

**NO SMALL CHANGE:**

**MAKING HALVING  
VAWG A REALITY**

**SNAPSHOT REPORT  
FIFTH EDITION**

**MARCH 2025**

**END  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
WOMEN**

# END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

This fifth edition of EAVW's annual snapshot report details the contexts and developments over the last year<sup>1</sup> impacting violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the UK; analysing the government's response through legislation, policy-making and practice. This report is both illustrative of the seismic change that is needed to tackle an epidemic of VAWG in our society, and how only with the appropriate investment from the government, we might collectively achieve it.

## ABOUT EAVW

The End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) is a leading coalition of more than 160 specialist women's support services, researchers, NGOs and other experts working to end violence against women and girls in all its forms. Established in 2005, we campaign for every level of government to adopt better, more joined up approaches to ending and preventing violence against women and girls, and we challenge the wider cultural attitudes that tolerate and condone this abuse.

[www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk)

## Acknowledgements

This report is informed by the lived experiences of women whose lives are impacted by violence against women and girls (VAWG), and would not have been possible without the expertise, knowledge, published research and practice-based evidence of our coalition members and others in the VAWG sector.

The EVAW Coalition is a company limited by guarantee (no. 7317881) and a registered charity (no. 1161132).



Photo of the End Violence Against Women Coalition team.

1 EVAW's 5th Snapshot report analyses the period between February 2024 to February 2025.

# FOREWORD

This is the fifth edition of the End Violence Against Women Coalition's annual snapshot report, which maps out the latest research on violence against women and girls (VAWG) and analyses the political and policy developments impacting victims and survivors over the last year.

VAWG remains one of the most pervasive global violations of human rights, and in the UK it has been called a 'national emergency' by police chiefs who highlight that two million women are victims of men's violence each year. The statistics detailed in this report address prevalence based on recorded data on VAWG, but we know this cannot capture the true nature and scale of violence and abuse against women and girls, particularly against those who are most marginalised and unseen because of structural barriers to accessing support and justice.

In this report we've considered some of the most pressing contexts for tackling abuse: the advancements in technology which are outpacing regulation and presenting a significant challenge for services supporting survivors; the concerning rollback of human rights on a global scale; the growing presence of extreme right-wing ideologies in mainstream public and political discourse – such developments have significant implications for women's rights and safety and our vision for a better world.

The last 12 months have seen a new Labour government emerge, with tackling VAWG as a firm mission, but also talking about tough decisions in the context of challenging public finances. When it comes to the funding of life-saving specialist VAWG services, we cannot afford business as usual. This will undermine any credible efforts to address the national emergency we face. We have urgent need for investment to address the persistent funding issues facing our frontline support services, especially those run 'by and for' minoritised survivors.

We will need decisive leadership from the government on its mission to halve VAWG in a decade, with a clear and measurable plan for this vital work. Whilst a cross-departmental approach is necessary, some government departments are still missing in action. We hope that the next year marks a sea change in approach that has a real-life impact for women and girls.

**Andrea Simon, Executive Director at EVAW**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our annual snapshot report tracks developments in the UK over the last year (February 2024-February 2025) that impact women and girls, as well as new research that has been produced by the violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector and wider partners. VAWG includes sexual violence, domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, so-called 'honour-based' abuse, exploitation and abuse of women and girls online.

Women and girls' experiences of violence and abuse are compounded by systemic inequalities on the basis of race, ethnicity, wealth and social class, sexuality, gender identity, religion, immigration status and age. Whilst Black and minoritised women are erased from official data on VAWG due to a lack of disaggregation by race, 'by and for' services detail the disproportionate harm experienced by Black and minoritised women.

This report arrives at a critical juncture as the Labour government develops the detail on how to fulfill its commitment to halve VAWG within a decade. The urgency of this mission is underscored by the troubling rise in reported VAWG-related crimes, a 37% increase between 2018/19 and 2022/23;<sup>2</sup> highlighting that the situation is worsening, not improving. Public sentiment echoes this concern, with nearly half of respondents to EVAW's research believing the UK has



become more dangerous for women and girls in the last five years.<sup>3</sup>

The available data demonstrates that VAWG is still prevalent within our society, however significant data gaps currently hinder effective transparency and assessment of government progress. Our analysis details the complexities of tackling VAWG, amidst increasing misogyny within our society and the rise of far-right ideologies that challenge women's rights and safety. It examines the government's "mission-led" approach through legislation, policy-making, and initial legislative actions, including new offences for deepfake abuse and spiking, whilst shedding light on the chronic underfunding of specialist support services.

The report also evaluates critical policy areas, from prevention and online safety to the criminal justice system, health and social care, immigration, human rights, family courts, housing, and media representation.

<sup>2</sup> <https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/call-to-action-as-violence-against-women-and-girls-epidemic-deepens-1>

<sup>3</sup> YouGov Poll, February 2025



Two women looking across the Thames, pointing at Parliament.

As the government sets out its plans to halve VAWG, we outline key recommendations including:

- ▶ **Protect the human rights frameworks needed to tackle VAWG**
- ▶ **The government must adopt ERAW's accountability framework, which sets out a cross-departmental approach to tackling VAWG**
- ▶ **Put prevention front and centre of the government's halving VAWG mission, including adopting a public health approach to preventing VAWG**
- ▶ **Create a safer online environment by making a commitment through legislation and other mechanisms to better address online VAWG**
- ▶ **Ensure equal access to support and justice for all survivors, embedding the specialist women-led and 'by and for' sector's practice of intersectionality to meet the needs of all women and girls**
- ▶ **Support the sustainability of the specialist VAWG sector, including 'by and for' services, by reforming the current competitive funding and commissioning landscape and delivering a secure, national, multi-year funding settlement that is accessible to these services**
- ▶ **Resource and reform public institutions – from housing to health, the welfare system, children's social care and the criminal justice system – so they are better able to prevent and respond to VAWG and to ensure a whole-society approach**

By addressing systemic issues, challenging harmful misogyny, and prioritising prevention, we can collectively strive to create a future without VAWG.

# INTRODUCTION

The past year has been characterised by horrifying acts of violence against women and girls, with countless headlines reminding us of the urgent need for interventions to tackle this abuse. Indeed, 49% of respondents to a survey carried out by EAW at the start of 2025 think the UK has become more dangerous for women and girls in the last 5 years, rising to 52% of women.<sup>4</sup> A new government that has a clear mission to halve VAWG provides a beacon of hope. For the task ahead to be achievable, it will require a cross-governmental approach that is informed by the expertise of the specialist VAWG sector, as well as dedicated funding, to ensure the government can fulfill its mission.

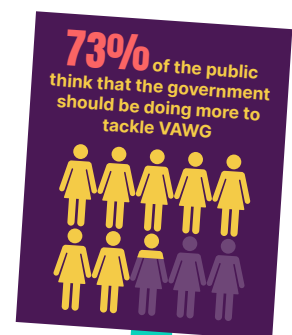
As the Labour government took power in July 2024, the conditions presented a monumental challenge, with reported VAWG getting worse, not better. The VAWG National Policing Statement, released in July 2024, reported a 37% increase in recorded VAWG-related crimes from 2018/19 to 2022/23.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) annual State of Policing report found that offences of VAWG remain highly prevalent, despite an overall downward trajectory in crime rate.<sup>6</sup> This rise in abuse is contributing to poorer mental health amongst women<sup>7</sup> throughout the country, particularly as falling living standards and growing gender inequality means women are trapped in abusive relationships by the cost of fleeing.<sup>8</sup>

Labour achieved a majority in the General Election with a manifesto commitment to halve VAWG within a decade. This is an ambitious aim, particularly set against the context of a reported £20 billion shortfall in public finances<sup>9</sup> and with very little public spending growth set out in the Chancellor's budget.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the government's commitment, public attitudes are increasingly divided across gender lines. According to Girlguiding, 47% of 11-21-year-olds feel less safe because of sexism and misogyny; a significant rise from 17% 10 years ago. However, a 2024 Ipsos survey revealed that half of Britons think women's equality has gone too far.<sup>11</sup>

The devastating murders of Elsie Dot Stancombe, Bebe King and Alice Dasilva Aguiar, and life changing violence against five other girls and two women, in Southport sparked a national conversation about extreme misogyny and the influence of violent online content, as well as catalysing an outbreak of racist riots and protests. The rise of the far right and mainstreaming of its ideas about VAWG and migration continue to present a challenge.

We know that tackling VAWG is a priority to the public. A YouGov survey carried out on behalf of EAW in February 2025 found that 73% of the public think that the government should be doing more to tackle VAWG; 5% higher than when we asked in 2024. The need for a human rights-based approach to tackling VAWG is urgent, yet it is still far from top of the agenda.



Source: YouGov

4 YouGov Poll, February 2025

5 <https://cdn.prgloo.com/media/034ed60aa6564c1fbdcfb03fd8e6a210.pdf>

6 <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/publication.html/state-of-policing-the-annual-assessment-of-policing-in-england-and-wales-2023/>

7 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/08/abuse-is-main-driver-of-mental-ill-health-in-women-and-girls-say-psychiatrists>

8 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Price-of-Safety-Report-2024-Final-Version.pdf>

9 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jul/25/rachel-reeves-expected-to-reveal-20bn-shortfall-in-public-finances>

10 <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/autumn-budget-2024-key-announcements-and-analysis/>

11 <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/international-womens-day-survey-2024>

# TRENDS



Women at a protest against police-perpetrated violence against women.

## A future without VAWG: Rhetoric vs. reality

### A mission-led approach

The previous government's Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy<sup>12</sup> came to an end in the Spring of 2024, with a new report from the National Audit Office (NAO) finding that 78% of commitments across the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan have been met.<sup>13</sup> Despite this progress, the report indicates that the prevalence of sexual assault against women has increased. The report also highlights that the Home Office historically underspent its own budget allocated to the VAWG Strategy by an average of 15% between 2021-22 and 2023-24. It is vital that the government learns from the failings of the last strategy in its approach to tackling VAWG.

The new government has committed to a "mission-led" approach that focuses on five key areas: growth, the NHS, clean energy, safer streets and opportunity.<sup>14</sup> Labour's commitment to halve VAWG within the next decade sits within the Safer Streets mission and sets out the need for a "national effort to

**Six months on, how the government plans to halve VAWG and what metric their progress will be measured against is yet to be formally laid out.**

target perpetrators and address the root causes of abuse and violence".<sup>15</sup> Six months on, how the government plans to halve VAWG and what metric their progress will be measured against is yet to be formally laid out. There have been indications that each government department is responsible for developing a metric of their own, to encourage a cross-departmental approach.<sup>16</sup>

There is a clear opportunity for the new government to set out its commitment to halve VAWG in a refreshed Ending VAWG Strategy which is ambitious in scope, prioritises prevention and applies an equalities lens throughout. The plan should address all forms of VAWG and consider the disproportionate impact of VAWG on Black, minoritised and marginalised women, including migrant women.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://labour.org.uk/change/mission-driven-government/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://labour.org.uk/change/take-back-our-streets/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-11-27/debates/1D3BC344-DC85-4A74-A262-A5B39B382D04/ViolenceAgainstWomenAndGirls#contribution-58271B08-5121-479B-B103-31FB68AB0F2B>





Man following a woman at night in an alley.

## What we've seen so far

In its first six months, the Labour government has announced new criminal offences for deepfake abuse and spiking, as well as making announcements around stalking, the details of which we outline in the 'legislation' section of this report. However, the delivery of policies has not yet matched the rhetoric. Labour's manifesto commitments on VAWG centred on actions within the criminal justice system, including:

- ▶ A legal advocate in every police force area to advise victims from the moment of report to trial
- ▶ Specialist rape and sexual offences teams in every police force
- ▶ Fast-track rape cases, with specialist courts at every Crown Court location in England and Wales
- ▶ Introduce domestic abuse experts in 999 control rooms
- ▶ Introduce a new offence of criminal exploitation of children

The government also commenced a series of reviews, including the Curriculum and Assessment review, the Sentencing Review, the Spending Review and the Strategic

Defence Review. We welcomed the publication of the Pornography Review, with many of the recommendations chiming with those made by the VAWG sector.<sup>17</sup> It is currently unclear how these findings will be coordinated and incorporated into strategies to reduce VAWG.

Following concerted attacks on human rights protections in recent years, there is an important role for the new government to play to restore legislative protections and promote human rights and civil liberties which are key to ending VAWG. VAWG organisations will hope that Labour demonstrates a proactive approach to restoring rights, including addressing previous regressive policies on immigration and migrant rights in the Nationality and Borders Act, which deny protections to women seeking asylum who have survived violence and abuse such as rape, FGM and trafficking into sexual exploitation. The UK's commitments under the European Human Rights Convention (EHRC) are concerningly still a target of Conservative party rhetoric. It is vital that strategies to end VAWG are pursued within a human-rights framework, incorporating the state's responsibilities to protect women and girls within both the Human Rights Act and EHRC.

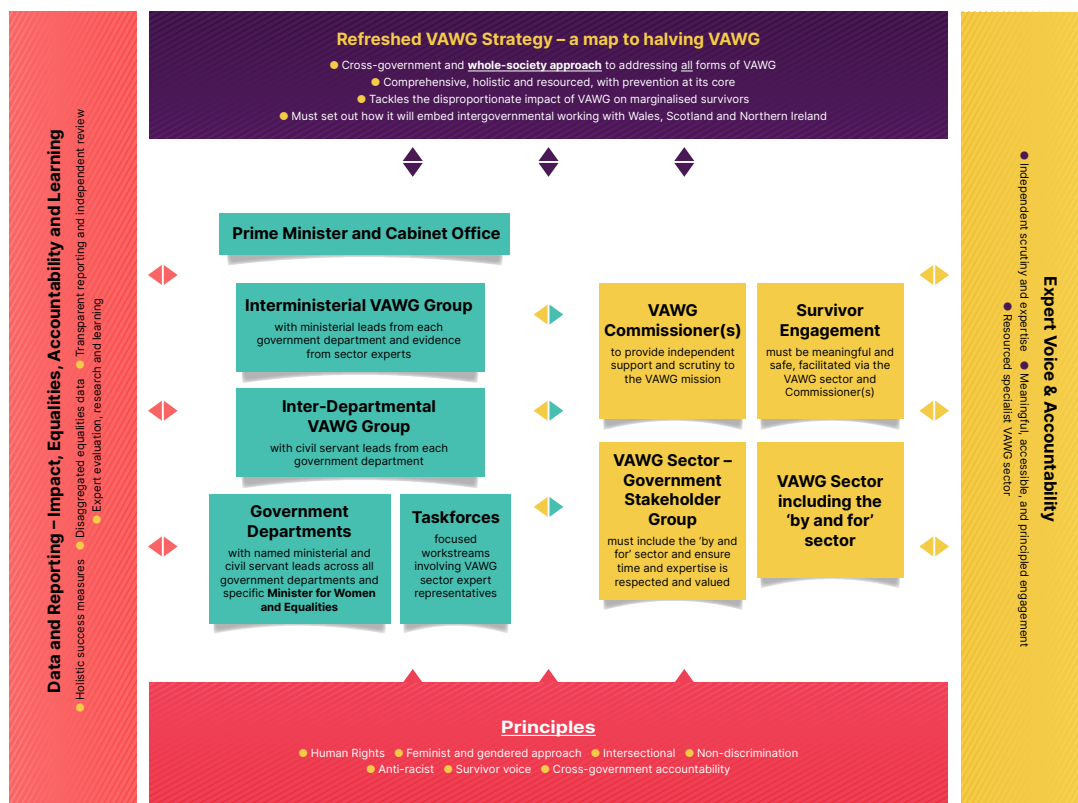
## Accountability framework

For the government to deliver a whole-society approach to tackling VAWG,<sup>18</sup> its delivery plan must sit across all government departments, with ultimate responsibility for robust oversight and governance sitting at the highest levels of government. Alongside Imkaan, Respect, Rape Crisis England & Wales, Women’s Aid Federation of England, Welsh Women’s Aid, and Women’s Resource Centre, EVAW set out a framework for government which outlines meaningful engagement with the specialist ending VAWG sector, accountability and transparency for and delivery of a new VAWG strategy.<sup>19</sup> (pictured below).

Without sufficient data we cannot assess how well government strategies are working

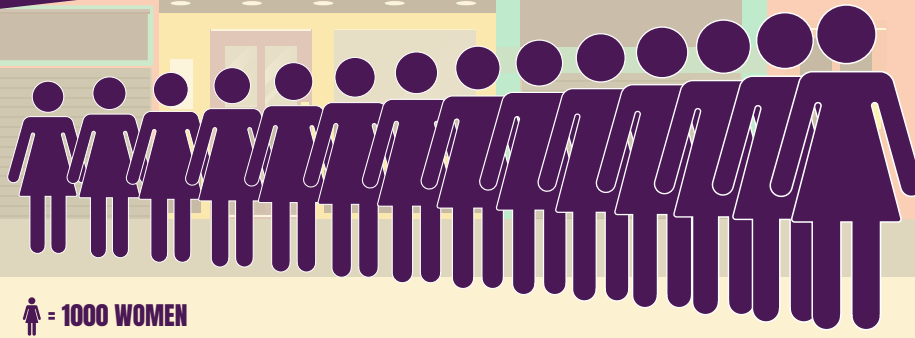
to prevent and tackle VAWG, and all too often government outputs become focused on what can be publicly framed as success rather than reflecting the realities survivors are facing on the ground. In particular, the lack of disaggregated equalities data severely limits our ability to assess if the actions of government and state bodies are addressing any disparities different groups of survivors face, e.g. equal access to justice and safety for Black and minoritised, D/deaf and disabled and LGBT+ survivors.

A robust monitoring and evaluation framework is therefore essential, with the expert VAWG sector feeding into its development to ensure it is focused on holistic success measures, captures government spending on VAWG and applies an equalities lens which enables us to see the impact of interventions for marginalised groups.



18 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/general-election-2024-vawg-sectors-manifesto-calls-on-political-parties-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-for-good/>

19 [https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EVAW\\_A-GOVERNMENT-FRAMEWORK-FOR-DELIVERY-AND-ACCOUNTABILITY.pdf](https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EVAW_A-GOVERNMENT-FRAMEWORK-FOR-DELIVERY-AND-ACCOUNTABILITY.pdf)



**RAPE CRISIS  
ENGLAND AND  
WALES REPORTING  
AN AVERAGE  
WAITLIST OF  
AROUND  
**14,000**  
SURVIVORS**

## Investing in change: The landscape for services

2024 saw specialist support services face another year of chronic underfunding and oversubscribed waiting lists, with Rape Crisis England and Wales (RCEW) reporting an average waitlist of around 14,000 survivors,<sup>20</sup> and services across the country continuing to close due to a severe lack of resource, disproportionately impacting services run 'by and for' Black and minoritised women.<sup>21</sup> Welsh Women's Aid contends that while rates of violence against women and girls in Wales are increasing, funding for the specialist services that support survivors is severely lacking.<sup>22</sup>

In the spring of 2024, the Conservative government's budget cut spending on public services and prioritised austerity,<sup>23</sup> disproportionately impacting women who rely on public services due to structural inequalities in the labour market and across society. A stripping back of services commissioned by local councils accompanied a lack of clarity at that time about the continuation of government funding past March 2025. This created a critical situation for domestic abuse and sexual violence services experiencing increased demand as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

A concerning 62.5% of Women's Aid Federation England (WAFE) services reported that between 2022-2023, survivors had been unable to afford to leave the perpetrator.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Women's Aid's 2025 Annual Audit found that three quarters (71.4%) of domestic abuse organisations running a service without dedicated funding used their organisational reserves to cover the costs,<sup>25</sup> and one in ten (15%) respondents had to close or reduce an area of work in their service over the past financial year. Whilst Labour's Autumn Budget announced a year of continuation funding for victim services at the same level, rising demands on services and increasing costs, including rising National Insurance (NI) contributions,<sup>26</sup> may signify real-term cuts for many organisations.<sup>27</sup>

In early 2025, ahead of a forthcoming Spending Review that will set up government departments' budgets for the coming years, there remains a lack of clarity on the future of victim funding for many services. Services must also contend with complex commissioning processes, which have a detrimental impact on the availability of specialised support often provided by smaller organisations, given how they can be disadvantaged by tendering processes which favour larger, national and mainstream organisations.<sup>28</sup> Short term, unsustainable

20 <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/news/sexual-violence-and-abuse-services-are-not-being-prioritised/#:~:text=Chronically%20underfunded%20and%20oversubscribed%2C%20Rape,growing%20demand%20and%20insecure%20funding>

21 <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/lifesaving-domestic-abuse-services-at-risk-from-council-financial-crisis-warns-commissioner/>

22 <https://welshomensaid.org.uk/news/state-of-the-sector-2023-24/#:~:text=In%20the%20report%2C%20we%20evidence,among%20staff%20in%20statutory%20services>

23 <https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-march-2024/>

24 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/annual-audit-2024/>

25 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/annual-audit-2025/>

26 <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/autumn-budget-2024-key-announcements-and-analysis/>

27 <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14982/pdf/>

28 <https://victimscomm-newsroom.prgloo.com/news/victim-advocates-going-above-and-beyond>

funding is damaging for organisations committed to providing more innovative support for victims of VAWG and fuels issues related to staff retention. However, Refuge reported that the prevalence of short-term contracts (one year or less) increased between 2022/23 and 2023/24.<sup>29</sup>

In Scotland, a £19 million funding extension will allow some organisations to continue their work until March 2026.<sup>30</sup> The Delivering Equally Safe fund is the Scottish Government's funding programme to support third sector organisations and public bodies to contribute to the objectives, priorities and outcomes of Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls.<sup>31</sup>

With Labour's ambition to halve VAWG, we look to the government to address significant underfunding, especially of the specialist 'by and for' sector, to ensure that their vital work supporting victims, can expand beyond crisis provision to provide earlier intervention and community outreach. As it stands, the 2024 Autumn Budget did little to reassure services about sustainable future provision. Whilst some have welcomed confirmed funding for the year ahead, specialist support services are concerned about cuts of 4.2% to core funding for Police and Crime Commissioners, and the knock on impact for local commissioning of victim support services.<sup>32</sup> Coupled with the impact of the National Insurance increases for employers and rises in inflation, the Victims' Commissioner highlights that this is causing an "existential crisis" for charities, calling for an urgent

funding increase in the next spending review.

In fact, for Rape Crisis services, the rise in National Insurance alone will cost them anywhere from £5,000-£82,000 per annum,<sup>33</sup> and for larger organisations such as Refuge there will be additional costs of £400,000,<sup>34</sup> which will further intensify the already significant funding pressures and operational challenges they face. This situation is even more precarious for specialist 'by and for' organisations who have been drastically underfunded for decades. For domestic abuse, Women's Aid estimates that current government investment falls £232 million short of the £427 million needed to properly fund local specialist services in England and Wales, and the separate ring-fenced funding that is needed to ensure the sustainability of vital 'by and for' organisations.<sup>35</sup>

## The rise of the right

The last year has seen the rise of the radical far-right movement in the UK<sup>36</sup> and across Europe,<sup>37</sup> and in Westminster four seats were secured by Reform in the general election, in the midst of increasing right-wing ideologies in the public domain.<sup>38</sup> Such developments have significant implications for women's rights and safety and our vision for a better world.

The rise of the far right over the last year surpassed ideological unrest, spilling into violent acts following the tragic murders of three young girls in Southport: Elsie Dot Stancombe, Bebe King and Alice Dasilva

29 <https://refuge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Refuge-Annual-Commissioning-Report-2023-24.pdf>

30 <https://www.gov.scot/news/preventing-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

31 <https://www.gov.scot/news/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-3/>

32 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/02/criminals-unpunished-victim-services-cuts-reeves>

33 A survey Rape Crisis England and Wales (RCEW) carried out with centre managers and directors in December 2024. 22 out of 37 centres responded. The total 22 centres expect to pay to account for the increase in National Insurance employer contributions in 25/26 is £491,716.15 – on average £22,250 per centre, however it ranged from £3,127 to £82,000, depending on the size of the centre (number of staff).

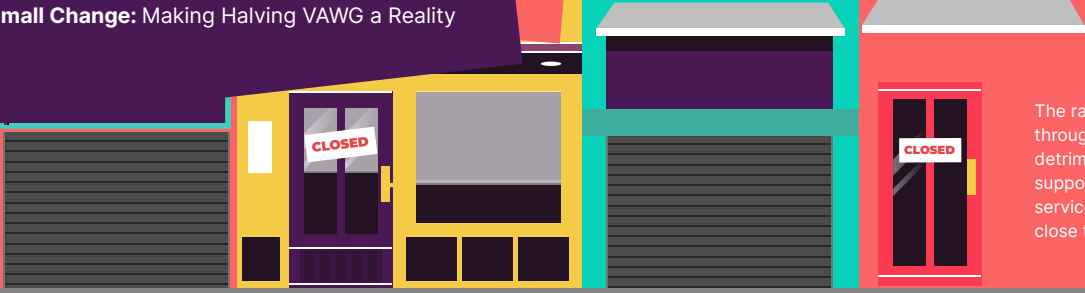
34 This figure was published in a private letter.

35 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Womens-Aid-Funding-Safer-Futures-Report-May-2024.pdf>

36 <https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/state-of-hate-2024-v15.pdf>

37 <https://www.ibanet.org/The-year-of-elections-The-rise-of-Europes-far-right>

38 <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2024/09/24/reform-uk-are-far-right-heres-why/>



The racist riots that spread throughout the UK had a detrimental impact on migrant support services and 'by and for' services, many of whom had to close their doors.

Aguilar. The far right weaponised their deaths, fuelling racist riots that rippled across the UK, resulting in extreme acts of violence by hordes of people against migrants and minoritised people, including attacks on immigration centres<sup>39</sup> and setting fire to multiple hotels housing migrants, many of whom were women escaping domestic abuse.<sup>40</sup>

The racist riots that spread throughout the UK had a detrimental impact on migrant support services and 'by and for' services, many of whom had to close their doors as a result of the racist violence occurring on the streets and direct threats from far-right groups. Whilst the Prime Minister was quick to condemn the riots, the government responded by introducing further police powers in the form of a violent disorder unit to deal with those involved in the attacks.<sup>41</sup>

A letter authored by Imkaan and co-signed by the VAWG sector highlights the fear among their staff and the women they support, that their services, including specialist refuges, will be attacked. It also details police failures to intervene in acts of violence and disorder rooted in racism and Islamophobia. We have witnessed mainstream politics and politicians increasingly contribute to the climate of punitive rhetoric and policies on immigration,<sup>42</sup> which has driven an anti-migrant sentiment that plays a role in such riots. The letter calls on the Prime Minister to address how immigration status and citizenship have been

used to legitimise the dehumanisation and othering of anyone who is not white, and condemn the spread of misinformation and normalisation of xenophobia.

The link between misogyny and extremism has been formalised by the government's decision to categorise misogyny as extremism.<sup>43</sup> It is currently unclear how misogyny will be addressed under this framework, however the VAWG sector has raised concerns about framing misogyny within the prism of counter-terrorism due to the historic over-policing of young men from Black and minoritised communities through the government's Prevent strategy.<sup>44</sup>

In January, the owner of X, Elon Musk, made a series of public comments about child 'grooming gangs' in the UK. This reignited conversations about the response to the sexual abuse and exploitation of girls in several towns across England a decade ago, as well as the spread of harassment and misinformation online. The weaponisation of victims of VAWG is a divisive and recurring right-wing, racist trope against men from Pakistani communities,<sup>45</sup> yet a Home Office literature review published in 2020 found that perpetrators of group-based sexual exploitation are mostly commonly white,<sup>46</sup> and most typically occurs within the family.<sup>47</sup> Musk's comments have been given power by the Home Secretary's announcement that the government will conduct a new nation-level "rapid audit" on so-called 'grooming gangs'.<sup>48</sup>

39 <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/news/statement-on-the-far-right-riots-following-the-southport-attack/#:~:text=Black%20women's%20groups%20like%20Southall,those%20sowing%20hatred%20and%20division>

40 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-issues-further-comment-on-the-escalation-of-islamophobic-and-race-riots/>

41 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2024/aug/01/keir-starmer-meeting-police-chiefs-southport-attack-kemi-badenoch-labour-conservatives-uk-politics-latest-updates>

42 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-increase-in-migration-returns-and-illegal-working-arrests>

43 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c15gn0lq7p5o>

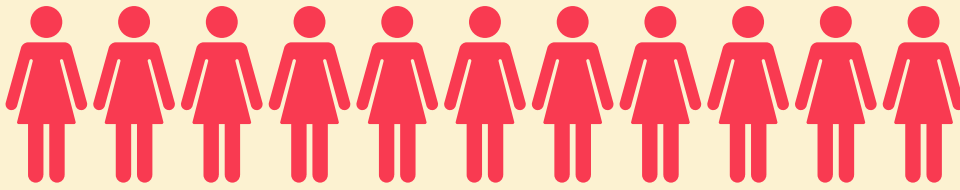
44 <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2023-11/Amnesty%20UK%20Prevent%20report%20%281%29.pdf?VersionId=.hjlwRZuHiGd1-IECXroFwg25jyBtwur>

45 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/solidarity-with-survivors-of-child-sex-abuse/>

46 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/944206/Group-based\\_CSE\\_Paper.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/944206/Group-based_CSE_Paper.pdf)

47 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/next-steps-to-tackle-child-sexual-exploitation>

48 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/cyv43zpr4pjt>



**1 IN EVERY  
12 WOMEN**  
WILL BE A VICTIM  
OF VAWG EVERY  
YEAR (2 MILLION  
VICTIMS)

## PREVALENCE

The College of Policing and National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) estimate that at least 1 in every 12 women will be a victim of VAWG every year (2 million victims).<sup>49</sup> However, the NPCC itself acknowledges that due to under-reporting of VAWG crimes, these figures are likely to fall far short of the real figure.

As such, recorded data on VAWG is inconsistent across criminal justice agencies and is often regarded as an unreliable measure of the true nature and scale of violence and abuse against women and girls. Available data sets often fail to capture the experiences of women and girls with protected characteristics, leaving significant gaps in understanding how age, disability, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership or pregnancy status<sup>50</sup> have an impact on survivors' ability to access justice and support. They are also rarely disaggregated by region.

In May 2023, changes were made to the Home Office Counting Rules for conduct crimes (stalking, harassment and coercive and controlling behaviour). The requirement for the police to record two crimes when one of them was a conduct crime, such as when there are multiple instances of harassment that make up a course of conduct, was removed, though police continue to

investigate these offences. This has led to a reduction in police recorded offences often associated with conduct crimes, such as stalking, harassment and domestic abuse. Whilst it is difficult to say conclusively whether these changes have led directly to the fall in recorded crimes over the last year, including domestic abuse and honour-based abuse, it is vital to acknowledge the impact these changes may have had when analysing published data.

### Sexual violence

Latest estimates from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) for the year ending September 2024 show that 2.2% of people aged 16 years and over had experienced sexual assault (including attempted offences).<sup>51</sup> Although there is year-to-year volatility in these estimates, over the last 10 years there has been an increase in sexual assault. The CSEW for the year ending March 2024 estimated 2.6% of people aged 16 to 59 years had experienced sexual assault (including attempted offences) in the last year compared with 1.5% in March 2014.

As set out by the ONS, there have been general increases in police recorded sexual offences over the last decade, largely

49 <https://cdn.prgloo.com/media/034ed60aa6564c1fbdcfb03fd8e6a210.pdf>

50 <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/giwl/assets/measuring-gender-equality-in-the-uk-data-on-violence-against-women-and-girls.pdf>

51 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2024#sexual-offences>



Woman sat on a sofa looking out of the window,

THE NUMBER OF  
SEXUAL OFFENCE  
CASES WAITING  
TO GO TO THE  
CROWN COURT  
NOW STANDS AT

**11,574**

because of improvements in police recording practices. In the year ending September 2024, there was a 5% increase to 199,445 offences, compared with the previous year (190,620 offences). Of the 199,445 sexual offences recorded in the 12 months up to September 2024, only 4.1% of cases were charged within the year.

Roughly 35% (69,958 offences) of all sexual offences recorded by the police in year-ending September 2024 were rape offences. This was a 3% increase compared with the year ending September 2023 (67,746 offences).<sup>52</sup> Police outcomes data sets out that of the 69,958 rapes recorded in the 12 months to September 2024, only 2.7% cases were charged within the year.<sup>53</sup>

However, it is important to remember that police recorded crime is only a very small part of the picture, with CSEW data providing an estimation that fewer than one in six victims of rape report the crime to the police (and this is likely an over-estimation of reporting).<sup>54</sup>

There were 7,703 rape flagged cases referred to the CPS by the police in year ending

September 2024 (an increase of 12% compared to previous year) and 4,148 cases charged (an increase of 18% compared to previous year), with 2,432 convictions (an increase of 21% compared to previous year)<sup>55</sup>. However, despite these increases there remain significant barriers to justice forcing victims to withdraw from prosecutions. 18.2% of CPS prosecutions that resulted in non-convictions were because the victim no longer supported or was unable to support the prosecution in the year ending September 2024.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, we are seeing a continued increase in the length of time to charge, with the most recent CPS data showing a mean average of 159.4 days for a charging decision.

New figures released by the Ministry of Justice in December 2024 showed that the number of sexual offence cases waiting to go to the Crown Court now stands at 11,574, a new record high.<sup>57</sup> This is a 44.5% increase compared to the number waiting at the same time in 2022. The number of adult rape cases waiting to go to court stands at 3,291.

52 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2024#sexual-offences>

53 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-outcomes-year-to-september-2024-data-tables>

54 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/natureofsexualassaultbyrapeorpenetrationenglandandwales>

55 <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-2-2024-2025>

56 <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-2-2024-2025>

57 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6758642e134b685863cfc960/cc\\_rdos\\_tool\\_OC.xlsx](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6758642e134b685863cfc960/cc_rdos_tool_OC.xlsx)

## Domestic abuse

Police recorded data on domestic abuse offending only provides a partial account of the actual levels of abuse experienced, due to under-reporting by victims, and therefore the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) self-completion module is considered a more reliable measure of domestic abuse. Estimates from the CSEW year ending September 2024 showed that 4.5% of people aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the last year.<sup>58</sup>

The ONS sets out that the police flagged 827,609 offences as domestic abuse-related in the year ending September 2024, including 646,211 violence against the person offences. This was a 6% decrease from the previous year (882,705 offences), mainly because of fewer violence against the person offences (down from 696,935 offences). This is likely, in part, to reflect recent changes in police recording practices. The proportion of violence against the person offences flagged as domestic abuse-related was 33%, similar to the previous year's 34%.

In contrast to the above decrease, the Women's Aid Annual Audit report found their members experienced higher demand for domestic abuse services this year, including with the quantity of cases, their complexity, as well as case lengths.<sup>59</sup>

There were 74,919 domestic abuse flagged cases referred to the CPS by the police in the year ending September 2024, an increase of 7.7% compared to previous year. In the same year 51,543 cases were charged, resulting in 39,499 convictions. The conviction rate was

THE POLICE  
FLAGGED  
**827,609**  
OFFENCES AS  
DOMESTIC ABUSE-  
RELATED IN THE  
YEAR ENDING  
SEPTEMBER 2024

Woman looking  
towards a window.

75.2%, the lowest in 8 years. Also concerning is the fact the prosecution timeliness was the highest in nine years at 165.7 days.<sup>60</sup>

48.5% of prosecutions (6,312) that resulted in non-convictions were stopped because the victim no longer supported or was unable to support the prosecution. This compares to 47.3% the previous year.<sup>61</sup>

Due to a lack of consistency around the way domestic abuse data is gathered, ONS data is unable to track domestic abuse cases through each stage of the criminal justice system, so it is therefore not possible to compare attrition rates year on year.<sup>62</sup> The Domestic Abuse Commissioner is therefore calling for the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and criminal justice agencies to overhaul and integrate data across the criminal justice system, to enhance operational work, improve accuracy, promote transparency and build accountability.<sup>63</sup>

58 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2024#domestic-abuse>

59 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Annual-Audit-2024.pdf>

60 <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-2-2024-2025>

61 <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-2-2024-2025>

62 [https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/dac\\_cjs-report\\_summary\\_FINAL-DIGITAL.pdf](https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/dac_cjs-report_summary_FINAL-DIGITAL.pdf)

63 [https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/dac\\_cjs-report\\_summary\\_FINAL-DIGITAL.pdf](https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/dac_cjs-report_summary_FINAL-DIGITAL.pdf)





Woman looking over her shoulder by a road.



**WOMEN ARE TWICE AS LIKELY TO BE VICTIMS OF STALKING**



## Stalking and harassment

A report published by the ONS in September 2024 shows that 1 in 5 women and 1 in 10 men will be victims of stalking in their lifetime.<sup>64</sup> These figures are consistent year-on-year and show that women are disproportionately impacted.

The CSEW year ending September 2024 estimated that 2.8% of people aged 16 and over had experienced stalking in the last year.<sup>65</sup> This was a 0.6% decrease compared with the year ending March 2023 (3.4%). In the same period, 9% of people aged 16 and over reported experiencing harassment.

In the year ending June 2024, police recorded stalking increased by 12% (to 132,912

offences) and police recorded harassment also increased by 11% (to 293,493 offences) compared with the previous year. Over the same time, there was a 1% decrease in the number of coercive and controlling behaviour offences (44,816 offences).

The NPCC's 2024 VAWG Strategic Threat Risk Assessment (STRA) report showed that 40% of all police recorded VAWG was stalking and harassment,<sup>66</sup> with a large proportion these offences being domestic abuse related (51%). The Domestic Homicide Project year 3 report identified that stalking behaviours are one of the most common risk factors for all suspects in domestic homicide.<sup>67</sup>

64 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/ifeellikeiamlivingsomeoneelseslifeoneinsevenpeopleavictimofstalking/2024-09-26#:~:text=Women%20are%20more%20likely%20to%20be%20a%20victim&text=One%20in%20five%20women%20>

65 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2024#stalking-and-harassment>

66 <https://www.vkpp.org.uk/assets/Uploads/VAWG-Strategic-Threat-and-Risk-Assessment-underpinning-and-informing-the-2024-VAWG-Statement-v2.pdf>

67 <https://www.vkpp.org.uk/assets/Files/Domestic-Homicides-and-Suspected-Victim-Suicides-2021-2022/Executive-Summary-Y3-Report.pdf>



Three women walking and chatting.

## Sexual harassment

According to the ONS, for the year ending March 2024, 5% of people aged 16 and over reported experiencing at least one of the forms of sexual harassment that the ONS asked about within the last 12 months.<sup>68</sup> Prevalence was approximately three times higher among women (8%) compared with men (3%).

The likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment was highest among younger age groups. This was particularly the case for women, with 23% of those aged 16 to 24 and 16% of those aged 25 to 34 experiencing some form of sexual harassment in the previous year compared with 5% of those aged 35 and over.

**Over half of minoritised young women have endured racially targeted sexual harassment, and they are less likely than their white counterparts to feel that their reports of sexual harassment or assault are taken seriously, with less than half feeling satisfied with the outcome of reporting these incidents to the police.**

Forward UK

A report by Forward UK published in October found that eight out of ten young women in London have faced sexual harassment or assault in the last two years.<sup>69</sup> Most concerningly, over half of minoritised young women have endured racially targeted sexual harassment, and they are less likely than their white counterparts to feel that their reports of sexual harassment or assault are taken seriously, with less than half feeling satisfied with the outcome of reporting these incidents to the police.

68 [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/experiencesofharassmentinenglandandwales/december2023#:~:text=Experience%20of%20sexual%20harassment,compared%20with%20men%20\(3%25\).](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/experiencesofharassmentinenglandandwales/december2023#:~:text=Experience%20of%20sexual%20harassment,compared%20with%20men%20(3%25).)

69 [https://www.forwarduk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/FORWARD-UK\\_Sexual-Harrassment-London-report\\_Press-Release\\_041024\\_FORWARD.pdf](https://www.forwarduk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/FORWARD-UK_Sexual-Harrassment-London-report_Press-Release_041024_FORWARD.pdf)



Woman sat in the dark, her face lit up by the glow of a phone.



**77%**  
OF GIRLS AND  
YOUNG WOMEN  
AGED 7-21 HAVE  
EXPERIENCED  
ONLINE HARM IN  
THE LAST YEAR

## Online abuse

77% of girls and young women aged 7-21 have experienced online harm in the last year, and over 1 in 5 girls aged 7-10 have seen “rude images” online. This has doubled since 2021.<sup>70</sup> The largest comprehensive survey of online harms across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, carried out by the Open University, found that women experiencing online violence are significantly more likely to be below the age of 25.<sup>71</sup>

A survey of over 500 teens aged 13-18 by Professor Jessica Ringrose et al found that 78% of all participants had experienced at least one type of digitally facilitated harm such as body shaming, harassing comments, public outing of their sexuality and image-

based sexual abuse.<sup>72</sup> While girls face higher rates of online harm, there are significant findings around boys that need to be addressed. For example, boys were often targeted via gaming platforms, porn bots and other fake accounts, as well as receiving unsolicited sexual images and pressure to send nudes.

Furthermore, in the first six months of 2024, child sexual abuse reports related to sexual extortion were up 19% compared to the same period in 2023, according to the Internet Watch Foundation.<sup>73</sup> Victims are getting younger, with a 25% increase in reports involving 14-15-year-olds compared to the previous year. While boys still make up the majority of victims, there has been a 2,600% increase in reports involving girls.

70 <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/gas-executive-summary-2024.pdf>

71 <https://oro.open.ac.uk/96398/1/OVAW%20AN%20full%20report%20%28March%202024%29.pdf>

72 <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10186290/>

73 <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/exponential-increase-in-cruelty-as-sex-tortion-scams-hit-younger-victims/>

## So-called 'honour-based' abuse (HBA), female genital mutilation and forced marriage

In the year ending March 2024, there were 2,755 HBA-related offences recorded by the police in England and Wales, a decrease of 8% compared with the year ending March 2023 (when there were 3,008 offences). This is the first decrease in police-reported offences since the time series began in the year ending March 2020.<sup>74</sup> However, Karma Nirvana, which runs the National Honour-Based Abuse Helpline, handled 2,962 cases in the same period, a sharp 13% rise from last year. The decline in police recorded incidents, paired with rising reports to Karma Nirvana, points to potential under-reporting or even misclassification by police forces, rather than a true reduction in HBA incidents, as highlighted in Karma Nirvana's statement on the decline.<sup>75</sup>

Of the 2,755 HBA offences recorded in the latest year, 111 were female genital mutilation (FGM) cases and 201 forced marriage offences. The number of FGM offences and forced marriage offences increased slightly (by 25 and 28 offences respectively). Over half (54%; 60 offences) of the FGM offences recorded by the police were reported under the mandatory reporting duty for FGM.

According to Karma Nirvana, there are significant statutory data gaps that prevent a complete understanding of how prevalent child marriage is in England and Wales. Other than via the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), the government has no way to track or monitor

THE AVERAGE  
AGE OF  
REPORTED  
CHILD  
MARRIAGE IS  
**15 YEARS  
OLD**

the number of child marriages taking place in England and Wales.<sup>76</sup> We do know that the average age of reported child marriage is 15 years old, and the most reported perpetrators are the victim's parents.

## Femicide

Whilst consistent data on femicide in the UK is lacking, organisations such as Counting Dead Women and the Femicide Census attempt to map out these discrepancies and report on cases where women were killed by men. This year, the Guardian reported that the number of women whose deaths have led to a man being charged has reached 80.<sup>77</sup> Yet these figures are likely to misrepresent the real scale of femicide in the UK.

In January, based on work by Killed Women, the BBC reported on "hidden homicides", which are not reported in official statistics.<sup>78</sup> These include deaths that appeared to be an accident or suicide, such as falls from a height or down stairs, which may be domestic homicide. The Home Office commented that police forces would first need to record this specific dataset before it and the ONS could include the information in their own data.

74 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-year-ending-march-2024/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2024>

75 <https://karmanirvana.org.uk/news-item/karma-nirvanas-reflections-on-the-2024-home-office-hba-data-release/>

76 <https://s40641.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Assessing-the-Impact-of-Legislation-v4.pdf>

77 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/ng-interactive/2024/dec/31/killed-women-count-a-project-highlighting-the-toll-and-tragedy-of-violence-against-women-in-the-uk>

78 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn7gmlp752do>



A young girl hugging her knees.

## Child sexual abuse and exploitation

The ONS does not currently report on child exploitation and sexual abuse, however some data is available on abuse that is recorded by services that work with children. It is important to note that child abuse often goes unreported and unrecorded, as adults often do not recognise signs that children in their lives are being abused, children may not disclose this information, and adults they confide in may not pass this information on to the relevant agencies.<sup>79</sup>

The NSPCC published a briefing in January that stated that almost 2,400 children across the UK were the subject of a child protection

plan or on a child protection register because of sexual abuse in 2023/24, making it a concern for around 4% of children on a plan or register.<sup>80</sup> Their briefing also highlights that police in England and Wales have amended recording practices to enable them to flag any offences where children under the age of 18 have been sexually exploited. For the year ending March 2024, in England there were 71,827 and in Wales 4,300 sexual offences were flagged as child sexual abuse. All offences that have been flagged as involving sexual exploitation are also flagged as involving child sexual abuse. Statistics for the year ending March 2024 showed that the police in England and Wales flagged 15,604 offences as child sexual exploitation. Equivalent data is not available for Northern Ireland or Scotland.

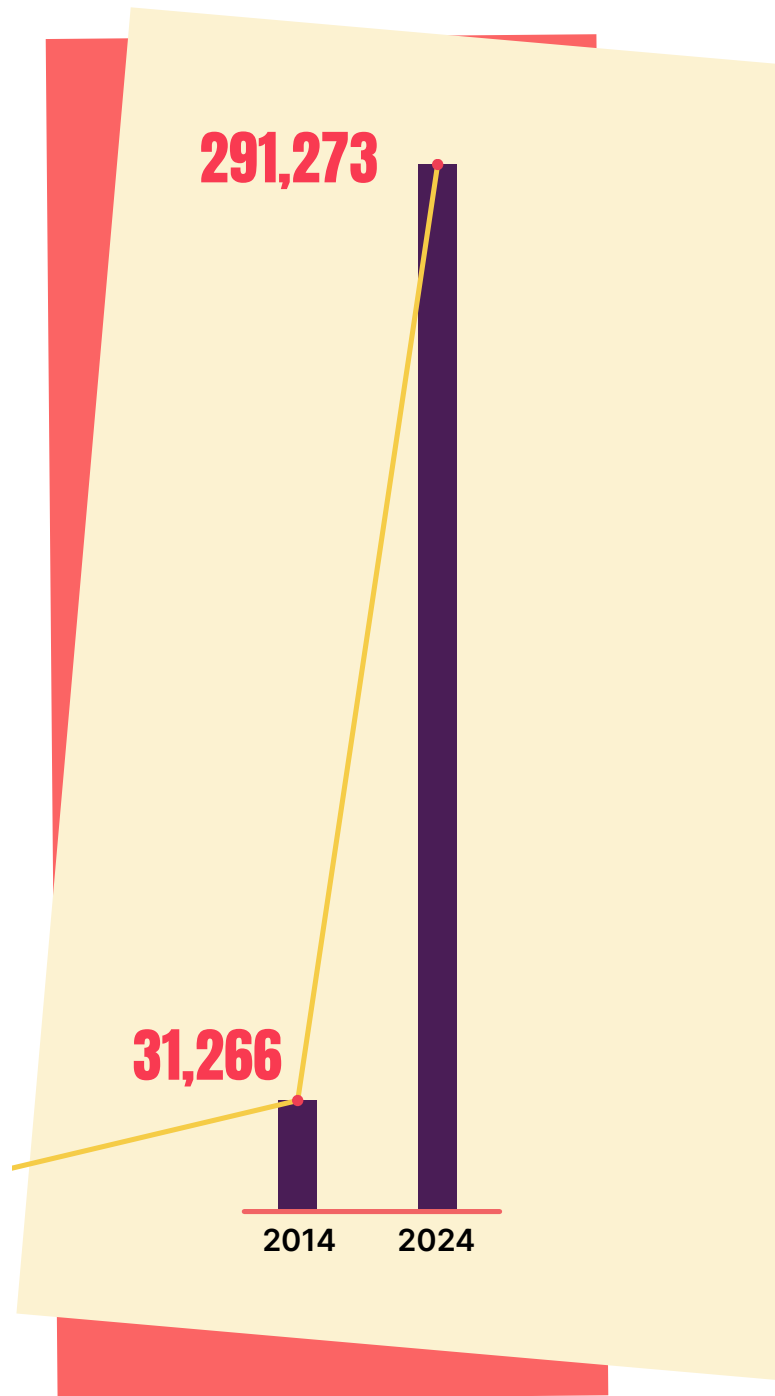
79 <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/ujzmp53v/issues-consider-looking-child-abuse-statistics.pdf>

80 <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/snddiv5e/statistics-briefing-csa-child-sexual-abuse-2025.pdf>

CPS data sets out that 10,438 child abuse flagged cases were referred to the CPS by the police in year ending September 2024 (a 13% increase from the previous year). In the same year the CPS prosecuted 9,744 cases, with a conviction volume of 8,048 and a rate of 82.6%.<sup>81</sup>

Whilst data on intra-familial child sexual abuse is limited, the Child Sexual Exploitation Police Taskforce, led by the NPCC, has estimated that out of the 115,000 child sexual abuse offences recorded by the police in 2023, around 4,000 involved more than one perpetrator.<sup>82</sup> Of those, it identified around 1,100 that involved abuse within the family, and over 300 involved abuse in institutions. It recognised that the vast majority of abuse goes unreported, meaning that the reported figures would be a significant underestimate.

As explored in more detail in the section on online abuse, new data from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) revealed that 2024 was the worst year on record for child sexual abuse material online,<sup>83</sup> with 291,273 confirmed reports in the last year compared with 31,266 in 2014. From May to October 2024, analysts at the IWF saw a 6% increase in confirmed reports containing AI-generated child sexual abuse material, compared with the preceding 12 months.<sup>84</sup> The IWF reports that many of the images and videos of children being hurt and abused are so realistic that they can be very difficult to tell apart from imagery of real children and are regarded as criminal content in the eyes of UK law, much in the same way as 'traditional' child sexual abuse material would be.



**2024 was the worst year on record for child sexual abuse material online, with 291,273 confirmed reports in the last year compared with 31,266 in 2014.**

Internet Watch Foundation

81 <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-2-2024-2025>

82 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/next-steps-to-tackle-child-sexual-exploitation>

83 <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/call-for-prime-minister-to-intervene-as-iwf-uncovers-record-levels-of-online-child-sexual-abuse-imagery/>

84 <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/public-exposure-to-chilling-ai-child-sexual-abuse-images-and-videos-increases/>

# LEGISLATION

With 40 Bills presented in the King's Speech, there is a full legislative agenda. Despite this, VAWG was only mentioned 5 times in the briefing document.<sup>85</sup> VAWG is only specifically mentioned in the Crime and Policing Bill. Likewise, there was a large focus on Bills relating to the criminal justice system, including its response to VAWG, but little about prevention.

## Victim and Prisoners Act 2024

In April 2024, the previous Conservative government accepted an amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Bill that will raise the legal threshold for when rape survivors' counselling notes can be requested by the police.<sup>86</sup> It will mean that police requests for counselling notes will only be permitted where an investigating officer "has reason to believe that the information sought is likely to have substantial probative value".<sup>87</sup> Individual measures within the Act will not come into force until the government specifically commences them.

The amendment, which received cross-party support, was tabled in the House of Lords by Baroness Bertin, following sustained campaigning by expert organisations EVAW, Rape Crisis England and Wales, Centre for Women's Justice and Rights of Women. It was

supported by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the National Counselling and Psychotherapy Society (NCPS).

## Government announcements

### Stalking

In response to a super-complaint submitted by the National Stalking Consortium (NSC) which detailed systemic issues with the police response to stalking,<sup>88</sup> the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) published the findings of its investigation which found that, in line with all of the findings of the NSC, too often cases of stalking were not being taken seriously and the quality of investigations were inconsistent across forces.<sup>89</sup> The government has committed to accepting, or partially accepting, all the recommendations made by the IOPC to the government within the super-complaint.

Bolstering the response to stalking crimes was a key tenet of the government's initial action on VAWG, with commitments in their manifesto to improve Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs) and allow victims to know the

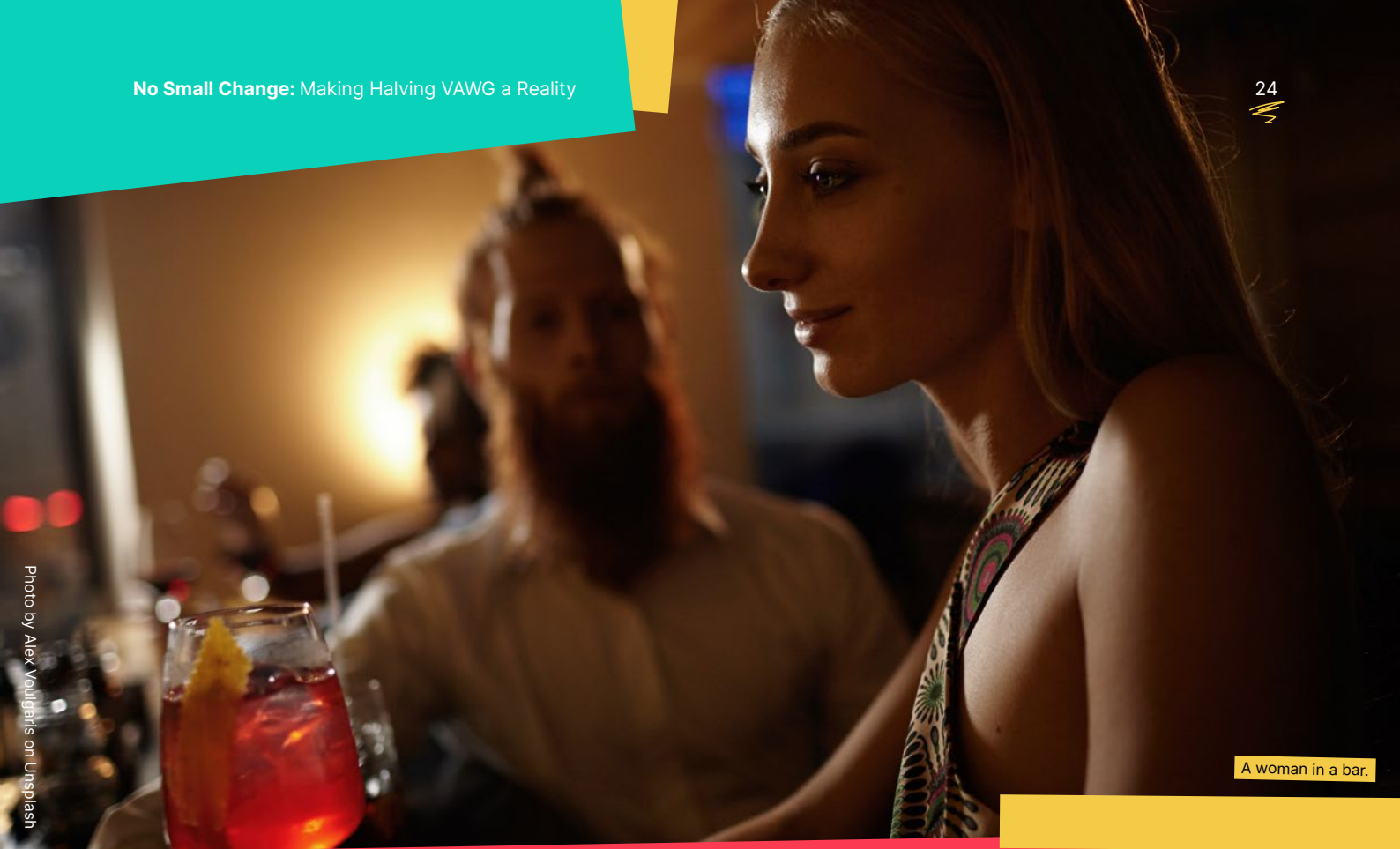
85 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6697f5c10808eaf43b50d18e/The\\_King\\_s\\_Speech\\_2024\\_background\\_briefing\\_notes.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6697f5c10808eaf43b50d18e/The_King_s_Speech_2024_background_briefing_notes.pdf)

86 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/campaign-win-government-changes-law-to-help-keep-rape-survivors-counselling-notes-confidential/>

87 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/campaign-win-government-changes-law-to-help-keep-rape-survivors-counselling-notes-confidential/>

88 <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/super-complaint-submitted-on-police-response-to-stalking>

89 <https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/news/changes-needed-ensure-stalking-victims-get-right-response-police>



A woman in a bar.

identity of their online stalker.<sup>90</sup> The government announced new 'Right to Know' statutory guidance in December to ensure the police release the identity of an online stalker at the "earliest opportunity",<sup>91</sup> as well as measures to allow the courts to impose SPOs directly on conviction.

Further measures included defining stalking in statutory guidance and setting out a framework to help support services including the police, education and health services work together and share intelligence on cases. The government also aims to introduce national standards on stalking perpetrator programmes and the Home Office set out plans to publish new data on stalking offences.

## Raneem's Law

In September, the government committed to embedding domestic abuse specialists in 999 control rooms under 'Raneem's Law' from early 2025.<sup>92</sup> Specialists would advise on risk

assessments and work with officers on the ground, backed up by dedicated domestic abuse teams, with the aim of improving how the police respond to reports, including use of Rapid Video response technology. There are currently 5 forces that are part of the phase 1 pilot, which will run until March 2025 and is funded by the Home Office.

## Spiking

The government announced in November 2024 that spiking will be made a new criminal offence, in line with commitments made in its manifesto ahead of the general election.<sup>93</sup> In his announcement, the Prime Minister demanded coordinated action across the police, transport network and venues to "stamp out spiking". The government has further set out plans to train thousands of staff working in the nighttime economy on how to spot and tackle spiking, which was expected to be rolled out to up to 10,000 bar staff across the country from December until spring 2025.

90 <https://labour.org.uk/change/take-back-our-streets/#vawg>

91 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/victims-to-be-given-more-protection-in-stalking-crackdown>

92 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-measures-set-out-to-combat-violence-against-women-and-girls>

93 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-pledges-joint-action-to-keep-women-and-girls-safe-at-night>



## Government legislation

### Employment Rights Bill

The Bill sets out to expand employers' duties to prevent harassment of staff and strengthen protections for whistleblowers of sexual harassment, in line with commitments made in the Labour manifesto 2024.<sup>94</sup> We welcome proposals to tackle workplace sexual harassment and ensure that whistleblowers have robust protections when they raise the issue.

### Crime and Policing Bill

Described as legislation that will “set out early measures to help deliver on the government’s mission to halve serious violence over a decade, with strong action to tackle knife crime and violence against women and girls”, it also focuses in on “retail crime and anti-social behaviour”.<sup>95</sup>

The Bill intends to improve responses to VAWG by ensuring the police have ‘the capacity to respond robustly to domestic abuse, rape and other sexual offences’,<sup>96</sup> with measures announced including a new criminal offence of spiking.<sup>97</sup> Most recently, the government announced that the Bill will include measures aimed at improving police and other statutory responses to rape and child sexual abuse. This includes the introduction of mandatory reporting and new measures aimed at tackling those organising, failing to report or covering up child sexual abuse.<sup>98</sup> Whilst the Bill was initially expected

in late 2024, it is now expected to be brought to Parliament in spring 2025.

### Data (Use and Access) Bill

The Labour Manifesto committed to ensuring the safe development and use of AI models by introducing binding regulation on the handful of companies developing the most powerful AI models and by banning the creation of sexually explicit deepfakes.<sup>99</sup> In January 2025, the government announced plans to make creating sexually explicit deepfake imagery a criminal offence,<sup>100</sup> alongside new offences for the taking of intimate images without consent and the installation of equipment with intent to commit these offences.

Along with survivor campaign group #NotYourPorn, survivor-campaigner Jodie\*, leading expert Professor Clare McGlynn and GLAMOUR UK, the End Violence Against Women Coalition have campaigned for a new offence for creating non-consensual sexually explicit deepfakes as part of a comprehensive image-based abuse law.<sup>101</sup>



94 <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3737>

95 <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3511>

96 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6697f5c10808eaf43b50d18e/The\\_King\\_s\\_Speech\\_2024\\_background\\_briefing\\_notes.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6697f5c10808eaf43b50d18e/The_King_s_Speech_2024_background_briefing_notes.pdf)

97 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-pledges-joint-action-to-keep-women-and-girls-safe-at-night>

98 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-01-06/debates/82491377-55C1-444F-8A7D-0EF61A181771/ChildSexualExploitationAndAbuse?highlight=crime%20policing%20bill%20child%20sexual%20exploitation#contribution-C039E13F-E5E3-4ABC-91E5-E13E78BAE034>, Column 633

99 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2024-0040/LLN-2024-0040.pdf>

100 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-crackdown-on-explicit-deepfakes>

101 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/campaign-win-law-to-stop-deepfake-abuse/>



Two women in a community centre.

As such, the government has tabled an amendment to the Data (Use and Access) Bill that will criminalise intentionally creating a sexually explicit deepfake without consent or reasonable belief in consent, and with either intent to cause alarm, humiliation, or distress, or for the purpose of sexual gratification.<sup>102</sup>

However, in addition to strengthening criminal laws about creating, taking and sharing intimate images without consent (including sexually explicit deepfakes), the government must take holistic action to prevent abuse in the first place by improving civil laws, preventing image-based abuse through Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE), funding specialist services and creating an online abuse commission.<sup>103</sup>

## Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill

This Bill introduces a range of measures including provisions around border security,<sup>104</sup> framing migration as a 'national security'

issue, without creating safe routes to reach the UK. It formalises the role of the Border Security Commander and introduces new offences related to the supplying or handling of items for us in 'immigration crime'.<sup>105</sup> Immigration officials will therefore be granted new powers to search for and seize items, alongside expanding information sharing capabilities. The Bill also repeals the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024, but only some parts of the Illegal Migration Act 2023; sections including expanded detention powers are retained. The Bill is reflective of the Labour government's rhetoric on strengthened border security and the deterrence of migration.

Free Movement say that new offences will incur harsh prosecutions, and may lead to an individual helping an asylum seeker being prosecuted without realising they are committing a crime.<sup>106</sup> Whilst the Bill intends to stop people smugglers, they say that prosecuting individuals who have not set foot on British soil will be impossible.

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/better-protection-for-victims-thanks-to-new-law-on-sexually-explicit-deepfakes>

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Image-Abuse-Bill-Campaign-Policy-Asks-.pdf>

<sup>104</sup> <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3929>

<sup>105</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-01-30/hcws406>

<sup>106</sup> <https://freemovement.org.uk/what-is-in-the-border-security-asylum-and-immigration-bill/>



Parliament and Big Ben.

## Private Members' Bills

### Non-Consensual Sexually Explicit Images and Videos (Offences) Bill

This Private Members Bill brought by Conservative Peer Baroness Owen aims to criminalise the creation and solicitation of intimate images of people made without their consent. This includes 'deepfake' images, where technology has been used to put a real person's face into a scenario that has been digitally manipulated. Whilst it is illegal to non-consensually share sexually explicit deepfakes online, it is still not illegal to create them in the first place.<sup>107</sup>

Further, the bill endeavours to future-proof by amending the current definition of an intimate image in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The aim of this is to bring into scope the problem of semen images, where a woman's image is posted online with generative AI semen added onto the image.

### Regulated and Other Activities (Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse) Bill

This Private Members' Bill brought by Cross-bench Peer Baroness Grey-Thompson aims 'to mandate those providing and carrying out regulated or other activities with responsibility for the care of children to report known and suspected child sexual abuse; to protect mandated reporters from detriment; to create a criminal offence of failing to report prescribed concerns; and for connected purposes'.<sup>108</sup> Baroness Grey-Thompson has explained that her Bill seeks to implement a recommendation of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) that the government should introduce mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse;<sup>109</sup> reflecting the IICSA finding that child abuse in the UK is under-reported. Mandatory reporting was introduced previously as an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill, which was thrown out before the 2024 General Election.

107 [https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2024-0070/2024-0070-Non-Consensual-Sexually-Explicit-Images-and-Videos-\(Offences\)-Bill-%5BHL%5D-LARGE.pdf](https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2024-0070/2024-0070-Non-Consensual-Sexually-Explicit-Images-and-Videos-(Offences)-Bill-%5BHL%5D-LARGE.pdf)

108 <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3743#:~:text=A%20Bill%20to%20mandate%20those,concerns%3B%20and%20for%20connected%20purposes.>

109 <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/investigation/cs-organised-networks.html>

# POLICY AREAS

## Prevention

### Children and young people's attitudes

The need for quality Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSHE) is ever more pertinent, with sexual harassment still rife in schools<sup>110</sup> and young people's attitudes to women's equality increasingly positioned across a gender divide. Research shows that young men today are no more supportive of action on gender equality than older men, despite being more socially liberal.<sup>111</sup> In an Ipsos report, 1 in 6 male 16–29-year-olds think feminism has done more harm than good and young men are three times more likely than young women to call themselves “anti-woke”, reflecting a growing pushback against liberal attitudes, including feminism, among this cohort.<sup>112</sup>

Concerningly, in the last four years there has been a 13% increase in 18–24 year olds who believe that women are responsible for keeping themselves safe from sexual violence, and a decrease of 17% in the same cohort who say that women are not responsible for this. This regression in young people's attitudes towards sexual violence against women and girls demonstrates the salience of victim-blaming language in the public domain, and the need for better education to combat this narrative.

Research by Hope Not Hate into attitudes amongst young people found that 26% have a positive view of online misogynistic influencer Andrew Tate, who is heavily linked to the normalisation of extreme misogyny online;<sup>113</sup> communicating to large audiences views that “there's no way you can be rooted in reality and not be sexist”<sup>114</sup> and that there is “no such thing as an independent female”. Tate is currently being tried in Romania on rape and trafficking charges,<sup>115</sup> and has previously been accused of extreme acts of violence against women such as strangulation and threats to kill;<sup>116</sup> a stark reminder of the link between extreme misogynistic ideologies and violence against women.

Research points towards the benefits of a whole-school approach to addressing healthy relationships, sex education, media literacy, harmful behaviours and abuse.<sup>117</sup> However, there are still widespread concerns about the quality of RSHE being delivered across the UK. Recent polling carried out by the SEF found that only half of young people surveyed reported that their RSE provision was good or very good, and only 43% of students felt personally represented and included by RSE.<sup>118</sup> Crucially there is still inadequate support for Black disabled pupils and their families in terms of advocacy and peer support.<sup>119</sup>

110 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/jun/18/sexual-harassment-still-rife-in-uk-schools-poll-of-female-staff-finds>

111 <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/masculinity-and-womens-equality-study-finds-emerging-gender-divide-young-peoples-attitudes>

112 <https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/state-of-hate-2024-v15.pdf>

113 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cne4vw1x83po>

114 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-64125045>

115 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-68907298>

116 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-65822365>

117 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66f5465230536cb9274827a1/Teaching\\_relationships\\_education\\_to\\_prevent\\_sexual\\_abuse.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66f5465230536cb9274827a1/Teaching_relationships_education_to_prevent_sexual_abuse.pdf)

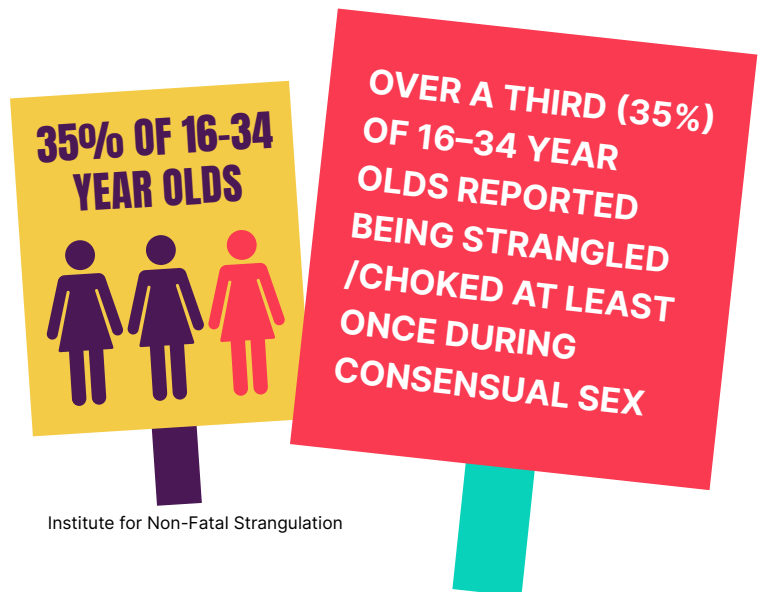
118 <https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/news/news/young-people-turn-online-sources-rse-information>

119 <https://www.allfie.org.uk/inclusion-resources/lived-experience-of-black-global-majority-disabled-pupils-and-their-families-in-mainstream-education/>

Polling by CEASE about British Attitudes to Pornography found that parents were most likely to talk to their child about pornography when they were 14-15 years old, by which time two-thirds of children have already been exposed to pornography.<sup>120</sup> Due to gaps in RSHE provision, 22% of young people are turning to the internet to learn about sex, and 15% say their main source is pornography itself<sup>121</sup>. Extreme pornography normalises sexual violence, which is detrimental for young people accessing content from as young as nine years old. A recent survey by the Institute for Non-Fatal Strangulation (IFAS) found that over a third (35%) of 16-34-year-olds reported being strangled/choked at least once during consensual sex, compared to 16% of 35-54-year-olds and 3% of those aged 55+.<sup>122</sup>

Evidence from a pilot programme run by Our Streets Now, which was funded by the Welsh Government to feed into their national sexual harassment strategy, found that public sexual harassment (PSH) remains a prevalent issue but is still not widely spoken about in schools, with knowledge amongst staff patchy.<sup>123</sup> They highlighted the need for external support to improve school responses to PSH.

There have also been reported fears that sexual harassment could be leading to absenteeism in schools,<sup>124</sup> reemphasising the need for a whole-school approach for tackling sexual violence.<sup>125</sup> Viewed within a human rights framework, it is of grave concern that girls may be failing to access education as a result of the abuse they face at school.



## RSHE guidance

Children begin to form perceptions and attitudes from a young age, with early learnt behaviour often shaping relationships throughout an individual's life. Primary prevention can play an important part in preventing harmful attitudes and behaviours that may go on to manifest as a normalisation or minimisation of VAWG.<sup>126</sup> Quality, research-led relationships and sexual health education based on consent and equality should therefore be central to the government's mission to halve VAWG crimes in the next decade by addressing the root causes of VAWG, right from primary through to the end of a young person's education.

Alongside the Sex Education Forum (SEF) and endorsed by EVAW, Make it Mandatory have campaigned to see mandatory RSHE extended to ages 16-19 and to include teaching about domestic abuse.<sup>127</sup> Currently it is only mandatory for schools with sixth forms to provide RSHE, however there is no legislative requirement for sixth form colleges or further education (FE) colleges to deliver an RSHE curriculum,<sup>128</sup> despite this age group

120 <https://cease.org.uk/british-public-attitudes-towards-pornography/>

121 <https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/news/news/young-people-turn-online-sources-rse-information>

122 <https://ifas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Strangulation-During-Sex-in-the-UK-December-2024-FINAL.pdf>

123 <https://www.ourstreetsnow.org/case-studies-1/case-study-wales-1>

124 <https://www.agendaalliance.org/news/sexual-violence-absenteeism-girls-school/>

125 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/new-report-its-about-time-a-whole-school-approach-to-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

126 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66f5465230536cb9274827a1/Teaching\\_relationships\\_education\\_to\\_prevent\\_sexual\\_abuse.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66f5465230536cb9274827a1/Teaching_relationships_education_to_prevent_sexual_abuse.pdf)

127 <https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/news/news/sex-education-forum-partners-make-it-mandatory>

128 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62cea352e90e071e789ea9bf/Relationships\\_Education\\_RSE\\_and\\_Health\\_Education.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62cea352e90e071e789ea9bf/Relationships_Education_RSE_and_Health_Education.pdf)

being at particular risk of domestic abuse<sup>129</sup> and sexual harassment.<sup>130</sup>

The politicisation of sex education by the previous government<sup>131</sup> created a polarised landscape for discussing crucial work that must be undertaken to update the 2019 RSHE guidance. In May 2024, draft guidance for RSHE was published for consultation by the DfE, containing a worrying denial of LGBT+ lives and realities, allowing primary schools the option to not include same-sex parents when discussing families, and banning any discussion of gender identity for all young people. It also failed to take an intersectional approach, despite the disproportionate levels of racialised sexual abuse faced by Black and minoritised girls. Age restrictions on the teaching of content relating to sexual abuse, harassment and domestic violence risks leaving young children without the information and tools to navigate abuse and seek support.

Despite confirmation from the Labour government that schools must continue to use the 2019 RSHE guidance rather than the draft guidance published by the Conservative government, we await decisive action on next steps. The government is currently undertaking a curriculum and assessment review, led by Professor Becky Francis, that will assess how RSHE fits into the wider curriculum. Whilst the halving VAWG mission demands a cross-departmental effort to achieve, it is currently unclear what role the Department for Education will play.

The recent NAO report on the 2021 Tackling VAWG Strategy found that the Home Office had not prioritised prevention activities despite prevention being a key pillar of the strategy.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, the report found that the

## SPENDING ON VAWG



majority of the Home Office's VAWG-specific prevention activity focused on addressing re-offending rather than preventing VAWG from happening. A quarter of commitments relating to prevention were allocated to the Department for Education (DfE), however the DfE spent £0.52 million across all activities relating to the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan between 2021-22 and 2023-24, with much of its work on supporting victims rather than prevention. In comparison, the Home Office team has spent £149 million between April 2021 and the end of September 2024 tackling VAWG. It is therefore vital that all government departments urgently prioritise primary prevention in the next iteration of the VAWG strategy to address misogynistic attitudes at the heart of VAWG.

129 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023>

130 [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/experiencesofharassmentinenglandandwales/december2023#:~:text=Experience%20of%20sexual%20harassment,compared%20with%20men%20\(3%25\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/experiencesofharassmentinenglandandwales/december2023#:~:text=Experience%20of%20sexual%20harassment,compared%20with%20men%20(3%25))

131 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/oct/23/gillian-keegan-tells-schools-to-let-parents-see-sex-education-materials>

132 <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls.pdf>



Woman looking at her phone.



## Online abuse and AI

The internet is an essential part of our lives, and its users are starting younger and younger. Around a quarter of 5–7-year-olds now own a smartphone, while three-quarters use a tablet.<sup>133</sup> Being online was highlighted as source of joy for most young girls in a recent survey conducted by Plan International.<sup>134</sup> However, online abuse continues to grow.

According to a recent YouGov survey commissioned by EVAW, 52% of people think that the internet is more dangerous for women and girls than it was 12 months ago, rising to 58% of women. Given that the Online Safety Act passed just over 12 months ago,<sup>135</sup> with Ofcom granted regulatory power, we are concerned that the majority of respondents think the online sphere has actually become less safe since the passing of this legislation which set out to make the UK the safest

place to be online in the world.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, 77% of the public think tech companies should be doing more to tackle the issue of women and girls' safety online. These results are a crucial signal to the government that there is a pressing need for more stringent regulation of tech platforms to ensure women and girls' are safe from abuse online.



133 [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/a-window-into-young-childrens-online-worlds?utm\\_source=tw\\_graphic&utm\\_medium=social\\_org&utm\\_content=childrens\\_media\\_lives&utm\\_campaign=media23](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/a-window-into-young-childrens-online-worlds?utm_source=tw_graphic&utm_medium=social_org&utm_content=childrens_media_lives&utm_campaign=media23)

134 <https://plan-uk.org/state-of-girls-rights-report.pdf>

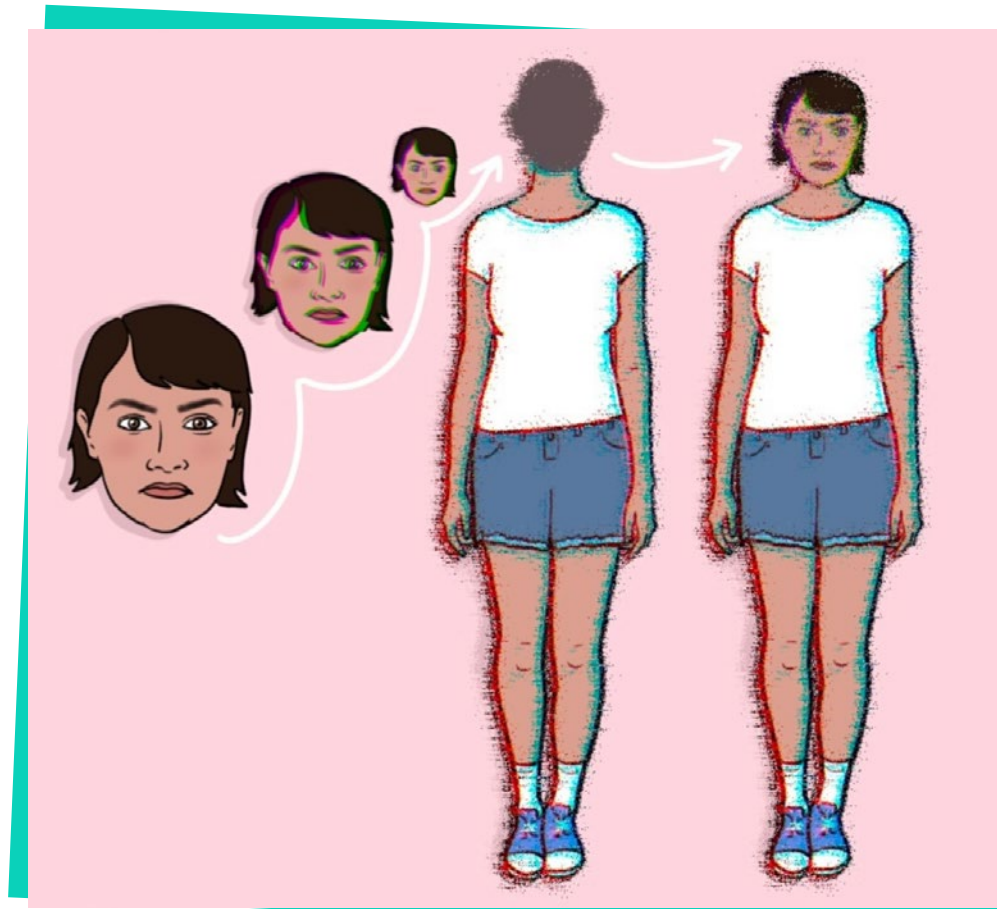
135 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-safety-act-explainer/online-safety-act-explainer>

136 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/bill-ofcom-parliament-nspcc-whitley-bay-b2414488.html>

## Deepfake technology

New technology is developing at a rapid rate, outpacing regulation and responsive solutions that consider the implications for gender inequality and VAWG. Advancements in machine learning over the past year has meant that technologies utilising Artificial Intelligence (AI) are now commonplace in households, becoming increasingly intrinsic to many of our daily tasks. One example of the harms of AI is deepfake technology, which enables the creation of non-consensual, sexually explicit content. Deepfakes utilise advanced AI to create highly convincing and deceptive content, making it difficult to distinguish real from fabricated images. The accessibility and ease of creating and sharing deepfakes online has contributed to their proliferation and can cause significant harm to individuals.

A report published by Ofcom stated that two thirds of UK internet users over the age of 16 came across a deepfake image in the first half of 2024,<sup>137</sup> indicating that fake content already exists in abundance online. Indeed, the Revenge Porn Helpline has seen a 400% increase in cases involving synthetic sexual content,<sup>138</sup> otherwise known as deepfakes, between 2017 and 2024. It is vital that the UK works proactively to encourage the



deployment of safety technologies and hold tech companies to account across jurisdictions, as per the recently published strategic priorities for online safety by DSIT.<sup>139</sup>

Alongside the development of deepfakes and AI technology, advancements in virtual and augmented reality have facilitated the growth of the metaverse, a network of digital worlds through which users navigate using virtual reality and augmented reality devices to connect with others.<sup>140</sup> With the development of virtual reality, boundaries between the physical and the virtual have become less clear, with reports of sexual misconduct and abuse within the metaverse increasing.<sup>141</sup>

137 <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/online-research/online-nation/2024/online-nation-2024-report.pdf?v=386238>

138 <https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/information-and-advice/need-help-and-advice/deepfakes-edited-or-altered-sexual-images/>

139 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-statement-of-strategic-priorities-for-online-safety/draft-statement-of-strategic-priorities-for-online-safety>

140 <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/metaverse>

141 <https://audri.org/resources/sexual-violence-and-harassment-in-the-metaverse/>

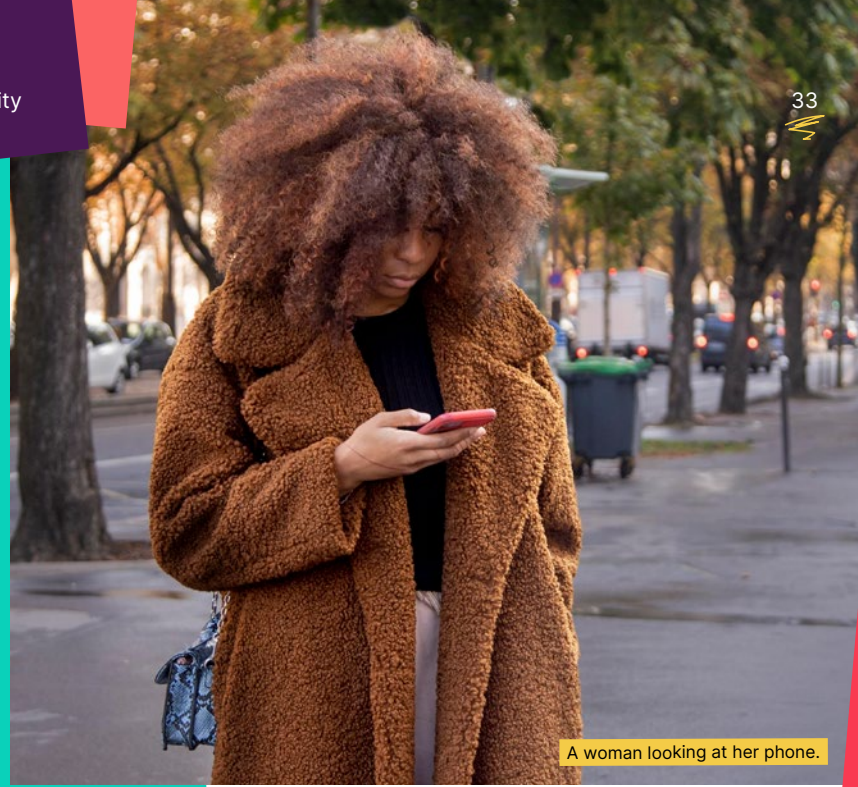


## Online misogyny

We are also seeing an increase in extreme misogynistic content available online. Over the last few years, we have seen the evolution of Incel culture from isolated individuals to a more connected and empowered collective leveraging of misogynistic rhetoric on mainstream social media platforms.<sup>142</sup> Incels have high levels of victimhood, anger and misogyny, and acknowledge a shared worldview which includes identifying feminists as a primary enemy.<sup>143</sup> They also commonly accept sexism and rape myths.

Survey data from the University of Kent and University College London (UCL) found that 30.4% of young people experience offensive and degrading messages about their gender online, with TikTok being the most common platform on which this abuse is experienced.<sup>144</sup> This same research found that TikTok's algorithms actively direct and amplify harmful misogynistic content, exploiting vulnerabilities related to neurodiversity, loneliness, and mental health.

A study by UCL and the University of Kent found that after only 5 days of TikTok usage, there was a four-fold increase in the level of misogynistic content being presented on the 'For You' page on TikTok.<sup>145</sup> This suggests that young people are being presented with toxic, hateful or misogynist material without actively seeking it out; normalising and spreading these views amongst a younger cohort.



A woman looking at her phone.

## Regulation

While the consequences of the profit-seeking algorithmic model of social media companies are considerable for women and girls, action to regulate platforms has been slow. Online abuse, particularly in targeting women and minorities, infringes victims' right to freedom of expression (Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>146</sup>) by creating unsafe online environments and silencing their voices. Globally, women are disproportionately targeted by online abuse.<sup>147</sup> Within the current framework set out by Ofcom, there is concern that tech platforms will continue to profit from content promoting extreme misogyny with impunity.

Purely legislative interventions to tackling harm occurring online will not address the root causes of these behaviours.

**It is vitally important to invest in media literacy in order to ensure young people have the digital tools and critical thinking skills to navigate the online world, recognise abuse and seek support.**

<sup>142</sup> <https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Help%20and%20advice/Inclusion/Safer-scrolling.pdf>

<sup>143</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/predicting-harm-among-incels-involuntary-celibates/predicting-harm-among-incels-involuntary-celibates-the-roles-of-mental-health-ideological-belief-and-social-networking-accessible>

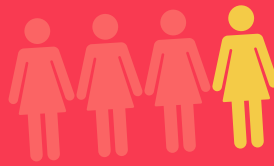
<sup>144</sup> <https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Help%20and%20advice/Inclusion/Safer-scrolling.pdf>

<sup>145</sup> <https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Help%20and%20advice/Inclusion/Safer-scrolling.pdf>

<sup>146</sup> [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention\\_ENG](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG)

<sup>147</sup> [https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Accelerating-efforts-to-tackle-online-and-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-en\\_0.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Accelerating-efforts-to-tackle-online-and-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-en_0.pdf)

Woman looking sideways, out in a street.



**A QUARTER**  
OF GIRLS AND  
YOUNG WOMEN  
OF COLOUR DO  
NOT TRUST THE  
POLICE AT ALL

## Criminal justice system

Public confidence in the police has withered<sup>148</sup> amidst countless reports of police-perpetrated VAWG,<sup>149</sup> police misconduct<sup>150</sup> and systemic failures within the criminal justice system to adequately address and prevent such abuses, as outlined in the Angiolini Inquiry<sup>151</sup> and the Casey Review.<sup>152</sup> One in five girls and young women do not trust the police at all to help them if they are in difficulty,<sup>153</sup> and a quarter of girls and young women of colour do not trust the police at all. This is particularly the case for Black and minoritised women and is linked to historic over-policing and criminalisation of their communities.<sup>154</sup>

The HMICFRS annual State of Policing report found that police officers are still struggling to get the basics right, such as responding

promptly to calls for help, investigating incidents, keeping victims informed and bringing offenders to justice.<sup>155</sup> Such findings precede those from the Casey report,<sup>156</sup> indicating the pervasive nature of police failures and the lack of meaningful change achieved for survivors. For example, reports show that police reports of domestic abuse-related crimes have increased markedly but the system has not responded to address this.<sup>157</sup> Analysis by Advance showed that the response has deteriorated drastically, with reports of domestic abuse crimes increasing by 48% and prosecutions reducing by 42% in 5 years.<sup>158</sup>

148 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/apr/18/only-40-of-people-in-england-trust-their-police-force-research-reveals>

149 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c36n0l5kr2go>

150 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8dm0y33yrmo>

151 <https://www.angiolini.independent-inquiry.uk/reports/>

152 <https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/met/about-us/baroness-casey-review/update-march-2023/baroness-casey-review-press-notice.pdf>

153 <https://plan-uk.org/summary-state-of-girls-rights>

154 [https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/sps/news/2024/Amatteroftrust\\_Gill&Anitha\\_November2024.pdf](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/sps/news/2024/Amatteroftrust_Gill&Anitha_November2024.pdf)

155 <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/state-of-policing-the-annual-assessment-of-policing-in-england-and-wales-2023/>

156 <https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/met/about-us/baroness-casey-review/update-march-2023/baroness-casey-review-march-2023a.pdf>

157 <https://www.advancecharity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Her-Story-Her-Justice-Executive-Summary.pdf>

158 <https://www.advancecharity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Her-Story-Her-Justice-Executive-Summary.pdf>

These systemic issues prevail alongside continued reports of failings by London's Metn Police<sup>159</sup> as well as a recent police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) inspection which found that the Met's response to investigating crime and managing offenders and suspects was inadequate.<sup>160</sup> The inspection also highlighted numerous areas that needed improvement, including responding to the public and protecting vulnerable people. Additionally, the recent Baird Inquiry shed light on the routine unlawful arrest and strip-search of victims of male violence against women when they seek protection from Greater Manchester Police.<sup>161</sup>

Furthermore, despite policy commitments from government to tackle police-perpetrated abuse,<sup>162</sup> the Centre for Women's Justice found that it is still not being taken seriously, with complaints being mishandled or dropped. Their report showed that it was not uncommon for survivors themselves to be arrested on spurious counter-allegations, or have their reputation smeared.<sup>163</sup>

In December, the Home Office announced that police across England and Wales will be given a £1 billion boost to aid the government's Safer Streets mission.<sup>164</sup>

**However, the funding uplift does not include ring-fenced funding for tackling VAWG, which is part of the Safer Streets mission.**

The majority of this funding will be given to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to 'tackle crime in their communities', with a focus on antisocial behaviour and repeat offenders. In addition to the money being given to PCCs, the Home Office is also investing an extra £140 million in Counter Terrorism Policing.

In February 2024, Professor Katrin Hohl was appointed as the Independent Advisor to the government Rape Review<sup>165</sup> after working on Operation Soteria; a scheme to overhaul the way in which police forces investigate rape.<sup>166</sup> Following the review, Hohl was named as the Independent Advisor on Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Violence. A government report indicated that some steps had been made towards achieving the ambitions set out in the 2021 End-to-End Rape Review; attributed to collaborative efforts across the justice system, including Operation Soteria, increased resourcing and improved victim support.<sup>167</sup>

However, as highlighted by the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales,<sup>168</sup> since the Rape Review was commissioned there have continued to be chronic delays to the progression of victims' cases, court backlogs and poor victim attrition rates plaguing the criminal justice response to rape cases. Victim attrition remains an ongoing and significant issue, particularly during the police investigation stage, and there is an urgent need for better data to understand the reasons for this drop out.

159 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/09/met-police-officers-dissuaded-children-making-sexual-abuse-claims-report>

160 <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/peel-reports/metropolitan-2023-25/>

161 <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/9861/the-baird-inquiry.pdf>

162 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/responses-to-police-perpetrated-domestic-abuse-report-on-the-cwj-super-complaint/d120ae22-3218-4c6b-9a17-4557a0cadd62>

163 <https://www.centreforwomensjustice.org.uk/news/2024/9/13/police-perpetrated-domestic-abuse-has-everything-changed-systemic-failures-continue-and-victimsurvivor-confidence-remains-disturbingly-low>

164 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/billion-pound-funding-boost-for-police-to-keep-streets-safe#:~:text=Police%20across%20England%20and%20Wales,19.5%20billion%20for%20next%20year.>

165 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/end-to-end-rape-review-report-on-findings-and-actions>

166 <https://www.city.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2024/february/katrin-hohl-appointed-independent-government-advisor>

167 <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65cb5cc2103de2000eb8f375/rape-review-progress-update.pdf>

168 <https://victimscomm-newsroom.prgloo.com/news/victims-commissioner-rape-review-progress-risks-being-undermined-by-systemic-issues-eroding-victim-confidence>



The Old Bailey in London.

As the Labour government assumed power, the overflowing prison population presented a considerable challenge. The SDS40 Early Release Scheme was introduced as a temporary measure by the new government to address overcrowding in prisons.<sup>169</sup> The scheme involved the release of eligible prisoners on licence into the community after they have served 40% of their sentence rather than 50%.<sup>170</sup> Perpetrators of the “worst violent and sexual crimes”<sup>171</sup> were formally or technically excluded, however, as pointed out by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner,<sup>172</sup> this could not overcome loopholes in the scheme, including that many abusers who were imprisoned for other offences were released through SDS40.<sup>173</sup> The short-term and crisis-led approach to the issue impacted survivors and supporting organisations, and contributed to concerns that new measures could come at the expense of survivors’ safety.<sup>174, 175</sup>

Indeed, just days after the scheme came into force, there were reports in the media about offenders with a history of domestic abuse who had been freed from prison under the government’s early release scheme then going on to reoffend,<sup>176</sup> which contributed to anxieties about the scheme. Such reports contribute to diminishing confidence in a criminal justice system already struggling to meet the needs of victim-survivors, and puts further pressure on a probation service that is already failing to effectively monitor offenders who have been released.<sup>177</sup> It is vital that specialist victim support services do not bear the brunt of the early release scheme, given they may struggle to meet demand from survivors concerned about the potential release of a perpetrator.<sup>178</sup> The SDS40 scheme also brought to the fore the need for a more considered strategy regarding imprisonment, rehabilitation and recidivism overall, which the Lord Chancellor set out would be reviewed by the Sentencing Review.<sup>179</sup>

169 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c16jpkzz9g3o>

170 <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/government-plans-to-ease-prison-capacity-pressure-and-manage-the-needs-of-vulnerable-prisoners/>

171 <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2024-07-29a.848.1#g848.2>

172 <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/all-domestic-abuse-perpetrators-must-be-exempt-from-sds40-says-commissioner/>

173 <https://www.channel4.com/news/exclusive-some-sex-offenders-to-get-early-release-from-prison-under-government-plans-warn-whistleblowers>

174 <https://refuge.org.uk/news/refuge-responds-to-the-governments-sds40-early-release-scheme/>

175 <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/commissioner-responds-to-new-measures-to-temporarily-delay-some-imprisonments/>

176 [https://inews.co.uk/news/domestic-abusers-re-offending-days-early-release-prison-3376653?srsId=AfmBOorhoEVIMJEa2JuqoD7i8znSmhXBfxu vDzeQ6h7fl7\\_CCginb8w-](https://inews.co.uk/news/domestic-abusers-re-offending-days-early-release-prison-3376653?srsId=AfmBOorhoEVIMJEa2JuqoD7i8znSmhXBfxu vDzeQ6h7fl7_CCginb8w-)

177 <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2024/10/Martin-Napo-speech-Fri-11-October.pdf>

178 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-responds-to-the-governments-new-plans-for-early-release-schemes-for-prisoners/>

179 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/independent-sentencing-review-2024-to-2025>



Woman talking to a doctor.



**80%**  
OF WOMEN  
SUBJECTED TO  
DOMESTIC ABUSE  
SEEK HELP FROM  
HEALTH SERVICES  
WHICH ARE OFTEN  
THEIR FIRST, OR ONLY,  
POINT OF CONTACT

## Health and social care

Addressing VAWG must be a central part of the Labour government's mission to build an NHS fit for the future,<sup>180</sup> particularly as evidence suggests that 80% of women subjected to domestic abuse seek help from health services which are often their first, or only, point of contact.<sup>181</sup> However, current plans to improve the NHS do not reference VAWG specifically, despite the devastating impact VAWG has on women and girls' physical and mental health.

In a recent survey by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the majority of respondents (59%) said violence and abuse are contributing to mental illness in their female

patients, which was closely followed by relationship issues (49%), often caused by coercive behaviour, and home and family pressures (48%).<sup>182</sup> However, mental health services are critically underfunded and are currently not set up to meet the demand made by referrals, which could have a knock on effect on specialist VAWG support services which are also struggling to meet demand.

In January 2024, the Conservative government announced new health priorities for women which included tackling disparities and improving support for vulnerable women, including victims of sexual abuse and violence. This included the creation of a new model within the NHS to protect its staff.<sup>183</sup> The start of the year saw deeply concerning reports which revealed that almost 20,000 sexual assaults and incidents had been reported in NHS-run mental health hospitals over a period of four years.<sup>184</sup> Just six out of 50 hospitals were able to prove they were meeting NHS standards aimed at protecting patients from sexual harm.

180 <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Labour-Party-manifesto-2024.pdf>

181 [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/5ef35f557271034cdc0b261f/1593007968965/Pathfinder+Toolkit\\_Final.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee0be2588f1e349401c832c/t/5ef35f557271034cdc0b261f/1593007968965/Pathfinder+Toolkit_Final.pdf)

182 <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/news-and-features/latest-news/detail/2024/03/08/violence-and-abuse-are-driving-mental-illness-in-women-and-girls--psychiatrists-warn>

183 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/health-secretary-announces-new-womens-health-priorities-for-2024>

184 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/sexual-abuse-mental-health-uk-b2484163.html>

In Northern Ireland, a Women's Health Action Plan was announced, which will identify priority actions across women's health services, including fertility and pregnancy, post-natal healthcare, baby loss, menopause, and gynaecological services.<sup>185</sup> Likewise, a Women's Health Plan for Wales was announced in December,<sup>186</sup> setting out how NHS organisations in Wales will close the gender health gap by providing better health services for women, and will specifically include violence against women and girls.<sup>187</sup>

At the start of 2024, there were concerning reports about a rise in prosecutions for women accessing abortion, with at least 6 women taken to court since 2022 for allegedly ending their pregnancies outside the legal requirements covering abortion. This compares starkly with just 3 women prosecuted in this way in the previous 20 years.<sup>188</sup> In response, new guidance was issued by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists for health staff to advise them to not report women suspected of illegally ending pregnancies to the police.<sup>189</sup> In October, the new government announced the creation of safe access zones for abortion clinics in England and Wales to protect women accessing abortion care.<sup>190</sup> Similarly, a new law was passed in Scotland at the end of September to protect women and girls who have abortions, as well as staff, by introducing safe access zones.<sup>191</sup>

## Immigration and asylum

As it stands, the UK continues to fail migrant survivors. The VAWG sector's joint manifesto made clear recommendations to end the Conservative government's 'hostile environment' in the UK, which creates conducive conditions for the abuse of women and girls through their exclusion from state protection. This includes equitable access to healthcare, welfare and policing.<sup>192</sup> However, EVAW's own analysis found that Labour's manifesto reflects a similarly punitive approach to migration; promising to invest in new border security, a new returns and enforcement unit and to negotiate additional returns arrangements.<sup>193</sup> In the month after its election, and only two weeks after the racist riots, the new Labour government announced a "major surge" in immigration enforcement activity, with plans to expand intelligence officers, increase detention capacity, and increase sanctions against employers – aiming for "the highest rate of removals" since 2018.<sup>194</sup>

In this context, recourse to safety for migrant survivors remains limited. For those with insecure immigration status, funding for the Support for Migrant Victims Scheme<sup>195</sup> is persistently short-term and precarious. Expert 'by and for' organisations have long called for a model of protection for survivors which grants women and children access to welfare so they can seek support and safety,

185 <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-swann-outlines-womens-health-action-plan>

186 <https://executive.nhs.wales/functions/networks-and-planning/womens-health/the-womens-health-plan-for-wales/>

187 <https://irisi.org/womens-health-wales-domestic-abuse-vawg/>

188 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/22/illegal-abortion-prosecutions-uk-police-royal-college>

189 <https://www.rcog.org.uk/news/rcog-issues-guidance-for-healthcare-professionals-on-involving-the-police-following-abortion-and-pregnancy-loss/>

190 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/abortion-service-protection-zones-in-place-in-england-and-wales>

191 <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2024/09/abortion-services-safe-access-zones-2/documents/abortion-services-safe-access-zones/abortion-services-safe-access-zones/govscot%3Adocument/abortion-services-safe-access-zones.pdf>

192 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/general-election-2024-vawg-sectors-manifesto-calls-on-political-parties-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-for-good/>

193 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Political-party-manifestos-at-a-glance.pdf>

194 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-announces-new-measures-to-boost-britains-border-security>

195 <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/our-services/sbs-no-recourse-fund/smv-scheme/>



Banner at a protest saying 'REFUGEES WELCOME'.

alongside eligibility for a route to leave to remain.

In February 2024, the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession was renamed to the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC),<sup>196</sup> and was extended to include partners of student and work visa holders, albeit without giving them rights to settlement. Southall Black Sisters, supported by 58 organisations, wrote an open letter to the Home Secretary in March 2024, raising alarm over the cliff-edge survivors would face at the end of the three month period, with many at risk of falling out of status.<sup>197</sup>

Significant concerns remain about this policy, with reports emerging of victim-survivors switching over from more favourable visa types or being advised by local authorities and non-specialist organisations to apply for the MVDAC without being made aware that their legal status will end when the three month period expires. This is resulting in victim-survivors falling out of status and being stuck in cycles of further harm. Whilst the government has not responded to the sector's concerns, at the start of February 2025, the MVDAC was expanded to include victims of domestic abuse who were last

granted leave as a partner under the Ukraine Schemes on the basis of their relationship with a Ukrainian national.<sup>198</sup>

**The Labour government is also yet to commit to the introduction of a firewall between the Home Office and statutory services to ensure that migrant survivors can report abuse safely without fear of detention or threat of deportation.**

Progress on both of these policies will be crucial to ensuring that the halving VAWG ambition applies to all survivors, regardless of ethnicity or immigration status.

Women seeking asylum who are temporarily housed in hotel accommodation are routinely monitored and surveilled, isolated from social networks and sources of support, subjected to humiliating and dehumanising behaviour by hotel staff, and punished if they do not comply with the restrictions placed on them.<sup>199</sup> Living in hotel accommodation has a devastating impact on women's mental health. 91% of women surveyed by Women for Refugee Women said living in a hotel made them anxious or depressed, and almost half of women said it made them suicidal.

<sup>196</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-for-benefits-for-visa-holder-domestic-violence>

<sup>197</sup> <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/03/joint-letter-on-mvdac.pdf>

<sup>198</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/victims-of-domestic-violence>

<sup>199</sup> [https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Coercion-and-Control-The-treatment-of-women-seeking-asylum-in-hotel-accommodation\\_WRW24\\_DIGITAL-2-compressed\\_1.pdf](https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Coercion-and-Control-The-treatment-of-women-seeking-asylum-in-hotel-accommodation_WRW24_DIGITAL-2-compressed_1.pdf)

Survivors are forced to share hotels with men, some of which have been found to be sites of sexual harassment and abuse,<sup>200</sup> resulting in women feeling perpetually unsafe.<sup>201</sup> The scale of abuse is hard to measure given that incidents often go unreported due to fears that either no action will be taken, or that there will be punitive repercussions such as being evicted or that their application for asylum will be rejected.<sup>202</sup>

Positively, Labour cancelled the so-called 'Rwanda Plan' on its first day of government, a law which had led to the unnecessary detention of women since its passage.<sup>203</sup> In November 2024, the new government announced an increase in civil legal aid fees for immigration and housing, both of which should positively impact survivors. However, many survivors are still struggling to access a lawyer to assist in their immigration and asylum matters. In 2023/24, 57% of people claiming asylum or appealing a refusal did not have access to a legal aid representative.<sup>204</sup>

A legacy of successive punitive legislation and policies currently remain, including the Nationality and Borders Act which rolled back international refugee protection law, and the Illegal Migration Act.

**Notably, since the introduction of the Nationality and Borders Act in 2022, a higher standard of proof has made it increasingly difficult for LGBT+ people seeking safety to prove their sexual orientation or gender identity, along with women who have experienced gender-based violence.**<sup>205</sup>

The government has since introduced the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, which sets out to strengthen laws on so-called 'immigration crime' and expand detention powers,<sup>206</sup> described in further detail in the legislation section of this report. This legislation is reflective of the government's punitive approach to migration,<sup>207</sup> which builds on rhetoric set by the previous Conservative government and frames it as an issue of 'national security'. Alongside this, the government has updated its guidance for staff assessing asylum seekers' applications to outline that applicants who have arrived in small boats should be refused citizenship; an update which has been heavily criticised by Labour MPs and refugee charities alike.<sup>208</sup>

In its concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 2024, the UN Human Rights Committee highlighted that migrant women who have experienced violence continue to receive unequal protections and risk being subject to immigration enforcement upon reporting the abuse they have faced.<sup>209</sup> The Committee made a series of recommendations to improve support for migrant victims of gender-based violence, including withdrawing the UK's reservation to Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention and amending the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to ensure equal protection for migrant women.

200 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/asylum-hotels-sexual-harassment-racism/>

201 <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/news/new-report-finds-women-face-threat-of-sexual-violence-and-abuse-in-uk-asylum-accommodation/>

202 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jun/03/asylum-seekers-report-widespread-abuse-in-home-office-accommodation>

203 <https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/rwanda-bill/>

204 <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2024/nov/25/legal-aid-lawyers-shortage-starmer-asylum-backlog-pledge>

205 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/uk-nationality-borders-act-queer-lgbtq-asylum-immigration/>

206 <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3929>

207 <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/refugee-action-responds-to-border-security-asylum-and-immigration-bill/>

208 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/small-boats-uk-citizenship-asylum-seekers-b2696687.html>

209 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4046143?ln=en&v=pdf>



## Human rights

2024 presented a decisive moment for human rights as key legislation and legal challenges hung in the balance. The previous government could not clarify that the Rwanda Act complied with the UK's obligations under the ECHR, which represented a serious blow to the UK's commitments to the rule of law and the principle of universal human rights.<sup>210</sup> Its cancellation by Labour has curbed this trajectory. However, there is now a legacy of legislation which undermines human rights protections – both the Victims and Prisoners Act and Nationality and Borders Act disapply parts of the Human Rights Act to cohorts of people<sup>211</sup> – undermining the important principle that human rights are for everyone – whilst the Illegal Migration Act risks breaching multiple international human rights treaties including the Refugee Convention and the ECHR, while shielding the government from accountability. The former government similarly admitted that it cannot confirm if the Illegal Migration Act is compatible with the UK's obligations under the ECHR.<sup>212</sup> We will be looking to the new government to address these infringements on fundamental rights and freedoms.

In national discourse, opposition to human rights protections continued, with the question of withdrawal from the ECHR being prevalent in the Conservative Party leadership contest.<sup>213</sup> Labour has confirmed it has no plans to leave the ECHR, however it remains to be seen whether it will go further to defend and promote domestic and international human rights protections,

including upholding the principle of universal human rights. It is vital that the new government preserves and restores human rights within legislation, policy and practice, as well as national discourse.

## Family courts

This year saw more reports of unregulated experts appointed by family courts in England and Wales causing harm to children by separating them from their mothers and forcing them to live with and have contact with fathers accused of violence and abuse.<sup>214</sup> Failings of the family court to recognise prior abuse still persist, particularly evidenced by the tragic murder of Sara Sharif after repeated abuse by her father and stepmother,<sup>215</sup> likened to torture. Sara's father was granted custody despite previous accusations that he had abused her siblings and mother for years.<sup>216</sup>

Research also suggests that women and children who have been abused are still facing punitive measures by the family courts, which prioritises the testimonies of abusive men deploying so-called 'parental alienation' experts. This is highly concerning given that the biggest single cost for a woman fleeing domestic abuse is likely to be legal fees for the family court, where survivors have to fight to ensure their children are safe,<sup>217</sup> whereas we know access to legal aid can decrease the cost of hiring a lawyer by 90%.

New guidance aimed at judges was published in November by the Family Justice Council to recognise the concerning trend of

210 <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2024-01/Rwanda%20Bill%202R%20Hol.%20Joint%20civil%20society%20statement%20-%20with%20logos.pdf?VersionId=XJv9Llycxe40kz8OP0xHd7XNjB36SYws>

211 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/EVAW-VB-briefing-160523.pdf>

212 <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/joint-civil-society-statement-on-the-passage-of-the-illegal-migration-act/>

213 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy0lqzjwqx8o>

214 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/nov/unregulated-experts-can-cause-harm-children-family-courts>

215 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czr3vygvyy7o>

216 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/dec/12/sara-sharifs-father-given-custody-despite-years-of-reported-abuse-of-mother-and-siblings>

217 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Price-of-Safety-Report-2024-Final-Version.pdf>



Outside Central Family Court.

counterclaims of parental alienation being raised in response to allegations of domestic abuse.<sup>218</sup> The guidance attempts to debunk the myth that there is a diagnosable syndrome of parental alienation and provides information about how to support a child that is reluctant or refuses to see a parent. In response, Women's Aid released a statement that welcomed the guidance, but expressed concerns that it is not sufficiently child-centred, and that the wishes of children will continue to be overlooked in family court proceedings.<sup>219</sup> They also highlighted the concerning absence of child sexual abuse in the guidance.

Significantly, a report by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (CSPRP), which reviewed 136 cases of serious child sexual abuse from between 2018 and 2023, was published in November; outlining systemic failures across all agencies to

recognise and respond when children are at risk of, or are already being sexually abused by someone in their family environment.<sup>220</sup> The research found an overwhelming reliance on verbal reports of abuse from children, which means many children who are pre- or non-verbal, or do not willingly disclose, are falling through the gaps.

The panel highlighted the need for a child-centred system that recognises the challenges children face in verbally speaking about their abuse and that does not rely on them doing so in order to take action. When sexual abuse is suspected or reported, including where children are non- and pre-verbal, where reports are retracted or where evidence has not yet reached the high threshold for a criminal justice intervention, practitioners at all levels of the system need to be empowered to act quickly and confidently to safeguard and support children.

218 <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2024-12-11/parental-alienation-argument-cannot-be-used-against-domestic-abuse-victims-say-judges/>

219 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-respond-to-the-guidance-on-allegations-of-alienating-behaviours-published-by-the-family-justice-council/>

220 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67446a8a81f809b32c8568d3/CSPRP\\_-\\_I\\_wanted\\_them\\_all\\_to\\_notice.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67446a8a81f809b32c8568d3/CSPRP_-_I_wanted_them_all_to_notice.pdf)



## Housing

There is still grave concern about barriers and discrimination towards survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls when accessing safe and affordable housing, as cost-of-living concerns continue to impact women's ability to flee abuse, with it costing £50,000 on average for a survivor to leave an abuser based on the direct costs of fleeing and rebuilding a new life.<sup>221</sup> Most significantly, cuts to local council funding and the pervasive lack of social housing will have a disproportionate impact on migrant survivors of VAWG, who face the most significant barriers when accessing support.<sup>222</sup>

Housing insecurity for survivors fleeing abuse can pose a huge strain on an individual's mental health<sup>223</sup> and even trigger mental health crises because of the constant stress and anxiety from securing accommodation.<sup>224</sup> Labour has made positive moves towards ensuring housing is a priority by introducing a Renters Rights Bill, which will include banning Section 21 'no fault' evictions, currently one of the leading causes of homelessness in England.<sup>225</sup> Labour's manifesto also set out changes to planning laws to enhance growth, however much debate surrounds the feasibility of this to meet the vast demand for affordable homes.

## Media

In a year when VAWG dominated the headlines, we saw the continued use of victim-blaming language and the invisibilisation of perpetrators in the news. The landmark case of Gisèle Pelicot – a woman in France who was repeatedly drugged and raped by her husband and over 100 other perpetrators – revealed the embedded nature of these harmful tropes when an article was published in the Telegraph entitled 'Woman takes public revenge on men who raped her every day on her husband's orders'.<sup>226</sup> Since then, Pelicot has become a figurehead of the French feminist movement, however her case was revealing of archaic but prevalent beliefs about consent within the marriage context. EVAW's 'Reporting on Rape' resource details how headlines such as this justify men's violence against women whilst hiding the perpetrator and their actions.<sup>227</sup> Indeed, the resource outlines how overt victim-blaming has become less socially acceptable, with the subtler myth that women lie about rape replacing it, despite false allegations being exceptionally rare.

221 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Price-of-Safety-Report-2024-Final-Version.pdf>

222 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/VAWG-Sector-Joint-Statement-on-Social-Housing-Allocations-Policy.docx.pdf>

223 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/womenwhohavesurviveddomesticabuseandtheirexperiencesoftemporarysafeaccommodationinengland/januarytojune2023>

224 <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/vbbdclpi/the-big-mental-health-report-2024-mind.pdf>

225 <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/crisis-media-centre/over-90-000-households-in-england-threatened-with-eviction-since-ban-on-section-21-promised/>

226 <https://thefemcast.com/2024/09/06/justice-not-revenge-telegraphs-misogynistic-headline-undermines-survivors-courage/>

227 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/FINAL-RESOURCE-REPORTING-ON-RAPE.pdf>

**seeks justice**

Wife ~~takes public revenge~~ on men who 'raped her every night on husband's orders'

High profile perpetrators such as Mohammad al-Fayed<sup>228</sup>, Russell Brand<sup>229</sup>, Neil Gaiman<sup>230</sup> and Sean 'Diddy' Combs<sup>231</sup> made the headlines with multiple reports of abuse, revealing once again how abuse is both hidden and institutionalised by power. Yet concerningly, research found that a significant proportion of social media posts reacting to media reports about the Russell Brand case included misogynistic language,<sup>232</sup> further evidencing the embedded nature of rape myths and the culture of victim-blaming that surrounds reports of VAWG.

In news reports about rape involving celebrities, continued use of the term 'alleged', instead of a more neutral term like 'reported', conceals a sense of 'himpathy'

defined as the excessive sympathy sometimes shown towards male perpetrators of sexual violence.<sup>233</sup> However, not all perpetrators are treated the same way. High profile singers, actors and athletes often receive preferential treatment in the press, with their actions downplayed as mere wrongdoing or misconduct, and a focus on their successful careers. This reflects and reinforces the cultural landscape that underpins the onslaught of victim-blaming on social media when these cases are reported on.

Misinformation and disinformation in the news continues to pose a significant threat to women and girls<sup>234</sup> as disinformation campaigns, particularly against high-profile women,<sup>235</sup> are used to discredit, intimate, or silence them.<sup>236</sup> A research report from Ofcom found that social media is a significant component of online news consumption, with more than half of UK adults (52%) using it as a news source.<sup>237</sup> Yet a recent announcement from Mark Zuckerberg that Meta is putting an end to fact checking across their platforms puts this trend in a worrying light and presents a concerning legitimisation of disinformation and fake news.<sup>238</sup> The rollback of user rights on social media<sup>239</sup> is reflective of a broader trend of deregulation that is taking hold on an international scale,<sup>240</sup> and will continue to pose a challenge to the VAWG sector as the year continues.

228 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/27/mohamed-al-fayed-may-have-raped-and-abused-more-than-111-women-say-police>

229 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2024/nov/02/police-ask-prosecutors-to-consider-charging-russell-brand-over-sex-assault-claims>

230 <https://www.tortoisemedia.com/2024/07/03/exclusive-neil-gaiman-accused-of-sexual-assault>

231 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cg56em38g2vo>

232 [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/heres-what-happens-when-victims-have-to-confront-news-about-sexual-assault\\_uk\\_651ad915e4b0c39562538035](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/heres-what-happens-when-victims-have-to-confront-news-about-sexual-assault_uk_651ad915e4b0c39562538035)

233 <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/kate-manne-on-the-costs-of-male-entitlement>

234 <https://wiisglobal.org/an-overlooked-threat-to-democracy-gendered-disinformation-about-female-politicians/>

235 <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/21/business/media/blake-lively-justin-baldoni-it-ends-with-us.html>

236 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e4ab31e40f0b677c3e37ff3/Quick\\_Read\\_Gender\\_and\\_countersing\\_disinformation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e4ab31e40f0b677c3e37ff3/Quick_Read_Gender_and_countersing_disinformation.pdf)

237 <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand-research/tv-research/news/news-consumption-2024/news-consumption-in-the-uk-2024-report.pdf?v=379621#:~:text=Overall%20news%20consumption%3A&text=In%202024%2C%20seven%20in%20ten,it%20as%20a%20news%20source.>

238 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/jan/07/meta-facebook-instagram-threads-mark-zuckerberg-remove-fact-checkers-recommend-political-content>

239 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/us/politics/2025/02/09/uk-willing-rework-online-harms-bill-avoid-trump-tariffs/>

240 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/unleashing-prosperity-through-deregulation/#:~:text=Regulatory%20Cap%20for%20Fiscal%20Year,existing%20regulations%20to%20be%20repealed.>

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ **Protect the human rights frameworks** needed to tackle VAWG by preserving and promoting domestic and international human rights and equalities legislation, including upholding the principle of universal human rights.
- ▶ The government must adopt EVAW's **accountability framework**, which sets out a cross-departmental approach to tackling VAWG through dedicated, resourced teams working across each government department.
- ▶ Put **prevention front and centre of the government's halving VAWG mission**, including:
  - ▶ Adopting **a public health approach to preventing VAWG**, including funding and delivery of multi-year, long-term effective public communication campaigns and community responses that challenge harmful social norms and perpetrator and bystander behaviour.
  - ▶ Strategic investment to prevent and respond to VAWG in all schools and higher education settings, including the delivery of a whole-school approach. This should include sufficient investment in school staff to enable training, resourcing and dedicated capacity for RSHE/RSE delivery, and dedicated funding for specialist local VAWG services, including 'by and for' organisations, to design and implement prevention interventions (see recommendations from EVAW's report 'It's #AboutTime: – A Whole-School Approach to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls'<sup>241</sup>).
- ▶ **Create a safer online environment** by making a commitment through legislation and other mechanisms to better address online VAWG – with a preventative, holistic and intersectional approach. Solutions should focus on safety-by-design and product security, and require accountability and transparency from tech companies within a human rights framework. It should also be future-proofed to tackle emerging harms.

241 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/new-report-its-about-time-a-whole-school-approach-to-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

- ▶ **Ensure equal access to support and justice** for all survivors, embedding the specialist women-led and ‘by and for’ sector’s practice of intersectionality to meet the needs of all women and girls and the intersecting forms of oppression they face. This includes:
  - ▶ Migrant survivors – by dismantling ‘hostile environment’ policies. This would include scrapping the No Recourse to Public Funds condition, introducing a ‘firewall’ to block data-sharing between statutory agencies and immigration, widening access to models of protection like the Domestic Violence Rule and Destitution Domestic Violence Concession, and removing reservations on the Istanbul Convention.
  - ▶ Those who face communication barriers – by implementing the recommendations of the VAWG sector’s ‘Listen to Us!’ report.<sup>242</sup>
- ▶ Support the **sustainability of the specialist VAWG sector**, including ‘by and for’ services, by reforming the current competitive funding and commissioning landscape and delivering a secure, national, multi-year funding settlement that is accessible to these services. This must include national ring-fenced funding for specialist services led ‘by and for’ Black and minoritised women, Deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors.
- ▶ Resource and reform public institutions – from housing to health, the welfare system, children’s social care and the criminal justice system – so they are better able to prevent and respond to VAWG and to ensure a **whole-society approach**. This includes:
  - ▶ Reforming the criminal justice system’s response to VAWG, per the recommendations set out in our briefing ‘Government’s End-to-End Rape Review: Two Years On’. This would include extending the work of Operation Soteria to scrutinise post-charge and court processes for VAWG cases. Also expanding the Soteria approach to look at Domestic Improving the response from health, housing, family courts and social care via recommendations set out in the **joint VAWG sector manifesto**.<sup>243</sup>

242 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Listen-to-us-Final.pdf>

243 <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/general-election-2024-vawg-sectors-manifesto-calls-on-political-parties-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-for-good/>

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