

It does matter campaign

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Practice note: raising awareness of non-contact sexual offences and empowering people to report these crimes

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As the Campaigns Officer for Thames Valley Police (TVP), I was proud to be involved in the development of the **'It Does Matter' campaign** as part of our violence against women and girls (VAWG) strategy, created in response to the Angiolini Inquiry. The VAWG team across the communications department brought the campaign to life with a powerful message. We focused on driving behaviour change when it came to reporting non-contact sexual offences and promoting safety on a night out.

Non-contact sexual offences

The campaign was developed in collaboration with Lisa Squire, whose daughter, Libby, was tragically raped and murdered after a night out in Hull in 2019. Her attacker had a history of committing non-contact sexual offences, highlighting the dangerous pattern of escalation. It Does Matter aims to raise awareness of these offences and empower individuals to report them, reinforcing that every incident, no matter how minor it may seem, truly matters.

A report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for UN Women found that 71% of UK women have faced sexual harassment in public, including exposure. Yet 95% of incidents go unreported, often because victims don't think it's serious enough or believe reporting won't help. Among young women (18-24), 85% have experienced unwanted sexual attention. Alarming, 9 in 10 people, regardless of gender, have faced some form of non-contact sexual offence (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

Non-contact sexual offences, such as exposure and voyeurism, have long been overlooked as forms of VAWG, but that must change. TVP and wider national policing is conducting research to better understand and tackle these crimes.

Behaviour change model

Our campaign was strategically designed using the COM-B behaviour change model (Michie, van Stralen and West, 2011). The COM-B model is a framework for understanding and influencing behaviour change. It suggests that three key components are necessary for a behaviour (B) to occur.

- Capability (C) – The individual's psychological and physical ability to perform the behaviour.
- Opportunity (O) – External factors, such as social and environmental conditions, which enable the behaviour.
- Motivation (M) – The internal processes that drive behaviour, including conscious decision-making and automatic responses.

By assessing these elements, policymakers, healthcare professionals and organisations can design targeted interventions to encourage positive behaviour change.

We wanted to use the model to address key factors influencing reporting behaviour, specifically to encourage an increase in reporting of non-contact sexual offences and promoting safety behaviours on a night out.

Approach

During the work, we explored how capability, opportunity and motivation influence attitudes and behaviours related to the reporting of non-contact sexual offences, particularly among our target audience of 18-24 year-olds.

We found that this group often face barriers, such as uncertainty about what constitutes a non-contact sexual offence, and doubts about how to make a report and what the outcome might be. Therefore, with a particular focus on enhancing capability, we concentrated on education, ensuring young people understood the issue, recognised unacceptable behaviours and felt confident knowing how and where to report incidents.

Education

We used the capability framework to shape our planned activity across universities and schools, as well as through internal and external messaging. This helped ensure our approach was consistent, targeted and rooted in behaviour change principles.

The first phase of the campaign introduced an educational package, available through the [PSHE Association](#) website, which incorporates Libby's story. This resource has been made accessible to schools nationwide and has already been downloaded thousands of times. It is helping to educate young people and introduce the importance of recognising and reporting non-contact sexual offences and making informed decisions around personal safety.

Awareness

The second phase of the campaign set out to reach 16-25 year-olds, with a secondary audience of parents of those in this age bracket. The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness of what a non-contact sexual offence is and how you can report an incident to the police or support agency. Libby's story was vital in our communication with younger audiences and having Lisa involved to tell it was even more impactful.

Campaign launch

The second phase of the campaign launched in September 2024 and has since been embedded into VAWG work across the force. We worked with an external company, TMC Strategic Communications, to assist with research, insights and graphics for the campaign.

Internal

We launched internally through the TVP intranet and bulletin news to spread the word. Several officers and members of staff offered their support and asked how they could help with the campaign, which was great to see.

External

The external campaign launched in September 2024 and was promoted to media outlets. Traditional methods of contacting the local press were used and we also contacted national outlets and organisations we had not worked with before. This included Good Morning Britain (GMB) and

BBC's Newsbeat, who collectively have both our target audiences making up their main audience figures (It Does Matter, 2024).

The day of launch involved in-person studio interviews for Assistant Chief Constable Katy Barrow-Grint, and Lisa Squire at GMB and Sky News Breakfast with Kay Burley. This was the first time a TVP campaign had been so welcomed on national television and news. We were keen to capture the learning as soon as we could, so a structured debrief was scheduled soon after the launch to record feedback and considerations moving forward.

Following the external launch, I liaised with universities across the force area to secure a presence at freshers' events in September and October 2024. Some were welcoming of the idea, but others did not want a policing presence at welcome events for students. The one aspect of the campaign that helped overcome these concerns was the branding of the campaign, which purposely does not include a police logo.

Outcomes

To understand the campaign's impact, I collaborated with neighbourhood policing teams and communications colleagues to engage directly with students at events. A survey was conducted with 577 students to assess their awareness, perceptions and responses to non-contact sexual offences.

The key findings were as follows:

- **Demographics:** Of the 577 students surveyed, 75% identified as female, 22% as male and 3% as non-binary.
- **Awareness:** When asked to identify non-contact sexual offences, the most commonly recognised were drink spiking, upskirting and exposure.
- **Safety concerns:** 73% of students reported feeling uncomfortable or unsafe while on a night out, highlighting the widespread discomfort in social settings.
- **Reporting behaviours:** When asked, "Who would you report to if a non-contact offence happened to you?" only 30% of students said they would go to the police. Other common responses included parents, security staff and teachers, indicating potential gaps in trust or awareness of

reporting channels.

This primary data provides a valuable insight. It is crucial for understanding the thoughts and feelings of our target audience regarding this crime type and their willingness to report concerns. By continuously monitoring this data, we can assess the impact of the campaign in achieving its aims and identify any shifts in attitudes or behaviours. This ongoing analysis allows us to refine our communications, ensuring they remain effective and responsive to the needs of our audience.

The campaign has generated interest from other police forces across the country. Linking in with other forces and sharing our best practice for this campaign has made me feel really proud of the team's work.

It Does Matter is a campaign that has been founded in response to a truly awful set of incidents in our society. But the work this campaign does to bring younger audiences into the policing space is vital. This is why the campaign is available to share across all forces. It remains unbranded; the only place a police logo or link is featured is on the dedicated website.

I encourage everyone to look at the bespoke website and watch the video detailing real experiences of non-contact sexual offences and how they affect everyone in different ways.

- This article was peer reviewed by Eleanor Prince, Principal Behavioural Scientist, Metropolitan Police Service

References

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