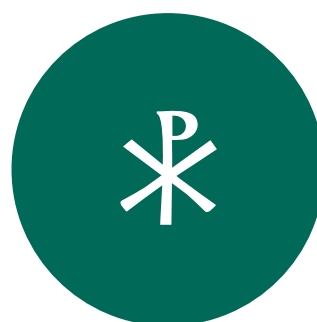
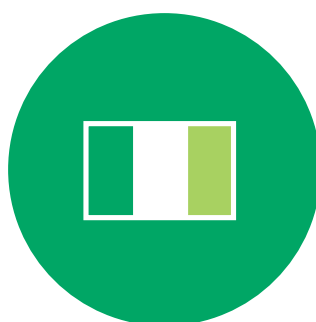
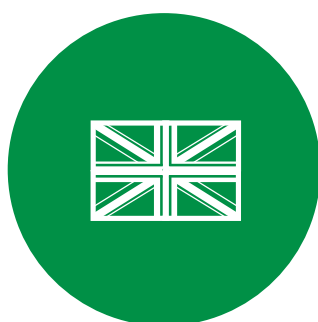
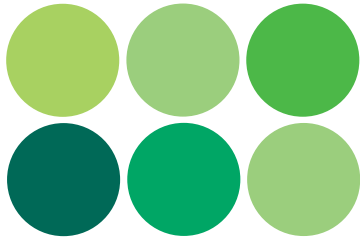


WOMEN AND SECTARIANISM IN SCOTLAND: BEYOND FOOTBALL





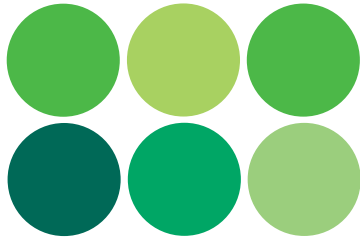
1. OVERVIEW

Research and actions to address sectarianism in Scotland do not appear to have taken women's perceptions and experiences into account. There has been an acknowledgement of some of the impacts on women, this has focused primarily on women as 'victims' of intimidation and violence in public space (e.g. drunken football supporters on public transport) or as 'victims' of domestic violence in private space (e.g. disgruntled football supporters taking out their team's loss on their partner).

However, whilst such violations may have some connection with sectarianism through football they are not the consequence of religious difference but rather of gender inequality. Indeed, there is little gendered analysis of the issues that result in sectarianism that might lead to reflections and responses with regard to the role of patriarchal hegemonic structures (such as religious bodies (churches, lodges), football clubs, and faith based schools) in the development of toxic masculinities.

VAF therefore commissioned Engender to carry out a participatory appraisal with the women in their networks to deepen the understanding of women and sectarianism.

This report sets out findings from phase one of what is now a larger project. You can find out more information about our work around sectarianism at our website: www.engender.org.uk.



2. OBJECTIVE

To better understand women's perceptions and experience of sectarianism in Scotland.

2.1 Participatory research questions

- How do women in Scotland perceive sectarianism?
- Does sectarianism manifest in their neighbourhoods, workplaces and families?
If so:
 - How does it manifest?
 - How do women experience and engage with it?
 - What is the impact on women and those around them?
- Do women believe that there are specific issues for women arising out of sectarianism that need to be addressed?

2.2 Target new

The initial terms of reference were for Engender to engage with women outwith the central belt of Scotland, and not to focus on sectarianism that was related to football. There was a perception on the part of the funders that a great deal of research and information about sectarianism already existed. However, it soon became apparent that the work done on sectarianism in Scotland had not taken a gendered approach, and had consequently not considered women's experiences and perceptions.

We therefore engaged with women across our membership and partnerships, including those based in the central belt, to hold focus group discussions.

Focus group discussions were held with women in:

- Edinburgh (Engender members and partners including NUS Scotland)
- West Dunbartonshire (Carers)
- Dundee (Engender members and partners)
- Maryhill Women's Centre
- Pilton Community Health Project - Women Supporting Women



- Oban (Arts and youth)
- Muirhouse Stepping Stones (Young Mums)

We also met and corresponded with:

- SACRO
- Bute elder people's forum
- Wild West Women a Facebook group

2.3 Limitations

Women have been reluctant to engage in discussion on sectarianism so focus groups have been small. This initial reluctance was expressed in several ways:

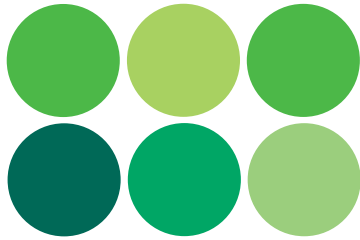
- that they feared that engaging with the issue would endanger their children and families safety;
- that it was a very sensitive issue, best left be; or
- that it was not really an issue in their community.

It should also be noted that the timing of this commission, which was short term and over the December and January holiday, may also have created barriers to participation.

A note on this report

This report compiles the perspectives, ideas, and analysis of women who attended focus groups on sectarianism across Scotland during December 2012 and January 2013.

This report does not reflect the views of Engender.



3. HOW DO WOMEN PERCEIVE SECTARIANISM?

3.1 As part of life

Once women agreed to engage in the focus groups it was soon apparent that sectarianism is much more ingrained in daily life than the women themselves had acknowledged, it is very much part of their lives, both in public and private spheres.

3.2 As colours

One of the most immediate and most common issues discussed was the association of religion and football with colours (of clothes, cars, walls or even drinking straws). There were many anecdotes relating to incidents that have occurred because they have used the 'wrong' colour. Examples include having her car vandalised because it was blue; being shunned for drinking out of a green straw; being attacked for wearing a football jersey; and having eggs thrown at her house because of the green window frames. Another woman reported that her husband over-painted their green kitchen as soon as she went away because he found it offensive. People are being stereotyped, prejudged and abused based on the 'colour' they are perceived to affiliate with.

3.3 As football

The associations with colour, however, are not necessarily related to religion, for many they are football colours; there were many examples of people of 'x' religion supporting 'y' football team, sometimes even in the same household. Women discussed at length how the relationship between football and religion came about historically, but were less clear as to why it remains connected.

3.4 As derogatory language

Throughout the focus groups women were familiar with a wide range of derogatory sectarian language and many were appalled that its use is just passed off as 'banter'. It was suggested that maybe women are more susceptible to nuances of language used to belittle and marginalise as 'women are used to it.' However, they also felt that many young people who use sectarian taunts actually don't know the meaning behind them.



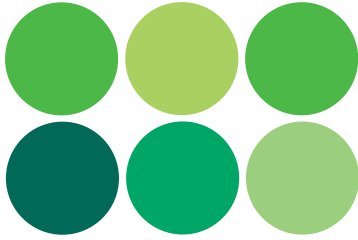
3.5 As songs

One young woman had songs on her iPod which she would not want people to hear if they weren't Catholic, others admitted teaching their children such songs and all knew them.

3.6 As discrimination against the Irish

There were clearly different experiences for women who were Irish or of Irish descent; they reported that they faced high levels of discrimination, harassment and bullying especially in the work place. It was unclear if that was related to their being Catholic or Protestant.

Some respondents, who were not Irish, suggested that historically sectarianism was brought to Scotland by the Irish and acted out here. However, it was noted that Protestant Irish still regularly travel from Ireland to Scotland to participate in Orange marches.



4. HOW DO WOMEN EXPERIENCE SECTARIANISM?

4.1 As an identity that can be discriminated against

Women felt that it is not only easy to be identified by as Catholic or Protestant by their name, the school they went to or where they live but that people actually seek out such information so as to identify their 'side' even if they do not practice any religion. It was therefore easy to be wrongly identified as being associated with the 'other' or 'wrong' side. Identification as the 'other' led to a loss of work opportunities, bullying, harassment, the need for police protection to attend school and the loss of freedom of movement and association.

4.2 As an expression of male violence and coercive control

Sectarianism is experienced by women as an expression of male violence (whether related to football or otherwise). Women don't feel safe to express what 'side' they are on as they fear for the safety of their family and children. One group in Glasgow was happy to talk to Engender about sectarianism but didn't want to take part in any longer term plan to tackle sectarianism due to fear of themselves or their children becoming targets of abuse and violence.

4.3 As football

It was noted that increasing numbers of young women are attending football games, with some stating that they see just as many women at games, being just as violent (Although media coverage of crowds would suggest that 'just as many' is an overstatement). The involvement of young women as football supporters was considered to be a redefinition of femininity and a reclaiming of space, to be 'Geezer Birds' was to be included and accepted as 'one of the boys' and not be afraid to go out on match days. However, as more women attend football matches and take on the 'colours' so the risk of 'sectarian' violence against them increases and women shared experiences of being beaten up on their way back from matches.

Travelling on a train on a match day was described as 'uncomfortable' and 'intimidating', especially on 'Old Firm' days as women are subjected to sectarian



language and songs, and alcohol fuelled intimidation. Also, on match days women felt that men are more likely to shout abuse at women on the streets.

4.4 As coercive control over their freedom

Most women said that they avoid going out, using public transport or going to the shops on match days. Those that do take precautionary measures to ensure their safety such as having 999 ready on their phone. However, women do not only limit their movements in public space, some also make adjustments in private space on football weekends leaving their homes to stay elsewhere in an effort to avoid domestic violence.

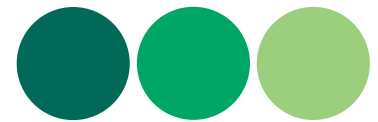
Mothers report that their children are impacted by the mood of the father as he watches football in the home, but this is related to football rather than sectarianism. However, people found it difficult to untangle the two.

4.5 As a danger for all

There was a perception that as a man you could just be in the wrong place at the wrong time and be subject to 'sectarian' violence, or violence wrapped up as sectarianism.

4.6 As something embedded in community and family life

Some of the women suggested that women had the potential to aggravate or calm sectarian situations and therefore had an agency that was being overlooked in current approaches. Many of them reflected that the importance of community and the need for a sense of belonging, linked to religion and family, created an enabling environment for sectarianism to continue. They said that it is in the home that much of the inculcation of values takes place with older generations passing down their views (including their assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices) to younger family members and that women were as involved as men in doing this. Women said they had agency in the perpetuation of sectarianism; upholding sectarian values and passing them on to their children through the use of sectarian language and jokes, teaching sectarian songs and encouraging participation in sectarian marches. It was thought that women who challenged this role would face exclusion from their family and the community. They thought with regard to the boys that was still a rite of passage associated with participating in a shared sectarian identity; to go with the men to the football, sing 'the songs', and be part



of a lodge, for example, and that female family members participated in preparing them for this. Whilst for girls, they felt the women's role was about ensuring girls conformed to gendered family expectations through the use of inclusion and exclusion, for example women shared experiences of being sent away or excluded because they had failed to conform in choosing a husband within their own religion. It was generally accepted that if a woman doesn't conform she will be excluded resulting in increased vulnerability and loss of voice.

However, there were some that thought that there was change afoot, whereas in the past girls would seek inclusion by 'ironing the suits' (for their men to go to the lodge) some were now said to be seeking inclusion through active participation i.e. joining the marches or by becoming 'Geezer Birds' (girls that engage in the same dress code and activities as men with regard to football). Young women reflected that high school girls 'acting like the boys' was so that they were part of the 'tribe' and could relate to their parents, this meant that they were accepted and accessed a sense of worth. One described how engaging in this way was the only way she could be close to her father. Many felt that conforming to religious norms and sectarian attitudes was the only way to be accepted in the community and at school.

The fear of exclusion and vulnerability as a driver of sectarian behaviour is particularly evident in the context of mixed marriages (Catholic-Protestant). Women talked of having had to move away so they could marry someone of another religion. Others had been sent away by their families to put a stop to an unacceptable relationship. However, whilst it was thought to be less of an issue than it once was, it is still common for a woman who marries a man of a different religion to be marked as 'other' and 'different' and live with feelings of exclusion and vulnerability. Women report being forced to choose between exclusions: if she doesn't conform to her husband's religion she is shunned by his family, and if she rejects her own family's religion she is shunned by them. Concerns were raised for the children of mixed marriages as they were usually forced to conform to one parent's beliefs at the expense of the other, who was generally the mother.

Women felt the underlying pressure to conform and ascribed it to the inherent sexism in religion that it gives men power over family and community life. Indeed, women respondents reflected in some depth on the position of women in religious institutions as being a problem in terms of their having the power and



voice to change attitudes in terms of sectarianism or other equality issues. Some Catholics felt that the position of the church on sexual orientation, along with the child abuse scandals surrounding Catholic priests, has resulted in increased discrimination against them as Catholics.

4.7 As something exacerbated in schools

Children are exposed and indoctrinated to sectarian attitudes in the home which then feeds into divisions at school. Women reported that children are being bullied and excluded at school if they don't support the 'correct' team for that school, be it Celtic or Rangers. From a young age children are being taught sectarian songs and language and often use derogatory language to insult and hurt when they don't actually know the meaning behind it. Girls reported using their support for a particular team to exclude and offend others in their class. Mothers were noted to have an active role in the segregation of their children from others along sectarian lines through the friendships that they form with other parents on the basis of community-religion.

The other issue discussed at some length was religious based schools and their role in 'othering'. Many questioned why the state supports the segregation of schools on the basis of religion and why they invested in non-denominational schools and Catholic schools being built on the same campus. Many thought this had actually added to the perpetuation of sectarianism and that shared campuses had not relieved any tensions because the children don't actually mix in these spaces. Catholic children in Edinburgh were reportedly being escorted to and from school by the police to prevent 'other' schools' children throwing things at them. Women, regardless of their religious background, believed that it was the government that had made sectarianism an issue because they are in control of the schools. Most felt it would be better if there was just one type of school.

It was noted that non-denominational schools are perceived to be the norm and Catholic schools as 'separate' and 'other'. Catholic mothers who had children in non-denominational schools were acutely aware of their decision, not least because other mothers pointed it out. A Catholic mother would know how many other Catholic children were in the primary school, they didn't know how they came to know this or why they wanted to know but they did. They were aware that other parents knew their children were Catholic and were in 'their' school. Catholic mothers spoke of the 'difficult' decision they had to make when deciding



whether to send their child across town to a Catholic school, which excluded from local social networks, or send them to the local school where they would be 'othered'. This childhood experience of difference, 'us versus them', is therefore experienced as being built into the education system and as state sponsored.

Catholic schools are perceived to be better and more privileged, with students getting better results. This thinking parallels the idea that Catholics, as Irish immigrants, live in close communities that looked after each other and exclude non-Catholics, thereby accessing privilege.

4.8 As unequal access to services

Mothers unable to get their children into childcare spoke of how access to childcare is affected by religion and is exacerbating sectarian tensions. They felt that the influx of Catholic Poles has meant that they are being 'denied' nursery places being provided by Catholic churches and schools. Another mother felt that her children were being excluded from their nearest nursery because they were not Catholic. She said this means mothers on low incomes having to take long, often multiple, bus rides to take children to secular nurseries, or baptising their children solely to get a nursery place nearby.

They also felt that, due to the fear of being labelled racist, nurseries are giving places to other communities rather than local Protestant children. They shared experiences of people having been on waiting lists for nursery places for less time and having got a place, 'it's about who you know'. However, they felt that this was the fault of the authorities and not because they are being sectarian against Catholic Poles. They feel that they are being discriminated against for nursery places because they aren't Catholic. They also discussed similar issues with regard to housing as they perceive Catholic Poles getting preferential treatment.

4.9 As more visible as an issue of class

Women suggested that sectarianism was more visible within working class communities where people protected the interests of 'their own' by looking out for each other and excluding others. In contradiction with the idea of Catholic education equating with privilege it was generally assumed that Catholics would be poorer and working class whilst Protestants would have more power and



connections, particularly with state institutions such as the police. However, it was agreed that sectarianism actually occurs at all levels of society and in that fact it is men in power who uphold sectarian divisions for their own social, economic and political gains.

4.10 As looking after 'their' own

Many spoke of discrimination in accessing work on the basis of their names or if they are known to be Catholics or Protestants. It was felt that the current context of austerity may have had some impact on the resurfacing or reinforcement of sectarian divides in poorer communities in terms of positive discrimination and therefore exclusion i.e. Catholics grouping together to give each other jobs and Protestants having the power in the systems and structures to make things happen in favour of their own. People were not only being discriminated in getting jobs but also within the work place in the form of direct harassment such as not being promoted, bullying 'jokes', and harassment. Women of a different religion had also experienced being excluded from after work socialising due to their religion and perceived religious biases in the unions, community events, political speeches and the media.

There was a clearly articulated element of 'Catholics are Irish and therefore immigrants and should not be here taking our jobs'.

4.11 As marches

Many spoke of the marches and lodges and the negative impact they have in creating a sense of a divided community. People spoke of how women are not able to take part in lodges, but that they 'support their men and press their suits', join marches and fulfil facilitating roles. They are often involved in fundraising and social event organisation rather than holding positions of power. It was said that male sectarianism was overt and acted out but that women were 'just as bigoted behind closed doors'.

4.12 As institutional

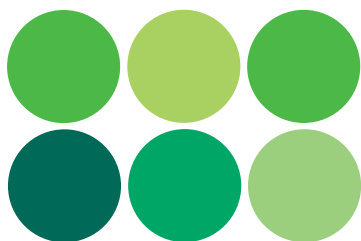
The women felt that sectarianism was ingrained in our society and culture; that it is everywhere and people don't think of the consequences of not challenging it. They felt that it is an issue at all levels of society. Some women were acutely



aware that the 1701 Act of Settlement prevented the monarch or future monarch from marrying a Catholic and that Camilla, Duchess of Rothesay, had had to convert to marry the Prince of Wales. It was stated that until sectarianism is 'sorted up there' it cannot be tackled in the community. This includes the churches being willing to change and reflect on the role of women in religious institutions.

Examples were given of fathers being told to go outside the church during their children's baptism because they were not Catholic, and of single mothers told by the priest to fill in christening forms so that 'no one will know you aren't married'.

Sectarianism was described as being controlled by those in power and that 'the more money you have the more you can hide sectarianism'. An example of good practice was given whereby the instigation to change came from the churches themselves who came together as a community. Change was also noted when the police reached out to the community.



5. WHY WOMEN THINK SECTARIANISM EXISTS

5.1 Manipulated masculinity for power and money

Many women thought that those who take part in sectarian activities do so to be part of a group and to feel solidarity with others and that this has been used by those in power (the state, the churches) to maintain their authority and by football clubs in their own commercial interests to drive commercial interests. According to some participants the benefits of this sense of identity and belonging, inclusion and protection, has resulted in more women taking part in sectarian and 'masculine' behaviour.

Others felt that men just use religion as an excuse to be violent and to express 'macho' behaviour. They pointed out that it was this sort of violent and aggressive behaviour that has been the focus of anti-sectarian approaches at the expense of actually addressing the real cause and consequence of sectarianism e.g. institutional religious bigotry in families, communities, schools, religious institutions and state structures.

5.2 Lack of honesty about the role of the churches and the state – institutional sectarianism

Related to the idea that sectarianism contributes to the existence of tribal divisions, many women recognised that sectarianism was fed by the construction of the 'other' that is a threat. For the Protestants the 'other' were 'the Irish' (who came over to take 'their' jobs), and who, supported by the church, accessed privileges (better education, local child care places) that excluded them. This 'other' now also extends to new groups of immigrants such as Poles who are also perceived to have accessed privilege because they are Catholics. Catholic women felt this 'othering' was further exacerbated by the position of the Catholic church on gay marriage and the 'collusion through silence' around the issue of institutional collusion in child abuse, which has tainted all Catholics as homophobic and hypocritical.

For there to be an 'other' there has to be a 'norm' and women were concerned that



the assumption of 'Protestantism' as normative was not being acknowledged. They thought it important to recognise that non-denominational schools were actually Protestant and not secular, that the head of state was Protestant and their family forbidden to marry Catholics, and that it was considered acceptable to spend public money to police Orange marches. Their concern is that without such acknowledgement, sectarian divisions will persist.

Related, to this many women spoke of the state's involvement in perpetuating sectarianism. The state's role in preserving segregated schools raised many questions as to the extent at which the government is involved in upholding these divisions. The institutionalised division of schools is seen as a cause and consequence of sectarian divisions. This also raised the question for the participants about the relationship between the church and the state. Without a clear break between the two and an end to segregated schools, many of the women didn't feel that sectarianism has much of a chance of ceasing to exist.

'Othering' and segregated schooling was also said to lead to people clustering together in certain areas of town, which whilst increasing their sense of security has also led to victimisation because they are perceived to be 'sticking together' and excluding the other.

5.3 Family as an institution of religion

The overwhelming majority of women involved in this research felt that the family is the place where sectarianism is learned and encouraged. From the experience of those Engender spoke to, the threat of exclusion if you did not partake drove many to conform and actively take part in inculcating sectarian messages, engaging in sectarian behaviour and using derogatory sectarian language. The women spoke of how both mothers and fathers not only passed on their cultural and religious values and norms to their children but also the attitudes, prejudices and language that led to 'othering'. Nearly all of the women that participated in the research knew sectarian songs and has taught them to their children.

The need for inclusion and protection through a shared identity and values has meant families take action to protect their religious value systems, even sending daughters away if they develop relationships with a boy from the other religion, and intervening in relationships. Women perceived that the churches further



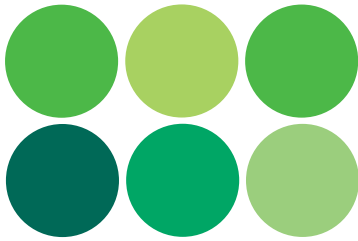
reinforce this idea of 'us' and 'them' by asking people to convert to facilitate marriage, sending the 'othered' partner out of the church during a baptism. They felt such interventions feed the ideology of difference.

5.4 Who benefits from sectarianism?

Women felt the main purpose of sectarianism was for men to maintain power. They said that in the past men in positions of power and influence benefited greatly from sectarianism continuing in the workplace, churches, government, schools, and politics, because they accessed and maintained their position due to the support of Catholic or Protestant groups. It was noted that although this is much less likely than it was historically it is still an element that needs to be addressed and that any interventions to address sectarianism need to be honest and transparent about the role of religion. Women involved in their religion said that their churches, concerned about the reduction in their congregations, would not challenge overt demonstrations of religious allegiance that took on a sectarian flavour and some even said that in some instances religious leaders actively encouraged participation.

Others felt that football clubs, who make most of their money from television rights, ticket sales and merchandising, benefited from strong allegiances (fostered historically through religion) and now through colours associated with sectarianism. Old Firm matches attract significant television money, because of the spectacle that they present, and commentary from broadcasters explicitly acknowledges that sectarianism adds interest to the matches.

Some thought there were far more people accused of racially motivated crimes and wondered why there was sudden focus on sectarianism. They felt that if sectarianism was 'left alone' it would die away, and therefore that the government probably had ulterior motives in wanting to divert attention away from the real issues of power and corruption in the banks and political system that are the real cause of poverty and difficulty among the proletariat, or by being seen to be 'fixing' something which is the proletariat's fault but that is not actually there.



6. WOMEN'S IDEAS FOR TACKLING SECTARIANISM

Women proposed that the government and those seeking to address sectarianism should avoid a narrow focus on football-related headline grabbing projects and address the systemic issues that enable sectarianism. These include:

6.1 Address toxic masculinities

- Acknowledging that for some it has nothing to do with religion, it is about football and gangs, toxic masculinity and public disorder.
- Addressing issues of masculinity, particularly forms of masculinity that generate gang behaviours through the education system.
- Football clubs working harder to demonstrate that they are proactively working to separate sectarianism from football.

6.2 Work on reducing 'othering' and increasing inclusion

- Creating awareness and educating people on the impact of sectarian discrimination.
- Acknowledging the relationship with poverty and the fear of the 'other' taking jobs and competing for services, especially in the current economic climate.
- Transparency and action to address the 'norming' of Protestant institutions.
- Separating the church from the state and ending state funding for religious schools of all kinds, including existing non-denominational schools.

6.3 Acknowledge the role of religious institutions

- Honesty about how religious institutions enable sectarianism, by their attitudes to mixed marriages and explicitly religious parenting.
- Understanding how the position and behaviour of churches feeds negative attitudes, for example by colluding in and covering up child abuse, and by appearing to promote homophobic laws and practices.
- Assessing the impact of religious based service delivery in education and nursery care, among others.



6.4 21st century religious institutions

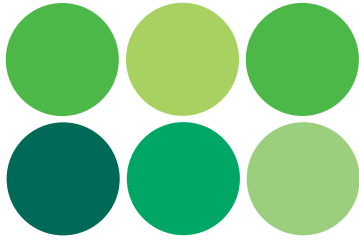
- Facilitating an honest and open dialogue on the power of the churches and the role that they play in society and politics.
- Tackle the impression that churches seem to be above the law, with regard to their apparent discrimination in not allowing women priests or bishops, and institutional collusion with child abuse.
- Democratise religion. Religions are based on hierarchy and patriarchal structures where women's voices are often not heard and are given little importance. The churches should promote positive gender relations and new forms of masculinity.

6.5 Involve women

- Recognise that women have agency in sectarianism and have a role to play in the family, in community, in churches, and in government led programmes to address sectarianism.

6.6 Put policy into practice

- Crack down on sectarian crime.
- Remove opportunity in application forms, employment or otherwise, to work out someone's religion.



7. CONCLUSION

Sectarianism is gendered in terms of its relationship with masculinity and the patriarchal structures of family and religious institutions, and in the way it manifests. It is therefore critical that gender be considered when trying to address it.

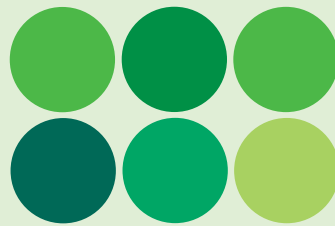
There is a great deal of literature about gender and ethnoreligious conflict available internationally that could and should be taken into consideration when trying to understand and address sectarianism in Scotland.

There are two main recommendations arising from this research:

- **That women's voices and analysis need to be included in the development of anti-sectarian approaches.** Women are both affected by and have agency in sectarianism but are cautious about engaging with the issue. This means that creative approaches that enable them to participate in safe space and articulate difficult issues will be necessary.
- **That there is a need to introduce an informed¹ gendered analysis into the work of organisations working on anti-sectarian agendas (including religious institutions) in Scotland.** Many organisations have addressed the issue of gender in terms of toxic masculinities e.g. football related violence, but there is a need for a deeper understanding of the gendered systems and structures that enable sectarianism to be inculcated through everyday family and community interactions.

¹ Informed by women and men's voices and by international literature and approaches to gender and ethnic/religious discrimination and conflict internationally.

Engender
1A Haddington Place
EH7 4AE
Edinburgh
t: 0131 558 9596



info@engender.org.uk
www.engender.org.uk
twitter: @EngenderScot
facebook: www.facebook.com/engender

Engender is Scotland's gender equality organisation.

For more than 20 years we have worked across Scotland on feminist policy, advocacy, and activism. We make women's inequality visible, and bring women together to make change happen.