

# Examining the social and psychological impacts of deepfake VAWG on victims

19 November 2025

# Who is Crest Advisory?

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**Crest is an independent crime and justice consultancy.**

We are experts in **justice, policing, and public safety**, working with partners in the charity sector, the police, local government, and central government to create positive change.

We were commissioned to conduct research into the **social and psychological impacts of deepfakes on victims**, with a focus on violence against women and girls (**VAWG**).

# We completed three phases of work to answer our key lines of enquiry

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## Phase 1: Evidence review

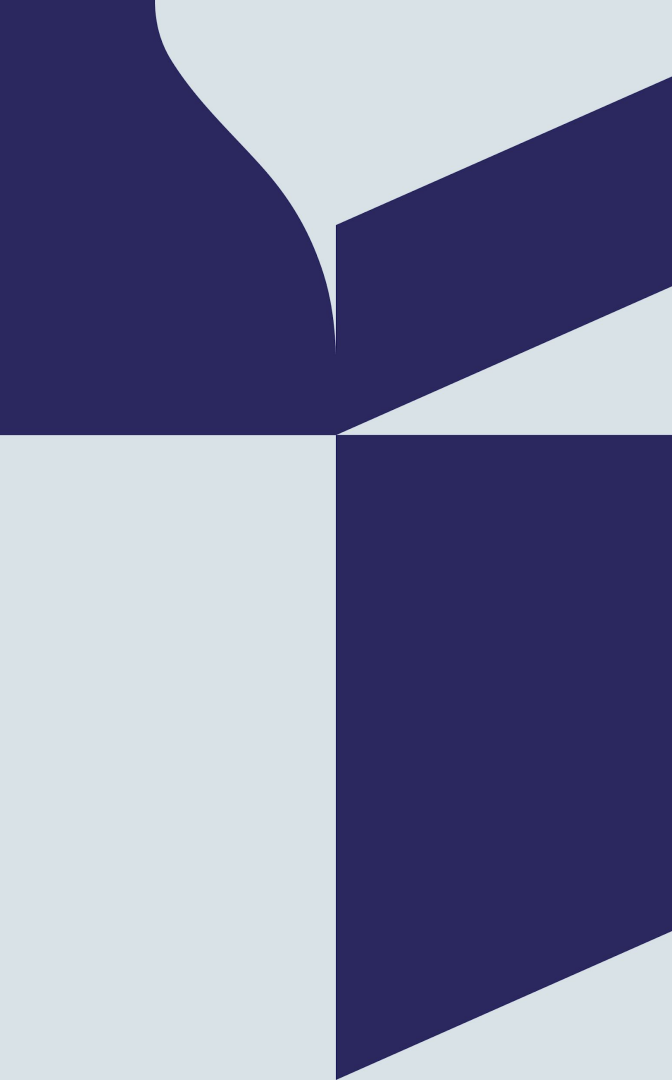
- Evidence gathering session
- Rapid evidence review

## Phase 2: Primary research

- Nationally representative public attitudes survey
- Victim and practitioner engagement
- Two policing workshops

## Phase 3: Analysis and reporting

- Final report
- Guidelines for policing



# Key findings: Scale

# Deepfake VAWG is a rapidly growing threat with increasing numbers of videos and views. It is estimated that the vast majority of deepfakes are sexual, and are of women

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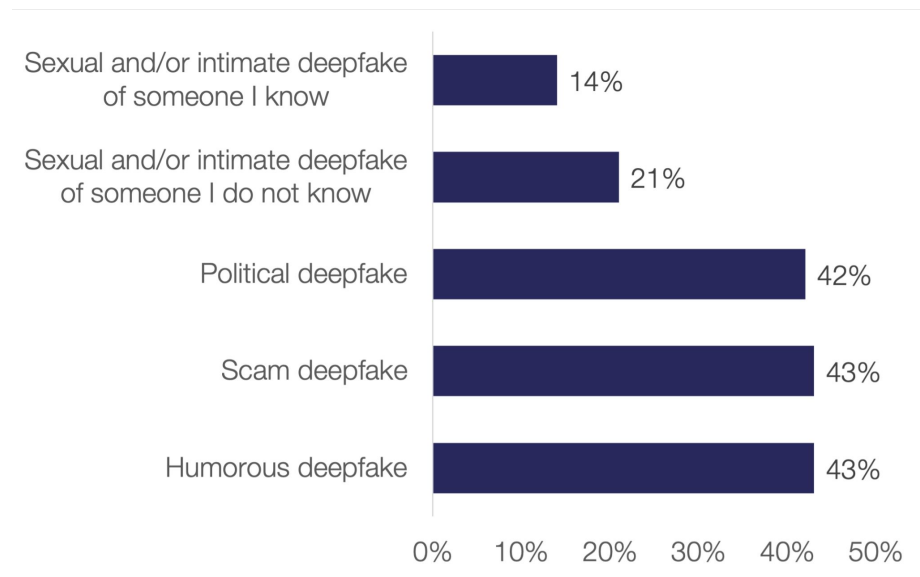
- A 2023 study identified that **deepfake pornography makes up 98% of deepfake videos online, and 99% of those are of women** ([Security Hero, 2023](#))
- As of February 2024, there are 276,149 videos depicting deepfake violence against women and girls, representing a 1,780% increase since 2019 ([Compton & Hunt, 2024](#)).
- **Viewership has increased by 3,942% since 2019**, estimated to exceed a total of 4.2 billion views ([Compton & Hunt, 2024](#)).

**This evidence suggests deepfake VAWG is a key threat.**

However, at present, **there are limitations to understanding the scale of this threat**. There are challenges in how data on online harms, specifically deepfakes, are **captured in crime recording**.

# Despite the volume of deepfake VAWG material, our survey found that the general public is most exposed to other types of deepfakes (political, humorous, scam)

**Proportion (%) of respondents by whether they have seen different types of deepfakes (n=1144)**



This may suggest that a **more concentrated pool of individuals are creating and consuming deepfake VAWG content**

**Social media and the news** were the primary sources through which the public had heard about deepfakes and where they had seen them.

# Our research sheds light on the proportion of the population that might be a victim of deepfake VAWG, and the proportion that have created deepfake VAWG content

## Victimisation

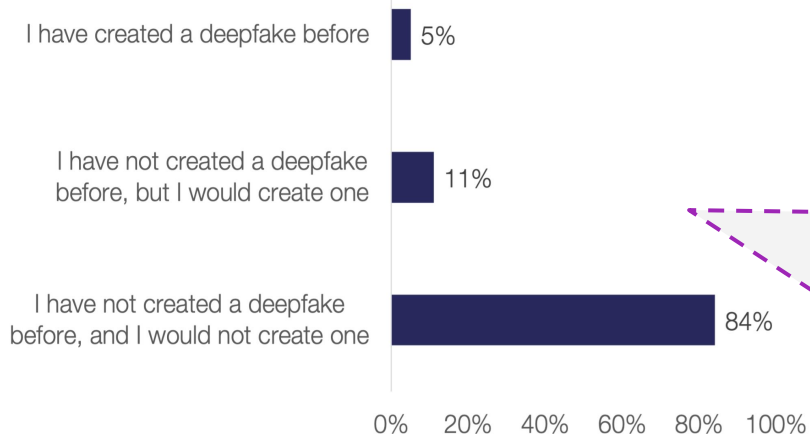
**7% (n=102)** reported that they had a sexual/intimate deepfake made of them.

**A third of these had not agreed** to the creation of the deepfake.

**Younger people** were more likely to report having had a deepfake made of them.

## Creation

Proportion (%) of respondents by their experience of and attitudes towards the creation of deepfakes (n=1669)



**27% (n=201)** of **younger respondents** stated they had or would create a deepfake in the future, compared to **7% (n=60)** of **older respondents**

# There is a chasm between the proportion of people who have heard of and seen deepfakes, and those who are aware of legislation surrounding deepfakes

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- **68% (n=1150)** of respondents to our public attitudes survey **have heard of deepfakes**, and most understand what deepfakes are.
- **Men were more aware** of deepfakes than women.

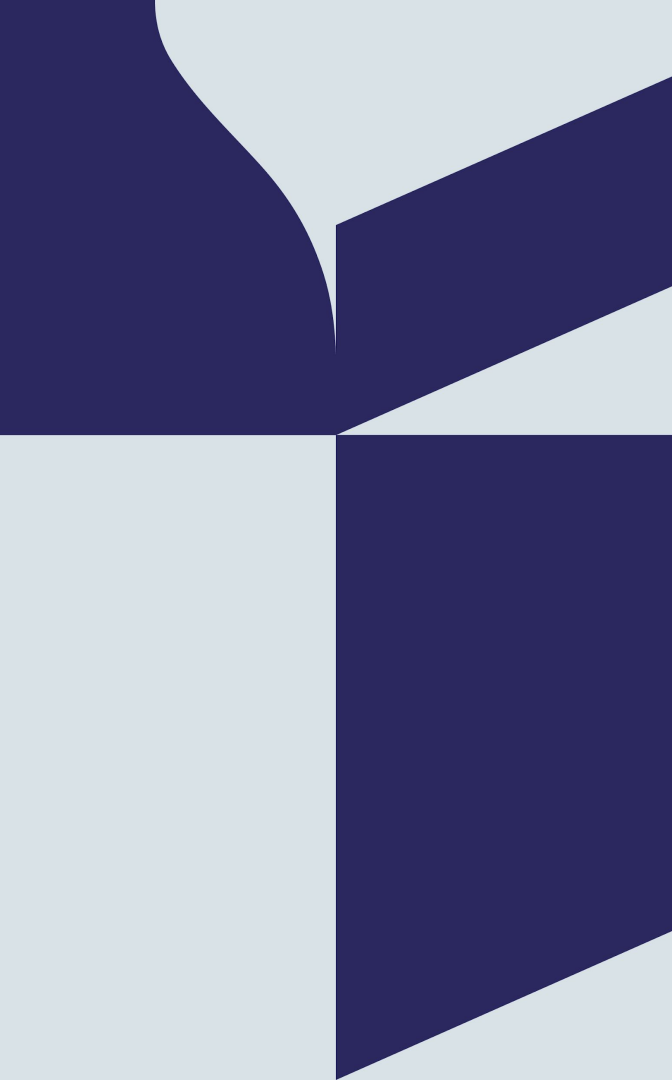
## HOWEVER...

- **Just 14% (n=244)** of respondents were aware of existing legislation around deepfakes in England and Wales.
- **Young people were more aware** of legislation than older people.

## Current and upcoming legislation

- ➔ **The Online Safety Act (2023)**
- ➔ **Data (Use and Access) Act (2025)**
- ➔ **The Crime and Policing Bill (2025)**

**Scholars and organisations have called for legislation to be taken further** to empower agencies to prevent and reduce the prevalence of deepfake VAWG.



# Key findings: Impacts

# Victims of deepfake VAWG face significant impacts which are comparable to contact VAWG offences, as well as additional harms unique to online and image-based abuse

## Some impacts mirror other VAWG crimes

- **Depression, anxiety, and paranoia**
- **Risk of suicide**
- Impacts on victims' **body image, identity, and senses of self.**

"I think it's **somebody taking away your consent and thinking that they can control your body** or that they **have ownership of you** in some way." (Practitioner)

"**This strikes to the core of somebody's identity** and that feeling of disassociation and alienation from your identity" (Practitioner)

## Other impacts are unique to deepfake VAWG

- Paranoia that the deepfake will be remade, reshared, or viewed by more people
- Victims **distrust** those in their lives
- **Withdraw from online and offline spaces.**
- Victims may **lose their jobs, or lose earnings** as a result of deepfake VAWG.

"These victims can't see themselves on video. They can't see themselves in a digital way. **I spoke to one client who had her graduation and she didn't want to be in any photographs for her graduation.** And I just think, like, that's so heartbreaking" (Practitioner)

# Most survey respondents were worried about having a deepfake made of them, and almost all thought that deepfakes are harmful

## The public think deepfakes are harmful

- **The vast majority agree that sexual / intimate deepfakes are “very” or “somewhat” harmful** (92%, n=1508).
- **60%** (n=1008) of respondents **were “very” or “somewhat” worried about being a victim** of a deepfake.

## The public think deepfake VAWG is morally and legal wrong

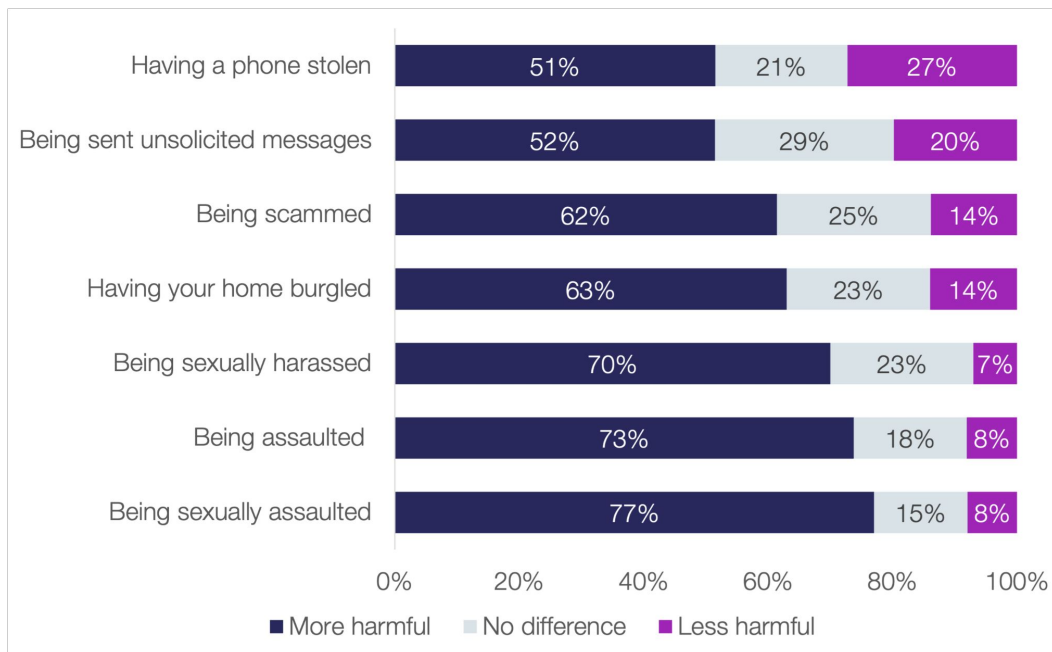
- The majority of respondents agreed that **creating (74%, n=1245) and sharing (75%, n=1259) sexual and/or intimate deepfakes was ‘wrong’**
- We asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree that a series of scenarios involving creating, viewing and / or sharing non-consensual sexual/intimate deepfake content should be 1) legally acceptable and 2) morally acceptable.
- **1 in 4 people** felt there is nothing wrong with creating and sharing sexual/intimate deepfakes or felt neutral about this.

## However, the public may underestimate the impact that deepfake VAWG has on victims, including in relation to the harm caused by other offences

Our public attitudes survey asked respondents to **compare how harmful they think deepfakes are in comparison to seven other crimes.**

Across each of the listed offences, **sexual/intimate deepfakes were considered less harmful by the majority of respondents.**

**Proportion (%) of respondents by whether they think each offence type causes more or less harm than sexual and / or intimate deepfakes**



# Our research suggests a link between deepfake VAWG and misogyny which may offer insight on motivations behind the creation and sharing of non-consensual deepfakes, which can include humiliation and coercion

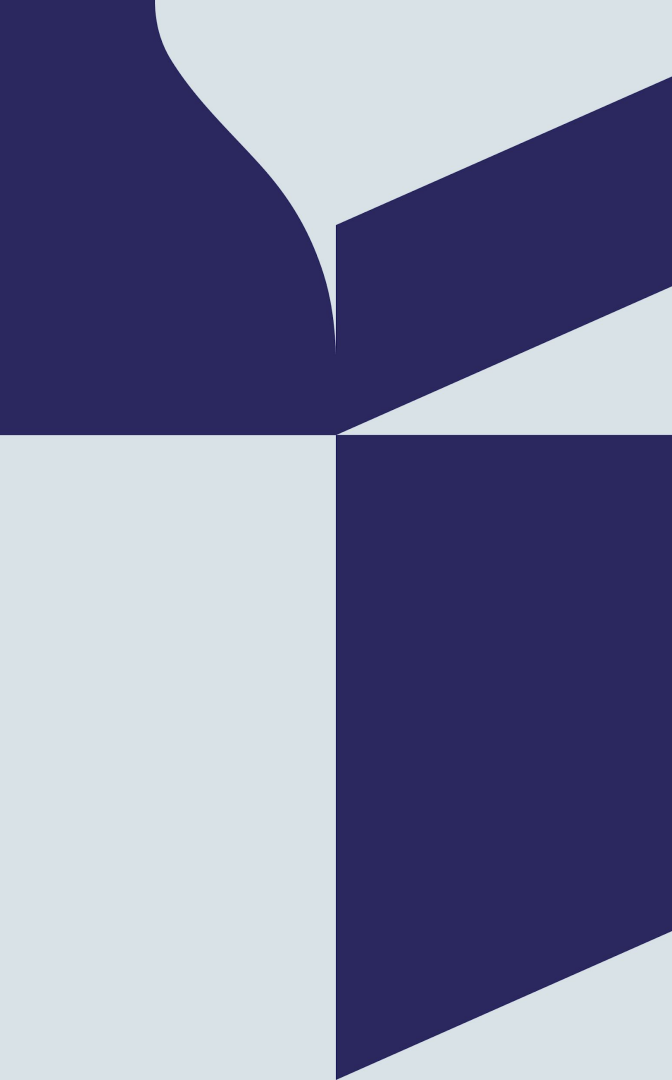
**Those who think deepfake VAWG is acceptable also hold more misogynistic beliefs; and creators of deepfake VAWG have similar motives to perpetrators of other VAWG crimes**

Respondents to our public attitudes survey who **found it morally and legally acceptable** to create, view, share and sell non-consensual sexual/intimate deepfake content also:

- held **more misogynistic beliefs**
- had **more positive attitudes towards AI**
- were more likely to be **actively watching pornography**.

Practitioners told us that the **motivation of creators** of non-consensual deepfake content in their experience included **humiliation, blackmail, or coercion**:

**“It's about having control and power over somebody else.** I think a lot of this content isn't because they find it arousing. It's because they want to control this woman.”

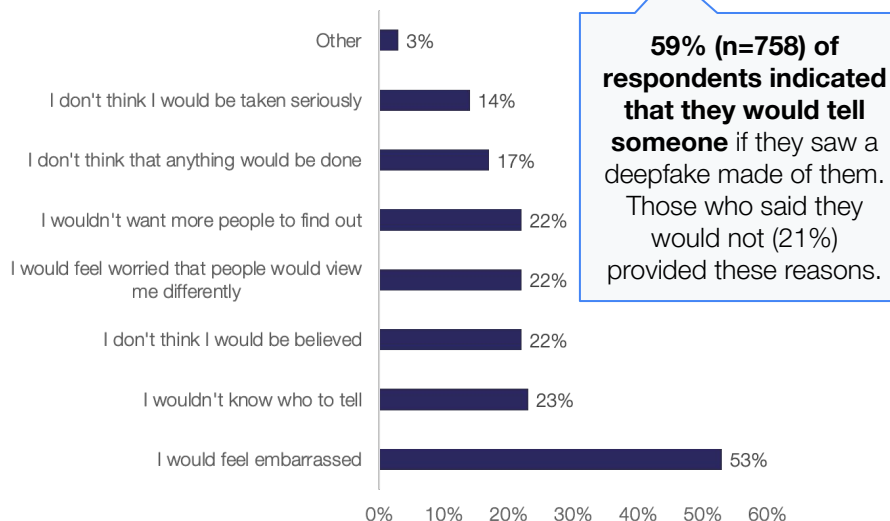


# Key findings: Police response

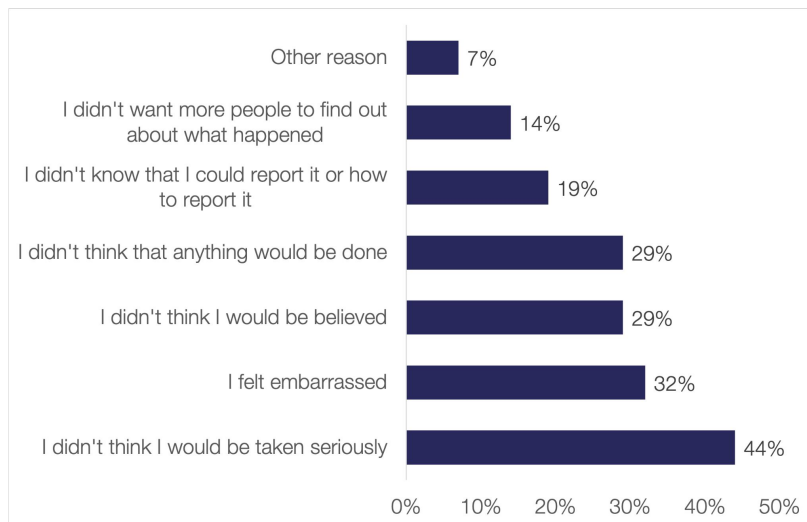
# The majority of respondents and victims would report deepfake VAWG to the police. To capitalise on this, the barriers that victims face in reporting deepfake VAWG must be addressed. In addition, most victims don't know that they are victims so the response must also be intelligence-led

The sense of **shame, humiliation, and embarrassment** that many victims experience may prevent them from telling friends, family, police, or support services. This includes a **'silencing' effect** as an impact of the abuse.

**Proportion (%) of respondents who stated that they wouldn't report if a sexual/intimate deepfake had been made of them by their reason(s) (n=282)**



**Proportion (%) of respondents who stated that they had a sexual and/or intimate deepfake made of them by their reason(s) for not telling the police about it (n=38)**



## Evidence suggests a link between deepfake VAWG and wider patterns of offending. There is a critical need for policing to understand these links

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We heard from practitioners that there may be a relationship between deepfake VAWG and wider **offending**, such as where a creator of deepfake VAWG may go on to stalk or harass victims, or where a victim's personal information is shared online. **However, there are gaps in our understanding of these links.**

"We might find that the **victim's personal information is shared alongside the picture**. So their full name, their date of birth, where they work, their address, anything that they can share alongside that person." (Practitioner)

Policing stakeholders suggested that lessons can be **learned and shifted from Operation Soteria** and from the **Angiolini Inquiry**, to conduct **suspect-focused investigations** and stem deepfake VAWG to **prevent an escalation in offending behaviour**.

**Deepfake VAWG is likely to sit within broader patterns of offending and victimisation. Policing should apply professional curiosity and take a contextual approach to deepfake VAWG.**

# The public would like policing to take action around deepfake VAWG by prioritising investigations, whilst victims would like policing to prioritise image removal

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- According to our public attitudes survey, **the public wants policing to prioritise investigation** (33%) **over collaboration with tech companies and other services to remove deepfakes from online platforms** (26%) and **education** (20%).
- Meanwhile, our qualitative engagement suggests that, **as a priority, victims want deepfake content removed**, and **an empathetic response** from police that recognises the impact of the abuse.

“**[The] first order of priority is for the abuse to stop and the images to be taken [down]**. So I think a focus on takedowns is important. Some people may then choose to pursue criminal prosecution.” (Practitioner)

“I think a lot of the time **they just want to feel heard**. They want to **feel like there's compassion towards them**.” (Practitioner)

# Our engagement with policing stakeholders identified several barriers to police responding effectively to deepfake VAWG. There is an opportunity to consider how policing can respond to meet these challenges

## Barriers to effective policing response

- Fast-moving and new legislation mean **the application of legislation is limited and inconsistent**
- There may be **limited awareness and understanding of deepfake VAWG** across policing
- Existing **digital- and evidence-handling tools are not consistently understood** by officers
- There are **challenges in information sharing** with tech platforms and **holding tech platforms to account**

“Although I think the law is quite clear in this area, **it's open to interpretation and we are at a time where we have a very inexperienced police force.**” (Practitioner)

“A lot of issues around the police like just **not knowing where to look or how to look, not having the skills to investigate on the Internet.** I have not heard of a single successful, you know, case where a police force member has gone out on the Internet, used open source investigative tools or whichever other tools to actually try and get some answers.” (Practitioner)

# There are opportunities for further research to explore existing evidence gaps, including deepfake perpetration and perpetrator patterns, as well as the disproportionate harms experienced by Black and minority ethnic women

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- The **true scale** of deepfake VAWG perpetration
- The prevalence and impact of deepfake VAWG on **children and young people**
- The **motivations and behaviours** of creators of deepfake VAWG
- The **disproportionate harms** of deepfake VAWG on Black and minority ethnic women
- The impacts of deepfake VAWG on **wider communities**
- The link between deepfake VAWG and other forms of **online/offline offending**
- Tangibly, what **policing and tech companies** would require to collaborate effectively to enable proactive, **intelligence-led policing**

# Discussion and Q&A