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Violence against women and girls (VAWG) newsletter



I am delighted to publish today the third edition of the Violence Against Women and Girls Newsletter to mark the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence to Women.

The Government’s ambition is nothing less than ending all forms of violence against women and girls.

In the UK, more than one in four women will experience domestic abuse from the age of 16, often with years of psychological abuse and every year around 400,000 women are sexually assaulted, 80,000 are raped and around 1 in 25 women are victims of stalking¹. So it is essential that all of us take a strong lead on this issue.

Last year we published our ‘Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls’ strategy and on 8th March, to mark International Women’s Day, we published a detailed, cross Government action plan with 88 actions encompassing all aspects of violence against women. I have today published a review of the action plan on the Home Office website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/vawg and I am pleased to say that we are making good progress in many areas.

¹ British Crime Survey 2010/11

We have protected £28 million of central funding for specialist services to tackle violence against women and girls until 2015, allocated £900,000 per year to support national domestic violence helplines and provided over £11 million over the next 3 years to develop new rape support centres. From next year we will be investing at least £1.2m of additional resource over the next three years in improving services for young people under 18 suffering sexual violence in our major urban areas – with a new focus on the girls and young women caught up in gang related rape and abuse. As we set out in the VAWG action plan the Government considers that this is an issue where services should not be easily cut at a local level.

We have also been active on the international stage, contributing £10 million of core funding to UN Women and £3.25 million to their Women, Peace and Security programme.

But there is still much more to do. I look forward to continuing to work with our partners in the police, the justice system and the voluntary sector to prevent these dreadful crimes from happening in the first place – and to provide the right support to victims when they do.

Thank you.
Rt Hon Lynne Featherstone

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This Is Abuse

The Teenage Relationship Abuse campaign launched on 1 September and will run through to early in the New Year. So far there have been over 136,000 visitors to the This Is Abuse website and the most visited sections, after the home page, are the videos ‘Need Help’, ‘Spot the Signs’ and ‘Have your Say’.

To date we’ve held four live forums on the site with Women’s Aid on 2 September, and with Respect on 16 September, when we gave male victims of abuse the opportunity to put their questions to the specialist advisors at Respect. On 7 October we had a live forum with Beatbullying, when young people put forward their questions and concerns about cyber bullying (i.e. bullying via text, email and social networking sites). Finally, there was a forum with Broken Rainbow on 28 October which gave teens the opportunity to discuss same sex relationships.

The next live discussion forum is taking place today, 25 November, from 5pm-6pm with AVA (Against Violence and Abuse). We are promoting this discussion forum on the This Is Abuse website but it would be really helpful if you were able to promote it through any channels you have available to you.

We also, produced posters, postcards, DVDs and a leaflet for parents and carers which are still available to order from the Home Office storage and distribution centre (Prolog). All these materials are free of charge to order.

If you are interested in receiving a campaign brief with details on how to order the support materials, please email Kerry.Charlesworth@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Services for young people experiencing domestic violence

The Home Office Domestic Violence Team would like to gather information about current specialist support services who work with under 18s in order to get a better picture of the services available to this age group across the England and Wales.

We would be interested to hear from domestic violence coordinators and local authorities about any specialist domestic violence services that are currently available to under 18s.

Please submit your responses to the VAWG Enquiries inbox.

Questions

Does your area have any IDVA or MARAC services that work with under 18s and if so what ages do they work with?

Does your area provide any other specialist support services for under 18s and if so what type of services are they?

Please send your responses to vawgenquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk by 31st December 2011.

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A National Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme consultation

On Tuesday 25th October, the Home Office published a consultation inviting views from the public on whether the protection of victims of domestic violence can be enhanced by the establishment of a national Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. The consultation will run for twelve weeks, ending on 13th January 2012.

The consultation seeks to gauge opinion on three options:

- whether to continue current arrangements under existing law where the police already have common law powers to disclose information relating to previous convictions or charges to an individual where there is a pressing need for disclosure of the information concerning a partner's history in order to prevent further crime.
- whether to establish a 'right to ask' national disclosure scheme which enables an individual to ask the police about a partner's previous history of domestic violence or violent acts where the police would undertake full checks to inform a risk assessment and disclosure. A precedent upon which suitable adaptations could be made exists with the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme;
- whether to establish a 'right to know' scheme where the police would proactively disclose information in prescribed circumstances to potential victims relating to a subject's previous history of domestic violence or violent acts.

The consultation document is available on the Home Office website at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/news/clare's-law-consultation-launch> and responses can be sent to DVDisclosurescheme@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

Standing Together guidance

Standing Together Against Domestic Violence is a charity that seeks to develop the best possible partnership response to domestic violence and violence against women. It was recently supported by the Home Office to write guidance for those partnerships. This guidance, In Search of Excellence, is available free on Standing Together's website (www.standingtogether.org.uk). In order to further promote improved responses to these issues, and thanks to some Government funding, they are now able to offer a free half day of consultancy to any partnership in England and Wales. The only cost will be for travel and accommodation where necessary.

This consultancy will concentrate on the possibilities for development within the local context, including operational solutions and financial limitations. This work will try to support a complete and coordinated response across all the relevant agencies to ensure real performance is enhanced. Standing Together believes that all partnerships can improve and that the independence of our approach allows for a clearer view of where those improvements may be achieved. If you are the lead for DV or VAWG partnerships in your area and are interested in this opportunity please contact the charity at excellentpartnerships@standingtogether.org.uk

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Say No To Fear iPhone application and national website

Enabling vulnerable victims of domestic and sexual violence to access resources that can increase their options for safety and survival needs to be multi-faceted and take account of the ever increasing technology available to consumers. Sefton Safer and Stronger Communities Division identified the need to increase the means of enabling victims to access national, regional and local services.

Working in partnership with the business sector, and with the Home Office providing £23k of funding as an initial enabler, the Sefton Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership is developing a national i-phone application through which victims of any type of VAWG will be able to access support and advice, and identify their nearest source of specialist help wherever they are in the UK, and where appropriate, using GPS technology, they will then be able to access this directly.

The application will be fed directly from a national website and this will enable each local authority area (free of charge) to upload their directory of services and also provide web space for the sharing of policies, procedures, research, and a calendar facility for training and MARAC dates to be shared.

Sefton is now inviting each local authority area to participate in this project. For further information please contact the Say No To Fear project lead Caroline Rowsell at Sefton Borough Council on 0151 288 6117, or caroline.rowsell@sefton.gov.uk

Home Office funding to under 18 services

The Home Office will be investing at least £1.2m of additional resource over the next three years in improving services for young people under 18 suffering sexual violence in our major urban areas – with a new focus on the girls and young women caught up in gang related rape and abuse. This funding will commence in 2012/13. Further proposals for how funding will be distributed will be developed with the Home Office Sexual Violence Forum. A decision on which areas will be supported has therefore not yet been taken.

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Ending Gang and Youth Violence report

Following the publication of the Ending Gang and Youth Violence report, published by the Government on 1 November, the Home Office will be setting up a working group to develop and advise policy to prevent the impact of gang violence on girls and young women. The terms of reference and membership are currently being finalised and the first meeting will take place in the New Year. This group will include representatives from the voluntary and community and the criminal justice sector and will:

- Look at how to improve data to more effectively understand the impact on girls and young women.
- Look at ways to increase reporting of gang violence by girls and young women.
- Consider how agencies can identify girls at risk of gang violence and abuse at an earlier stage.
- Develop good practice on programmes to challenge the attitudes and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity to prevent gang violence against girls.
- Look at how the provision of support services to girls can be improved and ensure that services understand the gender and age specific needs of gang-affected young women.
- Provide advice to the Ending Gang and Youth Violence team.

The report also made an additional £400,000 per year for three years available to improve services to support children under 18 suffering rape and sexual abuse – including from gangs. These proposals will be developed in consultation with the new Home Office Sexual Violence Forum and will be published shortly.

New Female Genital Mutilation Legal Guidance

In September the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) issued new guidance that sets out the legal elements of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the challenges prosecutors may face in bringing a case to court, particularly when a victim may retract her evidence due to social and cultural pressures. The guidance gives prosecutors a better understanding of the cultural background surrounding the illegal practice, which has been carried out for many years. The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 makes it clear that any British Citizen or UK resident involved in arranging or carrying out this crime abroad will be liable for prosecution. The CPS' aim is to bring strong cases to court, with prosecutors working closely with the police to investigate where appropriate whether victims have been taken abroad.

CPS centrally has asked its Area offices to notify all cases of FGM referred to the CPS, including whether the case results in a charge or not. CPS intends to monitor this for a period of twelve months (commencing September 2011) and will evaluate the results. See http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/d_to_g/female_genital_mutilation/

Early Adopter Programme (EAP)

The Department of Health Early Adopter Programme (EAP) team is looking to provide specialist sexual assault referral centre (SARC) commissioning support to the EAP commissioners to map the baseline spend, assess the quality of services and improve commissioning. All of the first wave of EAP sites have committed to include Sexual Assault forensic examinations and sexual assault services in their scope of work.

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Early Adopter Programme (EAP) stakeholder event

The links between specialist sexual assault referral centre (SARC) commissioning and Early Adopter Programme (EAP) were highlighted in a Department of Health (DH), Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) seminar on 31st October chaired by David Whatton, Chief Constable for Cheshire and ACPO lead on Rape Investigation. The event brought over 50 stakeholders from the EAP sites, SARC commissioners, clinicians and a number of national organisations together.

In her keynote address, Baroness Stern outlined the need to continue to improve access and quality of sexual assault services during the transition of commissioning from police forces to the health sector.

Policy updates were provided by DH and Home Office officials. Deborah Davidson from the University of Birmingham gave feedback on the findings of the study on the 'Feasibility of Transferring Budget and Commissioning for Forensic Sexual Offences Examination Work from the Police to the National Health Service (NHS)'. This showed much variation in commissioning, costs and quality of sexual assault services between forces and continuing challenges in adequate paediatric provision. Gender choice of forensic physician, separate sexual offences and custody healthcare rotas and independent accountability for clinical governance arrangements were found to be key drivers of improved quality of service provision.

Work on the ground will continue as part of the Early Adopter Programme in the current and future sites.

Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCS)

To support improved and more consistent commissioning of sexual assault referral centres (SARCS), a framework SARC service specification is being developed collaboratively by the London SARC commissioning team for local use. There has been wide input into the work from many stakeholders including the Faculty of Forensic Legal Medicine, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the National SARC Advisory Board, Association of Chief Police Officers, SARC clinicians, commissioners and managers, Department of Health and Home Office. The specification takes account of best practice care pathways (including adults and children) and includes a commissioning minimum dataset. This will be available in November 2011, for local use in the 2012-13 commissioning cycle.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) to produce public health guidance on preventing domestic violence

The Department of Health (DH) has commissioned National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) to develop guidance for commissioners and front-line professionals dealing with domestic violence. The guidance will include evidence-based interventions that can be used by professionals to identify and support victims, including children; enforce the law; and respond to perpetrators. An expert group has met twice to inform the scoping document which will be submitted to DH. The guidance is to be completed by 2015.

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Health visitor training

All Specialist Community Public Health nurse programmes now have to meet four basic principles agreed with the profession's training regulators. Two of these principles are pertinent to the awareness of and information relating to VAWC. In addition, domestic violence and safeguarding vulnerable groups are included in all higher education institutes' basic curricula. Work on updating current professionals' basic curricula. Work on updating current professionals is ongoing and expected to complete by 2015. So far, as well as specific guidance being published, domestic violence is included in the personal development programme for current health visitors. Take-up is optional and dependent upon the individual's interest in pursuing this area in the context of their own/their organisation's learning objectives.

National Health Service (NHS) Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) – Workforce, Education and Training Group

The Workforce, Education and Training Subgroup of the National Health Service (NHS) Violence Against Women and Children Implementation Group completed its work programme this autumn. The programme was based on the Department of Health Action Plan for improving services for women and child victims of violence.

The Subgroup's successes include scoping existing education and training on violence against women and children for health care professionals and other NHS-funded staff and identifying the gaps. They have also advised on the need for commissioning and delivery of further education and training resources that can raise awareness as well as provide professional training. The work of this group has led to the development of the E-learning training for GPs on Violence Against Women And Children.

The Department of Health commissioned and funded the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) to develop this training tool for GPs. It aims to help improve the GPs' understanding of the scale of the problem and their competencies and skills in identifying signs of violence, knowing what to do when someone does disclose and sharing information appropriately with other agencies. The e-learning tool was launched at the Annual Primary Care Conference on 20 October 2011.