

DV Bill Consultation

Submitted by: Digital Trust

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Digital-Trust, CIC welcomes the government's consultation on creating a law against domestic violence that includes coercive control. Current legislation is inadequate in dealing with the psychological and coercive nature of domestic violence.

This is a major contributory factor into the low charging and conviction rates on domestic abuse in England, Wales and Northern Ireland which in 2011 stood at just 6.5%¹. It is also why murder or suicide rates amongst victims of domestic violence remains far too high.

- Two women are killed every week in England and Wales through domestic abuse, a recurring number (Home Office statistics).
- 500 women who have experienced domestic abuse in the last six months commit suicide every year. Of those, just fewer than 200 attended hospital for domestic abuse on the day they died. (The Cost of Domestic Abuse. Women and Equality Unit, Walby, 2004).

There is currently a DV Bill that we believe will provide the legal framework women need. Elfyn Lwyd, MP put this before Parliament as a Private Members Bill on Domestic Violence in February 2014. This can be viewed at; <http://www.hfletcher.co.uk/bill>

Elfyn explained, "The proposed Bill will create a specific offence of domestic abuse. In terms of sentencing, a court would take into account a course of conduct of domestic abuse and whether that abuse was coercive and controlling. Abuse will be defined as physical or psychological or both."

It will also seek to ensure the successful implementation of the legislation by including requirements such as:

- Placing responsibilities on the police to develop, adopt and implement written policies in respect of domestic abuse.
- Put duties on the police to inform victims of their rights.
- Introduce protective orders prohibiting an abuser making contact in any way with the victim.

The Bill is being championed and was redrafted several times throughout 2014 by Harry Fletcher, Criminal Justice Director Digital-Trust, CIC and has had extensive consultation this year with victims, stakeholders and lawyers.

This Bill would also meet the requirements for the Istanbul Convention (the European Council Convention on Violence Against Women and Girls) which has yet to be ratified by the UK.

Harry Fletcher said, "We have gained cross party support to get domestic violence recognised as a serious crime. The principles of the Bill will be discussed during the passage of the Serious Crime in front of Parliament.

Although we welcome the consultation, we hope that it does not delay the possibility of getting a Bill through Parliament this year. Women in the England, Wales and Northern Ireland have waited far too long for a Domestic Violence Bill that can offer them protection”.

Ends

1 Despite this, domestic violence conviction rates in the five years to 2011 stood at just 6.5% of incidents reported to police– though a much higher proportion of around 70% of those charged. (Watson, 2010; CPS, 2011; CPS 2012.)

Notes to the Editor

Istanbul Convention - The framework this convention creates is a blueprint for a co-ordinated, victim-centred approach to combating all forms of violence against women and domestic violence. Its focus on violence against women as gender-based violence and its links with gender inequality are testament to the fact that the Council of Europe is leading international efforts in the protection of women’s human rights. For this reason, the convention addresses domestic violence as a form of gender-based violence while not losing sight of male, child and elderly victims of domestic violence, to whom the convention may be applied if states parties wish.

The Convention specifically states “Violence against women” is...a violation of human rights & a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in...physical, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty”

http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/default_en.asp

Statistics

- 80.4% of women in refuges and 85.6% of women using non-refuge services had experienced emotional abuse (Women’s Aid)
- 57.4% of women in refuges and 49.7% of women using non-refuge services had experienced financial abuse (Women’s Aid)
- Two women are killed every week in England and Wales through domestic abuse, a recurring number (Home Office statistics).
- The majority of researchers find that serious intimate partner violence is mostly perpetrated by men on women (Dobash and Dobash 2004). Critically, men’s opportunities for escape and independence are much different.
- 500 women who have experienced domestic abuse in the last six months commit suicide every year. Of those, just fewer than 200 attended hospital for domestic abuse on the day they died. (The Cost of Domestic abuse. Women and Equality Unit, Walby, 2004).
- Some domestic homicides and so-called ‘honour killings’ may be disguised as suicides or accidents, with the help of the extended family and community (Southall Black Sisters).
- 1 in 4 women experience domestic abuse during their lifetime and 6% to 10% of women experience domestic abuse in any given year (Analysis of ten separate domestic abuse prevalence studies by the Council of Europe, 2002).
- Domestic abuse has a higher rate of repeat victimisation than any other crime. (Home Office, July

2002).

About Digital-Trust: Digital-Trust is a new not-for-profit organisation that brings technologists together with those professionals working within the criminal justice system and the associated support charities. This new organisation will provide an accessible central resource for other stakeholder organisations struggling to keep abreast of the changing nature of digital abuse through technology. Digital-Trust will continuously develop new advice, tools and guidance to combat the developing risks to victims in this new digital age. The new organisation will formally launch in the autumn of 2014.

Harry Fletcher: Harry Fletcher is a criminal justice expert and parliamentary campaigner. Harry was the Assistant General Secretary of NAPO for over 20 years. His role as a criminal justice expert has been to campaign and influence for changes in government policy. He was instrumental in getting the new stalking law through parliament. His approach was to have parliamentary enquiry into stalking and then campaign for a new law. It was very effective and the new law passed in record time. Harry is currently working on a new Domestic Violence law.

For further information on any of the topics mentioned in this release, or to arrange interviews please contact Kathleen Clark at the press office on 0845 833 8292, or email press@digital-trust.org