

Sex and Violence: Improving your Care

Taskforce on the health
aspects of violence against
women and children.
Young people's version



What's the problem?

••••• **2 million** children and young people in the UK experience sexual abuse and many never tell anyone.

In **2007/08** ChildLine took the highest number of calls ever from children and young people saying they'd been abused. •••••

••••• **One** in every **16** girls aged **13 to 17** say that they have been raped.

••••• About **750,000** children and young people see violence going on at home every year.

••••• **24,000** young girls living in the UK are at high risk of being a victim of genital mutilation.

••••• More than **one-third of all rapes** recorded by the police are committed against children **under 16**.

Statistics taken from the Report from the Child Sexual Abuse sub-group, *Responding to violence against women and children – the role of the NHS*, published in March 2010. Available at www.dh.gov.uk/vawc

The Government has been looking at how to improve NHS healthcare to **meet the needs of children and young people** who have been sexually abused or assaulted (raped), including being forced to take part in any type of sexual activity that they didn't agree to. This might take place online, as part of gang activity, or might be inflicted by other young people in social or school situations.

- We are also looking at how to help children and young people who are living with violence at home; are experiencing violence or controlling behaviour at the hands of their boyfriend or girlfriend; or are at risk of being subject to harmful traditional practices such as forced marriage or female genital mutilation.

You may or may not have had these experiences yourself. You may know someone who's experienced these issues, or think that you know someone who's at risk. **This leaflet tells you what the Government is doing about the problem and where to get help.**

What young people told us

The Government has signed up to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which says that **it's important that we ask you your thoughts** before we make big decisions.

The care you receive is very important. We've been talking to lots of children and young people to find out their thoughts and experiences – both good and bad.

Here's what we found.

Where you're satisfied with the services you've received, you feel that:

- 1 Healthcare staff, nurses and doctors are the safest people to talk to when you've been sexually assaulted.
- 2 When proper systems are in place for staff to listen to you, it's much easier to talk about what's happening.
- 3 In places such as residential mental health units, you feel comfortable and able to talk about what's happened to you.
- 4 Counselling helped you to recover more than anything else.

1

"I felt ashamed telling her [my doctor] what my dad had done but **she made me feel at ease** and would always listen to me."

2

"Having someone **you can talk to in confidence** about being sexually abused is important."

3

"My therapist is caring and understanding, and **listens to me.**"

4

"The person who helped me most was my counsellor – she told me that I wasn't going mad and that **I would get better.** She was right."

Where we need to make improvements

We need to do more to prevent violence from occurring in the first place, identify those who are at risk and respond better when abuse has taken place.

- 1 You want people to be made more aware of abuse and violence. You'd like there to be more information available in places like youth clubs and schools, so that you know who to contact if you need help.
- 2 Health workers need more training and education to help you.
- 3 When you tell people like doctors or trusted adults that you've been abused, you want them to believe you.
- 4 If you're behaving in a certain way, you want doctors or nurses to ask you why, and whether you've been hurt in any way.
- 5 You want trusted adults, doctors and nurses to be friendly so that you feel you can talk to them honestly and openly.

1

"I didn't know who to trust or where to go for help."

2

"Maybe they should have training to **see past my scars** and maybe they will see that 11-year-old screaming to be believed and protected."

3

"I **wouldn't talk** because I'd be frightened of not being believed."

4

"You **ask me why** I didn't say anything sooner. I'll tell you why: because no-one asked."

"When I told my nurse **she listened** to me carefully and believed me. She told me what she was going to do and let me hear her on the phone talking to the police. She didn't take over, just explained what would happen. I told her because she was the only person who I trusted to tell. **She's always been there for me.**"

5

- 6 You don't want to be treated as if you have an illness just because you've been hurt. You want the abuse to be dealt with as an issue in its own right.
- 7 You want more adults who can give you independent support and advice.
- 8 If you tell your doctor or nurse things that you don't want shared with anyone, they shouldn't pass on the information – unless they have to because of the law.
- 9 You'd like the NHS to meet your particular needs – they may be different from someone else's because English isn't your first language or because you're gay. You may prefer to see a woman doctor because of how you've been hurt.

6

"I think the health service needs to think about what they can do for children who have been abused, and not just send them to their mental service... They have been raped or touched up but they are not mental."

Children's and young people's comments taken from the Taskforce on the Health Aspects of Violence Against Women and Children's *Consultation with children*, published in March 2010. Available at www.dh.gov.uk/vawc

7

"I was so relieved when my advocate said **she believed me**... That is the biggest thing that helped me."

8

"I think you don't tell because you are scared about what will happen. **I know I was terrified of my dad.** I thought that he would kill me or my mum if I told."

9

"I really believe, and I know I've said this before, but the health staff need to know that **being gay doesn't mean that you deserve what has happened to you.**"

"There needs to be a nice place, maybe in the hospital, **where the nurses help** cos the doctor that came to the police station was like my own doctor and he was stony-faced."

How we plan to improve things

As well as listening to the opinions of young people, we talked to other people who have been **affected by violence or abuse**, and also to NHS staff. Having done this, we want to make things better by:

- Providing information, health programmes and campaigns (eg on binge drinking and violence between boyfriends and girlfriends) to prevent violence from happening in the first place.
- Looking into how all doctors and nurses can have training on how to make sure they say the right things to you.
- Making services more friendly to children and young people.
- Getting organisations like the police, social services, schools and the health service to work together more closely to help you and to give you information about where to go if you are in trouble.
- Helping doctors and nurses who are being assaulted or abused themselves – you'd be surprised how many are.
- Providing doctors and nurses with rules on sharing the private things you tell them with other organisations like social services or the police.
- Making it easier for you to get help if you have been raped and to support you if you want to tell the police.
- Helping the NHS to provide services that fit the needs of local people like you.
- Tackling bullying in schools.

What support is out there?

Don't feel like you're alone. There are a number of sources of support available.

ChildLine: www.childline.org.uk or ring 0800 1111

Doctor Ann: www.doctorann.org

Frank: www.talktofrank.com or ring 0800 77 66 00

Get Connected: www.getconnected.org.uk or ring 0808 808 4994

Mental Health Foundation: www.mhf.org.uk

Mind: www.mind.org.uk

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk

NSPCC: www.nspcc.org.uk

Rethink: www.rethink.org

Samaritans: www.samaritans.org.uk or ring 08457 90 90 90

Stop It Now: www.stopitnow.org.uk or ring 0808 1000 900

Teenage Health Freak: www.teenagehealthfreak.org

Young Minds: www.youngminds.org.uk



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