

# Rape Victim Impact Assessments: what they are and why we need them

---

Dr Ruth Friskney, Professor Clare McGlynn, Dr Kelly Johnson



# Summary

- A Rape Victim Impact Assessment (RVIA) is a management tool designed to ensure a systematic and strategic approach to police policy-making affecting victims of rape and serious sexual offences.
- It was developed by drawing on the experience of impact assessments in other fields – such as equality, human rights and environmental impact assessments – and adapted to the specific context of policing sexual offences.
- It aims to ensure that sexual violence victims' rights and interests are embedded, from the very beginning, in policy and practice development, and strategic decision-making. Founded on the principles of procedural justice for victims of sexual violence, the Victims' Code, as well as the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998, it aims to centre victims within the criminal justice system.
- The RVIA was developed as part of the UK Home Office funded project Operation Soteria which brought together police and academic researchers to transform police investigations of rape and serious sexual offences.
- The RVIA is now part of the National operating model for police investigation of rape and serious sexual offences in England and Wales. If used systematically, the roll-out of RVIAs should improve public, stakeholder and victim understanding of police policy-making and enable police officers to be confident that the policies they are using ensure victims' rights and interests.

## Why do we need a Rape Victim Impact Assessment?

It has long been recognised that the criminal justice system is failing victim-survivors of sexual violence, with few prosecutions, low conviction rates, and some victims experiencing the reporting and investigatory process as re-traumatising. This 'justice-gap' has led to many legislative reforms and initiatives across the criminal justice system, but we are not yet seeing sustained improvements.

This may in part be due to the absence of a systematic approach and dedicated attention to understanding victims' concerns, rights and interests. For example, Baroness Casey's 2023 review of the Metropolitan Police referred to 'initiative-itis' and the 'bombardment' of individual attempts to improve practice, but an overall lack of co-ordination or follow-up (Casey 2023).

This echoes the research findings of the UK Home Office funded programme Operation Soteria, which brought together police and academics to transform police investigations of rape (Smith et al 2022). The research found that victims were being systematically failed by police. While there were examples of good practice, this was often driven by individual officers, without any systematic mechanisms to embed these improvements into policy or procedure. Similarly, there were examples of police trying to do their best for victims, but where the lack of space to carefully consider victims' rights resulted in practices with unintended adverse consequences. There appeared therefore to be a lack of strategic oversight, support and planning for developing policies and practices that carefully considered the rights and interests of victims.

Accordingly, we developed the Rape Victim Impact Assessment (RVIA) with the aim of supporting police forces to embed victims' rights and interests as policies, procedures and practices are developed. The RVIA draws on the principles of impact assessments from other fields, such as environmental, data protection, equalities and human rights impact assessments.

## What is a Rape Victim Impact Assessment (RVIA)?

The RVIA is a framework through which victims' rights and interests can be systematically considered, mainstreamed and embedded into policing policies, procedures and practices. It operates at a strategic level, separate from work around the rights, interests and needs of individual victims in specific cases. The term 'rape' is used for ease of reference; the Victim Impact Assessment can apply to all sexual offences.

The RVIA details a process of identifying whether and how a policy or practice might impact on sexual violence victims, ensuring the collation of information, systematically analysing the impact of proposed policies, and putting in place measures to prevent or mitigate any adverse impacts identified. It was developed through discussions with a range of public and voluntary sector stakeholders with expertise on police investigations of rape.

The RVIA process comprises an initial screening to consider whether an RVIA is required, followed by five phases:

- **Phase 1:** planning a proportionate RVIA
- **Phase 2:** gathering information about the impacts on victims' rights and interests, including making sure that information reflects the diversity of victims
- **Phase 3:** analysis of any adverse and positive impacts
- **Phase 4:** managing adverse impacts by prevention or mitigation
- **Phase 5:** monitoring and publication.

Underpinning the RVIA is the need for meaningful stakeholder engagement. Many police forces have productive relationships with their local stakeholders, but three key issues were highlighted in our consultations when developing the RVIA.

First, stakeholders must be engaged in the early stages of policy and practice development, before decisions are finalised. Second, engagement with

stakeholders must be reciprocal, ensuring that stakeholder contributions are acknowledged and taken into account. Thirdly, consultations and policy development must recognise the diversity of victims' experiences and particularly consider the implications for minoritised and marginalised victims. Stakeholders working with these groups must be part of the process wherever possible.

The RVIA contributes to enhanced transparency and accountability. Monitoring is a key phase of the process, where police forces put in place clear plans, including for any measures to mitigate adverse impacts. The RVIA should also be published as a default, not only as part of feeding back to stakeholders, but also to enable wider public understanding of police policy and strategic decision-making around rape investigations.

## What are the foundational principles of the Rape Victim Impact Assessment?

The Rape Victim Impact Assessment is based on four key standards:

- Procedural justice for victims of sexual violence, as outlined in the National operating model for the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences
- The Victims' Code
- The Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998
- Other relevant legislation, guidance and policy relating to sexual offending and policing

## What are the aims and potential benefits of the RVIA?

**The key aims are to:**

- 'Future-proof' police policies and procedures to ensure that victims' rights and interests are systematically embedded, with particular emphasis on considering the rights of more marginalised and minoritised victims, rather than dependent on individual officers
- Enable victims, stakeholders and the public to better understand police strategic decision-making and outcomes
- Help build greater understanding of victims' rights and interests across policing.

**As a result, the RVIA should lead to benefits including:**

- Improving police performance in terms of how they engage with victims, embedding the principles of procedural justice for victims of sexual violence
- Giving individual police officers more confidence that the policies, procedures and practices they are following are doing the best for victims
- Contributing towards improved partnership working by engaging with stakeholders
- Saving police resources in the long-run by avoiding adverse unintended consequences.

# How is the RVIA being put into practice?

The RVIA was introduced as part of the National operating model for the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences in England and Wales in 2023. The model recommends that police forces should be conducting RVIAs when creating new, or reviewing existing, policies, procedures and practices relevant to the rights and interests of victims of rape and serious sexual offences. Reviewing includes plans to discontinue a policy. As with all impact assessments, the value of the RVIA is dependent on meaningful engagement with its principles and practices.

## Next steps

### Using RVIAs beyond policing and rape:

While the RVIA was specifically created for police forces investigating rape, it is a framework that can be developed for use across the criminal justice system, including by the Crown Prosecution Service, the College of Policing, as well as by government departments such as the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. It could also be adapted to ensure the rights and interests of all victims of crime.

### Revising the RVIA in the policing context:

The RVIA will be subject to ongoing review and revision following its implementation across England and Wales.

---

## About the authors

**Ruth Friskney** is a Research Associate at the University of Glasgow with particular expertise around institutional responses to men's violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse and sexual violence.

**[ruth.friskney@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:ruth.friskney@glasgow.ac.uk)**

**Clare McGlynn** is a Professor of Law at Durham University with expertise in violence against women and girls. She developed the concept of 'kaleidoscopic justice' to better understand victims' perceptions of justice and investigated the possibilities of restorative justice in cases of sexual violence (with Westmarland). She has written extensively on rape trials and sexual history evidence and is co-editor of *Rethinking Rape Law: comparative and international perspectives* (with Munro).

**[Clare.McGlynn@durham.ac.uk](mailto:Clare.McGlynn@durham.ac.uk)**

**[www.ClareMcGlynn.com](http://www.ClareMcGlynn.com)**

**Kelly Johnson** is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Glasgow with research expertise in domestic and sexual violence, policing, victims, criminal and procedural justice, and emerging forms of abuse such as cyberflashing and image-based sexual abuse. She was the academic lead of Pillar 3 of Operation Soteria: Embedding a procedural justice approach to police engaging victims of sexual violence.

**[kelly.johnson@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:kelly.johnson@glasgow.ac.uk)**



## Further Reading

Ruth Friskney, Clare McGlynn and Kelly Johnson. *Centring Sexual Violence Victims: what role for Rape Victim Impact Assessments?* forthcoming.

Access the current version of the RVIA template and guidance from [Embedding procedural justice for victim-survivors into police responses to sexual violence](#)

For more information on the National operating model for the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences see <https://www.college.police.uk/national-operating-model-rasso>

## References

**Casey, Louise** (2023) [Final Report: An independent review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service.](#)

**Johnson, Kelly, Walling-Wefelmeyer, Rosa, Smith, Olivia, Hohl, Katrin and Brooks-Hay, Oona** (2024) *Procedural Justice for Victim-Survivors of Sexual Violence Briefing.*

**Smith, Olivia, Johnson, Kelly and Brooks-Hay, Oona.** (2022). [Detailed Learning from Pillar Three of Soteria: Embedding procedural justice and engaging victims.](#) Part of Operation Soteria.

## Suggested citation

Friskney, Ruth, McGlynn, Clare and Johnson, Kelly. (2024) *Rape Victim Impact Assessments: what they are and why we need them.* Research Briefing (University of Glasgow and Durham University).

## Further Information

Please contact [ruth.friskney@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:ruth.friskney@glasgow.ac.uk), [Clare.McGlynn@durham.ac.uk](mailto:Clare.McGlynn@durham.ac.uk) or [kelly.johnson@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:kelly.johnson@glasgow.ac.uk) for further information about this work.



University  
of Glasgow



Loughborough  
University

## Project

This briefing was developed from the project Embedding procedural justice for victim-survivors into police responses to sexual violence. The project forms part of Operation Soteria, funded by the UK Home Office.

## Research Team

### Glasgow University:

Dr Kelly Johnson (Principal Investigator)

Professor Michele Burman (Principal Investigator Year 3)

Dr Oona Brooks-Hay (Co-Investigator)

Dr Ruth Friskney (Co-Investigator/Research Associate)

Adrian Harris (Project Co-ordinator)

Sophie Geoghegan-Fittall (Research Associate)

Dr Bethany Jennings (Research Associate)

Amy Cullen (Research Assistant)

Emily Qvist-Baudry (Research Assistant)

### Loughborough University:

Dr Olivia Smith (Co-Investigator/Principal Investigator Feb-Sep 2022)

Dr Susan Hillyard (Research Associate)

Dr Rosa Walling-Wefelmeyer (Research Associate)

### Durham University:

Professor Clare McGlynn (Co-Investigator)

Sarah Molisso (Research Assistant)

---

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the police officers and staff, and specialist organisations and support service workers who participated in this work. We also want to thank and acknowledge the invaluable contributions from victim-survivors who shared their experiences with us.

Overarching Operation Soteria academic leads were Professors Katrin Hohl and Betsy Stanko. Team leads were Professor Michele Burman, Dr Kari Davies, Professor Miranda Horvath, Dr Kelly Johnson, Jo Lovett, Tiggey May, Dr Olivia Smith, and Dr Emma Williams.