



**NEW ZEALAND**

Affiliated with the International Federation of Business & Professional Women

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4th November 2009

## **SUBMISSION**

**To: Transport and Industrial Relations Committee.**

**Re: Injury Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Compensation Amendment Bill**

### **Introduction**

1. This submission is from the New Zealand Federation of Business and Professional Women Inc.

### **Our organisation**

2. Our organisation's aims are to link professional and businesswomen throughout the world, to provide support, to lobby for change and to promote the ongoing advancement of women. We work for equal opportunities and status for all women in economic, civil and political life and the removal of discrimination in all countries. We promote our aims and organise our operating structure without distinction as to race, language or religion.

Our membership is approximately 750.

Our structure is comprised of a National Executive, 30 branches located nationwide between Kaitaia and Southland, with a number of individual members in areas where there is no branch. We are a non political organisation.

**Our interest in this bill is because we are a women's group who are committed to ensure equality for all working women through advocacy, education and mentoring.**

**Please refer to the policy below.**

#### **18.6 Funding for Victims of Sexual Abuse**

- 18.6.1 **ASK** the Government to provide sufficient funds to run a full-time service for all Rape Crisis Centres and Women's Refuges.

**(1993)**

18.6.2 **URGES** the government to provide sufficient, long term funding to ensure that:

- i) Fully subsidized counselling and therapy are provided to victims of sexual violence for as long as is necessary to enable the victim to deal with the trauma and cope with every day life, and that
- ii) These services are available free of charge to all survivors of sexual violence throughout New Zealand. (2005)

Rationale:

- The government has recently drafted an Action Plan for the Reduction of Violence and Sexual Violence; however it has not specified a remedy for the problem faced by many survivors of sexual violence regarding the cost of counselling. Research has shown that sexually abused women are taking longer to recover from their ordeal because of the high cost of counselling and restricted access to subsidized therapy funded by the Accident Compensation Corporation. Some women report feeling pressured to finish counselling before they are ready due to lack of financial resources.
- *The scale of the problem is huge as New Zealand research suggests that up to 1 in 4 women may have had one or more unwanted sexual experiences before the age of 12. For adults, the National Survey of Crime Victims (NZ) in 1996 suggests that 1 in 16 women is sexually assaulted per year.*
- While not all people with a history of sexual abuse will experience serious long-term negative effects on their lives, the list of possible long-term consequences of sexual violence is long. These include a wide range of mental health problems such as depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, suicide attempts and self-harming behaviours.
- Government funding for services for the resolution of the effects of sexual violence is essential for maximization of the individual's quality of life and for the society as a whole. That New Zealand subscribes to this view seems evident from:
  - i) New Zealand's role in co-sponsoring the UN Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2003/45 Elimination of Violence Against Women, which "encourages States to ensure that women have access to comprehensive and accessible health services and programmes and to health-care providers who are knowledgeable and trained to meet the needs of patients who have been subjected to violence, in order to minimize the adverse physical and psychological consequences of violence" and "calls upon States ...to support initiatives undertaken by women's organizations and non-governmental organizations on the elimination of violence against women .... Including in the area of support services for victims".
  - ii) The Safer Communities Action Plan To Reduce The Victims' Rights Act 2002
  - iii) Community Violence and Sexual Violence, released in June 2004

***This resolution is in accordance with articles 5, 6 and 13 of CEDAW and paragraph C3 and D of the Beijing Platform for Action.***

BPW NZ Believes that the proposed changes to the ACC act will cause more stress and harm to women who are already suffering and that it also goes against the CEDAW agreement of which NZ is a signatory.

BPW NZ would like to say that to not only go through one ordeal that demoralizes the individual to then have to speak and 'prove' you have been affected mentally through a series of interviews is making the person relive their experience without any support at the end.

BPW NZ notes that the report illustrates the statistics of violent abuse, not mental abuse. Our argument is, if a woman has been subjected to one form (or another) of abuse, why:

- Go through three interviews to prove their story, they will continually relive the horror without any support at the end
- Be judged with a mental disability, they have been abused, so there is trauma, it may be only having someone help them find their own 'self-esteem' to give them the strength and courage within themselves to face life again
- Why are they again being 'abused' again, they have a right to be protected, this system will leave them exposed and no help. In effect it will be reopening a wound but no 'band-aid' will be put over it. I suppose the best way to look at it is how Christina took people through past experiences and then said to them now think of the positive which 'wipes out the past', these women would not get the positive only the horror of the past to keep looking at..... this is before the get any help.

- One of the horrors of this is they could select a number of courses which will all be self-destructive to them, this can't be permitted.
- They have already been victims, the government/ACC are making them victims again. This is so wrong.

BPW NZ along with NCWNZ supports the key findings of the recently released Ministry of Women's Affairs report, *Responding to sexual violence: Environmental scan of New Zealand agencies (September 2009)* which sets out the many changes that are needed:

- The cost of services is a barrier; the counselling should be fully funded by ACC.
- ACC should assist with the costs of transport/childcare necessary to support victims to access appropriate services.
- Currently those sexually abused/assaulted outside of New Zealand but now residing in New Zealand do not qualify for ACC. This means that ethnic minorities, migrants and refugee groups are unable to access the counselling services necessary for recovery.
- Subsistent funding of counsellors has created the shortfall in availability of services, hence unreasonable waiting lists exist.
- Rape crisis centres and other community-based organisations specialising in sexual abuse are not sufficiently resourced, hence the limited geographical coverage and inability to meet demand.
- Under the current system, the delay in gaining approval from ACC for assistance to partially meet the costs of treatment, has been alarmingly protracted. This puts extra pressure on victims and can lead to increased fear and anxiety.

While the Minister has been dismissing the claims that the changes to ACC funding rules for survivors of sexual abuse and sexual assault, due to come into force on October 27, are not part of the ACC cost recovery plan, most women do not accept this.