

Violence against women and girls

Oversight workshop for complaint handlers' toolkit

This toolkit supports an IOPC online workshop for complaint handlers and violence against women and girls (VAWG) specialists. It highlights the key expectations, legal duties and practice points from [Focus Issue 23 – Violence against women and girls](#). It is designed for use before, during and after the session as a practical aide and there are text boxes under each section to record any additional questions or notes you may have.

This toolkit includes the case studies we will be discussing during the session. Please read the case studies in advance to allow you to reflect on them and engage fully during the session.

Why this matters

Violence against women and girls is a national policing threat. Complaints and conduct matters linked to VAWG are rarely isolated service issues — they often sit alongside ongoing risk, safeguarding needs and criminal investigations. How they are handled can directly affect victim-survivor safety, confidence and willingness to engage with policing.

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Core principles

- victim-survivor safety comes first
- good communication underpins everything
- you are not expected to be an expert, but you should know where to go for guidance, support and advice consistency with legislation and statutory guidance is essential
- learning and improvement should be the default mindset

IOPC expectations

Across both sections of Focus — complaints about police handling of VAWG and reports of police perpetrated VAWG — all decision-making and handling is grounded in three overarching principles:

- communication
- safeguarding
- victim-survivor focus

Case study one: Emma

Background

Emma is a 39-year-old mother of two children aged seven and five. Both attend school in the local area. She works as a university lecturer.

Emma's ex-partner Tom is currently subject to bail conditions which state that he is not to attend the home address and not to contact Emma either directly or indirectly. Tom is the father of their two children. He is awaiting trial for criminal damage for breaking into a garden office on Emma's property — photos of her with the children were broken.

Emma has no other protective orders in place.

Complaint

Over the past ten days, Emma has contacted the police via 101 on seven occasions. The eighth occasion is to make a complaint which has now been passed to you for initial consideration.

Emma's complaint is as follows:

I want to formally complain about the way I've been treated by the police. I am not safe, I'm scared to leave my home and no one is taking me seriously. I think they think I'm attention seeking. The officer dealing with my case, who to be fair has been very supportive but who has an out of office message on, told me to ring up and log every time Tom does something which I have been trying to do.

The last time I rang 101, they said there was no way to prove that the anonymous suicide notes that I'm getting via messenger are actually from him. I know they have to be from him but they said Facebook would never hand over the IP address of the person sending them to me. They said I should delete my Facebook account.

I shouldn't have to delete my social media as that's how my students keep in touch with me after they've graduated and how I keep in touch with friends. The officer on the phone said that they couldn't link the occurrence record with my other reference numbers because it might not be Tom.

Today was the last straw, he left a load of flowers just outside of the gate to our house with a note that said he was sorry and not to worry, it would be over soon. I tried to report this again online and got fobbed off as the flowers might not even be for me.

When I saw those flowers, I felt sick. The boys were with me so I had to pretend mummy wasn't scared but inside I felt like I might black out. I've always hated roses as they just remind me of my gran's funeral. I think that was deliberate. I rang the florist but they said because of GDPR they couldn't say who sent them. They said they could share that with the police but that no one had contacted them.

He's done so much more over the past two weeks. He turned up at the boys' school saying that he was going to get full custody now and brought them some toys. He's not allowed to do that.

I don't know what has happened to the officer in my case but I feel like someone needs to take over now. I feel like no one understands how scary he is. He has tried to turn up at the uni a few times but security always keeps him out of the buildings. His bail conditions don't really mention it and I want some kind of order to keep him away from me at work. Not that it matters because he's breaching his bail conditions and no one seems to care.

Questions and assessments

We will be going through the case study in the workshop with reference to the Focus guidance and how to apply it. We don't expect you to be experts on stalking or frontline policing, but we want to discuss what role the PSD has to play in complaints of this nature.

Question one: What risks can you identify from the information that Emma has provided? Do you think she is adequately safeguarded at the moment?

Question two: Without referring to any expert guidance, can you identify any potential failings made by the police in handling Emma's reports so far?

Question three: What outcomes could reasonably be explored for this complaint?

Part one notes

Use the space below to capture notes from part one of the workshop.

Case study two: PS Grimm

These case studies have a single perpetrator, PS Ben Grimm. There are three victim-survivors, and each case comes to the attention of PSD in a different way. You should read the case studies as having been reported with a year or more gap between each report.

A — Anonymous

Background

The below was reported anonymously by a police employee via reportline.

Report

I don't even know why I'm writing this. I guess I hope someone will finally do something about PS Grimm. I don't have a lot of faith because everyone knows what he's like and no one ever does anything about it.

I tried to talk about it once and got told he's a good egg, just old school. I got told to avoid him as he's a bit of a sex pest but I have to work with him.

I heard he had a relationship with PS Roe and kept her from promotion until she slept with him. She's gone now and said she couldn't stand it anymore. He never does something so horrible that I can report him on the spot but rather it comes to me later that he's actually been inappropriate. He calls me "that girl" when I've messed something up. He talks about how having kids has ruined his sex life. I take folders into meetings with me because he just stares at my chest the whole time otherwise. He's said the focus on VAWG is just a load of politically correct nonsense and the police isn't what it was when he was coming up. I just think he needs looking into.

B — Beatrice

Background

PSD receives the following email from an IDVA who is supporting Beatrice, the now ex-wife of PS Grimm. In a further conversation, she reveals more details and outlines heads of complaint.

Email:

Ben and I were in a relationship for 10 years. It was a whirlwind – we fell in love quickly and got married a few months after we met. We had a baby in the first year and we went on to have three more children.

I've been in therapy after our divorce and realise now that he was always a bit controlling. At the time he said it was because he knew how dangerous the world could be. He always hated my sister because she said our relationship moved too fast and that he was a misogynist. He didn't speak to me for a week once because I didn't stand up for him when she had a go. I love my sister, but he was the father of my children.

I was so busy with the kids that I didn't notice how much he was in control of our lives. Right down to when I was to have the weekly Tesco delivery.

He was never interested in the kids except to show them off. He says he wants full custody now and wants me to pay child maintenance. I feel like you should know the kind of officer working for you.

Phone call:

- He used to pressure me to look perfect when we were anywhere that his colleagues might see me. He would criticise me if I looked messy or unattractive in his eyes.
- He used to show me photos from fatal RTIs he attended and told me that's why I couldn't drive. I think he has them stored on his phone still.
- He's let the kids "accidentally" see some intimate photos of me and refuses to delete them.
- He bought the kids teddies which turned out to have air tags in them. He said he just wanted to know where his family was when they were with me.
- I figured it out as he used to sit outside of my house in an unmarked car when my sister would take the children to the park to give me some breathing room. I could see him filming but I couldn't work out how he knew they weren't home.

C — Charlotte

PS Grimm sends an email to PSD. In it, he says that he is the victim of harassment from his colleague and ex-partner Charlotte. He says that Charlotte has shared sensitive operational information with him without a policing purpose. He says that she has lied about an overtime claim and should be investigated for keyjamming as well.

This was received into the PSD inbox at midnight. An hour later, PS Grimm was arrested at the property he shares with Charlotte. He destroyed some furniture in their house and was captured via GoodSam committing an assault against Charlotte.

Charlotte is a PC and is much younger than PS Grimm.

Questions and assessments

We will be going through the case study in the workshop. However, ahead of this, we would like you to consider how your force deals with complaints about police perpetrated VAWG and your force responses to counter allegations. Use the space below to record any comments or questions you would like to bring to the session.

Part two notes

Use the space below to capture notes from part two of the workshop.

Key legislation and guidance

When applying thresholds and legislative tests in VAWG matters, complaint handlers must be guided by core statutory instruments and supporting guidance, as listed below, recognising the heightened risks and potential impacts involved. The list is not exhaustive.

- [Police Reform Act 2002](#)
- [Police \(Complaints and Misconduct\) Regulations 2020](#)
- [Police \(Conduct\) Regulations 2020](#)
- [Victims' Code of Practice](#)
- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) [Article 2](#) and [Article 3](#)

IOPC publications and guidance

- [IOPC Statutory guidance](#)
- [Focus Issue 23 — Violence against women and girls](#)
- [Learning the Lessons issue 45 - violence against women and girls](#)
- [Guidance on ending victim blaming](#)
 - A quick guide to this can be found on [page 14](#) of this document.
- [Police perpetrated domestic abuse handling review](#)
- [Summary of our work related to Violence against Women and Girls \(VAWG\)](#)

College of Policing publications and guidance

- [Stalking or harassment: Advice to police responders to ensure an effective response to reports of stalking or harassment](#)
- [Violence against women and girls toolkit](#)
- [National centre for violence against women and girls and public protection](#)
- [Violence against women and girls research reports published](#)

National Police Chiefs' Council

- [Violence Against Women and Girls](#)

Quick guide - complaints made by members of the public about police handling of crimes involving VAWG

Initial contact

- Speak with complainants or offer them a phone call
- Take care not to use victim-blaming language
- Make sure their risk-assessments are up to date as part of safeguarding victim-survivors
- Ensure they have been offered victim support services
- Safeguard the victim-survivor and signpost them to support services
- Discuss with the complainant what a good resolution would look like and be creative with potential actions to take to resolve it

Logging

- Ensure the complaint comes to PSD for assessment
- Log the complaint

Recording

- Explain that handling complaints formally will give the complainant a right to review the outcome
- Consider recording all VAWG-related complaints inside of Schedule 3 of the *Police Reform Act 2002*
- Give the complainant a copy of the recorded complaint

Relevant review body

- Consider what has been alleged to

have occurred; do not assume the likely outcome

- Do not make the assessment without speaking to the complainant to ensure that the complaint is fully understood

Reasonable and proportionate handling

- What is proportionate for a complaint involving VAWG would not always be proportionate for other complaints
- Article 3 may be engaged and thus may require more thorough handling of the complaint

Decisions and actions

- What is proportionate to remedy a complaint involving VAWG may not be proportionate to remedy other complaints
- Work with the complainant to reach a satisfactory resolution
- Clearly explain to the complainant what action has been taken to resolve the complaint

Learning and improvement

- Every single complaint must be treated as an opportunity to improve and learn

Quick Guide – Police perpetrated violence against women and girls



Safeguard

Is the victim-survivor and their family safe?



Orders

Are there any applicable protection orders?



Support

Have you signposted to support services?

Initial contact

- Contact every victim-survivor and give them enough information to decide how they want to proceed: either as an interested party; or as a complainant; or neither.
- Discuss with them what the potential outcomes could possibly be and how the criminal and complaint/conduct cases will overlap.
- Explain how you record conflicts of interest and give the victim-survivor a chance to explore their concerns, if they have any.

Police victim-survivors should be given the same level of support and further:

- Should have a conversation with PSD about how PSD will protect the confidentiality of their report.
- Should have access to independent support services.
- Should be safeguarded in the workplace as much as is possible.

Initial handling – complaints

- All police perpetrated VAWG complaints should be logged and

recorded because they contain an allegation of criminality.

Initial handling – conduct

- Treat the victim-survivor as an interested person if they wish.
- Police perpetrated VAWG as defined in this document would meet the test for recordable conduct.

Thresholds and contact - complaints

- Police perpetrated VAWG as defined by this document would, if proved, amount to a criminal offence and should be investigated.
- The victim-survivor or their chosen advocate must receive regular and meaningful updates no less frequently than every four weeks.

Thresholds and contact – conduct

- Where a recordable conduct matter is investigated under Schedule 3, it must follow special procedures.
- An interested person must receive regular and meaningful updates no less frequently than every four weeks.

Annex A: Ending Victim blaming Guidance

Victim blaming

is defined as:

'the transference of blame from the perpetrator of a crime to the victim-survivor, who is held entirely or partially to blame for the harm they suffered'.

When victim-survivors are blamed, and this goes unchallenged, it can increase barriers to leaving an abuser, seeking help, and reporting violence against women and girls to the IOPC and the police, owing to a lack of trust and confidence in reports being taken seriously.

Do...



Use **neutral language** when describing a victim-survivor's account of violence against women and girls.



Think about your **body language** and any gestures you make - do they make the victim-survivor feel safe?



Be aware of the impact that **trauma** may have on the presentation of victim-survivors.



Think particularly carefully about how you **structure questions**.



Establish **who holds the power and control**, and be mindful of how this can vary between different groups or communities.



Consider that a victim-survivor may rely on **survival strategies** to manage the perpetrator's behaviour.



Take all violence against women and girls reports **seriously**, regardless of the age of the perpetrator or victim-survivor.

Don't...



Don't **make assumptions** about a victim-survivor's **mental health**, or 'pathologise' their behaviour.



Don't blame a victim-survivor for what happened to them when they have taken **alcohol or ingested substances**.



Don't **'minimise'** abuse.



Don't **'mutualise'** abuse.



Don't make assumptions about the needs of victim-survivors of violence against women and girls who are also **police officers or staff**.

Remember...



Use **'active'** rather than **'passive'** voice when talking about victim-survivors of violence against women and girls.



Some victim-survivors **may blame themselves**, or minimise their experiences of violence against women and girls.



Make reasonable adjustments for victim-survivors, and ensure that information is accessible.



Any **'choices'** a victim-survivor makes are often made in **compromised circumstances**.

Contact list

Use the space below to capture key internal and external contacts who can support safeguarding, advice and decision-making in VAWG-related complaints and conduct matters.

Public protection unit

Primary contact

Alternative contact

Notes

Stalking specialist / SPO lead

Primary contact

Alternative contact

Notes

Domestic abuse leads

Primary contact

Alternative contact

Notes

Legal services

Primary contact

Alternative contact

Notes

DVPO / protection order specialist

Primary contact

Alternative contact

Notes

CPS liaison

Primary contact

Alternative contact

Notes

IOPC Liaison

Primary contact

Alternative contact

Notes

Control room escalation

Primary contact

Alternative contact

Notes

Support service (IDVA, ISVA)

Primary contact

Alternative contact

Notes

Other useful contacts

Primary contact

Alternative contact

Notes

Personal action plan

Use the spaces below to identify one practical change you will make to support safer, more consistent handling of VAWG cases.

One thing to start

One thing to stop

One thing to share with your team

Your additional notes
