



Best Practice
Guidelines for
ethical co-design of
'Ending Male
Violence Against
Women and Girls'
campaigns with
underrepresented
communities

Introduction

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a severe problem. A number of regional and national campaigns have sought to induce change by challenging perpetrator behaviours, promoting support services, and/or encouraging positive upstander behaviours.

There are criticisms that the majority of behaviour-based campaigns, particularly those centred on Ending Male Violence Against Women and Girls (EMVAWG) can overlook non-White British populations, and where they do target diverse ethnicities there is a perception that this can be counter-productive.

Feedback from a Safer Streets Round 3-funded report by That's All Media (that explored perceptions of VAWG within Afro-Caribbean, South Asian & Arab, and LGBTQI communities) indicated an urgent need for tiered communications that properly understands the different culture, attitudes and experiences of people rather than a homogenous approach to 'all underrepresented groups' that can be viewed as offensive and exclusionary.

Getting campaigns right matters – as there are significant concerns and a growing evidence base on both the disproportionate impact and under-reporting of VAWG crimes within underrepresented groups.

For example, there is evidence that those from a minority background, particularly from a migrant community, are disproportionately impacted by domestic abuse (Gill, 2009). The ONS (2019) data showed that in the year 2018–2019, the rates of domestic abuse amongst Black and Minoritised communities were higher than their white counterparts, and rates of domestic abuse were highest amongst those of mixed ethnicity. Data shows us that underreporting is even more acute within minority communities (Imkaan, 2020).

[Listen to us! Communication barriers: How statutory bodies are failing Black, Minoritised, Migrant, Deaf and Disabled women and girls victims/survivors of VAWG](#) found that victims and survivors with communication needs (including language barriers) are more likely to be afraid to contact the police for fear of discrimination and violence based on their previous experiences and interactions.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for VAWG campaigns to reassess how campaigns are designed and delivered. Ethical co-design can help in shaping the messages and to properly encourage behavioural change, and needs to be paramount in developing any VAWG campaigns with underrepresented groups.

Here, we present guidelines for how to go about this process, with particular focus on how to properly design in-community focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

While these are intended for VAWG campaigns specifically, the guidelines may have value for designing other campaigns in underrepresented communities.

Methodology

Undertaking a co-designed campaign is not without risks.

The initial research and consultations with participants and partner organisations must be carried out with caution, to not only prevent the potential risk of re-traumatisation of those participating (should they have lived experience of VAWG crimes), but also to ensure a positive impact on the lives of those involved. Careful design of methodologies is therefore essential.

We piloted our approach with participants (male and female) from the Black British community in the West Midlands. The core objective was to test and modify the framework based on feedback from participants.

We also wanted to test the how the framework interacted with the usefulness of objective. In other words, we wanted to also improve the standard of insight (to better shape campaigns) as well as ensuring non-exploitative, risk-aware practice.

In our pilot we commissioned an independent market research agency to support the project (via a tendering process) and then set about designing a series of focus groups and IDIs (in-depth interviews). A discussion guide on VAWG topics that we wanted to investigate (including on how to make campaigns more effective) was co-developed with the Victims' Team at the West Midlands Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Recruitment took place through known networks and via online form submission (although via telephone was also accepted). Potential participants were screened for suitability based on geographic location, and then a preliminary call was held to confirm details and provide an opportunity for questions.

Participants were offered payment (£60) for attendance at either a focus group or IDI. We held two focus groups (one male, one female) and 8 IDIs.

Following the research, our market research partners produced a report on the findings.

Through this process we held regular discussions about the 'how' of the project – putting the emphasis on participant experience. As with any project, there were obstacles that arose. Here we started mitigation by exploring the ethics of potential pathways – putting that discussion at the heart of our planning. That meant we were not always taking the easiest or most practical option, but the one that stayed most true to our ethos.

Over the course of the pilot project design, and our experiences of running it, we identified some considerations that have helped to inform the guidelines and, in particular, Part 3 (elements to include in a project plan for ethically co-designed campaigns).

An overview of the guidelines

The guidelines are divided into three parts, which each address different areas of concern when designing VAWG campaigns with underrepresented communities.

They consist of:

- the EMVAWG Campaign design principles, which identify the core elements to adhere to in such projects (not only for underrepresented communities). These can help to 'set the table' for a proper, ethical approach to the work.
- a framework for a participant-centred approach, which includes key questions to check whether your project actually places participants, their safety and wellbeing at the forefront of the project. This way, organisations can avoid exploitative information gathering and campaign design, and instead aim to make research a meaningful and transformative experience for participants and partner organisations, while contributing to the ending of VAWG.
- recommendations of elements to include in a project plan for ethically co-designed campaigns.

How they can be used:

- To inform best practice in VAWG campaigns in underrepresented groups and to guarantee that the campaigns developed are both effective in encouraging behavioural change and compliant with ethical standards.
- As a framework to ensure that all practices are equitable and safe.
- As a resource to share with partners so that they are aware of the ethical practice being used and that the commitment to the EMVAWG Campaign design principles is demonstrated.

Part 1: EMVAWG Campaign design principles

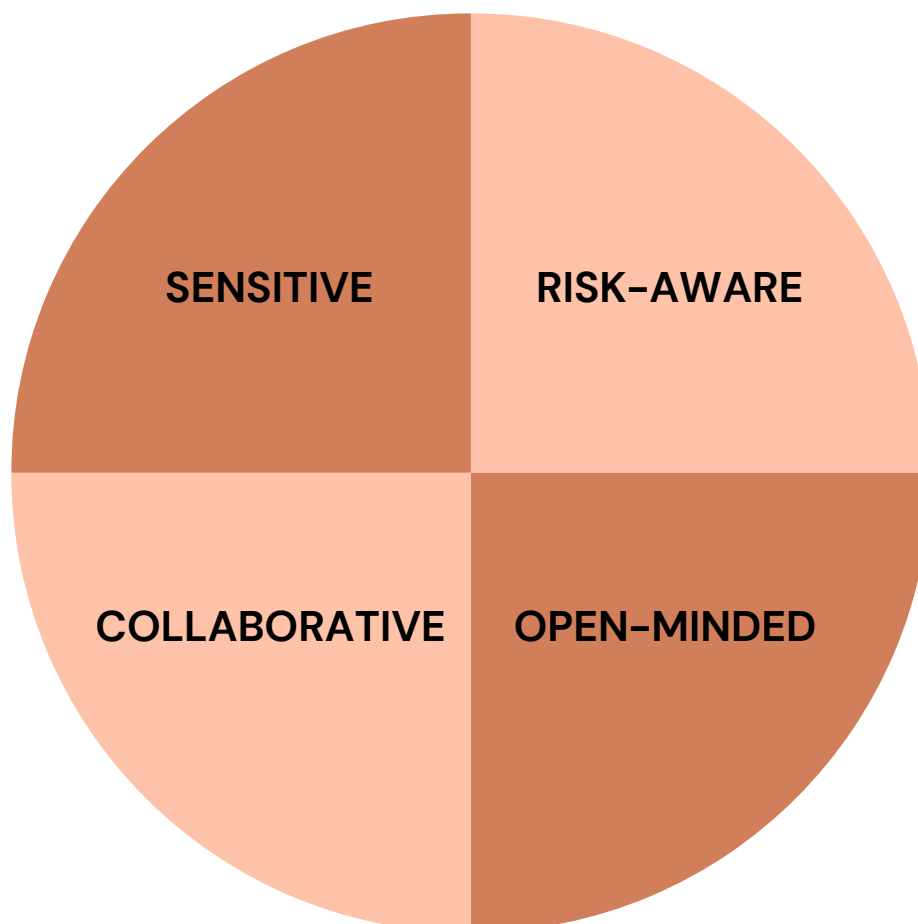
The EMVAWG Campaign design principles list the key elements that project designers should pay attention to, including those that ensure that the project avoids doing harm to the participants and instead aims to bring about a positive transformation of VAWG behaviours.

A first step towards this is being aware of and sensitive to the nature of the project and the potential risks for participants, partners, and the project team.

These can be context-specific (e.g., different cultural and / or religious contexts can imply different challenges and risks for participants) – and so analysing and mapping these risks at the outset is a crucial step in making sure that the research will not put participants in danger.

Risk analyses can be made in a collaborative way, since participants and partners are often best aware of the safety concerns they have. This will help to avoid discussions from becoming an extractive or exploitative experience for those involved in it.

Finally, it is important to shape an environment through which the most illuminating insight can be drawn. By this, we mean not having pre-determined ideas about the outputs desired (be that in terms of messaging, or methods of communicating). That is essential for developing meaningful communications campaigns that have the authenticity and ability to lead to positive change in VAWG behaviours within a specific community.



Part 1: EMVAWG Campaign design principles

SENSITIVE

The project leaders must account for the sensitive nature of the VAWG topic and its relevance in the context of underrepresented groups.

This means putting participant experience central to the design of insight projects and campaign outputs – sometimes making decisions that reduce other objectives (e.g., audience reach, size of focus groups) to put safeguarding and ethical co-design to the fore.

RISK-AWARE

Campaign managers, researchers and organisations should look to identify potential risks of conducting the project (both the process of research and insight, and the campaign design) and encourage open discussion of these risks.

Such risks might include participants or partners feeling disempowered, exploited or traumatised. In addition to anticipating these risks, project managers should consider viable ways for mitigating or addressing problems as they arise in line with the ethical approach: for example, provision of ongoing support for participants, providing opt-out opportunities, etc.

COLLABORATIVE

Representatives from the underrepresented community, not only those already embedded within the organisation leading the campaign, should be involved throughout all stages of the project. This includes in the design of methodology and the production of campaign elements.

Time frames should be agreed upon at the outset of the project to ensure that partners and participants are clear on when they might be expected to input. This should be realistic, inclusive, and permissive of proper reflection due to the nature of the subject. This can be contrary to how communications campaigns are often designed (rapidly and goal-oriented) and so needs to be established early. Rushed projects can lead to the decentring of ethical practice.

OPEN-MINDED

Ethical co-design of a communications campaign means not having pre-determined ideas about the types of message or means of communicating that message. This can be helped by bringing in an external, experienced interviewer to run focus groups and IDIs (thus avoiding unconscious bias).

Part 2: Framework

The framework for ethical co-design sets out key questions to help guide organisations in developing co-designed VAWG campaigns and checking whether projects place participant safety, wellbeing and voice at the heart of the process.

The questions are intended to be used as a tool to explore and negotiate the diversity of requirements for a project – to identify where gaps may exist and help bring partners towards a common understanding before the outset of the project.

The framework is organised into three areas.

1) Context: Aims to understand the local political, historical and social context, and what this means for the ways in which VAWG is experienced and understood.

2) Relationships: Aims to make sure that we build collaboration, as well as how we can reflect on the values and assumptions we all bring to the process.

3) Change: Aims to understand how to bring about positive change through the process and campaign outputs so that it benefits participants and communities.

CONTEXT

- What do we know about the context of VAWG in this community?
- What is the political, historical and cultural context?
- What does the context mean for risks, sensitivities and understanding of VAWG?
- Who has expertise, especially where it is lacking within the project team?

RELATIONSHIPS

- How do we work together?
- Who participates in the project?
- Who benefits from the campaign we design?
- How do we ensure genuine representation within the underrepresented group?
- How do we manage power inequalities?
- What values and assumptions do we bring to the design process?

CHANGE

- How will we learn more about the changes needed?
- What would positive change look like for participants?
- What would positive change look like for the community?
- Who decides what change should look like?
- What role can a campaign play in enacting change?

Part 3: Core elements of project plan and co-designed campaigns

Once project leaders and partners have held discussions based on the EMVAWG Campaign design principles and the above framework, we recommend the development of the overall plan for co-designing a campaign.

This plan should outline the different steps that the initial insight process will entail, but without being overly prescriptive about the outputs at this stage (merely a point of reference that outputs need to be delivered). In doing so, it stays true to the principle of open-mindedness.

The plan should include realistic timeline for each of the different phases of co-design; project design, recruitment, insight / data collection, campaign design and launch. It should also note the specific methods that will be used and, crucially, the ethical issues that the project managers foresee and the measures that can be taken to prevent and mitigate these risks.

Here, we outline a non-exhaustive list of key considerations for ethical co-design of VAWG campaigns with participants from the community.

Prioritise safeguarding

Before any interaction with participants, be sure to have clear processes in place for when concerns are flagged throughout the process. This may involve workshopping what to do during an interview if a safeguarding concern is raised, and / or putting in place systems that reduce risk for participants (e.g., having IDs available at different times so they can discuss from a quiet room without others nearby).

Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

It is important in any research insight, but particularly that pertaining to VAWG, that participants in focus groups are protected. This can be helped by putting an external interviewer from an accredited agency 'in-between' the project team and the participants, but also requires adherence to General Data Protection Regulation.

Signposting

Make the signposting of support services paramount throughout. This means providing easy-to-follow links to support services at the point of recruitment, reiterating these at the outset of the focus group / interview, and then providing a final link in follow-up.

Anticipate 'realisations'

There is a risk that people have lived experience of a VAWG crime without being fully aware of the severity of it. Going through the process of discussing VAWG and behaviours can prompt participants to a 'realisation', and so be sure to give people the opportunity to experience this safely.

Part 3: Core elements continued

Safeguarding researchers

Proper design means protecting both participants and the research team. Discussion of VAWG topics can be challenging for experienced interviewers too, and so build in processes to provide proper support and lines of communication throughout.

Provide options to participants

Some participants feel more comfortable in a focus group where they can interact with others, whereas others prefer a one-to-one discussion with an interviewer as they perceive it to be more anonymous.

Non-exploitative remuneration

While some projects might look for volunteers, or offer small voucher payments, find ways of paying people directly and with fair remuneration for participation. (In our pilot study we offered £60 for a 1.5 hour attendance). Doing so helps participants to feel properly valued for their input. Be clear that, should a participant become distressed during a focus group or IDI, and needed to withdraw, that this will not impact on payment (so as to not pressure people into persisting while at risk or traumatised).

Consider different ways of accessing focus groups or interviews

Not everyone has internet access / access to a computer. This can be helped by mixing IDIs and focus groups (as the former is easier to do via phone). By going through charities to reach participants there is also potential for participants to use a third party to access a quiet room and computer.

Language matters

Use clear language and avoid unnecessary jargon in order to make sure the project plan, and any related material, is understandable and relevant for all.

Communicate goals of project

During the recruitment phase, and at the start of interviews, clearly communicate the goal of the campaign and how insight will be used. Particularly with underrepresented groups, it is vital to stress that campaigns were not to 'target' a community, but to co-design campaigns with a community and to shape messages based on community-specific insight.

Take care in recruitment

It can be challenging to recruit participants to focus groups – so build in additional time to allow for a wider range of demographics within the community (age, employment status, other) to gain a more representative input. Where possible look to avoid interviewing 'in-sector' workers from VAWG. While they have valuable insight that should be incorporated into campaigns, they are skewed by subject-matter knowledge that we wanted to avoid having in focus groups.

When writing a discussion guide, start with broad themes

VAWG, in particular, is understood differently by people. Start with broad themes, perhaps about their understanding of the language, behaviours and ideas that underpin VAWG to gain a common ground. This can feel a little detached from more specific goals (e.g., what sort of campaign messages would work?) but is vital.

Build in time for reflection

When developing a guide, be clear to add in time at the outset to properly frame the conversation, and allow for 15–20 minutes post-call as a 'period of reflection'. By ringfencing this time it can empower participants to talk to the interviewer about how they felt the conversation went, to ask about the project, and to raise any concerns. Be sure not to end discussions abruptly.

Ethical design of campaign outputs

While the primary focus of the guidelines is to support ethical co-design of campaigns through the research, insight and consultation phase of development, the principles can also (and should also) be considered in terms of the production of campaign deliverables and outputs.

This can be helped by continuing open conversations with the community (perhaps with a community feedback group who are remunerated for their time).

This is not an exhaustive list of considerations, as VAWG campaigns can vary significantly in terms of their exact purpose and construction. However, we believe the questions posed can help guide campaign managers towards more ethical design of VAWG campaigns with underrepresented groups.

- Consider using more than one channel for campaigns. If you're primarily using digital/social content, don't forget that printed content for community hubs can be equally effective and helpful for those without access to social media.
- Ask participants in the research phase about specific channels they interact with. Perhaps there are specific radio shows / stations, TV shows, newspapers etc. that you might be able to target for campaign messages based on their insight.
- Representation matters. When it comes to casting for videos, or selecting photography, consult with members of your community feedback group. They can help to identify fair representation.
- Think carefully about language. Not only do you need to consider language in the sense of having suitable translations / subtitles on content, but you also need to think carefully about wording. Your community feedback group can help guide on this.
- Keep the community at the heart of all PR. There is a tendency for larger organisations to prioritise their CEO / leaders in press releases and as spokespeople for a campaign. Might you be able to bring a community leader, or charitable organisation, to the fore to take the public lead on the campaign?

Notes

These guidelines were developed by LH Communications Limited on behalf of the Office of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, as part of the Safer Streets fund (Round 4). The research pilot was conducted by Vision One.

Readers of these guidelines may find the resources provided by the Faith and VAWG Coalition helpful in navigating matters of faith within underrepresented communities. Visit www.faithandvawg.org to find out more.