

Addressing Gender-Based Violence

Carceral Reforms vs Abolitionist Strategies

This chart compares different strategies for addressing gender-based violence.

It includes 'carceral reforms' which expand the harms of the criminal legal system and 'abolitionist strategies' that do not rely on police and prisons for safety. Abolitionist strategies seek to address all forms of gender-based violence including by individuals, groups, institutions, and the state.

Abolitionist strategies invest in community support, collective safety, and holistic healing.

Further information about each strategy is available at: abolitionistfutures.com/gender-based-violence

Carceral Reforms

Does this...	Reduce funding to the police and criminal legal system?	Reduce the scope and scale of prisons and police power?	Challenge the notion that prisons and police increase safety?	Support wider institutions (eg. education, health) to reduce harm?	Increase safety and well-being for all?
1. More police in public spaces	NO. More police requires increases in police budgets.	NO. More police in public spaces increases police power by expanding their numbers and presence in communities.	NO. More police in public spaces reinforces the myth that more police means more safety from gender-based violence.	NO. Social institutions may defer to or partner with the police instead of proactively addressing root causes of violence.	NO. Police in public spaces give a sense of safety for some while harassing and criminalising racialised and marginalised communities.
2. Police reforms	NO. Police reforms and training on gender-based violence require additional funding and resources.	NO. Pushing for reform falsely suggest that police can deliver support, which can expand their powers into health and social care.	NO. This attributes police failures around gender-based violence to poor training or 'bad apples', when they are institutional and systemic.	NO. Other institutions and organisations are often co-opted into co-delivery of training and reform, draining time and resources.	NO. Decades of police training and reform have done little to increase community safety, particularly for gender-based violence survivors.
3. New criminal offences	NO. New laws increase budgets for training, resources and consultants, alongside increased funding for prisons and probation systems.	NO. New crimes expand police power and influence, and present criminalisation (often of social issues) as the solution to violence.	NO. New criminal offences reinforce the myth that criminal-legal enforcement increases safety, despite this not being the case.	NO. New offences frame harm as a police matter and absolve wider institutions from addressing it; this can lead to defunding violence prevention.	NO. Existing and new offences do not prevent gender-based violence, but will criminalise marginalised communities.
4. Harsher punishments for gender-based violence	NO. Longer sentences require increased funding to support expanding prison populations.	NO. Longer sentences contribute to the increased scope, scale and power of police and prisons.	NO. Calling for harsher punishment legitimates the carceral system when there is no credible evidence that longer sentences work as deterrents.	NO. Longer sentences exacerbate systemic inequalities. They expose incarcerated people to violence, which wider institutions must then mitigate.	NO. Longer sentences create harm for incarcerated people and their families, including destitution and (if migrants) risk of deportation.
5. Zero tolerance policies	NO. Zero tolerance policies require resources for enforcement, which are often linked to policing and criminal 'justice' measures.	NO. Zero tolerance policies often lead to social exclusion, which makes people more vulnerable to policing and criminalisation.	NO. They reinforce the notion that punishment and exclusion can address problematic behaviour and structural issues.	NO. Zero tolerance policies can increase the power of social institutions to punish and exclude.	NO. They often target those who are already marginalised. Automatic escalation can deter reporting and undermine survivors' agency.
6. Institution-centred safeguarding and mandatory reporting policies	NO. Punitive safeguarding and mandatory reporting funnel resources to police and divert resources away from broader care and support options.	NO. Many safeguarding policies are linked to police surveillance and entwine care systems with policing, increasing its scale and scope.	NO. Mandatory reporting reinforces the idea that we must outsource problems to carceral institutions or face punishment.	NO. Institutional safeguarding often outsources problems to the police and requires institutions to do surveillance, reducing survivor-centred responses.	NO. Institutional safeguarding tends to target racialised groups; violence goes unreported as oppressed people do not feel safe. It does not address causes of harm.
7. More funding for criminal 'justice' related services for survivors	NO. Funding to services such as women's centres, when contingent on engaging with police and courts, expands the criminal legal system.	NO. More funding expands the ways police are entrenched in gender-based violence services, which increases police power over survivors.	NO. Services tied to criminal 'justice' reinforce the idea that criminalisation is the answer to gender-based violence and reporting the only route to justice.	NO. Such funding requires that services meet police priorities, which does not reduce harm and saps resources from other supports.	NO. Criminal 'justice' agendas are not survivor-centred and do not increase safety. They fail survivors, particularly those not seen as 'ideal' victims.

Abolitionist Strategies

Does this...	Reduce funding to the police and criminal legal system?	Reduce the scope and scale of prisons and police power?	Challenge the notion that prisons and police increase safety?	Support wider institutions (eg. education, health) to reduce harm?	Increase safety and well-being for all?
1. Community-based night-time safety programmes	YES. By diverting funding and resources that would have been used for policing into community safety programmes.	YES. These programmes help to prevent and address harm, reducing the need to call on the police.	YES. These programmes encourage us to think about how communities can prevent and address gender-based harm.	YES. Increasing skills to intervene and prevent harm can reduce reliance on punitive institutional responses within health and education.	YES. Community safety reduces police capacity to inflict harm and increases community capacity to prevent and address gender-based violence.
2. Violence de-escalation training	YES. By diverting funding and resources that would have been used for policing into community-based interventions.	YES. Violence de-escalation training reduces the need to call on the police in gender-based violence situations.	YES. These programmes encourage us to think more about how communities can prevent and address gender-based harm.	YES. Effective violence de-escalation efforts which are organisationally embedded can support institutions to reduce harm.	YES. Violence de-escalation reduces police capacity to inflict harm and increases community capacity to prevent it.
3. Non-police-based crisis intervention teams	YES. By diverting funding and resources that would have been used for policing into non-police-based gender violence interventions.	YES. These types of interventions reduce the need to call on the police in a crisis.	YES. By affirming that the police are not best placed to respond to gender-based violence or address concerns for people in crisis.	DEPENDS. These can increase the capacity of wider institutions such as education and healthcare to reduce harm, but this relies on interventions not being punitive.	YES. Non-police crisis intervention reduces police capacity to inflict harm and increases community capacity to prevent and address gender-based violence.
4. Repeal laws that criminalise and punish survival	YES. Much funding is spent policing people in criminalised economies, including those who use drugs, are in insecure housing, and are migrants.	YES. This would reduce channels through which police come into contact with people whose survival is criminalised, including those fleeing gender-based violence.	YES. This challenges the notion that criminalisation is an appropriate response to modes of survival that exist outside the law.	YES. Repealing these laws reduces the impetus for partnerships between service organisations and criminal 'justice' agencies.	YES. Laws that criminalise survival can increase people's exposure to violence. Repealing requires that welfare issues be addressed outside of policing.
5. Mutual aid & community support	YES. Enhanced community support means less use of policing so funds can be redirected from criminal 'justice' to the community.	YES. Developing community connections and care for each other reduces the need to call on police.	YES. This encourages us to think more about how communities can directly prevent and address gender-based violence.	YES. Focusing on community initiatives can reduce regulatory and punitive agendas in healthcare, education and housing.	YES. Communities can provide support to survivors and shift the attitudes and behaviour of people at risk of doing harm.
6. Transformative justice (TJ)	YES. TJ means less reliance on the criminal legal system and less demand to fund that system.	YES. TJ initiatives do not involve police or the criminal legal system and so reduce our reliance on them.	YES. TJ challenges the notion that police and prisons make us safe, and builds community safety and accountability.	YES. TJ requires communities to build capacity for violence prevention, safety planning, healing and support for all.	YES. Because TJ seeks to address immediate harms and change their underlying conditions, it ultimately increases safety and well-being.
7. Mental health support for all	YES. More resources for support and counselling can divert funds away from policing and the criminal legal system.	YES. Such support reduces police involvement by preventing crisis incidents that occur when mental health and material needs are not met.	YES. This affirms that police involvement is not appropriate for people in crisis or with ongoing mental health issues.	DEPENDS. It can reduce harm but only if mental health supports are decoupled from punitive and criminalising approaches.	YES. It requires that mental health and policing are separate, and supports both survivors and people at risk of perpetrating harm.
8. Prevention-focussed education	YES. More resources for prevention-based education work can redirect funding away from criminal legal responses.	YES. Educational prevention work reduces reliance on policing and criminal 'justice'.	YES. Education can directly challenge this notion, helping us understand the root causes of violence and how to prevent it.	YES. Prevention-focused, liberatory education can address wider social issues, rather than working to narrow government agendas.	YES. When focused on structural and social change (rather than individualising harm and violence), education can impact widely.
9. Funding for support not connected to the criminal legal system	YES. This diverts resources from criminal legal programmes to community-based survivor support.	YES. When support is disentangled from criminal 'justice', police have less influence on how support is provided.	YES. When support is disconnected from criminal legal systems, it shows that healing and justice are not dependent on punishment.	YES. When funding is not tied to criminal legal 'service delivery' targets, there is greater freedom to expand the scope of support to survivors.	YES. Survivors not seen as 'ideal victims' can seek help without legal judgement. People who commit harm can seek help without fear of criminalisation.
10. Housing for all	YES. More resources for housing can mean diverting funding away from policing and the criminal legal system.	YES. Providing housing reduces police contact with people facing homelessness, including survivors fleeing domestic violence.	YES. This challenges the notion that police are the appropriate response to domestic violence, poverty and homelessness.	DEPENDS. If emergency housing is decoupled from immigration enforcement, it can reduce multi-agency partnerships that entangle welfare with policing.	YES. Housing helps people leave violent situations, prevents financial stress, and keeps people off the streets - reducing the risk of violence.
11. Build long term economic justice	YES. This requires diversion of funding from the criminal legal system, the military, border enforcement and other harmful institutions.	YES. It reduces reliance on criminal 'justice' because it decreases the poverty/deprivation that can underpin and exacerbate violence.	YES. It shows that the safest communities are those with the most resources, not the most police.	YES. Economic justice means resourcing health, education and housing to reduce inequalities and prevent harm.	YES. Economic security specifically gives survivors freedom to leave abusive situations, and generally reduces violence in society.