



Northern
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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:

e-mail: sexualviolenceunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk

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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 or www.nio.gov.uk

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

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: We would suggest the definition is widened to include the word 'understanding' i.e. "without consent or understanding."

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: Through publicity material, i.e. T.V, internet, radio and press in order to raise awareness. This will be required in various forms e.g. age appropriately for children and young people and should also take cognizance of the various cultural groups living within our society. The development of healthy relationships and mutual respect should also be promoted. The revised school curriculum should assist with helping children/young people make informed choices and appropriate decisions. This is to be encouraged. Overall a health promotion type approach is required.

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

Response: NIO, PSNI, ELBs, HSS Boards, HSC Trusts, NICTs, PPS, DHSSPS and DEL, plus voluntary and private agencies e.g. NSPCC and Barnardos. However all agencies and businesses have a responsibility in terms of protecting workers/client/service users. The promotion of an initiative similar to the Domestic Violence Workplace Good Practice Guide should be encouraged.

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

Response: Via school, internet, mobile phone surveys and magazine articles and also through community groups e.g. youth clubs, VOYPIC Include Youth.

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: This issue needs to be managed and co-ordinated regionally and much may be learned from efforts to tackle domestic violence and the media campaigns which have resulted from this. The impact of sexual violence on victims and their families needs to be communicated widely. It is imperative that all those involved in the various aspects of the legal profession and those working in related fields, including Education, need to work collaboratively to ensure 'joined up' working arrangements. Bearing in mind the influence of television, integration into primetime viewing of programmes and features aimed at increasing awareness of sexual violence and its consequences would be of benefit. The influence of alcohol and drugs must also be underscored, especially in light of information which suggests the majority of those making a complaint are under the influence of alcohol.

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

Response: Yes. It is essential that a clear sense of leadership is demonstrated and a clear message given that sexual violence will not be tolerated at any level.

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: Targeted campaigns highlighting the impact on victims/survivors and their families are necessary to increase awareness and the understanding of the damaging effects of sexual violence. The consequences for perpetrators i.e. prosecution and imprisonment, and their families must also be highlighted within the wider public domain. In order to encourage victims/survivors to report sexual violence, support services must also be available and victims and perpetrators made aware of how to access these. Factors such as alcohol and drugs which influence someone's capacity to inform their actions should also be highlighted.

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

Response: That healthy relationships built on mutual respect, equality, partnership/agreement, consent etc. needs to be promoted together with the right to self determination. The positive benefits of such relationships for the individual, the family and society need to be communicated.

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

Response: NIO, PSNI, HSS Boards, HSC Trusts, NICTs, PPS, DHSSPS, the Church/fairh groups and the media, plus voluntary and private agencies e.g. NSPCC and Barnardos. However, all agencies and businesses have a responsibility in terms of protecting workers/clients/service users. The promotion of an initiative similar to the Domestic Violence Workplace Good Practice Guide should be encouraged. Reducing sexual violence must be dealt with at a systemic level across the societal spectrum.

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

Response: The scope and aim of the consultation document is comprehensive and potentially far reaching. However, in order to maximise the potential within it, it is essential that additional and adequate resources accompany it.

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

Response: Firstly, there needs to be a commitment from all relevant agencies to collect data, using an agreed definition and then a referral/response system put in place to collate information. The capacity to either link systems or use centralised database to collate regional information and analyse this should be considered. There should be a clear purpose i.e. the development of services, to the gathering of information.

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: Given the complexities inherent in addressing sexual violence and the varying social/cultural attitudes and responses to this, a regional body similar to that established in relation to domestic violence is required. At a local level, sufficient resources need to be made available to agencies to enable joint working and a common/consistent response to sexual violence.

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

Response: The complexities of sexual violence and all its forms needs to be highlighted, together with awareness raising in respect of high risk groups such as those with a learning disability and those who have previously been abused etc. People must be made aware of what sexual violence is, how they can identify this, who is mostly likely to be at risk, the impact of sexual violence and how and where to contact if they are concerned for someone or have been a victim. The use of the arts as a medium for conveying information should be considered.

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: The cessation of sexual violence is arguably impossible; however, efforts must be made to reduce the risk of this occurring by public awareness raising, the promotion of the rights of the child and adequate support services. Given the power of television to influence all aspects of life, this should be harnessed to protect individuals and promote an attitude of zero tolerance in terms of sexual violence. Education programmes aimed at promoting healthy relationships and personal safety are vital.

Greater control of the internet and mobile technology is also desirable, as well as personal development programmes for children and young people which promote healthy relationships and increase self esteem.

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

Response: Renewed public confidence is essential. Sexual violence in respect of children/young people must be clearly treated as a significant crime. Children and young people need to be protected from further victimization and abuse post disclosure. This requires a clear and co-ordinated response by PSNI/Care Units, medical and social services in the initial stages followed by appropriate therapeutic input and minimum delay in terms of prosecution. Courts need to be 'child friendly' to enable children to testify and for those found guilty, adequate sentencing is required.

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: Courts must be 'child friendly' and the investigation swift to ensure no delay. The rights of the child must be upheld via appropriate sentencing, with perpetrators/society receiving a clear message that sexual violence against children is illegal and will be stringently punished.

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

Response: Young people require knowledge and information. They need to be empowered to say NO, they need to understand the concept of abuse and exploitation and how to respond. A wider health promotion type approach via the media may be a key means of communicating with this group. Young people need clear messages about the consequences of consensual and non-consensual sexual activity and need to be empowered to think independently. Young people also need to be aware of how their decision making and thinking are impaired when they use alcohol or drugs.

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

Response: The media and the power of 'the celebrity', personal development programmes within schools and colleges and the internet are potentially powerful tools.

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: Prevention of a progression of negative and damaging behaviours, the prevention of harm. However robust assessment is essential to ensure perpetrators/potential perpetrators are not 'labelled' in error.

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: There is a need for greater joined up working and consistency in terms of policy and practice and greater opportunities for joint training. Also, a mechanism at a strategic level to oversee policy and practice and to promote the development of regional consistency would be beneficial.

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

Response: Children and young people should be a priority to guard against undue delay. However, in addition to prosecution, adequate therapeutic support services need to be developed.

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

Response: A clear priority is required in terms of collecting this data with appropriate linkages to other systems. Data re victim and perpetrator profiles is required, reporting data, information re outcome of investigations and prosecutions, support services, is necessary to begin to clarify the extent of sexual violence and those at risk of abuse and those likely to offend.

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:

1. Age, gender and type of offence.
2. Date of incident.
3. Date and outcome of investigation.
4. If no prosecution, why.
5. Support services available.
6. Initial point of contact re reporting of incident.
7. Standards of practice.
8. Prosecution process.
9. User input and feedback.
10. Quality of assessments.

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: The identification of support services requires to be undertaken in conjunction with agencies already experienced in working with victims/survivors/perpetrators of sexual violence, those who have been assaulted and those who have offended. This will enable services to be mapped and unmet need identified. Research would be beneficial in terms of assessing what works and establishing models of best practice and service delivery.

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

Response: This will in part be determined by the response to Q24 and the response to the needs of victims. However, it is also essential that the law is 'Fit for Purpose' and victims are able to see a positive link between reporting incidents, the legal response to this and adequate legal redress in terms of perpetrators.

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: While there is the potential to duplicate some services by the differentiation of services, from a victim/survivor perspective this may be the most helpful way forward. Victims may be more prepared to engage with services that specialise/have experience of their specific cultural or gender needs. However, it is vital that services are equitable across the spectrum to avoid discrimination.

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: A regional mechanism similar to that in existence for Domestic Violence would be advantageous; with local systems established to develop/progress local service co-operation. The development of SARCs would assist in this process.

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

Response: PSNI, Trusts and Boards, NIHE, DSD, Medical/Nursing personnel, FME's, Churches/faith groups and Victim Support.

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: This would provide regional consistency in terms of response and the priority to respond. It is also imperative that assessments are holistic and comprehensive and 'fit for purpose'.

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: Clear statistical data is required to inform this response. It may be that additional resources, made available to existing agencies would be sufficient.

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

Response: Advertising leaflets placed in strategic places i.e. Doctors, Dentists, advice centres etc. and media campaigns.

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

Response: It may be more useful to ensure relevant agencies have general standards in terms of responding to cases involving sexual violence as opposed to singling out this area of work. These standards could in turn be monitored internally and independently.

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

Response: A range of specialist counselling and therapeutic skills are required and at different levels. These range from awareness of what sexual violence is, to victim empathy and high level intervention skills. Training must be kept up to date and intervention based on "Best Practice" systems for supervision and debriefing are also required.

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

Response: For many such staff this can be undertaken by extending and widening the existing framework on a unidisciplinary basis. However, multidisciplinary training is small scale and localized. Mechanisms would need to be established to develop and adequately resource this. Again, cognisance should be taken of feedback in respect of the proposed regional Domestic Violence Training Strategy.

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. Given pressures on staff and the reality that many staff, once qualified are required to respond to a wide range of needs, this is imperative. In addition, this should be built on as part of required professional training.

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: Adequate resourcing and high level commitment is required.

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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