



Federation Northern Ireland

RESPONSE TO

POLICE SERVICE OF

NORTHERN IRELAND

Consultation

**Risk Identification Assessment and
Management In Relation To Domestic
Abuse, Stalking & Harassment and Honour
Based Violence (DASH)**

November 2010

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
129 University Street
BELFAST BT7 1HP

Tel: 02890 249041

Fax: 02890 239296

General Email: info@womensaidni.org

Website: www.womensaidni.org

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 (2009 - 2010)

- 12 refuges with 300 bed spaces, playrooms and facilities.
- 1077 women and 854 children sought refuge.
- 15 resource centres for women seeking information and support; group work and training.
- 2,938 women and 4,489 children accessed the Floating Support service enabling women to access support whilst

- remaining in their own homes and communities.
- Move-on houses for women and children leaving refuges.
- In 2009/10 the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline, open to anyone affected by domestic violence, managed 32,349 calls. This represented an increase of 17% on 2008/09.

5. Additional Women's Aid Statistical Data

- Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 13,656 women and 13,602 children and young people
- During the last 15 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 244,564 calls to the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline

6. 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”;
- 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, 75% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2009/10 were female.*
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.**

7. Domestic Violence: Crime Statistics

- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2009/10 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (9,903) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,864). These include all recorded sexual offences (1,944), robbery (600), armed robbery (557), hijacking (119), theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle (2975), arson (1980) dangerous driving (865), handling stolen goods (226) and offences under anti-terrorism legislation (7).

- PSNI Statistics for 09/10 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 21 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 9,903 crimes with a domestic motivation in 09/10 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 53 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 09/10 total 18. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 38.9% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 09/10 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 461 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2009/10.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2009/10)

- Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported.
- 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.

(*Findings from the PSNI Crime Statistics Report 2009/10 N.B. "Adult" defined as aged 17 and over)

(** Women's Aid Federation NI)

8. Comments

Women's Aid Federation NI welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the PSNI draft service procedures on risk identification, assessment and management in relation to domestic abuse stalking and harassment and honour based violence (DASH), on behalf of our members. The following comments reflect their collective views.

8.1. Women's Aid fully supports the overall aim of the Service Procedure, specifically:

- To prevent and reduce homicides and serious injury (including domestic homicides, child homicides and intimate partner homicides) through effective identification, assessment and management of risks;
- To mainstream the understanding and use of established risk factors in domestic abuse and child abuse cases.
- To inform police decision-making and action, including effective investigation and evidence gathering;
- To identify safety planning considerations for victims; and
- To provide an overview of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference process for "high" risk victims of domestic abuse.

8.2. Further, we welcome the decision to review these service procedures and the PSNI's continued commitment to addressing these vital issues. We commend the standard of information and guidance given in the procedure, especially in the notes given as practice points.

8.3. However, we would wish to raise a number of issues of concern. Whilst the document correctly acknowledges that the overall risk process must remain dynamic and that events and circumstances may undergo rapid and frequent change, and that therefore the assessment of risk must be kept under review, we note that the procedure relies heavily on the exercise of "professional judgement" in the assessment of risk.

8.4. We in no way wish to undervalue the use of professional judgement which is essential and has often saved lives. As stated in the procedure when professionals have serious concerns about a victim's situation even if the victim is not 'visibly high risk' this needs to be acted upon, which we fully support.

8.5. However in establishing the category of risk, Standard, Medium or High, as outlined on page 31 of the draft document, response officers or officers completing the initial DASH form, are asked to establish the risk classification *solely* on the basis of professional judgement. We are concerned that the guidance given as to what should constitute a

Standard, Medium or High categorisation is minimal, and therefore open to flawed conclusions, particularly where there is a lack of experience or indeed where the officers themselves are subject to any of the prevailing myths about domestic abuse.

- 8.6. It is further stated on page 32 of the draft document, that officers who are not so experienced and therefore not very confident with their professional judgement, should speak to a supervisor or someone more experienced in this area.
- 8.7. In this context, it is a source of concern that in the case of a relatively inexperienced officer, the important decision to categorise risk might therefore be made by another officer who did not attend the scene of an incident or crime and is therefore making their professional judgement based upon second-hand information, whether objective or subjective, and/or upon a subsequent discussion and analysis of the circumstances to which they were not directly privy. This strikes us as being neither rigorous nor an appropriate methodology for categorising risk.
- 8.8. Women's Aid would contend that rather than rely solely upon the use of professional judgement, which is subject to individual observation, objectivity, knowledge and experience, there is a necessity for clear and concise criteria, guidance and training to be provided to officers on the ground.
- 8.9. It is in our view essential that there is uniformity throughout policing districts in Northern Ireland, in the assessment and categorising of risk. We feel that this uniformity needs to extend to all agencies who are assessing risk and that protection of domestic violence victims is best served by all agencies adhering to a **minimum** point score of the DASH tool for referral and action (eg to MARAC). We do not believe that this is any way undermines professional judgement, rather it enhances it by providing an additional safety mechanism for occasions where officers who are not so experienced use the DASH tool to help make an assessment of risk.
- 8.10. We are also disappointed that the draft document whilst mentioning weaponry in general, does not specifically address the removal of weapons, such as legally held firearms and personal protection issue weapons.
- 8.11. Similarly, the service procedures are silent in respect of important additional considerations necessary if the perpetrator or alleged perpetrator is a serving police officer. In this respect the automatic referral of victims above a certain point score provides an additional safeguard where there may be conflict of interest in respect of cases where a colleague is the alleged perpetrator.

- 8.12. Women's Aid notes that on page 47 of the draft document, under safety planning, reference is made to IDVAs, which do not yet exist in Northern Ireland.
- 8.13. We would suggest that given the close working relationship between police and local Women's Aid groups that the reference to Women's Aid work under Specialist Refuge Service Providers on page 47 and Support Groups on page 48 should be expanded to indicate the range of services available through Women's Aid. Specifically we would ask that reference is made to the 24-Hour Domestic Violence Helpline on 0800 917 1414, which is open to anyone affected by domestic violence. It has been well demonstrated that the sooner a woman who is a victim of domestic violence makes contact with a supportive agency such as Women's Aid the safer she will feel and hence the more likely it is she will feel able to proceed with any legal action; it is therefore extremely important that front-line officers are aware of the need to make these links.
- 8.14. We would also suggest that in respect of the support groups outlined on page 48, these should include sexual abuse services.
- 8.15. Finally, in respect of page 49 of the document in addition to the reference to child access, for completeness, child contact should also be added.

For further information about this response please contact:

Gillian Clifford
Regional Policy & Information Co-ordinator
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
129 University Street
BELFAST BT7 1HP
Tel: 028 9024 9041

info@womensaidni.org

Website: www.womensaidni.org

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