

VOICES OF SURVIVORS: HEARING WOMEN FOR CHANGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Hearing Women for Change

MORE THAN HALF OF FEMALE SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN GREATER MANCHESTER HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO ACCESS THE SUPPORT THEY NEED.

“As a society, we believe that sexual violence is a crime, no matter who commits it or where it happens. Yet 56% of female survivors from Greater Manchester have not been able to access the support they need.

For those who have, where they live has played a massive part in whether they have had the right support available to them.” Cate Allison, CEO, MASH

The Voices of Survivors (VOS) partnership, made up of Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH), Manchester Rape Crisis (MRC) and Trafford Rape Crisis (TRC), has listened to the views of 383 female survivors of sexual violence in Manchester to influence long-term change.

These women said:

“I didn’t know who to speak to about it.”

“I have never told anyone about it for fear of being judged.”

“People did not believe me.”

“I didn’t know where to go or who to contact.”

WHAT WE FOUND:

GEOGRAPHY MATTERS — “NOTHING IN MY AREA”

Where people live in Greater Manchester affects the likelihood of survivors accessing support. Specialist services operate mainly in central Manchester and Trafford. In Manchester and Salford, just over half the women we spoke to had accessed support. In Bolton, Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside, this fell to below one third.

EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE — “I FELT IT WAS MY FAULT, I THOUGHT IT HAPPENED TO EVERYONE”

173 women told us they had been raped. 153 women told us they had been victims of child sexual abuse. 84 women told us they had experienced sexual abuse in the home. For four women, completing the questionnaire was the first time they had disclosed what had happened to them.

EXPERIENCE OF SUPPORT — “I DIDN’T KNOW HOW TO FIND THE WORDS TO EXPLAIN IT”

The women we spoke to told us specialist women’s services such as Rape Crisis, MASH and other independent agencies like the LGBT Foundation, NSPCC and Samaritans were the most helpful.

For many women though, their most useful source of support was friends.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NOW?

“WE WANT TO WORK TOGETHER TO ENSURE THAT FEMALE SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE ARE ABLE TO ACCESS THE SUPPORT THEY NEED”

We see this research as the beginning of long-term commitment to change. We are committed to establishing a Greater Manchester-wide network of survivors, third sector organisations and statutory partners. There needs to be a greater awareness of sexual violence as an issue in society so that more of the people approached by survivors can offer some support. In order to achieve this we recommend:

- 1** A distinct Sexual Violence strand within the emerging Greater Manchester Violence against Women and Girls Strategy.
- 2** A review of current commissioning arrangements.
- 3** The establishment and resourcing of a Greater Manchester-wide Sexual Violence Network.

Led by the third sector, the network would:

Ensure that sexual violence is recognised and continues to be recognised as a significant issue by policy makers, providers and commissioners in Greater Manchester.

Continue to ensure that the voices of survivors are heard and responded to.

Support frontline workers, both statutory and voluntary through: training, sharing information and enabling networking.

Ensure that organisations are aware of each other’s work and are able to develop appropriate pathways between them.

**“I DIDN’T KNOW WHERE TO
GO OR WHO TO CONTACT.”**

**“THERE WAS NOTHING
IN MY AREA.”**

**“I HAVE NOT TOLD ANYONE
ABOUT IT BEFORE NOW.”**

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