

## **Agenda's response to the Labour Party's Health and Care Policy Commission Consultation into Mental Health**

2 June 2016

Agenda welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We welcome, in particular, the consultation's focus on 'ensuring that mental health policies work for all parts of society' and 'prevention and early intervention'.

There are significant gender differences in relation to mental health. Women's life experiences, socio-economic realities, expressions of mental distress, pathways into services and treatment needs and responses, differ greatly from those of men. For example, women tend to experience more common mental health disorders than men across their lives: more depression, more anxiety, more eating disorders and more PTSD.<sup>1</sup>

Agenda's research report, 'Hidden Hurt'<sup>2</sup> shows that the difference between men's and women's rates of mental ill-health is closely linked to the fact that women experience much more abuse, both physical and sexual, than men. 84% of those who experience the most extensive physical and sexual abuse are women and of those, over half have a common mental disorder.

The women and girls Agenda campaigns for are particularly vulnerable to mental ill-health. Our members work with the most excluded women and girls: those who have experienced extensive abuse, and whose lives have spiralled off course. They are often traumatised, have low self-esteem, and struggle with serious mental health problems.

Women and girls who have suffered the most extensive abuse and violence need the choice of specialist support when they experience mental ill-health. This should include clinical and wider holistic support. For example, dedicated, women-only, trauma-informed services which provide a safe space for women to open up about their experiences. These services can help women rebuild self-esteem, provide support around domestic and sexual violence, parenting, housing, debt, employment and a whole range of other services.

Agenda urges the Commission to have due regard to the differences between men and women across mental health services. From the head of the CCG making decisions about what services should look like, to GPs, to those working in A & E, everyone in the NHS needs to know that women's mental health, trauma and abuse are strongly linked, and to implement a trauma-informed response and put in place the right services that take account of this.

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<sup>1</sup> Working towards Women's Well-being: Unfinished business (National Mental Health Unit, 2010): <http://www.hsconsultancy.org.uk/system/resources/2/working-towards-womens-wellbeing-unfinished-business.pdf?1302161290>

<sup>2</sup> Hidden Hurt: Violence, Abuse and Disadvantage in the Lives of Women (Agenda, January 2016): <http://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Hidden-Hurt-full-report1.pdf>

## **About Agenda**

Agenda is a new alliance of organisations and individuals who have come together to campaign for change for women and girls at risk. We believe society is failing to adequately protect and support women and girls who face the most extensive violence, abuse, trauma and extreme inequality. We are calling for systems and services to be redesigned with women and girls at their heart so that they can access the support they need to rebuild their lives and reach their full potential.

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