

GBV 57

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill :
Stage 1

Response from: Families need Fathers s Both Parents Matter Cymru (Merthyr Tydfil)

CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO THE WELSH ASSEMBLY Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee inquiry into the general principles of the Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill.

Response of FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru (Merthyr Tydfil)

Who we are and what we do

We are a group of volunteers who support parents and grandparents primarily experiencing child contact difficulties in the Merthyr Area). The majority of the people who come to us for help are men excluded from contact with their children, although we provide support for many mothers and grandmothers faced by the problems.

The experience of our service users

Many of our service users have experienced domestic abuse. Our Referral Form - completed by new attendees - specifically asks for details of whether individuals believe they have been victims of domestic abuse. For those who indicate that they have their experience ranges from coercive control – typically in relation to the withholding of contact with children to ‘punish’ ex-partners or to extract money or concessions from the non-resident parent, through to examples of serious physical assaults perpetrated by the controlling partner or ex-partner OR by new partners (often male) who are themselves coerced to acts of physical aggression.

One significant problem we encounter when supporting male service users is that many do not perceive that they are victims despite describing experiences that clearly fit the models of both emotional as well as physical abuse. Another significant experience shared by male service users is the perception that services will not support them. This perception is unfortunately often borne out by the experience of those who do present as victims to DV services.

Our response

We recognise that the majority of victims of all forms of domestic abuse are FEMALE, in the same way that the majority of parents denied contact with their children are MALE.

We are mindful of the arguments put forward in many of the previous Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill consultation responses (which followed the Welsh Women's Aid template) that the Bill lacks clarity and is likely to fail to protect women and girls as a result. We also believe that male victims of domestic abuse will NOT be protected or supported by the proposals currently within the Bill. We are therefore proposing the following:

- The title of the Bill be changed to the 'Ending Violence against Women (Wales) Bill'.
- That the legislation be restricted EXCLUSIVELY to female victims of Domestic Abuse in its many forms. (For the avoidance of doubt the term female would include all those people who designate themselves as female – specifically to include trans-gender people as appropriate).
- That 'Gender Neutral' services be withdrawn completely (eg All Wales Domestic Abuse Helpline) and all initiatives and funding made available under this proposed Bill be exclusively reserved for the Violence against Women agenda.
- That a separate strategy be launched immediately by the Welsh Government to address the separate and distinct needs of male victims of domestic abuse with appropriate and proportional funding.
- That services that support female victims introduce a 'screening' process to identify those service users who are perpetrators in an equivalent way to the existing services that 'screen' male victims eg the Dyn Project.

We are strongly of the view that services to protect male victims in Wales that use the 'Dyn Project' methodology of call screening are not fit for purpose as they fail to inform service users that they are being screened or that their details may be shared with domestic abuse services that primarily or exclusively support female victims.

We wish to move away from the ZERO-SUM argument that sees a trading of statistics that prove or disprove that one gender is more or less likely to be a victims of domestic abuse in its many forms. We believe that this is deeply offensive to both female and male victims and gets in the way of appropriate and proportional services being delivered. We have no confidence whatsoever that the Welsh Government's existing plans contained in the Gender based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill as introduced will do anything to address the problems faced by male victims and so regrettably we feel that their absolute exclusion is the best course of action in the circumstances.

Signed: Steven Wade

On behalf of FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru Merthyr Tydfil