

Listening to Victims of Crime in Sandwell



A Report – November 2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PART ONE - INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

This report seeks to represent the views and experiences of victims of crime within the West Midlands Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell in 2014. It has been produced on behalf of the Sandwell Local Police and Crime Board by Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), a charity which acts as an umbrella body for over 1,000 local voluntary groups and community organisations.

In March 2014, the Sandwell Local Police and Crime Board received funding from Police and Crime Commissioner Bob Jones to put in place a programme of development support for local voluntary and community sector organisations delivering services to help victims to cope with and recover from the impacts of crime.

The Police and Crime Commissioner also made clear his intentions to create a 'Victims Commission' for the West Midlands region, which would oversee the commissioning of victims services. SCVO, along with other local voluntary and community infrastructure bodies, were invited to make their contribution to the shaping of this Commission.

Through the discussions and consultation around the Victims Commission with a wide range of providers and partners, it became clear that for any future Commission to be effective, it would need to gain a clear understanding of the local needs, views and experiences of victims across the region.

Consequently, this report, and the consultation that precedes it, seeks to present an accurate picture of how victims experience support in Sandwell. This piece of work forms a part of the wider programme of support for voluntary sector providers that Sandwell Local Police and Crime Board have commissioned.

OUTLINE OF THE PROCESS

In June 2014, SCVO launched a small grants programme aimed at local voluntary groups and community organisations that, through the services they provided or the contacts they had, had come into contact with Sandwell residents who had been victims of crime. The purpose of this grant funding was to enable those organisations to carry out research with their service users, recording their experiences and asking what they need from agencies delivering support to them.

Grantees were expected to:-

- deliver a combination of focus groups and one-to-one interviews, reaching a realistic number of victims for the purposes of the research
- collect data, using tools prepared by SCVO including templates and questionnaires
- collate, record and present the data/outcomes to a victims support network meeting in early September 2014

Despite a very short two-week timeline, the grants programme was oversubscribed, demonstrating the level of interest in support for victims across Sandwell's voluntary and community sector. At the beginning of July a multi-agency grants panel awarded grants to 11 local organisations, with the aim of apportioning funding for activities which would engage across Sandwell's diverse population.

The planned engagement of local residents by these groups included several minority groups such as domestic abuse and honour crime victims, gay men, people receiving addiction support/ in recovery, and those living with HIV. There were also larger groupings of older people, those living with mental health conditions, young people and social housing residents.

Throughout the process SCVO offered capacity-building support to grant funded organisations so that this activity could become a learning and development opportunity in how to engage service users, and how to understand and present the results of this. Groups were given information and guidance on how to undertake the consultation activities, and provided with a template so all information would be gathered in a consistent way.

As a result of the consultation activities, 317 local victims of crime completed questionnaires and 17 focus groups were held to explore in a different setting these victims' views and experiences.

REPORT OUTLINE

This report presents the findings of the consultation activities in two sections.

The first focuses on the aggregated data from all the questionnaires completed by victims. Analysis across the whole data set can create a better understanding of how the circumstances of the crime, or the profile of the victim, might influence their access to, and/ or experience of, support.

The second section presents, in turn, the more detailed feedback and commentary produced by the grant-funded organisations, principally conveying the views expressed by victims in the focus groups. As the reports submitted to SCVO by each organisation varied in style and length, some have been reduced in size so as to be accommodated within this report.

Copies of the full, unabridged reports are available upon request to SCVO.

Please note that the percentages shown in the analysis of data within the first section are based on only those people who responded to the relevant question, i.e. those respondents who omitted to answer were not included in the percentage breakdown for that question.

PART TWO - QUESTIONNAIRES

THE SURVEY SAMPLE

Profile of Respondents

The gender split between the 317 survey respondents was 70% women and 30% men. The large majority were of working age, between 18 and 65, and nearly one in six considered themselves to have a disability.

The ethnic breakdown of the group closely matches that of 2011 Census figures for Sandwell's population - with nearly 7 out of 10 respondents considering themselves 'British'/'white', 17% Asian/ British Asian and other minority ethnic communities well represented.

The respondent group also demonstrated a diverse spread of religious beliefs, with those professing themselves Christian or Muslim each representing around one third of the sample, and with one quarter professing no religious belief. One out of ten of the sample respondents considered themselves to be gay, lesbian or bisexual.

About the Incident

There was a wide range of experiences of crime amongst those surveyed. The large majority of respondents felt that they had experienced only one type of crime, but one in eight considered that their experience could be categorised by more than one type. The most common factor for those who experienced more than one type of crime was 'assault'.

Aggregating all responses together, the breakdown of the types of crimes experienced by our respondents were as follows:-

- 18% Burglary
- 17% Assault
- 14% Hate crime
- 12% Vehicle crime
- 11% Robbery
- 9% Domestic abuse
- 6% Anti-social behaviour
- 6% Criminal damage
- 5% Sexual abuse
- 2% Driving

For most respondents, their experience of crime took place within the last couple of years, with one third stating that the crime happened within the last year. Of the remainder, timeframes varied from five years ago, to ten years or beyond.

As for the location of the experience of crime, by far the largest sample was crimes in the victims' home, as well as in the homes of friends or family of the victim. The locations of crime experienced by respondents were as follows:-

- 57% Home
- 15% On the street
- 9% Friends/ family home
- 7% In a public building/ area

In addition to these, relatively few respondents also experienced crime at work, on public transport, in a shop, in another country, whilst in car/ driving and on the internet.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

Reporting the Incident

Respondents were asked whether or not they reported the incident to the Police. Seven out of ten said that they did, whilst most of the remainder did not (3% of the sample stated that someone else reported the crime on their behalf).

Analysis of the data does not suggest any obvious variations on the basis of age, gender or disability which would affect victims' willingness to report the crime to the Police.

When those who did not report the crime were asked the reasons for not doing so, in most (three-quarters of responses) the respondents gave more than one answer, and sometimes cited as many as five reasons for this.

Aggregating all reasons given by victims for not reporting the crime, the survey found:-

- 24% victims didn't think the police would help
- 19% victims didn't think it was serious enough
- 14% victims were frightened of what might happen

In addition to these, the following responses were also given:

- *I was worried that I would be blamed/judged*
- *I thought it would be too much hassle/I did not have time*
- *I didn't want it to be made public*

- *I didn't want my family/friends/local community to find out*
- *I don't trust the Police*
- *I don't have faith in the justice system*

Respondents were also asked whether they told anyone else about the incident. Three-quarters of victims told friends or family, whilst around one in ten told an organisation (most often a local charity/ voluntary group, as well as the Council, health and insurance companies) and one in ten not telling anyone else. A small number of victims (2%) reported the crime anonymously to Crimestoppers. Analysis of the respondents did not suggest any particular inclination to seek further support based on the victim's age, gender or disability.

Accessing Support

Respondents were invited to report where they accessed support after the incident. One in five claimed not to have accessed any further support. However, just under half of the others sought help from one source, with the rest typically gaining support from 2 or 3 different places.

Aggregating responses across all sources of support, the trends show a clear preference for support close to home:-

- 40% Support from family/friends
- 26% Help from the Police
- 13% Support from charity/voluntary/community organisation
- 5% Help from the Council, Housing, Social Services
- 5% Help from a health professional

Support was also accessed from criminal justice agencies, independent legal advice/ advocacy, Social Networking/online forums, local support/ faith groups, information on the internet, and telephone helplines.

The data shows that older people (over 65 years) tend to access support from friends and family more than other age groups, and that young people aged 24 or under are only half as likely to access support from the Police.

The survey asked respondents how easy it was to find the support they needed. Three-quarters stated that finding support was 'straightforward', 'easy' or 'OK'; however, the remaining quarter stated that this was 'not easy' or 'difficult' with as many as one in five of the whole sample claiming that they did not receive **any** information or signposting about local support services.

Of those who did receive information or help with accessing support, in almost half of instances this came from the Police. Aggregated findings are as follows:-

- 42% Via the Police

- 19% Charity
- 14% Family/ friends
- 13% Other support provider (not specified)

A smaller number of respondents also received signposting from: their GP or social worker, the Internet, the Council, the Hospital, from neighbours, their workplace, carers, housing agency, or their teacher.

Victims' Experience of Support

The survey asked victims what was good about the support they received, inviting a narrative reply rather than selecting from a list of options. The question elicited a wide range of responses, with the largest samples being summarised as *'good support generally'* (three in ten), *'being listened to'* (one in six), and *'practical help'*, *'immediate help'* and *'police support'* (all one in ten).

Other positives about the help received included *'increased confidence'*, *'good information or advice'*, *'charity support'*, *'choice of support'*, *'information given'*, *'supportive workplace'*, *'helped to sort it out myself'*, *'spoke my language'*, *'signposted to other support'*, *'guidance on how to stay safe'*, *'resolution to the incident'*.

The survey also asked what was bad about the support received, again inviting a narrative response. Responses can be summarised as follows:- *'no real support'* (three in ten), *'no follow up/ lack of advice or poor advice/ communication'* and *'communication with support agency could be improved'* (both one in six), *'delay in response'* and *'police didn't catch perpetrator/ didn't do enough'* (both one in ten).

The survey asked respondents what they thought could be made better about the support they had been given. Although only a minority of the respondents completed this section, this again provided some valuable pointers to where the victim experience could be improved.

Summarising the comments made, the most common focused on a desire for the police to take more action/ more effective action to investigate the crime and bring the perpetrators to justice (22%). Victims also felt it important that they were kept better informed by the Police as to the progress of the investigation (15%) and that they had access to better signposting information about support or better support itself (13%). Just over one in ten victims also felt that the Police could have responded more quickly to their concerns.

Other comments made, included:-

- *Would like to know the outcome of the investigation by the Police*
- *Would like more advice from the Police about what to do after the crime*
- *Wanted support before the Police visited me*

- *Help from Victims Support finished too soon*
- *Someone to help me report the crime [re hate crimes]*
- *Social media should close offensive pages*
- *Police need to do more preventative work/ give victims protection*
- *More help with housing when needed*
- *Council need to take more decisive action*
- *Need financial help/ compensation*
- *Changes in law needed to include hate crimes*
- *Better CCTV and ways of gathering evidence*
- *Better education on diverse communities within schools*

KEY FINDINGS BASED ON TYPE OF CRIME

Looking in turn at the six most prevalent types of crime amongst survey respondents identifies experiences or trends specific to that group. Within this section, the data for a specific crime has been compared to the whole data set and notable differences highlighted.

Assault

- Assault victims were slightly more likely to report to the crime to the police
- Slightly more assault victims felt that the police wouldn't help them
- Significantly more assault victims felt they did not have faith in the justice system (17% of respondents compared to 5% of the whole sample)
- Assault victims were slightly more likely than average to access support after the crime from a health professional
- More assault victims found it difficult/ not easy to access support than the main sample (37 % compared with 24%)

Hate Crime

- Victims of hate crime were twice as likely not to report the crime (55% compared with 28% of the whole sample)
- Of those victims who didn't report the reasons for over 8 out of 10 of them were either ... *'I thought it would be too much hassle/ I did not have time', 'I didn't think it was serious enough,'* or *'I didn't think the police would help.'*
- Specifically, one third of respondents felt that the crime wasn't serious enough to report (compared to 19% for the whole sample).
- Victims of hate crime were twice as likely to access support from a charity compared to whole sample

Robbery

- Victims of robbery were slightly more likely to report this crime than victims of other crimes
- The most significant issue for robbery victims not reporting the crime was that they didn't have any faith in the justice system (20% compared with 5% of the whole sample)
- Robbery victims were twice as likely to seek support from family and friends than victims of other crimes

Domestic Abuse

- Victims of domestic abuse were twice as likely to have someone else report the crime on their behalf
- Slightly fewer domestic abuse victims thought the police wouldn't help them
- Twice as many domestic abuse victims didn't report because they were worried or frightened (45% compared to 23% of whole sample)
- Domestic abuse victims were three times as likely to not report because they didn't want the crime to be made public (26% of sample compared with 8% of the whole)
- Twice as many domestic abuse victims didn't report because they didn't want family members to find out
- Not surprisingly, given those statistics, fewer victims also told family members and more victims told a support organisation about the crime
- Once support had been accessed, family and friends and the police were less likely sources of support
- Domestic abuse victims were much more likely than average to access support from the council or from a charity
- More victims found it difficult/ not easy to access support (38% compared with 24% of the whole sample).

Vehicle Crime

- Vehicle crime victims were slightly more likely to report the crime
- Vehicle crime victims not reporting their crime were twice as likely to give their reasons as not thinking the crime would be taken seriously enough (43% compared to 19% of the whole sample)
- Victims of vehicle crime were almost twice as likely to seek support from the Police (47% compared with 26%)

Burglary

- Victims of burglary demonstrated a very high reporting rate (92% compared with 68% of the whole sample)
- Burglary victims were more likely to not report the crime due to their not thinking that police would help them (33 % compared with 24% of the whole sample)

PART THREE – FOCUS GROUPS

YEMINI COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

The Yemeni Community Association in Sandwell carried out four focus group interviews with Muslim women who deemed themselves to have been a victim of crime.

A total of 19 women participated in the focus group interviews with the age ranging from 19 years up to 87 years. All the classed themselves as Muslim with all but one being easily identifiable as a Muslim women by her clothing (Hijab wearing). The ethnic makeup of this group included 4 Bangladeshi, 1 Morrocon and 15 Yemeni women. The geographical residence of these women were in the main West Bromwich (16 women) and Smethwick (3 women).

The groups were split in the following way:

Group 1a

5 Elder Yemeni women, age ranged from 65 years to 87 years, all 5 had a very poor command of English relying on others to translate/interpret for them and 3 were illiterate (both English and Arabic). This back ground information gives you an idea that this group may be deemed more vulnerable than others. 3 lived in West Bromwich and 2 lived in Smethwick

Group 1b

5 Elder Yemeni women, age ranged from 60 years to 71 years, though 4 classed themselves to have a poor command of English they were able to get by day to day using simple English language terms but relied on interpreting/translating support for more complicated words. 1 women had what she classed as fair command of English and was able to be more confident of the use of the English language than the others. 4 lived in West Bromwich and 1 lived in Smethwick

Group 2:

4 Yemeni and 1 Moroccan women, age ranged from 37 years up to 52 years, 4 of the women were fully fluent in the English language and have been born or brought up in the UK and 1 women had a fair command of English and was able to get by confidently in the use of the English language in her day to day life. All lived in West Bromwich

Group 3

4 Bangladeshi women, aged 19 years up to 28 years, all born in the UK and fully fluent in the English language. All lived in West Bromwich

In the main all the women talked about '*hate crime*' incidents that they had been a victim of and their experience of being a victim from the incident to the 'recovery'. They all felt that their experience of being a '*hate crime victim*' needed to be captured and for there to be a way forward and learning to assist future '*hate crime victims*' because in the main their experiences have been negative.

Findings:

The women's journey as a victim of 'hate crime' from incident to 'recovery' was surprisingly similar as it was expected that those women with a language barrier would have a very different experience to those with a good command of English.

The journey included

- Reporting the crime (either first hand or through family or a 3rd party reporting organisation),
- In the vast majority of cases the women did not report the 'hate crime' incident because they felt that they were either not going to be taken seriously by the 'police' or they had not got a witness to support their allegation (even though in some cases this physical contact – Hijab being pulled at and being racially sworn at and spat at in the face)
- Seeking the support of family and friends to resolve the situation 'taking matters into their own hands'
- Reporting to other agency such as 'housing' or 'school' therefore bypassing crime agency all together.
- Where it was reported to a crime or statutory agency there was a period of investigation and a crime reference number given
- In all the groups those women who reported the 'hate crime' to the police non were resolved as there was a lack of evidence to pursue which further reinforced the idea of 'they can do anything any way even if I report it therefore it's a waste of time'
- The groups stated that reporting to a other statutory agency such as 'housing' or 'schools' resulted in a better outcome for the victim.
- In the vast majority of women in all the groups stated that their journey as 'victim of hate crime' did not necessarily include reaching the 'recovery' stage but more of an 'avoidance stage' (of putting themselves in similar situation). Therefore the women coped by adjusting their life to minimize any further risks to themselves.
- From the 9 women who reported their crime to a crime agency such as the police only 2 recalled being offered victim support with 1 accepting it but was never contacted by them. All the women in the focus group did not really understand what 'victim support' was, entailed or indeed how to access it.

Barriers experienced:

- Language barrier to reporting crime in a quick and timely manner amongst the older women. The elder women relied on a 3rd party to help them report the crime
- Amongst the elder women it was confidence as they were not used to approaching the police and thought that police are 'only for more serious crime' "where there is no blood involved you don't report it"
- Surprisingly amongst the elder women there was also a financial barrier (This needs serious consideration amongst ALL the non-English speaking communities). Non English speaking Women reporting that they 'felt' pressurised to pay someone for their trouble (relative or friend) to go with them to interpret for them to report the incident in the first place.
- In the vast majority of the focus groups the women reported that they felt 'hate crime' against them was NOT taken seriously by crime agencies. Surprisingly the younger and fluent English focus groups felt the most strongest that this was the case.

What must be in place to improve the victim's journey

- Amongst the Elder women – language support that is accessible easily and within a timely manner.
- Frontline staff that reflect the diversity of the community it serves (not necessarily police it could include civilian front line desk staff that have a variety of languages)
- A victims advocate / Communication person who will communicate with victims (this was suggested by those who spoke poor and good English).
- More visible policing/reporting within the local community
- More local support to victims of crime/easily visible and accessible support within community settings
- Training for staff – customer service
- More information to victims of what 'victim support' can offer as there was a lack of understanding of what this entailed amongst all the focus group participants.

If we controlled the resources:

- Improved communication amongst the police and victims
- Improved communication amongst victim support and victims of crime
- Local / more visible victim of crime services
- Language support
- Improved/different ways of reporting crime such as on line or an app that way crime is reported easily and true statistics captured

Recommendations:

In the main the recommendations were about strengthening communication between victims and agencies.

- Improved communication process between the victim and the various agencies. It was suggested that resources be allocated more locally within voluntary organisation settings where victims can access not only language support to report crime themselves first hand but where they can access additional victim support resources.
- Invest in locally accessible victim support advocates/communication officers to help them along the journey from the incident to the recovery.
- More advertising of what victim support is / entails / how to access it – billboards/Social media etc.
- Develop an online service / app where victims can report ‘hate crime’ quickly and easily (officers can then follow this up) without them feeling they won’t be taken seriously, therefore true statistics are captured of the number of incidents occurring.

KALEIDOSCOPE PLUS

1. Executive Summary

People in Mind (PIM) were successful in their proposal to be involved in the project and commissioned to carry out aspects of the research and consultation with individuals, who experience mental illness. People in Mind is the Kaleidoscope Plus Group (KPG) service user involvement group and four members of the PIM Research and Development Subgroup volunteered to undertake the project with the support of a staff member.

The findings identified that the voluntary sector currently leads on the delivery of victim support services however there is a clear need for a more efficient and individualised support service for all victims of crime, with tailored provision, offering improved and more effective support networks and to share good practice across services that deliver support to victims. This new super service will help all victims of crime recover and cope from the impacts of crime.

2. People in Mind

People in Mind are The Kaleidoscope Plus Group's service user involvement group and strategy. Actually developed by its members on an on-going basis, People in Mind ensures that everybody who accesses services are given the choice of being engaged, involved and consulted either voluntarily or recommended as a step on their care plan.

The strategy is developed continuously based on feedback, organic and flexible to meet the changing needs of the individuals involved to ensure that real positive change can be achieved in addition to genuine and beneficial consultation, involvement and engagement.

People in Mind members are encouraged, empowered, fully supported and recognised for their involvement in all aspects of People in Mind and related engagement activities, ensuring that every individual has a voice and also recognises their full potential.

A preliminary consultation with The Kaleidoscope Plus Group service users was completed, which formed the basis of the proposal, identifying that just over 1.7% of users disclosed to have had experienced crime. It is understood that this figure is actually higher with individuals either choosing not to be involved in the project or uncomfortable with disclosing the fact that they had been a victim of crime.

3. Focus Group

A focus group was held on the 5th August 2014. Initially a total of eleven participants confirmed their attendance, however only eight participants arrived for the activity.

A decision was made to continue with the focus group despite of the required nine participants not being met.

All four questions were completed and the feedback is highlighted below:

Question 1.

Focussing on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime, what are the stages of the journey from the incident through to recovery?

1. The Incident or Crime.
2. Report it to the police / family / hospital.
3. Police response and explain the processes / investigation.
4. Offered support.
5. Emotional and Psychological feelings & beliefs:

Blame yourself, unsafe, insecure, afraid, frightened to face up to it, Shadows and voices, paranoid, irrational thoughts, might come back to finish you off, Thoughts and feelings, anger, annoyance, physical problems got to get over it, victims feelings.

6. Come out of shock, realisation / accept what's happened – coming to live with it.
7. Recovery.

Question 2.

Focussing on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime, what barriers are experienced at each stage from the incident to recovery?

Stage	Barrier
Incident or Crime	
Report it to the police/family/hospital	• not believed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wasting police time • not comfortable with culture/sex of police officer • It's my fault it happened • There will be come back or not dealt with • Mistrust of the police • Lack of evidence of what happened
Police response	
Offered support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not given information on any support or a referral to a service • Support is hard to access • There will be come back or reprisals • Cant get through straight away for support so give up • Communication issues • Confidence to ask for help • Want face to face support not a telephone call • Shock and depression • Not IT confident to find help
Emotional and psychological beliefs and feelings/journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication issues • Not understanding all of the emotions/feelings going through • Its not an individual service – people experiencing different

	<p>crimes have different needs and feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No support or signposting • Excluded or isolated in the community • Need help and support • Unable to take in what's happened or information about the crime at once or soon after it has happened
Shock/realisation/acceptance	As above
Recovery	

Question 3.

Focussing on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime, what must be in place to improve the victim's journey from the incident, through to recovery?

1. Support Plan – Based on individuals needs, longer length of time for support, maybe a tick list of goals/achievements, not just for the person directly involved but all friends and family involved in the background.
2. Information about the process / Updates on police progress, victim support, police support.
3. Communications from the authorities and to understand what's being said to the victim / and if it has not been understood why.
4. Sensitivity, privacy and confidentiality from the police and all services involved.
5. Create a safe Environment to encourage the victim to report the crime/incident.
6. Support for everyone involved – Family / Friends.
7. Protect the person.

Question 4.

Focussing on services and systems encountered by victims of crime, if your group controlled the resources designated to help victims to report, cope with and recover from the impacts of crime, what would your small group of people who have real life experience prioritise?

1. Support Plan – Based on individuals needs, longer length of time for support, maybe a tick list of goals/achievements, not just for the person directly involved but all friends and family involved in the background.
2. Information about the process / Updates on police progress, victim support, police support.
3. Create a safe Environment to encourage the victim to report the crime/incident.

4. PIM Consultation Findings and Recommendations

There is a lack of specialist provision for supporting victims with special needs such as those experiencing mental illness. Many individuals become a victim of crime as a result of being mentally ill and experience continuing abuse and stigma in the community they live in.

Similarly, individuals may develop a mental illness as a consequence of being a victim of crime, this also includes individuals who may well be on the periphery of the experience including family members and friends. In all examples an individual's health and wellbeing declines, the ability to manage a mental illness reduces and isolation is evidenced.

There is a demand for a more efficient and individualised support service for all victims of crime, with tailored provision, offering improved and more effective support networks and to share good practice across services that deliver support to victims. This new super service will help all victims of crime recover and cope from the impacts of crime.

In addition, it is a necessity that the police are required to provide on going and regular updates concerning the progress of the incident until full closure of the case and to proactively promote the support available to all victims of crime regardless of its assumed severity.

It is a recommendation that the police force, frontline police officers and key personnel need to understand, be empathetic and be able to confidently communicate with individuals experiencing mental illness regardless of whether the individual is a victim of crime or in custody. This includes an understanding of both the Mental Capacity Act and the Mental Health Act, in addition to the ability to sign post individuals experiencing mental ill health to the right specialist services and support.

The Kaleidoscope Plus Group deliver a range of mental health awareness courses aimed at professionals including Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), Mental Health First Aid Lite, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), Mental Health Awareness, Recovery and Stress Awareness which would be of great benefit and advantage to police officers and key personnel.

A further recommendation is to distribute out the 'Code of Practice for Victims Of Crime' (2013) to ensure victims know of their rights and entitlements, under section 33 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

5. People in Mind Victim Support Group

Currently, People in Mind manage and deliver a service user led Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Support Group. Following this research study, it is recognised that there is clearly a need to develop a more focused level of support for individuals that have been a victim of crime and experience mental ill health. It has therefore become a strategic direction for People in Mind to offer mutual support to individuals within Sandwell who have been a victim of crime.

It is an aim for this support group to also offer ongoing feedback and guidance to both the Police and support services in ensuring that the appropriate provision for victims of crime is implemented and that individuals experiencing mental ill health are fully supported throughout the process until full recovery.

ST ALBANS FRIENDSHIP CLUB

Setting

There were 9 participants in the focus group. The participants included elderly and disabled service users, local residents, staff and service users of other groups based at the centre.

After the initial ice breaker we settled them into groups trying to ensure a mixture of people in each group to maximise the information received.

Findings

Q1 - Focussing on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime, what are the stages of the journey from the incident through to recovery?

From the discussions that took part it was evident that it is a natural instinct to call the police when an incident occurred. However, it is not a natural instinct to call the non emergency numbers. Many people didn't know what the non emergency number was and would continue to call 999. There was also some doubt about whether a crime was serious enough to report to the police.

Fear, shock and disbelief played a large part in all of the stages of the journey as did knowing where and how to access support. Fear continued throughout the journey whether it be fear of the incident happening again, appearing in court or facing the offenders.

Most people that took part in the focus group had a good idea and agreed about the steps of the journey from beginning to end.

Q2 - Focussing on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime, what barriers are experienced at each stage from the incident to recovery?

Fear came up as a reoccurring theme and was identified as a barrier to recovery. In addition to this there were more practical barriers including hearing difficulties when using the telephone, people struggling with forms and language and cultural barriers.

The other barriers that were apparent in the discussion are knowing where to go to for advice about home security following a burglary, then once this they have obtained this information having someone that can secure their home for them.

The hassle and disruption to life including working hours and the cost of repairs or replacements including loss of earnings was also identified as a barrier to

recovery. People were concerned about the time and costs of getting repairs it takes to get things done after an incident

The thought of having to appear in court was also perceived as a barrier to recovery for several reasons including: the time that it can take for a case to come to court; having to face the offender and having someone that you know and trust that can come to court with you.

Q3 - Focussing on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime, what must be in place to improve the victim's journey from the incident, though to recovery?

One thing that came across in both of the groups is that people felt that they didn't know where they could go to get information on what support is available to them to assist them through to recovery. Information could be supplied by the police about the processes/steps that are taken and agencies that can support victims of crime with the issues they are facing including accessing support groups and sharing their fears and anxieties with in a non-judgemental way.

A named sympathetic person responsible for their case from beginning to end was identified as a requirement as very often victims were not kept informed about the steps of progress of an investigation. Ideally this person should be able to give regular updates on developments with the case including release dates of offenders of personal crimes.

Q4 - Focussing on services and systems encountered by victims of crime, if your group controlled the resources designated to help victims to report, cope with and recover from the impacts of crime, what would your small group of people who have real life experience prioritise?

Literature with information about how to report a crime and what support can be offered. More personal support from the officers handling their case, and where possible having the same person throughout. Access to counselling and advocates for support.

Introduce a different place where a crime can be reported, removing the stigma of visiting a police station. These could include community venues where people feel more comfortable.

Sentencing that reflects the victims have felt and longer sentences to deter repeat offenders.

Conclusion and recommendations

Fear and lack of understanding is the prominent feature that has come out of the focus group. Four recommendations to improve the provision cope with and recover from the impacts of crime are as follows:

- To allocate a named person to a victim of crime so that the victim can be kept informed of the progress of the case. This includes keeping the victim informed about court dates and release date for personal crimes.
- Have trained staff that can give information and sign post the victim to services such as counselling; home/personal safety and services such as advocates that can accompany victims to court.
- Promote the non emergency number more. 999 has been embedded into peoples minds for so long as the emergency number it is hard to recall other numbers. Promoting the non emergency number would reduce the number of 999 calls making to response time quicker.
- Offer alternative places where crime can be reported. This will remove the stigma of visiting a police station and the fear of being seen by the community visiting the station. If it were in a community setting a victim could be visiting that centre for any number of reasons. It is not apparent that they are reporting a crime.

RIGHTS AND EQUALITY SANDWELL

Methodology

Two sessions (one male/ one female) were held at the Iris outreach offices in West Bromwich. Both focus groups were held either within or immediately after other group activities. Support staff also participated. The ice breakers were not used as the groups were familiar with each other. In total there were 9 participants who all stated they had been a victim of crime. Each participant received a £25 gift voucher.

Findings

- Both groups had not had a good experience of being a victim of crime. Some of the females felt this was due to them being intoxicated at the time of the incident; the males felt it was due to their previous contact with the police.
- Though a number had been provided with a crime number, 90% of them had received no follow up from the police re the incident.
- Both groups felt perpetrators received more support and guidance than victims
- There was a lack of continuity with which officer was dealing with the case.
- For some the system re victimised/ was degrading them and reinforced their idea of them and us
- Both groups felt they had been pre judged by the police
- Both groups wanted improved follow up and communications for victims re their cases
- Improved privacy when reporting crime at police station (is the front desk the most appropriate place?)
- Ensure support is available for victims (and their families) of crime at all stages
- Should be dedicated victims workers to support people throughout the whole process
- People being able to report a crime at other venues/ organisations e.g. drop in centres
- More accountability e.g. the victim's code to be mandatory rather than guidelines.

Methodology;

Two sessions (one with HIV group one with gay men group) were held at the Summit House offices in West Bromwich and Dudley. Both focus groups were held either within or immediately after other group activities. Support staff also participated. The ice breakers were not used as the groups were familiar with

each other. In total there were 12 participants 11 of who stated they had been a victim of crime. Each participant received a £25 gift voucher.

Findings

- 83% of incidents happened near or within own home
- All incidents were reported to the police and 8 out of the 12 participants also told family and friends
- People stated they found it difficult to access support and information and needed more help and information from the agencies involved
- The one person who had had a positive response lived outside the borough
- There was no continuity in officers dealing with cases
- For the gay men's group many felt historical perceptions of the police and their attitudes to homosexuality was a barrier to reporting a crime and/or disclosing their sexuality
- Many felt that reassurances and offering updates would improve their experience of being a victim of crime
- Advice and signposting to emotional and practical support would be useful
- Police need a broader knowledge of support services available in their areas
- A number felt police training on responding to victims should be a priority
- More information on WMP website for victims would be useful
- Greater scrutiny of police and being held to account by the public regarding their treatment of victims

FRIAR PARK MILLENNIUM CENTRE

Questionnaires

The Friar Park research project reached a cross-section of different types of people in different areas through doing this consultation from all walks of life. In depth one to one interviews were undertaken following SCVO guidelines.

Of the 50 people engaged / questioned we found that there were only 10 No's which when explained had not been affected by crime. Of the others we were surprised to find such a high percentage who regarded themselves as victims had failed to report their crimes to the police. The main reasons being that they felt the police didn't take their cases seriously and so it was pointless to report. The other major factor was that they felt that the police would look to turn the responsibility for the crime onto the victim.

We found that people were pleased to have anonymity and assurances that the researcher would not report the unreported crimes to the police.

Focus Group.

We set up a focus group of children / young people to measure the impact that crime has had on the children/young people that live in the area WS10.

Firstly we identified 15 children/young people who were interested in taking part, then we sent out letters to let parents know the questions that we would be asking and consent forms to be completed prior to the focus group happening.

We had a group discussion firstly to let them know what would be happening through the session.

The primary findings was that children/young people have fresh in their minds how crime has affected their family members and in turn has impacted on their lives.

For example I have added some of their response;

Focussing on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime, what are the stages of the journey from the incident through to recovery?

*Our word against the thief's.

*Someone tried to break into my house and broke the door. We were scared and contacted the police and they didn't do anything

*Being chased by a car and threatened. Barrier -police tried to blame my self and put under a lot of pressure so all charges was dropped.

*In case I went to prison

*A car crashed into a wall which my granddad had to pay for the wall and his car we phoned the police but nothing was done, this was a barrier as the police did not help at all .just said its not our fault because of this we prefer not to refer to the police .

Focus on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime. What must be in place to improve the victims journey from the incident through to recovery?

*They need to make the law system more supportive.

*I would like them to make me feel more comfortable in telling me what has happened so they can solve it.

*I feel I will get the blame for what as happened.

*The police need to put in more effort into finding evidence in the crime.

*For the police to be more helpful.

*Every time I have needed help from the law system they have always told me there is not enough evidence.

See paperwork that covers the other questions handed in with this report.

Feed back From the Children/young people

Children/young people asked can we do it again

Liked making new friends

Junior Helper did the same format within our youth club

Being able to talk freely

Overall the focus group proved to be very informative.

BLACK COUNTRY HOUSING GROUP

Methods

We conducted individual questionnaires and achieved a total of 98 respondents, in addition we conducted four focus groups, two of which were in Smethwick and two of which were in Blackheath. We had 33 attendees at the focus groups.

Target Groups

We were asked to try to gain as high response from BME groups as possible especially Afro-Caribbean. Our total BME response rate was 40% (not including those who identified as British only) and our Afro-Caribbean response rate comprised 50% of the BME respondents.

Those who identified as white were 29% and those who identified as British but ticked no ethnicity box were 30%.

Summary of findings for Groupwork – As all groups had common themes their responses have been collated

Q1. What are the stages of the journey to recovery?

Stage One – Deal with Practicalities

- Report to the police / insurance / get other immediate help

Stage Two – Get support

You maybe be feeling some of the following

- Anger and dealing with your anger
- Despair
- Feeling violated
- Needing support and sometimes sympathy
- Disillusionment with the system
- Vulnerable
- Scared of repercussions
- Feeling ashamed
- Feeling like a nuisance

You will also need help with

- Getting feedback
- Understanding the system / procedures
- Help if you need to attend court
- Insurance / financial issues

- Keeping track of what is happening with your case

Access support from:

- Support services – victim support etc
- Police
- Family and friends (most popular choice)

Stage Three – See a resolution

- You may have to go through court / restitution / give evidence
- A positive outcome helps to come to terms with the crime
- Many people expressed frustration that they felt ignored, unimportant, that nothing had happened with the case so they felt unable to reach a resolution.

Q2. What barriers are experienced at each stage?

Stage One – Deal with practicalities

- Having proof
- People believing you
- Attitude of police (one member stated that their attitude was racist)
- Who to contact for support
- What repercussions will there be (fear of reporting)

Stage Two – Get support

- Who to deal with / how to get help
- Consistency of communications from the system
- What services are available
- What about out of hours services / are they available
- No follow up from services
- Slow response to queries
- Lack of interest from agencies
- Feeling embarrassed
- Feeling ashamed
- Feeling like a nuisance
- Feeling like a time waster
- Feeling like the crime was a minor issue to others
- Feeling like they had racism from those in authority
- Unsure what had and hadn't been followed up (i.e were CCTV cameras checked)

Q3. What must be in place to improve the victim's journey from the incident through to recovery?

- More information about services / resources
- Central point of contact for victim (one stop shop)
- Support from family, friends and various services
- More support for the victim
- More support from victim support
- Reassure the victim that they are the victim not a problem or a nuisance
- More feedback
- Address racism
- More focus of resources where crimes occur
- Focusing on victim and designing services around their journey
- Empathy to victim
- Make process of reporting easier

Q4. If your group controlled the resources, what would you prioritise?

- Mental wellbeing of victims
- Physical wellbeing of victims
- Trauma recovery / counselling for victims of serious crime
- Publications / awareness of resources and services available for victims
- Support groups
- Victims knowing outcomes
- Training for those in authority to show empathy
- 'Safe pod' if you feel threatened on the street
- Single point of contact for victim

Overall Summary

There was a frustration amongst some group members who felt unable to reach a stage of resolution. This seemed to be tied in with not feeling listened to, not feeling that they were being taken seriously and lack of any positive outcome after the crime i.e. a conviction or restitution.

The key themes to facilitate a successful transition to recovery seem to be

- The victim needs to know how to report a crime
- The victim needs to feel safe in reporting the crime and free from repercussions
- The victim needs to feel listened to, important and that those in authority will care and support them
- Support available to the victim needs to be communicated
- The victim needs to be kept in the loop during the investigation
- Ideally a single point of contact for the victim
- Outcomes need to be shared with the victim

WEST SMETHWICK ENTERPRISE

Crime in Sandwell: Findings

The study was discussed in focus groups during stay and play sessions as this is the best opportunity to demonstrate the services we provide for the community. Once discussed, the group all gave answers in various languages, a majority of which included Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu. Additionally, some spoke English but very minimal therefore this process wasn't the best way to carry out the research which is why I decided to conduct one to one in depth, semi-structured interviews. This allowed me to translate each question as well as the responses given, into English which allowed for a good level of detail to be recorded. This was however a very time consuming method and took place over a number of weeks at various stay and play sessions.

The common themes highlighted in this study are as follows:

- Stage 1 of the crime involved feelings that were common amongst the group such as fear, panic, worry and shock
- Mugging and theft was amongst the top crimes highlighted within the group
- A majority of victims claimed that language proved to be the biggest barrier within the process through from the incident to recovery
- A large number of victims would like to see better links between the community and the local police teams so that the public is more aware on how to complain/ report a crime as well as stay safe
- Some victims were unaware of services such as victim support and had no idea what they offered. These services should be promoted more effectively within local areas and be available immediately with a range of professionals who speak community languages.
- A majority of the participants were of an ethnic minority background
- Another area that was mentioned within the group was theft of money and items such as mobiles that occurred within the families. As I am multilingual I was able to pick up on various conversations which I followed up later during one to one interviews however none of the individuals wished to take part and answer the questions as this would be talking against their family.
- Another crime which is prevalent in Sandwell is that of domestic violence. However as this is such a sensitive topic, not many participants wished to speak about any experience due to factors such as fear, shame and worry. Again, this is something the focus group allowed me to highlight but when questioned directly, I wasn't given any information.

VICTIM SUPPORT SANDWELL

Summary of Findings

In completing the surveys direct with our client group there appears to be a trend appearing that individuals do not feel listened to by authority i.e. Police, Council, ASB, Housing.

We have spoken to people from Tipton, Cradley Heath, Oldbury, Smethwick, West Bromwich, Wednesbury and Rowley Regis which covers nearly every section of Sandwell.

It has been more difficult to try and get outcomes from the younger age groups as parents are often quite defensive and do not want to keep talking about the situation.

We have tried at various times, in various ways and through various individuals to try and extract the necessary information but we have also managed to get a wide variety of information from the older groups as they have been more willing to talk about how they have been affected.

We have spoken to thirty three people who have recently become victims of crime and have so far received feedback from twenty five. This covers most age groups and cultures so that we are getting an overview of how individuals feel rather than targeting a small group of individuals from the same category i.e. age, geographic area, culture.

It was highlighted on more than one occasion that communication with and from Police has not been satisfactory and clients do not feel that they are listened to. They also feel that there was not enough co-operation from the Police, they were rude and never followed up queries.

This is an on-going issue that we often hear during initial meetings with clients and it is fair to say that there has been improvement over the years with regards to returning calls to clients when we have requested them on their behalf.

It was also identified that there are issues around housing and the support that is required when victims need to move house to get away from a situation.

We have spoken to a wide variety of clients across all ages, genders, cultures and areas within Sandwell and the under lying theme is that people need to be

listened to at the early stages before they have to start to make decisions about what they need to do.

The majority of people who have used our service are very happy with the support and the fact that they were listened to, but also, that they were referred on to appropriate agencies who could help them i.e. Sandwell Women's Aid, Housing, ASB.

We have also identified that lack of communication is a factor that causes extra pressure to individuals who are struggling to come to terms with being a victim of crime.

This is something we as an organisation also need to be aware of, as often, the client does not actually hear what is being said as they are still in a state of shock.

It is also fair to say that if clients do not necessarily get the outcome they want to hear from a partner agency, they view the service as less favourable than if they get the outcome they want which may explain negative feedback about a wide group of different organisations rather than one specific organisation.

This has proven that the service we offer is valued by the vast majority of clients and that it makes a difference just being listened to.

AURAT SUPPORTING WOMEN

Overview of findings

In our experience during this exercise we found that people are willing to speak about their experiences based on a number of elements.

When speaking to individuals and groups about this research all agreed it was necessary, but some felt not much as going to come out this as is 'usually the case', where as others whose experience was far more traumatic would only do so based on trust. For others it was the thought that perhaps by completing a form that maybe something was going to happen or that something was going to come out of this, that there was going to be some conclusion for them.

It is interesting to note that 71% of victims were also victims of abuse either honour, sexual, or domestic violence. This is a significant percentage considering the total number of clients interviewed and almost all were from the ethnic minority community and almost all did not report the abuse for fear of reprisal and the dire consequences that may follow. However, this is not to say that all victims of such crimes are from the ethnic minority community and we must not assume that this is the case. It is just that statistics are taken from the clients that came forward and were supported by Aurat through either self-referral or through recommendation.

As for the reporting of crime, those that did report the crime only amounts to 35% with a well over 50% not reporting the crime at all but seeking support from family/friends amounting to an equal percentage. Approximately 28% not informing anyone of the abuse, not surprising considering 50% were frightened of what might happen in terms of reprisal with a further 46% worried about being blamed or judged, 42% feared the embarrassment or the shame this would cause them should it get into the public domain.

Interestingly even though majority of the crimes were not reported, approximately 3.5% didn't report the crime because they did not have faith in the justice system, with just over 7% not trusting the police, with over 28% not believing that the police or anyone would actually help them.

Significantly high percentage sought support from family or friends at over 57%. For those who suffered sexual, domestic or honour crimes this support usually entailed advice to keep silent about the abuse. However, for other crimes such as muggings or break in support was sought from within their close circle, as the victims felt there was no support out there for them. In fact most highlighted the lack of support for victims by the police with no updates or contact in relation to the crime and their trauma. A few were sign posted but felt that it was more about tick boxes than actually supporting the victims and the victims reached this conclusion based on 'no further contact' with them the victims after the initial meeting and form filling. 'It is all about funding' said client and 'the police are not interested' said another.

As for setting up a forum, 2 information sessions were held and both times the decision was unanimous not to set up a forum as the group questioned the value of the forum and what power or influence it would have and all felt it would only be a 'talking shop' to make the powers that be look good and it would not be beneficial where it really counts. Hence no forum, however, Aurat interviewed 28 clients thus overachieving its target of 25.

Trauma – During this consultation, it was found that all victims of crime still feel much traumatised even for the crimes that took place a number of years ago. Some indicated that they prefer not to think about the sequence of events or the event itself, as they still have flashbacks and others have said they find it difficult to trust and most feel hard done by the system. A number of the victims stated there should have been some counselling for them or someone to talk to, at least, at the time would have been very helpful in helping them to recover from this trauma.

During the consultation it was evident in a number of cases how most of the victims were still affected by their experience. Once they had begun to speak about the crime they had suffered no matter how long ago it had been, it was clear that most had not fully recovered from the experience. One of the indications being the reluctance initially to talk about the experience and then once they had 'got going' it was difficult to stop. Almost all raised a lot of questions about their experience as to why it happened, why did the perpetrator do this? why didn't the police investigate it properly? Why were the police not interested? And so on.

A lot of unanswered questions because for the victims, there has been no closure. With so much information covered as indicated by the consultation questionnaire and the responses received, please see attached spreadsheet containing the information for all statistical data and responses, however below is a breakdown of some data as mentioned.

BREAKING BREAD

Our main findings from our discussions were that people have an opinion that the police are just doing a job.

Victims in many cases, particularly where the crime is not considered to be 'serious', e.g. 'petty theft', 'car crime', anti-social behaviour', feel that they are wasting police time, this is how they are made to feel by the Police.

Generally people will phone 999, ring 101, or go to report the crime in person, their expectation is that there will be no follow up by the police, and they will hear nothing else. Although they appreciate that the police have a difficult job, people believe that the police treat them with no compassion and just go through the motions.

At the end of the day victims are victims, they are individuals and deserve to be treated with some respect, the police may have seen it all before and just go through the motions but to the individual it is serious and has a major impact on them.

Not everyone has access to the internet for information, they need a person to speak to. At the moment the victim has to do all the legwork and while they are made to feel that they are wasting time they won't follow up.

A lot of people didn't report the crime because of the above comments. Some felt that if there was a fact sheet or pack this would help them, something like "so you have been the victim of here is what to do next' and have it spelt out for them.

A lot of people didn't ask for any support because they weren't sure that it was a free service or that it would help, they saw it as just talking and didn't make the link between the talking, the information and closure. They saw it as just taking up more time without any benefit.

Few thought that the support received was really worth the effort, a couple thought the support they had was good, response times varied. The main thing was really if they had little support or understanding from the outset (police) then this really clouded their whole experience.

Many wanted feedback – what happened afterwards, was anyone caught? In reality few of our respondents had had to give evidence and believed that no one had ever paid for the crime, this left the victim without closure.

SANDWELL WOMEN'S AID

We conducted a focus group with our Survivors Group which meets monthly at SWA. Six women, one man and one transgender woman attended, aged between 30 and 70. Members of the group had been victims of crimes including childhood sexual abuse, rape, sexual violence and domestic abuse. All lived in Sandwell.

The format of the group was a general verbal discussion, to enable people of different abilities to take part fully. Three of the group had some level of additional needs and one was not literate. The group found the questions hard to understand and unclear, not pitched appropriately for people with no knowledge of commissioning or how victims services are designed. Staff from SWA therefore interpreted the questions to help the discussions flow. None of the group had heard of a Police and Crime Commissioner or knew what the role entails.

Following is a write-up of the discussion.

(Q1) Focussing on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime what are the stages of the journey from the incident, through to recovery?

The group found this question a little unclear and wanted to move the discussion on quickly to barriers experienced by victims. Some of the stages that were identified however were:

- Crime
- Victim is faced with a decision – report to the police or not? Report to someone else or not?
- Once you have reported – then what? Trauma of physical examinations and police questioning
- Once victims have reported they expect a result. Sometimes this takes a long time, or there is no result: “*What’s the point?*” leads to feelings of anger and frustration, victims feel disempowered, that things are out of their hands
- Backlash from perpetrator or family – anger that victim has reported. Revictimisation or counter-allegations
- Court – if the case gets there
- Aftermath – feelings of isolation, anger, frustration, guilt

(Q2) Focussing on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime what barriers are experienced at each stage from the incident to recovery?

To report or not?

The group discussed how the decision whether or not to report a crime to the police is a major one for victims of abuse. Victims of sexual abuse in particular face specific barriers to coming forward.

The group said that survivors of childhood sexual abuse are 'damaged anyway' and don't have a positive outlook about themselves or authority. They need help before even going to the police. Three of the group said they would 'never have reported to the police'

There was a feeling that "*people lose things through telling the truth*" – their families, their self esteem, their privacy. Sometimes it doesn't seem worth speaking out.

Feelings about authority

Many of the group expressed a lack of trust in authority which affected their feeling able to approach authorities to report crime.

Several of the group had been victims of abuse throughout their lives, beginning with childhood sexual abuse, followed by domestic abuse and further sexual violence. As children, they had not reported the abuse or received any support. They all talked of a climate of fear, shame and secrecy around abuse.

"As a child you had no say, no voice"

"I was too young to do anything about it"

"My parents and grandparents were so strict, I was scared to mention it"

The group said that they feared authority, and people in authority, feeling that no-one would help or protect them.

"As a child, adults had the power. Mum didn't believe me, why would anyone else?"

One woman said she feared authority because '*they can put you away*', having been classed as 'deviant' and threatened with 'borstal' as an abused and traumatised child.

They had a feeling of disempowerment stemming from childhood, the fact that they as abused children they had not been noticed, believed or supported by adults in their lives.

“Doctors, teachers, hospital had information [about the abuse] but nothing was said. I was labelled as ‘backwards, troubled’. They thought my injuries were self-inflicted.”

Several of the group agreed, that labels that had followed them throughout their lives such as ‘troubled and ‘learning disabled’ affected their confidence and the way they were seen by those in authority.

These early experiences had affected their feelings about authority; they felt that those in authority didn’t help and didn’t believe people like them.

Experiences with the police and courts

“Police twist things, put words in your mouth, say it was your fault”.

The group felt that the onus was on the victim to ‘prove the abuse happened’. They feel the police go on evidence, and in the case of childhood sexual abuse in past years it comes down to one person’s word against another’s.

Some of the group feared the court process, both due to their own experiences and media reports of how victims can be treated in court, for example judges using words such as ‘promiscuous’ about girls under 16. They said that judges should

“go on courses and do work experiences at victim’s services. They should come here for a week. We would have them in our survivors group and talk to them”

They also feared juries and what prejudices about victims they might hold, whether they would believe victims stories.

All of these feelings contributed towards a general climate of fear and distrust, that the criminal justice system did not work for people like them, or crimes like they had experienced.

Myths about abuse

All of the group agreed that myths surrounding domestic and sexual abuse (of children and adults) made it difficult to talk about or report. They feared that if they reported abuse, that they would be told

“you must have done something to encourage it, you must have lead him on”

“It would be my word against his, and I know who they will believe”

They said that children who are sexually abused have been so groomed or ‘brainwashed’ by perpetrators that they might appear to be going ‘willingly’ with

their abuser. Victims felt that authorities would therefore see the abuse as consensual sexual behaviour, even where children were being victimised.

"They'll ask you why you kept going to them, and what can you say?"

They also mentioned psychiatrists and 'false memory syndrome' – people seem to want to find reasons why victims would 'make things up'

Backlash from perpetrators

Several people in the group mentioned a 'backlash' once they had reported their abuse, either from families that did not believe them and resented the disruption and upset, or the perpetrators themselves. One woman in particular mentioned that her family who had abused her used the criminal justice system to harass her and the police to 'get to her', by counter-alleging that she was the abuser.

"When I have a policeman come to my house I think it's about the abuse, but it's about me being violent to my sister. Afterwards I got a text message – 'ha ha' from my sister"

Other victims agreed that counter allegations made them feel undermined, and made the police less likely to believe their report, querying 'who was in the right'.

Mobile phones are a source of harassment and bullying from perpetrators, there was a feeling that they make it harder to escape. Threats of violence via phones and social media should be taken more seriously by the police.

Isolation

The group said that where a victim had been abused by those close to them, once they chose to report the crime this led to isolation.

"Reporting... upsets a lot of people, your whole family"

"There should be work with the whole family to help support the victim"

Victims of childhood sexual abuse, honour based violence and domestic abuse are reporting crimes perpetrated by their own family, which inevitably leads to separation, or even being formally disowned. They feel on their own, lacking a support system, which makes them feel even more vulnerable and in need of support.

"Victims are isolated and vulnerable – out of their families. Even if they are removed from danger by being put in care. It has created a problem – they need backup"

(Q3) Focussing on services and systems encountered by people who consider themselves to be victims of crime what must be in place to improve the victim's journey from the incident, though to recovery?

Independent support was seen to be crucial. The group in general were very negative about the idea of reporting abuse to the police, but very positive about reporting to an independent support service such as SWA. All thought the role of an ISVA or IDVA was exactly what victims need – they said there should be one of them.

Support can help victims to cope with the complicated feelings and isolation they experience, help overcome guilt, ensure they are respected by police and courts, and through the long process of being in the criminal justice system.

However, the group agreed that people often did not know where to go for support. There should be more awareness of support services.

Disclosing

The group agreed that the police should not be the only route to support for victims of abuse.

Some of the group suggested that the initial stage after a crime should be to report to a victim's service, not the police.

"We could come straight here, that would give courage to go to the police and ensure they listened"

They suggested that even if a victim of abuse reported to a police station, the officers could call a victim's service to get an ISVA to the police station straight away to help the victim give their first report – so they had support from day one, someone independent making sure that they felt comfortable talking to the police.

The group mentioned that abuse happens "when offices are shut" so there should be more support available outside of office hours, or an on-call system so support can be accessed after 5pm.

There should be many opportunities for children, for example, to be noticed or to disclose to a trusted adult. There should be more awareness in schools of triggers and signs that a child is being abused, and they should be believed if they disclose.

There should be more positive messages in schools and society about gender, abuse etc. That it's ok to come forward, abuse isn't ok, that people will be believed and it's not their fault. The group questioned where these positive messages

should be shared for adults to see – on TV, buses? Campaigns should build awareness, not paranoia.

Holistic support

The group agreed that those who have been abused

“struggle with an image problem; we feel dirty and unworthy mentally and physically. We need a bolster”

They need support sometimes that is not just about the crime itself but about recovering their sense of self, perhaps life building courses or sessions about feeling good and looking good, even makeovers or wellbeing sessions.

(Q4) Focussing on services and systems encountered by victims of crime if your group controlled the resources designated to help victims to report, cope with and recover from the impacts of crime, what would your small group of people who have real life experience prioritise?

The group made the following main recommendations:

- More independent support workers for victims of crime, available at flexible times
- Holistic support that helps victims recover their sense of self, not just focussed on getting through the criminal justice system
- The police should not be the only referral route into victims’ services – there should be the choice to report to an independent victims service first
- Greater public awareness about abuse, strong messages against it to overcome guilt and shame

PART FOUR - APPENDIX

PROFILING VICTIMS OF CRIME: VICTIM EXPERIENCE CONSULTATION – QUESTIONNAIRE

Overview

The Safer Sandwell Partnership Board and Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) are helping the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner to put in place a development programme which will help victims to cope with and recover from the impacts of crime.

It is important that your experience of the police, criminal justice and support services is taken into consideration, and shared with providers and policy makers, to improve services and shape future provision.

[NAME OF GROUP] is carrying out research with their service users to help us to find out what victims of crime need from agencies delivering support to them in order to ensure that future provision meets their needs.

For the purpose of this research we **do not** need names and address but we do need to identify the area where respondents live, therefore we will ask for the first 4 digits of your post code (For example post code B77 4AB would become B77 4)

Victim Experience Consultation – Questionnaire

Section 1 – About the crime

1. Do you believe you have been a victim of crime?

Yes

No

2. When did the incident happen?

Within the last year

Within the last 2 years

Within the last 5 years

Within the last 10 years

Over 10 years ago

3. Where did the incident happen?

4. What type of incident was it?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal damage | <input type="checkbox"/> Driving offence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle Crime | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual abuse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Burglary | <input type="checkbox"/> Domestic abuse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Robbery | <input type="checkbox"/> Hate Crime |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assault/violent crime | <input type="checkbox"/> Anti-Social Behaviour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honour crime (including forced marriage) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other - (please give details below) | |

5. Did you report the incident to the Police?

- Yes - please skip to Q7
- No
- Someone reported it on my behalf - please skip to Q8

6. [if no to the above]

Why did you not report to the incident/crime? (please tick all that apply)

- I thought it would be too much hassle/I did not have time
- I didn't think it was serious enough
- I didn't think the police would help
- I was worried that I would be blamed/judged
- I was frightened of what might happen
- I didn't want it to be made public

- I didn't want my family/friends/local community to find out
- I don't have faith in the justice system
- I don't trust the Police
- Other – please give details below

7. Did you tell anyone else about the incident? (Please tick all that apply)

- No
- I told family/friends
- I reported it anonymously to Crimestoppers
- I told another organisation – please give details
- I don't know/can't remember
- Other – please give details below

8. How was the crime/incident reported? (Please select one)

- In person – by visiting a police station or speaking to an officer/Police Community Support Officer (PCSO)
- By dialling 101 or other non-emergency number
- I don't know/can't remember
- Other – please give details below

Section 3 – The Support and Your Experience

9. What sources of support did you access? Please tick all that apply

- Support from family/friends
- Help from the Police
- Help from another criminal justice agency (eg, the Court or CPS)
- Help from the Council, Housing, Social Services
- Help from a health professional
- Support from charity/voluntary/community organisation
- Telephone helplines (eg, The Samaritans, Childline)
- Independent legal advice/advocacy
- Social Networking/online discussion forums
- Information on the internet
- Local Support/faith groups
- Other – please tell us below

10. Please describe how you found and accessed the support you were looking for and whether this support was easy/straightforward or difficult to find?

11. What was good and what was bad about the support?

12. Were there things that could have been improved during your journey of receiving support, if so please describe these to us.

13. If there is any other feedback you would like to give us please tell us below.

The demographic questions below are based on the protected characteristics as set out in the Equalities Act 2010.

These standard questions are **entirely optional** but would make our understanding of responses more meaningful if you could answer them. All data will be treated confidentially and published anonymously.

14. The first 4 digits of your Postcode

15. Ethnicity

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or Asian British | <input type="checkbox"/> White |
| <input type="checkbox"/> British | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese or Chinese British | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed Heritage | |

16. Age Range

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child under 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> 36 - 50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 51 - 64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 19 - 24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 - 35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

17. Gender

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

18. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
|------------------------------|--|

No

19. Religious beliefs

Buddhist

Sikh

Christian

Other

Hindu

None

Jewish

Prefer not to say

Muslim

20. Sexual Orientation

Bisexual

Other

Gay or Lesbian
to say

Prefer not

Heterosexual

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey

21. Researchers only:

The evidence must be collected, collated and delivered to SCVO by 30th August 2014 and the data/outcomes must be presented to a networking meeting 23rd September 2014.

As part of this package of support successful applicants will receive one free entry on the Route2Wellbeing Portal – www.route2wellbeing. to promote their services, and one free contract readiness assessment.

Contacts:

Carole: carole@scvo.info

Leona: leona@scvo.info

Tel: 0121 525 1127

Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

1st Floor

Landchard House

West Bromwich

Sandwell

B70 8ER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SCVO would like to thank and acknowledge the contribution of all those who participated in the questionnaires and focus groups, sharing their views and experiences of being a victim of crime in Sandwell.

We would also like to thank the following organisations:-

- Aurat Supporting Women
- Black Country Housing Group
- Breaking Bread
- Friar Park Millennium Centre
- Kaleidoscope Plus
- Rights and Equality Sandwell
- Sandwell Women's Aid
- St Albans Friendship Club
- Victim Support Sandwell
- West Smethwick Enterprise
- Yemini Community Association

Further information regarding this consultation can be obtained from SCVO by contacting the team at the address below.



Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations,
1st Floor, Landchard House, Victoria Street, West Bromwich. B70 8ER

Tel: 0121 525 1127 Fax: 0121 525 4777

E-mail: support@scvo.info Website: www.scvo.info Directory: www.sandwellvcs.info