

Violence Against Women and Girls

LSE Research Briefing

Summary

In December 2025 the Government published its Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, with a target of halving VAWG in the next decade. It focuses on three objectives: prevention and early intervention to address root causes; the pursuit of perpetrators; and support for all those affected by violence and abuse.

This note covers **LSE’s world-leading research focused on tackling, preventing and better understanding Violence Against Women and Girls**, specifically:

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Key Policy Recommendations

- The DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour-based Violence) assessment police officers make on whether domestic abuse victims are likely to face violence again produces inconsistent results and errors. **Integrating AI into the process of determining whether repeat domestic abuse offenses are likely will cut down on these errors and potentially save lives.**
- Instances of domestic abuse increase after daytime football matches, when perpetrators can drink all day, including after the match. **Shifting football games to the evening and/or holding them on weekdays could help prevent some domestic abuse incidents.**
- Policymakers and regulators are struggling to keep up to speed with the potentially illegal activities of AI tools such as Grok, mainly due to lack of technical expertise. **Developing this technical expertise, and related tools, should be prioritised, as banning all AI tools will not be an easy go-to solution** as AI becomes more prominent in all aspects of daily life.
- **Criminalising the consumption – as well as the dissemination - of “revenge porn” will clearly signal its wrongness**, countering the idea that merely looking at such images is harmless. This could deter a lot of consumption, reducing the harm to victims.

- Many girls and women feel unsafe in public spaces. **Female perspectives should therefore be included in the planning of public spaces, and local and national policymakers need to consider how to normalise engagement with women and girls** to improve safety, and perceptions of safety.
- **The perspective of girls** – as opposed to women – **is too often missing from public and policy discussion around Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**. Bringing in girls' voices requires safe and inclusive spaces where their perspectives are taken seriously. Creating these will support policymakers to directly understand how and why girls are being exploited, and therefore to address and reduce girls' vulnerability to sexual victimisation and grooming.

Tackling Domestic Abuse With AI

- Prof Tom Kirchmaier, Director of LSE's Policing and Crime research group, has [highlighted](#) how the DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour-based violence) assessment police officers make on whether domestic abuse victims are likely to face violence again produces inconsistent results. **In fact, the evidence shows clearly that the DASH system makes errors.**
- To mitigate this, he has **recommended the police integrate electronic criminal history data into real-time call handling systems**. This would enable immediate risk predictions, better response urgency and resource allocation.
- The brief also recommends that the police adopt a **two-step risk assessment for domestic abuse cases**. The first screening would apply machine learning techniques to criminal history information, and then a second screening would use more sensitive technology to distinguish true high-risk cases from false positives. This would improve the likelihood of charging perpetrators, which in turn would deter repeat violence.

Domestic Violence and Football Matches

- Professor Tom Kirchmaier's research also shows how **alcohol consumption by men during afternoon football matches leads to increased domestic abuse**.
- Domestic abuse reduces by 5 per cent during a game, suggesting a substitution effect of football and domestic abuse. But Kirchmaier's data analysis shows that **reports of domestic abuse increase after the match, with the highest percentage of cases reported between 10-12 hours after kick-off as drinking takes place through the day, including after the game has concluded**.
- To tackle this increase in abuse, **the scheduling of football games should be reviewed**. Given that games scheduled at midday or the early afternoon can lead to prolonged drinking and higher domestic abuse rates, shifting games to the evening and/or holding them on weekdays could help to mitigate a significant proportion of domestic abuse incidents.

Online Harms and Better Regulation

- Prof Helen Margetts and Prof Cosmina Dorobantu at LSE's Data Science Institute [have welcomed action](#) against online harms and highlighted how it has always been a challenge for governments to regulate sexual content online.
- However, they argue that UK governments have acted slowly on findings from the Children's Commissioner for England's 2022 review into online harassment and abuse, which noted that **AI has supercharged every known harm**. Three years after the report, the UK became the first country to introduce laws criminalising tools used to create AI-generated child sexual abuse material as part of the Crime and Policing Bill. But a year on, the Bill is still being debated in Parliament.
- Most recently, it became clear the extent to which X's AI chatbot Grok was being used to create non-consensual nudified and sexualised images of identifiable women and children from photographs. It then transpired that the **provisions in the UK's Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, which criminalises creating such images, had not been activated**, and only after widespread pressure did the Government implement these provisions.
- The authors state that child sexual abuse material is evidence of a crime, not a form of meaningful expression. **Placing guardrails on Grok to stop it producing illegal content is not widespread censorship of the internet.**
- They argue that **monitoring AI tools such as Grok is a technical challenge as well as a regulatory one. Regulators need AI expertise and tools** to ensure compliance with the law, or else fines or bans will be the only option – and a constant game of catch-up, with resulting risks to users, will have to be played.

Criminalising the Consumption of Revenge Porn

- Dr Jonathan Parry (LSE) and Prof Helen Frowe (Stockholm University) [welcomed](#) recent legislative developments to tackle intimate-image abuse, including sexualised 'deepfakes' and so-called 'revenge porn' (private sexual photos or videos shared without a person's consent.)
- Yet most interventions focus exclusively on persons who non-consensually *create, obtain, and share* intimate images, or threaten to do so. **This neglects the important role of consumers of intimate-image abuse.**
- They argue that consumers play a significant and ineliminable role in the serious wrongs inflicted on abuse victims. They are also a key revenue source for platforms that host this material. **Consumers should therefore be understood as co-perpetrators of intimate-image abuse.**
- Their central recommendation is that interventions to prevent and discourage intimate-image abuse – including legal sanctions, public awareness campaigns, and education and training reforms – should also target consumers.

- In the case of especially clear and grave forms of intimate-image consumption, they [argue](#) that **legislation should go further**, setting out why consumption inflicts a serious wrong on victims and **should in principle fall within the scope of the [criminal law](#)**.
- Their research suggests that there are grounds for **criminalising the consumption of these images**, in addition to targeting those who create and share this material.
- Criminalising consumption will clearly signal the wrong it inflicts on victims, **countering the idea that ‘just looking’ at these images is harmless**. This signalling could deter a significant amount of consumption, thus reducing the harm to victims.

The Safety of Women and Girls and the Design of Public Spaces

- Dr Julia King from LSE Cities has [set out](#) how **girls and young women feel routinely excluded from, and even unsafe in, public spaces** surrounding where they live. Despite the benefits of public spaces such as parks and high streets for young women’s mental and physical development, they often feel excluded. Places such as shopping centres are viewed as ‘adults only’, whilst football pitches or skateparks are seen as ‘male only’ spaces.
- In her research, Dr King found that many spaces were avoided *“because their design felt unsafe, or other users (male peers and adults) made them feel intimidated”*.
- Dr King argues that **young women’s perspectives should be included in the planning of public spaces** to inform design, to make public spaces accessible and welcoming for all users. **Local and national policymakers need to consider how to normalise engagement with women and girls** to improve perceptions of safety.
- Similarly, the Government’s VAWG Strategy and The Angiolini Inquiry’s Part 2 Report, both published in December 2025, call on the need for urban design and planning that can reduce opportunities for harm against women and girls and also make women and girls feel safe in public spaces.

Centring Girls’ Experiences and Perspectives in Public and Policy Discussions

- Dr Selena Gray has [noted](#) that **the perspective of girls** – as opposed to women – **is too often missing from public and policy discussion around Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**. She points out that *“It is girls, not young adult women, who are most at risk today. Girls are the group being targeted, preyed on, and relentlessly pursued to be used for sex and then discarded...”*

- Despite this, “*While girls and their distressing experiences of grooming and child sexual exploitation remain at the centre of many political and policy discussions, their own perspectives on social interactions and sexual victimisation within grooming and CSE contexts expressed in their own words, are often excluded.*”
- When the public and policymakers are confronted with evidence of a **gap between girls’ views and legal perspectives**, it raises questions about the current attitudes of young people and how policy can attempt to close this gap.
- The current approach often **overlooks the need for creating safe and inclusive spaces where girls’ perspectives are taken seriously, and where policymakers and educators can acknowledge their perspectives** in their attempt to address and reduce vulnerability to sexual victimisation grooming and CSE contexts.
- Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) in schools often seeks to bring young people on the same page as the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which can obscure the way sexual consent is ongoing and can be given through coercion. However, the **updated RSE guidance for schools from September 2026 needs to allow for the gap between girls’ views and legal perspectives to be narrowed, and could be a good barometer for measuring impact of the guidance, including through more quantitative measures.**

Improving Support Services for Victims

- As the Government’s VAWG Strategy states, supporting victims of VAWG crimes is essential to breaking the cycle of reoffending. **The support that victims receive, though, is currently patchy.** Sustained commitment to funding services that provide life changing, and often lifesaving, support for victim/survivors is needed.
- Dr Ellie Whittingdale of LSE’s Law School highlights that the very act of listening to those who work within sexual violence support services, and how we listen, inevitably shapes the stories that can be shared.
- **Further, in depth research into the vital work of sexual violence support workers - and those who they provide support to who urgently need their help - could be pursued to inform and improve the landscape within which these services operate.**

*For more information, please contact Megan Marsh, Senior Public Affairs Officer,
at M.Marsh@lse.ac.uk*