

Women's Policy Group NI

Women's Policy Group Joint Written Response to Call for Views: New Strategies:

Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy (DOJ, DOH)

Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (TEO)

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE – Introduction and Overview of Women’s Policy Group NI Work	4
1. Introduction:	5
2. Women’s Policy Group NI (WPG) - Relevant Research, Submissions and Briefings Relating to Men’s Violence Against Women and Girls:	11
CHAPTER TWO – WPG Primary Research Project on Violence Against Women and Girls 2022	16
3. WPG Primary Research Project: Call for Views on Men’s Violence Against Women and Girls 2022 - Personal Testimony from a Survivor of Domestic Abuse:.....	17
3.1 Case Study – Beth: Domestic Abuse	17
3.2 Women’s Policy Group NI Primary Research Project for this Call for Views - WPG Survey on Men’s Violence Against Women and Girls:	20
3.2.1 Methodology:	20
3.2.2 Section 1 - Demographic Information Questions	23
3.2.3 Section 2 - Survey Questions:	25
3.3 WPG Primary Research 2022: Results and Key Findings	35
3.3.1 Section 1 - Demographic Information:	36
3.3.2 Section 2 - Survey Questions - Key Findings.....	41
CHAPTER THREE – Additional WPG Primary Research on VAWG.....	87
4. Additional WPG Primary Research 2021-2022:.....	88
4.1 Primary Research - WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan Relaunch One Year On: Putting Women’s Voices at the Core:.....	88
4.1.1 Key Quantitative Research Findings:	88
4.2 WPG Feminist Recovery Plan Testimonials relating to Men’s Violence Against Women and Girls in Northern Ireland:	92
4.2.1 Testimonies Relating to Violence Against Women and Girls	92
4.2.2 Testimonies Relating to Hate Crime, Misogyny and Online Abuse.....	95
4.2.3 Testimonies Relating to Education and Training to Prevent Men’s Violence Against Women and Girls:	97
4.3 WPG Feminist Recovery Plan Relaunch One Year On: Supplementary Report - Putting Women’s Voices at the Core - Anonymous Case Studies:.....	101
4.3.1 Case Study Anna: Racism, Hate Crime & Honour-based/ Domestic Abuse	101
4.3.2 Case Study Lisa: Spiritual Abuse & Honour-based/ Domestic Abuse.....	103
4.4 Primary Research - Protection from Stalking Bill WPG Research - Summary of Research and Key Findings	105
4.4.1 Overview of Primary Research on Stalking:	105
4.4.2 The questions we asked people to answer:	106
4.4.3 Results of Survey Questions and Key Findings:	107
5. Relevant Data, Evidence and Recommendations from the WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan - Cultural Pillar:	115
5.1 Women and Girls in the Media, Rape Culture and Violence Against Women	115
5.1.1 Sexism and the Portrayal of Women and Girls in the Media	115

5.1.2 Rape Myths and Rape Culture	116
5.1.3 Violence Against Women.....	120
5.1.4 Protection from Stalking.....	123
5.1.5 Consent to Harm for Sexual Gratification ('Rough Sex Defence')	123
5.1.6 Honour-Based Abuse.....	126
5.2 Hate Crimes and Online Abuse.....	130
5.2.1 Misogynistic Hate Crimes.....	131
5.2.2 Online Abuse against Women	133
5.3 Education and Training.....	135
5.3.1 Equality Proofing Education Post-COVID-19	135
5.3.2 Equality and Diversity Education	137
CHAPTER FOUR – WPG Comments Specific to these Calls for Views	140
6. WPG Comments Specific to these Calls for Views:	141
6.1 International Mechanisms and VAWG:	141
6.1.1 ILO Convention 190	142
6.2 General Comments:	144
6.2.1 General Comments on Timing of Calls for Views	144
6.2.2 Comments on Title of Strategies	145
6.2.3 Urgent Appeal to Save Regina Coeli Hostel and Further Fund Women's Hostels and Domestic Abuse Refuges	147
6.2.4 Inclusion of State Violence.....	148
6.2.5 Alliance for Choice Testimonies - Harms of Abortion Clinic Harassment and Abuse	152
6.2.6 Adequate Funding and Resourcing of these strategies.....	160
6.2.7 Workplace Perspectives	161
6.2.8 Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Gillen Review and Courts Reform.....	162
6.2.9 Girls as Victims of Sexual Abuse and Assault	166
6.2.10 Migrant, LGBTQI+, Working Class, Disabled and Rural Women	167
6.2.11 Traveller Women	172
6.2.12 Image Based Sexual Assault and 'Deep Fakes'	174
6.2.13 Violence and Abuse Against Women in Public Life	176
6.3 WRDA 'Women at the Heart of Public Consultations':	178
CHAPTER FIVE –	184
WPG Response to Department of Justice, Department of Health and The Executive Office Calls for Views	184
7. WPG Response to Department of Justice and Department for Health Call for Views on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy	185
8. WPG Response to TEO Call for Views on Equally Safe: Strategy to Tackle VAWG	237
9. Concluding Remarks	297

CHAPTER ONE – Introduction and Overview of Women’s Policy Group NI Work

1. Introduction:

The [Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland](#) (WPG) is a platform for women working in policy and advocacy roles in different organisations to share their work and speak with a collective voice on key issues. It is made up of women from trade unions, grassroots women's organisations, women's networks, feminist campaigning organisations, LGBTQI+ organisations, migrant groups, support service providers, NGOs, human rights and equality organisations and individuals.

Over the years this important network has ensured there is good communication between politicians, policy makers and women's organisations on the ground. The WPG is endorsed as a group that advocates on behalf of women of Northern Ireland on a policy level and we use our group expertise to lobby to influence the development and implementation of policies affecting women. This group has collective expertise on protected characteristics and focus on identifying the intersectional needs of all women.

The Women's Resource and Development Agency was invited to make a written submission to this call to views. As WRDA is the secretariat of the Women's Policy Group, alongside being lead partner organisation Raise Your Voice, we decided it would be best to do a joint evidence submission alongside a number of other organisations in the WPG membership that are experts in this field.

This evidence is a joint submission from several WPG members including:

Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA):

WRDA is a feminist membership organisation that was established in 1983. WRDA's work covers lobbying, policy, Good Relations, health promotion and training. WRDA's vision is of a fair and equal society where women are empowered and are a visible force for change and influence in all areas of life. We take a participative, grassroots approach to this work – all women have the right to be involved in policy decision-making and we aim to amplify the voices of the women who engage with the women's sector.

Raise Your Voice:

Raise Your Voice is a project that seeks to tackle sexual harassment and violence in communities across Northern Ireland. Our goal is to create true cultural change in order to tackle the root causes of these behaviours and empower people to act to change this in their own lives.

HERe NI:

HERe NI (previously LASI), established in 2000, is a regional organisation that works across all areas of Northern Ireland (NI) and the boarder counties to support lesbian and bisexual (LB) women and their families. We advocate for and support LB women and their families and improve the lives of LB women across Northern Ireland. We do this in lots of different ways; through providing information; peer support; facilitating training; lobbying government and agencies on LB women's issues; offering a community space for meeting and much more. HERe NI is the only women focused organisation within the NI LGBTQ+ sector.

Cara-Friend:

Cara-Friend has been serving the LGBTQ+ community in Northern Ireland for over 40 years founded in 1974, we work with young LGBTQ+ people aged 12–25. We provide regional LGBTQ+ youth groups across Northern Ireland, one-to-one support for individuals, LGBTQ+ awareness training for professionals and volunteers working in a variety of different areas, community development, the LGBT Switchboard, the LGBTQ+ Inclusive Schools Programme and the Domestic and Sexual Violence project, supporting LGBTI women and girls across the region.

Women's Platform

Women's Platform is a membership organisation working to promote the implementation of international human rights standards in Northern Ireland, and in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in line with commitments the UK has made to international human rights treaties. Established in 1988 as the Northern Ireland link to the European Women's Lobby, Women's Platform also represents women and girls in Northern Ireland at the European and international level, including at the UN. Women's Platform is in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN.

Alliance for Choice:

Alliance for Choice (AfC) believes everyone who needs an abortion should have free, safe and legal access in their own country, without stigma; set up in 1996, we campaign for barrier-free access to abortion, comprehensive, unbiased sex education for young people and an end to the harassment of people using reproductive health services.

Rape Crisis Northern Ireland:

Rape Crisis Northern Ireland is a non-governmental organisation and support service for anyone aged 18 and over who has experienced rape or serious sexual assault in adulthood. Within a framework of equality and human rights, our purpose is to provide support to victims and survivors; their families, friends, and the wider community. We do this to ensure everyone can live free from the causes and consequences of sexual abuse. We work ethically to challenge and prevent rape, sexual violence and associated myths. We empower by providing support, education, information and advocacy. Our service is based on equality, empowerment, respect, trust and commitment to good practice for survivors.

Migrant Centre NI:

Migrant Centre NI (MCNI) was established in 2010 and constituted as a registered charity in 2012 to protect the rights of migrant workers in Northern Ireland, eliminate barriers against migrant workers, tackle racism, advance education, and raise public awareness. MCNI has three offices across NI, in Belfast, Lurgan, and Derry-Londonderry. MCNI services and programmes include EU Settlement Scheme immigration advice, hate crime victim support and advocacy, financial health and wellbeing advice services including benefits advice, and the administration of the Comic Relief “BAME COVID-19 Recovery and Relief” grant schemes for all of NI. Migrant Centre NI advocates for a more just immigration system and for the rights of migrants and ethnic minorities in NI through policy, lobbying, and advocacy work informed by our service provision.

Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ):

The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) was established in 1981 and is an independent non-governmental organisation affiliated to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). CAJ seeks to ensure the highest standards in the administration of justice in Northern Ireland by ensuring that the government complies with its responsibilities in international human rights law. CAJ works closely with other domestic and international human rights and equality groups.

Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU):

The ICTU is the trade union federation, and largest civil society organisation, on the island of Ireland, representing some 800,000 members, 200,000 of whom live and work in Northern Ireland. Just over half of trade union members are women.

Congress seeks to achieve a just society - one which recognises the rights of all workers and citizens to enjoy the prosperity and fulfilment which leads to a good quality of life. Quality of life embraces not just material well-being, but freedom of choice to engage in the arts, culture and all aspects of civic life. This vision applies in the context of Ireland, Europe and the wider world and challenges the existing economic order.

Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group (NIWBG):

The Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group (NIWBG) is made up of organisations and individuals from the women's sector, trade union movement, academia and wider civil society in Northern Ireland, with the goal of implementing a gender equal economy. It aims to provide policy and budget-makers with policy analysis to secure substantive equality for women and men through the assessment of gender impact. The NIWBG works with a range of organisations in Northern Ireland on devolved issues and with sister organisations in Wales, Scotland, England and Ireland on East-West and North-South issues.

Unison:

UNISON is a public service union in Northern Ireland representing over 45,000 members and is the largest trade union in the UK with over 1.3 million members. UNISON membership includes public service workers in health and social care; education and higher education services; the library service; local government; youth justice; private companies providing public services and the community and voluntary sector. UNISON is one of the largest organisations of women on the island with nearly 38,000 (82%) women members.

NIPSA:

Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) is the largest trade union in Northern Ireland representing over 41,500 members employed across the whole of the public services in organisations such as the Northern Ireland Civil Service and its Agencies, Local Government, Education Authority, the Health Trusts, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as well as a host of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs). NIPSA also represents a significant number of members in the Voluntary Sector.

Reclaim the Agenda:

Reclaim the Agenda is a feminist coalition that connects and mobilises women to promote feminist activism through education, campaigning, and celebration. We want a place where all women are safe and secure to reach their potential and have

an active role in society and all women can be active change makers & have equal access to power. We are striving for, a life free from poverty & discrimination. To have healthcare services that meet our particular needs and a life free from domestic and sexual violence and abuse. To live in a World where women are equally represented as decision makers and have access to good, affordable and flexible provision.

50:50 NI:

50:50 NI is an organisation working to increase the number of women in politics in Northern Ireland. They provide training for women interested in getting into politics and advocate for change to make politics more compatible with women's lives such as the introduction of maternity leave and better childcare.

Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network:

Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) was established in September 2006 'to promote and support rural women in rural Northern Ireland. We are a membership-based organisation. Our vision is for an equitable society where rural women are visible, influential and valued and our mission is to advance the participation and recognition of rural women.

Women's Support Network (WSN):

WSN is a feminist organisation that provides support and services to women's centres and groups. WSN provides information, resources, training and direct support to relieve poverty, advance education and safeguard health for women in Northern Ireland, particularly in areas of disadvantage. WSN actively campaigns, lobbies, carries out research and supports funding bids on key issues affecting women, namely health, poverty, childcare and education. WSN collates the views of women to inform policy development and articulate concerns and areas of need to funders, government departments, statutory organisations and elected representatives.

Belfast Feminist Network:

Belfast Feminist Network is a community collective of feminist activists. Established in April 2010, the group is committed to providing an open and inclusive space for discussions of gender inequality in Northern Ireland.

This joint submission has been prepared by the following WPG members:

- Rachel Powell (WRDA)
- Elaine Crory (WRDA/Raise Your Voice)
- Aoife Mallon (WRDA Independent Contractor)
- Caoimhe McNeill (Unison)
- Coumilah Manjoo (Belfast Multicultural Association)
- Jonna Monaghan (NIWEP)
- Danielle Roberts (HERE NI)
- Amanda McGurk (Cara Friend)
- Geraldine Alexander (NIPSA)
- Clare Moore (ICTU)
- Helen Crickard (Reclaim the Agenda)
- Kendall Bousquet (Migrant Centre NI)
- Alexandra Brennan (NIWG)
- Aoife Clements (50:50 NI)
- Robyn Scott (CAJ)
- Eliza Browning (CAJ)
- Úna Boyd (CAJ)
- Karen Sweeney (WSN/Rape Crisis NI)
- Emma Campbell (AfC)
- Siobhán Harding (WSN)

2. Women's Policy Group NI (WPG) - Relevant Research, Submissions and Briefings Relating to Men's Violence Against Women and Girls:

We fully welcome developments to finally create a strategy to tackle men's violence towards women and girls in Northern Ireland, as this is something the women's sector has lobbied on and called for many years. The WPG membership is broad and has a deep understanding of how best to approach men's violence against women and girls. The WPG has engaged with the Justice Committee and all political parties in past calls for evidence on matters relating to gender-based violence, for example through our:

- WPG Protection from Stalking Bill written evidence submission and oral evidence presentation¹,
- WPG Justice (Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Bill) written evidence submission and oral evidence presentation²
- WPG Response to Home Affairs Inquiry into Spiking³
- WPG Submission on the Safe Leave Bill⁴,
- Submission to Health Committee on Safe Access Zones⁵,
- Submission to Justice Committee on Fatal and Non-Fatal Strangulation⁶,
- WPG Briefing on Treating Misogyny as a Statutory Aggravator in the Hate Crime Review⁷,
- Evidence submission to the committee on the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Bill in 2020⁸.
- Briefings to MLAs on the rise in domestic abuse in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic⁹,

¹ WPG Joint Submission to Protection from Stalking Bill (2021): <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WPG-Joint-Submission-Protection-from-Stalking-Bill-16-04-2021.pdf>

² WPG Justice (Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Bill) written evidence submission and oral evidence presentation: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WPG-Written-Evidence-Submission-to-Justice-Sexual-Exploitation-and-Trafficking-Victims-Bill-24-September-2021-1.pdf>

³ WPG Response to Home Affairs Committee into Inquiry into Spiking (2022): <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/WPG-response-to-Spiking-Inquiry.pdf>

⁴ WPG Response to Safe Leave Bill (2021): <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/WPG-Response-to-Safe-Leave-Bill-Dec-21.pdf>

⁵ WPG Evidence Submission to Safe Access Zones (2021): <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPG-Evidence-Submission-Safe-Access-Zones.pdf>

⁶ WPG Response to Non-fatal Strangulation Public Consultation (2021): <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WPG-response-to-NFS.docx.pdf>

⁷ WPG Response to Department of Justice Response to Hate Crime Review (2021): <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/WPG-Summary-Response-to-DoJ-Response-to-Hate-Crime-Review-Dec-2021-.pdf>

⁸ WPG Evidence Submission to Justice Committee (2020) Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/WPG-NI-Evidence-Submission-to-Justice-Committee-05.06.20.pdf>

⁹ WPG Statement on the Gendered Impact of COVID-19 and Domestic Abuse (April 2020): <https://wrda.net/2020/03/26/statement-by-the-womens-policy-group-on-the-gendered-impact-of-covid-19/>

- Calls for increased funding for domestic abuse support providers¹⁰,
- Calls for the urgent implementation of a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and broader measures to tackle gender-based violence in the WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan¹¹,
- Broader events such as our Feminist Recovery Plan Webinar Series analysing the rising levels of violence against women throughout COVID-19¹²,
- Response to the Independent Hate Crime Legislation Review Consultation¹³,
- WPG Feminist Recovery Plan Key Briefing on Gender Based Violence¹⁴,
- WPG Response to the Department of Justice Public Consultation on Enhancing Legal Protections for Victims of Domestic Abuse¹⁵,
- WPG Response to Private Members' Bill Consultation on Paid Domestic Abuse Leave¹⁶,
- WPG Response to Department of Justice Public Consultation on Consent to Harm for Sexual Gratification: Not a Defence¹⁷

The WPG member organisations included in this joint submission also have a long history of campaigning on issues relating to gender-based violence. This has included:

- WRDA article on the Impact of COVID-19 on women and rising levels of domestic abuse¹⁸,

¹⁰ WPG Call for Emergency Funding for Domestic Violence and Sexual Health (May 2020): <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/WPG-Letter-Emergency-Domestic-Violence-Funding-.pdf>

¹¹ WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan (July 2020): <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WPG-NI-Feminist-Recovery-Plan-2020-.pdf>

¹² WPG Feminist Recovery Plan Webinar Series - COVID-19 and Violence Against Women (in collaboration with Women's Aid and Raise Your Voice) summary briefing available here: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/VAWwebinarsummary.pdf>; and recording available here: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/VAWwebinar.mp4>

¹³ WPG (April 2020) Hate Crime Legislation Independent Review Consultation Response: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/WPG-Hate-Crime-Consultation-Review-Response-30.04.20-Updated.pdf>

¹⁴ WPG (April 2021) Feminist Recovery Plan Key Briefing on Gender Based Violence: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WPG-FRP-Gender-Based-Violence-Key-Briefing.pdf>

¹⁵ WPG (February 2021) Response to DOJ Consultation on Enhancing Legal Protections for Victims of Domestic Abuse: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/WPG-Response-on-Enhancing-Legal-Protections-for-Victims-of-Domestic-Abuse-Public-Consultation.pdf>

¹⁶ WPG (January 2021) Response to Private Members' Bill on Paid Leave for Victims of Domestic Abuse: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/WPG-Response-to-PMB-Consultation-Paid-Domestic-Abuse-Leave-Jan-21.pdf>

¹⁷ WPG (January 2021) Response to DOJ Consultation on Consent to Serious Harm for Sexual Gratification - Not a Defence: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Consent-to-harm-for-sexual-gratification-not-a-defence-by-WPG.pdf>

¹⁸ WRDA (April 2020), the Impact of COVID-19 on Women: <https://wrda.net/2020/04/03/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women/>

- WRDA briefing on Domestic Violence and Abuse - COVID-19 and Legislative Reforms¹⁹,
- WRDA Response to the Department of Justice Consultation on Domestic Abuse Offence and Domestic Abuse Violence Disclosure Scheme,
- Raise Your Voice Response to the Independent Hate Crime Legislation Review²⁰,
- Raise Your Voice Response to the DOJ “Rough Sex Defence” Consultation²¹,
- Raise Your Voice Misogyny Motion for NI Councils (currently passed in 8 out of 11 councils across Northern Ireland)²²,
- Raise Your Voice IPSO Guidelines Regarding Reporting of Sexual Offences²³,
- Multiple members of the Women’s Policy Group were also involved in developing the Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report, which includes a wide range of data and recommendations relating to all forms of gender-based violence, including stalking²⁴.
- ICTU findings relating to a survey on the impact of domestic violence in the workplace²⁵.
- ICTU findings relating to a survey of trade union members who had experienced workplace sexual harassment²⁶
- Alliance for Choice submission on Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones Bill) Nov 2021²⁷
- Alliance for Choice written submission to the Westminster Joint Committee on Draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill, Feb 2019²⁸
- Alliance for Choice written submission on Consultation on ‘A new legal framework for abortion services in Northern Ireland - Implementation of the

¹⁹ WRDA (April 2020), ‘Briefing on Domestic Violence and Abuse - COVID-19 and Legislative Reforms: <https://wrda.net/2020/04/27/briefing-on-domestic-violence-and-abuse-covid-19-and-legislative-reforms/>

²⁰ RYV (April 2020), Response to the Independent Hate Crime Legislation Review: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Hate-Crime-Legislation-Review-Consultation-Response-on-behalf-of-Raise-Your-Voice.pdf>

²¹ RYV (January 2021), Response to DOJ Consultation on Consent to Serious Harm for Sexual Gratification - Not a Defence: <https://www.raiseyourvoice.community/news-resources/ryv-response-to-rough-sex-defence-consultation>

²² RYV (February 2021) Council Motion: <https://www.raiseyourvoice.community/news-resources/our-update-misogyny-motion-for-ni-councils>

²³ RYV (May 2020), IPSO Guidelines Regarding Reporting of Sexual Offences: <https://www.raiseyourvoice.community/news-resources>

²⁴ Ann Marie Gray, Louise Coyle, Rachel Powell and Siobhán Harding (Dec 2020), ‘Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report’, <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/dfc-social-inclusion-strategy-gender-expert-advisory-panel-report.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.ictuni.org/publications/ictu-domestic-violence-survey-results>

²⁶ <https://www.ictuni.org/news/2019/11/27/nicictu-survey-reveals-shockingly-high-levels-of-u>

²⁷ <https://www.alliance4choice.com/s/AfC-Abortion-Services-Safe-Access-Zones-Bill-1.docx>

²⁸ <https://www.alliance4choice.com/s/AfC-DA-Bill-Scrutiny-Submission.docx>
<http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/Draft%20Domestic%20Abuse%20Bill/Draft%20Domestic%20Abuse%20Bill/Written/100915.html>

legal duty under section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019²⁹

- Alliance for Choice - 'Briefing - Bring Northern Ireland into the Domestic Abuse Bill, 2019' April 2019³⁰
- Alliance for Choice Letter to Women and Equalities Committee on including NI in Domestic Abuse Bill Feb 2019 ³¹
- Contributions from WPG including AfC to NIWEP Shadow report for the examination of the UK by the Committee on the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination against Women, including evidence on VAWG Jan 2019³²
- Alliance for Choice; Submission to the Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry on Abortion in Northern Ireland, including evidence on VAWG 2018³³
- Alliance for Choice; Submission to British Irish Parliamentary Assembly on Abortion provision, including evidence on VAWG Oct 2018³⁴
- Alliance for Choice; Oral Evidence to Women and Equalities Select Committee enquiry into the Government's plans for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) including evidence on VAWG December 2016.³⁵
- Alliance for Choice facilitation and evidence gathering with NIWEP and FPA NI (now ICNI) on the CEDAW UK Inquiry into abortion in Northern Ireland, including evidence on VAWG 2016³⁶
- Alliance for Choice submission to Review of the law on child sexual exploitation April 2019³⁷
- Alliance for Choice submission to the Department of Justice and Equality on the Operation of Part 4 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, Sept 2020³⁸
- Alliance for Choice: written evidence to the UK All-party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health (APPG) on abortion in Northern Ireland, including evidence on VAWG Aug 2017³⁹
- Women's Regional Consortium response to Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill Survey, Dec 2021⁴⁰

²⁹ https://alliance4choice.squarespace.com/s/AfC-Belfast_response-1.pdf

³⁰ <https://www.alliance4choice.com/s/Bring-Northern-Ireland-in-to-the-Domestic-Abuse-Bill.docx>

³¹ <https://www.alliance4choice.com/s/home-affairs-select-committee-submission-afc.docx>

³² <https://alliance4choice.squarespace.com/s/NIWEP-shadow-report-Jan-2019-1.doc>

³³ <https://www.alliance4choice.com/repeal-58/59/2019/4/afc-response-to-women-and-equalities-committee-inquiry-on-abortion-in-northern-ireland>

³⁴ <https://www.alliance4choice.com/s/BIPA-evidence.docx>

³⁵ <https://alliance4choice.squarespace.com/s/FPA-evidence-to-the-Women-and-Equalities-Select-Committee-on-the-SDGs.docx>

³⁶ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/GBR/INT_CEDAW_ITB_GBR_8637_E.pdf

³⁷ https://alliance4choice.squarespace.com/s/afc-child-exploitation_response.pdf

³⁸ <https://www.alliance4choice.com/policy-work>

³⁹ <https://alliance4choice.squarespace.com/s/FINAL-APPG-AFC-August-2017.docx>

⁴⁰ [Womens-Regional-Consortium-Response-to-Domestic-Abuse-Safe-Leave-Bill.pdf](https://womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/Womens-Regional-Consortium-Response-to-Domestic-Abuse-Safe-Leave-Bill.pdf)
(womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk)

- Women's Regional Consortium response to Hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland, Jan 2020⁴¹
- Women's Regional Consortium response to Stalking – A Serious Concern, Feb 2019⁴²
- Women's Regional Consortium response to Preliminary Report on Justice Delivery around Serious Sexual Offences, Jan 2019⁴³
- Women's Regional Consortium response to Domestic homicide Reviews, July 2018⁴⁴

⁴¹ [Prioritising Policy: Women's Perspectives \(womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk\)](https://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk)

⁴² [Prioritising Policy: Women's Perspectives \(women's regional consortium ni.org.uk\)](https://www.women'sregionalconsortiumni.org.uk)

⁴³ [Prioritising Policy: Women's Perspectives \(womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk\)](https://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk)

⁴⁴ [Prioritising Policy: Women's Perspectives \(womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk\)](https://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk)

**CHAPTER TWO –
WPG Primary
Research Project on
Violence Against
Women and Girls
2022**

3. WPG Primary Research Project: Call for Views on Men's Violence Against Women and Girls 2022 - Personal Testimony from a Survivor of Domestic Abuse:

When the Call for Views on the TEO Equally Safe: Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and the Department of Health and Department of Justice Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategies were launched, we put out our own call for views to women.

Before going into the key qualitative and quantitative findings of this research, we would like to highlight that WRDA were approached by a woman who wanted to share her own story about the violence she faced. We met with this woman to undertake an interview to gather her story through an anonymous testimony (Beth's story). This woman's story of the harrowing abuse she faced, and failings by the state in supporting her after she reported this abuse, which we would like to highlight before going into our survey findings. These are the examples of the widespread violence against women and girls by men and boys that we need to eradicate through this strategy.

This is one of the many, many stories behind the statistics in Northern Ireland.

3.1 Case Study – Beth: Domestic Abuse

"You're told to report domestic violence and then you're thinking, well, I can understand why people don't because look what happens."

Beth became homeless as a result of domestic abuse perpetrated by her ex-husband. This abuse continued for several years and took many forms including physical, psychological, online and financial abuse. Once Beth became separated from her ex-husband, he took ownership of their house and car, leaving Beth homeless in the midst of the pandemic. Beth lived in a homeless hostel for ten months while working as a frontline NHS worker.

Throughout her marriage, Beth worked three jobs to financially support her and her ex-husband who did not work and was in considerable debt. Despite this, Beth's ex-husband controlled the couple's finances and spent most of their disposable income on drugs and alcohol. Beth's ex-husband would lock her in her room, physically attack her and also attack her dogs. The violence came to a head in spring 2020 when Beth's ex-husband attacked her and caused damage to their house. Beth told her ex-husband not to return to the house, but a few days later he broke in and attacked her and her dogs, leaving them with serious injuries. Beth called the police who removed

him from the house, reinforced the windows, alarmed the house, and installed floodlights to prevent any further break-ins.

Despite these interventions, Beth's ex-husband continued to stalk and harass her. Due to the high level of threat against her, the police advised Beth to wear a body camera, change her work patterns and change her travel routes regularly. Beth acquired two non-molestation orders which her ex-husband repeatedly broke, forcing her to continuously take time off work to attend court. Beth's ex-husband was eventually charged with a two-year suspended sentence and Beth was granted a one-year restraining order, requiring annual renewal. Beth has little faith that the restraining order will be effective as the non-molestation orders did little to prevent the stalking and harassment by her ex-husband.

Beth became isolated from her friends as a result of the domestic abuse. Beth's ex-husband subjected her to online abuse by posting confidential and sensitive information about her and their court proceedings on Facebook in an attempt to humiliate and discredit her. He also publicly accused Beth of lying about the abuse, causing many of her friends to turn against her. This led to Beth deactivating her Facebook and social media. As Beth and her ex-husband shared mutual friends, this caused tension within their friend group and Beth lost contact with many of them as a result.

Beth's ex-husband would only agree to a separation on the condition that he was granted ownership of their house and other shared assets, which he sold to repay outstanding debts. This caused Beth to become homeless, forcing her to seek emergency accommodation. Beth initially sought accommodation in a women's refuge for abuse victims but there were no available spaces due to increased demand and limited resources during the pandemic. Beth was then offered an apartment by the Housing Executive in north Belfast, but was told two hours before moving in that the apartment was no longer available. The only other option for Beth was to move into a homeless hostel.

Beth is a Catholic and was told by the Housing Executive to move into a homeless hostel located in a loyalist estate, far away from her family and friends. This hostel housed criminals released on bail, people with severe mental health issues and many homeless people struggling with addiction. Beth was one of the only women in the hostel and one of the only Catholics. Beth faced intimidation by hostel residents and others from the estate as a result of being a Catholic in a predominantly loyalist area. Beth said that, "When I walked up the street, all the women in the street used to come out and stand at the door and stare at me... because they know I'm a Catholic and I'm from the hostel, so they think I'm a criminal."

Beth's apartment was unsafe for residency as it was unsanitary and had a permanent foul smell, compromising her physical and mental wellbeing. Beth was "terrorised" in the hostel and experienced harassment, intimidation and assault from the other residents. For example, Beth was punched in the face and knocked to the ground during a police evacuation of the hostel. Beth was also harassed by a male resident who wore a balaclava and had a criminal record of domestic violence. This resident would wait outside her apartment in the mornings when she left for work and be there in the evenings when she returned. He also self-harmed outside her apartment and spat blood across her front door.

Hostel residents struggling with addiction would frequently post inappropriate items through Beth's letterbox and press her buzzer throughout the night. The hostel was regularly raided by police wearing riot gear who would break into her apartment during the night searching for criminals. There were frequent stabbings and fights in the hostel which meant that police and ambulances were regularly called to the site. Beth could rarely sleep through the night, despite having to wake up at 6am for work every morning. Beth continued to work two jobs for the NHS throughout her time in the hostel, which meant that she was not entitled to free accommodation and had to pay £630 per month to live there.

The domestic abuse Beth experienced has had long-term impacts on her employment, health, social life and finances. Once Beth left the hostel, she suffered from a breakdown which left her unable to work and in need of specialised mental health support. Before the abuse, Beth had never experienced mental health issues but now suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and severe anxiety, causing her to have frequent nightmares and fear around leaving the house. Beth is currently on an 18-month waiting list to see a psychiatrist and takes sedation medication to manage her symptoms until she can get an appointment. Although she has left the homeless hostel, Beth is still homeless and is sofa-surfing until she can find permanent accommodation.

Beth's experiences point to the necessity of adequately funding women's refuges so that no survivor of domestic abuse is left homeless after leaving an abusive relationship. Beth felt that although she was a victim of abuse, she was being punished by public services after reporting it. Beth explained, "I was kind of getting punished for reporting him, getting punished for taking him to court, getting punished for being a frontline worker... in the middle of COVID and having to go to a homeless hostel. Like a lot of things could've changed... they [public services] could've done a lot of things differently." In terms of how public services deal with abuse victims, Beth believes "there has to be a plan in place to keep women safe...there just needs to be more support." This involves signposting victims to relevant support

services and providing them with adequate and appropriate healthcare support and accommodation.

3.2 Women's Policy Group NI Primary Research Project for this Call for Views - WPG Survey on Men's Violence Against Women and Girls:

3.2.1 Methodology:

Given the prevalence and seriousness of violence against women and girls in our society, with Northern Ireland being considered the most dangerous place to be a woman in Europe⁴⁵, we decided it would be appropriate to conduct primary research to inform the Women's Policy Group NI written response to the Executive Office Equally Safe: Violence Against Women and Girls Call for Views. We did this as we wanted to ensure that the voices of women are central in the development of a robust Violence Against Women and Girls [VAWG] strategy and to inform our own lobbying on this strategy in the future.

In addition, often women can find government websites, surveys, consultations and calls for views to be inaccessible. Therefore, in creating a short anonymous survey relating to the questions within the governmental call for views, we were able to reach more women that would not usually engage with government surveys.

The Women's Policy Group NI (WPG) and all the members involved within this joint written submission worked together to develop a webpage and a short survey for women to respond anonymously with their views on certain aspects of VAWG. We shared the following information on the Women's Resource and Development Agency Website:

The Women's Policy Group NI is gathering the views of women on what they believe needs to be addressed in a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy for Northern Ireland.

We want to ensure that the lived experiences and views from women shape this strategy so that it is as robust and enforceable as possible. We are seeking your views and experiences to shape our evidence submission and influence this strategy. Northern Ireland is currently the

⁴⁵ See Belfast Telegraph (Nov 2021), 'Northern Ireland is most dangerous place in Europe for women': <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/sunday-life/northern-ireland-is-most-dangerous-place-in-europe-for-women-41095214.html#:~:text=More%20women%20are%20murdered%20in,capita%2C%20frightening%20statistics%20have%20revealed.>

only part of the UK or Ireland without a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, and we believe that this needs to urgently change as this is an issue that has impacted so many women and girls.

All views and experiences shared will be completely anonymous.

We are asking women to complete [this short survey](#) to help us understand what we need to be calling for within our response to The Executive Office Call for Views on the develop of the '[Equally Safe: Strategy to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls](#)'.

Please note – the WPG is also responding to the call for views on the Department of Health and Department of Justice Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy. However, this survey is specifically about the strategy to tackle VAWG.

Disclaimer – throughout this survey we reference men's violence against women and girls. We recognise that violence against women and girls can come from men *and* boys, and when we reference men's violence this also includes boy's violence.

In addition, we also note that domestic and sexual abuse is also prevalent among LGBTQ+ relationships and we will be incorporating this into our response on the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse call for views. This survey is to get a better understanding from women on what they want included within the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy specifically.

Trigger Warning – this survey mentions various types of violence and abuse against women which some may find distressing. [Here](#) is a list of support organisations in case you need to reach out for support.

This survey has 27 questions in total and should take between **5 – 15 minutes to complete**. Only the tick box questions require responses. All other questions are optional. You are welcome to share your own experiences if you feel comfortable and these responses will be kept fully anonymous.

While this survey is completely anonymous, we ask some demographic questions at the beginning to ensure we are reaching a wide and diverse group of women.

Please respond to our survey [here](#)

This survey will close on **Monday 14th February 2022 at 12pm.**

Given the potentially triggering and upsetting nature of this survey, we wanted to ensure women and girls had access to information regarding support organisations at hand. We highlighted the following support organisations via the Raise Your Voice website:

Alliance for Choice - **www.alliance4choice.com**

Belfast Trans Resource Centre - **www.belfasttrans.org.uk**

Cara Friend - **www.cara-friend.org.uk**

Childline - **0800 1111** - **www.childline.org.uk**

Common Youth - **hello@commonyouth.com**

Belfast: **028 9032 8866**

Coleraine: **028 7034 2178**

Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline - **0808 802 1414**

Equality Commission NI - **www.equalityni.org/Home**

HereNI - **www.hereni.org**

Hollaback - **www.ihollaback.org/about/**

Labour Relations Agency - **www.lra.org.uk/**

Lifeline - **0808 808 8000**

Mens Advisory Project - **www.mapni.co.uk/**

Nexus - **www.nexusni.org**

PSNI - **www.psni.police.uk/contact-us**

Rainbow Project - **www.rainbow-project.org/counselling**

Rape Crisis - 08000246991 **www.rapecrisisni.org.uk**

Rowan Centre - **www.therowan.net/contacts**

Victim Support - **www.victimsupport.org.uk**

Women's Aid - **www.womensaidni.org**

Youth Action - **www.youthaction.org**

If you have an issue of sexual harassment in your workplace you should contact your trade union

Further, we included information relating to the TEO and DOH/DOJ public surveys where respondents could also provide views directly.

This survey opened on Thursday 20th January 2022 and remained open until Monday 14th February 2022. Whilst we would have preferred to have this survey open for at least 12 weeks, in line with good practice guidelines on public engagement, this was not possible due to the short eight week time frame given from TEO and DOJ/DOH in relation to the call for views on the VAWG strategy and Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy. Therefore, we closed this survey after 25 days of being open.

Section 1 of the survey began with a range of demographic questions to try and ensure we were gathering views from a wide range of women from diverse backgrounds. Before participants went through to the survey questions they found the below message from the WPG:

This is a Women's Policy Group NI (WPG) survey to gather views from women on issues relating to the development of a Violence Against Women and Girls strategy for NI - you can sign into google to save your progress if you prefer but it is not required.

In Section 1, we would like to know the demographic backgrounds of survey participants. This is completely anonymous information and we just want to ensure that we are reaching a wide range of women from different backgrounds.

Section 2 includes the survey questions where we would like to hear your views. Here we will ask a range of qualitative and quantitative questions. The majority of these questions are tick box, with some options to provide further views if desired (completely optional). All of this information is anonymous.

Thank you for taking the time to share your views with us, this is crucial in helping us shape the Women's Policy Group written submission and ensuring that women's voices and experiences are at the core of this strategy.

After the above message, participants could continue to section where which included the following questions:

3.2.2 Section 1 - Demographic Information Questions

Q1. Do you identify as any of the below groups (you can pick more than one if necessary)?

- LGBTQI+
- Disabled
- Migrant Community
- From a working class background
- Living in a rural area
- Prefer not to say
- None of the above

Q2. What age group are you from?

- 16-17
- 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+
- Prefer not to say

Q3. What is your nationality?

Q4. What is your ethnicity?

- Irish Traveller
- Roma
- Chinese
- South Asian
- Other Asian background
- Black African
- Black Caribbean
- Latin American
- Arab
- Eastern European
- Mixed ethnic group
- White
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Q5. Which religious group do you identify as?

- Catholic
- Protestant
- Muslim
- Jewish
- Hindu
- Other religion
- None - I am not religious
- Prefer not to say

3.2.3 Section 2 - Survey Questions:

Survey questions involved a range of qualitative and quantitative questions, with the majority of the former being optional and the majority of the latter being mandatory. We did this for several reasons. Firstly, we wanted to ensure that we had enough robust quantitative data in any of the quantitative questions. Secondly, we wanted to give women the option to provide further views or share their experiences in qualitative questions but not force this due to the triggering nature of the topic at hand. There questions included:

1. Do you think that Northern Ireland has a problem with men's violence against women and girls?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

2. Do you think that Northern Ireland should have a strategy to tackle men's violence against women and girls?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

3. Violence against women and girls can take place in many forms. Are you aware of the below forms of violence?

[Mandatory - multiple choice]

- Domestic abuse (physical and verbal)
- Sexual Abuse
- Online Abuse
- Honour-Based Abuse
- Economic Abuse
- Coercive Control
- Sexual Harassment
- Street Harassment
- Emotional Abuse
- Unwanted rough Sex
- Misogynistic Hate Crimes
- Spiritual Abuse
- Workplace Harassment
- Stalking
- Forced isolation from family and friends
- Controlling individual style and appearances
- Systemic violence by the state
- Aware of all of the above

4. Do you think that this strategy should address all of the above forms of violence against women and girls?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

5. Do you think there are any forms of violence against women and girls that we have not mentioned that should be included in the strategy?

[optional - short answer box]

6. Have you ever experienced/been impacted by men's violence against women and girls? (This includes but is not limited to: physical and verbal domestic abuse, sexual harassment and sexual assault, coercive control, street or workplace harassment, misogynistic or sexist abuse, online abuse)

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

7. If you answered yes to Q6, would you like to share any details about how you've been impacted by violence against women and girls and what age you were when this first happened?

[optional - short answer box]

8. If you have experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls, did you report this to the police?

[optional - tick box - Yes/No]

9. If you did report to the police, did you find this useful?

[optional - tick box - Yes/No]

10. Do you think the strategy should tackle violence against women and girls in the following places:

[Mandatory - multiple choice]

- Domestic settings (in the home)
- Public spaces (in the streets, bars, parks, other public venues etc.)
- Workplaces
- Educational Institutions (schools, colleges, universities etc.)
- Religious settings
- Sports and leisure spaces
- Community settings
- Media/social media and online

11. Do you think there are any spaces that we have not mentioned that should be included in this strategy to address men's violence against women and girls?

[Optional - short answer box]

12. Do you believe Northern Ireland has a problem with attitudes of sexism and misogyny?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

13. Do you believe Northern Ireland has a problem with rape myths and rape culture?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

14. Do you believe Northern Ireland has a problem with victim-blaming?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

15. If you answered yes to Q12, Q13 or Q14, what do you think are the root causes of sexism, misogyny, victim-blaming, rape myths and rape culture?

[Optional - short answer box]

16. Do you believe there is stigma surrounding issues of violence against women and girls?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

17. If you answered yes to Q16, why do you believe there is stigma surrounding these issues?

[Optional - short answer box]

18. Do you believe there are barriers to people reporting when they have been victims of men's violence against women and girls?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

19. If you answered yes to Q18, what do you think the barriers are to victims in reporting?

[Optional - short answer box]

20. Do you think that reducing levels of violence against women and girls requires focusing on changing men and boy's behaviours and actions?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

21. If you answered yes to Q19, what sort of measures do you think are necessary to change men and boy's actions?

[Optional - short answer box]

22. Different groups of marginalised women can face additional types of abuse (e.g. disabled women, black or minority ethnic women, migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, traveller women, rural women etc.). Do you think additional action needs to be taken in this strategy to address men's violence against these groups of women?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

23. If you answered yes to Q22, could you please expand on what additional factors need to be considered or what additional action needs to be taken to support these women?

[Optional - short answer box]

24. Do you think there needs to be a review of how the justice system treats victims and survivors of men's violence against women and girls?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

25. If you answered yes to Q24, what sort of changes would you like to see within the justice system in relation to men's violence against women and girls?

[Optional - short answer box]

26. Do you believe that state violence against women and girls (for example, the mother and baby institutions, denying access to reproductive healthcare or diminishing women's human rights) should be included within this strategy?

[Mandatory - tick box - Yes / No / Unsure]

27. Finally, is there anything else that you would like to share that you think the WPG should be calling for within the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy?

[Optional - long answer box]

We specifically chose these questions as we believed these would allow us to answer the questions within the TEO Call for Views and DOH/DOJ Call for Views. In particular, the questions we chose for our survey have enabled us to provide further evidence to the following questions from both the DOH and DOJ call for views and the TEO call for views:

DOH/DOJ call for views on a new domestic abuse and sexual abuse strategy:

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

All of the questions within our survey will provide further evidence in response to this question, but particularly Questions 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19.

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

The responses to questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 27 of our survey are particularly relevant in response to this question.

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

The responses to questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 25 and 27 of our survey are particularly relevant in response to this question.

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.

The responses to section 1 of our survey on demographics followed by the responses to questions 22, 23, 25 and 26 are particularly relevant to this question.

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

The responses to questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 28, 29, 30, 21, 24 and 25 of our survey are particularly relevant to this question.

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?

The responses to questions 8, 9, 18, 19, 24 and 25xx of our survey are particularly relevant to this question.

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?

Given the complex nature of this question we aimed to cover it through various questions asking views on prevention, early intervention, specialist services, specific needs of different marginalised groups and justice system reform.

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

Again, all responses to our survey are relevant to this question. In particular, questions 3, 4 and 5 show where education is needed to raise awareness of certain types of domestic and sexual abuse.

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

In response to this question, we would recommend that the Departments abide by the Guidelines for Public Authorities in WRDA's 'Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultation'⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ WRDA Guidelines (2018): https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/WRDA_WomenAtTheHeartOfPublicConsultation.pdf

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

Responses to questions 1, 2, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20 and 21 are particularly relevant to this question.

Question 2: We would like to hear your views on whether the draft vision set out below, or different words would best catch the ambition of what we want to do. Every woman and girl is safe in our communities, feels safe and can reach their potential. We have a society in which violence against women is not tolerated in any form, in which all victims are supported, and perpetrators are held to account.

Responses to questions 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 28, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26 and 27 are particularly relevant to this question.

Question 3: Do you agree with the draft objectives suggested for the new strategy? Are there any other objectives that should be included? • Understanding the scope and scale of the problem the strategy is seeking to tackle. • Prevention - Early intervention to get upstream of violence. • A co-designed strategy which is delivered in a collaborative manner and is based on local and international evidence. • Responsive services to ensure women and girls are equally safe.

Various responses to questions in our survey highlight the scope and scale and need to ensure prevention and early intervention.

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

While we had a problem with the framing of this question, as it is not possible to simply separate domestic and sexual abuse from violence against women and girls, responses to questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 15 of our survey provide further evidence of the scope, scale and prevalence of acts of gender-based violence.

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

Responses to questions 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 on the prevalence of and root causes of men and boys’ violence against women and girls are relevant to this question. Although it is worth noting we find the term “unwanted” behaviour to be diminishing of the seriousness of acts of violence against women and girls.

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

As highlighted above, responses to questions 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 on the prevalence of and root causes of men and boys’ violence against women and girls are relevant to this question. In addition, responses to questions 22 and 23 focus specifically on the intersectional needs of women and girls from marginalised backgrounds.

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

Responses to section 1 of our survey highlighting demographic backgrounds of respondents are relevant to this question. In addition, responses to questions 22 and 23 focus specifically on the intersectional needs of women and girls from marginalised backgrounds.

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

Again, we are unclear on how domestic and sexual abuse can be separated from violence against women and girl, but responses to questions 6, 7, 8 and 9 highlight the vast amount of women who’ve been directly impacted by men’s violence, their lived experiences and ages that abuse started. In addition, questions 24, 25 and 26 focus specifically on justice system reform and systemic state abuse.

Question 9: We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the treatment of perpetrators of violence against women and girls by the criminal

justice system or other public services which reflect good practice, or which could be improved.

Various questions in our survey highlight where women have been failed after reporting men's violence, as well as attitudes of stigma, victim blaming, misogyny and sexism, rape myths and rape culture and the need for full education reform which are relevant to this question.

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

Specifically, we would refer to the responses to the questions throughout our survey which relate to root causes and the overwhelming support for focusing on changing men and boys' behaviours and actions.

Once the website was created and the survey questions were agreed, we launched this survey via social media and all WPG members shared widely with our membership. This included various posts across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram as well as mentions in organisational newsletters, bulletins and e-zines going directly to membership. In addition to this, various organisations, including several women's centres and groups, went through the survey with their own members and talked through the questions at hand. The Women's Sector Lobbyist and Good Relations Coordinator in the Women's Resource and Development Agency talked through the survey with various women's centres, women's groups and other community groups to enable them to encourage their own members to respond.

In the past, WPG surveys have been open to men and women. However, on this occasion we took the decision to only ask women and girls for their views, as we want to know about their views, experiences and suggestions for change. We would recommend that a similar research project is undertaken to gather the specific views of men and boys on this matter, although this is not within the remit of the WPG, but is crucial to understanding what is needed to tackle VAWG which is overwhelmingly done by men and boys.

3.3 WPG Primary Research 2022: Results and Key Findings

As highlighted within the methodology, the WPG survey asking women for their views on a strategy to address Men's Violence Against Women and Girls was open for 25 days and within this timeframe we received 1,065 responses. This is an incredible response from women and girls across Northern Ireland and highlighted the appetite from women for change and to have their voices heard in the process.

Given the short consultation timeframe to respond to both the TEO and DOH/DOJ calls for views, we had our survey open for a short time frame and were pleasantly surprised by the huge number of responses we received. Given the short timeline to provide our written response to both strategies, it is difficult to fully analyse all 1000+ responses in such a short time frame, so we wanted to note that these are the preliminary findings from our research. The WPG will be publishing an additional report highlighting all research findings in addition to this written submission to TEO, DOJ and DOH. We would also like to stress that we would be keen to work with all departments to further explore the research findings from our survey beyond this initial call for views, as we would like to ensure that the voices of the women that responded to us are central to any strategy to address issues of gender based violence.

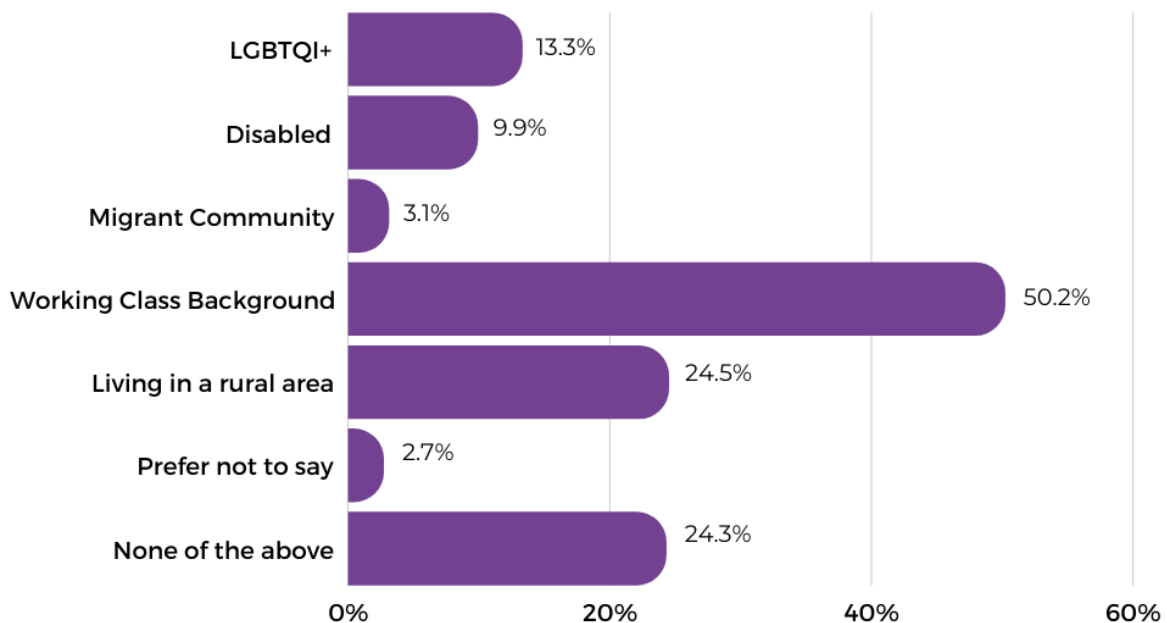
We will now give an overview of the research itself, the responses, key demographics of respondents and key themes. In addition, we will be using anonymous quotes from this research throughout this entire response. Please note, we will provide further information from our survey findings in response to the consultation questions in both calls for views.

Key Research Findings:

3.3.1 Section 1 - Demographic Information:

Q1. Do you identify as any of the below groups (you can pick more than one if necessary)? 1,065 responses

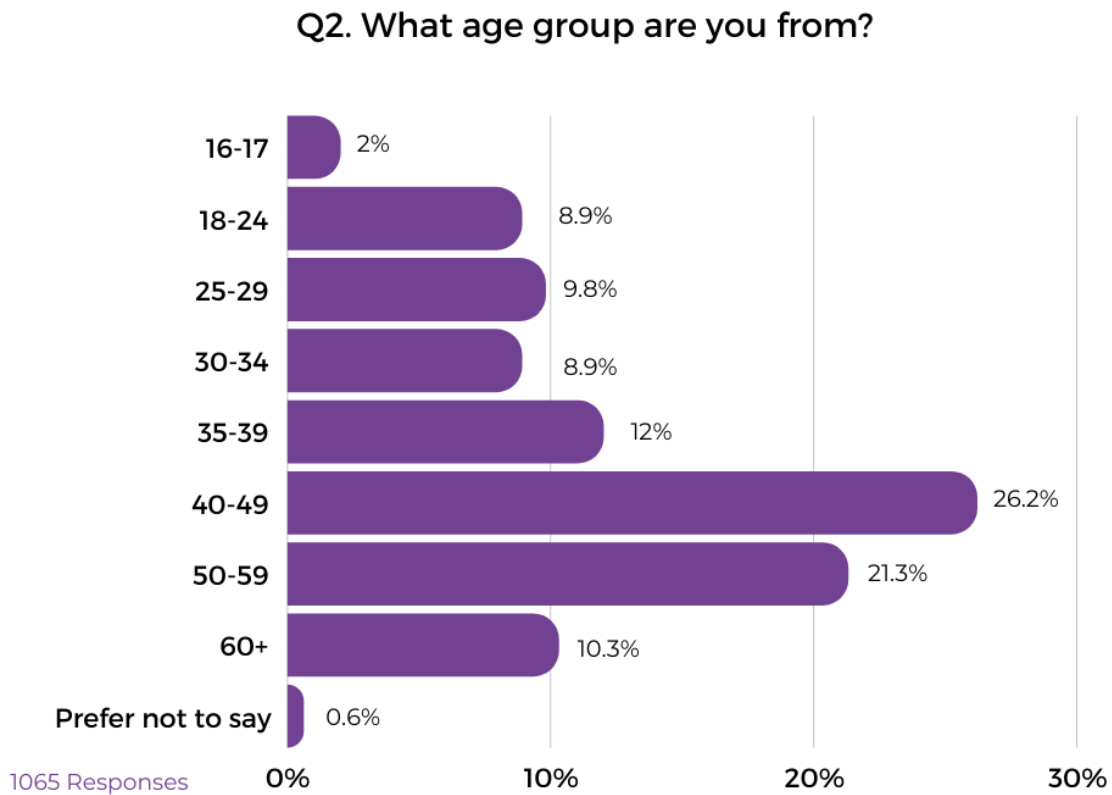
Q1. Do you identify as any of the below groups (you can pick more than one if necessary)?



1065 Responses

- LGBTQI+ (13.3%)
- Disabled (9.9%)
- Migrant Community (3.1%)
- From a working class background (50.2%)
- Living in a rural area (24.5%)
- Prefer not to say (2.7%)
- None of the above (24.3%)

Q2. What age group are you from? 1,065 responses



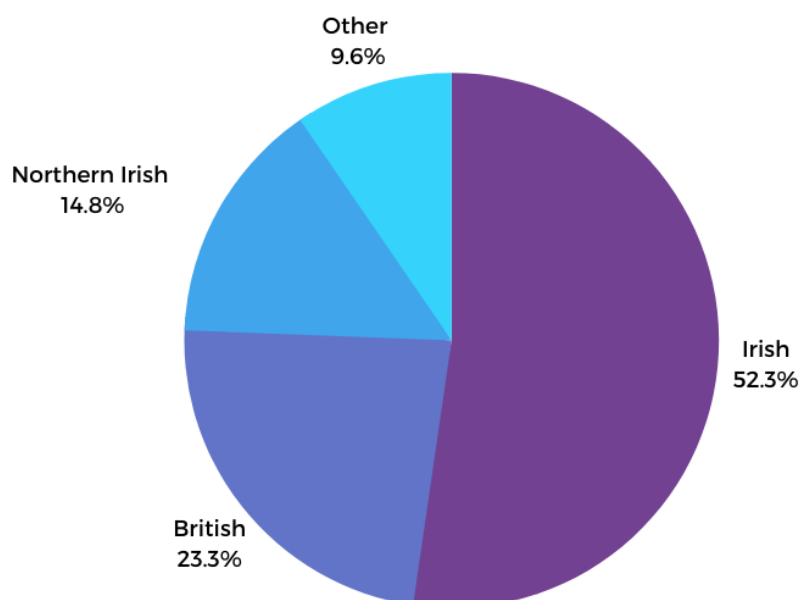
- 16-17 (2%)
- 18-24 (8.9%)
- 25-29 (9.8%)
- 30-34 (8.9%)
- 35-39 (12%)
- 40-49 (26.2%)
- 50-59 (21.3%)
- 60+ (10.3%)
- Prefer not to say (0.6%)

Q3. What is your nationality? 994 responses

Q3. What is your nationality?

Other nationalities of respondents:

- British and Irish
- Irish and Northern Irish
- British, Irish and Northern Irish
- British and Northern Irish
- Irish and English
- Polish and Irish
- Nigerian and Irish
- American and British
- American and Irish
- Ukrainian
- Italian
- American
- English
- Scottish
- Polish
- Turkish
- Algerian
- Somali
- Jamaican
- Chinese
- Asian
- Nigerian
- Canadian
- Indian
- German
- Zimbabwean
- Black African
- Dutch
- Black Caribbean
- Portugese
- French
- Spanish
- Bulgarian
- South African
- Latin American
- Arab
- Norwegian
- Danish
- Eastern European
- Mixed ethnicity



994 Responses

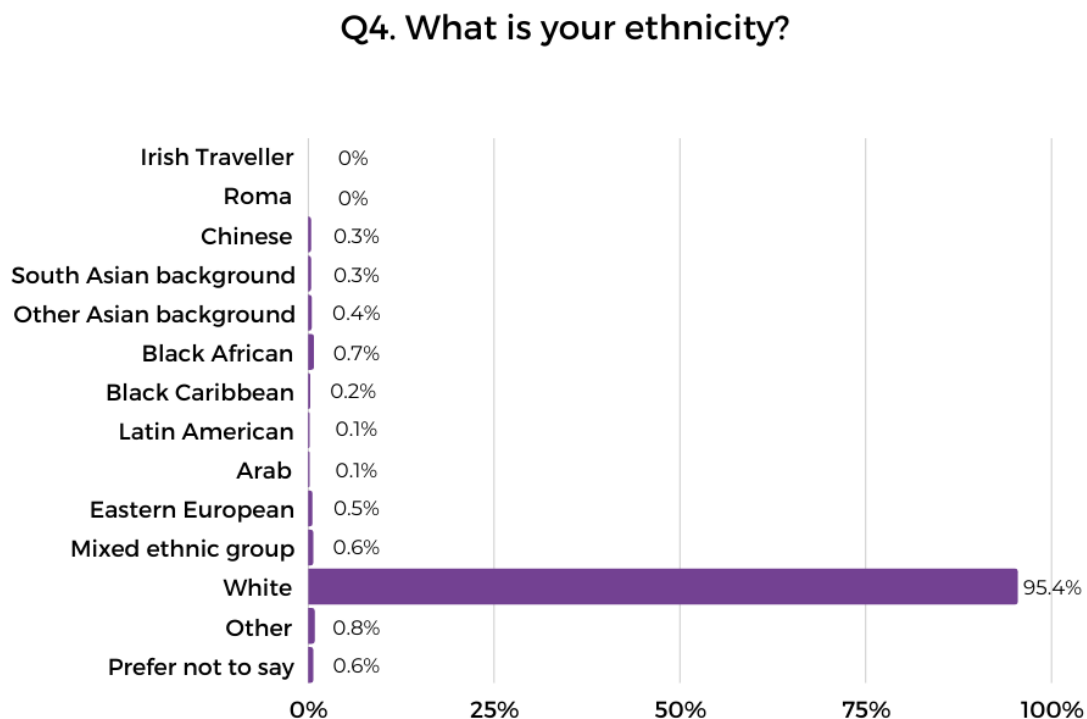
- Irish (52.2%)
- British (23.3%)
- Northern Irish (14.8%)
- Other (9.6%)

Other nationalities of respondents:

- British and Irish
- Irish and Northern Irish
- British, Irish and Northern Irish
- Irish and English
- British and Northern Irish
- Polish and Irish
- Nigerian and Irish
- American and British
- American and Irish
- Ukrainian
- Italian
- American
- English
- Scottish
- Polish
- Turkish
- Algerian
- Somali
- Jamaican
- Chinese
- Asian
- Nigerian

- Canadian
- Indian
- German
- Zimbabwean
- Black African
- Dutch
- Black Caribbean
- Portuguese
- French
- Spanish
- Bulgarian
- South African
- Latin American
- Arab
- Norwegian
- Danish
- Eastern European
- Mixed ethnicity

Q4. What is your ethnicity? 1,065 responses

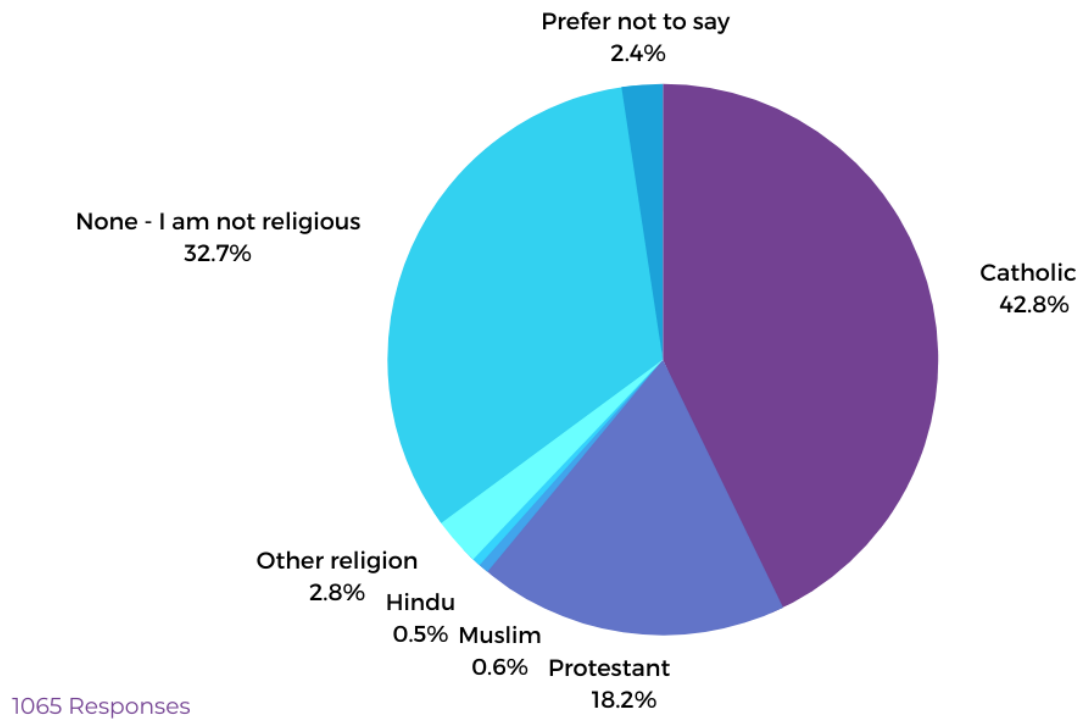


1065 Responses

- Irish Traveller (0%)
- Roma (0%)
- Chinese (0.3%)
- South Asian (0.3%)
- Other Asian background (0.4%)
- Black African (0.7%)
- Black Caribbean (0.2%)
- Latin American (0.1%)
- Arab (0.1%)
- Eastern European (0.5%)
- Mixed ethnic group (0.6%)
- White (95.4%)
- Other (0.8%)
- Prefer not to say (0.6%)

Q5. Which religious group do you identify as? 1,065

Q5. Which religious group do you identify as?



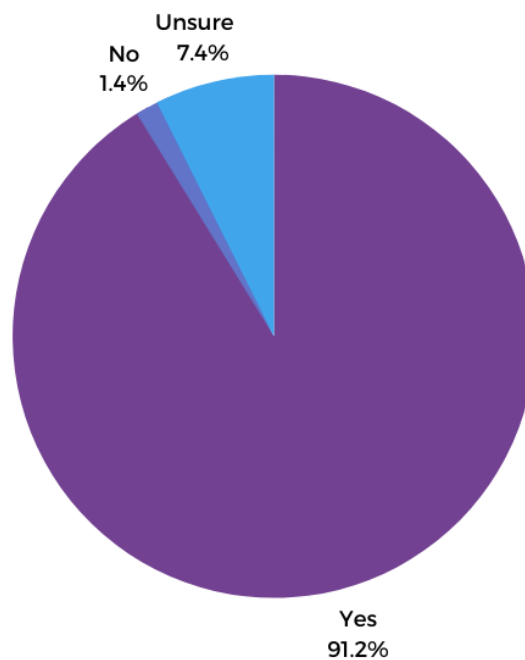
- Catholic (42.8%)
- Protestant (18.2%)
- Muslim (0.6%)
- Jewish (0%)
- Hindu (0.5%)
- Other religion (2.8%)
- None - I am not religious (32.7%)
- Prefer not to say (2.4%)

3.3.2 Section 2 - Survey Questions - Key Findings

Here we will ask a range of qualitative and quantitative questions. The majority of these questions are tick box, with some options to provide further views if desired (completely optional). All of this information is anonymous

1. Do you think that Northern Ireland has a problem with men's violence against women and girls? 1,065 responses

Q1. Do you think that Northern Ireland has a problem with men's violence against women and girls?

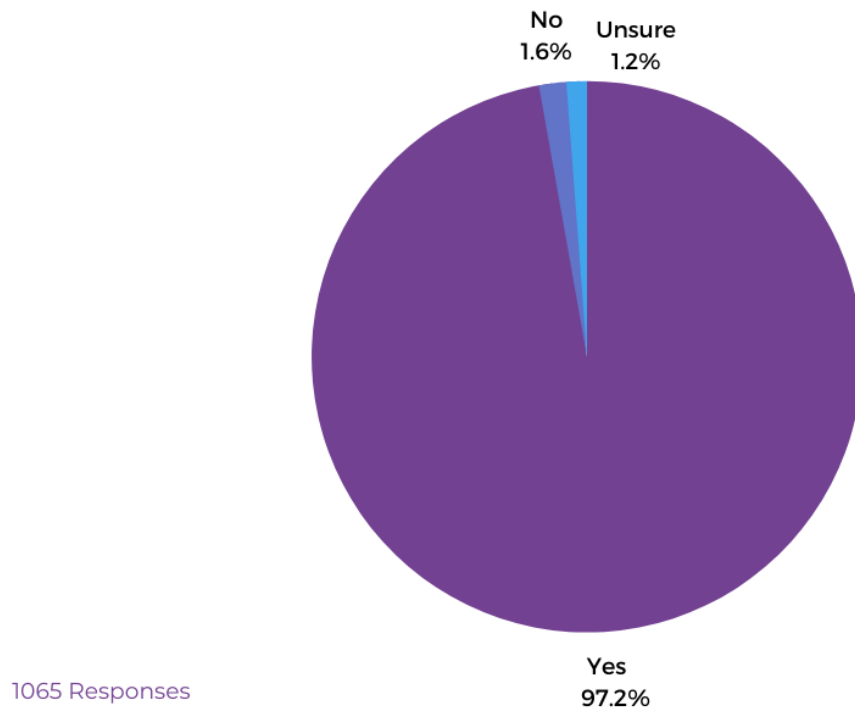


1065 Responses

- Yes (91.2%)
- No (1.4%)
- Unsure (7.4%)

2. Do you think that Northern Ireland should have a strategy to tackle men's violence against women and girls? 1,065 responses

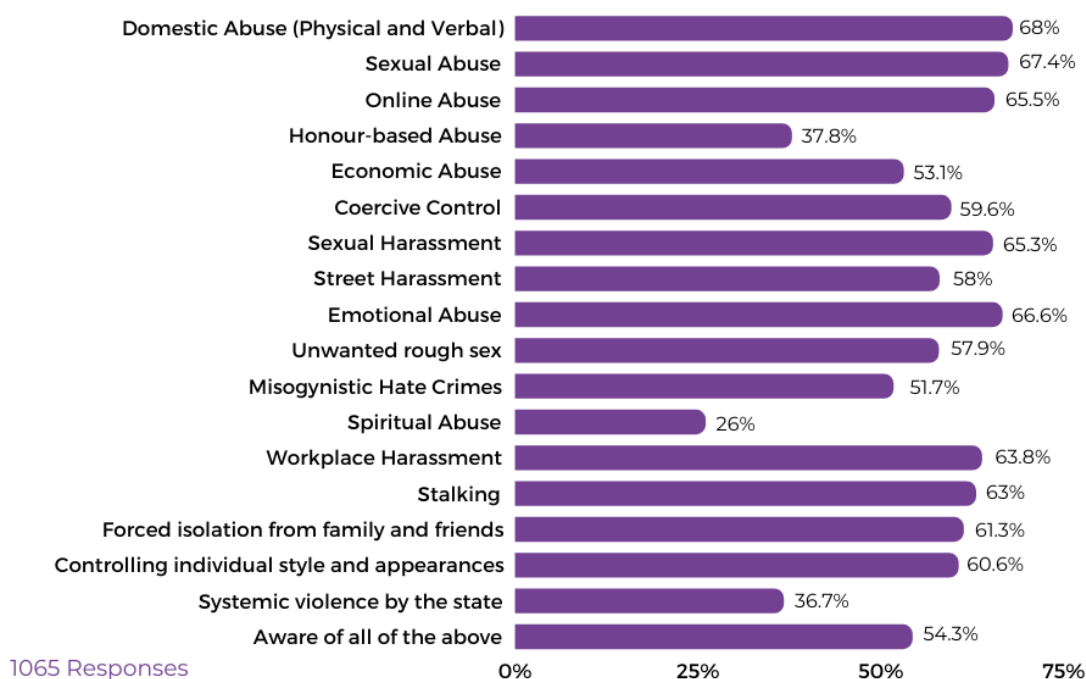
Q2. Do you think that Northern Ireland should have a strategy to tackle men's violence against women and girls?



- Yes (97.2%)
- No (1.6%)
- Unsure (1.2%)

3. Violence against women and girls can take place in many forms. Are you aware of the below forms of violence? 1,065 responses

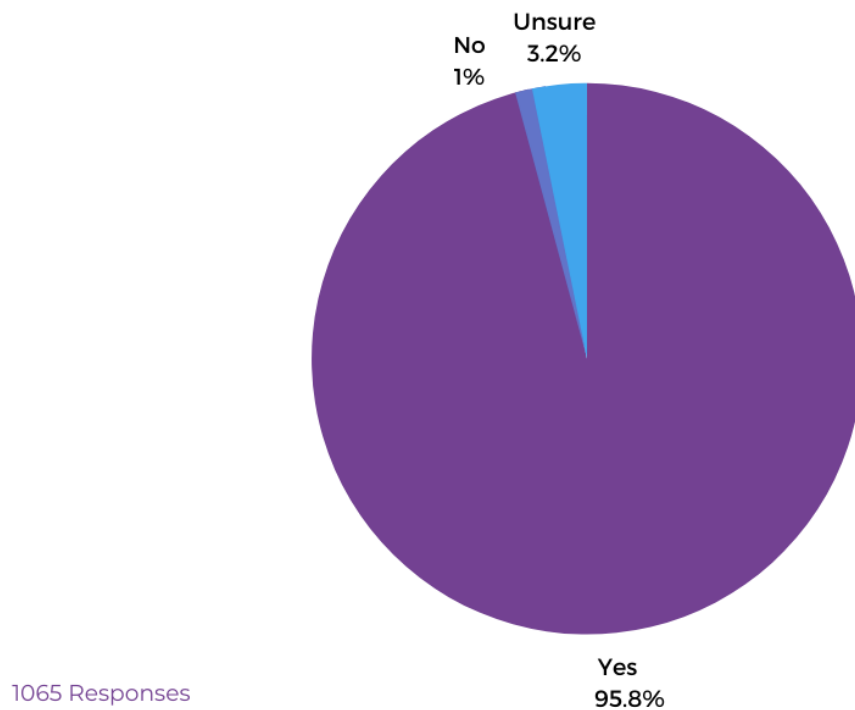
Q3. Violence against women and girls can take place in many forms.
Are you aware of the below forms of violence?



- Domestic abuse (physical and verbal) (68%)
- Sexual Abuse (67.4%)
- Online Abuse (65.5%)
- Honour-Based Abuse (37.8%)
- Economic Abuse (53.1%)
- Coercive Control (59.6%)
- Sexual Harassment (65.3%)
- Street Harassment (58%)
- Emotional Abuse (66.6%)
- Unwanted rough Sex (57.9%)
- Misogynistic Hate Crimes (51.7%)
- Spiritual Abuse (26%)
- Workplace Harassment (63.8%)
- Stalking (63%)
- Forced isolation from family and friends (61.3%)
- Controlling individual style and appearances (60.6%)
- Systemic violence by the state (36.7%)
- Aware of all of the above (54.3%)

4. Do you think that this strategy should address all of the above forms of violence against women and girls? 1,065 responses

Q4. Do you think that this strategy should address all of the above forms of violence against women and girls?



- Yes (95.8%)
- No (1%)
- Unsure (3.2%)

5. Do you think there are any forms of violence against women and girls that we have not mentioned that should be included in the strategy? 498 responses

There were almost 500 written responses to this question. Some of the comments wanted to emphasise the importance of including some types of violence that were already referenced in question 3, while others included new suggestions for other forms of violence that should be included.

Q5. Do you think there are any forms of violence against women and girls that we have not mentioned that should be included in the Strategy?

Examples of other forms of violence provided by survey respondents:

- Medical abuse
- Gaslighting
- Marital rape
- Grooming
- Spiking
- Lack of abortion access
- Caste-based violence
- Violence against sex workers
- Female genital mutilation
- Pornography
- Institutional abuse
- Human trafficking
- Stealthing
- Sectarian abuse
- Homophobic and transphobic abuse
- Corrective rape

498 Responses

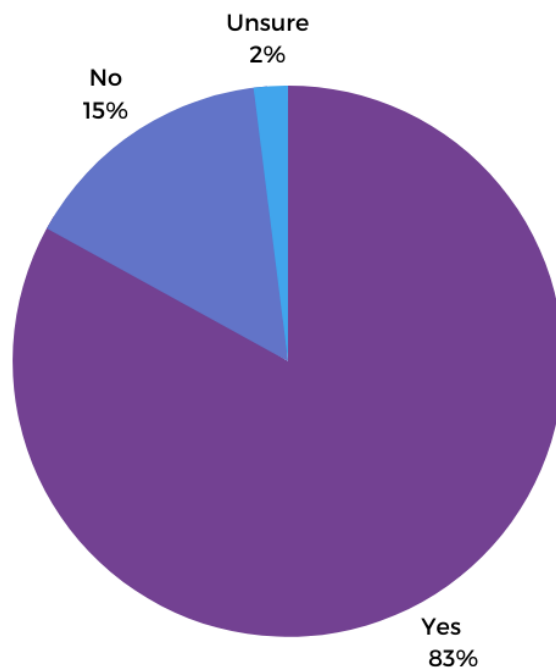


Examples of the other forms of violence provided by survey respondents included:

- Medical abuse,
- Gaslighting
- Marital rape,
- Grooming
- Spiking,
- Lack of abortion access,
- Caste-based violence,
- Violence against sex workers,
- Female genital mutilations,
- Pornography,
- Institutional abuse,
- Human trafficking,
- Stealthing,
- Sectarian abuse,
- Homophobic and transphobic abuse against LGBTQ+ women,
- Corrective rape.

6. Have you ever experienced/been impacted by men's violence against women and girls? (This includes but is not limited to: physical and verbal domestic abuse, sexual harassment and sexual assault, coercive control, street or workplace harassment, misogynistic or sexist abuse, online abuse) - 1,060 responses

Q6. Have you ever experienced/been impacted by men's violence against women and girls?



1060 Responses

- Yes (83%)
- No (15%)
- Unsure (2%)


Please note, this was an optional question yet almost every single woman or girl responded to this and a huge 83% of respondents stated that they had experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls.

7. If you answered yes to Q6, would you like to share any details about how you've been impacted by violence against women and girls and what age you were when this first happened?

We decided to split the findings of this question into two parts given the volume of responses.

7a. Would you like to share any details about how you've been impacted by violence against women and girls?

Q7a) Would you like to share any details about how you've been impacted by violence against women and girls



I was abused as a child, raped at 13, my boyfriend when I was 15 [and] 23, I had lots of underage sex with men who [knew] I was underage and enjoyed that fact, I was in a physically abusive relationship when I was 18, I always ended up in controlling emotionally abusive relationships, my ex passed me around for sex with his friends, my ex husband was 15 years older than me and was extremely abusive, I moved to Portugal in 2017 and 7 months later I was spiked in a bar and brought to an apartment and raped. I spent over two years being retraumatised going through the court system. The guy was found guilty and sentenced to five years in prison but he fled back to Angola. I'm now back living in Belfast with my partner who has cheated on me repeatedly and who lies all the time. It's sad but I feel like that's just how men are.

735 Responses

735 women decided to share information with us about how they had experienced or been directly impacted by men's violence against women and girls. This was an optional question, and we are grateful to the 735 respondents who shared their experiences with us. Many of these responses are extremely upsetting and triggering, but necessary reading for those developing both the domestic and sexual abuse strategy and the VAWG strategy. Here are some of the qualitative responses:

- Coercive control in relationship in my teens and 20s, attempted rape while in uni, pursued by a man at night in my late 20s while cycling home, multiple incidents of street harassment and everyday misogyny throughout my life,

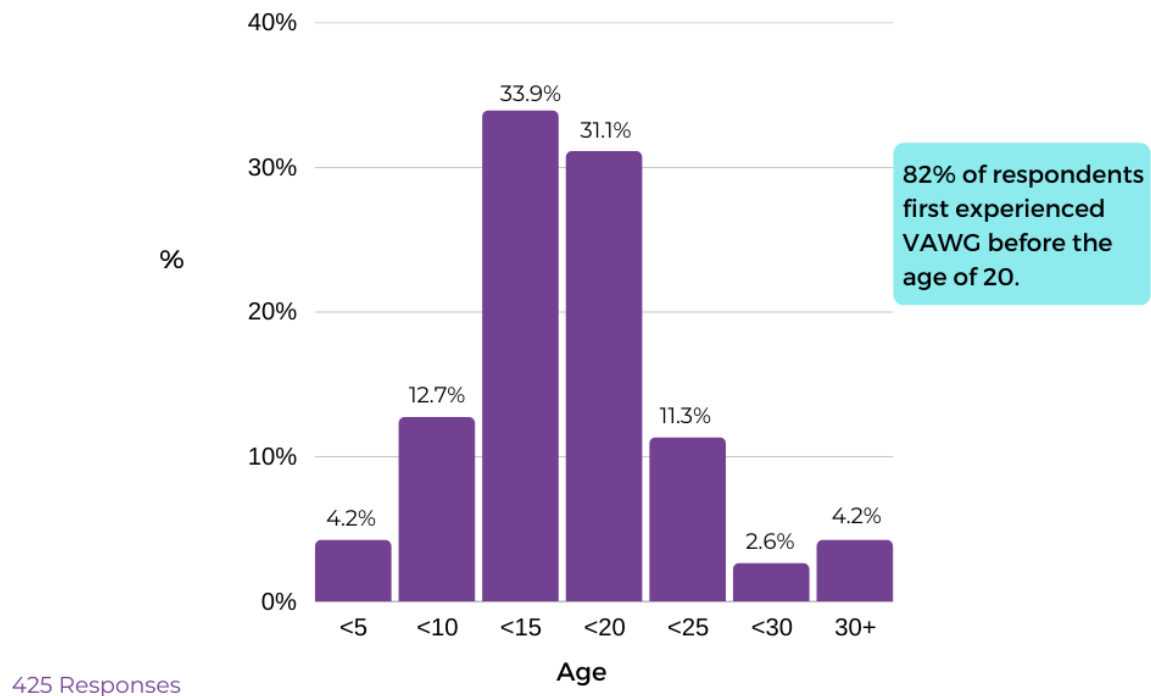
since i was in secondary school so maybe 13 or 14. The impact of this is to have normalised a lot of it to the point that i have to remind myself that it's not ok, while at the same time having a sense of not quite being safe ever really. The usual, the strategising what to do when i'm walking or jogging alone, not going out alone at night, pretending to talk to someone on the phone or actually calling my other half if i feel unsafe. It sucks.

- Street harassment mostly - whistling, lewd comments, shouting. Mostly when I was in my 20s/30s. Also witnessed a man publicly masturbating in the daylight on a popular walk. I was with a friend but it was a bit frightening and put me off walking there (especially later at night).
- It has impacted my confidence, the way I view myself and how I live my life. I'm not sure what age I was when it first happened as I can't remember a time in my life when it wasn't happening.
- I left the relationship when I was 5 months pregnant as I was told the baby would be kicked out of my stomach. I was with the perpetrator for 3 years in total and put in hospital on 2 occasions. I was in my 30s
- Unwanted sexual attention, commentary on my developing body from age 11 - from Uncles and older men living in my rural community. Bullying and controlling from my father, constantly criticising my appearance - from age 8.
- Being touched up by older men at work.
- Child sexual abuse (11), Physical abuse (23) and coercive control (33)
- 11- catcalling by adult men 11- groped and harassed by boy my age at a summer camp 11- 16 catcalled, harassment by boys when out especially if I declined their advances, groped and harassed repeatedly by best friend's brother when I visited, objectified by adult male employer in shop - he liked to make me blush by talking about how underdeveloped my body was 17- 18 catcalling, harassment at bar waitress job from customers, mostly men my parents age 19-25 groped on public transport, flashed, catcalled, use of degrading language by peers at university socials, harassed, kerb crawled. I never drank alcohol and always wore clothes/shoes I could run in to get away from men when needed. 25- 40 married to emotional abuser 40- divorced, groped again at a few bars
- Groped in a bar by someone not known to me. Sexist comments. Shouting from males in public relating to my gender- "show us your.... " . Threatened.

- My ex made me feel like I had to do certain sexual things to please him because that's what his ex did, also if I said about it being rough I was told to 'take it like a real woman'. I was 20 and was somewhat inexperienced before that relationship.
- As a young woman men would frequently touch you, hand on shoulder/arm etc as if they had a right to. Whistling at you, staring at you, making lewd comments - an assumption that they had a right to do this. No that I am older whilst is not so overt, but I am still subject to staring, leering etc. I have also curtailed my activity - where I go, at what time etc. But in essence **that is just a fact of life being a woman in NI.**
- My mum was domestically abused by my dad from when I was born, this impacted me as I was also physically and emotionally abused. After they got divorced he began to sexually abuse me at age 12. All through secondary school, I was street harassed, catcalled and sexually harassed by boys at school. Since I left home at 18, I have been subject to unwanted rough sex and sexually harassed in a number of places including nightclubs but also lecturers offices, university sports centre, botanic park etc.
- Workplace harassment at aged 40+
- At 13 I was sexually assaulted. I've been the subject of sexual harassment from the age of 11. I've been in abusive relationships on and off from 18-23
- I was 11 coming home from swimming, as I was walking home I had a grown man shout across the street at me saying me can see my knickers through my leggings, I looked around at him and he was smiling at me and stuck his tongue out, I quickly walked on and he kept shouting, "hey girl come back to me etc etc" this honestly scared me I thought he was going to follow me home

7b. What age were you first impacted by violence against women and girls?

Q7b) What age were you when you were first impacted by violence against women and girls?

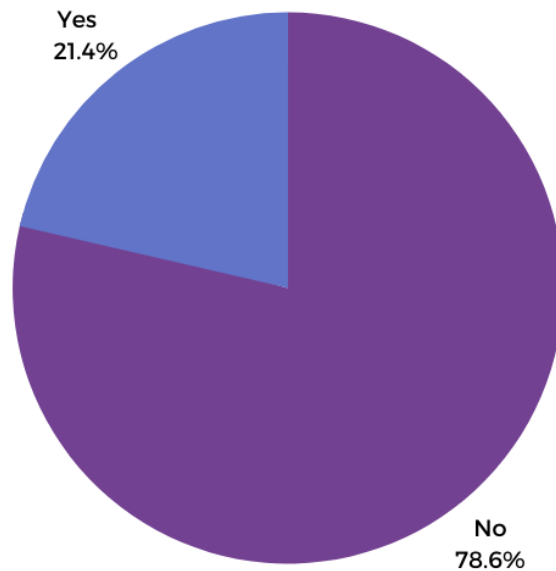


While this was an optional question, 425 respondents highlighted the age they were first impacted by, or experienced, men's violence against women and girls. Strikingly, 82% of those respondents experienced men's violence against women and girls before the age of 20. This means that 82% of respondents experienced men and boy's violence against women and girls while they were either a child or teenager.

This is reflective of survey data elsewhere, but highlights how in Northern Ireland, the majority of women experience men's violence while they are a child or teenager.

8. If you have experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls, did you report this to the police? 914 responses

Q8. If you have experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls, did you report this to the police?

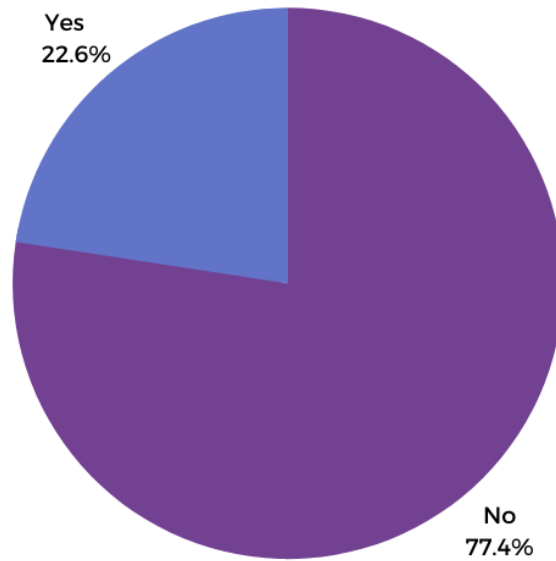


914 Responses

- Yes (21.4%)
- No (78.6%)

9. If you did report to the police, did you find this useful? 283 responses

Q9. If you did report to the police, did you find this useful?

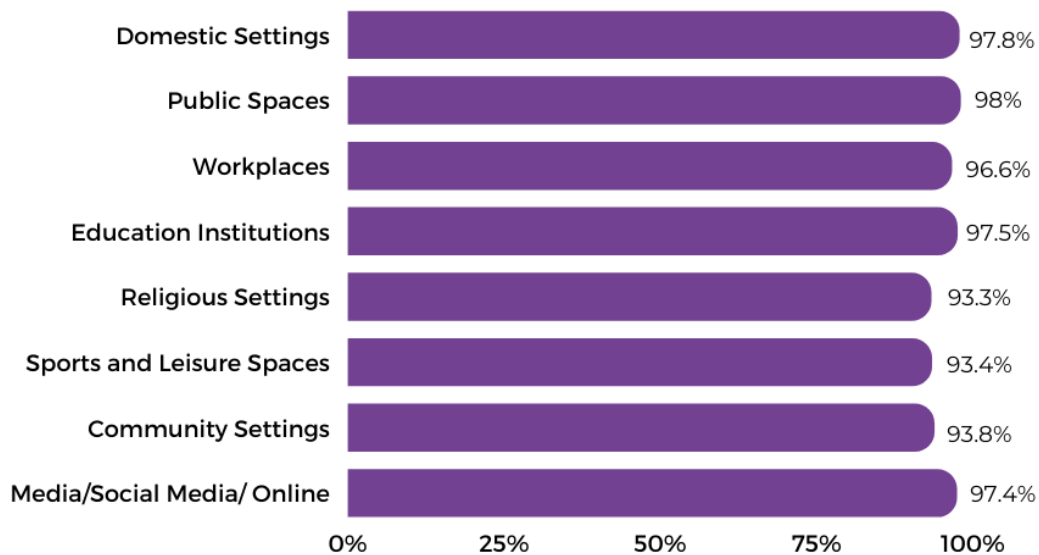


283 Responses

- Yes (22.6%)
- No (77.4%)

10. Do you think the strategy should tackle violence against women and girls in the following places: 1,065 responses

Q10. Do you think the strategy should tackle violence against women and girls in the following places:



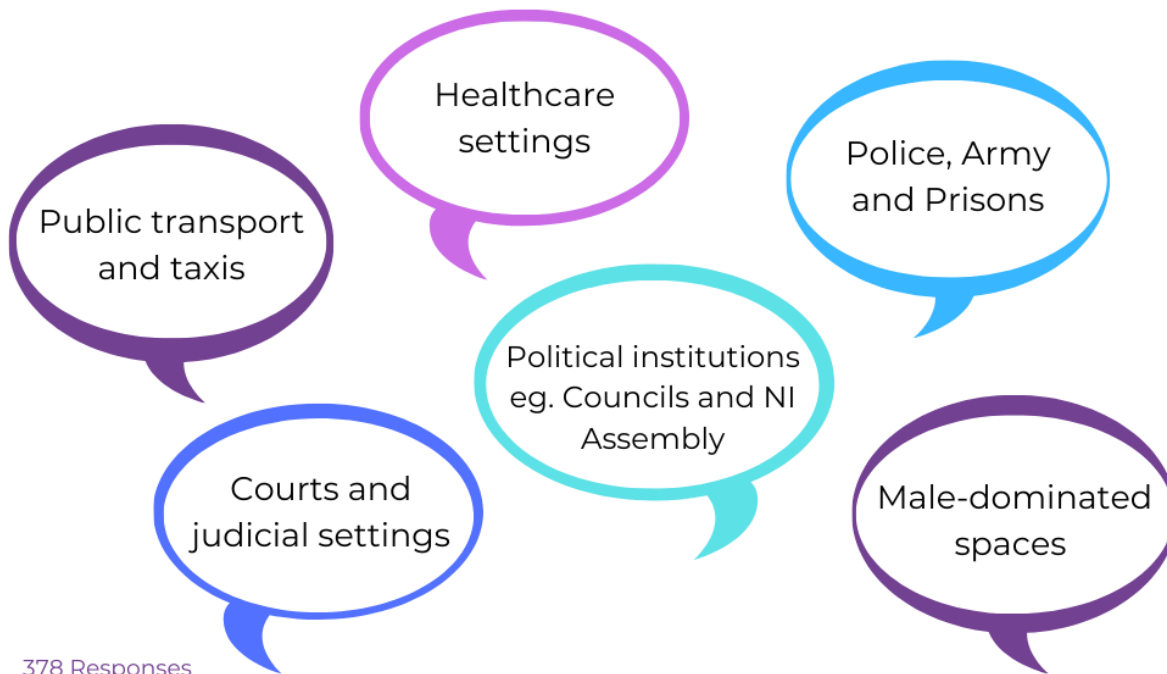
1065 Responses

Tackling violence against women and girls in public spaces received the most support from respondents.

- Domestic settings (in the home) (97.8%)
- Public spaces (in the streets, bars, parks, other public venues etc.) (98%)
- Workplaces (96.6%)
- Educational Institutions (schools, colleges, universities etc.) (97.5%)
- Religious settings (93.3%)
- Sports and leisure spaces (93.4%)
- Community settings (93.8%)
- Media/social media and online (97.4%)

11. Do you think there are any spaces that we have not mentioned that should be included in this strategy to address men's violence against women and girls? 378 responses

Q11. Do you think there are any spaces that we have not mentioned that should be included in this strategy to address men's violence against women and girls?

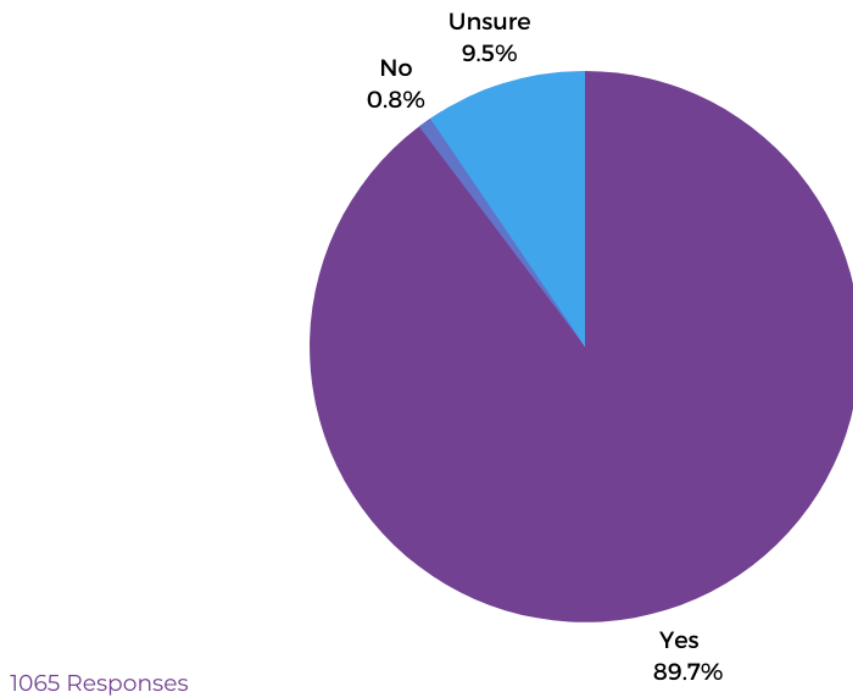


Again, some of these responses include references to places that are included in question 10 that some respondents wanted to particularly highlight. Others include additional settings that should be considered. These included the below common responses:

- Public and private transport (including taxis),
- Healthcare settings,
- Police, army and prisons,
- Courts and Judicial settings,
- Political institutions e.g. local councils and NI assembly,
- Male-dominated spaces (e.g. football clubs).

12. Do you believe Northern Ireland has a problem with attitudes of sexism and misogyny? 1,065 responses

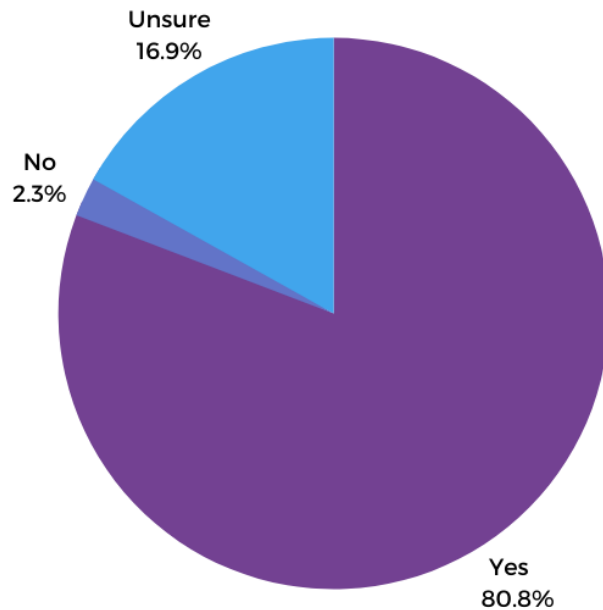
Q12. Do you believe Northern Ireland has a problem with attitudes of sexism and misogyny?



- Yes (89.7%)
- No (0.8%)
- Unsure (9.5%)

13. Do you believe Northern Ireland has a problem with rape myths and rape culture? 1,065 responses

Q13. Do you believe Northern Ireland has a problem with rape myths and rape culture?

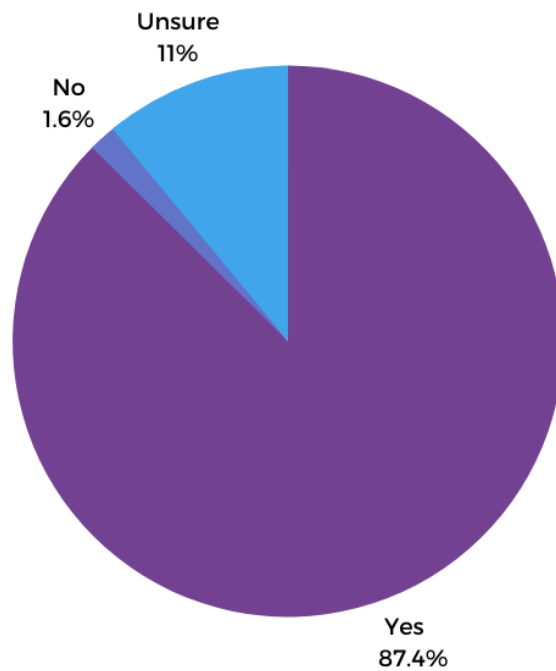


1065 Responses

- Yes (80.8%)
- No (2.3%)
- Unsure (16.9%)

14. Do you believe Northern Ireland has a problem with victim-blaming? 1,065 responses

Q14. Do you believe Northern Ireland has a problem with victim-blaming?



1065 Responses

- Yes (87.4%)
- No (1.6%)
- Unsure (11%)

15. If you answered yes to Q12, Q13 or Q14, what do you think are the root causes of sexism, misogyny, victim-blaming, rape myths and rape culture? 828 responses

Q15. What do you think are the root causes of sexism, misogyny, victim-blaming, rape myths and rape culture?

The five most common causes cited by respondents included:

- Lack of education
- Culture
- Patriarchy
- Religion
- Generational attitudes

828 Responses



The five most common causes cited by respondents included:

- Religion,
- Patriarchy,
- Culture,
- Lack of education,
- Generational attitudes.

Other examples of responses:

- Casual misogyny in all areas of life - and myth it's only a bit of craic. Homelife, men's sports. Normalising misogyny by everyone as if it should just be expected.
- Less value are placed on women and girls in our society than men. This is ingrained in both sexes from a young age, and re-enforced all the time

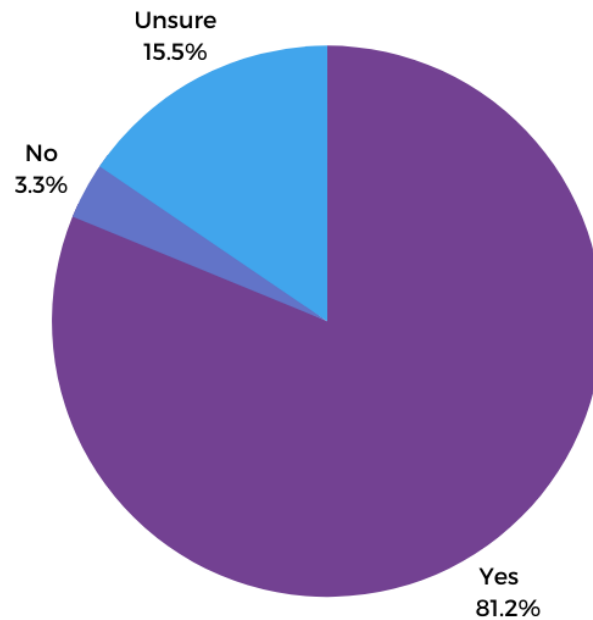
- Media reports, political voices and language. Old fashioned values still remaining in homes.
- Poor relationship guidance for young people, victim blaming especially around clothes worn and if victim has taken drink , drugs etc
- Lack of education. Religious control of school curriculums and sex education. Lack of women in policymaking roles. Media narratives and language (education needed).
- Lack of government and legal support
- I think sexism is systemic in NI because of its history. Conservative males running this country for too long with total disregard for women and women's issues. Deep rooted archaic beliefs that women are not equal and cannot be equal to men.
- I believe there is not enough faith in victims who come forward to the Psni. I myself didn't tell police who were called to my house after abuse as I felt there would be no action taken. I also believe there needs to be better education in schools
- Age older generation comments, community attitudes. Fear if the predator is in a position of power. They are protected a lot and no one supports offers it. You get threats. Mixed religions fear of the repercussion of
- Lack of education at a young age, lack of adequate relationship and sexual education in schools, lack of understanding of what consent means.
- How men are raised and how masculinity is constructed within our society. Men's egos are attached to their ability to make women do what they want women to do.
- Lack of sex ed and legacy of the troubles
- Promoting of traditional male/female stereotypes in the family. NI being stuck in the 1950s for the 30 years of the troubles and only just trying to move on from this!
- Men holding their power over women in every sphere of life and work and leisure in a completely unaccountable way. Women are still routinely seen as sexual objects rather than intellectual and human equals. Until we have universal childcare and caring and domestic duties are valued in the same way as gendered mens work then this will continue. Consent needs taught at school from primary age, when kids aren't given proper sex education they find and use unregulated porn as their teacher. Grown men need to be trained to lead these initiatives alongside women as women on their own are not listened to in the same way. Grown men need to be held accountable and need to be the role models for women.
- Terms like she deserved it for wearing a thong, skirt or any fashion choice, rugby and 'gentleman' on tours culture, sex driven tours, woman still not seen as equals. If a woman has voice she can be branded as a 'feminist'. Women can't seem to be loud, smart, leaders in most men's eyes... I've had recent discussions

with men about this and they say 'woman kill too'... they just don't get it that we are afraid, plan journeys around certain times of day to be safe... we have been conditioned this way as a result of some men's behaviours. Culture of men wolf whistling, or jeering out of their mates cars or howling at woman. this culture needs to stop and men need to be taught this is not acceptable, it's not banter, it's not funny and we hate it!

- De-humanisation of women, toxic masculinity, right wing movement and regressive state institutions, also outdated laws and old-fashioned penal responses to violence
- Inter-generational trauma; lack of RSE; and religious ethos instilled from childhood that creates an imbalance of power. Also, the accessibility of porn; media reporting in sexual abuse cases; the DUP.
- It's cultural, it needs to be tackled by both education and legislation.
- Not all victims are treated equally.

16. Do you believe there is stigma surrounding issues of violence against women and girls? 1,065 responses

Q16. Do you believe there is stigma surrounding issues of violence against women and girls?



1065 Responses

- Yes (81.2%)
- No (3.3%)
- Unsure (15.5%)

17. If you answered yes to Q16, why do you believe there is stigma surrounding these issues? 680 responses

Q17. Why do you believe there is stigma surrounding these issues?



Recurring responses:

- Male defensiveness e.g. “not all men” comments,
- Misogyny,
- Lack of compassion,
- Vilification of those who speak out,
- Lack of respect for women,
- Shame,
- Linked to mental health stigma, e.g. the mental health toll on those reporting,
- Lack of understanding,
- Victim-blaming,
- Society doesn't believe or support victims

Examples of other responses:

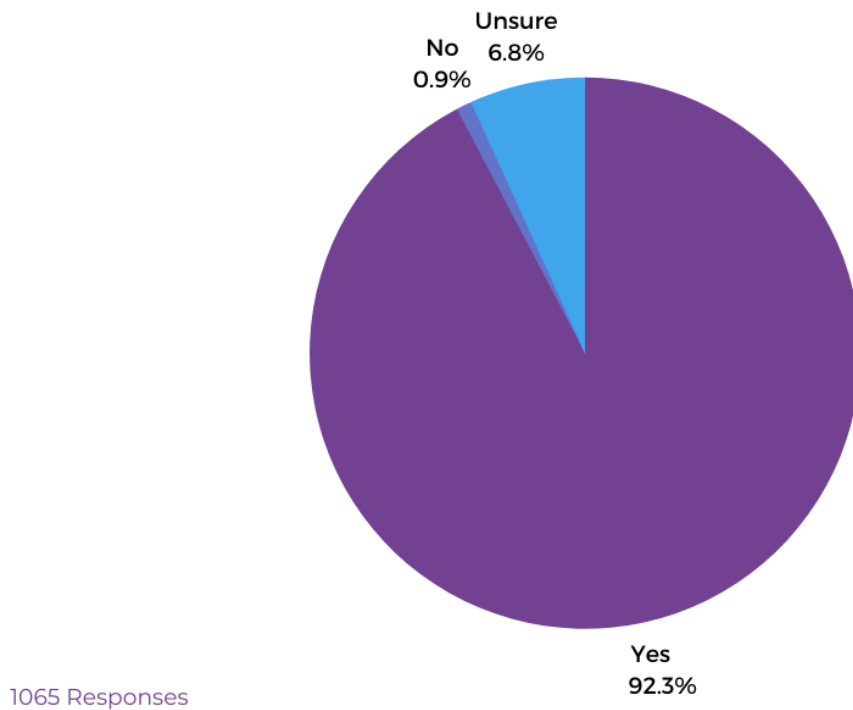
- It's not talked about enough, it is hushed up and not highlighted enough

- It's considered a lower class issue
- People don't want to get involved.
- A lot of people just think you're a crazy feminist if you say anything happens because you're a woman
- the idea that they were 'asking for it' or 'its just what men are like'
- too many people are uncomfortable with thinking someone they know could be violent and so wouldn't be believed
- Stigma in reporting, tendency to minimise lest others think you are being dramatic or soft, and stigma connected with our society's endless worry of airing our dirty laundry or letting the family down or making a show of yourself. Also i think some people still regard abuse victims as partly to blame or weak because they 'allowed it to happen' and this feeds into stigma further.
- Public don't want to talk openly about it
- So many reasons. A historic structural norm that a husband/father was entitled to do whatever he 'saw best' for his family with no state intervention has fueled a fear of getting involved in domestic issues. This was actively perpetuated by religious institutions. A culture of not trusting women and girls and the truth of their experiences/ victim blaming. A history of silence around abuse that was built by the state and religious orders (mother and baby homes, magdalene laundries etc)
- I think a lot of it comes from generational issues and patriarchal attitudes. Women were seen to be subservient to men and shouldn't question things. So all of these issues were secretive and kept to themselves for fear of rocking the boat. Lots of gender stereotyping where girls/women taught to be soft and gentle and not assertive or speak out about things.
- Class and nationality background being used to stigmatise that these are only issues that effect other communities
- Fear of not being believed although in the past few years it has been talked about more
- Madonna/Whore dichotomy, religious pressure against reform
- Because it is seen as a private matter. Because it requires acknowledgement of attitudes and historic abuses and neglect
- Because if it happens to you, there's the internalised misogyny where even other women ask what you did to deserve it
- The nature of sexual violence is destruction of the victim and victims can shut the trauma away to protect themselves from any other damage. The mental aspects of such criminal offences are so personal and complicated that the stigma is sometimes from within. That's the really difficult situation and I'm sure a direct result of insidious misogynistic indoctrination.
- I have experienced it as an uncomfortable and divisive social topic

- They are often viewed as personal issues and as something others shouldn't be involved with even now with more intervention people are still less likely to intervene if they come across it
- I think it can be embarrassing to admit you are a victim because it can make you think people will believe it's your fault and there is something wrong with you. Especially if the abuse is done by a parent or partner it makes you think you are unlovable because they should love you the most
- Men are uncomfortable at hearing that the issue is male violence and get defensive, wrongfully taking it personally when the issue of male violence is raised. This leads to victims' experiences being diminished for the sake of men's comfort, often mob mentality kicks in and men will defend their gender instead of listening to the victim.
- Most of the time women aren't believed when they ask for help, or the stress they have to go through to be heard and believed is too much.
- People in NI are not open to changing their beliefs and this means that they are not teaching their children that there should not be a stigma surrounding women's issues or that every woman deserves to be listened to.
- There is still a prevailing mindset and attitude that somehow a woman must have done something to have encouraged or at least not prevented the abuse. When domestic violence homicides are reported for example, often the narrative focuses on looking for answers/reasons why the perpetrator did what he did. The general headline we see often frames this as a mental breakdown or loss of control. There is a complete avoidance or misunderstanding of what happens in controlling and abusive relationships. Also, one of the biggest and longest standing myths.

18. Do you believe there are barriers to people reporting when they have been victims of men's violence against women and girls? 1,065 responses

Q18. Do you believe there are barriers to people reporting when they have been victims of men's violence against women and girls?



- Yes (92.3%)
- No (0.9%)
- Unsure (6.8%)

19. If you answered yes to Q18, what do you think the barriers are to victims in reporting? 863 responses

Q19. What do you think the barriers are to victims in reporting?

The five most common barriers cited by respondents included:

- Concerns around being believed
- Fear
- Shame
- Victim blaming
- Stigma

863 Responses



The five most common barriers cited by respondents included:

- Concerns around not being believed,
- Fear,
- Shame,
- Victim-blaming,
- Stigma.

Other examples of responses:

- Lack of prosecution
- Lack of support thorough legal and justices systems
- Threat of more violence
- Fear of not being believed and fear of being stigmatised and/or judged.
- social conditioning, abuser conditioning, huge onus on victim with minimal positive outcome for them

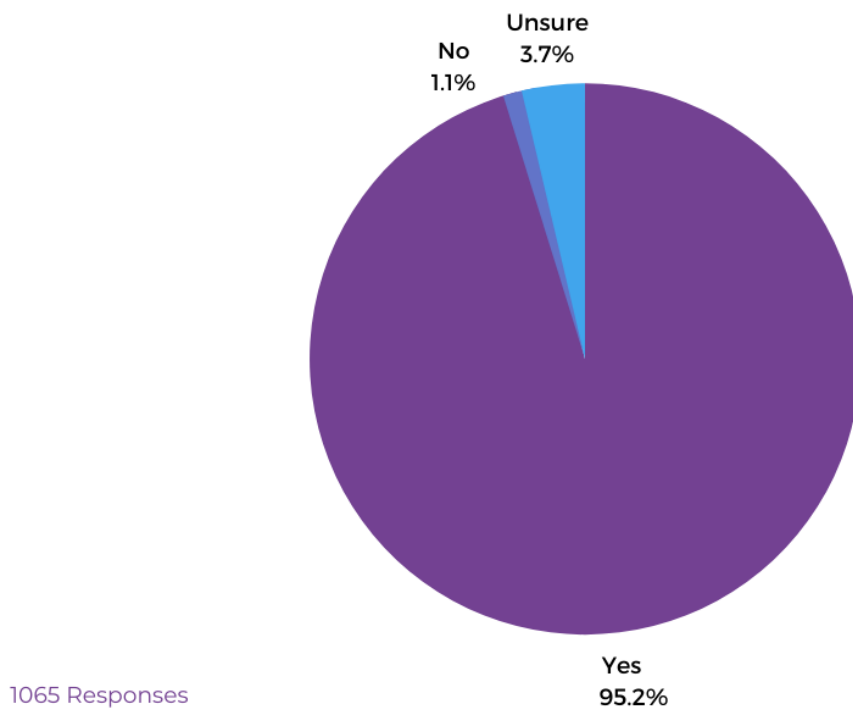
- Race, background, person having friends in the PSNI/prosecution, paramilitaries
- Fear of backlash, not knowing they deserve better, lack of easy ways to get help, lack of trust in police and lack of appropriate response by police and courts
- Often the victim knows the perpetrator and there are many reasons why she might not report. She may be in a relationship with him, she might love him, have children with him, be protecting her children from getting social services involved. She may also think there is no evidence and why would they believe her anyway? She may not want to relive the trauma by reporting it.
- Lack of female officers. Lack of officers trained in this type of crime. Lack of convictions for this type of crime could make a victim wonder what even is the point of going through this ordeal of reporting if it leads to no punishment.
- Fear of not being believed, the very real trauma of having the details of the worst thing that's ever happened to you made public for others to comment and pass judgement on, the reality that it is GRUELLING to go through the justice system and will take years and even at the end the conviction rate is very low. And if you have insecure immigration status, fear of police ignoring your report and focusing on immigration instead, or fear that as a woman with no recourse to public funds reporting abuse could mean you are destitute. For LGBTQ+, fear that you may get a homophobic or transphobic police officer that adds to the trauma of reporting and what you've been through
- Feeling they will not get the support they need from the relevant agencies, afraid they may be blamed, shamed and victim shamed. Unaware of who and where to report incidents/assaults too. Lack of education of what constitutes sexual assault/harassment themselves. Being from a religious family or community may make it difficult reporting incidents. Being afraid to report violence against them as they do not believe their case will be taken seriously or result in anything
- Again education is a major issue. From my own personal experience I did not report because my rapist made it out that we just had sex and that I had enjoyed it. I was drugged so therefore had no recollection of this. I am a rational and fairly educated woman and now I kick myself for not reporting but at the time I was in a state of shock and panic. I felt I had cheated on my partner who was emotionally controlling and couldn't speak out, in my mind.
- Conviction rates are so low why would you put yourself through it? Also I don't massively trust the police. Look at things like how they policed BLM protests and that pic of the chief constable posing with a massive gun in South Armagh one Christmas really impacted me
- Fear within community of responses to the violence being reported. Victim not being believed.
- Not knowing that certain behaviours constitute VAG, many are normalised. If we don't see and hear about it, we don't recognise and respond to it. The

history of relations with police and communities/lack of trust in the police and a culture of not touting make reporting difficult. Low conviction rates and the nature of rape trials can also be a barrier to reporting sexual violence.

- The legal system does not support victims, women know that in most cases she will be put on trial. Few cases are brought to trial and fewer still successfully prosecuted. Family courts still view a child's contact with a violent father as "in the child's best interest" despite strong empirical evidence to the contrary and allowing abusive men to use the court system to abuse women. Men are rarely held accountable. Women are rarely believed, their concerns dismissed or minimized. Reporting can be traumatic and ultimately unlikely to make a difference.
- Women know the low prosecution rate for sexual assaults. Also courts constantly do not take protective or appropriate action when abusers breach court orders. Women lose trust in the system and the lack of enforcement from first offence emboldens perpetrators and abusers have scant regard for authority to start with.
- Authorities want evidence. While this is in many ways understandable, it creates real barriers. Had I gone to the police when I was 18, I had no hard evidence of what had ever been said or done to me. I'd have been turned away for complaining that someone had just said a mean thing... and any police involvement would have extended no further than a caution being issued to my partner. It is often easier to do nothing, to not report it, as when a perpetrator is questioned or cautioned with no further action, they will then take their anger out on the victim. It can very often make things worse. Also, speaking for myself, raising these issues with authorities would mean that family members would find out. Shame keeps women quiet.

20. Do you think that reducing levels of violence against women and girls requires focusing on changing men and boy's behaviours and actions? 1,065 responses

Q20. Do you think that reducing levels of violence against women and girls requires focusing on changing men and boy's behaviours and actions?



- Yes (95.2%)
- No (1.1%)
- Unsure (3.7%)

21. If you answered yes to Q19, what sort of measures do you think are necessary to change men and boy's actions? 877 responses

Q21. What sort of measures do you think are necessary to change men and boy's actions?

Education was the most commonly cited measure and many respondents referred to the importance of starting this at a young age.



877 Responses

Some of the common measures cited by respondents included:

- Education (this was the most common response to this question with many referring to the importance of starting this at a young age and the need for RSE)
- Justice system reform,
- Increasing public awareness
- Legal reform,
- Tackling sexist societal attitudes,
- Address the media portrayal of women.

Other examples of responses to this question:

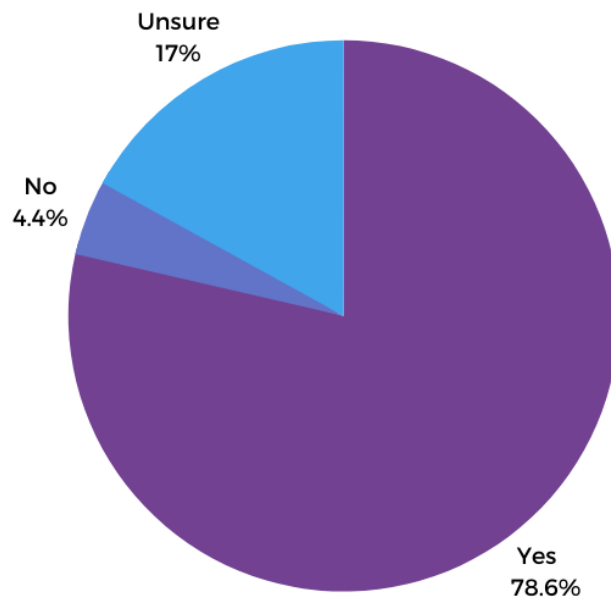
- Relationship and sexual education required in schools from the earliest age

- Zero tolerance to misogynistic behaviour and language from an early age and online. Look into porn effects on young men. Make it a hate crime.
- Mandatory workshops for offenders, include it in rse education from a young age, zero tolerance policy for workplaces/sports teams
- Teach respect and equality
- Clampdown on “jokes” that perpetuate toxic masculinity
- Q20 yes - huge public information campaign!
- End the boys will be boys culture. Admit the problem and systematically tear it down
- Full and proper accountability which should be part of the sex education we are taught, TRANSFORMATIVE and not restorative justice. Women should not be at risk of losing job or education places if they report harassment
- Tackling myths, toxic masculinity, 'banter' and 'boys will be boys' mentality, focus on equality for women. But also investing in education and mental health services for both men and women.
- Tougher laws etc to show they can't do what they want
- Overall the societal attitude towards women needs to change. Funding and resources need to be pumped into education, justice and family resources.
- We need to recognise this problem for what it is - it is MEN'S violence against women and girls. Simply saying "violence against women and girls" makes it seem like this violence is happening out of nowhere. Men need to change their behaviour and a first step is actually giving this strategy the proper name.
- It starts in the family and school
- Challenging attitudes when encountered, particularly among and by men eg in peer groups. To stay silent when you encounter misogynistic and sexist attitudes and behaviours is to condone it and is complicit. We need a whole system approach from the highest levels (judiciary) down through schools to within youth groups, communities and families.
- Boys and men are the problem but also the solution. We need our sons, brothers, fathers, uncles, friends to challenge this behaviour. This also needs to be part of the curriculum at schools, for both girls and boys as some women also perpetuate this.
- Understanding patriarchy and how it is embedded in our society and how it is acceptable and we buy into it
- Appropriate consequences for verbal abuse, physical abuse and more support to women so they feel comfortable to come forward in regards these sorts of abuse
- Expel the exposure of misogyny in all media
- Intersectional education starting at primary school age that promotes positive, healthy relationships. A judicial system that actually serves justice. A complete cultural overhaul where men are accountable for their actions.

- I think we need a cultural shift to change men and boys behaviour. I think that comes when men and boys face consequence for their actions. By this I mean losing social capital - when we hear whispers of certain men being creepy we should not go. When a football team hires a rapist, there should be consequences. There should be constant challenging conversations happening within men's groups - not a box ticking of "we have the women in to talk to us so that's all sorted"
- Changing attitudes at an early age, highlighting lived experiences, publicity (including in schools) and not just violent behaviour but using examples which often get misread as normal behaviour or overlooked i.e. minor comments, control issues which don't seem that bad in a single event/moment but are more likely happening on a regular basis over time and people don't see the bigger picture (or don't want to)
- Men need to educate themselves on the issues, that this isn't a new problem that has only happened within the last 5 years, men need to not take things personal, if the term "not all men" is in their vocabulary they are not embracing the general meaning of this statement. Taking the claims from women personally only creates a deeper cut and invalidates women's issues. Men holding their friends accountable for their actions and words, if men cannot stand up for women while around their friends then that speaks volumes of their true personality. Raising men to be a decent human who can empathise with women and these daily struggles without taking it personal is how we can start this.
- Apart from the obvious fundamental steps that will be put in place I believe that training in various less obvious settings should be put in place. I truly believe that parents need to be made aware of unconscious bias from the outset when raising children. I believe that parents and especially mothers don't even know they are discriminating within the home and setting their daughters up for a future of accepting a second class standing. Parenting classes. Neo-natal teaching. Mother and Baby groups, Pre-school, nursery settings. Also, I believe there should be classes for girls highlighting discrimination in all its forms from subtle to obvious and training on how to mitigate against it. Especially, the subtle discrimination from an early age. Girls need to learn much earlier to detect subtle discrimination and stop it in its tracks. If this was put in place much more serious violence would be avoided. Not sure what age this teaching should start from. As early as is possible with consultation with educators who can advise the age at which girls are teachable in this subject range. Also, Fathers (father figures) within the home setting need to stop stereo typing themselves into slobbish and misogynistic behaviour's. Boys probably require training from an early age also to point out to them what normal non discriminatory behaviour should look like.

22. Different groups of marginalised women can face additional types of abuse (e.g. disabled women, black or minority ethnic women, migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, traveller women, rural women etc.). Do you think additional action needs to be taken in this strategy to address men's violence against these groups of women? 1,065 responses

Q22. Different groups of marginalised women can face additional types of abuse (e.g. disabled women, black or minority ethnic women, migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, traveller women, rural women etc.). Do you think additional action needs to be taken in this strategy to address men's violence against these groups of women?

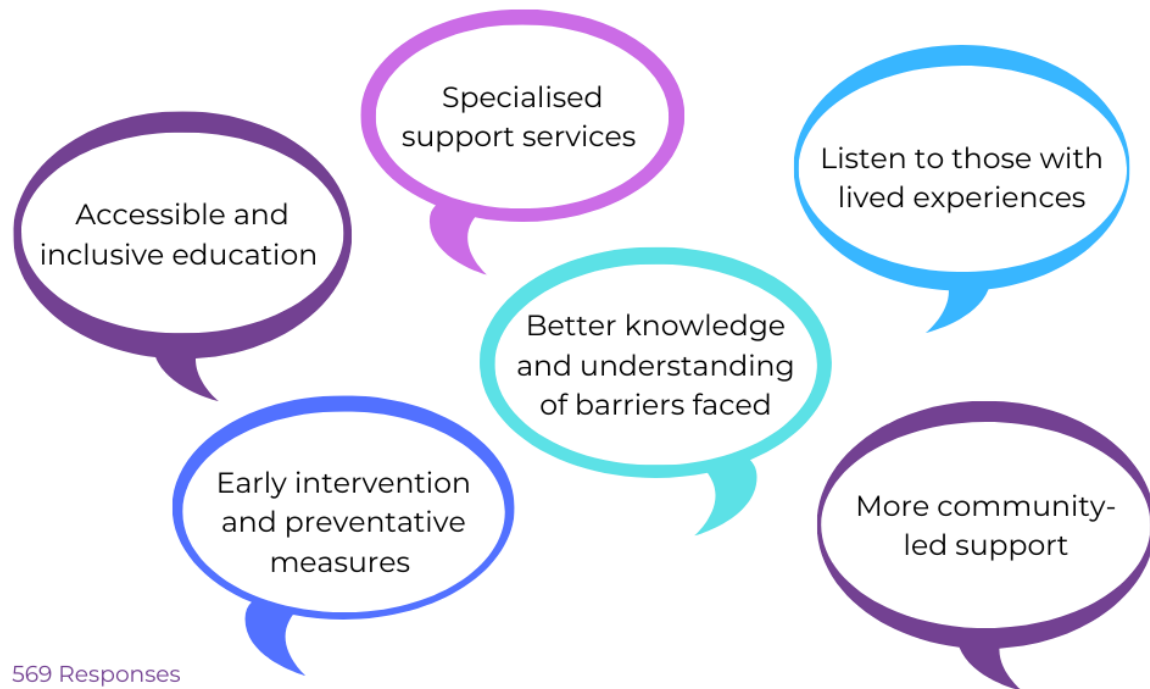


1065 Responses

- Yes (78.6%)
- No (4.4%)
- Unsure (17%)

23. If you answered yes to Q22, could you please expand on what additional factors need to be considered or what additional action needs to be taken to support these women? 569 responses

Q23. Could you please expand on what additional factors need to be considered or what additional action needs to be taken to support these women?



Some common responses to this question included:

- Funded specialised support services,
- Accessible and inclusive education,
- Listen to those lived experiences,
- Early intervention and preventative measures,
- Better knowledge and understanding of the barriers faced,
- More community-led support.

Other examples of responses to this question included:

- More outreach
- Language barrier, culture barrier, understanding of gender identity (trans men/women, non binary people)

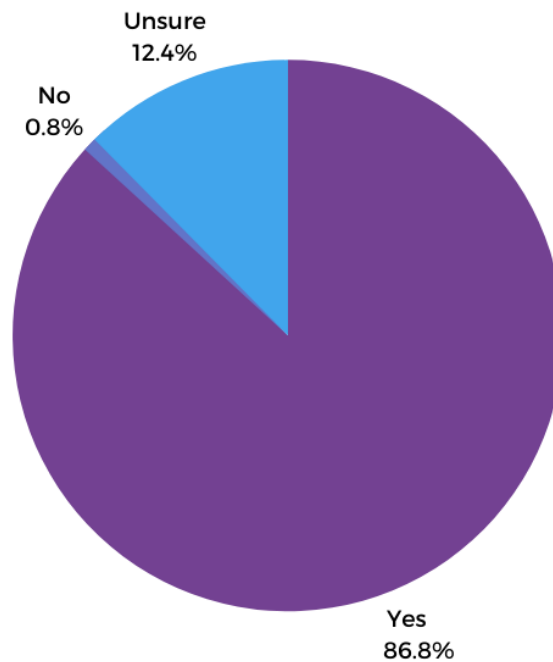
- Language and community awareness. May need greater support due to other barriers such as faith.
- See my answers above. If this strategy does not work for the most marginalised women and girls, then it is not a human rights-based strategy.
- Different groups, experiencing an intersection of discrimination will require tailored responses and specific resources. E.g. tackling misogyny without addressing racism will not help migrant women experiencing abuse in Ireland.
- Gaining better knowledge and understanding of these groups and communities to better understand the factors impacting them and to better help them as to not put them in increase risk of violence
- Factors needed to be considered include discrimination that those women already face and how that places into VAWg
- Much more complex for these groups as it is dealing with intersectionality - this needs to be recognised and tackled on various fronts not just because they are a woman. There needs to be more resources put into this work as often there is not the data/evidence to support the issues they face.
- The role of porn and how marginalised women are over sexualised
- Women, and therefore violence against women must be seen as the diverse issue that it is. Women are not one homogenous group and experiences differ significantly between women. Any work that hopes to address violence against women should engage with intersectionality in a meaningful way.
- Support facilities and resources available which are mindful of the specific needs of the groups.
- They should be included in the design of the processes of accountability
- Take in consideration that trans women are more vulnerable and have less options for getting help because of societal stigma, but also stigma within some 'women only' safe spaces.
- As a lesbian, I've been groped by as many gay men as straight men. Men collectively need to understand consent and that touching you only touch if invited. I think some men hide behind their sexuality.
- Cultural differences need to be taken into account. More support from the community they live in
- Sub culture ideologies will need to be considered particularly traveller women and the role and status they have in their communities.
- Violence against women in traveller communities has been quite prevalent and difficult to challenge as these women are more vulnerable and less autonomy in decision making for example.
- Adjusting the strategy to address the specific problems for each group, like having women's groups in rural areas, making childcare accessible so traveller women can access education and training etc.
- Support services should be enhanced. BAME women usually have no wider circles of family to rely on in situations like that and need to rely on services.

- Again, this all comes down to difficult conversations that need to be held by parents and taught in school - not the importance of homework diaries.
- From my experience i lived undiagnosed with ADHD and Autism until age 27. Autistic girls need extra support and guidance to navigate this area, these situations and understand them. This includes those undiagnosed so the basic information on handling such situations and how to say no or safely escape needs to be presented to ALL girls. Autistic women are at much higher risk of experiencing gender based violence and of committing suicide. As a queer and non binary person i wish education around same sex couples was given. I was bullied (physically and verbally) for being bi sexual when young and it made me reject women and date older men to make myself look straighter which led to many more problems. I had absolutely no sex education from my school.
- I have a mixed race daughter who has faced verbal abuse on the streets-society/ homes/ education needs to be aware of the mental health impact of this
- Again more resources into education of boys
- The courts need to pass sentences that make it clear this is not acceptable in our society
- Services need to be available to these women based on their needs and circumstances. Particularly if they are marginalised - reasonable adjustments need to be made to ensure services are available and work for them. For example in rural communities where sports or gaa is the hub of the community / organisations should be working together to support those in their local community. Equally those who are from different backgrounds and observe different customs - services need to be accessible and in a safe space.
- I think in particular transwomen are in need of protection because of the change in the political climate around transwomen in particular (but all trans individuals). It distresses me deeply that we allow our media outlets to perpetuate straight up lies and myths that used to be levelled against queer people, now just against people who are trans. I also think that recognising that abuse is often intersectional is key to preventing it. We cannot discuss the rights of girls and women without also speaking about how misogyny often goes hand in hand with ableism, racism, homophobia and xenophobia
- Marginalised women need to be included in any discussion/debate about policies as only they know what it is like to experience men's violence from their cultural/social perspective.
- I've explained a bit of this above, but for starters, disabled and neurodivergent people need specially trained keyworkers to help us deal with all the different dimensions of what it means to report abuse and to try to leave an abuse situation. We simply don't have the level of freedom and autonomy that even a non-disabled abuse victim has. Leaving an abuser can take us out of the catchment areas of services or supportive people we depend on. Nothing in the

system is set up with us in mind, and the expectations of services like Women's Aid that we be "independent" impose problematic additional pressures on us before we can benefit from their help. Often, services that people assume will help us do not - I have gone from pillar to post in the social work system, as three different departments have passed me around, and the much-lauded Citizens Advice gave me inaccurate info about benefits. You can't say this is separate from the issue of reporting abuse in the first place, because for us, reporting is more dangerous than for other victims and we cannot report unless we know that we have a genuine safety net waiting in terms of real practical tailored help to leave. Communication differences of neurodivergent people need to be part of the training of all agencies involved, also. And in general, services need to be codesigned and coproduced with disabled and neurodivergent people in order for meaningful improvements to happen.

24. Do you think there needs to be a review of how the justice system treats victims and survivors of men's violence against women and girls? 1,065 responses

Q24. Do you think there needs to be a review of how the justice system treats victims and survivors of men's violence against women and girls?

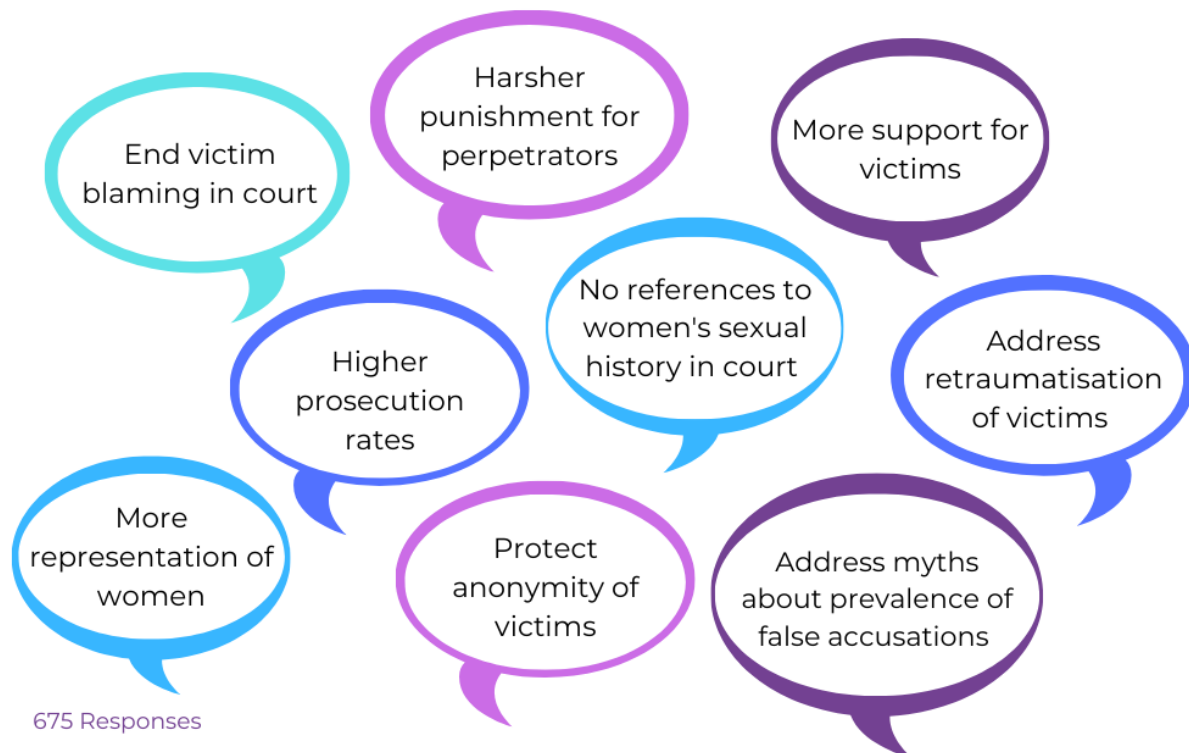


1065 Responses

- Yes (86.8%)
- No (0.8%)
- Unsure (12.4%)

25. If you answered yes to Q24, what sort of changes would you like to see within the justice system in relation to men's violence against women and girls? 675 responses

Q25. What sort of changes would you like to see within the justice system in relation to men's violence against women and girls?



The most common responses to this question included:

- End victim blaming in courts,
- Harsher punishment for perpetrators,
- More support for victims,
- Higher prosecution rates,
- No references to women's sexual history in court,
- Address retraumatisation of victims,
- More representation of women,
- Protect anonymity of victims,
- Address myths about the prevalence of false accusations.

Other examples of responses:

- Private court hearings.

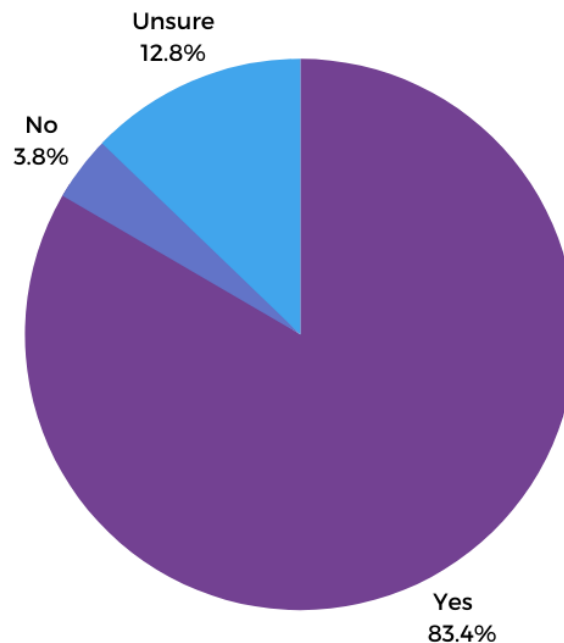
- Better victim support. Zero tolerance legislation that is clearly defined for police to act upon. Clear definitions for fair trials but an overhaul in how barristers question female victims, use of language, questioning of sexual history should be scrutinised for relevance to the case before it goes before a jury. Jury made up of diverse people.
- Longer sentencing, outfits victim wearing not discussed, character testimony scrapped
- Yes absolutely. As stated before I took my abuser to court. It was like the knife was twisted even deeper. It was the most painful and drawn out system. It took 5 years as he was allowed to use every trick in the book to delay and delay the court. He was on legal aid and it cost tax payers thousands. I found it really hard to continue working and moving on with my life. I was constantly re-traumatised all the time. It's a very very unfair system. The brave lady it takes to come out and speak up should be wrapped in cotton wool and protected at all costs. No questions asked. The fear I lived through remains with me to this day. I spoke up to get justice and protect other women. Future women should be protected, encouraged to speak up and protected against their perpetrators.
- Men being held to account for their actions, less victim blaming in court, protection in the courtroom. Not being questioned by the abuser et
- The Gillen Review has done much of this work, but a review encompassing DV/honour based violence and all other forms of VAWG and how the justice system treats victims would be really instructive.
- Higher prosecution of rape cases, better victim support, faster systems, less victim blaming / shaming, laws that actually tackle the issues.
- We need to move towards a model that is closer to transformative justice. Justice should focus on the victim/survivor.
- Huge education campaign required for those within justice system.
- Explore alternatives to incarceration and investing more in community building instead. Also updating laws and exploring best practice from around the world.
- So difficult to "prove" historical abuse, women need support when they are giving details of assaults etc. And ongoing support after women have testified, given evidence. Ensuring women are safe after testifying against perpetrators.
- Guarantee anonymity. Don't put the women on trial if they press charges. No turning a blind eye to cops w/no compassion or understanding.
- system is weighted against women and girls and results in re-traumatising victims and victim shaming. needs a root and branch review that respects the rights of complainants as well as alleged perpetrators. weighted towards the rights of.
- More awareness of the trauma experienced by women and girls who enter the criminal justice system for theft, addiction issues as this can be a direct response to the trauma experienced from abuse and during abuse, more

women centred approaches, a zero tolerance in the courts of highlighting what a woman was wearing or her past sexual encounters during prosecution, particularly in the case of women who experienced abuse as a child.

- Appropriately trained police to deal with investigation, no victim blaming, changes to how these cases progress to court and full anonymity from the jury if required, defence lawyers should not be permitted to make judgements on someone's character regardless of their clothes, appearance etc and how this has influenced the perp in some way/reflected that she has deserved it. Change in legislation that ensures the system is fit for purpose in today's society. Significantly reduced timescales for cases progressing to court.
- A more sympathetic/empathetic response. Not making girls re- live the experience in a court.
- My experience of family court was horrific. My children were made to have contact with their father despite his violent nature to both myself and them. If a man displays violence the justice system should be protecting children from further trauma not placing them in their unsupervised care.
- Better understanding of trauma and changes to how the court system works. Victims brave enough to face down their perpetrator must be protected and supported.
- Zero tolerance to all violence against women. Have the Justice System more representative of women.
- Law on consent in particular. But the justice system does not have the capacity to prevent these crimes. That work needs to be done elsewhere before it occurs, because clearly the law does not protect us from abuse happening in the first place.
- Make it easier for women to come forward to actually convict men
- There are a lot of processes expected for victims ie mediation, reporting to the employer and nothing being done. This needs to change as I have found it to be silly and is a real time wasting exercise. I feel it enables the other party to carry on without sanction etc. For example if you ran a red light and the police were behind you, it would be dealt with and you would be unlikely to do that again! I think the amount of steps to go through is what also causes stigma etc.

26. Do you believe that state violence against women and girls (for example, the mother and baby institutions, denying access to reproductive healthcare or diminishing women's human rights) should be included within this strategy?
1,065 responses

Q26. Do you believe that state violence against women and girls (for example, the mother and baby institutions, denying access to reproductive healthcare or diminishing women's human rights) should be included within this strategy?



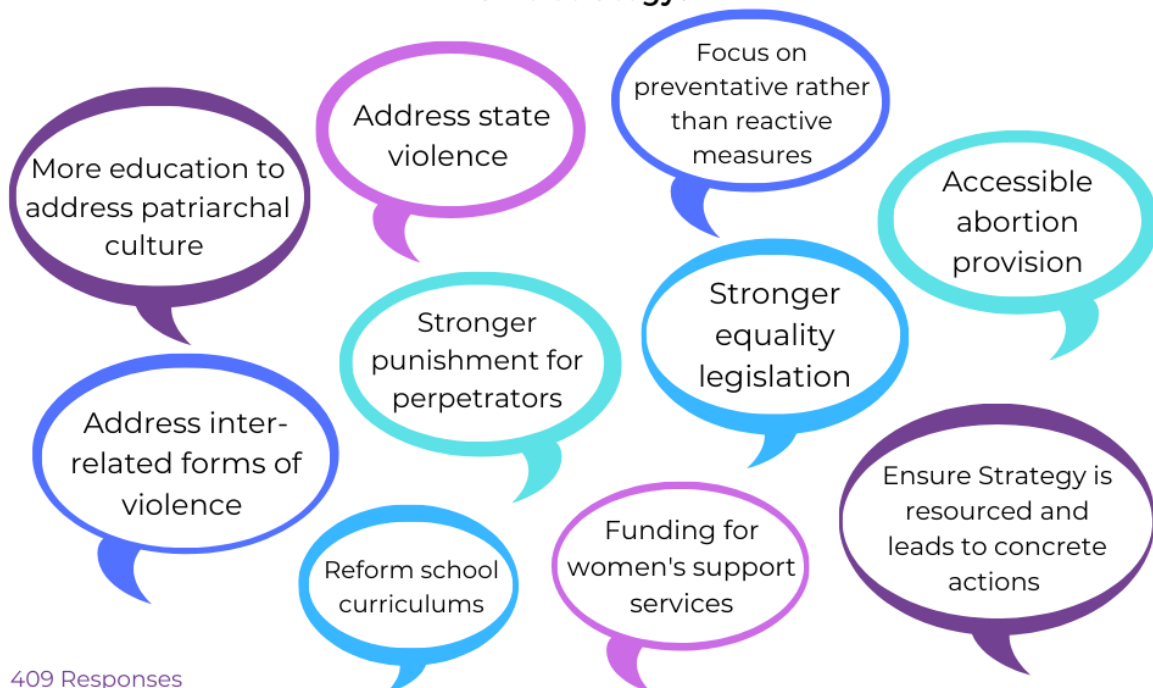
1065 Responses

- Yes (83.4%)
- No (3.8%)
- Unsure (12.8%)

27. Finally, is there anything else that you would like to share that you think the WPG should be calling for within the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy?

409 responses

Q27. Is there anything else that you would like to share that you think the WPG should be calling for within the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy?



Some of the common responses to this survey included:

- More education to address patriarchal culture,
- Address state violence against women and girls,
- Focus on preventative rather than reactive measures,
- Accessible abortion provision is needed,
- Address inter-related forms of violence,
- Stronger punishment for perpetrators,
- Stronger equality legislation is needed,
- Reform school curriculums,
- Funding is needed for women's support services,
- Ensure strategy is fully resources and leads to concrete actions

Some other interesting observations about the responses to this question include the high levels of those working in education (school principles and teachers) that

expressed support for the introduction of education measures on VAWG, RSE and wanting to be involved in seeing these introduced into their schools.

In addition, a high number of women mentioned the need to address state violence against women and girls, in particular the examples of denying access to abortion and the mother and baby institutions, and that a separate strategy to address state violence might be needed.

Other examples of responses to this question include:

- Women's services such as gynae, breast screening etc are the first to take a hit in cuts. This needs to stop
- Police and others need to have the power to help these women
- Easier access to abortion and harsher penalties for those who stand outside institutions giving abuse.
- Proper funding for those agencies that deal with VAWG - be it womens aid or the police service. There needs to be significant resource devoted to the issues.
- Ongoing support, but most of all, do not simply write a strategy and then not fully implement that strategy. review that strategy regularly, monitor the strategy, evaluate and most of all make changes, it should be a living strategy, not set in stone for time in memorial but most importantly, implement, act and stop talking and of course it goes without saying, ensure ongoing reliable sustained funding.
- I think the key to this strategy will be to not make it reactive. Because if we're only focusing on justice, we're focusing only on responding to violence, not preventing it. Real cultural change needs to happen, and it's this VAWG strategy that needs to be the driver behind that.
- Equal pay, affordable housing, affordable childcare, more refuges, safe night travel provision, 'safe hubs' in towns and cities, visible law enforcement, reporting by women taken seriously, education in schools, effective aftercare for women and girls who have been victims of abusive behaviour, remove abusive online content of violence against women and children, including pornography.
- Given the awful statistics in NI this must be a Government priority and resourced as such. There's no point in producing a Strategy if it is not resourced and there needs to be accountability for the actions coming from the Strategy so that it just doesn't sit on a shelf but is a document that produces real and substantial change.
- I think a key element is ensuring that boys engage with the topic from a young age. There should be space on primary school curriculum to allow children to explore gender relations, how it may affect them growing up and how beliefs/action can both enable and disable this. If they are old enough to

experience it, they are old enough to learn about it in an age appropriate way. This should continue throughout their education.

- There needs to be a complete overhaul of the judicial system here in Northern Ireland. Perps simply have to be held accountable regarding their offences against women children and should have to face the full force of the law!!
- Educate, educate, educate! from as early an age as possible. I see huge barriers in the form of the dominance of organised religion in NI politics and education - particularly those who would be referred to as 'fundamentalist Christians' in other parts of the world. This includes Catholics as well as Protestants - NI will find it difficult to get beyond the narrow view of women (and the belief in a woman's subservient place in the family and in society) which has been put forward by organised religions for thousands of years! NI is a particularly strong hold-out for those views it would seem. It will take another generation at least to overcome these.
- Social media needs to have a focus on it as the amount of online abuse is getting worse. There need to be consequences for it.
- Extra Support for pregnant women as this is a particularly dangerous time for them. Having recently given birth myself only once throughout my pregnancy was I asked by health professionals if there were any domestic abuse issues, and not once in my postpartum period have I been asked. When I was asked it was literally whispered to me. These conversations need to be clear and transparent and professional.
- Specific recommendations for what universities can do to end gender based violence. Universities represent thousands of women in NI, student areas such as the Holylands see high levels of street harassment and sexual assault, many students also live on very low income meaning they don't have disposable income to be able to leave violent homes etc. University culture means young women within these spaces are regularly victim to sexual harassment etc. The institution does nothing, and will continue to do nothing until forced to by the assembly through a strategy.
- implementation of UN resolution 1325
- Action! Have seen too many strategies which gather dust. A strategy is just a means to an end not an end in itself. It needs a timelined action plan, ongoing monitoring and review. I want to see concrete actions articulated, how these are going to be delivered, who will be responsible and accountable and on-going reporting on impact and change
- As a school principal, I would be happy to roll out a program addressing the ideology of male superiority and of inequality.
- Equal pay, affordable housing, affordable childcare, more refuges, safe night travel provision, 'safe hubs' in towns and cities, visible law enforcement, reporting by women taken seriously, education in schools, effective aftercare for women and girls who have been victims of abusive behaviour, remove

abusive online content of violence against women and children, including pornography.

- Equality for women in the workforce.
- Any strategy is long overdue. I understand that there are many men out there who also suffer at the hands of other men and in some rarer cases, women. However for too long myself and my female friends and many others before and after us have been speaking about the impact these behaviours have on our lives without any justice or consolidation. We have wrongfully learned to live with it. Every little minor incident continues to add up and every major incident therefore seems less serious. Every time this happens, men who have moved beyond the minor behaviours become more likely to confidently act and take chances which greatly harm women and girls.
- Institutions should not be allowed to investigate themselves A properly trained police force should be responsible for all allegations, social media should be held accountable for content, gender stereotypes begin with fairy stories, educate our females so they realise their own worth, teach self defence to all girls and young women as part of PE curriculum, educate boys and young men with a proper sex education programme. Porn distorts reality of relationships. I actually despair that we can undo the propensity for violence.
- A believe a stand alone policy/ investigation into State violence against women and girls is required.

CHAPTER THREE – Additional WPG Primary Research on VAWG

4. Additional WPG Primary Research 2021-2022:

The WPG has conducted a range of other primary research projects over the past year that are relevant to this call for views. We would like to take the opportunity to share the relevant findings from this research that related to male violence against women and girls.

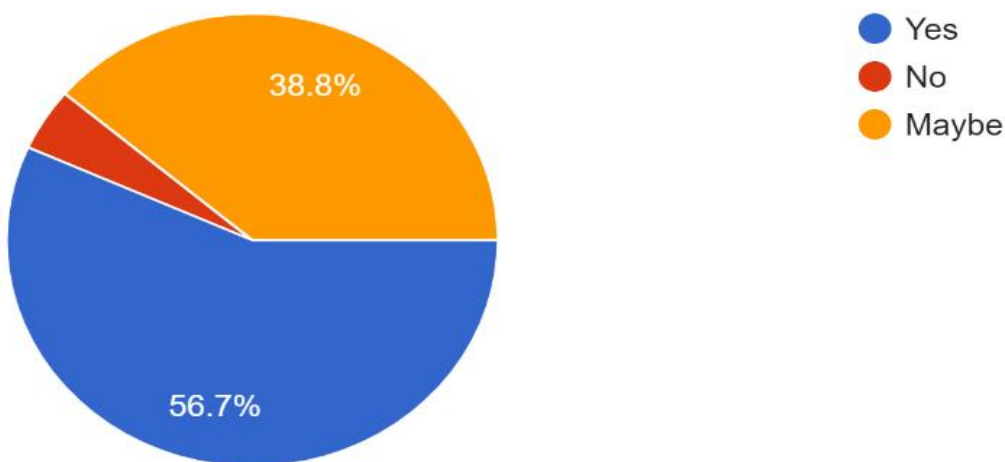
4.1 Primary Research - WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan Relaunch One Year On: Putting Women's Voices at the Core:

In July 2021, the WPG launched a WPG Feminist Recovery Plan Supplementary Report: Putting Women's Voice at the Core. This report summarised primary research undertaken with 150+ women across Northern Ireland through surveys, interviews, gathering testimonials and case studies. We would like to take this opportunity to share some of these findings relating to men's violence against women and girls. We will share some of our survey findings followed by two anonymised case studies from women who have experienced abuse and shared their story for our supplementary report.

4.1.1 Key Quantitative Research Findings:

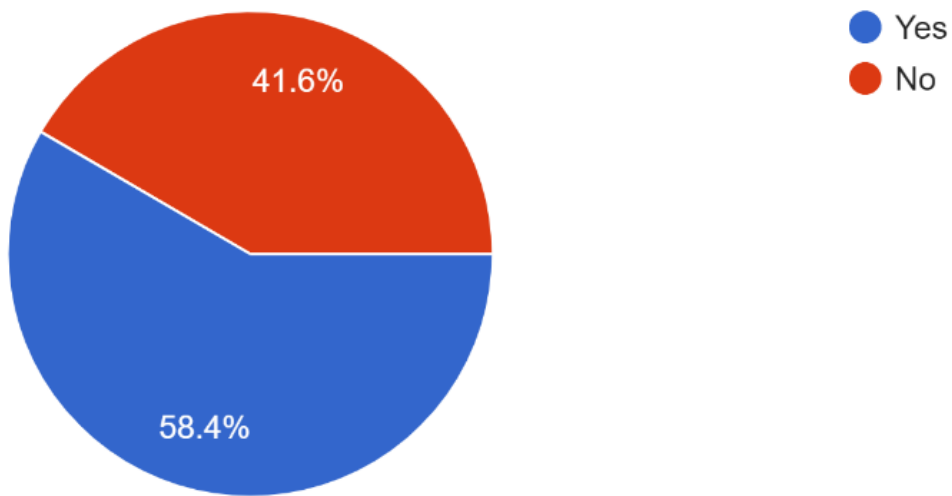
We asked 150+ women various qualitative and quantitative questions relating to violence against women and girls and below are the findings:

- Do you believe there is a problem of 'rape culture' in Northern Irish society?
What are your reasons for this?
 - Yes (56.7%) / Maybe (38.8%) / No (4.5%)



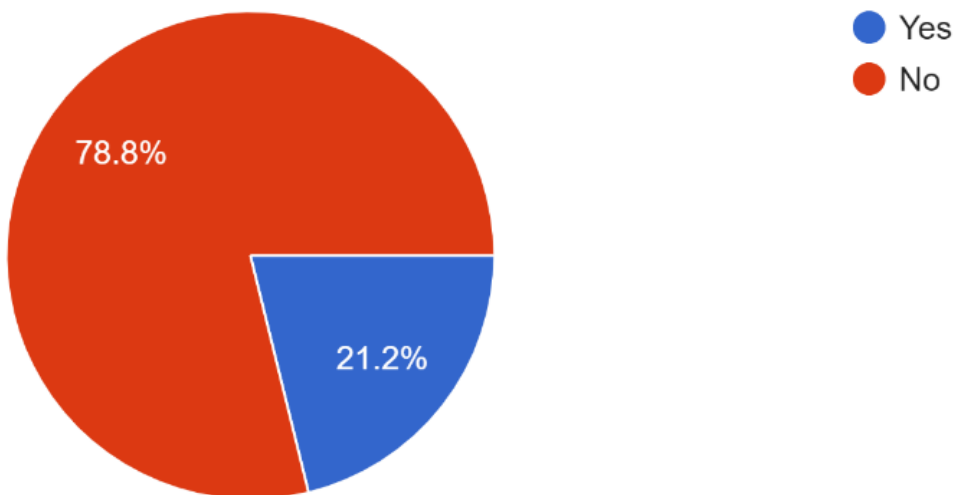
- Have you ever experienced domestic abuse, stalking, harassment, hate crime or assault? Could you please tell us about this experience?

- Yes (58.4%) / No (41.6%)



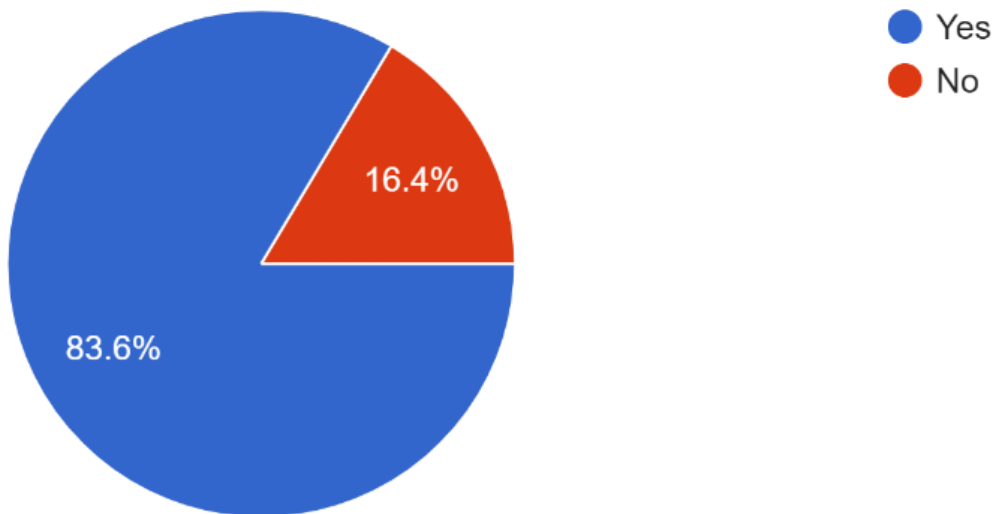
- Have you ever been targeted by online abuse? If so, in what way and how did this impact your personal wellbeing?

- Yes (21.2%) / No (78.8%)

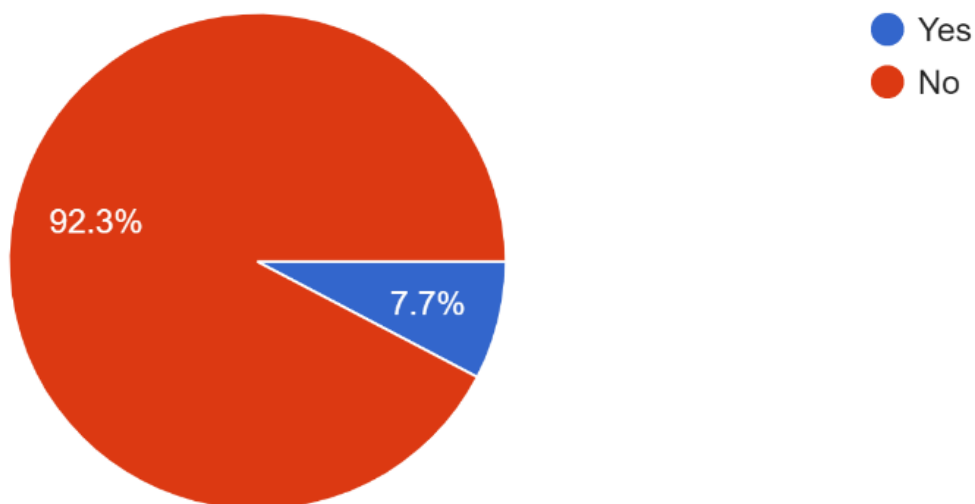


- Did you attend school in Northern Ireland and if so, do you feel that you received an adequate Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)? Could you please explain your reasons for this?

- Attended school in NI: Yes (83.6%) / No (16.4%)

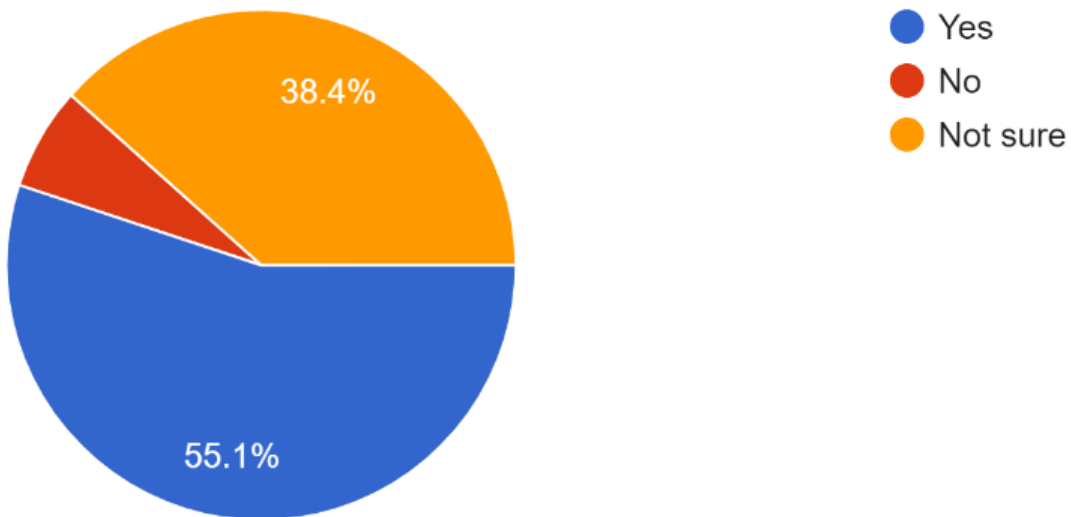


- Adequate RSE: Yes (7.7%) / No (92.3%)



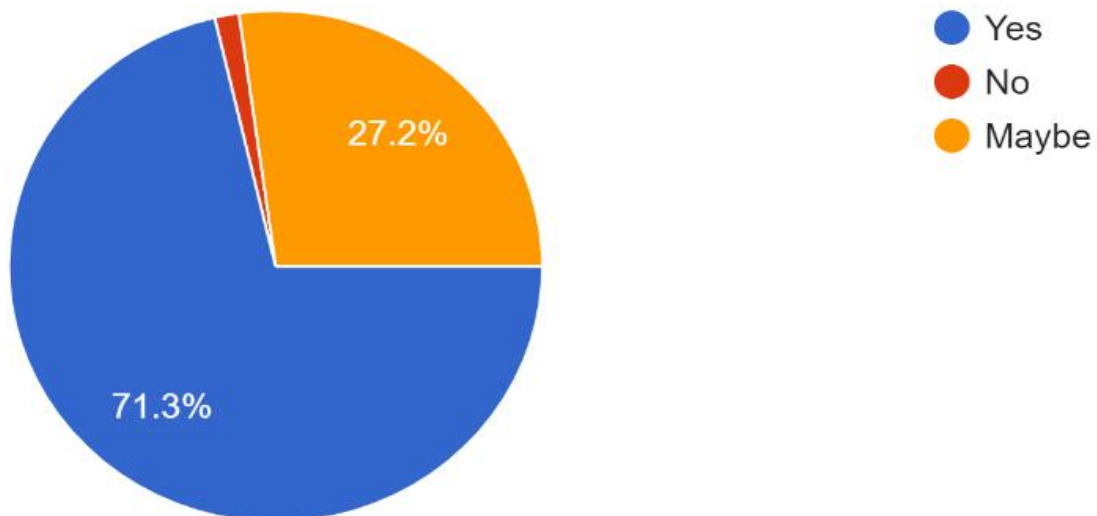
- Are you concerned about the impact of Brexit on women's rights in Northern Ireland? Could you please explain your reasons for this?

- Yes (55.1%)
- No (6.5%)
- Not sure (38.4%)



- Would you support the introduction of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland? Could you please explain your reasons for this?

- Yes (71.3%)
- No (1.5%)
- Maybe (27.2%)



4.2 WPG Feminist Recovery Plan Testimonials relating to Men's Violence Against Women and Girls in Northern Ireland:

4.2.1 Testimonies Relating to Violence Against Women and Girls

"I was physically assaulted more than once at home during lockdown. It felt like I had nowhere to go and was making too big of a deal over these incidents. Being isolated has made getting out of bad situations worse."

"Understanding of consent is low, permissiveness and 'boys will be boys' attitude remains, people don't even realise they are victim blaming when they do it and we have no RSE to undo the myths that our parents and peers pass on to us. I have personally been sexually assaulted as a younger woman and not reported because i didn't even recognise that it was sexual assault. I just passed it off as what happens in a club /bar / night out. It shocks me now that I and my friends all felt that way."

"There's an expectation that the way a woman dresses or behaves (especially when alcohol is involved) is an open invitation to sexual activity. Consent is a huge issue that needs more targeted interventions and awareness."

"There is a problem of rape culture anywhere patriarchy is normalized as the status quo such as street harassment, being molested by a friend who acted like it was no big deal, and several instances of being subtly blaming people like myself who are assaulted."

"We as a country indulge too much in lad culture which I believe is deeply entrenched in rape culture. Too often we excuse the "jokes" of cis men rather than calling them out for what they are."

"Just looking at the comments section on facebook when rape/abuse cases are reported."

"Because I honestly do not know any woman who has not been harassed, assaulted or raped."

"Toxic masculinity is rife in our community. Men/boys feel entitled to speak to women however they like or touch them without consent. I have personally received vile comments and been touched inappropriately by men in public."

"I believe we still very much blame women as a society, what was she doing / wearing/ what did she say / she wanted it."

“Saying that "boys will be boys" and that to stop sexual harassment, the women have to be taught differently, not the men, and experiences include cat calling, uncomfortable compliments from strangers, being cornered and touched by men I didn't know.”

“Men putting their hands on my waist to pass me at work (aged 16) catcalling (which disturbingly I have received less as my body matured).”

“We have a very outdated view on progressive social issues in Northern Ireland. I have experienced harassment, cat calling, groping, unwanted attention, unsolicited dick pics etc.”

“Women are still judged for their appearance and the blame culture is still there.”

“The blasé attitude towards sexual assault (eg groping) and the fact that women in this country have clearly been denied justice following sexual assault or rape.”

“It is not being spoken up enough. It has to be a constant thing, a normal thing and information needs to be shown and accessible in every school, doctors and situation. I as a person who is a woman feel unprotected, uncared for and that my rights and fights are only a thing to be talked about when something bad happens and I am very tired of it.”

“The Rugby Trial was frankly terrible as was the hell that young woman had to endure yet again after she so bravely brought the case. All that to let the rapists off Still sad that it turned out so badly. My child is old enough to understand the news and I tried to prevent her from hearing the details but it was a difficult responsibility. It's all too common and won't be the last case of abuse/violence/coercion to give no help or solace to the survivors of the abuse.”

“I’m terrified of going to clubs and pubs when they reopen without social distancing measures as I find the behaviour in NI society from men is appalling. There is no sense of consent and many feel they can just grab or harass you as they please.”

“The case of attacks in South Belfast was met with glee by groups of young men who took advantage of the heightened anxiety by further threatening women for their own amusement. Rather than stand in solidarity with women and girls they used this as an opportunity to harass.”

“The conflict here has also meant women and girls and their issues are not represented or championed by this country.”

“The stereotypical idea of the rapist as a sinister stranger down an alleyway is perpetuated here with men choosing to favour exceptionalism rather than accept any responsibility for their behaviour and how it, in fact, can often be construed as damaging to women. Too many experiences to detail (street harassment, issues of consent, online etc.).”

“My father was very cruel to my mother and us. He used Power and Control at every stage of his living with us. A man who I accepted a lift with tried to murder me. I was in my twenties and still bear the scars mentally He was never caught.”

“In my early 30’s I had a breakdown and lived in a women's aid refuge for over 1 year.”

“The domestic abuse continued harassment through court regarding child and online abuse orchestrated by my ex and his new partner have had the single most negative impact on my mental and physical wellbeing in my whole life. In my experience the PSNI, women's aid etc are excellent, courts are archaic and about 100 years behind in dealing with these things.”

- Testimonies from WPG Primary Research

4.2.2 Testimonies Relating to Hate Crime, Misogyny and Online Abuse

"The fear I experience as a woman on Belfast streets is acute, particularly on dark nights. During the knife attacks on women in late 2020, I had to be accompanied by a male friend at all times when walking around Belfast in order to feel safe."

"When I was on my student placement at university, I was sexually harassed by a colleague 13 years older than me. It got to a point where I was receiving multiple emails and texts and messages on all social media platforms, all inappropriate. I reported it to HR and their investigation blamed me and said I could move desks if I didn't want to sit near him but I had to still work in the same team. Despite me saying I was afraid for my safety and he knew my address. I quit the job. I almost dropped out of university."

"There is constant harassment while you walk around Belfast, doing it in broad daylight with others watching, it's disgusting."

"Yes, I experienced regular domestic abuse in my previous marriage, including violence and coercive control. Many people are not aware of that and frankly would be surprised were they made aware of it. Stereotyping those who experience domestic violence is unhelpful in that it's misleading. There are many women (and I am sure men) who have had lived experience but have never discussed or shared it even after leaving a relationship."

"I've had strange men online access my personal contact details and send me threatening and abusive emails/DMs/text messages. I posted a few items to sell on Gumtree and received awful sexual harassment by phone and text. The PSNI said I shouldn't have posted my number online. I received so much abuse on Twitter from men that I've made my account private."

"I have had misogynistic abuse. After speaking outside against the misogyny of PSNI on Twitter I got about 100 abusive messages some threatening me with rape and death. This made me feel very unsafe and drastically impacted my mental health where I felt depressed and anxious."

"[online abuse] About my physical appearance and death threats. I didn't go outside for months after."

"I have been trolled online which has had a huge impact on my mental health. I need to have a social media presence due to my job role but some see that as a license to attack me online for what I have/haven't done. It can be relentless and

very hard to switch off from. It affects my mood and that of my family. It has also led me to increase my alcohol consumption as a way to take my mind of it which isn't healthy."

"I have had people tell me to die for my pro-choice and leftist stances and make threatening comments in reference to my sexual orientation."

"[I was] sent messages saying I should die/kill myself because I'm not straight or cisgender, saying I should be raped to make me "realize I'm actually straight", being told I'm disgusted and an embarrassment to my family."

- Testimonies from WPG Primary Research

4.2.3 Testimonies Relating to Education and Training to Prevent Men's Violence Against Women and Girls:

"No support given to principals of schools from any statutory body. It has been a very lonely year."

"I think there is lack of sex education in schools and this creates a range of problems. There is limited knowledge and understanding of what consent means and boys grow up thinking it's ok to disrespect women - leading to other forms of abuse. More broadly, jokes about rape and a lack of societal understanding / perceptions create problems and victims may not want to speak out due to these attitudes. Stronger policies are needed to ensure victims are protected and are supported in sharing their experiences."

"Lack of education, morals and responsibility placed wrongfully on women and young girls. Stereotyping how we should dress and be seen."

"Staggering lack of understanding surrounding consent among both men and women, particularly in student cohorts."

"Lack of sex education in schools meaning children are learning through porn. Furthermore, religion still having an impact on people's lives and believing sex before marriage is not allowed etc which leads to lack of understanding. Personally, been subject to comments, looks and assault."

"There is no education on what a healthy relationship looks like, people don't get RSE. If you read the comments on any article on a rape trial there will be comments that the woman is lying, if a man has killed his partner there will be a list of his accolades in the coverage, frequently there are comments about high profile women's appearance both insulting and objectifying."

"I first experienced sexual harassment when I was 13 in my school uniform waiting for the bus home. I've experienced men's violence in the form of attempted rape and rape in my own home or a partner's home, assault and harassment in bars/clubs, sexualised comments and harassment while in work. I've lost count of the number of bars I avoid because bouncers won't believe my or other women's experience. I would never report a single incident, because the justice system/PSNI isn't built to support victims of male violence. I've had relationships with women too, but have never once had a woman violate me or do anything without my consent."

“One specific experience when I was at school but only recognised it for what it was in the last few years. Cornered by an older boy, held against wall, hand up my skirt trying to get in my knickers. Then the inappropriate everyday touching.”

“We had a scaremongering teacher that told us if we had sex before marriage we would get an STD and deserve it. I was petrified to access health clinics for years.”

“My RSE in school was wholly inadequate and perpetuates rape myths, was anti-choice and delivered by a Christian organisation who promoted abstinence. There was no discussion of consent, healthy relationships and boundaries, how to access contraception, power dynamics, pleasure and sexuality. I had already had consensual sex by the time we had RSE and I was out as bisexual, so after the lessons I felt dirty and ashamed. Nothing in those lessons prepared me or supported me to have healthy sexual relationships. It was a brainwashing session to satisfy the school governors!

“I am so disappointed that I did not receive RSE - this should be taught every year from first to final year. We need to support our young people and to help them understand the importance of RSE - what is right and wrong. The current provision / policy for RSE is failing our young people, especially those who have missed out on so much school over the past year. I worry that other subjects (e.g., maths/English) will take priority, when I believe that RSE is just as important.”

“I feel that we can pass all the domestic abuse laws, amend how the courts treat rape victims, that we like. But if we don't tackle the reason for the behaviours, toxic patriarchal views of men/women/ relationships, we are just using a toothpick to chip away at an iceberg.”

“My son had a brief RSE session in the Catholic school he attends and there was no mention of LGBTQ+ issues and the focus was very much on boy-girl relationships and did not provide sex education. I'm hoping that as it was a Primary School session these issues will be addressed in post-primary.”

“Comprehensive & standardised RSE should be introduced immediately and parents should not have the option to object”

“Never had any sex ed past the basic biology of the sperm and the egg, nothing covering different STDs ext. My only conversations at school on abortion where in GCSE RE as part of the debates of catholic teaching. The only lesson we were due to have was cancelled as one of the students was ill and threw up at the start of class so we never had the lesson.”

"Sex Ed and religion should be entirely separate. My sex education was primarily "if you have sex, you'll get an STD or get pregnant", rather than framing sex as an enjoyable experience between consenting adults. Education was also primarily on hetero relationships."

"We were allowed to have a talk from a group advocating celibacy despite being a liberal integrated school that supported LGBT students. It made very little sense. Additionally, in our class RSE did not cover anything helpful about relationships or having emotionally healthy sexual relationships - it was all about STDs, etc, and the teacher was as embarrassed as the students!"

"RSE should be mandatory, delivered in all schools and faith or other schools should not be exempted or allowed to teach this according to their own perceptions. Experts in this should set the curriculum for all schools."

"When we were in upper 6th, our school brought us to a "conference" at queens run by a pro-life group. It was entirely inappropriate and they offered no other RSE"

"As a teacher I feel it is not taken seriously enough. Too many people in N.I are afraid to tackle these subject and worry about parents reaction"

"As I went to a Catholic Grammar school, so the mean form of sex education taught was no sex, consent was briefly touched on, girls weren't taught how and that's it's okay to say no. Even in biology class, instead of teaching us properly about contraception or abortion, they pushed the rhythm method which they said wouldn't work until you are older and probably married anyway."

"It's unacceptable that young people are still kept in the dark and it is worse when there is a creationist/religious side to the teaching of it."

"It's not enough this needs to be increased, my sex education was, we were shown a mars bar and told it's just like your virginity once its gone it gone!"

"I have a teenage daughter and I believe that there is not enough knowledge to both male and female on the impact of domestic abuse, or the signs as such of it, bar the obvious of physical abuse, I believe that if I had been educated on this, and or aware of the signs or gateways of support agencies or any other form of guidance and help, perhaps I may have seen it sooner and left."

"It is not fit for purpose, even for straight people. I went to a grammar school and it was not adequate education on this topic"

“an absolute lack of any provision of RSE - we were told we were family makers and we needed to ensure our husbands were happy and our children clean and well behaved”

“I went to a catholic grammar school and we were told nothing, I have only recently learnt how my periods actually worked. We were told that we are always fertile and to never have sex.”

“It was as if queer people didn't exist. I'm trying to learn on my own now at 23 as I've put off sexual experiences for the most part and now feel very scared about my lack of knowledge.”

“With children knowing about sex earlier we need to talk to them earlier. Good relationships skills need to be taught and its ok to say no and that no means no pressure.”

- Testimonies from WPG Primary Research

4.3 WPG Feminist Recovery Plan Relaunch One Year On: Supplementary Report - Putting Women's Voices at the Core - Anonymous Case Studies:

4.3.1 Case Study Anna: Racism, Hate Crime & Honour-based/ Domestic Abuse

Trigger warning: Mention of abuse and suicide

Anna is an ethnic minority woman who moved to Northern Ireland in 2008 with her family. She is a single parent with three children. Since they arrived in Northern Ireland, Anna and her children have experienced multiple instances of racism and hate crime. Despite experiencing racism while living in other countries, Anna said she had “never faced anything like what I have in Northern Ireland.”

Two months after arriving in Northern Ireland, Anna and her two young children were stoned by a group of teenagers while out walking near their home. As a result, Anna and her children were left traumatised and fearful of leaving the house. In response, the police gave the attackers an informed warning and asked them to send Anna a letter of apology, but no criminal charges were brought. Despite being victim to numerous instances of hate crime since this event in 2008, after seeing how this incident was handled, Anna never reported another hate crime to the police.

Anna has also been subject to racist verbal attacks. For example, while out driving with her children, she was shouted at by a man in a neighbouring car who told her to “go home.” Anna’s children have also been subject to racism in the form of bullying at school and physical attacks. At four years old, Anna’s son told her that he wanted to wash his hands to make them whiter, as a result of the racism he had been exposed to. Anna fears for the safety of her children and has instructed each of her children to attend self-defence classes, as a necessary precaution.

At university, Anna described how other students would not sit with her or speak to her, leaving her feeling isolated and excluded. As a result, Anna described how she cried every day during the first three months of her degree. Anna found that there was an extreme lack of cultural sensitivity in her university classes, with one lecturer telling an auditorium of two hundred students that the Muslim headscarf was a symbol of religious oppression and control, while Anna sat in the audience being the only student in the room wearing a headscarf. Anna has also experienced long-term racial harassment in her workplace which has affected both her personal and professional life. This has manifested in the form of a series of microaggressions, spanning two years. These have included comments from co-workers such as: “how

can an educated woman like you still believe such a thing [Islam]?” and “Are you sure you’re meant to be wearing your scarf like that?”

Anna has also experienced racial profiling while attempting to access health services. During a visit to A&E, Anna was questioned about her immigration status and treated with suspicion by health professionals on the basis of her race. This involved a doctor asking her questions about how long she had been in the country and who she lived with. As someone who now works for the health service, Anna explained how: “people have gone from clapping me... to being race profiled.” This is evidence of the hostile environment which exists for people from ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. In this environment, Anna explained how: “You end up having all of these people, whether it's doctors, bankers or whoever it is, acting as police officers...policing people.”

Anna is also a victim of domestic abuse and honour-based abuse, which has had a severe impact on her physical and mental health. Anna described feeling extremely isolated during this time, being unsure of who she could turn to for help. The abuse was so severe that at one point Anna considered committing suicide. She said: “As an ethnic minority woman, I never knew of the support that was out there.” This abuse has spanned more than a decade and, despite Anna leaving her husband in 2016, harassment from her ex-husband is ongoing. Anna’s ex-husband has made a number of threats to her life, which the police are aware of but who have not taken meaningful action to mitigate against this risk. In her words: “If he does follow through with his threat of actually killing me, people will look back and do a review on my case, they will literally see how many of these agencies and organisations have failed me.”

Since 2009, Anna has made numerous attempts to seek help from police, social workers and domestic abuse charities in Northern Ireland. However, these attempts have largely been futile. Anna identified the lack of cultural competency in public services as a key obstacle in providing support to women from ethnic minorities who are victims of abuse. Honour-based abuse has an important cultural dimension, as it is often about protecting certain ideals or values associated with a particular culture or faith. However, Anna felt that police officers and social workers did not understand this, limiting their ability to support her and her children. When Anna finally escaped her abusive relationship, she and her children required specialised and culturally sensitive psychological support to work through this trauma, but she could find no such support in Northern Ireland. It was not until she found a specialist counsellor in England that Anna felt she could start to “rebuild” her life.

4.3.2 Case Study Lisa: Spiritual Abuse & Honour-based/ Domestic Abuse

Trigger warning: Mention of abuse and suicide

Lisa grew up in a religious conservative Christian community in Northern Ireland and was married at the age of twenty. Her Church followed the doctrine of headship, which asserts that men should occupy positions of leadership within the Church and family and that women should be their submissive subjects.

Lisa's husband was physically, psychologically, financially and spiritually abusive towards her, with their marriage being characterised by high levels of coercive control. Her husband controlled the couple's finances and would take and spend all of their money as soon as it was received. This meant that Lisa had no money of her own to buy food or other necessities. Lisa described being extremely hungry, walking the streets, hoping to find a pound coin on the pavement that she could use to buy some food. Lisa initially did not tell anyone about the abuse, due to the fear of being shamed by her community and bringing shame upon her family. Lisa's husband used this threat of shame to keep her silent; thereby allowing him to maintain control over her and keep her in the abusive relationship. In Lisa's words, the abuse was so severe and she felt so isolated that: "The only way I could see out was if he died or I died. I used to fantasise about just driving into a wall."

When the Church elders found out about the abuse, they called Lisa for a meeting and questioned her about what she had done to encourage her husband to be violent; pressuring her to go back to him and show him forgiveness. When Lisa made it clear that she would not stay with him, the Church elders told her that she could no longer remain in the Church as a full member and could never re-marry because, in their eyes, she was a "sinner." The Church also made efforts to excommunicate her parents from the Church for allowing her to live with them after she left her husband. Lisa internalised this shame and guilt to a large extent. She said: "I hated myself so much 'cause I brought shame on my family, I brought shame on myself. I was, as far as I was concerned, at that time, damaged goods." To an extent, this shame has stayed with Lisa throughout her life.

The spiritual abuse Lisa suffered, within her marriage and the wider religious community, impacted heavily on her self-esteem. From a young age, she had been taught that as a female, she was to put God first, others second, and herself last. This meant that, when Lisa became a victim of domestic abuse, she felt that she should keep her experiences to herself and simply pray for strength to accept her situation. Lisa felt that there is a considerable lack of awareness in Northern Ireland about spiritual or honour-based abuse, which many people assume exists only in minority

faiths and religions. However, spiritual or honour-based abuse can exist within any religious community, including Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland.

Lisa converted to Islam after divorcing her husband, which has given Lisa a greater sense of autonomy and has allowed her to practice her faith in a more individualised way. However, Lisa has faced widespread criticism from family, friends and her community for deciding to convert. She has been called a “race traitor” and “blinded by the devil,” for rejecting her background and bringing shame on her community. Lisa recounted experiences of Church leaders showing up at her mosque and accusing members of the Muslim community of “stealing Christian women and forcing them to convert to Islam.”

In addition, people from her previous Church called her stupid and accused her of being possessed by demons. To this day, Lisa has family members who will not speak to her because of her divorce and because she converted to Islam. Wearing her headscarf in public has also caused Lisa to become subject to discrimination and criticism. She has found that, because Islam is a minority faith in Northern Ireland, people assume that she isn't from Northern Ireland when they see her headscarf and say things to her like “speak English.” As Lisa explained: “When you're a Muslim in Northern Ireland, you're an ‘other.’”

Going forward, Lisa emphasised the need to reform divorce laws in Northern Ireland which make it difficult for women to leave abusive marriages and can re-traumatise women in the process. In religious communities where there are already high levels of spiritual abuse, this process can increase the shame and guilt women feel when attempting to leave abusive relationships. Specifically, Lisa advised the introduction of no-fault divorce, which is legal in England, and to end the two-year wait for applying for a divorce. In Lisa's words: “We have men and women in power who think divorce is so bad that we have to put all these hurdles in the way to stop people leaving, but all it does is put hurdles in the way of people who need to be safe.”

4.4 Primary Research - Protection from Stalking Bill WPG Research - Summary of Research and Key Findings

4.4.1 Overview of Primary Research on Stalking:

Given the prevalence and seriousness of stalking in our society, and the lack of Northern Ireland specific data on stalking, we decided it would be appropriate to conduct primary research to support this evidence submission and to ensure that the voices of victims are central to the development of a robust Protection from Stalking Bill.

The members of this joint submission put out a call for evidence on 30th March 2021 via the Raise Your Voice website. We created an online survey asking people who had been the victims of stalking to submit information on their experiences anonymously and gather their opinions on how victims could be better protected. This call for evidence was then shared widely with organisations across the women's and LGBTQI+ sectors and through our own organisational membership. We closed this call for evidence on Tuesday 13th April at 10am.

We will now give an overview of the research itself, the responses, key demographics of respondents and key themes. In addition, we will be using anonymous quotes from this research throughout this entire response.

Details of the content of this call for evidence and the questions asked are available below:

RAISE YOUR VOICE, AS A MEMBER OF THE WOMEN'S POLICY GROUP, IS DEVELOPING AN EVIDENCE SUBMISSION TO THE JUSTICE COMMITTEE ON THE PROTECTION FROM STALKING BILL CURRENTLY MAKING ITS WAY THROUGH THE NI ASSEMBLY.

We want to ensure that the lived experiences of women who have been the victims of stalking shapes this legislation so that it is as robust and enforceable as possible. We are seeking your views on your experiences of stalking to shape our evidence submission and influence this Bill. Northern Ireland is currently the only part of the UK without proper stalking legislation, and we believe that this needs to urgently change as this is an issue that has impacted so many women.

All views and experiences shared will be completely anonymous and if you would like, we can keep you up to date with how your experiences

of stalking shaped our evidence submission and any developments with this bill. Please share your experiences by answering the following questions.

All responses are needed by **Tuesday 13th April at 10am** to ensure we have the time to reflect these experiences appropriately in our written evidence submission. If you have been affected please see our signposting page

www.raiseyourvoice.community/helpadvice

4.4.2 The questions we asked people to answer:

We included a range of both qualitative and qualitative questions for respondents to answer anonymously. This included the following questions:

1. Are you (please click all that apply) LGBTQ+; Disabled; Black or Ethnic Minority Community; Female; Male; Non-binary; Trans Woman; Trans Man; Prefer not to say?
2. How many times have you been a victim of stalking?
3. Was your stalker known to you?
4. If you wish to, please detail your stalking experience(s)
5. Did you report any stalking incident you experienced?
6. If you reported this, who did you report it to (for example, police, employer, teacher etc.)?
7. If you reported it, was the response helpful? Can you tell us why?
8. Are you aware of "Clare's Law" or the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme?
9. If so, was this useful to you or your care? Please tell us how or why?
10. Did the stalking happen online, in real life or both?
11. How did the stalking end? Please describe anything you wish to tell us?
12. What would have made you feel safer?
13. What do you think would stop someone from harassing or stalking?
14. If you wish, please tell us the impact that stalking has had on you?

Given the challenging nature of the questions at hand, no questions were compulsory and we provided signposting to support service providers for those who had been affected by the issue and required support⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ For more information on the services signposted by Raise Your Voice, please visit: <https://www.raiseyourvoice.community/helpadvice>

4.4.3 Results of Survey Questions and Key Findings:

We received a total of 38 responses to this online survey. All evidence submitted by victims of stalking was completely anonymous and no identifying details will be shared in this submission. We did give respondents the option to disclose their demographics to help inform our submission through providing us with an understanding on how intersectional factors may impact victims.

In response to Q.1 on the demographics of respondents, results found that:

- 35 identified as female (92.11%),
- Two as male (5.26%) and,
- One non-binary (2.63%).
- Seven respondents also identified as LGBTQ+ (18.42%),
- Nine as disabled (21.05%) and,
- One as being Black or from an ethnic minority community (2.63%).

This was an open call for evidence, and we received responses from people with a range of intersectional identities. The prevalence of stalking towards women, the LGBTQ+ community and disabled women identified is particularly concerning. We received two responses from people who did not identify as female, with one male respondent having been stalked by a female ex-partner, and the other male and non-binary respondent having been stalked by both men and women in the past. Therefore, 97.4% of the cases disclosed to us involved male perpetrators and 5.26% of cases disclosed involved a female perpetrator.

Q.2 When asked: “How many times have you been a victim of stalking?”,

- 44.7% of respondents said Once
- 13.2% of respondents said Twice
- 21.1% of respondents said Up to 5 times
- 21.1% of respondents said Up to 10 times

Of these responses, the majority of respondents referred to how many people had stalked them, rather than the number of incidents of stalking each victim faced. This is explored more throughout the qualitative responses provided. Crucially, 55.4% of respondents were the victims of being stalked more than once, highlighting the prevalence of the issue. The fact that people can fall victim to this crime more than once in their lives may be indicative of the fact that, once people recognise it for what it is, they will recognise it for what it is should it happen again.

Q.3 When asked: “Was your stalker known to you?”,

- 71.1% of respondents said - Yes, well
- 13.2% of respondents said - Yes, an acquaintance
- 0% of respondents said - Yes, only online
- 21.1% of respondents said - Not at all

This is of great significance, as there are often myths that stalking only happens to famous people, or that it is done by some “random stranger”. Stalkers, more often than not, target somebody that they know; either an ex-partner, classmate, colleague and so on. We found that 84.3% of our respondents were stalked by someone they knew, compared to 21.1% who did not know their stalker at all.

Those who knew their stalker well generally had been in a previous relationship with them, often one which ended because of abuse. Many of the others had an acquaintance with the perpetrator through school, university, work or socialising, and often described being pursued for a romantic relationship in which they were not interested. This was the motivation in most of the cases where the person did not know the stalker, also.

Q.4 When asked: *If you wish to, please detail your stalking experience(s)*

In response to this question, the vast majority of respondents disclosed their relationship to their stalker(s). Throughout these responses, 79% of respondents identified their stalker as either an ex-partner or someone they had previously dated. A further 23.7% referenced being stalked by an acquaintance or a “friend of a friend” and 10.5% also referenced being stalked at school, or by someone they knew from school several years previously. 18.4% of respondents also referenced being stalked by a stranger or random person; 2.6% referenced being stalked by an employer and 2.6% referenced being stalked by a colleague.

In addition to this, 52.6% of respondents referenced being stalked at their home; 31.6% being stalked at their workplace; and 10.5% referenced being stalked at school or university. A worrying 47.4% of respondents referenced being physically followed by their stalker, with 23.7% being followed by a car. Several respondents also experienced unwanted phone calls, texts and emails (47.4%); online harassment (21.1%) and unwanted gifts (7.9%). Worryingly, 10.5% of respondents also mentioned concerns over the unstable mental health of their stalkers, with references to ex partners threatening suicide also.

The most universal theme in these experiences was the reported serious long term impacts on survivors. 100% of respondents listed long term impacts on their mental health because of their experiences, from those cases where the harassment was ongoing to those where it had ended decades before. Three respondents specifically

mentioned living with PTSD as a result. Some feared for their physical safety, others suffered damage to their career.

Other key themes include:

- The coexistence of in-person and digital stalking
- The prevalence of individuals experiencing stalking by more than one perpetrator
- The rise of Image Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA) also known as “revenge porn”
- The connection between perpetrators perceived “sense of entitlement” and their behaviour, and how gaps in the law enable this
- Confusion over how best to deal with the issue
- A wide variety of responses from institutions including the police, justice system, educational establishments and workplaces

Q.5 When asked: *Did you report any stalking incident you experienced?*

- 52.63% of respondents said - Yes
- 47.37% of respondents said - No

Q.6 When asked: *If you reported this, who did you report it to (for example, police, employer, teacher etc.)?*

Out of the respondents that did report the stalking:

- 42.1% reported it to the PSNI,
- 7.89% reported this to their friends, family or neighbours,
- 7.89% reported to their employers
- 5.26% of respondents referenced reporting it and receiving support from Women’s Aid,
- 5.26% reported it to their GP,
- 5.26% reported it to a solicitor,
- 2.63% reported it to their university and,
- 2.63% went as far as reporting it to the perpetrators’ family.

Some of the other key themes that emerged in response to this question included:

- Reports to agencies coming quite late into the pattern of behaviour, because of a mixture of fear of disbelief, embarrassment, a hope it would “all go away”, and taking some time to realise what was happening
- Employers putting practical supports in place at a higher rate than Universities or Schools
- Family members being forced to provide practical help where police did not

- Reports happening only when necessity has forced them

"1st time I spoke with a family member

2nd time I was too embarrassed to tell anyone" - RYV Respondent

"The police. They did drive by past my house for a couple of days. They did not speak to my ex or ask him to stop." - RYV Respondent

"Yes I had conversations with the police several times. Told my employer as well as they would often turn up at the shop I worked at - therefore if I seen him I could ring a bell for someone to come so I could leave his company" - RYV Respondent

"I didn't think it would be taken seriously at the time." - RYV Respondent

Q.7 When asked: *If you reported it, was the response helpful? Can you tell us why?*

Out of those who did report their experiences of stalking:

- 61.9% said that this was not helpful,
- 28.6% said that it was helpful,
- 9.5% said it was sometimes helpful, or eventually helpful

Some of the key themes that emerged included:

- Fear of being disbelieved leading to non-reporting
- Mixed experience with police, depending on the individual Officer
- Police "hands tied" with regard to enforcement
- Repeated breaches of orders such as NMOs

Another recurring theme was the response from police or the justice system more broadly. Views reflected a feeling that police responses were varied and seemed to depend on the officer. Some who reported speaking to helpful officers were then underwhelmed by the actual powers the police had to make this stop - very often repeated calls were helpful before the person was spoken to and asked to desist. Further, survivors struggled with the overall lack of sufficient laws and enforcement throughout their interactions with the justice system.

The experience with the justice system beyond the police were also mixed. While many reported that it was a court order that finally stopped the stalking, others had difficulty obtaining a barring order or NMO. Others found that such orders were routinely ignored anyway, with little done to enforce them or to follow up on breaches.

Q.8 When asked: Are you aware of “Clare’s Law” or the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme?

- 52.63% of respondents said - Yes
- 47.37% of respondents said - No

Q.9 When asked: If so, was this useful to you or your care? Please tell us how or why?

- 0% of respondents said it was useful
- 100% of respondents said it was not useful

We asked respondents of their knowledge of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, and if they knew about it whether it was useful in their case. While some cases were not applicable because they took place before the Scheme was in place, we found that almost half of respondents (47.37%) did not know about it at all, while those who did (52.63%) did not find it to be helpful to their case. This is both an indictment of public awareness on this Scheme and where it applies, and also an indication that it is not working effectively at the moment and needs urgent improvement.

“I hear of Clare law an takes too long time to find answer for a person background” - RYV Respondent

“Police had no information on Claire’s law and failed to get back to me useless i new more than the officer” - RYV Respondent

“No this was not useful as I was unable to get disclosure of his past records once he had moved out of the apartment, the police just kept telling me that he was a dangerous man and known to police and to be careful. I have since found out I wasn’t his first victim” - RYV Respondent

Q.10 When asked: Did the stalking happen online, in real life or both:

- 5.26% of respondents said - Online
- 39.47% of respondents said - In real life
- 57.89% of respondents said - Both

Q.11 When asked: *How did the stalking end? Please describe anything you wish to tell us?, the key themes and reasons that emerged included:*

- Perpetrators tended to be creative and endlessly persistent in their stalking, and digital stalking allowed them that flexibility
- The majority of respondents experienced both forms of stalking - this is an indicator again of the persistence of stalkers
- The access that is afforded to people's locations via social media platforms and options like geotagging allow perpetrators to blur the line between real life and digital stalking, using their digital stalking to plan their in person stalking
- Image Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA) also illustrates this blurring; having or gaining access to intimate images of the victim makes them vulnerable to very real life consequences through deliberate sharing designed to control and humiliate the victim which are in perpetuity
- Perpetrators are acutely aware of how lacking legislation is in this area and use this to control their victims and increase their sense of vulnerability

"I would get 100s of messages, phone calls, on every platform. I would block, and he would harass me on his friends socials. I kissed him when I was like 14 at a disco. That was all. Now when I didn't answer my phone they would land up to my house and bang my door and windows. He would ring me off random numbers and send me text message which I would reply to saying who is this? Not knowing who it was. On nights out the bouncers would shout out my name because 'my brother' or my 'boyfriend' was lifting me and was outside. I told the bouncers that I didn't have a boyfriend, never mind a brother. However, they presumed i was drunk and was trying to send me on. I don't know how they knew I was there or where I was. Also, when I was on a family holiday half way across the world. They also followed me there, I did not reply to any of their messages thinking surely not? I put up a boomerang on Instagram of the bar I was at, and approx 15 mins later they land in. Pretty scary when I see him" - RYV Respondent

Q.12 When asked: *What would have made you feel safer?, the key themes that emerged included:*

- Being taken seriously by the police
- Aftercare and information from the police
- Knowing the law would be sufficient to stop the experience
- Better mediation/counselling services when families break down
- Education / training / awareness to prevent this from happening

“Being able to report it without being made to feel like it was pointless and silly by the police.” - RYV Respondent

“For my feelings to have been validated and for someone to advocate for me.” - RYV Respondent

“That people understand the meaning of No. Not interested.” - RYV Respondent

Q.13 When asked: What do you think would stop someone from harassing or stalking?, the key themes that emerged included:

- Entitlement and a refusal to accept rejection or the end of a relationship came up a lot
- Many believe education needs to be central in this to dismantle this entitlement
- More robust police responses and training so that they know how to do this
- More robust court actions and Orders that are powerful enough to deter
- Mental health support for perpetrators and victims
- Practical information eg on registering to vote without making your address public
- Better information for employers, security staff, organisations, the general public, etc about how they can protect others from stalking or intervene

“I wish I knew this answer. My stalker sent messages on my wedding day to friends of mine saying I was getting married to ruin his life. It is terrifying the twisted way people think. And I can’t rationalise this. If the law was well known it would maybe have an effect.” - RYV Respondent

“The stalking bill is great as a deterrent but I think overall it’s a societal issue whereby some people just ignore boundaries and can’t take no for an answer.” - RYV Respondent.

“Better access to reporting and blocking; an interventionist scheme to stop them doing what they’re doing” - RYV Respondent.

Q.14 When asked: If you wish, please tell us the impact that stalking has had on you?, the key themes included:

- 100% of respondents reported long-term impacts on their mental health
- Many characterised the impact as a “loss of freedom” and “living in fear”
- Respondents reported leaving their workplace, moving from the city they lived in, dropping out of university, ceasing all social media use and changing email and phone numbers to try to stop the abuse

- Many respondents reported a long term effect on their job prospects, educational opportunities, etc
- Many reported a wariness around strangers, a reluctance to be friendly, a fear of trusting others, some expressed a fear of ever beginning another relationship

“My stalking took place well over twenty years ago and I still cannot sleep at night because that's when my ex husband always came to my home. I stayed up all night every night to make sure my two kids slept safe in their beds. I used to go to bed while they were at school and get up before they came home. To this day I cannot sleep at night even though I take sleeping tablets.” - RYV Respondent

“I am constantly looking over my shoulder and feel I am being watched. I am scared to go anywhere not public. I am anxious, stressed and scared. I'm not sure what will happen next. I feel like moving away and telling nobody due to fear. I am exhausted living in a state of fear” - RYV Respondent

“I had nightmares for years. I'm still terrified of posting on social media. I stopped going to gigs for years. Yet he went on to become a paediatric doctor.” - RYV Respondent

This is a brief overview of the findings from our call for evidence. The experiences of these victims goes far beyond these statistics or themes that emerged. We will be including anonymous quotes from respondents throughout the remainder of this evidence submission, and hope that the Justice Committee can gain a further understanding of the seriousness of stalking, the harm it causes to victims, the gendered nature of this form of abuse, the various types of stalking behaviours, the connection it has to domestic abuse, and crucially, the need to incorporate preventative measure into this Bill.

5. Relevant Data, Evidence and Recommendations from the WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan - Cultural Pillar:

The WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan: One Year On cultural pillar addresses a wide range of issues relating to men's violence against women and girls alongside primary research, evidence and policy recommendations to address this systemic problem. We would like to take the opportunity to highlight this information now:

5.1 Women and Girls in the Media, Rape Culture and Violence Against Women

5.1.1 Sexism and the Portrayal of Women and Girls in the Media

Sexism and the portrayal of women and girls in the media remains a serious issue.

Although it is most visibly focused on women in public life, it impacts not just those women, but women and girls who are exposed to it. Research by Girlguiding UK shows that the single biggest reason listed by girls aged 11-16 that they are put off entering public life is because “women leaders are criticised more than male leaders”, with the third largest percentage saying that “there is too much focus on how they look and not on what they do”⁴⁸. This demonstrates clearly the impact that this kind of media coverage has; while the women directly named may have developed a “thick skin”, the young women looking on will often exclude themselves for careers they would otherwise choose because of this scrutiny.

The same research from Girlguiding UK reports that young women are negatively influenced by advertising, in both traditional media and social media, that promotes certain beauty standards and encourages the use of cosmetic surgery, extremely restrictive dieting and similar methods including medically unsafe detox and diet products. With eating disorders on the rise⁴⁹ and the damage that they can do is known to medical professionals, this is something that needs to be strictly regulated.

Further, media can be especially critical when considering the intersectional identities that people have, with trans women and women of colour particularly impacted by intense media scrutiny. In recent years trans people - women and children in particular - have been the subject of a kind of “moral panic”, particularly in the UK media. Some of the media rhetoric has focused on the supposed danger that these people pose to women and girls. There is an urgent need to address the manner in which these topics are addressed in the media, with a focus on counteracting the

⁴⁸ Girlguiding, (2019), 'Girls attitudes survey', (available online): <https://bit.ly/3gWCdys>

⁴⁹ Guardian (2019), 'Hospital admissions for Eating Disorders Surge to Highest in 8 years', <https://bit.ly/3j1D8jU>

disproportionate focus on the alleged risks and dangers of the right of trans individuals to self-identify. The issue would benefit from the elevation of trans voices and a tighter control of the manner in which these topics are discussed, particularly given the relative vulnerability of the minority to which it refers. There are health implications for this, too, covered in section 2.7 of this document.

In addition to this, there are serious issues with the way the media report on sexual offences and on domestic abuse, violence and homicide. Many headlines, in particular, mislead the reader and can reinforce myths around sexual and intimate partner violence. There have been some successful strides made in persuading media outlets to accept that guidelines are needed in the reporting of domestic abuse and especially domestic homicide. Level Up campaigned to have guidelines accepted to prevent further trauma to victims and their families and to avoid sending the wrong message about the nature of intimate partner violence. While they were successful, there are still numerous instances of this occurring in the media and therefore, guidelines need to be enforced more stringently.

Their suggested guidelines on reporting domestic homicide⁵⁰ were as follows:

1. Accountability: Place responsibility solely on the killer, which means avoiding speculative “reasons” or “triggers”, or describing the murder as an uncharacteristic event. Homicides are usually underpinned by a longstanding sense of ownership, coercive control and possessive behaviours: they are not a random event.
2. Accuracy: Name the crime as domestic violence, instead of “tragedy” or “horror”, and include the National Domestic Violence Helpline at the end of the piece.
3. Dignity: Avoid sensationalising language, invasive or graphic details that compromise the dignity of the dead woman or her surviving family members.
4. Equality: Avoid insensitive or trivialising language or images
5. Images: Avoid using stock images that reinforce the myth that it’s only a physical crime.

5.1.2 Rape Myths and Rape Culture

Since the original Feminist Recovery Plan in July 2020, we are pleased to note that there have been some significant moves to enact the recommendations contained in the Gillen Review. Most notably the process has begun to provide legal counsel to complainants in sexual assault and rape cases, as per one of the Gillen

⁵⁰ Independent (April 2019), ‘Feminist Group wins Campaign to Change How Domestic Abuse is Reported’, <https://bit.ly/3h255Wb>

recommendations. This, like many of the changes recommended in the Gillen Review have the potential to be transformative for the experience of reporting rape or other serious sexual offences, and since the Review was commissioned by the state there is an imperative to act upon all of its recommendations as soon as possible, including those that require new legislation. **We urge action on this as soon as possible, and at least a timetable of the plans moving forward.**

One specific recommendation of the Gillen Review that will be vital for addressing this issue is a public awareness campaign, funded by the state, to tackle rape myths and to counter misinformation and confusion on the issue of consent, and we welcome the news that this campaign is in the design stages at present, but again we must stress the importance of true co-design. As more and more people come forward with complaints of sexual misconduct, it is apparent that we need this as urgently as ever.

Recent research by Victim Support highlights this, with their court observer's report underlining the prevailing rape myths that are heard in court rooms during trials dealing with serious sexual offences, concluding that "Rape myths were widely used during trial, especially during the defence's cross-examination of complainants, and these myths were rarely challenged effectively" and that "The treatment of complainants during trial is falling short of the dignity and respect they are entitled to. This was particularly the case regarding their treatment during cross-examination by the defence".⁵¹

Public awareness can also begin in formal educational institutions, specifically schools and third level organisations, and such a programme must deal with issues around consent and boundaries, in an age-appropriate manner, without fudging the issue. Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is, at present, dependent on individual schools who can choose who to invite to cover the topic and can do so in a way that does not deal with these issues directly, guided by their ethos. In addition, they are sometimes entirely heteronormative, not covering LGBTQ+ relationships at all, and therefore not providing the necessary skills to an especially vulnerable demographic. With the recent focus on issues like these, particularly evident in an Assembly debate in March 2021 following the murder of Sarah Everard in England and, shortly afterwards, the murder of two local women by a man known to them, there has been a renewed focus on the urgent need for appropriate RSE in schools. We renew calls for the **urgent introduction for standardised, mandatory and inclusive RSE in all schools.**

⁵¹ Victim Support (February 2021), 'Bearing Witness: Report of the Northern Ireland Court Observer Panel 2018-2019' <https://bit.ly/3gWmkbf>

With regards to rape myths, following the example of organisations that have successfully won agreement to standards of reporting around domestic abuse and death by suicide, Raise Your Voice has submitted evidence to IPSO and to IMPRESS on guidelines for the reporting of sexual violence. In it, they argue that there are many myths about rape and there will be more as society and technology evolve; all of this has been verified by Victim Support's original research, published in February 2021.

The real danger of rape myths is their persistence. The research shows how pernicious they can be, and research also shows that these myths pass down through generations, with college-aged men likely to espouse them when their father does, too⁵². A recent YouGov survey in the UK showed a similar trend among Britons, with a quarter of those 4,000 surveyed believing that marital rape does not exist⁵³ and many more expressing confusion regarding whether rape can occur where there is no (non-sexual) violence.

In the Gillen Review, one of his key recommendations with regards to tackling rape myths is Recommendation Number 18: "That the press and media should be party to a voluntary protocol governing how serious sexual offences are reported." This is especially true when reporting on rape myths⁵⁴. Gillen writes:

"Rape myths are a trial reality and can often form the basis of aggressive cross-examination and may attract the unreasonable thinking of jurors. Moreover, for all kinds of societal reasons, complainants often buy into these myths, blaming themselves. I regard them as potentially a major challenge to the concept of a fair trial."

If these myths are a barrier to a trial, when the jurors are in receipt of careful legal instruction, they are certainly a barrier to tackling sexual violence in society as a whole. We call on the **media and press to adhere to a protocol in the reporting of sexual offences**.

Raise Your Voice made the following recommendations to IPSO which the WPG endorse:

- Guidance must require reports to specify who they are quoting when quotations are used, particularly when they are quoting defence teams' characterisation of a complainant or complainant's behaviour.

⁵² Jessica Turnchik (2011), 'Rape Myths', <https://bit.ly/3xJJ7Om>

⁵³ The Week (2018), 'When Did Marital Rape Become a Crime?', <https://bit.ly/3j8f9zl>

⁵⁴ Gillen Review Report (2019): <https://bit.ly/3gWmSON>

- Guidance should encourage fact-based headlines, because merely using quotation marks around words does not necessarily convey to the reader that this is a person's opinion or a defence's argument.
- Guidance that encourages the centring of victims, particularly after a guilty verdict, as opposed to centring the wasted potential or the tribulations of the convicted sex offender.
- Guidelines requiring the clear identification of rape myths as rape myths, for example when a defence lawyer says, "why didn't she shout or fight", a responsible publication will follow that reporting with the proviso that in fact that most rape victims do not shout or fight.
- The detailed reporting of the very few cases where somebody has been falsely accused of rape or sexual assault should always be balanced by accounting for how rare these cases actually are. Failure to do so fuels a dangerous and common myth that these kinds of false accusations are common.
- Endeavour to make clear the difference between a failure to prosecute or a failure to convict and a proven false accusation.
- In the case of online content, publications should actively and adequately monitor comments or close comment sections entirely. Publications have a responsibility with regards to the spreading of misinformation and the potential damage to the public as well as to the complainant in any given case.
- When reporting on sexual crimes and especially serious sexual crimes, helplines and helpful websites for victims and survivors should be included at the end of the piece.

Further WPG recommendations to tackle rape culture include:

- Beginning a public awareness campaign as soon as possible and ensuring that funds are identified and ring fenced in order to make sure that this happens without delay.
- In the interim a timetable for implementing the Gillen Review recommendations must be published.
- We also recommend that a comprehensive, inclusive programme is developed on relationships and sexuality education (RSE), for all schools and 3rd level institutions.
- Ensure all awareness raising programmes in schools are in line with CEDAW General Recommendation 35, with a focus on informing and educating individuals on consent, sexual harassment and victim blaming to dismantle the belief that women and girls are responsible for their own safety.
- Ensure that effective measures are taken within the justice system to address high attrition and low conviction rates.

- Ensure that Violence Against Women and Girls is being reported in a responsible manner across media platforms so as to discourage victim blaming and rape myths as laid out in article 17 of the Istanbul Convention.
- Address issues with reporting gender based violence and threats to eradicate practices of victim-blaming, perpetuating myths and suggestions that women's behaviour should change. Have gender based violence, threats and abuse included as a protected characteristic in any upcoming Hate Crime Legislation Review in Northern Ireland.

5.1.3 Violence Against Women

The Women's Policy Group welcomes the introduction of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act which will be in operation in November 2021 and received Royal Assent on 1st March 2021. The WPG NI welcomed the proposed legislative changes regarding domestic abuse and violence both within the Northern Ireland Assembly and in Westminster Parliament. Activists, women's organisations and support providers have spent many years calling for adequate domestic abuse legislation in Northern Ireland. In the current global pandemic, domestic abuse and violence have sharply increased as many are put at greater risk due to the ongoing government-issued social distancing and lockdown measures. Creating adequate domestic abuse and violence legislation could not be more pertinent than it is right now. Lessons can be learnt from other jurisdictions and ensure that the women's sector is included in the application and implementation of relevant legislation moving forward.

Our full evidence submission, with detailed recommendations relating to the content of the bill, and most significantly, what is missing, can be read [here](#). A summary includes:

Recommendations:

- Remove the 'reasonable defence' clause 12
- Introduction of Stalking legislation
- Introduction of non-fatal and fatal strangulation legislation
- Recognition of Violence against Women and Girls and gender-based violence in line with the Istanbul Convention
- Grant of Secure tenancies in cases of domestic violence and abuse with recognition of the differing needs of disabled women, Traveller women, trans communities, rural women, migrant women etc.
- Review of the court systems in NI including criminal, civil and family courts

- Introduce a Domestic Abuse Commissioner for Northern Ireland (already in post for England and Wales)
- Secure funding for specialised services and a review of tendering and procurement in relation to domestic violence and abuse services
- Provide guidelines to employers on recognising the signs of abusive behaviour
- Fully funded programme to raise public awareness of domestic abuse
- Tackle heteronormative assumptions and increase awareness of domestic violence within the context of LGBT+ people
- Recognition of disproportionate impact on rural women, areas of paramilitary control, migrant women, LGBT+ groups, disabled women etc.,
- Powers to deal with domestic abuse:
 - Introduction of domestic abuse protection order
 - Introduction of domestic abuse protection notices
- Safer family court and child contact system
- Improve child safety through:
 - Prohibiting unsupervised child contact for a parent on bail for domestic violence and abuse, or where there are ongoing criminal proceedings.
 - Child contact in cases of domestic abuse is based on an informed judgement on what is in the best interests of children, not the presumption of parental involvement.
 - An independent statutory review of family courts in NI to assess how they deal with domestic abuse cases to work towards consistent outcomes across NI.
- More rigorous and innovative evidence collection approaches to support successful prosecutions including:
 - Use of the Domestic Violence register showing the number of times police have been called to the house, to build a picture of the frequency and nature of abuse (in line with CEDAW Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence),
 - Use of PSNI intelligence and evidence gathered from incidents to build a picture of coercive control as a course of conduct,
 - Use of body worn camera evidence from the scene on each occasion to effectively demonstrate the impact and seriousness of abuse. In parts of England where body worn cameras have been rolled out, there is a marked increase in the severity of sentences for domestic violence related crimes.
- NI has not fully implemented an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor service nine years after it's recommendation; any service should be specialised and not gender-neutral and consideration should be give to the introduction of children's IDVAs and making IDVAs mandatory in police stations

- Ensure there is effective reporting and monitoring of all Section 75 groups by the PSNI to ensure the diverse needs of victims from various minority groups can be met
- Addressing re-offending – highlighting the lack of a framework of prevention, rehabilitation and restorative justice in NI
- Guidelines for sentencing for coercive control
- Guidelines for measuring non-physical harm
- Ensure victims' statements cannot be weaponised by prosecutors
- Provide guarantees that women with uncertain immigration status can seek justice without their cases being reported to the Home Office
- Create an inter-departmental approach for the implementation and creation of other legislation with the collaboration of the third sector

Further recommendations re policy developments:

- Serial perpetrator register for the whole of the UK
- Clarify the use of 'barring orders' in the family courts to prevent abusive ex-partners from repeatedly dragging their victims back to court – which can be used as a form of continuing domestic abuse – we would need them in place first (as above)
- Controlling or coercive behaviour offence extended to include abuse where perpetrators and victims no longer live together
- 'Revenge porn' offence widened to cover threats to share intimate images & deepfakes
- Can there be NI specific obligations for social media corporations to adhere to?

Other key asks:

- If NI gets a VAWG Strategy – oversight on that strategy – at present the oversight for existing strategy does not work nor do the yearly Action Plans, this strategy has achieved very little now in the 6th of 7 years. Strategy also needs to be cross departmental – too much focus in NI of Department of Justice and Health taking lead on all things related to domestic and sexual violence – there is also no money attached to this strategy
- A Minister for Women and Safeguarding
- Changes to housing and homelessness legislation for those escaping domestic violence and abuse
- Ensure that welfare policies protect women and their children
- Reforms to ensure migrant survivors have equal access to protection and support
- Funding and resourcing of the current Domestic Abuse & Civil Proceedings Act 2021 which is essential to respond to domestic violence and abuse
- Review of the MARAC process

- Domestic Abuse specialist courts
- Training for all Judges

5.1.4 Protection from Stalking

Members of the WPG gave evidence to the Justice Committee on the Protection from Stalking Bill which is currently at committee stage. Please see link to full submission and recommendations from WPG [here](#). The WPG covers this in detail in the Feminist Recovery Plan 2021, however it is also summarised in section 4.4 of this written response, so we have not repeated it here.

5.1.5 Consent to Harm for Sexual Gratification ('Rough Sex Defence')

In December 2020 - January 2021, the Justice Department consulted on provisions to ban the use of the so-called “rough sex defence”. The WPG took the view that this consultation presented an opportunity to examine an alternative approach to that taken in England and Wales, one that will help victims and their families more than the formalisation in legislation of the existing R v Brown case law. There is no way to prevent defendants claiming that death occurred by accident, which is the essence of the so-called “rough sex defence”. The approach taken in England & Wales was attempting to address this, but the defence amounts to a lack of mens rea for murder and therefore cannot be banned as such. In practice, this usually means that the charge becomes one of manslaughter rather than murder, and this is why these cases tend to result in unsatisfactory outcomes, and leaves families feeling like justice has not been delivered.⁵⁵

To truly bring justice for these crimes we need a new offence that would capture these reckless and negligent forms of sexual manslaughter and allow for appropriate sentencing in accordance with the culpability of the defendant. We have argued for this and outlined a suggested shape for the kind of offence that we have in mind as below, once the R v Brown ruling is formalised in law. We also take the view that education is central to addressing this issue in a way that might prevent further cases and indeed cases of sexual violence more broadly.

We believe that the best course of action would be the drafting of a new, bespoke law designed with this issue in mind which would best deal with the concerns raised around the so-called “rough sex defence”. Since the legal system cannot prevent

⁵⁵ WPG (January 2021), Response to DOJ Public Consultation on ‘Consent to Harm for Sexual Gratification: Not a Defence’, <https://bit.ly/3d9Onmq>

defendants claiming that death was the accidental outcome of consensual activity, sexual or otherwise, this new law would provide for these cases. In these cases this argument can be addressed with a new charge – that the sexual activity was reckless or negligent to such a degree that a reasonable person must know that serious injury or death would be the likely outcome, akin to how the offence of causing death by dangerous driving charge creates a specific category of culpable manslaughter for cases where death or serious injury should have been foreseen as a possible outcome of the driver’s conduct.

We propose that this law should be a new category of sexual offence, based partially on the work of Dr Alison Cronin, Dr Jamie Fletcher and Dr Samuel Walker at Bournemouth University, whose work has informed our argument here. In the article *Homicide and Violence in Sexual Activity, Moving from Defence to Offence* they provide a persuasive argument that the legislation that would formalise the findings of *R v Brown* (1994) cannot actually prevent people from claiming that death caused during sexual activity was accidental, whatever its cause, resulting in the outcome that most of these cases are prosecuted as manslaughter or the defendant pleads guilty to the lesser charge of manslaughter. This cannot be mitigated against by formalising *R v Brown*, as per the approach in England and Wales; “in order to avoid a major legal pitfall, campaigners need to articulate the problem and their aim more clearly, engage with the current law and adopt the legal terminology that will effectively make their point. It is suggested that this could amount to a momentous change in criminal law that would see justice for victims who die as the result of violent sexual attacks. In order to achieve this, campaigners must move on from their discussion of defendants using a defence, which is not in law technically correct, and towards reform of the offence that the defendant has committed.”⁵⁶

Accordingly, we are specifically advocating the enactment of a sexual homicide offence, as an addition to the provisions of the Sexual Offences (NI) Order, that encompasses the existing law on manslaughter in the forms of unlawful and dangerous act, gross negligence, and reckless manslaughter with the additional element of sexual activity.

The importance of categorising this as a sexual offence is as follows:

1. It accords with the principle of “fair labelling” and would allow for the development of fair and proportionate sentencing guidelines for this category of homicide.

⁵⁶ STARS (2019), ‘Homicide and Violence in Sexual Activity, moving from defence to offence’, <https://bit.ly/3xNfBaA>

2. Categorisation as a sexual offence has the procedural advantage that evidence of the victim's past sexual history could be restricted by an extension of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 ss. 41 and 42 provisions. This would address widespread criticism that the current procedural approach in homicide cases contains no bar to the inclusion of the victim's past sexual history.
3. Framing the offence in terms of a sexual nature is preferable to the contextualisation as domestic abuse that has occurred in England and Wales. This approach would recognise that sexual relations also occur outside "domestic" relationships and that joint consensual engagement in a dangerous activity does not necessarily amount to "domestic abuse" – to suggest that it is would be a denial of the autonomy of both parties and *R v Wilson* has shown a reluctance within the legal system to intrude on the domestic relationship from a paternalistic standpoint.

Separately to the issue of the "rough sex defence" there are credible reports, many anecdotal, and some journalistic because there cannot be police statistics for something that is not specifically criminalised, that non-consensual rough sex is becoming an issue both in relationships and casual encounters. By "non-consensual rough sex" we mean an encounter where the sex is initially fully consensual, but during that encounter something occurs that is rougher, or more violent, than one party would have consented to, had they been asked. Sometimes written about in the same breath as the rough sex defence⁵⁷, this is not exactly the same issue. The lack of understanding of it comes from the shortage of studies into it; it is becoming confused with related but different phenomena like non-fatal strangulation, and people are reluctant to speak openly about it, because doing so requires sharing details of their private lives.

Writer Rachel Thompson explores it at length in her book *Rough*⁵⁸, and one of the things she identifies as a cause is the proliferation of pornography depicting acts that would previously have been rather niche and usually requires safety protocols, but that has become normalised and even "expected". The absence of comprehensive RSE leaves a gap that pornography fills, not just with ideas about what is "normal" but also with no information on safety protocols, asking for consent, using safewords and more. Thompson also discusses how people perform these acts, even when they don't necessarily want to, but because they mistakenly believe they are required of them. As the Guardian piece referred to above recalls "One young man who spoke to the Guardian for this piece said he chokes his girlfriend, and has done for several years, "because she likes it". Days later, he got in touch again. "I thought about our

⁵⁷ The Guardian (2019) The fatal, hateful rise of choking during sex
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jul/25/fatal-hateful-rise-of-choking-during-sex>

⁵⁸ Rachel Thompson, *Rough*, Penguin Random House (2021)

conversation and asked her about it. She said she doesn't actually like it; she thought I liked it. But the thing is, I don't: I thought it's what she wanted."

People who experience this sometimes find it difficult to frame their experience, also. As Thompson recounts one woman's testimony in *Rough* "She showed her friend the bruises, partly 'as a joke', she says, and partly because she was unsure what had happened and how she was supposed to feel about it. Her friend was really shocked and took it very seriously. Abigail felt confused by this at the time. 'I've been sexually assaulted before and I was once dragged into a dark driveway by a man trying to rape me, so in my head I didn't feel like the two experiences - stranger in an alleyway and attractive man on Bumble who texted me the next morning telling me how nice a time he had - were the same' she says."⁵⁹ This is testimony to the power of myths about rape and sexual violence and how they impact on the way people explain their experiences to themselves, but it is also a clear indication that people don't know what to expect, and second guess themselves and their experiences, far more than we know, particularly when their experiences fall into "grey areas".

Once again this highlights the need for thorough RSE, but because of the dangers inherent in this practice we recommend below specific, focused research on this phenomenon, as we can only tackle what we truly understand.

Recommendations:

- Formalisation of R v Brown (now passed as part of the Justice Bill)
- Introduction and enactment of a sexual homicide offence, as an addition to the provisions of the Sexual Offences (NI) Order, that encompasses the existing law on manslaughter in the forms of unlawful and dangerous act, gross negligence, and reckless manslaughter with the additional element of sexual activity.
- RSE reform in schools and a specific public awareness campaign addressing the issues that arise with regards to "rough sex", consensual or otherwise.
- Separately, the introduction of legislation on non-fatal strangulation, understood to be forthcoming.
- Work, including data collection, on non-fatal rough sex, designed to understand its prevalence and counter the ideas that make it so common

5.1.6 Honour-Based Abuse

Please Note: This section is informed by the research of Coumilah Manjoo on Honour-Based Abuse in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the United Kingdom. This

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.48

research relates to how Inter-Faith, Inter-Racial and Cross-Cultural Marriages can provide additional challenges, including disapproval from families and communities, associations of shame, and the potential for honour-based abuse or violence (HBA/HBV). HBA/HBV is not an attribute to any specific culture, faith or religion⁶⁰.

Honour-based abuse (HBA) is a prevalent issue that is often misunderstood in Northern Ireland. While gender-based violence is usually described as violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman or violence that affects women disproportionately⁶¹, HBA is often described as the violence predominantly inflicted on women who are thought to have brought shame and dishonour to their family through actual or perceived immoral behaviour⁶².

In the UK, there is no specific offence of “honour-based crime”. Instead, HBA is used as an umbrella term to cover various offences covered by existing legislation (although most of this legislation does not apply to Northern Ireland)⁶³. The Crown Prosecution Services describe HBA as relating to a collection of practices which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour⁶⁴. Such behaviour can occur when perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family and/or community by breaking their honour code.

The Honour Ambassadors against Shame Practices (HASP) define HBA and honour-based violence as:

“A collection of practices which are used to control behaviour and exert power within families to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour. Such violence can occur when perpetrators consider that an individual, usually a woman, has shamed the family and/or community by breaking their honour code. The individual is being punished for actually or allegedly undermining what the family or community believes to be the correct code of behaviour.

Honour based violence is a fundamental abuse of Human Rights. There is no honour in the carrying out or commissioning of murder, kidnap

⁶⁰ See More: Manjoo, C. (2018) “Shame” and “Honour”: Comparison of the Prevalence of “Honour”-Based Abuse/Violence in Northern Ireland and the Rest of the United Kingdom’, Queen’s University Belfast.

⁶¹ The Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, ‘General Recommendations Adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women’ (OHCHR 1992) <https://bit.ly/3d6U8S0>

⁶² HASP – Honour Ambassadors against Shame Practices, ‘Honour Related Violence in the United Kingdom’ (HASP – Honour Ambassadors against Shame Practices 2017) 2-90.

⁶³ Crown Prosecution Service, ‘Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriage’, <https://bit.ly/3d6tYik>

⁶⁴ Ibid, n362.

and the many other acts, behaviour and conduct which make up violence in the name of honour.⁶⁵

HBA can take place in many forms such as (but not limited to): threatening behaviour, assault, rape, kidnap, abduction, forced abortion, forced marriage, threats to kill and false imprisonment. Worryingly, the UK is considered one of the worst areas within Europe with almost 3000 'honour' attacks per year and 12 'honour' killings per year⁶⁶. Within the UK, the most common motivations behind these 'honour' killings have related to dressing or behaving in a 'western style', maintaining a close relationship with somebody that the victim's family do not approve of, refusing a marriage proposal brought by the family or extended family, seeking divorce or being a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

What is of further concern is how HBA can manifest itself through domestic abuse and how this violence and abuse is perpetrated within the family through links to concepts such as 'shame' and honour⁶⁷. In the UK, the working definition of 'honour' crimes relates to a form of domestic abuse governed by the code of 'honour'. It is crucial that attempts to understand the concepts of 'honour' based violence are considered in their connection to gender-based violence and misogyny. In examining the interconnected relationship between HBA and gender-based violence, it is also crucial that there is not an inappropriate focus on the alleged cultural aspects of such violence, which treats the phenomenon as a species separate from wider domestic violence⁶⁸.

In particular, it is important that the interconnected relationship of HBA and domestic violence is understood, as specific distinctions between the two can lead to increased racial tension, greater marginalisation of specific communities and create harmful perceptions of cultural-essentialism⁶⁹. This lack of understanding on the interconnected nature, or in the inappropriate focus on the alleged cultural aspects of HBA can create further barriers for victims seeking support or attempting to flee such abuse.

The Justice Inspectorate review of the response from police to HBA, forced marriage and female genital mutilation found that Northern Ireland had the lowest record of

⁶⁵ HASP Scope - <https://bit.ly/3d50pgQ>

⁶⁶ European Parliament, 'Briefing European Parliamentary Research Service' (European Parliament 2015) 4.

⁶⁷ Nootash Keyhani, 'Honour Crimes As Gender-Based Violence In The UK: A Critical Assessment' (2013) 2 Journal of Law and Jurisprudence 255-277.

⁶⁸ Wendy Aujla and Aisha Gill, 'Conceptualizing 'Honour' Killings In Canada: An Extreme Form Of Domestic Violence?' (2014) 9 International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences.153-166.

⁶⁹ Mohammad Mazher Idriss, 'Not Domestic Violence or Cultural Tradition: Is Honour-Based Violence Distinct From Domestic Violence?' (2017) 39 Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law 3-21.

victims making contact with the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) in 2015⁷⁰. The lack of reporting does not mean that HBA is not prevalent within Northern Ireland, as we have highlighted throughout this plan that data recording and disaggregated data from bodies in Northern Ireland are wholly inadequate. Rather, the factors leading to low levels of reporting of HBA in Northern Ireland should be examined in relation to barriers victims and survivors face in reporting, lack of understanding of this form of abuse from responders, inadequate data collection and how this form of abuse could be examined in relation to conflict.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Honour Based Abuse Strategy is a policing strategy for England, Wales and Northern Ireland aimed at eradicating HBA, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. However, awareness for HBA is low in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK and it could be argued that it was deprioritised due to ongoing issues relating to the aftermath of the conflict. However, rather than dismissing HBA as an issue that isn't as prevalent in Northern Ireland, an understanding of the unique manifestations of HBA within Northern Ireland must be developed, particularly in how cultural and religious beliefs and the prevalence of paramilitaries can also contribute to HBA.

A 2016 report on 'Intimate Partner Violence in Conflict and Post Conflict Societies'⁷¹ in collaboration with Women's Aid highlights several examples of domestic violence and abuse being perpetuated due to links with paramilitarism and their values, community attitudes and traditional religious belief. The lack of understanding or discussion of the 'honour' element of this form of domestic violence will enable this form of abuse to continue as root causes and societal attitudes are not addressed. Further, failing to recognise the 'honour' element of abuse can further prevent victims from speaking up about the abuse they have endured⁷².

Further, it is crucial that HBA is not just associated with Asian communities or certain religious communities, as evidence is growing of the impact of HBA on Traveller women, too⁷³.

In order to better address HBA in Northern Ireland, we recommend the following:

Recommendations:

⁷⁰ Metropolitan Police, 'Honour Based Abuse, Forced Marriage And Female Genital Mutilation: A Policing Strategy For England, Wales And Northern Ireland- Eradicating Honour Based Abuse, Force Marriage And Female Genital Mutilation Together' (National Police Chiefs' Council 2015) 16

⁷¹ Jessica Leigh Doyle and Monica McWilliams, 'Intimate Partner Violence In Conflict And Post-Conflict Societies' (Political Settlements Research Programme (PSRP) 2018) 1-120.

⁷² See more in relation to a case involving an elderly woman who spent her life in a mother and baby institution and the impact this had on her long-term: Patsy McGarry, 'Magdalene Laundries: 'I Often Wondered Why Were They So Cruel'' *Irish Times* (2018) <https://bit.ly/3d7phom>

⁷³ Aisha Gill, 'Honour'-Based Violence Runs Deep and Wide based Violence Runs Deep And Wide' *The Guardian* (2012) <https://bit.ly/3xQuCZh>

- Ensure the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalised individuals in society are heard through:
 - Requiring more robust data collection from agencies dealing with abuse,
 - Allocate funding to facilitate training and development to ensure there is a culturally competent understanding of HBA and how to address these harmful practices through co-design with experts in this area,
 - Develop specialist support for victims and survivors of HBA,
 - Ensure women with NRPF and/or insecure immigration status are supported to approach support providers,
 - Work with community leaders and the voluntary and community sector to raise public awareness on the issue and challenge dominant societal attitudes towards women,
- Develop a range of measures to ensure those working in relation to HBA and the broader justice system is equipped with cultural knowledge, awareness and sensitivity,
- Develop more robust recording measures with disaggregated data relating to HBA and implement measures to address under-reporting of HBA in Northern Ireland,
- Recognition that HBA is not attributed to specific cultures, faiths or religions, and has an intersectional impact on victims.
- Ensure funding is attributed to specialist organisations working on both HBA and Domestic Abuse to ensure support organisations can avail of specialist training,
- Update legislation and policy within Northern Ireland to ensure children or adults at risk of HBA are given a safeguarding response to ensure the HBA has been recognised for what it is,
- Develop a strategy for early intervention and consistent intervention/aftercare with those at risk and ensure any upcoming VAWG strategy includes HBA.
- Increase awareness of various forms of HBA across the justice system in Northern Ireland, including Spiritual Abuse and Coercive Control⁷⁴ through work with community groups supporting survivors of HBA.

5.2 Hate Crimes and Online Abuse

⁷⁴ For more information on spiritual abuse, see: University of Chester, (2021), 'Spiritual Abuse: Coercive Control in Religion', <https://bit.ly/3gZTfM1>; Church Times (2018), 'Understanding Spiritual Times' <https://bit.ly/3zVbv26>; Faith and Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition, (2021), 'Keeping the Faith: What Survivors From Faith Communities Want Us To Know', <https://bit.ly/3zL8uRP>

Hate crime in Northern Ireland should be considered within the context of paramilitary community control (see section on paramilitarism).

Hate crime is an intersectional issue. Because gender is not a protected characteristic under current hate crime legislation, women who are targeted for a hate crime ostensibly on the basis of race, disability, sexual orientation, or community background would be categorised by PSNI as following into one of those categories. The factors which make someone a target of a hate crime or hate incident may be related to multiple aspects of a person's identity. Is an ethnic minority woman wearing a headscarf harassed on the street being targeted for her religion, her race, or her gender? These aspects of our identity cannot be so neatly separated from each other.

5.2.1 Misogynistic Hate Crimes

The WPG, alongside many of our colleagues in the women's sector and LGBTQI+ sector, have long campaigned for misogyny to be recognised as a category (i.e. motivation) of hate crime in Northern Ireland.

A chilling and very public illustration of the urgency of this move presented itself in October 2020, when five women were attacked by a man with his fists and a knife in Belfast city centre and around the University area. None of the injuries were life-threatening, but the impacts go far beyond the impact on physical health. These attacks fracture their sense of security on the streets, as well as the security of their families, friends and the community as a whole. Women must be able to move through life safely, and the city should be safe for everyone.

In the immediate aftermath, and before any arrests were made, the PSNI advised people to be careful and not to walk alone. We know that some of those attacked were with others at the time of the assault and therefore this advice is useless, and of course it is not always possible for women to be accompanied at all times and defend themselves against a knife attack. Ultimately, and more importantly, the focus in cases like this should and must be on the behaviour of the assailant and not on what women can do to be safe (advice which leads to victim blaming).

These kinds of attacks are examples of gender-based violence. This type of violence takes many forms, but its root is always in antagonism towards women, or misogyny. Misogyny is so normalised in our society that people often deny its existence or seek to minimise it, insisting that women are making a fuss about nothing. The truth is that gender-based violence and misogyny ruins lives. We must not shy away from thinking about it, discussing it and tackling it in every way we can.

We welcome the motion that was adopted unanimously on 23rd March 2021 on developing a Violence against Women and Girls Strategy for Northern Ireland, recognising crime motivated by misogyny as hate crime and developing standardised, mandatory RSE in schools⁷⁵. However, work must be undertaken by the NI executive to action this motion and implement the adequate Hate Crime legislation that recognised misogyny motivated crime as hate crime.

We are also concerned by the growing prevalence of racist hate crimes in Northern Ireland, particularly the abhorrent racist hate crime attack on the Belfast Multicultural Association in January 2021.⁷⁶ We would again like to call for all recommendations from the Hate Crime Review to be implemented and highlight again our own recommendations in relation to intersectionality. The Women's Policy Group submitted a detailed Hate Crime Legislation Review consultation response in 2020 which you can read [here](#).

Recommendations:

- We again urge that misogyny motivated crime be recognised as a category of hate crime and that this phenomenon, the conditions in which it thrives, and a serious attempt to tackle it be incorporated into any VAWG strategy.

Summary of WPG Recommendations made in 2020 in relation to Hate Crime:

A summary of our recommendations include:

- Introduce of an adequate working definition of hate crime,
- Create a consolidated hate crime legislation model for Northern Ireland,
- Replacing the enhanced sentencing model with the statutory aggravation model,
- Apply the statutory aggravation model to all protected characteristics,
- Introduce specific guidelines and extensive programmes of training and education on any new model of hate crime legislation; including what the protected characteristics are and the consequences of committing a hate crime,
- Recognising gender as a protected characteristic through specifically treating misogyny as a standalone hate crime,
- Recognise transgender identity a protected characteristic,

⁷⁵ Northern Ireland Assembly (2021), AIMS Portal, Motion on Creating a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy for Northern Ireland: <https://bit.ly/3gWJM8u>

⁷⁶ Irish News (January 2021), 'PSNI treating fire at Belfast Multicultural Centre as Hate Crime', <https://bit.ly/2UqTWGB>

- Recognise intersex identity as a protected characteristic,
- Create a legal framework that recognises the importance of intersectionality to adequately reflect the experiences and identities of victims and motivations of perpetrators,
- Require the court to state if offences are aggravated, reflect this on court records and outline the difference the aggravation had on sentencing,
- Record aggravated offences on criminal justice records,
- Create a statutory legal definition of “hostility”,
- Add equivalent provisions to Sections 4, 4A and 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 to the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987,
- Remove “dwelling” defences,
- Include all protected groups under the stirring up provisions of the Public Order (NI) Order 1987,
- Recognise the severe harm caused by online hate speech against women,
- Update and amend existing legislation dealing with public order, malicious communications and harassment to reflect the changing nature of communications due to social media,
- Ensure online harm is fully covered within hate crime legislation,
- Strengthen law relating to public authorities tackling hate expressions in public spaces,
- Implement victim-led restorative justice programmes in collaboration with community-based organisations,
- Commission extensive research specific to Northern Ireland to tackle the under-reporting of hate crime and mistrust from minorities in reporting services,
- Adequately fund and expand the Hate Crime Advocacy Scheme,
- Restrict the press reporting of hate crime victims where appropriate,
- Create measures for legislative consolidations and scrutiny.

5.2.2 Online Abuse against Women

There have been 1,220 reports of online violence towards women in Northern Ireland since 2015 (the total could be even higher than the figures suggest as not all crimes specify the gender of the victim). In 2017-18 the PSNI saw the highest annual figure ever recorded with 433 women feeling so threatened that they reported the online abuse to the police – 30 of these involved death threats with another 394-constituting harassment⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ ITV News (2018), ‘Reports of Online Violence Towards Women in NI’, (available online): <https://bit.ly/3j8BnBA>

The issue of online abuse against women is extremely concerning. It has prompted the creator of the internet, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, to say that “the web is not working for women and girls.”⁷⁸ Berners-Lee stated that while the world has made important progress on gender equality he is “seriously concerned that online harms facing women and girls – especially those of colour, from LGBTQ+ communities and other marginalised groups – threaten that progress.” Berners-Lee said that “for many who are online, the web is simply not safe enough” and that online abuse:

“Forces women out of jobs and causes girls to skip school, it damages relationships and leads to tremendous distress. Relentless harassment silences women and deprives the world of their opinions and ideas, with female journalists and politicians pushed off social media and bullied out of office.”

In 2018 Amnesty International published research on ‘Toxic Twitter’⁷⁹ which included interviews with journalists, activists and politicians from the UK (including NI) and USA exposing how Twitter is failing to respect women’s rights and warned the social media company that it must take concrete steps to improve how it identifies, addresses and prevents violence and abuse against women on the platform.

The women's testimony details the shocking nature of violence and abuse they are receiving on Twitter, including death threats, rape threats and racist, transphobic and homophobic abuse. Public figures, MPs and journalists are often particular targets, but people who aren’t in the public eye are also experiencing abuse, especially if they speak out about issues like sexism and use campaign hashtags. Several recommendations were made and can be viewed [here](#).

In the independent review of hate crime in Northern Ireland, Judge Marrinan acknowledged the issue of hateful abuse online as part of this Review citing the abuse that many women politicians both in Westminster and locally in the Northern Ireland Assembly have to endure often on a daily basis.

This is a significant issue as it has led to the resignation of a number of women MPs in recent years with obvious impacts for gender equality and ensuring that the voices of women are at the table. Heidi Allen stood down because of the “nastiness and intimidation” she faced as a politician. Luciana Berger said the abuse she faced made her “physically ill” so much so that she had to work with the police and security for her personal safety. She described the abuse as “personal and sometimes very extreme in its nature. Sometimes it's pornographic, sometimes violent, often very misogynistic.”

⁷⁸ Why the web needs to work for women and girls, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, March 2020, <https://bit.ly/2SRAuTi>

⁷⁹ Amnesty International, (2018), ‘Toxic Twitter: A Toxic Place for Women’: <https://bit.ly/3zOQS7v>

Online abuse of some of Northern Ireland's female politicians has prompted calls to establish a cross-party working group on misogyny. Cara Hunter, SDLP MLA and Deputy Mayor of Derry has been subjected to near-constant "sexual and violent messages and threatening voicemails." DUP MLA Carla Lockhart said that online abuse was something she had become accustomed to. She explained "any time there's a picture of me on Twitter, no matter what it's connected with, I will have someone picking on my appearance."

There is a real need for action to prevent these online behaviours. It is important to have the best people involved in the Government representing their communities. It is not possible to achieve this if women feel excluded from these positions due to this type of misogyny and online hate. Women make up half the population and their rights and interests cannot be adequately protected unless women are involved in positions of power and in Government. Misogynistic behaviour of this kind limits women's representation and visibility not just in politics but in other spheres and it is therefore vital that this is tackled.

Online abuse against women and girls has specific implications, and often has a specific ferocity and disproportionate volume, for women of colour, LGBTQ+ women, and disabled women. In a wider UK context, the MP who received the most online abuse during the 2017 election was Diane Abbott⁸⁰, the first black woman to be elected MP. Further, online abuse against trans women and girls has skyrocketed in the past number of years, fuelled by animosity in the media, lack of political support, and lack of accountability for multinational social media companies.

The Independent Hate Crime Legislation Review provides an important opportunity for action to be taken on this issue. We have made several recommendations in the WPG consultation response which can be read [here](#). The Protection from Stalking Bill also provides an important opportunity to address online harassment. We have made several recommendations in the WPG Evidence Submission to the Justice Committee which can be read [here](#).

5.3 Education and Training

5.3.1 Equality Proofing Education Post-COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far reaching impacts on all aspects of NI society, not least education, with most pupils withdrawn from school for months at a time during

⁸⁰ Amnesty Insights (2017), '[Unsocial Media: Tracking Twitter Abuse against Women MPs](#)'

the periods of strict lockdown. Although almost all pupils have now returned to a school setting in NI, it is important that the impact of the pandemic on their education and mental and physical wellbeing is adequately addressed through future education policy.

The diverse needs of pupils must be taken into consideration; it is crucial that those who were already disadvantaged before the onset of the pandemic do not simply continue to become more disadvantaged. Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) will have experienced even more barriers to remote learning during lockdown than others. Whilst every child will have responded differently - some may have preferred home learning; others will have found it very difficult - the potential impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of children is hugely concerning and must be addressed as a major priority within schools. Some children may require specific support from their schools after lockdown. It is also important that the needs of staff are taken into account, with mitigating measures put in place to better promote equality where staff are differentially adversely impacted by changes in policy as a result of COVID-19.

Although it was inevitable that the pandemic would have an impact on how policies were developed by the Department of Education (DE), a worrying pattern emerged last year of the department failing to adequately consult with stakeholders on major decisions. Likewise, there was often a lack of visible equality screening of new policies.⁸¹ Going forwards, as NI returns to something resembling normality, it is vital that departmental decisions subjected to the proper assessment processes to ensure they promote equality of opportunity under Section 75. It is imperative that the DE complies with its own equality scheme, including through direct consultation with affected groups, and conducts proper assessment of policies via screening and/or EQIA. Additionally, teachers must be properly informed, in advance, of changes in policy; they are expected to provide certainty for their pupils, but it is difficult for them to do so if they themselves are facing uncertainty.

Ideally, the return to school will not have to be halted again. However, it is important that contingency planning is undertaken to prepare for future closures. Even if there are no further surges of the virus, there is a strong likelihood that individual schools will have to close due to local outbreaks.

Recommendations:

⁸¹ See the Equality Coalition's briefing paper, '[Equality proofing the return to school](#)', for specific examples of the rushing through of policies.

- Each time a new policy is developed by the Department of Education, it must, as a matter of course, undergo a) Equality screening / Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA); b) Rural Needs Impact Assessment; c) Consultation with relevant stakeholders. Whenever appropriate, the policy should be altered as a result of the above processes to ensure equality of opportunity.
- No child should be left behind as a result of the pandemic. It is likely there will be an increased demand on services supporting pupils with SEN and their teachers. These services should receive any additional resources they require. Likewise, schools must be provided with additional funding to combat any 'attainment gap' among pupils as a result of the pandemic.
- Schools should be supported by the department to take a whole-school, trauma informed approach to the return to school that incorporates a range of methods, such as changes to the formal curriculum, pastoral care, and counselling provision (including tailored support for LGBTQ+ pupils). The classroom must be made a safe space for all pupils. Additional funding should be provided as needed.
- Comprehensive guidance is needed to help teachers and pupils adjust to the 'new normal' within schools. The last guidance on the return to school (which is publicly available) was issued almost a year ago (June 2020)⁸². It is very surprising that this has not been since updated to incorporate lessons learned during the prior return to school and best practice examples, both from within NI and elsewhere.
- Universal free school meals should be provided to all children as a measure to combat poverty, improve educational outcomes, and improve public health.
- It is imperative that contingency planning is undertaken in case further school closures are required, incorporating joined-up working with other departments and resulting in published, publicly available guidance.

5.3.2 Equality and Diversity Education

It is evident from the shocking statistics that vulnerable groups in our society have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This is true both within Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. People living in low-income areas, those with disabilities, older people, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds are all at increased risk of suffering serious illness and death as a result of COVID-19. The pandemic has harshly exposed pre-existing structural divisions and shown the consequences of failing to create a truly equal society. Depending on what happens next, including future government policy, we may be at risk of inequalities deepening even further. As life begins to return to relative normality and children return to school,

⁸² Northern Ireland Reopening School Guidance - New School Day - 19 June 2020. Available [here](#).

it is more important than ever before that they receive adequate teaching on equality and diversity.

At present, rather than these themes being integrated across the curriculum, equality and diversity tend only to be taught within particular areas of learning (at primary level) and subjects (at secondary level). Primary school pupils are taught about equality and diversity as one element of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU), but how much time is spent on this will vary. Within secondary schools, it can be even more difficult for teachers to find space to look at these themes because of the focus on academic attainment, though subjects such as Religious Education, History, and English Literature are a more common home for teaching on equality and diversity than Mathematics and Science. Furthermore, teaching on diversity can sometimes become narrowly focused on the traditional sectarian divisions within NI, ignoring other complexities and obscuring the wider picture.

This has specific implications for Migrant and Black and Minority Ethnic people in school, where racist bullying may not be handled effectively due to lack of training. It also has implications for LGBTQ+ pupils, who are at higher risk of being bullied while also facing institutional barriers to expressing themselves and being who they are safely in an educational environment. Further training and education, for staff and students, would create a safer and more accepting environment for currently marginalised and often disenfranchised pupils. It would also build the foundations for an education system based in safety for all, centred on care, and focused on preparing our children to be tolerant and well-rounded members of society.

Effective teaching of equality and diversity often relies on there being committed teachers within schools who are willing to look for opportunities to explore these themes fully. Sometimes this involves signing up for optional initiatives such as Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning that have a focus on these areas, bringing in appropriate guest speakers and working directly with communities and civil society to improve learning in these areas. Not all schools will believe they have the time and resources to do this, while others will. This leads to a variation in the quality of equality and diversity education across the NI school system, which fails pupils.

Currently, schools are not subject to the requirements within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, nor the Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. There is a significant gap in equality legislation and rights protections across the board in Northern Ireland: nowhere is that more apparent than in our schools.

Current international guidelines for education encourage a focus on diversity and equality. For instance, one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (4.7) states:

“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.”

It is also worth noting that the NI Curriculum used in schools today was first introduced in 2007. So much has changed since then, particularly in the last few months, that an overhaul could be very beneficial to students.

Recommendations:

- An increased focus on equality and diversity should be introduced into the curriculum when it is next updated.
- Initial teacher training - and subsequent CPD opportunities - should place a greater emphasis on equality and diversity. The teacher competency framework for initial teacher education (ITE) should cover both how to teach about these themes effectively within the classroom and how to meet pupils' diverse social and educational needs. The latter should include consideration of a wide range of factors that may inhibit children's learning i.e. not just disability, but also covering sexuality or gender identity, etc. Anti-bias training should also be considered.
- Likewise, Principals and senior school managers should, as standard, receive training examining equality and diversity, including the underpinning legislation.
- The Department of Education (DE) should adequately resource the co-development of equality and diversity workshops, for staff and pupils, with community organisations working with BAME, LGBTQ+, disabled, and migrant communities.
- Regular guidance should be issued to schools by the DE on equality and diversity.
- Indicators should be introduced into the inspection process that look specifically at how schools are addressing equality and diversity.
- Furthermore, DE should prioritise measures on equality and diversity explicitly in the processes of school improvement.
- Section 75 requirements and the Sex Discrimination Regulations should be applied to schools, alongside other relevant equality legislation.

- Any relevant recommendations on education from international treaty bodies, such as CEDAW, should be adhered to.

CHAPTER FOUR – WPG Comments Specific to these Calls for Views

6. WPG Comments Specific to these Calls for Views:

6.1 International Mechanisms and VAWG:

The international law framework, including the Istanbul Convention as well as CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), provides a clear mandate for these strategies to be put in place. It is particularly vital that the strategies are in line with the Istanbul Convention, as shortfalls in Northern Ireland have in part prevented the UK from ratifying the Convention; this is a major concern for the women's sector UK wide, as it creates disparities between the UK and other European countries.

The Istanbul Convention holds that all state actors are obliged to conform to the requirements of the Convention. Key among these are requirements to implement effective legislation to protect women and girls from violence, ensure adequate resourcing for action, and implement gender sensitive policies. Importantly, the Convention emphasises data collection as the basis of action, and stresses the role of meaningful data in prevention. It also mandates work with men and boys to change cultures, attitudes and behaviours, and provides detailed guidance on development of judicial systems and responses.⁸³ The Council of Europe has also recently published guidance on education for prevention under the Istanbul Convention, which emphasises gender equality and non violent approaches, and provides examples of good practice from a number of countries as well as a checklist for developing national good practice.⁸⁴

CEDAW General Recommendation 35⁸⁵ specifically focuses on gender based violence, and provides guidance on interpretation and implementation of CEDAW in this regard. The CEDAW Committee holds that 'Women's right to a life free from gender-based violence is indivisible from and interdependent on other human rights, including the rights to life, health, liberty and security of the person, equality and equal protection within the family, freedom from torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, and freedom of expression, movement, participation, assembly and association'⁸⁶. The Recommendation explicitly includes psychological, sexual, economic and physical harm as well as threats of such acts, harassment, coercion and arbitrary deprivation of liberty in its scope of gender based violence.

⁸³ Council of Europe (2011). [Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#)

⁸⁴ Council of Europe (March 2022) [Preventing violence against women through formal and informal education: Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention](#)

⁸⁵ CEDAW Committee (67th session, 2017) [General Recommendation 35 on gender based violence against women](#)

⁸⁶ Ibidem, p.6

The Recommendation clarifies the CEDAW provisions and states that laws prohibiting gender based violence should include sanctions for perpetrators and reparations for victims.⁸⁷ It further notes that ‘all legal procedures in cases involving allegations of gender-based violence against women are impartial, fair and unaffected by gender stereotypes or the discriminatory interpretation of legal provisions, including international law’, and that capacity building is required to ensure that women’s right to equality is not affected by the application of preconceived and stereotyped notions of what gender based violence is, how women do and should react and the standard of proof required in proceedings⁸⁸.

6.1.1 ILO Convention 190

In June 2019, at the Centenary Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO)⁸⁹, the Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206) were adopted. The global community has made it clear that violence and harassment in the world of work will not be tolerated and must end. These landmark instruments were developed by the key world of work actors (representatives of governments, employers and workers), and set out a common framework to prevent and address violence and harassment, based on an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach. The Convention and the Recommendation also refer to domestic violence and its impact in the world of work.

The Preamble to the Convention notes that “domestic violence can affect employment, productivity and health and safety, and that governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations and labour market institutions can help, as part of other measures, to recognize, respond to and address the impacts of domestic violence”. As such, the Convention requires Members to “take appropriate measures to ... recognize the effects of domestic violence and, so far as is reasonably practicable, mitigate its impact in the world of work” (Art. 10(f)), and the Recommendation provides further guidance.

The inclusion of provisions regarding domestic violence in Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 reflects a fundamental change: historically, domestic violence was relegated as a “private” issue, with no connection to work, and it is now being acknowledged as having real consequences for workers, enterprises and the society at large.

⁸⁷ Ibidem, p.10

⁸⁸ Ibidem, p.11

⁸⁹ <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/violence-harassment/lang--en/index.htm>

The new instruments finally recognize the negative spill over effects that domestic violence can have on the world of work and the positive contribution that work can make towards improving the well-being of victims of domestic violence.

The UK Government has now ratified the Convention which means that the obligations apply to the Northern Ireland Executive.

The accompanying ILO recommendation 206 sets out measures and actions which should be taken by Government, employers and trade unions.

Each Member shall take appropriate measures to: ... (f) recognize the effects of domestic violence and, so far as is reasonably practicable, mitigate its impact in the world of work. Defining “violence and harassment” in the “world of work”

Following on from these provisions in the Convention, Paragraph 18 of Recommendation No. 206 sets out a number of measures that could be adopted to respond to and mitigate the impacts of domestic violence, such as:

- A. leave for victims of domestic violence;
- B. flexible work arrangements and protection for victims of domestic violence;
- C. temporary protection against dismissal for victims of domestic violence, as appropriate, except on grounds unrelated to domestic violence and its consequences;
- D. the inclusion of domestic violence in workplace risk assessments;
- E. a referral system to public mitigation measures for domestic violence, where they exist;
- F. f. awareness raising about the effects of domestic violence.

In recent years, countries have increasingly taken into account the effects of domestic violence on workers' well-being and productivity in their labour and employment provisions. A growing number of countries have introduced leave, whether paid or unpaid, for workers who are victims of domestic violence. Others have included domestic violence as a ground of discrimination in employment and occupation, and require employers to provide reasonable accommodations.

Some have envisaged employers' duties to take preventive measures to protect the employee or other workers, or included domestic violence within the management of occupational safety and health (OSH). In addition, with a view to protecting specific categories of workers, such as domestic workers, against violence and harassment, some laws and regulations have extended the definition of “domestic violence” beyond traditionally understood family relationships to include those working in the domestic sphere.

6.2 General Comments:

6.2.1 General Comments on Timing of Calls for Views

The WPG would like to raise concern over both Calls for Views being out at the same time. This has made it slightly confusing for those responding as it is unclear what issues are relevant for each issue. In addition, we do not see how Domestic and Sexual Abuse can be separate from a strategy to reduce Violence Against Women and Girls.

Domestic abuse and sexual abuse are extremely broad, and each incorporates a wide range of violence often perpetrated against women. We would argue that the VAWG strategy must also include domestic and sexual abuse and recognise the gendered nature of both against women, in most cases perpetrated by men.

We also welcomed the extension from 7th March 2022 to 21st March 2022. However, this still was short of the 12-week timeline to respond which is seen as good practice in terms of making public guidelines more accessible. We also were concerned with the lack of engagement with the women's sector from March 2021 to January 2022 in relation to the development of these calls for views. In particular, many women's sector organisations are members of the All-Party Group on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and this APG contacted TEO on several occasions to invite them to attend an APG meeting to discuss any updates on this new strategy but no response was given.

In addition, the Women's Sector has been campaigning for a VAWG strategy for many years in Northern Ireland. The WPG in recent years has submitted various evidence consultation responses, briefings and calls for views alongside publishing many recommendations in relation to VAWG in the WPG Feminist Recovery Plans. We would have welcomed earlier engagement with the sector rather than giving a short time frame to respond to such an important call for views at what is the busiest time for the women's sector due to the ongoing pandemic, political instability, the end of the mandate approaching and annual International Women's Day events. As the women's sector has significantly reduced funding in recent years, and is working beyond capacity, we would urge those involved in the calls for views to take measures to ensure engagement with women is meaningful and accessible. We would recommend that the guidelines for public authorities from WRDA's Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultation are abided by (see section 6.3 of this response for more detail).

As we are unclear what specifically is included in the VAWG strategy, and have doubts with how domestic and sexual abuse can be removed from a VAWG strategy, this

response will include evidence of how women have been impacted by domestic and sexual abuse in our response to the TEO call for views.

Please note, given the short timeframe to respond to these calls for views, and the overwhelming response we had to our own survey on VAWG, this written evidence submission includes preliminary results of our survey. We will be doing much more analysis of the 1,065 responses received and will be publishing a separate report on our findings. We would welcome further engagement with us on these results throughout the development of both strategies.

6.2.2 Comments on Title of Strategies

The WPG would also urge TEO to consider changing the name of their strategy to:

'The Executive Office Strategy to Tackle Men's Violence Against Women and Girls'

Please note, when we refer to 'men's violence' we refer to violence against women and girls by men *and* boys. We make this recommendation as simply calling it a Violence Against Women and Girls strategy, or something to that effect, lacks an active agent and fails to consider where this violence is coming from. Indeed, in our survey of over 1,000 women, there was agreement that this strategy should be called Men's Violence Against Women and Girls as well as agreement that the strategy must focus primarily on the behaviours and actions of men and boys. There is an epidemic of men and boy's violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland and if we are unable to even address that in the title of such a strategy, it is a poor indication of how this strategy will even begin to address the behaviours and actions of men and boys.

However, we do note that there are men who are victims of domestic and sexual abuse, and that women in LGBTQ+ relationships are too impacted by domestic and sexual abuse perpetrated by women. As there will also be a Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, we would urge DOJ and DOH to clearly state how this strategy will support victims of domestic and sexual abuse perpetrated by women, and what specific funding they will provide to organisations supporting men and LGBTQ+ people.

We do not wish to in any way diminish men or LGBTQ+ victims of domestic and sexual abuse, rather, we wish to focus the VAWG strategy on the endemic levels of violence against women and girls due to deeply rooted sexism and misogyny in Northern Ireland which will also support objectives of the domestic and sexual abuse strategy. Therefore, we call on DOJ and DOH to seriously consider how to improve funding for

all domestic and sexual abuse service support organisations in addition to the objectives of the VAWG strategy. We are also following the results of our survey, whereby 13% of respondents were LGBTQ+ and broadly agreed that this second strategy should be about tackling men and boys' violence against women and girls.

In addition to this, whilst we are aware that men and boys can both cause and receive harm in relation to domestic abuse and sexual abuse, serious consideration needs to be given to how we can educate men and boys on these issues beyond school age.

When deciding to undertake our own research to support our evidence submission, we decided that as the Women's Policy Group works to ensure the voices of women are heard in the development of policy and legislation, that we would only ask women and girls for their views rather than having it open to men and boys too. In the past, we have kept surveys open to all genders, but on this occasion we felt we had a duty to highlight the voices of women and girls and how they have been impacted by men's violence. We would recommend that TEO and organisations supporting men and boys undertake similar research to gather their views on how to address VAWG.

In addition, we wish to raise the issue of the confusion caused by consulting on both strategies at once, and asking particularly that, in responding to the call for views on the VAWG strategy, we exclude issues covered in the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy. This has also caused confusion for members of the public with whom we have run focus groups, also, not least because the use of the term "sexual abuse" rather than something broader such as "sexual violence" denotes to many people something systematic, something closer to child sexual abuse or abuse within domestic or romantic relationships. It is rarely understood as describing an encounter between strangers or acquaintances that may or may not meet the criminal bar for an offence like rape or sexual assault. If these are not sexual abuse, do they belong in the VAWG Strategy? Or do all sexual crimes belong in the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy? Where is the line? We regret that many things will be missing from many people's responses to these calls for views, because they do not have an obvious "home". Terminology is important for this practical reason alone.

Further, using the term "sexual abuse" in fact perpetuates the long-standing notion that only the most serious, violent and extreme forms of sexual violence matter enough to be subject to a Strategy like this one, the rest are just unimportant or inevitable. In preparing for this Call for Views, the WPG discussed this issue at length, and ultimately we chose to highlight this issue in our response, and also to not feel bound by the proviso that the content of one Strategy should not encroach on the other. They do; both in terms of the confusing terms set by TEO and in the lives of women and girls.

6.2.3 Urgent Appeal to Save Regina Coeli Hostel and Further Fund Women's Hostels and Domestic Abuse Refuges

On Tuesday 15th March 2022, a petition with 12,000 signatures calling on Communities Minister to save Regina Coeli Hostel was handed over by hostel workers Emma McCann and Bernadette Herald, and their Unite the Union representatives and NIC-ICTU leaders.

This petition followed the news that Regina Coeli Hostel is due to close in Spring 2022, despite being the only women-only hostel in Belfast. The Regina Coeli Hostel supports women who are homeless, have been abused, have addictions or mental health difficulties or have been trafficked. The WPG would like to remember the story of Beth, and how she was treated in the hostel she had to live in, and urge TEO and the Department for Communities to intervene to save Regina Coeli Hostel.

Given the drastic rise in violence against women throughout the pandemic, it is imperative that Regina Coeli Hostel is saved, and that long-term sustainable funding is provided to support other domestic abuse refuges or women only hostels across all areas of objective need in Northern Ireland. Regina Coeli House has provided a unique and vital sanctuary for many women who have needed it and it is clear that the government must intervene to prevent its collapse. Mental health difficulties are clearly a risk for women who have been abused and it is crucial that support for women with mental health difficulties and addiction is funded. Further, the treatment of the workers in Regina Coeli has been abysmal, with the workers and their campaign receiving huge levels of public support, as evident in the volume of signatures in their petition.

Regina Coeli House has provided the space needed for women who are homeless, have been abused, have addictions or mental health difficulties or who have been trafficked. There is simply nothing similar to it in terms of the support it provides to vulnerable women. Unfortunately, these workers were dismissed by management two days before they would become eligible for redundancy payments. It is clear that there must be sustainable and long-term government funding to support Regina Coeli Hostel and existing domestic abuse refuges across Northern Ireland. Further, given the horrific levels of femicide and violence against women and girls across Northern Ireland, it is clear that further refuges and hostels are needed to support women.

In addition to saving Regina Coeli Hostel and providing additional support for existing and new refuges, we also would request that all new city planning and regeneration schemes include a certain percentage of 'safe hostels' for women and girls across Northern Ireland.

6.2.4 Inclusion of State Violence

The WPG would also like to recommend that any strategies to deal with domestic abuse and sexual abuse or violence against women and girls also incorporate actions to deal with state violence against women.

Police Violence Against Women:

For instance, in relation to both strategies, it is important to consider that perpetrators may hold positions of power in governmental roles or public bodies such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

In particular, given the case of Sarah Everard being kidnapped, raped, strangled and murdered by Wayne Couzens, a Police Officer who pretended to be arresting her, it is crucial that any government action to address violence against women and girls includes looking inward to state enforced violence.

We make this recommendation given recent reports of 63% of PSNI officers accused of domestic abuse facing no professional discipline whatsoever⁹⁰, or the fact that 134 PSNI officers have been accused of sexual assault in the past five years with only one of these complaints resulting in disciplinary action⁹¹. Whilst this includes state violence against civilians, we also believe this should include taking action of violence against women working within government or public bodies, given accusations of sexual misconduct not being taken seriously⁹².

Women in Prison:

We are also concerned with the growing levels of violence against women in prisons, or women who've been victims of men's violence being sent to prisons, which is evidenced in the fact that the number of women in prison in Northern Ireland has doubled since 2000 and the majority of women imprisoned in NI have not committed violence crimes and many are themselves victims of rape, domestic abuse and sexual assault. Many of these women are being kept in prisons as a "safe place" as a result of vast government cuts to public services, mental health provisions and widespread poverty and growing austerity. The trauma and state imposed harm on these women should also be addressed in any VAWG strategy.

⁹⁰ Belfast Telegraph, (October 2021): <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/63-of-psni-officers-accused-of-domestic-violence-faced-no-professional-discipline-new-figures-show-40923713.html>

⁹¹ The Detail (October 2021): <https://thedetail.tv/articles/134-sexual-assault-allegations-against-psni-officers-in-five-years>

⁹² BBC (October 2021): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-59147597>

Examples of how women are treated within the criminal justice system are available in the Criminal Justice Inspection Report in November 2021 on 'How the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland Treats Females in Conflict with the Law'⁹³:

"Police Officers were called to a household dispute. A young adult woman was arrested for criminal damage and detained in police custody. Records on the police system showed a history of Adverse Childhood Experiences including offences committed against her. As a child, she had been a victim of sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. Records showed she was on the child protection register and in care as a child. There was a history of suspected offences, as well as being reported missing and concerns for her safety as a child. As a young woman, she had experienced domestic abuse by a partner. There were concerns about living in temporary accommodation and an associated deterioration in mental health and behaviour. The young woman was charged and bailed with conditions. A referral sheet for mental health and self-harm was provided." (p.34)

Another case study example from the same report:

A 17-year-old female attended a Youth Conference for theft of low value items. She was assessed as medium risk of reoffending and despite past non-compliance had been engaging well. The young women met with the victim and reflected maturely on the implications of her behaviour in the conference. There was evidence of significant trauma, substance misuse, and risk of sexual exploitation. There had been domestic abuse at home from an early age. Extensive contacts from early childhood and then subsequently as a victim and suspect as well as missing reports and concerns for safety were evident on the police system. On turning 18 years of age concerns about sexual exploitation continued. She appeared on ROP for a short period for measures to control offence behaviour. Services to provide support for reported concerns relating to sexual exploitation were not apparent from the record. (p.63)

⁹³ Criminal Justice Inspection System Northern Ireland (November 2021), 'How the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland Treats Females in Conflict with the Law': <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/6743c32c-cbd5-4356-8c78-4d0cb5bd9620/Females-in-Conflict-with-the-Law.aspx>

Intersectional Systemic Forms of Violence Against Women:

There are many examples of intersectional forms of systemic violence against women by the state that should be considered within any strategy to deal with VAWG. We would recommend much further analysis of these issues in general, but would like to highlight a few examples.

Systemic racism against women of colour across the UK is a huge issue. One example of this is maternal death rates and the fact that Black mothers are four times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than white mothers⁹⁴. This is a clear example of systemic racism and violence against Black women in the UK that must be addressed urgently.

Another example is the recent case of a young 15-year-old Black girl who was subjected to a police strip search in her school without parental consent and in the knowledge that she was menstruating, which involved exposure of intimate body parts and degrading her further by making her remove her sanitary towel and bend over and cough. This is clearly a humiliating and traumatising form of state violence against a young girl which clearly signifies systemic racism within this school and the police. Labour MP Diane Abbott stated⁹⁵:

'Police strip-searched a 15-year-old black girl at school. When will these abuses end? The pupil from east London was humiliated, and we should be outraged. It seems police racism and misogyny is as bad as ever ... it would be easy to dismiss the 2020 incident as an aberration, to believe that the police officers involved were the proverbial "bad apples" ... But there is a deeper truth here: although senior Metropolitan police officers are better media trained than ever, the racism and misogyny that has always characterised and blighted the force is still very much present. Recent incidents make that clear'

The Concept of a few "bad apples" is wrong, as the police service, and every other job with access to power over people, can attract people who want to use this power in a corrupt and criminal way; often with women and girls being the victims.

Another example of state violence against women can be seen in the cruel and inhumane austerity cuts across the UK over the past decade which have

⁹⁴ The Guardian (2021), 'Black women in UK four times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth': <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/11/black-women-uk-maternal-mortality-rates>

⁹⁵ Diane Abbott (Mar 2021), 'Police strip-searched a 15-year-old black girl at school. When will these abuses end?', The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/16/police-strip-search-black-girl-school-east-london-racism-misogyny>

disproportionately impacted women. Among those women, single mothers and disabled women have been the worst impacted and many have lost their lives. Here are just some examples of how state violence has been enacted upon disabled women through private companies:

- This woman⁹⁶, who is blind, who had to sell her belongings in order to live due to the delay in outcome of her Personal Independence Payment (PIP) appeal,
- This woman⁹⁷ who was sexually assaulted and left incontinent as a result and was humiliated by a PIP assessor and had disability benefit support removed,
- Capita, the private company responsible for PIP assessments, who had to pay damages to the family of a woman who died after being wrongly denied disability support⁹⁸,
- This disabled woman⁹⁹ who was called a 'lying bitch' by a disability assessor and had to fight to have her benefits restored,
- This woman¹⁰⁰ who died by suicide after having benefit payments cut,
- The fact that 17,000 sick and disabled people have died while waiting on decisions regarding entitlements to disability benefits¹⁰¹,
- The fact that the UK Government's Austerity Regime has caused life expectancy to decline in areas of social deprivation, with women's life expectancy of women in the most deprived areas being hit the hardest¹⁰², with poorer women in England dying nearly 10 years younger than the richest.

Further, a report on tackling violence against disabled women and girls rightly points out¹⁰³:

"When non-disabled people concentrate on domestic violence as being the dominant model of violence against women, they often miss cases into which they need to intervene. The model and policy of tackling domestic violence (for example, IDVA) needs to extend to violence in [state] institutions, which are often the 'domestic' setting where disabled people live. In addition, violence, neglect and abuse by nursing and support workers in disabled people's houses, care homes and

⁹⁶ BBC News (2019): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-47310767>

⁹⁷ BBC News (2019): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-47324184>

⁹⁸ BBC News (2019): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-shropshire-47324221>

⁹⁹ The Guardian (2019): <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/apr/12/dwp-to-restore-benefits-of-disabled-woman-it-called-lying-bitch>

¹⁰⁰ BBC News (2021): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56819727>

¹⁰¹ The Independent (2019): <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/pip-waiting-time-deaths-disabled-people-die-disability-benefits-personal-independence-payment-dwp-a8727296.html>

¹⁰² Wired (2020): <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/austerity-health-impacts-uk-life-expectancy>

¹⁰³ A Toolkit for Social Care, Housing, Mental Health and Safeguarding Services (2019), 'Tackling Violence Against Disabled Women and Girls': <https://avaproject.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FINAL-Drill-Final-Project-Toolkit-VADWG-2019-1proofed.pdf>

accommodation, should also be included in the remit of domestic violence workers.”

Much more information on the impact of poverty, austerity, universal credit, disability benefits and the cost of living on women in Northern Ireland specifically is available from the Women’s Regional Consortium¹⁰⁴.

Historical Abuse, Denial of Rights and Enabling Violence Against Women’s Rights:

Incorporating state violence in a VAWG strategy would also ensure that other forms of state violence, such as the horrific Mother and Baby Institutions, the denial of reproductive healthcare, and further reductions in the rights of women by the state would be included. It is clear that women support the incorporation of state harm into a VAWG strategy as evidenced in our own research.

In addition to this, allowing the ongoing harassment, abuse and bullying of women and pregnant people trying to access abortion or other reproductive health care would also be prevented if the Northern Ireland Executive is serious about addressing violence against women. More on the perspectives of women and pregnant people who have been subject to this form of abuse is available below.

6.2.5 Alliance for Choice Testimonies - Harms of Abortion Clinic Harassment and Abuse

Abortion Clinic Harassment and Abuse

As people who have had abortions, Alliance for Choice have been subjected to street harassment and abuse when accessing clinics and healthcare facilities. As clinic escorts we have witnessed first-hand, aggressive harassment and its traumatic impact on women and pregnant people. Moreover, we hear regularly from women who are traumatised by anti-abortion protesters when they have accessed abortion care. We also work with healthcare professionals forced to endure routine harassment, whilst they are expected to conduct clinical practice with megaphones and sound systems blaring abuse into their treatment rooms and terrifying their patients.

¹⁰⁴ Women’s Regional Consortium Research:
<https://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/research/>

It is completely unacceptable that women and pregnant people, their friends and families, and healthcare workers should be forced to run the gauntlet of abuse and harassment. This would not be tolerated for vasectomy or any other healthcare, reproductive and otherwise. Given the small size of NI some of those who contact us do not want to attend their most local provider as they are worried they will be identified while accessing the service. We have even been contacted by people with family members who are protesting outside the clinic, which makes it impossible for them to access without opening themselves to stigma and abuse.

The right to protest is fundamental but it is not unqualified, it relies on the protestors not causing or calling for harm to minorities or inflicting harm through language that will discriminate based on race, gender, sexuality and so on. Such tactics are not legitimate protest and infringe on people's rights, privacy, safety, mental health and access to legal abortion care. The fervent harassment is targeted deliberately and directly at abortion seekers and those who provide legal abortion services.

It includes:

- Blockage of entrances
- Unwanted engagement even after requests to stop
- Unwanted, scaremongering and misleading anti-abortion and anti-vaccination literature
- Filming of patients, family and friends and healthcare workers
- Verbal abuse: referring to people as 'murderers', baby-killers, or 'mother of a dead baby' after their appointments, patients being told they are 'eternally damned to hell'
- Patients having 'holy water' thrown over them or salt.
- Prayer vigils - including large judgemental, decontextualised scripture passages on placards.
- Plastic dolls being given names and women being told this is 'their' baby
- Patients being told they can get breast cancer from having an abortion
- Patients being told that abortion will ruin their fertility and future family plans
- Patients being told they will develop mental health issues because they have had an abortion
- Patients being told they are more likely to be an abusive parent after an abortion
- Parents accompanying women, being told they are an accessory to the murder of their grandchild
- Patients, friends and relatives being pursued in the street
- Patients being physically assaulted
- Graphic and misleading foetal images
- Patients being told that images of them will end up on social media

This is by no means an exhaustive list of what women have been subjected to. (See further information below)

None of this is passive protest, it is harassment and abuse. Neither is it simply 'free speech', as is claimed, it seeks to target women, pregnant people and healthcare workers with harmful consequences. You cannot claim to defend free speech unless you are prepared to call out those who twist it for targeted harassment.

During the pandemic, many political leaders have condemned the behaviour of those involved in 'anti-vaxx' protests outside hospitals. A number of anti-choice organisations and individuals are also vocally anti COVID vaccination and have produced unscientific and problematic literature in and around the vaccine. If many politicians agree that such behaviour outside healthcare facilities is unacceptable, then it should also be unacceptable that women, pregnant people and healthcare workers are subjected to the same and oftentimes worse treatment when it comes to accessing legal abortion healthcare.

The information below are testimonies from people who have encountered the protesters and contacted Alliance for Choice via an online form that we ask them to complete to describe such encounters. It has been online since January 2020 and this list is an edited selection.

"I have lived in England for nearly a decade yet every single time I am back in Belfast city centre without FAIL I will witness anti choice harassment. I was once verbally abused after simply walking PAST a crowd of anti-choicers blocking the entrance to the old MSI clinic in 2017. My mother had a violent miscarriage and I would regularly warn her if I heard there were gory images of fetuses plastered around town. This happens REGULARLY and has done for decades. It is part of the reason myself and many others leave NI and don't look back. Precious Life and similar organisations have used harassment tactics for years. It is a disgrace especially AFTER recent news of the scale of abuse in mother and baby homes. It's TIME for the women of NI to be able to go into TOWN (never mind while trying to access health care) without fear of harassment by abusive anti choicers."

"I had an appointment in a solicitors office across the road from John Mitchell place Newry, I was so scared entering hill Street newry"

How many people:

- **“Approx 20-30 protesters the last day I saw. One man with a microphone and loud speaker roaring about hell and sin. All with placards of fetus’ or big black writing saying babies are murdered here.”**
- “5 on one side of the entrance junction to the clinic and 3 on the other side as well as someone recording the protest across the road”
- “Approx 20-30 protesters the last day I saw. One man with a microphone and loud speaker roaring about hell and sin. All with placards of fetus’ or big black writing saying babies are murdered here.”
- “Mostly men, some vulnerable adults, about 15”
- “There must have been about 20 people, no social distancing, scary pictures”
- “People lined the footpath on both sides of the road, approx 20-30 maybe”
- “2 older men. One had a priest's collar and no mask. The other wore a mask.”

Covid-19 safety

- The woman with the clipboard was not wearing a mask. I made a complaint about what was happening to the police woman present. I said it was a breach of Covid rules which state only to leave for limited essential purposes. The police woman told me the 'protestors' had told her they were there for work purposes and they worked for Stanton Health Care. She said her Sargent was in the jeep working on it.
- No. None of them wore masks and they did not stand socially distanced from each other.
- No distancing. No masks on any of them, man with speaker was from Bangor(he said himself) so he's broken the travel restrictions for a start. Cara from Tipperary.
- No masks, occasionally not socially distanced from each other and you have to go threw the middle of them.
- Nobody was socially distancing at all.

- Not many masks, distanced for the most part, some in twos and threes
- One wore a mask. The other didn't. They weren't socially distancing from each other.
- No masks, distanced partially but not when having their conversations

- One wearing a mask the others no. One is well known anti abortion woman Bernie Smyth who is not from Newry so obviously broke travel restrictions.
- The young woman was not wearing a mask and they were all directly outside the clinic coming in contact and approaching people. They were grouped together.
- No masks, no social distancing, arguably blocking the side walk meaning close contact for people walking past or into the hospital.

Did they have images - can you describe them?

- They had pictures of fetuses and a picture of Holy Mary.
- They had pictures of fetuses and religious images propped up against the wall of the building.
- Signs saying "children being murdered here".
- **They had images and a bag of things they must have planned to give out. I didn't interact with them I was so afraid of them that I got a taxi from the airport straight to the door of the clinic and picked up to leave the same way**
- Yes, posters about the humanity of the unborn child
- Placards as mentioned with early stage pregnancy fetus. Signs of all sort with diff messages
- Yes, dismembered babies at different stages. Signs that are offensive and basically calling every1 that's ever needed an abortion a murderer
- Cut up babies, they had dead baby pictures
- Both men carried placards. One referred to murdering babies. The other had an image of what appeared to be a fetus in a womb
- Very graphic images. Distressing for anyone especially children and those affected by miscarriage or still birth. Many of whom will have to pass these to access health services
- All anti abortion, slogans, images, dismembered babies. Murder is done here signs.
- Graphic abortion images
- Horrendous images, of babies still in the womb, nothing anyone would want to see on their way to receive treatment for their mental health.
- 4 large placards with graphic images of what they say are aborted fetus'
- **They did not have images but they had signs reading "babies are murdered here" in red blood like writing.**
- Yes they were carrying signs, sometimes graphic, using guilt tactics and slogans such as 'my life matters'
- Aggressive posters with pictures of fetuses saying babies are killed here and other signs saying we love you and abortion is not healthcare

What were they doing or saying:

- At the time I was there, there was one woman holding a clipboard outside the door. However I recognised a woman I've seen on the TV called Bernie Smyth standing on the street opposite the clinic making a phone call. She is from a group called Precious Life.
- Two women were standing either side of the front door to the Health clinic, as if they were doormen. The third woman, the one with the clipboard walked back and forth in front of the door. She then stopped and began a conversation with a passerby. The woman with the clipboard was not wearing a mask and was not socially distanced from the passerby. I was so outraged by this disregard for the Covid regulations that I approached a police vehicle that was parked nearby. I made an official complaint to the police.
- **Baby killer, evil bitches getting abortions, whores, fallen women. never calm always abusive. Actively blocking not only the entrance to clinics but the whole pavement**
- Talked about babies being murdered and detail when the abortion clinic is running and state that they want to share the gospel with people using the facility
- I didn't interact with them they were across the street from the clinic, I did stand at the doors and have a cigarette and was nervous but they didn't shout at me.
- Silent protest, no blocking or interaction with the passersby
- Main man shouting over speaker non stop, rest were silent but standing the whole length of the clinic wall so very intimidating for anyone entering
- **Shouting through a speaker chanting verses turning them into anti abortion verses.**
- They had a speakerphone and were rambling on about christ. Calling us anti christ.
- Today they were silent but very intimidating
- They were handing out leaflets and engaging with passersby
- Holding graphic disturbing posters. Verbally abusive to anyone who challenged their imagery and location choices
- **Standing with the same cards they had a few weeks ago at JMP in Newry and clinic was moved and now they are outside that clinic which is also right outside mental health and as someone who's had a miscarriage and suffers ptsd and goes to counselling i cannot attend an appointment if they are here.**
- Blocking a footpath
- Standing at the entrance so anybody accessing the hospital can see them and their signs.

- No shouting but held signs
- This is a 10 week baby
- **As I was leaving the clinic the woman approached me not wearing a mask saying she could help me. Even though before my boyfriend had went outside before me and said not to be talking to me.**

How did the protestors make you feel

- The pictures made me sick to my stomach. They are incredibly distressing to view. The thought that this woman with the clipboard was there to harasses women accessing health care shook me to the core. My distress was exasperated by the fact that it was the day after the report on Mother and Baby homes was released. One of these homes had an infant mortality rate of 75%. What I saw today is the same as the attitude that created and enabled the incarceration of women and forced adoptions in these homes. It is now 8 hours since I witnessed this and I still feel wretched. I can't stop thinking of those poor women who had to pass this horror show today so that they could access their basic human right to health care.
- **I am a man but I immediately thought of my daughter and other young women like her. I was saddened and angered at the thought of a young woman with an unwanted pregnancy having to walk that gauntlet to access information and care . I am outraged and disgusted that these people are allowed to intimidate and bully pregnant women. Regarding the breach of Covid regulations, Initially I was flabbergasted. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Contemptuous and flagrant disregard for Covid regulations, their own health and safety, and the health and safety of others. I found their rank hypocrisy deeply infuriating. They were professing to care for the 'unborn', while showing total disregard for the living**
- sick. They are why I have never moved back home. the lack of respect for women in NI is unparalleled
- Uncomfortable and trapped. There were protestors on each side of the road as well as the road opposite the clinic. The person recording also made me feel uncomfortable.
- Angry. Frustrated that the police weren't moving them along. If they can't for freedom of speech as they said they could at least for covid restrictions
- Traumatized, Bernadette Smyth has personally traumatized me.
- **I felt really nervous even from when I booked the procedure at the thought of protestors being there. I felt anxious and panicked when I arrived in the taxi and ran straight in the door**
- Extremely intimidated, i have PTSD from a complicated birth after i suffered a miscarriage and these images are so traumatising ive been waking up soaked

in sweat and my nightmares have returned constantly running round a hospital searching for my baby

- I felt very scared
 - **Intimidated, I'm a midwife who works there and felt very uncomfortable walking past these people**
 - Really angry and upset.
 - Intimidated, and also frustrated and angry that they are allowed to do all of this freely without any intervention from police especially given it is taking place at a City healthcare facility
 - Angry, sad, upset, emotional, lost, alone, resentful, intimidated
 - Uncomfortable and inadequate
-
- Sick to my stomach, no longer receiving treatment there but personally I could never attend my appointment after passing something like that. Never mind it being a personal issue for some people, outside a mental health unit is just sick. They were also holding signs saying that there are babies killed inside that building. Which I'm pretty sure is false. I wanted to go back to counselling but until I know that there will be none of this happening, I will not be returning.
 - **Angry. Why aren't they being moved! Police need to move them or set up a perimeter that they must stay behind away from the main entrance.**
 - I was just passing by but as a person who accessed a similar service in the past I found this a "triggering" experience.
 - It is shocking and cannot imagine how a couple who've experienced miscarriage or still birth would feel - as well as those who avail of their bodily choice
 - Angry, upset, I felt like my life and my choice didn't matter
 - This made me angry abortion is legal and should be accessed safely without the judgment. I was so anxious because of the harassment and also upset by it.
 - Angry and upset

Can you easily describe how it made others feel

- I can't imagine how the woman felt who had to pass these images and the woman with her clipboard. I know what it's like to have a crisis pregnancy. What you need is support, not to be lied to and attacked with salacious images. I was lucky enough to have my abortion in a secular country where it was accepted as a woman's right. Exclusions zone must be put in place around Health Care Facilities so that women and people accessing services are protected from this type of horror show and harassment
- I saw a young woman approach the building, see the women and images outside it and then hastily turn on her heel and go back the way she came.

- **My mum was with me and she was worried for my sake about how these protesters would make me feel during such a difficult time**
- Uncomfortable. Angry, frustrated, motivated to get them moved
- Angry, frustrated, traumatised. Sad as they had a wee girl around 5 standing holding a sign
- **One woman stopped to confront the men. She started crying. My heart broke for her. She was clearly very upset by the placards these men were carrying and by what they were saying to her.**
- Others also very frustrated and angry that this is allowed to happen
- Intimated, angry, hostile
- Angry. Frustrated, sad
- This had made my boyfriend angry after because he seen I was already anxious about them and for them to verbally harass me

6.2.6 Adequate Funding and Resourcing of these strategies

We would like to stress the absolute necessity to provide adequate resourcing to both strategies to ensure all governmental departments, public bodies and those involved in the justice system can adapt to any recommendations made within both. We would also like to highlight the necessity of supporting the VCS organisations who have been filling the gaps in government provisions for victims of VAWG for many years, and how crucial it is to start adequately funding these organisations if any progress is to be made in relation to tackling men's violence against women and girls.

Funding the Women's Sector and other Specialist VCS Organisations

In recent years, funding to the women's sector has decreased dramatically while demand has increased, leading to a sector working at extreme over-capacity levels. It is absolutely crucial in tackling domestic and sexual abuse and violence against women and girls that adequate funding and resourcing is provided to the women's sector, and other VCS sector organisations supporting victims of VAWG, to enable support provision and education and training.

Many of the organisations across the women's sector, LGBTQ+ sector and migrant support sector are on short-term precarious funding, which makes it extremely difficult to adequately support women who have been victims of VAWG.

For instance, Raise Your Voice is one of the only organisations tackling VAWG at the roots by reaching out to victims and survivors directly about their experiences, but also by reaching out to men and boys to educate and workshop with them about

consent, sexual harassment, rape myths, stalking, image-based sexual abuse and ally bystander training. Decades of increasing legislation against rape, sexual violence and sexual harassment has done very little to decrease their incident rate. Indeed, emerging technologies have given rise, instead, to brand new forms of abuse. Raise Your Voice will soon reach the end of a 3 year period of funding by a charity, without the adequate funding to the organisations who can address the root causes such as misogyny and gender inequality, the issue will continue to spread.

In addition, it is well known that migrant women, disabled women, LGBTQI+ women and rural women face additional barriers to support when they are victims of VAWG. Despite this, Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK without specialist support for migrant women who have been victims of VAWG. HERE NI and Cara-Friend have the only funded LGBTQ+ sector worker focused on domestic and sexual abuse, and this funding is extremely precarious. Rural women only receive 1.3% of all government funding allocated to women's organisations. There are no specific disabled women's organisations in Northern Ireland. Rape Crisis Northern Ireland also recently opened, but as is the case with most of the above, funding is extremely precarious and there is nowhere near enough to meet the demand of victims of rape. The Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland have also seen massive increases in demand for their services throughout the pandemic with many domestic abuse refuges full throughout, yet Northern Ireland was the only part of the UK that did not receive emergency funding from Westminster to address this.

It is clear that more adequate funding structures must be developed to address the endemic levels of VAWG in our society. This funding must be drastically increased, not only for support for victims and survivors, but for the women's sector and broader VCS sector to deliver tailored education and awareness programmes aimed at prevention.

6.2.7 Workplace Perspectives

We also wanted to highlight that we have included perspectives of several trade unions in this response, and the need to see VAWG as a workplace issue. Throughout several responses to the calls for views, we will have a section on workplace perspectives, with recommendations and supplementary data from trade unions. It is clear based on the result of our own research that any measure to deal with VAWG should include all public and private spaces, including workplaces, and it is worth considering additional employment guidelines or statutory legislation to support these strategies.

6.2.8 Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Gillen Review and Courts Reform

Other recommendations the broader women's sector has advocating on for many years is the need for the full implementation of Gillen Review Recommendations (see section 5.1.2), implementation of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner in Northern Ireland (section 5.1.3), as well as the need for reform of the courts system in relation to cases of VAWG.

A recent Victim Support NI report highlights data on victims' experiences of the court process in cases of sexual violence¹⁰⁵:

"Something must be said about victims of sexual violence in this context. Professionals dealing with victims have come to understand how important it is that they feel believed. They may have been dignified by interview processes, by special arrangements at referral centres and a feeling of privacy at interview. However, when victims enter the courtroom and make their way to the witness box, they are simply witnesses who are yet to be believed. The implication is that the burden of proof sits on their shoulders, balancing on their performance. "(p.12)

*"One focus in evidence gathering has been on rape myths and the role they play in the course of a trial, influencing how evidence is presented and heard within the court setting. Jurors and others within the physical court represent the wider moral story of a society not yet settled on the matter of rape myths. Myths about who was truly responsible for the event, myths about women's power over men and manipulative ability to, with a chosen outfit, tempt a man from his normal self and fall into the shame of something he did not intend. Myths about 'no really meaning yes' and 'alcohol being the real culprit' persist, as the moral narrative of today's society has not yet been definitively decided. Sir John recognised the reality of these myths and their potential to derail justice: **Rape myths are a trial reality and can often form the basis of aggressive cross-examination and may attract the unreasonable thinking of jurors.** Moreover, for all kinds of societal reasons, complainants often buy into these myths, blaming themselves. I regard them as potentially a major challenge to the concept of a fair trial." (p.11)*

¹⁰⁵ Victim Support NI (2021): <https://www.victimsupportni.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Court-Observers-Feeling-Is-Understanding-report.pdf>

As well as the implementation of the remaining Gillen recommendations that remain outstanding, not least the provisions for the education of jurors on sexual offences trials to counteract common rape myths, a further recommendation the WPG would support in cases relating to VAWG and particularly sexual offences would be for courts in these kinds of cases not to have jury trials at all. While we are aware that this recommendation was made by Victim Support¹⁰⁶, Belfast Feminist Network and others in response to the Gillen Review, and that it was considered at the time and rejected, we return to this recommendation because at present the situation remains as it was before the Review; despite everything, courts do not seem to be able to deliver a fair trial in these kinds of cases. Victim Support's Court Observer's Report shows that victim blaming language and the reliance on rape myths by defence teams is still rampant, and it appears that juries are not yet able to identify these phenomena when they experience them.

In his preface to the final Report, Sir John Gillen writes "these offences seem to defy the ordinary trial process"¹⁰⁷. We concur, and until the elimination of the rape myths and victim blaming thinking that make this true, **we recommend a judge-led panel of experts, rather than jury trials, for these kinds of offences.**

Further, with regards to the outstanding Gillen Recommendations, we urge the immediate amendment of the 2008 Order as outlined by Sir John Gillen in his review, specifically with regards to the move towards "a requirement for some measure of affirmative or participative expression of consent and away from a focus on resistance as a means to prove the absence of consent"¹⁰⁸. Expanding on this in the Review, Gillen recommends three courses of action, all of which we support, and one of which we will expand on below.

Firstly, there is the recommendation to follow practice in New Zealand and amend the 2008 Order "to provide that a failure to say or do anything when submitting to a sexual act, or to protest or offer resistance to it, does not of itself constitute consent". That the present state of affairs provides the opposite is damning as it contravenes what is widely understood and accepted in the scientific community about human reactions to sexual violation - one does not necessarily respond with "fight or flight" responses; "freezing" is most common, while "flopping" and "fawning" or "friending" are widely recognised responses too¹⁰⁹. To have a law that fails to recognise this fact and mandates a certain response is not only enormously harmful to individual

¹⁰⁶ Victim Support NI (2019) : <https://www.victimsupportni.com/2019/02/11/our-gillen-report-response/>

¹⁰⁷ Gillen Review (2019) p.i https://www.lawsoc-ni.org/DatabaseDocs/new_8655264_gillen-review-report-into-the-law-and-procedures-in-serious-sexual-offences-in-.pdf

¹⁰⁸ Gillen Review (2019) p.36 <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/gillen-report-may-2019.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ STARS Dorset (2020) <https://www.starsdorset.org/blog/how-the-brain-works-in-response-to-a-traumatic-event-fight-flight-freeze-flop-friend>

complainants and damaging to their recovery, it is also actively reinforcing rape myths at the same time; both in the minds of the jury in that specific case, when used by defence teams, but also in the minds of the broader public. The appropriate amendments to the legislation must be made with the greatest possible haste.

Secondly Gillen recommends that the 2008 Order is amended to include provision to “expand the range of circumstances as to when there is an absence of consent to include, for example (i) where the complainant submits to the act because of a threat or fear of violence or other serious detriment such as intimidation, coercive conduct or psychological oppression to the complainant or to others; (ii) where the only expression of consent or agreement to the act comes from a third party; and (iii) where the complainant is overcome, voluntarily or not, by the effect of alcohol or drugs.” All of these situations are so common sense that it may shock people to realise that they are not already explicitly provided for; that they are not speaks to the ways that rape specifically and sexual offences more broadly have been understood, legislated for, tried and even spoken about in the past. Many of our laws on this issue date from a time when women and children were property to be disposed of at the will of their owner, and when change comes it often comes many years after it should. It is past time that these amendments be made, so that those who would take advantage of the poor understanding of consent that plagued previous generations are not actively abetted by the law in doing so. The Sexual Offences NI Order (2008) defines consent as follows: “a person consents if he agrees by choice, and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice”¹¹⁰. Amending the order as outlined above would define more clearly what is meant by the “freedom and capacity”.

Sir Gillen also recommends that the 2008 Order be amended “to add that, in determining whether there was a reasonable belief in consent, the jury should take account of a failure to take any steps to ascertain whether the complainant consented”. This area is one that we believe has the potential to be a significant step in the process towards improving the chances of a conviction in these kinds of cases as well as to reframe how these trials are approached by the legal system and experienced by survivors, and therefore we wish to expand on in some detail.

The Order says that, when a jury decides on the guilt or otherwise of the accused in a trial for sexual offences, consideration must be given to whether they reasonably believed that the complainant consented. This also must include consideration of all known circumstances in the case and any steps the defendant may have taken to determine whether the complainant consented¹¹¹. Gillen’s proposed reframing shifts responsibility and focus from the behaviour of the complainant to the behaviour of

¹¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2008/1769/article/3>

¹¹¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2008/1769/article/5>

the defendant in a fundamental way; instead of leaving the opportunity for a defendant to say that they observed no objection from the complainant and thus reasonably believed that they had consent, this proposed change intends to ask the jury to consider the defendant's failure to be certain that they had consent, and to require those steps to be accounted for. As Eithne Dowds argues in her in depth study on this issue, "as Gillen suggested, the reformulated reasonable belief threshold may shift attention to the perpetrator thus contributing to an important counter-narrative. In this way, Gillen's proposal can help to rebalance the focus of the trial and disrupt dominant narratives that imply consent by highlighting the unreasonableness of a defendant's belief in consent."¹¹²

We believe that this is a vital and potentially transformative change that relates to existing rape myths in all sorts of important ways; as Dowds observes and per a vast canon of feminist writings, the existing laws and provisions around sexual offences may have come a long way, but they are built upon a foundation where rape was not fully understood for a harm in itself, rather as an act of damaging property (in this case, human property). As such an image of an archetypal victim and indeed an archetypal rape as emerged; the victim is chaste, innocent of any wrong doing, ideally she is modestly dressed. She is overpowered, probably by a stranger, taken by force, she protests loudly and fights back with all of her might. We know that none of these things are seen in the vast majority of these cases, but the archetypes remain, and they impact on the perception of the jury and - most importantly - the line of questioning taken by defence barristers in particular. Important work is ongoing on undoing rape myths by the Gillen Review Implementation Team but there remains a long way to go, and we hear this reliance on myths in court rooms daily, as defence teams ask questions about a complainant's attire, alcohol consumption, why she went to a dangerous place, why she was alone. Rarely do we hear questions demanding answers from defendants about whether they asked for consent, what exactly they said and what was said to them, and whether, if the assumption was based on non-verbal cues, they followed this assumption up with verbal reassurance, or why they thought it was enough. As Dowds argues, this places responsibility on the complainant, their conduct at the time of the incident, in reporting to police and in the witness box scrutinised from every angle, a reality readily manipulated at trial, while the defendant too often offers little to no argument as to why they presumed that consent was present.

As such **we recommend the full implementation of recommendations 91 and 92 of the Gillen Report**, specifically;

¹¹² Dowds, Eithne "I presume she wanted it to happen": rape, reasonable belief in consent, and law reform in Northern Ireland Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly Vol.73 AD1 (2022) 74-102, p.100 <https://nilq.qub.ac.uk/index.php/nilq/article/view/946/808>

- we have proposed amendments to the 2008 Order as follows:
- to follow the example in New Zealand and to provide that a failure to say or do anything when submitting to a sexual act, or to protest or offer resistance to it, does not of itself constitute consent;
- to expand the range of circumstances as to when there is an absence of consent to include, for example (i) where the complainant submits to the act because of a threat or fear of violence or other serious detriment such as intimidation, coercive conduct or psychological oppression to the complainant or to others; (ii) where the only expression of consent or agreement to the act comes from a third party; and (iii) where the complainant is overcome, voluntarily or not, by the effect of alcohol or drugs; and
- to add that, in determining whether there was a reasonable belief in consent, the jury should take account of a failure to take any steps to ascertain whether the complainant consented.¹¹³

6.2.9 Girls as Victims of Sexual Abuse and Assault

We remain deeply concerned about the high levels of recorded sexual violence against children, particularly girls, in Northern Ireland. According to the most recent annual PSNI Trends in Police Recorded Crime In Northern Ireland 1998/99 to 2018/19, published November 2019, children remain the largest proportion of victims of sexual offenses across all age bands (in the category of sexual offenses, sexual assault is the largest offense). In other words, across a person's lifetime in NI they are most at risk of being a victim of a sexual offense before the age of 18.¹¹⁴

Female victims represented 83% of all sexual offenses against children in 2007/08, and 71 % in 2018/19.¹¹⁵

A Criminal Justice Inspection NI report of June 2020 identified major issues with the PSNI handling of child sexual exploitation cases. The report states:

“Even when high risk had been identified, important information and intelligence appeared not to have been recorded on the police system. This meant frontline Officers were not informed about the wider child

¹¹³ Gillen Review (2019) p.36

¹¹⁴<https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/documents/police-recorded-crime-in-northern-ireland-1998-99-to-2018-19.pdf>

¹¹⁵<https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/documents/police-recorded-crime-in-northern-ireland-1998-99-to-2018-19.pdf>

sexual exploitation risks. Proactive work with children required to be better evidenced. Crucially, child protection actors and outcomes were not evident from the system; and it was not always apparent if all children assessed at risk of child sexual exploitation had been referred for a child protection investigation.”¹¹⁶

The report also addresses the extremely low levels of prosecution of these cases, and states, “As it was, few children had experience of perpetrators being held responsible for the crimes against them and, as highlighted by a stakeholder, this risked communicating to children that the system expected them ‘to be the fix’.”¹¹⁷

6.2.10 Migrant, LGBTQI+, Working Class, Disabled and Rural Women

Disabled Women:

In order to facilitate meeting the diverse objective needs of different victim groups in Northern Ireland, much more robust reporting and monitoring of all section 75 groups is needed within the PSNI and broader Criminal Justice System.

For instance, it is estimated that one in two disabled women are in abusive relationships in the UK, however there is insufficient data collection in Northern Ireland to know the extent of disabled people experiencing abuse¹¹⁸. As disabled people face additional barriers in accessing support, not recording the numbers of disabled people specifically experiencing abuse prevents specific resources and support measures being put in place¹¹⁹. It is clear that more needs to be done to understand the extent of abuse that disabled women in Northern Ireland face, and that resourcing must be provided to enable specific support for disabled women who are victims of abuse.

¹¹⁶<http://www.cjini.org/getattachment/31173a89-f283-4e24-ac04-4aab3cbd0d04/Child-Sexual-Exploitation-in-Northern-Ireland.aspx>

¹¹⁷<http://www.cjini.org/getattachment/31173a89-f283-4e24-ac04-4aab3cbd0d04/Child-Sexual-Exploitation-in-Northern-Ireland.aspx>

¹¹⁸ Women’s Budget Group, (2018), ‘Disabled Women and Austerity’, <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Disabled-womenOctober-2018-w-cover-2.pdf>

¹¹⁹ Public Health England, ‘Disability and Domestic Abuse’: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disability-and-domestic-abuse-risk-impacts-and-response>

LGBTQI+ Women:

In addition, the lack of consistent Section 75 recording of victims and perpetrators has meant that statistics do not incorporate the levels of domestic abuse within LGBTQ+ relationships, and adequate community-based support is unable to appropriately support victims. Stonewall reports highlight that one in four of all lesbian and bisexual women has experienced domestic violence in the past, yet no data exists on this in relation to Northern Ireland specifically¹²⁰. This is particularly concerning given the high levels of violence against trans women across the world, with 2021 being considered the deadliest year for transgender and gender non-confirming people, with the majority of deaths being black or Latinx trans women¹²¹.

Often when LGBTQ+ people do report domestic violence, there is a lack of adequate recording, often making the LGBTQ+ community a hidden population in this area. We recommend that all section 75 groups should be monitored inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity. If monitoring sexual orientation and gender identity is standard procedure, this will remove the onus on the individual to 'come out' in an environment they are not sure will be welcoming. Everyone has a sexual orientation and gender identity, and we need to stop othering those who are not heterosexual and/or cis gender (their gender matches that assigned at birth). Policies and procedures should be co-designed with representatives of section 75 groups as specialists and experts to ensure there are no oversights – for example, even when recorded, bisexual people are often mis-recorded based on the gender of their current partner. There must be mandatory training on best practice such as using gender neutral pronouns and sexual orientation awareness. We recommend the Department considers this guide for service providers from Galop¹²².

We would recommend that the DOJ and DOH Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy has a specific pillar to deal with abuse within LGBTQI+ communities, and that additional resourcing and funding for specific LGBTQI+ domestic abuse support worker posts within the LGBTQI+ sector. While we still recommend that the VAWG strategy be named 'Tackling Men's VAWG', this is because we hope that the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse strategy can address violence within LGBTQI+ relationships, and that the VAWG strategy can address heightened levels of men's violence against LGBTQI+ women. Within the VAWG strategy, we would recommend that additional measures are implemented to address vast levels of misogyny, trans misogyny,

¹²⁰ Stonewall.org.uk. 2008. Prescription For Change:

https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/Prescription_for_Change_2008_.pdf

¹²¹ Human Rights Campaign (2021): <https://www.hrc.org/resources/fatal-violence-against-the-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-community-in-2021>

¹²² Galop, 'Barriers Faced by LGBT people in Accessing Non-LGBT Domestic Violence Support Services': <https://www.lgbtsand.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/For-Service-Providers-Barriers.pdf>

homophobia, biphobia and transphobia against LGBTQI+ women by men and boys in Northern Ireland.

Migrant Women:

Further, it is clear that the hostile environment and No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policies by the UK government provide further barriers to migrant women in reporting abuse. Transparency from the NIHSC Trusts on immigration reporting is necessary, given that the British Medical Association states that immigration reporting has a deterrent effect on migrants accessing healthcare¹²³. A coordinated engagement and outreach plan should be implemented to counteract the potential deterrent effect of immigration reporting on those who would otherwise report abuse to healthcare providers, or access care related to abuse.

Migrant and ethnic minority victims of domestic abuse may be uniquely or particularly susceptible to certain forms of coercive control. 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/etc), and the fact that they may not have an available support system of family and friends due to not having local connections. In addition to lack of English language ability, cultural knowledge, and local connections, abusers frequently leverage victims' immigration status against them when it is undocumented or tenuous. This includes abuse which weaponizes immigration status including tenuous statuses (i.e. asylum seekers awaiting an asylum claim decision) or status tied to a spousal or dependents' visa. Other factors which may be leveraged by abusers include lack of financial independence and benefits being in the abusers' name, victims having No Recourse To Public Funds, fear of and lack of knowledge about police and the criminal justice system, spiritual abuse including using religious law as grounds for abuse, and perceived loss of honour or reputation.

Victims may feel that if they come forward about their abuse to NHS workers, the PSNI, or even to support organisations, they may run the risk of deportation. Immigration reporting within the NHS has a detrimental effect in deterring migrants from accessing public services. Fear of immigration reporting leads to migrants and asylum seekers avoiding services such as health screenings, antenatal care, and reporting abuse. In the NI context, Monica McWilliams has gone in depth on the ways in which immigration status is weaponized as a form of coercive control against

¹²³ Coddington, K. (2020). Incompatible With Life: Embodied Borders, Migrant Fertility, and the UK's 'Hostile Environment'. *Politics and Space*, 0 1-14

victims of domestic abuse¹²⁴. Enforced immigration reporting by universities, employers, banks and the NHS and increased reporting from the police was introduced with the UK Immigration Act of 2016 as a follow-on to the 2014 Immigration Act. Furthermore, parallels may be drawn for immigration reporting through the PSNI where victims, including victims of domestic abuse, are deterred from reporting for fear of penalty or deportation. Immigration reporting should not take place in instances in which victims come forward to the PSNI or report to healthcare providers, the Housing Executive, benefits offices, or any other public body.

Unlike in England, Scotland, and Wales, no specialist services for migrant and minority ethnic victims of domestic or sexual violence currently exist in Northern Ireland. These have not been established due to a lack of resourcing. The Gillen Review into the law and procedures in serious sexual offenses in Northern Ireland acknowledges that a criminal justice approach to gender-based violence, when carried out in the absence of adequately resourced support organisations for victims, represents a “complete failure” on the part of the government (p. 529). The United Kingdom is a signatory to the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The Convention requires State Parties to “allocate appropriate financial and human resources for the adequate implementation of policies, measures, and programmes to prevent and combat all forms of violence”. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women requires State Parties to “include in government budgets adequate resources for their activities related to the elimination of violence against women”. As part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland therefore has a human rights obligation in keeping with international standards to fund resources and social programmes for victims of gender-based violence including domestic and sexual violence. These resources and programmes should include specialist services for migrant and ethnic minority victims of gender-based violence.

Refugee and asylum seeker women are at a particular disadvantage under hostile environment policies and are made more vulnerable to violence and abuse as a result. No Recourse to Public Funds, which applies to those awaiting asylum decisions as well as those with refused decisions or who are in the appeal stage, constitutes state-enforced poverty and destitution in practice for asylum seekers given that they are forbidden to work in most professions and receive an allowance of only £39.63 per

¹²⁴ McWilliams, M., Yarnell, P., Churchill, M., 2015. Forced Dependency and Legal Barriers: Implications of the UK's Immigration and Social Security Policies for Minoritized Women Living in Abusive Intimate Relationships in Northern Ireland. *Oñati Socio-legal Series*, 5 (6), 1536-1556.

week. A report by Women For Refugee Women on asylum seeking women made destitute in the UK¹²⁵ found that

- Over three-quarters of destitute asylum seeker women experienced gender-based violence perpetrated by the state or private individuals in their countries of origin
- Almost a third of women who had been raped or sexually abused in their countries of origin were then subject to rape or sexual violence while in the UK after claiming asylum
- Over a third of destitute asylum seeker women reported being forced into unwanted relationships as a result of homelessness or lack of financial recourse to meet basic needs, with 60% of those in unwanted relationships disclosing that they were subject to rape or sexual violence from their partner
- As a result of having No Recourse to Public Funds, one quarter of destitute asylum seeker women have been rape or sexually assaulted while rough sleeping or sleeping in other peoples' homes
- Fear of deportation or detention fuelled by immigration reporting by police and other public bodies stops women from reporting abuse

The hostile environment is a facilitator of and vehicle for gender-based violence and the NI Executive has a moral and legal obligation to mitigate the harms caused by these policies.

Working Class and Rural Women:

Based on our research findings, it is clear that working class and rural women are facing higher levels of men's violence. It is also clear that based on testimonials provided to us, that rural women and working-class women face additional barriers to support when they've been victims of abuse; either due to isolation, mistrust of the police or the effect of paramilitarism in their communities. In order to meet the needs of women in these communities and their ability to access justice and be safe, it is crucial that additional measures to support women from these backgrounds be provided to address the additional barriers they face.

¹²⁵ Dudhia, P. (2020). Will I Ever Be Safe? Asylum Seeking Women Made Destitute in the UK. *Women for Refugee Women*.
<https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WRW-Will-I-ever-be-safe-web.pdf>

WPG Research on Demographics:

Within our own research, we asked respondents a series of questions relating to demographics so that we could highlight which groups of women are at increased risk of experiencing men's violence. A full breakdown of these demographic characteristics has been included elsewhere in this response. It is important to note that several respondents designated themselves as being from multiple of the following categories. To summarise, out of 1065 survey respondents:

- 13.3% were from the LGBTQI+ community
- 9.9% were disabled
- 3.1% were from the migrant community
- 50.2% were from a working-class background
- 24.5% live in a rural area

The following percentages of women belonging to these groups said that they had experienced or been impacted by men's violence:

- LGBTQI+ (96.5%)
- Disabled (92.4%)
- Migrant community (78.8%)
- Working class background (87.7%)
- Live in rural area (84.7%)

In contrast, for those who belonged to 'none of the above' categories, 82.6% had experienced or been impacted by men's violence. This shows that LGBTQI+, Disabled, those from a working-class background and those who live in a rural area were more likely to have experienced or been impacted by men's violence than those who were not LGBTQI+, Disabled, migrant, from a working class background or living rurally.

It is clear that additional measures are needed to address the intersectional levels of violence and discrimination that women are facing from marginalised communities.

6.2.11 Traveller Women

Whilst we have acknowledged that violence against women is an endemic problem across all aspects of society in Northern Ireland, it is clear that certain marginalised groups of women face additional levels of discrimination that prevents them from accessing the support they need. We would recommend that additional work is undertaken by all departments and TEO with Traveller women in Northern Ireland to

ensure additional support measures are implemented. It is estimated that Traveller women are 30 times more likely to be victims of domestic abuse in Ireland¹²⁶. Clearly, Traveller women are facing levels of gender-based violence at disproportionately high levels, as it is estimated that in Ireland, Traveller women represent 0.5% of the Irish population but represent 15% of all gender-based violence service support seekers. Despite this, there is evidence that there is a complex interaction between culture, racism and discrimination on Traveller women experiencing abuse and the particular needs of Traveller women are often misunderstood¹²⁷.

Groups such as The Traveller Movement and Pavee Point, as well as traveller women with direct lived experience in Northern Ireland, would be worth consulting on and developing training with. The Traveller Movement has worked on domestic abuse and VAWG for over ten years and their projects are delivered by Irish Traveller women with lived experiences of domestic abuse and they work to ensure a deep level of understanding of the additional barriers traveller women face¹²⁸. At the launch of Pavee Point's Violence Against Women Programme leaflet and video giving Traveller women clear information on Safety and Barring Orders, Senator Eileen Flynn (the first ever Traveller to be nominated to be a member of the Oireachtas) highlighted¹²⁹:

"We know the needs of our own community - the realities and fears. And we are the best placed to develop resources for our community. The legal system is hard for anyone to navigate - never mind if you're a traveller woman that cannot read well and with very little education on the different systems of the state. This leaflet and video will be an important reference for Traveller women".

It is clear that the needs and experiences of Traveller women in Northern Ireland who have experienced VAWG are not adequately accounted for, and we urge all departments to undertake additional work with Traveller Women to ensure their needs are evident in both strategies.

¹²⁶ The Women's Health Council Report (2009) Translating Pain into Action – Gender-based Violence and Minority Ethnic Women in Ireland: <https://www.lenus.ie/handle/10147/298908>

¹²⁷ The British Journal of Social Work (2012), 'Domestic Violence within the Irish Travelling Community: The Challenge for Social Work': <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43771699>

¹²⁸ The Traveller Movement: <https://travellermovement.org.uk/domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence/>

¹²⁹ Pavee Point: Traveller and Roma Centre (2021), 'Highlight Needs of Traveller Women Experiencing Domestic Violence': <https://www.paveepoint.ie/new-information-resources-highlight-needs-of-traveller-women-experiencing-domestic-violence/>

6.2.12 Image Based Sexual Assault and ‘Deep Fakes’

We would like to highlight some information from the WPG Written Submission on the Protection from Stalking Bill in relation to Image Based Sexual Assault (IBSA) also known as “revenge porn” and “deep fakes”.

“I had persistent calls and messages from my ex who was able to tell me what time I'd last been active on WhatsApp. Like calls and texts constantly, threatening to publicly humiliate me online through revenge porn if I didn't answer.” RYV respondent

Many of our respondents also mentioned being the victims of image based sexual abuse by their stalkers. This is an area of growing concern on the island of Ireland, particularly as it is a practice increasingly used by stalkers against their victims. Given the increasing use of “revenge porn”, cyber stalking and image based sexual abuse in stalking cases, this is an area that needs to be considered by the Justice Committee. Some prevalent IBSA practices amongst young people have been looked at in a recent Belgian study, which found that:

“Around a quarter of our respondents justified the nonconsensual forwarding of sexting images as a “joke”. This may be similar to how inappropriate remarks and sexual inappropriate behavior are justified as being innocent ‘locker-room talk’. Framing the nonconsensual forwarding of sexting images as a “joke” may lead some youth to perceive image-based sexual abuse as less harmful and may reduce the likelihood that bystanders would intervene if they witness sexting abuse.”¹³⁰

The same study demonstrates clearly that a necessary way to tackle the harmful results of cyberbullying and stalking using sexting is embedding learning about the harmful impacts of such behaviours into Sexual Health Education programmes in schools. This ought to focus on digital citizenship, e-safety, bystander behaviour, and resilience in dealing with sexting-related pressure. Something else which can span the spectrum of consensual and non-harmful to abusive and dangerous is the rise of the use of deepfakes in IBSA.

Deep Fakes can be photographs or Videos where people’s faces and bodies are swapped to make believable social media content that isn’t true. The practice got its

¹³⁰ Joris Van Ouytsel, Michel Walrave, Lieven De Marez, Bart Vanhaelewyn, Koen Ponnet, (2021) Sexting, pressured sexting and image-based sexual abuse among a weighted-sample of heterosexual and LGB-youth, Computers in Human Behavior, Volume 117, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106630>

name from an anonymous user of Reddit, who went by the name 'deepfakes' and who shared the first deepfakes by placing celebrities into adult video clips without consent. By sharing the code that produced the deepfakes, widespread interest led to an explosion of fake content (Kietzmann et al. 2019).

*"The harm this can do to us all becomes even clearer in the case of a then-18- year-old female, an ordinary, non-famous citizen who one day discovered hundreds of explicit deepfake images and videos with her face on the bodies of porn actresses. These deepfakes not only put her reputation at risk, but also her emotional well-being, her career prospects as an aspiring lawyer, and her physical safety. With such a powerful technology and the increasing number of images and videos of all of us on social media, anyone can become a target for online harassment, defamation, revenge porn, identity theft, and bullying, all through the use of deepfakes."*¹³¹

We have anecdotal evidence that young people especially are already experiencing online abuse with the use of deepfake technology, in some cases where it is being used to threaten young people with police intervention, where the deepfake might be used as evidence of illicit images of a minor, or illegal sexual activity. There are strong correlations and overlaps between IBSA and deepfakes, both have become so prevalent as to be mainstreamed: an incident involving thousands of Irish women, whose images were leaked by a Discord server in November 2020, has prompted new legislation to be introduced in Ireland (Coco's law), yet 100s more each day are being shared and redistributed and ruining women's lives by harming their mental health, risking employment and study and impacting community reputations.

"'Revenge porn' is disturbingly big business. Before it was shut down in 2012, Hunter Moore's notorious 'Is Anyone Up?' website, which regularly featured 'revenge porn', was said to receive over 300,000 unique visitors a day (Lee 2012). Though figures vary, and date quickly, it is estimated that there are around 3000 dedicated 'revenge porn' websites, and more than 30 sites operating in the UK. These sites host images of women and sometimes men, but it is the images of women that are more frequently viewed and commented on. Not surprisingly in this light, the evidence on prevalence suggests high levels of abuse and a gendered impact. In the first year following the criminalization of

¹³¹ Jan Kietzmann, Linda W. Lee, Ian P. McCarthy & Tim C. Kietzmann(2019) Deepfakes: Trick or treat? https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007681319301600?casa_token=EFhDvC1OdU8AAAAA:VSBfBza8y3iwnFpU5gqpceFq1fNaRIKu53Kq4hS-ZPnsEeEe23f1NxbTs5M1GYAvZ76xxY4 p.8

'revenge porn' in England and Wales, over 200 cases were prosecuted."¹³²

Northern Ireland has no methods for prevention or justice for IBSA, prevention can only happen through education, awareness-raising, support services and protections for the victims of these malicious actions. In Ireland an organisation called CEARTAS help victims remove their images from the sharing sites, both those who make money from their images like OnlyFans, and non-commercial victims of image-based sexual abuse, but *"they have around 120 people a week requesting their help. Matt says that even with the new laws, gardaí will have to work proactively to try and stem the issue. "If the guards were to do this, it would take them three years to catch up," he said.*"¹³³

Therefore, it is vital that the investment into prevention is prioritised, as it is clear that the pace of technology will always be evolving faster than the capabilities of widespread police training and legislation to deal with the issue. In addition, American research has demonstrated that LGBTQ+ people are more than 4 times more likely to be victims of image based sexual abuse than heterosexual people, with 17% of respondents reporting either having an image shared without their consent, or having someone threaten to share an image¹³⁴. It is well documented that bisexual women in particular are the demographic most vulnerable to rape, sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking, so it is likely there would be a high incidence of related crimes experience by bisexual women.

6.2.13 Violence and Abuse Against Women in Public Life

In Northern Ireland, women who have entered public life have a very particular experience of male violence against women. The majority of which manifests online.

50:50 NI works on the issue of women in politics and regularly interviews women who have been elected to our political institutions. A significant majority of women in politics who have spoken to 50:50 NI have stated that the toughest part of being a woman in politics is the online violence against women that they receive.

Examples of this violence include abusive and aggressive and threatening messages being sent to women via social media. Abusive, aggressive or inflammatory

¹³² McGlynn, C., Rackley, E. & Houghton, R. Beyond 'Revenge Porn': The Continuum of Image-Based Sexual Abuse. *Fem Leg Stud* 25, 25–46 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-017-9343-2>

¹³³ Moore, A (2021) 'Collector culture': Thousands of non-consensual images of Irish women still being traded online <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40230338.html>

¹³⁴ Nonconsensual Image Sharing : one in 25 Americans has been a victim of 'revenge porn' (December 2016) Data & Society — Nonconsensual Image Sharing: <https://datasociety.net/library/nonconsensual-image-sharing/>

comments on social media which is known as 'trolling'. Some women in politics have also experienced strange men harassing them on their private phones. Women may also experience image-based sexual abuse which has been covered earlier in the submission.

This form of violence against women is not exclusive to women in politics and is experienced by all women in public life including journalists, activists, high profile women in business and government, even women working within the women's sector and many others.

Currently, there are no effective mechanisms by which this form of violence against women can be addressed. Reporting mechanisms that are built into social media are extremely ineffective due to the fact that abusers can easily create new anonymous accounts as quickly and easily as old accounts are being shut down. Further, many of these abusers do not even need anonymous accounts as they are aware of the complete lack of consequences for abusing women online. There needs to be more accountability for the actions of these perpetrators online. It is vital that this issue is tackled and that social media companies are held accountable for their role in facilitating this form of violence against women.

6.3 WRDA ‘Women at the Heart of Public Consultations’:

In the current political climate, there has been unprecedented numbers of public consultations, surveys to support private members bills and calls for evidence submissions to a range of committees in relation to various forms of legislation with extremely short deadlines to respond. The Women’s Sector has faced funding challenges for many years, alongside additional challenges in working to support women throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

WRDA produced a guide for public authorities on ‘Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultations’, and we would like to take this opportunity to share this resource again and some of the key recommendations. These guidelines are intended to provide advice for all those engaged in promoting women’s participation in public consultations and surveys. WRDA is the secretariat of the Women’s Policy Group and we would like to use this opportunity to share some extracts from their guidelines can be found below, as this will be relevant for future work on engaging with various stakeholder groups. The full guidelines can be read [here](#).

‘The case for proactively working to increase the participation of women in public decision making has been established by a number of international bodies that place obligations on the government and public authorities. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women requires the State to take action to ‘ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to participate in the formulation of government policy’. (CEDAW, Art. 7)

The UN’s Commission on the Status of Women, the Council of Europe and the UN Security Council have all made similar recommendations.

Domestic commitments were made in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement which includes a provision to fulfil *‘the right of women to full and equal political participation’* and *‘the advancement of women in public life’*. Whilst the St Andrew’s Agreement failed to mention women at all, the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements have both committed to addressing the participation of women in community development and *‘the advancement of women in public life.’*

However, even with these high-level policy commitments, on a day to day basis it can be hard to recognise why it is necessary to proactively make space for women’s voices. If you don’t work in the field of gender equality it can be easy to assume that the equality of opportunity that is now embedded into our society through anti-discrimination law means there should be no difference in how women and men experience the world. Gender neutral policy making is very common because we can

forget that equality of opportunity is not the same thing as equality of outcome. As you read this guide it might help to keep the following reminders handy to return to if you find yourself questioning whether or not a person's gender would be relevant.

1. Why ask women?

Women have only had access to public life for a tiny proportion of recent history and are still vastly underrepresented in all arenas of public power and decision making, Sexism is real and affects all women - experiences of sexism and traditional social expectations that women and girls grow up with can restrict ability to participate in public life.

Caring responsibilities have a much greater impact on women's lives than on men's lives, particularly for childcare (an area that has disproportionately impacted women throughout the pandemic and many women are unable to participate in public life due to homeschooling commitments), but also caring for older, sick or disabled relatives. Further, 92% of single parents in Northern Ireland are women and women undertake the majority of unpaid caring work.

The symptoms of gender inequality in our society affect different women differently. Some women bear the brunt of gender inequality due to other intersecting barriers connected to poverty, disability, race or sexual orientation. If we can understand the way to address gender inequality for the most marginalised women then this will benefit all women.

Above are just some of the domestic and international commitments to ensuring the participation of women in public life, and some of the additional barriers that women face in doing so. These factors, alongside the additional evidence outlined in this response, emphasise the need for meaningful engagement with women on an issue as crucial as a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights. Further comments from our guidelines include:

2. Women's participation is a priority for the women's movement in Northern Ireland:

We're not interested in simply having women's perspectives included as an afterthought. We're here to make sure women get the chance to change things. The inclusion of women in decision making should upset the status quo. It should put their stories and experiences at the centre of public policy and not on the edges.

We have produced this guide to demonstrate that women have the power to change the way society works and how services are shaped. It happens when they are supported to step into the process with the confidence to tell their stories and demand action from those who make decisions. In order to reimagine how women's participation can make a real difference, we need to raise expectations on both sides of the conversation. What do we do about the fact that women's organisations feel 'over-consulted', with the same people turning up to make the same demands but very little action taken? How can we improve the practice of statutory agencies whose community engagement activities can exclude many women because they fail to address the barriers women face? We hope that this guide can help us work towards improving participation practice with disadvantaged or marginalised women.

Public bodies have made significant improvements in consultation practice in recent years, both at Executive and Local Government level. However, this progress can always be reversed, such as the reduction in the time periods allocated to Executive consultations from 12 to 8 weeks as outlined under the Fresh Start Agreement. There are also some persistent barriers to best practice, particularly when it comes to how women are able to access the consultation process."

This guide is related to public consultations, and although this is a call for views, many of these principles still apply. These tips are particularly important for ongoing engagement outreach by the DOH, DOJ and TEO in future work relating to violence against women and girls.

Our key recommendations/tips for public bodies on including women in public consultations, surveys and calls for views include:

3. Work together:

- Reach out to community based women's groups, seek their help and approach them as equal partners in the process. Listen to their suggestions on how your consultation process could be improved as they are more aware of the barriers at a local level and can help you get the best out of the process in the long term, even if it means making some changes.
- Be honest about the limitations as you plan the process together. For example, one of the biggest barriers to effective and meaningful consultation is cost. It's important to work out what you can achieve together with the resources available. There will also be limitations around how progressed the policy or strategy is and how much is likely to change in response to the feedback women share. Most 'consultation fatigue' in the women's sector comes from the experience of being contacted too late in the process to have a meaningful impact on the outcomes and seeing very little change as a result.

- Consider working with already established groups – women’s confidence can be enhanced if the setting is familiar and the other participants are not strangers. Remember there is a very great likelihood that some women will have never given their views in a group before.

4. Make time for accessible face to face engagement:

- Design and plan engagement opportunities that are responsive to women’s needs and the practical and social barriers they face. It always helps to talk to women’s organisations to help identify the best way to do this. Different demographics of women will face different barriers and there will be a range of possible solutions that you can try.
- Childcare is always a key priority in addressing barriers to women’s participation. Increasing access for women with childcare responsibilities may include choosing a time for the engagement session during which children are at school or childcare support is available. Providing crèche facilities would be ideal – bear in mind that women’s centres make an excellent venue because most have childcare facilities on site and crèche places can be made available if booked in advance.
- Set the tone of the engagement in a way that deals with the legacy of women’s lack of access to formal decision making processes. The atmosphere should be as informal and non-intimidating as possible. Facilitate conversation in a way that is non-judgemental and makes it safe for women to talk about their experiences without feeling dismissed. The use of women facilitators with experience in community facilitation can help with this. A familiar, community based venue is most likely to feel like a safe, accessible space.
- Even if you plan a session with lots of thought put into how to be responsive to women’s needs, if they don’t know about it they won’t come. Review how your sessions are advertised and think about how accessible they appear to women from disadvantaged communities. Is the style and content of the invitation or flyer overly formal? Have you approached network organisations with access to community based women’s groups to ask them to include the invitation in their own newsletters? Have you made any statement about how you will provide for children, even if it’s just a line to say ‘child-friendly’ or ‘childcare available on request’?

5. Keep your language accessible and relevant:

- It’s difficult to avoid jargon entirely in policy documents as you try to work out the best approaches and solutions to difficult public policy issues, based on evidence and expert advice. While you may have to reflect this terminology in the end product, it’s vital that what is presented for consultation is easy for the

public to understand. Being open to hearing a different way of articulating the issues can only increase the potential for your policy to have a positive impact in the community.

- There's nothing like a consultation workshop with a group of women who aren't used to participating in formal decision making to put the substance of your proposals to the test! If what you've written isn't backed up by details about what will actually be put in place and how this will be achieved, then you can expect them to pull you up on that. Whatever your policy is aiming to achieve, make it meaningful and relevant if you want to get women's views on how it might affect them.

6. Listen to the stories:

- There is a barrier to participation in conventional consultation exercises that can often be overlooked and it is the intimidation some people feel when asked for their opinion on a topic that they don't feel well informed about.
- The most open approach when attending a storytelling session is to take a back seat and demonstrate that you're there to listen to whatever the women want to share. The opposite of this would be to attempt to direct the conversation and seek approval for plans or ideas that you're already hoping to pursue. Obviously the reality for any conversation has to be somewhere in the middle – you know what information is going to be the most useful to inform your work and the thinking of those decision makers further up the chain. It's OK to try to draw that out, as long as you remember not to knock people's confidence by appearing to dismiss something they've shared.
- Binary options (do you agree or disagree, support this proposal or not etc.) are key features of many consultation documents but in a storytelling session they are often useless. If a proposal sounds good on paper, of course it can be easy for any consultee to say they support it, but that only scratches the surface of what that person can contribute. Storytelling with women's groups can access the untapped expertise of a group of people who have seen many similar proposals come and go, understand what made them succeed or fail, felt the frustration of watching the good ideas lose funding or had to pick up the pieces at a community level when statutory agencies fail to deliver.

Consultations that do not make space for listening to women's stories are missed opportunities to get the best results.

7. Make women visible in the product as well as the process:

- Don't be afraid to highlight the gendered nature of an issue being addressed by public policy. Gender neutral policy is ineffective - we don't make policy in a social vacuum and you should aim to promote equality, not just recreate the same patterns of inequality that existed before. At the very least policies and strategies should take the inequalities and differences between men and women into account and make them visible.
- Statutory duties that address equality issues mainly deal with consideration of any adverse impacts that a policy might produce. On this basis alone many policies get screened out of equality impact assessment processes and opportunities are therefore missed to use policy as a vehicle for creating a more equal society. Other statutory duties, such as the duty under the Human Rights Act to ensure that everyone has equal access to their rights, can provide a framework for introducing policy that takes a more proactive approach.
- Remember that you should be planning to follow up any consultation exercise with feedback on how the consultees' views had an impact and so you will need to prepare information to take back to women's groups on how women's experiences and gender inequality will be dealt with in the final product.

Women in Northern Ireland have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; financially, socially and in terms of health. It is crucial that legislative processes on issues relating to women are accessible and open, as women's lived experience is crucial to creating more robust legislation and governmental strategies.

CHAPTER FIVE – WPG Response to Department of Justice, Department of Health and The Executive Office Calls for Views

7. WPG Response to Department of Justice and Department for Health Call for Views on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy

SECTION 1: ABOUT YOU

Question (a):

I am responding as... (Please tick one option only)

☐ A member of the public (Do not provide your name or email address)

☒ On behalf of an organization – Please specify below and include your organisation's email address.

- This is a joint written evidence submission for the Women's Policy Group NI - rachel.powell@wrda.net

Please note - several organisations involved in this written submission have also made their own organisational written submissions.

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

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

Please set out your response below:

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

"Suffered domestic abuse both physical and verbal for several years from I was 19 yrs old and changed me dramatically as a person, not for the better. It made me anxious, aggressive, afraid, nervous and angry. I probably continue to suffer from PTSD, however, the services just are not available for me to address my issues."

"I experienced domestic abuse from an ex partner in my early 20s. It took years for me to realise that what happened was abuse. I was also raped in my early 30s (he removed condom without my consent). I was hurt and angry for a long time and still struggle to deal with what happened to me in a healthy way."

"At 16 years old I was the victim of Domestic Abuse where he tried to isolate me from friends and would break my phone or take any money I had. Also pushed me around when I got pregnant."

Main research findings relating to domestic abuse and sexual abuse:

- 68% of respondents were aware of domestic abuse as a form of violence against women and girls,
- 67.4% of respondents were aware of sexual abuse as a form of violence against women and girls.
- 95.8% of respondents thought that a Strategy on violence against women and girls should address all of the following forms of violence:
 - Domestic abuse
 - Sexual abuse
 - Online abuse
 - Honour-based abuse
 - Economic abuse

- Coercive control
- Sexual harassment
- Street harassment
- Emotional abuse
- Unwanted rough sex
- Misogynistic hate crimes
- Spiritual abuse
- Workplace harassment
- Stalking
- Forced isolation from family and friends
- Controlling an individual's style and appearances
- Systemic violence by the state
- 54.3% of women were aware of all of the above forms of violence against women and girls, including various forms of domestic abuse such as honour-based abuse, economic abuse, coercive control, emotional abuse and forced isolation from family and friends.
- 83% of respondents have experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls
- 82% of those who had experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls first experienced this before the age of 20
- The following percentages of respondents thought that the Strategy should tackle violence against women and girls in the following places:
 - Domestic settings - 97.8%
 - Public spaces - 98%
 - Workplaces - 96.6%
 - Education institutions - 97.5%
 - Religious settings - 93.3%
 - Sports and leisure spaces - 93.4%
 - Community settings - 93.8%
 - Media/ Social Media/ Online - 97.4%

WPG would like to remind the Department of Justice that the scourge of VAWG in NI has been set amidst the backdrop and legacy of conflict, this is significant as it has been shown throughout the world that not only does this exacerbate the range and scale and type of violence but it limits both reporting and proper state response:

"Guruge et al. (2017) examined issues of impunity for IPV connected to the conflict in Sri Lanka, showing how membership of armed (militant) groups prevented perpetrators from being held accountable for IPV as police refused to intervene in incidents where perpetrators were involved in militant groups for fear of reprisal (Guruge et al., 2017). Swaine (2015) recorded similar findings from her research in Liberia, Northern Ireland, and Timor-Leste, finding that

women were too afraid to report IPV crimes and police refused to intervene where perpetrators were involved in armed (paramilitary) groups. Furthermore: In Northern Ireland, McWilliams and McKiernan (1993) and later Swaine (2015, 2018) also highlight how the dynamics of the conflict overlaid policing and specifically how the preoccupation of police with political violence and majority policing of a minority population limited reporting of IPV crimes to police and police responses to these crimes.”¹³⁵

As is always the case with VAWG we know that there is significant under-reporting: “the prevalence rates recorded by these population-based surveys (approximately one in every four women) are far higher than the PSNI figures (2016-2017 - 20,166)¹³⁶ suggest, indicating that even with the huge increase, these figures still underestimate the exact prevalence of IPV.” It has also been observed that policy making which enshrines traditional gender roles in any way, ultimately creates the environment and culture for VAWG to thrive.

“We further assert a relationship between gender-compounded vulnerability and the conflict and post-conflict dynamics in which control over fertility, reproduction and reproductive health is asserted by both state and non-state actors. Forced impregnation of women during conflict (or its threat) can help ensure that women remain in a subordinate role, dependent on their (male) partners throughout a conflict period, thereby re-inscribing gender roles and stereotypes. In post conflict settings, dependency roles are frequently elevated to the level of national policy.”¹³⁷

NI remains a danger zone for women, Northern Ireland had the second highest femicide rate in Western Europe, as defined by WEOG and the regions covered by the 2017 data published by Eurostat.¹³⁸

The effects of Domestic and Sexual Violence in the world of work

Trade Unions have been highlighting the issue of domestic violence and abuse and violence against women and girls in the world of work for many years. There is a

¹³⁵ Doyle, J.L. and McWilliams, M. (2019). What Difference Does Peace Make? Intimate Partner Violence and Violent Conflict in Northern Ireland. *Violence Against Women*, p.107780121983290.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077801219832902>

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ Ni Aolain, F.D. and McWilliams, M. (2014). “There is a War Going on You Know” -- Addressing the Complexity of Violence Against Women in Conflicted and Post Conflict Societies. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2489961

¹³⁸ FactCheckNI (2019). Does Northern Ireland have the highest femicide rate in Western Europe? [online] FactCheckNI. Available at: <https://factcheckni.org/articles/does-northern-ireland-have-the-highest-femicide-rate-in-western-europe/> [Accessed 10 Mar. 2022]. <https://factcheckni.org/articles/does-northern-ireland-have-the-highest-femicide-rate-in-western-europe/>

considerable body of work which demonstrates that the issue of domestic violence and abuse spills over into the workplace and affects victims and their work colleagues. The results of domestic violence and abuse also impact on the economy in hours of lost productivity.

It is for these reasons that we believe that the government, employers and trade unions have an important role in making the workplace a safe and supportive place for everyone.

In 2014, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions conducted a survey¹³⁹ to explore the impact of domestic and sexual violence against women on the workplace.

The results were striking and proved that although this type of violence most often takes place behind closed doors, that the impact is felt throughout society, including in work.

Of the nearly 1800 respondents, almost a third had experienced domestic violence with over 40% of those reporting that it affected their ability to get into work for reasons including financial control, threats, physical injury and restraint. Respondents also reported that the abuse continued at their workplace including being harassed through phone calls and emails, many people said that their partner physically turned up to their workplace. Disturbingly, fewer than one in three of those experiencing domestic violence discussed the violence with anyone at work. The main reasons for not disclosing were “shame” and “privacy”.

Building on this work and as part of the action plan under the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse strategy, a task and finish group involving trade unions, employers and NGOs was established to draw up revised Guidelines for Employers on developing workplace policies on domestic and sexual violence¹⁴⁰. This was published in 2018.

Whilst this work is encouraging and some employers are proactive at working with unions to ensure that victims of violence and abuse are supported in work, ICTU believes that additional measures are now necessary. Other areas of the UK have introduced legislation which places a duty on Government and Local Government to develop and implement strategies and action plans. In 2015, the Welsh Government introduced the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

¹³⁹ Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2016 <https://www.ictuni.org/publications/ictu-domestic-violence-survey-results>

¹⁴⁰ DoH DoJ Guidance for Employers of Developing a Domestic and Sexual Abuse Policy , 2018 <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/guidance-developed-employers-domestic-and-sexual-violence-and-abuse>

(Wales) Act 2015. This was a ground-breaking piece of legislation, which built on the progress made since the publication in 2010 of The Right to be Safe strategy and places a strategic public sector duty and statutory focus on the key issues as well as proactive powers.

Internationally, there is also much to learn. Unions in Australia have successfully campaigned on domestic violence as a workplace issue and have negotiated between 15-20 days of paid leave in cases of domestic violence across the whole of the public sector. The ability to take time off work without facing disciplinary action or losing out on pay is crucial for survivors of domestic violence who are trying to flee an abusive relationship. Finding a new home, getting a place at a refuge, securing school places for kids, seeking legal advice, opening a new bank account and seeking medical help and counselling all take time. Good workplace policies on domestic violence often offer advances on pay to help survivors of domestic violence get through a period when they may have no access to cash, or their own money is being withheld by an abusive partner.

In 2017, a European TUC report found that one in six workers across Europe report having been subjected to acts of violence, harassment and unwanted sexual attention (Eurofound). The report was the result of a multi-year European wide project, bringing best practice and making a number of strategic recommendations including:

- Highlight the economic and social case for tackling violence at work, including the business arguments that tackling violence against women can help to improve workplace relations, enhance wellbeing at work, retain workers, reduce absence from work, increase motivation and productivity.
- Lobby for the inclusion of measures to address sexual harassment and violence at work and domestic violence at work in government national actions plans on violence against women.

Taking into account the evidence supplied above, as well as the obligations placed on the Northern Ireland Executive by ILO C190, among other international standards, the Women's Policy Group recommends the following measures:

The development of an Act, similar to that in Wales, which places a strategic public sector duty requiring the Northern Ireland Executive to prepare, publish and review a strategy and which:

- Places a duty on public sector bodies, including NDPBs, health trusts and local authorities, to prepare and implement local strategies;
- Requires the development of a National Training Framework;

- Places a duty to publish National indicators that may be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the Act;
- Gives the power to issue statutory guidance including in relation to workplace policies to promote the well-being of employees of relevant authorities who may be affected by gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence; training for the members and staff of a relevant authority; the sharing of information between relevant authorities or by a relevant authority with another person; co-operation between relevant authorities or between a relevant authority and other persons.

Demonstrating leadership on this issue is of vital importance and that the appointment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner, similar to England and Wales, with the appropriate resources, to both advise and challenge Government would be of extreme importance.

A Domestic Abuse Commissioner is essential to act as a mechanism of accountability for this legislation. A Commissioner's role is to scrutinise policy and practice, funding allocation and the provision of key services. To effectively implement the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill will require huge amounts of training across the criminal justice system, a Commissioner can oversee this process and bridge any potential information gaps and inform on learning and best practice from other countries that have introduced similar legislation.

The Commissioner would be able to oversee a number of key ongoing developments in domestic abuse service provision in Northern Ireland including the introductions of Domestic Homicide Reviews and the specialist domestic violence courts pilot proposed for Belfast. More so, the Commissioner could direct research and data collection on the application of the offence of coercive control to ensure that it is being applied to cases and is justiciable

Introduce a minimum of 10 days leave, paid at the normal rate of pay which can be taken flexibly; there should be no eligibility criteria.

The Northern Ireland Executive has a responsibility to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are given the time and space to address impacts of domestic abuse without having to worry about being able to pay their bills. Workers may need time off to access legal or financial advice, to arrange childcare or alternative accommodation and to seek medical advice.

We would therefore recommend:

- Domestic Violence leave of 15-20 days available as a day one right

- Such leave should be paid as at the relevant daily pay, as per New Zealand. Not paying such leave runs the risk of excluding vulnerable and low paid workers as they may be financially unable to take up the scheme.
- Leave should be available to be taken as a block or flexibly with minimum administration
- Applicants should not have to 'prove' their eligibility
- Such leave should cover taking time off to care for a child/dependent who has been the victim of domestic abuse
- Should be accompanied by a right to request short term flexible working
- Should be accompanied by protection against dismissal for victims of domestic violence, as appropriate, except on grounds unrelated to domestic violence and its consequences
- Should require employers to have a DV policy negotiated with trade unions
- Should require employers to provide training to their staff, developed with specialist VAWG services and trade union representatives, to ensure their first response to survivor employees is safe and appropriate. Enhanced training should be provided for line managers and HR professionals.

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?

Please set out your response below:

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

“More support services available to support them [victims of domestic abuse], more awareness from psni as they are usually the first to witness domestic abuse.”

“Women who are disabled are more vulnerable to many types of abuse particularly financial abuse and coercive control. Rural women are at increased risk of physical violence, easy to cover up signs of domestic abuse when you live on a farm. I know a woman whose husband tried to crush her with a round bale wrapper, she thought to herself that if he succeeded he would be able to claim it was a farm accident. Loyalist women are less likely to report due to lack of trust in the police and a reluctance to be seen to be bringing the police into the area, paramilitarisation and the pressure that it will be used to make the community look bad, play into the 'thug' narrative.”

“Women are abused by women too and we cannot excuse that. Some lesbian and bi women face sexual and all elements of domestic abuse from their partners. Trans women face abuse from so many areas they must be protected. It is grotesque. BAMER women need to have wide ranging protection provided in ways that are culturally competent and easily accessible.”

Relevant findings from WPG Primary Research on VAWG:

In improving specific areas of service provision and support for victims of domestic and sexual abuse, it is important to address barriers to reporting domestic and sexual abuse.

Based on WPG research:

- The five most common barriers to reporting noted by respondents were:
 - Concerns around being believed
 - Fear

- Shame
 - Victim-blaming
 - Stigma
- 92.3% of respondents believed there are barriers to people reporting when they have been victims of men's violence against women and girls
- Of the 83% of respondents who said that they had been impacted by men's violence against women and girls, only 21.4% reported this to the police
- Of the 21.4% of victims who reported men's violence to the police, only 22.6% found this to be useful
- When considering barriers to reporting, it is important to note that:
 - 89.7% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with attitudes of sexism and misogyny
 - 80.8% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with rape myths and rape culture
 - 87.4% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with victim-blaming
 - 81.2% of respondents thought that there is stigma surrounding issues of violence against women and girls
- 78.6% of respondents thought that additional action needs to be taken in the Strategy to address men's violence against marginalised groups of women, such as disabled women, black or minority ethnic women, migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, traveller women and rural women.
- Common responses relating to how to better support these women included:
 - Accessible and inclusive education
 - Specialised support services
 - Listen to those with lived experiences
 - More community-led support
 - Better knowledge and understanding of barriers faced
 - Early intervention and preventative measures
- 86.8% of respondents thought that there needs to be a review of how the justice system treats victims and survivors of men's violence against women and girls
- Common suggested changes to the justice system by respondents included:
 - End victim blaming in court
 - Harsher punishment for perpetrators
 - More support for victims
 - Higher prosecution rates
 - No references to women's sexual history in court
 - Address retraumatisation of victims
 - More representation of women
 - Protect anonymity of victims
 - Address myths about prevalence of false accusations

In addition, it is clever that poverty and austerity policies also exacerbate the barriers women face in relation to service provision and support. Further information that is relevant around the harmful relationship between austerity and domestic abuse has been highlighted by Sisters Uncut:

“In the UK, two women a week on average are killed at the hands of a partner or ex-partner. The cuts make it harder for women to leave dangerous relationships and live safely. Safety is not a privilege. Access to justice cannot become a luxury. Austerity cuts are ideological but cuts to domestic violence services are fatal. Every woman’s experience is specific to her; as intersectional feminists we understand that a woman’s individual experience of violence is affected by race, class, disability, sexuality and immigration status. Doors are being slammed on women fleeing violence. Refuges are being shut down, legal aid has been cut, social housing is scarce and private rents are extortionate.”¹⁴¹

Poverty, which is currently at crisis point with the new cost of living, reduces the ability of women to leave violent relationships. Especially if there is no social housing stock left, and the only women’s hostel in Belfast is closed due to unsuitable conditions. This is state abandonment of women, an institutional framework that denies women liveable lives. Additionally, NI has the lowest funding for mental health and addiction services in the whole of the UK and Ireland, this lessens the avenues for people to be able to disclose abuse, seek help for symptomatic addictions and it does nothing to protect the children or their mental health, when they are just about surviving family violence.

This is further expanded upon by Doyle and McWilliams:

“Empirical studies from Northern Ireland have also recorded the serious physical and psychological consequences of IPV for victims and their families. Devaney (2013) and Dorahy, Lewis, and Wolfe (2007), for instance, found that women who had experienced IPV had higher levels of depression and anxiety, poorer physical health, and were more likely to report excessive alcohol and drug use. In addition, McWilliams and McKiernan (1993) recorded 22 different negative effects of IPV on children. At the most extreme end of the spectrum, domestic homicides account for, on average, one in every four murders, manslaughters, and

¹⁴¹ Sisters Uncut (2015). *Who are Sisters Uncut?* [online] Available at: https://www.sistersuncut.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/SU_Toolkit.pdf [Accessed 10 Mar. 2022].

attempted murders in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Policing Board, 2011).¹⁴²

Migrant, LGBTQI+, Working Class, Disabled and Rural Women

More information on migrant, LGBTQI+, Working Class, Disabled and Rural women is available in section 6.2.10 of this response. It is worth highlighting again that, in order to facilitate meeting the diverse objective needs of different victim groups in Northern Ireland, much more robust reporting and monitoring of all section 75 groups is needed within the PSNI and broader Criminal Justice System.

For instance, it is estimated that one in two disabled women are in abusive relationships in the UK, however there is insufficient data collection in Northern Ireland to know the extent of disabled people experiencing abuse¹⁴³. As disabled people face additional barriers in accessing support, not recording the numbers of disabled people specifically experiencing abuse prevents specific resources and support measures being put in place¹⁴⁴. In addition, the lack of consistent Section 75 recording of victims and perpetrators has meant that statistics do not incorporate the levels of domestic abuse within LGBTQ+ relationships, and adequate community-based support is unable to appropriately support victims. Stonewall reports highlight that one in four of all lesbian and bisexual women has experienced domestic violence in the past, yet no data exists on this in relation to Northern Ireland specifically¹⁴⁵.

In our survey, we asked respondents a series of questions relating to demographics so that we could highlight which groups of women are at increased risk of experiencing men's violence. A full breakdown of these demographic characteristics has been included elsewhere in this response. It is important to note that several respondents designated themselves as being from multiple of the following categories. To summarise, out of 1065 survey respondents:

- 13.3% were from the LGBTQI+ community
- 9.9% were disabled
- 3.1% were from the migrant community

¹⁴² Doyle, J.L. and McWilliams, M. (2019). What Difference Does Peace Make? Intimate Partner Violence and Violent Conflict in Northern Ireland. *Violence Against Women*, p.107780121983290. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1077801219832902>

¹⁴³ Women's Budget Group, (2018), 'Disabled Women and Austerity', <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Disabled-womenOctober-2018-w-cover-2.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ Public Health England, 'Disability and Domestic Abuse': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disability-and-domestic-abuse-risk-impacts-and-response>

¹⁴⁵ Stonewall.org.uk. 2008. Prescription For Change: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/Prescription_for_Change_2008_.pdf

- 50.2% were from a working class background
- 24.5% live in a rural area

The following percentages of women belonging to these groups said that they had experienced or been impacted by men's violence:

- LGBTQI+ (96.5%)
- Disabled (92.4%)
- Migrant community (78.8%)
- Working class background (87.7%)
- Live in rural area (84.7%)

In contrast, for those who belonged to 'none of the above' categories, 82.6% had experienced or been impacted by men's violence. This shows that LGBTQI+, Disabled, those from a working-class background and those who live in a rural area were more likely to have experienced or been impacted by men's violence than those who were not LGBTQI+, Disabled, migrant, from a working class background or living rurally.

Funding:

Providing adequate funding and resources to the women, LGBTQI+, disability and migrant support sectors is outlined in section 6.2.6, however, we would like to address some of these issues again. Clearly, greater funding is needed for advocate and support posts for migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, disabled women and rural women. At present, the only similar post in relation to domestic and sexual abuse is one funded position within HERe NI and Cara Friend to support LGBTQ+ women who have been victims of domestic and sexual abuse. However, there is evidence of greater need for additional posts like this and for them to be sustainability funded.

Currently, Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK without a funded support service specific to migrant women in Northern Ireland. Given the additional barriers migrant women face in escaping abuse (as highlighted in section 6.2.10), it is crucial that this is prioritised in any new strategy. We would recommend full funding for positions to support women from LGBTQI+, disabled, migrant, rural and working-class background and to support women from these groups in reporting domestic and sexual abuse. This would also involve cultural competency and awareness training for groups such as the PSNI, PPS and courts to ensure they are aware of the unique barriers women from these backgrounds face.

We would also like to highlight again the need to fund projects such as Raise Your Voice.

Raise Your Voice is one of the only organisations tackling VAWG at the roots by reaching out to victims and survivors directly about their experiences, but also by reaching out to men and boys to educate and workshop with them about consent, sexual harassment, rape myths, stalking, image-based sexual abuse and ally bystander training. Decades of increasing legislation against rape, sexual violence and sexual harassment has done very little to decrease their incident rate. Indeed, emerging technologies have given rise, instead, to brand new forms of abuse. Without the adequate funding to the organisations who can address the root causes such as misogyny and gender inequality, the issue will continue to spread.

The Rape Crisis Service is another area where funding and resourcing is needed as a matter of urgency. The Rape Crisis Service for Northern Ireland provides trauma informed emotional support for those impacted by rape and sexual violence in adulthood. This is an essential non-time limited service for all whether reporting or not, waiting on counselling, waiting on outcomes of court cases and in particular provides support for those whose cases are not being taken forward based on decisions made by PSNI or PPS not to proceed. The Rape Crisis Freephone line is open four evening a week to take self-referrals for one-to-one support and to provide information and sign-posting for victims/survivors, families members and others in need.

Referrals for support are also made through other stakeholders such as the Rowan centre and ASSIST NI. Additional funding support should be made available to 'roadmap' the range of services currently available, how they interlink, how and when they can be availed of depending on whether a case is being legally pursued or not, linking Rape Crisis, ASSIST NI, SOLAs and counselling through Nexus. Volunteer Support workers for Rape Crisis are encouraged from across Northern Ireland to ensure that services are not Belfast/Antrim centred and welcome the breadth of the new ASSIST NI services. However, additional funding for neutral, safe venues to provide one-to-one support in every county should be made available. Rape Crisis works through local women's centres and community organisations to provide this where possible but there is an urgent need for additional spaces with flexible opening hours.

Victims/survivors need to be given more information not only on how the current services link but also on how their personal information is used across support organisations. A number of survivors receiving support from the Rape Crisis Service are concerned about this having received unexpected phone calls informing them of their right to claim compensation from Victims Support. As one client commented, "out of the blue, just three weeks after what happened to me, I got a call offering me compensation for what happened, I wasn't expecting the call, I couldn't even think straight at the time and money was the last thing I wanted to talk about, and I don't

even know how they got my details or how much they knew about what had happened to me, who else had my information?" This client may have been informed at the time about this process and sharing of details but had no recollections because of the situation they were in. We need clear procedures with timeframes or one relevant contact to ensure victims/survivors are not subjected to additional trauma.

Funding discrepancies for service providers such as Rape Crisis NI have particularly impacts for marginalised women using this service, such as minority ethnic women, who may require specialist support and translators. Without adequate funding, this specialist support cannot be given which creates barriers for marginalised women. Additional funding for partnership working/training will remove these barriers. All Rape Crisis NI Support Workers are asked about any additional languages they may have to reduce language barriers where possible but additional training with for example the Migrant Centre NI would ensure wider linguistic and cultural support for migrant women. Due to the nature of the service, translation services are not ideal, which is why it is essential to have trained support workers across all communities, migrant, Traveller, LGBTQI+.

Access to Abortion for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Abuse:

Alliance for Choice

Large numbers of the women who call Alliance for Choice are victims and survivors of a range of domestic abuse and violent interpersonal relationships, including financial and contraceptive coercive control. Forcing women and girls to become pregnant against their will by hiding or destroying their contraception (including cutting out implant from arms), by denying them the ability to leave the house alone and controlling their finances, means accessing an abortion can be dangerously difficult and terrifying. We have had women who have had their id destroyed by controlling partners and exes and therefore cannot travel to access abortion care past 10 weeks. Women who already have one young child to a violent partner and are living in a hostel miles away from friends and family just to escape and only to discover they are once again pregnant to their abusers. It is absolutely crucial that abortion services are commissioned in Northern Ireland to prevent further harm to women and pregnant people here. More information and the range of testimonies on the harm of abortion clinic protesters and harassment is available in section 6.2.5.

Workplace perspective

Employers have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of their employees.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (NI) 1999¹⁴⁶ also requires employers to assess the risks of violence to employees and make arrangements for their health and safety by effective planning, organisation and control.

Workplace risk assessments should include an assessment of the risks posed by domestic violence. In addition, harm caused by domestic violence and abuse which causes absence of +3 days from work, should be reportable under the RIDDOR regulations.¹⁴⁷

Under the Human Rights Act all public bodies have an obligation to protect the human rights of individuals and to ensure that their human rights are not being violated. If an employer fails to tackle incidents of violence against employees, domestic abuse and sexual violence this could lead to an infringement of the Human Rights Act.

Under the Section 75 Equality Duty public authorities must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity for protected groups; and foster good relations. The scale and impact of domestic and sexual violence and abuse is so significant that it would be important for public authorities to prioritise this issue and **have as a specific action the development of a workplace policy.**

We believe there is a significant need for improved workplace training in safeguarding, recognising the signs of domestic and sexual abuse and how to act upon this. This is important for staff in Health and Social Care professions, particularly those who provide care in the community, youth services, youth justice, education and those working the community and voluntary sector who may be the first to notice these signs in their service users. Due to the nature of the work carried out in these sectors, and the safe environment they create for their service users, victims of domestic and sexual abuse may first disclose their abuse in these settings and so staff

¹⁴⁶ Health and Safety at Work Order and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, (1999) Hsni [https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/health-and-safety-work-northern-ireland-order-1978#:~:text=The%20regulations%20require%20that%20employers,at%20Work%20\(NI\)%20Order.](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/health-and-safety-work-northern-ireland-order-1978#:~:text=The%20regulations%20require%20that%20employers,at%20Work%20(NI)%20Order.)

¹⁴⁷ Reporting of Injuries Diseases Dangerous Occurrences regulations <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/report-incident>

must be adequately trained to deal with disclosures and the impact it may have on themselves.

Recommendations:

- The Health and Safety Executive should produce guidance on how to mitigate the risks posed to workers by domestic and sexual violence.
- Workplace risk assessments should include an assessment of the risks posed by domestic violence.
- In addition, harm caused by domestic violence and abuse which causes absence of +3 days from work, should be reportable under the RIDDOR regulations.
- Standardised training to adequately equip workers in recognising signs of domestic and sexual abuse. This training should be inclusive, created in collaboration with service users and providers and be trauma informed

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

Please set out your response below

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

“Awareness and preventative education programmes that take into account the specific issues of certain groups. A community development / from the inside out approach where the groups lead on the development and roll out of programmes and support services. Economic and housing support for women experiencing abuse where their immigration stays is an issue.”

“Law on consent in particular. But the justice system does not have the capacity to prevent these crimes. That work needs to be done elsewhere before it occurs, because clearly the law does not protect us from abuse happening in the first place.”

“There are too many repeat offenders. Too many women reporting men and nothing being done by the police only for these women to become injured.”

Prevention

Prevention is by far the most important part of the puzzle, if we think of a strategy as something primarily intended to reduce instances of Domestic Abuse, Sexual Abuse and Violence, and VAWG as a whole - rather than as a strategy to improve the justice system, prevention targeted at the root of the problem is vital.

Responses to the WPG survey tell us again what academic studies and primary research from around the world across decades tells us; key to prevention of violence is the prevention of, and re-direction of, the harmful attitudes that lie behind the violence. Rather than framing the issue in the way that the question has - in terms of reducing the number of “people who become victims” - it makes more sense and yields better results to think instead of ways to reduce the number of people who may become offenders. This has the further benefit of reducing these harmful attitudes across the board; not only in offenders but in those who accept a certain amount of

violence as inevitable, excusable and not worthy of attention or preventative efforts. These people have a vital role to play; they raise children, educate the public, write newspaper articles and serve on juries. Even if they never commit violence, their views matter.

For these reasons we believe, and the evidence shows, that education is key. None of these things are inevitable, and proper and thorough education, which is designed by experts and delivered by trained professionals and is cognisant of its pivotal role in the prevention of serious harm, can be transformative. It can undo harmful learning that has come from elsewhere, and divert at risk young people before the justice system might be aware that a problem exists.

Relationships and Sexuality Education in schools is an obvious place to start. Presently the Minimum Content Order is insufficiently specific and not rigorous enough in terms of the two issues that are most vital to tackling this problem; understanding consent and modelling healthy relationships. Because schools tend to be fairly rigidly limited to the content allowed by the Board of Governors and are constrained by that Board's interpretation of the School's ethos, very often the excellent resources currently available to schools via the RSE Hub do not get used in the way most conducive to fostering a perspective on consent and intimate relationships built on respect. We also know that school graduates are unhappy with the degree of education on these issues that they are receiving, finding it insufficient or even "useless".¹⁴⁸ The need for reform is evident and urgent, and it must be standardised, mandatory and comprehensive - including all kinds of relationships and all sexual orientations.

Schools, of course, are not the only sites for education about these topics. We must seek to normalise the inclusion of training on these topics in other contexts, including in community settings, workplaces, third level educational settings, in places of worship, in public buildings, and through public awareness campaigns of various kinds including online. These messages need to be repeated throughout a person's life, not covered briefly and only once in schools. This training and information also needs to be fully accessible; it must include alt-text if it is based on images online, for instance, leaflets must be available in multiple languages including BSL/ISL, and these materials need to be regularly updated and reviewed to take account of emerging issues, to update language, and to reflect evolving legislation.

As well as tackling the attitudes that can result in violence, we must raise awareness of "red flags" within relationships, making sure that people know warning signs, are

¹⁴⁸ Youth Forum 'Any Use?' report: <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/Documents/youth-forum/Any-use-report#rsefacts>

aware of the laws and aware of what help is available and what services they can avail of. This should ideally be integrated into RSE in schools but also part of a general public awareness campaign that must run on an ongoing basis and it should be aimed at everyone - not only because anyone can be a victim, but because it is also important that all of us have the relevant information to recognise red flags in our friends' and families' relationships, too. The ideal form of training would include, also, ways to talk to people about these topics in a way that is helpful and non-confrontational, and it must never be victim-blaming in tone. Far too many people still ask why a victim did not leave before a situation escalated; this kind of education can prevent that kind of thinking as well as articulating views like that which can alienate and endanger victims, rather than helping them.

Despite the many benefits of education as a preventative, we have to acknowledge that education will not prevent all violence. While this does not mean that the educational pieces conducted are a failure, it does indicate a need for service provision for those who experience it, as well as ways of preventing recidivism among those who commit it.

Provision of Services for Survivors

When a person has been a victim of violence they deserve swift, thorough and efficient help. On this front we are presently failing victims and there is an urgent need to increase funding so that the services we rely on are able to meet the demand that they are facing. Successive squeezes on public spending on these things have led to a situation where Women's Aid shelters are overwhelmingly full, their outreach service which provides support to people who continue to live in their home often with their abuser, is stretched, and we remain in a situation where our Rape Crisis provision is a phone line that runs for a few hours on 4 evenings a week, and the Rowan Centre operates by appointment only. While the Rowan offers an excellent service, located as it is in Antrim it is difficult to access for many survivors who live at a considerable distance from that, lack private transport (something that disproportionately impacts women) and those who live with an abusive partner and would have to explain their absence for the length of time it would take to get there, seek treatment and return. We should aim for a standard of service that our sisters across these islands expect and receive; emergency treatment and help should be localised. In short; all of the education in the world is not helpful if we cannot then sufficiently support victims when they are able to reach out for help.

Further, there are those who fear that they cannot reach out for help safely because of Government policy. We are acutely aware that the present immigration policies and the policy of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) are reserved matters that sit with Westminster, we are also aware that these policies can make it difficult for people to

reach out for help when situations become dangerous. In many cases these survivors face issues like language barriers and a lack of awareness of the laws, but in addition many face - or believe that they may face - removal from the state if their immigration status is tied to their spouse's visa status. Mitigations must be put into place to allow for people to seek treatment and report safely without the need to risk loss of status in the country and the associated risk of throwing their lives into further disarray.

Northern Ireland has a Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS)¹⁴⁹ which allows individuals to enquire with police about whether or not a partner has a history of domestic violence or abuse. In addition, the scheme is intended to be accessible to others known to the couple, so that people can find out relevant information about a friend or family member's partner. This scheme includes both a right to ask, as outlined above, and the power to tell, whereby police can offer this information without prompting to a person whose partner has a history of this kind of offending. While this scheme could be enormously beneficial, WPG has concerns, outlined in previous work, that this is not being used efficiently - particularly that the right to ask is not always resulting in disclosures when it should. In WPG research for the Protection from Stalking Bill¹⁵⁰, around 50% of respondents said that they were not aware of the scheme, and of those who were aware 100% said that it was not useful to them and their case. Respondents included reports of a lengthy wait for information, that they knew more about the person's history than the PSNI seemed to, and perhaps most worrying of all people said that the police told them that they were not eligible to receive information on the case because the relationship had ended or the couple no longer cohabited, despite harassment and stalking continuing beyond the life of the relationship. In follow up correspondence, PSNI confirmed that relevant information can be given out on a relationship that has ended, and that such a disclosure would "most typically be appropriate where there is considered to be an ongoing risk posed", but the criteria for this risk assessment remains opaque. We take the view that this scheme needs to be reviewed for a number of reasons, with these being the most pressing, because at present what seems to be a powerful tool for the prevention of escalation may be failing survivors who put their faith in it at a very vulnerable time.

Rehabilitation of Offenders & Recidivism

We are acutely aware that, even when convicted, offenders in domestic abuse cases and in cases of sexual violence rarely get lengthy sentences. This in itself can be an issue; the sentences can reduce survivor willingness to report if they are seen as too weak on the problem - not least because survivors are often very afraid that their

¹⁴⁹ PSNI page on DVADScheme: <https://www.psni.police.uk/crime/domestic-abuse/dvads/>

¹⁵⁰ WPG consultation response to Protection from Stalking Bill: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WPG-Joint-Submission-Protection-from-Stalking-Bill-16-04-2021.pdf>

abuser will target them again, even with renewed vigour, when they are released. Sentencing structures should be revised with greater emphasis on banding.

With that said, longer sentences are not the only issue at play here; even the most heinous offences in this regard do not attract life sentences, eventually the abuser will be allowed out among society and this presents a real problem for the survivor and for any future partner the person may have.

As such, it is imperative that research be conducted into the most effective forms of rehabilitation worldwide, and that this be used as a baseline for improving and reinvigorating the process currently at use. Ideally, this would become a mandatory part of the process, with justice focused on rehabilitation rather than merely on punishment, but we are mindful that rehabilitation of offenders is often only possible when they accept their guilt and recognise the wrongs they have done. Sexual offenders are particularly unlikely to do so, but when they do, and when they seek help, there is encouraging evidence that it works to significantly reduce recidivism¹⁵¹. Every possible use of these programmes should be made, both within prisons, after release, and as part of diversionary work, and they should be resourced, well-researched and regularly reviewed and updated. Separate work should be commissioned on the reasons why sexual offenders, in particular, are so often unable to accept their guilt¹⁵², even after their sentence is served.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner

Rising levels of domestic violence in Northern Ireland makes it clear that much more work is needed on a societal level to shift the prevailing culture and provide support to victims. This could be helped by the appointment of an Independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner who could provide important scrutiny and act as an essential mechanism for accountability on the new domestic abuse legislation. The Gender Equality Strategy Expert Panel¹⁵³ has stated that any new legislation requires *“huge amounts of training across the entire Criminal Justice System and a Commissioner could oversee this process and bridge potential gaps while applying learning and best practice from other countries that have introduced similar legislation.”* Domestic Abuse Commissioners are already in place in England and Wales and Northern Ireland has Commissioners in place to address other important issues such

¹⁵¹ Durham University, Rehabilitation programmes for domestic violence perpetrators can work (2015) <https://www.dur.ac.uk/news/newsitem/?itemno=23319>

¹⁵² Jayson Ware and Ruth E. Mann, How should “acceptance of responsibility” be addressed in sexual offending treatment programmes? <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178912000213>

¹⁵³ Gender Equality Strategy, Expert Advisory Panel Report, December 2020 <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/dfc-social-inclusion-strategy-gender-expert-advisory-panel-report.pdf>

as child abuse and supporting victims of the Troubles. Given the extent of this problem in Northern Ireland we believe that the appointment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner should be considered for Northern Ireland.

Welfare Reform

Gendered social norms restrict and limit women's roles in the economy, thereby contributing to women's economic disadvantage relative to men.¹⁵⁴ Women are more likely to be in receipt of social security benefits, more likely to be in low-paid, part-time and insecure work and also more likely to be providing care either for children or other family members which limits their ability to carry out paid work. This contributes to keeping women's incomes generally lower over their lifetimes and therefore means they are more likely to be dependent on men or the State through social security benefits. This lack of economic independence can make women more vulnerable to abusive relationships.

Added to this the impact of a decade of austerity and welfare reform policies that have disproportionately impacted on women. Research by the House of Commons Library shows that 86% of the savings to the Treasury through tax and benefit changes since 2010 will have come from women. It shows that, by 2020, men will have borne just 14% of the total burden of welfare cuts, compared with 86% for women.¹⁵⁵ Research by the Women's Regional Consortium on the impact of austerity¹⁵⁶ and on the impact of Universal Credit¹⁵⁷ on women shows the extent to which changes to the social security system have worsened their ability to provide for their children and families and made them more vulnerable to financial hardship and poverty. Poverty is one of the main risk factors for violence against women and girls.

With the social security system increasingly not providing a reliable safety net, women's vulnerability to violence is heightened. Abusers exploit women's existing economic inequality or create economic instability to reduce their partner's ability to resist control. Women who can't find £100 at short notice are 3.5 times more likely to experience economic abuse. Without access to the economic resources required to

¹⁵⁴ Violence against Women and Girls and women's economic inequality, Eva Neitzert , March 2020
<https://wbq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Violence-and-womens-economic-equality.pdf>

¹⁵⁵ Estimating the gender impact of tax and benefit changes, Richard Cracknell, Richard Keen, Commons Briefing Papers SN06758, December 2017
<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06758/SN06758.pdf>

¹⁵⁶ Impact of Ongoing Austerity: Women's Perspectives, Women's Regional Consortium, March 2019
<http://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/sites/default/files/Impact%20of%20Ongoing%20Austerity%20Women%27s%20Perspectives.pdf>

¹⁵⁷ The Impact of Universal Credit on Women, Women's Regional Consortium, September 2020
<http://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/sites/default/files/The%20Impact%20of%20Universal%20Credit%20on%20WomenRevised.pdf>

leave and live independently, victims stay with abusers for longer and experience more harm as a result.¹⁵⁸ The links between economic stability and safety are therefore very clear.

Concerns about austerity measures and about the way Universal Credit is paid have been raised internationally by the CEDAW Committee. Following its recent examination of the UK, the CEDAW Committee recommended that the UK government “undertake a comprehensive assessment on the impact of austerity measures on the rights of women and adopt measures to mitigate and remedy the negative consequences without delay.”¹⁵⁹ The Committee also highlighted its concerns about the single payment of Universal Credit stating:

*“the payment of the universal credit.....into a single bank account.....risks depriving women in abusive relationships of the ability to gain access to necessary funds and trapping them in situations of poverty and violence.”*¹⁶⁰

Addressing women’s disadvantage in the economy requires action to ensure that women are able to be economically independent not only through paid work but also through a properly supportive social security system which provides a safety net when women are not able to work. This should include ensuring that benefits are set at a level that enables women and families to afford to live free from poverty including the removal of gendered welfare reform policies such as the Benefit Cap and the two-child limit. It should also include work to reduce women’s economic dependence on their partners including by allowing Universal Credit payments to be automatically split between partners.

¹⁵⁸ [What we do - Surviving Economic Abuse](#)

¹⁵⁹ Concluding Observations on the eighth periodic report of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8, March 2019 (para 17)
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8%20&Lang=En

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, para 52

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.

Please set out your response below:

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

"There needs to be more provision of outreach to these women. Need to know of groups or individuals to whom they may turn for help, support, and assistance. Signposting is critical. Isolation, particularly during cov, is a big issue. Education of general population to embrace difference and welcome diverse women into established groups in community. There is great work being undertaken by various groups in NI like HereNI NIRWN, and many others. These groups need to have a more secure method of funding to continue and expand their work."

"I think in particular trans women are in need of protection because of the change in the political climate around trans women in particular (but all trans individuals). It distresses me deeply that we allow our media outlets to perpetuate straight up lies and myths that used to be levelled against queer people, now just against people who are trans. I also think that recognising that abuse is often intersectional is key to preventing it. We cannot discuss the rights of girls and women without also speaking about how misogyny often goes hand in hand with ableism, racism, homophobia and xenophobia."

"I think we need to listen to people from marginalised groups when they tell us what they think solutions are. Many marginalized groups are over policed as it is and don't trust the police in matters regarding their safety. We need to listen to their experiences and work with them to find solutions."

Relevant findings from WPG Research on VAWG:

In our anonymous survey, we asked women some demographic information and found that out of 1,065 responses, we were able to obtain the following information which indicates the prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse across a range of

intersectional identities, ages and nationalities. The following percentages indicate the percentage of survey respondents who designated as belonging to the following groups:

- LGBTQI+ (13.3%)
- Disabled (9.9%)
- Migrant Community (3.1%)
- From a working-class background (50.2%)
- Living in a rural area (24.5%)
- Prefer not to say (2.7%)
- None of the above (24.3%)

Ages:

- 16-17 (2%)
- 18-24 (8.9%)
- 25-29 (9.8%)
- 30-34 (8.9%)
- 35-39 (12%)
- 40-49 (26.2%)
- 50-59 (21.3%)
- 60+ (10.3%)
- Prefer not to say (0.6%)

Nationalities:

- Irish (52.2%)
- British (23.3%)
- Northern Irish (14.8%)
- Other = (9.6%)

Other nationalities of respondents:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| ● British and Irish | ● American |
| ● Irish and Northern Irish | ● English |
| ● British, Irish and Northern Irish | ● Scottish |
| ● Irish and English | ● Polish |
| ● British and Northern Irish | ● Turkish |
| ● Polish and Irish | ● Algerian |
| ● Nigerian and Irish | ● Somali |
| ● American and British | ● Jamaican |
| ● American and Irish | ● Chinese |
| ● Ukrainian | ● Asian |
| ● Italian | ● Nigerian |

- Canadian
- Indian
- German
- Zimbabwean
- Black African
- Dutch
- Black Caribbean
- Portuguese
- French
- Spanish
- Bulgarian
- South African
- Latin American
- Arab
- Norwegian
- Danish
- Eastern European
- Mixed ethnicity

Ethnicity:

- Irish Traveller (0%)
- Roma (0%)
- Chinese (0.3%)
- South Asian (0.3%)
- Other Asian background (0.4%)
- Black African (0.7%)
- Black Caribbean (0.2%)
- Latin American (0.1%)
- Arab (0.1%)
- Eastern European (0.5%)
- Mixed ethnic group (0.6%)
- White (95.4%)
- Other (0.8%)
- Prefer not to say (0.6%)

Religion:

- Catholic (42.8%)
- Protestant (18.2%)
- Muslim (0.6%)
- Jewish (0%)
- Hindu (0.5%)
- Other religion (2.8%)
- None - I am not religious (32.7%)
- Prefer not to say (2.4%)

Through our primary research, we found that LGBTQI+ women, Disabled women, those from a working-class background and those who live in a rural area were more

likely to have experienced or been impacted by men's violence than those who were not LGBTQI+, Disabled, migrant, from a working class background or living rurally.

The following percentages of women belonging to these groups said that they had experienced or been impacted by men's violence:

- LGBTQI+ (96.5%)
- Disabled (92.4%)
- Migrant community (78.8%)
- Working class background (87.7%)
- Live in rural area (84.7%)

In contrast, for those who belonged to 'none of the above' categories, 82.6% had experienced or been impacted by men's violence.

Through our research, we also found that:

- 78.6% of respondents thought that additional action needs to be taken in the Strategy to address men's violence against marginalised groups of women, such as disabled women, black or minority ethnic women, migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, traveller women and rural women.
- Common responses relating to how to better support these women included:
 - Accessible and inclusive education
 - Specialised support services
 - Listen to those with lived experiences
 - More community-led support
 - Better knowledge and understanding of barriers faced
 - Early intervention and preventative measures

Additional information on supporting women from these backgrounds is available in section 6.2.10 of this response as well as in response to question 2 of this call for views. However, we would also like to highlight some additional evidence and recommendations in relation to support for women from marginalised backgrounds.

As highlighted in 'The Protection and Rights of Black and Minority Ethnic Women Experiencing Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland'¹⁶¹:

"The number of BME women in Northern Ireland experiencing physical and sexual violence was widely under-reported. As the barriers outlined

¹⁶¹ McWilliams and Yarnell (2013) 'The Protection and Rights of Black and Minority Ethnic Women Experiencing Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland', SSRN: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2489957

below show, it was generally acknowledged that BME women in Northern Ireland are particularly isolated and that those experiencing domestic violence faced particular vulnerabilities preventing them from seeking help. The challenge of 'counting' and 'categorization' is obviously not unique to ethnic minorities. State parties should encourage the compilation of statistics and research on the extent, causes and effects of violence, and on the effectiveness of measures to prevent and deal with violence.

The barriers include the following:

- *Structural failings leading to financial dependence on abusive partners and no recourse to public funds;*
- *Dependence of some BME women on male partners for their immigration status and/or official leave to remain in the UK;*
- *Lack of knowledge of their own legal entitlements in the UK;*
- *An absence of BME community infrastructure to provide practical support and assistance;*
- *Lack of interpretation at the first point of contact for domestic violence, despite the requirement on public agencies to provide interpretation where necessary;*
- *Reluctance to involve Social Services due to fear of children being removed;*
- *Community pressure to remain in the family home and the stigma and shame attached to leaving the partner;*
- *Reluctance of other family members to support the women in this process;*
- *Reluctance to seek help from public authorities or 'outside' support agencies due to lack of culturally sensitive services;*
- *Internalizing religion and cultural beliefs that view domestic violence as permissible rather than criminal;*
- *Legacy of poor police response from previous experience in their home country, and on occasion, in Northern Ireland."*

Further Support for Migrant Women:

Specialist victim support services should be introduced specifically designed to serve refugee and asylum seeker, migrant, and ethnic minority victims of domestic and sexual violence. These specialist services should provide holistic support to victims including assistance accessing housing, benefits, healthcare, immigration advice, etc. and not exclusively exist to support interfacing with the criminal justice system. This

is important because many victims of domestic/sexual abuse will not ever go through the criminal justice system even if the option is available, and because victims regardless of whether they report to the police require basic needs of safe accommodation, financial independence, healthcare, and secure immigration status met in order to sustainably exit abusive relationships. Specialist services for refugee and asylum seeker, migrant, and ethnic minority victims of abuse currently exist in England, Scotland, and Wales, but not Northern Ireland - this is an area where NI needs to catch up.

Ring-fenced funding for specialist support organisations including those who support migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to access housing, entitlements, legal advice, victim support, and health services are crucial. Without resourcing for services, these actions will not be able to serve or reach those who need them. This is especially important considering that victims who leave abuse relationships are often referred from agency to agency in the process of relocating from an abusive home to deal with various needs - accommodation, benefits, healthcare and counselling, immigration advice, new schools for children, etc.

Resourcing and training should be implemented to support increased multilingual counselling services, as need currently far exceeds supply. This is especially important because some people are not comfortable having an interpreter in the room for a counselling session due to the intensely private nature, or there may be logistical issues associated with interpreters for counselling (especially over-the-phone counselling).

Children and Young People:

As highlighted in section 6.2.9 of this response, we remain deeply concerned about the high levels of recorded sexual violence against children, particularly girls, in Northern Ireland. According to the most recent annual PSNI Trends in Police Recorded Crime In Northern Ireland 1998/99 to 2018/19, published November 2019, children remain the largest proportion of victims of sexual offenses across all age bands (in the category of sexual offenses, sexual assault is the largest offense). In other words, across a person's lifetime in NI they are most at risk of being a victim of a sexual offense before the age of 18.¹⁶²

We were able to ascertain that 82% of the respondents to our survey who were victims of men's violence had this happen before turning the age of 20. This is a shocking statistic that highlights the prevalence of violence and abuse in childhood years and

¹⁶²<https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/documents/police-recorded-crime-in-northern-ireland-1998-99-to-2018-19.pdf>

the need for urgent action to support children and young people. However, we also acknowledge that although we have had extremely broad reach with women across Northern Ireland, we are not the sector experts in supporting children and young people who have been victims of domestic and sexual abuse, and would therefore refer to the recommendations made by our children's sector colleagues instead and recommend further engagement with them in supporting children and young people. We would also recommend that all departments engage with other campaigning groups led by children and young people too, to ensure they have a say in the process and that both strategies reflect their needs.

We would like to acknowledge work going on by our colleagues, Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, and the consultations they completed with children and young people in relation to domestic abuse and endorse their evidence submission.

LGBTQI+ Relationships - Heteronormativity:

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. The majority of campaigns are centred around heterosexual, white cis gendered (those who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth) people and rarely if ever show the diversity of our society. Often there is an assumption that if you are a woman, your partner will be a man. With the default of heteronormativity, quite often individuals within the LGBTQ+ community become invisible. This invisibility leads to a lack of awareness that stalking and domestic abuse can happen in same-sex relationships. Therefore it is important that the wording of any legislation recognises the multitude of relationships stalking can occur in, including LGBTQ+ relationships. Visibility is important for those from minority communities as it can lead to a shift in the social consciousness towards inclusion of diverse experiences¹⁶³.

There are concerns around reporting domestic abuse linked to a perceived fear of homophobia from professionals such as the PSNI, Domestic Violence support workers, Doctors and others. Considering reporting stalking or accessing support, the first barrier an individual has to face is having to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to someone from a mainstream organisation. Disclosure or coming out is seen as a one-time phenomenon, however, for LGBTQ+ people, coming out can happen as often as multiple times in a single day. This can be very difficult as the factors that need to be considered before you disclose sexual orientation or gender identity are quite complex including whether it is safe to disclose, and if there are any

¹⁶³ O'Brien, J. (2017) 'Why Visibility Matters: The impact of the rise of LGBTQ+ representation in the media.', *Psychology Today*, (), pp. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/all-things-lgbtq/201711/why-visibility-matters> (Accessed: 15th March 2021).

potential negative consequences. These consequences may be perceived rather than actual, but this does not make the fear any less real. Past experience of homophobia biphobia and transphobia along with inadequate knowledge on the LGBTQ+ community and how to provide best services to those from the LGBTQ+ community cited as reasons to expect a negative reception from service providers¹⁶⁴.

In addition, international research found that:

'According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's latest National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Black et al., 2011), Walters et al.,⁴ (2013) breaks down domestic violence figures by sexual orientation. This study reveals that 43.8% of lesbians reported to have been physically victimised, stalked, or raped by an intimate partner in their lifetime, compared to 35.0% of heterosexual women, 29.0% of heterosexual men, and 26.0% of gay men. Bisexual women experienced the highest rates with 61.1% (Hamel, 2014)'¹⁶⁵.

Disabled Women:

As highlighted elsewhere throughout this response, disabled women also face disproportionately high levels of domestic and sexual abuse and even greater barriers to reporting this abuse. Research from Scotland shows that¹⁶⁶:

'Research has found that overall, disabled people are 1.5 times more likely to be a victim of violence than non-disabled people; that is 1.6 times for people with intellectual impairments and 3.8 times more likely for mental health service users. Disabled men and women in psychiatric services are 2–8 times more likely to experience sexual and domestic violence than the general population and victimization is a trigger for suicide attempts among patients'

Further, when looking at the gendered aspect of violence and abuse against disabled people, the Crime Survey of England and Wales (2012-13) found that:

¹⁶⁴ Harvey, S., Mitchell, M., Keeble, J., McNaughton Nicholls, C. and Rahim, N. (2014) Barriers faced by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in Accessing Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Sexual Violence Services. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

¹⁶⁵ Hamel, J. (2014). Gender inclusive treatment of intimate partner abuse: Evidence-based approaches (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Springer Publishing

¹⁶⁶ A Toolkit for Social Care, Housing, Mental Health and Safeguarding Services (2019), 'Tackling Violence Against Disabled Women & Girls', <https://avaproject.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FINAL-Drill-Final-Project-Toolkit-VADWG-2019-1proofed.pdf>

“Disabled women have twice the prevalence as family violence victims (6.9% v. 2.7% for non-disabled women). But this figure is likely to be higher still - disabled people are heavily under-represented in household surveys about crime – violence in prison, assessment units, residential care and hospitals is invisible in the major source of information, the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW). The Crime Survey is not currently available in accessible formats (e.g. Braille, BSL, large print, easy words and pictures), for disabled or Deaf people to participate.

*In addition, **sexual violence linked to financial abuse is experienced by disabled women to a much greater extent than that experienced by non-disabled women** (Balderston, 2013). **Disabled women are reported to be between twice** (Smith, 2008) **and four times** (Martin et al, 2006) **more likely to experience sexual assault** (Balderston, 2013) **and domestic violence** (Hague et al, 2010) than non-disabled women or disabled men. Whilst disabled men experience a significantly higher prevalence of violence than non-disabled men, for women, the attacks are more likely to be repeated, sustained and result in more injuries than for men (Walby et al, 2017). **Overwhelmingly, violence against disabled people is perpetrated by men.**^{167”}*

In relation to supporting victims from marginalised groups, we would like to emphasise the importance of funding specialist support organisations and education programmes on cultural competency and awareness raising. We would like to highlight the below quote from Richie and Martensen on increased funding for punishment often reducing funding in social services and human needs, to highlight the need to adequate investment to support both strategies beyond investment in the criminal justice system:

“There has been considerable attention given to the ways that investment in punishment correlates with divestment in social services and human needs. When economic and ideological capital are directed toward punishment, surveillance, and control, then funding for health and mental health services, schools and other youth-oriented programs, transportation infrastructure, community-based service organisations, parks, and other public services decline in the communities that need them most.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, (n138).

¹⁶⁸ Richie, B.E. and Martensen, K.M. (2019). Resisting Carcerality, Embracing Abolition: Implications for Feminist Social Work Practice. *Affilia*, 35(1), pp.12–16.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0886109919897576>

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?

Please set out your response below:

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

"As a victim I got no help whatsoever from police or victim support. I had to ring all the time and ask what happened in court nobody would have told me otherwise."

"Improved legislation and protection for women, more support for women, stronger sentences when abuse takes place, that legal staff/ social workers have domestic and sexual abuse training, end to access at all costs approach, that courts see the full impact that that domestic abuse can have on a woman and not be manipulated by a perpetrator who appears pillar of society and is manipulating social workers, courts and continues to abuse the woman through her children and the court system."

"Complaints to be taken more seriously, less victim blaming culture within the justice system, not allowing barristers to bring things into cases to try and undermine the victim but which are not relevant, greater understanding and support for victims throughout the legal process, quicker processing of these cases so it doesn't put people off."

Relevant findings from WPG Research on VAWG:

- 86.8% of respondents thought that there needs to be a review of how the justice system treats victims and survivors of men's violence against women and girls
- Common suggested changes to the justice system by respondents included:
 - End victim blaming in court
 - Harsher punishment for perpetrators
 - More support for victims
 - Higher prosecution rates
 - No references to women's sexual history in court
 - Address retraumatisation of victims
 - More representation of women
 - Protect anonymity of victims
 - Address myths about prevalence of false accusations

More than two years on from the publication of the Gillen Review, we are still waiting for many of the more promising recommendations to be implemented. WPG members involved with various Gillen Review Implementation Team groups are actively involved in some of the vital work underway at present on education and awareness, and on training, and how these have the potential to unlock some of the most pervasive issues within and outside the justice system, including work being done on a public awareness campaign designed to tackle rape myths, work being done to bring training packages online for first responders or those who may hear disclosures in the course of their work (e.g. teachers, emergency services, social workers, etc) to help them understand, respond and help survivors. This work is vital and must be fully resourced.

More work on the Gillen recommendations, particularly the parts that need legislation to be passed, remains outstanding. Many of these are explored in more detail later in this response, particularly relevant is the use of victim-blaming language and tropes alongside a reliance of rape myths in court rooms, which has the effect of retraumatising the victim in that instance, scaring survivors off before the trial date arrives, and contributing in various ways to the enormous difficulty that the justice system has in prosecuting cases of sexual violence.

Because this problem is endemic in these kinds of cases, we recommend also bringing on board training for all parts of the legal system on these issues, including barristers and judges. Better trained and sensitive judges can stop barristers who, perhaps aware that they are straying into victim-blaming language or similar, but willing to do so to win a case, from pursuing a line of enquiry that might otherwise go unremarked on until the judge's closing remarks - by which time some jurors may have reached a conclusion already.

For the purposes of this Call for Views, we urge urgent action on the following:

- Further work to expedite the discovery process to reduce the rates of attrition and speed up the process for the PPS and the court system
- Legislation to be passed to allow for jury education on rape myths immediately preceding the trial itself
- Legislation to be passed to move the burden of responsibility to the defendant to justify their "reasonable belief" in consent and explain what steps they took to ascertain consent
- Training for Judges and other legal professionals addressing rape myths, victim blaming tropes, and the impact of retraumatising survivors

There are serious gaps in the protections afforded to victims of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland in comparison with the rest of the UK and Ireland. Victims here

should, at least, have access to the same protections as victims elsewhere. The WPG fully supports paid domestic abuse leave for victims and survivors. In our [response to the consultation on the Domestic Abuse \(Safe Leave\) Bill](#) we called for:

- Domestic Violence leave of 20 days available as a day one right.
 - Any leave must be of adequate duration. Providing for a maximum of 20 days does not mean that all of this need be taken but it provides assurance to victims that support is available at no financial penalty.
 - Furthermore, this leave must be available to all categories of workers, whether classified as employees or as workers, and must be available as a day one right.
- Such leave should be paid as at the relevant daily pay, as per entitlements in New Zealand.
 - Not paying such leave runs the risk of excluding vulnerable and low paid workers as they may be financially unable to take up the scheme.
- Leave should be available to be taken as a block or flexibly with minimum administration
- Applications should not have to 'prove their eligibility'
- Such leave should also:
 - Cover taking time off to care for a child/dependent who has been the victim of domestic abuse,
 - Be available to survivors of historic abuse. This is crucially important as, for example, criminal proceedings can take place quite some time after the abuse actually happened,
 - Should be accompanied by a right to request short term flexible working,
 - Should require employers to have a Domestic Violence policy negotiated with trade unions,
 - Should require employers to provide training to their staff, developed with specialist VAWG services and trade union representatives, to ensure their first response to survivor employees is safe and appropriate,
 - Enhanced training should be provided for line managers and HR professionals.

Domestic abuse is a workplace issue. It is estimated that 21% of women who experience domestic abuse take time off work.¹⁶⁹ Domestic abuse also reduces a worker's ability to go to work, whether it is because of the physical or mental impact of the abuse on them or if their abuser will not permit them to leave or has put barriers in place to their leaving home.¹⁷⁰ It threatens the health and safety of those who suffer,

¹⁶⁹ <http://nomsintranet.org.uk/roh/official-documents/HomeOfficeResearchStudy276.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ <https://neu.org.uk/advice/domestic-abuse-and-workplace-guide>

but also has a negative impact on the economy. The cost to the economy is estimated to be £2.7billion per year.¹⁷¹ Half of this cost is to employers, arising from lost output due to time off work and reduced productivity. While the other half is by the individual in lost wages. In 2009, research from the Home Office found that 20% of victims of domestic abuse had to take a month or more off work the previous year due to the abuse they were experiencing.¹⁷²

This demonstrates a clear need for further legislative work on domestic abuse as a workplace issue, including a statutory requirement on all employers to have an adequate workplace policy focused on the protection, safety and wellbeing of workers. UNISON Women's Committee has undertaken extensive work to identify which employers within their membership have domestic abuse policies in place. Following work between UNISON and the Education Authority on developing a domestic violence policy, UNISON successfully negotiated training for managers and union stewards in addition to a robust Domestic Abuse Policy.¹⁷³ The WPG supports ongoing work by UNISON and other trade unions in establishing similar workplace policies, but firmly believes this must be a requirement for all employers.

¹⁷¹ https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/55255/1/cost_of_dv_report_sept04.pdf

¹⁷² <http://nomsintranet.org.uk/roh/official-documents/HomeOfficeResearchStudy276.pdf>

¹⁷³ <https://www.eani.org.uk/about-us/equality/domestic-and-sexual-violence-and-abuse-workplace-policy-2021>

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?

Please set out your response below:

The justice system has particular issues with regards to the needs of victims of domestic abuse, in particular when they need to leave their home for safety, either to a shelter or, if a space is not available, to an alternative place. As we have covered extensively in this document, there is insufficient space in shelters in NI and they often operate at full capacity, meaning that people often end up homeless as their abuser may have equal rights (or indeed sole rights, depending on the lease arrangements etc) to stay in the home as them and refuse to leave. This puts the onus on the victim to find a place to live and the justice system presently does little to protect these people. As outlined in the case study below, this can have tragic consequences.

Further, since the point of leaving an abusive former partner can be the most dangerous time in an abusive situation, 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. At present, non-molestation orders are largely insufficient in terms of providing that protection, they are easily violated and arduous to acquire. DAPOs and DAPNs need to be rolled out urgently, as consulted on in 2020-21; they would provide greater legal protections¹⁷⁴.

As outlined elsewhere in this document, there are issues at present with the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS) which makes its application patchy and means that it is sometimes unavailable to those who need the information but are judged not to merit disclosure because, for instance, a relationship has ended, but often for opaque reasons. We recommend a review of the operation of this scheme which is vital and potentially lifesaving, including into the training available to police at present.

With regards to sexual offences, Gillen made multiple recommendations about speeding up and improving the discovery stage of the process in trials around sexual offences to enable a more efficient legal process and reducing the waiting times before prosecutorial decisions and court dates where applicable. Despite this, the delays continue, and this is unconscionable when we consider the enormous import of these cases for the complainant and defendant and for the wider society while potentially dangerous criminals remain at large. In Northern Ireland, we wait longer for these trials than elsewhere on these islands, partially because the legal system is

¹⁷⁴ WPG (2021) Enhancing Legal Protections for Victims of Domestic Abuse response: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/WPG-Response-on-Enhancing-Legal-Protections-for-Victims-of-Domestic-Abuse-Public-Consultation.pdf>

overstretched and under-resourced, and this must be remedied in the interests of justice - Gillen says that it has a significant influence on the attrition rates in these cases - and in the interests of the mental health and recovery process for survivors. The solution to this is much more straightforward than with so many of these deep-rooted problems; resourcing and proper processes will solve the problem if there is a will to do this.

We recommend that:

- DAPOs and DAPNs, consulted on in 2020-2021, need to be made available, widely used and actively used as efficiently as possible;
- The proposed pilot for DAPOs and DAPNs is adapted quickly and rolled out to all of NI as soon as possible
- All available resources to ensure that police are trained in their operation;
- Additional funding is made available to police to allow the expeditious use of these Orders/Notices without suffering financial loss
- Legal aid must be available for all applicants who need the Orders/Notices
- Appropriate housing is made available to any and all people fleeing domestic abuse, without placing them in inappropriate settings and without separating people from their children if applicable
- A review of the DVADS scheme to account for its patchy application and ensure a rigorous standard is applied
- The urgent implementation of the Safe Leave Bill, allowing people who are victims of domestic abuse and/or violence to take paid leave from work as needed to deal with the outworkings of this process

Relevant findings from WPG Research on VAWG:

Case Study Testimony:

As part of our primary research on violence against women and girls, the WPG conducted a one-to-one interview with a survivor of domestic abuse who provided several examples of where the justice system is failing victims. Beth's full case study has been included at the beginning of this response but we would like to highlight some key issues that Beth identified in terms of how linkages within the justice system can be strengthened to most effectively deal with domestic abuse and better support victims.

"You're told to report domestic violence and then you're thinking, well, I can understand why people don't because look what happens." - Beth

- After reporting the domestic abuse to the police, the police placed Beth on 'high-risk' alert. Beth's abuser was removed from their house, the police reinforced the windows, alarmed the house, and installed floodlights. The police also advised Beth to wear a body camera, change her work patterns and change her travel routes regularly. Despite these interventions, Beth's ex-husband continued to stalk and harass her.
- Beth acquired two non-molestation orders which her ex-husband repeatedly broke, forcing her to continuously take time off work to attend court. Beth's ex-husband was eventually charged with a two-year suspended sentence and Beth was granted a one-year restraining order, requiring annual renewal. Beth has little faith that the restraining order will be effective as the non-molestation orders did little to prevent the stalking and harassment by her ex-husband.
- When Beth became homeless as a result of the abuse, she initially sought accommodation in a women's refuge for abuse victims but there were no available spaces due to increased demand and limited resources during the pandemic. Beth was then offered an apartment by the Housing Executive in north Belfast, but was told two hours before moving in that the apartment was no longer available. The only other option for Beth was to move into a homeless hostel.
- Before the abuse, Beth had never experienced mental health issues but now suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and severe anxiety, causing her to have frequent nightmares and fear around leaving the house. Beth is currently on an 18-month waiting list to see a psychiatrist and takes sedation medication to manage her symptoms until she can get an appointment.
- Beth felt that although she was a victim of abuse, she was being punished by public services after reporting it. Beth explained, "I was kind of getting punished for reporting him, getting punished for taking him to court, getting punished for being a frontline worker... in the middle of COVID and having to go to a homeless hostel. Like a lot of things could've changed... they [public services] could've done a lot of things differently."

Beth's case study is a powerful example of how linkages within the justice system must be strengthened to effectively deal with domestic abuse and better support victims. It illustrates the importance of taking a lived-experience approach to strengthening justice mechanisms. In terms of how public services deal with abuse victims, Beth told us that "there has to be a plan in place to keep women safe... there just needs to be more support." This involves signposting victims to relevant support services and providing them with adequate and appropriate healthcare support and accommodation.

Survey findings:

- 86.8% of respondents thought that there needs to be a review of how the justice system treats victims and survivors of men's violence against women and girls
- 89.7% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with attitudes of sexism and misogyny
- 80.8% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with rape myths and rape culture
- 87.4% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with victim-blaming
- 81.2% of respondents thought that there is stigma surrounding issues of violence against women and girls

The most common responses of what reform is needed to the justice system include:

- End victim blaming in courts,
- Harsher punishment for perpetrators,
- More support for victims,
- Higher prosecution rates,
- No references to women's sexual history in court,
- Address retraumatisation of victims,
- More representation of women,
- Protect anonymity of victims,
- Address myths about the prevalence of false accusations.

Some testimonies from our survey on what sort of reform is needed within the justice system include:

"Unsure what systems are in place presently"

"Better victim support. Zero tolerance legislation that is clearly defined for police to act upon. Clear definitions for fair trials but an overhaul in how barristers question female victims, use of language, questioning of sexual history should be scrutinised for relevance to the case before it goes before a jury. Jury made up of diverse people."

"longer sentencing, outfits victim wearing not discussed, character testimony scrapped"

"Men being held to account for their actions, less victim blaming in court, protection in the courtroom. Not being questioned by the abuser etc."

"The Gillen Review has done much of this work, but a review encompassing DV/honour based violence and all other forms of VAWG and how the justice system treats victims would be really instructive."

"Higher prosecution of rape cases, better victim support, faster systems, less victim blaming / shaming, laws that actually tackle the issues."

"We need to move towards a model that is closer to transformative justice. Justice should focus on the victim/survivor."

"Huge education campaign required for those within justice system."

"Explore alternatives to incarceration and investing more in community building instead. Also updating laws and exploring best practice from around the world."

"So difficult to "prove" historical abuse, women need support when they are giving details of assaults etc. And ongoing support after women have testified, given evidence. Ensuring women are safe after testifying against perpetrators."

"Guarantee anonymity. Don't put the women on trial if they press charges. No turning a blind eye to cops w/no compassion or understanding."

"System is weighted against women and girls and results in retraumatizing victims and victim shaming. needs a root and branch review that respects the rights of complainants as well as alleged perpetrators."

"A more sympathetic/empathetic response. Not making girls re- live the experience in a court."

"Zero tolerance to all violence against women. Have the Justice System more representative of women."

"Law on consent in particular. But the justice system does not have the capacity to prevent these crimes. That work needs to be done elsewhere before it occurs, because clearly the law does not protect us from abuse happening in the first place."

"Make it easier for women to come forward to actually convict men [who abuse them]"

"There are a lot of processes expected for victims ie mediation, reporting to the employer and nothing being done. This needs to change as I have found it to be silly and is a real time wasting exercise. I feel it enables the other party to carry on without

sanction etc. For example, if you ran a red light and the police were behind you, it would be dealt with and you would be unlikely to do that again! I think the amount of steps to go through is what also causes stigma etc.”

We would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the recommendations in the Victim Support NI report on Court Observers¹⁷⁵:

“Something must be said about victims of sexual violence in this context. Professionals dealing with victims have come to understand how important it is that they feel believed. They may have been dignified by interview processes, by special arrangements at referral centres and a feeling of privacy at interview. However, when victims enter the court room and make their way to the witness box, they are simply witnesses who are yet to be believed. The implication is that the burden of proof sits on their shoulders, balancing on their performance.”

“One focus in evidence gathering has been on rape myths and the role they play in the course of a trial, influencing how evidence is presented and heard within the court setting. Jurors and others within the physical court represent the wider moral story of a society not yet settled on the matter of rape myths. Myths about who was truly responsible for the event, myths about women’s power over men and manipulative ability to, with a chosen outfit, tempt a man from his normal self and fall into the shame of something he did not intend. Myths about ‘no really meaning yes’ and ‘alcohol being the real culprit’ persist, as the moral narrative of today’s society has not yet been definitively decided. Sir John recognised the reality of these myths and their potential to derail justice: Rape myths are a trial reality and can often form the basis of aggressive cross-examination and may attract the unreasonable thinking of jurors. Moreover, for all kinds of societal reasons, complainants often buy into these myths, blaming themselves. I regard them as potentially a major challenge to the concept of a fair trial.” (p.11 2021)

¹⁷⁵ <https://www.victimsupportni.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Court-Observers-Feeling-Is-Understanding-report.pdf>

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.*

Please set out your response below

Driving Change Together:

We agree with this workstream and encourage proper co-design, co-production and meaningful engagement with the women's sector and broader VCS organisations working on issues relating to domestic and sexual abuse. Please refer to earlier information in relation to WRDA's Guide for Public Authorities on Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultation in Section 6.3. In addition, as evidenced throughout this response, the WPG has undertaken a significant amount of primary research on topics relating to VAWG and we would be keen to continue sharing this evidence and our insights in relation to this strategy.

Prevention and Early Intervention:

As also evidenced throughout this response in various sections, we believe prevention and early intervention is key to addressing the extreme levels of domestic and sexual abuse in Northern Irish society. We have highlighted consistently the ways this needs to be addressed throughout this response and urge both the DOJ and DOH to work with our sector moving forward on this workstream.

Responsive Services:

Again, we support this workstream, and we have highlighted throughout this response where women and girls have been consistently failed through response services when reporting domestic or sexual abuse. This is particularly evident in our primary research findings, where women consistently told us that they did not receive

adequate support from government and public agencies after reporting abuse. We have also made various recommendations in relation to the existing gaps in responsive services, and the need for vastly increased and more sustainable funding to the women's sector and other VCS organisations working to support victims of domestic and sexual abuse.

Supporting different needs

The WPG agrees that there must be a specific workstream focused on supporting different needs. In relation to supporting the different needs of women and girls, we need to recognise that whilst they account for the vast majority of victims of domestic and sexual abuse, they are certainly not a homogeneous group. This strategy must take account of the needs of specific groups of victims who face intersectional forms of discrimination and barriers to support, including LGBTQI+ women, rural women, Black and minority ethnic women, migrant women, disabled women, working class women, Traveller women and more.

In our anonymous survey, we found that 78.6% of respondents thought that additional action needs to be taken in the Strategy to address men's violence against marginalised groups of women, such as disabled women, black or minority ethnic women, migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, traveller women and rural women.

Common responses relating to how to better support these women included:

- Accessible and inclusive education
- Specialised support services
- Listen to those with lived experiences
- More community-led support
- Better knowledge and understanding of barriers faced
- Early intervention and preventative measures

Protection and Justice:

We agree that this needs to be a workstream for this strategy. Protection and justice are areas where, yet again, women reported being repeatedly failed, re-victimised, re-traumatised and let down again and again. Our shockingly low conviction rates relating to domestic and sexual violence are evidence of a failing system that is not challenging the culture in Northern Ireland. This is an issue that will continue to worsen without adequate reform and investment; particularly as more legislation dealing with domestic and sexual abuse is introduced.

Funding, Co-Design and Engagement

We would also welcome clarity on how this strategy will be resourced, particularly given the current Executive collapse and lack of a three-year budget. We would also welcome information on how the actions and workstreams within this strategy will be monitored and what accountability measures are in place. This needs to be a fully operational strategy.

The term co-design is being frequently used by Government departments but often does not directly involve those with lived experience. There is much time, work and resources required to ensure a true co-design process that genuinely involves those with lived experience at all stages of the process.

The voices of those with lived experience are a crucial element in helping to shape solutions around domestic and sexual violence. However, there must be genuine engagement and true value and recognition must be given to this work including the necessary resourcing. Drawing from lived experience must not be a tick box exercise it must be about genuine participation and willingness to learn from those who understand and live with the issues. It must recognise the time, energy and personal input required to share lived experience and for many that this can be difficult to share. This engagement should not be flippantly or freely demanded and taken. It should have proper recognition and value and consideration should be given to providing a resource for this work. This engagement must result in meaningful action on what has been learned through this work.

The Department should also consider specific engagement around the lived experience of those who are the hardest to reach and whose voices are often not heard. Voluntary & Community sector organisations are often the best way of reaching out to these groups as they have years of experience in working for those who are the most marginalised. They also provide trusted, local spaces where people are encouraged to share their views and are more comfortable in sharing the issues they face.

We stress the need for true partnership working which values collaboration with other sectors including the input of the voluntary and community sector which has done so much work in this area. The work of the third sector must be valued as part of this process and not simply viewed as an add-on or completely ignored. Many of the organisations working in the community and voluntary sector have years of experience in working with victims and survivors of domestic and sexual abuse and also in working with perpetrators. They are skilled at reaching those who are the most marginalised within communities and provide trusted spaces and skilled people to do this work. It is valuable work that must be recognised and rewarded as such.

The WPG welcomes the opportunity to participate in the delivery and oversight of these new Strategies, as a group that represents several organisations within the women's sector and human rights sector more generally. The WPG regularly engages with Department officials on the delivery and oversight of policies and strategies and believe that cross-sector working is crucial to delivering positive change for the people of Northern Ireland. In regards to engaging with the voluntary and community sector, the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) has produced a [guide](#) for public authorities when engaging with women through public consultation, titled 'Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultations'.

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

Please set out your response below

We would like to again raise the issue that it is hard to understand specifically what the Departments mean by 'Sexual Abuse' and what all forms of abuse this entails, particularly given widespread views that sexual abuse is how to describe historical child sexual abuse. As stated in section 6.2.2 of this written response:

The term sexual abuse has also caused confusion for members of the public with whom we have run focus groups, also, not least because the use of the term "sexual abuse" rather than something broader such as "sexual violence" denotes to many people something systematic, something closer to child sexual abuse or abuse within domestic or romantic relationships. It is rarely understood as describing an encounter between strangers or acquaintances that may or may not meet the criminal bar for an offence like rape or sexual assault. We would welcome clarity on what the Departments mean by sexual abuse and also what overlap there will be with both strategies.

In addition, we would like to also raise the additional information in section 5.1.6 in relation to Honour-Based Abuse and the need for this to be better understood within Northern Ireland, particularly in intimate-partner relationships or relationships that have ended.

In addition, we would like to raise again our comments in relation to stalking, in section 4.4, and the vast overlap between domestic abuse, stalking and femicide. In particular we would highlight the prevalence of stalking by ex-partners as well as the 100% of respondents who tried to access the domestic disclosure scheme finding this unhelpful.

We would also like to raise that when we asked women whether the below forms of forms of violence should be included within any new VAWG strategy, 95.8% agreed that they should be:

- Domestic abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Online abuse
- Honour-based abuse
- Economic abuse
- Coercive control
- Sexual harassment

- Street harassment
- Emotional abuse
- Unwanted rough sex
- Misogynistic hate crimes
- Spiritual abuse
- Workplace harassment
- Stalking
- Forced isolation from family and friends
- Controlling an individual's style and appearances
- Systemic violence by the state

Other forms of violence that women raised should be included in a VAWG strategy included:

- Medical abuse,
- Gaslighting
- Marital rape,
- Grooming
- Spiking,
- Lack of abortion access,
- Caste-based violence,
- Violence against sex workers,
- Female genital mutilations,
- Pornography,
- Institutional abuse,
- Human trafficking,
- Stealthing,
- Sectarian abuse,
- Homophobic and transphobic abuse against LGBTQ+ women,
- Corrective rape.

Now, we are conscious that this question was asked in our survey in response to a VAWG strategy rather than the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy. However, obviously many of these forms of violence and abuse are interrelated and it is difficult to therefore separate all forms of abuse. Therefore, we recommend that greater attention is given to the relevant forms of violence from above within the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy; and that Domestic and Sexual abuse are included in the VAWG strategy. **It is not possible to deal with Domestic and Sexual Abuse without recognising the inherently gendered nature of it, and it is not possible to address broader VAWG without incorporating Domestic and Sexual Abuse.**

As 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, and would therefore urge that the development of both strategies is done in a coordinated way and that domestic and sexual abuse specifically against women is incorporated into the new VAWG survey.

We have also highlighted consistently throughout this response that it is crucial that this new strategy is adequately funded and resources to make it operational and to fund the much needed specialist support posts for victims of domestic and sexual abuse from marginalised backgrounds. It is important that this is not a strategy that just sits on the shelves - both strategies in this call for views are so crucial to Northern Ireland society that they need to be embedded into all aspects of governance and properly funded. We would suggest considering having a pillar of the Programme for Government focused solely on these issues.

Finally, we would like to again raise the vast issues with data recording for victims of domestic and sexual abuse in Northern Ireland. Whilst it is widely acknowledged that official statistics do not represent the extent of the problem due to under-reporting, we still need radical change in how we record these crimes. In almost every instance where we try to analyse the impact of domestic and sexual violence against a marginalised group, we have to revert to GB data as it is non-existent in Northern Ireland. If we do not accurately try and record the impact of domestic and sexual violence on all aspects of our society, how can we ever be expected to meet the objective need of victims and address the issue?

The general lack of gender-disaggregated data hinders the sector's ability to effectively advocate on behalf of women and leaves decision-makers with data that presents a false narrative - one where the diversity of experiences between women and men is unaccounted for and therefore absent in crucial policy and budgetary decisions. In addition to obtaining properly disaggregated data, mechanisms must be put in place to properly assess the data, guided by predetermined gender equality objectives and indicators for each department. Such change needs to be monitored and reviewed in a comprehensive report to ensure that adjustments to the decision-making process produced intended results.

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

Please set out your response below

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research

"I think women and girls need to be listened to more within the Criminal Justice system, the majority of women tend to feel that they are not supported and listened to, they do not want this violence and attitude to continue, they want to feel they are of great worth and not put down."

"I believe the Gillen review remains largely unimplemented so that could provide a starting point, with a standing engagement with the women's sector to review identified aspects of the justice system and develop binding recommendations for change. There is a huge problem with lack of accountability, whereby recommendations are made but not actioned in a timely or sufficient way."

"This is a ludicrous question - in fact the whole consultation is as the massive cuts to women and lgbt support services, cuts to mental health and addiction services, poverty and austerity measures need ended and instead of building bigger prisons for women solve the problems of poverty and addiction and mental health that are the reason most women are in prison. there should be an amnesty for people sharing stories of sexual violence where they are not allowed to be sacked or lose education places for a certain period. But finally - all the solutions are suggested in every CEDAW and Un and violence against women sector org for decades."

We have consistently highlighted throughout this entire written response how meaningful engagement should work and how to ensure women are at the heart of legislation that impacts them disproportionately. We have also highlighted the current failures in how victims and survivors are engaged with and the appropriate measures that need to be in place through community organisation support and good practice throughout this response.

This consultation process itself, through a short timeframe for completion and inaccessibility of citizens space, has proven extremely difficult for women to engage with. We would very much welcome further discussions with both Departments on how to engage with victims and survivors, on sharing the thousands of testimonies

women and girls have already shared with us, and how to ensure meaningful engagement with the sector more generally.

Stakeholder engagement needs to be drastically improved - as even when this call for views were being launched most of the women's sector organisations involved in this written response did not find out until the morning of this event. Our organisations have close connections with a diverse range of women across all of Northern Ireland, and if the Departments wish to engage better with victims and survivors, they need to also address how they identify and engage with the stakeholder groups that work to support them.

The results of our own research, which was only open for 25 days and had responses from 1,065 women, is a clear testament that women and girls are absolutely willing and ready to discuss these issues. We need to ensure that these testimonies and case studies are not wasted, and that the departments engage with us properly beyond the closing of this call for views to ensure the voices of the women and girls who shared their stories with us are at the core of the strategy that is developed.

Previous answers throughout this call for views and written evidence submission are relevant to this question and we hope they can all be taken into account and acted upon.

8. WPG Response to TEO Call for Views on Equally Safe: Strategy to Tackle VAWG

New Strategies | Call for Views

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

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

Please set out your response below

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

"I think it is so important to shift the narrative and focus to the actions of men and boys. This needs to start early e.g. primary school and needs to be taken seriously - there is a real risk that it will be undermined by critics saying it is 'political correctness gone mad', etc."

"Initiatives trying to stop victims being victims just reinforces that it's the woman's or girl's responsibility. Moving the focus onto perpetrators seems more appropriate."

Relevant findings from WPG Primary Research on VAWG:

- 91.2% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with men's violence against women and girls
- 97.2% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland should have a Strategy to tackle men's violence against women and girls
- 95.2% think that reducing levels of violence against women and girls requires focusing on changing men and boy's behaviours and actions.

These findings are significant as they highlight that women overwhelmingly support the need for a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy for Northern Ireland, and that this should focus on **violence perpetrated by men and boys**.

In addition to this, the majority of survey respondents, 13% of which were LGBTQI+ women, supported a change in the name of the strategy to focus on men's violence. However, as highlighted in response to the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, it is still important that the language used in the legislation should be inclusive and recognise that domestic abuse can and does happen in same gender relationships and while largely perpetrated by men can also be perpetrated by women.

The harmful nature of gender-neutral policy making in Northern Ireland has been well documented in our WPG Feminist Recovery Plans. If we are to address VAWG, then of course this needs to focus on violence *against* women and girls. Northern Ireland is the most dangerous place in Europe to be a woman, and we are long overdue a strategy that focuses on this and isn't watered down into a gender-neutral strategy that won't address the problem at hand. We have made it clear that more robust action is needed to support people of all genders in the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy. However, this strategy is designed to be separate and to deal with the broader issue of violence against women and girls that is perpetrated by men and boys and the structural violence that enables it.

We have already highlighted in section 6.2.2 why we believe this strategy should be addressing men's violence against women and girls, and sincerely hope that the team working on drafting this strategy take this recommendation, and the voices of the many, many women who shared their views on this too. Elsewhere in this response we have raised the issue that men and boys can be victims of domestic and sexual abuse, and that greater support and measures must be taken to address this within the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Strategy. However, a significant amount of domestic and sexual abuse against men and boys is also perpetrated by men and boys, which supports the view that we need to address the cultural issues that are enabling men's violence in such high levels in our society. Addressing men and boy's violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland will hopefully lead to a cultural shift that will support all victims of violence in our society.

We have also addressed elsewhere in this response about interpersonal violence in LGBTQ+ relationships and made various recommendations in relation to this (sections 6.2.10, 6.2.10 and in response to Q2 of the Domestic and Sexual Abuse call for views). In terms of this strategy however, we would urge TEO to incorporate the needs of LGBTQ+ women in relation to men's violence through analysis and measures to address the high levels of violence against LGBTQ+ women by men. The VAWG strategy should consider the additional levels of violence against LGBTQ+ women through the lenses of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and misogyny as interlinked factors.

The vast evidence and testimonies throughout this written evidence submission highlight that women want this strategy to address men's violence against women and girls directly in this strategy. Further, this evidence shows that women experience these levels of violence and abuse because of the power dynamics in our society and the ongoing tolerance of men and boy's treatment of women and girls. We have also explored throughout this response the power dynamics and intersecting forms of violence women face due to systemic discrimination they face.

We believe that this Strategy must focus specifically on the phenomenon of violence against women and girls - specifically men's violence against women and girls - because it is a distinct and multi-layered phenomenon, which needs unique forms of preventative strategies and measures put into place to deal with it. We are not suggesting that violence is a unique blight on women's lives; rather that women experience violence in ways that are quite distinct from the kinds of violence that blight men's lives. Measures that are not sensitive to these differences will fail to address either problem. In addition, distinct strategies which aim to understand and treat the causes of men's violence against women, such as that proposed in this call for views, may well offer unique insights into the motivations behind men's violence overall (patriarchal attitudes for example), and indirectly contribute to efforts to reduce violence as a whole.

Women who are murdered, for example, are mostly murdered in their homes by current or former partners¹⁷⁶; this is not true for men. A useful exercise is to try to understand why this is, and then what can be done to address it. Very often these women experience this extreme violence *specifically because* they are women; not only because of misogyny, a phenomenon with many manifestations, but also because of their perceived vulnerability, and because of issues surrounding gender inequality; an abused woman may not have the financial means to leave her partner, for example, because she earns too little or does not earn anything at all. This fact is so widely recognised that child benefits and child tax credits were traditionally paid to the child's mother exclusively¹⁷⁷ unless in rare circumstances such as death or imprisonment; the state recognised that for many women, this was the only cash they had any access to. A campaign, cognisant of the importance of women's economic independence, to separate the payments from Universal Credit was inspired by this fact¹⁷⁸. Deep-rooted gender inequality impacts women's ability to leave an abusive

¹⁷⁶ BBC News (2020) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-51572665>

¹⁷⁷ Hansard, Child Benefit Bill(1975) <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1975/may/13/child-benefit-bill>

¹⁷⁸ Inside Housing, Charities Call for Default Split Universal Credit Payments to Avoid Worsening Domestic Abuse (2018) <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/charities-call-for-default-split-universal-credit-payments-to-avoid-worsening-domestic-abuse-55852>

relationship and may influence men's sense of ownership or control over their partners.

This gender inequality works hand in hand with gender stereotypes and old-fashioned but still prevalent ideas about ownership of partners to make domestic abuse something uniquely gendered, and to make leaving an abusive partner a uniquely dangerous period for a woman and, often, her children. These things have to be taken into account when we are looking at tackling violence, because failure to do so would mean trying to apply the lessons here - we should work towards gender equality, we should dismantle patriarchal attitudes in men, we need more shelter spaces for abuse survivors, for example - to gang violence or sectarian violence, where entirely different causes are at play. These issues are no less serious and urgent, but they are enormously different in terms of addressing their causes and finding solutions. Moreover, the violence that women and girls experience is more commonplace, more varied in expression, more hidden and more endemic than any of the more sensational forms of violence mentioned above; it is a tougher issue to tackle, but it is all the more urgent that we do so as a result.

The WPG raised similar points in our response¹⁷⁹ to the Department of Justice response to Judge Marrinan's Hate Crime review. Although these points relate specifically to the harm of taking a gender-neutral approach to hate crime legislation, they also reflect the harm of taking a gender-neutral approach to policy-making on violence against women more generally. In this response, the WPG explained that:

"There is no substantiated evidence of instances of gender-based hate crime towards men. This is not to say that men do not experience hate crime, but that men are not victims of hate crime *as a result of* their gender. In contrast, there is substantial evidence that women are victims of hate crime *as a result of* their gender, acts which are driven by misogyny. This includes misogynistic online abuse against women, which is particularly visible against women in public roles, such as female politicians.

It is crucial that the Department of Justice avoids taking a 'gender neutral' approach to the inclusion of gender as a motivator of hate crime. There are several reasons why this approach is harmful to women, not least because the provision could be abused to remove focus from misogynistic violence and other abuse against women and girls. This approach would be based on the problematic idea that, rather than

¹⁷⁹ WPG Response to DoJ's Response to Hate Crime Review (2021) Available at: <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/WPG-Summary-Response-to-DoJ-Response-to-Hate-Crime-Review-Dec-2021-.pdf>

protecting women and girls from hate crime they already experience as a result of their gender, men and boys should be equally protected from hate crime that they could potentially experience in the future, as a result of their gender. *Existing tangible threats to women and girls' safety should not be treated with equal weight to potential and unlikely threats to men, based on non-existent evidence regarding gender-based hate crime towards men and boys."*

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

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

Please set out your response below

The WPG welcomes this draft vision set out, as at present, women and girls in Northern Ireland are not safe in our society, and cannot reach their full potential due to this. We also do not have a society that is intolerant to VAWG, as highlighted in the below findings:

- 89.7% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with attitudes of sexism and misogyny
- 80.8% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with rape myths and rape culture
- 87.4% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with victim-blaming
- 81.2% of respondents thought that there is stigma surrounding issues of violence against women and girls

It is clear from the vast amount of evidence relating to VAWG in NI, including our own findings, that victims are not adequately supported, and perpetrators are not remotely held to account to the degree they should be. We agree that the vision of this strategy should connect women's ability to feel safe *and* reach their potential as well as the need for society to be intolerant to VAWG. These connections should be maintained throughout each phase of the strategy. This is because gender inequality is the background and reality against which this violence and the threat of it play out; the reality of gender inequality encourages ideas of ownership over women's bodies and lives, keeps women trapped in abusive relationships, encourages women to sacrifice their careers and therefore their freedom for parenting duties that men rarely are expected to share equally, and more. Recognising this and recognising the importance of women and girls reaching their full potential in a world where gender inequality is eliminated is vital to the success of the strategy.

We also note that the ability to feel safe is not just about violence women and girls do face, but also the ongoing threat of such violence. These threats of men and boys' violence are everywhere, and our research shows that 82% of women and girls had direct experience of violence by men and boys before turning 20 years old. This reality must not be underestimated; it demonstrates the age at which young women and

girls become aware of the violence they will likely face their whole lives at the same time as they become aware of why; simply because of their gender. It influences the choices they make and their very perception of themselves and those around them¹⁸⁰. This manifests itself also in the response of victims of violence to their own experience; having grown up around victim-blaming language and tropes, for example, victims of gendered violence too often blame themselves for the abuse that they suffered¹⁸¹.

In addition to this, the statistics above about the vast levels of stigma and victim blaming in our society highlight how this is an issue that will continue to worsen without radical change. We would urge TEO to include a definition of safety within this strategy, which should also include economic safety and stability, given the evidence of overlap between these issues highlighted in response to earlier questions.

Further, this definition of safety should also include safety from state violence, as highlighted elsewhere, respondents to our survey clearly believed this should also be included within this strategy. We would also like to highlight again our responses in relation to institutional state violence and the need for this to be incorporated into this strategy. This includes the denial of women's rights, the removal of women's rights and enabling the abuse of women and girls through inaction.

We welcome that this draft vision connects feeling safe with being safe. The threat of violence, act of violence and impact afterwards all limit women and girls' ability within our society. We have included further information on definitions of violence, VAWG and intersectionality throughout this response which we would also recommend being incorporated into the vision.

We would also welcome clarity on what exactly it means for victims to be supported and for perpetrators to be held to account. Further, consideration to alternative means to criminal justice must also be considered in relation to this question. As there are vast levels of under-reporting, and many women and girls understandably do not want to engage with the criminal justice system due to shockingly low convictions rates relating to VAWG or due to barriers preventing them from accessing the criminal justice system, consideration to other forms of justice for victims must also be considered.

In addition, it needs to be clear that 'society' also includes our government, public bodies and institutions, as all play a role in furthering or enabling violence against

¹⁸⁰ Los Angeles Times, By age 6, girls are less likely than boys to think that they can be "brilliant", study shows (2017) <https://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-girls-boys-brilliant-20170126-story.html>

¹⁸¹ Rape Crisis England and Wales, Challenging Thoughts of Self-Blame <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/looking-for-tools-to-help-you-cope/blame-guilt/self-blame/>

women and girls and must be a part of any cultural shift or action on ending VAWG. Some further comments on what we mean by state violence, and the views women and girls provided on this issue, are available throughout this response but we would like to highlight some further points on this below.

State Violence

We wish to highlight a number of areas which we believe are examples of state violence against women. These arise from the welfare reform and austerity cuts that have taken place over the last decade. These welfare reform changes have disproportionately impacted on women. Research has shown that 86% of the savings to the Treasury from the tax and benefit changes since 2010 will have come from women.¹⁸²

Analysis by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)¹⁸³ of the winners and losers from the reforms found that the proportion of losers is much higher among some groups. Female lone parents and female single pensioners are the household type with the highest proportion of losers (over 87% in both cases). At an individual level, women lost on average considerably more from changes to direct taxes and benefits than men. Women lose about £400 per year on average, and men only £30. Lone parents in the bottom fifth of the household income distribution lose around 25% of their net income, or one pound in every four, on average.

Locally an analysis of the impact of the reforms by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)¹⁸⁴ showed that across most income levels the overall cash impact of the reforms is more negative for women than for men. The research showed that women lose more on average from these reforms than men mainly because they are more likely to be receiving benefits and tax credits than men.

The social security system has a vital role to play in easing the impact of poverty on people and families. However, the welfare reform and austerity measures introduced have tended to limit the ability of the system to protect against poverty and as

¹⁸² Estimating the gender impact of tax and benefit changes, Richard Cracknell, Richard Keen, Commons Briefing Papers SN06758, December 2017
<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06758/SN06758.pdf>

¹⁸³ The cumulative impact of tax and welfare reforms, Equality and Human Rights Commission, March 2018
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/cumulative-impact-tax-and-welfarereforms>

¹⁸⁴ Cumulative impact assessment of tax and social security reforms in Northern Ireland, NIHRC, November 2019
https://www.nihrc.org/uploads/publications/Final_CIA_report_Oct_2019.pdf

outlined many of these changes have had more negative impacts on women than men.

The welfare and austerity changes have meant that those on the lowest incomes are more likely to have to resort to borrowing and debt to make ends meet. Borrowing and debt is far from gender neutral. As women's incomes are generally lower over their lifetimes this leaves them vulnerable to short-term financial problems or income shocks making them more likely to have to rely on borrowing and debt often for essential items.

Many women who are struggling financially on benefits and in low-income work are vulnerable to high-cost credit including illegal forms of lending. Often, they have limited options to access cheaper forms of credit because of their low income. Some of the most vulnerable borrowers are forced into using illegal lending or loan sharking because of an urgent need for money. This often leads to a cycle of dependence on this type of lending that they find it hard to escape from.

Paramilitaries are known to be involved in loan sharking in Northern Ireland and this gives cause for concern in terms of the associated fear and violence that can accompany this type of lending. This particularly impacts on those living on low incomes who are often forced into this type of lending and then can really struggle to meet these repayments putting them at increased risk of harassment and violence.

Research by Ulster University and the Consumer Council¹⁸⁵ suggests that those involved in illegal money lending fall into two broad groups: paramilitaries and 'regular' members of the community. Respondents to this research agreed that money lenders in Northern Ireland must have some form of local influence or legitimacy, which may stem from a paramilitary connection, but must have the ability to carry out enforcement measures in order to settle or recoup the debt, including coercing debtors to facilitate criminal activity.

This research¹⁸⁶ also found that Universal Credit was repeatedly described as a driver for illegal lending particularly around the harm caused by the five-week wait and issues with short-term benefits loans that were repaid from future benefits. This ensured that benefit claimants were often short of the funds they needed to support their household, leading them to look to other means of getting the money they needed.

¹⁸⁵ Illegal Money Lending and Debt Project, Research Report of Findings, Ulster University and the Consumer Council, March 2020

[Illegal Money Lending Report.PDF \(consumercouncil.org.uk\)](https://www.consumer-council.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Illegal-Money-Lending-Report.pdf)

¹⁸⁶ Ibid

Research by the Women's Regional Consortium¹⁸⁷ on women and debt showed a number of examples of borrowing through loan sharks including paramilitaries and the fear of violence that accompanied this type of borrowing.

Much more needs to be done to tackle the issue of illegal money lending and loan sharks in Northern Ireland. There is a need to divert vulnerable people from accessing borrowing through illegal lending by providing routes out of poverty and financial hardship. This includes more adequate support through the social security system to ensure that people have sufficient income to live decent, healthy lives without resorting to this type of debt and the fear of violence which accompanies it.

The failure of the NI Executive to commission abortion services in Northern Ireland amounts to state violence against women. As previously mentioned, findings from WPG Primary Research on violence against women and girls found that 83.4% of women think that state violence against women and girls (for example, the mother and baby institutions, denying access to reproductive healthcare or diminishing women's human rights) should be included within a Strategy on violence against women and girls. Several respondents specifically noted the need to address abortion access as a form of state violence against women:

"State violence such as institutional abuse or denying women healthcare such as abortion or perinatal mental health support which can lead to their deaths needs to be included."

"Denial of of abortion care, unacceptable waiting lists for contraception and lack of comprehensive RSE are systemic acts of violence against women that must be addressed and tackled immediately."

"Denying women abortions is violence against women. Controlling women's reproductive health and limiting what should be a basic human right regarding bodily autonomy is atrocious. Definitely would like to see more focus on this."

¹⁸⁷ Making Ends Meet: Women's Perspectives on Access to Lending, Women's Regional Consortium, February 2020
<https://womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Making-Ends-Meet-Womens-Perspectives-on-Access-to-Lending.pdf>

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

Please set out your response below

- *Understanding the scope and scale of the problem the strategy is seeking to tackle.*

We agree that it is important to understand the scope and scale of the problem. In doing this, TEO must be clear in what they are defining *as* the problem. In relation to the problem being men's violence against women and girls, our statistics show that:

- 91.2% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with men's violence against women and girls
- 83% of respondents have experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls
- 82% of those who had experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls first experienced this before the age of 20
- 92.3% of respondents believed there are barriers to people reporting when they have been victims of men's violence against women and girls
- Of the 83% of respondents who said that they had been impacted by men's violence against women and girls, only 21.4% reported this to the police
- Of the 21.4% of victims who reported men's violence to the police, only 22.6% found this to be useful
- 89.7% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with attitudes of sexism and misogyny
- 80.8% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with rape myths and rape culture
- 87.4% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with victim-blaming
- 81.2% of respondents thought that there is stigma surrounding issues of violence against women and girls
- 78.6% of respondents thought that additional action needs to be taken in the Strategy to address men's violence against marginalised groups of women, such as disabled women, black or minority ethnic women, migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, traveller women and rural women.
- 83.4% of respondents thought that state violence against women and girls (for example the mother and baby institutions, denying access to reproductive healthcare or diminishing women's human rights) should be included within this strategy.

Whilst we recognise that statistics will never show the full extent of the problem due to vast under-reporting, our data shows that the scope and scale of the problem is severe across Northern Ireland, therefore we support having this objective within the strategy.

We further urge caution as to relying on police statistics on these forms of violence; our data demonstrates the widely recognised fact that huge numbers of survivors of violence do not report to the police, and this is particularly true for sexual violence. While improved police responses and an attitudinal shift across society to certain forms of VAWG such as domestic abuse in recent decades has seen a rise in reports of these kinds of crimes, we still do not have a full picture of how often these kinds of incidents occur. There are various reasons why reports are not indicative of the full picture, including legislative gaps which preclude accurate recording of incidents, a fear of not being believed, a belief that justice will not be forthcoming, a reluctance to report due to the victim's immigration status, fear of repercussions from the perpetrator, or indeed the perpetrator may be connected with the police or otherwise an authority figure. Some forms of abuse, such as honour-based abuse, are especially hidden for both cultural reasons and because of a fear of repercussions from within the victim's community. As a result of these factors, we can never be entirely certain of the frequency with which these incidents occur, but official statistics remain our most accurate measure, even if they consistently understate the problem.

- *Prevention - Early intervention to get upstream of violence.*

We certainly support having prevention and early intervention as a draft objective within the strategy, we would urge for this to be a full Inter-Departmental approach that avoids siloed working, as this is an issue relevant to each and every department in Northern Ireland. This would also assist in ensuring progress in times of political insecurity, such as the recent collapse of the Executive again. In terms of prevention and early intervention, overwhelmingly the most common responses in our survey related to working with and funding community organisations including women's organisations and for reform of the minimum content order and implementation of CEDAW recommendations relating to RSE.

Urgent action is required on standardised, strengthened, widened and as soon as feasible, mandatory RSE as a central action for long term change on violence against women and girls, and violence in all intimate relationships. This is relevant to domestic and sexual violence, as age appropriate RSE, focused on healthy relationships and respect for self and others, is a critical cornerstone for breaking harmful stereotypes and developing new social norms. There has been no movement on the CEDAW Inquiry recommendation to implement standardised, age-appropriate relationships

and sexuality education (RSE)¹⁸⁸, widening the gap with Great Britain. Decisions continue to be taken at school level, with no systematic guidance¹⁸⁹ and participation in often extremely limited content lessons requires parental consent. The curriculum excludes the experiences of LGBTQI+ pupils, and pupils with disabilities may be withdrawn from lessons¹⁹⁰. Young people report that current RSE is ‘useless’ and ‘biased’¹⁹¹, but feel school is the best place for RSE.

Education takes place outside of schools and other places of formal learning, of course, and these must be included also. This may include workplaces, places of worship, in community settings including youth services and sports’ clubs, and more. The important thing is that the education be informative, non-judgemental, being careful not to repeat victim-blaming tropes. This also needs to be repeated throughout life; it should not be possible to “miss” it. This is both for practical reasons - language changes, new laws are passed, new issues emerge - but also because these issues are too important to be addressed once and then forgotten; they need to become societal norms and to replace harmful norms, so they need to be reinforced.

In relation to funding to community services, it is imperative that this strategy is adequately resourced to ensure it is operational. This includes sustainable long-term funding for the women’s sector, migrant support sector, LGBTQ+ sector and other specialist support services for women and girls from all backgrounds. A way to ensure this funding is secured is by prioritising these services and this strategy in the Programme for Government, and by aligning the Budget with the aims of the Programme for Government.

- *A co-designed strategy which is delivered in a collaborative manner and is based on local and international evidence.*

We also firmly support a co-designed strategy that is made in a collaborative manner and is based on local and international evidence. The evidence from our own survey highlights the need for this strategy and for it to specifically focus on men and boy’s

¹⁸⁸ CEDAW Committee (2018) [Inquiry into abortion legislation in Northern Ireland under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW](#)

¹⁸⁹ Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (2019) [Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance: Post-Primary](#); Teachers report feeling ill-equipped to deliver RSE.

¹⁹⁰ In particular LGBTQI+ pupils report poor experiences with bullying and harassment in school, including lack of expertise handling issues. New legislation in autumn 2021 provided a legal definition of bullying and strengthened duties of schools (Department of 4 March 2021 ‘Weir announces new legislation to address bullying in schools’). Legislation on issues such as upskirting is not yet in place - Department of Justice 5 July 2021 ‘Long introduces legislation to strengthen law on sexual offences and trafficking’.

¹⁹¹ Belfast Youth Forum, Common Youth and Queen’s University Belfast (2019) [Any Use?](#)

violence against women and girls and we recommend that this is the primary focus of this strategy.

In relation to co-design, we again would like to highlight the recommendations on section 6.3 which highlights the WRDA Guidelines for Public Authorities on Putting Women at the Heart of Public Consultation.

Over the past two years, the women's sector has responded to 40+ public consultations, evidence submissions and calls for views. In the vast majority of these responses, departments did not abide by good practice guidelines of having these consultations open for a minimum of 12 weeks. This has made it extremely difficult for the women's sector to engage in a meaningful way, and it is imperative that any strategy that is specifically about an issue relating to women such as VAWG, that action is taken to drastically improve engagement with the sector for meaningful co-design and co-production.

- *Responsive services to ensure women and girls are equally safe.*

We support this draft objective and we have highlighted throughout this response where women and girls have been consistently failed through response services when reporting men's violence against women and girls. This is particularly evident in our primary research findings, where women consistently told us that they did not receive adequate support from government and public agencies after reporting abuse. We have also made various recommendations in relation to the existing gaps in responsive services, and the need for vastly increased and more sustainable funding to the women's sector and other VCS organisations working to support victims of VAWG. ' This issue is more thoroughly explored in the section on prevention in the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy in this document.

In addition, an aspect that is missing from these draft objectives is institutional and state violence. State violence covers a range of areas that actively limit women reaching their full potential, such as (but not limited to) austerity measures that disproportionately impact women, denial of essential healthcare provisions like abortion, and historical instances of abuse like the mother and baby institutions. In a strategy dealing with VAWG, this absolutely must be included and there must be internal accountability for government and public bodies. If not, how can we expect society to change?

State violence findings from WPG Primary Research

In Question 26 of our survey, we asked survey respondents “Do you believe that state violence against women and girls (for example, the mother and baby institutions, denying access to reproductive healthcare or diminishing women's human rights) should be included within this strategy?” These were our findings:

- Yes (83.4%)
- No (3.8%)
- Unsure (12.8%)

Many respondents also emphasised the need to address state violence in their responses to Question 27, which asked: “Is there anything else that you would like to share that you think the WPG should be calling for within the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy?” Here are some examples of the responses we received relating to state violence:

“A believe a stand alone policy/ investigation into State violence against women and girls is required.”

“Denying women abortion is in itself violence against women/transgender people therefore they need to roll out access to this instead of continuing to push it off. The state is leading the example here and should stop blurring the lines between state and religion as it is creating more problems.”

“State violence such as institutional abuse or denying women healthcare such as abortion or perinatal mental health support which can lead to their deaths needs to be included.”

“State violence is the most harmful... leading the way for all other violence which seems acceptable by comparison. From my experience I suffered endometriosis from age 16 and every doctor at every appointment minimised my pain, ignored me, told me i wouldn't be treated unless i was planning pregnancy, told me to get pregnant to remove symptoms, told me essentially my early death is not as important as the potential for my womb to reproduce. I was repeatedly given birth control that i told them made me suicidal to tackle my pain when it didnt work. I was refused the Surgery to identify and treat the endo because i wasn't actively trying for a baby. My school reported my agonising symptoms of vomiting, passing out from pain etc to my parents as 'Drug abuse'. My doctor at age 16 made inappropriate and

creepy comments about my body when i went for an implant birth control (which was supposed to help the pain but made everything worse, 16 year old girls shouldn't be given such a high dose of hormones especially when PCOS and ENDO affect the hormonal system). My mental health problems were ignored then misdiagnosed for a decade until i took out a loan to get a private assessment and was able to access support for ADHD and Autism and correctly identify depression, anxiety and PTSD and prescribe effective medication. I had waited on NHS waiting list for 1 year prior to this to access mental health support and after one year waiting and one 20 minute phone call were i had to recall a huge amount of trauma, i was told no support available..... and was left on my own... again. And of course the fact women in NI STILL CANNOT ACCESS FREE SAFE ABORTION CARE."

In our primary research, we also asked survey respondents if they were aware of the following types of violence against women and girls.

- Domestic abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Online abuse
- Honour-based abuse
- Economic abuse
- Coercive control
- Sexual harassment
- Street harassment
- Emotional abuse
- Unwanted rough sex
- Misogynistic hate crimes
- Spiritual abuse
- Workplace harassment
- Stalking
- Forced isolation from family and friends
- Controlling an individual's style and appearances
- Systemic violence by the state
- Aware of all of the above

36.7% of survey respondents were aware of systemic violence by the state as a form of violence against women and girls and 54.3% were aware of all of the above.

95.8% of survey respondents thought that a Strategy on violence against women and girls should address all of the above forms of violence. When we asked respondents what other forms of violence should be included in this strategy, many respondents

called for the inclusion of lack of abortion access and institutional abuse as forms of violence against women and girls.

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

Please set out your response below

Before responding to this question, we would like to again raise comments made in section 6.2.1 and throughout this response, that we do not see how it is possible to have a VAWG strategy that does not include or reference Domestic and Sexual Abuse.

Domestic abuse and sexual abuse are extremely broad, and each incorporates a wide range of violence often perpetrated against women. We would argue that the VAWG strategy must also include domestic and sexual abuse and recognise the gendered nature of both against women, in most cases perpetrated by men. Now, we are conscious that this question was asked in our survey in response to aspects of VAWG apart from those addressed in the Domestic and Sexual Abuse strategy. However, obviously many of these forms of violence and abuse are interrelated and it is difficult to therefore separate all forms of abuse. It is not possible to deal with Domestic and Sexual Abuse without recognising the inherently gendered nature of it, and it is not possible to address broader VAWG without incorporating Domestic and Sexual Abuse.

As 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, and would therefore urge that the development of both strategies is done in a coordinated way and that domestic and sexual abuse specifically against women is incorporated into the new VAWG survey. Part of the problems with our current approach of “silo-ing” all of these workstreams is that things are missed; they don’t have a natural “home” and so they disappear; is groping sexual abuse, for example? Does one instance of sexual violence count as abuse? Which workstream covers which? The overlap is enormous between these phenomena, and measurement is next to impossible - not only because it relies on incomplete data such as police reports, which can only record things that are presently criminalised, and never capture all of the incidents, but also because people are often uncertain where an individual incident falls and therefore how to report it or record it. Again, we urge flexibility in accounting for this overlap, and a reconsideration of the term “sexual abuse”. One final issue with the silo-ing of these issues is the fact that so many of them have the same root causes and the same measurements that would work to prevent one would equally work to prevent the other; all of this could be avoided by beginning at the roots and working upwards with specialist interventions and service provision, as appropriate.

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

"I was 7 years old when a fourteen year old boy made sexual advances to me in a room where I was playing alone. I was terrified and left to find other people but was too shaken to tell anyone what happened for over a year. I have witnessed or been subject to numerous other incidents by boys who were at school/under 18, and this behaviour in boys and younger men is especially concerning to me. As an adult I have been subject to street harassment, threatened with a knife and had my drink spiked on different occasions though thankfully was not physically harmed in any of these instances. More recently I was outside a pub when a girl approached asking for help - she had cable ties round her wrists and had been assaulted and abused by a man in a nearby flat. I called the police and stayed with her. I now know he wasn't charged and is a serial offender - because my partner overheard him openly bragging about it in a barbers shop weeks later."

"I first experienced sexual abuse at the age of 6 until 10. I also have had intimate photos shared when I was 16. I have had experiences with street harassment from the age of 12. I was in a coercive and emotionally abusive relationship at 15 where I experienced unwanted rough sex. I was groped in school at 14. I was unable to access an abortion when I got pregnant during my A levels. I have received online abuse, both anonymous and from people that I know from the age of 12 until recently."

"Too many incidents to describe, started in childhood from about aged 10. Many different incidents involved men or boys that were complete strangers or well known to me and were all different ages. It was as simple as catcalling, beeping car horns etc to being groped, being touched under my clothes in my sleep, having my clothes pulled at or off in public, having my underwear pulled at in school and hands up my skirt at assembly and the list goes on to much more serious incidents which I don't like to talk about. A lifetime of these experiences, which happened more often when I was under 18 has left me with great difficulty trusting men, even those I care about, as my primary experience left me seeing them as predatory. Its difficult to form healthy relationships and difficult even to leave my children in male company even when I know its unreasonable of me to think this way about every man."

"My family has a long history of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. I was abused as a child, raped at 13, my boyfriend when I was 15 was 23, I had lots of underage sex with men who know I was underage and enjoyed that fact, I was in a physically abusive relationship when I was 18, I always ended up in controlling emotionally abusive relationships, my ex passed me around for sex with his friends, my ex husband was 15 years older than me and was extremely abusive, I moved to Portugal in 2017 and 7months later I was spiked in a bar and brought to an apartment and raped. I spent over two years being retraumatised going through the court system. The guy was found guilty and sentenced to five years in prison but he fled back to Angola. I'm now back living in Belfast with my partner who has cheated on me repeatedly and who lies all the time. It's sad but I feel like that's just how men are."

Our statistics show that:

- 91.2% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with men's violence against women and girls
- 83% of respondents have experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls
- 82% of those who had experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls first experienced this before the age of 20
- 92.3% of respondents believed there are barriers to people reporting when they have been victims of men's violence against women and girls
- Of the 83% of respondents who said that they had been impacted by men's violence against women and girls, only 21.4% reported this to the police
- Of the 21.4% of victims who reported men's violence to the police, only 22.6% found this to be useful
- 89.7% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with attitudes of sexism and misogyny
- 80.8% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with rape myths and rape culture
- 87.4% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with victim-blaming
- 81.2% of respondents thought that there is stigma surrounding issues of violence against women and girls
- 78.6% of respondents thought that additional action needs to be taken in the Strategy to address men's violence against marginalised groups of women, such as disabled women, black or minority ethnic women, migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, traveller women and rural women.

- 83.4% of respondents thought that state violence against women and girls (for example the mother and baby institutions, denying access to reproductive healthcare or diminishing women's human rights) should be included within this strategy.

In our primary research, we also asked survey respondents if they were aware of the following types of violence against women and girls. All of these types of violence result in or are likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls. The percentages beside each form of violence indicate the percentage of respondents who were aware of this type of violence:

- Domestic abuse (68%)
- Sexual abuse (67.4%)
- Online abuse (65.5%)
- Honour-based abuse (37.8%)
- Economic abuse (53.1%)
- Coercive control (59.6%)
- Sexual harassment (65.3%)
- Street harassment (58%)
- Emotional abuse (66.6%)
- Unwanted rough sex (57.9%)
- Misogynistic hate crimes (51.7%)
- Spiritual abuse (26%)
- Workplace harassment (63.8%)
- Stalking (63%)
- Forced isolation from family and friends (61.3%)
- Controlling an individual's style and appearances (60.6%)
- Systemic violence by the state (36.7%)
- Aware of all of the above (54.3%)

95.8% of survey respondents thought that a Strategy on violence against women and girls should address all of the above forms of violence. When we asked respondents what other forms of violence should be included in this strategy, these were the most common responses:

- Medical abuse,
- Gaslighting
- Marital rape,
- Grooming
- Spiking,
- Lack of abortion access,
- Caste-based violence,

- Violence against sex workers,
- Female genital mutilations,
- Pornography,
- Institutional abuse,
- Human trafficking,
- Stealthing,
- Sectarian abuse,
- Homophobic and transphobic abuse against LGBTQ+ women,
- Corrective rape.

Workplace Sexual harassment

In October 2019, ICTU surveyed more than 600 trade union members in Northern Ireland with experience of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace. Around 73 % of the responses were from women. The survey focused exclusively on people's experience of sexual harassment in the workplace, rather than measuring the scale of the problem.

The results revealed shocking levels of underreporting of both sexual harassment and assault whilst those who did report showed dissatisfaction with how their employers dealt with incidents.

3 out of 4 (75 %) of respondents did not report the unwanted sexual behaviour to their employer, while of those who did report 62% felt that it was not dealt with satisfactorily and in some instances.

29% reported their most recent experience of sexual harassment had taken place at a work-related social event; while a sizeable minority reported being harassed by phone or text (11%) or by email,

While sexual harassment in work is illegal and there is a responsibility on employers to prevent sexual harassment and protect their employees, given the scale and seriousness of the incidents, the WPG is concerned that duties on employers do not go far enough.

Employers must act urgently and proactively to tackle this problem – raise awareness such behaviour is unacceptable and may be subject to discipline, implement a comprehensive policy with an associated programme of training, set up proper, timely procedures for reporting and support the victims and deal with the perpetrators. There needs to be real consequences for those employers who don't

comply with their obligations. Everyone has the right to respect and wellbeing at work.

Key Findings of the survey include:

Incidence

Respondents were asked to select from several options the type of sexual harassment experienced and let them select more than one option in recognition of the fact they might have had multiple experiences. Subsequent questions invited respondents to think about the most recent incident.

- Nearly half (54 %) of respondents have been subject to unwelcome jokes of a sexual nature.
- 2 out of 5 respondents (44 %) reported receiving unwelcome verbal sexual advances in the workplace.
- 2 out of 5 (43 %) have been subject to unwelcome comments of a sexual nature about their body or clothes.
- More than a third (38 %) have experienced unwanted touching, such as a hand on the knee or lower back.
- 2 out of 5 (42 %) have been subject to unwelcome questions or comments about their sex life.
- Harassment via phone, text, online, by email or via social media accounted for 13% of all reported incidents.
- 1 in 5 (20 %) reported experiencing unwanted sexual touching or attempts to kiss them.
- Around one in six (16 %) have been subject to unwelcome questions or comments of a sexual nature about their sexual orientation.
- 2% of all respondents reported being seriously sexually assaulted or rape at work, of which 1 said that this occurred within the past 12 months.

Perpetrators and location

- In line with existing research on sexual harassment, the ICTU survey found that in eight out of ten cases (84 %) the perpetrator of the most recent incident was a man.
- For the majority, the harasser had been a colleague (55 %).
- Over a quarter (28 %) reported that their direct manager or another manager was the perpetrator.
- 56% of incidents of harassment took place at workplaces.
- However, for a significant minority (29 % of respondents) the harassment had taken place at a work related social event such as a Christmas party.

- 13 % of incidents of unwanted sexual behaviour had taken place on the phone, by email or on social media.

Reporting

- Three out of four (75 %) did not report the sexual harassment to their employer. Of those who did report, 62 % felt that it was not dealt with satisfactorily and in some instances reported that they had been treated less favourably as a result of reporting sexual harassment.
- 36 % respondents who did not report the incident to their employer feared that doing so would have a negative impact on their working relationships or on their career (29 %).
- 33 % did not think they would be believed or taken seriously, while 18% thought they would be blamed if they reported the unwanted sexual behaviour to their employer.
- Around 29 % did not believe the person responsible would be sufficiently punished.
- 29 % said they were too embarrassed to report the unwanted sexual behaviour to their employer.
- 13 % did not report the incident because the perpetrator was part of the reporting process.
- 17 % were unaware that they could report or know how to report the harassment.

Impact

- Those polled were asked to choose from several options describing the effect that the harassment had on them. Over half reported that they felt embarrassed (59 %).
- 50 % reported that they avoid certain work situations as a result.
- 38 % reported that they felt less confident at work, with a further 21 % saying it had a negative impact on their performance at work.
- Around a third 33 % reported that the harassment had a negative impact on their mental health, and a further 13 % reported that there was a negative impact on their physical health.
- 19 per cent had wanted to leave their job as a result but had been unable due to financial or other factors. A further 6 per cent reported the harassment had caused them to change their role within the company or to leave their job with that employer.

Another example of workplace sexual harassment is the issue of so-called 'up skirting' and 'down blousing'. We would highlight the work which has been done by trade

unions including the NASUWT in highlighting this as an issue and taking action in a landmark case to support their members who were victims of this sexual crime whilst at work.

Whilst we welcome the new crimes on voyeurism which will be introduced in the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill, we believe that the legislation does not go far enough and will not adequately protect victims.

The provisions mirror those brought forward in Scotland in 2010 and subsequently in England and Wales, i.e. a person commits the offence of voyeurism if, without consent, they operate equipment, or record an image beneath an individual's clothing with the intention of enabling themselves or a third party to observe that individual's genitals or buttocks in circumstances where they would not otherwise be visible, and where the person acted for the purposes of obtaining sexual gratification or humiliating, alarming or distressing the individual.

In a blog by the Northern Ireland Assembly Research Matters team, it is pointed out that criticism of the current laws in Great Britain suggests that they do not go far enough to protect victims, making it inadvisable to import policies that may not be fit for purpose.

They further comment on the problematic issue of intent in the GB legislation. This narrow definition of the offender's intent has proven problematic in both jurisdictions. In the first six years since the new law came into effect, 142 people were charged with upskirting offences in Scotland, but only 19 were convicted: a rate of 13%. The difficulty of proving the nature of an offender's intentions beyond reasonable doubt may be contributing to cases never reaching court.

Despite evidence which suggests that the requirement to prove intent inhibits conviction, and despite having given evidence to the Justice Committee during the scrutiny phase, the WPG is concerned that the Department is intent on replicating this flawed legislation - it would still be the case that 'up skirting' without consent would not be a crime in itself but dependent on proving that the individual carrying out the act was acting for the purposes of obtaining sexual gratification or humiliating, alarming or distressing the individual.

The Department has an opportunity to learn from the GB experience and we would urge the Minister to be bold and to develop bespoke provisions for Northern Ireland. We would support recommendations made by the NASUWT in terms of the legislation, namely that the Bill is amended to remove the clause that requires evidence that the person acted for the purposes of obtaining sexual gratification or humiliating, alarming or distressing the individual and instead replaces it with a form

of words that conviction rests on intent to record/distribute and whether consent was given for the image/video to be taken.

The Department for Business, Enterprise, Innovation and Science in GM launched a consultation on sexual harassment in the workplace in 2019.

The scope of the consultation was as follows:

- how to ensure employers take preventative steps on harassment
- the law surrounding employers protecting their staff from being harassed by clients, customers, or other people from outside their organisation
- whether interns and volunteers are adequately protected by current laws
- whether people should be given longer to take a harassment, discrimination or victimisation claim to an employment tribunal
- Following this consultation, the government has confirmed that they will introduce a duty requiring employers to prevent sexual harassment.

Additionally, explicit protections from third-party harassment will also be introduced. There is also an indication that the time limit for bringing cases to the employment tribunal will be extended from 3 months to 6 months.

In the response, the Government has said:

“This package of measures will not only strengthen protections for those affected by harassment at work, but will also motivate employers to make improvements to workplace practices and culture which will benefit all employees. As debate about the future of the workplace proceeds in the light of the last year’s developments, these steps will ensure that whatever it looks like, people feel safe and supported to thrive.”¹⁹²

The WPG agrees with trade union colleagues in believing that the measures could go further but we nevertheless welcome the announcement by the UK Government to introduce proactive duties.

There is a real danger that Northern Ireland will once again fall behind in the protections offered to employees and workers. The ECNI has already highlighted the significant gaps which exist in the equality and anti-discrimination framework between Northern Ireland and GB. Unless the Department for the Economy

¹⁹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace>

introduces measures similar to those proposed by BEIS, additional gaps will be produced.

We would therefore urge a comprehensive review of the legislation be undertaken as part of the VAWG strategy to urgently identify and address gaps in protections for women.

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

Please set out your response below:

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

“It is the wider society views that also need addressed. As a teacher I believe education has made progress in discussing rights and respect. Investment in this curriculum would be valuable. Wider society needs open discussion, and acceptance that assault and violence against women & girls is wrong in all instances.”

“This generation has very little respect for women, everything has been sexualised via social media etc.”

“It’s not something that can change overnight as sexist, misogynistic attitudes are inherently developed from a young age. The obvious answer would be in education. I am a teacher, and other than my general every day attitudes where I try to call out this behaviour whenever I see it, there isn’t much in the way of tackling this serious issue. I think young boys/men don’t want to feel attacked, or like they’re being accused of something that they haven’t done. I understand that completely, but we need to show them that they’re is so much nuance to the issue than what they see/think on the [surface].”

All behaviour or actions that emanate from an attitude to, or perception of, women and girls that lack respect are “unwanted.”. We would like to again highlight our concern over the framing of “unwanted behaviours” as this term seems to not do justice to the severity of violence against women and girls. Some key findings from our survey which are relevant to this question include:

- 91.2% of women believe Northern Ireland has a problem with men’s violence against women and girls,
- 97.2% believe Northern Ireland should have a survey to address men’s violence against women and girls,
- 83% of women have been experienced or been impacted by men’s violence against women and girls but only 21.4% reported this to the police.
- 82% of respondents experienced this violence before the age of 20.

- 96.5% of LGBTQI+ women have experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls
- 92.4% of disabled women have experienced or been impacted by men's violence against women and girls
- 89.7% of women believe Northern Ireland has a problem with attitudes of sexism and misogyny
- 80.8% of women believe Northern Ireland has a problem with rape myths and rape culture
- 87.4% of women believe Northern Ireland has a problem with victim-blaming

We asked women which types of violence they were aware of and found:

- | | |
|--|--|
| - Domestic abuse (physical and verbal) (68%) | - Misogynistic Hate Crimes (51.7%) |
| - Sexual Abuse (67.4%) | - Spiritual Abuse (26%) |
| - Online Abuse (65.5%) | - Workplace Harassment (63.8%) |
| - Honour-Based Abuse (37.8%) | - Stalking (63%) |
| - Economic Abuse (53.1%) | - Forced isolation from family and friends (61.3%) |
| - Coercive Control (59.6%) | - Controlling individual style and appearances (60.6%) |
| - Sexual Harassment (65.3%) | - Systemic violence by the state (36.7%) |
| - Street Harassment (58%) | - Aware of all of the above (54.3%) |
| - Emotional Abuse (66.6%) | |
| - Unwanted rough Sex (57.9%) | |

In addition, 95.8% supported all of the above types of violence being included in this strategy. Additional forms of men's violence against women and girls that women believed should be incorporated into this strategy included:

- Medical abuse,
- Gaslighting
- Marital rape,
- Grooming
- Spiking,
- Lack of abortion access,
- Caste-based violence,
- Violence against sex workers,
- Female genital mutilations,
- Pornography,
- Institutional abuse,
- Human trafficking,
- Stealthing,
- Sectarian abuse,

- Homophobic and transphobic abuse against LGBTQ+ women,
- Corrective rape.

The following results were derived from the WPG Feminist Recovery Plan Primary Research conducted in 2021. This survey received 141 responses.

- 56.7% of respondents believed there is a problem of rape culture in Northern Ireland
- 58.4% of respondents had experienced either one or multiple of the following: domestic abuse, stalking, harassment, hate crime and assault
- 21.2% of respondents had been targeted by online abuse
- 92.3% of respondents who attended school in Northern Ireland said they did not feel they had received an adequate relationships and sexuality education (RSE)

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

Please set out your response below

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research (when asked about these root causes):

"The patriarchy- systems around us that uphold the idea that men are superior to women and therefore should be "dominant" in all aspects of life especially in their home, their relationships and their physical/sexual interactions."

"Lack of respect for women generally in society; patriarchy; religion; inequality; not enough women in power; issues not addressed in education and childhood socialisation."

"I think that it is a cultural issue. Sexism and misogyny is pervasive in our society."

"It is systemic, in education, in law, in courts, in healthcare. It needs to be addressed on all levels."

Changing Men and Boys' Behaviour and Attitudes:

We have highlighted these findings elsewhere in this response but they are worth highlighting again. It is absolutely clear that women in Northern Ireland believe we need to focus on changing men and boys' behaviours and attitudes in order to deal with the root causes of VAWG.

- 91.2% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with men's violence against women and girls
- 97.2% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland should have a Strategy to tackle men's violence against women and girls
- 95.2% think that reducing levels of violence against women and girls requires focusing on changing men and boy's behaviours and actions.

These findings are significant as they highlight that women overwhelmingly support the need for a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy for Northern Ireland, and that this should focus on **violence perpetrated by men and boys**.

Gender Stereotyping and CEDAW:

CEDAW Article 5 focuses on gender stereotyping, and puts an obligation on States Parties to end cultural stereotypes and policies based on this. Evidence indicates that children in early primary school are aware of gender roles, often inadvertently exacerbated by increasingly gendered toy and clothes selections aimed at babies and toddlers. For example, girls as young as six report being unhappy with their weight and appearance, and by age 10, children become increasingly likely to report that sciences are for boys, and caring jobs are for girls¹⁹³. Impacts increase for teenagers and young adults, whose mental health can be severely impacted by stereotypes and sexual harassment; over half of teenage girls report having faced harassment either in person or online, and a quarter report negative mental health impacts, as well as changing habits in particular online¹⁹⁴.

In addition, young people's life choices can be shaped by these experiences: girls often report that schools discourage them from choosing STEM subjects and careers, while there also is evidence that sexist attitudes and behaviours in class by teachers and other pupils are causing girls who choose STEM subjects to leave¹⁹⁵. This, in turn, skews workplaces, denies women and girls opportunities to exercise free choice of career and perpetuates stereotypes - while limiting access to the fullest pool of talent. There is already evidence that due to the lack of women engaged in development of algorithms and artificial intelligence, these technologies fail to meet women's needs and are in many cases discriminatory towards women. As an example, facial recognition technology - typically built on Caucasian male features - discriminates against Black female features¹⁹⁶, while systems employing biased algorithms may disproportionately exclude women from job application processes, credit and loan applications and career progression. In addition, virtually all instances of so called deepfake pornography feature women.¹⁹⁷

Linking Behaviour and Attitudes

As well as the research outlined above and the overwhelming support for the idea that this issue needs to be addressed by changing the behaviour of men and boys, WPG has existing evidence that shows a similar view; asked what survivors of stalking believed could have changed their experience and what caused it, respondents repeatedly cited an attitude of entitlement on the part of their stalker, either out of a notion of "ownership" related to a past relationship, or out of a misguided idea of romantic love, where obsessive stalking was seen

¹⁹³ Fawcett Society (2021) [Unlimited potential - the final report of the Commission on Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood](#)

¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁵ Engender (2018) [Making women safer in Scotland: the case for a standalone misogyny offence](#)

¹⁹⁶ See eg. Amnesty International (2021) [Decode NYC](#)

¹⁹⁷ European Institute of Gender Equality (2022) [Artificial intelligence, platform work and gender equality](#)

as the enactment of this love, and the victim should reward this with time and attention as well as love¹⁹⁸.

This same sense of entitlement, co-mingled with an idea of ownership, is once again written against a background of gender inequality and notions about how men and women are expected to behave in relationships that bear little resemblance to any kind of healthy relationship. We see it in all forms of gender-based violence; much of domestic abuse and coercive control is influenced by similar ideas of ownership and the idea that men are head of the household. Sexual violence is frequently related to a total misunderstanding of consent, mixed with poor sex education and misconceptions about men's and women's sexuality.

Again, education is key to undermining these ideas and replacing them with better models; of healthy relationships, or acceptable behaviour, of accepting rejection in a responsible way, of understanding and actively seeking consent. Stressing again that education is much more than what happens within classrooms and in schools, this must be a lifelong learning project, backed up with significant resources and most of all it must have Executive-wide backing to reach into all corners of society.

The role of the justice system

Legislation is a part of the puzzle in terms of tackling VAWG as a whole; it is vital to understand the presentation of the issue, to allocate resources to it and so on, and of course it is important that legislation matched with appropriate training for police and sentencing structures allows appropriate punishment. But it is not enough; the justice system is sluggish to respond to urgent cases that may be life or death, protection orders are routinely ignored or broken, trials for certain kinds of crime yield unsatisfactory outcomes, sentences are too often totally ineffectual, recidivism is common, and perpetrators of abuse can even use the justice system to keep abusing their victim long after a relationship has ended.

Victims and survivors do not trust the system far too often, and while we take the view that the system must be improved urgently and the best legislation possible must be implemented, the most helpful approach is to begin with the source of the issue; the beliefs and attitudes that underpin the violence¹⁹⁹. It is a cultural problem that can only truly have a cultural solution.

¹⁹⁸ WPG Response to Protection from Stalking Bill (2021) p.18 <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WPG-Joint-Submission-Protection-from-Stalking-Bill-16-04-2021.pdf>

¹⁹⁹ Michael Flood and Bob Pease, Factors Influencing Attitudes to Violence Against Women (2009) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1524838009334131>

Relevant findings from WPG Primary Research on VAWG:

In our primary research, we asked survey respondents what they thought the root causes of sexism, misogyny, victim-blaming, rape myths and rape culture were. We received 828 responses to this question. The five most common causes cited by respondents included:

- Lack of education
- Culture
- Patriarchy
- Religion
- Generational attitudes

We would like to highlight some of the qualitative responses to this question which referenced the above root causes of sexism, misogyny, victim-blaming, rape myths and rape culture.

“Education, conservative society, transgenerational trauma, legacy of conflict, segregated education system.”

“Historical attitudes to women, poor education of male population, inherited views of how women should be treated.”

“Traditional male roles reinforced by religious traditions in NI.”

“Religion, the education system, people afraid of speaking out and afraid of making changes. We, as women also bring up our sons and the culture of mummy and son, my son wouldn’t do that etc etc has to stop. Laws are one thing changing peoples attitudes is harder.”

“Sexism is embedded in our society from the day children are born and I think this then feeds into attitudes and then crime. Of all the issues of violence I mentioned that happened to me it was laughed at minimised by men and women. I have seen time and time again women and girls who show no tolerance to any level of sexism or harassment are made out to be the problem, comments like making something out of nothing, she’s an attention seeker etc.”

“Societal acceptance of toxic masculinity as a norm and lack of education for both boys and girls on issues around consent, healthy relationships, empathy and acceptable behaviours.”

"Traditional views of women in the home still exist. Political leaders/parties often do little to promote equality. Women in sport under-promoted in the media. Lack of education around the issue of respect for women. Lack of regulation/policing of social media platforms And so much more....."

Other responses highlighted issues such as the portrayal of women in the media (and social media), the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict and capitalism. We would like to highlight some of the qualitative responses to this question which referenced these root causes:

"Patriarchal culture perpetuated over the years through Church Structure (both communities). Media imaging of and pejorative presentation of women (Male Gaze). Women & girls seen as unequal in society. Sports culture of toxic masculinity that it is ok to objectify and disrespect women. Page 3 of tabloid papers, the list is endless."

"Young boys being socialised at a very early age that they are superior than women by their family, media and peers. This then develops into a sense of entitlement over women as they grow older."

"I think the legacy of conflict and culture of silence and male power certainly has a particular impact in NI. Years of not talking about violence against women or only seeing violence as something experienced by men, primarily as physically, has invisibilised VAWG."

"The patriarchal, religious structure of the NI culture which is propped up by our history of violence and the political manipulation of deep seated fears of men involved with the troubles and the legacy of the troubles. This is further compounded by lad culture and toxic masculinity, where being a 'hard man' is revered and seen as a leadership trait in communities where community development is anchored in workers who are (ex?) combatants as role models. I also do not think there is a political option for equality based thinking outside the traditional split which means the issues women work to address are downgraded in terms of importance as politicians manipulate the legacy of the troubles to stay in power."

"Capitalism and the socialisation of men."

Quantitative findings from WPG Primary Research:

In our survey, we asked respondents a series of questions relating to demographics so that we could highlight which groups of women are at increased risk of experiencing men's violence. A full breakdown of these demographic characteristics has been included elsewhere in this response. It is important to note that several respondents designated themselves as being from multiple of the following categories. To summarise, out of 1065 survey respondents:

- 13.3% were from the LGBTQI+ community
- 9.9% were disabled
- 3.1% were from the migrant community
- 50.2% were from a working-class background
- 24.5% live in a rural area

The following percentages of women belonging to these groups said that they had experienced or been impacted by men's violence:

- LGBTQI+ (96.5%)
- Disabled (92.4%)
- Migrant community (78.8%)
- Working class background (87.7%)
- Live in rural area (84.7%)

In contrast, for those who belonged to 'none of the above' categories, 82.6% had experienced or been impacted by men's violence. This shows that LGBTQI+, Disabled, those from a working-class background and those who live in a rural area were more likely to have experienced or been impacted by men's violence than those who were not LGBTQI+, Disabled, migrant, from a working class background or living rurally.

In regard to the intersectional impacts of men's violence, we also found that:

- 78.6% of respondents thought that additional action needs to be taken in the Strategy to address men's violence against marginalised groups of women, such as disabled women, black or minority ethnic women, migrant women, LGBTQ+ women, traveller women and rural women.
- Common responses relating to how to better support these women included:
 - Accessible and inclusive education
 - Specialised support services
 - Listen to those with lived experiences
 - More community-led support
 - Better knowledge and understanding of barriers faced

- Early intervention and preventative measures

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

Please set out your response below:

For the purposes of answering this question, we would like to focus on a definition of violence, rather than 'unwanted behaviours' due to the reasons we cited previously in relation to the issues we have with this term. We would like to refer to the definition of violence from Johan Galtung:

*"Violence is here defined as the cause of **the difference between the potential and the actual**, between what could have been and what is. Violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance"*²⁰⁰

In the context of violence against women and girls, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines this as²⁰¹:

*"any act of gender-based violence that **results in, or is likely to result in**, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."*

In the context then of violence against particular groups of women and girls, it is important to consider how the above definitions relate with Kimberlé Crenshaw's definition of intersectional feminism²⁰²:

"American lawyer and scholar, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, introduced the theory of Intersectionality in 1989 and coined the term in 1993. This extremely influential theory explains **how overlapping identities relate to systems and structures of oppression, domination or discrimination**. The main argument behind this was that the experience of a black woman cannot be understood in terms of being black and of

²⁰⁰ Galtung (1969), 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969), pp. 167-191: http://www2.kobe-u.ac.jp/~alexroni/IPD%202015%20readings/IPD%202015_7/Galtung_Violence,%20Peace,%20and%20Peace%20Research.pdf

²⁰¹ UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993): <http://www.un-documents.net/a48r104.htm>

²⁰² Crenshaw, Kimberlé, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Available at: <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>

being a woman considered independently, but must include the interactions between the two, which frequently reinforce each other.”

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

“Women in marginalised groups face additional cultural and economic barriers to accessing services or being able to report crimes and this needs to be acknowledged and accounted for.”

“Women from these marginalised communities may feel they cannot speak to people who are unfamiliar with their specific circumstances or that they will be left more exposed and vulnerable if their issue is not taken as seriously or overlooked. Some of these women may also have been taught through their upbringing that this is just something they have to deal with or that the behaviour is cultural.”

“Trans women are at such high risk of male violence and are now being targeted by extremists. We need to make sure all women, including trans women, are protected by this strategy.”

“Migrant workers , minority ethnic women may face additional stigma for reporting or may not know where to access support.”

“Women who are disabled are more vulnerable to many types of abuse particularly financial abuse and coercive control. Rural women are at increased risk of physical violence, easy to cover up signs of domestic abuse when you live on a farm. I know a woman whose husband tried to crush her with a round bale wrapper, she thought to herself that if he succeeded he would be able to claim it was a farm accident. Loyalist women are less likely to report due to lack of trust in the police and a reluctance to be seen to be bringing the police into the area, paramilitarisation and the pressure that it will be used to make the community look bad, play into the 'thug' narrative.”

In our survey, we asked respondents a series of questions relating to demographics so that we could highlight which groups of women are at increased risk of experiencing men’s violence. A full breakdown of these demographic characteristics has been included elsewhere in this response. It is important to note that several respondents

designated themselves as being from multiple of the following categories. To summarise, out of 1,065 survey respondents:

- 13.3% were from the LGBTQI+ community
- 9.9% were disabled
- 3.1% were from the migrant community
- 50.2% were from a working-class background
- 24.5% live in a rural area

The following percentages of women belonging to these groups said that they had experienced or been impacted by men's violence:

- LGBTQI+ (96.5%)
- Disabled (92.4%)
- Migrant community (78.8%)
- Working class background (87.7%)
- Live in rural area (84.7%)

In contrast, for those who belonged to 'none of the above' categories, 82.6% had experienced or been impacted by men's violence. This shows that LGBTQI+, Disabled, those from a working class background and those who live in a rural area were more likely to have experienced or been impacted by men's violence than those who were not LGBTQI+, Disabled, migrant, from a working class background or living rurally.

Additional Comments on LGBTQ+ Women:

In service provision, quite often the LGBTQ+ community is overlooked because it is invisible due to the default of heteronormativity (the assumption of heterosexuality). As well as mainstream provision, there should be LGBTQ+ specific services for people who have been victims or survivors. Mainstream services should be explicitly inclusive in their resources and awareness campaigns that they are inclusive of LGBTQ+ people. Service providers should also be adequately trained to support LGBTQ+ people.

Access to LGBTQ+ specific support is very limited. It is rare to find specific support for issues like stalking in the LGBTQ+ sector and where there are supports in place, the organisations are funded by grant making organisations and are usually funded for between one and three years. This is not sustainable and sustainable long-term funding needs to be put in place to ensure the best possible support for minority groups.

Within the LGBTQ+ sector in NI we have approximately 35 members of staff across to Lgbt Centre's, one Centre and Foyle and one in Belfast. We have only one domestic and sexual violence support worker, who works specifically with women and girls who are at risk of or who have experienced sexual or domestic violence and abuse within an LGBTQ+ relationship. This post was funded for three years via grant making organisation, the three-year funding has now run out and continuation funding from the grant making organisation is not available. This leaves a massive gap in our service provision, we are currently lobbying the government and applying to any grant make organisations who have funding for such a post for funding, unless funding can be found for this post this position will be made redundant.

If this post is not refunded there will be no LGBTQ+ specific domestic and sexual violence worker for women and girls across NI. That means a loss of expertise in the area specifically for LGBTQIA+ Women and girls who are at risk of domestic and sexual violence and abuse, the loss of an expert voice for government consultations to ensure a fair and robust strategy and legislation. The loss of an expert for women and girls to come to you to tell her story and access help within their own community, as people from marginalised communities prefer to access help within their own community first before asking for help from mainstream organisations. Effectively this could cost lives of LGBTQ+ women and girls at the hands of their abusers, those who take their own lives or those whose lives end early due to chronic illness or long-term effects of abuse.

There must be mandatory training on best practice such as using gender neutral pronouns and sexual orientation awareness. There should be LGBTQ+ Domestic Violence Liaison Police Officers and specialist Independent Domestic Violence Advocates. Policies and procedures should be co-designed with representatives of section 75 groups as specialists and experts to ensure there are no oversights – for example, even when recorded, bisexual people are often mis-recorded based on the gender of their current partner. To date there has been very little acknowledgement in policy/legislation of LGBTQ+ people who experience domestic violence. When it does occur, it appears with language that minimises or does not include the needs within our community. Many people from the LGBTQ+ community believe that they are being abused because they are LGBTQ+ which often fuels internalised homophobia, biphobia or transphobia²⁰³.

²⁰³ <https://www.reducingtherisk.org.uk/cms/content/lgbt>

Migrant, Black and Minority Ethnic, Rural, Disabled, Working Class and Traveller Women:

We would also like to highlight particular responses already given throughout this written evidence submission that are relevant to this question. In particular, in Section 6.2.4 we go into detail of the types of systemic state discrimination and violence that Black women, disabled women and working class women face. We have also provided overwhelming evidence of women's support for institutional state violence to be included within this strategy throughout this response.

In addition, section 6.2.10, as well as various other parts of this response, provide further data, primary evidence and recommendations in relation to migrant, LGBTQ+, Black and minority ethnic, disabled, rural and working-class women, which we hope you will consider in response to this question. Further, section 6.2.11 of this response also makes recommendations in relation to the need for meaningful engagement and support for Traveller women in relation to VAWG. We have also shown throughout that many women are concerned by the additional levels of violence that sex workers face, and we would highly recommend that TEO engages with sex worker advocacy groups across Ireland such as S.W.A.I and UglyMugs.ie (who track levels of violence against sex workers in Ireland).

All of the data, recommendations, testimonies and case studies throughout this response show clear evidence of particular groups of women, particularly trans women, disabled women, rural women, LGBTQ+ women and more, being victims of men and boys' violence in Northern Ireland. These groups of women are not vulnerable due to their identities, but rather due to the intersecting levels of systemic and societal discrimination against them, and it is imperative that TEO fully understands this when considering additional levels of violence against particular groups of women.

Women are not vulnerable because they are women, or disabled, or working class, or an ethnic minority, or LGBTQ+ and so on. They are targeted due to systemic levels of intersecting discrimination in our society. The connecting link for all of these women is misogyny and this is why we need a robust strategy that directly targets men's, boy's and the state's violence against all women and girls.

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

Please set out your response below:

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

"Fear. I felt very very isolated when it happened to me, I thought the only way that the Police could help would be through a restraining order which would have cost me money I didn't have. All I had to do was tell my family and I didn't and to this day I don't know why."

"There are not enough 'success' stories about women and girls winning court cases and therefore it is less likely we will go to police because it will be a waste of time as the system also takes years for a case to be brought to court, and victim blaming then occurs if details are not remembered correctly. It feels embarrassing to be 'that girl' and not believed."

"The police reports are taken and dealt with by men with the same ingrained misogyny as the perpetrators. I know women who have been laughed out of police stations for reporting stalking by ex partners with threats of violence and murder. My own report was NEVER followed up. Its traumatic for women to report and there are not enough services (or sometimes none at all) to support women through this experience or dealing with this trauma. Knowing that you will be traumatised and the man will have nothing done to him is painful and makes the process seem pointless."

We would also like to refer the response we provided in relation to question 6 of the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy as it is of particular relevant and has overlap here.

Survey findings:

- 86.8% of respondents thought that there needs to be a review of how the justice system treats victims and survivors of men's violence against women and girls

- 89.7% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with attitudes of sexism and misogyny
- 80.8% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with rape myths and rape culture
- 87.4% of respondents thought that Northern Ireland has a problem with victim-blaming
- 81.2% of respondents thought that there is stigma surrounding issues of violence against women and girls

The most common responses of what reform is needed to the justice system include:

- End victim blaming in courts,
- Harsher punishment for perpetrators,
- More support for victims,
- Higher prosecution rates,
- No references to women's sexual history in court,
- Address retraumatisation of victims,
- More representation of women,
- Protect anonymity of victims,
- Address myths about the prevalence of false accusations.

Some testimonies from our survey on what sort of reform is needed within the justice system include:

"Unsure what systems are in place presently"

"Better victim support. Zero tolerance legislation that is clearly defined for police to act upon. Clear definitions for fair trials but an overhaul in how barristers question female victims, use of language, questioning of sexual history should be scrutinised for relevance to the case before it goes before a jury. Jury made up of diverse people."

"longer sentencing, outfits victim wearing not discussed, character testimony scrapped"

"Men being held to account for their actions, less victim blaming in court, protection in the courtroom. Not being questioned by the abuser etc."

"The Gillen Review has done much of this work, but a review encompassing DV/honour based violence and all other forms of VAWG and how the justice system treats victims would be really instructive."

“Higher prosecution of rape cases, better victim support, faster systems, less victim blaming / shaming, laws that actually tackle the issues.”

“We need to move towards a model that is closer to transformative justice. Justice should focus on the victim/survivor.”

“Huge education campaign required for those within justice system.”

“Explore alternatives to incarceration and investing more in community building instead. Also updating laws and exploring best practice from around the world.”

“So difficult to “prove” historical abuse, women need support when they are giving details of assaults etc. And ongoing support after women have testified, given evidence. Ensuring women are safe after testifying against perpetrators.”

“Guarantee anonymity. Don’t put the women on trial if they press charges. No turning a blind eye to cops w/no compassion or understanding.”

“System is weighted against women and girls and results in retraumatizing victims and victim shaming. needs a root and branch review that respects the rights of complainants as well as alleged perpetrators.”

“A more sympathetic/empathetic response. Not making girls re- live the experience in a court.”

“Zero tolerance to all violence against women. Have the Justice System more representative of women.”

“Law on consent in particular. But the justice system does not have the capacity to prevent these crimes. That work needs to be done elsewhere before it occurs, because clearly the law does not protect us from abuse happening in the first place.”

“Make it easier for women to come forward to actually convict men [who abuse them]”

“There are a lot of processes expected for victims ie mediation, reporting to the employer and nothing being done. This needs to change as I have found it to be silly and is a real time wasting exercise. I feel it enables the other party to carry on without sanction etc. For example if you ran a red light and the police were behind you, it

would be dealt with and you would be unlikely to do that again! I think the amount of steps to go through is what also causes stigma etc.”

We would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the recommendations in the Victim Support NI report on Court Observers²⁰⁴:

“Something must be said about victims of sexual violence in this context. Professionals dealing with victims have come to understand how important it is that they feel believed. They may have been dignified by interview processes, by special arrangements at referral centres and a feeling of privacy at interview. However, when victims enter the court room and make their way to the witness box, they are simply witnesses who are yet to be believed. The implication is that the burden of proof sits on their shoulders, balancing on their performance.”

“One focus in evidence gathering has been on rape myths and the role they play in the course of a trial, influencing how evidence is presented and heard within the court setting. Jurors and others within the physical court represent the wider moral story of a society not yet settled on the matter of rape myths. Myths about who was truly responsible for the event, myths about women’s power over men and manipulative ability to, with a chosen outfit, tempt a man from his normal self and fall into the shame of something he did not intend. Myths about ‘no really meaning yes’ and ‘alcohol being the real culprit’ persist, as the moral narrative of today’s society has not yet been definitively decided. Sir John recognised the reality of these myths and their potential to derail justice: Rape myths are a trial reality and can often form the basis of aggressive cross-examination and may attract the unreasonable thinking of jurors. Moreover, for all kinds of societal reasons, complainants often buy into these myths, blaming themselves. I regard them as potentially a major challenge to the concept of a fair trial.” (p.11 2021)

We would also like to refer to our evidence in section 6.2.4 of this response, particularly in relation to state violence against women, police violence against women, women in prison and more. In support of addressing institutional state violence against women in this strategy, we refer again to the statistics throughout this response from

²⁰⁴ <https://www.victimsupportni.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Court-Observers-Feeling-Is-Understanding-report.pdf>

women supporting the inclusion of institutional violence (for example, mother and baby institutions, denying reproductive healthcare and removing women's rights) in this strategy.

We would like to again remind you of the experience of Beth in the criminal justice system from our WPG Primary Research:

Case Study - Beth:

We would again like to highlight the experiences of Beth who is a domestic abuse survivor that the WPG interviewed as part of their primary research. Beth acquired two non-molestation orders which her ex-husband repeatedly broke, forcing her to continuously take time off work to attend court. Beth's ex-husband was eventually charged with a two-year suspended sentence and Beth was granted a one-year restraining order, requiring annual renewal. Beth has little faith that the restraining order will be effective, as the non-molestation orders did little to prevent the stalking and harassment by her ex-husband. Beth felt that although she was a victim of abuse, she was being punished by public services after reporting it. In her words:

"I was kind of getting punished for reporting him, getting punished for taking him to court, getting punished for being a frontline worker... in the middle of COVID and having to go to a homeless hostel. Like a lot of things could've changed... they [public services] could've done a lot of things differently."

This highlights current aspects of the criminal justice system that are failing women and girls who are victims of men's violence.

Loan sharks, high-cost lending and paramilitarism

Many women who are struggling financially on benefits and in low-income work are vulnerable to high-cost credit including illegal forms of lending. Often, they have limited options to access cheaper forms of credit because of their low income. Some of the most vulnerable borrowers are forced into using illegal lending or loan sharking because of an urgent need for money. This often leads to a cycle of dependence on this type of lending that they find it hard to escape from.

Paramilitaries are known to be involved in loan sharking in Northern Ireland and this gives cause for concern in terms of the associated fear and violence that can accompany this type of lending. This particularly impacts on those living on low

incomes who are often forced into this type of lending and then can really struggle to meet these repayments putting them at increased risk of harassment and violence.

Research by Ulster University and the Consumer Council²⁰⁵ suggests that those involved in illegal money lending fall into two broad groups: paramilitaries and 'regular' members of the community. Respondents to this research agreed that money lenders in Northern Ireland must have some form of local influence or legitimacy, which may stem from a paramilitary connection, but must have the ability to carry out enforcement measures in order to settle or recoup the debt, including coercing debtors to facilitate criminal activity.

This research²⁰⁶ also found that Universal Credit was repeatedly described as a driver for illegal lending particularly around the harm caused by the five-week wait and issues with short-term benefits loans that were repaid from future benefits. This ensured that benefit claimants were often short of the funds they needed to support their household, leading them to look to other means of getting the money they needed.

Research by the Women's Regional Consortium²⁰⁷ on women and debt showed a number of examples of borrowing through loan sharks including paramilitaries and the fear of violence that accompanied this type of borrowing.

Much more needs to be done to tackle the issue of illegal money lending and loan sharks in Northern Ireland. There is a need to divert vulnerable people from accessing borrowing through illegal lending by providing routes out of poverty and financial hardship. This includes more adequate support through the social security system to ensure that people have sufficient income to live decent, healthy lives without resorting to this type of debt and the fear of violence which accompanies it.

Allocation of funds

The individual testimonies highlighted in this response and throughout the larger response to the strategy emphasise how important it is that reactionary services are properly resourced, but as well that proper funding is directed at preventative

²⁰⁵ Illegal Money Lending and Debt Project, Research Report of Findings, Ulster University and the Consumer Council, March 2020
[Illegal_Money_Lending_Report.PDF \(consumercouncil.org.uk\)](https://www.consumer-council.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Illegal-Money-Lending-Report.PDF)

²⁰⁶ Ibid

²⁰⁷ Making Ends Meet: Women's Perspectives on Access to Lending, Women's Regional Consortium, February 2020
<https://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Making-Ends-Meet-Womens-Perspectives-on-Access-to-Lending.pdf>

measures. This would not necessarily require additional funds, but rather it would require an alternative method to determine the allocation of funding.

Gender budgeting²⁰⁸ is a tool that would make policy-makers consider gendered impacts of spending and revenue-raising decisions and facilitate ways to promote gender equality through these mechanisms. By actively looking for ways to promote gender equality through the budgetary process, this would prioritise the mitigation of systemic barriers and issues that create a culture of violence against women and girls.

²⁰⁸ Gender Budgeting: Working Paper 1: What does the literature tell us? Lessons for Northern Ireland (NI), J. Ballantine, M. Rouse, A.M. Gray, 2021
https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/sites/default/files/2021-02/Gender_Budgeting-1.pdf

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

Please set out your response below

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

“More prosecutions for sexual offences, less “lad” culture in policing, developing more trust in the police and harsher sentences for offenders.”

“Men who receive sentences for this behaviour need longer harsher sentences. It doesn't seem to be taken seriously unless someone dies. The victim may have to relive the moments over and over as they tell their story to police, lawyers and judges.”

“Harsher sentences and zero tolerance policy on violence against women.”

“The law needs to change. Sentences given for violence and abuse are far too lenient and there is little to deter potential assailants. Men get off too easily. Many women live in fear because men break their restraining orders and do not have a safe place to go to. Many lack the financial means to escape. Much more needs to be done in schools to raise awareness of these issues and the culture needs to change. Women need to learn to value themselves more and not accept less than what they deserve. Sentences for rape should be for a minimum of 25 years and I would advocate chemical castration. The level of trauma inflicted on rape victims is beyond measure and women must live their lives baring this scar whilst men walk free. Many women commit suicide because they cannot live with what has happened to them. Rape is an absolutely heinous crime and I think the judicial system approach is far too lightly.”

Relevant findings from WPG Primary Research on VAWG:

- 86.8% of respondents thought that there needs to be a review of how the justice system treats victims and survivors of men’s violence against women and girls
- Common suggested changes to the justice system by respondents included:
 - End victim blaming in court
 - Harsher punishment for perpetrators

- More support for victims
- Higher prosecution rates
- No references to women's sexual history in court
- Address retraumatisation of victims
- More representation of women
- Protect anonymity of victims
- Address myths about prevalence of false accusations

In addition, we have made recommendations throughout this written response in relation to improving the experiences of victims and survivors in relation to interactions with the criminal justice system which are relevant to this question.

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

Please set out your response below

Testimonies from WPG Primary Research:

"You don't need to sing to the choir. So telling girls how to handle mens violence is a waste of time. Go to boy's schools. Go look at what boys are consuming online. Talk to old men in pubs and clubs. Talk to male teachers. Go out to the GAA clubs and the tractor meetups. Those are the spaces you need to target."

"Any strategy is long overdue. I understand that there are many men out there who also suffer at the hands of other men and in some rarer cases, women. However for too long myself and my female friends and many others before and after us have been speaking about the impact these behaviours have on our lives without any justice or consolidation. We have wrongfully learned to live with it. Every little minor incident continues to add up and every major incident therefore seems less serious. Every time this happens, men who have moved beyond the minor behaviours become more likely to confidently act and take chances which greatly harm women and girls."

"For too long women have been treated as 2nd class citizens in Northern Ireland due to historical opinions of the male population. Too many women have had their lives ruined and their futures changed by men who considered it their right to control/own/abuse. Women are being murdered for simply existing in a world where a man feels he is superior just for being male. I feel this needs to be addressed at a very basic level of the youngest males in our society being taught that whether male or female that have no dominance over anyone and have no entitlement to expect nor control anyone."

"I think the key to this strategy will be to not make it reactive. Because if we're only focusing on justice, we're focusing only on responding to violence, not preventing it. Real cultural change needs to happen, and it's this VAWG strategy that needs to be the driver behind that."

In the past, WPG surveys have been open to men and women. However, on this occasion we took the decision to only ask women and girls for their views, as we want to know about their views, experiences and suggestions for change and we felt we had a duty to try and ensure the voices of women and girls are at the core of this strategy. We would recommend that a similar research project is undertaken to gather the specific views of men and boys on this matter, although this is not within the remit of the WPG but is crucial to understanding what is needed to tackle VAWG which is overwhelmingly done by men and boys. One survey respondent specifically referenced the need to do this under Question 27 that asked, "Is there anything else that you would like to share that you think the WPG should be calling for within the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy?":

"A psychological report about men's attitudes and understanding of their personal power, esteem, control and their attitudes about 'worthy' and 'unworthy' women. It should be carried out by an all male team, with boys and men. A smaller study where the research team includes some women (at least in one of the visible roles) would provide a very interesting insight into whether men change the presentation of their attitudes when women are about - personally I suspect they do, but we don't know whether it matters or not."

In Question 7 of our anonymous survey, we asked respondents who said they had been impacted by violence against women and girls to share details about how they had been impacted by violence and what age they were when this first happened. We received 735 responses to this question, many of which were extremely detailed and considerable in length. We would like to highlight some of these longer detailed responses below.

Respondent 1

"I will list them by age - these don't include the more everyday stuff like cat calls etc 12 is the first time I remember, school bullying because I developed early 12 is also when I began to be sexual assaulted regularly by a family friend and police officer 14 sexual violence with boyfriend 16 yrs 14 slut shaming in school because of sexual relationship 14 sexually assaulted by boy I knew - 17 years - tried to tell people but he had a girlfriend and i was made to apologise to him because of his reputation 15 house broke into, sister's ex boyfriend stole family photos of us on beach holiday with me and sis in bikinis and shared round her school 16 unwanted attention/stalking from boy 17 witnessed mother raped by local police man 17 sexual relationship with 27 year old man 17 science teacher asked me in front of class to stay behind so he could

paint watercolours of me 17 groped on bottom by science teacher whilst at the school formal 17 stalking by 27 yr old when relationship ended.

Came to work and wouldn't leave me alone, stole items, his adult gf beat me up, followed me home from school bus. At one point he locked me in his flat and threatened me with throwing my television he had borrowed at me and some friends came and rescued me. 17 made to sit on knee of work manager while he cashed the till 17 told I had to wear a tight skirt as a waitress 18 sexually groped under dress in bar in Belfast, I got thrown out not the man, when I caused a fuss 18 stalked by a fellow student union rep at Uni in Belfast, he was a photographer and used to take pictures off me all the time and follow me wherever I went.

Had to pretend closet gay friend in class was my bf. 18 sexual slurs, biphobia and slut shaming from older lesbian after we kissed and she discovered I was a bisexual 19 inappropriate comments by male tutor during interview for undergraduate course 20 groped whilst unconscious by 3 men at party, luckily disturbed by male friend who threw them out 21 stalked by man while I worked in bar, followed me repeatedly, came into bar when I was on shift, even found him staring in a window on the escape stairs while I was having sex, had to ask friends to walk me to work. 21 Uni tutor suggested I become a sex worker to make an interesting project 22 Attempted rape by security guard in Hospital - received multiple injuries, found by another security guard because of my screaming, thought i was going to die. Went to court a year later, he never showed up. End of that. 23 Stalked by male colleague who forced his way into my room after a night out 23 groped by older man on bus sitting beside me, he kept widening his leg and I couldn't get out until i said very loudly "stop trying to grope me" and he laughed and let me out and i got off 4 stops early.

24 male manager touched my knee every time he squeezed past me 25 colleague made image with my head and my managers head pasted on to a porn image and shared in work 25 Sexually assaulted by stranger walking home in Barcelona. Thought oh this time I am definitely going to die, he banged my head against the shop shutters repeatedly and violently punched me in the groin repeatedly and held me by the neck. Reported to police, who scanned streets immediately, but we couldn't find him. Told embassy, they didn't care. 26 Woman stranger I made friends with on 15 hour bus journey in Bolivia tried to get into my bedroom then bed repeatedly sexually harassed me 30 images made of me in online art/tech forum of mostly men, with my

face on porn image 31 images of me naked shared without my permission 32 partner brought man into our bed and had sex with him with me there without my consent 33 - had to come off dating app when I added I was bisexual as i was inundated with inappropriate sexual advances.

Now I only ever say looking for women. 34-40 in abusive relationship, many instances of coercion and control, 3 incidents of choking, couple of incidents of rape. Violence towards possessions, controlling behaviour, financial abuse, addiction issues, violence and abusive language in front of children. 32-now multiple incidents of sexually abusive comments online, including rape and sexual assault threats. Unsolicited penis images."

Respondent 2

"A man came to my student house at night numerous times over a 18 month period and tried to talk to me through my (street facing) bedroom window/knocked on windows. He then masturbated outside my window, saying disturbing things. Also, he seemed to show up exclusively when my flatmates had gone home for the weekend, making me think he was watching the house. Each time I left the room as I was too afraid to confront him and as the upstairs room was locked I could not photograph him without him looking at me directly. This happened (as far as I'm aware) about once a month for 12-18 months. I then bought a gopro type camera to put in the window and he stopped. I was 20. To this day I refuse to rent a ground floor flat. I used to love having the house to myself but when this started I dreaded it.

I also felt terrified walking anywhere alone, especially up or down my street even during the daylight. Walking home from uni past 5pm in winter was awful. > When I was 14 I went to my first teen disco. A boy (probably around 16) talked to me and I was politely replying. He then pulled me into a kiss and I was shocked and frozen by what happened. He just laughed. > I went to an all girls school, but in A levels I spent half my time taking classes in the neighbouring all boys school. The boys behaved like animals. From the second we entered the doors, the boys in the halls would jeer, catcall, wolf whistle us. The teachers laughed it off and when we complained said they were "just boys being boys" and we were taking ourselves too seriously. One of my friends started

receiving death and rape threats from a boy in that school while we were still studying there.

She took it to our own school admin then and I'm not sure how that was dealt with. But it was disgusting how the teachers normalised and defended their pupils and their misogyny. Unrelated to this incident, but another group of girls, who were supposed to study Computer Science at the boys school (our school didn't offer it) were told to get out on the first day because they would "distract the boys". They were unable to study computer science because of that male teacher. (My brother is in his class and has described the many sexist jokes he has told his all male students since - encouraging incredible misogynistic ideas to the pupils who all adore him.) > I used to work in a mostly male office.

The men my age I worked with rated women on their phones out of 10, made sexist jokes, made jokes about female genitals, even sent porn to their manager in the office. The managers thought they were hilarious "real lads". I went to one of the other women in the office to talk to her about it. Bad choice. She was on their side, said "yes that's horrible, I'd be annoyed too but they're just boys being boys". And "They just see you as one of the guys". Everyone then was hostile towards me, ignored my contributions to the work and called me the sensitive snowflake/feminist until I quit a few months later. I was 21."

Respondent 3

"When I was a child hitting puberty at 11yrs old my father used to feel my breasts, so did my older brother. They once sandwiched me on the sofa when no one was there and felt a breast each. My father used to run upstairs after i'd showered and barge into my room to see me naked. When I was 8 an older boy in my street who was 17 made me hold and suck his penis in an empty garage on our housing estate. He repeatedly bribed me to do it by telling me he would tout on us to his and my parents and that i'd get into trouble. Too many street harassment experiences to list here. When I was 19 a male friend of my university housemates who was at our flat for a party crawled into my bed and tried to have sex with me whilst i was unconscious.

I woke up with no underwear and him on top of me naked trying to get his penis inside me. His face was wet and so was between my legs, he had orally raped me before I woke up. When I was 19 my housemate

was raped and became pregnant and tried to kill herself in our bathroom. I heard her crying and had to break the door down to get her out. She had slit her wrists. When I was 21 two men came out of Frames bar in Belfast and started calling me and my partner names, we tried to walk away, but they came after us. One grabbed my girlfriend and started feeling her up. When I struggled with them they called me a dyke bitch and punched my face until I fell over.

They both kicked me as I lay on the ground, one in the back, cracking a rib I think (it was painful for months). The other in my stomach. I never went to hospital or reported because I don't trust the police. When I was 25 I was at a gay club with my girlfriend, a straight man assaulted her as we kissed in the lobby, by putting his hand up her skirt and his fingers inside her underwear. He told us both it would make us straight if we tried it with a man. A good friend of mine was "correctively raped" by two men she knew who thought they would turn her straight by gang raping her. It happened in her own home. She never reported it because she'd had a few beers.

Another friend was held at knife point for two days by a group of three men who brutalised her body, tortured her with cigarette burns and hundreds of knife cuts and repeatedly raped her because she was lesbian. The men were paramilitary and lived on her street. She never reported it because the police and paramilitaries were on the same side. Her family left Belfast. A friend of mine was subjected to electric shock therapy to her genitals when she was younger. She subsequently developed severe mental health issues and was ostracised from her entire family and community. A woman was raped by a group of rugby stars and they got away with it."

Respondent 4

"I was about 11 when a younger boy shoved his hand between my legs roughly when I happened to be on my own with him in the school shelters. I was 15 when on 2 occasions boys/men did the same thing to me when they thought nobody would see. I was 19 walking up a street one morning when a man in 50s in his garden remarked on my breasts. When I was 19/20 2 different ex-boyfriends stalked me and one told me he would kill me if he found out I was with somebody else. He wrote threatening letters.

When I was in my late 20s I worked with children and was asked by one set of parents to look after their son and a relative's baby overnight while they went to a family wedding. I was fast asleep in the box room with the door slightly ajar so I could listen out for the children when I was woken by a strange figure in the dark. I was very vulnerable because I was on the floor in a sleeping bag. The man was the father of the baby and his wife was obviously asleep in the back room. He had come back from the wedding drunk. He was French and he kept pretending that he thought I was his wife. I was so frightened because I think it was about 3am.

I kept telling him he'd got the wrong room. I kept my voice low because I really couldn't bear to wake up the children or his wife. Even at the time I suspected if he was caught he would say I'd asked him to come in. He got on top of me, pulled the zip of the sleeping bag down and shoved his hand under my nightie. I kept trying to push him off me but he was very heavy. I hissed at him that I would scream if he wouldn't get off me and I pushed at his chest and hit his chest as hard as I could. He finally left the room but I sat up awake all night and tried to leave as fast as I could the next day. Also around the same time (1991-1992) I was walking home from work on a bright summer evening in Belfast and a crowd of teen age boys came towards me. I automatically moved in towards the hedge to let them past and as they passed one boy reached out and grabbed my left breast very hard and squeezed it. It really hurt and I was in total shock. All the boys laughed and gave me the fingers as I swung at them with my bag and yelled. They disappeared around a corner and I went home. I have never really got over that incident. I actually rang the Samaritans as I was so upset and couldn't stop crying and thinking about it and being very angry. It was also very sore. I have been asked why I didn't report any of this to the police. At the time I really didn't think there was anything that could have been done. I still don't feel that the police could do anything about it unfortunately."

Respondent 5

"I worked as a civil servant for 35 years. Almost all that time I was subjected to sexual innuendos eg, I moved to a new office, a manager 2 grades above me kept trying to stroke my arm or put his arms around me. Once when I told him to stop I didnt like being touched he told me I'd better get used to it. In 1988 I was sexually assaulted. I was size 6 with long blonde hair and my family called me barbie doll. I was at a party

celebrating graduations, I was wearing a black sleeveless polo neck and a black mini skirt with thick black tights. A man I knew and trusted offered me a lift home. When we got to my place he said he would walk me to the door because I had to walk down a dark lane. I was so grateful and asked if he wanted a cup of tea.

We were only in through the door when he grabbed me.....I'm sorry this is triggering for me. After he was gone I crawled into bed and stayed there for 2 days not answering my phone. Another Male friend came and battered my door. When he saw the state of me he took me to a police station to report it. I was interviewed by a man. I got asked what I was wearing, was I wearing make up, had I been flirting with my attacker, how much had I to drink. At one point after asking about the way I was dressed he told me "even whores get raped". I had 3 more interviews over the next week by either 2 or 3 police women, one of whom told me I was very calm for what had happened to me.

I was asked about my entire sexual history. It turned out my attacker was in the police and was very well thought of. He wasn't interviewed, he had a telephone chat with policeman I first spoke to. Policeman told me the attacker said it was just a bit of ruff and tumble and I took it wrong. After that he said it would be hard to get a conviction because it would be he said/she said and I should think about withdrawing my complaint to save myself the stress and embarrassment of everyone knowing my sexual history etc. I felt I had no choice but to do so. A few days later one of the policewomen phoned me and told me because I had withdrawn my complaint I was going to be prosecuted for wasting police time. I ended up getting a solicitor involved who got that charge dropped and got a Non Mol order against my attacker. I have so much more I could write but I can feel myself getting stressed almost 36 years later. I have not had a serious relationship since."

Respondent 6

"Teenager on school bus attacked from behind on way to get off at my stop. Rural area local men groping and sexual talk 10yrs upwards. Regular sexual attacks on girls on bus of a sexual nature usually joined in by other boys. Sexual talk and belittling of girls in front of others Where primary & secondary aged children were on potato picking days to make some pocket money - girls often groped and talk of sexual nature occurred regular. I would often call the young girl away from or

tell another school age sister - to get her sister away that what was happening has not right.

I would then be ridiculed by perpetrator. But I was able to challenge and warn other fellow young persons. I probably would have been "told off" for going potato picking if reported to my parents and would not go back to potato picking. As a young woman I was attacked roughly by a similar aged man but fought him off and told him to stop. His friend was there and also told him to stop. I escaped but a weaker person would not. In general girls were second class citizens to boys. Especially in farming communities- need a bit to carry on farm business- often they did not. Boys get the larger inheritance. Boys would be paid more for odd jobs than girls. Girls were to look attractive and be easy to be dominated." Female "type jobs where men took up posts - men would always get promotion - higher pay or the " more important tasks to do in the same job band.

Women - especially older women in senior positions would promote men. Often Women in Evangelical type religions would back their husbands who would look at single mothers as a disgrace , want to take away a woman's right to her body re abortion even if the unborn has multiple defects etc Woman who refuse to see and understand that when a man gropes, defiles or verbally degrades a woman/girl just because he feels he can - need educated in what is right and what is wrong. Often these woman are also victims. On reporting an incident of sexual harassment or attacks - girls would be accused of "encouraging" these attacks."

9. Concluding Remarks

The WPG welcomes the introduction of a Strategy that specifically aims to combat men's violence against women and girls. However, in order for this Strategy to bring about meaningful change, it must be adequately resourced, informed by lived experiences and specifically target the root of the issue: men's violence. In this response, we have provided a comprehensive evidence base supporting the case for taking this approach, including findings from our own primary research. The WPG hopes that the recommendations provided in this response will be reflected in the drafting of the upcoming Strategies and looks forward to engaging further with the Departments on this work.

ENDS

For any questions or queries relating to this submission, please contact:

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