

PAN SUSSEX STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE/ABUSE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG)

2020 - 2024



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Pan Sussex Strategic Framework for Domestic and Sexual Violence/Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) 2020 - 2024

In Sussex, our commitment is a partnership of agencies, working together to provide robust, accessible and supportive services to those experiencing violence and abuse.

We want to see an end to violence against women and girls, domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Sussex to keep people safe. We are committed to preventing violence and abuse, improving the support and protection for victims and their children, and ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions.

We will commission effective services to ensure the whole system response to VAWG is as collaborative, robust and effective as it can be so that all victims and survivors, including children as victims in their own right, can get the help they need, in line with the VAWG National Statement of Expectations.

Where someone is a victim, regardless of gender, they are believed, not blamed, treated with dignity and respect and supported to feel safe within their community. A future where perpetrators of abuse are held accountable for their actions, via the criminal justice system and by accessing services and programmes designed to address abusive behaviour and bring about change.

Across Sussex, we will work together, breaking down barriers between sectors and services, in neighbourhoods and communities, recognising that Domestic and Sexual Violence is everyone's business; and that responsibility for tackling the issue is truly shared.

Our Priorities

Prevention and Early Intervention

Together we will work to prevent violence and abuse happening in the first place or from happening again by changing attitudes and challenging behaviours in our communities. By using evidence-based approaches we will protect victims and tackle and break the cycle of offending.

Service Provision

Together we will provide quality, coordinated and accessible intervention and support reflective of what people want and need, working with victims and survivors to better understand their experience of our services. We will commission and develop services intelligently, providing the right services to prevent violence and abuse and repeat victimisation in a longer term and sustained way. We will help to enable recovery, recognising the impact and outcomes of violence and abuse on **all** (children and adults) those affected and provide, victim centred services.

We will promote a listening and believing approach: in what victims tell us and in what we share with each other as providers; working together to solve issues and challenge actions and behaviours that blame victims of abuse and violence.

We recognise that women experiencing multiple disadvantage may not present at specialist servicesⁱ, and recognise the importance of working in close collaboration with partners across housing and homelessness services, mental health, substance misuse and women's services.

Pursuing Perpetrators

Together we will work with partners to strengthen the Criminal and Civil Justice response to perpetrators. We will work with all partners including non-criminal justice agencies to strengthen their part in assessing, controlling and minimising the risk(s) posed by perpetrators. We will robustly manage repeat offenders and as a priority consider perpetrator programmes for early intervention and behavioural change.

Partnership working

Together we will work collaboratively in and with a broad coalition of partners to develop and provide consistent quality services across the whole of Sussex.

Defining Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls

The impact of domestic and sexual violence and abuse is personal to every victim, so in addition to the formal definitions provided in this section, statements from recovering victims have been included.

Domestic Violence and Abuse

Domestic abuse is an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and can include violent behaviour where the victim and perpetrator are 16+ and personally connected. In the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. Domestic abuse is widespread, and it is important to acknowledge that adults and children of all genders can be victims of domestic abuse, within the statutory definition introduced by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Domestic abuse consists of any of the following and can consist of a single incident or pattern of behaviour:

- Coercive or controlling behaviour (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse
- Physical or sexual violence and abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Economic Abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse

“ The abuse wasn’t physical, he never hit me, but he broke me down, bit by bit – piece by piece, I spent all day, every day trying to avoid an upset, trying not to make him angry, even though I never really knew what it was I had done wrong, or what to do to make it right. I was frightened of him and terrified by the things he would say he would do, it was the threat, the walking on eggs shells, the not knowing when he would explode, it was unbearable”

Sexual Violence and Abuse

“Sexual violence and abuse is any behaviour (physical, verbal, virtual/online) perceived to be of a sexual nature which is controlling, coercive, exploitative, harmful, or unwanted that is inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, ability/disability or sexual orientation) without their informed consent or understanding.

There are many different kinds, including: rape, sexual abuse (including in childhood), sexual assault, sexual harassment, forced marriage, so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual exploitation (including child sexual exploitation), and others.

Sexual violence and abuse can take place in the community or be carried out online by people who are either acquaintances or strangers to the victim as well as take place within family and partner relationships” (Survivors’ Network)

‘It was easier to say nothing, let him get on with it...I felt so ashamed, like somehow, it was my fault..I felt worthless, outside I probably seemed...normal....nobody knew what was happening behind closed doors....inside I was just empty’

Harmful practices

So called ‘Honour’ based violence (HBV) and abuse is a collection of practices which are used to control or influence behaviour within families to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and ‘honour’. This abuse occurs when perpetrators perceive that an individual has brought shame to the family or wider community by breaking their honour code. HBV can be distinguished from other forms of abuse, as it is often perpetrated with some degree of collusion from family and members of the community. Although it is difficult to obtain a true figure, it is estimated that 12 women per year are murdered in the UK as a result of ‘honour’ based violenceⁱⁱ.

The government definition of forced marriage (2010) is as follows:

‘A marriage in which one or both spouses do not, or cannot consent to the marriage, and duress is involved. Duress can include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure.’

Forced marriage is a significant part of the abuse for many victims of HBV. Forced marriage should not be confused with arranged marriage, which is entered into freely by both parties. An arranged marriage may become a forced marriage when there is any element of duress, this can include a sense of duty, and emotional abuse.

According to the World Health Organisation, female genital mutilation (FGM), comprises of “*all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.*” A harmful practice with no health benefits, FGM can cause long-lasting physical, emotional and psychological trauma; and in some cases, death.

‘I was worried about repercussions from my family and the wider community. I thought that if I told somebody, I would basically be ostracised, I didn’t want to bring any shame on my family, it wasn’t just about me, it was them as well’

Stalking and Harassment

Stalking has no single definition in legislation. However, the national stalking consortium has adopted a working definition of stalking as “a pattern of fixated and obsessive behaviour, which is unwanted, repeated, persistent and intrusive and causes fear of violence or engenders alarm and distress in the victim”. During National Stalking Awareness week 2019, the College of Policing adopted the acronym “FOUR” which stands for “Fixated, Obsessive, Unwanted, Repeated” in an attempt to simplify and make more visible the signs of stalking.

Stalking can also occur online and is a form of technological abuse, including the monitoring the use by a person of the internet, email or any other form of electronic communication. This can include the use of spyware or GPS locators on items such as phones, computers, wearable technology, cars, motorbikes and pets.

‘For a very long time, I thought it was in my head. I would see him, often on his bike, in really obscure places, at first, I thought it was a coincidence, but he was always there. I had drones flown over my garden, he put a tracker in my car...in one year I had over 300 letters sent to my address....he was absolutely obsessed. It changes you, makes you scared and paranoid...always looking over your shoulder...’

Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse and Gender

Violence Against Women and Girls

According to the Office for National Statistics in 2019 one in three women aged 16-59 will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

In its declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls, the UN states that the term "violence against women" means 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.

It states that violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including physical abuse, sexual abuse of female children in the household, ‘so called honour based violence and forced marriage’, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

“Violence against women is both a consequence of and a cause of inequality between men and women. As well as being a health problem of epidemic proportions, it's also a human rights problem of equal severity. Depending on the violation, it can deprive a woman of

- her right to health and physical and mental integrity;

- her right to be free from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment;
- her right to life.” (Women’s Aid)

“Women are more likely than men to experience multiple incidents of abuse, different types of domestic abuse (intimate partner violence, sexual assault and stalking) and in particular sexual violence. Any woman can experience domestic abuse regardless of race, ethnic or religious group, sexuality, class, or disability, but some women who experience other forms of oppression and discrimination may face further barriers to disclosing abuse and finding help.” (Women’s Aid)

Male victims

Research states that nationally, about 1 in 6 heterosexual, men and 1 in 4 gay men will experience some form of domestic abuse or sexual violence in their lifetime. Locally we know that commissioned Domestic and Sexual Violence Services report that around 8% of victims accessing services are male.

Historically, research, strategies and campaigns have mainly focused on women and therefore, a lot less is known about men’s experience. We know that men and boys may face specific barriers to accessing support and that patriarchy also negatively affects men, making it difficult for them to disclose domestic abuse for complex reasons, including real and perceived perceptions of male victims. It can take over 25 years for a man to seek help for an incidence such as childhood sexual abuse. This lack of specialist intervention and support can contribute to complex mental health issues and behaviours due to feelings of confusion, guilt and shame. These not only affect the individual, but also their wider community through broader social issues such as relationship difficulties, distant parenting, homelessness, substance misuse, antisocial behaviour and crime.

‘Domestic abuse happens to men – I know, because it happened to me. The first person I spoke to at WORTH was a man and that actually helped me to feel less awkward about the situation, I was believed. Men need to know that if they are going through domestic abuse, they can get help, and that there is nothing to feel embarrassed about’

Children Affected by Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse

We know that gender is not a protective factor of domestic and sexual violence and abuse, and it is important to recognise that the impact of violence and abuse can affect the youngest of children; young people and into adulthood. The Domestic Abuse 2021 stipulates that a child who sees, hears, or experiences the effects of domestic abuse, and is related to the person being abused or perpetrating the abuse, is regarded as a victim of domestic abuse.

Our strategic approach, and therefore the services we provide, must recognise that whilst domestic and sexual violence and abuse are a gendered issue and perpetration is largely male oriented, the experience and impact on children is not. Legislation such as the Joint Thematic Area Inspection Guidance on Children Affected by Domestic Violence and Abuse provides support to professionals to support focus on the needs of the child as an individual.

“ I think that adults should know it affects us too, I used to feel really scared, and I used to pretend to be asleep so that my dad wasn’t even more angry with my mum, I didn’t want to go to school because I didn’t want to leave mum with her – I think that adults should teach children at school that abuse is not ok and give us time to talk about it without feeling embarrassed”

Responding to Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse and VAWG in Sussex: Legislation, Profiles, Needs Assessment and Review

Information on legislation and its local application; local data and profiles relevant to domestic and sexual violence and abuse including stalking and harassment and harmful practices; and needs assessments and reviews is available at *Safe Space Sussex*. Partners aim to maintain an up to date and relevant information resource to help in our response.

Equality at the Heart of Our Response

It is important to recognise that anyone, whatever their gender, age, ethnicity, capacity or sexual orientation can be a victim or perpetrator of domestic and sexual violence and abuse. The programme of services we provide should enable access for everyone. We are committed to ensuring that marginalised groups and individuals have fair and equal access to services. In addition, considering intersectionality and recognising individuals can be victims of multiple and different abusive behaviours due to the way vulnerabilities and protected characteristics can overlap in order to fully identify the lived experiences of all victims and ensure services are provided to victims without discrimination.

We recognise that some parts of our communities face additional barriers to accessing services and commit to working together to break down these barriers. Services should respond to differing needs both in terms of the support needed and how it is provided; taking into account geographical challenges across Sussex; whilst respecting the need for positive action when it is necessary to protect those at risk.

Our Commitment to Partnership Working

What we believe in

Collaboration across all sectors and with a wide variety of stakeholders: acknowledging the value of passion, interest, knowledge and ideas wherever they come from; co-production and co-design; and the benefits of sharing resources to respond more effectively. It is important to minimise competition between agencies to enhance victims' experience of support provided.

Taking responsibility both individually and collectively: the challenges and the risks are shared in a supportive no blame environment.

Mutual trust and respect: valuing different perspectives that provide better insights and lead to better, more robust solutions.

Fairness and openness: We keep each other informed of our work contexts and understand how we can accommodate and work through changes to collectively maintain and improve our response to domestic abuse and sexual violence.

How we intend to work together

We will:

- Always put those affected by domestic and sexual violence and abuse and wider experiences of violence against women and girls, and their voice at the centre of our work;

- Be aware of the context in which domestic violence and abuse and sexual violence including VAWG takes place, in line with safeguarding policy and frameworks for children and families, and adults;
- Maintain a focus on equality, recognising that anyone can be affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence and stalking ensuring that marginalised individuals within our communities are represented, have a voice, and are heard;
- Prioritise effective dialogue and communication between services, and with those affected by violence and abuse;
- Be brave in our innovation where evidence tells us to do things differently including how we respond to service demands and commission services.

Governance and Accountability

Domestic, sexual violence and abuse and VAWG is complex and is a cross-cutting issue for multiple services. This has an impact on the governance and accountability.

It is important that any delivery groups associated with the strategy for Sussex are supported in their ability to respond by having appropriate modes of escalation to strategic boards with overall responsibility for community safety and safeguarding, and health and wellbeing. It is also important that these same boards effect appropriate challenge and scrutiny in relation to the Sussex response.

Date document signed off: March 2020

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Review schedule: Annual. First review date: April 2021- completed

Refresh of this version: May 2022

ⁱ Breaking Down the Barriers: Findings of the National Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Multiple Disadvantage -AVA 2019

ⁱⁱ Brandon, J & Hafez, S (2008) Crimes of the Community [Online] Available at: <http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/CrimesOfTheCommunity>.