

GBV 48

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

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

Stage 1

Response from: **Churches' Network for Non-violence (CNNV)**

Consultation on the Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill

Churches' Network for Non-violence (CNNV)

CNNV was formed to broaden religious support for law reform to end corporal punishment and other cruel and humiliating forms of violence against children and to challenge faith-based justification for it. We challenge the view that corporal punishment is a biblical doctrine and believe that positive, non-violent discipline best models Christ's teachings.

We aim to work with people from all faiths and communities in forming a network of support, information and practical resources and to promote positive, non-violent discipline.

Faith-based support for prohibition and elimination of all corporal punishment of children is part of a growing, global movement. It is based on universal values of compassion, justice, equality and non-violence, shared respect for human dignity and a strong commitment to human rights. These values are incompatible with violent punishment of children.

The **Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill** aims to ensure a focus across the public sector on prevention and the protection of victims. It places duties on Welsh Ministers and others to publish strategies aimed at ending gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence, so it is astonishing that the Bill does not address the issue of giving children equal protection as an integral part of an overall strategy to prevent Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

Physical punishment of children is the most common form of violence in the domestic sphere and as long as it remains legal, strategies for the prevention of violence and protection of victims can never be fully effective.

The removal of the "reasonable punishment" defence is a crucial step towards ending gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual abuse. The Deputy Minister for Social Services, Gwenda Thomas made a commitment on 11th February this year to look at the issue further during this term. This Bill provides the opportunity for an amendment to remove the "reasonable punishment" defence and afford children equal protection under the law.

Tolerance of physical punishment of children inevitably leads to acceptance of other forms of inter-personal violence. Children who grow up experiencing physical violence at home are

more likely to use violence in their own personal relationships and this may carry on into adulthood. There are clear links between physical punishment in childhood and domestic violence, criminality and coercive sexual behaviour in adulthood.

As it stands, the law sends a confusing message to parents and society that some violence against children is acceptable. Children who are smacked learn that hitting is an acceptable means of control and this contributes to a social acceptance of violence. It is doubly confusing for children to be taught in healthy relationships education classes that interpersonal violence is wrong while at the same time they may be experiencing physical punishment at home.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 35th anniversary of Sweden's pioneering ban on all corporal punishment of children. To date 39 countries have demonstrated their commitment to children's rights and have prohibited corporal punishment of children in all settings. Welsh Assembly Government and the National Assembly for Wales have a history of support for "equal protection" and have confirmed that the National Assembly has the power to remove the "reasonable punishment" defence. This is an opportunity for the Welsh Government and National Assembly to lead the UK in respecting children's rights to equal protection.

We urge the CELG Committee to recommend that an amendment to the Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill is brought forward to remove the "reasonable punishment" defence.

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