**Main Consultation Response**

Section: Who the respondent is, and who they represent

**SECTION 2: RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON A DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL ABUSE STRATEGY**

**Question 1: What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse in Northern Ireland, supported by relevant data and statistics where available, to help underpin workstreams under the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy?**

**For years 2008 to 2021:-**

* **38% of domestic homicides in NI were male (33 male, 54 female), Ref.[1]**
* **21% of partner homicides in NI were men (10 men, 38 women), Ref.[1]**
* **20% of sexual offence victims were male, Ref.[2]**
* **62% of all violent crimes with injury in NI were male, Ref.[2]**
* **51% of all violent crimes without injury in NI were male, Ref.[2]**
* **70% of victims of robbery in NI were male, Ref.[2]**
* **53% of all crimes in NI were male, Ref.[2]**

**For years 2016 to 2021:-**

* **55% of child victims of violence were male, Ref.[2]**
* **31% of child victims of sexual assault were male, Ref.[2]**
* **26% of victims of all child sexual offences were male, Ref.[2]**

**Year 2021**

* **31% of domestic abuse crime victims reported to police were male in year 20/21, Ref.[3]. Men under-report 2.5 times more even than women, so this will be an under-estimate, Ref.[4]**
* **94% of perpetrators of partner abuse against men are women, Refs.[5,6]**

**References**

1. [Clarification and correction of data referring to Northern Ireland’s ranking in respect of Domestic Abuse Homicide rates across Europe (psni.police.uk)](https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics/documents/eurostat-intentional-homicide-figures-clarification.pdf)
2. [police\_recorded\_crime\_in\_northern\_ireland\_1998-99\_to\_2020-21.xlsx (live.com)](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fglobalassets%2Finside-the-psni%2Four-statistics%2Fpolice-recorded-crime-statistics%2Fdocuments%2Fpolice_recorded_crime_in_northern_ireland_1998-99_to_2020-21.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)
3. [Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2020/21 (psni.police.uk)](https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics/2020-21/domestic-abuse-incidents-and-crimes-in-northern-ireland-2004-05-to-2020-21.pdf)
4. [Statistics on Male Victims of Domestic Abuse - (mankind.org.uk)](https://www.mankind.org.uk/statistics/statistics-on-male-victims-of-domestic-abuse/)
5. [Men's Aid received 8,000 contacts last year — and 94% of their abusers were women (irishexaminer.com)](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40776516.html)
6. [Research (bpmuk.org)](https://bpmuk.org/research)

**Question 2: Are there specific areas where service provision and support could be further improved, and strengthened, in order to most effectively respond to domestic and sexual abuse?**

**The proposed strategy rightly includes the requirement to address the needs of LGBTQ as a potentially marginalised group (noting that bisexual and lesbian women suffer the highest prevalence of domestic abuse, Ref.[7])**

**Heterosexual men are also currently a marginalised group and I would urge the Executive to back the idea of a parallel Strategy to address Intimate Violence against Boys and Men in Northern Ireland. A separate Strategy for male victims is required because of the distinct stigmas, stereotyping and misunderstanding that pervades the area of male DV victimisation.**

**Currently NI is leading the UK nations in respect of gender equity, but the creation of a Strategy to address Intimate Violence against Women and Girls raises an obvious question in respect of Section 75. In order to consolidate the case for the VAWG strategy, and to maintain compliance with Section 75 and NI’s current lead in gender equity, a parallel Strategy to address Intimate Violence against Boys and Men is the best solution.**

**I note that in the rest of the UK there is an emerging consensus that a parallel Intimate Violence against Boys and Men strategy is the way forward. In September 2021 the Victims Commissioner for England and Wales backed this proposal, Ref.[8]; in Scotland the SNP included a commitment to fund services for male DV victims and to adopt a national Strategy for male DV victims, Ref.[9].**

**References**

1. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusefindingsfromthecrimesurveyforenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018/relateddata>
2. [We need a separate strategy for tackling physical and sexual violence against men and boys - Victims Commissioner](https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/news/we-need-a-separate-strategy-for-tackling-physical-and-sexual-violence-against-men-and-boys/)
3. [SNP Manifesto 2021 by HinksBrandwise - Issuu](https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04_15_snp_manifesto_2021___a4_document?mode=window)

**Question 3: What activity should be undertaken to aid prevention, and provide for early intervention, in order to help reduce the number of people that become victims in the first place? Linked to prevention, and equally important in preventing crimes, is any evidence that can be provided on abusers, particularly repeat offenders, so that we can gather as much evidence as possible on both who commits these crimes and what works to help them stop.**

**Policies on domestic abuse almost invariably present a perspective of a clear perpetrator and a clear and distinct victim. Responses to reports of DV deepen that simplistic presumption. But it is well established, e.g., Ref.[10], that the majority of domestic abuse is bidirectional. The first step is therefore to distinguish between the two cases: where there is a clear unidirectional perpetrator and where not.**

**Perpetrator programmes have not so far had a good record of success, and this is likely to be because of an overly simplistic (and accusatory) approach in cases where this does not align with reality. In some cases this approach will be necessary, but in the majority of cases, probably not. Where there is bidirectional abuse, therapeutic methodologies may be more appropriate.**

**I am not a psychologist, but I suggest that the failure to successfully address DV so far is because a false notion of its aetiology persists.**

**References**

1. [Domestic Violence Facts and Statistics At A Glance – Domestic Violence Research](https://domesticviolenceresearch.org/domestic-violence-facts-and-statistics-at-a-glance/)

**Question 4: How best can we take account of the needs of specific groups of victims, including, for example: women; men; LGBTQIA+ individuals; minority ethnic communities; children and young people; older people; and those with a disability? This should include consideration of how the experience of these groups of victims could be improved, including how to overcome any barriers to accessing services and reaching support.**

**A positive approach is to adopt a parallel Strategy to address Intimate Violence against Boys and Men in Northern Ireland. Whilst I have no difficulty with a proposal for a VAWG Strategy, if adopted without a parallel male Strategy it will inevitably imply that male victims are less important. I would urge the Executive to guard their current lead in gender equality.**

**I suggest there should be a full equality impact assessment at an early stage of this process. Any barriers to accessing services and reaching support will flow from this (though it is well known that DV services for male victims are scarce).**

**In England and Wales the “VAWG” label is used to denote a class of crimes which includes male victims. This is obviously anomalous and raises understandable suspicions that it is a ruse to hide male victimisation. However, both the Crown Prosecution Service and the Home Office have published Statements on male victims of VAWG which would be a useful starting point for a male-specific Strategy, see Refs.[11, 12].**

**References**

1. [Violence against women and girls strategy (cps.gov.uk)](https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/public-statement-male-victims-crimes-covered-by-CPS-VAWG-strategy.pdf)
2. [Male victims position paper (March 2019) (accessible version) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategy-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-2016-to-2020/male-victims-position-paper-march-2019-accessible-version)

**Question 5: How best can protection and justice be secured, in responding to domestic and sexual abuse, so that we protect those that are affected by abuse, address abusive behaviour to reduce numbers of victims and effectively hold offenders to account for their behaviour?**

**The phrasing of this question presumes the same simplistic binary as exposed above, namely that one party is the offender and the other party is the victim. In many (most?) cases this will not be reality and so it is not appropriate to use the language of protection and punishment since both would be applicable to both parties. Consequently, the therapeutic option is the only sensible option in such cases. Such services exist, e.g., that of TEMPER DV in England, which addresses perpetrators of both sexes, in mixed groups, with a record of success.**

**This should not detract from robust protective action and legal sanctions in cases of clear and serious one-way perpetration.**

**Question 6: How best can linkages within the justice system be strengthened in order to most effectively deal with domestic and sexual abuse more widely?**

**Partner abuse is strongly correlated with separation and divorce. The question is a huge one because it brings in both the civil and criminal jurisdictions. At present large volumes of allegations of domestic abuse, potentially of a criminal nature, are raised in the family courts. This is an anomaly.**

**Question 7: Do you agree with the following proposed workstreams suggested for the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy? Have you any comments about how best these workstreams can be progressed as well as their content?**

* **Driving change together: Delivering change through joint commitment, leadership and partnership working.**
* **Prevention and early intervention: Early and effective interventions that prevent violence and maximise safety.**
* **Responsive services: Building responsive services to ensure victims get the support they need.**
* **Supporting different needs: Taking account of the needs of specific groups of victims.**
* **Protection and Justice: Effective, supportive, responsive and timely protection across the criminal justice system.**

**Question 8: Are there any other key issues, on the specific area of domestic and sexual abuse, which you would like to raise?**

**It is crucial that both policies and practice are inclusive in both name and spirit. Research shows that supposedly ‘gender neutral’ public policy practices in this area are positioned within or alongside ‘gendered violence’ constructs and ‘violence against women and girls’ narratives that significantly diminish visibility and regard for male and female victims who sit outside the male perpetrator/female victim narrative. This excludes the class where abuse has its greatest prevalence, i.e., lesbian women, as well as heterosexual and gay men.

Question 9: How best can we engage with, and draw from, the experience of those affected by domestic and sexual abuse going forward?**

**There are a number of charities and other organisations in the UK which cater for male victims of domestic abuse or sexual abuse. These organisations have knowledge of these male victims, including data, which tends not to find its way into influencing policy. More attention could be paid to this sector.**

**SECTION 3: RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON EQUALLY SAFE – A STRATEGY TO TACKLE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

**Question 1: We are inclined to the view that this new Equally Safe Strategy should focus on women and girls. This reflects the different forms of violence and unwanted behaviour against women and its impact within the gendered reality of men’s and women’s lives. We welcome your views on whether this approach or another approach is more appropriate?**

**I agree with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland’s view that women and men’s experience of violence can be different and that we need to adopt gender specific approaches to tackling violence.**

**A strategy to tackle violence against female victims of crime in isolation prejudices NI’s lead in gender equality. The Executive must develop a strategy to tackle intimate violence against boys and men to complement and support the proposed strategies to tackle domestic, sexual abuse and violence against women and girls. The reality of men’s and women’s lives in Northern Ireland is that anyone can experience violence and unwanted behaviour, including discrimination.**

**Question 2: We would like to hear your views on whether the draft vision set out below, or different words would best catch the ambition of what we want to do.**

***Every woman and girl is safe in our communities, feels safe and can reach their potential. We have a society in which violence against women is not tolerated in any form, in which all victims are supported, and perpetrators are held to account.***

**I note that the aim "to feel safe" and "to be safe" are two distinct objectives. At present women feel less safe than men, but men are actually less safe than women, statistically, "in our communities" (see data in Section 2 Qu.1).**

**The laudable objective to support all victims would not sit well within a policy framework based on a VAWG Strategy but no parallel Strategy for boys and men.**

**I make no response to the remaining questions.**

**Question 3: Do you agree with the draft objectives suggested for the new strategy? Are there any other objectives that should be included?**

* **Understanding the scope and scale of the problem the strategy is seeking to tackle.**
* **Prevention - Early intervention to get upstream of violence.**
* **A co-designed strategy which is delivered in a collaborative manner and is based on local and international evidence.**
* **Responsive services to ensure women and girls are equally safe.**

**Question 4: What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of acts or threats of gender based violence (apart from that addressed by the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy) that result in, or are likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls?**

**Question 5: We want to understand the “unwanted” behaviour or actions (including on-line) that emanate from an attitude to, or perception of, women and girls that lacks respect. What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of such behaviour?**

**Question 6: We want to understand the root causes of violence against women and girls, and would especially welcome learning on intersectional approaches and on what works in promoting behavioural and attitudinal change.**

**Question 7: We want to understand whether there are particular groups of women and girls, including those with specific vulnerabilities, who are more at risk of particular offences or ‘unwanted’ behaviour or actions.**

**Question 8: We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the experience of women and girls who are victims of crime (apart from that addressed by the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy) in the criminal justice system that you would like to draw to our attention.**

**Question 9: We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the treatment of perpetrators of violence against women and girls by the criminal justice system or other public services which reflect good practice, or which could be improved.**

**Question 10: We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the experience of women and girls, or of men and boys, in the community, which you would like to draw to our attention in understanding violence against women and girls and how it can be combatted.**