



**Vulnerability Knowledge
& Practice Programme**



VAWG Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment

underpinning and informing the 2024 VAWG Statement

Produced by the VKPP on behalf of the NPCC VAWG Taskforce

OFFICIAL

Introduction

In July 2024, a [National Policing Statement for Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\)](#) was released outlining the scale of VAWG crimes recorded by policing and a call for a whole-system response across criminal justice partners, government bodies and industry. As highlighted in the statement, over one million VAWG related crimes were recorded by police during 2022/23. VAWG continues to be evidenced at an epidemic scale across England and Wales with incidents of the most serious forms of violence being reported in the media on an almost daily basis by [\(The Guardian\)](#). As one of the key sources that underpinned the National Policing Statement for VAWG, the VAWG Strategic Threat Risk Assessment (STRA) 2024 provides further detail of the change in scale and nature of the national threat of VAWG.

This report follows on from the publication in 2023 of policing's baseline assessment of VAWG. The [STRA](#) provides policing with information to inform decision making and planning about how best to respond to and prevent VAWG, particularly in relation to continued and emerging threats. This assessment outlines critical areas of focus for policing. The analysis reveals that whilst the scale of police recorded VAWG offences has increased over the past five years, the nature of the threat has remained relatively stable. In particular, key threat areas for VAWG remain the same as outlined in the 2023 baseline assessment of VAWG: Domestic Abuse, Rape and Serious Sexual Offences, Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and Tech and Online facilitated VAWG. These have been used to inform the 2024 [VAWG National Framework for Delivery \(NFD\)](#) and the 4P approach for VAWG outlined within the NFD. The current assessment identifies that for 2024, Stalking is also a key threat area based on volume and assessment of harm.

Our analysis also identifies a number of cross cutting themes which if addressed, present opportunities to tackle VAWG more holistically. These themes are: developing a response to support minoritised victims of VAWG, technology and the online space as an enabler of VAWG and the emerging prevalence of adolescent victims of VAWG, these are discussed in further detail in this document. The findings of this assessment will contribute to the development of a National Centre for VAWG and Public Protection and be used as part of an evidence base to drive activity for the new centre. The insight gleaned from our analysis will also be used as basis for future assessments to understand the scale and nature of threats relating to broader public protection.

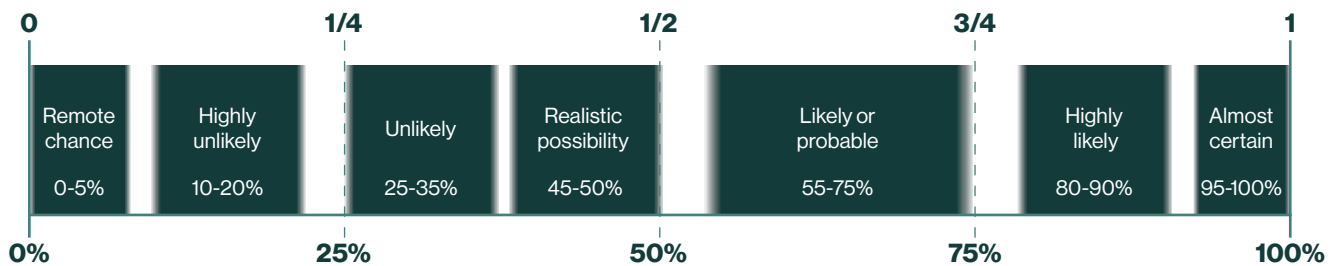


Scope

This analysis incorporates data relating to the **scale and nature** of the broad spectrum of VAWG for female victims aged 10 and over, including: Domestic Abuse, Rape and Sexual Offences, Stalking and Harassment, Child Sexual Assault and Exploitation (CSAE), Honour Based Abuse, Online and tech enabled VAWG, Spiking, Adult modern slavery and human trafficking and sex work. This summary document was informed by individual threat assessments of each VAWG crime type based on an analysis of police recorded crime data from 42 forces across England and Wales for the period August 2022 and July 2023. Data on the **scale** of VAWG was obtained through a separate data collection by the NPCC strategic hub focusing on policing performance in relation to VAWG police recorded crime, also using police recorded crime data. This collection consisted of data from April 2022 to March 2023 as well as a baseline comparison of April 2018 to March 2019. Where gaps were identified in policing data, insight was sought from academia, publicly available research and data from governmental publications, the VAWG sector and professional discussions with stakeholders such as TechUK.

To develop an assessment of the key areas of focus for VAWG, the [Management of Risk in Law Enforcement \(MoRiLE\)](#) tool was used, with input sought from VAWG policing thematic leads to provide contextual information.

Throughout this assessment, key judgments have been used, using probabilistic language in line with the [Professional Head of Intelligence Assessment \(PHIA\) probability yardstick](#). This yardstick is used to indicate the likelihood of future threats occurring.



Data limitations:

The quality and availability of police data on a national level presents a number of issues as indicated by [HMICFRS](#) which impact the ability to understand the threat picture for any crime type at a national level. This includes variation in the IT systems used to record crime across the 43 police forces in England and Wales which can impact the consistency of the type of information recorded. These data coverage issues include gaps in demographic information for victims and perpetrators which impact our ability to understand how different communities are affected by crime. In addition, police recorded crime in England and Wales is the tip of the iceberg in terms of measuring the scale of a problem, in particular VAWG offences such as sexual offences have high rates of underreporting. Where gaps in our data exist, we have used other publicly available sources of information to understand the threat picture as fully as possible. Where this has not been possible, several intelligence gaps have been identified to be filled by working more closely with other parts of policing and partners to enhance our knowledge of VAWG in the future. Work continues within policing to improve the coverage of policing data, particularly in relation to the recording of protected characteristics.



The overall VAWG picture

Scale and assessment of threat

37% ↑
increase

1. Police recorded **VAWG crime constitutes at least 20% of all crime** recorded in England and Wales. In the financial year ending March 2023, **1,080,157 offences** were recorded, this represents a 37% increase since 2018 / 2019. This equates to an estimated **2,959 VAWG crimes being recorded by police daily** and does not take into account the number of crimes which are unreported.
2. All forms of VAWG recorded crimes saw increases since 2018 / 2019 with the exception of murder and manslaughter.
3. Despite the demand placed on policing, [police workforce data as of March 2023](#) shows only 8.8% of police officers and 4.6% of police staff work in specialised public protection roles. Ensuring that policing has the right capability and capacity, including specialist provision, to respond effectively to the scale and nature of VAWG remains a significant strategic and operational challenge for policing.
4. Stalking and harassment, Violence with Injury and Public Order offences accounted for the highest volume of VAWG crimes (40%, 24% and 20% respectively), whilst murder and manslaughter and exploitation remain the lowest volume offences.

40%

Proportion of police recorded VAWG that is stalking and harassment

37%

Proportion of police recorded VAWG that is domestic abuse

10%

Proportion of police recorded VAWG that is rape and serious sexual offences

Victims

5. Overall, the profile of victims of recorded VAWG offences remains similar to that seen in our [2023 threat assessment](#). The **most common age group being 30-34 year olds for VAWG as a whole but a younger common age group seen for rape and sexual offences, online VAWG, spiking and honour based abuse.**
6. The most common self-defined ethnicity for victims was white British. All minoritised ethnic groups were underrepresented in recorded VAWG offences (except for Honor Based Abuse) compared to the [Census](#).
7. Within police recorded crime data, victims across all minoritised groups, including the LGBTQ+ communities and disabled people were underrepresented compared to the population. A survey by the [IOPC](#) indicates that trust in policing is lower for minoritised communities, this is recognised in reports such as the [Baroness Casey review](#) and may impact the willingness of women and girls from these communities to report victimisation.
8. Data coverage also plays a key role in our understanding of the threat, harm and risk of VAWG for girls from marginalised groups, including intersectionality. This can impact policing's ability to tailor the response according to victims need.



Perpetrators



75% male

9. **Similarly, the profile for perpetrators of VAWG remains the same** compared to the [2023 threat assessment](#). Across VAWG, **75% of suspects were recorded as male** (n=1,017,636). This figure increases to 90% when focusing on domestic abuse, rape and sexual offences. Where female perpetrators feature in VAWG offences, they are generally younger and a larger proportion in their teens and primarily involved in assaults and harassments. This suggests that there is probably a different motivation compared to when these offences are perpetrated by males.
10. Overall, perpetrators from police recorded data are most commonly aged 30-39 and the age profile is slightly older than victims. This only starts to differ once the victim is 50+, where the suspect age varies to a greater extent.
11. The majority of VAWG perpetrators self-define as white British which is reflective of the 2021 [Census](#). This is similar across most VAWG crimes, although within HBA and offending towards sex workers, white British suspects are less common. However significant issues with data capture relating to protected characteristics persist.



VAWG Thematic Threat Assessment

To assess key areas of focus for VAWG and policing, the Management of Risk in Law Enforcement ([MoRiLE](#)) tool was used. The tool allows strategic assessment of crime based on volume, harm, risk, and policing's capability and capacity to respond. Using this tool, **domestic abuse, rape and serious sexual offences, child sexual abuse and exploitation and online VAWG** continue to be identified as key areas of focus, representing little change in the way of threat compared to our assessment in 2023. In addition to the four focus areas, **Stalking** has been identified as a new area of focus for 2024 / 2025. A summary of the key findings of the analysis of each VAWG thematic is outlined below.

Stalking and Harassment:

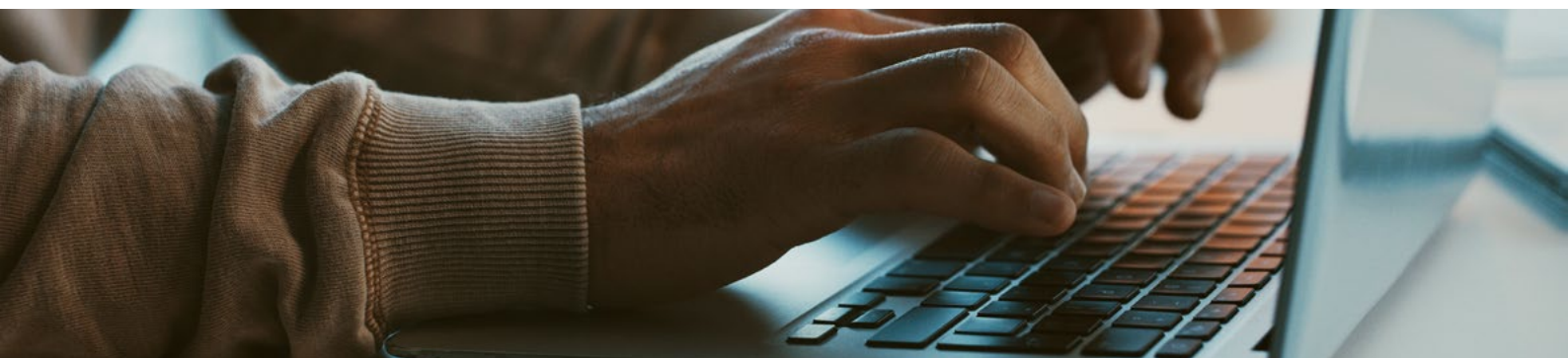
Scale

The scale of stalking and harassment offences within VAWG remains largely consistent to last year, with **436,196** offences recorded across England and Wales. Stalking and harassment continues to account for the highest proportion of police recorded VAWG crimes (40%) and is expected to increase over the next 12 months due the introduction of the [Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act](#) which is likely to result in more offences being reported and recorded.

Nature

A large proportion of stalking and harassment offences are domestic abuse related (51%). The [Domestic homicide project year 3 report](#) identified that stalking behaviours are one of the most common risk factors for all suspects in domestic homicide. There is a need for policing and partners to recognise that stalking exists on a spectrum of harm requiring early intervention to prevent the highest harm offences. The police response to the [stalking super-complaint](#) published in September 2024 highlights three themes of recommendations, across which there is a recognition of the need to improve the multi-agency response to all stalking offences.

Advances in technology continue to facilitate offending with **at least 20%** of stalking and harassment police recorded offences manually flagged as having an online element. However, the [Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#) found that 84% (n=1,182) of respondents to a recent public survey experienced behaviour consistent with stalking online suggesting that online stalking and harassment is hugely underreported. **It is almost certain that the majority of stalking and harassment offences online go unreported by women and girls to police.** The introduction of the Online Safety Act puts a responsibility on platforms to proactively tackle stalking and harassment, however more work is needed to ensure women and girls can report instances of harassment to tech platforms and for tech platforms to signpost users to support and formal reporting mechanisms.



Domestic Abuse:

Scale

37%

of all VAWG offences are domestic abuse related

There were a total of 400,213 offences flagged as Domestic Abuse recorded across England and Wales. Over a third (37%) of all VAWG offences are domestic abuse related, and over half of these domestic offences relate to more behavioural offences such as stalking and harassment. [Women's Aid](#) found the most common forms of abuse were emotional and jealous controlling behaviour. Although just 9% of police recorded domestic abuse is classified as coercive controlling behaviour, [The "Golden Thread": Coercive Control and Risk Assessment for Domestic Violence research](#)

identifies that coercive control is part of a pattern of behaviour which should be used to identify risk of serious harm. Furthermore, [analysis by the Domestic Homicide project within the VKPP](#) found that coercive and controlling behaviour was one of the top five risk factors in domestic homicides. Accounting for a small proportion of police recorded domestic abuse, overall police recorded coercive control offences are [increasing year on year](#), likely due to [improvements](#) in police recognition of coercive control as outlined by the College of Policing.

Although victims of police recorded domestic abuse are largely white British females, the [Domestic homicide project year 3 report](#) identified that black victims were doubly represented compared to the [Census](#), in domestic homicides. This highlights the importance of partner agencies in supporting victims from minoritised groups and reflects the need for policing to rebuild trust with minoritised communities to encourage reporting.

Nature

Refuge saw an increase

258%

in the number of survivors supported by their tech abuse team.



Technology continues to be used by perpetrators to facilitate domestic abuse, including smart devices to control and monitor victims with [Refuge](#) seeing an increase of 258% in the number of survivors supported by their tech abuse team. Within police recorded crime, just 6% of domestic abuse offences were manually flagged as having an online element, although it is almost certain that this is only a partial representation of the full picture due to consistency challenges around application. [Refuge](#) found that one in six respondents had experienced online abuse from a current or ex-partner, highlighting the responsibility on tech platforms to safeguard women and girls from abuse online.

Child to parent abuse is emerging as a threat within police data, accounting for 6% of recorded domestic abuse, although around [40% of cases](#) of child to parent abuse (based on London Violence Reduction Unit data) are estimated to not be reported. [Safe Lives](#) indicates that child to parent DA offending may be part of a longer-term pattern of DA in the family. This highlights the wider impact of children witnessing DA in their homes and the need for interventions from other organisations to prevent future patterns of victimisation or abuse.

To encourage reporting to police and restore trust and confidence in the wider criminal justice system, police and the CPS have launched a [DA joint justice plan](#) in 2024 to better support victims and bring more offenders to justice.

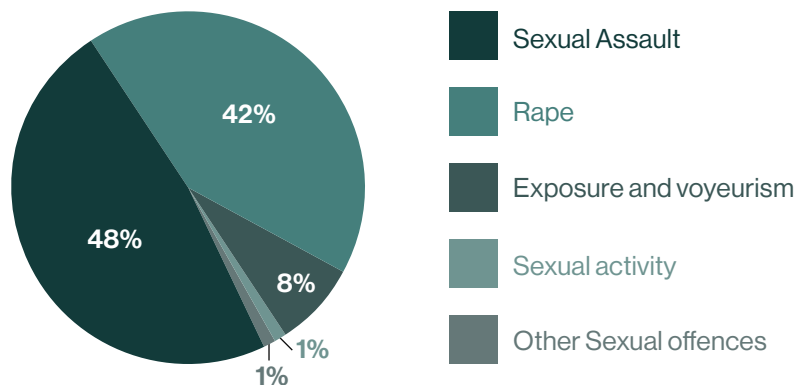


Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO):

Scale

There were a total of 103,135 RASSO offences recorded by police for the period April 22-March 23. Although the scale of recorded sexual offences has increased by 29% since 2018 / 2019, the nature of the threat of rape and serious sexual offences has remained consistent. These offences constitute 10% of all VAWG which is a comparable proportion to that reported in the VAWG threat assessment for 2023. Within these crimes, sexual assaults account for almost half (48%), with rapes accounting for 42%. Exposure and voyeurism offences account for a small proportion of offences (8%).

Nature



The majority of sexual offences are committed by perpetrators known to the victim, in particular current or ex partners or acquaintances of the victim. In relation to stranger offences, which account for 26% of all sexual offences, these are more likely linked to sexual assault, exposure or voyeurism. When sexual offences occur in public spaces, these remain similar to that seen in the VAWG 2023 threat assessment and are focused around nighttime economy locations such as nightclubs and bars, as well as public transport hubs.

Consistent with findings from the VAWG threat assessment 2023, almost a third of RASSO offences occur within a domestic abuse context, within these, the majority (73%) are rapes. This indicates that when sexual offences occur within a domestic setting, it is the most serious that are most likely reported to and recorded by police. Sexual offences where the perpetrator was a current or ex-partner took longer to report than those involving strangers. This suggests a continued need for policing to improve women and girl's trust and confidence in reporting sexual offences to police. The Operation Soteria [National operating model](#) is being rolled out across all police forces in 2024 and provides a victim-centred, suspect-focused and context led approach to RASSO investigations with the aim of building trust with women and girls impacted by sexual offences.



Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation:

Scale

400%
increase in CSAE
since 2013

Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) is a separate priority within the [Strategic Policing Requirement 2023](#) and remains a significant threat to girls, as outlined in the 2023 STRA. The [National Analysis of Police-Recorded Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation](#) identified that police recorded CSAE crimes had increased by in excess of 400% since 2013 (estimated 107,000 offences reported in 2022), with this upward trend expected to continue. From August 2022 to July 2023, there were 41,540 offences committed against girls aged 10-17.

For the purposes of the VAWG threat assessment, analysis of police recorded CSAE offences where victims were girls aged 10 and over was undertaken in line with the NPCC definition adopted. The findings are broadly reflective of that found in the [National Analysis of Police-Recorded Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation](#). CSAE offences are high harm and the most common offences are sexual assault and rape. In particular, child on child perpetrated CSAE accounts for just over half (where perpetrator age is known) of offences, within this 41% relate to indecent images of children offences. Reporting of intrafamilial CSAE continues to be lower than the estimated prevalence of this form of abuse, provided by the [CSA centre of expertise](#) indicating a particular need to encourage reporting of this form of abuse. The Home Office have published proposals for a new duty to report CSA for statutory partners and those working with children, this could lead to further increases in reporting of all forms of CSA.

Nature

Emerging threats in this area relate to the online space and are outlined in the above Online assessment, with particular concern relating to AI and the generation of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM). Sexual extortion of children is an increasing concern with work underway across the CSE taskforce to understand the scale and nature of these offences.

Although identified in the current threat assessment as a key threat area for VAWG, efforts to improve the response to CSAE are coordinated by the NPCC Child Protection Abuse Investigation (CPAI) portfolio, which includes a control strategy and the development of a CSE taskforce to enhance the police response to group based CSE. Significant progress has been made by policing to improve the response to CSAE, much of which provides learning for how policing can improve the response to VAWG, particularly with the identification of the cross-cutting theme of younger victims of VAWG outlined further on.

Spiking:

Scale

5%
of spiking offences which
are subject to the Eurofins
testing route indicate
spiking has taken place



Overall, the scale and threat of spiking has remained consistent since the publication of the VAWG threat assessment 2022 / 2023 with 6,749 offences recorded. The scale of spiking is expected to remain stable over the coming year. Only 5% of spiking reported to police that is subject to forensic testing results in positive identification that spiking may have taken place.

Nature

The majority (62%) of reported spiking incidents lack a clear motive due to the absence of a secondary offence. Drink spiking continues to be the primary method of spiking and nighttime economy locations remain the main locations for these types of offences. All forces have a process for investigating spiking and victims are strongly encouraged to report to police at the earliest opportunity to obtain forensic testing and opportunities for medical assistance. Policing will be publishing a refreshed assessment of the scale and nature of CSAE in early 2024.

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT):

Scale

There has been an increase in identified female victims since 2022, with 3,570 live investigations relating to MSHT as of December 2023. Of this, females account for a quarter of victims. Across all forms of MSHT, sexual exploitation is the greatest threat posed to women and girls (86%), followed by domestic servitude (71%) and labour exploitation (20%). Sexual exploitation investigations often uncover female suspects or alpha victims who are coerced into recruiting other victims and this is particularly the case when females are under 18.

Nature

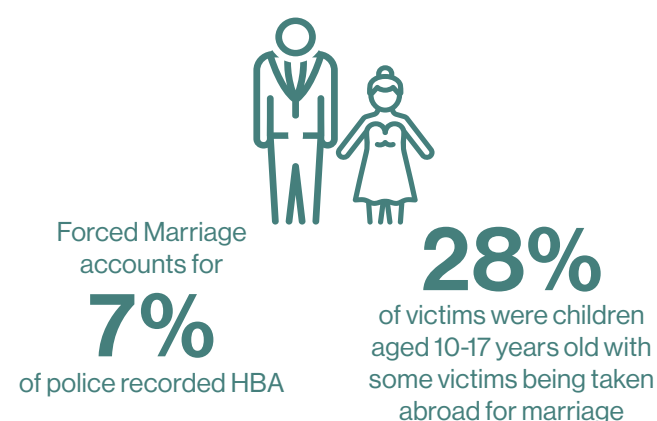
Criminal exploitation is when someone uses a child to commit a crime for them. Although the prevalence of female victims in criminal exploitation investigations is lower than identified in other forms of exploitation (10%), this often occurs alongside sexual exploitation and is more common when victims are children. There is a suspected underreporting/identification of females being criminally exploited, with sexual exploitation more likely to be recognised as the primary form of exploitation.

For labour exploitation, victims are often found in gender specific sectors such as the care and beauty industry and apart from British females, Filipino or Vietnamese victims are most common. Reducing the focus on immigration status will allow for potential victims to come forward and give exploiters less opportunities to use their immigration status to control victims.

Honour based abuse / Forced Marriage:

Scale

Overall, the threat of honour based abuse offences recorded by police has remained stable since 2022 / 2023 with a total of 2,905 offences recorded which had the HBA flag applied. Although within police recorded crime, the threat is higher in South East Asian communities, it is recognised that this is a problem not specific to one religion or culture with HBA being found across [Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Orthodox Jewish and traveller communities](#).



Forced Marriage accounts for 7% of police recorded HBA. 28% of victims were children aged 10-17 years old with some victims being taken abroad for marriage. Despite a change in law as part of the Marriage and Civil Partnership Act 2022, organisations such as [Karma Nirvana](#) report an increase in calls into their forced marriage helpline. Policing is working to become more proactive in the prevention of forced marriage, and has increased the number of forced marriage protection orders obtained between 2022 and 2023, particularly for people aged 17 years old and under.

Nature

HBA is complex and can manifest in different ways beyond physical violence. Almost a quarter (23%) of HBA offences relate to stalking and harassment for example, whilst coercive and controlling behaviour and neglect are also evidenced in police recorded HBA. This demonstrates the importance of policing and partners being able to recognise HBA can take many forms beyond violence.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

5,870

women and girls had health attendance where FGM was identified in the period April 2022 to March 2023

There is a clear continued gap between the numbers reported to police and those seen by statutory partners relating to FGM. The [NHS FGM Enhanced Dataset](#) reported that 5,870 women and girls had health attendance where FGM was identified in the period April 2022 to March 2023. In comparison, 51 FGM offences against females were recorded by police between August 2022 and July 2023. Data from healthcare shows that women who have been victims of FGM tend to come to notice during routine midwifery appointments. Although these victims are identified at a later stage

in life (mostly ages 30-24), they report that the FGM took place during their childhood (most commonly between ages of 5 and 9). This demonstrates the importance of policing proactively working with partners to understand the true scale of threat and the sharing of information to protect victims of FGM. Importantly, focusing prevention efforts on families of younger girls.

Sex work:

Scale

It is difficult to accurately assess the scale of threat against sex workers for a multitude of reasons including underreporting underpinned by a lack of trust and confidence in reporting to police which is reported by [National Ugly Mugs](#) to have [declined further over recent years](#). Police recorded crime data shows that sex workers are victims of high harm crimes which include violence, sexual offence, stalking and harassment, threats to kill and kidnap.

Police recorded crime data suggests an over-representation of white and Chinese victims compared to census data, but there is some [evidence there is some evidence that in certain settings, the risk of harm and vulnerability is greater for black and minoritised ethnic sex workers](#).

Nature

Offences against sex workers which are facilitated by the internet account for a small but growing proportion of crimes against sex workers, in particular, the use of Adult Service Websites (ASWs) being used to facilitate the sexual exploitation of women. However, the Online Safety Act makes it an offence to post material online which causes or incites prostitution for gain is highly likely to impact the use of adult service websites. [The English Collective of Prostitutes sex work community](#) have expressed concerns that this will impact safety and drive activities back on to the streets and into the hands of exploiters.



Cross-cutting Themes

Several cross-cutting themes were identified and provide opportunities to focus on activities that will have the biggest impact across all VAWG crime types.

VAWG and Young People

Victim Trends

There is a large prevalence of recorded VAWG offences involving victims aged **10-15**. In particular, the most common age group identified across **rape offences is 10-15 year olds**, also reflected in the [Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse](#). When compared to the [Census data](#), which shows only 6% of the female population is 10-14 years old, it shows the over-representation of young victims in sexual offences, **indicating significant harm to girls**.

Young victims are also more prevalent in online and tech-enabled VAWG offending, in particular offences relating to **indecent images of children**. These patterns align with data in the [national analysis of police recorded Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation](#), highlighting adolescence as a particularly vulnerable period; younger people face greater threats online, with rising exposure to graphic and sexual material.

Perpetrators of Offending against young victims

Perpetrators of offending where the victim is aged 10-15 are most commonly other children or young adults. This is similar when broken down by offence type for victims aged 10-15 years old:

- **Rape Offences:** 74% of suspects are aged 10-19 (n=5,555).
 - 29% are aged 10-15 and 45% are aged 16-19.
- **Online and Tech-Enabled VAWG:** 83% of suspects are aged 10-19 (n=10,257).
 - 74% are aged 10-15 and 9% are aged 16-19.

These findings underline the need for combined partnership prevention strategies focused on VAWG from national to local levels. There is also a significant importance on delivering education to teenagers on the subjects of online harms, consent, and legal matters. An evidence assessment by the [Welsh Violence Prevention Unit](#) found promising evidence on interventions that focussed on raising awareness amongst girls, and supporting them to recognise inappropriate behaviour by others, learn ways to keep safe and keep friends safe, feel empowered and enhance self-esteem. Overall, girls in all age groups showed significant improvements in understanding the importance of help seeking for themselves and others where the programme is taught by carefully trained instructors with a strong empowerment focus. Although a systematic review of relationships and sex education found wide differences in approaches and methods and variations in the efficacy of these treatments. There is a need for a consistent and evaluated approach to delivery of relationship and sex education for children and young people to start to tackle the longer term issue of VAWG.

Key judgement:

The threat to younger victims is highly likely to remain high and continue to evolve without investment in preventative education programmes for children and young people.

Online and tech-enabled

The true scale of online and tech-enabled VAWG is unknown in police data due to data coverage, despite its prevalence across all VAWG offences. However, it **is almost certain that the threat posed to women and girls in the online space, and technology used to facilitate VAWG has increased** over the past year, and it is almost certain to continue increasing as technology evolves.



The majority of crimes which take place in the online space go unreported to police, the [Open University](#) found that in online VAWG, more than half of victims (56%, n=7819) reported their concerns to the platform, however only 4% reported it to the police. This indicates a role for platforms and social media companies in signposting users for help and advice as well as ensuring they have an ability to report their experiences to the platforms.

Increasingly, younger victims are more prevalent than any other age group, with 10-15 year olds being the most common victims of online VAWG. This is further supported by findings in the [National Analysis of Police-Recorded Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation](#) in which at least 32% of CSAE took place online indicating that in particular, young people are at highest risk of harm in the online space.

The VAWG 2023 threat assessment identified key threats to women and girls relating to the online space and use of technologies, in particular the use of the Internet of Things and smart devices, as well as the metaverse. These continue to pose concerns in relation to how they are used by perpetrators to facilitate VAWG. Emerging within this year's threat assessment is the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence, with evidence by the [Internet Watch Foundation](#) that it is being increasingly used to generate a higher volume of and more severe Child Sexual Abuse material (CSAM). This is not limited to image based abuse of children, the increase in technology to 'nudify' images and create deepfake porn of women



Deepfake videos increased by

550%

between 2019 and 2023

and girls is a rapidly emerging threat. State of deepfakes research found deepfake videos [increased](#) by 550% (n=95,820) between 2019 and 2023 and 99% of victims of deepfake pornography are women. The creation of deepfakes was recognised as a criminal offence in the Online Safety Act. However, there are concerns that whilst the Online Safety Act will focus on taking down images and videos, more needs to be done to ensure safety by design principles are implemented by tech companies in the development of any AI technology to prevent the ability to create explicit images in the first place. An additional emerging threat in the online space is that of sexual extortion of children, the [IWF](#) reported an increase in reports of sexual extortion and although the majority of victims are male, female victims are rapidly increasing, with

children as young as 11 being identified as victims. Although in current police recorded crime, stalking and harassment crimes are the most common offences reported by victims, it is **likely that image based offences will become the predominant type of offence experienced and reported** by women and girls in the online space over the coming 1 to 2 years. Significant work is required across policing and partners to ensure they are equipped to prevent, respond and support women and girls experiencing these offences in the near future.

Key judgement:

Technology used to facilitate VAWG, specifically, to generate deepfakes and commit image based abuse, is highly likely to be the fastest growing threat in the next 12-24 months. This is largely due to the rapid development of technology as well as the growing use and capability of artificial intelligence.



Rebuilding Trust



Currently, there is no existing national measure of trust and confidence in VAWG policing and it is therefore not possible to accurately assess any progress or reduction over the last twelve months. However, a survey by the [IOPC](#) found that a higher proportion of women respondents felt more negatively about the police compared to men with some respondents citing recent events within policing as being responsible for this sentiment.

As highlighted in last year's [threat assessment](#), a number of high profile events alongside negative experiences of those reporting to police have damaged public trust and confidence. Following these events, forces with direction from the College of Policing have begun implementing policies and procedures in place to try and improve [engagement with communities](#), [internal culture](#) and [experiences of victims](#). Whilst policing is still in the early stages of rebuilding trust and this is a key focus [for policing](#), it is likely to remain a barrier for women and girls in reporting their experiences to police. These findings continue to emphasise the reliance in improving public opinion to truly understand the scale and nature of threat towards women and girls, which in turn can improve the policing response and safety of women and girls.

Minoritised Communities

Issues with police data on protected characteristics hinder the understanding of the scale and threat of VAWG towards minoritised communities. There are significant gaps in data related to the self-defined ethnicity of both victims and perpetrators. Additionally, data on sexuality, disability, and neurodivergence is often poorly recorded, if at all. This lack of comprehensive data persists despite research indicating that harm is often linked to these protected characteristics.

Understanding the impact of intersectionality is particularly important for obtaining deeper insights into compounded forms of violence. Women and girls from minoritised communities often experience VAWG alongside other forms of discrimination and are less likely to report their experiences to the police. For instance, the review by [Our Streets Now](#) highlights that veiled Muslim women frequently face harassment, illustrating the intersectionality between Islamophobia and misogyny. Similarly, academic [research online violence against women: a four nations study](#) suggests LGB+ women and girls, despite being among the most affected by online VAWG, are the least likely to report such incidents. Moreover, women and girls with learning disabilities and neurodiversity can be at greater risk due to their additional needs.

The true extent of VAWG impacting minoritised communities remains unclear when examining current policing data, which almost certainly limits the ability to provide a tailored response according to victim needs. Work is ongoing across policing to address these issues; notably, the Police Race Action Plan team is working closely with the NPCC to develop a more informed and effective response to VAWG for black and minoritised victims. However, there is a critical role for partners, particularly those who work with minoritised groups, to be engaged and seek opportunities to collaborate with policing. They are essential in encouraging reporting, especially within communities underrepresented in police-recorded crime data, and in ensuring that victims from all communities receive the necessary support, regardless of whether they choose to report to the police.

Key judgement:

It is almost certain that continuing low trust and confidence in policing amongst minoritised communities will impact their willingness to report their experiences of VAWG. This will impact policing's ability to develop a policing response which will best support victims and further decrease trust and confidence.



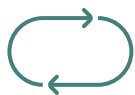
Forward Look

The forward look identifies several cross-cutting points of interest that will have an impact on VAWG policing in the future:

- **Technological advancements** - It's almost certain that the rapid growth of technology and generative AI will increase the threat of VAWG over the next year and beyond. AI has enabled media to be created that features a victim in a vulnerable state, including audio files of the victim talking about a highly sexualised subject matter, Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) and highly sexualised/pornographic imagery created without the knowledge or consent of the victim, with these often-portraying extreme sexual scenarios such as rape. The barrier to entry to this technology also continues to decrease, meaning that a wider range of potential perpetrators will be able to use AI as a method of offending.
- **Economic challenges** - The long-term impact of rises in inflation and cost of living continues to increase the amount of financially vulnerable women and girls. It is highly likely that the ongoing increase in cost of living will continue to increase the threat of abuse and violence towards women and girls. This is visible across a variety of themes including domestic abuse, HBA and sex work.
- **Professionalising public protection** - The ongoing work within policing to professionalise public protection will likely support forces in ensuring more officers are appropriately trained to identify and respond to the nuances of VAWG offending. There is ongoing focus on improving consistency in officer training and exploring possibilities for accreditation for officers investigating public protection offences. It is a realistic possibility that these improvements in public protection investigations will lead to an increase in the identification and reporting of VAWG offences in the long-term future.
- **Increased far right sentiment** - Recent events following the murder of three girls in Southport resulted in racially motivated riots in which immigrant and Muslim communities were targeted. As previously highlighted, women and girls from minoritised groups often experience VAWG alongside other forms of discrimination such as hate crime, it is a realistic possibility that an increase in hate crime linked to VAWG will be seen as a result of these tensions. Furthermore, there is a wider impact in terms of ensuring that women from minoritised groups have support services protected to ensure they continue to receive support.

Intelligence Gaps

There remain some core intelligence gaps that were outlined in [last year's Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment of Violence Against Women and Girls](#), along with emerging gaps identified in 2023/24:



VAWG repeat offenders - Due to data limitations, it is not currently possible to track the proportion of VAWG perpetrators who repeatedly offend or pathways of offending on a national basis. This limits understanding on patterns in offending and how behaviours do or do not escalate across VAWG.



Location of offences - Last year's STRA assessed the nature of VAWG within public, private and online spaces to identify the most harmful spaces using data and insight from force problem profiles. However, many forces reported that this data was either not possible to extract from their crime recording system or there were inconsistencies in how it was captured and was not always accurate.



VAWG and hate crime - Police recorded crime data highlighting where VAWG offences were also flagged as different types of hate crime was not collected for this year's report. However, there is [Hope not hate](#) research that [links misogynistic and racist behaviours](#).



Artificial intelligence and deepfake technology - The extent to which AI is now being used to generate CSAM and deepfakes of women and girls is not currently captured in police data due to the sophistication and indistinguishable nature from real images. Therefore, there is a reliance on academic research and partner agencies to provide insight into the scale of this threat.

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