

## **Home Office call for evidence: violence against women and girls**

This submission relates to:

- perpetrators/offender management
- rape and sexual violence
- domestic abuse
- multi-agency working
- criminal justice system
- children and adolescents

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of youth offending and probation services in England and Wales.

Probation and youth offending services play a vital role in protecting the public and supporting individuals to move towards crime-free lives. Probation services supervise 222,657 adults across England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, as at 31 September 2020). Youth offending services work with 16,898 children who have received court sentences, as well as many more who have been diverted from entering the criminal justice system (Youth Justice Board/Ministry of Justice, as at 31 March 2020).

### **Our findings on violence against women and girls**

Violence against women and girls is a widespread issue among those under probation supervision. Domestic abuse was a current concern in 42 per cent of the 5,948 cases we examined in 2018/2019 and sexual offending was a feature in 24 per cent of the 1,039 cases managed by the National Probation Service (NPS) that we examined in 2018-2020.

Our inspections found inconsistent activity to protect actual and potential victims, a lack of constructive work with domestic abuse and sexual perpetrators, and deficits in the way information is sought and shared across criminal justice agencies.

Probation officers do not always conduct checks with police on domestic abuse call outs or other intelligence on risk when they should, failing to do so in 35 per cent of cases (mean based on nine inspections of Community Rehabilitation Companies in 2019/2020). When probation services request information from police forces, the responses vary widely. Some regions, such as Thames Valley and South Yorkshire, have effective partnerships and share information regularly. In other areas, police forces struggle with the volume of requests, provide insufficient detail or experience delays in responding.

During the pandemic, safeguarding and public protection meetings moved online (MARAC for high-risk domestic abuse cases and MAPPA for sexual and violent perpetrators). We were pleased to see probation officers attended more regularly than in-person meetings. We support keeping these meetings online so agencies can work together effectively to protect victims/public.

Our investigation of work with the victims of John Worboys (2018) highlighted some poor outcomes. The NPS complied with the rules in delivering the victim contact scheme, but this still led to a situation where most of the victims eligible for the scheme found out about the decision to release him through the media. Correspondence to victims did not convey messages clearly, including at the time when the women had the opportunity to contribute their views to the parole hearing.

Our thematic inspection of the management of male sexual offenders (2019) found poor-quality work with sexual offenders in prison. The NPS did not do any work to address the sexual offending behaviour of four in 10 sexual offenders on probation and not enough was

done to protect children in around a third of the 120 inspected cases. We found a disconnect between how Her Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service described its work with this cohort and what was happening in practice.

Likewise, work with domestic abuse perpetrators is not as effective as it could be. Building Better Relationships is the only nationally accredited programme for this cohort in the community. Our thematic inspection (2018) found this intervention has potential but is bogged down by contractual and logistical issues, and has yet to be evaluated for its impact. There were far fewer referrals to the programme than expected; less than half of referrals in our sample had started the course and others were unable to start because their course had been cancelled. The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly reduced the probation service's capacity to deliver this programme and waiting times have increased.

We conducted independent reviews in the cases of Joseph McCann (2020) and Leroy Campbell (2018), highlighting practice that increased risk of harm to women and girls:

- information is not always captured, shared and acted on properly. For example, Campbell disclosed to a probation officer that he was thinking of reoffending, but this conversation was not recorded adequately and he was not recalled to prison
- approved premises support high risk of harm prison leavers to resettle in the community. Probation officers were unable to secure places for McCann on two occasions and he resided with family instead, making close monitoring much more difficult
- probation officers could have recalled Campbell and McCann to prison but did not do so. Our thematic inspection of recall practice (2020) found policies in place at the time dissuaded recalls. The situation has improved but there needs to be greater consistency in recall practice.

The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened some outcomes for women and girls:

- Crown Court backlogs have risen from 38,411 in January 2020 to 56,544 in January 2021 (Ministry of Justice). Victims are waiting longer for their cases to come to court; it is likely some will withdraw their support for prosecutions because they will have lost faith in the system – a view supported by the Victims' Commissioner
- we were concerned to see cases of children being violent towards their parents/carer (often a female) during the first lockdown. This was not a new problem but had become more acute as families were locked in together. The typical processes to protect domestic abuse victims do not apply because the perpetrators are too young, so a new approach is needed to keep women and girls safe in their own homes.

### **Recommendations to reduce risks to women and girls**

- Police forces must provide probation services with information on the behaviour of people under probation supervision that is sufficiently detailed and timely. Probation and youth offending services cannot protect victims/public effectively if they do not have robust and reliable intelligence at the right time (for example, when people are arrested or domestic abuse call outs are made).
- Likewise, the transfer of information must improve between prisons and probation, and between young offender institutions and youth offending services. This information will give services a clear picture of the individual and will support decision-making.
- We want to see high-quality support for victims. More must be done to cut Crown Court backlogs and ensure victims do not have hearings hanging over them for

several years. The victim contact scheme must deliver for all victims, regardless of region.

- Probation services must ensure accredited programmes for domestic abuse and sexual perpetrators are delivered on time, to a high standard and evaluated properly.

Individuals supervised by probation and youth offending services often have multiple and complex needs. Factors such as substance misuse or a lack of alternative accommodation can heighten risks – we advocate tackling these root causes as well as the symptoms.

Our inspections have identified recurring issues that inhibit effective probation practice such as high caseloads, under-estimation of risk, and variable management oversight. Probation services will be unified in June 2021 and we urge senior leaders to raise standards across the board.

### **Caveat**

This paper focuses on women and girls, in line with the Home Office's call for evidence.

We recognise women and girls are not the only victims of sexual offending, domestic abuse and other types of violent crime. We do not hold data on the sex/gender of victims in the cases that we inspect.

### **Key HM Inspectorate of Probation publications**

- [Investigation in the policy and process followed by the victim contact scheme in the Worboys case \(2018\)](#)
- [Independent review of the case of Leroy Campbell \(2018\)](#)
- [Domestic abuse: the work undertaken by Community Rehabilitation Companies \(2018\)](#)
- [Management and supervision of men convicted of sexual offences \(2019\)](#)
- [Independent review of issues arising from the case of Joseph McCann \(2020\)](#)
- [Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the criminal justice system \(2021 – as part of the criminal justice joint inspectorates\).](#)

### **Meeting/enquiries**

We would like to offer a meeting to the Home Secretary/Ministers with HM Chief Inspector of Probation Justin Russell. Alternatively, we can meet with officials or answer any further questions by email/phone. Please contact [communications@hmiprobation.gov.uk](mailto:communications@hmiprobation.gov.uk) if we can be of further assistance.