

# CyVAWG: Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls Workshop

## Unmasking Cyber Violence: Awareness, Action & Advocacy



In partnership with



# Workshop Essentials



Mobile Phones



Safety First



Stay Connected



Photography &  
Recording



Engage



Feedback



# Today's Journey



10:00 - Project Background by Dr. Anitha Chinnaswamy



10:15 - Opening Address by Prof Shivani Sharma



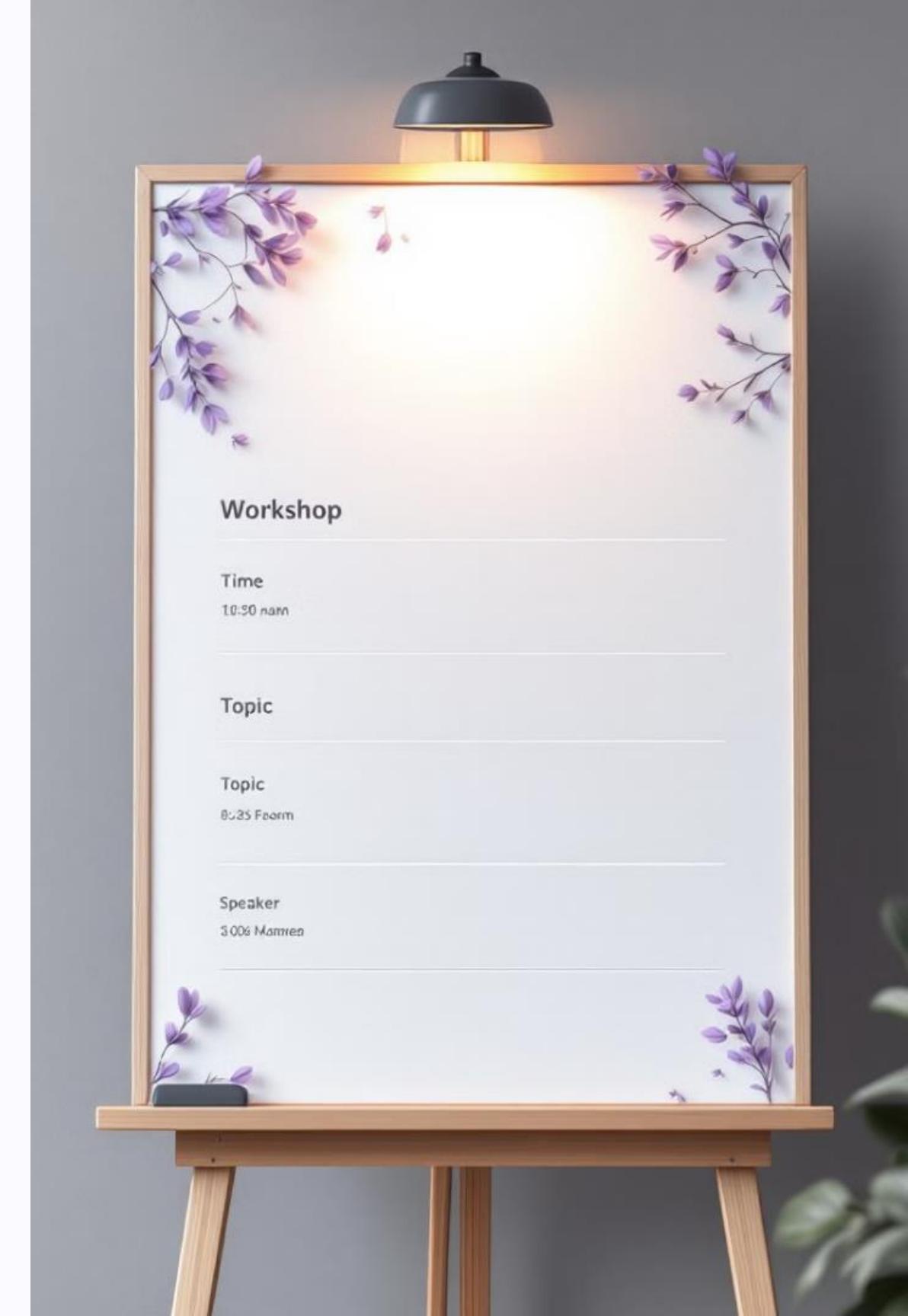
10:30 - Address by Department for Science, Innovation And Technology (DSIT)



10:45 - Keynote Address by Detective Superintendent Michelle Davies MBE

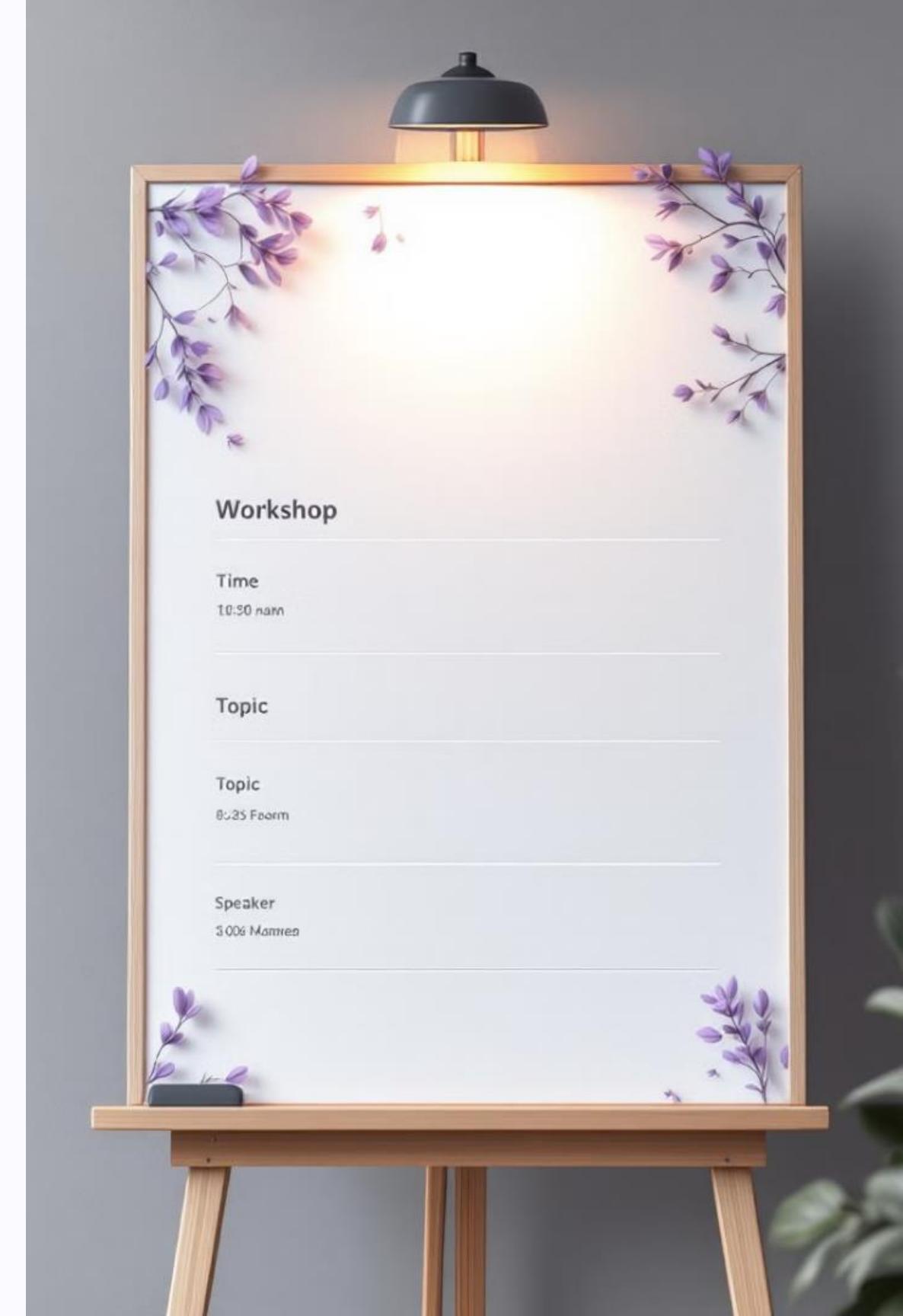


11:10 - Voices Unleashed - Theatre Style Act led by Aston Law Students



# Today's Journey

-  11:30 - Keynote Address by Farah Naz,  
Psychotherapist, Speaker
-  12:00 - Fire Chat with Activist Kirat Assi
-  12:30 - 3-Course Lunch at Conference Aston &  
Networking
-  13:30 - Panel Discussion: The Intersection of  
Technology, Law, and Mental Health
-  14:30 - Cyber Escape Room Game - Led by West  
Midlands Police
-  15:30 - Closing Remarks & Prize Distribution



# Project Overview: Dr. Anitha Chinnaswamy

Programme Director, MSc Cybersecurity Management

Senior Lecturer, Aston Business School

Deputy Director, Cyber Security Innovation Research Centre



# CyVAWG: Understanding Our Mission

1

## What We Are

A pioneering initiative tackling online abuse against women and girls through research and action.

2

## Our Support

Funded by Innovate UK with crucial backing from DSIT and West Midlands Police.

3

## Our Impact

Creating awareness, developing toolkits, and promoting prevention through community engagement.





# Opening Address: Professor Shivani Sharma

Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor  
(People, Planning, Performance),  
Aston University

# Address by the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT)

Gwilym Williams





Department for  
Science, Innovation  
& Technology

# Cyber Local and Online Safety

Unmasking Cyber Violence: Awareness,  
Action & Advocacy  
17th March 2025



**OUR  
PURPOSE**

**DRIVING  
ECONOMIC  
GROWTH**

**IMPROVING THE  
PERFORMANCE  
AND PRODUCTIVITY  
OF GOVERNMENT**

**EMPOWERING  
CITIZENS**



**By maximising...**

value for money for the taxpayer by applying AI and digital technologies to transform the citizen experience of public services, making it more effective, convenient, and productive.

the control people have over their interactions with government by widening and deepening their digital skills, knowledge, and trust in technology.

# CYBER LOCAL

- [Cyber Local](#) is a DSIT-funded programme to strengthen the cyber security sector and improve cyber security skills.
- A grant scheme providing targeted support across the UK for smaller-scale interventions identified by local experts.
- Total of £1.9 million funding.
- This year's funding programme will deliver projects between January - March 2025, including three in the West Midlands.
- Programme for Cyber Local funding 2025-26 underway.



# ONLINE SAFETY AND PROTECTING WOMEN AND GIRLS

- Tackling violence against women and girls, including when it takes place online, is a top priority for this government - we are aiming to halve it within a decade.
- The Online Safety Act 2023 is a crucial intervention. It puts a range of new duties on social media companies and search services, making them responsible for their users' safety on their platforms.
- For example, women will be better able to report abuse and expect to receive an appropriate response from the platform.
- On 31 January 2024, the Online Safety Act's new offences for the sharing, and threatening to share intimate images including 'deepfake' images without consent were brought into force. This was also recently made a 'priority offence', the most serious category of online offence under the Act.
- Ofcom is currently consulting on draft guidance, which sets out areas where technology firms should do more to improve women and girls' online safety.



# ADVICE TO STAY SECURE ONLINE

- **Protect your devices by:**
  - Using a password or fingerprint on your lockscreen. Don't tell anyone the password.
  - Always download software updates when they appear - these contain important security updates.
- **Protect your important online accounts:**
  - Use a strong password for your email account, which is different to your other passwords. You can make it stronger by using 3 random words, which are memorable to you. Don't share it with anyone.
  - Turn on 2-Step Verification (2SV) for your email - so even if someone malicious has your password, they can't access your email.
- Further advice and guidance on the Cyber Aware website: <https://cyberaware.gov.uk/> .
- Advice on how to avoid fraud and online scams at: <https://stophinkfraud.campaign.gov.uk/>

# Keynote Address

## Detective Superintendent

### Michelle Davies MBE





# The Policing Response to Violence Against Women & Girls

Detective Superintendent Michelle Davies MBE  
Force Lead for VAWG, West Midlands Police

West Midlands  
**POLICE**



# Definition of VAWG

Crimes of violence against women and girls are many and varied. They include rape and other sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse, ‘honour-based’ abuse (including female genital mutilation and forced marriage and ‘honour’ killings), ‘revenge porn’ and ‘upskirting’, as well as many others.

While these different types of violence against women and girls have their own distinct causes and impacts on victims and survivors, **these crimes disproportionately affect women and girls.**

## Global figures – why a VAWG focus?

Nearly 1 in 3 women aged 15 years and older have been subjected to physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.

World Health Organization (Geneva, 2021)

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Estimated 2.3 million victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales in the year ending March 2020, 1.6 million of whom were female.

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Two out of three 16-34 year-olds reported they had been sexually harassed in the last year.

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892,000 female victims (aged 16-59) of stalking.

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On average, a woman is killed by a man every three days in the UK.

HMICFRS (2021)

UK figures: on the street and behind closed doors

# Harm, cost and demands – why a VAWG focus

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**Unaccountable:** harm caused to women and girls – mental health etc

**£66 billion:** estimated socio-economic costs of domestic abuse in 2016/17 (about £74 billion in today's prices)

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**£3.7 million:** estimated cost of to society of every homicide

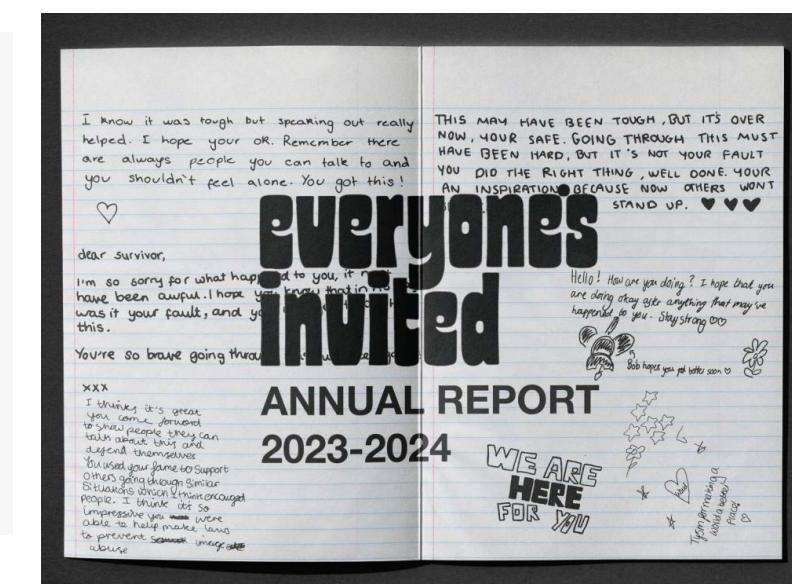
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**758,941** domestic-abuse-related crimes recorded by the police in 2019/20, equating to...

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**15%** of all crimes recorded by the police that year.

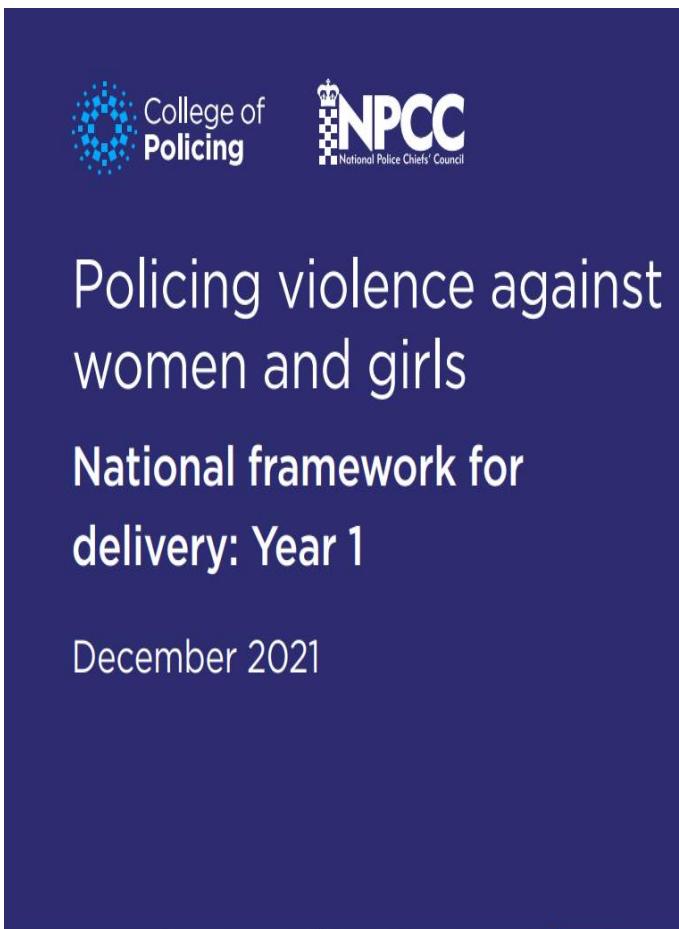
# 2021: when worlds collide & lives changes forever



An inspection report on progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations in early adopter police forces



# 2021: when worlds collide & lives changes forever



## Pillar 1: Build trust and confidence

1. Respond unequivocally to allegations of police-perpetrated abuse, learning from mistakes and best practice.
2. Challenge and address sexism and misogyny within policing.
3. Involve VAWG organisations, including charities supporting Black and minoritised women and girls, as well as individual women and girls with lived experience.
4. Collect consistent local and national information on the availability of specialist VAWG investigators to build the right capability and capacity.

## Pillar 2: Relentless perpetrator pursuit

5. Relentlessly pursue and actively manage and target the most dangerous and prolific perpetrators.
6. Better use of police powers to protect women and girls, and to manage and disrupt perpetrators.
7. Adopt a trauma-aware approach at all levels, to better support victims through the criminal justice process, and focus on evidence-led prosecutions where appropriate
8. Enhanced supervision of VAWG investigations.

## Pillar 3: Safer spaces

9. Immediate and unequivocal prioritisation of VAWG.
10. Focus prevention work on the most dangerous online, private and public spaces.

## Pillar 3: Safer spaces

- Extensive research & data for private spaces
- Developing safer spaces
- Focus prevention work on the most dangerous **online**, private and public spaces
- Online: front and centre
- Least known
- Online Safety Bill
- The most insightful conversation I have ever had.....

# VAWG: Strategic Digital Intent

The VAWG Digital Strategic Intent has one overarching requirement, three strategic objectives and a ask!

## **Foundational Requirement**

Build a dynamic intelligence picture on threats/opportunities, which can create opportunities to prevent violence against women and girls, pursue perpetrators, and drive-up detection rates.

## **Strategic Objectives**

1. Improve the interface between policing and public and create a single online violence against women and girls reporting route, which enables victims to report and to access the support they need, when they need it.
2. Adopt, adapt and upscale products that develop a digitally competent, confident and capable workforce – exploiting learning from SOC, CT and CSAE in order to relentlessly pursue perpetrators.
3. Make offender-hostile online environments, working with tech providers to challenge and address sexism and misogyny; designing out VAWG in online spaces and within the tech industry.

## **The ask**

Upstander not bystander

# VAWG: Strategic Threat Risk Assessment (STRA)

## Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Threat Risk Assessment 2023



### Key VAWG threat areas:

- Domestic abuse
- Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO)
- Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation (CSAE)
- Stalking & Harassment
- Technology and online enabled VAWG



# Technology and online enabled VAWG

- Advancement of technology provides increased opportunities for perpetrators
- Prevalence: Forces estimate that on average 10% of VAWG offences occur online, this is likely to be an underestimate. Most VAWG offences will likely have a digital component, even where they do not take place online.
- Most classified as stalking and is committed by known offenders via mainstream social media.
- A fifth (19%) of girls aged 11-16 have received unwanted sexual images, this increased to 33% for 17-21-year-olds. Half (51%) of young people report doing nothing when receiving unwanted sexual content.
- The impact of the manosphere (a network of online communities who promote misogynistic beliefs) and impact on young men and boys
- Developments of smart devices, AirTags and spyware
- Development of the metaverse and development of haptic suits provide additional opportunities for offenders to commit VAWG in a space (currently unregulated)
- Privacy enhancing technologies (end-to-end encryption) present challenges for investigation of online and tech-enabled offending.



Thank you

**VAWG and RASSO tech working group**

West Midlands  
**POLICE**



**Take a break**



# Keynote Address: From Streets to Screens: Violence Continuum

## Farah Naz

**FROM STREETS TO SCREENS**  
**BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE**  
**FARAH NAZ**



**ZARA ALEENA**

9 DECEMBER, 1986 - 26 JUNE, 2022



**When one voice is silenced, the fabric of society unravels; but when  
a life is upheld, we are bound together, stronger than before.**

# Zara Aleena murder: agencies' failures contributed to death, inquest finds

Jury finds 'multiple agencies' contributed to death of Aleena, 35, who was attacked in east London in June 2022

The  
Guardian

## Zara Aleena killer wrongly classified, inquest told

BBC

Zara Aleena: Failures 'across multiple agencies' contributed to death, inquest finds

THE  
**STANDARD**  
The Standard

1 in 3 women experience  
online harassment

## **THE WEB OF VIOLENCE**

**Reflect on one example of online abuse  
you've seen or experienced**

## WHAT IS CYBER VIOLENCE?

- Cyberbullying
- Cyberstalking
- Online Harassment
- Doxxing
- Trolling
- Revenge Porn
- Impersonation
- Flaming

**‘My ex would post horrible things, threatening things like ‘Tell [NAME] I’m coming for her.’ Sending me loads of private messages. He hacked into every single social media account I had and then changed my passwords. He would contact me through LinkedIn and my PayPal account with messages—hundreds of messages. If (my employer) posts anything on Facebook, he will comment on there.**

**I reported it to Facebook, and they just came back with ‘You can block this person’s account.’ A lot of the time, you go to report things, and they (online platforms) don’t really do much. I was frustrated that there wasn’t any action. I ended up deleting my Instagram account and my LinkedIn account—I don’t use Snapchat anymore.**

**I was in a really dark place. I had really bad anxiety. I’d have panic attacks, and it was constant worry: What’s he going to post next? Is it going to impact my job? What’s coming next?` REFUGE Service User**

# THE MIND-BODY IMPACT OF ONLINE HARASSMENT

- Our brains react to digital threats as real danger
- How does reading online abuse make you feel?

## **WHAT CAN WE DO?**

**Limit the personal information you share**

**Use strong passwords & different accounts for  
work/personal**

**Monitor your online presence**

**Be careful with sharing private images**

**If harassed, document everything**

# WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Call it out
- Support survivors
- Push for legal change



## FROM GRIEF TO PURPOSE: MY JOURNEY

- Losing Zara propelled me into activism
- Began with small steps: demanding accountability and sharing her story
- Overcame resistance and leaned on resilience.



# WHAT WILL YOU DO?

- Think of one small action you can take



# ZARA ALEENA

9 DECEMBER, 1986 - 26 JUNE, 2022



**When one voice is silenced, the fabric of society unravels; but when  
a life is upheld, we are bound together, stronger than before.**

# Unseen Battles:

Aston Law Students Girls Human Rights Hub (GHRH)

- Iffat Awan
- Ammna Razzaq
- Huda Feysal
- Durell Dacey



# Fireside Chat with Kirat Assi







# Unmasking Cyber Violence: The Intersection of Technology, Law, and Mental Health

Moderated by Suzanne Wheeler

# Our Panellists

## **Samantha Billingham**

Survivor turned advocate / Coercive Control Consultant

## **Dr Jacqueline Blyth**

Consultant Child and Adult Psychologist

## **Shaid Parveen**

Associate Dean for Engagement and Development for Aston Law School and Social Science

## **Dr Joanne Walker**

AI and Machine Learning Research Specialist

## **Neil Howells**

Police Detective/ Cyber Protect Training/ lecturer and Organisational Support at West Midlands Regional Cyber Crime Unit



Join at:  
**vevox.app**

ID:  
**166-488-145**



## The Digital Evolution of Coercive Control

Based on your lived experience, how does digital coercive control manifest in everyday life, and what key actions can empower victims to recognize and escape such behaviours?

Join at:  
**vevox.app**

ID:  
**166-488-145**



## The Hidden Mental Toll of Cyber Violence

What are the long-term psychological effects of sustained digital abuse, and how can clinicians and legal experts better support victims through tailored interventions?

Join at:  
**vevox.app**

ID:  
**166-488-145**



## Cybercrime & Digital Defences

Could you detail an emerging tactic in digital coercion and explain how technology might be re-engineered to mitigate this form of abuse?

Join at:  
**vevox.app**

ID:  
**166-488-145**



## Legal and Practical Responses to Cyber Violence

What are the primary legal gaps in our current frameworks for addressing cyber violence and which reforms do you believe are most urgently needed to protect victims?

Join at:  
**vevox.app**

ID:  
**166-488-145**



## Bystanders vs. Upstanders: A Collective Responsibility

Based on your investigations, what are the most effective strategies for identifying and counteracting digital abuse, and what key challenges remain for law enforcement?



# Tabletop Cyber Escape Room



# THE PASSENGER

**ROCU** CYBER  
WEST MIDLANDS REGION CRIME UNIT

**JUST DELETE  
THE APP...**



SEXUAL PREDATOR

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PORNOGRAPHY / SEX TRADE

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TROLLING  
PRANKSTER

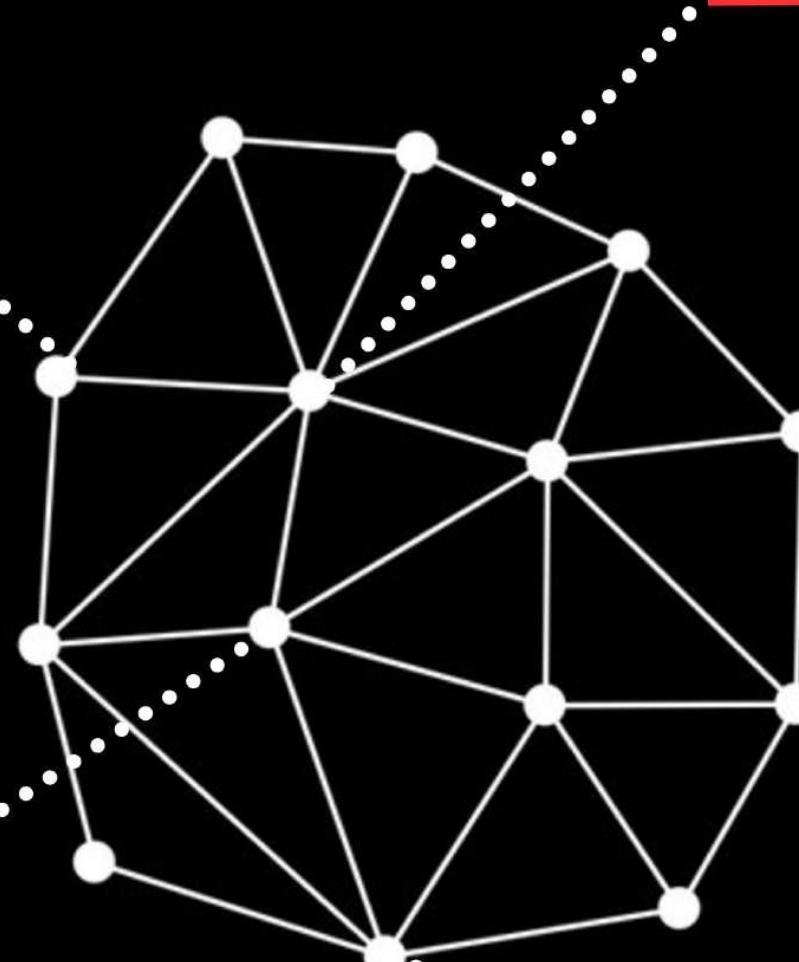
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YOU

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TEENAGER  
TESTING,  
HACKING

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**LOVE  
CANNOT BE  
CONTROLLED**

**ROCU**  
WEST MIDLANDS REGION

CYBER  
CRIME  
UNIT

**CONTROL  
CAN BE  
CURTAILED**

**ROCU**  
WEST MIDLANDS REGION

CYBER  
CRIME  
UNIT

# **CRIMINAL MINDSET >**

CONTROL, COERCE, COMPEL...

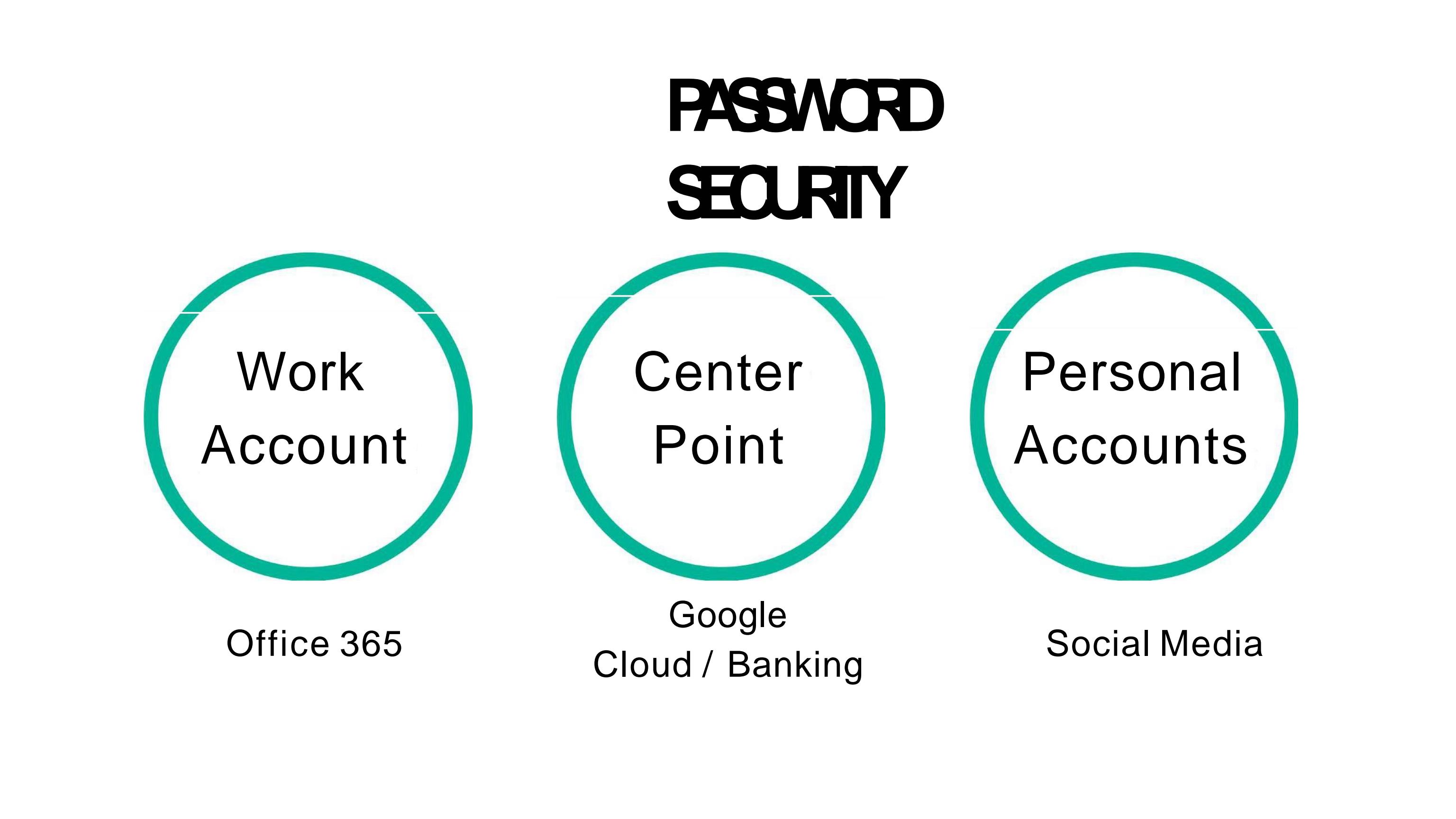
**MY LIFE... IS MY LIFE**

# PASSWORD

What does your  
password say about  
you?

Family, dates, pets?

# PASSWORD SECURITY



Work  
Account

Office 365

Center  
Point

Google  
Cloud / Banking

Personal  
Accounts

Social Media

# How Secure is Your app Password?

## Take the Password Test

**Tip:** Try to make your passwords at least 15 characters long

Show password:



**20 characters containing:**

lower case

Upper case

Numbers

Symbols

Time to crack your password:  
2 million years

MAKE YOUR OWN  
JOURNEY...

PASSWORDS...

FIRST CAR... FAMILY STORY... BIRTHDAY MEAL

FAVORITE TEAM, STAND AND PLAYER...

FIRST THREE STREET NAMES YOU LIVED IN...

**THE PASSENGER**

# INTELLIGENCE CASE RECEIVED



THE AMERICAN SECURITY AGENCY HAVE  
HIGHLIGHTED A VIOLENT CRIMINAL USING FAKE  
DOCUMENTS MAY HAVE TRAVELED TO THE UK..

# INVESTIGATION PRIORITIES



DECIDE WHO YOU ARE  
INVESTIGATING



WHAT IS THEIR  
PLAN?



TAKE NOTES!

THE PASSENGER

INVESTIGATION  
TIME...



THANK YOU

PASSWORDS...

FIRST CAR.... FAMILY STORY.... BIRTHDAY MEAL

THERES MORE....

CYBER STALKING AND HARASSMENT THROUGH  
TECHNOLOGY..



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**KHATIJA.NICHOLS@WESTMIDLANDS.POLICE.UK**

**RACHEL.HENSLEY@WESTMIDLANDS.POLICE.UK**

**THANK  
YOU**



**WMCYBER LINKEDIN**



# Our Growing Impact Against Cyber Violence

## Workshop with 90+ Year 9 Girls

Raising awareness about online violence

## 130+ Engaged Participants

Building dialogue and momentum for action

## Research & CyVAWG Toolkit

Creating resources to support women and girls

Scan the QR code in the corner for additional resources and to provide your valuable feedback. Together, we can combat cyber violence.

