



Federation Northern Ireland

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Response to: Service Procedure – Police Response to Stalking and Harassment

April 2011

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

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24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414

Core Work of Women's Aid: Background Information & Statistics

1.0 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.

2.0 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.

3.0 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.

4.0 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.

5.0 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. **

6.0 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)

7.0. Comments

7.1 Women's Aid Federation NI welcomes the publication of the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Service Procedure on the Police Response to Stalking and Harassment and the opportunity to comment upon the document on behalf of our ten local groups. The following comments reflect their collective views.

8.0. Aims of Service Procedure

8.1 Women's Aid fully supports the aims of the service procedure as outlined in the document (Point 2, Pg.3), specifically the aim to protect the lives of both adults and children who are at risk of harassment; to

ensure a consolidated service-wide approach to recording and investigation; and to facilitate effective action against offenders.

- 8.2 We further welcome the recognition of the positive obligations placed upon the Police Service by both the Human Rights Act (1998) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) to take reasonable actions, within their powers, to safeguard the rights of victims.
- 8.3 Similarly the acknowledgement of Article 2 of the ECHR which in addition to the rights to life, enshrines the positive obligation on police, to take reasonable steps within their power to avert a real and immediate risk of death or serious injury of which they are or should be aware and Article 3 of the ECHR, the right not to be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment.
- 8.4 Our organisation values the recognition that, “the public is entitled to expect the police and other public authorities to take all reasonable action to keep risk to a minimum when offences such as those relating to harassment are brought to police attention” and that “failure to deal with harassment, whether by an effective investigation, the arrest of the alleged perpetrator or other police action as appropriate to the circumstances, may leave the a victim or others at risk,” (Pg.4)
- 8.5 We note however that in the event that an officer does not follow the guidance they will be required to provide a record of the reasons behind the decision.
- 8.6 The example given is “where the victim has refused to answer questions.” (Pg.4)
- 8.7 It is imperative that police officers understand that in cases involving stalking and harassment there may be very legitimate reasons why a victim may be reluctant to answer questions, not least of which is fear of the consequences of doing so, particularly if the perpetrator is someone with whom they have a pre-existing relationship.
- 8.8 Women’s Aid would therefore strongly recommend that refusal to co-operate or answer questions, on the part of the victim, should not preclude further investigation of any allegations made and should not be accepted as a sole reason for failure to adhere to the guidance procedure.

9.0 Review

- 9.1. We agree that it is appropriate that the policy should be reviewed on an annual basis.

- 9.2. We would further suggest that the review should include feedback from organisations such as Women’s Aid, who may be in a position to offer positive suggestions on possible improvements and to highlight any emerging issues.

10.0 Reports of Harassment

- 10.1 Women’s Aid welcomes the focus on the best interests of the victim and on the management of risk.
- 10.2 We agree that it is essential that the full details of an incident and of parties involved should be accurately recorded and flagged on the incident log and on Niche so that individuals subjected to harassment, alleged perpetrators and associated risks such as prior use of weapons can be readily identified and considered as soon as an incident is reported.
- 10.3 It is also vital, in the context of stalking and harassment that fundamental links are made to criminal behaviour such as domestic violence and that pro-active measures are taken to accurately track repeat victimisation.
- 10.4 We would also urge caution in respect of house to house enquiries, particularly if there is a history of domestic violence linked to the harassment.
- 10.5 We would be concerned that family members or friends of the perpetrator living in the vicinity might alert the perpetrator, seek to interfere with the investigation, or threaten and/or intimidate the victim and any possible witnesses.

11.0 Identifying, Assessing and Managing Risk

- 11.1 Women’s Aid is broadly supportive of the guidance outlined in this section of the document.
- 11.2 In particular, we welcome the specific guidance that “Domestic abuse perpetrators present a particular danger to the victim, children and others” (Pg.12) and that reference should be made to the specific policy directive in respect of domestic incidents. Also, that DASH forms must be completed in cases in which a domestic motivation is suspected.
- 11.3 We also support the recognition that police must consider the risk to other agencies that may be supporting victims of stalking and harassment and that they may be harassed as a means of tracing the original victim.

11.4 We note that reference is made to guidance in respect of police officers suspected of harassment in the cases with a domestic motivation. However, there is no specific guidance in respect of police officers subject to other allegations of stalking and harassment, particularly in the context of firearms. We would welcome some clarification in this regard.

11.5 Women's Aid would also request that details of the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline, 0800 917 1414, open to anyone affected by domestic violence, should be available to victims of stalking and harassment in the context of informing victims of the practical steps they can take to protect themselves from harm.

12.0 Investigative Strategies in Harassment Cases

12.1 Whilst we acknowledge that there is potential value in the consideration of all charging options, we are concerned that if cases of harassment are not clearly identified as such but rather are charges as burglary or public order offences for example, it will prove even more problematic to address repeat offending and victimisation and thereby to evaluate risk.

13.0 Police Information Notices

13.1 Whilst we can see some merit in the use of Police Information Notices in some cases to inform the perpetrator that their alleged actions may constitute an offence, we agree that their issue should be authorised by a supervising officer and would further recommend that caution should be used in cases involving domestic violence to avoid further exacerbating a volatile situation and increasing the risk to the safety of the victim.

14.0 Cyber Stalking/Harassment Via the Internet

14.1 In the opinion of Women's Aid, the recognition of cyber stalking and harassment is extremely important. We also acknowledge that this type of behaviour can often be difficult to investigate and to prosecute.

14.2 Women's Aid would recommend that the PSNI engage with employers in respect of this type of behaviour as victims of stalking and harassment are often abused in the workplace via emails and text messages. The establishment of protocols in this regard would be potentially beneficial.

14.3 We would further suggest that the police should be proactive in encouraging Communication Service Providers to take steps to assist

victims reporting incidents of stalking and harassment and to swiftly act upon concerns raised.

For further information about this response please contact:

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