

Guiding Principles for Public Awareness Raising Relating to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence

Background

This document outlines guiding principles for conducting public awareness-raising related to domestic, sexual and gender based violence. It is intended as a guide to professionals and organisations undertaking public awareness raising activities. It aims to contribute to the overall strategic objective of the Irish governments' National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010 – 2014 which is focused on *'the development of a strong framework for sustainable intervention to prevent and effectively respond to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.'* In particular, this document forms part of the implementation of activity 1.2 and 3.3 of the national strategy which aim to develop guidance on practical steps to increase personal safety for those most at risk from domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

The guiding principles in this document are based on those agreed by the National Steering Committee for Violence Against Women (NSC) developed by its subcommittee on public awareness (PASC). Primarily, these guidelines aim to encourage a shift from a focus of public awareness activities on the victim to an inclusion of a focus on the perpetrator and bystander while also ensuring that information on support services is available to victims/survivors¹.

Introduction

The National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010 - 2014², divides prevention into two categories as follows;

Primary Prevention	Reducing the incidence of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence by changing the societal norms, practices and behaviours that support these oppressions.
Secondary Prevention	Ensuring society responds appropriately to these crimes by holding perpetrators to account. Preventing secondary trauma to survivors by addressing issues of victim blaming, silence, minimisation, denial and ineffective responses.

Primary Prevention:

In order to instigate real and profound social change there needs to be recognition that all individuals belong to communities, societies and cultures where beliefs, attitudes and standards are shared and prescribed. Therefore, primary prevention messages relating to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence should be informed by the societal context, structures and myths which perpetuate, enable and support such violence.

Irish cultural responses to such crimes are often victim-focused. Irish culture is less often focused on holding perpetrators to account for their decisions and actions. Responses therefore remain focused on the individual, largely the victim's, behaviour and actions. This can therefore reinforce a victim blaming culture where perpetrators are not held to account.

In contrast to this, the Cosc 2009 public awareness poster campaign targeted the general public and, in particular, the bystander, to address silences and the perception that domestic and sexual violence are private matters.

Guiding Principles when Communicating with the General Public

- Name domestic, sexual and gender-based violence appropriately
- Focus on perpetrator behaviour, choices and actions³ and their accountability
- Promote a culture of responsibility
- Challenge minimisation and denial
- Promote respectful human interactions where negotiations are active and positive (as opposed to passive and assumed)
- Promote equality
- Support and empower survivors
- Emphasise domestic, sexual and gender-based violence as criminal behaviour

¹ The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' are used interchangeably throughout the document.

² Cosc: The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, The National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based violence 2010 – 2014,

³ For example the **'Be SMART'** campaign launched in Dec. 2008 by the PSNI in Northern Ireland contains the following risk reduction messages for men: Sex without consent is rape; Make sure you ask and get a clear response; Alcohol or drugs will affect your judgement; Rape convictions last forever; Take NO for an answer.

Addressing Risks of Victimhood

Risk reduction messages aimed at victims and potential victims generally recognise the current prevalence of certain types of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and attempt to educate vulnerable groups as to how they can avoid these risk factors. These messages may, for example, caution on where to go; how to travel; how and where to socialise. However, unless they are tailored to very specific circumstances, they may contain elements that are unfeasible or experienced as contradictory. Also it is vital that such targeted messaging to potential victims does not reinforce negative stereotypes and conditions that, at least in part, perpetuate that group's vulnerability.

Target audiences for addressing risk of victimhood are:

1. Those who promote attitudes and behaviour which enable abuse
2. The source of the causing/exploiting vulnerability, i.e. perpetrators
3. Those who have the power to mitigate and intervene in that vulnerability
4. The vulnerable themselves.

Secondary Prevention:

1. Guidance for meeting survivor needs

All forms of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, whether committed against adults or children, involve the abuse of power and control by the perpetrator and the experience of powerlessness by the victim. It follows that the returning of power and control to the survivor must inform responses.

When communicating with survivors through public awareness-raising activities, messages should

- Address denial and minimisation
- Address isolation and any feelings of shame, guilt and self-blame
- Empower survivors with information, choices and service options

All public awareness raising messages aimed at survivors and their supporters should include direction to at least one appropriate service.

2. Guidance for improving service and societal responses to survivors

To eliminate secondary trauma the type and quality of response of the State and its agencies (such as the Gardaí, Courts Service, A&E etc.) to a victim of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence is paramount in terms of holding perpetrators to account and vindicating victims. This response is primarily, but not exclusively, delivered through an appropriate, effective and adequately resourced criminal justice response to these crimes.

Society's response to victims through statutory and other agencies, individual professionals, private individuals and society as a whole can be addressed through training, policy and public awareness-raising.

Guiding Principles when Communicating with the Community at Large and Professionals

1. Tackle denial and minimisation:

- ~ Impress the importance of survivors being believed
- ~ Promote accurate information about the true nature and extent of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence
- ~ Target training on the indicators/signs that someone may be suffering/have suffered domestic, sexual or gender-based violence.

2. Tackle victim-blaming, guilt and shame

- ~ Target training on best practice disclosure, or recognising violence, for example to GPs, mental health workers, teachers, etc. It is important that such an approach does not reinforce negative stereotypes of groups.
- ~ Provide information on how to respond appropriately to a disclosure of violence.
- ~ Provide information which facilitates making a good referral.
- ~ Empower victims/survivors
- ~ Recognise that victims/survivors have a right to choose what happens next, who to tell etc.
- ~ Provide information of domestic and sexual violence specialist or other appropriate services available.