

Council Meeting

Why Bristol needs a Rape Crisis Centre

Submission from: Bristol Women's Forum: Elaine Hutton – Adviser

1. The extent of sexual violence

- Sexual violence is a major problem in the UK.
- Sexual violence consists of rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse and exploitation. In some cultures it can also include female genital mutilation.
- In 2005 there were 14,000 reported rapes in England and Wales and an estimated 80,000 unreported rapes, according to government figures.
- One in five women will also experience some form of sexual assault in adulthood and one in five girls and one in ten boys will experience some form of sexual abuse in childhood, according to government figures.
- Young women aged 16-25 are more likely to experience rape and sexual assault than any other age group.

2. Impacts and Consequences of Rape and Sexual Assault

- The Government has stated that '***Sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse are two of the most serious and damaging crimes in our society.***' (Sexual Violence and Abuse Action Plan, 2007).
- The health impacts of rape and sexual assault are considerable. Women and girls may experience unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, panic attacks, and attempt suicide.
- A Home Office* study found that health related costs of a rape case are £73,487. This is the highest of any crime. (*The economic and social costs of crime against individuals and households 2003-04, published July 2005).
- Being raped can also have wider implications and affect family members of the victim. These can be worse for families from Black and Minority Ethnic communities
- Victims may lose their jobs and they and their families may have to move home, when they know the perpetrator.
- Rape and sexual abuse are both a consequence and cause of gender inequality. Most victims are female, most perpetrators are male (Sexual Violence and Abuse Action Plan, April 2007).
- Reporting rape is a very hard step to take for victims. They fear not being believed; hostile police questioning and facing the ordeal of having to relive their experiences in court. Many victims feel that they themselves are being put on trial, rather than the defendant.

- **Black and minority ethnic victims** may be even more reluctant to report, because they may have a distrust of the police and fear unfair and discriminatory practices, or that shame and dishonour will be brought on the family.

3. The need for a rape crisis centre in Bristol

Number of Rapes/Sexual Assaults

	2005-06	2006-07
a. Reported sexual offences	621	698
Sexual Offences change (increase/decrease)		12% increase
(source: Home Office website – recorded crime stats)		
b. Estimates of unreported offences		
However, on average less than 20 per cent of rapes and serious sexual assaults are reported to the police. year on year. A conservative estimate of unreported serious offences is more likely to be	2484	2792
Totals	3105	3490

Given the increased vulnerability of young women to rape and sexual assault and the high number of young people in Bristol due to the presence of two universities, the actual figure may be much higher than that cited above.

There is no dedicated rape and sexual assault service in Bristol, to which victims can turn for information, support, advocacy or counselling.

A needs assessment, undertaken with other voluntary organisations, identified this gap. These organisations were unanimous in supporting the need for a dedicated rape crisis service in the city and did not see any overlap with their own work.¹

Bristol Council has a legislative gender duty to meet the service needs of women and obligations to meet Public Service Agreements in this area.

*(See note at end)

. A specific service would provide:

- 1. A telephone helpline**
- 2. Immediate and long-term advice, support and advocacy to victims**
- 3. Face to face counselling**
- 4. Specialist training to volunteers on understanding the impacts of rape and appropriate support to victims and their families.**

¹ These organisations included: - Next Link, Knowle West Domestic Abuse Project, Avon Sexual Abuse Centre, Kinergy, YWCA.

5. Specialist services for Black and Minority Ethnic Women

Potential Outcomes – A dedicated rape crisis and sexual assault service would

- **Reduce the mental health impacts of rape and sexual assault for victims**
- **Assist more victims to gain justice through the criminal justice system**
- **Improve public safety**

4. Why does Bristol need a Rape Crisis Centre, when it is developing a SARC?

Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCS) provide only short-term counselling for people who have been raped. A SARC is most likely to deal with adult victims who report to the police in the first instance, whereas Rape Crisis deals with all female victims, including many who do not wish to report to the police and victims of historic childhood sexual abuse. A Rape Crisis Centre provides a confidential service, from women counsellors, and can therefore meet the needs of women who do not wish to, or cannot because of their ethnic cultural background, seek help from men.

When the Bristol SARC is in place, it is essential that a Rape Crisis service exists, as a SARC will not be able to meet the ongoing needs of victims; they do not deal with childhood sexual abuse, and do not offer women-only services.

5. Why do we need a Rape Crisis Centre when we have domestic violence services?

Domestic violence services are not the same as sexual assault services, which need counsellors trained specifically in the impacts of rape and sexual abuse, including childhood sexual abuse. The government has developed separate sexual violence targets which are different from domestic violence targets (PSA 23 and 24 and Sexual Violence and Abuse action plan). Additionally, half of women are not raped in the domestic context and would not be considered victims of domestic violence.

We would like all three political groups to support this vital provision of a Rape Crisis Centre in Bristol from next year's budget, in order to meet both the statutory and moral obligations of this city.

Note: Changes in legislation mean that local councils are now under some obligation to meet the service needs of women and specifically, to tackle sexual violence. These changes are embodied in:

- Gender Equality Duty, (April, 2007).
- Cross Government Sexual Violence and Abuse Action Plan (April, 2007)
- PSA 23 'Make Communities Safer' (October, 2007)
- PSA 24 'Deliver a more effective transparent and responsive Criminal Justice System for victims and the public' (also known as 'The Criminal Justice' PSA), (October, 2007)
- National Indicator 26 'Specialist support to victims of a serious sexual offence' PSA 23 (The New Performance Framework for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Single Set of National Indicators)