



More than Support to Court: ISVAs in Teesside

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Executive Summary

The research was commissioned by the Northern Rock Foundation to fill a gap in knowledge about the involvement of sexual violence services in supporting victims/survivors of rape and sexual abuse on Teesside, including cases progressing through the criminal justice system. The research built on the previous NRF study '*From Report to Court – rape cases and the criminal justice system in the North East*' (Hester 2013), and also looked at referrals from the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) to other agencies, interviewed 15 victims/survivors (12 female and three male) about their experience of support, and interviewed 14 practitioners from specialist sexual violence and other relevant services across Teesside. The research was carried out between March 2014 and March 2015. This summary outlines the findings regarding victim/survivor needs and agency responses, and also highlights strengths and weaknesses in provision of support across Teesside

Needs of victims/survivors

- For the needs of victims/survivors to be at the centre of service provision, it is crucial to understand the impacts and consequences of sexual violence alongside patterns of help-seeking and engagement with the criminal justice process.
- Of the 15 victims/survivors who were interviewed, most had experienced childhood sexual abuse (nine in total), three had experienced rape in domestic violence, and three experienced acquaintance rape/indecent assault. All but two of the cases ended up in court, and most resulted in conviction. All 13 cases were supported by ISVAs who were crucial to this progression.
- Victims/survivors have quite different needs at different stages of their 'journey', for instance as they moved through disclosure, when the abuse is reported to the police and the eventual hearing of the offender in court.
- Victims/survivors also had varying needs that were in some ways linked to the different 'types' of sexual violence experienced, especially experience of childhood sexual abuse or rape in domestically abusive relationships.
- For some of the victims/survivors, especially those who experienced CSA, the abuse had taken place years ago. They might have disclosed as children to parents, to other family members, to police, or to social services but without being believed or abusers being prosecuted; or they did not want to or were reluctant to disclose because of the influence and/or threats of the abuser.

- Specialist sexual violence services were crucial to all of the victims/survivors in providing the mix of counselling (as adult or child), support in court and practical help they (and quite often their families) needed. Also, specialist services were able to provide a changing mixture of targeted support as and when the victim/survivors' needs changed, for instance to increase counselling support when they were feeling more depressed/suicidal, and ISVAs to support them through the often drawn out criminal justice process.
- Victims/survivors experiencing rape as part of domestic abuse found that a combination of support from both ISVAs and IDVAs as well as other sexual or domestic violence support was important, with specialist sexual violence support particularly important during the criminal justice process if the abuser was being tried for sexual offences and then domestic violence support in the longer term.
- The victims/survivors of CSA suffered especially severe mental health problems as a consequence of the abuse, and a number of them had mental breakdowns following disclosure or had decided to disclose following a breakdown. They needed specialist sexual violence counselling before being able to engage with the criminal justice process, and often in the longer term.
- Some victims/survivors were referred by GPs to generic health sector counselling/ psychiatric support but preferred specialist sexual violence services where they could focus on the sexual abuse.

Sexual violence services on Teesside

Across Teesside, a range of support for victims/survivors of sexual violence is currently provided by Arch North East, the SARC (Helen Britton House), EVA Women's Aid, Foundation, Barnardos, Harbour, Victim Support, My Sister's Place, A Way Out and local Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services. Eight ISVAs¹ (four full-time and four part-time) and one LESA (Life Enhancement Skills Advisor) operate from Arch North East, the SARC, EVA Women's Aid, Foundation and the Barnardo's SECOS² project (a specialist children and young person's ISVA).

Findings from the agency interviews

- The agency interviews highlighted a multi-faceted picture of service provision across Teesside and uncovered a number of strengths and issues / weaknesses in current service provision in terms of meeting the complex needs of victims/survivors of rape and sexual abuse:

Strengths	Issues / weaknesses
<p>Support for victim/survivors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the specialist support services currently deliver varied and important services to victims, their family and multi-agency partners across Teesside, working with very complex cases and vulnerable victims to ensure that the victim/survivor and their needs remain the central focus of support 	<p>Support for victim/survivors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More work needs to be done to raise the profile of specialist sexual violence services and raise awareness of the remit of ISVAs in Teesside amongst the general public and with all partner agencies (e.g. sexual health/ primary care services, the wider police force i.e. outside of

¹ Funding has also been secured for a three- year specialist sex worker ISVA post (to be based within Arch North East).

² Sexual Exploitation of Children On the Streets

- All the specialist services offer a range of victim-led support at different stages of the victim/survivors journey i.e. support before they've even reported to police (specialist sexual violence counselling), emotional (non-therapeutic) and practical support once they have reported to police and during the time the case is with police / CPS; more intensive support prior to and during the court case; and then a finite period of support post-court. Specialist services respond flexibly to the changes in frequency and intensity of support needed during these key stages in the victim/survivor's journey
 - The specialist sexual abuse counselling and ISVA support currently provided for adults, children and young people in Teesside is essential to the recovery of victim/survivors, whether or not they enter the criminal justice system
 - As well as services for adult victim/survivors, Teesside benefits from specialist ISVA support for children and young people experiencing sexual violence (Barnardos SECOS) which aims to offer consistent quality of service to victim/survivors aged up to 18yrs
- major crime or child protection teams, court staff (Magistrates in particular) and social services in terms of the types and levels of support ISVAs and other specialist services can and do provide. This needs to be done consistently and on a regular basis to ensure all new practitioners are reached
- Despite the range of services available within the Teesside area, access is not equal, for example, there is no ISVA support based within the Redcar area for male victim/survivors of sexual violence
 - Certain restrictions on who can access specialist sexual violence services (e.g. Arch NE's exclusion policy for people accused of sexual offenses or Redcar DV/ISVA services for females only) contribute to the lack of choice for all victim/survivors
 - There is a need for much more clarity around the types of counselling /therapy offered to victim / survivors of sexual violence. A mix of counselling is currently being accessed, both specialist and generic, depending on service availability which in a sense creates a postcode lottery effect (e.g. all schools in Stockton use non-specialist counselling service for post court therapy and although they offer a child specialist service they are not specialist sexual abuse counsellors; also male victim/survivors of sexual or domestic abuse in Redcar do not have access to specialist counselling).
 - The non-directed person-centred approach to therapy currently being offered may not always be appropriate for all victim/survivors.

Referrals / links / pathways:

- The SARC seems to be working as the main referral route for Barnardos SECOS (children & young people) and for EVA and Foundation (DV/ISVA services in Redcar for females 12yrs+). The strong link with the referral route was reported to be working well, particularly for Barnardos SECOS
- New pathways between services and agencies are starting to be developed between specific agencies e.g. the SARC and the Witness Care Unit and Victim Support
- There are some well-established pathways between specialist services e.g.:
 - The agreement between Arch NE and Barnardos SECOS to provide support to 14-18yr olds who require child-specific approach to support (e.g. if learning or development needs or element of grooming)

Referrals / links / pathways:

- Pathways enabling statutory referrals to go through one central 'hub' has had a negative impact on some agencies leading to the loss of previously close working relationships e.g. between ISVA and investigating police officer (important for consistent victim/survivor support)
- There is a lack of clarity around how SARC refer to support services in Redcar (where there is a split in services between EVA and Foundation)
- There is still a need to develop and refine some existing referral pathways, both into and between specialist support services to make specialist care referrals less complicated /more efficient for statutory agencies such as the police. A more co-ordinated approach to developing new or improved pathways would be beneficial
- There is still a need to more clearly define the roles and responsibilities between some agencies, in particular between the SARC and Arch NE

- There is a need to develop a unified monitoring system in order to more accurately record referral pathways and track all sexual violence cases reporting/ seeking support in order to ensure victim/survivors don't 'fall off the radar' of services once they have been referred out to other services

Partnership working:

- Established partnership working between specialist services and statutory agencies (such as Arch NE and Barnardos SECOS relationships with CPS, individual police officers, witness care services) have developed /grown organically and successfully maintained over years of working in close partnership
- Important 'agency or institutional' advocacy is being delivered alongside individual victim advocacy by specialist sexual violence services e.g. Arch NE's involvement with RSSO (rape and serious sexual offences) training within the CPS or work by SARC to raise awareness within sexual health services, trainee midwives & safeguarding boards or work by Barnardos SECOS to raise awareness amongst court ushers and barristers etc re working with child victims of sexual violence and exploitation
- There is a consensus and a willingness to work in partnership and improve services for victim/survivors in Teesside across all specialist service providers plus an established forum for future strategic direction (TSVSG)

Partnership working:

- There is a need for clarification in terms of how specialist and non-specialist services, such as Victim Support (who do support victim/survivors of sexual violence) may work together / alongside each other e.g. developing tighter referral pathways and improving understanding of specialist ISVA role and support offered to victims by non-specialist victim support workers

Capacity:

- There are currently 4 x full-time ISVAs, 1 x full-time LESA (Life Enhancement Skills Advisor) and 4 part-time ISVAs (incl 1 male ISVA) with funding secured for a 3 year specialist sex worker ISVA post (based within Arch North East).
- The ISVA role is multi-faceted and diverse due to the number of ISVAs operating in Teesside and being situated in both the SARC and voluntary agencies with differing specialisms (sexual violence or domestic violence). The fact that they work in slightly different ways should not necessarily be seen as a weakness as they are providing a range of services to victim/survivors with differing needs.
- The SARC ISVA currently has capacity to fill a crucial gap in services in terms of providing ISVA support to victim/survivors who either 'bounce back' i.e. who cannot or do not engage with other specialist services or cases involving children & young people from the waiting list at Barnardos SECOS (i.e. doing a certain amount of 'mopping up') or to co-work on DV & SV cases within the Redcar area if needed

Capacity:

- Having to travel some distance to attend specialist ISVA training outside of the Teesside area means the SARC ISVA spends more time away from supporting victim/survivors which is not ideal, especially when ISVA works part-time. This should be temporary however.
- The SARC ISVA was still a fairly new and developing role and some of the 'bounce backs' / cases they had been able to 'mop up' were not referred in any systematic way and therefore this type of gap filling may only be a temporary solution.

ISVA support and supervision:

- Support and supervision of ISVAs in Teesside through regular practitioner meetings (informal, peer-

to-peer), ISVA manager meetings and the more formal TSVSG forum is appreciated and reduces the feeling of being powerless amongst some workers

CJS response to sexual violence:

- There is a consensus that working relationships with and the response to victim/survivors from police is improving (in terms of making victim/survivors feel believed when explaining NFA decisions and in pro-actively communicating with the victim and/or the ISVA re case progression)
- Specialist /voluntary sector services are working alongside police to help improve the CJS response to sexual violence on Teesside e.g. rape scrutiny panels (Arch NE are a key part of this process) and review of police 'no-crime' decisions

CJS response to sexual violence:

- There are still concerns amongst specialist services about 'patchy' CJS response to sexual violence, in particular:
 - the length of time it is taking to conduct police /CPS investigations (which now seems to be taking longer meaning ISVAs are having to 'hold' victim/survivors for longer);
 - the impact of NFA decisions (mainly CPS but also police) on victim/survivors;
 - some lack of awareness about the impact and therefore lack of appropriate police response to younger (early teens) victim/survivors;
 - some problems with communication between police and ISVAs arising when investigating officers change or move on during an active case;
 - still lack of awareness amongst some individual police officers of the role of the ISVA and the types of support they are able to provide
 - concern that different types of sexual violence are treated differently by police in terms of level of seriousness e.g. some cases judged based on the circumstance rather than the effect on the victim/survivor (e.g. stranger rape still treated more seriously than domestic rape) or cases of 'inappropriate sexual touching' seems to be a 'grey area' for police, support services not sure how this particular type of offence is dealt with currently or how seriously it is taken

ISVAs

- The ISVA role is multi-faceted and diverse due to the number of ISVAs operating across Teesside and being situated in both the SARC and in voluntary sector agencies with differing specialisms (sexual violence or domestic violence).
- ISVAs offer a 'core' service of (non-directive) emotional and practical support and they are also working in different ways across existing support services, supporting different groups of victims/survivors - with differing and complex needs - to a different extent and at different stages of the victim/survivor's 'journey' depending on the type of agency in which they are based.

- The type and level of support needed from or provided by ISVAs depends on the specific concerns of the individual victim/survivor, which in turn is impacted by whether or not their experience has been reported, how it was reported or whose actual choice it was to report.
- The length of time an ISVA spends with a victim/survivor can range from a few weeks up to two years and the length of time appears to be increasing, largely as a result of longer police or CPS investigations i.e. making a direct link between the capacity of criminal justice agencies and the work load of specialist support (mainly voluntary sector) services.

Recommendations

- Commissioning of effective sexual violence services requires consideration of the complex and changing needs of victims/survivors.
- ISVAs are working in different ways across the existing support services providing a range of different but essential services for victims/survivors who have differing and complex needs. It is important to highlight that this current model of response for victims/survivors of sexual violence is a strength and focused on victim/survivor need, and should not necessarily be seen as a 'weakness' or gap within current service provision in Teesside.
- More work is needed to raise the profile of specialist sexual violence services and raise awareness of the remit and benefits of ISVA support in Teesside, amongst the general public and with all partner agencies (e.g. sexual health/ primary care services; the wider police force (i.e. outside of major crime or child protection teams); court staff (Magistrates in particular) and social services in terms of the types and levels of support ISVAs and other specialist services can and do provide. This work should be done consistently and on a regular basis to ensure all new practitioners are reached.
- While there are some strong, well-established referral routes between specialist services and partner agencies, there is a need to more clearly define the roles and responsibilities between some of the key specialist services (e.g. the SARC and Arch North East) and a need to develop and/or refine some referral pathways, both into and between specialist support services, in order to make the referral process less complicated and thus more efficient for statutory agencies such as the police.
- The 'patchiness' of appropriate criminal justice agency response to different forms of sexual violence needs to be addressed.
- There is a need for clarification in terms of how specialist and non-specialist services, such as Victim Support (who do support victim/survivors of sexual violence) might work better alongside each other e.g. through developing tighter referral pathways and improving understanding of specialist ISVA role and support offered to victims by non-specialist victim support workers.

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