

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: The escalation of violence against women and girls, HC 131

Wednesday 15 November 2023

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Members present: Caroline Nokes (Chair); Dame Caroline Dinenage; Jackie Doyle-Price; Kirsten Oswald.

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Witnesses

[I](#): Ellen Miller, Interim Chief Executive, Refuge; Sophie Francis-Cansfield, Head of External Affairs, Women's Aid; Suky Bhaker, Chief Executive Officer, Suzy Lamplugh Trust.

[II](#): Baroness Newlove of Warrington, Victims' Commissioner; Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner; Claire Waxman OBE, Victims' Commissioner for London.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Refuge](#)

[Women's Aid](#)

[Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)

[Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ellen Miller, Sophie Francis-Cansfield and Suky Bhaker.

Q1 Chair: Good morning and welcome to this morning's evidence session in the Women and Equalities Select Committee's inquiry into the escalation of violence against women and girls. Can I thank all three of our witnesses this morning? We have Ellen Miller, chief executive of Refuge, Sophie Francis-Cansfield, head of external affairs at Women's Aid, and Suky Bhaker from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust. Members will, as normal, ask questions of you in turn and will indicate who they are asking the question of, but if any of you wish to come in at any time, please just do so.

I am going to ask a question to all of you. I just want to get an idea of the women who you have worked with and your experience. What proportion of victims are seeing an escalation of offences, and is that changing?

Ellen Miller: The idea of escalation is interesting. It would not necessarily be the word that I would choose. What I would probably say is that multiple types and forms of abuse are occurring. That may well include coercive behaviour; it may include physical violence. It is very common, throughout my years of working with victims and survivors of domestic abuse, that you will see the co-occurrence of multiple forms of abuse.

What has changed is two things. The first is the recognition of coercive control and that being a fundamental feature, so that it is no longer simply domestic violence; it is that controlling, misogynistic attitude towards women. I would say that the change is the recognition rather than the occurrence.

What has changed, and what our research and our extensive work as a large provider demonstrate, is the use of technology in terms of controlling behaviour and also in terms of abuse. In probably well over half of the cases that we deal with—we deal with tens of thousands of women every year—we will find that there is an element of tech abuse, be that financial abuse, identity theft, the use of indecent images or being forced to make those indecent images, and other related things that we will find with tech. That has changed, and there are more things.

Q2 Chair: There are going to be specific questions about, if I may use the word, the translation from online to offline, so expect more questions on that. Suky, the same question goes to you—I am going to take Ellen's lead and say, rather than escalation, how about intensification?

Suky Bhaker: The Suzy Lamplugh Trust runs the national stalking service and we work with thousands of individuals through our frontline services. In terms of intensification, stalking is very much a pattern of behaviour, and we need to understand the context in which we are operating. Low-level behaviours might often seem benign and low risk,



but, if you look at the frequency and the persistence with which those are occurring, you will get a better understanding of the risk that the victim is experiencing. It is that measure that we will take to understand the intensification and the victim's experience.

It has always been our experience that victims have experienced a combination of those offline and online, and non-contact and contact-type, behaviours. What is often not understood is that frequency and persistence when understanding the intensification. We would say that that combination has always existed, but there has been a significant lack of understanding in terms of being able to identify that.

Q3 Chair: Specifically around stalking, are we, as a society, now much more aware of it and better at identifying it?

Suky Bhaker: We are seeing reporting increasing, but the majority of individuals who call the national stalking helpline will often start with, "I do not know if I am experiencing stalking. I do not know how to explain this. I would not know how to define this". Often, what they are describing are behaviours. The majority of professionals we also work with through the national stalking service are often also talking about the individual behaviours that constitute stalking, rather than naming the crime in and of itself. Yes, we are seeing a gradual increase in reporting, but it feels like that is not happening quickly enough.

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: Both Ellen and Suky have touched on some really key points around understanding the more prevalent forms that we are seeing as technology is being used as an extension for so-called traditional crimes. When it comes to both of those, there is also the underlying point around the low conviction rates that we see when it comes to criminalised forms of violence against women and girls. They are very low, and that provides a significant barrier to determining whether there are serious precursors to serious violence against women and girls.

The poor response that we see from the police to the less serious violence against women and girls offences makes it difficult to ascertain where there is that escalation of offences. The eight stages of homicide model that Jane Monckton-Smith developed really shows that coercive and controlling behaviour is prevalent and escalates prior to intimate partner homicides.

When we talk about the importance of really having that deep-level understanding of coercive and controlling behaviour, and taking that seriously from the very first instant, that is where we need the points on training and understanding to be really prevalent.

Q4 Dame Caroline Dinenage: Good morning, everybody. Can I talk to you about the point that you moved on to a moment ago, which is the segue between online and offline, real-world offences? What needs to be done to tackle non-contact, online abuse before it moves into the offline world?



Ellen Miller: The first thing I would say is that there is a tendency for both to happen at the same time, so it would not necessarily be an escalation. If you are in an abusive relationship, women are reporting to us that they are having trackers on their phones. The money has gone because their accounts have been emptied or there are false accounts that have been set up in their name, such as gambling accounts, etc. They tend to occur at the same time rather than necessarily being one leading into another with online harassment, etc.

We are really pleased that we now have the Online Safety Act. That is great. We are really pleased that we were able to change that and to get in there the voice of the violence against women and girls sector in terms of guidance that is out there through Ofcom. We would really urge Members to keep a close eye on that and to hold the technology sector to account. We remain concerned that there will not be the level of compliance, that excuses will be made and that it will not have teeth.

The extent to which this is integral to so many cases of abuse now is absolutely shocking—it is part and parcel of them. In a way, that is because we now all live our lives, do we not, as a whole? There is not that distinction. It is part of who we are. It is part of how our relationships are with each other all the time. Therefore, it has become this incredible tool that is used by abusers.

Q5 **Dame Caroline Dinenage:** Do either of the others have any comments on the segue between the online and offline world?

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: I am in full agreement with Ellen that it is not happening in the virtual world alone. Women will be being abused both offline and online. This is where it is really key to highlight that, while technological advancements have extended patterns of domestic abuse and have given rise to new forms of violence against women and girls—such as intimate image-based abuse—online abuse is, ultimately, a manifestation of societal gender inequality. Look at the statistics on how women are significantly more likely to experience it than men, and particularly the stats when we look specifically at black and minoritised women.

It is really welcome that, in some of the new justice Bills announced in the King's Speech, there will be an increased focus on criminalising additional forms of intimate image-based abuse to give equal parity with upskirting and what exists there. Women's Aid's direct services are seeing a real increase in that specific form, so it is much needed that there is greater attention on those newer forms of violence against women and girls.

Q6 **Dame Caroline Dinenage:** Is there enough research or data to be able to back up the much-needed work that is happening?

Suky Bhaker: We are definitely seeing on the national stalking helpline that 100% of our cases have some sort of cyber element attached to



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them. Similar to the point that my colleagues have just made, we see it as a continuum. We see a combination of those behaviours occurring online and offline at the same time within any given stalking case.

The challenge that we have is understanding that those offline behaviours can constitute just as much risk as those contact-type behaviours. As I mentioned before, it is the persistence and the frequency that really determine the risk factors. Therefore, what we would be really advocating for is specialist training for officers and individuals across the criminal justice system.

We have had high-risk offenders with section 4A stalking offences and breaches of restraining order coming out of prison and immediately contacting victims through social media and multiple phone calls—sometimes hundreds—but the police telling those victims that they cannot do anything about that, and that they should just block that phone number. Again, they are not understanding the risk that is associated with those offline behaviours.

The Online Safety Act presents a real opportunity. It mandates tech platforms to tackle that harmful content, but it does not capture the online behaviours that are not illegal within themselves. Therefore, as my colleagues have already mentioned, we really welcome the guidance that will provide clarity on how tech providers must tackle cyber-stalking. A lot of those cyber behaviours can look innocuous or legitimate, and that is what we really need to name.

Q7 Dame Caroline Dineneage: Is there a need for more UK-wide research on this, or do we have as much data and evidence as we need?

Ellen Miller: You can never have too much useful research and data around this, but that does not just stand on its own. There is a systemic issue, which I would absolutely draw your attention to, around the way in which we understand risk. Historically, we have the use of something called the DASH RIC, which is a risk indicator checklist. That is an old tool that needs refreshing. It is a great recommendation in terms of something that can be refreshed to take into account issues such as stalking, online risk and those factors that we are now seeing as part of the whole. That has not been renewed or updated as a tool.

Q8 Chair: Since when?

Ellen Miller: It is about 10 years, is it not?

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: Yes. The College of Policing has been working on a slightly different model called the DARA, which has a greater focus on coercive and controlling behaviour, which is something that Women's Aid supports.

Ellen Miller: It is a police tool.

Q9 Dame Caroline Dineneage: Who uses the model that you are referring



to?

Ellen Miller: That model is used across most areas. The great joy of it is that it can be used by domestic abuse workers, the police, housing officers and social services. It has that level of currency to be able to be used. The DARA has been developed really for use by the police, and the danger is that we have potentially a disintegration of a system where we had consistency, because the tool has become out of date.

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: There is a slight issue, though, if there is an over-reliance on the risk assessment as it becomes a box-ticking exercise. When we think of the Casey review, there is that quote about domestic abuse being a complex picture, yet it is often given to the most inexperienced staff. If we just give them something that is a box-ticking exercise, there are going to be countless missed signs and opportunities for early intervention, if there is not also that training delivered by specialist organisations alongside.

Q10 **Dame Caroline Dinenage:** Are the police taking online behaviour sufficiently seriously?

Ellen Miller: Not consistently, no.

Suky Bhaker: No, certainly not from our experience and from what victims are telling us. They are considered low-level behaviours. The police often do not understand how to collect evidence around those issues, how to form an investigation or how to really identify what crime types they would sit under. They often do not see the pattern of behaviour that might be occurring or the context that it might be occurring within and, therefore, they are unable identify, "Is this a stalking crime? Are we seeing coercive control here?" That can lead the victim along an incorrect journey through the criminal justice system.

Q11 **Dame Caroline Dinenage:** With another hat on, I sit on the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. We recently did an inquiry into connected tech, and I was horrified at the results of that, which showed how some of the smart devices that we bring into our lives are now being used as a tool in domestic abuse and controlling and coercive behaviour—things like smart doorbells and other devices around the house, and even baby monitors. I do not know if any of you want to expand on your research and evidence into that and then talk a little more about the most common forms of online and tech abuse that you are seeing these days.

Ellen Miller: In terms of the main sorts of abuse that we will see, they are absolutely location-based and using that as part of being able to track someone. We are finding the financial form and the image theft form of tech abuse very prevalent. The issue is about location, but the financial stuff comes in there as well.

Q12 **Dame Caroline Dinenage:** When you say that it is about location, what do you mean?



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Ellen Miller: Being able to track where somebody is, using pre-installed apps. The use of secret surveillance is not an uncommon thing either. There are things that you can buy from Amazon, etc, which will be so discreet and so secret that they can be used for surveillance, which is very alarming in terms of the kinds of products that can be out there.

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: Just to add a layer to that, but also to your previous question, this is where perpetrators who are members of the police are also a real consideration, in the sense that we know from our direct services that police officers who are perpetrators are specifically using those sorts of smart technology to track their survivors. When there are already significant barriers to women disclosing to the police, if your perpetrator is an officer, that is an even more significant barrier. We hear a lot through our direct services about police officers tracking their survivors.

Suky Bhaker: The challenge is the accessibility of some of this software and these devices. They are not expensive. There really does need to be more of an onus on technology companies to ensure that these products are safe by design, working with industry and VAWG specialists. We saw quite a significant increase in use of Apple AirTags, for example, to stalk, and victims did not know that they were being tracked. Again, there needs to be better communication and collaboration.

Q13 **Dame Caroline Dinenage:** Do the police have a sufficient understanding of how these different forms of technology are being used for these purposes, or mis-purposed, in many ways?

Ellen Miller: Again, it is very variable. The other feature with it is that it is not just the devices or those specific types of abuse, but also the fact that we have different social world bubbles that have emerged through the use of technology, with people moving to a different, less collaborative form of media and living in their own bubbles. We have done some work with young people and young women who have seen the weaponisation of comments by influencers, some of whom you will have clearly heard of, and their views being used back at those young women, so there is the spreading of misogyny as well.

Q14 **Dame Caroline Dinenage:** Within Refuge, you have a tech abuse team.

Ellen Miller: We have.

Q15 **Dame Caroline Dinenage:** Can you talk us through how that works and how successful it has been?

Ellen Miller: With our tech abuse team, we work with women to make themselves as safe as possible online. We will go through what they have on their device and what devices and technology they have, and talk to them about how to become safe. They may well have suffered significant detriment through financial fraud, so we can help them in terms of being able to get through to their financial services provider to rectify the situation that they are in. It is about dealing with those knock-on



consequences, as well as rebuilding their confidence, because they can feel incredibly isolated having had this terrible experience. Then what do they do? They are living in a world of socials, so how do they then navigate that safely? We are rebuilding their trust, confidence and social skills.

- Q16 Dame Caroline Dinenage:** Is there anything more that the authorities could do to help you in that? One of the pieces of evidence that I was reading was that a woman who had been stalked via her smart doorbell was told by the police that that is the item that she should be using to keep herself safe. Is there more that could be done to share that learning?

Ellen Miller: There is. The training is really important, as well as keeping that training current. It is not a one-off thing. We have had the DA Matters training, which most forces have now gone through. That was half a day and some forces have not done refresher training, so there is a great extent to which the police are not necessarily aware of the tools that can be there in terms of looking at the risks when somebody is contacting the police or other organisations and making sure that that awareness is built into the assessment in the first place. We need to make sure that the stuff that comes out from the Online Safety Act is properly enforced, that we have ongoing dialogue, and that, if the guidance does not work, we move up to a code of practice.

- Q17 Chair:** Can I just ask a quick question about banks and how effectively they are working on prevention? I am not talking necessarily about the classic financial abuse of individuals, with victims having their bank accounts emptied. Starling Bank has recently introduced some tech that prevents perpetrators from sending messages via BACS transfers. How quickly are the other banks adopting that sort of technology to prevent abusive messages being sent via a chain of 1p transfers?

Ellen Miller: We would need to come back to you with evidence around that, just to absolutely check, because I would not know that off the top of my head. I know that we have varying levels of interest from the banks. There has been some good progress, but there is more to do.

- Q18 Chair:** I would always say that some of the banks have been great at picking up how they can help. Is there anything Government could do to encourage those that have been slower to do more?

Ellen Miller: We would always encourage making sure that, in terms of financial codes of practice, this is put absolutely front and centre. It is about seeing the world in terms of what the impact will be on different groups—the impact on women or the impact on people for whom English is not their first or a particularly strong language. All of these people are more alienated socially, culturally and procedurally, so making sure that there is a level of obligation within the codes of practice for the financial services sector would be great.

- Q19 Kirsten Oswald:** A couple of you have referenced the Online Safety Act,



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and I want to ask a little bit about that in terms of how far you think this is going to be effective in protecting women and girls from online abuse. In that context, thinking about the Ofcom guidance that is due to be published, how much is that going to help? What do you want to see in that guidance?

Ellen Miller: We are happy with the guidance. We would just like to see it being followed and, if necessary, increased to a code of practice.

Suky Bhaker: We need to be absolutely certain that the guidance really captures those online behaviours that are not illegal in themselves, and ensures that we can understand when we are looking at patterns and the context of a particular crime. It is really important that that is robustly set out and, as colleagues have said, adequately implemented. That would be our concern.

We welcome the inclusion of the mandated VAWG guidance set out in the Act, and the recognition of cyber-stalking as a specific risk, and we look forward to feeding into that. Our concern is that certain cyber-crimes are not understood within the VAWG context in the first place, so we need to make sure that we can understand what we are looking at when somebody might be receiving persistent harassment on a social media site. Are we just identifying that as one-off emails or are we able to identify the crime that is occurring? It is often not classified as a VAWG crime, and that would be a barrier to then making sure that the guidance fulfilled its role.

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: In addition to what my colleagues have said, there is a need for Ofcom to be equipped fully in order to be able to effectively hold tech companies and social media platforms to account. Given the data that exists from organisations such as Glitch and the End Violence Against Women coalition, there is a real need for Ofcom to work not only with sector colleagues represented here today, but particularly with specialist by and for the sector organisations in terms of the disproportionate impact that it has on black and minoritised women.

As Suky said, it did feel like a real missed opportunity not to acknowledge within the legislation that online abuse is a form of violence against women and girls. There is an opportunity, through the work that Ofcom will do on the guidance and implementing that, in terms of trying to ensure that commercial porn websites are more regulated and that we—the sector, Ofcom and the Government—are working together, as Suky and Ellen have said, to ensure that the implementation is really robust, because that is where a lot of this is going to lie.

Q20 **Kirsten Oswald:** Just to follow on from that, if we can stick with you, Sophie, are the Online Safety Act and Ofcom's guidance going to be able to successfully deal with the impact of misogynistic influencers, for instance—I know that that has been referenced by the panel already—and incel culture online?



Sophie Francis-Cansfield: Not alone, no. A whole-system response is needed. The work that is happening through the Online Safety Act and Ofcom's guidance is one part of that. What is happening through RSHE and the work of DFE is another part. There is also, as we have spoken about in terms of the police, the tolerance that is still so prevalent in society around domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.

We did some research with Goldman Sachs towards the end of last year, which highlighted that, if a perpetrator apologised, a significant percentage of people thought that it was okay that they had abused their partner. When we think about the influencers that Ellen alluded to earlier, they are directly encouraging our children and young people in society to think that consent is not important and to think that they can control what their partner wears or whether they go to the gym. This tolerance is so prevalent, and that is underlying the whole-system response that is needed. This is one part of that, and it has to all happen together with what is going on in banks as well, as Caroline suggested.

Suky Bhaker: I would very much agree with my colleague's comments there. What the challenges have highlighted is that the online behaviours that we often see are not illegal or do not look illegal in and of themselves, so will the Act go far enough in terms of protecting those individuals? That is why we really need some robust guidance and training to accompany that.

Q21 **Chair:** Ellen, the same question goes to you. In terms of misogynistic influencers and incel culture, how far are the Online Safety Act and Ofcom's guidance going to be able to deal with that?

Ellen Miller: It needs to be recognised as hate speech and taken seriously. It is absolutely about the interpretation and the application of it. I sat on the train yesterday coming down. There was a guy watching really sexist little TikTok videos. He was a big guy. I did not feel comfortable to challenge him, but he is okay to sit there and just have all sorts of rubbish about, "Your wife this", and, "Women this". These things are just so prevalent, so that needs to be enforced, and we need, as a society, to recognise that the cause of domestic abuse is misogyny; it is hate speech.

Q22 **Kirsten Oswald:** Is there enough data and research underlying the comments that you are making? Do we have enough by way of data to help us try to deal with some of these challenges?

Ellen Miller: I would say no, in terms of attitudinal misogyny.

Suky Bhaker: No. The challenge is that we have such an inconsistent picture from all of our statutory services in the way that they collect data, the timeframes in which they collect data and how they correlate. We just cannot map a victim's journey right through the process. We know from our services what we are hearing anecdotally and from our own research,



but there really needs to be better join-up when it comes to data at a national level and from statutory services.

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: I would, of course, agree, but it is also important to note that there is not enough research around how to fully address the behaviour either, so the data is lacking at both ends.

Q23 **Chair:** Sticking with that—this might be a simple yes/no answer from all of you—I will start with you, Ellen, because you have referenced this. When it comes to misogyny, underlying cultural attitudes and men watching TikToks on the tube and thinking that that is okay, what opportunity have any of your organisations had to feed into the DFE with regard to their review on statutory relationship and sex education?

Ellen Miller: We have had the opportunity to feed into that.

Suky Bhaker: We have not had much and we have really tried to push that door to influence that.

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: We have submitted written evidence but have not had further engagement.

Q24 **Chair:** I was disturbed—that is the only word that I can use—a couple of weeks ago to hear the research from Internet Matters that 56% of young dads think that Andrew Tate is a positive influence. This Committee recommended to the DFE that there should be—I am going to struggle to come up with the correct term—boy-centric relationship and sex education to help young men understand what is and is not a positive male role model. Should that be a required part of RSHE?

Ellen Miller: Yes, but we should not put the burden solely on teachers or those in schools to do this. As one of my friends said, all of the young men she is teaching think that Andrew Tate is amazing, and they are not necessarily going to listen to a 53-year-old woman telling them that that is not the case. This does need to be not just the role of teachers; it needs to be in those education guidelines. But it is a wider societal issue.

Suky Bhaker: I would also say yes, but the duty relies on wider messaging, awareness raising and campaigns. We know that a large proportion of young people think that behaviours such as following someone or sending harassing messages on social media are okay, so we need to challenge that and the normalisation of that. Schools are a good place to start, but it needs to be a broader campaign.

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: I agree with my colleagues. The age verification that came through in the Online Safety Act around online pornography could be examined in terms of whether that should go more broadly with regard to some of the content that is shared online, given the direct impact that it is having on children and young people. I agree that it cannot just be schools alone. As Ellen said, it is a whole-societal issue.



Q25 Chair: Sophie, if we are looking at perpetrators or potential perpetrators, what works as a positive intervention programme? Has your Make a Change programme made an impact?

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: From our perspective, when we look at the data, the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes really does vary. We would always recommend that the best standards are Respect-accredited perpetrator programmes, and that is why we partnered with Respect on Make a Change, which is an early intervention programme.

When we looked at the evaluation, it had a 75% retention rate for perpetrators, which is unusually high, and it enabled perpetrators within the programme to look at what was motivating their behaviour and to seek within themselves steps to address that, so it has been effective. There is sometimes too much of a focus on high-harm perpetrators, which lacks a bit of an understanding around risk in terms of survivors' experiences, so we very much advocate for the need for all types of models.

We have engaged survivors directly on what they want from perpetrator programmes and they are clear that there will sometimes be a group of perpetrators whose behaviour just will not change. It is then about what we can do to monitor that perpetrator programme.

Q26 Chair: Is there any evidence that early intervention in what I am going to refer to as the offender journey is more effective than with those who have been perpetrators of more serious offences, which is a term that I hate using?

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: There is not sufficient data to be able to say that with full confirmation, unfortunately. That is where we have seen more funding from the Home Office behind this, but the research is still lacking, unfortunately.

Q27 Chair: Has the Home Office got it right with the national standards and principles on domestic abuse?

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: There is a lot to welcome within it, and it is generally really welcome that the Home Office is looking to ensure that there are standards for perpetrator programmes. We would hope that the Home Office would continue to build on that to ensure that more perpetrator programmes are Respect-accredited, but there are also some differences between the Home Office standards and some of the outcome measures within Project Mirabal, which are interesting.

There are three differences. One is that there is nothing within the Home Office standards about the voice of the children, despite the fact that children are recognised as victims in the Domestic Abuse Act. There is nothing about positive parenting. For us, there is a real lack of focus on parenting/fathering within perpetrator programmes. Thirdly, the standards do talk about change, but they do not mention anything



specifically about awareness of self or the impact that their abuse has had on the adult and children survivors.

If they are ever to be refreshed, we would very much encourage the Home Office to look at Project Mirabal in terms of how they could make those more robust.

Suky Bhaker: If I could just add a couple of bits, the stalking-specific picture is slightly different. The Home Office guidance in terms of domestic abuse programmes is focused on domestic abuse programmes, not more broadly, and therefore not all VAWG and stalking is captured within that. It is important to mention that, because these are not applicable across all forms of VAWG.

When it comes to stalking, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, in collaboration with a number of partners, has been piloting and running a number of stalking intervention programmes, most notably MASIP—the Multi Agency Stalking Intervention Programme—which was originally funded by the Home Office. It is an interdisciplinary approach. It has various statutory services as well as victim-based services.

The key aims are victim safety and reducing reoffending. What we have seen from independent evaluations is that, on average, 55% of stalking offenders will reoffend. Those programmes have seen reoffending rates drop to about 22%, and 17% on some sites, when we know that we have that really holistic, interdisciplinary approach, keeping the victim at the heart of it.

It is not to say that we have the perfect model there, and there is certainly more research to be done. It is really important that those programmes are also seen and understood within the violence against women and girls context in totality, but what we try to do there is understand the various typologies, behaviours and motivations of different stalkers. Fifty per cent. of stalking victims are stalked by an ex-intimate partner, but 50% are not, and it is therefore important that perpetrator programmes are tailored.

Q28 **Chair:** When did the Home Office stop funding that?

Suky Bhaker: There was funding for two years, and that was in 2018. Individual PCCs have now picked up that funding.

Q29 **Kirsten Oswald:** In the context of the conversation about domestic abuse intervention programmes, what, if anything, can the UK Government learn from the Caledonian system in Scotland?

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: We are the England federation, but our sister federation in Scotland has partnered with the Caledonian model. On the whole, it has been positive and successful. In some feedback that I have received from colleagues, given the number of stakeholders and partners that are involved, they have called for greater communication and engagement with local justice and women's aid services to ensure



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that they are maintaining and monitoring that perpetrator behaviour. When the communication breaks down, that is when it is less effective, but that is something that occurs across many projects and programmes in terms of that multi-agency response.

Suky Bhaker: I really wanted to touch on the point around communication and monitoring. Going back to the MASIP model, it is not enough that it is just agencies coming around a table and having a discussion. There really needs to be an interdisciplinary approach to how we are tackling offending and perpetrator management. People often think that a one-off meeting is going to address that risk. It needs to be far more holistic. In the MASIP model, we have specialist risk assessments, where all of those agencies are feeding into it, taking collective responsibility and, therefore, ensuring that robust monitoring and communication is taking place. At the moment, there are just pockets of that across the UK and it needs to be more consistent.

Ellen Miller: I do not have much to add. On the point about consistency, the fact that a whole-system change has been looked at in Scotland, with a level of political commitment to that, are things that I look at with envy, as somebody who lives in England.

Q30 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** We are running short of time, so I have some questions now about victims. I will put them all to Ellen to start with and then invite Suky and Sophie to reflect on what has been said. The Home Office has found that 75% of victims of sexual abuse and violence have felt that their mental health had been damaged by things that the police had done or not done in terms of their case. Do these findings chime with what you see? I could see that you were nodding furiously.

Ellen Miller: Secondary victimisation absolutely occurs. The moment of report is so difficult. It is made difficult in so many more ways. Even in the most positive environment, to say out loud and to report the things that have happened to people, and to put themselves into that camp of, "I am a victim", is immensely painful and harmful. You are then doing that within the context that you may not be taken seriously.

Sophie has already referenced the number of police officers for whom there are suspensions—or not suspensions, in many cases—because they have been accused of abuse. We find that only 24%—with huge variation, and only 11% in the Met—will be suspended, so you do not even know if the person you are reporting to might be a perpetrator of abuse.

So, absolutely, it is repeated and it is not just that moment with the police. It is the amount of time that it takes to get to a prosecution. It is the way in which you are treated through that, being in courtrooms or wherever, where you are in the same courtroom or the same waiting room. It is potentially such a poor experience, and special measures that are supposed to be there are grossly inadequate. It is a really poor experience for many victims.



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Q31 Jackie Doyle-Price: I want to unpick what elements we need to tease out to really challenge the system about that. In my experience, having worked with victims, I very much had the feeling that people felt that they were being treated like a piece of evidence, and the whole system of investigation was very dehumanising. At the same time, we have seen lots of studies about institutional misogyny within the police service, and most notably within the Metropolitan police. We now have study after study that show that. How do we make this more centred on women as victims?

Ellen Miller: It is a combination of standards—regulatory standards that have teeth. It is then about getting the recruitment right, the training right and that accountability right. If we have a situation—as we do—where only 11% of Met staff who are accused of these crimes against women are being suspended, yet other forces can do two or three times that level of suspension, what is going on there? Where is the accountability? Where is the transparency around this? There is clearly something going wrong from that data.

Q32 Jackie Doyle-Price: We could do something about leadership there, could we not, such as putting this in the objectives of senior police leaders as an obligation?

Ellen Miller: Yes, absolutely.

Q33 Jackie Doyle-Price: That is quite interesting. You mentioned delays to prosecutions. Justice delayed is justice denied. To what extent do you see the length of time that victims are waiting to get justice influence them in terms of dropping out of the system?

Ellen Miller: It has always been the case that we see dropouts. Because we now have such huge backlogs, we then have that accelerated. If you are going to recover, get on with your life and overcome what has happened to you—you talked about impact on mental wellbeing—you cannot recover fully until you are in a position of stability and that threat is gone. So, often, that court experience will be weaponised. You are in that position where, even over a screen, you might have to see the person. How can you move on? How can you fully recover? How can you become the mum, the worker or the family member that you want to be when that is always there looming over you? It is cruel and it is holding women back.

Q34 Jackie Doyle-Price: It prolongs the trauma. Turning now to some specifics on the meting out of justice, the Secretary of State for Justice has announced a reduction in short-term sentences in terms of objectives around rehabilitation. Does this give you any concerns about victims of sexual violence and abuse?

Ellen Miller: Yes, absolutely, and we are completely behind the idea that this should be two categories of offence that are excluded.

Q35 Jackie Doyle-Price: That is very helpful indeed. Did they engage with



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you at all on any of this?

Ellen Miller: We have made comment on it. I would have to check with my team to see what they have done. I have been in this role for five weeks, so forgive me.

- Q36 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** There have been some notorious examples that we have heard about, where victims have made reports to the police and things have not happened. Then we have had escalations, some of which have had absolutely tragic consequences. Do you have any observations about that and how effectively the police are managing those multiple levels of offence?

Ellen Miller: I would point back to the previous answer about understanding the risks that are there. You have things like non-fatal strangulation, where we know that just a short period of pressure on the neck is an incredible predictor of future potential homicide, and yet, when the police turn up, they are seeing a woman who, having had that airway restricted, can appear and is judged to be drunk. They will release their bladder and their bowels after six or seven seconds, and they will look as if they are drunk. Because there is an ignorance around that, women are being diminished and denied. That is just one example of ignorance and how incredibly dangerous that can be.

- Q37 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** Suky, do you have any observations?

Suky Bhaker: First, stalking is a crime of psychological terror—thinking about that mental health component. There is a real sense of omnipresence. We know that victims experience severe anxiety, depression, hypervigilance and hypersensitivity, and so, when they are going to report to the police and are not being believed, it has a significant impact in terms of their trust and confidence.

We have heard not just that victims are not being believed or trusted, and that cases are not being understood within the risk context that they should be, but, worse still, that the police sympathise with the perpetrator because the victim is presenting as potentially very anxious, distressed and hypersensitive, while perpetrators might present as more plausible and have an excuse for the behaviour that they are carrying out, particularly if the behaviours look legitimate.

What we have often seen is that police excuse that behaviour away when they are speaking to the victim, which completely erodes trust and confidence and means that they will often drop out of those cases. More than 50% of individuals who contact our services have contacted us because they are unsatisfied with the police response, and that is where a large part of our work takes place currently. There needs to be a huge amount of training and a cultural shift when working with and managing victims. An independent regulatory body that can oversee this is absolutely vital.

- Q38 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** Following up on that, I recently had a conversation



with a prison governor. We know that many women who end up in custody are victims of violence of one kind or another. These women often have short sentences for quite low-level antisocial behaviour, generally. Let us be frank: those are exactly the cases that should not result in a custodial sentence. He recounted to me that he is often looking out of the window, seeing someone leave and seeing the car arrive with the perpetrator who is the reason for why they were in there in the first place. Is there a lot more that could be done within custody?

Suky Bhaker: Yes, absolutely. Stalking is about a fixation and an obsession. We are seeing that offenders will go on to offend from prison or on immediate release. If we are not addressing that fixation and obsession, it simply continues. That is part of the reason why it is so important to get the label right in terms of what the crime is that is occurring in the first place, so that we can have the right offender management that occurs and accompanies that.

That is not to say that there is not a place for a custodial sentence. There absolutely is, and I agree with my colleagues in terms of sentencing. It needs to be absolutely robust, but it needs to be accompanied by perpetrator intervention programmes, because we need to be addressing that behaviour. We need to be tackling and reducing that reoffending. Otherwise, what victims are telling us is that this is a respite period, during which they say, "I am just waiting for them to come out".

Q39 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** That is exactly it. Sophie, would you like to give some reflections on the entirety of victims?

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: In response to your first question, it is very much mirrored in what we are seeing through our direct services. Unfortunately, police officers are still telling survivors to return to their perpetrator, or that they are bringing the abuse on themselves. This is the real issue where the College of Policing has issued guidance on how the police should respond to violence against women and girls, but it is about that discrepancy between guidance and practice.

My colleagues have touched on a number of ways to improve that, with training by specialist organisations being a pivotal one. Funding does come into this as well—ensuring that both the police and the criminal justice system are sufficiently funded to be able to respond to the number of violence against women and girls cases that are coming through.

Q40 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** Is it funding, though, or is it behaviour? Funding affects the quantum of what you do, but what we are talking about really is poor behaviour towards those who are victims, surely.

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: As we have all said, there is most definitely a poor response and there is that poor behaviour, but it would be unkind to suggest that there is not some positive work that is taking place. There is some really good partnership work between police and local specialist services. I know from our 170 member services that we have across



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England that, although it is patchwork, there are some real areas of positivity. I am not trying to deny that there is that poor behaviour.

- Q41 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** One of the things that I would say in response to that is that, if I were to say, "Here is a pot of money. Let us make this better", would that be better directed at the police, so that they could do more, or at support organisations to support victims?

Sophie Francis-Cansfield: Given that the data really shows that, when specialist services are involved, it increases charging and conviction rates and reduces attrition, funding needs to be going to those specialist services, particularly when they are so underfunded. In particular, the by and for services are the most underfunded.

One aspect that has not been discussed is the probation service, and there is going to be a real focus on probation through what has been announced in the King's Speech in terms of the Criminal Justice Bill and the Sentencing Bill. If we do not improve the probation response around licensing conditions and management of DA offenders, the ambitions behind both of those Bills will not be met.

Chair: Can I just thank all three of our first witnesses for your evidence today? If there is anything that you wish to add in writing afterwards, please do so. Thank you very much.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Baroness Newlove of Warrington, Nicole Jacobs and Claire Waxman.

- Q42 **Chair:** We will resume the meeting with our second panel. Can I thank Claire Waxman, the Victims' Commissioner for London, Baroness Helen Newlove, the interim Victims' Commissioner, and Nicole Jacobs, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales for being here today?

I will start with a quick question to you all. I am conscious that we wanted to finish by midday and we have eaten into your time, so apologies for that. What are your top priorities as commissioners to help ensure that the prevalence of escalating violence is reduced and that victims are supported?

Claire Waxman: The key priorities are around tackling those barriers to reporting for women and girls. What are the structural barriers that prevent them from being able to come forward and to have the trust and confidence to come forward and report? It is about improving the police response and rebuilding trust and confidence, in particular with the Met, so that women and girls feel able to come forward and report. It is about looking at issues around insecure immigration status, which I know the Domestic Abuse Commissioner will focus on, which does create a real barrier to a number of minoritised women and those with an insecure



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immigration status, who just do not feel able to safely come forward and report.

When they do come forward, it is about having the right response and the right support to help them through the criminal justice process, ensuring that they also have their risk assessed properly, so that they get the right protections in place. Protective orders are being used far more robustly and frequently, like stalking protection orders or DVPOs.

There needs to be a real focus on the right protection, but, for me, it is about the treatment of these women and girls in the criminal justice system. We heard earlier that re-victimisation is very much a part of the justice process for many women and girls I speak to. A lot of the crimes that they come forward with and report are often minimised and can also be dismissed, especially around behaviours or criminal offences that require a real understanding of a course of conduct and being able to identify different behaviours that would constitute stalking, coercive and controlling behaviour, or post-separation abuse.

The criminal justice system does not have a good enough understanding around these different types of offences in order to provide the right support and protection to those victims and to help them through the criminal justice process.

Q43 Chair: Can I just ask you a very London-specific follow-up question? Having had the privilege—I do use that word—of working with a number of victims over the past 12 months, the message that I have had very clearly from them has been that they do not trust the Met. They are afraid to report to the Met. In one instance, victims reported to the Met, withdrew the complaint and then reported to Essex police, because “they have a better reputation”. Also, having worked with Georgia Harrison, who was a victim of a particularly hideous crime, she always said that Essex police had been incredibly supportive and helpful to her; they took it all seriously. What can the Met do so that victims come and see me and say, as Georgia did about Essex police, “They were brilliant”? How far does the Met have to change to get that sort of view?

Claire Waxman: It has a long journey and it has started that journey. There is the “A New Met for London” plan, which is very much focused on improving the response to victims, increasing the number of officers within public protection and improving their specialism, so that those victims get the right response. They need to deal with police perpetrated abuse, which they are trying to tackle robustly. We heard earlier that quite a number still remain on duty, but we do have wider issues around the criminal justice reform on that.

The Mayor and the Met Commissioner have been calling for more powers to be able to dismiss officers who are convicted, or to suspend those charged with offences, much more quickly. We want to try to get those officers out. The focus is on building better officers who have better specialism to respond to victims.



There is a lot of focus at the moment on the Met. It has launched its victim focus desk, which I have been working on with them. A key issue that I pick up time and time again from victims in London is that, when they come forward to report, they do not get any consistent response. They are not getting information about their rights and entitlements under the victims code. They are not accessing special measures before court.

There are lots of issues that push many victims, as you have said, to come out of the process because they have just not been given timely information, not been treated in a trauma-informed and supportive way, and not being given access to special support. There are a number of issues that the Met is fully aware of and alive to, and I am working very closely with them on trying to improve their response through this new victim focus desk, but it is only just up and running and has some way to go.

Q44 **Chair:** Helen, how can we make sure that victims are better supported?

Baroness Newlove of Warrington: Claire has covered quite a lot, but the main thread of all that we have heard from the previous witnesses is encouraging them to, and them having confidence to, report in the first place, and the support mechanism that they will be delivered.

If we flip it the other way, people presume that all these services are easily navigated, and it is only when you are in that system that you find out that it is not. The whole ballgame, before I came back as Victims' Commissioner, is the police not knowing where to navigate victims, and it feels very much like the Fiona Pilkington days, where everything is logged. We are now looking at police forces that have a portal, so the victim is investigating their own investigation.

For them to feel safe, my priority is the main vehicle now within Government, which is the Victims and Prisoners Bill, where we need to see the right navigating tools, but with quality, so with rights under the victims code and making sure that Government clauses mean what they say on the tin. What I mean by that is that we have a lot of delicate information being delivered within trials. Although it seems to be that that is the process, this is delicate and very personal, and can have a lot of repercussions.

There should also be funding for sexual abuse victims, so that they know their rights. This is a very delicate area, but the thread is right through. We need to make sure that they have the confidence. "Communication" and "accountability" are the two words, and only then will we make sure that victims come forward.

Nicole Jacobs: I agree with my colleagues, but my overarching priority, to your original question, is very much about, in the broadest sense, stepping back from the need to only have crisis intervention—that is currently what we have, and it is not very good as it is—to prevention



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and early intervention. In any strategy in England and Wales, it will mention prevention and early intervention, but, if you were to ask, "What exactly does that mean? What are you doing? What funding do you have for that?" I can tell you that it would be very thin on the ground, because all of the funding orients to crisis intervention, given that you have to deal with that because it is right in front of you.

We are just not at a stage where we have the ability to invest in understanding what good prevention looks like, in terms of the early intervention you can have by statutory services really playing their part and bridging that survivor journey or the victim's journey to more specific interventions. We just do not have that. In the broadest sense, how you do that would be a priority.

The next thing in front of me—I was doing an event earlier this morning on this—is the Victims and Prisoners Bill. There are many elements in it, but one of them is a duty to collaborate. Commissioners at the local level bring together many streams of different funding, all with different timescales, and we think that somehow, out of all of that, we will have a strategic, planned way of supporting specialist services. We just will not have that unless the Bill is amended so that there is a proper joint strategic needs assessment and some money and resource put into that bringing together of strands of opportunity on the ground.

None of our specialist services is sitting in core budgets at the local level. That is not how it has ever been. Until the Domestic Abuse Act, it is only in our accommodation-based services that we have funding that is set aside through that duty and going to local areas. None of our community-based services has that advantage. In terms of the former panel, all of their services are ones that have to cobble together funding.

The reason why that is so critically important is in answer to your question about the Met. I came here in the late 1990s. For many years, I worked in London in partnerships with the Met. The police really cannot meet the needs of the victim alone. They have to work in a joined-up way. There are really exceptional examples of partnerships where that happens and where people are able to be informed. There is really day-to-day joint working. We have lost the picture of what that is in recent years, but it does exist and I have experienced it myself in terms of being able to pick up the phone, call the police, figure out what is going on and help victims feel informed and understood and feeling a voice.

Also, when things are going wrong, I have been able to pick that up and do that kind of institutional advocacy. That is the other thing that I want to point out to all of us. When we say "domestic abuse services", we are presuming, a lot of times, that that is someone who is generally supporting the victim and doing all sorts of practical and emotional advice. That is all true, but, in fact, a lot of the work of the domestic abuse specialists is advocating to systems that are not working for the victims, so they are institutional advocates.



In my mind, the biggest safeguard that we can have is a strategic way of funding those services and an orientation to have them at the table, so that they are feeding back alongside victims in terms of what the changes and the improvements are. That is the practical work on the ground that we never emphasise enough. A lot of that all ties together for that greater strategic response.

Q45 Chair: Some of the written evidence that we have had has suggested that there simply is not enough data to understand what the picture looks like when non-contact offences become contact offences. There is not enough data around what early intervention should look like and what works and does not work. What are the barriers that are out there that prevent the better collection of data, and how could that be done better?

Nicole Jacobs: Put simply, the barriers are that the systems do not talk to each other. There is absolutely no way that I could say to you that I know what the journey is, end to end, from first contact to, if it ever gets there, the court. The way in which information is gathered is in silos, so I can tell you that our criminal justice performance across the board is significantly lower than it was even four years ago. I know that from police data alone, or CPS data, or referrals from one to the other.

The systems do not track, so there is no way of making sense of what those decreases are about or what might be the demographics of people—their age or their background—who are having less of a positive response in the criminal justice system. We will never be able to know that until we are able to have that end-to-end data. That would answer many questions.

Having said all of that, I have been involved with many initiatives over the years that dip sample, look at specific cases and do that tracking. You have to do it manually, essentially, to get anywhere. It is not that we do not have a general understanding and some general takeaways of how the attrition happens, for example, in the criminal justice system, or how that offending pattern looks. You can get to it. Academics dip sample and look at cases and get to that, but the system itself cannot do it.

The one thing that I would point out is that we have to distinguish between thinking about what we would know from systems versus what we know from the victim themselves. There is very clear and really robust evidence of escalation when you talk to victims. That is what our risk assessments in relation to domestic abuse are all about. It is about exploring the patterns of behaviour, the escalation and the things that are known risk factors for further abuse or high-harm homicide. The systems are not able to do that.

As your last panel talked about, training is all about having people within the systems understand the complexity and the dynamic nature of offending, given that it is not necessarily linear in terms of non-contact to contact, especially in domestic abuse. It is a much more complex pattern of behaviour.



Baroness Newlove of Warrington: This is not an area that I can speak too strongly on, but I agree with what Nicole was saying. The police systems are not designed for research, so there is inconsistent data. That is why it is all captured. They also never join the dots, so the research is never proper data, as such. There could be several occasions that are reported, both online and offline. The two together should never be separate. They run parallel. If they joined the dots, we would get really quality data, but police systems do not talk to them and they do not have it.

Claire Waxman: My points have been covered. An additional point goes back to those barriers to reporting for victims. We have low levels of reporting around VAWG. One in six rapes are reported. The Suzy Lamplugh Trust has done research that shows that a stalking victim will experience over 100 incidents before they come forward and report. We are not necessarily getting that insight through the victim's experience of those low-level, no-contact offences in order to really understand the escalation point from their perspective.

The point that Helen and Nicole both made is also around the lack of police data. Where is the perpetrator focus on that, as well as monitoring those perpetrators and watching how that behaviour escalates? We do not have that data.

Q46 **Kirsten Oswald:** As part of the Online Safety Act, Ofcom has been given a statutory duty to consult you in the preparation of its guidance for platforms on reducing harmful content that affects women and girls. I wonder what discussions you have had so far with Ofcom on that, and how you expect that relationship to continue. Could you also comment on whether Ofcom is sufficiently focused on preventing online abuse from escalating?

Baroness Newlove of Warrington: First of all, I welcome the Online Safety Bill. I took part, before I came back into this role, as a Back Bencher. I learned so much from the families who came forward, as well as the system that does not work for them and the time that it takes to get information for that. I welcome that, and there was a report from the Victims' Commissioner's office, "The Impact of Online Abuse: Hearing the Victims' Voice". Again, that was a very small group of people, but it showed a lack of confidence by victims—basically, log off/log on. I remember speaking for the NSPCC about child advocates on the panel, so that Ofcom would understand it.

My concern was also about VAWG understanding, which, with my colleague, Baroness Morgan, I really fought to get in the charter. More importantly, 40% of cyber-stalking victims say that abuse takes longer than two years. Ofcom has a challenge. We wanted everything to go under Ofcom, and the Government are going to keep their eye on it and give it a couple of years. I look forward to the guidance and I am glad that the Victims' Commissioner is one of the statutes there, but it is the length of time that it will take and what it looks like. In the



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meantime, we have people still suffering online. It is also quite a lengthy, complicated process.

As somebody who has been involved in this, I will definitely be keeping my eye on it, because Ofcom has a lot to do and to change, as have the tech companies, to ensure that we protect the people who are abused online.

Nicole Jacobs: I have had very good engagement so far with Ofcom in terms of the teams leading, and I have met the head of Ofcom. My impression is that there is a long way to go to get a sense of the evidence. Ofcom often talks about evidence-led monitoring in relation to this. The trouble with that is that you have the people who can tell you about the online harms. The people in your last panel, for example, have produced some really interesting and quite serious initial data for us all to consider, showing that there are huge amounts of online harm intersecting with offline harms.

One of the things that we need to grapple with quite quickly is the extent to which we need to fund and help equip specialist services—the people running helplines, for example. Refuge runs the English helpline, and there is the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and others. I had a meeting a couple of months ago with all the helplines in England and Wales, where we talked about this specifically. Whether it is Government or tech companies, what will be needed in order to make this successful is a much greater emphasis on the advice and support that they are able and geared up to give, because they are often a first point of contact.

The other anxiety that I have is, again, just reflecting on some of the need for police response and improvements wholesale, and the ability to take on board what coercive and controlling behaviour looks like in an online environment, for example. There is a lot of distance to travel, and that will not be done just by passing the legislation itself. It really has to be invested in as a priority.

Q47 Kirsten Oswald: Can I take you slightly further down that line? We have heard in written evidence that there is a perception that the police do not treat online offences as seriously as offline offences, and I wonder if you would agree with that sentiment.

Nicole Jacobs: On the whole yes, because, to some degree, they may not know what to do and it is unclear what actions are appropriate to take if you are in that frontline policing situation. That is why, again, we need a lot of investment in terms of what the implementation of proper support looks like and what the expectation is, not only of officers but in terms of the advice and support that the victim will get, which will help bolster how they communicate with officers—for example, the retention of evidence.

All of that much more granular advice needs to be developed, and the sector as a whole needs to be supported in how they do that. That is



something that we will see as Ofcom starts consulting properly very soon, and we will understand the extent to which we are underfunding in this area, if we want to properly live up to the expectations of this Act.

Baroness Newlove of Warrington: The week I started, we released a victims survey, which showed that just over half of the victims who came forward had high levels of dissatisfaction with the response that they received from the police. They felt that the police blamed them for the abuse that they experienced. Only four respondents to the survey reported that the police told them that their case had been successfully prosecuted.

It is also about the navigation of it. Sixty-two per cent. of responders reported the abuse to both the police and the internet companies. It shows you that they are still not being believed and feel that the police do not take this seriously. It is a bit like an invisible illness—you could have a chronic invisible illness that you do not see in front of you. Going back to my husband, it was antisocial behaviour and then murder. What do you see first?

I am delighted with the victims survey, and we are going to have a new one. We have just run one with YouGov. We are going to have over 3,000 victims—it is the biggest ever representation, so I really am pleased to get that. Hopefully, we will get some more information to go on. As Nicole said, this is legislation for professionals. What we must ensure is that victims understand the process for themselves, in their own language. Victims do not understand what offender programmes are out there. They are never told this information. While we are talking here about what victims' services and groups are able to have, I would like the Chair to understand that victims are not aware of all these programmes, because they are not giving that information in the first place.

Claire Waxman: Specifically on online behaviours and online crimes, I can say that overwhelmingly, unfortunately, the victims who I speak to and who have reported to the Met do not get the right response. Often, a number of issues are dismissed, minimised or not picked up. Again, going back to the earlier point that I made around the course of conduct, if it is in relation to stalking, it is about dealing with the offline, physical stalking and not looking at the online, which is all part of that course of conduct that has an overall impact on the victim.

There are a number of issues. There are a legislative issues that are real struggles for the police in terms of getting that information from the different social media companies. That becomes a barrier, because, if something takes too long for the police, they are not going to bother. It is just too difficult for them to try to get that information. That is something that has to be addressed, I hope, in the Online Safety Act as well, so that they can get that information quickly in order to help build an investigation and a good case file.

Q48 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** I want to just turn now to the recent announcement



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by the Ministry of Justice that sentences of less than 12 months should be suspended rather than custodial. I would just like to invite each of your reflections on what that means for victims and what you think generally about the approach.

Baroness Newlove of Warrington: It all came out in the same week I began, so I was straight on the computer, writing back to the Lord Chancellor. Recent MOJ data shows that a quarter of those convicted for indecent exposure reoffended, with 219 individuals having gone on to commit serious sexual offences.

You asked a question before about behaviour and funding. I know that the process struggles to identify, because it is not a long process—it is about 12 weeks, if somebody goes to prison, before they can get through the process, so even that sounds a bit bonkers. It is a good idea in a sense, but my worry is about probation, if I am honest about that. It is about resources. There was no consultation with my office prior to the announcement. It all came at once—like buses—when I first started.

I want more detail about this. The devil is in the detail. The headline is, “We are going to do something”, and victim safety is paramount in all of this. It will work only if there are sound risk assessments about the quality. I do feel for probation, because there is so much being put on their shoulders.

We have seen a huge number of very experienced officers leaving. Apparently, there are enough resources and funding, and it is not about just giving the money; it is about the quality, the depth and the understanding, to make sure that victims, when they do go for short sentences, have that respite and feel quite safe. When we see this in the Criminal Justice Bill, it should mean what it says on the tin, because, unfortunately, that is the only way in which we can regain victims’ confidence. It is about quality, not quantity.

Q49 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** Do you share my worry that this is a good measure, culturally and behaviourally, but it is being driven by prison capacity rather than the other steps that are needed to tackle that behaviour and reoffending?

Baroness Newlove of Warrington: You cannot deal with one and not the other. They have to go together. It is like swinging—it is a bit like victims’ rights. People say, “You want to take them off offenders”, but we want a level playing field. It has to go together for this to work. Even with parole hearings, and as somebody who has gone through many and is still going through them, we have to bolster that confidence within the justice system to ensure that they are being heard.

If I am quite honest with you, some of these orders that we talk about are not worth the paper that they are written on. Jackie, you know me. I say it as it is, in a sense, and I am going through it. Custodial sentences do not always work for victims as well. As you previously heard, the



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perpetrator will come out of prison, and the victim is picking them up in the car. The victims do not know about offender programmes and, until we get that communication working together, it will not work and will not give that confidence.

Claire Waxman: Picking up on the point that you just made, overcrowding in prisons is what is driving these reforms, and it has not been looked at through the lens of victims and victim safety, or not until all three of us raised it individually. I am pleased that we had some reassurance yesterday, with the details of the Sentencing Bill, that offenders with sentences of under 12 months for domestic abuse, coercive control or stalking where there is significant risk will still serve time in custody and not within the community. However, that is up to judicial discretion, so we still have issues around sentencing in these cases.

I do have concerns with the judiciary in relation to understanding the VAWG impact of stalking and coercive control, and sentencing effectively, so that it is commensurate with the impact on the victim. The concern is, obviously, if those sentences are in the community. We have a very overstretched, under-resourced probation service. In London, we have 12 out of 18 red sites with significant staffing shortages and not enough trained staff to risk-assess properly. It is all around risk-assessing and understanding. It is all very well saying "those who pose a significant risk", but who is doing the risk-assessing? Are they doing it effectively and well? If they are in the community, how well are they being monitored?

We are seeing an increased use of electronic tags. Only a couple of weeks ago, we had a stalking victim who thought that the defendant had a tag and it came to light that they did not. They had not been tagged. There were issues with the court not making sure that the tag had been put on. We have lots of problems in the system and I just worry that, unless we deal with all of the fundamental issues within the criminal justice system, it is not going to have the impact that the Government are aiming for.

Q50 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** That is very helpful. Nicole, we are short of time, but the Home Office recently published seven standards for domestic abuse perpetrator interventions. Could you just give us a view on whether they go far enough?

Nicole Jacobs: Sophie did a really good job in the previous panel of explaining exactly what they do and do not have in them in terms of how they might relate to what we consider the gold standard, which is the Respect standards for perpetrator programmes. It is not that they diverge massively. It is just that the Respect standards will look further into some of the relationships and the standards for practice that she outlined to you.

In my whole range of concerns, it concerns me more to see that we commission from Government programmes that adhere to those



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standards. We have just had several years of funding for perpetrator intervention and behavioural change—a whole range of work that relates to perpetrators of domestic abuse. We have never done that before on such a large scale. It is £75 million over three years.

What are we learning from that? Is everything that has been commissioned meeting those standards? At what point do we understand what we have achieved in that commissioning and what we have learned in terms of what will go forward and ahead? That is really critical to keep our eye on in particular. There is some evaluation of it, but I do not know that there is a real clarity as to what has been achieved, what it tells us or what it means we need to do more of.

On short sentences, we have had some reassurance this week about that, but one of the things that was specific in the MOJ announcement was that anyone who breaches an order would certainly not be able to have a community-based sentence or an order of protection. Keep in mind that we have a very difficult landscape on orders anyway. Even the police do not know when orders of protection are in place. Going back to our data and systems problems, they do not record and do not have a way of recording when an order is in place. Therefore, breaches of them happen on a huge scale, without much repercussion, so that was not a huge reassurance to me.

We have just had an inspectorate report from probation that tells us that domestic abuse has been treated appallingly in recent years, with huge impacts, including further homicides, because of staff shortages. The only way that this short sentencing regime will work is if probation is able to do proper pre-sentence reports, not on-the-day reports, as they are often required to do right now, and that they are fully resourced for this rehabilitative work. Why would we want perpetrators of domestic abuse picking up litter? We need to have them in custody for respite alone for the victim, or, if we are giving them a community-based sentence, make it a rehabilitative sentence.

My understanding is that there is currently a long waiting list for Building Better Relationships—the probation-run rehabilitation and behavioural change programme. The Government did a feasibility study about a proper evaluation of that. There is a very long list of things that you would want to be reassured about before we understand that this short sentencing regime will work properly for victims.

Chair: Thank you for that. I get the sense that there might be a long list of things that you wish to add in writing. Please can all of you do so? There might be some questions that we have not had the opportunity to ask that we will also follow up in writing with you. I thank the three of you very much for your evidence.