



Call for Views Summary Report

A new Domestic and Sexual Abuse
Strategy

July 2022



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Díl agus Cirt

Mánnystrie O tha Laa

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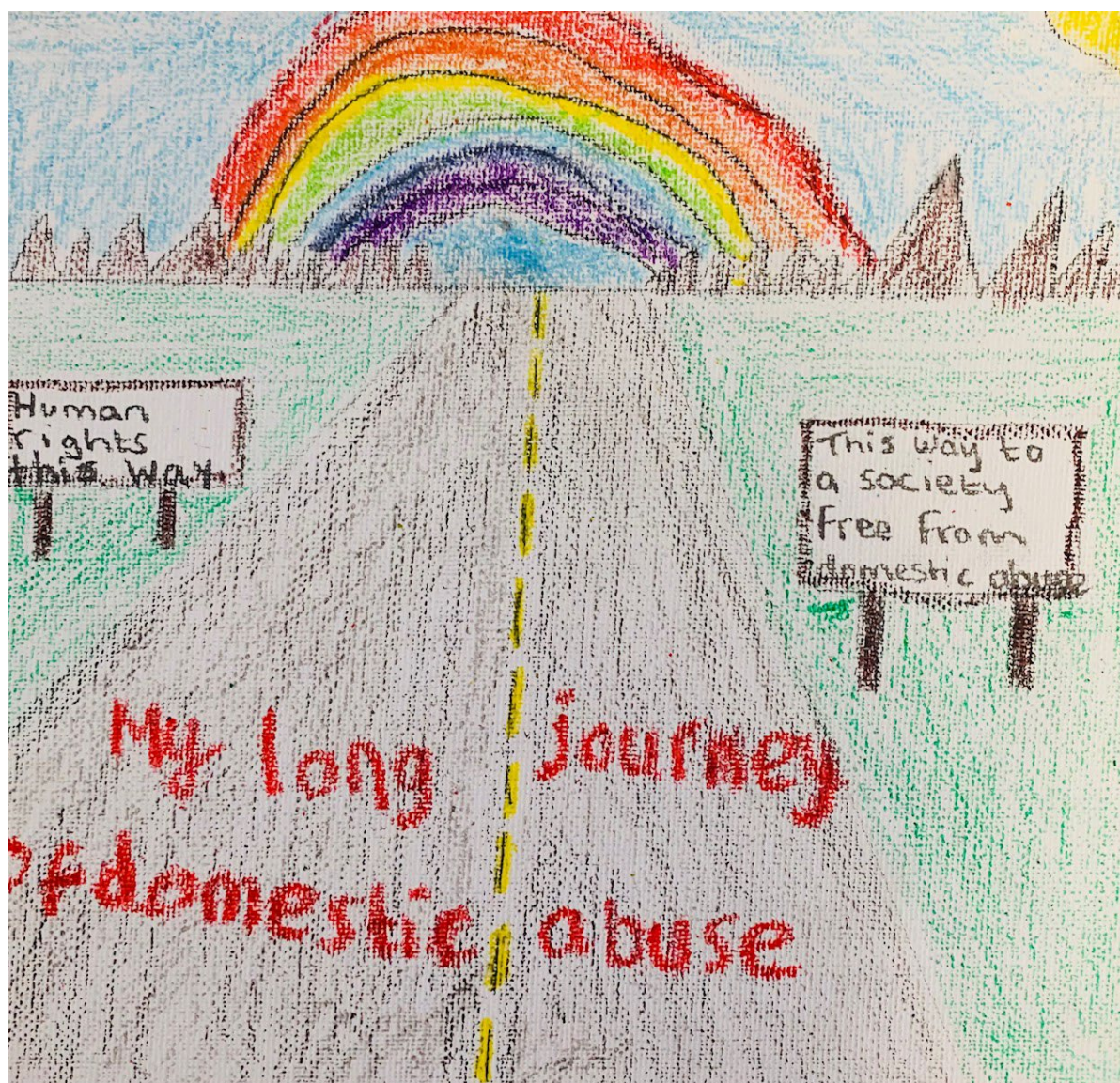
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Speak up – Speak out Competition Winner

As part of the Call for Views exercise, Departments asked voluntary sector partners for assistance in helping those with lived experience, including children and young people, to have their voices heard.

Women's Aid NI ran a drawing competition for children and young people (aged 8 – 18) engaged in their services. Children and young people designed posters as a way of asking government to “listen up”!

We are delighted to share the **competition winner's artwork** below and would like to thank all of the children and young people who shared their views with us.



Executive Summary

Call for Views

The Call for Views on a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy ran for ten weeks, to which there was a positive response. Views were submitted through various means with 91 written responses, 22 engagement events, five public events and 661 survey responses (250 victim survey, 411 public survey responses). A Call for views on a new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy was held at the same time, the summary report for which will be available at www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/topics/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls in the coming weeks.

Areas of discussion

To gather views on the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy a number of key issues were put forward for discussion. This included the scope, scale and prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse; service provision and support services; prevention and early intervention; the needs of particular groups; protection and justice; the proposed workstreams; and engagement with those affected by domestic and sexual abuse.

Key themes arising

A wide range of information, research and lived experience was reflected in the responses to the Call for Views exercise. The below key aspects were highlighted.

Scope, scale and prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse: Many responses noted the increased levels of domestic and sexual abuse but also that it continues to be underreported. The need for local research and disaggregated data to inform policy and service development was highlighted. It was also suggested that more use should be made of available global research.

Government Funding: Many responses emphasised that there must be longer term sustainable funding and a costed delivery plan, to fully implement the strategy and its action plans. This included additional resources for frontline services across health, housing, education and criminal justice so there is capacity to meaningfully tackle domestic and sexual abuse. There were also views that more funding should be provided to support organisations in the voluntary and community sector.

Prevention and Early Intervention: Many responses noted that prevention and early intervention is key to tackling domestic and sexual abuse and that it should be a central pillar of the new strategy. A range of areas were highlighted including:

- The need for **mandatory age appropriate Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)** dealing with healthy/unhealthy relationships, plus all types of

relationships and sexual orientation. This was one of most frequently raised issues. There was also a focus on the need for RSE in settings beyond schools, including sports and community facilities, and that 'education' should not be limited to those of school age.

- The need to **address and disrupt abusive behaviour**, through a multi-agency response. It was suggested that behavioural change programmes for females, and those whose first language is not English, be developed. Others noted that dealing with, and preventing sexually abusive behaviour, as well as appropriately responding to abusive behaviour by young people is needed. It was also suggested that there should be a perpetrator/abuser strategy.
- The need for more **awareness raising**, on the types of abuse, how to recognise it and on the support services available.

Supporting victims: Many felt that service provision and support could be strengthened. A range of views were provided with a particular focus on how to take account of the needs of particular groups of victims including: women; men; older people; people with a disability; children and young people; minority ethnic victims, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; LGBTQIA+ people; victims of rape and sexual violence; travellers; and rural communities. It was also noted that a victim may fall into more than one group.

Criminal justice experience: Many asked for improvements to the criminal justice system, streamlining and simplifying the process. Improving associated support services was also raised. It was felt that a Barnahus model should be introduced and Sexual Offences Legal Advisers extended to children and domestic abuse cases. Improved communication about the status of cases, reduced attrition, increased reporting, higher convictions and sentencing were also highlighted. A review of Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences was suggested and the need to fully implement the Gillen and Criminal Justice Inspection NI (CJINI) recommendations. Protection of victims was considered important, related to the introduction of Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders and awareness raising around the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme.

Housing and refuge provision: Many responses considered that more adequately resourced safe accommodation and refuge provision is needed for women and children and that dedicated 'crisis housing', floating support and outreach services are needed for male victims. More generally, the need for secure tenancies for domestic abuse victims was highlighted and to provide accommodation for those with no recourse to public funds.

Financial support for victims: Concerns were raised about the financial consequences of domestic abuse and ability to leave an abuser. Some noted the need for a review of the benefits system, in terms of the level, and use of, single payments as well as consideration of financial aid for victims in crisis.

Health-based support: Respondents commented on the need to strengthen health-based support. GPs were viewed as having a key role in identifying and supporting patients, through the Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS) programme.

Responses noted that there should be greater awareness across health and social care of how to identify and respond to domestic and sexual abuse, particularly in Emergency Departments. It was also felt that counselling waiting lists should be addressed.

Training and guidance: This was a common theme across responses. Many stressed the need for more training and guidance for professionals across a range of sectors, on how to recognise and respond to domestic and sexual abuse.

Domestic and sexual abuse as a workplace issue: Many responses commented on the need for businesses/employers to have workplace policies to support employees experiencing domestic and sexual abuse with training in place for staff. The importance of safe leave and flexible working arrangements was also noted.

Governance, accountability and delivery of the strategy: The importance of effective governance arrangements to monitor the delivery of the strategy, with performance indicators, was highlighted, as well as the need to work collectively across the region and between Departments. In terms of strategy delivery a number of responses noted the benefits of having organisational Champions; criminal justice co-ordinators; a standing Advisory Group; or a Survivors Board.

Proposed Workstreams for the strategy: Responses were broadly in agreement with the proposed workstreams. Some stated that they must be costed and the needs of specific groups should be considered in the context of each workstream.

A number of the key themes raised were also touched on in the Call for Views on a new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. There will be ongoing liaison with the Executive Office on this to ensure that a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy aligns with and complements a new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy.

Next steps

The issues raised during the Call for Views, as well the research and information provided, will be used to inform the development of the new strategy, which will be drafted over the coming months, with a view to consulting on the draft strategy in late 2022. It is intended that the final strategy will be published in 2023.

1. Introduction

Background

On 10 January 2022, the First Minister, deputy First Minister, Minister of Health and Minister of Justice launched a Call for Views, at a virtual stakeholder event, to inform the development of two new strategies:

- A Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, led jointly by the Department of Health and the Department of Justice; and
- An Equally Safe Strategy: a Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls, led by the Executive Office.

The purpose of the Call for Views was to provide an opportunity for as many people as possible to share their knowledge, experience and views on issues that could help inform the content, actions and overall direction of the new strategies. Ideas were welcomed along with any relevant data, statistics and research.

This document summarises the responses provided in relation to the **Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy** only. A separate report on the Equally Safe Strategy will be made available at www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/topics/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls in the coming weeks.

Call for Views Process

The Call for Views ran for a period of ten weeks and officially closed on 21 March 2022. A number of organisations requested further time to respond and were given until 1 April 2022 to do so.

Documentation was published on the NI Direct website (administered through Citizen Space) and was available in alternative formats on request.

There were a number of ways to respond:

- two online surveys were available for those aged 16 and above; one for the general public and one for those with lived experience;
- for those aged under 16 we asked our partner organisations to facilitate targeted focus group discussions using a children and young people's version;
- an easy read version of the Call for Views document was available; and
- an online written response form asked a number of questions and also enabled practitioners, specialist organisations and academics, to submit additional evidence and data to inform the development of the strategies.

A number of engagement events were held during the Call for Views period, which are listed at **Annex A** (in relation to the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy). There were five public events and 22 stakeholder focus groups which were held virtually in line with COVID-19 guidance. All views shared during the meetings were noted by the Departments but not attributed to any individuals or organisations. These views are reflected in the analysis in the following sections.

Responses

There were 91 written responses received and 661 surveys completed. Organisations that submitted a written response have been listed at **Annex B**.

This was a significant response, reflective of the considerable interest and importance placed in tackling these issues. The Departments are very grateful for the valuable contribution made and would like to thank all of the individuals and organisations for taking the time to respond and for helping to raise awareness and encourage participation in this very important exercise.

The summary of responses to the Call for Views reflects a range of comments made, including those that were most numerous and salient to the question at hand. It has not been possible to reflect every single comment that was raised.

2. Analysis of Responses

Call for Views Questions

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?

Of the written responses received, 76 (84%) replied to this question. The analysis below also incorporates feedback from the engagement events.

Whilst many noted the importance of having robust data in this area, few responses provided data that was specific to Northern Ireland service provision and experience. A small number of responses undertook surveys and localised data collection. Just under half provided statistical information (including reference to national and international research) to underpin future workstreams. Additional comments focused on where there are gaps in data collection; the importance of addressing barriers to reporting; and the need for improved data and information sharing at both a local and regional level.

Key points included:

- PSNI statistics provide information on reported crimes and incidents. However, more disaggregated data (in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, race, religion, disability, etc. – such as Section 75) is required.
- Data should provide the basis for action and inform future resource requirements.
- Use the Istanbul Convention as a checklist for developing good practice.
- Improve data collection to inform how service provision and support could be strengthened to meet the needs of particular groups of victims and better understand the prevalence of different types of abuse.
- Consider statistics from conducted surveys as well as local research to provide supporting evidence.
- All organisations should collect and analyse data to inform policy development.
- The true prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse is not reflected due to under reporting. Map this, with an intersectional focus, including why different groups do not report and how to improve reporting rates.
- A clear picture is needed of the nature and extent of sexual abuse, with harmful sexual behaviour and offending in schools recorded (including online abuse).
- Gather data on the uptake and delivery of the Ask for ANI code word scheme.
- Collate and publish better information on the numbers of children in families experiencing domestic and sexual abuse (especially those on the child protection register), including police incidents. Children and young people need to be included as victims in data.

- There should be a statutory requirement to strengthen methodologies for consistently measuring domestic and sexual abuse.
- Review referral quality. Have clearer reporting, referral and monitoring systems across all agencies and data sharing to limit victims retelling their story.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The reported figures are only the tip of the iceberg.”

“Increasing levels of incidents and crimes but decreasing numbers of prosecutions.”

“More must be done to ensure that ... information is appropriately shared within and between all the agencies involved.”

Some provided details of research material to help inform future workstreams. Others highlighted where there are gaps in research.

Key points included:

- Robust, long term, Northern Ireland research is needed to outline the context and extent of domestic abuse to increase understanding and provide clear direction for service development.
- There is a need to source and consider international research material.
- More research is needed to explore why certain groups are less likely to report domestic and sexual abuse, including women, men, LGBTQIA+ people, older people, young people, people with a disability and migrant and minority ethnic groups.
- While women are more likely to be victims more information, data and research is needed around abuse of male victims and their experience.
- Research needs to be informed by those with lived experience of domestic abuse, including children and young people, informing effective actions and responses.
- Consider more research and data into the link between suicide and domestic abuse, observation of court cases, and children abusing parents.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Research and statistics are valuable tools for developing evidence-based policies and interventions ... Effective solutions must be informed by data, and data collection based on agreed standards and this must be high on all government agendas.”

“There is a lack of supporting evidence in this area due to the minimal amount of local research available on the scope, scale and prevalence of domestic abuse within this group ... This is an area [that] needs addressed, with a wide ranging and detailed research program focusing in on male (Including GBT+) victims of abuse and their children.”

“It is vital this research is fully informed by children and young people ... [to] give them a voice and recognise them as experts by experience.”

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?

Of the written responses received, 78 (86%) replied to this question. The analysis below also incorporates feedback from the engagement events.

A key theme to emerge was the view that longer term sustainable funding is needed to tackle domestic and sexual abuse.

Key points included:

- The need for long term funding of the new strategy, each of its workstreams, action plans and associated legislation to ensure full implementation.
- Review how domestic and sexual abuse services are commissioned under the new strategy and ensure a consistent approach across all Departments.
- More government funding should be given to charities.
- Fund and build capacity in local communities to provide more community led support, including safe spaces and pathways to reach all victims and particularly those in rural communities.
- Invest in frontline services across health, housing, education and criminal justice so there is capacity to meaningfully tackle domestic and sexual abuse.
- Provide adequate PSNI funding to ensure a quick and effective response to reported domestic and sexual abuse incidents.
- Invest in crisis support so that when someone does get to the stage of reaching out and asking for help they are responded to immediately.
- Adequately resource services and support based on need.
- Establish a statutory duty to provide funding and services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse.
- Roll out pilots on a regional basis if they work well. Similarly, for the introduction of initiatives that have been validated and implemented in other jurisdictions.
- Fund more public awareness raising campaigns.
- Provide resources to enable meaningful participation and referrals to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) with advocates representing victims.
- Create 'One Stop Shops' in all council areas, bringing together all partner agencies under one roof, reducing the number of times victims have to recount their ordeal and increasing access to support services.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Money and resources must be ring fenced.”

“The short-term, often hand-to-mouth funding model has created competing and fragmented service provision.”

“Pockets of good work happen in isolation and there is a lack of cohesive and holistic working across the sector.”

Another common theme was the need for more training and guidance for professionals and organisations on how to recognise and respond appropriately to domestic and sexual abuse.

Key points included:

- The need to train police, court staff, legal professionals (including judiciary), public sector bodies, housing providers, doctors, social services, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, those providing care in the community, teachers, youth workers, hairdressers, beauticians, school staff, call handlers, church and faith based organisations, staff/employers in the workplace and also those organisations supporting victims. Some considered that training for professionals should be mandatory.
- Deliver more specialist training for mainstream services on the specific needs of different groups of victims to understand additional vulnerabilities.
- Greater awareness of the different types of abuse including coercive control, financial abuse, technological and online abuse, child to parent violence, domestic abuse of older people, emotional abuse, verbal and physical abuse, interfamilial abuse, people who are carers for their abusers and also where the carer is the abuser, bi-directional abuse and marital rape. There is also a need to consider victims married/living with people in positions of trust.
- The need to embed trauma informed practice.
- Training that informs, builds capacity to act and tracks changes to hold professionals accountable.
- More training is needed on DASH risk assessments.
- Consider bystander training to address attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate domestic and sexual abuse. People who witness domestic and sexual abuse also need to know what action they can take.
- Wider family members could benefit from additional information advice and support.
- The need for businesses to have workplace policies in place to support employees experiencing domestic and sexual abuse, working with Trade Unions and having statutory policy guidance.
- Introduce statutory guidance on the impact of domestic abuse on children.
- Establish a Training and Education Sub Group attached to the strategy's Stakeholder Assurance Group.
- Fund training to people who work with children and young people in educational settings and other appropriate settings.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“It is important that victims can get access to holistic information, advice and support across all the range of issues they may have when they need it and in the format they need it. There must be clear pathways to help and support victims. It is vitally important that this is provided in the right way and at the right time so that victims are not put off taking action about their situation.”

“Requires the development of a National Training Framework.”

“Policies and procedures should be co-designed with representatives of section 75 groups as specialists and experts.”

Many respondents considered service provision and support across particular sectors. Some provided views on how the justice system could be improved.

Key points included:

- There is a need for more training across the justice system.
- Address victim attrition and consider opportunities to expedite cases.
- Enhance support services for victims from when police are called to after court.
- Review advocacy support and consider the introduction of a dedicated advocacy service for children and young people at family courts.
- Extend the Sexual Offences Legal Adviser (SOLA) service to children and domestic abuse and continue advice and support throughout the trial, as well as after. Specialist independent legal advice for migrants also suggested.
- Establish Barnahus-style provisions on a regional basis.
- Ensure equal access to justice and address barriers for disabled people, LGBTQIA+ people and the minority ethnic community.
- Expand Domestic Homicide Reviews to include suicides and use Domestic Homicide Review reports to shape the new strategy.
- Roll out Operation Encompass.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Survivors do not believe that the outcome of their report will be worth the trauma of reporting and reliving their experience.”

“A separated court system does not sufficiently support victims of domestic abuse in family, civil and criminal settings. That two courts can sit and neither can be aware of the proceedings in the other, meaning that effectively each court can be blind to what is happening and because of that the family facing abuse cannot be supported adequately or in its entirety.”

The need to tackle homelessness as a result of domestic abuse was another key theme with views provided on how housing, refuge provision and floating support could be improved.

Key points included:

- The need for more adequately resourced safe accommodation and refuge provision for women and children. Refuge and floating support services, funded through Supporting People, should also include response services for children and young people.
- Dedicated ‘crisis housing’ needs to be introduced for male victims. Signposting men to the NI Housing Executive is not appropriate.
- Floating support and outreach should be offered to men who are homeless or at threat of losing their tenancy due to domestic abuse, funded through the Supporting People Programme.

- The need for secure tenancies for social housing in cases of domestic abuse. Long waiting lists can be a barrier to seeking support with victims potentially having to stay in an abusive home. This is a particular difficulty in rural areas where less social housing is available.
- The need for the NI Housing Executive and Housing Associations to have a domestic abuse compliance framework as in England and Wales.
- More security in homes. It was also suggested that police should have powers to remove perpetrators from the home and that this should be the focus (rather than the victim having to leave).
- Housing and refuge providers need to consider additional vulnerabilities of clinically vulnerable and disabled people. Being rehoused can mean leaving services or support they are reliant on. Other examples included the needs of minority ethnic communities particularly where there is no recourse to public funds. Gender-binary service provision was also noted as presenting difficulties for LGBTQIA+ people.
- The need for women-only shelters.
- Concerns around single payment of universal credit, the level of benefits and risk to those in abusive relationships by this (dependence and inability to leave).
- Provide temporary accommodation for those with no recourse to public funds.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The need for crisis accommodation and floating support response is at full capacity with lack of investment.... increasing this funding needs to be urgently addressed within the next strategy.”

“Rightly there are beds available for women and their children in crisis but we need to ask the question – why not [the same] for men?”

Respondents also commented on the physical, psychological and emotional impact of domestic and sexual abuse and the need to strengthen health-based support.

Key points included:

- The need for greater awareness of domestic abuse across health and social care and embedding trauma informed practice.
- People working in addiction and mental health services should be trained in domestic abuse and services should be more joined up.
- GPs have a role in identifying and supporting patients experiencing domestic and sexual abuse and must be able to identify victims. The IRIS programme was welcomed and identified as an area that should continue to be developed.
- Health professionals could help people disclose domestic abuse by ensuring they see patients alone.
- Ensure awareness of domestic and sexual abuse is embedded in all health settings. First responders and health professionals have an important role to play.
- The need for increased capacity in Emergency Departments to enable staff to identify and signpost victims of domestic and sexual abuse to specialist support services and refer high risk victims to MARACs. The pilot currently underway in

- Craigavon Area Hospital should be rolled out to other areas.
- Waiting lists for counselling and therapeutic support need to be addressed for adults, children and young people.
- Consider the Mental Health Champion's recommendations for Northern Ireland's mental health recovery plan, which includes tackling domestic abuse.
- Consider links with perinatal mental health support services.
- Take stock of the Ask for ANI code word scheme and consider improvements to maximise its availability, supporting those pharmacies taking part.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“There is a gap in availability of specialised mental health and trauma support service for victims of domestic and sexual violence and abuse, at a time, place and pace that each individual victim requires it.”

“An infrastructure needs to be in place to enable staff to be equipped with knowledge and time to ask targeted enquiries re a patient's safety and make referrals to support victims appropriately.”

Some respondents were of the view that there should be more specialist, victim support services with dedicated resources for particular groups.

Some examples listed below and also noted in earlier paragraphs:

Women: More refuge provision. Women only shelters. Education and therapy programmes. Financial relief for women in crisis. Support for Women's Centres.

Men: Dedicated 'crisis housing' for men. Crisis response. Counselling. Outreach and floating support. Peer support. More funding to support men's charities and support services.

Older people: Dedicated service recognition and provision. Counselling. An advisory group of older people with lived experience. Strengthening of Age Sector Networks. Consideration of creative options such as art.

LGBTQIA+ people: Advocacy service with a dedicated LGBTQIA+ Domestic Abuse Officer to work alongside partners including PSNI and ASSIST NI, carry out research and help tackle barriers. Specialist services including refuge support.

Children and young people: Operation Encompass. School Sanctuary Service. Group work. Therapeutic support for child victims of sexual abuse and abuse online. Barnahus-style provisions. Specialist advocacy support. SOLAs. Services are also needed for young people displaying harmful behaviours.

Minority Ethnic victims, Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Multi lingual, wraparound support on housing; benefits; healthcare; counselling; criminal justice system; and specialist legal and immigration advice particularly where no recourse to public funds. More translators/interpreters.

People with a disability: More specialist services for d/Deaf and disabled people. Improve access to interpreters for victims and have more suitably skilled independent advocates in healthcare and when engaging with criminal justice system. Increased accessibility to mainstream services and websites including refuge. Mental health and wellbeing support. Improved measures for identification and disclosure in supportive

environments.

Victims of rape and sexual violence: Strengthen the service pathway for victims of rape and sexual violence. Roadmap the range of services currently available for both adults and children and young people and better understand men's experience of sexual trauma. Trauma informed emotional support for all through a publically funded rape crisis service/centre, whether reporting or not, waiting on counselling, waiting on outcomes of court cases, or where court cases are not proceeding.

Rural communities: More local community support hubs and safe spaces. Extend digital services to reach remote areas. Fund Women's Centres and other groups in disadvantaged and rural areas. Explore a rural support helpline for farmers. Additional resources for support organisations in rural locations. Raise awareness and links with vets. Address the different risks for those living in rural communities including isolation, lack of mobile or internet connectivity, limited means of escape, possibility of firearms on premises etc.

Travellers: The need to understand culture and familial expectations. It was also noted that specialist services are needed but no examples were provided.

A victim may fall into more than one group: One size does not fit all when it comes to service provision.

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 commit these crimes and what works to help them stop?

Of the responses received, 78 (86%) replied to this question. The analysis below also incorporates feedback from the Call for Views engagement events.

Many were of the view that education, particularly throughout school years, was vital in addressing prevention and early intervention.

Key points included:

- Work in this area should be led by the Department of Education and prioritised by Government.
- Prevention and early intervention is key to tackling domestic and sexual abuse. This needs to be a central pillar of the new strategy.
- Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) needs to be standardised, developmentally and age appropriate (animations suggested), mandatory/statutory basis and objective (regardless of religious ethos) plus high quality and inclusive in order to provide consistency.
- RSE must cover what constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships, dealing with all types of relationships and sexual orientation, not being limited to a heterosexual male abuser, female victim scenario.
- RSE needs to be accessible in not only schools but also other environments such as churches, youth clubs, community and sports settings as well as across workplaces, public authorities and other responsible organisations.
- Current RSE provision is viewed as not fit for purpose, rather inadequate and inconsistent, with religion in school a barrier to it being effective.
- Undertake RSE from an early school age and through educational lifetime.
- Decisions on RSE should not be taken at an individual school level, nor be determined by Board approval or parental consent. A whole school ethos is needed, embedded throughout the school and delivered across the curriculum, with appropriate training for staff and access to specialist services for children and young people.
- Young people considered that school is the best place for delivery of RSE.
- Some considered that trained specialist professionals, rather than teachers, should deliver RSE. It was also suggested that it should be delivered in smaller groups, to allow for discussion.
- Ensure resources are fully utilised by schools, with training for new teachers. Provide funding to education bodies for prevention and early intervention and investment in RSE.
- Revise the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007.

- Specific RSE programmes should be developed for special schools and provide for all types of disabilities.
- Educate children and young people on equality between men and women, gender stereotypes, all forms of abuse and staying safe online.
- Prioritise children’s emotional well-being and mental health and provide counselling and support to children in educational settings.
- Debunk myths around rape and false accusations through education.
- Establish bystander programmes, to help young people understand early signs of abuse, with peer-to-peer mentoring programmes and peer interventions.
- Further consider teachers’ role in supporting children affected by domestic abuse.
- Rollout the recommendations in the Safeguarding Board for NI, Equally Safeguarded report.
- Consider extending the Ask for ANI code word scheme to schools.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Educate, educate, educate ... The need for reform [of RSE] is evident and urgent.”

“While all schools have been required to develop their own policy on how they will address RSE ... the statutory curriculum is designed to give schools and teachers flexibility in what they choose to include, or indeed leave out. This is further exacerbated by schools allowing their children to opt out of RSE.”

“RSE in schools is “inconsistent and insufficient” ... should not be “dependent on school ethos” ... [and] warned of a “systemic failure” to address RSE and called for a compulsory RSE curriculum similar to other school subjects.”

Responses also focused on the need for more awareness raising as a tool to aid prevention and early intervention.

Key points included:

- Online material should be available for young people to inform themselves about healthy relationships.
- Awareness raising is needed with the public, businesses, sporting organisations and the nighttime economy.
- More awareness raising needed for men, women and children on all types of abuse, how to recognise it, available services, the diverse range of victims as well as consent and what constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Make use of local celebrities to assist in getting key messages across.
- Consult with the Public Health Agency on awareness raising campaigns.
- Organisations should consider hosting coffee mornings, social workshops, children’s craft mornings and provide information through those routes.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The bystander approach would be good to adopt at a societal level in communities to call out perpetrator behaviour safely. The Welsh Public Health violence prevention programme’s campaign #SafeToSay is a good example.”

“Early identification is needed of sexual abuse / domestic violence victims/ survivors by statutory services and community agencies, particularly in A&E and localised health service.”

“Regularly run awareness-raising campaigns.”

Another key theme related to addressing the behaviour of offenders and those showing concerning behaviour.

Key points included:

Structural

- Ring-fenced funding needed for preventative work with perpetrators and those individuals displaying concerning behaviour, along with support for victims.
- Introduce national standards for working with perpetrators and those individuals displaying concerning behaviour, with an associated delivery plan.
- A common assessment model is needed to identify abusive behaviours early on.
- Establish effective risk assessment and tailored responses, with a multi-agency response, offering victims support and changing the behaviour of abusers.
- Public Protection Arrangements (PPANI) must consider the management of domestic abuse offenders (not limited to serious violent high-risk offenders).
- Long-term commitment needed to structural changes, changing behaviour and building capacity to respond to abuse.
- Bring forward a statutory duty to provide preventative and early intervention services, with specialist support for perpetrators and tailored interventions.
- Consider Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) that operate in England and Wales.
- Consider an abuser/repeat perpetrator strategy, with effective collaboration between partner organisations. This should include the swift, lawful flow of relevant information between partners.
- Approach to prevention and early intervention must be victim led, proactively focused on those posing the greatest risk and the highest volume of perpetrators and those showing concerning behaviour.

Behavioural change

- Undertake research into the most effective forms of rehabilitation and incorporate as a mandatory part of the offender management process.
- Refer and sign post perpetrators to appropriate restorative and supportive services in accordance with their needs to break the cycle of reoffending.
- Services needed for both male and female abusers, such as helplines, support/perpetrator programmes and alternative treatments such as mindfulness and therapeutic methodologies as preventative measures.
- Consider and resource behavioural change programmes for diversionary behaviours, those convicted (and in prison), including females, and after release.
- Adopt a holistic approach engaging offenders, disrupting behaviours and reinforcing newly learned behaviours.

- Address behaviour for those with insufficient English to engage in interventions.
- Early intervention services needed to prevent the escalation of harmful sexual behaviours and address underlying factors.

Cause and effect

- Consider the motivation and causes of, and underpinning reasons for, abusive behaviours; examine case history; track patterns of behaviour and offer support.
- Need to understand harmful sexual behaviour, address root causes and build in measures to prevent further offending. This must take account of influencing factors and triggers such as mental health and substance misuse.
- Take account of the impact of trauma and transgenerational trauma.
- Recognise the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and conduct research into how childhood experiences impact on becoming an abuser.

Children and young people

- Support young people and others worried about their behaviour.
- Where abusive behaviour is carried out by children treat them as a child first, prioritising a safeguarding and child welfare response.
- Prevention and early intervention needed in terms of peer on peer harmful sexual behaviour.
- Make use of a 'Friends Can Tell' campaign to educate and empower young people to spot abuse and support their friends.
- Support the whole family experience of domestic abuse, including through therapy sessions and family programmes.
- Strengthen early intervention with families and consider strengthening Family Support Hubs. Funding and family support needs addressed, possibly including a fund to support child victims of abuse.

Attitudinal

- Prevention programmes must change attitudes and norms that encourage abuse.
- Encourage perpetrators to take part in behavioural change programmes.
- Consider opportunities to work with parents through the voluntary sector.
- Get upstream to address abuse, through education, pre-conviction action and diverting individuals away from the criminal justice system. This includes addressing wider societal and cultural issues.
- Educate communities and understand the needs of diverse cultures, focusing on preventing abuse rather than awareness raising.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“It is essential that young people who may present as abusive in teenage relationships receive a response that recognises them as children and provides specialist support to address their needs and harmful behaviour.”

“Social Workers reported notable changes in behaviours from those who engaged in programmes, stating some were more open to considering the impact of their behaviours and evidenced more willingness to apply learning and make progress.”

“Any prevention strategy is an opportunity to seek early intervention before offending behaviour takes place ... when behaviours of concern would first be identified before this would ever reach the criminal justice arena.”

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.

Of the responses received, 73 (80%) replied to this question. The analysis below also incorporates feedback from the Call for Views engagement events.

It should be noted that the responses to question two and question four often overlapped. Comments relating to service provision and support have been summarised as part of the analysis at question two.

The majority of respondents provided views on how best to take account of the needs of different groups of victims.

Key points included:

- Listen, on a regular basis, to the first-hand experience of victims as well as the organisations that support and advocate for them, from all communities.
- Victim groups facilitated by specialist organisations should be established and resourced for the duration of the strategy to design engagement processes, provide direct insight and help with monitoring and evaluation.
- Sensitive and targeted consultation with meaningful co-design.
- More awareness raising (that is inclusive and relatable), including media campaigns, to educate the public that anyone can be a victim or an abuser regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age, etc.; to encourage reporting; and raise awareness of support services
- Some respondents were in favour of a gender-neutral approach. Others recommended gender specific actions.
- All organisations that come into contact with victims of domestic and sexual abuse should receive ongoing training to better understand different needs and review their needs assessment processes. Trained support workers are needed across all communities.
- Increase levels of representation across the statutory, voluntary and community sector from all ethnicities and genders.
- Develop mandatory workplace policies across all organisations that receive government funding, working with trade unions, and develop statutory guidance. Also consider for businesses more widely.
- Consider the role that local Government and community leaders can play in making connections with marginalised communities.
- Consider a centralised support system/online platform so that organisations can share resources to meet their clients' needs.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The first step in this process should be developing an understanding of the community landscape and answering questions such as – who is in my community? What are the challenges they are facing? What is their current relationship with police, support services, governmental Departments? What can I do to meet the needs of this specific group?”

“The experience of a person facing multiple inequalities is different from those facing inequality on a single ground.”

“This.... is about early intervention and identification of abuse and creating opportunities not for “hard to reach” groups but to change the conversation to “how do we reach them.”

Respondents also focused on the experience of specific groups of victims. Many considered the needs of:

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex or Asexual (LGBTQIA+) individuals

Key points included:

- Recognise that the LGBTQIA+ community is not one homogeneous group.
- Criminal justice agencies do not record sexual orientation or gender identity, which leads to a lack of visibility in statistics, services, policies and campaigns.
- There are structural barriers to reporting, including an assumption of heterosexuality, for those in the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Having to disclose sexual orientation or gender identity to a mainstream organisation can be very difficult. There is often a fear of negative consequences and a perceived fear of homophobia.
- There is a lack of knowledge around intersectionality.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“It is key that any support service is competent and culturally aware to deal with the complexities of issues and identities of LGBTQIA victims/survivors.”

“One significant barrier for LGBTQ+ women, along with other victims, is not recognising that they are experiencing due to a lack of education on healthy relationships.”

Minority Ethnic Communities, Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers (with a particular focus on women)

Key points included:

- There are language, cultural and religious barriers which result in isolation and a lack of information and education around domestic and sexual abuse.
- Reporting and access to services is significantly more difficult for those whose first

language is not English. Support services need to be culturally competent, receive ongoing training and have translation/interpretation services available.

- It is important to build trust in communities.
- Fear of immigration reporting and negative perceptions of the police and criminal justice system can deter victims from reporting abuse and accessing services.
- No recourse to public funds is a barrier to accessing support. Victims can be left financially dependent on their abuser and feel like they have no choice but to remain with their abuser.
- Tackling female genital mutilation, honour-based violence and forced marriage requires a specialist approach.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“They may be at particular risk of being trapped in abusive situations because of a lack of English language ability, knowledge of how to navigate local systems (benefits/housing/healthcare/criminal justice etc.), and the fact that they may not have an available support system of family and friends due to not having local connections.”

“Strategies should seek to focus on building relationships with women from migrant, minority ethnic, refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds to ensure needs are fully understood and outreach services developed to enable early intervention.”

People with a disability

Key points included:

- There are many barriers to accessing appropriate support. This includes physical barriers, as well as social and attitudinal barriers, and understanding what to expect in a relationship.
- A system that relies on helplines/phone calls may be difficult for those who cannot communicate on the phone. Websites can also be difficult for some people and many across the voluntary and community sector do not meet requirements.
- The importance of easy read materials.
- Many people with a disability are unaware that domestic and sexual abuse services exist. However, many that do exist are inaccessible and they need greater access to sign language and hard of hearing services.
- Someone can be financially and practically dependent on a partner or carer who may also be the perpetrator.
- Engage directly with disabled people. Close knowledge gaps and train frontline services so that they can fully support people with disabilities and provide more opportunities for disclosure.
- The need to be aware of the law around substitute decision making and the balance between making decisions for an individual and giving them the opportunity to tell their story.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“For people with significant disabilities, disclosures may come in the form of what is interpreted as ‘challenging behaviour’ and an organic part of their disability rather than

a communication about abuse or expression of trauma.”

“Being disabled strongly affects the nature, extent and impact of abuse.”

Older People

Key points included:

- Older people face a number of barriers including generational views about gender roles and feelings about religious faith, loyalty, shame and guilt.
- There is often confusion when defining abuse of older people, leading to domestic abuse being defined as elder abuse. Needs to be recorded as domestic abuse.
- There is a role for churches to play in addressing domestic abuse, calling it out as a crime. Many older people will turn to the church for support.
- Consider the impact of dementia on domestic abuse.
- Older people and people with dementia are vulnerable to financial abuse, from their children or other family members, who may also be their carer.
- Criminal justice and support services should be more joined up for older people.
- The specific needs of older male victims must also be recognised in terms of increased vulnerability and stigma.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The challenge is making people aware that it is okay to talk about domestic abuse, and that it is never acceptable.”

“Organisations need to be more aware and mindful of older people’s needs ... the victim might not be willing to seek help from dedicated services, but they might disclose the abuse in other situations.”

Women

Key points included:

- The strategy should recognise and address that women are disproportionately affected. For some a gendered lens is needed rather than one size fits all.
- Barriers to reporting include fear of not being believed; having their children taken away; financial repercussions; fear of and lack of trust in the police and criminal justice system.
- Consider the recommendations in the Women’s Policy Group NI, Covid-19 Feminist Recovery Plan.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The needs of women victims of domestic and sexual abuse are very different to those of men, because of the inequalities in those areas that are foundational to women’s overall inequality.”

“Women victims require specialised support and protection because of a high risk of

secondary and repeat victimisation.”

Men

Key points included:

- More needs to be done to address gender/societal stereotypes and to raise awareness, with the public, professionals, frontline services and men themselves, that heterosexual, gay, bi and trans men can also be victims of domestic and sexual abuse.
- Lack of specific service provision for male victims of domestic and sexual abuse is a barrier.
- More data on male victims is needed.
- It was suggested that a separate ‘Intimate Violence against Men and Boys Strategy’ should be developed.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Current national discourse... mainly presents domestic violence as a problem only involving heterosexual women suffering violence from men. Male victims including those who are gay, bi or trans assume that mainstream domestic abuse services are only for women.”

“Men do not recognise that they are victims in the first place. Even if they do, they feel ashamed, afraid they will not be taken seriously, fear ridicule, do not think they can escape or think they are weak/to blame and alone.”

Children and Young People

Key points included:

- Domestic abuse is an adverse childhood experience and there needs to be greater awareness of its impact.
- There should be awareness campaigns focusing specifically on children and young people.
- Engage and communicate directly with children and young people.
- Language and terminology must be accessible. Methods used in the Gillen Review were provided as an example.
- Consider both the positive and negative effects of social media. It has an impact on well-being and the potential to normalise abusive or negative behaviours; but it is also a platform for information and signposting to help overcome barriers.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“This requires greater multiagency collaboration between the young people and their families in conjunction with the health, education and Voluntary and Community Sector, and developed in consultation with young people their families and the Youth Justice System.”

“The unborn, infants, children, youth and young adults. LGBTQIA+ and care experienced children/young people, ethnic minorities and those with disabilities... should be included in these processes going forward.”

“The need for both strategies to recognise the particular needs of children and young people throughout the different objectives and workstreams, understanding how these needs differ from those of adults.”

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?

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?

Of the responses received, 67 (74%) replied to question five and 54 (59%) replied to question six. The analysis below also incorporates feedback from the Call for Views engagement events.

It should be noted that the responses to question five and question six overlapped. Given commonality of issues raised the comments made are summarised together. The justice related issues raised in most other questions (including question two) are not repeated here.

Many of those who responded commented specifically on what is needed for better protection and justice to be secured in responding to domestic and sexual abuse.

Key points included:

- Review the criminal justice journey, from reporting stage to court, to build trust, increase reporting and reduce attrition.
- Expedite introduction of Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders (DAPNs and DAPOs), with funding for legal aid for those applying.
- Reform and investment needed, particularly with the introduction of further domestic and sexual abuse related legislation.
- Review the family court system and child contact arrangements. Include direct links from PSNI, with a separate family division.
- Expedite and fully implement the Gillen and Criminal Justice Inspection NI recommendations.
- Provide for increased identification, traceability and recording of offenders, enabling a fuller picture of their abusive behaviours.
- Establish an accessible serial domestic abuse and stalking register.
- Introduce dedicated specialist domestic abuse courts, offering support to victims through independent advocacy services and developing specialist knowledge amongst prosecutors and police liaison officers.
- Review and raise awareness of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme, ensure consistency of application and application to former partners.
- Consider the use of an expert witness on mental health issues for victims.
- Provide better protections between reporting a crime and the court hearing.

- Better inform victims about the progression and status of their case.
- Review the operation of MARAC; attendees; and audit the quality of information sharing and agreed actions.
- Consider placing MARACs on a statutory footing.
- Establish Public Protection Arrangement NI (PPANI) or MARAC-style collaborative work process focusing on perpetrators and their management. PPANI processes need to establish improved links, including with MARAC, to ensure there are no gaps in protection.
- Consistent court representation, evaluating professionals involved.
- Consider Australia's online reporting option, allowing victims to record sexual assault even if they do not want to report at that time.
- Work with victims, and perpetrators, of sexual abuse in the prison service.
- Adopt a zero tolerance approach to domestic abuse, stop victim blaming and address rape myths (including in courts).
- Consider the needs of children as part of the criminal justice process. Design and delivery of services and support should reflect this.
- Consider the evidence for managing cases outside of the justice system via a restorative approach where relevant and safe to do so.
- Consider a judge-led panel with input from experts to hear cases
- Exemption for victims of domestic and sexual abuse from Legal Aid means testing.
- Focus on supporting police community and public protection personnel to remain in specialist posts where they have built up expertise and experience; similarly for skilled social workers engaged in joint protocol investigations and achieving best evidence interviews.
- Introduce criminal justice system co-ordinators for end-to-end support for victims.

A sample of some of the comments made:

"The protections available need to be strengthened and police and the justice system as a whole need to take seriously complaints and concerns of those fleeing abuse."

"The identity of victims must be protected during the court process – this will help strengthen confidence in the court process."

"Perpetrators need to know that society will not accept or tolerate the abuse".

"Exploring a repeat victim and offender strategy."

Almost half of respondents were of the view that improving many elements of the current justice system is important.

Key points included:

- Streamline and simplify the criminal justice process as well as services needed to help the victim through the process.
- Improve communication, consistency, linkages and processes within the justice system to increase reporting, convictions and reduce attrition.
- Reduce delay in case progression, with clear lines of communication and expectation around case times.
- Increase sentences as a greater deterrent. Some suggested a statutory minimum

sentence.

- Review the threshold for the prosecution of sexual abuse cases and increase prosecution rates, conviction rates and investigation systems.
- Establish a regional domestic abuse court system, which houses criminal, family and civil cases under one roof. This would provide a connection of incidents between criminal and civil courts, dealt with together and presided over by specially trained judges.
- Judicial recognition that abusers use the court system to inflict further abuse.
- Protect the anonymity of victims.
- Address fears around removal of children and loss of family life post separation.
- Consider the Commissioner for Older People's recommendations in 'Crime and Justice: The Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland' 2019.
- Treat victims with dignity and respect, with procedures and communications victim sensitive.
- Protect victims from further criminal acts, including retaliation and intimidation, with thorough risk assessments. Workplace risk assessments should include domestic abuse.
- Provide separate entrances for victims and protection at court.
- Improved communication by Public Prosecution Service to victims.
- Review police accommodation for interviewing victims.
- Improve investigative processes to meet the evidential and public interest tests required for prosecution of cases.
- Consider follow up visits with victims who have been through MARAC.

A sample of some of the comments made:

"Reducing delay between reporting and trial is crucial."

"Need for continued training across criminal justice agencies to ensure a trauma informed and victim led response. The strategic outcome and priorities ... must address the very low rate of conviction."

"The information given to the victims before they go to court is limited ... There should be more support ... take into account the emotions of victims and the re-traumatisation aspect of court."

Many respondents thought that support for victims in terms of criminal justice engagement could be improved. This has been considered as part of question two.

A number of responses also commented on the need for a more joined up approach and strengthened linkages within the justice system.

Key points included:

- Create stronger linkages between justice partners and service providers through training, improved communication and joined up approach to information sharing.
- Strengthen criminal justice system linkages through collaboration, agreed action plans, common objectives and training programmes.

- Improve multi-agency partnership working to remove barriers for victims.
- Improve communication with Police and Community Safety Partnerships, local councils and implement regional solutions.
- Formalise health and justice linkages to better support victims, including through formalised pathways to mental health support.
- Improve linkages between domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse as well as increased support for victims with mental health issues.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The judicial system is currently weighted against the victim - all statutory agencies should have a joined up approach in sharing information to most effectively deal with the victims and abusers of domestic and sexual abuse.”

“Linkages within the justice system are good. However, we need to include Departments of Health, Education and Communities as key partners to effectively deal with domestic and sexual abuse more widely.”

Many responses focused on the need for more training and guidance on how to recognise and respond appropriately to domestic and sexual abuse in the criminal justice system.

Key points included:

- Provide resources plus consistent and quality training across criminal justice partners and agencies to ensure a trauma informed and victim/survivor led response. Some felt this should apply to all staff.
- Further awareness programs and training for bodies such as PSNI, solicitors, etc. to provide the skills to effectively identify and respond to victims and abusers. This should deal with specific sections of the community, including minority groups and the barriers that they may face.
- Introduce a cultural change programme in the family court process for all participants as well as regional statutory guidance and training.
- Specific judicial training on the gendered nature of domestic abuse crimes.
- Consider the Attorney General’s guidance on domestic abuse and stalking.
- Provide training to underpin any new legislation/process in place, including specialist training on the new domestic abuse offence, and assess effectiveness.
- Share best practice development.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“There must be set mandatory regular training, to ensure those assessing and evaluating cases on an individual basis have a broad scope of specialist training.”

“Increasing the understanding of domestic and sexual violence and abuse as a trauma would ideally ensure that services to those facing abuse would receive increased support from other strategies and networks.”

“Training for Judges and other legal professionals addressing rape myths, victim blaming tropes, and the impact of re-traumatising survivors is essential.”

Some responses also focused on the need for improved information sharing.

Key points included:

- Improve information sharing between family and criminal courts, as issues such as mental health can be presented and treated differently in each.
- Improve information sharing between partners agencies and ensure victims only have to tell their story once.
- Improve information sharing agreements, with appropriate collaboration and clear guidance for external bodies, to alleviate fear of GDPR breach.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Put in place robust information sharing.”

“More must be done to ensure that the process of reporting is streamlined and information is appropriately shared within and between all the agencies involved.”

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

Of the responses received, 69 (76%) replied to this question. The analysis below also incorporates feedback from the Call for Views engagement events.

The majority of responses specifically agreed with the proposed workstreams, ranging from fully supportive to broad agreement. The remaining respondents neither explicitly agreed nor disagreed.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“All of the proposed workstreams are relevant and are supported.”

“Each workstream needs to be costed and resourced to be effective.”

“We support all the workstreams listed and see them as complementary.”

Respondents also provided comments on the content of the workstreams. These views have been taken account of in the analysis of questions two to six.

Additional comments were also provided on how the workstreams should be progressed along with some alternative workstreams for consideration:

Key points included:

- Ensure that workstreams are not considered in isolation.
- Other workstreams that were suggested included leadership and commitment; culture and environment; teaching and learning; professional learning; community partnerships; support for staff/volunteers and citizens; research; and supporting recovery.

Question 8

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

Of the written responses received, 62 (68%) replied to this question. The analysis below also incorporates feedback from the Call for Views engagement events.

It should be noted that many respondents provided comments that related to (and have been taken account at) questions one to six and question nine. The summary below considers **additional** key issues raised by respondents.

The main theme related to the overall direction, governance and delivery of a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy.

Key points included:

- The need to consider how we can work more collectively as a region. A joined up approach is needed across government, statutory, faith, voluntary and community organisations.
- The importance of having clear definitions. There can sometimes be confusion and differing views with terms such as “abuse” and “violence”; and “victim” and “survivor”, for example.
- Domestic and sexual abuse cuts across many different areas and government Departments, for example, housing, refuge provision, social security, education, health, employment, justice etc.
- Reconvene the Inter-Ministerial Group, with subject experts presenting to Ministers.
- Collaboration and improved partnership working across all government Departments, identifying departmental leads and working together (not silos). Some suggested clear leadership by one Department, others that it be led by the Executive Office rather than the Health or Justice Departments.
- Create a government Department to deal with gender-based violence and domestic and sexual abuse, providing a more joined up approach.
- The strategy’s vision should be to stop domestic and sexual abuse, making people safe not just safer.
- Some respondents were in favour of a gender-neutral approach. Others recommended gender specific actions.
- Appoint an independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner to scrutinise policy, practice and funding allocation.
- The Victims of Crime Commissioner should undertake an audit of support services, identifying gaps, being aware of the needs of the minority ethnic community. The Commissioner could also shift prevailing culture, provide support to victims and provide scrutiny and accountability of legislation.
- The need to consider whether domestic abuse and sexual abuse should be addressed as two separate issues, with differing views on this.

- A costed delivery plan should accompany the new strategy.
- There should be a continuous review process with accountable and transparent monitoring, reporting and accountability arrangements with performance indicators for each Department.
- Establish a duty to develop and implement strategies and action plans as well as publish national indicators, to measure progress made.
- Delivery of the strategy should be included in the Programme for Government.
- The need to have a Standing Advisory Group.
- Equality impacts of new strategies, policies and legislation must be considered as part of the development process. A Rural Impact Assessment should also be completed.
- The need to take account of the recommendations of the current strategy's mid-term review.
- Clear lines of accountability needed between the strategy and the Local Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnerships. Partnerships should also consider aligning their sub-groups to the strategy's workstreams, to support delivery and regional connection.
- Strong communication needed between statutory bodies and service providers, with ring fenced funding for grass roots organisations including minority groups, and support services.
- Literature reviews and stakeholder mapping exercises should determine best practice and resources already out there.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Any strategy for tackling Domestic and Sexual Abuse must be embedded within every government Department as no single agency can address domestic and sexual abuse alone.”

“This will require commitment, determination, resourcing, and funding.”

“Victims' participation and their time and input should be duly acknowledged and valued.”

“We recommend that the strategies clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of each Department so that there are clear lines of accountability.”

There were comments about the need for a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy to align with other strategies and frameworks.

Other areas that were highlighted included:

- The development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy
- The development of a Disability Strategy
- Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery, A Strategic Framework to Tackle Harm from Substance Use (2021-31)
- The development of a Gender Equality Strategy
- Children and Young People's Strategy (2020-2030)
- Ending Homelessness Together – Homelessness Strategy 2022-27
- The development of an LGBTQIA+ Strategy

- Mental Health Strategy 2021-31
- Keeping Children and Young People Safe: An Online safety Strategy for Northern Ireland 2020-25
- Victim and Witness Strategy 2021-24
- The Marshall Implementation Plan
- The Leonard Review
- The Gillen Review Implementation Plan
- Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland (Criminal Justice Inspectorate NI, 2020)
- The development of Hate Crime legislation
- Domestic Abuse (Safe leave) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022
- Children's Services Co-operation (Northern Ireland) Act 2015
- Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings (Northern Ireland) Act 2021

There were views that the new strategy should be rights based and take account of the Victims' Directive; the European Convention of Human Rights; the UN Convention on Elimination and Discrimination against Women; the UN Convention against Torture; the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention); the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention); and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Some concerns were also raised about how a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy would interrelate.

A sample of some of the comments made:

"We consider that a Domestic and Sexual Abuse strategy that includes distinct emphasis on tackling and calling out violence against women and girls is a more appropriate and inclusive strategy, than keeping them as two separate strands."

"We do not see how it is possible to have a VAWG strategy that does not incorporate domestic and sexual abuse against women into it."

"We would recommend having one strategy to encompass VAWG, DA and SA."

"There is an urgent need to share information about the work in hand and to explore whether some work can be consolidated - ensuring that we build on best practice developed in our local jurisdictions or internationally, and deliver strategies that are 'joined up'. The obvious risk being that a proliferation of strategies will result in public confusion and disparate outcomes with little or no ultimate change."

Other areas noted by respondents included the need to:

- Focus more on **sexual violence and abuse (including intimate partner)** in the new strategy which is underreported.
- Distinguish between cases where there is clear unidirectional abuse and where it

is bidirectional (**'mutual abuse'**). For the latter therapeutic methodologies might be more appropriate than behavioural change approaches.

- Focus more on **men and boys** as victims of domestic and sexual abuse.
- Have a greater awareness and broader recognition of the unique risks of sexual abuse within **sport**. There are additional barriers in sport including fear of allegations of sexual abuse not being believed and of sporting careers collapsing which can lead to a closed culture and underreporting. Introduce a **centralised licensing scheme**, banning coaches from sports where an offence has been committed and consider a **duty to report on sporting organisations** (regardless of age of the individual).
- Identify the **needs of parents** who suffer violence and abuse from their children and by other family members.
- Consider options and **safety plans** in the new strategy to keep victims and their families safe when they make the decision to leave an abusive partner.
- Address **strangulation, disclosure of sexual images and stalking**.
- Better understand **honour based abuse including forced marriage** with community engagement and evidence based interventions.
- Recognise the overlap between **domestic abuse, stalking and femicide**.
- Better understand and address **parental alienation**, with stakeholder training.
- Make **misogyny** a criminal offence.
- Remove the legal **defence of "reasonable punishment"** for parents.
- Increase public awareness and understanding of **child sexual abuse** with the development of a standalone Child Sexual Abuse Strategy.
- Accurate and appropriate **media reporting** is needed, as well as **monitoring social media content**.
- Future proof against **online harassment**, as a preventative measure.
- Wider **social security impacts** need to be considered. Consider how the delivery of **Universal Credit** impacts those leaving an abusive relationship. Address financial hardship and poverty, which can have implications for a victim's ability to leave an abuser. Specific **financial aid** should be provided to women reporting crimes and financial assistance to help victims escape the risk of harm.
- **Safe leave, flexible working arrangements and temporary protections** against dismissal and financial support needed. Implement the **Safe Leave Act** soon.
- **Extend 'position of trust' offences**, to protect vulnerable under 18s.
- Tighter **regulation of web content** and its accessibility, needed.
- Introduce local face-to-face 24 hour support service provision, in addition to the established helplines.

Question 9:

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

Of the written responses received, 62 (68%) replied to this question. The analysis below also incorporates feedback from the Call for Views engagement events.

The main theme to emerge in response to this question is the need for meaningful engagement with individuals with lived experience.

Key points included:

- People with lived experience offer unique and important insights that should inform the development of the strategy, action plans and support services.
- Engagement with individuals with lived experience must be genuine.
- Engagement should be an ongoing process, not just a one-off event.
- Organisations that already engage with and support victims have an important role in building trust and can facilitate victims groups.
- Recognise the time, work and resources to ensure a true co-design process that genuinely involves those with lived experience at all stages.
- Ensure that people are not retraumatised and are supported before, during and after an engagement process.
- Consider advocacy forums as a space for people to share experiences including family and friends.
- Improve communication to reach more people and ensure effective engagement with section 75 groups.
- Consider a dedicated, full-time engagement coordinator.
- Strategies must be accessible to children and young people.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Listen to us. Read our stories!”

“Victims come from all parts of the community, and you specifically need to engage with organisations run by and for marginalised people.”

“Each time a victim shares their experience they ... provide us with invaluable information and expertise.”

Many respondents also noted the importance of government Departments engaging regularly with charities and specialist organisations that support victims.

Key points included:

- Continue to engage with organisations beyond the Call for Views.
- Resource support groups to act as intermediaries and connect with populations.

- Support organisations hold important data which they may be able to share along with case studies to help shape policies.
- Organisations need adequate notice of meetings and time to respond to consultations.
- Learn from the experience of statutory organisations including the police, Public Prosecution Service and the health service including maternity services.
- Use local spaces such as community centres, mother and toddler groups, Surestart etc.
- Work with Youth Service to engage with children and young people.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Other organisations should be considered, such as sport clubs, religious and community groups and Age Sector Networks as part of promoting key messages about prevention, safety and support.”

“Support organisations provide a helicopter view based on experience supporting hundreds or thousands of victims year on year.”

Other suggestions included:

- **Victim panels/forums** with appropriate safeguards and funding. It was suggested that there should be a Survivors Board to share lived experience with decision makers and the judiciary, lead Champions within Health Trusts and a justice system values and attitudes Champion.
- A co-ordinated violence prevention **bulletin**.
- Consider the use of **creative activities** to facilitate engagement.
- A **standing advisory/working group**.
- **Focus groups** and **peer support**.
- **Accessible consultations**, questionnaires, feedback forms etc. Not everyone can access consultations online.
- Engagement of **community leaders** and influential peers.
- Consider **language** used for engagement and consultations.

Victim Survey

In addition to the written responses and engagement events views on the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, and lived experiences, were provided through victim and public surveys. 250 individuals completed the victim survey. An overview of the responses to this are set out below. The summary of the responses to the public survey are set out in the next section.

Respondent Profile

Almost all respondents identified as female (86%), 97% were aged under 65, 96% were of white ethnicity and, in terms of sexual orientation, 88% described themselves as straight/heterosexual and 11% identified as LGBTQIA+. In terms of the age profile 75% were aged between 25 and 54, 10% were aged between 16 and 24 while 3% were 65 or older. 21% of respondents indicated that they had a disability. This is very similar to the make-up of the public survey respondents.

Summary of Findings

The survey findings are summarised under each individual survey question. There is a certain amount of duplication given that similar issues were touched on under a number of questions. In interpreting the findings, it is also important to remember that these reflect the experiences of those victims who replied to the survey, rather than the wider population of all victims. Combined with the reality that people tend to have much more vivid memories of traumatic or negative experiences than of positive ones, it is not unrealistic to expect that the comments made may well be more heavily weighted in terms of negative as opposed to positive experiences. Caution is needed in terms of any generalisation of the findings to the wider victim population.

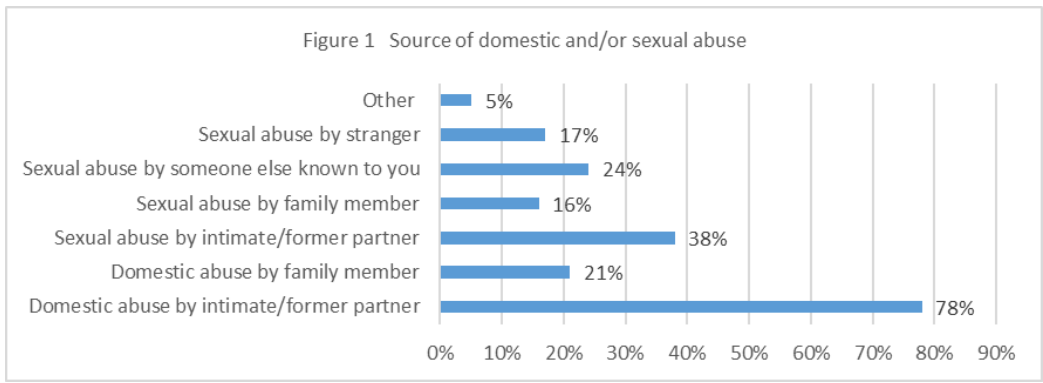
Section 1

Experience of Domestic and/or Sexual Abuse

Question 2¹: What type of abuse have you experienced?

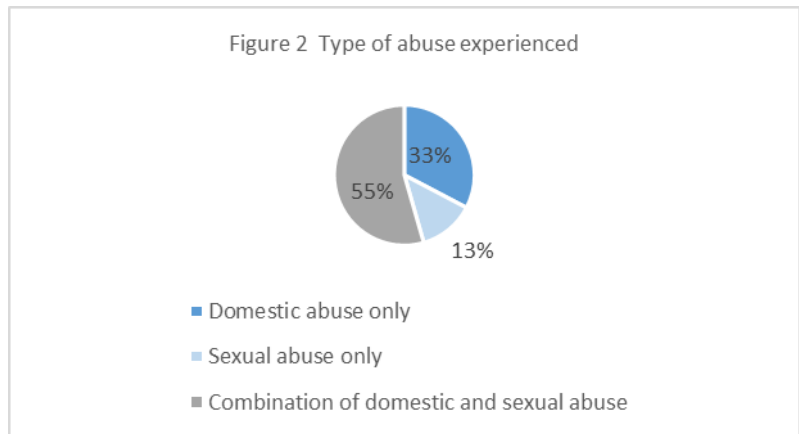
Over three quarters of respondents (78%) had experienced domestic abuse by an intimate partner/former partner, while 21% had experienced domestic abuse by a family member (Figure 1). With regards to sexual abuse, 38% had experienced abuse by an intimate partner/former partner, 24% had been abused by someone else known to them (e.g. a friend, a work colleague or an acquaintance etc.), 17% had been abused by a stranger and 16% had been abused by a family member (see Figure 1 below).

¹ Question 1 is not reflected as this related to agreement to take part in the survey (which is inherent to the data analysis).



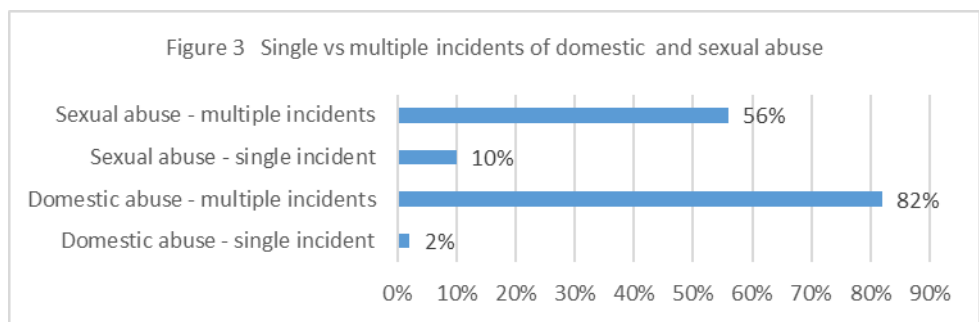
Question 3: Has your experience been one of domestic abuse, sexual abuse or a combination of domestic and sexual abuse?

Over half of respondents (55%) had experienced a combination of domestic and sexual abuse, 33% had experienced domestic abuse only and 13% had experienced sexual abuse only (Figure 2).



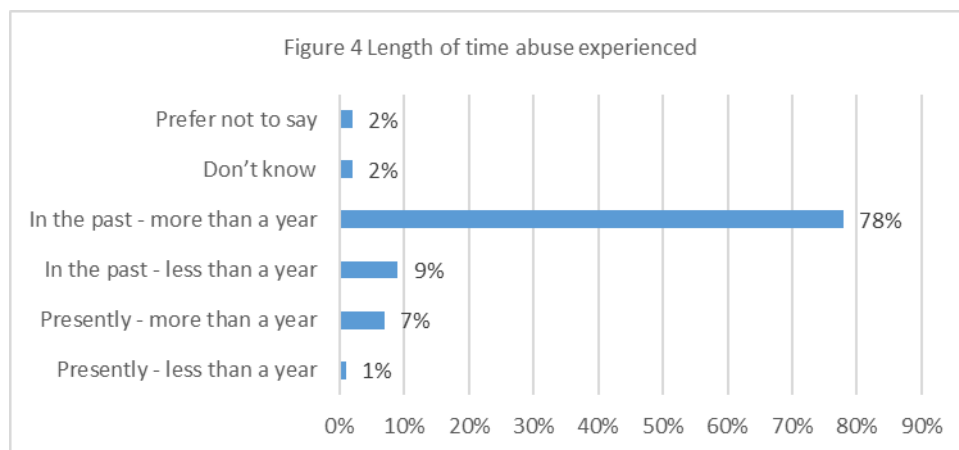
Question 4: Have you experienced a single incident or multiple incidents of domestic and/or sexual abuse?

Over four fifths of respondents (82%) had experienced multiple incidents of domestic abuse while over half (56%) had experienced multiple incidents of sexual abuse. Only a very small minority (2%) had experienced a single incident of domestic abuse; 10% reported having experienced a single incident of sexual abuse (see also Figure 3).



Question 5: For how long have you been experiencing domestic and/or sexual abuse?

The vast majority of respondents (87%) stated that the abuse they experienced had happened in the past. For 8% the abuse was still ongoing. Of the 218 respondents reporting historical abuse, 90% stated that the abuse had taken place for more than a year. Of the 21 respondents currently experiencing abuse, 86% said that the abuse had been ongoing for more than a year.



Views on other forms of violence

The responses to questions 6 to 8 on other forms of violence, which focused on violence against women and girls, are dealt with in a separate summary report which will be available at www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/topics/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls in the coming weeks.

Section 2

Experience of Domestic and Sexual Abuse Support Services

Question 9: Did you get any professional support or talk to anyone (including friends/family) about the abuse you experienced?

The vast majority of respondents (82%) had received support in relation to the abuse they had experienced, either in the form of professional support or from an alternative source.

Question 10: How helpful was any support that you received?

The sources of support that victims were most likely to rate as 'helpful' (i.e. either 'very' or 'somewhat' helpful) were charity/voluntary support services (rated as 'helpful' by 80% of those who accessed the support), friends (72%), family members (63%) and advocacy support service (62%) (Table 1 and Figure 5 below). At the other end of the spectrum, respondents were least likely to rate as 'helpful' the support received from the police (33%) and from education providers (35%). This will in part reflect that the focus of these organisations is primarily on law enforcement and education provision.

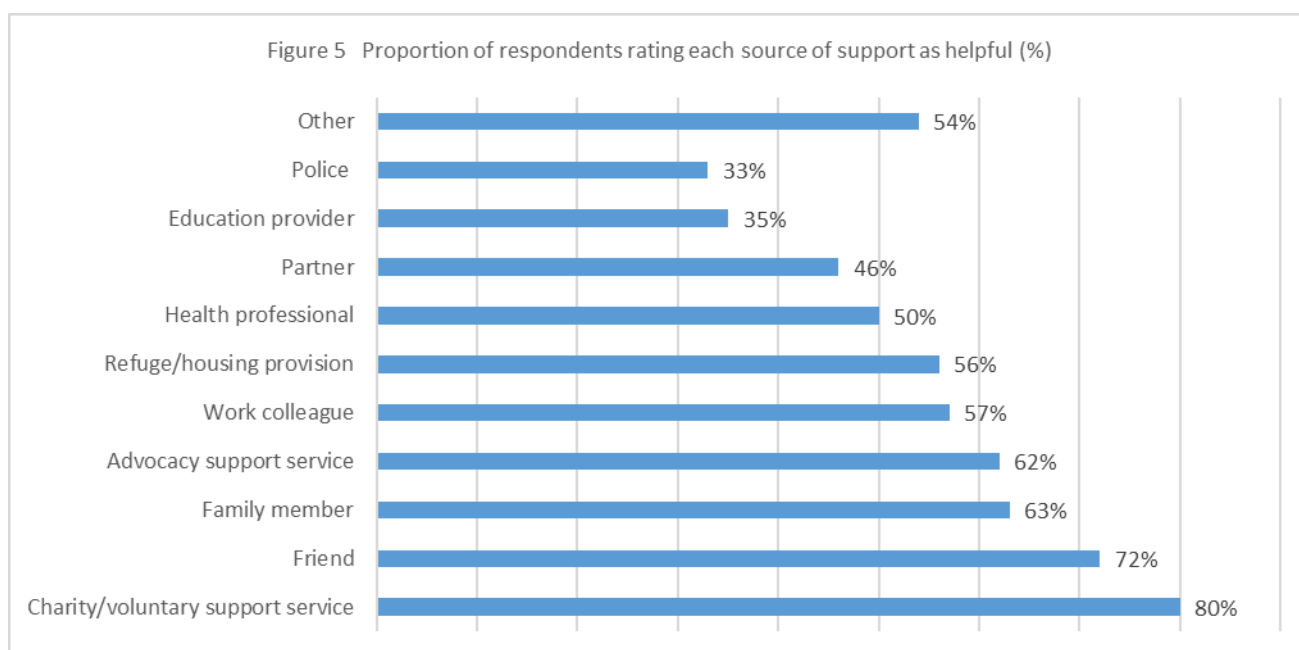
Table 1: Helpfulness ratings of sources of support (%)

Source of help	% Helpful ¹	% Neither helpful nor unhelpful	% Unhelpful ²	Base=100% ³ (i.e. Numbers accessing each source of support)
Charity/voluntary support service	80	4	16	157
Friend	72	6	22	166
Family member	63	7	30	164
Advocacy support service	62	14	25	73
Work colleague	57	21	22	91
Refuge/housing provision	56	7	38	45
Health professional	50	13	36	129
Partner	46	10	43	67
Education provider	35	15	50	60
Police	33	9	58	138
Other	54	2	43	46

¹ The 'Very helpful' and 'Somewhat helpful' responses have been combined

² The 'Somewhat unhelpful' and 'Very unhelpful' responses have been combined

³ The small number of 'Not sure' responses have been excluded from the base figure when calculating the percentages in the table



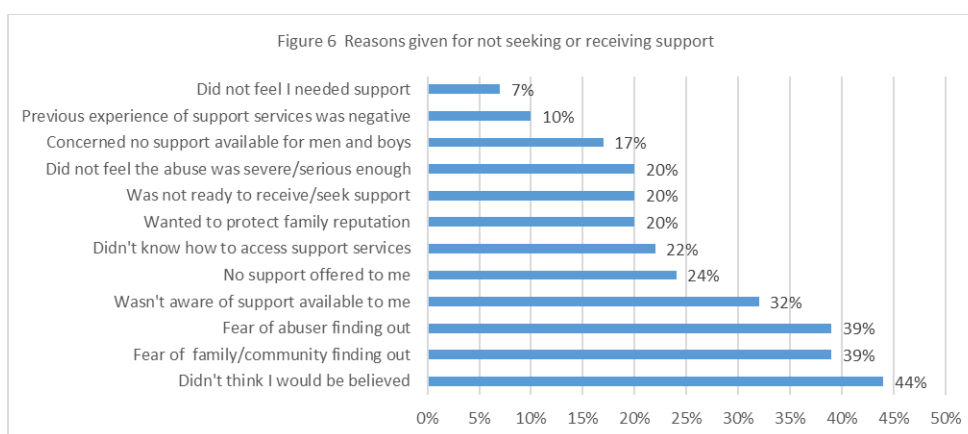
Question 11: If you did not receive or seek support, what was the reason?

A total of 41 respondents had not received or sought support. The main reasons for this were that (i) they did not think that they would be believed (mentioned by 18 respondents or 44% of those who did not receive/seek support); (ii) fear of their family/community finding out (16 respondents – 39%), (iii) fear of their abuser finding

out (also 16 respondents – 39%); (iv) not being aware of the support services available to them (13 respondents – 32%); and (v) no support having been offered (10 respondents – 24%). Others mentioned that they hadn't been aware of the support available to them (13 respondents – 32%) or that they didn't know how to access support services (9 respondents – 22%). Only a small number of those who did not receive/seek support (3 in total – 7%) stated that they did not feel that they needed support.

Table 2: Reasons for not seeking/receiving support (%)

Reason	Number mentioning each reason	% mentioning each reason
I did not feel I needed support	3	7
I wasn't aware of support services available to me	13	32
I didn't know how to access support services	9	22
I didn't think I would be believed	18	44
I was/am not ready to receive/seek support	8	20
I did not feel the abuse was severe/serious enough	8	20
I was concerned that support is not available for/or tailored for men and boys	7	17
I feared my family/community finding out	16	39
I feared my abuser finding out	16	39
I wanted to protect my family reputation	8	20
No support was offered to me	10	24
My previous experience of support services was negative	4	10
Base=100%		41



Question 12: Were there any identity or personal characteristics, such as your gender, gender identity, ethnicity or sexuality, that you felt were a factor or barrier to accessing support? If yes, please explain.

The majority of respondents (59%) did not perceive that identity or personal characteristics had been a barrier to accessing support. 34% considered that some

of these characteristics had presented barriers. The vast majority (both male and female) who felt that there had been barriers to accessing support attributed this to their gender. The main barrier for female respondents appeared to be fear of not being taken seriously and the extent to which they would be listened to. For males they were critical of the lack of support available to male victims and the common stereotype that portrays women as victims and men as perpetrators.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“I feel as a female reporting the crime alone and in person that I was ignored.”

“I did not report the rape as I was aware even then that women are treated as if they are on trial and have to try to defend themselves all over again, so I didn’t want to put myself through that. I also felt ashamed and didn’t want to put my family through it either.”

“Male gender equates to lower quality or no support.”

“As a man I had next to no one. As a boy I had literally no one. Fewer services for men ... This just reinforces the idea men are perpetrators of abuse.”

References to other personal characteristics as presenting barriers to seeking or receiving support were much less frequently identified. There were nonetheless some responses related to factors such as age, sexual orientation, disability/medical condition, professional/educational status, religion/church related and ethnicity.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“I was young woman in early 20s and didn’t think people would take me seriously.”

“I’m gay and told they didn’t have an LGBT officer.”

“I’m a hetero man. Automatically seen as likely aggressor and just simply not believed as a victim in any way at the hands of controlling and aggressive wife.”

“From an affluent background and abusive husband in top level professional job ... The fact that I am educated and was able to protect my children from his behaviours meant his behaviours not fully recognised by outside agencies.”

“Because I am a woman and because I have a disability.”

“I feel my nationality was a barrier as I am not from Northern Ireland.”

Question 13: What additional support, over and above that already available, do you think is needed for victims of domestic or sexual abuse?

(i) New and additional services identified

A number of individuals identified new services that they felt would benefit victims. These included services relating to physical health issues, mental health issues and practical support. Some examples included a mentoring service; occupational therapy services; psychotherapy services; walk in suicide centres; PTSD support; a one to one online support service; outreach support; an alcohol support helpline; IDVAs in

hospitals, A&E departments, maternity sites and GP surgeries; housing support; and legal support services. Some also wanted services to be available to victims 24/7 and for there to be longer term support.

(ii) More general/thematic types of response

Other more general comments can be summarised under three broad themes as below:

- *Education and training related to domestic and sexual abuse:* There was considered a need for more education and awareness training on domestic and sexual abuse. In addition to the many comments on the need for more education in schools, and for the provision of life skills for victims, respondents wanted mandatory and refresher training for professional groups who may come into contact with victims of domestic and sexual abuse including GPs; social workers; Helpline staff; and staff in workplaces.
- *Funding/financial position in relation to the provision of support:* The need for funding for support services was highlighted by many. A number of individuals alluded to staff shortages at service providers and long waiting lists to access services. A lack of support for male victims compared to female victims was emphasised, with explicit requests for more funding to be made available to male service providers. Many stated that more funding should be provided to domestic and sexual abuse service providers in general, including to reduce waiting lists. A five year, as opposed to the one year funding model, was suggested as beneficial in terms of planning services. It was also suggested that early financial support be available to victims and that a single point of access for all organisations would be helpful, rather than victims themselves having to engage with a range of bodies. Other types of funding identified as benefitting victims were provision of childcare at support groups, free legal advice, free court orders and paid leave from employment to deal with abusive incidents. There was also a suggestion that victims should be made aware of possible compensation claims.
- *Victim needs related:* Suggestions were also made to improve the victim 'journey'. This included having an advocate for victims; having an easier way to report incidents; guaranteeing the safety of victims following the reporting of an incident; greater empathy towards victims; being treated as more than a number and not as a criminal; helping victims re-integrate back into the community; ensuring the abuser is not living close to the victim and having more refuges and accommodation for male victims.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Extensive mandatory training on domestic abuse for all professionals involved.”

“Need more training for workplaces ... and take time off for counselling or mental health days when you need them without worrying about getting sacked.”

“Specific support services for men and boys with equal funding, equal number of beds, and male support workers to what exists for women.”

“Fully funded services essential. [Service providers] unable to plan and adequately resource due to only year to year funding - 5 year funding required.”

“An alternative funding model for service provision. It doesn't make sense that help is stretched across [bodies] ... If this were coordinated through, at minimum, a signal point of access, I think it would be more useful.”

Question 14: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about support services available to victims of domestic and sexual abuse?

Responses broadly fell under five main themes as below:

(i) Role and contribution of specific support organisations

Comments about service providers were predominantly positive. They were alluded to as 'life savers' and many commented on how understanding, patient and motivated staff had been. There was reference to the need for more funding in order to help more people. There were some comments around the length of time help is provided, the length of waiting lists, access to services by trans women and ability to engage in the criminal justice system if someone is seeing a psychologist.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“[Staff] are kind, understanding, caring, patient, educated, qualified, motivating and supportive but their resources can only help so much.”

“Super service, but they are under resourced, and waiting lists are very long.”

“Amazing people who really went out of their way to listen and to help me.”

“Better funding needed so that rape support services do not have to limit ... counselling sessions.”

“Men are hugely under represented ... There is a huge inequality ... 4% of the funding of women, yet representing 1/3 of victims.”

“I have found the support ... to me and to my two young children ... to be invaluable.”

Some respondents expressed concern about service provision for victims for various reasons including a lack of understanding of domestic and sexual abuse by some service providers, that they weren't able to help them and that they had not been aware of support services.

(i) Support for specific groups

A number of respondents commented on the extent to which the needs of particular groups are met and the lack of support for some groups. In particular, there was reference to the lack of support for men, children, trans women and those with learning difficulties. A number of male respondents commented on the lack of support services for men, including parenting and work support.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The system is very reluctant to support men and at every stage access and funding for support to men is low and limited.”

“Limited resources for therapeutic support for children.”

“Therapy services aimed at children under the age of 10 is very hard to source and has left a gap in my sons healing journey.”

“Specialist support for trans women as I am aware of trans women who have been turned away.”

“People with learning difficulties need extra support.”

(ii) Role of PSNI in dealing with incidents of abuse

Some individuals felt that the police had been helpful and supportive in dealing with their incident while others felt that they didn't care or had shown no interest in their case. While mixed comments were made it should be remembered that the focus of policing is wide and not solely to provide support to victims. Also negative experiences are more likely to be remembered and remain salient in victims' minds than positive experiences; they are therefore more likely to feature in survey responses.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“PSNI were very helpful and supportive.”

“Police etc. need more training on how to spot and respond to potentially dangerous situations for victims.”

(iii) Additional types of support required for victims

A number of respondents set out what they perceived as gaps in support, such as counselling sessions (including it being available for a longer period); therapeutic support for children; trauma/emotion related support; specialist support for trans women; legal support; more refuges/safe places to stay and practical support (e.g. for moving).

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Financial aid for those financially abused and affordable access to legal services.”

“Specific housing support and access to free childcare.”

“Free and accessible trauma counselling.”

“Anonymous groups online or over the phone to talk to other survivors.”

“Support them for as long it takes, there is no time limit.”

(iv) More general comments

Some more general comments related to issues such as the accessibility of support (including geographically), the need for clearer pathways to support as well as concerns about the confidentiality and aloofness of some professionals.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“There needs to be [a] clearer understanding of how to seek help and how those pathways/outcomes look for those seeking it.”

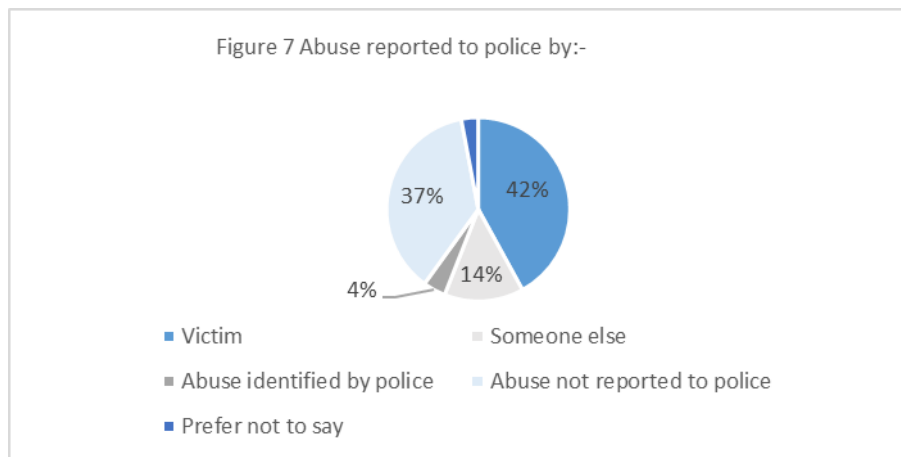
“More services, services there are seems Belfast centred.”

“Stressful to navigate the constraints of confidentiality - especially when I didn't want to press charges especially after seeing the rugby trial stuff.”

Section 3
Experience of the Criminal Justice System

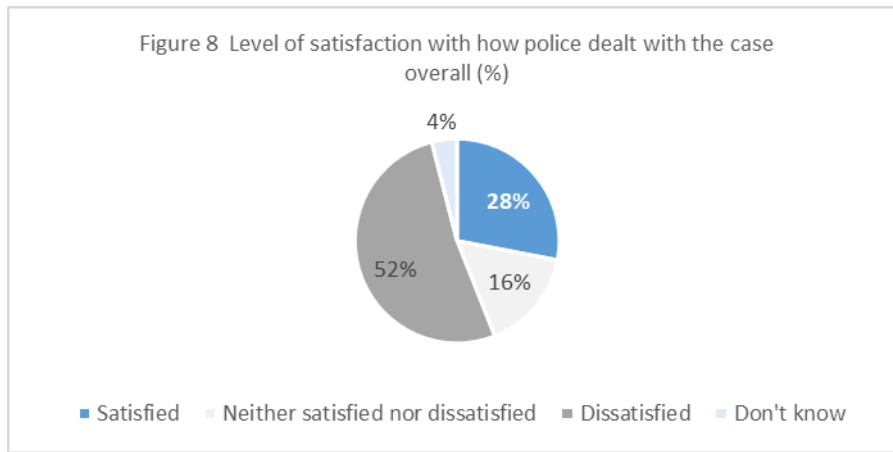
Question 15: Did you or someone else report your abuse to the police?

Over two fifths of respondents (42%) had reported the abuse to the police with 14% indicating that someone else had reported it. Almost two fifths (37%) had not reported to the police while 3% opted not to say who reported the abuse. A small number of respondents (4%) stated that the abuse had been identified by the police (Figure 7).



Question 16: How satisfied were you with how the police dealt with your case overall?

Of those whose abuse had been reported to, or identified by the police, just over half who answered the question (52%) were dissatisfied and 28% satisfied, while 16% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. 4% opted for the 'don't know' response option (Figure 8).



Of those who commented, there were references to the professional approach adopted by the police, the speed of response and how understanding, patient and supportive the police had been. Comments expressing concern on how the police dealt with their cases were somewhat more numerous. They largely related to a lack of empathy shown by the police. There were also some concerns about the gathering and submission of evidence (e.g. related to forensics, taking witness statements, ABE being conducted in a child friendly environment, submission of relevant evidence to PPS etc.) as well as the extent to which victims were updated on case progress.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The police were amazing from my phone call report ... right through to my video interview and throughout all stages. I felt supported in a way I had never been by family and friends.”

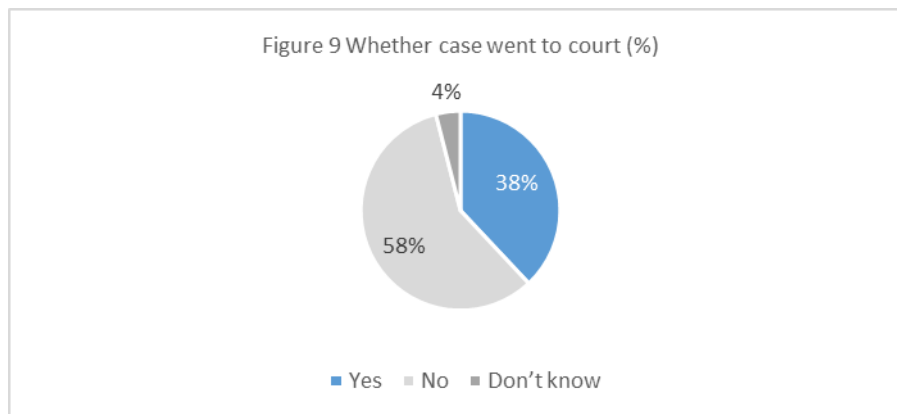
“My police woman built up a rapport with me and made me feel worthy and supported. She ended up getting an award for her work on my case. She was exceptional.”

“Lack of care or priority in gathering information. Accusatory of the victim with uneducated comments. Zero sensitivity or real understanding of the trauma the victim is experiencing.”

“There’s absolutely no empathy or respect from police officers and no respect or regard for the victim’s mental health and feelings.”

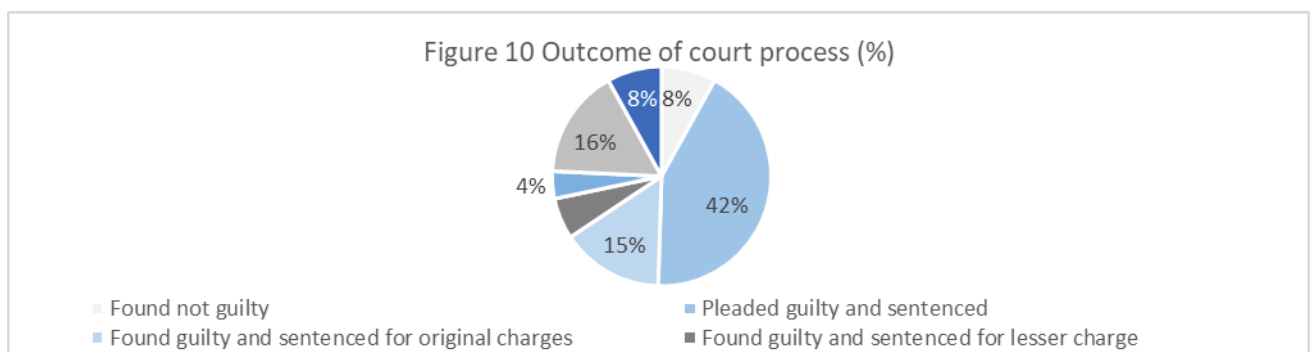
Question 17: After reporting what had happened to the police, did the case go to court?

58% of those who answered the question reported that their case had gone to court, 38% indicated that this had not been the case and a small minority (4%) didn’t know (Figure 9).



Question 18: What was the outcome of the court process?

Of the 48 respondents who answered the question regarding the outcome of the court process 42% reported that the perpetrator had pleaded guilty and was sentenced (including for a lesser charge), 15% reported that the perpetrator had been found guilty and sentenced for the original charges, 6% reported that the perpetrator was found guilty and was sentenced for a lesser charge, 4% reported that the perpetrator was found guilty of other related offences at trial and was sentenced. 8% reported that the defendant had been found not guilty. 16% said their case had been withdrawn, while 8% didn't know the court outcome (Figure 10).



Question 19: Thinking about how you were treated at court, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- Information provided:* Approximately one third of respondents (34%) agreed that they had been given the information they needed about the court process, 50% disagreed with the remaining respondents (16%) opting for the 'neither agree nor disagree' response option. Similar proportions agreed that they had been kept informed about the progress of their case (32% agreed; 51% disagreed) and that the court's decision and/or sentence had been clearly explained to them (32% agreed; 48% disagreed).
- Special measures:* Just under one third of respondents (31%) agreed that use had been made of special measures in court; almost half (46%) disagreed that this had been the case.
- Cross-examination:* 45% of respondents found the cross-examination uncomfortable. Almost a quarter (24%) indicated that it had included reference to

their sexual/dating history. A small minority (13%) agreed that it had not been unduly harsh or invasive of their privacy; 49% disagree that this was the case.

- *Treatment by professionals at court:* Almost two fifths of respondents (39%) felt that the prosecution lawyers and judge had treated them fairly and with respect. Just over one fifth (21%) felt that the defence lawyers had treated them that way.

Table 3 Respondent perceptions of how they had been treated in court¹ (%)

How treated at court	% Agree	% Neither agree nor disagree	% Disagree	Base=100%
Information:				
I was given the information I needed about the court process	34	16	50	70
I was kept informed about the progress of the case	32	16	51	68
The court's decision and/or sentence was clearly explained to me	32	20	48	60
Special measures:				
Use was made of special measures in court, for example a screen, video link	31	22	46	54
Cross-examination:				
I found the cross-examination uncomfortable	45	35	20	51
The cross-examination included reference to my sexual/dating history	24	35	41	51
The cross-examination was not unduly harsh or invasive of my privacy	13	38	49	53
Treatment by professionals at court:				
The Judge treated me fairly and with respect	39	30	31	61
The prosecution lawyers treated me fairly and with respect	39	27	34	56
The defence lawyers treated me fairly and with respect	21	34	45	56

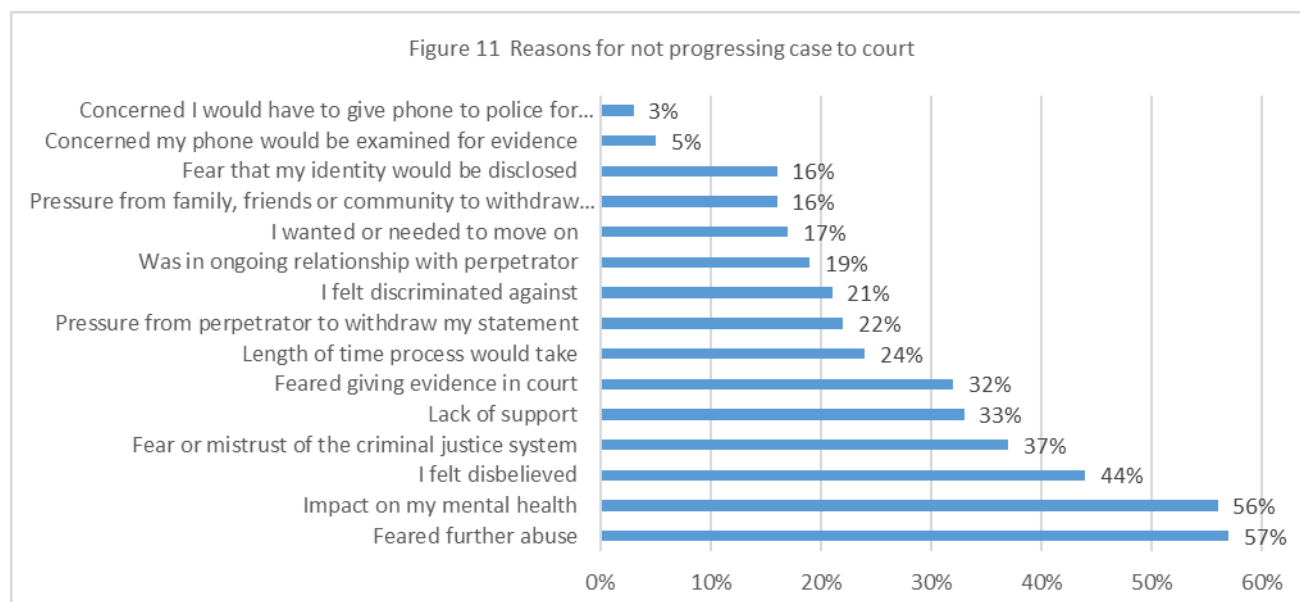
¹ The small number of individuals who opted for the 'prefer not to say' response option have been excluded from the base figures

Question 20: If you decided not to progress your case through to court, what were your reasons for withdrawing?

Of those who decided not to progress their cases through court 63 provided a reason. This included fear of further abuse (mentioned by 57% of respondents), impact on mental health (56%), feeling disbelieved (44%), fear or mistrust of the criminal justice system (37%), lack of support (33%) and fear of giving evidence in court (32%) (Table 4; Figure 11).

Table 4 Reasons for not progressing case through court

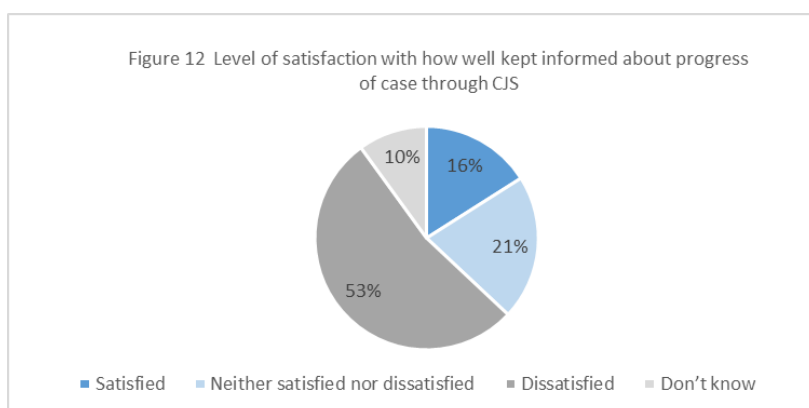
Statement	Number	%
I feared further abuse	36	57
There was an impact on my mental health	35	56
I felt disbelieved	28	44
I had a fear or mistrust of the criminal justice system	23	37
I had a lack of support	21	33
I feared giving evidence in court	20	32
The length of time the process would take/was taking	15	24
I received pressure from perpetrator(s) to withdraw my statement	14	22
I felt discriminated against	13	21
I was in an ongoing relationship with perpetrator(s)	12	19
I wanted or needed to move on	11	17
I received pressure from family, friends, or community to withdraw my statement	10	16
I feared that my identity would be disclosed	10	16
I was concerned that my phone would be examined to gather evidence	3	5
I was concerned that I would have to give my phone to the police as part of the investigation	2	3
Base=100%	63	



Question 21: Overall, were you satisfied or dissatisfied with how well you were kept informed about the progress of your case through the criminal justice system?

Over half of respondents (53%) indicated that they had been dissatisfied with how well they had been kept informed about the progress of their case through the criminal justice system. 16% had been satisfied, 21% were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'

and the remaining 10% opted for the 'don't know' response option. (Figure 12).



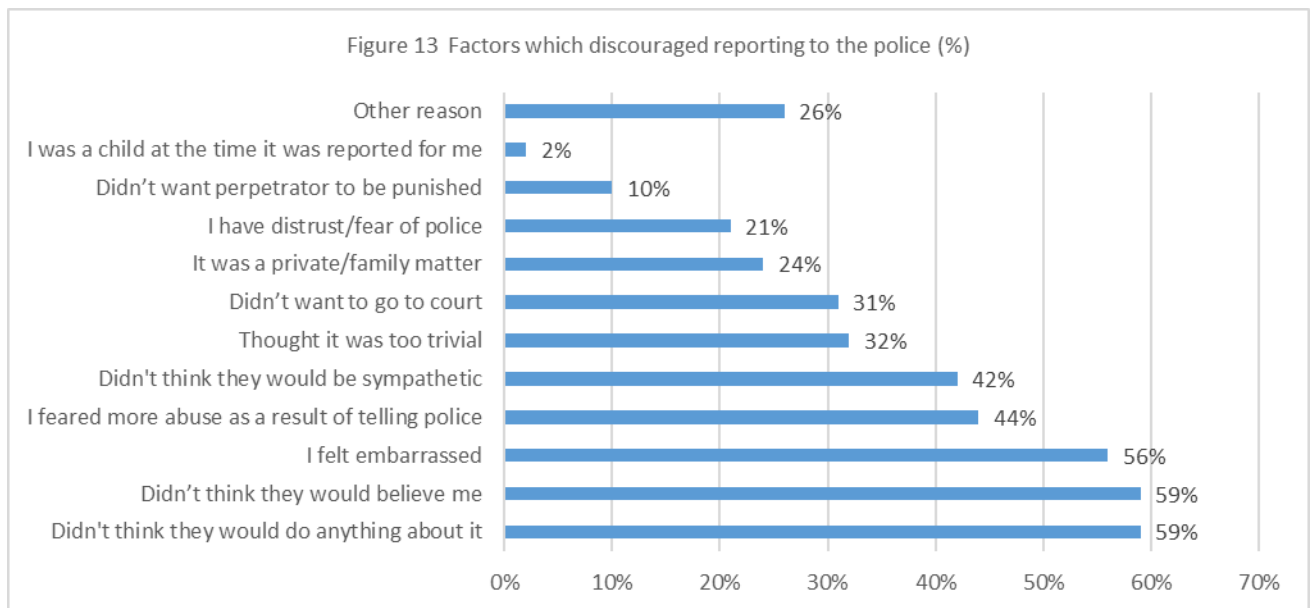
Question 22:

What factors discouraged you from reporting to the police?

Of the 90 respondents who hadn't reported their abuse to the police the top three factors that had discouraged them from doing so were a belief that they wouldn't be believed (mentioned by 59%), disbelief that the police would do anything (also 59%) and feeling embarrassed (mentioned by 56%) (Table 5, Figure 13).

Table 5 Factors which discouraged respondents from reporting to the police

	Number	%
I didn't think they would believe me	53	59
I didn't think they would do anything about it	53	59
I felt embarrassed	50	56
I feared more abuse as a result of telling the police	40	44
I didn't think they would be sympathetic	38	42
I thought it was too trivial	29	32
I didn't want to go to court	28	31
It was a private/family matter	22	24
I have a distrust/fear of police	19	21
I didn't want the perpetrator to be punished	9	10
I was a child at the time it was reported for me	2	2
Other reason	23	26



Question 23: Is there anything that could or would have encouraged or supported you to come forward in relation to reporting to the police?

In answering this question, many respondents focused on their reasons for not reporting as opposed to what might have encouraged them to report. The factors identified (either implicitly or explicitly) as potentially helpful, in terms of encouraging or supporting victims to report to the police fell into three broad categories.

- *Police related:* This included factors such as police encouragement to report incidents; more female police officers; knowing specialist officers would deal with the incident; having non-uniform police dealing with the incident; having a safe place to talk to the police; a guarantee of police action and a reassurance that the police understand the nature of abuse.
- *Victim related:* From a victim perspective this included understanding what abuse is, knowing that they would be safe; not being re-traumatised; reassurance that a child will be listened to; a means to report abuse online; reassurance of confidentiality; knowing that justice would be done and understanding the potential outcomes; greater awareness through media campaigns; and having well funded support services.
- *Other Criminal Justice System related:* Criminal justice factors suggested to encourage reporting included more convictions and increased sentencing, speedier processing of cases; better legal protection for victims and believing that justice would be done.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The system is stacked against victims. Victims are re-traumatised over and over.”

“Better knowledge about what abuse was. I did instinctively go to dial 999 once, then stopped myself and felt silly. Had I had a better understanding of what constitutes domestic abuse (and how I might be treated by the police), I would have dialled.”

“Feeling that I would be believed and taken seriously as a man complaining of

psychological abuse by a woman.”

“If I felt that justice would have happened I would have ... I didn't think it would have been worth it as it's my word against his.”

Question 24: Is there anything further you wish to tell us about your experience with the police, Public Prosecution Service or criminal courts?

In response to this question while a few individuals made positive comments, the comments on criminal justice experience were predominantly negative. As mentioned earlier, this is not unexpected, given that people are more likely to remember and respond more strongly to traumatic or adverse experiences than to positive ones. The key comments made related to police, PPS and courts.

- *Police related:* While some individuals stated how helpful, fair, understanding and supportive the police had been, many who made additional comments were critical of police in terms of their attitude, actions and knowledge of how to deal with domestic and/or sexual abuse. A number felt that there had been a lack of empathy and that they hadn't been taken seriously. It was considered that the police need better training and more information to help victims (including around court dates and sentencing, albeit not the responsibility of police).
- *PPS related:* It was suggested that PPS should inform victims how prosecution decisions are arrived at, that PPS letters should be clearer and the need for greater appreciation of the impact of letters advising of non-prosecution on victims.
- *Courts related:* A number of respondents highlighted how difficult the court experience is for victims, with suggestions that clearer information be provided on how the court system works and likely outcomes. Some expressed concerns about a lack of protection for victims arriving at and leaving court, while many commented on how traumatic attending court can be. There was also reference to intimidation of victims in court, that the public gallery should be monitored and that counselling be provided both during and after court. On court outcomes, low conviction rates and the inadequacy of sentences were raised. It was suggested that Judge's comments be made available to victims.
- *General criminal justice related:* At a more general level concerns were raised about the time taken for cases to reach court (including the need to fast track domestic abuse cases), a lack of joined up working, the need for clearer information on the criminal justice process and being notified of prison release dates.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“I felt I was treated fairly by the police service and I am glad they were there to help me. I don't regret contacting them and I would encourage anyone to do so.”

“I had to contact them myself to get updates about the case. I was not informed that my abuser was arrested or released. I did not know what the conditions of his bail were until I asked for the information.”

“PPS needs to give victims more information as to how they reached the thought process not to prosecute. It ... ends up re-traumatising victims. It makes them feel

like they were not believed ...and it's the reason why many victims do not come forward."

"It is a terrifying experience unless you know what is going to happen. There should be support offered in all domestic violence cases through a phone call to see if help is needed."

"Services do not see victims as 'victims' instead they are seen as a number, a statistic, a reliable witness, a good prosecution ... greater support and training is needed."

"The courts need to be sorted, fast tracking domestic abuse cases and actually giving abusers a sentence when found guilty and not a suspended sentence."

"Change needs to be made in all aspects of communications, documentation, PPS/police/court involvement ... updated knowledge and training, training on personal skills and being more victim focused."

"They could never fully explain or interpret what it meant ... what the result in court actually was ... what the judge said was much more detailed and understandable ... The judge's comments should be available to victims."

Section 4

Views on How the Northern Ireland Executive Approaches the Issue of Domestic and Sexual Abuse

Question 25: Are you aware that the Northern Ireland Executive has an existing strategy for tackling domestic and sexual abuse?

Fewer than half of respondents (46%) reported being aware that the Northern Ireland Executive has an existing strategy for tackling domestic and sexual abuse.

Question 26: Have you any suggestions for how the Northern Ireland Executive could better promote work related to domestic and sexual abuse?

The responses to this question were wide ranging and diverse and summarised under the themes below:

- *Awareness related:* Need for greater awareness of domestic and sexual abuse e.g. on social media, public transport, story lines in soaps, at sporting events etc. as well as the consequences for abusers. Also considered a need for more widespread distribution of leaflets e.g. in schools, youth clubs, bars, leisure centres, supermarkets etc. Respondents also stated that there should be more training days, seminars, in-person information days as well as sharing real life accounts and raising awareness that anyone can be an abuser. In addition, it was felt that the media should focus on statistics, with reminders of the strategy.
- *Education related:* Need to link in with early education, with education awareness in schools, universities, workplaces (including the signs of domestic abuse and relationship and sex education). Considered that there should be mandatory domestic abuse training for public service providers.
- *Victim related:* Need to show compassion and listen to victims, reflecting on their lived experience, keep them updated on their case and ensure they are aware of

their rights. Increased support should be provided around accommodation and to parents as well as more support for men.

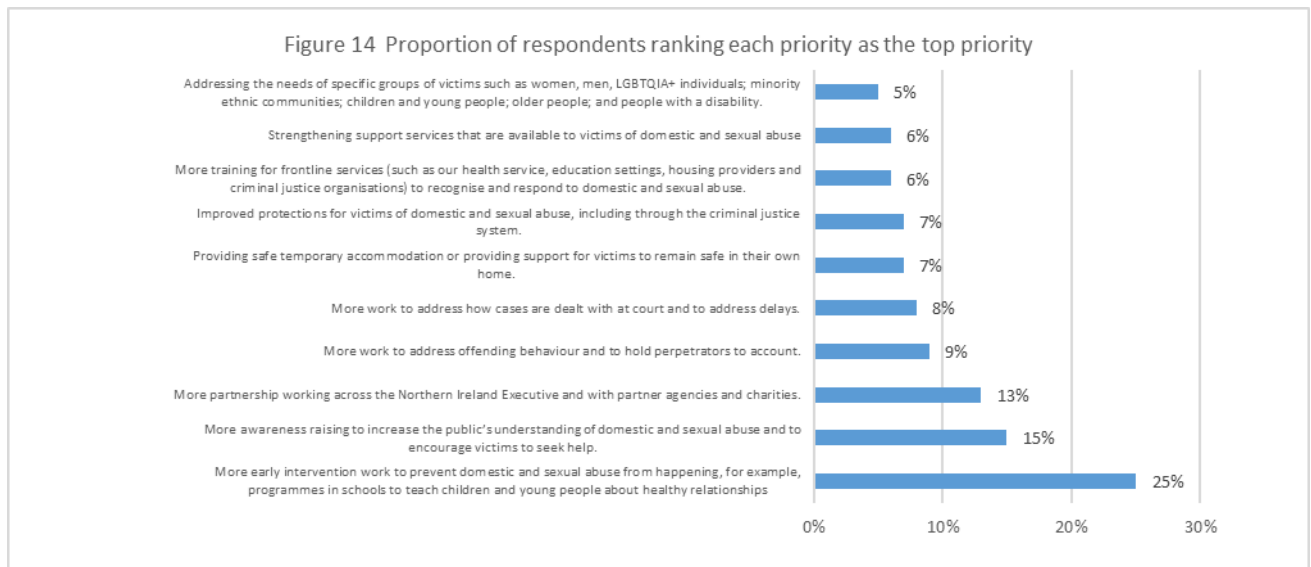
- *Criminal Justice System related:* There should be zero tolerance of abuse, increased sentencing and powers for the police to act as well as anonymity for a defendant until convicted.
- *Support organisations related:* More funding needed, with specialist expertise and confidential support services and recovery services provided.
- *Housing and safety:* A need for more safe places for victims; increased safety in the workplace and safe methods for children to report abuse.
- *Funding related:* Appropriate recovery services need to be funded to avoid mental health consequences and funding provided for male services.

Question 27: Which of the following do you think should be the most important priorities for the Northern Ireland Executive in tackling domestic and sexual abuse? Please rank from 1 to 10 with 1 being the most important.

The most frequently identified priority was early intervention to prevent domestic and sexual abuse from happening (25% of respondents had as the top priority) (Table 6, Figure 14). The other two priorities most highly identified were increased awareness raising (cited by 15%) and more partnership working (mentioned by 13%). When looking at the cumulative picture for the top three priorities, more early intervention work was identified by 50% of respondents, increased awareness raising (42%) and more training for frontline services to recognise and respond to domestic and sexual abuse (34%).

Table 6 Proportion of respondents identifying each priority as the first, second and third highest priorities

	Top priority	Second priority	Third priority	Any of top 3 priorities	Base= 100%
More partnership working across the Northern Ireland Executive and with partner agencies and charities.	13	7	8	28	231
More awareness raising to increase the public's understanding of domestic and sexual abuse and to encourage victims to seek help.	15	21	6	42	232
More early intervention work to prevent domestic and sexual abuse from happening, for example, programmes in schools to teach children and young people about healthy relationships.	25	13	12	50	232
More training for frontline services (such as our health service, education settings, housing providers and criminal justice organisations) to recognise and respond to domestic and sexual abuse.	6	10	18	34	232
Strengthening support services that are available to victims of domestic and sexual abuse.	6	8	11	26	232
Providing safe temporary accommodation or providing support for victims to remain safe in their own home.	7	7	13	27	229
Addressing the needs of specific groups of victims such as women, men, LGBTQIA+ individuals; minority ethnic communities; children and young people; older people; and people with a disability.	5	5	4	15	220
Improved protections for victims of domestic and sexual abuse, including through the criminal justice system.	7	11	11	28	228
More work to address offending behaviour and to hold perpetrators to account.	9	12	9	30	225
More work to address how cases are dealt with at court and to address delays.	8	7	9	24	225



Question 28: Are you aware of any new or emerging issues that the Northern Ireland Executive needs to be considering, or areas of work that need further development in order to specifically address domestic and sexual abuse?

Of the 228 individuals who answered the question, 28% suggested new and emerging issues, 41% didn't have any suggestions and 31% opted for 'don't know'. The suggestions related to types of offences, issues related to male victims and abuse through technology.

- *Specific types of offences:* Some individuals expressed the need for consideration of particular types of offences. This included stalking; upskirting; revenge porn; parental alienation; protection for children; impact of poverty (making it difficult to leave an abusive relationship); access to abortion; sex trafficking; honour based violence; female genital mutilation and drugging/drink spiking. Some are outside the scope of a domestic and sexual abuse strategy.
- *Issues related to male victims:* Another recurring theme was the need for greater support for male victims of abuse with concern from some that there is not going to be a specific strategy for men and boys. The need to address support for men and boys was raised, with concern about under-reporting of abuse against male victims given prevailing stereotypes as well as insufficient funding, support services and refuge for male victims.
- *Technology:* Concerns were expressed about the use of technology to abuse people, such as creating fake accounts for inflicting abuse, increased use of sexting, ease of access to porn and the use of tracking devices/phones to control their respective partners.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“No refuge for men and their kids ... Refuge should be equal for men and women’s projects. Why is it not?”

“Male victims under report as there is not only a lack of support but organisations who actively paint them as perpetrators and not victims.”

“Social media and the ability to hide behind fake accounts without anyone being able to trace abusers online.”

“The availability of tracking devices/phones ... There are more ways for domestic abusers to control partners.”

Question 29: What difference or change should be achieved from the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and how best can this be measured?

There was a diverse range of responses to this question, a number of which have already been touched on. This included the difference or change to be made through the new strategy and how to measure this change. There was considered to be a need for greater public awareness, early intervention and preventative measures plus more specialised and mandatory training for professionals. It was also felt that there was a need for improved safety controls, increased funding for support services, reduced waiting lists, as well as reduced delay and increased sentencing. It was suggested that there is a need to measure societal change and attitudes, undertake further research and ensure people can distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships. It was noted that there should be improved outcomes for victims; and monitoring of satisfaction levels of victims.

Question 30: Are there any final comments that you would like to make in relation to the development of a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy?

Responses largely repeated earlier comments relating to education, victim needs, support services and criminal justice processes. Additional comments related to the need for the strategy to be urgently implemented with an action plan; the need for victim input to its development (and to help make it easy to understand); having a more joined up approach; and taking account of the needs of rural communities.

Public Survey

In addition to the victim survey 411 individuals completed a public survey providing views on domestic and sexual abuse. An overview of the responses to this are set out below. Both the public and victim survey responses reflected views that were also expressed in written responses and the engagement events.

Respondent Profile

Of the 411 respondents to the Public Survey, 41% reported that they had previously been a victim of domestic or sexual abuse, 48% reported that they had not been a victim, 10% stated that they would prefer not to say and 1% didn't answer the question. In terms of respondent profile, the vast majority of respondents identified as female (86%), 92% were aged under 65 (around two thirds were aged between 25 to 54, with 13% under the age of 25), 97% were of white ethnicity and, in terms of sexual orientation, 88% described themselves as straight/heterosexual. 11% of respondents indicated that they had a disability.

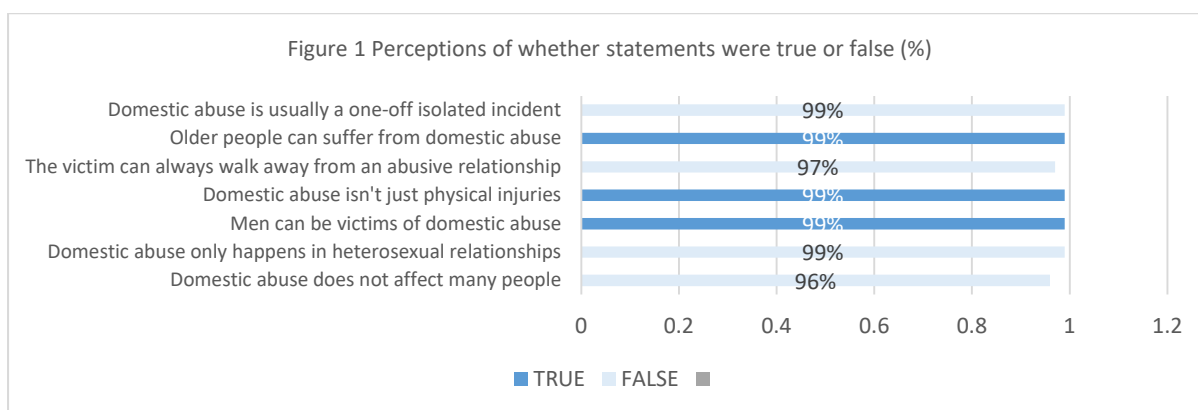
Views on Domestic and Sexual Abuse

Question 1: Which of the following statements about domestic abuse would you say are true and which would you say are false?

The responses are summarised in Table 1 and Figure 1. Responses were generally unanimous across all of the statements, with the vast majority having a good grasp of the reality of domestic abuse. Only a small minority of respondents believed that domestic abuse did not affect many people, that it only happened in heterosexual relationships or that it was usually a one-off isolated incident caused by anger or stress. Almost all respondents recognised that men and older people can be victims of domestic abuse and that domestic abuse is not just about physical injuries (both 99%). 97% of respondents disagreed that the victim can always walk away from an abusive relationship.

Table 1 Respondents perceptions regarding statements about domestic abuse

	True	False	Don't know	Base= 100%
Domestic abuse does not affect many people	2%	96%	2%	410
Domestic abuse only happens in heterosexual relationships	<1%	99%	<1%	411
Men can be victims of domestic abuse	99%	1%	<1%	409
Domestic abuse isn't just physical injuries	99%	2%	-	408
The victim can always walk away from an abusive relationship	1%	97%	1%	410
Older people can suffer from domestic abuse	99%	1%	<1%	410
Domestic abuse is usually a one-off isolated incident caused by anger or stress	1%	99%	<1%	410



Question 2: Domestic abuse can happen in couple relationships. It can take place between current and former partners and the relationship need not necessarily be longstanding or indeed sexual. Domestic abuse can also occur between close family members. Which, if any, of the following behaviours do you think constitutes domestic abuse?

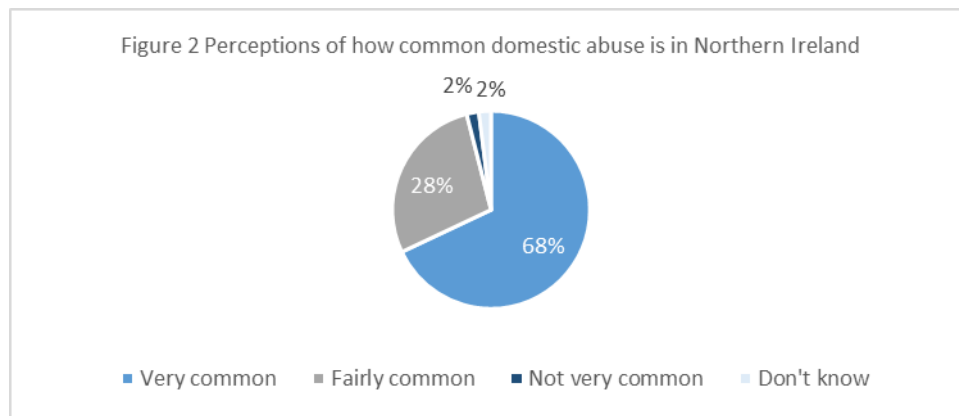
Responses here again were largely unanimous in relation to the behaviours which constitute domestic abuse. Almost all respondents considered that each of the behaviours listed in the table constituted domestic abuse.

Table 2 Whether or not behaviours were considered to constitute domestic abuse

	Yes	No	Don't know	Base= 100%
Hitting or threatening to hit the individual	100%	<1%	-	410
Constant put downs and humiliation	99%	<1%	1%	410
Not letting the individual see family/friends	100%	-	<1%	410
Not allowing the individual money for their own use	98%	1%	1%	409
Throwing things at the individual	100%	-	-	409
Forcing the individual to have sex	100%	<1%	<1%	409
Controlling the individual's style and appearance	99%	1%	1%	410
Sending abusive texts and emails	99%	<1%	1%	408

Question 3: How common do you think domestic abuse is in Northern Ireland?

Almost all respondents (96%) believed that domestic abuse was either 'very' (68%) or 'fairly' (28%) common in Northern Ireland (Figure 2). 2% considered that it was not very common and a further 2% said they didn't know how common it was.



Question 4: Which, if any of the following behaviours do you think constitutes sexual abuse?

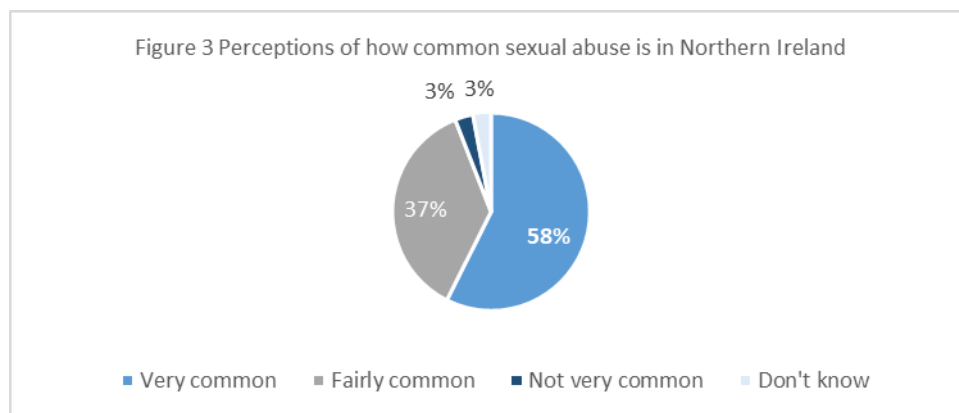
93% or more respondents believed that all but one of the statements listed in the table below constituted sexual abuse. The statement which was least likely to be perceived as sexual abuse was ‘A stranger pretending to be someone else in an online relationship’ (this was perceived as sexual abuse by 79% of respondents).

Table 3 Whether or not behaviours were considered to constitute sexual abuse

	Yes	No	Base= 100%
A person having sex without consent	100%	<1%	409
A person forcing their partner to engage in sexual activity when the partner has said they do not want to	100%	<1%	410
A person forcing someone, who is not their partner, to engage in sexual activity when the person has said they do not want to	100%	<1%	409
A stranger making sexual remarks to a person walking down the street or in a public place	93%	7%	408
An employee being offered a promotion in exchange for sexual activity	97%	3%	406
A person sending someone photos of their genitalia when the recipient has not asked for them	97%	3%	409
Uploading or threatening to upload private intimate images to the internet without the consent of the person in the image (sometimes referred to as ‘revenge porn’)	100%	<1%	409
A person filming up someone’s skirt without their permission	99%	1%	410
A person filming down someone’s blouse without their permission	99%	1%	409
A stranger pretending to be someone else in an online relationship	79%	21%	407

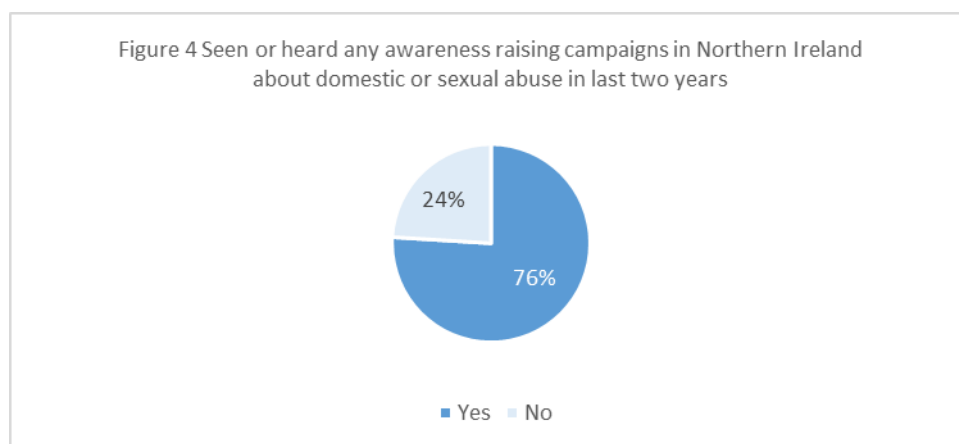
Question 5: How common would you say sexual abuse is in Northern Ireland?

The vast majority of respondents (94%) believed that sexual abuse was either 'very' (58%) or 'fairly' (37%) common (Figure 3). 3% believed that it was not very common and a further 3% didn't know how common it was.



Question 6: Have you seen or heard any awareness raising campaigns in Northern Ireland about domestic or sexual abuse within the last two years?

Just over three quarters (76%) of respondents reported that they had seen or heard an awareness raising campaign in Northern Ireland about domestic or sexual abuse within the last two years (Figure 4).

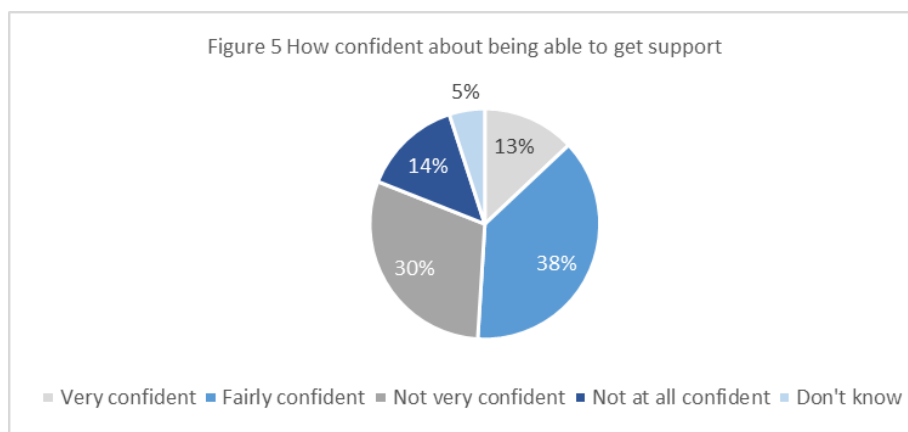


Question 7: How confident would you feel about being able to get support if you experienced domestic or sexual abuse?

Half of respondents said that they would feel 'very' or 'fairly' confident about being able to get support if they experienced domestic or sexual abuse. This compared with 44% stating that they would not feel confident and a small minority not knowing either way (Figure 5).

Many of those who commented on this question reported that they were familiar with where to seek support, for example, having heard about this through their work. They were not so sure, however, that many victims would know. It was suggested that victims might not be confident about accessing support due to concerns that police

would not take abuse seriously, may adopt a victim blaming approach (particularly in cases involving rape) and may not investigate incidents properly. It was also suggested that police need more training in the area of domestic and sexual abuse.



From a victim perspective, some respondents mentioned that they would have confidence in seeking support from family and friends but recognised that it may be more difficult to seek support from elsewhere. This was suggested as due to a fear of not being believed or taken seriously; the stigma often associated with abuse; concerns related to confidentiality; the difficulty of proving abuse of a non-physical nature; fear of further abuse; and lack of confidence in the courts. The lack of support services for male victims and for those who don't speak English was also highlighted.

There were views expressed that support organisations are not well signposted; there needs to be an easy way to take that first step in seeking support; support services are under funded; waiting lists are long; and services must be needs as opposed to funding led.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The system ‘does not have the resources which means women and girls are not at all confident about coming forward in the first place.”

“Individuals do not know where to get confidential support for sexual abuse ... and it is extremely difficult to access especially for people who live in rural areas.”

“I am a man so I do not think I would be believed or taken seriously, and even if I was, there would be no support service available for me anyway.”

Views on other forms of violence

The responses to questions 8 to 11 on other forms of violence, which focused on violence against women and girls, are dealt with in a separate summary report which will be made available at www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/topics/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls in the coming weeks.

Views on how the Northern Ireland Executive Approaches the Issue of Domestic and Sexual Abuse

Question 11: Are you aware that the Northern Ireland Executive has an existing strategy for tackling domestic and sexual abuse?

Just under half (47%) of respondents reported being aware that the Northern Ireland Executive has an existing strategy for tackling domestic and sexual abuse.

Question 12: Have you any suggestions for how the Northern Ireland Executive could better promote work related to domestic and sexual abuse?

Suggestions for how work in this area could be better promoted included:

(i) Awareness raising

Many respondents highlighted the need to enhance public awareness of domestic and/or sexual abuse. There were suggestions that this could be achieved through issuing leaflets to homes, billboard adverts and flyers in public places. Other suggestions were for wider media coverage through TV adverts, news articles, wider social media coverage or getting celebrities to speak out about the subject.

There were views expressed about the importance of early intervention programmes, as part of the school curriculum or awareness in universities and workplaces, including comprehensive Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). Other suggestions were a dedicated website or to have prominent links on Advice NI. There were also suggestions for ambassadors to reinforce awareness, through collaboration with community groups and churches as well as outreach events.

The main topics identified as needing addressed were the stigma associated with domestic and sexual abuse; the issue of consent; how to recognise the signs of abuse; what healthy relationships look like; and cultural bias training.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Celebrities’ speaking out and headlining a campaign would impact on younger people.”

“TV advert campaigns, education in schools ... billboards and posters in public areas/transport, leaflets sent to workplaces, in safe spaces like hairdressers and beauticians.”

“Use more social media Also a series of short ... videos with key messages. Work with local bloggers ... & local online media ... to spread the word.”

“Run training events for community workers so that they can impart knowledge back into the community in which they work.”

“Comprehensive relationship and sexuality education.”

(ii) Support services for victims

A number of respondents suggested increasing funding for voluntary agencies and community groups to provide services such as additional sheltered accommodation, safe places and other support services. There was a suggestion that in developing the new strategy, it may be beneficial to work with service providers to get first-hand knowledge and information of how victims feel, how the process affects them and triggers.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Listen to victims, help them find the charities and fund more counselling centres for victims of abuse especially sexual assault.”

“More funding for voluntary agencies that are the ones supporting women and children through abuse.”

“Work with other organisations White Ribbon NI to encourage men and boys to support campaigns and educational programmes.”

(iii) Increased focus on victims

From a victim perspective, there were requests for there to be a greater focus on listening to victims. In particular, there was recognition that more needed to be done in terms of supporting male victims. Other suggestions were to give victims paid leave and female victims easier access to female doctors.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Easier access to help or sign posting on where to go for help.”

“Better support organisations and statutory rights for victims to have time off work.”

“Take it seriously. A message of zero tolerance.”

“It is also extremely important that the Executive clarifies that ... the suffering and experiences of each individual victim is no less real, severe and valid, whatever their gender, or whatever the gender of their abuser, and that ... every individual victim is entitled to, and in need of, similar levels of support, care and sympathy.”

(iv) Criminal Justice matters and system related

It was felt that work in this area could be better promoted through changes to criminal justice processes. This included system overhaul, increased sentences and more behavioural change programmes. There were calls for additional resources for PSNI and PPS.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Criminal justice system needs to be overhauled ... [so victims] have confidence in the system ... Victims should be treated with dignity and respect and properly resourced services.”

“Solicitors and lawyers need to be better trained on the impact of abuse and trauma.”

“Resource the PSNI as well as increased domestic and sexual abuse training for dispatchers and police officers, all front-line workers ... Resource PPS and include successful prosecution targets.”

“More awareness, advanced training for police/criminal justice practitioners, and other NGOs.”

(v) Government related

There were views expressed that Government needed to take the subject more seriously and for politicians to engage on cross-Executive work and finances. A Citizens Assembly was suggested to explore key issues and make recommendations to the Executive.

Question 13: Which of the following do you think should be the most important priorities for the Northern Ireland Executive in tackling domestic and sexual abuse? Please rank from 1 to 10 with 1 being the most important

A number of respondents considered that all listed priorities were of equal importance. In terms of the top stated priorities more intervention work was identified as most important by 29% of respondents, more awareness raising by 17% and more partnership working by 11%.

Table 4 Most important priorities for the Northern Ireland Executive

	Top priority	Second priority	Third priority	Any of top 3 priorities	Base= 100%
More partnership working across the Northern Ireland Executive and with partner agencies and charities.	11%	8%	6%	24%	392
More awareness raising to increase the public’s understanding of domestic and sexual abuse and to encourage victims to seek help.	17%	18%	8%	43%	396
More early intervention work to prevent domestic and sexual abuse from happening, for example, programmes in schools to teach children and young people about healthy relationships.	29%	15%	14%	58%	395
More training for frontline services (such as our health service, education settings, housing providers and criminal justice organisations) to recognise and respond to domestic and sexual abuse.	5%	11%	14%	30%	391
Strengthening support services that are available to victims of domestic and sexual abuse.	9%	12%	15%	36%	390
Providing safe temporary accommodation or providing support for victims to remain safe in their own home.	5%	10%	11%	26%	386
Addressing the needs of specific groups of victims such as women, men, LGBTQIA+ individuals; minority ethnic communities; children and young people; older people; and people with a disability.	3%	35	5%	10%	384
Improved protections for victims of domestic and sexual abuse, including through the criminal justice system.	6%	5%	15%	26%	386
More work to address offending behaviour and to hold perpetrators to account.	7%	13%	7%	27%	387
More work to address how cases are dealt with at court and to address delays.	9%	7%	5%	21%	386

Question 14: Are you aware of any new or emerging issues that the Northern Ireland Executive needs to be considering, or areas of work that need further development, in order to specifically address domestic and sexual abuse?

A number of respondents took the opportunity to suggest new or emerging issues that needed further consideration, under four broad subject areas as below:

- *Specific types of abuse being addressed:* Specific types of abuse identified as needing addressed included strangulation and choking; human trafficking; spiking incidents; disclosure of private sexual images; female genital mutilation; grooming; elder abuse; modern day slavery; and child sexual exploitation.
- *Specific services needing developed:* Services identified as needing addressed includes sexual health services; addiction services; mental health services; family planning services; trauma services; single sex services; and services for non-english speaking people.
- *Addressing the needs of vulnerable/marginalised groups:* The need of potentially vulnerable/marginalised groups were identified as needing addressed and included children; women; men, older people; LGBTQIA+ individuals; trans women and ethnic groups.
 - Children: Issues raised included the risks associated with perpetrator access to children; the need for domestic abuse laws to protect children; listening to the views of children; enhancing awareness of children around relationships, sex education and staying safe online; parental alienation; and the hidden cost to children in terms of self-development, confidence and mental health.
 - Older people: Issues raised related to violence against older people and the challenges faced by the older generation and those in a caring relationship.
 - Transgender individuals: Issues raised included the need for protection from violence and abuse.
 - Ethnic groups: There were points made regarding the need to take cognisance of the cultural differences that exist in society.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Awareness of violence against the older generation possibly instigated by a long term husband or partner with dementia who doesn’t know where or who to turn to for help.”

“Domestic violence in a care relationship, e.g. partner or child or parent. Enough support needed to ensure that carers do not restrict or abuse the person depending on them, whether it is a child or an older person.”

“Ensuring Women’s safe spaces remain for biological women only and remain single sex.”

“Cultural differences within ethnic groups and attitudes towards women and girls.”

“Different ethnic groups may view domestic violence in different ways i.e. may see abuse as a cultural norm.”

- *Criminal Justice processes and legislation:* The main issues related to criminal justice processes and legislation were resourcing; concerns around trust in police

(including historic elements); delays at court; conviction rates; issues of consent; as well as the need for legislation related to the sharing of nude images, strangulation and misogynistic behaviour.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“The lack of resources in the criminal justice system to adequately address the issue.”

“More police presence does not necessarily equal a feeling of safety, particularly in Northern Ireland where police presence can be divisive for some communities. Many young people are brought up to fear/avoid the police.”

“The court system - why are there so few convictions - this puts women off coming forward.”

“Misogynistic views or acts need to be called out and challenged in the law.”

Question 15: Are there any further comments that you would like to make in relation to the development of a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy?

A number of individuals provided general comments about the development of the new strategy. A number of these related to issues raised earlier. The main additional points related to the new strategy being long overdue and needing to be urgently taken forward; the need for more service user/victim input to the development of the strategy; that the strategy should be gender-neutral; the need for the new strategy to be well publicised, promoted and put into practice as well as funding to support it.

A sample of some of the comments made:

“Co-production with service users may strengthen the strategy, having a real account of experiences in terms of the abuse and seeking and accessing support during and after it.”

“Make it work equally for all victims.”

“I would not join the two issues [domestic abuse and sexual abuse]. Each is huge and important in its own right.”

“Please get away from the male perpetrator/female victim narrative ... The person suffering abuse NEEDS to know that they aren't alone ... no matter their gender.”

“It needs to recognise the gendered nature of Domestic and Sexual Abuse.”

3. Next steps

A wide range of views and issues were raised during the Call for Views, which will helpfully inform the development of the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy. We want to ensure that the necessary time is taken to further consider the materials that were provided, including relevant research and data as well the lived experience that so many have helpfully shared with us.

The Departments of Health and Justice will share this evidence with other relevant Departments and bodies, including the Department for Communities and the Department of Education as well as criminal justice partners, and will work together over the coming months to prepare a draft strategy. We will continue to engage with our Stakeholder Assurance Group as part of that work and also liaise with the Executive Office to ensure that a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy aligns with and complements a new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy.

The key stages in the strategy development process are:



It is our intention to consult on the draft Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy towards the end of 2022, with a view to it being published in 2023. We anticipate that the draft strategy will cover a period of seven years, from 2023/24 through to 2029/30.

Annex 1

Organisations that attended Call for Views engagement events

Date	Sector
24 January 2022	Stakeholder Assurance Group
25 January 2022	Northern Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership
28 January 2022	Western Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership
1 February 2022	South Eastern Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership
2 February 2022	Organisations supporting female victims (Belfast Feminist Network; NI Women's Budget Group; NI Women's European Platform; Victim Support NI; Women's Policy Group; Women's Regional Consortium; Women's Resource and Development Agency; Women's Support Network; Woman's Aid Federation NI)
8 February 2022	All Party Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence
8 February 2022	Organisations Supporting Children and Young People (Barnardos; Children in NI; Education Authority NI; National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children NI; The Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre)
9 February 2022	Public Event
10 February 2022	Public Event
11 February 2022	Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline
14 February 2022	Organisations Supporting Victims of sexual violence and abuse (Nexus NI; Rape Crisis NI; Victim Support NI).
15 February 2022	Organisations supporting male victims (La Dolce Vita; Men's Action Network; Men's Alliance NI; Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline; Nexus NI)
15 February 2022	Belfast area Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership
16 February 2022	Organisations supporting Minority Ethnic Communities (Bomoko NI; Ethnic Minorities Support Worker, Building Communities Resource Centre, Causeway Area; Flourish NI; Migrant Centre NI; NI Council for Racial Equality)
22 February 2022	Public Event
23 February 2022	Public Event

23 February 2022	Criminal justice organisations (Criminal Justice Inspection NI; Office of the Attorney General NI; Police Service of NI; Public Prosecution Service; NI Courts and Tribunals Service; Youth Justice Agency)
23 February 2022	Public Event
24 February 2022	Organisations supporting older people (Age NI; Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne, Newtownabbey Women's Aid and Older People's Project; Hourglass)
1 March 2022	Organisations supporting people in rural communities (Rural Support; Ulster Farmer's Union; Vet NIVA; Vet Support; Western Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership; Women's Institute)
8 March 2022	Victim Support NI service users
10 March 2022	Organisations supporting the LGBTQIA+ community (HERE NI; Rainbow)
14 March 2022	Southern Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership
15 March 2022	Organisations supporting Minority Ethnic Communities (Armagh Support Group; Chinese Welfare Association; Belfast Islamic Centre; Inter Ethnic Forum; South Tyrone Empowerment Group (STEP); Sudanese Women's Group; Irish Traveller)
15 March 2022	Nexus NI Service Users
15 March 2022	Girl Guides
16 March 2022	Organisations Supporting people with a disability (Disability Action NI)
21 March 2022	NI Civil Service Student Network

Annex 2

Organisations that submitted a written response to the Call for Views

1	Action for Children
2	Age NI
3	Ards and North Down Borough Council
4	Barnardo's NI
5	Belfast Area Domestic & Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership
6	British Medical Association NI
7	Both Parents Matter Cymru
8	Children in NI
9	Church and Society Commission of the Church of Ireland
10	Commissioner for Older People for NI
11	Disability Action
12	Education Authority
13	Equality Commission for NI
14	Evangelical Alliance NI
15	Girlguiding Ulster
16	Hear Our Voices - Mid-Ulster
17	Here NI and Cara Friend
18	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
19	La Dolce Vita Project
20	Law Centre NI
21	Lisburn & Castlereagh Policing and Community Safety Partnership
22	ManKind Initiative
23	Men and Boys Coalition
24	Men's Alliance NI
25	Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
26	Migrant Centre NI
27	Mothers' Union
28	National Secular Society
29	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children NI
30	Newry Next Chapter Group
31	Nexus NI
32	Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (women's group)
33	NI Public Service Alliance
34	NI Commissioner for Children and Young People

35	NI Housing Executive
36	Participation and the Practice of Rights
37	Pharmacy Forum NI
38	Police Service of NI
39	Practitioners Forum
40	Public Prosecution Service
41	Queen's University Belfast researcher
42	Rape Crisis Service for NI
43	Regional Trauma Network – Southern Health and Social Care Trust
44	Relate NI
45	Safe & Healthy Relationships Wellbeing Adviser, Queen's University Belfast
46	South Eastern Domestic & Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership
47	Sinn Féin
48	Stop Street Harassment NI
49	South West Grid for Learning Helplines
50	Men's Advisory Project
51	NI Human Rights Commission
52	Office of the Attorney General for NI
53	Presbyterian Church in Ireland
54	Probation Board for NI
55	Rainbow Project
56	Ulster Unionist Party
57	UNISON NI
58	Victim Support NI
59	White Ribbon NI
60	Women in Sport
61	Women's Policy Group NI
62	Women's Regional Consortium
63	Women's Aid Federation NI
64	Women's Platform
65	Workers Party