



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

Insights Report

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Contents

Handling instructions	3
Language of probability	4
Judgement confidence statements	4
Building trust and confidence: Police-perpetrated VAWG	5
Insight	5
Key judgement 1	8
Key judgement 2	8
Relentless pursuit of perpetrators	9
Insight	9
Key judgement 3	11
Safer spaces	12
Insight	12
Key judgement 4	13
Data	14
Insight	14
Key judgement 5	15

Handling instructions

This report has taken insights from the ‘Statistical bulletin: Police performance, England and Wales’ reporting period 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. When reading this insights report it is important to reference the limitations and data caveats in the statistical bulletin. To address this, insight has also been taken from other recent publications relevant to policing conduct and the response to violence against women and girls (VAWG).

- Baroness Casey of Blackstock. (2022). **Letter sent via email to Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service Sir Mark Rowley.**
- College of Policing, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC). (2019). **A duty to protect: Police use of protective measures in cases involving violence against women and girls.**
- College of Policing, HMICFRS and IOPC. (2022). **Police perpetrated domestic abuse: Report on the Centre for Women’s Justice super complaint.**
- College of Policing and National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC). (2022). **Themes, learning and next steps following police forces’ reviews of police-perpetrated violence against women and girls.**
- Domestic Abuse Commissioner. (2022). **A patchwork of provision: How to support victims and survivors across England and Wales.**
- HMICFRS. (2021). **Police response to violence against women and girls: Final inspection report.**
- HMICFRS. (2022). **An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service.**
- Stanko B. (2022). **Operation Soteria Bluestone Year One report.**

Language of probability

Throughout this assessment, language of probability is made that is defined by the **Professional Head of Intelligence Assessment (PHIA) Yardstick**. The probability ranges for such terms are as follows.

Probability range	Judgement term
Up to 5%	Remote chance
10% to 20%	Highly unlikely
25% to 35%	Unlikely
40% to < 50%	Realistic possibility
55% to 75%	Likely or possible
80% to 90%	Highly likely
95% or above	Almost certain

Judgement confidence statements

This assessment makes key judgements based on the information analysed. The confidence of any judgements made will depend on the quality of the information source used. To indicate the quality of the information used, a confidence statement is given for any judgements.

High confidence	Good quality and or corroborated from a range of different sources, or situations where it is possible to make a clear judgement.
Moderate confidence	Open to various interpretations, or credible and plausible but lacks corroboration.
Low confidence	Scant or very fragmented, and or based on sources of suspect reliability.

Building trust and confidence: Police-perpetrated VAWG

Policing needs to take every possible step to root out those who do not uphold the culture and high standards that the public rightly expects from it. Policing cannot claim to take VAWG seriously unless it responds immediately and robustly to VAWG-related allegations against its own workforce.

Insight

1. The statistical bulletin shows how police-perpetrated VAWG has been defined for the purpose of providing data. Police-perpetrated VAWG allegations can be categorised as either conduct or complaints. Multiple allegations may be recorded in relation to a single police workforce member. Consequently, the number of allegations can be higher than the number of cases.
2. Between 1 October 2021 and 31 March 2022, there were 1,177 recorded cases of police-perpetrated VAWG, of which 653 (55%) were investigated as conduct and 524 (45%) were investigated as a complaint. These cases resulted in 1,483 unique allegations being recorded against 1,539 officers or staff members, representing 0.7% of the workforce employed on 31 March 2022. The total number of police officers and staff in the workforce on 31 March 2022 was 225,229.
3. While 1,177 cases were recorded, it is almost certain that this does not represent the true scale of all improper or prejudicial behaviours towards women and girls from the workforce. HMICFRS found that forces' understanding of the scale of misogynistic and improper behaviour towards female officers and staff is an area for improvement.

4. It is likely that under-reporting of improper or prejudicial behaviours is driven by a lack of confidence. HMICFRS reported a variety of reasons detailing acquiescence, fear of reporting and the consequence of doing so, poor investigations, and dissatisfaction with the outcome. In her commissioned review of the Metropolitan Police Service internal misconduct system, Baroness Casey of Blackstock found that officers and staff do not believe that action will be taken when concerns around conduct are raised, nor does the misconduct system find and discipline officers with repeated patterns of unacceptable behaviour.
5. It is a realistic possibility that these barriers to reporting reduce opportunities for early intervention and for preventing escalation to more serious behaviours.
6. Of the 1,483 unique allegations that were raised, 481 (32%) related to some form of inappropriate sexual conduct (sexual assault, sexual harassment, abuse of position for sexual purpose and other sexual conduct). There were 444 (30%) allegations recorded as discreditable conduct, which is a defined standard of professional behaviour that would include inappropriate sexual behaviours or domestic abuse.
7. Most behaviours captured under sexual conduct or discreditable conduct related to conduct matters, meaning that they were reported internally. However, the victim could be a member of the public or employed by the police service. It is likely that the greatest volume of police-perpetrated VAWG is identified internally by the workforce.

8. As part of the investigation into the super-complaint relating to police-perpetrated domestic abuse (PPDA), data was obtained from 15 forces for 2018. This showed that the volume of criminal charges brought against staff for PPDA was broadly similar with the charge rate for all domestic abuse investigations (9% v 11%). The data collection for the statistical bulletin is insufficient to identify how many police-perpetrated VAWG investigations resulted in a criminal charge.
9. The PPDA super-complaint data showed that 13 of 122 (10.7%) allegations resulted in formal proceedings, with seven members of the police workforce (6%) receiving a formal misconduct sanction, including dismissal. The data obtained for the NPCC performance framework showed that 22 (2%) allegations were referred to formal proceedings, with 13 (1%) allegations resulting in dismissal. At the time of data collection, 234 complaint and 486 conduct allegations had not been finalised.
10. From these data sets, although the criminal charge rate for domestic abuse is comparable, the number of allegations resulting in formal proceedings and the lower burden of proof in misconduct proceedings indicate that it is highly unlikely that members of the police workforce investigated will be referred to proceedings relating to police-perpetrated VAWG. There is also only a remote possibility that those referred will receive formal sanction, including dismissal.
11. It is almost certain that current misconduct recording processes across forces provide a significant barrier to articulating a more accurate picture of police-perpetrated VAWG, leading to a reduced understanding of the risks it presents and limiting the opportunities to tackle it.

Key judgement 1

It is almost certain that inappropriate sexual conduct presents the greatest volume and the highest risk of police-perpetrated VAWG. It is highly likely that the use of discreditable conduct as a category to capture inappropriate sexual behaviour or domestic abuse means that the proportion of allegations relating to these threats are higher than identified. **High confidence.**

Key judgement 2

It is a realistic possibility that the deficiencies identified within the PPDA super-complaint response are replicated across police-perpetrated VAWG investigations. Given the extent to which this is referenced in different sources and over different timeframes, it is a reasonable possibility that these deficiencies are systemic. **Moderate confidence.**

Relentless pursuit of perpetrators

Perpetrators are the one and only cause of VAWG. Victims should not feel as though they are the ones under investigation. Identifying and understanding the effect of trauma on VAWG victims helps to ensure the right policing response. Investigations should centre on the offence, perpetrator behaviour and the impact on victims. Convicting perpetrators of VAWG will improve victims' confidence to report and to challenge a culture in which perpetrators think they can 'get away with it'.

Insight

1. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner report into service provisions found that 2.4 million people were subjected to domestic abuse in the year prior to publication (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022).
2. The data return for the statistical bulletin showed that there were at least 507,827 VAWG crimes recorded between 1 October 2021 and 31 March 2022. Overall, there were 3,209,298 offences recorded, meaning that VAWG represents at least 16% of all recorded crime over that period.
3. During the same period, the statistical bulletin data return showed that there were 428,355 investigations finalised and outcomes applied to VAWG offences. Of these, the outcome with the greatest volume – 163,404 (38%) – was where a suspect was identified but there were evidential difficulties, and the victim did not support (outcome code 16). The next greatest volume – 98,706 (23%) – was where a suspect was identified and the victim supported but there were evidential difficulties (outcome code 15).
4. In 3,926 investigations (1%), the police recorded a decision that it was not in the public interest to proceed or continue an investigation.

5. The reason why a victim does not support, or withdraws support, is personal to them and may be made up of a number of complex factors. The Victims' Commissioner found that delays in the criminal justice system, perceptions of a lack of support (including limited referrals to victim support services), failure to be kept informed of progress, and missed opportunities for victim personal statements led victims to feel neglected and disregarded. They also found that almost half of all victims withdrew in violence against the person and rape investigations, and one in three withdrew in sexual offences investigations. **Operation Soteria Bluestone** found that some victims had made disclosures to the police which they never intended to be treated as a crime for investigation. These disclosures have been recorded as crimes by policing.
6. The statutory Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales sets out the services and minimum standards that must be provided to victims of crime. These include the right to be referred to services that support victims (Right 4), the right to be provided with information about the investigation (Right 6), and the right to make a victim personal statement (Right 7).
7. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner report into service provision found that 65% of victims wanted support with the police process, but only 31% were able to access it. Similarly, 71% of victims wanted support or advice for criminal courts, but only 27% were able to access it. The report also found that 43% of female survivors first disclosed to a health professional and 42% first disclosed to a police service. The report identified that those who were able to access help did so because services proactively engaged with them, and because professionals identified domestic abuse effectively.
8. It is a realistic possibility that challenges with police workplace culture identified in the **Operation Soteria Bluestone Year 1 Report** and the response to the PPDA super-complaint act as a barrier to victim engagement and to pursuing perpetrators across all VAWG crime types.

9. There are a range of protective measures available to both law enforcement and victims that seek to place controls on the behaviours of perpetrators to protect victims. These are a mix of both criminal and civil proceedings with differing consequences if breached. The use of a range of these measures have been considered as part of a super-complaint from the Centre for Women’s Justice and responded to by HMICFRS in their report **‘A duty to protect’**, with recommendations across the whole of system. The data returns from forces to support the work presented in this report identified varying levels of consistency, communication across agencies and understanding in forces regarding the range of protective orders in place. It is highly likely that poor levels of communication across agencies and data management provide a barrier to understanding the effectiveness of the range of protective orders, as well as their use and enforcement.
10. The statistical bulletin that accompanies this report demonstrates challenges in forming a holistic picture of the use of protective orders across police forces, as well as the level of breaches that take place with data from police forces. It is highly likely that insufficient data undermines efforts to understand what protective orders are most effective or which present the highest risk of breach. It is likely that this insufficient data is driven by inconsistent sharing of information across the whole of the system and a lack of national guidance.

Key judgement 3

It is likely that consistent and meaningful application of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales, supported by suspect-focused investigations across all VAWG crime types, will have the greatest impact on the relentless pursuit of perpetrators. **Moderate confidence.**

Safer spaces

VAWG occurs online, behind closed doors and in public spaces, and risk and volume may vary across each space. Appropriate tactics are required to identify and gather evidence, to convict perpetrators and to understand what enables their crimes in order to develop successful prevention strategies.

Insight

1. The recorded crime data in the statistical bulletin shows that stalking and harassment presents the greatest volume of VAWG offending with 217,945 (43%) recorded offences. Though the data does not allow identification of which space the offence took place in, these offences will cross public, private and online spaces. Stalking and harassment is further sub-divided as:
 - malicious communications (80,983)
 - harassment (75,196)
 - stalking (42,895)
 - controlling and coercive behaviour (17,162)
 - racial or religiously aggravated harassment (1,709)
2. Violence with injury is the next highest volume of VAWG offending, with 119,674 (24%) recorded offences. The sub-category of assault with injury accounts for 111,848 (94%) of these offences. These offences will cross public and private spaces.
3. VAWG-related public order offences account for 100,038 (20%) of recorded offences. This includes 8,439 offences where race or religion have been identified as an aggravating factor. VAWG-related public order offences are outlined in sections 4, 4a or 5 of the Public Order Act 1986. These offences cannot occur inside a private dwelling unless the 'act' in question will be seen or heard by someone outside a private dwelling. This includes offences aggravated under section 31 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Given the definition of these offences it is almost certain that the criminal behaviour will take place in a public space.

4. It is likely, based on volumes of offences and low criminal justice outcome rates – 3,456 (4%) charged or summons – that perpetrators feel they are able to get away with causing alarm, harassment or distress to women and girls in public spaces with only a remote possibility that they will be held to account for their behaviours.
5. **Research conducted in 2020** found that 76% of girls between the ages of 12 and 18 had been sent unsolicited nude images of boys or men. The volumes and the nature of the act indicate that it is highly likely that perpetrators feel they are able to get away with causing alarm, harassment or distress to women and girls in online spaces with only a remote possibility they will be held to account for their behaviours.
6. VAWG-related sexual offences account for 68,744 (14%) of recorded cases, with 17,385 of these being recorded as sexual offences against children. It is highly likely that these offences will predominantly occur in private spaces, with public and online spaces acting as an enabler for some to identify, groom, target and access victims.
7. It is likely that consistent and iterative ‘safety by design’ strategies, legislative responses such as the Online Safety Bill and UK and US Data Access Agreement, and improving understanding of VAWG across the public and law enforcement will create a more hostile online space for VAWG offenders.

Key judgement 4

It is a realistic possibility that the greater volume of VAWG offences occur – or are enabled – in a public or online space. However, it is highly likely that more threat and risk exists in VAWG offences occurring in private spaces. **Low confidence.**

Data

Policing (and partner) resources are finite. It is vital that an evidence-based approach to tackling VAWG is adopted to have the greatest impact on improving the lives of women and girls. Achieving this requires accurate and reliable information sources, especially those containing policing information, from which conclusions can be drawn with as high a level of confidence as possible.

Insight

1. Data from 43 territorial police forces across England and Wales, as well as the British Transport Police (BTP), was collected between 1 October 2021 and 31 March 2022. This identified that some of the data collected was being done nationally for the first time. This highlighted challenges with consistency of data across a range of areas, including a lack of demographic data, which has had an impact on the assessment of progress in areas such as engagement with, and outcomes for, minoritised victims.
2. The response to the PPDA super-complaint collected data across 15 forces for 2018 and found that it was not possible to reliably estimate the number of PPDA allegations that the police have been made aware of, or the number of outcomes, due to poor data quality and consistency.
3. The **Operation Soteria Bluestone Year 1 report** collected data from five pathfinder forces and found that none of these forces had sufficient data systems to support good strategic analysis to improve rape and other sexual offences investigations. Missing and incorrectly entered data were identified as a key limitation.
4. The VAWG outcomes and performance framework sets out to answer 10 key performance questions (KPQs), each with a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure performance. It has not been possible to address all KPQs in this initial data capture for varying reasons.

5. KPIs 2.1 (sexism and misogyny) and 3.1 (trust and confidence) demonstrated that there was no national survey data that informed these KPQs. Similar challenges exist with defining and quantifying trust and confidence in policing, both of which may require the development of both qualitative and quantitative measures. However, proxy data suggests that there is a persistent prevalence of misogynistic attitudes towards women working in the police and that women are less confident than men when asked if the police currently tackle VAWG seriously.
6. KPIs 4.1 (involvement of women and girls, particularly black and minoritised groups), 5.4 (outstanding suspects) and 8.1 (supervising investigations) were lacking in data for analysis, so they could not be reported.
7. KPIs 9.1 (reflection of VAWG in policing control strategies, police and crime commissioner plans, and community safety partnership plans) and 10.1 (identification of riskiest online, public and private spaces) provided qualitative data that gave insight into the activity of forces. However, consistency and detail has varied across forces, negating meaningful analysis or interpretation as to effectiveness at this time.
8. KPI 10.2 (preventative response to riskiest places) has identified insight from qualitative data. Analysis identified policing working in partnership to prevent VAWG and with education partners to support children having safe experiences across online, public and private places. However, the data period relating to these activities varies, so there are challenges in using this insight in a statistical bulletin.

Key judgement 5

It is almost certain that the poor and inconsistent collection, quality and management of data mean that the true scale of risks, harms and opportunities for policing across all VAWG threats are not fully understood. It is almost certain that this presents a barrier to effective service delivery, design of crime prevention tactics and practice improvement. **High confidence.**

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.

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