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## Children who witness domestic violence

### Committee Opinion<sup>1</sup>

Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Rapporteur: Ms Marlene RUPPRECHT, Germany, Socialist Group

### A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men congratulates the rapporteur of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, Mrs Carina Ohlsson (Sweden, Socialist Group) on her excellent report and, overall, approves of the proposed draft resolution and draft recommendation.
2. The committee wishes nevertheless to make some amendments aimed chiefly at enhancing the gender dimension of the draft resolution and draft recommendation.

### B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Rupprecht, rapporteur

1. I wish to congratulate Mrs Ohlsson on her excellent report. I fully endorse the conclusions of the report and join with Mrs Ohlsson in deploring the impact of domestic violence witnessed by children on their present and future lives.
2. In this opinion, I should like to emphasise that it is necessary to take account of the gender dimension when endeavouring to protect and rehabilitate child victims of domestic violence. Indeed, domestic violence has a different impact on girls and boys:
  - 2.1. certain studies show that boys are more vulnerable to psycho-social stress factors and develop externalised problems (impulsiveness, hyperactivity, attention disorders, delinquency and aggressiveness) as well as internalised problems (anxiety, depression, social withdrawal and low self-esteem);
  - 2.2. other studies emphasise that girls are more sensitive to affective indices, tending more to identify with their mothers and to develop a victim's identity;
  - 2.3. among the behaviour patterns observed, it is also noted that boys seem more inclined to react to violence with anger and aggression whereas girls would inhibit their behaviour more and experience more distress.<sup>2</sup>
3. Plainly, domestic violence has a different impact on the future lives of children witnessing it, depending on whether they are girls or boys: the former will be more exposed to the risk of undergoing domestic violence, whereas the latter will be exposed to the risk of becoming perpetrators of domestic violence, thereby perpetuating the cycle of violence.

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1. See report tabled by the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, [Doc. 12111](#).

2. These various studies are mentioned by the Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Family Violence and Violence against Women, [www.criviff.qc.ca](http://www.criviff.qc.ca).



4. Like the rapporteur Mrs Ohlsson, I am convinced that if the situation of children who witness domestic violence is taken into account in the future Council of Europe convention on the prevention and combating of violence against women and domestic violence, there will be better prospects for protecting and rehabilitating these secondary victims in Europe and for developing education programmes aimed at breaking the vicious circle of inter-generational violence.

5. Accordingly, I should like to propose some amendments to this report.

5.1. In the draft resolution it should be reiterated, in accordance with Assembly [Recommendation 1847 \(2008\)](#) on combating violence against women: towards a Council of Europe convention, that the focus of the convention is – and must remain – violence against women and domestic violence which, as the CAHVIO<sup>3</sup> stresses, disproportionately affects women (Amendment A).

5.2. Education based on non-violence, but also on mutual respect (and respect for the other sex especially) is a crucial factor for ending the cycle of inter-generational violence (Amendments C, D and L), which needs to be included into legislation in the form of a right to non-violent education (Amendment G).

5.3. The protection of children who witness domestic violence must be the priority action of the public authorities (Amendment F). At the same time, bearing in mind that women are the main and the direct victims of domestic violence, the child's interests should not override the mother's protection and rehabilitation. I shall therefore propose amending the draft recommendation along those lines (Amendment K). The best interest of the child who has witnessed domestic violence should be taken into account when ruling on parental authority and contact of the author of domestic violence with the child concerned (Amendment H). When a man allows his child to witness domestic violence, he does not have the best interest of the child at heart, but rather accepts massive psychological consequences for the child.

5.4. Lastly, the policies developed should take the gender dimension into account (Amendments B, E, I and J).

## C. Proposed amendments

### To the draft resolution

#### *Amendment A (to the draft resolution)*

In paragraph 3, replace the terms “with a view to preparing one or more legally binding instruments regarding domestic violence and specific forms of violence against women” with:

*“to develop a binding legal instrument on violence against women and domestic violence, which disproportionately affects women”.*

#### *Amendment B (to the draft resolution)*

Add a new sub-paragraph 5.4.3 worded as follows:

*“provide for specific measures gender-mainstreamed in order to deal with the specific consequences of domestic violence for girls and boys in their lives as children and adults;”.*

#### *Amendment C (to the draft resolution)*

In paragraph 5.4.4, add after “education of children” the words “from the earliest age”.

#### *Amendment D (to the draft resolution)*

In paragraph 5.4.4, replace “non-violent behaviour” with “behaviour based on mutual respect and non-violence”.

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3. See document CAHVIO (2009) 4 FIN, paragraph 6.

*Amendment E (to the draft resolution)*

In paragraph 6.2, after “in an interdisciplinary approach”, add the following words: “with gender mainstreaming”.

*Amendment F (to the draft resolution)*

In paragraph 6.2, replace “for example when it comes to” with: “for the protection of children especially,”.

*Amendment G (to the draft resolution)*

After paragraph 6.2, add a paragraph worded as follows:

*“to include in their legislation, the right of children to an education based on mutual respect and non-violence.”*

*Amendment H (to the draft resolution)*

After sub-paragraph 6.3.4, insert a sub-paragraph worded as follows:

*“take into account the best interest of the child who has witnessed domestic violence when ruling on parental authority and contact of the author of domestic violence with the child concerned”.*

**To the draft recommendation**

*Amendment I (to the draft recommendation)*

In paragraph 1, add at the end of the paragraph: “and must take into account the specific impact of domestic violence on girls and boys.”

*Amendment J (to the draft recommendation)*

In paragraph 2.2, after “in order to appropriately consider”, add the following words: “, having regard to the gender dimension,”.

*Amendment K (to the draft recommendation)*

In paragraph 2.3, delete the following phrase: “and notably the mothers involved”.

*Amendment L (to the draft recommendation)*

In paragraph 2.4, after the words “on the importance of education of children”, insert: “..., from the earliest age, towards behaviour based on mutual respect and non-violence,”.

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*Reporting committee:* Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

*Committee seized for opinion:* Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

*Reference to committee:* Bureau decision of 29 May 2008

*Opinion* unanimously adopted by the committee on 25 January 2010

*Secretariat of the committee:* Ms Kleinsorge, Ms Affholder, Ms Devaux