

A National Survivor Engagement Framework

Executive summary

There is a genuine ongoing commitment from Welsh Government to engage survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in informing and shaping our related work. The role of survivors in the development of policy work this year has been invaluable. We are determined to continue working closely with survivors from across Wales to shape the development of a sustainable national survivor engagement framework.

This document outlines the Welsh Government's plans to develop a National Survivor Engagement Framework. It presents the background learning and evidence that informs this work, together with a series of options for implementation. We welcome the views of survivors of violence against women, other gender based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and those of organisations working with survivors, on the content of this document and, specifically, the following questions:

1. What are your views on the options outlined within this document as methods through which national survivor engagement can be taken forward?

Which of the options do you prefer and why? How would you combine the options?

2. What additional mechanisms would you like to see Welsh Government consider for survivor engagement for the purposes of policy development?

*Are there additional models of practice the Welsh Government should consider?
What additional options would you like us to consider?*

3. How would you like to see survivors taking forward communications, advocacy and education activity within regions or local authorities?

*Are there additional models of practice the Welsh Government should consider?
What additional options would you like us to consider?*

Please submit a written response to these questions by 12pm on the 3rd May 2018 to VAWDASV.LlywodraethCymru-WelshGovernment@gov.wales

1. Background

The Welsh Government wants survivors' voices and experiences to be central to the continued development and delivery of legislation, policy and strategy related to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The Welsh Government made a commitment in the National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (2016-2021) to the development of a sustainable national survivor engagement framework.

The purpose of a National Survivor Engagement Framework

The purpose of a National Survivor Engagement Framework is to ensure that the needs and experiences of survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, including the most marginalised survivors, those who face multiple disadvantage in accessing help and support, are understood. It is also important that those for whom policy is made, are able to influence and guide that policy and share what works for them

Survivor engagement has become a more common Welsh Government activity in recent times but can be ad-hoc and tends to relate specifically to one policy activity, the development of the National Training Framework, the creation of the National Strategy or media campaigns, for example.

There are some strong examples of regional or local survivor engagement models but nothing that is directly aimed at informing national Government policy on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Nor are there any formal, national programmes which facilitate a role for survivors in educating their communities, raising awareness of these issues, or advocating for themselves. Evidence suggests that this activity can strengthen corresponding national activity aimed at awareness raising or public education. The National Survivor Engagement Framework is intended to address these deficits.

What is required?

A sustainable, national, formal survivor engagement framework is required to ensure that survivors, witnesses and affected others inform and influence Government work related to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales.

The survivor engagement framework must (as a minimum):

- include a wide variety of survivors, witnesses and affected others, including representation across the protected characteristics and those with complex, multi-faceted needs;
- be a continuous process that creates dialogue between Government, survivors, witnesses and affected others of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence;
- provide full geographical representation across Wales;
- generate formal inputs and outputs that are measurable; and
- integrate with existing citizen engagement work, such as that of "Young Wales" or the Older People's Commissioner.

2. Developing a sustainable national formal survivor engagement framework

In order to develop an effective method of engagement, it is important to consider the following:

- What research exists regarding survivor engagement?
- What are survivors' views on how they would like to engage with Government?
- What good practice exists in Wales?
- What new work is required to achieve strong survivor engagement at a Government level?

The remainder of this paper addresses each of these questions and sets out potential options for launch of national survivor engagement work which will commence in financial year 2018-2019.

What research exists regarding survivor engagement work?

A literature review was commissioned to identify the barriers and enablers to successful survivor engagement and addresses the following questions:

- To what extent survivor engagement forums/practices effectively facilitate and promote the voices and views of survivors?
- What does the evidence tell us about the effectiveness of survivor engagement/involvement forums in influencing policy change?
- What does the evidence tell us about where and how government can be most effective in facilitating survivor engagement/involvement?

The literature review findings are summarised below and key points are incorporated within this document. A full version is available on request.

A spectrum of survivor engagement activity takes place for a number of purposes across Wales. Inter-agency domestic violence forums of professionals exist in most towns and cities in the UK to bring together statutory and voluntary sector agencies to build policy and good practice. Domestic violence survivors' forums are different and, whilst they may take many forms, many comprise groups of women who have used services. Such survivors' forums often (but not always) have links to women's activism. They may be referred to as survivors' groups, focus groups or advisory groups and are established to work alongside the main inter-agency forum to advise and comment on its work.

The activity underway in Wales mirrors the activity underway in other parts of the UK and globally. It comprises, at its most basic, consultation, through to, at its more equitable and meaningful, strategies for participation of service-users and other abuse survivors in policy and decision-making.

There are very strong practice examples of survivor engagement underway in Wales, including the work to develop the National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (2016-2021). The objectives of this strategy were based on the recommendations made through the survivor engagement report: *Are you listening and am I being heard?* (March 2016). The

literature review, however, raises concerns related to the quality of some existing survivor engagement activity. These include tokenism; the perception that consultation is being used to delaying action, or legitimise decisions; inviting survivors to meetings rather than actively engaging with them; and leaving survivors feeling patronised or overwhelmed.

3. Survivors views on how they would like to engage with Government

The lived experience of survivors is central to the development of the framework. In order to begin this process, we have undertaken a period of survivor consultation which we will continue throughout the its development.

All Welsh Government VAWDASV stakeholders were contacted in August 2017¹ to invite expressions of interest in participation in the development and call for examples of existing best practice and research.

A diverse group of survivors from across Wales have engaged with this work². Survivors who contributed had experienced a number of forms of violence and abuse including sexual violence; physical and emotional abuse; financial abuse; coercive and controlling behaviour; female genital mutilation; sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Some survivors we spoke to were current service users, others were recent service users and some had not accessed services for a number of years but still spoke of the impact of the abuse on their lives.

Some stakeholders also led engagement activity on behalf of the Welsh Government and fed back on the issues raised.

These engagement meetings aimed to:

- ensure that survivors voices are heard in the development of the national engagement framework;
- gather issues, concerns and opinions from survivors; and
- inform a more sustainable framework for survivor engagement.

¹ At Appendix 2

² At Appendix 1.

4. Themes related to the process for survivor engagement

Below we outline the themes which emerged. The themes relate specifically to **how** Welsh Government could work better with survivors and the processes of engagement.

Inevitably during the engagement work, survivors shared their immediate concerns about the processes and systems they had found themselves in as a result of the abuse they had suffered. These are outlined in appendix 3. Survivors shared stories of great distress and many were very emotional as they shared their experiences with us. This replicated the types of feedback provided through previous engagement work and has prompted additional work across Government and partner agencies.³

Survivors and stakeholders all felt that survivor voices and experience should be central to policy development, should be planned and meaningful, and should be considered from the outset.

4.1. The importance of community groups

A group setting was seen as fundamental in helping survivors to develop their understanding of associated terminology, services, other means of support and structures. For the Survivor Engagement and Education model (run by Welsh Women's Aid), where survivors are actively engaging in communication and education, the group was also seen as an opportunity to debrief and prepare and when necessary as a support network.

The group setting helped members prepare to advocate for themselves and others, offered education, and also support following engagement work. This support is crucial because episodes of triggering or re-traumatisation still take place when going into challenging environments (such as training where strong views are shared) irrespective of how long ago the abuse took place.

Some survivors also referenced the opportunities that being in a group had offered, such as participation in media and other exciting work.

Some survivors mentioned the importance of support groups to build confidence to speak out on their own, and on others' behalf.

4.2. The role of the "organiser"

Some survivors referred to the support offered by the organisers of survivor groups. These organisers were named as third sector organisations and their role in organising the group and offering education and training opportunities and support was valued by participants. In some cases the organiser had assisted in preparing conference presentations and speeches which the survivor gave at public events. In all cases, survivors spoke of the increase in confidence and different skills as a result.

Survivors also recognised the support provided by these third sector organisations and provided examples of the care and commitment shown, particularly when most

³ Are you listening and am I being heard? March 2016

required. Some spoke of support workers sensing they needed an extra visit and of the rapport, respect and trust built over time.

4.3. Need for ongoing support/ counselling

Those working in the sexual violence sector were keenly aware that they could not always provide support when it was needed. They also felt that due to the higher level sensitivities around sexual violence and historic sexual abuse, plans should be in place to support those with whom we are seeking engagement.

4.4. Decision making (understanding)

Many survivors said they did not understand the decision making processes used in Government and other public services, or how they would be able to feed in. They wanted consultation to be planned, rather than ad hoc and expressed frustration that they rarely receive feedback on what changed as a result of the consultation or any level of ongoing contact.

4.5. Models of engagement

Survivors wanted to be offered multiple and alternative ways of engaging, including anonymous and online participation, and be able to exercise choice as to how they participate. Social media was suggested as a useful tool.

The sexual violence sector, in particular, highlighted that any engagement should not be a “one size fits all” and stressed the uniqueness of the sector. In addition those for whom English is a second language suggested that multiple ways of engaging would be useful. Some did not feel comfortable speaking English but far more comfortable to write their views.

4.6. Financial recompense

Some community groups cover the expenses of those who participate in the group. Other survivors give their time for free. Both service representatives and survivors suggested there should be a budget to cover reasonable travel and subsistence expenses. Childcare should also be considered as many were not able to attend meetings due to care commitments.

4.7. Visible leadership

Some stakeholders spoke of the need to show commitment, at the highest level through greater visibility of senior officials and Ministers to ensure a more sustainable, consistent engagement framework.

4.8. Authenticity

Some survivors feel that current methods of engagement are too scripted to allow them to share their own thoughts adequately. Alternatively, views expressed in engagement sessions are reframed in write ups or following presentations to fit a set approach or agenda.

4.9. Engagement as an additional activity, rather than as an embedded approach

Some survivors expressed concern that survivor engagement was often an “add on” to local practice. Examples given included being invited to meetings as a one off rather than the survivor representative being consistently invited. They also mentioned often being invited to participate in work, such as strategy development, late in the process and rarely at the beginning of projects.

4.10. To focus on issues which affect survivors and not to discount any issues

Input from asylum seeking women revealed the complex inter-relationship between abuse, immigration and the immigration process.

Given the complexities of the experience of VAWDASV alongside issues such as immigration, together with other challenges, such as substance misuse, family issues and children’s issues, it would not be appropriate to exclude any particular experience from the engagement work. Further complexity is introduced when survivors want to discuss devolved and non devolved topics. In order to ensure that survivors feel heard, it is important that issues for discussion aren’t excluded on this basis either.

Survivors welcomed the development of a national mechanism for engagement. Many spoke about their readiness to engage and advocate and educate for themselves. Throughout the consultation process, survivors placed a special emphasis on their own role in educating others, raising awareness and increasing the knowledge of their peers, colleagues and the general public.

5. What is a good model of engagement?

The many forms of survivor engagement which have taken place in Wales over recent years include focus groups, groups which support survivors to advocate for themselves (the SEEDs model), informal groups, written consultation, conferences and community engagement events. In 2008, the Kafka Brigade project in Rhondda Cynon Taf led to improved services for survivors and their families, influenced by strong survivor engagement.

The literature review (along with survivor voices) found the model of involvement that is likely to be successful should be allowed to evolve and be informed by ongoing engagement. A key ingredient is genuine commitment to the importance of survivor accountability. Engagement should also include those with complex, multi-faceted needs, men, LGBT+ people, older people and children and young people

We have sought feedback from survivors on these models as well as inviting ideas for how Welsh Government can better support survivor engagement for the purposes of national policy development. This feedback has contributed to the development of options presented below:

6. What new work is required to achieve strong survivor engagement at a Government level?

The levels of survivor engagement work across Wales range from well funded, formal processes, emerging, promising practice, informal but well sustained work to ad hoc engagement for specific purposes. The purpose of this work is also widely varied. In some areas, groups exist for peer support; in others the purpose of engagement is specific to the role of one organisation, and some groups have a specific objective to educate or advocate on behalf of other survivors.

There are examples of very good practice emerging across Wales and, as part of local strategy development; there is increased local activity to engage survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Understandably, this practice tends to have a local or regional focus.

Beyond one-off consultation, there is no national process of survivor engagement which has a direct influence on the development of Government policy. Although there is a survivor representative on the Ministerial Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advisory group, this is the extent of a direct link between survivors and national policy.

The Welsh Government intends to develop a mechanism of National Survivor Engagement. The purpose of this engagement will be to influence how policy is developed at a national level, to inform Government of emerging issues which require a national policy response, and to facilitate outward facing, survivor led activity. Wherever possible, a national approach should build on the good practice which is emerging locally. The term “framework” is being used for the time being as an acknowledgment that several layers of engagement might be required.

The Welsh Government will undertake or facilitate survivor engagement with a genuine commitment to the importance of survivor accountability in the development of policy related to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Taking forward a mechanism for national survivor engagement.

The literature review and consultation suggest that any engagement process will require the following:

1. It must be Wales-wide and be representative of diversity, difference and geography.
2. It must be broad enough to allow authentic feedback.
3. It must not “re-victimise” those involved, be trauma informed and avoid stigmatisation for those involved.
4. It must not create barriers to participation due to the impacts of poverty, socio-economic status or cultural imperatives and differences.
5. Reasonable expenses should be met.
6. Confidentiality and anonymity must be protected in line with safeguarding procedures.
7. Survivor engagement should be allowed to take many forms.
8. Engagement must be ongoing and never tokenistic.
9. Engagement work and structure should evolve based on feedback.

7. Options for inclusion within a National Survivor Engagement Framework

The following options include methods through which survivors will influence national policy development and methods through which survivors will communicate and raise awareness of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. These are not presented as either/or options; it may be appropriate to take forward a combination of mechanisms and plan for further development. These options may also provide a catalyst for the development of other ideas.

7.1. Survivor-informed research collaboration groups

A themed survivor-informed research collaboration group would be set up to identify issues (associated with specified themes) which are of most concern to survivors, and make recommendations to the Welsh Government. Each group would function on a task and finish basis and would function for an initial six months. During that time they would scope issues around the theme, consider associated literature, practical arrangements and survivors' lived experience. They would report their findings to the VAWDASV Advisory group. The group would also suggest how their recommendations could be mainstreamed into Government work.

The aim of the survivor-informed research collaboration group would be to join academic expertise (related to the subject/theme) with lived experience and practical input from those working in the field. This model builds on the survivor-informed research collaboration referenced in the literature review.

Clear terms of reference and principles of engagement would be required to ensure all contributors are comfortable, feel valued and that they are adding value.

As an initial pilot, the Welsh Government would consider two themes (two survivor-informed research collaboration groups) a year. These themes will be selected based on survivor and stakeholder feedback.

Benefits of the approach

This approach was well liked by survivors and is based on good practice highlighted in the literature review. It combines academia, lived experience and practical knowledge. We are not aware of any current practice of this kind in Wales or other parts of the UK. It would provide a detailed consideration of pressing issues which could be used to develop similarly detailed and pertinent policy work.

Concerns regarding the approach:

The cost implications and time frames for each task and finish function have not been tested.

This option could have a very strong impact on Welsh Government policy development but may not further the role of survivors in terms of community education. With that in mind, one of the themes could be community education.

7.2. Utilising third sector organisations to facilitate the voices of survivors, through an agreed and structured process.

This would build on existing approaches across Wales which involve formal and informal survivors groups that are facilitated by local specialist service providers.

This approach could be widened to survivors groups in every region in Wales. It may involve a cost to Welsh Government and/or some work with grant making trusts.

Benefits of the approach:

Such an approach would strengthen community engagement and offer the peer support which has strong support from survivors. It would also provide a mechanism through which survivors can advocate for themselves and offer education opportunities within their communities.

Concerns regarding the approach:

The current local provision does not have particularly strong influence on Government policy direction and it also exists quite separately from practice and practice development. A stronger national pathway for policy engagement that is formally embedded in Welsh Government decision making structures would still be required.

7.3. Development of specific issues groups

Survivors' forums need to overcome and manage a number of practical and ethical challenges. Key matters to be considered include the safety and confidentiality of the survivors. The makeup of the group should be sufficiently representative to have diversity and difference among members and discussions which address cultural issues. Survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence are not a homogenous group and may have very different experiences of abuse. For this reason the combined experience, demographics and an acknowledgment of the impact of trauma must be borne in mind when bringing survivors together.

Stakeholders in the sexual violence sector, particularly, felt strongly that a dedicated group for those who had experienced sexual violence would be a valuable way of ensuring that their voices could feed in to Government work. This was preferred to any generalist or subject-based approach.

Issues-based groups could be facilitated through leading national providers who specialise in specific issues who would report on a regular basis to the Welsh Government. We are aware that some providers of sexual violence services are able to bring together service users very effectively. These groups have worked with Welsh Government on previous consultation projects.

Benefits of the approach

The approach would include specialist providers and be based on the existing excellent relationship these organisations have with their service users.

Concerns regarding the approach

Although it would formalise engagement work for policy development purposes, this approach does not offer a marked difference from current practice. Specialist services should already be led by their client group and identify implications for practice.

7.4. Digital opportunities

Some survivors also raised the usefulness of online forums to share their views. Message boards and discussion forums were options mentioned. Digital forums could also be used to support other options outlined in this paper.

Benefits of the approach

Using digital platforms would allow those who have not disclosed their experience to participate in engagement and provide an alternative way of engaging for those who are not confident to speak in a group or who prefer to write. Alignment with the Live Fear Free web chat function would be important.

Concerns regarding the approach

An online forum would need to be monitored to protect the wellbeing and safety of survivors, and to manage disclosures appropriately.

7.5. Survivor led community advocacy

Many survivors felt that they had a key role in raising awareness, education and communication and would be interested in pursuing ways in which to make this happen across Wales on an ongoing, structured basis. Ongoing support that recognised the potential for trigger events stigmatisation and trauma would be crucial.

This would integrate well with campaigns and communications work. The activity could be widely varied and include, for instance, groups, choirs, theatre, talks, and presentations and learning events. It could also include digital activity.

This advocacy and education work would, most likely, be facilitated through community based organisations, who would bid to take forward local projects that would be led by or delivered in partnership with survivors. It could include formal survivors groups and less formal groups, who are unlikely to have engaged in Government activity before.

This process would be managed within a national context which sets out standards of engagement related to welfare and safeguarding, empowerment, self advocacy and sustainability.

Benefits of the approach

This option offers opportunity for varied forms of survivor engagement. It offers broad opportunities to engage survivors from many backgrounds and with many experiences and provides opportunities through which they can share their lived experience and advocate on their own behalf.

Concerns regarding the approach

The need to manage grants could make this approach resource intensive and unwieldy.

8. Summary

There is no single proven approach to engaging survivors of VAWDASV in national policy work. We want to avoid ad-hoc, tokenistic interventions, recognising that it may take time to reduce ad hoc work. The way survivor engagement takes place should evolve and be shaped by survivors' voices.

Irrespective of the form survivor involvement takes, key matters to be considered are the confidentiality, safety of survivors and their families, ensuring the make up of the group is representative, the need for diversity and difference within the group, including attention to cultural issues and the involvement of BAME women, covering expenses, the avoidance of exploitation, support and training, and awareness of the potential for trauma and stigmatisation.

Welsh Government has a genuine commitment to the importance of survivor engagement in informing and shaping our work. The role of survivors in the development of policy work this year has been invaluable and we are determined to continue working closely with survivors across Wales in the development of a national sustainable survivor engagement framework.

We welcome their views and those of organisations working with survivors on the following questions:

Consultation questions

1. What are your views on the options outlined within this document as methods through which national survivor engagement can be taken forward?

Which of the options do you prefer and why? How would you combine the options?

2. What additional mechanisms would you like to see Welsh Government consider for survivor engagement for the purposes of policy development?

*Are there additional models of practice the Welsh Government should consider?
What additional options would you like us to consider?*

3. How would you like to see survivors taking forward communications, advocacy and education activity within regions or local authorities?

*Are there additional models of practice the Welsh Government should consider?
What additional options would you like us to consider?*

Please submit a written response to these questions by 12pm on the 3rd May 2018 to VAWDASV.LlywodraethCymru-WelshGovernment@gov.wales

Thank you

Thank you to the following organisations and groups who gave their time to contribute to the development of this proposal document:

Women's Survivors Support Group, Carmarthen

Bawso Swansea

Bawso Wrexham

Safer Wales

Single Parents Cardiff and Vale

Individual Survivors

RASAC

Welsh Women's Aid SEEDs group

Stepping Stones

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Dewis Choice, Aberystwyth University

Port Talbot and Afan Women's Aid

The Survivors Trust

Neath Port Talbot Women's Aid (one stop shop)

Appendix 1: Participant information

As part of our engagement activity, we developed a participant information sheet to gather anonymised data to show the age of those we reached, their gender, ethnic origin, their local authority area, sexual orientation and any disability. Some participants chose not to complete these forms, or only partially complete them. For this reason we have only provided an overview here:

Over 60 participants were reached as part of our engagement activity. All were over 18 with some over 65.

Approximately 50% of the participants were not originally from Wales or the UK. The origin of participants included: Albania, Iraq, Palestine/Jordan; Pakistan; Kenya; Poland; Portugal; Egypt; Bangladesh; Sri Lanka and Nigeria.

All participants were women. Organisations which work with men were included in the consultation and we are grateful for their assistance. Unfortunately we have not been able to talk directly to male survivors as none came forward during the initial consultation period. We will continue to strive to include men during the remaining consultation period.

Appendix 2: Original communication to stakeholders

Dear VAWDASV stakeholder

The National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence 2016 - 2021 contains a Welsh Government commitment to develop a sustainable national survivor engagement framework to ensure that the needs and experiences of survivors of these issues are understood and inform the continued development and delivery of legislation, policy and strategy related to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

Over the next few months the Welsh Government will begin the initial development work of this framework.

Survivors who have been involved in Government work to-date are clear that any engagement with them must not be tokenistic and must be part of an ongoing dialogue so that they have clarity as to how their views have or have not influenced work.

Survivors are also clear that they have multiple roles to play in relation to engagement with Government work. Not only are their views crucial in relation to leading policy development but they have powerful voices through which to take forward Government activity, particularly communications work, training and education. Evidence suggests that the impact and reach of national campaigns is strengthened when they are accompanied by corresponding grass roots and community activity.

Our initial aim for the framework, therefore, is that it has two purposes:

1. To provide a formal process through which survivors develop, impact and influence Welsh Government policy on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.
2. To ensure that survivors are able to advocate and speak for themselves as part of Welsh Government communications activity.

We hope that these purposes will evolve as we engage further on what the framework can do and achieve.

We want to create the framework in partnership with a wide variety of survivors, witnesses and affected others, including representation across the protected characteristics and those with complex, multi-faceted needs. We also want to ensure that we make links across Wales, including those in rural and urban communities and with those who have and those who have never engaged with services.

In order to begin planning this, it is important that it takes into account existing engagement work and evidence related to good practice. We have commissioned a literature review to ensure the approach we take is evidence based but we also want to build on the strong practice and engagement which is already in place across Wales. As such we would be grateful if you could provide the following information:

- Existing survivors groups/forums which run in your area (with contact details).
- Any publications issued by local survivor groups or forums in your area.
- Any wider research or reports that you believe should inform the development work.
- Any high level issues that you want us to ensure are considered as we plan the work.

We would also like to include you in the project itself. If you work with those who have experienced violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, in any form, who want to help develop the framework with us please contact us at VAWDASV.LlywodraethCymru-WelshGovernment@gov.wales. We hope to run engagement events over the next six months but will also undertake informal engagement and visits across the country.

Later in the Autumn we also hope to advertise a fund for which local services can bid to undertake community based activity to support our national campaigns messages. This work will involve working with survivors to facilitate them sharing their own stories, educating their peers and community members or raising awareness of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Further details on this will follow but you may wish to consider whether the fund could provide any opportunities for survivors group which you run or work with.

Please provide any information by the 15th September.

With kind regards,

The VAWDASV Team

Appendix 3: Themes related to the lived experience of survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence

1. Accessing services/refuge

This was raised at each meeting. Issues included not being able to access a service when required and the ability to access a service if the survivor changed location. Some survivors reported they were deemed fit to leave refuge to make room for others in need. Although help with accommodation was provided, they often felt they could have benefited from staying in refuge longer before being encouraged to move on. Some reported that this heightened feelings of isolation. Language could be a barrier, particularly for asylum seeking women/refugees. They highlighted possible use of language line but pointed out that appointments needed to be booked in advance which could mean significant delays to being seen. There was a call to ensure that engagement considers language issues at the start.

The cost and difficulty of access to transport, particularly in rural areas, led to some survivors feeling isolated.

The sexual violence sector raised concerns about waiting times for counselling and timeliness of support.

2. Economic issues

Economic pressures and uncertainty were highlighted repeatedly. Financial abuse as well as financial difficulties following an abusive relationship were raised.

3. Isolation

This theme was raised both in terms of when experiencing abuse or violence as well as following it. Feelings of isolation linked to location could increase where disclosure meant everyone in a small village, for example would know about the abuse or violence. Victims within the sexual violence sector may not be able to discuss their situation in a counselling setting if their case has not yet been heard in court. The impact of an inadequate broadband connection was also raised as an issue in terms of finding information and accessing support.

4. Geographical situation

Women in North Wales, in particular, had needed to take different forms of public transport, both to get to the meeting and to access a service. Some spoke about being housed out of school catchment area which had then added the financial pressure of needing to pay for school transport for both adults and children.

5. Family Justice System

This was raised through engagement with survivors within a service setting and with links with single parents. They felt that the family courts had a lack of understanding of domestic abuse and its impact on the non abusing parent and children. All who had experience of family courts highlighted that even in the case of a conviction, in the eyes of the family courts and in terms of child contact and custody, the perpetrator was seen as a fit parent. Issues raised in this area related to the need for training on handling sensitive cases alongside the needs for sensitivity in terms of

hearing scheduling. Child contact and handover were also a concern as they could present opportunities for ongoing controlling and coercive behaviour. Improved information sharing was also called for. The need for assistance in developing coping strategies during handover with the abusive parent was also highlighted. Many survivors spoke about safety implications during court proceedings and feelings of anxiety when faced with the perpetrator.

6. The Justice System

Stakeholders within the sexual violence sector raised particular issues around the legal situation in terms of discussing their case, even if within a confidential counselling session. The Sexual Violence sector wanted counselling that was timely to avoid the potential for further issues. In other settings, many felt let down by the justice system with the safety of the victim/survivor requiring more prominence and support.

7. Status/ Stigma /No recourse to public funds

This was highlighted during the two meetings with Bawso where women talked about difficulty accessing services; education and training. They all expressed frustration with not having a fixed timeline to hear about their Asylum claim status.

8. Trauma

This was particularly prevalent when meeting with survivors of human trafficking/slavery and the Sexual Violence sector. Victims were unable (due to legal reasons) to discuss their situation until their case had been heard. Survivors would like to have specialist immediate trauma counselling.

9. Perpetrators

Some survivors we spoke to felt let down by interventions provided for the perpetrator and believed that this did not alter the perpetrator's behaviour.

10. Education

Many survivors spoke of the need for educating children and the wider public. They felt survivors are best placed to put messages across and that when others spoke for them this was disempowering. They spoke about the prevalence of gender inequality and links to domestic abuse and the need to begin education early.

Ensuring young children hear about what constitutes a healthy relationship was considered key, with issues such as consent introduced where appropriate. Children of victims/survivors needed to learn at the earliest opportunity when relationships are not healthy. While awareness is improving, there is still work to do.

Victims of coercive and controlling behaviour and financial abuse in particular said that they had learned about these terms during support offered and were now keen to ensure others recognised when they were experiencing these behaviours. The majority of the survivors we spoke to were keen to tell their stories to raise awareness, challenge attitudes and most importantly in their view to stop abuse from happening in the first place.

11. Communication

Survivors highlighted that awareness of different forms of abuse was now greater than in previous years but felt that more still needed to be done. They felt that survivors should be central to developing messages and were keen to share their stories with a view to helping raise awareness/change attitudes. They spoke of the stigma still surrounding these issues with a feeling that this is still a private/behind closed doors feeling and how messages portray the survivor is not helpful.

Appendix 4: Definitions

Survivor: A person who has experienced a form of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence at some point in their past.

Other terms used by those who have experienced these issues are “person with lived experience” and “victim”. Each person will have a preference for the term they identify most with. Many survivors choose not to use the term “victim” as it does not demonstrate appropriately, the strength and survival associated with escaping abuse.

Survivor engagement: A formal working practice through which survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence influence policy development and lead elements of communication, education and advocacy to share their own expertise by experience.

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