GBV 21
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill: Stage 1
Response from: School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

Gender based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Bill

A Response on Prevention, Pedagogy and Policy

from the research findings of NAfW commissioned research "Boys and Girls Speak Out: A qualitative study of children's gender and sexual cultures" (2013)

Professor Emma Renold, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

1. Introduction

On 9th July, the minister for Local Government assured all assembly members that *"**healthy relationships education is a very important part of preventing gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence**. I think that teaching our young people to be aware of what behaviour is and is not acceptable at a **very young age** can help them to develop healthy relationships in their own lives and prevent abuse in future relationships. My officials and those of the Minister for Education and Skills are working together to assess how we might include further provisions in this area in Stage 2 or 3".*

I welcome the Bill's key aim *'to improve arrangements for the **prevention** of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence'.* However, I am puzzled and concerned that proposals in the White Paper to ensure that, education addressing inter-personal violence and safe relationships via a

mandatory whole-school approach is delivered to all children and young people, is notably **absent from this Bill**.

This absence is all the more **urgent and concerning** in light of recent research findings (Renold 2013) that pre-teen children (age 10-12) growing up in Wales report increasingly **compulsory boyfriend-girlfriend cultures in which gender-based forms of conflict, coercion and control are seen by children as an inevitable component of young relationships and common place** (see also Lombard 2014).
Prevention, **pedagogy** and **policy** in this area is fundamental to addressing the realities of children' early relationships cultures at the age of 10,11 and 12. Indeed it is vital that preventative pedagogy and policy does not solely consider gender-based violence and harassment as something which only affects children's 'future relationships' in adolescence and beyond.

2. PREVENTION, PEDAGOGY AND POLICY

This response asks the Welsh Government to consider putting prevention, pedagogy and policy at the heart of the Bill. It asks that they fulfil their commitment, made in the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence White Paper to **ensure ALL school age children and young people in Wales receive a comprehensive education via a whole-school core curriculum that addresses** their reported and often **daily experiences of inter-personal gender-based violence and sexual harassment.**

It calls on Welsh Government to consider the following, during Stage One:

A. Prevention

It is paramount that the Bill foregrounds *prevention* and includes measures on 'Improving Education and Awareness' in educational settings. Such a move will strengthen the current Welsh Government Curriculum Review as it clarifies its "supporting measures" on how to address and embed the education of ALL children on issues and experiences of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence through a core PSE curriculum.

B. Pedagogy

There is currently no standardised PSE pedagogy that directly addresses pre-teen children's everyday realities of negotiating sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence from within a gender equalities framework. Any pedagogy must be informed by the following:

A Whole–school Approach that is experience-near, age appropriate and rights based.

Pedagogy aimed to prevent gender based violence and harassment is most successful when it is mediated through a whole-school approach and can be taught across a range of curriculum subjects, from science to English literature or history for example.

While ensuring that any pedagogy is both age-appropriate and experience-near is challenging, it is absolutely essential in meeting and supporting children's needs and experiences that directly address their own everyday realities of gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

Only by foregrounding children's own voices and experiences, and thus giving due regard on the UNCRC (Articles 34, 28, 19, + 13) can the Bill enshrine in law every child's right to be safe and promote cultural change that challenges gender stereotypes and prejudice in line with a human rights approach[1] and the Public Sector Equalities Duty.

Gender Equalities Framework:
Any pedagogy to address inter-personal gender based violence and sexual harassment needs to be embedded within a gender equalities framework that addresses how gender stereotypes are embedded in, and used to justify, coercion, control and harassment in young relationships. This is particularly the case for pre-teen children (Renold 2013, Lombard 2014). Indeed, evidence (see below) suggests that many young children were coupling up as boyfriend and girlfriend early so they could participate, without gender-based harassment, in non-stereotypical gendered activities.

Involving Children and Young People
Educational resources, strategies, practices and policies need to connect with children and young people's *own* experiences, which is in line with Welsh Government's commitments to pupil voice and article 12 of the UNCRC. Pedagogic practices that are most successful occur when children and young people have been directly involved in their production and, where appropriate, their delivery (e.g. peer-led lessons).

Evidence Based Training:
For teachers who do recognise and want to address some of the everyday gendered and sexual harassment that takes place within and across boys' and girls' peer group cultures, many lack the training and confidence that such training can often foster, or they may be unsupported by senior management.

[1] General obligation contained in Article 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in terms of (1. Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men).

Given that PSE is not mandatory but left to the discretion of each individual school (section 101 (1) of the Education Act 2002), some teachers may find both time and resources for training in the area of 'healthy relationships' hard to negotiate.

C. Policy

Making 'healthy relationships' education (as outlined above) *mandatory* is the only way to begin to ensure children and young people progress through the education system free from conflict, abuse and coercion in their young relationships and free from gender-based and sexual harassment in their everyday peer interactions. While this proposal may be considered as part of the curriculum review, it certainly does not preclude its inclusion in the Bill.

However, policies, guidance and duties do not necessarily translate into practice. While there is much good practice about, it can vary considerably across local authorities and individual schools and third sector organisations. Indeed, we need to look at and learn from best practice both within Wales and further afield to ensure appropriate and fit for purpose curriculum content.

Having a core mandatory curriculum, evaluated and inspected by Estyn, with evidenced based learning outcomes and resources is essential to ensure consistency and quality.

3. THE EVIDENCE

This response is based upon research carried out on behalf of the NAfW Cross Party Group on Children's Sexuality–Sexualisation and Equalities and funded by the NSPCC, Cardiff University and the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales[i]

Renold, E. (2013) Boys and Girls Speak Out: A Qualitative Study of Children's Gender and Sexual Cultures (age 10-12).

Aims and Methods: The research used participatory methods to generate qualitative data on how diverse groups of pre-teen children (age 10-12, n=125) understand their own and other's gender and sexual identities, relationships and cultures. Its core aims were three-fold:

- to address the lack of knowledge about children's own sexual cultures in the context of their everyday lives;

- to foreground equality and diversity (Public Sector Equality Duty, 2012);

- to enable children's own views and experiences to inform and shape future research, policies and practice (Article 12, UNCRC).

The full report is downloadable here:
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/boys-and-girls-report_wdf100416.pdf

The Executive summary is downloadable here:
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/boys-and-girls-summary-English_wdf100422.pdf

The following 'evidence' sections focus specifically upon the findings of section 4 of the report which documented children's views on their own relationship cultures (age 10-12).

It is important to note, that children were not asked directly about gender-based violence or sexual harassment. These comments emerged in discussions about young boyfriend girlfriend cultures and general talk on bodies and body image.

3.1 Research overview of sexual harassment in pre-teen relationship cultures

1.1 When sexual harassment in peer cultures has been the focus of research, the site of investigation has been the secondary school and usually the lives of teenagers. However, as recent research is increasingly demonstrating, sexual coercion and harassment are not confined to older teens, but emerging in the everyday lives of pre-teen children (Pelligrini 2001, 2002; Renold 2002; Stein 1996, 2007, 2013; Gådin 2012; Afra 2013; Holford et al. 2013, Lombard 2014).

1.2 This research prioritised children's own reporting of what they considered to be unwanted, offensive and hurtful behavior as constituting sexual harassment. This was important given how a singular act or event or set of practices can have multiple meanings. For example, as Renold (2002: 418) found, 'bra pulling' could be experienced by girls both positively (e.g. a welcome sign of a boy or girl's romantic or sexual interest) and negatively (e.g. an invasive practice and humiliating recognition of a girls' sexual maturation).

1.3 While most children reported either experiencing direct or indirect incidents of sexual harassment, from slut-shaming to anti-gay talk, much of this occurred in and across the gendered and sexual dynamics of children's everyday peer cultures. However, young boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were a volatile mix of anxiety, pain, pleasure and power with many girls and boys talking about a range

of unwanted, offensive and hurtful sexual behaviours.

Selected Findings from "Boys and Girls Speak Out" (Section 4, pp. 75-100)

3.1 Pre-teen Boyfriend-Girlfriend Cultures

3.1.1. Many children talked about the pressure to participate in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures in school, making boy-girl friendships almost impossible. The pressure to turn a boy-girl friendship into a boyfriend-girlfriend 'relationship' in primary school was pervasive.

Kelsey: I was best friends with a boy called Jay. And that's just changed now, When I seen him he'll talk to me but then, if he's with the boys he'll like call me names, like tramp and stuff like that [Year 8]

Hayley: Oh, the peer pressure

Vicky: Yeah, like people asking you to go out who I [don't want to] go out with takes away a lot of your energy like I get really tired and cry and cry about it [Year 7]

3.1.2. Many boys and girls had little choice but to participate in or witness the heterosexualising practices of fancying, dating and dumping, such as who 'liked', 'loved', or was 'hot' for who. This was particularly the case in children's final year of primary school.

Nico: At my primary school you just had to [go out with someone], it was a virtual rule [Year 7]

3.1.3. While the degree to which girls and boys participated in these heterosexualising practices varied considerably across the sample, most children could name and discuss them at length. In some schools, children described their participation as compulsory and as a cycle of endless 'going out and dumping' that was subject to constant peer scrutiny and evaluation.

Aron: Darryn was just talking to a girl … and then all the girls went, 'oh they're flirting, ooh aaah' [Year 7]

Darryn: It's annoying … cause we were learning partners, because you know, if you're learning partners, you have to talk, but you can't [Year 7]

3.1.4. For some boys, simply 'having a girlfriend', 'any girl' was enough to secure social status and popularity. In contrast, many girls highlighted the ways in which their status as 'girlfriends' objectified them, particularly when girls' attractiveness

was rated and ranked. Many girls also resented how they were 'passed around' and 'fought over' by boys who wanted to claim them as 'theirs'.

Robyn: They ask someone to ask the same girl out again and again, they like pass you around [Year 7]

3.1.5. For girls, being a girlfriend was talked about as an inevitable part of being a normal girl and variously described as an identity that was older, scary, constraining, powerful, and something that had to be endured and got used to. Resisting or rejecting the world of girlfriends and boyfriends was difficult for girls, particularly in schools and communities where early boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were strong.

3.1.6. For boys, being a boyfriend was not a defining feature of pre-teen boyhood. Many boys did not want a girlfriend. For younger boys, being a boyfriend was a precarious role that aligned them with femininity (which could be shaming) and heterosexuality (which could bolster their 'masculinity'). Boys were more able to resist participation in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures than girls.

Kelsey: They call all the girls [who don't go out boys] tramps … If we wouldn't [hug and kiss], they'd call us a fridge [Year 8]

Alun: [If a girl breaks off a relationship with a boy] they slag her off like, innit … they get really angry … the older you get the more serious it gets [Year 8]

3.1.7. Deep investment in being a boyfriend or girlfriend was highly classed, raced and gendered, and drawn upon in a range of ways. One boy talked about how his primary school girlfriend helped him cope with the death of his father. Another boy explained how he had to pretend that his best friend Alice was his cousin for an entire school year, so that they could hang out free from heterosexual verbal harassment. Girls living in communities where they witnessed domestic violence talked about finding a boyfriend who could protect them.

Veronique: [I want a boy] who won't cheat on you [Year 6]

Jessie: Who won't raise a hand to you [Year 6]

3.2 Sexual harassment, coercion and control in pre-teen boyfriend-girlfriend cultures

3.2.1. Coercion and harassment is a key part of many boyfriend-girlfriend cultures and viewed by many children as an inevitable part of young

relationships.

3.2.2. Very few children felt comfortable talking about the abusive power plays in boyfriend and girlfriend cultures with parents or teachers.

Daman: Keep to ourselves, because in our school teachers wouldn't know about it because it would make it awkward/ [Year 7]

James: My dad says they are all my girlfriends. If I have a friend what is a girl, he says they are my girlfriends and winds my up about it [Year 6]

Kayley: They [staff on dinner duty] go 'the more the boys hit and chase you the more they love you' [Year 6]

3.2.3. Boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were frequently talked about as compulsory, scrutinised, collective and highly public practices. Many children talked about these practices as contradictory, hierarchical and rarely consensual.

Veronique: He just wants to go out with every girls he sees, it's like, it's basically like, if he wants to go out with one girl, he'll ask and ask and ask and ask until that girl says yes [Year 6]

3.2.4. Some girls talked about going out with boys they didn't want to and some avoided dumping them so as to not to hurt their feelings. Many children also witnessed coercive sexual practices, such as being 'forced to kiss' in the playground, which urges us to shift our understandings from consent as a process between two individuals to consent as a social process negotiated in peer group cultures. Current pedagogic interventions do not address group 'consent' in this way.

Cal: (in primary school) Like we used to have a wheelchair alley thing to go down for kids, and then my friend was dragged into there with this girl and they said 'go on kiss' and all this [Year 7]

Tessa: People try and push you together [ ] Myra: And I think that the only reason I went out with this person because it was like on text, and I felt really bad about saying no. You can't like say no. So you are like, 'okay' [Year 8]

Sadie: If a girl is asking them out and they ask them out too many times, they go to their friend and say, 'if she is going to ask me out again, it's your decision' and so the boys make up the other boy's mind for them
INT: So you could end up going out with a boy because another boy said yes?

Sadie: Yeah [Year 6]

3.2.5. Girls with deep investments in 'being a girlfriend', talked about going out with boys they didn't like or who were abusive to them, with some girls interpreting their abusive behavior as a sign of flirtation. Some girls refused to delete 'nasty' texts because they were 'in love'.

INT: Does a girl ever go out with a boy when she doesn't really want to?
Karina: Because their friends force them sometimes
Sadie: Sometimes you don't like them
Karina: You end up giving in sometimes
Sadie: You give up because they keep nagging [Year 6]

3.2.6. Boys with deep investments in 'being a boyfriend' and boys positioned low down the gendered and sexual peer group hierarchies were also described as the same boys who would engage in harassing behavior such as repeatedly asking girls out, or sending abusive texts to girls who refused to go out with them, or ended the relationship.

Maisy: they will say 'well go out with me or I will hate you' or something like that. And then the girls will get scared and they will go with them (Year 6)

3.2.7. Children who talked about receiving sexually abusive texts and emails also talked about how they could be deleted or blocked, and almost all of the children described in detail exactly how to achieve this. However, they were much less confident and felt more vulnerable about how to deal with ongoing 'romantic' advances (e.g. repeatedly being 'asked out') or sexually harassing comments from boys in school and in their community, with one girl hiding in her house, refusing to open the door.

Maisy: A lot of the boys like, were ganging up on me, cause I wouldn't go out with them and then he found out, the group found out where I lived and they like, used to go in and like walk up and down my street (Year 6)

3.2.8. Some girls and boys resorted to physical and verbal bullying as a response to coercive, controlling or abusive behaviours and a compulsory boyfriend-girlfriend culture.

4. Concluding Statement

4.1 125 children across south Wales shared some deeply personal experiences of what it means to negotiate the everyday sexisms, and gender-based and sexual harassment in their young peer cultures. These experiences were shared under the assumption, as outlined in the commissioned cross-party group research aims, that their views would shape, inform and be addressed by future welsh government policy and practice (Article 12, UNCRC).

4.2 It is thus imperative that **prevention**, **policy** and **pedagogy,** as outlined above, be considered at Stage One if the Bill is to fulfil its general principles.

Indeed, without legislative change, children's experiences of coercion, control and harassment in their pre-teen relationship cultures will remain hidden and inevitably endure.

References

Afra, A. (2013) *'Primary school sexualities. A critical social psychological foregrounding of children's constructions of "childhood sexuality"'*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Dublin: Trinity College.

Gådin, K. G. (2012) Sexual Harassment of Girls in Elementary School: A Concealed Phenomenon Within a Heterosexual Romantic Discourse, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* June, 27: pp. 1762-1779

Holford, N., Renold, E. and Huuki, T. (2013) 'What (Else) Can a Kiss So?: Theorising the Power Plays in Young Children's Sexual Cultures'. *Sexualities*, 16 (5-6): 710–729

Lombard, N. (2014) 'Because they're a couple she should do what he says': Young People's justifications of violence: heterosexuality, gender and adulthood, *Journal of Gender Studies*, [available on ifirst: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/.VAbP5VZOhfM]

Mellor, D. (2007). 'Playground Romance: An Ethnography of Children's Investments in Romantic Love'. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Cardiff: Cardiff University

Pelligrini, A. D. (2001) 'A Longitudinal Study of Heterosexual Relationships, Aggression, and Sexual Harassment during the Transition from Primary School through Middle School'. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 22, (2): 119–133.

Pelligrini, A. D. (2002) 'Bullying, Victimization, and Sexual Harassment During the Transition to Middle School'. *Educational Psychologist*, 37 (3): 151–163.

Renold, E. (2002) '"Presumed Innocence": (Hetero)sexual, Homophobic and Heterosexist Harassment amongst Primary School Girls and Boys'. *Childhood* , 9 (4): 415–433.

Renold, E. (2003) '"If You Don't Kiss Me You're Dumped": Boys, Boyfriends and Heterosexualised Masculinities in the Primary School'. *Education Review*, 55 (2): 179–194.

Renold, E. (2005) *Girls, Boys and Junior Sexualities: Exploring Children's Gender and Sexual Relations in the Primary School*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Renold, E. (2006) '"They Won't Let Us Play Unless You're Going Out With One of Them': Girls, Boys and Butler's "Heterosexual Matrix" in the Primary Years'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 27 (4): 489–509.

Renold, E. (2007) 'Primary School "Studs": (De)Constructing Young Boys' Heterosexual Masculinities'. *Men and Masculinities*, 9 (3): 275–298.

Renold, E. (2013) *Boys and girls speak out: a qualitative study of children's gender and sexual cultures* (age 10-12). Cardiff: Cardiff University.

Renold, E., Ringrose, J. and Egan, D. (forthcoming) *Children, Sexuality and the Sexualisation of Culture*, Palgrave.

Rysst, M. (2010) 'Girls, Bodies and Romance in the Light of a Presumed Sexualisation of Childhood'. *Girlhood Studies*, 3 (2): 69–88.

Stein, N. (1996) 'Sexual Harassment in School: The Public Performance of Gendered Violence'. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65 (2): 145–162.

Stein, N. (2007) "Locating a Secret Problem: Sexual Violence in Elementary and Secondary Schools." In L. O'Toole, J. R. Schiffman & M. L. Kitter Edwards (Eds.), Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 2nd Edition. (pp. 323-332) New York and London: New York University Press.

Stein, N. (2013) "Middle school sexual harassment, violence and social networks" Mumford, E., Okamoto, J., Taylor,B., and Stein, N., American Journal of Health Behavior, 37(6), 769-