

Police response to violence against women and girls

Final inspection report

Contents

Foreword	1
Summary	4
Main findings	6
Defining the problem	6
Assessment of police effectiveness at every stage of their response to VAWG	7
Expansion of our three interim report recommendations	13
Overarching recommendations	16
1. Background to the inspection	17
July 2021 interim report	17
Structure of this report	18
2. Methodology	19
Expert Reference Group and sector engagement	19
Literature review and analysis of evidence from previous inspections	19
Lived experience work	19
Fieldwork	20
Surveys	20
Force management statements	22
3. Information and data on the scale of violence against women and girls in England and Wales	23
Violence against women and girls includes complex crimes with far-reaching and devastating consequences	23
A global epidemic	23
Crimes including stalking, domestic abuse and sexual assault disproportionately affect women and girls	24
Child sexual abuse disproportionately affects girls	26
Many girls are subjected to sexual harassment and online sexual abuse	26
Many women and girls feel unsafe in public spaces	27

The number of crimes reported is rising, but many victims still do not report VAWG offences	28
The number of cases that don't proceed through the criminal justice system is high	30
It is important to understand the complex needs of the victim, including any protected characteristics and intersectionality	31
There is much further to go in understanding the information and data on VAWG	32
4. How well prepared are the police to engage with women and girls, and to respond to violence against women and girls?	33
Strategic arrangements	33
Communication with women and girls	35
Gathering and using information about women and girls	37
Recording crimes accurately	38
Specific difficulties with coercive and controlling behaviour	39
Surveys and hearing the voices of female victims	39
Learning, development and staff wellbeing	42
5. How effectively do the police prevent violence against women and girls offences?	45
Work in schools and other educational establishments	46
The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme	46
Crime prevention	50
Public space safety activities	51
Partnership work (including MARACs)	53
6. How effectively do the police protect women and girls?	55
Protective orders	55
Offender management	59
Identifying vulnerable victims	63
Advocate services	65
Safety planning	66
7. How effectively do the police pursue perpetrators of violence against women and girls?	68
Responding to calls for service	68
Investigating VAWG	71
Keeping victims informed	74
Working with the Crown Prosecution Service	77

Recommendations arising from fieldwork	79
8. Achieving an effective policing response to violence against women and girls: what needs to be in place?	81
Sufficient capability and capacity to investigate VAWG offences effectively	81
Immediate improvements to understanding of use of outcomes 15 and 16	83
Swift and thorough investigation of accusations of VAWG offences and inappropriate behaviour carried out by a member of the police service	86
Effective joint working between the police and CPS	87
9. How effective are the police at responding to crimes where girls are victims, and keeping them safe?	89
How well prepared are forces to respond to offences against children?	89
Hearing children's voices in developing services	90
Data and performance management for child protection	91
How well do the police prevent girls from being victims of violence?	91
How effective are the police at protecting girls who are victims of VAWG?	93
How effective are the police at pursuing perpetrators of offences against girls?	93
Achieving an effective response to crimes against girls: What needs to be in place?	94
10. Raising the priority of the response to violence against women and girls offences	96
Raising the priority: in policing	97
Raising the priority: a whole-system approach	104
Arrangements that would allow for a whole-system approach to VAWG	105
11. Tackling perpetrator behaviour	111
A co-ordinated approach is needed to tackle perpetrator behaviour and improve the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes	111
The Government's perpetrator strategy represents a significant opportunity to improve and standardise the response	113
The evidence around young people as perpetrators is limited and needs further consideration	113
12. Tailored and consistent support for victims of violence against women and girls	115
The role of the independent adviser/advocate	116
All victims are entitled to a high standard of care and support	116
Support is not always tailored to the needs of the victim	117
Identifying the different needs of different women and girls	118

A need to maximise the use of special measures at every opportunity	119
There are multiple benefits to victims receiving support from independent commissioned or non-commissioned services	120
Many victims need help to understand all their entitlements under the Victims' Code	120
Victims are not always kept updated on the progress of their cases	121
Characteristics of a victim co-ordinator	122
13. Full recommendations and next steps	125
Annex A: Terms of reference and commission	131
Annex B: List of Expert Reference Group members	132
Annex C: Literature review	134
Annex D: About the data	139
Annex E: Definitions and interpretations	142

Foreword

This report sets out findings from our inspection of how effectively the police respond to [violence against women and girls \(VAWG\)](#) offences. These are violent and high-harm crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls, such as domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking and female genital mutilation.

The Home Secretary commissioned this report in March 2021 as part of the response to the horrific murder of Sarah Everard. The names of other women who have been murdered have reached public consciousness since then, including Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, Gracie Spinks and Julia James.

But over the past decade, an average of 80 women a year were killed by a partner or ex-partner, and many of these women's names do not appear on the front pages of the newspapers. Statistics on the prevalence and scope of other VAWG offences are also shocking. For instance, in the year ending March 2020, it is estimated that 1.6 million women (and 757,000 men) in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse. In one [recent survey](#), two out of three 16 to 34-year-old women and girls reported that they had been sexually harassed in the past year. These figures are alarming. We consider they represent an epidemic of violent and abusive offending against women and girls in England and Wales.

In fact, we struggled to keep our section in this report on the scale of the problem updated as a result of the pace of new data and findings on the size and shape of this epidemic. Every week brought new data or surveys on the crimes committed against women and girls; on the harassment they experience in public spaces, online, in their homes or schools, or where they work; on how unsafe they feel and the extra precautions they take as a result. The problem is known, consistent and deep-rooted in its presence, and growing in the forms it takes.

To assess the police response to this problem, we have gathered evidence from inspections of police forces, from national data, and from policing and Government policies and strategies. Most compellingly, we have also heard the individual accounts of victims and survivors themselves.

First, I want to underline, early and with emphasis, that the police alone cannot 'solve' violence against women and girls. It is a societal problem which requires a societal response. I say more of this later in this foreword. However, the police do have unique powers and responsibilities to protect victims from further harm, pursue perpetrators and prevent crime.

We conclude that the police have made vast improvements over the past ten years in how they respond to and investigate VAWG. We have reported in recent inspections on generally better identification of repeat victims, for instance, and improved safeguarding measures and support.

In every force, we also find dedicated and professional police officers and staff providing exceptional policing. At the national level, we find evidence of passionate and visible leadership, committed to improving the service provided across England and Wales. This is against a backdrop of increasing reported crimes in this area (including more reports of non-recent offences), competing priorities, and the continuing effects of austerity on policing and partner-agency budgets.

Despite all these improvements, this inspection found inconsistencies at every level in how the police respond to VAWG and victims. For instance:

- at an individual case level: victims reported very different responses, depending on which officer they spoke with, or the call-handler who took their call; they told us that some officers showed exceptional care and sensitivity, while others made them feel like they weren't believed;
- at force level: there are unexplained variations in how frequently different forces are using the protective powers and orders at their disposal to protect women and girls;
- at local partnership level: roles and responsibilities for partners working together in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements vary considerably; and
- at national level: actions to improve the police response are split over multiple Government strategies.

These structural, strategic and tactical inconsistencies must be addressed if the police and their partners are to make inroads in tackling the deep-rooted problem of VAWG offences. Too often, we find that the connections across sectors, and from national strategies to frontline practice, are frayed or absent.

We contrast this with the responses to other high-harm areas of policing, such as terrorism or county lines offending. These are generally marked by a clearer focus, better funding, a relentless pursuit of perpetrators and a clear sense that these are urgent national policing priorities. VAWG needs to be addressed in the same way. There needs to be an immediate shift upwards of the priority given to the policing response to these offences.

However, policing cannot do this alone. We reiterate in this report the need for a whole-system response to tackle VAWG offences.

Since publishing our [interim report](#), our inspection activity has been focused on policing. But almost every interview, case file review and focus group has underlined the need for more effective and more collaborative working between policing and other agencies, whether it be with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), victim representatives, housing and education, or the Government. This is particularly important in ensuring good victim support; in work to improve the safety of public spaces; and in prevention activity more widely.

If we are to give women and girls confidence that there is not just the will but also the power to improve things, all means possible to improve these joint working relationships need to be deployed. Our recommendations in this area include the introduction of a new statutory duty on all appropriate partner agencies to collectively take action to prevent the harm caused by VAWG.

We also recommend other actions to better define and mandate joint working arrangements. At the moment, too often these are loose, open to interpretation, or the element of them dedicated to tackling VAWG appears merely tagged onto the main purpose of joint working. For instance, there is no consistent and dedicated model in place for managing domestic abuse offenders, despite the huge numbers of them.

We consider that the current child protection multi-agency arrangements offer a good model for a new statutory framework designed to improve the multi-agency response to adult victims of VAWG. As we set out in the chapter of our report on the police response to child victims, we find in inspections that child protection responses are generally more consistent. While not a perfect analogy, we give this as an example of how a relentless focus at all levels on providing a consistent and high standard of protection, prevention and response can be successful.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of much better victim care and support. As a society, we have a moral imperative to support and protect victims of these appalling crimes. Our evidence shows better support also means victims are more likely to feel able to support prosecution of their perpetrator. Even though we acknowledge that not all victims want a criminal justice outcome, successful prosecution means justice is served. We give more details of the characteristics of what form this support should take in this report.

In my role, I have been privileged to see at first hand officers and staff, partner staff, independent sexual violence advisers (ISVAs), independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) and other support services helping women and girls at the most vulnerable points in their lives. The experiences of those victims, and of those who told us about their experiences in this report, will stay with me always, but so will the tireless dedication and talent across the country of all those who have worked with them.

There is also commendable commitment and motivation at a national level to improve things for women and girls who are victims of violence. I hope this report helps to further work in this area, and I extend my thanks to all those who are involved.



Zoë Billingham

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

Summary

In March 2021, the Home Secretary commissioned Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to inspect the effectiveness of police engagement with women and girls. This report sets out findings and recommendations from one part of this inspection, which focuses on how effectively the police respond to violence against women and girls (VAWG). It builds on the [interim report](#) we published in July 2021.

The terms of reference for the inspection are found in Annex A.

VAWG offences are acts of violence or abuse that disproportionately affect women and girls (in this report, girls are those who are 17 years old or younger). Crimes and behaviour covered by this term include rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking and so-called honour-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour killings), as well as many others, including offences committed online.

While we were commissioned specifically to inspect police effectiveness in engaging with women and girls, men and boys can be victims of many of these crimes too. We hope that some of our recommendations, if adopted, will lead to improvements for all.

Methodology

We had already gathered significant amounts of evidence on the police response to VAWG offences through previous inspections (both force-level and thematic). We combined our inspection activity to allow for a comprehensive review of police effectiveness in responding to VAWG offences. This ranged from what work they are carrying out to prevent these crimes from being committed in the first place, to how they manage convicted offenders.

Our methodology included:

- reviewing evidence from more than 30 previous and current HMICFRS inspections of the police response to different VAWG offences (listed in Annex C);
- examining the national and local strategies, policies and guidance on the police response to VAWG offences (including analysis of force management statements and police and crime plans);
- collecting and analysing new data and evidence on all 43 forces in England and Wales;

- conducting focused fieldwork in four forces, including interviews, focus groups and reviews of the management of the most dangerous offenders against women and girls in their areas;
- interviewing more than 60 victims and victim representatives (such as domestic abuse practitioners);
- surveying police officers and staff, and female members of the public (including victims) who are 18 and over; and
- consulting widely with experts from across policing, Government, academia and the third sector.

More information is available in the ‘Methodology’ chapter of the main report.

Recommendations in the interim report

In July 2021, we published an [interim report](#) on our initial findings and recommendations. This was to inform work on the Government’s revised [tackling VAWG strategy](#).

The interim report was based mainly on our review of evidence from our previous inspections and from our consultations with experts. It made three overarching recommendations:

- there should be an immediate and unequivocal commitment that the response to VAWG offences is an absolute priority for government, policing, the criminal justice system and public-sector partnerships, as part of a whole-system approach (recommendation 1);
- the relentless pursuit and disruption of adult perpetrators should be a national priority for the police, and their capability and capacity to do this should be enhanced (recommendation 2); and
- structures and funding should be put in place to make sure victims receive tailored and consistent support (recommendation 3).

We also set out the underpinning actions required to implement these recommendations. We gathered more evidence in support of these actions through our new fieldwork for this inspection. In some cases, we have added more detail to them as a result.

Main findings

The order of these findings reflects the structure of the main report. They are organised into four main sections:

- defining the problem: data and evidence on the scale and prevalence of VAWG offences;
- assessment of police effectiveness at every stage of the response to VAWG offences: from prevention through to managing offenders, with a separate section on the response to victims who are girls (that is, who are 17 years old or younger);
- reiteration and expansion of our interim report findings; and
- conclusions and recommendations.

Defining the problem

This section is based on evidence from a literature and data review, and from analysis of findings from our previous inspections on the police approach to different VAWG offences. A list of documents reviewed can be found in Annex C.

The figures on VAWG in England and Wales are stark and shocking

The scale of VAWG offences is extremely worrying. For example, data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (which is used to estimate actual crime numbers, as opposed to the subset which are reported to or recorded by the police) shows that in the year ending March 2020 there were an estimated:

- 1.6 million female victims (aged 16–59) of [domestic abuse](#) in England and Wales;
- 618,000 female victims (aged 16–74) of [sexual assault \(including attempts\)](#); and
- 892,000 female victims (aged 16–59) of [stalking](#).

Data on police recorded crime, released for the first time in this report and based on information from 36 forces for the year to March 2021, shows that 82 percent of sexual grooming offences are against women and girls; 81 percent of sexual activity with children younger than 16 is against girls; and 80 percent of victims of stalking, voyeurism and exposure are female.

Women and girls frequently report that they don't feel safe going about their daily lives. A recent [ONS study](#) found that two out of three women aged 16 to 34 had experienced harassment in the previous 12 months, and 29 percent felt like they were being followed. Fifty percent of the women who responded to our public survey said they felt unsafe in public spaces.

Demand on police from VAWG offences is rising

[The number of sexual offences recorded by the police has almost tripled in recent years.](#) There was a 9 percent increase in the total number of domestic abuse-related offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2020 compared with the previous year (on the basis of data provided by 42 forces).

These increases partly reflect improvements in police recording, and the increased willingness of victims to report offences (including non-recent or historic crimes). However, estimates of actual crime from the Crime Survey for England and Wales suggest that many victims don't report these crimes to the police.

In chapter 3 of the main report, we provide more data and evidence on the scale and scope of VAWG offences, and the demand it places on the police.

The police response to VAWG offences and victims has improved

Over the past five years, and across multiple inspections, we have found improved and more consistent risk assessments; better identification of repeat victims, to ensure more tailored responses, safeguarding measures and support; an increased use of body-worn video, to gather evidence at the scene of an incident; committed and professional police officers and staff; and passionate and visible local and national leaders, dedicated to improving services for victims.

In this inspection, we found evidence of how policing continues to innovate and work to improve the service it provides to victims. In our fieldwork, we identified 20 examples of notable practice which are set out throughout the chapters in the main report.

Some victims also told us that they believed the police response to them has improved. For example, one victim of domestic abuse said she'd noticed differences in the police response to her in 2020, compared with five years previously:

“Well the police seem to have done more this time ... they put extra locks on my door, they got a female firefighter to come out and install a fire reduction letterbox and offered me locks on my windows. They [the police] also interviewed him [the perpetrator].”

However, as we set out below, we found that there is much more to do to make this good practice consistent, and to be able to keep pace with the growth in demand caused by VAWG offences.

Assessment of police effectiveness at every stage of their response to VAWG

This section comprises new findings on the current effectiveness of the police response to VAWG. Using the 4Ps framework in place for other areas of policing (such as serious and organised crime), it focuses on how well the police are prepared to respond to VAWG; prevent offences from happening; protect women and girls from harm; and pursue perpetrators.

How well prepared are the police to engage with women and girls, and respond to VAWG?

Government and policing leaders understand the need to improve the response, and are putting in place different strategies, plans and pilots as a result

We found that all forces we inspected understood the importance of tackling VAWG. They all were acutely aware of increasing demand and of the need to respond more effectively and make sustainable improvements. All forces were trying different ways of directing the response, such as through introducing new strategies, pilots for managing perpetrators or increasing the capacity of specialist teams to investigate domestic abuse.

These force-level changes and commitment to improving the response are reflected at the national level. For example:

- a new policing VAWG strategy is being developed (and will be informed by this inspection); and
- following a successful pilot in Avon and Somerset Police, Operation Soteria is being extended across five forces and corresponding CPS areas so that police and prosecutors can trial innovative ways to deal with rape cases. These are based on robust perpetrator management, better understanding of data and better victim care. More details on this can be found in chapter 10.

This policing work is partly directed by several recent (or imminent) Government strategies, all of which will have been produced in 2021. These include a revised VAWG strategy; a refreshed national strategy on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales; an updated domestic abuse strategy, including a new perpetrator strategy; and the [Government's end-to-end rape review](#). VAWG is also contained in several other Government strategies, such as the [Beating crime plan](#) published in summer 2021.

There is little consistency or clear join-up between much of this activity

All the forces we inspected had different governance arrangements in place for VAWG. They gathered different information to help monitor performance in tackling VAWG and dedicated different types and amounts of resources to it.

At a national level, the multiple strategies risk making it unclear where priorities lie. There was also little evidence of how learning or recommendations from one area of VAWG should be applied elsewhere. For instance, recommendations from the rape review on better data collection and use would undoubtedly be appropriate for other types of offences. And learning from child protection on effective use of special measures to help make sure that vulnerable victims are supported could also apply to adult victims.

Overall, we found that there are some excellent processes, pilots, practice and strategies in place, but sometimes there is little connectivity between them. This is inefficient and makes it hard to draw a clear line between strategic priorities and frontline practice.

As a result, we make recommendations aimed at improving consistency and join-up in the policing response to VAWG – both within and across forces.

Local and national information on VAWG offences has major gaps, and does not allow for proper oversight or accountability

Consistent and high-quality force-level information on VAWG offences, victims and offenders would allow chief constables to monitor their forces' performance in this area; to assure themselves that this is effective; to spot emerging trends or problems; and to take action in response.

But we found considerable inconsistencies over what data on VAWG offences is collected at local level, and how it is used.

For instance, victim surveys are used inconsistently across England and Wales, even though the experiences of victims themselves should be a central way for forces to assess the level of service they are providing. When surveys are used, we found that sometimes there was little obvious scrutiny or action on the findings, and certain categories of offence and victim sometimes are actively filtered out. This means that important information is not available at a local or national level to assess how well the police are performing and whether there are any improvements needed. Worryingly, this included cases where the victims no longer supported police action, which is referred to as [outcome 16](#).

Another gap includes information on the protected characteristics of victims. For instance, all the forces we inspected had large gaps in their data regarding ethnicity. In one force, 50 percent of cases had no self-defined ethnicity information recorded, while the best performing force only had this recorded in 65 percent of cases. We were told that one reason for the absence of this important information was that race and other protected characteristics were not mandatory fields on the crime reporting systems.

This inconsistency at local level then makes it impossible to have an accurate national picture of responses to women and girls across England and Wales. There are missed opportunities to use the experiences of victims themselves to improve practice, spot trends or diagnose problems. And it makes clear accountability at local and national levels difficult.

This has also been a common finding from other thematic inspections in this area (such as our 2021 joint inspection of [the police and CPS response to rape](#), which we conducted with HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPIS)). We make recommendations in this report aimed at ensuring more consistent gathering, analysis and action following the acquisition of better-quality data.

How effectively do the police prevent VAWG offences?

Prevention activity is a mixed picture

All the forces we visited had conducted initiatives (often with other organisations) designed to prevent crimes against women and girls. Much of this was focused on the night-time economy. The locations for this activity had been identified as a result of the analysis of crime and incident data. And sometimes they had also been informed by engaging with women and girls. We saw evidence of targeted prevention work resulting from this, often in partnership with other agencies.

This is positive. However, there was no consistency and forces did not always share with other forces how effective these initiatives were, to help policing improve across England and Wales.

We also found significant variation (and some problems) in how forces were conducting certain forms of preventative activity. For instance:

- Preventative work in schools: we inspected two forces that had dedicated youth engagement workers. One force had 22 and the other had 12. The forces were roughly similar in terms of size of the population and number of officers per 1,000 population. As the number of officers working with schools varied between the forces, it is likely that the amount of preventative activity that forces can do in schools will also vary.
- Online activity: online crime has significantly increased, including harassment and abuse of women and girls, and grooming offences. However, we found that often officers have no skills/training in giving advice about how to keep safe online. Instead, crime prevention (and resources dedicated to it) is still too focused on the concept of physical prevention advice (for example, the use of alarms and locks).

As a result of these and the findings that follow, we make a new overarching recommendation aimed at improving consistency in the police response to VAWG (recommendation 4).

How effectively do the police protect women and girls?

Use of protective powers is inconsistent, and this is unexplained

We didn't find that the police report they are lacking powers to protect women. However, there are unexplained variations between forces across England and Wales in how often protective powers and notices are used (such as Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs), Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) and Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs)).

We discuss this more in our recent super-complaint investigation report, which was undertaken with the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct, on [police use of protective measures in cases of violence against women and girls](#), and we reiterate recommendations from that investigation in this report.

We conclude that some forces do not pay enough attention to breaches of orders, the effect they have on victims and how well they perform in this important area.

Oversight and use of the domestic violence disclosure scheme require immediate improvement

The domestic violence disclosure scheme (DVDS, also known as Clare's Law) gives any member of the public the right to ask the police if their partner may pose a risk to them. The scheme also includes a responsibility on the police to make decisions about whether to disclose information to protect another individual from harm. The scheme is an important mechanism for helping to prevent domestic abuse.

In the forces we visited, none had established robust performance management processes to make sure the scheme was working effectively. In three of the four forces, the framework of domestic abuse performance measures didn't include the DVDS. While one force did monitor numbers of disclosures, the timeliness of the disclosures was not monitored. One force couldn't tell us how long disclosures took, as they didn't keep a central record of this. The result was that in all the forces we inspected, there seemed little oversight of how this may affect the victim, particularly how long the disclosures were taking and the relative risks to the victim during this time.

In one force, decisions about most cases didn't appear to routinely involve any other relevant organisations. This is very worrying as one of the purposes of involving partners is to make informed decisions on the basis of all available information.

Neither the scheme itself nor the guidance seem to have been reviewed and updated since 2016. We also consider that a guide time of 35 days to decide about disclosure is unsatisfactory.

This shows a wider problem with the response to VAWG offences. Powers and tools are available, but we found there is often limited local, national or Government oversight. Often we found there is limited evaluation of how these powers are being used, no indication when they should be introduced and no guidance as to what their results should be.

Better offender management is urgently required

While the forces we inspected were able to identify high-harm and serial offenders against women and girls, the continuing management of these individuals was not consistent.

We asked our fieldwork forces to identify five individuals who they considered posed the highest risk to women and girls within the local force area. We also asked the forces to identify five individuals who posed the highest risk to different women and girls. We were concerned that of the 40 individuals that the forces identified to us, 34 hadn't already been recognised and managed by the force as their most prolific repeat VAWG offenders.

Of the 40 individuals identified by forces, nearly half had offended against 2 women or girls, but 14 had offended against 3 or more. Some offenders in the cases we reviewed had offended against 8 or 9 different victims. There may be many more victims who were not known to the police.

In many cases, we couldn't be reassured that the forces were managing known offenders in a consistent and effective way. So it appears that there is limited consistency in the way serial perpetrators are identified and managed.

Some forces work in partnership to manage domestic abuse perpetrators in specific schemes. These are sometimes called multi-agency tasking and co-ordination (MATAC) meetings. All the forces we inspected had introduced this approach or were about to. All the approaches varied. We also found that there was inconsistent access to perpetrator programmes for individuals being managed in these schemes.

How effectively do the police pursue VAWG perpetrators?

In our interim report, we made a recommendation that policing should focus more relentlessly on pursuit of adult perpetrators of VAWG offences. This includes responding swiftly to reports of offences, and working effectively with the CPS in building cases for prosecution. Our evidence from fieldwork supports this recommendation.

Breaches of protective orders are not always acted on

In this inspection, we examined 83 cases of breaches of non-molestation orders and restraining orders to see whether there had been any improvement in how forces deal with these types of cases.

We found that in 52 out of the 83 cases, the police had failed to correctly identify that the breach of the order (as well as being an offence itself) was evidence of further stalking, harassment or coercive and controlling behaviour. We also checked how long it took for officers to respond to reports of breaches of non-molestation and restraining orders. In just over half of cases the police didn't respond to the breach in under 24 hours.

The high use of outcomes 15 and 16 for VAWG offences is a matter of grave concern

We are extremely concerned that a large proportion of VAWG offences are closed by the police as requiring no further action, with either outcome 15 (evidential difficulties) or outcome 16 (victim does not support further action).

As we reported in our 2021 [review of policing domestic abuse during the pandemic](#), on average, three out of every four recorded domestic abuse cases are closed with outcomes 15 or 16. The number for rape cases is also very high: the number of offences ending in outcome 16 for recorded rapes for females increased from 5,773 in 2014/15 to the highest record of 18,584 in 2018/19.

There are many reasons why a victim may choose not to continue with an investigation or prosecution. However, we have serious concerns that there are significant variations between forces in the use of these outcomes, with limited explanation as to why this is the case. In our 2021 [joint inspection of the police and CPS response to rape](#), we also highlighted the lack of information and recording in the crime file about these cases, and some severe gaps in the data that would allow forces to assure themselves these are always the right or only decisions.

We are recommending immediate action to increase supervision and understanding of the use of these outcome codes (recommendation 5).

But more widely, we consider the high use of these outcomes provides a good case study of the problems in the current police response to VAWG:

- there are inconsistencies between forces in their use, and limited data to explain why this is the case;
- information recorded on case files to support this decision-making is often patchy, again limiting opportunities for forces to assure themselves it is correct;
- low use of evidence-led prosecutions means these alleged perpetrators are at liberty and may offend again; and
- some forces then exclude victims whose cases are closed with outcomes 15 or 16 from victim satisfaction surveys, meaning another missed opportunity to check decision-making.

Expansion of our three interim report recommendations

This section gives more detail on the three recommendations we made in our interim report, based on further analysis of all the evidence gathered and reviewed for this inspection.

Recommendation 1

There should be an immediate and unequivocal commitment that the response to VAWG offences is an absolute priority for government, policing, the criminal justice system, and public-sector partnerships. This needs to be supported at a minimum by a relentless focus on these crimes; mandated responsibilities; and sufficient funding so that all partner agencies can work effectively as part of a whole-system approach to reduce and prevent the harms these offences are causing.

There needs to be an immediate upwards shift in the prioritisation of VAWG offences in policing

Everyone we interviewed or otherwise spoke with as part of this inspection was committed to making improvements, and agreed with the need to make VAWG offences a priority. The multitude of strategies and plans pay testament to this commitment.

But despite some improvements, and strong commitment at national and local levels to providing a better service, we stated in our interim report that the current response to VAWG offences is unsustainable. While there is some extremely effective policing practice across England and Wales, this is inconsistent in too many respects.

The demand on the police associated with these crimes is also increasing, as is the number of offences not resulting in a charge or a timely prosecution. In parallel, there are many competing priorities for the police that need to be managed and balanced.

We cannot keep making the same recommendations and expect them to have the effect that is needed. A radical refocus and shift is required. The new approach should be multifaceted: to act to prevent VAWG from happening in the first place; to support victims; and to relentlessly pursue and disrupt offenders with the full force of the law.

VAWG offences need to be a higher priority, both within forces and on a national scale. Ways of working should be informed by other areas of policing, including how the service responds to serious and organised crime, county lines offending, child abuse and terrorism, in terms of both prioritisation and resources. We consider all these areas are good examples of what increased prioritisation can achieve. While none is analogous to VAWG – and the responses are all different – they share a complete clarity of purpose that tackling these offences is central to the policing mission. They have established and consistent structures in place to oversee them, more robust performance management, and overall there is a better grip on them.

We therefore recommend that the Government and policing use all reasonable means at their disposal to raise the priority of the response to VAWG, and to make sure it is improved, consistent and sufficiently resourced. We give as examples of actions that would achieve this recommendation the inclusion of these crimes in the Government's strategic policing requirement; appointment of a National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) national policing coordinator to coordinate policing's response to VAWG; and the use of the Home Secretary and College of Policing powers to mandate minimum standards in policing in this area.

Evidence gathered since our interim report provides further support for our recommendation that the Home Office, the NPCC and all forces should improve the data gathered and used to monitor performance in responding to these offences.

Given the high number of domestic abuse cases, it is unacceptable that not all forces conduct victim surveys, and that those forces that do use different criteria. It's also extremely concerning that few forces gather consistent information on how long it takes to respond to requests under Clare's Law, for instance, and that most cannot distinguish between rape victims who never supported prosecution, or those who did but then withdrew their support.

Revised data sets must include qualitative information from victims and their representatives, including information that would allow understanding of any variation in experiences of women with different protected characteristics. This information should then be used not just to monitor performance but also to allocate accountability for overseeing improvements, to direct these improvements at every level, diagnose changes in trends and allow forces to learn from each other.

This increased prioritisation in policing should be one part of much wider, whole-system improvements in the response to VAWG

Policing cannot solve VAWG on its own. While the police have unique powers and responsibilities in dealing with VAWG, this deep-rooted societal problem needs a whole-system approach in response. As we stated in our interim report, this includes the need for much more consistent and effective working across the criminal justice system (for instance, between the CPS and the police on rape cases, as we set out in our 2021 [joint thematic report on the police and CPS response to rape](#)) and between policing and partners such as housing, health and education.

Again, all reasonable means available to improve this joint working must be deployed if we are to give women and girls confidence that there is not just the will but also the power to improve the response to VAWG.

Our recommendations in this area include:

- the introduction of a new statutory duty for partners to work together to protect women and girls;
- the development of a statutory framework for wider partnership working, which we suggest could have the same intent and focus as the frameworks in place for child protection in England and Wales; and
- other work to better define and mandate joint working arrangements.

The implementation of this recommendation will be different in Wales, due to some public services being devolved and elements of this recommendation already being in place. We discuss this further in chapter 10.

Recommendation 2

The relentless pursuit and disruption of adult perpetrators should be a national priority for the police, and their capability and capacity to do this should be enhanced

We stated in our interim report that an effective criminal justice system is critical to ensuring that perpetrators are held to account for their crimes, and for behaviours to be addressed in a way that stops further crimes being committed. The police need to have sufficient resources to be able to respond to the changing demand and complexity of these crimes. They should also assure themselves that they are performing in a way that the public would expect in prioritising violent crimes against women and girls.

Evidence gathered since our interim report has supported this recommendation, and is summarised in the 'How effectively do the police pursue VAWG perpetrators?' section above.

Recommendation 3

Structures and funding should be put in place to make sure victims receive tailored and consistent support

We stated in our interim report that victims' needs should be a central consideration of any investigation. Victims should be fully supported towards a result that reflects their wishes and considers any discrimination and inequality they may face. Consistent and accurate recording of information on the protected characteristics of victims is needed to help ensure the right support is offered.

Evidence gathered since the interim report supports this recommendation – particularly the accounts given by victims themselves. Supporting and protecting victims (including from repeat victimisation) should be a guiding principle of all improvement activity – as it was for this inspection. This is clearly the right and empathetic thing to do.

But our evidence shows better support also means that victims are more likely to feel able to continue to support police action. We give more details of the characteristics of what this support should be later in our report.

Overarching recommendations

As a result of these findings, we make five overarching recommendations in this report. Details of the specific underpinning actions required to implement these recommendations, who should do these and in what timescale are given in the 'Recommendations and next steps' section of the main report.

Recommendation 1

There should be an immediate and unequivocal commitment that the response to VAWG offences is an absolute priority for government, policing, the criminal justice system, and public-sector partnerships. This needs to be supported at a minimum by a relentless focus on these crimes; mandated responsibilities; and sufficient funding so that all partner agencies can work effectively as part of a whole-system approach to reduce and prevent the harms these offences are causing.

Recommendation 2

The relentless pursuit and disruption of adult perpetrators should be a national priority for the police, and their capability and capacity to do this should be enhanced.

Recommendation 3

Structures and funding should be put in place to make sure victims receive tailored and consistent support.

Recommendation 4

All chief constables should immediately review and ensure that there are consistently high standards in their forces' responses to violence against women and girls and should be supported in doing so by national standards and data.

Recommendation 5

Immediate review of use of outcomes 15 and 16 in violence against women and girls offences.

1. Background to the inspection

On 26 March 2021, the Home Secretary commissioned us, under section 54(2B) of the Police Act 1996, to carry out a thematic inspection into how police engage with women and girls who are [victims](#), offenders and witnesses. The full terms of reference for this inspection are given in Annex A.

The first part of our inspection focused on the police response to victims of violence against women and girls (VAWG) offences, and sought to answer:

1. How effective is police work to prevent women and girls becoming victims of violence and abuse?
2. How effective is the police response when women and girls report crime?

Work is also underway to consider police engagement with women and girls who are offenders or witnesses. We will provide further details of the scope of this work in due course.

VAWG offences are acts of violence or abuse that disproportionately affect women and girls. Crimes and behaviour covered by this term include rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking and so-called honour-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour killings).

However, we recognise that women and girls can be subjected to any crime, and that there are other crimes which disproportionately affect those of different genders and with other protected characteristics. We hope that some of our findings and recommendations, if adopted, will also help improve results for all victims.

July 2021 interim report

In our [interim report](#) (which was mainly based on a review of evidence from previous HMICFRS inspections) we concluded that there is an epidemic of offending against women and girls which requires fundamental system-wide change to make the vast improvements required.

While we acknowledged that the police have made considerable improvements over the past decade in how they respond to these crimes – and this progress should continue – the police cannot tackle the harms posed by VAWG on their own. There needs to be a whole-system approach involving all partner organisations, including health, local authorities, education, social care and the CPS. To achieve this, we stated that strong action is needed at a local and national level in terms of governance, accountability, scrutiny and long-term funding.

We made three overarching recommendations in the interim report.

1. There should be an immediate and unequivocal commitment that the response to VAWG offences is an absolute priority for the Government, policing, the criminal justice system and public-sector partnerships. This needs to be supported at a minimum by a relentless focus on these crimes, mandated and clear responsibilities, and sufficient funding so that all partner agencies can work effectively as part of a whole-system approach to reduce and prevent the harms that these offences are causing.
2. The relentless pursuit and disruption of adult perpetrators should be a national priority for the police, and their capability and capacity to do this should be enhanced.
3. Structures and funding should be put in place to make sure victims receive tailored and consistent support.

We gathered more evidence in support of these recommendations through our subsequent inspection activity, and have reiterated and (in some respects) expanded them in this report.

Structure of this report

The next chapter provides the methodology used for this inspection. This is followed by four main sections of findings and recommendations:

- defining the problem: data and evidence on the scale and prevalence of VAWG offences;
- assessment of police effectiveness at every stage of the response to VAWG offences: from prevention through to management of offenders, with a separate chapter on the response to victims who are girls (that is, who are 17 years old or younger);
- reiteration and expansion of our interim report findings; and
- conclusions and recommendations.

2. Methodology

We used the following evidence sources for this report, which have allowed us to take a wide view of police effectiveness in responding to VAWG.

Expert Reference Group and sector engagement

We regularly discussed our findings and approach with our Expert Reference Group, which was set up specifically for this inspection. It included representation from throughout policing, the Government, and the charity and voluntary sector. We are grateful to the Expert Reference Group for their continued support and expertise, which have been invaluable. A full list of members is given in Annex B.

We also consulted other interested parties that play a strategic role for policing or the criminal justice system, including those who work as part of the wider charity and voluntary sector.

Literature review and analysis of evidence from previous inspections

We have collated evidence and reviews from our previous inspections. We have reported on the police approach to different violence against women and girls (VAWG) offences in multiple inspections, and we continue to do so – evidence from 2021 is included in this report.

The inspections reviewed for this report include force-level PEEL assessments, rolling child protection programmes, and thematic inspections focused on [domestic abuse](#), rape, missing children, so-called honour-based abuse, harassment, and modern slavery and human trafficking. We also considered data and findings from other reports and sources, including those published by the Home Office. A list of documents reviewed can be found in Annex C.

Lived experience work

The [Home Secretary's commissioning letter for this inspection](#) included the requirement that we include “a focus on the lived experiences of women and girls”.

Our lived experience work gathered the first-hand accounts of victims, and of the practitioners who supported them during their experiences within the criminal justice system. Throughout this report, the term ‘victim(s)’ is used to refer to those affected by VAWG offences. It incorporates other terms such as ‘complainant(s)’, ‘client(s)’ and ‘survivor(s)’, as referred to by focus groups and interviewees.

As well as considering lived experience work from our existing inspections, including as part of our current rape review, we obtained evidence from 27 victims and 32 practitioners who work for victim support groups. We have used this invaluable evidence to support our findings and recommendations throughout this report. Unless otherwise stated, any quotes come from our lived experience work.

We would like to thank all who took part in these interviews and groups for their invaluable support to this inspection and for their courage in participating in the evidence-gathering sessions.

Fieldwork

Our fieldwork was informed by discussions with our Expert Reference Group and was focused on the following four themes.

- **Prepare** – strategies, structures, equipping the workforce and the understanding of VAWG.
- **Prevent** – using information and working in partnership to educate and restricting opportunities for crime (including safety in public spaces).
- **Protect** – offender management principles and protective orders.
- **Pursue** – arrests, initial case progression and looking after victims.

Although a 4Ps framework like this is not currently used in policing for VAWG, it is for other areas such as counter-terrorism and serious and organised crime. We believe that there is potential for the framework to be applied more widely to VAWG in future. This is discussed in chapter 10, where we make recommendations aimed at raising the priority of VAWG offences.

The fieldwork forces were Avon and Somerset, Cheshire, Surrey, and Humberside. These forces were primarily selected because of their emerging practice in response to VAWG crimes. We are grateful to the officers and staff in these forces for their participation in the inspection.

The fieldwork included:

- **Pre-inspection activity:** reviewing documents and information, including policies and procedures linked to how the forces manage the response to VAWG.
- **In-force fieldwork:** including interviews with VAWG strategic leads, focus groups and case file assessments.
- **Staff survey:** focused on frontline officers and staff as well as public protection unit specialists.

The findings from fieldwork are presented in chapters 4–8 of this report.

Surveys

We carried out two bespoke surveys: one of police officers and staff across England and Wales (using the same questions as we did in our staff surveys during our fieldwork); and a second of the public, including victims. The surveys were voluntary and therefore most likely to be responded to by motivated, interested people who may not have been representative of the general population.

Both surveys covered a wide range of areas, including:

- opinions on the effectiveness of the response to VAWG, supporting victims and repeat victimisation;
- whose responsibility it is to educate boys and girls on healthy relationships and consent;
- whose responsibility it is to support women after they have reported a crime to the police;
- what barriers the police face when investigating VAWG;
- how to increase feelings of safety among women and girls;
- how likely respondents would be to encourage the public to report crimes; and
- whether the police response to VAWG has improved or worsened in recent years.

The first survey was sent to all police forces to gain a national perspective on how effectively the police engage with women and girls. Including our fieldwork forces, we received 2,181 responses from 34 forces.

The second survey invited participation from all women over 18, including those who have been a victim of crime and those who have not. We regularly tweeted the link to the survey, and encouraged members of our Expert Reference Group to promote findings via their various contacts and platforms. We received 1,507 responses in the two weeks this survey was open.

For some questions, we were able to make a direct comparison between answers we received from both groups of respondents. This gave us an opportunity to consider whether the police's perception of the service they are offering women and girls is the same as the public's perception. The survey results have been used throughout the report.

We also analysed results from a survey for practitioners working with victims of domestic abuse that we distributed via our social media account and our website in autumn 2019. This was originally designed to be completed by practitioners, but some responses were also received from police officers.

This survey covered a range of areas, including:

- Which areas within domestic abuse practices need improvement?
- What should the priority be for domestic abuse practices?
- Has the response to domestic abuse improved in recent years?

This survey received 1,311 responses in total. About 70 percent of responses were from practitioners working with victims of domestic abuse and the rest were from police officers and staff.

Force management statements

We have also used evidence from force management statements (FMS) to inform our inspection findings.

An FMS is a self-assessment that chief constables (and London equivalents) prepare and give to HMICFRS each year.

It is the chief constable's statement and explanation of:

- the demand the force expects to face in the next four years;
- how the force will change and improve its workforce and other assets to cope with that demand;
- how the force will improve its efficiency to make sure the gap between future demand and future capability is as small as it can reasonably be; and
- the money the force expects to have to do all this.

3. Information and data on the scale of violence against women and girls in England and Wales

Violence against women and girls includes complex crimes with far-reaching and devastating consequences

The term ‘violence against women and girls’ (VAWG) includes often devastating and complex crimes such as female homicide, rape, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, and coercive and controlling behaviour.

The figures on the prevalence of these offences are shocking. For example, there were an estimated [2.3 million victims of domestic abuse](#) in the year ending March 2020, 1.6 million of whom were female.

Between 2009 and 2019, on average, [one woman was killed by a man every three days](#) in the UK. A current or former partner of the women was responsible in 62 percent of these killings. And a history of abuse was known in 59 percent of the 1,042 female homicides committed by current or former partners or other male relatives.

Data recently published in the report [Domestic homicides and suspected victim suicides during the Covid-19 pandemic 2020–2021](#) showed that nearly all victims of intimate partner homicides and victim suicides during this period were women, and nearly all suspects were men. The overall number of domestic homicides in the 12 months between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 was 163. There were also 38 suspected suicides of victims of domestic abuse.

A global epidemic

Violence against women and girls – particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence – is a major global problem. Estimates published by the [World Health Organization](#) indicate that globally approximately 1 in 3 (30 percent) of women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Most of this violence is intimate partner violence.

Worldwide, almost one third (27 percent) of women aged 15–49 who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.

Crimes including stalking, domestic abuse and sexual assault disproportionately affect women and girls

Millions of women and girls are subjected to violence and abuse every year. While many of the crimes that fall under this category are also committed against men, women and girls are disproportionately the victims of them.

For example, the Crime Survey for England and Wales – which provides a good reflection of the true prevalence of crime (including where it isn't reported to the police) – estimates that in the year ending March 2020, 618,000 women and 155,000 men between the ages of 16 and 74 experienced [sexual assault \(including attempts\)](#), and 892,000 women and 443,000 men between the ages of 16 and 59 experienced [stalking](#). Since 2011, while the number of male victims of stalking has reduced, the number of female victims has continued to increase.

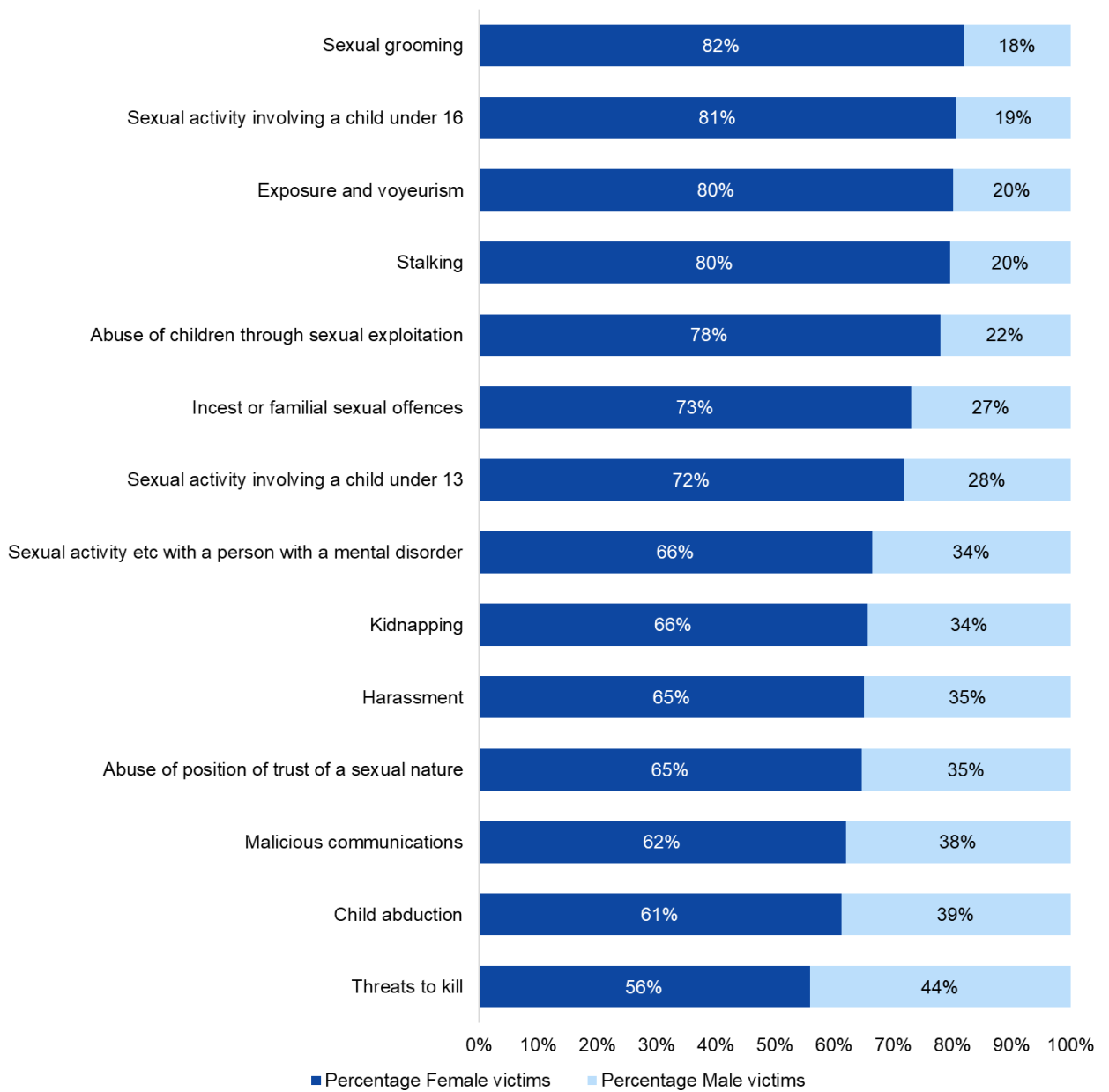
Over time, we have seen how women are consistently more likely to be victims of domestic violence. For example, the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) reports](#) that 4.0 percent of men and 8.1 percent of women aged 16 to 59 years experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2020. This compares with 6.5 percent of men and 11.1 percent of women in the year ending March 2005.

Offences involving [rape and sexual assault](#) are recorded more for females than males. The number of recorded rapes for females and males increased from 11,445 and 850 in 2002/03 to the highest recording in 2018/19 of 53,419 and 6,468, respectively. This then decreased to 49,997 offences of rape of a female and 5,699 offences of rape of a male in 2020/21.

The [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) also reported that the number of women aged 16 to 24 who experienced cyber stalking almost doubled from 659 in the year ending March 2013 to 1,290 in the year ending March 2017.

Figure 1 highlights the types of crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls. However, it is important to note that we don't have enough data or evidence to really understand the number and prevalence of these crimes or how they affect women and girls from different backgrounds with certain protected characteristics. This makes it hard to establish the trends and drivers behind VAWG.

Figure 1: Proportion of crimes recorded by the police committed against male vs female victims in the year to March 2021



Source: Home Office data hub

Note: This is police-recorded crime data from 36 forces that provided data via the Home Office data hub. This data is therefore incomplete and will not match data available elsewhere that is for all forces.

Child sexual abuse disproportionately affects girls

Nationally collected statistics show that there has been a sharp increase in reporting of child sexual abuse to the police in recent years. [Government figures](#) that include all child sexual abuse cases show that the police recorded over 83,000 child sexual abuse offences (including obscene publications) in the year ending March 2020. This is a rise of approximately 267 percent since 2013. Research estimates indicate that approximately one quarter of all child sexual abuse cases involve a perpetrator under 18.

In the year ending March 2019, the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) reported that women were more likely to have experienced abuse than men before the age of 16, with abuse affecting about one in four women and one in six men.

Figures for [police-recorded crime](#) in England and Wales in the year ending March 2020 show there were over 2.5 times as many sexual assaults on a female child under the age of 13 compared with a male child aged under 13. Witnessing domestic violence and emotional abuse were the most common forms of child abuse experienced in 2019.

Many girls are subjected to sexual harassment and online sexual abuse

A [recent rapid thematic review](#) by Ofsted revealed how prevalent sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are for children and young people. Worryingly, girls reported that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse, such as being sent unsolicited explicit sexual material and being pressured to send nude pictures ('nudes'), are much more prevalent than adults realise.

Ofsted also found that sexual harassment takes place so often that it has become 'commonplace'. For example, 92 percent of girls and 74 percent of boys said that they or their peers experience sexist name-calling 'a lot' or 'sometimes'. Ofsted reported that the frequency of these harmful sexual behaviours means that some children and young people consider them normal and not worth reporting.

In September 2021, Girlguiding reported that [online harms involving girls were on the rise](#). Some 2,114 girls and young women aged between 7 and 21 were surveyed between March and April for Girlguiding's annual girls' attitudes 2021 survey.

Of all those polled, 71 percent said they had experienced an online harm, including 73 percent of girls aged between 11 and 16 and 91 percent of those aged between 17 and 21. Almost half (49 percent) of girls aged between seven and ten years old had experienced an online harm in the last year. Almost a fifth (18 percent) said they had encountered a person pretending to be someone else, while more than 11 percent said that they had seen obscene pictures.

Disabled and LGBTQ girls and women in the Girlguiding survey were more likely to experience online harm – 40 percent of disabled women and girls aged between 11 and 21 years old reported experiencing online harm, compared with 25 percent of respondents without a disability, and 42 percent of LGBTQ respondents had reported experiencing online harm compared with 24 percent of straight girls and women.

Many women and girls feel unsafe in public spaces

Women and girls throughout the world fear and experience various types of sexual violence in public spaces, from unwelcome sexual remarks and unwanted touching to rape and murder. It happens on streets, in and around schools, on public transport, and in workplaces, parks, public toilets and online spaces.

While a large proportion of VAWG offences, particularly those involving rape or domestic abuse, do unfortunately happen at a victim's or offender's home, many take place in public settings. The ONS reports that [37 percent of rape offences](#) take place outside the home.

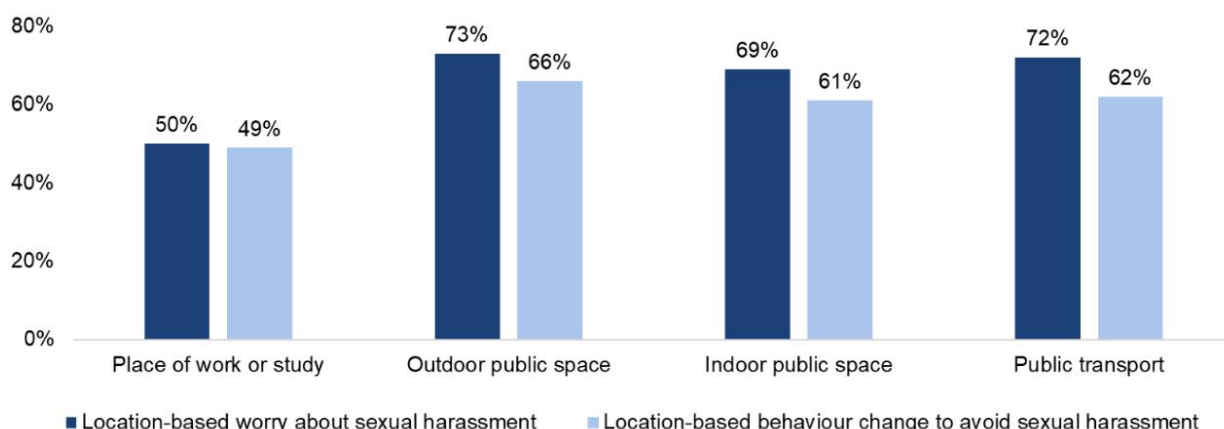
There is increasing concern about women's safety in public spaces more generally. For example, a recent [ONS study](#) on the perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment in Great Britain found that one in two women felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a busy public space. In addition, two out of three women aged 16 to 34 had experienced one form of harassment in the previous 12 months, with 44 percent of women aged 16 to 34 having experienced catcalls, whistles, unwanted sexual comments or jokes, while 29 percent had felt like they were being followed. Of the women who responded to our public survey, 50 said they felt unsafe in public spaces. This was reflected in some of the accounts from our lived experience work:

“As a teenager when I walked home – there were two ways. The shorter way was unlit, but I'd go the longer way with streetlights. It's so prevalent every day, e.g. Sarah Everard – nothing has changed – it hasn't got better but people are more aware of it.”

The Government Equalities Office's consultation on [sexual harassment in the workplace](#) showed that a large percentage of women worry about sexual harassment and/or change their behaviour to avoid it. It found that sexual harassment is a concern for three in four women when they are outside or on public transport and one in two women when they are in the workplace.

This clearly highlights that society as a whole needs to consider what should be done to resolve this and ensure women and girls feel safer in all circumstances.

Figure 2: Percentage of UK women who worry about sexual harassment and/or change their behaviour to avoid sexual harassment, by location



Source: Government Equalities Office sexual harassment survey 2020

According to the [Police and Crime Plan 2017–2021](#) for London, on average, 11 women and girls are raped or sexually assaulted in every London borough every week. Domestic abuse accounts for a tenth of all crime reports to the Metropolitan Police Service. In a recent survey of 8,000 Londoners on policing and crime, 74 percent of female respondents said they worried about their safety some or all the time. For these reasons, in his Police and Crime Plan for London, published in March 2017, Mayor Sadiq Khan made tackling VAWG a major priority.

The number of crimes reported is rising, but many victims still do not report VAWG offences

The police are recording more VAWG crimes. For instance:

- in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester), there was a 9 percent increase in the total number of domestic abuse-related offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2020 compared with the year ending March 2019;
- police-recorded crimes also saw a 9 percent increase in offences recorded in April to June 2020 compared with the same months in 2019; and
- the number of sexual offences recorded by the police has almost tripled in recent years.

This rise contrasts heavily with the reduction previously seen in total crime and ‘violence against the person’ offences. This may reflect improved recording by the police as well as increased reporting by victims.

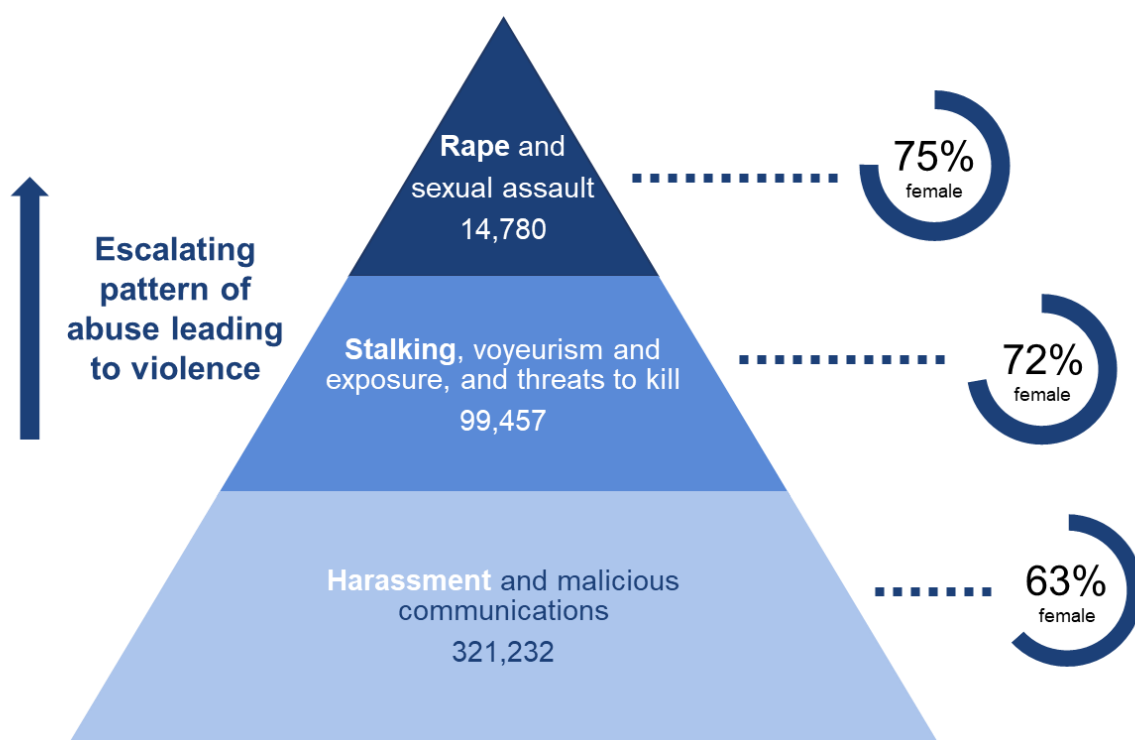
It is important to note how non-recent or historic crimes can affect police demand. In its [call for evidence](#) for the recent [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#), the Home Office reported that for a subset of forces providing data to the Home Office data hub, 23 percent of sexual offences recorded in the year ending March 2020 were non-recent offences (those that took place more than 12 months before being recorded by the police). For many years, these crimes were seen as the reason why the overall demand was increasing. However, reports of non-recent

offences have declined in the past 12 months, which means that they are no longer contributing to the overall increase in sexual offences.

We know that not all crimes are reported to the police. For instance, latest estimates for victims of sexual assault by rape or penetration since the age of 16 from the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) showed that fewer than one in six (16 percent) female victims and fewer than one in five (19 percent) male victims aged 16 to 59 years reported it to the police.

The Victim and Survivor Survey undertaken as part of the Government's [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#) found that the two main reasons why women and girls of all ages don't report incidents are: "I didn't think that the incident was serious enough to report" (55 percent) and "I didn't think that reporting it would help" (45 percent).

Figure 3: Number of crimes committed during the year to March 2021 and the proportion that were committed against females



Source: Home Office data hub (2021)

Note: The above is based on police-recorded crime data received from 36 forces via the Home Office data hub. This data is therefore incomplete and will not match data elsewhere that is for all forces.

The number of cases that don't proceed through the criminal justice system is high

Of the offences that do come to the attention of the police, many don't proceed further through the criminal justice system. Charges and prosecution rates for various VAWG offences are continuing to fall, despite evidence showing that the prevalence is increasing. There is a widening gap between the number of some types of crimes recorded, and the number of cases going to court and resulting in a prosecution.

In its 2018/19 [Violence against women and girls report](#), the CPS reported on a range of offences, including domestic abuse, rape, stalking and honour-based abuse. This showed a 15.1 percent decrease in prosecutions and a 14 percent drop in convictions in domestic abuse, rape and sexual offences in comparison with the previous year. This reflects the 12 percent fall in the number of investigations referred to the CPS by the police, as well as a significant increase in the amount of digital data – meaning some cases are taking longer to charge.

Half of all sexual offences recorded by the police don't proceed further through the criminal justice system as a result of evidential difficulties. These cases are closed by the police using outcome code 15; we discuss this further in the chapter 8. This figure reflects the problems involved in investigating sexual offences, despite the majority of suspects being identified.

Although the CPS stated that the number of domestic abuse prosecutions fell, this decrease isn't reflected in the number of victims using support services. For example, the [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) saw an 80 percent increase in calls during the first lockdown in comparison with the same period the year before.

In addition, the [ONS](#) has stated there were 61,169 prosecutions for domestic abuse-related crimes in the year ending March 2020. This accounted for approximately 14 percent of all CPS prosecutions in England and Wales. This figure was much lower than that for the previous year (78,624).

The number of [coercive and controlling behaviour](#) offences recorded by the police increased from 4,246 in 2016/17 to 24,856 in 2019/20. Some of this increase is likely to be due to [legislative changes](#) that happened shortly before this period in 2015.

In 2019, 1,112 defendants were prosecuted for coercive and controlling behaviour offences (either as the principal or non-principal offence). While still low, this figure represents an 18 percent rise from the previous year. The average length of custodial sentences for coercive and controlling behaviour has been longer compared with those for assaults (which are the most common domestic abuse-related offences recorded) and those for stalking. Despite these improvements, prevalence estimates from the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) suggest that currently only a small part of coercive and controlling behaviour comes to the attention of the police or is recorded properly.

It is important to understand the complex needs of the victim, including any protected characteristics and intersectionality

Victims' needs are often complex. The police need to make sure they fully understand their vulnerabilities and what action is needed to support them, as well as protect them from future harm. This includes any discrimination or inequality they might face. This means that the police need to collect and have access to appropriate data that will give them information on victims' protected characteristics as well as [intersectionality](#), which describes how race, class, gender and other personal characteristics 'intersect' with one another and overlap.

The approaches taken by the [VAWG sector](#) suggest that an intersectional response is one "where all experiences must be addressed comprehensively, holistically and through women-centred, trauma-informed, needs-led wrap-around support recognising women as a whole".

Those with a long-term disability or illness are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault than the population at large. For example, for the year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined, the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) showed that women with a disability were more likely to have experienced sexual assault in the past year than women without a disability (5.0 percent and 2.8 percent respectively). There was no significant difference for men. It should be noted that there is no evidence on causation, and the figures should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive.

There is a clear link between mental health and women's experiences of violence and abuse. For example, the report [Hidden hurt: Violence, abuse and disadvantage in the lives of women](#) stated that 54 percent of women who suffer from mental ill health have experienced extensive abuse. Most research in this area stresses the need for the police and public health services to have a better understanding of VAWG and its link with mental ill health.

Research produced by [Sussex Stalking Support and the National Centre for Cyberstalking Research](#) at the University of Bedfordshire indicates that about eight in ten victims of stalking experience symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the aftermath of being stalked.

Despite the high prevalence of PTSD symptoms in victims of stalking, only about a quarter were assessed for this when attending health services. As a victim reported during our lived experience research:

"Firstly, there needs to be more training, more understanding. My circumstances are a little bit different as I have extra vulnerabilities due to my [physical disability]. None of the police have taken that into consideration and how my perpetrator would use that in the abuse. They have no knowledge and understanding of that."

VAWG cuts across geographical, religious and ethnic boundaries, with certain types of violence disproportionately affecting women from some cultural backgrounds. For example, forced marriages, female genital mutilation and so-called honour-based violence are more likely to be present in Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities.

A [study supported by the Home Office and Trust for London](#) showed that there are over 137,000 females in England and Wales living with the consequences of female genital mutilation. The [Halo project](#) reports that nationally there are approximately 12 reported so-called honour killings per year in the UK. This doesn't, however, consider all the potential victims, including those who are taken abroad and whose whereabouts remain unknown.

[The Government's VAWG strategy](#) highlighted that an increased prevalence of VAWG among some ethnic minority groups was also evident. For example, those identifying as being of mixed ethnicity were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than other ethnic groups. And those identifying as Black/Black British were more likely to be a victim of sexual assault and those identifying as being of an 'other ethnic group' were more likely to be victims of stalking than those from different ethnic groups.

Rape was the only crime that the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) showed disproportionately affected those from a White background. However, as reported in the 2021 [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#), it's difficult to disentangle ethnicity from socio-economic status and other contributing factors, meaning these findings need to be interpreted with caution.

Through our lived experience we work, we heard that those from a BAME background may find it more difficult to leave an abusive relationship or situation due to cultural beliefs, the lack of available services to provide them with the support they need as well as a lack of trust in the police to handle the investigation in a culturally sensitive manner. As one victim reported, "Women from ethnic minority backgrounds are often discouraged to report hate crime or racism on the basis that nothing is likely to change or improve."

In addition, our super-complaint investigation with the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct, [Safe to share? Report on Liberty and Southall Black Sisters' super-complaint on policing and immigration status](#), found that victims of crime with insecure or uncertain immigration status are fearful that, if they report crimes to the police, their information will be shared with the Home Office.

There is much further to go in understanding the information and data on VAWG

The police need to be equipped with the information and data to be able to ensure they can make the right decisions in terms of the investigation and the complex and multifaceted needs of the victim.

To achieve this, more diversity data is needed. At present, we aren't aware of any force that collects comprehensive data regarding the protected characteristics of victims. Although collecting gender and age data is mandatory, this isn't the same for other protected characteristics. For example, only 2 forces out of 43 were able to provide a full set of data for self-defined victim ethnicity (according to data provided to the Home Office data hub for 2020/21).

4. How well prepared are the police to engage with women and girls, and to respond to violence against women and girls?

As mentioned in chapter 2, our fieldwork assessed police effectiveness in responding to VAWG using the 4Ps delivery framework. This is also used by police in counter-terrorism, and in the response to serious and organised crime.

Preparedness is the first of these 4Ps. It's important for police forces to have well-planned arrangements in place so they can engage effectively with women and girls. Different aspects of police work need to operate together seamlessly to help the police prevent offences, protect victims and pursue perpetrators in a more effective way.

If the police are to be effective, they need to have focused leaders who are supported by clear strategies. These strategies should be underpinned by a wide range of regularly updated information that has been analysed so that leaders can understand how effectively the force is performing.

A particular focus of this section was to consider how extensively police forces prioritised VAWG and whether there was appropriate governance, accountability and scrutiny in place to ensure the best possible results were being achieved.

In our fieldwork, we found all the inspected forces used the term 'violence against women and girls' (VAWG) to describe their approach to offences disproportionately affecting women and girls.

We have considered all the evidence from fieldwork presented in chapters 4–7 and made an overarching recommendation at the end of chapter 7.

Strategic arrangements

All the forces we visited had VAWG strategic leads, but the ranks varied between superintendent and assistant chief constable. In the latter case, this person also had responsibility for several other operational policing functions. The force lead should be senior enough to make wide-ranging operational decisions about practice and procedure but have enough capacity to understand performance problems and be able to continually assess where improvements are needed.

A single named leader in each force is also important to ensure effective two-way communication with relevant NPCC leads, the proposed NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead and other local organisations that have a role in tackling VAWG that the police work closely with.

Besides strong leadership, it is also important for the relevant force strategies to have strong links to national police strategies and those of other relevant organisations. One force we inspected had recently signed off a strategy, one had a strategy in draft form and two forces didn't have a VAWG strategy at all. One force that didn't have a strategy told us that it was waiting for the final national police strategy to be introduced before deciding on its own approach. All of the forces considered crimes against women and girls within their wider approach to vulnerability. We were able to confirm that 14 out of 43 forces already have a dedicated VAWG strategy. Out of those that don't have a strategy, some are in the process of developing one.

There were also differences in how forces viewed the relationship between domestic abuse and VAWG. For example, one force had two separate strategies on domestic abuse and VAWG, which mirrors the central government approach. One force planned to introduce a VAWG strategy which included domestic abuse. This mirrors the approach taken by the Welsh Government, where there is a combined [violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence strategy](#).

In our fieldwork we examined what aspects of crimes against women and girls were the most important priorities for forces, as set by the police and crime commissioner (PCC) or mayoral equivalent in police and crime plans. The police and crime plan is a legal document that the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) must produce under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

At the time of our inspection, new PCCs had been elected and the process of determining priorities was taking place. All the previous police and crime plans stated that it was a priority to support and protect victims, but they differed widely in how this specifically related to women and girls. In our review of 43 police and crime plans in September 2021, we found that 13 refer to VAWG; 24 make no specific reference; and 6 were still being updated, so information was not available.

In all the forces we visited we found that working relationships with organisations involved in the response to crimes against women and girls, both at a strategic and operational level, were generally good.

At a strategic level, all forces had oversight boards that included some elements of VAWG. Several forces included other partner organisations at these meetings. Most of the focus for the oversight boards was on performance, demand and capacity in areas such as domestic abuse. We noted that over the last 18 months a great deal of activity and board scrutiny had been driven by the need to address a changing policing landscape due to the pandemic.

Some of these arrangements had grown organically and this had resulted in a variety of different names for groups with similar remits. This could cause confusion for partner organisations working with different forces. For example, one force had a domestic abuse executive group, a domestic abuse management board and a VAWG

executive group. Despite the name, the latter seemed to report to the domestic abuse executive group.

Communication with women and girls

Police forces communicate and consult with both women and girls in a variety of ways, both directly and through groups and individuals who represent their interests. It's important that the police communicate effectively with a wide range of groups and individuals so they can hear and understand the views of service users and victims. This should then inform force practice and procedures.

All the forces we visited told us they had communicated more with women and girls during the pandemic. This was in response to the perceived increased risks to women and girls during this period, particularly from domestic abuse.

Some forces told us of innovative ways they had been using to communicate with women and girls.

Notable practice

Cheshire Constabulary and other partner organisations that focus on VAWG held a weekly online community engagement forum broadcast on the audience interaction platform Sli.do.

This was specifically designed to discuss domestic abuse, but different topics were covered each week, such as honour-based violence.

During the events, questions were submitted anonymously and answered by the force. The events were well attended, with over 1,200 questions asked by the public over the year. The sessions were advertised on social media by all involved organisations, and through press releases by police and local authorities.

Notable practice

Surrey Police has a dedicated vulnerability communications lead who attends relevant meetings. This means that one person is responsible for producing communication products aimed at all vulnerable groups and making sure that information is targeted at specific groups to meet their needs. While they don't communicate exclusively with women and girls, the staff member can easily communicate in a way that reaches women and girls in different groups.

Notable practice

Following the death of Sarah Everard, in March 2021 Cumbria Police and the OPCC introduced the '[Call it out](#)' survey to find out more about where and when women and girls feel unsafe, intimidated and harassed.

Another way forces consult the public is by using independent advisory groups (IAGs). These are voluntary groups made up of members of the public that are independent of the police and are designed to inform and improve the police response. Most forces have a strategic IAG which covers the force area, but some may also have local-level IAGs covering specific areas within the force.

Only one force we inspected had a specific Women's IAG. One other force told us that it had plans to set one up. In the force that had a specific IAG for women, we found that it hadn't been used effectively, although we were told that there were plans to revive it.

Considering the scale of offending against women and girls, and its effect on the force and local communities, we think forces should consider setting up IAGs to advise them on the specific problems affecting women and girls. This may also allow forces to hear the voices of a broader range of people who can provide advice and guidance on this subject.

Notable practice

We were pleased to find that one force we inspected – Surrey – had also conducted a similar survey in May 2021. The survey had received more than 5,500 responses with 20,000 comments. At the time of our inspection, the force hadn't completed its full analysis of the results or decided what actions to take in response.

However, initial analysis of the results had shown that the demographic profile of respondents didn't represent the communities the force serves. The majority of respondents self-declared as being White and over the age of 50. So, the force had decided to send out the survey again in a targeted way so that it could also learn from more diverse communities.

More forces could learn from this approach to understanding how and where women and girls feel unsafe and what can be done to address their concerns. There are also opportunities to bring this information together nationally to improve the police response to women and girls.

We discuss further the need for better measures linked to police forces having a better understanding of performance in section 5 of this report. In considering this, it is important for forces to recognise the value of feedback from women and girls in developing their approach. This could include, for example, feedback from communications and the IAG as a qualitative measure that can be used to bolster understanding of what is working well and where continuous improvements are needed.

Gathering and using information about women and girls

Police forces gather and use information about crime in two main ways:

- Information gathered as part of routine activity – for example, when creating incident logs in the control room, completing crime reports or carrying out other police activities such as completing risk assessments. Analysing this information allows forces to monitor performance and decide where improvements can be made.
- Additional information gathered from members of the public and victims, for example by way of surveys. This information creates a richer picture and allows forces to understand better the experiences of victims and make improvements if necessary.

All forces we visited had invested in analytical products (for example, 'PowerBI') to help police managers understand the information gathered. The products helped managers analyse performance and make decisions, but the products weren't all used in the same way even if they had the same information.

For example, some forces had 'landing pages' for domestic abuse for senior managers containing information about performance. In one force, senior managers commissioned analysis but didn't use the analytical product directly themselves. So, forces don't all use the same information about women and girls in the same ways. This could lead to differences in the way forces understand and approach crimes against women and girls.

None of the forces we inspected split information automatically and routinely into genders, but they could all do this easily if required. We asked one force to demonstrate how easy it was to find information about gender. The force immediately identified that of 749,000 victims of crime in the preceding year, 348,000 were female. Of the roughly 10,000 high-risk victims of crime in the preceding year, 5,700 had been female. The force, like all the forces we visited, had never done any further analysis to find out more about any patterns of victimisation that affected women and girls.

We also asked forces to check for any gaps in data which could affect the analysis of crimes against women and girls. The gender of the victim was missing from crime reports in between 1 and 2 percent of cases.

All the forces had large gaps in their data regarding ethnicity. We found ethnicity information was missing in a substantial number of crimes in all the forces we visited. The force with the least amount of missing ethnicity information had 35 percent of cases missing this data, and for one force 50 percent of cases had no self-defined ethnicity information recorded. We were told that one reason for the absence of this important information was that race, and some other protected characteristics, weren't mandatory fields on the crime reporting systems.

Without routinely analysing and evaluating this information, forces can't properly understand how crimes affect women and girls with protected characteristics or those from communities currently engaged with less successfully. It also means forces can't easily tell whether some groups are more or less likely to report offences than others. If they knew this, they could take remedial action along with other relevant

organisations or adjust the service that is provided to make it more suited to individual needs.

We have made similar observations in other inspections, such as those on [hate crime](#), particularly in relation to forces complying with the [Public sector equality duty](#). As this seems to be a persistent and enduring problem in policing, we made a recommendation in our [interim report](#) that all police forces should ensure information on the protected characteristics of victims is accurately and consistently recorded.

In the forces we visited, information available to the police about crimes against women and girls didn't include any automatic updates from other organisations, such as local authorities. This means the information available for the police to make decisions about action, such as preventative activity, is usually based only on what the police know. One force had started two-way information-sharing between the police and one local authority area. As this was in the earliest stages of development, we weren't able to establish how effective it was.

Recording crimes accurately

Forces also need to make sure that crimes are recorded accurately. This helps them understand the nature of victimisation in their areas, and decide where to allocate their officers and spend their money. It also helps PCCs make informed decisions about what victim services they should commission in their areas.

In our fieldwork, we examined a sample of breaches of non-molestation orders and restraining orders. We wanted to see if the forces had correctly considered whether the behaviour of the suspects also amounted to separate crimes of harassment, stalking or coercive and controlling behaviour.

This is important so that the police don't treat the breaches in isolation, but instead consider the full previous offending history when deciding what action to take. We have found in other inspections, such as on [Sussex Police's response to stalking and harassment](#), that police officers sometimes don't consider everything that has previously happened to the victim and take appropriate action.

For example, in our stalking inspection we found that when officers don't correctly identify patterns of behaviour amounting to harassment or stalking, there is less likelihood of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) advising that these are the most appropriate charges. It's therefore important that the police get this right at the first opportunity.

It was disappointing to find as part of our case assessments that of the 83 breaches of orders, in 52 there should have been an additional crime of harassment, stalking or coercive and controlling behaviour recorded. This continuing failure to recognise patterns of behaviour, and in some cases the resulting escalation of risks to victims, is a concern. We will focus on this further within our PEEL improvement programme to determine the extent of the problem throughout all 43 forces.

Specific difficulties with coercive and controlling behaviour

The Home Office review of coercive and controlling behaviour 2021 showed that in 35 percent of coercive and controlling behaviour offences in 2018/19, despite the victim supporting further action being taken, sufficient evidence couldn't be collected to charge the suspect. This proportion is higher in comparison with that for all domestic abuse-related offences (24 percent) but similar to that for domestic abuse-related stalking (33 percent). This may be due to the lack of awareness or understanding of the complexities and requirements needed to investigate these newer types of offences.

As a domestic abuse victim reported during our lived experience work:

“They need to not see it as ‘well you haven’t got a bruise or a broken arm’. But I’m broken here, and I’m broken here [points to head and heart]. They need to stop seeing the physical and start realising the emotional and mental is a lot worse because I’ve had both. I would rather be hit than emotionally and mentally tortured. They [police] need to realise that and change it in some sort of way.”

Surveys and hearing the voices of female victims

In our 2014 report [*Everyone’s business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse*](#), we recommended that the Home Office ensure “that the views of victims of domestic abuse are incorporated routinely and consistently into national monitoring arrangements”.

In the report, we outlined what interested parties told us would be useful methods of engaging with domestic abuse victims. One of these was surveys conducted with victims by independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs).

In our 2015 report [*Increasingly everyone’s business: A progress report on the police response to domestic abuse*](#), we expressed disappointment at the pace of the introduction of guidance for forces on how they should carry out surveys of domestic abuse victims.

In 2016, the Home Office introduced guidance regarding a domestic abuse survey and made it mandatory for forces to report to them the number of surveys completed and the number of victims who have completed the safety questions that form part of the survey.

The Home Office doesn't publish this data, but it is collected and is provided to us on request. This data showed that not all forces report, and those that do report don't routinely do so every year. For example, out of the 43 forces in England and Wales, 11 forces have never reported any domestic abuse survey results and in the first three years responses were only received from a total of 18 forces. In 2019/20, only 14 forces responded. In the most recent year (2020/21), 26 forces responded.

However, most forces reported lower sample sizes because the pandemic caused surveys to be suspended to protect the safety of the victim. The Home Office guidance recommends that forces carry out about 600 surveys per year (or adapt this on the basis of the number of domestic abuse cases). In 2019/20, before the pandemic,

only three forces met this threshold. In 2020/21, only one force achieved this number of surveys.

While we recognise that forces could be taking a different approach, for those that haven't reported the results to the Home Office, it isn't clear if they aren't running surveys at all or are conducting surveys but not reporting the results. As the Home Office doesn't publish this data, we are also not clear how they make use of this information – which could potentially be very useful to all organisations involved in the police response to VAWG.

Further consideration needs to be given at both a local and national level to assess the processes currently in place and how the data can be collected in a way which can inform the approach individual forces and the Government take to VAWG.

Forces were given discretion as to whether they use the survey tool that the Home Office provided, but they were required to follow the good practice principles set out in the guidance.

We have been told that since 2016 forces have developed different ways of conducting the surveys. For example:

- forces use different survey modes, such as online, telephone;
- some forces use the survey template provided by the Home Office and others use an amended version;
- different forces include different types of crimes (for example, some include or exclude stalking);
- some forces include victims of incidents and crimes and other forces just include victims of crimes;
- forces interview victims at different stages in the criminal justice process; and
- some forces conduct the surveys themselves, while others contract the service to other forces or external contractors.

Because of these differences, the survey results are not comparable between different forces, so the Government and national leaders don't have a good way of understanding the experience of domestic abuse victims.

It is also notable that some categories of victims are routinely excluded from these surveys. This may be because they aren't suitable to be surveyed in this way, for example because they don't have a 'safe' number or because they are flagged as vulnerable by the police.

In our fieldwork, we found that three of the four forces conducted surveys of domestic abuse victims as per the Home Office requirement. All three forces had suspended the surveys during lockdown, and in two of these forces the surveys had only taken place intermittently since. One force had just re-started the surveys. Pausing the surveys during the pandemic was understandable as victims were more likely to be unable to take part safely.

Two of the forces we visited contracted the surveys to Leicestershire Police to carry out on their behalf. Leicestershire Police has conducted surveys on behalf of

18 forces, although not all these forces have re-started arrangements since the pandemic.

In this arrangement, contact details of recent victims were provided to Leicestershire Police, who then conducted the survey – but as we noted above, all forces exclude certain categories of offence or victim from this process. Worryingly, this included cases where the victim no longer supported further police action, which is referred to as [outcome 16](#).

In the year ending March 2020, 53 percent of [domestic abuse crimes](#) nationally were closed with the outcome 16 code. So it is likely that in these 18 forces a significant proportion of victims were excluded from the survey from the start. While we didn't review data from all of England and Wales, this may also be true for other forces.

We understand that victims in outcome 16 cases have withdrawn their support for further police action. But this doesn't necessarily mean they don't want to give their views about their experiences. This is a missed opportunity to engage with victims and for the police and partner organisations to learn from these experiences.

Notable practice

Surrey Police has its own small team of survey staff. This means the force has responsibility for the results, can be more flexible and the team can also be used to conduct other bespoke surveys. For example, the force had surveyed a small number of domestic abuse victims in outcome 15 and outcome 16 cases.

The survey results of domestic abuse victims in the two forces that had conducted surveys before our fieldwork showed very high satisfaction rates. In one force, the latest satisfaction rate was 92 percent from 205 interviews. In another force, although the satisfaction rates were very high, the response rate was about 20 percent and only 86 surveys had taken place in the six months they had been conducted.

There is an obvious difference between the high satisfaction rates of domestic abuse victims recorded in the force surveys and what we are told by groups advocating for victims, who report low levels of satisfaction. We acknowledge that forces may be wary about seeking the views of more vulnerable victims for fear of re-traumatising them, but the differences in satisfaction rates need to be better understood.

This is undoubtedly a complex and difficult problem, but it isn't acceptable for forces to know so little about the experiences of more vulnerable victims. They need to look for systematic ways of hearing the voices of these victims, so they can use this information to further improve their responses.

As part of this inspection we carried out focus groups with practitioners, including IDVAs, who provided a valuable insight into the service provided to victims. Local victim organisations also helped vulnerable victims provide their lived experiences. One solution would be for police forces to routinely seek feedback on individual cases from IDVAs so that the police and other relevant organisations can find out what worked well or where improvements could be made. None of the forces we inspected

did this. One force told us that this had previously been considered on an ad hoc basis but had proved too difficult for IDVAs as a result of limited time and resources.

In contrast, two forces had conducted surveys of independent sexual violence advisers (ISVAs) to understand what had happened in rape and serious sexual offence (RASSO) cases and where improvements could be made, although in one force this was just a one-off event.

Notable practice

In Avon and Somerset Constabulary, as part of Project Bluestone, ISVAs are routinely asked to complete a questionnaire with the victim at the conclusion of an investigation. The results are anonymised by the ISVA service and sent to the police every three months to help them improve the service to victims. Project Bluestone brings together academic experts and operational policing to explore ways of improving and completely changing the police response to rape and sexual assault. Operation Soteria is now extending the work of Project Bluestone in more police and CPS areas.

The [National Vulnerability Action Plan](#) contains the following three actions under the action 'Voice of the victim':

- “1. To ensure that ‘the voices of vulnerable victims and witnesses’ are heard relating to service provision and victim/witness feedback.
2. To understand if existing practice is meeting the need of the victim/witness and is in line with the Victims’ Code of Practice.
3. To seek feedback and use the voice of the victim to shape and plan future service design.”

The police and the organisations they work with can do more to achieve these aims. The current arrangements are inconsistent and unsatisfactory.

Some forces also conduct more general victim satisfaction surveys. Unlike the domestic abuse survey, the Home Office doesn't require any information about these to be sent to it. All the forces we visited carried out these surveys, but the results were not routinely analysed for gender differences.

As well as communicating externally with women and girls, all the forces we inspected had been communicating with women in their own forces. One force had conducted a specific survey of its own female staff to better understand their views and experiences.

Learning, development and staff wellbeing

The College of Policing offers nationally available learning and development sessions that consider the experiences of victims and help officers to recognise and respond to vulnerable people. Forces are also given the flexibility to design and provide their own learning and development to meet local needs and priorities.

We asked all the forces we inspected to tell us what learning and development they had provided to their officers and staff on VAWG and domestic abuse. All of them had provided some learning but, apart from initial learning and development for student officers, it often differed between forces.

‘Domestic Abuse Matters’ is a course designed by the College of Policing and the charity SafeLives. There is a requirement for 75 percent of police responders to receive it in the forces that provide the course. We found that it had been attended by some officers in all four forces we inspected. For example, in one force all staff in the control room had received this learning.

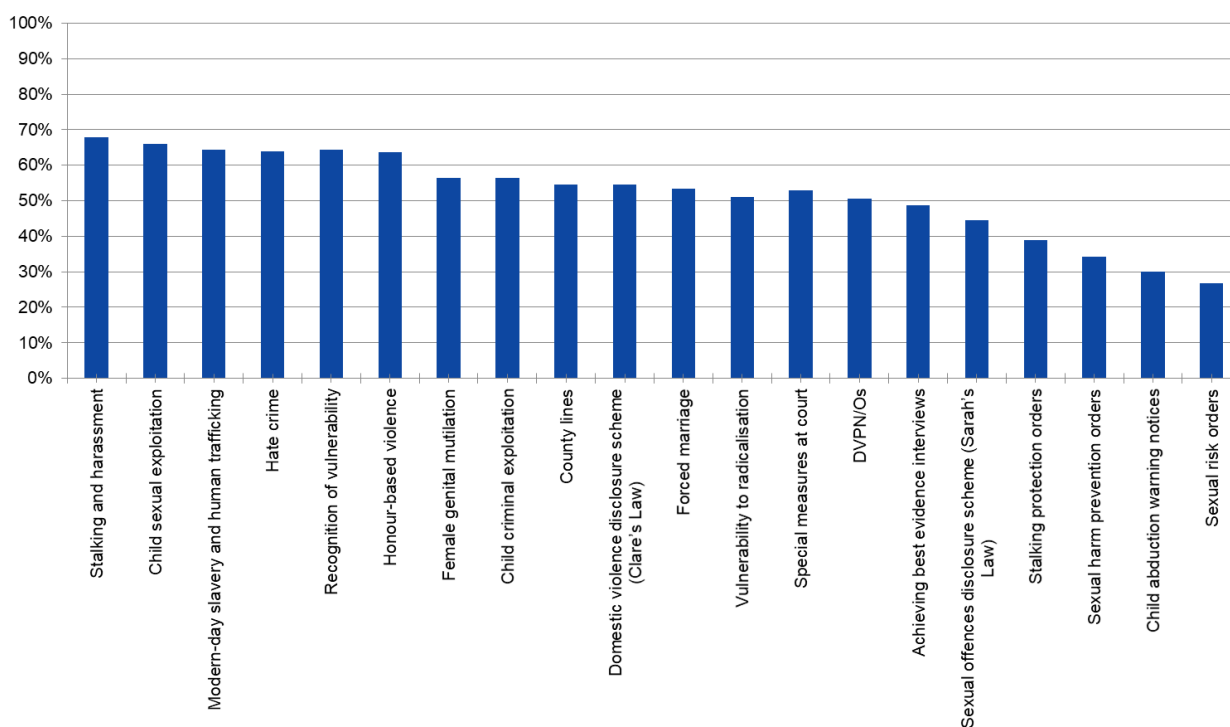
One force had recognised that while the course was a very useful introduction, officers also needed to learn more about certain aspects of the police response. This included learning more about what happens beyond the initial actions taken to deal with vulnerable domestic abuse victims (for example, in relation to investigation and case progression). As a result, the force was planning to give enhanced learning and development opportunities for all relevant officers.

Besides the more formal learning and development provided, all four forces had given ad hoc training on specific subjects, such as coercive controlling behaviour, on a continuing basis.

We conducted a national survey of officers and staff to find out what learning and development they had received.

When learning had been completed, we also asked officers and staff how useful they found it.

Figure 4: Percentage of officers who found learning and development activity on these topics to be useful or very useful



Source: HMICFRS survey analysis from police force survey

There were obvious differences in how useful officers and staff found the learning and development that was provided. For example, we found that of the courses offered:

- stalking and harassment was regarded as the most useful, with 68 percent rating it either very useful or useful;
- child sexual exploitation (66 percent) was graded as the second most useful;
- Sexual Risk Orders had the lowest percentage numbers scoring it as useful/very useful (27 percent); and
- Sexual Risk Orders was the subject that most officers hadn't completed.

The College of Policing provides guidance to all police forces in England and Wales on learning and development in relation to VAWG, including developing an understanding of [risk and vulnerability](#). We have provided it with the results from this survey to help it understand if any further resources are needed to support learning and development in this area.

Each force should ensure their officers and staff have wellbeing support and have ways to determine when they might need extra support

Investigating crimes against women and girls and working in specialist units can be difficult and stressful for police officers and staff. Sometimes this will be because of the distressing nature of the cases, and/or because workloads are high.

For these reasons, police roles involving vulnerability are generally classed by forces as 'high risk' in terms of wellbeing. As such, they should have either yearly or six-monthly wellbeing assessments. This varies between forces, however. Some forces also offer mandatory annual occupational health sessions, while other forces have yearly or six-monthly self-assessment questionnaires which can result in an occupational health referral.

There are generic occupational health referral and trauma risk management referral options in all forces. In many forces the feedback we have received through our PEEL inspection is that the support isn't sufficient and is too reliant on the member of staff raising a concern. There is also a concern that self-assessment can be manipulated to avoid the occupational health referral. This may be because people don't want to be seen as 'not coping' and to risk damage to their career. Also, in some forces the service that results from self-assessment can be very poor.

In 2020 [Oscar Kilo](#), the National Police Wellbeing Service, introduced foundation occupational health standards for police forces, which are intended to ensure that the health and wellbeing of police officers and staff is supported and there is more consistency. The standards are intended as guidance to help forces establish a structure for occupational health services to ensure they are being provided in a way that is consistent but also flexible to respond to local demand. The introduction of these standards was complemented by a new [psychological risk assessment](#) as a screening tool for officers and staff in higher risk roles.

All the forces we visited had wellbeing policies for officers working in RASSO teams and units dealing with child sexual offences. These policies included mandatory regular psychiatric and wellbeing assessments.

5. How effectively do the police prevent violence against women and girls offences?

Police forces, together with a variety of different organisations, stop crimes against women and girls from taking place in many ways, including:

- Giving general information to the public, or more targeted communications with specific groups, such as victims of domestic abuse.
- Early intervention and preventative work in schools and other educational establishments, including universities.
- Patrolling areas where information and analysis has identified that crimes may be more likely to take place.
- Disseminating specific information, for example through the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme.
- Providing victims with further support, including those with any complex needs, by using referral pathways to support organisations.
- Working with other organisations to provide support and prevent re-victimisation.
- Ensuring that they have a robust way of identifying and managing high-risk perpetrators and the risk they pose to the public.

Pursuing suspected perpetrators, arresting and/or taking action against them may also prevent further crimes from taking place. We consider these aspects in the sections 'Protect' and 'Pursue', below.

In the 'Prepare' section, we described how forces communicate with women and girls. Much of this communication is aimed at preventing women and girls from becoming victims of crime.

For example, Surrey Police had a 'bystander' communication activity aimed to make onlookers aware of their responsibility to identify and report socially unacceptable behaviour towards women to the police.

Work in schools and other educational establishments

In our fieldwork, forces provided examples of work done by their officers and staff in schools and other educational establishments. Some of this activity was specifically relevant to girls, or attitudes towards VAWG.

Notable practice

Humberside Police schools involvement officers had helped to provide a course called 'These hands aren't for hurting', supporting a campaign led by the charity White Ribbon UK. This is a domestic abuse awareness-raising programme aimed at five-year-olds and above. The police attend with a police car and the fire and rescue service attend with a fire engine. Year 6 pupils receive a white ribbon and a bookmark. 'Loves me, Loves me not' and 'These hands are not for hurting' are messages which are used to raise awareness of domestic abuse.

In the four forces we inspected, two had dedicated youth engagement officers and two had officers and staff who were a 'single point of contact' (SPOC). The SPOCs were neighbourhood officers who had other duties.

In the two forces that had dedicated youth engagement workers, one force had 22 and the other had 12. As the number of officers working with schools varied between the forces, it's likely that the amount of preventative activity that forces can do in schools will also vary.

Forces also told us about preventative work carried out together with higher educational establishments, especially during university freshers' weeks.

Notable practice

In Cheshire, during freshers' week students are given information packages from the Alice Ruggles Trust to raise awareness of stalking and harassment (including coercive and controlling behaviour). Officers also raise awareness among women about the dangers of spiked drinks.

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme

A domestic abuse support worker commented as part of our fieldwork that:

"I've signposted many people to access Clare's Law but not had a single successful outcome – applications get lost, forces don't know the process, applications are pursued months later – don't know who to contact, can't get through to the right person."

In 2009, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) reported that there should be "a policy that persons at risk of violence have the 'right to know' about relevant information in the possession of State". The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS), also known as 'Clare's Law' (or 'Right to Ask'), was introduced in all police forces in March 2014. This scheme was established following the tragic murder of

Clare Wood in 2009. Clare had made allegations against her ex-partner in the months before her death. These included harassment, threats to kill and sexual assault. Despite her ex-partner having a history of VAWG, Clare was not alerted to this.

The DVDS provides any member of the public the right to ask about a partner's violent history. The police then decide whether to disclose such information if they think it is necessary to prevent a crime.

'Right to know' disclosure considerations are normally generated by the police or partner organisations as part of information-sharing and safeguarding arrangements. Decisions about whether to disclose information are based on whether it is considered necessary to protect another individual from harm.

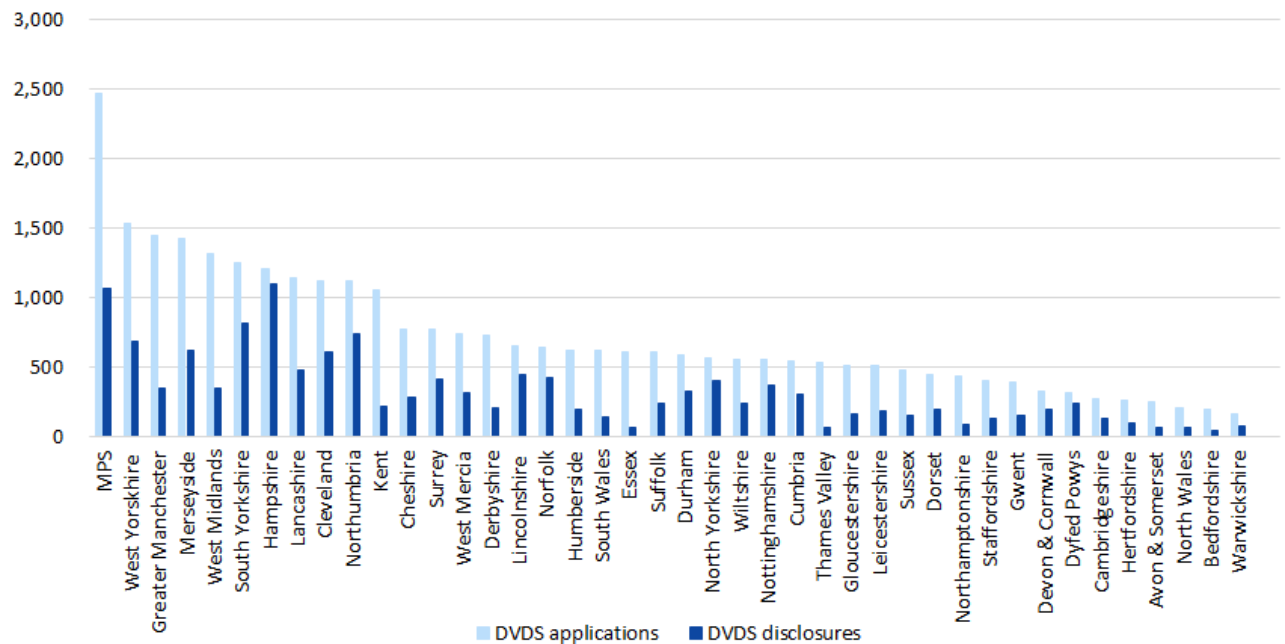
In March 2016, the Home Office carried out an [assessment of the first year of the DVDS](#). Data provided by the police for the assessment showed that between 8 March 2014 and 31 December 2014 there had been a total of 4,724 applications and 1,938 disclosures. The police and other organisations were mostly positive about the scheme. Good ways of doing things, and areas in which the scheme could improve, were identified.

The assessment also led to the Home Office updating its [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme guidance](#), which sets out how the DVDS should operate. The guidance includes clear processes for police and other organisations to follow for both the 'right to ask' and 'right to know' elements of the scheme. The guidance suggests a timeframe of 35 days for the process to be completed, although it acknowledges that extenuating circumstances may lead to delays.

The Home Office guidance is supported by further comprehensive 'Authorised Professional Practice' produced by the College of Policing. Forces are required to provide information to the Home Office about how many applications they have received and considered as part of the Annual Data Return. However, forces aren't required to provide any other information, such as how quickly the disclosures were considered and/or the categorised risk of the person concerned.

Force data from 42 forces (figure 5) shows that, in the year ending March 2021, there were 12,192 'right to know' decisions in England and Wales, resulting in 6,405 disclosures (52 percent of applications). We don't know why so many disclosures aren't made, and we intend to examine this more closely in future. In the same period there were 18,131 'right to ask' applications, resulting in 7,034 disclosures (39 percent of applications). Applications won't result in disclosure if there is no information to disclose.

Figure 5: DVDS – Right to Know and Right to Ask applications and disclosures from April 2020 to March 2021 by police force area



Source: HMICFRS data collection

Note: Some forces were not able to return the full data for this request.

In the forces we visited, none had robust performance management processes in place to make sure the scheme was working effectively. In three of the four forces, the framework of domestic abuse performance measures didn't include the DVDS.

While one force did monitor numbers of disclosures, the timeliness of the disclosures wasn't monitored. One force couldn't tell us how long disclosures took as it didn't keep a central record of this. The result was that in all the forces we inspected, there seemed little oversight of how this may affect the victim, particularly how long the disclosures were taking and the relative risks to the victim during this time.

Case study

A perpetrator with a long history of intimidation, violence and stalking behaviour towards women was released from prison custody having previously breached a restraining order. The risk assessment for the victim, who was an ex-partner, was graded as high.

It was established that the perpetrator had a new partner who lived in a different force area some distance away. A force decision-maker decided not to make a 'right to know' disclosure for the new partner, and made the following entry on the force crime system:

"I have considered the suggestion that the new girlfriend should have a DVDS, but I have concluded that she lives in XXXXX and only comes to XXXXX occasionally. The risk to her is very minimal and therefore I do not consider a DVDS necessary."

The officer didn't seem to understand the risks to the new partner or the purpose of the DVDS. It was irrelevant where the new partner was living and how frequently she visited the county in which the previous partner resided. The force reviewed this case and rightly concluded that a disclosure should have taken place.

Home Office guidance states:

"the police will aim to complete the enquiry within 35 days but there may be extenuating circumstances that increase this timescale. A or C will be informed if this is the case." [In the guidance, A is the partner and C is a third party]

All the forces surveyed were using the timescale of 35 days as the standard for their disclosures. The Home Office (and College of Policing) guidance states that a 'local multi-agency forum' (multi-agency risk assessment conference or MARAC) must be involved in the decision-making process about disclosure. However, we found little evidence of this, except for those cases that were deemed to be high risk. One reason for this could be that the MARACs had little time to consider all the requests.

In one force, decisions about most cases didn't appear to routinely involve any other relevant organisations. This is very worrying as one of the purposes of involving partner organisations is to make informed decisions based on all available information.

While forces and their partner organisations are making decisions about disclosures, it's likely that in some cases the person making the request will still be living with the other person concerned. This means that, depending on the circumstances, the person making the request may be at continuing risk. So, it's important that the decisions are made as quickly as possible, and that the person making the request receives frequent and appropriate updates.

In the month of our inspection, another force had only made three of the ten 'right to know' disclosures within 35 days, and one case was still outstanding after 150 days. The same force had made three of the four 'right to ask' disclosures within 35 days, but the outstanding case had been running for 53 days. We didn't examine individual

cases, so we cannot be sure how often those requesting disclosures were informed of the delays.

IDVAs we spoke with in one force told us that the police didn't always consider that DVDS requests were safeguarding actions that required an immediate response.

Some forces told us that in some cases an IDVA was involved in meeting the person making the request, to gather further information and provide support. However, we couldn't determine how often this happened, and in what circumstances.

Neither the scheme itself nor the guidance have been reviewed and updated since 2016. We consider that a guide time of 35 days to decide about disclosure is unsatisfactory. However, we understand that the Home Office has recently set up a 'task and finish group' to support the implementation of new DVDS provisions under Section 77 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

The main change is that the new legislation requires the Home Secretary to issue statutory guidance to the police about the disclosure of police information by police forces for the purpose of preventing domestic abuse. This will replace the current guidance which is issued on a non-statutory basis. The review will examine a range of different aspects, including the minimum levels of knowledge required by practitioners and risk assessment and safety planning.

We haven't previously considered the operation of this important scheme in detail, and we are concerned about what we found in this fieldwork. We will consider what more we can do to help the above recommended review.

Crime prevention

In this inspection we wanted to see whether Designing Out Crime Officers (DOCOs) – previously called Crime Prevention Officers – were involved in keeping women and girls safe. DOCOs provide advice to local authorities and other organisations about how to design buildings and built environments to minimise crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

We found that the numbers of DOCOs in forces varied, as did the exact roles they performed. In our survey of forces across England and Wales, 39 percent of respondents agreed that they had access to a DOCO.

The DOCOs we spoke with were aware of the importance of making sure that street lighting was adequate, and potentially dangerous areas such as subways were made as safe as possible for women and girls.

In some forces, DOCOs could also be given the task of providing specific advice to high-risk victims about how to make their houses safer. However, we found that mostly this provision of prevention advice fell to response and neighbourhood officers. We couldn't tell how effective this advice was, or how easy it is for victims to access crime prevention services, such as lock replacement, including where the funding (if any) was coming from.

There also seemed to be a disparity between the resources and expertise available to give crime prevention advice about physical problems, such as the need for lighting or locks, compared with making people safe online. In one force we visited, the force had six DOCOs but only one online prevention officer – and this role was specific to the force Paedophile Online Investigation Team.

So, it's likely that most prevention advice about online crime is mainly given by frontline or investigative officers. But it's not clear what, if any, learning and development officers are given so they can provide this advice effectively. We know that many crimes committed online, such as harassment and stalking, disproportionately affect women and girls. In our stalking inspections we found that officers sometimes gave poor advice about online safety. Considering the surge in online crime, particularly during the pandemic, this is a continuing matter of concern.

In our public survey designed as part of this inspection, 14 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that 'Police in my area work to prevent violence against women and girls'. The same percentage agreed that 'I trust the police to prevent violence against women and girls'. We also asked an open text question about what the police can do to prevent this type of offending. Suggestions received from women overwhelmingly referred to:

Taking the offences against women more seriously by:

- arresting and charging more offenders for all types of violence/abuse;
- taking it seriously at the beginning stages of violence so it doesn't escalate;
- speeding up the process of dealing with the offences;
- making it a priority;
- supporting victims appropriately;
- listening to women's concerns about safe spaces;
- tagging and monitoring offenders;
- putting more pressure on the CPS to prosecute offenders; and
- harsher punishments for domestic violence.

Other themes that emerged from this question included:

- ensuring police have the correct values with more empathy towards female victims and that misogynistic behaviour is tackled;
- stopping victim-blaming and put the responsibility on male perpetrators; and
- officers need to work with other organisations to address the epidemic of sexual violence and image-based crimes that girls are being subjected to.

Public space safety activities

When we asked women responding to our public survey what more the police could do to make them safe in public spaces, responses included:

- provide them with a fast and reliable service;
- actively engage in every contact opportunity;
- encourage women to recognise and report unacceptable behaviour;

- empower women in the community to report crimes;
- increased visibility and patrols;
- greater street presence;
- officers should be visible everywhere;
- more police officers on foot rather than in cars in known problem areas;
- more female police officers on patrols;
- prosecute more offenders;
- be proactive rather than reactive; and
- more positive media coverage rather than the negatives.

In our survey of police officers and staff, 37 percent of respondents did not agree that their force 'identifies open spaces where violence against women and girls occurs'. A further 42 percent neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement; 21 percent agreed.

However, all the forces we visited had undertaken activities (often with other organisations) designed to prevent crimes against women and girls. Much of this was focused on the night-time economy. The locations for this activity had been identified by analysis of crime and incident data, but they could also be informed by getting feedback from women and girls.

Notable practice

Humberside Police had introduced a preventative initiative, Operation Contract. Force analysis had shown that before the pandemic 25 percent of reported rapes and sexual assaults were directly linked to the night-time economy, and half of those involved drugs and alcohol consumption. The force completes a monthly profiling exercise to establish areas of concern.

The operation is intended to create a safe environment for women and girls, by both having a visible presence and also by targeting the behaviour of men who may make women and girls feel unsafe. The force was working with victim support services, door staff and volunteers such as street pastors to help identify individuals who may be of concern and take preventative action if necessary. The operation is supported by a communication campaign targeted at males aged 18 to 30, with a hashtag #GetConsent.

We were also told about the 'Ask for Angela' scheme. This is a national scheme designed to reduce sexual abuse in the night-time economy. The idea is that if someone feels unsafe or uncomfortable, they can go to the bar and ask for 'Angela'. The staff, made aware of the scheme by police, would then either call for a taxi, help them to leave discreetly or call the police if required.

Partnership work (including MARACs)

Forces can also help prevent women and girls from becoming victims by determining opportunities in police custody to refer people to support services. Liaison and diversion schemes operate in police custody suites together with local NHS trusts. Workers are trained to recognise opportunities for intervention and referral. The police also work as part of safeguarding partnerships to prevent children from being harmed. Much of this work is focused on girls. We discuss this further in chapter 9.

Notable practice

In Bristol, Avon and Somerset Constabulary takes part in a partnership initiative called Operation Topaz, to identify children at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation. Partner agencies, including schools, social care, the local authority and the Department for Work and Pensions, disseminate and analyse information to identify children at risk and potential suspects.

A risk assessment process takes place to prioritise those children at most risk, or those who present the greatest threat. At the time of our inspection, this process had identified 452 girls at risk, and 779 people potentially posing a risk of exploiting children (283 of these were female and 492 male). Partner agencies then work together to safeguard potential victims.

All the forces we inspected held multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs). These are partnership meetings with the main aim of safeguarding high-risk adult victims of domestic abuse, but the meeting is also designed to make links with relevant organisations and services to safeguard children and manage the behaviour of perpetrators.

MARACs are often based on local authority areas, so there may be several MARACs operating in one force area. We were told that the frequency of meetings had sometimes increased during (and since) the pandemic, to cope with the increased number of high-risk victim referrals. We didn't examine in detail the operation of the MARACs in the forces we inspected.

MARACs are often chaired by a police officer, but this doesn't necessarily have to be the case. This is often because many of the referrals are generated by the police. From a police perspective, what is important is that the police representative is senior enough to make operational decisions. Forces also need to make sure there is consistency of practice and decision-making in all the MARACs in their force area.

In the forces we inspected, there were differences in the level of the police chair, sometimes even within forces. In one case, the chair was the CEO of the local IDVA service, who had taken on the (unfunded) role as a result of a perceived lack of commitment from other organisations.

Notable practice

Surrey Police had recognised the importance of a consistent approach to the operation of all the MARACs in the force area. The force had recently secured PCC funding for a detective inspector whose main role was to chair all six of the MARACs. This meant that the force had greater oversight of the number and nature of the high-risk victims, and there was more consistency of decision making. Such arrangements are also easier for organisations that may also work in several force areas, such as IDVA service providers.

6. How effectively do the police protect women and girls?

In our inspection fieldwork, we examined how well police forces safeguard women and girls, including the use of protective orders. In this section we also consider how the police forces we inspected work in partnership with other relevant organisations to manage perpetrators.

A recent super-complaint report also examined use of orders to protect women. This was submitted by the Centre for Women's Justice, who alleged that the police were failing to use protective measures in cases involving violence against women and girls (VAWG).

In August 2021, following a joint investigation, HMICFRS, the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct published [*A duty to protect: Police use of protective measures in cases involving violence against women and girls.*](#) The investigation found that:

- there were good examples of the police using protective measures, and evidence of dedicated officers working to protect victims; but
- there was a lack of understanding within police forces over how and when to use protective measures, which means support for victims is sometimes not good enough; and
- better data collection on the use of protective measures is needed to help the police determine which measures are most effective in different scenarios.

Protective orders

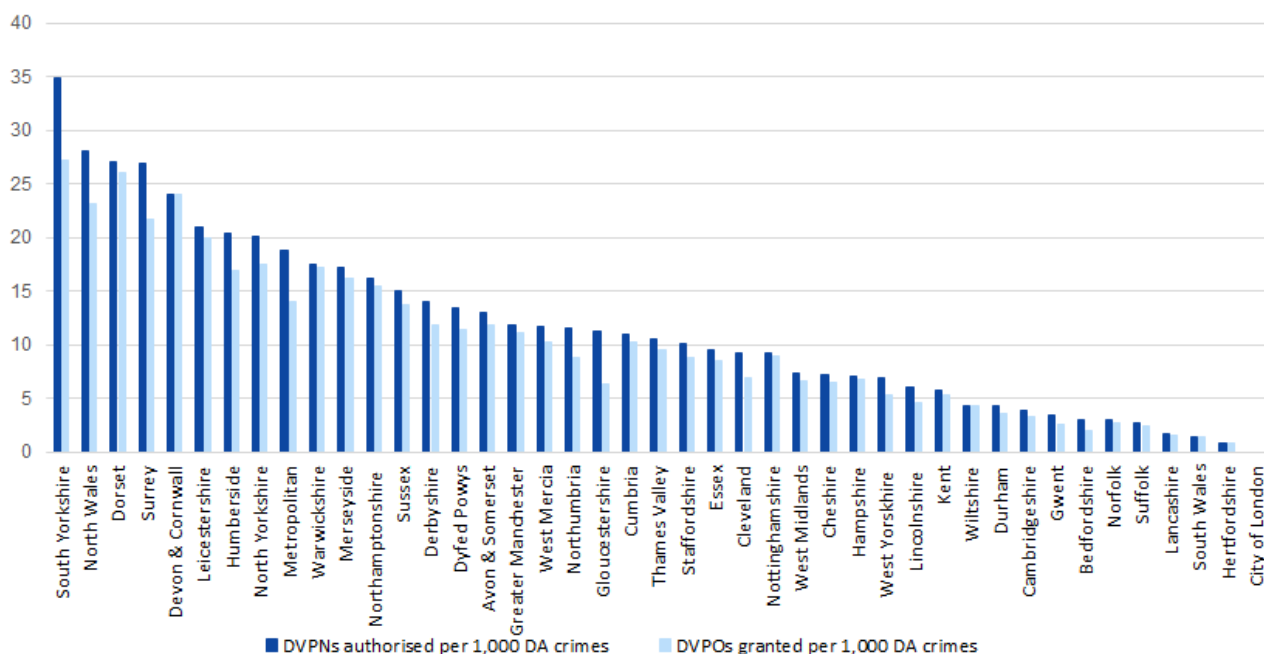
In the forces we inspected, the systems for managing Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) and Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) applications were well established. There was evidence of early recognition of the need for a DVPN when a detained person was likely to be released from custody. The force structures of daily management meetings and the force allocation processes ensured that orders were managed throughout their duration.

We also saw evidence of performance management of the numbers of DVPNs and DVPOs in forces, including by way of a breakdown by geographical area.

As part of the recent super-complaint investigation described above, we assessed the police use of protective orders across 37 forces and questioned police officers and staff on why there were low numbers of both DVPN and DVPO applications. Over half reported that DVPNs were time-consuming, complicated, bureaucratic and difficult. These tended to be the forces where the numbers of DVPNs applied for per 1,000

domestic abuse crimes had fallen. Officers in one of the forces with the lowest rate we visited suggested that custody officers were reluctant to consider DVPNs because they thought they would be seen as influencing the investigation.

Figure 6: DVPNs authorised and DVPOs granted per 1,000 domestic abuse flagged crimes, 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021



Source: HMICFRS data collection

Note: Some forces were not able to return the full data for this request.

Three of the four forces we visited used their legal departments for applications. One force had dedicated officers who had received learning and development and were experienced in attending courts and making applications. We didn't examine these different processes in detail.

Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs) were introduced in January 2020, which are civil orders. Police can apply to a magistrate for either an interim or full order. Any breach of an SPO without a reasonable excuse is a criminal offence.

The criteria for applying for an SPO are set out in section 1(1) of the [Stalking Protection Act 2019](#). The police should consider applying for an SPO where it appears to them that:

- the defendant has carried out acts associated with stalking;
- the defendant poses a risk of stalking to a person; and
- there is reasonable cause to believe the proposed order is necessary to protect the other person from risk. (The person to be protected does not have to have been the victim of the acts mentioned above.)

When applying for protective orders, the police can also now apply for positive requirements to be imposed by a magistrate, as well as the prohibitions more normally associated with orders. Examples of positive requirements could include that the defendant:

- attend an assessment of suitability for treatment;
- attend an appropriate perpetrator intervention programme;
- attend a mental health assessment;
- attend a drugs and alcohol programme;
- surrender devices;
- provide the police with access to social media accounts, mobile phones, computers, tablets and passwords/codes; and/or
- sign on at a police station.

So, these orders are potentially more powerful in addressing offender behaviour. They can also be imposed for far longer periods (fixed periods are of at least two years) than DVPOs, which can only last for a maximum of 28 days.

In the forces we inspected, we examined the application process for SPOs. Two of the forces had applied for more than 20 SPOs since January 2020, one force had applied for five and one force hadn't applied for any.

The forces that had applied for the most SPOs had paid more attention to the early screening of stalking cases by specialist officers. This allowed for an earlier consideration of suitable cases and consultation with the authorising officer and legal department. This is important because SPOs are designed to be used as an early form of protection for potential victims. So, the sooner proceedings can start, the quicker victims can be safeguarded.

In the force that had not applied for any SPOs, the legal department had mistakenly insisted that the force chief constable had to authorise applications. This is despite the statutory guidance making it clear that this could be delegated to superintendents (as is the case with other types of orders). While this wasn't cited as the main reason why no orders had been applied for, it did illustrate the lack of preparation for, and attention to, the requirements for implementing these important new powers.

In the 25 cases we examined, we found that in 16 cases the offender had displayed stalking or harassment behaviour previously and before the actions that led to the application for the order. In eight cases, the offender had previously been convicted of stalking or harassment. In 18 cases, the offender was already the subject of other protective orders and/or bail conditions. This indicates that the SPOs were not necessarily being used to protect victims the first time they had reported the matter to the police, but instead were being used as an additional protection for victims.

As we noted above, for the first time, forces can apply for positive requirements to be placed on the person subject to the order. We saw some cases where these were granted, and we could see the intended benefits these would bring in terms of protecting the victim and preventing further offending (against them or other victims by the perpetrator).

But 17 of the 25 SPOs we examined didn't contain any positive requirements. This is disappointing and may indicate that forces aren't familiar with this important change of practice.

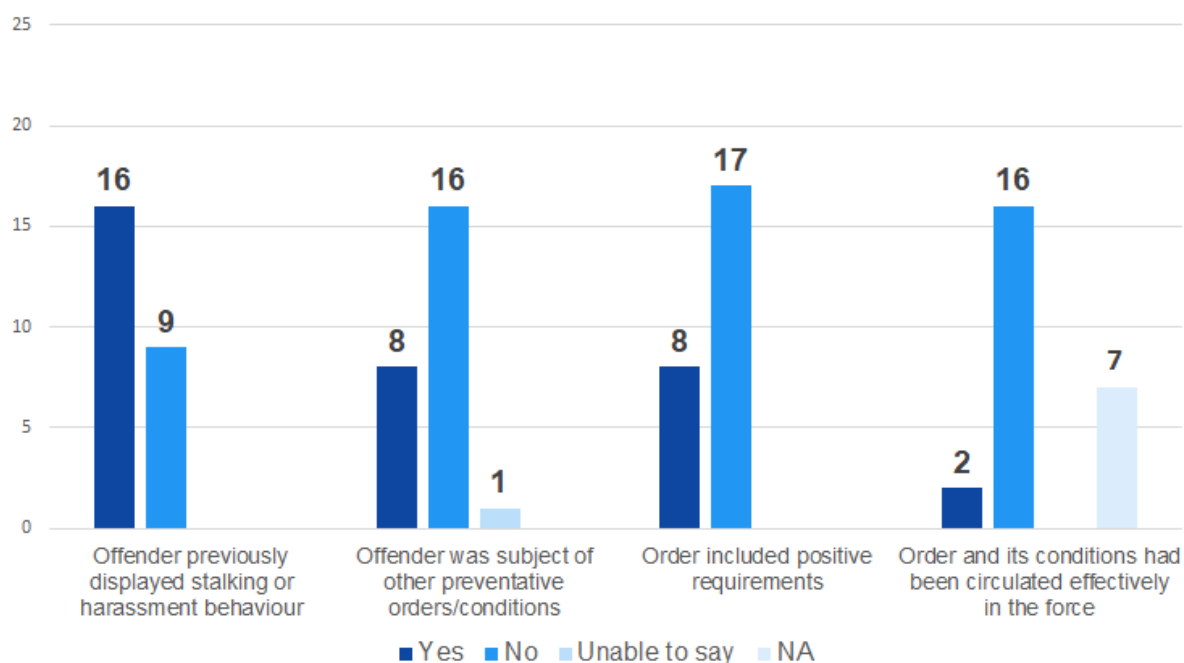
Case study

A 28-year-old woman and another female victim both reported multiple incidents of being followed by an unknown older male. The male was identified and charged with stalking against both. He was released on conditional bail, which he breached. A Stalking Protection Order was applied for. Prohibitions were granted to prevent him from entering locations where the victims reside or frequently visit, physically approaching the victims, engaging in any form of surveillance of the victims or tracking, monitoring or recording the movements of the victims. He was also required to attend a mental health assessment, an assessment of suitability for treatment and attend a drugs and alcohol programme. The offender had not breached the terms of the order to date.

We also considered how well the force communicated the existence of an SPO to operational officers, such as neighbourhood teams. It is important that officers are aware of the existence of an order so that victims can be protected. In 16 out of 25 cases, we couldn't see any evidence that details of the SPO and its conditions had been circulated effectively in the force.

Figure 7 shows case files assessed by the following questions in the review: whether the offender had displayed other stalking and harassment behaviour; whether the offender was subject of other orders/conditions; whether the SPO included positive requirements; and whether the SPO was circulated effectively.

Figure 7: Stalking Protection Order case file review responses



Source: HMICFRS case file review analysis (25 cases reviewed)

The Home Office conducted a review of the use of SPOs in June 2021 and reported on the review the following month in the [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#) (p72). The review concluded that they were working well but:

“it also showed that there is more that can be done to increase their use, as well as to manage individuals who have an order imposed on them. The Home Office will therefore work with the police to ensure that all police forces make proper use of Stalking Protection Orders.”

The Ministry of Justice and the Home Office are planning to publish regular data on SPOs showing how many are being used and how their use varies from force to force.

We are concerned that some forces aren't protecting some victims of stalking by using SPOs effectively. We will closely monitor progress against the recommendations for improvement in the Home Office review.

Offender management

There are several ways in which forces manage perpetrators of offences against women and girls. For the most serious offences, convicted perpetrators should normally be managed under multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPAs). Otherwise, there are various arrangements in place, in particular for domestic abuse and to a lesser extent stalking.

Some forces work in partnership with other agencies to manage domestic abuse perpetrators in specific schemes. These are sometimes called multi-agency tasking and co-ordination meetings (MATACs). All the forces we inspected had introduced this approach or were about to. All the approaches varied. For convenience we have called these approaches MATACs below, although this may not be how they are described by the forces concerned.

The objectives of a MATAC are for relevant organisations to work together to identify serial and dangerous domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators, safeguard victims, intervene with perpetrators, provide support and rehabilitation, and take enforcement action where required. MATACs should work closely with MARACs so that information can be disseminated seamlessly between the two groups.

Notable practice

Cheshire Constabulary's Harm Reduction Unit works together with the local probation service and health professionals to manage the risks associated with stalkers and serial domestic abusers. The unit has specialist victim advocates who provide support, advocacy and safety planning for victims. The unit also deals with requests for information from probation officers dealing with the prison releases, orders and licence conditions for perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Identification and management of those perpetrators who pose the most risk to women

In 2020, the College of Policing published a [research paper](#) containing eight principles for the identification, assessment and management of serial or potentially dangerous domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators.

The first principle outlined by the College of Policing is to have systems to identify perpetrators, and these approaches should “take account of the recency, frequency and gravity of incidents, as well as whether they have been abusive with one or multiple victims”.

The College indicates that the use of algorithms can help to identify perpetrators who pose a risk to more than one individual. Not all the forces we inspected used algorithms, although one force intended to introduce them. So there seems to be no consistency in the way that forces identify their most high-harm offenders.

In our fieldwork we asked forces to identify five individuals who they considered posed the highest risk to women and girls within the local force area. We also asked the forces to identify five individuals who posed the highest risk to different women and girls. We did this to understand how forces identified these individuals and how they were managed.

In our survey of police officers and staff across England and Wales, 42 percent agreed with the statement that ‘My force makes me aware of serial offenders of crimes against women and girls’. However, we were concerned that of the 40 individuals that the forces identified to us, 34 hadn’t already been recognised and managed by the force as their most prolific repeat offenders of violence against women and girls.

We were also concerned that none of the offenders had been identified and managed as a potentially dangerous person (PDP). The College of Policing defines a [PDP](#) as:

“a person who is not currently managed under one of the three [MAPPA categories](#), but reasonable grounds exist for believing that there is a risk of them committing an offence or offences that will cause serious harm”.

The first example of a potential PDP in the College of Policing guidance is:

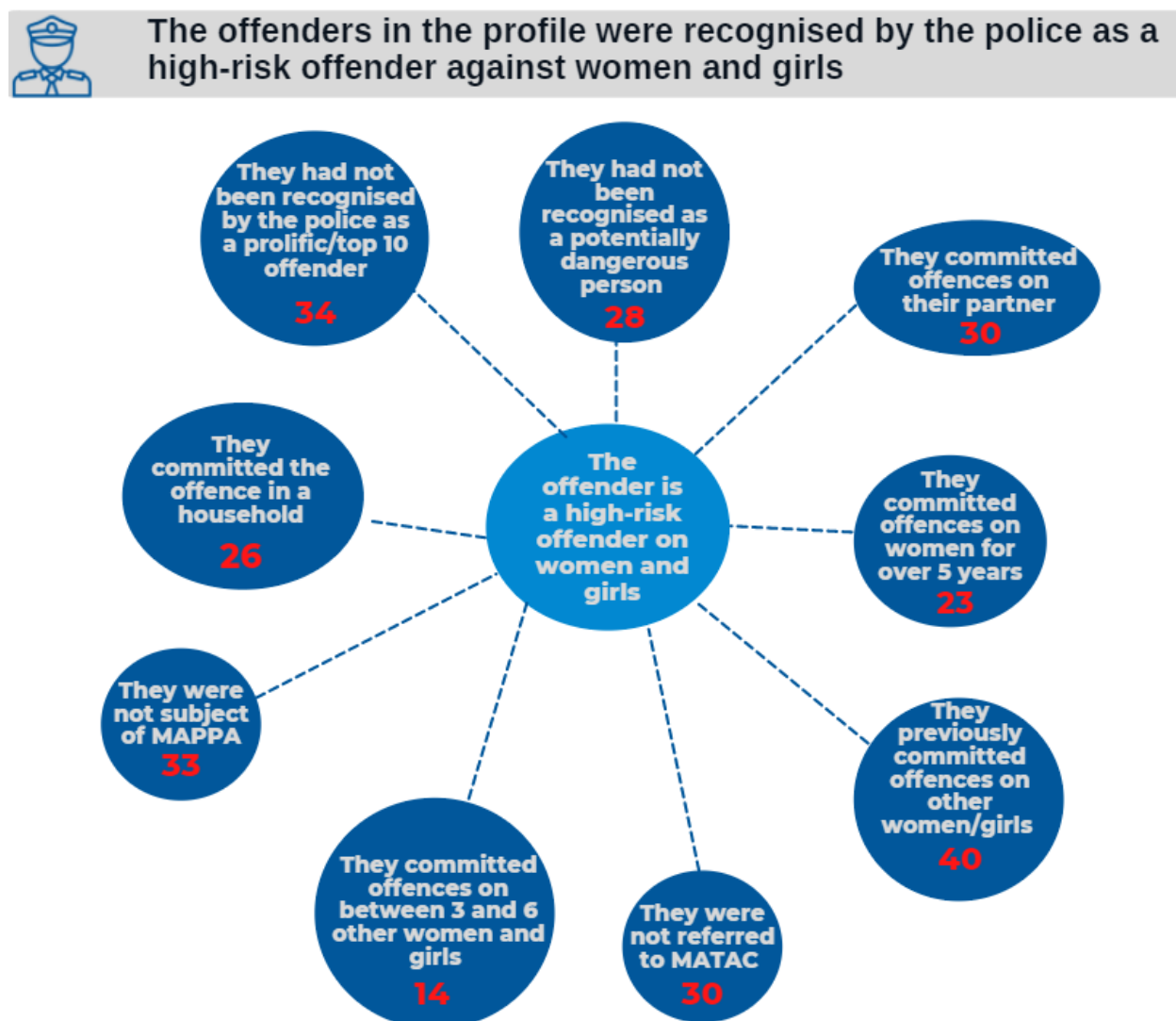
“a person charged with domestic abuse offences on a number of occasions against different partners but never convicted of offences that would make them a MAPPA-eligible offender”.

Of the 40 individuals identified by forces, nearly half had offended against two women or girls, but 14 had offended against three or more, and some offenders in the cases reviewed had offended against eight or nine women and girls.

Over half of the individuals had been offending against women and girls for more than five years.

The infographic in figure 8 shows a profile example for offenders included in our case file reviews. The offenders in the below profile were chosen by forces and considered to be the highest risk to women and girls.

Figure 8: Profile example from 40 case file reviews of violence against women and girls male offenders



Source: HMICFRS case file review analysis (40 case files)

Managing offenders

In the cases that we examined:

- there was only evidence in three cases of monitoring the offender/s to identify potential breaches of orders;
- in 15 out of 40 cases there was no evidence of multi-agency involvement in the management of the offender;
- in 10 out of 40 cases the offender wasn't highlighted on a daily briefing document given to operational officers; and
- in 32 out of 40 cases a suspect profile wasn't created.

So, in many cases, we couldn't be reassured that the forces were managing known offenders in a consistent and effective way.

In two of the forces we visited, although the MATACs served to identify potential perpetrators, the management of the offenders took place within Integrated Offender Management (IOM) schemes. The MATACs performed an identification function, rather than assessing the whole approach to the management of offenders.

The Government refreshed the IOM scheme in December 2020 and published a new strategy, the [*Neighbourhood crime integrated offender management strategy*](#). The strategy makes clear that neighbourhood crime includes burglary, robbery, theft from the person and vehicle theft – often called serious acquisitive crime.

The IOM strategy advises forces to align their offenders into cohorts. The ‘fixed’ cohort, consisting of offenders involved in serious acquisitive crime, should make up 60 percent of the number of offenders. Forces can then include other acquisitive criminals on the basis of local factors; this is the ‘flex’ cohort. Lastly, the strategy advises that while domestic abuse perpetrators could be included in IOM schemes, they should form part of a ‘free cohort’. This is because IOM is heavily focused on neighbourhood crime, and so there is no natural ‘home’ for the management of perpetrators of domestic abuse.

In the forces we inspected, we were told that the restricted size of the IOM free cohort was a barrier to the management of all high-risk domestic abuse perpetrators. So, some offenders weren’t being managed in a multi-agency way. In one force, this meant that although there were about 250 adults on the IOM scheme, only between 50 and 60 could be perpetrators of domestic abuse.

We were also told by probation officers in one force area that because the rehabilitative needs of domestic abuse perpetrators were often different from the needs of those involved in theft, robbery or burglary, it was difficult to manage both types of offender in the same scheme. For example, perpetrators of burglary may need drug rehabilitation to prevent further offending, but domestic abuse perpetrators may need behavioural programmes.

One of the principles for the management of domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators advocated by the College of Policing is that intervention options need to be available and relevant to both engaging and non-engaging perpetrators.

We found that there was inconsistent access to perpetrator programmes for individuals being managed in the above schemes. In one police force, decisions about how to use some police and crime commissioner (PCC) funding had been delegated to individual Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs). One CSP had decided not to fund domestic abuse perpetrator programmes in that part of the police force area.

In another force, a perpetrator programme called ‘Drive’ was only available in one part of the force. The Drive project was set up in 2015 by Respect, SafeLives and Social Finance and works to establish interventions for high-harm perpetrators of domestic abuse.

In May 2021, the Home Office published an invitation to PCCs to apply for grant funding to support the introduction of perpetrator-focused domestic abuse programmes in their areas. £11.1 million was made available, £2 million of which was for programmes aimed at stalking perpetrators. Not all the police force areas had made a bid for these funds. While the provision of funding for programmes to address

offending is welcome, based on the evidence from this inspection, we are concerned that some forces don't have effective multi-agency arrangements in place to make best use of these funds.

Some forces also manage small numbers of domestic abuse perpetrators on MAPPA schemes. Of the 40 individuals whose cases we examined as part of our fieldwork, 3 were being managed under these arrangements.

We didn't examine how the MAPPA arrangements in the forces worked, but we will consider whether we should include this aspect of managing domestic abuse perpetrators in our anticipated thematic inspection of MAPPA arrangements in 2022.

In summary, we found that arrangements to manage perpetrators of crimes against women and girls were inconsistent. While some forces have invested in schemes, these arrangements are sometimes hampered by attempts to find suitable management structures.

While the forces we inspected were able to identify high-harm and serial offenders against women and girls, the continuing management of these individuals wasn't consistent.

Recommendation 2.4

By March 2022, as part of the work to establish and implement the Government's perpetrator strategy, the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice should co-ordinate work to improve, review and standardise the current arrangements and capability for the management of VAWG offenders. This should aim to increase consistency in the use of multi-agency public protection arrangements, multi-agency tasking and co-ordination, and integrated offender management, and make recommendations to ensure there is sufficient capacity in the system to manage VAWG offenders effectively.


Identifying vulnerable victims

We asked the forces we inspected to identify the five female victims who had been subject to the most offences, and five female victims who had been subject to the most offences by different offenders. We did this so we could assess how easily the force systems could identify these individuals, and to examine how these victims had been dealt with.

In our survey of police officers and staff across England and Wales, 55 percent agreed with the statement that 'My force makes me aware of my most vulnerable repeat victims'.

The identification of the most vulnerable victims is usually based on the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence ([DASH](#)) risk assessment scoring, with the additional factor of the number of repeat victimisations. Some forces had difficulty in easily separating out those victims who had been the subject of offences by different offenders.

Figure 9: A profile example for victims included in our case file reviews. The victims in the profile were chosen by forces and considered to be repeatedly targeted by male offenders

 The female victims in the profile were recognised by the police as a repeat victim for offences committed by males



Source: HMICFRS case file analysis (40 case files)

Our analysis of the 40 cases we examined showed that 32 had been the subject of crimes by a partner or ex-partner. This shows that women and girls can repeatedly become victims of crimes in many different ways, and such crimes aren't just related to domestic abuse. In 6 out of 40 cases, there was no evidence of domestic abuse.

But we did find evidence that the offending against the victims was pervasive, repetitive and had taken place over long periods. For example, in 16 out of 40 cases, victimisation had taken place for between 2 and 5 years, and in a further 16 cases it had lasted over 5 years.

In our survey of police officers and staff across England and Wales, 58 percent of respondents agreed that repeat offending against women and girls is investigated effectively. However, 7 percent of women that responded to our public survey agreed with this statement; and 5 percent of those women who had themselves been victims.

In over two thirds of the cases we examined, we couldn't find evidence that the victim had been referred to victim support. This may be because of the way that referrals are recorded, and we explain this further under 'Referral for victim support', below. In 24 of the cases we examined, the victims had been referred to MARACs.

We found there was no correlation between the offenders who had targeted these victims repeatedly, and those offenders who we describe above who had been identified as the forces' most harmful offenders. None of the offenders had been recognised by the forces as one of their most prolific/harmful offenders.

This was despite the fact that in 28 out of the 40 cases reviewed the offender had also committed violence against other women and girls. Nearly half had on average committed offences against between one and five women and girls, and nearly a third against six to ten women and girls.

We couldn't see evidence that these offenders were being effectively managed. For example, in over three quarters of cases the offender wasn't referred to a MATAC or similar arrangement. In two thirds of cases reviewed no preventative measures or protective orders had been put in place.

Advocate services

In our lived experience research, a domestic abuse victim said "we relied heavily on [named advocate]. They've been the link to it all, the consistent person to keep us updated, follow up, listen to us. I don't know how anyone copes without that ... It was very, very hard going through it. The scaffolding we got from others was what sustained us, not [from] the police."

All the forces we inspected worked closely with independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) to provide support and protection to victims. Some forces co-located their specialist domestic abuse teams with IDVAs to provide a better service to victims. One force had also introduced an out-of-hours IDVA service into its control room. This meant that victims could receive immediate support and referral, sometimes before the police had even arrived on the scene.

Two forces were working closely with IDVA services located in accident and emergency departments at hospitals.

Notable practice

Surrey Police had recently worked with partner organisations to place IDVAs in some hospitals. Early analysis had shown that a large proportion of people who had attended hospitals for domestic abuse-related injuries weren't previously known to the police.

The use of IDVAs in this way meant that high-risk victims could be recognised earlier, and decisions made on MARAC referrals. As these victims seemed to have made a conscious decision not to report their abuse to the police, further analysis could potentially identify communities currently engaged with less successfully. This could allow more targeted preventative activity.

In our case assessments of breaches of non-molestation orders and restraining orders, we found that there was no evidence of the involvement of an IDVA in 42 out of 83 cases. We didn't examine how referrals were made to IDVAs in individual cases, so we couldn't establish why no IDVAs were involved in these cases.

Safety planning

Non-molestation orders are injunctions that are taken out by (or on behalf of) victims of domestic abuse by application to a civil court. The police aren't directly involved in this process. However, breaches of these orders are criminal offences¹ and are dealt with by the police. In contrast, restraining orders are imposed by criminal courts either after conviction or acquittal in existing criminal cases.²

In both cases, by their very nature, these offences are examples of repeat victimisation. So the victims should be treated as particularly vulnerable and are entitled to enhanced rights under [The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales](#).

We discuss our assessments of the cases we examined in more detail in the following section on how effectively police pursue perpetrators. However, in all the cases we assessed whether the risk management (or safety) plan was sufficient and adequate in the circumstances. We found that in nearly half of the cases the police didn't have an adequate risk management plan to manage the risks to the victim/s and/or witnesses.

Case study

A pregnant and vulnerable 16-year-old girl had been assaulted. The perpetrator, her new partner, was a registered sex offender and was a serial offender against women and girls. The police completed the DASH risk assessment and graded the risk as high. The safety plan consisted of the following entry on the crime report:

1. Has the victim been safeguarded? Yes, initially after suspect was arrested and taken to station and officers liaised with (redacted)
2. What safeguarding measures have been put in place? As above
3. Panic alarm required? No
4. Target hardening required? No
5. Probe referral completed? No

¹ Section 1 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004. On 1 July 2007, the Family Law Act 1996 was amended and a new section 42A inserted which made it a criminal offence to breach a non-molestation order.

² Section 12 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 came into force in September 2009. It amended section 5 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, which had previously allowed a criminal court to make a restraining order following conviction for either an offence/s under section 2 or 4 of the Act, to allow restraining orders to be imposed on acquittal if the court "considers it necessary to do so to protect a person from harassment by the defendant" (Section 5A(1) of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997).

This example of a cursory and inadequate safety plan was not unusual in our case assessments.

The [College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice](#) for domestic abuse gives forces detailed information about how risk management processes should be carried out. It states that plans should:

- extend beyond the initial investigation, through the court process and beyond;
- include a locally agreed risk management framework, such as Proportionality, Legality, Accountability, Necessity and based on Best Intelligence/Information at the time (PLANBI);
- provide officers and staff with possible actions which are proportionate to the risk and aimed at specific risk variables; and
- include a tactical list of intervention options for victims and offenders corresponding to each grading of risk – standard, medium and high.

We are concerned that despite previous [recommendations](#), forces aren't always providing officers with the correct tools to complete adequate safety plans. And officers don't always consider the importance of effective and robust risk management when dealing with victims of crime.

7. How effectively do the police pursue perpetrators of violence against women and girls?

In our [interim report](#), we said that the police should focus on using the full extent of their powers to relentlessly pursue and disrupt perpetrators. In our fieldwork, we examined aspects of the police response from when the police are first notified of an incident through to the consideration of a prosecution.

We expect that forces will deal quickly and effectively with calls for service, deal appropriately with breaches of protective orders, investigate offences robustly and give victims the best possible service while taking into account victims' individual needs.

Responding to calls for service

We noted that the number of calls for service, particularly about domestic abuse, has increased year on year. In our [2019 domestic abuse report](#) we concluded that, overall, forces were getting better at dealing with calls about domestic abuse.

In our [Review of policing domestic abuse during the pandemic](#), we acknowledge that the police responded effectively in the most difficult situations, adapting their practices, focusing on prevention and sharing ideas for new ways of working through well-established national arrangements.

Sometimes, for example at periods of peak demand, forces can struggle to send officers to see people in person as quickly as they would like. Some forces we visited had recognised the inherent risk in control rooms of a delayed response to domestic abuse victims and had set up systems to manage this.

Notable practice

Cheshire Constabulary was piloting a vulnerability and safeguarding team (VAST) in the control room. The team consisted of one detective sergeant and six constables. Officers reviewed calls that had been flagged as having a vulnerable victim, and would call victims where appropriate, seeking to make immediate referrals for support. An additional benefit was that officers who later visited the caller had more information to deal with the case more effectively.

Another way that forces can provide a better service to domestic abuse victims is by having 'appointment cars'. This is a system that asks callers whether they want to see

an officer straight away or if they want to make an appointment to be seen at a time and place of their choosing. Not all calls regarding domestic abuse are urgent. In some cases, callers may just want advice or may want to report an incident, but there is no immediate threat to their safety. There are also benefits to victims in this approach, as they can decide where and when it is safest to see a police officer.

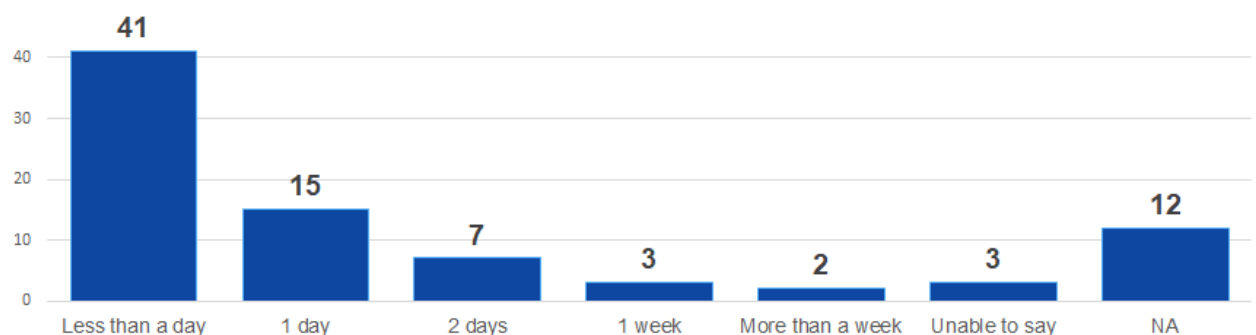
One force told us that the use of an appointment car had stopped because the available appointments were filled too quickly and officers weren't given sufficient time to deal with cases. This combination of factors had led to some appointments not being kept and a poor service provided to victims. Rather than explore how the system could be improved, it was discarded. The force reverted to handing over cases between shifts. In the same force, we were told that on occasions this could mean anything up to 60 domestic abuse cases could be left after a busy night, awaiting officers to be deployed to them.

Notable practice

Humberside Police operates an appointment car system for domestic abuse callers who would like to choose when they see a police officer. There is an Outlook calendar managed by the control room and it is the responsibility of the local police area managers to allocate resources to fill the appointments. If additional resources are required to manage increased demand, this is resolved at the force 'Pacesetter' morning meeting.

In our assessment of cases we checked how long it took for officers to respond to reports of breaches of non-molestation and restraining orders. In just over half of cases the police didn't respond to the breach in under 24 hours of receiving the report. So, while forces are making attempts to improve the immediate response to victims, it appears from the cases we examined that there is still room for further improvement.

Figure 10: Length of time taken for the force to respond to the complaint of the breach



Source: HMICFRS case review analysis (83 case files reviewed)

Breaches of protective orders

A domestic abuse victim reported in our lived experience work: "The non-molestation was a complete waste of time. He breached it four times ... I wouldn't get one again. He was just laughing at it, 'she's got this order and I can breach it and nothing ever gets done'."

We have not previously inspected how forces respond to breaches of non-molestation orders, but we did consider breaches of restraining orders in our 2019 [Stalking and harassment inspection report](#).

The findings in our 2019 report were worrying and showed that police forces were dealing with breaches of restraining orders in isolation and therefore not recognising or properly addressing the wider patterns of victimisation. This means that forces may not have been assessing the risk posed to the victim or investigating crimes to the standard required to secure a prosecution for offences other than the breach of the order itself.

We were so worried about this that we made several new national recommendations. These were designed to improve the learning and awareness of officers, and to make sure that crimes were recorded more accurately.

In our fieldwork for this inspection, we examined 83 cases of breaches of non-molestation orders and restraining orders to see whether there had been any improvement in how forces dealt with these types of cases. As we noted above in the section on ‘How effectively do the police protect women and girls?’, victims in these cases will by their very nature be repeat victims and are more likely to be at increased risk of harm.

In our assessments we found that in 52 out of the 83 cases the police had failed to correctly determine that the breach of a restraining order (as well as being an offence itself) was evidence of further stalking and harassment. This continued failure to identify patterns of behaviour, and the associated likely escalation of risk, is very worrying.

As a result of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, non-molestation orders and Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) will be replaced by Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs). However, some of the problems we found with breaches of orders will still exist when DAPOs come into force unless forces take immediate remedial action.

In the cases we examined we found that:

- nearly all of the offences related to domestic abuse;
- one fifth of the victims were assessed as high risk;
- the offender was arrested in 57 out of 83 cases; and
- in 9 out of the 83 cases the offender wasn’t arrested but was subject to a voluntary interview.

We concluded that in one fifth of the cases the police hadn’t taken speedy and robust action to deal with the breach and to bring the offender before the court in a timely manner.

Independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) in one force told us that the force’s approach to breaches of non-molestation orders was inconsistent, and in some cases non-existent. One IDVA gave us an example of a case where a non-molestation order was breached 18 times with no apparent police action.

IDVAs told us that they would give advice to victims that a non-molestation order is a good approach to help protect them. But when breaches aren't effectively enforced by the police it puts the IDVAs in a very awkward position, and both the victim and IDVA can feel let down.

We didn't examine what happened to the cases of breaches of orders beyond the initial actions of the police, but this may be an area to explore further when assessing new performance measures and the VAWG 'scorecard', as recommended in our [interim report](#).

In one of the forces we inspected, the force had recently modelled demand generated by domestic abuse incidents. The force had included DVDS requests and breaches of DVPOs but hadn't included the demand from breaches of either non-molestation or restraining orders. In another force, the performance measures didn't show how the force was scrutinising and performing in relation to breaches of orders.

The criminal justice system provides for a range of orders that can be used to protect women and girls. The responsibility for applying for these orders is sometimes out of the control of the police – for example, for non-molestation orders. However, when perpetrators breach the orders the responsibility for enforcement rests with the police.

But it seems that some forces don't pay enough attention to breaches of orders, the effect they have on victims and how well they perform in this important area.

In the light of the imminent introduction of DAPOs, and the inevitable breaches that will follow, the police service should learn lessons from the current arrangements. An implementation plan should include a proper evaluation of what works and how improvements can be made to the existing systems and processes.

Investigating VAWG

In our [interim report](#), and based on our analysis of recent evidence from HMICFRS inspections of the police response to VAWG, we concluded that the police don't always investigate these offences effectively.

In every inspection we reviewed, there was evidence of dedicated, committed professionals providing an excellent policing response to some very vulnerable victims, often in difficult circumstances and with high caseloads. However, there were also some consistent themes of areas for improvement. Some of these – such as delays in investigations, slow criminal justice system processes, and a lack of specialist resources – don't just affect VAWG victims. But we highlighted as of particular concern the number of VAWG cases the police close as requiring no further action because of evidential difficulties (outcome 15) or because the victim does not support further action (outcome 16).

We discuss this further in the section 'Achieving an effective policing response to VAWG: What needs to be in place?'

Specialist investigators

In our fieldwork, we found that not all forces had specialist teams to investigate either domestic abuse or [rape and serious sexual offence \(RASSO\)](#) cases. For domestic abuse:

- one force had moved to specialist investigative teams but the teams weren't at full capacity;
- one force had plans to introduce specialist teams in 2021;
- one force had no specialist investigative teams but had a small central team that played an active part in supervising cases and providing guidance; and
- one force used officers in criminal investigation departments and response teams to investigate domestic abuse cases.

In the forces that were increasing the capacity of specialist teams to investigate domestic abuse, the uplift was being provided by the wider [increase in police officer numbers](#) announced by the Government in 2019.

In our 2019 [domestic abuse update report](#), we concluded that specialist trained officers generally conduct better investigations of domestic abuse cases. A crime file review in the same inspection concluded that there was evidence of better supervision of investigations in specialist teams.

One of the forces we inspected had conducted a comparison exercise to find out if, and in what ways, other forces used specialist domestic abuse investigators. The force contacted 19 other forces and concluded there were varying approaches throughout the country.

Our 2021 [report on the police and CPS response to rape](#) found a similar mixed picture of provision of specialist RASSO investigators. A review of Operation Bluestone in Avon and Somerset Constabulary concluded that specialist investigators would provide a better force response to these crimes.

We discuss further the importance of forces having sufficient specialist investigative capacity and capability in the section 'Achieving an effective policing response to VAWG: What needs to be in place?'

Responding to online crime

There is evidence to suggest that online crime directed at women, in particular [cyber stalking](#), is increasing at a rapid pace. This has created several problems for police forces, such as the need to increase the provision of digital forensic services to retrieve evidence.

In early 2021, we stated in our [Policing in the pandemic](#) report that problems that existed before the pandemic, such as backlogs in the examination of forensic exhibits and digital media, had worsened.

Police forces have responded to the increase in demand for digital evidence retrieval by increasing the size of the teams that do this, outsourcing and introducing mobile phone 'kiosks'. These are digital hardware products that can be positioned throughout force areas and used by officers and staff who have received training. The kiosks are

only suitable for use in relatively simple cases, and where officers can already gain access to the phone through its security features.

In the forces that use kiosks, it is likely that many victims of domestic abuse who have potential evidence on their phones will have their phones examined in this way. In one force, because the kiosks weren't integrated into the force ICT systems, the force wasn't able to evaluate how the kiosks were working. For example, they couldn't tell what cases the kiosks had been used for, and how long the retrieval had taken. So the force couldn't tell us whether phones were being taken from domestic abuse victims for longer periods than necessary.

For more detailed or complicated analysis of mobile phones, or for evidence retrieval from other digital devices, forces use specialist digital forensic teams. These teams often have service level agreements (SLAs) that dictate how quickly devices submitted to them for examination will be dealt with. We found differences in the SLAs between forces, and none of them prioritised crimes against women and girls. One force's SLA didn't differentiate between the devices of victims and those of suspects, although we were told that in practice victims' phones would take priority.

The Government's [End-to-end rape review report on findings and actions](#), published in June 2021, contained the following extract and objective for the police:

“The Review has heard victims' experience of feeling digitally 'strip searched' and many have been left without phones for months, leaving them without vital support at a time of immense trauma. Our ambition is that:

no victim will be left without a phone for more than 24 hours, in any circumstances, and our priority is that victims have their own phones returned within this period, with replacement phones being provided in the minority of cases.”

Although we agree with this objective, we believe that it will be extremely difficult to achieve in complex cases, given the current capacity and capability levels within digital forensics. It is likely that significant further investment will be required to achieve this level of service for all victims. For example, none of the forces we asked in fieldwork were able to provide this service, although a basic replacement phone could be arranged.

In one force, IDVAs told us that there were delays in returning phones to victims. Although the force concerned couldn't provide the exact data, we were told that most victims' phones would be returned within 24 hours if the retrieval was pre-arranged.

We were, however, encouraged to find that one force we inspected had a draft SLA that included an aim that victims' mobile phones would be examined and returned within 24 hours. The latest figures for May indicated that this had been achieved for all nine cases where phones had been removed, four of which had been for rape.

We welcome this intention to improve the experience of victims of rape and serious sexual offences. We will closely follow the progress on the actions in the rape review to accomplish this objective.

But we are still concerned that too many female victims of crime will receive an inconsistent service.

Keeping victims informed

“The impression I get is the police don’t see it as important enough; not significant enough, not high on their priority list, not something they need to be acting on. They don’t understand the need for survivors to be kept informed about what’s happening.” (Domestic abuse victim)

When reports of crime are made, victims generally make an agreement with the reporting officer about how often they would like important updates, and what form these should take (for example, phone call, email). This agreement about receiving important updates is often called the ‘victim contract’ and is a right under the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) (the Victims’ Code). We discuss the requirements of the Victims’ Code more in chapter 12.

Many women and girls who are victims of crime will be entitled to enhanced rights under the Victims’ Code. This includes the right to be informed about the arrest of a suspect within one day.

In our fieldwork, IDVAs told us that sometimes they have difficulty contacting investigating officers. This could be to obtain updates on the progress of investigations, or to provide information to the police. We were told that regular updates from the police are particularly important after a report has been made, and before the suspect has been located. This could be because the victim may be at greater risk and on heightened alert for the possible return of the suspect.

In 2020, the Victims’ Commissioner published [research into the service provided to survivors of rape](#). The report found that:

“Survivors were asked their level of agreement about a range of statements on the police investigation. Fifty-seven per cent said they were kept informed about all the actions police took. However, 82% agreed with the statement that there were long periods when they heard nothing, and 70% agreed that they (or their representative) had to chase for information.”

In a survey we distributed to members of the public, we asked women who had been victims of crime if the police had kept them informed about their case. Sixty-one percent disagreed that they had, 24 percent agreed and the remaining 15 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Notable practice

Surrey Police has recently received PCC funding for two domestic abuse caseworkers in each of the three force divisions. The force recognised that it is sometimes difficult for victims (or their representatives) to contact officers. The caseworkers are focused on victim contact and offering enhanced support to victims through to the court process. The force hopes this enhanced service will help victims stay engaged with the criminal justice process.

Referral for victim support

A domestic abuse victim told us:

“I had an IDVA. She was pretty good. I reached out to [named domestic abuse charity]. They’ve been amazing, on the end of the phone, Teams meetings, they listen, put a plan together. Having the support to push me through that, just being there when I need them.”

After reporting a crime, every victim is entitled to be referred to a service that can give them support. This is a right included in the Victims’ Code, which states that victims have the right “To be referred to services that support victims and have services and support tailored to your needs.”

Police and crime commissioners (PCCs) and their mayoral equivalents are primarily responsible for funding victim support services in their areas. The ways in which forces make referrals to victim support services on behalf of victims vary.

We first reported on the effectiveness of the police in this important aspect of their work in our [hate crime thematic report](#) in 2018.

In our 2019 inspection report [The poor relation: The police and Crown Prosecution Service’s response to crimes against older people](#), we were so concerned about the lack of progress in this important area that we included a recommendation for chief constables to work with PCCs and their mayoral equivalents, and other relevant organisations, to review whether victim support services can be provided in a better way.

In our fieldwork we examined the cases of 40 victims of crime who, according to the forces, had been victimised the most times (see the section above, ‘Identifying vulnerable victims’). In over two thirds of case files reviewed we couldn’t find any evidence that the victim had been referred to victim support services.

We also examined 83 cases of breaches of non-molestation orders and restraining orders. In 49 out of 83 cases reviewed there was no evidence that the victim was referred to victim support.

We couldn’t say for certain that no victim support services were provided in these cases, because the force crime systems don’t always record that a referral has been made. For example, some forces provide a daily and automatic download of information to the relevant victim support service, and this may not subsequently be recorded on the crime system in individual cases.

In the survey we distributed to members of the public, women were asked to report their level of agreement on a range of statements relating to victim support. Twenty-two percent of those who identified as victims agreed that the police provide information to women and girls on where they can get further support. Forces were also asked to complete a survey which asked similar questions relating to support services. Sixty-nine percent of respondents agreed that their force provides information to women and girls on where they can get further support.

Table 1: Attitude statements from all women who responded to our public survey

Statement	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Police provide information to women and girls on where they can get further support	25%	36%	39%
I am aware of support agencies I can go to if I am the victim of violence	58%	14%	27%
I trust the police to treat me fairly because of who I am	31%	25%	44%

Source: Police engagement with women and girls public survey

Table 2: Attitude statements from those women who identified as victims and responded to our public survey

Statement	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Police provide information to women and girls on where they can get further support	22%	32%	46%
I am aware of support agencies I can go to if I am the victim of violence	58%	12%	30%
I trust the police to treat me fairly because of who I am	24%	25%	50%

Source: Police engagement with women and girls public survey

Table 3: Attitude statements from police forces who responded to our survey

Statement	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
My force provides information to women and girls on where they can get further support	69%	20%	6%
I am aware of the available support agencies who I can signpost women and girls to	69%	13%	11%

Source: Police engagement with women and girls force survey

Working with the Crown Prosecution Service

We discuss the importance of effective joint working between the police and CPS further in the next chapter, 'Achieving an effective police response to VAWG: What needs to be in place?' In this section, we focus on our fieldwork findings on two elements of this joint working: the sharing of risk assessments in domestic abuse and stalking cases; and the effect of the interim charging protocol, introduced in 2020 as a result of the pandemic.

When the police consider that there is sufficient evidence to charge a suspect, they must comply with [charging guidance](#) issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The guidance includes information about what material the police are required to send to the CPS when asking for charging advice. This includes risk assessments, including those relevant to domestic abuse, which in most cases will be DASH forms.

The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice for domestic abuse includes a list of material that should be sent to the CPS as part of the 'Post arrest management of suspect and case file' section. The long list includes this item:

“Relevant police records, for example, pocket notebook entries, risk assessments, incident logs, custody records...”

The CPS's [Domestic abuse guidelines for prosecutors](#) also includes the following extract: “Prosecutors should request from the police a copy of the risk assessment for each case as a matter of routine.”

Material provided by the police to the CPS for charging advice in domestic abuse cases is supported by a checklist agreed between the CPS and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). This checklist should be completed in all cases of domestic abuse and submitted with the case material. The purpose of the checklist is to make sure that all relevant material has been considered and included.

In relation to risk assessments, the checklist includes the heading “Relevant information to include from Police Records” and the following entry:

“Risk of reoffending. Any previous DASH or equivalent risk identification checklist with outcome (i.e. MARAC case, high risk, standard risk).”

The guidance clearly states that copies of risk assessments must be submitted with the other case material at the earliest point when charges are being considered. This is because it's important that CPS lawyers understand all the facts of the case, including what risks the victim may be subject to. This can help lawyers consider whether there has been a pattern of offending, choose the appropriate charge and decide what arrangements could be requested to help safeguard the victim – for example, bail conditions or restraining orders.

In the forces we inspected for this aspect, we found that officers don't routinely send risk assessments to the CPS. One force told us that the existence of a risk assessment would be listed on the case file as 'sensitive material', which meant it would only be disclosed to the CPS if it was requested. In another force we were told

by a CPS member of staff that the police don't send the risk assessments to the CPS, and that the CPS area reviewing lawyers didn't routinely request them.

Although the national police and CPS guidance is clear, it seems that in some areas neither the police nor the CPS are complying with these important requirements. From this inspection we can't say whether this problem is more widespread and/or what effect it may have had on cases and the ability of prosecutors to make informed decisions about cases. However, all forces should consider this problem and make sure they are complying.

We will explore this further, working with HMCPSI.

There may also be a related problem in relation to risk assessments completed in stalking cases. These cases may not necessarily involve a suspect who is, or has been, an intimate partner.

In stalking cases, police officers should complete a stalking checklist and submit this to the CPS along with the case file. This serves a similar purpose to the domestic abuse checklist – that is, to make sure that all relevant material has been considered and included. In one force, we were told that an audit of stalking cases showed that the checklist had only been completed and submitted to the CPS in 3 out of 24 cases.

In March 2020, at the start of the pandemic, the CPS and the NPCC issued an [interim charging protocol](#). The protocol sets out how charging should be managed, considering the problems caused by the pandemic – for instance, at that time no new trials were taking place. At the time of our inspection the protocol was still in place.

The protocol sought to limit the demand on the CPS and the courts by identifying three categories of cases and giving guidance on how each should be dealt with. Cases of domestic abuse where the police weren't seeking to refuse bail were classed as 'high-priority cases'. The protocol stated that these cases should be dealt with by the 'out of custody process', meaning the police should bail the suspect for a period of 28 days awaiting the CPS decision.

After receiving the CPS advice in these cases, the police were advised to bail the suspect to court – in anticipated guilty cases for 28 days, and for anticipated not-guilty cases for 56 days.

This was a change to the position before the pandemic, when the police were able to get immediate charging advice from the CPS in domestic abuse cases when a suspect was in custody – even when the police didn't intend to refuse bail. This meant that suspects could be charged quickly and appear at the first available court.

In our fieldwork we were told that the protocol was still in place and had led to increased delays in court hearings for domestic abuse cases. This could increase the likelihood of victims becoming frustrated and deciding to withdraw their support for the prosecution. We were also told that the delay in receiving charging advice meant the police had to manage the risk to the victim while the suspect was on police bail, and this could lead to the possibility of repeat victimisation.

The methodology for our inspection didn't extend to examining this aspect further. However, we are told that the protocol is being reviewed by the Joint NPCC and CPS

Charging Transformation Board to establish when the working arrangements could return to those that were in place before the pandemic.

Recommendations arising from fieldwork

Given the significant inconsistencies between forces identified in this inspection, and discussed in this section, we recommend that all chief constables immediately review and improve where necessary the processes and practices related to VAWG in their forces, to make sure they are effective and consistent. Forces should be supported in this by much clearer national standards and data, and consistent and comparative information about the capacity and capability required to make improvements.

Recommendation 4

All chief constables should immediately review and ensure that there are consistently high standards in their forces' responses to violence against women and girls and should be supported in doing so by national standards and data.

We recommend:

4.1 By March 2022, chief constables should establish and publish an action plan that specifies in detail what steps the force will take to improve and standardise its approach to responding to violence against women and girls offences, with the aim of ensuring policies, processes and practices are effective, actively monitored and managed, and meeting national standards.

This should include (but is not limited to) improving and standardising:

- the use of police powers to protect women, including arrest of perpetrators, use of pre-charge bail, the applications for orders (where appropriate) and processes for responding to breaches of non-molestation and other orders;
- the use of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme;
- the capability of generalist and specialist staff to respond to violence against women and girls offences effectively, including consistent understanding of newer offences (such as coercive control);
- the identification and management of high-harm violent offenders against women and girls (in partnership with other organisations);
- the identification and protection of the most at-risk victims of violence against women and girls offences (in partnership with other organisations); and
- internal and public communications related to violence against women and girls to ensure that messages raise awareness of the risk and emphasise the seriousness of the issues.

- 4.2 By December 2021, the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead should set a framework for the force-level action plans, and work with chief constables to make sure their action plans are in place. By June 2022, the national lead should then provide HMICFRS with an assessment of national progress, which establishes any potential gaps and areas for improvement.

This force-level activity should be supported by clearer standards and improved performance monitoring, to help chief constables better assure themselves of their forces' effectiveness in responding to VAWG, and to allow greater accountability, support and direction at local and national levels.

We recommend:

- 4.3 Immediately, the College of Policing should develop a violence against women and girls minimum standard, creating a consistent and clear standard for police investigations. The Home Secretary or the College of Policing should then consider whether to use their powers under section 53A of the Police Act 1996 to require police forces to adopt the procedures and practices it sets out.
- 4.4 By March 2022, the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council should establish mechanisms and processes to allow rapid and consistent sharing of evidence, information, and evaluation on new and effective ways of working in response to violence against women and girls offences.
- 4.5 By December 2021, the Home Office together with other government departments should introduce a set of measures to monitor improvements in the criminal justice system approach to all crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls. This should be developed together with women and children's representatives and include a strong focus on evidence of victim experience (and include such information as is necessary to identify and act on variation in service provided to women with different protected characteristics). The measures should enable better accountability and support at local and national levels. Where possible, this should complement the work the Government is already doing following its end-to-end rape review to develop a 'scorecard' for measuring improvements to rape crimes.
- 4.6 By March 2022, the Home Office should work with other government departments, policing, and victim representatives and support organisations to build awareness of the importance of ensuring communications and terminology related to violence against women and girls are appropriate and don't have any unintended consequences.

8. Achieving an effective policing response to violence against women and girls: what needs to be in place?

In this section, we focus on some essential resources, processes and relationships the police need to have in place (or urgently improve) in order to achieve a more consistent, open and effective response to violence against women and girls (VAWG). The evidence comes from fieldwork for this inspection, interviews with victims and their representatives, and analysis of other relevant HMICFRS current and recent inspections.

Sufficient capability and capacity to investigate VAWG offences effectively

In our [interim report](#), we noted that while the demand on policing has increased, their capacity and resources have not, and in some cases have decreased.

Evidence from each chief constable's annual force management statement shows that forces generally consider and plan for future changes in demand related to rape, serious sexual offence and domestic abuse. However, this is not the case consistently for other VAWG offences.

Sometimes, this planning has resulted in forces creating or retaining specialist teams. In our 2021 report, [The police response to domestic abuse: An update report](#), we stated that most forces now have dedicated domestic abuse officers or public protection units with staff responsible for investigating cases and safeguarding victims. These units usually focus on those victims who are assessed as high risk, and our evidence suggests the service they provide in these cases is often good.

Similarly, our rape and child protection inspections consistently report generally more effective investigations by specialist teams.

However, there are often problems with capability and capacity in these teams. This is partly because of low recruitment and retention into specialist roles, which aren't always seen as a career pathway into leadership roles through promotion. We make a recommendation to the Home Office to carry out an urgent review of the role of the detective constable, which should include specific recommendations to make sure there is adequate capacity and capability in every force to thoroughly and effectively investigate VAWG offences.

We support the Government's intention, as part of its uplift programme, to recruit 20,000 new police officers by 2023. This offers an opportunity to enhance capacity

for VAWG. We were pleased that during our fieldwork forces told us they were planning on using the extra resources from the uplift programme for this purpose.

Notable practice

Humberside Police conducted a review to develop and establish domestic abuse safeguarding units.

The aims of these units are to:

- provide a high-quality service for victims of domestic abuse;
- create a dedicated team of skilled and professional investigators to manage investigations into domestic abuse and associated safeguarding arrangements;
- work closely with partners to achieve better outcomes for victims of domestic abuse; and
- target re-offenders through a reactive and proactive approach to their behaviour.

Indicators of how successful the units are will be measured by:

- improvements in the timeliness and quality of domestic abuse investigations;
- improved outcomes in terms of crime and safeguarding;
- improved conviction rates;
- reduction in re-offending;
- any positive response from partnership feedback – CPS (file quality), independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) services; and
- any positive response from victim surveys and feedback.

To staff the domestic abuse safeguarding units, the force intends to re-organise existing arrangements and use a total of 42 posts from the funding provided by the Home Office for an uplift of officers. The force's units are intended to improve the service provided to victims.

Recommendation 2.1

By March 2022, the Home Office and the relevant National Police Chiefs' Council leads should review police capability and capacity to relentlessly pursue and disrupt the perpetrators of violence against women and girls offences and enhance these, as necessary.

Recommendation 2.2

As part of the work to develop the Government's domestic abuse perpetrator strategy, the Home Office should carry out an urgent review of the role of the detective constable. This should establish appropriate incentives, progression and support for both officer and staff investigators to encourage this career path. This review should include specific recommendations to make sure there is adequate capacity and capability in every force to thoroughly and effectively investigate violence against women and girls offences.

Immediate improvements to understanding of use of outcomes 15 and 16

We are extremely concerned that a large proportion of VAWG offences are closed by the police as requiring no further action (NFA), with limited information to offer assurance that this is always the right decision.

When an investigation is completed, the case gets an outcome code under [Home Office counting rules](#). These rules are a national standard for recording and counting notifiable offences recorded by police forces in England and Wales (known as police-recorded crime). Outcome codes record the reasons that crime investigations have been finalised.

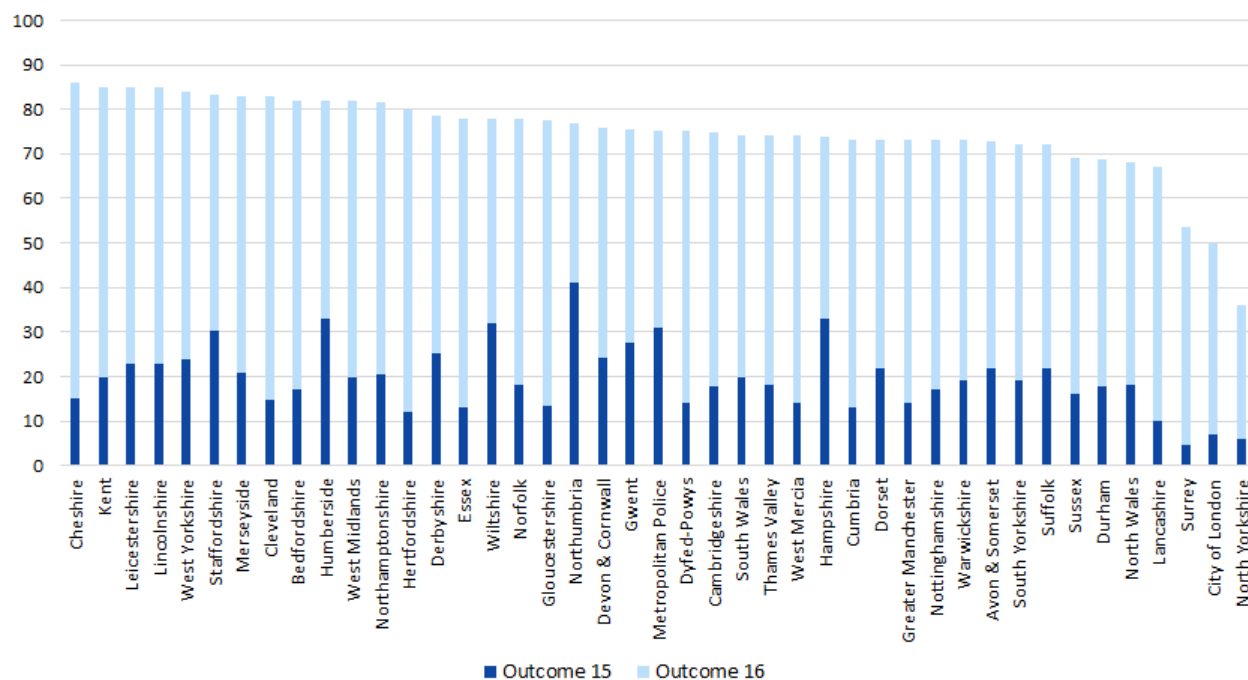
The outcome codes used most frequently for VAWG offences are:

- Outcome 15: evidential difficulties – named suspect identified. The crime is confirmed, and the victim supports police action, but evidential difficulties prevent further action.
- Outcome 16: evidential difficulties – named suspect identified. The victim does not support (or has withdrawn support for) police action.

On average, three out of four domestic abuse cases are closed with outcomes 15 or 16, with unexplained variation between forces.

In our [review of policing domestic abuse during the pandemic](#), we recommended that all forces should immediately review their use of outcomes 15 and 16. This was because data from all forces showed that, on average, the police were closing three out of every four domestic abuse cases with one of these outcome codes. This will be the right decision in some cases – in certain non-recent or historic cases, for instance.

Figure 11: Combined rate for the use of outcomes 15 and 16 for domestic abuse-related crime, by force, in the 12 months to 31 March 2020



Source: Home Office data and HMICFRS data collection

But forces also vary in their use of outcomes 15 and 16. Moreover, many forces are unable to explain why their figures are so high, what evidential problems there were, and whether the decisions are disproportionately affecting individuals or groups of individuals due to their protected characteristics. This is extremely worrying, especially as the use of these outcomes for domestic abuse cases is increasing.

Use of outcome 16 in rape cases

There is also evidence to show an increased use of outcome 16 by the police for closing cases involving other types of VAWG. For example:

- for sexual assaults against women, use of outcome 16 increased from 4,326 in 2014/15 to 13,395 in 2019/20 (these figures rose from 665 to 2,439 over the same period for cases where the victim was male); and
- for rapes against women, use of outcome 16 increased from 5,773 in 2014/15 to 18,584 in 2019/20 (these figures rose from 403 to 1,205 over the same period for cases where the victim was male).

The 2020/21 data shows a slight decrease in use of outcome 16 in these offence types (for both female and male victims). Overall, however, this represents a large number of cases closed in this category.

We examined outcome 16 cases in detail as part of our July 2021 joint inspection of the [police and CPS response to rape](#). While acknowledging that there were different and sometimes complicated reasons why a victim may not support the prosecution, we highlighted the lack of information recorded about these cases.

For instance, the current system doesn't tell us at what stage of the process the victim withdrew their support. Being able to distinguish between the victim who doesn't support the investigation from the outset and one who later withdraws their support is important. It would allow the force to analyse this information to understand the reasons victims may withdraw support and, where it is able, to adapt its approach to investigations to provide greater opportunities for better outcomes and victim care.

The help that victims need may depend on their feelings about supporting prosecution. Victims who doesn't support police action from the start may have different needs to those who withdraw at a later stage. Equally, victims who indicate a lack of support from the outset may change their minds if they then receive support that is targeted to their specific circumstances. Although some forces could identify when the victim withdrew support, there is no national process for this.

In our joint inspection, we therefore concluded that better data would also help the public to understand these investigations. The current outcome codes rely more on process and fail to give a full picture of a victim's experience. Furthermore, without thorough and scrutinised information on why cases are not progressing, forces are less able to assure either themselves or the public that their decisions to take no further action are correct.

Use of outcomes 15 and 16 in cases involving girls

There is also a gap in national data on the police use of outcomes 15 and 16 in cases where the victim is a girl (that is, 17 years old or younger). Again, this is a missed opportunity to gather information that could help understand why girls do or don't support further police action, and so tailor support and safeguarding measures accordingly.

Recommendation 5

Immediate review of use of outcomes 15 and 16 in violence against women and girls offences.

An unacceptably high number of domestic abuse, rape and other violence against women and girls cases are closed by the police using outcome codes 15 and 16. These numbers vary between forces, and there are significant gaps in the data and information gathered about these outcomes. This makes it impossible for policing to assure itself (or victims) that they are consistently closing these cases appropriately.

We therefore recommend that:

- 5.1 By March 2022, the Home Office should review and refine the data on outcome codes gathered nationally and make improvements in the ways this can be used to identify trends and outliers.

5.2 By December 2022, the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead should develop and disseminate to forces a process for consistent and robust monitoring of outcomes 15 and 16 violence against women and girls cases. This should require, as a minimum, inspector-level sign-off of these cases and that evidence on the rationale for these closure codes is recorded and auditable.

There are gaps in data on the use of evidence-led prosecutions in domestic abuse cases

The high use of outcome 16 is also troubling given gaps in data around the use of evidence-led prosecutions (those where victim support for prosecution isn't needed).

The CPS's [Domestic abuse guidelines for prosecutors](#) make it clear that all cases of domestic abuse should be led by evidence and that the starting point should be to build cases in which the prosecution does not need to rely or focus on the credibility of the victim.

Evidence-led prosecutions are a crucial approach in managing the risk to victims both in terms of avoiding retraumatising victims through the court process, and potentially preventing perpetrators committing further offences. But when we (with HMCPSSI) inspected the use of these prosecutions for domestic abuse cases, we found that neither the police nor the CPS could distinguish evidence-led cases from domestic abuse cases in general. It was therefore difficult to measure the numbers or the effectiveness of these prosecutions. In our 2020 report [Evidence led domestic abuse prosecutions](#), we concluded that this made it more difficult for policing and the CPS to learn lessons or share effective ways of doing things with each other.

Swift and thorough investigation of accusations of VAWG offences and inappropriate behaviour carried out by a member of the police service

The public expect the police to act with the highest professional standards at all times. If a police officer is alleged to have acted illegally or inappropriately, this must be taken seriously and investigated fully. This is essential to maintain trust in the police.

Responding to allegations of police-perpetrated domestic abuse

The College of Policing has issued guidance which established that police-perpetrated cases of domestic abuse should be dealt with just like any other case. While this is correct, our lived experience research uncovered several specific concerns of victims where the perpetrator has been a serving police officer at the time. These include ensuring that the investigation is being undertaken independently and unnecessary information is not being disclosed to the officer in question or their colleagues.

We did not examine the response to allegations of VAWG committed by police officers in this inspection. We are however, working with the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct to investigate a super-complaint specifically on [the police response to allegations of police-perpetrated domestic abuse](#). This super-complaint, raised by the Centre for Women's Justice, alleges multiple

failings in the police response to such allegations and that these are harming both the victims and wider public confidence in policing. The investigation is due to conclude later in 2021 and will result in a published report of findings and recommendations.

Responding to workplace harassment and abuse

Sadly, women who work for the police sometimes experience instances of harassment, abuse, and other inappropriate behaviour from colleagues. Forces need to ensure that staff are empowered to challenge inappropriate behaviours, and that concerns are dealt with swiftly and effectively. It is important that forces recognise this, encourage officers and staff to challenge unacceptable behaviours and relentlessly work to identify and address any concerns swiftly and effectively.

While this was not a focus of this inspection, we have noted that there is a national plan for every force to have in place a robust sexual harassment and VAWG policy.

Notable practice

In 2019, the four Welsh police forces commissioned [Chwarae Teg](#), a charity working to support gender equality in Wales, to carry out a review of sexual harassment in the workplace. A series of focus groups were held, in which participants were invited to discuss their experiences of sexual harassment to help explain the effect it has had on them and the organisational culture. The findings were stark. The majority of those interviewed said they had been a victim or had witnessed this behaviour.

Women who stated they had been a victim said they started to avoid police buildings, locations and people. Some wouldn't even apply for a promotion.

In the light of the findings, South Wales Police developed internal policies and procedures alongside the Professional Standards Department, unions, staff association and human resources. The lead in South Wales is now the NPCC lead on sexual harassment and leads on the national working group, which is attended by representatives from forces throughout England and Wales.

The national terms of reference state that the purpose of the group is: "to provide strong and visible leadership; to oversee and lead the development of best practice and change relating to the subject [of] sexual harassment to deliver national coherency, provide the best service to the public, support to officers and staff and coordinate work streams".

Effective joint working between the police and CPS

Our inspections with HMCPSI of the police and CPS response to different VAWG offences consistently highlight the need for an effective joint approach. Recently, these have included inspections of [evidence led domestic abuse prosecutions](#) (2020); [use of pre-charge bail and released under investigation](#) (with a focus on cases of domestic abuse, rape and serious sexual offences, and offences against children); and [the response to reports of rape](#), up to the point of charge.

Analysis of findings from across these inspections shows that the overall experience of the victim within the criminal justice system is generally better when there is effective engagement and close joint working between the police and the CPS from the point of report. In these circumstances, cases are generally set off on the right track, and victims are more supported.

Where communication isn't good between the police and the CPS and where there is a lack of understanding of the joint approach, we find that victims can be forgotten. And the service they receive can be less than effective. In some instances, this results in victims being told different things by the police and the CPS, and there are some examples where this leads to miscommunication and mistrust.

We are currently carrying out phase 2 of our joint inspection with HMCPsi on the police and CPS response to rape. This examines what happens to cases after a charge has been authorised. As part of this inspection we will again be assessing the importance and effectiveness of the relationship that exists between the police and the CPS, but we will also make a further assessment of the whole system, including observations in the courts and commissioned and non-commissioned services. This report will be published in early 2022.

9. How effective are the police at responding to crimes where girls are victims, and keeping them safe?

The commission for this inspection required us to report on the police response to girls as well as women.

Most of the findings and recommendations from the previous sections of this report are as relevant to police engagement with girls as to their engagement with women. For instance, regardless of the age of the victim, the police still need to work closely with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in preparing cases, to conduct thorough risk assessments and to have sufficient investigative capacity and capability.

However, there are some different considerations for girls. These include the additional safeguarding measures required due to their age; some different protective powers; and the different governance and guidance in place to direct the police response to child protection issues. There are also specific frameworks for how the police must work with partner organisations (such as local authorities and health) to promote the welfare of children, and identify and respond to their needs. We discuss this further in the next chapter.

The evidence used in this section comes from our three major [child protection inspection programmes](#). These make recommendations at national, force or local authority level to improve the service provided to all children.

In these inspections, we do not explicitly look for any differences that might distinguish between the service the police provides to girls as opposed to boys. However, as set out in the 'Defining the problem' section, more than 80 percent of victims of child sexual abuse are girls.

How well prepared are forces to respond to offences against children?

Nationally, we find that the police's senior leaders and staff are clearly committed to better protecting vulnerable children. When we return to police forces we have inspected previously, we find that every force has made some progress in achieving better results for children at risk of harm. However, we find that too often the priority placed on protecting those who are vulnerable isn't translating into consistently better decisions being made for children in need of help and protection.

Forces universally recognise the importance of developing more child-centred approaches. For instance, we are encouraged by some examples of innovative

practice to help make sure children who have been sexually assaulted aren't further traumatised by the investigation of a crime.

Notable practice

The Lighthouse project in London is a multi-agency service for children and young people who have experienced any form of sexual abuse, including exploitation. It offers a child-centred approach and provides guidance and support to help children and young people recover. Children can access emotional and medical support and advocacy under one roof. Clinical psychologists assist the police in carrying out interviews. It is funded by the Home Office, NHS England, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the Department for Education.

However, the availability of these dedicated facilities is inadequate and inconsistent. More work and greater guidance from the Government is required to ensure the needs of vulnerable children are prioritised and that their trust is gained. The protection of children should be done with them, not to them.

Hearing children's voices in developing services

We have also found many examples of forces and their partner agencies making efforts to improve and develop the ways they engage. The police and their partners are beginning to take the thoughts and views of children into consideration when making strategic plans and policies.

In some places, we have seen clear evidence that the voices of children are listened to carefully and have influenced decisions about how services are provided.

Notable practice

In York, the child sexual abuse assessment centre has used the observed experience of, and feedback from, children to ensure that the service provides an environment that is as welcoming as is reasonably possible.

The use of 'you said, we did' posters encourages children to talk about their views and further develop this work, particularly as the posters feature the offer of hot chocolate and use of electronic tablets to help children feel welcome while waiting to be seen. There is a good range of helpful and well-considered guidance and information, including about services that relate to child sexual abuse in a family environment, on both the local safeguarding children's board and York Children's Trust websites. Children and young people have helped to shape this material and the impressive hit numbers on the site pay testament to the success of the programme.

Data and performance management for child protection

All the forces we inspected had performance processes in place. Many of them, however, were limited to quantitative information. And many of them include little focus on qualitative measures, despite an emphasis being put on the importance of these in ensuring the quality of decision-making.

Notable practice

Lancashire Constabulary developed a comprehensive system of analysing practice relating to child protection. Experienced officers from each geographical area in the force audit ten cases per month. The subject matter mirrors that of the nine areas inspected by our child protection inspections, with an additional case selected to explore an area of activity of interest to the force. A detective inspector with child protection experience then reviews the audits, moderates them to achieve consistency and identifies themes. Areas for improvement and examples of good ways of doing things are fed back to officers and their supervisors, to improve individual performance. In addition, the detective inspector reports to a monthly protecting vulnerable people meeting. Thematic findings are discussed and actions are agreed to make improvements. This is done through briefings and email messages to all officers and staff, guidance on the force intranet, internal media campaigns and additional learning and development opportunities.

In many forces, such audits aren't currently carried out consistently to provide analysis of the nature and quality of decision-making or outcomes for children in need of help. Nor do they consider the way in which decisions are made about a child at each stage of their involvement with the police or safeguarding partners, or what effect those decisions have on a child. Instead, they focus on the number of incidents reported, whether particular processes were followed and if there was compliance with policy.

Consequently, senior leaders can't be assured that staff are consistently making the best decisions for vulnerable children in all cases. There is an opportunity to use audits (particularly multi-agency audits) as a way of understanding a child's journey and analysing the whole system. This would help to find ways of improving continuous learning and development, supervision and decision-making.

How well do the police prevent girls from being victims of violence?

Adverse childhood experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful events that occur during childhood, such as having a parent who is an alcoholic or abuses drugs. Children who have several ACEs are more likely to need substantial, continuous support to help keep them safe.

Research shows that in these cases there are benefits to intervening early in a way that recognises the root causes of vulnerability and the cumulative effect of trauma over time.

In our inspections, we are seeing more use of early support to children identified as exposed to ACEs. For instance, in Wales, the police are part of a programme to give early support to children exposed to ACEs. However, in England, the approach to early intervention isn't consistent. The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme is designed to address this problem by evaluating the best ways of achieving early intervention. In our 2019 [child protection thematic report](#), we stated that this would be helped by clear Government recognition of the benefits of early intervention by people who understand trauma.

Responding to children who go missing

Children who go missing regularly from home may be at risk of being groomed for sexual and criminal exploitation and abuse. But in our 2019 [child protection thematic report](#), we found that when a child goes missing, police decisions still tended to focus on what has just happened and on locating and returning them to their home. Officers didn't always seek to understand the wider circumstances or risks faced by children, which often contribute to them going missing. Consequently, there were sometimes missed opportunities to carry out protective planning to help prevent them becoming victims of crime.

Many forces have good daily oversight of children who have been reported missing. This oversight is becoming more consistent and we have seen numerous examples of the good work of officers and staff. However, we still find that children can be reported missing on numerous occasions with limited evidence of early intervention. In some cases, children, most notably those in local authority care, can be reported missing over 20 or even 30 times without any recognition of wider risks and vulnerability. And little is action taken to protect those children.

We were pleased to find that in general officers and staff are beginning to recognise the signs that a child might be at risk of sexual exploitation. There is an increasing focus on identifying and assessing the nature and extent of the criminal exploitation of children nationally, regionally and locally. However, many officers and staff still don't consistently recognise that children who regularly go missing from home may be at risk of being groomed for sexual abuse or exploited by individuals or organised networks and coerced to commit criminal offences.

We also found that forces better understand the importance of using information from independent return interviews as an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children who have previously gone missing from home. These are the responsibility of the local authority and while they are available in most areas, there are often delays in their completion. The details of what was said aren't always recorded on police systems. We were also disappointed that, in many cases, there was no evidence of the interviews being used to inform the development of protective plans.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 now recognises children as victims within a domestic abuse incident in their own right. But children weren't overlooked before this Act. At an incident, the 'voice of the child' would have been recorded and safeguarding referrals made by the police as part of the wider risk assessment. Operation Encompass would have been considered for children of school age, in those areas running the scheme. However, categorising children as victims means additional demand on support.

There are also a number of other problems for organisations in how they manage girl victims and their risk assessments. In particular, organisations must decide what mechanisms need to be in place to ensure an ongoing safety plan for a victim. This could be similar to the MARAC process for adults or it could be managed through existing child protection arrangements.

All of this requires great consideration to ensure girl victims are protected and their needs are met.

How effective are the police at protecting girls who are victims of VAWG?

We find that the police response is generally good when a case is clearly defined from the start as a child protection matter. We see many examples of officers and staff making effective decisions to protect children, recording important evidence using their body-worn video cameras.

When there are significant concerns about the safety of a child – for example, a parent leaving a child at home alone or being drunk while looking after them – our inspections find that officers usually handle incidents well.

Officers use their protective powers appropriately to remove children from harm. It is a very serious step to remove a child from a family. Mostly, we conclude that decisions to take a child to a safe place were well considered and made in the child's best interests.

How effective are the police at pursuing perpetrators of offences against girls?

Although investigations within specialist units are often of a higher standard than in the past, we continue to be concerned about the sometimes lengthy delays in investigations involving indecent images of children.

The increasing availability of abuse images of children has inevitably resulted in an increase in the number of cases for the police to investigate. While many forces have created dedicated teams to investigate these offences, we routinely find that the level of demand means that delays and drift can often occur.

In most of the forces we visited, investigations where a suspected perpetrator presents a clear risk to children – either because of their job or because they live with or have easy access to children – are prioritised for action and are generally (though not universally) undertaken in a timely way. However, in those cases that are considered to be a lower risk we often find there can be a significant delay in even allocating the case to an investigator. This leaves children facing an unmanaged risk.

Multi-agency public protection arrangements

All police forces have specialist teams dedicated to the management of sex offenders and violent offenders. They oversee MAPPA, which sees the police, national probation service and prison service working together to ensure the proper management and monitoring of sexual or violent offenders.

Since 2015, forces generally have had a better understanding of the nature and scale of demand within these units. In many places, though not all, staffing levels have risen to ensure that the ratio of offenders to individual offender managers is reasonable and manageable.

Achieving an effective response to crimes against girls: What needs to be in place?

Sufficient investigator capacity and capability

While investigations carried out by specialist staff are generally of a higher standard, we are concerned that many 'specialist' investigators have received no additional training to carry out their role. Officers and staff conducting specialist child protection investigations should have completed the Specialist Child Abuse Investigators Development Programme.

However, many of our inspections since 2015 show that significant numbers of officers and staff in these teams have not received this training. In some cases, there has been no indication as to when the training will be provided.

A good level of support and supervision for officers and staff

The support and supervision provided to officers and staff undertaking these complex investigations is variable. In most cases, the focus of supervision is on compliance (with force policy or national guidance), and there is little evidence that the quality of decision-making is considered.

Making complex decisions about children's lives is difficult and stressful. Giving officers and staff the opportunity to reflect on the quality of their work with their peers and supervisors can improve the decisions made about and for children and help to support officers and staff more effectively.

What support is given to officers?

Most forces now have a wellbeing plan in place for their officers and staff. We found that most have increased the level of support available for those dealing with the most traumatic cases. Often this involves regular interviews with professionals to assess whether what is on offer is helping those officers and staff.

Notable practice

Hampshire Constabulary has a wellbeing strategy in place for its entire workforce. This recognises the extra demands on those working in child protection roles. Officers and staff in these roles have an annual psychological assessment, with access to further support if needed. Their roles rotate after three to five years, to reduce how much they are exposed to trauma.

The force has trained some staff to be 'wellbeing bronze co-ordinators'. After significant incidents, these co-ordinators assess whether officers and staff need psychological and wellbeing support. If it is needed, they arrange this.

Officers and staff dealing with childhood deaths are also assessed on how they have been affected.

We found the workforce were positive about this wellbeing support.

Sufficient capacity and capability for effective multi-agency working

The Children Act, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, placed new duties on the police, clinical commissioning groups and the local authority in each area (the three statutory agencies). They are required to make arrangements to work together to promote the welfare of children and identify and respond to their needs. However, the 2021 [Wood review](#) of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements reported that resources for protecting children are under considerable stress.

The recruitment and retention of safeguarding professionals remains a problem for all three statutory agencies. The pandemic has meant that resources to fund activity have been stretched even further and partnerships in many areas report that they face problems in ensuring that safeguarding children is prioritised because finances are limited.

The review noted that a central factor underpinning better and more effective local multi-agency working is the role played by central government departments. Ministers and senior officials in those departments must send clear and focused messages to the statutory partners in a way that demonstrates that central government itself has a joined-up culture.

Changes to legislation may lead to a surge in demand for support services. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims within a domestic abuse incident in their own right. This means they could access support services in their own right, without the need for a referral from the police. Victim support services should therefore prepare to face increased demand, and partnerships will need to decide whether new processes or mechanisms are needed to manage this, and to agree safety plans for victims. We will keep this under review as part of our child protection inspection programmes.

10. Raising the priority of the response to violence against women and girls offences

In our [interim report](#) for this inspection, we said that there should be an immediate improvement in the priority given to preventing, reducing and responding to violence against women and girls (VAWG) offences:

“Recommendation 1: There should be an immediate and unequivocal commitment that the response to VAWG offences is an absolute priority for government, policing, the criminal justice system, and public sector partnerships. This needs to be supported at a minimum by a relentless focus on these crimes; mandated responsibilities; and sufficient funding so that all partner agencies can work effectively as part of a whole-system approach to reduce and prevent the harms these offences are causing.”

To support this objective, we recommended the following actions:

Short-term

- The Home Office should add the policing of VAWG to the SPR [Strategic Policing Requirement]. This will give a clear signal that the government sees VAWG as a priority and that sufficient capabilities are in place to tackle it. It would also help chief constables and police and crime commissioners (PCCs) to balance national and local priorities.
- The Home Office should make sure that VAWG is a priority for the ministerially chaired crime and policing performance board. It should introduce a new Home Secretary-led board to provide clear governance for the VAWG strategy and for the urgent improvements needed.

Medium-term

- The Home Office and other government departments should consider proposing a statutory duty on all appropriate partner agencies to collectively take action to prevent the harm caused by VAWG.
- In doing this, consideration should be given to whether this could be included in any existing duties and how those for safeguarding children will interact and complement the changes.
- The Home Office should agree with other government departments the measures and actions that each partner agency needs to implement both at a national and local level to encourage joint responsibility in tackling VAWG. This may need a new statutory framework.

- The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the Home Office should jointly appoint a full-time NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead to lead on all police activity related to VAWG. The lead should act as a point of contact for each police force, work closely with the College of Policing to make sure best practice is identified and communicated, ensure progress is monitored, act as the 'voice of policing' at cross-sector national discussions, and regularly report to the Home Secretary.
- The Home Office and other government departments should agree sustained, multi-year funding to support collaboration between agencies, where they have joint responsibilities.
- The College of Policing and the NPCC should establish mechanisms and processes to allow rapid and consistent sharing of evidence, information and evaluation on new and effective ways of working in response to VAWG offences, and methods that improve VAWG investigation. This should include input from partner agencies and assess specific actions or skills which could be used to develop a minimum standard for VAWG crimes, to improve the consistency and quality of outcomes for victims.
- If this minimum standard is established (and depending on whether and how other agencies need to act), the Home Secretary should consider whether it is appropriate to use her power under section 53A of the Police Act 1996 to require police forces to adopt the procedures and practices it sets out.
- As per the recommendation in the government's 2021 report 'The end-to-end rape review report on findings and actions', the Home Office should implement a 'score card' for measuring improvements in performance in the criminal justice system for all crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls. This should be developed with input from victim representatives."

We are pleased that the Government's 2021 [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#) has taken some action towards achieving this, including introducing a NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead. However, the complexity and pervasiveness of VAWG, and its harm, mean that no single agency can tackle it alone.

Since the publication of the [interim report](#), we have developed these recommendations. This includes adding more detail to how the priority of the response to VAWG could be raised within policing and as part of a wider, whole-system approach.

Raising the priority: in policing

To bring further consistency, urgency and pace to the policing response to VAWG, we are recommending the introduction of a single and ambitious strategy for policing VAWG offences, inclusion of VAWG in the [Strategic Policing Requirement](#) (SPR), minimum standards for investigating VAWG, and processes to speed up the implementation of examples of good practice to produce a consistently better policing response. We also give more detail on the role of the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead.

A single and ambitious strategy for policing VAWG that sets a clear direction and focus and is supported by a delivery framework using the ‘4Ps’ approach

Policing is guided by many strategies and action plans relating to VAWG, including the recent [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#), the forthcoming domestic abuse strategy, the [Beating crime plan](#) and the Government’s [End-to-end rape review report on findings and actions](#). Considering this, as well as the introduction of new and complex legislation, there is a need for co-ordination so that the police can systematically prioritise their actions in a consistent way, and avoid an inconsistent response to VAWG.

To maximise the benefits that all these strategies can offer, we are recommending a strong overarching governance structure for VAWG policing. This should include the new NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead, and could be overseen by the ministerially-led group that is currently being set up by the Home Office to oversee both the VAWG and domestic abuse strategies. This governance should help provide clarity on where the accountability rests within the system and provide clear direction and objectives, based on regular review of disaggregated and consistent data.

We are also recommending that the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead should work with the Home Office to develop a new national policing strategy for responding to VAWG. This could be supported by development of a regular strategic assessment for VAWG, to help the police service better understand trends and emerging threat and harm, and agree appropriate policing and partnership responses.

We described in our [interim report](#) the benefits of using the 4Ps approach as the delivery framework for this new national strategy. In chapter 4 of this report we showed how activity related to the policing of VAWG can be successfully split in this way.

The 4Ps approach is used in work to tackle serious and organised crime, and in counter-terrorism. It is well understood in policing, Government and among partner organisations, and it has been tested and reviewed in terms of effectiveness. And given that the effect of violence against women and girls is felt at the local level, it will give some needed consistency to policing approaches, and further support for collaboration. It will also assist in making the role of policing in tackling VAWG clear to partner organisations and the public. This will help improve scrutiny and accountability, and will promote continuous improvements.

The 4Ps approach will also complement what the police already do under the [National Vulnerability Action Plan](#) (NVAP). This plan provides support for the police in seven identified areas:

- early intervention and prevention;
- protecting, supporting, safeguarding and managing risk;
- information, intelligence, data collection and management of information;
- effective investigation and outcomes;
- leadership;
- leading and development; and
- communications.

We consider that activity under these themes can be mapped across the 4Ps approach. This will also help strategic leads undertake a gap analysis to find out whether there are other areas that need to be considered. The strategy will also set a clear direction on why the actions under NVAP are necessary. Its aim is to have these actions in place more quickly, with better oversight and accountability at local and national levels.

Learning from other areas of policing: counter-terrorism

The Government's CONTEST counter-terrorist strategy splits action over the 4Ps delivery framework. In 2018, the Government introduced a strengthened [CONTEST strategy](#) following a fundamental review to ensure they had the right response to increasing threat. The review found that CONTEST and the 4Ps framework approach was well organised and comprehensive. The framework is managed currently in the following way:

- **Prevent:** to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.
- **Pursue:** to stop terrorist attacks.
- **Protect:** to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack.
- **Prepare:** to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack.

The benefits of this approach for counter-terrorism are that it allows for a shift in approach with a different focus on the four elements of the framework as the threat diversifies and evolves. It also helps improve the integration of frontline skills and ensure that the partnerships – whether within the Government or external – are clear on their individual and combined responsibilities in preventing the harms terrorism can cause.

Learning from other areas of policing: serious and organised crime

Central government has used the 4Ps delivery framework to prioritise activity among the main partner agencies involved in countering serious and organised crime, from preventing crime in the first place to convicting perpetrators and helping victims. The four different strands are split in the [strategy](#) as follows:

- **Pursue:** protecting and disrupting serious and organised crime.
- **Prevent:** preventing people from engaging in serious and organised crime.
- **Protect:** increasing protection against serious and organised crime.
- **Prepare:** reducing the impact of serious and organised crime.

There is a focus on a whole-system approach at a local level, with multi-agency partnerships and action plans. This includes developing a common understanding among local organisations of the threats, vulnerabilities and risk relating to serious and organised crime. This will promote an understanding of priority locations and vulnerabilities and strong collaboration between policing and local authorities. It also helps target the use of resources and capabilities, and ensure their use is proportionate to the risk.

Case study: Whole-system approach to tackling county lines

In January 2021, the [Government announced £148 million of new investment](#) to cut crime and protect the public from the harms caused by illegal drugs. This gives extra resources to law enforcement to focus on dismantling organised crime gangs and to tackle the supply of drugs. At the same time, it makes more money available for drug treatment and recovery to help cut drug-related crime and reduce misuse and re-offending.

This includes £40 million of new money to tackle county lines drug dealing and builds on previous investments which have seen more than 3,400 people arrested, more than 550 lines closed, drugs seized with a value of £9 million and £1.5 million cash seized and more than 770 vulnerable people safeguarded.

A further £28 million will be invested in piloting Project ADDER – a new intensive approach to tackling drug misuse, which combines targeted and tougher policing with enhanced treatment and recovery services. Project ADDER (which stands for Addiction, Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement and Recovery) will bring together partner agencies, including the police, local councils and health services, and will run for three financial years in five areas with some of the highest rates of drug misuse: Blackpool, Hastings, Middlesbrough, Norwich and Swansea Bay.

The funding will allow the police to target local gang leaders driving the drugs trade while better helping people to recover from addictions. An extra £80 million will also be invested in drug treatment services throughout England to give more support to offenders with drink and drug addictions, which can fuel crime. This new money will increase the number of treatment places for prison leavers and offenders diverted into tough and effective community sentences.

This example shows the effect of a whole-system approach incorporating all elements of the 4Ps with funding at a level which elevates priority and can bring about lasting systematic change.

Recommendation 1.4

By January 2022, the Home Office and the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead should develop a new National Policing Strategy for violence against women and girls (VAWG), to elevate the priority of VAWG and set a clear direction to forces on what is expected. Consideration should be given to establishing an annual strategic assessment of VAWG to support this strategy, and to using the 4Ps as a framework to implement it. This framework should emphasise the role of effective partnership working, a strong and clear policing culture, and continuous improvements across all the four strands.

Inclusion of VAWG in the Strategic Policing Requirement

We described in the [interim report](#) various ways the Government can use existing mechanisms to raise the priority of VAWG at both local and national levels. One opportunity is to use the [Strategic Policing Requirement](#) (SPR).

The SPR was originally introduced in 2012 in response to the Home Secretary's statutory duty to set out what the national threats are and what capabilities are required to counter those threats. While some threats can be tackled individually by police forces, others require a more co-ordinated effort. These currently include terrorism, child protection and serious and organised crime. These offences often need forces to work together and with other partner organisations and national agencies or national arrangements to ensure they are tackled effectively.

Chief constables are required to 'have regard to' the SPR when exercising their functions, and police and crime commissioners (PCCs) 'will hold them to account for doing so'. PCCs must also keep their police and crime plans under review in light of any changes made to the SPR by the Home Secretary.

Given the scale and severity of harms caused by VAWG, we think there is a strong case for it to be added to the SPR. This would help:

- support both national and local efforts and reflect the increasing demand and harm from both current and non-recent cases;
- reflect the high number of VAWG cases and promote the sharing of intelligence on a regional and national basis and in collaboration with the National Crime Agency (NCA);
- help forces alleviate budgetary pressures by providing more effective resourcing solutions, as well as helping them develop more efficient ways of doing things; and
- reassure both victims and the public that VAWG is a matter of national importance and that the police are expected to take swift and collaborative action.

We consider the addition of VAWG to the SPR to be in line with policies for other areas, particularly child protection. It will also help the new NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead to raise its priority both within forces and with central government.

While we recognise that child sexual exploitation and abuse are already covered by the SPR, the addition of VAWG will help ensure that all other offences affecting girls are also included. This is important given the breadth of crimes that disproportionately affect girls and how quickly these are emerging and evolving.

We note that the Home Office has committed to [investing a further £500,000 this year](#) in the NCA to develop its innovative data capability to establish methods of identifying serial sex offenders. This will help local police forces to prevent and tackle this offending through building better links between crimes to help identify serial sex offenders, particularly high-harm, high-risk offenders. The national focus in this work could be further supported through the addition of VAWG to the SPR.

Learning from other areas of policing: child protection

Child sexual abuse is listed in the SPR due to its national importance in terms of prevalence and effect. This threat requires a united, strong and consistent national effort to safeguard children from such harm.

Inclusion in the SPR has brought benefits (in terms of a better understanding of the nature and scale of the threat as well as increasing specialist operational policing activity and associated engagement with child safeguarding partners). However, our

inspections continue to find some consistent problems, made worse by the increasing child sexual abuse threat and rising online activity. This can lead to delays and drift in police investigations.

The 2021 NCA [National strategic assessment of serious and organised crime](#) estimates that there are between 550,000 and 850,000 people in the UK who pose varying forms of sexual risk to children. This underlines the fact that inclusion in the SPR is not a panacea, but it does provide a level of prioritisation.

Recommendation 1.2

Immediately, the Home Office should add the policing of violence against women and girls to the Strategic Policing Requirement.

Swift dissemination of good practice for a consistently better policing response

While we recognise the importance of pilots to test different approaches to tackling VAWG, we find they often do not result in force or multi-agency wide approaches, or become adopted nationally. We were told this was often due to insufficient funding, which is only allocated for a few years, and doesn't allow local organisations to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the proposal. In addition, evidence from pilot activity is often not shared within forces or nationally.

As part of its [End-to-end rape review report](#), the Government announced 'Operation Soteria'. This builds on Operation Bluestone, which was led by Avon and Somerset Constabulary and was mentioned in our [interim report](#).

Case study: Operation Soteria

In Operation Soteria, five forces and corresponding CPS areas will test innovative ways for the police and prosecutors to deal with rape cases. This approach is designed to focus on the patterns of behaviour that are a significant feature of rape and sexual offences. It aims to make sure that an early and robust assessment of suspect behaviour and offending patterns takes place, and that decision-making is based on evidence. This approach moves away from a focus on the victim's credibility. This is a promising development that could make positive change.

We are encouraged to see that the proposals for this are to be extended into a framework for a new operating model that could be brought in nationally over the next 24 months. We were also pleased to see that external panels are being introduced to scrutinise decisions to take 'no further action'. However, we are concerned that the principles are not yet being introduced nationally, and that sustainable funding has not been agreed to support the roll-out.

Rapid and consistent dissemination of information and standards to improve the policing response to VAWG offences

As we concluded in the interim report, repeated inspections of the police response to VAWG offences have highlighted the inconsistency of the response. We have found good practice, excellent victim care, and innovative and effective offender management within every force – but never consistently in all forces.

We consider that there is both need and opportunity to bring much more consistency in this area, and so are taking the unusual step of recommending a mandated minimum standard for the response to VAWG offences. This will support forces in making progress against our recommendation that ‘All chief constables should immediately review and ensure that there are consistently high standards in their forces’ responses to violence against women and girls and be supported in doing so by national standards and data’ (recommendation 4 in this report).

Recommendation 4.3

Immediately, the College of Policing should develop a violence against women and girls minimum standard, creating a consistent and clear standard for police investigations. The Home Secretary or the College of Policing should then consider whether to use their powers under section 53A of the Police Act 1996 to require police forces to adopt the procedures and practices it sets out.

Recommendation 4.4

By March 2022, the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs’ Council should establish mechanisms and processes to allow rapid and consistent sharing of evidence, information, and evaluation on new and effective ways of working in response to violence against women and girls offences.

The role of the NPCC Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) National Delivery Lead

In our [interim report](#), we recommended that the Home Office and NPCC appoint an NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead for all police activity related to VAWG. The lead should act as a point of contact for each police force in England and Wales and work closely with the College of Policing to make sure good ways of working are identified and communicated, ensure progress is monitored, act as the ‘voice of policing’ at cross-sector national discussions and report regularly to the Home Secretary.

Their role should include a focus on distinguishing where girls require a different response to women, and ensuring this is reflected appropriately in all their work.

We are pleased that this role was announced as part of the Government’s [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#) and that the NPCC is working at pace to get someone in post. We see the role as pivotal, not only in improving how the police engage with women and girls, but also in translating national strategic objectives into operational priorities.

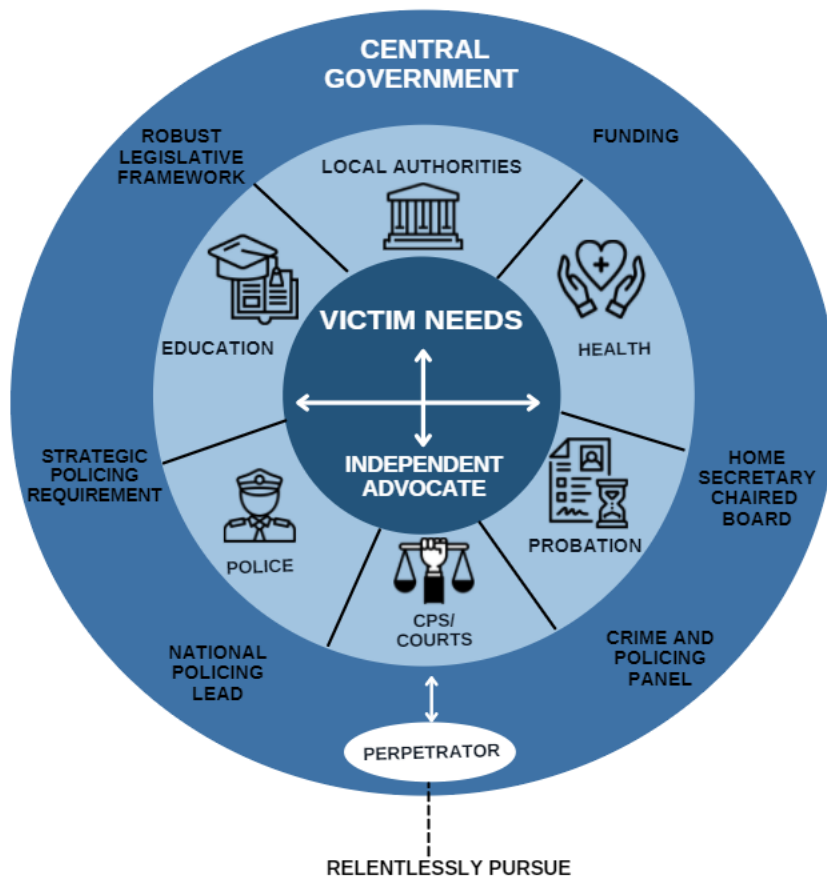
We consider that, for this role to be a success and have the desired effect, it needs long-term funding and the tenure for each person in the role should be at least four years. The role also needs to be supported by strong leadership on VAWG at force level, and by a robust understanding of both force and national data.

Raising the priority: a whole-system approach

It is important to take a whole-system approach to responding to VAWG offences. This involves all relevant organisations working effectively together to prevent VAWG in the first place, reduce crime and protect women and girls from harm.

Figure 12 highlights the need for wrap-around support for the victim and effective joint working between relevant organisations at a local level. This needs to be supported by the right interventions at national level to elevate its priority and ensure that the right capacity and capabilities are in place.

Figure 12: The whole-system approach to tackling violence against women and girls



Arrangements that would allow for a whole-system approach to VAWG

Clear national governance and accountability

For VAWG to be given the priority status it requires, there should be clear governance arrangements in place at both local and national levels to make sure that all organisations involved are meeting expectations.

In our [interim report](#), we referred to improved national co-ordination through both the existing Crime and Policing Performance Board (mainly focused on policing) and the proposed new Home Secretary-chaired board (examining the criminal justice and wider public sector systems). We consider that these would be appropriate governance mechanisms to ensure the complexities of VAWG offences are being properly considered and the requirements on each relevant department and local partner agency are carefully planned to set a clear focus and direction. The boards should use data on performance to monitor progress and help local services to achieve the best possible results.

Recommendation 1.3

By December 2021, the Home Office should make sure that violence against women and girls is a priority for the ministerially chaired crime and policing performance board.

Devolved considerations

In describing the whole-system approach, we recognise that while policing in England and Wales is the responsibility of the UK Government, in Wales the elements relating to health, local authorities, social care and education are devolved to the Welsh Parliament.

There is also some different relevant legislation in Wales. For example, the [Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) was introduced to improve prevention, protection and support for people affected by these offences. It seeks to achieve this through an improved collective public sector response.

It also places a duty on Welsh Government Ministers to prepare, publish and review a [national strategy on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual abuse](#). This strategy sets out the overarching objectives that the Welsh Government will work towards, in partnership with interested parties, to progress the aims of the legislation.

Public consultation on the 2022–27 national strategy is due to begin shortly. We will make sure evidence from this inspection is made available to the Welsh Government as part of that process.

Improved standard data and performance measures that can be used effectively both locally and nationally

In order to achieve a whole-system approach, progress needs to be checked against a broader set of new measures that are common to all relevant organisations. These need to reflect the joint responsibilities of each of the organisations involved in protecting women and girls against violence, including policing, health, support providers and other criminal justice partners.

In developing the measures for VAWG, the Government should work closely with women's and children's representatives, the Victims' Commissioner as well as academia to ensure the measures are fit for purpose, can be used to identify the specific difficulties encountered by both women and girls, and that they will not lead to any unintended consequences.

It is important to use performance measures as part of a diagnostic tool to monitor improvements. The measures should allow for a full and open shared understanding of outliers, trends and emerging threats throughout England and Wales and create a 'golden thread' of shared understanding from local to national level.

When developing the measure for the criminal justice system, our inspection findings suggest that particular attention should be given to the decline in referrals, and to rates of charges, prosecutions, use of outcomes where no further action is taken and convictions. Where the data indicates potential problems or new trends, both national and local action plans should be put in place with clearly assigned responsibilities in place to ensure accountability for addressing them, including in the support and provision provided.

With regard to the principles for the measures, we think it is essential to consider the views of the victim on their experiences and whether the outcome achieved met their expectations and ultimately made them feel safer. This should include a record of whether the correct provisions were put in place to address any complex needs, in particular those of children and women with different protected characteristics.

As described in our fieldwork findings (chapter 4), it is possible to use audits (particularly in collaboration with other organisations) to understand a woman's or girl's journey and analyse the whole system. This can help determine how learning and development, supervision and decision-making can be improved. The approach requires a good understanding of the victim's needs, including any discrimination or inequality they may face. There is also a need to ensure that data on the protected characteristics of victims is being recorded to inform future prevention activity and future commissioning based on local needs. This will also help the relevant organisations make decisions on whether structural inequalities exist and what to do to remove them. There is currently a legal requirement on all public sector bodies to do this through the Equality Act 2010, and through the Public Sector Equality Duty which was introduced as part of this legislation.

In its [*End-to-end rape review report*](#), the Government agreed to publish regular scorecards to openly show how the whole system is performing. We recommend that any approach to VAWG complements this approach for both women and girls wherever possible.

Recommendation 4.5

By December 2021, the Home Office together with other government departments should introduce a set of measures to monitor improvements in the criminal justice system approach to all crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls. This should be developed together with women and children's representatives and include a strong focus on evidence of victim experience (and include such information as is necessary to identify and act on variation in service provided to women with different protected characteristics). The measures should enable better accountability and support at local and national levels. Where possible, this should complement the work the Government is already doing following its end-to-end rape review to develop a 'scorecard' for measuring improvements to the response to rape crimes.

Clearly defined roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for local joint working

In this section, we focus on multi-agency working at a local level with partners such as local authorities and health and education services.

The nature of VAWG offences means effective joint working between the police and agencies such as local authorities, housing and health services, schools, and victim support services is absolutely crucial. This allows for a fully informed view to be taken of the risk posed to a particular victim, or by an offender. In particular, it can help ensure that the right services are involved in supporting victims to prevent them from being victimised again.

But this inspection found inconsistencies in the effectiveness and structures of partnership working at a local level. This is a common finding across all HMICFRS inspections of the police response to vulnerable adults. When they work well, and all partner agencies have defined roles and responsibilities, we have found they can have an extremely positive effect.

However, there is no consistency in how many adult safeguarding partnerships are operated, or in the contributions of different partner agencies to them. This means that opportunities to share information among multiple agencies to inform the best possible picture of the risk facing a woman – and the best possible way of responding to that risk – are missed.

Learning from other areas of policing: multi-agency arrangements for child protection, and the case for a statutory framework for VAWG

We consider the statutory framework, guidance and duties in place for child protection multi-agency arrangements offer a good model for how much greater consistency and effectiveness could be achieved in the response to VAWG (and in the response to adult safeguarding more widely).

Police forces, in conjunction with other local organisations involved in protecting children, have specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children. The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 state that the welfare of children is paramount.

In England, the Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, placed new duties on the police, clinical commissioning groups and the local authority in each area (the three statutory agencies). They are required to make arrangements to work together to promote the welfare of children and identify and respond to their needs. This should include having a clear understanding of the collective needs and context of children.

The Equality Act 2010 also applies to the process of identification of need and risk faced by the individual child and the process of assessment.

In addition:

- The statutory guidance [*Working together to safeguard children*](#) (in England) summarises the statutory framework for three local safeguarding partners (local authority, clinical commissioning group for an area and the chief officer of police for a police area) to work together to safeguard children. These three safeguarding partners have equal and joint responsibility for local safeguarding arrangements. They agree on ways to co-ordinate their safeguarding services; act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging others such as Barnardo's, the NSPCC and local services; and implement local and national learning.
- *Working together* also directs the structure and approach of tactical meetings (such as strategy discussions and child protection conferences, to discuss individual children), and provides detailed expectations which can be used to monitor partnership performance.
- Furthermore, it sets out an unequivocal shared purpose for all agencies – that they should work:

“in a system where:

- children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted
- partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children
- organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively
- there is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats
- learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice
- information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families.”

The Government has therefore set a clear requirement for how safeguarding partnerships should work together, with a strong emphasis on effective joint working to safeguard children. While there is local flexibility in some elements of how the partnership is run (for instance, how health services should be involved), this helps to provide a level of consistency. It also allows for greater accountability: for instance, *Working together* provides the framework we use to inspect police forces on their child protection practices.

The arrangements are different in Wales, where provision of social care services is a devolved responsibility. This means that the Welsh Government is responsible for child protection. However, the [Wales Safeguarding Procedures](#) set out what is expected of all partner organisations involved in child protection, in a similar way to *Working together* in England.

We consider that a similar framework for VAWG would improve multi-agency working. Based on our inspections of child protection, not only would this better define roles and responsibilities and improve multi-agency collaboration, it would also help promote consistency in agreed standards, stronger accountability, improved safety planning and improved end results in terms of reducing re-victimisation.

Introduction of a new and complementary statutory duty

A central part of any new framework could be the introduction of a statutory duty on relevant organisations to work together to prevent harms caused by offences that affect women and girls. This would further assist in intensifying efforts to respond to VAWG, and in increasing joint working to achieve this. We noted in our [interim report](#) that any new duty needs to be considered alongside existing duties and be complementary to them.

The Government has recently announced that it will be bringing forward legislation to introduce a new serious violence duty on public bodies to work together to share data and knowledge in a way that will help them target their approach to prevent serious violence. The duty will aim to do this by placing obligations on local organisations to carry out a strategic needs assessment and then set a local plan for priority areas. The duty aims to provide sufficient flexibility so that relevant organisations can decide what constitutes a priority and how they will work together to address it.

The Government has given some indication that the priority areas will be those covered as part of the [Serious violence strategy](#), which was designed to counter certain crimes in public spaces. Home Office [draft guidance](#) therefore states that “homicide, knife crime and gun crime and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent” should be included as part of any local plan.

There is flexibility for other crimes to be included where there is a local requirement for this, on the basis of a strategic needs assessment. The examples given in the guidance of crimes which could be included as a result are domestic violence, alcohol-related violence, sexual abuse, modern slavery, and ‘gender-based violence’. But these other crimes inevitably run the risk of being viewed as peripheral and less important than those listed as definite requirements.

Given the focus of the duty, serious VAWG offences which do not involve serious physical violence perhaps also seem very unlikely to be included (such as harassment, stalking, online offences and forced marriages).

While we recognise the importance of this duty to tackle serious violence, we consider that it will not go far enough to promote the co-ordinated and bespoke multi-agency response that is needed specifically for VAWG. Although we understand why the response is intentionally flexible to allow specified authorities to determine the geographical extent of their collaboration, the lack of a universal requirement specific to VAWG could mean little action is taken in some areas.

We also recognise that there is separate legislation in Wales to encourage multi-agency collaboration on VAWG that does not exist in England, including through the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 which, among other actions, requires local authorities and health boards to prepare a plan for tackling VAWG.

Recommendation 1.5

To increase the prioritisation of VAWG as part of a whole-system approach, we recommend:

By March 2022, the Home Office should work with other government departments, including the Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care and Ministry of Justice, to come to an agreement on the measures and actions that each partner agency needs to implement both at national and local levels to encourage joint responsibility in tackling violence against women and girls. This should be co-ordinated through the planned Home Secretary-chaired board. The agreement should also include sustained, multi-year funding to support collaboration between agencies, where they have joint responsibilities, and serious consideration of:

- a new statutory framework and statutory guidance to define roles, responsibilities and expectations; to standardise existing non-statutory arrangements; and to allow better accountability at local level, and support and scrutiny at national level;
- as part of this: a statutory duty requiring the police and relevant partner agencies to work together to collectively take action to prevent the harm caused by violence against women and girls (VAWG). In doing this, the Home Office should consider whether this could be included in any existing duties; how duties for safeguarding children will interact with and complement the changes; and how this duty will be incorporated into the new statutory framework for VAWG.

11. Tackling perpetrator behaviour

This chapter builds on recommendation 2 within the [interim report](#), which stated:

“The Home Office, together with the Ministry of Justice, should improve the evidence it has about perpetrators. This includes considering how to consistently evaluate the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes and use models to plot a perpetrator’s progress through the system more effectively.”

In chapter 7, ‘How effectively do the police pursue perpetrators of violence against women and girls?’, we describe how police forces are currently working in partnerships to manage perpetrators in a way to ensure that:

- those who are deemed ‘high harm’ by the chief constable are well known and managed effectively;
- there is partnership working in place to identify and act early to prevent any further reoffending; and
- the victim is being protected from further harm and provided with the support they need.

This chapter expands on this. It examines the evidence on the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes. It also considers what more needs to be done to improve understanding and achieve better outcomes, both in terms of preventing reoffending and reducing re-victimisation and further harm.

A co-ordinated approach is needed to tackle perpetrator behaviour and improve the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes

We found limited evaluated evidence on what works to change the behaviour of the perpetrator to help prevent any further re-offending. However, there is strong evidence that a perpetrator’s behaviour can escalate, and that re-offending occurs even when they have left prison.

It should therefore be a priority to understand this better at both local and national levels. Agencies should work together to identify individuals leaving prison or displaying worrying behaviours, and to form interventions or disrupt perpetrators at an early stage. Multi-agency working should be a priority with regard to tackling perpetrators and holding them to account.

In England and Wales, community-based programmes are accredited by [Respect](#) and mandated programmes are run by prison and probation services. HM Prison and Probation Service supports a range of [accredited programmes](#) that, as part of a wider package of rehabilitation, address the needs of those who have offended against women and girls. These programmes have been awarded accreditation by the

Correctional Services Accreditation and Advice Panel – an independent and international advisory body of academics and expert practitioners who offer evidence-based advice on the development and implementation of effective criminal and social justice services and programmes.

Although domestic violence perpetrator programmes are widely used and analysed, there is limited evidence that they are effective. This is due to limitations with the methodology, which often mean that it is difficult to draw firm conclusions.

The College of Policing carried out a systematic '[review of reviews](#)' and research on the effect of domestic violence perpetrator programmes on the victim and criminal justice outcome. It found that several reviews of programmes aimed at perpetrators of domestic violence had been published. However, the evidence in these reviews was inconclusive in terms of whether programmes were effective or not.

There was, however, some evidence to suggest that programmes that paid attention to a person's readiness and motivation to change had some positive effects. They also found that motivation-enhancing interventions used as aids to perpetrator programmes helped to reduce re-offending among perpetrators.

In its recent [call to action](#) for a perpetrator strategy, the [Drive](#) Partnership stated that all perpetrator interventions should go hand-in-hand with co-ordinated support for the victim. It suggested the main elements of a successful perpetrator intervention should include:

- initial assessments to understand the perpetrator's history, how the referral has been made and whether they are suitable for the available interventions;
- structured group work, individual work or a combination of both, where perpetrators are challenged to recognise abuse and reflect on their own behaviour and what effect it has; programmes should be tailored to respond to the needs of specific groups;
- one-to-one intensive case management for those with more complex needs or a higher severity of offending profile; and
- disrupt approaches, which are needed for perpetrators who are not willing to co-operate or whose abuse is continuing despite behaviour change work; this generally consists of multi-agency efforts to manage risk to victims/survivors.

It is clear, however, that robust evaluation studies are needed on the different elements of the programmes to see what is most effective and how they should be implemented – with a view to giving accreditation to those considered to be most successful. This should include programmes for all types of violence against women and girls and should be adapted with the introduction of new offences.

We note that the Home Office now has a £11.1 million fund for police and crime commissioners to bid to run programmes for domestic abuse perpetrators and perpetrators of stalking. We believe that this scheme could usefully stipulate that successful bids must carry out consistent and comparable evaluations of the programmes.

The Government's perpetrator strategy represents a significant opportunity to improve and standardise the response

A requirement of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 is for the Home Secretary to prepare and publish a perpetrator strategy within one year of Royal Assent. The purpose of the strategy is for the Government to set out its approach to:

- detecting, investigating and prosecuting offences involving domestic abuse;
- assessing and managing the risks posed by individuals who commit offences involving domestic abuse, including domestic abuse-related stalking; and
- reducing the risk of such individuals committing further offences involving domestic abuse.

This is a positive step forward in focusing on perpetrator behaviour to reduce re-offending and protect victims from any future risks and harm.

We consider that there is a good opportunity to link this to the wider strategy on VAWG and look for opportunities to tackle perpetrator behaviours in all crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls. This should consider the current capabilities the police have and include consulting the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead to consider any operational elements and guidance that needs to be issued to policing as a result.

The evidence around young people as perpetrators is limited and needs further consideration

The evidence around children as perpetrators is complex and, although evolving, it still isn't well understood. [SaveLives reports](#) that there is a lack of comprehensive and long-term research that looks at domestic abuse and young people affected by violence and crime together.

This is true of those perpetrating abuse and those who are victims. Young perpetrators are likely to have complex needs themselves. They can be victims of sexual abuse, making understanding the links between this and perpetrator behaviours important in terms of early interventions which can result in positive outcomes both in terms of reoffending and improving life chances.

The research project [Boys to Men](#) considered what more could be done to intervene early to reduce the number of young men who become perpetrators. It concluded that preventative education probably needs to start before children reach the age of 13 and to be responsive to the different realities of boys and girls.

Schools also focus on developing healthy relationships through their [relationship, sex and health education programmes](#). These programmes have been mandatory for schools since 2020, and all schools are required to consider statutory guidance covering topics such as consent, misogyny and sexual harassment.

The Department for Education published [guidance for schools and colleges](#) to help them respond to sexual harassment and violence, including online between children. There is a role, however, for all local partners and services to identify and provide support to young people demonstrating harmful behaviours.

We will continue to work closely with Ofsted to assess opportunities for joint inspection, as well as to consider how we can further promote and encourage partnership working and innovative practice to intervene early to prevent perpetrator behaviours in young people in the first place and prevent them from escalating when it does occur.

12. Tailored and consistent support for victims of violence against women and girls

It takes immense bravery and resolve for many victims of violence against women and girls (VAWG) offences to report crimes to the police. These are personal, usually targeted and frequently devastating offences, and unlike some other violent crimes, the victim has often suffered multiple or a course of crimes before reporting. In our [interim report](#), recommendation 3 stated that: ‘Structures and funding should be put in place to make sure victims receive tailored and consistent support.’ We recommended three underpinning actions:

- The Home Office and other government departments should provide funding so that an independent advisor/advocate is available to support victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence as they go through the criminal justice system (and should consider this for victims of other crimes that disproportionately affect women). This support should be designed in consultation with the victim and should continue after a perpetrator is released from prison.
- All police forces should ensure information on the protected characteristics of victims is accurately and consistently recorded.
- The Home Office and the National Police Chiefs’ Council should introduce a single national survey to measure victim satisfaction. This should allow for both local and national quality assurance, as well as the identification of any emerging issues, risks or variables that need further action to resolve. Police forces and partner agencies should have clear responsibilities in supporting victims through every stage of the case. The victim’s voice should play a central role in shaping this, and their individual needs should be understood and addressed throughout.

In this chapter, we set out further findings from our inspection that support the need for wrap-around care and we suggest further characteristics of the independent advocate role. We also stress the benefits of better quality and more consistent data on the protected characteristics of victims. We discussed the third underpinning recommendation (on victim surveys) in chapter 4, ‘How well prepared are the police to engage with women and girls, and to respond to violence against women and girls?’

The role of the independent adviser/advocate

The sector has developed a range of different support models to meet the needs of specific communities, crime types and victims. For instance, independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs) support victims of domestic abuse and independent sexual violence advisers (ISVAs) work with victims of sexual violence. Further, we know other support workers are available for victims in a range of circumstances, from independent gender violence advisers (IGVAs), Refugee advocates to independent stalking advocacy caseworkers (ISACs), homicide caseworkers young people's violence advisers (YPVAs), and family court IDVAs, alongside a range of caseworkers who provide similar functions. There are also other specific support roles to care for children and young people.

The main aim of the role described here is not to replace these other roles or create a new role but to make sure that the wrap-around care the victim needs is co-ordinated in a way that makes them feel fully supported.

We are aware of the work currently underway by the Ministry of Justice to create a 'Victims Law' aimed at improving victims' experiences of the criminal justice system and ensuring that they receive the support they need. Much of the evidence described in this chapter will be relevant to this aim and so we have shared our findings with the Ministry of Justice to inform its considerations before its formal consultation on this law begins.

All victims are entitled to a high standard of care and support

Unlike, for example, burglary and other acquisitive crimes, the police approach and behaviours needed to investigate VAWG offences are different. This includes putting the safety of the victim first, and ensuring the right support and provisions are in place so they are safe and the situation does not get worse.

The police should respond sensitively and fairly, identify and manage needs and risks robustly, and investigate crimes exhaustively, while keeping the victim informed of progress. The best outcome may not always be one within the criminal justice system, so it is essential that the views of victims are fully understood and that they are consulted during the decision-making process. This will help victims to feel supported, and (if a criminal justice outcome is most appropriate) there is a better chance that they will continue to support any prosecution.

During this inspection we found examples of where the police did get this right. In these cases, we heard that the victim felt listened to and believed; their individual needs were considered; the statements taken accurately reflected their account; they were kept regularly up to date as the case progressed and provided with any special measures; and felt prepared to go to court. In examples like these, victims are more likely to get the end results they expect, and this will make them feel safer.

Supporters or advisers can help improve victims' journeys, providing personalised emotional as well as practical support. While this support is already currently available, the response can be disjointed and time-limited meaning that decisions are not always the most effective in meeting the victim's needs.

In addition, the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) (Victims' Code) is the statutory code that sets out the minimum level of service victims should expect. The Victims' Code sets out the rights victims have, including:

- to be referred to victim support services and to have services and support tailored to their needs (including provision of special measures to the most vulnerable victims);
- to be provided with information about the investigation and prosecution; and
- to be given information about the outcome of the case and any appeals.

Victims often receive inconsistent support from the police

“There is too much inconsistency in individual officers' understanding and placing importance on domestic abuse. I do completely understand that resources are stretched, and that additional funding is required for us to see improvements. Having said this, I have also worked alongside some amazing officers who have supported my clients fantastically and have put them and their safety at the very heart of their work.” (Specialist children's worker, HMICFRS domestic abuse practitioner survey, 2019)

In our case files, and throughout all our inspections, we find examples of police officers and staff providing outstanding care and support for victims. This can make a huge difference to a victim's experience of the criminal justice system.

“Victims of domestic abuse may not always have the confidence or self-belief to press charges and go through with the process due to the massive psychological impact that the abuse has had on them. They need to have officers that are driven and passionate and can build up that relationship to give them the knowledge that they are heard, they are listened to and they are believed.” (NHS worker, HMICFRS domestic abuse practitioner survey, 2019)

However, we have also frequently reported on some poor police responses. This includes victims reporting that officers sometimes show a lack of empathy or belief. This can cause considerable distress to the victim, as one victim who participated in our lived experience research described:

“My phone was about to die; my mum was panicking asking where I was. I had no clothes, no phone charger, I wasn't allowed to tell my mum where I was going. He [the police officer] said I could either go to a refuge or go home. I said I can't go [to the refuge]. And that was the end of that ... Didn't want to be cut off from my mum. She was all I had left. No friends, isolating me from that and my hometown.”

Support is not always tailored to the needs of the victim

The needs of the victim are often complex. This means that the range of support they need should be carefully considered and co-ordinated by multiple partner agencies, including health and local authorities. Pathways need to be in place to make sure the victim is offered support based on their individual needs (which might include one or more protected characteristics) and is reassured that they will be kept safe from any further violence from the perpetrator.

In our [interim report](#), we concluded that the most effective services are those that offer end-to-end support, consider the entirety of the victim's situation and are informed by their trauma. However, while police forces have some support available, this is often generic and doesn't provide the specific support each victim needs. In our case file reviews, we found that the offer of assistance can focus on the crime type and not what the victim needs to help them become more resilient and less susceptible to further victimisation.

We think that an independent advocate role could help by providing someone independent who can assess the victim's wider needs, determine which agencies can provide the best support and help her access them.

Identifying the different needs of different women and girls

We have recommended immediate improvements to the data collected by forces on the different protected characteristics of victims.

In its response to the cross-Government VAWG strategy, [SafeLives reports](#) that although women from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background are disproportionately affected by crimes such as so-called honour-based violence, official data may not be disaggregated accurately enough to highlight the extent of any disproportionality and specific experiences of women of different racial and ethnic identities.

For example, the forums that are used for data collection may not be trusted or used by those women at the same rate as by white women. Despite being just as likely to experience abuse as any other ethnic group, [research shows](#) that the level of disclosure for these victims of domestic abuse is far lower than that of the general population.

The police need to improve their awareness of the victim's needs, including any cultural barriers that exist. This means understanding the victim as an individual. Any cultural barriers and additional risks must be considered, and the police must make sure the right measures are in place for the victim. We heard of some good ways of working in this area, especially when the police work closely with support services that specialise in supporting those from a BAME background and/or specific religion. This included giving women the opportunity to speak to the police in a safe setting such as a mosque, where they feel more comfortable and are less likely to attract unwanted attention.

In contrast, however, during our lived experience work several BAME victims/witnesses told us that language and a lack of understanding of culture were barriers. One mother of a victim, speaking through an interpreter, explained that she thought she had received a reduced service because of language and culture. "She actually believes it's because of her language or culture. They thought she wouldn't know any better; that's how she was made to feel."

There were also examples where the police in their initial contact and support with the victim did not demonstrate cultural awareness or an understanding of the risks associated with so-called honour-based violence.

Case study

A practitioner who works with BAME victims described that when a victim finally decides to report, the initial contact process will normally involve a uniformed officer being sent to the victim's address. The practitioner said that victims are then faced with a dilemma because this is likely to bring shame or 'dishonour' due to community/neighbour reaction. This response can put victims at greater risk.

The practitioner also explained that it is very difficult to break down existing process but there should be better staff awareness and the opportunity for alternative reporting processes. Sometimes forces do offer appointments at a police station as opposed to going to the victim's home. However, often this is not communicated effectively and police still turn up at the victim's home.

The practitioner then reported that women from certain communities are less likely to go through with the investigation. This results in police being less likely to support women from the same cultural background in the future because they assume that the women are unlikely to proceed with the case. The practitioner said that there had been instances where an officer had asked a victim whether they were sure they wanted to make a statement. The practitioner stated this was definite discouragement and it was interpreted by the victim as not to bother.

Positively, some police forces are providing additional training for staff in so-called honour-based violence and cultural awareness. However, the practitioner described that when giving this training they sometimes find it hard to engage with some of the police officers who attend. They said that often police officers fail to acknowledge the complexities and severity of the problem.

With the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct, we are investigating some of these points in more detail as part of our response to the [super-complaint submitted by Tees Valley Inclusion Project](#). This alleges failures in the police response to BAME victims of sexual offences. This investigation will result in a published report with recommendations.

A need to maximise the use of special measures at every opportunity

One process for determining and providing tailored support is through the use of special measures. These are steps taken for vulnerable or intimidated victims to help them to give their best evidence, whether during a police interview or in court. They can include giving evidence in court from behind a screen or via live video link or having a registered intermediary present throughout police and any court proceedings, to help the victim understand what they are being asked.

The police should consider if special measures should be used right at the start of an investigation. However, in her report [Next steps for special measures](#), the Victims' Commissioner found that they were often identified too late in the process, or were inadequate to meet the victim's needs.

We are inspecting the use of special measures in rape cases as part of our rape inspection with HMCPST, and our report is due to be published in winter 2021/22. Early findings suggest inconsistent knowledge of application for and use of special measures is still a significant problem, and that this is sometimes leaving very vulnerable victims without the support to which they are entitled.

We think an independent advocate could bring consistency to the use of special measures, by being responsible for making sure they are considered at the right time, implemented as planned and having the anticipated effect.

There are multiple benefits to victims receiving support from independent commissioned or non-commissioned services

In many cases, the victims we spoke with as part of this inspection – and during the inspection of the police response to domestic abuse and rape – were generally extremely positive about the support they have received from ISVAs, IDVAs, and other commissioned or non-commissioned services.

In addition, there is evidence that the provision of this support makes it more likely that the victim will continue to support a prosecution. For instance, in our July 2021 rape inspection, we found that victims of rape are more likely to continue to engage with the police and support an investigation when an ISVA is involved.

We therefore welcome the announcement in the 2021 [rape review report](#) of new Government funding for more ISVAs and domestic abuse advisers.

We think there needs to be sufficient funding to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse and rape can access an independent adviser as soon as they report a crime.

“IDVA services in this County are not supported, funded correctly, or understood. We keep getting told that DV is a force priority, however there is no sustainability in support services. I have worked as an IDVA for five years and each year have not known if my job is safe.” (IDVA, HMICFRS domestic abuse practitioner survey, 2019)

Many victims need help to understand all their entitlements under the Victims’ Code

Victims may not always be in the position to work through these rights on their own for several reasons. They may simply be too exhausted by what is happening around them to understand the processes that they are entitled to, or they may also have poor physical and mental wellbeing.

When we asked an IDVA why victims often do not pursue their full entitlements, they responded that it was “too much like a battle and there are enough battles with a domestic abuse crisis so the last thing a victim needs is one with the system as well”.

Because of this, the Victims’ Code establishes that the relevant service provider will tell victims which rights apply to them. This may be the police, or an independent advocate, or another support service, for instance.

We explored victims' awareness of the Code during our lived experience research. Very few victims could recall being informed about the Victims' Code. They didn't remember any discussion or information being provided about the frequency of updates, for instance, or any mention of entitlements.

We think an independent advocate could help victims fully understand their entitlements under the Code and make sure they are accessing them.

Victims are not always kept updated on the progress of their cases

The police and the victim should make sure that they agree a contract for how often and by which method they will be in contact. This may include a victim being updated by phone, in person, by text or email or even by a third party. Some victims may ask for regular contact, others may prefer only being contacted with new information.

In the cases we reviewed for our rape inspection, we were pleased to see that, in nearly all the cases we reviewed, the police were good at keeping the victim informed throughout the investigation when a contract was in place. But in just under a third of cases, there was no evidence that a contract had been agreed.

Our commissioned research for the same inspection revealed that most victims were negative about the quality of police communication. They told our researchers that they were dissatisfied with the amount, type and timeliness of communication from police. And the frequency and quality of contact tended to get worse as the investigation went on. Some victims felt they had to do 'all the chasing' to get updates. This caused victims to feel unsupported and increased their anxiety and uncertainty.

A few victims were more positive. They valued having a single police contact and said that the police explained the process well and were available when needed.

"I think it was explained well. They told me what they were doing next and what had been done. It was all done over telephone. The officer did say I could ring her at any time." (Quote from a victim of rape)

Notable practice

Some forces have taken action to keep victims fully informed. For example, in Wales the [Gwent Victims' Services Hub \(VSH\)](#) was introduced in July 2021 to improve the support given to victims of all crimes, with a particular focus on preventing further serious harm. The Hub draws up a 'victim contract' and makes regular contact with the victim. This is separate to the contact made by the officer in the case to discuss the investigation.

The VSH is expected to improve compliance with the Victims' Code 2020, support the writing of a victim personal statement and refer victims to other support services to help with any other needs they may have. The VSH will support victims but won't be advocates for them. It will signpost people to other organisations, and allocate IDVA/ISVAs if required, but it won't speak on the victim's behalf in court, or indeed have any involvement with the investigation process. The VSH will explain to victims how a victim personal statement (VPS) is used in court and then refer to the appropriate staff to record the VPS should the victim wish to write one. As this arrangement was introduced so recently, there hasn't yet been any evaluation of how it works in practice.

We think an independent advocate could help to ensure the victim is kept updated and feels fully informed about the criminal justice process.

Characteristics of a victim co-ordinator

Our findings support the conclusions of our [interim report](#) that:

- the police are not always the best placed to support a victim's complex needs, which often require external specialist services which can only be provided by other organisations with the relevant expertise – in particular, local authorities and the health service; and
- while there have been improvements in the response to victims, there is clear evidence of the inconsistent and unacceptable level of support sometimes offered to victims through the criminal justice system.

We have submitted evidence from this inspection on victim care and support as part of the Ministry of Justice's consultation on the Victims Bill, including further details that have led us to this conclusion. In addition, below are the characteristics we think should be included as part of an independent advocate role for consideration by the Ministry of Justice in developing the new legislation:

- Ability to offer independent and bespoke advice to the victim.
- Ability to work with all involved organisations and a knowledge of processes and procedures, including any associated timescales.
- An awareness of legislation and the criminal justice system.
- Strong interpersonal skills with the ability to break down barriers and conflicts to get the best support in place for the victims.
- Knowledge of trauma-based investigations.

- Knowledge of available support sector services and pathways.
- Understanding of the Victims' Code and when it should be applied.
- Ability to support victims in the court proceedings, ensuring their needs are met.
- Knowledge and understanding of special measures and when they should be applied.
- Knowledge and understanding of performance measures and how they should be used as a diagnostic to support continuous improvements and overcome problems.
- Act as an accepted professional and representative for the victim throughout the process.
- Act as a pivotal partner in ensuring learning is addressed and continuous improvements are being made to the criminal justice system process to improve the experience of victims.

Recommendation 3

Structures and funding should be put in place to make sure victims receive tailored and consistent support.

Victims' needs should be a central consideration of any investigation. Victims should be fully supported towards a result that reflects their wishes and considers any discrimination and inequality they may face. Consistent and accurate recording of information on the protected characteristics of victims is needed to help ensure the right support is offered.

The best result may not always be one within the criminal justice system. The needs of the victim are often complex. This means the range of support they should be given access to should be carefully considered and co-ordinated across victim services – some of which will be commissioned and others of which will be independent, such as advisers/advocates – and other agencies, including health and local authorities. An effective pathway needs to be in place that offers the victim the right bespoke support, as well as the reassurance that they will be kept safe from any further violence by the perpetrator.

We recommend:

- 3.1 By March 2022, informed by and connected to work on the proposed Victims Bill, the Ministry of Justice, Home Office and other government departments should review funding to ensure it is sufficient for specialists to support victims making complaints to the point that they have received the outcome they need. The aim should be to provide funding so that an independent (non-legal) adviser/advocate is available to support victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence as they go through the criminal justice system (and should consider this for victims of other crimes that disproportionately affect women). This support should be designed in consultation with the victim and should continue after a perpetrator is released from prison.

- 3.2 By March 2022, all police forces should ensure information on the protected characteristics of victims is accurately and consistently recorded.
- 3.3 By March 2022, informed by and connected to work on the proposed Victims Bill, the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead, National Police Chiefs' Council leads and the Home Office should work together to establish guidance for all forces on how the views and experiences of victims should be recorded, analysed and considered as part of performance management of VAWG offences. As a minimum, this should include a single national survey to measure victim satisfaction, and processes to link local performance management data with the proposed national VAWG improvement measures (recommendation 4.4). This should allow for both local and national quality assurance, as well as the identification of any emerging issues, risks or variables that need further action to resolve. Police forces and partner agencies should have clear responsibilities in supporting victims through every stage of the case.

13. Full recommendations and next steps

This section comprises our five overarching recommendations and sets out the detailed recommendations which underpin them.

Recommendation 1

There should be an immediate and unequivocal commitment that the response to VAWG offences is an absolute priority for government, policing, the criminal justice system, and public-sector partnerships. This needs to be supported at a minimum by a relentless focus on these crimes; mandated responsibilities; and sufficient funding so that all partner agencies can work effectively as part of a whole-system approach to reduce and prevent the harms these offences are causing.

The police cannot tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) on their own. By the time there is a response from the police, a crime has been committed, but action is needed to prevent it happening in the first place. The only way we can achieve bold and sustainable change is if national and local government, partner agencies, and organisations work together with the police to prevent women and girls becoming victims, and make sure those who do become victims receive all the support they need.

For this approach to be effective, VAWG needs to be a higher priority. All agencies involved need to have a relentless, consistent and co-ordinated focus on it, and the whole system needs to be accountable for tackling these offences.

We recommend the following actions, all of which are needed to make sure the whole-system approach is successful in protecting women and girls. These actions should be supported by a clear and rapid implementation plan that provides a pathway for how and when change is going to happen.

To increase the prioritisation of VAWG offences in policing, we recommend:

- 1.1. Immediately, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the Home Office should jointly appoint a full-time NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead to lead on all police activity related to violence against women and girls. The lead should act as a point of contact for each police force, work closely with the College of Policing to make sure best practice is identified and communicated, ensure progress is monitored, act as the 'voice of policing' at cross-sector national discussions and regularly report to the Home Secretary.
- 1.2. Immediately, the Home Office should add the policing of violence against women and girls to the Strategic Policing Requirement.

- 1.3. By December 2021, the Home Office should make sure that violence against women and girls is a priority for the ministerially chaired crime and policing performance board.
- 1.4. By January 2022, the Home Office and the national policing lead should develop a new National Policing Strategy for violence against women and girls (VAWG), to elevate the priority of VAWG and set a clear direction to forces on what is expected. Consideration should be given to establishing an annual strategic assessment of VAWG to support this strategy, and to using the 4Ps as a delivery framework to implement it. This framework should emphasise the role of effective partnership working, a strong and clear policing culture, and continuous improvements across all the four strands.

To increase the prioritisation of VAWG as part of a whole-system approach, we recommend:

- 1.5. By March 2022, the Home Office should work with other government departments, including the Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care and Ministry of Justice, to come to an agreement on the measures and actions that each partner agency needs to implement both at national and local levels to encourage joint responsibility in tackling violence against women and girls. This should be co-ordinated through the planned Home Secretary-chaired board. The agreement should also include sustained, multi-year funding to support collaboration between agencies, where they have joint responsibilities, and serious consideration of:
 - a new statutory framework and statutory guidance to define roles, responsibilities and expectations; to standardise existing non-statutory arrangements; and to allow better accountability at local level, and support and scrutiny at national level;
 - as part of this: a statutory duty requiring the police and relevant partner agencies to work together to collectively take action to prevent the harm caused by violence against women and girls (VAWG). In doing this, the Home Office should consider whether this could be included in any existing duties; how duties for safeguarding children will interact with and complement the changes; and how this duty will be incorporated into the new statutory framework for VAWG.

Recommendation 2

The relentless pursuit and disruption of adult perpetrators should be a national priority for the police, and their capability and capacity to do this should be enhanced.

We recommend:

- 2.1 By March 2022, the Home Office and the relevant National Police Chiefs' Council leads should review police capability and capacity to relentlessly pursue and disrupt the perpetrators of violence against women and girls offences and enhance these, as necessary.

- 2.2 As part of the work to develop the Government's domestic abuse perpetrator strategy, the Home Office should carry out an urgent review of the role of the detective constable. This should establish appropriate incentives, progression and support for both officer and staff investigators to encourage this career path. This review should include specific recommendations to make sure there is adequate capacity and capability in every force to thoroughly and effectively investigate violence against women and girls offences.
- 2.3 By March 2022, as part of the work to establish and implement the Government's perpetrator strategy, the Home Office, together with the Ministry of Justice, should improve the evidence it has about the management of perpetrators.
- 2.4 By March 2022, as part of the work to establish and implement the Government's perpetrator strategy, the national policing lead, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice should co-ordinate work to improve, review and standardise the current arrangements and capability for the management of violence against women and girls (VAWG) offenders. This should aim to increase consistency in the use of multi-agency public protection arrangements, multi-agency tasking and co-ordination, and integrated offender management, and make recommendations to ensure there is sufficient capacity in the system to manage VAWG offenders effectively.

Recommendation 3

Structures and funding should be put in place to make sure victims receive tailored and consistent support.

Victims' needs should be a central consideration of any investigation. Victims should be fully supported towards a result that reflects their wishes and considers any discrimination and inequality they may face. Consistent and accurate recording of information on the protected characteristics of victims is needed to help ensure the right support is offered.

The best result may not always be one within the criminal justice system. The needs of the victim are often complex. This means the range of support they should be given access to should be carefully considered and co-ordinated across victim services – some of which will be commissioned and others of which will be independent, such as advisers/advocates – and other agencies, including health and local authorities. An effective pathway needs to be in place that offers the victim the right bespoke support, as well as the reassurance that they will be kept safe from any further violence by the perpetrator.

We recommend:

- 3.1 By March 2022, informed by and connected to work on the proposed Victims Bill, the Ministry of Justice, Home Office and other government departments should review funding to ensure it is sufficient for specialists to support victims making complaints to the point that they have received the outcome they need. The aim should be to provide funding so that an independent (non-legal) adviser/advocate is available to support victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence as they go through the criminal justice system (and should consider this

for victims of other crimes that disproportionately affect women). This support should be designed in consultation with the victim and should continue after a perpetrator is released from prison.

- 3.2 By March 2022, all police forces should ensure information on the protected characteristics of victims is accurately and consistently recorded.
- 3.3 By March 2022, informed by and connected to work on the proposed Victims Bill, the national policing lead, National Police Chiefs' Council leads and the Home Office should work together to establish guidance for all forces on how the views and experiences of victims should be recorded, analysed and considered as part of performance management of VAWG offences. As a minimum, this should include a single national survey to measure victim satisfaction, and processes to link local performance management data with the proposed national VAWG improvement measures (recommendation 4.4). This should allow for both local and national quality assurance, as well as the identification of any emerging issues, risks or variables that need further action to resolve. Police forces and partner agencies should have clear responsibilities in supporting victims through every stage of the case.

Recommendation 4

All chief constables should immediately review and ensure that there are consistently high standards in their forces' responses to violence against women and girls and should be supported in doing so by national standards and data.

We recognise that elements of the whole-system approach we have recommended in this report will take time to establish. This could mean a delay to improvements in the service received by victims, and in the consistent effectiveness of policing in response to violence against women and girls more broadly.

Given this, and the significant inconsistencies between forces identified in this inspection, we are therefore recommending that all chief constables immediately review and improve the processes and practices related to VAWG in their forces, to make sure they are effective and consistent. Forces should be supported in this by much clearer national standards and data, and consistent and comparative information about the capacity and capability required to make improvements.

We recommend:

- 4.1 By March 2022, chief constables should establish and publish an action plan that specifies in detail what steps the force will take to improve and standardise its approach to responding to violence against women and girls offences, with the aim of ensuring policies, processes and practices are effective, actively monitored and managed, and meeting national standards.

This should include (but is not limited to) improving and standardising:

- the use of police powers to protect women, including arrest of perpetrators, use of pre-charge bail, the applications for orders (where appropriate) and processes for responding to breaches of non-molestation and other orders;

- the use of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme;
 - the capability of generalist and specialist staff to respond to violence against women and girls offences effectively, including consistent understanding of newer offences (such as coercive control);
 - the identification and management of high-harm violent offenders against women and girls (in partnership with other organisations);
 - the identification and protection of the most at-risk victims of violence against women and girls offences (in partnership with other organisations); and
 - internal and public communications related to violence against women and girls to ensure that messages raise awareness of the risk and emphasise the seriousness of the issues.
- 4.2 By December 2021, the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead should set a framework for the force-level action plans, and work with chief constables to make sure their action plans are in place. By June 2022, the national lead should then provide HMICFRS with an assessment of national progress, which establishes any potential gaps and areas for improvement.

This force-level activity should be supported by clearer standards and improved performance monitoring, to help chief constables better assure themselves of their forces' effectiveness in responding to VAWG, and to allow greater accountability, support and direction at local and national levels.

We recommend:

- 4.3 Immediately, the College of Policing should develop a violence against women and girls minimum standard, creating a consistent and clear standard for police investigations. The Home Secretary or the College of Policing should then consider whether to use their powers under section 53A of the Police Act 1996 to require police forces to adopt the procedures and practices it sets out.
- 4.4 By March 2022, the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council should establish mechanisms and processes to allow rapid and consistent sharing of evidence, information, and evaluation on new and effective ways of working in response to violence against women and girls offences.
- 4.5 By December 2021, the Home Office together with other government departments should introduce a set of measures to monitor improvements in the criminal justice system approach to all crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls. This should be developed together with women and children's representatives and include a strong focus on evidence of victim experience (and include such information as is necessary to identify and act on variation in service provided to women with different protected characteristics). The measures should enable better accountability and support at local and national levels. Where possible, this should complement the work the Government is already doing following its end-to-end rape review to develop a 'scorecard' for measuring improvements to rape crimes.

- 4.6 By March 2022, the Home Office should work with other government departments, policing, and victim representatives and support organisations to build awareness of the importance of ensuring communications and terminology related to violence against women and girls are appropriate and don't have any unintended consequences.

Recommendation 5

Immediate review of use of outcomes 15 and 16 in violence against women and girls offences.

An unacceptably high number of domestic abuse, rape and other violence against women and girls cases are closed by the police using outcome codes 15 and 16. These numbers vary between forces, and there are significant gaps in the data and information gathered about these outcomes. This makes it impossible for policing to assure itself (or victims) that they are consistently closing these cases appropriately.

We therefore recommend that:

- 5.1 By March 2022, the Home Office should review and refine the data on outcome codes gathered nationally and make improvements in the ways this can be used to identify trends and outliers.
- 5.2 By December 2022, the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead should develop and disseminate to forces a process for consistent and robust monitoring of outcomes 15 and 16 violence against women and girls cases. This should require, as a minimum, inspector-level sign-off of these cases and that evidence on the rationale for these closure codes is recorded and auditable.

Next steps

HMICFRS will monitor police force progress against these recommendations in accordance with our standard monitoring process. We will also request updates from national organisations on progress made in April 2022.

In parallel – and in recognition of our role as part of the whole-system approach – we will make sure that, wherever possible, we will make sure our inspection activity so it can best support and challenge forces as they work to make these improvements. This includes working with other inspectorates and regulators on joint inspections and assessments, to allow an informed view of partnership and criminal justice system arrangements to respond to VAWG, and of police effectiveness within these.

Annex A: Terms of reference and commission

Purpose

On 26 March 2021, the Home Secretary commissioned HMICFRS, under s54(2B) of the Police Act 1996, to carry out a bespoke thematic inspection “into police handling of female victims and engagement with women and girls”.

Terms of reference

Overarching question

How can the police better protect women and girls?

Inspection questions

1. How effective is police work to prevent women and girls being made victims of violence and abuse?
2. How effective is the police response when women and girls report crime? Including a review of:
 - the effectiveness of police investigation of VAWG offences;
 - why victims/survivors drop out of the system pre-charge; and
 - support to victims post-charge.

To answer these questions, we will:

- review existing evidence from inspections, and from other reviews and reports (including the end-to-end rape review, for instance);
- conduct new inspection activity; and
- consult widely with experts from across policing, Government, academia and the third sector.

Annex B: List of Expert Reference Group members

Name	Organisation
Lynne Abrams	Home Office
Dame Vera Baird	Victims' Commissioner
Assistant Chief Constable Maggie Blyth	Hampshire Constabulary
Katy Bourne	PCC – Sussex Police
Temporary Chief Constable Sarah Crew	Avon and Somerset Police
Rachel De Souza	Children's Commissioner's Office
Julia Dwyer	Refuge
Cathryn Hannah	Ministry of Justice
Catherine Hinwood	Ministry of Justice
Nicole Jacobs	Domestic Abuse Commissioner
Suzanne Jacob OBE	SafeLives
Sophie Linden	The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)
Deputy Chief Constable Paul Mills	Wiltshire Police
Assistant Commissioner Louisa Rolfe	Metropolitan Police Service
Rani Selvarajah	Ending Violence Against Women Coalition

Name	Organisation
Andrea Simon	Ending Violence Against Women Coalition
Chief Constable Michelle Skeer	Cumbria Constabulary
Marie Southgate	Crown Prosecution Service
Professor Elizabeth Stanko OBE	Research Lead, Project Bluestone
Chief Constable Rachel Swann	Derbyshire Constabulary
Nerys Thomas	College of Policing
Cordelia Tucker O'Sullivan	Refuge
Rachel Tuffin OBE	College of Policing
Harriet Waldegrave	Children's Commissioner's Office
Claire Waxman	Independent Victims' Commissioner for London
Angie Whitaker	West Midlands Police
Terri Wilkinson	Wiltshire Police

Annex C: Literature review

Report	Year
<u><i>Girls and gangs</i></u> , Centre for Social Justice	2014
<u><i>Girls in the criminal justice system</i></u> , Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (CJJI)	2014
<u><i>Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse</i></u> , HMIC	2014
<u><i>Protecting children from harm: A critical assessment of child sexual abuse in the family network in England and priorities for action</i></u> , Children's Commissioner	2015
<u><i>The welfare of vulnerable people in police custody</i></u> , HMIC	2015
<u><i>Witness for the prosecution: Identifying victim and witness vulnerability in criminal case files</i></u> , HMIC	2015
<u><i>Increasingly everyone's business: A progress report on the police response to domestic abuse</i></u> , HMIC	2015
<u><i>The depths of dishonour: Hidden voices and shameful crimes – An inspection of the police response to honour-based violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation</i></u> , HMIC	2015
<u>National child protection inspections</u> , HMICFRS	2015-21
<u>Attrition rates in domestic abuse: Time for a change? An application of Temporal Sequencing Theory</u> , Katy Barrow Grint, <i>Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice</i> , Volume 10, Issue 3	2016
<u><i>Barriers to help-seeking: Older women's experiences of domestic violence and abuse – briefing note</i></u> , Dr Michaela Rogers, SHUSU, University of Salford	2016
<u><i>National strategy on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence – 2016–2021</i></u> , Welsh Government	2016

Report	Year
<u>Missing children: who cares? The police response to missing and absent children</u> , HMIC	2016
<u>Living in fear – the police and CPS response to harassment and stalking</u> , HMIC & HMCPSI	2017
<u>A progress report on the police response to domestic abuse</u> , HMICFRS	2017
<u>Stolen freedom: the policing response to modern slavery and human trafficking</u> , HMICFRS	2017
<i>Perennial issues in policing</i> , College of Policing	2018
National Policing Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme – Action plan (VKPP)	2018
<u>Statistics on race and the criminal justice system 2018</u> , Ministry of Justice	2018
<u>The poor relation: The police and Crown Prosecution Service’s response to crimes against older people</u> , HMICFRS & HMCPSI	2019
Domestic abuse problem profile, Greater Manchester Police	2019
<u>Stalking and harassment: An inspection of Sussex Police commissioned by the police and crime commissioner, and an update on national recommendations in HMICFRS’s 2017 report</u> , HMICFRS	2019
<u>Evaluation of the Drive Project – A three-year pilot to address high-risk, high-harm perpetrators of domestic abuse</u> , Marianne Hester et al., Centre for Gender & Violence Research, University of Bristol	2019
<u>Rape, inequality and the criminal justice response in England: The importance of age and gender</u> , Sarah-Jane Lilley Walker et al., <i>Criminology & Criminal Justice</i> , Volume 1, Issue 3	2019
Gender mainstreaming in urban planning	2019
<u>The police response to domestic abuse: An update report</u> , HMICFRS	2019
<u>The impact of the two pandemics: VAWG and COVID-19 on black and minoritised women and girls</u> , Imkaan/Rape Crisis England & Wales	2020
<u>National Child Protection Inspections: 2019 thematic report</u> , HMICFRS	2020
<u>Statistics on women and the criminal justice system 2019</u> , Ministry of Justice	2020

Report	Year
<u>National Vulnerability Action Plan (NVAP) Revised 2020–2022 v2</u> , NPCC	2020
<u>A joint thematic inspection of offender management</u> , Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (CJJI)	2020
<u>Joint inspection – Evidence-led domestic abuse prosecutions</u> , Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (CJJI)	2020
<u>Final report: Evaluation of the Sexual Violence Complainants’ Advocate scheme</u> , Olivia Smith and Ellen Daly, Loughborough University	2020
<u>‘Feeling heard’: partner agencies working together to make a difference for children with mental ill health</u> , Ofsted, HM Inspectorate of Probation, HMICFRS, Care Quality Commission	2020
<u>Police super-complaint: Invisible survivors: The long wait for justice. Police response to BAME victims of sexual abuse</u> , Tees Valley Inclusion Project	2020
<u>Reclaiming voice: Minoritised women and sexual violence</u> , Dr Ravi Thiara and Sumanta Roy, Imkaan	2020
<u>Mean streets</u> , Children’s Commissioner	2020
<u>Research into victim and suspect experiences of changes to the Police and Crime Act 2017</u> , HMICFRS	2020
<u>The decriminalisation of rape: Why the justice system is failing rape survivors and what needs to change</u> , Centre for Women’s Justice et al.	2020
Ministry of housing, communities and local government – Improving families’ lives: Annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2019-2020	2020
Insights ISVA data sets, SafeLives	2020
Insights IDVA data sets, SafeLives	2020
Enhancing the experience of procedural justice for domestic abuse survivors by improving the policing response, Jane Goodman-Delahunty and Anna Corbo Crehan	2020
<u>Missing persons data report 2019/2020</u> , NCA and UK Missing Persons Unit	2020
<u>Violence reduction unit interim guidance</u> , Home Office	2020

Report	Year
<u>Pre-charge bail and released under investigation: striking a balance</u> , HMICFRS and HMCPSI	2020
<u>Code of practice for victims of crime in England and Wales</u> , Ministry of Justice	2020
<i>Gender equality and plan making – The gender mainstreaming toolkit</i>	2020
<u>Safe to share? Liberty and Southall Black Sisters' super-complaint on policing and immigration status</u> , College of Policing, HMICFRS and IOPC	2020
<u>Review of the controlling or coercive behaviour offence</u> , Home Office	2021
<u>Review of policing domestic abuse during the pandemic – 2021</u> , HMICFRS	2021
<u>A joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape. Phase one: from report to police or CPS decision to take no further action</u> , HMICFRS and HMCPSI	2021
<u>Coming out of the woods. Do local support services influence the propensity to report sexual violence?</u> Daria Denti and Simona Iammarino, Geography and Environment Discussion Paper Series 20, LSE	2021
<u>Police super-complaint: force response to police-perpetrated domestic abuse</u> , Centre for Women's Justice	2021
DHR review, College of Policing and NPCC	2021
<u>An inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service's policing of a vigil held in commemoration of Sarah Everard</u> , HMICFRS	2021
<u>Next steps for special measures: A review of the provision of special measures to vulnerable and intimidated witnesses</u> , Victims' Commissioner	2021
Force data collection tracker, HMICFRS	2021
<u>Terms of reference for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on UN Women</u>	2021
<u>Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges</u> , Ofsted	2021
<u>Draft Online Safety Bill</u> , HM Government	2021
UK women do not feel & aren't safe in public spaces, Refinery	2021

Report	Year
<u>Stalking Protection Orders: Statutory guidance for the police</u> , Home Office	2021
<u>Women and planning (part II): Creating gender-sensitive urban environments post covid-19: Challenges and opportunities</u> , RTPi	2021
<u>Serious violence duty: Preventing and reducing serious violence: Draft guidance for responsible authorities</u> , Home Office	2021
<u>Tackling violence against women and girls strategy</u> , HM Government	2021
<u>A duty to protect: Police use of protective measures in cases involving violence against women and girls</u> , College of Policing, HMICFRS and IOPC	2021

Annex D: About the data

Technical annex

The data in this report has been compiled from police, government, non-government organisation and academic sources. These include:

- the Home Office;
- the Office for National Statistics (ONS);
- our inspection fieldwork; and
- data we collected directly from all 43 police forces in England and Wales.

The way we collect data was agreed with forces and other interested parties such as the Home Office. We gave forces several opportunities to quality assure and validate the information they gave us, to make sure it was accurate. We made this information available to other forces, so they could review their own and other forces' data. This allowed them to analyse where data was notably different from other forces or inconsistent internally.

Methodology

Data in the report

The British Transport Police (BTP) was outside the scope of this inspection. Any combined totals for England and Wales exclude BTP data, so will differ from those the Home Office publishes.

If other forces were unable to supply data, we mention this in the relevant sections.

Population

We use ONS mid-2019 population estimates as a denominator in our calculations, unless otherwise noted.

Case file analysis

In the four forces we inspected, we reviewed a sample of case files from our main inspection types. There were four case file reviews for each force:

- We examined a sample of breaches of non-molestation orders and restraining orders. We wanted to see if the forces had correctly considered whether the suspects' behaviour also amounted to separate crimes of harassment, stalking or coercive and controlling behaviour. (We reviewed 83 cases throughout the four forces.)

- We examined a sample of Stalking Protection Orders to understand and review how the forces we inspected used them. (We reviewed 40 throughout the four forces.)
- For our male offender case file tool, we asked each force to identify five individuals they considered posed the highest risk to women and girls in the force area. We also asked each force to identify five individuals who posed the highest risk to women and girls. We did this to understand how forces identified, and managed, these individuals. (We reviewed 40 throughout the four forces.)
- For the final case file tool, violence against women and girls perpetrated by males, we asked each force we inspected to identify the five female victims who had been subject to the most offences, and five female victims who had been subject to the most offences by different offenders. We did this so we could assess how effective the force systems were at easily identifying these individuals, and to examine how each force dealt with the victims' cases.

The inspectors' responses were gathered to allow us to:

- numerically assess victim and offender attributes in the forces we inspected;
- review how these forces respond to, and deal with, violent offences against women and girls; and
- understand how victims are supported and served.

As well as numerically assessing the data, we developed infographics to visualise the offender and victim profiles we sampled in our case file reviews. For the few open text responses that were included in the case file tools, we read all responses and extracted themes that best described what force inspectors reviewed.

Voluntary surveys

We carried out two surveys with different participant groups:

- police forces (circulated through force internal comms); and
- women in the public (circulated on social media and via external reference group members).

These were intended to apply questions that were as similar as possible to allow comparisons between both groups. These are volunteer surveys and so are not statistically representative of their populations. But they can provide insights when compared with other data. For example, to determine if views in interviews and focus groups were the same or different.

Women police officers disproportionately responded to surveys of police forces. And more members of the public who responded to the survey identified as victims than for other surveys, such as the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#).

As it was an anonymous online survey, we relied on people to reply to questions honestly. Unlike targeted telephone or in-person surveys, we have no way of verifying what we're told.

For open-text responses, a social researcher read and categorised a sample of 100 responses for each field, for a selection of sub-populations. A second reader, with

specialist experience working with victims, categorised a further 100. And our team resampled where the two disagreed until a consensus was reached.

Victim service assessment

Our victim service assessments (VSAs) track a victim's journey from reporting a crime to the police through to the end result. All forces will be subject to a VSA as part of our PEEL inspection programme. Some forces will be selected to also be tested on crime-recording. This will be carried out to make sure that every force is assessed on its crime-recording practices at least every three years.

See our website for the [VSA technical methodology](#).

Annex E: Definitions and interpretations

In this report, the following words, phrases and expressions in the left-hand column have the meanings assigned to them in the right-hand column. Sometimes, the definition will be followed by a fuller explanation of the matter in question, with references to sources and other material which may be of assistance to the reader.

Term	Definition
4Ps	approach to organising policing and cross-sector activity in support of the Government's counter-terrorism and serious organised crime strategies (amongst others); activity is categorised under the heading of either prepare, prevent, protect or pursue
abuser	person who causes harm or distress to another
Authorised Professional Practice (APP)	professional practice on policing, developed and approved by the College of Policing; police officers and staff are expected to have regard to APP in discharging their responsibilities
bail	alternative to custody, usually imposing conditions on what the individual can and cannot do; types of bail include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• pre-charge bail or police bail, imposed by the police when there isn't sufficient evidence to charge the individual;• post-charge bail, imposed by the police when an individual has been charged; and• court bail, imposed by the courts when an individual has been charged
Clare's Law	scheme under which the police can disclose to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about their partner's or ex-partner's previous abusive or violent offending; formally known as the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS); implemented across all police forces in England and Wales in March 2014

Term	Definition
Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (the Victims' Code)	statutory code of practice issued by the Secretary of State for Justice under section 32 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004; the Code establishes minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime; its stated objective is to ensure the criminal justice system puts victims first, making the system more responsive to them and easier for them to navigate; it also aims to ensure that victims of crime are treated well and receive appropriate support to help them cope and recover, and to protect them from becoming victims again; the code specifies the services which must be provided to victims of crime in England and Wales, and sets a minimum for the standard of those services; higher entitlements are set for victims of the most serious crime, persistently targeted victims, and vulnerable or intimidated victims; the public sector bodies which are obliged to provide services to victims of crime are specified in the Code, and include police forces and police and crime commissioners; the Victims' Commissioner has a statutory duty to keep the Code under regular review
controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour	behaviour and actions of a perpetrator that are intended to control the victim through isolation, intimidation, degradation and micro-regulation of everyday life; the term and concept were developed by Evan Stark, seeking to explain the range of tactics used by perpetrators, and their effects on victims; the concept highlights the continuing nature of the behaviour, and the extent to which the actions of the perpetrator control the victim; crucially, the concept sets out that such abuse can be psychological as well as physical; the term is explicitly covered within the definition of domestic abuse; the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour within an intimate or familial relationship is set out in section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015, and carries a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment, a fine, or both, for offenders
Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)	annual survey to monitor the extent of crime in England and Wales, conducted by Kantar on behalf of the Office for National Statistics; it is used by the Government to evaluate and develop crime-reduction policies and also provides information about the changing levels of crime over the past 30 years

Term	Definition
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)	principal prosecuting authority in England and Wales, established by section 1 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985; responsible for prosecuting criminal cases investigated by the police and other investigating bodies and, in particular, for deciding charges on cases for prosecution, reviewing prosecutions to ensure the right defendants are prosecuted on the right charges before the right court, preparing cases for court, and presenting cases in magistrates' courts, the Crown Court and higher court
designing out crime officer (DOCO)	specialist police officer who provides advice and guidance to local authority planning departments, architects and others on how to minimise crime, disorder, and anti-social behaviour in the built environment
domestic abuse	incident or pattern of incidents of abusive behaviour of one person towards another, where those persons are aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other; behaviour is abusive if it consists of (a) physical or sexual abuse, (b) violent or threatening behaviour, (c) controlling or coercive behaviour, (d) economic abuse, or (e) psychological, emotional or other abuse; persons are personally connected if they are or have been married to each other or civil partners, engaged, in an intimate personal relationship, relatives, or where they have or once had a parental relationship in relation to the same child; the abuse may also be towards another person, such as a child; economic abuse is behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on the victim's ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services; Domestic Abuse Act 2021, section 1
Domestic Abuse Protection Notice (DAPN)	notice issued by a senior police officer prohibiting a person ('P') from being abusive towards a person aged 16 or over to whom P is personally connected; Domestic Abuse Act 2021, section 22
Domestic Abuse Protection Order (DAPO)	order made by a court for the purpose of preventing a person ('P') from being abusive towards a person aged 16 or over to whom P is personally connected; it may be made (a) on application by the person for whom the protection order is sought, by the police or by other person specified, or (b) in the course of certain proceedings; Domestic Abuse Act 2021, section 27

Term	Definition
Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN)	initial notice issued by the police under sections 21 to 33 of the Crime and Security Act 2010 to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence; must be authorised by a police superintendent; contains prohibitions that effectively bar the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's home or otherwise contacting the victim; may be issued to an adult if the police superintendent has reasonable grounds for believing that the adult has been violent towards, or has threatened violence towards an associated person, and the notice is necessary to protect that person from violence or a threat of violence by the intended recipient of the notice; piloted in three police areas in 2011–12 and introduced nationally in 2014
Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO)	order that helps the police and magistrates' courts to put in place protection in the immediate aftermath of a domestic abuse incident; where there is insufficient evidence to charge a perpetrator and give protection to a victim via bail conditions, a DVPO can prevent the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days; this gives the victim an opportunity to consider their options and get the support and guidance they need from a dedicated domestic abuse service
Expert Reference Group	specialist individuals, academics or authority groups
female genital mutilation	procedure where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured or changed, without medical reason; the practice is illegal in the UK and is an internationally recognised human rights violation; also known as 'female circumcision' or 'cutting'
force control room	facility in each police force in which call operators answer telephone calls from the public, determine the circumstances of the call and decide the initial response

Term	Definition
force management statement (FMS)	<p>self-assessment that chief constables (and London equivalents) prepare and give to HMICFRS each year; presents the chief constable's statement and explanation of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the demand the force expects to face in the next four years; • how the force will change and improve its workforce and other assets to cope with that demand; • how the force will improve its efficiency to make sure the gap between future demand and future capability is as small as it can reasonably be; and • the money the force expects to have to do all this.
forced marriage	marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties
high-harm case	case in which the victim is at high risk of harm; includes most cases of domestic abuse and sexual violence
Home Office data hub	central store of data from Home Office-funded police forces in England and Wales; established and overseen by the Home Office
(so-called) honour-based abuse	<p>collection of practices used predominantly to control the behaviour of women and girls within families or other social groups to protect supposed cultural and religious beliefs, values and social norms in the name of 'honour'; honour-based violence incidents and crimes include specific types of offence, such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation, and acts that have long been criminal, such as assault, rape and murder; we use the term to refer to the full range of incidents and crimes that perpetrators carry out under the guise of maintaining or protecting perceived 'honour'</p>
human trafficking	<p>arranging or facilitating the travel of another person by recruiting, transporting or transferring, harbouring or receiving, or transferring or exchanging control over them with a view to exploiting them; the travel may be within a single country or over one or more international borders; it is irrelevant whether the person consents to the travel; an unlawful act, contrary to section 2 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015</p>

Term	Definition
independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA)	trained specialist who provides a service to victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members, with the aim of securing their, and their children's, safety; also known as independent domestic violence advocates; serve as a victim's primary point of contact and usually work with their clients from the point of crisis, to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans; can be accessed through voluntary organisations against domestic abuse or local authority services, and usually work within a multi-agency framework
independent sexual violence adviser (ISVA)	trained specialist who gives a service to victims who have experienced rape and/or sexual assault, irrespective of whether they have reported it to the police; the nature of the support provided varies depending on the needs of the individual and their particular circumstances; provides impartial information to victims about all of their options, such as reporting to the police, and accessing specialist support such as pre-trial therapy and sexual violence counselling; also provides information on other services that victims may require, for example in relation to health and social care, housing or benefits
lived experience	personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events, rather than through representations constructed by other people
multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA)	set of arrangements providing a common framework for public protection agencies to identify, assess and manage certain offenders in the community; agencies involved as responsible bodies include the police, probation trusts and prison services; other agencies may become involved, for example the Youth Justice Board will be responsible for the care of young offenders
multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)	locally held meeting where statutory and voluntary agency representatives come together and share information about people at high risk of domestic abuse; any agency can refer an adult or child they believe to be at high risk of harm; the aim of the meeting is to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase an adult or child's safety, health and wellbeing; agencies that attend vary, but are likely to include the police, probation, health and housing services; over 250 are currently in operation in England and Wales

Term	Definition
multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)	arrangements that allow organisations with responsibility for the safety of vulnerable people to collaborate; organisations work alongside each other, share information and co-ordinate activities, often through co-locating staff from the local authority, health agencies and the police; most safeguarding partner agencies support these arrangements so that risks to vulnerable children can be identified early; the MASH model was endorsed in the Munro Review of Child Protection, and The Care Act 2014 highlights the benefits of MASH arrangements to adult safeguarding professionals
multi-agency tasking and co-ordination meeting (MATAC)	agency response to managing perpetrators of domestic abuse, usually serial perpetrators
National Centre for Domestic Violence	community interest company that provides a free, fast emergency service to help survivors of domestic abuse and violence get protection against an abuser; also offers services to the police, probation service, domestic abuse organisation workers, the legal profession and judiciary; helps survivors of domestic abuse and violence to get injunctions regardless of their financial circumstances, race, gender, age, beliefs or sexual orientation
National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC)	organisation which brings together 43 operationally independent and locally accountable chief constables and their chief officer teams to co-ordinate national operational policing; works closely with the College of Policing, which is responsible for developing professional standards, to develop national approaches on matters such as finance, technology and human resources; replaced the Association of Chief Police Officers on 1 April 2015
non-molestation order	court order that victims of domestic abuse can apply for that provides a longer period of protection than other protective measures, usually 6 to 12 months; it can also be extended
Operation Encompass	process by which the police provide schools with information on domestic abuse incidents experienced by their pupils; information on a domestic abuse incident affecting a child is provided by the police to a trained member of school staff the day after officers have attended a domestic abuse incident; appropriate support can then be given, dependent upon the needs and wishes of the child

Term	Definition
Operation Soteria	series of pilot projects aiming to establish systematic improvements in police investigations of rape and sexual offences; builds on findings from Project Bluestone
outcome 15	Home Office classification used by the police to describe the finalisation of an investigation where the suspect was identified, but evidential difficulties prevented further action
outcome 16	Home Office classification used by the police to describe the finalisation of an investigation where the suspect was identified, but the victim did not support police action
outcome codes	Home Office classifications used to describe the finalisation of investigations; listed in the Home Office Counting rules , which present the national standard for recording and counting notifiable offences recorded by police forces in England and Wales (known as police recorded crime)
Pacesetter	management meeting structure some police forces use to review and manage emerging risk
partner	in relation to a police force, a public, private or voluntary sector entity, such as one concerned with health, education, housing, social care or the management of offenders, which from time to time works with the force to attain their common or complementary objectives
partnership	established collaborative working between the police and other public, private or voluntary organisations
PEEL assessments	HMICFRS inspections of police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy
perpetrator	person who purposely causes harm to another or allows harm to be done to another
police and crime commissioner (PCC)	elected entity for a police area, established under section 1, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, responsible for securing the maintenance of the police force for that area and securing that the police force is efficient and effective; holds the relevant chief constable to account for the policing of the area; establishes the budget and police and crime plan for the police force; appoints and may, after due process, remove the chief constable from office

Term	Definition
police and crime plan	plan prepared by a force's police and crime commissioner pursuant to section 7, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 which sets out how the police, community safety partners and other criminal justice agencies will work together to reduce crime in the local area; it must cover the elected local policing body's police and crime objectives, the responsibilities of the chief officer, the financial and other resources which the elected local policing body is to provide to the chief officer to exercise his or her functions, the means by which the chief officer is to report to the elected local policing body, the means by which the chief officer's performance will be measured, the services to be provided by virtue of section 143, Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and any grants which the elected local policing body is to make under that section
Project Bluestone	research programme aiming to improve the police response to rape and sexual assault; academic experts work with operational policing to explore new ways of working; initiated by Avon and Somerset Police
protected characteristics	characteristics of a person which, if established to be the basis of discrimination, will render that discrimination unlawful under the Equality Act 2010; the characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation
public protection unit	section of a police force dedicated to ensuring the safety of those in danger of becoming victims of crimes, such as child sexual exploitation, modern slavery and human trafficking, and domestic abuse
public sector equality duty	requirement for public sector bodies to consider how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act 2010
Refuge	UK charity providing specialist support for women and children experiencing domestic violence
released under investigation (RUI)	alternative to police bail that allows a suspect to be released from police custody while police investigations continue, but without conditions having been imposed

Term	Definition
restraining order	civil order made by a court that considers it necessary to protect the persons named in it from harassment or conduct that will put them in fear of violence; can be made on conviction or acquittal
risk assessment	structured professional judgment using a guide/checklist method by which the likelihood of risk is determined; completion is intended to help police officers in the decision-making process on appropriate levels of intervention for victims of domestic abuse
safeguarding	protection of an individual's health, wellbeing and human rights, enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect
SafeLives	UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone and for good; works with organisations throughout the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse; it looks at the whole picture for each individual and family to get the right help at the right time to make families everywhere safe and well
sexual exploitation	exploitation that includes rape, prostitution, sexual photography, subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts, and sexual assault or sexual acts to which a person has not consented or was pressured into consenting; adults and children can be sexually exploited
stalking	pattern of unwanted, persistent pursuit and intrusive behaviour directed by one person to another, which engenders fear and distress in the victim and is characterised by an obsessive fixation with the victim; offences under sections 2A and 4A of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; examples of the types of behaviour that may be displayed in stalking offences are given in section 2A(3) of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, and include following a person; contacting, or attempting to contact, a person by any means; and monitoring the use by a person of the internet, email or any form of electronic communication

Term	Definition
Stalking Protection Order (SPO)	civil order that can be sought by the police to enable early police intervention, pre-conviction, to address stalking behaviours before they become entrenched or escalate in severity, and to protect victims from more serious harm; there is no restriction as to the stage of the criminal justice process at which an order may be made, and depending on the circumstances an order could also be made following conviction or acquittal
strategic policing requirement	document that presents the Home Secretary's view of the national threats that the police must prepare for, and the appropriate national policing capabilities that are required to counter those threats; focuses on those areas where the Government has a responsibility for ensuring that sufficient capabilities are in place to respond to serious and cross-boundary threats; first issued in July 2012, in accordance with Section 77 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011
VAWG strategic lead	person in a police force with overall responsibility for setting the strategic direction formatters related to violence against women and girls
victim personal statement	statement written on behalf of the victim of a crime; gives victims an opportunity to describe the wider effects of the crime on them, express their concerns and say whether they need support; provisions relating to its preparation for, and use in, criminal proceedings are included in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code), October 2015
vulnerable person	person in need of special care, support or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect
Women's Aid	UK charity working to eradicate domestic violence and abuse
Wood Review	Sir Alan Wood's review of multi-agency safeguarding children arrangements in England; published May 2021

In this report, where terms such as 'victim', 'offence', 'offender', 'perpetrator' and 'crime' are used, it is often in a context where there is a suspicion an offence has been committed against a person or an allegation has been made but there has been no conviction. In using these terms in those contexts, we emphasise that there is no suggestion that the fundamental criminal justice principle of the presumption of innocence of a suspect or accused person is being disregarded, and our report should be read in that light.

September 2021 | © HMICFRS 2021

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs