



SCOTTISH POLICE
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Violence Against Women and Girls - Public Briefing

Briefing No. 15



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Summary

The Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland are committed to supporting the creation of a society where women and girls live free from violence, abuse, exploitation and harassment. This is an area of increasing public focus and scrutiny following high-profile cases such as the kidnapping, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer.

This briefing provides information on the policy context in Scotland, the prevalence of crime and offences relating to violence against women and girls, and what action is being taken to reduce these.

What we mean by violence against women and girls (VAWG)

There is no single agreed definition of the scope of VAWG. However, the United Nations 1993 declaration defines it as:

"Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life".

While the abuse covered by the term VAWG is also experienced by men and boys, it disproportionately impacts women and girls. The [Scottish Government](#), when referring to VAWG, also includes:

- physical, sexual and psychological violence in the family, general community or institutions. This includes domestic abuse, rape, incest and child sexual abuse.
- sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in public.
- commercial sexual exploitation including prostitution, pornography and trafficking.
- so called 'honour based' violence, including dowry-related violence, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriages and 'honour' crimes.

Police Scotland adopted this definition in its recently published [VAWG Strategy](#), recognising that this definition is not exhaustive.

Scottish context

The joint Scottish Government and COSLA [Equally Safe Strategy](#), first published in 2014, sets the strategic context for responding to VAWG in Scotland. This was refreshed in December 2023 and will be underpinned by a refreshed delivery plan.

Legislation and the wider criminal justice system

The [Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#) (introduced a specific offence of domestic abuse) and the [Domestic Abuse \(Protection\) \(Scotland\) Act 2021](#) (provisions to protect a person from abusive behaviour by their partner / ex-partner and allow termination of tenancies in cases involving abuse of a partner / ex-partner by a tenant) set the legal framework for the policing of VAWG in Scotland.

The Scottish Government [Programme for Government 2023-24](#) committed to bringing forward legislation to criminalise misogynistic conduct, in response to the [Working Group on Misogyny](#) recommendations from March 2022.

Additionally, the Women's Justice Leadership Panel published, in 2023, their report on [The Case for Gendered and Intersectional Approaches for Justice](#). Consisting of representatives from across the criminal justice system, the Panel reported the following key conclusions:

- there is strong evidence which supports the view that women's experience of the justice system is very different to that of men.
- there is a need to improve gender and intersectional data collection and research across the justice system as well as deeper and meaningful engagement with women and girls with experience of the justice system.
- there is a need within the justice system for an agreed understanding of an intersectional and gender competent approach that is used to inform both policy and practice.
- services provided should be person-centred and trauma-informed, and consistent across the entire justice system.

VAWG in England and Wales

The UK Government published the [Violence against women and girls national statement of expectations](#) in March 2022, seeking strategies and services which are victim / survivor centric, focus on perpetrators, acknowledge the system wide response required, are locally led, and work with communities to design and deliver solutions.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and College of Policing published an [outcomes and performance framework](#) in April 2022 which underpins this statement of expectations.

In 2015, the Welsh Government introduced the [Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act](#), which aims to improve the prevention of gender-based violence and the protection and support for those affected by such violence.

Inspection

In 2021 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) produced a [final inspection report](#) into the effectiveness of the police response to VAWG across England and Wales.

The report concluded that considerable cross-system change (including healthcare and education, in addition to policing) is urgently needed to tackle VAWG. HMICFRS suggested that the UK Government consider legislation for a new statutory duty, similar to the existing framework for child protection, for all partners to work together to protect women and girls. Areas of particular concern to HMICFRS with regards to the police response were the number of cases closed without charge, and gaps in VAWG data.




Prevalence

Analysing the prevalence of VAWG offences across Scotland and the UK is challenging. VAWG is not a distinct crime group, and instead incorporates various elements of other crime categories. Another challenge comes from the fact that historically – and even currently – many crime statistics are not reported by the gender of the victim.

There is however an improving picture in relation to the availability of VAWG data, with relevant areas set out below that provide an insight into the extent of this violence in Scotland and how this compares to England and Wales, using the most recent figures available in each area. The Authority recognises that there are other areas not yet reported by gender, and that the prevalence of VAWG in our society is therefore likely to be under-reported in published statistics.







Domestic abuse

	Scotland		England & Wales
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
 Overall number of domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police	65,251	64,807	-
 Domestic abuse victims that were female (where the gender was recorded)	82%	83%	74%
 Incidents with a female victim that led to the recording of a crime / offence	46%	47%	-



	Scotland	
	2021-22	2022-23
 Detection rate for domestic crimes (not reportable by gender)	67%	65%



Sexual crimes

	<u>Scotland</u>		<u>England & Wales</u>
	2021-22	2022-23	2021-22
 Number of rapes and attempted rapes recorded by the police	2,498	2,529	-
 Victims of rape and attempted rape that were female (where the gender was reportable)	95%	94%	91%
 Number of sexual assaults recorded by the police	5,359	5,282	-
 Victims of sexual assault that were female (where the gender was reportable)	89%	86%	86% ¹



¹ Percentage of victims of *all sexual offences* that were female


	<u>Scotland</u>	
	2021-22	2022-23
 Detection rate for rape crimes (not reportable by gender)	53%	53%
 Detection rate for all sexual crimes (not reportable by gender)	53%	53%

Despite an overall decrease in the Group 2 sexual crime category as a whole, [Police Scotland](#) notes that rape of a female over 16 has had a notable increase and is now at the highest level of reporting over the last six years.



Homicide

	<u>Scotland</u>		<u>England & Wales</u>
	2021-22	2022-23	2021-22
 Number of homicide cases	52	51	-
 Victims of homicide that were female	30%	25%	28%

	<u>Scotland</u>	
	2021-22	2022-23
 Detection rate for homicides (not reportable by gender)	99%	92%



Seven of the homicides in 2022-23 were categorised as domestic homicides, and six of these victims were female (86%). Of the victims, more females than males were killed by hitting and kicking, and by blunt instrument. Males were more likely to be killed by sharp instrument or shooting than females.

Of the 13 female homicide victims in 2022-23, the main person accused in 46% of cases was a partner or ex-partner, while 31% were a friend or social acquaintance. The comparative figures for males were 5% partner or ex-partner and 23% friend or social acquaintance. For seven male victims (18%) the main accused person was a stranger not known to them, while only one female victim fell into this category (8%). This illustrates that female homicide victims are far more likely to know their killer, and often know them well.

Where the main motive for homicide was known, the highest category for female victims was rage or fury (3 victims; 23%), whereas the highest for males was a fight or quarrel (10 victims; 26%) followed by a feud or faction rivalry (8 victims; 21%). Only one female victim's case was related to a fight or feud (8%). The main motive in one case with a female victim was sexual (8%), with no male victims falling into this category.



Femicide

	Scotland		England & Wales
	2019	2020	2020
 Number of women killed by men	9	8	-
 Femicide rate per 100,000 population	0.164	0.146	0.181

The Femicide Census specifically focuses on women who have been killed by men in the UK each year. The data in the 2020 report provides insight into the deaths of 110 women, noting that this means that, on average, one woman was killed by a man every 3 days in the UK. This decreases to every 45 days in Scotland.

The 2020 census shows that women are significantly more likely to be killed by a current or former partner (52%) than by a stranger (8%). It also reports that there was a known history of violence and abuse by the perpetrator of the victim in 43 cases (48%), and 42 perpetrators (53%) were known to have previous histories of violence against women.

Impact

The impact of VAWG on victims and wider society is considerable. The [Femicide Census 2020](#) report states that men's violence against women is a leading cause of the premature death for women globally, while the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2021 study on [The lasting impact of violence against women and girls](#) states that this violence can lead to significant and long-lasting impacts for survivors, such as mental health issues, suicide attempts and homelessness.

The ONS study also recognises that these experiences are sometimes hidden and are not limited to physical violence, including abusive treatment such as coercive and controlling behaviour or exploitation. Violence against women and girls can have profound long-term effects on both survivors and the people close to them.

The [Scottish Crime and Justice Survey \(SCJS\) 2021-22](#) shows that, in wider society, females continue to feel less safe than men. In the 2021-22 survey 63% of females said they felt safe walking alone after dark in their local area, and 94% felt safe alone in their home at night. The equivalent figures for males were 90% and 98%. These levels show no real change since the 2019-20 survey.

The survey asked respondents the extent to which they were worried about being the victim of specific types of crime. 21% of females were worried about being physically assaulted or attacked in a public place, compared to 12% of males. 21% of females were worried they would be sexually assaulted compared to just 3% of males.

Any respondent who stated they were worried about being the victim of a crime were then asked to what extent their worry prevented them from doing things that they would otherwise want to do. 64% of males said not at all, compared to 49% of females.

Police response and prevention activity

In October 2021 Police Scotland launched the 'That Guy' campaign, which focuses on male sexual entitlement and misogynistic attitudes that act as enablers to serious sexual offending. At [June 2023](#) Policing Performance Committee, Police Scotland reported that the campaign had been viewed over one million times across various social media platforms.

Other campaigns include 'Domestic Abuse is everybody's business' [#ReportDomesticAbuse](#). The campaign sought to warn potential perpetrators and to encourage reporting of domestic abuse, including by requesting a disclosure under the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS). DSDAS gives people the right to ask about the background of their partner and it also gives concerned relatives and friends the right to ask about someone else's partner and if they have been abusive in the past.

Police Scotland is fully involved in delivery of the Equally Safe Strategy, working with a range of partnership groups with focus on reducing violence against women and girls such as Fearless Glasgow, a consortium of Universities, Colleges, third sector organisations and Police Scotland in Glasgow and the West. This has led to an increase in reporting of incidents which may suggest increased confidence in the potential response victims will receive, as [reported](#) in 2023.

Police perpetrated VAWG

In November 2023 Police Scotland advised the Complaints & Conduct Committee that, at the time of reporting, there were 32 officers and six staff suspended in relation to sexual allegations. There were also three officers with duty restrictions relating to allegations with a sexual element. They also noted that in the previous 12 months, eight officers had resigned or retired while subject to suspension or restrictions related to sexual allegations. These cases are not currently split by gender.

In October 2021, Police Scotland commissioned a review of all complaints and conduct matters that contained sexual circumstances, sexual offending or misconduct by officers or staff between January 2017 and October 2021. The purpose was to ensure Police Scotland had discharged its responsibilities in relation to the management of risk relating to these cases, and where appropriate had fully investigated and progressed matters within relevant legislation, powers and regulations. A resulting high level [report](#) was presented to the Complaints & Conduct Committee in public session in May 2022, noting that no significant issues were identified with the quality of investigations, but making a number of recommendations to enhance organisational learning and development and raise awareness of standards of professional behaviour. Action taken as a result of these recommendations continues to be reported to Committee on a biannual basis.

There is no evidence available to suggest a specific reluctance of members of the public to report matters. However, in respect of confidence in reporting matters internally, the findings of the sexism and misogyny engagement survey reported to [May 2023](#) People Committee suggested that much goes unchallenged/unreported, and identified a key area of focus being to provide safe spaces for reporting.

In England and Wales, an area of particular focus for the NPCC and College of Policing is ensuring an appropriate response to police-perpetrated abuse. [Baseline data](#) highlighted that between October 2021 and March 2022, 1,177 cases of police-perpetrated VAWG were recorded. In addition, 653 conduct cases against 672 individuals were recorded. Finally, there were 524 complaint cases against 867 individuals. Following this initial baseline, this data will now be published annually.

Authority oversight

In 2021 the Authority agreed [joint equality outcomes](#) with Police Scotland that included a commitment to ensuring women and girls at risk of becoming victims of violence, and those facing violence, are safer and confident that the police are responsive to their needs. Progress against this outcome was [reported](#) in April 2023.

Police Scotland brought a paper on VAWG to the Authority's Policing Performance Committee in [December 2021](#) and the Authority in [January 2022](#).

In August 2022, the Authority hosted a VAWG seminar in conjunction with Police Scotland and COSLA. The aim of this seminar was to involve stakeholders in the development of the Police Scotland VAWG Strategy. In March 2023, Police Scotland presented the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and Implementation Plan to [PPC](#) and then to the [Authority](#) for endorsement.

In [April 2023](#), the Authority reiterated that it welcomed Police Scotland's commitment to a society safe for women and girls.

Authority staff sit on Police Scotland's Stakeholder VAWG Strategic Oversight Board, established in April 2023.

Next steps

Appropriately responding to VAWG remains an area of high priority to the Authority. Key to the oversight of the improvement of response to VAWG will be through the Authority's ongoing monitoring and scrutiny of Police Scotland's VAWG Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Keeping up to date

To keep up to date with our work, please keep an eye on the Scottish Police Authority's [website](#) where you can find papers and watch livestream committee discussions, and follow us on Twitter:

@ScotPolAuth

Purpose of these Public Briefings

The Strategic Police Plan commits to the provision of Policing for a safe, protected and resilient Scotland. This requires designing and maintaining services which meet rising and evolving demands in a constantly changing environment. To meet these demands, now and in the future, Scotland's police service must adapt and proportionately adopt the necessary technologies which will enable them to protect the safety and wellbeing of our communities (as outlined in the Policing Principles - Section 32 of Police and Fire Reform Act 2012).

This series of public focused and user-friendly public briefings has been developed to provide an overview of the benefits of emerging technology and upcoming developments within policing, the policies that will govern them, and the ethical, privacy and human rights implications.