



Government Equalities Office

HM Government

Tackling Violence Against Women

A cross-government narrative

April 2008



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Foreword

On 17 July 2007, I set out the government's main priorities as the new Minister for Women. They were:

- To support families, as they bring up their children and look after their older and disabled relatives
- To tackle violence against women, and improve the way we deal with women who commit crimes; and
- To empower black and minority ethnic women, to build cohesion within their own communities, and to build bridges between different communities

This report into how the Government is tackling violence against women clearly underpins the second priority, but in many ways, it cuts across all three.

Violence against women not only harms women, but can also have a devastating impact on children, and the wider family unit. All the evidence shows that even if children are not physically caught in the crossfire, they are always traumatised and damaged by living in a household where there is domestic violence.

Domestic violence still claims up to two lives every week. Around one in four women and one in six men will be a victim of domestic violence and nine out of ten of those victims suffering four or more attacks are women. Those who commit acts of domestic violence must be prosecuted and brought to justice. We can not tolerate a situation where it appears that if someone assaults a person while walking down the street, they will be brought to justice, but if they assault their wife or partner behind closed doors, they have a good chance of getting away with it.

Many elements of the violence against women agenda, including human trafficking, forced marriages and so-called 'honour' killings are particularly challenging. For instance human trafficking, in all its many different forms, blights the lives of men, women and children across many different continents.

In recent years, we have done a great deal to step up action against domestic violence, forced marriages, sexual offences, human trafficking and rape. Reporting of rape has increased since 1997, with the number of rapes reported to the police rising from 6,628 to 13,780 in 2006-07. As a result, the criminal justice system is dealing with more cases, many of which hinge on consent, and the 26% increase in the number of convictions has not kept pace with the increase in reported cases.

Rape Crisis England and Wales has done an important job in alerting us to the funding challenges faced at local level by rape crisis centres. Since we put together this report we have announced funding of up to £1million aimed at keeping a number of rape crisis centres open. But there is more to do. We need to ensure that the substantive law is right, and make it clear beyond doubt that violence of any kind will not be tolerated.

The laws and conventions we sign to this end are very important. But beyond that, it comes down to what we actually do and the practical things which make a difference in people's lives.

Initiatives such as trained domestic violence prosecutors, Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVC) and extra support for victims are making a real difference. For example victims of domestic violence often fear going to court. In SDVC, they can enter and leave via separate entrances, wait in a separate area and they can be accompanied by specialist support staff who ensure they know what is happening. These initiatives work – which is why the successful prosecution rate for domestic violence has increased from 46% in 2003, to 69% by December 2007.

That's why we are seeking to ensure that these initiatives are rolled out to every part of the country, to ensure that every area becomes as good as the best, when it comes to tackling violence.

In the past several years we have worked across Government to ensure an integrated approach to tackling violence against women, providing support services to individuals and families. The Government also brought laws up-to-date to better reflect modern attitudes and practices, and to encourage women to come forward

and seek help. The Government passed The Sexual Offences Act 2003 which modernised the legal framework for sexual offences, and made it easier for prosecutors to meet the legal requirements for proving their case. The next year we passed The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 which created a number of new powers, and amended existing powers, with to strength the victim's case when it was brought to the attention of the criminal justice system. Last year two more provisions of this Act came into force: breaking a 'non-molestation' order is now a criminal offence, and anyone convicted of doing so could face a prison sentence of up to five years. And coming into effect later this year is The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 which provides civil protection for people threatened with forced marriage. The Act enables courts to make a Forced Marriage Protection Order to protect victims of forced marriage and those facing forced marriage, and send out a clear message that forced marriage will not be tolerated.

The Government continues to work with Local Government and with the Voluntary and Community Sector to tackle violence against women. We are overseeing this through the three Inter-Ministerial Groups which work together on all the issues associated with domestic violence, sexual violence and abuse, prostitution and human trafficking.

As well as ensuring that more perpetrators are brought to justice, we want to deter violence and we also want to see victims of violence being given all the help they need to rebuild their lives and to live securely in their homes.

Harriet Harman

Minister for Women and Equality



About this report

This report is based on what the Government has been doing to tackle violence against women, and particularly activity in the last 18 months. It is based on the evidence gathered by individual departments in response to the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) campaign's *Making the Grade?* survey (May 2007).

The report is designed to tell the story of what we are doing to tackle violence against women. It does not, and is not intended to replace the department by department analysis which EVAW undertakes.



Introduction

Since 1997, the Government has made a sustained effort to tackle violence against women, both here in the UK and abroad.

The last couple of years have seen a number of important changes introduced, ranging from new legislation to the introduction of initiatives such as Specialist Domestic Violence Courts, Sexual Assault Referral Centres and a concerted effort to work 'across Government' to tackle violence against women.

Today, we have cross-government action plans for:

- Domestic violence
- Sexual violence and abuse
- Human trafficking
- Tackling violent crime
- Prostitution strategy
- Cross-Criminal Justice System (CJS) Rape Performance Group

Around two thirds of the existing type of Local Area Agreements, which encourage multi-agency working at the local level, now have targets related to violence against women.

The Government Equalities Office and the Ministers for Women and Equality are determined to lead across Government for issues related to violence against women. The introduction of the Gender Equality Duty and the first, cross-Government Equality PSA – which links to the 'Making Communities Safer' Public Service Agreement, which specifically covers violence against women – and the publication of their first Gender Equality Schemes is encouraging many departments to look at how gender, and specifically violence against women, impacts on their work.

Box 1: Violence against women – everyone’s problem

Departments with policy areas directly related to violence against women are participating in cross-government initiatives to tackle issues including domestic violence, sexual violence and trafficking.

Many other departments have also set themselves internal objectives to raise awareness about violence against women in relation to their staff and HR management, including: adopting robust domestic violence policies; providing employees with the necessary support; and making specific mention of violence against women in their Gender Equality Schemes (GES) and the accompanying action plans.

There are also real improvements on the ground.

Today, we have 64 Specialist Domestic Violence Court systems; we are expanding the network of Sexual Assault Referral Centres; we have specialist rape prosecutors in every Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) area; and we have opened the UK Human Trafficking Centre, the first of its kind in Europe.

Looking to the future, the ‘Co-ordinated Community Response’ model, is aimed at bringing together all the different agencies involved in dealing with domestic violence, and highlighting what each agency should be doing effectively to tackle it.

Much has changed in the last ten years, and particularly in the last two. But there is always room for improvement. To this end, we are continuing to work on a number of initiatives to raise the profile of violence against women; put measures in place to continue to tackle it; and ensure that all victims of violence receive the support and help they need.

1

How it used to be – identifying the scope of the problem

In 1999, the Government published 'Living without Fear: An integrated approach to tackling violence against women', the first document comprehensively to set out the scope of the problem of violence against women.

In this document, the Government recognised that violence against women was a serious problem, with serious consequences. It also painted a very grim picture of the lack of consistent support and help available to its victims; and the difficulties involved in securing convictions.

Some help was available for victims of violence, but it was not comprehensive, consistent or easy to access. Some areas had good and efficient services to help victims in place but in other areas, these simply did not exist.

This created a situation where, in some cases, women were being sent to up to ten different places before they got the help they needed.

Box 2: Excerpt from 'Living without fear', published in 1999

"One in four women experience domestic violence at some stage in their lives. Thousands of children live in fear in their own home, witnessing or experiencing violence. The number of rapes reported has nearly doubled in the last ten years, often committed by people the victim knows. And seven out of ten women under 30 worry about being raped."

It was clear that a radical overhaul of the services available to victims of violence against women was needed, in order to give victims decent, comprehensive and timely support; bring more perpetrators to justice; and create a legal system which was more sensitive to – and understanding of – their particular needs and requirements.

'Living without fear' set out the main problems that the Government would need to tackle. These included:

- Ensuring that violence against women was taken seriously by the Criminal Justice System, making it less of an ordeal for victims to testify in court and tackling the problems associated with securing convictions
- Addressing personal safety issues, including issues over housing; and protecting the children of victims of domestic abuse
- Ensuring that the Government acted in a more 'joined-up' way to tackle violence against women
- Creating an atmosphere of 'zero tolerance' for violence against women

Later on, as the issues of forced marriage and human trafficking became more visible, the Government also pledged to tackle these manifestations of violence against women.

2

Taking action and making improvements

Over the last few years, the Government has introduced new laws, funded new initiatives, and developed new measures to tackle violence against women.

Below, we list some of the latest developments for 2007, and then explain more generally how the situation has improved.

Box 3: Key improvements to tackle violence against women – 2007

- All pregnant women in the UK are now routinely asked about domestic violence, helping to identify potential victims as early as possible
- Domestic violence is now included in all routine assessments of children in education
- The Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence has been launched, representing approximately 160 companies and over 2 million employees – including all seven Government departments which are represented on the Inter-departmental Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence (November 2006)
- The joint Foreign & Commonwealth Office / Home Office Forced Marriage Unit now helps around 400 victims and potential victims a year
- Communities and Local Government support a range of accommodation options for victims of domestic violence, ranging from refuges to Sanctuary Schemes, which enable victims to stay safely in their own homes
- By end of 2008, all police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutors will have received training about domestic violence

- Every police force and CPS area in the UK now has a domestic violence co-ordinator. Every police force also now has a domestic violence champion
- The Specialist Domestic Violence Court (SDVC) Programme is continuing to expand, with 64 SDVCs since April 2007. There will be around 100 SDVCs by April 2008
- All probation areas now have accredited domestic abuse perpetrator programmes.

Ensuring that violence against women is taken seriously by the Criminal Justice System

The Government understood and accepted that a number of changes needed to be made to ensure that violence against women would be taken more seriously throughout the criminal justice system. We have introduced a range of legislative changes and other measures to address this, which we will look at in more detail below.

Better laws and procedures

The Government recognised that many of the laws pertaining to sexual offences needed to be brought up-to-date, to better reflect modern attitudes and practices.

To this end, we introduced new legislation, most notably the Sexual Offences Act 2003, and the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 modernised the legal framework for sexual offences, and made it easier for prosecutors to meet the legal requirements for proving their case.

For example, the new laws have limited the circumstances in which a victim's previous sexual history is admissible in court for rape trials. It is now easier to introduce evidence of a defendant's bad character – which is often crucial to proving a pattern, and convicting serial attackers.

We introduced the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 which created a number of new powers, and amended existing powers, with a view to strengthening the victim's case when it was brought to the attention of the criminal justice system.

On 1 July 2007 two more provisions of this Act came into force. Breaking a 'non-molestation' order is now a criminal offence, and anyone convicted of doing so could face a prison sentence of up to five years.

The second provision introduced in July makes it possible for courts to grant 'non-molestation' and occupation orders, even in cases where a couple have never been married or lived together.

The new legislation also laid the groundwork for a number of initiatives to boost the chances of successfully prosecuting cases involving violence against women, which we'll look at in more detail below.

Human Trafficking laws

The Government introduced amendments in the UK Borders Bill, which aim to improve our ability to prosecute trafficking cases.

The UK also signed The Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, on 23 March 2007, which contains obligations to:

- Give the victim a 30 day 'reflection period' to recover and consider all their options, before they have to provide a full statement; and
- Give the victim a residence permit for the duration of the investigation and court process.

On the same day that we signed the Convention, the Government launched a detailed action plan. This is discussed in more detail on page 30.

Child pornography laws

The Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill contains a new offence of possessing violent and extreme pornographic material.

Forced Marriage laws

The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act, which received Royal Assent in July 2007 will provide injunctive relief and damages for victims of forced marriage. The Act provides civil protection for people threatened with forced marriage by enabling courts to make a Forced Marriage Protection Order to protect victims of forced marriage and those facing forced marriage. The Act sends out a clear message that forced marriage will not be tolerated. The Act will be implemented in Autumn 2008.

Rape

We published last year our response to the 2006 consultation paper 'Convicting Rapists'. Work is ongoing with a view to strengthening how we deal with rape cases by using generic expert evidence, video recordings of evidence in chief of all rape complainants and making the first complaint automatically admissible as evidence.

Ensuring safe contact between children and non-resident parents

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 amended the definition of 'harm' to make it clear that when a court is considering whether a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer harm, it should take into account that children can also be harmed from witnessing domestic violence, and not just from being a victim of it themselves.

Children and Adoption Act 2006

The Children and Adoption Act 2006 requires Children and Family Court Advisory Support Services (CAFCASS) officers, or Welsh family proceedings officers, to carry out risk assessments where they consider that there is cause to suspect that a child is at risk of harm. They are then required to inform the court of their findings.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 makes it an offence for UK nationals or permanent residents to carry out FGM abroad or to aid, abet, counsel or procure the carrying out of FGM abroad, even in countries where the practice is legal.

Tougher sentences

In December 2006, the Sentencing Guidelines Council published its definitive guidelines on deciding sentences in domestic violence cases. Called: *Overarching Principles: Domestic Violence and Breach of a Protective Order*, the guidelines were introduced to help make sentencing more consistent, and to ensure that the punishment better fits the crime.

Creating Standards

The Government also want to introduce minimum standards and consistency into the kind of services being made available to help and support both victims and perpetrators.

To this end, we are working to develop national occupational standards with the voluntary sector organisations that deal with domestic and sexual violence.

Draft service standards have already been prepared by the charity Women's Aid and these are being circulated as part of a consultation exercise. In addition, draft occupational standards for the newly introduced Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) are being consulted on, and will be developed during this year.

This work is being co-ordinated with the Victims of Violence and Abuse Prevention Programme, to create a package of measures to ensure that the best possible responses to domestic and sexual violence are available locally.

Perpetrator programmes

All probation areas now run either the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP) or the Community Domestic Violence Programme (CDVP). HM Prison Service runs the Healthy Relationships Programme (HRP). The programmes are based on the best available evidence of effective practice in this area. They are truly integrated programmes delivering a challenging core group work curriculum as part of a wider system of inter-agency risk assessment and pro-active offender management. The programmes are designed to enhance the safety of victims and hold the offender to account. In the last financial year, 1,800 offenders completed the accredited programmes. It is expected that this figure will be exceeded this year.

Improving the situation on the ground

The Government is keen to ensure that the changes in laws and procedures translate into solid improvements on the ground. As discussed in more detail below, we were keen to make the process of participating in a trial as easy as possible for the victims; and we also wanted to see some real improvements in the prosecution rates for crimes of violence against women.

But we also recognised that in order to reduce violence against women, we had to put concrete plans in place that would identify and eliminate the problem at its root. This means tackling the causes as well as the effects of violence against women, and recognising that it is a cross-cutting issue which requires input from across government.

The Government has created a number of cross-government Inter Ministerial Groups. Their role is to identify the main issues, develop action plans to start addressing them and monitor the delivery of those action plans.

The main 'action plans' are related to domestic violence, sexual violence and abuse, and human trafficking. Below, we outline the key outcomes for domestic violence and sexual violence and abuse.

National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan

The main outcomes sought by the National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan are:

1. To reduce the number of domestic violence-related homicides
2. To reduce the prevalence of domestic violence
3. To increase the rate of reporting for domestic violence
4. To increase the rate of reported domestic violence offences that are brought to justice
5. To ensure that victims of domestic violence are adequately protected and supported nationwide.

In order to achieve these outcomes, the Government has committed itself to:

- Better using its contacts with front-line professionals to identify – and intervene with – victims of domestic violence earlier
- Building more capacity within the domestic violence sector, to give victims of domestic violence more effective advice and support
- Improving the way the criminal justice system responds to cases of domestic violence
- Better supporting victims and managing perpetrators through the criminal justice system, to reduce risk

Putting an end to forced marriages

Forced marriage is another key issue. The joint Foreign & Commonwealth Office / Home Office Forced Marriage Unit currently handles an average of 400 cases a year, 15% of which are male victims. They also answer thousands of advice or enquiry calls per year.

Around a third of the cases the Unit deals with involve children subjected to forced marriage, some as young as 13 years old.

A substantial proportion of the Unit's work is on immigration-related cases. For example, the Unit helps so-called 'reluctant sponsors', people who are forced into a marriage and then subsequently forced to sponsor a visa application. The Unit has dealt with over 100 such cases since May 2006 in addition to the number above. The Border and Immigration Agency has recently closed a public consultation "Marriage to Partners from Overseas" that will recommend provisions to help tackle this issue.

As well as providing support and assistance to victims and potential victims, the Forced Marriage Unit also does a great deal of outreach and awareness-raising work, speaking to interested groups and providing training to social workers, teachers, police officers and health professionals at around 85 events each year across the UK. The Unit has written guidelines for police, social services, health professionals and education professionals for handling forced marriage cases, which will be placed on a statutory footing as part of the Forced Marriages Act in autumn 2008. This will provide robust civil remedies for victims of forced marriages.

The Government is aware of the acute problems faced by women with insecure immigration status who suffer domestic violence. We will shortly be announcing details of a new scheme where victims of domestic violence, with indefinite leave to remain (ILR) in the UK, may qualify for a contribution towards their housing and living costs.

The Home Office is working with the Border and Immigration Agency to re-examine the fee regulations for domestic violence ILR applications to ensure that genuine claims are not hampered by prohibitive costs.

Sexual Violence and Abuse Action Plan

The cross-government Sexual Violence and Abuse Action Plan was published on April 2 2007 and contained three main objectives, namely:

- To maximise prevention of sexual violence and abuse
- To increase access to support and health services for victims of sexual violence and abuse
- To improve the criminal justice response to sexual violence and abuse.

In order to do this, the Government committed itself to:

- Expanding the network of Sexual Assault Referral Centres which provide medical care, forensic examination and counselling in the aftermath of a sexual assault
- Developing national service guidelines on responding to the needs of child victims of sexual abuse; adult survivors of child sexual abuse and adult victims of recent sexual violence, through the Victims of Violence and Abuse Prevention Programme
- Giving police officers and all barristers prosecuting serious sexual offence cases sexual offences training
- Implementing a new vetting and barring scheme, to make sure all those who work with children are safe to do so
- Better managing sex offenders through Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
- Implementing new strategies for treating offenders.

Police and CPS Performance on Rape

The Government has established a Cross criminal justice system Group to monitor the progress of all police forces and Crown Prosecution Service areas, against a series of indicators.

Where there are any concerns about a particular area or force's performance, these are raised with the relevant Chief Constable and Chief Crown Prosecutor, who are also offered operational support from a team of Home Office and Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) experts.

Prostitution Strategy

In January 2006, the Government published a co-ordinated strategy on prostitution.

The strategy is being used as a 'blue print' for local areas to develop their own responses to prostitution, including:

- Preventing people from being drawn into prostitution;
- Providing support for people who are already involved, and want to find a way out; and
- Tackling the demand for prostitution.

The Government is now in the process of developing a set of measures to monitor how well the prostitution strategy is being implemented in different areas.

Tackling Violent Crime Action Plan

In February 2008 we launched our Tackling Violent Crime Action Plan. As part of this we are extending our programme of work with police and other services to tackle domestic violence which emphasises early intervention and prevention, as well as the support and resettlement of victims and bringing perpetrators to justice. Key elements of the plan include:

- More than doubling the number of Sexual Assault Referral Centres;
- Developing a national action plan for addressing so-called 'honour crimes'.

Making it less of an ordeal for victims to testify in court

One of the biggest stumbling blocks for bringing more perpetrators to justice – and ensuring that victims were getting the protection and support they needed – was the ordeal victims faced when going to court.

This ordeal arose from having to testify in front of their attackers, and in some cases, the attackers themselves would cross-examine the victim on the stand.

This is why in 2002, we introduced a number of 'special measures'.

Special measures

Since 2002, intimidated witnesses appearing in criminal courts can apply for special measures which include: being screened off from the rest of the court; giving evidence by live television links; excluding people from the courtroom to provide a more private setting; and allowing witnesses to give their evidence in pre-recorded interviews. The CPS can also apply to have the victim's/witness's name withheld from the press, under section 46 of Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.

Recently the Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with the Justices' Clerks Society, published guidance as a reminder to staff of the provisions which exist to protect victims from cross-examination by defendants presenting their own case in court. This responded to concerns that defendants who were financially ineligible for criminal legal aid, or opted to conduct their own cases, were seeking to cross-examine witnesses and victims in person. The guidance reminds staff of existing legislative provisions, as well as providing additional advice on early identification of domestic violence cases and the scope of payments from Central Funds.

Family courts which deal with protective injunction hearings can also provide special facilities.

Making it safer for victims in court

The Government has also:

- Invested more than £3 million to improve witness waiting accommodation; the target set to have 90% of Magistrates' Courts and Crown Courts implement some kind of separate waiting area for victims and witnesses by 2008 has been met.

- Introduced videolinks in 75% of magistrates' courts; and 100% of Crown Court centres
- Introduced Witness Liaison Officers in all courts, to act as a main point of contact for information.

Specialist Domestic Violence Courts and Independent Domestic Violence Advisers

Introducing special measures was the first stage of making the court process more user-friendly; the second stage, in terms of dealing with domestic violence, has been the introduction of Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVCs).

As the name suggests, SDVCs specialise in domestic violence cases. The key to success of SDVC has been their co-ordinated community approach to domestic violence.

SDVCs bring together Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVA), police, social services, housing, the CPS, the probation service, primary care trusts and hospital Accident and Emergency departments.

Representatives from each area work together to identify quickly cases of domestic violence, and then give the victim the support and help they need to extricate themselves from the situation while simultaneously trying to bring the perpetrator to justice through the courts.

Since April 2007 there have been 64 SDVC systems operating across England and Wales; at least one in every region. This will be doubled by 2011.

The Government has also produced a DVD on what to expect in family courts when seeking a protective injunction and updated the comprehensive court guidance 'Domestic Violence A Guide to Civil Remedies and Criminal Sanctions' which is available in English, Welsh, Bengali, Urdu, Punjabi, Somali, Chinese, Arabic, Gujarati and Polish.

Tackling the problems associated with securing convictions

While improving the victim's experience at court and updating the legal framework are key elements of securing more convictions, they are not the only ones. Rape Crisis Centres play a vital role in providing long-term support for victims of sexual offences.

Recently Rape Crisis England and Wales alerted us to the funding challenges faced at a local level by rape crisis centres. We have stepped in with emergency funding of up to £1million to help stop them from closing, while we consider the best way forward.

Better training and guidance

As already mentioned, the Government has introduced sexual offences training for police officers and all barristers prosecuting in serious sexual offences trials.

In addition, specialist rape prosecutors and rape co-ordinators have been introduced, to ensure the strongest cases are built, and the police are also now training specialist 'rape' officers, to help gather evidence and liaise with the victim.

National training programmes and guidance related to violence against women is also being rolled out nationally, by both the Central Police Training and Development Authority and ACPO.

Box 4: CPS pilot on forced marriage and honour crimes

The CPS pilot project on forced marriage and so-called honour crimes ran from June 2007 to March 2008. The aims of the pilot were to:

- Identify the number and pattern of cases;
- Identify issues facing prosecutors in accurately identifying, managing and prosecuting these cases; and
- Inform the development of any national guidance and training for prosecutors which we expect will, in the longer term, reduce risk and increase support for victims.

Specialist prosecutors have been selected in four CPS areas; guidance has been developed for them, and prosecutors have already received training.

Raising awareness

Over the last year, the police have been running a number of domestic violence enforcement campaigns, to develop the evidence base on what works when policing domestic violence.

As a result, they've adopted some innovative approaches to policing, which is leading to better evidence-gathering. One example is the use of head cameras, which is enabling officers to gather graphic footage when responding to domestic violence incidents, which can then later be presented in court.

The police are also increasingly learning to look for the wider context to domestic violence – including football tournaments and other large sporting events.

Taken together, all of these initiatives are having a real impact on prosecution rates¹.

¹ For cases where charges have been made. Conviction rate for all cases reported is just under 6%

Box 5: Key prosecution facts²

- The successful prosecution rate for domestic violence went up from 46% in 2003, to 66% by December 2006
- By December 2007, the successful prosecution rate was 69%
- Over 54,000 cases of domestic violence cases were prosecuted in 2006/07
- The number of successful prosecutions for sexual offences rose from 64% in 2006, to 67.5% in 2007
- Over the same period, successful prosecutions for rape cases rose from 52.7% to 56.6%
- In 2007 there were 2,021 convictions for charged rape cases, compared to 1,632 in 2006.

Making domestic violence a local priority

Local Area Agreements (LAA) encourage local agencies and organisations to work together to address local crime reduction issues, and also to ensure that comprehensive services are being provided for victims and perpetrators – including in cases involving violence against women – where this issue is a priority.

Two thirds of existing LAAs address domestic violence and contain targets related to violence against women. These targets include:

- Increasing the number of incidents of domestic violence and serious sexual offences reported annually either directly to the police or through a third party, including the health service
- Increasing the proportion of incidents of domestic violence or serious sexual offence, which result in 'sanction detections' (sanction detections are crimes for which someone is charged, summonsed, receives a caution or other formal sanction)
- Increasing the proportion of offenders convicted

² Data based on CPS flagged cases, reflecting outcomes from charge to conviction.

The Local Government White Paper put LAAs at the heart of the new Local Government Performance Framework. From June 2008, LAAs will be the only place where central government will agree targets with local authorities and their partners on outcomes delivered by local government on its own or in partnership.

Addressing personal safety issues, including housing and protecting children

Providing more options for housing

Once a victim of domestic violence decides to leave and/or prosecute their partner, their single biggest concern is usually finding somewhere safe to live.

In the past, the options were limited to trying to find an available place in a women's refuge. The Government recognised that was a real need to provide victims of domestic violence with more options, particularly where children were involved.

To this end, we are giving £47.2 million to local authorities, and an additional £26.8 million to charities and voluntary organisations who work to reduce homelessness. A proportion of this money can be used to fund Sanctuary Schemes.

Box 6: Explaining Sanctuary Schemes

The Sanctuary Scheme is an innovative approach to homelessness prevention. It provides security measures to allow those men and women experiencing domestic violence (and other hate crimes) to remain in their own accommodation **where it is safe** for them to do so, where it is **their choice** and where the **perpetrator no longer** lives within the accommodation.

Case study

Sally is 36 years old and lives with her 12-month-old child in a two-bedroom ground floor flat owned by a Housing Association. Police were called to her home by a neighbour stating that her ex-partner, Steve, was trying to gain entry to the flat. When police arrived, he had gone.

Sally explained that Steve had been sending her text messages and telephone calls threatening to kill her and the baby. Steve is a crack addict and very violent. Sally was very concerned for her and her baby's safety, as her ex-partner had assaulted her on previous occasions and she believed that he was capable of carrying out his threats.

Sally was visibly terrified, and stated that she didn't want to move to another property as she was settled at this address. However, she had no option.

The Crime Prevention Officer carried out a survey at the flat and recommended the following security measures to be implemented, free of charge, under the Sanctuary Project:

- Replace the front door with a solid core door
- Reinforce the frame with 'London' and 'Birmingham' bars and reinforce the glass panel above the door
- Fit three large steel hinges, hinge bolts, key operated door chain and 180-degree door viewer
- Fit a letterbox on the wall outside
- Fit collapsible grilles across the bedroom window at the front of the property and collapsible grilles across the French doors at the rear.

This work was carried out and Sally now feels happy to stay at the address. She said: **"I feel 100% safer than I did before and I'm really pleased that I didn't have to move somewhere else. My baby and I are both settled in this flat."**³

The Government's commitment to making it easier for victims of domestic violence to find or sustain accommodation is already bearing fruit. Between 1995 and 1999, the number of homeless households accepted by local authorities by reason of loss of the last settled home because of a violent relationship break-down with a partner accounted for 17-18% of all reasons for people

³ Case study supplied by Harrow Sanctuary Scheme

losing their last settled home. The latest figures from 2005/06 show this has now dropped to 13%.

Providing more comprehensive support for victims

As discussed earlier, as part of our efforts to make it easier for victims to come to court and testify, and to bring more perpetrators to justice, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) we introduced in each of the 64 existing Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVA).

These advisers act as a single point of contact for victims, and 'walk' them through the whole process of pressing charges and going to court, as well as helping them to put their lives back together.

As well as helping victims through the legal process, domestic violence advisers can also refer them to other services, including helping them with housing, health and other related issues.

Since we introduced Independent Domestic Violence Advisers, the number of victims who don't want to press charges has dropped and there's been much greater awareness about children who may potentially be at risk.

Along the same lines, we have also started to introduce Independent Sexual Violence Advisers in our sexual assault referral centres (see box below, for more details).

Box 7: Explaining Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)

Gathering evidence in the aftermath of a serious sexual offence or rape can be an incredibly traumatic experience for the victim, and is often beset by a number of obstacles.

The forensic evidence has to be collected within a very short period of time, in order to be effectively used in any subsequent prosecution. Often, though, the victim is extremely traumatised, and can find the evidence gathering process very difficult.

Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC) were introduced to try to ensure that victims were receiving the mental and physical care they needed, throughout this difficult time. Most SARCs are located on hospital premises, and are normally jointly funded by the local authority, health services and police.

As well as giving victims access to general medical and sexual health services, SARCs can also provide victims with counselling and other services.

Currently 19 SARCs are in place. By the end of 2008-09, there should be up to 36 Centres open around the country with the Government committed to developing a SARC in every police force area by 2011.

Protecting children

In addition to providing more support and protection for the victims themselves, the Government recognised the need to do more to protect children who are affected by domestic violence.

Again, this meant updating the relevant legislation, to ensure that courts would take domestic violence into account when deciding access and residency issues.

In 2005, the definition of harm amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 was formally implemented. The Act made it clear that when a court is considering whether a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer harm, it must consider the harm that

a child may suffer, not just from domestic violence, but from witnessing it.

In June 2006, The Children and Adoption Act 2006 received Royal Assent. Section 7 of this Act requires the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Services (or in Wales, family proceedings officers) to carry out risk assessments if they suspect that a child may be risk of domestic violence.

They are then required to inform the court of their findings in respect of the risk of the child suffering harm – and these findings can and do influence custody, contact and other arrangements.

Tackling human trafficking

When *Living Without Fear* was published in 1999, human trafficking was such a new phenomenon that it wasn't even mentioned. Today, the number of prosecutions of human trafficking cases with sexual offences has increased from 16 cases in 2004/5, to 116 cases in 2006/7 – and putting an end to human trafficking has become one of the Government's key priorities for tackling violence against women.

The UK Government has already signed up to the Council of Europe Convention on Trafficking, and is putting other new laws in place as part of the UK Borders Bill, to make it easier to catch, prosecute and convict traffickers.

In addition we are doing the following:

UK Action Plan on Trafficking

On 23 March 2007, the Government formally launched the UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking, which underscored our commitment to tackling this horrendous crime.

The Plan sets out practical measures that we hope to implement with a view to better preventing, detecting and prosecuting trafficking; and also better to protect and assist victims. Further, the Government announced on 14 January this year that we are *accelerating* our plans to ratify the Council of Europe Convention

on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings. We will make the necessary legislative and procedural changes before the end of this year, as part of our wider strategy to combat trafficking, aiming to be in a position to ratify at the end of 2008.

Box 8: UK Human Trafficking Centre

In October 2006, the Government launched the UK Human Trafficking Centre in Sheffield, the first of its kind in Europe.

As well as providing specialist care for victims of human trafficking – many of whom end up being forced into prostitution once they arrive in the UK – the Centre also houses academics, lawyers, immigration specialists and criminal justice experts under one roof.

The aim of the Centre is to learn more about how traffickers operate, with a view to shutting them down; and also to ensure that the first point of contact for victims is a positive one, that can help them to access the support and services they may need.

Box 9: The POPPY Project

The POPPY Project was launched in 2003, to provide a combination of safe accommodation and support for victims of trafficking. The project is being run by Eaves Housing for Women and is getting £2.4 million from the Government over the next two years. Amongst other things, this money will help to pay for:

- A specialist team of four outreach workers who will work alongside law enforcement agencies and immigration to identify and assist trafficked women escape from prostitution
- 25 'acute' beds, offering safe accommodation and one-to-one support for trafficked women in the immediate stages after they have left prostitution
- Ten new 'step-down' places, enabling women gradually to gain their independence but ensuring vital support is still on hand when they need it

- A new resource pack which will provide information and advice for victims, support projects and law enforcement personnel.

Ensuring that the Government acts in a more ‘joined-up’ way to tackle violence against women

Our consultation with stakeholders showed a strong demand for the Government to start acting in a more ‘joined-up’ way.

As we’ve already seen, the chances of a woman leaving an abusive situation or participating in a successful prosecution were much smaller if she was left to ‘sink or swim’ by herself.

In order to start successfully tackling violence against women, the Government needed to do more to identify the problem as early as possible; ensure that the right people and agencies were informed; and then ensure that the victim was given comprehensive help and support to put an end to the violence and bring the perpetrator to justice – including help with housing, social services and family issues.

Joined-up working on the ground

Initiatives like Sexual Assault Referral Centres, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors and the Human Trafficking Centre in Sheffield are giving victims of violence a ‘one stop shop’ to access the help they need on the ground.

The health service now works with the police and other criminal justice agencies to identify possible victims of domestic violence as early as possible, by routinely asking all pregnant women whether their pregnancy has affected their relationship with their partner.

The Specialist Domestic Violence Court Programme, which was jointly developed by the Ministry of Justice, CPS and the Home Office has changed the experience of the courts for victims of domestic violence.

In order to be really effective, the Government recognises that 'joined-up' working had to underpin every element of its work to tackle violence against women.

Working across Government

To that end, over the past couple of years the Government has established three 'Inter-Ministerial Groups' to work together on all the issues associated with domestic violence, sexual violence and abuse, prostitution and human trafficking.

The groups include ministers from across government, to ensure that all the key interdepartmental policy areas across Whitehall are linked.

The Ministers for Women & Equality play an important part on all three of these groups, by ensuring the approach to gender equality is fully championed and executed by the delivery departments.

Each of these groups has already published a delivery or action plan, which we have covered in more detail elsewhere. The Inter-Ministerial Groups play a vital monitoring role in ensuring that key deliverables are achieved, and are a key part of ensuring that the Government is joined up on this agenda.

There are also cross-government 'virtual units' of officials on domestic violence, sexual violence and human trafficking, who work together on implementing the National Domestic Violence Plan and the Cross Government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse.

The Government is planning to take 'joined-up working' to the next level, by introducing new initiatives like the Co-ordinated Community Response to domestic violence, and multi-agency risk assessment conferences. These are discussed in more detail below.

Creating an atmosphere of ‘zero tolerance’ for violence against women

At the same time as the Government has been working to tackle the symptoms of violence against women, we have also started to look at doing more to tackle the underlying causes. This meant taking steps to create an atmosphere in homes, schools and workplaces where any form of violence against women would no longer be tacitly accepted, or worse, condoned.

Raising awareness within the Government itself

Over the past couple of years, many government departments have devoted a significant amount of time, effort and resources to developing comprehensive policies about dealing with domestic violence, training staff, and raising awareness about the problem of violence against women.

One outstanding contribution has been the Crown Prosecution Service’s (CPS) employee domestic violence handbook for staff, which has been promoted across Whitehall to other government departments as a good example of best practice.

Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence

In 2005, the Government helped to launch the Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence (CAADV). More than 160 new companies – and many Government departments and public sector organisations – have joined the Alliance since its launch, representing more than two million employees.

Any organisation signing up to the Alliance commits to working to address the impact of domestic violence in the workplace, both through prevention and intervention.

CAADV has developed an online training package for members, which enables employees to get information about domestic violence, and gives employers access to online resources including workplace policy templates, a strategic communications toolkit, case studies and other resources.

Developing a men's agenda

Over the last year, the Government has also been working hard to get more men involved as a powerful lobbying force to challenge the culture and behaviour that enables – and excuses – violence against women.

Changing attitudes takes time, but we have made a start in a number of ways.

Firstly, we have linked the RESPECT phoneline (for male perpetrators) and the MALE phoneline (for those men who find themselves in abusive relationships) more closely.

The Government also recently funded The Centre for Public Innovation to host two seminars on changing men's behaviour in 2006-07, which were attended by a wide range of groups who all have an interest in this emerging agenda.

This work is ongoing, with the National Men's Coalition launched in November 2007.

The Men's Coalition is a membership organisation comprising organisations and individuals with an interest in promoting policy and practice development in relation to men and gender equality.

Promoting equality and respecting diversity

The Government recognises that some victims of violence against women, including people with learning disabilities and people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, often face additional barriers to getting the help they need.

In recent years, we have introduced a number of initiatives to try to make it as easy as possible for victims of violence to get help.

On the legal side, we've introduced new anti-discrimination regulations which outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, and also the Civil Partnership Act, which is enabling thousands of lesbian and gay couples to have their commitment legally recognised.

Section 3 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, which was implemented in 2005, also clarified that the definition of cohabiting couples in relation to domestic violence included same sex couples.

Box 10: Making the Criminal Justice System accessible

Across the CJS, every effort is being made to give victims of violence – and the people supporting them – information and advice in an accessible way.

For example, one of the court system's most popular reference guides, called *Domestic Violence – A Guide to Civil Remedies and Criminal Sanctions* is now available in 10 languages, including Arabic, Gujarati and Polish.

And over the next year, the Crown Prosecution Service will be undertaking additional research to get a better idea of what the needs and patterns of 'help-seeking' behaviour are, within the BME population, in order to better address them.

Examples of the work being done elsewhere across Government include a step-by-step guide for BME victims of domestic violence which is expected to be published shortly.

The Department of Health is also continuing to publish its Domestic Abuse Handbook, which contains a lot of information on women with particular needs, including minority or migrant women, older women, disabled women and lesbian and bisexual women. The book signposts readers to a number of useful contacts, including national helplines, resources and specialist agencies.

Box 11: The Ethnic Minority Innovation Fund

The Government's Ethnic Minority Innovation Fund is helping to fund a number of accessibility-related services, programmes and initiatives on the ground, including:

- Funding a Community Mentoring and Outreach Support worker, working with Trafford Women's Aid to raise awareness about domestic violence
- Supporting a project which aims to provide a holistic service for South Asian victims of violence against women, by offering workers who come from the South Asian community and have a profound understanding of South Asian culture.

3

Plans for the future

Below, we look at key initiatives that are in the process of being developed and introduced, which we hope will further 'join-up' our work to tackle violence against women, and ensure that victims of violence get all the support and help that they need.

The Co-ordinated Community Response model

The 'Co-ordinated Community Response' model brings together all the different agencies involved in dealing with domestic violence, and highlights what each agency should be doing to tackle it effectively.

At each point in the process, it sets out which agencies (including police, social services, housing and health) should be involved, how they should be working in partnership, and what they should be doing in order to intervene successfully, and prevent domestic violence cases from escalating to serious injury or homicide.

In 2007-08, the Government will continue to develop a Co-ordinated Community Response for both domestic violence and sexual violence.

Further, the Home Office has committed to implementing Section 9 of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004 in the summer (2008). This Section will place the establishment and conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews on a statutory footing.

Box 12: Violence Against Women and the Violent Crime Action Plan

We will be driving forward actions outlined in the Violent Crime Action Plan which focuses on those crimes which cause the most suffering and result in more long-term psychological and physical problems. These include:

- homicide
- serious wounding
- offences involving weapons
- domestic violence
- serious sexual violence.

Currently, around half of all female homicides are committed by a partner or ex-partner, so tackling domestic violence, serious sexual violence and homicide will continue to be clear priorities for the Government.

We have recently announced an investment of over £20 million over the next three years to support the rollout of multi-agency interventions and information sharing, involving local police, local councils, voluntary groups and health workers across the country to manage and identify people at risk of committing serious violence as well as providing support for victims.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) are a recent development in the services offered to high-risk victims of domestic violence. MARACs encourage agencies to share information in order to get a better picture of a victim's situation, and then develop a response that is better tailored to the needs and goals of individual victims and their children.

MARACs are currently operational in 100 areas – we will expand this number to 262 by 2011.

Box 13: Impact in numbers due to MARACs

- Areas which have implemented the MARAC and have supplied data to us have demonstrated around a 50% overall reduction in repeat victimisation among those cases heard at MARAC. This provides cost benefits to local areas as the average costs of a MARAC case is estimated to be approximately £14,000.

Looking forward

Last October, we announced a new range of Public Service Agreements (PSA), through the Home Office, which will put the emphasis on reducing and tackling the most serious crimes, which cause the most harm to victims and society, such as rape and sexual assaults.

Indeed, the first objective of the 'Making Communities Safer' PSA is to 'reduce the most serious violence, including tackling serious offences and domestic violence.'

This renewed commitment can also be seen at the local level – where new indicators on domestic violence and sexual offending have been included as part of the new National Indicator Set for local government.

And it can also be seen on the ground, where we are well on the way to having a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in every police force area. By the end of 2009, there should be at least 36 SARCs around the country, and we expect more to develop.

Whether it's in the home, the community, the workplace, or the courts, we will continue to make it clear that there should be zero tolerance for violence against women.

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