NOTTINGHAMSHIRE POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER

Nottinghamshire's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

Survivor Focus Group - Report

February 2023

Introduction

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Nottinghamshire, Caroline Henry, has worked with local authorities and specialist charities to develop a long-term plan to tackle violence against women and girls: **The VAWG Strategy.**

The 5-year plan aims to create a Nottinghamshire that is safe for women and girls. Key activity has been identified to:

- **prevent** violence against women and girls,
- **respond** better to it,
- **support** women and girls affected by it and
- **include** all those affected by violence against women and girls by ensuring services reach all women and girls.

Commissioner Henry wants to embed the views of women and girls in the plan from its conception onwards, encouraging input to influence and shape the strategy.

The aim of this work was to begin the inclusion of community voices in the strategy through a set of focus groups.

Focus Groups

The OPCC reached out to front line services to support in the facilitation of focus groups. These organisations directly invited women and girls to participate and arranged for groups to be held in familiar settings with key known staff present with the groups.

6 Focus groups were arranged to discuss the 4 pillars of the plan:

- Responding
- Supporting
- Including
- Preventing

A set of exploratory semi structured questions were posed to encourage open conversation and discussion about the plan itself and what will help or hinder it's success. The questions posed focused around the exploration of:

- What are the main barriers to achieving the aims of our VAWG strategy.
- Which pillar is the most important to prevention and reduction of VAWG.
- Will this strategy make a meaningful difference to survivors across Nottinghamshire.
- How do we best create a shift in thinking towards women and girls as victims.
- How can we best include survivors in our work around VAWG.
- What are the most positive aspects of support services.
- What more could partner agencies do to tackle VAWG.

The focus groups were run by experienced facilitator Anna Clark.

All participants were provided with a strategy information sheet and informed consent document.

All participants were over 16. All participants could withdraw at any time and were in control of how much they decided to share.

All focus groups were recorded with consent to accurately lift key themes and relevant quotes.

The Focus groups were aimed to compliment a structured survey conducted by a social research company consulting around the VAWG Strategy.

Demographics

33 individuals took part in the focus groups.

Group 1: 3 participants
Group 2: 2 participants
Group 3: 3 participants
Group 4: 15 participants. (This group had English as a second language so a translator relayed key information from the group. Not all completed demographics information.)
Group 5: 5 participants
Group 6: 5 participants

23 responded with demographic information: 23 were female, 1 male attended the larger community group.
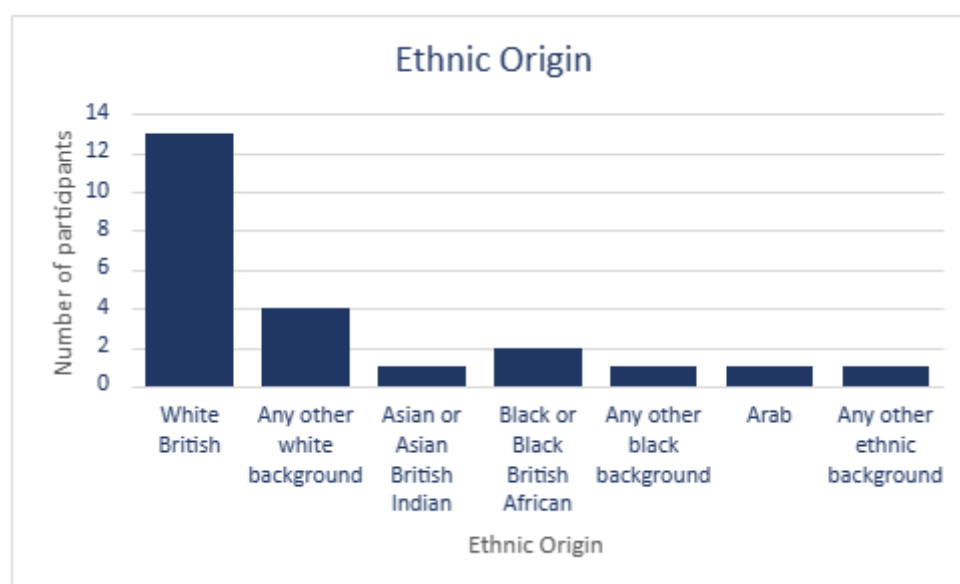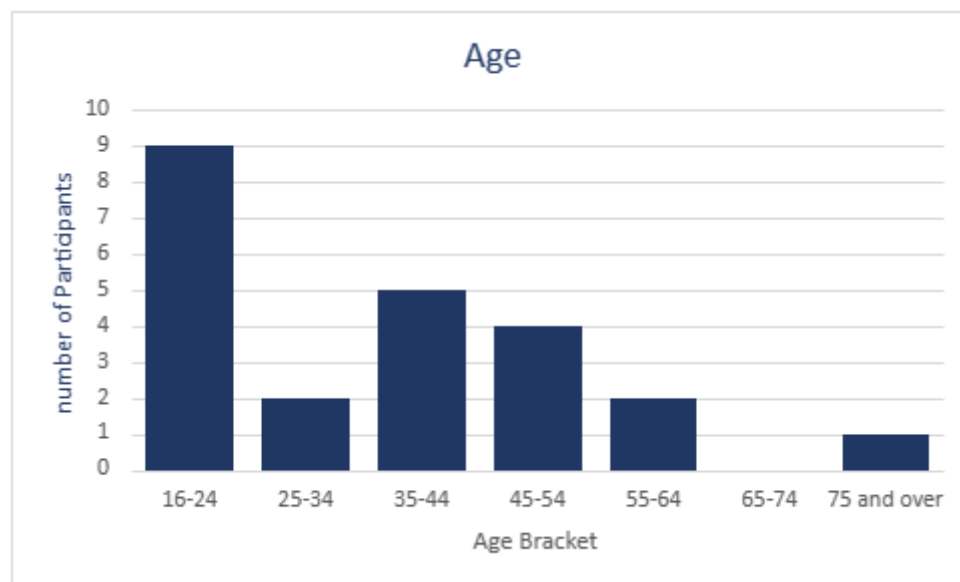
Pillar 1 - Responding to VAWG

1. Information in the community

5 of the groups said they had seen information in the community about abuse and support mechanisms/services but all agreed there was not enough information about any type of VAWG.

If information was seen it was not effective enough. Static information did not capture the attention, with no recollection of service names or not recognising what the content was. Adverts can be ignored as they are mistaken for product or film advertising.

The group with English as a second language (ESL) was unaware of any information in the community about abuse and support that was accessible in the right language.

Information had been identified:

- On the back of toilet doors – especially Ask Angela and Angel shot information (discreet signal to bar staff help is required and they feel unsafe).
- As adverts on TV.
- On social media – TikTok adverts for dialling 999 and ordering pizza.
- Avon purse with QR code.
- On trams and buses (consent coalition campaign).
- Via Online searches – but individuals need to understand abuse and what to search for.
- Consent sessions in schools had been experienced but were not taken seriously by the pupils.

Suggested opportunities for information:

- Supermarkets
- Trains
- Libraries
- Parks
- In contraceptive pill packets
- Churches
- Beauty industry
- On the School run
- Doctors and Chemists
- Work environment
- Social media posted as paid adverts or by key influencers – what you see is influenced by who you follow.
- Online information that can be shared discreetly via phones
- Big Billboards when driving

> *I'd like an hour in tutor ... one of them was on consent. I remember. And everyone took the mick out of it. And it was like, no one listened. It was horrible, actually, like, ridiculous. I think it's like the general culture within schools now. It's just so against it P6*
>
> *There should be more information about what is abuse, because then you don't know until, till it gets to a really bad point. I think I've learned more off social media than anywhere else about violence. P7*
>
> *I think for me, when the incident happened to me, I went very insular. So maybe not seeing these things. Was not the forefront of my mind. I didn't go many places. So probably online for me. I would say social media, mostly searches, things like that P19*
>
> *The first goal is always police and if there's physical evidence of the violence, they would go to a place like a healthcare setting, but otherwise, they would not know where to go. ESL group*

The effectiveness of static information such as posters was questioned as abuse can be so difficult to understand, you can't fit nuance and understanding on a poster. Participant feedback was that you don't notice the posters until you knew what to look for, so you have to understand abuse before you see the support information.

Face to face and human interaction was considered a better method of disseminating information about abuse and where to get help. For the ESL group this was the main suggestion for awareness raising within ESL communities.

Suggested face to face interaction:

- Open days and face to face campaigning.
- Education sessions with young people in schools and youth groups.
- Work celebration days to openly discuss issues affecting women e.g. International Women's day.
- Community outreach and building relationships to enable conversations to take place. The importance of those doing the outreach to be culturally similar to the community to understand and break down specific barriers. This was particularly important to the ESL group. Identify key places where new communities are e.g. colleges where people are learning English.
- The idea of having community champions was supported across most groups. With friends being mentioned as a key source of support and information. There was feedback that if services were recommended by a friend that they would be accessed. The flip side of that word of mouth could damage a service reputation and prevent contact.
- Doctors and health professionals were considered key points of contact with some participants stating they had only disclosed to a doctor.
- A point of contact in the community such as community hub for women only run by women who understand the community. A point of triage and assessment where

women can find out the next steps and be clear on their choices. One participant spoke about Women's Centres, but most were unaware of their existence.

> *It's got to be where people feel safe, because people aren't now quick to kind of get involved, people aren't quick to say are you ok? I think everybody plays a part, everybody. P4*
>
> *A lot of services have been cut. So it (accessing help) is a lot harder to do. It was kind of in my day, there was a lot more available. There were a lot more refuges. P5*
>
> *So, there should be a woman preference that understands women like them. So women like them, it could be cultural, it could be language wise, it could be how they look like someone who could they can relate to, doesn't necessarily have a uniform on to scare them, and then have that rapport. ESL group*
>
> *Word of mouth is powerful because not only did it get information, but they can also ask questions. And an advert is, you may see a couple of seconds, but you don't know the complexities or the services. You can't explain it all yet. So having people come into the community will allow you to know more, and also share that with others. ESL group*

2. Barriers to help and support

Several barriers to reaching out for help and support were identified by all groups including:

- Not understanding what abuse is and that you are experiencing it. Groups felt that physical abuse is understood but many abusive behaviours are still considered "normal". This links to a lack of knowledge for online searches for support services.
- Knowing that services are stretched and have waiting lists means individuals will stay where they are. If they can't leave immediately into something appropriate, they won't try to leave.
- Not having enough time with services to speak out, specifically within health appointments.
- The reputation of services within a community will influence whether someone reaches out. People talk to each other. (links to police and social care, and the importance of word of mouth).
- A lack of belief that anything can be done to protect you or hold perpetrators to account (links with police and CJS response).
- Perception that the police force is predominantly male. Participants overall would want a female officer.
- Being with the perpetrator when you see the information, never having the safe space to contact services.
- Not being allowed out so can't find the information.
- Perpetrators seeing support information and adverts also knowing about the support services and how to access them. In particular, the TV adverts for dialling 999 and ordering a pizza were criticised because the perpetrator will see them too and know what is happening.
- Not being able to use or access technologies that help – camera phones, QR codes.
- Being single and not having any reason/excuse to go out alone.

- Dyslexia, dementia, disability, mental health, learning disability barriers to understanding and being able to reach out.
- Language barriers to understand or reach out. Only 2 out of 15 in the ESL group had heard of Women's Aid.
- Even when there is information on who to contact for support in the correct language many would not call stating: cultural acceptance of abuse or not snitching on people; Lack of understanding of what comes next or how it could help; not understanding what support looks like.
- Those from abroad can be unsure of what is available to them, especially if abuse happened abroad.
- Poor family and community response reinforcing beliefs that abuse is OK and you are to blame.

> *I rang Women's Aid and I had to ring through many times. When you have a time curfew, trying to also get hold of women's aid, I was in the queue for an hour and a half. P1*
>
> *I also have a thing that when they send police officers out, it's mostly males, and I don't talk to males I only talk to females P8*
>
> *What she knew was if you have a problem, you can go to the police go to the hospital and they'll, they'll help you from there. But there was no realization of women's aid specialist services. ESL group*
>
> *(reputation) When I went there it was absolutely *****, people do talk and I've never gone back for support P4*

3. Reaching out for help and support

The importance of curiosity from both communities and professionals was noted by most groups. Including:

- Just being asked if you're OK – simple sensitive questions from those prepared to ask.
- People trained in the community, seeing women alone and creating safe spaces to have conversations, in doctors, at work, churches and community venues. In places you'd go to for comfort.
- Discussions with pharmacists when collecting female related products.
- Beauty industry response (Nail technicians, hairdressers, beauticians) with core training in abuse.
- Hospitals when you give birth.
- Teachers asking for women only meeting.

> *But just ask "Are you Okay? Are you happy? Do you want to be seen alone?" it would be nice for the doctor to say, "Are you okay? How is the family, just that, how is the family?" P3*
>
> *(health) Are there any other things we can help you with? That question's never asked. a lot of the time the ailments that we have are all interlinked. And if they're only looking at one thing, they're not collating the evidence to treat you properly. P19*

4. Professional/service response when reaching out for help

There was agreement across all groups that professionals do not know enough about abuse or how to respond well. Steps should be taken to train professionals:

- In understanding abuse and picking up on indicators.
- To ask the right questions, at the right time and not wait until abuse has escalated. Participants expressed that if someone had cared and noticed sooner it would not have felt too late.
- In listening skills, careful, with respect, empathy and compassion.
- To give disclosures more time and not to rush the situation. To understand that their response to your first disclosure is crucial.
- Not to immediately try to fix a situation and not to tell survivors what to do, make sure women want the support at the right time.
- The importance of building relationships of trust to encourage open communication.

Individuals had experienced just being given a number and told to call themselves. There was a need for professionals to provide support to call a specialist service or help to find refuge as in the moment of disclosure individuals are often not able to do that physically or emotionally.

> *Here's your helpline, if you ain't got a phone, you can't get to the phone, you can't talk because he's always there or whatever. How can you access it? It's hard. P5*
>
> *I think if you just go bullyish, straight in 10,000 questions, and all you need to do this or that Oh, yeah, I can get that or I can do this or I can do that. You've scared them away. It's not going to work. You've got to be quite gentle. You've got to have some empathy and understanding. P4*
>
> *But I don't really think you can be too busy when someone tells you that, I don't know, like, if you tell someone at school, or wherever they've got to just prepared to spend time doing whatever, because if they rush it then you really can tell. And then you're less likely to come to open up to someone else. I actually half think it comes down to the fact that they don't care until it's too late. P6*
>
> *And you know, the first people that you reach out to the first people you go to for help, you'd expect them to have that compassion. And they really, it's that first people that you go to that then point you in the right direction, and kind of help shape that journey for you. And if it's not got to the right start in the first place, it really makes it difficult. P18*
>
> *(building relationships) It's to humanise it, say hey, this my name, you can tell me, you humanize me, I'll be a human to you. It's human to human rather than I'm superior, and I can help you maybe if I see that you need help. P24*

5. Groups spoke of a lack of trust in the systems and processes that are supposed to help.

- Being told the wrong advice by those that are meant to help or to go back to the perpetrator.
- Mistakes being made in processes.
- Lack of empathy, compassion, and care.

- Being told you'd be called back but it never happening.
- Victim blaming and not being believed by professionals.

The ESL group spoke about not understanding what could be done to help. There was a clear understanding to go to the Police or Health services but there was uncertainty as to what would happen next.

> *I lived with it for years, for 15 years. And some point I went to the Citizens advice Bureaux. I was told that. I was told I'd have to go back because I have kids there. That I was paying some bills that I should still stay there. P3*
>
> *Just, I guess like the people that are meant to be there the most in that situation are just like gaslighting you. P16*
>
> *I actually went to my GP for help. And he told my family that I've reported it to him, he broke my confidentiality. So I endured more abuse because I could put it to my GP try and go to him for help. And he broke my trust. P17*
>
> *They just laughed at me when I reported it. they said he's your husband. So that's telling me the same as my mom, my dad and my family P17*

Specific Services:

5 of the groups spoke specifically about the police and that women have no trust or belief in them to be respond well or be able to take action. This is due to:

- The recent negative publicity about them. There is a belief that the police force is culturally misogynistic and that police are perpetrators of violence towards women and girls.
- A lack of compassion or care when reporting or when the police respond to incidents. A range of abuse had been reported to the police by individuals in the groups: domestic abuse, sexual assault, stalking, harassment. Groups discussed individual officers that had behaved and responded well but they were in the minority.
- Victim blaming when being questioned and taking statements. There was a shared understanding that Police need to investigate and not show bias, but some comments and questions were felt to be directly victim blaming.
- Lack of success in pursuing any abuse charges due to a lack of evidence. Incidents of reporting had led to no charges, increasing the sense that nothing is ever done to hold perpetrators to account. This also fed the victim blaming and sense of not being believed.
- Poor handling of cases with a lack of communication and accurately following process. Individuals felt perpetrators had had lesser charges and sentences because of poor processing.

A solution to the lack of care and compassion from the police was a victim chaperone to be present for responding and reporting.

> *Why are you going to report it you're nothing probably is gonna get done. And for two, you're probably going to be made to feel like it's your fault. And then in the next breath, they they've got people who work for the police force that are going out there committing the most heinous disgusting crimes. P4*

> *The police force need to make women feel completely safe that when they go they report a horrendous things happen to them when raped domestic violence and are not to be belittled or laughed at. P4*

> *Big thing is of not believing ……. if you're in a police interview about what happened and stuff like that. They be like really blunt and I understand they can't lead anyone on, can't do whatever. But they'd be really blunt and you're like, You're heartless, you don't believe me. So why am I? Why am I here? P7*

> *When I reported my incident to the police, it was six months after, so I bottled it for six months, I told friends and allies. It was not nice, but when I did actually pluck the courage up to go to the police. It was like I was questioned. I wasn't offered any support with the police at that point, I would have thought that police would say here's a charity, here's a rape crisis centre or something, but it was basically I always found feeling like I was questioned and that I doubted myself even more. I was told why didn't I jump out of a bedroom window by a police officer? But right when I was at my lowest, but when I felt like I'd plucked up the most amount of courage, I wasn't believed. And that's very hurtful. I think that was damaging. And as hindered my progression. P19*

> *I was physically, mentally abused, they turned up, like 9 police cars turned up and they just walked in, where is he oh, okay, where is he. I just wanted somebody to hold me and say we're here, we're protecting I was in a state battered and bruised. they weren't bothered, nothing P17*

> *I went to police multiple times, I had interviews and everything, and they just shut me down and said, You haven't got no physical proof. So, it never happened. And it was like numerous occasions, like multiple girls came forward. I think was like 15/17 Girls in total that came forward about this guy. Nothing can be done, because there's no physical proof against anybody P20*

> *How do you know you can actually trust that police officer because the police officers have actually raped people before. So it's a catch 22 for victims because you're you don't know if you're telling a rapist or not. P21*

> *It's almost like maybe someone who's like part of the police but has a different role. To be there to like, actually, like comfort. P15*

> *It's more word of mouth like the more distrust towards police is when people turn around saying I did speak out and it didn't work for me. P24*

There is also a mirrored lack of trust in Criminal Justice System and holding perpetrators to account due to low prosecution rates and the Crown Prosecution Service not pursuing cases.

Education settings were mentioned for:

- Not having enough time to build relationships with staff to trust enough to reach out.
- Not taking issues seriously, time was not given to listen, and intervention was not timely.
- Not taking appropriate action and perpetrators seeming to "get away with it". Knowing something will be done would help individuals speak out.
- Gossip amongst the school staff and pupil community. Participants spoke of how hard it was to remain knowing that they were being discussed and not believed.

Learning mentors in education were considered approachable and available, with individuals being mentioned as key support mechanisms.

Safeguarding was considered to be a priority within education but without the personal approach for individuals and where no safeguarding was needed little action was taken.

> *Loads of teachers were like chatting and stuff, like, there was loads of gossip about it and everything else. Like, it's just rather than actually taking the time to believe they just play it off. like Yeah whatever. P6*
>
> *I only talked to one specific mentor I wouldn't talk to anyone else. Because they weren't paying attention P8*
>
> *(taking action properly) I told a tutor and then obviously, he spoke to others and then they was all observing it to make sure I wasn't in any danger or anything. So they did put like safeguarding into place. P21*
>
> *I don't feel like you're here long enough to connect with somebody to trust them. So, at my secondary school, I had one teacher who I knew I could trust with everything and they would safeguard me if and when necessary. P20*

Social care had been experienced by some participants who stated:

- They felt let down and abandoned by them.
- Felt judged and mocked by individual workers.
- That support was not appropriate or understanding of situation.
- That individuals are just a checklist and a job/task to complete.
- That reports about siblings still living at home were not treated seriously.

> *My two young sisters are still living with our mother who was very mentally abusive, and we were physically abused as well. And I've put in so many social reports, like in to say, like, I've left with my two young siblings still there. I can't take them with me that I need them out. P20*
>
> *The police and social care like, they're just like, Well, for me, it felt like they were just trying to tick off a checklist. And then as soon as they ticked it off, it was like, Oh, well, I've done my job like, like, they always treat it, they do very much treat it as a case and not that you're individual people. P15*

Within discussion about all specific services mentioned above, (health, police, education, social care) no-one could give an example of when a whole service had responded well, but there was recognition that some individuals in services had responded well.

> *I've got help now. 28 years I've been to hell and back. I'm actually disgusted with the services. They weren't there for me. Let me down in a big way. It's taking me a lot to trust them, police, everybody. P17*
>
> *You know, just it's, it's human life, we're dealing with it. We're not tick boxes and cases, things. So I feel like there needs to be more around how this impacts people's lives, getting the right support, when we're confident and brave enough to speak to who we think are the right people. Because for me, when I did open up, I went back in my shell because the service wasn't what I expected. And so I've harboured this for years, and it's hindered my progression. P19*
>
> *I have a couple of individuals as in people themselves, you know, had one police officer, you know, she really tried her best to, of course, it wasn't a good experience. But she, she was just so positive, and just had a really good attitude. A particular member of staff at college was really understanding and made sure the right support was put in place P18*

1. The most beneficial aspects of accessing support.

Key positive feedback when accessing support services included:

Refuge:

- Being able to access refuge at all. Many were aware of cuts to the refuge network and the huge length of waiting lists and were pleased to be able to access a space.
- Refuge paying for travel arrangements.
- Knowing there were staff available and their response – gentle, kind, listening properly and empathetic.

General:
- Knowing the support is long term, that there is a safety net of support and are not rushed through.
- Staying with a single service for the length of time each individual needs to recover well.
- Knowing that someone is there for you, specialist services help you to understand your situation and yourself.
- Services that don't judge you, that are there to listen and be gentle and allow you to open up.
- Individually tailored support e.g. Staff arranged for participant to be able to take their dog to court with them.
- Having the offer of long or short therapy.

Staff were praised by all groups across all organisations that participated.

> *The most beneficial thing is having refuge. So that's a positive. But the negative is that we are left to deal with it. We're left to find the support. We're left to find where to go. P1*
>
> *They were brilliant, this Women's aid. She was so gentle when I was explaining my story. They listen, it's all about listening. P3*
>
> *The ongoing support that, you know, is there, whether you access it once a week, or whether you access it once a month, it's just knowing that it's there. So that's your safety net, your safety barrier. I think it needs to be longer, because the longer you get that support, the easier you are then to go on to, to be a happy, contented person. P4*
>
> *No judgment, and just knowing that you're not alone, and that there is help out there. And like, come when you're ready, like, you can only do your steps and your baby steps P5*
>
> *(support) The person that will sit there listening to you ranting again and moan and cry or whatever. P21*
>
> *You go to the people that treat you human, you go to people that know your name, know your age, know your story. the people who remember, not people who have to open the file and check your name and the people who do that because, you wouldn't trust that person. P24*

2. Challenges to support services and development needed.

Areas for development for support to be effective included:

Refuge:

- Not being able to work in refuge as it is too expensive. DWP put pressure on and do not understand the rules for easement.
- Not enough meaningful activity when you are unable to work or you have children, isolation in your room becomes challenging. Rural or smaller communities have very little community activity within reach or affordable.
- Being offered basic knowledge of computers, English, first aid to be able to access the community and build confidence.

Mental Health support and Therapy:

- Accessing the right mental health support after experiencing abuse can be very challenging. Services are not available or appropriate.
- Waiting lists for therapy are incredibly long, which is damaging and puts meaningful recovery on hold.
- Participants in short term therapy (6 weeks) felt rushed and could not engage with sessions fully. There was an emphasis on how many sessions remained and an implication that there was no care for the participant.
- Brief intervention, 6 sessions is far too short for the impact of abuse, it was more damaging than helpful.
- Therapy needs to be offered for longer time periods to meet the needs of the individual.

- Counselling did not push issues enough in a constructive way.
- Being referred to many different types of counselling but not finding the right one.

Family issues

- More protection for those co-parenting with abusers.

Other:

- Support for families of those that have or are being abused.
- Not having to repeat experiences. There is a strong understanding of confidentiality but having a mechanism that allows information, with informed consent, to be passed on to other services.
- Having a more immediate response and not having to wait for physical or more serious incidents.
- Well trained support service staff not just academically trained but having a team with lived experience or influenced and trained by those with lived experience.
- Continuity of workers where possible.
- Being referred to multiple services but being referred on for being too complex.
- Being referred to services that were not suitable or didn't help. Need more time to assess with the individual what would help them properly. Services need to be patient, flexible and appropriate for level of need.
- Support needs to be person centred, support currently can feel formulaic, and one size fits all approach.

> *They should not make you look for work until you've at least left refuge, got your own place and settled in. Especially if you've got kids. You've also got to settle the kids as well again. P2*
>
> *You're having to tell one refuge one situation, to another refuge repeating the same situation, it's torturing the woman, that they have to say, Well, this has happened. That's happened. No, sorry, we're not going to take you, next. P1*
>
> *(Need to hear from support) We will focus and train you how to recognize yourself again. Looks like good accommodation for you. Build up that independent woman and you then put you back. P3*
>
> *We need more in Mansfield like day centres for women. We can't all travel, we can't all afford it, we can't work. You lose your way, your ability of talking to people. You lose confidence with people and become isolated. P1*
>
> *I just think there should be more protection around co-parenting with a narcissist because that's damaging the children and that woman can't ever heal because she's been trying to still do a good job as a parent. P2*
>
> *They don't really interact every service you go to you start your journey all over again. P4*
>
> *It was kind of like, they're very clear that every session you've got two left, you've got one left and it's like, you literally don't want to be here, like you literally just want to go home. P6*
>
> *It took like a couple of like suicide attempts to even get any help at all. P7*
>
> *Honestly, I had CAMHS, Harmless, I had so many different ones. And none of them worked. Because to be honest, IMARA helped with strategies more than any other ones I've tried. P8*
>
> *With IMARA, it's person centred. So, it's not just this works for everyone so it will work for you. P7*
>
> *(therapy) We need to talk about what's happened. So we can process it, and move from it and leave it behind. Because otherwise it's just going to stay inside us. P16*
>
> *I had a number of sessions where the human flourishing project which did actually help me, stop isolating myself, force myself into town into an environment that I was not, I'd shut myself off from and get out, but I never spoke about it. P19*
>
> *So, I think like the fact that I ended up getting therapy was good, but during, like, that wait wasn't a very good time. Like, it does impact you quite a lot. P15*
>
> *I was offered something like six sessions. And when you feel already violated, you need to begin to trust somebody and six sessions is nowhere near enough, its like you're just started to open up and then all of a sudden it stopped. P19*

3. Service Accessibility.

Barriers to services being available to all:

- Support is not available when it is needed across all services, specifically mentioned:
  - Waiting for support on helplines.

- o Being constantly signposted somewhere else.
  - o Difficulties getting Doctors' appointments and only being seen for one thing.
  - o No long-term housing available.
  - o Knowing services have been cut (links to barriers to reaching out).
- Services are not available and accessible for the length of time needed by the individual – they need to be tailored to meet their needs from 4 weeks to 4 years.
- Refuge space not being available for peoples needs – (too many children for spaces available). Individuals spoke of the number of times they had tried to leave and space just wasn't there.
- Being placed in a hostel instead of specialist accommodation.
- Language and cultural barriers lead to waiting longer or being referred elsewhere. Action is not immediate for those who can't communicate their situation.
- School places not being available in a timely way when in refuge or being nearby.
- Need for older persons refuge spaces.
- Challenges accessing college with children (when in refuge).
- Many barriers to financial support and benefits – had to push for diagnosis to be able to get financial help.

Additional challenges are presented when you are marginalised further such as drug use, mental health issues, sex working. You are treated differently and it's even harder to access services.

> *The police don't look at you the same. Could be a crack head. could be you know, they don't look at you. Because you look like you're kind of the dregs of society. Like if you're a sex worker. P5*
>
> *I was told to leave over Christmas and the council were going to put me in a massive unit that was full of drugs and alcohol. All the things you are running away from. P1*
>
> *I feel like in Women's Aid its something that they should look into, understanding other people's culture and language, I would say, because it's really unfair from people like us, you know, going asking for help and then we're just being kept refer somewhere else. ESL group*

4. Challenges to Services working together.

Groups reported a lack of communication between services or rules clashing creating further barriers to support.

Better communication between services when cases go to court was identified. Participants shared having to facilitate communication between services such as CPS, Police and the courts for themselves.

Groups felt services should come together to share learning and knowledge. The bringing together of services within a community hub could help services work better together and enable sharing of survivor stories (link to having to repeat experiences).

5. Peer support services.

Groups had a majority positive response that Peer support would be a beneficial additional service (not replacing any other support):

- Women will listen more to those that have been through it.
- It will give someone more hope and strength to move on if they can see someone who already has.
- Participants had looked forward to the focus group to be able to connect to others with lived experience.

There was recognition that there would need to be proper training and individuals would need to be ready to support others.

One participant raised the issue that they live in a rural community, they would find it hard to reach, so they need to be accessible in all areas.

Suggested use of peer support was to take survivors out with officers to provide that caring and compassionate response.

One participant had experienced a peer support group while on the waiting list for counselling and had found this hugely beneficial.

One participant had worked with the Human flourishing project for mental health support which arranged activities with others on an ongoing basis, they had engaged with this service 3 times.

(peer support group) Sometimes we'd like, do like, activities, where we just like painting or like that or things like that, whilst we'd also be talking about, about like, things that are like we've been through, and like, things like that. So it would just kind of make it a bit more enjoyable. And you could all like and a bit better about your situations. P15

I always think that in groups, you hear somebody else say something and you identify with it. And you can learn through each other as well. You know, how somebody else dealt with it, or somebody might mention a perspective that they had that you might find helpful to yourself P16

There aren't services in my area, so I often feel quite isolated, in my experiences. It does get really lonely and to have a group session or, or even something in the city that I can get to in the evening, or you know, just something more accessible for people who don't necessarily live somewhere like this. P18

(peer support) I was a support worker for women going through the criminal justice system there was one girl that had issues, and she would like integrate into women's groups and stuff. But this amount of stuff she went through there was like, I went home and cried because I couldn't believe what she could do. P2

Pillar 3 - Including Lived Experience of VAWG in Services and Strategy

Including lived experience in the Strategy and all aspects of implementation was considered to be important and a positive step. Suggestions on how to do this included:

- Speak to survivors properly, take notice, don't be tokenistic with giving survivors a voice, make it meaningful.
- Include a wide variety of people and groups.
- Engage properly by holding meetings or outreach in community settings: Faith settings; food banks; post offices; supermarkets. Balance of listening and giving information.
- Run more focus groups like this, but those who organise them need to truly be open to listen, including negative feedback and changing their practice. There needs to be a process where feedback is given to the groups to say what has changed. Most participants would have been prepared to take part again.
- Include lived experience in front line training of professionals, especially the police.
- Include lived experience within the hierarchy of all organisations. From front line workers to managers, CEO's and right through to government.
- Include lived experience in recruitment of staff in all services.
- Make it easier for those with lived experience to get a job in front line services.

Discussions about lived experience panels within organisations and especially Scrutiny Panels for the police were well received within groups. At least 10 individuals in the focus groups expressed an interest in being involved in trained panels.

By and For Services were also well received by the focus groups as those that have lived it know what is needed.

As well as the OPCC, all services need to engage and listen to their communities and share that learning with each other.

> *Take more notice of us and take us seriously. Get some front line (officers) actually to talk to people that have gone through it, and have been coming through it for a while. Those that are in recovery stage, to actually get an input as to how much it has affected the person. P1*
>
> *You should get survivors to go in and do like a bit of training with the officers on how to deal with survivors. P2*
>
> *They don't listen enough to the people who have actually gone through it, it's all textbook, when sometimes textbook don't really work, read textbooks and education, but you can't beat whoever has already gone through it. I think you feel a bit of a more of like, inner strength in yourself. Because you can see the results, no-ones lying to you, your eyes are seeing it yourself. So, if you can see that, that success, you're going to believe in it. P5*

They've (services) got to be open as well to them sharing their experience, putting things into practice, and not being judged by it. P4

That panel thing you were saying, that, I'd love to see that come in to play. P5

I would happily be in like a group …….. because there's benefits for us and them. And I'd like my voice heard and whatever. And also, like, it's good to build your whatever. And then they come to you and say, Okay, we've listened to your decision we've, like, we'll come up with this. How'd you feel about that? P6

They can't just be you know, we really spoke to two people. So there's, all those two people's opinions, no. They need to have it every step of the way …. They need to do **** properly, And it means to actually focus on the people that, like, the bad stuff, as well as the good stuff. Not just you haven't heard from them in a while lets just put them in for this. P7

That we matter , that we're people and that we exist and that we're here. Like, they often forget that we are people, that we exist. P16

Things like this are really useful, but not only that, I believe I'd be interested. Okay. and as a follow up, what are they then implementing or You know, what changes do they want to make off the back of the conversations like this? Because I think it's just as helpful for us to feel empowered to feel like they have a voice and to know that they take those concerns seriously, and keen are actually wanting to make a change for me. P18

I've felt like my self-worth is so low that I really would like to help, obviously, with the police in the way they treated me. I want to offer my services even, I'd like to offer other people who have had experience similar to mine, its tarnished the police for me entirely. P17

Pillar 4 - Preventing VAWG

The groups raised several actions could be taken to prevent VAWG.

Perpetrators:
Perpetrators being held to account more effectively, prosecute and sentence perpetrators to prevent reoffending.

Perpetrators should leave the home not the survivor.

There is a perception that perpetrators are treated better than abuse victims. This needs rebalancing to build trust in the systems.

One group suggested compulsory courses to challenge abusive behaviours – like speed awareness courses (the barriers to doing this and the need for perpetrators to want to change was discussed).

> *(holding perpetrators to account) We've lost everything. Absolutely everything. Right down to identity because we have to leave our identity behind. We have to leave our physical identity because we don't get enough time to get these important documents. P1*
>
> *I think the guys or girls that assaulted us, they either don't want to know, or they've not been punished. And they think it's still acceptable, and it's those that will go on to reoffend and we need to stop those and that, that part of crime P19*

Education:
Education in schools should include:
- Early intervention so young people don't learn how to abuse. Focus on healthy and unhealthy relationship information. Help young people to speak out about what is happening at home.
- Sex education including consent sessions need to continue, but they need to be within a culture that means consent is taken seriously.
- Look at rules that normalise behaviours – school uniform rules around girls showing their shoulders or skin reinforces victim blaming – male staff and students will be distracted by them, rather than telling men to not be distracted. These rules build distrust towards the staff.
- Education for parents.

> *You know, people go ooh, I don't want my kids learning about that, they're only six. So, when do you want them learning? when they're 16? And when, God forbid, something horrendous has happened? P4*
>
> *Secondary school and we had to wear a uniform that was like, girls must not show their shoulders they must not do this. There, there was nothing for the boys. So, even on like non uniform days, there was like no skin showing and you can't have any skin showing. and that's just like, it's like, oh, but the boys or the teachers might get distracted. How is the teacher get distracted by 13 year old sat in a lesson because her shoulders are out. P22*

> *Well, if I do that (skin showing), he's gonna look at me. So I obviously can't. And it builds that lack of trust towards teachers by going well, obviously, if the person is wearing that, the teacher is going to look. It's normalized it in the wrong way. P24*
>
> *(Sex Education) We did have a bit of things on consent, things like that, but it wasn't enough, it's just kind of brushed over. So more on that and more breaking the stigma as well. Something that stopped me reaching out for help, was because I felt ashamed, you know, at that age, everything embarrassing, it's not talked about enough. P18*

Education of Communities should include:

- Better community awareness of what abuse is and how to get help (linking to barriers to reaching out to help). Especially financial and coercive control. Communities understand physical abuse but not other types of abuse.
- The cultural judgement and hatred from communities when survivors act needs to be challenged as it prevents people from leaving or reporting.
- Educate families to influence the perpetrators.
- Educate Friends and family as important methods of getting information into the community.
- Educate on the healthy relationships side of things too. People do not know what healthy looks like to truly understand unhealthy or to know how to recover successfully.

> *Where I come from the whole family can disown you for leaving. They will force others to hate you. Only because you said, no I can't do it anymore. So, you lose everything. Everything.P3*
>
> *(Healthy relationship education) You need the good stuff so you can understand deeply more about the bad stuff. As well as knowing when you're being abused and stuff like that. P7*
>
> *(healthy relationships for survivors) I think a lot of us have trauma responses to things. Like with my partner, for example, I think this is the first healthy thing I've been in. But I don't even know what healthy is, you know, and I don't know how to communicate in a healthy way, either. I don't know how to open up, I don't know how to trust that it will be okay. P16*

Campaign to challenge attitudes including:

> *Teach society - violence against any woman or any man is not acceptable. P1*
>
> *So, like, at the minute I've seen on social media about how, like, rape is okay, and stuff because Andrew Tate says so. So… I think it's more of like that one person who can show a big view. And I, whether it's male or female, like whoever that has shown a big view to then other people who are like, Oh, I'm gonna follow that. P23*
>
> *I think they should educate the society. Men listen to their religious leaders more than anybody else. P3*
>
> *So, educate men on what they shouldn't do. And also, women to recognise and help them recognise what domestic violence is and how it manifests. So, it's education on both ends. ESL group*
>
> *First is the mentality that men and women are equals, in certain communities that we represent. Women are not seen as equal. Yep. So, it's that, to shift that mindset is quite difficult. ESL group*
>
> *This could be elders, this could be the older people, the uncles who could show them the way. And then they have more of an influence over them by modelling their behaviours, how they were treated. So, it's really the people around you who are doing the right thing. They should speak up more. Being held accountable by your peers, and people that they respect, for every man is going to be very different. ESL group*
>
> *Like finding it through stories and like a lot of them are visual stories of writing a documentary or someone speaking out you learn a lot more from that than turning around and writing a poster. P24*

The police:

Build trust in the police force and Criminal Justice System, strengthen their reputation and build confidence something will happen when reporting.

- Being more present and building relationships with the community, do simple things like taking a picture with someone, chatting to people at football matches.
- Being kind empathetic and seeing people as individuals.
- Being honest with what they can or can't do. Women will understand that sometimes nothing can be done if the officer's attitude is positive and supportive.
- Educate officers with the survivor's voice.
- Officers giving talks to women's groups and schools.
- Communicating better during case investigations examples given were not being told when non molestation order was running out and not receiving calls when promised.
- Communication between CPS and Police to get process right.
- Not allowing lesser charges or lesser sentences.
- Celebrating positive results and convictions.

> *I know a lot of people who have no faith in the police. They'll stick it out with a person because they think if they go to the police, nothing's going to happen.P2*

> *(Police) They're doing their job, and they're just doing their job. And I think, I don't know, it's how you get through to them that actually, you can do more than the job and you don't have to be scared of like, saying the wrong thing. But actually, you could just tell someone that you care. Have they just thought about having a conversation with actual, like a survivor that isn't going through something right now. Bet they don't really get to see that perspective so much. Actually having a conversation, (with survivor) not when it's in their worst moment. But actually afterwards, and actually thinking, How did how could we do better for you? P6*

> *Police, I don't ever report anything to them. I just don't trust them. They need to build that, when I reported someat, all they were bothered about is they finished after they'd seen me. P8*

> *Having them in part of like community things are not just on the side-lines, waiting for someone or something to kick off. P7*

Funding:

Protect funding for the sector. If women think services can't help they will stay with the perpetrator.

> *If they keep cutting back on the funding, then you're going to have a lot more women that are going to stay with their perpetrator and end up killed by the perpetrator P2*

Priorities and success of the VAWG Strategy

Will the strategy make a difference to Women and Girls in Nottinghamshire.

Groups fed back that if all elements of the strategy are implemented well, it will have a positive impact for Women and Girls. But every element must be included and done properly.

Need to integrate all communities into the strategy.

There was a mixed response from the groups about which pillar was a priority.

- Most groups said all of them – recognising the value and importance of all elements of the plan to make an impact.
- 4 Individuals stated prevention.
- 1 individual stated supporting (but most thought specialist support services were already good).
- 4 individuals stated responding.

Changing the police culture, behaviour and reputation needs to be more strongly emphasised.

> *If you don't get that good response, then you'll back away? And that could be a long time before you get to give a response again. P4*
>
> *Unless you do all this, right, then it's never going to work because they've tried and tried before, and it's failed. I believe that, you know, the Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner would like to do some good for the for the city. But, unless they do it right it's not going to work. I think all of this will work, like I say, as long as its all put together good. With the right people in the right places.*
>
> *Prevention, like preventing it get to the worst point. Not necessarily, not just at first, any of it happening in first place. But you shouldn't have to get to the worst point .... so it's like preventing along the journey. P6*
>
> *They are all a priority P8*
>
> *The point was about the integration of the work that we're doing today, you have the strategy, you're going to act based on the outcome of the different community outreach work that you've done. But in order to be inclusive of us, it's useful to integrate us within the strategy. So for example, we spoke about cultural sensitivity, people are more likely to speak up and speak out about the acts of violence if they're able to speak someone who can relate to them. ESL group*

Recommendations

It is important to note that the focus group participants were recruited via specialist organisations and individuals were self-selecting. The groups were not fully representative of Nottinghamshire's population.

Much of what was discussed in the focus groups about experiences and opinions shared are embedded within the strategy under the 4 pillars. There is now a need to cross reference all feedback to ensure all is incorporated, specifically:

1. Review the impact of information disseminated into the community about abuse and support available. Identify what can be done to widen the reach of written and online information. Identify what can be developed for social media and in other formats.
2. Explore what face to face campaigning can be incorporated into the strategy including
   - Community champions
   - Community outreach
   - Open days
   - Explore how services that already exist e.g. Women's Aid, Women's Centres, doctors can be promoted and used more effectively.
3. Review how the barriers to support listed can be minimised over the length of the strategy.
4. Review professional VAWG training available, how many are accessing it and from which organisations. Promote uptake of professionals training and expand what is available. Review internal VAWG training within key organisations.
5. Feedback on support offered and accessibility of services needs to be given directly to the services mentioned or to those commissioned by the OPCC with specific action identified to improve the response to survivors.
6. Including lived experience and how to make it meaningful needs to be more thoroughly explored. There was a desire to be a part of this from all groups, to feel empowered to encourage learning from individual experience and improve situations for other survivors.
7. Peer support groups development should be a priority to both encourage lived experience engagement in the support of survivors but also recognised for it's benefit to those already on their journey.
8. Confidence in services, in particular the police but also health, social care and CPS should be a priority. It was the most talked about barrier for those wanting help and support.