



Research on Sexual Abuse: Mapping the Gaps in Northern Ireland

A project by Nexus and Victim Support NI

March 2025



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Introduction

The aim of this joint project is to identify research gaps relating to sexual abuse in Northern Ireland. This project sought to scope out what research already exists and what the gaps are with a view to inform future research. It was intended that the focus of this project was on research based on Northern Ireland with the view of achieving two key outcomes:

1. Build a repository of local research for reference.
2. Highlighting gaps to inform key stakeholders and offer insight as to the need for research in certain areas.

Overview

Part I: The Literature Review is divided into two parts - the Thematic Review and the subsequent Review of Research 1 Year On. Sections I-V collate research on sexual abuse in Northern Ireland from the last 15 years; Section VI provides an update on research from 2023-2024 to review against the recommendations in Section V.

Part II: Overview of the Joint Sector Workshop presentations and Roundtable discussions.

Part III: Summary of concluding findings and the recommendations for future research and collaboration initiatives.

Appendix I: Repository of Research identified through the desktop gap analysis and the Workshop Roundtables.

Appendix II: Provides a list of organisations that attended the workshop.

Appendix III: Lists research recommendations from reports, reviews, and inquiries conducted on Northern Ireland to benchmark against recent research findings.

The project was carried out jointly by Nexus and Victim Support NI.

Part 1: Literature Review

I. Methodology

To meet our research objectives, we used the following criteria to select and screen research outputs:

1. Literature would be limited to academic research, statutory and sectoral reports, legislation, statutory and sectoral recommendations and initiatives.
2. The above literature must be within the last 15 years, 2008-2023. (we later added an update on research from 2023-2024 to review against the recommendations)

3. The above literature must pertain to Northern Ireland. For the comparative exercise, regional and international literature may be included but is not the primary focus of the mapping exercise.
4. The above literature must relate to the topic of sexual abuse.

We employed the following search engines, websites, and open access online journal databases to identify relevant work to include in our review:

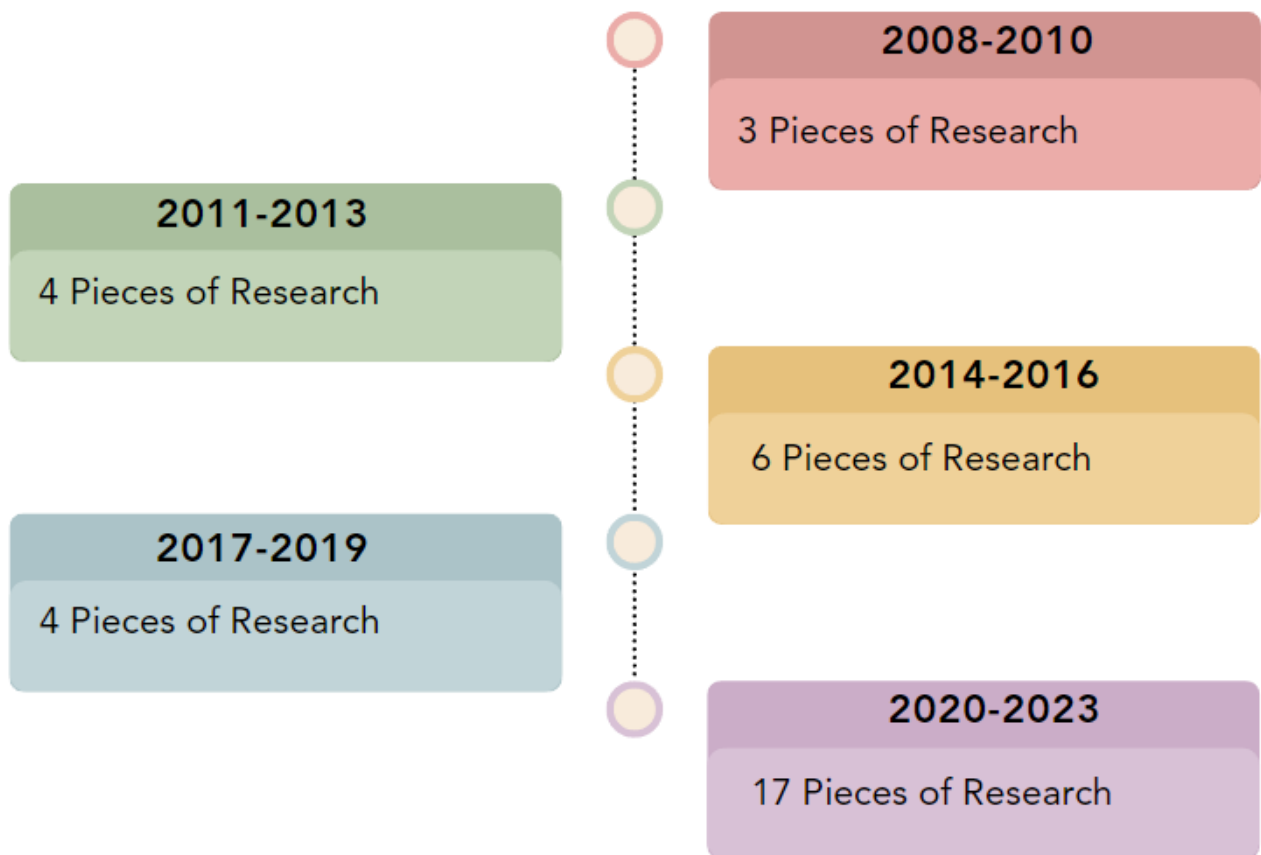
Google Scholar
Legislation.gov.uk
ScienceDirect
ResearchGate
University of Edinburgh
Queen's University Belfast
Ulster University
Wiley Online Library
Sage Journals
SSRN
Springer
Taylor and Francis Online
Department of Justice NI
Public Prosecution Service
Department of Health NI
Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
Victim Support NI
Northern Ireland Victims of Crime Commissioner Designate

The following limitations are recognised as having had a material impact on the outcomes of the literature review

1. Inability to access articles, reports, and research that were not open access
2. Low number of suitably qualified staff to conduct research reviews;
3. Restricted timeline to conduct review.

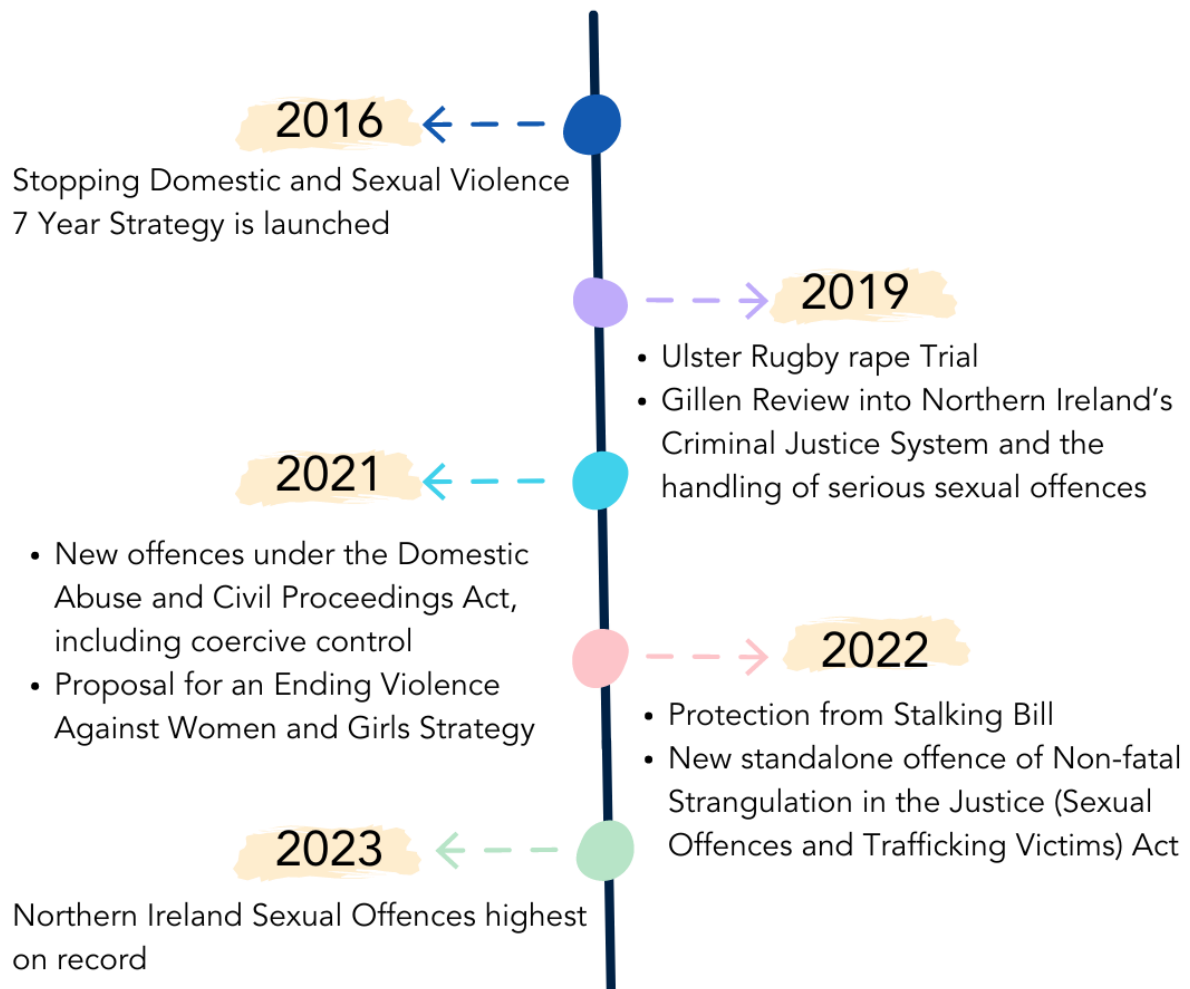
II. Results: Research Timeline

The parameters discussed in the Methodology section informed our research outputs. As a result, the mapping exercise identified 34 pieces of research relating to sexual abuse in Northern Ireland. The following illustrates the timeline of research, the titles of which can be found in Section III,



To further contextualise the rapid increase in research outputs from 2014 to 2023, we included a timeline of notable events, actions, and initiatives during the same period. (see next page)

Both timelines showcase the context for progress in sexual abuse research and the motivations for increasing research output.



III. Results: Thematic Review of Existing Literature

Through the research mapping process, 4 themes were identified that characterised the research. These are detailed below:

1. Support and Service Delivery
2. Criminal Justice
3. Prevention (Education and Awareness)
4. Experiences and Prevalence (Victims' Voices, Special Interest Groups)

The following section will overview the research as categorised using the themes above.

Theme 1: Support and Service Delivery

Subthemes: Types of support available; Provision of services; Gaps in delivery; Where is the support coming from?

Sexual abuse and therapeutic services for children and young people: The gap between provision and need, NSPCC, Allnock et al., 2009. Link access [here](#)

In Demand: Therapeutic Services for Children and Young People Who Have Experienced Sexual Abuse, NSPCC, Allnock et al., 2012. Link access [here](#)

A Review of the Adult Safeguarding Framework in Northern Ireland, the UK, Ireland and Internationally, commissioned by the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, Carter Anand et al., 2014. Link access [here](#)

Supporting adult victims of sexual violence & abuse: An international scoping review to inform service development in Northern Ireland, Impact Research Centre and Queen's University Belfast, McCartan et al., 2023. Link access [here](#)

Theme 2: Criminal Justice

Subthemes: Victim Experiences of the Courts and Support Services; Pressures on the Criminal Justice System

Sexual Offences against children: An exploration of attrition in the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System, Bunting, 2008. Link access [here](#)

Sexual Violence and Abuse - A thematic inspection of the handling of sexual violence and abuse cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, 2010. Link access [here](#)

Child Victims in Contact with the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, NSPCC, 2011. Link access [here](#).

Sexual Violence and Abuse: A follow-up review of inspection recommendations for PSNI and PPS made in the Criminal Justice Inspection NI's 2010 Report (see below), Criminal Justice Inspection, 2013. Link access [here](#)

Research into the Experiences of Victims of Sexual Abuse/Violence, Analytical Services Group of the Department of Justice NI, 2015. Link access [here](#)

Gillen Review: Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland, 2019. Link access [here](#)

Sexual Offence Trials in Northern Ireland: The Cultural and Legal Dimensions, in Sexual Violence on Trial, Dowds and McAlinden, 2020. Link access [here](#)

Sexual Violence on Trial: Local and Comparative Perspectives, Killeen et al., 2021 (hard copy only available to team)

Without Witness: A Thematic Inspection of the Handling of Sexual Violence and Abuse Cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, Criminal Justice Inspection, 2021. Link access [here](#)

Bearing Witness- Report of the Northern Ireland Court Observer Panel 2018-2019, Victim Support NI, 2021. Link access [here](#)

Who's Under Investigation? The Processing of victim's personal data in rape and serious sexual offence investigations, ICO, 2022. Link access [here](#)

Theme 3: Prevention and Early Intervention

Subthemes: Public Awareness of Sexual Abuse Signs and Support Services; Provision of Relationship and Sexuality Education

Reducing the barriers to relationships and sexuality education for persons with intellectual disabilities, Lafferty et al., 2012. Link access [here](#)

Attitudes to sexting amongst post-primary pupils in Northern Ireland: a liberal feminist approach, MacKenzie and Purdy, 2021. Link access [here](#)

Statement on Children's Rights in Northern Ireland 3, NICCY, 2022. Link access [here](#)

Putting the Child at the Centre - Barnahus (Children's House) – a one door approach to supporting children who have been sexually abused in Northern Ireland' NICCY, 2022. Link access [here](#)

Exploring the Validity of a Modified Version of the SES-SFV with Students Attending Northern Irish Universities, Anyadike-Danes et al. 2023. Link access [here](#)

Theme 4: Experiences and Prevalence (Victim's Voices, Special Interest Groups)

Subthemes: Diversity and Representation in experiences of victims; Prevalence of sexual abuse in Northern Ireland

Young people's self-reported experiences of sexual exploitation and sexual violence: a view from Northern Ireland, Beckett and Schubotz, 2014. Link access [here](#)

Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland- Report of the Independent Inquiry, Kathleen Marshall, 2014. Link access [here](#)

Understanding Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: Prevalence, policy, and practise, in The Routledge Handbook of Irish Criminology, Holt and Devaney, 2015. Link access [here](#)

Policing unruly women: The state and sexual violence during the Northern Irish Troubles, O'Keefe, 2016. Link access [here](#)

Gender, violence and reparations in Northern Ireland: A story yet to be told, O'Rourke and Swaine, 2017. Link access [here](#)

The other side of late-life intimacy? Sexual violence in later life, Bows, 2020. Link access [here](#)

Gender and Sexuality Politics in Post-conflict Northern Ireland: Policing Patriarchy and Heteronormativity Through Relationships and Sexuality Education, Wilkinson, 2021. Link access [here](#)

Unseen at Uni: Unwanted and Non-Consensual Sexual Experiences Reported by University Students in Northern Ireland, Anyadike-Danes et al. 2022. Link access [here](#)

Speaking Out on Sexualized Violence Through Artistic Storytelling in Post-conflict Northern Ireland, Van Ooijen et al. 2023. Link access [here](#)

Every Voice Matters! Violence Against Women in Northern Ireland, Ulster University, Lagdon et al. 2023. Link access [here](#)

'It's just what happens' Girls' and young women's views and experiences of violence in Northern Ireland, Queen's University Belfast, McAlister et al. 2023. Link access [here](#)

Experiences and Mental Health Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence against Men and Boys: A Rapid Review, Commissioner for Victims of Crime, McGlinchey et al., 2023. Link access [here](#)

IV. Results: Global Trends Comparison

As part of a comparative analysis, the above research exercise was also completed on sexual abuse research for regional and global outputs. The following research has been included in this project to contextualise Northern Ireland-focused research within regional and global outputs:

UK Research
Cybering, online grooming and ageplay, Kierkegaard, 2008. Link access here
The prevalence of child sexual abuse in community and student samples: A meta-analysis, Pereda et al, 2009. Link access here
Review of Meta-Analyses on the Association Between Child Sexual Abuse and Adult Mental Health Difficulties: A Systematic Approach, Hillberg et al, 2011. Link access here
Estimating the costs of child sexual abuse in the UK, Saied-Tessier, 2014. Link access here
Image-Based Sexual Abuse, McGlynn and Rackley, 2017. Link access here
Beyond 'Revenge Porn': The Continuum of Image-Based Sexual Abuse, McGlynn et al, 2017. Link access here
Long-term outcomes of childhood sexual abuse: an umbrella review, Hailes et al, 2019. Link access here
Technology assisted child sexual abuse in the UK: Young people's views on the impact of online sexual abuse, Hamilton-Giachritsis et al, 2020. Link access here
Republic of Ireland Research
The media and the Catholic Church in Ireland: Reporting clerical child sex abuse, Donnelly, 2010. Link access here
Profiles of adult survivors of severe sexual, physical and emotional institutional abuse in Ireland, Fitzpatrick, 2010. Link access here
Lost in Translation: The Legal appropriation of the voice of child sexual abuse victims in Ireland, McDonough, 2010. Link access here
Comparing incarcerated and college student women with histories of childhood sexual abuse: The roles of abuse severity, support, and substance use, Asberg, 2013. Link access here
Disclosure of child sexual abuse: Delays, non-disclosure and partial disclosure. What the research tells us and implications for practice, McElvaney, 2015. Link access here
Child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church: A review of global perspectives, Terry, 2015. Link access here
"Why would you want to do that work?" The positive impact on therapists of working with child victims of sexual abuse in Ireland: a thematic analysis, Wheeler, 2018. Link access here
Benevolent Secularism and the Recalibration of Church-State Relations in Ireland in the Aftermath of the Clergy Child Sex Abuse Scandals, Warner, 2020. Link access here

Sexual violence and its associated psychosocial effects in Ireland, Vallieres, 2022. Link access [here](#)

International Research*

Saving masculinity:” Gender reaffirmation, sexuality, race, and parental responses to male child sexual abuse, McGuffey, 2008. Link access [here](#)

Child sexual abuse: Consequences and implications, Hornor, 2010. Link access [here](#)

Educational resilience among African survivors of child sexual abuse in South Africa, Phasha, 2010. Link access [here](#)

Cultural issues in disclosures of child sexual abuse, Fontes, 2010. Link access [here](#)

Prevalence and correlates of emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse and potential neglect in the United States: The National Elder Mistreatment Study, Acierno, 2010. Link access [here](#)

A meta-analysis of disparities in childhood sexual abuse, parental physical abuse, and peer victimization among sexual minority and sexual nonminority individuals, Friedman, 2011. Link access [here](#)

Sexual abuse in Malawi: Patterns of disclosure, Mason, 2014. Link access [here](#)

Epidemiology of child sexual abuse, Salter, 2014. Link access [here](#)

Physical, emotional and sexual adolescent abuse victimisation in South Africa: prevalence, incidence, perpetrators and locations, Meinck, 2016. Link access [here](#)

Childhood trauma, intimate partner violence, and harsh parenting: findings from the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific, Fulu, 2017. Link access [here](#)

Stigmatized loss in women survivors of childhood sexual abuse in South Africa, Ebrahim, 2018. Link access [here](#)

Sexual abuse and exploitation of unaccompanied migrant children in Greece: Identifying risk factors and gaps in services during the European migration crisis, Digidiki, 2018. Link access [here](#)

Rethinking the detection of child sexual abuse imagery on the internet, Bursztein, 2019. Link access [here](#)

Thirty years of the convention on the rights of the child: Developments in child sexual abuse and exploitation, Simon, 2020. Link access [here](#)

Improving justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in research on sexual abuse perpetration, Fanniff, 2022. Link access [here](#)

*Countries identified in the scoping exercise include United States, South Africa, Malawi, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Greece.

Using the thematic review above, a visual representation of the word data from each article title was created to present the current research available in Northern Ireland on the topic of sexual abuse. Word clouds are created based on the frequency of word data present, meaning that the larger and bolder the word appears in the graphic, the more often the word appears in the subject data. The purpose of this was to identify the reoccurring trends

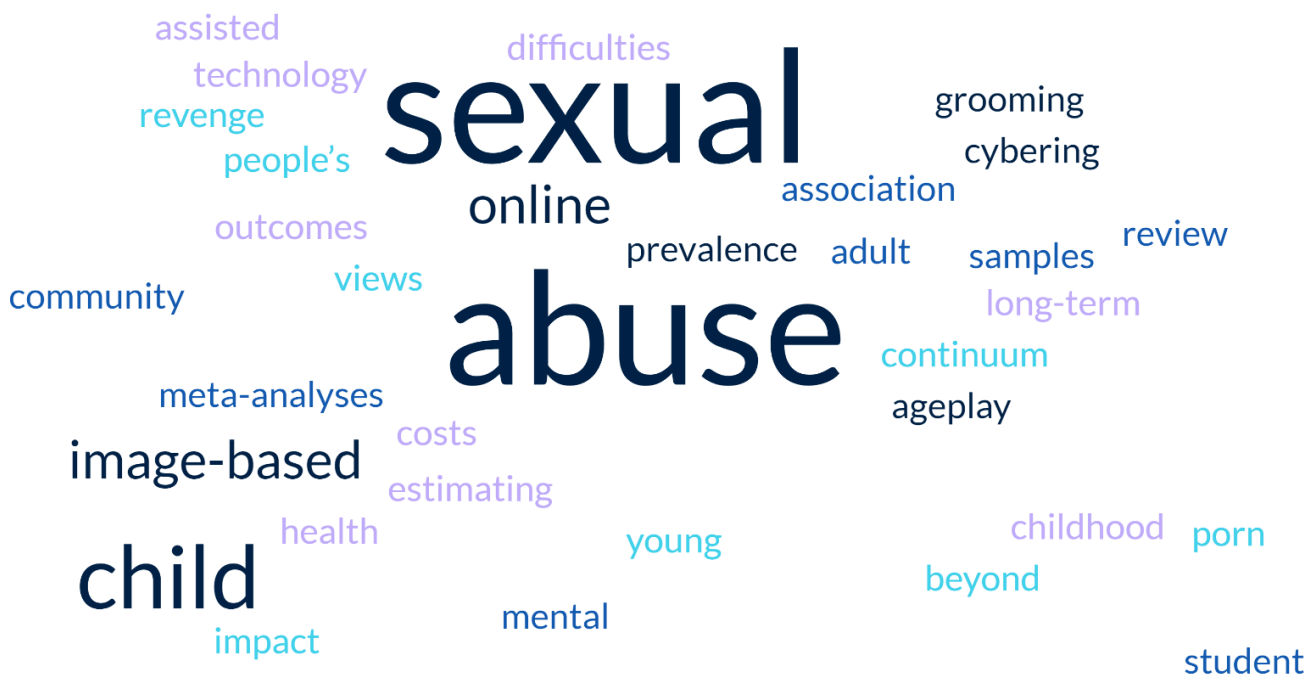
Trends in Research on Sexual Abuse- Northern Ireland



Trends in Research on Sexual Abuse- Republic of Ireland



Trends in Research on Sexual Abuse- United Kingdom



*Trends in Research on Sexual Abuse- International**



*Countries identified in the scoping exercise include United States, South Africa, Malawi, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Greece.

These word clouds provide snapshots into the kinds of research being conducted around the world with regards to sexual abuse. By presenting the reoccurring words in a size comparative manner, we can see the different focuses within sexual abuse research in each geographic area. For example, research in the Republic of Ireland focused heavily on child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, whilst trends in Great Britain would indicate a larger focus on online abuse. The international research ranges from exploitation to parental abuse, to males and masculinity, showing a greater variety of research into sexual abuse.

Northern Ireland's word cloud revealed a greater focus on violence as opposed to abuse, as well as research on sexuality and victims' experiences. It is important that we look to other jurisdictions and regions for their research outputs and critically examine the emerging themes, trends, and focuses that can guide research in Northern Ireland.

V. *Results: Thematic Review- Identified Gaps in Research*

From the thematic review and subsequent word cloud exercise, we determined that there were significant gaps in research subject in Northern Ireland. Some of the gaps include:

1. Male Victims

The statistics vary, however the Office for National Statistics report that 1 in 18 men have been raped or sexually assaulted as an adult¹. We know that there are significant sociocultural barriers to reporting and seeking support for anyone who identifies as male, and as such the current Northern Ireland research landscape does not reflect male experiences of sexual abuse.

2. Victims with Disabilities

Research from Safe Lives UK found that 31% of disabled victims suffered from sexual abuse compared with 23% of non-disabled victims². The same report stated that disabled victims were also more likely to report abuse from multiple perpetrators; one in five (19%) compared with around one in 20 (6%) non-disabled victims. There are significant risks that may impact someone with a disability who is suffering from abuse, such as living and caring arrangements, access to support services, power imbalances, and access to life supporting equipment being withheld by the abuser. It is vital that research in Northern Ireland reflects the experiences of people with disabilities and the significant barriers to reporting and receiving support.

3. Racial and Ethnic Diversity

Between March 2018 and March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that individuals identifying as Black or Black British and Mixed ethnicities were significantly more likely to experience sexual assault within the preceding year compared to individuals of White, Asian, or Other ethnic backgrounds³. There is a lack of research in Northern Ireland on the experiences of people who also experience racism and ethnic discrimination.

4. LGBTQIA+ Victims

¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/sexualoffencesprevalenceandvictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales>

² <https://safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub/spotlights/spotlight-2-disabled-people-and-domestic-abuse>

³

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/sexualoffencesvictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/march2020#:~:text=For%20the%20year%20ending%20March%202018%20to%20year%20ending%20March,assault%20within%20the%20last%20year>

From a Galop Survey in 2023, 88% of LGBTQIA+ respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment and 77% reported experiencing sexual assault since the age of 18⁴. In the same report, 31% of the trans women surveyed reported being sexually abused by a stranger. LGBTQ-phobia, risk of being ‘outed’, and discrimination are just some of the barriers for LGBTQIA+ people to reporting and seeking support for sexual abuse. Current research in Northern Ireland does not appropriately address LGBTQIA+ experiences of abuse.

5. Refugees and Asylum Seekers

A study by the Sexual and Gender Based Violence against Refugees from Displacement to Arrival (Sereda) found that 66% of women who had sought asylum in the UK had experienced gender-related persecution in some form, including rape, sexual violence, forced prostitution and forced marriage⁵. As our society becomes more diverse, it is important that our research reflects the experiences of everyone.

6. Early Intervention and Education

We know from research that factual and age-appropriate Relationships and Sexuality Education alongside other broader educational support can support the following outcomes for children and young people:

- A) Promote safe sexual health practices
- B) Challenge rape myths and stereotypes inherent in society
- C) Enable disclosures and appropriate signposting.

In a survey conducted by the Belfast Youth Forum, 52% of young people said they felt their right to RSE was not being met⁶. In another report by SafeLives, one student told researchers “We’re being taught this stuff too late, and, at this point, I feel like...the information that we have, either we learnt it from our parents, or we learnt it on the internet because the school really doesn’t do much to help us with these types of topics”⁷. With the RSE content announcement by the Secretary of State⁸, the subsequent RSE Consultation⁹, and the Assembly’s Education Committee conducting an Inquiry into RSE, it is imperative that research into early intervention is conducted to measure the experiences, implications, and successes of RSE to inform best practise.

This is not an exhaustive list; however, the exercise provided a starting point for facilitating the workshop portion of the project.

⁴ <https://galop.org.uk/resource/sexual-violence-a-snapshot-of-those-harming-lgbt-people/>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/29/victims-of-sexual-violence-let-down-by-uk-asylum-system-report-says#:~:text=Previous%20research%20found%20that%20out,soldiers%2C%20police%20and%20prison%20guards.>

⁶ <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/youth-forum/any-use-report#ourfindings>

⁷ <https://safelives.org.uk/press-release-RSE-Report>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-requirements-for-relationship-and-sexuality-education-curriculum-in-northern-ireland>

⁹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/consultations/relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse-consultation>

VI. Results: Research One Year On

The following is a repository of research published after the Joint Research Workshop in October 2023. This section serves as a snapshot of where the landscape of research on sexual abuse in Northern Ireland has progressed in the last 11 months, with the aim of undertaking a review of research objectives and opportunities identified in Section III.

To meet our research objectives, we used the following criteria to select and screen research outputs:

1. Literature would be limited to academic research, statutory and sectoral reports, legislation, statutory and sectoral recommendations and initiatives.
2. The above literature must be within the last year, from October 2023 to August 2024.
3. The above literature must pertain to Northern Ireland. For the comparative exercise, regional and international literature may be included but is not the primary focus of the mapping exercise.
4. The above literature must relate to the topic of sexual abuse.

a. Literature Review

Following the above criteria for October 2023 to August 2024, 14 pieces of research were identified in the literature review. This is a significant increase in yearly output compared to the previous gap analysis, where research output reached its highest between 2022 and 2023, with 10 pieces of research in year.

The following research has been categorised to reflect progress on the research gaps identified in Section V. The categories are:



Category 1: Research that continues to explore one of the 4 Themes.

Category 2: Research that addresses an identified gap.

Category 3: Research that explores an unidentified gap.

Northern Ireland Research	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
Reforming the law on 'Reasonable Belief' in Consent: Lessons from Rape Reform in Northern Ireland, Dowds, 2023. Link access here			✓
Non-recent Institutional Abuses and Inquiries: Truth, Acknowledgement, Accountability and Procedural Justice,			✓

Transforming Justice Project, 2023. Link access here			
Lessons from Transitional Justice? Toward a New Framing of a Victim-Centered Approach in the Case of Historical Institutional Abuse, Hamber, Lundy, 2020. Link access here			✓
Public Understanding of Coercive Control in Northern Ireland, Lagdon et al., 2023. Link access here	✓		
Resurfacing Gender: A Typology of Conflict-Related Violence Against Women for the Northern Ireland Troubles, Swaine, 2023. Link access here	✓		
Introducing a Criminal Offence of Domestic Abuse in Northern Ireland: Comparative Insights into Criminalising Coercive Control, Bettinson, McQuigg, 2023. Link access here			✓
Young People's Understanding of Coercive Control in Northern Ireland, Lagdon et al., 2023. Link access here		✓	
Technology-facilitated abuse within the context of intimate partner violence: Barriers to and recommendations for safety planning, Pentaraki, Speake, 2024. Link access here			✓
Towards a New Criminal Offence of Intimate Intrusions, McGlynn, 2024. Link access here			✓
'Nobody ever told you, "actually, this feels great"': Religion informed sexual health education and barriers to developing sexual literacy, Flanagan, 2024. Link access here		✓	
(Un)reasonable Beliefs: How rape myth beliefs impact (mock) juror decision-making in Northern Ireland and how potential bias might be lessened, in Contemporary Challenges in the Jury System: A Comparative Perspective, Cowan, 2024. Link access here	✓		
Cyberbullying and sexting: regulatory challenges in the digital age, Agnew, 2024. Link access here			✓

Social media and political participation: making sense of digital feminist Twitter artifacts in the aftermath of a Belfast rape trial and #IBelieveHer in Handbook of Social Media in Education Consumer Behaviour and Politics, Holm et al., 2024. Link access here			
The Battle for Believability: Sexual Trauma, Testimony, and Victimhood in Anna Burns' 'Milkman' and Ruth Ozeki's 'A Tale for the Time Being', Marisa, 2024. Link access here			

b. Research Timeline

As referenced in Part A, the October 2023 to August 2024 gap analysis found the highest rate of research publication compared to the 2008-2023 research review. To further contextualise the rise in research outputs from 2023-2024, we included a timeline of notable events, actions, and initiatives during the same period.



c. Global Trends Comparison

As part of a comparative analysis, the above research exercise was also completed on sexual abuse research for regional and global outputs for the same time period, between 2023 and 2024. The following research has been included in this project to contextualise Northern Ireland-focused research within regional and global outputs:

Republic of Ireland Research
Addressing domestic, sexual and gender-based violence Part One: Overview, Doyle et al., 2021. Link access here
Addressing domestic, sexual and gender-based violence Part Two: Interventions, Doyle et al., 2021. Link access here
Addressing domestic, sexual and gender-based violence Part Three: National Strategies/Actions Plans to address GBV, Doyle et al., 2021. Link access here
Female perpetrated sexual assault: a review of attendances to the national sexual assault treatment units in the Republic of Ireland, Kane, Eogan, 2023. Link access here
Female adolescent sexual assault; a national review of 1014 consecutive cases, Kane, Eogan, 2024. Link access here
Post-exposure prophylaxis, STI testing and factors associated with follow-up attendance: a review of 4159 cases of acute post-sexual assault medical care, Kane et al., 2024. Link access here
Male patient attendances at Sexual Assault Treatment Units in Ireland: An analysis of 381 cases and a comparison with female patients, Kane et al., 2024. Link access here
Sexual assault of the older person: Attendances to the Republic of Ireland's sexual assault treatment unit network, Kane et al., 2024. Link access here
"Wherever There's Men, it can Happen": Constructions of Violence Against Women by Young Adults in Ireland, Bolton et al., 2023. Link access here
How Effective Are Ireland's Monitory Mechanisms in Improving Its Child Protection and Welfare Services?, Burns et al., 2024. Link access here
Socioecological Risk and Protective Factors for Sexual Victimization in Post-Secondary Students in Ireland: A Brief Report, Mahon et al., 2024. Link access here
CASEE - Introducing a new assessment tool for supporting victims of Child Sexual Exploitation, Ireland et al., 2024. Link access here
Rapid Review of Evidence on Delays in Processing Criminal Adult Sexual Cases, An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt, Hanly, Cassidy, 2024. Link access here
Patterns of Sexual Harassment: An Intersectional Approach to Reported Victimization in a Campus Climate Survey of Students at Irish Higher Education Institutions, Dawson et al., 2024. Link access here
What We Don't Know Really Will Hurt Us: Examining Trauma Awareness Knowledge, Strategies, and Training in Ireland's Early Childhood Education and Care Profession, Sheehan et al., 2024. Link access here

UK Research
Sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape by colleagues in the surgical workforce, and how women and men are living different realities: observational study using NHS population-derived weights, Begeny et al., 2023. Link access here
General practice trainees' understanding of post-sexual assault care: the impact of a specialist educational intervention, Kane et al., 2024. Link access here

Genital signs of child sexual abuse in boys: a systematic review, Law et al., 2023. Link access here
Papering over the Cracks or Rebuilding the System: Opportunities and Challenges for the Barnahus Model in the United Kingdom, in Justice and Recovery for Victimised Children, Devaney et al., 2024. Link access here
Support or justice: a triangulated multi-focal view of sexual assault victim support in a UK sexual assault referral centre (SARC), Widanaralage et al., 2024. Link access here
Moving beyond masculine defensiveness and anxiety in the classroom: exploring gendered responses to sexual and gender-based violence workshops in England and Ireland, Ging et al., 2024. Link access here
What are practitioners' views of how digital health interventions may play a role in online child sexual abuse service delivery?, Quayle et al., 2024. Link access here
Sexual Violence Among Higher Education Students in the United Kingdom: Results from the Oxford Understanding Relationships, Sex, Power, Abuse and Consent Experiences Study, Steele et al., 2024. Link access here
Online violence against women: A Four Nations study, Olga, 2024. Link access here
How to talk about relationships and sexuality with people who have intellectual disabilities: New guidelines on relationships and sexuality education programmes for children and young adults with intellectual disabilities offer nurses practical advice, Brown, 2024. Link access here
Patriarchy, Masculinities and Gender-Based Violence in Rural Communities in Rural Social Work in the UK, Turbett, 2024. Link access here
'The culture is disgusting': analysing continuities and differences in experiences and perceptions of youth rape culture through cross-generational testimonies online, Whitehead, 2024. Link access here
Pornography, the Online Safety Act 2023 and the need for further reform, McGlynn et al., 2024/ Link access here
Pornography Is Not the Answer (It Isn't Even the Right Question ...): Reflections from Practice in Tackling Sexual Harassment and Harmful Sexualised Behaviours in Response to Everyone's Invited and the Online Safety Bill, Hunt, 2024. Link access here
The Experiences of Young People with Intellectual Disability, Parents and Professionals in Relationships and Sexuality Education Programmes: Findings from a Qualitative Study, Brown et al., 2024. Link access here
Male rape: survivors, support and the law in late twentieth-century England and Wales, Severs, 2024. Link access here
UK prevalence of university student and staff experiences of sexual violence and domestic violence and abuse: a systematic review from 2002 to 2022, Jones et al., 2024. Link access here
General practice trainees' understanding of post-sexual assault care: the impact of a specialist educational intervention, Kane et al., 2024. Link access here
The multiple and competing functions of local reviews of serious child abuse cases in England, Dickens et al., 2024. Link access here
Who's Who? Individual Characteristics of Those Involved in Sexual Assaults in Adult Men's Prisons in England and Wales, Wilkinson, 2024. Link access here

Student-reported relationships and sex education coverage and knowledge among a diverse population of early adolescents: a cross-sectional survey of students in England, Melendez-Torres et al., 2024. Link access [here](#)

International Research*

The prevalence of genital injuries in post-pubertal females presenting for forensic examination after reported sexual violence: a systematic review, Kane et al., 2023. Link access [here](#)

Comprehensive sexuality education: an overview of the international systematic review evidence, UNESCO, Lohan, López, 2023. Link access [here](#)

Prevalence of unwanted sexual experiences and their associations on university students in the United States, United Kingdom, and Ireland: a systematic review, Reynolds et al., 2023. Link access [here](#)

Violence against women during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Scoping review of the literature in collaboration with the World Health Organization protocol, Ain et al., 2023. Link access [here](#)

Review of Child Sexual Abuse Reported by Adult Survivors: Legal Responses in England and Wales, Ireland and Australia, Ring et al., 2023. Link access [here](#)

‘Then I Met This Lovely Police Woman’ Young People's Experiences of Engagement with the Criminal Justice System, McElvaney et al., 2024. Link access [here](#)

Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault: A Systematic Review, Recalde-Esnoz et al., 2024. Link access [here](#)

Sexual abuses in the Peruvian ecclesial environment in Abuse in the Latin American Church, Pratto et al., 2024. Link access [here](#)

Male Intimate Partner Violence Victims’ Experiences With Seeking Help From Legal System Services Over Time and Across Countries, Hines, Lysova, 2024. Link access [here](#)

A Qualitative Study on University Students’ Perceptions Regarding Sexual Violence Perpetrated by Women Against Men, de Oliveira et al., 2024. Link access [here](#)

Justice and Recovery for Victimised Children, Johansson et al., 2024. Link access [here](#)

A scoping review of policing and coercive control in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer plus intimate relationships, Jennings-Fitz-Gerald et al., 2024. Link access [here](#)

Sexual Harassment Myths and Victims’ Blame Game among the Students of Institutions of Higher Learning, Okafor et al., 2024. Link access [here](#)

Parental involvement in school-based sexuality education in the WHO European Region: findings from a scoping review and expert consultations, Sara et al., 2024. Link access [here](#)

Defining and Measuring Sexual Consent within the Context of University Students’ Unwanted and Nonconsensual Sexual Experiences: A Systematic Literature Review, Anyadike-Danes et al., 2023. Link access [here](#)

Origin stories: Framing 25 years of Dutch political discourse on child sexual exploitation by tourists and travelers, Koning et al., 2024. Link access [here](#)

Legal Protection of Revenge and Deepfake Porn Victims in the European Union: Findings From a Comparative Legal Study, Mania, 2024. Link access [here](#)

*Countries and Regions identified in the scoping exercise include the United States, Australia, the European Union, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Netherlands, Canada, Portugal, Nigeria

As was done in Section IV, a word cloud was created to highlight the prevalence of specific research topics in relation to sexual abuse research globally. The following word clouds can be compared internally as well as contrasted against the same exercise undertaken in Section IV.

Trends in Research on Sexual Abuse- Northern Ireland 2024



[illegible]

sexual

violence

assault

relationships

abuse

education

experiences

study

intervention

genital

pornography

intellectual

online

support

people

disabilities

impact

different

observational

uk

gender-based

nhs

programmes

care

living

women

papering

population-derived

sex

rural

educational

specialist

realities

among

young

post-sexual

harassment

workforce

using

weights

signs

general

child

understanding

practice

rape

men

colleagues

culture

and

Trends in Research on Sexual Abuse- International* 2024



*Countries and Regions identified in the scoping exercise include the United States, Australia, the European Union, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Netherlands, Canada, Portugal, Nigeria

As can be seen above, there are both similarities and differences between the research conducted in Northern Ireland and internationally. For instance, research in the Republic of Ireland focused on delays in the criminal justice system and the types of evidence used in sexual offence cases, whilst research in the United Kingdom focused on online harms and education. Research globally focused on prevalence rates and experiences of sexual abuse amongst students. Interestingly, the most common research in Northern Ireland centred on coercive control and barriers to disclosures.

d. Concluding Thoughts

From this review, it can be deduced that there has been a marked shift in research focus compared to the same exercise conducted in Section IV. In the case of Northern Ireland, research conducted between 2008 and 2023 focused on sexual violence, victims' experiences, and children. One year later, research in the same geographic region largely focused on coercive control and sexual abuse. The most recent outputs also highlighted digital abuse more frequently than in the previous exercise, as well as education and barriers to disclosure.

In summary, the literature review conducted in the year following the joint workshop explored new topics such as coercive control, digital abuse, and the role of social media in

facilitating abuse. With the implementation of the Online Safety Act and increasing awareness of coercive control, it can be expected that there will be further research forthcoming in these areas. Recent research also addressed one of the identified gaps from Section V- youth education and RSE will continue to be a burgeoning field of research as updated RSE Guidance is released, and the Committee on Education conducts its Inquiry into RSE.

Part 2: Joint Workshop

I. Methodology of the Workshop

The literature review conducted in Part 1 informed the development of the workshop, enabling the team to organise a thematic inspection of the research and maximise joint working amongst the attendees. A list of organisations that attended the workshop can be found in Appendix I. The day was divided into two halves- a series of presentations to contextualise research in Northern Ireland, the challenges and methods of conducting research, and an overview of the literature review. Specifically, the first portion of the day included:

- *Evidence Through to Impact - Professor Cherie Armour, Professor of Psychological Trauma & Mental Health, Queen's University Belfast*
 - A discussion on the importance of researching in order to identify gaps in knowledge, create policy and practise, and impact attitudes, awareness, and understanding.
- *Sexual Abuse in Northern Ireland Literature Review - Meg Stith, Policy & Research Officer, Nexus*
 - A presentation of thematic literature review and potential gaps for future research.
- *Sexual Violence on Campus – The Journey of Conducting Research - Dr Susan Lagdon, Lecturer in Psychology (Mental Health), Ulster University*
 - A report on research on unwanted and non-consensual sexual experiences at Northern Irish universities and the importance of ethical design in sexual abuse research.
- *Experiences and Mental Health Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence against Men and Boys, A Rapid Review - Geri Hanna, Victims of Crime Commissioner*
 - A review of the available literature on exploring impacts of intimate partner violence on men and boys to identify key priorities for further work.

The second portion of the day was dedicated to the roundtable discussions with the aim of identifying gaps in research and key priorities for future projects. The workshop was designed around the 4 themes in the literature review- Support and Service Delivery, Criminal Justice, Prevention and Early Intervention, and Experiences and Prevalence. In order to facilitate knowledge sharing across all identified themes, guests were attributed to a round table and were provided with the literature review 3 weeks before the event to facilitate informed discussions exploring each theme on a rotational basis. The questions at each table were as follows:

1. Are you aware of data/research missing from what's been collated so far?
2. Are you aware of any pieces of research from other regions/parts of the world that could/should be replicated in Northern Ireland?
3. Ideas from your own practice – where are you are having difficulties finding data/think there should be more data available?
4. How can we make partnerships between statutory, academic and voluntary and community sectors better in this area?

II. Results from the Roundtable Group Discussions

The following section is compiled of each table's contributions to the four themes of the workshop, including relevant research and recommendations for future work. The research identified through the workshop is included in the full repository of sexual abuse research in Northern Ireland in Appendix I.

Identified Research in Northern Ireland

- Helping Hands Evaluation Report, 2020. Link access [here](#).
- "Keeping Safe Report", NSPCC, 2021. Link access [here](#).
- "Independent separate legal representation for rape complainants in adversarial systems: lessons from Northern Ireland", Iliadis, Smith, Doak, 2021. Link access [here](#).
- "Are Juries Fair?" Ministry of Justice Research Series, Thomas, 2010. Link access [here](#).
- "Violence Against Women and Girls in Northern Ireland", NI Women's Policy Group, 2022. Link access [here](#).
- "Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland", Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, 2020. Link access [here](#).
- "Females in Conflict with the Law", Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, 2021. Link access [here](#).
- "Any Use? Young people's opinions on Relationships and Sexuality Education in Belfast" Belfast Youth Forum, 2019. Link access [here](#).
- "'I presume she wanted it to happen': rape, reasonable belief in consent, and law reform in Northern Ireland", Dowds, 2022. Link access [here](#).
- "Redefining consent: rape law reform, reasonable belief, and communicative responsibility", Dowds, 2022. Link access [here](#).

- “Survived...but at what cost? A study of women in the criminal justice system who experienced domestic abuse, and the potential for change” McGuigan, Walker, 2019. Link access [here](#).
- “Everyone’s Invited” database of anonymous stories of survivors of rape culture. Link access [here](#).

Gaps in Research and Data

- Harmful sexual behaviours in schools
- University Staff Support for handling and experiencing sexual abuse
- Disclosure Research- who do people disclose to in various locations such as school or work?
- Gendered Housing and safety at home for people affected by sexual abuse
- Offenders, Sexual Assault trauma and risk of reoffending, rehabilitation
- Experiences of Military veterans
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Victims of Modern Slavery and sexual abuse who are not foreign nationals
- Data on Vulnerabilities, Neurodivergent individuals, and people with disabilities- ADHD, dyslexia, other physical, mental, psychological disabilities and experiences of sexual abuse
- Data on victims and their victim personal statements
- Police Service NI do not collect data on characteristics of victims- we need quality data on disability, sexual orientation, age etc. for all crime types (not just hate crime)
- Cases in which rape myths have been utilised in court
- Age breakdown of defendants and any effect this has on conviction rates
- Confidence in the criminal justice system- Are there any alternative paths other than the courts that could help bring satisfaction?
- Delays, special measures data- how it is captured?
- Attrition rates
- Possible emerging research with older people and Early Intervention.
- Gaps with Men and LGBTQIA communities
- Correlation between socially and economically deprived areas and sexual abuse
- Gap in support for parents who may have not received education on healthy relationships when they were younger that they could pass down to their own children
- Education and challenging rape culture at all levels of society
- Sexual History Evidence
- Paramilitary abuse and post-conflict societies experiences of sexual abuse
- Experiences of Refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants

- People who experience homelessness and those who are in precarious living situations. For example, victims of domestic violence.
- Experiences of all victims of modern slavery and sexual exploitation, regardless of nationality or immigration status
- Experiences of Sex workers
- Data on the effect of rape myths on reporting sexual offences, particularly regarding young people.
- Experiences of Children in the care system
- Experiences of Older Women

Recommendations- Academic Sector

- Look at recommendations for actions from existing research, and if those have been achieved, and look at what is still ongoing or expired
- Collaboration within the sectors-open days and networking events with charities/universities
- Open access frameworks - accessible research, 10 free e-copies, creating repository. Networks and newsletters being set up by Ulster University - suggestion this could be shared through Northern Ireland Council of Voluntary Action (NICVA)
- Enhanced understanding of scale of the problem including all forms of sexual abuse as well as online abuse
- Greater networking opportunities – putting a face to the name and knowledge sharing.
- Up to date Northern Ireland specific information and research database with email alerts and easy to understand summaries of new developments.

Recommendations- Voluntary and Community Sector

- Issue of resourcing- we need to pull our resources, data research together to share knowledge
- Would be worth looking into an interactive system that the statutory and voluntary sectors have access to map the journey of victims through the criminal justice system and provide recommendations, support, etc.
- Reaching out to other sectors groups on signs of abuse and support – school bus drivers, people who look after sports grounds etc.
- Bedrock/foundational data should be collected by all with each organisation collecting data outside of this for their own service - how are we contributing to delivery of government strategies?

Recommendations- Systemic Change

- Unified criminal justice database
- Constant monitoring of how strategy is working- fixing as we go, being reflective and responsive

- Biannual meeting with researchers, community and voluntary sector, and relevant stat agencies
- Enhanced provision for increased prevalence of cybercrimes in this area. More specialised and better resourced to cope with increased demand.

Part 3: Conclusion and Recommendations

Through a joint research project and scoping workshop, we brought together 50 representatives from 25 different organisations, government departments, and universities to examine current research into sexual abuse in Northern Ireland and explore future projects and partnerships. Researchers from Victim Support NI and Nexus presented the research landscape through 4 identified themes, illustrating the focus of past and present research. The workshop event created a forum for discovering further research as well as discussing how we can advance our research outputs to represent new ideas and platform marginalised groups. The findings of this report demonstrate the extensive nature of sexual abuse in Northern Ireland and the work that needs to be done to engage with diverse people who have experienced sexual abuse to inform policy and improve practise. As a result of the above work and the research gap analysis, we identified the following recommendations:

1. There is a growing need for more evidence-based research to support initiatives and support trauma-informed approaches to research, projects, and reformation of the criminal justice system, education, healthcare, and more. We should be investing in research opportunities and promoting the work of researchers from all institutions, levels of study, and primary focus to expand our learnings. This research should be multi-faceted and represent Northern Ireland's diverse society and should make a considerable effort to reach the most marginalised in society.
2. From the roundtable discussions, it was clear that there needs to be a collaborative and accessible forum for research to be shared and connections to be built between organisations. The community and voluntary sector, research institutions, and governmental departments work in tandem but do not always exchange best practise and share information consistently. Whether this be an open access database, a membership forum, or another iteration of teamwork, there is a need for a coordinated joint effort to tackle sexual abuse, violence against women and girls, and promoting healthy relationships in society.
3. When research is produced and recommendations are made, there should be greater effort dedicated to monitoring the progress of the recommendations and analysing how the recommendations are being implemented, and if not, how we can improve application.

Victim Support NI and Nexus are thankful for attendees' participation and look forward to progressing the recommendations made throughout this report. The ongoing work to tackle sexual abuse and abusive relationships is paramount to creating a healthier, happier, and more equal society in Northern Ireland. Collaboration, communication, and investing in research will support this mission and lay the foundation for positive change.

Part 4: Appendixes

Appendix I: Research Repository

The following is the full collection of identified research on sexual abuse in Northern Ireland, from 2008 to 2024. The research has been categorised by the following Themes:

- Theme 1: Support and Service Delivery
- Theme 2: Criminal Justice
- Theme 3: Prevention and Early Intervention
- Theme 4: Experiences and Prevalence
- Theme 5: Emerging Issues

Theme 1: Support and Service Delivery

Subthemes: Types of support available; Provision of services; Gaps in delivery; Where is the support coming from?

Sexual abuse and therapeutic services for children and young people: The gap between provision and need, NSPCC, Allnock et al., 2009. Link access [here](#)

In Demand: Therapeutic Services for Children and Young People Who Have Experienced Sexual Abuse, NSPCC, Allnock et al., 2012. Link access [here](#)

A Review of the Adult Safeguarding Framework in Northern Ireland, the UK, Ireland and Internationally, commissioned by the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, Carter Anand et al., 2014. Link access [here](#)

Helping Hands Evaluation Report, 2020. Link access [here](#)

Keeping Safe Report, NSPCC, 2021. Link access [here](#)

Supporting adult victims of sexual violence & abuse: An international scoping review to inform service development in Northern Ireland, Impact Research Centre and Queen's University Belfast, McCartan et al., 2023. Link access [here](#)

Theme 2: Criminal Justice

Subthemes: Victim Experiences of the Courts and Support Services; Pressures on the Criminal Justice System

Sexual Offences against children: An exploration of attrition in the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System, Bunting, 2008. Link access here
Sexual Violence and Abuse - A thematic inspection of the handling of sexual violence and abuse cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, 2010. Link access here
"Are Juries Fair?" Ministry of Justice Research Series, Thomas, 2010. Link access here
Child Victims in Contact with the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, NSPCC, 2011. Link access here
Sexual Violence and Abuse: A follow-up review of inspection recommendations for PSNI and PPS made in the Criminal Justice Inspection NI's 2010 Report (see below), Criminal Justice Inspection, 2013. Link access here
Research into the Experiences of Victims of Sexual Abuse/Violence, Analytical Services Group of the Department of Justice NI, 2015. Link access here
Gillen Review: Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland, 2019. Link access here
"Survived...but at what cost?" A study of women in the criminal justice system who experienced domestic abuse, and the potential for change, McGuigan, Walker, 2019. Link access here .
Sexual Offence Trials in Northern Ireland: The Cultural and Legal Dimensions, in Sexual Violence on Trial, Dowds and McAlinden, 2020. Link access here
Sexual Violence on Trial: Local and Comparative Perspectives, Killeen et al., 2021(hard copy only available to team)
Without Witness: A Thematic Inspection of the Handling of Sexual Violence and Abuse Cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, Criminal Justice Inspection, 2021. Link access here
Bearing Witness- Report of the Northern Ireland Court Observer Panel 2018-2019, Victim Support NI, 2021. Link access here
Females in Conflict with the Law, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, 2021. Link access here
Independent separate legal representation for rape complainants in adversarial systems: lessons from Northern Ireland", Iliadis, Smith, Doak, 2021. Link access here
Who's Under Investigation? The Processing of victim's personal data in rape and serious sexual offence investigations, ICO, 2022. Link access here
(Un)reasonable Beliefs: How rape myth beliefs impact (mock) juror decision-making in Northern Ireland and how potential bias might be lessened, in Contemporary Challenges in the Jury System: A Comparative Perspective, Cowan, 2024. Link access here

Theme 3: Prevention and Early Intervention

Subthemes: Public Awareness of Sexual Abuse Signs and Support Services; Provision of Relationship and Sexuality Education

Reducing the barriers to relationships and sexuality education for persons with intellectual disabilities, Lafferty et al., 2012. Link access [here](#)

Any Use? Young people's opinions on Relationships and Sexuality Education in Belfast, Belfast Youth Forum, 2019. Link access [here](#)

Attitudes to sexting amongst post-primary pupils in Northern Ireland: a liberal feminist approach, MacKenzie and Purdy, 2021. Link access here
Statement on Children's Rights in Northern Ireland 3, NICCY, 2022. Link access here
Putting the Child at the Centre - Barnahus (Children's House) – a one door approach to supporting children who have been sexually abused in Northern Ireland' NICCY, 2022. Link access here
Exploring the Validity of a Modified Version of the SES-SFV with Students Attending Northern Irish Universities, Anyadike-Danes et al. 2023. Link access here
Public Understanding of Coercive Control in Northern Ireland, Lagdon et al., 2023. Link access here
Young People's Understanding of Coercive Control in Northern Ireland, Lagdon et al., 2023. Link access here
'Nobody ever told you, "actually, this feels great"': Religion informed sexual health education and barriers to developing sexual literacy, Flanagan, 2024. Link access here

Theme 4: Experiences and Prevalence (Victim's Voices, Special Interest Groups)

Subthemes: Diversity and Representation in experiences of victims; Prevalence of sexual abuse in Northern Ireland

Young people's self-reported experiences of sexual exploitation and sexual violence: a view from Northern Ireland, Beckett and Schubotz, 2014. Link access here
Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland- Report of the Independent Inquiry, Kathleen Marshall, 2014. Link access here
Understanding Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: Prevalence, policy, and practise, in The Routledge Handbook of Irish Criminology, Holt and Devaney, 2015. Link access here
Policing unruly women: The state and sexual violence during the Northern Irish Troubles, O'Keefe, 2016. Link access here
Gender, violence and reparations in Northern Ireland: A story yet to be told, O'Rourke and Swaine, 2017. Link access here
The other side of late-life intimacy? Sexual violence in later life, Bows, 2020. Link access here
Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, 2020. Link access here .
Gender and Sexuality Politics in Post-conflict Northern Ireland: Policing Patriarchy and Heteronormativity Through Relationships and Sexuality Education, Wilkinson, 2021. Link access here
Unseen at Uni: Unwanted and Non-Consensual Sexual Experiences Reported by University Students in Northern Ireland, Anyadike-Danes et al. 2022. Link access here
Violence Against Women and Girls in Northern Ireland, NI Women's Policy Group, 2022. Link access here
Speaking Out on Sexualized Violence Through Artistic Storytelling in Post-conflict Northern Ireland, Van Ooijen et al. 2023. Link access here
Every Voice Matters! Violence Against Women in Northern Ireland, Ulster University, Lagdon et al. 2023. Link access here

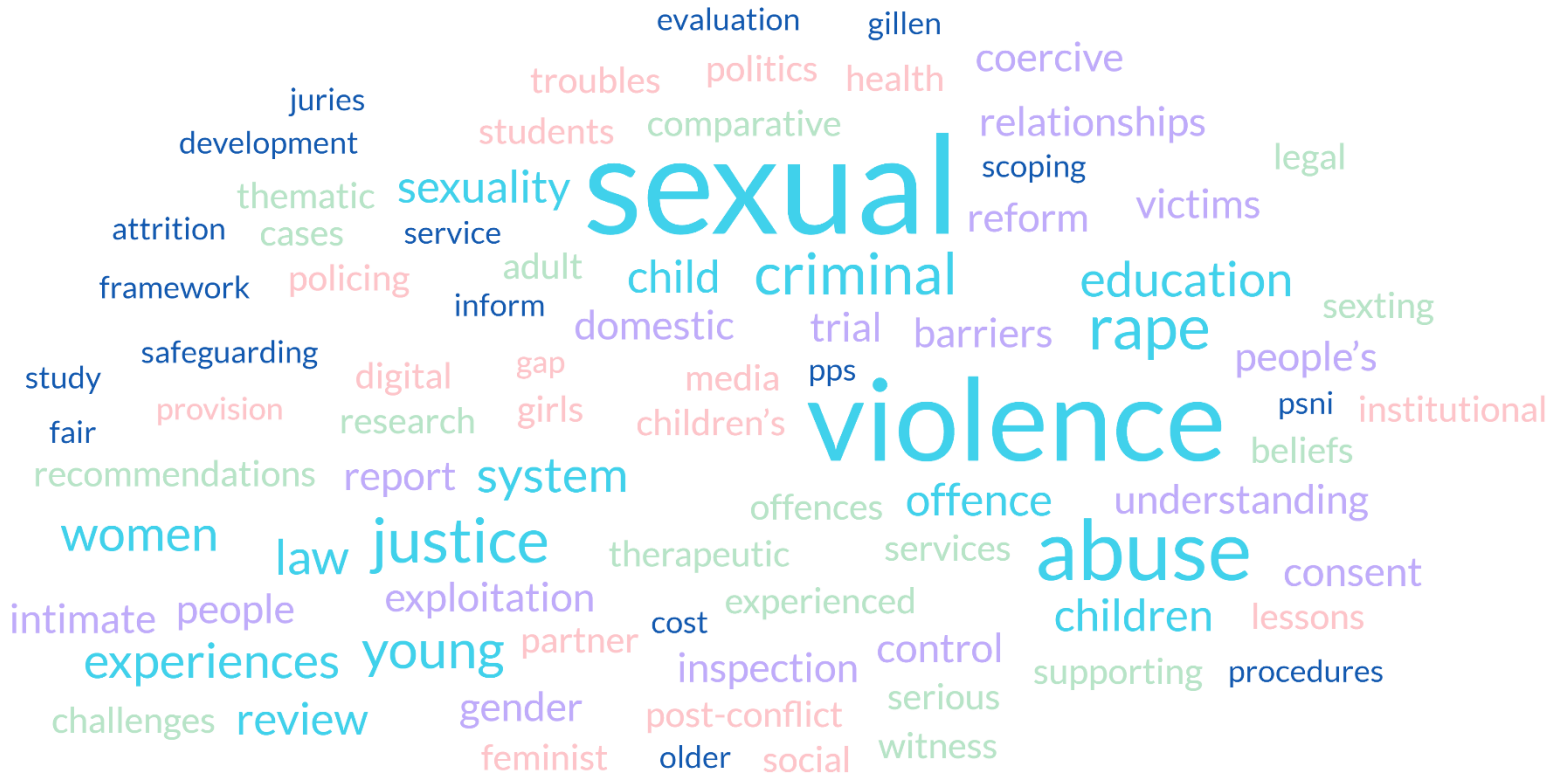
'It's just what happens' Girls' and young women's views and experiences of violence in Northern Ireland, Queen's University Belfast, McAlister et al. 2023. Link access here
Experiences and Mental Health Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence against Men and Boys: A Rapid Review, Commissioner for Victims of Crime, McGlinchey et al., 2023. Link access here
Resurfacing Gender: A Typology of Conflict-Related Violence Against Women for the Northern Ireland Troubles, Swaine, 2023. Link access here
The Battle for Believability: Sexual Trauma, Testimony, and Victimhood in Anna Burns' 'Milkman' and Ruth Ozeki's 'A Tale for the Time Being', Marisa, 2024. Link access here

Theme 5: Emerging Issues

Subthemes: Law reform; Considerations for business sector, regulatory bodies, service providers, statutory agencies; Technology and social media; Victim-Centred Approaches

Redefining consent: rape law reform, reasonable belief, and communicative responsibility, Dowds, 2022. Link access here
'I presume she wanted it to happen': rape, reasonable belief in consent, and law reform in Northern Ireland, Dowds, 2022. Link access here
Reforming the law on 'Reasonable Belief' in Consent: Lessons from Rape Reform in Northern Ireland, Dowds, 2023. Link access here
Introducing a Criminal Offence of Domestic Abuse in Northern Ireland: Comparative Insights into Criminalising Coercive Control, Bettinson, McQuigg, 2023. Link access here
Towards a New Criminal Offence of Intimate Intrusions, McGlynn, 2024. Link access here
Cyberbullying and sexting: regulatory challenges in the digital age, Agnew, 2024. Link access here
Social media and political participation: making sense of digital feminist Twitter artifacts in the aftermath of a Belfast rape trial and #IBelieveHer in Handbook of Social Media in Education Consumer Behaviour and Politics, Holm et al., 2024. Link access here
Technology-facilitated abuse within the context of intimate partner violence: Barriers to and recommendations for safety planning, Pentaraki, Speake, 2024. Link access here
Lessons from Transitional Justice? Toward a New Framing of a Victim-Centered Approach in the Case of Historical Institutional Abuse, Hamber, Lundy, 2020. Link access here
Non-recent Institutional Abuses and Inquiries: Truth, Acknowledgement, Accountability and Procedural Justice, Transforming Justice Project, 2023. Link access here
"Everyone's Invited" database of anonymous stories of survivors of rape culture. Link access here .

Trends in Research on Sexual Abuse- Northern Ireland, 2008-2024



Appendix II: Joint Workshop Attendees

We would like to extend our thanks to the following organisations for attending the Joint Workshop and sharing their valuable expertise:



Ulster University

Queen's University Belfast

Equality Commission for NI

Office of the Mental Health Champion

NSPCC Young Witness Service

Foyle Women's Aid

The Family Justice Centre

Public Prosecution Service

Sexual Trauma and Recovery Service for Children & Adolescents (STARNI)

Criminal Justice Inspection NI

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Department of Justice

Department of Education

Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime

Cithrah Foundation

ASSIST NI - Domestic & Sexual Abuse Advocacy Support Service

Regional Trauma Network

North Down & Ards Women's Aid

HERE NI

Probation Board NI

Advocacy VSV

Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Team - Northern Ireland Executive Office

Department of Health

Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse (COSICA)

Appendix III: Inquiries, Reports, Strategies, and Reviews

The following appendix includes research-specific recommendations that focus on fact-finding and developing policies and guidelines to support strategic outcomes. Reviewing these recommendations measures progress on achieving the research-related aims of each strategy, report, or review. Thematically, the various recommendations fall into the following categories:

- Research on public awareness and subsequent awareness-raising campaigns
- Measuring satisfaction levels and user satisfaction
- Developing service guides and educational materials for professionals
- Conducting prevalence studies
- Measuring social attitudes, awareness, and experiences
- Section 75 specific research

Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse: A Regional Strategy 2008-2013, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2008 ([link](#))

Prevention

Research-related Performance Indicators

- the proportion of those interviewed through the Northern Ireland Crime Survey that say they have been the victim of a sexual offence;
- public attitudes and perceptions about sexual violence and abuse; (using NI Crime Survey and other surveys);
- delivery of public information campaign increasing public understanding towards issues surrounding sexual violence and abuse;
- number of schools and further and higher education institutions delivering targeted messages;
- delivery of personal safety campaign, communicating strategic messages including influence of alcohol and drugs and that “no” means “no”;

Protection and Justice

Research-related Performance Indicators

- satisfaction levels to measure the services delivered to victims and witnesses across the criminal justice system.

Support

Research-related Performance Indicators

- average waiting times for counselling services for recent and historical cases of sexual violence and abuse;

The use of special measures in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, 2012 ([link](#))

Research Recommendations

1. A guide to working with intimidated witnesses for police and criminal justice system practitioners, such as is available in England and Wales, is not available in Northern Ireland. Inspectors therefore recommend that the DoJ oversee the development of such a guide, with consultation and contributions from all relevant agencies, which should inform all criminal justice system practitioners and the public alike of the criminal justice system processes and of the help and support available. When developed, such guidance may act as a reference for criminal justice organisations internal policies and an addendum to the Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) Guidance.
- b. Inspectors recommend that a criminal justice system-wide leaflet is developed and made available, which clearly sets out for witnesses, the kind of support available to them, and the organisations who may provide it. This includes on the NI Direct website and that this is also linked via the various criminal justice system agency websites

CEDAW Inquiry concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 2018 ([link](#))

On 9 December 2010, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women received information from several organizations 1 pursuant to article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The sources allege that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has committed grave and systematic violations of rights under the Convention owing to the restrictive access to abortion for women and girls in Northern Ireland.

Research Recommendations

- A. *Sexual and reproductive health rights and services*
 - a. Provide non-biased, scientifically sound and rights-based counselling and information on sexual and reproductive health services, including on all methods of contraception and access to abortion;
 - b. Make age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights a compulsory component of curriculum for adolescents, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, and monitor its implementation;
 - c. Intensify awareness-raising campaigns on sexual and reproductive health rights and services, including on access to modern contraception;
 - d. Adopt a strategy to combat gender-based stereotypes regarding women's primary role as mothers;

Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland: A Seven Year Strategy, DoJ, 2018 ([link](#))

Research Priorities- Prevention and Early Intervention

1. Establish a baseline on societal attitudes to domestic and sexual violence and abuse.
2. Teachers will have access to a range of age appropriate and evaluated resources to support the teaching of sensitive subjects.

Research Priorities-Delivering Change through Responsive Services

12. A renewed emphasis on awareness training, on how to recognise, respond, and seek help; and this may include facilitating safe disclosure in line with recognised standards.
14. Appropriate partnership networks to increase multi-agency recognition and responses to domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

Research Priorities- Protection and Justice

18. Continue to develop and deliver initiatives and interventions, based on best practice, to effectively address harmful, violent and abusive behaviour.

Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland, Part 1, Sir John Gillen, 2019 ([link](#))

This report contains a large array of individual recommendations, all of them important and relevant. Together they create a pattern of coordinated reform. The following recommendations pertain to research:

4. Measures should be introduced at the outset of the trial to combat rape myths for example, jury educational material, a short video and written judicial directions. In the wider context there is a need for an extensive public awareness and school education campaign
11. The Department of Justice should commission individual research projects to gather knowledge and data in Northern Ireland on the prevalence, extent, nature and experiences of serious sexual offences. This should include identifying how current law and procedures impact on black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, immigrants, LGBT+ groups, Traveller communities, sex workers, older people, males and those people with a physical, sensory and learning disability or mental ill health.

Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report, Gray et al., Department for Communities, 2021 ([link](#))

Section 3.5- Sex Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Maternity, and Pregnancy Discrimination

Research Recommendations

- The prevalence of workplace sexual harassment, low levels of reporting and consequences for perpetrators needs to be addressed; and
- Models of good practice elsewhere, alongside recommendations for workplace policies to protect against these issues should be considered. This could be implemented and overseen through a Women's Employment Strategy.

Section 6.7- Gender Based Violence

Research Recommendations

- There is a need for research exploring inter-personal violence against males to identify the best strategies for prevention and service provision.

Section 8.1- Domestic Violence and Abuse

Research Recommendations

- Inadequate recording on the Section 75 Characteristics of both victims and perpetrators makes it impossible to adequately address objective need of all victims in NI. Specialist support provisions are needed for women and girls, rural victims, disabled people, men, LGBTQI+ people, migrants and more;

Section 8.2 Sexual Violence, Harassment, and Rape Culture

Research Recommendations

- None of the recommendations contained in the Gillen Review Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland that require legislation have been brought into place. A timetable to implement all recommendations from the review should be published urgently;
- An adequately funded public awareness campaign on tackling victim-blaming, rape myths and rape culture, as recommended in the Gillen Review, needs to be co-designed with community organisations working in this area and rolled out as a matter of urgency;

Bearing Witness: Report of the Northern Ireland Court Observer Panel 2018-2019, Victim Support NI, 2021 ([link](#))

Research Recommendations- Rape Myths

1. All agencies: fully implement the recommendations of the Gillen review relating to rape myths.
4. DOJ: Conduct robust, peer-reviewed research into how Northern Irish juries deliberate in sexual offences trials, with a view to identifying if rape myths are

influencing decision making. If the research confirms that rape myths continue to influence the jury deliberation process, reconsider the suitability of jury trials in these cases.

Research Recommendations- Previous Sexual History

1. Further, focused research on the use of previous sexual history in Northern Irish courts to establish whether improper introduction and usage of such evidence is prevalent and if it is influential on verdicts.

Research Recommendations- Improving information for Juries

5. Provide comprehensive information and explanation about rape myths

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan, PSNI, 2021 ([link](#))

Build Trust and Confidence

Research Objective 2- We will design and implement learning and development programmes for our officers and staff, to ensure they have the confidence and knowledge to be able to identify crimes and incidents where gender is an aggravating factor and subsequently build strong prosecution cases to bring offenders to justice.

Relentless Perpetrator Pursuit

Research Objective 3- We will determine how to classify and record misogyny and/or gender-based crime.

Research Objective 7- We will, as part of our homicide reduction strategy, use the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) process to better understand, learn from trends identified and take all steps possible to prevent the murder of women and girls in domestic settings in the future

Safer Spaces

Research Objective 2- We will seek to raise awareness of and subsequently reduce the incidents of spiking across Northern Ireland.

Research Objective 3- We will work with partners to design safer public spaces for the future.

Objective 4- We will work with a range of stakeholders to develop and promote media campaigns for policing that challenge offender behaviour in all spaces for violence against women and girls offences.

Research Objective 5- We will develop a bespoke violence against women and girls engagement programme in each policing district, overseen by a specific local policing lead.

Research Objective 6- We will develop a multi-disciplinary Independent Advisory Group (IAG) to build trust and confidence by ensuring the voices of women and girls are heard and actively shape the implementation of this action plan.

Research Objective 7- We will form a strategic partnership with key stakeholders working with them to change attitudes and behaviours to never commit, condone or stay silent about violence against women and girls.

Research Objective 8- We will establish a programme of listening initiatives to ensure that our practice is trauma-informed by creating ongoing opportunities for police officers and staff to hear directly from women and girls about their lived experience.

Experiences and Mental Health Impacts of Intimate Partner Violence against Men and Boys: A Rapid Review, Professor Amour et al., Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime NI, 2023 ([link](#))

There is a lack of empirical research evidence exploring experiences and impacts of intimate partner violence (IPV) among male victims. The objective of the current report is to synthesize the available literature examining how common intimate partner violence is among men and boys, and what the associated mental health outcomes are for this population via a rapid review approach.

Recommended Research Priorities

1. Address the dearth of research in Northern Ireland (and UK more broadly) concerning males IPV experiences and mental health outcomes.
2. Identify the true extent and range (e.g., types) of IPV experiences among males in NI.
3. Identify the mental health impacts of IPV experiences among men and boys in NI.
4. Increase understanding on suicidality as an outcome for males who have experienced IPV.
5. Identify if IPV experiences and mental health outcomes differ by subgroups and if certain sub-populations of males at a greater risk.
6. Understand stigma and perceptions of IPV among men and boys in NI.

Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime Response to Law Commission 'Evidence in Sexual Offences Prosecutions' Report, 2023 ([link](#))

The Commissioner Designate wrote a letter to the Law Commission in response to their report on evidence in sexual offences prosecutions. Whilst the report focused on law applicable to England and Wales, the Commissioner Designate provided her opinion on some of the key areas highlighted and how this report could be used as a blueprint for changes to law in Northern Ireland.

Chapter 2- Rape Myths

The report highlights the negative impact that rape myths can have on victims which echoes the feedback received from victims in Northern Ireland. Whilst researcher opinion may vary as to the impact of such myths on jury decision-making, the Commissioner Designate remains of the opinion that such debate detracts from the reality that these myths continue to pervade each step of the process most often cited by victims to be propagated by defence practitioners in particular as a means to undermine the credibility of the victim.

Chapter 13- Radical reform

The Commissioner Designate is supportive of the introduction of specialist sexual violence courts and believes it may be the most expedient way to achieve the cultural and systemic changes needed to address the issues of attrition, further trauma and delay which impact negatively on the victims' experience and their access to justice. Any such court should be carefully constructed to mitigate against concerns such as practitioner burn-out. Such initiatives should also be cognisant of other developments and how they can complement each other e.g. the development of a Barnahus model.

She remains convinced however that the most expedient and effective way of addressing issues such as the use of rape myths, victim blaming, jury stereotypes, excessive requests for disclosure etc. is through the replacement of juries with a judge-led panel (judges and lay assessors) in sexual offence cases. Such a panel would be chaired by a Judge however could also include experts in trauma or healthcare. The panel could be required to provide detailed reasons for their determinations which whilst of course could be used as grounds for appeal for the defendant would also serve as explanation for victims which may be particularly helpful in cases where the panel were not convinced beyond reasonable doubt.

A 'Second Assault' - The impact of third party disclosure practices on victims of sexual abuse in Northern Ireland, Commissioner for Victims of Crime, 2023 ([link](#)) .

Research Recommendations

1. The Commissioner Designate calls on key criminal justice agencies, the Bar of NI, Judiciary and Other relevant stakeholders to explore non-legislative practice changes, guidance and training.
2. The Commissioner Designate calls on the judiciary to fully implement the Gillen recommendation to ensure that any applications to access or introduce evidence relating to criminal injuries compensation is duly scrutinised before the trial.