



Scottish Women's Convention response to:

Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Petition PE1817: End Conversion Therapy

August 2021

Premise

The petition was lodged in August 2020. It calls on the Scottish Parliament "to urge the Scottish Government to ban the provision or promotion of LGBT+ conversion therapy in Scotland".

In previous evidence submitted, the Scottish Government noted that the UK Government published its LGBT Action Plan in 2018, which included a commitment to ban conversion therapy in the UK. The UK Government announced measures would be brought forward to ban conversion therapy in the Queen's speech. This was followed by a commitment to launch a consultation and then introduce legislation banning conversion therapy in the UK.

The petition can be found in full here: <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1817>

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including roadshow events, thematic conferences, and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in several key areas relevant to women's equality.

The SWC is currently engaging with women through digital roadshows, online surveys, asking women to comment by email and by telephoning those who want to talk. We are also using our wide network to ask women to collate views in their local communities and forward these to us on a regular basis. We are continuing to review innovative ways of engaging with women throughout Scotland using whichever medium is appropriate to them.

1. What are your views on the action called for in the petition?

The women we spoke to have a range of views on this issue.

Some were supportive of the petition and agreed that all forms of conversion therapy should be ended.

- “A comprehensive ban on conversion therapy, accompanied by support to survivors and communities impacted by these practices is both necessary and urgent.”
- “The ban must be comprehensive. It must include all forms of Conversion Therapy on the basis of sexuality or gender identity without exception.”
- “I totally agree with the ending of conversion therapy. At the end of the day, I do not believe in indoctrinating anyone to anything and that is fundamentally what conversion therapy is.”
- “I totally agree with the petition. It's shocking that conversion therapy has not already been made illegal in Scotland, and that some people are still going through this today.”
- “People cannot stop being gay, bisexual, or trans, and attempts to 'convert' people are abusive, whatever the methods used. It's a form of psychological abuse which impacts adversely on mental health. As such, the ban should include all forms of conversion therapy. No forms of conversion therapy are acceptable or harmless.”
- “I think conversion therapy of any sort should not be happening.”
- “Conversion therapy in all forms, including in relation to faith groups should end.”
- “I do not agree with conversion therapy. Homosexuality is not a predilection.”
- “I do not believe that sexual orientation can be ‘converted’. People may be confused about it and may wish to experiment and not much harm will come to them so forced conversion therapy for this seems criminal.”

However, some disagreed with elements of the proposal, specifically the issue of transgender conversion therapy.

- “I would support a ban on LGB conversion therapy. However, evidence shows that children who think they are trans will mainly desist if they are offered appropriate support. I am very concerned that clinicians who offer treatment to trans identifying young people will be lumped in with odd religious extremists.”

Some women expressed particular concern about the inadvertent effects of gender reassignment or the fact it may be used as a means of homosexual erasure.

- “It’s unhelpful to conflate sexual orientation with gender identity. These are different things and ought to be separated in any discussion. There’s an element of truth in the fear that young people are being encouraged to transition as a way or erasing homosexuality.”
- “I believe this is shocking and must stop but I also view the huge issue of gay kids being told they are trans, is also a form of conversion therapy.”
- “In some countries transition is seen as a pathway to avoid the social stigma of a same sex attracted person in the family. So, transition can be conversion therapy in some circumstances.”

There needs to be a broader discussion about exactly what is categorised as conversion therapy, ensuring that there is still room for people to be given supportive opportunities to explore their identity and sexuality.

- “There’s too much false narrative going around just now and not enough understanding of the counselling process and what affirmation and/ or conversion therapy really means. So much is being taken out of context... It’s wrong to assume any counselling process, discussion, or exploration of other psychological issues is a form of conversion therapy.”
- “No one should be forced into conversion. Equally there should be space for people to explore how they are feeling. Sexuality can be fluid for some people, and I think it’s important to allow space for that. I do not agree that counselling or discussion is the same as conversion therapy.”
- “I do not believe in conversion therapy for LGBT people. I would like to see more information supplied about the practice of conversion therapy and what is meant by it. What is conversion therapy for LGB vs conversion therapy for T? I believe that there is an inherent contradiction here.”
- “LGB are sexual orientations and T is gender identity. They do not necessarily fall under the same umbrella or have the same needs. I think that grouping them together conflates sometimes contradictory needs and leads to confusion and causes harm.”
- “I am deeply worried that under the guise of banning conversion therapy what will happen is that therapists working with exponentially growing numbers of children and young people (especially girls) who are distressed around their gender will be prohibited from exploring with those young people all the reasons for their trans-identification, and instead being obliged to use the affirmative model which accepts that the child or young person as having a gender identity misaligned with their sex. Given that most young people’s gender dysphoria resolves during puberty, if no attempt is made to socially transition, this is very problematic.”

Finally, it was highlighted that this problem cannot be fully addressed within the parameters of a petition and the Scottish Government needs to be proactive in facilitating meaningful discussion on this important topic.

- “Much of the narrative around just now is disingenuous, I think. It’s not something that can be answered by signing a petition.”
- “Human rights should not be put forward to a public consultation like this.”

2. What action would you like to see the Scottish Government take, within the powers available to it?

Women would like to see the Scottish Government take stronger action on this issue and use its powers to take more progressive steps than the UK Government.

- “The Scottish Government should act immediately on conversion therapy, without waiting for Westminster, to prevent further harm.”

- “The Scottish Government should implement a criminal ban on the promotion, provision, causing of a person to undergo conversion therapy, or removing a person from the UK to undergo conversion therapy abroad.”
- “The Scottish Government should use its powers over the criminal justice system to make conversion therapy a criminal offence.”
- “I would like for the Scottish Government to take a stronger stance against conversion therapy, and to make it a key priority to end it.”
- “Conversion therapy should be banned in all its forms, including the denial of transitional care to transgender people, and in religious settings.”
- “Be honest and speak with clarity in the first instance.”
- “I would like to see a system which outlaws LGBT+ conversion therapy in Scotland, including sanctions for violation (e.g removal of professional registration, fines etc).”
- “I would like to see the Scottish Government be more transparent about the questions raised about redefining conversion therapy, addressing the conflation of LGB and T, and being clearer about what demographic is affected by conversion therapy. Addressing these questions would allow for a more targeted, and therefore more effective approach to ending conversion therapy.”

Women have recommended that more support should be provided for survivors of conversion therapy, and also that counselling services are more accessible and widely available for those exploring their sexuality or gender identity in the first place.

- “I think conversion therapy of any sort should not be happening. However, I don’t think that affirmation without counselling is helpful either.”
- “There should be more outreach and support for survivors and communities affected by conversion therapy.”
- “Have a range of options available to people which include exploration and discussion.”
- “There needs to be more promotion of the dangers of conversion therapy, so victims feel comfortable coming forward.”
- “I would like the Scottish Government to ensure that not a single person is steered towards or provided with medical or surgical intervention until a full and detailed assessment has been carried out to establish what is driving their apparent desire for it. This is not denying essential treatment. It is providing good health care.”
- “There needs to be much more impartial research either conducted or considered.”

Several women raised the point that the Scottish Government could do more to work with communities where there are disproportionate numbers of people experiencing or being threatened with conversion therapy.

- “There needs to be outreach and engagement with religious and community leaders including training to explain the impact of certain teachings on LGBT+ members of their communities.”

- “They should invest in training and education to support relevant professionals to understand conversion therapy and its impacts, as well as with religious leaders.”

The Scottish Government should also take responsibility for promoting greater public awareness of conversion therapy.

- “There also needs to be more promotion of the dangers of conversion therapy, so victims can feel more comfortable coming forward.”
- “Training on safeguarding and awareness in the public health service and private healthcare providers, and the establishment of an anonymous reporting system.
- “More resources are required. Stop allowing children to be sexualised from such an early age.”

3. Do you have suggestions on how the Committee can take forward its consideration of the petition? (e.g. who should it talk to and hear from)?

We received a range of suggestions on who the Committee should speak to in taking this petition forward. These included:

- Women’s grassroots organisations
- LGBT+ groups and organisations
- People who have experienced conversion therapy
- Families of those who have experienced conversion therapy or whose children are questioning their gender identity and sexuality
- Counsellors, psychotherapists and psychiatrists who work with those exploring gender identity and sexuality
- Older adults who may have once identified as LGBT+ but now do not
- Legal expertise from those with experience in implementing Scottish law in similar areas, for example in domestic abuse, hate crime, and coercive control legislation should be considered to examine the possible application and impact of a criminal ban
- Detransitioners and desisters
- Mental health charities, organisations, and providers

4. Do you have any final thoughts on this topic that have not been covered elsewhere?

Women have told us that they feel that all avenues should be explored. They have advised that they want to be part of the conversation, and they feel that the consultation and any action taken by the government should be inclusive. They would like more research on the subject and more clarity on what the term conversion therapy means in relation to gender identity as well as sexual orientation.

Conclusion

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee's consultation on ending conversion therapy. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to such legislation and the effect of this on women's equality.

For further information, please contact

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