



How are we working?
....the story so far

An audit of interagency cooperation
on domestic violence in
Northern Ireland

NORTHERN IRELAND
Women's
AID
FEDERATION



This research was carried out by Consultancy Mentoring Works on behalf of Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation.

Acknowledgements

The Consultancy Mentoring Works team Helen Donnelly, Jacqui Stubbings and Cecilia Whitehorn wish to express their thanks to all those who participated in the audit. Particular thanks are due to the Project Steering Group Eithne Gilligan and Anne Graham from NIWAF, Margaret Gallagher Foyle Women's Aid and Hilary Forrester North Down and Ards Women's Aid.

February 2004

Design & Layout by Charlene@NIWAF.

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1.0 introduction

The research document Bringing It Out in the Open ¹ concluded that the response to domestic violence in Northern Ireland should encompass a wide range of Government Departments and other agencies. The findings also recommended the development of an inter-departmental policy framework and increased inter-agency liaison.

In 1995 a Government policy document Tackling Domestic Violence - A Policy for Northern Ireland ² was published that set out a series of four key priorities:

- To heighten awareness of domestic violence, highlighting domestic violence as a crime.
- To improve services for victims.
- To challenge perpetrators attitudes and behaviours.
- To improve the information base.

A series of principles was also produced that could be translated by individual agencies into good practice guidelines.

The commitment of Government Departments and other agencies to address domestic violence throughout Northern Ireland was to be co-ordinated through the Regional Forum on Domestic Violence and through local inter-agency networks. Additionally, the Regional Forum was to “seek to be kept informed of local developments and how best practice is being identified and spread.” It would also seek to “ensure that all the organisations in the Regional Forum give appropriate support to the local networks and any projects they may propose.”

The policy document went on to acknowledge the diversity of those networks in different areas but suggested certain core similarities: -

- Responsibility for the establishment of such networks to lie with the agencies involved.
- Appropriate initiators and convenors to have the status to command the confidence of all participants and the resources to service and sustain the networks.
- All statutory and voluntary agencies and occupational groups who have a role in combating domestic violence to be represented.
- A common ‘core’ group of representatives was suggested, that might be found in all local networks including the police, probation service, social services, general practitioners, community health services and relevant voluntary agencies.

While an evaluation of the work of the Regional Forum is not the remit of this audit, nonetheless its presence or otherwise in providing strategic direction to local fora has certainly had an impact upon local development.

¹ Bringing It Out In The Open (1993). McWilliams and McKiernan, HMSO.

² Tackling Domestic Violence : A Policy for Northern Irelandnce (1995). DHSS and NIO.

The Regional Forum has itself carried out a recent review of its activities and working. The review document states: -

“Initially the Forum achieved much in addressing its objectives and each of its respective subgroups had key areas of work to take forward. Over the past couple of years the Forum has lost a degree of momentum with few targets met or outcomes achieved. Some of the subgroups have either been stood down or have as yet failed to meet”.³

As a result of the review two additional key aims have been identified and agreed as the remit of the Regional Forum. These are: -

- To achieve a multi-agency/integrated response to domestic violence.
- To review the adequacy of current and influence future legislation.

The document that follows has, as its primary purpose, an audit and the provision of baseline information in relation to those local domestic violence fora. It also seeks to inform all primary stakeholders concerned with the current inter-agency response to domestic violence in Northern Ireland to assist future development and planning.

2.0 aims and objectives

The aims of the audit are to: -

- Identify and outline the ongoing work of the thirteen local interagency domestic violence fora across Northern Ireland.
- Provide relevant information that will enable Northern Ireland Women’s Aid Federation (NIWAF), local domestic violence fora and the Northern Ireland Regional Domestic Violence Forum to gauge the range and extent of domestic violence interactivity throughout Northern Ireland.
- Inform future strategic planning of the primary stakeholders named in the Northern Ireland Regional Forum on Domestic Violence.

The objectives of the audit are to: -

- Gather information and carry out a baseline assessment of the past and current activities as well as any agreed objectives for local domestic violence interagency fora across Northern Ireland.
- Review the effectiveness of those fora for the local membership in general and in particular for Women’s Aid staff locally and regionally.
- Carry put a baseline assessment of the extent and nature of services for those affected by domestic violence in Northern Ireland and the availability of those services to the general public.
- Make recommendations to inform Women’s Aid groups locally and regionally and the Regional Forum on Domestic Violence to inform their future working.

³ Review of the NI Regional Forum on Domestic Violence (2003). DHSS&PS.

3.0 methodology

A matrix was developed to ensure all audit area objectives were included and a number of measurement tools were designed to gather the information. Questions were formulated to gather comparative information at meetings with interagency fora. A questionnaire was designed and circulated by means of electronic mail and postal means to approximately 275 people to enable information to be gathered from individual fora participants.

The questionnaire was designed to: -

- ✓ Attempt to record the domestic violence activities of individual agencies.
- ✓ Self-assess the confidence and competence of individuals participating in the fora.
- ✓ Gauge their individual views on the effectiveness of their local forum.

Internal seminars were held with local Women's Aid groups and the NIWAF Operational Team and Director. Focus groups were held with 12 local interagency fora.

Individual interviews were also held with: -

- ✓ The outgoing Director of NIWAF.
- ✓ The Chair Regional Forum on Domestic Violence.
- ✓ Family Policy Unit DHSS&PS.

Information Resources: -

- ✓ Tackling Domestic Violence Policy
- ✓ Review of the Regional Forum on Domestic Violence September 2002
- ✓ Documents provided by others.

The findings that follow are presented in two main sections. The first is concerned with issues that may impact upon the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of local domestic violence interagency working. In order to ensure some synchronicity sub-sections address some of the key themes contained in the Regional Forum Review Report.

The second section is an audit of the activities undertaken by fora individually and collectively throughout Northern Ireland. Sub-sections here refer to a variety of the activities undertaken across local domestic violence fora.

Throughout both sections reference is made to the findings from the semi-structured interviews with all local fora and the questionnaire returns from individuals and organisations.

The main sections are followed by a summary and conclusions that are used to make recommendations for future working.

4.0 findings

4.1.0 introduction

Currently there are 11 domestic violence fora throughout Northern Ireland that parallel the structure of the local Health Trusts.

Armagh & Dungannon
Causeway
Craigavon & Banbridge
Down Lisburn
Foyle
Homefirst
Newry & Mourne
North Down and Ards
North & West Belfast
South & East Belfast
Sperrin Lakeland



In two Trust areas sub-fora have been set up. The Homefirst Forum has also local fora in Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey. At the meeting with this group they explained that they are now reviewing how practical this is, particularly given that the Newtownabbey group has never met and that some individuals are attending four out of the five sub-groups. In the Down Lisburn Trust there are two sub-fora with one operating in Downpatrick with a rural remit and one in Lisburn with an urban emphasis. There is a comparative difference in the amount of meetings and activity in these sub-fora.

4.2.0 section one

4.2.1 policy and strategic planning

Internal Policy

The audit found a lack of a formal domestic violence policy in local fora or at individual agency level.³ The majority of local fora had however, developed best practice guidelines that encompass many of the issues found in a formal policy document. Whilst domestic violence is the core purpose of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland, it is also currently developing a policy for employees and a code of practice for member groups. Three out of the eleven fora had developed a domestic violence policy adapted from various sources. Others were looking at models provided by Barnardos and Derry City Council. Where a domestic violence policy was available there were indications from the questionnaire returns that these had not been incorporated into the policies of many individual agencies. Exceptions noted from the questionnaires were Barnardos, SAFFA and Craigavon Area Hospital. There was even less visibility of awareness raising and support for a domestic violence policy to be in place disseminated to community and other sectoral organisations. Those fora or agencies with best practice guidelines felt that these outlined many of the issues that would be included in a formal domestic violence policy document for the future.

Strategic Plans

The Regional Forum Review states: -

*“Strategic planning is a systematic and integrated approach by which organisations set and achieve specific long-term goals. This approach requires broad yet effective information gathering, the exploration of strategic alternatives and an emphasis on the future implications of present decisions. It can help facilitate communication and participation, accommodate divergent interests and values and promote successful implementation.”*⁴

All of the local fora, with the exception of two of the smaller sub fora, have a domestic violence inter-agency strategic plan in place. 53% of questionnaire respondents said that their organisation had an individual strategy in place to respond to domestic violence. However, the comments that accompanied the response to this question showed that some individuals were unclear about the difference between a policy and a strategic plan. Other agencies responded that they had a domestic violence strategic plan. Further questioning found that in the majority of cases it was the local domestic violence forum that had a strategic plan, which agencies were working to but without a formal document at their individual organisational level.

Many of the fora had carried out their strategic planning as a consequence of ‘Mapping the Vision’. This was an event that was carried out with NIWAF support or as self-facilitation. These initial plans are either still in place, have been reviewed internally with an external facilitator or there is an intention to do so in the near future.

Two of the fora carried out a review for the next phase of strategic planning in 2003 using an external consultant to do so. Another forum accessed support from the NIWAF operational team.

The majority of the fora intend to review their plans in the near future. Those who have reviewed more recently commented on the clarity that they now felt in relation to the remit and responsibilities of the fora in comparison with the role and work of individual agencies.

An issue that was raised by many of those undertaking the review was the need for a Government domestic violence strategy to be in place to inform the planning and development at local level.

⁴ ibid

4.2.2 business and operational issues

Structure and Representation

Table 1 shows how the frequency of local fora meetings varies within groups.

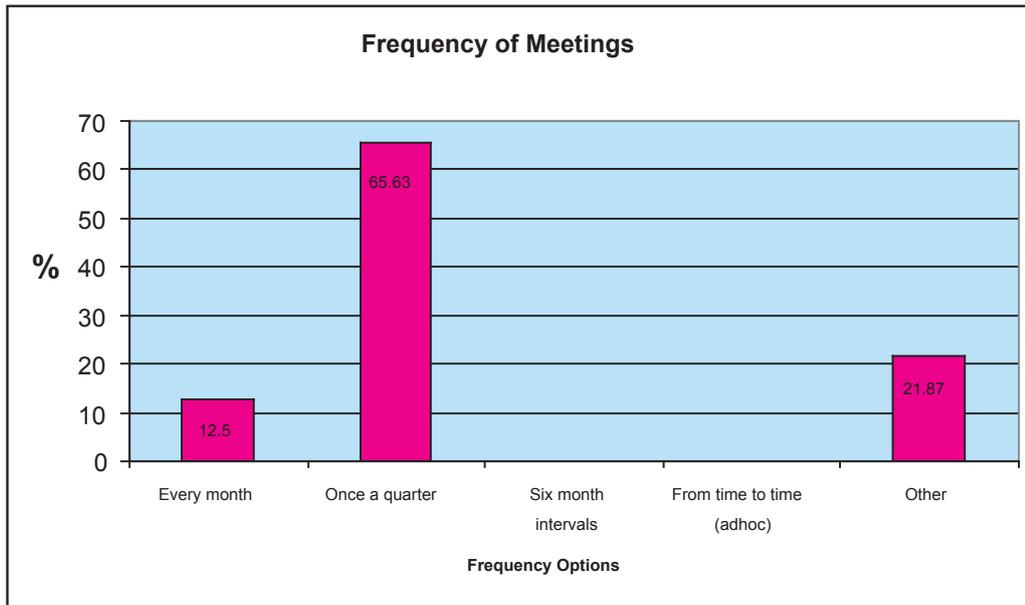


Table 1

Individual comments on the level of satisfaction in regard to frequency varied with individual perception as is illustrated in the comments below:

“Would prefer once per month.”

“Would prefer once a quarter.”

“In between forum meetings the sub groups meet regularly and feed back to the wider forum.”

“Due to local circumstances the local group has not met for approximately 2 years.”

“Meetings seem to be sufficient at present to meet the Forums’ objectives.”

“When we have been working on policies and training needs we meet regularly - depending on the needs of the group.”

Responses also indicated other factors that appeared to enhance meetings for individual members.

Membership

Individual members were also asked to assess the effectiveness of the balance of representation between statutory, voluntary and community representatives within their own forum.

Tackling Domestic Violence recommended that: -

- ◆ All statutory and voluntary agencies and occupational groups who have a role in combating domestic violence to be represented.
- ◆ A common 'core' group of representatives was suggested that might be found in all local networks including the police, probation service, social services, general practitioners, community health services and relevant voluntary agencies.

The individual questionnaire responses and the interviews with local fora indicated that there are a number of key professional groups, particularly GPs and clergy that many local fora have been unable to attract as members.

Table 2 illustrates the individual opinions as to the membership balance between statutory, voluntary and community organisations on their local fora.

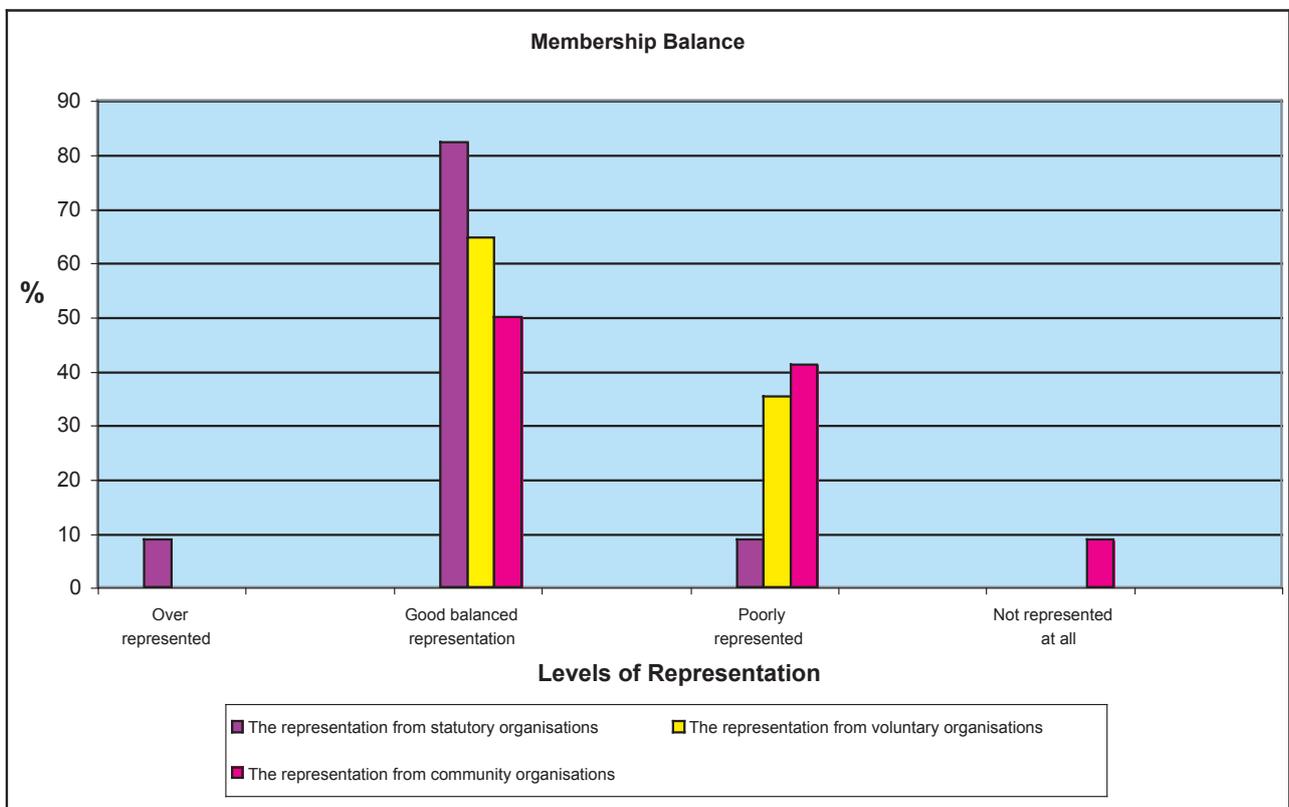


Table 2

While the majority of responses showed that the cross-sectoral representation was balanced there were also indications among individuals and groups that the voluntary sector and particularly community sector representation needs to be increased.

“We are currently looking at increasing representation from the community sector particularly other women’s groups. However, [named] Trust has a large number so it needs to be achieved to keep the group manageable and effective in terms of size.”

“A greater number of community representatives would be welcomed.”

“There is a need for greater community representation if we are to be successful in tackling issues at a community level.”

It is worthwhile noting that the Regional Forum in reviewing its own structure has suggested reducing its numbers to “10 –12 vocal members who are willing and able to contribute with greater emphasis falling on sub groups”. At a local fora consultation workshop in June 2002, it was suggested that although the membership of the Regional Forum may reduce at a strategic level it “envisages that church groups and the voluntary sector would be represented on local fora and would feed into the consultation process at an operational level.”

This would result in making the consultation and participation at local level of greater importance. However, the same difficulties arise at local level as at regional level. There is a need to have ‘vocal members’ who are not only willing to contribute at meetings but to take on the action required between meetings at subgroup level. The need for this ‘core’ group may be at odds with the need for wider representation. Nevertheless, the necessity remains to continue to develop opportunities for information sharing and consultation through all sectors, particularly with voluntary and community representatives.

The audit examined levels of satisfaction in regard to membership at two levels. One was the sectoral level representation outlined above. The second, at the occupational representation level referred to in the recommendations of the original policy:

“A common ‘core’ group of representatives was suggested that might be found in all local networks including the police, probation service, social services, general practitioners, community health services and relevant voluntary agencies.”⁵

Generally, the audit found that with a few exceptions, there was a scarcity of representation from GPs, clergy and the legal profession. As this is currently a challenge at local level, the regional forum may need to continue to influence policy and decision-makers within these professional groups.

⁵ ibid

Specific comments from individual questionnaires found that, in certain fora, representation was not always present from some key representatives such as Probation and Family and Childcare staff. The selection of comments that follow illustrate this experience of many fora.

“Efforts to include a GP representative have been wholly without success.”

“We would like GP’s and nurses from A&E to attend more often.”

“The clergy also agreed to join although their attendance can be erratic.”

“No representatives from the court system - we do have 2 solicitors who attend forum regularly, no religious leaders attend, no GP’s attend.”

“No representation from the legal profession that is a large gap; no input from the mental health profession; no representation from survivors of DV (or perpetrators!).”

The latter comment is of further significance in relation to the involvement of service users in providing information on identified need and the effectiveness of interagency working in practice. It was clear from the fora interviews that there is a perceived and actual motivation to ensure that some form of user feedback is represented within the fora.

Gaps in services for survivors and perpetrators are currently carried out through a variety of methodologies both formal and informal. It would be effective and efficient if a proforma was established and shared among local fora that would provide such a tool. Furthermore, if standardised, this could be used for comparative purposes across the region as a whole and be linked into service development at regional, local and individual organisational level.

Concerns were expressed, particularly in the individual returns, at the level of staff representation of some key agencies in some fora and the fluctuating levels of attendance and participation in fora activities.

“Membership has fluctuated over the life of the forum. The initial high level of representation by the police is now invested in two individuals.”

“It is not so much the actual membership in terms of which agency etc. but also at what level these representatives are at especially in decision-making. We need both on the ground staff and managers especially from statutory agencies.”

“Many members were not sure of their role (mainly voluntary) and therefore attendance was not regular and participative for strategic agencies - local managers/representatives did not have the power/authority to make changes, therefore, their attendance was often poor.”

Venue

“The forum meets in a central location within [named area] to facilitate attendance by both sides of the community. This location was agreed by the forum members. Meetings are scheduled a year in advance and are held at lunch time 12:30-2:30pm with lunch provided to facilitate easier participation. Minutes are circulated and agenda items invited.”

“Continuity of venue is important, as is agreeing and forming a pattern of when to meet i.e. it is the first meeting of the morning.”

“We usually meet in [named Women’s Aid Centre] which brings members into a user venue. I think this is useful and is a ‘grounding exercise’ for us all.”

Chair

As stated earlier Tackling Domestic Violence recommended that:

“Appropriate initiators and convenors to have the status to command the confidence of all participants and the resources to service and sustain the networks.”

Some respondents also discussed current structures with statutory agencies chairing the fora. The response generally was very positive to the resources provided by local Trusts to service the networks through the provision of venues, administrative support, convening the meetings etc.. Where difficulties were expressed in the individual questionnaire responses this appeared to be less to do with the status of the Chair as a statutory member and more with other aspects of their role in sustaining the fora.

“The forum used to meet monthly but members felt unempowered due to the lack of leadership from [named specific Trust]”

“Having a Senior Trust Services Manager chair the meetings is important.”

“The Chair should facilitate . . . not dictate!”

Foyle Women’s Aid recently carried out research that also identified additional factors that impact on the provision of advice and information access and support in relation to domestic violence at individual, organisational and inter-agency level.

Infrastructure Resources

There was universal agreement among all the fora that a local dedicated inter-agency domestic violence worker was required to either “drive the action forward between meetings “ or to carry out specific activities.

What is less consistent is the source of funding for the current interagency workers, the amount of time allocated to the posts and their roles and responsibilities. This is illustrated in [Table 3](#).

Local Fora	Post and Role Responsibilities
Armagh & Dungannon	Worker based in Trust Professional Support and Development seconded for 25% of time.
Causeway	A two year post funded by the Trust for the past 2 years (Due to finish March 2004). Main focus of post is on training and development . Previously one-year admin post funded.
Craigavon & Banbridge	Domestic Violence Co-ordinator seconded to pilot perpetrators programme on a % of overall time. Continuing to provide overall co-ordination support in % basis.
Down Lisburn	Provision of admin support by the Trust to convene and facilitate the forum.
Foyle	Initially full-time interagency trainer funded by Londonderry Regeneration Initiative based in Foyle Women’s Aid. Part-time admin resource support funded by Foyle HPSS Trust. Currently Executive Funds from DSD accessed by joint funding application from Trust and Foyle Women’s Aid for full time Inter-agency Policy Development Co-ordinator, full time Inter- agency Training Worker and one full time Admin Worker.
Homefirst	Women’s Aid accessed funding from the Children’s Executive funding for an Interagency Worker with a particular focus on children across the entire area of the Homefirst Trust.
Newry & Mourne	Interagency worker seconded on a 25% of time to facilitate the Forum.
North & West Belfast	Provision of admin support by the Trust to convene and facilitate the forum.
South & East Belfast	None although current plans are in place for Development Worker funded from the DSD Executive Funds.
Sperrin Lakeland	Provision of admin support by the Trust to convene and facilitate the forum.
North Down and Ards	Provision of admin support by the Trust to convene and facilitate the forum.

Table 3

At a regional level the NIWAF Inter-agency Worker was seconded for approximately two years to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to undertake work in relation to domestic violence and the NIHE Supporting People Programme.

During that time despite attempts at recruitment NIWAF was unable to secure a worker for a temporary secondment to meet the gap. External inter-agency partners commented upon the effectiveness of the previous worker in carrying out her role and the implications of the gap caused by the secondment.

“The guidance received from NIWAF to set up the local forum was invaluable as was Mapping The Vision.”

“NIWAF need to be aware that in not replacing [named interagency worker] when seconded that it diluted the inter-agency work.”

Some discussion also took place on the potential of a Regional Forum Co-ordinator post being created. While one interviewee commented, “this is not a ‘done deal’ by any means” others explored the issues arising if the post was to be created.

The factors that might impact upon the effectiveness of such a role would be clarity of purpose and of how the post might interface with the NIWAF Inter-agency Worker and the local fora workers.

This is also the situation that exists in relation to all the inter-agency workers with each other regardless of their status as regional or local staff.

At local level the decisions in relation to roles and responsibilities have been made based on a number of primary considerations: -

- The identified need of the individual forum.
- The effectiveness or otherwise in accessing direct funding.
- The decisions made when secondment is made from within a particular agency.

With the return of the NIWAF Regional Inter-agency Worker from the NIHE secondment, the local fora have indicated the type of work that they would recommend to NIWAF as providing the basis of her future activity.

“She could provide a strong link in filling in the gaps between the regional and local forums. They might also provide a support group for local inter-agency fora workers.” [This was echoed in a number of groups]

“They should continue to support the Forum [local] and have a role in strategic development and to facilitate a more consistent approach.”

“It is not necessary for the NIWAF Regional Inter-agency Worker to go to all of the fora all of the time.”

The role of the NIWAF interagency post will be determined primarily by:

- The collective need of local Women’s Aid groups in Northern Ireland in terms of inter-agency support and the support needs of local fora as highlighted within this report.
- The findings of the Government domestic violence consultation exercise and its recommendations.
- The decision that is made as to the Regional Forum putting a full time co-ordinator in place.
- The roles and responsibilities of a possible Regional Forum Co-ordinator.
- The resources that are accessed at a regional and local levels for inter-agency co-ordinators.

A separate document has been provided to NIWAF and local Women’s Aid groups outlining the findings and recommendations from their internal audit. Other factors identified that helped and hindered the development of local fora are summarised below.

- Resource funding; either its presence or absence. [This was a universal response across all fora]
- The mandate from individual agencies.
- Need for additional time given to sub-groups to progress activities.
- Changing membership with new members with varying degrees of knowledge and understanding about domestic violence and the interagency forum.
- Varying levels of commitment from individual agencies and their representatives.
- The honesty and openness of members.
- Rolling review.
- Input from user group.
- Large geographical area.
- When information is not fed back into individual agencies.
- Different levels of staff present [the need for senior managers that can influence decision-making and on the ground staff who feedback what is happening.
- Lack or presence of a dedicated interagency worker.
- The workload of existing members and the fact that the interagency participation was often described as “additional “ to their work rather than an integral organisational response to domestic violence
- The competence and the confidence of staff in individual agencies to undertake the interagency work

There was a 15% return from the individual questionnaires. Those who did respond indicated their self-assessment of their participation in the fora. This is illustrated in Table 4.

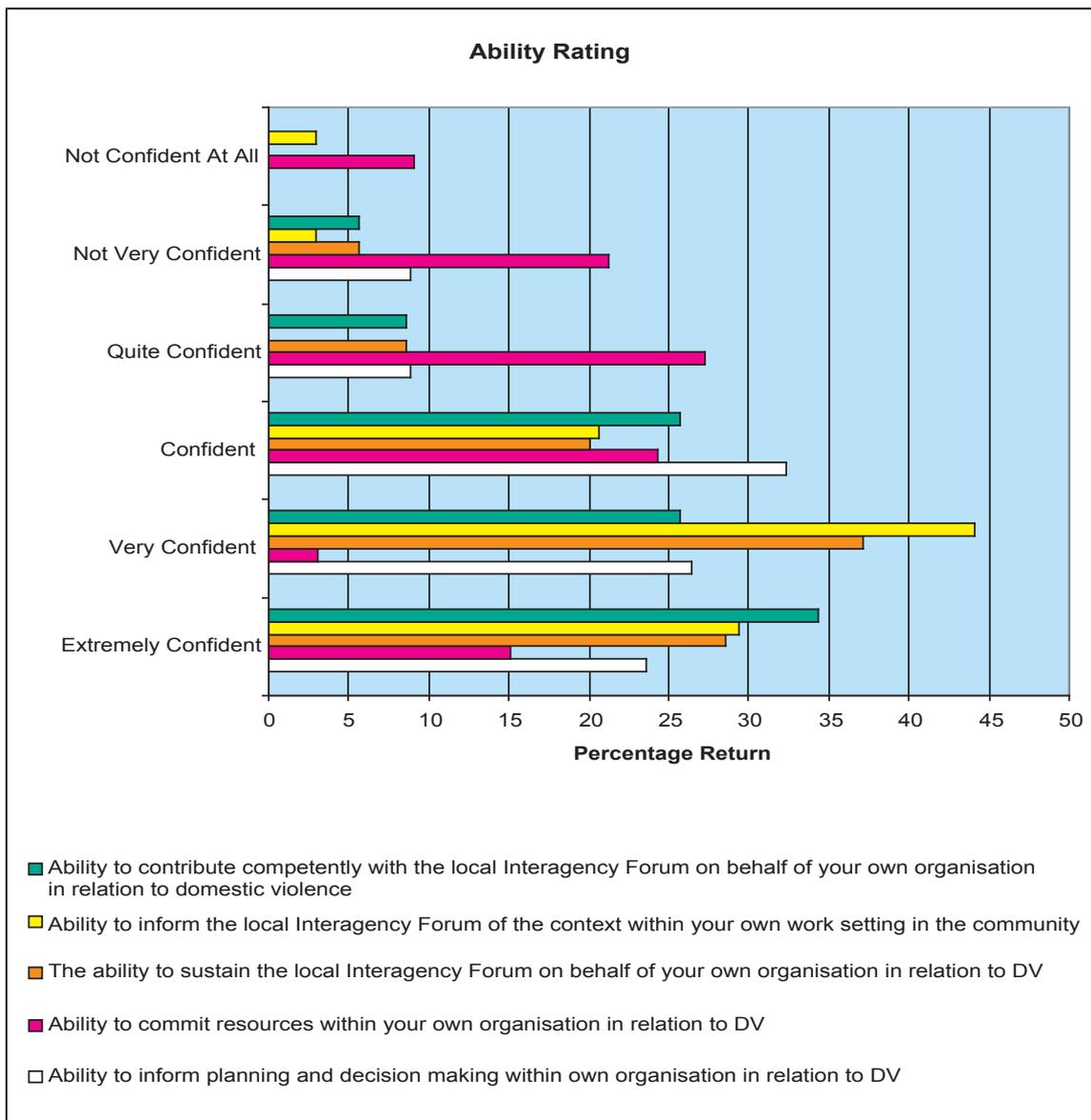


Table 4

Overall the ability rating for the individuals who responded to this question was favourable for each of the statements asked. The majority rated themselves as anywhere from ‘confident’ through to ‘extremely confident’ in relation to competence to contribute to their local forum on behalf of their own organisation in relation to domestic violence. They were also very confident in being able to inform their local forum of the context of their own work settings, and to sustain their local forum on behalf of their own organisation and inform planning and decision-making. The overall area of least confidence was in being able to commit resources from within own organisation in relation to domestic violence. This was a response that was also reflected during interviews. This may be a reflection of the decision-making capacity and authority of the representative member on the forum and the organisational commitment to domestic violence.

4.2.3 the regional and local fora interface

As stated earlier, it is not the remit of this audit to evaluate the work of the Regional Forum. However, its presence and activities undoubtedly has had an impact upon local fora development.

During the semi structured interviews local fora were asked what helped or hindered their relationship with the Regional Forum and for any recommendations that they would wish to make to the Regional Forum.

These have been categorised into key areas and are intended to provide the Regional Forum with feedback and recommendations that will enable them to identify needs from a primary internal service user i.e. local domestic violence fora and to inform their future strategic and operational planning. A selection of comments from the consultation have been included under the following key areas: visibility; strategic leadership; communication; resourcing; and networking and partnership.

Visibility

“Be more visible, driven and coordinated.”

“Not quite sure of their role and function.”

“I’ve heard some comments that they are revitalising but we need awareness raising of their own existence and what they are doing regionally and locally.”

Strategic Leadership

“Needs mechanisms for exchange for example with the ACPC and child protection in general. This needs to be happening at a strategic level. We are still waiting on terms of reference to inform the local forum.”

“Need a review of the Tackling Domestic Violence Policy document.”

“They could provide a lead in lobbying, in providing a common strategy on key areas and proposals.”

“Need a Ministerial steer to have clout and domestic violence included in the Government priorities.”

“The consultation document that’s happening should act as a lead strategy.”

“There should be championing at regional level, offering direction, resource creation and availability to be called upon at local level. Need to see more lobbying at regional level – local forum feels that it does not have sufficient leverage to make a difference, especially when dealing with a hierarchical organisation such as the

Church, where mediation needs to be made at the highest level.”

“Regional Forum should tackle Northern Ireland wide issues so that the local fora can be more productive and hands-on.”

Communication

“Need communication strategy.”

“There needs to be more questions asked by Regional Forum as to the needs of the local fora - there are differences in needs due to geographical location, relationship between forum members, client base etc.”

“Communication is very erratic. No formal method to ask for advice and direction to regional level”.

“It would be useful to have a directory and regular updates from the Regional Forum for the benefit of local fora.”

Resourcing

“We need resources and funding but so do they. Two levels regionally and locally who don't have funding to take a fundamental policy forward.”

“A Domestic Violence Coordinator at regional level would be useful. Perhaps Civil Service”

“We know that they don't have money but they could provide information on accessing funding”

Networking and Partnership

“Regional Forum should facilitate the chairs of local fora meeting regularly.”

“Very little contact, meetings stopped taking place with them.”

“Acknowledge the work that is being done at local level and communicate this with other local fora so that there is less of a need of ‘reinventing the wheel.’”

“Encourage and support the work that is being done - and maybe ask from time to time if ‘there is anything that the local forum needs?’”

“When receiving copies of Regional Forum minutes, issues are being identified that cannot be dealt with at local level e.g. male victims – this should be directed and influenced from regional level, identifying how the local fora manage at local level.”

Interviews with some of those involved in the Regional Forum indicated their awareness of some of the issues raised above.

“It has been moribund for quite a while with all the activity being at local level.”

“Each of the Board areas now have a co-ordinator on the Regional Forum. Three of the Four reported that they had met with the Chair of local Fora and that should give a much better loop.”

It has been agreed at the next meeting of the Regional Forum [Due 12/ 03] that it will look at meeting with local fora chairs and discuss communication and shared information.

“There are plans for a multi–agency integrated response that will develop standards of practice.”

“The Regional Forum could take responsibility to share practice.”

“It has to be remembered that there is no resourcing at the regional level either.”

Whilst some of the comments may be critical of the Regional Forum as it currently operates, they also reflect a desire for it to be strengthened and resourced to allow it to continue in an effective way. The need for a Departmental and Ministerial commitment to such a body is also clearly identified.

This concludes the first section of the report, which has sought to review the factors that impact upon the effectiveness of domestic violence fora throughout Northern Ireland. Section two reports the findings of the extent and nature of the past and current activities as well as any agreed objectives for local domestic violence interagency fora across Northern Ireland.



4.3.0 section two

4.3.1 activities audit

Identified Gaps

All of the fora identify gaps in services through a variety of methods. For some this is informal and raised by individual agencies at meetings, for others it is incorporated into strategic and operational planning review. For a small number it is a specific activity.

Some examples found are as follows: -

- Craigavon & Banbridge have just completed a study of services in key areas and are using the information for their strategic review.
- Foyle formally records gaps in services and informs the relevant agencies. Recent research commissioned by Foyle Women's Aid assisted by a Steering group comprising local domestic violence partnership members examined the factors that help and hinder survivors and perpetrators accessing advice and information.
- In Newry and Mourne gaps in services for children are being looked into by the Childcare Services Subgroup. The Trust Child Protection Panel is looking into the unmet needs of child violence from domestic violence and are currently discussing this with Barnardos. Women's Aid in Newry distributes questionnaires to survivors of domestic violence to understand where they went to seek help and assistance.
- The Armagh and Dungannon, Craigavon and Banbridge and Newry and Mourne fora have come together to discuss gaps across their shared geographical area.
- The Down Lisburn Trust are about to undertake a tracking exercise when all the agencies involved will be asked to invite their service users to indicate if they are accessing domestic violence services and if those services are satisfactory and appropriate etc..

Mechanisms for identifying gaps range from regular review and formal recording to anecdotal evidence and awareness among members of the issues arising.

The audit found a number of service development issues that were raised by individual fora. However, as many are also relevant across all areas they are provided here as collective concerns.

-
- Lack of dedicated support workers to sustain and develop interagency work.
 - In many areas there is a lack of programmes for perpetrators [the issue of female perpetrators and male victims was also raised by two fora].
 - Gaps in services for children and young people in particular geographical areas within individual fora.
 - Work required with rural communities and cross border links.
 - Work with GPs, schools, solicitors and clergy.
 - Support for women going into court.
 - Develop tracking and recording mechanisms.
 - Feedback from service users.
 - Internal feedback loop that is linked through to service development planning.

Development of Services

As a result of previously identified gaps, different fora have been involved in joint collaborations in the delivery of the Men Overcoming Domestic Violence (MODV) programme and preventative education programmes. A number of the fora commented on the changing perception of their role as being less concerned with the development of services but increasingly in identifying gaps and encouraging and influencing others to provide those services. A sample of developments referred to specifically include

- A tri-partite collaboration between Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Women's Aid to provide a drop-in service for a year in the Armagh CAB office.
- Transport provision for Craigavon refuge.
- Barnardos pilot risk assessment analysis.
- Employer policies along with protocol and policy development for use of agencies in the Foyle area.
- Enabling GPs to meet with survivors at the Women's Aid Centre in Newry.

- Secondment from Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid to carry out development work with community groups.
- ACPC Piloting common data research in screening.
- Domestic violence training in hospitals.
- Development of a video by a solicitor on the North and West Forum to support women going to court.

Awareness Raising

Table 5 illustrates the extent and diversity of the awareness raising activities carried out by all fora.

Forum Name	Events Organised	Comments
Armagh & Dungannon	Yes	Information seminar for minority ethnic groups; Wishing Tree event with local supermarkets (Sainsbury's and Curley's). Production of directories and posters 2-3 years ago. Provision of information / safety card.
Causeway	Yes	Best Practice Guidelines produced and used to inform staff. Link to Causeway Trust website. Numerous articles in local papers and on radio.
Craigavon & Banbridge	Yes	Published Best Practice Guidelines outlining definition, myths, beliefs and legal position etc., and links between domestic violence and child protection policy and practice. Also published second edition of their Domestic Violence Directory.
Down Lisburn	Yes	Held a series of local seminars four years ago and published leaflets and posters. Published a Domestic Violence Directory and have scoped out the information for another one but have no funds for republishing. Awareness raising on male victims and abuse on the elderly. Seminar held for local clergy in Lisburn
Foyle	Yes	Published a directory in 1997 that is currently being reviewed and to be made available on CD ROM and linked to the website. In 1998 they organised a major conference on domestic violence. They are hoping to plan a Zero Tolerance Campaign in the area with the support of the local councils.
Homefirst	Yes	Produced Guidelines for Good Practice in 1999. Four of the five sub groups have produced directories for their local area. They have made presentations to local bodies and agencies throughout the Trust area. A launch day and information distribution was also organised recently in the Antrim / Larne area.
Newry & Mourne	Yes	Organised launches for the inter-agency directory, good practice guidelines, pregnancy leaflet, wallet cards and GO flyers. Publicity was generated in regard to training events, seminars and school programmes. Further plans include activities with GP's, schools and solicitors.

North & West Belfast	Yes	Raise awareness through the use of Women's Aid posters and directories of domestic violence services. They have carried out a number of awareness raising sessions including events with community groups. They have also made use of local radio in North and West Belfast. Individual agencies also do their own events e.g. PBNI, Law Centre, Women's Aid. They are currently developing a PR strategy with the support of Trust specialist staff that will increase integration of events. A local solicitor on the fora is producing a video to support women going into court.
South & East Belfast	Yes	Within the last four years they have published Guidelines for Ministers of Faith, Good Practice Guidelines and an Information Leaflet for Staff, an Information Leaflet on the Abuse of Older People, and held a range of seminars including one for minority ethnic groups. They are currently planning a 10 th anniversary event to publicise their achievements over that period.
Sperrin Lakeland	Yes	Published a Directory of Services in 1999, Crisis Cards in 2000 and currently reviewing their Best Practice Guidelines. They have undertaken a number of events with schools eg the painting competition and have an information sub-group that has been operational for approximately 1 year.
North Down and Ards	Yes	Published a directory 5-6 years ago and Good Practice Guidelines in June 2003 with a public launch. They have also revised and re-launched their leaflets and safety cards.

Table 5

Preventative Education Programmes

All fora have initiated activities in relation to preventative education programmes. However, the degree of development and the range of activities in this area of work varied greatly across the fora. One of the forum commented that they see preventative education 'as the way forward'. They stated that one of the objectives of their forum is to focus on these issues by way of: -

- Safety planning for survivors – which will be user orientated, proactive.
- Risk assessment for adults and children – looking at protection services.
- Personal relationship programmes – focused training with 6th form/adolescents delivered by Women's Aid and PSNI.
- Emphasis to agencies that domestic violence is unacceptable and needs to be placed in child protection and duty to care . Offering men (potential/actual perpetrators) better support and making services more accessible for them to seek assistance, particularly in rural areas .

For most groups preventative education programmes involve the delivery of the No Fear⁵ and Helping Hands⁶ programmes in the area, although many are delivered as a service of Women's Aid rather than the forum itself. The same is also true of the Journey to Freedom programmes, which are domestic violence education courses for women survivors. Therefore what is presented as fora activity may actually be a Women's Aid service with the fora informed of development and progress.



The target group of the preventative programmes also varies across Northern Ireland. Ballymena Women's Aid has carried out the programme with 13 primary schools, 6 post primary schools and an adolescent partnership after schools project. Craigavon and Banbridge also have a teen relationships programme funded for three years and Causeway have a school age mothers project. The North and West Trust in Belfast has targeted the No Fear programme for social workers with the South and East Trust in organising seminars for schools, nurses, teachers and with minority ethnic groups. Sperrin Lakeland targeted primary and secondary head teachers in Omagh and Fermanagh, linked to their audit of need. In the North Down and Ards forum area, the local Women's Aid group is providing outreach in 10 schools and to the local Surestart programme. They are also providing mentoring to health visitors on safety planning, accessing support and counselling for women etc.



The development and accessibility of programmes for male perpetrators is inconsistent across Northern Ireland. Issues arising included cross Trust/area access to the MODV programmes and programmes where men are the victims of the violence.



Currently Causeway and Foyle fora have a collaborative MODV partnership between PBNI, Social Services and Women's Aid operating effectively in their areas. Ballymena Women's Aid are also involved in the steering group for the Causeway programme and contribute to its support. Craigavon and Banbridge and the North Down and Ards Fora have both piloted the programme in the past. Armagh and Dungannon, Craigavon and Banbridge and Newry and Mourne are exploring the possibility of linking up to secure funding to provide the MODV programme across their geographical area. Some of the fora members also refer to the Men to Men programmes offered by Relate and the Family Centre in Barnardos, which carries out rehabilitation and risk assessment.



In the Belfast area a pilot programme is currently under way for a programme for non-court mandated perpetrators which includes support offered to families of perpetrators attending the programme. The pilot programme has a multi agency Steering group including North and West and South and East Trusts, PBNI and Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid. The project staff who have been seconded from Social Services, PBNI and Women's Aid on a full time basis for a period of two years are managed by PBNI.



⁵ No Fear Heading for Healthy Relationships - an activity pack for young people (1998), Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation.

⁶ Helping Hands for Children – an activity pack for children (2001), Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation.

Training

Most of the fora have a training sub group. However, the audit found little consistency in aspects such as the identification of training needs or in the target groups selected. This undoubtedly, as in other areas of the audit relates to the development of local fora responses based upon the needs in each area. Again there were reports of training that was Women's Aid provision rather than direct fora activity.

Therefore the sub sections that follow can only contain snapshots of the training development and provision within fora across Northern Ireland.

Training Needs Analysis

Causeway carried out a formal training needs analysis and they have a regular review of training and development. They found the primary need was to target training with the staff members from the local forum representative agencies and for new forum members themselves. Causeway have a dedicated interagency training and development worker carrying out this work. Craigavon and Banbridge's training analysis identified the need to provide training to community groups that were responding to the needs of minority ethnic groups. They also prioritised the training need for 'frontline services' including NIHE, Social Security Agency and Court Service staff. Other target groups are the PSNI generally, magistrates and GPs. Foyle have carried out training needs analysis in the past. They feel that the domestic violence basic awareness delivery is good but intend to develop more skills training and multi disciplinary working particularly on the impact of domestic violence on children. Newry and Mourne currently have a training needs analysis underway. North and West Belfast carry out a rolling review of their training needs.

Sperrin Lakeland carried out an audit of training needs of schools and churches in their area. North Down and Ards carried out a training audit across members and are trying to secure funding to have domestic violence training rolled out in conjunction with good practice indicators. Only Foyle produced a formal written training plan or strategy although reference was made to their presence in individual agencies returns.

Training Provision

Health Visitors seem to be a specific group targeted for training particularly by Armagh and Dungannon, South and East Belfast, Ulster Community and Hospital Trusts. Ballymena Women Aid historically and currently carry out Health Visitor training in their Trust area. The North and West Trust in Belfast have a training information input into all of their meetings. Examples provided include changes in legislation, the NIHE and Floating Support, Victim Support and the Non Violent Relationships Project referred to earlier in the preventative education sub section. Foyle are developing training based on options for different professional groups and levels. As a university city they are also targeting social work and law students. The training is provided by a staff member of Foyle Women's Aid who is directed in the targeting of training by the local fora.

The South and East Trust Belfast provide training for social workers on an annual basis through their training unit and in association with Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid. Armagh and Dungannon Fora have developed a training pack for the delivery of training in partnership with Cookstown and Dungannon Women's Aid.

There was a discussion at an individual interview for the need for standardised levels of skills, knowledge and understanding to be developed. It may be that the Regional Forum could develop a strategy to identify key skills and knowledge and to implement standardised training for all key professional groups.

Training Providers

In all but one fora Women's Aid provide some input to varying degrees to the staff training. Those participating are mainly within health and social services including health visitors, social workers midwives and accident and emergency staff . Many Women's Aid groups also provide training to local PSNI officers. Women's Aid also provides training in partnership with internal training staff from other agencies or in a multi disciplinary team with the PSNI and the Social Services Trust.

Other training providers identified include:

- Internal Social Services Trust Trainers.
- Multi-disciplinary Trust training teams.
- Trainers and speakers from other fora.
- Beeches Management Centre which provides Nursing and Midwifery Education.
- NIWAF training

Training for Fora Members

Not all of the fora members currently sitting on their local forum have had domestic violence training. Foyle have a plan for members to access training. In Sperrin Lakeland individual agencies providing domestic violence training offer places to forum members as they arise. Some other fora try to arrange for members to access training through whatever opportunities are available from the provision cited earlier.

One forum referred to the logistics of organising internal forum training in that it was hard to get dates that suited all. They had devised a plan but returns for attendance proved difficult. Another explained that when the number of new members coming in were so small it was impossible to organise an event for two or three people alone.

Training for Individual Members

There was a fairly poor response by individuals to this question in the questionnaire. Of those that answered, most had undertaken half-day events where the training had been facilitated by a representative from Women's Aid (either at local or regional level). Two individuals had cited a conference on domestic violence as training. It is important to recognise the distinction between conference events and training courses and the purpose of each.

4.3.2 outcomes

Co-ordination and Collaboration

Previous sections of this report focused on the identified inputs and outputs of domestic violence interagency activity throughout Northern Ireland. However this audit has also attempted to record some of the outcomes as well as the activities of local fora.

There was universal agreement that interagency collaboration and co-ordination had increased as individual agency representatives had got to know each other and begun to understand the range of services that each provided.

Comments to illustrate this included: -

“There is more clarification now about who does what.”

“Everyone has always done good work but now doing it together.”

“Work is more focused and in-depth.”

“It has been crucial from a health perspective. The level of support has grown over the years so that no agency feels in isolation. There is a joint ownership.”

“There is more shared practice.”

“Now have domestic violence network.”

“There is a better rapport and understanding.”

“Confidence built among agencies. Consultative element went a long way towards doing this.”

“More structured in its approach.”

Some practical examples of the collaboration are provided below: -

- MODV partnerships.
- Tripartite partnership between CAB, PSNI and Women’s Aid for a drop in centre in Armagh.
- Child protection risk assessment and analysis.
- Joint agency protocols developed with the PSNI in Foyle.
- Community involvement with PSNI and the MODV programme as well as the Violence ‘on the edge’ programme for those who support minority ethnic groups.

Respondents also felt that the individual fora has had a positive impact on signposting to other agencies, joint working and referrals.

“The relationship creates an atmosphere where referral is easier”

“As a result of the interagency work referrals have increased from health visitors, A&E and PSNI”

“Some information is shared on joint working with individual families”

The way in which information was shared within each forum varied greatly: -

- It is included in the minutes of meetings and circulated.
- Information sharing is an agenda item.
- Information fed back to ACPC and administration.
- The strategic plan sets out our stall for information sharing. Information is shared at every meeting.
- Internal communication comes through forum into or out of sub groups based on strategic plan.
- Have multi disciplinary planning.
- Verbal communication – telephone liaison with other members.

Respondents also identified the areas where they thought that co-ordination and collaboration needed to be more effective.

“Need to influence colleagues and senior managers, it can be difficult to translate the work back into our own agencies.”

“If there is no recognition of domestic violence or a shared understanding that can create a difficulty”

“Problems arise when there is a turnover of staff, and the membership keeps changing”

“Need to promote the Inter-agency Forum within [named individual agency] when this is done such as [named individual agency] it was used to influence policy”

“While there has been a positive impact it needs to be developed further. Currently [referring to own forum] it is driven by a few main players”

“The difficulty is to know how to spread it out beyond core members”

One of the greatest challenges at regional and local level is to develop protocols that are independent of personalities and will remain in place even when staff change.

Record Keeping and Monitoring Systems

There was a low response rate to this particular question on the questionnaire. Within the responses given only six agencies indicated that they had recording systems in place. From the statistics recorded by agencies, it also suggested that the systems are not adequate and do not give a true reflection of the extent of domestic violence.

The PSNI records show that from April 2002 through to March 2003 a total of 7,253 violent incidents were attended and identified as domestic violence.

In the same period, local Women's Aid groups accommodated 989 women and 1,112 children in refuges throughout Northern Ireland. They responded to at least 14,307 telephone requests for advice and information. At least 4,451 women used their local Women's Aid group for non-accommodation support such as; court accompaniment; aftercare; one-one; attending courses; and drop-in sessions.

The NIWAF Regional Helpline received 17,580 calls throughout the year.

5.0 summary and conclusions

Before drawing conclusions based on the information recorded previously in this report there are a number of further issues for consideration.

Seeking to create a database of members in local fora for questionnaire distribution purposes proved difficult. There is no central record of individual fora or as a whole. When approached for the information some individual fora found it difficult to provide up to date membership lists. It was also suggested that the Regional Forum provide a directory of agencies and Chairs of fora on a regional basis. [A similar model is distributed in related to community development personnel in each Trust area.]

Only 15% of distributed questionnaires were returned. In part, this may have been due to consultation fatigue or in some cases the mistaken belief that the individual questionnaires required a collective response from the local forum as a whole. Some organisations where they had more than one staff member on a forum choose to submit a group return. This said, the percentage return reflects responses from all of the 11 local fora.

Currently there are 11 domestic violence fora throughout Northern Ireland that parallel the structure of the local Health Trusts. Where sub-fora exist the response from members suggests that this may create an inconsistent response within the overall area.

The audit found a lack of a formal domestic violence policy in local fora or at individual agency level. Three out of the eleven fora had developed a domestic violence policy adapted from various sources. The majority of local fora had however, developed best practice guidelines that encompass many of the issues found in a formal policy document.

Where a domestic violence policy was available there were indications that these had not been incorporated into the policies of many individual agencies, including statutory providers.

Planning

All of the local fora have a domestic violence inter-agency strategic plan in place many of which were completed during the Mapping the Vision event facilitated by NIWAF. Many of these strategic plans have either been reviewed or updated on a 'rolling basis' with three fora undertaking a more formal review within the recent past.

The audit found that the local fora are committed to ongoing strategic planning and policy development. For this to be facilitated however there is a need for a framework based on a regional strategic plan. Such a plan would indicate targets to provide direction and mutual accountability between local fora and the Regional Forum and be underpinned by a policy document that can be replicated at local and individual organisational level.

It was clear from the discussion with the fora that many of them are looking for direction and regional strategic leadership from the Regional Forum in order to inform their local work and to operationalise activities in their own areas.

The dissemination of the information from any regional domestic violence strategy and plan needs to take place in a way that results in the tangible production of domestic violence policies and plans among local fora members.

In the meantime, it may be more efficient for local fora to maintain momentum and review their current plans on a short-term basis until the outcomes of the government regional consultation are known.

There is also an identified need for many of the fora to carry out a formal review of the Mapping the Vision plans to meet current operational planning requirements and to keep the momentum of the existing work going. Those fora that have reviewed more recently commented on the outcomes of the process in that they had achieved greater clarity in understanding the remit and responsibilities of the fora in comparison with the role and work of individual agencies.

Tackling Violence At Home

The Government is to undertake a domestic violence consultation exercise before the end of 2003 Tackling Violence at Home. It is likely that such an exercise could result in the production of an updated regional policy and strategic plan in relation to domestic violence.

Meetings and Participation

A number of factors enhance meetings for individual members and contribute to the differences that are apparent in the development of different fora as well as the level and amount of activities undertaken.

Issues identified by the fora members as affecting the effectiveness and efficiency of the individual forum either positively or negatively included: -

- A clear mandate from their individual agencies.
- Need for additional time given to sub-groups to progress activities.
- Changing membership with new members with varying degrees of knowledge and understanding about domestic violence and the interagency forum.
- Varying levels of commitment from individual agencies and their representatives.
- The honesty and openness of members.
- Rolling review as a regular event.
- Input from user group.
- Size and profile of geographical area.
- When information is not fed back into individual agencies.
- The workload of existing members and the fact that the interagency participation was often described as “additional” to their work rather than an integral organisational response to domestic violence.
- The competence and the confidence of staff in individual agencies to undertake the interagency work.

The frequency of meetings can vary from every month to once a quarter. This may be more frequent if attendance at sub groups is also calculated. Members need to be aware of achieving a balance between commitment and burnout.

Indications are that the voluntary sector and particularly community sector representation needs to be increased in many of the fora. However this needs to be balanced with an efficient core-working group.

With a few exceptions, there was a scarcity of representation from GPs, clergy and the legal profession on the local fora. Given the extent to which this is a shared difficulty it needs perhaps to be addressed at two levels. The first at the regional level is to engage with key decision makers and influencers in these professional areas. The second is at local level is to plan a marketing strategy which promotes 'bite sized contact' to attract interest and participation from these professionals in domestic violence events.

There is a perceived and actual motivation to ensure that some form of user feedback is represented within the fora. NIWAF may wish to co-ordinate and develop guidelines and standards for enhancing user participation and feedback and share these with interagency partners locally and regionally.

Concern was expressed in many fora at the level of staff representation of some key agencies in some fora and the fluctuating levels of attendance and participation in fora activities. If domestic violence is prioritised at Government level with commitment and senior policy and decision makers being involved at the regional level it is likely to result in a revitalisation and prioritisation among senior managers and activity at local level and in individual organisations . A mechanism needs also to be in place to ensure that the experiences and feedback from staff working 'on the ground' is also heard.

High levels of facilitative and strategic leadership of the individual forum by the Chair proved motivating and supportive to individual participants and vice versa. Reviews carried out by the local forum might perhaps provide opportunities to revisit the expectations of members in regard to process as well as activities.

There was a very positive response to the resources provided by local Trusts and some individual agencies to service the networks through the provision of venues, administrative support, hospitality etc. However the lack of sustained and dedicated resources was a concern to all. The local fora requires information and guidance on funding opportunities and access to funding.

There was universal agreement among all the fora that a local dedicated domestic violence worker was required to either 'drive the action forward between meetings' or to carry out specific activities. What is less consistent is the source of funding for the current interagency workers, the amount of time allocated to the posts and their roles and responsibilities.

The effectiveness of all the inter agency workers whether regional or local will be affected by the clarity of purpose of their role and how they interface with each other.

Regional Forum

The presence and outputs of the Regional Forum has had an impact upon local fora development. The recommendations from the local fora to the Regional Forum indicate specific areas for future planning.

- Increase visibility and presence among the local fora and in the region as a whole as a focus for a response to domestic violence.
- Provide Strategic Leadership [policy, planning, information on funding opportunities, terms of reference, standards, lobbying].
- Enhance communication with local fora with more interface opportunities for shared information, consultation and decision-making. A regional directory would be of benefit.
- Provide guidance and information on resourcing.
- Lobby for dedicated funding.
- Facilitate opportunities for joined up working, networking and partnership events locally and regionally.
- Provide protocols to clarify roles and processes between the regional and local government and fora in relation to domestic violence.

Service Development

The second main section of the report outlined the findings of the extent and nature of the past and current activities of local domestic violence interagency fora across Northern Ireland.

The audit found a number of service development issues that were identified by individual fora but may also be collective concern. These may be useful in planning future service development locally and regionally.

Extensive awareness raising activities have taken place in all fora. Consideration needs to be given to a more focused 'marketing' approach in the future, utilising existing expertise within the forum membership or their organisations.

A number of the fora commented on the changing perception of their role as being less concerned with the development of services but increasingly in identifying gaps and encouraging and influencing others to provide those services. This is a crucial aspect of the future development of the local fora and reiterates the need for clarity of purpose, roles and responsibilities between individual agencies and the local forum, particularly in relation to service development.

All fora have initiated activities in relation to preventative education programmes. However the degree of development and the range of activities in this area of work varied greatly. It might prove useful for regional and /or area seminars be held on a Board or regional basis to explore what preventative education is and to share best practice and information.

The development and accessibility of programmes for male perpetrators is inconsistent across Northern Ireland. Issues arising included cross Trust/area access to the MODV programmes and support programmes when men are the victims of the violence.

Given this inconsistency, it would be useful for PBNI to produce a paper which collates the evaluations and results from previous MODV programmes in relation to reoffending and to outline new developments.

The audit found little consistency in aspects of training such as identifying needs or selecting target groups. It is recognised however that this is due to local decisions based on available resources and the use of informal mechanisms and feedback from members.

The majority of the fora carry out their training needs analysis on an 'ad hoc' basis either within their own agencies or in the fora as a whole. The presence of a training plan or the monitoring, review and evaluation of training is, in the majority, informal or non-existent across the fora. This impacts upon the diversity, frequency and identified opportunities for training provision. It may be that the Regional Forum could develop a strategy to implement standardised training for all key professional groups. In all but one fora Women's Aid provide some input in varying degrees to the training. In a few this is provided in partnership with internal training staff from other agencies or in a multi disciplinary team with the PSNI and the Social Services Trust.

Not all of the fora members currently sitting on the local forum have had domestic violence training and may have difficulty in accessing this training easily. It can also be a problematic for individual forum to arrange this themselves. NIWAF may wish to consider offering domestic violence and interagency training on a rolling basis in different locations throughout Northern Ireland with mentoring support from local fora members.

There is evidence of some excellent research-taking place throughout Northern Ireland. However there is no central reference point to access this information nor is it currently shared through the networks of local fora themselves nor with the Regional Forum.

While previous sections focused on identified inputs and outputs the audit has also attempted to record some of the outcomes of local fora.

There was universal agreement that interagency collaboration and co-ordination had increased as individual agency representatives had got to know each other and begun to understand the range of services that each provided.

Practical examples were provided of the collaboration and co-operation. It was clear that respondents also felt that the individual fora has had a positive impact on signposting to other agencies, joint working and referrals.

The way in which information was shared within each forum varied greatly and it may be useful for individual fora including the Regional Forum to consider how to maximise opportunities in the future.

Respondents also identified other areas where they thought that co-ordination and collaboration needed to be more effective.

- To influence colleagues and senior managers.
- To promote and integrate the work back into individual agencies.
- Adoption of a shared understanding of what domestic violence is.
- Promoting the work in the external environment.
- Standardised recording of domestic violence.

Tackling Domestic Violence records a commitment by Government Departments and public agencies to work together to tackle domestic violence and to develop greater liaison between agencies at community level. The recommendations that follow will contribute to and strengthen future co-ordination.

6.0 recommendations

The recommendations are made in regard to three key stakeholders, the local fora, NIWAF and the NI Regional Forum on Domestic Violence. Where the same recommendation is appropriate for more than one stakeholder, it has been placed within the context of its own remit.

NI Regional Forum on Domestic Violence Recommendations

- The Regional Forum should be strengthened. It should review and clarify its role to take forward and oversee the full implementation of the Government's strategy on domestic violence following consultation on 'Tackling Violence At Home'. It is essential that the Regional Forum produce its own strategic plan with outputs and outcomes that measure performance and provide clear direction to inform local fora planning.
- The Regional Forum should secure the commitment of one lead Minister and Government Department to take responsibility for its work.
- Each Government Department and regional organisation with membership on the Regional Forum should commit to the full implementation of its strategy and plans.
- The Regional Forum should secure political commitment and financial resources to carry out its plan.
- The Regional Forum should secure adequate and appropriate co-ordination and administrative support to ensure the implementation of its own strategy and Government domestic violence policy.
- The Regional Forum should improve and develop its relationship and communication with local domestic violence fora to ensure effective support and co-ordination of their work.
- The Regional Forum should develop and promote guidelines for departments, agencies and organisations to implement effective systems to monitor and record domestic violence. It should consider the introduction of 'domestic violence proofing' in a model similar to that of Equality and Human Rights.
- The Regional Forum should prioritise and action the operational tasks identified in this report including:
 - Engage with prioritised sectors.
 - Request a briefing paper on perpetrator programme developments in Northern Ireland.
 - Develop and disseminate standardised tools to assist needs analysis, service development, record keeping and monitoring and evaluation.
 - Produce a Regional Inter-agency Directory
 - Explore vocational standards for inter-agency workers and professional staff responding to domestic violence.

NIWAF Recommendations

- NIWAF should advise local fora and the Regional Forum of the revised role and responsibilities of its Inter-agency Co-ordinator.
- NIWAF should offer facilitation and support to local domestic violence fora to review and plan their strategic and operational priorities.
- NIWAF should identify and disseminate best practice in relation to effective inter-agency working based, in part, on the issues identified in this report. This may include the development of best practice indicators for interagency working for self-assessment purposes.
- NIWAF should develop and disseminate best practice guidelines in relation to the involvement of users in providing feedback, consultation and decision-making.
- NIWAF should organise in collaboration with others events such as seminars and conferences that provide opportunities to explore recent developments, research and best practice on domestic violence.
- NIWAF should include training events in its annual training calendar for new fora members to provide for areas where no local access to training is available.
- NIWAF should provide opportunities for information sharing and support for local domestic violence fora and/or inter-agency workers.
- NIWAF should circulate the findings and recommendations of this report to all local domestic violence fora and the Regional Forum.

Local Fora Recommendations

- Local fora should revisit their existing membership to clarify the commitment, role and responsibility of each agency's representative.
- Each local fora and agency should consider both operational and strategic decision-making representation amongst its membership to ensure effective action and implementation.
- Local fora should adopt a process of annual review and planning to ensure progress and co-ordination with local and Government priorities on domestic violence.
- Local fora members should review the mechanisms for communication, participation and decision making within their own agencies.
- Local fora should annually review the effectiveness of their meetings, decision-making, training, and membership processes.
- Local fora should adopt and implement effective systems to monitor and record domestic violence.
- Local fora should identify, circulate and promote best practice in relation to policy and procedures on domestic violence and monitor the implementation and effectiveness of same.
- Local fora should develop mechanisms to include the views of women and children who have experienced domestic violence in the planning, review and development of services.

Additional copies of this report and further information on any publications cited can be obtained from:

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