



NOTA (NI) Response to Consultation on “Hidden Crimes Secret Pain”

NOTA is the only professional multi-disciplinary organisation in the UK dedicated to work with individuals who commit sexual offences. It is consequently in a unique position to promote and develop work in this area of public protection.

NOTA (NI) have a multi-disciplinary membership comprised of practitioners, managers and policy makers from the public, private and voluntary sectors. As a result, NOTA bring a wide variety of perspectives to interventions to combat sexual crime. We currently have 40+ members in Northern Ireland and this response has been forwarded to all members for comment.

NOTA (NI) welcome the consultation document on developing a regional strategy to respond to sexual violence. We are supportive of many of the points raised in the document and believe that recognising sexual violence as such a major issue for our society can lead to a more proactive response from government and more importantly an appropriate understanding from the wider community. We particularly welcome the public health approach to the prevention of sexual abuse and the recognition of the need to develop victim support services.

Re Question 1 NOTA accepts the broad definition as appropriate given the wide range of sexually abusive acts and the central importance of the victim's perception and victim impact.

Even less serious offences, including some non contact offences can have a major impact upon victims.

Response to Prevention Section

Q.2 What will be the most effective ways to increase understanding of the realities of sexual violence among the general public, including children?

Recent public attitudes surveys [unpublished] and public responses reported and to some extent encouraged within the media certainly highlight the persistence of myths and stereotypes held about sexual crime and offenders. These include myths about the nature and extent of sexual offending, stereotypes about offenders and victims, overestimation of risk of re offence, underestimation of the impact of prosecution, supervision and treatment.

Although there have been attempts to challenge these myths and stereotypes through publications [eg NSPCC, NISOSMC] and these have been widely circulated and well received there is a need for a consistent and ongoing public health approach to the realities of sexual violence. Models that have proved effective in educating the public about other major problems such as alcohol/drug abuse, domestic violence, drink driving could be adapted to the problem of sexual violence.

The tendency to abstract sexual abuse and sexual crime from other societal problems is at best unhelpful and at worst has been a factor contributing to the persistence of public ignorance and public fear. Labelling



individuals [usually inaccurately] as paedophiles has further exacerbated the situation and created the impression in the public mind that sexual violence is untreatable and unmanageable.

NOTA recognises that sexual abuse is a highly emotive and sensitive problem and any public health initiatives will have to be mindful of this.

The strategy should take the long view as myths and stereotypes are not going to disappear overnight.

How information is communicated to targeted groups and to the wider public is as important as the accuracy of the information. There should be opportunities for discussions, inputs from victims and survivors and if possible from treated offenders. Agencies responsible for risk assessment and risk management should be required to provide appropriate information about their roles and responsibilities. Organisations providing support and professional counselling services should provide input and guidance about the overall process.

Organisations and Multi agency structures that are currently well placed to lead or support a public health approach directed towards the adult population include.

The Health Promotion Agency
Stop it Now N. Ireland project managed by NSPCC.
Nexus Institute
Area Child Protection Committees or the new Safeguarding Boards.
Northern Ireland Sex offender Strategic Management Committee

For children the public health approach is equally appropriate and some of the above are also well placed to deliver here although other agencies in the statutory and voluntary sector should be partners in this approach. The Education and Youth Services will play the lead role.

Ensuring that the Personal Development Curriculum is given a statutory entitlement for children and young people in Northern Ireland is a possible method of introducing a more appropriate understanding of sexual violence.

Q.3 Which key target groups could contribute to supporting the process of increasing public understanding of the realities of sexual violence?

NOTA (NI) can see the benefits of a targeted approach to support the process of increasing the public's understanding of the realities of sexual violence. To some extent this is already underway through the work of the Stop it Now project and the Leisure watch project and there have been other initiatives in recent years, particularly through the work of the Volunteer Development Agency and Community sector trainers to provide up to date and accurate information about the nature and extent of sexual abuse, how offenders operate, how risk is assessed and managed. The wide dissemination of child protection training through statutory and voluntary organisations, sports organisations, church organisations and community groups has included specific information on sexual violence.

The above work needs to be developed and a consistent, evidenced based model used to deliver the key messages to targeted groups. While we cannot suggest an exhaustive list NOTA thinks that the following are essential.



Media

All Faith based organisations
Rural Community Network
Responsible Community groups
M.L.A'S and local councillors

Q.4 How best can children's attitudes to sexual violence be gathered?

Through universal services including Education and Youth Services and Health Services.

Through targeted services listed below.

Child Protection Services within the Trusts.

Organisations such as VOYPIC would have access to specific groups of children to consult, as would NICCY, Include Youth, NSPCC Barnardo's, and Youth Justice Agency.

Methods of gathering the information should be selected from best practice in other countries and should be appropriate to the age groups and the sensitivity of the information. Young people may themselves be the best medium for getting reliable feedback from other young people about their attitudes to sexual violence.

Q.5 What will be the most effective ways to (a) develop, deliver and evaluate initiatives aimed at encouraging the development of social attitudes that will support the prevention of sexual violence and

NOTA agrees that it is vital to develop educational programmes for children and young people and other public health initiatives, directed at adults and children that will encourage appropriate social attitudes that will challenge those attitudes that support sexual violence.

Some of the pro offending attitudes, beliefs and behaviours about children, women and men, about sex and about victims identified in offenders are also visible and audible within the general population, including the non offending population. These need to be openly identified and challenged through multi media tools and other

In a conference organised by NOTA (NI) in 2006 David Finkelhor, Director of the Crimes against Children Research Centre, Department of Sociology, University of New Hampshire spoke about the decline in sexual abuse in the USA.

Mr Finkelhor is an internationally respected figure since the 1980's and has written extensively on the subject of child sexual abuse.

He argued that the decline in sexual abuse was due to factors such as,

“The intensity of educational programs and moral debates may have certainly reinforced the norms, made it clear to young people in the course of development that this is wrong, may have even created more empathy with victims. In effect, we may have had an era where a whole population received a low dose of the kind of treatment therapists provide more intensively for offenders. This may have curtailed some offending even among those who didn't get caught.”



Again the strategy needs to take the long view and focus on how to make these educational programmes meaningful and appealing to young people.

NOTA support the proposal for systematic evaluations to take place to monitor changes over time in relation to public understanding and awareness of the realities of sexual violence and changes in social attitudes

(b) Which key influencers could contribute most effectively to the process of dispelling myths and changing social attitudes?

There are already key influencers of public opinion, notably the media, MLA'S and councillors, politicians, religious leaders, other high profile or respected individuals in the business, sporting or cultural community. All of these should be targeted within a public health strategy.

Specific roles that could have significant authority/public confidence include

Children's Commissioner
Directors of NSPCC/Barnardos.
Chief Constable
Lord Chief Justice
This is not an exhaustive list.

Q.6 Should Government give a clear message ahead of public opinion, to stem the tide of normalising sexual violence in society?

NOTA do not accept that sexual violence itself is being "normalised" in society though it is clear that some of the attitudes that support sexual abuse/violence are being normalised. For example the sexualisation of children. The reaction to sexual violence is generally one of horror and fear so the issues underneath it are pushed away and society is asked to focus on the "evil monsters" that committed the offences rather than the underlying causes.

The new Executive should give clear messages to dispel myths and to support changes in social attitudes once the public health strategy has been agreed and the key messages clarified. It is unlikely that the new Executive will be in a position to do this until they are more aware of the issues.

Q.7 What steps could the media take to support the process of increasing public understanding and awareness of the realities of sexual violence.

Probably it will be impossible to change the tabloid approach to sexual violence quickly! But the media could:

Increase awareness of how their stories/programmes influence beliefs and attitudes that support sexual violence.

Show more sensitivity to victim issues and to the families of offenders.

Educate themselves about the realities of sexual violence and how to combat it.



Produce more balanced and in depth programmes and as part of normal scheduling not in reaction to the latest high profile case.

Assist with the key messages delivery and advise re public health approach.

Q.8 What key messages should be promoted in relation to how healthy relationships and respect can help to prevent sexual violence?

Key messages to promote gender equality and how adult modelling of healthy and respectful relationships impact on the young.

Key messages about the age of consent/meaning of consent in all types of sexual relationships.

Key messages about normal sexual development and its connectedness to mental and emotional development.

Key messages about accurate sex education within a framework of values/self respect and respect for others.

Messages that challenge beliefs and attitudes to women, particularly rape supportive beliefs about women's dress, drinking habits.

Messages that challenge child abuse supportive beliefs about child precocity, physical development, and sexual knowledge.

Key messages to combat the sexualisation of childhood by the fashion/advertising/media and music industry.

Q.9 In addition to the education and training sector, what other cross sectoral groups and influencers have a role in delivering relevant messages?

New Safeguarding Boards

Domestic Violence Forums

Community safety partnerships

District Policing Partnerships

Parenting programme providers

Youth and Community providers

Sports organisations

Media

NOTA consider that peer educators could play a significant role in delivering relevant messages to young people.

Q.10 What more could Government do to promote the importance of healthy relationships in society?

There should be core funding for the public health strategy based on the need for a long-term programme to consolidate key messages and to adapt its strategies following evaluation. A 10-year period would be the best starting point.

The linking public funds to standards of practice auditing via the DHSSPS Accreditation scheme when it is launched will ensure organisations are working to an acceptable standard.

Core funding should be available for significant development of parenting programmes because poor modelling of adult relationships within families is a major factor in promoting a lack of respect within relationships.



The government should ensure that a consistent approach to sex education/ including values is promoted within all N. Ireland schools.

Q.11 What mechanisms could be used for the ongoing collection of data?

NOTA (NI) would support 2.22 Key proposal 1 proposing a comprehensive study into the prevalence of sexual violence in Northern Ireland. We believe that this data will be crucial in developing a regional picture about risk and vulnerability, and in addressing the gaps in information. It is essential there are cross-functional methods of recording reports of sexual abuse and tracking outcomes.

Q.12 In what ways can consistent messages and guidance be developed about specific risk factors and how best could the task of co-ordinating the multi-sectoral aspects of addressing known risk factors be taken forward?

This will be one of the first tasks of the organisations/ partnerships that will lead on and deliver the public health strategy.

There are models that can be applied to defining the risk factors and subsequently addressing them.

David Finkelhor's models/ 4 factor *Why* and 4 factor *How* sexual abuse occurs provides a useful and readily understood theoretical and practical framework.

The first 2 factors focus on the motivations and the pro offending thinking of the offender.

There has been substantial research in the last 20 years that has identified significant risk factors for offenders who commit sexual offences. These risk factors are currently targeted in prison and community behaviour change programmes and are assessed within current models of static and dynamic risk assessment.

What is required now where possible is to connect these known factors to a prevention strategy.

The second 2 factors focus on the opportunities that can be created or used by the offender to target or groom potential victims how other adults who might be potential protectors can be groomed or manipulated so that the victim, particularly the child victim is left exposed or more vulnerable to the offender.

There has also been substantial research into the above factors and this can be used within a prevention strategy.

Q.13 What practical measures could be developed to promote personal safety, generally, and to protect those most at risk, in particular?



Introducing key messages re personal protection via the Education curriculum, Parenting programmes, Health Promotion and Media.

The introduction of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act will prevent those who are barred from working with children or vulnerable adults. In addition to this the launch of the DHSSPS Accreditation system will increase the standards and procedures for those working directly with young people.

The link between alcohol binge drinking and female victimisation [particularly rape offences] could be tackled within a public health approach as recent Health Promotion material has demonstrated.

Q.14 (a) How can we stop sexual violence happening to children (b) what actions can be taken to better protect young people from sexual assault (c) what role can the media play in bringing this about?

Children should be provided with information through school and other youth settings, to raise their awareness about how they can keep safe.

The focus on stranger danger needs to be set in a broader context, as most children are not victimised by strangers but by adults or other children that are known to them.

CEOP's interactive materials to help children better understand how they can keep safe are examples of good practice.

However adults are responsible for the protection of children and parenting programmes should include advice and guidance about protective parenting. These programmes should also tackle the difficult issue of intra familial abuse and provide education about warning signs [for example the link with domestic violence] and how to seek help.

Media can play an important role as mentioned previously in providing accurate and balanced information and encouraging discussion about these difficult issues rather than sensationalising them. Media personalities could be very helpful in promoting age appropriate educational material such as CEOP, NSPCC or Barnardo's resource packs.

Q.15 What type of protection under the law should children and young people have?

NOTA (NI) is very supportive of the proposal aimed at identifying and supporting the introduction of appropriate professional development and skills programmes relevant to the treatment of victims and witnesses in sexual offence cases within the criminal justice system. The introduction of PSNI/SW training on sexual exploitation would increase the awareness of the issue among those in direct contact with children.

Q.16 how do we ensure that the legal system is better able to provide children with protection and justice when they have experienced sexual assault?



The NSPCC Young Witness programme is designed to support young people involved in the court process. The time delay has been identified as a significant issue with the NI Criminal Justice Inspection (2006) finding the problem to be worse here than in England and Wales. Young people should not have to wait 2 years for their case to come to trial. Long delays can often be viewed as a deliberate stalling strategy used by defence barristers in order to increase the likelihood of the victim withdrawing from the process and needs to be prevented.

Q.17 What additional actions are required to protect sexually active young people from abuse and exploitation?

NOTA (NI) would agree that it is important for action and decisions to be on a case-by-case basis to ensure the protection is available to vulnerable young people.

Q.18 How can awareness is raised among children and young people about sexual exploitation?

Awareness can be raised with children and young people about the risks of sexual exploitation by training peer educators and through similar programmes to that for anti-bullying.

Barnardo's educational magazines have been developed to inform the youth audience.

Q.19 What are the key messages to be developed in relation to early intervention with (a) adult perpetrators and potential perpetrators (b) with young people who display sexually harmful behaviour?

The ethos of the public health approach [Stop It Now project is a clear example] is to encourage perpetrators or potential perpetrators or their concerned family members to come forward to disclose concerns or behaviours and seek help.

There is still a clear gap in services for non-convicted adults or young people who display sexual harmful behaviour. There is little incentive in the current climate of fear and labelling for individuals to come forward to disclose offences or potential to offend or for parents of children who are displaying sexually harmful behaviour to seek help or advice. However the Stop it Now experience both here and in UK has demonstrated that a pro-active response through a help line has been effective.

Key messages to be developed and communicated to the public include:

Highlighting that sexual offending is not an illness but behaviour and that behaviour can be controlled or managed.

That disclosure by self or others is the first and most important step towards stopping the behaviour and beginning the control.



That control and management involves the offender taking responsibility for the behaviour and the harm it has caused.

That family members of the offender need education and support so that they can provide assistance with future monitoring and support the offender in the change process.

Early intervention, particularly with adolescents is highly effective.

Treated offenders are up to three times less likely to sexually re offend compared to untreated offenders.

That treatment services are available for adolescents and adults.

Response to Protection and Justice

(1) NOTA welcome the proposals to modernize the law on sexual offences in Northern Ireland.

(2) We welcome the emphasis on victims within the proposals.

Q20 How can the policy and practices of the different criminal justice agencies be improved when addressing the needs of victims of sexual violence?

Harmonisation of standards within the agencies focusing on victims of sexual violence

Each of the key criminal justice agencies should have a clear value base, strategy, policies and procedures to address the needs of all victims of crime, including victims of sexual violence.

The particular needs of this group should be highlighted within these.

The interests of victims should be central to the operations of all the criminal justice agencies from investigation of crime, to prosecution, to sentencing, to management of offenders in prison and in the community.

Victim Information schemes should be expanded and their remit extended towards a more restorative approach.

The concept of Public Protection Teams is welcomed as a natural extension of the current MASRAM arrangements. The structures of these units need to retain close local links, particularly in rural areas and they need to be responsive to victims' issues.

Q21 what areas should the criminal justice system prioritise when addressing cases of sexual violence?

Keeping up to date with evidenced based best practice in other countries.

Specialist Sexual assault referral centres that can be accessed by victims throughout the region.

Early interventions with those children and adolescents who come within criminal justice.



Ongoing funding and support for those organisations providing treatment services for children and adolescents.

Consideration of the application of restorative justice models to address sexual violence.

Reduction in the long delay between disclosure/reporting /investigation of sexual crimes and decision about adjudication and prosecution.

Reduction in the long delay between prosecution and sentencing.

High-risk cases and serious assault cases should be prioritised within the above changes.

Bail information scheme to ensure public safety.

End to the plea bargaining system that allows some cases to be dealt with without pre sentence reports and others to receive suspended prison sentences.

Courts should be provided with a full multi agency risk assessment prior to sentencing.

We believe the criminal justice system should require all medium and high-risk offenders convicted of sexual offences to address their behaviour both in prison and in the community.

Offenders who will be subject to public protection sentencing should not be released until they have demonstrated progress in treatment.

Behaviour change programmes [group and one to one] should be available throughout the region both in custody and the community for all adult offenders.

These programmes should also exist for unadjudicated individuals who are willing to address their behaviour.

Appropriate accommodation of offenders at the bail or post release stage.

Q22 What types of improvements are required in the statistical information available within the criminal justice system?

This needs to be made consistent within all organizations in the criminal justice system. Statistics also need to be more up to date.

We believe it is important to separate out statistical information between adults and children.

Q23 What might be included in the terms of reference for an inspection by the criminal justice inspectorate of the handling of cases involving sexual violence?



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- Victim information, care and support throughout the process
- Child Protection issues addressed throughout the process
- The quality of the investigative process re evidence gathering, interviewing of victims and suspects
- Decision making process re bail
- Decision making process re prosecution
- The sentencing of offenders
- Risk Assessment models and their application.
- The robustness of risk management plans in prison and in the community.
- The availability and effectiveness of programmes
- Supported accommodation and its effectiveness
- The supervision process and its effectiveness.

This is not an exhaustive list!

Proposals – part 4 – Support

We warmly welcome the inclusion of adult survivors in the responsibilities of Health & Social Services Trusts (Heather report 1999).

We hold the view that a global information directory should exist which will provide information for victims/survivors of sexual violence. This should be available at public facilities.

We recommend that the criminal compensation agency review their policy on compensation for victims of sexual violence.

Victim Information and support schemes within criminal justice should be further developed and where possible restorative model to be applied.

It is important that consistent support measures be in place for all staff working with victims and offenders. It would be helpful if these support structures were available on a multi agency as well as a single agency basis.

Q24 What will be the most effective way to identify necessary support services and models for resourcing and delivering them?

Victim support and counselling organisations and Survivor groups are in the best place to identify the required support services.

Children's Services planning groups have also identified specific gaps in support services for family members of victims and offenders.



There is also evidence from best practice in UK, Europe and other countries that we can learn from in relation to models of support

Government giving out a clear message that victims' interest and needs are central and a priority should lead resourcing.

Q25 What key services would contribute most to victim/ survivor care and support?

Along with the proposed services in the consultation document we would welcome availability of services that can offer support at the "golden hour". It is important to provide support/counselling services within a short period of time rather than placing people on a waiting list.

During the criminal justice process would be very useful to have one person who is consistent with the contact with the victim.

Q26 is there a need to develop different services for different cohorts of victims/survivors, for example, due to gender, age or sexual orientation?

There are already in place different services for adult victims and child /adolescent victims and it would be possible to build on these services towards achieving a consistency throughout the region in terms of availability, timeliness and quality of service.

Given that victims are likely to need services at continuing points during their life it would be helpful if there were a more integrated model/overarching structure that could plan, monitor and evaluate service provision for victims of sexual violence throughout the region.

Q27 How can services provided by HSS Trusts and the PSNI be better co-ordinated with those services provided by voluntary sector organizations to achieve the best outcomes for victims/survivors?

Joint planning of services by a multi agency structure.

Joint protocol training to be expanded to include victim support organisations.

Use of joint training and secondment opportunities.

Q28 Which organizations could benefit victims/survivors by having clear protocols for joint working?

All statutory and voluntary organizations involved in the criminal justice system and the social care/child protection system, child and adult mental health services and the victim support organisations.

Q29 What is the advantages of developing a uniform model of assessment (to complement the DHSSPS model) for assessing the risks of young people who present with sexually harmful behaviour?



It would be a welcome step forward to have a uniform assessment model for young people. Early assessment and intervention with young people is the most effective way to make an impact on the risk of re offence. At present young people who present with sexually harmful behaviours are usually diverted from the criminal justice system. This may be appropriate particularly if they are able and willing to engage in treatment but it is important that risk factors are assessed and a risk management plan is put in place particularly for higher risk offenders.

The A.I.M model [Assessment, intervention and management] is already in use by a number of specialist projects in N. Ireland and NOTA would support the adoption of this model.

Q30 Taking account of existing help-line facilities already in place, is a 24hr sexual violence regional help-line needed in Northern Ireland?

There may be a case for a specialist 24-hour local help line and NOTA would suggest that this is piloted for a reasonable period.

Q31 What will be the most effective ways of increasing awareness about services that are available?

A common directory that is available at all public places, schools, further education colleges, universities etc.

Frequent Advertising of services through multi media approach.

Q32 To which services should regional standards apply and how should standards be monitored?

Any organization providing a service to victims should be required to comply with regionally agreed standards. This should be monitored by the victims commissioner /children's commissioner in conjunction with the social work/criminal justice inspectorate.

Q33 What (a) skills and training and (b) support, do people working directly with victims/ survivors of sexual violence need?

There are a variety of levels of skills and training necessary for people involved in this area.

People providing individual or group counselling services to victims and survivors should be highly trained and appropriately remunerated.

Others who offer support or who use their own victim experiences to help victims may not require a high level of training but they have a valuable role to play and should be offered appropriate training.

Listening and communicating skills are paramount.



Specialist knowledge of appropriate counselling techniques and models of intervention.

A sound knowledge base about the short and long-term impacts of sexual abuse on children and adults.

A sound knowledge base about the nature and extent of sexual abuse, how offenders operate, risk factors, the legislation, criminal justice process and its impact on victims.

Promoting a positive view of the benefits of treatment and the possibility of recovery

Being clear about who is responsible for sexual assault and that in all circumstances the victim is not to be blamed.

Workers providing counselling services need to have professional supervision re the quality of their work.

All those providing services to victims should be able to access personal support re the personal impact of the work.

Q34 How best could a training strategy feed into existing multi-disciplinary training plans in statutory and voluntary sector agencies?

Some joint training could be provided within the current multi agency arrangements within child protection and criminal justice.

Current multi agency training needs to focus more on victim and survivor issues

Q35 Should training about the nature, incidence, impact and response to sexual violence are incorporated into pre-qualification training for relevant health professionals?

Certainly for all health professionals but also for all criminal justice professionals.

NOTA has welcomed this opportunity to respond to the consultation document and we are confident that the views expressed here will be echoed by many other organisations.

We are particularly supportive of the development of a public health approach to the problem of sexual violence because it underlines the openness necessary to identify the issues and deal with them in a rational and more positive way. We do not underestimate the challenges in pursuing this direction both for government, agencies and the community.