

NCVPP

National Centre for
Violence Against
Women & Girls and
Public Protection

**ORGANISED DRUG-FACILITATED
SEXUAL ASSAULT**

**AWARENESS BRIEFING FOR
STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS**

JUNE 2026



Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault

Awareness briefing for stakeholders and partners

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Background and Context

Drug-facilitated sexual assault (DFSA) is a serious and underreported form of sexual offending and domestic abuse. It involves victims being subjected to non-consensual sexual acts while incapacitated or unconscious due to the effects of alcohol and/or drugs.

Recent intelligence and operational activity across police forces and the National Crime Agency (NCA), supported by international partners, indicates an evolving and increasingly complex threat picture. There is growing evidence of **organised drug-facilitated sexual assault (ODFSA)**, involving networks of individuals who are connected to, or associated with, one another and who participate in, facilitate, or encourage abuse, both in person and within online environments.

This emerging pattern has been identified through ongoing investigations, alongside wider insights from international cases. These include instances of sustained domestic abuse within intimate partner relationships, sometimes involving multiple perpetrators, and in some cases reinforced or enabled through online communities. While this may appear novel, it sits within a broader and well-established context of sexual offending, controlling and coercive behaviour and domestic abuse, often perpetrated by individuals known to the victim.

This form of offending has both criminal justice and public health implications, particularly in relation to the administration of substances, repeated exposure to harm, and long-term physical and psychological impact.

Recent media coverage, survivor-led campaigning and upcoming court proceedings have increased public awareness of this issue. As a result, we expect further attention in the coming weeks and months and, importantly, an increase in disclosures, reporting and demand across policing, health services and the specialist sector.

We recognise that you as stakeholders, specialist sector and partners are the experts in understanding what victims and survivors need and how they engage with services. Your insight, experience and challenge will be critical as we continue to develop our response to this evolving threat.

A coordinated, whole-system approach includes ensuring that:

- victims are recognised and supported, including those who may not be aware that they have been harmed
- frontline professionals are equipped to identify indicators and respond appropriately
- pathways between policing, health, safeguarding and specialist services are clear, accessible and trauma-informed

We are asking all stakeholders and partners to support this approach by:

- working within your own organisations and networks to raise awareness and prepare for potential increased demand
- amplifying consistent and victim-centred messaging
- continuing to share insight, learning and feedback to inform the national response

The NCA and National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls (NCVPP) are working proactively together in both enforcement and safeguarding, recognising both the significant impact on victims and the wider public health implications of this form of sexual offending and domestic abuse. This includes aligning policing's priorities of serious and organised crime, online and VAWG capabilities to strengthen identification, evidential development and disruption activity.

This is a shared challenge, and a collective response will be essential to addressing it.

Further mechanisms for sharing insight and feedback will be coordinated through existing national networks, including the National Rape Working Group, the Domestic Abuse stakeholder group and via existing partnerships.

Below you will see the jointly agreed NCA and NCVPP core narrative, key messages, lines to take and Q&A that have been shared with all police forces. These materials are designed to support a consistent national approach, while recognising the vital role that you play in shaping how messages are understood and delivered in practice.

What we are asking of you

We encourage you to use and adapt these messages within your own materials and within your own networks, to help ensure a coordinated, victim-centred response across the system.

- Share this briefing and messaging within your organisations and networks
- Brief frontline staff (including clinicians, support workers, helpline staff and others who may receive disclosures)
- Consider how this type of offending may present in your services, including where individuals may be unsure what has happened
- Ensure clear and accessible pathways into support, including for those who do not wish to report to police
- Be prepared for an increase in disclosures and demand
- Continue to share insight, emerging issues and feedback to inform the national response – this can be via the National Rape Working Group, the Domestic Abuse group or other stakeholder groups with policing that you belong to.

Please note that as of 18 June 2026, the NCVPP and NCA have not undertaken proactive national media engagement on this issue. The messaging provided below are our reactive lines to take at this time.

If you are approached by the media with enquiries about the national policing response, we ask that these are referred to the NCVPP and NCA communications teams to ensure a consistent, coordinated response (sarah.wolf@npcc.police.uk and adam.edwards@nca.gov.uk) Further lines may be provided as the communications approach develops.

Core Narrative

- Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault is a disturbing form of hidden sexual offending and domestic abuse. It involves the deliberate removal of a person's capacity in order to commit sexual offences, often by someone they know and trust, and in some cases by multiple connected offenders working together.
- This offending is increasingly enabled by technology and can be concealed within intimate partner relationships. Victims may have no idea they have been harmed until police make contact.
- It may often form part of a wider pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour within an intimate partner relationship.
- While some victims may have no idea they have been harmed, other may have a sense of something not feeling right in their relationship, even if they do not directly identify it as domestic abuse.

- We recognise the enormity of that trauma. Our focus is on what has been done to the victim. Victims will be treated with care, dignity and specialist support.
- We are also clear with offenders: if you drug, rape, facilitate rape, abuse, record abuse or coordinate these crimes online, we will identify you, pursue your networks and bring you to justice.
- This is not low-risk or hidden offending. It is being actively investigated, and those involved will be pursued using all available legal powers.
- This is a whole-system response involving police forces, the National Crime Agency, the National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection, health services, Sexual Assault Referral Centres and specialist support organisations.
- Law enforcement is also working closely with the specialist sector and gaining insight to ensure that victims and survivors' needs are considered throughout.

Key Messages

- Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault is a disturbing form of hidden sexual offending and domestic abuse.
- It involves the deliberate removal of a person's capacity to consent in order to commit sexual offences, often by someone they know and trust, and in some cases by multiple connected offenders.

On victim impact

- For many victims, the first indication that something may have happened comes not from memory, but from police contact or digital evidence. Some victims may have a sense of something not feeling right, or may be in a controlling and coercive relationship and recognise patterns.
- We recognise how deeply traumatic and destabilising that is, particularly where the suspected offender is an intimate partner or someone trusted.

How might victims present?

Each case will be different but there are some features that victims have been explaining including:

- experiencing unexplained memory gaps or confusion
- raising concerns about repeated illness, sedation or feeling "unwell"
- questioning events that occurred in private or domestic settings
- being referred by police to support services following identification through digital or intelligence-led activity

Disclosures may be partial, delayed or uncertain, and may emerge over time rather than as a single clear account.

On the nature of offending

- This is not isolated behaviour. In many cases, offending forms part of an abusive pattern over time particularly in relation to controlling and coercive behaviour in an intimate partner relationship. The offending can often involve multiple individuals connected online.
- Technology is being used to enable, reinforce and normalise this behaviour.

On the policing response

- The National Crime Agency is coordinating activity and intelligence at a national and international level, particularly where there are links to serious and organised crime, online networks or cross-border offending.
- The National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection is working with police forces to ensure a consistent, victim-centred approach across forces.
- This means that while investigations are led locally by police forces, there is strong national coordination to share intelligence, support investigations, safeguard victims and disrupt wider networks.
- The NCA, the NCVPP, and police forces are also working with health services and specialist partners to safeguard victims and disrupt networks, with a focus on offending behaviour, patterns and connections.
- The NCVPP is rapidly consolidating and disseminating practical information for frontline officers and investigators, drawing on existing materials, addressing identified gaps (including in areas such as digital forensics and victim identification), and incorporating emerging learning from live investigations.
- This is intended to support a consistent national approach when reports or intelligence relating to Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault are received, ensuring officers are equipped to recognise, investigate and respond effectively.
- Alongside this, there is sector-wide engagement with partners including the Crown Prosecution Service and Ministry of Justice.
- Particular attention is being given to the distinctive characteristics of Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault, including victims who may be unaware of their victimisation, and the need for trauma-informed approaches.

- Detection and evidential development are inherently challenging in this area; in response, policing is bringing together serious and organised crime, online and VAWG capabilities to improve identification of offending, strengthen evidential opportunities and disrupt networks

Broader law enforcement response

- Law enforcement is prioritising the early identification of online indicators of offending, including the use of digital platforms to communicate, target victims and coordinate activity. This includes developing intelligence from online environments and working with international partners, including Europol, to identify and disrupt networks and safeguard victims.
- The NCA and NCVPP are working proactively together in both enforcement and safeguarding, recognising both the significant impact on victims and the wider public health implications of this form of sexual offending and domestic abuse. This includes aligning policing's priorities of serious and organised crime, online and VAWG capabilities to strengthen identification, evidential development and disruption activity.
- Perpetrators should be clear that they cannot act with impunity. Law enforcement is proactively working to identify, locate and arrest those responsible, using all available capabilities across national and international partners.

On offenders

- To those committing or facilitating these crimes: the fact that you hide behind trust, technology or private networks will not protect you.
- If you drug, rape, facilitate rape, record or share abuse, we will pursue every available investigative lead and use every available offence.

On scale

- This is an evolving picture. What has been identified so far includes international networks and large online communities.
- While the organised nature of this offending is concerning, it represents a specific and evolving pattern within the wider context of sexual offending and domestic abuse, which affects far more people overall.
- Our message is clear: whatever your experience, if something has happened to you or does not feel right, you can come forward and you will be supported.

Audience Messaging

Victims and Survivors

Your own messaging here may be more suitable for victims and survivors who you work with. These key messages have been provided to police forces and are based on the work of Rape Crisis England and Wales, and the Operation Soteria victim information guide, developed with victims and survivors and academics to be trauma-informed.

- You might be unsure what happened to you. Many people who have experienced sexual assault, domestic abuse or rape feel confused, have gaps in their memory, or aren't sure how to describe what happened.
- You might be asking yourself whether what happened to you "counts" as rape or sexual or domestic assault. You don't need to work that out before speaking to someone.
- If something sexual happened without your consent, that is a criminal offence.
- Consent means having the freedom and capacity to choose. If you were unable to make that choice because you were asleep, unconscious, affected by alcohol or drugs, or not fully aware then that is not consent.
- You might have been told you agreed to sexual contact but not remember it that way. If you didn't have the ability to choose that is not consent.
- These offences don't always involve strangers. Sexual assault and rape can involve intimate partners, ex-partners, or people you trust.
- Sometimes these situations involve planning, control, or more than one person. In some cases, others may have been present, involved, or encouraging what happened. This can make it harder to recognise at the time
- You do not need proof, certainty, or a clear memory to be taken seriously. You are not expected to understand exactly what has happened or who was involved in order to be taken seriously. If you feel that something has happened then please ask for help.
- You won't be judged for trusting someone or for the situation you were in.
- You can talk to someone confidentially without involving the police. Rape Crisis England and Wales will listen, believe you, and never judge you. **0808 500 2222**
- The **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** can be reached at **0808 2000 247**

- Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) can support you after rape or sexual assault. They offer medical care, support, and advice—whether or not you want to report. [[Help after rape and sexual assault - NHS](#)]
- You don't need to have the right words or a clear account.
- If you do choose to speak to police, you will be listened to, taken seriously, and treated with respect.
- You do not need to come with a clear story or full memory. Sexual assault and rape can involve confusion, gaps, and uncertainty.
- If you do want to report to the police:
 - Specially trained officers will support you.
 - Our focus will be on what may have been done to you, not questioning your decisions or your behaviour
 - You will be involved in decisions about what happens during the reporting process
 - You can take your time. There is no right or wrong moment to come forward.
- You can speak to support services such as Rape Crisis England and Wales and the Domestic Abuse Helpline before speaking to the police, and decide later what you want to do.
- If you're questioning what happened, that's enough to talk to someone.
- You don't have to decide whether it was rape, abuse or sexual assault before reaching out.
- Some people only realise much later that something wasn't right. You can come forward at any time and will still be taken seriously.

Public

- This is a real, hidden and serious form of sexual offending and domestic abuse. It is often not visible at the point it happens, and in many cases only comes to light later through investigation or disclosure.
- Victims may not realise they have been harmed. The use of alcohol or other substances can affect memory, awareness and the ability to recognise what has happened, sometimes for a long period of time.
- If something does not feel right, or you are unsure about what may have happened, support is available to help you understand your options.

Perpetrators

- All forms of involvement in this behaviour are criminal. This includes domestic abuse, sexual offences including rape, administering substances, facilitating access to a victim, encouraging or coordinating abuse, recording or sharing material, and participating in offending in any way.
- Being part of a network, whether online or offline, will not protect you. Collective behaviour, group dynamics or shared responsibility do not reduce individual accountability.
- Online anonymity does not prevent identification. Law enforcement is actively developing intelligence, working across jurisdictions, and using digital and investigative methods to identify individuals involved in these activities.
- This is not low-risk or hidden offending. It is being actively investigated, and those involved will be pursued using all available legal powers.

Those who see content (online audiences, bystanders)

- If you encounter content or behaviour that suggests someone is being drugged, unconscious, or sexually exploited, you are not just observing, you are witnessing potential harm.
- Reporting concerning content or behaviour can help prevent further abuse and protect victims, including those who may not know they have been harmed.
- Sharing, liking or ignoring this type of material contributes to the normalisation of abuse and can enable further harm. Choosing not to engage, and reporting where appropriate, makes a difference.
- If in doubt, report it to the platform, the police, or an appropriate reporting service.
- Acting on concerns is an important part of preventing harm.

Q&As**What is Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault (ODFSA)?**

Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault refers to a form of serious sexual offending and domestic abuse in which victims are subjected to sexual acts while they are incapacitated or unconscious due to the effects of alcohol and/or drugs, and are therefore unable to consent.

The “organised” element means that this behaviour involves two or more individuals who are connected to one another, either directly or through online environments, and who are involved in or facilitate the abuse.

That facilitation can include:

- administering substances
- enabling access to victims
- coordinating offending
- encouraging or directing abuse
- recording or sharing material

In most cases, this offending takes place in intimate partnerships or domestic settings, including within relationships. In some cases this intimate partner offending is linked to online networks or communities, where individuals share material, exchange advice and, in some cases, coordinate abuse in real-world settings.

This is not a single type of incident — it can include sustained and repeated offending over time, and in some cases multiple perpetrators. This repeat offending could include other types of controlling and coercive behaviour or other sexual or domestic abuse.

Is this simply “spiking”?

No. While the use of substances can overlap with what is commonly described as spiking, this is a distinct and more complex pattern of offending.

In many Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault cases:

- the victim is known to the offender, often within an intimate partner relationship or social context
- the offending then escalates to involve additional perpetrators, including those unknown to the victim
- substances may be administered repeatedly over time – alcohol and sedative substances
- offending may involve planning, coordination or facilitation by others
- there may be an online element, including discussion, encouragement or sharing of material

So while spiking may form part of the behaviour, Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault it also involves exploitation of trust, control and access, and in some cases multiple connected individuals.

Is this a national police investigation?

No. There is not a single national police investigation into Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault.

Individual police forces are responsible for leading investigations into offences within their force areas, including identifying suspects, gathering evidence and safeguarding victims.

The National Crime Agency is coordinating activity and intelligence at a national and international level, particularly where there are links to serious and organised crime, online networks or cross-border offending.

The National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection is working with police forces to ensure a consistent, victim-centred approach across forces.

This means that while investigations are led locally by police forces, there is strong national coordination to share intelligence, support investigations, safeguard victims and disrupt wider networks.

Why might victims not know this has happened to them?

A defining feature of this type of offending is that victims may be incapacitated or unconscious at the time, and therefore unable to understand what is happening or recall it afterwards.

Alcohol and a range of substances — including sedatives — can:

- cause memory loss or gaps
- affect awareness and perception
- impair a person's ability to recognise harm

In some cases, victims:

- remember nothing at all
- feel confused or unsure about what happened
- only become aware through police contact, third-party information or digital evidence

Where offending occurs within an intimate partner relationship or familiar setting, this can make it even harder to recognise or question at the time.

What should someone do if they are worried this might have happened to them?

They should seek support as soon as they feel able. They do not need to be certain, and they do not need to make a decision about reporting before getting help. All forms of domestic abuse and sexual offending are illegal.

Support is available through:

- **Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)** – providing medical care, forensic support and advice
- **Rape Crisis England and Wales, the Domestic Abuse Helpline and other specialist organisations** – offering confidential emotional and practical support
- **NHS services including GPs and pharmacies**
- **Sexual Health Clinics**

These services can:

- help someone understand what may have happened
- provide healthcare and safeguarding support
- talk through options without pressure

Importantly, support is available whether or not the person chooses to report to police.

Do I have to report to the police to get help?

No. You can access support services without reporting to police.

Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), GPs, pharmacists and specialist organisations such as Rape Crisis England and Wales and the Domestic Abuse Helpline can provide:

- medical care
- emotional support
- advice and guidance

In some cases, forensic evidence can be collected and stored by a SARC while someone takes time to decide what they want to do.

The decision to report is entirely the individual's choice, and support will continue regardless of that decision.

How do I report to the police?

You can report in a number of ways:

- by contacting your local police force via **101**
- by calling **999 in an emergency**
- through a **Sexual Assault Referral Centre or support service**, who can help you make a report if you choose

If you do choose to report:

- you do not need a full account or clear memory
- you can share as much or as little as you feel able
- you will be supported by trained officers
- your immediate safety and wellbeing will be the priority

You can also speak to a support organisation first and decide later whether to involve police.

Is this happening in the UK?

Yes. While international cases have helped bring attention to this type of offending, there are also ongoing investigations in the UK.

Law enforcement activity has identified:

- individuals in the UK linked to online networks
- domestic investigations across multiple forces
- victims being safeguarded

Because of the nature of this offending, including the use of online platforms and international networks, it is being treated as both a violence against women and girls (VAWG) issue, reflecting the harm to victims, and a serious organised crime threat.

What can you say about the scale?

- This is still an evolving intelligence picture, and it is not possible to provide a definitive assessment of scale at this stage.

- Organised Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault represents a relatively small proportion of overall sexual offending and domestic abuse. However, what has been identified so far is concerning and complex.
- This includes:
 - large online groups, in some cases with hundreds or thousands of users
 - international networks spanning multiple countries
 - individuals actively engaged in behaviour that may pose a direct threat to victims
- There is also concern that this type of offending has historically been under-recognised and largely hidden, particularly where victims are unaware of their victimisation. As understanding develops, the picture is likely to continue to evolve.
- In response, the National Crime Agency and the National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection are taking a proactive and coordinated national approach to prevent future harm. This is one of the most significant examples of organised violence against women and girls (VAWG) offending currently identified, and reflects the increased prioritisation of this threat across law enforcement.
- Capabilities across serious and organised crime, VAWG and online policing are being brought together, with the full range of available assets being used to identify offenders, safeguard victims and disrupt networks.
- This issue is being addressed openly, without jeopardising ongoing investigations, in order to support disruption, prevention and deterrence, and to encourage reporting and bystander action, including in online spaces. It demonstrates how VAWG, serious and organised crime and online harm priorities are being addressed collectively to respond to emerging threats.

What is law enforcement doing about it?

- Law enforcement is prioritising the early identification of online indicators of offending, including the use of digital platforms to communicate, target victims and coordinate activity. This includes developing intelligence from online environments and working with international partners, including Europol, to identify and disrupt networks and safeguard victims.
- The NCA and NCVPP are working proactively together in both enforcement and safeguarding, recognising both the significant impact on victims and the wider public health implications of this form of sexual offending and domestic abuse. This includes aligning policing's priorities of serious and organised crime, online and VAWG capabilities to strengthen identification, evidential development and disruption activity.
- Perpetrators should be clear that they cannot act with impunity. Law enforcement is proactively working to identify, locate and arrest those responsible, using all available capabilities across national and international partners.

Are online platforms involved? What about regulation?

Technology is a significant factor in how this offending has developed.

Online environments, including open forums, social platforms and encrypted services, can:

- allow individuals to find like-minded offenders
- enable discussion and normalisation of harmful behaviour
- provide spaces where abuse can be facilitated, coordinated or shared

Law enforcement is working with partners, including international agencies and platform providers, to:

- identify harmful activity
- disrupt networks
- support safeguarding

Given the operational sensitivities, it would not be appropriate to comment in detail on specific platforms or regulatory actions.

What substances are being used and where do they come from?

A range of substances can be involved, including:

- alcohol
- prescription medications
- illicit drugs, including sedatives

These substances may be used individually or in combination to:

- impair awareness
- prevent memory of the incident

Because of the risk of misuse, it would not be appropriate to discuss specific substances, sources or methods in detail.

The focus remains on:

- identifying harm
- safeguarding victims
- pursuing offenders

Is the law strong enough to deal with this?

Existing legislation already provides robust powers to investigate and prosecute this behaviour.

Relevant offences include:

- rape
- sexual assault
- assault by penetration
- causing a person to engage in sexual activity without consent
- administering a substance with intent to stupefy or overpower (Section 61, Sexual Offences Act 2003)
- offences relating to recording and sharing images

- coercive and controlling behaviour and other relevant domestic abuse related offences

Legislation including Sexual Offences Act 2003, Serious Crime Act 2015 and the Online Safety Act 2023 are all relevant in these offences, along with several others. These offences carry significant penalties, including life imprisonment for the most serious cases.

Policing and prosecutors will use the full range of existing law to address this offending. At the same time, the legal and operational framework will continue to be reviewed as understanding of this pattern develops.