



# Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls – Policing Performance and Insights Publication

Executive Summary

March 2023

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## Foreword

Events of the last two years have shone a light on the terrible reality for many women and girls who are victim to violence, sexual crimes and harassment. They have also raised women's longstanding concern that the criminal justice system does not protect them or bring them justice.

Following my appointment as the National Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Coordinator for policing, I published the [\*\*national framework for policing\*\*](#), which focused on the areas that policing could help to improve immediately. In support, police forces have galvanised their local response through their own action plans.

In April 2022, I made a commitment to reporting on policing performance openly and publicly in the [\*\*VAWG: Outcomes and performance framework\*\*](#). That has culminated in this report, the first national policing performance and insights publication on tackling VAWG. The data herein provides a baseline for measuring our progress and is an important part of policing's commitment to reviewing and improving its overall response to VAWG.

In conjunction with the report, the VAWG strategic threat and risk assessment (STRA) will be published in April 2023. The STRA will provide greater insight into how perpetrators of VAWG are offending, as well as policing's capacity and capability to tackle this epidemic. These products, along with the continued support of the VAWG sector, will allow me to bring sharp focus and to drive practice improvement for the public and our staff.

The stream of police misconduct has highlighted cases of sexism, misogyny and criminality within policing. Trust in the police remains deeply shaken and will only be rebuilt through clear and robust action. There will be more cases and, while this will rightly shock many, they show that policing is rooting out and tackling corruption and abuse of power. I am saddened at the findings showing that our workforce lacks the confidence in our leaders to deal with this. A measure of our leadership must be the confidence that our people have to be

upstanders and to call out their colleagues who do not belong. Our recruitment, vetting and training programmes need to ensure that, wherever possible, we stop criminals and those intent on corrupting our integrity from being part of the policing family.

The role of policing is to relentlessly pursue those who target women and girls and bring them to justice, while recognising that some victims will never be able to relive their trauma in a courtroom. We need to convict where we can and, in instances where we cannot convict, we need to ensure that we take all opportunities to manage risk, including within our own ranks.

**DCC Maggie Blyth**

**National Violence against Women and Girls Coordinator**

## Executive summary

In February 2023 the Home Secretary published the strategic policing requirement, setting the direction against the biggest threats to public safety. For the first time this included violence against women and girls. A national threat is defined as a threat (whether actual or prospective) which is:

- a. a threat to national security, public safety, public order or public confidence that is of such gravity as to be of national importance; or
- b. a threat which can be countered effectively or efficiently only by national policing capabilities to counter threat.

Violence against women and girls is an epidemic of offending which disproportionately impacts on women and girls.

This is the first national policing performance and insights publication on tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG). It realises the commitments made in the [\*\*VAWG delivery framework\*\*](#) and [\*\*VAWG: Outcomes and performance framework\*\*](#).

This publication contains two separate but interconnected products:

- a **statistical bulletin** based on a presentation of data, which directly responds to the VAWG performance framework and was of sufficient rigour for national reporting
- an **insights report** drawing upon the statistical bulletin and wider evidence to add context and interpretation to findings, including priority areas that it was not possible to cover in the statistical bulletin

While this executive summary highlights key findings from both products, the two reports should be read alongside each other for a full explanation of the methodology, context and findings.

In totality, this publication provides the narrative with regards to policing's ability to understand national VAWG performance, context to help translate findings and a benchmark for future performance analysis and scrutiny.

Readers should use all sections of the publication to obtain a holistic insight into the key performance questions set in the [\*\*VAWG: Outcomes and performance framework\*\*](#).

The statistical bulletin incorporates an analysis of new data regarding policing demand and practice between 1 October 2021 and 31 March 2022, including all 43 territorial police forces across England and Wales, as well as the British Transport Police (BTP). It provides a critical benchmark for future planned performance analysis. This data was collected from forces and the Home Office Data Hub (HODH). It covers police misconduct, recorded crime data, and the use of orders and disclosure schemes. Data abstracted from the HODH was collected on 21 September 2022, while force data was returned by 6 January 2023.

The term VAWG refers to acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls.

For the purposes of collecting data on complaint and conduct matters, this has been defined as involving **any** of the following:

- delivery of duties (such as police action following contact)
- use of force
- discriminatory behaviour
- abuse of position or corruption (such as abuse of position for a sexual purpose)
- individual behaviours (such as overbearing or harassing behaviours)
- sexual conduct (such as sexual assault)
- discreditable conduct
- other, including any issues that do not fall into the other categories – this category is used where specific issues are identified, not as a catch-all

For the purposes of crime data collection, this has been defined as involving all of the following:

- at least one victim of a recorded crime has a recorded sex of female

- victim(s) should be 10 years and over
- **either** any crimes that have a domestic abuse (DA) or honour-based abuse flag (unique identifiers to indicate that the police believe domestic or honour-based abuse is involved), or one of the following crimes, whether flagged as DA or honour-based abuse or not:
  - forced marriage
  - female genital mutilation
  - homicide
  - rape
  - other sexual offences
  - violence with injury
  - public fear, alarm or distress
  - exploitation of prostitution
  - stalking and harassment
  - modern slavery

Producing this analysis has been highly challenging. The performance framework set out an ambitious collection plan that, during enactment, exposed numerous gaps. In particular, the absence of standardised national surveys of victims, police officers and staff means that it is not possible to track overall trends relating to victim experience and policing culture.

Where collection was possible, it has involved data gathering from IT systems built predominantly for local case management rather than for analysis. The information therefore may be captured but, in many cases, cannot be extracted nationally. Some data is held with partners rather than policing. Where data was available, the quality was variable, with certain key fields – such as recording of ethnicity – often missing. The lack of historic data collection also prevents analysis of trends over time within this publication.

## Key findings

### Building trust and confidence: Police-perpetrated VAWG

The first pillar of the delivery framework recognised the need to address standards within policing and to tackle police-perpetrated VAWG. This included improving the ability and confidence of victims and witnesses to report and to ensure that robust action was taken in response. This publication has enabled the number and nature of national police-perpetrated VAWG cases, as well as their outcomes, to be reported for the first time.

### What the data says

- **Volume:** Between October 2021 and March 2022, the police recorded 1,177 police-perpetrated VAWG complaints and conduct cases. Just over half of these cases (n=653, 55%) were investigated as a conduct matter, with the remaining cases (n=524, 45%) investigated as a complaint. Overall, these cases resulted in 1,483 unique allegations being recorded against 1,539 members of the police workforce, representing 0.7% of the workforce employed on 31 March 2022.
- **Nature:** Most complaint allegations were in the category of use of force (n=386, 63%). The most common definitions for conduct cases were:
  - discreditable conduct (n=423, 48%)
  - inappropriate sexual conduct, which includes sexual assault (n=170, 19%)
  - sexual harassment (n=110, 13%)
  - other sexual conduct (n=59, 7%)



- **Outcomes:** Just under half of complaints (n=234, 45%) and nearly three quarters of conduct cases (n=486, 74%) recorded during the data collection period had not been finalised when the data was collected, so outcomes for these cases are not included in the outcomes data. Where cases had been finalised, 70% (n=136) of conduct allegations and 91% (n=287) of complaint allegations resulted in a decision that no action was required.

## What wider insight suggests

Available data on police-perpetrated VAWG cases only provided a partial picture of the scale of police-perpetrated VAWG. Under-reporting is believed to be a factor (linked to gaps in victim and witness confidence in the response), as are issues with the police recording system to track and understand VAWG cases. Due to the categorisation of complaints and conduct cases, it is considered highly likely that, for example, DA and inappropriate sexual behaviour levels are higher for conduct cases than the data currently states and are grouped within the discreditable conduct category.

The investigation following the police-perpetrated domestic abuse (PPDA) super-complaint identified several concerns regarding the policing response, based on an analysis of data from 15 forces. This included concerns around independence of investigation, information sharing and missed opportunities between misconduct and criminal investigations. It is inferred that some of these issues are also present across wider police-perpetrated VAWG.

## Relentless pursuit of perpetrators

The second pillar of the VAWG delivery framework focuses on the relentless pursuit of perpetrators, ensuring that opportunities to prevent offending and bring offenders to justice are maximised. This publication reports on the volume of police-recorded VAWG offences, their outcomes and the use of policing powers. It also incorporates wider insight on the scale of VAWG.

### What the data says

- **Volume:** Over half a million VAWG-related crimes, as defined in the statistical bulletin, were recorded between October 2021 and March 2022, representing at least 16% of all recorded crime. Due to the aggregate nature of the DA-flagged crimes volume, the total of all VAWG-related crimes is likely to be higher. VAWG offending occurs in different forms and contexts, the most prevalent of which is DA. 447,431 crimes were flagged as DA during the data collection period.
- **Outcomes:** Data on recorded crimes where investigations were finalised during the data period was available from 40 police forces. In the period, 428,355 recorded crimes were finalised with an outcome code applied. Of all recorded crimes, 6% (n=27,835) were closed with a suspect being charged. The most prevalent code that was applied to closed cases indicated that there were evidential difficulties and that victims did not support – or withdrew their support for – onward action (n=30,188, 38%).
- **Protective measures and civil orders:** It is not possible to provide a figure for the total number of these orders relating to VAWG. Where data is available, numbers and breach volumes vary by type.
- **Disclosure schemes:** There were 9,214 disclosures made under the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS). National guidelines advise that these should be resolved within 35 days or fewer. 84% of forces reported a median response time of 35 days.

## What wider insight suggests

There remains a gap between police-recorded crime and insight gathered through the Crime Survey of England and Wales. However, this is reducing and work continues to help bridge the gap of under-reporting.

A consistent and more meaningful application of the Victims' Code, combined with a more suspect-focused investigation, has the potential to have the largest impact on policing's ability to improve outcomes.

Findings from the recent super-complaint into the police use of some protective orders highlighted issues across policing and partners regarding information sharing and data management. These gaps have an impact on policing's ability to enforce orders and to assess what works within the operating capacity of policing.

## Safer spaces

'Safer spaces' is the third pillar of the VAWG delivery framework, which focuses on partnership work to prevent and reduce offending. A range of practice examples were provided by forces. However, these were often geographically focused, time-limited and unsuitable for production of statistical data.

Available insight continues to highlight that VAWG occurs across public, private and online settings but is likely to manifest in different ways, with the greatest amount of harm and risk typically presenting in private spaces.

## Strategic threat and risk assessment

The first VAWG strategic threat and risk assessment (STRA) will be published in April 2023 and will provide greater insight into how perpetrators of VAWG are offending and policing's capacity and capability to tackle this epidemic. This publication and the insight from the STRA will inform how policing nationally and locally tackle VAWG.

## About the College

We're the professional body for the police service in England and Wales.

Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

**[college.police.uk](https://college.police.uk)**