

Communities and Culture Committee

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Scrutiny Inquiry: Domestic Abuse

Purpose

This paper will draw on the experience and expertise of Cardiff Women's Aid as a front line service provider and an organisation that is fully engaged in addressing the long term issues and conditions underpinning the continued existence of domestic violence within its gendered, socio-economic and political context.

We will locate domestic violence within the broader 'Violence against Women' agenda and suggest that the All Wales Strategy needs to evolve to address Violence against Women and recognise a gender-based definition of domestic violence/abuse.

This paper will also argue that a diversity of services be appropriately resourced and included within strategic planning. Diversity here means a range of forms of service provision to include refuge, helplines, advocacy and counselling across all forms of violence and for all social groups with additional needs (young women, BME women, women with disabilities, women with enhanced support needs - mental health etc.).

Given that only a minority of incidents (24%) are dealt with via a criminal justice system/advocacy response we will ask that a broader range of access points and services are seen as key to addressing both crisis and long term issues of domestic violence particularly and VAW generally.

Background

Cardiff Women's Aid has been invited to give evidence to the Committee in order to brief members on current service delivery and developments and to use our local experience to provide feedback on the national strategy; suggesting any revisions or re-focussing that would further enhance delivery of the strategy's key objectives.

Cardiff Women's Aid was established nearly thirty five years ago and was one of the first two or three Women's Aid groups providing refuge in the UK and is the largest mainstream Women's Aid group in Wales. During the last three decades Cardiff Women's Aid in partnership with other women's organisations have created diverse contexts in which women feel able to name and discuss experience of violence, and also achieved widespread recognition for previously hidden, private and normalised practices (Kelly 2005). Innovative forms of service provision developed by CWA (and its sister organisations) are now considered essential responses to a range of social problems including refuges/shelters, helplines, self-help groups and advocacy.

As an organisation we have taken a lead (in partnership with the specialist Women's Aid group BAWSO) in work with women who have insecure immigration status and who have no recourse to public funds and women who are escaping forced marriage or so called 'honour based' violence.

CWA continues to provide a full range of services to survivors of domestic violence which include running four refuge houses, tenant support services, a crisis intervention centre, and children's services. Our service users cover the whole spectrum of victims/survivors and include lesbians and gay women in same sex relationships, women who are experiencing violence/abuse from family members (e.g. older women experiencing abuse from children and women in forced marriage or honour based situations from a range of family members) and women with no recourse to public funds etc.

Women's Aid from its inception was, and remains, committed to bringing multi-agency working to address domestic violence and as such is fully engaged with the MARAC process and is a key partner in Cardiff.

Cardiff Women's Aid also delivers programmes of preventative work with women, children and young people; provides free (at the point of delivery) counselling; behaviour changing programmes for women and children; work with youth groups and delivers a range of training to external partners.

Domestic violence is the physical, sexual, psychological or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. This can include forced marriage and so-called 'honour crimes'.

Domestic violence may include a range of abusive behaviours, not all of which are in themselves inherently 'violent'. Research shows that domestic violence is most commonly experienced by women and perpetrated by men ("Walby, Sylvia and Allen, Jonathan (2004) Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: findings from the British Crime Survey"), and affects every community regardless of race, ethnic or religious group, class, sexuality, disability or lifestyle. One in four women experience domestic violence in their lifetimes, and between 6-10% of women in any one year ("Council of Europe 2002").

For the purpose of this paper we refer to women as victims/survivors and men as perpetrators - though we recognise that men may sometimes be victims.

Whilst all acts of violence (domestic and otherwise) are to be deplored and combated it is increasingly unhelpful for the misleading statistic that one in six men experience domestic violence. These figures are based on single incidents of a criminal nature and cannot be directly compared to the experience of women not least because the statistics used exclude sexual violence which is overwhelmingly

perpetrated against women.

Other factors that must be taken into account when comparing or conjoining domestic violence that is experienced by women and men include the severity of the violence (it is still the case that on average two women a week are killed by a current or former male partner); whether or not the violence/abuse is repeated and if there is a complex pattern of overlapping abuse of various kinds (we know that the experience of women is that the violence is ongoing and encompasses a wide range of abuse behaviour by the perpetrator).

Finally emotional abuse (which is a violation of the person and ought therefore also to be recognised as violence) which is often not regarded as a crime, but which survivors themselves often find more destructive and more difficult to recover from, is also excluded from the statistics. In essence 1:4 women experiencing the full range of violent and abusive behaviour that we have all come to recognise as the hallmark of domestic violence and 1:6 men experience single incidents of violence without the addition of sexual assaults or emotional abuse.

Cardiff Women's Aid also recognises that abuse may be perpetrated by other family members and as such will recognise those individuals as perpetrators.

Violence against women (VAW) is used in this paper to reflect the meanings it has been accorded by the United Nations.

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action states it is:

"...any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. (United Nations, 2001)"

Secretary General's report (UN, 2006):

"...the term 'violence against women' is understood to mean any act of gender-based violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately."

VAW encompasses but is not limited to: domestic violence, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM); forced and child marriage; honour crimes; rape and sexual assault; sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of girls; sexual harassment (in the workplace and in the public sphere); trafficking in women and exploitation in the sex industry. Women in particular groups may be additionally targeted for violence and abuse, have more limited resources to resist or find support. A high percentage of CWA service users (and particularly those at high risk) have a combination of exacerbating factors such as mental health issues, substance misuse, insecure immigration status, repeat and sustained victimisation and poverty.

At any given time CWA will be supporting women who are not only experiencing domestic violence but who are also at risk of offending, are currently or have been working in the sex industry (including street prostitution), have been raped or sexually assaulted.

From Cardiff Women's Aid experience of delivering front line services to women and children it is clear that there are many connections that cut across all forms of VAW; some serve to sustain it, others indicate common impacts and consequences. Our experience is born out by a recent study in Ireland (Regan and Kelly, 2001) which found that young people had high levels of contact with harassment, abuse and violence:

23% of young women and 7% of young men knew someone who had been forced to have sex

56% of young women and 31% of young men knew someone who had been hit by a partner

65% of young women and 15% of young men had been told about an abusive experience by a friend or relative

About a third of young women and young men also knew a perpetrator

Three research studies with children and young people (Burton and Kitzinger, 1998; Mullender et al, 2001; Regan and Kelly, 2001) reveal that at the most basic level most children and young people do not accept VAW, but when asked more contextual questions uncertainty and justification emerge, particularly among young men. One in two young men and one in three young women found the use of pressure and force to get sex justifiable under certain circumstances.

The current extent of VAW shows no sign of decreasing and demands for support services will remain at current level or increase over the next five to ten years. CWA is asking that current provision is maintained and where there are gaps provision should be developed. But we recognise that merely extending the current forms of provision will have little impact on prevalence and to decrease and prevent violence and abuse requires the following raft of action:

A strategic approach to VAW

A move on from the silo thinking that currently separates domestic violence and other forms of VAW

Encourage service development that builds on the potential for knowledge transfer for existing providers

A commitment in the strategy document to a long term approach to prevention

Coordinated measures addressing various forms of violence/abuse

Monitoring of the impact of interventions on the prevalence and seriousness of violence/abuse

At CWA we see common themes and threads of experience that affect all the victims/survivors we work with. Cardiff Women's Aid is concerned that the underlying causes and opportunities for continued levels and ferocity of VAW will not be tackled without two key changes in strategic thinking.

Firstly, there is evidence contained within this paper that questions the statistics around most men's experience of domestic violence which results in the over-emphasis on a gender-neutral approach and our concerns are that this will not only skew resources (including agenda time of local domestic abuse task groups) but will obscure the root causes of domestic violence as a constituent part of VAW.

Secondly, if we accept that domestic violence (and VAW) needs a long term, generational and attitude changing approach to prevention and eradication this must be devised and delivered from a gender perspective. The women and children that we work with do not spring out of nothing, they live in families, communities, within a society that struggles to commit wholeheartedly to the concept that gender stereotyping and expectations give rise to unhealthy behaviour and relationships for both women and men.

There is wide acceptance of abuse among young people in the UK: 45% of teenagers believe that in some circumstances it is acceptable for a boy to assault his girlfriend. This is reflected in the numbers of young women that we work with, at any given time we are likely to have both in refuge and accessing support from our crisis intervention centre significant numbers of under 25 year old women both with and without children. Some of the young women we work with are also into their second or third violent relationship and the most effective way we have of long term recovery and behaviour change is through our preventative work and counselling. But both of these service delivery areas are under resourced and over subscribed.

The tolerance of violence and abuse is linked to gender inequality and sexual stereotyping and although local authorities are required to carry out work addressing domestic violence in schools, in a recent UK wide survey only half the respondents thought that schools responses to domestic violence had improved. Our own experience of working with young people in schools, although limited due to resources, has been very productive. Using a detached youth work approach has yielded high levels of engagement, our most disappointing experience was in talking to one group of teachers who were hostile to working on domestic violence, and who both felt that it was not their job and that they could see no evidence of its effects in the classroom.

CWA along with partners (including the youth service) are delivering programmes and work that specifically address issues of gender and VAW but placed within the broader context of healthy relationships. We would argue that domestic violence/VAW issues are included as mandatory and integrated with work on anti-bullying, conflict resolution and healthy relationships.

Cardiff Women's Aid supports the need for a strong response from the criminal justice system to domestic violence and recognises that Cardiff has been at the vanguard of the development of multi-agency working. Currently referrals to the MARAC (multi agency risk assessment conferences) are at very high levels and the system is being refined to ensure that numbers remain manageable. The use of police drop in sessions within CWA is helping to break down suspicion and barriers to engagement, though the rapport built is often dependent on the individual officer that is present at the drop in. Mandatory training for all new police officers on the dynamics of domestic violence/abuse, risk assessment, risk management of perpetrators and evidence gathering would support continued development of the quality of service experienced by victims through their contact with the police.

But it must be noted that according to research reflected by our own experience in working with women in Cardiff on average 24% of domestic violence offences are reported to police. CWA and other services provide support and information for huge numbers of victims who do not use the criminal justice system (CJS). Our crisis intervention centre provides advocacy and ongoing support to women who choose for a variety of reasons not to engage with the police or courts. Maintaining this service and others like it ensures a diversity of routes for support and offers opportunities for CWA to work with women to improve their confidence in the CJS whilst also being able to access children who are experiencing/witnessing domestic violence.

Women's Aid (including our experience in Cardiff) has continuing concerns about the safety of children when child contact or residence is contested and there is domestic violence. CAFCASS (The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) has found rates higher than 25% of cases in private law contact cases involve allegations of domestic violence. CWA will be working with CAFCASS to support the further development of good practice and training.

It is clear that awareness and understanding is growing around both the incidence and impact on children of experiencing and witnessing domestic violence/abuse. What we must be concerned with is that all forms of VAW and child sexual abuse are under-reported, and where reports are made, cases have extremely high attrition rates. We must improve knowledge transfers across the sectors which to date has been minimal. At CWA we often have as many children in contact with our services (in refuge or accessing our children's services for example) as we do adult women; we are developing a Children's Centre of Excellence model that will draw together current good practice and provide a full programme of work/activities that will be age and context specific/appropriate that can be used in any setting and by any agency or organisation that comes into contact with children. We also strongly believe that children's counselling and other therapeutic interventions (i.e. child psychologist) needs to be seen as a necessary component of the diverse range of services provided to women, children and young people. This will address both the immediate and short term support and crisis intervention needs and will also lay the foundations of on-going, long term preventative work that is the only sure way of reducing and eliminating domestic violence. As such CWA is currently fundraising to develop its existing counselling service to work with children and young people.

The connections between domestic violence and child abuse have been highlighted for more than a decade, including in virtually every child death enquiry. However, because the areas are not connected in law, policy and most provision, the changes these insights should have prompted have not been easy to achieve. Building on the work, skills and knowledge of organisation like Cardiff Women's Aid and

funding a fuller range of services will be the quickest and most effective route to address the underlying causes of, and social supports for, violence against women and children which are common to both. Addressing both issues within a strategic context that understands their common roots through awareness and prevention programmes has the potential both to be cost-effective and to deepen understanding.

We would argue that only with a keen understanding of what 'diversity of services' looks like will the Welsh Assembly Government know what its national strategy and its commissioners should be aiming for. Diversity here means a range of forms of provision that includes refuge, advocacy, helplines and counselling across all forms of violence and for all social groups with additional needs (young women, minority ethnic women, women with disabilities). Diversity of provision must ensure that the following can be accommodated:

The complexity and differences between forms of violence

Both crisis/acute interventions and longer-term support

Specificity of needs with respect to age, minority status, other vulnerabilities

Access for women with complex needs

Variations across criminal justice, health, wider social and community support and/or empowerment needs

The different routes women take into support

The time lag from events before many women are ready to seek help

The possibility for continued innovation and change

It remains the case that only a minority of victims/survivors ever report violence to statutory agencies and less than 26% of incidents are reported through criminal justice routes - therefore access to support for the majority relies upon there being alternative routes.

A vibrant and accessible women's voluntary sector (particularly addressing the violence against women agenda) is an essential component of a co-ordinated community response for a plethora of reasons of which providing access for women who will not, or are uncertain whether to, make an official report ranks as a key function.

Although quite a radical step we feel that finding a way to use Supporting People (SPRG) money more creatively to address the needs of children and young people (who need more intense interventions for a longer period of time) would be an enormous step forward both as crisis support and the building blocks of preventative work and long term healing. It could be allocated in the same way that tenant support is currently delivered, but not just as an attachment or add on to current tenant support allocations. One of the ways that we are working at CWA is through risk assessment and support planning for children that are independent of their parents needs. So if a woman is assessed as no longer being in need of support but one or all of her children are risk assessed as in need of ongoing support from our children's workers this will continue; thereby ensuring that all members of the family access support and receive appropriate services as individuals.

A further development to SPRG that we feel would greatly improve our ability to provide appropriate levels of support for women would be more flexible use of units of tenant support. The ability to use SPRG to support women for shorter periods of time (through our crisis intervention centre) would allow a larger number of women/families to access short but intensive sessions of support, particularly effective for homelessness prevention; providing highly impactful interventions that will contribute to a reduction of the need for refuge and ongoing tenant support.

Perpetrator programmes remain a scarce resource and, more worryingly, one that is mostly accessed under duress. CWA remains to be convinced that those programmes actually succeed in de-programming perpetrator behaviour patterns. As we can all agree experienced perpetrators are accomplished at manipulation and may find the programmes content useful to use in the future against victims rather than to amend or ameliorate their own behaviour. CWA fully supports effective and timely programmes that will support perpetrators or potential perpetrators make an informed and free choice to change their behaviour and attitude towards women and relationships and as such will continue to support the development of such programmes.

However, we strongly feel that the most effective way of changing behaviour is before it becomes too entrenched and practised which is why preventative programmes and education in schools and with young people must be a high priority and we would suggest a higher priority than working with existing perpetrators.

Where such programmes exist it is absolutely essential that current or ex-partners of men who attend those programmes have access to their own programme (such as the Freedom Programme). This is essential so that victims are aware of the issues and work that the perpetrators are doing and also so that they can work on their own issues in order to ensure a level field of understanding within the relationship (if it is ongoing).

Cardiff Women's Aid is evolving its services to meet the needs of the women and children that are currently experiencing domestic violence and will continue to seek innovative and long lasting solutions to the issues that our service users face. These are our current key developments:

We are limiting the time that women and children need to spend in refuge through more intensive and focussed support work within refuge and the development of a wider range of options for re-settlement from refuge (including private tenancies where appropriate)

The development of an intake and assessment model (we hope to bring our new refuge online in December 2008) will enable us to provide shorter stays to women and children who could return back to their own homes with appropriate CJS interventions, risk and safety planning (including target hardening - we have access to security camera's and safety alarms), ongoing support from family, community and CWA etc.

Our priority is to support women and children to remain in their homes and remove the perpetrator wherever this is safe to do

The expansion of our counselling service to meet current demand and also to develop crisis counselling sessions for women who have been sexually assaulted or raped

The development of a range of services specifically designed to improve outcomes for children and young people (including children's counselling and youth work)

We continue to provide support and advocacy to high numbers of women and children through our crisis intervention centre - this service delivers positive outcomes both in terms of homeless prevention and long term support for women who are still in violent relationships and those who have left

Our preventative work is a long term solution to the issue of domestic violence

As an organisation CWA recognises that it already does work across the whole range of VAW and that we can share our expertise and experience with partners and further develop the effectiveness of work on domestic violence/abuse and wider VAW issues

Recommendations

In conclusion we would like to bring together the following recommendations that have been discussed within the paper.

The Welsh Assembly Government should adopt a gender-based definition of domestic violence/abuse, as does the Scottish Government

This should be set within a Wales wide Violence against Women Strategy, which recognises the need for specialist gender-specific services, raising awareness and changing attitudes

There is a long term funding strategy to respond to the support and accommodation needs of women and children survivors

Supporting people funding to be extended, to ensure specialist services for the most traumatised children and young people

Women experiencing domestic violence should be exempt from the no recourse to public funds rule

The Welsh Assembly Government should commission a qualitative review of the impact of MARAC on survivors: repeat victimisation monitoring is not adequate

Survivors should be offered support as soon as their partners/ex-partners are referred to perpetrator programmes