

## Written evidence from Dr Karen Jones, Institute of Education, University of Reading [EOV0009]

This evidence is submitted by Dr Karen Jones from the Institute of Education at the University of Reading, an expert with 17 years research experience in higher education, focusing for the past 10 years on gender equality research.

1. My evidence for the ***escalation of violence against women and girls inquiry*** relates to the question of how effective the police service is at responding to these behaviours and how might those responses be improved.
  2. In March 2019 the UK Treasury announced a £100m Serious Violence Fund to address violent crime. £35m was allocated to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in 18 local areas to support multi-agency approaches to tackle and prevent serious violence at a local level through the creation of violence reduction units (VRUs). Preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one key aim of VRUs.
  3. My research evidence is based on evaluation of a VRU led intervention to reduce and prevent VAWG behaviours that was implemented in Secondary Schools in a region of England between 2021-22. The intervention chosen by the VRU is known as: '*Mentors in Violence Protection*' (MVP). This is an established peer mentor-led programme designed to help young people challenge beliefs and narratives that lead to gender violence using a bystander approach
  4. MVP was pioneered in universities in the United States in the mid-1990s<sup>1</sup>, and since then has been widely implemented in school, university and youth settings in the United States. In the United Kingdom MVP has been implemented in schools in Scotland since 2012 and in England since 2015.
  5. Multiple evaluations of MVP in the United States and the United Kingdom provide mixed results, ranging from positive reports that MVP is effective in countering sexist attitudes and paves the way to prevent gender violence<sup>2</sup>, to studies finding mixed effects<sup>3</sup> or no effect<sup>4</sup>.
  6. Findings from my evaluation of a VRU led MVP project highlighted significant barriers and difficulties implementing MVP and evaluating this intervention in secondary schools.
  7. One plausible reason for these difficulties is that the project coincided with the global Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, an initial online information event, delivered by an education expert from the VRU, was well attended resulting in 39 secondary schools provisionally indicating an interest in the project. These schools received an MVP project pack detailing steps to take, with guidance, teaching materials and lesson plans, etc.
  8. Periodic monitoring was conducted by a named contact at the VRU. 11 schools did not respond to that person's emails, telephone calls or voicemail messages. Two schools lost their staff lead for MVP due to staff changes, which stalled progress. 16 schools indicated they had done some preliminary work and/or planned to start MVP the following school year. Five schools had done nothing but after follow-up communication from the VRU they indicated an interest. Four of those schools had to be sent the training pack again.
- Overall, monitoring by the VRU suggested that five schools had implemented MVP and**

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<sup>1</sup> Katz, J. (1995). Reconstructing masculinity in the locker room: The Mentors in Violence Prevention project. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65(2), 163–175. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.65.2.55533188520136u1>.

<sup>2</sup> Cissner, A.B. (2009) Evaluating the Mentors in Violence Prevention Program – Preventing Gender Violence on Campus. [https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/MVP\\_evaluation.pdf](https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/MVP_evaluation.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Kettrey H., Marx R. (2019). The effects of bystander programs on the prevention of sexual assault across the college years: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 48(2), 212–227. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-018-0927-1>

<sup>4</sup> Pagani, S., Hunter, S. C., & Elliott, M. A. (2023). Evaluating the Mentors in Violence Prevention Program: A Process Examination of How Implementation Can Affect Gender-Based Violence Outcomes. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(3–4), 4390–4415. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221115117>

<sup>5</sup> Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (1997). *Realistic evaluation*. London: Sage.

- another 25 schools were at varying stages of early planning or implementation, totalling 30 schools.
9. My research followed an established Realistic Evaluation approach<sup>5</sup> and involved an online survey of the 30 schools. Focus groups with staff, mentors and mentees/pupils were planned in a smaller sample of at least three schools, however, only 7 schools participated in the online survey, and none agreed to take part in focus groups. Notwithstanding the limitations of the sample, the evaluation provided important insights into the realities of implementing VAWG interventions in secondary schools.
  10. My evaluation revealed that only three schools implemented MVP, not the original number believed. Four other schools taking part in the evaluation confirmed they did not implement MVP. Most schools not participating in the evaluation also confirmed they had not implemented MVP.
  11. Schools that disengaged in MVP did not appear to be unmotivated, instead, they reported that operational demands and the Covid-19 pandemic impeded roll out of the intervention. Several schools also said they were not given sufficient notice or time to plan and prepare for the project.
  12. The results for the three schools that implemented MVP show that none of the schools followed all the recommended steps. However, steps taken included the following: across the three schools 21 staff were involved in leading and delivering MVP. One school trained 18 pupils from key stage 5 (years 12-13) as mentors and delivered MVP to 360 pupils from key stage 3 (years 7-9). Another school chose not to use peer-mentors due to the complex educational needs of pupils but delivered an adapted version to 60 pupils. The third school also chose not to train mentors but delivered an adapted version of MVP to 1200 pupils. In all three schools, MVP was delivered within tutor time, pastoral sessions, PSHE and/or RSHE.
  13. All three schools that implemented elements of MVP said it was relevant to pupils, meaning they could relate to it. The school that used peer mentoring valued the approach, citing it supported engagement among younger pupils and built pupils' confidence to speak up and tackle problems when these arise.
  14. An interesting and unexpected outcome was the *Staff training element* helped to build confidence among staff and empowered them to deal with problems.
  15. Still, these schools experienced various challenges including gaining buy-in from different stakeholders, such as senior leadership, staff (teaching and non-teaching), and pupils, finding time to train mentors and meet with them regularly, time to prepare pupils for peer mentoring, scheduling peer-mentoring to fit with different year-group timetables.
  16. Overall, the three schools rated MVP as very good, which placed it mid-way between higher ratings of exceptional and excellent and lower ratings of fair and poor. When asked if similar results could have been achieved if the school had not participated in MVP, one said probably and two did not know.
  17. Although the sample in this evaluation is small, due to time pressures in schools and competing demands of different curricula it is plausible that a similar set of issues will impact on future VAWG interventions in schools if these are not addressed.

## Recommendations

18. The effectiveness of MVP in terms of empowering teachers raises the question of how teachers and school leaders can be better supported to tackle VAWG. Teacher training and continuous professional development should be an important consideration in future school-based interventions. Interventions tailored to the needs of school staff and UK school contexts (e.g., curricula) are likely to be most efficacious.

19. When developing new VAWG interventions for schools, projects should involve staff and pupils (and potentially other stakeholders) in programme design to ensure interventions respond to the needs of the contexts and people intended on using them.
20. Future VAWG interventions for schools must be planned to provide time for schools to prepare and roll out programmes. Schools need time and support to gain buy-in from school leaders, staff, parents/carers and pupils; time to engage with community partners (if applicable), time for training, timetabling, and they need ongoing support.
21. WAWG interventions in secondary schools have significant potential to address the complexities of gender-based violence as part of the revised curriculum for Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) and Relationship, Health and Sex Education (RHSE). Explicit alignment to the curriculum might help to persuade schools of the benefits.
22. The support needs of schools should be considered as integral to the design of future VAWG interventions. This offers a promising opportunity to build communities of practice that may equip schools not only to deliver interventions, but to also play a key role in community-based efforts to prevent and tackle VAWG.
23. It would be beneficial to undertake a risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis for any future VAWG interventions as there is a risk of further and even entrenched disengagement in such interventions if schools question the operational viability or usefulness of what is offered.
24. Effective monitoring by partners of WAWG interventions is critical, not only to give an accurate picture of take-up but so that timely support is given to schools when needed.
25. Future programmes should build evaluation in at design stage to ensure data can be easily and securely recorded, is fit for purpose, and can easily be shared among project adopters to help with continuous improvement and planning. It is recommended that baseline data collection and follow-up data collection points are embedded into programmes.

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