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# Rape cases to be reviewed by government after 'alarming' drop in prosecutions

Investigation comes after warnings that trawling of victims' phone and personal records could discourage reports

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Review to probe 'entire criminal justice system – from police report to conviction or acquittal in court' ( Getty )

**Rape** and sexual violence cases are to be reviewed after an “alarming” drop in the number of prosecutions.

The Home Office pledged to investigate how the reports are handled by police and prosecutors, amid warnings that victims are having their privacy violated with intrusive **disclosure** practices.

Officials said a “cross-sector, end-to-end review into how rape and sexual violence cases are handled across the criminal justice system” would be

launched.

“The review will look at the entire criminal justice system – from police report to conviction or acquittal in court – and make recommendations for change to ensure that victims have the confidence that if they report their crimes, action will be taken,” a Home Office spokesperson said.

It came after the proportion of reported rapes prosecuted **plummeted to 1.9 per cent in England and Wales.**

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Rachel Kryz, co-director of the End Violence Against Women Coalition, said: “Despite a huge increase in the numbers of women reporting rape to the police over the last five years, there has been an alarming recent collapse in the rate of cases being charged.

“Women who report rape can be made to feel it is they who are under investigation and on trial and we need to turn this around.”

Campaigners have suggested that demands for victims’ mobile phones and personal records were causing rising numbers of women to drop complaints.

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“We are concerned that there has been a change in the way decisions are being made on whether to charge rape cases,” Ms Kryz added.

A woman who was raped in London told *The Independent* she **discontinued her report because police said she had to hand over**

**her phone** “so that all the details on it can be downloaded”.

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Prosecutors have insisted that phone downloads are not a requirement for rape prosecutions, but lawyers say demands have spread after last year's scandal over collapsed rape cases

Senior police officers have accused the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) of "raising the bar" for the evidence needed, slowing down investigations and causing victims to drop out.

The Information Commissioner is currently investigating "excessive and disproportionate" trawling of complainants' phones and personal records.



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Ann Coffey MP, who revealed "shockingly low" conviction rates for young men accused of rape last year, said a crisis was "engulfing the criminal justice system's approach to rape".

"It is vital that this review thinks outside the box and examines whether the jury system is the best way to deliver justice in rape cases because of the dominance of 'rape myths' in society," she added.

"We cannot have a situation where the clocks are turned back and young women become frightened of speaking out because they fear justice will not be done."

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Katie Russell, national spokesperson for Rape Crisis England and Wales, called for a "complete overhaul of the criminal justice system" in relation to sexual offences.

Baroness Newlove, the victims' commissioner for England and Wales, said: "For many victims of sexual offences, the criminal justice journey is as harrowing as the crime itself. This is not acceptable.

"At times, it seems that you must qualify as a saint to be classed as a credible rape victim. It demonstrates a breakdown in confidence between victims of sexual violence and the criminal justice system, it is therefore right that it is to be reviewed."

A sub-group of the Criminal Justice Board is being created to oversee the review, as well as an advisory group including victims' groups.

It was announced as one of 54 commitments in the government's new Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy.

The government said it was also commissioning research into the connection between pornography and violence against women, explore "online flashing" – where women are sent unwanted intimate pictures – and consider the impact of alcohol on domestic violence.

The strategy also commits to introduce a statutory code of practice for employers on sexual harassment, work with online dating apps to raise awareness among users and develop further measures to support LGBT+ victims.

The home secretary, Sajid Javid, said: "Any incident of violence or abuse against a woman or girl is a cowardly act that will not be tolerated.

"We must do all we can, across government and society, to support victims and bring perpetrators to justice."

The strategy has been backed by £100m of funding in order to support victims and prevent crime.

It was unveiled amid a spate of fatal stabbings, which included the domestic murder of a 50-year-old woman in London.

Victoria Atkins, the minister for crime, safeguarding and vulnerabilities, said: "Violence against women and girls strike at the heart of our families, friendships and communities and it is our responsibility to bring light, justice and support to victims and survivors."

Victims minister Edward Argar, said funding for support services had almost doubled since 2013.

"Victims of rape and sexual violence show immense bravery in coming forward – they must be protected and supported, and get the justice they deserve," he added.

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