

Written evidence from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner [EOV0045]

1. Role of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner

2. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner is the pre-eminent independent voice for victims and survivors of domestic abuse. As an independent statutory body, the Commissioner works to ensure that no matter who you are or where you live there should be a strong and comprehensive response to domestic abuse
3. The Commissioner uses statutory powers, which are set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, to raise public awareness and hold both agencies and government to account in tackling domestic abuse.

Response to the Call for Evidence

4. To what extent is there evidence that men who exhibit certain non-criminal behaviours, including online, go on to commit criminal offences against women and girls?

4.1. There is a growing body of evidence which suggests that there is a correlation between men who perpetrate online abuse and abuse offline.

Evidence base:

- Research for SWGfL's new platform, Minerva [[Minerva Research Finds Links Between Online and Offline Abuse | SWGfL](#)] has shown that perpetrators of online abuse will also often show a pattern of abusive behaviour in real life. The study undertaken by Dr Katherine Allen and Megan Hermolle at the University of Suffolk highlights the importance of linking online and offline abusive behaviours, as well as the impact on victims, many of whom are women and girls.
- Evidence from the National Institute of Health in the US [[Cyber Abuse among Men Arrested for Domestic Violence: Cyber Monitoring Moderates the Relationship between Alcohol Problems and Intimate Partner Violence - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)] highlights the high prevalence of cyber-monitoring amongst men, its links with inter-personal violence, and, when paired with alcohol problems, also increases likelihood of perpetration of abuse.
- Evidence from the National Institute of Health in Thailand [[Connections Between Online Harassment and Offline Violence among Youth in Central Thailand - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)] indicates that offline violence and online harassment are closely interlinked among Thai youth, and that violence and bullying prevention programs should tackle both online harassment and offline violence as interconnected problems.
- Findings from a study examining 100 cases of intimate partner femicide to determine the frequency of technology-facilitated intimate partner violence in Queensland, Australia [[Intimate Risks: Examining Online and Offline Abuse, Homicide Flags, and Femicide: Victims & Offenders: Vol 17, No 5 \(tandfonline.com\)](#)] indicates that risk factors of intimate partner femicide,

including coercive control and stalking are closely associated with technology-facilitated intimate partner violence. This suggests that technology allows offenders to enact an omnipresent violence. Implications highlight the need for future research, policy, and practice to acknowledge the interconnectedness of offline and online abuse in responding to fatal intimate partner violence.

2.2 The Committee should also look at recent cases of mass shootings, such as the Plymouth incident and also international cases in the United States where there is presence of online misogyny (but at that point in time, not criminal behaviours) and the escalation to mass shooting. Further research includes:

- A study led by Monash University in collaboration with RUSI [[Misogyny, Hostile Beliefs and the Transmission of Extremism | Royal United Services Institute \(rusi.org\)](#)] examines the role of online channels in amplifying gender ideology and misogyny across transnational networks. Research found that the impact of the online/offline intersection of communication throughout narratives can be used to promote and legitimise violence and misogynistic messages towards women.

3. To what extent is there evidence that men who commit certain crimes (such as non-contact sexual offences) go on to commit serious violent offences against women and girls?

- There is risk of escalation and lack of identification pathways as well as early interventions. Although not within the specific remit of this Call for Evidence, it would be remiss to not direct the Women and Equalities Committee to the growing body of evidence which shows the impacts of growing up in a household where there is domestic abuse, and the impacts this has on criminal activity later in life, both VAWG and non VAWG related. The DAC has discussed this in her recent consultation responses:
 - [DAC-response-to-the-SVD-Guidance-Consultation-21st-July-2022-1.pdf \(domesticabusecommissioner.uk\)](#)
 - [The-Domestic-Abuse-Commissioner-for-England-and-Wales_-Response-to-Government-consultation-on-Childrens-Social-Care-Stable-Homes-Built-on-Love-1.pdf \(domesticabusecommissioner.uk\)](#)
- The DAC would also direct attention to:
 - McNally and Fremouw's paper (2014) [[Examining risk of escalation: A critical review of the exhibitionistic behavior literature - ScienceDirect](#)] which critically reviews the literature regarding the reported link between male exhibitionistic behaviour and contact sexual offending in 12 studies post-1981. The studies reveal that a history of exhibitionistic behaviour was prevalent in a minority of perpetrators of various contact sexual offenses. Over an average follow-up period of greater than five years, an estimated 5–10% of exhibitionistic perpetrators were found to

escalate to contact sexual offending, while approximately 25% recidivated with a subsequent exhibitionistic offense. The most supported risk factor for escalation was a general clustering of antisocial behaviour, including a history of sexual and nonsexual convictions.

- A study published in the Cambridge Journal of Evidence-Based Policing [[Targeting Escalation of Intimate Partner Violence: Evidence from 52,000 Offenders | Cambridge Journal of Evidence-Based Policing \(springer.com\)](#)] investigating whether the severity or frequency of intimate partner violence or abuse reported to Thames Valley police increases over time, once a unique perpetrator-victim couple has encountered police, has found that despite there being increasing frequency, there is no evidence of increasing seriousness of harm caused to victims.
- Due to the disparity between studies using different data, the Australian Institute of Criminology [[How does domestic violence escalate over time? \(aic.gov.au\)](#)] highlights the difficulty in determining whether escalation is in fact characteristic of abusive relationships. It is apparent that additional research using different data and methods is needed to explore this dimension of abusive relationships and understand what escalation means for victim-survivors.
- Research published by the University of Gloucestershire on Intimate Partner Homicides [[The Homicide Timeline - University of Gloucestershire \(glos.ac.uk\)](#)] suggests that violence is no longer the biggest predictor of homicide, finding similarities in many cases in the early stages of a relationship which may allow professionals more opportunities to intervene and save lives. The research highlights the shift in emphasis that is needed to focus motivation behind actions rather than the actions themselves.
- Analysis by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [[Gender-based hate crime as an early warning indicator of escalating violence and armed conflict - Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog \(icrc.org\)](#)] suggests that the spectrum of misogynistic violence between involuntary celibates and armed groups using extreme violence against women is based around the desire to restore 'traditional' gender norms of male dominance and maintain systemic inequality between men and women. This often manifests in gender-based hate crimes before escalating into community violence and armed conflict.
- A study by Kafonek, Cray and Parker (2022) [[Understanding Escalation Through Intimate Partner Homicide Narratives - Katherine Kafonek, Andrew C. Gray, Karen F. Parker, 2022 \(sagepub.com\)](#)] investigating escalation from intimate partner violence to intimate partner homicide by exploring the known circumstances leading up to a lethal event, drawing on qualitative data from law enforcement reports and coroner/medical examiner reports to identify themes preceding and surrounding IPH incidents. Findings support the utility of risk assessments in identifying escalation while illustrating the complex ways that violence between

current or former intimate partners can escalate to lethality, particularly the role of separation and the use of firearms.

- Levell's work [[Bristol University Press | Boys, Childhood Domestic Abuse and Gang Involvement - Violence at Home, Violence On-Road, By Jade Levell](#)] highlights how boys and young men have been previously overlooked in domestic violence and abuse policy and practice, particularly in the case of boys who are criminalised and labelled as gang-involved by the time they reach their teens. Levell offers radical and important insights into how boys in this context navigate their journey to manhood with the constant presence of violence in their lives, in addition to poverty and racial marginalisation.

How effective is (a) the police service and (b) the criminal justice system at responding to these behaviours and offences and how might those responses be improved?

- The recently passed Online Safety Bill will have a Code of Practice for Controlling and Coercive Behaviour (CCB). It is vital that this Code, which can set minimum standards for terms of service, training, response, and prevention for CCB is ambitious and does not become limited to only cover CCB where it is being perpetrated towards a specific individual, it must prevent CCB being encouraged as a criminal offence (which Codes of Practice should be doing). Where we see online influencers who over a collection of content encourage CCB the Code of Practice must work to ensure the service prevents and responds to the content and its creator.
 - A report by Women's Aid into online abuse, harassment and stalking [[Evidence Hub: Virtual world, real fear - Women's Aid \(womensaid.org.uk\)](#)] draws out key themes demonstrating the intrinsic link between online abuse, harassment and stalking and domestic violence as part of a pattern of behaviours by perpetrators, and makes recommendations for Government, social media providers and criminal justice agencies. It argues that the impact online abuse has on women's lives has been underestimated by all statutory services and that the responses that women victims of online abuse receive from the police, criminal justice system and social media providers are currently inadequate.
 - A report by Refuge on the online abuse of women [[Refuge launches 'Unsocial spaces' - a report on the online abuse of women - Refuge](#)] highlights how social media companies and other online platforms are failing to protect women and girls from abuse. It calls on the government to explicitly include VAWG in the Online Safety Bill to compel platforms to act.
 - Please also see the DAC's response to Ofcom's Call for Evidence on the Online Safety Bill which provides further evidence here: [2310-Ofcom-Call-for-evidence-categorisation-research-and-advice.pdf \(domesticabusecommissioner.uk\)](#) The DAC's response to OfCom's Call for Evidence on the Online Safety Bill encourages Ofcom to pay

particular attention to submissions made by the Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition of Experts, including the submission by Refuge who hold a tech abuse response function in their organisation.

- The DAC also provided a response to the Home Affairs Select Committee's Call for Evidence on police priorities and issues with responding to VAWG: [2301 - HASC Call for Evidence on Policing Priorities.docx](#) This response to the Call for Evidence is limited to the questions which are most relevant to the DAC's work, in particular, policing issues which are pertinent to supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse.
- The Commissioner has significant concerns around the changes to the Home Office Counting Rules which she would be keen to discuss with the Committee further: [Home Office Crime Recording Rules for frontline officers & staff - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). [The commissioner](#) understands that the Rules create operational difficulties in certain areas and there is a desire for consolidation to make them more accessible. However, the Commissioner is concerned that the shift back towards the principal crime rule would artificially deflate domestic abuse figures. It would also be counterproductive in achieving a more insightful breakdown on the volume of each type of domestic abuse crimes being committed and the disaggregated victim data. The Commissioner is also concerned about the language of "less serious assaults" which is being associated with these changes and that this would counteract work being done to improve confidence in survivors to report.

What interventions are currently in place for perpetrators with different offending histories and how effective are they for different offender pathways?

- Examples of good practice:
 - In October 2022, the Commissioner visited Northumbria to learn more about the strategic approach to tackling perpetrators that the Violence Reduction Unit and the OPCC are taking, and met with the Local Authority domestic abuse leads to hear about the challenges and opportunities for partnership working across the region. The Commissioner was very impressed with this approach and would strongly recommend the Committed engaging with Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit to hear more on their work to map and improve the response to perpetrators.
 - South Wales (Early, DRIVE, and change that lasts) In November 2022, the Commissioner travelled to North Wales, South Wales, Gwent and Bristol, meeting a wide range of partners involved in tackling domestic abuse. These included meeting with perpetrator intervention teams (including Early, Drive and Change that Last in South Wales. The Commissioner was very impressed with this approach and would

strongly recommend the Committee undertaking further engagement work on this issue.

- In response to the debate as to whether interventions to change the behaviour of domestic abuse perpetrators work in the sense of reducing perpetrators' violence and abusive behaviour, the Drive Project [[Drive-Evaluation-Report-Final.pdf \(driveproject.org.uk\)](#)] focuses specifically on high-risk, high-harm perpetrators, including serial perpetrators who are deemed to cause harm. The report shows that the perpetrators using the most severe violence and abuse were also the ones who changed to the greatest extent.
- A 2-year evaluation of the Croydon Drive Project [[croydon_drive_final_evaluation_report.pdf \(london.gov.uk\)](#)] found that Multi-agency working continues to be a key strength of the project and continuing improvements in year two were reported by participants—particularly between Drive and the police. Participants reported improved understanding of both the model itself, and the role of each organisation in its execution, with a sense that Drive is becoming more embedded and established within the local landscape. Going forward, thought should be given to further developing the eligibility and selection criteria for Drive in Croydon, to provide clarity for both new and existing staff and agencies, and, to ensure and maintain project integrity.
- The Commissioner would recommend looking at the below papers which discuss these concerns:
 - A rapid evidence assessment of what works for DA perpetrators [[Rapid Evidence Assessment: What works with domestic abuse perpetrators? \(gov.wales\)](#)]
 - [MASIP evaluation final report v2.6.pdf \(ucl.ac.uk\)](#)] found that despite considerable efforts by researchers and practitioners there is still ambiguity around 'what works' with perpetrators of domestic abuse when attempting to prevent such offending or reduce re-offending. This finding is largely reflective of the heterogeneity of approaches to both the design and delivery of perpetrator services as well as the means by which they are evaluated, both in terms of quality, methodology and objectivity.
 - This report [[MASIP – Stalking Threat Assessment Centre | London City Hall](#)] requests approval to fund project management and delivery costs for London's Stalking Threat Assessment Centre for one month (March 2020), part of the national Multi-Agency Stalking Interventions Programme funded by the Home Office Police Transformation Fund which comes to an end on 29 February 2020. The Chief Executive Officer was recommended to approve £106,053 funding towards continuation of project management and delivery costs for one month between 1 to 31 March 2020.

- The Cheshire Harm Reduction Unit (HRU) is an evidence-informed service. Referrals into the service, their journey and outcomes are recorded from the point of entering the pathway, and in accordance with the information sharing agreement [[Harm reduction unit | College of Policing](#)]. The outcomes for the police force data reflected favourably on the three local area partnership sites. Each of them had a greater proportion of cases that resulted in a charge. Proportionately fewer resulted in a caution in Cheshire and Hampshire forces, which are considered an inappropriate outcome for stalking cases. The other notable finding is that MASIP intervention is not always cost-beneficial for victims. Stakeholders perceived that a multi-agency approach did improve the response to stalking as a crime type. Stakeholders indicated that victims required further support from victim advocacy, which is resource intensive.
 - The Multi-Agency Stalking Partnership (MASP) is a collaborative service involving Southern Health, Hampshire & IOW Constabulary, Hampshire & IOW Probation, and Stop Domestic Abuse (victim advocacy) - aimed at addressing stalking by adults residing in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight [[Stalking \(Multi-Agency\) Partnership :: Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust](#)]. MASP's objective is to reduce the risk of further stalking behaviour and improve the psychological wellbeing of the service user, whilst keeping the safety of the survivor and their dependents at the centre of our work.
 - The North Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner evaluated their services [[What do we do well? - Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner North Yorkshire \(northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk\)](#)] and found that greater value for money will be achieved overall by ensuring the total local investment by commissioners collectively prioritises the most effective interventions and services for these victims, perpetrators and their children thereby reducing demand on policing and criminal justice services, and other related statutory services such as health, housing, children, young people and family prevention services.
 - This paper asks [What is the way forward for perpetrator management in England and Wales.docx](#). It recommends that rather than focus on adding an additional category to MAPPA, the better approach is to focus on securing funding for [a national roll out of?] quality-assured best practice programme models such as DRIVE and MATAC, which require multi-agency cooperation and effective data-sharing between police force areas. This paper suggests that this might best be achieved through a statutory duty that would require relevant public bodies and agencies to cooperate with such programmes, and to assess the effectiveness of perpetrator interventions in their local areas.
- The Commissioner would also encourage the Committee to review her mapping of provision report which identified the gaps in perpetrator provision

and wider issues in investment and commissioning for community-based services, which found that only 7% of victims and survivors who wanted their perpetrator to receive support to change their behaviour were able to get it.

[DAC Mapping-Abuse-Suvivors Long-Policy-Report_Nov2022_FA.pdf](#)
([domesticabusecommissioner.uk](#))

- Further there is an inconsistency in availability for medium and standard risk cases and the Commissioner would welcome further engagement from the Committee with herself, DRIVE, the wider domestic abuse sectors, and local and national Commissioners.

To what extent is there evidence that escalating behaviours is a particular problem within the emergency services and other public sector organisations?

- The DAC has been concerned significantly by the presence of perpetrators in the police and the ill-equipped response:
 - This study examined the question: [Do 40% of police families experience domestic violence? – Joshua Klugman \(temple.edu\)](#) , and found that two independent studies in the early 1990s show that domestic violence is common in police families. The study also observes that officers who do perpetuate domestic violence would be less likely to volunteer to take a survey measuring various forms of personal and professional dysfunction.
 - A study into DV within law enforcement families [["Domestic Violence Within Law Enforcement Families: The Link Between Tr" by Lindsey Blumenstein \(usf.edu\)](#)] attempted to identify whether officers who adhere to the aspects of the traditional police sub-culture are more likely to use violence against their intimate partner using two types of domestic violence-physical assault and psychological violence-as well as examine gender's moderating influence on police domestic violence and traditional police sub-culture. The study found no relationship found between traditional police culture and physical domestic violence.
 - The Casey Review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service [[The Baroness Casey Review | Metropolitan Police](#)] has eight main conclusions: There are systemic and fundamental problems in how the Met is run; The Met has not managed the integrity of its own police service; The Met's new leadership represent a welcome change of tone and approach. However, deep seated cultures need to be tackled in order for change to be sustained; Londoners have been put last; London's women and children have been left even further behind; The Met lacks accountability and transparency; Discrimination is tolerated, not dealt with and has become baked into the system; The Met is in danger of losing its way – consent is broken.

- The overarching aim of Part 2 is to establish if there is a risk of recurrence across policing, to investigate police culture, and to address the broader concerns surrounding women's safety in public spaces that were highlighted by Sarah Everard's death [[Updates from the Angiolini Inquiry – The Angiolini Inquiry](#)]. A final report will be provided to the secretary of state for the Home Department within 24 months.
- The DAC responded to the Met's investigation into police perpetrators [[Domestic Abuse Commissioner responds to Metropolitan Police investigations into more than 1,600 police officers and staff - Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#)] by calling on the Metropolitan police to 'go further to ensure future perpetrators have no place in the force. I want to see radical culture change, from strong vetting processes, to ensuring safety and accountability from the moment a report about a police officer is made. It is also imperative that misconduct hearings are transparent and independently chaired, rather than being the responsibility of chief constables over their own officer'.
- The DAC responded to police gross misconduct [[Domestic Abuse Commissioner responds to police gross misconduct reforms - Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#)] strongly supporting new changes to automatically remove police officers that are found guilty of gross misconduct, and to allow officers who fail re-vetting checks to be dismissed. Adding that the changes 'must go further, introducing root and branch reform'.
- The DAC is also conscious that the Armed Forces will similarly attract perpetrators, due to the power, prestige, and authority which comes with the position:
 - Research from the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR) at King's College London [[More than 1 in 10 Armed Forces personnel have experienced Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse - King's College London \(kcl.ac.uk\)](#)] has found that Armed Forces personnel are significantly more likely to both experience and perpetrate intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) than the wider civilian population.
 - A study into IPVA in the UK military [[Intimate partner violence and abuse experience and perpetration in UK military personnel compared to a general population cohort: A cross-sectional study - The Lancet Regional Health – Europe](#)] found higher prevalences of IPVA experience and perpetration in the military compared to the general population cohort and highlighted both non-military and military factors associated with increased risk of both. Relationship dissatisfaction, military trauma and mental health difficulties mark key areas for IPVA prevention and management efforts to target.

Wider considerations from DAC to committee

- Impact of online abuse on victims and survivors in the long term and intersectional issues which arise – i.e. greater levels of abuse for black and minoritized women / LGBT individuals [untitled \(asu.edu\)](#)
- A priority work stream for the Domestic Abuse Commissioner relates to the Family Court, which has rightly gained considerable focus due to the re-traumatising experience many [women] victims and survivors of domestic have. The prevalence of domestic abuse in the Family Court is high, with figures suggesting at least half of all cases involving abuse.¹ The Commissioner hears accounts on a daily basis indicating that survivors of domestic abuse feel disbelieved, re-traumatised and reprimanded for raising concerns in relation to safe contact to children they may share with perpetrators. The Commissioner remains deeply concerned that the Family Court continues to poorly engage with domestic abuse and that the pro-contact principle, enshrined in law, acts as an impediment to a victim and child-centric approach. Further, the Family Court has been shown to be used as an arena for ongoing abuse in the form of post-separation control, though presented as a matter of parental concern. In this regard, children are weaponised and the Family Court is instrumentalised. Illustratively, a perpetrator is able to repeatedly initiate protracted, costly and stressful proceedings due to parental rights. Poor engagement and identification of domestic abuse is therefore evident in the risk established to children and adult survivors of domestic abuse when the Family Court fails to fulfil its mandate.

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¹ A small-scale study by Cafcass and Women's Aid Federation England in 2016 suggested that allegations of domestic abuse are present in up to 62 percent of such cases, meaning that there could be up to an estimated 32,400 private law children cases involving domestic abuse every year. See: [Allegations-of-domestic-abuse-in-child-contact-cases-2017.pdf \(cafcass.gov.uk\)](#)