

Liaison with non-police organisations and agencies using an integrated approach

Section 9 introduces liaison with statutory referral agencies and non-governmental organisations. There have been major developments in inter-agency liaison and coordination in response both to child physical and sexual abuse and domestic violence offences in some Commonwealth jurisdictions. In these jurisdictions liaison in relation to children is more formally organised and governed by legislation than liaison in relation to offences against adult women. Liaison regarding children is also discussed in Section 6.

Why is liaison with other agencies necessary?

The police have a crucial role to play and this can be assisted by the intervention of other agencies with a social and welfare remit. Complainants of child abuse and domestic violence are left with problems that are not solely legal. Abused children, for example, lose self-esteem and trust and possibly their home and family, and abused women require help with housing and income support as well as cessation of the violence. In sexual crimes too, follow-up treatment of the complainant is essential. Although an investigation will often appear to be completed and conviction acquired, responding to the issues of accommodation, income maintenance and personal support must proceed at the same time. Effective case management and investigation may require coordination with non-police agencies, such as social services and women's refuges or shelters where these exist.

Responding to social and personal needs are core responsibilities of other statutory and of voluntary agencies (NGOs) and community based groups. Without training in working with other agencies, law enforcement officials are not adequately prepared to confront interpersonal crime against women and children. This requires more than training by other agency staff on their work, valuable as this is. It also requires joint training with other agency staff. The police have significant experience of cooperation and coordination with hospitals and medical personnel, but this is more recent with other agencies. In some jurisdictions, coordination of agency investigation into child sexual abuse has developed into joint work between the police, social and health services. Coordination in other jurisdictions may be confined to referrals for counselling or to other agencies to help complainants come to terms with their experiences. In some Commonwealth jurisdictions multi-agency coordination is non-existent and remains to be developed.

Which agencies should police liaise with?

The agencies police should liaise with varies between jurisdictions and depends upon their availability. Where non-governmental agencies are available the police should consider developing working partnerships with those able to meet the needs of children and women victimised by violence and abuse. Agencies that offer continuing contact and assistance with practical problems are particularly valuable as they complement police action against the offender. Statutory health and welfare services are essential partners, when available. Jurisdictions may have good provision in cities and be less well provided for in rural areas.

Women's organisations offering services to women and children are of particular importance to police investigating family based incidents. These organisations provide accommodation, advice and counselling, and include women's aid refuges or shelters, rape crisis centres, incest survivors groups, and for more general support, women's centres. Women's organisations for specific migrant and refugee groups can offer valuable assistance to victimised women. Building up effective contacts

and working practices takes time and commitment, but the rewards for policing in terms of quality of service delivery cannot be over-estimated. Few jurisdictions will have all these types of supporting services, but even a single social or welfare agency can make a substantial difference when police effort is directed towards developing joint working practices.

The police, through community funding for crime prevention schemes, for example, can assist in the setting up of independent non-governmental groups with a remit to provide services for victims of violence. Women providing services for women and children are particularly valuable and any initial distrust can be overcome through sustained efforts to cooperate. This will involve the police listening to the experiences of victimised women and children and the recognition of inadequate responses by the police. Openness in building relationships with the non-governmental sector is one way of acquiring knowledge that can lead to good practice in policing.

Survivors of violence may need civil law actions to ensure their continuing safety, such as protection orders restricting their abuser from contact with them and, in some jurisdictions, it is possible to obtain an ouster injunction which means the man must vacate the matrimonial home even when the house is in his name. This latter civil law remedy means women and children are entitled to remain in the home until the last child reaches the age of majority. Non-governmental agencies may provide advice and assistance in enabling women to access civil law remedies. This complements the actions of the police in relation to criminal law actions.

Criminal law enforcement involves other criminal justice organisations; magistrates, prosecutors, probation, corrections. Joint training with Justice department personnel facilitates knowledge of how the work of each aspect of the criminal justice system fits together, how cooperation can be better organised, and provides a basis for raising problems and issues. For example, the prosecution can fast track crimes against children and women if these are identified by the police as in need of urgent action. Probation services can provide magistrates with pre-sentence reports. Local issues can be discussed and the improvements needed in any sector of the system identified. Good working relationships, even within the criminal justice system, take time and patience to develop.

What constitutes liaison with other agencies?

Jurisdictions vary in the number and type of agencies with which the police can undertake joint work. Every community will have community leaders, both formal and informal and both women and men, and are likely to have religious organisations, the media and research institutions. Some will have local offices of state provided social and welfare services and local voluntary agencies responding to violence against women and children. They will have lawyers, including some who are particularly interested in undertaking legal work on violence against women and children. However small the absolute or initial number of potential partners, a start can be made.

The extent of liaison can vary beginning with information sharing with victims, with other agency personnel, to actually working together on cases:

- information sharing with victims often takes the form of information cards with agency contact details, including relevant police personnel. These may be a brief one line description of what each agency can offer with telephone numbers or addresses, for example
- information sharing with other agencies can take place through multi-agency fora which meet on a regular basis. The aim is to enable people to meet each other, to learn more about each other's work and to discuss issues of particular relevance, including new legislation and its implementation. These fora require limited central coordination and funding in order to arrange meetings, their agendas and update mailing lists. Funding may be undertaken by local government and a neutral coordinating base by the department responsible for women's affairs

- training initiatives can be organised by the police with invited speakers from statutory and voluntary agencies to explain the services they offer and how these can assist the police when responding to inter-personal crimes against women and children
- joint training can be organised by another agency. This can include expanding understanding of the work of the other agencies and the causes and consequences of child and woman abuse while permitting closer relationships to develop between the participants
- the networks that result from joint training are informally as well as formally structured. It is not unusual for individual officers and other agency staff to contact someone they know in another agency, rather than making a general inquiry. Joint training facilitates personal network building between individuals who become a first point of contact for further information and assistance. The organisation and responsibilities of personnel in other large agencies can be opaque. Joint training provides a professional understanding of the work of other agencies and facilitates contact between agency staff
- when joint working committees are set up, these serve the same purpose and more formally structure the relationship between agency personnel.

A multi-disciplinary approach is very valuable in the context of sexual and other inter-personal crimes to women and children, but careful protocols must be introduced to prevent the complainant from being revictimised by having to repeat her complaint to a number of agencies.

Training of all agencies involved in providing assistance to women and children who have been victimised by violence is essential and, from a policing point of view, it is important that other agencies understand the police perspective. The development of agreed protocols to encourage sharing of information between agencies, while maintaining confidentiality, can follow on from initial training and liaison meetings.

Inter-agency approaches are rewarding for police work, but it is not easy to achieve more than superficial contact. This is because agencies have different remits and working practices. It takes time and effort to become familiar with these and to find constructive ways of working together.

GUIDELINES

- Sexual crimes require skills and interventions to complement those of the police. Both the police and survivors of sexual crimes benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach.
- Liaison with non-police agencies must be carefully managed both to protect the complainant and achieve the best results. This liaison can be important not only in the management of particular cases, but as a means to train the police and other organisations. For example, the perspective of rape crisis centres should be understood by the police and taken into account seriously.
- Liaison with other agencies requires face-to-face meetings to encourage inter-agency cooperation and to identify any misunderstanding that may develop between different disciplines and services.
- Police, non-police organisations and referral agencies should share as much information as possible, while at all times protecting the confidentiality of the complainant.
- Care should be taken to determine whether the concept of confidentiality is being used to the detriment of the complainant.
- While police should liaise closely with non-police agencies in the context of sexual crime and other forms of violence against women and children, it must not be forgotten that these assaults are criminal and must be prosecuted. It is essential, therefore, that the police retain control in their areas of competence and authority.
- When working together is mandated by legislation, then responsibilities of each agency needs to be clearly spelt out. If confusion or disagreements arise between agencies, these must be treated with sensitivity in order to avoid permanent damage to governmentally required joint working practices. Joint training is a basic requirement as are protocols for joint work.