



Federation Northern Ireland

RESPONSE TO

NIO Consultation on Special Measures: An Evaluation and Review

May 2009

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24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414

Core work of Women's Aid: Background information & statistics

1. Introduction

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic violence and providing services for women and children. We recognise domestic violence as one form of violence against women. Women's Aid seeks to challenge attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate domestic violence and, through our work, promote healthy and non-abusive relationships.

2. Core Work of Women's Aid

The core work of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland, including Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland and the 10 local Women's Aid groups is:

- To provide refuge accommodation to women and their children suffering mental, physical or sexual abuse within the home.
- To run the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline.
- To provide a range of support services to enable women who are leaving a violent situation to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children.
- To provide a range of support services to children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.
- To run preventative education programmes in schools and other settings.
- To educate and inform the public, media, police, courts, social services and other agencies of the impact and effects of domestic violence.
- To advise and support all relevant agencies in the development of domestic violence policies, protocols and service delivery.
- To work in partnership with all relevant agencies to ensure a joined up response to domestic violence.

3. Women's Aid Statistics (2007 - 2008)

- 12 refuges with 300 bed spaces, playrooms and facilities.
- 1102 women and 896 children sought refuge.
- 15 resource centres for women seeking information and support; group work and training.
- 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline managed 24,153 calls.
- 2,205 women and 1,831 children accessed the Floating

- Support service supporting women in their own home.
- 2,767 children and young people accessed protection and support services.
- Move-on houses for women and children leaving refuges.

4. Statistics: Domestic Violence & Violence Against Women

- 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”;
- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2007/08 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (9,283) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,254). These include all recorded sexual offences (1,822), robbery (607), armed robbery (444), hijacking (92), theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle (3,336), arson (2,244) dangerous driving (513), handling stolen goods (191) and offences under anti-terrorism legislation (5).
- PSNI Statistics for 07/08 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 23 minutes of every day of the year.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 07/08 total 25. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 11. Therefore, 44% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 07/08 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 382 rapes in Northern Ireland in the period 2007/08, 38 attempted rapes and 317 indecent assaults on a female.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2007/08)

- Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported.
- The joint NIO, DHSSPS Strategy “Tackling Violence at Home” estimates that the cost of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, including the potential loss of economic output, could amount to £180 million each year.

- 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.
- Where the gender of the victim was known, 76% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2007/08 were female.*
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.**
- Violence Against Women is not limited to domestic violence, it includes amongst other crimes murder, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, trafficking, sexual stalking and sexual harassment.

(*NIO Statistics & Research Branch Bulletin 16/2008 “Experience of Domestic Violence: Findings from the 2007/08 Northern Ireland Crime Survey, 2008, pg.2. N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 17 and over)

(** Women’s Aid Federation NI)

Women’s Aid Federation NI welcomes the publication of this NIO consultation on Special Measures: An Evaluation and Review and the opportunity to comment upon it.

5. Comments

Women’s Aid would wish to preface our comments by stating our support for the provision of Special Measures and our belief that they represent a vital component in ensuring that women, who have experienced domestic and sexual violence, are able to give evidence and participate in the legal process in the knowledge that their safety, security and well-being are given paramount importance.

- In respect of the identification process and the level of understanding organisationally and generally of the legislative criteria, Women’s Aid holds the opinion that there is a need for comprehensive awareness raising and training in this respect.
- Our organisation is comfortable that existing definitions in respect of Special Measures criteria encompasses domestic violence victims, specifically under the definition of “An Intimidated Witness.”

- Women's Aid would wish to urge that the process of identifying a victim/witness' need, should be expedited as early as possible.
- Similarly, it is our view that the process of informing victims and witnesses both of the nature of special measures and how and when they will be applied, must be carried out swiftly, accurately and with respect for the needs of the individuals involved.
- In recognising the complexity of the legal process for the lay person and the stress and anxiety experienced by victims and witnesses, there is a need for public awareness raising in respect of special measures provisions.
- Victims and Witnesses must be made aware that these provisions are available to them. In doing so, anxieties can be allayed and the legal process can be better served.
- It is the experience of Women's Aid that the earlier victims have assurances, the more confident they are likely to be in the process.
- There is currently a joint working protocol in place between Women's Aid and Northern Ireland Victim Support in respect of referrals between the two organisations.
- A training and awareness raising programme is associated with this protocol designed to educate staff on the contamination of evidence and to develop court support procedures for civil and criminal proceedings.
- We have also engaged in making staff aware of how to deliver appropriate levels of support and also in court support training for victims.
- We feel that it would be beneficial to provide a much clearer and concise detailing of the criteria and process applied when considering special measures. This is particularly appropriate for victims and witnesses who may be confused when these measures are not applied.
- To date, Women's Aid has not received nor been offered the opportunity to engage in specific guidance and training in the use of special measures.

- Whilst our organisation plays no role in the provision of special measures, we have an important function in making victims and witnesses aware of their rights.
- In respect of feedback sought from victims/witnesses following their use of any special measures, our staff are not aware of victims we have supported, being asked for feedback.
- As an organisation primarily concerned with the support of women and children who have been subjected to domestic violence, we would wish to see an extension of special measures to cover the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Order 1998.
- In addition we would wish to see special measures provisions extended to Children Order proceedings.
- It is the opinion of Women's Aid that by expanding the scope of Special Measures provisions, access to justice will be improved for Women and Children affected by domestic violence.
- In addition, this would be in keeping with the strategic objectives of the Tackling Violence at Home Strategy in respect of improving the number of cases going forward to prosecution in Northern Ireland.

For further information about this response contact:

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