

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Violence against Women and Girls](#), HC 138

Wednesday 9 June 2021

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Ruth Edwards; Laura Farris; Simon Fell; Andrew Gwynne; Adam Holloway; Stuart C. McDonald.

Questions 1-51

Witnesses

I: Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner; Yasmin Khan, National Adviser for Violence against Women, Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, Welsh Government, and founder and CEO of the Halo Project; Sophie Linden, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, London; and Claire Waxman, Victims' Commissioner for London.

II: Surwat Sohail, Chief Executive, Roshni Birmingham; Cordelia Tucker-O'Sullivan, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Refuge; and Harriet Wistrich, Founding Director, Centre for Women's Justice.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Refuge \(VAW0017\)](#)

[Centre for Women's Justice \(VAW0020\)](#)

[Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Nicole Jacobs, Yasmin Khan, Sophie Linden and Claire Waxman.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this evidence session of the Home Affairs Committee and our inquiry into violence against women and girls. I am very grateful to our panel for giving evidence to us today. This will be part of our first evidence session, which is an overarching evidence session on issues around violence against women and girls. We intend to then focus on some particular issues within the inquiry and we will be beginning with looking at rape prosecutions.

Joining us on our first panel are Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner; Yasmin Khan, national adviser to the Welsh Government on violence against women; Sophie Linden, London's Deputy Mayor for policing and crime; and Claire Waxman, Victims' Commissioner for London. Welcome to all of you. Thank you very much for joining us this morning.

Can I ask you first what you see as being the most urgent issue? What would you highlight as being top priorities, for us to investigate, but, more importantly, where action is needed on violence against women and girls? Can I begin with Nicole Jacobs?

Nicole Jacobs: Good morning and thank you for having me. One of the things that I would like to get across in terms of urgency is that we are inclined to want to do something new and different, and to move in a different direction. I suppose I would urge the Committee to consider having the fundamentals in place for our co-ordinated response to domestic abuse, whether that is improvements in the criminal justice system, for our specialist services for victims, or thinking very particularly about the most marginalised victims, who need particular types of service in place.

We have made a lot of progress, and I don't want to deny that, but I think we have a lot to bed down in the most fundamental things—about services for the whole family, for children, for perpetrators to change, for victims to receive the support they need. We also need to be much more assertive with our statutory services about the need to mainstream really excellent practice in these areas. Before we build on any other new or "innovative" ideas, we have to be assured that we have got the fundamentals in place and right. I think we are very far from that.

We have priorities, in particular this year, in terms of implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act. We have a lot that has been thankfully passed into legislation, but we now have a lot of work to implement those changes. We have a lot of work to ensure that across all Government Departments, at local and national level, we have clear, strategic responses and priorities in our strategies on violence against women and girls and domestic abuse.



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In all that, we need to think about those who are the most marginalised, such as migrant women in particular, and black and minoritised women, and those areas where we have very few services, such as LGBT and disabled victims of domestic abuse. I know others will want to build on some of those thoughts.

I would urge a sense of ensuring that we have the most fundamental services and strategies in place, and a governance structure, inter-ministerial group—any way in which we can see clear implementation and know where we are headed on that. This issue has been neglected in that way for many years, in terms of a sense of priority. There are some legislative things we can do about that, which I am sure we will come to, but I will give the floor to others to give their opening views.

Q2 Chair: Yasmin Khan, what are your most urgent priorities?

Yasmin Khan: One of the most urgent priorities is to look at how we can adopt a public health approach to violence against women and girls, as we have seen with the pandemic, really understanding the root causes, which I feel we still haven't got a clear understanding of.

I agree with Nicole about better co-ordination across Government Departments and, therefore, having a better impact for survivors when they access services. I feel there is still an issue around training programmes and ensuring that those training programmes lead to a better response, to ensure that we can identify the complexities.

Some of the learning can be taken from Wales, since we had the legislation five years ago, but we need to move away from the monolithic approach to violence against women and girls, and try to have a programme and a strategic commitment across Government Departments that look at the needs, complexities and risks, which I feel are still not understood.

That collaboration is essential, ensuring that all communities and survivors are included in that dialogue, and the programme of work that forms out of not only the legislative programme, but the non-legislative programme. It is about what those risks are that are still not being met. I feel that the multi-agency response needs to be improved, because I have seen on the ground far too much the safeguarding hot potato that continues. We need to take responsibility; we need to work within a co-ordinated approach that provides a better service for victims and survivors.

Sophie Linden: There are two things I would point to in terms of urgency, which have been thrown up by the dreadful Sarah Everard case and by the pandemic. They have shown what we probably already knew was happening, but have put it in sharp relief. The first thing is around trust and confidence in the criminal justice system, including policing, of victims, survivors, and women and girls.

That is incredibly urgent. We all need to ensure, across the country, that we have quick action to try to address that. There are too many women, girls and young women who don't have trust and confidence in the



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system, so they don't come forward to report and so continue to suffer the abuse and violence perpetrated upon them, day after day. That is the first thing I would say is incredibly important.

The second thing the pandemic has thrown up is the pressure on our services to support victims and survivors. That is pressure to enable them to have the services they need to cope and recover. Going back to the criminal justice system, it is also the pressure on our courts and police. Those are two really important, urgent issues. We need to ensure that there is not only a fundamental cross-Government response to them, but a fundamental cross-Government response in terms of funding.

Claire Waxman: I echo what has already been said. For me, there are three key areas around what Sophie Linden said about tackling that trust and confidence, so that we have more victims and survivors coming forward. My work is specifically with victims and survivors when they do come forward. We have an issue of high rates of withdrawal of victims and survivors from that criminal justice process because they are not getting the right level of service.

We need that wraparound support service as early as possible, as soon as they come forward to report, to keep them well supported and engaged, through a very complex and now—in the light of the pandemic—very long justice process.

It is critical that we support those victims all the way through, and get more into court, because they are helping to bring offenders to justice. If we don't bring those offenders to justice, we leave more women and girls at risk, because we know a lot of offenders are prolific and repeat offenders.

Going back, prevention is critical and has to start in schools, in the light of what we have seen recently with the Everyone's Invited website. The testimonies that have come forward show we have a real issue and education plays a huge part in that. Schools need to adopt a whole-school approach, working with the entire school community, to tackle misogyny and stop putting the emphasis on girls to change their behaviour, and look at challenging the boys' inappropriate behaviour. We need to challenge those societal behaviours that are leading to male violence.

As Nicole pointed out, a lot of the work we do is around black and minoritised victims and survivors not having that trust in police, and not having the trust and confidence to come forward. It is also about not recognising some of the abuse. It is important to look at how we get into those communities and set up safe spaces for those women to come forward, to share their experiences and understand that they are actually experiencing abuse, and to show them what is available for them to get the support that they need, and potentially a justice outcome.

Q3 **Simon Fell:** Thank you to our witnesses for joining us. Going back to the point Nicole Jacobs raised about strategy, the most recent Government strategy on violence against women and girls was published in 2016. I



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am interested in your thoughts on how the Government is doing against that, and whether that strategy needs refreshing.

Nicole Jacobs: I can tell you that the strategy is being refreshed now. The most recent strategy we had ran until 2019. I have a few top-line comments. There were 95 recommendations in that strategy. There is a document that will give us a picture of the actions that have been taken. I think the Government would mark itself as having completed many of those actions.

From our recent strategy, things that were weaker in terms of implementation that we could do better and focus on more would be unfinished business. On domestic homicide reviews, there were commitments in the last strategy about implementing lessons learned and more work there. I think we could do much more on that.

I have proposed—and I think the Government has agreed—more oversight on the part of my office, in ensuring that actions are taken for all sorts of reviews, including homicide reviews. There has been some movement ahead and some funding on perpetrator work, which is to be welcomed.

You can see from the Bill debate on the Domestic Abuse Act that we are still not focusing on what works and what is happening with multi-agency responses for early intervention, all the way through to much more focus on serial perpetrators. We need to see more concerted effort on what we want to see in those areas. We are doing a lot of piloting of innovation, picking up and putting down some of that. We could do better there.

Stalking was in the last strategy, with stalking protection orders. They have come into place now. We need to see more concerted effort on how those are rolling out and what more support is needed. There is a stalking consortium that we should be listening to very carefully about services on that.

Prevention is largely missing. That goes back to what Yasmin Khan said about her priority, which I agree with. It is missing in all strategies at the local level. We know this from research that Standing Together has done, and asking strategic partnerships at the local level as well. Also, in our national strategies, we always mention prevention, but we are not putting a lot of work and effort into prevention, and we must address that going forward.

In general, for our next strategy, which, as you will know, has been open for public consultation—it reopened after Sarah Everard's tragic murder—we have had 180 additional responses from the public to help inform the survey. So, I think this is all good news. We need to really weight the specialist sector evidence given to Government for the next VAWG and domestic abuse strategies, but we need to address in it some of the things you have heard such as the very poor criminal justice outcomes. To underscore that, in the last five years, domestic abuse conviction rates are down some 30% and sexual violence down 44%. We have really poor conviction rates for so-called honour-based abuse, so we have to, again,



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get those fundamentals right and build back the confidence that others have talked about.

In the VAWG strategy, we have to address service funding. We do not have a sustainable service funding system. We have opportunities in the VAWG strategy, but also the victims Bill is coming and a consultation on community-based support, and the MoJ is working on a victims funding strategy. These are things that I would really appreciate your help in looking very carefully at over the next year. Unless we get that funding right, we cannot build and innovate and do any prevention because we are constantly addressing the crisis in front of us. We must be able to address crisis intervention in order to get to prevention. I will stop there because I know others will have much to say as well.

Q4 Simon Fell: Thank you. That was really informative. Yasmin Khan, can I ask you for your perspective from the Welsh Assembly Government?

Yasmin Khan: I can hopefully provide some context to our strategy, which is currently being refreshed after five years. Within that strategy and the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, we had very clear objectives around training, about making local authorities look at the prevention, protection and support model, and making sure that there was a campaigns programme and also work with schools and health. That knitting of the cross-Government Department work was very important in terms of the fall-out of how that would be implemented at the local level.

In terms of developing priorities for the future, if honour-based abuse or forced marriage is referenced in a small paragraph in a huge strategy, it is very likely that the focus will be comparable within local authorities and public bodies, too. So, we really need to invest more in the complexities of domestic abuse in all its forms. In any strategy going forward, that is something that we must consider, particularly with the criminal justice system. Honour-based violence, or domestic abuse, should be a policing priority, and so referenced in a national strategy. Work to improve that criminal justice outcome for victims is very important. If you put training in a strategy, what is really important is what the training will lead to. Will it ensure there is better identification? That first response is very important.

Picking up on the legislation, since 2014 when forced marriage became a criminal offence, we have not had as many prosecutions as we had anticipated, so there needs to be a better understanding across the board about forced marriage, honour-based violence and FGM because we really need to focus on that in any strategy going forward.

Q5 Simon Fell: Nicole raised the point about security of funding. How is that reflected in Wales? Are you facing the same challenges, or is it a different set-up for you?

Yasmin Khan: There are definitely the same challenges. What we have done to address some of those challenges is this. When we had a sustainable funding group, which was made up of commissioners and



stakeholders, we looked at commissioning guidance, which they informed, and it was developed etc. But I chair the VAWG equivalent, if you like, commissioners group, which I set up because there is a real desire and demand from commissioners to look at what more they need to do. There is no endless funding pot, so this is about better collaboration, improved co-ordination across the departments and also working towards a blueprint of services that should be available to victims, irrespective of where they live in Wales. So there is actually considerable work in progress in this area—about how we can be better informed about what the needs are, where the gaps are and where the priorities should be—through the dedicated commissioners group that we have set up in Wales.

Q6 Simon Fell: Sophie Linden, can I come to you on the wider strategy point?

Sophie Linden: Before I get on to that, can I just give you an example to exemplify the problem around funding? The Home Office recently—in the last couple of weeks—have announced a fairly small funding pot for services to tackle perpetrators. It is really welcome to have that funding pot. But yesterday, I had to have a meeting with my officials in MOPAC to discuss how we cope with this, because we have to have bids in by August and all the money has to be spent in this financial year. That is just no way to run serious programmes to tackle perpetrators or serious programmes to support victims. There are fundamental problems in that. It is very difficult to set up and deliver the programme so quickly. There is a problem for the workforce. That is just one example to exemplify the issue with funding pots and funding streams, not just from the Home Office but from the Ministry of Justice, across the country.

In terms of the strategy, the last Government's violence against women and girls strategy, has produced a lot of progress—we can't deny that—and it's really welcome. We have Nicole as Domestic Abuse Commissioner. We have the new Domestic Abuse Act, even though it does not go as far as we wanted it to go. So there has been real progress, but you can see from the things that the strategy set out to do that it has not succeeded in everything—for example, in criminal justice outcomes. We have already had the figures that show domestic abuse detections are woefully low. We know the problem with rape prosecutions as well.

Another thing that the strategy set out to achieve was a cross-Government response to violence against women and girls. During the pandemic—just to give another example of how difficult that is—I and police and crime commissioners from around the country went to Government to say, "We know there is going to be a problem. We can learn from abroad there is going to be a problem with domestic abuse and violence against women and girls during the pandemic. What do we do to step up the services?" We had to trail from the Ministry of local government, to the Home Office, to the Ministry of Justice. There just was not a co-ordinated response. So that's what I really want to see—a really robust, co-ordinated response coming out of the Government's next violence against women and girls strategy. And really importantly, I don't want to see, and I don't think the sector wants to see, a separate



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domestic abuse strategy, because we need to look at violence against women and girls in the round. Often, a domestic abuse victim is also a rape victim. I don't feel that two separate strategies will provide the services, the support and just the focus that is needed. So that's incredibly important.

The two things I really want to see in the strategy coming forward are, first, not just an integrated strategy but much more work on perpetrators, as Nicole has suggested. There has been some very good and innovative work, but we need to have that focus; we need to have the police absolutely focused on the offenders and offender management. The second thing is prevention and public space violence. That is what we will be looking at in refreshing the VAWG strategy in London, which I have just set off doing post election, and that is what I would like to see in the Government's VAWG strategy as well.

Q7 Simon Fell: I would like to come back to you on that point about domestic abuse and wider violence against women and girls, but first I will go to Claire Waxman to take her views on strategy.

Claire Waxman: As we have heard, the strategy has made some good progress: we obviously have the stalking protection orders and coercive control legislation. The strategy was meant to overhaul the criminal justice response to vulnerable victims and to identify patterns of behaviour rather than look at them as single incidents in coercive control and in stalking. However, as we know, the prosecution rates are still woefully inadequate, so there is definitely still a gap between the legislation and what is happening in practice. Too many stalking and coercive control cases are not taken forward. The pattern of behaviour is not recognised. So that is still an issue that the strategy has not been able to resolve.

As we have heard, sustainable funding is absolutely critical, especially in light of what we have seen with the pandemic. Those support services that provide a lifeline to victims and survivors are really struggling. There is increased demand on them, because they are holding victims and survivors for so much longer, because the criminal justice response is slower. It is taking so many more years for the victims to get to court. It is absolutely critical that we look at that sustainable long-term funding so that we can put in place proper support services.

As we have talked about, prevention is absolutely critical for tackling the root causes of male violence. We need to have a robust perpetrator strategy as well, because we are putting so much onus on victims and survivors to come forward into a very complex and delayed criminal justice process that is not serving them well. We really need to focus on how we tackle and prevent, rather than always putting pressure on victims to come forward and report in a system that is obviously incredibly delayed and has a lot of issues delivering justice. Those are my key areas.

Q8 Simon Fell: For my last question, I want to go back to Sophie Linden's point about the dual strategy approach: violence against women and girls, and domestic abuse. I am interested in your view on that, and



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whether you think it is a good thing or not to separate the two out, but also what that means in terms of delivery. We know that these issues are deeply interconnected, but there are delivery issues connected to them such as provision of services and funding streams, so what, to your mind, is the impact on the ground of this dual strategy?

Sophie Linden: When I talk to the providers and those who are working with women and survivors in London, they are really clear that there should not be a separate strategy, because the two issues are so interconnected. I take their advice on that, because they understand the consequences of separating out funding streams and strategies far more than I do. In terms of what it can also mean for delivery on the ground, if we take the Metropolitan Police, they have had separate commands and separate ways of dealing with things. One of the things that the restructuring of the Metropolitan Police over the past couple of years has done is bring that together at a local level, with enough expertise to be able to look at the interconnections between the violence that women are suffering.

For me, separating it out creates risks and vulnerabilities. It creates problems for victims and survivors—they will possibly have to go to more than one professional in order to get the help and support they need—and it could also be a problem in terms of policing, in that a victim has to continually repeat their story. That is one of the reforms, and restructuring the Metropolitan Police has brought that together so that there is a cohesive, coherent response to victims in the way that they present, not saying, “You need to go to one place because you have been a victim of this, and another place because you have been a victim of a different type of violence.”

Q9 **Simon Fell:** That is really helpful, thank you. Nicole Jacobs, can I take your view on this?

Nicole Jacobs: I agree very much with what Sophie has said. Some people might be surprised; they think that as the domestic abuse commissioner, I would prefer my own domestic abuse strategy, but the trouble with it is that there is so much overlap. Anyone who works in this area for any length of time will know that there are links between, very quickly, sexual violence, stalking and harassment—you know, there are all sorts of interconnections between these issues.

If it is going to be the case that there are two strategies, which seems to very much be the intention of Government, they must be integrated. I have trouble visualising how it looks because of those overlaps. There would be a lot of replication, for example, within the strategies. I have heard Ministers argue that this gives greater weight to respective issues, because there would be a separation out. I understand that, too, but we have to really look carefully at the strategy, which is being developed now. We should be seeing it relatively soon.

One of the things that I would be looking for—the Government have committed to this—is a huge amount of integration between the two



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strategies. There must be a recognition of all victims of abuse. For me, as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, it is very important that we recognise male victims of abuse as well, and all victims of abuse. But we should also recognise—the Government have committed to this—how highly gendered these abuses are. I won't rehearse all the statistics, because I am sure you know them. We have to retain those principles in the strategy or strategies, and not lose sight of those things.

I would just stress how much we need that oversight in the inter-ministerial group and a cross-government commitment to drive a co-ordinated response. One of the things that we have talked a lot about is the problems within the criminal justice system today. Those are all true, but we have to recognise that most victims or survivors of abuse will not initially approach the criminal justice agencies. They will be looking to health visitors, teachers, social workers and people they trust within their community, so we need to see a huge amount in these strategies or this strategy to show that commitment across government.

One of the things that is really important is the modelling down to the local level. Police and crime commissioners and local authorities, in their community safety partnerships and safeguarding partnerships, will all be looking at the national strategy. Obviously, it is a different set-up in Wales, and I am sure Yasmin can speak to that. Our recent research shows that, although domestic abuse, for example, is a stated priority at the local level, half of local authorities surveyed did not have an active strategic partnership or strategy that had been recently refreshed. We need to recognise that what happens nationally will very much affect the local level. We need to see much closer management across Departments, and more support and clarity for local governance. That is where most of the commissioning happens and where most of this co-ordinated community response, which we are advocating, is being implemented. We really need to support local strategic partnerships to prioritise and have the best information and insight into their own strategies at the local level. We are having these debates, but does it engender a really coherent view, as that trickles down, out and around into other work?

Q10 Simon Fell: Yasmin Khan, I am interested in your view from Wales. Obviously, your title straddles both these areas, so I am interested in your approach and your view.

Yasmin Khan: Our approach in Wales has been welcomed by the sector. We have one national strategy, and we thereby give the authorities that are there to protect, including local authorities, safeguarding and policing, a much clearer understanding of what that means for them and how they protect victims—not only those who have experienced abuse but those who are at risk of it.

I have also been involved in some of the Home Office consultations around the separate strategies. It is clear—the other speakers have echoed this many times—that there is a real desire among the specialist providers and survivors to stress that this dual approach is misleading. It convolutes some of the areas, specifically around forced marriage and honour-based



abuse, and it dilutes the specific complexities around forms of violence. Our experience in Wales has been one of a very clear, coherent strategy that is implemented by public services and widely understood, and thereby provides a clearer approach and a pathway for victims who are at risk of violence. We have to listen to what the survivors and experts are telling us. Although it has been called having two bites of the cherry, that is not how the sector views it, based on the experience of survivors. We need clearer guidance, and one strategy provides that guidance and that reference point. I think this dual approach is not the right way to go.

Q11 Simon Fell: Last but not least, Claire, what is your view from the victims' perspective?

Claire Waxman: From the sector's perspective, and from victims and survivors' perspective, to retreat from a joined-up approach and one strategy really will take us backwards. That is the concern, because obviously most violence against women and girls is inter-related. As Nicole has already said, in domestic abuse cases we will see stalking and sexual violence, so I don't really understand how we can split it out, and I think it will have an impact on the policy and also on support services and how they are being delivered. What worries me, as I said earlier, is that we need to look at recognising all forms of violence, how they are joined up and the risks to the victim, and if we separate that out, we will not pick up those risks. We will leave women and girls at greater risk if we don't have one strategy. That is felt very much across from the sector, and from survivors and victims I hear directly from. It is really important that we look at what Wales is doing and have one strategy to really ensure that we are protecting all victims and survivors and looking at all the inter-related forms of violence.

Simon Fell: That is a very clear steer from our panel. I very much appreciate it.

Q12 Andrew Gwynne: I thank the witnesses for their time today. In all of your opening remarks, I was taken by your calls for greater collaboration across government and agencies in tackling violence against women and girls. It is remarkable that you are still having to make those calls, and we heard that message loudly and clearly.

I am interested in the approaches of the devolved institutions to tackling this very serious area. Maybe I can start with Sophie Linden, because the Mayor of London is committed to refreshing the city region's violence against women strategy. That was in his election manifesto, to his credit. What progress has been made in London since the last strategy?

Sophie Linden: In terms of the last strategy—we set out quite an ambitious strategy in terms of investing in survivors and victims' services—the Mayor has put in £60 million, so we have had quite a significant change in terms of service provision. It does not meet demand. Claire's report on the victims' code of practice in 2019 showed that demand had risen by about 83% in London since 2010, but funding had fallen by 50%. In terms of our overall strategy, we have made significant progress in investment in services, but there is still a big gap in terms of



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what is needed. As I said earlier, I am setting out to refresh the strategy in consultation with the sector and with survivors and victims in London. I will be focusing on what more we can do to ensure that we have the right victim support, but I want the Government to do more on perpetrator strategies and on investment in perpetrators, prevention and public space safety for young women and girls.

During the course of the strategy, we have invested in some really good programmes to tackle those individuals who are perpetrating violence. We have had Drive in Croydon, and that has been rolled out to two other boroughs in London. We have other quite innovative programmes across London that are looking at perpetrators and how we support them to stop and to change their behaviour. During the pandemic we put in place, working with the boroughs, a very small programme of trying to intervene early, so that where risk was escalating in the home, it was not the woman who had to move, but the man. We have worked with a handful of men in that situation. With the next strategy, I want to increase that.

I really want to make sure that, on all fronts, we are treating violence against women and girls as we would treat other crimes. That, for me, is incredibly important. We are absolutely looking at how we prevent it, what we do when people offend, what we do when violence is committed, and what we do to make sure that when somebody is perpetrating violence, we get them to change their behaviour, whether that be through a criminal justice outcome or not. One of the things we have brought in through the previous strategy is a ground-breaking programme of tagging domestic abuse offenders. It is the first time there has been a specific programme whereby GPS tags are being fitted to offenders. It gives safety to the victim and it also gives confidence and assurance to the probation officer—they know that they can check what that individual is doing.

Lastly, there is the refresher of the strategy on services for victims, working with Claire as the independent Victims' Commissioner to ensure that they are supported to cope and recover and that they are supported through the criminal justice system.

Q13 Andrew Gwynne: That is absolutely brilliant. Sophie, is there anything in the London strategy that the Government should pick up and run with on a national basis? Are there any successes that you think really could be rolled out nationwide?

Sophie Linden: The work that we are doing on perpetrators is a success. There is also, I think, the work that Claire's part of the strategy has been undertaking in her deep dive on rape reviews, to really understand those cases, which has been picked up in the end-to-end rape review for the Government. Then there is the work we are doing on domestic abuse and the deep dive in domestic abuse cases to see exactly what is happening during the course of the cases.

I genuinely think that the joined-up nature of our strategy is again what the Government should be doing. But also, if you took the investment that the Mayor of London has put into London in services, and services for



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perpetrators, and you replicated that across the country, we would be in a much, much better place. You could also replicate the way in which that investment is being delivered. It was not a one-off; we have invested in services with programmes and delivery for three years, not the one-year one-offs that we get from the Government.

Q14 **Andrew Gwynne:** Claire, on the London strategy, I would be really interested to hear how the victims of violence are involved in the strategy refresh. What is the process of involving the victims? Because they absolutely have to be at the heart of this refresh going forwards.

Claire Waxman: In the first Mayor's strategy—I was involved in the refresh of the 2016 strategy—I led extensive survivor consultations through focus groups and surveys, as well as one-to-one meetings with women and girls. That was absolutely critical to help to shape the strategy in London, but also, as Sophie said, it has been picked up nationally as well.

Through the consultation, it became very clear to me that there were a few critical areas. One was around rape prosecutions, so we did the London rape review, which obviously found a huge rate of victim withdrawal from the criminal justice process. It actually shone a light on some groundbreaking and innovative new ways of working for the police and CPS, finally recognising the impact of trauma on memory and how that affects victims' recall and how they relay that in testimonies. The police and CPS were looking at those inconsistencies in accounts and putting it down to a case of the victim not being credible—that they were actually lying. But the fact that, on the back of our London rape review, the police and CPS are undertaking this really important training, looking at the impact of trauma—it is in the CPS legal guidance on rape as well—means that they will better understand a victim who comes forward and reports and ensure that those allegations are taken seriously. So a lot of great work came out of the London rape review, which I know the Government have picked up, and we hope to see some of that in their end-to-end review when they publish it.

We also picked up the issues around migrant women and how they were not able to leave abusive relationships for fear that if they came forward to report, the immigration enforcement would be prioritised over the serious abuse they had experienced. So a lot of work came out of the strategy, working with support services and the Step Up Migrant Women campaign, which we saw through the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill, of really trying to push the urgent need for protection for migrant victims who come forward to get the support services they need, as well as to report to the police safely and securely. Of course, that work is still ongoing and needs to happen—it was not picked up in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, unfortunately.

Another key area of work that came up from listening to survivors is that we are constantly telling survivors, "You are not alone. Please leave the abusive relationship and get to safety"—the Government did this in a fantastic national campaign during covid—but the family courts remain a



place of great risk to domestic abuse victims. Unfortunately, when women leave an abusive relationship, if there are children involved, they will be pulled back into the family courts, which are a high-risk area. We still need urgent work to be done in the family courts to safeguard both women and children from violence.

- Q15 **Andrew Gwynne:** Absolutely, thank you. Yasmin, may I come to you very quickly to talk about Wales? You have already mentioned the 2015 Act and the impact that it has had. How have you been able to get that one national strategy and that co-ordination in place, and how does it work in practice? In opening, you spoke about the need for a public health approach. How is that being developed in Wales?

Yasmin Khan: One of the things that has really helped to progress the co-ordination across the Wales has to be the establishment of a cross-ministerial Government group that looks at VAWDASV. That has really helped to improve the co-ordination across all Welsh Government policy areas, and has really instigated that improved collaboration, which has worked wonders in terms of the understanding in all those areas.

In terms of how that works and what we feel is really benefiting the survivors—Claire mentioned the campaigns—we had a very strong focus within the strategy on campaigning. One of the campaigns that we did was around coercive control. The impact of that campaign has to be noted, because in one area of Wales there was a 90% increase in improved flagging of coercive control, so good campaigns and broad campaigns really do work, but specific campaigns on honour-based abuse and coercive control are also very, very effective.

One of the things that is really working well in Wales—when we talk about preventive models, we have to look at the far end of the scale, at homicides and what we can learn from homicide reviews. If we are not learning the lessons then, at that point, how can we prevent future homicides from happening? In Wales—Nicole is aware of the work that we are doing—we are really escalating that co-ordination across Government Departments and community safety partnerships, where the responsibility for quick-time learning lies. That piece of work has proved essential, because one area of Wales had a homicide review that required eight separate homicides. The impact on those families was profound, and that is why this unified homicide review, which is due to be implemented in December, is going to be game changing.

- Q16 **Andrew Gwynne:** Lastly, may I ask about cross-border co-operation? It is great having co-operation within Wales, but Wales is not a stand-alone part of the world; it is part of the United Kingdom and has very close links, particularly in parts of north and south Wales, with neighbouring England. What is the co-operation and co-ordination like between the Welsh and English authorities?

Yasmin Khan: We have that co-ordination because the Home Office in England and Wales meets regularly, as do the Welsh Government officials, and Nicole and I meet regularly. That improves that joined-up work and



collaboration, but it has to be said, from meeting with the umbrella organisation in Wales, there is some concern about the need for better alignment of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. Part of that process will be to ensure that we have a work programme that looks at, if you like, a violence-against-women masterplan, so that we are clear on what work falls out of the two separate pieces of legislation, and on the criminal justice agencies and how we work better across both Administrations. Work is being done, but more certainly needs to be done, and it starts with better alignment of the two pieces of legislation.

Q17 Laura Farris: Claire, may I ask about rape convictions? The report produced by *The Times* newspaper last week said that in the year from March 2019 to March 2020, 55,130 rapes were reported to the police, of which 2,747 were referred to the CPS, so less than 5% made it from the police to the CPS, and those that proceeded to trial had a 50% conviction rate, which was actually about standard—I looked back over the previous decades. It looked as if the problem is with the police. Does that correspond to your experience of working with victims, and if it does, what have they said to you about that?

Claire Waxman: Going back to the London rape review, we saw quite a high proportion—the highest proportion were victims withdrawing from the system, then we saw police taking no further action on cases. As I mentioned earlier, when we drilled down and looked into that, what was happening with the police, and is still happening, is that they were focusing too much on the victim, looking at the credibility of the victim, asking for personal material through mobile phone data, as we know, then analysing and scrutinising that, very much putting the victim on trial, as opposed to focusing on the suspect. We have been trying to push for a national programme of work—through MOPAC, the Deputy Mayor and me, we have been trying to push the Government to ensure a national programme of work that will take place through the Government end-to-end review, when they publish it, focusing on offender strategy, to make sure that the police and the CPS focus on offenders, as opposed to the victims, so a far more offender-centric investigation.

Q18 Laura Farris: What do you mean by focusing on the offender?

Claire Waxman: Instead of focusing as we have seen, which is always on the victims—that is why we see a lot of victims withdrawing from the process, because they find it far too brutal a process to be sharing all that personal material and to be scrutinised on it, so they feel that they are the one on trial, coupled with the fact of course that they are not getting the right support that they need to keep them engaged in the process. More focus needs to be on the suspect, to disrupt their behaviour—so, looking at suspects' actions and behaviour first, as opposed to looking at the victims, but we have not been doing that in rape investigations.

Q19 Laura Farris: May I pin you down a bit more on that? What do you mean? Somebody is accused of rape; what do the police not do that they should do as a next step?



Claire Waxman: A pilot has just been done in Avon and Somerset called Project Bluestone. The research that has come out of that has been absolutely staggering really, because a high proportion of the suspects are linked to other crimes or other offences. Police were not even looking into what other offences those offenders had been involved in. The first starting point is, once you have a suspect named, to have a look at whether they are involved in other crimes, and at their behaviour and actions. As I said, investigations over however many years have—this is the problem—focused too much on how a victim behaves post rape. What they do, what their actions are, what they did before the rape as well—there is too much focus on the victim’s behaviour, which is why I say we need to look at focusing on a suspect and making sure that we are disrupting offenders’ behaviours, picking up whether they have been involved in other crimes as well and making sure that the suspect is properly investigated. We are not seeing that at the moment in rape investigations—too much focus is on the rape victim.

Q20 **Laura Farris:** May I ask about another aspect, with more low-level sexual offending, which is public sexual harassment? I have raised that with my local force. They say those sorts of things are public order offences, when they occur. Perhaps, Sophie, you could answer—why is it that they are not treated seriously, or there is a perception that they are not, when they arise? Is that a policing problem? Is it a failure to report? Is there a need for new legislation in this area?

Sophie Linden: There are two things here. First, I think that there is a need for new legislation in this area, to make it absolutely clear what is criminal behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour in the public space. We are lobbying for the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill to have an offence of sexual harassment in a public place.

However, I also think that some legislation is already in place that could be used—public order and antisocial behaviour legislation. So, while we lobby for and will hope to be successful in getting sexual harassment legislation in place, the police need to be much clearer about what they can do. They need to encourage women and girls to come forward when they are victims of sexual harassment. That is incredibly important, that they come forward.

Q21 **Laura Farris:** Do you think the police do not fully understand their powers under the various public order offences that apply?

Sophie Linden: I think what has happened is that there has not been sufficient focus on the victimisation of women and girls in public spaces, the workplace or the hospitality industry. That is much more of the issue. One of the things that I am very pleased to hear in my own area, with the Metropolitan police, is that when I have had discussions—which I have had recently—with them about their plans for tackling violence over the summer, because we are all concerned about coming out of covid, those plans absolutely include, at their core, what they will do to keep women and girls safe as well. There has been movement and progress, because there is now a much better focus on the crimes that women are suffering



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and the violence that women are suffering. There has not been a sufficient focus previously.

Q22 Laura Farris: Sophie, I want to ask a similar question about stalking. Even though it is a criminal offence, I have heard concerns expressed that when it is reported to the police, it is not treated as seriously as victims might hope or expect. It is not controversial to say that stalking can be a precursor to much more serious violence and sexual violence. Could you or Claire comment on whether you think that is right—whether you think the police do not take it seriously enough, or whether there is perhaps a disparity in the way that different forces treat it?

Sophie Linden: I am sure Claire will want to come in on this. In terms of cases I see coming through, in complaints and in women's cases, what we find and can see is that links are not being made—individual incidents aren't being linked, so it is not being seen as stalking, but as a bit of criminal damage or something like that. However, we got money from the Police Reform and Transformation Board for a stalking assessment centre in London, which really has improved our multi-agency response and the response of the police in terms of making sure they investigate cases of stalking much more efficiently and that they are there to give victims' services as well, but there is undoubtedly still an issue of frontline officers not always making the connections between the individual incident they have been presented with, whether that is physically or online, and then making that connection to stalking. As Claire has talked about already, that is missing out on vulnerability and risk.

Claire Waxman: Sophie has covered it very well. As I said earlier, stalking and coercive control needs a police officer to really have that curiosity to ask the right questions and look at the different patterns of behaviour and join that up. We don't often see that happening still with first responders. We see quite a poor response. Too many stalking victims that I hear from just say that the patterns of behaviour have not been identified as stalking and they have just been told there is not enough evidence to take a case forward.

We brought in stalking protection orders for that very reason—to protect a victim—and early intervention with stalking behaviour as well, to try to tackle that fixated, obsessive behaviour. It is so important to get in as early as possible. Unfortunately, we are not seeing stalking protection orders being used as much as we would like by the police. There are still issues around that that need to be addressed.

So we still have some way to go on stalking and coercive control. I think it is very much a training issue and making sure that there is a leadership pushing to make sure that stalking protection orders are being used, which they are unfortunately not being.

Q23 Stuart C. McDonald: Thanks to all our witnesses. I have two questions. The first is about the Istanbul convention. How important could it be for the Government to ratify that convention? What might the impact of that be? Does anyone have any ideas about why there is a delay in that



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happening?

Yasmin Khan: We have been waiting with anticipation in Wales for England to ratify the Istanbul convention. I think one of the areas that is in question is support for migrant women. As far as we are aware, in Wales, we can almost state that we are compliant, and we are looking to England to see what more needs to be done, so that we can ratify the Istanbul convention. I would like to hear what plans are in place, because that is a question that providers and stakeholders are very keen to understand.

Sophie Linden: I would back that up. The issue is about the protection and services given to migrant women and refugees. We have had a long battle through the course of the DA Bill, now the DA Act, to make sure that they aren't being discriminated against, basically. Until that happens, we are not going to be able to ratify the Istanbul convention. It is really important that we do, because at the moment we have a two-tier service for women and girls in England and Wales. How you will be treated and whether you will be reported to immigration services depends on your refugee status. That is creating massive vulnerability and massive risk. There are all sorts of issues underneath that question of why the Istanbul convention has not been ratified. For me, it is because, at the moment, the Government will not move on this issue of protection for migrant women.

Q24 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Once—or if—the convention is ratified, what difference will that make? What is the significance of that? Is it because of what we would have done to have enabled that to happen, or will something change after the convention is ratified?

Nicole Jacobs: It is a commitment the Government have made, and it is a really important international symbol of what services we should expect for citizens in relation to violence against women and girls. I think it sends a really important message, in terms of leadership and the importance of these issues. It reflects a commitment made by the Government to follow through. Within it, as Sophie and Yasmin and others said, are really important, very tangible benefits that give a structure to what we would expect. One thing I would respectfully suggest to you is that some kind of joint hearing with the Work and Pensions Committee in relation to the provision of services for migrant women would not be appropriate or really beneficial in really exploring how migrant women could have recourse to public funds or welfare benefits in order to be safe.

An issue that is very live right now, and on which work in Government is quite actively going on, is decisions in relation to the firewall—the passing of information between police and immigration services—which of course is off the back of a super-complaint that was made and a report just before Christmas from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services that recommended, No. 1, a ceasing of any information being passed along during the time at which the Government are making decisions about the firewall. I think it is really important to come back to that in your plans for this year, in terms of this inquiry.



Q25 Stuart C. McDonald: That is very helpful, thank you. That brings us to my second question, which is about whether particular groups of women and girls have been missed from previous strategies and policies. If so, which particular groups do you think have been missed altogether, or maybe under-represented or not thought about enough? Why has that happened, and how can we make sure we do not repeat these mistakes?

Claire Waxman: As we have talked about, black and minority women and girls—absolutely. There is a real issue with trust and confidence in coming forward and actually reporting, but also with recognising the abuse as well. That is really important. I led a number of roundtables where I listened to organisations that support black females affected by violence, and what came out loud and clear from those roundtables was that many women were not recognising the abuse that they were experiencing. First and foremost, we need to ensure that they get support within their communities to understand that the abuse is not right, and then we need to make sure there are support services there to help them leave the abuse, and that they have the trust and confidence that, if they want to come forward to the police, they will be treated properly and fairly, which many of them fear they will not be if they come forward. The Government VAWG strategy of 2016 only made a reference to black and minority ethnic women, so it did not really go far enough. I think that is an urgent piece of work, because we really need to make sure that those communities want to come forward.

We have also talked about migrant women. Of course, that issue is still outstanding. Insecure immigration status is very much still being weaponised by perpetrators. We are giving perpetrators the tool to keep migrant victims at risk of violence and harm because we are prioritising immigration enforcement over their safety. That is a critical issue that I do not feel we have really resolved.

I know the Government will be doing a pilot, but we do not have the timescales around that. As I talked about, there are of course gaps in the family courts. If we are going to keep asking women to leave abusive relationships, we need to make sure that there is safe and secure accommodation for them to go to, and the right wraparound support services. Also, if children are involved, more often than not those women will be called into the family courts, which is a high-risk area for them and their children. I still do not think we are doing enough to protect women and children in the family courts. Those are my three main areas where the gaps are.

Q26 Stuart C. McDonald: Does anyone on the first panel want to add any other groups or to say anything more about the gaps that have already been identified?

Surwat Sohail: Can I start?

Stuart C. McDonald: I think we have to wait for the second panel to begin, then we can discuss that. Nicole Jacobs—yes.



Nicole Jacobs: I am sorry—I think that there is an issue with two different panels, and we'll be finishing up our panel here soon, I know.

I would point out to the Committee the national oversight for part 4 of the Bill. Right now, for the first time—in England particularly—because of the duty on accommodation-based services, areas are mapping their needs. That needs a great deal of oversight and looking at in this year, to make sure of things. Is it happening well? In other words, if Government are providing funding to go to areas for specialist accommodation-based support, how well is that mapping going? Are all victims who need it getting what they need out of that commitment through the Domestic Abuse Act?

There is a national oversight group that I will sit on as part of the MHCLG implementation of that part of the Bill. However, I think it is something to flag to you that, in theory, regarding a lot of the things that Claire has talked about, a lot of the people who need these services, at least accommodation-based services, should get what they need through this process. And we need to really make sure that that gets off to a very good start in the first phase of this new duty.

So, there is a lot of oversight that I think you could provide as a Committee in looking at that, and then extending the lessons learned to wider community-based services, because what I would say is that we could all list many different groups and categories of people, but the fact is that every area needs to have a truly adequate, community-based and accommodation-based service for the whole family. Children are hugely missing from our services. I think we will see teens addressed in an upcoming Ofsted review of VAWG in schools. There are big gaps.

We really have to think strategically—nationally, but also locally—about what needs must be met in every locality. And the overarching point is that we have to maintain our specialist services. We cannot expect generic services. We really need to have the kind of buy-in for specialist services in place, which have years and years of experience in addressing these issues, and they need to have a very good voice—a strong voice—at the local level in commissioning decisions and strategies, in order to get this right.

Q27 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Thank you very much. Yasmin Khan, do you want to come in? Then that will be me done.

Chair: Can I ask for very brief responses now because we obviously need to move on to the second panel after we have heard the questions from Ruth Edwards?

Yasmin Khan: To summarise, the victims from the BME community are over three times more likely to suffer death by suicide. They suffer far more incidents of abuse than their white counterparts, so there really needs to be an emphasis from local authorities, which need to get it right and reform their approach to commissioning to ensure that BME women within their local areas are represented in their commissioning priorities.



What we are seeing across England and Wales now is that some of those smaller community-based services that Nicole referred to are being decommissioned—we have certainly seen that in the north-east—and we really need to make sure that services are available for all, particularly groups that are under-represented.

Q28 Ruth Edwards: My questions are around so-called honour-based abuse. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services made an inspection in 2015 of honour-based abuse that found that a lot of forces felt constrained in their response to honour-based violence by deficits in national leadership. Yasmin Khan, in your view, what are those deficits in national leadership and how can they best be overcome?

Yasmin Khan: Just before the criminalisation in 2014, there seems to have been accelerated campaigning and commitment from Government. It seems to be for the past seven years that we have taken our foot off the pedal, so to speak. There really needs to be a better understanding on classifying honour-based abuse, and really it should be applied as a racially aggravated crime. So, we should have an honour-based abuse aggravated uplift on sentencing.

It is really important to say that we do not really understand the true scale of the problem, because the classification is not right. When a victim comes forward—I run a charity in England, so I can speak with conviction, as I speak to many of the providers—the first point of classification is listed as forced marriage or honour-based abuse, but beneath that is sexual violence, so the complexities around honour-based violence are still not understood.

The Government guidance needs to be refreshed. It was something that was done many, many years ago, leading up to the legislation. As Nicole has mentioned, one of 16 super-complaint bodies just conducted a review across England and Wales of police forces and how they respond to victims of sexual abuse from the black and minority ethnic communities. Unfortunately, that is very stark and compelling reading, and it says we have not learned a lot. We are still making mistakes. We are putting victims at further risk because police forces do not understand, or are unaware of, the distinction as between the revenge, retribution, stalking and coercive nature of honour-based abuse. We really need to accelerate the work programme within policing and ensure that the lessons can be learned.

The recommendations really focus on the institutional failures that mean police forces are sadly failing victims within the BME community because they are releasing suspects under investigation and conducting voluntary suspect interviews. On honour-based abuse training, there was a piece of work done with HOPE, which I was part of, and which looked at the sporadic approach in England and Wales to honour-based abuse training. That has to be refreshed. The risk assessments do not take into account the particular vulnerabilities, and this is an area of work that I feel really needs to be put right back up in the priorities for policing in England and Wales.



Q29 Ruth Edwards: In your view, do a lot of the problems stem from a misunderstanding, or not really much understanding at all, of the nature of the crimes?

Yasmin Khan: There is a sporadic approach to their understanding. For example, the flagging—how do you record it on a basis of violence? Where is the pathway in the main safeguarding pathway? It really seems to be an add-on, not integral to identifying those risks and thereby supporting the victims. Unfortunately, it is about the support for black and minority ethnic victims who experience honour-based abuse, the decommissioning of services, and public bodies not having that understanding. I still see local areas not recording honour-based abuse because it is actually easier to put it down as domestic abuse. Therefore, it follows a different pathway. We need to be very clear about ensuring that there is a place for BME specialist providers and their understanding at that strategic level. Victims are being failed, and this is an area of work that we really need to focus on.

Q30 Ruth Edwards: Thank you. Nicole Jacobs, will you share a similar perspective? Is there anything you would add?

Nicole Jacobs: It seems obvious that we need to see where we have got to after this inspection. Why have we not come back and looked at the progress made, or lack thereof, since the inspection in 2015? My understanding is that there have been 75 killings in relation to so-called honour-based abuse since that inspection. Karma Nirvana, which is one of the service providers in this area, has consistently talked about increases throughout covid in the last year—for example, there has been a 264% increase in demand for their helpline. We have a lot of work to do, as Yasmin pointed out very clearly.

To go back to Simon's questions, there is a connection between domestic abuse and honour-based violence, and charities in this area really need us to recognise that interconnection. Again, Karma Nirvana talks about 99% of people it supports and that personal connection between the perpetrator and the victim, so we have to see these as interconnected, which they are.

Q31 Ruth Edwards: Thank you. Sophie Linden, how much of an issue is honour-based violence or honour-based abuse in London? What is the Mayor's office doing to tackle these types of crime?

Sophie Linden: I would reiterate what Nicole said. This conversation and these questions really do show the interconnections and how important it is that we connect it all and do not have different strategies.

In London, of course, we recognise that there is a real issue with honour-based crimes, honour-based violence and harmful practices. To tackle that, we have put investment in. The Mayor has invested about £5 million in three programmes looking at harmful practices, which is of course about supporting the victims, but also about disrupting the perpetrators and working across agencies, so it is also about the training of agencies.



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We have had a programme of investing in training professionals who will be coming across women and girls who are victims of honour-based violence so that they can understand it, spot it and refer appropriately. It is an issue in London, as it is across the country, and we have programmes and services tackling it. Of course, we need to do more. In terms of policing, there is the issue of making sure the police—frontline officers—can spot the signs, know what to do and have appropriate places they can go. That is certainly something we are working on.

- Q32 Ruth Edwards:** Thank you. Claire Waxman, we have had evidence from the Crown Prosecution Service that one of the big challenges with prosecutions in this area is that many victims are very nervous about coming forward because of the abuse that takes place within community or family networks. There is obviously the international dimension to this as well. What do you think can be done to better support more victims to come forward?

Claire Waxman: Under-reporting is obviously a big issue in this area, and for that very reason there is fear of coming forward, and fear of reprisal or retribution and what will happen should people come forward, report to the police and go through the criminal justice process.

As I said at the start, one of the critical issues is about getting that early wraparound support to victims as soon as they report and come in. It is about doing the right needs assessment and making sure you are picking up all the complex needs and getting the right support, advocacy and risk assessments so that they are protected throughout that process and are getting the right support. Those are still issues for many victims coming into the criminal justice process, but more for victims of honour-based abuse and crimes, because of the huge risks that they face when they come in to report. It goes back to what I said originally: it is about having the right support as early as possible and identifying the needs of the victim as early as possible.

Ruth Edwards: Thank you very much.

- Q33 Chair:** I have couple of quick follow-up questions on specific policy measures. I have been working with a woman in Yorkshire who showed great bravery in leaving an abusive relationship in which she had been physically assaulted twice. She went to the police, but due to errors on the police side, but also how difficult it was for her sometimes to respond to requests from the police swiftly, there was no prosecution. She was told that the six-month limit for common assault meant that there could be no prosecution, and there were other reasons why other charges could not be pursued. It seems to me that this is a broader issue. Can you tell me very briefly your views on whether you would support an extension to the time limit of six months for common assault prosecutions where there is domestic abuse, and whether you have seen similar cases? I will go first to you, Nicole, very briefly.

Nicole Jacobs: I would be very supportive of that change. I would like to think that hand in hand with that is better-functioning support for victims



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when they are reporting and more structure around the operational partnerships to ensure that the police are getting what they need to do a good job. Having said all that, thinking about the context of covid and some of the circumstances that you just described, it seems very reasonable to think that this is a crime that would merit that type of approach.

Q34 **Chair:** I have to hurry you, sorry. Can I ask the others whether they would support that or have seen similar cases?

Sophie Linden: It is something that we would support. As Nicole said, it is something that we lobbied on during the covid pandemic, because we were extremely concerned that there would be women who had become victims and were unable to report or come forward, and the timing would be out.

Q35 **Chair:** Thank you. Yasmin Khan?

Yasmin Khan: Most definitely. As you laid out, the delays are a big reason why many victims don't come forward. It would also give the police and professionals time to look at special measures and the trauma-informed approach that we are really trying to achieve.

Q36 **Chair:** Thank you. Claire Waxman?

Claire Waxman: I absolutely would support it because we see such an issue at the moment. I have many cases that are out of time and unfortunately the case does not get taken forward, and that victim is left at risk, so we absolutely need to look at an extension. I am mindful that the police are a bit reticent about extending that, because they do not want the investigation to go on longer than it should and to have a suspect under investigation for a huge length of time, but that comes back to the police doing their job effectively and responding quickly and effectively in these investigations.

Q37 **Chair:** Thank you. My final question—apologies for asking for brief answers—is that as part of the Domestic Abuse Bill, we discussed whether serial perpetrators of abuse should be added to the serious offenders register. Again, do you believe that the serious offenders register should be extended in that way?

Sophie Linden: There are two things there. The police already have a lot of powers, and they need to get much better at offender management, basically. They can already do a lot, but yes, one of the things we have been lobbying for is a domestic abuse register. We wanted the DA Bill to include a clause saying that that would be reviewed in 12 months' time, to enable the police to put their house in order in a better way, but also to look at what progress could be made by having a domestic abuse perpetrators register.

Claire Waxman: As we have talked about, we see rape and domestic abuse prolific offenders and stalking prolific offenders, so it is absolutely imperative that we are able to track that. As Sophie said, the police can already do that: they need to do a better job at joining the offenders to



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different crimes and tracking them as well. However, as we are hearing, with such low levels of prosecutions for coercive control and stalking, I worry it would give a false sense of hope to victims. I think a lot of perpetrators will not end up on that register because of all the issues we have discussed today.

Yasmin Khan: Yes, I think there is a need for that, because it really holds perpetrators to account and sends a very strong message about the offending behaviour.

Nicole Jacobs: I agree with a lot of what has been said. We need to do a serious piece of work to look at what powers exist already. There are areas that are looking at high-harm offenders, and we need to remember, as Claire just said, that in some areas such as Northumbria, they will tell you that when they are selecting high-harm offenders, they find that 50% of those who are being monitored by the police in these really specialist ways—which we need to do a lot more of—do not have criminal histories.

We have to do something about known perpetrators with criminal histories who are serial perpetrators, but that will not be good enough if we do not have something in place that looks at the whole intelligence available to the police to enable them to select perpetrators who are likely to cause the highest rates of harm. So this is a little bit the registry argument, but going further and doing more. We need to really come together and decide what works, look at these pockets of exceptional practice and learn from them. We need to have higher expectations about practices differing from area to area. We need to have, across the board—

Chair: I am sorry to interrupt you, but I am going to have to draw this session to a close. I am very appreciative of everybody's evidence. I thank our first panel—we are very grateful for your time and the evidence you have given us—and ask the second panel to be ready to answer our questions.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Surwat Sohail, Cordelia Tucker-O'Sullivan and Harriet Wistrich.

Q38 **Chair:** I welcome Cordelia Tucker-O'Sullivan from Refuge, Surwat Sohail from Roshni Birmingham, and Harriet Wistrich from the Centre for Women's Justice. Can I begin by asking you the first question that I asked our first panel: what, based on your experience, do you see as the priority now in terms of support for action against violence against women and girls? We will begin with Cordelia Tucker-O'Sullivan.

Cordelia Tucker-O'Sullivan: Thank you very much, and thank you for having me today. The fundamental thing that we need to get right, which is still very poor in practice, is funding for specialist support services. It is extremely patchy and piecemeal. It is very, very short term, and there just isn't enough money made available to ensure that all survivors who reach out for support can access it, as well as that the services being



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made available are high quality, independent and delivered by specialists. While short-term funding boosts have of course been very welcome and can mean the difference between a service remaining open for a short period of time and a service closing its doors, the lack of long-term, consistent funding makes it extremely difficult to deliver this service effectively and efficiently when so much of our resource is diverted into recruiting and retaining specialist staff and retendering for services that we have run effectively for many years. So, overall, we would support a return to long-term, ring-fenced grant funding for the provision of specialist independent services. We think that should form the cornerstone of the upcoming VAWG strategies.

Just to give a bit more context for this, our national domestic abuse helpline, which provides critical practical and emotional support via our phone lines, live chat service and web form, as well as acting as the national gateway to specialist refuge accommodation across the country, has experienced a 61% increase, above pre-pandemic baselines, in the volume of calls and contacts that we log on our database. While the Home Office did provide some very short-term emergency funding, this has now ended and it is now up to Refuge to fundraise to continue to subsidise that service. Of course, this makes the service fundamentally vulnerable, and there is no guarantee that we will continue to be able to answer the number of calls and contacts that we are getting.

I want to pick up on the point made by Nicole, on the previous panel, about implementation of the part 4 duty. We have experienced years of funding cuts to our refuge services and we now subsidise almost all of them across the country. While the new legal duty could put specialist refuges on a more sustainable footing, what we are really concerned about is that it might actually lead to the commissioning of cheap, generic services that amount to, frankly, little more than homelessness accommodation with a little bit of domestic abuse support on the side. What we really need to do is safeguard existing provision, but also enable the national network of refuges to grow and meet demand. We need to make sure that the duty is much more specific about commissioning specialist refuges. Nicole mentioned national oversight. We need to make sure that that oversight has teeth, so that where local authorities are failing to commission specialist gendered services, something actually happens. We need to make sure that the duty is fully funded—in addition to ensuring that there is adequate funding for the range of community-based services. Those services are just as important for survivors' safety and recovery and are extremely precarious, given that their existence relies on bidding into various ad hoc pots of funding, which has no guarantee of existing past the next funding cycle.

I want to touch on support for migrant women as well. If there is anything that I can identify as one of the biggest gaps when it comes to supporting survivors in this country, it is services for migrant women with insecure immigration status or with no recourse to public funds. The way in which refuges are funded is partly via women's entitlement to housing benefit and partly via support costs that come from various pots of money.



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Migrant women with no recourse find it extremely difficult to access refuge accommodation, precisely because they are not entitled to claim housing benefit. The only sustainable solution is to abolish the no recourse to public funds condition for migrant survivors, and extend the domestic violence rules, so that they can secure their immigration status.

This has been discussed quite thoroughly, but we would also very much support the introduction of safe reporting routes for migrant women. We recently supported a woman who contacted us through the helpline. She had reported the violence and abuse that she was experiencing to the police, only to be deported before she was able to access legal advice or any specialist support, and this increased the risk that she and her children were facing. So I think it is absolutely critical that that firewall is introduced between the police and immigration enforcement, and other public services. I could talk about this for days, but I will leave it there for now.

Surwat Sohail: Again, thank you so much for inviting me to the meeting today. Although our previous strategy talked about the support for marginalised women and black and minoritised women, on the ground we have seen the closure of between 45% and 52% of the specialist refuges. The refuges have been closed down, or they have been decommissioned and are relying on pockets of funding to continue. We need to do more work around marginalised women. During the last couple of years, we have been looking at our figures, particularly during the pandemic, and we saw a 453% increase in the number of victims we supported. That has been primarily because during the pandemic the funding was made available, and we were able to expand the services that we had to meet the needs that were always there.

Another piece of work that we have done is consultation. We consulted the women who came through our service during the pandemic. One of the things that we wanted to look at was whether domestic abuse had gone up during the pandemic. One hundred per cent. of these women actually said, "No, I have been a victim for many years. I've always tolerated the domestic abuse, because he was at work. He would come back for a few hours, then he would go to sleep." We have a society in which women are tolerating the abuse. We did quite a large campaign whereby we created videos in different languages that went to some of the specialist TV channels. Those generated a huge response. A lot of the women said, "Because it was in a language I could understand, I was able to then pick up the phone and call you." Also, the information was being taken to the homes. We had one service user who said, "I wasn't allowed out of the house. The only time I was allowed out of the house was to throw the garbage away." She said, "I used to go and throw black bags into the bin. I wasn't allowed to see relatives. I wasn't allowed to have friends."

We need to be able to get the information across. It is not just about supporting the victims. Prosecutions are quite low. The biggest issue that we are facing is around honour and shame. We have to do more preventive work—that is work in schools. We need to do more work with

the communities. We have to allow the communities to have their say, and then we have to constructively challenge those views.

I want to share a workshop that I did with the community. We had a group of 15 members. Out of 15 members, we had seven who very much supported the idea that victims should not be forced into marriage, but we had two gentlemen there who said, "On certain grounds, they can be forced into marriage." But what we saw as we went through the workshop was that those seven members were able to stand up and say, "No, this is wrong" and constructively challenge the other person. We have to have more platforms where we can do that.

The other piece of work that we did was just before the pandemic. We worked with 750 children in schools. Again, it was a workshop. We did a session with them at the beginning to test their knowledge, and a session at the end to see what differences we made. In the session that we did right at the beginning, 90% of the children could not even pick up honour-based abuse and forced marriage. If they cannot even understand what is abuse, how are they going to seek support if they are victims? What was more alarming was that, during those sessions, teachers sat in and we asked the teachers, "If this child came to you, what would you do if they had just disclosed forced marriage or honour-based abuse?" A great number of them said, "We would actually talk to the parents."

There are also other wider issues when dealing with honour-based abuse. It is about how we are recording things. I have dealt with the same issue in the organisations I have worked with. Women come in and the first thing we ask is, "What is the reason for the referral?" Quite simply, we get the feedback, "It was the physical abuse." We never drill down to see the complex needs behind that.

When I first joined the company, we did an exercise where I looked at the figures and said, "Go back and speak to the service users and ask these questions." Ninety per cent. of those victims of domestic abuse were also victims of honour-based abuse. Some were also victims of forced marriage, but we had missed all that because we did not ask the right questions.

There are issues around training frontline providers. Whether it's teachers, social workers or police officers, the training is not there for them to have the knowledge and skills to deal with those cases.

Q39 **Chair:** I am sorry to cut you short. You are giving very powerful evidence and we will want to come back and ask further questions on it, but let me go to Harriet Wistrich before we come back on those issues.

Harriet Wistrich: Thanks very much. We are a legal charity. We are criminal justice focused and do a lot of work around the country, in England and Wales, with frontline service providers and survivors generally.

There is a huge lack of confidence generally, across the board, in the criminal justice system. We have seen a deterioration in the



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implementation of measures to tackle violence against women and in the charging and prosecution of crimes. In particular, we have seen that played out in rape, but also across the board in domestic abuse generally. We would identify the key problem being not the need for more legislation but the need to implement existing legislation.

We produced a police super-complaint, which focused on four areas in relation to domestic abuse, where there were measures to protect victims and survivors but there was a lack of implementation. In particular, DAPOs are now being brought in but previously we had domestic violence protection orders, and our finding was that police forces were using them in only 1% of cases. They were either not using them at all or sending women to get civil remedies, which puts the onus back on victims. There are issues around bail, on which we have been working closely and on which there is a bit of movement, and a lack of applying for restraining orders.

Generally, the measures are there, but they are not being implemented. Why are they not being implemented? We have seen a lack of commitment and resourcing. In terms of specialist units in policing, we are hearing across the country that a lot of specialist units are no longer operating, so you end up with police officers who do not understand the issues. In particular, we are seeing a lack of accountability and a lack of leadership, which is critical in order to ensure implementation of existing measures. We do have laws, and there are laws that can be improved, but we see a lack of follow-through in the implementation. Laws and rhetoric are no good unless you actually can see them operating on the ground. That is a key issue for us.

In our submission we also discuss femicide. The previous panellists talked about the need for a national oversight mechanism, and that also is about learning and accountability. What we have, again, is a range of different ways in which we can look at and learn from domestic homicides: recommendations are made in DHRs, and by the IOPC if there are police failings, and there is an inquest process, with lessons learned and recommendations made by coroners. But where are we learning from those? There is no better way for anyone involved in the criminal justice process to understand what needs to be done when looking at the most extreme cases—that is, the murders of women—than by seeing what failed along the road.

In order for us to be more effective, we need more specialist support, more resourcing, and more oversight, leadership and accountability. That may help to begin to restore some confidence in the criminal justice system, which is at an all-time low, particularly in relation to rape and serious sexual violence, which is a key area that we have worked around. We have put in detailed submissions on that, because I know the Home Affairs Committee is looking specifically at the investigation and prosecution of rape; we have a lot to say about that.

Chair: I apologise that our time is a bit constrained this morning. Laura, Ruth and Adam have questions to put to you. May I just ask you to be as



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focused and brief in your responses as you are able to, so that we can get through as many of these questions as possible? Thank you and apologies for that.

- Q40 **Laura Farris:** Harriet, I have some follow-up questions for you. I am sorry to go back to first principles, but I would be very interested to know how you think violence against women—sexual violence, regular violence—has changed or is changing. Are you seeing more of it? Are you seeing new kinds of violence materialising? If so, could you tell us what they are?

Harriet Wistrich: If you look at underlying causes, we know that the huge change in our culture over the last 10 to 15 years is around social media, and around the growing and widespread availability of hardcore pornography that is available to children. I am sure that that must play a role, certainly in relation to sexual violence; it appears from surveys, particularly from young women, that there is a greater acceptability that things like strangulation and other forms of extreme violence are normal because that is portrayed in pornography. That probably has caused a change.

I think serial offenders know how to target the vulnerable. They know, for example, that the use of drugs and drink is very effective in enabling them to get away with it, because if a victim does not recognise and does not remember what has happened to them, the police are saying, "Well, we can't prosecute because where is the evidence?" If a drug is lost from the system, that is a problem. As long as the criminal justice system is not holding offenders to account, they will see where they can target more effectively and get away with it. Those are a few things off the top of my head.

- Q41 **Laura Farris:** I want to ask one more question about what you said about causation and online pornography. One of the things that we probably have to accept is that, in some respects, women are encouraged to be complicit in their own abuse—for example, with choking. How we deal with the issue of consent was one of the issues in the Domestic Abuse Act. The subject of online pornography has been well covered, but do you think that there are other kinds of triggers or environments that are not properly addressing nascent misogyny—the early development of the kind of conduct that could subsequently become criminal?

Harriet Wistrich: This is perhaps not my best specialism, but one area we have done some work around is in schools and among youngsters. There are real issues that have come alive quite recently because of the campaign—I have forgotten the name of it—

Laura Farris: Everyone's Invited.

Harriet Wistrich: Yes. That has shown us that schools are not intervening on the side of victims. They are not taking a stand, and obviously there is a whole issue about education, and education of youngsters, and trying to undermine the false narratives that are part of a kind of pornographic culture around what is normal, what is to be



expected, and what you are supposed to enjoy in a sexual encounter. That has to be pretty critical in respect of that form of violence.

- Q42 **Laura Farris:** Going back to what you said at the very beginning about the police response, and the adequacy of the police response, if you were going to make just two or three changes to the national policing response on sexual violence specifically, what would they be?

Harriet Wistrich: We highlighted some issues in our other submission, but it is what Claire Waxman was talking about earlier. The critical thing is that victims, or women who come forward to report, feel as though they are being treated as suspects, and that is because essentially the way victims are being treated is unlike any other crime. This is very particular, I think, to sexual violence crimes, and generally crimes against women. There are very extensive and unnecessary disclosure requests. Another issue that we have tackled is around excessive digital data requests, and other third-party disclosure requests. There is guidance from the Court of Appeal and elsewhere about reasonable and necessary requests but, I think partly as a backlash after the Liam Allan case and others, there has been a move in the other direction. That is one issue.

Another issue that we have found is that the police are kind of returning to a previous approach. They are saying, "We can't bring a prosecution if there is no corroboration." That is not a correct statement of law, so that is another area that we have highlighted. Then, in relation to prosecution, we have been very concerned by the Crown Prosecution Service's decision to remove what was known as a merits-based approach, which was very clear guidance that really helped to improve the prosecution of rape. It was brought in as figures were increasing in terms of cases brought, and the CPS removed that guidance. We believe that that was a trigger to a reduction in the number of cases being charged.

- Q43 **Ruth Edwards:** Cordelia, Refuge did an excellent campaign, the Naked Threat, which obviously resulted in the outlawing of threats to share intimate images. From your experience, how are survivors of domestic abuse having technology used against them in other ways? We have some really disturbing stories from local campaigners of tracking chips being put in children's teddy bears or women being made to stand in front of CCTV cameras in their own homes, so that perpetrators can monitor them when they are away at work. I was wondering what you were seeing at Refuge.

Cordelia Tucker-O'Sullivan: Violence against women and girls and domestic abuse has not fundamentally changed, in the sense that it is still about power and control. It is still about male entitlement, and it is about misogyny. However, what has changed is the ease with which abusers are able to stalk, monitor and gaslight women, due to the proliferation of widely available and very cheap technologies. Perpetrators are certainly using these technologies to perpetrate abuse.

We have seen some changes. For example, the total proportion of women reporting to our helpline experiences of tech abuse has significantly increased over the past few years and now hovers at around the same



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level as the proportion of women who are reporting experiences of non-fatal strangulation, which we also know is a very serious problem and which has recently been made an explicit criminal offence in the Domestic Abuse Act.

When it comes to tech abuse specifically, over the past year or so, in the course of the pandemic, we have seen an increase in the number of cases referred to our specialist tech abuse team—which is made up of staff specially trained to deal with very complex cases, like some of the cases that you have raised—and their case load has almost doubled since the pandemic began and actually in the past five to six months has increased by 118%. These cases involving complex misuse of technologies to perpetrate violence and abuse are growing at very, very serious and significant rates. Despite that, our specialist tech abuse team, as with the majority of specialist services, remains chronically under-resourced and with very, very high case loads, so it is critical that these teams have the funding they need.

One of the more concrete ways abusers use technology to perpetrate abuse is by using online platforms such as social media to harass, intimidate and threaten women, including sharing or threatening to share intimate images, hacking survivors' accounts, setting up fake accounts to harass women and impersonating women online. For example, we have recently supported a woman whose perpetrator set up over 200 fake accounts on just one social media site, for the sole purpose of harassing the survivor. When she reported this to the platform, they said that they were unable to do anything about it because the perpetrator was changing the public names on each of the accounts. For us, that is essentially an abdication of responsibility, to be quite frank, and leaves us in a situation where abusers are able to operate with complete impunity and survivors are often forced offline and into further isolation.

On the draft Online Safety Bill, which was published just a few weeks ago, we have welcomed the thrust of, in terms of putting duties on platforms around this kind of harmful practice and content, which is abusive. However, it is a huge missed opportunity in its current form, because it doesn't once mention or prioritise violence against women and girls in the same way as it mentions child sexual exploitation and abuse and extremist content. By failing to prioritise online VAWG, we are missing the opportunity to hold social media companies to account, so we really couldn't encourage more the DCMS and the Home Office to look again at the draft and make sure that online VAWG of the type that I have described is prioritised and tackled.

Q44 Ruth Edwards: In Refuge's experience, is the use, the exploitation, of social media platforms the main way in which abusers are using technology now to target women?

Cordelia Tucker-O'Sullivan: It ranges widely. That is one of the more common ways in which perpetrators use technology to perpetrate abuse, but there are many other ways. We recently supported a survivor where, in the relationship, she and her child were constantly monitored via



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various devices: their Google Nest, iPad, Alexa smart home devices, home computer and mobile phone. It was all of these devices. Basically, any device connected to the internet was being used by the perpetrator to monitor not just their movements and their conversations but any activity that was happening on that device.

She separated from her abuser and set up new accounts for these devices. However, they were subsequently hacked, along with her social media accounts. When she recovered the accounts, she could see an IP address that she suspected was that of the perpetrator. However, when she reported that to the police, they basically said it wasn't their responsibility and advised her to get in touch with the platforms and, if this didn't work, just stop using the devices and come off social media altogether. During the following five months, she reported three additional incidents of hacking of her accounts—her wi-fi, her Apple ID and another social media account—and on every single occasion, the police advised her to come offline and change her password, and refused to investigate these as crimes and even to speak to her partner about the incidents.

There is a wide range of behaviours, both from businesses and platforms and from the police. The response across the board is quite poor, and there definitely need to be some concrete actions, like amending the Online Safety Bill, to better tackle these issues and hold these different agencies to account.

Q45 Ruth Edwards: That is very helpful; thank you, Cordelia. Surwat, does this chime with your experience?

Surwat Sohail: Absolutely. We have seen an increase: the main one we have had is where you have these doorbells that are recording people going in and out of the house. That has been very common with some of the service users we have dealt with. Again, with Facebook, we have recently faced an issue where the perpetrator put her picture up and said, "Looking for love." The service user was concerned about honour issues—that her own family may turn on her, thinking she had done that post. We did everything we could to try to bring that post down, but we faced shut doors. We contacted the police—they were not able to do anything. We contacted Facebook, and we just could not do anything. They basically said, "It does not contravene any of our provisions," so we were not able to do anything. It is an area that we are getting more and more issues in.

As Cordelia mentioned, we have also had issues around changing names on the different Facebook accounts and Twitter. It varies; it takes different forms. Again, we have had ones where there are cameras inside the house and they are being monitored every step as to what they are doing, where they are going and what time they are eating.

Q46 Ruth Edwards: That is very helpful; thank you very much. I am just conscious of time, so my final question is to Harriet. You have obviously represented many women in court, particularly in violence cases. On a slight tangent to that, I understand that there is no criminal offence at the moment in the UK to prosecute cyber-flashing: physical flashing, yes,



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but not if you are being sent unsolicited—well, dick pics, quite frankly. It is very difficult to prosecute it under existing harassment offenses. In your view, does there need to be a specific law on cyber-flashing to make sure that we are trying to tackle this? The number of women who seem to have been victims of it is really huge.

Harriet Wistrich: It is not particularly an area we have worked around, but I can see that Cordelia wants to come in. I think that Refuge have done some real work on that, so it might make more sense for her to answer that question.

Cordelia Tucker-O'Sullivan: You have touched on a broader point about image-based sexual abuse and intimate image abuse, which is that, again, the laws are very complicated. They are held across multiple different pieces of legislation and are, a lot of the time, quite incoherent: like you said, physical flashing and cyber-flashing have different levels of criminality, and we also have the same with sharing, or threatening to share, intimate images versus down-blousing and upskirting. There is a huge range of incoherence when it comes to the law, as well as complication, and the Law Commission is doing some brilliant work in reviewing the law around this, and we made a very lengthy submission to its consultation. We agree that cyber-flashing in particular is not adequately covered by the criminal law, and that the law needs to be both simplified and extended to meet, frankly, common-sense understanding of these crimes happening both in person and online.

Q47 **Adam Holloway:** On the points about the technical side, I was horrified to hear a story of an American having lunch in London and showing images of his wife's bedroom from his mobile phone.

Just back to the point about hardcore pornography, obviously strangulation and all that sort of thing is terrible, but I think it is even more insidious than that. So many young men—so many teenagers—are watching pornography that does not reflect general attitudes towards sex, and which really objectifies women in a way that we have never really seen before. What on earth do we do about that?

Harriet Wistrich: There are obviously always going to be debates about what is illegal and what is not, censorship and so on, but forms of extreme hate are perpetrated, and hardcore pornography often involves the actual harm of women or girls in the making. Clearly, an investigation into what is happening to produce that hardcore stuff is important.

Q48 **Adam Holloway:** I was making the slightly different point that it is so generalised that I just think this has changed the view of young men about women. Even at the "mild" scale, the sorts of things that kids are seeing, and the expectations that they are getting about the way women behave—I think you know what I am talking about—is a real problem for our society. I would love to hear about how we can deal with that, because I personally cannot think how.

Harriet Wistrich: I am sure we have to, at the very least, go back to young children at school and have a very brave and engaged process



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through schooling and through out-of-school provision to address and discuss that and relationships. Again, it is not quite my area, but I think that has to be something that we get people to engage in, and that we get children to engage in understanding what is normal and what is not, what is harmful, and what is abusive.

Cordelia Tucker-O'Sullivan: Refuge is a feminist organisation, so we believe that violence against women and girls is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. We are of course extremely concerned about the objectification of women and the relationship that it has with misogyny. We are a small team; we have not done specific detailed work on the relationship between extreme pornography and violence against women and girls, but we certainly do have real concerns about the normalisation of what, in many instances, appears to be abusive and non-consensual sexual imagery, and the impact that it has on attitudes towards women and violence against women and girls.

I agree with Harriet that, ultimately, this has to be a point of education more widely. Extreme pornography is one example of wider misogynistic attitudes towards women. Yes, it is very explicit and the sharp end of misogynistic imagery, but this has to be a wider piece of work around challenging gender norms and stereotypes and misogyny, and which, at the very least, can be built into mandatory relationships and sex education, with a really well thought through curriculum delivered by specialists who are not afraid to have those difficult conversations with children and young people.

Adam Holloway: I was not really talking about extreme pornography; I was talking about how this is so absolutely rampant that it has really changed the view of women for so many young men. I think that is a great problem. That you both very much indeed.

Q49 **Chair:** Surwat, may I come back to some of the evidence you gave at the beginning? I was struck by your comments about the work you have done in schools, with the teachers you asked effectively raising the abuse with the perpetrators or going to the parents when young people raised concerns about forced marriage or honour-based violence. Could you say a little more about that and about how widespread you think that problem is?

Surwat Sohail: The workshops were aimed at the children, so this was not a workshop aimed at teachers, but it was during the workshop that we said to the young people, "What would you do if your friend or somebody who has confided in you said that they are going through these issues and they had disclosed it to you? What would you do?" The young person looked and said, "I would go to my teacher." We then just suddenly turned to the teacher and said, "What would you do?" and the teacher said, "I would speak to the parents." There was no particular workshop with teachers at that stage, but this same issue was repeated in three different schools, where we had exactly the same response.

Q50 **Chair:** Do you think, then, that that would be the widespread response



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from teachers in schools across the country?

Surwat Sohail: Yes, because there is no mandatory training for teachers around forced marriage and honour-based abuse. A lot of the teachers tend to follow the basic principle, which is to discuss everything with the parents—without realising that where there is a risk to the child, we shouldn't be doing that. In particular, we must identify the high risks in cases of honour-based abuse and forced marriage. The training is not there, unfortunately.

Q51 **Chair:** Teachers get training on safeguarding issues and child abuse more widely. Why are they not getting training on honour-based abuse or forced marriage as part of that?

Surwat Sohail: If they had a simple case where the child actually said, "I am being forced into marriage," I think they would follow that process. The scenario we were discussing was one where a child said, "I am going on holiday. I am a bit scared. What if my parents do something? There's been talk about marriage in the past and my cousin's gone abroad." It is those cases that I am more concerned about teachers missing. Where somebody has come forward and said, "I am a victim of forced marriage," or, "I am a victim of honour-based abuse," yes, the existing training would cover that and they would probably follow the process. It is the other cases where, a lot of the time, we get subtle information drip-fed. You are not going to get many victims saying, "I am a forced marriage victim," or, "I am an honour-based abuse victim." That is where the teachers are missing.

Chair: Thank you. We have to draw this evidence session to a close. We are very grateful to you for your time. We are looking to pursue some of these individual issues further, so on that point, if there is any more information that you are able to send us on what kind of training or support you think there ought to be in schools, that would be very welcome. Likewise, to all our panellists, any further written evidence you want to send us about issues that we should focus further on would be very welcome. I thank everyone for their evidence.