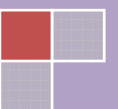


2009

# The Scottish Women's Convention

Consolidated Report  
2009



## Introduction

The purpose of the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is to communicate and consult with women in Scotland to influence public policy. Through the Convention's policy work, round table and celebratory events the SWC strives to have contact with women and relevant organisations. The SWC aims to provide an effective way of consulting with a diverse range of women in Scotland.

The Scottish Women's Convention has a network of over 300,000 women from relevant organisations throughout Scotland.

## Scottish Women's Convention 2009

The SWC were delighted that 2009 was a particularly busy and successful year in terms of the range and depth of policy issues discussed at our events, the large numbers and diverse circumstances of women registering for our events and the geographical spread of event locations.

The SWC International Women's Day (IWD) Celebrations are renowned and well attended. This year's event held in the Scottish Parliament saw 300 register to attend. The 2009 theme focused on Violence Against Women. Speakers included Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning; Harriet Harman QC MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Women and Equality in the UK Parliament; Rt. Hon. Thabitha Khumalo member of the newly elected Democratic Parliament of Zimbabwe; Lily Greenan, Manager of Scottish Women's Aid; Annabel Goldie MSP, leader of the Conservative Party in Scotland and Cathy Peattie, MSP

This event is always a significant day in the SWC calendar. Nevertheless the SWC year is made up of numerous Conferences, Roadshows, Speakout events and roundtable discussions where we have successfully recorded the views and opinions of women throughout Scotland to inform consultation responses and SWC policy position. This report is a consolidated record of our 2009 activities.

## 2009 Road Shows

Our first Roadshow of 2009 was a thematic event and centred on aspects of health. The purpose was to confer with women on the Scottish Government/NHS partnership consultation “A Question of Access”.

Other Roadshows in 2009 provided positive opportunities for women to discuss a number of public policy issues from a local perspective. There were a number of recurring themes highlighted at all the Roadshows that evidenced widespread concerns amongst women in Scotland about Social Housing, Transport, Childcare, wider caring responsibilities and access to services. Many of the issues had common strands of concern despite demographic differences.

Rural women felt transport provision did not adequately meet needs within their communities. Reliability, cost and a lack of integration between services were common concerns.

A lack social housing or affordable housing was a recurring problem in all the areas visited in our Roadshow programme.

Recent Welfare legislation that promotes work as the way out of poverty is putting pressure on women with young children to undertake work on minimum or low wages whilst finding the means to cover the costs of childcare. This has left many in a worse financial position.

Participants expressed dissatisfaction that economic strategies followed by both the UK and Scottish Governments fail to acknowledge or reward the value of work undertaken by family carers, the majority of whom are women.

For a number of women, access to various public services proved challenging. There was growing concern that the provision of services already inadequate to meet demand would be critically reduced or withdrawn entirely due to budgets priorities. Older women in rural communities were very troubled by the diminishing local access to banks, shops and post offices and the centralisation of support networks.

Many women commented on the complex confidentiality issues in rural communities. The fear of being stigmatised created very real emotive and physical barriers for potential service users.

During our Roadshow programme women were also wholehearted in conveying their views on matters relating to alcohol and drug misuse, the impact of the financial recession and Violence against Women.

There was agreement among participants that women were likely to be more vulnerable to the effects of any recession. Women were keen to see a living wage rate applied to low income employment and the gender pay gap rectified through greater enforcement of the Equal Pay legislation.

SWC 2009 Road Shows were held in:

West Dumbarton  
- 17<sup>th</sup> February

Galashiels  
- 15<sup>th</sup> May

Elgin  
- 25<sup>th</sup> June

Lerwick, Shetland  
- 19<sup>th</sup> August

Kirkwall, Orkney  
- 10<sup>th</sup> September

Aberdeen  
- 19<sup>th</sup> November

*“There is absolutely no value placed on the guidance and nurturing of our children. Women will still be expected to be the main carers and balance work and home commitments, yet also be criticised if the children lack stability or guidance.”*

*“There needs to be a better understanding of what poverty is and how it affects women. It’s too easy to say it is financial. It is inequality – in a woman’s case one breeds the other.”*

*(Quotes within this report are from women attending the specific SWC events.)*

*The SWC held 2 of these events in 2009*

*A Women in Faith Roundtable Discussion at the SWC offices in Glasgow on the 30<sup>th</sup> March.*

*“The speed of intimacy in relationships and the consequence of this physically and emotionally, especially for women, has a huge impact on the structure of families and communities in Scotland”.*

*A Disabled Women Roundtable Discussion at the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living on the 31<sup>st</sup> March.*

*“There can be any number of impairments of the mind, body and senses that cannot be seen and accessing support and engaging understanding from services or the public can be difficult”.*

## 2009 Roundtable Events

Those attending the Women in Faith event agreed that the increasing secularization of western society has contributed to a more individualistic code of conduct and a lack of understanding or support of collective responsibilities.

They said they would welcome the targeting of resources by policymakers towards supporting increased public awareness of citizenship and recognition of a moral reference base for society regardless of religious affiliations.

Participants also re-affirmed feedback the SWC have received at other events in calling the Scottish Government to ensure education and information on sexual health encompasses in depth evaluation of wider relationship responsibilities and the building of mutual respect.

A number of media issues were discussed and included the portrayal of women in advertising, the consumption of alcohol and the depiction of sexual relationships.

Issues of segregation, violence against women and the reality of “honour” killing also highlighted in debate.

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Disabled women talked about the “double discrimination” in many aspects of their lives – gender and disability. They agreed that legislation such as the Disability Equality Act (2006) had improved aspects of equality however they continued to face significant barriers to participation due to attitudinal, social and environmental obstacles.

Disabling attitudes had eroded self confidence for a number of women particularly in relation to education and career choices. There was widespread support for the view that gender barriers and assumptions about capability too often confined disabled women to low paid subsistence employment or a status of being unemployable.

There was a strong feeling that whilst disability awareness has arguably improved; the achievement of disability equality was still some way off.

A wider range of connected topics were also debated such as refuge suitability and availability for abuse victims, Access to Work programmes, positive role models and the “spread effects” of disability in relation to attitudes in society about sexual relationships and the reproductive health of disabled women. The final session of the event was centred on the issues relating to the introduction of Employment Support Benefit and the phasing out of Incapacity Benefit.

## Conference on the Trafficking of Women and Children

Our event brought together approximately one hundred delegates to hear from several prominent and informative speakers on this important topic.

Ann Hamilton told the audience there was a growing demand from groups of men taking up sexual services through “adult entertainment” venues. The need for integrated partnership working and networking was essential to combat this growing abuse of women and a Scottish Practitioners Group was soon to be established following ratification of European Convention on Human Trafficking.

Det. Supt. Michael Orr commented that the scale of the problem was far greater than the current figures indicate. He also commented on the significant challenge of problems in terms of people from foreign countries who don't trust the police and confirmed that they are trying to address issues of cultural understanding.

Johann Lamont MSP opened her contribution by saying there is a need to confront the fact the trade in trafficked women and children exists because of demand. She also told the audience that every level of government needs to act to support women and children who have been trafficked and to enforce the law against those who profit from this appalling trade.

Jack Dromey described people trafficking as an obscenity that scars our society. He further emphasised that workers recruited from their home countries, deceived as to what they can hope to earn and then having their hopes dashed was also a crime. He called for the UK Government to extend the remit of the Gangmaster Licensing Authority to tackle exploitation of newly arrived workers in the construction industry.

Margaret Hazell MBE provided evidence from Wales about young girls aged between 12 and 16 years being “groomed” before being taken to other parts of the UK to be sexually exploited. Many of these young girls are already vulnerable as a result of disengagement with school or problems with family. She called for funding to be directed towards training essential services to recognise potential victims.

Helen Atkins spoke of three key elements involved in the trafficking of women, namely movement, coercion and exploitation. She went on to describe how trafficked women could be abducted and betrayed by family members and close acquaintances and many suffer isolation and alienation and disorientation.

Jan Macleod showed a short film “Not for sale” that included women who have been abused in both legal and illegal regimes.

*The conference was held in Glasgow on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2009*

*Speakers at the event were:*

*Ann Hamilton*  
*General Manager  
Glasgow Community &  
Safety Services*

*Johann Lamont*  
*MSP*

*Jack Dromey*  
*Deputy General  
Secretary of Unite the  
Union*

*Detective  
Superintendent  
Michael Orr  
Chair of the Scottish  
Human Trafficking  
Group*

*Margaret Hazell*  
*MBE*

*Helen Atkins*  
*Poppy Project*

*Jan MacLeod*  
*Senior Development  
Officer, Women's  
Support Project*

*“Human Trafficking is the fastest growing form of slavery today and is prohibited under international law, as well as under the criminal laws of the UK and other countries, yet thousands of women, children and men are trafficked to the UK each year.”*

*Agnes Tolmie,  
Chair of SWC*

## Teenage Pregnancy Conference

The Scottish Government is committed to reducing the number of teenage pregnancies and the SWC organised this conference as a means of ensuring young women's voices are a part of that process. 102 individuals registered for this event.

Discussion focused on lifestyle, relationships, aspirations, health and education and feedback was evaluated from a pre, during and post pregnancy position.

It was clear that reduced aspirations or opportunity encourage young women to see pregnancy and motherhood as a positive life path option.

Basically the capability of becoming pregnant and being responsible for the care of a baby can counter balance a perceived lack of attainment or control in other aspect of their lives.

Participants overall agreed that conception and birth at a young age requires a supportive environment, The chances of both mother and child being able to move towards a healthy and economically self supporting lifestyle very much depended on being adequately guided during pregnancy and for the initial years after the birth.

*The conference was held in Dundee on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2009.*

*Speakers at the event were:*

*Shona Robinson MSP, Minister for Public Health and Sport*

*Dr. Mary Hepburn, Obstetrician and Gynecologist, Princess Royal Maternity, Glasgow*

*Among teenage participants a number were expectant or young mothers. Other participants included teachers, midwives and support workers.*

*"What shouldn't be happening is a significant number of young women being denied the opportunity to develop personally and contribute to society because they are young mothers. Life should not be written off that early."*

## Speak Out Event on Violence against Women (VAW)

The Speak Out Event took place in Glasgow on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2009.

Workers from Rape Crisis Glasgow, Rape Crisis Scotland, Say Women, and Shakti Women's Aid agreed to act as facilitators of the discussion groups.

*"Bring the justice system out of the Victorian age. For victims of violence against women the courts adversarial nature and legislation favours the abuser."*

Women who had suffered male violence were invited to talk about their awareness and experiences of reaching and using mainstream VAW services.

It was made clear that many women do not recognise, or are unable to acknowledge, the range of behaviours imposed upon them as constituting male violence and this is a significant barrier to accessing services.

Feedback indicated a number of statutory services are likely to treat the "symptoms" of abuse e.g. depression and anxiety, rather than the cause, this had left many women unable to resolve the core issue. It was also suggested that service staff in some statutory agencies lacked awareness of abuse indicators. This can hinder appropriate signposting to essential VAW services and consequently opportunities for victims to gain wider support were lost or delayed.

It was apparent that Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) participants who were instilled with cultural, faith or gender and kinship hierarchical systems had significant difficulties in accessing VAW services. For women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) the whole issue of service awareness was overridden by the insurmountable barrier this status imposed on their ability to leave abusive relationships or seek help.

Responses provided at SWC Conferences, Roadshows and Roundtable activities in 2009 have also supported the evidence provided by the SWC to the following consultations:

- Submission to the Independent Budget Review Panel – to inform its analysis of prospects for public expenditure in Scotland. (Scottish Government April 2010)
- Submission to the Equal Opportunities Committee – to inform the inquiry into the extent and nature of trafficking. (Scottish Parliament April 2010)
- Submission on Stage 2 amendments to the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill – proposed changes to the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 (Scottish Parliament March 2010)
- Proposed Civil Protection Orders and Access to Justice (Scotland) Bill (Scottish Parliament, February 2010)
- Submission on the Alcohol Etc (Scotland) Bill (Scottish Parliament, January 2010)
- Equality Duty - Specific Duties (Scottish Parliament, January 2010)
- Forced Marriage: A Civil Remedy? (Scottish Parliament, March 2009)
- The Scottish Government Consultation on a Patient's Rights Bill for Users of the NHS in Scotland (2009)

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Copies of all SWC reports and consultation responses are available on the Scottish Women's  
Convention Website

<http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org>



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