

Rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) victim feedback

Structured phone interviews with victims to improve police and partners' understanding of their experiences of investigations.

First published

8 June 2023

Updated

18 July 2024

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Violence against women and girls Rape and serious sexual offences Criminal justice
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Local authority Private sector

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	June 2022
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Victims

Aim

The aim of the victim feedback panel is to:

- improve understanding of rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) investigators' performance
- make effective and efficient service improvements to meet victims' needs
- reduce victim disengagement by improving their confidence in force performance

Intended outcome

By collating and responding to the data, the victim feedback panel seeks to result in increased levels of engagement (or reduced disengagement) from RASSO victims. This in turn should lead to:

- an increase in the number of charged RASSO cases
- a greater percentage of RASSO charges from allegations

Description

Approximately £10,000 was invested in employing an outside agency/charity to work in collaboration with the force to create a bespoke questionnaire.

The questions are presented to participating RASSO victims six weeks after their initial crime report, via a phone call or video call. Each structured interview is conducted by an individual from the independent agency who has a background as an independent sexual violence adviser (ISVA).

The questionnaire style questions are designed to illicit both a statistical measure and offer the opportunity to provide commentary. Each interview takes on average 45 to 50 minutes, affording a conversational style of approach.

Question set

The interview captures the victim's assessment of investigative performance, progress, and victim care. Different questions on these topics are presented to the victim part way through their investigation and again at the conclusion.

The question set seeks to understand process driven responses, such as achieving best evidence (ABE) and the arrest of the suspect. It also seeks to understand the behaviours and values of Cambridgeshire officers and police staff by asking specific questions to the victims on the themes of:

- respect – listened to what you had to say and were considerate of your needs
- sensitivity – showed understanding of your feelings and responded appropriately
- knowledge - were able to explain processes and answer questions
- effectiveness – helped you understand what was happening in a manner that was timely and appropriate
- safety – able to respond to your needs around safety and security

Feedback

Each month the independent agency sent through an Excel spreadsheet of both the qualitative and quantitative feedback gained. This feedback is produced as a dashboard which maps data around each specific question for individual months. It also provides cumulative statistics which allow the force to monitor trends and measure the impact of changes.

The dashboard is used as part of the force's overall victim feedback measurements. It feeds into governance as well as tactical, organisational and partnership meetings.

Evaluation

Overall, the victim feedback panel seems to have had a positive impact. Officers have fed back that the questionnaire data is contemporaneous and clear, while victims appreciate the opportunity to

express their views.

Below are the thematic areas where change has been made so far due to the victim feedback panel. These changes have been circulated to all those who have participated in the panel to evidence change.

The force expects further service improvements to be made once the final thematic report is produced.

Victims said

1. The ABE rooms (video interview rooms) were of differing standards with some lacking basic supplies such as tissues.
2. The explanation and description of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) needed a review to minimise anxiety about the process.
3. Having access to supporters was important when participating in an ABE (video interview).
4. Explanation of what to expect when participating in an ABE (video interview) was lacking.
5. The mobile phone form was confusing and didn't explain well why police needed to download the device.
6. ISVA service need upskilling on civil orders.

How we've responded

1. We've undertaken a complete review of the force's ABE rooms with the help of the ISVA service. Now all rooms have supplies of tissues and other support items to ease nerves. We are also investing in a brand new ABE suite in an area of the county without one. This will reduce travelling time and costs for survivors.
2. Training has been delivered and the feedback provided during the project shared to help officers understand why explanation and description of the SARC is important. We are developing a leaflet (and hopefully a video). This will be given to survivors to ensure there is a clear visual representation of the SARC and for survivors to read and watch at a time that suits them to reduce confusion.
3. This was a particular problem at the station in Cambridge. A new room is now used by the ISVAs/supporters, so they are available at any time the survivor needs them.

4. Training has been given to both frontline and specialist officers to ensure what to expect from an ABE interview is fully explained. We will also be producing a leaflet with photographs of the ABE rooms so survivors have a visual aid and can ask questions more readily.?
5. The force has now adopted the nationally recognised form. This has an accompanying information leaflet and ensures that the investigating officer has to clearly detail the reasons why phone examination is necessary.?
6. The ISVA service has undergone complete refresher training on non-molestation orders.

Overall impact

The victim feedback programme has been finished for over 12 months but we continue to see the legacy of the project through our operational to strategic responses to RASSO investigation. The work from the project is also being fed directly in to our Operation Soteria transformational plan.

The project has also laid the foundations for an ongoing piece of work within the constabulary and partnership about how to build in feedback mechanisms from a variety of sources. The sustainability of independent feedback mechanisms were the key driver to obtaining quality data.

Learning

The following factors have been key to ensuring the success of the victim feedback panel.

1. The independent agency has been a crucial collaborator in ensuring the success of the project. Their knowledge of national practices and scrutiny in the violence against women and girls (VAWG) arena – and their specific skillsets in relation to survivor engagement – have been key to developing a framework that is responsive to organisational and victim needs.
2. Working collaboratively with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC). This has allowed the assessment of a more whole-system approach through data collection around the ISVA service.
3. A robust risk assessment process that acknowledges safeguarding, re-traumatisation and criminal justice threats.
4. Trauma-informed practices being at the heart of the project.
5. Linking the project to organisational culture and process changes in response to the national VAWG response. This has allowed staff in all areas of the organisation to understand its significance and embrace the referral mechanism and data gathered.

6. Multi-agency briefing and continuous review has ensured the project has remained live and responsive to feedback.
7. Formal and properly embedded reviews with the OPCC and independent agency have ensured ongoing assessment against aims and objectives.
8. The risk register allows amendments to project processes to be made responsively.

The following key learnings have arisen so far from the victim feedback panel.

1. Ensuring officers engaging with survivors asked them questions at the most appropriate point, as opposed to the panel being seen as a specific process at a specific point in the investigation. Timing is crucial to engagement.
2. Giving consistent messaging to the survivors – the difference in experience of officers who ask survivors about participation can be vast. This can lead to inconsistent messaging, which affects agreement to engage with the panel.
3. Agreement to participate figures can be much higher than the actual number of interviews that take place. This is linked to the trauma and psychological safety of survivors at the time they are contacted to participate.

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Tags

Criminal justice Violence against women and girls