

# Domestic abuse victims in England and Wales to be given more time to report assaults

- Further measures to protect women and girls added to Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts bill
- New breastfeeding voyeurism offence punishable by up to two years in prison
- Builds on plans to lock up serious sexual offenders for longer

Under the changes, victims of domestic abuse will be allowed more time to report incidents of common assault or battery against them. Currently, prosecutions must commence within six months of the offence.

Instead, this requirement will be moved to six months from the date the incident is formally reported to the police – with an overall time limit of two years from the offence to bring a prosecution. Domestic abuse is often reported late relative to other crimes; so this will ensure victims have enough time to seek justice and that perpetrators answer for their actions.

Meanwhile, taking non-consensual photographs or video recordings of breastfeeding mothers will be made a specific offence punishable by up to two years in prison. It covers situations where the motive is to obtain sexual gratification, or to cause humiliation, distress or alarm. Similar legislation introduced by the Government in 2019 that criminalised “upskirting” has led to more than 30 prosecutions since it became law.

Ministers are changing the law to protect mums from being harassed no matter where they choose to breastfeed.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Dominic Raab said:

We are committed to doing everything we can to protect women, make them feel safer, and give them greater confidence in the justice system.

We’re giving the victims of domestic abuse longer to report the offence to the police – so abusers don’t evade justice. And we will introduce a new offence to stop people filming or taking photos of mothers breast feeding without their consent – because no new mum should be harassed in this way.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner Nicole Jacobs said:

I strongly welcome the additions made to the PCSC Bill today, which allow victims of domestic abuse more time to report to the police.

It is important that all domestic abuse victims have the time and opportunity to report to the police. This is especially important following Covid restrictions, when many victims faced additional challenges to seeking help and reporting domestic abuse.

I want to see increased prosecutions for domestic abuse, and hope to see that as these measures remove another barrier to bringing perpetrators to justice.

In making photographing breastfeeding mothers without consent a specific offence, the Government is giving police and prosecutors the clarity and powers they need to ensure perpetrators face justice.

Today's announcement builds on measures already in the Bill to better protect women such as ending the halfway release of offenders sentenced between four and seven years in prison for serious sexual offences – forcing them to spend two-thirds of their time in prison.

In December, the legislation was amended to make clear that a new legal duty requiring public bodies to work together to tackle serious violence can also include domestic abuse and sexual offences. It means that these crimes should be taken as seriously as knife crime and homicide, with police, government, and health bodies required to collaborate locally, so that they can develop more holistic strategies to protect people from harm, including through early intervention.

Home Secretary, Priti Patel, said:

My commitment to making our homes, streets and communities safer for women and girls is clear. Every department in government is working to address and tackle all issues relating to violence against women and girls. The Government has a focussed Strategy, dedicated to providing essential support for survivors, the prevention of crimes against women and girls and bringing perpetrators to justice with the full force of the law.

Our actions include the new Domestic Abuse Act, with important changes to our laws; a newly created national police lead responsible solely on violence against women and girls, and millions of pounds have been invested in direct safety measures through the Safer Streets Fund. These are all important public confidence measures and changes to ensure the safety of women and

girls in public spaces.

But this Government is determined to do more, and the amendments being introduced to this Bill today put victims' voices at the heart of our decisions – giving domestic abuse victims more time to make a report to the police, and providing better protections to mothers breast feeding their children.

The amendments will be made to the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts](#) and debated by Parliament.

## **Prosecution of common assault in domestic abuse cases**

- We will change how the six-month time limit is applied in England and Wales to run from the date of it being reported to the police either through a formal witness statement or video recording given with a view to use as evidence, rather than the date of the offence, subject to an overall limit of two years from the offence.
- This would give victims more time in which to seek justice given that domestic abuse is often reported late relative to other crimes, but with a two-year backstop to prevent the police from being inundated with historical reports.

## **Breastfeeding voyeurism**

- Our measures create new offences of recording images of a person who is breastfeeding, or operating equipment with the intention of enabling another person to observe a person who is breastfeeding, where that is done without consent and for the purposes of sexual gratification (on either the part of the person taking the image, or a third party), or to humiliate, alarm or distress the person depicted.
- This will build on existing offences of voyeurism at sections 67 and 67A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, as amended by the Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019 which banned 'upskirting'. The highly intrusive practice – colloquially known as 'upskirting' – typically involves offenders taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks. Our most recent [data](#) shows there have been 32 prosecutions for this offence since the law change.
- At our request, the Law Commission is currently conducting a wider review of the law on taking, making and sharing intimate images without consent, including photography of breastfeeding. We will consider the recommendations of the Law Commission's review when they are published (currently expected in spring 2022) and any further changes to criminal offences in this area which may be needed to further protect victims.