

A Response to Police Service of Northern Ireland's

**"Draft Equality Impact Assessment of
Proposals to Introduce Taser"**

April 2008

**Fiona O'Connell
Policy and Research Co-Ordinator
Women's Support Network
Floor 2
109 – 113 Royal Avenue
Belfast
BT1 1FF
Email: policy@womenssupportnetwork.org**

Table of contents

Introduction: Women's Support Network	Page 3
Comments	Page 4
Conclusion	Page 6
Appendix 1 WSN member groups	Page 7

Introduction

Women's Support Network

The Women's Support Network (WSN), established in 1989, is an infrastructural umbrella organisation, which provides support services to, and represents over 40 groups (see Appendix 1 for full member and associate member listing) including; community-based women's centres, women's projects and women's infrastructure groups.

WSN aims to achieve social, political and economic justice through the promotion of the autonomous organisation of women. The Network aims to strengthen the collective voice of women's groups and to promote and develop networking opportunities, to enable collective action and to impact upon policy and decision making processes. The WSN provides an accessible, feminist, relevant and high quality support service and resource for its member groups. The Network is also an important information resource on issues relevant to community-based women's organisations and for other infrastructure groups, nationally and internationally.

WSN welcomes this opportunity to respond to this Draft Equality Impact Assessment on PSNI proposals to introduce taser as an option for use by the PSNI specialised and authorised firearms officers.

Comments

Alternative Policing Approaches Second Report

WSN notes references made to the Research Programme into Alternative Policing Approaches in section 5.2.7 and WSN is greatly concerned that this report indicates whilst tasers have been widely used in the US that “*the biophysical and physiological basis of their effectiveness and safety does not appear to be well understood.*”¹ WSN is concerned about these proposals to introduce tasers given the lack of understanding of their effectiveness or of their safe usage from a medical perspective.

Data by Equality grouping

WSN would like to draw attention to section 5.3 which sets out data by equality grouping. WSN notes that section 5.3.7 contains figures on taser usage by gender and also notes that these figures do not reflect multiple identities of men or women. It may be beneficial to have a breakdown of figures relating to different groups of women for example younger women, older women, women with disabilities, minority ethnic backgrounds etc, to determine if there is a differential impact on different groups of women.

Existence of differential impacts

WSN would like to make reference to section 6.2 of the draft EQIA which details the differential impact arising from the use of taser between men and women generally. WSN welcomes acknowledgement in the EQIA that women are more likely to be affected than men by taser being used on them. WSN also welcomes acknowledgement of the risks to pregnant women and unborn babies, if subjected to the use of taser. WSN however notes with some concern that there is no acknowledgement of the multiple identities of women and would request that the Equality Impact Assessment would consider the impact of the use of taser on different groups of women for example young

¹ PSNI “Draft Equality Impact Assessment of Proposals to Introduce Taser” Pg 28.

women, older women, disabled women, lesbian and transgender women and women from minority ethnic groups

Nature of Impacts on s75 groups

WSN notes that under section 6.2 the EQIA says “the evidence overall suggest women may be more affected than men by taser being used on them.” WSN therefore finds it puzzling that women are not listed as being one of the groups in respect of which there may be a differential impact. Section 6.3 refers to pregnant women but not to women generally. WSN believes that this is especially troubling because it is not always apparent whether a woman is pregnant.

WSN welcomes the EQIA conclusion in section 6.3 that a number of s75 groups could be potentially adversely affected by the use of taser. The EQIA concludes that “if taser were used exclusively in situations where more lethal options would be considered, then the possibility of adverse impact is less likely.” WSN understands the aim of this policy, but believes that in practice it may be extremely difficult to ensure that tasers are only used in this narrowly defined situation.

Alternative policies and mitigation of impacts

WSN notes with concern that the only main policy alternative considered in the draft EQIA in section 7.2 is not to introduce taser. The EQIA suggests that not introducing Taser would not promote equality of opportunity for section 75 groups. WSN would ask PSNI to detail in the draft EQIA whether the introduction of other forms of “less lethal” or perhaps even “non lethal” weapons were considered in the process of drafting proposals. WSN would also ask PSNI to clarify whether an alternative proposal of not permitting the use of tasers on women was considered.

WSN notes the reference to International Human Rights Obligations in section 7.2. WSN would ask the PSNI to explain on what basis the EQIA concludes

that “PSNI believe that International Human Rights Obligations would be breached by failure to introduce taser...” It is important that PSNI provides clarity on this point as this appears to be one of the main reasons for rejecting the alternative policy of not introducing tasers.

Mitigation of adverse Impacts

WSN notes in section 7.3 that under training and guidance there is a reference to pregnant women and people of small stature, but there is no specific reference to women as a group. This would appear to contradict what was said in section 6.2.

Conclusion

WSN welcomes the opportunity to respond to this draft EQIA and has made some constructive comments.

WSN draws attention specifically to:

- The acknowledged potential adverse impact in the EQIA to women, especially pregnant women and unborn babies;
- It is not always apparent whether a woman is pregnant;
- The lack of understanding of the safe usage of taser from a medical perspective.

On the basis of the above WSN urges PSNI to prohibit the use of tasers on women.

WSN would hope that PSNI would consider these comments in their deliberations on finalising of this Equality Impact Assessment.

Appendix 1

WSN Member groups

Full Members

Ardoyne Women's Group
ATLAS
Al Nisa Women's Group
Ballybeen Women's Centre
Ballymurphy Women's Group
Belfast Travelers' Support Group
Carrickfergus Women's Forum
Carew II Newtownards Road Women's Group
Causeway Women's Aid
Clan Mor Women's Group
Derry Women's Centre
Falls Women's Centre
First Steps Women's Group
Footprints Women's Centre
Foyle Women's Information Network
Greenway Women's Centre
Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative
Lesbian Line
Lenadoon Women's Group
Ligoneil Family Centre
Markets Women's Group
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation
NIWEP (NI Women's European Platform)
Newry & Mourne Women
Older Women's Network
Shankill Women's Centre
Strabane & Lifford Women's Centre
Windsor Women's Centre
Women's Aid
Women's Aid Federation
Women into Politics
Women's Information Group
Women's News
Women's TEC
WRDA

Associate Members

Ballymena Community Forum
EBCEC
Newtownabbey Community Voice
Parents Advice Centre
WEA

Rasharkin Women's Group