

Justice Committee

Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from the White Ribbon Campaign UK

We write regarding your call for evidence on the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm [ABSH] (Scotland) Bill. We welcome wholeheartedly the legislation.

We would also ask if MSPs would consider debating extending the premise to include prevention actions in the forthcoming legislation namely: sexual education, indecent displays in public places and public sector gender violence prevention duties. In addition to suggesting an amendment to the homelessness target in the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 given the updated definition of Domestic Abuse proposed.

We would support the proposal submitted by George Eckton's proposed new Part 4 to the proposed Bill. Mr Eckton's amendments seek to prioritise prevention in future and current cohorts of the population. He has submitted them to previous legislation but they have never been debated despite a significant chunk having the support of the Girl Guiding Scotland and Aileen Campbell from the Child Eye Line campaign.

We hope current draft ABSH Bill might offer you the opportunity to consider whether legislation is necessary in this area for child protection and decency reasons and other long-term preventative actions due to the fact that Police Scotland have noted that nearly a quarter of police time is spent on reacting domestic violence related cases.

The European Commission has previously estimated the cost of violence against women within the European Union of gender-based violence to be €228 billion in 2011, 1.8% of EU Gross Domestic Product, of which €45 billion a year equates to costs to public and state services and €24 billion of loss economic product. Estimates in the UK suggest that we have costs of up to £40 billion a year through the impact on gender inequality and all forms of violence against women.

Whilst, the main focus and rightly so is "Revenge Porn", could the bill could also debate the longer term behavioural antecedents of such transmission of indecent and private images.

In regard to your request for further comments, we would hope that in taking forward the Equally Safe Strategy you could give due consideration to amending the Civic Government Licensing regime in Scotland to reduce the display and normalisation of sexualised images in Scotland. We feel this would be relevant to your proposals on sharing private intimate images given the display of images in public could be linked to a mindset amongst some that it is normal to view and receive such images.

Also, we suggest that as well as seeking to strengthen criminal law to deal with offenders, you also consider the introduction of a Gender-based Violence & Abuse Prevention amendments to prioritise further various methods of prevention across

Scotland and place greater elements of the Equally Safe Strategy upon a statutory footing?

In 2010 the independent review called 'Let Children Be Children' looked at the sexualisation and commercialisation of children in society. It was conducted by Reg Bailey, Chief Executive of Mothers' Union, also known as 'The Bailey Review'. The review addressed the concerns that children are exposed to a tide of sexual imagery in public places. As a result of the report, recommendations were made, including:

- Clampdown on sexualised 'wallpaper' surrounding children.
- Sexual images on magazine and newspaper front pages should be covered up.
- Retailers should sign up to a family friendly code of practice

Reg Bailey's recommendations are based on parents' concerns and are intended to support both parents, by making sure their views are taken more seriously by businesses and broadcasters, and children, by helping them understand the potential dangers they face.

Therefore, whilst we recognize that parents have a responsibility to protect children. The problem we have is that parents are unable to protect children as sexual imagery and pornography is in every arena. See the Children's Commissioner report entitled 'Basically porn is everywhere'

http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/press_release/content_505

Parents are asking for help from the government, retailers, the media, internet service providers and the porn industry. Protecting children from imagery in public (newsagents, supermarkets, post offices etc) and online is a mammoth task that many parents are struggling to navigate.

White Ribbon Campaign believe these proposals are in line with some of the positions expressed by a cross-party selection of MSPs when the related issue of media portrayal of women in newspapers was debated by the Parliament in November 2013 and led by Jackie Baillie MSP on the specific subject matter of Page 3 in the Sun newspaper. Annabel Goldie MSP highlighted the known and proven link between the portrayal of sexualised images of women in media and attitudes that reinforce sexism, sexual harassment, abuse and violence towards women. Sarah Boyack MSP highlighted the research of Zero Tolerance which highlighted the concerns about the impact of gender stereotyping and suggested that children especially girls are overly concerned with their body image and also highlighted the need to take a wider look at sexualisation in our society, whether in retailing or in other media. Alison Johnstone MSP highlighted that in previous years the images of scantily dressed women in gossip pages were not at eye level when she was a child but highlighted the continued blurring of lines and relentless objectification of women. Alison went on to highlight that the average supermarket shelf where we shop with our children could have a profound impact on our impressionable young sons and daughters.

Elaine Smith MSP highlighted research from the 1990s by the UK Home Office that highlighted that sexually violent pornography is the most dangerous but that

newspaper nudity is still to a small degree harmful and because newspapers are more everyday than extreme pornography their aggregate effects might be greater. Patrick Harvie MSP highlighted the findings of Lord Leveson inquiry in terms of the evidence from the organisation Object which showed sexualisation or demeaning articles about women from The Sun, The Daily Star and the Daily Sport. Lord Leveson concluded that all 3 titles included articles which appeared to eroticise violence against women.

Shona Robison MSP concluded the debate for the Scottish Government highlighting their commitment to tackling gender discrimination and all forms of violence against women alongside a recognition of a wider commitment across the Scottish Parliament to address these issues. One of the key strands highlighted by the Cabinet Secretary of the Government's approach is to address negative portrayals of women in the media. Also Shona stated that society didn't want to have our young people exposed to a culture that repeatedly tells young women that they are sexual objects and that tells young men that it is completely acceptable to perceive young women in that way. Before concluding with a comment, on the then emerging work on the Equally Safe Strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls, highlighting the increased emphasis on prevention and early intervention and the knowledge that women experience a spectrum of violence of many forms over their lifetime and that the Scottish Government take the protection of children and young people extremely seriously.

We are heartened by the First Minister's words in the Programme for Government, which outlined the Scottish Government's proposals to show a determined and zero tolerance attitude to domestic abuse in Scotland. Therefore, in the context of this consultation and the publication of the Equally Safe Strategy, we hope that the Justice Committee can help prioritise prevention of violence against women and girls by adopting a zero tolerance approach to prevention through this legislation.

White Ribbon Campaign UK
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