique national and/or local government policies and approaches.

Wider impact: Funding for criminal ‘justice’ related services is increasingly the main form of funding available to anti-violence groups. Such funding makes it harder for service providers to challenge violent state policies and advocate for survivors. Such funding also reinforces the view that police and courts are the only way of obtaining justice. This reduces survivor options for accessing support and justice outside of a criminal legal system that is violent to the majority of those who engage in it. This also means that the most marginalised survivors who are most at risk of criminalisation often feel unsafe accessing support from mainstream services.

Who is most affected

When services work more closely with the police, prisons and courts, these services become less safe for survivors who are more likely to be criminalised such as those who are Black and brown, LGBT+, sex working and disabled. This heightens their risk of further abuse and/or re-traumatisation. Information sharing with the police has additional risks for those who are sex working and/or from migrant communities.

Funding for gender-based violence support that is not linked to criminal legal systems 🌸

Examples

Direct support services and refuges for gender-based violence survivors that are not affiliated to, or funded by the criminal legal system; community-based restorative and transformative justice facilitation; harm-reduction work that is not tied to the legal system.

Purpose

Gives power to communities: Disentangling survivor supports from the criminal legal system means that services can centre the needs of survivors, rather than the requirements and priorities of the legal system. It also means that groups and organisations providing support are more likely to be seen as safe by those who are most marginalised and at risk of criminalisation.

Removes power from policing: Disconnecting gender-based violence support from the criminal legal system reduces police power over survivors and over communities more broadly. Service providers can then build more flexible, survivor-centred alternatives.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

Decoupling gender-based violence support from the criminal legal system does not necessarily reduce the desire to punish those who cause harm. Community work must be done to hold space for emotional responses, challenge internalised dependencies on punitive practices, and offer ongoing support for collective healing.



Housing for all 🌸

Examples

Provision of social housing that is safe, fit for purpose, and accessible for all who need it - irrespective of immigration status; increasing the social housing housing stock so that there is enough housing for all including within city centres; increased provision and accessibility of emergency housing for all who need it.

Purpose

Creates possibility: Ensuring there is safe and appropriate social and emergency housing for anyone who may need it means that those who are at risk of gender-based violence will be more able to leave an abusive situation or relationship earlier. This is especially the case for those who struggle to access social and emergency housing because of restrictions placed on accessing welfare and support by violent border regimes.

Gives power to communities: Increasing social housing, so that there is enough housing for all, means that communities are more likely to live in stable, safe and secure environments. This in turn has the potential to reduce and prevent the root causes of gender-based violence and thus increase safety and wellbeing for all.

Removes power from policing: Increasing safe housing options also has the potential to reduce dependency on the police, prisons and courts to intervene in gender-based violence.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

This strategy requires that housing providers are not funded by - and thus do not share information with - the police, prisons, immigration services and courts. Otherwise, this housing will not be safe for those who are at risk of criminalisation. This strategy therefore also necessitates a dismantling of violent border regimes to ensure that those from migrant communities are able to access appropriate housing safely and without fear of deportation.



Build long term economic justice 🌸

Examples

Universal basic income (guaranteed income for all) in addition to: labour rights; housing for all; freedom of movement across borders; free quality health care for all; disability justice; environmental and climate justice; economic and land reparations for the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism.

Purpose

Removes power from policing: Building long term strategies for economic justice is essential for creating safety and wellbeing for all. This strategy can reduce funding to the police and criminal legal system, by diverting resources from the criminal legal system, the military, border enforcement and other harmful institutions.

Longer term economic security reduces reliance on police and criminal 'justice' because it decreases the poverty and deprivation that underpins and exacerbates many forms of harm (including gender-based violence).

Gives power to communities: Economic justice means reorganising our economies to ensure that everyone (not just those deemed 'deserving') has their economic, health and wellbeing needs met in a sustainable, just, and non-exploitative way. Economic justice seeks long term flourishing for everyone, meeting people's needs outside of punitive institutions and practices. Economic justice means care at both individual and collective levels.

Creates possibility: The safest communities are those with the most resources, not the most police. Building long term economic justice means resourcing education and healthcare provision towards reducing inequalities and structural issues, rather than focusing on 'bad' or 'dangerous' individuals. Ensuring basic economic needs are met means survivors have more freedom to leave abusive situations and can better protect themselves from harm. Economic security for all can prevent violence by reducing financial stress conditions that escalate harm.

Cautions and potential pitfalls

Economic restructuring can seem daunting and may lapse into either superficial changes or postponing large scale changes to an always distant future. Narrow economic framings can also reduce discussions to a limited cost-benefit analysis (i.e. can we afford this? Is it cost-effective?) which measures outcomes in purely financial, rather than holistic, ways: this obscures wider benefits such as long term environmental sustainability, long term health and wellbeing, reparation of racial injustice, etc. Economic strategies also cannot be one-size-fits-all, and must address the specific ways that marginalised groups are impacted.

Further resources

Interested in reading more about abolishing the police, prison and carceral systems?

Aviah Sarah Day and Shanice McBean, 2022. [Abolition revolution](#). Pluto Press.

Koshka Duff, 2021. [Abolishing the police](#). Dog Section Press.

Cradle Community, 2021. [Brick by brick: how we build a world without prisons](#). Hajar Press

Jared Knowles and Andrea J. Ritchie, 2021. [Cops don't stop violence: combating narratives used to defend police instead of defunding them](#).

Sarah Lamble, 2021. [The false promise of hate crime laws](#). Abolitionist Futures

Leah Cowan, 2024. [Why would feminists trust the police?](#) A tangled history of resistance and complicity. Verso Books.

Interested in learning more about transformative justice?

adrienne maree brown, Mia Mingus, Stas Schmiedt, Ann Russo, Esteban Kelly, Martina Kartman, Priya Rai, and Shira Hassan, 2020. [What is transformative justice?](#).

Mariame Kaba, 2020. [Transform harm: a resource hub about ending violence](#).

Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2020. [Beyond Survival: strategies and stories from the transformative justice movement](#).

Xhercis Méndez in conversation with Dean Spade, 2022. [Organising transformative justice responses to gender-based violence and campus sexual violence](#).

Interested in exploring practical resources on abolitionist responses to violence?

Mariame Kaba and Eva Nagao, 2021. [What about the rapists? An abolitionist FAQ zine](#).

Creative Interventions, 2021. [Creative interventions toolkit](#).

Community Justice Exchange, 2022. [Safety planning and intimate partner violence](#).

Mimi E. Kim, Megyung Chung, Shira Hassan, and Andrea J. Ritchie, 2021. [Defund the police - invest in community care](#).

Interrupting Criminalization, Project Nia, and Critical Resistance, 2022. [So is this actually an abolitionist proposal or strategy?](#).

Ruairi White, 2022. [Reimagining safety beyond safeguarding](#).

Fireweed Collective, 2022. [Crisis toolkit](#).

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