

Scottish Women's Aid Briefing for Scottish Government Debate Ending Homelessness Together

Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) is the lead organisation in Scotland working towards the prevention of domestic abuse and plays a vital role in campaigning and lobbying for effective responses to domestic abuse. We provide advice, information, training and publications to our 36 member groups and to a wide variety of stakeholders. Our members are local Women's Aid groups, which provide specialist services, including safe refuge accommodation, information and support to women, children and young people.

Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan

SWA strongly welcomed the renewed focus of the Scottish Government on preventing homelessness. We are therefore very disappointed that this important opportunity to consider the distinct gendered differences and underlying causes of women's homelessness and, correspondent approaches to prevent it, has not been taken.

While people experiencing homelessness will share some common experiences, homelessness is inherently gendered. An understanding of women's, and their children's, distinct experiences and the underlying causes of their risk of homelessness is essential if we are to develop effective responses in Scotland to tackle and prevent women's homelessness. Women's economically disadvantaged position in the labour market, often working in part time low-paid employment to manage child and other care responsibilities, means they are disproportionately dependent on the social housing sector.¹

Domestic abuse is a major cause of women's homelessness in Scotland. A "dispute within the household: violent or abusive" was given as the main reason for homelessness by 4,395 applicants; 78% of applications in this category were made by women, and more than half had children on their application.² **In fact, more women make a homeless application under this category, than for any other reason.**

These figures are likely to be the tip of the iceberg. Many women do not disclose domestic abuse when making a homeless application, often staying with family or friends or in various insecure housing situations before making a homeless application.³

¹ Scottish Household Survey 2010

² Scottish Government Homeless Statistics 2017/18 disaggregated by gender accessed 5/11/18

³ Scotland (2010), Domestic abuse, housing and homelessness in Scotland: An evidence review, Scottish Government Communities

The recent EHRC report on the state of equality and human rights in Scotland highlighted that, “Evidence presented so far does not capture ‘hidden’ homelessness.” The report comments that women’s homelessness is of particular concern and that women aged 34 and under, households with children, and lone parents (the vast majority of whom are women) are at particular risk.⁴

SWA published [Change, Justice, Fairness](#) in 2016, a research report based on a two-year research project carried out by women with lived experience of domestic abuse and homelessness. The research found that women were let down by a housing system that was supposed to support them and forced women to become homeless to escape domestic abuse. SWA called then for a new housing strategy to specifically address domestic abuse and to provide real protection and choice for women and children to remain in their homes.

To date we have seen little progress in this becoming a reality for women in Scotland. While the action plan rightly places a greater focus on preventing homelessness, women experiencing domestic abuse remain unprioritised within a list of ‘groups with particular needs.’ We are also concerned that the timetable for developing preventative pathways for ‘high-risk’ groups stretches through to 2020 -2023.

The fact that that an Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) was not carried out as part of the work of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group on this major policy area exemplifies our concerns. The key point of an impact assessment is to take account of equality (and take action to reduce inequality) as policy and plans are developed. Doing an EQIA at the end, as outlined in the action plan, fails to follow the government’s own policies. This failure delivers flawed policy analysis, prevents adequate consultation, and eliminates opportunities to identify issues and make adjustments as part of the policy development process.

A critical finding from our research was that the lack of national or local gendered policy and practice response to homelessness as a result of domestic abuse, meant that the existing inequalities experienced by women were repeated and reinforced.

Domestic abuse is both a cause and consequence of women’s inequality. This is embedded in the Scottish Government and CoSLA’s strategy on violence against women and girls, Equally Safe; “Some factors can increase vulnerability to abuse and keep women and girls trapped. These include age, looked after status (current and former), financial dependence, experience of child abuse and neglect, poverty, disability, homelessness, insecure immigration status and ethnicity.”⁵

We therefore urge the Scottish Government to now address the issue of women’s homelessness by holding an inquiry into women’s homelessness, involving women with lived experience and organisations with relevant expertise.

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⁴ EHRC (2018) Is Scotland Fairer?

⁵ Scottish Government (2014) Equally Safe, Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls