



A response to

Northern Ireland Policing Board

Policing Plan Consultation 2020-25

2020

Policing Board Northern Ireland

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Who We Are

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic and sexual violence and providing services for women and children. Women's Aid exists to challenge attitudes and beliefs which perpetuate domestic violence. We work to promote healthy, non-abusive relationships.

Our vision is the elimination of domestic and sexual violence

What We Do

Women's Aid supports all women and children affected by domestic violence. We work to help women and children be safe, to break free from the cycle of violence, and to rebuild their lives. Women's Aid has 9 local groups and one regional umbrella body covering the whole of Northern Ireland, and our wraparound services are available across Northern Ireland. Our core work includes:

- Refuge accommodation for women and their children suffering domestic violence.
- Support services to enable women affected by domestic and/or sexual violence to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children.
- Support services for children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.
- Preventative education programmes in schools and other settings.
- Educating and raising awareness among the public, media, police, courts, social services and other agencies of the impact of domestic and sexual violence.
- Advising and supporting other agencies in responding to domestic & sexual violence.
- Working in partnership with other agencies to ensure a joined-up response to domestic and sexual violence.

Throughout this response, the term "Women's Aid" refers to the overall Women's Aid movement in Northern Ireland, including our local groups and Women's Aid Federation.

Domestic & Sexual Violence in 2018-19: a year in numbers

- **654** women and **421** children stayed in a Women's Aid refuge.
- **49** pregnant women were supported in refuge and **159** pregnant women accessed outreach services.
- **10** babies were born to women in refuge.
- **6,308** women and **5,966** children accessed Women's Aid outreach services, enabling them to get support while staying in their own homes.
- **704** women took part in programmes run by Women's Aid, including our *Journey to Freedom* and *You and Me, Mum* programmes.
- We trained **161** teachers across **102** primary schools to deliver the *Helping Hands* preventative education programme.

Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland: Trends

- Domestic violence is a violation of Article 5 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that “*no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*”.
- The *Stopping Domestic & Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy* estimates the cost of domestic and sexual violence in Northern Ireland to be **£931 million**.
- UNICEF research released in 2006, showing per capita incidence, indicates that there are up to **32,000 children** and young people living with domestic violence in Northern Ireland.
- **69%** of all domestic abuse crimes were female and 31% were male. Of all offenders dealt with by police in 2018/19 in connection with domestic abuse crimes that resulted in an outcome, 86% were male and 12% were female.¹
- Victims of domestic abuse

Crime Statistics 2015-16

- Domestic Violence is a crime. Domestic abuse crimes (**31,682**) accounted for **16% of all crime** reported to the PSNI.
- There were two and a half times as many domestic abuse crimes as drug offences (**16,182** as opposed to **5,577**), and twice as many domestic abuse crimes as shoplifting offences (**6,773**).
- Police responded to a domestic incident **every 17 minutes** of every day of the year.
- Between 2018 – 2019, there were **4 murders** with a domestic abuse motivation in Northern Ireland and all victims were female. In the last year in Northern Ireland there was the highest level of femicide in Europe per 100,000 people.

¹Findings from the PSNI Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 31 March 2019 N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 18 and over

Consultation Response

- Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the publication of the *Northern Ireland Policing Board Policing Plan Consultation 2020-25*, and the opportunity to respond on behalf of our Women's Aid local groups.
- Our comments are focused on the aspects of the Policing Plan that relate directly to domestic violence and abuse and the policing of crime connected with gender-based violence in Northern Ireland.

Question 1: Do you agree with our outcomes for Policing?

The outcomes in the current consultation include:

Outcome 1: We have a Safe Community

Outcome 2: We have confidence in policing

Outcome 3: We have engaged and supportive communities

Everyone wants to feel safe and protected. The police force is there to support all victims of crime including those affected by domestic violence and abuse. With domestic abuse currently accounting for 16% of all recorded crimes in NI, it is paramount that our police force has the right robust legal remedies to use to support all victims. At present this is not the case. In Northern Ireland our domestic abuse crimes and incidents are increasing year on year yet our protections for all victims of domestic violence are weaker than the rest of the UK and Ireland.

Women's Aid calls for equal protection to make our community safer, have more confidence in policing and their powers through the introduction of:

- Coercive control legislation
- Stalking legislation
- Domestic Homicide Reviews
- Domestic Abuse Commissioner for NI
- Adequate training and resourcing for our police service to support all victims of domestic abuse crimes through

With no coercive control legislation in place including domestic abuse protection orders and notices (included in the proposed Domestic Abuse Bill), NI is not offering those living in a household where domestic violence is presenting the same opportunity for justice as those in other parts of the UK.

With new legislation comes training and development, a greater understanding of the dynamics of coercive and controlling behaviours and the police will be able to identify and deal with these cases more appropriately. Women's Aid supports any tool that would give the police and courts greater powers to protect victims of abusive relationships. Through introduction of new legislation the risk of repeat victimisation and repeat offending could be addressed more adequately. Domestic violence is a reoccurring crime and earlier intervention is key to address the issue and to keep people safe within their community.

Within the CJINI Report "No Excuse"² the Inspectors were concerned about lack of training of police officers in relation to domestic abuse. They identified the training and development of student officers and first responders in the areas of harassment, stalking and coercive and controlling behaviour and their approach to risk assessment as areas all requiring improvement.

It is noted that the PSNI is taking steps to identify training through the College of Policing Domestic Abuse Matters Change Programme which is delivered by Women's Aid (England) and Women's Aid (Wales) and also SaveLives collectively. This programme was delivered in conjunction with the College of Policing in England and Wales and is focused on equipping officers to recognise and respond to the signs of coercive control and behaviours. Women's Aid has a wealth of experience of over 40 years as the lead organisation addressing domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland. It has also been informed by our expertise in training development and delivery. It is our view that Women's Aid NI is best placed to deliver this training in Northern Ireland, and we were pleased to present our rationale in a proposal to the PSNI along with the added value we, as an organisation can bring to the Domestic Abuse Matters Programme.

The College of Policing Domestic Abuse Matters Change Programme can only be delivered by those who hold the College of Policing Licence, those being Women's Aid (England), Women's Aid (Wales) and SafeLives. As the Women's Aid Federations work across the 4 nations the deliveries have always been shared to ensure consistency and importantly to give assurance that local specialist providers are involved in the deliveries. For this reason, it was felt that the licence for two of the four federations was enough to ensure quality roll-out, therefore Women's Aid Federation NI has a Women's Aid licence to deliver the programme. We have submitted an extensive Business Case to PSNI which outlines how we would roll out Domestic Abuse Matters across NI.

² No Excuse, Public Protection Inspection II: A Thematic Inspection of the Handling of Domestic Violence and Abuse cases by the Criminal Justice System in NI: Criminal Justice Inspection NI June 2019

This training could inform officers how best to respond in the first instance with the wider family including children and young people who are often present. Women's Aid again are best placed to inform and work with police to inform them on the best response.

More robust responses to breaches of orders and call outs to domestic abuse incidents also need to be addressed. Better understanding of the needs of a victim and her family when the police are called out to an incident is important and this can only be introduced through training of the whole police force with all officers of every rank and all frontline responders. It is important that all front line officers know how to respond to the needs of all the family including children and young people present.

With reference to risk assessment, Women's Aid welcomes the review of the DASH form which is currently going through a pilot process in England through the College of Policing. All assessment of domestic abuse incidents requires a high level of risk assessment and appropriate tools to assist police officers in identifying and supporting all those victims of domestic violence identifying at different risk levels. Partnership working is key in producing and developing tools for risk assessment and screening. A review of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences would also be needed to review and evaluation how effective they are in keeping people safe.

Northern Ireland continues to have no Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAS) which have been in place in England and Wales from the start of their MARAC process. This is critical to the effectiveness of a MARAC and Women's Aid are taking on the work without appropriate funding and putting already stretched services under pressure. The role of the advocate has been proven to encourage victims through the criminal justice process. The Criminal Justice support worker role which has been adapted through various Women's Aid local groups in NI including Belfast & Lisburn, ABCLN & Causeway Women's Aid has proved very positive. An evaluation of the service funded by DOJ and published by Ulster University in September 2018 notes that these posts have showed an impactful and positive response and service provision to victims of domestic abuse in collaboration between police officers and Women's Aid. These posts would instil confidence in policing of domestic violence.

Women's Aid welcome the introduction of The Domestic Violence & Abuse Disclosure Scheme in March 2018 but would like to ensure that the police do use their "right to ask" to inform those at risk. Women's Aid would welcome a review of the scheme to see how effective it is in keeping people safe and again giving confidence in policing domestic violence.

Question 2: What will tell us that we have a safe community?

1.1 Fewer repeat victims of crime

Concerning reducing repeat victims of crime we appreciate that the plan identifies the support needs of victims and survivors as a priority. Domestic abuse is one of the most common crimes involving repeat victims, PSNI statistics reveal that 1 in 5 victims of domestic abuse is a repeat victim³. As such it is our position that we will have safer communities when the following provisions are in place:

- Early intervention and direction to specialist support services at the earliest opportunity. This requires collaborative work by the PSNI with community and statutory organisations providing specialist services. Women's Aid provide specialist support services to women and children experiencing domestic abuse, Men's Advisory Project provides support to male victims, Rainbow/HereNI/Cara Friend provide support and information to LGBT victims of domestic abuse.
- The CJINI Report "No Excuses" identified that there were inconsistencies in the filling out of DASH forms across policing. Creating more consistent policies around filling out these forms, sharing information with appropriate agencies and referring to MARAC are needed.
- As noted in our response to Question 1 of the consultation, Domestic Homicide Reviews are close to being implemented in NI. Taking the learning from these reviews and implementing them in policing and across all agencies will be important in reducing fatal victimisation.

1.2 Fewer repeat offenders

- We appreciate that in instances where police arrive at a domestic abuse incident and no crime has been committed it can be frustrating for officers. Hopefully NI will soon have legislation in place to tackle coercive control and stalking. In the meantime, we urge the Policing Board to educate officers on the dangers of coercive control and stalking, it is often a precursor to physical violence and should be taken seriously. This will also encourage more victims to seek support and reassure them that this behaviour is not acceptable.
- We recognise that the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS) has been advantageous in allowing victims to make informed decisions based on their partners' history of abuse. Greater awareness could be raised about the scheme to make more victims and survivors aware of it. And where information is known to

³ <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/sites/nipb/files/publications/board-assessment-psni-performance-policing-plan-201718.PDF>

police about a perpetrator, any potential new partners should be made aware that they have the “right to ask”.

- Taking domestic abuse prevention orders seriously where there has been a breach is integral to reducing offending behaviours. CJINI also identified inconsistencies in the application of policies where there has been a break of non-molestation orders⁴. The positive duty on PSNI to make an arrest is often not carried out. Voluntary interviews where no arrest has been made are often not attended by perpetrators. It is important to use these orders more effectively in order to reduce future offending.
- Recognise the gendered nature of domestic abuse. Victims are disproportionately female, with females making up 69% of victims in 2018/19⁵. These crimes are committed against women because they are women. Recognising the gendered nature of abuse will strengthen further understanding around the motivation for these crimes and help inform perpetrator programmes to reduce offending.

1.3 People in all communities feel safe

- Recognise and address the intersectional nature of domestic abuse. This is an issue that can affect anyone but the impact on marginal groups is compounded by their minority status. Link in with specialist organisations like Rainbow, HereNI, Trans NI, NIRWN, Disability Action, AgeNI and Step to ensure that all officers are educated about the difficulties faced by minority groups when reporting domestic abuse. Also ensure that victims are being signposted accordingly.
- Women in rural communities are half as likely to report domestic abuse and typically stay in domestic abuse relationships for 25% longer⁶. Ensure that officers in rural areas are specially trained in the unique circumstances faced by rural women experiencing domestic abuse.

1.4 Crime rates and trends showcase an effective policing response

- When domestic abuse statistics increase it is often a sign of positive policing because people are feeling confident enough to report. While there are many still suffering in silence, we commend the work of the police in creating a space where victims feel comfortable enough to break the silence around their abuse.
- We appreciate that reporting around domestic abuse is increasing. And we understand the NI lacks the necessary legislation on coercive control and stalking to

⁴ <http://www.cjini.org/getattachment/079beabb-d094-40e9-8738-0f84cd347ae8/report.aspx>

⁵ <https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics/2018-19/domestic-abuse-incident-and-crimes-in-northern-ireland-2004-05-to-2018-19.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.ruralabuse.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Domestic-Abuse-in-Rural-Areas-National-Rural-Crime-Network.pdf>

- be able to frame many domestic abuse incidents as crimes. But domestic abuse remains a crime with a low rate of conviction. We encourage the PSNI and PPS to work collaboratively to address this.
- When producing statistics, it is our recommendation that these marginal groups are accounted for. Producing data around minority groups and domestic abuse is integral to understanding the impact that it is having within these communities.

Question 3: What will tell us

2.1 The level of public confidence in policing

- Victim blaming attitudes held by individual officers, minimising abuse, fear around not being believed and instances where officers do not act with compassion lowers confidence in policing around policing. This is not an exhaustive list. Taking care to address these concerns and assuring victims and survivors that they will be believed is integral for building public confidence.

2.2 The level of satisfaction with the service received

- As noted in our response to 2.1 there are numerous reasons why victims of domestic abuse may feel dissatisfied with their contact with the PSNI when intervening in an incident. We welcome the plan's commitment to taking the level of satisfaction of victims and survivors into account. However, we note that evidence of satisfaction is substantive and cannot be gleaned from data alone. There may also be concerns on the part of the victim in sharing their dissatisfaction with the PSNI directly. Therefore, we recommend linking in with Women's Aid groups who work with victims and survivors on the ground to garner more substantive information about the level of service provided.

2.3 The representativeness of the police service

- Women's Aid welcomes the Policing Board's commitment to representativeness and reiterates that where the PSNI cannot reflect the full spectrum of society, it can educate officers in issues faced by minority groups that they do not represent to ensure a compassionate and informed response to all members of the community when dealing with domestic abuse.

2.4 The delivery of effective crime outcomes

- We recognise the high attrition rates associated with domestic and sexual violence. It is Women's Aid's ethos that a response to domestic abuse should be victim led. However, we encourage the adoption of effective measures to tackle high attrition rates for these crimes and deliver effective crime outcomes.

Question 4: What will tell us that we have engaged and supported communities?

3.1 Policing in partnership with local communities included PCSPs, identify local solutions to local problems

- Women's Aid commends the Policing Board on its commitment to engaging with local communities through statutory, community and voluntary organisations, particularly through PCSPs. Most women disclose their experience of abuse to a person within the community first, these organisations provide front line services to support victims at a local level meaning there is a wealth of knowledge to be shared.
- CJINI identified issues with funding from PCSPs pertaining to Criminal Justice Workers sought by Women's Aid local groups⁷. As a result there is "postcode lottery" access to the service, where victims benefit from it only if they live in certain areas.
- Utilising these specialised services for information, local expertise and possible training opportunities will reflect an engaged and supportive community approach to tackling domestic abuse.

⁷ <http://www.cjini.org/getattachment/079beabb-d094-40e9-8738-0f84cd347ae8/report.aspx>

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