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 Ymateb gan: Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Parliament  
 Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee  
 Remote Working: Implications for Wales  
 Evidence from: Welsh Women's Aid

### Remote Working: Implications for Wales

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| <b>These are the views of:</b> | <i>Welsh Women's Aid (Third Sector) - the national charity in Wales working to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women.</i> |

### About Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid is the umbrella organisation in Wales that supports and provides national representation for independent third sector violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services in Wales (comprising our membership of specialist services and members of the regional VAWDASV Specialist Services Providers Forums). These services deliver life-saving and life-changing support and preventative work in response to violence against women, including domestic abuse and sexual violence, as part of a network of UK provision.

As an umbrella organisation, our primary purpose is to prevent domestic abuse, sexual violence and all forms of violence against women and ensure high quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender responsive and holistic. We collaborate nationally to integrate and improve community responses and practice in Wales; we provide advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements across government, public, private and third sector services and in communities, for the benefit of survivors.

We also deliver the Wales National Quality Service Standards (NQSS), a national accreditation framework for domestic abuse specialist services in Wales (supported by the Welsh Government) as part of a UK suite of integrated accreditation systems and frameworks. (More information on the NQSS can be found here: <http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/our-members/standards/>)

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## Introduction

Welsh Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on Remote Working: Implications for Wales. Our below response focuses on the experiences of survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) and the increased opportunities perpetrators have to further abuse and control.

COVID-19 has not caused VAWDASV, but has escalated the circumstance in which it is taking place. The pandemic has provided opportunities for perpetrators to further their power and control. COVID-19 has created further barriers for support seeking, particularly for specific cohorts like children and young people, BAME women and girls who may be more reliant of community led responses, women with insecure immigration status and women exploited by the sex industry who fear further persecution and prosecution for breaching restrictions.

For some survivors, work is an important rest bite away from abuse which may be taking place in their home. If an employee is working from home, the abuser will have increased opportunity for control and concealing the abuse.

The possible change in working environment and consideration of hubs and lone working may affect sexual harassment and women's experiences of working in environments where they feel safe and supported. We are currently running a campaign which looks into sexual harassment in the workplace, as part of this we are currently collating responses from a Wales wide survey to gain insight into the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace before the onset of Covid-19 so that we can draw comparisons and fully understand the extent of the impact of isolated working conditions. We look forward to sharing our findings on this.

## Protecting the safety of survivors

Protecting the health and wellbeing of employees should be a priority in all workplaces. The consequences of not doing so are far reaching and will have a real and significant impact on both the employee and the organisation.

Self-isolation and social distancing has shown an increase violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and an impact on survivors' safety and support networks.<sup>1</sup> Now more than ever, it is vital that we understand violence and abuse and support the needs of survivors.

## Indicators of abuse

Welsh Women's Aid advise and support our organisational supporter members on ensuring they have robust workplace policies surrounding Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WWA-short-med-long-COVID-briefing.pdf>



As part of this we help employers identify indicators that may occur if someone is experiencing abuse, as confiding in a manager may not always be someone’s first course of action. These may include but are not limited to:

| Work productivity  | Psychological indicators   | Physical indicators   |
|--|--|---|
| Persistently late with no real explanation &/ or needing to leave work early | Changes in behaviour, may become quiet and withdrawn, avoid interaction or making acquaintances or friends at work, may always eat alone | Repeated injuries such as bruises that are explained away, explanations for injuries that are inconsistent with the injuries displayed            |
| High absenteeism rate without explanation                                    | Problems with concentration  | Frequent and/or sudden or unexpected medical problems/sickness absences   |
| Needing regular time off for appointments                                    | May cry at work and/or appear to be very anxious   | Sleeping/eating disorders   |
| Changes in quality of work performance for unexplained reasons               | Could display fearful behaviour such as startled reactions   | Substance use/dependence  |
| Interruptions at work e.g. repeated upsetting calls/texts/e-mails            | Fear of partner/references to anger  | Depression/suicide attempts   |
| Increased hours being worked for no apparent reason                          | Is seldom or never able to attend social events with colleagues  | Fatigue   |
|  | Expresses fears about leaving children at home alone with partner  | Change in the way the employee dresses e.g. excessive clothing in summer, unkempt or dishevelled appearance, change in the amount of make-up worn |
|  | Secretive regarding home life  |   |
|  | Appears to be isolated from friends & family   |   |

These indicators of course, are assuming that employers and employees are interacting within a physical workspace. There is a high likelihood that due to the impacts of COVID-19 some workplaces will be operating on a ‘working from home’ basis for a continued period of time.

As mentioned for some survivors, work is an important rest bite away from abuse which may be taking place in their home. If an employee is working from home, the abuser will have increased opportunity for control and concealing the abuse. We would advise that during this period of change, workplaces



that have employees who work from home, reflect this in their Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Workplace policies.

Indicators of abuse when working from home could include but are not limited to:

- Repeated reluctance or refusal to join video meetings
- An instance on keeping the camera turned off during video meetings
- Rushed work or a decline in quality of work

In light of COVID 19 Welsh Women's Aid included advise to employers in our #StandwithSurvivors Bystander toolkit that can be found [here](#).

### Conclusion and Key recommendations

Supporting survivors in the workplace should be a priority for all workplaces. For many working environments have changed. Adapting practices to acknowledge this, ensuring there is access to information and support and that managers are well trained to be able to spot the signs of abuse, signpost to relevant services and ensure a safe and flexible working environment going forward will be fundamental to ensuring home working is safe and accessible for survivors across Wales.

### **The drafting of any Welsh Government's remote working proposals must consider the safety of survivors as a priority.**

We would also expect proposals to be informed in part by the Welsh Government responsible businesses resource on Supporting employees at risk of domestic abuse<sup>2</sup> which we welcomed the opportunity to input on.

*key recommendations for supporting survivors in the workplace:*

1. All organisations to have robust workplace policies covering the areas outlined below and take steps to ensure they provide a safe and supportive workplace both on site and remotely.
2. Provide paid leave for survivors of all forms of violence against women to access support and recover from abuse. This would include time off to access refuge and therapeutic support, attend court and manage child care arrangements.
3. Specialist training for all levels of the organisation from strategic leadership, management and human resources to awareness raising with all staff. Training should be informed or led by experts on violence against women, its causes and consequences.<sup>3</sup>
4. Acknowledge all forms of violence against women, and the continuum of violence and abuse women experience in the workplace, in public and at home. This includes taking action to promote gender equality, show zero tolerance to all forms of violence against women by holding perpetrators to account and ensuring the work environment is supportive and safe for all staff and clients.

<sup>2</sup> <https://businesswales.gov.wales/responsible-business/supporting-employees-risk-domestic-abuse>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/training/courses/>





5. Ensure that the workplace response to survivors and perpetrators of abuse recognises and responds to intersectional experiences and actively takes action to dismantle the barriers to disclosure, support and justice.

More information on each of these recommendations can be found in our response to the UK Government's call for evidence on support in the workplace for victims of domestic abuse, where we both acknowledge current good practice in Wales, and recommendations for change across the UK.



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