**Sexual Assault and Abuse: Needs and Priorities**

Prior to the pandemic in Cumbria there had been several research documents and needs assessments conducted into the needs and priorities for victims and survivors. As this was produced prior to the pandemic some agencies have recognised a change in the number of victims and survivors coming forward and the types of needs they now require support with.

Set out below is a summary of information collated from previous needs assessments, police data and partnership discussions which were conducted through our Safer Cumbria Partnership, which included input from our Sexual Abuse and Domestic Abuse Groups.

For the purpose of this funding round, applications are encouraged which support the needs and priorities of those areas highlighted in bold in this report. For further information on services expected to be available in the county during the funding period, please contact the OPCC.

**Trends in Sexual Abuse and Assault in Cumbria**

Cumbria Constabulary has seen an increase in reporting of sexual offences, the increase is still on the rise and is overtaking levels of reporting last seen in 2019.

**489** rapes and **1165** other sexual offences were recorded by Cumbria Constabulary in the 12 months to 28th February 2022.

The main types of sexual offences recorded in this time period were:

* Sexual assault on a female aged 13 years and over
* Rape of a female aged 16 years and over
* Sexual activity involving a child under 13 years
* Sexual activity involving a child under 16 years

During the periods where restrictions were relaxed during the Coronavirus Pandemic, support service providers have reported an increase in demand for help.

Support Services have also reported seeing an increase in the number of service users needing assistance with more complex needs (e.g., mental health, financial support and practical issues).

This support needs to be addressed with the victim/survivor before they can then concentrate on dealing with the actual abuse or assault, they have experienced.

This then increases the length of time support is required for that victim/survivors needs and also the types of support which will benefit them.

The Cumbria Community Safety Assessment identified that the majority of offences involving young victims is around “causing or inciting a child to watch or engage in sexual activity”, or “sexual communication with a child” which is often committed over the internet and is not a direct contact offence. There has been an increase in online child sexual exploitation and an increase in concerns relating to young people sending nude images.

On average between 10% and 20% of the service users who have accessed one of the Bridgeway Sexual Assault Support Services are reported as being male. A small number of service users report being transgender, non-binary or gender fluid. (It is recognised that some people may not wish to disclose). The male population in Cumbria is estimated to be around 49%[[1]](#footnote-1) **so further work is required to provide services for the needs of men, to make men more aware and give them confidence to access support if they need it.**

It is reported that 44% of victims of rape and 68% of victims of other sexual assaults/offences were under 18 years of age at the time of the offence (for data to 28th February 2022) - it is worth noting that many of the reports made by adults occurred more than a year before they actually reported the offence (66%).

Approximately 22% of service users of the sexual assault support services which make up the Bridgeway Support, are aged under 18 years, this is a lower proportion to crimes reported but a higher proportion when you look at the population of children under 18 years in Cumbria which 18%. It is noted that children under 5 may not be able to engage with some types of support which also impacts the figures in part.

**Services for children and young people and for survivors of historic childhood abuse are required, as well as services which encourage and enable young people to get support soon after the event.**

**The vulnerability of people with drug or alcohol dependency and/ or mental health issues to domestic or sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or sex working has repeatedly been identified as a risk factor, which requires joined-up approaches of services to prevent and support victims with complex needs.**

**Sustainability of Services**

Through the pandemic, Cumbria has been able to obtain additional funding via a number of sources (such as via Ministry of Justice and the Covid Recovery Fund) which have supported community organisations to work with sexual abuse victims, including those who have experienced sexual abuse as part of domestic abuse. Some of this funding has ended and some will shortly come to an end, leaving a potential gap in service provision in the future. With many changes around commissioning, agency structures and uncertainties about future funding for sexual abuse services, **ensuring the sustainability of the core offer of services in the county will need to be a priority.**

**Emerging Gaps and Needs**

The following were recently highlighted by the Safer Cumbria Sexual Abuse Group as areas where further support would be beneficial or where there were gaps in services:

* **Children and young people: responding to a trend in peer-on-peer sexual abuse amongst young people aged 13 to 18 years, this also includes sexting; and we need to look at developing an appropriate approach to support**
* **Male victim support - particularly in relation to historic abuse and increases in sexual assaults on males.**
* **Therapeutic services, particularly adults (currently there are long waiting times for specialist services, which impact on the length of support required by other services supporting the victim/survivor until they move onto therapy).**
* **Support for people who are black or brown or minority ethnic /Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic - encouraging these victims to come forward**
* **Support for children and young people at risk or experiencing child sexual exploitation.**
* **An overall challenge related to mental health services availability**
* **A continued need for support for victims of historic abuse, which is often related to domestic abuse / sexual abuse**

**Survivors’ Voices**

Previous research into survivors’ lived experiences after sexual abuse or assault, feedback via support service providers and research into preferences for accessing services highlights those important aspects of support should include:

* **Emotional support;**
* **Help with understanding the police and court processes, as well as other services such as sexual health;**
* **Practical help, such as filling in forms and navigating dealing with the impact of the crime(s) such as health care, rehousing, absence from work and benefits, plus advocacy where needed;**
* **Timely access to support.**
* **Availability of services in different locations within the county;**
* **Having the option not to involve the police.**
* **Gender-aware approaches, with a choice of gender of the support worker being important for some;**
* **For young people, being spoken to and supported directly by the support worker, with or without their parents/carers, and support appropriate to their age;**
* **Avoiding the unnecessary repeating of information and having to retell their story to agencies;**
* **Finding the right service quickly and not having to contact, or be contacted by, multiple services, especially if it is hard to know which service to contact- having a “joined-up” service pathway;**
* **Confidentiality of the service and consent to share information (wherever possible);**
* **Being taken seriously and listened to;**
* **Sensitivity of and respectfulness of the staff, showing care and consideration;**
* **Being kept informed and having someone to contact when needed;**
* **Having a variety of ways to get in contact with a service.**

**People who are Less Likely to Access Services (Underrepresented Groups)**

* Women have the highest representation amongst victims. As well as specialist sexual violence services, community services for women have been developed locally to provide a universal first step and have given an opportunity for women to start to seek support in a different way. **Ensuring sustainability of these different routes to access services is a priority.**
* People are accessing support services who are BAME, LGBT, male and/or with disabilities but it is believed that some face barriers or are not comfortable to engage with support as it is currently provided or advertised, particularly BAME (including Eastern European, gypsy and travellers). Through the Safer Cumbria Sexual Abuse Group, **it has been recognised that this is an area in need of development- especially BAME (including people who are Eastern European, gypsy and travellers).**
* Male victims- There has been a recent trend of more men reporting sexual abuse and some good work to support men in certain services. **Challenges include ensuring the sustainability of this targeted work and ensuring it is offered across all services men may need.**
* **Victims/ survivors in rural areas have been identified as facing barriers to accessing services,** although some recent outreach work has increased access for some women (in relation to domestic abuse rather than sexual abuse specifically). **This continues to be an area of need of development in Cumbria.**

**References**

[Crime and Community Safety Strategic Assessment Cumbria 2020-21](https://cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/671/4674/17217/17222/44560133847.pdf)

Serious Violence Needs Assessment conducted for Safer Cumbria Partnership (2022)

Safer Cumbria Needs Assessment (2022)

Getting it Right for Adults following rape and sexual abuse (2015) and Getting it Right for Children and Young People following rape and sexual abuse (2015)- Research conducted by Safety Net on behalf of Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group

“Taking the Next Steps” Review of Service Provision for the People of Cumbria Affected by Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: Professional Lead Research Report to Cumbria Police and Crime Commissioner

“Care, Consideration and a Voice for Victims” Review of Support Needs and Service Provision for Victims in Cumbria: Professional Lead Research Report to Cumbria Police and Crime Commissioner

1. 2020 population estimate, Cumbria Observatory. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)