NCVPP

National Centre for Violence Against Women & Girls and Public Protection

Violence Against Women & Girls and Public Protection Strategic Threat Risk Assessment



College of Policing

NPCC National Police Chiefs' Council

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Foreword



Violence against women and girls and the threat areas defined as Public Protection represent harm to the public at enormous scale. Tackling them is one of the most important responsibilities facing policing today. Every day, women, girls and children experience abuse, violence and exploitation in their homes, communities and online. Behind every statistic presented in this assessment is a victim, survivor or family whose lives have been profoundly affected.

Their experiences are why this remains one of policing's highest priorities, why it is classified as a national emergency, and why we must continue to strengthen our collective response.

It is also why the NCVPP's first Strategic Threat Risk Assessment represents an important step in building a shared national understanding of the threats facing women, girls and vulnerable people across England and Wales. It provides a comprehensive picture of the harms affecting our communities, how those threats are evolving, and where policing and partners must focus their efforts.

The findings are sobering. At least one in five police-recorded crimes relates to Public Protection threats, with violence against women and girls accounting for the majority. Yet recorded crime tells only part of the story. Many victims never report offences to police, while many harms, particularly those occurring online, remain hidden. The true scale of harm is therefore significantly greater than available data can capture.

Many of the threats identified in this assessment are longstanding, particularly domestic abuse, where the scale and impact remain profoundly shocking. At the same time, the threat landscape is changing rapidly. Technology now features across almost every area, creating new opportunities for perpetrators to offend, exploit and control victims. The growth of image-based abuse, online misogyny and artificial intelligence is creating new risks, more complex investigations and significant safeguarding challenges.

The five Critical Threat Areas identified within this assessment; domestic abuse, repeat perpetrators, public-space sexual offending, image-based abuse and child-on-child abuse, reinforce the need to identify and manage high-harm perpetrators, intervene earlier and invest in prevention.

Importantly, the assessment also highlights progress. Across policing there is evidence of innovation, strong leadership and determined efforts to improve outcomes for victims. Operation Soteria demonstrates what can be achieved when evidence, operational expertise and partnership working come together.

Work being done to roll out Domestic Abuse Protection Orders, the Rapid Video Response and the Domestic Abuse Joint Justice Plan with the Crown Prosecution Service similarly represent important progress. These examples are amongst many helping to transform how domestic abuse is identified, investigated and prosecuted. The purpose of the NCVPP is to build on this progress and drive a more consistent, evidence-led and preventative approach across policing.

However, policing cannot address these threats alone, or without sufficient resource. We expect the volume of police-recorded crime in this area to continue increasing as recording and identification improve, and efforts to increase confidence to report continue.

Lasting change requires a whole-system response involving criminal justice, safeguarding, education and health partners. It also requires industry and technology providers to play a more active role in protecting victims and holding perpetrators to account.

This assessment is intended to support leaders and practitioners in making informed decisions about risk, capability and investment. It will help shape the future work of the NCVPP, inform strategic priorities across policing and strengthen understanding of where collective effort can have the greatest impact. Most importantly, it provides an evidence base to support our shared ambition of reducing harm and improving outcomes for the victims who must remain at the heart of decision-making.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of victims, survivors, families, practitioners, academics and partner organisations whose insight and expertise continue to improve our understanding of these harms. Their willingness to share knowledge and challenge existing approaches is essential to shaping a more effective response.

The harms described throughout this assessment are significant, but they are not inevitable. By working together, focusing on prevention, pursuing perpetrators, listening to victims and adapting to changing risks, we can build a stronger response. We owe nothing less to the women, girls, children and communities we serve.

DAC Helen Millichap KPM, NCVPP Director

About the NCVPP Violence Against Women & Girls and Public Protection Strategic Threat Risk Assessment

This is the first national Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) and Public Protection Strategic Threat Assessment (STRA) for policing. The STRA provides policing with an understanding of the scale of the threats, as well as the identification of the most significant and emerging threats, risks and harms. This STRA is informed by data, information and insight held by policing and partners, and builds on previous national VAWG strategic threat risk assessments.

Due to the growth in scope in this threat assessment from VAWG to encompass wider Public Protection (see Figure 1), this STRA draws out cross cutting themes rather than focus on individual VAWG or Public Protection threat areas. This approach supports policing to identify where it can make best use of resources and maximise impact across multiple threat areas.

Policing has defined Public Protection as a "core policing function to prevent and reduce harm through safeguarding, investigation, tackling perpetrators and working in partnership. Specifically, it incorporates **14 threat areas and crime types** with particular focus on Violence Against Women and Girls."

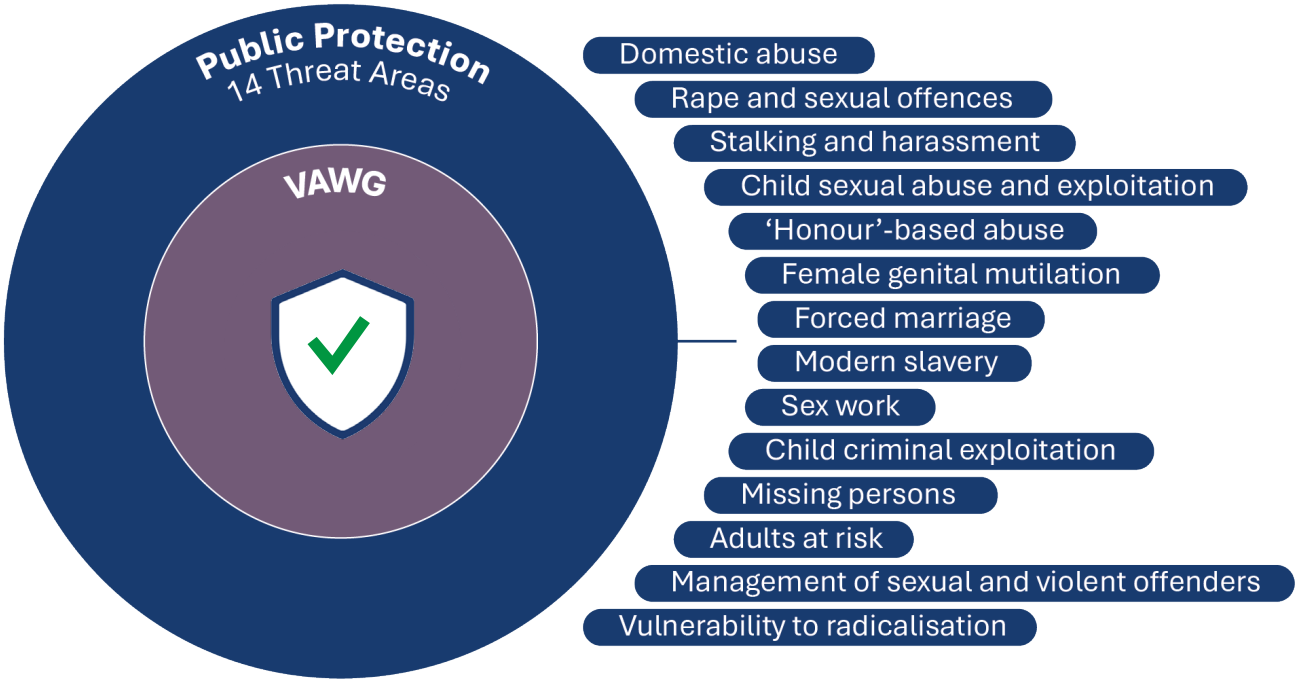


Figure 1: Thematics in scope of VAWG and Public Protection



The STRA provides policing with an evidence base to underpin decision making, to support effective strategic planning and target future intelligence gathering at a local, regional and national level within policing and out across wider partnerships. The STRA also supports policing identify where there may be gaps in activity to effectively tackle current and future threats, assisting with a more proactive approach to the prevention of VAWG and Public Protection harms.

This publication is a public summary of the NCVPP Strategic Threat Risk Assessment. A more detailed policing assessment exists which contains additional analysis and contextual material.

A note on language

Throughout this STRA, probabilistic language has been used to convey our assessment of the threat. Our assessments have been made based on various sources of information, including academic evidence, policing data and stakeholder insight from roundtables and challenge panels. Probabilistic language is used in line with the Professional Head of Intelligence Assessment (PHIA) probability yardstick to indicate the likelihood of future threats occurring. This allows for consistency when considering the availability and quality of the data, insight and information available to inform our assessment of threat.

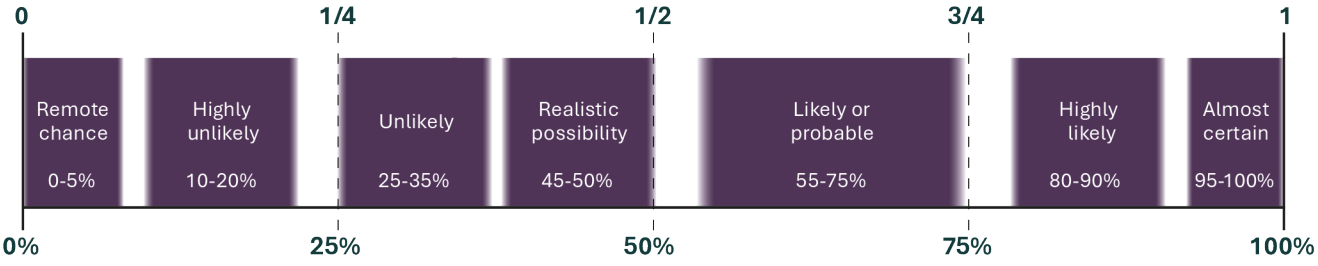
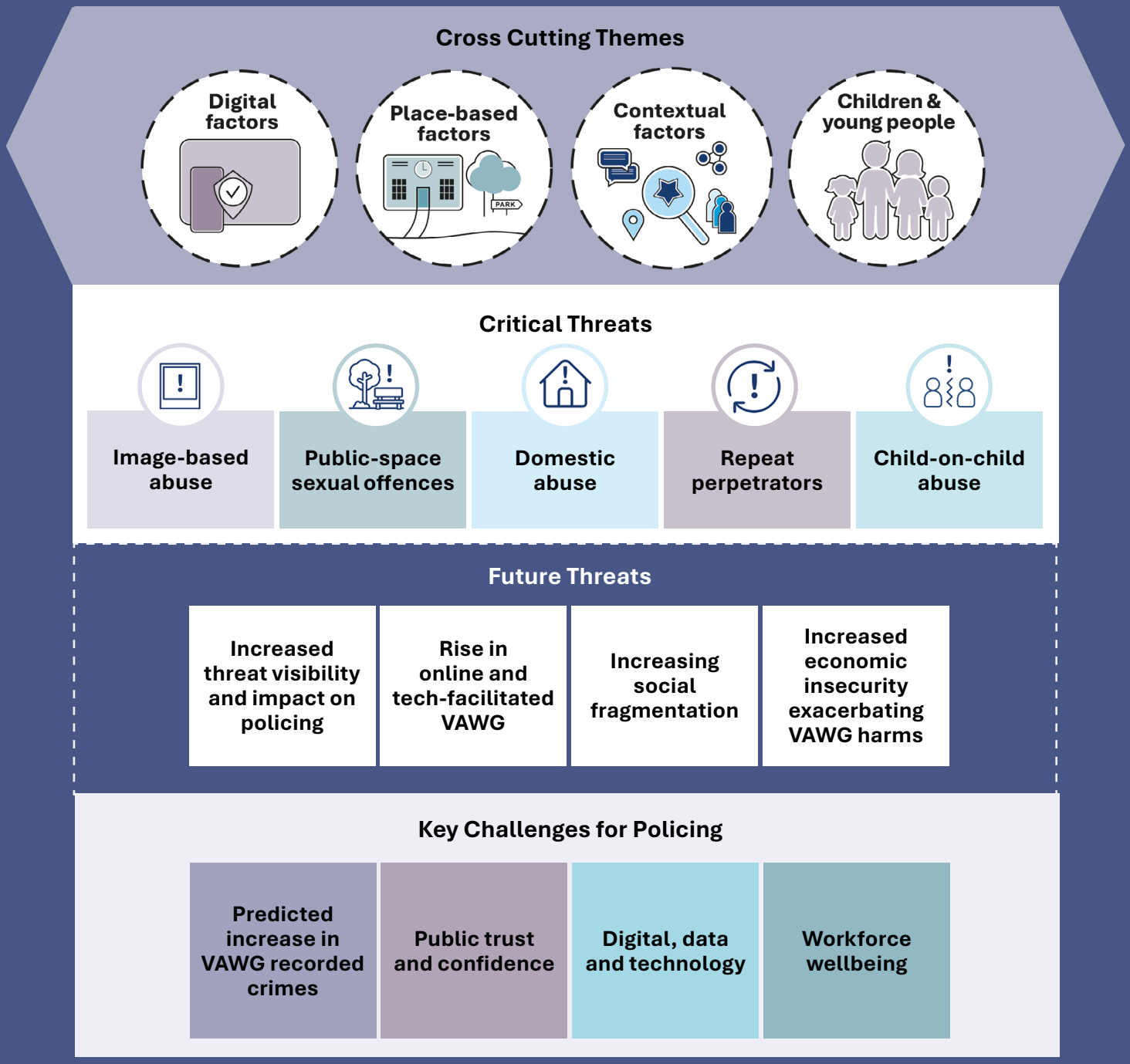


Figure 2: PHIA Probability Yardstick

Data Source: Explaining Uncertainty in UK Intelligence Assessment

Executive summary

How the Strategic Threat Risk Assessment fits together



Every day in England and Wales, women and children are disproportionately subjected to abuse and exploitation in their homes, communities and online.

The prevalence, persistence and severity of this harm remain a national emergency as declared by the NPCC in 2024.

In the year ending March 2025

5.1
million people

were estimated to have experienced VAWG

Separately, as of year ending March 2024

13.6
million adults

are estimated to have experienced abuse as a child

Policing recorded approximately 1.36 million VAWG and Public Protection crimes which disproportionately impact women and girls and represents at least 21% of all police-recorded crime. In addition, 1 in 5 homicides are recorded as domestic homicides. The latest report from The Domestic Homicide Project highlights 73% of victims were female, and 6% of victims were children under the age of 16 years.

There is a long-term trend in increased reporting and is likely to continue as policing remains focused on improving its response to tackling VAWG.

[1] 59% of offences did not have a location recorded.

This would likely represent a positive trajectory in efforts to reduce the under-reporting gap and improve public trust and confidence in policing.

This is the first STRA for policing, assessing the threats across VAWG and wider Public Protection. This assessment sets out a frank picture of those threats and the structural conditions that sustain them. It makes the case for a decisive shift: from reactive, siloed responses to a coordinated, proactive and properly resourced national approach which reflects VAWG as a national priority using all parts of policing to tackle the threat. This should include earlier identification of risk, disruption of offender pathways and clearer safeguarding referral routes.

To help achieve this, four cross-cutting themes are identified, consisting of factors which cut across VAWG and Public Protection threats, these are: digital factors, place-based factors, contextual factors, and children and young people. Within these themes, assessments are made to understand specific areas that are increasing, emerging and persistent.

To support policing understand which elements of these cross-cutting themes represent the biggest threat, harm and risk to the public, **five Critical Threat Areas** have been identified in our assessment:

Domestic abuse - A cross-cutting, high-harm, high-risk threat, contributing to 65% of all VAWG crimes.

Public-space sexual offences - At least 20% of all VAWG crimes (where a location was recorded[1]) take place in public spaces, most of which are rape and sexual offences and harassment. However, there are challenges for policing in understanding the prevalence of and harms caused by sexual offences in public spaces at a macro level.

Repeat perpetrators - Police-recorded data across nine forces identified that at least 24% of suspects had committed three or more additional VAWG or Public Protection offences in the previous three years.

Image-based abuse - At least 20% of all online flagged VAWG and Public Protection crimes relate to image-based abuse, most of these crimes relate to indecent images of children (IIOC), which now accounts for almost a third of all police-recorded Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE).

Child-on-child abuse - There remains a high proportion of child-on-child abuse across a range of threats such as online harms and sexual offences. For example, 50% of CSAE is committed by children aged 10-17.

This assessment also identifies future and emerging threats that will shape the VAWG and Public Protection landscape moving forward. The following emerging and future threats have been identified:

- Improved visibility of the scale of the threat reported to policing through increased reporting.
- A continued exponential rise in online and tech-facilitated VAWG, with digital environments and the rapid evolution and easy reach of AI changing the VAWG threat picture in particular, consideration of AI chatbots in simulating and providing guidance on how to abuse women and children.
- Deepening social fragmentation and its potential to heighten vulnerability for women and girls, particularly migrant and asylum-seeking women.
- Heightened VAWG and safeguarding risks driven by economic insecurity alongside funding pressures for policing and other statutory agencies.

The assessment includes analysis of policing's capacity and capability to respond to VAWG and Public Protection threats. Key challenges for policing include:

- **Predicted increase in VAWG crimes** - Forecasted sustained growth in VAWG recorded crimes, exacerbated by increased complexity of investigations.
- **Workforce wellbeing** - High workloads, limited resourcing and poor workplace culture are negatively impacting policing, including Public Protection teams.
- **Public trust and confidence** - Reduced rates of public trust and confidence have an obvious impact on levels of reporting and at the same time are also impacting on workforce morale, retention and recruitment.
- **Digital, data and technology** - Policing is struggling to keep pace with technological advancements and how it is transforming the scale and complexity of offending and the processing of digital evidence.

Overall, whilst the critical threats and reporting trends remain similar to what has been highlighted in previous threat assessments, the operating environment continues to evolve.

Technology now runs through virtually every form of VAWG offending - as a tool for coercion, a medium for abuse, and a space in which exploitation occurs at scale and with impunity. Artificial intelligence is accelerating this, and the threat to children in particular is prominent across threats. Policing's ability to fully quantify this threat is currently hampered by data gaps, but the direction of travel is unambiguous and demands an urgent response. Investigations are becoming more difficult due to online offending and significant safeguarding work.

Yet policing is tackling growing and increasingly complex demand with insufficient capacity, outdated and inconsistent technology, and structures that too often treat VAWG as a secondary concern. In an operating context with competing pressures and finite resources, the STRA provides a national evidence-based, intelligence-led assessment to support the effective targeting of resources and capabilities to the most significant current need and prospective future threats.



What we know from previous threat assessments

VAWG and Child Sexual Abuse has been designated a national priority threat via the Strategic Policing Requirement since 2023. Since this time, policing has assessed VAWG and Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) to be high volume, high harm, and complex.

The VAWG National Policing Statement 2024 declared VAWG (inclusive of CSAE) as a national emergency having reached "epidemic levels" across England and Wales. Previous assessment findings highlighted that:

- VAWG and CSAE police-recorded crime has been subject to a large increase over the last five to ten years.
- Police-recorded VAWG consisted predominantly of domestic abuse, with stalking and harassment representing the highest volume crime type.
- Perpetrators were overwhelmingly male, and that women and girls from minoritised communities experience disproportionate and compounded harm.
- Perpetrators of VAWG were taking advantage of the online space and technological advancements to commit harm at scale, facilitated by a lack of safety by design features.
- There was an emerging large cohort of children who harm other children, with image-based abuse of particular concern, driven by self-generated indecent imagery.
- Developing effective responses to VAWG and CSAE against this threat picture presented a range of challenges against a wider backdrop of a less experienced workforce. Policing has been unable to resource increased reporting through an associated increase in specialist Public Protection roles. It has also faced significant operational challenges with the increasing use of technology and volumes of digital evidence to process across the majority of investigations.

The following were previously designated as Critical Threat Areas for policing based on harm, volume and capability and capacity to respond: domestic abuse, rape and sexual offences, stalking, CSAE and online enabled VAWG. These critical threats were used to inform priority activities for the development of the National Centre for VAWG and Public Protection (NCVPP).



Our current assessment of threat for VAWG and Public Protection

VAWG: A note on definition

Policing's previous national analysis of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) used an NPCC definition introduced in 2022. Following recommendations from the National Audit Office and the Home Affairs Select Committee in 2025 for a consistent approach to reporting VAWG data, the NCVPP has adapted policing's definition of VAWG to align with that used by HMG.
This includes the following offences:

Rape & sexual offences (including child sexual abuse)	**Stalking**	**Harassment**	**Controlling & coercive behaviour**	**Forced marriage**
Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)	**'Honour'-Based Abuse (HBA)**	**Domestic abuse** (including domestic homicide)	**Exploitation of prostitution**	**Non-fatal strangulation or suffocation**

See Appendices and Data Tables

Headline scale data on VAWG presented within this report will therefore include all victims, of any sex or age. Policing continues to be committed to also explicitly draw out data and insight on the disproportionate threat, harm and risk to women and girls. This approach does not seek to overlook the harm experienced by male victims but support appropriate gender-based considerations and responses.

Note:

Complete breakdowns of the Home Office Offence Codes in scope of both VAWG and Public Protection, as well as a full methodology for the STRA and full data tables can be found in the documents that accompany this publication.

Prevalence and scale of VAWG and Public Protection

Prevalence

Police-recorded offences are not an accurate indicator of prevalence or experience of VAWG. It is widely acknowledged that experiences of VAWG go mostly unreported to police. The majority of VAWG survivors do not report their experience - not because it didn't happen, but because of fear of not being believed, a lack of public trust and confidence that reporting will help deliver a timely response and improve their safety, not wanting to progress through a criminal justice response or barriers to accessibility needs such as translators to be able to report.

Policing is working to improve public trust and confidence to mitigate some of these factors, such as strengthening vetting processes, however, it will take some time to realise the impact of this work. This means that currently police-recorded crime figures significantly undercount the prevalence of VAWG.

Therefore, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is used as a more reliable measure of estimated prevalence of crime, although it is acknowledged that it does have its own limitations, including that it only captures the experiences of those over 16.

Whilst it is not possible to provide an overall figure for VAWG and Public Protection using the CSEW, as the specific breakdown of all offences is not available, estimates for the largest volume offence types are provided below.

VAWG prevalence

Prevalence data for the year ending March 2025 indicates that:

3.8
million people
aged 16 or over were victims of domestic abuse

900,000
people were victims of sexual offences

1.4
million people
were victims of stalking in the last year

HMG's VAWG Strategy (2025) sets out its ambition to halve VAWG prevalence (measured via the combined measure of domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking) through the CSEW, acknowledging that increased police recording of these crime types is a positive.

According to the CSEW for the year ending March 2025, 10.6% of people aged 16 years and over (estimated as around 5.1 million people) experienced domestic abuse, sexual assault or stalking in the last year.

A comparison against police-recorded data shows the majority of this goes unreported and policing is therefore only aware of a small proportion of the actual scale of the threat.

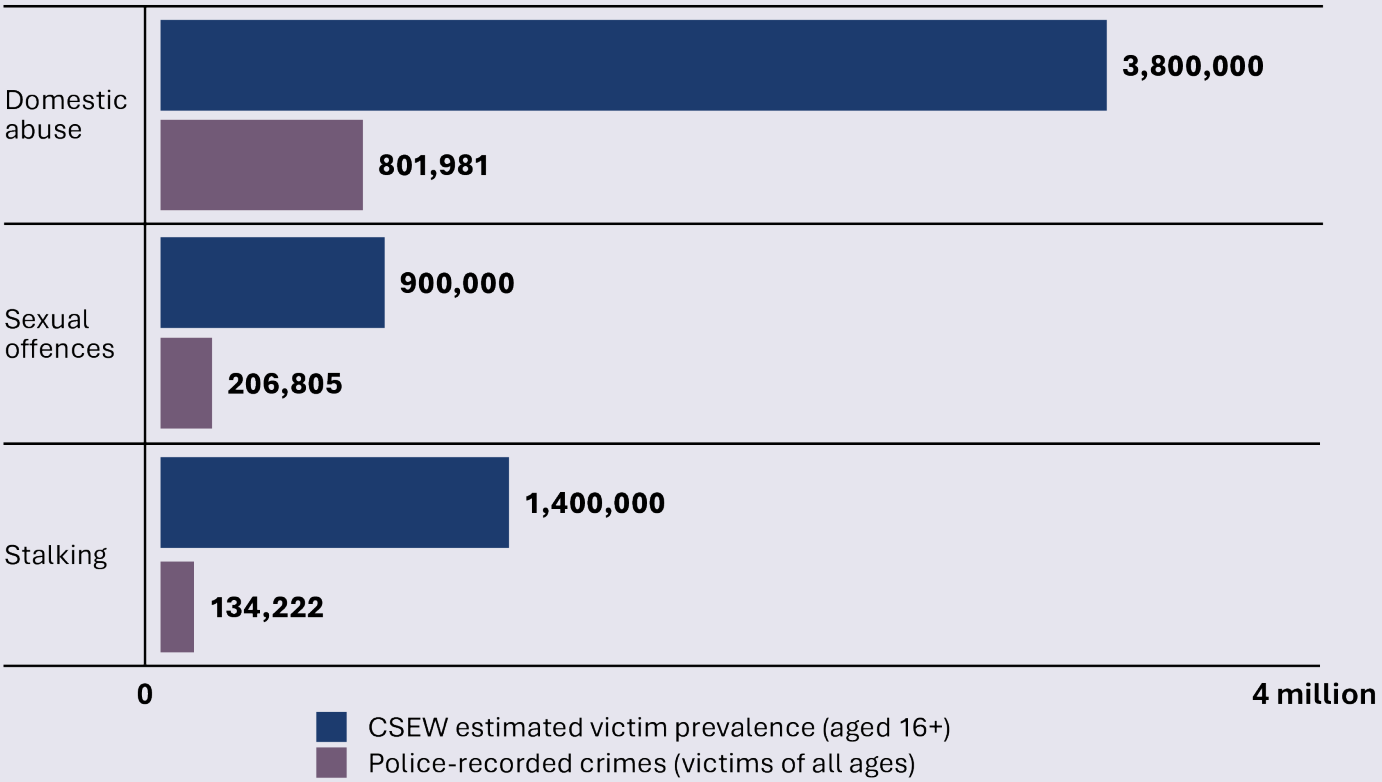


Figure 3: Comparison of annual ONS estimated victim prevalence of VAWG (where victim is aged 16+) against Home Office Annual Data Requirement (ADR) police-recorded offences

Data Sources:
Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2025
Sexual offences in England and Wales overview: year ending March 2025
Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2025

Note: These figures represent volumes against both male and female victims.

Police-recorded VAWG and Public Protection

Police-recorded crime provides an indicator of the overall impact into policing by crime type. This inaugural national analysis of VAWG and Public Protection establishes ––a new baseline for future comparison. Recent changes to which offences are included in counts of VAWG mean the refined categories cannot be compared with previous national analyses.

For full details on the new counting measures, see Appendices 2 and 3.

Police-recorded crime data in this section is drawn from two distinct sources. The first is through the Home Office Annual Data Requirement (ADR), which collects crime data. For the purposes of this report, this data has been provided specifically for the offences in scope of VAWG and Public Protection.

The ADR has some constraints, notably the ability to aggregate into an overall estimate of VAWG crime due to challenges with duplicate crimes within the data.

For that reason, this STRA also uses data collected directly by the NCVPP from 42 forces across England and Wales including British Transport Police (BTP) in order to provide an aggregated VAWG estimate, and also in relation to some wider Public Protection metrics.

VAWG crimes

In the financial year 2024/25, based on data provided to the Home Office through the ADR, police-recorded at least **723,271 offences in scope of VAWG**. Where victim sex was recorded, **at least 426,587** involved female victims[2]. This figure does not include all offences flagged as domestic abuse or 'honour'-based abuse as these are not standalone crime types but are 'flagged' offences which may overlap with other offences in scope of VAWG. For this reason, domestic abuse and 'honour'-based abuse flagged data is provided separately.

When domestic abuse flagged crimes are considered separately, **801,981 domestic abuse related offences** and **2,948 HBA flagged offences**, were recorded, with women and girls comprising nearly three-quarters of victims where sex was recorded.

723,271
VAWG recorded crimes (excluding DA and HBA)

801,981
domestic abuse related offences

2,948
HBA flagged offences

Long-term increases

Police-recorded VAWG crimes have risen sharply over the past decade, at a faster rate to crime overall. Long term trends of prevalence cannot be reliably assessed for domestic abuse using CSEW data, due to changes in survey questions. However, the Office for National Statistics notes that stalking prevalence has remained broadly stable while sexual assault has increased since the year ending (YE) March 2015.

Where comparable police-recorded data exists, overall recorded crime rose 44% from:

3.6 million in YE March 2015 to **5.2 million** in YE March 2026

while sexual offences increased by

147%
(from 88,219 to 217,567)

Domestic abuse offences show a similar pattern, rising 98% between YE March 2016 and YE March 2025. Although some increases reflect legislative changes and improved recording, the data indicate a significant expansion in VAWG and Public Protection crimes. As outlined in the VAWG National Policing Statement 2024, rising complexity of investigations, the fast-paced development of technology, and evolving perpetrator behaviour continue to pose major challenges for policing.

[2] 20% (144,803) of victim sex was recorded as unknown.

A deeper dive into VAWG and Public Protection

NCVPP police-recorded crimes data collection

Analysis of police-recorded crime data collected separately to the ADR by NCVPP from **42 police forces** shows that in FYE 24/25 Public Protection offences account for **at least 21% of all police-recorded crime** (excluding fraud).

This does not account for non-crime domestic incidents (533,967) or missing person investigations (378, 272 for FYE 23/24) both of which contribute to the workload of policing.

The volume and nature of offending impacts all parts of policing, from frontline response to serious and organised crime. This means a joined-up approach is required, equipping all parts of the workforce to tackle these crimes.

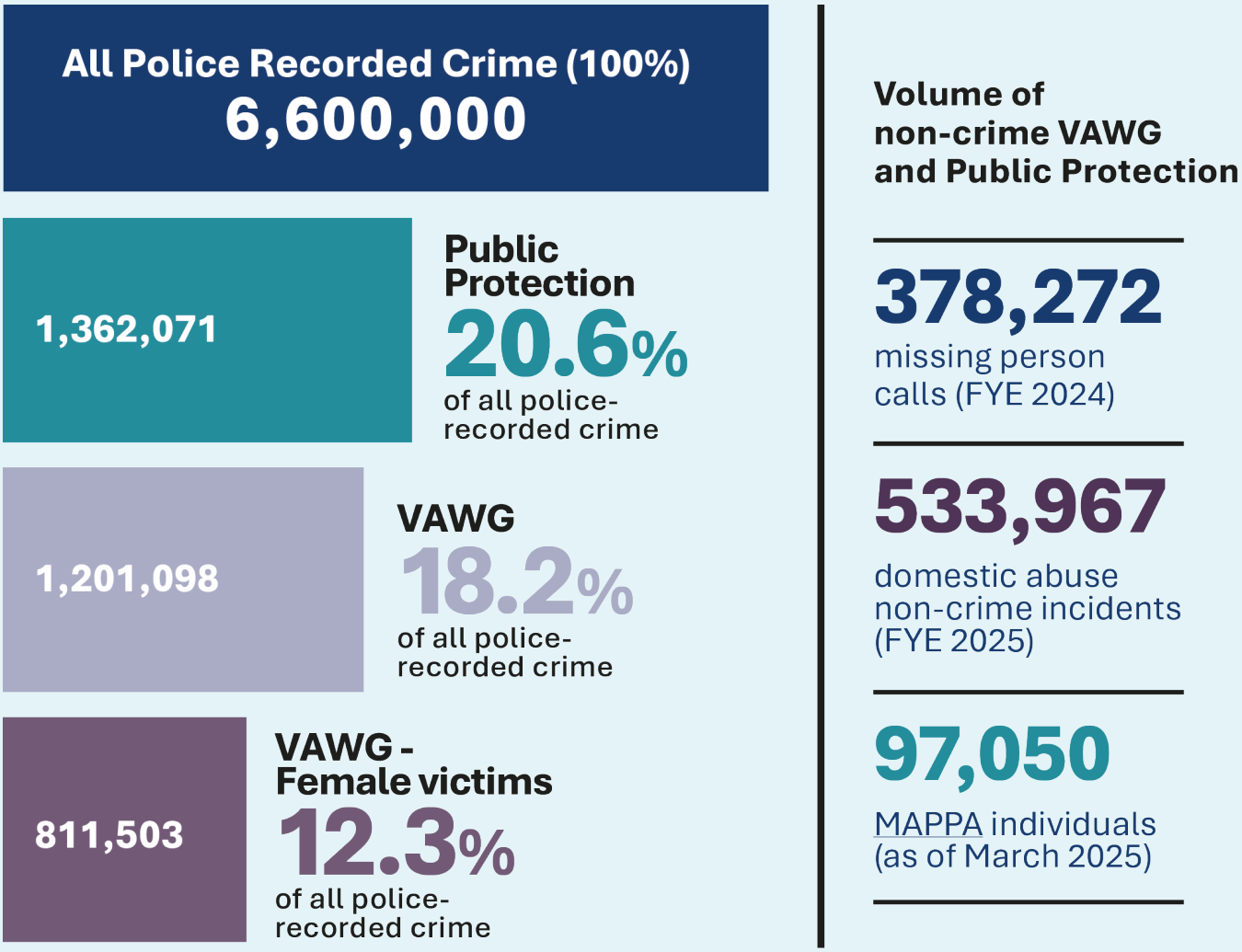


Figure 4: Proportion of all crime which relates to VAWG and Public Protection and wider public safety requirements

Data Source: NCVPP Police Force Recorded Crimes Data Collection for FY 24/25

VAWG related crimes are a significant contributor to Public Protection, accounting for 88% of Public Protection crimes and 18% of all police-recorded crimes. Within this data, 65% of all VAWG crimes were domestic abuse related.

VAWG related crimes are significant contributors to Public Protection:

18% police-recorded crimes are VAWG

88% Public Protection crimes are VAWG

65% of all VAWG crimes were domestic abuse related

The most prevalent forms of VAWG crimes (all victims inclusive of domestic abuse) recorded were:

Harassment	Rape and sexual offences	Stalking
24%	16%	11%

Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation accounts for the largest proportion of abuse of children, based on policing data, however, it is recognised that cruelty and neglect is more likely to come to notice of partner agencies than police.

Police-recorded

161,802

child abuse offences

78% of these were child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) offences

21% were cruelty to children/young persons offences



Threat assessment

Unless otherwise stated, all remaining data presented relate to the NCVPP police-recorded crime data collection. There are known limitations, data quality issues and variations across police force crime recording systems. For this reason, it should be noted that stats presented from this data collection should be considered indicative and are not designated as National Statistics.

VAWG and CSAE crime continue to be highly gendered and disproportionately committed by males

Across all Public Protection offences for the YE March 2025, there were:

975,784

female victims recorded (70% of offences where victim sex was recorded). Of these:

86%

were related to a VAWG offence type

VAWG crimes are predominantly driven by male violence, with women and girls disproportionately victimised, reflected across both prevalence and police-recorded crime data[3,4].

Within crime data, where victim and suspect sex were recorded, approximately **four in five offences against women and girls were perpetrated by males**. This highlights the need to ensure specific focus within policing responses on the prevention of male violence towards women and girls.

CSAE is also heavily gendered, with the majority of victims being female and perpetrators male, also reflected in prevalence data. Policing and partner strategies which focus on tackling VAWG must consider CSAE as part of a spectrum of VAWG harms, rather than as an isolated threat.

[3] Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview - Office for National Statistics
[4] Stalking: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

Technology and the online space continue to be significant enablers of VAWG

Technology and online spaces continue to be a major enabler of VAWG offending, expanding offenders' reach, increasing anonymity, and creating new pathways for harm across both established and emerging forms of abuse. It is highly likely that online harms and tech-facilitated VAWG will continue to be the fastest growing threat across VAWG and Public Protection.

Within police-recorded crime,

14%

(194,198 out of **1,362,071)**

of VAWG and Public Protection offences had an online flag applied

However, due to inconsistencies in how the online flag is applied, this is almost certainly a large underrepresentation of the scale of online harms reported to policing.

Digital harms are characterised by high volume, hidden victimisation, low perceived risk for perpetrators and high investigative complexity for policing. More needs to be done by platforms and technology providers to prevent online harms and implement safety-by-design features.

Minoritised communities are often at higher and unique risks of harm, however, barriers to reporting and a lack of public trust and confidence in policing remain

Minoritised communities continue to face barriers to reporting and lower public trust and confidence in policing, meaning the true scale of harm experienced is unlikely to be reflected in police-recorded crime data. Without recognising this, policing risks missing victims who are already less visible.

Evidence shows that some minoritised communities experience disproportionately high and distinct levels of harm across VAWG and Public Protection compared to their non-minoritised peers. For example, **CSEW findings show domestic abuse is more commonly experienced by those with disabilities (13.7%), compared to people without a disability (6.7%)**.

Experiences of Intimate Image Abuse experienced by Muslim and other minoritised women can be unique, with a lower threshold for what may be considered 'intimate' compared to the current legal threshold, but with serious consequences for victims from these communities. This has implications for the policing response, to ensure that victims are safeguarded appropriately and that victims' voices are central to understanding threat and risk.

Research suggests that the threat to minoritised groups of economic abuse is disproportionately high. Women from Black and Asian heritage, with disabilities or with migrant status are most at risk. Perpetrators exploit support needs such as language barriers or additional vulnerabilities, to exert control over finances.

There are a disproportionally high proportion of Black and mixed-ethnicity individuals among those reported missing, when compared with census population proportions. Drivers of missing incidents such as exploitation, a lack of belonging, and conflict at home are reported as particularly pronounced for Black children. (Missing People, 2023 and Missing People, 2024).

Analysis of police-recorded crime focusing on children involving both CSAE and County Lines highlights the disproportionate vulnerability of exploitation for children from Black and mixed-ethnicity communities. **Mixed-ethnicity (11%) and Black (9%) children are over-represented in this data compared to census data (3% mixed-ethnicity and 4% Black)**.

Assessment of changes to threats and enablers

Our assessment identifies four cross-cutting themes that underpin and amplify harm across both **VAWG** and **Public Protection**.

These themes represent the principal areas where policing and partners can maximise impact:

- Digital factors
- Place-based factors
- Contextual factors
- Children and young people

The cross-cutting themes outlined consist of a wide breadth of factors that cut across VAWG and Public Protection threats.

Each broad theme consists of a number of smaller sub-themes.

For example, 'digital factors' encompasses sub-themes such as online misogyny, image-based abuse, indecent images of children and cyberstalking.

Each sub-threat has been assessed as one of the following:

Persistent: a threat identified in previous threat assessments.

Increasing: identified in previous threat assessments, but increasing in prevalence and impact.

Emerging: assessed as threats which have not been previously identified and increasing.

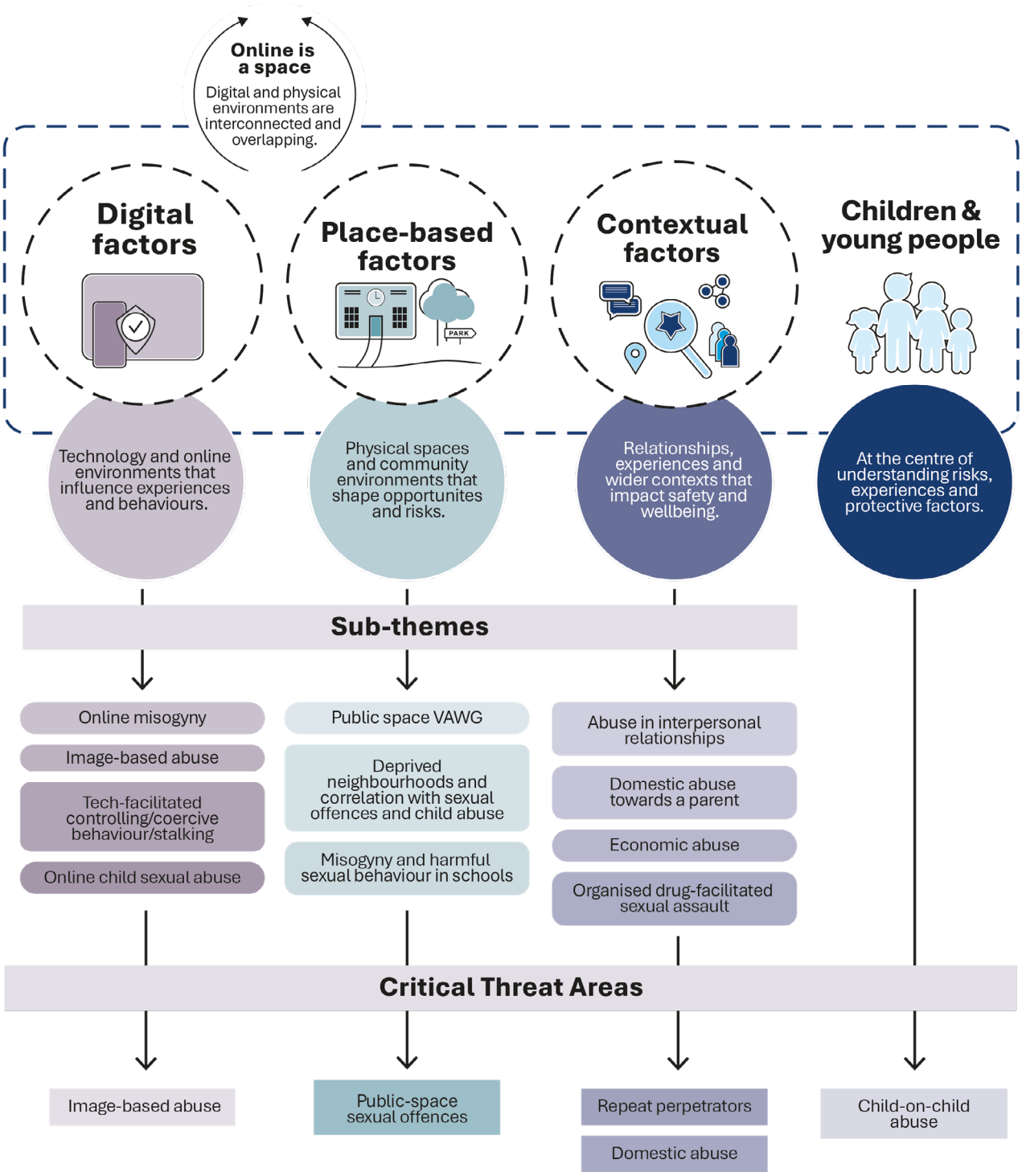


Figure 5: Cross cutting and sub-themes across VAWG and Public Protection



Digital factors

Increasing: Online misogyny

It is highly likely the increase of misogynistic content across mainstream online platforms over the last three years has been significantly influenced by algorithmic amplification, often boosting sensational or polarising material such as gender-hostile "self-improvement" content and anti-feminist content. The increasing amount of gender-hostile content normalises harmful attitudes and influences offline behaviour, particularly among boys and young men, creating volatile and unsafe environments for women, girls and other children.

Increasing: Image-based abuse

Image-based abuse including child and adult offences, such as non-consensual sharing of intimate images, AI generated sexual imagery, sexual extortion, cyber flashing and indecent images of children (IIOC) offences.

Image-based abuse continues to be one of the fastest-growing threats to women and children. Data from the Revenge Porn Helpline identified an **11% increase in reports to them in 2025 compared with the previous year, with 98.9% of reported images depicting women**. Reports to the Helpline for Financially Motivated Sexual Extortion (FMSE) made up 24% of all direct case; 94% of those seeking advice regarding FMSE were male.

Sexual extortion reports related to children, made to the Internet Watch Foundation showed a 127% increase in 2025 compared to the same period in 2024. This is reflected in our analysis of police-recorded crime data which saw sexually and financially motivated extortion offences of under-18s increase by between 60 and 75% over the eighteen months to the end of calendar year 2025.

At least

20%

of all flagged online crimes in scope of VAWG and Public Protection were image-based abuse offences, with

73%

victims female

For children, indecent image offences are now the predominant threat, accounting for 29% of all CSAE in 2024. Overall, image-based abuse offences are highly gendered, with the exception of sexual extortion where a higher proportion of victims are male. These offences are underreported to policing, with some victims not aware that an offence has taken place, and recording is often inconsistent, obscuring the true scale of harm.

Victims of image-based abuse are likely to be less willing to report to police, due to fear, shame, and uncertainty of the response they will receive. This widens the gap in policing's understanding of this threat and makes it difficult to pursue perpetrators effectively.

Increasing: Tech facilitated controlling or coercive behaviour and stalking

Tech-facilitated coercive control and stalking are highly likely to increase over the next three years as surveillance technologies become increasingly sophisticated, cheaper and easier to disguise, making them increasingly challenging to detect.

27% of all stalking offences had an online flag applied

87% were domestic abuse related

Police-recorded crime data shows that 27% of all stalking offences had an online flag applied (data quality issues mean this is highly likely to be an underestimate and may not capture surveillance technologies); of these, 87% were domestic abuse related.

As surveillance technologies, such as stalkerware, and Internet of Things (IOTs) smart devices, have developed and become more widely available, the threat to victims is increasing, with behaviours becoming harder to detect and more complex to investigate.

Increasing: Online child sexual abuse

It is highly likely young people are at greater risk of exposure to online harms due to the merging of their online and offline worlds, and due to their presence online at a younger age than previous generations. The continuous evolution of technology presents increased opportunities for online sexual offending and harm to children; **victims under 18 account for 24% of all victims of online VAWG offences**, including CSA offences. Our previous analysis on CSAE highlights online CSA as the fastest growing threat to children.

For many children, online and offline worlds are increasingly merged into inseparable experiences, where online interactions shape their real-world mental health, identity and relationships. The Online Safety Act has put steps in place to protect children from harm, such as the Protection of Children Code. However, technology companies need to do more as harmful content remains accessible.



Place-based factors

Place-based risk factors play a role in providing opportunities for VAWG and Public Protection crimes to occur. Identifying these environmental factors gives policing the opportunity to work in collaboration with partners to tackle VAWG and Public Protection, pursue perpetrators, and tackle enablers of these harms. This includes public spaces, schools and the online space, the latter of which has been discussed earlier in this summary.

Persistent: Public space VAWG

Whilst the majority of VAWG offences (74%) occurred within the home environment, the prevalence of and harms caused by VAWG offending in public spaces remains a key challenge for both policing and wider society to tackle and is poorly understood by policing. It is almost certain that public-based VAWG is under-reported to the police, with research indicating much higher levels of women and girls experiencing street harassment in a public space than is recorded by police.

At least 20% of VAWG crimes were identified as taking place in public spaces, with rape and sexual offences and harassment being the most commonly reported (37% and 21%). Data from force problem profiles identifies locations such as city centres, transport hubs and the night-time economy as key locations for adult rape and sexual offences and CSAE. The high footfall and transient nature of these locations provide opportunities for harassment, sexual and violent offences.

Public spaces also often function as initial contact points prior to future offences, especially in stranger perpetrated harm. Proactive, place-based approaches, using safety-by-design and partnership-led interventions, rather than reactive enforcement alone can help reduce harm, as evidenced by the work of Project Vigilant.

Persistent: Deprived neighbourhoods and correlation with sexual offences and child abuse

Whilst VAWG offences can be experienced across all socio-economic circumstances, adult sexual offences and child abuse are disproportionately concentrated in the most deprived neighbourhoods in England and Wales.

These offences all show a strong correlation with deprivation, with 46% of recorded CSAE occurring in the most deprived 30% of areas. These patterns raise important questions about the role that place-based disadvantage and shared environmental factors play in creating conditions which may affect Public Protection.

A number of charities including Barnado's, Refuge and Women's Aid have highlighted the increasing risk that higher cost-of living has on survivors of abuse.

Increasing: Misogyny and harmful sexual behaviour in schools

The widespread availability of misogynistic content poses particular risks to children. This content can distort adolescents' perceptions of relationships and desensitise them to harm. Research shows teenage boys tend to be less concerned than girls about exposure to sexual, misogynistic, or violent material.

Meanwhile, the offline impact is increasingly visible, with schools reporting growing concerns, and significant numbers of girls avoiding education due to sexual harassment. Where offence location is recorded, **police data shows that where VAWG suspects are aged 10-18, 10% of offences occurred in educational settings**. The government has announced plans to strengthen teaching on healthy relationships within the national curriculum.



Contextual factors

Abuse in interpersonal relationships

Most police-recorded VAWG occurs within relationships between intimate partners and family members **(75% where relationship was recorded)**. Within these, harms often present as patterns of abuse, rather than isolated incidents. Child to parent abuse, economic abuse and drug-facilitated sexual assaults are three threat areas that have become increasingly visible, but remain poorly understood, underreported and inconsistently responded to.

Increasing: Domestic abuse towards a parent

In 10% of domestic abuse offences the suspect's relationship to the victim was recorded as 'child', with the majority (69%) of suspects being male. In domestic homicides, 11% of suspects were recorded as a child of the victim.

This is a 4% increase in domestic abuse towards a parent when looking at female victims, compared to police-recoded data FY 2022/2023. In this context, 'child' refers to the familial relationship between the suspect and the victim, rather than the age of the suspect. This type of abuse does not comfortably sit within any of the statutory service offerings and can lead to a lack of available support for these cases.

Increasing: Economic abuse

Economic abuse has increased from the previous year in the CSEW and is now the second most common form of domestic or partner abuse, (behind emotional abuse, often occurring as a form of controlling or coercive behaviour. This encompasses any behaviour that impacts a person's ability to acquire, use or maintain money/assets, in the context of domestic abuse. It is highly likely that the increasing cost of living has contributed to an increase in economic abuse within relationships, most commonly impacting women and girls. This is also likely being exacerbated by the increasing ability to apply for finances online, with perpetrators holding enough information about victims to apply for finance in their names.

Emerging: Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault (ODFSA)

Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault (ODFSA) within intimate relationships is a form of domestic abuse where perpetrators use substances, including alcohol, prescription medication or illegal drugs, to intentionally incapacitate their partner in order to commit sexual offences. Some of this abuse has been identified as coordinated and organised online, with the perpetrator facilitating the sexual assault of their partner by other perpetrators. This abuse can often be streamed or shared online to networks of other perpetrators. Within police-recorded data 12% of spiking offences are domestic abuse flagged or committed by a current/ex-partner. This is almost certain to be an under-representation, as many victims may not know they are victims of this type of offence. This is a barrier to understanding ODFSA as an emerging threat, with an unknown prevalence. International high-profile cases have highlighted the links between ODFSA in intimate relationships and organised online networks, including organised drug purchasing, stranger rape and the progression between online voyeurism and contact offending.

Persistent: Repeat perpetrators

Police-recorded crime data from nine forces in the Tackling Organised Exploitation (TOEX) Programme Eastern Region identified that 24% of all VAWG and Public Protection suspects recorded between April 2024 and March 2025 were repeat suspects. They were reported for three or more VAWG/Public Protection offences since 2022.

Within this cohort, suspect ages peaked among those aged 15 to 19 and 30 to 39, representing variances in offending patterns. The data highlights that 15 to 19 year olds are more commonly involved in child-on-child offending. In contrast, the 30 to 39 age group is more consistent with repeat domestic abuse patterns, typically involving sustained harm towards the same victim.

Our analysis of the contexts of children who commit teenage relationship abuse within police-recorded crime also identified a cohort of repeat offending, with 42% having committed VAWG-related offending prior to the teenage relationship abuse (TRA) offence, and 34% committing further VAWG offending post the index TRA offence. Identification of repeat and high-harm perpetrators supports policing and partners to target prevention and early intervention, and to prioritise the highest risk offenders. The NCVPP, as a priority, are working to drive consistency in the identification and management of repeat and high-harm perpetrators.

Teenage relationship abuse within police-recorded crime identified a cohort of repeat offending, with:

42%

committing VAWG related offending prior to the TRA

34%

committed further VAWG offences



Children and young people

There remains a high volume within police-recorded crime of both children as victims, and those who harm other children, cross-cutting multiple areas of VAWG and Public Protection.

Evidence shows a strong pattern of child-on-child offending, often influenced by online exposure, peer norms and unmet needs linked to vulnerabilities. A multi-agency, child-centred approach is required to ensure that appropriate support, early intervention, and risk management can continue even when criminal justice outcomes are not appropriate.

However, there is a challenge for policing and the wider criminal justice system in balancing a child-centred approach for children who harm with an appropriate criminal justice outcome. There is also a lack of consistency across policing and other statutory partners in what 'good' interventions look like to prevent future harm by children.

Persistent: Child-on-child abuse

Children who perpetrate VAWG and CSAE offences continue to predominantly target victims of a similar age group, across several different areas of VAWG and Public Protection.

Where age was known, children aged 10-17 most commonly perpetrated offences against victims in the same age bracket, across malicious communications (75%), harassment (67%), online flagged offences (61%) and CSAE (47%).

This reflects our previous findings in the 2024 report of National Analysis of Police-Recorded CSAE crimes in which **50% of CSAE offences were committed by 10-17 year olds**.

Increasing: Teenage relationship abuse

There is increasing evidence that abuse within teenage relationships is highly prevalent. A survey by the Youth Endowment Fund found that **43% of teenage children who reported being in a relationship had experienced violent or controlling behaviours**, whilst the CSEW found 16-19 year olds experienced domestic abuse at a higher rate than any other age group within the last year (year ending March 2025).

Within police-recorded crime data, where the victim and suspect were both under 18, 17% of VAWG offences were committed by a partner/ex-partner. Analysis of a sample of cases identified as teenage relationship abuse (where both children were under 18) **identified that 95% of victims were female and 89% of suspects were male. In 40% of cases, the incident was part of a wider pattern of abuse**, ranging from physical and sexual abuse to coercive or controlling behaviour.

Within this sample, just over a quarter of perpetrators (27%) had grown up in an abusive environment, including being a victim in their own right as a result of witnessing domestic abuse and being a victim of neglect, echoing previous research.

Our analysis also emphasises that there is an important role for partners in supporting children who perpetrate abuse, recognising them as children in their own right, to support, safeguard and aid prevention of further harm. **This is particularly pertinent given in 55% of these cases, the victim did not support further action against the offending child**, which is higher than that seen in broader CSAE cases and domestic abuse crimes.

Critical Threat Areas

Assessment of the cross cutting sub-themes, in relation to their scale, harm and the key gaps in the policing response, allows policing to identify those that are deemed to be Critical Threat Areas.

To support with this, all sub-themes have been risk-assessed using the Management of Risk in Law Enforcement scoring mechanism (MoRiLE), to identify Critical Threat Areas for policing and inform prioritisation of activity.

Five Critical Threat Areas have been identified which provide policing with the opportunity to take a cross-cutting capability approach to tackling VAWG and Public Protection, such as that outlined in the National Vulnerability and Public Protection Strategy. These are:



Domestic abuse

A cross-cutting, high-harm, high-risk threat, contributing to **65% of all VAWG crimes**. A significant proportion of other VAWG, like RASSO and stalking offences, occur within abusive relationships.

The common feature is VAWG being used as a means of coercing and controlling victims within a relationship. Policing's capability and capacity to tackle domestic abuse is impacted by high need and increasingly complex cases.

There are clear intersections with other priority and emerging themes, such as image-based abuse, economic abuse, cyberstalking and the impact on children who grow up in households where domestic abuse is present.



Public-space sexual offences

Whilst most VAWG offending takes place in private spaces, **at least 20% of all VAWG crimes where a location was recorded[5] take place in public spaces**, most of which are rape and sexual offences and harassment.

However, there are challenges for policing in understanding the prevalence of, and harms caused by, sexual offences in public spaces at a macro level. This remains a key challenge, particularly where victims are approached in public spaces but harmed in other non-public locations.

There are also challenges relating to how Policing with Community Safety Partners effectively identify and prioritise spaces where women and children feel unsafe and the subsequent implementation of safety-by-design features to prevent public space sexual offences.

[5] 59% of offences did not have a location recorded.

Repeat perpetrators

Police-recorded data across **nine forces identified that 24% of VAWG and Public Protection named suspects had committed three or more additional VAWG or Public Protection offences in the previous three years**. External factors that create challenges in pursuing perpetrators through a criminal trial, such as time taken to get to court and the likely impact of the Independent Sentencing Review, and Sentencing Act (2026) on management of offenders, reinforce the need for policing to prioritise the identification and disruption of repeat perpetrators.

This would prevent cumulative risk, escalation of harm and ultimately protect the public. Significant work has been undertaken across police forces to support with this in recent years, and the NCVPP are working to drive consistency across policing in the management of high-harm and repeat perpetrators. However, there is a clear role for the wider policing system to support in tackling this threat.

This is likely to include utilising regional and national tasking structures and deploying approaches currently used in responding to Serious and Organised Crime and Counter Terrorism policing, mirrored for VAWG, recognising the scale and associated levels of harm in this space.

Image-based abuse

At least 20% of all online flagged VAWG and Public Protection crimes relate to image-based abuse. Most of these crimes relate to indecent images of children (IIOC) which now accounts for almost a third of all police-recorded CSAE.

Image-based abuse remains significantly under-reported to policing, particularly when it relates to adult victims, due to multiple barriers to reporting such as limited awareness that the abuse and threats are illegal, along with uncertainty who is responsible and who to report the abuse to (tech companies, Ofcom or policing).

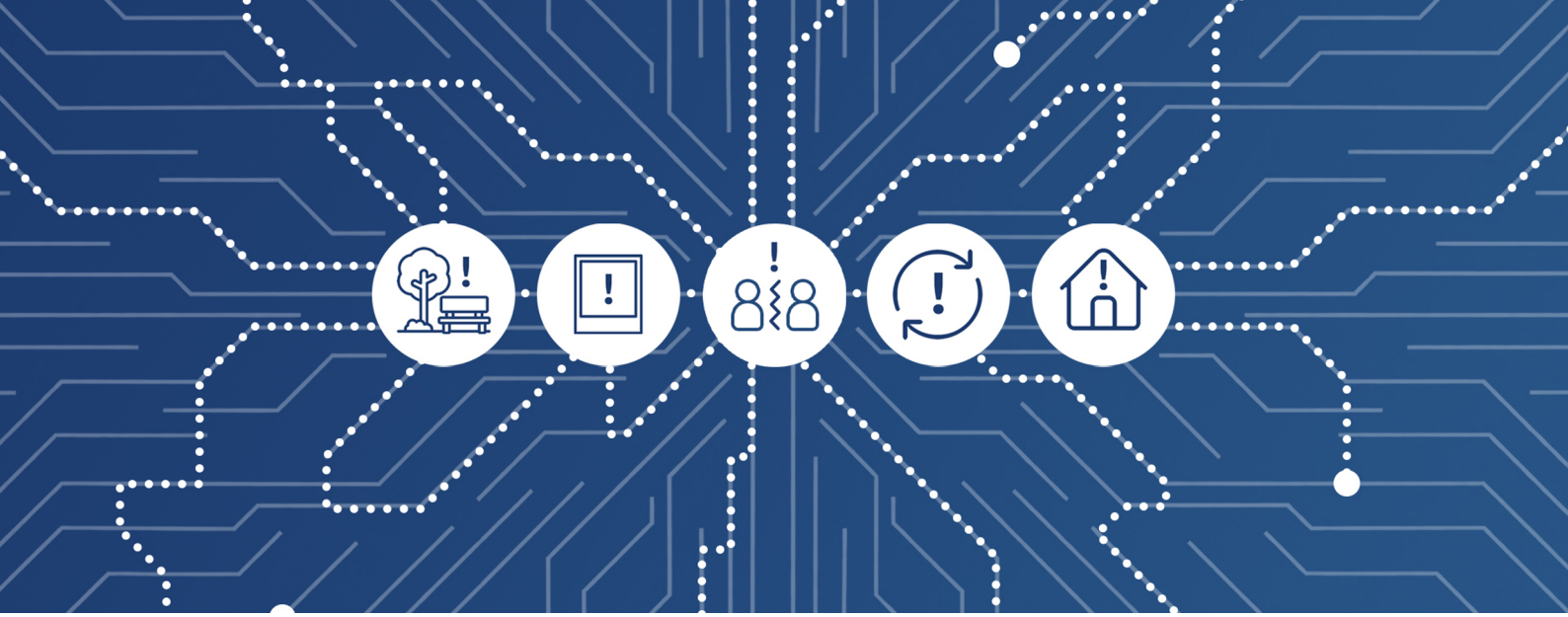
Rapid developments in AI mean that the threat of image-based abuse is likely to continue to rise. The increasing volume and rapidly evolving nature of this threat present challenges for policing and wider partnerships and requires ongoing consideration as to the capabilities required to meet need effectively.

Child-on-child abuse

As highlighted in our previous assessments of VAWG and CSAE, there remains a high prevalence of child-on-child abuse across a range of threats such as online harms and sexual offences. For example, **where the victim and suspect were both under 18, 17% of VAWG offences were committed by a partner/ex-partner. 50% of CSAE (where age is known) is also committed by children aged 10-17**.

This presents an operational challenge and policy tension as policing, alongside partners, seek to balance child-centred policing commitments and wider Public Protection responsibilities.

In addition, focusing earlier intervention and prevention within this cohort would likely present opportunities to prevent and reduce future harm and contribute to HMG's ambition to halve VAWG within a decade.



Overlap with Serious and Organised Crime and Counter Terrorism

What is clear from our assessment is that the disproportionate exploitation and harm of women and children runs as a consistent thread throughout Public Protection.

This thread extends into elements of Serious and Organised Crime followed by (SOC) and Counter Terrorism (CT), in particular the emerging threats of sadistic online networks and organised drug-facilitated sexual abuse, highlighting the role that all parts of policing have in tackling VAWG and Public Protection. VAWG has stood alongside SOC and CT on the strategic policing requirement since 2023. However, intelligence gaps persist about the overlap between VAWG and Public Protection offending and victimisation and SOC involvement.

Serious and organised crime

VAWG and Public Protection-related threats, including sexual offences, CSA and modern slavery represent a number of areas of overlap with serious and organised crime. However, there continues to be gaps in policing's full understanding of the overlap between VAWG and Public Protection and SOC. A better understanding of the nature of the intersections between SOC and VAWG and Public Protection would facilitate collaborative working within policing to tackle cross-cutting threats and perpetrators who may pose a risk across these threat areas.

Modern slavery

Modern slavery is a term that includes any form of human trafficking, slavery, servitude or forced labour, as set out in the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Potential victims of modern slavery in the UK who come to the attention of authorised first responder organisations are referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). **There was a 22% increase in potential victims of modern slavery who were referred to the Home Office in 2025, compared to the previous year. 26% of potential victims were female.**

Exploitation types typically have gendered patterns. For example, in 2025, males most often reported labour exploitation (43%) or criminal (29%), whereas females most often reported sexual exploitation (28%).

For further insight into modern slavery, please refer to the Home Office official statistics or National Crime Agency National Strategic Assessment 2026.

Sadistic online harm groups

Online networks dedicated to inflicting harm and committing a range of criminality, known as "com-networks", remain a threat that evidences the clear overlap between VAWG, Public Protection and SOC offending. Com-Networks consist predominantly of teenage boys and often share sadistic and misogynistic material, drawing in young people, often girls, to inflict or incite others into committing serious harm.

There is an overlap between CSAE and county line involvement

Collaboration with the National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) comparing children identified as victims and/or perpetrators of CSAE and County Lines over a two-year period found that 15% appeared in both datasets. The interconnection between CSAE and County Lines is not always clear cut, with children represented as both victims and suspects across the two harm types. Among those appearing in both datasets, the majority (81%) were primarily involved in County Lines through the movement of drugs as a runner or courier indicating overlaps in vulnerabilities across both harms.

Of the 15% of children who appear in both datasets, the majority (91%) experienced County Lines and CSAE as separate forms of harm. Where a sequence could be identified, involvement in County Lines and related Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) most commonly preceded CSAE (57%). It is **likely** drug-related CCE may increase individuals' vulnerability to CSAE, whether directly associated to the CCE or as a broader result of increased exposure to harmful environments.

Children identified across both CSAE and County Lines datasets appear to be at greater risk of experiencing, or being involved in, more serious sexual harm. A higher proportion were linked to rape offences (26%) compared with the wider CSAE cohort (17%). Missing episodes are also a recognised indicator of exploitation; at least 31% of missing children with an identified County Lines link were also connected to one or more CSAE offences.

Misogyny and extremism

Extremism in the UK is evolving, and is increasingly characterised by fluid, hybrid and conflicted ideological belief systems, with a shift towards violence fixation. Violence-fascinated individuals, not motivated by a particular ideology, can be drawn into extreme violence and radicalisation.

Misogyny has emerged as a cross-cutting element of many extremist ideologies, effectively bridging individual divides and facilitating the spread of these narratives across cultural contexts. Incidents of extreme violence in the UK have provided examples of real-world harm that has been linked to the accessing of misogynistic content online, demonstrating the role of misogyny as a driver for extreme violent offences. The cross-cutting nature of misogyny across extremist ideologies and its impact on extreme violence suggests a need for preventative action for individuals with these beliefs.

Many individuals (though not all) with extremist views against women and girls, linked with extremist ideologies, will be identified by the Counter Terrorism system (Prevent and Pursue). However, for those individuals who fall below current CT thresholds, the work of the Non-Ideological Extreme Violence taskforce, will likely determine how those cases are managed in the future.

Many of these factors were highlighted in the Southport Inquiry, with recommendations for policing and other statutory organisations relating to the need for clear accountability and ownership of individuals who fall within scope. In addition to this, the Inquiry made recommendations for improved interventions for those accessing extremist material online.



Policing's capability and capacity to respond to VAWG and Public Protection threats

Our forecasting analysis predicts a gradual and sustained increase in recorded VAWG crimes against female victims over the next two years, mostly across sexual offences, which is likely due to the improved police recording practices as well as the introduction of new sexual offences focusing on the creating and taking of intimate images.

Similar increasing trends are likely across controlling or coercive behaviour (defined as an offence in 2015) and non-fatal strangulation, which was also made a new specific offence in 2022[6].

Furthermore, the future introduction of the new statutory duty to report CSA is likely to contribute to increased reporting into policing. Whilst new legislation is important in tackling VAWG and Public Protection as the nature of harm develops, it is important that with these, policing have the appropriate capability, skills and structures in place to implement the new legislation and properly manage the increase in need that these can lead to.

It is also important to acknowledge that whilst Police Reform remains in early planning stages, it has the potential to improve policing's ability to bring together resources to respond to VAWG and Public Protection threats more effectively.

[6] New non-fatal strangulation offence comes into force - GOV.UK

Key challenges for policing

Capacity and capability

At least 21% of all crimes relate to VAWG and Public Protection offences; however, this does not capture related activity such as non-crime incidents, missing persons investigations and the management of sexual and violent offenders. With technology and online-enabled offending likely to continue increasing, investigations are likely to become more complex, requiring more technical skillsets to support them. It is highly likely that increasing reporting and complexity in Public Protection and VAWG investigations will continue to exceed available resources, over the next two years.

Workforce wellbeing

Workforce wellbeing continues to be a significant challenge in policing, shaped by workload, resourcing, organisational support, pay fairness, health, length of service and workplace culture. For officers and staff working in Public Protection roles, it is likely this is exacerbated by the levels of risk they carry in their workloads. It is highly likely that without a clear, comprehensive wellbeing strategy that accounts for complexity, trauma, and effective management, wellbeing issues will persist, further straining police capacity, over the next two years.

Public trust and confidence

Declining rates of public trust and confidence impacts on levels of reporting of crime into policing, which affects our understanding of threat, harm and risk and the ability to safeguard victims and pursue perpetrators effectively.

This is exacerbated in some communities where trust in policing already low. High-profile cases of police officers committing VAWG offences, such as Wayne Couzens and David Carrick, along with findings from the Baroness Casey Review of internal culture, will also impact public trust and confidence.

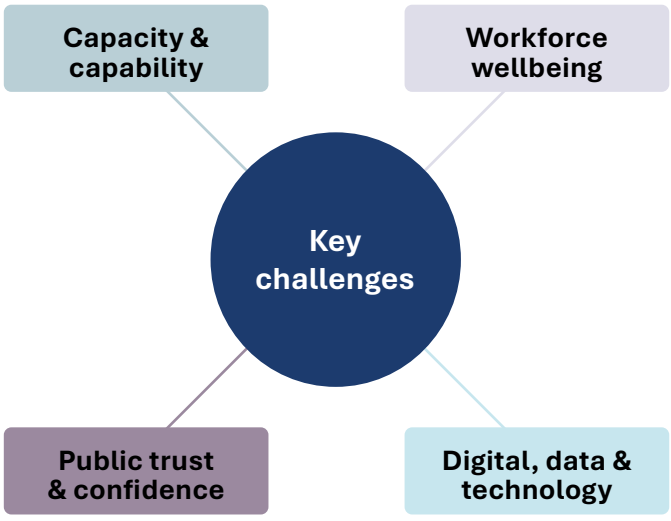
Decreasing public trust and confidence also impacts workforce morale, retention and specialist capability, impacting overall capacity to meet Public Protection needs. Police Reform, the adoption of a victim-centred approach, and commitments to reform the police vetting and misconduct system all provide opportunities to improve public trust and confidence. The impact of reduced public trust and confidence must be considered as part of any future wellbeing strategy.

Digital, data and technology

As highlighted throughout this assessment, the threats posed across VAWG and Public Protection by online harms remain highly prevalent, with technology transforming how and where VAWG offending occurs.

Keeping pace with technological advances is difficult due to financial constraints impacting investment in technology for policing, training and fragmented implementation. It is almost certain that police capability to respond to the evolving nature of VAWG and Public Protection offences will require significant investment in new online digital capabilities and skills, over the next two years.

There are opportunities to explore how investment in AI can be used by policing to tackle VAWG and Public protection, particularly with the launch of the new AI Centre for Policing.



A coordinated policing response

Policing's ability to reduce VAWG and Public Protection harms continues to be constrained by fragmented and predominantly reactive activity across the organisation. Traditionally, VAWG and Public Protection threats have been viewed in isolation, to be tackled by Public Protection teams. This is despite Public Protection threats spanning the wider policing landscape. It is therefore important for all officers to have a baseline knowledge of VAWG and Public Protection; however, there must be investment in specialist capability to tackle these harms.

There are examples of initiatives and protocols that have improved the response, including strong vulnerability strategies, effective performance and governance frameworks and processes where regular feedback is sought from victims and partner agencies. But there is still more to do to ensure these approaches are consistently implemented across all forces. There is also a need to move beyond reactive and siloed responses towards approaches that consider all areas of policing, including frontline response teams and specialist capabilities traditionally used by Serious and Organised Crime or Counter Terrorism.

Since its inception in 2025, the NCVPP has provided a coordinated and centralised response to tackling VAWG and Public Protection, continuing to build on progress made by policing in recent years.

This includes work to professionalise Public Protection through CPD, publication of a vulnerability and Public Protection strategy, as well as providing guidance to forces in relation to high harm perpetrators and image-based abuse.

However, local and national tasking mechanisms must evolve to reflect VAWG as a national priority and ensure a consistently proactive approach to tackling high harm, repeat and cross border perpetrators which uses all parts of policing to tackle the threat. VAWG and CSA threats are designated as strategic policing requirements, requiring collaborative responses, where everyone has a role to play, and these threats must be considered in policing prioritisation processes for proactive asset allocation and operational activity.

A whole system response

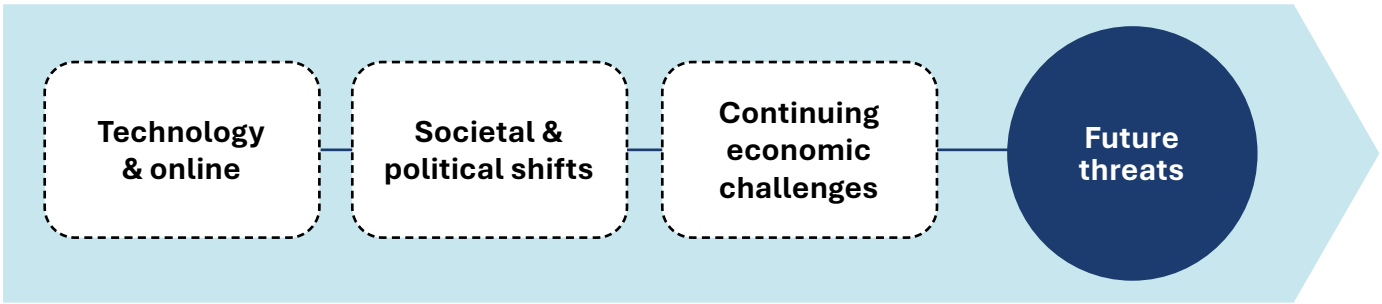
Whilst it is important to highlight key gaps and areas for improvement in policing's capability and capacity to tackle VAWG and Public Protection crimes, an effective approach to these offences also rely upon improvements in policing's response being aligned and combined with wider partnerships. It is not possible for policing to prevent and respond to these threats alone; whole system approaches are needed across local to international interventions to better safeguard the public.



How the threat is expected to develop in the future

This assessment has identified that over the next decade, VAWG and wider Public Protection offending is expected to increase, in both volume and complexity as well as become challenging to detect, driven by the interaction of technological change, societal shifts and economic pressures.

Without whole-system, collaborative interventions these factors will reinforce a low risk, high reward environment for perpetrators and place sustained pressure on policing and safeguarding partners.



Technology and online environments will continue being exploited by perpetrators to enable offending

It is highly likely offenders will increasingly use AI to commit VAWG and CSAE. This includes the creation and misuse of synthetic imagery and more sophisticated methods of coercion, impersonation, and harassment.

AI-enabled abuse will lower barriers to offending and significantly increase offender reach, automation and sophistication.

Furthermore, the deployment of AI chatbots to enable roleplays of harmful scenarios such as CSA and provide guidance on 'how to' commit abuse are likely to contribute to an increased normalisation of harms. HMG has recently introduced an new clause into the Online Safety Act (202i3) that gives it the power to amend the act in respect of AI-generated illegal content to help tackle this issue. Building on our previous assessment, the threat of the Internet of Things will continue, as technology develops, such as smart tech, medical tech and meta glasses.

Online environments will increasingly act as both a direct setting for VAWG and an enabler of offline abuse, as AI, synthetic media, algorithmic amplification and harmful digital cultures expand offenders' capabilities, reduce investigative visibility, and normalise gender-hostile attitudes -particularly among boys and young men. This includes the generation of 'AI slop' in gaming and social media environment; the generation of realistic harmful content, including gore and sexualised imagery that breaches safety mechanisms on platforms.

These shifts, combined with anonymity, encryption and limited platform accountability, are expected to increase safeguarding need, intensify online to offline escalation risks, and is creating growing investigative complexity, placing sustained pressure on policing and partners to identify harm and disrupt offenders across rapidly evolving digital spaces.

Societal and political shifts compounding harms

Widening social divisions are likely to create more permissive environments for VAWG and intersecting harms. Polarisation and identity-based fragmentation will weaken shared norms and reduce informal challenge to harmful attitudes. Misogyny is increasingly likely to intersect with racism, homophobia and anti-migrant sentiment, producing more complex forms of hostility and hate crime.

There is continuing concern within the VAWG sector that the protection of women and girls is being weaponised in ways that can create, rather than mitigate, risk. These dynamics may further compound harms experienced by women and girls from minoritised communities in particular, such as migrant women and girls, potentially exacerbating issues with public trust and confidence in reporting to police. Evidence from Operation Soteria also highlights how myths and misconceptions continue to act as a significant barrier for victim survivors to report crimes and access support.

Continuing economic challenges heightening risks

As highlighted previously, rising inequality and deprivation shows links to risk of VAWG and child abuse harms. High levels of economic hardship are likely to deepen victims' reliance on perpetrators, further expanding opportunities for coercive control and exploitation, among other harms. Without consistent and effective multi-agency coordination, gaps in early intervention and safeguarding responses are likely to widen, leaving vulnerable households with uneven protection and increasing the risk that harm remains hidden.

Conclusion

The national threat posed by VAWG and Public Protection remains both significant and enduring, characterised by high demand, substantial harm, and persistent underreporting across multiple offence types.

The threat continues to be amplified by offenders' exploitation of digital technologies, the increasingly blurred boundaries between online and offline harms, and the complexity of offending occurring within a broader context of harms. Through context-led investigation, proactive offender management and targeted disruption activity, all parts of policing play a vital role in reducing opportunities for offending and increasing accountability for perpetrators.

The assessment indicates that effective management of the VAWG threat requires a whole-system approach that recognises no single agency can reduce harm in isolation. The complex and often intersecting nature of VAWG demands a coordinated response across policing, criminal justice, health, social care, education, local authorities and specialist victim support services. Effective partnership working enables earlier identification of risk factors, more comprehensive safeguarding of victims, and greater opportunities to disrupt offending behaviour before harm escalates.

A shared understanding of threat, risk and vulnerability, supported by timely information-sharing and joint governance arrangements, is critical to ensuring vulnerable individuals do not fall between organisational boundaries.

Action being taken

Policing is working to improve its response to VAWG and Public Protection. As part of this, a whole-system approach must also extend beyond safeguarding and enforcement to encompass prevention and long-term societal change.

This includes addressing the drivers of offending, challenging harmful attitudes and behaviours, promoting healthy relationships, and engaging men and boys in prevention initiatives. Equally important is the development of evidence-based interventions for perpetrators, ensuring that those responsible for harm are identified, managed and, where appropriate, diverted from future offending.

By combining enforcement, prevention, education, public health and community-based interventions, a joined-up approach can deliver a more sustainable reduction in VAWG-related harm than could be achieved through criminal justice measures alone.

Accessing support

We acknowledge the sensitive and potentially distressing nature of the themes covered in this report.

If you are a survivor or are worried about someone else, please know you are not alone and that confidential support is available:

You can report to the police by calling 101, or 999 if you're in immediate danger.

You do not have to report to the police to access support services:

National Domestic Abuse Helpline:

Call **0808 2000 247** for FREE, 24/7 support, or access the live chat via the Refuge National Domestic Abuse Helpline.

24/7 Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Line:

Call **0808 500 2222** anytime or visit the 24/7 Sexual Abuse Support Line for confidential guidance and crisis care.

Rape Crisis England & Wales:

Call 24/7 Support Line on **0808 500 2222** or chat online at the 24/7 Sexual Abuse Support Line.

National Stalking Helpline:

Call **0808 802 0300** for advice and support.

Non-consensual intimate image abuse:

Resources and Support | StopNCII.org

Childline:

Call **0800 1111** for free, 24/7 advice, or initiate a 1-to-1 webchat on the official Childline Website.

NSPCC Helpline:

Adults concerned about the safety or wellbeing of a child can contact child protection specialists on **0808 800 5000** (Monday to Friday, 10am-4pm) or email help@nspcc.org.uk.

Acknowledgements

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The Open University

University College London

Lime Culture

Ofcom

Refuge

Rape Crisis

NAPAC (National Associated of People Abused in Childhood)

Children's Society

Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

Revenge Porn Helpline

NCVPP

National Centre for Violence Against Women & Girls and Public Protection

About the National Centre for Violence Against Women & Girls and Public Protection

We are a collaboration between the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council.

Our vision is to transform policing's response to Public Protection and enable the system change needed to end violence against women and girls.

You can contact the NCVPP:

by email: NCVPP@college.police.uk

by post: National Centre for Violence Against Women & Girls and Public Protection, Leamington Road, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, Coventry, Warwickshire, CV8 3EN

National centre for violence against women and girls and public protection

Vulnerability Knowledge & Practice Programme

College of Policing

NPCC National Police Chiefs' Council