

Statement on the statistics released by COPFS on Domestic Abuse and Stalking Charges in Scotland, 2020-2021

Dr Marsha Scott said: “These statistics by COPFS highlight not only the sheer enormity of domestic abuse in Scotland, but the increased risk to survivors that has been ongoing since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. We remind everyone regularly that COVID does not cause domestic abuse, but that it has given perpetrators more tools for controlling and coercing and has made help-seeking so much more difficult for those living with domestic abuse. It is also worth noting that the most women do not report to police, so these figures represent only a fraction of what is actually happening in our families and communities.

We welcome the continued high percentage of charges that the Crown chooses to prosecute and are happy to see the small uptick in the percentage of overall domestic abuse charges that are prosecuted under Section 1 the law, which is essentially the new law. We would hope to see that percentage continue to climb over the coming years. We are very interested to see the increase in percentage of cases going to the high court, given what we have heard from some fiscals about the opportunity offered by the new law to present more evidence about the abuse, and we will be watching this figure in next year’s report. We would also welcome improved disaggregation of data—by sex, by race and ethnicity, by disability, etc. In addition, we would very much like to know what percentage of the cases included children in the family so we had a more accurate picture of when child aggravations are and are not a feature.

It’s also crucial to recognize that this data relates to charges received by the Crown and not to outcomes in cases. The massive backlog of cases in the courts that has grown due to the COVID-19 pandemic has brought heightened risk to survivors, and we hear from colleagues that many survivors are leaving cases when faced with multi-year waits. This is incredibly problematic, and resolution of the backlog is a critical challenge for justice in Scotland.”

If you feel scared of your partner or ex-partner, or if you are worried about someone you know, get in touch with Scotland’s 24-hour Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline on 0800 027 1234 for support and information. You can also email and web chat from www.sdafmh.org.uk. There are translation and interpreting services available.

For any media enquiries please contact Eilis Slater, External Affairs Officer via email: media@womensaid.scot.

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