

LEARNING THE LESSONS

IOPC Independent
Office for
Police Conduct

Improving policing policy and practice



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

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WELCOME



Violence against women and girls: improving the response to restore trust and confidence.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a serious problem in society, affecting policing and the police complaints system. High-profile cases involving police perpetrators or a policing response where improvements were required have harmed victim-survivors and damaged public trust and confidence. Our focus has been to support policing to improve. This issue of Learning the Lessons examines violence against women and girls in depth, with contributions from a wide range of leading experts and key stakeholders.

We are delighted to hear from the Minister for Safeguarding and VAWG Jess Phillips MP, outlining the Government’s ambition to halve violence against women and girls in a decade, and the progress made so far – you can read her feature on page 4.

In an NPCC feature article, CC Maggie Blyth, ACC Sam Millar, and AC Louisa Rolfe outline the work to implement the national policing centre for VAWG, introduce improvements to policing such as Raneem’s Law, and summarise the most recent findings of the Domestic Homicide Project.

The edition also includes news on projects such as Operation Soteria, a national operating model transforming the police response to rape and sexual offences to increase charge rates and improve support to victim-survivors. The role of Independent Sexual Violence Advocates is explained, along with the importance of engaging with victim-survivors to shape policing strategy in this area.

We share updates on how policing is addressing the problem of police perpetrated domestic abuse, explore the challenges of responding to domestic abuse in adolescent relationships, and Karma Nirvana outline their work to raise the profile of honour-based abuse and campaign for a statutory definition.

This issue also includes thought-provoking case studies, highlighting missed opportunities to safeguard vulnerable women and girls, and the dangers of slipping into inappropriate or victim-blaming behaviour. As always, we raise questions to encourage you to reflect on what you would do in a similar situation. We also outline the real-world outcomes and learning from the cases.

The IOPC is proud of its recent work in this critical area, but I am aware we must keep working with key partners across the system to continue to make progress. I would like to thank all the contributors to this important issue of Learning the Lessons. I hope that the information, insights and reflections that it contains can help everyone face the challenges head-on and improve the service for victim-survivors of violence against women and girls.

Rachel Watson
Director General, IOPC

Key to case topics

- Call handling
- Custody and detention
- Forensics & evidence gathering
- Information management
- Investigation
- Mental health
- Personal Safety
- Public protection
- Guidance

Cover photo: iStock

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Content warning

This issue contains descriptions of incidents involving sexual assault, domestic abuse, violence, and mental ill health.

Reading this content can have a triggering impact. You can call Samaritans for free on 116 123 or visit www.samaritans.org if you would like support.

Please see page 56 for more support organisations you can contact if you are affected by this issue.

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Halving VAWG in a decade: a new strategy

Jess Phillips MP discusses how the Government plans to work with the police to achieve their aim

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to Learning the Lessons. I am, and always have been, determined to help victim-survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG). As the Minister for Safeguarding and VAWG, I am working to drive real change across policing and beyond, as part of a Government which is treating VAWG as the national emergency that it is. I will use every lever available to me to halve levels of VAWG in a decade.

Throughout my career I have worked with amazing officers and leaders who have gone above and beyond to keep people safe. I know how hard officers and staff work every day to respond to VAWG offending and support victims, and I appreciate the difference they are making in people's lives. However, not everyone in policing understands or responds effectively to VAWG, and the current systems are not fit for purpose to ensure consistency. That is why reforming the police response to these crimes is a key part of the Government's mission. This includes directly addressing violence and abuse perpetrated by police officers.

Improving the police response to VAWG

The police are a crucial partner in delivering our ambition, and every force has a role ensuring that women and girls can be confident to report abuse. We are working closely with forces to restore trust and confidence, to support officers to significantly improve standards, and to ensure justice for victims.

To help achieve this, we must make sure that policing has the right skills and training to respond appropriately to victims and robustly deal with perpetrators. That is why we have committed to strengthening training on VAWG, and we are working closely with the College of Policing to put this in place.

I want to see the police relentlessly pursue high-risk

“ The Government has set out a bold ambition to halve VAWG in a decade, and policing must play its part in helping achieve it ”

perpetrators, including police perpetrators, and use all the tools at their disposal to get high-harm offenders off the streets. We are already taking steps to achieve this, including working with the National Police Chiefs' Council and the College to develop a new national approach on data-driven tools and help police prioritise and pursue the most dangerous offenders.

What have we done so far?

While I am focused on developing a new and ambitious VAWG strategy for publication this year, the Government has not been waiting to act.

In November 2024, we launched new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs). The early signs are promising, and I hope to see forces embedding DAPOs in their responses to domestic abuse, to improve victim safety.

In December 2024, we announced new measures to address stalking. Five of these are in response to recommendations directed to the Government in the recent stalking super-complaint report. This includes reviewing stalking legislation to ensure it is fit for purpose, legislating to introduce multi-agency statutory guidance on stalking and allowing the courts to impose a Stalking Protection Order upon conviction or acquittal. We will also deliver on our manifesto commitment, introducing statutory 'Right to Know'



“ I know that change is required to the police handling of complaints and misconduct ”

Photo: West Midlands Police

guidance to set out the process by which the police should release identifying information to victims about stalking perpetrators so appropriate safeguards can be put in place.

In February 2025, the Home Secretary announced £13.1 million of funding for a new National Centre for VAWG and Public Protection to drive coordination in the policing response to VAWG through evidence-based practices, support for forces and strengthened specialist training. In the same month, we delivered on a manifesto commitment, launching ‘Raneem’s Law’ to embed the first domestic abuse specialists in 999 control rooms across five police forces, ensuring that victims of domestic abuse receive more specialist support. This was established in memory of Raneem Oudeh and her mother Khaola Saleem, who were murdered by Raneem’s ex-husband in August 2018. The government will work closely with these first forces to gain understanding of how this new approach is working, to inform a national roll-out and new statutory guidance.

What more are we going to do?

We have made several commitments to transform the criminal justice response to sexual offences. This includes ensuring there is a specialist Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) team in every police force and introducing free, independent legal advice for victims of adult rape. We will also continue to work with police to equip them with the right powers to respond to RASSO, bring perpetrators to justice and manage sex offenders.

Cases of police-perpetrated VAWG are unacceptable and damage trust and confidence in the police. Women and the wider public deserve to have confidence in the officers that serve them. To that

end we are working with policing partners to implement recommendations from Part 1 of the Angiolini Inquiry and will consider further findings when available. I also know that change is required to the police handling of complaints and misconduct, which is why, in October 2024, we announced reforms to the complaints, misconduct and vetting systems. These changes will improve trust and confidence by enabling forces to remove officers who simply should not be in policing. This includes those convicted of certain criminal offences automatically amounting to gross misconduct and allowing a presumption of dismissal where gross misconduct is proven. However, the Government will go further and is considering options on strengthening the requirements on forces to suspend officers under investigation for domestic abuse and sexual offences.

Conclusion

The Government has set out a bold ambition to halve VAWG in a decade, and policing must play its part in helping achieve it. However, this means looking across the whole criminal justice system and beyond. We will go further than before to deliver a cross-Government approach, underpinned by the new strategy. I know there is a long way to go to meet our aim, however we are taking steps in the right direction. I am grateful for the part police are playing in this vital mission, and appreciate the valuable work of the IOPC providing accountability and assurance to policing. ■

Jess Phillips is the Minister for Safeguarding and VAWG, and MP for Birmingham Yardley



Our case studies: an overview

The IOPC oversees the police complaints system, reviewing police complaint handling and conducting investigations. We also share learning from our work to improve police policy and practice, to improve trust and confidence in policing.

We understand that violence against women and girls and the police response to it has a significant impact on public trust and confidence, which informed our focus of this issue of Learning the Lessons.

In this magazine, we have carefully selected nine case studies to share with you. They are based on real investigations and reviews the IOPC has completed, highlighting some of the types of cases we often see.

Many of the case studies demonstrate clear examples of missed opportunities to safeguard victim-survivors of violence against women and girls. The sobering reality is that each case study represents a devastating outcome for these women and girls, and the people in their lives. As we will see from the other content in this issue, these cases are not isolated incidents, and we recognise work is ongoing across policing to address this. We share these case studies to ask readers to reflect on opportunities to improve policies and practices to prevent similar adverse incidents. This includes readers working in public protection, specialist roles such as Domestic Abuse or Sexual Offences teams, call handlers, dispatchers, professional standards departments, training teams, line management roles, and frontline officers and staff.

Some of the case studies highlight inappropriate behaviour, victim-blaming and police culture impacting

the service victim-survivors receive. These case studies may feel reflective of scenarios you have encountered, heard about, or could imagine facing, and are intended to encourage you to consider your own knowledge and confidence. For example, how can you prioritise victim-survivor safety while working in a challenging environment? How confident do you feel to identify and address empathy fatigue or victim-blaming in yourself or a colleague? Do you have sufficient training on key issues like risk assessment, safeguarding and engaging with victim-survivors? Are you aware of the expectations, best practice, and all the tools available to you?

We include case topic symbols at the top of the page so you can quickly identify cases involving themes relevant to your role. All our case studies include reflective questions for readers, designed to unpack key learning opportunities. We ask you to consider your own answers to those questions, and encourage your colleagues or team to do the same. By sharing learning from our work, we hope to encourage you to consider opportunities to improve police policy and practice in response to violence against women and girls, so that everyone can have trust and confidence in policing. ■



Hannah Haederle-Collier is the Learning and Improvement Lead at the IOPC.

CASE STUDY 1

Inappropriate language by an officer during a domestic incident



This case was independently investigated by the IOPC.

A woman contacted the police and reported that her partner had pushed her and was controlling her. She said she was hiding in the bedroom in his house, that she was “afraid” and wanted to go to a refuge.

Officers went to the address. PC A was with the woman when PCs B and C arrived. She disclosed that she had been assaulted by her partner the night before, the incident had been reported by her son and the police had attended and removed her from the house.

PC B asked, “What’s happened today then?” and PC A stated there had been an “argument”.

PCs D and E attended and spoke to the man.

The IOPC investigation noted that the man had taken full control of her money and had isolated her from seeing her friends and family. She also disclosed he was controlling when she could leave the house and where she could go.

The woman also stated he had attempted to get her to alter her statement in relation to another incident.

G College of Policing Major Investigation and Public Protection Authorised Professional Practice: Context and dynamics of domestic abuse

Controlling or coercive behaviour can take a range of forms but often involves micro-managing the victim’s daily life in an identifiable pattern. In many relationships, there are occasions when one person makes a decision on behalf of another [...]. Officers and staff dealing with domestic abuse incidents should be alert to patterns of behaviour that could be controlling or coercive.

More information

www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/context-and-dynamics-domestic-abuse

The officers discussed both accounts. PCs D and E arrested the man on suspicion of witness intimidation and coercive and controlling behaviour and took him to the police station.

PCs B and C took the woman to her home, as she wanted to provide them with a statement.

Once there, PC C carried out a DASH (domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence) risk assessment. PC B was not present. Once the DASH was completed PC C invited the woman to provide a statement, but she no longer felt able to.

Following this incident, PC B completed the paperwork. He recorded that the woman “refused to provide” a statement. He also noted that the woman could not confirm where her money went.

PC B considered whether there was enough evidence to charge the man without a witness statement. He also considered if there was enough information to prove controlling behaviour or to state the man was receiving the woman’s money in his bank account.

For a short period of time PC B took PC C’s electronic pocket notebook (EPNB). PC C did not feel this was right and sought advice from his former tutor officer.

The following day, PC C reviewed the incident log. He noted there had been two images of notes uploaded, one of which stated that the woman did not want the police to pursue the matter.

A tutor officer brought PC C’s concerns to his Sergeant and Inspector. The Inspector reviewed the incident log and discovered PC B had signed his EPNB on the woman’s behalf. When challenged about this, he used derogatory language to describe her.

The sergeant spoke to PC D who stated that PC B’s demeanour when speaking to potential victim-survivors at previous domestic incidents was inappropriate and dismissive.

The IOPC investigation noted that PC B had dealt with the woman before and was aware of her history. When dealing with this incident PC B had told PC D that he did not see this incident progressing further. The IOPC investigation noted that this may have prejudiced how the investigation would progress.

In the IOPC interview PC B was asked if his previous dealings with the woman had affected his views of her. He did not answer this question.

The IOPC investigation noted that by using offensive language to describe the woman, PC B had failed to consider the woman’s vulnerabilities or take them into consideration when dealing with her at this incident. Such victim-blaming language and attitudes being used by a police officer are ‘inappropriate’.

The police carried out a series of safeguarding

enquiries and spoke with the woman. She stated that she did not feel able to provide a statement and had made that decision without any influence from officers. ■

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS, POLICY MAKERS AND TRAINERS

- How can you ensure officers and staff are using appropriate language and taking a trauma-informed approach when talking to victim-survivors?
- How has your force used the IOPC’s guidance on “Ending victim blaming in the context of violence against women and girls” in your local policy, guidance or training?
- What processes are available for your workforce to raise concerns, and are they aware of these?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND STAFF

- How would you raise a concern about a colleague?
- What support can you provide to a repeat victim-survivor of domestic abuse who does not feel able to support police action?

ACTION TAKEN BY THE FORCE

- The force supported the IOPC throughout the investigation and attended court to provide evidence.

OUTCOMES FOR THE OFFICERS AND STAFF INVOLVED

In this investigation PC B was found to have a case to answer for gross misconduct.

A separate IOPC investigation was referred to the Crown Prosecution Service. PC B was convicted of misconduct in public office and received a suspended sentence.

The separate IOPC investigation had already found PC B had a case to answer for gross misconduct. He faced disciplinary proceedings for breaching the Standards of Professional Behaviour for honesty and integrity; authority, respect and courtesy; duties and responsibilities and discreditable conduct. As a result, he was dismissed and placed on the barred list, before the case to answer decision in this investigation.

Beyond blame: transforming our language to improve trust in policing

Claire Norton introduces IOPC guidance on ending victim blaming

Words don't simply convey facts – they reflect values, create narratives, shape our culture and influence our behaviour. Language can even leave its own legacy. Consider how accounts are recorded in systems. If the file contains victim-blaming language, it may impact life opportunities if it is required for employment, housing or personal reasons. In the context of violence against women and girls (VAWG), victim blaming can be incredibly damaging by transferring the responsibility for harm from the perpetrator to the victim-survivor. This can have a profound effect on recovery and self-identity. These far-reaching implications create a significant barrier to tackling VAWG and preventing future harm.

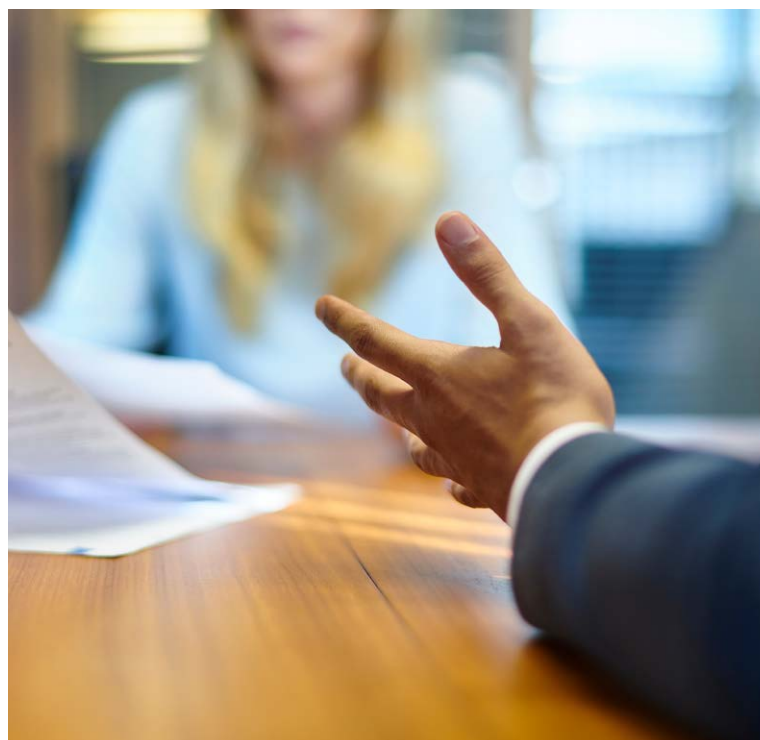
In March 2024, the IOPC published guidance on 'Ending victim blaming' in the context of VAWG to support policing professionals to improve their communication with victim-survivors. The guidance sets direction through key principles and promotes a victim-centric approach, in line with learning being applied across policing.

A history of harmful narratives

Developing our guidance cast a light on the pervasive problem of victim blaming attitudes in our society and culture, permeating the systems tasked with protecting victims.

The language used to describe victim-survivors often perpetuates harmful narratives. Questions that focus on the victim-survivor's behaviour, rather than the actions of the perpetrator, reinforce damaging stereotypes. This discourages victim-survivors from seeking support and empowers perpetrators.

We may unintentionally display subconscious victim-blaming attitudes through our words and behaviours. To protect ourselves from the victim-survivor's trauma, we may assume we would behave differently to reject the possibility that we are equally vulnerable to the same experience. Awareness is key to managing empathy fatigue.



“ When engaging with victim-survivors, think carefully about your body language, gestures, and how you structure questions ”

Impact on policing

Policing is not immune to victim blaming. Investigation reports, incident logs and statements reveal that unconscious bias can set the tone for an investigation, even influencing outcomes.

An academic study (Lynn and Canning) highlighted critical issues in “institutional retelling”, particularly through MG3 forms which police used to summarise evidence when making a charging referral. The research demonstrated how additions, omissions and

transformations in wording significantly altered the narrative in domestic violence incidents. This framing distorted the reality of abuse and even influenced decision-making, including charging decisions.

Journey to new guidance: key principles

Words alone will not solve systemic issues within policing, but they are a powerful tool. Getting them right is essential.

We recognised at the IOPC that as part of the system, we are part of the problem. Examining our work, we identified instances where we used victim blaming language ourselves or did not challenge its use by others. This led to us developing internal resources to improve our own work before creating our guidance to support policing. We also want to encourage others to reflect on their language, identify assumptions and unlearn biases so we can all be part of the solution.

Our guidance was shaped by invaluable input from victim-survivors, charities, policing professionals and academics. Their perspective helped produce key principles to follow when engaging with victim-survivors.

1. Focus on the perpetrator's actions

Language should clearly establish the offender's responsibility. Consider 'the suspect gained entry to the victim's home' not, 'the victim allowed the suspect into their home'.

2. Use neutral language

Avoid language that implies blame or judgement. Phrasing such as 'the victim-survivor willingly consumed alcohol' implies complicity where 'the victim-survivor had consumed alcohol' remains a neutrally stated fact.

In the event of a burglary, it would usually be recorded that a member of the public 'reported they were burgled' rather than 'alleged they were burgled'. Practitioners should adopt a similar approach and record 'reported they were raped'.

When practitioners record violence against women and girls as having 'allegedly' happened, it risks casting doubt on the truth of the report from the beginning.

3. Use active voice

Using 'passive voice' can shift the focus onto the victim-survivor. Changing a sentence into the active voice from, 'Y was beaten by X', to 'X beat Y' makes it clear who is committing the abuse.

4. Avoid assumptions and leading phrasing

Consider how questions are asked during the investigation. Reframe enquiries to explore events without assigning blame.

5. Show contextual awareness

Language needs to reflect a nuanced understanding of trauma. Victim-survivors may react in ways that seem counterintuitive to those unfamiliar with a trauma response. Avoid suggesting that resistance or delayed reporting undermines credibility.

The role of intersectionality

Intersectionality acknowledges that an individual's experience is influenced by overlapping factors such as race, class, sexuality and disability. It's equally important to understand how power, privilege and vulnerability manifest in society. Our approach to victim-survivors can be improved by being aware of the multiple barriers they may face.

What have we done since?

Changing established habits requires collective effort and leadership. We aim to improve victim-survivor trust and confidence in policing by raising awareness and encouraging self-reflection.

Since publication, we have continued promoting best practice internally through training and dip sampling our work on VAWG. Externally, we continue to promote our guidance and have been delivering presentations and workshops for policing and non-policing stakeholders.

Response from policing stakeholders

After our workshop sessions on the guidance at the NPCC VAWG Conference on 20 May 2024, a senior figure in policing said, "We had some great feedback from those that attended."

After presenting our guidance to City of London Police, the organiser said, "A massive thank you to you both for presenting earlier, the feedback so far has been fantastic and certainly will have impact."

Find our guidance in full on the IOPC website:

www.policconduct.gov.uk/publications/violence-against-women-and-girls-victim-blaming-guidance-feb-2024

Other supporting publications:

Lynn and Canning (2023) 'Additions, Omissions, and Transformations in Institutional Retelling of Domestic Violence'.

Claire Norton is a Policy and Engagement Officer at the IOPC



Police response to stalking: a call to action

Jane Crane discusses our joint investigation into the stalking super-complaint

Stalking is a serious crime that can have a devastating impact on victims. It is a crime that has not always been well understood within policing, across the criminal justice system or by wider society.

In November 2022 the Suzy Lamplugh Trust made a super-complaint about the police response to stalking on behalf of the National Stalking Consortium. The super-complaints system aims to identify and address broad or systemic issues in policing. The IOPC, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and the College of Policing conducted a joint investigation into this super-complaint.

Although awareness of the problems and risks associated with stalking has increased across policing, our investigation found that significant problems persist with the police response to stalking. Further changes and improvements are needed to ensure that all victims who report stalking to the police are taken seriously and receive an appropriate response.

While our investigation found examples of the police taking stalking seriously, safeguarding victims well and carrying out good investigations, in too many cases the police response was not good enough and victims were being let down. In September 2024, we published our joint investigation report, featuring 29 recommendations to police and other agencies to address these issues, including:

- Steps chief constables should take to improve the quality of stalking investigations
- Changes to the criminal law on stalking to make it easier to understand and apply
- Making stalking protection orders simpler and easier for the police to use

Consider the stalking mnemonic **FOUR**. Are the behaviours:

- › **F**ixated
- › **O**bsessive
- › **U**nwanted
- › **R**epeated

- Closer working between police and support services to improve the service provided to victims

What changes are being made in response?

We are pleased that the Government responded to our investigation report by committing to review the law in relation to stalking, to make it clearer and easier to apply. They are also looking at how the legal framework around stalking protection orders might be improved. The Government has agreed to publish more data on stalking offences and to issue statutory guidance on stalking, and standards for stalking perpetrator intervention programmes.

The College has already updated its e-learning and Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on stalking and harassment. It is now undertaking a more detailed update of its APP to the police on responding to stalking.

What can the police do now to improve their response to stalking?

We know that some of our proposed changes will take time to put in place. Our investigation also identified that policing should do more now to improve its response to stalking. This involves following/applying the existing guidance, which includes:

- **Identifying stalking effectively** - There are tools and aides available that can help, such as the mnemonic FOUR (Fixated, Obsessive, Unwanted, Repeated) which provides a reminder of the key markers of stalking. The NPCC has also worked with the College to release a stalking screening tool to all forces, which is designed to support the identification of stalking behaviours and to prompt early safeguarding actions.
- **Properly assessing and managing risk in all stalking cases, including recognising the heightened risk associated with breaches of protective orders** – Risk assessments must be undertaken in all stalking cases regardless of whether the stalking takes place in a domestic or non-domestic context. Advice on available risk tools is included in the College stalking or harassment APP.
- **Taking a victim-centred approach** – This includes ensuring that victim needs assessments are completed, victims of stalking are referred to appropriate specialist victim support services and that the police response considers the impact of stalking on the victim.

Where to find further information

Our super-complaint investigation report and all the responses to our recommendations:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/super-complaint-on-the-police-response-to-stalking

Guidance for police officers and staff on stalking or harassment:

www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/stalking-or-harassment

Stalking screening tool: library.college.police.uk/docs/NPCC/Stalking-screening-tool.docx

Examples of innovative and promising practice in the policing response to stalking:

www.college.police.uk/support-forces/practices

Jane Crane is the Super-complaints Lead at the IOPC



“It should have immediately been recognised as a potential stalking case... when it got to that point, I felt reassured, I felt taken seriously and I felt more confident in the police. But it took too long .”

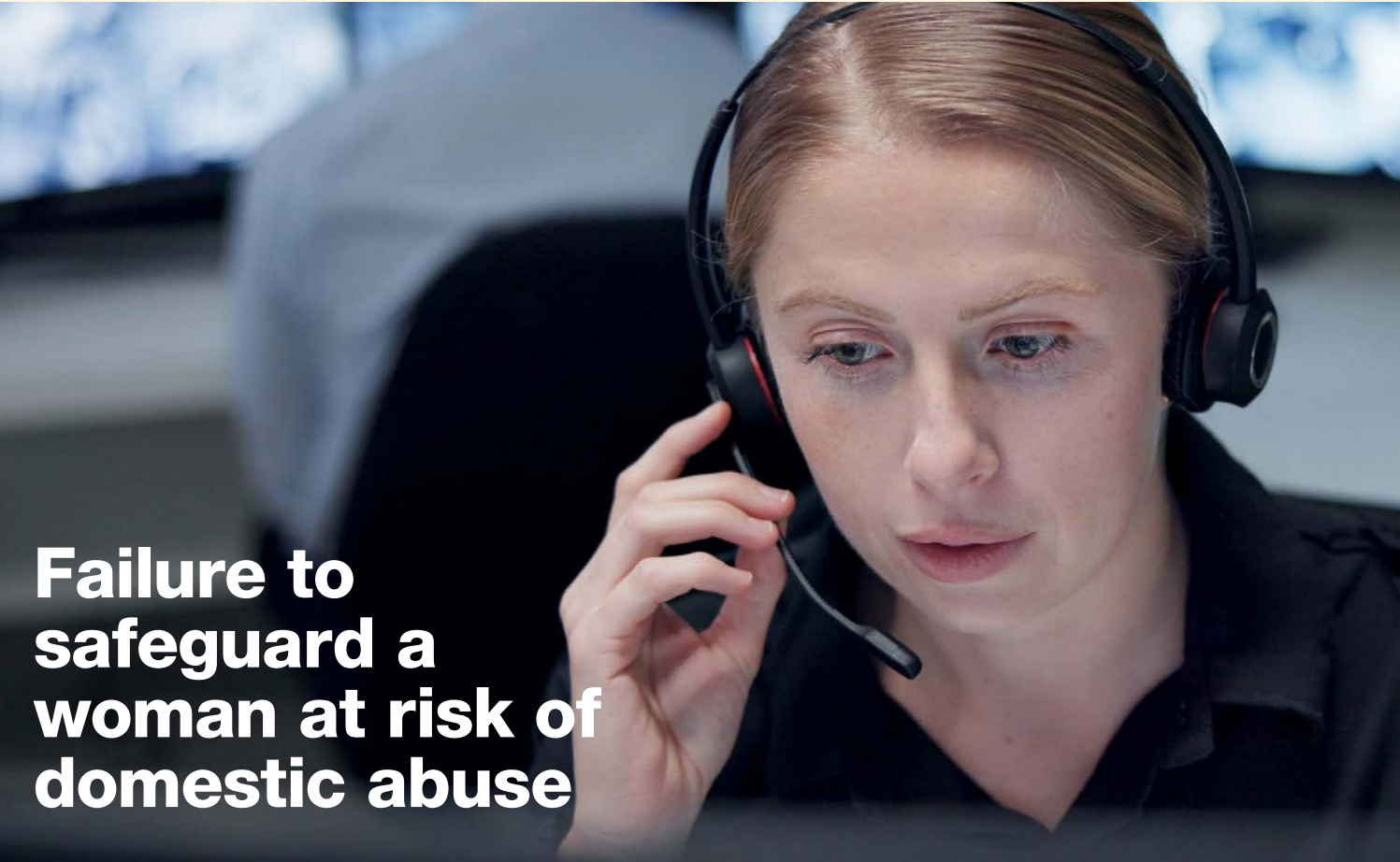
Stalking victim interview – Super-complaint report on the police response to stalking

During our investigation, we were encouraged to hear about examples of promising practice in some forces – including multi-agency responses to stalking and the innovative use of analytical software to process digital evidence in stalking cases. The College has added these examples to its online practice bank, and we have asked forces to consider where they can be applied more widely.

All police forces have now published action plans on their own websites setting out the steps they are taking to respond to our recommendations.

We are seeing promising signs of improvement – but the proof will be in the delivery of a better and more consistent service to victims. We look forward to the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) reporting on the progress made across policing, later this year.

CASE STUDY 2



Failure to safeguard a woman at risk of domestic abuse

This case was independently investigated by the IOPC.

Over a two-year period, police investigated multiple reports of a man’s domestic abuse against his partner, but he was not charged with any offences. The risk to the woman was assessed as ‘standard’ or ‘medium’.

The woman received support from a charity to leave the man after his behaviour escalated. After police arrested him for voyeurism – he had installed CCTV to monitor her at home – the risk was reassessed as ‘high’ but then downgraded to ‘standard’ based on the length of the relationship and a report that they were attending relationship counselling. Police released the man with bail conditions, including not contacting the woman or going to her home.

A multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) reviewed the case and considered the risk to be ‘high’. The MARAC manager later remarked that it could be difficult to challenge police risk assessments.

Around this time, the woman successfully applied for a non-molestation order.

Weeks later the woman reported the man was following her car and that she managed to film him doing this. The call was assigned as ‘medium’. While completing a risk assessment, the woman disclosed the man had raped her some time ago. The woman

later said she told the officers that the man would “kill” her if she reported it but believed telling them “everything” would help, and was told the man would be arrested if she gave her statement. Officer A was advised to take a first account from the woman and pass it on to a different team so that a specialist officer could conduct an Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview. No one was available that day.

Supervisory officers made the decision not to arrest the man. There were several reasons for this: his whereabouts were not known, and his car registration had been added to police systems so that police would be alerted if the car was spotted. It was decided that, without an ABE interview, it was not appropriate to arrest the man for rape. Police assessed the risk to the woman as ‘medium’, adding a rationale, but seemingly not considering the man’s escalating behaviour. At this point there were several investigations into the man being dealt with by officers from multiple teams.

Over the following days, the woman asked police for updates several times. She handed her phone in for examination, providing another contact number. The new number was not linked to the woman or her address on police systems. Police completed a further risk assessment. This was not counter-signed

– and therefore not reviewed – by a supervising officer, against policy. Risk stayed at ‘medium’. Investigation of the stalking, voyeurism and rape offences was assigned to Officer B, who was on rest days. Other officers investigated the breaches of bail and the non-molestation order.

Increasingly frightened, the woman called police several times for updates. Officer B, having not read the email regarding the woman’s new phone number, tried unsuccessfully to contact her on the old one.

The woman reported further offences, which were dealt with by another two officers, with new crime reports created. Officer C was tasked with creating a ‘wanted file’ for the man but had administrative issues with the non-molestation order. They escalated the matter before going on rest days but there was a shortage of supervisors.

Some days later, the man was detained for breaching the non-molestation order. Officer C returned to four further investigations involving the man, including a threat to kill the woman. The woman wasn’t provided with one point of contact. Officer B later said that having several different teams and officers involved was not appropriate for the woman and the investigations were “all over the place.” There was also still a shortage of supervising officers.

Two officers looked at the various crime reports, some duplicated. They decided to take a further account from the woman, but it was agreed that officers from a domestic abuse unit should take an account from the woman about the rape.

A supervising officer, Officer E, reviewed the cases and considered remand. After consulting with a more senior officer, they concluded there was insufficient evidence to go to the Crown Prosecution Service and the man should be released with bail conditions. They amended the risk assessment to ‘high’, with further safety planning. Based on incomplete information recorded on police systems, the custody sergeant and on-duty inspector decided to release the man on bail with conditions not to contact the woman. Officer E called the woman to inform her.

The following day, an officer discussed safeguarding with the woman, who requested a panic alarm for her home, but was given a hand-held alarm instead.

A day later, the man stabbed the woman in her home. She called police for help. Records show that the operator asked the woman numerous questions, including her home address – this information was not available to them because the phone number had not been linked to the woman on police systems. The woman survived her injuries. The man was convicted of attempted murder. ■

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS, POLICY MAKERS AND TRAINERS

- How does your force ensure consistency and oversight of multiple investigations relating to the same suspect and victim-survivor, managing risk and record keeping, and maintaining contact?
- What policies does your force have in place around obtaining digital evidence from victim-survivors, and ensuring contact details and safety plans are updated as a result?
- Does your force provide training to frontline officers on handling breaches of bail conditions and protective orders?
- How does your force mitigate risks to victim-survivors where there is a shortage of resources?
- Are you confident in your force’s relationships with MARAC managers and members? Do you think your force is open to being challenged by them?
- What is your force’s policy on allocating enquiries to officers on rest days where the victim-survivor is at ‘medium’ or ‘high’ risk?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND STAFF

- How confident are you in using risk assessment tools for domestic abuse and stalking?
- Would you know what to do if the validity of a protective order was questioned?
- Do you understand how cumulative risk increases the risk of harm?

LEARNING RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION TAKEN

- The IOPC issued five learning recommendations to the police force regarding guidance for officers when multiple investigations involve the same parties; training on domestic abuse and handling protective orders; and processes to ensure all relevant information, including advice from fellow professionals and safeguarding plans, are uploaded onto police systems.

OUTCOMES FOR THE OFFICERS AND STAFF INVOLVED

Officer E did not have a case to answer for misconduct. They were referred to the reflective practice review process to learn from the incident.

Multi-agency approach to combating stalking: An officer's perspective

Detective Sergeant David Thomason answers our questions about the work of the Cheshire Harm Reduction Unit

What three words best describe your role?

Interesting - I'm still surprised by the diversity of cases I see, and stalkers find so many ways to impact their victims. Stalkers exploit new technology to gain access to their victims, and the legislation struggles to catch up. Just when I think I've 'seen it all', I am still learning new investigative tactics.

Challenging - Despite all the progress we have made in raising awareness of the dangerous behaviour of stalking, I still feel like I have to convince both professionals and victims – it's a battle. Small wonder that many victims don't report or find barriers when they do.

Relentless - We receive reports of stalking every day. The stakes are always high, and stalkers are determined, often feeling unconstrained by legal boundaries because they don't accept their behaviour is criminal. I think this is why my team are relentless in holding stalkers to account, and why successful outcomes feel so gratifying.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

The flaws in our legislation constantly present practical barriers. As a specialist in this area it's still difficult to explain to police officers what the law says (or doesn't say) about the difference between stalking and harassment. It's even harder for victims. This causes problems in the policing response, risk management, prosecutions and sentencing.

What is the biggest misconception about your role?

That I run a 'treatment programme' for stalkers. We are an integrated stalking risk management service. 'Integrated' means that we are co-located and collaborate with health care, probation and victims' advocacy professionals as one entity. Whilst we do offer a therapeutic input for some stalkers, the Harm Reduction Unit is by no means a 'treatment'

“Stalkers exploit new technology to gain access to their victims, and the legislation struggles to catch up”

or care programme. Any therapeutic intervention is accompanied by a range of other psychological, social and legal interventions. It's certainly not a case of diverting all stalkers out of the Criminal Justice System (or conversely, prosecuting them all). The therapeutic input is a relatively small but significant part of how we manage risk.

What part does learning play in the unit?

"Beware the expert!" as that label implies there is nothing more to learn. I'm still amazed at how the evidence-base and literature on stalking is evolving, especially the rapidly changing use of technology and the techniques required to investigate this. I regularly share research and policy updates with my team to try and keep abreast of the latest developments. We're always scrutinising our operations to refine our work, managing our limited time and resources to add value where it makes the biggest difference to victims.

How has the collaborative model with partners impacted your work?

We can all do our jobs better to give stalking victims a

domestic abuse as 'serious crime' was an important positive step.

Following the publication of the stalking super-complaint, the current government is now looking at a duty for local area agencies to collaborate more closely in tackling stalking. Collaboration being optional created a 'postcode lottery' for victims, so this would bring more consistency.

How has your unit developed skills in other areas of your force and how do you share learning more widely?

When this multi-agency journey started, I knew this specialised service could not reach its full impact in isolation; we needed the whole organisation and our partners on board and aligned. The Harm Reduction Unit provides initial anti-stalking training to new recruits as well as regular role-specific inputs. We also provide free training to agencies in Cheshire who encounter stalkers and their victims.

We can measure success in our crime and outcome statistics, but also our consistent improvements to narrative and culture around stalking. I regret we can't spend more time writing papers and spreading the message, because we're so busy on the frontline! Senior leaders help us effect change by breaking down barriers, overseeing performance, and sharing the evidence and learning from our work.

Finally, what one tip would you share?

The National Stalking Helpline's 'Am I being stalked?' tool, developed by Suzy Lamplugh Trust, is really useful. It can be used when people aren't sure if they are being stalked, or they are reluctant to report it. It can also be used by police, professionals, or people who are worried about someone they care about. Like any problem, you need to name it before you can start to fix it. We know people have reached out and reported with more confidence after using it. The tool asks a series of questions, explains what might be happening, provides guidance, and gives options. ■

Further information:

www.suzylamplugh.org/am-i-being-stalked-tool

DS David Thomason is force stalking SPOC at Cheshire Constabulary



The new National Operating Model for investigating rape and serious sexual offences

Assistant Chief Constable Dee Perkins introduces how Operation Soteria is transforming the police response to rape and sexual assault investigations.

The epidemic of violence against women and girls (VAWG) directly impacts policing, with an estimated 2,959 crimes recorded daily. From April 2022 to March 2023, VAWG offending accounted for almost 20% of all police recorded crime; the Metropolitan Police received on average 24 reports of rape per day in 2023. In 2018, rape charges fell to the lowest recorded levels, with less than two percent of reported rapes resulting in a charge. Reported offences still do not provide the full picture of gender-based violence, as police recorded 194,434 sexual offences in the year ending June 2024, yet the Office for National Statistics estimated that 1.1 million people aged 16 or over experienced sexual assault.

Operation Soteria aims to address this with the following principles:

- **Victim-centred** – victims' rights and interests inform investigator decision making
- **Suspect-focused** – specialist knowledge about sexual offending behaviour and its impact on victims informs investigation and prevention strategies
- **Context-led** – investigators consider the context of the offence, suspect, and victim from the start of the investigation

We want to transform the police response to rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) and provide better



outcomes and procedural justice for all, relentlessly pursuing perpetrators.

The Soteria journey began in 2021, when Professors Betsy Stanko and Katrin Hohl, with a team of over 50 academics, led a deep dive in Avon and Somerset Constabulary.

Known then as Operation Bluestone, the research approach taken between police and academics necessitated policing truly opening their doors to academia and allowing them full access to people and material. The honesty and transparency of officers and staff involved enabled the breadth and depth of the research.

Following this, we developed the National Operating Model (NOM) with over 90 products to support policing to drive improvements in RASSO investigations.

The learning from Operation Soteria has supported the implementation of the NOM, with new learning material co-designed by the Soteria academics, the College of Policing, and the National Police Chiefs Council. This training supports the effective delivery of the NOM.

Continuous Professional Development is built into the NOM to underpin the learning. The current guidance supported by the Operation Soteria Joint Unit helps operational investigators and leaders to better understand the NOM, and how the products help officers deliver the investigators' journey with confidence. This learning is imperative to improve justice outcomes and the experiences of victims and officers.

Case Study

Detective Chief Superintendent Zara Brown, Head of Public Protection and Crime Command at Bedfordshire Police reflected on their experience of Operation Soteria. They started with self-assessment and encouraged their teams to fully embrace the programme. Over the past 12 months, the force has seen a steady increase in charge rates. It has been instrumental in driving performance and cultural change, fostering a more victim-centred and suspect-focused approach. By prioritising the needs and experiences of victims, and implementing the NOM products, RASSO officers feel more confident in their knowledge and skills to investigate effectively and build a more rounded file for court.

The remarkable early success of Operation Soteria in Bedfordshire serves as a powerful example of how dedicated efforts and strategic initiatives can lead to meaningful change, and we hope to see continued progress and improvements.

At the beginning of 2024, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) conducted an inspection into a selection of pathfinder and expansion forces. Their report, published in August 2024, described Soteria as a "game changer" that is enabling a victim-centred culture. HMICFRS evaluation and our own insights identified the cultural change in officers' attitudes and how they are applying the Soteria principles. Officers have improved awareness of offender behaviour and forces have a deeper understanding of targeting repeat suspects and identifying high-risk, high-harm offenders.

The NOM focuses on the supervisor role, introducing critical reflection, guidance on case numbers, and the importance of meaningful supervision time with officers. It also encourages the use of early Crown Prosecution Service advice and promotes best practice in digital investigations, investigation strategies, and parameters for third party material. We have seen improved supervision and investigation standards in RASSO cases.

Without any legislative changes, charge rates have more than trebled to 7% and are now the highest since 2017. We believe the true figure is higher, considering the significant backlog of cases awaiting charging decisions. This shows the impact of Operation Soteria, although there is still more to do to increase charge rates.

We also know we still need to do more to improve victims' experiences, focus on suspects and the context around their offending, and tackle archaic views. This requires us welcoming scrutiny and 'lifting the stones' to understand what we need to improve. As well as improving officer training and culture, we also need to look after the wellbeing of our staff.

Operation Soteria sets new standards in the fight against gender-based violence, ensuring that the voices of victims are heard and respected. It provides our staff with the right skills, knowledge, and attitude to make a difference through a victim-centred, suspect-focused and context-led approach. Soteria creates a supportive ecosystem for organisations to successfully respond to RASSO, but most importantly, it is making a positive difference to victims. ■

ACC Dee Perkins is the Strategic Programme Director for Operation Soteria



CASE STUDY 3



Police handling of a rape investigation

This case was locally investigated by the force. The IOPC reviewed the investigation to decide whether there was an indication that a person serving with the police may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a manner which would justify disciplinary proceedings.

A woman reported she was a victim-survivor of rape and attended a sexual assault referral centre for a forensic medical examination. A Sexual Offences Investigations Trained (SOIT) officer, supported by a detective constable, interviewed the woman and took her statement.

The officers explained initial investigatory steps such as evidence-gathering for potential CCTV and witness accounts. The officers shared that the prospect of identifying the offender without evidence was low.

There was a positive DNA result which matched a man whose details were already in the system, however officers did not inform the woman of this.

A few weeks after the officers became aware of the positive DNA result, the woman withdrew her support from the investigation. At this point she had not been informed about the match.

Two years later, the woman was contacted by a different officer and was told there had been another rape, in which DNA evidence revealed the perpetrator to be the same man. He had been identified from his DNA being on record from previous criminal activity.

The woman queried how her case was linked to this incident since she was not aware of any available DNA evidence.

The officer established that neither the detective constable nor the SOIT officer shared this update with the victim-survivor. Additionally, the SOIT logbook could not be located.

The SOIT officer explained that they did not disclose a DNA match because the victim-survivor could not remember details of the suspect and had withdrawn from the investigation shortly after the DNA match returned. The SOIT officer said that if this information changed the victim-survivor’s mind, it may have undermined the case.

The woman made a complaint about the police. She requested the IOPC review the outcome of the force’s investigation into her complaint.

The IOPC review noted that in line with the Victims’ Code of Practice and other guidance, the update should have been shared with the victim-survivor for her to make an informed decision on whether to support the investigation.

Informing victim-survivors with updates is in line with the National Operating Model for investigating Rape and Serious Sexual Offences.

G Statutory Guidance: Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victims’ Code)

‘Right 6. To be provided with information about the investigation and prosecution.

You have the Right to be provided with updates on your case and to be told when important decisions are taken..’

More information
www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime/code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime-in-england-and-wales-victims-code

The IOPC review also noted conflicting accounts from the two officers over who was responsible for sharing key updates with the victim-survivor. While the update was recorded on the crime report, the IOPC could not locate any record that outlined the agreed working parameters between the two officers. This should have been contained within the SOIT logbook. ■

G College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice, Working with victims and witnesses

‘If a specialist officer is deployed to assist an investigator, an accurate record must be maintained on the crime report, policy log or file outlining the specific role of the specialist officer. The investigator and the specialist officer need to maintain close contact. This can be achieved by regular meetings to brief and debrief each other.’

More information
www.college.police.uk/app/investigation/working-victims-and-witnesses

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS, POLICY MAKERS AND TRAINERS

- What does best practice look like when information is shared between investigator and specialist officer?
- What training does your force give officers on the Victims’ Code of Practice (VCOP)?
- How does your force handle complaints about dissatisfaction with VCOP updates?
- Does your force provide officers with clear guidance on how and when to share updates with victim-survivors, including in situations where they have withdrawn support for the investigation?
- Does your force use paper SOIT logbooks or have these been digitised to ensure accurate records management?
- Is the current guidance outlining the roles and responsibilities for specialist sexual offences investigators a victim-centred approach, a core principle to the National Operating Model?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND STAFF

- How would you ensure that any significant updates are shared with victim-survivors?
- What steps can you take to ensure information is accurately recorded and appropriately shared?
- When you are working closely with other officers on an investigation, how do you make sure that you each have clarity on who is responsible for completing tasks, including providing updates to victim-survivors?

LEARNING RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION TAKEN

- The IOPC issued two learning recommendations to the force and asked that they review and update their SOIT guidance. They asked them to set clear expectations of the SOIT role and their responsibilities in relation to investigation sexual offences; and in sharing information between the investigative team and victim-survivor.
- The force has combined several separate policies into one standard operating procedure (SOP) for rape and serious sexual offences with specific reference to the division of responsibility when updating the victim-survivor. The force will publish the SOP internally and make it available to officers and staff.

OUTCOMES FOR THE OFFICERS AND STAFF INVOLVED

The officers did not have a case to answer for misconduct and did not face disciplinary proceedings.

The SOIT officer was referred to the reflective practice review process (RPRP) and later received further training to learn from the incident.

The detective constable was also referred to RPRP regarding effective investigation management.

There was no indication that any other person serving with the police may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a manner which would justify the bringing of disciplinary proceedings.

Partnership working: advocates and policing

Kate Garner answers our questions about their work managing an Independent Sexual Violence Advocate/Advisor (ISVA) service

What is the role of an ISVA?

An ISVA provides proactive crisis intervention, advocacy and support to victims and survivors of sexual violence, who are engaging or considering engaging with the criminal justice process.

At Solace, our North London Rape Crisis ISVA service supports women, trans women, and non-binary people (age 13+), helping them make sense of a complex and confusing justice system. We help them to navigate the process and to access other support, such as housing, health and therapeutic services. We are independent from the Police, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and social care, though we work closely with them.

ISVAs perform diverse and challenging roles, offering various types of advocacy support. They are based within different organisations, including specialist sexual violence and abuse organisations, sexual assault referral centres or Rape Crisis centres.

What misconceptions are held about ISVAs?

There are three common misconceptions:

- 1) 'ISVAs perform the same role as Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs).' There can be crossover, but the roles differ. An IDVA works closely with victims who have experienced domestic abuse and are at high risk of harm. ISVAs provide ongoing continuity, advocacy, impartial advice and support to victims of sexual violence engaging with the criminal justice process – a potentially re-traumatising experience. An ISVA will often provide long-term support, as a charging decision can take many years.
- 2) 'ISVAs can be exposed to too much evidence.' ISVAs limit any knowledge of the evidence or offence(s) itself. This is to minimise the possibility of a victim-survivor providing them with disclosable information that may later be used against them at court. ISVAs are trained to focus on providing practical and emotional

support around the process, and CPS guidance explains ISVA notes are rarely a reasonable line of enquiry.

3) 'ISVAs are "difficult" and "obstructive."' This misconception was cited in a recent report following the CPS implementation of Operation Soteria. The role of an ISVA is professional, boundaried, and accredited by recognised training providers. Our aim is to provide victims with up-to date, clear information around the criminal justice process, and their rights within it, so they can make informed choices. Sometimes, this does involve challenging existing processes and acting as a critical friend to policing.

What types of ISVAs are there?

Cultural differences can create significant barriers to accessing support, so we are committed to providing support in a culturally sensitive manner. We have dedicated ISVAs who work with women subject to multiple disadvantages, such as homelessness, poverty or mental health challenges, or women who have learning difficulties or communication barriers. We also have Young Women ISVAs to support victims aged 13-25. They have specialist knowledge around sexual offences involving children and younger people, and work closely with education, family and care networks for support outside of the justice system.

When do ISVAs and the police work together?

ISVAs work closely with police, CPS and other agencies from the start of a criminal investigation, through to prosecution and trial. Under the Victims' Code, anyone reporting a crime should be referred to support services at the earliest opportunity - ideally, we want to be supporting victims before they make their initial report or formal statement so they can be accompanied throughout the process.

ISVAs cannot sit with a victim whilst they give their video-recorded interview but provide practical and emotional support around this stage. This is often the first time they are asked to verbalise what happened to them, so they may need additional support in the days and months afterwards, including referrals to specialist services.

Once the investigation has started, ISVAs liaise with the officer on the case or Sexual Offences Investigation Trained (SOIT) officers on the victim's behalf, to ensure they receive regular updates in an understandable way. We work with officers, ensuring safety plans and security measures are put in place and regularly reviewed. The time between the formal statement and a charging decision can take months or even years, so

effective communication between the ISVA and officers is vital.

If a case is 'no further actioned' (NFA), an ISVA works with officers to ensure the victim understands the reasons and that this has been communicated to them with care and sensitivity. We ensure victims are made aware of their right to challenge a decision not to charge, and signpost legal or other advice if necessary. If a case goes to trial, ISVAs work closely with police to ensure the victim or survivor understands the process and is aware of any support to help them give their best evidence.

How do you share learning with police?

Solace works in partnership with the police. Local ISVA services are invited to take part in regular NFA Scrutiny Panels with police and CPS. ISVAs, police, CPS and other organisations also share updates and learning at quarterly 'ISVA Forums'. We've been involved in Operation Soteria feedback and police community safety events relating to VAWG. We have also trained officers on our role and how best to support victims of sexual offences.

Can you describe a change to policy or practice which has improved how police engage with ISVAs?

Operation Soteria has increased understanding of procedural justice for victims and survivors of sexual violence and improved partnership working between police and ISVAs, especially in London.

How could police services develop stronger partnerships with ISVAs?

Having an ISVA often improves victim's experience and the likelihood of them being able to engage with the justice process. It also benefits officers; with an ISVA prioritising victim care and support, they can focus on completing thorough and timely investigations. We would like more consistency nationally in how police work collaboratively with ISVAs. We also want investigators to ensure that victims' sensitive information, such as digital evidence or counselling notes, is only requested where necessary and proportionate. ■

Kate Garner is an ISVA Manager at the North London Rape Crisis service at Solace Women's Aid



CASE STUDY 4



Police handling at a domestic dispute

A complaint was locally investigated by the force. Following the outcome of the force's investigation, the complainant exercised their right to review by the IOPC.

A woman received several obscene text messages from her ex-partner. The woman had a non-molestation order against the man which forbade him from sending intimidating or threatening messages. They shared custody of their young son, who was at the man's house.

The woman reported that she had mental ill-health because of the abuse inflicted by the man.

The woman went to collect her son and used the key she had previously been given to enter his house. The man forcibly removed her from the property. The woman contacted the police and reported she had been assaulted and that her son had witnessed it.

Two police officers attended and, when they arrived, the woman was crying and concerned for her son's safety. Constable A went into the property to talk with the man. Constable B stayed with the woman. The woman explained that her ex-partner had sent her abusive messages, but Constable B did not look at them in detail.

The police investigation noted that Constable B showed no empathy towards the woman and commented that she would be arrested for breach of the peace. The IOPC review noted that Constable B did not view the messages on the woman's phone and failed to interact appropriately with the woman, who was visibly distressed.

Constable A approached the woman outside the man's property. Body-worn video footage showed the woman was clearly upset and did not want to leave

“ Body-worn video footage showed the woman was clearly upset and did not want to leave without her son ”

without her son. Constable A told the woman that there were no concerns for the child's welfare, which Constable B supported. Constable B described the woman to a supervisor as “hysterical”.

The man made a counter allegation of assault, as the woman had scratched his arm when he removed her from his house. The officers arrested the woman for assault, handcuffed her, and placed her in a police vehicle, which the child witnessed.

The woman was transported to custody and interviewed. She stated she did not intend to cause any injury to the man. She disclosed to the custody officer that she had injuries to the top of her arms and had a mental health condition which she took medication for.

A healthcare professional examined the woman twice while in custody: the first time, to consider the woman's mental health; the second, to document injuries to her wrists from being placed in handcuffs. She was not allowed to take her medication for several hours.

The police investigation noted that Constable A was concerned about the son seeing his parents arguing and carried out a child risk assessment about the woman's demeanour.

After several hours, the woman was released from custody. She reported that the incident had had a negative impact on her mental health. The woman sought assistance through a local charity, who supported her in asking the IOPC to carry out a review into how the police had handled her complaint.

The IOPC review found that Constable A should have considered all the information, including previous incidents. Several incidents mentioned by the man and the woman had not been recorded on police systems. ■

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS, POLICY MAKERS AND TRAINERS

- What steps can you take to ensure officers are not using unnecessary force at an incident?
- What training is given to officers and staff to reduce the distress to children when a parent is arrested?
- How do your force's policies support officers and staff to handle counter allegations in a domestic abuse situation?
- What training does your force provide to officers and staff about how trauma or mental illness could impact a person's demeanour?
- How does your force ensure your officers recognise children as victims in their own right at domestic abuse incidents?
- Do your officers understand the use of orders and the expectations of them to respond to breaches?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND STAFF

- What steps can you take to ensure you have considered all available evidence before taking action?
- What questions could you ask to make sure you understand the situation before making an arrest?
- What action can you take to reduce the distress someone may be facing?
- Would you have taken any action in relation to the man?
- How do you ensure that children are recognised as victims and safeguarded at a domestic incident they may have witnessed?
- How would the breach of a non-molestation order impact your assessment of an incident?

ACTION TAKEN BY THE FORCE

- Following this incident, the force reviewed its computer systems to ensure that accurate records are held in relation to previous domestic abuse incidents involving the parties.

OUTCOMES FOR THE OFFICERS AND STAFF INVOLVED

The review was upheld as the IOPC found the service level provided was not acceptable, and the outcome of the police complaint investigation was not reasonable and proportionate. The review found the officers' actions amounted to practice requiring improvement, and the IOPC recommended that they undertake the reflective practice review process to learn from this incident.



How survivors with lived experience of domestic abuse can influence policing

Kerry and Michelle Blunsom MBE discuss the principles of meaningful survivor engagement

DA SEEN stands for Domestic Abuse, Surrey's Expert by Experience Network. We are a group of women from across the county who have all received support from the Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership specialist outreach services. Our aim since March 2021 has been to 'put survivors at the heart of what you do'.

Early on in our journey we met with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner who recognised the value of our group and collaborated with us to inform a gold standard framework for coercive and controlling behaviour in the county. The Coercive Control Gold Standard aims to change the culture and practice of how all agencies including the police deal with domestic abuse. This led to us working with Detective Superintendent Matt Barcraft-Barnes from Surrey Police who consulted us on their rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) strategy and domestic abuse (DA) strategy.

Working ethically with lived experience experts comes with its challenges, but can be achieved with a **transfer of power, support, intention, investment and commitment**. Too often engagement is a tokenistic tick-box exercise whereby survivors are brought in to tell their story with no real thought to the trauma this can cause and no clear objective or outcome from that experience. We require the professionals we work with to take responsibility for keeping survivor voices

at the centre of their policy and decision making, by following these principles.

Transfer of power

Domestic abuse is about power and control, and yet when we have left our abuser and receive help from statutory agencies, often the system then replicates that theme of power and control. Understanding these power dynamics is crucial when working with survivors and empowering them to create change. From the moment Matt came into our environment rather than us attending a police station, he recognised he was a guest, and that our space belonged to us. This shift was very helpful to us forming a mutually respectful working relationship.

Support

This transfer of power is achieved in part by the support provided by the specialist domestic abuse services



who make up Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership. True and trauma-informed survivor engagement must be carried out within a framework of specialist support, investment in clinical supervision, pre- and post-session specialist support, payment of expenses and robustly challenging agencies on their intentions. We must move beyond a model that seeks survivor voices in return for a small token of goodwill. These women are experts and should be treated as such. When we truly listen and act, we have the opportunity to create systemic change.

Investment

We welcome constructive and challenging conversation. Many of us have had difficult experiences at the hands of the police, but we were able to explore these in a safe environment where Matt was fully present, and actively listened to what we had to say,

even when it was confronting. He was reflective and respectful, not defensive. Instead of pushing or hurrying the agenda, he invested his time in making us and our experiences visible.

Intention

When reviewing the RASSO strategy, we noticed it lacked SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound) goals. We appreciated there were actions relating to preparation, protection and prevention, but crucially there was no clear plan. In contrast, the force DA Strategy was concise, SMART-centred, and therefore measurable in terms of effectiveness and outcomes. We provided feedback on both, that Matt then presented on our behalf to others within the force. He intentionally kept us updated throughout this lengthy process.

Commitment

It is clear from Surrey Police's response that they have been committed to using our lived experience in a tangible way. Our thoughts and comments were represented in their entirety in the finished RASSO strategy and their DA Strategy. The positive working relationship we have cultivated then enabled us to advise on the care of women with insecure immigration status. Not only have Surrey Police demonstrated their commitment to us, but also to intentionally improving the experience of others entering the system. We know that our work cannot change our own circumstances, but part of our justice is being able to do that for others.

Matt reported that "the group has enabled unique professional review, challenge and advice that no-one other than this group could have provided. This undoubtedly took our policing strategy forwards years, adding a clear community, professional, strategic and financial benefit. Advice from these groups should be viewed as a cornerstone to effective public protection-based organisation strategies".

These results and positive feedback show that survivors with lived experience of domestic abuse can and should be empowered to inform professionals when policy is being drawn up, to ensure other survivors receive the best service possible. ■

Further information:

www.healthysurrey.org.uk/domestic-abuse/professionals/surrey-gold-standard-coercive-and-controlling-behaviour-framework

Kerry is a survivor of domestic abuse and a leader at DA SEEN. **Michelle Blunsom MBE** is the CEO of East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services (ESDAS)

CASE STUDY 5



Missed opportunities to safeguard a victim-survivor of domestic abuse

This case was independently investigated by the IOPC.

A woman called the police during an altercation with her ex-partner.

Student Officer PC A and PC B (from district 1) were deployed to her home (in district 2) due to resourcing issues. The woman explained her ex-partner (who had left) had physically assaulted her.

The officers completed a DASH (domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based abuse) risk assessment. The woman only answered one of the questions: she believed the man had a previous domestic abuse history. PC A assessed the risk to the woman as 'medium'. Officers did not consider sharing information about the man's offending history as part of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS). The woman did not want her details being shared with other domestic abuse agencies. The woman said she may support the investigation if her ex-partner did anything else.

Officers made a note for the investigation to be allocated back to district 2.

A domestic abuse officer subsequently reduced the risk to 'standard', noting this was the first incident and the woman had not expressed fear of her ex-partner. As the risk was reduced, there was no requirement for the domestic abuse team to contact the woman to provide advice.

The next day the case was sent to district 2 to be allocated to an officer, but this did not happen until 17 days later. No actions were taken. This was not in line with force policy and the early identification of suspects.

During this time, PC A was assigned to district 2 and became Officer in Charge (OIC) of the investigation.

A week after the first incident, the woman reported a further assault attempt to the police. She was concerned the police hadn't contacted her. She disclosed she was back with her ex-partner. The man left before police arrived, and the woman agreed to stay with a friend. Police recorded this as 'non-crime domestic abuse' and raised the risk level to 'medium'. This occurred in a neighbouring force.

In a second incident before the case was allocated, the man got into a fight with another man, with the woman present. The control room did not share with

“ One officer told the IOPC they had no concerns for her safety at that point. The welfare check was not recorded on the police database ”

attending officers that the man was a suspect in another live investigation. No further action was taken.

The domestic abuse team unsuccessfully tried to contact the woman in the days after.

Nineteen days after the first incident, A/PS C, who managed officers in district 2, reviewed the investigation. Evidence indicates that A/PS C knew about the second incident. Six days later, PS D, who managed officers in district 1, reviewed the crime report. The IOPC found there was confusion over who had responsibility for supervising PC A, and therefore this case.

PC A conducted house-to-house inquiries, which provided no new information. He called the woman three times and went to her home, but there was no answer.

The IOPC found no further action was taken regarding the first incident.

The man was reported missing after talking about ending his life. The woman called the police to say he had gone to her home the week before and attacked her. This was not recorded before the log was passed back to the originating force.

Officers were dispatched to find the man. His housemates told officers they had taken a knife off him. The man's family said he had been found, but officers were diverted to another incident and did not speak to him.

Officers conducted a welfare check and spoke to the woman. One officer told the IOPC they had no concerns for her safety at that point. The welfare check was not recorded on the police database.

Two weeks later, the woman reported that her ex-partner had been threatening her. The call handler



recorded the man had told the woman he would “come to her address and get her this evening”. The log recorded warning markers in relation to the man for self-harm, suicide, weapons and being a high-risk domestic abuse offender.

It was initially graded as attendance within 60 minutes. However, due to resourcing issues it was marked to be dealt with the following morning. The A/PS on duty told the IOPC he called the woman back. He reported the woman was calm and nothing suggested a risk of immediate danger.

The police were not able to contact the woman until two days later. After a DASH risk assessment, officers recorded the risk as ‘medium’.

The same day, the woman’s housemate called the police to report the man was threatening to stab the woman. On arrival, officers found the woman dead and arrested the man. He was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. ■

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS, POLICY MAKERS AND TRAINERS

- How does your force ensure that domestic abuse incidents that cross district and force boundaries are appropriately investigated and repeat victim-survivors safeguarded?
- What processes does your force have in place to make proactive disclosures under the DVDS?
- How do you ensure investigations involving reports of domestic abuse are adequately resourced and managed?
- What steps does your force take to ensure relevant background information is shared with officers attending a report of domestic abuse?
- What is your force’s policy on allocating domestic abuse cases to new or student officers and providing effective supervision?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND STAFF

- How do you ensure all relevant actions are quickly progressed for domestic abuse investigations?
- How would you identify and safeguard a victim-survivor of repeated domestic abuse?
- How would a victim-survivor’s plan to end a relationship impact your assessment of the risk of escalation?

LEARNING RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION TAKEN

- The IOPC issued six learning recommendations. These included asking the force to:
- Review how cases are allocated to officers from sergeant work trays. The force reviewed its policy and provided clarification on the process.
 - Amend training and guidance on the DASH risk assessment to highlight the importance of asking whether the victim-survivor is aware of any previous police history involving the perpetrator. The force is now using Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment, a narrative approach to questions. This considers the victim-survivor’s knowledge of the perpetrator’s history, and whether a Clare’s Law domestic violence disclosure should be made.
 - Review its approach to the support provided to student officers under performance review. The force has developed a documented handover process clearly outlining responsibilities and expectations for supervisors receiving student officers from other teams.
 - Review its approach to concern for welfare reports with an element of domestic abuse. The force changed its policy to ensure that, where welfare checks have been undertaken in relation to a known domestic abuse perpetrator or victim-survivor, attending officers must review previous and live/ongoing domestic cases. They should ensure the OICs for those cases are updated so the risk can be updated.

OUTCOMES FOR THE OFFICERS AND STAFF INVOLVED

PC A resigned from the force after this incident and did not engage with the IOPC investigation. A decision on whether he would have had a case to answer for misconduct, had he not resigned from the force, was not made due to the legislation. A/PS C and PS D did not have a case to answer for misconduct and did not face disciplinary proceedings.

There was no indication any other person serving with the police may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a manner which would justify the bringing of disciplinary proceedings.

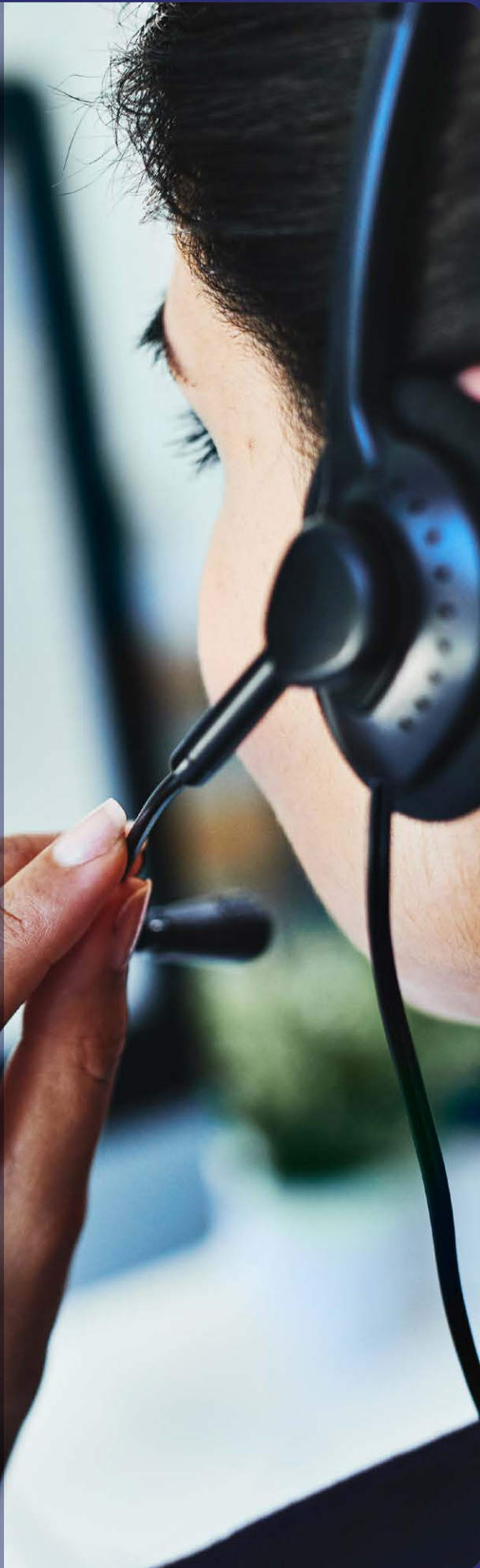
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

A joined-up approach: the development of an intelligence-led national policing centre

We bring together **Maggie Blyth**, **Sam Millar** and **Louisa Rolfe** to outline policing innovations in dealing with violence against women and girls, and the importance of partnership working.

In recent months the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) and College of Policing have been working to create the new National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Public Protection, unifying victim-orientated policing programmes including Operation Soteria, the national VAWG Taskforce and the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme. The centralised policing hub will proactively share specialist knowledge and work more closely with partners to tackle what we now class as a national emergency. The dedicated national centre will also support forces with training and insights, leading a multi-agency approach that better meets the needs of victims and stops perpetrators from offending.

The National Centre forms part of our wider work with government on reforming policing and ensuring forces have the people and resources they need to keep the public safe. This builds on existing best practice and is an important start but needs long-term investment and commitment if we are to make real progress.



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

**Interim Chief Constable
Maggie Blyth, NPCC VAWG
lead, on the police response**



Last year, our National Policing Statement highlighted the epidemic of VAWG, assessing that at least 1 in 12 women in this country are victims and 1 in 20 people are estimated to be perpetrators. A 'whole system' approach is needed to meet the Government's ambition of halving VAWG offences in a decade.

Having stepped into the role of Chief Constable (interim) in Gloucestershire, I have seen the absolute commitment that front line officers and staff are giving to this area. Domestic abuse, rape, stalking and harassment are the primary threats of VAWG, as well as online harm and child sexual exploitation and abuse.

However, now it's time to tackle the threat in a different way and become more focused on perpetrators and prevention.

Every three days a woman dies at the hands of a man, often behind closed doors, and we need to do more. Realistically, we can't lock up 1 in 20 of the population who are perpetrators; we must change attitudes and behaviour to prevent these crimes happening. We need more government investment to enable sectors to work together on prevention to reduce the number of victims.

We already have the foundations in place, with strong partnerships across the College of Policing, NPCC and specialised programmes to drive better consistency in policing's response to VAWG.

I am proud of how policing has mobilised to tackle the scale and threat of VAWG offences, but there is more to do. That starts with supporting our forces, equipping our officers with the right training and support to be able to investigate effectively, in the same way as we would provide specialist training to firearms or public order officers.

We also need to listen and support victims through the criminal justice process and alongside partners, we will drive improvements for swifter response and justice when people seek our help.

**Assistant Chief Constable
Sam Millar, NPCC VAWG
Strategic Programme
Director, on current work
and next steps**



Our primary focus as a taskforce is to ensure women and girls are safe and feel safe. We are supporting forces to implement key programmes of work that will meet this aim.

VAWG is a national priority, and each force has its own action plan to tackle the threat, pursue offenders, reduce criminality and safeguard victims.

We will continue to oversee progress and communicate regularly with key partners and stakeholders to understand victim experience, driving improvements.

No matter where you are in the country, if you report a crime, you should receive the same service. We are working hard to improve our own culture and understand these crime types so that we can give women and girls confidence to report, knowing they will receive a consistent quality service.

Our priorities are:

- Consistency of practice and supporting excellence in forces,
- Professionalising public protection, and
- Analysis of the impact of online harm

The work to meet these aims includes implementing the Domestic Abuse Joint Justice Plan with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). This was launched at the end of 2024 to bring agencies together earlier, for faster decisions and progress on cases and to meet the needs of the victim. A key part of this includes the CPS and NPCC working together to gather evidence on charging that helps reduce domestic abuse.

We will continue to oversee co-ordination to drive improvements in force control rooms for victims of abuse. This includes embedding a domestic abuse specialism in every force and supporting a national, phased rollout of Rapid Video Response (RVR) technology. With RVR, victims receive a virtual response, delivering the same service as if an officer attended in person, but without any delay. It has been assessed as promising practice by the College.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

**Assistant Commissioner
Louisa Rolfe, NPCC
Domestic Abuse Lead, on the
DA portfolio and Domestic
Homicide Project**



We will support the development of a digital risk assessment tool to recognise and manage prolific, high-harm offenders, enabling us to have a consistent approach across forces.

The NPCC will continue to collaborate with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners to develop working practice to tackle VAWG.

We also evaluate and respond to changes in legislation, identifying its impact on officers, the public and our partners. These groups offer us valuable insight which in turn means we can support them from an informed position.

We work in a complex, ever-evolving landscape with new crimes and emerging technologies. But women and girls are our priority and remain at the heart of all our work.

Our progress needs to be consistent and quicker. But we know where to focus our efforts and will continue to work hard to reduce offending, ultimately making real improvements for women and girls.

Domestic abuse (DA) accounts for around 20% of all reported crime, and forces are working incredibly hard to bring perpetrators to justice and protect victims. Alongside other agencies, we are determined to tackle the continued and enduring problem of domestic abuse and homicide which remains deeply rooted in our society.

Our knowledge of domestic abuse has improved significantly in recent years. Supported by new legislation on coercive and controlling behaviour and non-fatal strangulation, we are better able to assess risk and investigate offences.

DA is complex and the police response is therefore nuanced and should be supported by a specialist approach. Nationally, we are working to support officers and investigators to ensure they have the knowledge and tools needed to identify and investigate domestic abuse and safeguard victims. We are also working to ensure consistency and share best practice across forces through several dedicated strands of work.



Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPO)

There are many complex protective orders that can restrict and manage the behaviour of an offender in order to protect victims. We are currently piloting new civil orders - DAPOs - which provide immediate protection for victims following a domestic abuse incident. They simplify and build on the strongest elements of existing protective orders. DAPOs will adopt a case-by-case approach, considering the victims' individual circumstances and needs, with longer-term, more robust safety measures. They have no minimum or maximum duration and allow the courts to impose conditions such as exclusion zones, monitored with electronic tags, or mandatory attendance on perpetrator programmes. Critically, breach of a DAPO is a criminal offence, which is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment.

It's an encouraging milestone in improving the protection available to victims when they report abuse.

Pilots began in November 2024 in Greater Manchester, three London Boroughs (Croydon, Bromley and Sutton) and the British Transport Police. While these pilots are being evaluated, all other forces will continue with using existing Domestic Violence Protection Orders. Further guidance is available from the College: assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2025-03/DAPNO-briefing-for-non-pilot-forces.pdf

Raneem's Law

Raneem's Law was introduced following the tragic deaths of Raneem Oudeh and her mother, Khaola Saleem, both murdered by Raneem's ex-husband. Raneem called the police four times on the night of her murder.

The Government has committed to introduce domestic abuse specialists and dedicated domestic abuse police teams into 999 control rooms under Raneem's Law. The Government will introduce statutory guidance on this commitment in due course as part of its wider ambition to halve VAWG offences within a decade.

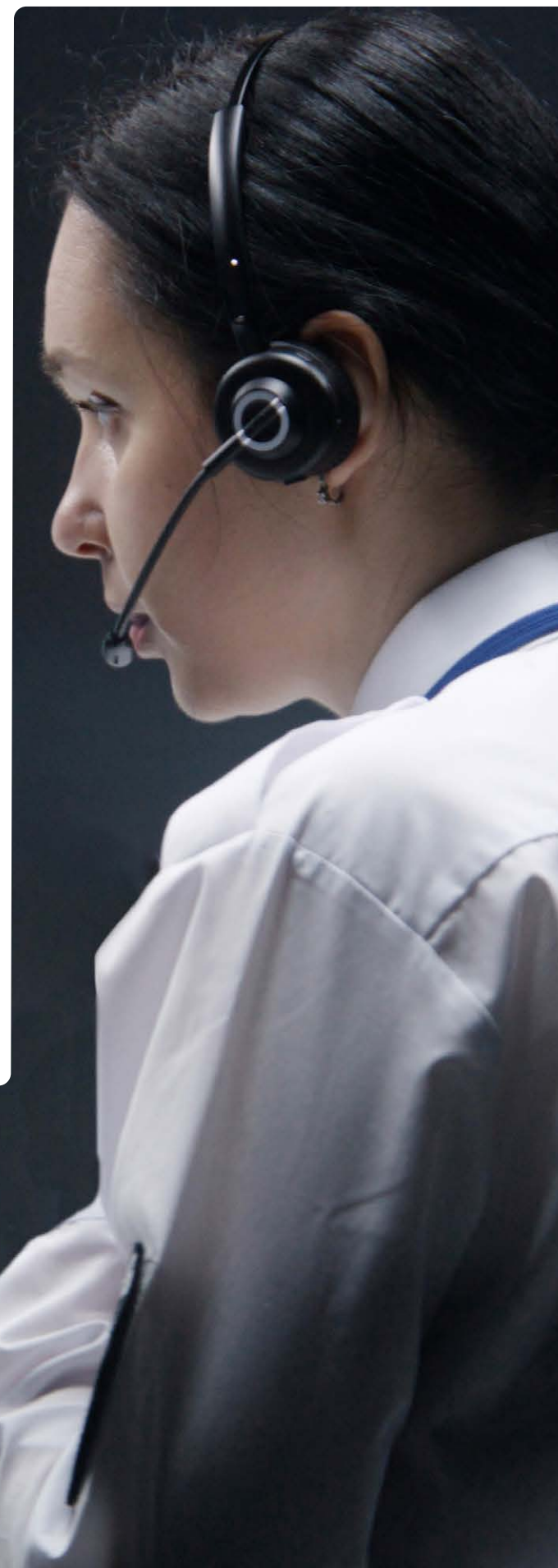
To ensure the national approach is effective and evidence-based, this measure will initially be introduced in a select group of forces. Phase one began in January 2025 and involves five forces who already have a DA specialist within their control rooms. Subject to the spending review, we plan to extend this rollout to additional forces under phase two later this year.

Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS)

The DVDS (also known as 'Clare's Law') was introduced in 2014 following a successful campaign by the parents of Clare Wood, who was tragically murdered by her former partner in 2009. The scheme sets out procedures that the police can use to disclose information about previous violent or abusive behaviour, in order to protect a person who may be at risk of harm.

The NPCC has collaborated with the College, regional DA leads, academics and sector colleagues to create strategic principles and statutory guidance for the scheme to bring consistency in the way forces respond to applications for information. The guidance covers six key areas: governance, performance, training, assessing risk, using intelligence and partnership working and can be found here: www.college.police.uk/article/new-domestic-abuse-principles-published.

Each area is underpinned with good practice examples and will support officers by providing practical guidance on how to successfully implement the DVDS. The principles also cover the use of tools to effectively manage performance, such as Power BI.



Domestic Homicide Project

The national Domestic Homicide Project tracks the scale and nature of domestic abuse-related deaths in quick-time, gathering detailed case information, including suspect and victim demographics, prior contact with the police and partner agencies, and risk factors.

In 2020, the Project was established by the police and government in England and Wales to collect, review and share quick-time learning from all police-recorded domestic homicides, unexpected deaths and suspected suicides of individuals with a history of domestic abuse victimisation. The Project includes all deaths identified by police as meeting these categories, not only those meeting the statutory definition for a Domestic Homicide Review.

We classify deaths into six types for analysis: adult family homicide (AFH), child death, intimate partner homicide (IPH), suspected victim suicide following domestic abuse (SVSDA), unexpected deaths and 'other' where individuals live together but are not intimate partners or family members.

Across four years of data collection, the Domestic Homicide Project has counted 1,012 deaths. These included:

- 354 Suspected Victim Suicides Following Domestic Abuse (SVSDA),
- 332 Intimate Partner Homicides (IPH)
- 169 Adult Family Homicides (AFH)
- 71 unexpected deaths,
- 61 child deaths and
- 25 deaths classified as 'other'

In the year ending March 2023, the number of suspected suicide cases surpassed those of partner homicides, and it remains the most recorded case type across all the categories. The overall increase in reported SVSDA likely reflects improved case identification and submission to this project, rather than an actual rise in cases.

IPH deaths have remained relatively stable across four years of data collection representing around a third of the domestic abuse-related deaths each year. This highlights the entrenched, deep-rooted nature of this issue and the need for further work on prevention.

Some of the most commonly identified suspect risk factors were:

- Mental ill health
- Controlling and coercive behaviour (CCB)
- Alcohol use
- Drug misuse
- Relationship ending/separation (threat/fear of, or actual)

Multiple risk factors may be present, and these risk factors vary by type of case. CCB was the most common risk factor in both SVSDA and IPH, and mental ill health was the predominant risk factor in cases of AFH. To intervene effectively, the police and their partner agencies must understand the 'problem profiles' of different domestic abuse-related deaths in their force.

Notably, at the time of analysis, 12 cases of SVSDA were confirmed to have successfully achieved a posthumous charge. All 12 cases also had a risk factor of CCB. Only one case in this dataset was known to have achieved a posthumous charge for Unlawful Act Manslaughter in a case of SVSDA. With recent changes to policy and guidance regarding the response to unexpected death, it is important to understand how these are being translated into practice.

Action has been taken to train and better equip officers in understanding coercive control and to apply an investigative mindset when attending unexpected or sudden deaths. Guidance to police in attending unexpected deaths, including suspected suicides, has been updated.

Forces must continue improving their approach to suspected victim suicides, including by recognising the high risk posed by CCB, speaking to family and friends to establish any history of domestic abuse, embedding professional curiosity attending unexpected deaths, and prosecuting perpetrators for domestic abuse after a victim's suicide.

Further details and findings from this research project can be found in the Year 4 report, available here: www.vkpp.org.uk/vkpp-work/domestic-homicide-project



CASE STUDY 6



Police contact with woman before she sustained serious injuries

This case was independently investigated by the IOPC.

A member of the public called the police reporting damage to her property, caused by her friend’s partner. She disclosed she had concerns for her friend’s welfare and safety following a conversation they had about the partner’s behaviour. Her friend indicated she had been a victim-survivor of domestic abuse.

Two police officers went to the friend’s home and spoke to her. She looked scared and shaken and was breathing fast. She said that the man in her company was a friend who did not live there and nothing of concern had happened between them. The officers noticed the woman had a facial injury.

The officers tried to separate the pair to speak to the woman alone. The man refused and acted in an intimidating way.

The officers decided not to complete a Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) as they thought the woman would not be able to answer the questions accurately with the man present.

Since the woman did not report any offence and was unable to engage with questions, the officers left and spoke to the friend who had initially made the call.

She did not wish to pursue the criminal damage but repeated her concern for the other woman’s safety and welfare.

The officers returned to their car, where they discussed their concerns for the woman’s welfare. They did not feel comfortable leaving the woman in the current situation and conducted intelligence checks.

They called their supervisor for advice, who recommended they arrest the man on suspicion of causing the injuries they had observed.

The officers felt they needed assistance to arrest the man due to his build and behaviour: they had concerns for their own safety since an identity check showed the man had warning markers for assaulting emergency workers.



“ The officers told the IOPC investigation they were concerned that, if they pressed their emergency button, there may be a delay before assistance arrived ”

The officers told the IOPC investigation they were concerned that, if they pressed their emergency button, there may be a delay before assistance arrived due to the area being busier than usual.

While the officers were calling their supervisor, the man and woman left, walked away and did not return. The officers returned to the station to complete paperwork to safeguard the woman.

That evening, a neighbour called the police and reported hearing banging and cries for help. When officers arrived, they found the woman sitting outside, looking upset and distressed. She told the officers the man had assaulted her by repeatedly hitting her in the head. She asked to be taken to the hospital, where she was diagnosed with a bleed on the brain caused by her injuries.

Officers arrested the man on suspicion of causing grievous bodily harm.

The College of Policing allows officers to justify a decision not to arrest based on their professional judgement and based on available information. In this instance, the officers may have been able to arrest the man earlier that day, before he assaulted her.

The IOPC investigation noted that, while the safety concerns held by both officers were reasonable, the decision to not arrest the man sooner may impact public confidence in how police respond to domestic violence.

The investigation also noted officers may have misunderstood instructions for using the emergency button activation. ■

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS, POLICY MAKERS AND TRAINERS

- How do you equip officers with the skills and knowledge necessary to help them make arrests in domestic abuse cases where there is an active threat of violence?
- What other steps would your force have expected officers to take to help safeguard the woman?
- Does your force actively encourage officers to reach out to supervisors, colleagues or other specialist resources for advice when they have concerns about leaving a victim-survivor alone with a perpetrator, and need advice on safeguarding?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND STAFF

- What other steps would you have taken to safeguard the woman?
- What steps would you have taken to try to complete the DARA where you weren’t confident that the victim-survivor was able to answer questions openly because of the presence of the perpetrator?
- What immediate steps would you take to facilitate an arrest in these circumstances?
- How confident do you feel when interacting with hostile and potentially violent members of the public?
- Are there steps you can take to improve future interactions with such individuals?
- Is there anything you would have done differently if you found yourself responding to a similar incident?

ACTION TAKEN BY THE FORCE

- Following this incident, the force referred the officers to the post-incident support process. This was to ensure the officers are supported and sufficiently prepared to perform their duties lawfully and effectively. This process involved completing a post-incident debrief with subject matter experts to address any skills and knowledge gaps.
- The force also examined whether there was any scope for wider local training.

OUTCOMES FOR THE OFFICERS AND STAFF INVOLVED

The officers did not have a case to answer for misconduct or gross misconduct and did not face disciplinary proceedings.

Both officers underwent informal processes to address performance issues through their line management.

There was no indication that any person serving with the police may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a manner which would justify the bringing of disciplinary proceedings.

Improving the response to police perpetrated domestic abuse

Chief Superintendent Jamie Daniels introduces promising practice relating to police perpetrated domestic abuse

Following the investigation of a super-complaint made by the Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ) in March 2020, the College of Policing has been delivering a programme of work supporting forces to improve their response to police perpetrated domestic abuse (PPDA).

CWJ's super-complaint raised concerns about all aspects of the policing response to PPDA including that victims were discouraged from reporting and that coming forward as a police victim of domestic abuse negatively impacted the careers of women in policing. CWJ asserted that forces were not conducting criminal investigations properly, nor were they considering potential misconduct by officers accused of domestic abuse. A year before the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, the super-complaint identified that 'sexist locker room culture' in policing enabled abusers to go unchallenged. The super-complaint shone a light on the extent of police perpetrated violence against women and girls.

The College, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) jointly investigated the CWJ's super-complaint and concluded that forces were not fully recognising and responding to the risks and responsibilities associated with PPDA. The investigation noted that forces were not consistently applying safeguards to protect and demonstrate the impartiality of investigations and case decisions, and that victim care was not always good enough. It also found a significant failure to treat reports of domestic abuse as potential misconduct and apply police complaint and conduct regulations to the handling of cases.



“ Domestic abusers in police roles pose clear risks to both their victims and vulnerable people across society ”

Forces were asked to review their recent investigations and ensure their policies for handling PPDA were robust. The College, IOPC and HMICFRS recommended that forces should consider referring PPDA investigations to an independent force to secure victim confidence.

The College updated its Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on domestic abuse to support forces to make the necessary improvements. The updated APP makes it clear that forces must respond robustly to reports of PPDA as this is fundamental to public trust and confidence in policing. It also provides guidance on when it may be appropriate for external forces to conduct investigations, including when a 'truly independent investigator cannot be found in force' or when 'victim trust and confidence cannot be secured another way.' APP now explains forces should

have plans in place to ensure reports of PPDA are investigated by someone with no prior connection to any of those involved.

The College worked with Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary to develop two 'smarter practices': the role of senior oversight officers and a workplace domestic abuse scrutiny panel.

Smarter practice is activity tried in a force, reviewed jointly by the College, HMICFRS and NPCC, then shared with other forces and considered for further testing. As a key partner in the super-complaints process, the IOPC also reviewed the smarter practice developed by Hampshire & Isle of Wight on PPDA.

Senior oversight officers (SOOs) in Hampshire & Isle of Wight are chief inspectors who act as a single point of contact for police and non-police victims of PPDA. The

SOO is independent but liaises directly with the victim to provide support and ensure they are appropriately updated. The SOO also presents cases to the workplace domestic abuse scrutiny panel. SOOs are specially trained so they have the right knowledge and skills to support victims. They also share learning and good practice with investigations teams, feeding into wider organisational change.

The workplace domestic abuse scrutiny panel sits monthly and is chaired by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary's domestic abuse lead, a chief superintendent. Panel members include the force's domestic abuse silver lead, representatives from the force's professional standards department, organisational learning team and domestic abuse specialists from partner agencies. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary have excellent working relationships with partner agencies whose expertise is invaluable to the panel.

The SOO presents cases to the panel, who help to identify the next steps for the investigation, including victim care, safeguarding and lines of enquiry. Discussions are analysed to identify reoccurring issues, good practice and any learning that can inform wider organisational change to the force response to PPDA.

These innovations show how forces can prioritise delivering a robust response to PPDA. Domestic abusers in police roles pose clear risks to both their victims and vulnerable people across society. A poor response can also cause irrevocable damage to victim and public trust and confidence in the police. We must remain vigilant to ensure that there is no place in policing for abusers. ■

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Chief Superintendent Jamie Daniels is the Crime and Criminal Justice Lead for the College of Policing

CASE STUDY 7



This case was independently investigated by the IOPC.

The police arrested a man after he had assaulted his partner. No domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based abuse (DASH) risk assessment was completed, and the woman stated that nothing had happened.

The police progressed with a witness-led investigation and the man was sentenced to 40 days in prison.

While in prison, the man contacted the woman via telephone and was recorded as being abusive towards her. The prison service informed the police.

Subsequently, the local multi-agency risk assessment conference decided that, as the man had been assessed as a high-risk domestic abuse perpetrator, the woman had a right to know his previous history. The police went to the woman’s home and shared this information.

It was noted that the woman had declined a ‘TecSOS’ phone during the visit. This is a mobile phone which automatically connects to the police and also allows the police to track a silent call.

After being released from prison, the man met up with the woman. During this meeting, a member of the public reported to the police that the man had assaulted the woman.

“ One officer felt uncomfortable leaving the woman and sought advice from a supervisor ”

Two police officers attended the incident and began talking with the pair. The IOPC investigation noted that the pair were close enough that they could still communicate with each other. Had the officers requested assistance they could have better managed the separation.

The woman denied being assaulted and said her injuries came from tripping over. The officers repeated their question but her answer remained the same. The woman declined medical assistance.

The IOPC investigation highlighted that the man had told officers that the pair had been arguing, but he declined to go into further detail.

The officers did not speak to any witnesses. They felt there were insufficient grounds for arrest and left the pair.

One officer felt uncomfortable leaving the woman

and sought advice from a supervisor, who suggested they carry out further enquiries. The officers learned of the man’s previous conviction for assaulting the woman. They went back and found the pair.

During this second interaction, the man denied assaulting the woman, then or in the past. The woman reiterated that he had not assaulted her and denied any previous assaults.

One of the witnesses approached the officers and said they had seen the man assaulting the woman. Based on this information the officers arrested the man on suspicion of assault and detained him in a nearby police vehicle.

The IOPC investigation noted that one officer took a verbal account from one witness, who did not want to provide a statement; the second witness agreed to provide a statement, but later. At this stage no witness statements were taken.

A third officer, who had been monitoring this incident, helped the woman home.

The officers transported the man to custody.

The IOPC investigation noted that one officer completed a domestic abuse report and graded the risk as ‘standard’, despite the woman’s visible injuries and the pair’s history. This grading was later changed to ‘high’ when reviewed by a safeguarding specialist. It also noted that, while officers offered the woman medical assistance, they focused on the assault and did not ask her to complete a DASH risk assessment.

While the man was in custody the police conducted CCTV enquiries. Officers had also been tasked with obtaining witness statements, which was still an outstanding action.

The man was bailed to allow the police to continue their enquiries, particularly obtaining witness statements. The IOPC investigation noted that the lack of witness statements impacted on the investigation, which led to the decision to bail the man, rather than seeking authority to charge him.

The police contacted the woman to notify her the man was being bailed with conditions not to contact or approach her.

The IOPC investigation stated that, over two days, the police made numerous attempts to contact the woman, in person and via telephone, to ensure she was safe and to obtain a statement from her.

In the afternoon of the second day, the ambulance service reported to the police they had found the woman unresponsive at a property, with injuries to her face and body. The woman was taken to hospital but died the next day.

The man was arrested at the property and charged with murder. He was remanded in custody. ■

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS, POLICY MAKERS AND TRAINERS

- How does your force monitor DASH compliance and ensure risk is appropriately assessed?
- How does your force ensure officers have the right skills, experience and training for attending domestic abuse incidents?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND STAFF

- What other actions would you have taken to safeguard the woman?
- Would you have requested additional officers to help with early evidence gathering?
- How do you conduct conversations with victim-survivors in a trauma informed way?
- Would you have considered the history of the couple when assessing the risk and your response?

LEARNING RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION TAKEN

- The IOPC issued four learning recommendations to the force. They asked the force to remind officers of when they should call for further assistance to help with the early evidence gathering; to provide training to officers to identify serious injuries; to consider additional training to officers regarding when to carry out a DASH risk assessment; and to better manage intelligence received via email.
- The force provided additional training to officers regarding witness-led prosecutions.
- Following this, the force has implemented a number of actions to improve the workforce’s understanding of domestic abuse, and processes of how they record, monitor and highlight risk.

OUTCOMES FOR THE OFFICERS AND STAFF INVOLVED

There was no indication that any person serving with the police may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a manner which would justify the bringing of disciplinary proceedings.



Centre for Women's Justice: reflections on the PPDA super-complaint

Ruth Brander discusses how policing can improve following the super-complaint and better support victim-survivors of PPDA



Centre for Women's Justice has spearheaded work around police perpetrated domestic abuse (PPDA), filing a police super-complaint highlighting the issue in March 2020. Since then, we have been contacted, unsolicited, by over 200 women who are victims of PPDA. They complain of ongoing serious failures in the system to record complaints, adequately investigate, prosecute or begin misconduct proceedings.

We see cases where officers have been accused by multiple victims. We also see many cases where police abusers misuse their power to attempt to criminalise their victims and continue their control through the family courts. In September 2024, we published a follow-up to the super-complaint looking at what, if anything, has changed in the police response to PPDA. This can be found here: www.centreforwomensjustice.org.uk/news/2024/9/13/police-perpetrated-domestic-abuse-has-anything-changed-systemic-failures-continue-and-victim-survivor-confidence-remains-disturbingly-low

Based on evidence from survivors we believe forces should be taking the following steps to improve the quality and independence of PPDA investigations:

Beware of stereotypes and keep an open mind

What does a victim of PPDA, a police perpetrator or PPDA itself look like? These basic questions are important. A consistent message from the hundreds of PPDA survivors we've spoken to is that policing needs to keep an open mind about the answers and face up to the stereotypes that are affecting police responses. Forty-five percent of the PPDA survivors who contacted us are police officers or staff. Many describe facing disbelief and discrimination from colleagues, with attitudes like 'police officers should be made of sterner stuff', especially when reporting psychological abuse, or controlling or coercive behaviour (CCB).

Another recurring theme is survivors being told that what they are reporting is 'unpleasant, but not criminal'. Behaviour can be dismissed as part of the officer's 'private life', with the underlying message that the perpetrator is 'a good bloke' who must have been 'having a bad day' and no further investigation is warranted. Research shows that the picture is far more complex: domestic abusers can be charming and socially charismatic. The fact that an officer is well-liked should not influence how reports of PPDA are handled. CCB is relevant to an officer's ability to perform his professional role. Any officer who behaves in a criminally abusive way at home should not be in the police.

force or the IOPC. Unless or until that approach is implemented, forces should, at a minimum, ensure that no one investigating a PPDA case has personal or professional links to the accused or the complainant. Written declarations of independence should be recorded on all PPDA case files. It is concerning that in the IOPC dip sample from February 2024, most of the forces reviewed didn't have clear declarations around conflicts of interest in their PPDA case files. That urgently needs to change.

Don't criminalise victims

Abusers often make counter-allegations against their victims as a deflection technique and as a means of continuing CCB. Sometimes, this is done in anticipation of a report being made against them.

In a number of cases we have seen perpetrators contrive evidence, for example, by provoking a reaction and then recording it, in order to criminalise their victim. This is often a feature of domestic abuse generally, but the risk is especially high where the perpetrator is a police officer. Many of the women we have spoken to report their abuser using his contacts on the force and his knowledge of police processes to ensure priority is given to his allegations over those made against him.

Home Office statutory guidance recognises that perpetrators may make counter-allegations against their victim and highlights that care must be taken to assess evidence and correctly identify the primary victim and perpetrator. Crown Prosecution Service guidance also states that where counter-allegations are made 'a thorough investigation should be conducted into the background of the relationship between the victim and alleged suspect to ensure the full context of the incident is understood.'

It does not appear from the cases reported to us that this is being done consistently in cases involving PPDA. This may be because preferential treatment is being afforded to police suspects, or due to avoiding the perception of 'taking sides.' This highlights the real difficulties when a police force investigates its own.

Taking an apparently neutral stance and investigating both sides' allegations 'equally' may, in fact, facilitate ongoing abuse, where the counter-allegations are themselves a form of harassment and control of the victim. What is needed is an independent and domestic abuse-informed assessment of who is the primary abuser and who is the victim. ■

Ruth Brander is a barrister who works with Centre for Women's Justice

The experiences of survivors suggest that forces are struggling to take an independent and objective approach to PPDA reports against their own officers.

Better understanding and recording of CCB

One of the most prevalent complaints from survivors is a lack of understanding of controlling or coercive abuse, particularly where there is no overt evidence of physical or sexual violence. Survivors' reports of such abuse are often dismissed as not meeting the threshold for investigation and are not being recorded. This means the data is not collected and patterns can't be identified.

CCB cases often require analysis of a pattern of behaviour over time. We have been approached by many survivors who have subsequently discovered that other women made similar allegations against their abuser, but records were not kept, so patterns were missed.

We welcome the IOPC's stance that all allegations of PPDA should formally be recorded and investigated under the framework of Schedule 3 of the *Police Reform Act 2002*. This is necessary for victim confidence, but also for police vetting and public protection.

Independent investigation

We consider that there should be fully independent investigations in all PPDA cases, either by a separate

CASE STUDY 8



Challenges when responding to a silent 999 call

This case was locally investigated by the force. The IOPC reviewed the investigation to decide whether there was an indication that a person serving with the police may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a manner which would justify disciplinary proceedings.

A woman dialled 999 and, when prompted, could only cough to answer. The BT operator, believing the woman required assistance, transferred the call to the police. The woman communicated that she was in immediate danger and required medical attention but could not answer the door.

Controller A received the call. She asked the woman to cough or tap the handset if she needed police assistance. The woman remained silent and the call was ended.

Controller A checked local police systems; this highlighted that the woman had a marker for high-risk domestic abuse. Controller A added this information to the call log. At the time of the call it was force policy to send the address to the control room as a grade 2. This policy has since changed and, if a silent 999 call is received from a number linked to a domestic abuse

marker, the call is marked as grade 1.

The woman attempted to contact the police a second time. A call handler listened to the abandoned 999 call and tried to contact the woman. There was no answer, so they left a voicemail and updated the log.

The call log remained open with outstanding actions and, after assessment, it was allocated to Controller B. Her role included reviewing logs, conducting checks and calling people back.

Controller B called the number on the log, but there was no answer. She did not leave a voicemail as she knew one had been left already. Controller B sent the log to the ‘Force Incident Manager (FIM) buddy’, asking

“ The call handler used a series of ‘yes or no’ closed questions to communicate with the woman. ”

them to send the woman an ‘abandoned 999’ text.

No officer had been allocated, and Controller B updated the call log to reflect this. Due to the number of other outstanding incidents and the fact police were unable to contact the caller, the log was not prioritised for deployment.

A control room supervisor assessing all outstanding calls to ensure that high-risk calls were not missed noticed the log and realised that no one had tried to ring the caller back for several hours. When her call was not answered, the supervisor did not leave a voicemail because an ‘abandoned 999’ text had been sent 20 minutes earlier.

Controller C was operating as the ‘FIM buddy’ that night. Part of his role involved sending ‘abandoned 999’ text messages. The system converts SMS replies from the recipient to email. These are then reviewed and added to the log. After sending a text, Controller C received a reply asking for help. He responded, asking, “What has happened?” The woman’s reply said she could not leave the property.

Later, the police received a further 999 call from the woman. The call handler used a series of ‘yes or no’ closed questions to communicate with the woman. From these, the call handler established the woman’s location, the fact she was injured, and that a man was also at the property.

G Independent Office for Police Conduct: Make Yourself Heard: Understanding the Silent Solution

- If you need urgent police help but cannot speak, you should:
- 1. dial 999
 - 2. listen to the questions from the operator
 - 3. respond by coughing or tapping your device, if you can
 - 4. if prompted, press 55 to let the operator know it’s a genuine emergency and you’ll be put through to police

More information
www.policeconduct.gov.uk/our-work/key-areas-of-work/silent-solution

The log was upgraded, and two police officers were sent to the property. On arrival, they established that a man had assaulted the woman with a weapon, causing her to lose consciousness and suffer severe facial injuries. These impacted her ability to speak when calling 999 ■

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS, POLICY MAKERS AND TRAINERS

- Does your police service include real-life silent 999 calls in training sessions to enable officers and staff to learn firsthand about the challenges these types of call may present, and how to respond appropriately?
- What steps can your force take to make sure members of the public are aware of the Silent Solution system?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND STAFF

- Are you aware of the Silent Solution system?
- What steps can you take to ensure you gather accurate information to appropriately grade risk when dealing with a silent 999 call, especially in relation to domestic abuse?

LEARNING RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION TAKEN

- The IOPC issued one learning recommendation to the force: to update its call handling and domestic abuse policies to include guidance for call handlers on actions needed when dealing with silent or abandoned 999 calls. The force updated its policy and reinforced these changes in training. This is also included within the force’s domestic abuse policy.
- The IOPC also recommended the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) should issue an advisory note to all forces to remind them to ensure their policies on silent and abandoned 999 calls are up to date and fit for purpose. The NPCC lead for contact management wrote to all contact management leads in all police forces.

OUTCOMES FOR THE OFFICERS AND STAFF INVOLVED

There was no indication that any person serving with the police may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a manner which would justify the bringing of disciplinary proceedings.

Setting expectations, standards and consistency in handling VAWG-related complaints

Louise Bell introduces the IOPC Oversight work on supporting forces to ensure a consistent approach to VAWG related complaints

The Centre for Women's Justice super-complaint, submitted in 2020, raised concerns that police forces were not responding appropriately to cases of domestic abuse involving police officers or police staff. Following a joint investigation and report in 2022 involving the IOPC, College of Policing and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), we began a targeted programme of oversight work to review how police forces are handling police perpetrated domestic abuse (PPDA). This formed part of our work to help tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) and ensures police forces understand their obligations to handle these matters in line with police complaints legislation. The IOPC has a role to play in identifying and sharing learning, as well as ensuring the police are held accountable for their approach to complaints

and misconduct involving VAWG, including by police perpetrators.

We reviewed a selection of complaint and conduct files to assess how they handled matters where violence against women and girls was a factor. We considered whether their responses were appropriate, proportionate and in line with relevant law and guidance. In addition, to provide us with insight into how forces are responding to reports of PPDA, we surveyed all police forces in England and Wales, and held follow-up discussions with six forces. We asked them how reports of PPDA are identified and recorded, about initial assessment decisions and subsequent investigations. We also asked for information on the training complaints handlers receive and what support is given to victim-survivors. These targeted interventions

have allowed us to identify areas for improvement and to highlight promising practice.

Overall, we have found that many of the forces are compliant with the legislation and are making progress to improve their response. But we continue to hear that victim-survivors do not have a positive experience when reporting their abuse to the police. In order to help forces make continued progress we have made a series of 'calls to action' in the areas where improvements have been identified.

Rather than making new recommendations, we have focused on highlighting the promising practice that we have found and the areas still requiring improvement. We intend for these 'calls to action' to set standards for handling complaint and conduct matters involving PPDA and are calling on police forces to use them as a

checklist to consider against their processes. This will help to identify any areas for improvement that might apply to their police force. Our findings and calls to actions were grouped into the following themes:

- Identification, reporting and recording
- Reporting by police victim-survivors
- Initial response and assessment
- Ensuring impartial and independent investigations
- Complainant / victim-survivor support
- Quality assurance processes
- Managing risk
- Training and development

All police forces should be able to demonstrate a zero-tolerance approach to police perpetrated VAWG, with a robust policing response. We will continue our work with police forces to build trust and confidence in the system so that victim-survivors feel heard and supported when they report VAWG or PPDA.

One of the most important things we can do to support police forces is to issue learning and guidance to clarify expectations, drive up standards, and provide greater consistency. The IOPC will publish a special VAWG edition of our Focus guidance in the Spring to complement this issue of Learning the Lessons. Focus is aimed at complaints practitioners and provides professional standards departments with practical guidance and examples of dealing with complaint and conduct matters. It will bring together learning and insights from our work on VAWG and will set our expectations for handling complaint and conduct matters and supporting victim-survivors through the process. To subscribe to the mailing list to receive Focus, email oversight@policeconduct.gov.uk ■

References

www.policeconduct.gov.uk/publications/violence-against-women-and-girls-case-handling-review-february-2024

www.policeconduct.gov.uk/publications/police-perpetrated-domestic-abuse-handling-review

www.policeconduct.gov.uk/our-work/learning/oversight/focus

Louise Bell is the Oversight Strategic Support Manager at the IOPC



CASE STUDY 9



Missed opportunity to identify risk from a domestic abuse incident

This case was independently investigated by the IOPC.

A woman reported to the police that the previous day a man had assaulted her teenage daughter who he was in an intimate relationship with. He had bitten the girl’s finger after she had tried ending their relationship and thrown objects at her. He later threatened the girl and her family over the phone, including threats to kill.

A call handler created an incident log and carried out a threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement (THRIVE) assessment, grading the incident as ‘low’ risk. The IOPC investigation noted the call was graded as standard response, and the police would attend within 48 hours, based on the risk grading (and not resource availability).

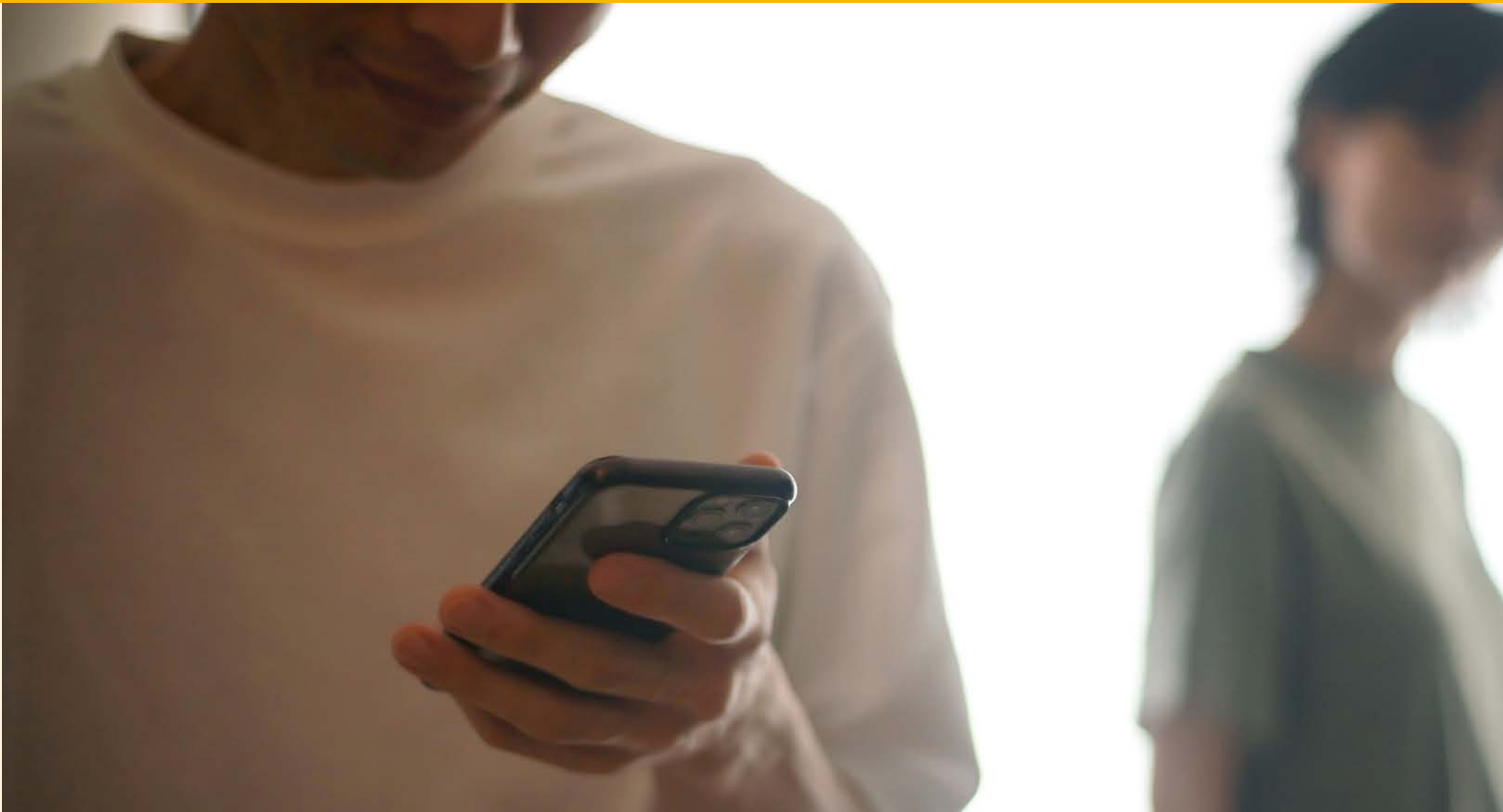
In a statement to the IOPC, the call handler explained that conducting Police National Computer (PNC) checks was not within her remit and that she did not have access to PNC or to intelligence reports. She also stated that the THRIVE grading reflected the incident at the time of reporting: the girl was at no immediate risk due to her location and the actions she was taking.

Dispatcher A, in the control room, received the incident log and added a ‘domestic tag’, as well as the man’s warning markers, for self-harm, drugs and mental health.

The following day Dispatcher B reviewed the log and noticed the girl should have been contacted after 2pm. The IOPC investigation highlighted that the night had been “very busy”. Dispatcher B did not change the grading but added a note so the log would be picked up for review.

The IOPC investigation highlighted that, when a call had been active with no action for 12 hours, a supervisor would receive an automatic alert, repeated at the 24-hour mark. The supervisor reviewed the incident log but made no alterations. The IOPC investigation noted that, due to demand in the control room, the supervisor had not read the log in detail and had potentially missed that the call had been incorrectly graded.

On the third day a control room risk sergeant – who



manages incidents with higher risks and vulnerabilities – reviewed the THRIVE assessment. The IOPC investigation highlighted that the sergeant stated there was no formal training (including on THRIVE) or role profile for his role in the control room but he was tasked with reviewing domestic abuse-related incidents.

Based on the available information, the sergeant increased the THRIVE assessment to ‘medium’.

At this stage, the police had visited neither the girl nor the man. It was agreed that the following day a police unit would visit the girl.

The next day the girl made an abandoned call to 999. The police called back, but she hung up. After a THRIVE assessment the police graded the incidents as ‘high’. Two police officers went to the parents’ home. The girl was not there and officers unsuccessfully tried to call her.

They asked the parents to call when they had heard from their daughter. The IOPC investigation stated that, being unable to speak to the girl, the officers were limited in their enquiries.

The girl called the police later to report she had been assaulted and held against her will. She was able to flee to a nearby pub. Officers were dispatched to her location but were diverted twice to other domestic incidents.

The IOPC investigation noted that a local sergeant monitoring this incident was concerned the girl may not be safe, and diverted an available officer, who found her. The girl said the man had assaulted her, causing

a head injury, and threatened to sexually assault her. The officer took her to hospital.

The officer completed a domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based abuse (DASH) risk assessment, grading the risk as ‘high’. The IOPC investigation highlighted that this was not signed off by a supervisor.

The man was arrested at his home for assault and false imprisonment. ■

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS, POLICY MAKERS AND TRAINERS

- What audits do you complete to ensure staff are recording rationales for decisions?
- Does your force have role profiles for those working in the control room to ensure officers/staff are aware of their responsibilities?
- Do your force processes ensure risk and vulnerability inform deployment not resource availability?
- How do you ensure that staff have the right skills, experience and training to review domestic abuse or specialist crimes?
- What processes does your force have in place to ensure calls are not unresourced for long periods of time?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND STAFF

- Do you understand why it is important to clearly document your rationale when making decisions?
- How do you ensure you take all relevant information into account when grading calls?
- How would the age of a victim-survivor of domestic abuse impact your assessment of risk and affect the language you use?
- What action would you consider to ensure the safety of this victim?

LEARNING RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION TAKEN

- The IOPC issued four learning recommendations to the force: to ensure that staff record what action they have taken to resolve a call; to develop a role profile for risk sergeants working in the force control room, with adequate training; to ensure calls are graded based on risk and vulnerability rather than resource availability; and to make sure that DASH risk assessments are reviewed by a supervisory sergeant.
- The force reiterated to staff the importance of updating call logs. It created a role profile for sergeants based in the force control room. The force refreshed THRIVE training for staff and embedded this for new starters. It refreshed its domestic abuse policy for sergeants and introduced a DASH supervisor investigation plan template.

OUTCOMES FOR THE OFFICERS AND STAFF INVOLVED

There was no indication that any person serving with the police may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a manner which would justify the bringing of disciplinary proceedings.

Adolescent domestic abuse: challenges and practice points for police

DCC Katy Barrow-Grint and **Dr Ruth Weir** discuss the nuances of adolescent domestic abuse and shaping the response.

The murder of 15-year-old Holly Newton, who was stabbed to death by her 16-year-old ex-boyfriend in 2023, was a stark reminder that domestic abuse is not only experienced by adults but can also happen in teenage relationships. Holly's mother has spoken openly of her frustration that the case was not classified as a domestic homicide due to the fact that Holly was under 16 when she died.

Abuse within young people's relationships - whether physical, emotional or sexual - is often overlooked in research and policy, making it very difficult for agencies like schools, social care and policing who deal with cases every day. According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), young women aged 16 to 19 are at the highest risk of domestic abuse, yet they are less likely to access support services. The CSEW does not include under-16s, leaving a significant knowledge gap.

While the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognised children living in abusive homes as victims in their own right, it does not extend this protection to children under 16 in abusive relationships. Research by SafeLives found that abusive behaviour in teenage relationships often begins at 14 or 15, but there is limited recognition, support, or prevention for those under 16. This makes it difficult to address abuse in teenage relationships, since the statutory requirements for support only apply to over-16s.

Holly's tragic case highlighted this issue, however research into adolescent domestic abuse has been ongoing for the last two years through our work at the VISION Consortium. The project convened a cross-sector working group from government, police, social care, and advocacy organisations as well as hosting two roundtables to explore teenage relationship abuse.

VISION research also includes a systematic review of

risk and protective factors in teenage relationships, and co-produced workshops with young people who have experience of abuse.

Key findings and next steps

Lack of consistent terminology and recognition

There is no agreed terminology for teenage relationship abuse, with terms like 'adolescent domestic abuse', 'teen dating violence' and 'youth intimate partner violence' all being used inconsistently. Young people are more likely to describe their experiences as 'toxic relationships' and often do not recognise abusive behaviours that would be described as domestic abuse for adults.

Social media has normalised unhealthy relationships, outdated views of abuse, and early exposure to violence. Over 27% of children aged 11 have seen extreme pornography on the internet, promoting the idea that this is part of a normal intimate relationship.

Limited research on under-16s

A systematic review of academic research on teenage relationship abuse revealed only one UK study on risk and protective factors for under-16s over the past decade, with most research coming from the U.S. Key themes include social, cultural and environmental factors, as well as links between mental health, bullying, and witnessing parental abuse. Few studies explore differences by ethnicity or sexuality, creating a gap in understanding diverse experiences or intersectionality. This makes the ongoing work at VISION important to help policing and other partners deal holistically with such crimes.

Schools and communities as key intervention points

Unlike adult domestic abuse, teenage relationship abuse often occurs in public settings like schools. Schools are crucial for early intervention and education

The work so far by the project team has delivered a number of recommendations which include:

1. Develop a national strategy for prevention and early intervention.
2. Provide support for both victims and those exhibiting harmful behaviours.
3. Commission research focused on under-16s.
4. Improve data collection to better measure the extent of abuse.
5. Agree on terminology and implement educational programmes to raise awareness.
6. Gather police-specific responses on handling under-16s in abusive relationships.
7. Map local partnership responses to teenage abuse through roundtables.
8. Use natural language processing to analyse social care casefiles for abuse data.
9. Trial school-based data collection on signs of unhealthy relationships.
10. Conduct systems mapping with SafeLives to better understand local responses.

on healthy relationships. The review found that positive school environments reduce victimisation risks, while negative experiences such as feeling unsafe or disconnected increase vulnerability. Young people emphasised the need for improved relationship education and earlier recognition of abuse.

Some areas have a children's domestic abuse risk assessment that can be used to identify teenage relationship abuse, but this is not standard practice. Similarly some areas have children's Independent Domestic or Sexual Violence Advisors, but commissioners often face funding challenges because the statutory age for domestic abuse is 16 and over.

Challenges in measuring abuse

Abuse among under-16s is poorly documented due to the Home Office definition of domestic abuse excluding this age group. Policing practices often fail to flag domestic abuse in under-16s, leading to inconsistent data collection. For instance Holly Newton's murder was classified as knife crime rather than domestic abuse, highlighting systemic recording issues. Social care data is also often unquantifiable, further obscuring the scale of the issue and limiting funding for services.

Some forces involved in this project are starting to identify and record teenage relationship abuse using Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs. However, this is at a very early stage, and standardisation across all police forces and other partner agencies in the future would be welcome.

Systemic barriers

Current systems struggle to address teenage relationship abuse effectively. Youth Justice Services hesitate to criminalise young offenders, while alternative interventions are scarce. Schools face rising mental health challenges and higher referral thresholds, leaving them under-resourced to support students.

Discussions on lowering the statutory age for domestic abuse to 13 concluded that systemic changes are needed to support young people before simply reducing the age limit.

By addressing these gaps in research, data collection, and systemic support, the VISION consortium seeks to improve recognition, prevention, and intervention for teenage relationship abuse. ■

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Katy Barrow-Grint is the deputy chief constable at Gloucestershire Constabulary. **Dr Ruth Weir** is the deputy director and senior research fellow at City St Georges, University of London





Pushing for change: the charity supporting police to deal with honour-based abuse

Sara Abubaker shares why Karma Nirvana is calling for change to improve the response to honour-based abuse (HBA) and forced marriage.

What is honour-based abuse (HBA)?

HBA is an incident or pattern of abuse motivated by a perpetrator's belief that an individual has brought shame or violated community norms. This abuse can target individuals who have either acted in a way that is seen as shameful or who are perceived to be at risk of doing so. It can involve violence, threats, intimidation, coercion and control in various forms. Importantly, HBA is not linked to any specific culture or religion - it is abuse that can occur in any community, regardless of faith or background.

The #Push4Change campaign to define HBA

Many organisations have definitions for HBA, but these vary or fail to capture the full scope of the abuse. Without a statutory definition, cases can be misclassified or overlooked. The #Push4Change campaign, led by Karma Nirvana and backed by over 30 sector partners, seeks to establish a clear statutory definition. This will help police and safeguarding organisations accurately identify and intervene in HBA cases.

Central to HBA is the use of honour-related norms. Victims are often expected to adhere to strict behavioural codes, and perpetrators use overt or subtle control to enforce these norms. Non-compliance may result in punishment aimed at restoring family

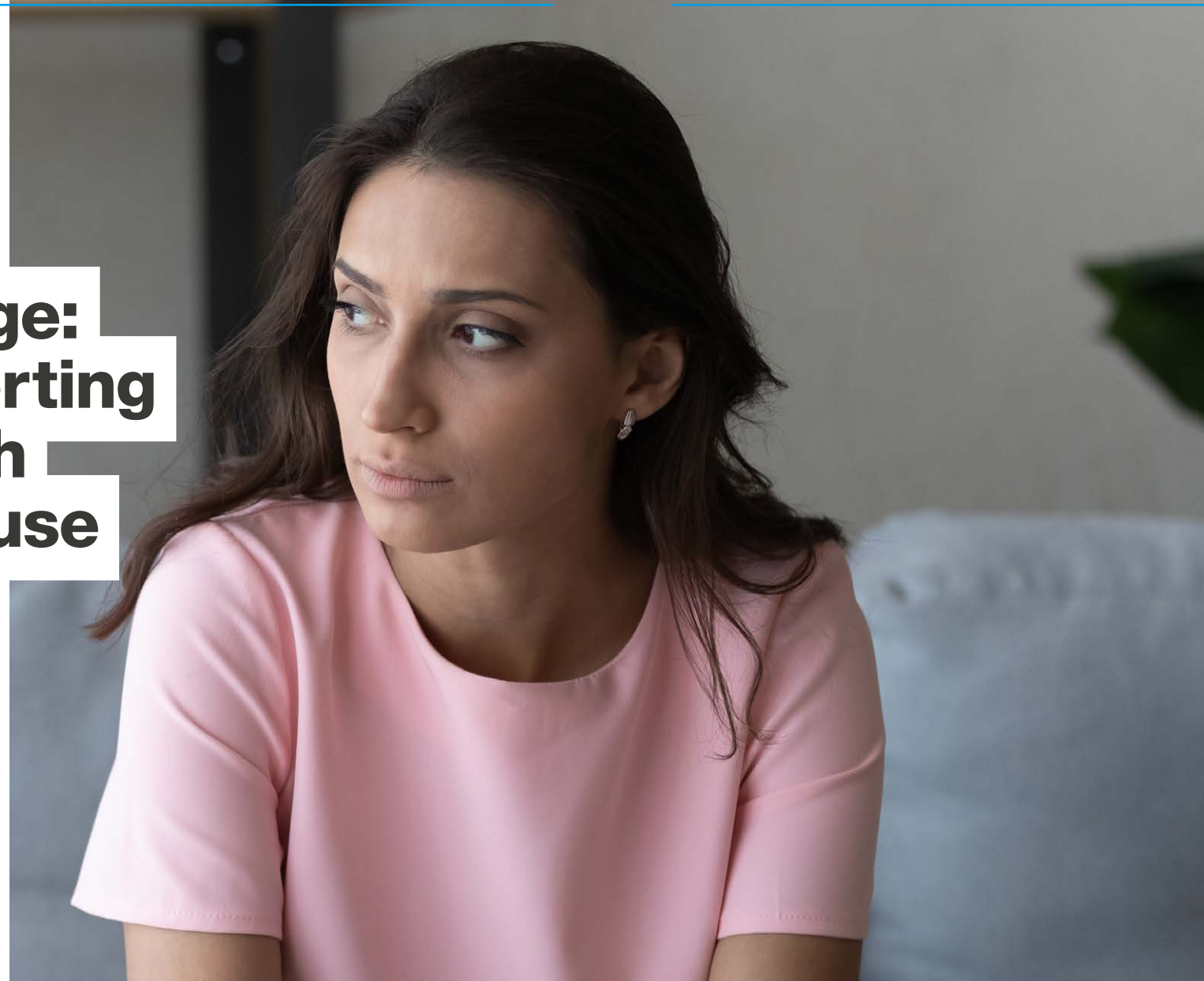
honour or community standing, often using shame and guilt as tools to prevent victims from speaking out.

The proposed statutory definition:

"An incident or pattern of violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion, control or abuse (including but not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, economic, spiritual, faith-related or emotional abuse) motivated by the perpetrator's perception that an individual has shamed, or may shame, the perpetrator, the family, or community or has otherwise broken, or may break, the perceived norms of the community's accepted behaviours, including by speaking out about the abuse and where the perception of shame may also prevent a victim from accessing support or help."

Why the #Push4Change campaign matters

Statutory definitions play a vital role in providing precision, uniformity and legal acknowledgment. Establishing a statutory definition for HBA has several implications:



For policing, this would mean:

- Recognise HBA as a distinct form of abuse.
- Ensure victims feel that their cases are taken seriously.

How the Karma Nirvana helpline can support officers

Police officers often encounter cases where HBA or forced marriage is suspected, but they may not have the confidence or specialist knowledge to respond appropriately. The Karma Nirvana helpline offers direct support to professionals and victims, providing real-time advice and guidance on identifying HBA and the appropriate safeguarding interventions. This service helps ensure that victims are protected from further harm.

Karma Nirvana's police training

Karma Nirvana also delivers specialist training to equip police with the skills to handle HBA and forced marriage cases effectively. Training sessions focus on understanding cultural contexts, our risk assessment tools and building confidence to challenge HBA.

This training has already transformed responses in many forces, helping officers understand and enhance the overall safety of those at risk.

What you can do

The police play a crucial role in protecting those at risk of HBA, but they cannot do it alone. Establishing a statutory definition, raising awareness of specialist support services, and equipping officers with the right training will ensure a whole-sector response that truly safeguards victims.

Karma Nirvana is calling on policing bodies to work with us to create a system that not only responds to HBA but prevents it. We urge officers and frontline professionals to engage with our training, use our helpline, and support the #Push4Change campaign. Because when it comes to honour-based abuse, the right response can save lives. ■

For more information about the training or to access support, please visit our website:
www.karmanirvana.org.uk

Our helpline number is 0800 5999 247, available Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Sara Abubaker is the Communications Officer at Karma Nirvana

Support and information

Violence against women and girls

National

Galop

www.galop.org.uk/get-help/helpline

Galop's National Helpline provides emotional support, guidance, and help to explore what options may be available to LGBT+ people aged 18+ who are experiencing or have experienced violence and abuse. Galop also provides one-to-one advocacy and casework support to LGBT+ victims and survivors.

Tel: 0800 999 5428

Email: help@galop.org.uk

Make a referral: www.galop.org.uk/make-a-referral

Hourglass

www.wearehourglass.org

Hourglass is a national charity who provide support and information to older people and those concerned about an older person experiencing abuse or exploitation.

Tel: 0808 808 8141

Karma Nirvana

www.karmanirvana.org.uk

Karma Nirvana is a charity dedicated to ending honour-based abuse in the UK.

Tel: 0800 5999 247

Email: karmanirvana.org.uk/about/contact-us

Rape Crisis

www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Rape Crisis England & Wales is the feminist charity working to end child sexual abuse, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment and all other forms of sexual violence.

Tel: 0808 500 2222

Refuge

www.refuge.org.uk

Refuge is the largest specialist domestic abuse organisation in the UK. On any given day their services support thousands of survivors, helping them to overcome the physical, emotional,

financial and logistical impacts of abuse and rebuild their lives – free from fear.

Tel: 0808 2000 247

Live chat: nationaldahelpline.org.uk (available 10am-10pm)

British Sign Language helpline:

www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/bsl

SafeLives

www.safelives.org.uk

A UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone and for good. SafeLives work with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse, at a local, national and societal level.

Surviving Economic Abuse

www.survivingeconomicabuse.org

Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) is the only UK charity dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse and transforming responses to it.

Tel: 0808 196 8845

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

www.suzylamplugh.org

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust is the UK's pioneering personal safety charity and leading stalking authority.

Tel: 0808 802 0300

The Survivors Trust

www.thesurvivorstrust.org

The Survivors Trust is a national membership organization and provides access to a range of specialist services to survivors including counselling, support, helplines and advocacy services for women, men, non-binary people and children.

Tel: 0808 801 0818

Victim Support

www.victimsupport.org.uk

Victim Support is an independent charity dedicated to supporting victims of crime and traumatic incidents in England and Wales.

Tel: 08 08 16 89 111

Women's Aid & Welsh Women's Aid

www.womensaid.org.uk

www.welshwomensaid.org.uk

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. Women's Aid is a lifesaving federation of frontline domestic abuse services, supporting women and children at the most challenging times of their lives.

Live chat: www.chat.womensaid.org.uk

Email: helpline@womensaid.org.uk

Regional

BAWSO

www.bawso.org.uk/en

Bawso provides practical and emotional prevention, protection and support services to Black Minority Ethnic and migrant victims in Wales.

Tel: 0800 731 8147

Email: referrals@bawso.org.uk

East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service (ESDAS)

www.esdas.org.uk

ESDAS is an independent charity providing specialist outreach services to victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

Tel: 01737 771350

Email: support@esdas.org.uk

Solace Women's Aid

www.solacewomensaid.org

Solace Women's Aid offers free advice and support to women and children in London to build safe and strong lives.

Tel: 0800 802 5565

Southall Black Sisters

www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

Southall Black Sisters provide support for gender-related abuse against Asian and African-Caribbean survivors.

Tel: 020 8571 9595

Stay Safe East

www.staysafe-east.org.uk

Stay Safe East is a London based charity who support disabled survivors of domestic abuse.

Tel: 020 8519 7241

Text: 07587 134 122

Email: enquiries@staysafe-east.org.uk

Mental health

Oscar Kilo

www.oscarkilo.org.uk

Oscar Kilo is the National Police Wellbeing Service, providing support and guidance for police forces across England and Wales to improve and build organisational wellbeing. It provides resources and support developed specifically for policing, by policing, and designed to meet the unique needs of officers and staff, their families and those who leave the service.

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org

When life is difficult, Samaritans are here to listen – day or night, 365 days a year. You can call them for free or visit their website for more ways to speak to a Samaritan..

Tel: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Shout

www.giveusashout.org

Shout is the UK's first and only, free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope.

Text: 'SHOUT' to 85258

YOUR FEEDBACK ON ISSUE 44: Corruption

(October 2024)

Thinking about the content of issue 44

95%

said this magazine was relevant to their work

92%

said the case summaries were clear and easy to understand

92%

said the case studies were relevant and explored the key issues

90%

said the mix of cases and articles felt about right

90%

said the key questions helped them identify learning in the cases

Thinking about the impact of issue 44

92%

said this magazine provided useful knowledge to supplement information received from training, briefings or practical experience

86%

said they intend to share issue 44 with their colleagues to share the learning it contains

81%

said this magazine was a useful tool to help drive change in police policy and practice

72%

said they intended to look in more detail at resources signposted in issue 44

68%

said reading issue 44 improved their confidence to speak up if they hear or see something that isn't right

Based on 39 responses to the survey.



YOUR FEEDBACK ON ISSUE 44: Corruption

(October 2024)



Top tips: What next from our readers

In response to previous issues of Learning the Lessons, readers gave us important insights into how they shared the magazine with others, and how they put the learning to use. We have turned some of those insights into top tips.

Which could you put into action?

Manager or supervisors

- Consider different ways to talk about and share the magazine with your team.
- Could you use the case studies or key questions as discussion points with your team to identify opportunities to reflect on existing practices?
- Consider the different meetings, boards and events you attend. Would it be useful to highlight key insights from the magazine at any of them?
- Encourage your teams to join our mailing list by emailing learning@policeconduct.gov.uk

Frontline officers and staff

- Did you find any case studies or articles that were particularly interesting or relevant? Consider sharing them with colleagues who may be interested in finding out more.
- Join our mailing list and encourage your colleagues to do the same by emailing learning@policeconduct.gov.uk
- Fill out our feedback survey (QR code below) so we can make sure Learning the Lessons continues to work for you.

Communication teams

- Could you share the latest magazine on your intranet, organisational learning portal or other platforms regularly accessed by officers and staff?
- Do you have noticeboards in key places? Consider featuring our poster, which features a handy QR code to download the magazine onto phones and devices www.policeconduct.gov.uk/our-work/learning/learning-the-lessons
- Consider helping us to share the magazine on your social media accounts to help reach new audiences.

Policy leads

- Consider opportunities to review and sense check existing policies in line with the learning in the magazine.
- Can you help to make sure the magazine has reached the right thematic leads in your force who will be most interested in the learning it contains, and can help influence changes to policy and practice?

Learning and development teams

- Consider if any of the case studies included in this magazine would be useful to embed into existing training packages to bring important topics to life.
- Have a training event coming up? Ask us for a small pack of free hard copies of the magazine to hand out by emailing learning@policeconduct.gov.uk

**YOUR
FEEDBACK
NEEDED**

What do you think about the latest issue?

How useful did you find it?

What topics would you like to see covered in future issues?

Please complete our three-minute feedback survey:
www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/Learningthelessons45/

The survey is open until
30 June 2025.



Interested in receiving new issues of Learning the Lessons?

The magazine is available
to everyone. Email
learning@policeconduct.gov.uk
to be notified when we publish
a new issue.



Want to get involved in the development of Learning the Lessons?

We have created a virtual panel, bringing together stakeholders from policing, academia, and community and voluntary sectors, to shape the development of future issues of the magazine. We invite panel members to review and provide feedback on drafts before publication.

Email learning@policeconduct.gov.uk if you are interested in joining the panel.