



relate ni
the relationship people

Relate NI:
Response
to
Questions
on a Sexual
& Domestic
Abuse
Strategy



Relate NI is the leading relationship support charity in Northern Ireland and has been supporting families and their relationships for over 75 years. We deliver a range of therapeutic and educational services across Northern Ireland. We provide support to approximately 3,000 people annually and we know that this support has an indirect impact on a further 4,395 people, mostly family members.

Relate NI recognises that domestic and or sexual abuse occurs in relationships across all groups in society, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, sexuality and geography. Evidence confirms that experiencing domestic and or sexual abuse is detrimental to the physical and mental wellbeing of those who are directly or indirectly impacted and that experiencing domestic and or sexual abuse as a child or an adult can lead to the development of depression, anxiety and a range other mental health issues.

Relate NI offers a range of support services to adults, children and young people impacted by domestic and or sexual abuse provided by our team of highly trained therapists. The safety of those experiencing abuse is central to our work in this area and the main aim of this work is to promote healthy and non-abusive relationships.

We provide counselling services at locations across NI including from Belfast to Foyle, Newry to Coleraine and Ballymena to Omagh – we also offer professional counselling services through webcam and telephone. Healthy relationships are essential to our health and wellbeing, as well as that of our families. However, when those relationships are not healthy, it can be a risk factor to our health. Working relationally means being aware of the role that our relationships play in maintaining our health and wellbeing.

For further information about this policy paper, E-mail KellieODowd@relateni.org

SECTION 2: RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON A DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL ABUSE STRATEGY

Question 1: What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse in Northern Ireland, supported by relevant data and statistics where available, to help underpin work streams under the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy?

In considering this strategy response, we spoke with our counsellors who provide frontline services as well as to colleagues across the community and voluntary sector who are working on the issue of domestic and sexual abuse. Our feedback has been informed by those interactions and by our experience of working with the issue of domestic and sexual abuse and violence.

Through our casework over many years, we are aware that domestic and sexual abuse has a devastating impact and legacy on those who are subjected to it and those who witness it, particularly children and young people. We are also aware of the prevalence of coercive control and how this issue is presenting in our counselling rooms.

The pandemic has clearly highlighted the issue of domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland. Media reports indicate at least five domestic killings since lockdown began, and almost 2,000 domestic abuse calls to the police in the first three weeks of

April 2020 alone. However, on average victims experience 50 incidents of abuse before getting effective help. Therefore the reported figures are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse.

Question 2: Are there specific areas where service provision and support could be further improved, and strengthened, in order to most effectively respond to domestic and sexual abuse?

In 1995, the UK signed the UN Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), which requires that governments work towards ending Violence Against Women by implementing national action plans containing the following elements:

- Effective planning across the board
- A coherent and integrated approach to prevention
- Devising and delivering effective protection
- Full access to and provision of support and rehabilitation
- Effective mechanisms for prosecution
- Adequate resources.

This strategy should comply with the Istanbul Convention/ the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It is the most comprehensive legal framework that exists to tackle violence against women and girls, covering domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, female genital mutilation (FGM), so-called honour-based violence, and forced marriage. The Istanbul Convention sets minimum standards for governments to meet when tackling violence against women. When a government ratifies the Convention, they are legally bound to follow it. The UK Government are a signatory to the convention but have yet to ratify it.

Question 3: What activity should be undertaken to aid prevention, and provide for early intervention, in order to help reduce the number of people that become victims in the first place? Linked to prevention, and equally important in preventing crimes, is any evidence that can be provided on abusers, particularly repeat offenders, so that we can gather as much evidence as possible on both who commits these crimes and what works to help them stop.

In accordance with the Istanbul convention, The NI Government should:

- Regularly run awareness-raising campaigns;
- Train professionals who work closely with survivors;
- Provide education on equality between men and women, gender stereotypes, violence against women and girls, and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships;

- Encourage the media and the private sector to have stronger policies, guidelines, and standards to prevent violence against women and increase respect for their dignity;
- Set up treatment programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence and for sex offenders.
- Promote alternative models of masculinity
- Regulate the sexualisation of women and girls the in the media

As a provider of Relationship and Sexuality Education, Relate NI are aware that currently, children and young people are missing out on equal access to standardised, high quality, age-appropriate relationships and sexuality education, which we view as a fundamental factor in aiding prevention and providing early intervention.

While all schools have been required to develop their own policy on how they will address RSE within the curriculum since the 2007/08 school year, the statutory curriculum is designed to give schools and teachers flexibility in what they choose to include, or indeed leave out.

This is further exacerbated by schools allowing their children to opt out of RSE; which they say may be down to misunderstandings about the content and purpose of this part of the curriculum. Relate NI believe that the worst case scenario is that children and young people receive none or very little RSE, despite the fundamental importance of healthy relationships to improved outcomes.

A 2019 report from the Belfast Youth Forum highlighted that young people were more likely to learn about sex and relationships from their friends or peer groups (62%) or from social media (55%) than they were to learn about it through lessons at school.

This can lead to a spread of misinformation among young people which can result in unrealistic expectations, normalisation of abusive behaviour and increased anxieties around relationships and sexual health.

Research commissioned by the Department of Education into the experiences of LGBT children and young people found that 90% of respondents said that no discussion ever took place about LGBT relationships, and 67% said the sexual health education they received was either “unhelpful” or “very unhelpful”.

Relate NI are cognisant that some teachers may not feel confident in their ability to teach more structured RSE, and that forcing anyone to do so what not be in the best interests of the teachers or the children and young people involved.

Relate NI advocates for an approach which makes the curriculum compulsory, but still allows flexibility for schools in how they deliver that curriculum, whether that is through investing in training for teachers or by bringing in external providers. The range of issues on which children should receive education help is varied; from the meaning and importance of consent, to knowledge and awareness of diversity.

Going forward however Relate NI believe that to create the cultural change that is required, inclusive RSE should also be made a mandatory part of teacher training with the expectation that new teachers will be required to deliver a compulsory curriculum of relationships & sexuality education.

Relate NI are keen to stress that from our experience, even the most loving and considerate home lives will not necessarily be able to fulfil the role of providing children and young people with the adequate understanding of relationships and sexuality, and the diversity and enjoyment that can exist in healthy relationships and to being safe in the online age. There is a general assumption in NI that children and young people will learn and understand what healthy relationships are by seeing them role modelled in their own families and communities. However, our experience indicates that that is not always the case.

Giving children and young people age-appropriate relationships and sexuality education is essential to improving outcomes across their life course. Doing so provides children and young people with a safe space to explore issues around relationships, including what healthy relationships look like so that they can recognise and negotiate unhealthy relationships.

High quality and evidence based RSE is about empowering children and young people to develop confidence and self-esteem by promoting healthy relationships and providing information on issues like puberty and consent.

It is also about protecting children and young people by teaching them how to stay safe online; how to tackle inappropriate behaviour and to develop coping strategies. It also allows opportunities for young people to receive age-appropriate information about sexual health. By teaching young people about consent for example, we can protect them from sexual abuse and exploitation.

Now that the NI Assembly has unanimously passed a motion which calls for the introduction of a standardised, comprehensive relationships and sexuality education in our schools, the NI Executive alongside the Department for Education should bring forward the appropriate statutory framework to do so.

RSE is most often designed and implemented from an educator (adult) perspective and fails to explore what young people themselves understand about their rights and readiness for RSE, what they think is age appropriate content, how they felt RSE should be delivered in schools and who should deliver it.

Relate NI assert that the Department for Education should work in consultation with the Education Authority as well Youth, Women's and LGBTQ+ and other organisations to develop an age appropriate syllabus of RSE which ensures that all of the children in NI receive the same quality of relationships education and subsequent life chances.

Question 4: How best can we take account of the needs of specific groups of victims, including, for example: women; men; LGBTQIA+ individuals; minority ethnic communities; children and young people; older people; and those with a disability? This should include consideration of how the experience of these groups of victims could be improved, including how to overcome any barriers to accessing services and reaching support.

Relate NI believe that the best way to take into account the needs of specific groups is to engage with them. Consultation with victims, survivors and those with lived experience are best placed to speak about the barriers to accessing services and

reaching support. Engaging with organisations such as Relate NI, Nexus, Women's Aid, Victim Support, Age NI, Stronger Together and The Rainbow project who all have experience of supporting victims and survivors from particular groups will enable the identification of barriers that need to be removed to accessing services and people being able to access support.

Question 5: How best can protection and justice be secured, in responding to domestic and sexual abuse, so that we protect those that are affected by abuse, address abusive behaviour to reduce numbers of victims and effectively hold offenders to account for their behaviour?

In line with the Istanbul Convention the NI Government should:

- Fund a sufficient number of shelters to provide women and girls experiencing violence with safe accommodation;
- Fund sufficient number of rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres that provide medical and forensic examination, trauma support and counselling for survivors;
- Ensure that country-wide 24/7 telephone helplines are available free of charge, in addition to specialised helplines;
- Ensure that survivors of violence have access to the services their need, such as legal and psychological counselling, financial assistance, housing, education, training and assistance in finding employment.
- Define and criminalise different forms of violence against women and girls, including psychological and physical violence, sexual violence and rape, stalking, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced abortion and forced sterilisation;
- Take action to ensure the effective investigation of any allegation of violence against women and domestic violence;
- Ensure that culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called "honour" are not considered as justification for such acts.

Question 6: How best can linkages within the justice system be strengthened in order to most effectively deal with domestic and sexual abuse more widely?

Effective planning across the board

A coherent and integrated approach to prevention

Devising and delivering effective protection

Full access to and provision of support and rehabilitation

Effective mechanisms for prosecution

Adequate resources.

Question 7: Do you agree with the following proposed work streams suggested for the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy? Have you any comments about how best these work streams can be progressed as well as their content?

Driving change together: Delivering change through joint commitment, leadership and partnership working.

Prevention and early intervention: Early and effective interventions that prevent violence and maximise safety.

Responsive services: Building responsive services to ensure victims get the support they need.

Supporting different needs: Taking account of the needs of specific groups of victims.

Protection and Justice: Effective, supportive, responsive and timely protection across the criminal justice system.

Relate NI are fully supportive of the proposed work streams

Question 8: Are there any other key issues, on the specific area of domestic and sexual abuse, which you would like to raise?

At Relate NI we believe that access to age appropriate, high quality and evidenced based Relationship and Sexuality education (RSE) will equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to:

- Realise their health, well-being and dignity;
- Develop respectful social and sexual relationships;
- Consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others
- Understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives

These educational interventions also allow young people to explore the issue of consent and to discuss bullying, psychological violence, physical violence, sexual abuse, sexual assault and intimate partner violence, as well as signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships. We believe that RSE should be available to all young people in Northern Ireland, which currently it is not.

As a provider of Relationship and Sexuality Education, Relate NI are aware that currently, children and young people are missing out on equal access to standardised, high quality, age-appropriate relationships and sexuality education.

Giving children and young people age-appropriate relationships and sexuality education is essential to improving outcomes across their life course. Doing so provides children and young people with a safe space to explore issues around relationships, including what healthy relationships look like so that they can recognise and negotiate unhealthy relationships.

Question 9: How best can we engage with, and draw from, the experience of those affected by domestic and sexual abuse going forward?

By working with and through organisations such as Relate NI, Women's Aid, Victim Support, Disability Action, Age NI, Stronger Together and the Rainbow Project, who already engage with, support victims and survivors. These organisations will have gathered data and evidence on the lived experience of those affected by domestic and sexual abuse which can be used to inform how best to engage with and learn from those with lived experience not only of domestic and sexual violence but also their experience of the police, the judicial system, the NHS, and social services. This can only help improve services and strengthen the linkages and identify gaps/areas of improvement between these services.

SECTION 3: RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON EQUALLY SAFE – A STRATEGY TO TACKLE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Question 1: We are inclined to the view that this new Equally Safe Strategy should focus on women and girls. This reflects the different forms of violence and unwanted behaviour against women and its impact within the gendered reality of men's and women's lives. We welcome your views on whether this approach or another approach is more appropriate?

Relate NI are fully supportive of this approach.

Question 2: We would like to hear your views on whether the draft vision set out below, or different words would best catch the ambition of what we want to do. Every woman and girl is safe in our communities, feels safe and can reach their potential. We have a society in which violence against women is not tolerated in any form, in which all victims are supported, and perpetrators are held to account.

Relate NI believe that this draft vision is robust enough to capture the key elements which we believe are required from any strategy. Our thinking in this regard has been informed by previous work undertaken in 2010, outlined in the diagram below which scopes the factors that contribute to violence against women and girls, and as such, should be reflected in the final strategy.



Question 3: Do you agree with the draft objectives suggested for the new strategy?

Are there any other objectives that should be included?

Understanding the scope and scale of the problem the strategy is seeking to tackle

Prevention - Early intervention to get upstream of violence.

A co-designed strategy, which is delivered in a collaborative manner and is based on local and international evidence.

Responsive services to ensure women and girls are equally safe.

Relate NI agree with the draft objectives

Question 4: What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of acts or threats of gender based violence (apart from that addressed by the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy) that result in, or are likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls?

Through our therapeutic services, our counsellors have reported anecdotally a rise in acts or threats of gender based violence, coercive control that are presenting in the sessions. We are at present reviewing our domestic violence policies and procedures as a result of this.

Question 5: We want to understand the “unwanted” behaviour or actions (including on-line) that emanate from an attitude to, or perception of, women and girls that lacks respect. What information can you provide on the scope, scale and prevalence of such behaviour?

Relate NI believe that rape culture and victim blaming that is prevalent in our society creates attitudes to, and perceptions of, women and girls that lack respect.

Rape Culture is an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence is normalised and excused in the media and popular culture. Rape culture is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women's bodies, and the glamourisation of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women's rights and safety.

Rape culture can include:

- Blaming the victim (“She asked for it!”)
- Trivialising sexual assault (“Boys will be boys!”)
- Sexually explicit jokes
- Tolerance of sexual harassment
- Inflating false rape report statistics
- Publicly scrutinising a victim's dress, mental state, motives, and history
- Gratuitous gendered violence in movies and television
- Defining “manhood” as dominant and sexually aggressive
- Defining “womanhood” as submissive and sexually passive
- Pressure on men to “score”
- Pressure on women to not appear “cold”
- Assuming only promiscuous women get raped
- Assuming that men don't get raped or that only “weak” men get raped
- Refusing to take rape accusations seriously
- Teaching women to avoid getting raped

Victim-blaming attitudes marginalise the victim/survivor and make it harder to come forward and report the abuse. If the survivor knows that society blames her for the abuse, s/he will not feel safe or comfortable coming forward. Victim-blaming attitudes also reinforce what the abuser has been saying all along; that it is the victim's fault this is happening. It is NOT the victim's fault or responsibility to fix the situation; it is the abuser's choice. We need to address victim-blaming attitudes, through a multitude of ways including education and awareness raising campaigns so that our society no longer allows the abuser to perpetrate relationship abuse or sexual assault while avoiding accountability for their actions.

Other unwanted behaviours Relate NI have identified are:

- Social media trolling
- Image-based sexual abuse
- Coercive control
- Stalking
- Sexual harassment

Question 6: We want to understand the root causes of violence against women and girls, and would especially welcome learning on intersectional approaches and on what works in promoting behavioural and attitudinal change.

At Relate NI we believe the root causes of violence against women and girls is multi-faceted but begins with sexist attitudes and gender stereotyping. The origins of which can be found in:

- Religion – Islamic, Jewish & Christian teach women are different from, inferior and subservient to men. Classical representations of women as goddesses, whores, wives & slaves all serve to dehumanise women and girls.
- Social Learning- children learn what it means to be male and female in society from their environment and their parents i.e. division of labour in the home, who does the cooking and cleaning etc. With rigid gender stereotypes, women and girls who do not conform are seen as not fulfilling their 'given' roles within society
- Cultural Institutions – Movies, Magazines & T.V. and social media portray women and girls as damsels in distress who need rescued or sultry sirens who want to seduce men. These stereotypes again dehumanise women and girls.
- Evolution Versus Social Roles –The passing on of genes v's different roles that men and women form in society. The social roles in society teaches that women and girls are best placed for domestic roles including the care and rearing of children. However after a woman has given birth and perhaps breastfed her child, why is she better equipped to love and care for a child ra-

ther than a man? Again this feeds into negative gender stereotypes of both men and women and can deny men a meaningful and fulfilling relationship with their child and the opportunity to be a positive role model as opposed to fulfilling the characteristics that have all the hallmarks of toxic masculinity.

- Power – societies based on strong patriarchal structure that grants men power over women. In nearly all of our institutions within society men dominate the leadership roles. This again can lead to harmful stereotypes that women are the weaker sex and better fitted to domestic roles as opposed to changing the structure of society which would allow men and women to enjoy both leadership roles and family life.
- Control –stereotypes legitimise prejudice and discrimination. The Powerful are more likely to stereotype the powerless to maintain the power imbalance – this limits the range of behaviours open to the stereotyped individual and demands conformity in order to maintain smooth social and cultural interactions
- The Language we use - demonstrates the patriarchal nature of society e.g. policeman, fireman, snowman, postman, chairman, even the name you carry. Maternal lineage is lost as even as women if we decide not to take our husbands name, we still carry our fathers name and not our mothers. This again reinforces male as thesis women as antithesis.

We firmly believe that early intervention and education on healthy relationships, gender stereotyping and exploring where these attitudes come from, how they manifest in society and how we can combat them, will go a long way in promoting behavioural and attitudinal change.

Question 7: We want to understand whether there are particular groups of women and girls, including those with specific vulnerabilities, who are more at risk of particular offences or ‘unwanted’ behaviour or actions.

While all women may be subject to domestic and sexual violence, the experiences and needs of disabled, Black and Minority Ethnic , migrant, homeless, destitute women and girls are always marginalised and remain invisible. For lesbian and bisexual women, the use of ‘corrective rape’ is a particular offence for this specific group of women. There is also a persistent tendency to tell all victims to modify their behaviour rather than looking at what drives perpetrators of abuse.

Question 8: We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the experience of women and girls who are victims of crime (apart from that addressed by the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy) in the criminal justice system that you would like to draw to our attention.

In 2016/17 Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland carried out a consultation response with victims and survivors of domestic violence and abuse. These women

spoke of their lived experience and made the following recommendations with regards to the criminal justice system:

- The need for all PSNI officers to understand domestic abuse and its impact on victims

While women's experiences with specially trained Domestic Violence Officers (DVOs) and officers from the Rape Crime Unit were very positive, women's reports of their experience with PSNI officers responding to domestic abuse incidents were inconsistent. Many women said they had very positive experiences with responding officers when they called the police because of a domestic abuse incident. In these cases, officers were sympathetic, showed an understanding of domestic abuse, and signposted victims to specialised services, such as Women's Aid or Victim Support NI, where they could seek support. However, many women told of bad experiences with responding officers, with everything from officers appearing irritable and making the woman feel she was wasting police time to police taking one woman's children away from her for a week. The overall impression is that an in-depth understanding of domestic abuse is not consistently applied across the PSNI, and it comes down to the 'luck of the draw' whether a woman gets an officer who understands the situation properly or gets one who doesn't.

- The need for a consistently strong response to perpetrators from the criminal justice system

Victims and survivors felt that the justice system doesn't punish perpetrators appropriately for domestic abuse crimes, sending the message to perpetrators and victims alike that the justice system doesn't take crimes of this nature seriously. This message leads perpetrators to believe that there will be no consequences for their actions, thereby increasing the likelihood of repeat offences and putting women in greater danger. Women feel that non-molestation orders, one of the main legal recourses for people affected by domestic abuse, are not taken seriously either by the criminal justice system or by perpetrators, rendering them ineffective tools for protection. Perpetrators know that, even if they are arrested for breaking a non-molestation order, they will be released again almost immediately with no further consequences.

- The need for a different approach in the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence and coercive control

Victims of domestic abuse incidents and crimes are often forced to repeat the details of their experience many times to different police officers. Going over a detailed account of sexual abuse, for example, multiple times re-victimises a survivor and can be an extremely traumatic and painful experience. One woman described being made to go over every detail of her sexual abuse over the phone with a police officer she'd never met and whose interrogative style of questioning showed a lack of sensitivity to the subject matter.

Having multiple police officers deal with a survivor's case means that a survivor will be expected to repeat their experience to each new police officer they come into contact with. The need to avoid re-victimising survivors of domestic abuse suggests that assigning a single police officer to oversee sensitive cases of domestic abuse would be in keeping with a more victim-centred approach. This approach would also help police officers to recognise and understand the full picture of a case of domestic

abuse. As domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour or 'course of conduct', it cannot be understood properly by looking at individual incidents and crimes. If there are multiple police officers responding to victims at different times, this pattern or 'bigger picture' will likely not be seen and the full extent of the abuse could be missed. Based on their experiences with the police, many women felt that, operationally, the criminal justice system does not understand victimhood or re-victimisation, and that is something needs to change. We at Relate NI believe that a wider range of training, education and awareness raising, for those working in the criminal justice system will be required to ensure the effective administration of justice which will serve to drive a more effective response to tackling violence against women and girls.

Question 9: We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the treatment of perpetrators of violence against women and girls by the criminal justice system or other public services which reflect good practice, or which could be improved.

Relate NI are aware from the research that despite widespread use of domestic violence perpetrator programmes there is limited evidence of their effectiveness.

Throughout this response, we have indicated the necessity of both planning and resourcing of training, education and awareness raising as essential foundations to combat violence against women and girls. We draw particular attention to the need to adequately support jury members in this regard. Abusers are often manipulative and in Relate NI's experience, abusers often deliberately choose certain courses of abusive behaviour for the very fact that they can appear reasonable to bystanders. We also draw attention to the need for adequate police resources to support robust investigation of complaints; and adequate guidance for and training of police personnel, including call handlers, responding to calls concerning abuse. This is particularly relevant when a person might not wish to pursue a report or investigation and police personnel have to independently judge whether or not an offence has been committed.

Relate NI believe that the Gillen recommendations on the arrangements around the delivery of justice in serious sexual offences should be fully implemented. We would like to draw particular attention to (1) 'Pre-recorded cross-examination of vulnerable victims and witnesses (which includes children under 18) at least in serious sexual offence cases but preferably in all Crown Court cases involving vulnerable witnesses and victims, should commence on a carefully phased basis'. (2) 'Publicly funded legal representation should be granted to all complainants in all serious sexual offence cases.' (3) 'Radical steps to combat excessive delay in the criminal justice system. A wholly new mind-set is required, which will involve front-loading the legal system with an early-time-limited and case managed system that has at its core early joint engagement by both prosecution and defence representatives'.

Question 10: We want to understand whether there are any aspects of the experience of women and girls, or of men and boys, in the community, which you would like to draw to our attention in understanding violence against women and girls and how it can be combatted.

Please set out your response below

In April 2020 Dr. Jessica Taylor published her book “Why Women Are Blamed For Everything; Exploring Victim Blaming of Women Subjected to Violence and Trauma.” This book is an exploration of many ways we blame women for being abused by men; and how prevalent and normalised this is; from how we encourage women to change their behaviour through prevention and intervention programmes to the psychiatric diagnosis and treatment of women and girls who disclose violence, abuse and exploitation.

Through her research Dr. Taylor gives voice and agency to women with the lived experience of trauma and violence. Women have told her how they have felt about their portrayal in the media, how the police treated them, the way the legal system re-traumatised them, how their religion had them believe that the abuse was punishment by their god; the way their cultures and communities silenced and shamed them, the way rape myth acceptance had them doubt what actually happened to them, and the way sexist ideals made them believe that their female bodies had caused sexual violence.

Dr. Taylor identifies a number of recommendations for improving sexual violence prevention:

- Journalists, news presenters, talk show hosts and media editors could engage in training and further education to improve the language they use to describe sexual violence, victims and offenders
- More responsibility could be placed on production companies and TV channels to ensure they do not encourage misogyny and blaming of women and girls subjected to sexual violence
- Wider education on the harms of pornography should be implemented for both adults and children, including information about the ways sexual acts in pornography do not reflect sexual acts in real life and the way sex is staged for film.
- Prevention campaigns by authorities could be aimed at offenders, potential offenders and bystanders – rather than aimed at women and girls to change their behaviours and appearance
- Prevention campaigns should seek to prevent sexual violence from being perpetrated at all and should not seek to encourage individual women to protect themselves from inevitable sexual violence
- Prevention campaigns should not position sexual violence, exploitation and abuse as ‘poor choices’ of women or children
- Prevention campaigns should be developed and piloted in conjunction with a group of diverse victims of sexual violence experts in the field to ensure that messages are thoroughly researched and tested before use
- Women and girls should not be encouraged to change something about themselves to prevent sexual violence

- Prevention campaigns should name the problem and name the perpetrators of the problem clearly rather than using metaphorical language about 'being a victim' which omits the choices and actions of the offender(s)

Relate NI fully support these recommendations.