

Response ID ANON-S8BX-D4KC-B

Submitted to **Improving Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and interventions for victims of domestic abuse**
Submitted on **2019-04-01 16:02:07**

Questions

1 How can we ensure training on domestic abuse and appropriate risk assessment tools for public bodies, agencies and services staff?

How might we ensure training on domestic abuse and the DASH checklist for public bodies, agencies and services staff?:

We support a consistent approach and understand that SafeLives will support MARAC development in Scotland. Since each agency involved has a responsibility to train its own staff and volunteers, it is vital that this training is consistent across each organisation. Topics should include new legislation; the expectancy and responsibilities of multi-agency working; the devastating effects of domestic abuse on victims and their families; and recognising all forms of domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour. Training should be informed by the experiences and views of people affected by domestic abuse. Gender competence factors should be integral to training and actions.

Training is vital for those representatives directly involved in MARAC, but also for decision makers higher up the organisation, so that domestic abuse issues inform policy decisions at all levels.

All staff conducting domestic abuse risk assessments should have comprehensive training to enable them to complete assessments effectively and with due consideration for the victims and their safety. This needs to be adequately funded to enable access to all.

For information, a link to Victim Support Scotland's training on domestic abuse can be found here:

<http://www.victimssupportsco.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Domestic-Abuse-Leaflets-2018.pdf>

In this course participants explore the impact of domestic abuse on victims, witnesses, families and the community as a whole. It is intended that participants will value and grasp the complexities of this crime, including types of abuse, individuals' reaction to the experiences of domestic abuse, the factors which affect those reactions, and the challenges of reporting to the police. A domestic abuse victim's journey through the Criminal Justice System is examined; key legislation discussed on the rights of victims and witnesses of domestic abuse and the training includes a brief discussion of civil measures that may be necessary to protect the safety of the victim and family.

2 In your view, what is the best model of multi-agency working for ensuring effective and early interventions for victims of domestic abuse?

Comments:

Whichever model is deemed the best, our priority is that key principles are applied, namely, information sharing, joint decision making, and coordinated victim-focused intervention.

MARACs are most often used in cases of victims who report domestic abuse and are deemed to be at high risk. However there are small numbers of victims who report domestic abuse and MARACs should be widened to enable representatives to recognise the signs of domestic abuse at an earlier stage, enabling earlier identification and possible support for victims at high risk of domestic abuse.

MARACs need to take into account the diversity of victims that they support and how best to provide support in the context. It would be useful to consult with people from a wide range of communities who have experienced domestic abuse to explore the most suitable response for their needs. This should include people from BAME communities, LGBTI, people with disabilities and abused men.

Consideration should be given to the length of time MARACs support high risk victims. It would be helpful for support to be available beyond the initial focussed period with a comprehensive safety net in place as needed.

Children and young people who experience domestic abuse should be considered carefully, particularly how they are involved in a MARAC, how their voices are taken in account and how they can best be supported and their safety ensured in a way that suits each individual. Although the parent has a representative at the MARAC to advocate for them, this does not happen for a child or young person.

3 In your view, what is the best model for professionals assessing risk in relation to domestic abuse?

Comments::

Multi-agency safeguarding hubs (or similar) could lead to more accurate assessment of risk and need, as decisions are based on coordinated, sufficient, timely and accurate information. The crucial aspect is the capacity to compile intelligence from a wide range of sources to build a more complete picture in each case, ensuring leads are followed up, greater efficiency achieved, and a better understanding between all the agencies involved.

It makes sense for each agency should use a common structure and language for risk assessment tools, so that there is a shared, clear understanding of the situation across all organisations.

Any model used should be able to capture coercive control in a comprehensive manner ensuring a sensitive, carefully handled approach to respect and protect the victim.

Thorough, comprehensive training would be needed for all users. This is vitally important and should have adequate funding in place to enable representatives from all organisations to be properly trained.

4 In your view, who are the key partners that should be involved in multi-agency working to support victims of domestic abuse?

Is there any data missing from the national analysis that would be helpful to create a local and national dataset for MARAC in Scotland?:

Victim Support Scotland (VSS) is the largest voluntary organisation in Scotland helping people affected by crime. We provide practical help, emotional support and essential information to victims and witnesses. However, there are organisations who position themselves as leads in this area.

We believe multi-agency working should include Police Scotland, criminal justice agencies as appropriate, NHS, drug and alcohol services, support services (such as VSS, Scottish Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Scotland, Engender, Zero Tolerance); children and young people's support services, housing services, and education, where appropriate. Specialist support services could also be included such as LGBTI support, disability support and BAME community support organisations. This list is not exhaustive, but extensive enough to capture the types of organisations who should be involved in driving multi-agency working to support victims of domestic abuse.

5 In your view, what guidance is required to support and embed effective multi-agency working for victims of domestic abuse?

How should data from MARACs be used in terms of reporting, providing evidence of impact and informing continual improvement of MARACs?:

The national protocol between VSS, COPFS and the Scottish Government enables us to provide support in a collaborative manner.

Through our community and court-based services, VSS provides a coordinated service to victims who have experienced violence, including domestic violence, from when the offence has been committed, and through the whole criminal justice process. Based on this experience, we support the aim to foster collaborative working among the key partners. However, agency representatives have a duty to share information and expertise.

We agree with SafeLives that substance misuse and mental health services should attend every multi-agency meeting. These issues cannot be fully understood without their input and they will need to be involved in any effective action planning.

Care should be taken to ensure the needs of the individual are taken into account and that communication with the victim is clear at all times, so there are no surprises or interventions without the victim's knowledge.

The needs of children and wider family should be considered in every case, including although not exclusively in relation to safeguarding and this should be done without duplication and undue trauma for those involved.

Breaking down the different priorities of agencies would help advance MARAC and develop new ones and encourage relationship building and multi-agency work.

6 What protocols need to be put in place to ensure effective information sharing between agencies?

Please explain your answer.:

Any protocol should clearly outline the processes and the principles for sharing information and take cognisance of GDPR. The arrangement should show how information will be shared within each organisation and other agencies involved.

All agencies should aim to gain consent to share information – however we should be mindful of situations where to do so would place a victim at an increased risk of harm. When decisions are made to share or withhold information, it should be recorded who has been given the information and why.

There should be a consistent basis for sharing/storing information safely in cases involving domestic abuse. GDPR should not be interpreted as a barrier to organisations providing supporting and exchanging relevant information in the passage of their operations. If this is a stumbling block, all organisations involved should consider campaigning collectively to ensure that data protection, whilst crucially important, especially in the context of domestic abuse, is not an obstacle to providing streamlined multi-agency support to victims of domestic abuse.

7 Do you think that multi-agency arrangements for protecting victims of domestic abuse should be placed on a statutory footing?

Not Answered

Please explain your answer.:

VSS supported the principle of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, as it has the capacity to increase understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse and reduce the stigma surrounding this offence. We were encouraged by the creation of a statutory offence of domestic abuse and the inclusion of non-physical aspects of domestic abuse, including that of psychological harm and coercive control, which will greatly increase recognition of the damage caused to victims, enabling legal redress, as well as strengthening the criminal justice response to domestic abuse.

We will continue to engage in dialogue with the Scottish Government and partner agencies as to whether a community or legislative approach or combination of both is the best and most workable option for victims of domestic abuse.

About you

What is your name?

Name:

Moira Findlay

What is your email address?

Email:

moira.findlay@victimssupportsco.org.uk

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Victim Support Scotland

The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response only (without name)

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

Evaluation

Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)

Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this consultation?:

Very satisfied

Please enter comments here.:

Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this consultation?:

Very satisfied

Please enter comments here.: