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Violence Against Women and Girls

Strategy 2017–2020



Crown Prosecution Service
cps.gov.uk

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2017–2020

VAWG Strategy Statement

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) crimes can have a devastating impact on victims, their families, and wider communities and have no place in our society. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) takes prosecuting VAWG crime seriously. We will continue to bring perpetrators to justice. We will carry on working in partnership with those most affected to help to drive forward the development of legislation and policy both nationally and internationally so that ultimately, ‘no woman should live in fear of violence, and every girl should grow up knowing she is safe, so that she can have the best start in life’.¹

The VAWG Strategy is an overarching framework to address crimes that have been identified as being committed primarily but not exclusively by men against women. These crimes include domestic abuse, rape, sexual offences, stalking, harassment, so-called ‘honour-based’ violence including forced marriage, female genital mutilation, child abuse, human trafficking focusing on sexual exploitation, prostitution, pornography and obscenity. They have been grouped together under the heading ‘VAWG’, recognising the disproportionate volume of female victims abused by male perpetrators. However, it is recognised that abuse of both male and female victims have their roots in society’s attitudes about expected gendered roles and behaviour. We acknowledge that these offences can also be carried out by women, and targeted at men and boys, and our position statement for male victims reaffirms our commitment to male victims of these crimes.

The approach set out in this strategy aims to secure justice and support all victims of these crimes. VAWG policies are applied fairly and equitably to all perpetrators and victims of crime – irrespective of their gender.

The strategy is underpinned by partnership working at local, national and international levels and is supported by a CPS VAWG action plan. This strategy will link to the more detailed *VAWG strand specific* action plans later this year.

Data on the gender of victims of these crimes can be found at [Annex A](#).

Introduction

This VAWG Crime Strategy should be read in conjunction with *Ending Violence against Women and Girls the cross-Government VAWG 2016–2020 strategy and action plan*. This recognises VAWG as a gendered crime and a fundamental issue of human rights, drawing on the United Nations (UN) conventions that the UK has signed and ratified.² The UN addresses VAWG as a cause and consequence of women’s broader inequality within society.

¹HM Government, ‘Ministerial foreword by the Home Secretary’ in *Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2016–2020* (London: Home Office, 2016)

²The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, *15 Years of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (1994–2009)—A Critical Review* <<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/15YearReviewofVAWMandate.pdf>>

We will play a key role in delivering CPS commitments in the cross-Government action plan as well as contributing to multi-agency activity. We aim to bring more perpetrators to justice and improve the support for victims through reviewing our guidance, training, best practice and performance across VAWG strands and engaging with stakeholders.

We recognise that victims of VAWG crime are often subjected to controlling and coercive behaviour, which can significantly affect the way in which they live their lives. This pattern of controlling behaviour may occur in isolation or together with other offending behaviour and needs to be given early consideration. We acknowledge that marginalised groups of victims facing multiple forms of discrimination, such as BAME or disabled victims, may be even more vulnerable to VAWG crimes.

Our VAWG crime strategy also reflects the vision of CPS 2020.

We will continue to work with colleagues internationally by sharing our experience of VAWG crime prosecution with a focus on disruption of criminal activity, prevention and supporting prosecutors.

Outcomes

We will demonstrate achievement by means of:

- Improving performance in relation to key issues including: volumes, conviction rates, guilty pleas, and victim issues;
- Providing victims and witnesses with relevant and appropriate support by considering their safety and support through the Criminal Justice System (CJS) process;
- Publishing the VAWG Crime Annual Report (including data on men and boys) incorporating performance data, supporting activity, stakeholder engagement and next steps to ensure we are held to account and transparent;
- Producing innovative and effective communications which better reach communities and inform victims, witnesses, defendants and the wider public;
- Improving the accuracy and completeness of relevant data including: personal characteristics of defendants, victims and witnesses; and
- Incorporating lessons learnt for policy development through internal and external scrutiny structures ensuring we are appropriately using NGO specialist knowledge and expertise.

Key Commitments for 2017–2020

This strategy contributes towards the CPS's overall objectives as outlined in the CPS 2020 plan; public confidence, high quality casework, continuously improving and success of our people. The key commitments below have been grouped under the main 2020 objectives; however, most will contribute to more than one.

Public Confidence

We will work with our key partners and stakeholders to protect the public and create a safer society by:

- Reviewing policies, guidance, training and best practice across VAWG strands;
- Ensuring transparency and accountability of VAWG prosecutions through the annual publication of a CPS VAWG Crime Report; and
- Create engaging multimedia campaigns at home and abroad to explain our work and raise awareness around VAWG crimes.

High Quality Casework

We will deliver justice through excellent, timely legal decision-making, casework preparation and presentation by:

- Emphasising the need to explore appropriate and relevant evidence in order to build a case that is not only reliant on the evidence of a victim. This includes considering information about the perpetrator, social media, Body Worn Video and any circumstantial evidence;
- Demonstrating an appropriate understanding of the needs of vulnerable VAWG victims;
- Building effective partnerships nationally and internationally across VAWG strands to ensure excellence across the CJS and prevent harm to the UK;
- Treating every case fairly and equally, and bringing the correct charges across VAWG strands according to the evidence and the Code for Crown Prosecutors; and
- Ensuring that decisions to drop or alter the charges substantially in cases involving VAWG crimes are communicated to victims in a timely and transparent manner.

Continuously Improving

We will deliver justice, continuously improving the way in which we work by:

- Ensuring that best practice in VAWG cases is shared across the CPS;
- Provide regular oversight of CPS casework including a bi-annual assurance to the Director of Public Prosecutions;
- Engaging with stakeholders to inform the work of the CPS on VAWG; including through internal and external scrutiny structures and, locally, through the work of the Inclusion and Community Engagement Managers; and

- Addressing ways in which the CPS can work with: others across government, internationally and with NGOs to improve the level of support provided to victims of VAWG crimes throughout the criminal justice process.

Success of our People

We will deliver justice through supporting the success of our people by:

- Assisting the CPS to effectively prosecute VAWG crimes by identifying and supporting senior leadership VAWG champions, specialist VAWG Coordinators and specialist leads for special VAWG strands of RASSO, Stalking and Harassment, so-called 'Honour Based' Violence including Forced Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Sexual Abuse;
- Build resilience and capability of our prosecutors both in the UK and overseas; and,
- Invest in the skills of our workforce through bespoke training packages for individual VAWG strands as well as identifying cross-cutting issues and themes to increase the effectiveness of our case strategies.

Conclusion

Ending violence against women and girls, including responding to male victims of VAWG crimes, requires the cooperation and engagement of multiple sectors of society including (but not limited to) the CJS, education, health services, as well as specialised support services for victims.

It requires promotion of equality and the elimination of gender stereotypes, challenging engrained and institutionalised attitudes towards violence, and the cooperation and coordination of multiple services for victims. It is toward this purpose that we will focus our work.

The CPS will review this strategy annually through consultation with internal and external partners.

Annex A – Data on gender of victims

The year ending March 2016 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)³ showed that:

- The biggest difference between women and men for types of intimate partner violence was for sexual assault, with women nearly 5 times as likely to have experienced this form of abuse as men (3.2% compared with 0.7%). Women also experienced significantly more intimate violence since the age of 16 than men, for all main types and sub-categories of intimate violence including family abuse (non-sexual).

Domestic abuse:

- Between 2004–05 and 2015–16 there was a fall in annual domestic abuse (a fall of 26% for female victims and 28% for male victims);
- The difference between the prevalence of domestic abuse for men and women is the lowest it has been since the year ending March 2005. The 3.3 percentage point difference between men and women in the year ending March 2016 compares with a peak difference of 5.1 percentage points in the year ending March 2010 and 4.6 percentage points in the year ending March 2005;
- In 2015–16, 28 men were killed by their partner or ex-partner compared with 77 women;
- Data published in 2014–15⁴ identified groups of people facing domestic abuse who were highly victimised – they were female and separated, lone parents aged 16–24 or had long-term disability;
- 4.4% of men (716,000) and 7.7% of women (1.27m) aged 16 to 59 were victims of domestic abuse in the year ending March 2016; with 2.8% of men (451,000) and 5.4% of women (891,000) experiencing partner abuse (non-sexual);
- 13.6% of men and 26.3% of women aged 16 to 59 were victims of domestic abuse since the age of 16; 8.8% of men and 20.1% of women experienced partner abuse (non-sexual); 6.6% of men and 17.2% of women faced threats or force;
- From 2014–15 CSEW⁵, 61% of male victims and 88% of female victims told someone; 26% women and 10% of men told the police;

³ These data are published alongside ['Focus on: Violent Crime and Sexual Offences, year ending March 2016'](#)

⁴ Data on identified groups were not available in 2015-16 CSEW data sheets.

⁵ Data on reporting were not available in 2015-16 CSEW data sheets.

- Of the increasing volume of domestic abuse cases going through Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARACs), Home Office data reports more than 95% of the victims in these cases are female and 4% are male. These are the victims accessing the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor service (IDVA) which deals with the most severe cases of domestic abuse.

Stalking:

- 2.7% of men and 4.6% of women were stalked in the year ending March 2016; 0.5% of men and 1.3% of women were stalked by a partner. Since 2005, this fall has been more pronounced for men (9.2% to 2.7%) than for women (7.5% to 4.6%).

Sexual assaults:

- In the year ending March 2016 approximately 111,000 men and 533,000 women were victims of any sexual assault (including attempts);
- 0.7% of men and 3.2% of women experienced a sexual assault (3.6% of men and 19.9% of women since the age of 16; and for rape including attempts 0.3% of men and 5.3% of women experienced this since the age of 16).

Key data from other sources:

Forced Marriage:

- In 2015, 240 forced marriage cases (20%) involved male victims and 980 forced marriage cases (80%) involved female victims⁶.

Child sexual abuse:

- Since 2013 there has been a rise in all forms of recorded CSA crimes⁷: with greater volumes of female victims but a larger % rise in male victims from a lower baseline e.g. sexual assault on a female child under 13 increased 50% (+2103); sexual assault on a male child under 13 increased by 89% (+1124).
- 80% of reports of online grooming involved female victims⁸.
- From an analysis of over 9,000 children and young people who were victims of sexual exploitation supported by Barnardo's: 66% of were female and 33% male⁹. More of the male victims were disabled or had a youth offending record and were slightly younger than the female victims.

Trafficking and modern slavery:

⁶ Source Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2015.

⁷ Data coordinated by the Home Office in May 2015.

⁸ Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre 2014.

⁹ 2014 Report on sexual exploitation of boys and young men, Nuffield Foundation.

- In 2015 victims of trafficking and modern slavery: 88% of victims of sexual exploitation and domestic servitude were female; 86% of victims of labour exploitation were male¹⁰.

Online abuse:

- UN research in 2016 indicated that women are 27 times more likely to be abused online than men and 73% of women reported being abused online¹¹.
- A 2017 UK survey of over 1,000 young people aged between 11-18 years found that almost 50% of girls and 40% of boys had experienced harassment online¹².

Further links to data related to the gender of VAWG victims and perpetrators:

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/how-common-is-domestic-abuse/>

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/femicide-census-published>

<http://new.mankind.org.uk/>

<https://kareningalasmith.com/counting-dead-women/>

<https://issuu.com/survivorsmanchester>

<https://www.nr-foundation.org.uk/downloads/Who-Does-What-to-Whom.pdf>

¹⁰ Data from National Referral Mechanism in England and Wales – referrals of potential victims.

¹¹

http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report.pdf?v=1&d=20150924T154259

¹² Plan International UK survey conducted by Opinium 2017.

About the Crown Prosecution Service

The CPS is responsible for prosecuting most cases heard in the criminal courts in England and Wales. It is led by the Director of Public Prosecutions and acts independently on criminal cases investigated by the police and other agencies. The CPS is responsible for deciding the appropriate charge in more serious or complex cases and provides information, assistance and support to victims and witnesses.

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