

21.03.23

5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the eradication of male violence against women and girls (OQ.76/2021):

What steps has the Minister taken since 2018 to work towards eradicating male violence against women and girls and what plans does he have for any new measures before the 2022 election?

Connétable L. Norman of St. Clement (The Minister for Home Affairs):

Since becoming the Minister for Home Affairs in 2018, one of my highest priorities has been to bring in a domestic abuse law for Jersey. Late last year I issued law-drafting instructions to commence this vital piece of legislation and I fully expect to bring this before the Assembly towards the end of this year. It is my intention that this is the flagship piece of legislation that provides as strong as possible protection for victims of domestic abuse. The law will recognise that domestic abuse is a specific offence more complex and more damaging than simple violence. It will recognise controlling and coercive behaviour as an offence and will allow for the creation of the domestic abuse register, similar to the sex offenders' register, to manage repeat and serious perpetrators and ensure the potential partners of such offenders are protected. I have also ensured that we have capital funding for new premises for the Sexual Assault Referral Centre for adults and a child's house for children who are victims of sexual abuse. I have also secured significant investment in the Domestic Abuse Service, as well as the S.A.R.C. (Sexual Abuse Referral Centre), which allows for the provision of dedicated support to victims. We now have new campaigns that are running throughout the year to promote awareness and understanding of domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, including a high-profile campaign regarding consent. Of course all of this is designed to benefit and support all victims of crime, regardless of their gender. But we know that women are statistically more likely to be victims of domestic abuse and of sexual assault and it is my hope that these actions will provide greater protection for women and girls.

3.5.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I thank the Minister for his answers. Could the Minister please give his comments on the possibility of a cross-departmental strategy on violence against women and girls, which he has answered a written question for me about, and there is not one at the moment? Is that something he could commit to? Also, I would like him to commit to reconsidering not adding sex as a protected characteristic in the hate crime law, please, and doing this would have the effect of making misogyny and misandry a hate crime.

[10:30]

Could he comment on those 2 strategies or laws, please, that I feel he should be doing?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I could not agree with the Deputy more on the first point because in all areas of criminality enforcement is not the only solution. There has to be education, there has to be understanding, there has to be community involvement to understand what the causes of these issues are. I do agree that we would need to have cross-agency structures to enable us to improve the situation, not just in this area but all areas of criminality where clearly this is extremely important. On the area of the prejudice law, I do not like to call it the hate law, in some jurisdictions gender is a protected characteristic, in others it is not. It is something which is still under consideration. We will be lodging the prejudice law under consultation fairly shortly. It does not include at this stage gender as a protected characteristic but that is still open for debate and even when the law is lodged it will

still be open for amendment. I know it is something we will be discussing even further, as we already have done, with our Scrutiny Panel, of which the Deputy is a member.

3.5.2 Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier:

90 per cent of young women have experienced sexual harassment in public places in the U.K., how will he find out what the numbers are in Jersey?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

This is difficult and the only way it can be carried out is with a survey. But I know the States of Jersey Police and our other agencies are concerned that women will feel safe in Jersey. Let us be honest, Jersey is a safe place but incidents can occur. I think when ladies, women and girls feel uncomfortable, feel that they are being subject to inappropriate behaviour they should not resist calling the police to explain their concerns and get the protection that they need; the police will be waiting for their calls.

3.5.3 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier:

To follow up Deputy Le Hegarat's question. Only 4 women told in the recent survey that was published on 10th March that only 4 per cent reported the incidents of harassment to the official organisation, with 45 per cent of women saying they did not believe reporting would change anything. What would the Minister suggest can be done to ensure that our public spaces are safer?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I do not quite understand why people should not wish to report incidents of sexual assault. In fact they must report them because the more information the police have the more arrests the police are able to make, the less chances of these offences taking place. The police do need the co-operation of victims, as well as the high-profile policing that we now have, particularly in the town area. I would urge victims of assault or inappropriate behaviour - and I repeated in the earlier question - that they must report these incidents to the States of Jersey Police.

3.5.4 Deputy I. Gardiner:

As the U.K. are coming out from the lockdown, the owners and administrators of public spaces asked to implement a solution to make public spaces safer. There are around 150 solutions offered by U.N. (United Nations) Women U.K. Is the Minister and his department aware about these solutions and if he is what action is planned to be taken by the Government in Jersey?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, I am not aware of it but if the Deputy would pass them to me, I would be happy to study them and share them with the enforcement agencies.

3.5.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

The Discrimination (Jersey) Law 2013 states: "A person who also harasses the subject, if the person engages unwanted conduct of a sexual nature." I was asked about these laws by a constituent, a young woman who has seen sexual harassment in Jersey when she has been here and has not reported it and when she did report it, it was not acted upon. Does the Minister believe that the laws that exist now should be better enforced and that women in particular need more support in order to feel that reporting these actions will be taken seriously?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I can assure the Deputy that complaints of the sort or the nature that he talks about will be taken very seriously. The police want to take them very seriously. The Government has invested and is investing significant sums in, as I have just mentioned in my preliminary answer, the Sexual Assault Referral Centre, where people who perhaps do not want to report to the police can get the counselling and support and the advice that they need. But also if they do wish to involve the police can be referred to that agency for the support that they need. My belief, and all the surveys tell us, that the vast majority of people have absolute confidence in the States of Jersey Police, as they should. I repeat, and I cannot repeat it often enough, that if you are the subject of sexual harassment, assault or inappropriate behaviour, please report it and you will be taken seriously. You will be listened to and appropriate action, where it is practical and possible, will be taken.

3.5.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister believe that there is a message to be sent out to men, as a male Minister, as male-elected Members of the Assembly, that these laws exist and they will be used if you sexually harass women? What does the Minister say that that message should be and will he give that message today?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The message is that these situations are taken very seriously. We saw only 2 or 3 years ago, and I pay tribute to my predecessor, regarding the excellent Sexual Offences Law we now have in place and would draw attention to some of the prosecutions that have been able to be made, which could not have been made previously. I mentioned during my opening remarks the intention to have a similar quality domestic abuse law, which is not on our statute book at the moment, which will give women, in the main, greater protection and support. The message is that the legislation is in place, the legislation is being strengthened all the time and the police are there to support victims of crime and particularly victims of sexual assault and inappropriate behaviour in that area.

3.5.7 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Returning to the original question. In steps taken by the Minister to work on this issue, can he outline any work about education with the charity Prison! Me! No Way!!! and educating young people and, if not, what more can be done in that area?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, Prison! Me! No Way!!! is being redefined but what we are aiming to do with the additional investment we have put into the States of Jersey Police, we now have dedicated officers who are responsible for work within schools. They are part of the education system, part of the education curriculum and are there to advise and guide young people in all areas of life. That, I think, has been a very, very valuable improvement in the way that our police operate.

3.5.8 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Does that include those officers or those team of people going into schools and sitting and working with schools and others to educate young people, young men about this situation?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

There are a myriad of things that the States of Jersey Police do to help educate our young people and that is one of them.

3.5.9 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I wonder if the Minister could forward the answer to the previous question about education because I would like to know specifically what education is carried out in schools. But my final supplementary is on the issue of sex or gender, crimes motivated by hatred of someone's sex or gender, in the meantime before the new law is in place. Could the Minister look into crimes which are motivated by this being recorded by the police, as is being done by several police forces in England and Wales already, please?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

Yes, of course, only be too pleased to do so.