

# Amen Support Services

## **Positive Developments**

### **1.1 Victims' experience of state services**

Many of the male victims of domestic speak of having very positive experiences of dealing with state services. Male victims relay their experiences as highly responsive and optimistic. This may be as a result of Action 1 of the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender based violence. Awareness raising campaigns funded by Cosc may have also increased awareness and knowledge of the issues and experiences of male victims of domestic abuse.

### **1.2 Victims' experience of voluntary sector services**

As with state services, male victims have spoken about highly encouraging experiences of voluntary sector services. This too may be as a result of Actions 1 and 2 of the National Strategy also.

### **1.3 Accountability of perpetrators**

Unfortunately there are no perpetrators programmes for female perpetrators in Ireland so therefore there is very little accountability for female perpetrators. Action 6 of the National Strategy appears to be solely focused on male perpetrators.

### **1.4. Awareness and attitudes**

In the period 2010 to 2014, awareness of the occurrences of domestic abuse against men has increased significantly. Attitudes to the issue has also become considerably more accepting. Society as a whole are more willing to accept that men too can be victims. This may be also in part to Action 1 of the National Strategy.

### **1.5 Prevention**

It is generally accepted that the response to domestic abuse is reactive rather than preventative. However, it is vitally important that younger people become aware and knowledgeable of the issue in order to be fully conversant of the issue. Action 3 of the National Strategy should educate 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> level students in the experiences of victims of domestic abuse, both male and female.

### **1.6 Policy making or service planning**

Amen Support Services have no comment to make on this point

### **1.7 Research or data collection**

Amen Support Services are extremely satisfied with the manner in which research has been conducted and data has been collected. The organisation feels that the inclusive and all encompassing attitude of Cosc has facilitated a comprehensive response.

### **1.8 Structures or processes to support the strategy**

The six monthly review reports allow for a clear and transparent understanding of the National Strategy and the processes and stages of development of the National Strategy. Consultation meetings enable all parties to voice their opinions, concerns and to bring forward their outlooks.

### **1.9 Outside the Strategy**

Whilst not in the context of the Strategy, Amen Support Services feel the establishment of the National Steering Committee for Violence against Men is a monumental happening. The National Steering Committee has provided Amen Support Services with a platform to express the positions of male victims at a national level. Also, the stream of funding available to publish information leaflets and booklets for those experiencing visual and literacy issues has also been an immense process and constructive and beneficial venture.

## **Undesirable Developments**

### **2.1 Victims' experiences of state services**

Whilst many male victims speak of excellent encounters with state services, unfortunately many also speak of the opposite. They speak of being met with disbelief and incredulity. This may be in direct conflict and divergence with Action 2 of the National Strategy. This scepticism often comes from state services such as members of An Garda Síochána, HSE frontline staff such as social workers, County Council Housing Settlement Officers, Legal Aid Board staff and Court Service Staff, etc. It would appear that this too is in variance of Action 2 of the National Strategy. This perhaps is something that needs to be discussed at a further stage. In recent weeks, a principal social worker stated that Social Workers do not ask children during assessments about violence against men, it is simply focused on violence against women.

### **2.2 Victims' experience of voluntary sector services**

Once again, whilst the service users of Amen Support Services speak of favourable responses from voluntary sector services, it is also a familiar happening that male victims of domestic abuse also state that they are once again disbelief, astonishments and cynicism. There is a habitual lack of uniformity amongst services which is in discord with Action 6.5 of the National Strategy.

### **2.3 Accountability of perpetrators**

As mentioned previously, there is currently no perpetrator programmes for female perpetrators of domestic abuse. It would seem that Action 6 of the National Strategy is intended to exclusively converge on male perpetrators. This is perhaps something that should also be investigated at a later stage.

### **2.4 Awareness and attitudes**

Whilst society as a whole are more willing to accept that men can be victims of domestic abuse, many people still disbelief that this is an extremely and ever increasing issue.

As mention in point 2.1 and 2.2, many voluntary and state services regularly treat male victims with contempt, disregard and impertinence.

## **2.5 Prevention**

As highlighted in previous responses, the overall and by and large retort to domestic abuse is reactive rather than preventative. However, this something which will optimistically be confronted through the education of state services staff, the entire voluntary services sector and most importantly second and third level students.

## **2.6 Policy Making or Service Planning**

While Amen Support Services are in the main happy with the policy making and service planning associated with the National Strategy and the comprehensive and inclusive approach of Cosc, there are some issues which must be raised in relation to policy making. Amen Support Services were entirely unaware of the existence of many projects mentioned in the National Strategy. This is of upmost concern to the organisation as it may highlight a distinct lack of consideration to the views and outlooks of male victims of domestic abuse in this process. Amen Support Services, were at no stage informed of projects such as the pilot one stop shop project in the Mid – West and also the Domestic Violence Service currently in operation in Dundalk District Court and this is tremendously disheartening. The inclusion of a representative from Amen Support Services on subcommittees such as PASC and LISC needs to be urgently reviewed.

## **2.7 Research or data collection**

Amen Support Services are happy with the manner in which research is conducted and data collected and therefore have no undesirable comments to make on this issue.

## **2.8 Structures or processes to support the strategy**

Amen Support Services are most content with the structures and processes in place to support the strategy.

## **2.9 Outside the Strategy**

Amen Support Services repeatedly work in entire isolation with very little communication from other domestic violence services. Whilst the organisation is completely aware of the fact that it targets a different demographic than other domestic violence services, the core issue and overall remit is however the same, i.e. the support of victims of domestic abuse. Amen Support Services are most open and receptive to opening channels of communication and interaction with other domestic violence service but this frequently met with resistance.

## **The Evidence**

### **3.1 What actions did you take to evaluate or review the impact of any of the actions under the National Strategy**

Amen Support Services ask all service users how they became aware of the organisation. This is in order to gain an insight into the effectiveness of awareness raising and also to interpret the societal view of the organisation as well the consciousness of the issue of domestic abuse against men. This would be an internal and informal review of the impact of Action 1 of the National Strategy.

### **3.2 Are you aware of evaluations or reviews by others of the impact of any actions under the Strategy**

At present, Amen Support Services are unaware of evaluation or reviews done by others but should information on this become available, the organisation would be most interested in receiving this information as it could better enlighten the work of Amen.

## **What can be done better in the future?**

### **4.1 State Services for victims**

Amen Support Services are hoping to offer a one day awareness raising training course to certain front line state services employees such as new members of An Garda Síochána and social workers. In the past, a presentation was delivered to Garda recruits in Templemore, it is expected that upon commencement of training for new Gardai that this deliverance will recommence.

### **4.2 Voluntary sector services for victims**

As mentioned above, Amen Support Services would be highly receptive to establishing effective channels of communication between agencies within the voluntary sector. This could enable a more unified response to all victims of domestic abuse as well as possibly providing a greater and more effective approach. This could possibly be assisted with a new National Strategy.

### **4.3 Accountability of perpetrators**

Unfortunately due to the lack of available resources, Amen Support Services would not be in a position to offer a perpetrator programme to female perpetrators of domestic abuse. However, the organisation could investigate the possibility of collating relevant data on such a topic. This too could be assisted by a new National Strategy.

### **4.4 Awareness and attitudes**

For the period 2015 – 2019, Amen Support Services will strive to further enlighten the general public of the issue of domestic abuse against men. The hope is to change the attitudes of those who are in disbelief that men can be victims. This has been particularly effective in 2010 – 2014 timeframe as contacts to the organisation have increased and many perceptions have been altered. Amen Support Services are optimistic that the introduction of a programme for 2<sup>nd</sup> level senior cycle will greatly facilitate this. The organisation is extremely anxious and enthusiastic about this and will support this process in any way possible. Amen Support Services will celebrate 20 years in operation in 2017 and would be hopefully that increased focus on the organisation during this phase will further increase public awareness.

### **4.5 Prevention**

Amen Support Services are unsure how this particular specific issue can be managed but are exceptionally amenable to any suggestion that should arise.

### **4.6 Policy making or service planning**

As highlighted previously, Amen feel that is imperative that the positions of male victims of domestic abuse are taking into consideration at all stages during future policy making and service planning. Therefore, the organisation believe that is critically important that a representative from Amen Support Services be included in any future policy making procedures and service planning practice. This is something that must be taken into deliberation when compiling any new National Strategy.

#### **4.7 Research or data collection**

Amen are more than willing and are particularly happy to assist where necessary and required in research or data collection and would be delighted to impart any of the information garnered from the service users.

#### **4.8 Structures or process to support the strategy**

As mentioned in 4.7, Amen Support Services are very agreeable to contribute towards any process that would enable the effective implementation of any future strategy.

#### **5. What specific actions is your organisation proposing to undertake for victims generally which will also apply to victims of domestic, sexual or gender based violence?**

Presently, Amen Support Services are unsure as to what specific action will be undertaken during the period 2015 - 2019. However, the organisation would be most open to any suggestions.

As discussed previously, Amen are most eager to open lines of communication amongst all domestic violence services and this is perhaps something that will be focused on during this period. Whilst not in the context of a National Strategy, it is anticipated that through the newly introduced Meitheal system from Tusla – Child and Family Agency, that there will be greater co-operation amongst all agencies.

Amen Support Services will continue to raise awareness of the issues and incidents of abuse towards men in Ireland at all given and available opportunities.

#### **6.1 State services for victims**

Further awareness raising should be undertaken amongst state services to the experiences of victims of domestic abuse and in particular male victims. Employees of state service need to be made aware that domestic abuse is not a gender issue specifically effecting women. It is crucial that this happen sooner rather than later and needs the support of a National Strategy to enable effective initiation.

## **6.2 Voluntary sector services for victims**

Due to much resistance that is often introduced by voluntary sector services towards victims, a uniformed approach to victims of domestic violence regardless of gender needs to be established. This too is something that could be supported by any future National Strategy.

## **6.3 Accountability of perpetrators**

Female perpetrators must be held accountable for their violent or abusive actions. This must be equal to male perpetrators of domestic abuse. This issue is definitely one that needs to be further explored by a new National Strategy.

## **6.4 Awareness and attitudes**

The availability of funding to conduct awareness raising campaigns is essential in changing attitudes and increasing awareness of domestic abuse against men. Also, the inclusion of male victims and their experiences in training packs, educational programmes, etc. is crucial for awareness to amplify.

## **6.5 Prevention**

Amen Support Service is unsure how this issue can be tackled.

## **6.6 Policy making or service planning**

As declared throughout this document, it is fundamental that a representative from Amen Support Service be included in the policy making and service planning process. This must be supported and encouraged by any new National Strategy for the period 2015 – 2019.

## **6.7 Research or data collection**

It is critical and necessary that all research conducted and data collected included male victims as has happened in the previous strategy.

## **6.8 Structures or processes to support the strategy**

Amen Support Services would be most if the structures and process in place to support the 2010 – 2014 strategy were to continue for any future strategy

## **7.1 What specific actions should be undertaken for victims generally which will also apply to victims of domestic, sexual or gender – based violence, in the period 2015 – 2019, under any of the above categories?**

Amen Support Services have no further comments to make at present.

## **7.2 Who should undertake the actions mentioned above?**

Amen Support Services believe that Cosc in conjunction with Tusla, HSE, An Garda Siochana, other statutory agencies as well as Non – Governmental Organisations should work in collaboration in order to undertake the above mentioned actions.

## **8. Any additional comments**