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Recognising and responding to vulnerability-related risks: Guidelines

Rapid evidence assessment

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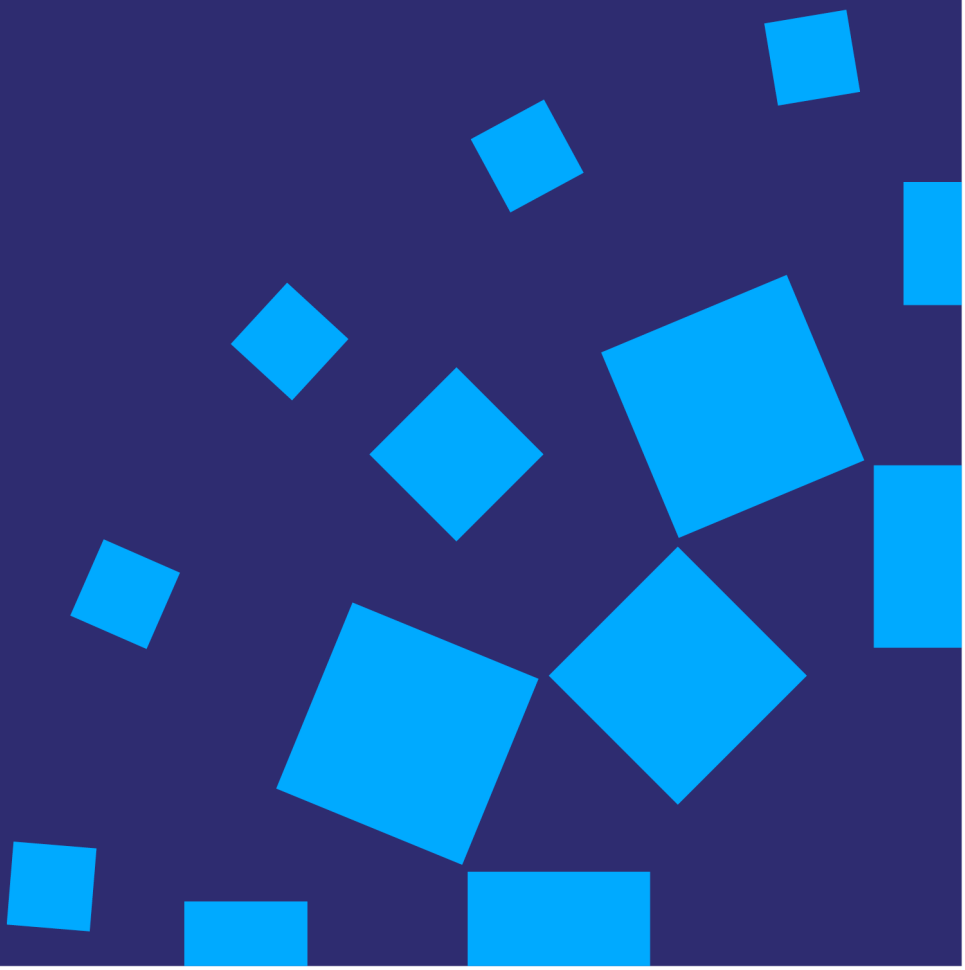

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Executive summary

Background

This report presents the findings of a rapid evidence assessment (REA) conducted to inform the development of the College of Policing's national guidelines on vulnerability and risk, to support police in recognising and responding to individuals at risk of harm.

First responders and staff often face difficulties identifying indicators of vulnerability during an encounter, due to the wide range of – and the complex relationship between – risk factors. These initial police interactions present crucial opportunities to build confidence and offer protection. Responding to these opportunities requires the ability to:

- recognise vulnerabilities and potential or actual risks of harm
- maintain an open position of professional curiosity
- understand one's own responsibility
- know the most appropriate action to take

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) have expressed concern that some forces are under 'significant stress' due to an increased number of recorded crimes, which may stretch them to such an extent that they risk being unable to keep people safe and meet the expected demand. Police forces continue to face increasingly complex demands with reduced resources. The concern, therefore, is that vulnerable victims may not always receive a prompt emergency response from the police, because forces have been overwhelmed by the scale of the demand they face[1].

[1] HMICFRS. (2018). **PEEL: Police Effectiveness 2017, a national overview** [internet]. [Accessed February 2019]

In addition, inspection reports across a number of areas have highlighted issues with culture, attitudes, knowledge and understanding that affect police response to vulnerable people and victims[2]. Police responses to vulnerability have been found to be variable and inconsistent, with recurring themes of officers not listening to victims and/or making incorrect assumptions or judgements. These issues pre-date the impact of austerity and reduced resources.

Addressing the factors mentioned above will help to improve the policing response to vulnerability-related risk. It is important to acknowledge, however, that policing activity occurs as part of a wider social, public and multi-agency response. The guideline, therefore, explores how the role of the police service in responding to vulnerability-related risk aligns with the capacity and capabilities of other responding agencies, with a view to informing a wider strategic discussion on this issue.

To help ensure that the guidelines are based on the best available evidence, a review of the empirical evidence was carried out to address the following question:

> How can police officers create safe and trusting encounters that encourage vulnerable victims to engage and disclose abuse and harm?

A systematic search of a wide range of relevant databases and websites retrieved 11,395 records, which were sifted based on relevance and quality criteria. A total of 119 studies were included and synthesised.

Findings

Findings from the 119 included studies focused on factors that encourage the disclosure of abuse and harm, as well as factors that might discourage victims from such disclosures. Identifying and understanding signs of risk were also considered

[2] HMIC. (2014). **Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]; HMIC. (2015). **The depths of dishonour: Hidden voices and shameful crimes** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]; HM Inspectorate of Probation, HMIC, Care Quality Commission, Ofsted. (2016). **'Time to listen' – a joined up response to child sexual exploitation and missing children** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]; HMICFRS. (2017). **Stolen freedom: the policing response to modern slavery and human trafficking** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]

important for creating safe and trusting encounters. The research findings are split into 11 themes, which fall into two main groups.

- Personal and situational circumstances of vulnerable victims and individuals that may have an impact on their ability or willingness to disclose any harm.
- Professional behaviours (verbal and non-verbal), attitudes and beliefs that help to facilitate positive engagement, and that encourage vulnerable victims and individuals to disclose harm and provide detailed accounts that can support action to help them – and other potential victims – to be safe.

A summary of the findings is presented below.

Factors associated with vulnerable people's circumstances

Coercive control

- Coercive control is a range of abusive behaviours intended to keep a victim subordinate and create a state of entrapment. Coercive control emerged very strongly as a theme in the domestic abuse literature, but also cut across numerous other strands of public protection and vulnerability, including human trafficking, serious sexual offences, and child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Several sub-themes were identified that represented behaviours used by perpetrators and/or the effect of those behaviours on victims' ability to disclose their experiences and seek help:
    - fear
    - immigration status
    - monitoring and isolation
    - dependence
    - repercussions

Fear

- There was considerable crossover between the themes of fear and coercive control, with specific and generalised fear reflecting both the abusive behaviour of perpetrators and the disempowered status of victims. Fear was found in research with victims across several strands of vulnerability, including domestic abuse, human trafficking, serious sexual offences, and child sexual abuse and

exploitation. A victim's fear of their abuser may reflect an imbalance of power. Threats and violence (physical and sexual) are designed to disempower and subjugate the victim, and make it harder for victims to seek help.

Internal barriers

- The review also highlighted barriers to disclosing abuse that were internal to victims' experiences of abuse and its impact, including:
  - confidentiality
  - shame
  - stigma
  - self-blame
  - recognising and naming abuse
  - minimising abuse
  - normalisation
  - concern for the abuser

Reasons for disclosing

- Reasons for disclosing were most commonly discussed by victims of domestic abuse and serious sexual offences, although views of victims and service providers from other vulnerability areas were also covered in the literature. Understanding these motivations may help to encourage victims to engage.
- Reported motivations included:
  - wanting the abuse to stop
  - wanting the perpetrator to be prosecuted
  - validation
  - moral obligations
  - self-preservation
  - preservation of others
  - being persuaded by others
  - reaching a breaking point
  - being ready to leave the abuser

External barriers

- The review identified barriers to disclosing abuse that were external to victims' direct experiences of abuse and its impact, including:
  - cultural influences
  - general perceptions of the police and other agencies
  - actual past experiences of engaging with agencies

Factors associated with professional's knowledge, attitudes and interactions with vulnerable people

Interpersonal treatment

- The evidence strongly suggests that sensitivity in interactions and considering the victim's welfare and support needs are important factors in building confidence and encouraging disclosure of abuse. Failing to treat victims with sensitivity may result in them reliving the experience and trauma ('secondary victimisation'). Victims shared more positive experiences when they perceived the police response to be reassuring, empathetic and tailored appropriately to their needs.

Preconceptions and victim blaming

- Victim blaming – which can be described as police creating the impression that they find the victim culpable, or partly culpable, for their vulnerable position – was observed across several vulnerability strands in the literature, and was equally prevalent for victims of domestic abuse and serious sexual offences. The themes of blame and judgement were also discussed in relation to victims' behaviour, characteristics and circumstances, based frequently on inaccurate assumptions.

Believing victims

- In the studies, the feeling of being believed was reported to be one of the most important aspects of the interaction for victims, as it validates their experience and confirms that they were right to disclose it. Fear of not being believed was consistently cited as a barrier to reporting, and victims reported experiences of police appearing to doubt their accounts.

- Police were seen to demonstrate belief in the victim's account both directly, through verbal reassurance, and also indirectly, by how they treated the victim more generally and how thoroughly they investigated the report.

Fairness and process

- Victims shared a number of perceptions of the police that had a negative impact on their encounters and willingness to disclose abuse. The literature identified that perceptions that the police don't care, are dismissive and won't help can influence the willingness to disclose. The literature also stated that victims' previous experiences of police encounters can have a negative impact.
- The evidence suggests that body language, active listening, taking what the victim has to say seriously and explaining police processes clearly can all help towards creating a positive encounter, which facilitates the disclosure of abuse.

Knowledge and awareness

- The evidence reviewed considered knowledge and awareness in relation to officers and victims, both of which have an impact on the disclosure of abuse. Police officers and staff need to appreciate that victims may not understand processes or know what help is available to them, and may feel unsure as to whether police will provide the support they need. Police lack of knowledge and awareness pertaining to culture, the impact of trauma, coercion and control, and victim needs was recognised by victims and vulnerable individuals, as well as police officers, police staff and other support providers.

Communication

- Communication between police and victims was discussed in relation to language (interpretation services and victim's preferred terminology), building rapport and asking questions. Building rapport with victims came out especially strongly in relation to child sexual abuse and exploitation, but was also referenced in relation to other vulnerability strands. The evidence highlighted that the police should take their time and not appear judgmental when asking questions, and that the police should also be aware of the impact of trauma and other factors on people's ability to respond to questions.

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a rapid evidence assessment (REA) conducted to inform the development of the College of Policing's national guidelines on vulnerability and risk, to support police in recognising and responding to individuals at risk of harm.

Background

First responders and staff often face difficulties identifying vulnerability during an encounter, due to the wide range of – and the complex relationship between – risk factors[3]. These initial police interactions present crucial opportunities to build confidence and offer protection. Responding to these opportunities requires the ability to:

- recognise vulnerabilities and potential or actual risks of harm
- maintain an open position of professional curiosity
- understand one's own responsibility
- know the most appropriate action to take

Police-recorded crime has risen in recent years, with notable increases in the reporting of specific crime types[4]. For example, in the year to March 2018, compared with the previous year, there was a 24% increase in police-recorded sexual offences, a 23% increase in recorded domestic abuse offences[5] (continuing the upward trend seen since the year ending March 2017[6]), and a 36% increase in the number of recorded cases of stalking and harassment[7]. These increases reflect increased

[3] Robinson AL, Myhill A, Wire J, Roberts J and Tilley N. (2016). **Risk-led policing of domestic abuse and the DASH risk model** [internet]. What Works Centre: Crime Reduction Research. [Accessed March 2019]
[4] Ongoing efforts to improve recording practices since 2014 (in response to inspections by HMICFRS) have also contributed to this rise: Office for National Statistics. (2018). **ONS Statistical Bulletin – Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2018** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]
[5] House of Commons Home Affairs Committee. (2018). **Policing for the future** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]
[6] Office for National Statistics. (2018). **ONS Statistical Bulletin – Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2018** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]
[7] Office for National Statistics. (2018). **ONS Statistical Bulleting – Crime in England and Wales: year ending June 2018** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]

awareness, campaigning by advocates and a strong policy focus in government[8]. There have also been improvements in recording of these offences following an inspection of crime data integrity by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)[9]. The increased recording of these crimes, which are often complex, means that officers and staff need to be better equipped to identify and assess a range of risk factors, in order to make informed decisions.

HMICFRS expressed concern that some forces are under 'significant stress' due to an increased number of recorded crimes, which may stretch them to such an extent that they risk being unable to keep people safe and meet the expected demand. Police forces continue to face increasingly complex demands with reduced resources. The concern, therefore, is that vulnerable victims may not always receive a prompt emergency response from the police, because forces have been overwhelmed by the scale of the demand they face[10].

In addition, inspection reports across a number of areas have highlighted issues with culture, attitudes, knowledge and understanding that affect police response to vulnerable people and victims[11]. Police responses to vulnerability have been found to be variable and inconsistent, with recurring themes of officers not listening to victims and/or making incorrect assumptions or judgements. These issues pre-date the impact of austerity and reduced resources.

Addressing the factors mentioned above will help to improve the policing response to vulnerability-related risk. It is important to acknowledge, however, that policing activity occurs as part of a wider social, public and multi-agency response. The guideline, therefore, explores how the role of the police service in responding to

[8] For example, see the Violence against Women and Girls Strategy: HM Government. (2016). **Ending Violence against Women and Girls: Strategy 2016 – 2020** [internet]. [Accessed March 2021]
[9] HMIC. (2014). **Crime recording: Making the victim count 2014** [internet]. [Accessed February 2019]
[10] HMICFRS. (2018). **PEEL: Police Effectiveness 2017, a national overview** [internet]. [Accessed February 2019]
[11] HMIC. (2014). **Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]; HMIC. (2015). **The depths of dishonour: Hidden voices and shameful crimes** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]; HM Inspectorate of Probation, HMIC, Care Quality Commission, Ofsted. (2016). **'Time to listen' – a joined up response to child sexual exploitation and missing children** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]; HMICFRS. (2017). **Stolen freedom: the policing response to modern slavery and human trafficking** [internet]. [Accessed March 2019]

vulnerability-related risk aligns with the capacity and capabilities of other responding agencies, with a view to informing a wider strategic discussion on this issue.

Methods

Overview

An REA uses transparent, structured and systematic processes to search for, sift and bring together research on a particular topic. An REA is not an exhaustive summary of the literature, as limits are placed on the review process in order to deliver results rapidly. However, the systematic and transparent nature of the REA process helps to reduce bias and enables others to replicate the review[12].

The review question was:

> How can police officers create safe and trusting encounters that encourage vulnerable victims to engage and disclose abuse and harm?

The aim of the review was to identify the following.

- Personal and situational circumstances of vulnerable victims and individuals that may have an impact on their ability or willingness to disclose any harm.
- Professional behaviours (verbal and non-verbal), attitudes and beliefs that help to facilitate positive engagement, and that encourage vulnerable victims and individuals to disclose harm and provide detailed accounts that can support action to help them – and other potential victims – to be safe.

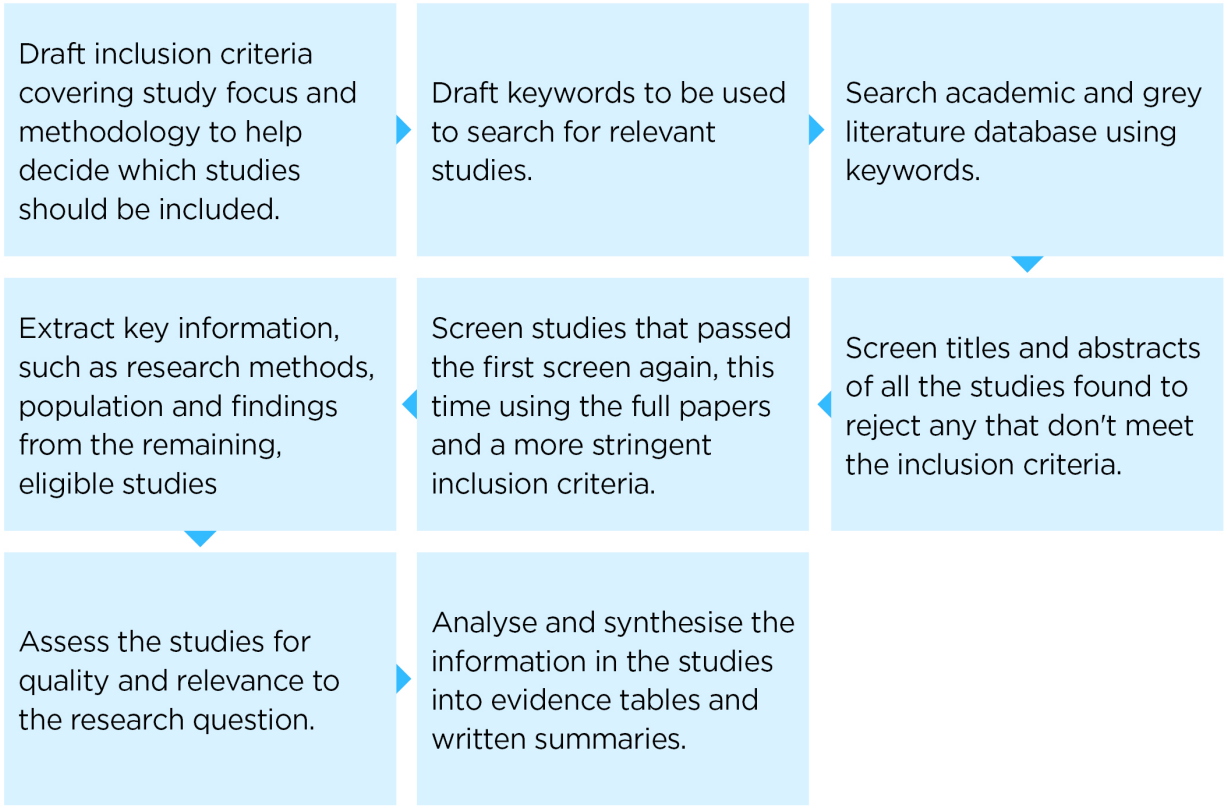
Review process

The review followed the process outlined in figure 1. The Guideline Committee were consulted on the approach taken at key stages[13]. Protocols were developed after some exploratory searches and discussions with subject matter experts[14], and prior to beginning a systematic search or sifting. The final approach was amended slightly

[12] For further details regarding REA methods, see: Government Social Research Service. (2014). **Rapid evidence assessment toolkit index** [internet]. [Accessed July 2019]
[13] The beginning of the process, to agree the scope of the review. Prior to commencing systematic searches, to agree the review protocol and search strategy (see appendices A and B).
[14] Academic experts who have published in the fields of risk assessment and vulnerability.

to ensure that the evidence identified was most relevant to the guideline being developed (see appendix A).

Figure 1: Review process



Criteria for inclusion of studies in the review

The REA involved a systematic search for, and assessment of, both academic and grey literature.

The following definition of vulnerability was used:

> A person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care of or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation.

Studies met the inclusion criteria if they:

- focused on one or more of the 12 identified strands of vulnerability[15]
- were qualitative research studies, or had a qualitative research component (with relevant findings)
- were about, or from the perspective of:
  - **victims** who had experienced a crime or crimes covered by the 12 strands of vulnerability
  - **vulnerable individuals** and their interaction, or reasons for not interacting, with the police
  - **police officers and/or staff** working with vulnerable people
  - **relevant, formal service providers** (for example, support organisations for victims of domestic abuse)
- reported one or more of the following outcomes:
  - **victims' experiences or perceptions of contact** with frontline officers and staff, including other formal support providers
  - **barriers or facilitators** to victims disclosing abuse and harm
  - **behaviours and verbal and non-verbal cues** that could encourage or impede a positive interaction between victims and police or formal support providers

Search strategy

Searches were carried out in three academic databases[16] and three grey literature databases.[17] The searches were conducted in March 2019. Only studies available in English were included in the review. No initial date or other restrictions were placed on the search. After the searches were run, results from the three academic

[15] Adults at risk, child abuse, child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honour-based violence, human trafficking, missing persons, prostitution, serious sexual offences, stalking and harassment.
[16] EBSCO, Web of Science Core Collection, ProQuest.
[17] Global Policing Database, OpenGrey, Social Care Online, EThOS, National Police Library classic catalogue. Searches were also trialled in TRiP, SSRN and CORE. However, the results were too cumbersome and non-specific to be included in the review.

databases were merged in EndNote[18] – a reference management software – and de-duplicated.

Detailed information about the databases searched is provided in the protocol in Appendix A. The search terms are provided in Appendix B.

Sifting

Studies were initially sifted by title and abstract based on the inclusion criteria (a detailed copy is presented in Appendix C). Study abstracts were uploaded to Covidence[19], a web-based software platform that streamlines the production of systematic reviews. Approximately 5% of studies were dual sifted to ensure consistency. Any uncertainty during this period was resolved through discussion.

A large number of studies (n=415) passed the initial sift. These were reviewed for a second time by two researchers, at which point the review was restricted to include only studies from 1990 onwards, to ensure that the evidence identified was most relevant to the guideline being developed and that it was feasible to complete the review in the time available. An additional 139 studies were excluded as a result of this second sift (reasons for exclusion are reported in full in figure 2).

The full texts of 276 studies were then reviewed against the inclusion criteria. A relevance rating was also introduced: studies were given a rating of ‘low’, ‘medium’ or ‘high’ according to the study’s relevance to the purpose and context of the guideline. Studies that received a relevance rating of low were reviewed by a second researcher and, if the researchers were in agreement, the study was excluded.

This process was recorded in Microsoft Excel, with reasons for exclusion reported.

Data management and extraction

A detailed coding protocol was used to extract the following information:

- country and year in which the study took place
- aims

[18] **https://endnote.com/**
[19] **https://www.covidence.org/**

- method
- population
- sample size
- sample characteristics
- vulnerability area
- detail about the vulnerability

College of Policing researchers coded all eligible studies. Any uncertainty was discussed with another coder and resolved through consultation.

Quality assessment

To assess the quality of the eligible studies, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist for qualitative research was used.[20]

When appraising a qualitative study, the tool considers ten questions that cover three broad issues:

- Are the results of the study valid?
- What are the results?
- Will the results help locally?

The checklist suggests a 'yes', 'no' or 'can't tell' answer to most of the questions, and there is some degree of overlap between them. A number of prompts are also given after each question. These are designed to remind the assessor why the question is important and to help ensure consistency between assessors. The checklist does not specify a scoring system.

An overall quality rating of 'weak', 'fair' or 'strong' was assigned to each study, taking into account the answers to each of the questions. Of the studies that met the inclusion criteria and had a relevance rating of either medium or high, only ten were given a quality rating of weak.

[20] Critical Appraisal Skills Programme. (2018). **CASP Qualitative Checklist** [online]. [Accessed July 2019]

Synthesis

Evidence was synthesised using NVivo[21] through a process of thematic analysis. Initial codes were generated from the data to identify and group relevant findings. These codes were refined and reviewed iteratively to identify the most important, recurring themes. A narrative synthesis of the evidence related to each theme was produced in evidence tables for the Guideline Committee to consider. Often, studies feature in multiple tables, as they contained findings relevant to multiple themes.

Overview of evidence

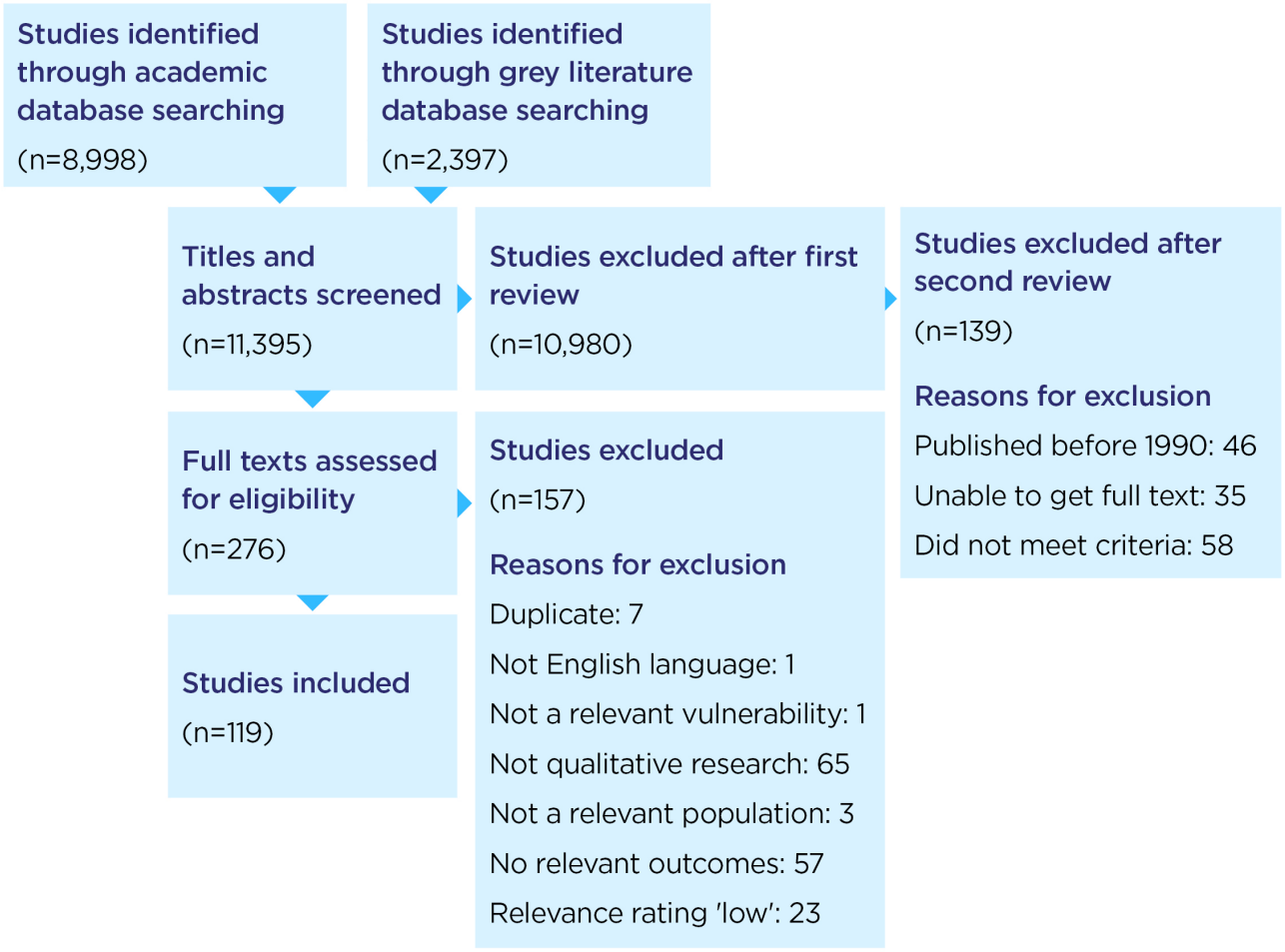
Evidence flow

Figure 2 shows the flow of studies through the stages of the review process[22]. A total of 11,395 studies were identified through systematic searches of academic and grey literature databases. After sifting, data were extracted and synthesised from 119 studies.

[21] A qualitative data analysis computer software package: **https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/nvivo-products**

[22] Studies were rated as having 'low' relevance for the following reasons: research conducted in a country or context with a non-comparable legal system and/or values (n=18); limited, relevant qualitative data (n=3); focus of the study was on wider criminal justice processes or prolonged interactions, not initial interactions, making it difficult to disentangle relevant findings (n=3).

Figure 2: Flow of studies



Characteristics of studies

Vulnerability area

The largest proportion of studies that met the inclusion criteria for this review focused on domestic abuse (46 of the 119 studies), with serious sexual offences and human trafficking accounting for a further 34 and 16 of the 119 studies, respectively. Table 1 below provides a full breakdown of the studies by vulnerability area.

Table 1: Count of studies by vulnerability area

Vulnerability	Count
Domestic abuse	46
Serious sexual offences	34
Human trafficking	16

Vulnerable adults	6
Child abuse	4
Child sexual abuse and e==xploitation	4
Stalking and harassment	3
Vulnerability (general or multiple)	3
Female genital mutilation	1
Honour-based violence	1
Prostitution	1
Total	**119**

Population

The majority of studies focused solely on the experiences of victims and vulnerable individuals (78 of 119 studies).[23] Some studies researched victims and vulnerable individuals, as well as either formal support services (n=12) or police and law enforcement personnel (n=3), or a combination of all three (n=6). A small number of studies gathered information from police and law enforcement personnel and formal support services (n=7), or police and law enforcement personnel alone (n=4).

Country

The largest proportion of studies were conducted in North America (50 in the US and 8 in Canada). A total of 36 studies were conducted in the UK, 12 in Australasia (11 in Australia, 1 in New Zealand), 10 in Europe, and 2 in multiple countries. There was 1 study where the country was unclear.

Publication year

Approximately half of the studies were published during or after 2012 (67 of 119 studies). Only eight of the studies were published between 1990 (the earliest inclusion date) and 1999. The remaining 44 studies were published in the years 2000 to 2011.

[23] In a small number of studies, members of communities who had not experienced abuse or harm were also included.

Method

The vast majority of studies used interview methods (82 of 119 studies), or interviews combined with focus groups, case studies, document analysis or survey data (n=20).[24]

Other methods used were focus groups, surveys, narrative research and institutional ethnography (n=17).

Findings

Findings from the 119 included studies focused on factors that encourage the disclosure of abuse and harm, as well as factors that might discourage victims from such disclosures. Identifying and understanding signs of risk were also considered important for creating safe and trusting encounters. The research findings are split into 11 themes, which fall into two main groups.

- Personal and situational circumstances of vulnerable victims and individuals that may have an impact on their ability or willingness to disclose any harm.
- Professional behaviours (verbal and non-verbal), attitudes and beliefs that help to facilitate positive engagement, and that encourage vulnerable victims and individuals to disclose harm and provide detailed accounts that can support action to help them – and other potential victims – to be safe.

Factors associated with vulnerable people's circumstances

Coercive control

Coercive control is a range of abusive behaviours intended to keep a victim subordinate and create a state of entrapment. Reference to coercive control was present in 70 of the included studies. Coercive control emerged very strongly as a theme in domestic abuse, but also cut across numerous other strands of public

[24] Only methods from which findings were synthesised are included here. For example, a number of the studies also reported quantitative data or other qualitative data, which did not meet the inclusion criteria for this review. Findings from surveys have been included where either the results included a large number of open responses and so qualitative data was collected, or where the survey findings were reported alongside findings from qualitative interviews and the two could not be separated.

protection and vulnerability, including human trafficking, serious sexual offences, and child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Several sub-themes were identified in the literature that represented behaviours used by perpetrators and/or the effect of those behaviours on victims' ability to disclose their experiences and seek help. These sub-themes are set out below.

Immigration status

The evidence suggested that insecure immigration status may be used by the abuser as a direct threat or method of control, or victims of domestic abuse may not want their partner punished, as they fear it will affect their immigration status. Victims displayed:

- fear of police
- fear of being deported or punished
- fears that as foreigners they do not have the same rights as victims born in the country
- general fear of discrimination

Table 2 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 2: Summary of references contributing to immigration status (N=21)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Bales and Lize (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	73	Interviews; document analysis; case studies	Fair +
Briones-Vozmediano and others (2015)	Spain	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	29	Interviews	Fair +
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +
Clavesilla (2014)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Interviews	Fair +
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Epstein (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Erez and Globokar (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	137	Interviews	Fair +
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Joseph (2006)	UK	Service providers	Domestic abuse	16	Interviews	Strong ++
Kulwicki and others (2010)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Domestic abuse	60	Focus groups	Fair +
Lebov (2010)	Scotland	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Human trafficking	28	Interviews	Weak -
Nichols and Heil (2015)	USA	Stakeholders	Human trafficking	12	Interviews	Fair +
Richards and Lyneham (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; stakeholders	Domestic abuse	25	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Ungar and others (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	271	Interviews; focus groups; survey	Fair +
Wachholz and Miedema (2000)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	48	Focus groups	Fair +
Wallen (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Westwood and others (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	136	Interviews	Strong ++

Monitoring and isolation

Monitoring and isolation refers to restrictions placed on victims' movements. In the evidence, this included abusers discouraging or preventing victims from contacting family, friends and agencies, and abusers not letting victims speak with police or other agencies by themselves. Table 3 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 3: Summary of references contributing to monitoring and isolation (N=26)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Bales and Lize (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	73	Interviews; case studies; document analysis	Fair +
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +
Chistolini (2013)	Italy	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Focus groups; interviews	Fair +
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Dichter and Rhodes (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Epstein (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Erez and Globokar (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	137	Interviews	Fair +
Evans and Feder (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	31	Interviews	Strong ++
Franklin and Doyle (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	35	Interviews; survey	Fair +
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Gill and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerability (general)	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Child sexual exploitation	108	Case studies; interviews	Fair +
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Idriss (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Honour-based violence	38	Interviews	Strong ++
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
McGarry and others (2014)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Meyer (2011a)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Newberry (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	74	Document analysis	Strong ++
Robinson (1999)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Weak -
Sullivan and Hagen (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	61	Focus groups	Fair +
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Wachholz and Miedema (2000)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	48	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Westwood and others (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	136	Interviews	Strong ++

Dependence

Victims discussed their dependence on the perpetrator as a barrier to disclosing abuse and/or wanting their partner to be punished.

A number of forms of dependence were identified in the literature, including:

- financial
- for housing, transportation, child care and family relationships
- as a carer
- due to immigration status
- debt bondage or not wanting to return home (human trafficking)
- loss of access to goods and services in community (for example, drugs and alcohol), or community support

Table 4 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 4: Summary of references contributing to dependence (N=22)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Annan (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	28	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +
Chang and others (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Dichter and Rhodes (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Focus groups	Fair +
Epstein (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Ghanbarpour (2011)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	8	Interviews	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Child sexual exploitation	108	Case studies; interviews	Fair +
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Huey and Quirouette (2010)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	91	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Kulwicki and others (2010)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Domestic abuse	60	Focus groups	Fair +
Lebov (2010)	Scotland	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Human trafficking	28	Interviews	Weak -
Leon and Raws (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement; service providers	Human trafficking	31	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Lichtenstein and Johnson (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
Özçakar and others (2016)	Turkey	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Fair +
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Wachholz and Miedema (2000)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	48	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	41	Focus groups	Fair +

Repercussions

Victims also feared repercussions if they disclosed to, or engaged with, professionals (particularly the police), including:

- retributive action by the perpetrator
- the possibility of 'dual punishment' (if the abuser made a counter-allegation)
- the effect on their children or other family members

Table 5 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 5: Summary of references contributing to repercussions (N=52)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Abdullah-Khan (2008)	UK	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Weak -
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Ahrens (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	8	Interviews	Strong ++
Al-Khateeb and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	305	Questionnaire	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Bales and Lize (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	73	Interviews; document analysis; case studies	Fair +
Beckett and others (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerability (general)	45	Interviews	Strong ++
Briones-Vozmediano and others (2015)	Spain	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	29	Interviews	Fair +
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
DeLoveh and Cattaneo (2017)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	14	Interviews	Fair +
Dichter and Rhodes (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Focus groups	Fair +
Douglas and Harpur (2016)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Elliott and others (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	110	Interviews	Strong ++
Erez and Globokar (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	137	Interviews	Fair +
Evans and Feder (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	31	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Franklin and Doyle (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; social workers	Human trafficking	35	Interviews; survey	Fair +
Gangoli and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Female genital mutilation	14	Interviews	Fair +
Ghanbarpour (2011)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	8	Interviews	Fair +
Gill and others (2018)	UK	Victims; practitioners	Vulnerability (general)	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Gilligan (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	CSE	25	Interviews	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	CSE	108	Case studies; interviews	Fair +
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Huey and Quirouette (2010)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	91	Interviews	Fair +
Kelly and others (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement; service providers	Domestic abuse	23	Interviews; focus groups; observations	Fair +
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +
Lichtenstein and Johnson (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
Meyer (2011a)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Meyer (2011b)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Morgan and Zedner (1992)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Child abuse	335	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Nichols and Heil (2015)	USA	Stakeholders	Human trafficking	12	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Overlien and Aas (2015)	Norway	Police and law enforcement; Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	49	Interviews	Fair +
Özçakar and others (2016)	Turkey	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Fair +
Rajaram and Tidball (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	22	Interviews	Strong ++
Richards (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; stakeholders	Domestic abuse	25	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Rodriguez and others (1996)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	51	Focus groups	Fair +
Roush and Kurth (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Rymer and Cartei (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Survey; interviews	Weak -
Simpson and Helfrich (2005)	Unclear	Service providers	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Stewart and others (2013)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Sullivan and Hagen (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	61	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Wachholz and Miedema (2000)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	48	Focus groups	Fair +
Weisz (1999)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	11	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Westwood and others (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	136	Interviews	Strong ++
Wickes and others (2015)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	53	Focus groups; interviews	Fair +
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	41	Focus groups	Fair +

Fear

Fear was a relatively strong theme and was mentioned in one-third of included studies (n=39). There was considerable crossover between the themes of fear and coercive control, with specific and generalised fear reflecting both the abusive behaviour of perpetrators and the disempowered status of victims. Also in common with coercive control, fear was found in research with victims across several strands of vulnerability, including domestic abuse, human trafficking, serious sexual offences, and child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Fear of offender, threats and violence

The research identified that victims frequently displayed fear of their abuser and a consequent reluctance to disclose abuse or seek help. It was suggested that this fear may be based on threats and other abusive behaviours, but may also reflect an imbalance of power. Threats were wide-ranging and may be direct to the victim, or indirect (for example, threats to harm the victim's family or other people or things important to them, including animals and pets). The violence used to underpin and reinforce threats may be physical and/or sexual. Both threats of violence and actual violence were designed to put the victim in a state of dependence or subjugation. Table 6 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 6: Summary of references contributing to fear, threats and violence (N=32)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Abdullah-Khan (2008)	UK	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Weak -
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Bales and Lize (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	73	Interviews; document analysis; case studies	Fair +
Briones-Vozmediano and others (2015)	Spain	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	29	Interviews	Fair +
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +
Clawson and others (2006)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	Unclear	Survey; interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Epstein (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Erez and Globokar (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	137	Interviews	Fair +
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Franklin and Doyle (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; social workers	Human trafficking	35	Interviews; survey	Fair +
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Child sexual exploitation	108	Case studies; interviews	Fair +
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Hester and Lilley (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Serious sexual offences	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Keenan (2014)	Northern Ireland	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	64	Focus groups	Weak -
Lebov (2010)	Scotland	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Human trafficking	28	Interviews	Weak -
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +
Leon and Raws (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	31	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Lichtenstein and Johnson (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Meyer (2011a)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Newberry (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	74	Document analysis	Strong ++
Nichols and Heil (2015)	USA	Stakeholders	Human trafficking	12	Interviews	Fair +
Özçakar and others (2016)	Turkey	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Richards and Lyneham (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; stakeholders	Domestic abuse	25	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Wachholz and Miedema (2000)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	48	Focus groups	Fair +
Wallen (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	41	Focus groups	Fair +

Disempowered

Research found that victims' sense of disempowerment manifested in a lack of confidence, low self-esteem, depression and feelings of worthlessness. Disempowerment was also prompted by abusers' manipulative behaviour, including:

- convincing the victim that the abuse was their fault or didn't really happen
- making malicious counter-allegations or presenting the victim as mentally unstable
- telling the victim that the police won't help, or playing on victims' fears and lack of self-confidence to discourage them from seeking help
- speaking for victims who can't speak English

Table 7 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 7: Summary of references contributing to disempowerment (N=14)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Epstein (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Evans and Feder (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	31	Interviews	Strong ++
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Hester and Lilley (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Serious sexual offences	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
Richards and Lyneham (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; stakeholders	Domestic abuse	25	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Roush and Kurth (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Simpson and Helfrich (2005)	Unclear	Service providers	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Westwood and others (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	136	Interviews	Strong ++
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	41	Focus groups	Fair +

Internal barriers

Nature of the evidence

The review highlighted barriers to disclosing abuse that were related to victims' experiences of abuse and its impact. These internal barriers emerged from 73 of the studies. Internal barriers to disclosing abuse are described below.

Confidentiality, shame and stigma

The literature showed that victims discussed their concerns about information relating to their abuse being made public, as well as the possible effect of open disclosure on relationships, networks and employment.

Feeling shame, guilt or embarrassment about the abuse they have suffered can prevent victims from wanting to disclose. Other related emotional responses identified from the evidence include:

- feelings of anxiety, anger, fear, confusion and frustration

- fear of what people might think of them
- fear that disclosing abuse would expose their family to shame

For some individuals, there was a perception of stigma attached to their victimisation. In particular, traditional gender norms and/or heterosexist attitudes of society may affect willingness to disclose. Table 8 provides a summary of the evidence for this theme.

Table 8: Summary of references contributing to shame, stigma and confidentiality (N=46)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Abdullah-Khan (2008)	UK	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Weak -
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Aliraza (2018)	UK	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	70	Interviews	Fair +
Annan (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	28	Interviews	Strong ++
Beckett and others (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerability (general)	45	Interviews	Strong ++
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Briones-Vozmediano and others (2015)	Spain	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	29	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	Fair +
Christofi (2018)	Cyprus	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
DelleDonne and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	32	Interviews	Fair +
DeLoveh and Cattaneo (2017)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	14	Interviews	Fair +
Dichter and Rhodes (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Focus groups	Fair +
Epstein (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Evans and Feder (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	31	Interviews	Strong ++
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Gangoli and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Female genital mutilation	14	Interviews	Fair +
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Gill (2004)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims; police and law enforcement	Child sexual exploitation	108	Case studies; interviews	Fair +
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Hughes and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Vulnerable adults	25	Focus groups	Strong ++
Idriss (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Honour-based violence	38	Interviews	Strong ++
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Keenan (2014)	Northern Ireland	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	64	Focus groups	Weak -
Kulwicki and others (2010)	USA	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	60	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Leon and Raws (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	31	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Lichtenstein and Johnson (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
Mitchell (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	46	Interviews	Strong ++
Moore (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Pajak and others (2014)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Powell and Cauchi (2013)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	25	Interviews	Fair +
Rodriguez and others (1996)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	51	Focus groups	Fair +
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Rymer and Cartei (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Survey; interviews	Weak -
Simpson and Helfrich (2005)	Unclear	Service providers	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Sullivan and Hagen (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	61	Focus groups	Fair +
Temkin (1997)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	17	Interviews	Fair +
Temkin (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Ungar and others (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	271	Interviews; focus groups; survey	Fair +
Wallen (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +

Self-blame

Victims also discussed themes on self-blame as barriers to disclosing, specifically:

- feelings of regret
- blaming reactions from other parties (for example, friends or family, or past experiences with professionals)
- feeling at fault for putting themselves in the situation, or not alerting the police right away
- feeling that they somehow deserved the abuse as punishment or that it's their fault (common in victims of coercive control)

Table 9 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 9: Summary of references contributing to self-blame (N=25)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Ahrens and others (2007)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	102	Interviews	Weak -
Annan (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	28	Interviews	Strong ++
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +
Chistolini (2013)	Italy	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Focus groups; interviews	Strong ++
DeLoveh and Cattaneo (2017)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	14	Interviews	Fair +
Elliott and others (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	110	Interviews	Strong ++
Evans and Feder (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	31	Interviews	Strong ++
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Gill and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerability (general)	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Child sexual exploitation	108	Case studies; Interviews	Fair +
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Greeson and others (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
Mitchell (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	46	Interviews	Strong ++
Moore (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Robinson (1999)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Weak -

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Rodriguez and others (1996)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	51	Focus groups	Fair +
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Sullivan and Hagen (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	61	Focus groups	Fair +
Temkin (1997)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	17	Interviews	Fair +
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++

Recognising and naming abuse

Victims may not perceive what they have experienced as abuse, or as something that it is legitimate to report to the police.

Reasons identified in the literature that victims may not recognise that they have experienced abuse include:

- uncertainty about how to define the experience, or it does not register immediately that the experience was unwanted
- being unsure or unaware that the experience qualified as a crime (for example, unfamiliarity with systems, exploitation, an experience that may not be considered a crime in their country of origin)
- victims may wonder if they abuse is ‘bad enough’, especially in relation to:
    - non-physical abuse, such as controlling behaviour
    - lower-level physical abuse (pushing, shoving, slapping)

  - sexual offences perpetrated by someone who is known to the victim
- victims feeling uncomfortable about the legal or common language used to label the experience

Table 10 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 10: Summary of references contributing to recognising and naming the abuse (N=31)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Abdullah-Khan (2008)	UK	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Weak -
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Ahrens and others (2007)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	102	Interviews	Weak -
Annan (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	28	Interviews	Strong ++
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
DelleDonne and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	32	Interviews	Fair +
DeLoveh and Cattaneo (2017)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	14	Interviews	Fair +
Dichter and Rhodes (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Epstein (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Erez and Globokar (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	137	Interviews	Fair +
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Gangoli and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Female genital mutilation	14	Interviews	Fair +
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Gilligan (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	25	Interviews	Fair +
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Child sexual exploitation	108	Case studies; interviews	Fair +
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Keenan (2014)	Northern Ireland	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	64	Focus groups	Weak -

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Lebov (2010)	Scotland	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Human trafficking	28	Interviews	Weak -
Leon and Raws (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	31	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
McGarry and others (2014)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Pajak and others (2014)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Richards and Lyneham (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; stakeholders	Domestic abuse	25	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Semi-structured interviews	Strong ++
Ungar and others (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	271	Interviews; focus groups; survey	Fair +
Weisz (1999)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	11	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Wickes and others (2015)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	53	Focus groups; interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +

Minimising and normalising abuse

Victims may minimise or not disclose the full extent of the abuse due to threats from the perpetrator(s), or lack of trust in the police. The abuse may become 'normalised', such that the victim views it as a normal part of their life. Table 11 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 11: Summary of references contributing to minimising and normalising the abuse (N=23)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Ahern and others (2017)	UK	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Child sexual exploitation	15	Interviews	Fair +
Chang and others (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Clavesilla (2014)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Interviews	Fair +
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Clawson and others (2006)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	Unclear	Survey; interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
DelleDonne and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	32	Interviews	Fair +
Epstein (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Evans and Feder (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	31	Interviews	Strong ++
Franklin and Doyle (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	35	Interviews	Fair +
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Ghanbarpour (2011)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	8	Interviews	Fair +
Gill (2004)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Gilligan (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	25	Interviews	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Child sexual exploitation	108	Case studies; interviews	Fair +
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Keenan (2014)	Northern Ireland	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	64	Focus groups	Weak -
Lichtenstein and Johnson (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Morgan and Zedner (1992)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Child abuse	335	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Nichols and Heil (2015)	USA	Stakeholders	Human trafficking	12	Interviews	Fair +
Özçakar and others (2016)	Turkey	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Fair +
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++

Concern for the abuser

Victims may be concerned for the welfare of the perpetrator and be dealing with a range of associated emotions, including:

- feelings of guilt, confusion, loyalty, love or compassion
- not wanting the abuser to go to prison
- feelings of concern about the treatment of the perpetrator by police or the community

Table 12 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 12: Summary of references contributing to concern for the abuser (N=12)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Al-Khateeb and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	305	Questionnaire	Strong ++
Annan (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	28	Interviews	Strong ++
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +
Evans and Feder (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	31	Interviews	Strong ++
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Child sexual exploitation	108	Case studies; interviews	Fair +
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Johnson (2017)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	219	Survey	Fair +
Joseph (2006)	UK	Service providers	Domestic abuse	16	Interviews	Strong ++
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Wachholz and Miedema (2000)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	48	Focus groups	Fair +
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +

Reasons for disclosing

A range of reasons and motivations for seeking help and disclosing abuse were identified through this review. Reasons for disclosing were most commonly discussed by victims of domestic abuse and serious sexual offences, although views of victims and service providers from other vulnerability areas were also captured. Understanding these motivations may help to encourage victims to engage. Table 13 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Reported motivations

- To help catch the perpetrator and have them prosecuted (for example, for retribution, justice, or to send a message).
- Validation or to have a voice and be heard.
- Moral or ethical obligations (to protect others or through a sense of duty).
- To protect themselves.
- Being ready to leave the abuser.
- Reaching a breaking or turning point where they've had enough, sometimes triggered by an escalation in abusive behaviour.
- The impact of the abuse on others, especially children.
- Being persuaded by others or when others give them the 'extra push'.

Table 13: Summary of references contributing to reasons for disclosing (N=25)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Ahern and others (2017)	UK	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Child sexual exploitation	15	Interviews	Fair +
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Christofi (2018)	Cyprus	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Demers and others (2017)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	13	Semi-structured interviews	Strong ++
Dichter and Rhodes (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Focus groups	Fair +
Dylan and others (2008)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	11	Interviews	Fair +
Ekström (2015)	Sweden	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Weak -
Elliott and others (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	110	Interviews	Strong ++
Evans and Feder (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	31	Interviews	Strong ++
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Franklin and Doyle (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	35	Interviews; survey	Fair +
Gill and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; practitioners	Vulnerability (general)	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Greeson and others (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Johnson (2017)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	219	Survey	Fair +
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +
Meyer (2011a)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Noone (2000)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Stewart and others (2013)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Taylor-Dunn and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	35	Interviews; survey	Strong ++
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Weisz (1999)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	11	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +

External barriers

The review identified barriers to disclosing abuse that were external to victims' direct experiences of abuse and its impact, including:

- cultural influences
- general perceptions of the police and other agencies
- actual past experiences of engaging with agencies

These barriers were mentioned in more than half of the studies identified (n=69).

Cultural and societal influences

The evidence suggests that in some cultures, certain forms of abuse – such as patriarchal abuse – may be regarded as customary, common or acceptable. Victims feared being criticised for not respecting the cultural norm of family privacy, or for bringing shame

or unwanted attention to the relationship, family or wider community. Others feared breaking up the family, or believed that seeking help represents failure. Other fears included receiving insensitive responses and being ostracised. The literature suggests that these fears may be heightened when the victim's gender or age does not reflect the typical characteristics of victims sharing their experience (for example, male victims of domestic abuse), or when they feel restricted by generational or societal norms and values (such as taboos around sex and sexuality). Table 14 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 14: Summary of references contributing to cultural and societal influences (N=31)

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Abdullah-Khan (2008)	UK	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Weak -
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Annan (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	28	Interviews	Strong ++
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +
Chistolini (2013)	Italy	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Focus groups; interviews	Strong ++
Christofi (2018)	Cyprus	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Clavesilla (2014)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Interviews	Fair +
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
DelleDonne and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	32	Interviews	Fair +
Dichter and Rhodes (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Focus groups	Fair +
Epstein (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Erez and Globokar (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	137	Interviews	Fair +
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Gangoli and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Female genital mutilation	14	Interviews	Fair +
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Gill (2004)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Gill and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerability (general)	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +
Huey and Quirouette (2010)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	91	Interviews	Fair +
Joseph (2006)	UK	Service providers	Domestic abuse	16	Interviews	Strong ++
Keenan (2014)	Northern Ireland	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	64	Focus groups	Weak -
Kulwicki and others (2010)	USA	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	60	Focus groups	Fair +
Lebov (2010)	Scotland	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Human trafficking	28	Interviews	Weak -
Leon and Raws (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	31	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Lichtenstein and Johnson (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
Moore (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +

General perceptions

The research suggested that some victims had pre-existing negative perceptions of authority figures in general, or the police specifically, including a lack of trust in the system and fear of the police. The literature states that these perceptions may have been influenced by past experiences or the experiences of others, or were carried over from other countries or generations where police were seen as oppressive or corrupt. Children may be scared of police and the uniform. The research found that victims may also be reluctant to disclose for fear that it would be ineffective, for example:

- they wouldn't receive help
- nobody would care
- appropriate action would not be taken against the perpetrator
- they wouldn't receive fair treatment

Perceptions of the legal system more generally also found to have an impact on decisions to disclose. Some victims did not understand the process or lacked faith in system, or felt that the time, energy and resource required to pursue legal action was not worthwhile. Table 15 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 15: Summary of references contributing to general perceptions (N=34)

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Ahern and others (2017)	UK	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Child sexual exploitation	15	Interviews	Fair +
Ahrens and others (2007)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	102	Interviews	Weak -
Beckett and others (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerability (general)	45	Interviews; group interviews	Strong ++
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Brewster (2001)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	187	Interviews	Fair +
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +
Chistolini (2013)	Italy	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Focus groups; interviews	Strong ++
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Ekström (2015)	Sweden	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Weak -

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Gangoli and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Female genital mutilation	14	Interviews	Fair +
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Ghanbarpour (2011)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	8	Interviews	Fair +
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Huey and Quirouette (2010)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	91	Interviews	Fair +
Hughes and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Vulnerable adults	25	Focus groups	Strong ++
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Joseph (2006)	UK	Service providers	Domestic abuse	16	Interviews	Strong ++
Love and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Weak -
Meyer (2011b)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Overlien and Aas (2015)	Norway	Police and law enforcement; victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	49	Interviews	Fair +
Pajak and others (2014)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Pratt-Eriksson and others (2014)	Sweden	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Richards and Lyneham (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; stakeholders	Domestic abuse	25	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Stewart and others (2013)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Temkin (1997)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	17	Interviews	Fair +
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Ungar and others (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	271	Interviews; focus groups; survey	Fair +
Wachholz and Miedema (2000)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	48	Focus groups	Fair +
Wallen (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Weisz (1999)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	11	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Wickes and others (2015)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	53	Focus groups; interviews	Fair +
Yu and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Fair +

Past experiences

The evidence found that victims may be hesitant to trust police and feel that additional disclosures would be harmful, rather than helpful. Previous negative experiences were found to affect future decisions about whether to approach the police, and may extend to experiences with the wider criminal justice system, as well as other professionals (for example, healthcare providers, social services), and even friends or family. Table 16 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 16: Summary of references contributing to past experiences (N=35)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Ahrens and others (2007)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	102	Interviews	Weak -
Annan (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	28	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Beckett and others (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerability (general)	45	Interviews; group interviews	Strong ++
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Brewster (2001)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	187	Interviews	Fair +
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	Fair +
DeLoveh and Cattaneo (2017)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	14	Interviews	Fair +
Dylan and others (2008)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	11	Interviews	Fair +
Eastwood and others (1998)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Evans and Feder (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	31	Interviews	Strong ++
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Gangoli and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Female genital mutilation	14	Interviews	Fair +
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Ghanbarpour (2011)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	8	Interviews	Fair +
Gill and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; Service providers	Vulnerability (general)	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Giorgio (2002)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; Service providers	Domestic abuse	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Hughes and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Vulnerable adults	25	Focus groups	Strong ++
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +
Li and others (2015)	USA	Perpetrators	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Strong ++
Love and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Weak -

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Meyer (2011b)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Pajak and others (2014)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Pfeffer (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	40	Interviews	Strong ++
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Rymer and Cartei (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Survey; interviews	Weak -
Sullivan and Hagen (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	61	Focus groups	Fair +
Taylor-Dunn and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	35	Interviews; survey	Strong ++
Temkin (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Weisz (1999)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	11	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Wickes and others (2015)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	53	Focus groups; interviews	Fair +
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +

Factors associated with professional's knowledge, attitudes and interactions with vulnerable people

Interpersonal treatment

Interpersonal treatment between the victims and the police officers and staff, specifically the importance of sensitivity in interactions, was a strong theme mentioned in more than half of the included studies (n=68).

Sensitivity and secondary victimisation

Lack of sensitivity to the victim was a recurring theme in the literature, with the police response being described variously as unsympathetic, cold, remote and detached. Some victims reported being treated like a case or crime scene rather than a person, and that the police depersonalised victims and put consideration of victims' welfare and support needs second to their input as a source of information. A related theme was that not treating victims with sensitivity resulted in them being revictimised or reliving the experience and trauma (secondary victimisation). Table 17 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 17: Summary of references contributing to sensitivity and secondary victimisation (N=54)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Abdullah-Khan (2008)	UK	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Weak -
Ahern and others (2017)	UK	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Child sexual exploitation	15	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Ahrens and others (2007)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	102	Interviews	Weak -
Barrett and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2013)	UK	Police and law enforcement	Serious sexual offences	22	Interviews	Fair +
Beckett and others (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerability (general)	45	Interviews	Strong ++
Bows (2017)	UK	Practitioners and victims	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Brewster (2001)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	187	Interviews	Fair +
Carmody (2006)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Weak -
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	Fair +
Christofi (2018)	Cyprus	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Clavesilla (2014)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Interviews	Fair +
Clawson and others (2006)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	Unclear	Survey; interviews	Fair +
DelleDonne and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	32	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Douglas and Harpur (2016)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Dylan and others (2008)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	11	Interviews	Fair +
Elliott and others (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	110	Interviews	Strong ++
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Fraser-Barbour and others (2018)	Australia	Service providers	Vulnerable adults	7	Interviews	Fair +
French (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Fair +
Gagnon and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	224	Interviews	Strong ++
Ghanbarpour (2011)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	8	Interviews	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +
Hughes and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Vulnerable adults	25	Focus groups	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Johnson (2017)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	219	Survey	Fair +
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Kelly and others (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement; service providers	Domestic abuse	23	Interviews; focus groups; observations	Fair +
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +
Long (2018)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Love and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Weak -
Machado and others (2017)	Portugal	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Fair +
Meyer (2011b)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Mitchell (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	46	Interviews	Strong ++
Moore (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Morgan and Zedner (1992)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Child abuse	335	Survey; interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Morse (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Noone (2000)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Strong ++
Patterson (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Pfeffer (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	40	Interviews	Strong ++
Powell and Cauchi (2013)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	25	Interviews	Fair +
Pratt-Eriksson and others (2014)	Sweden	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Rodriguez and others (1996)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	51	Focus groups	Fair +
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Rymer and Cartei (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Survey; interviews	Weak -
Simpson and Helfrich (2005)	Unclear	Service providers	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Stewart and others (2013)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Sullivan and Hagen (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	61	Focus groups	Fair +
Temkin (1997)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	17	Interviews	Fair +
Temkin (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Wallen (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Wickes, and others (2015)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	53	Focus groups; interviews	Fair +
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Yu and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Fair +

Reassuring

Victims reflected more positive experiences when they perceived the police response to be reassuring, empathetic, supportive and focused on their needs. A fairly strong sub-theme was female victims' preference for female officers, though some victims said that the officer's attitude mattered as much as, or more than, their gender. Table 18 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 18: Summary of references contributing to reassuring and matching victim's needs (N=41)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Al-Khateeb and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	305	Questionnaire	Strong ++
Barrett and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2013)	UK	Law enforcement	Serious sexual offences	22	Interviews	Fair +
Beckett and others (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerability (general)	45	Interviews	Strong ++
Bows (2017)	UK	Practitioners and victims	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	
Christofi (2018)	Cyprus	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Clavesilla (2014)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Interviews	Fair +
Eastwood and others (1998)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Ekström (2015)	Sweden	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Weak -
Elliott and others (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	110	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Franklin and Doyle (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	35	Interviews; survey	Fair +
Gagnon and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	224	Interviews	Strong ++
Gill and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; practitioners	Vulnerability (general)	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Gilligan (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	25	Interviews	Fair +
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Johnson (2017)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	219	Survey	Fair +
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Lee (2016)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Leon and Raws (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement; service providers	Human trafficking	31	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Long (2018)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Love and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Weak -
McCoy and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; stakeholders	Human trafficking	180	Interviews	Fair +
Moore (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Morgan and Zedner (1992)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Child abuse	335	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Morse (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Noone (2000)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Strong ++
Powell and Cauchi (2013)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	25	Interviews	Fair +
Rajaram and Tidball (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	22	Interviews	Strong ++
Rodriguez and others (1996)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	51	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Roush and Kurth (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Rymer and Cartei (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Survey; interviews	Weak -
Stewart and others (2013)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Taylor-Dunn and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	35	Interviews; survey	Strong ++
Temkin (1997)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	17	Interviews	Fair +
Temkin (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Yu and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Fair +

Preconceptions and victim blaming

More than half of the included research studies referenced 'victim blaming' by police or other agencies, or described victims' feelings of being judged by service providers (n=65). Such attitudes and feelings were observed across vulnerability strands, and were equally prevalent for victims of domestic abuse and serious sexual offences (the latter including perpetrators who were strangers and acquaintances).

Victim blaming

Victim blaming can be described as the police blaming the victim – or creating the impression that they blame the victim, in full or in part – for their vulnerable position. Victim blaming creates the potential for victims to lose faith in, and disengage with, the process. Table 19 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 19: Summary of references contributing to victim blaming (N=37)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Ahrens and others (2007)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	102	Interviews	Weak -
Aliraza (2018)	UK	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	70	Interviews	Fair +
Annan (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	28	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Bows (2017)	UK	Practitioners; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	Fair +
Chistolini (2013)	Italy	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Focus groups; interviews	Strong ++
Christofi (2018)	Cyprus	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Clavesilla (2014)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Interviews	Fair +
Dylan and others (2008)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	11	Interviews	Fair +
Elliott and others (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	110	Interviews	Strong ++
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Gilligan (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	25	Interviews	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Greeson and others (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Johnson (2017)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	219	Survey	Fair +
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Kelly and others (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement; service providers	Domestic abuse	23	Interviews; focus groups; observations	Fair +
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +
Long (2018)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Lonsway and Cassidy (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Weak -
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
Meyer (2011b)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Morse (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Pajak and others (2014)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Patterson (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Rajaram and Tidball (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	22	Interviews	Strong ++
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Rymer and Cartei (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Survey; interviews	Weak -
Stewart and others (2013)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Sullivan and Hagen (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	61	Focus groups	Fair +
Taylor-Dunn and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	35	Interviews; survey	Strong ++
Temkin (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Yu and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Fair +

Judgement

In the literature, victims reported feeling judged or police making judgements in relation to their behaviour and/or personal characteristics or circumstances, including:

- age
- disability
- gender
- ethnicity
- sexuality
- life circumstances (for example, socio-economic status, chaotic lifestyles, alcohol or substance use)

Victims felt that such judgements affected the quality of service they received, including whether they were afforded the status of victim. Table 20 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 20: Summary of references contributing to judgement (N=50)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Abdullah-Khan (2008)	UK	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Weak -
Ahrens and others (2007)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	102	Interviews	Weak -

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Aliraza (2018)	UK	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	70	Interviews	Fair +
Annan (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Serious sexual offences	28	Interviews	Strong ++
Barrett and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2013)	UK	Police and law enforcement	Serious sexual offences	22	Interviews	Fair +
Beckett and others (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerability (general)	45	Interviews	Strong ++
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	Fair +
Christofi (2018)	Cyprus	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
DeLoveh and Cattaneo (2017)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	14	Interviews	Fair +
Douglas and Harpur (2016)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Dylan and others (2008)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	11	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Erez and Globokar (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	137	Interviews	Fair +
Evans and Feder (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	31	Interviews	Strong ++
Franklin and Doyle (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; social workers	Human trafficking	35	Interviews	Fair +
Fraser-Barbour and others (2018)	Australia	Service providers	Vulnerable adults	7	Interviews	Fair +
Gagnon and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	224	Interviews	Strong ++
Gangoli and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Female genital mutilation	14	Interviews	Fair +
Ghanbarpour (2011)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	8	Interviews	Fair +
Gilligan (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	25	Interviews	Fair +
Giorgio (2002)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Greeson and others (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Hughes and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Vulnerable adults	25	Focus groups	Strong ++
Johnson (2017)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	219	Survey	Fair +
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Kelly and others (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement; service providers	Domestic abuse	23	Interviews; focus groups; observations	Fair +
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +
Love and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Weak -
Machado and others (2017)	Portugal	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Fair +
McCoy and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; stakeholders	Human trafficking	180	Interviews	Fair +
Meyer (2011b)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Mitchell (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	46	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Moore (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Morse (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Pajak and others (2014)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Pfeffer (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	40	Interviews	Strong ++
Powell and Cauchi (2013)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	25	Interviews	Fair +
Rajaram and Tidball (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	22	Interviews	Strong ++
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Rymer and Cartei (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Survey; interviews	Weak -
Simpson and Helfrich (2005)	Unclear	Service providers	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Temkin (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Wachholz and Miedema (2000)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	48	Focus groups	Fair +
Wallen (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Weisz (1999)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	11	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Yu and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Fair +

Believing victims

Feeling believed was reported to be one of the most important aspects of the interaction for victims, as it validated their experience and confirmed that they were right to disclose it. The importance of being believed was one of the strongest themes, appearing in almost half of the included research studies (n=57).

The theme was prominent in research across several vulnerability strands, including domestic abuse, serious sexual offences, human trafficking, and child sexual abuse and exploitation. Fear of not being believed was consistently cited as a barrier to reporting, and victims reported experiences of police appearing to doubt their accounts.

Perceived reasons for being doubted

Perceived reasons for being doubted that were identified in the studies included:

- victims knowing the perpetrator or being unwilling and/or unable to leave the perpetrator
- victims having their credibility questioned due to the circumstances of the offence (for example, alcohol was involved)
- victim's life circumstances or characteristics (for example, age or mental health)
- victims being uncertain of specific details or inconsistencies in victim accounts
- police placing more trust in other people's accounts than the victim's
- victims being accused of exaggerating or being hypersensitive
- victims being questioned as to why they didn't fight back
- victims being told that they would be charged if they were found to be lying
- perpetrators giving false accounts or manipulating the police
- victims not behaving like a 'real' or 'ideal' victim
- victims being disbelieved because they had a calm reporting demeanour
- victims' reluctance to go to the police immediately

Police were seen to demonstrate belief in the victim's account both directly, through verbal reassurance, and also indirectly, by how they treated the victim more generally and how thoroughly they investigated the report. Table 21 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 21: Summary of references contributing to believing victims (N=57)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Ahrens and others (2007)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	102	Interviews	Weak -
Barrett and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2013)	UK	Police and law enforcement	Serious sexual offences	22	Interviews	Fair +
Beckett and others (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerability (general)	45	Interviews	Strong ++
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Carmody (2006)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Weak -
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	Fair +
Christofi (2018)	Cyprus	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Clavesilla (2014)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Clawson and others (2006)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	Unclear	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Dylan and others (2008)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	11	Interviews	Fair +
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Gagnon and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	224	Interviews	Strong ++
Ghanbarpour (2011)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	8	Interviews	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Giorgio (2002)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Child sexual exploitation	108	Case studies; interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Gover and others (2013)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	236	Interviews	Fair +
Greeson and others (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Hester and Lilley (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Serious sexual offences	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Huey and Quirouette (2010)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	91	Interviews	Fair +
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Johnson (2017)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	219	Survey	Fair +
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Keenan (2014)	Northern Ireland	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	64	Focus groups	Weak -
Kelly and others (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement; service providers	Domestic abuse	23	Interviews; focus groups; observations	Fair +
Kuosmanen and Starke (2015)	Sweden	Service providers	Prostitution	22	Interviews	Strong ++
Lee (2016)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +
Leon and Raws (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement; service providers	Human trafficking	31	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Lichtenstein and Johnson (2009)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	Unclear	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Long (2018)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Lonsway and Cassidy (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Weak -
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
Meyer (2011b)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Moore (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +
Morgan and Zedner (1992)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Child abuse	335	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Newberry (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	74	Document analysis	Strong ++
Noone (2000)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Strong ++
Özçakar and others (2016)	Turkey	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Pajak and others (2014)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Patterson (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Pfeffer (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	40	Interviews	Strong ++
Powell and Cauchi (2013)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	25	Interviews	Fair +
Pratt-Eriksson and others (2014)	Sweden	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Rajaram and Tidball (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	22	Interviews	Strong ++
Richards and Lyneham (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; stakeholders	Domestic abuse	25	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Ruttan (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	11	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Sullivan and Hagen (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	61	Focus groups	Fair +
Taylor-Dunn and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	35	Interviews; survey	Strong ++
Temkin (1997)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	17	Interviews	Fair +
Temkin (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Ungar and others (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	271	Interviews; focus groups; survey	Fair +
Wachholz and Miedema (2000)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	48	Focus groups	Fair +
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Yu and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Fair +

Fairness and process

Discussions about fair and respectful treatment of victims by police were identified in 53 of the studies and covered a range of vulnerabilities. Two main sub-themes are presented below, which capture the experiences and perceptions of respondents in the literature. There are close links between some of the findings presented here and in the theme ‘interpersonal treatment’.

Perceived interest

The literature identified that the following perceptions of police had a negative impact on feelings of fairness and the victim experience:

- perceptions that the police will wait for something to happen before doing anything
- it being the victim’s responsibility to make a change to their circumstances to stop the harm
- that the police don’t care, aren’t going to help or are indifferent to the victim’s circumstances, and are just following a process
- victims receiving insensitive, impersonal, dismissive, hostile or cold treatment from police officers
- victims feeling that their opinions and needs did not matter or are not understood, or that they were wasting police time
- assumptions being made about how victims were feeling, and decisions being made on their behalf

Table 22 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 22: Summary of references contributing to perceived interest (N=24)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Ahrens and others (2007)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	102	Interviews	Weak -

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Al-Khateeb and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	305	Questionnaire	Strong ++
Christofi (2018)	Cyprus	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Clavesilla (2014)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Interviews	Fair +
Dichter and Rhodes (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Focus groups	Fair +
Ghanbarpour (2011)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	8	Interviews	Fair +
Gilligan (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	25	Interviews	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Greeson and others (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Kelly and others (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement; service providers	Domestic abuse	23	Interviews; focus groups; observations	Fair +
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Li and others (2015)	USA	Perpetrators	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Strong ++
Long (2018)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Machado and others (2017)	Portugal	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Fair +
Meyer (2011b)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Strong ++
Morgan and Zedner (1992)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Child abuse	335	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Newberry (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	74	Document analysis	Strong ++
Özçakar and others (2016)	Turkey	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Fair +
Powell and Cauchi (2013)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	25	Interviews	Fair +
Pratt-Eriksson and others (2014)	Sweden	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Stewart and others (2013)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Taylor-Dunn and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	35	Interviews; survey	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Temkin (1997)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	17	Interviews	Fair +

Explaining

Important factors for encouraging victims to disclose included:

- active listening
- showing interest in what the victim has to say and taking it seriously
- explaining how the process works
- providing follow-up information (accurate information about the support services available and proactively referring victims to support services)

Creating an appropriate and safe environment for disclosing abuse, including for formal interviews, was also considered important in the literature.

Table 23 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 23: Summary of references contributing to explaining (N=44)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Beckett and others (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerability (general)	45	Interviews	Strong ++
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	Fair +
Clavesilla (2014)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Interviews	Fair +
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Dylan and others (2008)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	11	Interviews	Fair +
Eastwood and others (1998)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Ekström (2015)	Sweden	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Weak -
Elliott and others (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	110	Interviews	Strong ++
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Franklin and Doyle (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	35	Interviews; survey	Fair +
Fraser-Barbour and others (2018)	Australia	Service providers	Vulnerable adults	7	Interviews	Fair +
Gagnon and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	224	Interviews	Strong ++
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Hughes and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Vulnerable adults	25	Focus groups	Strong ++
Idriss (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Honour-based violence	38	Interviews	Strong ++
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Johnson (2017)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	219	Survey	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Joseph (2006)	UK	Service providers	Domestic abuse	16	Interviews	Strong ++
Kulwicki and others (2010)	USA	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Domestic abuse	60	Focus groups	Fair +
Kuosmanen and Starke (2015)	Sweden	Service providers	Prostitution	22	Interviews	Strong ++
Lee (2016)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Love and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Weak -
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
McCoy and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; stakeholders	Human trafficking	180	Interviews	Fair +
Newberry (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	74	Document analysis	Strong ++
Nichols and Heil (2015)	USA	Stakeholders	Human trafficking	12	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Noone (2000)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Strong ++
Overlien and Aas (2015)	Norway	Police and law enforcement; victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	49	Interviews	Fair +
Pajak and others (2014)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Powell and Cauchi (2013)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	25	Interviews	Fair +
Rajaram and Tidball (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	22	Interviews	Strong ++
Rodriguez and others (1996)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	51	Focus groups	Fair +
Roush and Kurth (2016)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Taylor-Dunn and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	35	Interviews; survey	Strong ++
Temkin (1997)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	17	Interviews	Fair +
Temkin (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Westwood and others (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	136	Interviews	Strong ++
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	41	Focus groups	Fair +

Knowledge and awareness

Knowledge and awareness was a relatively strong theme emerging from the review of research and was mentioned in 44 of the included studies. This theme covers victim and police knowledge and awareness, both of which the literature found had an impact on the disclosure of abuse.

Victim knowledge and awareness

The literature suggested that victims not knowing what help was available to them or how to access help, and/or unfamiliarity with the legal system, made them more vulnerable to coercion by a perpetrator. Key issues included:

- not being sure how police can help, or whether they will help
- a sense of loss of control when engaging with agencies or not knowing what will happen next
- fear of the perpetrator manipulating the system
- language barriers
- unfamiliarity with the legal system in a new country
- children relying on adults to report crimes on their behalf

Such gaps in knowledge and awareness emphasise the utility of victim advocates[25]. Table 24 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 24: Summary of references contributing to victim knowledge and awareness (N=27)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Bows (2017)	UK	Practitioners; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +
Chang and others (2006)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Clawson and others (2006)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	Unclear	Survey; interviews	Fair +
DeLoveh and Cattaneo (2017)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	14	Interviews	Fair +
Dichter and Rhodes (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	15	Focus groups	Fair +

[25] Wedlock E and Tapley J. (2016). **What works in supporting victims of crime: A rapid evidence assessment** [internet]. Victims' Commissioner. [Accessed March 2021]

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Dylan and others (2008)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	11	Interviews	Fair +
Ekström (2015)	Sweden	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Weak -
Elliott and others (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	110	Interviews	Strong ++
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Franklin and Doyle (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; social workers	Human trafficking	35	Interviews; survey	Fair +
Gavin (2008)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Idriss (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Honour-based violence	38	Interviews	Strong ++
Keenan (2014)	Northern Ireland	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	64	Focus groups	Weak -

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Mandl and others (2014)	Multiple	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Vulnerable adults	113	Interviews	Fair +
Morgan and Zedner (1992)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Child abuse	335	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Rymer and Cartei (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Survey; Interviews	Weak -
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; health workers; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Ungar and others (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	271	Interviews; focus groups; survey	Fair +
Wallen (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Weisz (1999)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	11	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Westwood and others (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	136	Interviews	Strong ++

Police knowledge and awareness

Police lack of knowledge and awareness was discussed with regard to a variety of areas by victims and vulnerable individuals, as well as police officers and staff and other support providers. Specific areas reported on in the literature included:

- lack of cultural awareness, or a lack of personnel from multi-ethnic backgrounds

- awareness of impact and needs, for example, relating to disability and mental health
- appreciation of intersectionality (multiple barriers experienced, for example, by women from ethnic minority groups, or people with disabilities from ethnic minority groups)
- lack of understanding of coercion and control (including arresting the primary victim)
- lack of understanding of the impact of trauma

Table 25 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 25: Summary of references contributing to police knowledge and awareness (N=24)

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Bales and Lize (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	73	Interviews; case studies, document analysis	Fair +
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Carmody (2006)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Clawson and others (2006)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	Unclear	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +
Fraser-Barbour and others (2018)	Australia	Service providers	Vulnerable adults	7	Interviews	Fair +
Gohir (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Child sexual exploitation	108	Case studies; Interviews	Fair +
Horwitz and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	22	Focus groups	Strong ++
Hughes and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Vulnerable adults	25	Focus groups	Strong ++
Idriss (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Honour-based violence	38	Interviews	Strong ++
Lee (2016)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Leisenring (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	40	Interviews	Fair +
Leon and Raws (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	31	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +
Li and others (2015)	USA	Perpetrators	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Strong ++
Nichols and Heil (2015)	USA	Stakeholders	Human trafficking	12	Interviews	Fair +
Pfeffer (2012)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	40	Interviews	Strong ++
Rodriguez and others (1996)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	51	Focus groups	Fair +
Simpson and Helfrich (2005)	Unclear	Service providers	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Taylor-Dunn and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	35	Interviews; survey	Strong ++
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Wallen (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +

Communication

Communication between police and victims was another fairly strong theme emerging from the review (covering language, building rapport and asking questions). Communication was mentioned in more than one-third of included studies spanning several vulnerability strands, primarily human trafficking, serious sexual offences and domestic abuse (n=44).

Language

The literature found that the following may mean that victims are unable to communicate with police, or unable to disclose fully:

- a lack of interpretation services for non-English speakers and sign language users
- using family members, children, or perpetrators as translators
- a lack of awareness of how to communicate with people with intellectual disabilities

Language also refers to using the victims' preferred terminology (for example, 'survivor'). Some uses of terminology (for example, gender-specific) were found to exclude people. Table 26 provides a summary of the evidence used for this theme.

Table 26: Summary of references contributing to language (N=24)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Briones-Vozmediano and others (2015)	Spain	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	29	Interviews	Fair +
Bui (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	45	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Carmody (2006)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Weak -
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	Fair +
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Franklin and Doyle (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	35	Interviews; survey	Fair +
Gillis and others (2006)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	20	Focus groups	Fair +
Hailes and others (2018)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	29	Interviews	Fair +
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Hughes and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Vulnerable adults	25	Focus groups	Strong ++
Idriss (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Honour-based violence	38	Interviews	Strong ++
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Kuosmanen and Starke (2015)	Sweden	Service providers	Prostitution	22	Interviews	Strong ++
Lebov (2010)	Scotland	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Human trafficking	28	Interviews	Weak -
Love and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Weak -
McCoy and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; stakeholders	Human trafficking	180	Interviews	Fair +
Morgan and Zedner (1992)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Child abuse	335	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Rymer and Cartei (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Survey; interviews	Weak -
Simpson and Helfrich (2005)	Unclear	Service providers	Domestic abuse	6	Interviews	Fair +
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Westwood and others (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	136	Interviews	Strong ++
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Yu and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Fair +

Building rapport and asking questions

Building rapport with victims came out especially strongly in relation to child sexual abuse and exploitation, but was also referenced in relation to other vulnerability strands. It was suggested that building rapport takes time, and is improved by consistency and stability of support (both in terms of the approach over a series of encounters, as well as the number of different staff involved). In relation to children in particular, police need to avoid appearing as intimidating or authority figures.

The evidence suggests a need for the police to be aware of the impact of trauma and tiredness, as well as other factors, such as disability, on people's ability to understand and respond to questions. Police should take their time, go slowly and not appear judgmental when asking questions. Officers should communicate clearly and in a terminology that the victim can understand, and should check regularly that the victim has understood what has been said.

Table 27: Summary of references contributing to building rapport and asking questions (N=47)

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Aden (2009)	USA	Service providers	Human trafficking	10	Interviews	Weak -
Ahern and others (2017)	UK	Police and law enforcement; service providers	Child sexual exploitation	15	Interviews	Fair +
Bales and Lize (2005)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Human trafficking	73	Interviews; document analysis; case studies	Fair +
Beckett and others (2015)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerability (general)	45	Interviews; group interviews	Strong ++

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Bows (2017)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	30	Interviews	Fair +
Carmody (2006)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Weak -
Child and others (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	52	Focus groups	Fair +
Clawson and others (2003)	USA	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	124	Survey; focus groups	Fair +
Clawson and others (2006)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	Unclear	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Collins and others (2014)	Scotland	Service providers	Vulnerability (general)	19	Interviews	Strong ++
DeLoveh and Cattaneo (2017)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	14	Interviews	Fair +
Dylan and others (2008)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Vulnerable adults	11	Interviews	Fair +
Eastwood and others (1998)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	12	Interviews	Fair +
Elliott and others (2014)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	110	Interviews	Strong ++
Exton and Thandi (2013)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child abuse	26	Focus groups	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Fraser-Barbour and others (2018)	Australia	Service providers	Vulnerable adults	7	Interviews	Fair +
Ghanbarpour (2011)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	8	Interviews	Fair +
Gilligan (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Child sexual exploitation	25	Interviews	Fair +
Giorgio (2002)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	21	Interviews	Strong ++
Harvey and others (2014)	UK	Service providers; police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	18	Interviews	Fair +
Helfferich and others (2011)	Germany	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	53	Interviews	Fair +
Horwitz and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Domestic abuse	22	Focus groups	Strong ++
Hughes and others (2011)	USA	Police and law enforcement	Vulnerable adults	25	Focus groups	Strong ++
Idriss (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers; police and law enforcement	Honour-based violence	38	Interviews	Strong ++
Jobe (2008)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; police and law enforcement	Human trafficking	10	Interviews; document analysis	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Johnson (2017)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	219	Survey	Fair +
Jordan (2001)	New Zealand	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	48	Interviews	Fair +
Kuosmanen and Starke (2015)	Sweden	Service providers	Prostitution	22	Interviews	Strong ++
Lee (2016)	UK	Service providers; victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	24	Interviews; focus groups	Fair +
Long (2018)	USA	Service providers	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Love and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Weak -
Machado and others (2017)	Portugal	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	10	Interviews	Fair +
McCoy and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people; stakeholders	Human trafficking	180	Interviews	Fair +
Morgan and Zedner (1992)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Child abuse	335	Survey; interviews	Fair +
Morse (2015)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	7	Interviews	Strong ++
Overlien and Aas (2015)	Norway	Police and law enforcement; victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	49	Interviews	Fair +

Authors	Country	Sample population	Vulnerability	Sample size	Methods	Quality rating
Patterson (2011)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	20	Interviews	Strong ++
Powell and Cauchi (2013)	Australia	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	25	Interviews	Fair +
Rodriguez and others (1996)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	51	Focus groups	Fair +
Taylor-Dunn and others (2017)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Stalking and harassment	35	Interviews; survey	Strong ++
Temkin (1997)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	17	Interviews	Fair +
Temkin (1999)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	23	Interviews	Strong ++
Tokode (2012)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people; service providers	Domestic abuse	30	Interviews	Strong ++
Ungar and others (2009)	Canada	Victims and vulnerable people	Serious sexual offences	271	Interviews; focus groups; survey	Fair +
Westwood and others (2016)	UK	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	136	Interviews	Strong ++
Wolf and others (2003)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Domestic abuse	100	Institutional ethnography	Fair +
Yu and others (2018)	USA	Victims and vulnerable people	Human trafficking	80	Interviews	Fair +

Discussion

This review showed that the narratives of survivors of interpersonal crimes and other vulnerable people are remarkably consistent across time and jurisdiction. It also revealed that some themes reflected in the earliest in-depth work with victim-survivors – police scepticism, victim blaming, lack of empathy, and so on – are still evident and have not been addressed successfully. The consistency of these findings suggests that these issues go beyond resourcing and demand, and are likely as much a product of factors associated with culture, attitudes, knowledge and understanding.

From the 11 themes identified during the evidence synthesis, the review team identified four overarching themes with particular relevance to police policy and practice.

Coercive control

Understanding coercive control appears to be crucial to identifying vulnerability. Coercive control was evident across several strands of public protection, whereby vulnerability was linked to power imbalances between victims and those who seek to exploit them. Proponents of addressing coercive control have sought to reframe the experiences of some domestic abuse victims as ‘liberty crimes’, in recognition that a primary goal is to deprive victims of their capacity for self-determination.

Coercive and controlling behaviour underpins many of the barriers to disclosing abuse identified by this review, and explains the extreme levels of fear and reluctance to engage displayed by some victims.

Procedural justice

The College has undertaken work on procedural justice relating to police–public contacts more generally[26]. Many of the same themes around procedural fairness and good interpersonal treatment were evident in this review. Victim–survivor narratives focused consistently on:

- fairness of processes (victims feeling that the police listen and take reports of abuse seriously)
- victims feeling that they are believed and not judged
- quality of interpersonal treatment (the police showing sensitivity and providing reassurance)

Investigation

The review findings concerning barriers to disclosing and reporting abuse suggest that the notion of professional curiosity – challenging assumptions, and exploring and understanding the potentially complex dynamics of a situation, rather than taking things at face value – is particularly important in relation to identifying vulnerability.

The literature on coercive control, in particular, shows how perpetrators seek to manipulate situations, and how victims may minimise abuse for a number of reasons, including shame and coercion and threats from the perpetrator. A prominent commentator on coercive control uses the analogy of treating an incident not as a picture but as a 'window', through which to explore the wider context of abuse[27].

The findings of the review also underlined the importance of investigators – whether at the primary or secondary stage – not making judgements based on assumptions, building rapport with victims and vulnerable people, and asking appropriate questions.

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Communication

A somewhat cross-cutting theme is that of communication skills. Officers require good communication skills, including active listening and displaying empathy, in order to exercise professional curiosity and facilitate procedurally fair encounters. Good communication skills are key both to identifying and encouraging disclosure of abuse, and to engaging victims and vulnerable people in ongoing safeguarding and investigations.

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Appendix A: Review protocol

The review protocol is available to view below.

The final review deviated from the original protocol in a number of ways.

- Searches were trialled in TRiP, SSRN and CORE. However, the results were too large in volume and non-specific to be included in the review.
- Not all the websites listed were searched, due to the volume of evidence retrieved through systematic searches and resource constraints.
- To ensure that the evidence identified was most relevant to the guideline being developed, the review was restricted to studies from 1990 onwards.
- A relevance criteria was introduced, with studies given a rating of 'low', 'medium' or 'high' according to the study's relevance to the purpose and context of the guideline.
- NVivo was used in place of EPPI-Reviewer to synthesise the findings, as this software package is better suited to qualitative data analysis.

Component	Description
Review question(s)	**How can police officers create safe and trusting encounters that encourage vulnerable victims to engage and disclose abuse and harm?**
Context and objectives	**Aim** The evidence review will focus on identifying robust qualitative literature that explores the experiences and accounts of vulnerable victims, with a particular focus on understanding what enables or inhibits a positive initial interaction during a police encounter – specifically, to encourage victims to disclose abuse and harm. The aim is to identify behaviours, attitudes and beliefs that would help to facilitate this positive engagement with vulnerable victims (including verbal and non-verbal cues).

	In combination with other work, this evidence review will allow us to provide advice on communication styles and behaviours that may encourage vulnerable individuals to disclose abuse and to provide detailed accounts that can support action to make victims and potential victims safer. The research will focus on 12 strands of vulnerability (as defined by the College of Policing):[28] ▪ adults at risk ▪ child abuse ▪ child sexual exploitation ▪ domestic abuse ▪ female genital mutilation ▪ forced marriage ▪ honour-based violence ▪ human trafficking ▪ missing persons ▪ prostitution ▪ serious sexual offences ▪ stalking and harassment **Terms** **College of Policing definition of vulnerability:** A person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care of or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation.

[28] The College identifies 12 strands of vulnerability however, as the focus of this work is on victims, the vulnerability strand relating to 'managing violent offenders' is out of scope.

Types of study to be included	Qualitative research (for example, case studies, in-depth interviews) or quantitative and mixed methods studies with relevant results (for example, survey data).
Participants, population	▪ Victims that have experienced a crime or crimes covered by the 12 strands of vulnerability. ▪ Vulnerable individuals and their interaction, or reasons for not interacting with the police. ▪ Police officers and staff working with vulnerable people. ▪ Relevant, formal service providers (for example, support organisations for victims of domestic abuse)[29].
Intervention(s), exposure(s)	N/A
Comparator(s), control	N/A
Outcome(s)	▪ Victims' experiences of contact with frontline officers and staff, including other formal support providers. ▪ Barriers or facilitators to victims disclosing abuse and harm. ▪ Behaviours and verbal and non-verbal cues that could encourage or impede a positive interaction between victims and the police and support providers.
Context	Vulnerable victims' experiences of disclosing abuse and harm to police or other formal support providers. Papers that report on reasons why victims may have chosen not to disclose abuse and harm will also be included.

[29] For example, informal support that may be provided by friends or family is out of scope.

	This evidence review is restricted to initial encounters with police and other formal support providers. The following are out of scope: ▪ victim experience through the criminal justice system (for example, in court) ▪ life after the crime (for example, coping) ▪ physical characteristics of victims that make them more or less likely to disclose abuse or harm
Searches	We anticipate searching the following databases: ▪ College of Policing classic catalogue ▪ CORE ▪ **EBSCO** – PsychINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection ▪ Electronic Theses Online Service (EThOS) ▪ Global Policing Database ▪ OpenGrey ▪ **ProQuest** – PTSDpubs, Criminology Collection, IBSS, Politics Collection, Social Science Database, Sociology Collection ▪ Social Care Online ▪ Social Science Research Network (SSRN) ▪ Turning Research Into Practice (TRIP) ▪ **Web of Science: Core Collection** The following websites will also be searched: ▪ **Gov.uk** ▪ **Victims' Commissioner** ▪ **Victim Support** ▪ **NSPCC**

	The following additional sources have been suggested and key stakeholders will be approached for further citations: ▪ **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence** ▪ Justice, Inequality and Gender-Based Violence project (Bristol) ▪ **Trauma, Violence and Abuse journal** Only studies written in English will be included in the review and no date restriction will be imposed. Unnecessary duplication will be avoided should the databases overlap and results will be de-duplicated in EndNote before sifting commences.
Selection of studies	The review team will sift the titles and abstracts of the studies returned from the search. A proportion of studies will be sifted by all members of the review team to ensure consistency. Full copies of all potentially relevant studies will be obtained and screened. A proportion or all of the studies will be independently sifted by two reviewers, depending on the volume of studies. Any uncertainty will be discussed and resolved. If uncertainty persists, a third reviewer will make the final decision. All excluded studies and reasons for their exclusion will be documented. A PRISMA flowchart will be included in the review showing details of the search.
Data extraction and quality assessment	Two reviewers will independently extract data from relevant studies. Any disagreement will be resolved through discussion with a third reviewer. If the volume of studies makes this unfeasible, both reviewers will extract data from a proportion of studies and inter-rater reliability will be assessed.

	EPPI-Reviewer will be used to record, manage and extract data. Data to be extracted will include, at a minimum: ▪ bibliographic details ▪ study aims ▪ study design ▪ location ▪ population ▪ key findings An assessment of study quality will be undertaken using an appropriate quality assessment tool.
Strategy for data synthesis	A narrative summary of the evidence will be produced through a thematic synthesis. Studies will be mapped and tagged according to harm during the full-text sift (for example, domestic abuse, human trafficking). Findings from the studies will be grouped into themes (for example, interactions with police, interactions with other formal support providers, barriers and facilitators, verbal, non-verbal). A summary of the themes will be provided in evidence statements.

Appendix B: Search strategy

victim* OR suffer* OR survivor* OR surviving

AND

police OR policing OR “law enforcement” OR (support NEAR/2 (provider* OR informal OR formal OR service* OR organi?ation*))

AND

narrative* OR testimon* OR experience* OR account* OR perce* OR perspective* OR “stories” OR “story” OR view* OR qualitative OR interview* OR “case stud*”

AND

rapport OR disclos* OR empathy OR respon* OR report* OR engage* OR interact* OR demeanor* OR support* OR help* OR behavio?r* OR attitude* OR belief* OR believe*

AND

Each vulnerability line below in turn.

Vulnerability	Terms
Adults at risk	mental OR elder* OR “older person*” OR “older people” OR “the age*” OR abuse OR exploit* OR “memory loss” OR “hate crime” OR discrimin* OR cuckooing OR “county lines” OR “gang*” OR “vulnerab*” OR radicali* OR “violen*” OR suicid* OR assault* OR disab* OR neglect* OR mistreat* OR maltreat*
Child abuse and child sexual exploitation	“child abuse*” OR “child sexual abuse” OR “child sexual exploitation” OR CSE OR CSA OR p?edophil* OR groom* OR neglect*

Vulnerability	Terms
Domestic abuse	((domestic OR familial OR marital OR spousal OR partner OR wife OR dating) NEAR/2 (abus* OR violen* OR control* OR coerc*) OR "domestic homicide" OR "marital rape" OR batter* OR "intimate partner violence" OR (coercive NEAR/2 (control OR behavio?r*)))
Female genital mutilation	cutting OR “female genital mutilation” OR FGM
Forced marriage and honour-based violence	“hono?r based violence” OR HBV OR “hono?r based abuse” OR HBA OR “forced marriage*” OR “hono?r crime*” OR “hono?r killing*” OR “gender* violence” OR “gender based violence” OR femicide OR “violence against women”
Human trafficking	“human traffick*” OR “people traffick*” OR “modern day slavery” OR “modern slavery” OR “forced labo?r” OR “domestic servitude” OR “unpaid labo?r” OR “trade in people” OR “people trade”
Missing persons	missing OR disappeared OR misper*
Prostitution	prostitut* OR “sex work*” OR “sexual exploit*”
Serious sexual offences	(sex* NEAR/2 (offence* OR assault* OR violen* OR coerc*) OR rape*)
Stalking and harassment	stalk* OR harass*

Appendix C: Review inclusion and exclusion criteria

Question	Answer	Action	Guidance
Crime type Is the paper relevant to one or more of the 12 strands of vulnerability?	**No**	**Exclude**	Only papers relevant to one or more of the 12 strands of vulnerability should be included: ▪ adults at risk (this is very broad – see definition of 'vulnerable' below) ▪ child abuse ▪ child sexual exploitation ▪ domestic abuse ▪ female genital mutilation ▪ forced marriage ▪ honour-based violence ▪ human trafficking ▪ missing persons ▪ prostitution ▪ serious sexual offences ▪ stalking and harassment A person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care of or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation.
	Yes	**Go to Q2**	
	Unclear	**Can't exclude**	

Question	Answer	Action	Guidance
Study type Is the paper a qualitative research study or does it have relevant qualitative research components?	**No**	**Exclude**	We are primarily interested in **qualitative research** (for example, case studies, in-depth interviews). Quantitative and mixed methods studies (for example, survey data) should be included if the abstract suggests that it includes some relevant, qualitative results (for example, survey results should be included if they seem likely to include some open-ended questions where participants could give detailed information, but should be excluded if it's only reporting percentages and counts). Papers that are solely quantitative, theoretical or discursive should be excluded. The following should also be excluded: ▪ audiocassettes ▪ films ▪ handbooks and guidance not supported by evidence ▪ collections of papers
	Yes	**Go to Q3**	
	Unclear	**Can't exclude**	

Question	Answer	Action	Guidance
Population Is the paper about, or from the perspective of: ▪ **victims** who have experienced a crime or crimes covered by the 12 strands of vulnerability ▪ **vulnerable individuals** and their interaction, or reasons for not interacting with the police ▪ **police officers and/or staff** working with vulnerable people ▪ **relevant, formal service providers** (for example, support organisations for victims of domestic abuse)	**No**	**Exclude**	Disclosures to family and friends are out of scope. Keep in mind that the evidence review focuses on vulnerable victims' experiences of disclosing abuse and harm to police or other formal support providers.
	Yes	**Go to Q4**	
	Unclear	**Can't exclude**	
Outcomes Does the abstract suggest the paper considers any of the following: ▪ **victims' experiences or perceptions** of contact with frontline officers and staff, including other formal support providers ▪ **barriers or facilitators** to victims disclosing abuse and harm ▪ **behaviours and verbal and non-verbal cues** that could encourage or impede a positive interaction between victims and the police and support providers	**No**	**Exclude**	This evidence review is restricted to initial encounters with police and other formal support providers. The following are out of scope. Papers focusing solely on these areas should be excluded: ▪ victim experience through the criminal justice system (for example, in court) ▪ life after the crime (for example, coping) ▪ discussions of broad-brush police attitudes that have already been well covered in the literature (for example, scepticism about rape)
	Yes	**Include**	
	Unclear	**Can't exclude**	

About the College

We're the professional body for the police service in England and Wales.

Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

college.police.uk