

The need for One Health systems-thinking approaches to understand multiscale dissemination of antimicrobial resistance

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WHO LIES BENEATH? REFLECTIONS ON SCOTLAND'S UNSEEN CHANGE MAKERS

Katy Proctor

Abstract

As a former Rape Crisis and Women's Aid support worker turned feminist academic, I have had the privilege of working with some of the most inspirational and courageous women in Scotland. I see these women as the unsung heroines who are ultimately responsible for changing Scotland and making it internationally renowned for innovative and progressive practice in preventing Gender-Based Violence. For decades, women have worked as volunteers and/or paid staff to support survivors, run refuges, helplines, and campaigns whilst also training local authorities, police, and other agencies. Without them, we would have no women's support organisations, many more victims would remain in relationships with abusive men, and many more women would be dead at the hands of their partners or ex-partners. Yet, the organisations they run are desperately under-funded and many workers are on insecure contracts with low pay – a form of structural violence that reinforces gender inequality in Scotland. Equally important and unrecognised are the victim/survivors who have raised their voices to ask for help, to resist their abusers, and who risk everything to try to secure their survival. Without them we wouldn't know about the horrors many endure, and many others would not have been inspired to work tirelessly to change Scotland for the better. Collectively and individually, their achievements are significant. This article

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explores their resistance and resilience that has allowed Scotland to earn its stellar reputation.

Keywords: gender-based violence; survivors; inequality; resistance

Introduction

It is likely that we have all heard the saying ‘Behind every successful man, stands a woman’. However, having had my roots established and firmly embedded in the Scottish Third Sector working for the elimination of violence against women (VAW), I prefer to reword the adage;

*Behind every successful and visible woman stands
an invisible collective of women’s resistance.*

The edit is not as simple as the original maxim, but neither is the work that thousands of women have done for decades in efforts to end Gender-Based Violence (GBV). We have witnessed significant moments in recent years which signal substantial progress towards women’s equality in Scotland, many of which have focused on GBV. Since 2000 Scotland has defined domestic abuse as a form of GBV (Scottish Executive, 2000) recognising its gendered dynamics and we have ‘Equally Safe’ – a national strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls (Scottish Government, 2018). Within the Scottish Criminal Justice System (SCJS) there has been recognition of coercive control and course of conduct crimes in legislation such as the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act (2018) and in the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act (2010) where stalking has been criminalised. In 2013 a joint protocol between Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal was launched to enhance collaboration in investigating domestic abuse. This was later revised to include guidance on dual reporting (Police Scotland and COPFS, 2019).

Many of these initiatives and others have been visibly championed and driven by the increasing number of women in high profile and powerful positions (Barker & Jurasz, 2022). Often it can appear that only a handful of powerful people are responsible for these developments. Our current cultural need for short, sharp soundbites means the media report on these issues throwing in eye-catching and recognisable names such as Nicola Sturgeon and Baroness Helena Kennedy. Both women have fought hard against gender inequality and discrimination to not only be seen and heard but to prevail and thrive. As impressive and hard-won as their achievements are, however, they could not have succeeded without the considerable efforts of thousands upon thousands of unseen and uncelebrated women. Scotland’s internationally

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renowned reputation in tackling VAW (Lombard and Whiting, 2017) could not exist without these invisible women having provided a sturdy and unfaltering bedrock on which innovative policies and legislation could be placed.

Who Lies Beneath?

With the first Women's Aid groups opening in Scotland in the early 1970s, 2023 marks 50 years since the first refuge opened in Edinburgh in 1973, and 2024 marks 50 years since the first in Glasgow (Scottish Women's Aid, 2017). The first Rape Crisis centres are not far off their 50th anniversary having been established in Glasgow and Edinburgh in 1976 and 1978 respectively (Maitland, 2009). Today there are 34 Women's Aid groups and 17 Rape Crisis centres across Scotland and many other specialist organisations supporting victim/survivors of GBV. If we consider the number of women working within these organisations alone, either in a voluntary capacity or paid workers, we can begin to appreciate how significant this workforce is. Each centre or organisation is likely to have children's workers, women's workers, outreach workers, workers in management, Trustees, and more. I have had the privilege and pleasure of working with many of these organisations over the course of 20 years – some as an employee support worker for women, children, and young people (CYP), some in the capacity as a Trustee or other voluntary role, and many others through delivering training to their workers and volunteers or during the course of my research. Consequently, I have witnessed first-hand the commitment, passion, and endless hours that workers invest in the organisations, women and CYP they support. I have also experienced the kindness and generosity in which they do it. It is rare, however, for this to be acknowledged in the public eye and all too often for their expertise to be ignored.

The structural violences that these workers experience on a day-to-day basis are enormous. I started working in the sector fully prepared to feel anger and frustration at perpetrators because of the way they treated the women and children in their lives. I was not prepared, however, to feel the rage and hopelessness triggered by the institutions, systems, and processes failing to keep women safe and perpetrators accountable. I did not have the emotional or physical resilience needed to remain working in the sector and had to leave after experiencing burn out, depression, and anxiety. I had to find alternative employment that allowed me to continue working for women's equality but gave some respite from my own feelings of hopelessness. I have yet to escape the anger and doubt I ever will. There are countless other women, though, who find the strength to keep battling without respite maintaining their rage against

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the misogynist machine. And what these women achieve is nothing short of miraculous, they can turn their hands to pretty much anything.

The women's support sector is a collective of thousands of volunteers and paid workers. They provide emotional support and counselling to women who are fleeing violence, they negotiate housing applications, benefit systems, school applications, liaise with police, social work, immigration, criminal courts, civil courts, provide advocacy, provide information, maintain records, write reports, run support groups, run children's groups, apply for funding, raise money, maintain premises, create gardens and other relaxation spaces, provide and attend training, complete vocational and other qualifications, create and manage websites, maintain a social media presence, engage in research, conduct their own research, chair boards, volunteer as Trustees, provide legal advice, work weekends and evenings, engage with the press, provide on call services, write publications, manage their own organisations, campaign, organise events and protests, contribute to government consultations and much, much more. Many have to do this work anonymously to minimise any risk to their own safety from perpetrators and their cronies objecting to the support given to those they choose to victimise. I myself have been followed by a perpetrator who was hoping to track down a woman he was abusing who I had supported to leave. I have heard about much worse experiences from other workers who have experienced threats, intimidation, and smashed car windows. In any other career, there would be sympathy for a workforce that had to deal with constant risk of abuse from the public and poster campaigns expressing zero tolerance. For women's support organisations, it is just part of the job that women must manage and cope with. In any other career, their specialist knowledge of the psychological, practical, and legal issues and challenges that women and children face would deem them experts in multiple fields and disciplines. They would be highly paid as expert consultants. They would be championed as heroines. And yet they do all of this behind the scenes, working beyond any hours they are contracted for, with inadequate resourcing, because they care deeply about other women who live routinely with fear, violence, and the consequences of abuse. Many are doing this in the absence of any pay, others are on short term contracts dependent on insecure and short-term funding to keep them employed and with premises to work in.

There can't be many who genuinely believe that this is the way things should be, and yet it continues. Structural violence, conceptualised by Galtung (1969), has been defined as:

... physical and psychological harm that results from exploitive and unjust social, political and economic systems. This is not necessarily

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carried out by individuals but is hidden to a greater or lesser extent in structures that prevent people from realizing their potential. [...] Unemployment, job insecurity, cuts in public spending, destruction of institutions capable of defending social welfare, dispossession, and violation of rights – these are social harms that could be encompassed within ‘violence’.

(Ray, 2018: 9)

If you accept this definition, then it isn't a significant leap to accept that the women working in these organisations are living and working in situations of structural violence and social injustice. In essence, social justice only exists when there is an egalitarian distribution of power and resources (Galtung, 1969). It speaks volumes, therefore, that the Third Sector has the highest gender pay gap across income distribution (Brett and Macfarlane, 2022). It reflects also, the wider cultural gender inequalities in Scotland where women are much more likely than men to work in poorly paid and under-valued sectors and have lower average earnings, and carers are taken for granted (Brett and Macfarlane, 2022). Regretfully though, I have to admit that this all makes sense – we know that GBV is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. The violence maintains the inequality and the inequality maintains the violence. It is not possible to have one without the other. If as a culture, we don't value women, a sector that employs women to empower women is, at best, surplus to requirements and not worthy of significant investment. Without significant investment there are substantive challenges to a sector trying to demonstrate it is far from surplus. If a sector can't unequivocally prove its own value, it's not going to be taken seriously. If that sector comprises predominantly women, they too lack value, and their insignificance becomes justified. What better way to maintain a status quo of inequality? If the system had been planned and implemented by a Bond villain, they would be considered an evil genius.

For me the reinforcing cycle that justifies the inequality, highlights the symbolic violence which contributes to and reinforces the structural violence. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence is defined as 'the imposition on subordinated groups by the dominant class of an ideology which legitimates and naturalizes the status quo' (Oxford Reference, 2023). Schubert (2012, p.179) offers the following explanation.

... contemporary social hierarchies and social inequalities, as well as the suffering that they cause, are produced and maintained less by physical force than by forms of symbolic domination. [Bourdieu] refers to the results of such domination as symbolic violence.

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If a sector doing such vital work in the field of basic human rights can be so under-valued, then the plethora of women that it supports must be viewed in these structures and systems by many as having little to no value. The majority truly are invisible in society. They are enduring violence and abuse at the hands of those closest to them and they are enduring the structural violence that prevents them from reaching their potential and they are enduring the symbolic violence that prevents change. To all intents and purposes, they are seen as beneath everyone in the social hierarchy but in reality their value is great.

These are the women that I want to celebrate most vociferously because against all the odds, they are surviving, and they are contributing more to society than we can express. Despite their personal challenges they are living and breathing resilience by getting up each day, taking their kids to school, and going to work. Some raise their heads even further above the parapet and speak up in the ultimate demonstration of resistance. By asking for help, by sharing their experiences, they are inspiring others to forge ahead and fight for equality. Without them we would have no women's support sector and we would have no progress.

Conclusion

Despite the adversity, women continue to push for change, to empower others, and to resist and escape the abuse that they endure, often at great cost and sacrifice to themselves. They are the drivers of the movement towards women's equality, the end of gender-based violence and they are literally saving lives whilst they are doing it. Without them we wouldn't know the names 'Sturgeon' or 'Baroness Kennedy' or have legislation criminalising domestic abuse and stalking. They are the women who lie beneath. And they have worth. As individuals their voices have been muted to a whisper but collectively their voices can be deafening – if you care to listen, you too will hear them roar.

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