

**Wales Women's National Coalition (Women's Voice)**  
**Proposed questions for the CEDAW Committee to use**

**July 2008**

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- **Paragraph 2: Constitutional, legislative and institutional framework**

**What steps is the Government taking to ensure that the specificity of gender discrimination is not diluted in the new Single Equality Bill?**

*Background:* Wales Women's National Coalition (WWNC) has been actively involved in the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)'s consultation for the new Single Equality Scheme, which is similar in its scope and content to Westminster's Single Equality Bill. While WWNC welcomes the review of existing equalities bills and has provided extensive feedback to WAG regarding the Scheme, we are concerned that gender as a 'strand' unto itself is not diluted among the other 5 equalities strands. In Wales, the Single Equality Scheme is not yet completed, and third sector organizations are yet to see concrete action plans for how the plans in the Scheme will be achieved. We hope that in its development, WAG avoids privileging any one strand over the others, or diluting any one strand, or inadvertently creating a hierarchy of equalities. Similar views have been expressed by other NGOs across all equalities strands who we have liaised with during the Scheme's consultation.

- **Paragraph 8: Violence against women**

**What steps is the Government taking in school and further education to involve boys and men in preventing and eliminating violence against women?**

*Background:* WWNC is concerned that not enough is being done in Wales in terms of preventative work surrounding violence against women. WWNC's consultations with our member groups, such as Welsh Women's Aid, the national umbrella organization of 34 local Women's Aid groups throughout Wales, has found that time and time again education is emphasized as the key tool in changing attitudes towards violence against women. Education is crucial in preventing and eliminating violence against women, including domestic violence and sexual violence. WWNC has recently contributed to Amnesty International UK's draft Violence Against Women strategy, which also emphasises the primary importance of preventative education to challenge the myths surrounding domestic and sexual violence, to educate boys in sex equality and to eliminate all forms of violence against women. Violence against women is inextricably linked to wider attitudes that devalue and demean women, and schools are a crucial site where these attitudes could be challenged. Welsh Women's Aid has recommended in their recent report to the Welsh Assembly Government's Communities and Culture Committee that the Assembly's Department for Education engage in issues surrounding violence against women firstly through providing specialist training for teachers, and secondly through teaching teenagers about healthy relationships and the unacceptability of violence. This would enable a more preventative approach, and one that would include and educate men in preventing and eliminating violence against women.

Research just published from surveys in Welsh universities by Amnesty International has shown worrying incidences of violence against women, and worrying levels of acceptance of domestic and sexual violence amongst higher education students in Wales. Men's attitudes in the survey were typically harsher towards women, e.g. more men than women think that a woman is totally or partially responsible for being raped if she has acted in a flirtatious manner (39% compared to 34%), and 27% of males thought that it was acceptable to expect sex from a woman if he had spent a lot of time and money on her (compared to a

still shockingly high 17% of women). Education is key in changing these attitudes, and involving boys is key in challenging the mistake of blaming the victim, i.e. placing all responsibility onto women. Education on violence against women, including domestic violence, should be mainstreamed into the National Curriculum, and teachers should be provided with specialist training in order to both teach about the issue and to recognize and deal appropriately with pupils who may be experiencing violence.

**And**

**Why has the Welsh Assembly Government opted for a gender-neutral definition of domestic abuse in its 'Tackling Domestic Abuse: The All Wales National Strategy', rather than incorporating the UN definition, which situates domestic violence within a wider context of gendered oppression – particularly as only 2% of calls to the Wales Domestic Abuse Helpline from April 2007-March 2008 were from men?**

- **Paragraph 26: Women in vulnerable situations**

**What steps is the Government going to take to ensure that the Pensions Bill adequately addresses the specific needs of retired women and tackles the feminization of poverty in later life?**

*Background:* Pensions affect men and women work differently, not least because women are paid less, often work part time, move jobs more often and are exposed more often than men to lone parenthood and caring responsibilities. It is therefore important that the new Pensions Bill addresses gender-specific issues, and also allows women to access savings in an emergency before they retire, if necessary (e.g. after a divorce, when women's incomes fall while men's rise).

Occupational pensions that presume a full-time attachment to the labour market may therefore disadvantage women. The Pensions Bill should include safeguards for women, including the right of buy-back for missing years when they may have been caring for children or the elderly (estimates for Wales show that if carers were paid, it would cost at least £1 billion a year); greater flexibility regarding women's capacity to contribute to their pension, and the need to ensure that women with more than one job aren't unintentionally penalized.

This is crucially important for women in Wales where the issue of an ageing population is particularly pertinent. For every 4 men over the age of 80, there are 7 women. A higher proportion of people are over the age of 60 in Wales than in England, Scotland or Ireland. By 2031, it is expected that 26% of people living in Wales will be over 75. Currently, life expectancy in Wales is 74.8 for men and 79.7 for women; it is expected to rise to 81 and 85 by 2031. UK-wide, 1 in 4 single women pensioners live in poverty – a situation worse in Wales, where salaries tend to be lower.

*If you have any queries/comments, please contact:*

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