

## **Lewisham's VAWG COVID-19 response**

Domestic violence and abuse is likely to increase during this period based on evidence from countries a few weeks ahead of us in this pandemic. In turn we want our VAWG partners to know that support is available for victims during this time.

### **Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence is a general term used to describe any behaviour thought to be of a sexual nature which is unwanted and takes place without consent. Sexual violence and abuse can be physical, psychological, verbal or online. Any behaviour of a sexual nature that causes you distress is considered sexual violence or abuse.

It is not uncommon for a victim of sexual assault to have no physical injuries or signs of their assault. But sexual assault is still a crime and can be reported to the police in the same way as other crimes. Most sexual assaults are carried out by someone known to the victim. This could be a partner, former partner, relative, friend or colleague. The assault may happen in many places, but is usually in the victim's home or the home of the alleged perpetrator (the person carrying out the assault).

Sexual offences are prosecuted as part of the Crown Prosecution Service's Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy. This is an overarching framework to address crimes that have been identified as being committed primarily but not exclusively by men against women.

These crimes include domestic abuse, rape, sexual offences, stalking, harassment, so-called 'honour-based' violence including forced marriage, female genital mutilation, child abuse, human trafficking focusing on sexual exploitation, prostitution, pornography and obscenity.

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### Supporting a victim of sexual assault

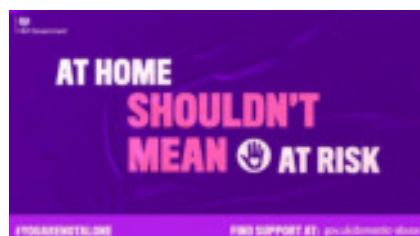
- Don't judge them, don't blame them. A sexual assault is never the fault of the person who is abused.
- Listen to the person, but don't ask for details of the assault. Don't ask them why they didn't stop it. This can make them feel as though you blame them.
- Offer practical support, such as going with them to appointments.
- Respect their decisions – for example, whether or not they want to report the assault to the police.
- Bear in mind they might not want to be touched. Even a hug might upset them, so ask first.
- Don't tell them to forget about the assault. It will take time for them to deal with their feelings and emotions. You can help by listening and being patient. Find the nearest rape and sexual assault services, including SARCs (sexual assault referral centres).

### Impacts of sexual violence

- **Feelings**
- **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's)**
- **Pregnancy**

#### **Feelings**

- In shock. This could mean feeling numb or unemotional.
- In disbelief. Crying, shaking, laughing or vomiting.
- Self- blame. Feeling responsible for what's happened, or feeling guilty.
- Having nightmares or trouble sleeping.
- 'Reliving' the events (having flashbacks). This can be triggered by a sound, situation or smell and can be very frightening.
- Loss of confidence, trust in themselves and/or trust in others.
- Feeling worthless or even self-hate.



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- Finding it difficult to cope with day-to-day life.
  - Feeling angry, irritable or short-tempered, even with people close to you.
  - Feeling 'dirty' and ashamed about what's happened.
  - Depression. Upset and tearful a lot of the time.
  - Feeling suicidal.
  - Feeling afraid of people, places, or being on their own.
- Experiencing relationship or sexual difficulties. They may have no interest in sex or intimacy at all, or might crave extra physical contact or comfort.

Whether a victim has been raped, assaulted or abused recently or many months or years ago, they might have a range of different feelings.

### **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

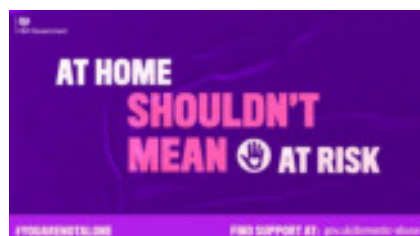
STIs can be caught by vaginal, genital, anal or oral sexual contact with someone who has an infection.

If a victim has caught an STI as a result of their experience, it is because the rapist or attacker has one. Contracting an STI from being raped or sexually assaulted has nothing to do with whether or not the victim had sex before or how many times or with how many people.

Some STIs don't have obvious symptoms and are not easily picked up without a medical check-up. So it's important for victims to get tested as soon as possible and don't wait for symptoms to appear.

Most STIs can be treated easily and effectively. But if some STIs are left undiagnosed and untreated for a long time, they can cause complications and serious illness.

When STIs do have noticeable symptoms, they can often be quite similar for different infections and can include: pain on passing urine; unusual vaginal discharge; lower abdominal pain; pain in your pelvis; itching; soreness; painful lumps or warts in/on the genital area.



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### Pregnancy

If a victim thinks they could be pregnant as a result of rape, they have a choice of different places where they can take a pregnancy test and discuss options.

These include their GP / local doctor, the SARC (sexual assault referral centres), a family planning, sexual health or GUM clinic, or a Brook centre.

Other options include;

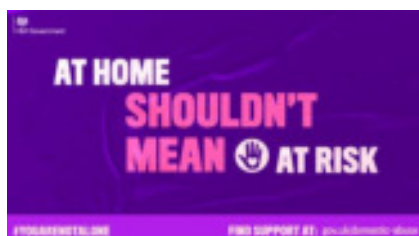
- The Emergency Contraceptive (or 'Morning After') Pill from your GP or local sexual health clinic. Up to 3 days (72 hours) after the attack. Or can be bought from a pharmacy for around £25
- Alternatively, an IUD (intra-uterine device), often called a coil, can be fitted up to 5 days (120 hours) afterwards and must remain inside you until the time of your next period.
- If a victim discloses they are pregnant and does not want to continue with the pregnancy, they need to contact their GP / local doctor, a family planning clinic, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (bpas), or Marie Stopes to discuss a termination (abortion).

### Legislation in the UK

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 provides specific legal protection for children aged 12 and under who cannot legally give their consent to any form of sexual activity. There is a maximum sentence of life imprisonment for rape, assault by penetration, and causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity.

The age of consent to any form of sexual activity is 16 for both men and women. The age of consent is the same regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of a person and whether the sexual activity is between people of the same or different gender.

It is an offence for anyone to have any sexual activity with a person under the age of 16. However, Home Office guidance is clear that



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there is no intention to prosecute teenagers under the age of 16 where both mutually agree and where they are of a similar age.

It is an offence for a person aged 18 or over to have any sexual activity with a person under the age of 18 if the older person holds a position of trust (for example a teacher or social worker) as such sexual activity is an abuse of the position of trust.

## Statistics

One in 40 women aged between 16 and 24 in England and Wales experience rape or assault by penetration, including attempts, each year

Office for National Statistics.

Overall, 0.1% of men and 0.8% of women aged over 16 said they were victims of these crimes in the year to March 2020.

773,000 adults aged 16 to 74 said they were victims of any type of sexual assault. The survey captures crimes that were not reported to or recorded by police.

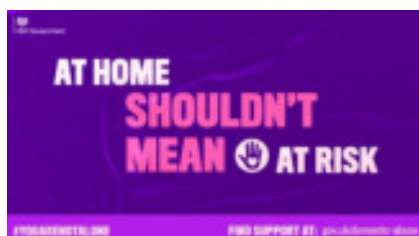
Police in England and Wales recorded a total of 162,936 sexual offences in the year ending March 2020, a drop of 0.7% compared to the previous year, the ONS said.

Helen Ross, from the ONS Centre for Crime and Justice, said: "The drop was driven by reductions in indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching, however there was no change in the prevalence of rape or assault by penetration.

## Support for victims of rape and sexual assault

If you've been the victim, please [report rape or sexual assault](#) as soon as possible. Even if you're not 100 per cent sure, we'd sooner hear from you so that we can make sure you're safe. If you're not ready to talk to the police just yet, that's OK. Below you can find a range of places to get support, advice and medical help.

You can speak to these organisations in confidence and what you tell them won't be shared with the police unless you ask for it to be.



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Independent sexual violence advisors (ISVAs)

Independent sexual violence advisors (ISVAs) work with people who have experienced sexual violence to get them access to the services they need.

They provide impartial advice on all the options available such as reporting to police, the criminal justice process, accessing sexual assault referral centres (SARCs), seeking support from specialist sexual violence organisations and other services such as housing or benefits.

[Find your local sexual assault referral centre.](#)

Other useful links

The charities, groups and organisations below can also provide specialist information and support.

### **The Havens**

Havens are specialist centres across London where victims of rape and serious sexual assault can get support and advice. Even if you're not ready to talk to the police, the Havens can provide you with medical help and advice about your options in confidence. Find out more at [The Havens](#).

### [Victim Support](#)

A national charity dedicated to helping anyone affected by crime – not just victims and witnesses, but friends, family and anyone else caught up in the aftermath.

### [Rape Crisis](#)

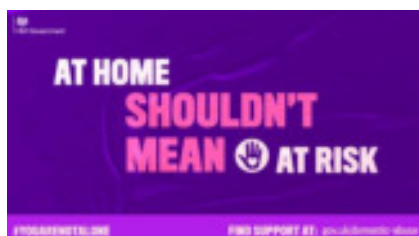
A national charity offering confidential help, advice and a range of Rape Crisis Centres around the UK.

### [Galop](#)

A national charity providing advice and support to members of the LGBT community.

### [Survivors UK](#)

A national charity supporting men who have been raped or sexually assaulted.



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### [Crimestoppers](#)

A national charity with a free helpline for reporting crime anonymously.

### [Refuge](#)

Refuge supports women, children and men with a range of services, including refuges, independent advocacy, community outreach and culturally specific services.

### [Women's Aid](#)

Women's Aid is a national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children.

### [Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327](#)

Confidential helpline for men experiencing domestic violence from a partner or ex-partner (or from other family members).

## National resources for guidance

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19): support for victims of domestic abuse**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-and-domestic-abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-and-domestic-abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse)

### **Apps to support those experiencing domestic abuse**

[www.hestia.org/brightsky](http://www.hestia.org/brightsky)

### **COVID-19/Coronavirus: Safety Advice for Survivors**

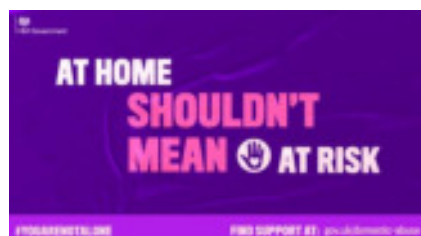
[www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors)

### **Domestic abuse and COVID-19**

[www.safelives.org.uk/news-views/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19](http://www.safelives.org.uk/news-views/domestic-abuse-and-covid-19)

### **National campaign to raise awareness of the Silent Solution system**

[www.policeconduct.gov.uk/news/national-campaign-raise-awareness-silent-solution-system](http://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/news/national-campaign-raise-awareness-silent-solution-system)



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### Useful numbers and websites

#### **Athena**

Freephone 24-Hour National Domestic Abuse

Helpline: 0808 2000 247

To contact the Athena directly: 08001124052

[www.refuge.org.uk/our-work/our-services/one-stop-shop-services/athena](http://www.refuge.org.uk/our-work/our-services/one-stop-shop-services/athena)

[www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)

#### **Early Years Alliance - Lewisham Children's and Family Centres**

[www.lewishamcfc.org.uk](http://www.lewishamcfc.org.uk)

**The Deaf Health Charity – Sign Health** [www.signhealth.org.uk/our-projects/deafhope-projects/](http://www.signhealth.org.uk/our-projects/deafhope-projects/)

Text: 07970350366

#### **RASASC** (Rape and sexual abuse centre)

0808 802 9999

#### **African Advocacy Foundation**

[www.africadvocacy.org](http://www.africadvocacy.org)

020 8698 4473

#### **Rights of women:**

[rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://rightsofwomen.org.uk)

#### **National stalking helpline – Suzy Lamplugh Trust**

[www.suzylamplugh.org](http://www.suzylamplugh.org)

0808 802 0300

#### **Respect Helpline for men**

0808 8010327

[respectphoneline.org.uk/help-for-domestic-abuse-victims](http://respectphoneline.org.uk/help-for-domestic-abuse-victims)

#### **Women's Aid live chat**

This is an online chatting service which is ideal for victims who are self-isolating and do not want to be heard.

[chat.womensaid.org.uk](http://chat.womensaid.org.uk)

[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

0117 944 44 11

#### **NSPCC**

Helpline - 0800 028 3550 or [fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk)





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### **GALOP National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline**

0800 999 5428

[www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse](http://www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse)

### **Women and Girls Network**

Sexual violence helpline - 08088010770

Free advice line - 08088010660

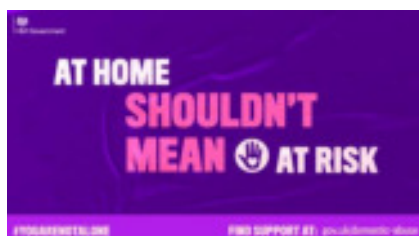
### **Future bulletins**

Please let me know if there is anything you would like to feature or promote within these bi-weekly bulletins.

[isis.pottinger@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:isis.pottinger@lewisham.gov.uk) or  
[charlene.noel@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:charlene.noel@lewisham.gov.uk)

For any other enquires please email  
[Vawg@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:Vawg@lewisham.gov.uk)

For MARAC enquires please contact  
[Theresa.Stone@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:Theresa.Stone@lewisham.gov.uk)



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## Future Training Sessions in Lewisham



### HARMFUL PRACTICES TRAINING

MARCH 23  
2PM-5PM, VIA ZOOM  
LEWISHAM PROFESSIONALS ONLY

The training will cover:

- Dynamics of VAWG;
- Definition of Harmful Practices;
- FGM, so called "Honour" based abuse and forced marriage;
- Risk factors;
- Effective referral pathways

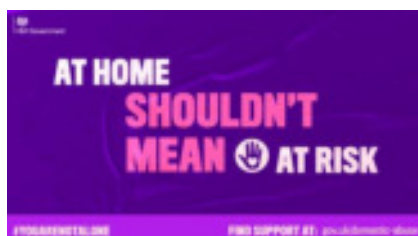
To book a place register on EventBrite or email:

[isabelamg@lawrs.org.uk](mailto:isabelamg@lawrs.org.uk)

Funded by MOPAC

Please kindly register on EventBrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/vawg-and-harmful-practices-training-tickets-144687210341>



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### References

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/sexual-violence-and-abuse>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/help-after-rape-and-sexual-assault/>

<https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/looking-for-information/what-is-sexual-violence/impacts-of-sexual-violence/pregnancy/>

<https://www.fpa.org.uk/factsheets/law-on-sex>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56444275>

<https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/rsa/rape-and-sexual-assault/support-for-victims-of-rape-and-sexual-assault/>

