Safer Streets

Rapid Evidence Assessment of VAWG in public spaces

Presented by

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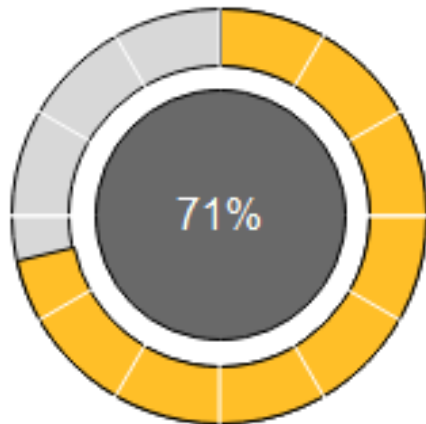University of Suffolk

Aims of REA

Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) conducted for OPCCN to lay the groundwork for a community crime prevention and awareness campaign to:

- **challenge beliefs, attitudes & behaviours** that support violence against women and girls (VAWG)

- increase feelings of **safety**
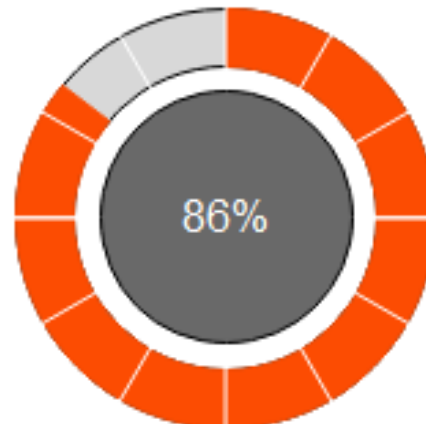
- address **barriers** that deter reporting

Support the creation of a campaign that is tailored to local context, and responsive to the wider evidence base on VAWG perpetration and prevention.

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Problem profile

- VAWG in public spaces is an entrenched, and underreported, issue. The 'dark figure' of sexual violence estimated to greatly exceed police recorded reports (ONS, 2020a).

- Not a uniform risk or experience across groups/areas: deprivation and intersecting marginalisation shape the likelihood of experiencing VAWG, feeling able to report, accessing justice and safety (Thiara & Roy, 2020; McIlwaine *et al*, 2019).

- Disproportionately perpetrated against young women and girls.

71%

All ages

86%

18-24

The two main reasons women of all ages cited for not reporting incidents are: "I didn't think the incident was serious enough to report" (55%) and "I didn't think reporting it would help" (45%)
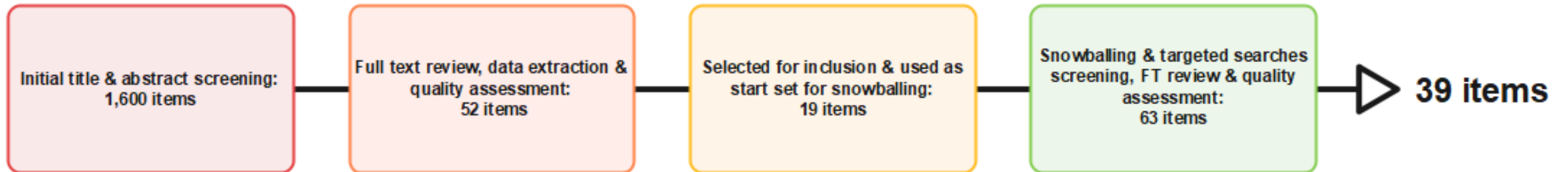
Based on national survey data from All-Party Parliamentary Group for UN Women (2021) *Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces*

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Research approach

- Question-led adapted **Rapid Evidence Assessment.**

- Four reviewers conducted initial title and abstract screening, three performed full text review, data extraction and quality assessment (**each FT item by two reviewers independently**).

- From 1,600 initial items to a final 39 suitable for the analysis.

Initial title & abstract screening:
1,600 items

Full text review, data extraction & quality assessment:
52 items

Selected for inclusion & used as start set for snowballing:
19 items

Snowballing & targeted searches screening, FT review & quality assessment:
63 items

39 items

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Context & findings:RQ1

- **RQ1:** What does the available literature say regarding the **attitudes and beliefs** associated with VAWG and how do these contribute to VAWG in public spaces? What does available evidence show regarding '**what works'** to tackle these attitudes and engender behavioural change?

- **Background:** **Rape myth acceptance** (RMA) is a significant risk factor for sexual coercion and secondary victimisation (Trottier *et al*, 2021; Campbell *et al*, 2001).

Rape myths: Prejudicial and false beliefs regarding rape, rape victims and rape perpetrators that contribute to creating a hostile environment for rape victims

(Trottier *et al*, 2021)

Context & findings:RQ2

- **RQ2:** What does the literature say regarding the **barriers to reporting VAWG** in public spaces?

- Contextual & social norms (permissiveness, 'lad culture' civil inattention)
- (Non-)recognition
- Minimisation
- Shock/freeze response
- Embarrassment
- Self-blame; fear of being blamed by gatekeepers
- Disbelief
- Lack of awareness of reporting options; unclear reporting options

Freeze response

The victim froze in the moment due to shock or fear
(Gekoski et al, 2015)

Disbelief

Adherence to RMs by those in gatekeeping roles
(Murphy & Hine, 2019; Sleath & Bull, 2017*)

Self-blame/fear of being seen as "undeserving victim"

Victim feels that they did not take enough precautionary measures, or fears that others will think this
(Brooks, 2014)

Reporting options

Not familiar with reporting options available

(Gekoski et al, 2015; Solymosi et al, 2017*)

Lack of faith/fear of CJS

Believes reports will be dimissed or won't progress, afraid of police involvement

(Brooks, 2017; Gekoski et al 2017)

Non-recognition

RMA plays a role in "unacknowledged rapes" where victims do not recognise that what has happened meets definition
(Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004*; Waterhouse *et al*, 2016)

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Context & findings:RQ3

- **RQ3:** What does the literature say about **feelings of diminished safety** in relation to VAWG in public spaces?

- Women and girls engage in routine **'safety work'**: ongoing risk assessment & mitigation behaviours, limiting or altering activities to avoid or minimise risk of VAWG (Gekoski *et al,* 2015; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020; Nicholls, 2017)

- Evident in studies relating to NTE, HE and public transport contexts

- Can contribute to reduced mobility, social & economic exclusion

Safety work

Routine, embodied risk minimisation behaviours

Interventions: key contexts

REA identified campaign interventions operating within three key contexts:

Higher/Further Education – I Heart Consent, the Intervention Initiative and End It Now

Public Transport – Project Guardian and Report it to Stop It

Night-time Economy – Stop SV, the Good Night Out Campaign

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What works? Key findings

- Tangible impacts (i.e. increased reporting) from public transport campaigns – staff & police visibility & additional reporting channel

- Promising findings regarding intermediate outcomes of bystander-related interventions in NTE & HE – knowledge, confidence, attitudes & reported willingness to intervene.

- However, limited evidence to date in UK contexts of longer-term & wider impacts (reduced perpetration, organisational change).

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What works? Key findings

- Social marketing campaigns which address community norms around VAWG can amplify effects of bystander training

- Positive & community-focused messaging associated with bystander training mitigates potential for resistance & backlash effects (counters/sidesteps perception that prevention programmes treat men as perpetrators-in-waiting)

- Stakeholder consultation supports social/cultural relevance

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Recommendations

1

Consult local stakeholders to ensure that key messages are **contextually relevant, understandable and acceptable**

2

Context counts - messaging that resonates in one setting may not transfer to others

3

Different environments are associated with different **social norms and expectations** (NTE, 'lad culture' in HE

ONGOING MONITORING AND FEEDBACK PROCESSES

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Recommendations

1

Ensure resources & training in place to **support effective reporting (e.g. staff visibility on public transport)**

2

Identify **target cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural** changes and how these will be tracked (pre- and post-)

3

Identify how **wider impacts** will be theorised, measured and attributed to the intervention (**theory of change**)

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