

# 'Trans widows' fears if spousal permission is waived

**Wives could be in difficult position if alteration to the law lets husbands change sex without their say-so**

By Ewan Somerville

"TRANS widows" face being trapped in loveless marriages if their spouses no longer need their permission to change gender, MPs examining proposals to change the law have been warned.

Activists are asking ministers to ditch

the requirement for a spouse's agreement, a clause that some women say is a lifeline for them if their husband transitions to a woman.

It allows them to exit a heterosexual marriage before it legally becomes homosexual, or get an annulment for those who cannot divorce for cultural reasons.

Women who left their male partners when they came out as trans women, sometimes overnight, describe how their other half became unrecognisable.

These women, who call themselves "trans widows", are flocking to new

support groups, amid fears they may be branded bigots if they find their new situation as a couple difficult.

"It absolutely floored me," said one young British trans widow. "I don't have a problem with wanting to do that, but for a lot of women if we don't immediately agree with it then we are automatically deemed transphobic... [my husband's] whole family blocked me from everything, I was completely shunned."

Yvonne Williams, 68, said: "We had been together for 23 years. He has undergone the full gender change and I

have found this an incredibly difficult emotional and lonely journey. The hormones and other drug treatments required for the success of the transition have a huge impact on personality traits, hence the term trans widow as most feel their husbands have died.

"There is no support for the partners other than the self-help groups."

Currently, people cannot obtain a full Gender Recognition Certificate to legally change their gender without the consent of their spouse.

But MPs on the Commons women and equalities select committee are

holding an inquiry into how laws could make changing gender easier, as part of a wider probe into reforms of the Gender Recognition Act (GRA). The LGBT charity Stonewall told MPs it "strongly urges" scrapping the spousal consent provision, citing the 84.9 per cent who disagreed with it in the Government's recent GRA consultation.

Jennifer Kimmel, who lives in Ireland, said her children's bedroom became a sanctuary when her husband changed gender.

"It just became an unlivable situation. We [trans widows] are terrified to

speak. We are often trapped. We have very little support," she said. Trans Widows Voices, a new support group, said the feelings of these women are often forgotten.

Traffic to their website, offering support tips, has risen 12-fold in a year with people from 139 countries visiting.

A Government Equalities Office spokesman said: "Following the consultation on the GRA, the Government has made clear that the current legislative system allows people to change their legal sex in a fair way, and there are no plans to alter anything within the Act."