

The public health approach to preventing gender-based violence

Note of second advisory group meeting

Monday, 11 September 2023

Background

1. Nine members of the advisory group met with the Committee for the second advisory group meeting during a private session at the Senedd on Monday, 11 September 2023. Seven of the attendees contributed to the first advisory group meeting, whilst two of the attendees were new members.
2. The following themes emerged from the discussion.

Themes

Theme 1: The police and other frontline services

3. Frontline services responsible for supporting those experiencing gender-based violence were described as 'stretched'. Some advisory group members queried whether the organisations to which funding is being allocated, have the capacity to deliver a service which is fit for purpose and able to meet demand.
4. Serious concerns were raised about the quality of training received by the police to allow them to respond appropriately and sensitively to incidents where domestic abuse and/or sexual violence is alleged.
5. Domestic abuse and/or sexual violence is often complex and nuanced. Robust and frequent training that would allow police officers to pick up on cues



and potentially identify instances of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence at an early stage is essential. Some advisory group members contrasted their personal experience with the police, which was largely described in negative terms, with their experience of engaging with other frontline services.

- 6.** Domestic abuse and/or sexual violence is multi-faceted and does not always manifest in a way which is visible or easily identifiable. All professionals involved with supporting an individual who experiences domestic abuse and/or sexual violence need to be trauma-informed and aware of the wide gamut of abuse.
- 7.** A greater understanding is needed of the reasons why a victim may present in a certain way at different stages of an investigation. For example, a victim may appear to be in a heightened state of emotion (described by one advisory group member as being in 'fight-or-flight mode') when providing a statement to a police officer on first contact.
- 8.** The advisory group were concerned that any statement given at a later stage in the investigation, which may appear inconsistent with an earlier statement, was often used to discredit the victim. Little to no consideration is given to the view that a victim's account may differ somewhat once they have had the opportunity to compose themselves, reflect on the incident(s) and process their trauma.
- 9.** Victims of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence may not always be comfortable to readily disclose information to a police officer, with some advisory group members explaining that they "put a barrier up". It was suggested that a professional with lived experience of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence should accompany a police officer, where possible, during first contact with a victim.
- 10.** Survivors of gender-based violence are experts by experience. A potential role for survivors of domestic abuse to play in informing and educating frontline services on the complexities and nuances of abuse.

Theme 2: Perpetrator programmes

- 11.** Serious concerns were raised about the efficacy and consistency in delivery of perpetrator programmes, which were described as tick-box exercises by some advisory group members.
- 12.** Those responsible for delivering perpetrator programmes should be trauma-informed and have the necessary experience and expertise to identify

whether a service user is perpetrating or at risk of perpetrating whilst engaged on the programme.

13. There were concerns that perpetrators are attending the course to manipulate decision-makers in childcare proceedings, whilst failing to truly take accountability for their behaviour. Some advisory group members shared personal examples of their perpetrator attending a programme, but continuing their behaviour during or upon completion of the course.

14. One advisory group member was of the view that perpetrator programmes put too much emphasis on “the perpetrator’s voice” and receive too much funding.

Theme 3: Disability

15. The experiences of disabled people of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence is unique and overlooked by services. There are nuances and subtleties in their experience, which can mean that an onus is often placed on the disabled person to explain the additional risks they encounter.

16. All professionals (not exclusively services responsible for supporting victims of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence), engaged with or responsible for supporting disabled people, like sensory and housing officers, should be given training to recognise signs of abuse experienced by disabled people.

17. Disabled people who experience abuse and have children with their perpetrator, may also encounter barriers when navigating childcare proceedings. An example was given of a report being disclosed to a disabled victim of domestic abuse, a day prior to her hearing, which was not in an accessible format for her.

Theme 4: Data collection

18. The advisory group discussed the use of personal data in the Welsh NHS and how it will be used and shared when electronic (e-prescribing) is rolled out.

19. Whilst the level of awareness about the proposed changes was low, advisory group members were concerned that a perpetrator or a perpetrator’s family member/friend employed by the NHS could potentially have access to their data.

20. The advisory group shared accounts of their personal data, like medical records, being shared by organisations during childcare proceedings, which left many of the women and their children feeling vulnerable and unsafe. One

advisory group member explained that she was forced to move home as a result of her location being disclosed to her perpetrator without her permission.

21. Some advisory group members agreed that the issue was complex and recognised the need for data to be shared on occasion, particularly across local authority areas where the personal safety of an individual may be at risk. A consistent, transparent and considered approach to data sharing is essential when the safety and wellbeing of an individual and/or child is involved.

Theme 5: Post-separation abuse

22. There is very little understanding of, and provision for, post-separation abuse. Victims of abuse are not often considered to be at risk because they no longer live with the perpetrator. However, the abuse is often ongoing but manifests in a different way, particularly where the victim and perpetrator co-parent.

23. It is essential that institutions involved in childcare proceedings are better equipped to understand post-separation abuse and deal with the implications of their decisions, particularly on the relationships between the parties involved. There was a view from some advisory group members that perpetrators of abuse manipulate institutions involved in childcare proceedings as a way of maintaining control and continuing with the abuse of their victim.

24. Services with an understanding of, and the ability to support victims of post-separation abuse is essential as the characteristics of post-separation abuse are unique. Services may recognise the dangers victims may face, but will not often have the funding or expertise to support them. One advisory group member explained that a number of women and children are often killed after they have ended an abusive relationship.

Theme 8: Online safety and social media

25. Some members of the advisory group did not think schools were doing enough to address the dangerous and incendiary effect of social media influencers like Andrew Tate, on their pupils. Examples were shared of fourteen year olds desperate to lose their virginity and the use of trackers by teenagers.

26. Serious concerns were also raised about the nature and ease of accessibility of online pornographic content, which can distort what a young person may consider a healthy and loving relationship.