

APPG on Domestic Violence

Tackling Misogyny as a Hate Crime

5-6pm, Wednesday 29 March 2017

Committee Room 20, House of Commons

The APPG on Domestic Violence 'Tackling Misogyny as a Hate Crime' was convened to consider how misogyny can be tackled by classifying it as a hate crime, following the landmark decision to do so by Nottinghamshire Police in July 2016.

The meeting was chaired by Maria Miller MP. Members also in attendance were:

- Sarah Champion – MP for Rotherham and Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities
- Vernon Coaker - MP for Gedling

Speakers at the meeting were:

- Dr Vanita Sundaram – Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of York
- Melanie Jeffs – Centre Manager, Nottingham Women's Centre
- Rosemary Mansfield – Survivor of Misogyny Hate Crime
- Polly Neate – Chief Executive, Women's Aid
- Chief Constable Sue Fish OBE – Nottinghamshire Police

Maria Miller MP, Welcome and Introduction

Maria Miller welcomed the audience and briefly introduced the speakers.

Dr Vanita Sundaram – Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of York

Dr Vanita Sundaram provided a snapshot of her research on sexism, sexual harassment and violence in education. She explained that misogyny, as described in this context, essentially centres on daily micro-aggressions which include abusive language, harassment and sexualised and physical violence. These forms of sexist and sexualised harassment are widespread among young adults, secondary school pupils and even younger children. Young people often justify and excuse a range of misogynist practices, such as sexist language, through "lad culture". Vanita stated that it is necessary to categorise these behaviours specifically as forms of gender-based violence, which control young girls' behaviour and teach them how to conform to normative expectations of 'femininity' and 'girlhood'. She argued that classifying and criminalising these behaviours as misogynist can help to ensure they are no longer viewed as isolated incidents of harassment which can easily be dismissed, but as part of a continuum of violence against women and girls (VAWG). She also called for intersectional approach, which recognises the different types, experiences and impact of misogyny on different groups who suffer additional forms of discrimination.

Melanie Jeffs – Centre Manager, Nottingham Women's Centre (NWC)

Melanie Jeffs outlined that the decision in Nottingham had originated from NWC's research, which had found that women in the area were experiencing misogyny as a form of hate crime - i.e. it is perpetrated against them *because* of their gender. As the experience of misogyny starts from a

very young age, by the time women reach adulthood it is accepted and seen as part of their lives. This means that women often then don't report criminal offences, including sexual harassment, because they aren't seen as serious enough to report to the police. She described misogyny as the "soil" in which violence against women and girls (VAWG) grows - it is about entitlement, the attitude of the offender, and the impact upon the person who is often unable to leave the experience behind.

Mel stated that classifying misogyny as a hate crime is an important measure to increase women's confidence in reporting all offences, and enables the police to deal robustly with the root causes of VAWG. She discussed the impact in Nottingham one year on: there have been 100 reports (which is likely to be the "tip of the iceberg", as hate crime is significantly underreported); women have reported they have more confidence as the police understand and take them seriously; and it has helped women to recognise and define what is not acceptable in the wider community. She quoted one woman who had stated the change had helped her "walk taller" in Nottingham.

Rosemary Mansfield - Survivor of Misogyny Hate Crime

Rosemary Mansfield explained that her experience of misogyny hate crime is typical, given that women continually experience verbal and physical harassment because of their gender. She shared her personal experience of reporting a misogynist incident in Nottingham. A man at a building site had shouted obscenities at her, and a number of other men on the site were staring at her and laughing. She shared how she felt a sense of fear and anxiety as she had to walk back past the same site; she had been intimidated and reminded that, as a woman, she is vulnerable.

She explained that Nottinghamshire Police had informed the building site manager of the incident, and taken steps to ensure the men were aware the behaviour was unacceptable. Rosemary stated the police response had exceeded her expectations - they were well trained, supportive and understanding - and her experience of reporting had been positive and empowering. She believes that classifying misogyny as a hate crime is a strong statement in support of women, and she fully supports it rolling out across the UK.

Polly Neate - Chief Executive, Women's Aid

Polly explained that hate crime has a meaning beyond the individual. It is part of a system of prejudice, unequal treatment, and violence towards a person because of their identity. She explained that while categorising misogyny as a hate crime won't stop it from occurring completely, it sends a clear message that society does not condone this behaviour - which is vital for preventing domestic abuse and VAWG in the long term. Misogynist attitudes towards women are socially constructed, and therefore society can change them.

She noted that prevention measures, such as compulsory Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), police awareness schemes, and Women's Aid's Ask Me project, are expanding. But there is still a need for a whole-society approach to understanding and preventing violence against women and girls, including by local commissioners, who frequently deny the gender dynamic of domestic abuse and refuse to see it as part of the spectrum of gender based violence. Polly saw the classification of misogyny as a hate crime as a critical preventative measure in this regard, and called for it to be rolled out nationally in order to tackle the root causes of VAWG. Misogyny is not only irritating, it is dangerous.

Chief Constable Sue Fish OBE - Nottinghamshire Police

Chief Constable Sue Fish explained why the force had taken the decision: it was based on the clear findings of the NWC research which showed that women experience misogyny as a form of hate

crime. There is therefore a clear need for the police to deal with it in order to uphold their public protection duty. The policy was important both to her as Chief Constable, responsible for operational issues, and to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), who sets police strategy and is accountable to the electorate.

Sue explained the crucial role that training played in the implementation of the change. Training was provided to those in the control room, response teams, and neighbourhood and community support officers. The specialist trainer outlined both the research and policy rationale, and shared women's lived experiences of misogyny. Sue stated that the training helped to place the 'everyday' experiences of misogyny within the spectrum of VAWG offences. In terms of impact, the policy has made a real difference in reducing sexism within the organisational culture of the police force and has reinforced their approach and standards for tackling hate crime. Feedback on the police response has also been impressive, in terms of the officers' empathy and treatment of victims.

Sue explained that five other forces had already moved to classify misogyny as a hate crime, and stated her commitment to see the policy adopted nationally. She stated that there was clear parliamentary and central government interest in the change - and, given the clear evidence base, it was a question of when, not if, this would happen.

Discussion

There was a clear consensus from the panel and contributors that this policy has been an important step forward for tackling street harassment and abuse, and challenging wider sexism and objectification of women in society. The discussion focused on:

- The barriers to adopting the policy within police forces - including rising demand and decreasing resources, the increasing complexity of tackling modern crime, and reputational and public relations issues. It was highlighted that MPs could play a key role in pressing local PCCs and Chief Constables to implement the policy.
- Concerns were raised that if the policy was adopted nationally, it would be termed "gender based hate crime" because of a view that men should be treated equally under the law. However, this would fail to address misogyny as a structural problem, and could lead to widespread reporting of misandry, when in reality it is very rare indeed for men to be victims of hate crime because of their gender specifically. It was also highlighted that, when talking about race hate crime, anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic hate crime were used to describe specific forms of the crime. Homophobic hate crime can be recognised without a need to see heterosexual people as at risk because of their sexual orientation. There was a call for further legal clarification on this point.
- Gendered online abuse is a clear form of misogynist hate crime, but it was highlighted that evidencing this can be highly challenging. Nottinghamshire Police Force have included online forms of misogynist hate crime within their policy. The police recognised that this was a challenging area, but considered it important for women to be able to report it.
- It was acknowledged that a 'twin-track' approach (compulsory RSE within schools - which tackles misogyny at the youngest age, and the classification of misogyny as a hate crime to tackle the issue within communities) would be a real step forward for preventing VAWG.

Actions

- The APPG on Domestic Violence to provide MPs on the Group with a letter about the classification of misogyny as a hate crime, which can be shared with local PCCs and Chief Constables.
- The APPG on Domestic Violence to seek further legal guidance on whether the term 'gender based hate crime' would be required if this policy was to be adopted nationally.