



Llinell Gymorth Camdriniaeth yn y Cartref
a Thrais Rhywiol Cymru Gyfan
All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual
Violence Helpline

0808 80 10 800




Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid
Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf
Putting Women & Children First

PIW 15

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Poverty in Wales: Strand 1

Response from: Welsh Women's Aid

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These are the views of:	<i>An organisation (Third Sector)</i>

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Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
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Deadline: 12.09.14

1. About Welsh Women's Aid (WWA)

- 1.1 WWA is the lead national organisation in Wales, providing the voice of local services, service users and survivors to government as well as campaigning, influencing policy and practice, and innovating to end domestic abuse and violence against women across Wales and the UK. WWA is a membership organisation for 26 independent, specialist violence against women services in Wales which provide a range of support, advocacy and prevention services for women, children and families affected by domestic abuse.
- 1.2 WWA also delivers essential national and local services and projects across Wales, including the *All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline* – a 24 hour helpline for victims, concerned others and professionals; *the Children Matter Project* – to improve support for children and young people across Wales who are affected by domestic abuse; *running an Accredited Training Centre* - WWA is an Aored Cymru centre, developing and delivering training

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in domestic abuse accredited qualifications for member organisations and external agencies; and delivering services for women and children in North Wales (Wrexham and Conway) by providing refuges, outreach and community advocacy and support for women and children affected by domestic abuse.

2 Violence against women in Wales

2.1 Wales was noted as a leader in violence against women prevention earlier this year when the UN Special Rapporteur for Violence Against Women visited Cardiff.¹ Despite progress that has been made, research studies continue to find alarming and persistently high levels of violence against women and girls in the UK in general and Wales:

- In Wales in 2013/14, there were **6,325** prosecutions of violence against women and girls offences, with a conviction rate of 76.7%. Of these, **5,637** were cases of domestic abuse; **257** cases of rape, and **431** cases of sexual offences.
- Welsh Women's Aid's members supported **9,337** women in 2013/14, with **2,263** women entering refuge;
- The All Wales Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Helpline (managed by Welsh Women's Aid) supported **27,972** callers in 2013/14.

3.0 – How effectively the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and other government Strategies work together

3.1 WWA would like to thank the National Assembly for Wales for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry, and is pleased to see the Welsh Government's (WG) commitment to tackling poverty in Wales.

3.2 WWA would comment that the different strategies aimed to tackle poverty in Wales, including the 'Tackling Poverty Action Plan', 'Strategic Equality Plan' and 'Building Resilient Communities: Taking forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan' are all succinct in their approach to tackling poverty in Wales and diverse in their responses, but do not necessarily align together from a domestic abuse and violence against women and girls perspective.

3.3 With the introduction of the Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill (GBV Bill), it is crucial to consider the violence against women (VAW) agenda as a priority in all policy areas. However, VAW is only mentioned in detail in the 'Strategic Equality Plan' and not in either the 'Tackling Poverty Action Plan' or 'Building resilient Communities'. The link between VAW and poverty, which can be an exacerbating factor for VAW, means that is an important issue that needs to be strategically aligned to the GBV Bill and its outcomes.

3.4 WWA is encouraged by the number of strategies initiated by WG to tackling the root causes of poverty in Wales, but would like to discuss the effectiveness of the 'Flying Start' programme. The programme, where it operates, has great outcomes and is effective in supporting many women who have suffered DA in accessing childcare support whilst they seek support and training, as well as much needed support whilst residing in local refuge services. However, the 'postcode lottery' element to the service has proved problematic for a number of women and families. Part of the success of Flying Start is that it can be accessed by anyone within the catchment area, but research suggests many people who can afford child care are accessing this service, while a single woman who has little or no disposable income living just outside the catchment area is unable to². Another aim of Flying Start is to increase access to the Health Visiting Service, which is crucial when reaching women suffering from VAW. It is important to ensure all women, despite where they live, have regular visits from Health

¹ 'Special Rapporteur on violence against women finalizes country mission to the United Kingdom and calls for urgent action to address the accountability deficit and also the adverse impacts of changes in funding and services' (April 2014): http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/images/Final_press_statment_UK_15_Apr_VAW.pdf

² <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/thousands-children-across-wales-missing-7663322>

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Visitors trained in spotting the signs of domestic abuse and are able to support women in need of services. Appointments with professionals such as health visitors may be the only time a woman is able to be alone and able to disclose or discuss anything she is going through. This valuable service should not be dependent on where you live. WWA would like to discuss adjustments to the programme with WG to ensure that those most in need of the service are able to access it.

3.5 WWA commends WG's commitment to preventing poverty from a young age, including the strategy to develop skills and opportunities for young people. As discussed, VAW is linked to poverty. Therefore it is crucial to tackle VAW and encourage healthy relationships from a young age, as well as challenging what may already be happening within a young person's relationship.

3.6 It is widely acknowledged the domestic abuse can impact on a child's education³. This could include children being prevented from going to school, a child truanting from school to protect a parent or carer, arriving late to school (often exhausted) and a chaotic lifestyle which can mean that children attend school on an ad-hoc basis. Other affects may include:

- Developmental difficulties - babies may be slower in learning to crawl, walk, and talk and in being potty trained;
- Significantly more behavioural and emotional problems: externalised behaviours may include aggression and anti-social behaviour, including in class;
- Internalised behaviours are reflected in depression, anxiety and other trauma symptoms;
 - Below average school performance;
 - Higher rates of absences from school;
 - A lack of concentration, falling asleep in class, and becoming easily distracted and disruptive.

3.7 Domestic abuse can lead to significant disruption to a child's education. While support workers do all they can to minimise disruption to education, children living in refuge face additional barriers to education. It may take weeks or even months for a child who has been moved out of their area to gain a school space. This may also have an impact on future education and employment, which can lead to an increased risk of poverty in the future, if an individual is unable to gain qualifications or a job⁴.

3.8 In refuge, some children may not be able to access the space or quiet to complete school work or may not have the 'head space' to be able to keep up with school work. Leaving home and moving to refuge is a huge change and has a significant impact on children. Data collected by Welsh Women's Aid showed that 34% of children in refuge had no access to schooling⁵.

3.9 It is also vital to tackle VAW for those girls and young women in school, who may be suffering personal abuse through their own relationships, with 16 to 24 year olds being twice as likely to be a victim as those aged 25 to 34⁶. Young people affected by violence and bullying are likely to have lower attendance rates, as well as reduced capabilities to engage in education and therefore to attain and progress, which are contributing factors to living in poverty. For example, there is evidence to suggest the following⁷:

³ Welsh Women's Aid briefing Dec 2013 'Links between Domestic Abuse, Poverty and Education'. Accessed at http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=495:wwa-briefing-on-links-between-domestic-abuse-poverty-a-education&catid=35:news&Itemid=168

⁴ Welsh Women's Aid briefing Dec 2013 'Links between Domestic Abuse, Poverty and Education'. Accessed at http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=495:wwa-briefing-on-links-between-domestic-abuse-poverty-a-education&catid=35:news&Itemid=168

⁵ Welsh Women's Aid briefing Dec 2013 'Links between Domestic Abuse, Poverty and Education'. Accessed at http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=495:wwa-briefing-on-links-between-domestic-abuse-poverty-a-education&catid=35:news&Itemid=168

⁶ Office of National Statistics Report 'Focus on: Violent Crime and Sexual Offences, 2011/12' 7th February 2013. Pg 4 accessed through; http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_298904.pdf

⁷ Violence Against Women Action Group Report 'Priorities for a Violence against Women (wales Bill) <http://walesvawgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/vaw-priorities-for-vaw-wales-bill.pdf>

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- The stereotyping of young women and girls as sexual objects and sexually available may negatively influence girls' achievements and opportunities through restricting their aspirations;
- Young BME women are subject to particular racialised and gendered stereotyping as hyper-sexual, which limits and restricts their aspirations;
- There are links between teenage pregnancy and non-consensual sex, which are based on gendered dynamics of pressure, coercion and expectation and may be reinforced by media representations of sex – ensuring good quality sex and healthy relationships education is available to young people is critical in terms of ensuring safety, preventing VAW, and increasing attainment.

3.10 Preventing VAW through the education system would therefore have the additional desirable effect of improving attainment, achievement and aspirations, both when girls and young women are within the education system and after they have left education. Healthy relationships discussions with young men and women are also a positive step towards preventing poverty, by preventing the cycle of abuse and unhealthy relationships.

4.0 Impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people

4.1 WWA believes for the strategy to reflect society and those most affected by poverty, there should be a more gendered approach to prevention and support out of poverty. As previously discussed, VAW is a factor when considering poverty causes and effects to which women and girls are the most prevalent victims. Last year in Wales there were 6,325 VAW related prosecutions⁸ of which 84% of victims were women and 94% of defendants were men⁹. Although this number is high, it does not include the considerable number of women who did not seek a prosecution or engage with the criminal justice system. Therefore WWA believes that it is crucial when tackling poverty and domestic abuse, that the approach is gendered and supports the women most likely effected.

4.2 Poverty and financial issues within a household are not a cause of abuse, but can exacerbate abuse and keep women trapped in violent relationships. The fear of coping alone, being unaware of welfare and benefits they are entitled too and not having enough money to even pay for transport to support services are all reasons why women continue to stay in abusive relationships. These issues need to be addressed and prioritised within any tackling poverty strategies¹⁰.

4.3 Keeping women in poverty and controlling the financial state of the household is also a tool to controlling the relationship, ensuring the woman has no means to leave is a part of coercive control model. This can have horrific consequences on women and their children. A recent Women's Aid report into financial control showed a number of women getting in to huge amounts of debt, unable to feed and clothe their family adequately because of their partners control over finances¹¹.

4.4 The long term effects of financial control can exacerbate a woman's state of poverty dramatically¹².

- a. It can impact her current employment status, i.e. through ill health, being forced to leave work by a partner or having to relocate for safety and unable to maintain employment;
- b. Impact on future employment i.e. through ill health, disability, interruptions in her career and homelessness;

⁸ CPS 'VAWG Report' 2013-14 pg 81. Accessed at http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/cps_vawg_report_2014.pdf

⁹ CPS 'VAWG Report' 2013-14 pg 17. Accessed at http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/cps_vawg_report_2014.pdf

¹⁰ Women's Aid report 'Domestic Abuse and Financial Abuse; An overview. Page 18 Accessed at www.womensaid.org.uk/core/core_picker/download.asp?id=3607

¹¹ Women's Aid report 'Domestic Abuse and Financial Abuse; An overview. Page 18 Accessed at www.womensaid.org.uk/core/core_picker/download.asp?id=3607

¹² Women's Aid report 'Domestic Abuse and Financial Abuse; An overview. Page 20 Accessed at www.womensaid.org.uk/core/core_picker/download.asp?id=3607

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- c. Having been left with debt;
- d. Lack of credit history;
- e. Costs associated with domestic abuse i.e. legal costs, legal protection proceedings, divorce, child care, moving costs and loss of possessions;
- f. Possibility of no recourse to public funds.

4.5 Women who escape domestic abuse will therefore often continue to experience poverty, and those who did not suffer financially whilst in the abusive relationship could subsequently suffer.

4.6 Single parent families are at greater risk (on average) of poverty than two parent families and women are on average 28% worse off immediately after separation/divorce¹³. Changes to benefits and tax credits, as well as effect on ability to work full time will also have an effect, heavily exacerbating poverty within households.

4.7 Children of survivors, by effect of the family finances, are also forced to live in poverty after leaving a domestic abuse situation. They are less likely to be in a position to afford to participate in after school activities, sport clubs and holidays. They are less likely to access computers and the internet, which could affect school work in comparison to other children. The basic extracurricular activities aimed at developing young people's experiences and skills may be non-existent, leaving them less developed and more isolated from their peers¹⁴.

4.8 Women are more likely to go without basic necessities in order to provide and enable their children to have more. Statistics on family poverty from the Fawcett Society and the UK Women's Budget Group have shown how the 2011 budget and impact of welfare reform has fallen more heavily on women than on men and has increased women's and single parents poverty generally¹⁵.

4.9 The impact of domestic abuse on a woman and her family is heavily effected by poverty and financial exclusion. Any poverty strategy needs to address domestic abuse and other forms of VAW as a matter of urgency, in order to support women out of domestic abuse and ensure they're able to live independently and support their families without fear of being unable to provide.

5.0 How legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality are co-ordinated and prioritised across the Welsh Government.

5.1 It is crucial to ending poverty to ensure all policies, strategies and budgets are cross-departmental and not the responsibility of one department.

5.2 The GBV Bill, which aims to eradicate all forms of violence against women, will be integral to not only the Local Government strategy and funding pot, but also relies on knowledge from Housing, Health, Education and Tackling Poverty to place funds into prevention in each different area.

5.3 A cross departmental budget, and more importantly a 'multi-departmental' approach to tackling poverty is essential. All departments are in touch with and work to support people affected by poverty and all have a role to play in preventing prevalence and supporting those already affected.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. If you require any further clarification of the information contained in this response, or any other matter relating to violence against women, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

¹³ Women's Aid report 'Domestic Abuse and Financial Abuse; An overview. Page 21 Accessed at www.womensaid.org.uk/core/core_picker/download.asp?id=3607

¹⁴ Women's Aid report 'Domestic Abuse and Financial Abuse; An overview. Page 21 Accessed at www.womensaid.org.uk/core/core_picker/download.asp?id=3607

¹⁵ Fawcett Society 2008 see fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?pageID=658

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