



Ministry
of Justice

Trauma-informed victims' data collection guidance

Introduction

The working definition of trauma-informed practice outlines how trauma can affect individuals, groups and communities, the importance of recognising the signs and impact of trauma and the importance of preventing re-traumatisation¹.

A trauma-informed approach to collecting victims' data ensures that victims feel comfortable and empowered to share their information while also preventing the data collection process from creating any additional barriers for victims accessing support. By empowering victims to feel comfortable to provide their information, this can lead to better quality data collection.

In response to feedback that highlighted uncertainties around how to collect data in a trauma-informed way, this guidance sets out practical examples of how to apply trauma-informed principles to the collection of victims' data. This includes examples of how best to capture protected characteristics information, and maps the principles onto a typical victim journey through a support service.

Benefits of taking a trauma-informed approach to collecting victims' data

Empowering victims to share their information will support the collection of high-quality data and ensure a better understanding of how we can improve services to meet the needs of all victim cohorts. This guidance will benefit:

- Victims: Collecting data in a way that victims are comfortable with and that enables them to provide accurate information to support better quality data collection.

¹ DHSC provides a [working definition of trauma-informed practice](#). This working definition reflects the original internationally recognised [definition developed by the United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#).

- Victim support services: Building confidence to routinely ask victims for their protected characteristic information and to do so sensitively and accurately to best understand their needs and submit high-quality data to commissioners.
- Commissioners: Inform evidence building to understand 'what works' for victims and enhance our understanding of victim cohorts. Additionally, this allows central government to understand whether funding is meeting the needs of victim cohorts.

Why better data is needed

It is important for commissioners and service providers to have access to good quality data to effectively monitor and evaluate services and inform decision making.

Victim support services are required to collect data on victims as part of regular grant or contract management reporting requirements. The [Victims Funding Strategy](#) sets out core metrics and outcomes which services are expected to report against to help demonstrate impact so that all victims receive the right support to enable them to cope, build resilience and move forward in their lives.

This guidance is aimed at people and organisations involved in the collection and submission of data from victims accessing support services.

The guidance aims to enhance staff confidence to prioritise data collection while encouraging fewer data gaps and better supporting the needs of victims. It will do so by empowering staff to effectively and sensitively record victims' data, including protected characteristics data, while best supporting the needs of victims.

Key principles of trauma-informed data collection

We have developed four key principles that guide our approach to trauma-informed data collection. These have been developed through consultation with commissioners, service providers and other government departments.

Victim-centred: A victim-centred approach ensures that decisions about data collection are informed by victim need. Victims are empowered to share their information at data collection points when support services are person-centred.

Safe: Victims are protected from harm and violations at every stage of the data lifecycle, including during data collection, and feel safe to provide their information due to pre-established trust. Safety involves victims being seen as of worth, with valid experience and opinions when conducting data collection.

Transparent: Data collectors are clear, open and honest about how data will be used in a way that is easily accessible and easy to understand. Defining why data is being collected and what this will be used for, including how this will benefit victims, ensures transparency when collecting data.

Inclusive: A trauma-informed approach to data collection recognises the impact of systemic inequalities. It understands the impact of these inequalities and is flexible to be

inclusive of everyone in society, particularly during the collection of personal characteristics data.

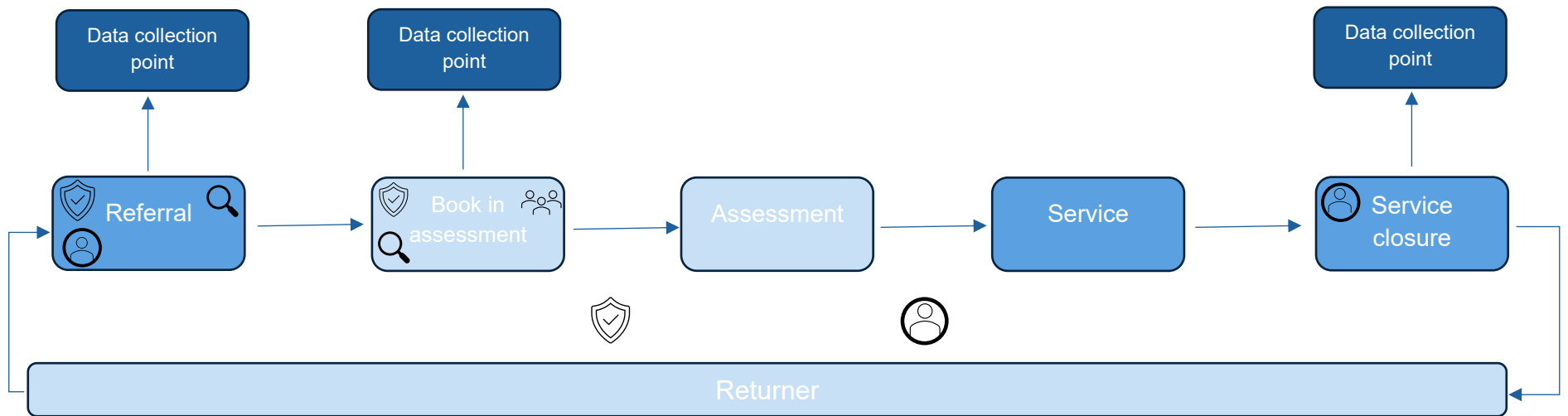
The victim journey and data collection

Each victim's journey through support services is unique. A victim's journey can vary depending on their needs, circumstances and whether they wish to access any further specialist support, such as counselling.

There are specific data collection points within a victim's support journey which may vary between services. Generally, there are five broad stages that have been identified as common milestones in the support service journey as well as key data collection points in which victims' data may be collected. Services may be flexible and use their discretion as to the appropriate points to ask for data from victims during their support service journey.

The key principles have been mapped against an illustrative support journey map. Additionally, case study examples illustrate where the best practice examples may apply within a service and these have also been illustrated below.

Illustrative support journey data collection map



Key

-  Victim centred principle
-  Safe principle
-  Transparent principle
-  Inclusive principle

Victim-centred principle in practice



Services demonstrating this principle in practice could:

Offer victims a choice as to how they provide their data. This may include asking if there is a safe space they would prefer to provide their personal information from and may also include offering a choice between staff assisted or unassisted, online or paper data completion.

Ask for victim's data through their journey, and at the end of the journey ask for victim feedback on the experience of doing so. This may include feedback questions on whether they felt comfortable providing their information at different points in their journey, and if not, how this could be improved to understand what is or is not working about data collection within the service.

In collaboration with their commissioner, services may host a series of lived experience groups to inform data collection practices within support services. Sessions can be used as an opportunity to hear from victims, including their experiences of data collection.

Victim support service case study: Providing service users a choice as to how they provide their data

One organisation providing domestic abuse and sexual violence support provides service users the choice to share their personal information in a way that feels most comfortable for them. A secure and private separate room was arranged for the caseworker and service user and a choice between staff assisted or unassisted, online or paper data collection was offered. As a result, the organisation found that the service user felt more comfortable sharing additional personal details as they progressed through their support journey, which in turn enabled the organisation to provide better tailored support.

Safe principle in practice



Services demonstrating this principle in practice could:

Ensure, prior to collecting victims' data, staff introduce themselves, their role and introduce the service to help build rapport and trust with a victim from the beginning when they enter the service. This may include asking them to recall something that they enjoyed doing recently.

Refer to archived information and refrain from asking victims the same questions that have already been answered through previous data collection. This could include reviewing the information victims have provided already and/or a case summary.

Provide assurance that data would be stored securely and confidentially in line with GDPR and data protection legislation.

Carry out safety and wellbeing check-ins with victims throughout their journey at the different data collection points within the service. For example, this could include asking victims how they are feeling and whether they feel comfortable when providing their information.

Victim support service case study: Building trust and rapport

To build trust and rapport, one organisation providing domestic abuse and sexual violence support encouraged their service user to provide personal information at their own pace, offering a 'prefer not to say' option, while explaining that any data shared would be handled confidentially. Additionally, the caseworker conducted data collection incrementally and flexibly while signposting support to the service user to maintain trust.

The caseworker also found that making notes of relevant personal information that the service user volunteered while recounting their experience prevented duplication during data collection. As a result, the organisation found that they were able to build trust and rapport that enabled service users to feel empowered to provide their personal information.

Victim support service case study: Case reviews

One organisation providing domestic abuse support conducts regular case reviews to ensure that the data is being collected appropriately and to identify any gaps. If any gaps are identified, the service holds a discussion with the service manager to determine the appropriate approach to collect the missing information in a way that is least harmful to the victim. This includes identifying whether there are any difficulties to collecting the missing information, reviewing summaries of what has already been disclosed or whether this can be obtained from somewhere else, such as an alternative partner. This service has seen an improvement in staff empowerment and understanding of the importance of data collection and has seen an improvement in their data completion because of these efforts.

Transparent principle in practice



Services demonstrating this principle in practice could include:

A verbal or written explanation before collecting data explaining why they are collecting this information and what this will be used for, including that victims can withdraw consent at any time.

A line within the data collection form after each question setting out why this information is being collected and what the data will be used for.

For example, when collecting protected characteristic information:

“This information is required to help our service understand who is using the service and how it helps them. It also lets us understand who isn’t accessing the service and may need more proactive support. By collecting this information our service is able to understand support needs, and the information can help form the basis of a support plan”.

Victim support service case study: Protected characteristic data collection

An organisation providing domestic abuse support ensures that before any personal data is collected, the caseworker outlines why it is important to collect service users’ personal details – that it helps staff to understand how best to support individual service users’ needs. As part of in-house training about protected characteristics data collection, staff are given the following advice to support them:

Use reflecting skills when asking questions, for example, ‘You mentioned that you are religious, please can I ask which religion?’ To avoid questions feeling like a checklist, think about how to ask some questions appropriately, for example, ‘Please can I ask how you describe/identify your sexuality?’.

This service has seen a change in service user willingness to provide their personal information when the purpose as to why their information is collected is clearly outlined.

Inclusive principle in practice



Services demonstrating this principle in practice could:

Use data collection methods that do not make assumptions about identity and circumstances.

In practice, when collecting data from victims, services will ask how the victim identifies under each of the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. This may include providing definitions for each protected characteristic data category to enable more accurate reporting and understanding of protected characteristics data.

Consider opportunities to increase staff confidence and capability with collecting data in an inclusive way. This may include in-house skills practice and modelling good-practice conversations for staff or shadowing staff experienced in trauma-informed data collection.

Tailor the data collection methods to be culturally sensitive by ensuring that the language used during data collection is inclusive and accessible to people from different cultural backgrounds, genders, ages and abilities.

Victim support service case study: In-house skills practice and model data collection conversations

One organisation providing sexual violence support set up a staff Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group to ensure that their service delivery and data collection is inclusive and accessible to people from different cultural backgrounds, genders, ages and abilities. Through this group, staff provided feedback on the challenges with asking service users' questions about their sexuality consistently and in a trauma-informed way. In response, the service conducted in-house skills practice and model conversations which included practice for staff on what to say if challenged by service users on the collection of demographic information. This included outlining that it is the service users' choice to provide their information, while explaining that collecting personal information helps staff understand how different life circumstances can impact an individual's experience, and informs improvements to ensure the organisation is inclusive and accessible. As a result, this organisation has seen an improvement in the collection and completion of personal information, particularly sexuality data, within their service.

Victim support service case study: Role play for collecting protected characteristics information

To increase staff confidence and capability with collecting data in an inclusive way, an organisation offers modelling of good-practice conversations for staff. This included standing back-to-back for role play discussions on how best to collect protected characteristic information from service users, and included weaving in demographic data collection into conversation while providing signposting of support to service users.

The organisation found that staff confidence increased when asking service users for their protected characteristic information and that data completion within case systems of protected characteristics improved as a result.