

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Drais yn erbyn menywod, cam-drin domestig a thrais rhywiol: menywod mudol](#)

This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) consultation on [Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: migrant women](#)

MW04

Ymateb gan: Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru | Response from: Public Health Wales

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## **Public Health Wales Response to Equality and Social Justice Committee**

### **Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: migrant women**

1. Name:

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2. Email address:

3. In what capacity you are responding to this consultation?

Individual responding on behalf of an organisation – Public Health Wales

**Please find our response to the consultation under each of the headings set out in the Terms of Reference.**

#### **4. Migrant women's experiences of violence and the extent to which cultural norms and practices contributes to VAWDASV (e.g. FGM, forced marriage, honour-based' abuse).**

4.1 There has been some significant research in Wales over the last ten years that has provided evidence of the experience of Violence Against Women and Girls in Wales. In 2013, the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership published 'Uncharted Territory' which was the first study in Wales to two at the experience of violence against migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women and girls. It can be found on the WLGA website at:

<https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx> This report makes extensive reference to how culture and practices contribute to VAWDASV, but also how a lack of understanding of how violence such as sexual violence is a taboo in some cultures and societies can lead to traumatising experiences for those who have experienced them and are asked to recount these experiences.

4.2 In 2020 the Adverse Childhood Experiences Support Hub, hosted by Public Health Wales and funded by the Welsh government produced a report entitled the 'Review of Uncharted Territory'. This report can be found on the public Health Wales WHO Collaborating centre website at <https://phwwhocc.co.uk/resources/uncharted-territory-review/>

4.3 This report examined the experience of refugee, asylum seeking and migrant women and girls, during the COVID pandemic and looks at what progress had been made against the reconditions of the initial report. In respect to cultural norms and practices the review found that

'Women from minority ethnic backgrounds may suffer from further pressures due to cultural and community concerns; many women sometimes decide to stay in their abusive relationships due to fear of social exclusion if they leave their abusive partners and the fact that language barriers may prevent them from accessing support. A discussion paper on Inter-Personal Violence (IPV) in Sweden on migrant women with insecure immigration status found that women may experience social

isolation, a lack of awareness about services, and racism from services, resulting in a higher prevalence of violence'.<sup>1</sup>

4.4 In relation to progress made on the recommendations of the 2013 Uncharted Territory report, cultural norms and practices are referenced in one of the responses of partner agencies:

'Home Office asylum interview: 'We also focus on addressing gender specific issues such as the impact of cultural norms and other underlying factors on the interviewee's ability to provide their account. Additionally, trainees are taught more specifically about how they can deal with Female Genital Mutilation and other forms of Gender Based Violence sensitively in the asylum interview'.<sup>2</sup>

The responses include reference to the specific forms of violence considered harmful traditional or cultural practices, but not further comment on the cultural norms that underpin them. For example, training provided as part of the Welsh Government National Training Framework, training offered by Welsh Women's Aid and resources produced by the ACE Support Hub, Welsh Women's Aid and BAWSO with Welsh government for schools.

4.5 Public Health Wales has also looked at the experience of ACEs and Child Refugees in the 2020 report 'Adverse Childhood Experiences in child refugee and asylum seeking populations' that can be found on the WHO Collaborating Centre website:

<https://phwwhocc.co.uk/resources/adverse-childhood-experiences-in-child-refugee-and-asylum-seeking-populations/> The issue of the relationship between cultural norms and violence is identified as being an important factor as to why some families are forced to flee their home country.

'Risk of exposure to abuse and neglect (and whether parents recognise certain behaviours as being abusive or neglectful) varies by cultural context, relating to home country norms; expectations and laws around parenting and the use of corporal punishment; cultural norms around gender roles and parent-child relationships; and the social and economic conditions in home countries... In some instances, experience of or threat of child abuse is a reason for flight e.g. escaping abuse because of their sexual orientation/gender identity... or fleeing the threat of genital mutilation ...'<sup>3</sup>

4.6 The report on ACEs and child refugees also identifies the specific link to domestic abuse 'As with child abuse, prevalence of domestic violence can be culturally specific, relating to gender roles and cultural norms around the use and acceptability of violence within relationships..... In Wales for instance, research among refugees, asylum seekers and migrants identified that women had often suffered physical or emotional violence from their husbands (as well as in-laws and other family members), often as a result of unequal

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<sup>1</sup> [https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Uncharted-Territory-Rapid-Review-19\\_08.pdf](https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Uncharted-Territory-Rapid-Review-19_08.pdf) p17

<sup>2</sup> Ibid p23

<sup>3</sup> <https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ACEs-in-Child-Refugee-and-Asylum-Seekers-Report-English-final.pdf> p8.

power relations.<sup>4</sup> This is also a finding in relation to cultural norms however that are also a resilience factor. By ensuring that there is a sense of cultural identity, shared lived experience and culture connection we are building important protective factors, so it is also important to distinguish between cultural norms and practices which are harmful (and illegal in the UK) and those that provide a protective factor against broader adversity and harm. It is important to note that the Public Health Wales response to the Welsh Government VAWDASV Strategy consultation in 2022 identified that this distinction was not clear in the consultation document.

4.7 The importance of cultural connection in supporting unaccompanied children in particular to integrate was highlighted in the 2020 Aberystwyth University Report 'Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Refugee Children in the 1930s in the UK: A History Shaping the Future.' This report can be found on the ACE Support Hub website at: [https://issuu.com/acesupporthub/docs/aberystwyth\\_aces\\_and\\_child\\_refugees\\_report\\_eng\\_fi](https://issuu.com/acesupporthub/docs/aberystwyth_aces_and_child_refugees_report_eng_fi)

'The combination of a secure cultural base and shared experience when in contact with other refugees from a similar background, and the daily contact with British work, characters, and values, enabled these refugees to be connected to both their Continental background and simultaneously establish a new independent adult life in Britain'.<sup>5</sup>

The link to that cultural identity is seen as an important way for young people to have supported independence so this aspect should also not be lost in the discussion around harmful culture norms and practices.

## **5. The scope and coverage of specialist services and interventions which are adequately resourced and trained to support survivors from migrant communities, including meeting cultural and linguistic needs.**

5.1 The Uncharted Territory Review finds that there is a need for more specialist services to support survivors from migrant communities, and where survivors have been signposted to there is an additional set of barriers for those who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). There is also an 'Invisibility of migrant women and girls including those from the Gypsy Roma Traveller community, migrant and seasonal workers, students and others on temporary visas. This found little evidence of work that has addressed the particular experience of these groups directly in relation to VAWDASV'.<sup>6</sup> In response to the recommendation from the 2013 Uncharted Territory report on availability and resourcing of specialist services, Welsh Women's Aid's response was 'We have been calling for this in our State of the Sectors reports for years. It is a commitment within the national VAWDASV commissioning guidance and national VAWDASV strategy. The Wales Audit Office report

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid p11

<sup>5</sup> [https://issuu.com/acesupporthub/docs/aberystwyth\\_aces\\_and\\_child\\_refugees\\_report\\_eng\\_fi](https://issuu.com/acesupporthub/docs/aberystwyth_aces_and_child_refugees_report_eng_fi) p13

<sup>6</sup> [https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Uncharted-Territory-Rapid-Review-19\\_08.pdf](https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Uncharted-Territory-Rapid-Review-19_08.pdf) p37

recommendations and numerous Equalities and Local Government Committee Senedd Committee Reports have highlighted it. But it is still not delivered.’<sup>7</sup>

5.2 The 2020 report on ACEs and child refugees also identified access to support services as essential for a range of needs not just VAWDASV. ‘Ensuring that children and families have the necessary support available to them, whether that is access to health and mental health services or systems within school to help with academic learning, is essential. Considering and overcoming barriers to accessing services (e.g. within health services in Wales: challenges of communication, transport costs and poor provision of mental health services... is therefore important’.<sup>8</sup>

5.3 In 2021, the Wales Violence Prevention Unit, of which Public Health Wales is a founding member published a systematic review on ‘What works to prevent VAWDASV? The report makes the recommendation that further research is required with diverse communities to consider effective programmes for the prevention of VAWDASV<sup>9</sup>. The report was commissioned by Welsh Government and can be found on the violence prevention unit website [https://www.violencepreventionwales.co.uk/cms-assets/research/What-Works-to-Prevent-Violence-against-Women-Domestic-Abuse-and-Sexual-Violence-Systematic-Evidence-Assessment\\_2021-09-20-124755\\_aypz.pdf](https://www.violencepreventionwales.co.uk/cms-assets/research/What-Works-to-Prevent-Violence-against-Women-Domestic-Abuse-and-Sexual-Violence-Systematic-Evidence-Assessment_2021-09-20-124755_aypz.pdf)

5.4 The forthcoming SEREDA Wales report supported by the ACE Support Hub and led by Professor Jenny Phillimore from Birmingham University IRIS, will also include some important suggestions from improvement from survivors of Sexual and Gender based Violence in Wales. These are in the areas of funding, training and access to services but also supports the need for better join up with areas of Welsh government priority such as LGBT+ communities and older people, race equality and opportunities for education and employment. This research will be published in late May.

## **6. Consideration of the barriers preventing migrant women and girls in Wales from accessing services and additional barriers faced by women with insecure immigration status, or whose immigration status is dependent on a spouse or employer or those who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).**

6.1 The Uncharted Territory Review found that here is particular cause for concern around the barriers that women who have No Recourse to Public Funds face. There are two case studies within the report that show the difficulty women face in finding a refuge space, but also the lack of join up between governments on this issue.

‘NRPF. The original recommendations of the 2013 report identified recommendations for both the UK Government and Welsh Government on NRPF, and yet this still seems to be falling through the gap of devolved/non devolved

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid p36

<sup>8</sup> <https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ACEs-in-Child-Refugee-and-Asylum-Seekers-Report-English-final.pdf> p32

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.violencepreventionwales.co.uk/cms-assets/research/What-Works-to-Prevent-Violence-against-Women-Domestic-Abuse-and-Sexual-Violence-Systematic-Evidence-Assessment\\_2021-09-20-124755\\_aypz.pdf](https://www.violencepreventionwales.co.uk/cms-assets/research/What-Works-to-Prevent-Violence-against-Women-Domestic-Abuse-and-Sexual-Violence-Systematic-Evidence-Assessment_2021-09-20-124755_aypz.pdf) p55

responsibility. Welsh Government state clearly that this is the responsibility of the Home Office. Although this is the case for immigration, in terms of support services, Welsh Government could make funding available for those with NRPF if it chose to. Work undertaken by the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership as recommended still shows that we are unclear on the data if how many people have NRPF and evidence from Welsh Women's Aid shows that accessing any accommodation or support is extremely difficult for women in this position. The question of funding for refuge provision for women and girls was as big an issue in 2013 as it is in 2021, with the case studies showing the challenges faced by helpline staff in securing spaces.'<sup>10</sup>

6.2 The review also identified opportunities for the experience of women and girl in Wales who have NRPF through a better understanding of the existing Welsh legislation that may enable services in Wales to provide support a way that English services, for example, may not.

'Lack of awareness of Social Services duties under Welsh legislation. As exemplified by the Case Study where social worker says it's "more of a DV issue" (and therefore not within their remit). WG have commissioned the NRPF Network to deliver training on this, which recently concluded. But this review finds that there is more work to be done to ensure that there is better understanding of the duties under the Act, which are not mentioned in the updated from Welsh Government in relation to social services and local authorities.'<sup>11</sup>

6.3 The review further finds the need for better join up between governments on this through improved governance and wider related issues around VAWDASV and migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women as well a need for improved join up between the VAWDASV policy area and the Nation of Sanctuary Plan, as well as wider policy areas that are relevant in the experience of displaced people who have suffered VAWDASV including the wider equalities work.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Uncharted-Territory-Rapid-Review-19\\_08.pdf](https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Uncharted-Territory-Rapid-Review-19_08.pdf) p37

<sup>11</sup> Ibid