



Housing
Executive

Sanctuary Scheme Review

Ipsos MORI



Sanctuary Scheme Review

January 2023

Research Report for the NIHE

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1 Introduction and Background

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) appointed Ipsos to undertake an independent review of the Sanctuary Scheme. The aim of the review is to assist the Housing Executive in determining the usefulness of the current Sanctuary scheme in limiting the negative effect of domestic abuse on a personal, financial and physical level for both victims of domestic abuse and the Housing Executive via costs of repairs and other associated revenues. The research also aims to examine the availability of support to victims of domestic abuse across communities, including the LGBT community and temporary accommodation for those who are homeless due to same sex domestic abuse.

Research objectives

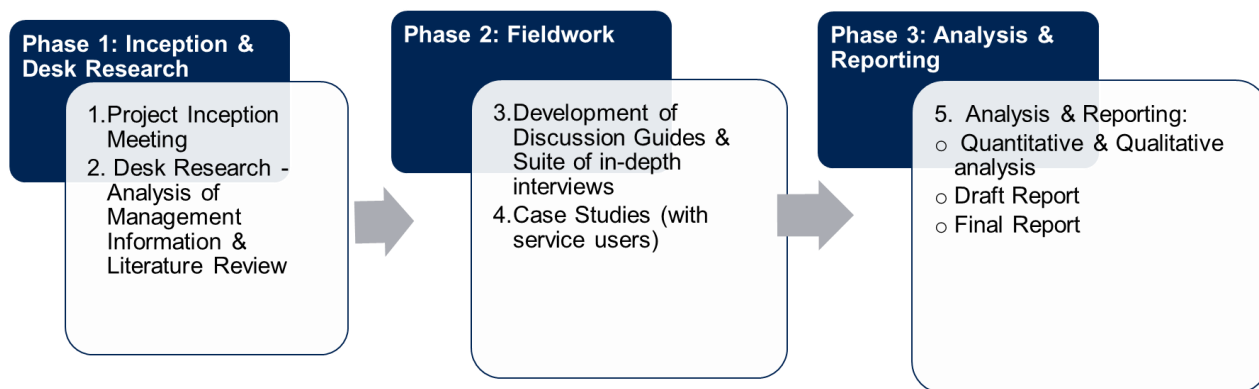
Specifically, the key objectives of this research are as follows:

- To explore the trends, causes and nature of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland;
- To provide an overview of the assistance available to victims of domestic abuse in neighbouring jurisdictions with a view to identifying potential services for development in Northern Ireland;
- To identify area/regional variations in the provision of the Sanctuary scheme across Northern Ireland and potential contributing factors behind this;
- To gauge the effectiveness of the current Sanctuary Scheme;
- To identify challenges in the expansion of the Sanctuary Scheme across the Housing Executive and other tenures;
- To identify challenges in inter-agency working, particularly around the implementation of the Sanctuary Scheme.
- To identify any additional challenges/lessons arising from the rise in domestic abuse as a result of lockdown arrangements implemented during COVID-19.
- To identify any emerging evidence/trends with regards to domestic abuse in the LGBT community and to identify any effective temporary accommodation provision in neighbouring jurisdictions in the absence of bespoke hostel accommodation for this client group.

Methodology

Our methodology for the evaluation involved three main phases of work as summarised in the following diagram.

Figure 1: Methodology



Background to the Scheme

The Sanctuary Scheme is a multi-agency, victim-centred initiative to enable households at risk of domestic abuse to remain safely in their own homes by installing a ‘sanctuary’ in the home, once the perpetrator has left.

The Sanctuary Scheme model was conceived in 1998 by the Crime Reduction Unit (CRU) at Harrow Police Station. While much work was being done to assist victims of domestic abuse, many felt isolation following leaving their homes, often experiencing repeat periods of homelessness.¹ While the police could advise about home security, there were no formal mechanisms in place to fund or implement additional security measures. In September 2002 the CRU in partnership with the London Borough of Harrow Housing Department, launched the ‘Sanctuary Project’. The aim of the project was to help households at risk of domestic abuse and hate crime remain safely in their homes by installing enhanced security measures, including an inner ‘Sanctuary’ or ‘Sanctuary Room.’² Sanctuaries have since been promoted by governments as an accommodation option for households at risk of domestic abuse which can, where suitable and appropriate, offer households the choice of remaining in their homes.

Typically, Sanctuaries should be individual packages informed by a full risk assessment, the type and condition of the property and the needs and circumstances of the individual household. Sanctuaries are created by enhancing security in the property through ‘target hardening’ of the property and the provision of safety equipment. Sanctuary measures might include:

- Reinforced exterior doors;
- Extra door and window locks;
- Reinforced double-glazed windows;
- Laminated windows;
- Window grilles;
- Fire retardant letter boxes;

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6015/1697793.pdf

² *Ibid*

- Smoke detectors and fire safety equipment;
- Window alarms;
- Alarm systems that connect directly to the police or care control system;
- Intercom systems;
- Video entry systems.

Sanctuaries sometimes include a Sanctuary Room. This is created by securing a room, normally the main bedroom, by installing a reinforced Sanctuary door, and equipping it with a mobile telephone or an alarm and other safety equipment. The purpose of the Sanctuary Room is to provide a safe place from where victims can call and wait for the arrival of the police.³

Sanctuary scheme in Northern Ireland

In 2007 a Sanctuary Scheme was piloted for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's social housing tenants in the Antrim/Ballymena area. Following a 2011 evaluation carried out jointly by the Housing Executive and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the scheme was extended to Housing Executive tenants throughout Northern Ireland. However, in reality it has only been targeted at those tenants most at risk and has been led by the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

The primary objectives of the current Sanctuary scheme provided by the Housing Executive are to:

- Reduce repeat incidents of domestic abuse;
- Minimise the disruption of having to move home and/or becoming homeless;
- Enable families to remain in familiar areas and close to support networks, friends and family; and
- Enable any children to remain in their schools and to maintain friendships and support networks.

Operation and procedure of the scheme

Under the Sanctuary Scheme, the NIHE can specify and issue work to trade contractors to provide security enhancements to a designated room in tenant's properties. There are two broad options for the implementation of the Scheme:

Sanctuary: This involves the creation of a 'sanctuary room' – a safe room, usually a bedroom, where the victim can call and wait for the arrival of the police. Other work includes door and window security and provision of fire safety equipment.

Sanctuary Plus: This involves all of the elements within the 'sanctuary' option (as outlined above) but also includes additional security provisions such as door and window grills as well as higher specification fire safety equipment.

³ *Ibid*

2 Strategic Context

Introduction

The following paragraphs provide an overview of the legislative and policy context in which the Sanctuary Scheme in NI operates. For comparative purposes it also provides an overview of the legislation in other UK regions.

Legislation

The Sanctuary Scheme is consistent with key pieces of legislation across the UK. Over the last number of years, key legislation has been passed by the UK Government, The Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland assembly to provide support for victims of domestic abuse and bring perpetrators to justice. Whilst the new Northern Ireland legislation is the most relevant to the operation of the Sanctuary Scheme, this chapter briefly explores the legislation recently passed in other parts of the United Kingdom (UK) for the purposes of comparative analysis, and to underpin the models of effective practice which are later outlined in the literature review.

The UK Government, Domestic Abuse Act 2021⁴

The UK Government passed a landmark Bill in 2021 to transform the criminal justice response to the crime of domestic abuse, to ensure that the prevention of abuse and protection of victims is enshrined within legislation. The legislation pertains to England and Wales.

The Bill was published in draft in January 2019 for pre-legislative scrutiny. The Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill published its report on 14 June 2019 and the government published its response on 16 July 2019. A further government response to the Joint Committee was published in February 2020. The Bill received Royal Assent, was passed within both houses of Parliament and was signed into law in April 2021.

1: Definition of domestic abuse: This section of the Bill creates a statutory definition of domestic abuse, emphasising that domestic abuse does not just pertain to physical violence but also can involve emotional, controlling, coercive and economic abuse. A definition is also presented for who can engage in domestic abuse; those who are 'personally connected.' Two people are considered personally connected if they are or have been married to each other if they are or have been civil partners, if they have agreed to marry one another, if they have entered into a civil partnership agreements, in they are or have been in an intimate relationship with each other, if they have had a parental relationship of the same child or if they are relatives.

2: Domestic abuse commissioner: The Bill established the office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, who must encourage good practice in the prevention of domestic abuse, as well as in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of domestic abuse offences, and the provision of services and support to victims of domestic abuse. The commissioner must establish an advisory board to provide advice about the exercise of the commissioner's functions and must set out a strategic plan and submit annual progress reports against this plan.

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted>

3: Powers for dealing with domestic abuse: The Bill provides a new Domestic Abuse Protection Notice and Domestic Abuse Protection Order to protect victims. A senior police officer may give a domestic abuse protection notice if they have reasonable grounds for believing that domestic abuse has occurred, and it is necessary to protect the victim from the risk of further abuse. If such a notice is served, the person to whom it is given may not contact the person for whom the notice has been given and may not come within a specified distance of any premises in England or Wales in which that person lives. If the two individuals for whom the notice pertains to live in the same premises, the notice may prohibit the perpetrator from entering the premises and leave the premises. If a constable has reasonable grounds for believing that a person is in breach of a domestic abuse protection notice, they may arrest them without warrant.

4: Local authority support: The Bill places a duty on Local Authorities in England to provide accommodation-based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation. It also requires each Local Authority to assess the need for such support in its area and prepare a strategy for its delivery.

5: Protection for victims and witnesses in legal proceedings: The Bill creates a statutory presumption that victims of domestic abuse are eligible for special measures in the criminal, civil and family courts, and prohibits perpetrators from cross-examining their victims in person in civil and family courts in England and Wales.

6: Offences involving abusive or violent behaviour: Under this legislation, the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour has been extended to include post-separation abuse and the offence of disclosing sexual photographs/films has been extended to cover threats to disclose such material. Additionally, a new offence has been introduced to cover non-fatal strangulation or suffocation of another person.

7: Miscellaneous and general: The Bill provides that all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' for homeless assistance. It also ensures that where a local authority, for reasons connected with domestic abuse, grants a new secure tenancy to a social tenant who had or has a secure lifetime or assured tenancy, this must be a secure lifetime tenancy.

Scottish Parliament, Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill, 2021⁵

This Bill was created to provide additional protection for people who are at risk of domestic abuse, particularly when they are living with their abuser. It aims to fill a gap by providing immediate short-term protection for a person experiencing domestic abuse. Additionally, the Bill gives additional protection for those in social housing who experience domestic abuse. It enables the landlord to end the tenancy rights of someone who has been abusive (if they wish to continue living in the home). The Bill was first introduced in October 2020 and became an act on the 5th May 2021.

Similar to the Bill passed by the UK Government, the Bill as introduced creates new types of protection notices and orders to protect people from domestic abuse: Domestic abuse protection notices (DAPNs) and Domestic abuse protection orders (DAPOs).

⁵ <https://www.parliament.scot/Bills-and-laws/Bills/domestic-abuse-protection-scotland-Bill>

DAPNs can be made by senior members of the police. They are a very short-term way to offer immediate protection from domestic abuse until a DAPO can be made by a court. A DAPO can last for up to 2 months and can be extended by another month. A DAPN does not need to be in place to ask the court for a DAPO. A DAPN includes provisions stopping an abuser from entering the home of the person they have abused.

A unique provision of the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill is the additional protection created for those at risk of domestic abuse, particularly when where they are living with their abuser. The policy memorandum⁶ for this Bill outlines the causal factor of domestic abuse for women and children in Scotland. Historically, social housing policy and practices have focused on women and children experiencing homelessness leaving their homes, rather than perpetrators moving out. In advance of the new measures introduced in this Bill, the working group looking at preventing women and children becoming homeless as a result of domestic abuse have advocated for social landlords to take a more proactive role in supporting victims to enable them to remain in the family home. The policy memorandum outlines that this will support the physical and mental well-being of victims at a time of anxiety and stress by providing continuity and familiarity of accommodation, surroundings, support networks and schools.

The Bill therefore adds a new reason for ending a Scottish secure tenancy when a tenant has been abusive to their partner or ex-partner. A social landlord can apply to the court to end a tenant's interest in a house where they have engaged in abusive behaviour.

Northern Ireland Assembly, Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Bill, 2021⁷

New legislation has been implemented in Northern Ireland to support victims of domestic abuse and prosecute perpetrators. This legislation is considered long awaited, given that the collapse of the Northern Ireland assembly in 2017 stalled the legislative process.⁸

The Bill was first introduced to the Northern Ireland Assembly in March 2020 and was made into legislation on 18th January 2021. Royal Assent was received in March 2021 and became operational February 2022. A body of work is taking place (at the time of writing) to ensure the necessary systems and processes are in place to deliver the changes, that training is provided to the police and public prosecutors, and that the public are aware of the new offence pertaining to coercive control.⁹

The most significant aspect of the proposed Bill is the introduction of coercive control as a criminal offence in Northern Ireland. As well as violent or threatening behaviour, the following behaviour would be punishable in law:-

1. Making a victim feel dependent on, or subordinate to a perpetrator;
2. Isolating a victim from friends, family members or other sources of social interaction or support,
3. Controlling, regulating or monitoring a victim's day-to-day activities,
4. Depriving a victim of, or restricting their freedom of action,

⁶ <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/Bills/current-Bills/domestic-abuse-protection-scotland-Bill/introduced/policy-memorandum-domestic-abuse-protection-scotland-Bill.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2/part/2/enacted>

⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55664653>

⁹ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/long-welcomes-new-domestic-abuse-legislation>

5. Making a victim feel frightened, humiliated, degraded, punished or intimidated.

The Bill also makes provision in relation to information sharing to schools, protection of victims, civil legal aid for victims of abuse, guidance and operational matters (including independent oversight) related to the new offence. Similar to UK Government legislation, the Bill enhances the measures available to protect victims of domestic abuse while giving evidence in family and civil courts by prohibiting cross-examination of the victim by the perpetrator.

Additionally, the Bill includes provisions for the effect that domestic abuse can have on children, with enhanced sentences possible in cases where a child is exposed to an incident of domestic abuse. Convictions for the most serious domestic abuse offences will carry a penalty of up to 14 years imprisonment.

Northern Ireland operational policy context

Within Northern Ireland, there are a number of key departmental policy documents which are important to consider in order to contextualise the operation of the Sanctuary Scheme in Northern Ireland. While the new legislation introduced in 2021 will likely lead to revised departmental strategy, the below documents pertain to its operation at present.

Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety and the Department of Justice, *Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland, 2016*¹⁰

This joint strategy was implemented by the Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive in 2016. The vision at the heart of the strategy is to realise a society in Northern Ireland in which domestic abuse and sexual violence are not tolerated in any form, where effective tailored preventative and responsive services are provided, all victims are supported, and all perpetrators are held to account.

The strategy outlines the context in Northern Ireland in terms of the extent of domestic abuse, while acknowledging that the actual figures are likely to be significantly higher given that the majority of incidents are not reported.

The strategy presents definitions of domestic violence and abuse and is constructed around five strands:

Strand 1: Driving change through co-operation and leadership

This strand of the strategy focuses on collaborative working and promoting a more cohesive approach to tackling domestic abuse and sexual violence and abuse. The priority for this strand involves all Government Departments reaffirming their commitment to working in partnership to promote societal change in attitudes and endorse the provision of justice, services and support for victims of domestic abuse.

Strand 2: Prevention and early intervention

This strand focuses on primary intervention which aims to prevent domestic violence and abuse from happening. This involves promoting increased knowledge and understanding of violence and abuse, focusing on promoting healthy relationships, changing societal behaviours and attitudes towards domestic violence and abuse as well as prioritising early intervention for those at risk.

¹⁰ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/stopping-domestic-sexual-violence-ni.pdf>

Priorities for this strand include:

- Establishing a baseline on societal attitudes towards domestic abuse.
- Equipping teachers with the necessary skills to teach on subjects including child abuse and domestic violence and abuse, including the provision of age-appropriate evaluated resources.
- Ensuring teachers are alert to pupils experiencing distress and are trained to respond appropriately.
- Providing quality assurance arrangements to ensure the preventative school curriculum is effective.
- Encouraging collaboration of relevant Government Departments to promote preventative safeguarding for adults at risk of harm.

Strand 3: Delivering change through responsive services

This element focuses on preventing further violence and abuse towards victims and families at risk of re-victimisation through building more responsive services. This aims to go beyond statutory or community services, so that all stakeholders know their designated roles and responsibilities. This requires training and expertise and the further development of specialist services.

Priorities for this strand include:

- Implementing an integrated pathways approach to facilitate the four elements of service provision for those who present with domestic abuse: encourage disclosure and recognising signs, respond to disclosure, identification of harm and coordinated action following disclosure.
- Development of a safety plan to support individuals and families through the immediate and longer-term consequences of domestic violence and abuse.
- A renewed emphasis on training for how to recognise, respond and seek help.
- Commissioning and providing services informed by the views of those who have been affected by, or are at risk of, domestic violence and abuse.
- Appropriate partnership networks to increase multi-agency recognition and responses to domestic violence.

Strand 4: Support

This reflects the importance of providing support for victims of domestic and/or sexual violence and abuse. Support can include educational support services, housing support, outreach and advocacy services and improving access to more specialist psychological interventions.

Priorities for this strand include:

- Provision of appropriate outreach and advisory services for victims, with consideration of individual needs.

- Evaluation of the provision of emergency housing support based on emerging and complex needs.
- Recognising and addressing the emotional and psychological needs of victims in order to improve outcomes.

Strand 5: Protection and justice

This strand focuses on continually improving the protection and justice available to victims of violence and abuse and their families, including both civil and criminal justice.

Priorities for this strand include:

- Focused protection, support and information being available to all victims throughout their engagement with the Justice System.
- Ongoing assessment of the capacity of the justice system to respond to current, new and emerging issues.
- Development and delivery of initiatives and interventions based on best practice to effectively address harmful, violent and abusive behaviour.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Homelessness Strategy Northern Ireland, 2017-2022¹¹

The Sanctuary Scheme is also consistent with the NIHE's obligations and policy direction.

The Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland is structured around the vision 'ending homelessness together' and aligns with the draft Programme for Government (PFG) outcome 'we care for others and help those in need.' At a high level, the Strategy aims to prevent homelessness and ensure that those experiencing homelessness are supported to find suitable accommodation. Additionally, the Strategy aims to ensure a collaborative, inter-agency approach to ending homelessness.

The Strategy contains numerous elements which pertain to domestic abuse and is thus relevant to this project. Firstly, the document outlines that spending on homelessness services accounts for 38% of the programme grant and delivers 22% of the Supporting People support units. These services provide support to single homeless people, homeless families, people at risk of homelessness due to addictions and people facing homelessness due to domestic violence and abuse.

Additionally, a review of the Strategy outlines progress against actions concerning domestic abuse issues, all of which have been completed. This includes continuing supporting the Domestic Abuse Helpline, supporting the MARAC process, rolling out the Sanctuary Scheme and conducting a review of refuge provision.

A related document, the Chronic Homelessness Action Plan¹² highlights that an individual would be regarded as chronically homeless if they have experienced more than one episode of homelessness within the last 12 months or they have had multiple (3 or more) placements or exclusions from temporary accommodation during the last 12 months. Additionally, two of the following criteria must apply:

¹¹ <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Homelessness/homelessness-strategy-northern-ireland-2017-2022.aspx?ext=.>

¹² <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Chronic-homelessness/Chronic-Homelessness-Action-Plan.aspx>

- They are an individual with mental health problems;
- They are an individual with addictions e.g. drug or alcohol addictions;
- They are an individual that has engaged in street activity (including rough sleeping, street drinking, or begging) within the last 3 months;
- They are an individual who has experienced or is at risk of violence/abuse;
- They are an individual who has left prison or youth custody within the last 12 months;
- They are an individual who was defined as a 'looked after' child.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive, *The Way Home: Homelessness response to COVID-19, 2020*¹³

A recent publication from NIHE addresses the changes in experiences of homelessness due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This demonstrates that the number of presentations due to domestic abuse has dramatically increased during the COVID-19 period. Moreover, it posits that these figures are likely to continue to rise as it is assumed that some victims of domestic abuse may have felt prohibited from moving during lockdown. Indeed, as lockdown restrictions have eased, homeless presentations due to domestic abuse have concurrently increased.

Additionally, domestic abuse helplines have noted that incidents have become more frequent, more severe and more dangerous during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have also noted that a perceived loss of control can be a trigger for abusive behaviour. Given that perpetrators may have been able to exert greater control during lockdown, this may be threatened as restrictions ease which would lead to a further spike in domestic abuse and subsequent increase in homeless presentations.

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), *Domestic Abuse Corporate Policy, 2018*¹⁴

The PSNI has a corporate policy which provides guidance for how police officers should respond to, report and investigate domestic incidents. The PSNI is committed to a multi-agency response to domestic abuse which operates within an ethos that considers domestic violence and/or abuse within the family home as unacceptable.

In line with its multi-agency approach, the PSNI also upholds a number of joint agency documents in responding to domestic abuse, including:

- The Domestic Violence and Abuse disclosure scheme (DVADS): this allows the PSNI to better manage risk to share relevant information about domestic abuse history with a third party better placed to safeguard the individual.
- PSNI/Public Prosecution Service (PPS) Service Level Agreement for the investigation, management and prosecution of Domestic Violence and abuse cases.
- Domestic Abuse- a Joint Response within the Defence Community Service Level Agreement for the Management of Civil Orders made under the Family Homes and Domestic Violence (NI) Order 1998.

¹³ [https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Homelessness/homelessness-reset-plan-the-way-home.aspx?ext=.](https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Homelessness/homelessness-reset-plan-the-way-home.aspx?ext=)

¹⁴ <https://www.psnipolice.uk/globalassets/advice--information/our-publications/policies-and-service-procedures/domestic-abuse-190418.pdf>

- Partnership Agreement between the PSNI and Women's Aid

3 Secondary Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents the available data on the incidence of crimes with a domestic abuse motivation in Northern Ireland, as well as UK-wide figures on domestic and sexual abuse from police statistics and Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference meetings (MARACs). MARAC data for Northern Ireland is also presented, including the incidence of those who have been identified as high risk of current or future violence, by overall referrals and broken down by subgroups. An overview of public perceptions of coercive control as captured by the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey is also included.

Incidence of domestic abuse

The table below provides an overview of the statistics relating to domestic abuse crimes recorded between April 2020 and March 2021, compared to the previous 12-month period. The number of domestic abuse crimes rose by 408 in this period, compared to same 12 months in the previous year.

Table 1. Police recorded domestic abuse crimes by crime type

	Domestic Abuse Crimes Recorded			
	April '19-Mar'20	April '20-Mar'21	change	% change
Violence against the person offences	13,932	14,501	569	4.1
<i>Homicide</i>	5	9	4	-
<i>Violence with injury (including death or serious injury by unlawful driving)</i>	4,340	4,474	134	3.1
<i>Violence without injury</i>	5,988	6,091	103	1.7
<i>Harassment</i>	3,599	3,927	328	9.1
Sexual offences	670	742	72	10.7
Theft (including burglary)	930	905	-25	-2.7
Criminal damage	2,029	1,745	-284	-14.0
Breach of non-molestation order	708	732	24	3.4
All other offences	359	411	52	14.5
Total crime (domestic abuse motivation)	18,628	19,036	408	2.2

Source: [PSNI Statistics Branch](#)

It is important to note that there is a difference between a domestic abuse incident and a domestic abuse crime¹⁵, as reported by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Not all incidents will result in the recording of a crime, as what happened during an incident may not meet the criteria for it to be recorded as a crime¹⁶. Table 2 overleaf shows the number of domestic crime incidents per local government district for the period between April 2020 and March 2020. Please note that the figures for domestic

¹⁵ 'Incident' means an incident anywhere and not confined to the home of one of the partners/family members.

¹⁶ <https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics/2020-21/q4/domestic-abuse-bulletin-mar-21.pdf>

abuse crimes are included in the overall figures for domestic abuse incidents (the figure of 18,628 crimes is included within the overall figure of 31,817 total incidents).

While there was a decrease of 621 of domestic abuse incidents (see Table 2 overleaf) compared to the previous 12 months, domestic abuse crimes rose by 408 in the same period (see Table 1).

Table 2 shows that Belfast has the highest level of domestic abuse incidents, followed by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon which is aligned with census data which indicates that Belfast and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon have the highest resident counts in Northern Ireland, respectively¹⁷.

Table 2. Police recorded domestic abuse incidents by local government district (LGD)

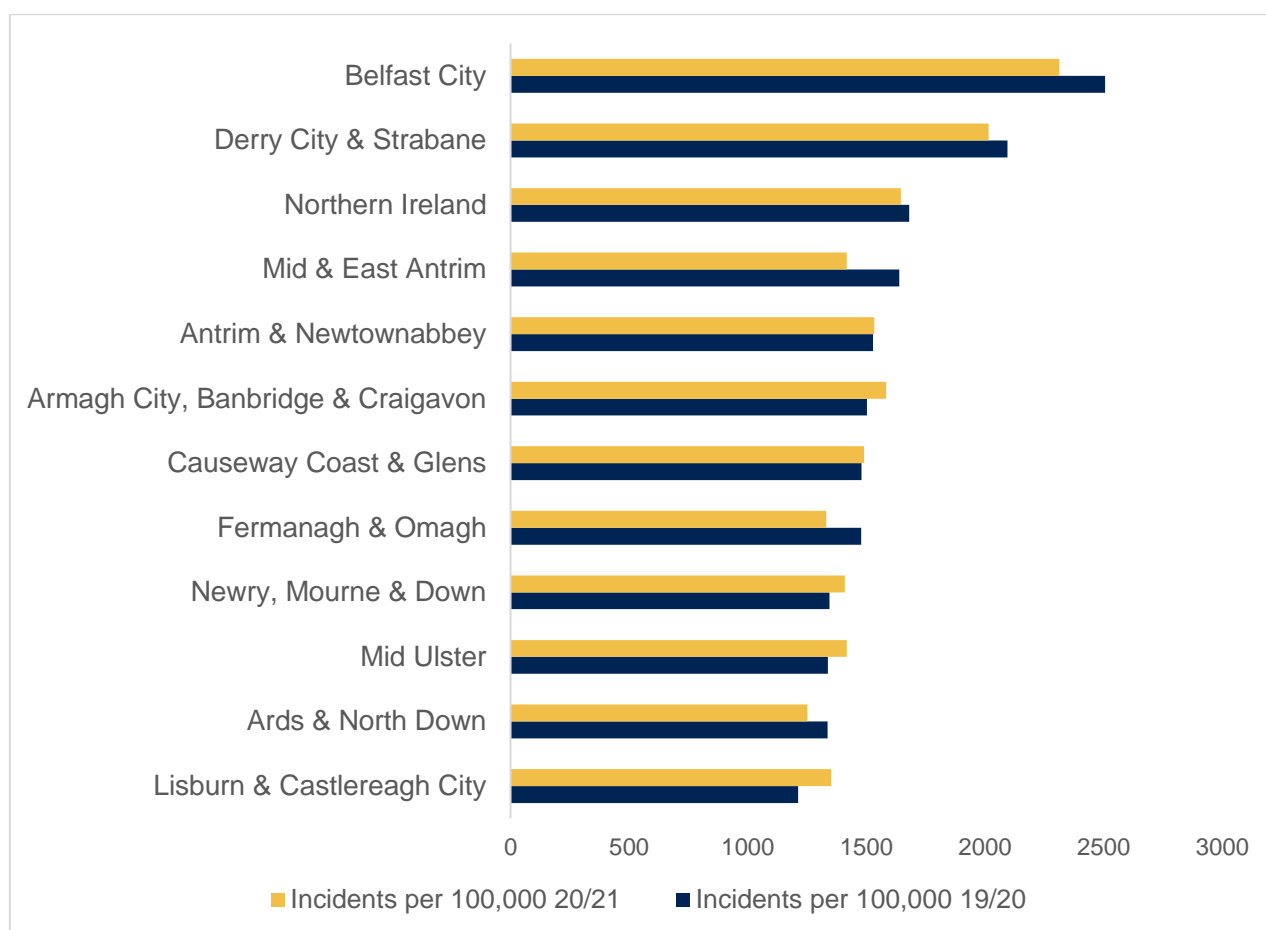
LGD	Domestic Abuse Incidents			
	April '19- Mar'20	April '20- Mar'21	change	% change
Antrim & Newtownabbey	2,193	2,205	12	0.5
Ards & North Down	2,161	2,028	-133	6.2
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	3,248	3,442	194	6.0
Belfast City	8,610	7,926	-684	7.9
Causeway Coast & Glens	2,144	2,160	16	0.7
Derry City & Strabane	3,170	3,046	-124	3.9
Fermanagh & Omagh	1,736	1,562	-174	10.0
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	1,771	1,980	209	16.4
Mid & East Antrim	2,283	2,176	-107	4.7
Mid Ulster	2,063	2,111	48	2.3
Newry, Mourne & Down	2,438	2,560	122	5.0
Northern Ireland	31,817	31,196	-621	2.0

Source: [PSNI Statistics Branch](#)

As in Figure 1 below, when the number of incidents is considered on a population basis, as expected the rate of incidents in urban areas such as Belfast City and Derry City are higher than in rural areas such as Fermanagh and Omagh.

¹⁷ NINIS, NISRA (2014)

Figure 1. Police recorded domestic abuse incidents by local government district (LGD) and per 100,000 of population



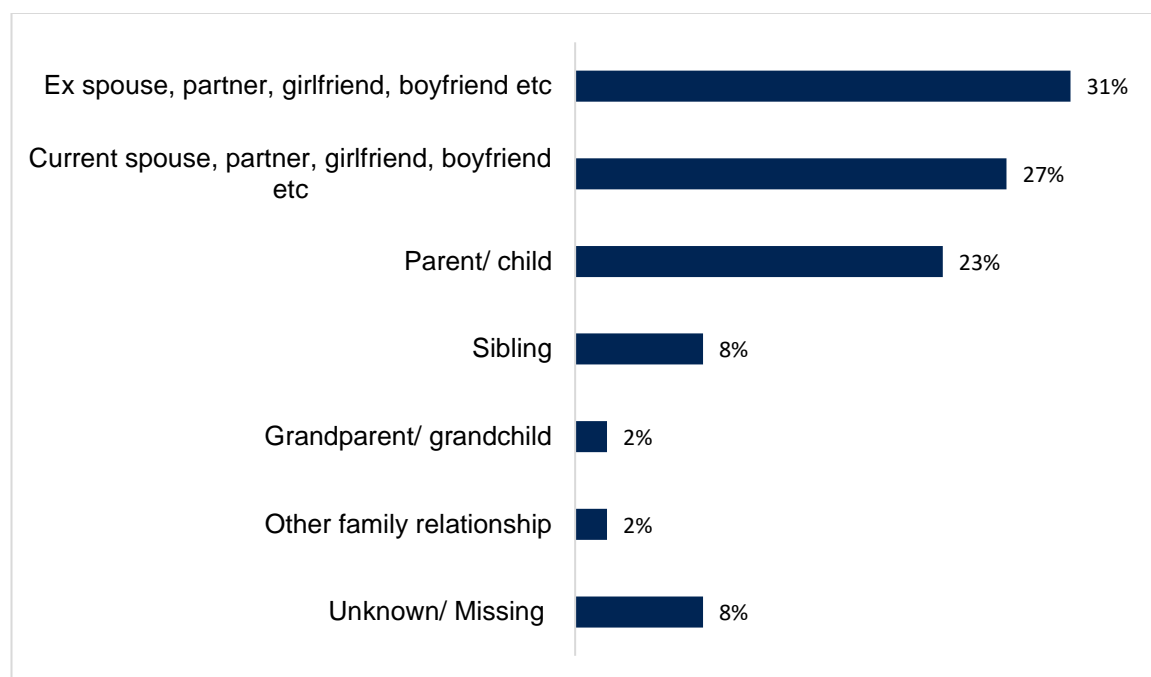
Source: PSNI / NISRA

Offender characteristics & Nature of relationship

The majority of domestic abuse offenders are male (85%), while a much smaller proportion are female (14%)¹⁸. Approximately nine in ten offenders are over 18 years old (up to 5% are under 18). Offenders are more likely to be an ex-spouse or partner of a victim (31%) or a current spouse or partner of a victim (27%). Almost one quarter of the relationships between offenders and victims related to a parent and child relationship in 2018-19. Figure 1 overleaf provides a breakdown of the nature of the relationships between the victim and the offender for the 2018-19 period.

¹⁸ <https://www.psnipolice.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics/2018-19/domestic-abuse-incidents-and-crimes-in-northern-ireland-2004-05-to-2018-19.pdf>

Figure 2. Nature of relationship between victim and offender, 2018/19



Source: [Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2018/19. Annual Bulletin – November 2019.](#)

Victims of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland

According to Women's Aid, 5,536 women and 5,143 children have accessed outreach support in 2019/20. 561 women and 316 children have stayed in Women's Aid refuges. 276 women were unable to access refuge in this period as it was full¹⁹. Of those who accessed Women's Aid support services, 36 women in refuge were pregnant, while 205 women who accessed outreach support were pregnant. 11 babies were born in refuge during 2019/20. The same report highlighted that domestic violence crime accounted for 17.5% of all crime reports to the PSNI in 2019/20, an increase from 13.4% in 2015-16. Table 3 provides an overview of the women who accessed Women's Aid support services over the past four years of available data²⁰.

Table 3. Women and Children who availed of Women's Aid services, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2018-19, 2019-20

	2015-16	2016-17	2018-19	2019-20
Women who stayed in refuge	738	710	654	561
Children who stayed in refuge	520	568	421	316
Babies born to women in refuge	15	13	10	11
Women who could not access refuge as it was full	267	245	381	276
Women who accessed outreach support	6,212	7,030	6,308	5,536
Children who accessed outreach support	7,296	7,878	5,966	5,143
% of women in services over 55 years old	10%	7%	7%	8%
% of women in services under 25 years old	18%	17%	18%	16%
Domestic violence as % of all crime reported to PSNI	13.4%	14.2%	16%	17.5%

¹⁹ <https://www.womensaidni.org/assets/uploads/2020/12/Final-Womens-Aid-Annual-Report-2019-20.pdf>

²⁰ Please note, an annual report for 2017-2018 was not available.

Sources: Women's Aid Annual reports: [2015-16](#), [2016-17](#), [2018-19](#), [2019-20](#).

Table 4 below details the number of women from ethnic minorities who accessed Women's Aid services in 2019/20.

Table 4. Black and minority ethnic women who accessed Women's Aid support service, 2019/20

	In Refuge	Received Outreach support
Black and Minority Ethnic Women	100	291
Women from the travelling community	20	-
Women with no recourse to public funds	39	-
Children with no recourse to public funds	23	-

Source: [Women's Aid Annual Report 2019-20](#).

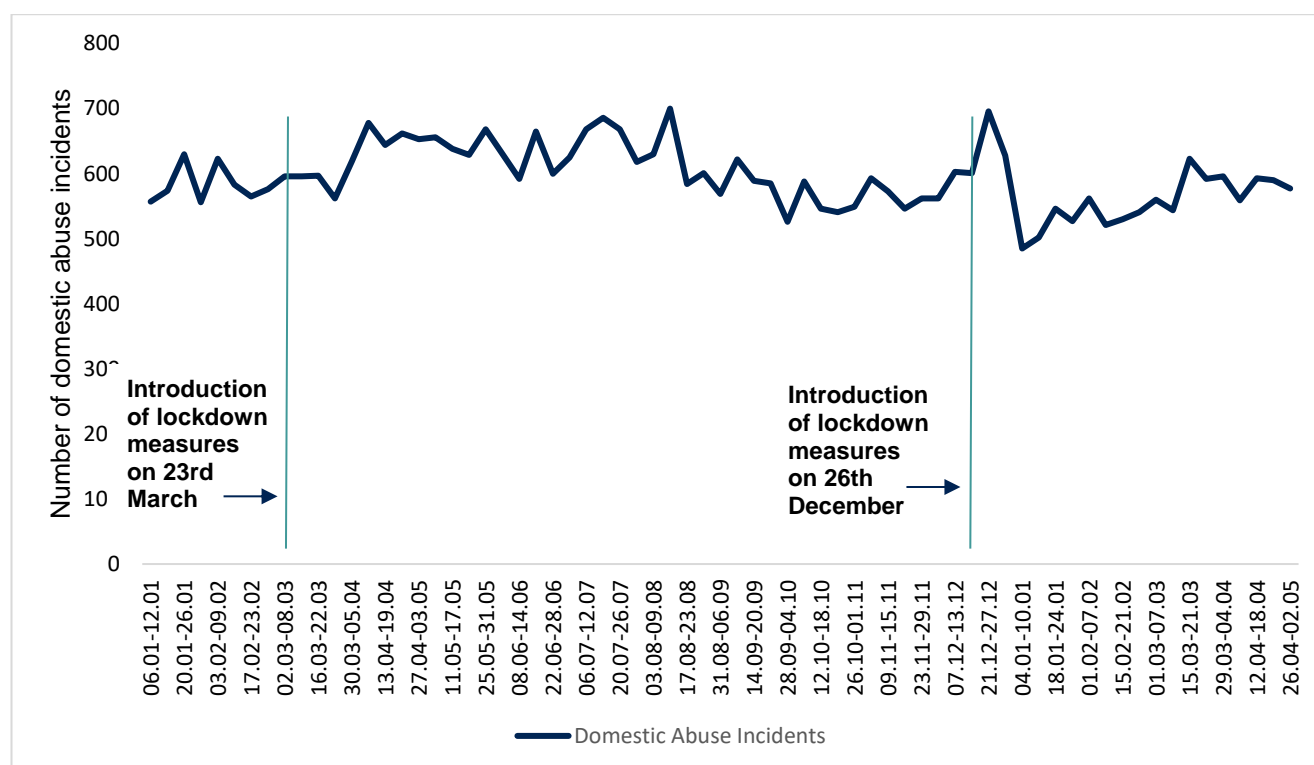
Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

While it is difficult to disentangle the many complex factors contributing to crimes with a domestic abuse motivation, trend data in relation to domestic abuse in Northern Ireland shows that domestic abuse crimes rose to 20.2% of all police recorded crime during 2020/21, compared with 17.5% during the previous 12 months. The proportion of domestic abuse crime in 2020/21 is the highest since the domestic abuse data series began in 2004/05.

Whilst, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the Covid-19 pandemic has directly impacted levels of domestic abuse crimes in Northern Ireland, domestic abuse incidents were higher in April 2020 (+291) and May 2020 (+255) compared to the same months in 2019. This rise in incidents occurred shortly after lockdown measures were introduced in Northern Ireland in March and December 2020²¹. Figure 2 overleaf shows the rise in weekly domestic abuse incidents after 23rd March 2020 compared to the beginning of the same year (6th January 2020). A sharp rise in incidents can also be seen after the introduction of lockdown measures on 26th December 2020.

²¹ Ibid.

Figure 3. Weekly domestic abuse incidents from 6th January 2020, including weekly domestic abuse incidents after the introduction of lockdown measures on 23rd March 2020



Source: [PSNI Statistics Branch](#)

Domestic abuse figures in other UK regions

In the year ending March 2020, approximately 2.3 million adults in England and Wales (aged 16 to 74 years) experienced domestic abuse in the previous year. This figure was not significantly different from the previous year²². According to the Office for National Statistics this equates to around a 5% prevalence rate²³. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) covers crimes which are not reported to the police (which explains why the above figure is larger than the figures in Table 5). Domestic abuse measured by the CSEW combines non-sexual abuse, sexual assault and stalking.

²² Crime Survey for England and Wales (year ending March 2020).

²³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseprevalenceandtrendsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020>

Table 5. Domestic abuse prevalence, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 – as recorded by the police

	Domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes	Domestic abuse related crimes only	Change from previous year
England and Wales ²⁴	1,288,018	758,941	+9%

In Scotland, the number of charges with a domestic abuse motivation, reported to the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service have remained around the 30,000 mark. As shown in table 6, however, the number of charges reported in 2019-20 is the highest figure since 2015-16.

Table 6. Total charges reported with a domestic abuse identifier, by year

Year of Report	Total charges reported
2013-14	36,552
2014-15	36,667
2015-16	34,420
2016-17	30,630
2017-18	30,481
2018-19	29,054
2019-20	30,718

Source: [Domestic Abuse and stalking Charges in Scotland 2019-20. Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service](#)

Similar to Northern Ireland, more than three quarters of individuals accused of domestic abuse in Scotland are male (88%). In 2019-20, the majority of accused were between 31-40 years old (34%) and 21-30 years old (33%).

MARAC data – United Kingdom

A MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is a meeting where information is shared on victims considered to be at the highest risk of serious harm as a result of domestic abuse.

Representatives from various organisations will attend these meetings, including for example, the police and health and social care agencies. Across the UK, there are approximately 290 Maracs who submit data to SafeLives (a charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse) on a quarterly basis²⁵. The following table provides an overview of the most recent published MARAC data for the whole of the UK.

²⁴ Excluding Greater Manchester Police. Issues with data supply meant their data were not included in the ONS Domestic abuse prevalence and trends publication for England and Wales.

²⁵ <https://safelives.org.uk/practice-support/resources-marac-meetings/latest-marac-data>

Table 7. Latest UK MARAC data (including England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland)

Overview	Previous Quarter	Latest Quarter
	12 months 01/01/2020 to 31/12/2020	12 months 01/04/2020 to 31/03/2021
Total number of MARACs who submitted data	292	293
Number of cases seen at these MARACs	111,913	113,538
Year-on-year change in number of cases	+9%	+8%
Number of children	139,249	141,024
Number of cases per 10,000 adult females	44	44
% of repeat cases seen at these MARACs	32%	33%
% if partner agency referrals to these MARACs	35%	35%

Source: [SafeLives](#)

According to the above UK data for all MARACs, more than ten percent of all cases discussed related to cases where the victim is black, Asian or racially minoritised. Table 8 provides an overview of the proportion of cases based on diverse subgroups. There have been no significant changes in these figures between the previous quarter and the latest quarter.

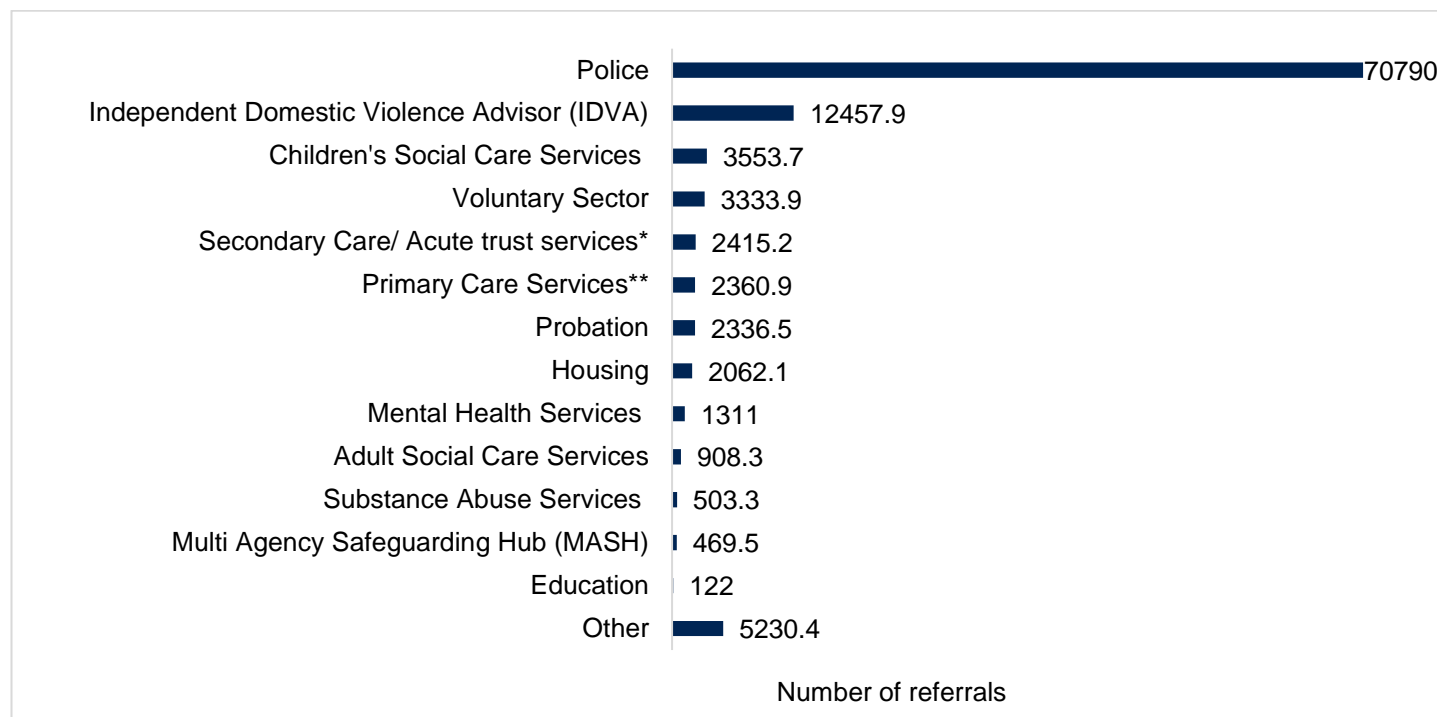
Table 8. Latest UK MARAC data by diversity subgroup

	Previous Quarter	Latest Quarter
	12 months 01/01/2020 to 31/12/2020	12 months 01/04/2020 to 31/03/2021
% of these cases where the victim is Black, Asian or racially minoritised	16.1%	16.6%
% of these cases where the victim is LGBT+	1.3%	1.4%
% of these cases where the victim has a disability	7.2%	7.5%
% of these cases where the victim is a male	5.8%	5.9%

Source: [SafeLives](#)

The below chart shows the MARAC referral routes for England and Wales, for the year ending March 2021. Of the 107,855 cases referred to MARACs, the largest proportion of referrals were made by the police (65.6%), followed by independent domestic abuse advisors (11.6%), Children's Social Care Services (3.3%) and the Voluntary Sector (3.1%).

Figure 4. Sources of referrals to MARACs for England and Wales, year ending March 2021²⁶



*Includes all hospital-based services such as Accident & Emergency, Obstetrics', Elderly Medicine and Sexual Health Clinics

** Includes community-based health services such as Midwives, Health Visitors, School Nurses and GPs. This category also includes Dentists, Ophthalmologists and Pharmacists.

Source: [SafeLives latest MARAC](#) dataset England and Wales, 2020/21.

MARAC data – Northern Ireland

According to the latest available MARAC data for Northern Ireland, more cases within the Northern Trust were discussed at MARAC compared to the other regions (see below table). Of the total number of cases discussed between April 2020 and March 2021, around 25% were repeat cases (333). This is slightly lower than the proportion of repeat cases seen at MARACs across the whole of the UK in 2020 (33%), as reported in Table 7.

Table 9. Latest MARAC data by trust area Northern Ireland

	No. of Cases Discussed at MARAC April 2020 – March 2021	No. of repeat cases ²⁷ April 2020 – March 2021
Belfast Trust	303	90
Northern Trust	360	108
Western Trust	308	69
Southern Trust	176	45
South-Eastern Trust	144	21
Total	1,291	333

Source: Public Protection Branch, PSNI

²⁶ The number of MARAC referrals by each source are not presented as whole numbers as referrals can be made by more than one service. For example, one case could be referred by both the police and a health service, and would therefore count as 0.5 of a referral by the police and 0.5 of a referral by the health service. <https://safelives.org.uk/node/2036>

²⁷ Repeat cases are included within the total number of cases discussed.

Table 10 below shows the breakdown of cases discussed at MARAC by diversity subgroup. Of 69 cases where the victim was Black or Minority Ethnic (BME), 29 where victims living in the Northern Trust, 16 lived in the Belfast Trust, 11 in the South-Eastern Trust, 7 in the Southern Trust and 6 in the Western Trust. The proportion of cases discussed at MARAC in Northern Ireland where the victim is LGBT (0.9%) is slightly lower than the wider UK figures for 2020 (1.4%).

A similar proportion of those with a disability are likely to be discussed at MARAC within Northern Ireland (7.6%) compared to the UK as a whole (7.5%). Again, within this subgroup, a higher number of victims were living in the Northern Trust (61) compared to any of the other trust areas (Belfast Trust = 12, Western Trust = 12, Southern Trust = 8, South-Eastern Trust = 5).

Table 10. Latest MARAC data for Northern Ireland by diversity subgroup

	April 2020 – March 2021	% of overall cases discussed
No. of cases where the victim is BME	69	5.3%
No. of cases where the victim is LGBT+	11	0.9%
No. of cases where the victim has a disability	98	7.6%

Source: Public Protection Branch, PSNI

The majority of cases discussed at MARAC in Northern Ireland relate to female victims (see table below), with around 4.5% of the total number of cases discussed being male victims. This is slightly lower than the proportion of male victims for the UK as a whole, reported in table 8 (5.9%).

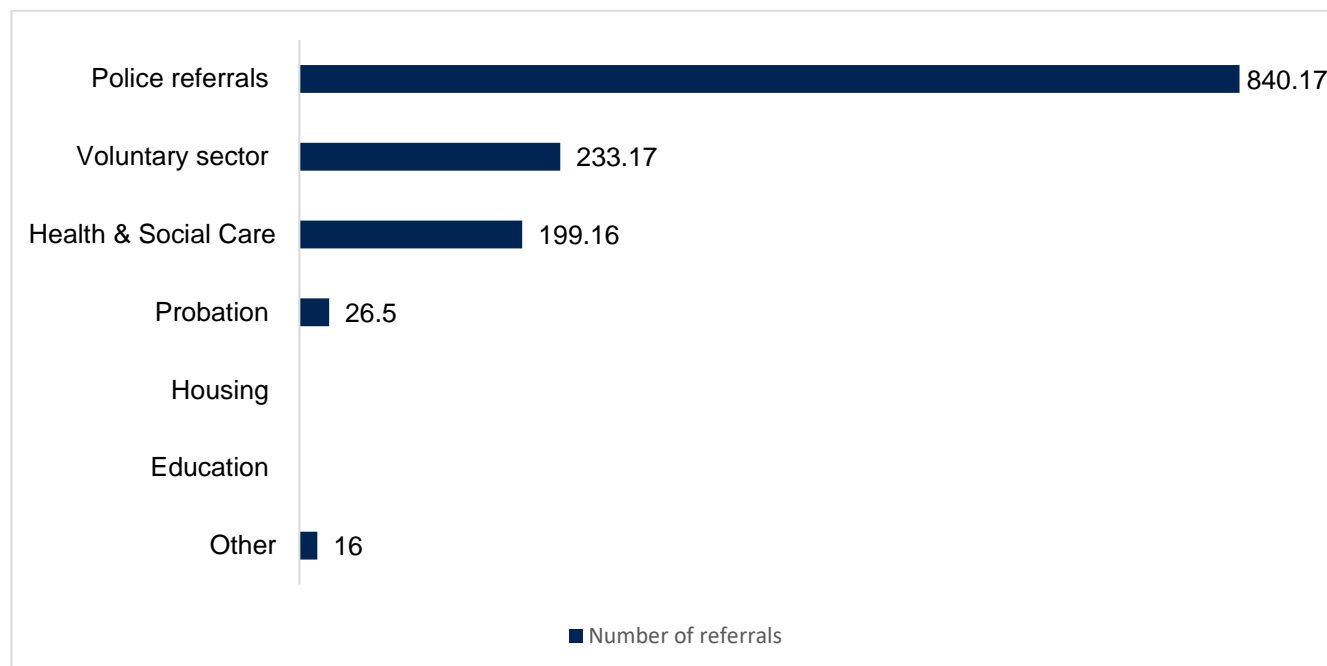
Table 11. Cases discussed at MARAC by gender and Health and Social Care Trust area (NI)

	Female victims April 2020 – March 2021	Male victims April 2020 – March 2021
Belfast Trust	268	15
Northern Trust	354	6
Western Trust	292	16
Southern Trust	171	9
South-Eastern Trust	126	9
Total	1,211	55

Source: Public Protection Branch, PSNI

In line with the data for the whole of the UK, the largest proportion of referrals in Northern Ireland come from the police (see Figure 4 below). In Northern Ireland, the voluntary sector is the second largest source of referrals, closely followed by the Health & Social Care sector.

Figure 5. Sources of referrals to MARAC Northern Ireland, April 2020 – March 2021



Source: Public Protection Branch, PSNI

Table 12 below provides a breakdown of MARAC cases by housing status for April 2020 – March 2021 according to the eight police districts in Northern Ireland. Of the available housing status data for this period, of the known housing status of MARAC cases, the majority are housing by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), followed by other housing associations.

There are a significant number of MARAC cases where the housing status is unknown, for example, of the below data 183 cases across the districts were unknown between April 2020 and March 2021. The “Don’t know” figure for North & West Belfast was proportionately higher than the rest of the regions (88). While there is no available data for South & East Belfast, the below figures for North & West Belfast indicate that much fewer MARAC cases are currently housed by NIHE compared to those in other police districts.

Table 12. MARAC cases by housing status Northern Ireland, April 2020 – March 2021

	NIHE	Housing Assoc.	Private Landlord	Mortgaged	Living with family/friends	Other	Don't know
District A (North & West Belfast)	10	61	2	1	4	25	88
District B ²⁸ (South & East Belfast)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
District C (Bangor & Ards, C'Reagh & Down)	83	15	17	13	8	5	5
District D (Antrim, Carrick, N'Abbey)	62	24	30	36	20	4	9
District E ²⁹ (C'avon, B'bridge, Armagh, Newry)	35	6					50
District F (E'skillen & Omagh, C'town & Dungannon)	23	2	3	1	7	3	10
District G ³⁰ (Foyle, Strabane, L'vady, Magherafelt)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
District H (Coleraine, Moyle, B'money, Ballymena & Larne)	62	14	29	13	26	11	21
Total	379	122	81	64	65	48	183

Source: Public Protection Branch, PSNI

Perceptions of coercive control

Coercive control is a type of domestic abuse which can be known as psychological or emotional abuse, indirect abuse or emotional torture. It is characterised by behaviour which aims to threaten, intimidate or humiliate a person. It can also take the form of restricting an individual's independence, for example, controlling who an individual can see (such as friends or family) or repeatedly putting someone down. Research has found that this kind of abuse is associated with future violence³¹.

The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey 2020, carried out by Ipsos, found that more than half of participants had heard of the term coercive control (63%). A fifth (20%) had heard of the term but were unsure as to what it means and the remaining 17% had not heard of the term or did not know.

Participants aged 18-24 were more likely to indicate that they had not heard of the term (33%) or that they had heard of the term but were unsure of what it meant (25%), while those in older age groups were

²⁸ No available data for District B

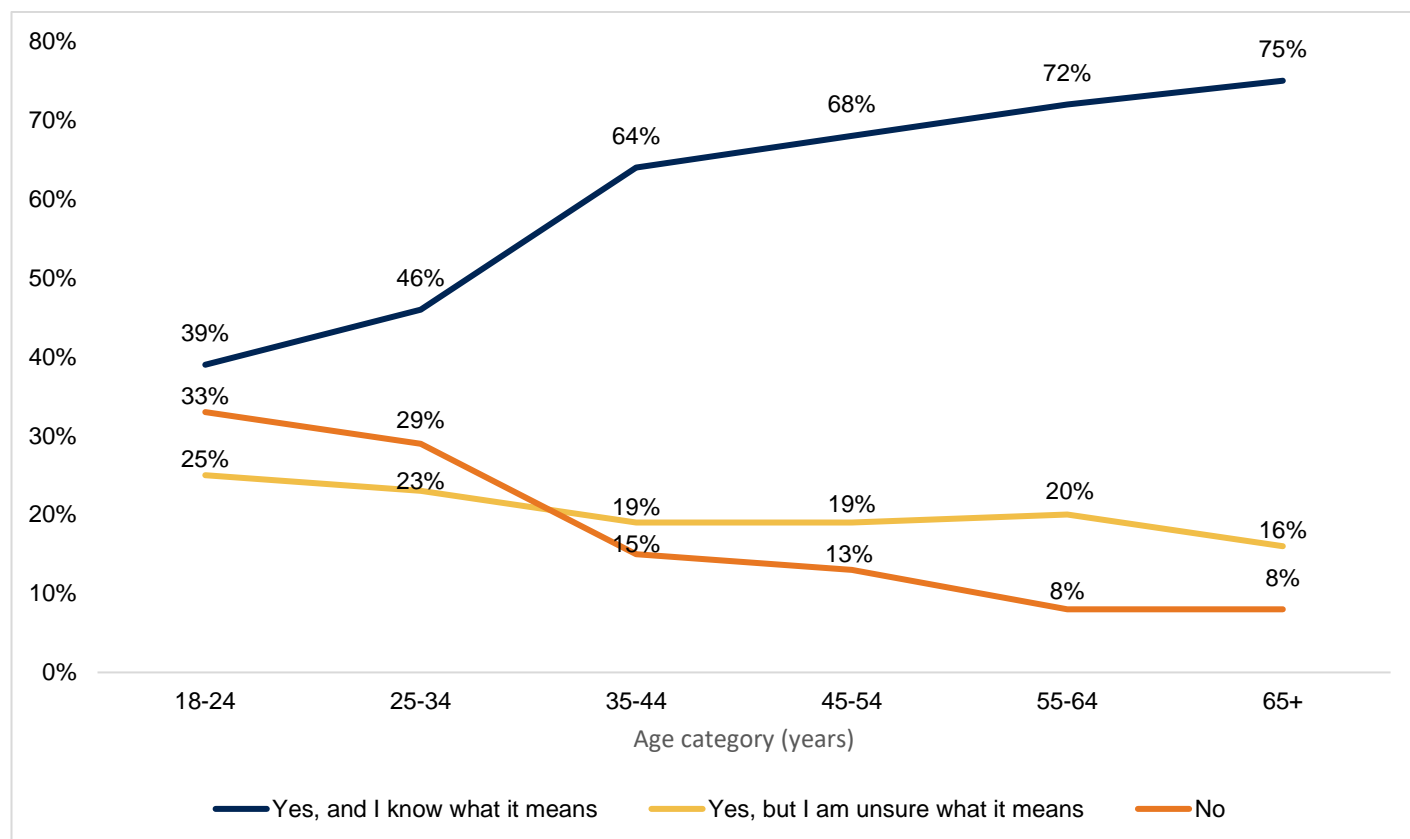
²⁹ No available data after 16/09/20

³⁰ No available data after 15/12/15

³¹ Public Understanding of Coercive Control. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/sites/default/files/2021-06/update141.pdf>

more likely to have heard the term and know what it meant. Figure 5 below provides an overview of the awareness of coercive control by age group.

Figure 6. Awareness of coercive control, by age group



Source: [Northern Ireland Life and Times](#) (NILT) 2020 data.

No differences in awareness were found for men and women, with 62% of males and 63% of females being aware of the term and knowing what it meant. The above data, however, indicates that those in younger age groups have a lack of understanding of what coercive control is.

Economic and social costs of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse has significant economic consequences³², the estimated cost of domestic abuse in the UK to public services was £3.85 billion³³. The costs associated with domestic and sexual abuse are also costly to the Northern Ireland economy and has been estimated to be approximately £1bn per annum. For the year 2011/12 the cost of domestic abuse has been estimated to be £674.3m, while the cost of sexual violence and abuse (excluding child victims of rape and sexual assault) in the same year was estimated to be £257.3m³⁴. The estimated cost of health and social care support in Northern Ireland as a result of domestic abuse was approximately £50.2 million for the 2011/12 period³⁵.

³² Cleaver, K., Maras, P., Oram, C. and McCallum, K. (2019) A review of UK based multi-agency approaches to early intervention in domestic abuse: Lessons to be learnt from existing evaluation studies. *Aggression & Violent Behavior*. V. 46 (2019), pp. 140-155.

³³ Walby, S. 2009. The costs of domestic violence, 2009 update.

³⁴ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/mid-term-review-dsva-strategy.PDF>

³⁵ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/stopping-domestic-sexual-violence-ni.pdf>

In the year 2018/19, PSNI figures show 31,682 reported incidents and more than 16,000 domestic abuse recorded crimes. Using the unit cost from a Home Office report³⁶, this has been estimated to equate to an annual cost in Northern Ireland of between £1.077m and £550m.

Table 13 below provides estimates of the annual cost of domestic and sexual violence in Northern Ireland, based on Home Office unit costs broken down by offence type.

Table 13. Estimates of annual cost of domestic and sexual violence in Northern Ireland

Offence type in NI	Annual costs by offence (estimate)
Violence with injury	£327.4m
Violence without injury	£171.0m
Harassment	£49.4m
Rape	£26.3m
Homicide	£8.8m
Other sexual offences	£6.1m
Theft	£1.3m
Criminal damage	£2.3m
Robbery	£0.2m
Total (excluding non-molestation order enforcement and other offences). Includes health and social care, policing costs and wider costs such as loss of income	>£592.9m

Source: [Mid-term review of the Stopping Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy, 2020](#)

The annual cost of MARAC to the PSNI is approximately £295,000, which includes staffing costs³⁷.

Sanctuary Scheme Northern Ireland – service user data

For the 10-year period between 2011 and 2021, there is information available relating to 132 service users of the Sanctuary Scheme in Northern Ireland. The following table provides a breakdown of service users who have availed of the Sanctuary Scheme by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust area. These figures include all those who are awaiting home inspection through to those who have had works ordered or completed following inspection. Based on the available data, more than a quarter (30%) of those who have availed of the Sanctuary Scheme, have done so between January 2020 and June 2021 (39 of a total of 132). It is also notable that in recent years there have been no service users from the Southern Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area. This is most likely due to the fact that the Ards and North Down Policing and Community Safety Partnership, which covers a large proportion of the Trust area, deliver a similar home security scheme which is funded through the Department for Justice (DoJ).

³⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf

³⁷ Public Protection Branch, PSNI

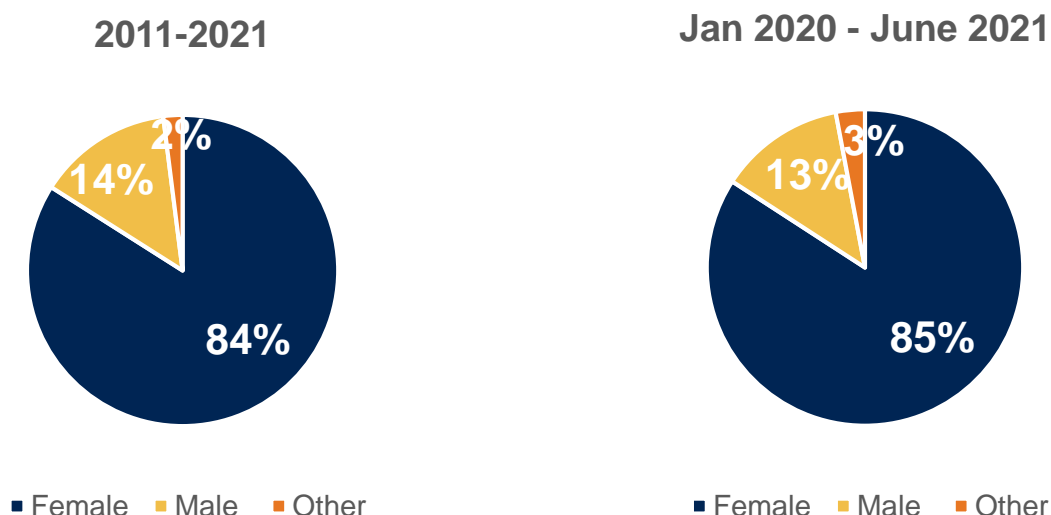
Table 14. Sanctuary Scheme service users by trust area, Northern Ireland

	Total no. of Sanctuary Scheme users 2011 - 2021	No. of Sanctuary Scheme users Jan 2020 – June 2021
Belfast Trust	9	7
Northern Trust	54	14
Western Trust	62	18
Southern Trust	6	-
South-Eastern Trust	1	-
Total	132	39

Source: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

In line with Northern Ireland statistics on domestic abuse victims, which shows that 85% of victims are female, the majority of Sanctuary Scheme service users are female (84%) and more recently between January 2020 and June 2021 (85%) were also female.

Figures 7 & 8. Sanctuary Scheme service users by gender, Northern Ireland



Source: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

The Sanctuary Scheme is operated on a 4-Tier basis. At Tier 1 advice and information is given to the victim, up to Tier 4, which may include installation of CCTV, a safe room and house alarm systems. Following home inspections (by Crime Prevention Officers), a number of safety measures can be put in place for service users. An overview of the services provided to Sanctuary Scheme service users is provided below (Table 15).

Table 15. Security measures ordered for Sanctuary Scheme service users, Jan 2020 – June 2021

	No. of measures requested across total no. of service users ³⁸
Door inspections/ replacements	41
4-Tier security	34
Inspection requested	28
Security lights/ Sensor lights	19
Lock changes/ repairs	18
Seal letterbox/ Provide outdoor letterbox	11
Installation of 'Safe room'/ 'Sanctuary room'	9
Window inspection/ replacement	4
Other	23

The available data on Sanctuary Scheme data on service users, highlights that the most common referrals are 4-tier referrals, door inspections or replacements, the installation of sensor lights and lock replacements. For measures which fall into the 'other' category, some examples include smoke alarms and heightened fences, while the remainder had no detail relating to specific measures required.

³⁸ Please note that the total number of measures requested exceeds the total number of service users as a service user may have had multiple works completed. Those who have been noted to receive a 4-tier referral, have also had other services recommended on inspection.

4 Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of published literature relating to best practice in the provision of sanctuary schemes for victims of domestic abuse. Examples of specific initiatives are provided as well as overarching characteristics of schemes which have contributed to positive outcomes for individuals and families who have experienced domestic abuse.

Methodology

The aim of the rapid literature review was to examine the evidence base relating to best practice in the provision of sanctuary schemes in the UK, Ireland and beyond.

4.1.1 Search strategy

A strategic search strategy was conducted by accessing a number of relevant search engines, including:

- Social Care Institute for Excellence Library;
- Cochrane Library;
- IngentaConnect;
- Google Scholar;
- Policy Research Bureau; and
- Jstor.

A combination of the following search terms were used:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Domestic Abuse/Violence | • Effectiv* / Eval* / best practice |
| • Intimate Partner violence | |
| • Sanctuary; | • Victim/ survivor |
| • Safe room / refuge /security | • Target hardening |
| | • Minority / LGBTQ |

Standard search strategies were employed to maximise the possible results from each search. For example, the above keywords were combined with search commands “AND” and “OR”. A snowballing approach was also used to source relevant literature within the references of key papers. In addition to the literature which was retrieved via the above search engines, relevant grey literature was also retrieved from government and voluntary organisations’ websites.

Need for Sanctuary Schemes

Domestic Abuse is recognised as a major contributing factor to homelessness across the UK³⁹. An All Party Parliamentary report⁴⁰ in the UK highlighted that found that domestic abuse was the cause of homelessness for 20% of homeless women and another study which found that 33% of residents in hostels stated that domestic abuse contributed to them becoming homeless. Data from the NIHE

³⁹ Netto, G., Pawson, H. and Sharp, C. (2009) Preventing Homelessness due to Domestic Violence: Providing a Safe Space or closing the Door to New Possibilities. Social Policy Administration V.43 Issue 7. Dec. 2009.

⁴⁰ An Inquiry into scaling up Housing First in England. All Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness (2012).

Homelessness Strategy shows that in 2015/16, 845 people presented as homeless due to domestic abuse.

There is a growing body of literature highlighting the need to provide alternative provision to shelters and refuges. Whilst shelters are vital, there is a need to provide multiple pathways to secure stable and safe housing⁴¹. Prenzler and Fardell (2017)⁴² noted that well designed home security programmes can negate the need for shelters.

Multi-agency Working

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidance⁴³ for the delivery of sanctuary schemes in the UK note that it is a multi-agency scheme. A common theme emerging from the literature is the need for a co-ordinated approach in the delivery of sanctuary schemes from a number of different agencies, including housing, justice and the voluntary and community sectors. Best practice guidance provided by Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance⁴⁴ notes delivering a Sanctuary Scheme service is most effective when it is delivered as multi-agency initiative.

A review of the literature relating to multi-agency approaches to domestic abuse found that overall multi-agency approaches had more impact and were more sustainable particularly when voluntary sector agencies were involved⁴⁵.

Referral Processes and Awareness

A review of policy and procedure documents and evaluation reports indicated that it is common for Sanctuary Schemes to have an open referral system, whereby referrals can be made from a wide range of agencies. An evaluation of Sanctuary Schemes in Cambridgeshire and Stockton⁴⁶ noted that referrals can come from a range of sources including individuals. However, most referrals were made by specialist domestic abuse agencies, social services and police. One evaluation of a scheme in Cardiff noted that whilst it is important for a wide range of access points to allow partner agencies to refer into the scheme self-referral was impractical and resource intensive, as it left the scheme open to abuse.⁴⁷

Awareness of a scheme is clearly key to the referral process, it is also partly linked to the extent to which multi-agency is in place and is effective, as the more agencies that are involved the greater chance there is of raising awareness of the scheme.

Tenure

Guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG, England)⁴⁸, noted that sanctuary schemes should not be limited to local authority or housing association tenants, but should also be available for those who own their home or those who live in the private rented sector. The

⁴¹ Whole Housing Approach Evaluation. Year 1 Report. (2020). Whole Housing Approach Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.

⁴² Prenzler, T. & Fardell, L. (2017). Situational prevention of domestic violence: A review of security based programs. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*. 34. (2017) 51-58.

⁴³ Sanctuary Schemes for Households at Risk of Domestic Violence, Practice Guide for agencies developing and delivering Sanctuary Schemes. Department of Communities and Local Government (2010)

⁴⁴ https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/media/10661/15_-wha-sanctuary-scheme.pdf

⁴⁵ Cleaver, K., Maras, P., Oram, C. and McCallum, K. (2019) A review of UK based multi-agency approaches to early intervention in domestic abuse: Lessons to be learnt from existing evaluation studies . *Aggression & Violent Behavior*. V. 46 (2019), pp. 140-155.

⁴⁶ Whole Housing Approach Evaluation. Year 1 Report. (2020). Whole Housing Approach Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.

⁴⁷ Robinson, A., Tregida, J., Rees, A. and Roberts, J. (2010). Final Evaluation Report on the Cardiff HomeSafe Project (2010)

⁴⁸ Options for Setting up a Sanctuary Scheme. Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006.

guidance also highlights that for private tenancies, the permission of the landlord is required before any work is undertaken.

A number of the schemes identified in the review were open to residents of different tenures. The Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) Programme provides services to individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse across New South Wales from a range of tenures, owners and private rented. In addition to security measures such as locks and security lighting the programme also provide personal duress alarms. An evaluation of the programme⁴⁹ found that the programme allowed service users to remain at home, maintain stable housing and to feel safer in their own home. However it was not clear the extent to which the programme resulted in reduced police call-outs or damage to property.

A review of other schemes across the UK also identified services that were open to residents from a range of tenures, including Local Authority Social Housing, Housing Association, Private Rented Sector and Owner Occupied Sector (e.g. Dartford Borough Council, Tamworth Council). An evaluation of a scheme in Cardiff noted that the greatest barrier to widening out the service to other tenures (including Housing Associations) was funding. The scheme is currently funded by the local authority and is only available to Council tenants⁵⁰.

It has been noted that the provision of support for those in the private rented sector and owner occupied homes is more complex and there is a need to undertake further research into tenure type - beyond social housing - to develop effective responses to domestic abuse⁵¹.

Minority Groups

One Australian study⁵² noted the need for culturally appropriate schemes specifically for indigenous Australian women. It was noted that some cultures are more tolerant of domestic abuse than others and that referral agents and staff should be aware of that, the harm caused by domestic abuse is more likely to be downplayed by service users from some cultures.

The evaluation of the Sanctuary Scheme in Cardiff also noted that it was important for the service to be culturally sensitive, in order to be more accessible to women from ethnic minority groups. This scheme overcame barriers to BAME women by employing a BAME, female member of staff. Feedback, from this scheme suggested that having a female complete the installation of the security equipment created a sense of trust particularly with vulnerable service users.

A study by Safelives⁵³ in England found that members of the LGBT+ community are more likely to experience domestic abuse than others and also experience additional barriers to accessing support services. The report specifically notes that members of the LGBT+ should be offered the choice to stay safely in their own homes. The option of staying safely in their own home is particularly as other LGBT+ support organisations report that many people who are lesbian, gay bisexual or transgender experience significant barriers when accessing domestic abuse services⁵⁴. Galop also suggest that most domestic

⁴⁹ Beckenridge, J., Walden, I. Flax, G. (2014) Staying home leaving violence, evaluation final report. Sydney. Gendered Violence Research Network, University of New South Wales.

⁵⁰ Robinson, A., Tregida, J., Rees, A. and Roberts, J. (2010). Final Evaluation Report on the Cardiff HomeSafe Project (2010)

⁵¹ Whole Housing Approach Evaluation. Year 1 Report. (2020). Whole Housing Approach Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.

⁵² Spinney, A. (2012). Home and Safe? Policy and practice innovation to prevent women and children who have experienced family violence .becoming homeless AHURI. Final Report No. 196,

⁵³ Free to Be Safe. LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse. Savelives, 2018.

⁵⁴ Galop 2019. Barriers faced by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender+ People in accessing non-LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Support Services.

abuse support services are not established to support anyone who is not heterosexual, cisgender female and that more staff training is required to build knowledge and capacity to meet the needs of this diverse population. Stonewall⁵⁵ have noted that refuge or emergency accommodation for gay, bisexual or transgendered men is particularly limited.

Funding

A number of the studies noted that the ongoing funding of schemes is an issue. The source and availability of funding can also create limitations for eligibility to Sanctuary Schemes, for example some schemes noted that they could only provide services to Local Authority tenants. A review of the available studies demonstrated that Sanctuary Schemes have been supported through a wide range of funding streams. Guidance for schemes in England notes that whilst funding for the scheme should be channelled through Local Authorities (as they have responsibility for housing) other partner agencies who also benefit from the scheme can contribute (such as Public Health, Housing Associations and Police and Crime Commissioners)⁵⁶. An evaluation of a similar scheme in Australia noted that funding was provided via Community Crime Prevention funds, providing an example of where the focus of funding has not been through Housing Agencies.

Although now dated, the DCLG guidance on sanctuary schemes provided evidence of cost savings to Local Authorities which remains relevant. It notes that Local Authorities saved in other areas such as the provision of temporary and emergency accommodation to families through the provision of sanctuary schemes. One study⁵⁷ reported significant cost savings through the reduction in the need for emergency accommodation, for example the costs to re-house a family were reported to be in the region of £5,500, whereas the average costs of additional security measures installed via the scheme was £600. This study also noted that key agencies should ensure that there is clarity around funding Sanctuary Schemes and funding decisions should take into account the agencies who may accrue benefits from the Scheme.

The evaluation of the whole Housing Approach Programme in England which was a holistic approach to housing for those who have been subject to domestic abuse that provided a range of services including advocacy, housing advice and sanctuary estimated that every one pound invested generated savings of between £3.39 and £59.27. However, other studies have noted that there is a lack of evidence on the medium and long term impacts of domestic abuse interventions. This lack of longitudinal studies means that the cost effectiveness of interventions is likely to be understated⁵⁸.

Outcomes Achieved

A review of evaluations of the schemes that were identified highlighted that the majority of data collected is anecdotal or, qualitative and focuses on the victim/ survivor. The lack of outcome data limits the evidence on the impact of the schemes on survivors and their families. However, a number of common themes were identified from the evaluations which show the positive impacts that the schemes have.

An important aspect of Sanctuary Schemes is that they provide the choice to stay at home, which has number of inter-related benefits. This can prevent families and individuals becoming homeless. That

⁵⁵ Housing Options for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people experiencing domestic abuse. Stonewall, 2008.

⁵⁶ For example: The Sanctuary Scheme Toolkit, The whole housing approach.

⁵⁷ Jones, A. et al, 2010. The Effectiveness of Schemes to Enable Households at Risk of Domestic Violence to Remain in their Homes. Research report. University of York. Department for Communities and Local Government.

⁵⁸ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2014). Domestic Violence and abuse multi-agency working. Public Health Guidance.

families and individuals were able to remain in the own home and meaning that many families can more easily stay in touch with extended families and local support networks and any disruption to children's education is minimised.

However, the over-arching impact for service users reported in many evaluations is a reduction in anxiety levels and improved well-being amongst service users. A meta-analysis of schemes in Australia noted that the timely provision of effective security measures can also prevent the escalation of mental health issues amongst service users⁵⁹. Another study found that the scheme increased the self-confidence of service users and therefore their engagement with other formal and informal support networks and systems, which in turn helped to reduce their sense of social isolation and begin to address issues of trauma, mental illness, and low self-esteem⁶⁰.

A small number of evaluations noted that in the long run the reduction in domestic abuse also reduces the demand on other agencies such as the emergency services through a reduction in repeat incidences, although this has not been quantified⁶¹. The evaluation of the Australian scheme Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV)⁶² also noted that it was not possible to quantify the extent to which the scheme has reduced police call out as no baseline data was collated prior to the introduction of the scheme.

Summary

Review of the literature highlighted that Domestic Abuse is a leading contributor to homelessness in the UK and there is an ongoing need to provide alternative housing options than hostel/shelter based accommodation.

There is a growing body of international literature noting the benefits and positive impacts of Sanctuary Schemes for both service users and wider society. However, a small number of studies noted that it is difficult to draw any definitive causal conclusions from the evaluations of these types of schemes due to the qualitative nature of the evidence gathered and the different reporting systems of the various agencies involved⁶³. One study noted that whilst the schemes may have had attributable impact they cannot be isolated and measured in an empirically robust way.⁶⁴ That said there are also studies that have also demonstrated the Value for Money offered by Sanctuary Schemes through the reduction in the demand for other services (such as emergency services, health and social care and criminal justice).

Common themes emerged from the review of the literature in relation to the challenges associated with the delivery of Sanctuary Schemes. This included referral processes, other studies noted that whilst it is important to ensure that the scheme is accessible to those who are most in need it is also important to ensure that the resources are appropriately targeted. Funding has also been recognised as a major limitation to delivering Sanctuary Schemes and like Northern Ireland a number of local authorities have

⁵⁹ National mapping and meta-evaluation outlining key features of effective "safe at home" programs that enhance safety and prevent homelessness for women and their children who have experienced domestic and family violence: research report / Jan Breckenridge, Donna Chung, Angela Spinney, Carole Zufferey. Sydney : ANROWS, c 2016

⁶⁰ Breckenridge, J., Hamer, J., Newton, B.J., & valentine, k. (2013). NSW Homelessness Action Plan Extended Evaluation: Hunter HAP Domestic Violence Project Final Report. HAP Project 3.13b. Centre for Gender-Related Violence Studies (CGRVS) and Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC). Sydney: University of New South Wales.

⁶¹ For example see: The Effectiveness of Schemes to enable Households at Risk of Domestic Violence to remain in their own home. Housing Research Summary. No. 245 (2010). DCLG.

⁶² Breckenridge, J., Walden, I. & Flax, G. (2014) Staying Home Leaving Violence Evaluation Final Report, Gendered Violence Research Network, UNSW, Australia

⁶³ For example, see:

⁶⁴ Robinson, A., Tregida, J., Rees, A. and Roberts, J. (2010). Final Evaluation Report on the Cardiff HomeSafe Project (2010)

also restricted access to their schemes such as only accepting referrals from Local Authority housing tenants.

5 Stakeholder Interviews

Introduction

A suite of interviews were conducted with key stakeholders from statutory and voluntary and community sector organisations who are involved in the Sanctuary Scheme or provide services and support to victims of domestic abuse. In total 18 interviews were completed with representatives from the following organisations:

- NIHE
- A Housing Association
- The Rainbow Project
- Women's Aid
- Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)
- Rural Community Network – Housing sub-group
- A Local Council
- Rural Women's Network; and
- Representatives from various local Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs).

Each interviewee was invited to share the views on the need for additional home security for those who have experienced domestic abuse, the demand for the current NIHE scheme and ways in which it could be improved. Due to COVID-19 restrictions the interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams. The qualitative responses to the interviews were analysed thematically using a three-stage process established by Braun & Clarke (2006)⁶⁵ which involves, coding, sorting and analysing qualitative responses. The following paragraphs summarise the key findings from the interviews.

Need for the scheme

Many interviewees noted that they believed that COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns had made levels of domestic abuse worse in Northern Ireland but, also reduced the extent to which victims would report it. Representatives from the voluntary and community sector who provide services to victims of domestic abuse noted that during periods of lockdown not only did domestic abuse become more intense for many of their service users but, it was also much more difficult for those experiencing domestic abuse to report it and therefore access support. To some extent this is also supported by the Domestic Violence and abuse statistical data, which highlights that during the period of National COVID-19 lockdowns reported incidents of Domestic Violence and abuse did not increase (see section three).

"Domestic Violence all went quiet over lockdown. People just weren't coming forward. Victims were afraid to leave over lockdown"

⁶⁵ Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101.

Representatives from Women's Aid also noted that not only have they experienced increased demand for support (particularly after periods of lockdown) but the issue has been exacerbated by a reduction in capacity in Women's Aid shelters due to social distancing requirements. Therefore, any service which allows women to remain in their own home safely is vital.

Awareness of the Sanctuary Scheme

There was a general perception amongst those interviewed that the Sanctuary Scheme is not well known even amongst NIHE staff and MARAC representatives. Interviewees from all sectors noted gaps in knowledge and awareness of the scheme. Interviewees from MARACs and NIHE noted that NIHE attendance at MARACs in some areas can be sporadic. This means that when discussing high-risk cases the full range of options for people who have been subject to Domestic Abuse are not always discussed. A small number of interviewees noted specific issues in the Belfast area, including sporadic attendance at MARAC meetings from NIHE representatives, particularly since COVID. This is perhaps reflected in the service user data which shows low levels of referrals to the scheme from the BHSCT area.

"There is a lack of NIHE representatives on MARAC, therefore, there is a lack of awareness of the scheme."

One NIHE representative also noted that because of staff turn-over, working from home patterns (due to COVID) and a reduction in staff training over the past number of years it is likely that many NIHE staff who are in contact with tenants or, who attend MARACs may not be fully aware of the Sanctuary Scheme, who is eligible and what it can offer. Therefore, some potential service users are not aware of the full range of options that may be available to them, they may think that moving house is their only option.

"NIHE staff are not trained in DASH [Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment, risk identification, assessment and management]. Changes in staff has created gaps in knowledge".

Interviewees highlighted that there are often multiple incidents and repeat repairs carried out before a referral to the scheme is made. Tenants may not always provide exact details as to why repairs are required and therefore the reason for the repair will not always be accurately recorded. Furthermore, the NIHE Housing Management Systems are not set-up to accurately record reasons for repairs and there is no way to assess patterns of repairs in individual properties. Therefore, there is a need for NIHE staff to build a rapport with tenants Maintenance Officers and Housing Officers should be trained to identify potential Domestic Abuse. This would also provide multiple access points to the scheme and potentially protect victims earlier.

Tenure

It was readily recognised by those interviewed that the greatest limitation to the scheme is that it is currently only available to Housing Executive tenants. There was general agreement amongst those interviewed that an extension of the scheme to support tenants in other tenures (such as Housing Association tenants) would be of great benefit.

"The Housing Associations should be involved, they should provide more support".

It was also noted that a similar scheme operates in one Local Council District in Northern Ireland, which is open to all types of tenure. It is funded by the Department of Justice (DoJ), via the District Policing and Community Safety Partnership. It provides a wide range of home security devices from door chains

to security lighting as well as crime prevention advice. Staff from this scheme noted that some of those who have used their scheme may not have much disposal income to pay for additional security in their home or, know how to get it installed even if they are homeowners. Referrals to this scheme can be made through the local MARAC as well as other statutory agencies and community and voluntary sector organisations.

Interviewees also noted that in order to offer the scheme to tenants from other tenures permission from the landlord would be required in order to fit any additional security devices. This may require additional permissions, such as data sharing agreements. Therefore, whilst extending the scheme to people in other tenures has the potential to support many more people who have been subject to domestic abuse there are a number of administrative and legal issues to be considered.

Gaps in Service Provision and Hard to Reach Groups

Interviewees were asked if they were aware of gaps in service provision. All of those interviewed noted that the majority of people who have been subjected to Domestic Abuse are reluctant to report it, therefore there is a significant level of under-reporting amongst all types of victims. This under-reporting of incidents makes it very difficult to judge exactly where the gaps in service provision are.

"People are proud, they don't want to ask for help or, admit what has happened to them."

It was noted that those who are referred to the scheme are usually women who have experienced Domestic Abuse from their male partner, whilst a small number had experienced abuse from other family members (such as grown-up children) and an even smaller number of service users had been abused by their same sex partner. Interviewees also noted that many people who are referred to the scheme have been subjected to abuse in various forms for a long time before being referred and that this is also likely to be the case for men, people who are LGBTQ and people from an ethnic minority. Interviewees noted that many referrals to the scheme came from Women's Aid and that their hostels may be inaccessible to members of minority communities and male victims, although representatives from NIHE, Women's Aid and other voluntary and community sector organisations noted that they do refer individuals to other sources of support and outreach services.

Interviewees also noted that they were aware of some gaps in service provision for some groups of people. For example, a number of different voluntary and community sector organisations noted that it is often difficult for those in rural areas to access help and support. This tends to be due to the nature of domestic abuse generally (where perpetrators isolate victims) and the accessibility of support services in rural areas. Interviewees from the voluntary and community sector highlighted that many people in rural areas who are subject to coercive control do not have access to transport or finances, which would allow them easier access to advice and support services. Representatives from Women's Aid noted that it can also be difficult for them to provide outreach services in rural areas without causing more difficulty for the women they are trying to support.

Currently, the only way to access the NIHE Sanctuary Scheme is via a referral to a local MARAC, this ensures that those who are most at risk are prioritised within the scheme. However, as noted by NIHE staff referral to the scheme is dependent on the tenants talking to NIHE staff and having the confidence in them to explain why their house needs repaired or, PSNI officers (who are called out to an incident being aware of the scheme). Representatives from voluntary and community sector organisations noted that they believed that men and people from minority groups (such as LGBTQ people or, those from ethnic minorities) are even less likely to explain their situation to NIHE staff or, the PSNI, therefore

ongoing engagement with a wide range of voluntary and community sector groups is important to raise awareness of the scheme and increase accessibility to those who may otherwise be excluded.

A small number of interviewees also noted that whilst the NIHE scheme is based on the Home Office approved Sanctuary Scheme and that the equipment provided under the NIHE scheme is consistent with the scheme guidelines⁶⁶, the NIHE scheme does not provide the full range of safety equipment that is set out in the guidelines and that is used by other police forces across the UK. Interviewees suggested that not having to the full range of safety devices/security measures that are set out in the Sanctuary Scheme manual limits the range of safety measures that can be installed in Northern Ireland and reduces its effectiveness.

Effectiveness of the scheme

Whilst most interviewees noted that the Sanctuary Scheme had some limitations and gaps in provision, the overwhelming feedback was that it is a worthwhile and effective service. Examples of its effectiveness were highlighted by NIHE staff and representatives from voluntary and community sector organisations. The benefits of the scheme that were identified by interviewees, included:

- Helping to prevent homelessness
- Reducing the need for /demand on Women's Aid Shelters
- Reducing call-outs from emergency services and preventing crime; and
- Providing 'peace of mind' for service users.

There was a high level of agreement amongst those interviewed that providing additional security/target hardening to tenants who had been subject to Domestic Abuse allowed them to stay in their own home and sustain their tenancy. For example, one NIHE stakeholder highlighted that

"It is recognised that 80% of [Sanctuary Scheme] service users remained in their NIHE tenancy, for a period of time, following the security enhancements".

This was regarded as vital to a wide range of tenants, as it allowed them to stay close to their friends and family and other sources of informal support. Furthermore, for tenants with children it allowed the children to maintain routines such as attending school. It was also noted that given the pressure on social housing in Northern Ireland, it could also be very difficult to find service users suitable accommodation within their preferred areas.

"Definitely without doubt without sanctuary scheme, some of these women would be homeless".

Feedback from interviewees and service users (as noted in the next section) highlighted that the installation of additional security acted as a deterrent to perpetrators. It was the perception amongst interviewees that once perpetrators realised that they were no longer able to force their way into a property or, that their actions were recorded on security cameras the number of incidents reduced. This not only reduced the number of call-outs to the property by the police (and also the ambulance service at times) but, also reduced the numbers of repairs that were required to the property. However, as noted

⁶⁶ The Sanctuary Scheme Installation Manual. A place of safety for those at risk. Secured by Design (official police security Initiative). www.securedbydesign.com

by MARAC members, as there is no formal way of recording this consistently (especially across various agencies) it is very difficult to quantify these impacts.

Feedback from Women's Aid representatives highlighted that over the last number of years their shelters have become very busy. During COVID and the associated lockdowns they had to reduce the number of people within the shelters to facilitate social distancing, which created additional pressures on their services. It was noted that the provision of additional security measures allowed some women to stay at home or, to leave their shelter quicker, as their own home had been secured through the scheme, which in turn, helped with the pressures on the shelters.

Many interviewees highlighted that the 'peace of mind' provided by the scheme contributed to better mental health for service users. Interviewees highlighted that often service users had been subjected to abuse for many years and were vulnerable individuals. Knowing that the perpetrator could no longer force an entry into their home was a very significant factor for them feeling secure in their home and reduced their fear of further abuse.

Summary

All interviewees noted the ongoing need to provide support to victims of domestic abuse to protect them in their home. Overall feedback on the scheme was positive and the key benefits that were highlighted included that the scheme allowed users to remain in their own home which not only allowed them to stay close to informal sources of support (from family and friends) but, that it also potentially prevented them from becoming homeless. The scheme also reduced the number of repairs that were required to the NIHE properties, although it was not possible to quantify this due to NIHE maintenance reporting processes. A further important benefit of the scheme, as highlighted by interviewees was the 'peace of mind' and sense of security that the scheme provides service users with.

Interviewees also noted some limitations with the scheme and areas for improvement, they included:

- **Tenure:** almost all interviewees noted that as the scheme is limited to NIHE tenants only this significantly reduces the number of people who could be referred to the scheme.
- **Awareness of the scheme:** the level of awareness across all MARACs and NIHE staff was highlighted as a concern amongst interviewees. It was highlighted that there was not always consistent attendance at MARAC meetings by NIHE staff which limited the referrals to the scheme and restricted information sharing across all partners. There was also a general perception that not all NIHE staff were aware of the scheme which further limited the potential for referrals.
- **Hard to reach groups:** Interviewees noted that the scheme has predominantly been used by females who have been subject to intimate partner abuse or, to a lesser extent abuse from other family members. It was highlighted that other individuals such as men, members of the LGBTQ community, people from ethnic minorities and people in rural areas could also benefit from increased access to the scheme.

Service User Feedback

Introduction

A key element of the review is to understand the experiences of tenants who have used the Sanctuary Scheme, to gather their views on their access to the services, the effectiveness of the service and the impact of the service. NIHE contacted all tenants who have used the service offering them the opportunity to engage with the Ipsos team to contribute to the review. Four services users consented to be interviewed.

A number of key themes emerged from the interviews as summarised below. In order to protect the identity of services users, details of when and where they accessed the scheme have not been reported.

Access to the Sanctuary Scheme

Service users were asked how they first accessed the Sanctuary Scheme. A common theme emerging from the interviews was that service users had experienced Domestic Abuse for many years before seeking help or, accessing the scheme. Service users expressed a sense of embarrassment about the abuse that they had experienced and were reluctant to seek help. For example, one service user noted that she had experienced abuse from a family member for around seven years, before she was referred to the scheme by the police following a serious assault.

"The first time it happened I couldn't tell anyone, I just said that I fell down the stairs".

(Service User from a rural area)

Many service users who were interviewed noted that they were referred to the scheme by the PSNI following a serious incident. This highlighted the issue that many of those who are subject to Domestic Abuse may not be aware of the scheme and are unlikely to seek support themselves until there are in a crisis.

"He attacked me outside [the house] and a passer-by phoned the police. The police then referred me [to the scheme]."

(Service User in urban area)

Need for the scheme

All of the service users who were interviewed had experienced serious violent assaults by intimate partners or, family members prior to accessing the scheme. They each described in detail how the perpetrator had attacked them in their own home

"I was left with nothing, because I had to leave so quickly. I had to start from scratch."

(Service User in urban area)

Installation Process

All of the service users who were interviewed noted that the PSNI, Crime Prevention Officer (CPO) visited their home and did a thorough review before compiling a report on the type of security installations that were most suitable for them. There was a broad level of agreement amongst service

users that the installation process was generally good and that a number of very helpful security devices were installed, which improved their home security.

All of those who were interviewed generally noted how helpful the NIHE Housing and Maintenance Officers and PSNI Officers were. A common theme noted across service users was the wide range of security devices that were installed, many of which the service users had not previously been aware of.

Impacts of the scheme

Half of the service users who were interviewed noted that getting the additional security measures installed meant that they did not have to move house. Being able to remain in their home was important to them as it allowed them and the rest of household to maintain contact with family and friends who may be nearby and to retain easy access to school and work. Two further service users who were interviewed noted that although they did have to move house because of the Domestic Abuse they were experiencing, they still required additional security measures to be installed in their new home. One service user noted that she was unable to stay in her home (for her own safety) and had to move to the other side of her town and how difficult that was for her:

"I am not near my parents now, I don't know anyone, there is no friendly neighbourhood here".

(Service User in rural area)

Another service user noted that although she needed to move to get away from the Domestic Abuse, she still felt unsafe and therefore required the Sanctuary Scheme in her new home.

Service users noted that following the installation of the safety measures, the Domestic Abuse often stopped once the perpetrator realised that they could no longer access the property.

"Because he couldn't get to me he just moved on."

(Service User in urban area)

"The number of attacks reduced, the cameras put him off and we could also check who was at the door before opening it."

(Service User in rural area)

Service users also noted that because perpetrators desisted in the abuse this led to a reduction in the use of other services such as police, hospitals and Women's Aid

There was a high level of agreement amongst service users that the Sanctuary Scheme had improved their mental health, as they were now less anxious about the personal safety within the home and were now able to relax.

"When I am in my [sanctuary] room I am calm, it is the only place I feel safe on my own."

(Service User in urban area)

Improvements to the Scheme

Service Users were asked their views on how the Sanctuary Scheme could be improved. Increasing awareness of the scheme was a common issue discussed by service users. For example, one service user noted that although she had been in a Women's Aid hostel they did not seem to be aware of the scheme as they had not referred her to it. There was a general agreement that all of those involved in

the process, who may come into contact with someone who is experiencing Domestic Abuse should be aware of the scheme, from those on the MARACs to the maintenance officers (so that they understand why work is being completed).

Access to scheme for all those experiencing Domestic Abuse, regardless of their tenancy was noted as an important improvement to the scheme. All of those interviewed noted that they would not have been able to afford security devices or, know how to install them. Another, related issue that was highlighted is that often individuals who are experiencing Domestic Abuse have their finances tightly controlled by the perpetrator, therefore, whilst it may appear that they have can afford security devices, they may not have access to their own money, as one service user noted:

"A lot women out there, even though they are home owners, have no money or, no access to their money, even a small window lock costs money. If your money is being controlled you are trapped".

(Service User in rural area)

Whilst most service users noted that they were treated kindly and sympathetically throughout the process, one service user also noted that all staff should be trained to deal with service users sensitively. This service user highlighted that whilst the Housing Officer and the Crime Prevention Officer has been very good and very helpful, the contractor that was installing the security devices was less sympathetic.

"The maintenance people were a bit rude, they made assumptions about me and my family. They assumed because of the area and that the door was kicked in, that it was a drugs bust."

(Service User in rural area)

Whilst service users were mostly happy with the speed at which the security devices were installed, prompt installation was highlighted as being crucial. Service users noted that once the referral to the scheme had been made and their house had been assessed, they then felt vulnerable until all the equipment had been installed.

"I didn't feel safe at all, when there was no door".

(Service User in urban area)

Another service user highlighted how the abuse can continue until all the installations are complete.

"The speed of installations is very important. If I had got security cameras quicker, I would not have opened the door and I would have avoided that last beating."

(Service User in rural area)

One issue that was highlighted by a service user is that the crime prevention officers (who complete the assessment) and the maintenance / installation staff are encountering very vulnerable people who have recently experienced a very traumatic situation and are still living with fear. This means that when the processes and fixtures are being explained to them it can be overwhelming and difficult for them to take in.

“Three or, four people came out at once. I was just overwhelmed. They had all these plans, I didn’t know what was going on.”

(Service User in urban area)

Summary

All the service users expressed high levels of gratitude for the additional security measures that were installed under the Sanctuary Scheme. Many of the service users noted that they believed they would have been killed or seriously injured without the additional security measures provided under the Sanctuary Scheme. Therefore, from the service users’ perspective the scheme is a life saver.

The interviews with service users also highlighted the fact that often people who have been subjected to Domestic Abuse cannot afford even the most basic of security devices to protect themselves or their home. Therefore, without the scheme they would have no additional security at all. As one service user highlighted this is also true even for some women who own their own home and that the scheme should be open to all tenures.

Timeliness was a key issue noted by service users. Frequently service users were only referred to the scheme when they were at crisis point and categorised by the PSNI as high risk. Therefore, the speed of assessment and installation was critical for their physical and mental health.

As one service user highlighted, by the time they are referred to the scheme they have experienced many years of abuse and they were vulnerable and afraid. Therefore, the quality of inter-actions between them, the Crime Prevention Officers (completing the assessments) and the NIHE staff was critical. There was a perception amongst service users that all NIHE staff should be well trained and aware of issues relating to domestic abuse.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Introduction

The rate of recorded domestic abuse crimes across Northern Ireland stayed relatively stable from April 2019 to March 2021, with 18,628 and 19,036 recorded crimes respectively. As a proportion of the overall population Belfast and Derry City Council had the most domestic abuse crimes at 2,313 and 2,015 per 100,000 population. Data from Women's Aid shows that since 2015 domestic abuse as a proportion of all crime has increased from 13.4% in 2015 to 17.5% in 2020.

Almost 1,300 domestic abuse cases were referred to the MARACs in 2020-2021 and the majority of victims were women (85%). Less than 1% of cases referred to MARACs related to victims who identified as LGBTQ. Since 2011, 132 people have been supported by the Sanctuary Scheme.

In addition to the human costs associated with domestic abuse it is also a significant drain on the local economy. In 2011/12 the cost of domestic abuse was estimated to be £674.3m⁶⁷. The estimated cost of health and social care support in Northern Ireland as a result of domestic abuse was approximately £50.2 million for the 2011/12 period⁶⁸. However, evaluation of Sanctuary Schemes in England identified significant savings associated with the implementation of Sanctuary Schemes, ranging from £3 to £59 savings generated for every £1 invested.

Key findings

The common themes which emerged from the review of the literature and interviews with key stakeholders and service users are discussed in the following paragraphs:

The analysis of feedback provided by service users and key stakeholders and the evidence set out in the literature relating to sanctuary schemes highlighted the range of positive impacts associated with them.

Positive impacts on the health and well-being for service users were emphasised by key stakeholders, service users and throughout the literature, including reduction in mental health and anxiety issues. Other positive impacts were noted on public services, including a reduction in repeat incidents (leading to a reduction in call outs for emergency services); a reduction on repairs to social housing and a reduction in the number of people who are homeless due to domestic abuse. A common theme across the literature was the difficulty in quantifying the benefits accrued by the schemes due to the qualitative nature of the impacts and the different reporting and recording processes of the agencies involved.

Key stakeholders and service users discussed the general lack of awareness of the scheme across various stakeholders and sectors. Key stakeholders noted that not all staff across the key agencies (including NIHE and Women's Aid) appear to be aware of the Sanctuary Scheme. This means that, potentially some eligible individuals have not been referred to scheme who should have been.

The main limitation of the scheme that was identified was that it is currently only available to NIHE tenants. There was a general consensus amongst all those interviewed that this restricted the impact and reach of the scheme. Both service users and key stakeholders highlighted that often due to the controlling nature of domestic abuse, even those who own their own home cannot afford to install the

⁶⁷ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/mid-term-review-dsva-strategy.PDF>

⁶⁸ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/stopping-domestic-sexual-violence-ni.pdf>

most basic security devices and that consideration should be given to widening the scheme to other tenures based on need.

Evaluations of schemes across England also emphasised the funding issues associated that are often associated with sanctuary schemes. Most schemes were funded by Local Authorities (who are responsible for social housing in England) and therefore access to the schemes was restricted to Local Authority tenants. However, a wide range of agencies also benefited from the scheme, including health, social care and criminal justice. It was suggested that contributions could be made to the schemes from other agencies to enable access to the scheme to be widened.

Both key stakeholders and evidence in the literature highlighted the difficulties in making sanctuary schemes accessible to the wide range of individuals who are at risk of harm due to domestic abuse. Whilst the data shows that 85% of those who had experienced domestic abuse were female, there is no clear data on the proportion of individuals who are LGBTQ or, from ethnic minorities. Feedback from key stakeholders reported that where required they used translation services and referred people to other sources of support if they were unable to meet their needs. Evaluations of programmes in other countries also demonstrated difficulties in making sanctuary schemes accessible to ethnic minorities due to cultural differences and language barriers. Generally speaking, it was noted that support services for domestic abuse were primarily focused on the needs of English speaking, heterosexual females.

Recommendations

A review of the key findings highlighted a number of recommendations for the ongoing delivery of the Sanctuary Scheme in Northern Ireland, mainly:

- NIHE should consider implementing a domestic abuse policy. Such a policy will include the requirement for domestic abuse training to be delivered to customer facing staff, enabling the provision of a customer focussed response for those clients citing domestic abuse or violence in a housing context. This may include training in the completion of the Domestic Abuse, Stalking & Honour Based Violence (DASH) risk checklist and escalation of appropriate cases to MARAC.
- NIHE should ensure that all staff and contractors are sufficiently trained to ensure that they are aware of the signs of domestic abuse and to sign-post tenants to support services as appropriate.
- There is a need to raise the profile of the scheme across all MARACs to ensure that individuals who are identified as at risk at MARAC committees have the option of remaining in their own home, where appropriate.
- NIHE should work with other key agencies such as Women's Aid to raise the profile of the scheme.
- NIHE may consider working with NIFHA to raise awareness in respect of how Sanctuary scheme works could be provided for those in need who are Housing Association tenants, this might include a review of other potential sources of funding and may require further liaison between other departments and agencies (such as Department for Communities, Department of Justice and Department of Health).
- NIHE should review their Sanctuary Scheme guidance manual to ensure that it is consistent with the Home Office Guidelines and the manual used by police forces across the UK to ensure that the full range of recommended safety and security measures are available in Northern Ireland.

- NIHE may also wish to consider ways in which repairs are recorded, in order to have a better understanding of the scale of the problem in their properties. This may also involve the inclusion of a flag on records where domestic abuse has been reported or is suspected and NIHE should consider how best to do this within GDPR guidelines.
- There is a need to increase understanding of hard to reach groups and their experiences of domestic abuse/access to support services, including individuals who are LGBTQ+ and Ethnic minorities. Engagement with the community and voluntary sector organisations who advocate for such hard to reach groups is key in building awareness of the supports available to those experiencing domestic abuse and in shaping future service provision.

This report can be found on the Housing
Executive website: www.nihe.gov.uk

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