

## Relate Cymru response to the draft Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill.

relate Cymru  
y bobl perthynas  
the relationship people

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### About Relate Cymru

Relate Cymru is a national charity specialising in relationship support for individuals, couples and families. We work to promote health, respect and justice in couple and family relationships. Our vision is of a future in which healthy relationships are actively promoted as the basis of a thriving society in Wales.

Our aims are to enable people to engage in positive relationships for the benefit of themselves, their family and society by:

- Supporting individuals, their partners and families to make relationships work better;
- Delivering inclusive, high quality services that are relevant at every stage of life;
- Helping the public and policymakers understand what makes relationships flourish and why this is important for adults and the children and young people who live with them.

We work to enhance the health and wellbeing of adults and children by the promotion and provision of relationship support to improve the quality and resilience of couple, parental and family relationships and limit the damage caused by relationship breakdown.

We are submitting this response because we provide a unique menu of relationship support services that work with victims and perpetrators of domestic violence in alternative and complimentary ways to traditional domestic violence services.

### Range of services

Relate Cymru works throughout Wales to build stronger relationships, limit the damage of relationship breakdown and help parents maintain appropriate relationships with their children following separation. Last year we supported over 4,000 families in Wales.

### Relationship Counselling & Sex Therapy

- We work face to face, by phone and on-line with individuals, couples and families to help them explore their relationship problems and the reasons behind them. This includes relationship counselling for those affected by cancer (in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support) where there is a disproportionate incidence of domestic abuse disclosed.
- For every £1 spent on relationship counselling there is a longer-term saving to the tax-payer of £11.40 (Department for Education (2014) *Relationship Support Interventions Evaluation*, Crown).
- Only 4% of relationship counselling clients report domestic violence or abuse on intake, after assessment we identify 33%.

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- We provide brief intervention through our 'Responsive Model' to domestic abuse. This approach has received the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) award for excellence.
- We work with families often before they recognise domestic abuse is present and before they access any other domestic violence specialist service. We are an open access, early intervention, preventative and front-line service.

### **Choose 2 Change perpetrator programme**

- Our key priority is to increase the safety of women and children who are or have been experiencing domestic abuse.
- We deliver group and one2one perpetrator programmes with integrated partner support services in a variety of locations across Wales, aiming to assist perpetrators to change their behaviour and to support their partners/ex-partners and children throughout the process, making them safer.
- 90% of partner or ex partners report reduction in abuse.
- Perpetrator programmes reduce the cost upon the police, courts system, social services and domestic violence services.
- There are very few programmes for non-convicted perpetrators available throughout Wales.
- We offer the only fully Respect accredited programmes in Wales.

### **Training and Education**

- We provide training courses to professionals and the public,
- Our offer includes parenting information programmes for separating parents delivered under contract with CAFCASS Cymru.
- A popular range of courses enables professionals to identify and tackle abusive behaviour of children and young people towards other young people or adults.
- We also deliver training and on-going supervision for organisations wishing to establish perpetrator programmes.

### **Family Mediation**

- We work throughout north Wales with separating couples dealing with disputes relating to children, property and/or finance. We have a contract with the Legal Services Commission to provide publicly funded mediation and the service is also available to fee-paying clients.
- Mediation is quicker and cheaper for parents than court battles and in the long-term reduces the cost upon the court system and is better for children.
- 40% of Family Mediation clients have named domestic violence as one of the contributing factors to the relationship breakdown.
- Many of our mediation clients do not access perpetrator or victim services elsewhere.

### **Child Contact Services**

- We deliver Supervised and Supported Contact services in north Wales that ensure safe access to parents for children.

- We assist families to maintain relationships where one or more parent has been assessed as a risk to the child.
- On average, 70% of supervised contact clients have reported domestic violence within the co-parent relationship.

### **Our expertise and the focus of our submission**

Relate Cymru does not tend to work with clients experiencing forced marriage, female genital mutilation or 'honour-based' violence so we will not comment on these issues. We would note that childhood sexual abuse is commonly reported by our clients and often leads to relationship and sexual problems as adults. The focus of our submission will be domestic violence and abuse (DVA). We will outline some themes that we think are important to this Bill. It is our intention that this will help the committee understand some of the complexities of tackling DVA.

### **Is DVA a 'relationship problem'?**

Many clients seeking relationship support, especially couple counselling, bring issues of (what we would identify as) DVA. The majority of the population do not approach DVA with an awareness of feminist theories of power and control but instead use the language of relationship problems; 'he gets angry' or 'she never listens'. The majority of DVA presented at counselling is coercive control.

Although Relate's services, particularly couple counselling and perpetrator programmes are underpinned by feminist theory, we need to accommodate the common language of the general population in order to provide an accessible service to all whilst being mindful of ensuring the safety of all concerned. Our priorities for clients are to:

- Increase the safety of victim/survivors and their children.
- Prevent DVA occurring/re-occurring.
- Help abusers to be accountable for their abusive behaviour.

### **Gender based violence**

We note the change in terminology from 'violence against women & girls' to 'gender based violence'. We hope that this change in emphasis does not lead to a 'one-size-fits-all' approach when planning services and that it does not result in a reduction of funding to specialist services for women fleeing violent relationships. The data around DVA is well known and we would hope that any guidance to Local Authorities acknowledges violence against women is the most prevalent form of gender-based violence.

We work with clients presenting with DVA, both perpetrators and victims (sometimes clients presenting as both); in same sex relationships, between family members, men who are abused by women as well as women abused by men. Our services help clients deal with their DVA in later life and whilst living with cancer. We know that characteristics such as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and class have little influence on how likely we are to experience DVA.

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We know that, as a general rule, men and women require different approaches to support. Relate have worked with the Men's Health Forum to highlight the barriers men face when seeking relationship support. Although this is not specifically in the context of DVA, it nevertheless helps us to identify the best ways in attracting men and women to access support. One key finding was that men have a tendency to want to "solve problems" whilst women want to discuss change and understand why things have happened. This desire to "solve problems" can often result in unrealistic expectations of counselling by men.

Men often wait to access support for their relationship until there is a trigger or crisis in their relationship or permission has been conferred by friends or family whilst women tend to notice strains in the relationship earlier. We have started to address this difference in need through our site [www.wheresyourhead.org.uk](http://www.wheresyourhead.org.uk) and the report, 'Try to see it my way', which explores men's attitudes to help-seeking in general and more specifically about relationship support. <http://www.relate.org.uk/policy-campaigns/publications/try-see-it-my-way-improving-relationship-support-men>

There are opportunities for (Welsh and English language) on-line resources which will help to deal with the significant increased interest in getting help following the introduction of routine questioning as outlined in this Bill.

### **Early intervention & those currently at 'low risk'**

We believe that early intervention is key to reducing the longer-term societal and financial costs of DVA. Early interventions should include Relationships Education in schools and we note that this is not included in the Bill. We have submitted evidence to the Curriculum Review and hope that colleagues work closely to ensure a joined-up approach. Work-place interventions provide another way to access high numbers of people in order to raise awareness.

Both our counselling services and perpetrator programmes attract clients early in their DVA journey. It will be important to identify a range of services in Wales that a high proportion of 'low-risk' clients access in order to deliver appropriate early interventions. Offering support to perpetrators and victims early, in ways that they 'buy-in' to is vital.

One challenge for all organisations is how to use the right language to attract the right clients at the best time. To label a service as being for 'Domestic Violence' may not appeal to clients who do not initially consider their situation abusive. We continue to identify the best messages to encourage people to access support, 'helping with relationship problems' seems to be an effective way of attracting clients earlier (before crisis point).

Relationship counselling is a service attracting about 50/50 men and women and a service that is likely to be accessed by 'lower-risk' victims and perpetrators (including those in same-sex relationships). These are clients who would be unlikely to access DVA crisis services. Once it is identified, however, it is important to provide a joined-up, safety-focussed service.

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An important outcome of our approach to DVA in relationship counselling has been in helping clients identify that the behaviour of their current or past partner has been abusive. It is common for clients to view physical violence as unfortunate and emotional abuse/financial abuse/coercive control as being normal.

Relate Cymru will only work with couples/families when it is safe to do so. For couple counselling, our 'Individual structured interview' process assesses whether we can work with couples where DVA has been disclosed or suspected. Clients have an opportunity to talk to the counsellor one-to-one and we identify the types of abuse, if it is current or historical and if the more powerful person is taking responsibility for their actions.

For our Choose2Change programmes, the partners we have supported have often been those who were unlikely to have been in contact with other support services for victims. The majority report that they appreciate the whole-family approach. These programmes therefore help to extend the reach of the local coordinated community response to victims as well as perpetrators.

The benefit of non-court-sanctioned perpetrator work is that clients are more likely to stay with the programme and more likely to reduce their abusive behaviour than those referred to programmes post-conviction.

### **Accredited approaches**

We believe that in order to ensure a consistent approach throughout Wales which works, services should conform to quality standards and, where possible, they should be accredited.

### **Better protected children**

The majority of Relate Cymru clients presenting with DVA are parents. The negative effects of living with DVA on children are well documented. We suggest that a range of approaches to tackling DVA with new parents needs to be a strategic priority in Wales.

Choose2Change receives referrals from Cafcass (England) in relation to cases involved in private proceedings where the perpetrator lives in Wales. Where Cafcass have agreed to pay for their client to attend, Respect Accreditation has been essential. Cases being dealt with by Cafcass Cymru are currently not able to access a service unless they can self fund. We believe that this needs to be addressed.

We would suggest that this Bill could be used to remove the 'reasonable punishment' defense for physical punishment of children in Wales. Government have made a commitment to look further at the issue of banning physical punishment during this Assembly term, ideally on a cross-party basis. This Bill provides an excellent opportunity to achieve a positive change in legislation. We believe that while hitting children remains legal there can be no consistency of approach in either prevention or protection from violence and abuse.

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### **Funding & Pooling resources**

We welcome the intention to improve the joined-up approach to tackling DVA in Wales. Like many other policy areas, a challenge for Wales (and organisations that work throughout Wales) is to allow planning and commissioning to happen on a regional basis whilst at the same time ensuring consistency of access to good quality services for people throughout the country.

A challenge for national and local decision makers will be to identify how much DVA costs them (housing, A&E, loss of earnings etc) and to pool resources between diverse departments in order to ensure that crisis demand is reduced in the longer-term.

One of the biggest challenges to third sector providers is the short-term funding available. Our hope is that this challenge is addressed in the National and Local guidance proposed in the Bill. Relate Cymru deal with issues that are cross-cutting, eg. mental health, children & families, older people, poverty, criminal justice. There is currently no specific thinking in Wales about the importance of relationships as a theme and relationship-specific funding is difficult to identify. Relate Cymru have experienced a 70% cut in state funding over the last 3 years and as a result, clients are less able to access relationship support in Wales. Local Authorities appear unwilling to fund perpetrator work but we are hopeful that Police & Crime Commissioners will do so. It is our hope that a consistent approach to commissioning services at national and local levels will be outlined in the guidance.

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