



Federation Northern Ireland

A response to
Victims Policy
Probation Board Northern Ireland
14 January 2015

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

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24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline

Call: 0808 802 1414

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Text **support** to 07797 805 839

Freephone from all landlines and mobiles. Translation service available.

Open to *all women and men* affected by domestic & sexual violence

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1. Women's Aid 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 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 & Sexual Violence Helpline.
-) To provide a range of support services to enable women who are affected by domestic and/or sexual 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.

Throughout this consultation response, the term "Women's Aid" is used to reflect the overall Women's Aid movement in Northern Ireland, which is made up of our local Women's Aid groups and Women's Aid Federation. All local Women's Aid groups are members of Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland. Each Women's Aid group offers a range of specialist services to women, children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.

3.0 Women's Aid statistics (2013-14)

-) 999 women and 747 children sought refuge.
-) 59 women in refuge were supported during their pregnancies and 15 babies were born to women in refuge.
-) 1,084 one to one support sessions were held with children and young people in refuge.
-) 3,558 women with 4,869 children accessed the Floating Support service, and a further 1,662 women accessed other Women's Aid outreach services, enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.
-) 1,554 women participated in a range of group work and personal development programme including *Journey to Freedom* and *You and Me, Mum*.
-) 375 women accessed support from a Women's Aid Women's Safety Worker while their partners or ex partners were undertaking the IDAP perpetrators programme provided by Probation Board Northern Ireland. An additional 128 children were referred to the Women's Safety Worker in 2013-14.
-) The 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline, open to all women and men affected by domestic & sexual violence, managed 55,029 calls.
-) 150 teachers were trained to deliver the Helping Hands programme in primary schools.

4.0 Additional Women's Aid statistical data

-) Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 17,424 women and 16,235 children and young people.
-) Between 1995 – 2014, 429,435 calls were managed by the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual 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.

- J Where the gender of the victim was known, 70% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2013/14 were female.¹
- J Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.²

6.0 Domestic & Sexual Violence: Crime statistics (Source: PSNI Statistics 2013/14)

- J Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2013/14 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (12,720) than the combined total of all the following crimes (12,079) – possession of drugs (3764), shoplifting (6,372) and theft of a motor vehicle (1,943).
- J PSNI Statistics for 13/14 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 19 minutes of every day of the year.
- J The total of 12,720 crimes with a domestic motivation in 13/14 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 41 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- J The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 13/14 total 17. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 41% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 13/14 had a domestic motivation.
- J There were 550 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2013/14.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2013/14)

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

¹Findings from the PSNI Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2013/14 N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 18 and over

²Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland

2. Comments on Victims Policy

-)] Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the update of the Probation Board's Victims Policy and the opportunity to comment on it on behalf of our local Women's Aid groups.
-)] Women's Aid is generally supportive of the contents of the updated Victims Policy, and the commitment of the Probation Board to support victims and incorporate the victim's perspective into work with offenders.
-)] We urge that the Probation Board NI works to implement this policy in full. While the content of the policy is encouraging, more must be done to make these aims a reality and achieve the outcomes set out in the document.
-)] We would point out that policies that work for victims of general crime are not always appropriate for victims of domestic and sexual violence. Domestic violence is unique in the sense that there is a relationship between offender and victim, which by definition involves that offender exerting power, manipulation and control over that victim. The existence and abusive nature of this relationship must be taken into account when working with both victim and offender to ensure that the needs of the victim are being met. It is crucial that this policy does not inadvertently open a victim to further abuse or re-victimisation.
-)] We would also highlight that while a domestic violence offender may be in the probation system for a particular crime, the victim's experience of abuse goes much further than the crime(s) in question. Many aspects of domestic violence and abuse do not constitute a crime - for example, psychological and emotional abuse, manipulation, or controlling every aspect of a victim's life. Nonetheless, a victim may have suffered months or years of such abuse, as well as other criminal physical, sexual or financial abuse that they have not reported to police. When dealing with victims of domestic violence, it is crucial that Probation Board staff understand that the victim is not just victim of one single criminal act. They have most likely suffered a sustained pattern of abuse over a considerable length of time, and that this has a substantial negative impact on that victim.
-)] We welcome the commitment to training of Probation Board staff throughout the Victims Policy. Given the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence in Northern Ireland, it is essential that any such training of staff includes training on domestic and sexual violence. This should be delivered by experts in the field of domestic and sexual violence, and effectively deal with the many myths and misunderstandings surrounding them, such as questions like "why doesn't she just leave" or lack of knowledge about

domestic violence as a pattern of control and manipulation that is underpinned by psychological abuse. Women's Aid urges that any commitment to training within this Victims Policy (at sections 2(d), 5(c), 5(d) and 9), will automatically include training on domestic and sexual violence from an expert source with sufficient understanding of the nature of domestic and sexual violence.

) The safety of victims must be a primary concern and must underpin this policy. Regarding the commitment to incorporate the victim's perspective into all work with offenders (sections 2(c), 5(a) and 5(e)), although we recognise the value of doing so for many victims, this must be done in a manner that avoids putting the victim at risk in any way. Any proposed sharing of a victim's information or perspective must be carefully considered, particularly if the offender is a domestic violence perpetrator, and sharing anything that a victim disclosed in confidence may lead to further future abuse. In many cases where the offender is a domestic violence perpetrator, it may not be appropriate to share the thoughts or perspective of the victim with the perpetrator.

) While we welcome the commitment to provide information to victims, we would urge that section 2(e) is strengthened to ensure the provision of information to victims in a timely manner. Informing victims of domestic violence as soon as possible about any change in the status or circumstances of their perpetrator is essential, and can be life-saving. Any delay in providing information could place victims in at high risk of serious injury or death. Victims of domestic and sexual violence need to be able to take decisions on their safety on the basis of accurate, up to date information about their case. Their confidence in the Probation Board is partly based on knowing that they can be kept informed about their perpetrator's whereabouts and any other information that could affect their safety. This is another respect in which domestic violence cases are unique - while offenders for other crimes are generally unlikely to seek out a victim to perpetrate further crimes, the opposite is usually true of domestic violence perpetrators.

) Regarding the use of restorative interventions at section 2(f), while we recognise that these can be effective tools in general, such restorative justice solutions are not appropriate in domestic violence cases. They provide perpetrators with access to their victim and present a further opportunity to abuse, manipulate, and control. We would also urge caution about even using such solutions in domestic violence cases on the basis that the victim has "consented" to such a course of action. A victim of domestic violence may feel pressure to consent to mediation or other restorative justice practices due to their relationship with, or fear of, their perpetrator - this is not true consent. It is bad practice to expose a victim to any process which may open them to abuse or re-victimisation in any way, and general best practice and knowledge in the field of

domestic violence indicates that restorative interventions are not suitable where domestic violence is a factor.

3. Contact Details

For further information about this response please contact:

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