



Federation Northern Ireland

**RESPONSE TO
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
CONSULTATION
A CODE OF PRACTICE FOR
VICTIMS OF CRIME**

January 2011

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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 (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 3,617 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.**

6. 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

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)

7.0 Comments

- 7.1 Women's Aid Federation NI welcomes the publication of the Department of Justice's consultation on a Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and the opportunity to comment upon the document on behalf of our ten local groups. The following comments reflect their collective views.
- 7.2. Women's Aid can see the merits of placing the provisions of the Code of Practice on a statutory footing in order to ensure that the option of more stringent sanctions is put in place for non-compliance. However, we are of the opinion that the code must be responsive to the evolving needs of victims of crime and that this is an important consideration.
- 7.3. As such, we support the Department's proposal as outlined in point 18 (Pg.9) to place the Code on a statutory footing as in England and Wales and therefore to give it the advantage of a legal footing, without impeding the flexibility and adaptability of the Code by placing the specific provisions in legislation.
- 7.4. We support the proposal in point 19 (Pg.9) to introduce the Code as a guidance document in advance of the legislative process, particularly in light of the statement, contained in the consultation document (Pg.9) that the opportunity to put the Code in legislation, will not be available until 2012.

8.0. Key Omissions:

- 8.1. In embracing the principle of a Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and given the nature and extent of the work carried out by Women's Aid across Northern Ireland and our on-going partnership work with criminal justice agencies, our organisation is extremely disappointed to note that the Department has not included Women's Aid specifically in the draft Code, nor have we been consulted in respect of the drafting of the Code.
- 8.2. It is essential that in establishing a Code the Department should explore the totality of services available to victims of crime in Northern Ireland, which would include Women's Aid.
- 8.3. In excluding any key victim support organisation there is a real danger that victims may not be fully informed of the full range of support services available to them. Similarly, the absence of an organisation as a signatory to the Code may lead an individual to conclude that the organisation either does not support the Code, or that their compliant procedures are not as rigorous as the Code requires.
- 8.4. Further, there are a number of omissions and inaccuracies contained in the list of "Other Support Organisations" listed for those who have experienced domestic violence (Pg.64).
- 8.5. Firstly, it is not specified that the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline, managed by Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, is open to anyone affected by domestic violence. The inclusion of this specific statement is a requirement of the service level agreement between Women's Aid Federation NI and our Government funders. It is also an accurate reflection of the levels of accessibility and service provided by the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline.
- 8.6. Secondly, the web address given for the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline in the document, is incorrect. The website for Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, which includes the Helpline, is www.womensaidni.org
- 8.7. It is a further source of disappointment to our organisation, that the contact details for Women's Aid Federation NI and our ten local groups have not been specifically detailed in the document in the context of organisations providing support to victims of domestic violence.
- 8.8. We have both a regional and a local presence which is highly valued by those who use our services. The provision of contact details for our groups constitutes essential information for women who have experienced domestic violence and may be seeking support in their local area. As such, this omission is in our view, unacceptable and is in stark contrast to the highly detailed entry for the Citizens Advice Bureau for example. We would request that this is rectified and have

attached an appendix with all the relevant Women's Aid contact details for inclusion.

- 8.9 Finally in respect of the recommendation included in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement that '*victims should be provided with assistance including material, psychological and social assistance through governmental, voluntary and community-based means at all stages of the criminal justice system*' we would note that this is not the case at present with many domestic violence victims not receiving the assistance they require across all these categories.
- 8.10 We believe that this Code lacks a connectedness across agencies that will be reflected in variable levels of support to victims. There is an urgent need for individual victims to be supported with their individual journey through the criminal justice system in a cohesive and victim-centred manner. Although the intention to so support individual victims is reflected in the description of each service there is no obvious overarching point of contact for an individual to connect with and gain help from; instead presented with this Code they are faced with a bewildering complexity of organisations and areas of responsibilities. We would urge that this should be addressed as a priority.

9.0. Other Issues for Consideration:

- 9.1 Women's Aid is pleased to note the commitment on the part of a number of agencies to improving their communication systems to ensure the timely and accurate supply of information to victims of crime.
- 9.2. The absence of clear, concise, timely and accurate information from criminal justice agencies has been identified as a major issue for many of the women who use our services. Addressing and improving internal and external communications would be enormously beneficial to ensuring the best outcomes for victims of crime and to improving their experience of and ability to fully engage with and participate in, the legal process.
- 9.3. Our organisation remains concerned that the Code does little to redress the requirement of victims to pro-actively seek out key services designed to assist them. In this context, we would cite the Northern Ireland Prison Service, Prisoner Release Victim Information Service (PRVIS).
- 9.4 This service has been highly praised both by Women's Aid staff and by the women who use our services however we note that if a victim of crime does not register for the service they will not receive information.
- 9.5. It is essential to remember that individuals interacting with the criminal justice system are often at their most vulnerable and as such may

require support and guidance to navigate what is often an unfamiliar and complex process involving multiple agencies.

- 9.6. It is the strong opinion of Women's Aid that the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime should be widely publicised to ensure that members of the public are fully aware of their rights and remedies and of the services available to them, should they or someone close to them, become the victim of crime.
- 9.7. Women's Aid would also suggest that the Code should be subject to regular review and evaluation to ensure that it evolves in line with best practice in the care and support of victims of crime.
- 9.8. We note that the Victim and Witness Task Force will be asked to monitor the performance of each organisation to ensure that the commitments in the Code are met and would strongly suggest that this monitoring must include consultation with organisations, such as Women's Aid, who can feed in the direct experiences of victims.

For further information about this response please contact:

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