



Operation Soteria

Improving Rape & Sexual Offence Outcomes

Detective Chief Superintendent
David Ashton

PROBLEM?

Ministry of Justice 18 June 2021

[Home](#) > [Crime, justice and law](#) > [Courts, sentencing and tribunals](#)

Policy paper

End-to-End Rape Review Report on Findings and Actions

This report sets out the government's action plan for improving the Criminal Justice System's response to rape in England and Wales.

7 December 2021

The London Rape Review

Reflections and Recommendations

Claire Waxman, Independent Victims' Commissioner for London

Operation Soteria – National Programme across England and Wales

2021

Initial Pathfinder x1

Avon and Somerset

2021/2022

Pathfinder x 4

Metropolitan Police

Durham

West Midlands

South Wales

2022/2023

Expansion x14

Northumbria

Lancashire

Devon and Cornwall

Wiltshire

Gwent

Greater Manchester

North Wales

Dorset

Hampshire

Sussex

Dyfed-Powys

Kent

Warwickshire

Gloucestershire

2024

Adopter x 24

All remaining forces

Operation Soteria Framework

Pillar 1



**Suspect
focused
investigations**

Pillar 2



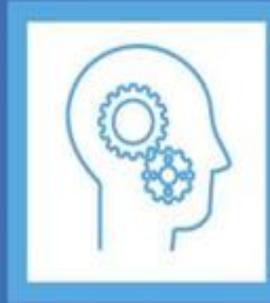
**Repeat
suspects**

Pillar 3



**Procedural
Justice
approach to
victim
engagement**

Pillar 4



**Learning,
development
and officer
well-being**

Pillar 5



**Data and
performance**

Pillar 6



**Digital
Forensics**





**RASSO = Rape and Serious
Sexual Offences**



SCANNING

What was examined in Force level Deep Dive?

Rigorous multi-method research approach

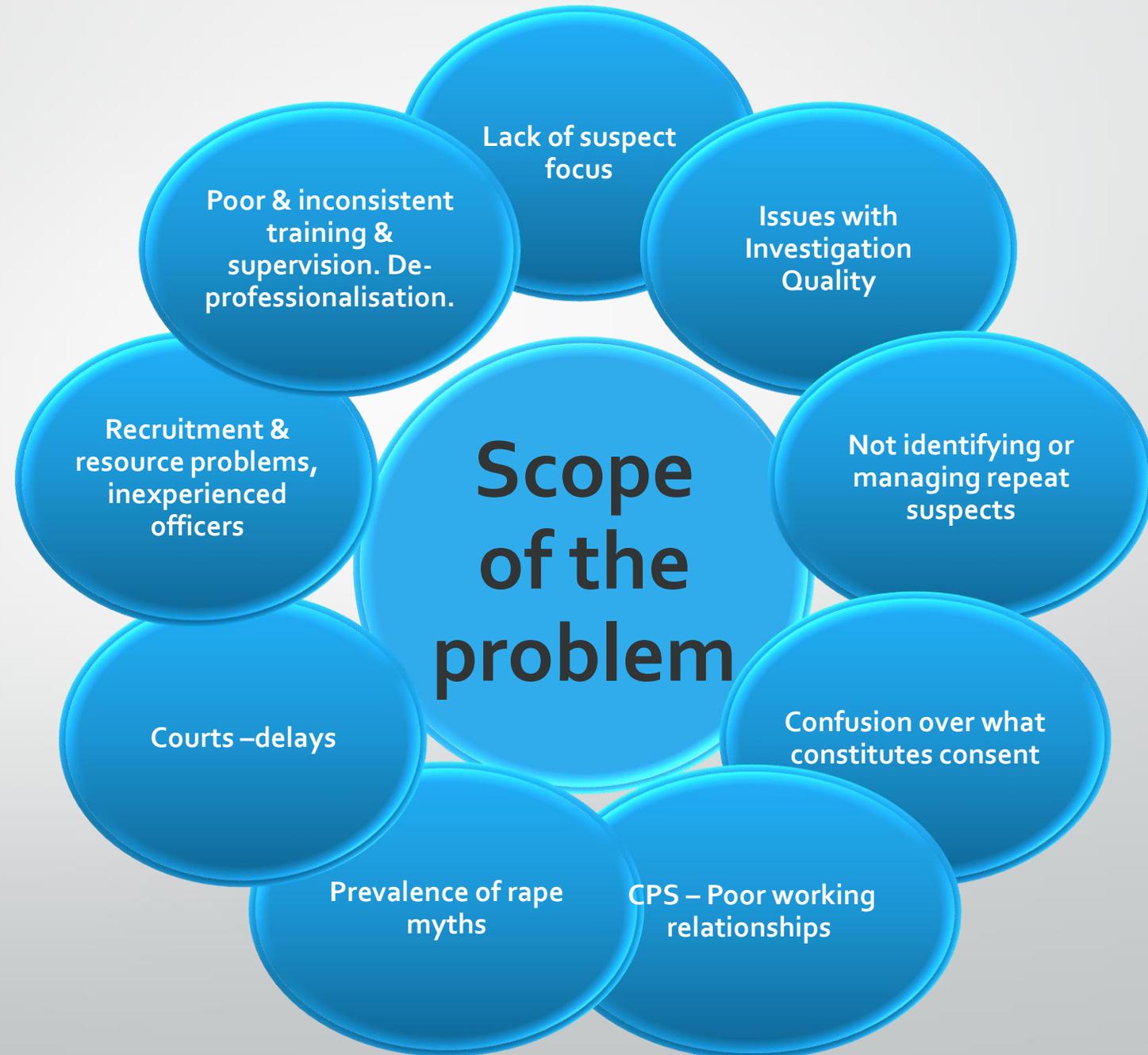
Over 40 academics across 6 Universities:

- All rape and serious sexual offences reported between January 2018 and November 2021 (6,386 crimes, 5,362 victims and 4,206 named suspects)
- 44 case file reviews (police internal peer review based on academic coding frame & training)
- Observation of 12 RASSO shifts (including VRIs) and analysis of BWV in 9 cases
- 150 outcomes 14, 15 & 16 case file reviews
- Observations of 1 training course
- 29 Interviews and 13 focus groups with officers of all ranks and roles, ISVAs, support service provides, 2 victim-survivor feedback consultations, 1 CPS interview
- 1 police officer survey – approx. 80 responses
- Document reviews of all force internal RASSO-related documents

Key findings at Force level

1. Good victim care BUT 'forms' and 'processes' get in the way.
2. Improvements required in disrupting offenders.
3. Strong starts to investigations followed by 'long drifts'.
4. High workloads, high levels of burnout symptoms and poor training.

- Charge rates for RASSO are at an all time low
- Lack of confidence in law enforcement to respond robustly to RASSO
- Poor victim service and opportunities for perpetrators to continue to offend without disruption





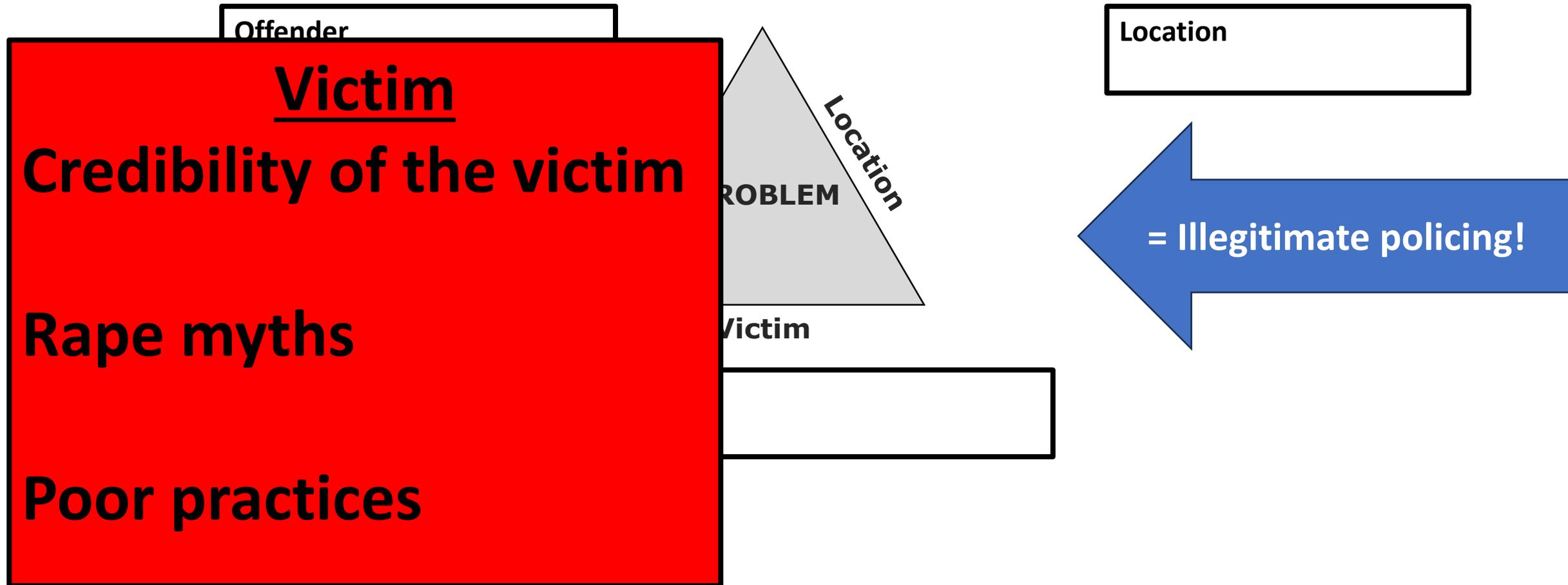
Investigative Challenges to UK Policing...

- Lack of Suspect Focus
- 'Victim Credibility' only investigations
- Rape Myths
- Digital and RASSO investigation in isolated silos
- Procedural Justice – 2 outcomes



ANALYSIS

Analysis - P.A.T - Where we were



Analysis - P.A.T - Where we want to be

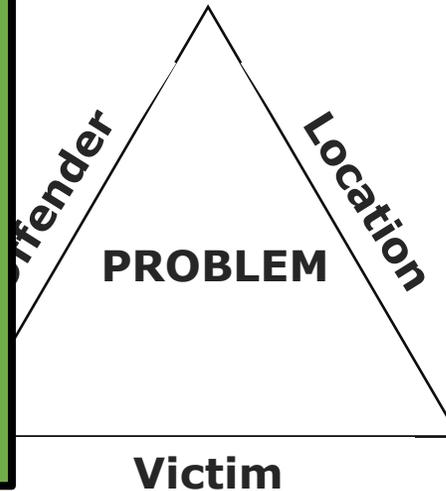
Offender

Repeat offender?

Predator?

Grooming?

Manipulating vulnerability?



Location

Physical location
Context led
Before and after

Victim

Believed
Supported
Understanding of the trauma



P.A.T - 2nd Layer

Handlers

Police Investigators
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)
Probation Service
Courts

Manager



Guardian

Sexual Violence Support Services
Domestic Abuse Support Services
Police Investigators
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

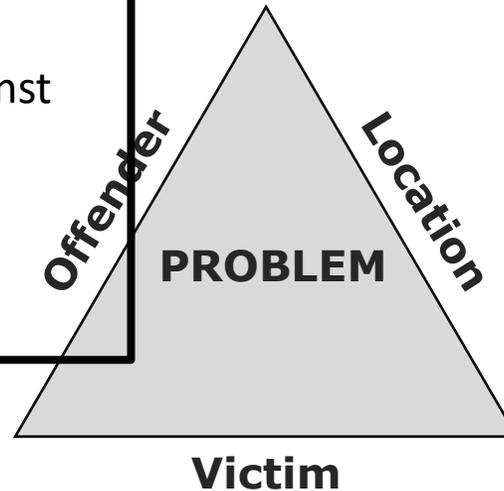
Super-controllers

National Government - Home Office & Ministry of Justice
Police - National Police Chief Council (NPCC)
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

Key features

Offender

- 41 % of RASSO suspects were repeat suspects
- A quarter of repeat suspects only committed RASSO offences
- nearly 75% engaged in cross-over offending across other types of crime.
- 14% of suspects committed RASSO offences against both males and females
- 40% of suspects had offended against victims of different ages



Location

- Secrecy
- Behind closed doors
- Social media regularly being used for grooming

Victim

- 35% of RASSO in a Domestic Abuse setting
- 29% of RASSO suspects involving an intimate partner
- 18% of offences against male victims
- 72% of rapes against under 13 yrs occurred over 5 yrs before reported



RESPONSE

THE
WHOLE
STORY

INVESTIGATING
SEXUAL CRIME:
TRUTH, LIES & THE
PATH TO JUSTICE

PATRICK TIDMARSH

Dr Patrick Tidmarsh 30 years research

... think about the GROOMING PROCESS in relationship-based crime

eg Domestic Abuse, Coercive Controlling Behaviour, Rape, Sexual Offences, Child Sexual Exploitation

Gain power, control and authority

Build trust / reliance / dependence
Could be 15 mins (eg Night Time Economy)
Could be 3 years (eg CCB)
Gifts eg Buying drinks,
Befriend
Provide attention, attachment
Violence / Threats

Isolate and sexualise

Discredit family
Discredit friends
Barriers to communication / contact
Suspect planning:
- minimize chance of getting caught
- make the victim think they are responsible

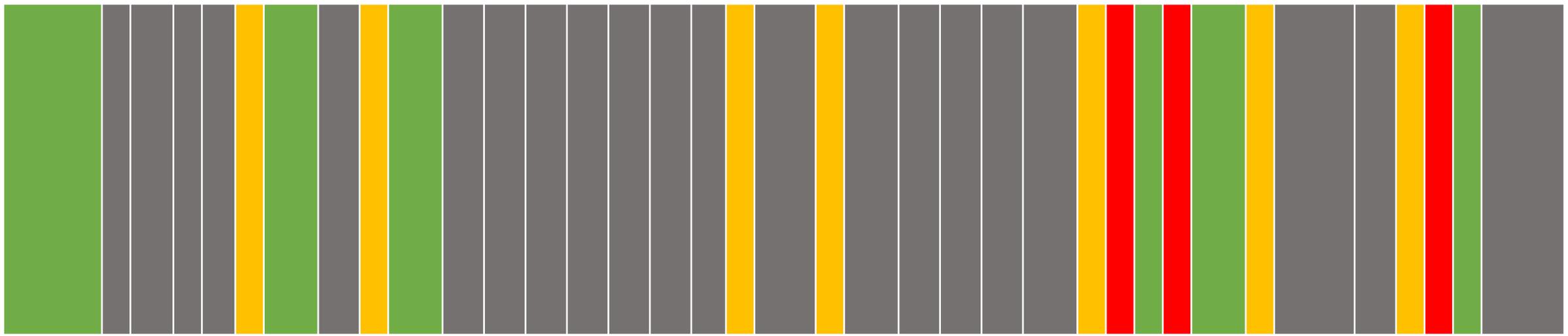
Offence

Commit offence in isolation & secrecy

Back to stage 1

Love bombing?
Threats?
Reassurance?
---> Confusion / doubt

The Whole Story

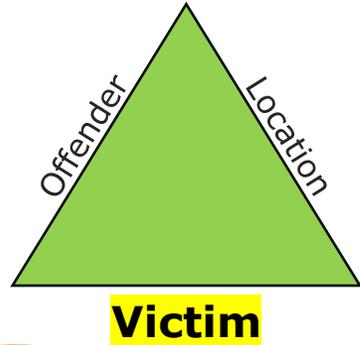


12 MONTH RELATIONSHIP →

- KINDNESS & SUPPORT
- PHYSICAL VIOLENCE / THREATS
- SEXUAL ASSAULT

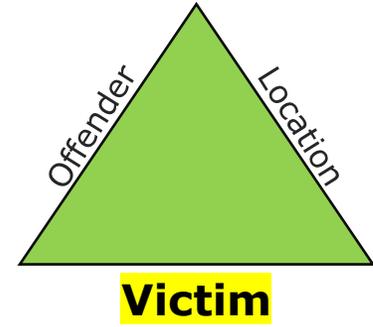
Victim Reports 1 x sexual assault to Police

Tackling Rape Myths



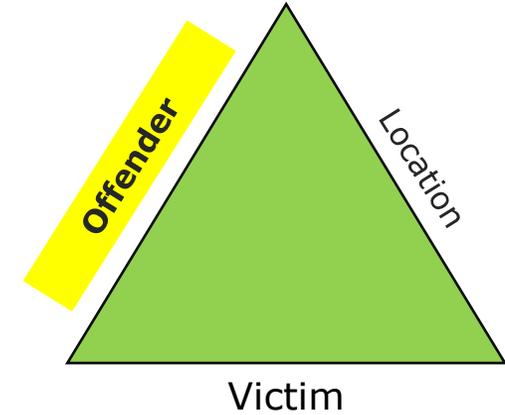
- Often no visible sign of injury
- Most commonly perpetrated by someone known to the victim
- Some victims may return to the suspect
- Meeting people via dating apps or flirtatious behaviour do not imply consent

Tackling Rape Myths



- **Intoxication** doesn't mean a recollection of events is unreliable.
- **Victims' Response** to rape is likely to include instinctual survival responses: not just fight or flight, but flop, freeze or befriend.
- **Delayed Reporting** feelings of shame and guilt may inhibit a victim from making a complaint.
- **Inconsistencies** in accounts can happen where a person is telling the truth or not.

Understanding the WHOLE story



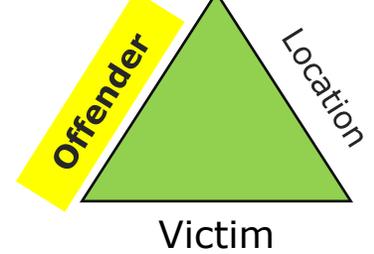
‘The problem is there is too much concentration on the events rather than the RELATIONSHIP - need to tell the **Whole Story**. The relationship helps us to understand the events.’

HOW A TYPICAL OFFENDER THINKS?

1. Get them to do what you want them to do
2. minimise chances of getting caught and
3. make them feel responsible

-> Creates self blame in victims

Offender Psychology: Implicit Theory



Dangerous world - adult world is difficult to navigate provoking anxiety

Uncontrollability - always someone else's fault

Entitlement – I was entitled to this because...

Sexual objectification - extreme sexual activity is normal

Nature of Harm - persuade themselves that it hasn't caused harm



Learning application: suspect and witness interviewing

Grooming

- How did he establish power, control and /or authority in the relationship?
- How did he sexualise the relationship?
- What behaviours did he introduce first?

Unique signifiers

- picking out what the offenders do
- eg words, phrases, gestures, distinctive behaviours, games, bed time routines, punishments, labels used by the suspect

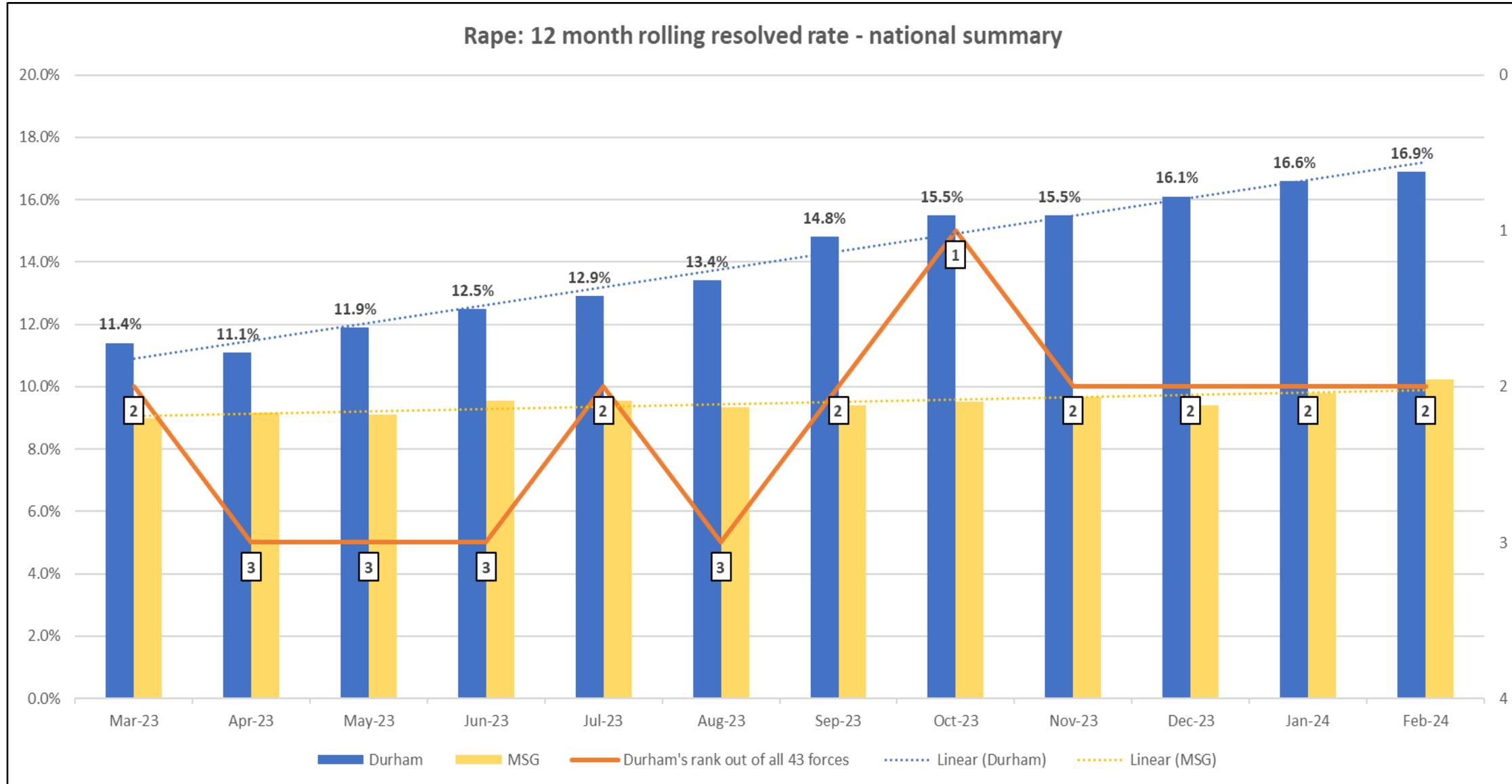


- Initial contact
 - Video recorded interview with victim
 - Suspect interview
-
- Listen
 - Don't interrupt
 - Allow free account



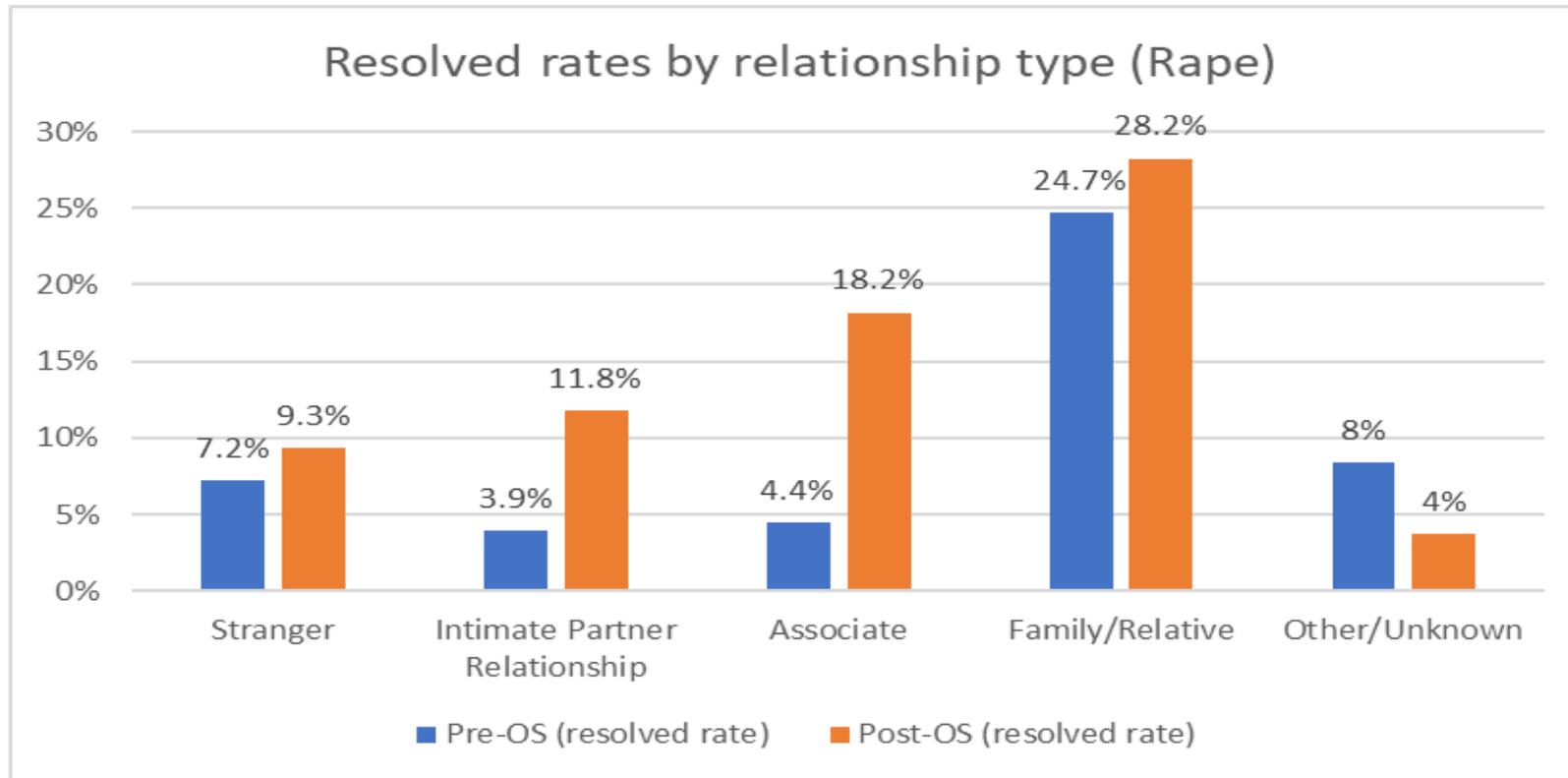
ASSESSMENT

Force Resolved Crime Outcomes for Rape

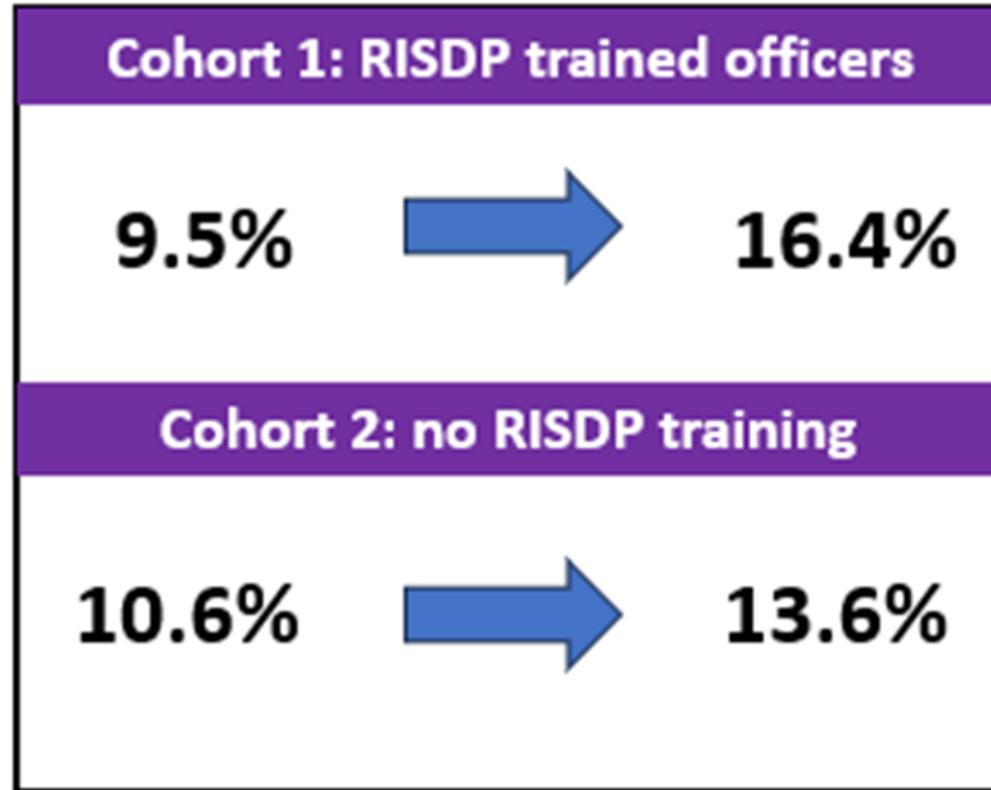


Outcomes & Suspect-Victim Relationship

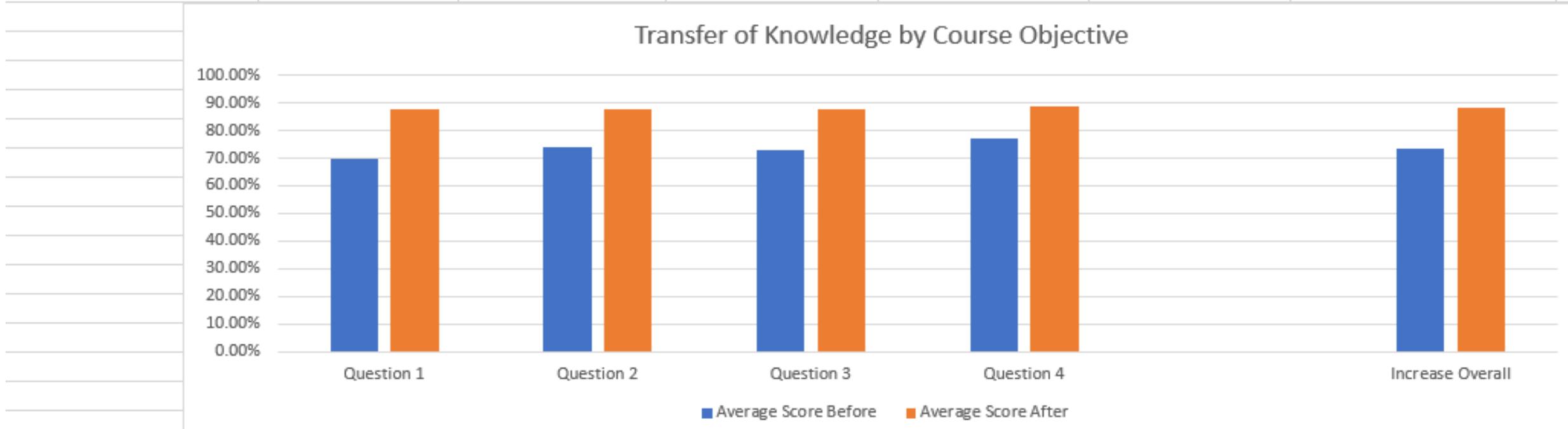
- RASSO crimes assigned a charge or summons outcome increased by 67% from Pre Soteria (n=129) to Post-Soteria (n=216)
- Resolved rates for rape offences occurring within intimate partner relationships have increased by 7.8% rape and 10.4% for sexual offences.
- Charges for domestic related RASSO crime have more than doubled, increasing from 24 charges Pre-Soteria to 55 charges Post-Soteria.



Greater improvement in resolved rate for RISDP trained officer cohort compared to cohort who had not yet received the training.



Level 2 Evaluation	On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the best) How confident are you in your understanding of relationship-based crime?	On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the best) How confident are you in your understanding of sexual myths and Misconceptions?	On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the best) How confident are you in your understanding of grooming/coercive control?	On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the best) How confident are you in the actions you can take to deal effectively with sexual offence investigations?	
	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Increase in knowledge overall
Average Score Before	70.00%	74.00%	73.00%	77.00%	73.50%
Average Score After	87.78%	87.78%	87.78%	88.89%	88.06%
Percentage Increase in knowledge	17.78%	13.78%	14.78%	11.89%	14.56%



Chief Constable Sarah Crew

'In the year ending December 2023, charges for sexual offences were up by 18% compared to the previous year, while adult rape charges increased by 38% in the same period.'





Thank you





Further Reading

- ***Misconceptions of sexual crimes against adult victims: Barriers to Justice.* Patrick Tidmarsh and Gemma Hamilton. Australian Institute of Criminology. November 2020.**
- **<https://www.college.police.uk/national-operating-model-rasso>**
- **[Rape and Sexual Offences - Annex A: Tackling Rape Myths and Stereotypes | The Crown Prosecution Service \(cps.gov.uk\)](#)**