



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

**SNAPSHOT REPORT
2021-22**



**END
VIOLENCE
AGAINST
WOMEN**

END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

ABOUT EVAW

The End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) is a leading coalition of more than 120 specialist women's support services, researchers, activists, victims and survivors and NGOs 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.evaw.org.uk

Photo of a young woman outdoors

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Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the published research, expertise, knowledge and practice-based evidence of our coalition members and others in the violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector.

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

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Photo of an older woman

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the state of violence against women and girls (VAWG) as of January 2022, setting out the prevalence and policy landscape around this issue. We have drawn on the latest government statistics, research and insight from specialist VAWG sector organisations and researchers to highlight the extent of VAWG in England and Wales (unless otherwise stated) to bring together an overview of related key policy developments over the past year.

In order to properly respond to the experiences of women and girls we must understand VAWG as a cause and consequence of

gender inequality, as these forms of abuse are committed disproportionately against women and girls, and the perpetrators are overwhelmingly men. Women's further inequality as a result of structural oppression and discrimination because of ethnicity, disability, wealth and social class, sexuality, gender identity, immigration status and age makes them more likely to experience violence and less likely to access justice and support. VAWG is commonly experienced as a continuum of violence¹ often across women's lifetimes, that cannot be properly understood without acknowledging the inter-connected instances and impacts.

1 Kelly, L. (1988) Surviving sexual violence

Our key recommendations for addressing this violence are:

► **Ratification of the Istanbul Convention**

10 years after signing up to the Istanbul Convention, the government must commit to both ratifying the Convention in full, and a timetable for swift ratification so that this rights-based, 'gold standard' of responding to VAWG can be enshrined in UK law.

► **A multi-year, well-resourced public attitudes campaign to end VAWG**

To deliver the profound cultural shift needed to end VAWG, a national public attitudes campaign must run for many years and have adequate investment to transform attitudes in a society that minimises and makes excuses for VAWG.

► **A strategic investment to end abuse**

In order to deliver the life-saving work that helps thousands of women and girls every day, the VAWG sector needs long-term, sustainable funding. This includes ring-fenced funding for specialist services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, which are chronically under-funded.

► **Effective protection and support for migrant women**

The government must remove the barriers to support currently facing migrant women. This would include the introduction of safe reporting mechanisms for migrant victims and survivors to report abuse without fear of their information being shared with immigration enforcement, equal and effective access to protection and support for all women regardless of their immigration status in line with the Istanbul Convention, and the extension the eligibility of the Domestic Violence Rule (DVR) to all migrant women.

► **An Online Safety Bill that comprehensively tackles online VAWG**

The forthcoming Online Safety Bill should name VAWG as a harm on the face of the Bill, ensure there is a VAWG Code of Practice and designated funding for online VAWG support services, including ring-fenced funding for organisations led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women.

► **Support for schools to implement a 'whole school approach'**

The Department for Education (DfE) must commit to resourcing a 'whole school approach' to tackling VAWG, along with the creation of a 'whole school approach' taskforce that has representation from specialist, led 'by and for' VAWG organisations.

► **Far-ranging reform to the criminal justice system's approach to VAWG**

This includes extensive reforms to the police, CPS and courts; improved leadership and accountability; wraparound support and advocacy for all victims and survivors; and ensuring access to justice and equality of outcomes for all. This includes research into the barriers to reporting, the impact of rape myths and stereotypes on the system, and what rape victims and survivors want from the justice system.

► **A Victims' Bill that responds to the diversity of victims and survivors' experiences with greater rights and entitlements**

This should include safeguards to guarantee victims and survivors' protections against over-intrusive and excessive police requests for third-party material, such as medical notes, school reports and therapy notes, and survivors having the right to access specialist therapeutic and advocacy support at any time.

INTRODUCTION

2021 is the year that saw a national conversation about the state of violence against women and girls (VAWG) following the murders of Sarah Everard, Bibaa Henry, Nicole Smallman, Sabina Nessa and many others whose names may not have made the headlines. In a year when the government's refreshed VAWG strategy was published, much political and media attention has focused on interventions relating to women's personal safety rather than perpetrator behaviour and the conducive context that allows it to manifest. This focus on safety has included funding for street lighting and CCTV, as well as increased police presence in communities.

However, it is clear that ending VAWG requires a different approach. It requires investment in prevention and in addressing harmful societal attitudes; significant support for the specialist VAWG sector, including those organisations led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women; transformation of the criminal justice system so that it delivers for all victims and survivors; and measures that go beyond the traditional ideas of 'public space' to comprehensively tackle VAWG that takes place online. Fundamentally, an approach to ending VAWG that focuses on 'safety' can not be as successful as a comprehensive, rights-based approach for all women.

Concerningly, the government has introduced a number of pieces of legislation that pose a risk to women's rights and exacerbate the inequalities that prevent marginalised women from seeking protection and support. These include the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill; the Nationality and Borders Bill; the Judicial Review Bill; and the Human Rights Act Review. We echo the widespread concerns about the impact of these proposals on the lives of Black, minoritised, migrant and marginalised victims and survivors of abuse.

We are also approaching the 10th anniversary of the UK signing the Istanbul Convention. However, the government is no closer to ratifying the Convention that is widely seen as the international "gold standard"² for tackling VAWG and enshrines the right to support and protection from abuse without discrimination, including for migrant women whose lack of rights under this government's 'hostile environment' policies remain the major impediment to ratification.

Yet, despite the pervasive nature of abuse, we know that this violence is not inevitable. To eradicate it takes both courage and bold leadership from those in positions of power. It requires an approach that centres the prevention of abuse and seeks to shift cultures of misogyny and sexism within society and institutions, whilst also funding and supporting specialist women's services to meet the immediate and long-term challenges women and girls are facing.

2 Former UN Women Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri – UN Women (5 March 2013) [The Istanbul Convention: strengthening the response to ending violence against women](#)

TRENDS

Femicide

The issue of femicide reached a new level of public awareness in the UK due to the series of high profile murders of women in the past year. At the time of writing this report, it has been reported that in 2021 at least 141 UK women were killed by men (or where a man is the principal suspect);³ an increase on the previous two years.⁴



Photo of flowers and placards that read 'when will women be safe?'

Domestic Homicide during Covid-19 2020-21

Although the national conversations on VAWG in the last year have primarily focused on women's safety in public spaces, we know that the majority of the abuse experienced by women, such as domestic abuse and sexual violence, is most commonly perpetrated by someone known to them.⁵ Recent domestic homicide figures from the Home Office show that the largest proportion of domestic homicide deaths were intimate partner homicide (49%).⁶ We also know that this is a highly gendered crime, with intimate partner homicide victims being overwhelmingly female (85%) and the majority of perpetrators male (80%). We can also understand domestic homicide as part of the continuum of VAWG, as almost half of all suspects were previously known to police for perpetrating domestic abuse.

Whilst the majority of domestic homicide victims were white (76%), the figures suggest that the proportion of Black and minoritised victims since the start of the pandemic (24% in total) is higher than the previous 15-year domestic homicides average and higher than the 2019-20 domestic homicides data by five percentage points; illustrating that Black and minoritised women were disproportionately affected.⁷ Furthermore, Black and minoritised victims were less likely to be previously known to the police and other agencies than white victims. It is evident that the barriers to protection and support that many Black and minoritised women face have deeply harmful consequences.

3 Karen Ingala Smith (8 February 2022) 2021

4 Karen Ingala Smith (2021) *Karen Ingala Smith As I See It*

5 Rape Crisis (accessed 15 February 2022) *Statistics: sexual violence and abuse*

6 Home Office (25 August 2021) *Domestic Homicides and Suspected Victim Suicides During the Covid-19 Pandemic 2020-2021*

7 Ibid.

Domestic abuse

The number of police recorded domestic abuse-related crimes in England and Wales rose 6% in the year ending March 2021, to 845,734.⁸ Yet police referrals to the Crown Prosecution Service for a charging decision have decreased by 3% to 77,812. And for the third successive year, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) charging rate for domestic abuse-related crimes in England and Wales decreased to 70% in the year ending March 2021,⁹ down from 76% in the year ending March 2018.¹⁰ And the actual volume of prosecutions has decreased for the fifth time in a row, to just 54,515.¹¹ This means that while reports of abuse have increased, the number of cases going to the CPS is decreasing, with these cases less likely to result in a charge, contributing to a 5 year decline in the number of cases being prosecuted. Such statistics illustrates the criminal justice system's failure in how it treats violence against women and girls, and suggests that treatment of domestic abuse in the criminal justice system is going the same way as rape, which saw a dramatic decline in the number of prosecutions since 2017.

We know that criminal justice statistics are not a true reflection of prevalence as many women feel unable to or prefer not to report to the police. This is clear from demand on domestic abuse helplines: there was a 22% increase in people supported by the National Domestic Abuse Helpline in England in the year ending March 2021.¹²

Women may feel like they cannot or do not want to engage with the criminal justice system as a result of many factors, such as

victim-blaming attitudes in society and myths and stereotypes that impact how victims and survivors are treated by the police.

For example, migrant women face a significant barrier to justice because of the risk of the police sharing migrant victims and survivors' data with the Home Office for immigration enforcement purposes.

While there is no ethnicity data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for the above domestic abuse crime statistics, Freedom of Information (FOI) data from 30 police forces between 2016 and 2020 found that police forces were 1.6 times more likely to charge when the victim or survivor was white than when they were Asian, and 1.5 times than when the victim or survivor was Black.¹³ Such disproportionate criminal justice outcomes can arise from a number of factors, including pervasive myths and stereotypes around victim and survivor 'credibility'. The Law Commission's work to understand the extent to which myths and stereotypes impact justice for rape victims and survivors is expected to be underway later this year, but it is clear that urgent work needs to be done to understand the different justice outcomes for minoritised and marginalised women.



8 ONS (24 November 2021) [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2021](#)

9 ONS (24 November 2021) [Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system](#)

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 ONS, op cit.

13 NationalWorld (2 November 2021) [Police more likely to bring charges for rape, sexual assault and domestic abuse cases when victim is white](#)



Sexual violence

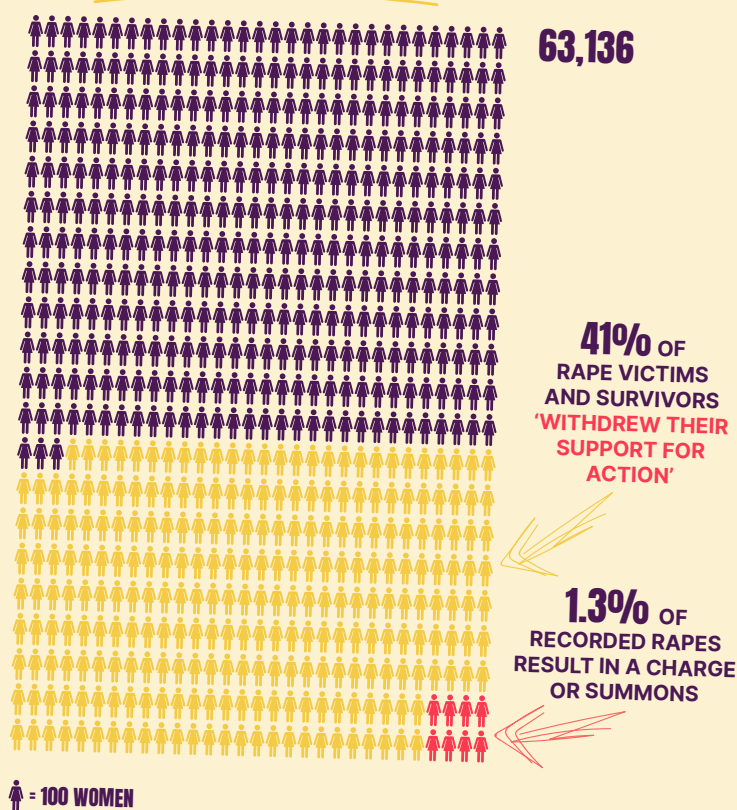
Latest ONS crime figures for the 12-month period ending in September 2021 show that sexual offences recorded by the police were the highest on record, at 170,973 offences. This is a 12% increase from the same period in 2020. Rape accounted for 37% of these offences – 63,136 offences.¹⁴

In the same period, the latest Home Office data shows dire outcomes for police reports – with just 2.9% of reported sexual offences and 1.3% of recorded rapes resulting in a charge or summons. This has fallen from the previous 12-month period to September 2020, in which charges or summons were brought in 3.6% of sexual offences and 1.5% of rapes.¹⁵

The data also shows 41% of rape victims and survivors are ‘withdrawing their support for action’ during the criminal justice process. This illustrates that there are many barriers obstructing victims and survivors’ access to justice and a system that is stacked against and failing them.¹⁶ In practice, we can understand that this will disproportionately impact LGBTQ+ and Black and minoritised victims and survivors who are most likely to be “lost at the first stage of attrition”.¹⁷ With regard to timeliness, the Ministry of Justice data also revealed that in 2021 the median time between offence and completion in rape cases was 1,020 days, or over two and a half years.¹⁸

The picture for rape justice also varies dramatically across England and Wales. Home Office data for rape charges over the

REPORTS OF RAPE



past three years show victims and survivors in Durham, the best performing area, are ten times more likely to see their case result in a charge than in Wiltshire, which is the worst performing. In Durham, 7.1 per cent of rapes result in a charge, compared with 0.7 per cent in Wiltshire, 1.1 per cent in Kent, 1.6 per cent in Avon and Somerset and 1.9 per cent in Greater Manchester.¹⁹ The fact that even the best performing police force has a charging rate of just 7.1% is indicative of the transformative change needed for the system to be fit for purpose.

The London Victims' Commissioner's 2021 London Rape Review also found that among those who allege rape or sexual assault to police, 65% withdrew support for the case, up 7% compared with the last survey covering the capital two years ago.

14 ONS (27 January 2022) [Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2021](#)

15 Home Office (27 January 2022) [Crime outcomes in England and Wales, year to September 2021: data tables](#)

16 Ibid.

17 Walker, S.J.L., Hester, M., McPhee, D., Patsios, D., Williams, A., Bates, L. and Rumney, P., (16 July 2019) Rape, inequality and the criminal justice response in England: The importance of age and gender. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*

18 The Guardian (31 January 2022) [1,000 days between rape offence and case completion in UK, data shows](#)

19 The Telegraph (10 January 2022) [Areas where most rape victims are denied justice to be named and shamed](#)

Nearly two-thirds of London rape victims and survivors who drop their complaint do so within a month of going to police, with the proportion of withdrawals tripling in two years. Of those, there has been a huge rise in complainants dropping out quickly: 64% withdrew their support for an investigation within 30 days, up from 18% two years ago.²⁰ The report identifies that withdrawal at such an early stage suggests that early interactions with the criminal justice system can have an enormous impact on attrition, as can requests for mobile phones and searches of digital data.²¹

Latest ONS data show the disproportionality of sexual assault against minoritised and marginalised women. Black and mixed race adults were more likely to experience sexual assault than white or Asian adults. Mixed race adults were most likely (3.62%), followed by Black adults (2.89%), compared with white (2.03%) and Asian adults (1.38%). Additionally disabled victims and survivors were also more likely to experience sexual assault than those who were not disabled

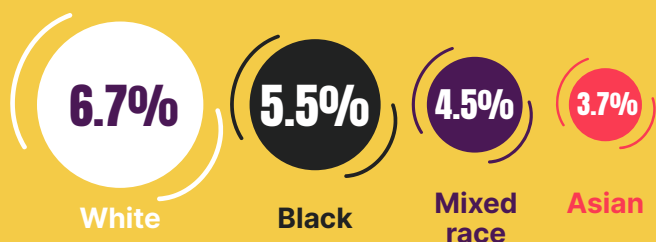
Photo by Joanna Nix Walkup on Unsplash

Photo of a young woman

(5% vs 2.8%).²² We also know that the disproportionality is not fully reflected in official figures as sexual violence experienced by older and disabled women in institutions and care homes is not included.

And yet, FOI data²³ has found that charge rates for white rape victims and survivors was 6.7%, for Black victims and survivors the charge rate was 5.5%, for mixed race victims 4.5% and for Asian victims 3.7%. This means that cases with white victims and survivors are 1.2 times more likely than those with Black victims and survivors to result in a charge, and 1.8 times more likely than when victims are Asian (6.7% vs. 3.7%). Most egregiously, the investigation also found that 10 police forces did not bring a single charge over the rape of a Black victim over the five-year period, despite recording 148 reports between them. These prevalence rates, analysed alongside the charging data above, serves to illustrate how structural inequalities inform victims and survivors' experiences of the criminal justice system.

CHARGE RATES FOR RAPE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS BASED ON ETHNICITY



20 The Guardian (7 December 2021) [Most rape victims in London drop complaints after speaking to police](#)

21 London.gov.uk (7 December 2021) [The London Rape Review – 2021 Update](#)

22 ONS (18 March 2021) [Sexual offences victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

23 NationalWorld (2 November 2021) op cit.



Photo of women protesting with a megaphone and placards that read 'equal rights' and 'I want to be heard'

Police abuse

The past year has shone a light on the alarming scale of abuse perpetrated by police officers. An Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) investigation into police officers who abuse their position for a sexual purpose has shown a sharp rise in reported cases in the past three years, with this form of abuse now comprising the single largest form of police corruption they deal with.²⁴ This report followed a recent tide of data showing the prevalence of abuse perpetrated by police officers:

- ▶ **At least 15 serving or former police officers have killed women since 2009**²⁵
- ▶ **More than 750 Met police employees have faced sexual misconduct allegations since 2010, yet only 83 were sacked**²⁶
- ▶ **Undercover police officers deceived protesters they were spying on into sexual relationships, with the knowledge of senior officers**²⁷
- ▶ **One woman a week reports domestic abuse by a police officer – a super-complaint highlighted systemic failures to hold such officers accountable**²⁸
- ▶ **Nearly 2,000 officers faced accusations of sexual wrongdoing since 2017. Over 60% did not result in disciplinary action. Just 8% were dismissed. Nearly 300 officers had previously been reported for misconduct.**²⁹

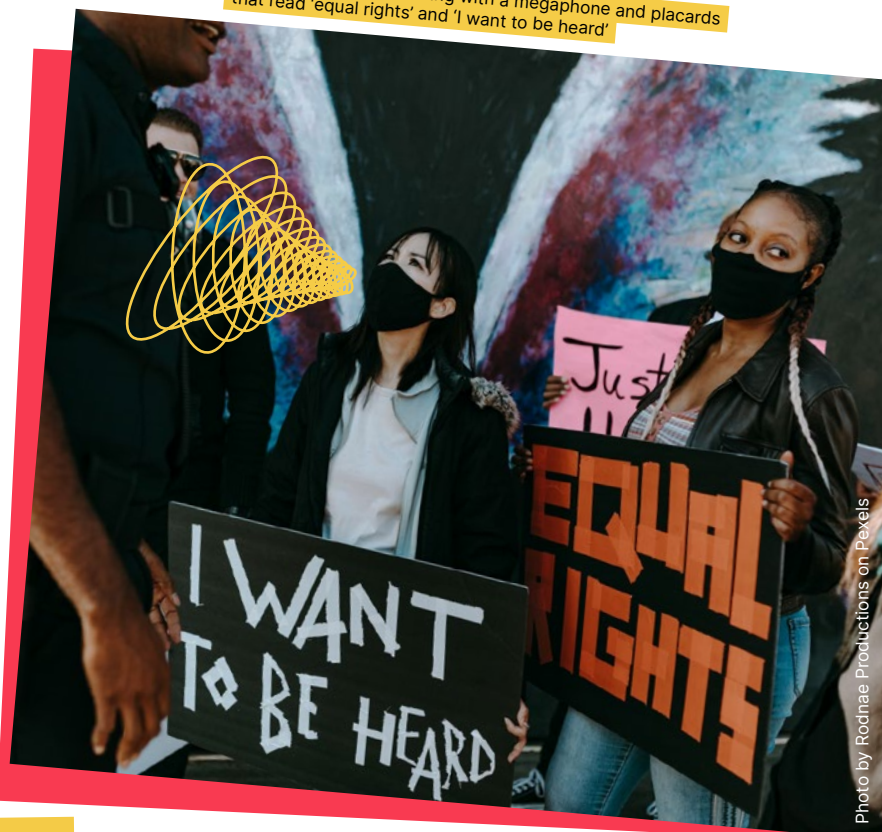


Photo by: Rodnae Productions on Pexels

The police hold a particular position of authority and power, and should be held to the very highest standards of conduct. This is of critical importance if women are expected to have trust and confidence when reporting abuse, particularly given the extent to which misogyny and sexism are rife in our society. Alongside this, decades of over-policing and surveillance of Black and minoritised communities means that building trust also requires addressing racism and xenophobia in the police through root and branch reform. Two police inspectorate reports in 2021 found systemic policing failures to safeguard women and girls from violence, and called for radical change and prioritisation of the police response to what the HMICFRS (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services) called an 'epidemic of VAWG'.³⁰

24 Independent Office for Police Conduct (25 November 2021) **There must be nowhere to hide for police who abuse their position for a sexual purpose**

25 The Times (28 September 2021) **At least 15 women killed by police officers in past 12 years**

26 iNews (30 September 2021) **More than 750 Met Police employees have faced sexual misconduct allegations since 2010 – with just 83 sacked**

27 The Guardian (30 September 2021) **Kate Wilson: after spy cops case the Met is beyond redemption**

28 Super-complaint by Centre for Women's Justice (9 March 2020) **Failure to address police perpetrated domestic abuse**

29 The Times (11 October 2021) **Sex claims against 2,000 police officers**

30 HMICFRS (17 September 2021) **New cross-system approach needed to end epidemic of violence against women and girls**

Women's trust and confidence in the police has sharply eroded over the past year following the rape and murder of Sarah Everard by serving Metropolitan Police officer Wayne Couzens, and the disgraceful policing of the subsequent peaceful vigil at Clapham Common. EVAW commissioned nationwide research³¹ which showed that 47% of women and 40% of men had declining trust in the police following Sarah Everard's murder. The data also found that 76% of women (and 71% of all adults polled) think the culture of policing has to change in order to better respond to violence against women and girls.

Such distrust naturally also creates a barrier to reporting as 1 in 10 women said that they would be less likely to report sexual assault



to the police following the Sarah Everard case.³² Evidently, if the government and our criminal justice agencies expect women to come forward and engage with the justice system, then it must tackle police-perpetrated abuse head on and address an institutional culture in which discriminatory attitudes and abuses have been able to thrive.



31 EVAW (18 November 2021) **Almost half of women have less trust in police following Sarah Everard murder**. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,699 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 27th – 28th October 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+)

32 Ibid.

Public sexual harassment

ONS data³³ showed that 1 in 2 women felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a quiet street near their home, compared to 1 in 7 men. 1 in 2 women also felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a busy public place, compared to 1 in 5 men.

Alongside this, the data revealed the extent of public sexual harassment that women had experienced, with 2 out of 3 women aged 16 to 34 having experienced one form of harassment in the previous 12 months. 44% of women aged 16 to 34 years had experienced catcalls, whistles, unwanted sexual comments or jokes, and 29% felt like they were being followed.

The data also highlighted that disabled people felt less safe walking alone in all settings than non-disabled people, and echoed the experiences of disabled women who talked about experiencing inappropriate sexual touching “at least once a month” in pre-pandemic times.³⁴ This harassment is not just limited to public spaces, as a 2021 Trades Union Congress (TUC) survey of more than 1,000 disabled women found that 68% had experienced sexual harassment at work.³⁵ Such abuse is exacerbated by ableist myths and stereotypes of desirability and vulnerability that suggest disabled women cannot be assaulted, or that they are unreliable witnesses that do not understand whether they have been assaulted or not.³⁶ As a result, disabled women are less likely to be believed or seen as competent witnesses.³⁷ This results in cases of sexual

assault against disabled women being less likely to be charged or prosecuted.

The ONS survey had a major data gap for Black and minoritised women, meaning that their experiences were missing from the picture. This is a glaring omission when we know the disproportionate extent to which Black and minoritised women are affected by sexual harassment and abuse and how often it is combined with racism,³⁸ underscoring the need for disaggregated equalities data.



Photo of a woman protesting holding a placard that reads 'our bodies, our streets'

Photo by Ehimetator Akhere Unuabona on Unsplash

33 ONS (24 August 2021) [Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 2 to 27 June 2021](#)

34 The Guardian (25 November 2021) [The everyday assault of disabled women: 'It's inappropriate sexual touching at least once a month'](#)

35 Trades Union Congress (21 July 2021) [TUC survey: 7 in 10 disabled women say they've been sexually harassed at work](#)

36 Guardian (25 November 2021) op cit.

37 Manjoo, R. (2014) 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences' (A/HRC/26/38)

38 EVAW (8 March 2016) [Powerful new film – Black women speak out about racist sexual harassment](#)



Photo of girls and young women walking

Sexual abuse in schools

After the launch of the Everyone's Invited website, more than 16,000 testimonials of sexual abuse in schools were shared from girls as young as 11 years old. The testimonials named 10% of all the schools in England.³⁹ Following these revelations, Ofsted launched a review that found 9 out of 10 girls had experienced sexist name calling and 92% of girls had been sent unsolicited explicit pictures or videos.⁴⁰

The extent of the disclosures and accompanying statistics illustrate concerns EAW has raised for several years:⁴¹ that sexual harassment and abuse in schools is pervasive and needs urgent action by the Department for Education and school leaders, in particular regarding enabling

schools to educate young people about healthy and respectful relationships; ensuring teachers and school leaders have the training and resources they need to create a school culture which does not tolerate or minimise this abuse; and working closely with the specialist VAWG sector, which is sustainably resourced to do this. Significantly, the report recommended that all schools should assume sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are happening in their settings, whether or not they have any specific reports.

39 SchoolsWeek (10 June 2021) [A tenth of England's schools and colleges named on Everyone's Invited website](#)

40 Ofsted (10 June 2021) [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#)

41 Whitfield, L., et al. (September 2016) ["All day, every day" – Legal obligations on schools to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and violence against girls](#)

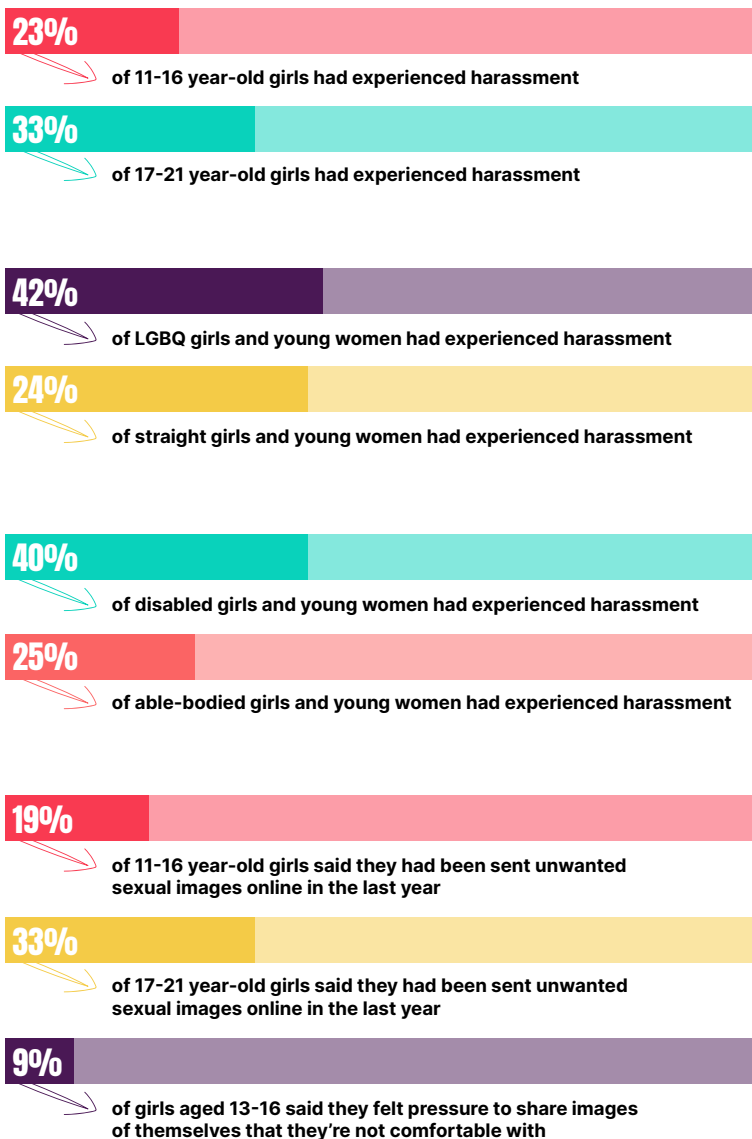
Online VAWG

What the testimonials on Everyone's Invited highlighted was that sexual harassment and abuse is not just confined to what happens in person behind the school gates. More and more, sexual abuse and harassment is being perpetuated online. We know that we cannot separate our online and offline lives – our online experiences are real life. For this reason, online abuse must be understood as part of the same continuum of VAWG as offline abuse, and prevention work in schools must include education about online abuse as well.

Girlguiding's 2021 Girls' Attitudes Survey⁴² showed that 71% of girls and young women aged 7-21 years old had experienced some form of harmful content while online in the last year. 49% of girls were aged 7-10 years old. By the time girls reached 17 years old, this rose to a staggering 91%.

23% aged 11-16 and a third (33%) aged 17-21 had experienced harassment, such as unwanted messages or receiving threats. This was higher for LGBTQ girls and young women (42% compared to 24% who are straight). Disabled girls are also more likely to be harassed online (40% compared to 25% who are not disabled).

71% of girls and young women aged 7-21 years old had experienced some form of harmful content



From Girlguiding's 2021 Girls' Attitudes Survey

19% of girls aged 11-16 and 33% aged 17-21 said they had been sent unwanted sexual images online in the last year. And 9% of girls aged 13-16 said they felt pressure to share images of themselves that they're not comfortable with.

A report by Refuge⁴³ found that 1 in 3 women in the UK (36%) has experienced some form of online abuse on social media or another online platform. Nearly a fifth of women (17%) had experienced image-based sexual abuse.⁴⁴

⁴² Girlguiding (September 2021) **Girls' Attitudes Survey 2021**

⁴³ Refuge (29 October 2021) **Unsocial Spaces**

⁴⁴ Defined by Professor Clare McGlynn and Erica Rackley here and used in this briefing: <https://claremcglynn.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/mcglynnrackley-stakeholderbriefing-5-may-2021-final-1.pdf>

Photo of a young woman holding her phone

Additionally, 4% had been victims and survivors of 'deepfake' pornography,⁴⁵ a new and emerging form of online VAWG. 1 in 6 (16%) said online abuse was from an intimate or former partner, and for young women this rose to 1 in 5 (22%), a stark indicator of the connection between online and offline abuse.

Echoing some of the findings of EVAW and Glitch's 2020 research into online abuse during the first lockdown of the pandemic,⁴⁶ Refuge also found that intersecting inequalities meant minoritised and marginalised women experienced disproportionately higher levels of abuse. 75% of LGBTQ+ female survey respondents said they had experienced online abuse, compared to 33% of non-LGBTQ+ women, and 45% of Black and minoritised women said they had experienced online abuse.

15% of women said the abuse worsened when they reported the perpetrator or took an action to mitigate the abuse, such as blocking the perpetrator online. Furthermore, only 13% of women reported the abuse to the social media platform they experienced the abuse on. Of those who reported abuse to the social media company, 52% said the platform handled their report badly. This figure rose to 56% for women experiencing abuse from a partner or former partner. Almost a third of women (29%), and 42% of women experiencing domestic abuse, said they did not receive a response to their report at all.

The Online Safety Bill, due to re-enter Parliament this year, offers a once-in-a-

REPORTS OF ABUSE TO SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES

52%

of women said the platform handled their report badly.

56%

of women experiencing abuse from a partner or former partner said the platform handled their report badly.

29%

of women said they did not receive a response to their report at all.

42%

of women experiencing domestic abuse said they did not receive a response to their report at all.

From Refuge's Unsocial Spaces report

generation opportunity to set the international standard for online harms legislation and ensure tech platforms are required to take action so that women can freely express themselves online without fear of abuse. A YouGov poll commissioned by EVAW⁴⁷ revealed that 74% of all people think the government should do more to ensure social media platforms address online harassment and violence against women and girls. This figure increases to 78% of women respondents. Additionally, Refuge's research found that 96% of all women, and 100% of women experiencing domestic abuse, said platforms should take more action to address online abuse.

74%

of all people think the government should do more to ensure social media platforms address online harassment and violence against women and girls. This figure rises to 78% of all women polled.

YouGov poll about Online Regulation commissioned by EVAW

45 Defined by Professor Clare McGlynn here: <https://claremcglynn.com/imagebasedsexualabuse/fake-porn-deepfakes-and-need-to-reform-criminal-law/>

46 Glitch and EVAW (September 2020) [The Ripple Effect: Covid-19 and the Epidemic of Online Abuse](#)

47 EVAW (2 December 2021) [74% think government should do more to ensure social media platforms address online abuse of women and girls](#)




Photo of a woman in a hijab looking out at the beach

Photo by Ifrah Akhter on Unsplash

KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

So-called 'honour-based' abuse

Government figures showed that in the year ending March 2021, there was an 18% increase in so-called 'honour-based' abuse offences reported compared with the previous year.⁴⁸ This follows a trend over the last five years, as FOI data from the 28 out of 39 constabularies showed that the number of so-called 'honour-based' abuse cases – including offences such as rape, death threats and assault – rose from 884 in 2016 to 1,599 last year, a rise of 81%.⁴⁹

Of the 2,725 so-called 'honour-based' abuse-related offences recorded, there were 78 FGM (female genital mutilation) offences and 125 forced marriage offences. 71% of the

FGM offences recorded by the police were reported under the FGM mandatory reporting duty. However, FORWARD, an organisation led by and for African women that have experienced FGM, has highlighted concerns that professionals may report to the police without sufficient evidence due to false assumptions and biases.⁵⁰

It should be noted however that the figures above do not include any data from Greater Manchester police (GMP) which was excluded because of the installation of a new IT system. As GMP is the third largest police force and Karma Nirvana's helpline receives many calls from that area, this is a significant omission.⁵¹ There is clearly a need for more reliable and detailed government data so that a fuller analysis can be drawn.

48 Home Office (9 December 2021) [Statistics on so called 'honour-based' abuse offences, England and Wales, 2020 to 2021](#)

49 The Guardian (31 October 2021) ['Honour-based' offences soared by 81% in last five years](#)

50 FORWARD (February 2021) ['Do No Harm': Experiences and Impacts of FGM Safeguarding, Bristol Study](#)

51 The Guardian (31 October 2021) op cit.



Photo of a woman holding a placard that says 'silence is violence'

The need for a human rights approach to VAWG

2021 saw a raft of legislative measures and reviews that are cause for serious concern regarding their potential impact on women's human rights, which underpin how VAWG should be responded to and prevented. Most concerning, ending VAWG has been instrumentalised as a justification for what are fundamentally deeply damaging pieces of legislation, particularly for Black, minoritised and migrant women whose communities stand to be most harmed by these measures.

We continue to be deeply disappointed in the government's failure to ratify the Istanbul Convention, approaching a dismal 10 year anniversary since it was signed. The biggest hurdle to ratification remains the government's failure to address the significant gaps in protection and support for migrant women that is required by the Convention. Article 4(3) says that States must ensure victims and survivors of VAWG have access to protection and support without discrimination, regardless of immigration or refugee status. Article 59

requires States to give migrant survivors whose residence status is dependent on abusive partners the ability to independently apply for residence permits. The government had previously stated its intention to ratify the Convention with the Domestic Abuse Act, which became law in 2021. However, a key amendment to the legislation called for by EVAW, which would have secured equal protection and support for migrant women, was rejected by the government despite securing wide support in the House of Lords.

The "vast majority"⁵² of submissions to the Independent Review of the Human Rights Act (IHRAR) were strongly supportive of it and the Review's report does not call for sweeping reforms. Yet the government persists with plans to do away with it and introduce a Bill of Rights. The Human Rights Act is a critical tool in upholding women's rights and challenging failures by the State in how it responds to and prevents VAWG. EVAW, along with Southall Black Sisters, has previously detailed⁵³ how the Human Rights Act provides legal protection that is fundamental to women's rights, as an overwhelming number of police failings relate to sexual violence and domestic abuse.

52 Ministry of Justice (14 December 2021) [Independent Human Rights Act Review](#), p. 16, paragraph 46

53 EVAW and Southall Black Sisters (October 2017) [Violence against women and girls: Protecting women's human rights and holding the state to account](#)

Rights of Women, EVAW and other VAWG organisations have made it clear that the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill is an attack on our fundamental human rights⁵⁴ including the right to protest, which is woven into the long and rich history of women's rights movements.

Proposals in the Bill such as the Serious Violence Duty⁵⁵ will increase police powers to, for example, demand information be disclosed by education authorities, clinical commissioning groups and local authorities among others. Such data-sharing threatens individual privacy and could place minoritised victims and survivors, particularly migrant women, at risk by creating a significant barrier to accessing vital services. Furthermore, the Serious Violence Reduction Orders linked to the Duty risk expanding surveillance and criminalisation, which would have a direct, devastating impact on the lives of Black and minoritised women. This is at a time when a police super-complaint submitted by the Centre for Women's Justice found that police were failing to use protective measures in cases involving violence against women and girls.

One of the most vital tools the Human Rights Act provides for women challenging the State's failures relating to VAWG is the judicial review procedure. Women have relied on judicial review to hold the police to account for failing to protect them from rapists like John Worboys. Furthermore, EVAW's judicial review against the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), despite not ultimately being successful, brought huge public awareness to the criminal justice system's failures regarding the treatment of rape, led to changes to prosecution guidance and



Photo of a young woman looking into the distance

harnessed political attention to women's struggle for justice, resulting in the Home and Justice Secretaries stating that they were "deeply ashamed" of rape conviction rates.⁵⁶ However, the Judicial Review and Courts Bill will limit victims and survivors' ability to challenge the State. Without this, it will be harder to challenge when the police, CPS or any other State institution breaches a victim or survivor's human rights in their response to VAWG.

The Nationality and Borders Bill would increase the risk of women and girls being wrongfully denied asylum. Many of the women who seek asylum in the UK are victims and survivors of violence, and such measures would further increase their vulnerability to abuse. These measures include restricting the point at which people seeking asylum can make a claim, as well as making their eligibility for asylum dependent on their route of entry into the UK. Such measures do not account for the impact of trauma which may make it difficult for victims and survivors to disclose abuse, as is currently reflected in Home Office guidance. Again, the government claims that the Bill will help women – a claim thoroughly rejected⁵⁷ by many in the VAWG sector and by leading legal experts.

54 EVAW (14 September 2021) [Women's groups urge the House of Lords to oppose the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill](#)

55 Home Office (7 July 2021) [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021: serious violence duty factsheet](#)

56 BBC (18 June 2021) [Priti Patel and Robert Buckland 'deeply ashamed' of rape conviction rates](#)

57 Women for Refugee Women (24 November 2021) [52 Organisations unite to tell Priti Patel that the Nationality and Borders Bill will have a "cruel and discriminatory" impact on women](#)

VAWG strategy

2021 saw the delayed publication of the government's VAWG strategy.⁵⁸ The Home Office's public call for evidence to inform its new strategy drew more than 180,000 responses, the overwhelming majority of which came after the call for evidence was reopened following the murder of Sarah Everard. In the Home Secretary's foreword, she says that she refuses to accept that VAWG is inevitable, which is very welcome and echoes EVAW's own belief that a different world is possible. Its stated ambition to be a "comprehensive strategy for major societal change" was also welcome. It is only with vision and ambition that we can build a society in which women and girls live free from violence.

Some key announcements in the strategy included policing and safety measures such as a new VAWG policing lead and a £5 million 'Safety of Women at Night' Fund, which women's organisations have expressed

concerns about, given the fund's focus on measures such as CCTV and street lighting.

The strategy also announced a public attitudes campaign aimed at tackling the harmful behaviours and attitudes that contribute to the persistence and prevalence of VAWG. EVAW's research demonstrated that, as recently as 2018, a third of men stated that if a woman has flirted on a date it generally wouldn't count as rape, even if she hasn't explicitly consented to sex (compared with 21% of women).⁵⁹ Since 2018, EVAW has called for a public campaign that addresses such harmful attitudes and it is clear that such a campaign can only work if it is supported with significant resources, is multi-year in scope, and has the input of the specialist VAWG sector, particularly led 'by and for' organisations.

The criminalisation of virginity testing was welcomed, especially by organisations such as Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) who have long campaigned for this. However, when it comes to the crucial issue of gender inequality and how it intersects with other inequalities and impacts on Black, minoritised, migrant, Deaf, disabled and LGBT+ victims and survivors of abuse, the VAWG strategy falls short.

It was also disappointing that the VAWG strategy had limited resourcing attached to it, and no measures to address the evolving nature of public sexual harassment, tackling online VAWG such as cyber-flashing and image-based sexual abuse. Though not without merit, as the government's blueprint for ending VAWG over the next three years, the cross-governmental VAWG strategy does not go far enough in tackling the underlying causes of abuse, nor does it attempt to address how VAWG impacts women and girls minoritised and marginalised by society.

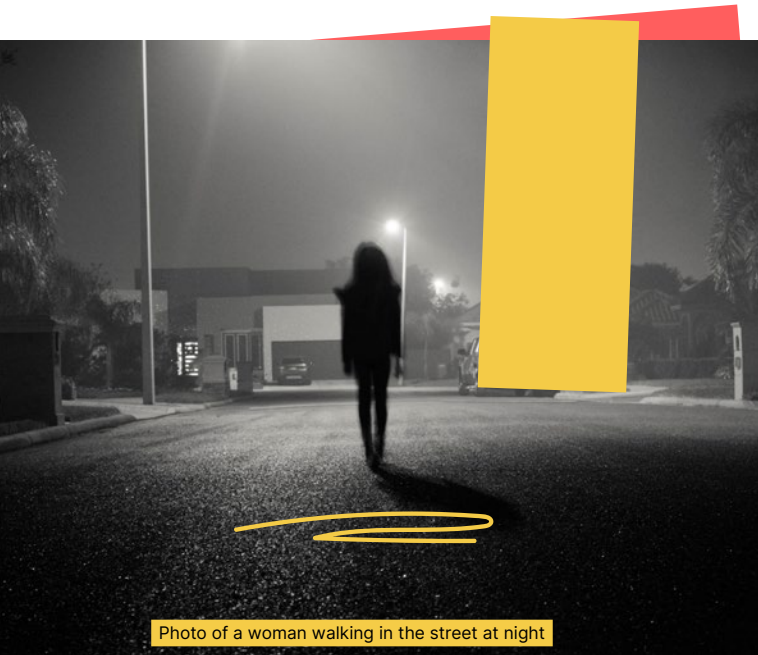


Photo of a woman walking in the street at night

58 Home Office (21 July 2021) [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#)

59 EVAW (6 December 2018) [Major new YouGov survey for EVAW: Many people still unclear what rape is](#)

Domestic Abuse Act

Three years after it first entered Parliament, the Domestic Abuse Bill became the Domestic Abuse Act in 2021. Throughout the Act's long journey through Parliament, the government adopted several necessary amendments, thanks to the tireless campaigning of the VAWG sector. This includes recognising non-fatal strangulation as a new offence, extending coercive control to include post-separation abuse and recognising threats to share sexual images as an offence, among others. However, the gaps in this legislation mean that it cannot be transformative for some of the most marginalised victims and survivors of abuse.

The government resisted putting support for migrant women on an equal footing with other victims and survivors of domestic abuse in the legislation, despite this being wholeheartedly supported by a majority of the House of Lords. They opted to run a one-year pilot project instead, which specialist women's support organisations say will provide only a fraction of the support needed. Furthermore, the government rejected an amendment put forward by EVAW that would have ensured effective protection and support to all victims and survivors of domestic abuse, including migrant women, by incorporating a non-discrimination clause in line with Article 4(3) of the Istanbul Convention.

Additionally, despite a police super-complaint⁶⁰ outcome which was clear that data-sharing between the police and



Photo of a young woman looking out across a river

immigration enforcement should stop as it deters women from reporting abuse, the government has instead opted to introduce a 'Migrant Victim's Protocol'.⁶¹ This will mean that the police can continue sharing migrant victims and survivors' data with the Home Office, which 'by and for' organisations such as Latin American Women's Rights Service and Southall Black Sisters have made clear is inadequate and wholly inappropriate.⁶²

Despite the promise of further consultation, the government failed to resource community-based support for victims and survivors to help women and children cope and recover. The government also voted against a serial domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators register. More could have been offered to address those offenders who repeatedly abuse victims and survivors, and to acknowledge the abuse disabled women face at the hands of their carers.

The Domestic Abuse Act, although much improved from its initial iterations, is far from the much-needed comprehensive, intersectional framework for addressing violence against women and girls put forward by Imkaan in their Alternative Bill.⁶³

60 Liberty (accessed 27 January 2022), [Liberty and Southall Black Sisters' Super-Complaint on data-sharing between the police and Home Office regarding victims and witnesses to crime](#).

61 Home Office (December 2021) [Home Office and Police data sharing arrangements on migrant victims and witnesses of crime with insecure immigration status](#)

62 Latin American Women's Rights Service (15 December 2021) [Press release: Home Office Review on data-sharing on migrant victims is not fit for purpose, say women's rights and civil liberties groups](#)

63 Imkaan (October 2018) [From the Margin to the Centre: Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls](#)

Rape Review

Similarly long-awaited, the government's Rape Review report was finally published in June 2021, two years after it was launched.⁶⁴ There were some encouraging measures in the Review such as the appointment of a ministerial lead for the Rape Review, Minister for Crime and Policing Kit Malthouse MP. This was one of the many recommendations in the Decriminalisation of Rape report, a landmark report examining the treatment of rape in the criminal justice system by EVAW, Imkaan, Rape Crisis England and Wales and the Centre for Women's Justice.⁶⁵ The Rape Review's commitment to developing better understanding of the impacts of trauma on rape victims and survivors across the criminal justice system, and the important commitment to taking a more 'suspect-focused' approach to rape investigations, was also encouraging.

However, a number of the calls for radical change that were made in the Decriminalisation of Rape report were not addressed by the government's Review, such as:

- ▶ **A meaningful equalities analysis – independent research into who does and doesn't report sexual offences to the police and why**
- ▶ **An urgent review of Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) governance to ensure accountability for poor charging decisions**
- ▶ **A radical review of a system that treats victims and survivors as suspects and measures to ensure that only relevant disclosure is sought from those reporting**
- ▶ **A Special Commission on the role and efficacy of juries in rape trials**
- ▶ **A publicly funded and specialist-led public awareness and education campaign on rape myths and consent**

There was also a concerning lack of urgency in the timescales put forward, as well as a lack of reference to how implementation of any recommendations would be resourced. Moving towards a new model of "suspect-centric" policing through extending the Project Bluestone pilot in Somerset and Avon

to four regions as part of Operation Soteria is promising. However, success depends on long-term funding and a willingness from the police and the CPS to fully engage with academics and other VAWG experts and move towards a culture of transparency.



Photo of a placard at a protest that reads 'boys will be held accountable'

64 Ministry of Justice (June 2021) [The end-to-end rape review report on findings and actions](#)

65 EVAW, Imkaan, Rape Crisis England and Wales and Centre for Women's Justice, op. cit.



Concerns regarding the lack of an equalities analysis was sadly reflected in the first 6 month scorecard⁶⁶ showing how each part of the criminal justice system is performing in prosecuting rape. This showed that there is still a blindspot in understanding justice outcomes for rape victims and survivors who are Black and minoritised, Deaf and disabled or LGBT+. The fact that this information is still missing shows a fundamental lack of commitment to making our justice system work for everyone, and makes it impossible to hold leaders to account.

This year also saw various reviews and inquiries launched into police conduct and engagement with women and girls. However, with numerous recommendations arising from them, how leaders in government and criminal justice agencies will be held accountable for failures in the justice system, so that women can finally access the justice they deserve, is still in question.

And while we agree with the HMICFRS inspection report into police engagement with women and girls that a whole systems change⁶⁷ is badly needed for women who choose to pursue an outcome via the criminal justice system, we also agree that the best result for victims and survivors of VAWG may not always be one within the criminal justice system. For this reason, the wraparound support provided by the specialist VAWG sector, especially organisations led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, is so vital, as it supports women to recover and rebuild their lives regardless of whether they decide to pursue a criminal justice outcome.

VAWG in public spaces

A great deal of the conversation around VAWG that emerged this year, as well as the government's response, has centred on framing VAWG as an issue of individual women's 'safety' that can be addressed through measures such as CCTV and street lighting; measures we know do nothing to address the root causes of VAWG, particularly given that the majority of perpetrators of VAWG are known to the victim or survivor. Furthermore, tools such as the Streetsafe app, which allows members of the public to report places where they feel unsafe, can serve to exacerbate existing structural inequalities and the over-policing and surveillance of Black, minoritised and marginalised communities.⁶⁸

For responses to deliver the transformation women and girls so urgently need, we need to focus on women's right to live free from abuse and the threat of it. As set out in a joint letter from the sector to the Chancellor ahead of the Autumn budget,⁶⁹ ensuring all women can live their lives free from abuse requires strategic investment through the adequate funding of specialist VAWG services, including ring-fenced funding for 'by and for' services. It requires significant funding in prevention, including the roll-out of a 'whole school approach' in all mainstream schools and alternative provision. Part of this investment in prevention should also be a significant, multi-year funding commitment to the government's national VAWG public attitudes campaign in order to see a tangible change in harmful attitudes and the prevalence of VAWG.

66 Ministry of Justice (9 December 2021) [CJS scorecard – recorded adult rape offences](#)

67 HMICFRS (17 September 2021) [Police response to violence against women and girls – Final inspection report](#)

68 EVAW (18 June 2021) [VAWG Organisations write to Home Secretary about Safer Streets Funding concerns](#)

69 EVAW (30 September 2021) [VAWG specialists urge the Chancellor to prioritise spending on VAWG](#)

Prevention

2021 saw significant media attention on the issue of sexual harassment and abuse in schools, as a result of the testimonies shared on the Everyone's Invited website. EVAW's own research in 2010 found almost one in three (29%) 16–18-year-old girls had experienced 'groping' or other unwanted sexual touching at school and 71% of 16-18-year-olds said they heard sexual name-calling towards girls at school daily or a few times per week.⁷⁰ Over 10 years later, despite the government committing to introduce statutory relationships and sex education (RSE), the picture for young women and girls remains equally bleak.

Despite commitment to statutory RSE, the government has only earmarked a paltry £6 million for its roll-out.⁷¹ Additionally, FOI data shows that the government's online training materials to help teachers deliver RSE, on topics such as consent and online pornography, were downloaded a mere few thousand times – only a fraction of the teachers in the 20,000 schools they were designed to support.⁷² Such figures clearly illustrate the need for the government to invest more in order to create a culture where abuse is not tolerated, minimised or excused in every school.

We welcomed the leading recommendation of the Ofsted review into sexual abuse in schools and colleges,⁷³ which stated that all school and college leaders should put in place a 'whole school approach' to tackling VAWG. It was, however, greatly disappointing that the Ofsted review didn't assess which



Photo of young people in a classroom

young people are most likely to be targeted for sexual harassment and violence, or explore the impact of race, disability or other characteristics that can compound the abuse girls are subjected to online and offline. This includes racialised sexual harassment experienced by Black and minoritised girls, who can be targeted by harmful gendered and racist stereotypes – or disabled girls or with learning difficulties, which other research finds are very disproportionately targeted for abuse.⁷⁴

For this reason, EVAW and several other VAWG organisations wrote to the then Education Secretary calling for a 'whole school approach' taskforce, with representation from 'by and for' organisations, to advise on next steps following the review, and to drive the roll-out of a 'whole school approach' that is relevant to the daily experiences and reality of young people's lives.⁷⁵

In Scotland, however, there does appear to be some movement towards rolling out a 'whole school approach'. Rape Crisis Scotland launched Equally Safe at School,⁷⁶ a programme that supports secondary schools to take a holistic approach to preventing gender-based violence, consistent with the Scottish Government's Equally Safe strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls.

70 EVAW (October 2010) [YouGov Poll Exposes High Levels Sexual Harassment in Schools](#)

71 SchoolsWeek (25 February 2019) [Hinds unveils training plan for schools ahead of relationships and sex education rollout](#)

72 Vice (25 November 2021) [Sex Education 'Not Being Taken Seriously' in England](#)

73 Ofsted (10 June 2021) [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#)

74 Stay Safe East (June 2021) [Stay Safe East statement on the Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#)

75 EVAW (28 July 2021) [Women's Groups call on Secretary of State for Education to create 'Whole Schools Approach' taskforce](#)

76 Rape Crisis Scotland and the University of Glasgow (2021) [Equally Safe at School](#)



Photo of a woman looking at her phone

Photo by Chad Madden on Unsplash

Online VAWG

2021 saw the long-awaited Online Safety Bill be published in draft form. Though wide-ranging in scope, the Bill as currently drafted does not explicitly address the multiple and overlapping forms of online VAWG that women and girls experience daily. Along with multiple VAWG organisations and leading experts, EVAW published a report detailing joint VAWG principles for the Online Safety Bill;⁷⁷ setting out what needs to be done for the legislation to name and properly address abuse against women online.

The lead overarching principle is for online VAWG to be explicitly named as a harm on the face of the Bill. There are myriad forms of online VAWG, all linked to one another because of their shared drivers: women's and girls' persistent inequality and other inequalities which intersect with this.

Research has found a strong level of disproportionality of abuse, with women 27 times more likely than men to be harassed online.⁷⁸ Furthermore, given the links between online and offline VAWG, such as the perpetration of image-based sexual abuse by partners or ex-partners, a VAWG lens is crucial to addressing the disproportionate harm of online abuse against women and girls.

Additionally, the failure of tech companies to properly respond to and prevent online VAWG, as highlighted in research by Refuge,⁷⁹ demonstrates the need for a VAWG Code of Practice to accompany the Bill. Such a Code of Practice should outline clear expectations on the responses of tech companies to online user reports, complaints and requests as well as to civil and criminal investigations in VAWG cases, including how evidence is handled, stored and shared. Despite the joint

77 EVAW (2 December 2021) op cit.

78 European Women's Lobby (2017) [Her Net Her Rights – Mapping the state of online violence against women and girls in Europe](#)

79 Refuge (29 October 2021) [Unsocial Spaces](#)



pre-legislative scrutiny committee recommending 12 Codes of Practice that should be produced by Ofcom,⁸⁰ a Code of Practice for online VAWG was not one of them.

Although the joint pre-legislative scrutiny committee⁸¹ and the DCMS Select Committee⁸² failed to recommend specific measures to address online VAWG, as the Bill progresses there will be further opportunities to ensure the problem is acknowledged and named explicitly, and that tech companies are required to be transparent and proactive in preventing and tackling online VAWG.

A petition launched by EVAW and Glitch calling on the government to ensure the Online Safety Bill protects women and girls from abuse has, at time of writing, had over 59,000 signatures,⁸³ illustrating a clear appetite from the public for the government to act and ensure that tech companies' responsibility to prevent and appropriately respond to online VAWG is taken seriously.

Other principles to ensure the Online Safety Bill comprehensively addresses online VAWG include:

- ▶ **Properly resourcing VAWG organisations that support victims and survivors of online VAWG in all its forms, with ring-fenced funding for 'by and for' organisations**
- ▶ **A new high level principle requiring tech companies to mitigate against potential harms**
- ▶ **Transparency reporting to include a separate VAWG category and greater transparency around content moderation**
- ▶ **A robust, effective and proactive regulator with the power and resource to order the take down of image-based sexual abuse and harmful content and provide an effective challenge to cross-industry tech companies**
- ▶ **A commitment to 'future-proofing' in the area of online harms including online VAWG regulation**

80 Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill (14 December 2021) [Report of Session 2021-22](#)

81 Ibid.

82 DCMS Committee (20 January 2022) [The Draft Online Safety Bill and the legal but harmful debate](#)

83 Change.org (accessed 15 February 2022), [The UK's new Online Safety Law must protect Women and Girls from Online Abuse](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ratification of the Istanbul Convention

10 years after signing up to the Istanbul Convention, the government must commit to both ratifying the Convention in full, and a timetable for swift ratification so that this rights-based, 'gold standard' of responding to VAWG can be enshrined in UK law.

A multi-year, well-resourced public attitudes campaign to end VAWG

To deliver the profound cultural shift needed to end VAWG, a national public attitudes campaign must run for many years and have adequate investment to transform attitudes in a society that minimises and makes excuses for VAWG.

A strategic investment to end abuse

In order to deliver the life-saving work that helps thousands of women and girls every day, the VAWG sector needs long-term, sustainable funding. This includes ring-fenced funding for specialist services led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women, which are chronically under-funded.

Effective protection and support for migrant women

The government must remove the barriers to support currently facing migrant women. This would include the introduction of safe reporting mechanisms for migrant victims and survivors to report abuse without fear of their information being shared with immigration enforcement, equal and effective access to protection and support for all women regardless of their immigration status in line with the Istanbul Convention, and the extension the eligibility of the Domestic Violence Rule (DVR) to all migrant women.

An Online Safety Bill that comprehensively tackles online VAWG

The forthcoming Online Safety Bill should name VAWG as a harm on the face of the Bill, ensure there is a VAWG Code of Practice and designated funding for online VAWG support services, including ring-fenced funding for organisations led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women.

Support for schools to implement a 'whole school approach'

The Department for Education (DfE) must commit to resourcing a 'whole school approach' to tackling VAWG, along with the creation of a 'whole school approach' taskforce that has representation from specialist, led 'by and for' VAWG organisations.

Far-ranging reform to the criminal justice system's approach to VAWG

This includes extensive reforms to the police, CPS and courts, improved leadership and accountability, wraparound support and advocacy for all victims and survivors and ensuring access to justice and equality of outcomes for all. This includes research into the barriers to reporting, the impact of rape myths and stereotypes on the system, and what rape victims and survivors want from the justice system.

A Victims' Bill that responds to the diversity of victims and survivors' experiences with greater rights and entitlements

This should include safeguards to guarantee victims and survivors' protections against over-intrusive and excessive police requests for third-party material, such as medical notes, school reports and therapy notes, and survivors having the right to access specialist therapeutic and advocacy support at any time.

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