

William Powell AC/AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
CARDIFF
CF99 1NA

25th June 2014.

Dear Mr Powell,

Petition P-04-540 Stop Sexism in Domestic Abuse

I refer to the letter from Ms Lesley Griffiths AC/AM dated 21st of May 2014 in connection with the above petition and I thank the Minister for her response and for confirming the Welsh government's (WG) commitment to supporting all victims of domestic abuse and violence (DA). There are concerns, however, that the Minister's response does not address certain key issues as described below.

Healing Men's Petition (HMP) refers to domestic abuse (DA) and the intimate personal nature of this phenomenon. The forthcoming legislation was originally entitled Domestic Abuse (Wales) Bill before it was radicalised by the Task and Finish Group (TFG) and adopted by the WG. This response is focused on that element that constitutes the original pre-radicalised concept of the new legislation i.e. domestic abuse in Wales.

DA is universally understood to be a complex phenomenon involving intimate personal relationships. The radicalised ideology put forward by the TFG divides the entire 7,000,000,000+ population of the world into two groups regardless of country, culture, situations, circumstances, age, history and any personal factors etc and then goes on to discriminate against one group as a violent stereotype and stereotypes the other group as non-violent – purely, and only, on the basis of a person's sex. An ideology framed in this way cannot hope to effectively recognise the subtleties and complexities of the intimate human relationships involved in DA in Wales. It is simply too crude and insensitive. It is old fashioned and backward facing, based in radicalised theories from the 1960s that are becoming increasingly discredited. The world has moved on in the last 50 years.

There is a hidden crisis as a result of these radicalised ideologies and that is the huge scale of under-reporting of DA by men. The barriers that men face include cultural, societal, institutional, lack of awareness, shame, profound shame and the fear of being shamed and other personal and gender issues. Some men stay with, and do not report, violent and abusive partners because they love them and want things to get better. They also stay to take the abuse and violence on themselves in order to protect their children from abuse. Men fear reporting DA from a female partner because radicalised and institutionalised sexism (TFG; “*..masculinity is associated with violence..*”) may well blame the man and arbitrarily exclude him from his partner, his children and his home.

The two sets of DA statistics quoted by the Minister start to come into line when the huge scale of this under-reporting is taken into account and the prevalence of DA starts to come into something like parity between the sexes. The use of severe force tends to mitigate the effect of under-reporting and, of those that suffered partner abuse in 2012/13, proportionately more men (34%) suffered from severe force than women (28%) (*ONS BCS Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences 2012/13 <http://tinyurl.com/nb4xga>; Table 4.11*). Research shows that suicide among men after suffering the effects of DA brings the deaths attributable to DA into approximate parity between the sexes.

The Equality Act 2010 and the WG's Gender Equality Duty requires the WG to ensure that an individual (as distinct from groups) is not discriminated against because of a protected characteristic i.e. this woman is not treated differently from this man because of her sex. Thus the prevalence, or otherwise, experienced by a group is not the issue under this legislation as it is one person's experience of discrimination that is the criterion. Although the Minister confirms the WG's support for all victims of DA, the Minister does not confirm that all victims of DA will be treated with equality regardless of that person's protected characteristics i.e. sex and/or sexual orientation. The current legal view is that the WG is already exposed to legal action by its adoption of the radicalised TFG Report but this is being in abeyance pending a detailed review of the proposed new legislation.

The Minister's response does not address the most important issue raised in the HMP and that is the protection of girls and boys from all instances of witnessing abuse or being abused themselves regardless of the sex of the instigator of the abuse. Boys and girls are at three times the risk when both parents are abusive, underlining the need to recognise all forms of abuse especially when it is bi-directional and girls and boys are also involved.

It can be shown that some 75% to 100% of both male and female instigators of DA witnessed or experienced abuse as children and were traumatised or assimilated this as acceptable or "normal" domestic behaviour. All incidents of DA must be recognised and addressed, especially where boys and girls are involved, if the WG is to succeed in its aim of reducing DA in Wales. Explicitly and specifically in response to the Minister's letter, this must include recognising the true extent and prevalence of DA that is instigated by abusive and violent women on their partners (of either sex) and any girls and boys that may be associated within the relationship.

The Minister does "not consider the petition (*treating [DA] ... as a gender inclusive and human phenomenon in which many men and women share both suffering and responsibility*) accurately reflects ... the position of the Welsh government ...". However, the direct budgetary costs of DA in Wales run into £millions every year with the indirect costs to the Welsh economy said to be far greater. DA in Wales will be actively perpetuated by the WG until all causes of DA are recognised and responded to effectively and intergenerational transmission effectively disrupted.

The forthcoming legislation provides the Assembly with the opportunity urge the WG in the strongest possible terms to move on from an outmoded, insensitive and radicalised ideology and to frame new forward facing legislation based on equality, humanity and fairness in order to;

- Address all incidence of DA regardless of the sex of the instigator
- Equally support and protect all victims regardless of that person's sex
- Intervene effectively where there are girls and boys present to break the cycle of intergenerational transmission of learned abusive and violent behaviours.

Thank you very much for your kind consideration.

Please let me know if I can provide any further information or clarification to assist the Committee in its consideration of my Petition.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Stott

Healing Men
