

How to guide:

Juvenile Women's and Children's Units

What is the J4A ‘How to’ series?

The guide is part of a series of products developed by J4A to communicate lessons learned from projects and pilots, to provide stakeholders with guidance on how to adapt and replicate the initiative in their own context.

Who is this ‘How to’ guide for?

Influencers and decision makers in the justice sector (police, prisons, judiciary and civil society).

Reference tools

Accompanying reference tools are available at www.j4a-nigeria.org or by request from info@j4a-nigeria.org

The problem

- Under reporting of cases of sexual and gender based violence to NPF.
- Victims further traumatized by the process of engagement with law enforcement agencies.
- Individuals blamed for their victimization.
- Multiple interviews.
- Victims and suspects brought together for questioning.
- Poor evidence gathering/statements in divisions.
- Delay in provision of medical reports.
- Low numbers of suspects charged to Court.
- Settlement of serious crimes, contrary to the law.
- Limited engagement with other government or civil society actors.
- Negative public opinion and media attention to police practice in relation to handling of SGBV cases.

Background

TSexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) against women and children is a violation of their dignity, safety and human rights. It is often hidden, taking place behind closed doors, a place that should be a refuge of safety and security.

Historically, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and others regard the violence as a 'private' or domestic matter. In practice this condemns the victim to further suffering and abuse. Such violence is a crime that takes place across the whole of society. It can have a devastating affect on the lives of victims. Legislation exists to prosecute offenders but without effective enforcement practices, particularly by police, vulnerable members of society will continue to be victimised.

Victims should be encouraged to come forward and make their complaints to police but will not do so if they are subjected to negative attitudes and poor police practices. The way in which the police first treat a victim is very important to help ensure a successful investigation of the crime

What you can do

- Develop dedicated Juvenile Women's and Children's Units JWCs, also (known as Family Support Units in some locations, within your police station to enhance the capacity of the police to prevent, detect and investigate crimes against women and children and other vulnerable groups.
- Select suitable officers for training.
- Encourage working in collaboration with relevant

government agencies and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) on cases of child abuse, domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and other matters that concern women and children.

- Victims of Sexual and Gender Based Violence are amongst the most vulnerable members of society and have usually been abused several times before they have the courage to make their complaint.
- Police have a duty to protect these victims and must provide a professional and gender sensitive approach that is focussed on the victim and responsive to their needs.

What you can achieve

- Victims are directed at the earliest opportunity on arrival at the Police Station and directed to the JWC.
- A thorough and sensitive investigation is carried out.
- Collaboration is on going with other government and civil society organisations, which provide services to victims of GBV.
- Rules of evidence are satisfied.
- Victims are safeguarded from further harm.
- Community confidence in the NPF is increased.
- Reporting levels increase.
- Increased access to justice for vulnerable persons.

Juvenile Women's and Children's Units: Steps for implementation

When a victim reports a complaint or allegation of GBV, police should respond appropriately and without delay to ensure their safety and well being. Where the victim is a woman or child and the complaint is of a sexual nature or arises from within a family, a sensitive approach is required.

The treatment of the victim by police, either at the scene of the crime or when making their complaint at the police station, can be the critical factor in securing the cooperation of the victim in supporting a prosecution. Good police practice will support the victim, and provide evidence, which may be placed before the court in the event of a criminal prosecution. This in turn should become a deterrent to other potential offenders.

A shift in organizational thinking is required within the NPF, from JWC being officers whose role is largely to take care of found children, to recognising the importance of a skilled and trained department of specialist investigators.

To signal the change in how services are delivered, and convey to the community that NPF are 'doing business differently', the option of changing the name of JWC to FSU – Family Support Unit can be considered.

A suitable office should be made available for the JWC. This needs to be large enough for the number of staff posted to the Unit and equipped with desks and chairs to enable victims to be interviewed and reports to be prepared. The room selected should present a welcoming environment and offer privacy. Ideally it should be separate from the main police building but where this is not possible, it should be away from the Charge Room Office, Cells and the sound of the police radio. There should be facility to lock away confidential investigation files.

The Unit should be led by an officer of the rank of Inspector or above, and supervised by the Divisional

Crime Officer. The number of other ranks deployed will depend on the workload of the division, and all officers should have received appropriate training.

Staff duties should be arranged to ensure a JWC officer is available at all times. However, officers should not be expected to work long shifts as this will affect their ability to respond appropriately to victims and an 8 hour shift should be considered. The majority of officers should be available during the period 8am – 8pm and a single officer on duty outside those hours.

Full details should be recorded of all cases handled by the JWC to assist in identifying repeated complaints of violence. This will include Registers indexed to easily identify victims and suspects / offenders. See Appendix 1 & 2 for a template JWC Register and some notes or guidance for completion.

Responding to victims of SGBV begins at the front gate of the police station. Awareness raising for all rank and file officers in a Division and shared recognition of the importance of applying the principles of investigation may be achieved through discussions at Divisional Management Team meetings, and DPO lectures.

Community sensitization is required, and may be supported through Community Safety Partnerships, Neighbourhood Policing, Voluntary Policing Sector and civil society organizations.

The Five Principles of Investigation

1. The victim of the abuse is NEVER to blame.
2. The welfare of the child/adult victim is paramount and the conduct of the investigation must seek to ensure that no further damage is done to the child.
3. Remember to treat victims with the best interests of the child are served by a multi-disciplinary approach involving welfare agencies, the police and the courts.
4. The investigation of alleged sexual abuse is only the beginning of a process of protection, assessment and treatment.
5. The conduct of the investigation should be entirely victim centred. In this way both the victim's needs and the rules of evidence will be satisfied.

Cost Implications

In Divisions where a JWC already exists the only costs will be the deferred costs of initial training and the purchase of a JWC register. In Divisions where there is no JWC then there would be additional extraction costs to create the posts



Lessons Learned

Lesson 1:

Obtain permissions and approval so that the JWC investigate sexual and GBV crimes.

Lesson 2:

Identify appropriate staff.

Lesson 3:

Provide supervision and support structure.

Lesson 4:

Include JWC on Divisional Management Team.

Lesson 5:

Introduce JWC Register, with regular review by senior officer.

Lesson 6:

Allocate appropriate facilities for interviewing witnesses.

Lesson 7:

Victims should be immediately directed to JWC upon report to a Division.

Lesson 8:

Collaborate with relevant Ministries and civil society organizations.

Lesson 9:

Where a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) is established, strong working relationships are necessary.

Lesson 10:

Encourage direct communication links with designated DPP representatives.

Best Practice Considerations for JWCs

- Victims (adults and children) of sexual assault, domestic abuse should be directed at the earliest opportunity to a JWC officer, and should not be interviewed in the charge room office.
- Victims should be interviewed once, to provide a statement of evidence, in an environment free from distractions.
- Witnesses, victims and suspects should be interviewed separately.
- Officers need to be alert to the needs of victims and conduct interviews in a sensitive manner.
- Develop relationships and share information with Social Welfare and other appropriate organisations in all cases of children. Remember the main priority is the protection of the child. Information sharing should also take place in appropriate cases when adults are abused.
- Consider crime scene issues and early preservation of a scene/exhibits
- Police officers should not check intimate areas of a victim's body to see if there are any visible injuries of assault.
- Develop close relationships with the SARC where these have been created, ensuring victims are referred in all sexual assault cases.
- Cases should not be 'settled' by way of monies and suspects should be prosecuted.
- JWC staff should receive specialist training and remain in post for at least three years where possible.

Improvements

A professional standard of investigations with specialist training.

Evaluation

A number of tools have been introduced to assist the NPF to evaluate success, including household surveys to ascertain public satisfaction and as exit surveys for those citizens who have cause to come to the police station.

The quality of investigations can be measured through seeking the views of the courts and prosecutors. Victims can be surveyed to understand their experience of the investigation process.

Contact

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