



Northern  
Ireland  
Office



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

An Roinn  
**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta  
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

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***“HIDDEN CRIMES***

***SECRET PAIN”***

**A CONSULTATION PAPER ON A PROPOSED REGIONAL  
STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN  
NORTHERN IRELAND**

**JANUARY 2007**

**CONSULTATION RESPONSE DOCUMENT**

## CONSULTATION RESPONSE QUESTIONNAIRE

You can respond to the consultation document by e-mail, letter or fax.

Responses should be sent to:

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Written: Sexual Violence Unit  
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Further copies of the consultation paper are available by telephoning 028 9052 0271 or text phoning 028 90527668 or via the internet at: [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk) or [www.nio.gov.uk](http://www.nio.gov.uk)

Responses must be received no later than **27 April 2007**

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I am responding: as an individual  on behalf of an organisation

(please tick a box)

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## **PART 1 - INTRODUCTION:**

***The regional strategy will use the term sexual violence, which is defined as follows:***

*'Any behaviour perceived to be of a sexual nature which is unwanted or takes place without consent'.*

***Q.1 Is this definition of sexual violence acceptable?***

***Response:*** YES, for the purposes of a Regional Strategy, common language to be used for the wider public i.e. lay person's terms.

## **PART 2 - PREVENTION:**

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

***Response:*** Police awareness and improved clinical techniques have done much to bring this issue to the fore but there is a public backlash of disbelief (often seen in criminal trials) including accusations of hysteria and witch hunting. A co-ordinated campaign, as has been conducted in relation to Domestic Violence and drink driving, would be beneficial.

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

**Response:** Communities have a genuine fear for their children and demonstrating those fears is one way to voice it. The press and politicians will represent those fears and add their own motivations for taking up the 'cause'.

Therefore better use of the media and the voice of local politicians should be availed of.

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

**Response:** Via a Questionnaire containing meaningful and unambiguous questions to a cross sectional number of students and after the exact information needs has been decided on.

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

**Response:** Any initiatives aimed at changing/developing social attitudes need to be delivered predominantly at local level by local community members assisted of course by the various statutory and voluntary bodies as requested.

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

**Response:** YES, cultural expectations are still supported by patriarchal norms that are still to be found in institutions and language used to-day. Male (more commonly/the offender) expectations of women and children, often perceived as property, are backed up by attitudinal verbal and actual violence in all areas of life.

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

***Response:*** The media have a tendency to concentrate on the more sensational cases which provide the most opportunity to titillate or to feed public outrage. Another discovery of recent years by the media is that of the word 'paedophile'.

Engaging with local press editors to agree some form of guidelines and to encourage better understanding of the issues would benefit the more mature reporting of stories and associated issues.

Consideration should also be given to discussions with, or indeed formal reporting to, the Press Complaints Commission.

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

***Response:*** Particularly in relation to children and vulnerable adults, the current focus is to prevent abuse by saying 'No'. However this must be incorporated into other important messages and skills training. Given a child's or vulnerable person's respect for authoritative figures and the ease and power they can be overpowered and intimidated it must be expected that most are unable to say 'No'. Therefore the emphasis should be on encouraging a victim to tell someone if abuse happens. Also it is important to alert children and others to the kinds of threats they might receive in order to prevent them revealing the abuse.

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

**Response:** Community group leaders, local politicians, media.

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

**Response:** There is a real need for funding and resources to be directed towards effective treatment programmes for potential young abusers/risky children and the early identification of same. Also Counselling Centres or similar for those adult individuals who recognise they may have problems relating to sexually offending and want help before it occurs. This would build on the work of 'STOP-IT-NOW' and also promote the importance of healthy relationships.

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

**Response:**

- Police/NIO stats re reports and conviction rates.
- Data recorded by any subsequent Sexual Assault Referral Centre
- Outcomes of training programmes
- Effectiveness or outcomes of treatment programmes
- Survey/questionnaires - user satisfaction
- Complaints recorded by the various agencies

**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?**

**Response:** Trends and specific risk factors may be identified following the establishment of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre and the subsequent data that will be collated. Co-ordinating this would be best placed to sit with the appointed manager of this centre.

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

**Response:** The development and expansion of the Derwent Initiative/Leisurewatch to include all Council Leisure Services and other facilities such as shopping malls.

**Q14** *(a)How can we stop sexual violence happening to children (b) what actions can be taken to better protect young people from sexual assault and (c)what role can the media play in bringing this about?*

**Response:** Young child and disabled children are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Therefore better societal controls over child care and other relevant facilities are essential. A more comprehensive training package should be provided to pre-school and day care centre administrators and other professionals who have ongoing contact with children and their families, eg dentists, teachers.

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

***Response:*** Consideration for a child development specialist to monitor court and general C3 procedures.

Consideration for child interpreters to formulate and ask questions for Solicitors on both sides.

The right to obtain treatment even if the abuse was short lived or denied.

***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?***

***Response:*** Legislative and procedural changes to make testifying easier on children over and above current practices and if possible, particularly with young children, no personal interaction at all to allow the presentation of a wider variety of evidence and testimony that might corroborate children's complaints and increased advocacy for the child witness. The burden of proof should be taken away from complaints of children. The fact finding and investigatory skills of police, doctors, clinical personnel evaluating child victims and alleged offenders must be highly developed and made more use of by the courts. Consideration should also be given to the use of 'Intermediaries' as used by the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales.

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

***Response:*** A co-ordinated response by police, HSS staff and, if applicable, medical/psychiatric services, in relation to 'looked after' children in residential units who are at risk. Guidance to be issued.

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

***Response:*** Pamphlets, articles in popular media, films and workshops appropriate for education sector and youth organisations. Also via IT systems, popular events, personalities. Text messaging systems.

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

**Response:** Although the emphasis falls on adults, the extent of sexual offending by children and young people has long been recognised with some estimates suggesting it could account for up to a third of all sexual offending. Some recent high profile cases in Northern Ireland of adults who have offended have highlighted they have displayed some form of risky behaviour as a child to one or more agencies.

Information needs to be provided to parents/carers as to what constitutes risky or inappropriate behaviour and a practical pathway to take with regard to support/intervention.

Training for the appropriate voluntary agencies (eg youth groups and statutory bodies including education in identifying early indicators.

For children - developing appropriate relationships with peers.

### **PART 3 - PROTECTION AND JUSTICE**

**Q.20** *How can the policy and practices of the different criminal justice agencies be improved when addressing the needs of victims of sexual violence?*

**Response:** See Q16 and Q21

**Q.21 What areas should the criminal justice system prioritise when addressing cases of sexual violence ?**

***Response:***

Complaints against young abusers/risky children. A better co-ordinated response by all CJ agencies is required and an evaluation as to the best method of disposal for the young person involved.

Time delays particularly in cases involving child victims and vulnerable persons.

Treatment of victim in court - See Q16.

**Q.22 What types of improvements are required in the statistical information available within the criminal justice system?**

***Response:*** At present there is no statistical information gathered regarding reported cases of abuse in each of the Section 75 categories. This is important in identifying which areas are more vulnerable to abuse and directing actions and resources accordingly.

**Q.23** *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?*

**Response:** Determining a measurement for 'Victim Satisfaction' within the whole Criminal Justice System. This needs to include the quality of service provided by the Public Prosecution Service from the moment they receive a file from the police until the matter is finally decided, ie by way of Direction of 'No Prosecution' or court hearing etc. Victims groups have voiced concerns around these issues in recent years i.e. that victims are not being treated well at this stage of the process.

## **PART 4 – SUPPORT**

**Q.24** *What will be the most effective way to identify necessary support services and models for resourcing and delivering them?*

**Response:** At point of referral/entry to any of the services. UNOCINNI should assist in this process.

**Q.25** *What key services would contribute most to victim/survivor care and support?*

**Response:**

NSPCC  
Child Care Centre  
Young Peoples Centre  
Nexus  
Childline  
Child Exploitation & On-Line Protection Centre (CEOP)  
Brook Advisory Centre  
Guardian Ad Litem Agency  
NICCY  
Samaritans  
Women's Aid  
Victim Support Northern Ireland  
Youthline Northern Ireland  
Housing Executive  
Various HSS Boards and Trusts

**Q.26** *Is there a need to develop different services for different cohorts of victim/survivors, for example, due to gender, age or sexual orientation?*

**Response:** There could be better co-ordination of services.

There is an assumption (lack of stats) that better provision could be made for those from an ethnic background.

**Q.27** *How can services provided by HSS Trusts and the PSNI be better co-ordinated with those services provided by voluntary sector organisations to achieve the best outcomes for victims/survivors?*

**Response:** The provision of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre.

**Q.28** *Which organisations could benefit victims/survivors by having clear protocols for joint working?*

**Response:** Judges, doctors, solicitors, social workers, nurses, police, teachers, psychologists and all child care personnel need to know what they can expect from other professionals with whom they are involved in order to evaluate whether a victim's needs are being met in terms of diagnosis, placement, protection etc.

A second level down are those organisations who come into contact with victims who need to know

1. how to recognise the problem
2. what they are required by law to report
3. how to report
4. what services to request
5. how to refer to a trained therapist or agency

**Q.29** *What are 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?*

**Response:** The advantage would be a uniform response by any of the relevant agencies to whom the young person first comes to the attention of. This would also assist in the 'tracking' of this young person through any subsequent criminal proceedings and treatment programmes, ensuring the young person's needs are subsequently met.

**Q.30** *Taking account of existing help-line facilities already in place, is a 24 hr sexual violence regional help-line needed in Northern Ireland?*

**Response:** Yes, to compliment the services of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre, once established.

**Q.31** *What will be the most effective ways of increasing awareness about services that are available?*

**Response:** A directory of services would be beneficial that could be accessed via a range of measures, eg corresponding websites, entry to services etc.

**Q.32** *To which services should regional standards apply and how should standards be monitored?*

**Response:** All Criminal Justice agencies and other statutory bodies involved with victims and/or offenders.

Students may be monitored by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate and the Safeguarding Board.

**Q.33** *What (a) skills and training and (b) support, do people working directly with victims/survivors of sexual violence need?*

**Response:** In the case of children, specialised training in child development as a pre-requisite to working in these positions.

**Q.34** *How best could a Training Strategy feed into existing multi-disciplinary training plans in statutory and voluntary sector agencies?*

**Response:** For a training strategy to purposely feed into existing multi-disciplinary training plans there needs to be research undertaken of the effectiveness of current programmes focusing on such areas as the efficiency of particular treatments, number of successful prosecutions etc.

**Q.35** *Should training about the nature, incidence, impact and response to sexual violence be incorporated into pre-qualification training for relevant health professionals?*

**Response:** Yes, perhaps leading to certification. Police Officers, Family Court Judges and Solicitors would also benefit from this.

## **PART 5 - EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

**Q.36** *Are the proposals in this document likely to have an adverse impact on equality of opportunity or on good relations with regard to the Section 75 categories of people described above? Please give details of any qualitative or quantitative evidence. If yes, please state how these adverse impacts could be reduced or alleviated in the proposals.*

**Response:** No

***Q.37 If you feel the adverse impacts cannot be alleviated within the current proposed actions, please suggest alternative actions that could be considered to reduce the adverse impact.***

***Response:***

***Q.38 Have the needs of the Section 75 categories of people been fully addressed in the proposals? If not, please provide details.***

***Response:*** Yes

***Additional Comments (please refer to Questions if continuation from above)***

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMENTS**

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January 2007

Ref: 222/2006

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