

Women's Aid submission to the Education Select Committee on PSHE and SRE in schools – June 2014

About Women's Aid and our work with children and young people

- Women's Aid is the national domestic violence charity that supports a network of around 300 local services working to end domestic violence against women and children in England. Our member services are integrated domestic violence service providers delivering a range of holistic services for women experiencing domestic violence and their children. Keeping the voices of survivors at the heart of its work, Women's Aid campaigns for better support for women and children, provides training and resources for professionals and delivers a package of vital 24 hour lifeline services through publications, websites and the National Domestic Violence Helpline (run in partnership with Refuge) on 0808 2000 247 and information for children and young people at www.thehideout.org.uk.
- Women's Aid Annual Survey 2013¹ of almost 200 domestic violence services in England found that in 2012/13 these organisations supported nearly 117,000 women and children through refuge accommodation and outreach support. This included 9,599 women and 10,117 children in refuge, and over 82,500 women and 14,200 children in outreach services.
- For many years, Women's Aid have supported parents, schools and communities in providing quality information, advice and practical support about healthy relationships and preventing abuse in intimate relationships. In 2008 Women's Aid ran a campaign on respectful relationships called Expect Respect² and continues to support educators with our free Expect Respect Education Toolkit³ for primary and secondary schools. An adapted version of the original, *Expect Respect: A Toolkit for addressing Teenage Relationship Abuse*⁴ was created with the as a resource for the 'This Is Abuse' Campaign run by the Home Office. In 2013 we created a new and free resource, Can You See Me?⁵, a DVD complete with education toolkit for teachers and practitioners working with young people to challenge and discuss abusive behaviour in intimate teenage relationships.
- Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence on Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) and will restrict our comments to our areas of expertise.
- In addition to submitting our own response, we are a member of the End Violence Against Women Coalition and endorse their response the Inquiry.
- We believe that ending violence against women and girls and all children should form a significant part of the vision for schools through its policies and curriculum, with

¹ Women's Aid Annual Survey 2013: Domestic Violence Services, Women's Aid Federation of England

² <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-violence-press-information.asp?itemid=1783§ion=0001000100150001> , Women's Aid 2008

³ <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/page.asp?section=00010001001400100004§ionTitle=Education+Toolkit>

⁴ <http://www.justice.gov.uk/youth-justice/effective-practice-library/expect-respect-a-toolkit-for-addressing-teenage-relationship-abuse> , Women's Aid 2012

⁵ Can You See Me? <http://www.canyouseeme.coop/>

PSHE education and SRE being main components to this. We hope that from this Inquiry, real progress can be made, translating into something tangible for children and young people.

1. Summary of Recommendations

- 1.1 The most recent data from the Office of National Statistics shows that women aged between 16 and 19 years old and 20 and 24 years old were more likely to be victims of domestic violence than older women⁶. This is one reason why Women's Aid believes that PSHE education should be made a statutory part of the National Curriculum, addressing the need for education which fulfils the UK's obligations under international and human rights law. Just as children need to learn to read and write, they need to learn the skills of being responsible and respectful, no matter their own gender, ethnicity, religion, culture or socio-economic status or that of others. Parents have a significant role to play in this education; however for the families where this does not occur, schools can provide a safe environment where children can learn these fundamentals.
- 1.2 Within PSHE education, education is needed to end Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) with the key themes of healthy relationships, gender equality and safety embedded across the whole curriculum, using a whole school approach and addressing the core issues.
- 1.3 It is vital that teachers be given comprehensive training directly on PSHE education and not as an add-on to their existing subject(s). There should be a national training programme developed which works in a multi-agency setting with specialist VAWG organisations.
- 1.4 Teacher training should ensure teaching staff are aware of specialist support services to which they can refer those who have experienced abuse and prevention programmes for young men who use violence in their intimate relationships.
- 1.5 PSHE requires attainment targets where there is assessment to ensure that is placed on the same par with other existing subjects.
- 1.6 PSHE education and SRE provision in all schools could be improved by the use of the Ofsted Inspection Framework and the comprehensive updating of the 2000 SRE guidance by the Department for Education.

2. Need for PSHE to be a statutory part of the National Curriculum or through some other means of entitlement.

- 2.1 The National Curriculum provides a key opportunity to challenge gender stereotypes, teach about domestic violence and VAWG and to promote positive respectful relationships through differing subjects in education such as media literacy in ICT classes as well as through PSHE education and SRE. Women's Aid has produced the Expect Respect Education Toolkit that consists of at least one

⁶ Office of National Statistics [Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences, 2012/13 Release](#) (February 2014)

easy to use and age appropriate 'Core' lesson for each year group from Reception to Year 13 and is based on themes that have been found to be effective in tackling gender stereotypes, effective ways of dealing with conflict, understanding legal parameters and promoting healthy relationships.

2.2 There is a need for PSHE education to become statutory and for children and young people to learn about respectful relationships as research has shown there is a high level of violence against girls and young women in the UK which has not decreased over the years.

2.3 The teaching of PSHE education is more vital than ever, as issues such as harassment, sexual bullying and pornography overwhelm children and young people. Research has shown that there is a strong correlation between tolerance of physical and sexual violence and a repeated long-term exposure to sexualised imagery. Pornography, which is now accessed by boys as young as 11, is used by young men as a yard stick for relationships and has a great influence on their sexual expectations of young women.⁷ A poll conducted in 2010 found that over a quarter (28%) of young people reported they had seen sexual pictures on mobile phones at school a few times a month or more.⁸ The poll also found that sexual violence is a common experience for young women – that 29% of girls had experienced unwanted sexual touching in UK schools⁹ and the NSPCC's 2009 study found that 33% of girls in a relationship aged 13-17 have experienced some form of sexual violence from their partner. Furthermore, 75% of girls and 50% of boys reported some form of emotional abuse from their partner.¹⁰

2.4 Tolerance of domestic violence is linked to gender inequality and sexual stereotyping. Therefore preventative work in schools, in relation to gender inequality and from a young age, has been identified as important in promoting acceptable behaviours and changing attitudes before they harden in the teenage years. Early intervention is key in this respect and is more cost effective.

2.5 Although there is overwhelming evidence to reflect the difficulties children and young people face, these issues can be challenged with attitudes changed. A standard and consistent approach to the teaching of PSHE education is necessary to ensure that all students are able to benefit from this education. Providing only 'guidance' for equipping children with tools to deal with abuse within their home or intimate relationships fails to recognise the profound and long-lasting negative impact this can have on children and young people in their childhood and into adulthood. Having clear minimum statutory standards for PSHE education promotes a holistic approach to the welfare and wellbeing of children in education.

2.6 Working with boys and young men within the National Curriculum through PSHE education and SRE is extremely important as it ensures there is education about

⁷ Limmer, M., (2009), 'Young men and pornography: Meeting the Challenges through sex and relationship education', *Education and Health*

⁸ End Violence Against Women and YouGov (2010), *Sexual Harassment in UK Schools*

⁹ End Violence Against Women and YouGov (2010), *Sexual Harassment in UK Schools*

¹⁰ Barter, C., McCarry, M., Berridge, D. and Evans, K. (2009) *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*, London: NSPCC

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/partner_exploitation_and_violence_wda68092.html

rights and responsibilities of both girls and boys, and the onus of responsibility is not just on girls to 'keep safe' but equally, or more importantly for boys not behave in a manner that places girls in an unsafe situation. Recent research has found that targeted intervention through relationship based education programmes which allowed young people to pose and respond to difficult questions about relationships was welcomed and effective in challenging tolerance to violence and inequality and changing attitudes.¹¹ The research also showed that campaigns such as 'This Is Abuse'¹² by the Home Office cannot just be left for a passive audience, but needs to be linked to active participation of young people in discussing the presenting issues, as that is when the learning occurs¹³.

3. Is the current accountability system sufficient to ensure schools focus on PSHE?

3.1 Ofsted's inspection framework provides adequate monitoring of schools and whether or not they focus on PSHE. However they are limited in their interventions where there is no statutory requirement for the teaching of important issues such as domestic violence and teenage partner violence in an informed and consistent manner. There are schools that excel in the area of providing a PSHE programme as they understand that it not only provides children with important life skills, but it enhances their academic potential.

3.2 Governing bodies of schools should support head teachers and staff by taking a lead with policies on PSHE and garner the support of parents, with a commitment to promoting gender equality and ensuring the PSHE is on par with other subjects.

4. What is the overall provision of Sex and Relationships Education in schools and the quality of its teaching, including in primary schools and academies?

4.1 The most current report on the provision of PSHE education in schools from Ofsted, 'Not yet good enough: PSHE'¹⁴, clearly shows from its title what their view is of PSHE education provision in England. Two of the key findings below reflect the necessity for quality provision of PSHE/SRE and a robust programme that promoted a deep understanding, ensuring learning was acquired:

- Lack of high-quality, age-appropriate sex and relationships education in more than a third of schools is a concern as it may leave children and young people vulnerable to inappropriate sexual behaviours and sexual exploitation. This is because they have not been taught the appropriate language or developed the confidence to describe unwanted behaviours or know where to go to for help.
- In just under half of schools, pupils had received lessons about staying safe but few had developed the skills to effectively apply their understanding, such as the assertiveness skills to stand up for themselves and negotiate their way through difficult situations.

¹¹ Gadd, D., Fox, C., Corr, M., Butler, I., Bragg, J. (2013) From Boys to Men, University of Manchester School of Law

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/this-is-abuse-campaign>

¹³ Gadd, D., Fox, C., Corr, M., Butler, I., Bragg, J. (2013) From Boys to Men, University of Manchester School of Law

¹⁴ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/not-yet-good-enough-personal-social-health-and-economic-education-schools>

4.2 Members from the Women's Aid Young People Advisory Panel (YPAP)¹⁵ reported that PSHE education classes were seen as 'joke' lessons, which may be the result of it being an 'add-on' subject taught by a teacher who may have expertise in a different area and who may not feel trained and comfortable with teaching the subject. Teaching important life skills in PSHE education needs to be viewed as not only a valued component of the school curriculum, but one that is fundamental, and needs to be led by government and senior school staff. However, one YPAP member noted that although PSHE education lessons weren't taken seriously by students, discussions about racism and cultural cohesion provided enormous help with integration and acceptance of different ethnicities.

4.3 Children and young people are asking to be taught factual and honest information, empowering them to debate and discuss domestic violence, healthy relationships and respect openly; allowing them to learn empathy, become emotionally intelligent and have a critical analysis of the information they get from school, the internet and their peers. This critical analysis and emotional intelligence developed through high quality PSHE education and SRE that includes teaching of domestic violence and healthy relationships enables the each generation to have healthy relationships.

4.4 Without a standardised curriculum, schools are left to the time consuming task of finding and funding their own resources and material, leaving many schools at a disadvantage where there is inadequate funding. Understanding this, Women's Aid has provided free education resources for schools and other education providers to teach and discuss healthy relationships; however without minimum core and statutory standards, it is left to chance on whether students across the country are able to access quality PSHE education.

5. Are recent Government steps to supplement the guidance on teaching about sex and relationships, including consent, abuse between teenagers and cyber-bullying adequate?

5.1 We warmly welcome the supplementary guidance produced for the Department for Education by the PSHE Association, Brook and the Sex Education Forum¹⁶. We also welcome the Government understanding the need to address important issues such as consent, domestic violence, pornography and the various issues arising from technology that children face daily and the need for them to make informed decisions. However, we would like to see the SRE Guidance from 2000 updated by the Department for Education and distributed amongst all schools.

5.2 A recognition of boys and men's responsibility for their behaviour is also a key element in the education about domestic violence and respectful relationships and needs to be emphasised in any subsequent material.

¹⁵ Young People's Advisory Panel (YPAP) is a young people's engagement group providing views of children and young people to the work of Women's Aid Federation of England.

¹⁶ SRE for the 21st Century (PSHE Association, Brook and Sex Education Forum, 2014)
<http://www.brook.org.uk/index.php/information/sre-supplementary-advice>

5.3 There is now information available around what is considered to be abuse, however the recent materials do not adequately address the reasons why this is an issue that predominantly impacts on children, especially girls, and women. Merely responding to children and young people's questions around abuse of 'what' but not 'why', provides them with only the ingredient to part of the solution. Gender inequality is widely evidenced in VAWG, with the Government taking great strides to tackle this problem. However, without a cohesive approach from government departments, great opportunities for schools and children are missed, and the cost effectiveness of campaigns and programmes are limited.

5.4 The End Violence Against Women Coalition have provided detailed information in this section which we further endorse.

6. How the effectiveness of SRE should be measured.

6.1 Monitoring of PSHE education and SRE of all schools- maintained, academies, free and special schools should continue to be a part of the Ofsted inspection framework, whereby they can provide consistent evaluation of schools and practices.

6.2 Schools need to have policies in place that allows for teaching staff and student feedback and collaboration. The YPAP felt that a structured approach to PSHE education and SRE was important, as "there's so many chances to make jokes and get off topic in the subject. But at the same students need to feel able to contribute."

6.3 The subject of PSHE would require formalised, or some form of assessment whereby students would be able to illustrate and reflect their knowledge about issues such as around rights and responsibilities around consent, healthy relationships, domestic abuse, internet safety, equality and legal aspects. In assessing the subject, both education staff and students would understand the importance of the subject, rather than seeing it, as YPAP members put it "a joke subject" or where "teachers saw it as a break and time to do some marking and didn't invest in it really". Assessment of PSHE education also allows the subject to be on par with other existing and formally assessed subjects.

6.4 Follow-up with students and obtaining their feedback on relevance of content, information being taught, structure and style is fundamental to effective practice and engaging young people in a subject such as PSHE education. Constructive student feedback should be included in any measure of success and content development.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Women's Aid believes that PSHE education and a broadened SRE should be statutory parts of the National Curriculum for all schools in England. With numbers of women being killed by their partner or ex-partner not decreasing, it is vital that children and young people are empowered with the knowledge and skills to develop healthy relationships and know where to go to for support if they do experience violence.

**Women's Aid Submission to Education Select
Committee Inquiry on PSHE education and
SRE in schools
June 2014**



- 7.2 We believe that the Ofsted Inspection Framework could be used as a lever to improve PSHE education and SRE in schools and hold schools accountable for the delivery of high quality PSHE education and SRE which includes teaching about domestic violence, healthy relationships, consent and safety.
- 7.3 We would like the 2000 SRE Guidance to schools comprehensively updated by the Department for Education and subsequently distributed to all schools in England.
- 7.4 Finally, Women's Aid would like to see all schools able to access free and specialist resources, such as the Women's Aid Expect Respect Education Toolkit, 'Can You See Me?' and The Hideout¹⁷, to ensure that they are able to meet the needs of their children and young people. This will also enable them to link with local specialist services such as local Women's Aid members who can support schools in this area.

¹⁷ <http://www.thehideout.org.uk>