

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Atal trais ar sail rhywedd drwy ddulliau iechyd y cyhoedd](#)

This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) consultation on [The public health approach to preventing gender-based violence](#)

**PGBV 09**

**Ymateb gan: Bwrdd Cenedlaethol Pwyllgor Trais yn Erbyn Menywod Catholig Merched a Merched Catholig | Response from: National Board of Catholic Women Violence Against Women and Girls Committee**

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## **Evidence for the Equality and Social Justice Committee Consultation on Terms of Reference on Public Health Approach to Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls**

**25.4.23**

### **National Board of Catholic Women Violence Against Women and Girls Committee**

#### **Background**

The National Board of Catholic Women is a consultative body to the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. We work nationally to end discrimination and promote gender justice. The Board works with other Faith and secular groups and organisations as well as the UK government and the United Nations Economic and Social Committee.

The National Board of Catholic Women Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Committee is made up of experts, professionals and academics working with different forms of violence against women and girls. We work to campaign for gender justice, awareness raising and creating guidance through working groups focusing on different VAWG related areas. The VAWG Committee has links with VAWG organisations including Welsh Women's Aid, whose CEO is a committee member.

#### **Evidence for the terms of reference**

This response is based in both practice based evidence and our aspirational aims for future development. It is noted that anecdotal evidence and grey literature play an important role here as there is commonly a lack of robust evaluation and research on many very helpful interventions. Although we work closely with other organisations, this evidence focuses on experiences from within the Catholic Church.

The committee is fully supportive of the principle of a public health approach to VAWG prevention; this evidence explores the success of methods of implementation of the approach.

#### **What works in preventing gender-based violence before it occurs (primary prevention) and intervening earlier to stop violence from escalating (secondary prevention)**

The most effective tool of primary prevention is education understanding. This informs education about gender equality, safe relationships and consent. In the Catholic Church this can take place for children and young adults within the context

of Catholic primary and secondary school systems but also within parish communities, particularly within catechetical programmes, for example preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation.

### **Education in schools**

The RSE framework in Catholic schools in England and Wales responds to this need. In line with Welsh statutory guidance and code, children are taught about the importance of recognising the dignity of each person and how to foster healthy and respectful relationships. Building on this, the NBCW VAWG committee is currently in the early stages of creating guidance on primary prevention measures with young people; collaboration with organisations (such as Welsh Womens Aid) will be beneficial. Welsh Women's Aid have existing primary prevention programmes aimed at young people <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/chidren-and-young-people/>

### **Education in parishes**

In parish contexts, primary prevention can take place in the form of information displayed on noticeboards and in parish newsletters. There is potential for specially trained priests and deacons to include information aimed at primary prevention in sermons, in particular when the readings at Mass might contain ideas which could be taken out of context and weaponised by perpetrators of domestic abuse.

### **Education through Catholic projects**

There is currently a pilot project in the Archdiocese of Westminster "Safe in Faith" which is training clergy to provide this level of primary prevention. The project also has a website which contains signposting information and a downloadable signposting toolkit for clergy.

Safe in Faith also has in development the idea of training some parish staff to provide secondary prevention measures through their office by offering a safe and confidential space to seek help using phones and computers and offering signposting information. Survivors of domestic abuse and gender based violence will be able to ask for this service either directly or by asking for "Mary." The project is currently training both clergy and a group of faith-literate counsellors and psychotherapists with a view to creating directories for survivors to access spiritual or faith literate psychological support as additional secondary prevention measures.

Although this project is not currently available in Wales, the intention is for the pilot in the Diocese of Westminster to eventually be copied out in dioceses across England and Wales. Currently, the Catholic church in Wales is addressing gender justice issues around migrant women and refugees, but more work needs to be done.

**How effective is a public health approach to preventing gender-based violence and what more needs to be done to address the needs of different groups of women, including LGBT+, ethnic minorities , young and older people at risk of violence at home and in public spaces**

**Reaching women of Faith**

Public health approaches to social problems have the potential to be extremely effective when they are well implemented, as has been evidenced by responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Public health approaches to VAWG prevention similarly have the potential to be impactful depending on the way they are implemented. It is clear that some groups of women are not reached by generic public health initiatives. Poorly implemented public health approaches, which do not consider the needs of different communities, fail to effectively reach many groups of women; the focus of this evidence is women of faith. The needs of women of faith are often overlooked, in particular if they

The Faith and VAWG Coalition's "Keeping the Faith" report (2020) <https://www.faithandvawg.org/publications/resiurce-page-document-only/> highlights the barriers to effective support faced by survivors of faith. Survivors have described statutory support failing to meet their faith/spiritual needs while faith leaders were insufficiently trained to meet their needs as victims/survivors of abuse. Primary prevention messages may be more accessible to women of faith in the context and language of their faith community, and when they demonstrate awareness of and respect for their faith or spirituality.

### **Building bridges**

The Faith and VAWG Coalition aims to create robust links between faith communities and the DA/VAWG sector, upskilling both to more effectively meet the needs of survivors of faith. Strong links between statutory and third sector organisations and faith groups enable them to work together and educate each other to more effectively reach women of faith. It should be noted that Catholic women are not a homogenous group, and, particularly in more urban areas, may identify with a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, with diverse language needs.

**What is the role of public sector and specialist services (including the police, schools, the NHS, the third sector and other organisations that women and girls turn to for support) in identifying, tackling and preventing violence against women, and their role in supporting victims and survivors**

### **Experiences of women of Faith**

It should be noted that there are a range of places where women may reach out for support. Women of faith may well turn to faith leaders or members of their faith community for help, and clergy may find themselves in the role of "first responder". Effective training of clergy, catechists and parish workers is essential, in order to recognise potential situations where women in their communities are being harmed. This could be carried out through connections with existing DA/VAWG organisations and/or initiatives like the pilot Safe in Faith project which has the potential to be developed in Welsh dioceses. The Church is open to engagement with the public sector to discuss the opportunities for dialogue and with involvement from the Catholic community.

### **Connecting parish and school**

As families with children attending Catholic primary schools will commonly worship at the parish church affiliated with the school, there is potential for parish and school to work together to support families affected by DA/VAWG. Catholic schools and parishes working closely with statutory and third sector services have the highest chance to effectively reach Catholic women children and young people who may be subjected to VAWG.

## **Conclusion**

The NBCW VAWG committee would welcome the enquiry and Welsh Government's ambition to endorse the commitment to exploring a public health approach to prevention of VAWG if it is translated into action. The public health approach can be highly effective in prevention of VAWG when it is well implemented. Challenges to implementation include meeting the needs of diverse groups, including the needs of women of faith. These are groups of women whose needs are often overlooked, but generic public health approaches may fail to reach them. It is important to remember that faith groups are heterogeneous and needs of individuals within these communities may vary widely. There is potential for Catholic schools and parishes to form an effective part of public health initiatives, particularly when specialist training is provided to faith leaders and when close links are formed with other services.