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**UK Women and Equalities Committee consultation:
 Inquiry: Sexual harassment of women and girls in public places**

Responses by Monday 5th March 2018

Consultation

Response Form

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About Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid is the umbrella membership organisation in Wales that supports and provides national representation for 24 independent third sector violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services in Wales (our membership of specialist services).ⁱ These services deliver life-saving and life-changing support and preventative work in response to violence against women, including domestic abuse and sexual violence, as part of a network of UK provision.

As an umbrella organisation, our primary purpose is to prevent domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women and ensure high quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender responsive and holistic. We collaborate nationally to integrate and improve community responses and practice in Wales; we provide advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements across government, public, private and third sector services and in communities, for the benefit of survivors.

We also deliver direct services including the Welsh Government funded Live Fear Free Helpline; a National Training Service; the national Children Matter programme of work which, for example, supports local services to help children and young people affected by abuse and to deliver preventative Safety, Trust and Respect (STAR) programmes across Wales, and refuge and advocacy services in Colwyn Bay and Wrexham. We are piloting the Survivors Empowering and Educating Services (SEEdS) project, which is empowering survivors of





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violence and abuse to collectively influence and inform services and commissioning frameworks, and help change attitudes.

We also deliver the Wales National Quality Service Standards, a national accreditation framework for domestic abuse specialist services in Wales (supported by the Welsh Government) as part of a UK suite of integrated accreditation systems and frameworks. (More information on the NQSS can be found here: <http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/our-members/standards/>)

1. Welsh Women's Aid's response

1 As the umbrella organisation for violence against women and girls (VAWG) services in Wales, our response is based on consultation with our membership of specialist services from across Wales and with survivors of abuse through Welsh Women's Aid's SEEdS project (Survivors Empowering and Educating Services). To do this we carried out a survey with our members and survivor representative, the response to which are incorporated in our answers below.

Executive Summary:

2. The scale and impact of sexual harassment of women and girls in public places:

- Robust data is needed to substantiate widespread anecdotal evidence that sexual harassment in public places – both acts of sexual harassment and the fear of sexual harassment – has a profound impact on the lives of women, children and some men in the UK in order to understand the magnitude of the problem.
- Girl Guides' research shows an increase of girls who have experienced any type of sexual harassment in schools has increased from 59% in 2014 to 64% in 2017.¹
- 24% of all women reported that they had been sexually harassed in a public place in the last five years, this amounts to 52% of women aged 18-24, 31% of women aged 25-49, 14% between 50-64 and 7% of women aged 65 and over.²
- YouGov research³ shows that younger women are more likely to consider negative behaviour such as wolf whistles as sexual harassment, whereas older women are less likely to label it as sexual harassment. Increases could be as a result of more people recognising sexual harassment and the negative impact it has on them.
- Investing in preventing sexual harassment and tackling it at the source has financial benefits to health services, economic output and other public services, such as emergency services.

¹<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2017.pdf>

²<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/10/19/most-18-24-year-old-women-have-been-sexually-harass/>

³https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/6use40wjdi/SexualHarassment_Oct17.pdf;

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/11/01/sexual-harassment-how-genders-and-generations-see/>





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While the costs of sexual harassment is unknown, each adult rape costs society over £96,000⁴ and cost incurred in the criminal justice system with sexual violence costing society in England and Wales an estimated £8.5 billion.⁵ Considering the scale of sexual harassment and significant impacts on women’s wellbeing and economic opportunities, we can assume that there is a significant economic cost to society.

3. Why does sexual harassment of women and girls in public places happen?

- Gender inequality is the cause and consequence of all forms of VAWG, including sexual harassment in public places.⁶ Sexual harassment manifests from unequal power relations within society between men and women. International research⁷ has shown that men and boys who have a comprehensive understanding of VAWG have more positive attitudes to gender roles and are less likely to be supportive of any form VAWG.
- These attitudes are normalised through the objectification of women and the portrayal of unacceptable behaviour such as sexual harassment and abuse through the media, in films, computer games and adverts. When this behaviour is so widely presented as acceptable it makes it more difficult to challenge. Further to this perpetrators are often not held to account, therefore this behaviour is further normalised.
- Sexual harassment that occurs in schools is not adequately handled. In addition, the current standards of sex and healthy relationship education is low, outdated and non-compulsory. By not challenging this behaviour in schools, it is then perpetuated in public and in the workplace.

4. Preventing and responding to sexual harassment of women and girls in public places

- It is everyone’s responsibility to help tackle sexual harassment, including the police, local authorities or other bodies. The problem is clearly endemic and must be tackled by all public bodies. Guidance⁸ for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention regarding the prevention of VAWG highlights the importance in challenging men’s views of acceptable violence, abuse and behaviour through awareness raising campaigns that are engaged with target audiences at community level that clearly frame VAWG as a human rights issue and show the benefits to eliminating it. The guidance outlines best practice examples that could inform campaign development.

⁴ This is incurred through its emotional and physical impact on the survivors, lost economic output due to convalescence, treatment costs to health service

⁵ Home Office (2005) ‘The economic and social costs of crime against individuals and households 2003/04’, 2005. Figures from this report were up-rated to 2009 prices in the government response to the Stern Review (2011) See https://www.sericc.org.uk/pdfs/5953_government-stern-review.pdf.

* All names have been changed.

⁶ UN General Assembly 2006: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/VAW_Study/VAWstudyE.pdf; http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/gender.pdf.

⁷ Geeta Nanda, 2011, *Compendium of Gender Scales, C-Change*

⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/168046e1f1>



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- It is also important that a policy of zero-tolerance and sufficient accountability for perpetrators is communicated by the UK Government and implemented within communities across the UK. This should be clear that such behaviours is not condoned and will not allow sexual harassment to be 'the norm' in a society that currently seems to treat them as part of acceptable behaviour.
- The current recognition of sexual harassment in the Equalities Act 2010 is too limited in the protection it offers, only offering protection in the workplace. This should be expanded to recognise sexual harassment in other public places and in schools and clearly define it as a form of VAWG.
- Additional training in schools and workplaces is needed to enable people to identify the issues around sexual harassment and put policies in place to eradicate it. Educational institutions have a duty to students to have a zero-tolerance attitude towards sexual harassment so that students are not subjected to violence against women in their schools, colleges and universities, and that a whole educational approach to tackling violence against women is fully incorporated into the curriculum.
- Programmes, similar to those of accredited perpetrator programmes for domestic violence abusers should be created so that the police or the judiciary can refer perpetrators of sexual harassment to awareness raising and attitude-changing programmes as a way of combating sexual harassment and holding the perpetrators to account.





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5. The scale and impact of sexual harassment of women and girls in public places

5.1 Robust data is needed to substantiate widespread anecdotal evidence that sexual harassment in public places – both acts of sexual harassment and the fear of sexual harassment – has a profound impact on the lives of women, children and some men in the UK in order to understand the magnitude of the problem. The data that do exist offer valuable sources of information, largely driven by the research from third sector organisations, such as Girl Guiding⁹, TUC and Everyday Sexism¹⁰, Fawcett Society¹¹, Stonewall (UK)¹² and Stonewall Cymru¹³. The data is specific to certain groups and therefore does not offer a coherent picture of the problem across society.

5.2 One survivor consulted said that sexual harassment is “*extremely widespread. It has become accepted as the norm through physical gesture, looks, comments, body language. It is so inherent that we accept it as second nature.*” An extensive, non-exhaustive, list of examples: wolf whistling, beeping horn, slowing down whilst driving, grabbing body (e.g. in a nightclub), invading personal space, breathing very closely, inappropriate comments, using graphic and derogatory language, staring or following e.g. in restaurants/shops.

5.3 The list of types of sexual harassment clearly describes a variety of behaviours that occur on streets, night clubs, restaurants, in shops and online. Trolling and sexual harassment, including the receiving of unsolicited pornographic content, are particular concerns of many women online, and social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, and dating apps such as Tinder have been highlighted as places where some feel that they experience the greatest amount of sexual harassment.

5.4 24% of all women reported that they had been sexually harassed in a public place in the last five years, this amounts to 52% of women aged 18-24, 31% of women aged 25-49, 14% between 50-64 and 7% of women aged 65 and over.¹⁴ Girl Guides’ research shows an increase of girls who have experienced any type of sexual harassment in schools has increased from 59% in 2014 to 64% in 2017.¹⁵ One respondent reported that they felt it has “*definitely increased over the years, especially with the introduction of social media sites. You see more and more younger victims of harassment on online platforms.*”

⁹ <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2017.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=e473a103-28c1-4a6c-aa43-5099d34c0116>

¹² <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt-in-britain-trans.pdf>

¹³ [http://www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt in wales - hate crime stonewall cymru.pdf](http://www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt%20in%20wales%20-%20hate%20crime%20stonewall%20cymru.pdf)

¹⁴ <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/10/19/most-18-24-year-old-women-have-been-sexually-harass/>

¹⁵ <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2017.pdf>



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5.5 YouGov research¹⁶ shows that younger women are more likely to consider negative behaviour such as wolf whistles as sexual harassment, whereas older women are less likely to label it as sexual harassment. Increases could be as a result of more people recognising sexual harassment and the negative impact it has on them. Increases in figures that show the number of people who have experienced sexual harassment might therefore be part of an increased understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined by the victim's perceptions, and not those of the perpetrator, so increased figures of any kind suggest more and more people identifying themselves as victims of this type of behaviour and the negative impact it has on them.

5.6 Survivors and specialist services have highlighted that sexual harassment impacts women in relation to depression, mental health, relationships, confidence and self-esteem and *“makes women scared”*. One woman highlighted how she suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following sexual assault. This highlights the need to situate sexual harassment within women's wider experience of VAWG throughout their lives.

5.7 Investing in preventing sexual harassment and tackling it at the source has financial benefits to health services, economic output and other public services, such as emergency services. While the costs of sexual harassment is unknown, each adult rape costs society over £96,000¹⁷ and cost incurred in the criminal justice system with sexual violence costing society in England and Wales an estimated £8.5 billion.¹⁸ Considering the scale of sexual harassment and significant impacts on women's wellbeing and economic opportunities, we can assume that there is a significant economic cost to society.

Recommendations

- **Educate the public to recognise behaviour that constitutes sexual harassment in public and elsewhere through awareness raising campaigns and through compulsory healthy relationship education in all educational institutions, including proper understanding of what constitutes consent.**
- **Collect robust data to determine the full extent of the issue, while making sure that data suppliers (e.g. survey recipients) fully comprehend what constitutes sexual harassment so that perceptions of societal 'norms' do not skew the stats.**

¹⁶https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/6use40wjdi/SexualHarassment_Oct17.pdf;

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/11/01/sexual-harassment-how-genders-and-generations-see/>

¹⁷ This is incurred through its emotional and physical impact on the survivors, lost economic output due to convalescence, treatment costs to health service

¹⁸ Home Office (2005) 'The economic and social costs of crime against individuals and households 2003/04', 2005. Figures from this report were up-rated to 2009 prices in the government response to the Stern Review (2011) See https://www.sericc.org.uk/pdfs/5953_government-stern-review.pdf.

* All names have been changed.



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- ***Target the behaviour of perpetrators, rather than teaching preventative measures to victims such as 'don't walk alone at night', 'don't wear a short skirt if you don't want to be cat-called' etc.***
- ***Increase pressure on providers of online platforms, e.g. social media sites and dating apps, to demonstrate a zero-tolerance policy to all forms of online bullying, discrimination and harassment, including that of a sexual kind. Failure to do so by said platforms should have consequences.***





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6. Why does sexual harassment of women and girls in public places happen?

6.1 Gender inequality is the cause and consequence of all forms of VAWG, including sexual harassment in public places.¹⁹ Sexual harassment manifests from unequal power relations within society between men and women. International research²⁰ has shown that men and boys who have a comprehensive understanding of VAWG have more positive attitudes to gender roles and are less likely to be supportive of any form VAWG.

6.2 These attitudes are normalised through the objectification of women and the portrayal of unacceptable behaviour such as sexual harassment and abuse through the media, in films, computer games and adverts. Prevalent stereotyping in advertising, schools, workplaces and through entertainment frequently see women objectified, inherently connected to the role of 'home maker' and cleaners of these houses, playing second fiddle to a 'breadwinning' husband. We welcome the stricter guidelines from the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) that bans the use of gender stereotyping.²¹ For example, 55% of girls aged 7-21 say that gender stereotyping affect their ability to say what they want.²² 95% of girls from same cohort said that the advertising industry should make sure adverts show more positive, diverse representations of girls and women.²³

6.3 Misogynistic victim-blaming in the media must be challenged so that crimes against women are reported with dignity and are not contributory to the wider societal issue of portraying women as lesser than men and responsible for the crimes that are perpetrated against them. The women's sector can play a part in educating the press around this, busting myths about sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women. Welsh Women's Aid is holding a seminar to engage with the Welsh press on this topic in March 2018 and the rolling out of this practice across the UK would be beneficial to survivors of abusive behaviour and to women and survivors of these crimes more generally.

6.4 Further to this perpetrators are often not held to account, therefore this behaviour is further normalised. Respondents from Welsh Women's Aid's network have highlighted "*men's entitlement, the widely accepted concept that women are there to please men in whatever shape or form*" as a huge contributing factor that leads to sexual harassment of women and girls both in public, online and in employment. There is also a perception that "*women are to feel somehow appreciative of this unwanted or uninvited attention from women.*" This is all-too-often the rhetoric of the self-perceived 'hard-done-by' perpetrator when challenged, though understanding that this behaviour, whether

¹⁹ UN General Assembly 2006: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/VAW_Study/VAWstudyE.pdf, http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/gender.pdf.

²⁰ Geeta Nanda, 2011, *Compendium of Gender Scales*, C-Change

²¹ <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/new-rule-to-ban-harmful-gender-stereotypes-next-year.html>

²² <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2017.pdf>

²³ Ibid.



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consciously or not, is based on and motivated by power makes it clear that women ‘appreciating’ street harassment would not in fact satisfy perpetrators.

6.5 Programmes, similar to those of accredited perpetrator programmes for domestic violence abusers should be created so that the police or the judiciary can refer perpetrators of sexual harassment to awareness raising and attitude-changing programmes as a way of combating sexual harassment and holding the perpetrators to account.

6.6 NSPCC has conducted research²⁴ into the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of children. The study found that while most young people (49%) saw pornography as unrealistic, a minority rated it positively. Of this minority, this group was made up mostly of boys, younger respondents and those whose families and/or schools had not engaged with them about online pornography.²⁵ Sexual harassment that occurs in schools is not adequately handled. In addition, the current standards of sex and healthy relationship education is low, outdated and non-compulsory. By not challenging this behaviour in schools, it is then perpetuated in public and in the workplace. Proper, age-appropriate sex and healthy relationship education, such as that outlined in Welsh Women’s Aid’s *Good Practice Guide*, as published by Welsh Government²⁶ and through the AGENDA project²⁷ are essential tools that open up discussions with young people in the classroom and starting conversations that will continue amongst their peers to empower young people to make educated deductions and decisions around pornography use.

Recommendations:

- **UK Government takes positive and extensive measures that tackled gender inequality across society – such as equal representation across the genders in public and political life, tackling gender stereotyping, challenging portrayals of VAWG in the media and through educational institutions.**
- **The development of sexual harassment perpetrator programmes, with the VAWG specialist sector, to hold abusers to account and to stop the pattern of violence through expert interventions.**
- **Funding for the specialist VAWG sector to provide long-term support programmes to children who have survived abuse and violence so that they have positive role models.**
- **Media coverage of sexual harassment, and VAWG, must be improved through journalist engagement to ensure women are represented with dignity in news pieces so as to not further perpetuate negative, victim-blaming attitudes across the population.**

²⁴ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/mdx-nspcc-occ-pornography-report.pdf>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ <http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/151020-whole-education-approach-good-practice-guide-en.pdf>

²⁷ <http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/2016/12/agenda-a-young-peoples-guide-to-making-positive-relationships-matter/>



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7. Preventing and responding to sexual harassment of women and girls in public places

7.1 It is everyone's responsibility to help tackle sexual harassment, including the police, local authorities or other bodies. The problem is clearly endemic and must be tackled by all public bodies. Guidance²⁸ for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention regarding the prevention of VAWG highlights the importance in challenging men's views of acceptable violence, abuse and behaviour through awareness raising campaigns that are engaged with target audiences at community level that clearly frame VAWG as a human rights issue and show the benefits to eliminating it. The guidance outlines best practice examples that could inform campaign development.

7.2 VAWG organisations and survivors of abuse have suggested other tactics such as increased awareness campaigns, through increased media coverage and billboards, in line with the adoption of a zero-tolerance stance from the UK Government and increased engagement opportunities between policy makers and survivors. It should be clear that such behaviours is not condoned and will not allow sexual harassment to be 'the norm' in a society that currently seems to treat them as part of acceptable behaviour. Further training in workplaces, including the public services was also raised. Survivors have also called for increased funding for specialist VAWG services to enable them to use their expertise in relation to violence against women, including sexual harassment, to *"give the right messages about healthy relationships and communicating in a healthy manner."*

7.3 Welsh Women's Aid's State of the Sector 2017 report²⁹ highlights the current strain that specialist violence against women services are facing in Wales today.³⁰ If the UK Government is committed to making huge societal change with regards to tackling sexual harassment in public, this needs to be resourced and the experts in the field – the specialist VAWG sector and survivors – need to be involved in this process. Sexual harassment is a form of violence against women and street harassment is part of a continuum of violence against women, and should not be treated in silo. Any successful awareness campaign should also result in increased demands on specialist services as more people seek help, therefore it is imperative that funding is secure but also adequate to meet demands.

7.4 Current sexual harassment legislation in the Equalities Act 2010 is in place to protect employees from workplace sexual harassment. Legislation should be updated to show a governmental commitment to a zero-tolerance for sexual harassment across society as a whole, including in workplaces – and certainly within political institutions – educational institutions and street-based sexual harassment. Without clear procedures and consequences, sexual harassment will continue to exist and continue to be significantly underreported.

²⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/168046e1f1>

²⁹ <http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/WWA-State-of-the-Sector-2017-ENG.pdf>

³⁰ <https://1q7dqy2unor827bqjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NWTA-Full-report.pdf>



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7.5 Increased emphasis on tackling school-based sexual harassment was also raised. Schools and other educational institutions act as microcosms of society and when sexual harassment is rife – as research from Girl Guiding shows us that it is and that it is on the increase³¹ – it would be naive at best to believe that degrading and highly inappropriate, abusive behaviour such as sexual assault, sexual harassment, up-skirting and sexual violence, which happens routinely in schools is going to stop at the school gates and not continue into the streets and into the lives of those pupils once they finish their educations. Children and young people in the UK deserve more and it is not acceptable that places of work offer post-16 young people greater protection against sexual harassment than they received throughout their entire education.

7.6 Welsh Women's Aid is currently running a series of bystander initiatives with a number of university and sixth-form colleagues across Wales to empower participants to challenge unacceptable behaviour amongst their peers, as well as developing their own awareness and understanding and highlighting the support that survivors can be signposted towards. Initial findings from pre-training questionnaires around definitions of violence against women and consent have been deeply worrying. Initiatives like this need to be made compulsory and widely available to increase awareness and understanding for all students.

7.7 Finally, the power and reach of online campaigns such as #MeToo and #TimesUp have done a huge amount to raise awareness and empower women to share their experiences of sexual harassment in public places, amongst other experiences. Such viral social media storms have raised awareness amongst men and increased solidarity amongst women. Change needs to come from grass roots but it also needs to be supported from the top. That is why it is essential that policy makers, such as those within this committee, commit to a zero-tolerance for all forms of violence against women, including sexual harassment in public, in work and anywhere else. Politicians need to lead by example and when they are found to have perpetrated such acts, they need to be appropriately held to account.

Recommendations:

- ***Campaigns on healthy relationships and combating violence against women formally in male dominated spaces for boys and young men such as the Scouts, sports teams etc.***
- ***Roll out of a compulsory whole educational approach to violence against women in all educational institutions, including appropriate support and training for teachers and staff, with links to local and national specialist violence against women organisations, with adequate resources to make this possible.***
- ***UK Government to adopt a strong, well-advertised and properly implemented zero-tolerance to sexual harassment and other related abuses in both the political sphere and across public life, with higher penalties for perpetrators of these abuses.***

³¹ <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2017.pdf>



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- **Update the Equalities Act 2010 to protect all from sexual harassment, and not just those in the workplace, so that it includes those in school, volunteers and those in public.**
- **Change attitudes through action so that sexual harassment is seen as worth reporting by victims.**
- **Implement increase awareness campaigns and positive media coverage that is informative around sexual harassment and what is not acceptable, in collaboration with experts in the VAWG specialist sector.**
- **Increase training and the development of effective sexual harassment policies in the workplace.**
- **Appropriately resource teachers so that they can combat school-based sexual harassment, so that no pupil is sexually harassed inside or outside of schools.**
- **Sustainable funding for the specialist violence against women sector across the whole of the UK is essential both to tackling sexual harassment.**

Welsh Women's Aid thanks the UK Women and Equalities Committee for the opportunity to respond to this important issues. If you have any comments or questions about this consultation, please don't hesitate to get in touch with:

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ⁱ Our membership of 24 third sector violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence specialist services in Wales, with whom we have national partnership agreements to ensure our work is coordinated and integrated includes: Aberconwy DAS, Atal y Fro, Bangor and District Women's Aid, Clwyd Alyn Housing Association (CAHA) Women's Aid, Stepping Stones, New Pathways, Safer Merthyr Tydfil, Carmarthen Domestic Abuse Service, Calan DVS, Cardiff Women's Aid, Cyfannol Women's Aid, Domestic Abuse Safety Unit (DASU), Glyndwr Women's Aid, Gorwel (Grwp Cynefin), Montgomeryshire Family Crisis Centre, Newport Women's Aid, North Denbighshire Domestic Abuse Service, Port Talbot & Afan Women's Aid, RCT Women's Aid, Safer Wales (including Dyn Project), Swansea Women's Aid, Threshold (formerly Llanelli Women's Aid), West Wales Domestic Abuse Service and Rape; and Sexual Assault Centre North Wales.

