

Scottish Women's Aid's Position Statement on Transgender Women

Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) believes the oppression of trans women **is** a women's issue. Sexism, homophobia and transphobia go hand in hand, in an oppressive gender system that maintains the superiority and mastery of 'real men' over women and those who do not confirm to expected gender norms.

SWA Aid understands gender to be the array of socially constructed roles, traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, responsibilities, relative power, status and influence ascribed to male and female humans on a differential basis (WHO). These are not biological, but learned. Gender identities condition the way human beings are perceived, and how they are expected to think and act. Women and men are made, not born. SWA works with a definition of gender-based violence as 'any form of violence used to establish, enforce or perpetuate gender inequalities and keep in place gendered orders. In other words gender-based violence is a policing mechanism' (Lang 2002). As such it incorporates all violence against women. However it also includes violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in the form of homophobic and transphobic hate abuse in any setting. It is any kind of violence used to maintain gender orders and LGBT people experience this on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression which deviates from that which is perceived to be the gender norm.

SWA believes that transgender women and young people experience discrimination and abuse from the same gender-based system all other women and young people, including domestic abuse. The domestic abuse that transgender women and young people experience may be further compounded by the discrimination and abuse they may have experienced in other areas of their lives. Transphobia on a regular basis throughout their lives may result in a trans woman/young person being unable to identify what they are experiencing as domestic abuse. This kind of transphobia may result in

low self-esteem and increased vulnerability and inability to identify abusive behaviour from a partner.

SWA believes that transgender women and young people can experience domestic abuse in the same ways as all other women. This includes emotional abuse, sexual abuse and physical abuse. The abuse is often coupled with specific tools of abuse, targeting gender identity or gender expression. A woman's gender identity can be used by an abuser as a powerful tool of abuse and control. For example a trans woman may experience transphobia from her partner. They may tell her that she's not a *real* woman or make jokes about her bodily appearance. They may also sexually abuse their partner by touching parts of her body she is not comfortable having touched, even by herself. Some trans people report that their abuser normalises the abuse by telling them that they wouldn't experience jokes, name calling, even violence if they were not transgender and not *pretending to be someone that they're not*. This internalises feelings of transphobia and is serious mental and emotional abuse. Transgender people may also be isolated from family and friends due to discrimination experienced on grounds of their gender identity or gender expression, which leaves support from family and potentially friends inaccessible. The isolation a person can experience due to domestic abuse can be further compounded by this.

As a women's organisation, SWA works to be inclusive of trans women in all areas of our work. We believe that women are a diverse, not homogenous, group with trans women an important part of our rich and culturally diverse society and an important part of the women's rights movement of which we are proud to be part. We seek to represent the views and experiences of women with disabilities and of differing race, class, age, sexuality and gender identity in the work we do. As a women's organisation, SWA recognises that transgender women and young people, like all other women and young people, may experience gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, in their lifetime. We recognise domestic abuse as both a cause and consequence of women's inequality with men in society and intrinsically related to gendered beliefs and systems