

Police Scotland

Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2023



**POLICE
SCOTLAND**
Keeping people safe
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Foreword

Police Scotland has a critical role to play in preventing violence and safeguarding women and girls. Our vision is to create a society and culture where women and girls live free from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and harassment.

Police Scotland has made significant improvements to its service and approach to tackling violence against women and girls in recent years. However, it is clear more needs to be done. Violence against women and girls continues, with certain crime types, such as domestic abuse, rape, sexual assault, commercial sexual exploitation, and so called “honour based” abuse, disproportionately affecting women and girls.

The Rise Report, developed and written by the Young Women’s Movement and Scottish Women’s Aid, found that over a third of young women had been in an intimate relationship with an individual who was abusive or inflicted physical or emotional harm and almost three quarters knew someone who had. [The-Rise-Report-Final.pdf \(womensaid.scot\)](https://www.womensaid.scot)

Perpetrators are the sole cause of violence against women and girls. Therefore, we will continue to challenge the harmful attitudes and behaviours of men which perpetuate violence and abuse.

While Police Scotland holds a vital role in tackling the harm inflicted upon women and girls, we recognise that we cannot resolve this issue in isolation, and throughout this strategy, we have outlined the actions that we will take both independently as a service and collectively with our partners.

We also recognise that we must lead by example and tackle harmful attitudes or behaviours which exist internally.

We will address any issues within the organisation and its culture to meet the expectations of the public and build trust and confidence in our service.

The voices of women and girls are at the heart of this strategy. We have listened to a wide range of individuals and views to ensure our approach meets the needs of those who have been or continue to be affected by violence. We have been informed by individuals’ lived and living experiences of abuse, engaging with survivors from different communities and backgrounds. We have also worked closely with and listened to the ideas of key stakeholders across the public, private and third sectors, as well as engaging with academics to learn from their research.

This strategy is only the beginning. We will continue to engage with and listen to survivors of violence and work with our partners to ensure that all women and girls feel listened to, believed, and supported. We are committed to achieving our vision and being part of the societal change to end violence against women and girls.

I would like to thank all the victims and survivors who bravely shared their stories with us. Each account has helped to guide our approach and develop this strategy. I would also like to thank the members of the public who contributed their ideas to our online platform, and the organisations and stakeholders that have offered their assistance and support as we have developed this important strategy. Their contributions will help make Scotland a safer place for all women and girls.



Sir Iain Livingstone QPM
Chief Constable

Police Scotland engaged extensively with survivors, stakeholders, partners and the public to develop this strategy and we are grateful to all who took part. Quotes used within this document are from participants of this engagement work and are fully anonymised.



“

I was kept awake, shouted at and felt like I was a prisoner. I had to do everything and was regularly crying every weekend. I dreaded coming home for 20 years. A look could signal whether my day was free of torture or if it was going to be hell. My weight and health fluctuated, I felt physically sick a lot and I was walking daily on a tightrope waiting on the moment it would all be over. This is complex because a person who does this knows exactly what they are doing and it is a pattern of abuse against women and girls.”

Strategic Alignment

The delivery of a Violence Against Women and Girls strategy aligns with the following strategic outcomes from the [Joint Strategy for Policing \(2020\)](#):

Outcome 1: threats to public safety and wellbeing are resolved by a proactive and responsive police service.

Within our [Joint Equality Outcomes for Policing 2021](#)

Outcome 4: Violence Against Women and Girls - Confidence and Support reflects the challenges and barriers preventing the reporting of violence against women and girls..



Our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#) outlines the action we are taking to champion equality and inclusion. We will tackle discrimination, and become a service where every officer and member of staff can flourish and thrive with the knowledge they are welcome and valued for their true and authentic selves.

Our strategic response to Violence Against Women and Girls aims to support the delivery of a society and culture where women and girls live free from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and harassment.

Case for Change – Why do we need a Violence against Women and Girls Strategy?

Introduction

Police Scotland’s strategic response to Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) aims to enhance our organisational capability to ensure women and girls live free from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and harassment.

Since its inception, Police Scotland has been dedicated to tackling these issues, however, in recent years a series of significant events have brought the issue of violence against women and girls into sharper focus. This has prompted widespread debate on the socio-cultural factors which contribute to this systemic problem, as well as the changes required to ensure all women and girls live free from harm.

The term VAWG is used to refer to a range of actions that harm, or cause suffering and indignity to women and children. These include but are not limited to:

- 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” abuse and violence, including dowry-related violence, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriages and ‘honour’ crimes

Violence against Women and Girls covers 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 private life.

Police Scotland’s purpose is to improve the safety and wellbeing of people, places and communities in Scotland. We play a vital role in preventing and protecting women and girls from violence along with using our policing powers proportionately to bring perpetrators to justice. Our Violence against Women and Girls strategy will outline how we will approach this.

We recognise women and girls are disproportionately affected by particular forms of violence because of their gender. We are committed to leading and contributing to a culture which stops seeing acts of violence, abuse or harassment as an inevitable part of being a woman.

To develop the strategy we underwent a significant period of self-assessment and reflection, recognising where there are issues in our organisation and its culture that we must address in order to meet the needs of the people we serve and build trust and confidence in our ability to do so.

We sought the views and experiences of our partners and the communities and people impacted by these complex and challenging issues. We listened carefully and responded to their suggestions of how we can improve the services we provide.

We have considered the recommendations made by our scrutiny partners and those directed towards other police services across the United Kingdom to identify best practice that we can incorporate into our existing organisational approaches.

The justice system in Scotland is changing to better meet the needs of those it serves. Our strategy recognises the importance of delivering person-centred, trauma informed approaches that meet the needs of victims, witnesses and perpetrators.

Building trust and confidence

Since 2020, there have been several high profile cases where police officers have been convicted of committing acts of violence against women and girls, taking advantage of their positions of power to cause harm. In the wake of these shocking and despicable acts, testimonies from victims and survivors highlighted the prevalence of inappropriate conduct and attitudes amongst officers and staff in police services across the United Kingdom.

To build and retain the trust and confidence of the people and communities we serve, we must remove individuals from the organisation who commit acts of violence or abuse against women and girls, as well as those who perpetuate inappropriate attitudinal and cultural issues which allow sexist and misogynistic behaviours to persist.

Police Scotland has zero tolerance for any individuals demonstrating discriminatory views or behaviours. These people are not welcome in our organisation and we will take the necessary steps to ensure they are prevented from further pursuing or continuing careers in policing.

This strategy will align with other established work streams within Police Scotland, including Policing Together, our Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy, the Misogyny and Sexism short life working group and the development of our Human Rights Framework.

Change needs to happen within policing to protect women and girls from violence and abuse. We welcome the opportunity to lead and become an exemplar across law enforcement. Misogyny, sexist behaviour and other forms of discrimination will not be tolerated. We are committed to creating a workforce that is respectful, inclusive and safe for all.

Challenging attitudes and behaviours

Violence against women is an issue rooted in gender inequality. To prevent male violence against women and girls, we must challenge the misogynistic attitudes and harmful social norms that normalise and excuse this behaviour.

Too many women and girls change how they behave and act in their everyday lives in order to feel safe – from what they wear, what they say and do, where they go and when.

“Both my mother’s and sister’s response deeply affected me, as well as the incident itself - to them, it was completely normal and to be expected to experience harassment as a woman or girl.”

(Violence against Women and Girls Insights 2022)

This is not an acceptable solution to male violence and we all must work to turn the narrative away from preventative advice to women and victim-blaming.

Instead, we must focus on a cultural shift which encourages men to listen, reflect and take action to challenge or change their own behaviours and views.

The Equally Safe Strategy, published by the Scottish Government and COSLA, is Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against Women and Girls.

Its priorities are:

- achieving greater gender equality
- intervening early and effectively to prevent violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people
- tackling perpetrators

The strategy sets out how key partners in the public, private and third sector will work collaboratively to ensure Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect; rejects all forms of violence against women and girls; allows women and girls to thrive as equal citizens; and ensures interventions are early and effective and men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls.

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (The Istanbul Convention) emphasises that men and boys should be encouraged to actively contribute to preventing all forms of violence against women and girls. [The Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on violence against women](#)

Police Scotland engaged with and provided a written response to the Scottish Government's ongoing Misogyny and Criminal Justice in Scotland Working Group, chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy. [Misogyny - A Human Rights Issue \(www.gov.scot\)](#).

This group was set up to independently consider how the Scottish criminal justice system deals with misogyny faced by women and girls and have recommended the development of a Misogyny Bill to address these issues.

Police Scotland has provided wider thought leadership on the key steps for societal change, drawing together a strong narrative to underpin a range of extensive conversations. The service first launched the 'That Guy' sexual harm prevention campaign in October 2021 focused on male sexual entitlement, encouraging men to take responsibility for their actions and reflect on how they might be perpetuating sexual violence. [That Guy \(that-guy.co.uk\)](#) We intend to build upon our work and explore how we can support an improved understanding of these issues within wider society.

Supporting a person-centred justice system

Recommendations from partners and stakeholders have helped to inform the strategy and ensure our approach to addressing violence against women and girls is consistent with expectations, as well as taking into careful consideration ongoing developments across the justice system.

Lady Dorrian's Review Group published a report in March 2021 outlining recommendations to improve the Management of Sexual Offence Cases, including the implementation of trauma-informed procedures. [Improving the Management of Sexual Offence Cases](#)

The review was undertaken as a result of both the rise in number and complexity of cases of rape and sexual assault and the recognition that despite recent improvements, there was still much which could be done to improve the experience of those who participate in these proceedings.

Key findings included issues with delays, communication, anonymity for complainers, the debate on the use of juries and pre-recording of evidence.

Building on this, the Scottish Government's Vision for Justice Strategy promotes a person-centred approach amongst justice partners and sets out how we all must take urgent action to improve the justice system and ensure it meets the needs of women who experience violence underpinned by inequality and societal attitudes towards gender [The Vision for Justice in Scotland 2022 \(www.gov.scot\)](#). It aims to create safer communities and shift attitudes and circumstances which allow for crime and harm to continue. Victims and their needs must be at the heart of service delivery and their voices must be heard.

Related developments include the Scottish Government's 2022-23 Programme for Government commitment to abolish the not proven verdict in Scots Law. The reform to move to a two verdict system in Scotland will be part of a wider Criminal Justice Reform Bill, which will progress the ambition and priorities set out in the Vision for Justice Scotland of delivering person-centred and trauma-informed practices.

The not proven verdict has a disproportionate impact on rape and sexual assault cases, resulting in lower prosecution and conviction rates. According to data provided by Rape Crisis Scotland, not proven made up 44% of rape and attempted rape acquittals compared with 20% for all crimes and offences. [Rape Crisis Scotland – End Not Proven](#). It has the same impact as a not guilty verdict, with there being no legal consequences for the accused. [End Not Proven | Rape Crisis Scotland](#). As a result, many survivors feel let down, not believed and are left without any sense of justice.

Police Scotland will pay close attention to future legislative developments and wider justice system reform, ensuring organisational readiness in response to any changes made.

Working with communities

Police Scotland commits to delivering a person-centred approach when responding to incidents of violence against women, involving affected communities in the design and delivery of our services to ensure they are supported and their experiences are understood and heard.

We are aware of the importance of understanding intersectionality between gender and other characteristics and it is imperative our response considers those from different marginalised or minoritised groups and reflects the diversity of all women and girls in Scotland.

This includes continuing to build and develop our relationships with communities who may not traditionally approach or put their trust in the police, including ethnic groups, asylum seekers and those with care experience. It is our responsibility to look at how we can change these relationships and make it clear that individuals and their safety and wellbeing are at the heart of what we do.

This strategy is informed by our values, ethics, service standards, and by understanding lived and living experience. We want to work with the people of Scotland to identify what will make a difference and play our part in wider societal efforts to make Scotland a safe place for everyone.

This is a priority both internally and externally. Work has been carried out to hear from those affected, including a colleague engagement survey on experiences of misogyny and sexism at work and their ideas about how Police Scotland can tackle these issues, as well as an engagement activity that allowed the public to share their experiences of violence directed towards women and girls.

Our Approach – engaging with our partners, communities and people

It was vital that the Violence against Women and Girls Strategy was developed with our values, ethics and service standards in mind. We wanted to ensure our approach was respectful, collaborative and inclusive.

Our intentions were to enable spaces for open and safe conversations and feedback on our approach to tackling violence against women and girls, inviting the public, communities and victim-survivors to share their views, experiences and ideas.

The approach included several ways for people to participate including online engagement platforms, interviews, focus groups and conversation cafes.

The engagement was underpinned by trauma-informed principles and co-designed with subject matter experts to better inform the long-term strategic and tactical response to violence against women and girls and to ensure the wellbeing of victim-survivors was at the heart of our approach.

Public Engagement

Storytelling Platform

A safe and private online space for survivors and witnesses to share their lived experience in their own words.

135 people anonymously shared their stories. 95% of participants were women, 1% were men and 1% non-binary.

Dialogue - Ideas Platform

An open space for anyone to share their ideas or rate and comment on existing ones about how we can tackle violence against women and girls.

This was a new approach for Police Scotland, and provided a safe space for ongoing discussion amongst our communities.

31 ideas for change were shared on the Dialogue platform.

Focus Groups and In-depth Interviews

All in-depth interviews (13 participants) and focus groups (17 participants) were conducted with consideration of our trauma-informed principles. Topic guides were developed with public sector experts, however conversations were largely guided by participants. The wellbeing of participants was of priority at all times and signposting to further support was utilised.

Conversation Cafes

In conjunction with Women’s Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre Dundee and Angus (WRASAC), 9 Conversation Cafes were held with 47 men and boys in Dundee, Edinburgh, Perth, Arbroath, Lanarkshire and Stenhousemuir.

Participants were invited to share their opinions on VAWG and how Police Scotland can respond.

Strategic Engagement

Stakeholder Engagement Forum

A small number of senior leaders from a range of services who provide a coordinated strategic approach to Police Scotland's response to tackling violence against women and girls.

Academic Challenge Sessions

A series of focused discussions led by academics expert in subject matters related to VAWG.

Topics included:

- Diversity and inclusion
- Stalking and harassment
- Online and digital harm
- LGBTQI+
- BAME

VAWG Seminar

Co-chaired by Police Scotland, COSLA and the SPA, the seminar provided an opportunity for VAWG advocates and experts from across Scotland to share their experiences and opinions to help shape Police Scotland's future approach.

Plan on a Page

Police Scotland’s Violence against Women and Girls Strategy

Vision

A society and culture where women and girls live free from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and harassment.

Aim

Drive change through the development of effective prevention strategies, the pursuit of perpetrators and the creation of safe spaces for everyone to live freely and safely.

Strategic Outcomes and Description

1. Supporting women and girls

Police Scotland has a duty to keep people safe; provide services and support to meet their needs. We will work with our justice partners to deliver integrated, person-centred and trauma informed services which recognise people’s experiences and respect their needs and views.

2. Preventing harm and securing justice

We will maximise our police powers to effectively target men who harm women. We will work with partners to prevent men’s violence against women and girls from continuing, escalating or occurring in the first place.

3. Creating safe spaces

Violent, threatening and inappropriate conduct by men leaves women and girls feeling fearful within their own homes, as they go about their daily lives or interact online. We will coordinate our data and resources to target and challenge these behaviours online and in public.

4. Trust and confidence

Sexism and misogyny do not belong in our organisation. We will take every opportunity available to us to deliver a robust response, ensuring we eradicate from policing those who demonstrate discriminatory beliefs or have committed acts of violence or other forms of harm.

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I hope police will be better trained on trauma response and how there is no such thing as a 'perfect victim'... the victim's statement will not be polished and perfect, and shouldn't be expected to be flawless. These people are confused and traumatised. Police need better training on understanding the effects of trauma...”

Outcome 1: Supporting Women and Girls



Overview

Police Scotland is committed to protecting the people of Scotland and we will continue our dedication to improving our services for victims of gender based violence.

Misogyny, sexism and discrimination of any kind are deplorable. They should have no place in society and no place in policing. It is vital that, individually and as an organisation, we challenge our own and each other's behaviours in relation to misogynistic attitudes and actions. We have a duty and an opportunity to lead a change which improves the experiences of all women, including our own officers and staff. This starts with enabling and supporting those who speak up, who have a right to be heard without fear of detriment or victimisation.

(Chief Constable Sir Iain Livingstone QPM)

Whilst valuable progress has been made, we know we have more work to do to improve the services we provide to the women and girls who encounter violence and other forms of abuse or harm in their own homes, in public or online. Primarily, we must acknowledge societal inequalities for those accessing the justice system and provide the support people need during these potentially traumatic and distressing processes.

In this outcome, we will focus on how we best develop our services to meet the support requirements of women and girls who have experienced violence. By adopting a trauma-informed and victim-centred approach to support, we can ensure individuals who experience violence have access to the right assistance from policing and partner services which cater to their own specific needs.

Whilst policing alone cannot solve all issues faced by the victim throughout their journey, from the process of reporting an incident to ultimately receiving justice, we can work with our partners across the justice system, and more widely, to appropriately support the needs of each individual.

Victim centred approaches

To achieve justice, victims of crime must first have trust in law enforcement to take action and protect them when they are at their most vulnerable. For Police Scotland to fully achieve this, the public need to have trust and confidence that our services are truly designed to support and help them. Whilst research has shown that generally most people have favourable views of the police, with 82% saying they feel safe within their local area, we cannot ignore the systemic, inherent inequality faced by women and girls within society. [Your Police 2021-2022 - Police Scotland - Citizen Space](#)

“...if the response you receive from people who are supposed to be there to help to keep you safe is negative, you are less likely to reach out for help again and the impact can shame you further for something that is not your fault”

(Violence Against Women and Girls Insights 2022)

Qualitative responses from our storytelling space found that just 13 out of 135 (7%) respondents had a positive experience when reporting to the police. 36% who did report to the police described their contact as negative due to police officer insensitivity, being ignored and not receiving enough support.

The majority of participants (57%) chose not to report violence to the police due to a range of barriers including trust concerns over not being taken seriously or even believed, being aware of negative experiences involving themselves or others, lack of officer to victim communication and police officers showing a lack of knowledge around abuse.

By adopting a victim centred approach, we will address the needs of all women and girls, delivering services that are accessible and meet the needs of individuals by listening to feedback and focusing on the well-being, safety and expressed needs of individuals.

The Scottish Government Vision for Justice Strategy commits to prioritising improvements to the justice system, including support for women and girls experiencing gender based violence. The Victim Centred Approach Fund has been established by the government and has pledged at least £10 million per year towards assisting organisations to provide practical and emotional support to victims, survivors and witnesses of crime across Scotland.

In order to uphold our part in the aim of improving the lives of women and girls in Scotland, we must recognise our position as a first point of contact of the justice system for victims and witnesses and actively demonstrate our policing values in all interactions. [Our Transformation Priorities - The Vision for Justice in Scotland - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

[Victim Centred Approach Fund - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Building on the recommendations provided by Lady Dorrian in her report on the Management of Sexual Offences, we will implement trauma-informed procedures when managing sexual offence cases. We will focus on the use of pre-recorded evidence to lessen trauma for victims. We will ensure any communication relating to sexual history evidence; legal rules around specific evidence; and privacy when dealing with medical records with all involved is clear and well explained.

Between 2020-21 and 2021-22, sexual crimes increased by 15%, from 13,131 to 15,049. These crimes are now at the highest level seen since 1971, the first year for which comparable groups are available.

[Gov.Scot Publication - Statistics Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-2022](#)

In total, 65,251 domestic abuse incidents were recorded in 2020/21, compared to 62,907 in 2019/20, an increase of 4%.

[Gov.Scot news on Domestic Abuse recorded by the police in Scotland 2020-21](#)

“The response I got from the Police was fine, they made me feel as comfortable as possible given the circumstances. However, the process needs to be much quicker. The fear was exacerbated by not knowing what was happening and having to wait for so long. Because once you are given your statement you are just left, this feeling added to my trauma. Being in limbo is hard because you don’t know when they have been spoken to and you have to do the chasing yourself. So the Police checking in more frequently would be helpful.”

(Violence against Women and Girls Insights 2022)

Figures released by the Scottish Government set out that rape and attempted rape has had the lowest conviction rate of all crimes each year for the last decade. In 2021-22, just 51% of rape and attempted rape trials resulted in conviction, compared to a 91% overall conviction rate. The number of convictions also decreased by 405 from 130 in 2019-20 to just 78 in 2020-21. However, there was an 81% increase in convictions for crimes under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, from 212 convictions in 2019-20 to 383 in 2020-21.

Whilst the increase in reporting numbers may be partly attributed to increased public trust and confidence in policing, there is more work to be done to ensure policing contributes effectively to securing justice for victims. We must work with our partners in justice to improve the experience of victims and witnesses as they progress through the justice system, ensuring their needs are understood and met.

We will strengthen our investigative efforts by developing the skills of our officers to capture evidence in an effective and timely manner. This will involve reviewing our approach to victim engagement, ensuring officers and staff involved are informed of the circumstances of the case, are accessible to the complainer and able to provide the necessary support for victims throughout their journey, with the aim of reducing victim attrition rates.

From the outset, victims of sexual offences should be assigned a sole and consistent trauma informed point of contact with adequate knowledge of the process, the circumstances of the case and of the complainer. We will work to embed standard procedure where by every statement made by a victim and survivor of rape is recorded in the first instance, reducing unnecessary trauma and stress for the individual.

We will explore how we can best provide this consistent support to complainers and deliver improvements to our approach where they are required. [Improving-the-management-of-Sexual-Offence-Cases.pdf \(scotcourts.gov.uk\)](#)

We will continue to support activity currently underway across the criminal justice system to deliver Bairns Hooses across Scotland. Based upon the Barnahus model pioneered in Iceland, Bairns Hoose will bring together services in a 'four rooms' approach with child protection, health, justice and recovery services all made available in one setting to reduce the number of times children have to recount their experiences.

To achieve this, we will develop a coordinated response which places the needs of the child at the centre across services. [Factsheet – Bairns Hoose: the Scottish Barnahus](#)

Police Scotland is committed to participating with our partners in the development of this approach, which is based on the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and contributing our policing expertise in line with our own rights based approach to policing.

Delivering an inclusive service

Recommendations set out by Lady Eilish Angiolini in the Independent Review of Complaints, Investigations and Misconduct in Policing continue to be implemented with particular focus on accelerating improvements in equality, diversity and inclusion. Police Scotland's Policing Together Strategy is being implemented to improve our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion issues within the organisation and support cultural change. Our internal sexual offence prevention campaign, 'That Guy', was initiated to engage and encourage all men to challenge their own attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls as well as those of their friends, family members and colleagues.

Whilst gender based violence is primarily perpetrated by men, it is important we highlight and remind ourselves that when talking about VAWG, we include violence that occurs in same sex couples and to transgender and non-binary people. Experiences shared with us by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Survivors highlighted obstacles which may prevent or impact them from contacting the police:

- Culture differences
- Language barriers
- Lack of information within and for BME communities
- Feelings of isolation
- Fear of deportation
- Fear of repercussions from their partner or other family members

Intersectionality is the word we use to describe how race, class, disability, age, pregnancy, gender, and other forms of discrimination can "intersect" with one another and overlap. It is a framework used to understand oppression and highlight how discrimination cannot be resolved by solely focusing on one single issue.

By adopting inclusive approaches, we will ensure individuals are not alienated or unintentionally shunned as survivors of violence when they encounter different forms of discrimination which may not be clear or obvious to the police.

"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."

(Audre Lorde)

Understanding the impact of intersectional issues on women and girls, as well as the impact particular offences have on those from certain communities or with protected characteristics – so called “honour based” abuse and violence, female genital mutilation, violence and other forms of harm directed towards LGBTQ women and girls, alongside wider societal changes, is key to tackling violence against women and girls.

The Istanbul Convention, a treaty of the Council of Europe against gender-based and domestic violence, states that in order for inclusion to ensue, the focus must be on how to refer to the survivor of violence as well as how to refer to the act of violence. Therefore, it is vital to implement and deliver effective tools and equip our officers and staff with the knowledge to provide victims and survivors purposefully with inclusive services that meet individual needs.

We also recognise that there will be times where victims may not want to or feel comfortable engaging with police officers. Therefore, it is vital we continue to build and maintain our working relationships with victim and survivor groups and ensure people are either signposted to these services or can be referred to policing if and when they feel able to do so. For individuals who require additional services such as sign language or alternative spoken language interpretation, we will ensure this is offered at the first available opportunity. We will also work with partners across all sectors to increase the profile of women’s refuge spaces amongst survivors to ensure those fleeing violence have safe spaces, particularly in remote and rural locations.

Our commitment

- Adopt a person-centred and trauma-informed approach to support victims and witnesses of violence.
- Review and adapt our internal processes and procedures, as well as our involvement within wider justice processes, to improve victim/witness journey.
- Build relationships and improve our engagement with women and girls from all communities.
- Develop our understanding of diversity and intersectionality.

“

There needs to be a societal change. Police need to be more educated in trauma responses, abusive behaviour patterns such as reactionary abuse, coercive control etc. and how to spot this in real terms. There needs to be more support, early intervention etc. for struggling families. More research into why abuse happens. There needs to be harsher punishment and education to reform abusers, more ways to find out if someone has an abusive past etc. There needs to be more community police and a bigger presence in our communities.”

Outcome 2: Preventing Harm and Securing Justice



Overview

Police Scotland commits to preventing men's violence against women and girls from continuing, escalating or occurring in the first place. We will utilise our policing powers effectively to pursue, manage and disrupt perpetrators that inflict such harm.

We will provide a swift and robust response to the types of crime that disproportionately impact women and girls – domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, stalking and harassment, online harm, forced marriage and so called "honour based" abuse – ensuring we deliver the necessary resources, specialist services, and equip our officers and staff with the knowledge and skills to effectively target men who inflict such harm.

Perpetrators are the sole cause of violence against women and girls. Therefore, we must hold offenders to account for their actions. While we will continue to pursue traditional justice outcomes to safeguard people from violent and dangerous individuals, where appropriate we will explore options with our partners to deliver effective early intervention mechanisms.

Our approach to perpetrators

Police Scotland will provide a proactive policing response to pursue perpetrators and safeguard victims against immediate danger at times where there is a known risk of escalating harm or violence.

While the pursuit of perpetrators is a key objective of the police, we recognise the importance of considering the needs of victims and achieving their desired outcome. We will listen, inform and support all victims of abuse and ensure our approach is driven by the needs of those who have been or continue to be affected by violence. We will co-design our response to perpetrators with the victim, and where appropriate, we will provide information on alternative support routes and non-criminal justice outcomes.

We will develop our understanding of all crime types and abusive behaviours, ensuring we recognise indicators of violence and disrupt the most dangerous perpetrators involved in both single and multiple-perpetrator abuse, and the contexts in which this can occur.

This will see all frontline officers and staff undertaking specialist training to recognise gender based violence in all its forms.

Our engagement with survivors of violence has highlighted the importance of challenging both physical and emotional abuse, with 37% of respondents who have experienced violence by a partner discussing physical violence and 34% sharing their experience of emotional abuse. This analysis of respondents' experiences also demonstrates that emotional abuse can often lead to physical harm and other forms of domestic abuse. For example, one survivor said:

"I started experiencing emotional abuse. This soon turned to physical. I had no idea at the time how bad it was and it started happening most days."

(Violence Against Women and Girls Insights 2022)

We will develop our understanding and ability to address all forms of violence and abuse in order to intervene at the earliest opportunity and prevent continuing harm.

We will increase our operational activity and utilise all legal options available to policing to tackle dangerous and serial offenders. This includes the use of legal tools which can be used in domestic abuse incidents, providing the police and courts with the authority to remove suspected domestic abusers from the homes of victims and other individuals that may be at risk.

The majority of charges reported to the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) with a domestic abuse identifier are prosecuted. In 2021-22, 62% of the cases where the decision made by COPFS was to take 'No Action' was a result of "Insufficient Admissible Evidence". [Domestic Abuse- Publication 2021-22 final.pdf \(copfs.gov.uk\)](#)

We are committed to improving this figure by maximising our evidence gathering efforts to build more robust investigations and support our partners within the criminal justice system to increase prosecution rates.

This will involve the review of our information and evidence sharing processes, such as the Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC) programme. We will assess this initiative to ensure its effectiveness in allowing officers and other justice partners to digitally access evidence in an efficient manner and ensure evidence is shared, considered and disclosed at the earliest opportunity. This will help to avoid unnecessary involvement of witnesses and the potential re-traumatisation of victims.

We recognise that certain types of harm are more hidden in nature. Human trafficking can be difficult to detect due to the many forms it can take and the lack of victim reporting associated with this type of abuse. Our officers and staff will be trained to understand the complexities of this type of harm and proactively identify and disrupt the individuals and groups that orchestrate this crime.

Our National Human Trafficking Unit will continue to work with partners and explore information and intelligence sharing opportunities to equip all officers and staff with the resources to tackle traffickers from their involvement in initial recruitment to ongoing exploitation. Victims of human trafficking are often extremely vulnerable and can be difficult to reach.

We will continue to prioritise a victim-centred approach and work closely with our partners to improve our identification efforts and ensure that the specific needs of each victim are met.

The Scottish Government is reviewing a new approach to tackling commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) – termed as the “Nordic Model” – which has been adopted in countries such as Sweden, Norway and Northern Ireland. This approach involves criminalising the purchase of sex and decriminalising victims of sexual exploitation. We will continue to monitor and respond to such legislative changes, to ensure our approach effectively tackles perpetrators of these types of harm, while prioritising the safety and wellbeing of individuals who have become victims of violence.

Our officers and staff will be trained to understand the impact and trauma experienced by women involved in CSE. We will continue to develop a consistent and trauma-informed approach to engaging with women affected by CSE to encourage the reporting of violence and ensure victims feel safe, respected and supported throughout the justice process. We will assist our partners and representative organisations to develop support mechanisms for victims, establish routes to escape this type of violence and access justice, and challenge the origin of exploitation.

Multi-agency Collaboration

We will seek to maximise the use of our multi-agency partnerships across the service to deliver a thorough response to perpetrators and enable timely interventions to reduce or prevent the risk of severe harm or homicide for victims, as well as their children and families.

We will expand and improve our existing multi-agency initiatives to ensure we identify as many offenders and increase our efforts to reduce repeat victimisation. An academic study analysing domestic abuse cases over a 6 year period found that 83% of the male perpetrators involved in the study had at least 2 incidents of recorded violence. [Hester, M. \(2013\). Who does what to whom? Gender and domestic violence perpetrators in English police records. *European Journal of Criminology*, 10\(5\), 623–637.](#)

To identify and disrupt dangerous and serial offenders, we will develop and improve our multi-agency working methodologies. This will include reviewing the structure of the Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination process (MATAC) to ensure the partnership working and information sharing involved is effective in identifying and tackling the most dangerous domestic abuse perpetrators.

We will continue to support the delivery of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) – a regular gathering of local agencies to share information on high risk domestic abuse victims and to establish plans to safeguard those at risk of future harm. We will develop guidance for local divisions to improve agency coordination and ensure officers and staff know when and how to make referrals to a MARAC.

We will continue to develop our role in the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) process, which involves working with partners to assess and manage the risk posed by dangerous offenders within the community. We will work closely with Justice Social Work and other MAPPA partners to share information efficiently and manage individuals who pose the greatest risk of harm.

Research has signified a close connection between domestic violence and child abuse. For example, one study found that “34.4% of under-18s who had lived with domestic violence had also been abused or neglected by a parent or guardian.” [Radford, L., Aitken, R., Miller, P., Ellis, J., Roberts, J. and Firkic, A., Meeting the needs of children living with domestic violence in London Research report Refuge/NSPCC research project. Funded by the City Bridge Trust November 2011 \(London: NSPCC and Refuge, 2011\), p. 101 \(From a sample representative of the population in the UK.\)](#)

During our own engagement with survivors, one third of respondents who had experienced domestic abuse also discussed children being negatively impacted.

The findings demonstrate that children involved in partner violence are often exploited and harmed in various ways, including emotional control, to remain in contact with the survivor or to stalk them, to manipulate a court process or to abuse the child. For example, one survivor said:

“My ex husband hit me. After leaving him he continued exercising control via the children and stalked us 100+ times. He often used the police to facilitate this.”

(Violence Against Women and Girls Insights 2022)

This involvement can have a damaging effect on the physical and mental health of children. For example, one survivor said:

“I called them because he was harassing my daughter, I had a harassment order for me but it didn’t cover my daughter because the sheriff said no, ‘that’s her dad she can see her dad’, she was screaming that she didn’t want to see him. There was no protection provided for her. 2 and a half years later she’s got PTSD because nothing could be put in place for her dad harassing her ‘oh it’s your dad’.” ... “I’ve had to pay for therapy for my daughter so that she can shake off this, because the NHS is too long to wait, I don’t have much money but she needs it.”

(Violence Against Women and Girls Insights 2022)

To support the continuous improvement of our multi-agency processes, we will support the Scottish Government to develop Multi-Agency Domestic Homicide Reviews across Scotland, ensuring organisational learning is taken from as wide a scope as possible. We will seek to implement any learning or good practice to effectively identify and disrupt violent perpetrators, provide a holistic response that considers the needs of all individuals impacted by the abuse both directly and indirectly, and prioritise the safety and wellbeing of victims and their children.

Early intervention

Intervening at the earliest stage possible to prevent further abuse is critical. Therefore, we will work closely with our partners to explore opportunities to introduce prevention and early intervention initiatives. This will involve the development of our relationships with agencies across various sectors, such as health, education and the third sector.

In the 2019/20 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, only 16% of those who had experienced partner abuse in the 12 months prior to interview said that the police came to know about the most recent (or only) incident. [Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20: Main Findings \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultations-petitions/html/2020/01/SCJS201920-Main-Findings.html)

During our own engagement, 57% of respondents stated that they did not report their experience of violence to the police.

These findings demonstrate the importance of working with partners and promoting alternative routes to support. We will explore opportunities to develop training programmes and toolkits with key partners, such as GPs and health visitors, to support the early identification of violence and encourage professionals to feel confident in helping people to recognise that they are a victim of abuse, make referrals, and provide support and advice.

Many women and girls' experiences of violence begin at an early age. Our engagement with survivors has indicated that the most common age range of victims of sexual abuse is less than 12 years old, rape is 12-18 years old, and harassment is 12-24 years old. We will develop existing and new partnerships with schools and universities to provide support and training to staff on how to recognise and respond to indicators of violence and provide the appropriate support to young women and girls.

We will raise greater awareness of and signpost to our existing initiatives, such as the Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme, which allows individuals, and their relatives and friends, to request information from the police about their partner to see if they have been abusive in the past. This scheme also allows the police to inform people that they may be at risk, via the 'Power to Tell' pathway, even if the information has not been requested.

We will ensure the provision of a consistent and high-quality service that reaches as many people as possible from across all communities in a timely manner. We will seek feedback from users of the scheme to assess its effectiveness and address any aspects that require improvement. Working with our partners, we will develop an external campaign that is accessible to all in order to raise awareness of the scheme and how it works.

Preventing harm

We are committed to working with our partners to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls all together. We will support efforts to challenge underlying harmful attitudes and behaviours, such as misogyny, objectification and sexualisation, with the aim of achieving systemic and long-lasting change.

"I think there is a role for police in prevention and understanding the cycle of reacting needs to be broken earlier. A service of people who listen, respect and believe. We are identifying police as part of the problem here, but they are also part of the solution. We would love if they didn't need to arrest as many people because they have broken the cycle earlier on."

(Violence Against Women and Girls Insights 2022)

This will involve building upon our existing 'That Guy' campaign which encourages men to change their attitudes and behaviours towards women, as well as challenging others, to help prevent violence against women and girls. We will explore opportunities to develop new campaigns to raise awareness of the various types of violence that are inflicted upon women and girls and how to recognise early signs of harm. We will utilise our established social media presence to inform and raise awareness amongst the public of these issues and the support available.

We recognise the importance of educating children and young people on healthy relationships, consent, and online safety to prevent the development of harmful attitudes and behaviours. We will explore opportunities to expand our campaigning efforts to specifically target and educate children and young people on these key issues. We will use social media platforms and develop relationships with organisations and online influencers to share and promote our messaging.

Our commitments

- Develop our approach to identifying and managing perpetrators of all types of violence against women and girls.
- Continue to work collaboratively with partners to raise awareness and educate the public on gender based violence.
- Explore opportunities to implement early intervention initiatives with partners across the health and education sectors.
- Maximise our evidence gathering efforts to build more robust investigations and support our partners within the criminal justice system.
- Continue to improve our approach to tackling human trafficking and supporting victims of this crime, with the development of intelligence sharing opportunities, cross-sector working and the provision of additional resources.
- Develop our approach to engaging with women and girls affected by CSE. Deliver support, personal safety advice and signposting to external support services for people advertising on online platforms or adult services websites.

“

Since becoming a teenager, I have constantly be surrounded by sexual harassment in person and online. I feel afraid to walk outside at night due to my experiences with the comments of men, some examples include: “Wow you’re hot”, as I was casually walking down the street from a group of drunk men, “Do you have a boyfriend? He doesn’t need to know”, this was during harassment from a middle aged men on the bus, no one intervened to help me”

Outcome 3: Creating Safe Spaces



Overview

Violent, threatening and inappropriate conduct by men leads women and girls to feel fearful within their own homes, as they go about their daily lives within their communities or interact online.

These are crimes and behaviours which disproportionately deprive women and girls of the basic right to live freely, and safe from the threat of violence or other forms of harm.

This is not an issue Police Scotland can solve independently, and we intend to utilise cross-sector cooperation to identify perpetrators and prevent harm from occurring both online and in real life.

We need to support wider societal understanding of these issues, particularly amongst young men and boys, to be clear that these are attitudes and behaviours to be challenged, not tolerated or ignored.

Online safety

Our lives are increasingly lived online. We work, communicate, learn and socialise via digital devices, numerous applications and various social media platforms. Unfortunately our online lives provide those with malicious intent additional opportunities to inflict harm.

The manipulation of technology and social media poses a risk for both adults and children, with women and girls disproportionality affected. The 2021 Internet Watch Foundation's Annual Report found that 97% of child sexual abuse material identified showed female children.

[IWF Annual Report 2021](#)

YouGov research shows that one in five (19%) have received an unsolicited sexual photo from someone who was not a romantic partner. This figure rises to 40% among women aged 18 to 34. [YouGov](#)

The pace of technological change, and the constant evolution of tactics deployed by perpetrators, means policing and other justice system partners must be equipped with resources to disrupt these threats and protect people from harm.

According to the Scottish Government Crime Survey 2021-22, an estimated 14,280 cyber-crimes were recorded by the police in Scotland, almost double the recorded figure in 2019-20. In the same period an estimated 4,210 sexual crimes (28%) recorded by the police were cyber-crimes, similar to the estimate of 4,630 in 2020-21, an increase over the longer term from 1,100 in 2013-14.

[Recorded Crime in Scotland 2021-22](#)

Of particular concern is the rise in online child sexual abuse and exploitation. This type of offending includes the taking, distribution or viewing of indecent images of children, online grooming, inciting children to commit sexual acts online and live streaming of sexual abuse. In 2019 Police Scotland received 1,961 referrals relating to online child abuse, the majority of which were shared by the National Crime Agency (NCA). This marks a 1,290% increase from the inception of Police Scotland in 2013, where 81 referrals were received. [Strategic review of Police Scotland's response to online child sexual abuse](#)

The investigation and prevention of online abuse is challenging. However, Police Scotland is committed to disrupting perpetrators and preventing harm wherever it takes place. We recognise the specific threat these crimes present and are working to adapt our services to keep people safe online. Our existing cyber strategy will help us develop the organisational capability and capacity to proactively identify and investigate threats.

To meet future demand we will direct our resources to deliver an effective, pro-active, intelligence-led service which identifies perpetrators and protects those at greatest risk of harm.

We will build upon our work with the NCA and improve collaborative work to target those who seek to cause harm online. Bespoke analysis to determine the scale of the online threat for children within Scotland and the creation of an Online Child Sexual Abuse threat desk will enable us to more accurately identify areas of concern such as intelligence gaps, connections between offenders as well as prevention and disruption opportunities.

We will expedite work already underway to improve our digital forensic capabilities to ensure we can quickly disrupt offenders and better support victims and witnesses. We will work with partners to explore how we can better use available digital technologies such as the Child Abuse Identification Database (CAID) to identify victims, whilst also paying close attention to how we can use technology to support the wellbeing of officers and staff undertaking these challenging roles.

Raising awareness of different forms of online sexual harassment, such as the sending of unsolicited pictures, will form part of our future approach to encourage victims to come forward and report. Here, we will place a particular focus on the consequences for perpetrators, such as being placed on the Sex Offender's Register, as well as the impact on victims who may feel unsafe or traumatised as a result of unwanted, harassing or threatening behaviour.

Online communities

We will closely monitor the work ongoing to develop the Online Safety Bill which aims to make the UK the safest place to be and will improve the safety of users on digital platforms by increasing the duty of care placed on the platform providers. Police Scotland is committed to building and maintaining connections with online providers and the regulator OFCOM. These relationships will help Police Scotland to stay at the vanguard of technological change, aware of emerging risk and able to intervene quickly to keep people safe.

Technological advances will enable the creation of new online communities facilitated by virtual and augmented reality.

As the use of these spaces increases, we must work with platform providers to ensure there are safeguards in place to prevent harm, such as Virtual Reality Sexual Assault (VRSA), from occurring and ensure appropriate reporting mechanisms, as well as the ability to identify those who wish to cause harm and provide escalation routes to law enforcement or third parties offering support or advice.

The use of online spaces by those who wish to radicalise others or promote harmful content is well known and is also used as a means to promote and encourage violence against women and girls. "Incels", which stands for Involuntary Celibates, is a misogynistic ideology where male supporters believe women are to blame for their lack of intimate relationships and as a result should be verbally, physically or sexually assaulted. It is a largely online community where "incels" communicate across various platforms in what is referred to as the "manosphere".

Note: Laura Bates, Men Who Hate Women (Simon & Schuster, 2020)

The gateway to more extreme forms of misogyny are often self-styled "men's rights" or "toxic masculinity" advocates who promote archaic, demeaning opinions about women and their role in society. The links to these ideologies and extremism are becoming increasingly known.

We will challenge these unacceptable beliefs and look to establish the scale and potential threat arising from these individuals; improve understanding amongst officers and staff of these issues and work with partners to devise appropriate awareness raising campaigns. For example advocating for the inclusion of incel culture and violent misogyny within existing cyber choices packages rolled out within schools as well as other environments such as further and higher education and workplaces.

Stalking and harassment

Stalking and harassment is an intrusive and frightening crime which traverses both physical and online spaces. It can disrupt every aspect of a person's life and cause significant fear, alarm and distress over prolonged periods. Whilst stalking and harassment often presents as a continuum of other forms of harm such as coercive control and domestic abuse, perpetrators regularly target people not personally known to them both online and in real life.

The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20 found that 25.6% of women aged 16 to 24 have experienced at least one form of stalking and harassment. The results of our own public engagement found harassment to be one of the most prevalent types of violence, with 22% of respondents across all age groups discussing their experiences of being harassed.

The findings suggest women experiencing harassment are often being targeted by strangers. We will review our current approach to stalking and harassment and explore the feasibility of establishing an expert stalking and harassment unit to support victims and identify perpetrators.

Again raising awareness amongst the public, within our own service and with partners will be critical to our future approach. Stalking and harassment, as well as its impact on victims, is not always recognised or well understood. This has a significant impact on the confidence of victims to come forward and hinders the effective disruption of perpetrators. We will explore how policing can better support wider understanding, whilst ensuring our people are equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognise and respond appropriately to victims of stalking and harassment.

We will also do more to understand the continuum of harm that many victims encounter and ensure different types of violence and crimes are examined holistically. We recognise that many types of violence are linked or can develop concurrently, for example stalking and harassment can often become an extension of domestic abuse. A study from the University of Gloucestershire found that 94% of the homicide cases reviewed as part of the research also involved stalking behaviours. [National Stalking Awareness Week | Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)

Safe Spaces in Public

“I was standing on a train and a man came up behind me and purposefully pushed himself right onto me and pressed himself against me for longer than a genuine fall would’ve caused. Nobody said a word. He was drunk, loud and scary and I didn’t feel I was in a position to challenge this behaviour.”

(Violence Against Women and Girls Insights 2022)

According to the Scottish Government Crime & Justice Survey, 35% of women in Scotland do not feel safe to walk in their own communities when it is dark due to fears of being targeted, harassed, and potentially becoming victims of crime.

[Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20: Main Findings \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultations-policies/cjs/scottish-crime-and-justice-survey-2019-20-main-findings/)

Our local authority partners’ combined intelligence, insights and community engagement feedback will help us to identify where and when women currently feel at highest risk. This will allow us, where appropriate, to direct visible policing patrols to help improve feelings of safety and confidence.

We will review our approach to policing the night-time economy to tackle issues such as public sexual harassment to ensure everyone can socialise safely. We will also consider our policing of major events such as festivals, concerts and public gatherings to ensure we deliver a service which acknowledges and meets the needs of women and girls.

We have built effective working relationships with our night-time economy partners, collaborating across a series of initiatives to improve the safety of women as they socialise in bars, restaurants and night-club venues.

Local divisions have delivered by-stander training to staff in licenced premises, student unions and representatives from the Security Industry Association (SIA) as well as supporting the promotion and adoption of the Ask for Angela scheme.

Other initiatives have included intelligence-led campaigning to raise awareness of issues at times of the year when we know people can be at increased risk.

These include responding to reports of spiking at colleges and universities during fresher’s week events and across the festive period. We are committed to continuing this work.

Access to healthcare is a fundamental human right. As the Scottish Government seeks to develop the Abortion Services Safe Access Zones (Scotland) Bill into legislation we will ensure Police Scotland’s readiness to adopt any provisions or obligations that future legislation may place upon policing to ensure those seeking to access health and wellbeing services can continue to do so without fear of harassment, abuse or public exposure.

Whilst we are actively involved with our partners in Education, through existing activity such as campus cops, there is more we can do to support the safety of girls in school who may be experiencing physical, sexual or emotional abuse by male classmates. We will also explore how we can establish a national reporting mechanism, as well as guidance to support decision making, for schools to report instances of gender based violence where appropriate to do so.

We hope to see education around violence against women and girls become a mainstay of the curriculum in Scotland, in addition to exploring appropriate mechanisms to promote healthy relationships, attitudes and behaviours within wider society. This is critical to ensuring attitudes within society change and future generations can live free from harm. We will continue to promote the use of our You, Me, Together programme, designed in conjunction with Education Scotland, in high schools across Scotland to inform young people on domestic abuse and coercive control in teenage relationships.

Our commitments

- Work with partners to ensure that women and girls are safe online.
- Review our approach to stalking and harassment to support victims and identify perpetrators.
- Work with partners to develop and promote safe spaces for women and girls.

“

Enough justice for me was being believed by police and I feel I didn't have that, I don't have trust in them – if something happens now I feel I can't pick up the phone”

Outcome 4: Trust and Confidence



Trust and Confidence

Policing culture and the prevalence of unacceptable attitudes towards women and girls have come under increased scrutiny in recent years, and it is clear that Police Scotland must take positive steps to continue to build trust. Existing practice has not been enough to convince women and girls that policing behaviour will contribute to them being safe. Change is required to assure women and girls they can trust Police Scotland and that we are responsive to their needs.

Sexism and misogyny do not belong in our organisation. We will take every opportunity available to us to deliver a robust response, ensuring we permanently rid policing of those who demonstrate discriminatory beliefs or have committed acts of violence or other forms of harm. We will pursue those with discriminatory views within our organisation and seek to enact the most serious consequences for perpetrators in policing.

Internal focus

The credibility and effectiveness of our external approach to violence against women and girls is underpinned by our internal approach to these issues. In our public engagement, 57% of respondents chose not to report violence to the police for reasons including a lack of trust.

Existing practice, culture, and legislation have not been sufficient to persuade women and girls that they can place their trust in officers and staff. A number of high-profile incidents from across the UK have advanced the perception that the police are part of the problem of violence against women and girls, rather than forming part of the solution to it. Police Scotland have work to do in order to change this perception.

We know some people will apply for a role in the police because it allows them to exert influence upon vulnerable individuals. [Police must call out sexism in force, says chief taking on violence against women | Police | The Guardian](#)

We will use every tool at our disposal to ensure that these individuals are prevented from joining the police and, where appropriate, removed from the organisation.

Where sexism and misogyny are identified within Police Scotland, we will take a zero-tolerance approach and prioritise public safety at every opportunity. Every effort will be made to ensure that officers and staff who exhibit these abhorrent views are subject to the maximum penalties for their actions, both criminally and through internal conduct proceedings. We will also lobby for legislative change which allows us to dismiss these employees more easily.

Benchmarking across the UK has revealed that Police Scotland's vetting function is under-resourced compared with other forces. We will enhance our vetting procedures to ensure that officers and staff share our values, and that those with perspectives antithetical to those of Police Scotland are not given the opportunity to serve our communities. To support the cultural changes that our organisation requires, we will deliver an internal campaign to challenge and address unacceptable views and behavior within the workplace.

Our Tackling Sexism and Misogyny Working Group will gather insights from those within Police Scotland who have experienced discriminatory behaviour. These insights will guide our approach towards inappropriate behaviour within Police Scotland and ensure that the experiences of women within the organisation are prioritised and that they inform our practice. We will ensure that officers and staff who have been victims of abuse or discrimination are effectively supported and safeguarded, and that everyone is encouraged to speak out when they witness unacceptable behaviour.

In our Policing Together strategy we have committed to delivering the recommendations included in the Rt. Hon. Lady Angiolini's Independent Review of Complaints Handling, Investigations and Misconduct Issues in Relation to Policing.

The coordination of this delivery is carried out by the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights Strategic Oversight Board.

When officers and staff are accused of crimes against women or girls, we will pursue perpetrators with tenacity and professionalism, and ensure that our investigations are centred around the experiences of victims. When criminality and misconduct are identified, we will prioritise the safety and wellbeing of victims and witnesses and pursue perpetrators through both criminal and regulatory channels. To support this work, we will develop new policies and processes that prioritise the experiences of employees who are victims. Officers and staff found to have engaged in criminality against women and girls will be rooted out of our organisation as soon as possible. We will ensure that they will not be able to serve the public as police officers or staff in any capacity, ever again.

"I did not report this to the police as I was threatened not to. Also I experienced abuse of power with a police officer who was trying to force me into having sex with him. No trust."

(Violence Against Women and Girls Insights 2022)

We recognise that many people who engage in misconduct are likely to be involved in more than one case of such behaviour and that patterns of behaviour might only become apparent over time. *Note: Independent Review of Complaints Handling, Investigations and Misconduct Issues in Relation to Policing: Final Report*

Baroness Casey's Interim Report on Misconduct also identified this within policing. [MET Interim Report on Misconduct | Baroness Casey](#)

When investigating officers and staff, we must ensure that we consider conduct over the entirety of a person's career, rather than investigating incidents in isolation.

We will make examples of officers and staff who target women and girls, aiming to dismiss those found guilty of gross misconduct at every opportunity. The Police Complaints and Misconduct Handling Bill will aim to accelerate misconduct hearings for officers, and to hold these hearings in public.

It will also introduce processes to deal with gross misconduct even after officers leave the service, meaning that voluntary resignation will no longer preclude Police Scotland from pursuing those who put victims at risk.

We will be aggressive in our approach to criminality and misconduct in Police Scotland. We will investigate thoroughly, bringing offenders to justice and holding them to account. Where bureaucracy and procedure prevent us from pursuing officers and staff we consider to be a risk to the public, we will lobby for legislative change which allows us to safeguard women and girls. Misogynistic behaviour will not be tolerated in our organisation.

Engagement

In order to adopt a victim-led approach to violence against women and girls, we will engage effectively and constructively with service users. We engage with communities every day across a range of platforms, and these conversations will continue to provide an invaluable source of feedback as we seek to improve trust and confidence in our services.

When engagement is successful, it can bring about benefits to women and girls. Aspects of our engagement that victims liked were feeling believed, and officers being supportive, caring, kind, empathetic and knowledgeable.

Victims also prioritised being offered support and advice. Services based on the requirements of victims include the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland, where increases in 'Right to Ask' applications and 'Power to Tell' interventions have meant that thousands of women are able to make an informed choice about whether to continue in their relationships.

Positive examples of policing practice encountered during our engagement centred on the way we comport ourselves when dealing with survivors. Highlighted characteristics included:

- Being gentle and kind;
- Showing empathy and warmth;
- Showing understanding of violence or domestic abuse and providing reassurance;
- Helping survivors feel heard and validated;
- Showing a trauma-informed approach; and
- Following through with promises to act, whether in providing a follow-up or keeping appointments.

There is no reason why this prioritisation of the human aspect of policing should not be adopted in every engagement with victims of violence against women and girls. Professional, empathetic liaison with survivors must be the keystone of our service provision.

We know that a lack of trust in policing or negative outcomes when incidents have previously been reported to the police damages victims' confidence and the likelihood they will report incidents.

Whilst 46% of those who took part in the Your Police survey of 2022-23 stated that they trusted Police Scotland as an organisation, over a third neither agreed nor disagreed, or didn't know. We also know abusers sometimes use the police as part of their harassment, making it important that we understand the impact our involvement in people's lives can have. Our Domestic Abuse Matters training will continue to educate officers on the insidious forms abuse can take.

Cultivating and maintaining trust is particularly challenging in some groups. Victims of human trafficking and exploitation may not see engagement with police as a route out of their situations, with cultural traits used by traffickers as a means of stopping reporting. In addition, we must be aware of and address cultural and language barriers experienced by members of BME communities. Partnerships with relevant third sector organisations will be key in creating and maintaining trust between vulnerable people and police.

Our public engagement work for this strategy revealed only 7% of those who told their stories to police described their experience as a positive one. Indeed, many people saw the whole process, from initial response to court proceedings, as re-traumatising.

We will welcome and act upon dynamic insights on our services from victims and witnesses, expanding upon the feedback we receive from organisations such as Rape Crisis, Scottish Women's Aid and ASSIST. In particular, we will seek engagement with minority groups, with whom we have engaged less successfully in the past and who tend to trust policing organisations less. [Policing at the margins: fostering trust and cooperation among ethnic minority groups | Murphy, Kristina](#)

In addition, our Your Police and User Experience surveys allow the public to provide feedback on policing in Scotland on an ongoing basis.

To complement these ongoing engagement mechanisms, the Public Protection Development Programme and our stakeholder engagement forum will allow us to tailor our services to the lived experiences of women and girls. We will also gather information from our partners in the public sector.

This engagement will cater for a range of views and provide opportunities for our partners to challenge aspects of our strategic approach, as well as informing our future service provision.

Our engagement will expand upon the insight that the organisation already has. We will build on our 'That Guy' campaign, hosting conversations with men and boys using our 'Dialogue' online platform. We have invited men to share their perspectives on violence against women and girls in Conversation Cafes, with a view to identifying what is needed to stop the perpetuation of this violence.

Our approach to research will be crucial in improving engagement with women and girls. We will continue to build and maintain relationships that improve victims' confidence when reporting, and where appropriate, we will support advocates and survivors to co-create and guide research and public engagement activities.

There will also be a review of wider research available. Insights from the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls, and the Mentors in Violence Prevention are all examples of national work which will influence and inform our engagement. In addition, the Scottish Institute for Policing Research's (SIPR) public protection network coordinates research on gender-based violence, child abuse and sexual exploitation; our partnership with SIPR will produce valuable insights as we seek to improve our service provision.

Our commitments

- Ensure a zero-tolerance approach to sexism and misogyny within Police Scotland.
- Develop and maintain a robust mechanism for dealing with complaints against the police.
- Design and implement a dedicated mechanism to allow people to report misogyny, abuse of position, domestic abuse and sexual misconduct on behalf of police officers and staff.
- Carry out meaningful engagement with women and girls to improve trust and confidence in Police Scotland's service provision.

Violence against Women and Girls – a futures perspective

Police Scotland remains alert to a number of new and emerging threats to the safety and wellbeing of women and girls. We undertake focused futures research to identify trends or scenarios that may impact on policing in the next 10-40 years. We have identified a number of VAWG related issues which may be of concern into the longer term as well as some which present more immediate challenges. We are committed to identifying and mitigating the harm arising from these issues both now and in the future.

Issue	Description	Impact	Context	Future Considerations
Cyber-flashing	A form of sexual harassment occurring when “an individual sends an unsolicited sexual image (including a moving image, such as GIF or video) through a digital device.”	<p>Women are more likely to be victims than men; 44% of millennial men believe sending an unsolicited sexual image was ‘sexy’ compared to only 14% of millennial women believe receiving one was ‘sexy’.</p> <p>Cyber-flashing can cause the victim trauma, feel like an invasion of the victim’s privacy, and cause them to feel unsafe.</p>	<p>It is illegal under the offence of ‘coercing a person into looking at a sexual image’ as it is illegal for “someone to make you look at a picture of their genitals (or someone else’s genitals) or of them, or another person, engaging in a sexual act.”</p> <p>If an individual is found guilty of cyber-flashing they may serve prison time and be placed on the Sex Offenders Register.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A nationwide crackdown on cyber-flashing. • Reports of cyber-flashing will rise.

Issue	Description	Impact	Context	Future Considerations
Upskirting	<p>Is when “someone takes a picture under a person’s clothing without their permission” and can take place anywhere but mainly public spaces, in particular public transport. Anyone of any gender, age, sexuality, or background can be a victim but statistics indicate young women are disproportionately impacted.</p>	<p>It can cause mental distress for the victim as well as alter their lives seeing them lose jobs, friends, or be exiled by family members. Many victims of upskirting may be unaware of the crime therefore actions must be taken to deter perpetrators from acting in the first place.</p>	<p>Since 2010, upskirting has been a sexual offence in Scotland under the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act. During, 2011-2018, in Scotland 19 cases of upskirting were prosecuted and resulted in conviction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology will continue to evolve and be harder to spot upskirting. • Upskirting will continue to target young people. • Internal investigations into bad police behaviour may shed light on upskirting incidents.
Romance Fraud	<p>Where an individual is scammed out of their money by someone they believe to be in a relationship with. The perpetrator works to gain the victims trust, leading them to believe they are in a real romantic relationship and once established asks for or manipulates the victim into giving them money.</p>	<p>Victims of romance fraud are estimated to give out on average £8,610 with older generations more likely to fall victim and lose the most with 55-64 year olds losing around £15,957 and those aged 18-24 only losing around £2,128.</p> <p>In 2020, £68 million was lost to romance fraud in the UK and continued to rise 20% during January and November 2020.</p> <p>Scammers use tactics like economic abuse, isolation, and degradation causing financial, emotional and physical distress for victims.</p>	<p>Romance fraud is illegal and Police Scotland have identified three types of romance fraud; foot-in-the door where perpetrators ask for small sums of money then increase; face-in-the-door when perpetrators ask for a sum of money so extreme most would struggle to refuse; and webcam blackmail.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romance fraud will spread to cryptocurrency. • Police Scotland will deal with the aftermath of romance fraud during the COVID-19 pandemic and any future national lockdowns if implemented. • Romance fraud will continue to rise and target non-digital natives.

Issue	Description	Impact	Context	Future Considerations
<p>The rise of contemporary men’s rights movements (CMRM)</p>	<p>The CMRM exists predominately online, in an area of the Internet deemed the ‘manosphere’; a compilation of male-oriented websites, forums, and blogs united by an anti-feminist agenda.</p> <p>The manosphere has reshaped the male supremacy ideology and seen the formation of new sub groups and created a global, borderless, and faceless network.</p>	<p>CMRM groups like Pick Up Artists teach manipulation techniques as ways for men to engage in sexual relationships with women. Which in some cases has led to mental abuse and threatening behaviour.</p> <p>Involuntary celibates (incels) have become the most prominent CMRM group, encouraging other men via forums, videos, or websites to commit suicide. Since 2014, 16 supporters of the CMRM, in particular incel ideology, have committed extremist motivated acts, killing approximately 67 people.</p>	<p>The manosphere and CMRM subgroups are not illegal but close attention must be paid to ideas and ideologies spreading amongst them. Police Scotland’s zero tolerance approach to VAWG includes the internet and ensuring threats of violence online are monitored and prevented offline.</p> <p>The encouragement of violence against other men or threats to end their lives by supporters of the CMRM is also of concern for Police Scotland.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CMRM groups will continue to spread and thrive online. • CMRM ideologies will become normalised amongst boys and men, re-shaping social norms around VAWG. • CMRM subgroups will become more violent in their ideologies and frequently engage in acts of extremist violence. • The rise of the far right will continue. • Incels will continue to grow as the most prominent and develop sub-factions within the ideology. • Male suicide will rise.

Demonstrating Progress

Governance and performance

The Vision for Justice in Scotland 2022 sets out to transform the justice sector and outlines the role of public services in tackling violence against women and girls. We have given significant focus to this in our Annual Police Plan for 2023-24.

Our Violence against Women and Girls Strategy is a fundamental element of carrying out our obligations within the priorities that the Scottish Government has set out. With the design, development and implementation of this strategy, we make a clear commitment to proactively and supportively police violence against women and girls.

We have developed an Implementation Plan in accordance with this strategy which focuses on the actions, milestones and timelines for embedding each of our commitments. Linked to our plans, our outcomes focused performance framework describes how we monitor and measure our progress on our priorities for policing, outcomes and objectives to evidence the impact of our policing approach for women and girls in Scotland.

Ongoing engagement and insight

We have established an approach to bring lived experience and wider public awareness to the development of the strategy. This has been achieved by:

- Gathering stories from the public
- Online idea generation platform
- Carrying out qualitative engagement with survivors
- Community-based conversation cafes with men and boys

The results of these engagement methods, alongside the findings of the Your Voice Matters survey, have helped us to develop our strategic ambition and activities. We will continue to work and engage with these groups when implementing the strategy.

It is essential that Police Scotland upholds its organisational values when carrying out engagement. Through past and ongoing stakeholder conversations and briefing sessions, we will ensure our approach is appropriate and supportive for the communities we are engaging, and will keep them involved during and after the engagement.

Publication

Please contact us if you would like an alternative format of this document.

<https://www.scotland.police.uk/secureforms/contact/>

