



Federation Northern Ireland

Department of Justice

A Response to: Provision of Community Impact Assessments Consultation

18 September 2012

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Open to anyone affected by domestic violence

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 (2010 - 2011)

- 12 refuges with 300 bed spaces, playrooms and facilities.
- 1058 women and 754 children sought refuge.
- 15 resource centres for women seeking information and support; group work and training.
- 3,450 women and 3,739 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 2010/11 the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline, open to anyone affected by domestic violence, managed 38,296 calls. This represented an increase of 18% on 2009/10.

4.0 Additional Women's Aid Statistical Data

- Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 14,714 women and 14,356 children and young people.
- During the last 16 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 282,860 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 DOJ, 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 2010/11 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 2011/12 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (10,387) than the combined total of all the following crimes (10,327) – all recorded sexual offences (1,836), shoplifting (6,201) and theft of a motor vehicle (2,290).
- PSNI Statistics for 11/12 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 21 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 10,387 crimes with a domestic motivation in 11/12 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 51 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 11/12 total 16. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 3. Therefore, 19% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 11/12 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 553 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2011/12.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2011/12)

- 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 2010/11 N.B. "Adult" defined as aged 18 and over)

(** Women's Aid Federation NI)

7.0. Comments

7.1 Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the publication of the provision of Community Impact Assessments consultation, and the opportunity to comment upon it on behalf of our ten local groups.

8.0 Do you agree that Community Assessments should be used in a targeted manner?

8.1 Women's Aid agrees that Community Impact Assessments should be used in a targeted manner. There are some instances in which a Community Impact Assessment might be useful, such as to gauge the impact of anti-social behaviour, crimes of a violent or sexual nature in the community, or crime with a hate motivation perpetrated on members of the community. In these cases, such crime can create fear among entire sections of the community or entire neighbourhoods, and it might be useful to take the impact of these crimes of the community into consideration during sentencing.

8.2 There is a need to ensure that the limitations of Community Impact Assessments are clear to community members, and that there is awareness that Community Impact Statements must be considered in balance with other needs in society. In particular, Community Impact Assessments should not encourage a 'not in my back yard' mentality, in which they are used to campaign against necessary facilities such as hostels in the community under the PPANI arrangements.

8.3 There are also instances in which Community Impact Assessments might be inappropriate and even damaging, such as using them to publicise the existence of a known perpetrator of domestic violence against the wishes of the victim. In certain domestic violence cases, publication of a crime might put a victim at risk, and it should be for the victim and the PSNI to assess whether it would be in the interests of the victim for the crime(s) to be made public, not the community, however well-meaning they be.

8.4 There are other instances in which a Community Impact Assessment may not be useful or appropriate, and in these cases an Assessment should not be offered, in the interests of expediency and avoiding undue burden on the justice system. If administered incorrectly, Community Impact Assessments may be in danger of becoming a huge resource drain for very little pay-off, and this is a scenario that Women's Aid, and everyone involved in the criminal justice system, would be keen to avoid.

- 8.5 Women's Aid would also have concerns regarding the potential for Community Impact Assessments to distort the picture of crime that actually takes place in a community. Often the perception of crime, and the perception of what policing priorities should be, can be different from actual crime levels and policing needs within a community. Women's Aid would urge that any Community Impact Assessment system is construed to avoid an imbalanced view of crime in an area affecting policing priorities. Community Impact Assessments should not result in policing priorities being skewed in favour of visible crimes, at the expense of hidden crimes such as domestic violence. Although there may be little awareness among communities as to the extent of domestic violence crime in their area, this does and should not detract from the need to devote sufficient police time and resources to tackling it, in line with existing strategies such as the Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence Action Plan 2012 – 13.
- 8.6 Women's Aid would also strongly urge that Community Impact Assessments should not be used as a means by which to target victims. Perpetrators of domestic violence exist in all sections of society, and can be individuals with high standing or reputation within a community. In our professional experience, accusations of domestic violence can sometimes be met with suspicion and hostility by communities, if the perpetrator is a community figure or otherwise highly regarded by the community. This can lead to victim-blaming, accusations of fabricating domestic violence, and targeting the victim in other ways. Therefore we would strongly oppose Community Impact Assessments being able to be used to make statements in favour of the accused or to cast negative aspersions on the victim.
- 8.7 Community Impact Assessments should not be permitted to become a vessel for prejudiced views or targeting of other communities or minority or ethnic groups associated with a perpetrator. Nor should they be used as a means by which to stereotype vulnerable groups, or lay blame for crime on family members or other individuals associated with the perpetrator of a crime.

9.0 Who should be responsible for identifying suitable cases?

- 9.1 In our view, it would make sense for suitable cases to be identified by the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), in consultation with local community groups and the PSNI.
- 9.2 We would be strongly in favour of identifying the role of community organisations to represent the views and concerns of communities within any Community Impact Assessment system. Often it is community and voluntary groups that have a broad knowledge of how crime is affecting a community, and this expertise should be harnessed effectively within the Community Impact Assessment process. We

would particularly recommend that relevant, established groups are consulted on crimes related to their area of expertise, for example that local Women's Aid groups are consulted as a matter of course when considering Community Impact Assessments relating to violence against women.

10.0 How much discretion should be left to the justice agencies to decide when a Community Impact Assessment should be completed?

10.1 We are of the opinion that there should be an agreed process by which to complete Community Impact Assessments, and that this should be decided via PCSPs.

11.0 In which circumstances should a community be invited to complete a Community Impact Assessment?

11.1 Women's Aid recommends that communities should only be invited to complete a Community Impact Assessment in the event that the crime in question has a discernible effect on that community as a whole, for example violent crime or anti-social behaviour that results in a community fearing for its safety.

11.2 We are also of the opinion that any decision to conduct a Community Impact Assessment should be taken with sensitivity towards the welfare of any direct victim of the crime in question. The voice of the community should never overwhelm that of the victim of a crime, and the ultimate priority of the justice system should be to the welfare of the victim.

12.0 How might the community affected by the crime apply to have a Community Impact Assessment completed?

12.0 Applications should be made using an agreed process via PCSPs.

13.0 How should differing views be reflected?

13.1 Often there won't be consensus within a community, and consensus cannot and should not be forced. Differing views should therefore be reported within the Community Impact Statement.

14.0 Should guidance be provided and if so what could it contain?

14.1 Women's Aid agrees that guidance should be provided on how a Community Impact Assessment is carried out and completed.

Guidance should include the circumstances in which it is appropriate to carry out an assessment, how this should be done, and who should be consulted during the process.

15.0 Should there be a standard template for a Community Impact Assessment?

15.1 We believe that this would be useful, provided that it didn't prevent people from submitting any extra information if they desired to do so.

16.0 Should the entitlement to make a Community Impact Statement be placed in legislation?

16.1 If entitlement to make a Community Impact Assessment is to be placed in legislation, then Victim Impact Assessments should also be placed in legislation, to ensure that a two-tier system does not develop whereby the views of the victim are overshadowed by those of the community at large.

17.0 Should we link a Community Impact Statement to a Victim Impact Statement and how would it work? What factors should be taken into consideration to balance the views of the direct victim and the community, as indirect victim?

17.1 Women's Aid strongly believes that the impact of a crime on its victim should take precedence over any views held by the community. While we recognise the merit in conducting assessments for crimes that impact upon the community as a whole, this should never detract from, or take precedence over, the impact upon the direct victim.

17.2 We would also question why Community Impact Assessments are being considered at this stage, when the Victim Impact Assessment process remains far from perfect. There is still no clear, efficient mechanism for conducting Victim Impact Assessments, and in our professional experience there are many instances in which a Victim Impact Assessment is not carried out when it would in fact be beneficial. In domestic violence cases, for example, we have found that in practice many public prosecutors and courts do not request a Victim Impact Statement, and that our keyworkers then have to request them. We believe this to be evidence that Victim Impact Assessments are not yet sufficiently integrated into the criminal justice system, and that more work needs to be done to ensure that Victim Impact Assessments and Statements are fully utilised for the benefit of victims of crime. Therefore we are of the view that the Victim Impact Assessment

process should be revisited and refined as a matter of priority, before another similar system is put in place.

- 17.3 Women's Aid would also query what would happen in the event that the new Community Impact Assessment process is more far-reaching than the Victim Impact Assessment, in terms of what it is used for and how it is implemented. If this were the case, and Community Impact Statements effectively overshadowed those made by victims, the result could be an imbalance in the weight given to the impact on the community and that on the victim. Therefore we would request that, if a more efficient and far-reaching process is put in place for Community Impact Assessments, the Victim Impact Assessment process also be reviewed to ensure a proper balance.

18.0 Who should a Community Impact Statement be shared with?

- 18.1 We believe that Community Impact Statements should be shared with relevant agencies and groups. This would need to be closely monitored to ensure that there are no potential risks to victims as a consequence of sharing.

For further information about this response contact:

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