



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:

e-mail: sexualviolenceunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk

Written: Sexual Violence Unit
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
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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: Yes

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: In our view the most effective approach will be to build upon existing structures in respect of:-
health, social services and public safety,
education, and
the wider criminal justice and support systems.

Stakeholders' efforts must be focused in a way which can capture the potential synergies of mutli-agency partnership working while adopting a framework of accountability/corporate governance which is a capable of holding all strategic partners to account for 'delivery' of their respective commitments/undertakings.

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

Response: Tried and tested consultative processes, run under the auspices of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act should identify key target groups in a robust and defensible manner.

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

Response: Given the particular sensitivities associated with this task, coupled to the imperative of not skewing or sensitising the survey sample to matters of which they were previously unaware, we have no particular insights to offer in what is a very difficult area to conduct research.

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: See Q2.

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

Response: A key task of government (whether devolved or national) is to sensitise public opinion to important emergent issues and trends - no less significant in this area than in matters of fiscal policy, foreign affairs etc.

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: This is not a matter in which the media (alone) should shape the agenda, and much of what can and should be achieved could be under the aegis of a formal and dedicated communications strategy developed under the partnership approach advocated in response to Q2.

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

Response: It is well recognised that government and indeed many individuals in public office have contributed to the blurring sexual boundaries in a variety of areas.

While we have not reached a settled view in this matter, government should be aware that some colleagues have advocated that key messages should be fidelity in marriage & abstinence; while others suggest that informed choices in the context of healthy relationships is the way forward.

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

Response: Religious institutions should be consulted and (in the context of primary and secondary education) other groups should not be involved without the consent of parents & Governors of schools.

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

Response: See Q8. There are also clear linkages with regard to excessive consumption of alcohol and extension of licensing hours, both of which should be incorporated in the formulation of the wider regional strategy on sexual violence.

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

Response: We have an open mind on data collection and would not wish to unduly constrain the research in this area.

Our one proviso would be that any research should not sensitise young children to matters on which they would otherwise be unsighted and that research involving children and other vulnerable individuals would be designed and conducted with the safety of those individuals as a paramount consideration.

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: Co-ordinated media and educational campaigns (cf Q2 and Q7), coupled to appropriate Criminal Justice responses and interventions will achieve the optimal results.

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

Response: We await the outcome of the promised research designed to establish the extent of victimisation before turning our minds to identification of the potential solution(s).

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: See Q13

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

Response: See Q13.

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: Much has already been done in this area, and there are many promising initiatives which will yet bear fruit.

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

Response: See Q8 - further research is required to establish what 'works best' in terms of educating and advising young people of the attendant risks of being sexually active at a young age.

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

Response: See Q17

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: While each case has naturally to be judged on its merits, the message that gross breaches of trust will almost inevitably result in the full weight of the law being brought to bear, including a substantial period of imprisonment, must be clearly and unequivocally communicated.

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: As far as the 'enforcement' aspect of police-work is concerned, there should be a provision for police supervising Category 2 or 3 sex offenders to enter premises controlled by high risk sex offenders and to inspect any computers or communication devices therein. Government will be aware that at the moment police can be kept on the front doorstep leading to inevitable loss of evidence and, potentially, reoffending.

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

Response: These should be identified by further research.

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

Response: Relevance, timeliness and accuracy, as ever, should be the bedrock of such information. 'Robust 'dip-sampling'', coupled to agreed measures to remedy identified deficiencies should be a bench-mark of the CJ system.

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: None identified

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: Further research is required.

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

Response: Further research is required

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: This is self-evident and all victims should be regarded and treated as individuals, with differing needs, wants and demands. We are unattracted to the homogeneity which is often (mis)applied when discussing the victims.

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: See Q2

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

Response: Further research required to ensure that all appropriate organisations are identified.

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: Advantages are well-known and articulated in the research which it is not proposed to rehearse at this juncture.

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: We remain to be convinced of the efficacy of this suggestion.

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

Response: See Q 2 and Q7

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

Response: Standards should apply 'across the board'.

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

Response: To be identified by strategic partners. All such individuals should also be vetted to a common and appropriate standard.

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

Response: See Q2

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: Self-evidently 'yes'.

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 adverse impacts have been identified on our reading of the proposals

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: N/A

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

Response: See Q 36

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

The need for a regional strategy for Northern Ireland is clear - the statistics make uncomfortable reading and appropriate action is therefore welcome. In particular we welcome the proposals for changes to sentencing - contained at paragraph 3.55 of the consultative document.

However, despite the pressure from some sections of society to liberalise public and indeed private attitudes in this field, the adoption of arguably glib terminology 'workers in the sex industry' (1.23 and elsewhere) is objectionable to many - in that it is contended that it glosses over the social consequences, including increased risk of victimisation, for those involved.

It also tends to 'legitimise' those who seek to consume the products of that 'industry'; and hides the fact that many such 'workers' may not be voluntarily acting as such.

We therefore pose the question whether the adoption and use of this vocabulary facilitates the enforcement of laws designed to protect vulnerable individuals from exploitation and harm, and would ask that future consultation and work in this area reflects such concerns.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMENTS

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