

Report reveals scale of police misconduct across England and Wales

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A sign is seen as people gather at a memorial site in Clapham Common Bandstand, following the kidnapping and murder of Sarah Everard, in London on March 13, 2021 [File: Hannah McKay/Reuters]

London, November 3 (RHC)-- A culture of misogyny and predatory behaviour, fuelled by poor vetting standards, is "prevalent" in police forces across England and Wales, according to a police watchdog. The report by the HM Inspectorate of Constabulary comes more than a year after the March 2021 death of Sarah Everard, who was killed by Metropolitan Police officer Wayne Couzens.

He was last year jailed for life for the kidnapping, rape and murder of the 33-year-old in a case that exposed the failings of the police force. Police were criticised for neglecting to take any action after Couzens allegedly exposed himself in 2015 and was involved in another incident in 2002.

The interior minister at the time, Priti Patel, ordered the police watchdog to investigate misogynistic and predatory behaviour within forces. In some of the most concerning cases Wednesday's report cited, police officers who had been hired without thorough checks had gone on to sexually abuse children.

A force in Cheshire, for instance, failed to properly vet a candidate who was accused of rape. In October 2017, months after Ian Naude had been hired, the then 30-year-old answered a call to a domestic abuse emergency where he ended up meeting a 13-year-old girl.

Three days later, while "her mother was out, he drove the child to a secluded country lane and raped her, filming the offence on his mobile phone" the report said.

"Over the last decade, there have been many warning signs that these systems aren't working well enough. Some police officers have used their unique position to commit appalling crimes, especially against women," the report said.

Female officers were surveyed and the report found that an "alarming number" of women reported "appalling behaviour by male colleagues." This included allegations of sexual harassment and "serious sexual assault."

"We concluded that far too many women had, at some stage in their career, experienced unwanted sexual behaviour towards them," the report added. The watchdog looked at 11,277 police officers and staff and examined 725 vetting files.

Inspectors called for minimum standards for pre-employment checks and for changes to the law dealing with police complaints and disciplinary procedures.

Lead inspector Matt Parr found that "it is too easy for the wrong people to both join and stay in the police" and that there were "significant questions" over the recruitment of "thousands" of officers.

While most police officers and staff meet the required standards of behaviour, the report found "systemic failings, missed opportunities, and a generally inadequate approach to setting and maintaining standards in the police service. "It is too easy for the wrong people to both join and stay in the police. If the police are to rebuild public trust and protect their own female officers and staff vetting must be much more rigorous and sexual misconduct taken more seriously," said Parr.

The London force tweeted in response that it would be "ruthless in ridding the Met of those who corrupt our integrity."

Inspectors also found cases where incidents such as indecent exposure were dismissed as a "one-off" and where applicants with links to "extensive criminality" in their families had been hired.

The report said that "over the last three or four years, the number of people recruited over whom we would raise significant questions is certainly in the hundreds, if not low thousands".

Patel's successor Suella Braverman said the report shines a "stark light" on problems within the police, adding it was "unacceptable" that women "continue to experience misogynistic and sexist behaviour".

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