

Violence Against Women and Girls Evidence Synthesis

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Violence Against Women and Girls Evidence Synthesis

The content of this document contains graphic references and details sensitive, potentially triggering and upsetting themes from the outset including but not limited to violence, self-harm, sexual abuse, and suicide. We appreciate this may lead to emotional responses and readers are advised to prioritise their emotional wellbeing when reading this document.

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List of Abbreviations

ABH	Actual Bodily Harm
APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group
ASE	Adult Sexual Exploitation
CAPVA	Child/Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CPS	Crown Prosecution Services
CSE/A	Child Sexual Exploitation/Abuse
DA	Domestic Abuse
DM	Direct Message
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FM	Forced Marriage
FMPO	Forced Marriage Protection Order
FOI	Freedom of Information Request
HBA	So called Honour Based Abuse
HMP	Her/His Majesty's Prison
HO	Home Office
ICTA	Independent Child Trafficking Advocates
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
ISVA	Independent Sexual Violence Advisor
MSA	Modern Slavery Act
MSOA	Middle Layer Super Output Area
NFIB	National Fraud Intelligence Bureau
NFS	Non-Fatal Strangulation
NPCC	National Police Chiefs Council
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
OCG	Organised Crime Group
ONS	Office National Statistics
PEGS	Parental Education Growth Support
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RASSO	Rape and Serious Sexual Offences
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VRP	Violence Reduction Partnership
WYP	West Yorkshire Police
YOI	Young Offender Institution

Executive Summary

This evidence synthesis, produced by the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership's Knowledge Hub, aims to provide a greater understanding of violence against women and girls across West Yorkshire.

One in five women are victims of sexual assault (or attempted assault) in their life and every three days, a woman is killed by a man in the UK. In 2023, 16.2% of all crime across the United Kingdom was domestic abuse.

Utilising open-source research into violence against women and girls, this evidence synthesis gathers and presents insights into the experience and impact of different types of violence against women and girls.

The document explores Domestic & Relationship Abuse, Coercive Control, Non-fatal Strangulation, Child/Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse, Stalking, So-called Honour Based Abuse, Sexual Offences, Street Harassment, Misogyny, Online Crimes, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and Spiking.

Key insights highlight the under-reporting of domestic abuse by particular groups of women, the impact of domestic abuse on mental health, and the increased victimisation of girls.

Recommendations are made about improving data quality, understanding victims experience and support, as well as highlighting further areas for exploration, and areas to influence in the future.

Introduction

One in five women are victims of sexual assault (or attempted assault) in their life¹ and every three days, a woman is killed by a man in the UK². For the year ending 2023, nationally 889,918 domestic abuse-related crimes were recorded by the police in England and Wales, a similar figure to the previous year³. Rape Crisis⁴ estimates that 6.5 million women in England and Wales have been raped or sexually assaulted since the age of 16.

The term Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) encapsulates a wide range of abuses and behaviours, the commonality of which is that they disproportionately affect women and girls. Crimes against women and girls include rape, other sexual offences, domestic abuse (DA), stalking, 'honour-based' abuse and revenge porn, amongst many others.

The impact of violence against women and girls is significant and long lasting, the most prominent impacts of VAWG crimes include⁵:

- *A detrimental effect on mental health:* this can be short or long-term and can include anger, frustration, decreased self-esteem, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and loss of identity.
- *Physical harm:* victims of violence against women and girls have poorer physical health outcomes, have been found to engage in poorer health behaviours such as smoking, and some crimes can result in long-term physical health complications.
- *Negative employment, educational and financial impacts:* experiencing violence can impact on victim and survivors' educational attainment, employment, and income prospects due to absence from school or work or being unable to find or keep employment. Sustained domestic abuse has been linked to a lack of financial independence.
- *Homelessness:* domestic abuse can lead to homelessness either due to a victim losing their income or having to flee to escape an abusive situation.
- *A negative impact on children and family:* exposure to domestic abuse can impact on children's educational attainment and mental health and increase the risk of them engaging in risky behaviour, for example substance misuse and increase their vulnerability to being involved in further crime.

¹ [CRASAC - Statistics](#)

² [Femicide Census](#)

³ [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview - Office for National Statistics](#)

⁴ [Rape Crisis - Statistics](#)

⁵ [Tackling violence against women and girls - gov.uk](#)

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- *Making women feel less safe:* statistics from the Crime Survey of England 2020 and Wales show that only 24% of women feel very safe walking alone after dark and this is significantly lower than feelings of safety amongst men.

In July 2021, the Government published its *Tackling Violence Against Women & Girls*⁶ strategy, the ambition of which is to increase support for victims and survivors, increase the number of perpetrators brought to justice, and reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls. The government outlines four key priorities of this work:

- *Prioritising prevention:* addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls, improving education on healthy behaviours and understanding harmful attitudes, and creating safer public and online spaces.
- *Supporting victims:* ensuring victims can access quality and timely support and have the confidence to report their abuse feeling reassured the criminal justice system will support them in doing so.
- *Pursuing perpetrators:* ensuring perpetrators of violence against women and girls are brought to justice, breaking the cycle of re-offending and re-victimisation.
- *Strengthening the system:* ensuring a cross-system approach is taken to tackling violence against women and girls.

In response to the Tackling VAWG strategy, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and College of Policing published a new police VAWG framework⁷, developed under the then newly appointed National Police Lead for VAWG, Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth. This framework was adopted by West Yorkshire Police (WYP) who launched their own VAWG strategy in December 2021. The force's strategy has focused on three core priorities⁸:

- Pillar 1: Increasing trust and confidence in policing
- Pillar 2: Pursuit of perpetrators
- Pillar 3: Creating safe spaces (in private, public and online and in education)

The first national threat assessment of Violence Against Women and Girls was published in May 2023 and outlines the greatest dangers to women and girls. The offences identified as carrying the biggest threat are:

- Domestic abuse
- Rape and serious sexual offences
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation
- Tech enabled VAWG such as online stalking and harassment

⁶ [Tackling violence against women and girls - gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls)

⁷ [Policing violence against women and girls - College of Policing](https://www.collegeofpolicing.org.uk/policing-violence-against-women-and-girls)

⁸ [Violence Against Women and Girls | West Yorkshire Police](https://www.wy.gov.uk/vawg)

Domestic abuse accounted for 16.2% of all crime recorded in the year ending November 2023⁹. Domestic abuse provides the context in which other crimes including behaviourally abusive coercive control, sexual offences and rape occur. It is also a key driver for stalking and harassment, with 32% of offences being DA related. Approximately, 75% of DA victims are women and high rates of repeat victimisation indicating there are several points at which a victim may come into contact with policing.

Rape and serious sexual offences account for 10% of all VAWG offences and 36% of sexual offences are rape. 24.1% of sexual offences are committed against children aged 10-14, whilst 25% are committed against children aged 15-19. Rape and other serious sexual offending can be perpetrated by strangers (5% of rapes) but is more often a common feature of domestic abuse with 33% of reported rapes being committed by an intimate partner¹⁰.

The majority of recorded child sexual abuse and exploitation relate to child sexual abuse, with just under a third relating to rape of a child. Child sexual abuse in the family environment accounts for just under half of all reported child sexual abuse offences.

The proliferation and availability of technology has provided increased methods, forms, and systems through which VAWG offences can be committed. Police forces estimate that on average 10% of VAWG offences occur online, but this is likely to be an underestimate due to data recording. Stalking is the most common offence facilitated online to be reported to the police, usually committed by known offenders using mainstream social media. 19% of girls aged 11-16 have received unwanted sexual images, and this increases to 33% for 17–21-year-olds¹¹.

Using the evidence available, this synthesis hopes to examine these VAWG offences, and others, to understand prevalence in West Yorkshire.

Profile Rationale and Aims

This evidence synthesis was written by the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership to provide a greater understanding of violence against women and girls in West Yorkshire. The evidence synthesis utilises published research and open-source data sets. As well as increasing understanding about the problem of violence against women and girls, this profile highlights gaps in data and knowledge and makes recommendations for partners to address violence against women and girls.

⁹ [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview - Office for National Statistics](#)

¹⁰ [Violence Against Women and Girls - Strategic Threat Risk Assessment 2023 \(NPCC\)](#)

¹¹ [Violence Against Women and Girls - Strategic Threat Risk Assessment 2023 \(NPCC\)](#)

Whilst the crime types discussed in this profile disproportionately impact women and girls, we understand and fully acknowledge men and boys are also victims of these crimes. This profile does not seek to dismiss or minimise their experiences. We hope the findings and recommendations in this profile will be useful to everyone working with and for all victims. The aim of this profile is to fully understand the current picture pertaining to the safety of women and girls and so research into the experience of men who are victims has been excluded.

The evidence synthesis aims to gather insights and improve understanding based upon the research available and inform our partners:

- Updating the picture of violence against women and girls.
- Understanding the gaps in data sources available.
- Providing recommendations for future partnership working.

Scope of profile

This profile will explore different types of violence against women and girls based on the behaviours outlined in the *College of Policing Violence Against Women and Girls: Toolkit*¹². Whilst some of the behaviours included there are not crimes, they still constitute behaviours that disproportionately impact women and girls.

Category
Domestic & Relationship Abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coercive control• Non-fatal strangulation• Child/Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse• Stalking
So-called Honour Based Abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting• Forced Marriage
Sexual Offences <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rape and assault by penetration• Sexual Assault
Street Harassment
Misogyny
Online crimes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cyberflashing

¹² [Violence against women and girls: Toolkit - College of Policing](#)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cyberstalking• Revenge porn• Romance fraud
Sexual Exploitation and Abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modern slavery• Human trafficking• Forced prostitution• Sexual exploitation• Grooming• Sex for rent
Spiking

TABLE 1 - THE CATEGORIES OF VAWG EXPLORED IN THIS PROFILE

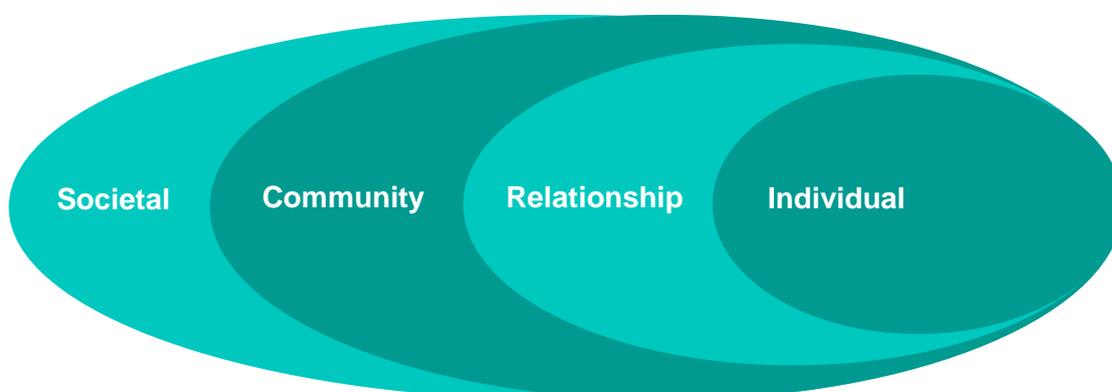
A Public Health Approach

The West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership are committed to a public health approach to violence reduction which encapsulates a series of underlying principles that focus on improving population health and reducing inequalities with and for communities. The public health approach uses data and evidence to understand the risk and protective factors for violence and develop interventions to address the underlying causes, focusing on the long-term as well as the short-term.

Influential factors

By taking a public health approach, the common risk factors driving violence against women and girls can be identified and understood. These risk factors can be found, and the interventions implemented, across all levels of the socio-ecological model (Figure 3) of violence: individual, relationship, community, and societal. Risk factors are associated with a higher likelihood of engaging with or experiencing violence and exploitation. Protective factors are the inverse, whereby they can reduce the likelihood of engaging with or experiencing violence and exploitation.

FIGURE 1 - SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE RISK FACTORS OF VIOLENCE



Some risk and protective factors can be conceptualised as being on different ends of the same continuum, for example parental conflict has been identified as a risk factor for violence and conversely positive family relationships may be a protective factor against violence.

The socio-ecological model emphasises that single risk or protective factors do not directly cause violence or prevent violence, instead it is the interaction amongst many different risk factors that influences the level of risk. Examples of risk factors associated with violence against women and girls have been identified across the levels of the socio-ecological model (Table 2).

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Societal	Community	Relationship	Individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Economic, social, and gender inequalities • Masculinity linked to aggression and dominance • Weak legal and criminal justice system • Perpetrators not prosecuted • Employment opportunities • Public policies • Societal and cultural norms that support violence • Discriminatory family law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High unemployment • High population density • Social isolation • Lack of information • Inadequate victim care • Schools and workplaces not addressing VAWG • Poor safety in public spaces • Challenging traditional gender roles • Victim-blaming • Community violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family dysfunction • Intergenerational violence • Poor parenting practices • Parental conflict • Peers who engage in violence • Low socio-economic status • Socio-economic stress • Family honour • Poor communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender, age, and education • A family history of violence • Witnessing violence against women and girls • Victim of childhood abuse or neglect • Economic disadvantage • Unemployment • Mental health problems • Alcohol and substance misuse • Disabilities • Sex work • Refugee status

TABLE 2 - RISK FACTORS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

A public health approach delivers prevention at three different levels aimed at addressing the risk factors and reducing the prevalence of violence against women and girls:

- **Primary** – focused on preventing violence before it happens, addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls – for example, tackling gender inequality.
- **Secondary** – taking an immediate response to instances of violence, for example behavioural change programmes for those that perpetrate violence against women and girls.
- **Tertiary** – focused on long term care and rehabilitation to prevent further acts of violence against women and girls.

The World Health Organisation and United Nations RESPECT Framework for preventing and responding to VAWG describes seven interventions that can be implemented to prevent violence against women and girls¹³.

¹³ [RESPECT women – Preventing violence against women](#)

- **R – Relationship skills strengthened** refers to strategies aimed at individuals or groups of women, men, or couples to improve skills in interpersonal communication, conflict management, and shared decision-making.
- **E – Empowerment of women** refers to both economic and social empowerment including inheritance and asset ownership, microfinance plus gender and empowerment training interventions, collective action, creating safe spaces and mentoring to build skills in self-efficacy, assertiveness, negotiation, and self-confidence.
- **S – Services ensured** refers to a range of services including police, legal, health, and social services provided to survivors.
- **P – Poverty reduced** refers to strategies targeted to women or the household whose primary aim is to alleviate poverty ranging from cash transfers, savings, microfinance loans, labour force interventions.
- **E – Environments made safe** refers to efforts to create safe schools, public spaces, and work environments, among others.
- **C – Child and adolescent abuse prevented** refers to establishing nurturing family relationships, prohibiting corporal punishment, and implementing parenting programmes.
- **T – Transformed attitudes, beliefs, and norms** refers to strategies that challenges harmful gender attitudes, beliefs, norms, and stereotypes that uphold male privilege and female subordination, that justify violence against women and girls and that stigmatise survivors. These can range from public campaigns, group education to community mobilisation efforts.

Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate, critical race and feminist scholar, originally coined the term intersectionality in 1989 to refer to the double bind of simultaneous racial and gender prejudice faced by Black women¹⁴. The concept of intersectionality has continued to be used to acknowledge and understand how distinct forms of harm, abuse, discrimination and disadvantage are experienced by people when multiple categories of their social identity interact with each other¹⁵.

There is a need to examine the intersecting inequalities of victims and survivors of VAWG, for example in reference to their needs, service accessibility, police investigation and criminal justice journeys¹⁶. Using an intersectional lens when analysing, reviewing, and commenting on data and literature is critical to understand need and hold others to account. This evidence synthesis will explore how intersectionality and VAWG interact and offer insight into how the system can better support women and girls in West Yorkshire.

¹⁴ [Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics](#)

¹⁵ [What is meant by the concept of 'intersectionality'? - Using intersectionality to understand structural inequality in Scotland: evidence synthesis](#)

¹⁶ [The value of intersectionality in understanding violence against women and girls | UN Women – Europe and Central Asia](#)

Context

West Yorkshire is a metropolitan county in the north of England, comprised of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, and Wakefield. Within West Yorkshire, women and girls represent over 50% of each district's population meaning the region is home to over 1.2 million women and girls.

West Yorkshire has a large, growing population of 2.35 million¹⁷, accounting for 43% of the population of Yorkshire and the Humber and 15% of the population of the North of England. The population of West Yorkshire is relatively young, with 19% of people aged under 15 years (compared to 17% in England) and 38% aged under 30 (compared to 26% in England). Bradford has the fourth highest population of under-15s (21%) of all local authorities in England. The age breakdown of the five West Yorkshire districts is shown in Table 3.

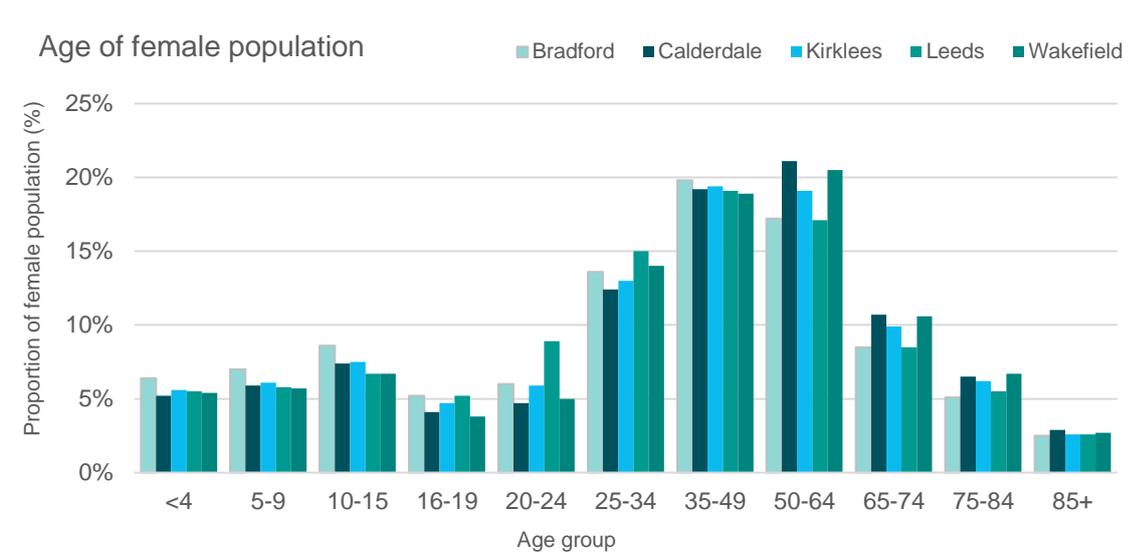
Age group	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield
Aged 0-4	6.4	5.2	5.6	5.5	5.4
Aged 5-9	7.0	5.9	6.1	5.8	5.7
Aged 10-15	8.6	7.4	7.5	6.7	6.7
Aged 16-19	5.2	4.1	4.7	5.2	3.8
Aged 20-24	6.0	4.7	5.9	8.9	5.0
Aged 25-34	13.6	12.4	13.0	15.0	14.0
Aged 35-49	19.8	19.2	19.4	19.1	18.9
Aged 50-64	17.2	21.1	19.1	17.1	20.5
Aged 65-74	8.5	10.7	9.9	8.5	10.6
Aged 75-84	5.1	6.5	6.2	5.5	6.7
Aged 85+	2.5	2.9	2.6	2.6	2.7

TABLE 3 - AGE OF THE FEMALE POPULATION (%) IN EACH WEST YORKSHIRE DISTRICT

¹⁷ All the data included in this section is taken from the 2021 Census

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FIGURE 2 - AGE OF THE FEMALE POPULATION BY DISTRICT IN WEST YORKSHIRE



As shown in Figure 4, Bradford has a larger proportion of women and girls below age 49, demonstrating a younger population when compared to the other West Yorkshire districts. In contrast, Calderdale has an older population of women with a higher proportion of women aged 50 and over. This trend can also be seen in Wakefield, as the district has the lowest proportion of girls and young women aged 16-19, yet a considerable proportion of women aged 50+.

West Yorkshire is a diverse region with 23% of the population identifying as being from an ethnic minority, an increase from 11% in 2011. Bradford has the highest proportion of those identifying as from an ethnic minority at 39% of its population. As shown in Figure 5, Wakefield has the highest proportion of residents identifying as White (93%).

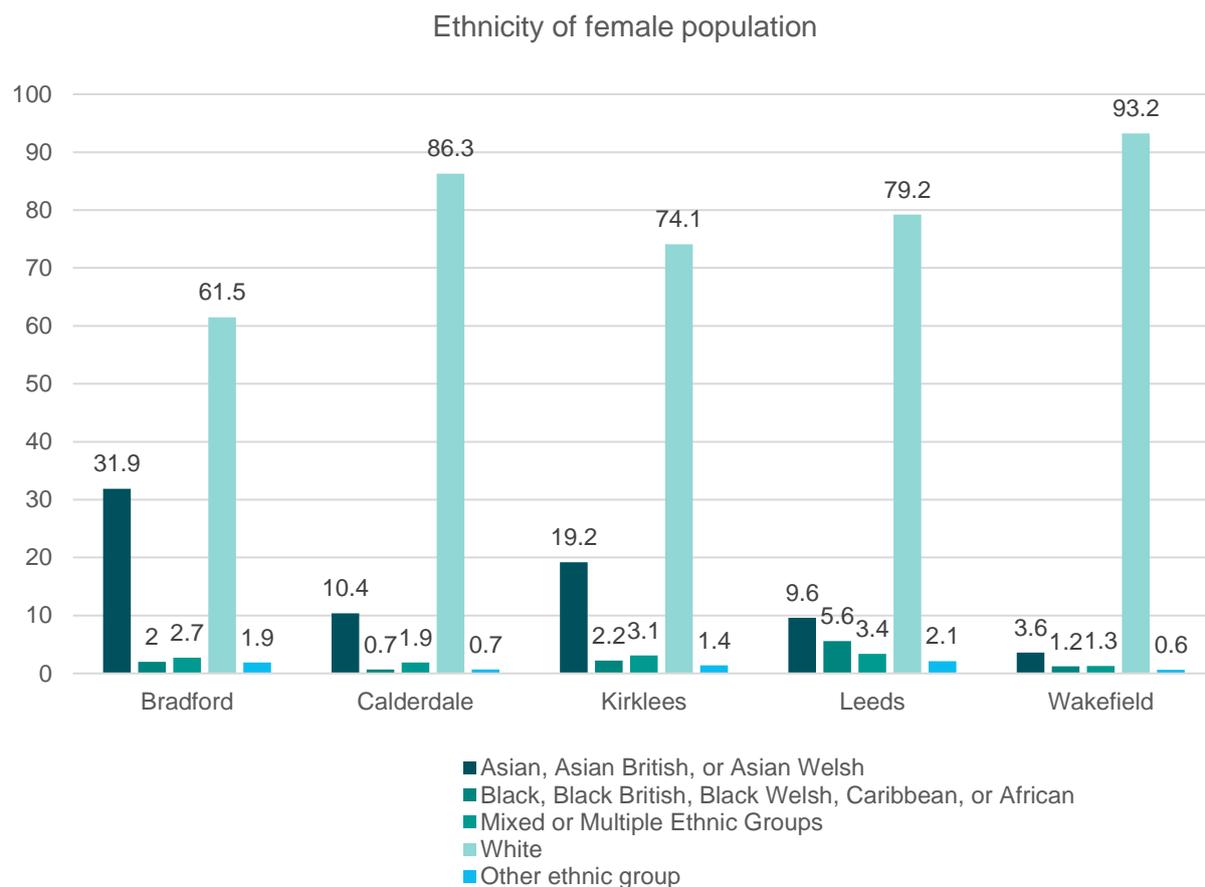


FIGURE 3 - ETHNICITY OF THE FEMALE POPULATION (%) IN EACH WEST YORKSHIRE DISTRICT

The region has an industrial history, leading in manufacturing, health, and digital sectors. There is an employed workforce of around 1.1 million and approximately 95,000 businesses. The region’s economic output is worth £57.4 billion, which makes it the third largest city region economy in the UK outside London¹⁸.

Covid-19 impacted the economy and employment rate across the country, and in West Yorkshire the employment rate fell during the pandemic and is likely to still be recovering. Based on data for the year ending June 2022, 1,072,000 people were in employment in West Yorkshire making the employment rate 74% (slightly below the national average of 76%).

¹⁸ [West Yorkshire State of the Region 2022](#)

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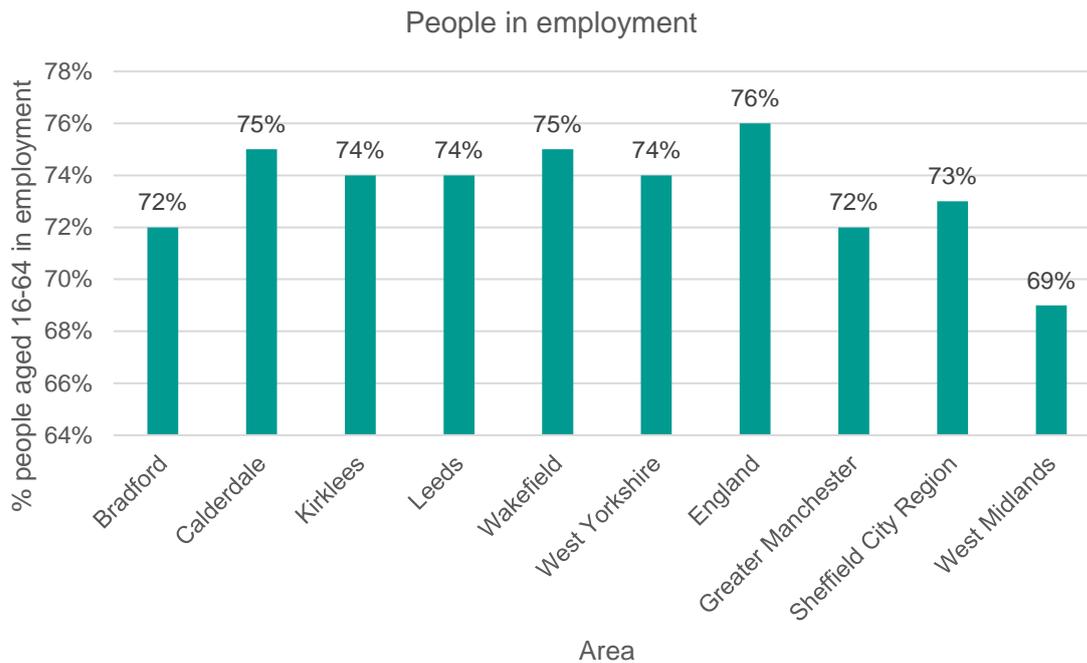


FIGURE 4 - PEOPLE AGED 16-64 IN EMPLOYMENT FROM THE ANNUAL POPULATION SURVEY 2021/22

As of June 2022, the rate of unemployment in West Yorkshire is 4.2%, marginally above the national average of 3.9%. There are small differences between local authorities, with Bradford consistently having the highest unemployment rates in the region.

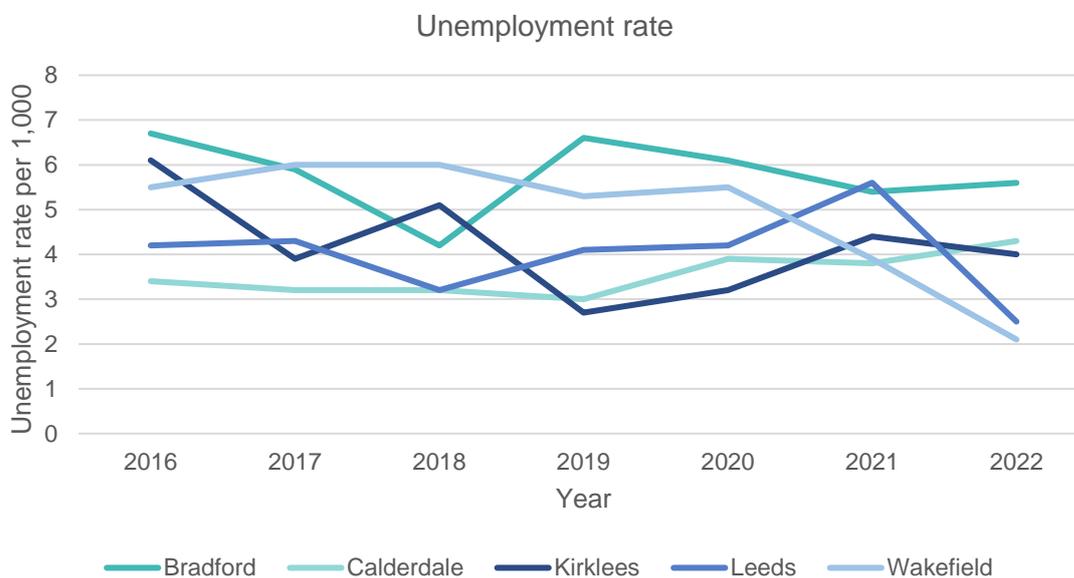


FIGURE 5 - UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN WEST YORKSHIRE

2021 data also shows demographic differences in unemployment with the rate being higher for Black (9%), Asian (7%), Mixed (10%), and Other (8%) ethnic groups compared to White (4%). In West Yorkshire, the difference in employment rate is more pronounced for females from an ethnic minority background with a 51% employment rate compared to 71% of females overall. Furthermore, there are 333,700 people in

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West Yorkshire who are economically inactive, with Kirklees having the highest number of economically inactive people.

Despite economic growth in recent years, poverty and deprivation within West Yorkshire remains a challenge. More than one in five people in West Yorkshire live in areas within the 10% most deprived in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Bradford has the highest percentage (33%) of its LSOAs experiencing the greatest degree of deprivation within West Yorkshire. Living in deprived areas has been shown to be a contributory factor for violence.

Domestic & Relationship Abuse

Background

Domestic abuse is defined as “any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional”.¹⁹ Domestic abuse is very much a gendered crime rooted in societal inequality between men and women²⁰ and so women are more likely than men to experience incidents of domestic abuse.

Though domestic abuse perpetration is mostly committed by men against women, victims can be men, and abuse happens within same-gender relationships. Not all women experience domestic abuse in the same way or are at similar levels of risk. This risk cannot be explained through individual factors alone, instead structural factors such as socio-economic poverty, racism and policies relating to immigration and welfare can heighten and sustain risk.

Physical abuse includes intentional and unwanted contact and violence with an individual’s body. Examples of physical abuse are²¹:

- Scratching, punching, biting, strangling or kicking
- Throwing items such as a phone, book, shoe or plate
- Hair pulling
- Pushing or pulling
- Grabbing clothing
- Physical acts which prevent someone from leaving or to force them to go somewhere.

Psychological or mental abuse involves exposing an individual to a situation that can result in psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder²². Verbal abuse is the use of harsh or insulting language, such as being called names or being constantly put down. Emotional abuse can consist of threats, insults, humiliation, intimidation, isolation, or stalking.

Sexual abuse can happen in relationships or with someone known to the victim and refers to any action that pressures an individual to do something sexual that they do not want to. Examples include²³:

¹⁹ [Domestic Abuse | West Yorkshire Police](#)

²⁰ [What is domestic abuse? - Women's Aid](#)

²¹ [Stop Domestic Abuse](#)

²² [Domestic abuse - Victim Support](#)

²³ [Getting help for domestic violence and abuse - NHS](#)

- Unwanted kissing or touching
- Unwanted rough or violent sexual activity
- Rape or attempted rape
- Refusing to use condoms or restricting access to birth control
- Threatening unwanted sexual activity
- Pressuring or forcing sex or pressure to perform sexual acts
- Using sexual insults

Women who have experienced domestic abuse are three times more likely to have made a suicide attempt in the past year compared to women who have not experienced abuse²⁴. It is also suggested that women are ten times more likely to experience sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) than men and is an IPV type particularly associated with self-harm and suicidality.

The Covid-19 lockdown periods are recognised as having heightened the risk and prevalence of domestic abuse. This intensification was coined the ‘shadow pandemic’ by the United Nations²⁵. Policies reiterated and affirmed the narrative that homes are spaces of safety and security, however these seemingly gender-neutral policies had different gendered consequences²⁶. Periods of lockdown and associated precaution measures, such as shielding, were used as means of perpetrating coercive and controlling behaviour with perpetrators using the pandemic as an excuse to re-enter a victim’s home, increase a victim’s financial dependency, deny access to medical treatment or control already limited movement outside the home. The response to Covid-19 also failed to recognise the pre-existing inequalities especially for minoritised women, which only further compounded social and economic inequality.

Prevalence studies have suggested that pregnancy can be a trigger for domestic abuse and existing abuse can escalate during pregnancy or after giving birth, with 20-30% of women studied experiencing physical violence by their ex/current partner²⁷. Pregnant women also experience sexual violence, financial abuse and verbal abuse which may include attacking a woman’s sense of parental competence to knock confidence and instil feelings of shame. Violence during pregnancy can worsen pre-existing health conditions, increase risk of maternal complications such as UTIs and bleeding, and may result in death. In addition to the harms experienced by the mother, the unborn child is in danger with increased risk of miscarriage, infection, premature birth, and injury or death to the baby²⁸. In some instances, physical violence may stop

²⁴ [Underexamined and Underreported - Agenda Alliance](#)

²⁵ [Measuring the Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women During Covid-19 \(UN Women\)](#)

²⁶ [The nature of domestic violence experienced by Black and minoritised women and specialist service provision during the Covid-19 pandemic \(Gill, A.K., & Anitha, S\)](#)

²⁷ [The prevalence of domestic violence in pregnant women \(Johnson, J.K et al\)](#)

²⁸ [Domestic abuse in pregnancy - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

during pregnancy however this abuse will often manifest into other forms of perceived control until after the birth.

Wider Evidence

Experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community

LGBT+ people may have their sexuality, gender identity or HIV status used against them as a tactic for the perpetrator to establish or maintain power and control in the relationship. This could include intimidation and threats of disclosure to family, friends, work colleagues, and the community. In addition, internalised homophobia, transphobia and sexism can lead to lower self-esteem and may result in victims blaming themselves²⁹.

Examples can include:

- Psychological abuse may undermine the sense of sexual and/or gender identity/self-expression making a person feel guilty or ashamed of their sexual orientation and gender.
- Individuals may have their access to LGBT+ spaces limited or controlled leading social isolation and withdrawal.
- The use of immigration laws can be used to manipulate and threaten a person with deportation to a country of origin which might be unsafe.
- LGBT+ survivors may be coerced to believe that they will not be believed and that their experiences are invalid due to societal misconceptions of what constitutes domestic abuse or that no help or support is available to them.

Trans survivors are one of the most hidden groups of domestic abuse survivors as they experience specific forms of abuse related to their trans identity, such as³⁰:

- Outing a person as trans and/or disclosing their gender history without consent.
- Deliberately using the wrong pronoun or using a person's 'deadname'.
- Forcing a person to perform a gender they do not wish to present.
- Coercing a person into not pursuing gender transition (including denying or withholding access to medical treatment or hormones).

Living in rural or remote areas can heighten the risk of being outed and can reduce access to gay or trans communities. As a result, people can be forced into inappropriate relationships and face additional difficulties when leaving abusive relationships. Rural isolation can also mean travel opportunities are limited especially if public transport is infrequent, this can contribute towards dependence and create a power imbalance.

²⁹ [Same sex sexual violence and sexual violence involving a trans complainant or suspect/defendant - gov.uk](#)

³⁰ [Domestic violence and abuse and LGBT+ communities - Galop](#)

In lesbian relationships, there are many other indicators of power aside from gender and may include socio-economic status or class, disability, race/ethnicity, faith and relative wealth. The length and extent to which each individual is “out” may also contribute to power imbalances by persuading or coercing false notions or practices of lesbian relationships.

Experiences of women from a Black and Ethnic Minority background

Whilst gender and gender identity is the main commonality across domestic abuse, the level of risk is not experienced homogeneously. Women from ethnic minorities may experience increased risk due to a combination of individual circumstance, such as limited-service awareness or language proficiency, family and wider community structures and socio-cultural norms. However, these are underpinned and reinforced by systemic socio-economic disadvantages including poverty, racism, immigration policies and the welfare system.

There are structural inequalities and disadvantages, alongside societal pressures, facing the Gypsy, Roma and Irish travelling community. Cultural expectations and norms may allow women to believe they are their husbands property, meaning domestic and sexual abuse is not recognised. Barriers to acknowledging abuse can include the fear of being ostracised not just from their family but from the wider community if they disclose information or reach out for support³¹.

There is a significant need to address the needs of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority women to tackle the intersectionality of racism and VAWG. Previous data by Refuge (2021)³² found that between March 2020 and June 2021, Black women were 14% less likely to be referred by the police to Refuge for support than white survivors of domestic abuse. After a 106,000-signature petition, for Valarie’s Law, triggered a Parliamentary debate, Labour MP Abena Opong-Asare highlighted how black women did not receive the same level of support as white women due to the way bruises can be masked by dark skin, as well as racism and “adultification”, where young black women are perceived as older than they are³³. This legislation was proposed and campaigned for by Sistah Space, a specialist charity that supports African and Caribbean heritage women affected by domestic and sexual abuse³⁴. Intersecting structural inequalities and distrust of the police and statutory bodies within the Black community due to historic institutional racism can prevent women from disclosing domestic abuse and accessing effective support.

Women’s Aid 2023 annual report demonstrated that only 9.6% of all service users were from Asian/Asian British ethnic backgrounds, and 6.3% were from

³¹ [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities - Women and Equalities Committee](#)

³² [Ahead of Black History Month, Refuge calls for better protection for Black women experiencing domestic abuse](#)

³³ [Black abuse campaigners get Valerie’s Law proposal heard - BBC News](#)

³⁴ [Sistah Space](#)

Black/African/Caribbean/Black British ethnic backgrounds. Of the 4,628 service users who were not British nationals, 30% were recorded as having no recourse to public funds. Regarding immigration statuses the annual report showed there to be a higher proportion of survivors with indefinite leave to remain (20%) or spouse visas (15.8%) accessing refuge services compared to community-based services³⁵. This was attributed to the types of funding available for refuge spaces, as those with spouse visas or indefinite leave to remain can apply for the destitution domestic violence concession or welfare benefits to secure public funds to pay for a refuge space. For women with no recourse to public funds, their access to refuge services may be restricted. Additionally, women may also be threatened by the perpetrator with deportation and detention which may prevent accessing support in the first place.

Spotlight: Jyoti

The Jyoti service is a specialist service for Black, Asian, and Minoritised women and girls, which is run by Black, Asian, and Minoritised women.

Jyoti offers a culturally sensitive approach to dealing with issues around rape and sexual violence. The fear of how women can be perceived within their family, community, and culture often means issues are dismissed, kept secret or never acknowledged. Shame and family honour prevent many women from speaking about their experiences.

Jyoti offers services in a range of languages and are able to provide a confidential interpreting service as well as running a specialist helpline. The services also offers one to one counselling and a support group which enables women to come together to share experiences.

³⁵ [The Domestic Abuse Report 2023 - The Annual Audit](#)

Experiences of disabled women

Disabled people experience disproportionately higher rates of domestic abuse, experience the abuse for longer periods of time, and experience more severe and frequent abuse than non-disabled people³⁶. This was partly evidenced by the Crime Survey for England and Wales for the year ending March 2022³⁷ which showed that a significantly higher percentage of adults with a disability experienced domestic abuse in the last year than those without. Data from SafeLives³⁸ in 2017 estimated that disabled victims typically endured abuse for an average of 3.3 years before accessing support, compared to 2.3 years for non-disabled victims.

Disabled women can experience domestic abuse in wider contexts than non-disabled women and by a greater number of significant others. This can include people who they depend on for care such as intimate partners, family members, personal care assistants and health care professionals. Disabled women may be socially isolated which may reduce their ability to recognise, report and escape abuse.

Findings from the Women's Aid Domestic Abuse Report 2023: Annual Audit³⁹ which provided an overview of the domestic abuse support services available in England, showed that 22.3% of victims reported having a physical health disability, however, only 1.1% of refuge vacancies listed on Routes to Support in 2021-22 were suitable for a woman with limited mobility and just 0.9% of vacancies could accommodate a woman requiring a wheelchair accessible space⁴⁰.

More recent data from SafeLives⁴¹ (2024) suggests that 1 in 12 visually impaired people in the UK are believed to be a victim or survivor of domestic abuse. However, there is little specific research into the domestic abuse experiences of visually impaired people. What is known is that information on domestic abuse and services is in printed format or on inaccessible websites. Where research has been conducted, findings show that blind and partially sighted victims face additional forms of abuse. Perpetrators can move items so they cannot be easily found, or items can be moved to trip victims. Withholding support or accessibility items have also been noted as forms of abuse. As victims may be dependent on the perpetrator for care they can be encouraged to stay with their perpetrator by professionals or family members. The barriers to accessing support are further exacerbated if victims are Black and/or from cultures that are minoritised in the UK due to social prejudices and a lack of professional understanding and specialised support.

³⁶ [Disability and domestic abuse. Risk, impacts, and response - Public Health England](#)

³⁷ [Domestic abuse victim characteristics 2022](#)

³⁸ [Disabled Survivors Too Report.pdf \(safelives.org.uk\)](#)

³⁹ [Evidence Hub: Annual Audit 2023 - Women's Aid \(womensaid.org.uk\)](#)

⁴⁰ [Evidence Hub: Annual Audit 2023 - Women's Aid \(womensaid.org.uk\)](#)

⁴¹ [The Unseen: Blind and partially sighted people's experiences of domestic abuse | Safelives](#)

The lack of accessible British Sign Language information means it can be more difficult for Deaf women to understand and recognise abuse and to access support. Signed languages have different grammatical and sentence order than written text and can make translating them more difficult⁴².

Deaf women may have their communication skills exploited by a perpetrator which can inhibit their ability to report domestic abuse or access appropriate support. Additionally, domestic abuse services may not be equipped to support Deaf people with some refuges refusing to accept Deaf women citing health and safety concerns in meeting their access requirements⁴³. There is a clear need for culturally and linguistically accessible support for Deaf survivors.

Coercive Control

Background

Coercive control is an element of domestic abuse defined as '*an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation, and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten someone*'⁴⁴. The intention of coercive control is to exert power and make the victim dependent upon the perpetrator by isolating them from support systems, exploiting them, and monitoring their everyday behaviour.

Examples of coercive and controlling behaviour are:

- Isolation from friends and family
- Deprivation of basic needs
- Monitoring time
- Monitoring via online communication tools
- Control over aspects of everyday life, for example daily movements, social circles, clothing
- Repeated belittling
- Humiliation, degradation, or dehumanisation
- Financial control
- Threatening or intimidating behaviour

Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 created a new offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship. Under this legislation, to be considered an offence, victims of controlling or coercive behaviour must be personally connected to their abuser when the behaviour occurs. There must be evidence of repeated behaviour that has a serious effect on the victim. The offence carries a sentence of up to five years' imprisonment.

⁴² [Sign Language Interpreter, Deaf Awareness Training, BSL Translations | Sign Solutions](#)

⁴³ [New funding for our Domestic Abuse Service - SignHealth](#)

⁴⁴ [Coercive control - Women's Aid](#)

Wider Evidence

Experiencing coercive control has been likened to being taken hostage, as “*the victim becomes captive in an unreal world created by the abuser, entrapped in a world of confusion, contradiction, and fear*”⁴⁵. Fear is central to how we conceptualise coercive control and has been described as “*living in a world of moving goalposts, shifting sand, it is like constantly walking on eggshells, it is a world of everyday terror*”⁴⁶. Coercive control has physical, emotional, psychological, social and financial impacts on victims. Victims can experience direct physical effects such as immediate injuries as well as long-term health problems. Some survivors experience post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health disorders⁴⁷.

Disabled victims may be at increased risk of coercive control due to the power imbalance between the disabled person and the perpetrator who may have a responsibility of care. This relationship creates a dependency on the perpetrator and thus isolation of the victim. Coercive and controlling behaviours specific to this context can include: withholding medical equipment, taking control of finances, fear of institutionalisation, and making demands in return for care giving.⁴⁸

Hamberger et al (2017)⁴⁹ identified three consistent elements defining coercive control: **intentionality or goal orientation in the abuser**, a **negative perception of the controlling behaviour by the victim**; and **deployment of a credible threat**. Coercive control is driven by intent to achieve a particular goal and thus goal-oriented behaviours are used. These include isolation, distorting reality, deprivation of resources, surveillance, and monitoring. Isolating victims from their friends and family can also have negative impacts on children. For example, Katz (2016) interviewed mothers who had experienced coercive control and found that the isolation they experienced limited their children’s opportunities to engage positively with their wider family, peers, and extra-curricular activities.⁵⁰

Victims’ negative perceptions of coercive and controlling behaviour has been evidenced in a number of studies. For example, Coy et al (2008) interviewed over 50 women who were victims of coercive control, and all described the abuse in similar terms describing psychological tactics, being belittled and demeaned, and mental bullying.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Stark, E. (2007) *Coercive Control: How Men entrap Women in Personal Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

⁴⁶ [What is coercive control - Women's Aid Scotland](#)

⁴⁷ [What is coercive control - Women's Aid Scotland](#)

⁴⁸ [Disabled Survivors Too: Disabled people and domestic abuse](#)

⁴⁹ Hamberger L, Larsen S and Lehrner A (2017) ‘Coercive control in intimate partner violence’. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* Vol.37: 1-11.

⁵⁰ Katz E (2016b) ‘[Coercive control-based domestic abuse: Impacts on mothers and children](#)’.

⁵¹ [Realising Rights, Fulfilling Obligations: A Template for an Integrated Strategy on Violence Against Women for the UK](#)

The credible threat typically used will be physical violence and abusers ensure their victims are aware of their willingness to execute threats made. Threats around housing, such as threats of homelessness, are also commonly used in instances of coercive control. 'Mother-blaming' also forms part of perpetrators coercive behaviour⁵², using threats of having their children removed to enforce fears of being perceived as a bad mother, which in turns prevents many women from disclosing their abuse.

There are challenges in estimating how many children are affected by controlling and coercive behaviour taking place in their household. SafeLives⁵³ data suggests that children living in households where domestic abuse occurs experience coercive control mainly through feeling emotionally abused or feeling as though they are to blame for the domestic abuse.

West Yorkshire Police's policy on domestic abuse includes '*any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour*' in their adopted definition of domestic abuse. The attending officer responding to a report of domestic abuse must consider controlling coercive behaviour as a high-risk factor to be recorded and understand that evidence of these behaviours may not always be obvious. Incidents of coercive and/or controlling behaviour should also be considered as a key safeguarding concern when securing the safety of the victim and any children involved⁵⁴.

An element of coercive control that has not yet been extensively explored is reproductive coercion and abuse. Reproductive coercion, whilst not having an agreed international definition, has been described as '*actual or attempted acts that are experienced as aiming to reduce individual autonomy over reproductive decision-making through coercive or controlling behaviour, deceptions, manipulation, threats, violence, or other forms of abuse*⁵⁵'. As with other forms of coercive control, reproductive coercion can include the regulation of everyday behaviour but specifically in relation to preventing or promoting pregnancy, or access to reproductive healthcare. Reproductive coercion has been associated with other intimate partner violence⁵⁶ being present in a relationship. Experiencing reproductive coercion can be traumatic for women resulting in unwanted pregnancies and further domestic abuse.

As noted previously, coercive control is a form of domestic abuse and often occurs alongside other acts of physical, emotional, or mental acts of domestic abuse, however coercive control has now been also linked to homicide. A study by Manchester Metropolitan University analysed more than 300 domestic homicide reviews in

⁵² Stark, E. (2007) *Coercive Control: How Men entrap Women in Personal Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

⁵³ [SafeLives - Children's Insights national dataset 2014-17](#)

⁵⁴ [WYP Force Policy - Domestic Abuse](#)

⁵⁵ [Safeguarding for reproductive coercion and abuse | BMJ Sexual & Reproductive Health](#)

⁵⁶ [Reproductive Coercion: A Systematic Review - PMC](#)

England and Wales between 2013 and 2018. The research found that in cases where a victim had been killed by their current or ex-partner, more than half had experienced coercive and controlling behaviour in the relationship⁵⁷.

Since coercive control was made a criminal offence in 2015 instances have, rightly, received increased media attention. The highly publicised case of Sally Challen evidenced how coercive control was previously misunderstood by the law and highlighted the need for it to be included under the Domestic Abuse Act. In 2010, Sally Challen killed her husband after years of experiencing his controlling and humiliating behaviour, she was sentenced to life imprisonment. In 2019, Sally won her appeal as the improved understanding of coercive and controlling behaviour better explained Sally's actions.

West Yorkshire Police have published a campaign to educate that "controlling behaviour is domestic abuse". Their series of images show examples of coercive control, including financial control, alienation, and monitoring. The campaign is supported by information on how the police can help, the locations of safe spaces, advice for a victim planning to leave an abusive relationship and how to stay safe at home, and national and local support services⁵⁸.

In 2022, it was reported in the Wakefield Express that there are rising numbers of coercive and controlling behaviour crimes in West Yorkshire⁵⁹. Home Office figures for the year ending March 2022, showed that West Yorkshire Police received 3,197 reports of coercive and controlling behaviour, up from 2,682 in 2020/21 (the first year these crimes have been recorded). This is in line with national figures which increased by a third from 30,800 in 2020/21 to 41,300 in 2021/22. In addition, the 2021 Home Office review of the controlling or coercive behaviour offence reported Yorkshire and the Humber as the region with the second highest rates of offences (69 offences per 100,000).

Closure of coercive control cases reveals a disappointing picture. In West Yorkshire in 2021, 94.8% of cases were abandoned due to difficulties in gathering evidence and only 2.8% resulted in a suspect being charged or summoned to court. A project analysing police responses to domestic abuse since the introduction of the coercive control offence (using data from 2016-2017) found that police officers 'struggled to demonstrate experiences of sustained, patterned abuse within victim statements' and in some cases failed to capitalise on other evidence present, such as digital evidence⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ [Coercive control: The women killed by abusive partners - BBC News](#)

⁵⁸ [Controlling Behaviour is Domestic Abuse | West Yorkshire Police](#)

⁵⁹ [Rising number of coercive and controlling behaviour crimes in West Yorkshire \(wakefieldexpress.co.uk\)](#)

⁶⁰ [Police responses to coercive control](#)

Media coverage of instances of coercive and controlling behaviour offences occurring in West Yorkshire bring attention to offenders who are sentenced. In 2021, a man in Bradford was jailed for three years and three months and given a five-year restraining order to prevent him contacting the victim. The victim described the offender saying *"he seemed like a decent guy, but quickly became very possessive and jealous. He held me prisoner and followed me everywhere and months later, he tried to kill me"*, this statement shows how coercive and controlling behaviour can escalate. Another case, tried at Leeds Crown Court, involved a man who had coerced and controlled two women during their relationships. His behaviour included not letting the victims see her family or friends, buy new clothes, or put make up on and turning up at their place of work. The offender was sentenced to two years imprisonment and required to attend a healthy relationships course.

There are West Yorkshire based resources available to support professionals and practitioners in understanding and responding to incidents of coercive and controlling behaviour. For example, Bradford City Council has published a training module on recognising coercive control and Calderdale Safeguarding Children Partnership published a short film of a victim story for Safeguarding Week in 2021.

Non-fatal strangulation

Background

In June 2022 the new criminal offence of non-fatal strangulation (NFS) or suffocation was introduced as part of the Serious Crime Act 2015⁶¹ and Section 70 Domestic Abuse Act 2021⁶². This legislation is based on the *obstruction or compression of blood vessels and/or airways by external pressure to the neck impeding normal breathing or circulation of the blood*⁶³. This reasoning highlights the significant dangers of the offence and codifies that individuals cannot consent to serious harm resulting from strangulation or suffocation. Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidance is clear that strangulation does not require a certain level of pressure or force and suffocation is to deprive a person of air which affects their normal breathing. NFS carries a maximum sentence of 5 years imprisonment and does not need to have occurred in UK for prosecution. However, recent prosecutions have only carried 12-to-24-month sentences.

Strangulation commonly leaves minimal or no visible signs of injury, yet the consequences can be severe. The absence of injury has previously made it difficult to prosecute under offences such as Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) which carry lower sentences⁶⁴. Nonetheless, recent evidence suggests that the onset of symptoms of NFS are sometimes delayed by days, weeks or even months. Harms can include

⁶¹ [Non-fatal strangulation or non-fatal suffocation | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

⁶² [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

⁶³ [Non-fatal strangulation or non-fatal suffocation | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

⁶⁴ [New non-fatal strangulation offence comes into force - GOV.UK](#)

stroke, cardiac arrest, increased risk of miscarriage, incontinence, seizures, paralysis, speech disorders, and other forms of long-term brain injury⁶⁵.

NFS is a recognised gendered crime⁶⁶ and is a common feature of domestic abuse used to instil power and fear, with 90% of NFS offences having a history of domestic abuse. Strangulation has also been shown to be prevalent in intimate partner sexual assault⁶⁷. An estimated two million women in the UK have experienced unwanted “choking” or strangulation in formerly consensual sex⁶⁸. The pressure/force applied in NFS can result in victims being unable to consent and withdraw that consent at any point.

Wider Evidence

NFS is also an established homicide risk factor for women as NFS increases the risk of being killed, with homicide reviews showing NFS victims being seven times more likely to be killed at a later date⁶⁹⁷⁰. As NFS involves the obstruction of oxygen, the hippocampus, the area of the brain most sensitive to lack of oxygen, is critical for forming, organising and storing memory can be damaged meaning victims may have limited memory of the offence. Evidence suggests there were 342 strangulation homicides from 2011 to 2021 of which 75% of victims were female. The Institute for Addressing Strangulation also reported that female victims of strangulation homicide over the age of 16 were 54 times more likely to have been killed by an ex-partner or partner than a male victim of strangulation homicide⁷¹.

Pornography can affect children and young people’s perception of what a healthy relationship is by actively shaping sexual attitudes and behaviours. A report published by Children’s Commissioner in 2023⁷² found that children and young people express an expectation that sex involves physical aggression. Almost half, 47%, of respondents aged 16-21 stated that girls expect sex to involve physical aggression, such as strangulation or slapping, compared to 39% who stated that boys expect sex to involve aggression.

⁶⁵ [The neuropsychological outcomes of non-fatal strangulation in domestic and sexual violence: A systematic review.](#)

⁶⁶ [‘I thought he was going to kill me’: Analysis of 204 case files of adults reporting non-fatal strangulation as part of a sexual assault over a 3-year period](#)

⁶⁷ [Non-fatal strangulation in sexual assault: A study of clinical and assault characteristics highlighting the role of intimate partner violence](#)

⁶⁸ [I thought it was normal — We Can’t Consent To This](#)

⁶⁹ [Non-fatal strangulation is an important risk factor for homicide of women](#)

⁷⁰ [Institute for Addressing Strangulation](#)

⁷¹ [Institute for Addressing Strangulation](#)

⁷² [Evidence on pornography’s influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children](#)

Child/Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA)

In this section, CAPVA and child to parent abuse (CPA) will be used interchangeably.

Child to parent abuse is usually defined as *‘a pattern of behaviour...which involves using verbal, financial, physical and/or emotional means to practice power and exert control over a parent...such that a parent unhealthily adapts his/her own behaviour to accommodate the child. Commonly reported abusive behaviours include name-calling, threats to harm self or others, attempts at humiliation, damage to property, theft and physical violence’*⁷³. There is however no agreed legal definition. The forms of abuse may leverage the parent-child or caregiver relationship and the legal and moral responsibility of parents to care for their children⁷⁴. Previous, slightly dated, research examining caseload data from four local authorities in England identified CAPVA to be 21-27% of cases within youth offending services⁷⁵.

Child to parent abuse is considered domestic abuse in instances where the child is 16 or over, yet there is contention about the most appropriate response for cases where the child is below 18 years. The abusive behaviours of CAPVA share some of the gendered patterns of power and control, which is often seen in domestic abuse.

CAPVA is gendered. At a ratio of 8:2, mothers appear to be more likely to be targeted than fathers⁷⁶ and after a violent incident, mothers are more likely to be fearful of their child. Evidence suggests the most common dyad involves mothers and sons; however, fatal violence data suggests there is no significant difference as to whether mothers or fathers are likely to be killed by their children.

Parents may have difficulties acknowledging and admitting the imbalance of power and abuse. CAPVA constitutes a ‘double stigma’ by combining the stigma of being a victim of domestic/family violence with the stigma of being the parent of a perceived ‘difficult’ or ‘troublesome’ child. This can lead to a reluctance to disclose their experiences due to feelings of shame, humiliation, and blame. Fear of their child being criminalised may also prevent parents from reporting or seeking support. Parents may also experience an element of denial whereby they convince themselves that their child’s behaviour is part of normal adolescent conduct⁷⁷. With all this considered, findings from the Mayor of London’s VRU are unsurprising with at least 40% of parents or carers who had experienced violence by their children having refused to report it⁷⁸.

⁷³ [Working with Adolescent Violence and Abuse Towards Parents: Approaches](#)

⁷⁴ [Understanding CAPVA - Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#)

⁷⁵ [Understanding CAPVA - Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#)

⁷⁶ Simmons, M., McEwan, T.E., Purcell, R. and Ogloff, J.R.P. (2018). ‘Sixty years of child-to parent abuse research: What we know and where to go’, *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 38, pp. 31–52.

⁷⁷ [Child on parent violence | Reducing the Risk](#)

⁷⁸ [Comprehensive needs assessment of Child/Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse in London](#)

Wider contextual factors have been associated with CAPVA such as prior experience of domestic abuse in the family home, which is noted as being more pronounced in violence involving sons and mothers. Substance use, previous suicide attempts, mental ill health and neurodivergence have been associated with higher risk of CAPVA. Others in the home can also be subject to abusive behaviours, such as siblings, who may withdraw from the family in response. Similar to the impacts of domestic abuse, CAPVA can have negative harms, aside from physical injuries, on psychological health, financial stability and social relationships. This can include loss of income, property damage, social withdrawal and depression.

A parents survey undertaken by Parental Education Growth Support (PEGS)⁷⁹ in 2022 found 24% of parents experiencing CPA had a long-term physical illness or disability. Up to 19% of parents reported being physically attacked every day by their child, with this proportion increasing to 35% reporting weekly, and 22% monthly. In regard to verbal abuse, 72% of parents reported verbally abuse by their child every day, 20% weekly and 4% monthly. Parents reported feeling isolated and alone, worried, blamed and ashamed. If parents were to ask for support, they were most likely to contact the school (86%), a doctor (76%), CAMHS (74%) or social services (73%).

In a 2023, PEGS conducted a survey to understand the number of parents, carers and guardians who were experiencing CPA, who had vision or hearing impairments and who are unable to access services. The research suggested 1 in 23 people experiencing CPA also had a sight impairment and 1 in 28 also had a hearing impairment. Of those involved, one third of children had experienced loss or bereavement. Almost all of the participants completing the survey identified as women, which is an overwhelming pattern also seen in the past 3 years.

At present there is no comprehensive data collection system for CAPVA and there is limited research investigating the socio-economic and racial/ethnic characteristics of families.

Stalking

Background

The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012⁸⁰ created two new offences of stalking. However, despite being an offence stalking does not have a legal definition, instead there are several stalking associated behaviours⁸¹. This absence of a definition allows stalking to be interpreted and defined subjectively based on the cases severity,

⁷⁹ [Child to Parent Abuse Parent Survey \(cdn-website.com\)](#)

⁸⁰ [Protection of Freedoms Act 2012](#)

⁸¹ [Stalking and Harassment | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

perception, and legislation, this can lead to ambiguity as experiences, perception and interpretations may vary.

Most definitions, including that of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, define stalking as a pattern of fixated and obsessive behaviour which is repeated, persistent, intrusive and causes fear of violence or engenders alarm and distress in the victim⁸². Stalking is a crime of persistence, and stalking behaviours can seem omnipresent and harmless, as they can be an amplification of typical contact and everyday interaction. It is the unwanted and repetitive nature of these behaviours meaning stalking can be described as a construct based on an amalgamation of behavioural acts⁸³.

Due to the multifaceted nature of stalking, it is not limited to a single type of behaviour. These can be offline such as visiting the victim's home or place of work without invitation, following the victim, leaving gifts, or online including unwanted social media communication, calls, texts, emails, hacking and spyware. When unwanted, unreciprocated and repeated, these behaviours have perceived credibility of both fear and harm.

Wider Evidence

The most recognised types of stalkers were classified in literature in 1999⁸⁴. The typology continues to be used and adapted today, and classifies stalkers as having specific motivations: being rejected, resentful, intimacy seeking, incompetent suitor and predatory.

Rejected stalkers are likely to be former sexual partners or a close relation to the victim and often have a desire to reconcile a relationship. The behaviours exhibited are beyond that of reasonable attempts to reconcile a failed or fractured relationship. The rejected stalker is noted as the most persistent, intrusive, and intimidating and are said to be fuelled by the agitation of being separated from the victim. They use knowledge gained during their prior relationship with the victim such as place of work or hobby location which can increase physical proximity and face-to-face encounters.

The desire for revenge motivates the **resentful stalker** as they believe they have been wronged or suffered an injustice. The behaviours can be seen as a campaign of harassment with the intention is to punish, distress or humiliate the victim to remove their perceived power over the offender.

Those motivated by **intimacy seeking** are attempting to show love and affection, but this is one sided and their fixed attention is unwanted. Perpetrators tend to be strangers or acquaintances to the victim as other motivations may include loneliness, desire for love or company, and social isolation. Intimacy seekers are referred to as

⁸² [What is stalking? | Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)

⁸³ [Measuring stalking: the development and evaluation of the Stalking Assessment Indices \(McEwan et al., 2021\)](#)

⁸⁴ [Study of stalkers - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

being typically older and their methods are noted as being simple, intrusive and long-standing. The behaviours continue as they are detached from reality and sustained by the perpetrators hope for reciprocation.

Incompetent suitors are said to have a need for contact, and they communicate to build friendships or to become short term sexual partners (Mackenzie et al, 2009). their character may be deemed insensitive, overbearing, and egoistic (Mullen, 2008). Acquaintances or strangers tend to be targeted by the perpetrator and their behaviours are likely to be brief in frequency. Unlike the intimacy seeker, incompetent suitors have some awareness that feelings are not reciprocated by the victim but have difficulties in accepting rejection.

Predatory stalking is based on gaining power and control over the victim for sexual or personal gratification. There are similarities noted between predatory stalking and sexual offenders. Victims tend to be unaware that they are being stalked. Alongside rejected stalkers, are more likely to assault and harm their victim than other categories of stalker.

Stalking is one of the most frequently experienced forms of abuse according to Paladin National Stalking Advocacy Service, with victims often suffering an average of 100 incidents before they report it to the police, leading to significant discrepancies between events and offence reports (College of Policing, 2021). The understanding of stalking recidivism and escalation is also widely unknown. Where evidence is available, national figures show there were 42,895 stalking offences recorded by the police between October 2021 and March 2022. A further 80,983 malicious communication offences and 75,196 harassment offences were recorded. An estimated 4.5% of women aged 16 or over were victims of stalking in the ending March 2022⁸⁵. Due to the subjective and persistent nature of stalking, it could be possible that stalking offences have been recorded as a different offence type.

⁸⁵ [Stalking and Harassment](#)

So-called Honour Based Abuse

So called honour-based abuse (HBA) is described as a collection of practices, which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or “honour”.⁸⁶ This abuse occurs when perpetrators believe that a family member has ‘shamed’ the family or community. Honour cultures have been described as “*inherently patriarchal and characterised by strict gender roles. Females maintain an honourable reputation by demonstrating their purity, modesty, and obedience to their father and husband*”⁸⁷. However, there is currently no statutory definition of Honour Based Abuse in England and Wales meaning the issue is largely misunderstood and interpreted differently across agencies.

Victims of so-called honour-based abuse can find it difficult to leave abusive relationships due to the ‘shame’ attached. This is heightened for individuals with uncertain immigration status who may fear deportation.⁸⁸ Honour-based abuse is not related to any specific ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, or ‘religion’, but can occur within any community.

The CPS note that there is no specific offence of so-called honour-based abuse, instead it is an umbrella term used to encompass various offences, e.g., causing grievous bodily harm, stalking, rape etc., that are covered by existing legislation. This includes coercive control (the most common type of so-called HBA), physical abuse, psychological pressure, forced marriage; abandonment, forced suicide or “honour” killing (murder)⁸⁹. The UN estimate that worldwide there are 5,000 honour killings annually, and between 12-15 murders occur in the UK each year⁹⁰.

The number of “honour-based” offences recorded by police forces has reportedly increased by more than 60% in two years. Instances of so-called honour-based abuse, including forced marriage, rape, death threats and assault increased from 1,599 in 2020 to 2,594 in 2022 as reported by 26 out of 39 constabularies⁹¹.

For the year ending March 2023, there were 2,905 recorded HBA-related offences (172 forced marriage offences and 84 female genital mutilation offences). This is an increase of 1% compared with the previous year (when there were 2,871 offences recorded). Also in this year, 19% of HBA-related offences were for controlling and coercive behaviour, 16% for assault with injury and 12% for assault without injury⁹².

⁸⁶ [So-called honour-based violence inspections](#)

⁸⁷ [‘Honour’ abuse: the experience of South Asians who identify as LGBT in Northwest England](#)

⁸⁸ [Honour Based Abuse and Violence](#)

⁸⁹ [So-Called Honour-Based Abuse | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

⁹⁰ [The State of World Population - Lives Together, Worlds Apart](#)

⁹¹ [‘Honour-based’ abuse in England increases 60% in two years | Society | The Guardian](#)

⁹² [Statistics on so called ‘honour-based’ abuse offences, England and Wales, 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

In the same year, West Yorkshire Police reported 128 HBA-related offences, the 5th highest of all police forces, preceded by the Metropolitan Police, West Midlands Police, Greater Manchester Police and Leicestershire Police. Whilst this is a fall in recorded cases in the region since the previous year, figures remain much higher than the four-years prior.

It is likely however, that these numbers do not reflect the true extent of so-called honour-based abuse in the UK⁹³. As a comparison, in 2021/22 the national charity Karma Nirvana which provides support for victims of HBA, received 10,046 calls and already this year have supported 2,540 victims. In April 2020 after lockdown began, the charity experienced a 200% rise in calls in less than three weeks⁹⁴. The NPCC also notes that there is significant underreporting of so-called HBA for a multitude of reasons including shame, worries about childcare, and the perpetrator being in control of the victims' finances.

As with other forms of gender-based violence, HBA is most commonly perpetrated by men against women. However, women within the family (usually mothers and mothers-in-law) have been found to be involved in acts of so-called honour-based abuse⁹⁵. Whilst in some cases women have played an active role in the abuse, others are more complicated with women's roles falling somewhere between perpetrator and coerced victim. Women themselves internalise the gender roles of the honour system and reinforce these onto young women within the family. Analysis of cases of HBA where a woman was involved as a perpetrator showed three different 'roles' enacted by women. 1. **Controllers** – where women led, organised, and directed other family members in the abuse, and this was most often perpetrated by mothers-in-law. 2. **Collaborators** – women were actively involved acting jointly with male relatives. 3. **Coerced** – women in these cases were victims themselves, usually of domestic abuse perpetrated by their husband.

SafeLives insight data found that over half (54%) of domestic abuse victims at risk of HBA were abused by multiple people, compared to only 7% of those not at risk. There are additional risk factors for honour-based abuse, for example 26% of victims require an interpreter which can make the process of seeking support much more difficult. Furthermore, 25% of victims accessing SafeLives support had no recourse to public funds and so are unable to access emergency accommodation, apply for housing benefits or income support⁹⁶.

As noted previously, gender is the most common predictor of domestic abuse, however Black, Asian, and Ethnic Minority women may be more likely to experience particular forms of abuse, such as so-called honour-based abuse, forced marriage,

⁹³ ['Honour' abuse, violence, and forced marriage in the UK](#)

⁹⁴ [Lockdown fears for BAME honour crime victims as charity sees 200% surge in calls | Yorkshire Post](#)

⁹⁵ [Females perpetrating honour-based abuse: controllers, collaborators or coerced?](#)

⁹⁶ [Your Choice: 'honour'-based violence, forced marriage and domestic abuse](#)

and female genital mutilation⁹⁷. Within West Yorkshire there is a specialist service for Black, Asian, and Ethnic Minority women and girls run by Bradford Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Survivors service. Jyoti offers culturally sensitive support in a range of languages, understanding how shame and family honour prevent many women from speaking out.

In addition, so-called honour-based abuse can be perpetrated against members of the LGBTQIA+ community if their identity is considered to bring shame on the family. Between October and December 2022 Karma Nirvana⁹⁸ supported 17 cases from the LGBTQIA+ community, most of whom reported that their sexuality was a trigger for HBA, showing the importance of applying an intersectional lens. Some victims were experiencing abuse from family members due to their sexuality, whilst others already experiencing HBA feared that disclosing their sexuality would worsen the abuse.

In 2022, West Yorkshire Police launched a series of training events to improve victim support and the quality of investigations. This included training delivered by Karma Nirvana to 120 officers and staff across the force to raise awareness of honour-based abuse and forced marriage. The training was aimed at building confidence in identifying and challenging honour-based abuse and forced marriage and improving and developing supportive and effective responses to victims.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

Background

Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.⁹⁹ FGM is a form of child abuse with no medical justification but is used to control female sexuality.¹⁰⁰ FGM can have long lasting physical and emotional impacts on women and girls including severe pain, infections, infertility, depression, and self-harm.

FGM is illegal in the UK under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003, and this covers mutilation taking place in England and Wales as well as assisting a non-UK person to carry out FGM outside the UK on a UK national or resident. However, it is estimated that there are 137,000 women living in England and Wales that may have been affected by FGM¹⁰¹. Furthermore, in 2023 there were 5,870 individual women and girls who attended healthcare providers with a case of FGM¹⁰².

⁹⁷ [The nature of domestic violence experienced by Black and minoritised women and specialist service provision during the Covid-19 pandemic](#)

⁹⁸ [Karma Nirvana Helpline Statistics 2022/23](#)

⁹⁹ [Female genital mutilation](#)

¹⁰⁰ [Female Genital Mutilation - Prevent & Protect](#)

¹⁰¹ [Updating and improving estimates of the prevalence female genital mutilation in England and Wales](#)

¹⁰² [Female Genital Mutilation, Annual Report - April 2022 to March 2023 \(experimental statistics report\) - NHS Digital](#)

It is also an offence to fail to protect a girl from FGM and if an offence is committed each person responsible for the girl at the time can be prosecuted. The offence carries up to seven years' imprisonment or a fine or both.

Wider Evidence

NHS Digital reported that 33,950 women and girls who had undergone FGM have been seen at NHS services since April 2015. Where the data is available, for 92.1% FGM was undertaken under the age of 18¹⁰³.

More than 2,600 women and girls living in West Yorkshire are estimated to have undergone FGM. The State of Women's Health in Leeds report published in 2019 found that within Leeds it is calculated that there are approximately 1,787 women who have experienced FGM. The majority of those are aged 15-49 (82%), but 197 (11%) are aged between 0-14¹⁰⁴. Recent figures from the NHS found that 90 patients with FGM injuries were seen in Bradford during 2022, an increase from 80 patients in the previous year¹⁰⁵.

Although FGM is hidden in nature and extremely underreported, a 2015 report by the Black Health Initiative¹⁰⁶, based in Leeds, recognised the district as an area of good practice in supporting victims of FGM, especially through Haamla, a unique service for women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

In 2022, ITV¹⁰⁷ reported on survivors of FGM from West Yorkshire in order to raise awareness of the abuse and encourage others to get help. The Blossom Clinic, which opened in Leeds in 2018, and has recently opened a second clinic in Bradford, offers survivors advice about FGM, provides counselling, and any medical procedures women may need as a result.

¹⁰³ [FGM 2023 Q1 - NHS England](#)

¹⁰⁴ [The State of Women's Health in Leeds](#)

¹⁰⁵ [Rise in Bradford FGM victims seen by NHS services | Bradford Telegraph and Argus](#)

¹⁰⁶ [FGM Conference Evaluation Report 2014](#)

¹⁰⁷ ['They're killing us': West Yorkshire FGM survivors speak out | ITV News Calendar](#)

Spotlight: Haamla

Haamla is a unique service that provides essential support for pregnant women and their families, from ethnic minority communities, including asylum seekers and refugees, throughout their pregnancy and postnatal period. It aims to improve access within maternal services, empower and inform women of the choices available during their pregnancy and birth, to improve their health and wellbeing.

Services include:

- Bi-lingual support workers available at Children's Centres, including support with social, religious and cultural needs, and bereavement support.
- Antenatal groups for women who need language support.
- Volunteer doula service for practical and emotional support during pregnancy, birth and for up to 6 weeks after your baby is born.
- Midwifery team providing enhanced antenatal and postnatal care to women seeking asylum and some other vulnerable women from ethnic minority groups.

Forced Marriage

Background

Forced marriage, which can be linked to honour-based abuse (although this is not always the case), is where one or both individuals do not, or cannot (for example those with particular learning disabilities), consent to a marriage.¹⁰⁸ Victims may be emotionally or physically blackmailed or threatened to go through with the marriage. Whilst both women and men experience forced marriage (one in five victims are men), women and girls face disproportionate harm as a result, including losing access to education, employment, and financial and personal autonomy.

¹⁰⁸ [What is forced marriage? | Metropolitan Police](#)

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 made it a criminal offence to force someone to marry. This includes taking someone overseas, doing anything to cause a child to marry before their eighteenth birthday, or causing someone who lacks the mental capacity to consent to get married. Forcing someone into marriage can result in a sentence of up to seven years in prison.

Wider Evidence

In 2021, the Forced Marriage Unit gave advice and support in 337 cases relating to a possible forced marriage and/or possible female genital mutilation. 35% involved victims under the age of 18 and 74% involved women victims. In 2021, 10% of cases came from Yorkshire & the Humber. Data from 2018 found that victims are most often from a Pakistani background (36.7%), followed by Bangladeshi (10.8%) and Somalian (7.6%)¹⁰⁹. The ethnicity of victims of forced marriage is relevant to West Yorkshire given the diverse population, particularly in Bradford where 25.5% of the population are of Pakistani ethnicity.

The case of Somaiya Begum, a young woman living in Bradford who was murdered by her uncle after refusing a forced marriage, drew media attention which called for more to be done to support victims. In 2021, family courts in England and Wales made 324 forced marriage protection orders (FMPO), an injunction which imposes restrictions on perpetrators. In the case of Somaiya Begum, an FMPO had been issued to her father after he had used threats of violence to force her to marry a cousin. However, the order failed to protect her from other family members, including her uncle, who ultimately killed her.

Although there was a drop in the number of FMPOs issued during the pandemic, school closures posed additional risks for potential victims of forced marriage by removing routes by which to disclose and seek support. Whilst the pandemic might have prevented individuals travelling for forced marriages, it is likely that following the pandemic the risk of in-country and cross-border forced marriages may increase¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁹ [The State of Women's Health in Leeds](#)

¹¹⁰ [The nature of domestic violence experienced by Black and minoritised women and specialist service provision during the Covid-19 pandemic](#)

Sexual Offences

Background

“Sexual violence is as different from sex as drowning is from swimming.” – Rape Crisis

Several crimes are included in the umbrella term ‘sexual offences’. The CPS include non-consensual crimes such as rape or sexual assault, crimes against children including child sexual abuse or grooming, and crimes that exploit others for a sexual purpose, whether in person or online¹¹¹. Offenders can be strangers, friends, acquaintances, current or ex-partners, or family members.

Defendants in sexual offence cases are more likely to plead not guilty than in other types of cases. As a result, a jury trial is required and with the postponement of jury trials during 2020, due to the pandemic, and the additional time needed to hold a jury trial, sexual violence cases have been and continue to be disproportionately affected by the Crown Court backlog¹¹².

In June 2022, 380 days on average passed between an adult rape case arriving at the Crown Court and its completion, this represents a 53% increase in time since December 2019 and is 143 days longer than other criminal cases. When factoring in the time taken for the police to charge the offender and then the CPS making a charge after a police referral, adult survivors can expect to wait 839 days (2.3 years) from the reporting of an offence of rape to the case completion in court.

Rape and assault by penetration

Background

“Rape is often described as unwanted or forced ‘sex’, but sex can only happen when everyone consents. If there is no consent then it’s not sex, it’s rape. No matter the circumstances.” – Rape Crisis¹¹³

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 states rape is when a person intentionally penetrates another's vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, without consent. Assault by penetration¹¹⁴ is the intentional penetration of another person's vagina or anus with any part of the body other than a penis, or by using an object, without consent¹¹⁵. A person consents to sexual activity only if they agree by choice, and they have the freedom and the capacity to make that choice and consent can be withdrawn at any

¹¹¹ [Sexual offences | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

¹¹² [Breaking Point - The re-traumatisation of rape and sexual abuse survivors in the Crown Courts backlog](#)

¹¹³ [What is rape? | Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)

¹¹⁴ [Sexual Offences Act 2003](#)

¹¹⁵ [What is rape and sexual assault? | Metropolitan Police](#)

time¹¹⁶. Statutory rape involves cases where the victim cannot consent due to their age.

Wider Evidence

Rape is a crime of basic intent and drunkenness cannot be used as a defence. Both rape and assault by penetration carry a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and are viewed as one of the most complex cases the CPS prosecutes. The average sentence for rape in England is between 4-19 years depending on the circumstances of the case.

The following table presents the principal harm factors that should be taken into account¹¹⁷.

Harm	
Category 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme violence • The extreme nature of one or more category 2 factors that may elevate to category 1
Category 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnancy or STI as a consequence of rape • Additional degradation/humiliation • Abduction/detention • Prolonged/sustained incident • Use of violence • Context of habitual sexual abuse • Forced entry into victim's home
Category 3	Factor(s) in categories 1 and 2 not present

TABLE 4 - PRINCIPAL HARM FACTORS RELATING TO RAPE

Until recently, the term stealthing was relatively unknown. Stealthing is non-consensual condom removal during sex. This act falls under the legal concept of 'conditional consent' as consent was given to condom-protected sex¹¹⁸.

The Centre for Women's justice estimate that 85,000 women are raped every year, of which only 2 in 10 will report to the police¹¹⁹. In comparison to the number of reports made to the police, the number of charges and summonses is extremely low. Whilst public awareness of rape is rising, confidence in the justice system continues to rapidly decline. The 2022 Victim Survey¹²⁰ found only 10% were confident that the criminal justice system is effective and 8% were confident that they could receive justice by reporting a crime. Intrusive investigations, evidential thresholds and court backlogs

¹¹⁶ [Key facts about how the CPS prosecutes allegations of rape | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

¹¹⁷ [Rape - Sentencing Council](#)

¹¹⁸ [Stealthing and Conditional Consent - Reeds Solicitors LLP](#)

¹¹⁹ [The decriminalisation of rape: why the justice system is failing rape survivors and what needs to change](#)

¹²⁰ [2022 Victim Survey - Victims Commissioner](#)

are noted as some of the many reasons why rape victims do not get justice. The thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape¹²¹ evidence that on average 706 days elapsed from when the offence was reported to the start of the trial. These reasons are further compounded when considering the intersecting identities of the victim. Recent findings from Now Then¹²² shows that when a non-disabled woman reports rape to South Yorkshire Police, it is twice as likely that the person she accuses will be charged or summonsed compared to when a disabled woman reports.

Under the current legislation in England and Wales, there is no statute of limitations for rape and other serious sexual offences. This means charges can be brought irrespective of when the offence took place. Late reporting may be due to trauma of the incident, fear of repercussions or going to court, maturity with age recognising the abuse, control or coercion of the perpetrator¹²³.

Deep-rooted sexism and objectification are societal attitudes which have led to misconceptions and the trivialisation of sexual violence and abuse. These attitudes have constructed and continue to perpetuate rape myths which shift blame from the perpetrator to the victim and reduce empathy despite **all** culpability being with perpetrator. These misconceptions were evident in the CPS's research into the public understanding of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) and consent. The research showed the public's accurate understanding of rape to be outweighed by false beliefs, misunderstanding, lack of knowledge, and underlying stereotypes¹²⁴. An example being, only 36% of respondents correctly identified women rarely make up rape allegations.

Pervasive and damaging myths include how rape is perpetrated by a stranger, is more likely to occur in public or outdoor spaces and victims are required to fight back. However, 5 in 6 rapes against women are carried out by someone they know which includes acquaintances, ex/current partner, friends, and family etc. Of the cases prosecuted in 2019-20, 335 were cases of domestic abuse flagged rape and accounted for 16% of all rape prosecutions. Home Office findings also suggest that rapes committed by partners and ex-partners entail the highest occurrence of multiple rape attacks, are more than twice as likely to result in injury than attacks by strangers. The majority of rape offences occur in or near the victims' home or at the home of an acquaintance or friend. There are also pre-convinced ideas that rapes are falsely reported, however false rape allegations are rare and at similar levels to other crimes.

¹²¹ [A joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape – Phase two: Post-charge](#)

¹²² [Justice Gap - What the data says | Now Then Sheffield \(nowthenmagazine.com\)](#)

¹²³ [CPS Consultation - Our Response | Notts SVS Services](#)

¹²⁴ [CPS and Equally Ours: Research into the public understanding of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences \(RASSO\) and consent | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

The CPS survey¹²⁵ highlighted worrying issues from respondents aged 18-24 years, as they supported assumptions and misconceptions more than older respondents. Only 53% recognised that it can still be rape if a victim doesn't resist or fight back and 42% recognised that being in a relationship or marriage does not mean consent to sex can be assumed. It is important to note that remaining silent or not showing resistance to the sexual activity does not equal consent. Resistance and self-protection and defence can be through dissociation, freezing or trying to befriend the perpetrator.

The meta-analysis of 9 studies by Hald and Malamuth (2010)¹²⁶ showed a significant association between pornography use among adult men and attitudes supporting violence against women, such as 'rape myth acceptance'. The association was found to be significantly stronger for violent pornography than non-violent pornography.

Sexual violence and rape are about ideas of power and control. *“So called “corrective rape” is a term used to describe rape which purports to ‘punish’ or ‘cure’ [‘prove’] someone’s sexuality and/or gender identity¹²⁷”*. It can also be perpetrated against trans men and women, cisgender, gay and bisexual men and arises as an issue in so-called honour-based abuse. Research carried out by Galop¹²⁸ in 2020 into LGBT+ people's experiences of sexual violence in the UK found that almost a quarter of respondents (220 of 935) said yes to having experienced sexual violence that they believed was intended to convert them to heterosexuality or their assigned gender at birth, or to punish them for their gender or sexual identity.

Another pervasive rape myth is that sex workers cannot be raped. This is not true. The threat of prosecution for loitering or soliciting may prevent street-based sex workers or women who are being sexually exploited from reporting rape and other violent offences. Research suggests that sex worker see their victimisation as not being taken as seriously and are largely not believed by the police¹²⁹. When offences are reported the credibility of the victim is examined and there are blame attributions. During 2020 and the Covid-19 lockdown, National Ugly Mugs (NUM)¹³⁰ received 603 reports containing 723 accounts of harm to sex workers, of which 41% (295 reports) were of physical violence including rape, attempted rape, sexual assault, and condom removal¹³¹.

¹²⁵ [More to do to tackle rape misconceptions and lack of understanding of consent, CPS survey finds | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

¹²⁶ Hald, G.M., Malamuth, N.N., & Yuen, C. (2010). 'Pornography and Attitudes Supporting Violence against Women: Revisiting the Relationship in Nonexperimental Studies'. *Aggressive Behavior*, 36(1): 14-20

¹²⁷ [Rape and Sexual Offences - Chapter 5: Issues relevant to particular groups of people | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

¹²⁸ [The use of sexual violence as an attempt to convert or punish LGBT+ people in the UK - Galop](#)

¹²⁹ Zvi, L. (2022). Police Perceptions of Sex-worker Rape Victims and Their Offenders: A Vignette Study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(15-16), NP14189-NP14214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211005140>

¹³⁰ National Ugly Mugs (NUM) is a UK-wide charity which was founded in 2012. NUM provides a UK-wide reporting and alerting service where sex workers, frontline services and police forces report harms against sex workers.

¹³¹ [Why Report? Sex Workers who Use NUM Opt out of Sharing Victimisation with Police | Sexuality Research and Social Policy \(springer.com\)](#)

Previous FOI data¹³² suggested that charge rates for white rape victims/survivors was 6.7%, 5.5% for Black victims, 4.5% for mixed race victims and 3.7% for Asian victims. This means that cases with white victims and survivors were 1.2 times and 1.8 times more likely than Black victims and Asian victims, respectively, to result in a charge.

Sexual Assault

Background

Sexual assault refers to many different forms of sexual violence where physical, psychological, and emotional violation in the form of a sexual act are inflicted upon someone else without their consent.¹³³

Experiencing sexual assault can have a wide range of impacts, including physical, emotional, and psychological. Each survivor reacts to experiences of sexual assault differently, but impacts can include feelings of guilt, shame and loneliness. Victims may also experience post-traumatic stress disorder, the symptoms of which include depression, flashbacks, and suicidal thoughts. Victims may also experience alcohol misuse, self-harming behaviour, and relationship difficulties.¹³⁴

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 states that sexual assault happens if:

- They intentionally touches another person
- This touching is sexual
- The other person does not consent to the touching
- They do not reasonably believe that the other person consents
- The touching can be with any part of the body or with anything else

This can include, but is not limited to the following behaviours:

- Kissing
- Attempted rape
- Touching someone's breasts or genitals – including through clothing
- Touching any other part of the body for sexual pleasure or in a sexual manner
- Pressing up against another person for sexual pleasure
- Pressuring, manipulating or scaring someone into performing a sexual act on the perpetrator
- Touching someone's clothing if done for sexual pleasure or in a sexual manner

Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 an offender can receive a sentence of imprisonment up to 10 years.

¹³² [EVAW-snapshot-report-FINAL-030322.pdf \(endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk\)](#)

¹³³ [What is rape and sexual assault? | Metropolitan Police](#)

¹³⁴ [The Effects of Sexual Violence | The Survivors Trust](#)

Violence Against Women and Girls Evidence Synthesis

For the year ending December 2023, 191,052 sexual offences were recorded by the police. Although this is a 2% decrease on the previous year, sexual offences remain 187% higher than the year ending March 2020¹³⁵. Of these, 68,387 were rape offences and the remainder were other sexual offences. For the year ending March 2023, Home Office data showed that only 3.6% of reported sexual offences resulted in a charge or summons¹³⁶.

Wider Evidence

Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority women, nationally, are disproportionately impacted by sexual assault. In the year ending March 2020, mixed race women were most likely to experience sexual assault (3.62%), followed by Black women (2.89%), compared to white women (3.7%). In addition, disabled individuals are more likely to experience sexual assault than non-disabled individuals (5.8% compared to 2.8%). However, these figures do not include sexual violence experienced by those living in institutions and/or care homes¹³⁷.

22% of respondents to the Government's 2020 Sexual Harassment survey reported being sexually assaulted in their lifetime and 6% had experienced this in the previous 12 months¹³⁸. This was highest for women aged 16-24 with 15% having been sexually assaulted in the previous year and for members of the LGBTQIA+ community (14% compared to 6%). Further evidence of sexual violence against members of the LGBTQIA+ community based on research by Galop shows that 65% of survey respondents had experienced sexual assault and over half felt this was linked to their sexuality¹³⁹.

The rise of sexual assault in UK universities has become increasingly concerning. Data shows that between March 2018 and March 2020 students in England and Wales were over three times more likely to have experienced sexual assault than average.

Research by Revolt Sexual Assault found that 62% of all students and graduates experienced sexual violence at UK universities. Relevant to this profile, the figure rises to 70% for students who are women, 48% of whom have experienced sexual assault. This was also slightly increased for students with a disability, 54% of whom have experienced sexual assault.

Only 6% of students reported their sexual assault to their university and the same figure reported to the police. The barriers to reporting included thinking the incident 'wasn't serious enough', feeling ashamed, and not knowing how to make a report.

¹³⁵ [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

¹³⁶ [Crime outcomes in England and Wales 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

¹³⁷ [Violence Against Women and Girls Snapshot report 2021-22](#)

¹³⁸ [2020 Sexual Harassment Survey](#)

¹³⁹ [LGBT+ People and Sexual Violence | Galop](#)

Violence Against Women and Girls Evidence Synthesis

Students reported significant impacts on their daily lives, self-confidence, and mental health as a result of experiencing sexual violence¹⁴⁰.

The experiences of girls at school is also worrying. The End Violence Against Women Coalition found that 24% of girls in mixed sex schools had experienced unwanted sexual touching in school and these experiences are compounded by racism, ableism, and homophobia¹⁴¹. Experiencing sexual violence at school can have negative consequences for girls, leading to lower school engagement, anxiety, poor self-esteem, alienation from teachers, and poor academic achievement.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ [Research - Revolt Sexual Assault](#)

¹⁴¹ [It's #AboutTime - A whole school approach to ending violence against women and girls](#)

¹⁴² [Comparing the impact of bullying and sexual harassment victimization on the mental and physical health of adolescents](#)

Street Harassment

Background

Street harassment is unwanted behaviour in public areas. Behaviour can include but is not exclusive of¹⁴³:

- unsolicited sexualised or offensive comments or gestures
- unwanted whistling or honking, so-called 'catcalling'
- indecent exposure
- intrusive staring
- unwanted touching
- being insulted or shouted at
- feeling physically threatened

Public areas include:

- streets
- shopping centres
- public transport
- hospitality venues
- public events
- parks and other public recreational spaces.

Unwelcome and persistent sexual advances can also be referred to as public sexual harassment. The Women and Equalities Committee (2018) noted that public sexual harassment “*reduces women and girls’ freedom to enjoy public life, and can negatively affect feelings of safety, bodily autonomy and mental health*¹⁴⁴”.

There is not a specific offence of street harassment which can limit our understanding of prevalence. Depending on the circumstance there are several offences which can be used to respond including offences under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the Public Order Act 1986 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003. It is unclear the effectiveness of these but as part of the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls strategy, the Home Office are said to be working with the College of Policing and others to produce new advice on existing laws for police officers to respond to street harassment more effectively¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴³ [Understanding street harassment | Neighbourhood Watch Network](#)

¹⁴⁴ [Sexual harassment of women and girls in public places - Women and Equalities Committee](#)

¹⁴⁵ [Tackling violence against women and girls’ strategy \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK](#)

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 says someone commits exposure if they intentionally expose their genitals and intend that someone will see them and be caused alarm or distress. This is sometimes also referred to as indecent exposure or 'flashing'. Someone who commits exposure can be sentenced for up to two years in prison.

Exhibitionism refers to sexual arousal achieved from showing others one's own genitals, or from sex acts (Turvey, 2023)¹⁴⁶. This often occurs in public and can include masturbation, oral sex, vaginal sex, and anal sex committed in front of an audience. Previous research by McNally and Fremouw (2014)¹⁴⁷ estimated that 5 to 10% of exhibitionistic perpetrators were found to escalate to contact sexual offending, over an average follow-up period of greater than five years, while approximately 25% committed another exhibitionistic offence. The research found the most supported risk factor for escalation was a general clustering of antisocial behaviour, including a history of sexual and nonsexual convictions. At present, there is a lack of robust evidence exploring escalation which means the current evidence base cannot provide consistent findings about how or why this escalation in behaviour occurs¹⁴⁸.

Wider Evidence

Research examining misogyny hate crime in Nottingham¹⁴⁹ found that 75% of people who had experienced street harassment reported that it had a long-term impact on them, with 63% reporting that they changed their behaviour as a result. Of the participants, only 7% of victims reported the incident to the police. Women from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority groups often experienced simultaneous racism and misogyny hate crime. A 2014 survey by Transport for London¹⁵⁰ indicated there were differences in incidences of sexual harassment in public places based on ethnic or cultural backgrounds. The findings showed that 8% of white adults and 10% of adults from Black or Ethnic Minority backgrounds experienced unwelcome sexual behaviour.

A Bradford university student said street harassment is debilitating¹⁵¹ when speaking about harassment from men when walking around the university campus. This led to students feeling threatened and unsafe.

In the year ending March 2022, national figures show that 22% of women aged 16 to 34 years and 16% aged 35 to 44 years reported having experienced being insulted or shouted at by a stranger in public in the past 12 months. These figures rise to 38% for 16 to 34 years and 18% for 35 to 44 years regarding experiencing catcalls, whistles,

¹⁴⁶ [Exhibitionism - an overview | ScienceDirect Topics](#)

¹⁴⁷ McNally, M., & Fremouw, W. (2014). Examining Risk of Escalation: A Critical Review of the Exhibitionistic Behavior Literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 19, 474-485. 10.1016/j.avb.2014.07.001.

¹⁴⁸ [Sarah Everard: we still treat indecent exposure as merely a 'nuisance' offence \(port.ac.uk\)](#)

¹⁴⁹ [Misogyny Hate Crime Evaluation Report - Nottingham Women's Centre](#)

¹⁵⁰ [Safety and security annual report 2013/14 \(tfl.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁵¹ [Bradford police operation to tackle street sexual harassment - BBC News](#)

unwanted sexual comments or jokes from a stranger in a public place in the past 12 months¹⁵².

A YouGov survey (2022) conducted by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust found high levels of violent, aggressive, sexual and unwanted behaviours against employees working or on their way to work in the night-time economy. Women were found to be more likely than men to have experienced harassment within or on their way to work, with 44% of women compared with 26% of men. The survey found that the perpetrator was a man in most of the reported cases of harassment (83%)¹⁵³.

In 2021, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for UN Women published a report on sexual harassment in public spaces¹⁵⁴. The findings showed 71% of women of all ages in the UK had experienced a form of sexual harassment in a public space – with young women reporting high incidence. Of those surveyed, only 3% of women aged 18-24 reported not having experienced sexual harassment. Regarding reporting their experience, women of all ages cited not believing the incident was serious enough (55%) or not thinking reporting would help (45%) as the main reasons for not reporting harassment to the police.

Recent Ministry of Justice (2023) analysis¹⁵⁵ which examined the escalation in the severity of offending behaviour suggested that exposure as a precursor for escalation had a strong positive association with sexual homicide, but it had a strong negative association with serious sexual assault by those with a sexual offence history. The report showed that offences related to kerb crawling and voyeurism had very strong positive associations but were only present for three and one of the perpetrators respectively.

¹⁵² [Stalking and Harassment](#)

¹⁵³ [National Personal Safety Day 2022 \(suzylamplugh.org\)](#)

¹⁵⁴ [Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces](#)

¹⁵⁵ [Escalation in the severity of offending behaviour \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Misogyny

Background

Misogyny can be described as *“the hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women and girls”*¹⁵⁶ and it prevalent throughout society. Misogyny as a concept has been evolving and so is difficult to define. The Scottish Government’s Working Group on Misogyny and Criminal Justice define misogyny as *“a way of thinking that upholds the primary status of men and a sense of male entitlement, while subordinating women and limiting their power and freedom. Conduct based on this thinking can include a range of abusive and controlling behaviours including rape, sexual offences, harassment and bullying, and domestic abuse”*¹⁵⁷.

Examples of sexist and misogynistic behaviour includes¹⁵⁸¹⁵⁹:

- Using misogynistic language casually, e.g., ‘girly’ as an insult
- Pervasive abuse and harassment, offline and online, using insulting or sexualised language
- Considering feminism as a negative influence
- Objectification of women and girls based on looks
- Believing in traditional gender norms
- Joking about sexual violence towards women and girls
- Issuing threats of harm or invoking harms to cause fear and distress
- The growing ‘incel’ culture advocating misogynistic viewpoints

Wider Evidence

Experiencing misogyny has long-term impacts on victims with many altering their future behaviour, for example avoiding an area or only going out with others following experiences of misogyny. Young women who experience sexism and misogyny also report a lower satisfaction with life and these experiences are associated with depression and poor mental health.¹⁶⁰

Misogyny is an ever-growing concern in school environments. Ofsted’s 2021 review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges found that 92% of girls and 74% of boys said sexist name-calling happens a lot or sometimes to them and their peers¹⁶¹. Evidence

¹⁵⁶ [Tackling misogyny](#)

¹⁵⁷ [Living with misogyny; where it happens, who it happens to, and the harm it causes - Misogyny – A Human Rights Issue](#)

¹⁵⁸ [Get It Right For Girls](#)

¹⁵⁹ [Living with misogyny; where it happens, who it happens to, and the harm it causes - Misogyny – A Human Rights Issue](#)

¹⁶⁰ [Impact of Sexism on Young Women's Mental Health](#)

¹⁶¹ [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges - GOV.UK](#)

given to the recently published Women and Equalities Committee report, *Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings*, stated that those working with young people in schools felt that negative attitudes towards women and girls had worsened during the pandemic, during which schools were unable to counter the views young people were encountering online¹⁶². A study¹⁶³ published in early 2024 used algorithmic modelling to explore how social media algorithms were exposing young people to harmful content. The research found that after only 5 days of using the social media platform TikTok, there was a fourfold increase in the level of misogynistic content present on the 'For You' page. Children and young people's exposure to misogynistic material on TikTok, the research found, can be traced into mainstream youth cultures including within the school environment, normalising sexism and misogyny. Public figures, such as Andrew Tate, have popularised misogynistic views amongst young people with research showing that 1 in 5 (21%) of men aged 16 to 29 who had heard of him saying they had a positive view¹⁶⁴. A 2023 report from Women's Aid highlighted the dangers posed by Andrew Tate's views, finding that children and young people exposed to content such as his, were almost five times more likely to view hurting someone physically as acceptable if you apologise afterwards¹⁶⁵.

In December 2021, the House of Lords asked the Government to consider making misogyny a hate crime to recognise the sexual harassment experienced by women and girls. The West Yorkshire Mayor, Tracy Brabin, and Deputy Mayor, Alison Lowe, were supportive of this. However, in February 2022, this proposal was rejected due to concern this would be counter-productive by making it more difficult to prosecute serious violent crimes against women.

As part of the Mayor's pledge to act on women and girls' safety, West Yorkshire Police, since December 2021, have started to record misogyny related crimes. In practice this means when someone has been a victim of a crime the police will record whether the victim feels the incident was motivated by their sex. This replicates the Nottinghamshire Police Pilot which began in 2016, where Nottinghamshire Police were the first police force to expand its hate crime categories to include misogynistic hate incidents. The pilot's evaluation¹⁶⁶ found that 6.6% of respondents had reported incidents of misogynistic harassment to the police and all of these were aware of the hate crime initiative. Despite the low number of women reporting misogynistic hate crimes, an increase in reporting was observed as well as increased confidence in how the police will respond to these incidents.

Data and evidence specific to West Yorkshire about misogyny in the region is sparse, as well as not being a hate crime, misogyny as a concept is hard to define since it has

¹⁶² [Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings](#)

¹⁶³ [Safer Scrolling - University of Kent](#)

¹⁶⁴ [Emerging tensions? How younger generations are dividing on masculinity and gender equality](#)

¹⁶⁵ [Influencers and Attitudes - Women's Aid](#)

¹⁶⁶ [Misogyny Hate Crime Evaluation Report | Nottingham](#)

become so pervasive within society proliferating beyond public spaces and increasing in frequency online.

Across West Yorkshire there is evidence of a number of campaigns aimed at tackling sexism and misogyny. For example, last year Leeds United launched a partnership with Her Game Too¹⁶⁷, a community organisation tackling sexism and championing women in sport, to raise awareness of sexist abuse in football. This is pertinent considering a recent study found that more than two thirds of male football fans hold hostile, sexist, or misogynistic attitudes towards women's sport¹⁶⁸.

Bradford Council has also partnered with Empowering Minds, an educational organisation, to run a series of workshops exploring what misogyny is and how it can be addressed. The workshops aim to enable productive conversations between men and women and ensure both genders feel empowered. In addition, the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership funded EdShift CIC¹⁶⁹ to provide a VAWG intervention in schools so young people feel equipped to identify and challenge the root causes of VAWG including sexism, sexist language, stereotypes, and abuses of male privilege.

¹⁶⁷ [Leeds partner with Her Game Too to raise awareness of sexist abuse in football](#)

¹⁶⁸ [Women in sport: misogyny among male fans - Durham University](#)

¹⁶⁹ [EdShift Home - EdShift](#)

Online crimes

Online spaces have led to the emergence of new forms of violence against women and girls. Consequently, women and girls around the world are at far greater risk of being subjected to certain forms of online violence compared to the wider population¹⁷⁰. The following sections provide further details about **four** online crimes against women.

Cyberflashing

Cyberflashing is a form of sexual harassment where someone digitally sends unsolicited sexual images or pornography to an unsuspecting person without their consent. Cyberflashing is primarily conducted via social media or dating apps but can also be over data sharing services such as Bluetooth or Airdrop. Cyberflashing can have long-term impacts on victims' wellbeing making them feel scared and unsafe. The term came into common parlance in 2015 when the first reported incident occurred on public transport.

Cyberflashing could previously be prosecuted under the Malicious Communications Act 1998 if the content is sent with the intent to cause distress and anxiety. Under the new Online Safety Bill, cyberflashing became a criminal offence with a sentence of up to two years. For this offence, victims will still have to prove intent to cause distress. As of February 2024, less than a month after the introduction of the Online Safety Bill, the first person has been convicted of cyberflashing and sentenced to 66 weeks in prison, a restraining order for 10 years, and a sexual harm prevention order for 15 years¹⁷¹.

Cyberflashing is disproportionately experienced by women, with research estimating that between 41%¹⁷² and 48%¹⁷³ of young women have received an unsolicited sexual photo. Among young girls' prevalence is even higher, with one study finding that 76% of girls aged 12-18 had been sent unsolicited nude images from boys or men (Ringrose, 2020). In addition, Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges found in their survey of other 800 students that 90% of girls and nearly 50% of boys said being sent explicit pictures or videos of things they did not want to see happens a lot or sometimes¹⁷⁴.

Analysis of Instagram data found that direct messages (DMs) are regularly being used to send image-based sexual abuse, including images/videos that would be defined as cyberflashing. A quarter of DMs sent to participants from strangers constituted image-

¹⁷⁰ [Identifying the challenges and solutions for tackling online Violence Against Women and Girls - Online Safety Data Initiative](#)

¹⁷¹ [Court jails first person convicted of cyberflashing in England | Crime | The Guardian](#)

¹⁷² [Four in ten young women have been sent unsolicited sexual images | YouGov](#)

¹⁷³ [Bumble - U.K. Government Accepts Bumble's Call to Make Cyberflashing a Crime](#)

¹⁷⁴ [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges - GOV.UK](#)

based sexual abuse, including sending pornography, cyberflashing, and deep fake images. 31.2% of instances of image-based sexual abuse were perpetrated by serial cyberflashers. Despite image-based sexual abuse breaking Instagram's Community Standards, the platform failed to act on these messages within 48 hours¹⁷⁵.

Experiences of cyberflashing have been described by victims as an invasion of their personal space and a violation of *"one's sexual autonomy, privacy, and right to everyday life"*. Victims also report increased depression, anxiety, and lower self-esteem after receiving unsolicited pictures¹⁷⁶.

Literature has discussed four main motivations for sending unsolicited pictures: 'transactional', sexual gratification and exhibitionism, threatening, harassing and causing distress, and masculine entitlement, power, and control¹⁷⁷. Transactionally motivated cyberflashing is considered to be the most common framing, *"underpinned by the hope that sending an unsolicited penis image will result in sexual images in return or instigate sexual activity"*. In a 2020 study approximately half of the men surveyed said they were in part motivated by the hope of receiving an image in return and a third hoped sending images would facilitate an in-person sexual encounter¹⁷⁸. Descriptions of cyberflashing as 'digital exhibitionism'¹⁷⁹ argue explanations that reflect those for physical flashing motivated by sexual arousal, some of which stems from the non-consensual aspect of cyberflashing. In some cases, cyberflashing is intended to harm women, with a UK survey finding that 30% of men who sent non-consensual images thought women would find these distressing and 25% thought they would find them threatening¹⁸⁰. A commonality between these different motivating factors is a desire to exercise power and control.

Cyberflashing can engender a sense of fear and threat for women, and its online nature means women's typical strategies to stay safe are disrupted, for example using a phone in public to avoid eye contact with men.

In Scotland, cyberflashing is already illegal, albeit not intentionally, under the Sexual Offences Act. There has been a rise in reports of cyberflashing offences, but 95% of reports do not result in a conviction. This is likely because the thresholds for prosecutions are too high¹⁸¹. There is concern that this problem will be replicated in the new Online Safety Bill legislation.

Although the Online Safety Bill criminalises cyberflashing, it is reliant upon intent which is hard to prove and could allow men to claim the images they send without consent are sent as 'jokes' UN Women UK, along with Grazia and Bumble, are campaigning for the law to take a consent-based approach, meaning if an obscene or sexual image

¹⁷⁵ [Hidden Hate - Center for Countering Digital Hate](#)

¹⁷⁶ [Understanding and Combatting Youth Experiences of Image-Based Sexual Harassment and Abuse](#)

¹⁷⁷ McGlynn, C. & Johnson, K. *Cyberflashing. Recognising Harms, Reforming Laws*

¹⁷⁸ [I'll Show You Mine so You'll Show Me Yours: Motivations and Personality Variables in Photographic Exhibitionism](#)

¹⁷⁹ [Digital Exhibitionism: Why Strangers are AirDropping Nudes to Unsuspecting Recipients](#)

¹⁸⁰ [Four in ten young women have been sent unsolicited sexual images | YouGov](#)

¹⁸¹ [More than 95% of cyberflashing goes unpunished in Scotland \(thetimes.co.uk\)](#)

is sent without consent this constitutes a cyberflashing offence. The motivations behind cyberflashing are varied, including misogyny, intent to cause distress, sexual gratification, humour, or to boost status, but the particular motive does not predict the harm experienced. By taking a motive-based approach to legislation creates a hierarchy of abuses which are not reflective of victims' experiences. Furthermore, as cyber facilitated sexual crimes become increasingly common, a consent-based approach provides a better basis for education and prevention about consent and sexual offences more widely¹⁸².

Cyberstalking

Background

Cyberstalking primarily takes place using technology including social media, mobile phones, messaging, GPS tracking and surveillance. The growth of media and communication platforms has led to a higher degree of technology-supported interactions¹⁸³. Cyberstalking can originate online, or it can be an extension or transfer of offline behaviours. It is however similar to 'traditional' stalking as both seek to cause fear and distress. Consequently, victims experience a continual state of anxiety which can impact their quality of life and force them to modify both online and offline behaviours¹⁸⁴.

More recently, most of the National Stalking Helpline cases involve elements of both online and offline contact. Cyberstalking can be experienced for many years and vary in intensity with some victims have reporting having experienced the abuse for more than 2 years¹⁸⁵.

Wider Evidence

Online spaces have created unequal opportunities whereby communication and surveillance can be easily and quickly facilitated with relatively low financial costs. There are also more contact points between the perpetrator and the victim, which can increase the intensity of the stalking behaviours. Coupled with the anonymity of the internet and its lack of physical proximity, perpetrators can behave in ways they would not in a contemporary 'real world' setting.

As a result of emerging technologies and Covid-19, there has been a rapid shift to a more virtual reliant reality. There is an increased reliance on online methods for shopping, dating, banking, appointments and communicating meaning there are more opportunities for personal details and whereabouts to be anonymously accessed.

¹⁸² [Why a Consent-Based Cyberflashing Offence will be more Straightforward](#)

¹⁸³ [A systematic literature review on cyberstalking. An analysis of past achievements and future promises - ScienceDirect](#)

¹⁸⁴ Acquadro Maran, D.; Varetto, A.; Zedda, M.; Franscini, M. Health care professionals as victims of stalking: characteristics of the stalking behavior, consequences, and motivation in Italy. *J. Interpers. Violence* 2017, 32, 2605–2625.

¹⁸⁵ [Suzy Lamplugh Trust submission to Online Safety Bill Committee](#)

Previous research conducted by YouGov (2017)¹⁸⁶ on behalf of Suzy Lamplugh Trust and funded by dating service, Match, showed that almost three quarters of online daters shared personal information about themselves earlier than they would do in other situations. Relationship formation can be accelerated and intensified causing individuals form deeply intimate bonds in a short time frame, these emotions can be exploited and increase risk if an individual is misrepresenting themselves or their intentions¹⁸⁷.

In their study comparing an age and gender matched sample of 36 off-line stalkers and 36 cyber stalkers, Cavezza and McEwan (2014)¹⁸⁸ concluded that in most cases both online and offline stalkers tended to be ex-intimate partner. Their findings supported existing evidence base which suggests there relatively few differences between the two.

Smart, internet-connected devices such as thermostats, Alexa's, cameras, and Bluetooth item finders can be used to survey victims¹⁸⁹. AirTags and smart watches have also been identified as means of tracking an individual's location without their consent¹⁹⁰. It is difficult to understand the extent of technology related stalking as means of surveillance can go unnoticed and methods can be easily changed. Smart devices are becoming more common in shared environments and homes, however control over smart home devices has been noted as being imbalanced among users. The person who installs the device tends to have more control over them. As a result, the capability of the device may not be fully understood by users. These devices can be remotely accessed meaning private conversations can be listened to and perpetrators can speak through them. This can allow perpetrators to coerce or intimidate victims¹⁹¹.

Revenge porn

Background

Revenge porn is the sharing of private, sexual materials, either photos or videos, of another person without their consent and with the intention of causing embarrassment or distress¹⁹².

The term 'revenge porn' can minimise the experience of victims as sharing intimate images without consent is not revenge as it is not warranted, and it is not porn but

¹⁸⁶ [Suzy Lamplugh Trust submission to Online Safety Bill Committee](#)

¹⁸⁷ [CIS Presentation \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁸⁸ [Cyberstalking versus off-line stalking in a forensic sample: Psychology, Crime & Law: Vol 20, No 10 \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

¹⁸⁹ [Abuse Vectors: A Framework for Conceptualizing IoT-Enabled Interpersonal Abuse](#)

¹⁹⁰ [Stalking victims reminded help is always available as lockdown eases \(npcc.police.uk\)](#)

¹⁹¹ [Technology and domestic abuse - POST \(parliament.uk\)](#)

¹⁹² [Revenge Porn](#)

abuse¹⁹³. Furthermore, revenge porn is commonly used as an overarching term which does not adequately cover all the aspects of intimate image abuse, for example, (s)extortion (use of sexual images or video for financial gain), threatening to share content, cyberflashing, or upskirting. Whilst we feel 'image-based sexual abuse' is a more accurate and inclusive term, we use 'revenge porn' throughout this profile to differentiate from cyberflashing, which is also a form of image-based sexual abuse.

Revenge porn is captured under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 which considers it an offence to disclose or to disclose a private sexual photograph or film and carries a sentence of up to two years imprisonment. Threatening to share intimate content is not included under this offence but was included under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 which makes it illegal. In June 2023, it was announced that upon the introduction of the Online Safety Bill, victims of revenge porn will no longer have to prove the perpetrator intended to cause distress.

Wider Evidence

It is challenging to ascertain the prevalence of 'revenge porn' and estimates range from 1.1% to 23% of the population¹⁹⁴. Revenge porn has been said to disproportionately affect women *'both in terms of the number of women affected and the amount of social stigma attached'*¹⁹⁵.

The accessibility of online spaces means sexual images shared without consent can be distributed across numerous platforms, including popular social media platforms and sites created specifically for revenge porn. Victims of revenge porn are greatly impacted feeling violated, vulnerable, and anxious¹⁹⁶, with many being further subjected to harassment, suffering from mental ill health, and in some cases taking their own life. Furthermore, the sharing of non-consensual sexual images online can be accompanied by a practice known as 'doxing'. Doxing is when a victim's personal details - usually their name, social media profile, and address - are published alongside the images or videos of them, leaving them more vulnerable to continued victimisation¹⁹⁷. More recently, the Online Safety Bill passed in October 2023, has also made the sharing of "deepfake" pornography illegal. "Deepfake" pornography is where artificial intelligence is used to place someone's image into pornographic material. These altered images can act as revenge porn, despite being fake images, and regardless of the purpose of them being created and distributed, victims experience the same emotional harm as victims of revenge porn using 'real' images.

¹⁹³ [Beyond 'Revenge Porn': The Continuum of Image-Based Sexual Abuse](#)

¹⁹⁴ [Adult Online Hate, Harassment and Abuse: A Rapid Evidence Assessment](#)

¹⁹⁵ [The right to be virtually clothed \(Cooper, P. 2016\)](#)

¹⁹⁶ [The Impact of Revenge Porn](#)

¹⁹⁷ Franklin, Z. (2014) 'Justice for revenge porn victims: Legal theories to overcome claims of civil immunity by operators of revenge porn websites', *California Law Review*, pp. 1303-1335.

In 2021, the Revenge Porn Helpline received 4,406 reports regarding experiences of revenge porn. Incidents of images being shared made up a quarter of Helpline cases, and cases of sextortion doubled from 2020 to 2021¹⁹⁸. 75% of cases reported in 2021 were from women victims. In 2020, in 25% of cases the perpetrator was known to the victim, and in 55% of cases they were a previous or current partner¹⁹⁹. ONS figures also suggest a link between revenge pornography and domestic abuse. 83% of recorded offences (376 prosecutions) between March 2018 and March 2019 were flagged as being domestic abuse-related²⁰⁰.

Following the criminalisation of revenge porn, police nationally received 1,160 reports in the first eight months²⁰¹. However, only 61% of these were pursued and, in the first year, only 206 perpetrators were prosecuted. In many instances victims were not aware that an image or video of them has been published online making it challenging to identify and report perpetrators²⁰².

Romance fraud

Background

Romance fraud is the exploitation of an individual's emotional needs and caring qualities with the intention of extracting money or personal information from them. This is an organised and staged process which can commonly occur on online dating websites or apps as perpetrators use fake profiles to establish a seemingly trusting relationship. Perpetrators will then use this connection to manipulate and persuade the victim, they can do this by distorting their perception of reality to make an individual feel that they are making reasonable and rational decisions²⁰³.

Wider Evidence

Requests for money can often be disguised or hidden in stories so that they do not cause alarm and explanations may seem reasonable and legitimate. Perpetrators can also isolate victims from friends and family by wanting the relationship to be kept a secret or evoking shame of where the relationship started. As victims become detached from their social networks, it can become easier for perpetrators to further manipulate the victim as they do not have 'reality checks' from friends and family²⁰⁴.

Perpetrators of romance fraud may use situations with "legitimate" urgency which are time sensitive to prompt victims to help or protect them. Victims can be told about housing, health or safety problems and feel compelled to help and intervene. These situations can involve panic and may require victims to act quickly without thinking or

¹⁹⁸ [Revenge Porn Helpline Cases and Trends 2021](#)

¹⁹⁹ [Intimate image abuse, an evolving landscape](#)

²⁰⁰ [Violence Against Women and Girls](#)

²⁰¹ [The Malevolent Side of Revenge Porn Proclivity: Dark Personality Traits and Sexist Ideology](#)

²⁰² [Revenge porn: More than 200 prosecuted under new law - BBC News](#)

²⁰³ [Staying Safe from Romance Fraud - Crimestoppers](#)

²⁰⁴ [Staying Safe from Romance Fraud - Crimestoppers](#)

verifying the request. The victim feels a sense of responsibility and if they do not solve the problem they are berated as a failure and disloyal.

Myths of shame and embarrassment are often associated with this offence however it shares similarities with other offences such as grooming, domestic abuse and coercive control²⁰⁵. A lack of understanding and empathy from others can lead to blaming the victim and invalidating their experience.

A Freedom of Information request received by West Yorkshire Police in 2022 detailed that there is no specific offence for romance fraud as this is recorded by false representation²⁰⁶. A West Midlands Police report, however, did show that their region had lost £2.8 million to romance fraud, with 347 reported victims in 2021²⁰⁷, thus showing the cost and impact of romance fraud.

In a May 2024 report from Crest Insights²⁰⁸, showed the emotional impact of online fraud for victims is worse than the financial aspect even when the loss was thousands of pounds. Feelings of shame and self-blame were experienced by many of the 90 participants involved in the research, especially by those who considered themselves 'tech-savvy'. Some victims felt they were less likely to receive compassion or empathy compared to if they were the victim of more 'traditional' crime types. Romance fraud victims described damage to their personal relationships as they became suspicious of people and for some, they lost friendships because of it.

²⁰⁵ [It wasn't your fault - Romance Fraud Practical Support Guide \(Thames Valley Police\)](#)

²⁰⁶ [January 2022 FOI 1012033-22 Romance Fraud](#)

²⁰⁷ [Romance Fraud \(594A/22\) - Freedom of Information - West Midlands Police](#)

²⁰⁸ [Behind the screen: perceptions and experiences of online fraud \(crestadvisory.com\)](#)

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Modern slavery

Modern slavery is a human rights violation and “*is the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation. It is a crime under the [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) and includes holding a person in a position of slavery, servitude forced or compulsory labour, or facilitating their travel with the intention of exploiting them*”²⁰⁹.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 (MSA) consolidates existing offences of slavery and human trafficking into a singular act, ensuring stricter sentences for perpetrators and requiring businesses, of a certain size, to be transparent ensuring modern slavery is not operating in their business or supply chains. If an individual is guilty of an offence under section 1 or 2 of the MSA they are subject to a maximum statutory penalty of life imprisonment.

Prosecutions under the MSA can be intertwined with the *Asylum and Immigration Act 2004* relating to trafficking people for exploitation, *Immigration Act 1971* for offences assisting or facilitating unlawful immigration and the *Human Rights Act 1998*.

As part of the MSA, Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders were introduced to restrict the activities of an unconvicted person where there is a risk that they will commit a trafficking offence. Breach of a Risk order is an offence punishable with up to 5 years imprisonment on conviction on indictment or up to six months' imprisonment on summary conviction.

Modern slavery is an exploitative crime which is both inter- and intra-national and ever evolving. It pierces social divisions such as age, gender and nationality. According to the Global Slavery Index²¹⁰ developed by Walk Free, there is an estimated 50 million people were living in modern slavery on any given day in 2021, and it is likely a significant underestimate. Due to the covert nature of modern slavery, it is difficult to produce an accurate prevalence measure meaning there is no one data source that accurately quantifies the number of victims in the UK²¹¹

Modern slavery is the removal of a person's freedom and disrupt an individual's sense of self. Nationally, there were 1,210 modern slavery offences recorded by police between October 2021 and March 2023. The covertness of this offence likely means figures are significant underestimates.

²⁰⁹ [Modern slavery and public health - GOV.UK](#)

²¹⁰ [Country Data | Global Slavery Index](#)

²¹¹ [Modern slavery in the UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

The mechanism used for identifying, referring and supporting victims of modern slavery is the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). First responder organisations such as the police, local authorities, the Gangmasters Licensing Authority and some designated charities, including Unseen have responsibility to refer into the NRM²¹². Individuals who are recognised as a potential victim of modern slavery through the NRM have access to relevant legal advice, accommodation usually for victims without recourse to public funds and a caseworker.

Human trafficking

"Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control of another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or removal of organs."²¹³

The Palermo Protocol is to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime. The Protocol was signed by the UK in December 2000 and ratified in February 2006²¹⁴. Section 48 of the Modern Slavery Act introduced a requirement to establish Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTAs) in England and Wales to represent child victims of modern slavery and ensure their best interests are taken into account for all decisions made about them.

Human trafficking for sexual exploitation is the arrangement, facilitation or travel of persons for sexual exploitation purposes. This has previously been referred to as 'sex trafficking' however this term removes the human element of this offence. An element of human trafficking is the commodification and disempowerment of women, as their trust and agency can be eroded. Women can be forced to work in the sex industry including pornography, phone sex lines, internet chat rooms and escort agencies. Sexual exploitation through human trafficking can appear to be consensual sex work but these interactions are not consensual as perpetrator are disproportionately profiting from the exchange²¹⁵. When trafficked for sexual exploitation, women are at a higher risk of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infections, psychological distress and also lasting mental ill health including anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicide ideation and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Whilst there are cases of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, it is important to not conflate the issues into one. Immigration status can deter survivors of human trafficking from reporting abuse

²¹² <https://www.unseenuk.org/>

²¹³ [Together Against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)

²¹⁴ [Palermo Protocol - European Commission](#)

²¹⁵ [Stage - Changing the Narrative Report \(prismic.io\)](#)

to the police as well as limit their access appropriate and necessary support. In their November 2023 report²¹⁶ exploring the realities of adult sexual exploitation, the STAGE partnership²¹⁷ found that 60% of women accessing STAGE who had experienced trafficking from overseas said they were uncomfortable talking to statutory agencies because they have feared that they will be criminalised due to their immigration status.

Wider Evidence

Individuals can also be forced to work long hours for low pay, or no pay, in poor conditions with threats of punishment or violence to them or their families. Many can be forced to stay in overcrowded and unsanitary accommodation with little food. Victims can be led into a spiral of debt bondage whereby the perpetrators 'deduct' costs of travel to the UK and accommodation from their promised salaries and ensuring debt continues to be accumulated. Forced labour can occur in various industries including construction, manufacturing, car washes, hospitality, food packaging, agriculture, maritime and beauty salons. In industries where protective clothing is needed, victims will often not be provided with the correct or appropriate equipment which can further endanger their health. Common commercial practices can create vulnerabilities in the workforce where criminality can thrive such as through complex supply chains, gaps in security and vetting, worker shortages worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic and changing immigration rules.

Domestic servitude is a commonly unidentified form of trafficking and forced labour, it is the second highest form of exploitation in which women and girls are most at risk and often takes place in conjunction with domestic abuse and sexual exploitation. The covert nature of domestic servitude makes it difficult to identify as it is performed in private residences as seemingly routine acts. However, this is used as cover for the exploitation and control.

Forced marriage has been discussed in detail [earlier](#) in this document but women and girls can be trafficked for the purpose of marriage. In all instances of child marriage, it is forced marriage because they cannot give full or free consent²¹⁸. Forced marriage can consist of several other forms of exploitation including forced labour, servitude, forced pregnancy. The promise of marriage has been used as a method of recruitment to traffic girls into sexual exploitation. This can also be referred to as a 'servile marriage', forced marriage can occur when a woman is forcibly transferred in exchange for a form of payment or when a widow does not have a choice and is inherited by one of her husband's male relatives²¹⁹.

²¹⁶ [Stage - Changing the Narrative Report \(prismic.io\)](#)

²¹⁷ The STAGE partnership is a consortium of charities; A Way Out, Ashiana, Angelou Centre, Basis Yorkshire, WomenCentre, Together Women, GROW and Changing Lives.

²¹⁸ ["I bought you. You are my wife": "Modern Slavery" and Forced Marriage](#)

²¹⁹ [Child/Forced/Servile Marriages ⇄ Human Trafficking](#)

Women and girls can be forced to commit criminal activities such as pick-pocketing, shoplifting, drug trafficking and cultivation, each of which carry penalties and create financial gain for the trafficker. Individuals can also be forced to beg in public areas or claim benefits on behalf of the trafficker²²⁰.

Illegal adoption involves the potential abduction and sale of a child as a commodity to facilitate an adult to parent and others to make money or exploit in other ways such as domestic servitude²²¹.

People can be vulnerable to exploitation due to various reasons including²²²:

- Fear of deportation
- Limited English skills
- Being trapped in debt
- Work visas that are with a singular employer
- Intimidation or threat of violence
- Fear and mistrust of authorities
- Mental health or substance use
- Remittance payments are needed to support families.

Forced prostitution

Throughout this section, there is reference to 'prostitution'. The VRP recognises the stigmatising and insensitivity of this term. As an organisation, we do not endorse this use of terminology or language and will avoid use, where possible. The term 'prostitution' will only be used if the specific research or legal guidance it was extracted from uses this or refers to this term.

There is not a singular offence of sexual exploitation of adults but there are a range of criminal offences which can be used to prosecute. CPS guidance refers to 'control' when referring to controlling prostitution for gain, however this includes, but is not limited to, 'compulsion', 'coercion' and 'force'. In reference to gain, this denotes "*financial advantage, including the discharge of an obligation to pay or the provision of goods or services (including sexual services) gratuitously or at a discount*"²²³. Children under 18 who have been exploited are treated as victims of abuse under current legislation.

Offences of causing, inciting or controlling prostitution for gain, or trafficking for sexual exploitation carry significant sentences. These offences also provide opportunities for

²²⁰ [Other types of exploitation | West Yorkshire Police](#)

²²¹ [Illegal adoptions | OHCHR](#)

²²² [Modern Slavery in Construction - Industry Information](#)

²²³ [Prostitution and Exploitation of Prostitution | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

seizure of assets through Proceeds of Crime Act orders and the application of Trafficking Prevention Orders.

Sexual exploitation and grooming

Adult sexual exploitation (ASE) and Child sexual exploitation (CSE) are forms of sexual abuse involving exploiting someone, sexually, for personal benefit through threats, bribes, and violence. Abusers may use threats and blackmail to force victims to take part in further sexual activity, using sexual exploitation to exert power and control.

Sexual exploitation can take many forms, including:

- Rape
- Sexual assault
- Being tricked or manipulated into having sex
- Being trafficked
- Being forced to share sexually explicit images
- Being forced to take part in or watch pornography
- Being victim to revenge porn

Adult sexual exploitation may involve organised crimes where adults are trafficked and sexually exploited on a large scale.

Sexual exploitation can result in an adult or child being in fear of being blamed or not believed, a lack of self-esteem and in some cases feelings of misplaced loyalties to the offenders²²⁴. Victims of child sexual exploitation in particular can become isolated from their friends, education, hobbies and interests, and begin to engage in dangerous behaviours.

Sexual exploitation, of both children and adults, overlaps with other forms of violence against women and girls, with many victims experiencing multiple types of violence at once or throughout their lives. Whilst sexual exploitation has been argued to be part of a continuum of violence against women and girls, there are also distinct elements particular to sexual exploitation that serve to disguise the abuse and cause the victims to feel implicated in the exploitative behaviour²²⁵.

²²⁴ [The impact of CSE | Ivison Trust](#)

²²⁵ [Exploratory study of the scale and nature of sexual exploitation of adults and transition aged young people](#)

Grooming is when a person builds a relationship with a child, young person, or adult in order to abuse and manipulate them²²⁶. Grooming can be perpetrated by a stranger, or someone known to the victim. In many cases, groomers try to isolate victims from their friends and family in order to make them dependent on the groomer as well as using blackmail to create feelings of guilt and shame within the victim. Grooming can involve children being given items such as food, accommodation, or drugs as part of the abuse.

A key element of grooming is shame, and children can feel a sense of complicity which makes it more difficult to identify abusive behaviour. Children who have experienced grooming can suffer from serious long-term mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal thoughts²²⁷.

In cases of adult exploitation, any sexual acts that occur without consent, or with an adult who lacks the mental capacity to consent, are criminal offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. For offences of child exploitation, offenders can be prosecuted under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 for causing or inciting sexual exploitation of a child, controlling a child in relation to sexual exploitation, and/or arranging or facilitating the sexual exploitation of a child. The maximum sentence for these offences are 14 years imprisonment.

²²⁶ [Grooming | Metropolitan Police](#)

²²⁷ [The impact of online grooming](#)

Spotlight: Basis Yorkshire STAGE project

Basis Yorkshire works to end stigma, create safety and promote empowerment for:

- sex workers living and/or working in Leeds
- women, young people experiencing sexual abuse and exploitation

The STAGE Project offers women support to address and overcome experiences of sexual exploitation. The STAGE projects supports in following ways:

- emotional support
- recognising exploitation and managing risk
- navigating the health system
- supporting you or advocating for you
- access to housing
- access to the criminal justice system
- moving on
- enabling your voice to be heard

The STAGE project brings together women's sector charities GROW, A WAY OUT, Together Women, Basis and WomenCentre to work across Yorkshire in areas where there are emerging, live and recent sexual exploitation investigations.

Adult Sexual Exploitation Background

Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 there are specific offences relating to the sexual exploitation and grooming of children, but no such equivalent crimes applying to adults, other than provisions for those with 'a mental disorder impeding choice'. However, even this is not framed around exploitation. The lack of statutory definition or specific legislation around adult sexual exploitation means discussions are typically framed in terms of sex work or prostitution, which can become victim-blaming in nature²²⁸.

Wider Evidence

It has been suggested that one of the reasons why the concept of ASE is limited may be because legal adults are considered to have *"sufficient experience, maturity, and capacity to make their own decisions, such as whether or not to consent to sexual activity."* As such, acts that are considered 'risky' are (incorrectly) viewed as individual choices.

A social model of 'abused consent' has been conceptualised²²⁹ which describes how the 'consent' given by victims of sexual exploitation can be distorted through different abusive/relationships and/or concepts. The model includes four types of 'abused consent':

1. 'Condoned' consent - where practitioners are either not trained to recognise or ignore sexual exploitation
2. 'Coerced' consent - covers the range of methods abusers use to coerce and manipulate people to gain control
3. 'Survival' consent - highlights the impact financial hardship has on decisions to exchange sex for items of need
4. 'Normalised' consent - refers to the normalisation of violence in intimate relationships and peer networks

An in-depth study²³⁰ focused on adult sexual exploitation in Thurrock, an area of South Essex, used case studies from the area to illustrate the continuum of ASE. The contexts where ASE takes place identified in the data collected were: CSE into adulthood, intimate partner violence, familial CSA into adulthood, prostitution/trafficking, institutional abuse and criminal exploitation.

²²⁸ Hallett, S. (2017) Making sense of child sexual exploitation: exchange, abuse and young people, Bristol: Policy Press

²²⁹ Pearce, J. (2013) A social model of 'abused consent', in Melrose, M. and Pearce, J. (eds.) Critical perspectives on sexual exploitation and related trafficking, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 52-68)

²³⁰ [Exploratory study of the scale and nature of sexual exploitation of adults and transition aged young people](#)

CSE that continued into adulthood was present in cases of young people in social care who had been exploited through county lines gangs and with whom services had lost contact with when they turned 18 and were referred to adult safeguarding due to the silos between services, for example. This context overlapped with examples of intimate partner violence as the perpetrator was often viewed as a 'boyfriend' figure. In cases of intimate partner violence, the woman often considered themselves to be in a loving relationship rather than being a victim of exploitation. Familial CSA into adulthood tended to involve victims with learning disabilities or long-term mental ill health where exploitation had continued or developed to involve additional perpetrators in adulthood. Prostitution and trafficking examples of adult sexual exploitation involved international trafficking into the sex industry and local trafficking such as county lines. Examples of institutional abuse were less common in this research, which may suggest there are safeguarding gaps with few cases coming to the attention of agencies. The final context, criminal exploitation, describes instances where ASE is linked to criminal activity. Cuckooing is an example of this, where Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) utilise the home of a vulnerable individual for criminal activity, including sexual activity.

Child Sexual Exploitation Background

The statutory definition of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), relating to children and young people up to the age of 18, is:

"Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity, (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology."
(Department of Education)²³¹

Child Sexual Exploitation can affect any child in any community, but children aged 12-15 years of age are most at risk, particularly in online spaces. Children with other vulnerabilities can be more at risk of experiencing child sexual exploitation. These vulnerabilities include the lack of a stable home environment, recent bereavement, social isolation, having a physical or learning disability, and being in care amongst others.

²³¹ [Child sexual exploitation | Department for Education](#)

Wider Evidence

The majority of recorded CSE crimes relate to child sexual abuse and 90% of offenders are male²³². Nationally, 12,569 police recorded offences were flagged as CSE in the year to March 2020²³³. There has been an increase of 290% in child sexual abuse offences since 2013.

Estimates of the prevalence of Child Sexual Exploitation in England (for 2016) vary from 1.1 to 137 children per 10,000²³⁴. West Yorkshire Police recorded falling numbers of child exploitation offences since 2017, with 700 offences in 2017/18, 632 in 2018/19, and 473 in 2019/20. It is not clear why recorded crimes have fallen so dramatically during this period.

The Force also reported the number of child exploitation and grooming offences involving social media recorded between 2018 and 2022. 109 offences were recorded for the year ending July 2022, 28% of these were flagged as CSE offences and 72% as grooming offences, with some flagged as both. The majority of both offences took place on Snapchat.

Although, by definition, child sexual exploitation, a considerable proportion of child sexual abuse involving women and girls is child-on-child through the creation and sharing of indecent images, usually of themselves, and so criminalising children for these offences is not considered necessary and appropriate²³⁵.

SafeLives research from 2015, found that 30% of young people supported by the service were either experiencing or at risk of experiencing child sexual exploitation. In more than three-quarters (77%) of cases where young people were at risk of CSE, the risk was considered to be increased due to the age of perpetrator. 60% of young people had experienced historic abuse, including neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse during their childhood²³⁶.

As with other forms of violence against women and girls the true prevalence is unknown. The State of Women's Health in Leeds report estimated that 11,777 girls in the city may have experienced sexual abuse as children and nearly half of the users of Support Against Rape & Sexual Violence Leeds are victims of child sexual abuse²³⁷.

It is even more difficult to ascertain the prevalence of child sexual abuse from Black, Asian, or Ethnic Minority backgrounds as they tend to be underrepresented in official figures. This could be because of resistance within statutory bodies to acknowledge children from some ethnic backgrounds as victims or because of the difficulty

²³² [Measuring the scale and changing nature of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation](#)

²³³ [Characteristics of group-based child sexual exploitation in the community: literature review](#)

²³⁴ [Measuring the scale and changing nature of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation](#)

²³⁵ [Child Sexual Abuse: Guidelines on Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse](#)

²³⁶ [Young people at risk of child sexual exploitation | SafeLives](#)

²³⁷ [The State of Women's Health in Leeds](#)

members of these communities' face in disclosing experiences of abuse²³⁸. For example, in some languages the terms 'child sexual abuse' and 'child sexual exploitation' are not easily translated and thus are seen as a 'Western' or 'White' problem²³⁹. This can be exacerbated by a lack of culturally or linguistically sensitive services which leave individuals unable to report abuse²⁴⁰. In addition, cultural pressure to maintain honour within a family or community present a barrier to disclosing experiences of sexual abuse or exploitation and in turn facilitate further abuse through silence²⁴¹. Furthermore, myths that Asian children are not sexually exploited because their families have more control over them are widely accepted²⁴².

It has been reported that, like other areas across the UK, West Yorkshire has experienced large-scale investigations into historic Child Sexual Exploitation. Examples include Operation Dalesway, an ongoing investigation into historic CSE crime in Bradford involving 37 suspects and Operation Tendersea, a successful investigation in which 38 men were convicted of historic offences in Kirklees²⁴³.

Child marriage can involve elements of child sexual exploitation. This differs from forced marriage in that, even legal marriages involving anyone under the age of 18 in the UK, including religious ceremonies, are considered child marriages. 34% of all reported marriages involving children under the age of 18 in the UK in the past three and a half years, happened in, or involved a victim from, West Yorkshire²⁴⁴. This figure is three times higher than numbers reported by the Metropolitan Police.

Grooming Background

The NSPCC have reported that online grooming crimes rose by more than 80% between 2018 and 2022²⁴⁵. In 2021/22, there were 6,591 Sexual Communication with a Child offences recorded, which is, on average, 126 offences per week²⁴⁶. Snapchat was the platform most commonly used by grooming perpetrators (in 33% of cases).

Grooming has also seen the steepest rise in Child Sexual Abuse offences, with a 34-fold increase since 2004²⁴⁷.

²³⁸ [Improving responses to the sexual abuse of Black, Asian and minority ethnic children](#)

²³⁹ Williams, M. (2018a) Working with a Community to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse in the Home. London: NSPCC

²⁴⁰ [Between the Lines - Service Responses to Black and Minority Ethnic Women and Girls Experiencing Sexual Violence](#)

²⁴¹ [Intra-familial Female Child Sexual Abuse within England's South Asian Communities - Kent Academic Repository](#)

²⁴² [The child sexual exploitation of young South Asian women in Birmingham and Coventry](#)

²⁴³ [Investigations into Child Sexual Abuse in West Yorkshire](#)

²⁴⁴ [West Yorkshire has 'country's highest number of recorded child marriages', report by Leeds honour abuse charity Karma Nirvana claims | Yorkshire Post](#)

²⁴⁵ [Online grooming crimes have risen by more than 80% in four years | NSPCC](#)

²⁴⁶ [Child sexual abuse in 2021/22: Trends in official data](#)

²⁴⁷ [The scale and nature of child sexual abuse: Review of evidence](#)

Grooming victims are mainly girls, with 82% of cases in 2021 having a female victim, and 39% of cases being girls aged 12-15 years old²⁴⁸. The 'boyfriend model' is a common method of offending in cases of grooming. This is where the offender grooms the victim into believing they are in a relationship, before abusing them and coercing them into being raped by other offenders. Offenders target victim's vulnerability and desire for affection and use this as a means of control. Within the boyfriend model, a traumatic bond can be formed between the perpetrator and the victim leading to feelings of guilt and a desire, by victims, to protect the perpetrator²⁴⁹.

Sex for rent

Sex for rent is an exploitative practice which refers to a situation where someone is asked to pay for housing costs in the form of sexual favours. Housing can be used as a vehicle for sexual harassment against women, for instance when entering a new tenancy, the offer of free accommodation, reduced rent or removal of rent arrears²⁵⁰.

At present there is limited data and evidence on the extent of sex for rent practices. However, it is likely that the current cost of living crisis, housing crisis and shortfalls in the housing system will increase the prevalence of sex for rent due to financial limitations in an increasingly pressured rental market.

This practice exploits the housing crisis and those most vulnerable²⁵¹. Women are entering an arrangement in which they have no control and are viewed as a resource. These exploitative arrangements, which are based on unequal power dynamics target those who believe they have no other choice in fear of becoming or remaining homeless.

There has only been one prosecution under current legislation, however the Online Safety Bill which is being reviewed in the House of Lords details tightening online protocols for online sex for rent advertisements. Under current legislation, it is an offence under any of the provisions of the Sexual Offences Act 2003—

- a) section 52 (causing or inciting prostitution for gain);
- b) section 53 (controlling prostitution for gain).

The Home Secretary is considering a new 'sex for rent' law to better protect victims. As such the Home Office has opened (April 2023) a call for evidence on 'sex-for-rent', and is seeking the views of victims, police and charities to better understand the scale and nature of 'sex for rent' exchange in the UK. The findings from this call could further support the development of 'sex for rent' processes and policies in West Yorkshire.

²⁴⁸ [Online grooming crimes have risen by more than 80% in four years | NSPCC](#)

²⁴⁹ [Working with children who are victims or at risk of sexual exploitation | Barnardo's model of practice](#)

²⁵⁰ [Sex for rent in Scotland - topic briefing \(Shelter Scotland\)](#)

²⁵¹ [The vile exploitation of 'free rent for sex' ads | Shelter](#)

Spiking

Background

Drink spiking is defined as “*when someone puts drugs or alcohol into a person’s drink without their knowledge and consent*”.²⁵² Spiking includes putting alcohol into a non-alcoholic drink, adding extra alcohol to an alcoholic drink, or putting drugs into a drink (non-alcoholic or alcoholic). Needle spiking can also occur where someone is injected with drugs without their consent. Recently attention has been drawn to ‘vape spiking’, where substances such as THC and spice are being placed inside vape pens²⁵³.

National police data shows that 74% of drink spiking victims are women in their early twenties²⁵⁴. Women also accounted for 88% of needle spiking victims and 73% are aged 18 to 21.

In many cases victims of spiking experience physical injuries and if high doses of drugs are administered some victims can experience problems with their muscles or become comatose. Long-term impacts can also include anxiety in drinking environments, being extra cautious when out drinking, feeling scared, and taking more preventative measures against being spiked.

There are several existing criminal offences under which spiking can be prosecuted, but spiking itself is not a criminal offence. Both drink and needle spiking can be prosecuted under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, if a substance is administered without consent, with the intention of engaging in sexual activity. Needle spiking can also be considered a physical assault and prosecuted under the Criminal Justice Act 1988. Sentencing under these offences are between six months and 10 years. Spiking is difficult to prosecute, with 87.5% of offenders being unknown.

In January 2023, the UK Government announced they would not be introducing a specific law to tackle spiking as the current legislation was deemed comprehensive enough to cover all types of spiking offences. However, in December 2023 the Government announced changes to the Criminal Justice Bill which would explicitly clarify that spiking is illegal. Alongside this the Government also set out practical measures aimed at supporting victims of spiking, including increased training for door staff, investing in research into spiking testing kits, and updating statutory guidance on spiking²⁵⁵.

²⁵² [Spiking - Home Affairs Committee](#)

²⁵³ [Met Police warn of ‘dangerous new threat’ of spiking using vapes laced with spice | The Independent](#)

²⁵⁴ [Force Shares National Policing Warning On Drink Spiking Ahead of New Year’s Eve Parties | West Yorkshire Police](#)

²⁵⁵ [Spiking to be targeted in raft of new measures - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Wider Evidence

Drink spiking has been widespread in the UK for years, with recorded crimes for drink spiking increasing every year between 2016 and 2019²⁵⁶. Achieving a full picture of the prevalence of spiking is challenging due to poor data recording and minimal official statistics²⁵⁷.

A 2021 YouGov poll found that 11% of women and 6% of men reported that they had been spiked, and a third of women and a fifth of men know someone (family, friend or someone else) who had been spiked²⁵⁸.

Data from 15 police forces across the UK showed that, between 2018 and 2021, 3,625 spiking related incidents were reported. This is a 54% rise in offences, from 828 in 2018 to 1,271 in 2021. 87% of the offences reported during this period were taken forward as crimes, but only 44 people were charged with offences and 15 received cautions²⁵⁹.

Given the lack of cohesive official statistics, it is difficult to understand the prevalence of spiking in West Yorkshire. West Yorkshire Police recorded 116 spiking crimes in 2018, which surged to 717 reports in 2022. The latest available data for 2023 (up until April) shows there have been 189 reported offences this year. In addition, there have only been 94 arrests made for spiking offences by West Yorkshire Police since 2011.

Between October 2021 and June 2022, during intensive media attention, there were 170 reports of spiking by needle made to West Yorkshire Police. However, none of these cases found evidence of injection spiking.

A challenge in prosecuting perpetrators of spiking is the low level of reporting. A snap poll of young adults by the Alcohol Education Trust²⁶⁰ found that 92% of individuals who had their drink spiked did not report it. A common reason for not reporting is a lack of confidence that the police would do anything about the incident, followed by not knowing where to report, and feeling it was too late. Furthermore, a perceived culture of victim blaming will impact on victim's trust in reporting incidents of spiking. The Director of the End Violence Against Women Coalition commented "*we know that survivors are systematically disbelieved at every stage of the justice process and rape myths impact whether survivors enter process at all. This is compounded in cases of spiking as survivors may have little memory of what happened and therefore have to endure the trauma of confronting harmful victim blaming*"²⁶¹.

²⁵⁶ [Spiking - Home Affairs Committee](#)

²⁵⁷ [NPCC Evidence on Spiking](#)

²⁵⁸ [YouGov Drink Spiking Survey](#)

²⁵⁹ [Drink and drug spiking reports to UK police forces rise by 50% in 4 years but very few led to criminal action \(inews.co.uk\)](#)

²⁶⁰ [Alcohol Education Trust Survey](#)

²⁶¹ [Drink and drug spiking reports to UK police forces rise by 50% in 4 years but very few led to criminal action \(inews.co.uk\)](#)

In addition, the level of prosecution is low due to the absence of evidence caused by a delay in reporting, insufficient forensic testing provision, and difficulties in identifying and apprehending perpetrators due to a lack of insight into their motivations. Efforts are being made across West Yorkshire to tackle spiking in the region. West Yorkshire Police have established a multi-agency response to spiking under Operation Jeanhaven. This approach involves and is supported by health services, Community Safety Partnerships, and key partners including pubs, clubs, and bars across West Yorkshire²⁶².

There are also existing support services across the region for those who suspect they have been spiked. Kirklees district has stationed a 'Night Safety Bus' in Huddersfield town centre every Wednesday and Saturday. The bus was introduced specifically to support women but is open to anyone who feels vulnerable whilst out in the nighttime economy. The bus is staffed by Kirklees drug and alcohol service who will provide a place of safety and offer support. In the Leeds area, Street Angels are present on Friday and Saturdays in the city centre providing care and support. To equip people against spiking Leeds Street Angel also hand out Spikey's to prevent bottle drinks from being spiked.

²⁶² [Police Response to VAWG](#)

Women who offend

Women are a minority in the criminal justice system, and as of July 2022, there were 3,219 women in prison²⁶³. The causes of offending, the types of crimes committed, and routes out of offending differ between men and women. Women commit less violent, serious or organised crime, but more acquisitive crime than men.

Women offenders are more likely to have mental health issues and to suffer from drug addictions. They are also more likely to be victims of crime and particularly victims of previous domestic abuse. Almost 60% of female offenders have experienced domestic abuse²⁶⁴ and research found that women were three times more likely to be arrested than their male partner in the event of counter-allegations in a domestic abuse incident.

Current data

In March 2024, the Ministry of Justice published a Female Offender Strategy Dashboard²⁶⁵. The web-based data tool presents the key metrics identified in the *Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan*²⁶⁶. The plan had 4 key priorities to reduce women's offending over the 2022 to 2025 period which are:

- Priority 1: Fewer women entering the Criminal Justice Service.
- Priority 2: Fewer women serving short custodial sentences.
- Priority 3: Better outcomes for women in custody.
- Priority 4: Protecting the public through better outcomes on release.

The resource allows users to conduct custom analysis for adult women, including by locality, ethnicity and age depending on the data set. For each metric, the most recent year's data is compared with the previous 12 months.

Analysis regarding first time entrants suggests that in 2022 32,092 women were prosecuted for TV licence evasion, 3835 for truancy offences relating to their children and 58 for benefit fraud. Prosecutions for TV licence evasion and benefit fraud have decreased from the previous year, yet numbers remain high.

In 2022, 2836 women were sentenced to immediate custody of less than 12 months, many of which received 6 months or less. The percentage of women remanded in custody at Crown Court increased by 3% from 29% in 2021 to 32% in 2022. In the 2021/22 financial year the proven reoffending rate was 20.2%, which was a 1% increase from the previous year.

²⁶³ [Women in Prison - Justice Committee \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/women-in-prison)

²⁶⁴ [Female Offender Strategy \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

²⁶⁵ [Female Offender Strategy Dashboard](#)

²⁶⁶ [Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan 2022 to 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

In 2022, the self-harm rate in prisons which hold female prisoners was 5,035 per 1000 prisoners. This represents a 36% increase from 2021 and means the self-harm rate is 9.9 times the equivalent rate in prisons holding male prisoners.

In the 2022/23 financial year, the accommodation rate at three months post release for women who offend was 72.5%, this is a 0.4% decrease on the previous year.

The data dashboard will be updated annually, and the above figures can be found [here](#)²⁶⁷.

HMP/YOI New Hall

New Hall is a closed prison and young offender institution near Wakefield for women aged 18 and over. The operational capacity of New Hall is 381 but at the time of the most recent inspection (November 2022), there were 341 women residing.

The recent inspection provided a population summary, which detailed²⁶⁸:

- that 797 prisoners were admitted in the previous 12 months, roughly equating to 66 per month and up to 60 prisoners were released into the community each month;
- at the time of the inspection there were 17 foreign national prisoners;
- 191 prisoners receiving support for substance use and an average of 75 prisoners referred for mental health assessment each month and;
- there were three pregnant women in custody and three mothers in the mother and baby unit with three babies.

Of the women at New Hall in November 2022, 52% were sentenced, 20% were on recall and 10% were on remand. In regard to sentence, 16% had a sentence of less than a year of which 10% had a sentence of less than 6 months. Almost 23% has a sentence of 4 to 10 years²⁶⁹.

The majority of women at HMP New Hall were between the ages of 30 to 39 years (42.6%) and the age groups 21-29 years and 40-49 years each contributed over a fifth (21.3% and 22.9% respectively). Of the women at New Hall, 89% of women were White, 3.9% Mixed Ethnicity, 3.5% Asian and 2.9% Black.

Domestic knife crime

Homicides caused by a sharp instrument is the most common method of killing, for both male and female victims. In the year ending March 2023, there were 244

²⁶⁷ [Dashboard](#)

²⁶⁸ [Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP New Hall by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 14 November - 1 December 2022 \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](#)

²⁶⁹ [New Hall Adult HMP Establishments Population Breakdown 2022](#)

homicides committed using a knife or other sharp instrument (41% of all homicides)²⁷⁰. Knives have been identified as a weapon commonly used in domestic violence by both male and female perpetrators of spousal homicide²⁷¹. A contributing factor to this may be that knives are universally available in domestic settings and therefore can be easily used in reactive violence or self-defence.

Female perpetrators, especially younger perpetrators, are significantly more likely than young males to use knives to injure or kill family members or partners in domestic settings, while men are more likely to commit knife crime against strangers and in community settings²⁷². It has been suggested that the increased likelihood of women being perpetrators of knife crime in domestic settings can be explained by the notion that female intimate partner homicides are 'defensive reactions precipitated from prior abuse'²⁷³.

Domestic homicide

Domestic homicides are defined by the death of an adult that has resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by a person they were related to, a person they were or had been in an intimate personal relationship with or a member of the same household.

Whilst the majority of homicide victims overall are men, the majority (70%) of domestic homicide victims are women²⁷⁴. Previous intimate partner violence has been described as the 'number one risk factor' for intimate partner homicide, regardless of the gender of the victim²⁷⁵. Where men are victims of domestic homicide, between 2017 and 2019, less than half were killed by a woman²⁷⁶. A man who has previous experience of perpetrating intimate partner violence is at greater risk of being killed by his partner²⁷⁷. Women generally commit homicide in self-defence or in retaliation to violence towards them. The risk factors for domestic homicides perpetrated by women include previous victimisation, unemployment, alcohol/drug abuse, and having no mutual children with their partner. In some cases, domestic homicide can be characterised as 'violent resistance' – perpetrated whilst resisting violence – but it can also occur separately with male violence as a pertinent precursor.

Offending due to coercive control

As noted above, many women in prison have been victims of much more serious offences than the ones they are accused of, with evidence suggesting that women's

²⁷⁰ [Homicide in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

²⁷¹ [Perpetrators of Spousal Homicide: A Review - Mari L. Aldridge, Kevin D. Browne, 2003 \(sagepub.com\)](https://sagepub.com)

²⁷² [Knife crime offender characteristics and interventions – A systematic review \(sciencedirectassets.com\)](https://sciencedirectassets.com)

²⁷³ [Knife crime offender characteristics and interventions – A systematic review \(sciencedirectassets.com\)](https://sciencedirectassets.com)

²⁷⁴ [Homicide in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

²⁷⁵ [Before the killing: intimate partner homicides in a process perspective, Part I in: Journal of Gender-Based Violence](#)

²⁷⁶ [Homicide Abuse Learning Together](#)

²⁷⁷ [Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results From a Multisite Case Control Study](#)

exposure to abuse, including coercive control can be a driving factor of offending²⁷⁸. Women who have experienced coercive control report committing offences on behalf of or to protect a partner, to support a partner's drug use or due to pressure from their partner.

There is a drive to reduce the culpability of women involved in offences where coercive control is directly relevant. Currently, women who are considered to have assisted a partner in an act of violence can be convicted of the offence, regardless of if they are coerced or abused into doing so²⁷⁹. Parallels have been drawn with the Modern Slavery Act, Section 45 of which provides protection for victims of modern slavery who have been forced to commit crimes by their exploiters²⁸⁰. In a study of women convicted of non-violent offences with male co-defendants, the majority reported that they offended out of 'love' or as an outcome of a coercive relationship which often included threats, including to life²⁸¹. Furthermore, research by Clarke & Chadwick (2020) found that almost half of women convicted of joint enterprise were experiencing domestic abuse at the time of their offence, and in 87% of these cases, the co-defendant was the perpetrator of this domestic abuse²⁸². There is evidence of women being convicted under joint enterprise even when they have not been present at the scene. In cases where women were present at the scene, they were often not present in support of their partner but because they felt unable to leave due to their experience of abuse. This illustrates how fear dominates abusive relationships and can constrain the choices women feel they have and how love and fear become intertwined in instances of coercive control.

²⁷⁸ ["There's a reason we're in trouble" Domestic abuse as a driver to women's offending](#)

²⁷⁹ [Defending 'Co-offending' Women: Recognising Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control in 'Joint Enterprise' Cases Involving Women and their Intimate Partners](#)

²⁸⁰ [Women who offend as a result of coercive control - Russell Webster](#)

²⁸¹ [Partners in crime: A study of the relationship between female offenders and their co-defendants](#)

²⁸² [New report: Joint enterprise and the criminalisation of women | Centre for Crime and Justice Studies](#)

What works

Overview

Understanding of ‘what works’ in tackling violence against women and girls in the UK is limited. Evidence reviews that have sought to understand interventions to prevent violence against women and girls have either drawn on evidence from interventions based internationally or outdated interventions within the United Kingdom.

The Government’s 2014²⁸³ guidance produced by the Department for International Development sought to examine the evidence base for the effectiveness of interventions that seek specifically to reduce different types of violence against women and girls and target key risk factors for violence perpetration and experiences. The report highlighted that there has been an increase in the evidence base for violence prevention interventions within low- and middle-income countries showing some success in preventing violence, however many gaps remain. There are disparities in the amount of evidence available for certain interventions, e.g. school-based interventions, leaving other types of interventions under-researched, e.g. transforming masculinities. Often the latter are more complex and multi-component interventions.

The review concluded that there is fair evidence to recommend²⁸⁴:

- relationship level interventions, e.g. those covering gender roles and norms
- microfinance combined with gender-transformative approaches e.g. those that build women’s economic resources
- community mobilisation to change social norms e.g. community workshops aimed at shifting attitudes
- interventions targeting boys and men through education combined with community mobilisation e.g. encouraging reflections on gender norms, and
- parenting programmes e.g. to improve relationships between parents and children

More recently, the Scottish Government²⁸⁵ published a summary of evidence into what works to prevent violence against women. The report was undertaken to support strategic thinking into what works in preventing VAWG, focusing on primary prevention interventions. Most of the interventions reviewed were international, which whilst helpful in understanding the spread of available and robust evaluations, may not be applicable to the UK context.

Strong evidence was found for:

- Interventions focused on modifying unsafe physical school environments
- Programmes promoting equal relationships (in secondary settings)

²⁸³ [What works to prevent violence against women and girls? Gov.uk](#)

²⁸⁴ It must be acknowledged that the report is almost a decade out of date

²⁸⁵ [What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women: A Summary of the Evidence \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

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Promising evidence was found for:

- Bystander interventions
- School-based programmes seeking to prevent violence in dating and intimate partner relationships

Mixed evidence was found for:

- Education as a sexual violence prevention strategy (in higher education settings)

Limited evidence was found for:

- Awareness campaigns and edutainment
- Honour-based and female genital mutilation interventions

The College of Policing²⁸⁶ have also published an evidence briefing looking at interventions to reduce VAWG specifically in public spaces. The interventions included were grouped into four types: policing strategies, designing out crime interventions, interventions that tackle violence in the night-time economy and education interventions.

Strong evidence was found for:

- Hot spots policing and problem-oriented policing
- Improved street lighting
- Targeted police enforcement and multi-level community interventions in the night-time economy

Moderate evidence was found for:

- Crime prevention through environmental design
- Bar staff training
- Bystander programmes
- School-based interventions
- Empowerment or feminist self-defence classes

Limited evidence was found for:

- Publicity campaigns
- Street pastors
- Drinkaware Crew

In addition, the Violence Reduction Partnership commissioned an assessment of best practice interventions for perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence review and a service mapping exercise identifying perpetrator provision in West Yorkshire. Whilst this has not been published publicly, but 26 different perpetrator programmes were

²⁸⁶ [Interventions to reduce violence against women and girls \(VAWG\) in public spaces: Evidence briefing \(college.police.uk\)](https://college.police.uk)

identified across the region. Some of these were dedicated perpetrator interventions and others were broader focused on promoting healthy relationships. There was no consistency in the types of programmes, interventions or support services provided. Thus, it was recommended that commissioners in West Yorkshire work together to commission a suite of services that include:

- Early intervention
- Interventions for low-risk offenders
- Interventions for medium-risk offenders
- Interventions for high-risk offenders
- Interventions for sexual violence offenders

The VRP has also supported the delivery of programmes working to end violence against women and girls by recruiting allies, raising awareness, and encouraging positive bystander action. Whilst the initial feedback from children and young people who have engaged with the programme has been positive, a robust evaluation has not been conducted to understand the impact of this programme on reducing violence against women and girls.

Interventions with strong evidence

Interventions focused on modifying unsafe physical school environments²⁸⁷

The *Shifting Boundaries* school-based programme focuses on modifying unsafe school physical environments alongside classroom-based sessions. The interventions aims to increase knowledge of the consequences of abusive behaviour, whilst increasing surveillance and awareness of unsafe areas in the school environment. Evaluations of this intervention indicate that there were reductions in perpetration and victimisation of sexual harassment, peer sexual violence, and adolescent relationship abuse.

Programmes promoting equal relationships (in secondary settings)²⁸⁸

Whilst overall programmes promoting equal relationship among young people only have promising evidence in their ability to prevent VAWG, strong evidence has been found for the US school-based *Safe Dates* programme. Safe Dates is an educational curriculum focused on preventing and reducing violence perpetration and victimisation, through raising awareness of healthy and abusive relationships, equip students with the skills and resources to help themselves in abusive relationships and develop healthy dating relationships. A long-term evaluation of the programme found that those who took part reported less psychological, moderate physical and sexual dating violence perpetration and less moderate physical dating violence victimisation.

Hot spots policing and problem-oriented policing²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ [What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women: A Summary of the Evidence \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

²⁸⁸ [What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women: A Summary of the Evidence \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

²⁸⁹ [Interventions to reduce violence against women and girls \(VAWG\) in public spaces: Evidence briefing \(college.police.uk\)](http://college.police.uk)

Both of these policing strategies have been shown to be effective as they target resources and activities to the places where crime and harm are most concentrated. Problem-oriented policing requires the police to implement tailored and targeted interventions based on the nature and extent of a problem.

Targeted police enforcement and multi-level community interventions in the night-time economy²⁹⁰

Evidence from a systematic review found that police measures targeting specific premises in the night-time economy showing problems with violence in collaboration with local agencies are more effective at reducing violence than measures without this collaboration. Collaboration with community interventions includes drawing on community information campaigns, training for bar staff and door staff, and police engagement with bar management.

²⁹⁰ [Interventions to reduce violence against women and girls \(VAWG\) in public spaces: Evidence briefing \(college.police.uk\)](https://college.police.uk)

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

Violence Against Women and Girls encapsulates a wide range of abuses and behaviour, the commonality of which is that they disproportionately affect women and girls. Violence against women and girls' places half of society are at risk of becoming a victim and experience the long lasting and significant impacts of this, including the detrimental effect on mental health, physical harm, negative employment impacts, homelessness, negative impacts on children and family and feeling unsafe.

This evidence synthesis aimed to update the picture of violence against women and girls in West Yorkshire, understand the gaps in data and sources available, and provide recommendations for future partnership working.

By synthesising insights gathered from a wide range of research we hope to inform and empower our partnership to continue to tackle VAWG.

Below we make recommendations about improving data quality, understanding victims experience and support, highlight further areas for exploration, and areas to influence in the future.

Recommendations

Data Quality

- There is a data gap regarding disability and the risks faced and as such a need to work in partnership to reduce this.
- Introduction of a comprehensive data collection system for CAPVA.

Victim experience and support

- The evidence of an increased risk of suicide and self-harm as well as mental health being identified as a vulnerability factor for victims, highlights the need for increased, improved, and targeted mental health support for victims of domestic abuse
- The partnership needs to continue to work to understand women's experiences of domestic abuse and services in rural locations
- There is a need to highlight the social model of 'abused consent' and how this impacts victims of sexual exploitation

Further areas for exploration

- The prevalence and experience of older victims of domestic abuse needs to be understood in more detail.
- Further exploration of the specific barriers faced by women in Roma, Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities, specifically around fears of being ostracised, is needed to be able to support this group.
- An increased understanding about the experiences of and barriers faced by women with no recourse to public funds or insecure immigration status is needed due to unique impacts domestic abuse can have on these women.

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- Further research is required around victims who are visually impaired and those who are deaf as well as an improved understanding around accessibility in support services.
- Further research is required to understand the picture of reproductive coercion in West Yorkshire.
- Further analysis of district differences for rape and sexual offences in public spaces, including MSOAs and location, should be conducted.
- Increase in the evidence-based link between active masturbatory indecent exposure and subsequent contact offending as recommended in the Angiolini Inquiry with VRP support.
- Research into violence against women and girls in online spaces must prioritise Snapchat and Instagram to understand the prevalence on these platforms.
- Continue work to understand the topics of sex for rent and forced prostitution in more detail and why there is such a data gap around this.

Areas to influence

- To lobby the government on new RSHE legislation given twice as many 11-year-old girls were victims of other sexual offences compared to 10-year-olds.
- There is a need to work with PoEd and educational establishments to tackle the increasing prevalence of rape myths amongst children and young people.

Appendix 1 - Glossary of terms

Word	Definition
Adult Sexual Exploitation	Adult Sexual Exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that involves someone taking advantage of an adult, sexually, for their own benefit through threats, bribes, and violence.
Assault by penetration	Assault by penetration is the intentional penetration of another person's vagina or anus with any part of the body other than a penis, or by using an object without consent.
Child Sexual Exploitation	Child Sexual Exploitation is a type of sexual abuse where a child is coerced, manipulated, or deceived into sexual activity.
Child/Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse	Child to parent abuse is defined as 'a pattern of behaviour... which involves using verbal, financial, physical and/or emotional means to practice power and exert control over a parent'.
Coercive Control	Coercive control is an element of domestic abuse defined as an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation, and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten someone.
Cyberflashing	Cyberflashing is a form of sexual harassment where someone digitally sends unsolicited sexual images or pornography to an unsuspecting person without their consent.
Cyberstalking	Cyberstalking is the repeated use of electronic communications to harass or frighten someone.
Deepfakes	Deepfakes are synthetic media that have been digitally manipulated to replace one person's likeness with that of another, including onto pornographic material.
Domestic Abuse	Domestic abuse is defined as "any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional'.
Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting	Female Genital Mutilation or 'cutting' comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

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Forced Marriage	Forced marriage is where one or both individuals do not, or cannot, consent to marriage.
Forced prostitution	Forced prostitution refers to conditions of control over a person who is coerced by another to engage in sexual activity usually for a financial advantage.
Grooming	Grooming is when a person builds a relationship with a child, young person, or adult in order to abuse and manipulate them.
Human Trafficking	Human trafficking is the unlawful act of transporting or coercing people in order to benefit from their work or service.
Intersectionality	Intersectionality refers to how multiple categories of one's social identity interact with each other, and the distinct forms of harm, abuse, discrimination, and disadvantage experienced as a result.
Misogyny	Misogyny can be described as 'the hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women and girls'.
Modern Slavery	Modern slavery is defined as the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women, and men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation.
Non-fatal Strangulation	Non-fatal strangulation refers to any obstruction or compression of blood vessels and/or airways by external pressure.
Public Health Approach	A Public Health Approach seeks to understand what causes violence, identifying risk and protective factors that are associated with violence, and responding with interventions to prevent or reduce violence.
Rape	Rape is where a person intentionally penetrates another's vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, without consent.
Reproductive coercion	Reproductive coercion has been described as actual or attempted acts that are experienced as aiming to reduce individual autonomy over reproductive decision-making through coercive or controlling behaviour, deceptions, manipulations, threats, violence or other forms of abuse.
Revenge Porn	Revenge porn is the sharing of private, sexual materials, either photos or videos, of another person without their consent and with the intention of causing embarrassment or distress.
Romance Fraud	Romance fraud is the exploitation of an individual's emotional needs and caring qualities with the intention of extracting money or personal information from them.

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Sex for Rent	Sex for rent is an exploitative practice which refers to a situation where someone is asked for payment for housing costs in the form of sexual favours.
Sexual Assault	Sexual assault refers to many different forms of sexual violence where physical, psychological, and emotional violation in the form of a sexual act are inflicted upon someone else without their consent.
So-called Honour Based Abuse	So-called honour-based abuse is described as a collection of practices, which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect 'honour'.
Spiking	Spiking is giving someone alcohol or drugs without them knowing or agreeing.
Stalking	Stalking is defined as 'a pattern of unwanted, fixated, and obsessive behaviour which is repeated, persistent, intrusive and causes fear of violence or engenders alarm and distress in the victim'.
Street Harassment	Street harassment is unwanted behaviour in public areas, including but not exclusive of: unsolicited sexualised or offensive comments or gestures, indecent exposure, catcalling, intrusive staring, or unwanted touching.
Violence Against Women and Girls	Violence Against Women and Girls encapsulates a wide range of abuses and behaviours, the commonality of which is that they disproportionately effect women and girls. Crimes against women and girls include rape, other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, 'honour-based' abuse, and revenge porn, amongst many others.

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