

**THE VIOLENCE,
ABUSE AND MENTAL
HEALTH NETWORK:
OPPORTUNITIES FOR
CHANGE**

ANNUAL REPORT

2021-2022

ABOUT THE VAMHN

Who we are

We are a network of individuals and organisations aiming to reduce the prevalence of mental health problems by addressing associated violence and abuse, particularly domestic and sexual violence. We bring together and support research by experts from a range of disciplines, sectors, and backgrounds - some with personal experience, others with expertise from the work that they do, and survivor researchers with both.

What we do

The VAMHN runs a number of free events and activities including: Providing grants of up to £25k through our annual competition, and training bursaries of £250

- Hosting meetings, lectures, and conferences;
- Developing new resources, including an online research database;
- Disseminating the latest findings and collaboration and funding opportunities;
- Identifying priorities for future research

The activities of the network are organised into 3 themes:

Measurement

Measuring the extent and impact of domestic and sexual violence in relation to mental health. Our first year activities focused on the theme of measurement

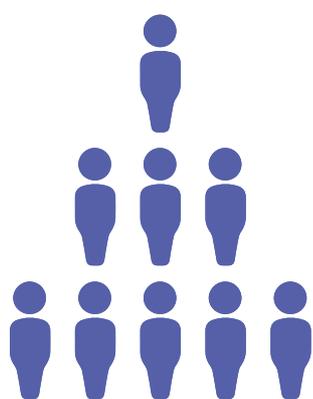
Understanding

Understanding the pathways that lead to domestic and sexual violence and their relationship to mental health problems

Intervention

Planning interventions and services to prevent, reduce and address domestic and sexual violence in people with mental health problems or at risk of developing mental health problems

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS



1,119
Network
members



2,507
Twitter
followers



12
Grant
projects
funded



29
ECRs
awarded
funding



13
Events
held



106
Members on
our directory
and forum

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO: WEBINARS

During 2021 we were busy! The next few pages we've highlighted some of the activities we've run over the past year, from engagement activities to creating new resources

We ran 13 webinars across 2021 which served a variety of functions which we've summarised below.

Forming connections

We have been delighted to work with a number of different organisations through our webinars including co-hosting webinars with the Trauma Informed Community of Action and The Connect Centre. We also welcomed speakers from the The Sexual Violence Research Initiative at our most recent network meeting, and have invited speakers from dozens of universities and NGOs across the UK and internationally.

Supporting Early Career Researchers

At the start of 2021 we began our ECR Lunchtime Seminar Series which ran across the year. These webinars were hosted by our VAMHN co-lead Prof. Helen Fisher and VAMHN co-investigator Dr Leonie Tanczer and were attended by over 150 ECRs . You can read more about this series on page 5.

Sharing knowledge from experts by experience

Over the past year our Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) have run two webinars on best practice when involving people with lived experience in research. These have been run both to support our VAMHN funding calls, as well as to provide guidance to researchers more broadly. Our LEAG members have also regularly spoken at our other webinars. You can read more about our LEAG on page 9

Sharing knowledge across disciplines

Overall our webinars are run to share knowledge from different sectors and disciplines. We've had speakers from the government, healthcare trusts, academia and the third sector. We have run webinars on a diverse range of topics including technology and domestic abuse; children and adolescents; and researcher trauma. To have a look at the full list of webinar recordings we have available, click [here](#).

EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

The VAMHN has over 300 ECRs signed up to the network. The network has run a variety of activities to help provide opportunities for growth and skill development for junior researchers. Have a look below at how we've been engaging our ECR members

ECR Grant Writing Workshop

From 2020-2021 we have been running ECR Grant Writing Workshops. The workshops support attendees to develop their grant proposals through feedback from their peers and senior members of the VAMHN team. We had 15 members attend these workshops and were grateful for their positive feedback on the sessions.

ECR Lunchtime Seminar Series

From 2021-2022 we ran six webinars as part of our ECR Lunchtime Seminar Series. This series invited expert speakers from across the country to advise ECRs on how to navigate and develop different research skills. These included:

- How to engage with the media
- How to engage with policy
- Juggling commitments
- Meet the publisher
- The ins and outs of grant applications
- Non-academic career pathways

To access the webinar recordings for each event, visit our website [here](#).

ECR Bursary Award Scheme

Since its inception, the VAMHN has been running two rounds of our ECR bursary award scheme. In 2021, we awarded 10 ECRs with funding of up to £250 to support their attendance at training courses and conferences relevant to domestic/sexual violence and mental health. To have a read about their experiences and what they did with their bursary, you can read their blogs on our website [here](#).

Here's what some of our previous awardees have had to say about their experience with the bursary scheme

"I am extremely thankful to the VAMHN network for offering me this opportunity and I would strongly advise fellow-ECRs to apply for this bursary."

"I am very grateful to the VAMHN for the support they provided me with the Early Career Researchers' (ECR) Bursary, which enabled me to attend the course."

"I am grateful to have received the VAMHN Early Career Researchers Bursary which allowed me to have this incredible learning experience and networking opportunity."

SETTING A RESEARCH AGENDA

The VAMHN is committed to helping shape and develop the research agenda around violence, abuse and mental health. We've collaborated with two high impact journals to foster state of the art publications.

Violence, Abuse and Mental Health: A linked series with the Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology Journal

We have partnered with the SPPE Journal to publish a linked series on violence, abuse and mental health. We put out a call to our network members asking to submit their papers. So far we have 6 papers published in this series. They are:

- Respect for the journey: a survivor-led investigation of undergoing psychotherapy assessment - *Faulkner et al*
- Sex differences in experiences of multiple traumas and mental health problems in the UK Biobank cohort - *Yapp et al*
- Research, education and capacity building priorities for violence, abuse and mental health in low- and middle-income countries: an international qualitative survey - *Keynejad et al*
- Past-year intimate partner violence perpetration among people with and without depression: an individual participant data (IPD) meta-mediation analysis - *Saunders et al*
- Medium-term health and social outcomes in adolescents following sexual assault: a prospective mixed-methods cohort study - *Clarke et al*
- Receiving threatening or obscene messages from a partner and mental health, self-harm and suicidality: results from the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey - *McManus et al*

To read these papers and to their invited commentaries click [here](#).

The Lancet Psychiatry Commission on Intimate Partner Violence and Mental Health

We are continuing our work on our commission piece with the Lancet Psychiatry. We are happy to announce this paper has been accepted for publication and we hope to launch it in June this year.

SMALL GRANT FUNDING

The VAMHN has held a small grant competition every year since we started. We have been lucky to receive high quality applications from across the country in every round. Our most recent call was on the theme of interventions. We received 23 applications in total and were able to award four project teams with awards of up to £25,000. Have a look below to see what they're about. To read more about the research we've funded in other rounds, visit our website [here](#).

What must I seem like to you? How 'victimhood' is portrayed in educational advocacy interventions for female survivors of domestic violence and abuse

The University of Roehampton

- Dr Melissa Jogie
- Professor Cecilia A. Essau
- Professor Aisha K. Gill

£24.9k

Support and interventions for parents with mental health needs and children identified as at risk of abuse: A systematic review and thematic synthesis of parent and practitioner experiences

King's College London

- Dr Angela Sweeney
- Dr Billie Lever Taylor

£24.9k

Intervention components that have common impacts across parental domestic violence, mental ill-health, and substance misuse

The University of Exeter

- Vashti Berry
- Kate Allen
- G.J. Melendez-Torres
- Chris Bonell
- Tamsin Ford

£24.9k

How do autistic adults conceptualise and recover from intimate violence and abuse?

The University of Sunderland

- Amy Pearson
- Felicity Sedgewick
- Monique Botha
- Kieran Rose
- Sarah Douglas

£24.9k

DIRECTORY RESOURCES

In 2020 we launched our Data Directory which signposted data repositories, datasets and aggregate/published statistics relevant to domestic and sexual violence and mental health.

We have now launched two additional directories to help connect our network members with each other and encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration.



Experts Directory

Our expert directory collates details of Network member expertise – e.g., academics, policy-makers, practitioners, those with lived experience, etc. This resource can be used to help members find experts to help with bids or research or more general questions and queries. To access the Expert Directory webpage click [here](#).



Network Directory

Our network directory is for organisations and networks – again, academic, policy-making, practitioner, lived experience, third sector, voluntary sector, etc. These may be formal or informal; organisations, discussion forums, mailing lists; etc. The resource can be used to help members find relevant networks to join, to signpost others to and potentially to help with bids or research or more general questions and queries. To access the Network Directory webpage click [here](#).

LIVED EXPERIENCE ADVISORY GROUP

Our Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) has been providing expert guidance to the activities of the network for over a year. They've been involved in developing many resources including blogs, podcasts, research papers and commentaries. This page highlights some of their brilliant work so far.

The past year...

Grant funding

Our LEAG was integral to redeveloping our grant panel process, from the wording of the brief through to the scoring criteria and the decisions around the award of funding. This meant that applications were only considered if they adequately considered co-production in the design of their research.

Written resources

In addition to authoring blog posts, our LEAG members have written commentary pieces that will be published in our SPPE Journal series.

Webinars

Our LEAG members have a wealth of knowledge and experience around violence, abuse and mental health. They have shared their expertise in a number of our webinars - the recordings of which are all accessible online. These include sitting on panels about researcher trauma and specialised webinars designed to advise on best practice around co-production in research.

Coming up...

Research

Our LEAG is currently working with The McPin Foundation to develop a research project addressing key gaps identified in our [VAMHN Consultation Report](#). We hope to keep members updated on the development of this project later this year.

Autoethnography paper

The LEAG will also be authoring a collaborative autoethnography on "The impact of criminalising and silencing trauma in mental health support through (mis)diagnoses". We have submitted the abstract to a journal and look forward to sharing the final publication in time.

“Whilst the pandemic waves hit yet again, and social restrictions and challenges loomed. Whilst this impacted everyone in so many unforeseen ways, there was a purposeful, proactive set of resilient people that brought a bright display of courage, consistency and confidence to me and to the aims and objectives of the VAMHN. It is a privilege to be a part of the VAMHN LEAG team and to be a part of a firm contribution to helping people who are coping with Complex Trauma. Thank you one and all, and long may it continue”

- Justin Coleman, VAMHN LEAG member

LIVED EXPERIENCE ADVISORY GROUP

A Note from our LEAG Coordinator

Lisa Ward joined the VAMHN as our Lived Experience Involvement Consultant in 2021. Lisa previously worked as the CEO of the Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse & Rape Crisis Centre, and is currently a lived experience consultant and researcher focusing on violence and abuse. She is involved in coordinating the network's Lived Experience Advisory Group. Lisa shares the below about her experience working with the VAMHN so far:



"Working alongside the LEAG members and VAMHN grantholders is a truly rewarding experience in which lived experience is held with the same value as learned knowledge. By coming together to share experiences and knowledge the group offer a space to question and challenge the dominate social narratives around violence, abuse and mental health and to suggest vital ways of changing how we work to ensure improved outcomes. I am indebted to the members of the LEAG for their willingness and capacity to share so eloquently, and have learnt so much in my role supporting the group."

- Lisa Ward, VAMHN Lived Experience Coordinator

To read more about our LEAG members visit our website [here](#).

POLICY INVOLVEMENT

In 2021 we were pleased to submit evidence to two national consultations. Details of both can be found below.



The Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

In February 2021 we were pleased to submit written evidence to the The Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. Information about the aims and objectives of the call (now closed) can be found [here](#).

APPG Inquiry into Domestic Abuse and Mental Health

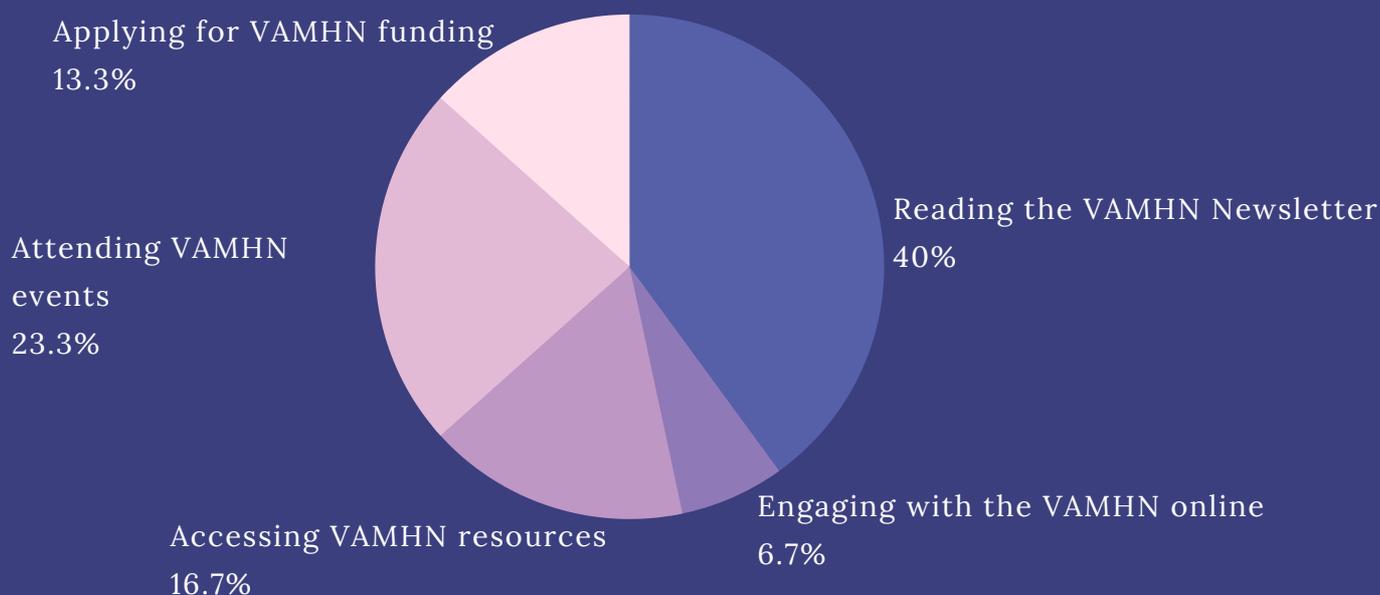
We were invited to submit written evidence to the APPG Inquiry into Domestic Abuse and Mental Health which we submitted in September 2021. Our submission was based on the content of our Lancet Psychiatry Commission on intimate partner violence and mental health, which we look forward to launching in June this year.

We look forward to continued participation in policy consultations and will continue to share calls for evidence with our network members in our monthly newsletters.

OUR MEMBERS FEEDBACK

To check in with our members we ran a survey to capture how they engage with the network and for feedback on how they think the VAMHN is doing. We received 14 respondents. Here's a look at what they said.

Which of the following activities have you engaged with as part of the network



Which of the following activities have you engaged with as part of the network



WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL?

Below is some of the lovely feedback we received from our members in our survey

"Building a Proactive and vibrant network of people that are not just 'talking about VAMH' but are actively grappling with VAMH. Research is delving deeper and the academic support, the staff interactions are outstanding!"

"Excellent newsletter"

"The newsletter and stuff for researchers"

"Sharing information and generating conversation"

"I think the newsletter and events are great - I often forward to others in other organisation. So while I may not have personally gained knowledge on policy and practice, others in my organisation have."

"Building up a network of interested people from across sectors and disciplines; offering funding for innovative and useful projects..."

"As my research area is quite niche, I very much enjoy being able to keep up-to-date with research and practice developments."

"Keeping the community updated on new research and raising awareness"

"Thank you and please, please, please keep on fighting the good fight!"

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE

Below are some points and questions raised by our members when we asked what we could do to improve

Can you provide larger or more creative grants or funding channels?

This year we decided to run another funding call focusing on creative public engagement events and look forward to updating our members when decisions have been made. Although we are not able to run another grant competition at this point, we do hope to continue to signpost our members to larger grants and opportunities where possible.

Are you able to engage with other organisations and the community more to develop research ideas?

Our LEAG are currently working with the McPin Foundation to develop a new research project that centres the priorities of people with lived experience. Additionally, the projects we fund through our grant competitions actively engage with their communities and local organisations to develop research that will impact the VAWG sector. We have also created our directory of experts and networks, as well as our VAMHN forum to allow cross disciplinary and cross sector collaboration between members.

Do you do much in terms of policy or activism? There is so much work to be done in terms of lobbying the government to make changes to the criminal and family justice system for example

We have been involved in a number of policy consultations relevant to violence, abuse and mental health including the DHSC, WomensAid, CPS and Domestic Abuse Bill. We aim to continue submitting evidence to these consultations and special interest groups within policy to bring violence, abuse and mental health to the forefront of the public agenda. Our fourth year of activities is also themed on raising awareness. We'll also be working with our coordination team on their Mental Health Research Matters campaign to highlight the importance of mental health in the VAWG arena.

THE YEAR AHEAD

We're now on our fourth year at the VAMHN! We've got some really exciting things lined up including:

- Funding projects of up to £15k for our VAMHN Arts Competition
- Even more exciting work from our LEAG
- A host of webinars, network meetings and events
- Sharing findings from our small grant project teams
- Launching our Lancet Psychiatry Commission on IPV and Mental Health
- Representing the network at the SVRI Forum in September

If you have any ideas on events we should run as part of the VAMHN do let us know at vamhn@kcl.ac.uk

We would like to send a huge thank you to all of our members for making the network what it is over the last year. It has been a joy to be able to connect with so many of you, and we hope you continue to stay engaged with us over the next year.



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