

national assembly of women domestic violence

introduction

The term “domestic violence” refers to a range of abuses experienced by women; this includes emotional, sexual and financial abuse, as well as physical violence, intimidation and threats. Most domestic violence comes from women’s partners, family members – including their sons – or someone with whom there is or has been a relationship. The NAW recognises that some domestic violence occurs in same gender relationships, but by far the greatest extent is from men to women. This policy paper therefore focuses on that issue.

Domestic violence is the largest single type of violence against women and accounts for around a quarter of all violent crime. Two women are killed every week and thousands of children witness such violence (source: Home Office/Cabinet Office June 1999). One in four women will experience domestic violence and a domestic violence incident is reported to the police every six seconds. About a third of women reported being hit for the first time when pregnant. More than one in five women are raped by their partner or husband.

Domestic violence occurs at similar prevalence among people at all income levels and amongst households of all ethnic origins. However, some groups of women are particularly vulnerable to such violence. These include refugee women, displaced women and women living in poverty. The debilitating effect on women’s self esteem and pride is huge and the impact on children is similar – children are traumatised, and there is a severe impact on their mental health and well being. The economic costs of domestic violence are also massive – with costs of policing, emergency health care, ongoing health care, social services, housing, legal services, benefits, refuge and rape crisis etc. etc. Overall, there are high social, health and economic costs to individuals and to society.

government responses

The government is committed to doing something about domestic violence and about other violence against women. In 1998, it published a comprehensive strategy and action plan *Living without Fear*. It claims an action focus and determination to build on good practice around the country. It sets out an integrated approach to tackling the issue of domestic violence. However, NAW believes that a fundamental shift in cultural attitudes and financial resources is essential to go beyond the current worthwhile but piecemeal and uneven developments.

NAW policy

We want to see holistic and multidisciplinary approaches to the challenging task of promoting families, communities and countries that are free of domestic violence. A foundation must be education – we need the promotion of concepts that violence against women is unacceptable. The new Citizenship curriculum and developing Youth Services should carry this unambiguous message. Community based education and training campaigns are vital. Domestic violence must be condemned and there should be a clear plan of action, to which local authorities, health authorities and others can sign up, and which they are then bound to follow through.

refuges and shelters

It is time for an end to the underfunding and undersupply of refuges for women and their children who need to escape violence at home. A comprehensive network is essential, including linguistically and culturally accessible provision and provision which meets the needs of women with disabilities and learning difficulties.

perpetrators

We want to see effective sanctions against domestic violence, but also recognise that counselling and rehabili-

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tation programmes are vital for perpetrators if a cycle of recurrent violence is not to be established.

victim support

Comprehensive counselling, healing and support programmes to the victims of domestic violence are essential. Battered self-esteem takes more than a sticking plaster to heal it. Sometimes victims of violence are thought to bring their predicament upon themselves by, for example, not leaving the violent perpetrator. It is vital that we recognise that this is not an individual problem but one that demands a community and collective response. However, individuals do need help to restore their mental well-being.

media

We want to see an end to commercial media products (film, TV, radio) and advertisements that foster the idea that women are sexual property. The impact of negative imagery

permeates the lives of both women and men and contributes to the erosion of women's human rights.

working with others

NAW is committed to the elimination of domestic violence and other violence against women. We will work with all other organisations with the same aim. We want to see the development of multi-agency working and proper resourcing to enable the range of different needs around this issue, including those of children and the elderly, to be addressed.

Physical, emotional, educational, economic and civil action is necessary. A comprehensive infrastructure of support is vital. That demands a reappraisal of existing responses and an upward step-change in investment.

Our thanks are due to Warrington Domestic Violence Forum for resources that informed the drafting of this policy.

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