MINISTRY OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS
MINITATANGA MŌ NGĀ WĀHINE

11 September 2007

Report on stakeholder workshop: Strong and safe communities - effective interventions for adult victims of sexual violence

Background

1   In February 2007, the Cross Departmental Research Pool (CDRP) announced that the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA) had obtained $800,000 for a two-year research project, *Strong and safe communities - effective interventions for adult victims of sexual violence.* MWA is leading the research project in partnership with the Ministry of Justice and New Zealand Police.

2   A factsheet on the research project outlining objectives and approach is attached at Appendix A.

Purpose and format of the workshop

3   As a first step in community consultation, MWA held a workshop with non-government organisations (NGOs) on 23 August 2007. The purpose of the workshop was to outline the project's scope and aims and to hear the views of NGOs. The workshop agenda is attached at Appendix B. Ten representatives from eight NGOs participated (Appendix C).

4   Shenagh Gleisner, Chief Executive of MWA, welcomed the participants. Dr Denise Lievore, the Research Manager, gave a presentation on the prevalence and nature of sexual violence against adults in New Zealand and an overview of the project's objectives and approach. Emma Yeatts, MWA Policy Analyst, then spoke about the Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence and its links with the research project.

5   The participants broke into two groups to discuss three broad topics:

- priorities and desired outcomes for the research

- appropriate ways of engaging with diverse social groups

- victim help-seeking.

6   The discussions centred on:

- awareness, understanding and communication

- justice and non-justice services
- victim help-seeking
- cultural awareness
- engaging with diverse groups in research.

Summary of key themes

Awareness, understanding, communication

7   Participants discussed the importance and impact of societal attitudes to sexuality and sexual violence. At the social level there are difficulties around talking about sexual matters. Making sexuality something we can all talk about is integral to changing attitudes to sexual violence. Likewise, it is important that victims of sexual violence are acknowledged as survivors, as heroes and heroines. Given the power of the media, it may be useful to educate journalists in the use of appropriate language around sexuality and sexual violence.

8   The discussion raised the following questions:

- Do women and men have the language to talk about sexuality and respect in sexual relationships?
- Do women and men understand what sexual violence is?
- Does the community have sufficient awareness of sexual violence to support and accept women who speak out about it?

9   The lack of positive language around sexuality was seen to be linked to a lack of understanding about what comprises sexual violence. There is a need for awareness-building among women and men. For example, promoting awareness that sexual violence includes forced prostitution, exposure to pornography, and sexual degradation.

10   Added to this, the link between family violence and sexual violence is often not recognised. There are also misconceptions that sexual violence is most often perpetrated by a 'dangerous stranger'. Although there may be a higher prevalence of sexual violence in intimate relationships, it is less likely to be reported, particularly in non-heterosexual relationships. Victims may experience confusing feelings stemming from sexual violence within relationships. They may feel that they were complicit in their victimisation and experience shame and self-blame, which hinder disclosure.

Responding to these issues

11   Suggestions for addressing these issues centred on:

- increasing public awareness and addressing misconceptions about sexual violence

- changing the way language is used around sexuality and sexual violence

- education for women

- providing more resources for victims of intimate partner sexual violence.

Justice and non-justice services

12   The participants identified a need for justice and non-justice support services to demonstrate increased sensitivity towards victims of sexual violence. They suggested that the public needed more information on the nature of sexual violence and justice responses to it.

13   Re-victimisation, especially through the criminal justice system, was a key concern for all stakeholders. The silo effect of current service structures was seen to contribute to revictimisation: in some areas, staff from support services cannot act as court advocates.

Criminal justice system

14   There was agreement that criminal justice processes were in need of a "revamp". Victims were more likely to opt out of the process if their needs were not met. Some of the issues facing victims include:

- the isolation of those whose family or friends are called as witnesses and are therefore unable to speak to them

- failure to advise support and advocacy services of trial dates

- victims feeling like they are on trial

- the need for one advocate to support the victim through the criminal justice process

- the need for consistent advocacy guidelines across the country.

15   The following questions were raised:

- How can criminal justice processes be tailored so that victims feel supported, for example judge-alone trials?

- How well do we understand what victims want from their engagement with the criminal justice system?

- What does the concept of fairness mean to victims? Does it relate only to criminal justice outcomes, or does it extend to issues such as sensitivity, attitudes, and trust?

- How can a safe and respectful environment be created, particularly in the courts system?

Support services

16   Victims who choose not to report sexual violence to police must have access to alternative service options. Issues related to non-justice support services include:

- a lack of services and options

- the need to promote awareness of existing services

- the need for more supportive intervention services

- how to best train service providers, particularly in respect of cultural awareness.

17   A number of strategies for dealing with violence have already been established for Māori. These include iwi services and zero tolerance to violence (Ngāi Tahu).

Victim help-seeking

18   Participants made the point that there is a lack of understanding about victims who do not disclose sexual violence to police or other support services and their reasons for this. It was also acknowledged that the decision to report to police or other support services seems to be a "drop out point" for some victims.

19   Potential barriers to help-seeking include:

- inaccessible services

- lack of interpretations services

- poorly funded services that cannot respond to the victim's needs

- lack of information on where to seek help

- attitudinal barriers, for example, stigma and victim-blaming

- physical barriers, for example, for women with physical disabilities

- fear of the reaction of family or whānau

- the victim's perception that they were complicit in their victimisation, leading to shame and self-blame

- sexual violence may be secondary to other violence

- victims may seek advice for related issues, such as sexually transmitted infections, without disclosing sexual violence

- opportunity to disclose, for example, routine screening by GPs may invite disclosure

- dependency on the perpetrator

- implications of disclosure for the perpetrator.

20   Factors that promote disclosure include:

- trust in the other person
- de-mystifying sexual violence
- balancing privacy issues
- ensuring support after disclosure
- overcoming media stereotyping
- promoting attitudinal change and prevention efforts.

Cultural awareness

21   Cultural awareness and culturally appropriate frameworks were also discussed. These are essential for encouraging ethnic, migrant and refugee women to come forward. This issue cuts across all of the themes emerging from the discussion. The principles discussed here are applicable to all social groups.

22   In some ethnic, migrant and refugee communities, the taboo against discussing sexuality means that victims either do not have the language or are unable to talk about sexual violence. For these women, sexual violence is more a "violation of the soul" than a physical violation.

23   For some, the stigma and shame attached to sexual violence have a severe impact on the victim, her family and her community. For example, a woman who admits to sexual victimisation may face personal ostracism as well as jeopardising her sisters' chances of marriage and her family's status in the community.

24   Women from ethnic, migrant or refugee communities often face considerable community pressure not to talk about sexual violence. While they may acknowledge marital rape in the context of a workshop, they are unlikely to proceed with prosecution due to these pressures. There is a need for culturally appropriate services to break the barriers around speaking about sexual violence and have the community still accept the victim.

Engaging with diverse groups in research

25   Representatives of diverse groups made the point that they were often sidelined in research.

26   *Older women.* The prevalence of sexual violence against older women is likely to be highly underestimated. Older women are often seen as non-sexual and the issue of intimate partner sexual violence is "never on the radar". Both the risk of sexual violence and barriers to speaking out about it are increased for older women in residential care. Sexual violence by other residents is often excused on the grounds of dementia.

27   *Women with disabilities.* The "otherness" of women with disabilities means that their concerns are often "tacked on" to research. This was described as "more than invisibility".

28   *Men.* Male victims are less likely to report sexual violence to police and face specific barriers to talking about it. Their problems are compounded by social attitudes to male rape and shame around homosexuality.

Ways of engaging

29   Participants discussed various ways to engage with diverse groups. Taking time to build credibility and relationships of trust with diverse communities is essential in gaining their support and engagement in the research. It is important to find appropriate ways of engaging and communicating messages about sexual violence.

30   Research approaches must also take into account victims' preferences. While some might be willing to speak in focus groups, others – such as older women, for whom non-disclosure is a generational issue – are likely to prefer individual interviews.

31   For rural women, an informal, group approach in someone's home would be best. Consideration should be given to childcare, transport, timing of the meeting, and safety. Young people might be best engaged through other young people. One group in Waikato, Te Ahurei Rangatahi, was mentioned.

32   Research needs to be done *with* and *for* diverse groups, rather than *on* them. Research processes that trigger conversation and provide support could be empowering and help victims name the problem. Some of the issues raised in relation to victims include:

- ensuring ethical and authentic engagement to avoid the feeling that victims have been "research raped"

- reciprocity - ensuring that the research has benefits for participants

- awareness of communication barriers; for example, use of facilitators or interpreters with knowledge of the subject, who can ask questions in appropriate ways

- demonstrating belief of and sensitivity to victims

- attention to safety.

Factors hindering engagement

33   Factors that could hinder engagement of diverse groups in research include:

- the hidden nature of sexual violence in residential care or psychiatric care

- the difficulty of identifying victims

- the silence of victims and witnesses.

Other important points

Involvement of non-government organisations

34   NGOs are often conduits between victims, their communities and researchers. The concerns of NGOs include ensuring that:

- they have input into research questions

- their role in the research is acknowledged

- consideration is given to the fact that it is "a big ask" for them to do this work

- ensuring that the level of reimbursement is commensurate with their skill and effort.

The role of government in responding to sexual violence

35   Two final questions centred on government involvement in responding to sexual violence.

- what is the government's responsibility in respect of sexual violence?

- how can we obtain the best value from funding; through directing it to the grassroots level, or to government agencies?

Next steps

37   MWA plans to continue its community consultation by holding further workshops/meetings in October/November 2007.

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Strong and safe communities – effective interventions for adult victims of sexual violence

The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA) is conducting research to:

- improve the safety and longer term well-being of adult victims of sexual violence and

- increase offender accountability.

Objectives

The research project will identify:

- the key points at which, and reasons why, different groups of victims opt in and out of the criminal justice system

- the basis for victims' decisions about accessing non-criminal justice services such as counselling or other support

- the key points at which government and non-government intervention and support is most effective

- ways to improve the likelihood of victims making formal complaints, where appropriate, and persisting through the criminal justice process

- options to improve service delivery within the criminal justice system.

Research approach

The project will employ a range of methods to explore this complex and very sensitive issue for different groups of adult victims including:

- Māori

- Pacific

- ethnic, migrant and refugee

- those with physical and intellectual disabilities

- rural

- male, and

- those who know their offender/s.

The research will be both qualitative and quantitative, and will include:

- an examination of New Zealand's sexual violence conviction rate

- a review of relevant literature

- analysis of existing data sources

- surveys and interviews with service providers, victims and other key informants, and

- tracking of alleged sexual assault cases reported to Police and selected victim services over two months in three locations for two years.

Timeframes

The research project will start in July 2007. The research project will finish in 2009.

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Appendix B
Agenda

**Workshop on effective interventions for
adult victims of sexual violence**

Thursday 23 August 2007

Objectives

The purpose of the workshop is to introduce the new research project to key partner organisations

Time	Task
9.00 am	Greeting/karakia/mihi mihi (Sonya Rimene)
	Greeting (Shenagh Gleisner)
Tea/coffee	
9.30 am	Presentation: Effective interventions for adult victims of sexual violence project (Denise Lievore)
9.50 am	Presentation: Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence (Emma Yeatts)
Followed by discussions on these topics:	
	What is of interest to your group? What do you expect from this research project?
	How can we engage with your group?
Short break	
	How do victims go about seeking help?
11.20 am	Report back to whole group
12.00	Conclusion and karakia
Followed by a light lunch	

Appendix C
Participants

Non-government organisations

National Council of Women of New Zealand
Rural Women New Zealand
Age Concern
National Network of Stopping Violence Services
Shakti
National Network Ending Sexual violence Together / Wellington Sexual Abuse Help
National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges
National Assembly of People with Disabilities

Government Ministries

Ministry of Justice
New Zealand Police
Ministry of Women's Affairs

Apologies

IHC
YWCA
Māori Women's Welfare League
P.A.C.I.F.I.C.A