

**Grŵp Trawsbleidiol ar Drais yn erbyn Menywod a Phlant / Cross Party Group on Violence Against Women and Children**

**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2023, 12.15-13.15 (Via Teams)**

<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Apologies</b>
<p>Abigail Rees, Barnardo's                      Allie Iftikhar, Policy Officer; WWA (Secretariat)                      Carol Harris, Stori Cymru                      Charlotte Archibald, Welsh Government                      Claire Short, Stop It Now!                      Eleri Morgan, Senedd Commission (Translator)                      Emily Watson, WWA (Minute Taker)                      Gwendolyn Sterk, Cardiff Women's Aid                      Hannah Blythyn MS, Deputy Minister for Social Partnership                      Jodie Saunders, SMT                      Kate Bacon, Welsh Government                      Katryn Bennett, New Pathways                      Liz Downie, Thrive Women's Aid                      Lorna Jones, Live Fear Free Helpline                      Michelle Whelan, Calan DVS                      Nancy Lidubwi, Bawso                      Niamh Salkeld, Plaid Cymru                      Rebecca Griffiths, Welsh Government                      Rhianydd Williams, Wales TUC                      Sam Lewis, Llamau                      Sara Kirkpatrick, CEO; WWA                      Sarah Thomas, National Federation of Women's Institutes                      Simon Borja, Safer Wales                      Sioned Williams MS (Chair)                      Stephanie Grimshaw, WWA                      Vivienne Laing, NSPCC                      Yasmin Khan, National VAWDASV Advisor</p>	<p>EJ Renold, Cardiff University</p>

<b>Item</b>
<p><b>Welcome, Introductions &amp; Apologies – Sioned Williams MS (Chair)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SW thanked everyone for attending, introduced the agenda topic and highlighted housekeeping for the meeting.</li> <li>• This CPG will focus on sexual harassment in the workplace. Research has found that a considerable number of women, 4 out of 5, in Wales have experienced workplace sexual harassment and this abuse intersects with other forms of discrimination in the workplace. Everyone has a right to work in an environment free from sexual harassment and employers must ensure that their workplaces are safe and inclusive spaces, to ensure those who disclose sexual harassment are believed and supported.</li> </ul>

## **Tackling Sexual Harassment in the Workplace** - Deputy Minister for Social Partnership – Hannah Blythyn MS

- Firstly, thanks to all for the work that is already being done on this – The Senedd recognises the need to drive forward faster on this issue. This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Senedd first having more female members than male & we do not still want to be having these conversations in another 20 years, this seems like the time for Welsh Government to redouble our devolved opportunities to tackle this issue.
- Wales TUC & WWA have done great work so far, now we need to look at how we build on those foundations, everyone should be free from any form of fear in their workplace.
- Welsh Government are very clear on our aim to end violence against women & girls in all forms & tackling workplace harassment is only one small part of achieving this aim – It is not for women to change their behaviour, it is for abusers to do so. We need to look at how we support & empower those who want to report workplace harassment & ensure they do not experience any form of retaliation for doing so. We also need to ensure employers understand not only their legal responsibilities, but how to create a culture where people are confident coming forward as a victim of or an observer of any inappropriate behaviour.
- Welsh Government has committed to our 5-year strategy on tackling VAWDASV having a specific focus on workplace harassment – This strategy was developed with a number of partners, including survivors, and we aim to strengthen the connections between public, private & specialist services to tackle workplace harassment as part of the wider workplan.
- Through this work, we aim to ensure workplaces have the resources & guidance available to make the changes to attitudes & practices that we need to see. These resources are currently being audited to ensure they are fit for purpose, and we want to hear ideas & suggestions today as to how we can go forward in the right way.
- We are keen to work with Wales TUC & WWA to ensure that the work that they have done on the toolkit is rolled out & amplified. The toolkit sits along the No Grey Area report that SG will update on later in the meeting. It is not acceptable that 4/5 women in Wales are experiencing some form of sexual harassment in the workplace – We need to look at not only how we change the behaviour, but also ensure that the right cultures are in place so that people receive appropriate support.

*SW thanked HB for her update & noted that it is good to see cross party work happening on this issue – The work is too important to allow political differences to interfere with it.*

*SW invited any comments or questions from the meeting:*

- SW: We know that employment law isn't devolved - How are we going to use the powers we have currently to address the situation?
  - YK: As a member of the workplace harassment workstream, I can update that there has been great progress made already. We have developed high level actions & are now working on delivery plans, we also held a workshop to learn about good practice developed by South Wales Ambulance Service & the toolkit developed by the TUC. There is still work that needs to be completed, but progress and governance so far feels strong. I was also a panel member for the independent review into London fire service & can provide an update on that if there is time in AOB.
  - HB: Employment rights aren't reserved to Westminster, so we can use the levers we have in the public sector, including bodies that are funded by Welsh Government, as well as looking at socially responsible procurement & wellbeing in the workplace.

**Sexual Harassment in the Workplace - Introduction into to the Sexual Harassment Toolkit – Rhianydd Williams, Policy & Equality Officer, Wales TUC**

- The toolkit launched in March 2023 & can be accessed via this [link](#). It gives information and advice on how to tackle workplace harassment, and how to prevent it from happening.
- Through the development of the toolkit, it became very clear that misogyny & harassment are pervasive throughout society & culture, and the workplace is one place that reflects this.
- We know it is a global issue and is growing alongside the advancement of technology & recent changes so many have seen to our working patterns, which cause a blurring of lines around work & personal life.
- Workplace harassment happens where there are power imbalances & often intersects with other issues such as homophobia, ableism, etc.
- Advances in technology are changing the nature of sexual harassment – More people are being influenced by people they see online who are not promoting an attitude of equality & fairness – This feedback has been noticeably coming from teachers who state that it is a growing problem with boys.
- What was also clear from the survey is that, despite any commonalities of experience, how each person responds is very personal to them and affects their mental health, job security & progression prospects, and their workplace safety. Also, harassment takes many forms – physical, verbal & online acts can all constitute harassment.
- Often, the first time a person discloses workplace harassment is when their job performance has been affected to the point that they are facing their own disciplinary procedures. It is important to get the message across that it is never the fault of the victim, or their responsibility to find a solution.
- We felt we needed to act as we had thousands of responses to the survey & workers need a voice in this area. We also noticed unions representing many workers with serious allegations & we could not allow the issue to grow. Therefore, this work was agreed as a motion at our bi-annual conference & we approached WWA to work in partnership with us to get that specialist voice.
- Through the toolkit development, we found a varied picture of what drives sexual harassment:
  - Online influencers creating spaces for a sexist & misogynistic culture that is particularly influencing young people. TikTok are slow at taking creators of this content down & we feel that their algorithms are not recognising this content as they should.
  - The nature of some workplaces - Precarious work & poor contracts put women in vulnerable positions; zero hours contracts disproportionately affect black women and women on precarious contracts are more likely to be harassed, creating an intersecting problem.
  - Tech – There are links between the online activities of incels & the far right and workplace harassment. Senior terrorist officers describe incels as being an emerging & serious risk.
- Specific issues identified in workplaces via the survey:
  - Journeys to work are a space where workers are particularly vulnerable & there is no peer support.
  - A lack of management support & training, people feel that they would not be believed if they disclosed any experiences of harassment.
  - -Intersectionality – LGBTQ+ respondents reported being harassed in different ways.
  - 68% of disabled women reporting being harassed at work (survey and experienced multiple forms of harassment rather than isolated incidents)
  - Telling us they were gaslit at work – Harassed & then being told it did not happen the way that they remembered. Many disabled workers exp multiple forms of harassment rather than isolated incidents
  - BAME women face double disadvantage of race & sexism in the workplace.
- Impacts of workplace harassment:
  - Wellbeing suffered - People felt like did not want to apply for progression opportunities and affected their ability to perform in their current roles.
  - Lots of people who have experienced workplace harassment lose trust & faith in their workplace and therefore do not approach their managers to report it, choosing instead to escape the situation – It should never be the case that someone should suffer this type of economic disruption due to the actions of others.

- At Wales TUC sexual harassment is an issue we have on every workplace general council agenda – We have fundamentally changed our practices & looked at how our movement can help to dismantle this; we are on our own learning journey. We are making real progress, but this is a pervasive culture & it will not happen overnight.
- Information about the toolkit:
  - It is meant to be a resource with information & tools on how to deal with workplace harassment.
  - The document is colour coded into sections to help users easily navigate to the information & support that is relevant to them.
  - The toolkit is bilingual & is available online via the link, but hard copies can be ordered by contacting [rwilliams@tuc.org.uk](mailto:rwilliams@tuc.org.uk).
  - We are taking it to employers & telling them that this is what they need to work on, as it gives a very comprehensive overview of how you tackle the culture.
- What your union rep can do:
  - Helping with the implementation of gender sensitive risk assessments – Health & safety has long been about physical safety only, but the wider issues of dignity & respect need to be considered to create healthy workplaces. These assessments are gender sensitive as we know this is a gendered issue, there is a section on this in the toolkit.
  - Help employers to take a proactive approach to tackling the issue – Helping them to put in place adequate supporting policies around flexible working, manageable workloads & reducing workplace stress.
  - Regular management training, including how to create a culture where the management is approachable and where complaints will be believed, and the appropriate action taken.
  - Helping to look at insecure & casual contracts.

*SW thanked RW & noted that, due to time constraints, questions or comments can be fed back to RW via email: [rwilliams@tuc.org.uk](mailto:rwilliams@tuc.org.uk).*

**No Grey Area – Experience of Workplace Sexual Harassment – Stephanie Grimshaw, Head of Public Affairs & Communications, Welsh Women’s Aid**

- This presentation is based on the [No Grey Area report](#) that WWA produced in 2021 and the work done in alignment with Wales TUC on the production of the toolkit.
- No Grey Area aimed to shine a light on the cultures & behaviour that made the workplace unsafe for women and to determine the scale of the problem as well as the impact on women in Wales.
- Questions we asked:
  - The job position of the harasser (Is this more likely to come from the top down)
  - Has there been a rise in instances due to online working during Covid-19
  - If you chose to report, then what was the outcome & was it satisfactory?
  - If you did not choose to report, why was this?
- Over half of those surveyed answered yes to the question ‘have you ever experienced sexual harassment in the workplace?’ We found this to be shocking but also, unfortunately, not surprising.
- Types of harassment identified:
  - 82% reported comments of a sexual nature that make them feel uncomfortable.
  - 62% ‘jokes & banter’
  - 62% touching
- When asked about the job role of the perpetrator:
  - Over half were coworker of team member
  - 37% from a line manager or supervisor
  - 27% were senior managers.
- The survey did identify an increase in instances in line with the introduction of online & hybrid working. The sharing of more personal details, such personal mobile numbers, has increased the opportunities, and people’s confidence to do it as a less formal work environment creates a feeling of a lack of boundaries.
  - Having a permanent online presence makes us more accessible than we have ever been before.

- 33% of those who did not report the harassment said that they felt they would not be believed or taken seriously.
- Our research has told us that most women have experienced sexual harassment on more than one occasion, proving that it is common in workplace cultures and there is a lack of structural support on how to report & how to break that cycle, it is everybody's problem & responsibility.

*SW thanked SG & noted that any questions or comments can be emailed to [StephanieGrimshaw@welshwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:StephanieGrimshaw@welshwomensaid.org.uk).*

**AOB - Sioned Williams MS (Chair):**

- YK noted that a report produced by the NUS in 2021 reported that 61% of university students had experienced sexual harassment but only 2% felt safe & confident to report that – These experiences of children & young people would be good to explore further in the future or in another forum.

*SW asked that YK give a brief overview, as mentioned earlier of her experience on the review panel for the London fire service:*

- This independent review into the fire service looked at the impact of sexual harassment, misogyny & racism in this workplace, and found it to be at an epidemic level, having a serious effect of the mental health of staff.
- Senior staff were not being held accountable & the practices and acceptance of this as a culture had been going on for decades. Every part of the reporting mechanism was failing – all staff (women & men) were not being supported to go through that process.
- The main message from the findings is that there must be no organisation where sexual harassment is not taken seriously – be it fire service police force, WRU, or any other workplace. Every organisation needs to have a look at what is being hidden in plain sight.
- The rights of employees need to be elevated and the profound impact of abuse over several years understood.
- We need an immediate response and a process for ensuring the accountability of employers.
- Via the blueprint work investigations are taking place & they are showing that leaders are struggling & need support, so through that workstream I am pushing for a cross Wales independent accountability body.
  - We cannot expect police, or the fire service to mark their own homework – We need a collective response to an issue that is affecting so many people across Wales.

*SW thanked YK for the update & the suggestion of an independent review body for accountability, which can be looked at in future.*

- The next scheduled meeting is 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023; 12.15-13.15, if you would like to suggest any agenda items or raise any issues prior to that, please contact [Aliyalfikhar@welshwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:Aliyalfikhar@welshwomensaid.org.uk).