

Appendix 1: Domestic and Sexual Violence and Diversity

Gender Duty and Domestic and Sexual Violence

The Equality Bill introduces a duty to promote gender equality. This general duty requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

This strategy therefore needs to consider the gender equality impact of its predominant focus on women as victim/survivors of violence and abuse.

Both men and women experience violence and abuse and this recognition is a positive development as all abuse should be addressed. But a strategic response needs to respond to the evidence of prevalence, the social context and differing experiences of domestic and sexual violence that men and women will have.

It has long been understood that the overwhelming majority of victim/survivors of domestic violence are women. However, this understanding has been called into question by the 2004/5 British Crime Survey which revealed that 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence, and 1 in 6 men, throughout their lifetimes. Exploring these inconsistencies, the Scottish Parliament, went on to analyse these findings further, and concluded that a truer picture was of 1 in 5 women and 1.5 in 100 men will experience domestic violence over a similar period.

The Scottish Parliament went onto demonstrate that even these figures conceal many of the differences in the ways that men and women experience domestic and sexual violence, or are violent themselves. In particular:

- Women are more likely to be injured through domestic and sexual violence
- Women are more likely to be repeatedly abused – 47% men had experienced a single incident – whilst women on average experience 20 incidents per year
- Women are more likely to be frightened and more likely to be abused post-separation
- Women are more likely to be murdered – 42% of women who are killed are killed by a current or former partner – 7% of men murdered are murdered by a current or former partner and 20% of these are murdered by a same sex partner. Many men who are killed by female partners are killed when women fight back or seek to defend themselves in some way
- Men are less likely to be impoverished by their experiences of violence and abuse
- Men's experiences of violence often presents them with less danger at the time of ending an abusive relationship, and they often have wider options that economic independence brings.

It is vitally important to recognise these differences to enable resources and services to be targeted to the best effect, and to enable us to understand the context of violence and abuse and the different way it manifests itself when men women are victims and/or perpetrators.

Aside from refuge provision, there are few women only services in the borough to which men are denied access. The whole range of statutory services, including temporary accommodation, and the Sanctuary Scheme, are accessible to abused men.

Merseyside is fortunate enough to have a helpline called 'Worst Kept Secret' which provides services to both male and female victims of domestic violence.

Whilst arguments do not currently prevail for increased investment in services specifically for men experiencing domestic violence, there is no doubt that for those men who are experiencing domestic and sexual violence, the stigma which they will feel may make it particularly difficult to seek help.

All services should be sensitised to the needs of each individual, as required by the National Domestic and Sexual Violence Standards. Adopting these service standards will make a considerable difference for all victims of violence and abuse, particularly men.

To understand why women's experiences of domestic violence differ is to understand that violence against women has historically, across contexts and cultures been minimized, justified, denied and legitimized. Over 50% of women have been subjected to violence, whether through domestic violence; rape and sexual assault; stalking; female genital mutilation; forced and child marriage; sexual abuse and the sexual exploitation of girls; trafficking in women; exploitation in the sex industry and sexual harassment. Our strategy needs to address the social, cultural, political and legal context of violence against women if it is to meet its ambitions.

Domestic and Sexual Violence & Race Equality

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 creates a general duty on public authorities to promote racial equality. Whilst historically Sefton is a richly diverse borough, it only has a very small percentage of its population being from BME backgrounds, this is gradually changing with an increase number of BME people choosing to live and work in Sefton. These changes will greatly enrich the borough but at the same time will bring a range of challenges that we will need to respond to in order to ensure that we can meet the needs of all people in our community.

Whilst research indicates that in some forms of violence and abuse against women there is little differential in relation to prevalence, in other forms BME women are far more liable to victimized. In addition BME women are far less likely to know how to access services, or to access them once they are aware of them, particularly those in the statutory sector.

This strategy sets out to ensure that the needs of BME women are identified and met, both in the availability of identity specific services and in the need for all agencies to be sensitised to the barriers that many marginalised women face.

Again the adoption of the National Service Standards for Domestic and Sexual Violence will significantly assist us to rise to the new challenges that diverse communities bring.

Sexuality Duty

People in same-sex relationships, also experience violence and abuse, although there is limited research to determine actual prevalence and incidence levels. However, Broken Rainbow a national organization estimate that gay men in particular experience domestic and sexual violence in similar numbers to heterosexual women.

The Sexuality Duty makes it clear that Sefton must provide services that are sensitive to the needs of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender people. Therefore, this strategy also sets out to ensure that the needs of people in same sex relationships experiencing violence and abuse are identified and met, both in the availability of sexuality specific services, and also in the need for all agencies to be sensitized to the barriers that gay, lesbian and bi-sexual people may face.