

**PROMOTING GENDER JUSTICE WITHIN  
THE CLINICAL CURRICULUM: EVALUATING STUDENT  
PARTICIPATION IN THE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST  
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE CAMPAIGN**

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*Abstract*

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an international campaign which runs annually from 25 November (The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December (Human Rights Day)<sup>1</sup>. The campaign aims to raise awareness of and stimulate action to end violence against women and girls globally. The issue of gender violence has gained worldwide prominence in the last few decades with the emergence of legislative frameworks including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Istanbul Convention<sup>2</sup>. More recently, there has been a policy focus on education as a tool for raising awareness of gender-based violence. The recent public unrest regarding sexual harassment, epitomised by the ‘#Me too’<sup>3</sup> and ‘Times Up’<sup>4</sup> movements, demonstrate that gender-based violence remains an everyday reality for many women and girls. In England and Wales, there has been an increase in applications to the Family Court for domestic abuse

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<sup>1</sup> More information about the 16 Days campaign can be found at the website: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism>

<sup>2</sup> Fully referred to as The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Council of Europe Treaty Series Number 210)

<sup>3</sup> See more about the movement at: <https://metoomvmt.org>

<sup>4</sup> See more about the movement at: <https://www.timesupnow.com>

protection,<sup>5</sup> however this has come at a time where cuts to the availability of legal aid have led to concerns about the ability of survivors to seek access to justice<sup>6</sup>.

During the 2017-2018 academic year the authors designed and delivered a range of teaching activities for clinical students as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. The aims were to increase student engagement with issues of gender justice and develop their understanding of the different forms of gender violence, the domestic and international frameworks for protecting victims and the roles that different organisations play in achieving this. It was hoped that this would better prepare students for the realities of family practice in England and Wales. Surveys and a semi-structured interview were used to gain insights into the student experience of participating in the campaign. This article will address how their participation went some way to meeting the objectives set out above in that students demonstrated increased knowledge of civil and criminal law relating to gender-based violence, developed their critical lawyering skills and competency in working with vulnerable clients and contributed to wider efforts to advance gender justice. Further the article will draw on the ancillary advantages of participating in the campaign, including improved client outcomes and reputational benefit. The limitations of the 16 Days campaign will also be acknowledged along with ideas for developing the programme in the future.

## INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) can be defined as “any interpersonal, organisational, or politically oriented violation perpetrated against people due to their gender identity, sexual orientation, or location in the hierarchy of male-dominated social systems”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Justice and National Statistics (29 March 2018) *Family Court Statistics Quarterly: October – December 2017*.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Amnesty International UK (October 2016) ‘Cuts that Hurt: The Impact of Legal Aid Cuts in England on Access to Justice’ ([www.amnesty.org.uk/cutsthathurt](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/cutsthathurt)) and The Law Society of England and Wales (June 2017) ‘Access Denied? LASPO Four Years On: Law Society Review’ ([www.lawsociety.org.uk](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk))

<sup>7</sup> O’Toole, L. Schiffman, J. Edwards, M. (2007) *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. New York: New York University Press

Within international law, it is regarded as encompassing “all acts of violence which may result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering... such as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”<sup>8</sup>. GBV is often synonymous with ‘violence against women’ because acts such as human trafficking, domestic servitude, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and harassment are disproportionately perpetrated against women<sup>9</sup>. GBV is viewed as an expression of gender inequality and a human rights infringement because it often stems from and reflects structural power inequalities which discriminate against women<sup>10</sup>.

This article will examine how the elimination of GBV is increasingly recognised as a priority for the international community. In part, this has arisen organically through a series of grassroots social media campaigns following the allegations of sexual abuse against Harvey Weinstein and other male celebrities<sup>11</sup>. However, there are also legal frameworks which require states to pursue a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and put in place measures to protect women from domestic violence and unequal treatment<sup>12</sup>.

In particular, there is a new legislative and policy focus on educating the general public through awareness raising campaigns as a means to challenge understandings of gender

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<sup>8</sup> See Article 3a, Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention)

<sup>9</sup> The European Institute for Gender Inequality’ (2015) “Strategic Framework on Violence against Women 2015-2018” Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<sup>10</sup> See the European Institute for Gender Inequality (2014) “Estimating the Costs of Gender-Based Violence in the European Union” Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the ‘Me Too’ and ‘Time’s Up’ movements at <https://www.timesupnow.com> and <https://metoomvmt.org>

<sup>12</sup> See Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and General Recommendation No 19 of the CEDAW Committee on violence against Women.

norms, gender stereotypes and to promote a better understanding of legal rights and responsibilities with regards to GBV. This arguably reflects the current climate of austerity in which the Government are keen to reduce the economic cost of GBV and comply with their international obligations in the most cost effective manner<sup>13</sup>. Further, the focus on public legal education is revealing at a time when many victims are struggling to enforce their rights and seek justice through the legal system as a result of the cuts to legal aid implemented by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO).

Alongside public legal education the demand for legal services from law school based clinics demonstrates they make an important contribution to facilitating access to justice in areas where public funding is no longer available and for those clients where paying privately for advice is not feasible. This is particularly important in the context of GBV where women (and in particular Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME)) women face multiple disadvantages. Not only are they more likely to be victims of GBV but they have been disproportionately affected by the legal aid cuts and are therefore more likely to require the assistance of law school clinics<sup>14</sup>. This is reflected in statistics which report that in the year ending April 2017, 58% of clinic users were women and 48% were from BAME communities<sup>15</sup>. Whilst there are no figures directly relating to GBV, 67% of clinics

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<sup>13</sup> Domestic violence alone costs the UK economy £16 billion per annum – as reported in Siddiqui, H (2018) 'Counting the Cost: BME women and gender-based violence in the UK'. IPPR Progressive Review Volume 24 Issue 4. pp 362 -368.

<sup>14</sup> Sandhu, K. Stephenson, M.A. (2015) 'Open space layers of inequality – a human rights and equality impact assessment of the public spending cuts on black, Asian and minority ethnic women in Coventry'. Feminist Review Volume 109. pp 169-179.

<sup>15</sup> LawWorks Clinic Network Report April 2016 – March 2017 (December 2017) 'Analysis of pro bono legal advice work being done across the LawWorks clinic network between April 2016 and March 2017'. Published by LawWorks.

reported seeing an increase in the number of clients in crisis or distress<sup>16</sup>. It is possible these figures may include victims of domestic abuse on the basis that over a quarter of the work carried out by clinics relates to family law<sup>17</sup>. This would reflect the authors' own experiences where there has been a considerable increase in the number of domestic abuse survivors making enquiries at their clinic. Further, the authors have been contacted by three domestic violence organisations over the last year who have wished to establish links with the clinic. They have sought advice on behalf of their service users and legal training for their volunteers. There is evidence that clinics in the USA are engaging with work relating to GBV<sup>18</sup> however to date, there has been no evidence that this is being replicated in the United Kingdom.

Against the backdrop of unmet legal need, new domestic laws in relation to GBV and a policy focus on awareness raising, the authors, who are clinical supervisors at a full representation law clinic at Northumbria University, identified a critical need to incorporate training about GBV within the family law clinical curriculum. This was achieved through accepting instructions on client cases relating to GBV and setting up a referral system for enquiries with a local domestic abuse organisation for those clients

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<sup>16</sup> LawWorks Clinic Network Report April 2016 – March 2017 (December 2017) 'Analysis of pro bono legal advice work being done across the LawWorks clinic network between April 2016 and March 2017'. Published by LawWorks.

<sup>17</sup> LawWorks Clinic Network Report April 2016 – March 2017 (December 2017) 'Analysis of pro bono legal advice work being done across the LawWorks clinic network between April 2016 and March 2017'. Published by LawWorks.

<sup>18</sup> At the University of Chicago Law School students can elect to take part in the Gendered Violence and the Law clinic. The clinic aims to increase students' understanding of the civil and criminal systems that address GBV through field work complemented by a weekly seminar which addresses cases on domestic violence, sexual assault and child protection issues (see <https://www.law.uchicago.edu/clinics/genderedviolence>). The University of Buffalo also has a Family Violence and Women's Rights Clinic. Students have the opportunity to work on projects which impact the local community, including the preparation of self-help leaflets for survivors and the provision of community legal education for domestic abuse service providers. The clinic has also worked with advocacy groups to support domestic violence legislative reform (see <http://www.law.buffalo.edu/beyond/clinics/domestic-violence.html>).

who were unable to secure alternative funding. Further, the authors established a drop-in clinic (*Empower 4 Justice*) with a local BAME women's organisation. Empower 4 Justice is an interdisciplinary project which allows BAME women to receive one-off legal advice alongside independent domestic violence advocate (IDVA) services. The project was conceived out of the idea that BAME women often experience culturally specific forms of abuse, multiple barriers to reporting and difficulties accessing advice because of a shame culture, immigration insecurities and a lack of awareness of their rights.

Alongside these projects, the authors felt it was appropriate to supplement the students' case work with an overarching teaching programme about GBV. This was because many of the students' cases related to a single issue and this prevented the students developing a breadth of understanding that would allow them to put their learning experiences in a wider context. In order to achieve this, the authors decided to participate in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (16 Days campaign). The 16 Days campaign takes place annually between 25 November (The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December (Human Rights Day) and aims to raise awareness of and stimulate action to end violence against women and girls globally. The dates of the campaign are intended to highlight that the act of perpetrating gender violence is a human rights violation<sup>19</sup>. It was felt that the 16 Days campaign was an appropriate cultural fit due to its interdisciplinary focus, international reach and

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<sup>19</sup> The 16 Days campaign was first run in 1991 by the Women's Global Leadership Institute coordinated by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership. Since then, it is estimated that over 2,800 organisations from approximately 156 countries have taken part. More information about the campaign can be found at <http://16dayscswgl.rutgers.edu/>.

emphasis on building local alliances. It was also an academic fit for law students because of its focus on advocacy and policy development. Whilst participants were invited to use a 16 Days toolkit<sup>20</sup> this was not compulsory and the authors retained full discretion about the topics covered and style of teaching activities. Further, as time is a premium within the clinic, the 16 Days campaign did not take too much time out of an otherwise busy clinic curriculum.

The authors' main objectives in participating in the campaign were to:

- a) Increase student engagement with issues of gender justice; and
- b) Develop an effective educational tool for raising student understanding of the different forms of gender violence, the domestic and international framework for protecting victims and the roles that different organisations play in achieving this.

If these aims were met, it was felt that we would realise the overall aim of;

- c) Better preparing the students for the realities of family practice in England and Wales.

Following completion of the 16 Days campaign, the students were asked to participate in a focus group or complete a questionnaire about their experiences.

The authors are not aware of any similar studies which have been conducted about the effectiveness of GBV awareness raising programmes in higher education students or within clinical legal education. There are however a number of studies regarding gender justice programmes which have been conducted with middle and high school students<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> The 16 Days toolkit can be accessed at The Centre for Women's Global Leadership. Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences ([https://www.sas.rutgers.edu/cms/16days/images/16dayscwg/2017\\_16\\_Days\\_of\\_Activism\\_Against\\_Gender-based\\_Violence\\_Action\\_Kit\\_Complete\\_September\\_28\\_2017.pdf](https://www.sas.rutgers.edu/cms/16days/images/16dayscwg/2017_16_Days_of_Activism_Against_Gender-based_Violence_Action_Kit_Complete_September_28_2017.pdf)).

<sup>21</sup> A helpful summary of this literature is provided in Malhotra, K. Gonzales-Guarda, R. Mitchell, E (2015) 'A Review of Teen Dating Violence Prevention Research: What About Hispanic Youth?' *Trauma, Violence and Abuse* Volume 16, Issue 4. pp. 444-465. Sage Publications. Further studies are discussed later in this article.

These studies have focussed on improving student knowledge of domestic abuse and healthy relationships and preventing teen dating violence. These studies differ from ours in that they often do not deal with issues of GBV which occur outside an intimate partner relationship. In the authors' view, many of these studies fail to recognise wider issues of family violence such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and honour violence. Further, whilst it was an aim of this programme to improve the students' knowledge, the authors did not intend to change the students' behaviour in their own personal relationships. The majority of the studies in this area have been carried out in America and the authors are not aware of any studies which have taken place in the United Kingdom.

This article will discuss the teaching materials that were designed and will present the students' experiences of participating in the campaign. It will address how their participation went some way to meeting the objectives set out above in that the students demonstrated increased knowledge of civil and criminal laws relating to GBV, developed their critical lawyering skills and competency in working with vulnerable clients and contributed to wider efforts to advance gender justice. Further, the article will draw on the ancillary advantages of participating in the campaign, including improved client outcomes and reputational benefit. The limitations of the 16 Days campaign will also be acknowledged along with ideas for developing the programme in the future.



## SCOPING THE PROBLEM - GBV IN ENGLAND AND WALES

The legal and political significance of GBV has gained momentum in recent years. On an international level this can be evidenced through the Sustainable Development Goals which vowed to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030<sup>22</sup>. The targets to achieve this goal include eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private sphere including trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation and eliminating harmful practices such as child and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Likewise, the United Nations and the Council of Europe have developed international instruments to provide legal frameworks for ending GBV. An example of this is The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which was adopted in 1979 and requires signatory states to implement measures to abolish discriminatory laws, establish public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination and the elimination of all acts of discrimination by persons and organisations. More recently, the Istanbul Convention obliges signatories to develop a comprehensive legal framework and approach to combat violence against women, through preventing violence, protecting victims and prosecuting perpetrators. The UK Government is a signatory to both conventions but is yet to take steps to ratify the Istanbul Convention. Providing a comprehensive legal

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<sup>22</sup> See the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - 'Gender equality and women's empowerment' available at: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

framework is important for providing protection and access to support services for victims and acting as a deterrent to perpetrators<sup>23</sup>.

At a domestic level, there has been growing recognition of the different forms that GBV takes. This is evidenced through the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 which seeks to protect victims of human trafficking. In the same year, the Serious Crime Act 2015 came into force, criminalising coercive and controlling behaviour. There have also been considerable developments in relation to forced marriage. In 2005, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office launched the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) to lead on the Government's forced marriage policy and casework. In the last year, the FMU gave advice or support in relation to a possible forced marriage in 1,196 cases<sup>24</sup>. In 2014, it became a criminal offence to force a person to marry, under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. The Government also introduced forced marriage protection orders as a civil remedy to protect someone who is facing being forced into a marriage or who is in a forced marriage<sup>25</sup>. These provisions have been met with some success in tackling violence against women. Over the last year, 247 forced marriage protection orders have been granted (in all cases the applicants were women)<sup>26</sup> and two convictions for forced marriage have taken place<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Klugman, J (2017) 'Background paper for World Development Report 2017 'Gender Based Violence and the Law' Georgetown University. Available at: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/232551485539744935/WDR17-BP-Gender-based-violence-and-the-law.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (16 March 2018) 'Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2017'. Home Office Publications.

<sup>25</sup> See the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Justice and National Statistics (2018) 'Family Court Statistics Quarterly: Annual 2017 including October to December 2017' Published by the Ministry of Justice.

<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.familylawweek.co.uk/site.aspx?i=ed190141>

Whilst GBV may be encountered in many legal practice areas, it has particularly close links with family and criminal law because these areas regulate the most prevalent forms of GBV - intimate partner violence and domestic abuse. In the year ending March 2017, an estimated 1.9 million adults in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse<sup>28</sup>. In the same year, the Crime Survey for England and Wales reported that 26% of women and 15% of men had experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16 – equivalent to 4.3 million female victims and 2.4 million male victims<sup>29</sup>. There continues to be an upward trend in applications for domestic violence remedy orders (e.g. non-molestation orders and occupation orders) in England and Wales<sup>30</sup>. In 2017, there were 24,912 such applications, representing an increase of 5% in the year ending December 2017. Of course, this does not reflect the full reality of the situation as domestic violence is a vastly underreported area.

However, whilst on the one hand the Government has demonstrated a commitment to conferring rights on women and girls by becoming signatories to CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, they have simultaneously made cuts to the funding which allows victims to enforce these rights. LASPO came into effect on 1 April 2013 and removed large parts of family law from the scope of public funding and removed completely funding for civil claims for compensation<sup>31</sup>. Funding remains available for victims of domestic

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<sup>28</sup> Office of National Statistics (November 2017) 'Domestic Abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2017. Statistical Bulletin'. Published by the Office of National Statistics.

<sup>29</sup> Office of National Statistics (November 2017) 'Domestic Abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2017. Statistical Bulletin'. Published by the Office of National Statistics.

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Justice and National Statistics (29 March 2018) 'Family Court Statistics Quarterly: October – December 2017'. Published by the Ministry of Justice.

<sup>31</sup> In the context of GBV this is important because victims can pursue civil claims for compensation against perpetrators in respect of injuries suffered. Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) remains available for categories of law which do not ordinarily

abuse in family law proceedings, however in practice many victims are ineligible because they cannot provide the requisite gateway evidence and/or satisfy the strict means test. This has led to an increase in domestic abuse survivors representing themselves in court proceedings<sup>32</sup>. This situation is indefensible because despite promises from the Government, there are no legal prohibitions on unrepresented defendants cross-examining their alleged victims and no firm plans to introduce this<sup>33</sup>. Court proceedings can therefore be a forum for perpetrators to exercise further control over their victims<sup>34</sup>.

#### A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE – GBV IN EDUCATION

There have been attempts to raise public awareness of GBV through formal and informal channels of education. To some extent, this has happened organically following the allegations of sexual misconduct against Harvey Weinstein and other male celebrities, which have led to grassroots social media campaigns such as “#Me too” and “Time’s Up” and which aim to demonstrate the worldwide prevalence of sexual assault and

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attract public funding but where a failure to provide legal services would be in breach of an individual’s rights under the Human Rights Act 1998. However, research suggests that there have been fewer than expected applications for funding. The Government estimated there would be between 5,000 – 7,000 applications for ECF per annum, however in 2013/2014 only 1,516 applications were made, of which around 50% were granted. Statistics reported in: The Law Society of England and Wales (June 2017) ‘Access Denied? LASPO Four Years On: Law Society Review’ Published by the Law Society.

<sup>32</sup> Statistics indicate that in 2017 neither party had legal representation in 35% of cases in front of the family courts. Reported in the Ministry of Justice and National Statistics (29 March 2018) ‘Family Court Statistics Quarterly: October – December 2017’ Published by the Ministry of Justice.

<sup>33</sup> This issue has been raised in the HM Government consultation (2018) ‘Transforming the Approach to Domestic Abuse’. The consultation document acknowledges that unlike the criminal courts, the family courts do not have a specific power to prevent cross-examination of a victim by an alleged perpetrator. The consultation goes on to state ‘the government is committed to addressing this issue and will legislate to give family courts the power to stop this practice as soon as legislative time allows’ (p. 52) however no definitive time frame has been indicated.

<sup>34</sup> Richardson, K. & Speed, A (2019) ‘Restrictions on Legal Aid in Family Law Cases in England and Wales: creating a necessary barrier to public funding or simply increasing the burden on the family courts?’. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* Volume 41 Issue 2 pp.135-152 DOI: 10.1080/09649069.2019.1590898.

harassment<sup>35</sup>. Changing and challenging attitudes towards GBV through education however is also a key focus of GBV legislation. This shift towards prevention and education about legal rights and responsibilities is arguably reflective of the current climate of austerity in which the Government are keen to reduce the economic cost of GBV and comply with their legal obligations in the most cost effective manner<sup>36</sup>. Further, the focus on public legal education is revealing at a time when many victims are struggling to enforce their rights and seek justice through the legal system as a result of the cuts to legal aid implemented by LASPO. Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention, for example, obliges states to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and other practices which are based on the inferiority of women. It is expected this will be achieved through Article 13 which requires signatories to “promote or conduct on a regular basis awareness raising campaigns or programmes... to increase awareness and understanding among the general public of the different manifestations of all forms of violence covered by the Convention, their consequences on children and the need to prevent such violence”. Further, under Article 14, parties must “include teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-

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<sup>35</sup> It is reported that within 24 hours of the ‘Me Too’ hashtag going viral, there were more than 12 million posts, comments and reactions by 4.7 million internet users around the world. Reported at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/metoo-reaches-85-countries-with-1-7-million-tweets/>.

<sup>36</sup> Domestic violence alone costs the UK economy £16 billion per annum. Reported in Siddiqui, H (2018) *Counting the Cost: BME women and gender-based violence in the UK*. IPPR Progressive Review Volume 24 Issue 4. pp 362 -368.

based violence against women and the right to personal integrity... in formal curricula and *at all levels of education*".

The need for early education has been emphasised in the global 'Think Equal' initiative, which calls for governments across the world to embed "social and emotional learning" into their curriculums at an early stage (from 3 years old) in order to "end the discriminatory mind set and cycle of violence across our world".<sup>37</sup> So far 147 schools across 15 countries (including the United Kingdom) are piloting the Think Equal educational programme.<sup>38</sup> The outcome of that pilot study is currently being evaluated.

In March 2018, the Government launched a consultation on 'transforming the response to domestic violence'<sup>39</sup> in respect of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill, which (together with the Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Ratification of Convention) Act 2017) will enable ratification of the Istanbul Convention into domestic law. One of the four key themes of the consultation is 'promoting public and professional awareness' of GBV. In order to ensure that domestic abuse is properly understood, the consultation proposes introducing a statutory definition of domestic abuse which will include economic abuse and controlling and coercive behaviour. In addition, it is intended that funding will be provided for all schools to deliver Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education so that young adults leave

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.thinkequal.com/>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.thinkequal.com/where-we-work/>

<sup>39</sup>HM Government (2018) 'Transforming the Response to Domestic Abuse – Government Consultation'. Available at: [https://consult.justice.gov.uk/homeoffice-moj/domestic-abuse-consultation/supporting\\_documents/Transforming%20the%20response%20to%20domestic%20abuse.pdf](https://consult.justice.gov.uk/homeoffice-moj/domestic-abuse-consultation/supporting_documents/Transforming%20the%20response%20to%20domestic%20abuse.pdf)

school with the knowledge to prepare them for adult life. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 places a duty on the Secretary of State for Education to introduce 'relationship education' at all schools in England. Crucially, most of our students are between 21 and 22 years old and therefore are unlikely to have received any education around domestic abuse in their formative educational years. They have therefore not benefited from the changes that are currently being implemented into primary and secondary education.

The implication in the Istanbul Convention and the domestic abuse consultation is that improved knowledge and awareness will have a positive effect on reducing domestic abuse perpetration and will lead to more competent practitioners in this field. This because knowledge is typically regarded as a precursor to attitudinal and/or behaviour change<sup>40</sup>. Whether this is in fact accurate has been the subject of many academic studies. The majority of studies in this area have been conducted with middle and high school students in the USA and have focussed on improving student knowledge of domestic abuse and healthy relationships and preventing youth violence within relationships. Whilst GBV is taught within university clinics, the authors are not aware of any such studies which have been conducted about the effectiveness of GBV awareness raising programmes in higher education students or within clinical legal education. Further, these studies often do not deal with issues of GBV which occur outside an intimate partner relationship and therefore fail to capture the full scope of family violence. These

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<sup>40</sup> Salazar, L. Cook, A (2006) 'Preliminary findings from an outcome evaluation of an intimate partner violence preventing program for adjudicated, African American, adolescent males' *Journal of Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* Volume 4, Issue 4, pp. 386-385.

studies are motivated by a desire to change youth behaviour within personal relationships rather than in a professional capacity. The findings suggest that such programmes have varying levels of success – a factor which may be attributable to the different teaching activities, format of the programmes and the time dedicated to teaching these issues. A comprehensive analysis of studies in this area has been prepared by Malhotra et al<sup>41</sup> however for the purposes of this article, only those studies which focussed on developing students' knowledge and understanding of legal frameworks around domestic abuse/GBV have been considered.

Producing change in knowledge following an educational intervention has been well documented in studies<sup>42</sup>. Jaycox et al<sup>43</sup> for example, delivered a three-class programme over three hours to educate students aged 13-14 years old about domestic violence, healthy relationships and legal rights. The intervention group showed increased knowledge of the laws relating to domestic abuse and increased likelihood of seeking help (in particular from a lawyer specialising in domestic abuse) compared to a control group. However, the position on whether knowledge directly results in attitudinal or behavioural change is less clear. Salazar et al, for example, conducted five 2-hour sessions on intimate partner violence with predominantly African American males aged between

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<sup>41</sup> Malhotra, K. Gonzales-Guarda, R. Mitchell, E (2015) 'A Review of Teen Dating Violence Prevention Research: What About Hispanic Youth?' *Trauma, Violence and Abuse* Volume 16, Issue 4. pp. 444-465. Sage Publications.

<sup>42</sup> See Foshee, V. A. Bauman, K. E. Arriga, X. B. Helms, R. W. Koch, G. G & Linder, G. F. (1998) 'An evaluation of Safe Dates, an adolescent dating violence prevention program' *American Journal of Public Health* Volume 88. pp 45-50 and Lavoie, F. Vezina, L. Piche, C. & Boivin, M. (1995) 'Evaluation of a prevention program for violence in teen dating relationships' *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* Volume 10. pp 516-524. Macgowan, M. J. (1997) 'An evaluation of a dating violence prevention program for middle school students' *Journal of Violence and Victims* Volume 12. pp 223-235.

<sup>43</sup> Jaycox, L.H. McCaffrey, D. Eiseman, B. Aronoff, J. Shelley, G.A. Collins, R.L. Marshall, G.N. (2006) 'Impact of a school-based dating violence prevention program among Latino teens: randomised controlled effectiveness trial' *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume 39 Issue 5 pp. 694-704.



12 and 18 with the aim of developing the students' awareness of violence against women, personal choice, and connecting violence against women to violence against ethnic minorities and the lesbian and gay community<sup>44</sup>. Whilst the participants reported higher levels of knowledge of intimate partner violence, only those who had witnessed high levels of parental violence demonstrated lower patriarchal attitudes than the control group. Similar findings were reported by Lowe et al<sup>45</sup> whose study comprised four one-hour sessions on assault, coercion, victims' rights, legal information and healthy relationships. Lowe found that the students demonstrated a statistically significant increase in knowledge after the programme but there was no real effect on attitudes towards dating violence.

Another study which led to increased knowledge (but not necessarily behavioural change) was carried out by Taylor et al <sup>46</sup>. The researchers examined the effect of a teaching programme on student attitudes and knowledge of GBV and assessed whether participation reduced the probability of perpetration and/or victimisation. The study involved 123 sixth and seventh grade classrooms being randomly assigned to one of two five-session curriculum addressing GBV and sexual harassment or to a no-treatment control group. The first curriculum was 'interaction-based' which focussed on setting and communicating boundaries in relationships, the formation of relationships,

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<sup>44</sup> Salazar, L. Cook, A (2006) 'Preliminary findings from an outcome evaluation of an intimate partner violence preventing program for adjudicated, African American, adolescent males' *Journal of Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* Volume 4, Issue 4, pp. 386-385.

<sup>45</sup> Lowe, L. Jones, C.D. Banks, L (2007) 'Preventing Dating Violence in Public Schools: an evaluation of an interagency collaborative program for youth' *Journal of School Violence*, Volume 6 Issue 3. pp. 69-87

<sup>46</sup> Taylor, B. Stein, N. Burden, F (2010) 'The Effects of Gender Violence/Harassment Prevention Programming in Middle Schools: A Randomised Experimental Evaluation' *Violence and Victims Journal* Volume 25 Number 2. pp. 202-223.

wanted/unwanted behaviours and the role of the bystander as intervener. The lessons in this curriculum did not provide simple answers but required the students to engage with ambiguity. In contrast, the 'law and justice' curriculum focused on laws, definitions, information, data about penalties and the consequences for perpetrators of GBV. Students in the law and justice curriculum, compared to the control group (which received no training on GBV), had significantly improved outcomes in awareness of their abusive behaviours, attitudes towards GBV and knowledge. The knowledge gained was not long-lasting for all the groups however. Those in the interaction-based group demonstrated a similar level of knowledge as the control group after a six-month period. Students in the interaction-based curriculum experienced lower rates of victimisation, increased awareness of abusive behaviours, and improved attitudes toward personal space. Interestingly, students in both treatment groups were more likely to have committed violence against people they had dated. The researchers believed that the interventions affected the students' sensitivity to the problem of GBV, and it made it more likely for them to identify and report certain behaviours as GBV.

In a second study, Taylor et al ran an intervention programme in public middle schools in New York City<sup>47</sup>. Students were allocated to a 'classroom-based intervention', a 'building based intervention', a mixed building and classroom intervention group or a control group. The classroom-based intervention consisted of six sessions over a ten-week period and covered consequences of domestic abuse for perpetrators, laws relating

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<sup>47</sup> Taylor, B.G. Stein, N.D. Mumford, E.A. and Woods, D (2013) 'Shifting Boundaries: an experimental evaluation of a dating violence prevention program in middle schools' *Journal of Prevention Science*. Volume 14 Issue 1. pp 64-76.

to domestic abuse, the social construction of gender roles and healthy relationships. The building-based intervention included temporary building-based restraining orders, posters in school buildings to increase awareness and reporting of domestic abuse and higher levels of security presence in safe/unsafe 'hotspots' mapped by students. The results indicate that there was no significant difference between groups on the prevalence of sexual harassment perpetration. Contrary to expectations, prevalence of sexual harassment victimisation was significantly higher in the building only group, compared to the control group.

Some studies have reported an increase in prejudicial attitudes and behaviours following participation in gender justice programmes. For example, Jaffe found an increase in sexist attitudes among a minority of the males who participated<sup>48</sup>. It was felt this could have arisen from a feeling of male defensiveness as females were present in the teaching sessions but the content related solely to male-to-female abuse. Edwards et al<sup>49</sup> also found that whilst the majority of the programmes had a moderate positive effect, 25% of the eight studies they analysed lead to a deterioration in the students' attitudes. These students appeared to be more supportive of dating violence after participating in the programme. This is also referred to as 'backlash effect'<sup>50</sup>. However, there have also been

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<sup>48</sup> Jaffe, P.G. Sudermann, M. Reitzel, D. Killip, S.M (1992) *An evaluation of secondary school primary prevention program on violence in intimate relationships*. *Violence Vict* 1992 Summer: 7(2) pp.129-26.

<sup>49</sup> Edwards, A. Hinsz, V (2014) *A Meta-Analysis of Empirically Tested School-Based Dating Violence Prevention Programs*. *SAGE Open* April-June 2014 1-8.

<sup>50</sup> Salazar, L. Cook, A (2006) *Preliminary findings from an outcome evaluation of an intimate partner violence preventing program for adjudicated, African American, adolescent males*. *Journal of Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* Volume 4, Issue 4, pp. 386-385. *Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences*.

criticism of those programmes which have adopted a 'gender neutral approach' and failed to recognise that GBV disproportionately affects women<sup>51</sup>.

Negative effects can also stem from poor programme design, including sessions that are not engaging or effective, and adopting a 'one size fits all' approach which is not sufficiently tailored to the audiences they address. This was identified by Salazar who noted that many studies lack cultural competency and do not address culturally specific forms of abuse<sup>52</sup>.

## THE STUDY

In order to try and meet the aims outlined above, the authors asked clinical students to take part in a number of activities centred around GBV. Those activities were compulsory for the 18 final year Masters in Law Exempting degree (M Law)<sup>53</sup> students who chose to undertake family law casework in the Student Law Office. However, all other final year students on the MLaw (Solicitors Route) degree programme at Northumbria University were invited to take part on a voluntary basis. Only three additional students chose to take part. As such, a total of 21 students participated in the programme. 19 of these students were female and 2 were male. The activities organised were as follows:

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid*

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*

<sup>53</sup>The MLaw programme is an Integrated Master's which meets the requirements of a Qualifying Law Degree, and incorporates the knowledge and professional skills needed to succeed as a solicitor (M Law Exempting) or barrister (M Law Exempting (Bar Professional Training Course)).

- a) A documentary screening of “Banaz: a love story”. The documentary chronicles the life and death of Banaz Mahmood, a young British Kurdish woman killed in a so-called ‘honour’ killing. Following the screening, the students took part in a discussion about the issues raised in the documentary.
- b) A workshop on GBV and online abuse ran by an academic whose research focusses on the online abuse of feminists as a form of violence against women and girls<sup>54</sup>.
- c) A workshop on the domestic and international frameworks for protecting victims of domestic abuse.
- d) A seminar by a domestic violence organisation which focussed on identifying domestic abuse, the services offered by independent domestic violence advocates and the role that different organisations play in supporting survivors.
- e) The authors established a family law blog called “A Family Affair”<sup>55</sup> and all students were asked to submit a blog article on the subject of GBV. Students were able to pick their own topics, which ranged from sexual harassment in the workplace through to rape as an act of genocide.

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<sup>54</sup> Lewis, R. Rowe, M and Wiper, C (2017) ‘Online abuse of feminists as an emerging form of violence against women and girls’. *British Journal of Criminology*, 57 (6). pp. 1462-1481.

<sup>55</sup> The blog can be accessed at <https://afamilyaffairsite.wordpress.com/>

In addition to these compulsory activities, the authors also ran a voluntary poster competition during the 16 Days campaign in which all students were invited to submit a poster considering the different forms of GBV or proposals for ending violence against women. Five students submitted posters to the competition. The posters were displayed at Northumbria University's Festival of Feminism in February 2018.

The students took part in these activities alongside their case work in the Student Law Office and additional one off advice provided through the Empower 4 Justice project.

### ***Methodology***

The authors adopted a mixed-methods approach for this research, using a semi-structured interview and electronic questionnaires. Ethical approval was provided for this by Northumbria University.

The initial approach was to only use focus groups with a mix of closed and open ended questions. All students who participated in at least one of the activities as part of the campaign were emailed inviting them to attend the focus groups to provide their views on their participation. 21 students were therefore emailed to participate. Participation was anonymous and the focus groups were to be conducted by a third party experienced researcher. This was important as the authors were also the academics who were responsible for marking the students on their clinical work. It was therefore important to avoid students perceiving the research as impacting on their clinic mark or distorting their opinions to please the researchers. Unfortunately, due to the focus groups taking

place at a busy time during the students' studies, one participant volunteered to take part in the focus group. The focus group therefore took the format of a semi-structured interview instead. There were specific points for discussion but the idea was that the interview would be conversational in order to obtain the student's general views on participating in the campaign. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed by a research assistant. To maintain anonymity, the transcription, but not the audio recording, was provided to the authors.

The low response rate meant that the data gathered from the focus group could not in any way be reflective of the overall view of the participants more generally. A number of students did however indicate to the third-party researcher that they would like to give feedback on the campaign in a different method. To increase the response rate and provide more reliable data, the decision was therefore made to adopt a mixed approach using a combination of the feedback already gathered from the interview, together with additional electronic questionnaires.

Electronic questionnaires were emailed to all the students who participated in at least one of the campaign activities. Information was provided to the students about the aims of the research and they were asked to email their completed questionnaires, together with a signed consent form, to the same third-party researcher who had conducted the semi-structured interview. This again maintained appropriate anonymity for the respondents. In addition to the student who had already provided their views in an interview, four other students provided responses to the questionnaire. From a sample of 21 students, a

response was therefore received from 5 students, providing an improved response rate of 24%. Whilst this is not a particularly high response rate, research conducted by Fosnacht et al into the importance of high response rates for college surveys indicates that a response rate of 20 to 25 percent in a survey of higher education users with a small sampling frame should provide reliable results<sup>56</sup>.

Once the authors received the questionnaires and transcription they separately coded the data on paper to ensure consistent analysis<sup>57</sup>. The authors both used thematic analysis to identify any themes or patterns in the data, which was particularly useful when analysing the data from the semi-structured interview<sup>58</sup>. After coding the data, the authors compared the themes they had identified and found them to be consistent, adding validity to the findings. In the next section, the authors will analyse the themes identified.

## FINDINGS

Many of the themes that arose from the questionnaires and the semi-structured interview were as a result of the specific questions posed. For example, participants were asked about the impact on student well-being and whether they thought that the campaign was 'too female-victim focused'. However, there were other additional themes that arose naturally from the qualitative nature of the questionnaire. These largely related to the

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<sup>56</sup> Fosnacht, K. Sarraf, S. Howe, E and Peck, L.K (2017) 'How Important are High Response Rates for College Surveys?' *The Review of Higher Education*, Vol 40, Number 2, Winter 2017, John Hopkins University Press p.245-266

<sup>57</sup> Schreier, M (2014) 'Qualitative Content Analysis' in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, SAGE Publishing, p. 179

<sup>58</sup> Burnard, P (1991) 'A method of analysing interview transcripts in qualitative research' *Nurse Education Today* 11:6. p461



different benefits the students felt they had obtained from their participation in the campaign.

The main themes the authors identified were as follows:

1. Educational benefits/skills enhancement
2. Employability benefits
3. Student well-being
4. Limitations/feed-forward ideas

### *Educational benefits*

The findings were broadly consistent with Jaycox<sup>59</sup> and Taylors'<sup>60</sup> studies in that there was a positive correlation between the students' participation in the programme and their improved knowledge and understanding of GBV. All of the participants agreed that the campaign increased their awareness of GBV issues. This was also supported by the definitions that the participants were able to provide about their understanding of GBV (a specific question within both the electronic questionnaires and the semi-structured interview):

*“Gender-based violence can be understood as a violation of human of rights and a form of discrimination against women”*

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<sup>59</sup> Jaycox, L.H. McCaffrey, D. Eiseman, B. Aronoff, J. Shelley, G.A. Collins, R.L. Marshall, G.N. (2006) 'Impact of a school-based dating violence prevention program among Latino teens: randomised controlled effectiveness trial' *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume 39 Issue 5 pp. 694-704.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor, B. Stein, N. Burden, F (2010) 'The Effects of Gender Violence/Harassment Prevention Programming in Middle Schools: A Randomised Experimental Evaluation' *Violence and Victims Journal* Volume 25 Number 2. pp. 202-223. Taylor, B.G. Stein, N.D. Mumford, E.A. and Woods, D (2013) 'Shifting Boundaries: an experimental evaluation of a dating violence prevention program in middle schools' *Journal of Prevention Science*. Volume 14 Issue 1. pp 64-76.

*“Violence predominantly impacting women but can also be men. This can be in various ways and not limited to hurting an individual physically”*

*“Gender-based violence is a widespread issue of violence against someone because of their gender.”*

*“Where an individual is a victim of domestic violence due to their gender.”*

*“Gender-based violence is an extremely wide term and includes acts such as FGM, forced marriage, rape and domestic servitude. Gender-based violence is often a societal norm in many cultures.”*

Whilst each participant gave a different interpretation of their understanding of GBV, the definitions acknowledge the wide range of issues that could fall under the GBV heading. Many of these definitions also fit within the guidance provided by the international frameworks for protection against GBV including CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, as discussed above. Furthermore, many of the definitions acknowledge that GBV is predominantly (although not always exclusively) perpetrated against women and girls. In one case, the respondent used the term GBV interchangeably with domestic violence. This suggests that particular student’s understanding was weaker than the other students’ because they did not comprehend the fact that GBV is broader than domestic violence and also includes gendered abuse which takes place in the public sphere.

The final definition quoted above expressly mentioned the international and cultural elements of GBV. This increased knowledge of international family law issues was

another key theme running through the responses to the questionnaires. For example, when asked about their experience of writing for the blog, one participant commented:

*“I thought it was really interesting, it allowed me to research an area of law I have never been able to before, in jurisdictions I have not looked at before.”*

When discussing their experience of working on the Empower 4 Justice project, that same participant commented that:

*“If I am honest, I had no idea of BME issues, never mind that they occurred so locally.”*

Building on Salazar’s findings that many educational programmes fail to appropriately address cultural forms of violence<sup>61</sup>, the authors specifically set out to educate the students about forms of violence that disproportionately affect minority communities. Recognising the diversity of GBV was reflected in their initial aims. The authors did this by ensuring that the workshops dealt with a wide range of culturally sensitive issues and the international frameworks for protecting women and children from GBV.

Evidence of the students’ knowledge development was also evident from the blog articles and academic posters. The students both correctly identified the domestic and international legal provisions (despite being provided with minimal supervisor

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<sup>61</sup> Salazar, L. Cook, A (2006) ‘Preliminary findings from an outcome evaluation of an intimate partner violence preventing program for adjudicated, African American, *adolescent males*’ *Journal of Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* Volume 4, Issue 4, pp. 386-385.

guidance) and included insightful practical assistance to support victims<sup>62</sup>. The choice of topics demonstrated that the students understood the broad spectrum of GBV and the fact that eradicating it demands a multi-agency approach. The '16 blogs for 16 days' were:

- 16 Days of Activism – about the campaign
- Social norms of GBV
- Sexual harassment in the workplace: a study of the Weinstein allegations
- The Istanbul Convention: Tackling Violence against Women and Girls
- Female Genital Mutilation: the law in England and Wales
- Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage in Kenya
- Raising awareness of domestic abuse in same-sex relationships
- Rape as an act of Genocide in Rwanda: the Role of the International Criminal Tribunal
- Marital rape: an exploration of the position in India
- Protection available under civil law for victims of domestic violence
- Forced marriage protection orders
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century honour killings
- Banaz: a love story – review
- Strategies to prevent Gender Based Violence
- Strategies for ending Female Genital Mutilation
- Legal aid for victims of domestic abuse

The respondents appeared to feel empowered by this knowledge. They felt there was value in understanding about GBV because of its prevalence and because as future

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<sup>62</sup> See for example *Strategies to Prevent Gender Based Violence* at <https://afamilyaffairsite.wordpress.com/2017/12/10/strategies-to-prevent-gender-based-violence> and *Protection available under the civil law for victims of gender based violence* at <https://afamilyaffairsite.wordpress.com/2017/12/04/protection-available-under-civil-law-for-victims-of-domestic-violence/>

family law practitioners they may be called upon to support victims of abuse. The personal rewards for the students are demonstrated in the participant comments below:

*“Working in this project has helped me learn and grow and I think become a more well-rounded individual never mind practitioner.”*

*“Working in communities and with women where they seemingly have no other access to legal advice made it more satisfying that I was able to be a part of it.”*

*“You just felt so sorry for the women that you were helping, just it really made me feel like I was doing something worthwhile.”*

*“I found it rewarding to write an article which is aimed at helping others.”*

Many of the respondents recognised that during the 16 Days campaign, they were exposed to topics and legislation which was not covered elsewhere on their degree programme. This raises the question about whether GBV should form part of the formal curriculum because only limited topics could be covered during the relatively short 16 Days campaign. Students were therefore also asked whether they would have benefited from the opportunity to undertake an academic module in International Family Law. One participant responded by stating:

*“I think this would be a brilliant module to take, regardless of the E4J project... if I had been previously exposed to these issues, I would have had a wider understanding of them. Without this module, I had to understand the context*

*of their issues before I could begin to consider legal advice – a module would have removed this.”*

As a result of this feedback, one of the authors has now developed an elective International Family Law module which will be available to level 6 students.

Unlike the majority of studies considered earlier in this article, this study did not attempt to measure attitudinal or behavioral change in the respondents’ own relationships. However, in a professional capacity it was apparent to the authors that the students became more sensitive to issues of GBV, which is consistent with the findings of Taylor’s research in this area<sup>63</sup>. The students demonstrated increased competency in recognising triggers that many suggest a client had been subject to GBV that they may have previously overlooked. In turn, this allowed the students to ask appropriate fact find questions and direct their research appropriately.

### ***Employability benefits***

From the data gathered, the respondents appeared to value the employability benefits of participating in the campaign and comments were made about the fact that they could talk about this in job interviews. The authors are aware from separate conversations with students who participated in the campaign, that several students took a copy of their blog article along to job interviews as evidence of their written communication skills and understanding of the legal climate. Many of the students

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<sup>63</sup> Taylor, B. Stein, N. Burden, F (2010) ‘The Effects of Gender Violence/Harassment Prevention Programming in Middle Schools: A Randomised Experimental Evaluation’ *Violence and Victims Journal* Volume 25 Number 2. pp. 202-223.

opted to prepare a second article on GBV, thereby demonstrating an engagement with GBV even after the campaign was over.

The focus on employability could be as a result of the stage of education that these students were at. All students who participated in the campaign were in their final year of study and may therefore be more focused on their impending graduation and post-education job prospects.

Participants were also asked about whether the campaign had any impact on their future career choices. There was an equal split of participants who said that the campaign had made them rethink their future career choices and those who said that it had no impact. One student now wants to pursue a career as a police officer specialising in domestic abuse and another wishes to become an IDVA. One student commented:

*“It made me more interested in working within the area of family law.... I was able to gain a deeper insight into something that normally happens behind closed doors. I want to help people that are in similar situations”.*

The fact that students reported a change in their career aspirations suggests that at least some of the students' engagement with issues of gender justice continued beyond involvement in the 16 Days campaign. The choice of their careers (i.e. a police officer and IDVA) also demonstrates that the students appreciate the roles of different organisations in tackling GBV. This suggests the students did not simply view GBV as a 'legal' issue for lawyers to solve.

**Student well-being**

The authors were aware that many of the issues covered during the campaign could potentially be distressing for students with no previous experience of GBV. That said, the authors recognised the benefit to students in learning about those issues in a safe educational environment before being exposed to these issues in practice. In order to limit the risk of vicarious trauma, students were provided with information about each of the sessions in advance and were given the opportunity to opt out of sessions if they felt that the issues covered would be too distressing. Both in advance of and following the sessions a number of students made disclosures to their supervisor about previous experiences of GBV. For some of them, this was the first time they had spoken out about their experience and they indicated that the campaign had given them the courage to make those disclosures. This meant that their supervisors were then able to direct them to appropriate support services. It is possible that the students had not identified their experiences as GBV before they participated in the campaign but that the sessions made them more sensitive to this. This would be in line with the findings of Taylor et al who found that their participants were more likely to identify their own behaviour as GBV after participating in the programme<sup>64</sup>.

Participants in the study were asked whether they found any of the topics covered during the campaign distressing and all indicated that they did. However, those who

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<sup>64</sup> Taylor, B. Stein, N. Burden, F (2010) 'The Effects of Gender Violence/Harassment Prevention Programming in Middle Schools: A Randomised Experimental Evaluation' *Violence and Victims Journal* Volume 25 Number 2. pp. 202-223.



responded to the questionnaires also felt that they did not feel the need to approach their supervisor for additional support. The reasons given for this included:

*“Although some of this information was distressing, it is the truth and it made me more aware and gain a greater understanding of gender-based violence although I did speak to my friends about this.”*

*“Whilst the issues in discussed the various sessions were distressing, I did not feel the need to discuss the issues with my supervisor further. I also think discussing these issues in the sessions themselves, allowed me to reflect on them and deal with them.”*

One student said that the documentary was distressing but they did not feel the need to approach their supervisor and decided to watch a similar documentary after the session because, whilst it was on a distressing topic, they found the subject matter interesting. This again suggests that this particular students continued to have an interest in gender justice issues after the campaign ended. They also said that they would have been able to approach their supervisor for support if they had needed to because their supervisor was so *“approachable”*.

The documentary screening appeared to be the session that the participants found most distressing but the responses also indicated that it was also one of the most enjoyable sessions, alongside the blog articles. The participants clearly valued the educative aspects of these activities and felt appropriately prepared and supported to deal with them within a classroom environment. For example, one participant stated:

*“Some of the topics were distressing, such as the violence Banaz was exposed to. However, we are warned of this at the start and had the option to leave. Gender-based violence is real life for many young girls and therefore the activities were more eye opening than distressing.”*

The data suggests that the authors struck an appropriate balance in meeting their duty of care to the students whilst also highlighting issues that in practice they may be exposed to with little support or prior warning.

### ***Limitations of the campaign***

When asked about the limitations of the campaign and areas that could be improved in future campaigns/activities, a number of issues were raised by the participants.

Firstly, students were asked whether they thought the campaign was too “female victim focused”. Four out of five respondents felt that it was. The female focus of the campaign was also reflected in the definitions of GBV outlined above, where two out of five of the students specifically mentioned abuse perpetrated against women. Students made the following comments about the mainly female-victim focus of the campaign:

*“I know that Gender-based Violence and Violence against Women is interchangeable, but it has been really women focused and I’m just wondering if it could be more men focused”*

*“I just feel like it needs to be a bit more like, “ok, this can encompass everyone”, whereas it was just really “women, women, women, women”, which I understand. It’s mainly just against women...”*

*“When [X] came in, you could tell straight off that she was really, just a feminist basically... which isn’t like awful, but... the way she was speaking was a bit against men in some aspects. She was like “when men do this” and “when men do that.”*

*“Whilst I appreciate that GBV is considered to be generally towards females and their perspectives need to be presented, I think it would allow students to have a more well-rounded and informed viewpoint if other groups of people are also considered.”*

The negative reaction to the female focus of this campaign appears to be evidence of the ‘backlash effect’ as highlighted by Salazar.<sup>65</sup> This was particularly apparent in the session on online abuse against feminists. It is possible that students who did not identify as feminist felt ostracised by this session or that the focus on male-to-female abuse led to some students feeling defensive about the treatment of men within the sessions. However, as is apparent from the quotes above, students appeared to understand that the reason for the female-victim approach was that statistically there are more female victims of GBV.

However, as identified in the final quote, students were also keen to hear about other victims of GBV. Students expressly indicated a wish to hear about male victims of domestic abuse and abuse within same-sex relationships.

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<sup>65</sup> Salazar, L. Cook, A (2006) ‘Preliminary findings from an outcome evaluation of an intimate partner violence preventing program for adjudicated, African American, *adolescent males*’ *Journal of Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* Volume 4, Issue 4, pp. 386-385.

## REFLECTING ON OUR INITIAL AIMS

After analysing the data and identifying the key themes, the authors then considered the feedback from the participants, reflecting on the initial aims. All respondents agreed that participation in the campaign had increased their awareness of GBV and in particular the practical issues of advising BAME victims of domestic abuse. England is a multicultural, diverse society and as a result family law practitioners are now often being expected advise in culturally sensitive or international family law cases. As has been highlighted earlier in this article, recent family court statistics demonstrate a continuing general upward trend in both the number of applications and actual orders made for Forced Marriage Protection Orders and Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders.<sup>66</sup> By increasing the students' awareness of these issues the authors would argue that they have taken steps towards developing an effective educational tool to ensure that students are equipped to deal with the realities of family practice in England. There was some evidence that the students' engagement with issues of gender justice was continued beyond participation in the campaign in those students who completed second blog articles on GBV and those who reported changed career aspirations after participating in the 16 Days campaign.

There was also evidence that the students' knowledge of the domestic and international frameworks around GBV had increased. This was reflected in the blog articles and the definitions that the students provided of GBV. As this was not a longitudinal study, the

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<sup>66</sup> Ministry of Justice and National Statistics (28 June 2018) *Family Court Statistics Quarterly: January to March 2018*.

data does not reveal whether this knowledge was retained after the end of the programme. This is discussed in the research limitations.

However, the campaign largely focused on GBV perpetrated against female victims by male perpetrators. This was somewhat led by female victim focus of the international campaign and also by the generally accepted view that the majority of victims of gender-based violence and abuse are female.<sup>67</sup> That said, the number of male victims of GBV is not insignificant. For example, there were an estimated 713,000 male victims of domestic abuse in 2017<sup>68</sup> and in the same year 21.4% of the cases referred to the Forced Marriage Protection Unit involved male victims<sup>69</sup>. This limitation in the campaign was identified by many of the students in their responses and cannot be ignored. By failing to consider the wider victims of gender violence such as male victims, victims of abuse in a same-sex relationships or non-binary victims, it could be argued that the authors have not yet succeeded in fully achieving the aims of the study.

### ***Research limitations***

The research had other general limitations. This study only relates to students undertaking the Student Law Office module on the MLaw (Solicitors Route) Exempting course at Northumbria University. It therefore cannot be said to be representative of

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<sup>67</sup> The Office of National Statistics estimates that, for the year ending March 2017, there were 1.2 million female victims of domestic abuse compared to 713,000 male victims: Office for National Statistics (23 November 2017) *Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2017* <  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017>>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Home Office (16 March 2018) *Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2017*

students on other programmes or at other Higher Education institutions. It is recognised that the findings therefore cannot be generalised and further research is necessary to understand if this is an effective way of educating students more generally about GBV.

To maintain anonymity in the responses the students were not asked to identify whether they were participating in a family law firm in the clinic and therefore required to attend the sessions or whether they were a member of a different firm and therefore attending voluntarily. It could be argued that the 18 students who elected to participate in a family law firm, may have an existing interest in some of the issues covered. The findings may therefore not be representative of MLaw students more generally.

It was not possible to identify from the data which of the particular activities were most effective in developing the students' knowledge or practical skills. As such, the authors are only able to comment on the campaign as a whole. Furthermore, whilst the authors noted an improvement in the students' confidence and ability to deal with vulnerable clients (and this was mirrored in comments made by the respondents), it was not clear from the data whether this was directly related to their participation in the campaign or the fact that the students simply became more experienced at working with such clients over the course of the academic year. It is the authors' belief, however, that the campaign provided the students with the breadth of knowledge that allowed them to think more broadly (and more creatively) about the issues affecting their clients.

A final limitation of the study is that the data does not show whether the students' knowledge was retained beyond their participation in the 16 Days campaign. Research

suggests that studies which focus on ‘laws and justice’ may be more likely to have longer term benefits than curriculums which are interaction based (i.e. focussed on setting and communicating boundaries in relationships, the formation of relationships, wanted/unwanted behaviours)<sup>70</sup>. The authors’ curriculum was predominantly focussed on law and justice however further research would be needed to evaluate the longer-term effects of the study.

#### IMPACT ON THE WIDER COMMUNITY

One of the underlying reasons for asking students to participate in the campaign was to aid them in assisting victims of GBV both in their clinic work but also in their future employment, should they choose a career in this field. The true aim of the project therefore goes beyond the impact on the students participating in the campaign, towards the impact on victims of GBV in the local community and beyond. This is something that was acknowledged by one of the participants who stated that:

*“I know that working in family firms is rewarding but working in communities and with women where they seemingly have no other access to legal advice made it more satisfying.”*

Since 2017, students in the family firms in the Student Law Office have provided assistance by way of advice or representation in over 30 cases and over 20 women have received advice through the Empower 4 Justice drop in clinic. In addition to this, the A

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<sup>70</sup> Taylor, B. Stein, N. Burden, F (2010) ‘The Effects of Gender Violence/Harassment Prevention Programming in Middle Schools: A Randomised Experimental Evaluation’ *Violence and Victims Journal* Volume 25 Number 2. pp. 202-223.

Family Affair blog has received over 2200 views across 35 countries since its launch in November 2017.

The impact of this project was acknowledged at the annual Law Works & Attorney General Student Pro-Bono Awards, where it was awarded “Best New Pro Bono Activity”.<sup>71</sup> The award nomination acknowledged the 16 Days campaign, combined with the wider work that the students do to assist victims of domestic abuse in the local community through the clinic, Empower 4 Justice and the online blog.

#### TAKING THE RESEARCH FORWARD – CONCLUDING REMARKS

Building on the feedback received and in a continued attempt to meet the aims set out, the authors now plan to move away from the female-focused 16 Days campaign, towards a two-day student conference that will consider a wider range of victims of GBV. Workshops will be developed to specifically discuss male victims of domestic abuse and domestic abuse within same-sex relationships.

However, when educating students about these issues, the authors consider that it is important to maintain the pedagogical focus of the activities, acknowledging that students learn in very different ways. Jacobson discusses the importance of this in her work around learning style theory and particularly how increased diversity of gender and ethnicity in law schools has equally led to increased diversity in thought and learning

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<sup>71</sup><https://www.lawworks.org.uk/solicitors-and-volunteers/get-involved/lawworks-and-attorney-generals-student-pro-bono-awards-2018>



styles.<sup>72</sup> A variety of different learning activities will therefore be incorporated into the conference structure including workshops, poster competitions and documentary screenings.

Adopting a conference structure will also be an opportunity to engage students in research-rich learning, a focus for many UK higher education institutions. At the end of the conference, students will be invited to either submit an article to the “A Family Affair” blog<sup>73</sup> or a paper to the Student Journal of Professional Education and Academic Research<sup>74</sup>. This has employability benefits for the students who choose to take up these publication opportunities and provides evidence of their research and written communication skills that they can provide to potential employers. The data already gathered indicates that this is a benefit that students particularly value.

Staff and students from other higher education institutions will also be invited to attend the conference. This will be an opportunity to share best practice in this area and to engage other universities where there is a demand for this type of work but where there may be a lack of expertise, time or funding to be able to run similar programmes. Secondly, this will allow data to be gathered on methods of educating students about GBV outside of Northumbria University, making the findings more widely applicable to higher education institutions.

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<sup>72</sup> Jacobson, M.H. Sam (2001) *A primer on learning styles: reaching every student (law school)*, Seattle University Law Review, Summer, 2001, Vol.25(1), p.140,

<sup>73</sup> <https://afamilyaffairsite.wordpress.com>

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.northumbriajournals.co.uk/index.php/sjpe>

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