

“Investigation ongoing”

An easier-to-read summary of our super-complaint about very long police investigations into sexual offences

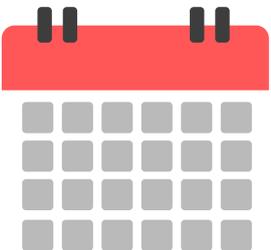
December 2025

This document gives an overview of our 'super-complaint'.

What is a 'super-complaint'?



A super-complaint raises concerns about problems with the police that have become part of the normal way things are done, but have a negative impact on lots of people.



We are complaining on behalf of survivors of sexual violence who have reported this to the police, and for who the police have taken too long to investigate - more than three years.

What will this document tell me?

- We will explain how many survivors we think this impacts
- We will explain how these long police investigations harm survivors
- We will look at problems we think are making the police take so long
- We will explain what the law says about this problem



Who are we?

We are a group of four organisations who have worked together on this complaint:



Rape Crisis England & Wales (RCEW)

Rape Crisis England & Wales is a national charity that represents survivors of sexual violence and a network of Rape Crisis centres who support survivors. They campaign to change laws and policies that disadvantage survivors.



Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre

Cambridge Rape Crisis is a charity that supports survivors of rape and sexual abuse in Cambridgeshire. They have helped survivors harmed by long investigations.



Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ)

Centre for Women's Justice is a charity run by lawyers who fight for the government to do a better job keeping women and children safe. They often work with survivors of sexual violence.



Bindmans LLP

Bindmans is a law firm based in London. They are lawyers who specialise in working for people to make sure their legal rights to be protected. Bindmans have worked for a number of survivors bringing legal cases against the police for very long delays.

Key people mentioned in our complaint



Police

Police officers keep people safe and investigate crimes.

This might be a crime like stealing, or crimes like the ones we are worried about - rape and sexual abuse.

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

Lawyers who work for the government.



It is the job of CPS lawyers to work together with police to help them investigate crimes properly.

For rape and sexual abuse, it is the CPS who decide if the police have found enough evidence.

If the CPS think they have, then they take the case to court.

Survivors or victims

Someone who has experienced rape or sexual abuse.



People who have gone through sexual abuse sometimes prefer to be called a victim, others would rather be called a survivor.

We will use the word 'survivor' in this document.

What is this complaint about?

We are complaining about the police taking too long to investigate rape and sexual abuse.

- Rape and sexual abuse are serious crimes, and so should be investigated quickly.
- The police are taking more than 3 years to investigate some cases.
- We have also heard about cases taking much longer - 5, 6, and 7 years.
- We think this is too long, and the police need to investigate quicker.
- We don't think long delays in police investigations are fair for survivors.
- We think long delays in police investigations don't keep people safe.

What survivors of sexual violence told us

We have worked with survivors who have reported sexual abuse to the police.

They told us the police took much too long to collect the evidence.

Sometimes when the police take a very long time, this is very stressful for survivors.

Some tell the police that they don't want their help anymore.

Sometimes the police take so long, that the person who did the crime is too old to go to prison. Or has died.

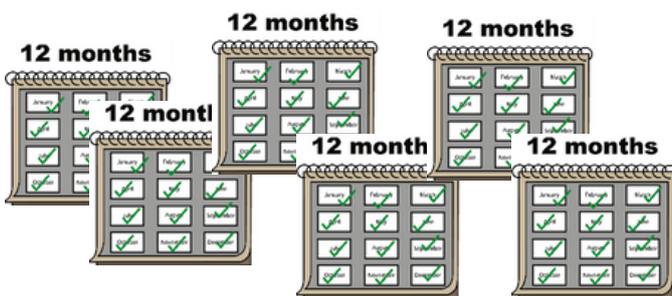
One survivor who told us about this was Rachel.

The police took six-years to investigate the crimes Rachel told them about.

Rachel's story



Rachel spoke to the police and told them that she was sexually abused by a man when she was a young child.



It took the police 6 years to investigate what happened to Rachel



The length of time the police took was very hard for Rachel.



The man who had abused her was allowed to live his life as normal whilst they investigated.

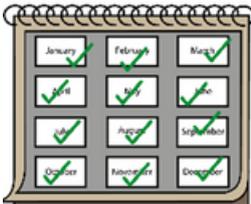


She was scared a lot of the time that he might hurt her or her children.



The CPS lawyers eventually said the man would go to court.

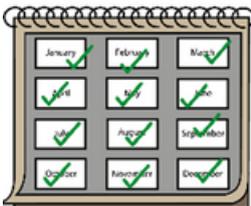
12 months



But Rachel would have to wait another year

Court was arranged for nearly 7 years after Rachel first spoke to the police.

12 months



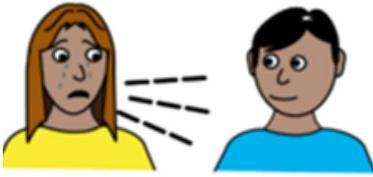
Just before court, Rachel was told it was cancelled and she would have to wait for one more year for a new date for court.



She decided she could not wait and chose to stop the case so that she could look after herself better.



The man who hurt Rachel died soon after this. He was never punished for what he did to her.



Rachel got help from lawyers to complain about how long the police took to get the evidence and make the case ready for court.



The police accepted that they did not do a good job and that this harmed Rachel.



The police agreed with Rachel's lawyers they should pay her some money for the harm they caused by not investigating properly.

How many cases take a very long time?

We know from speaking to Rape Crisis workers that Rachel's case is not the only one that took the police a very long time to investigate.

We asked the police how many sexual abuse cases like Rachel's have taken them a very long time to investigate.

The police could not give us a proper idea about this, because there are lots of problems with the ways they collect the information.

We also asked the government department who collect information about the way police investigate crimes - the Home Office.

The Home Office told us the police may have taken a very-long time to investigate about 37,000 sexual abuse cases in the last ten years.

Why very long delays are bad for survivors

Telling the police about sexual abuse can be very scary for survivors.

Very long investigations are harmful for people who have gone to the police for help.

- They may feel confused why the police are taking so long.
- Waiting so many years makes survivors mental health worse.
- Long investigations make it harder for survivors to concentrate at work, or school. This can cause long-term problems for them.
- Survivors can't speak about what happened properly to counsellors whilst the police are investigating. This makes them feel more alone.
- Survivors worry that the person who hurt them might hurt someone else.
- Some survivors feel like the police don't believe them or don't care about what happened because they are investigating so slowly.
- When investigations take such a long time, many survivors feel like they can't trust the police anymore.

Problems that we think cause slow investigations

We found lots of problems that make the police take too long with some cases.



1. The police spend more time working on some cases than others. They say this is because some cases are more urgent.



2. The police say they don't have enough money and police officers to investigate all cases properly.



3. Senior police officers are not doing a very good job of making sure sexual abuse cases are managed properly and don't take too long.



4. The police don't always find it easy to work with CPS lawyers and this can make cases take longer.



5. Changes to the law on how the police monitor people they are investigating, means there can be less pressure on police to act quickly in some cases.

We think these things can make investigations take longer.

We have made some suggestions in our full report about what could be done better.

We also want the agencies investigating our complaint to find any other causes making sexual abuse investigations take too long and fix these.

What the law says



The law says that everyone who lives in the United Kingdom has human rights.



These rights are like a set of rules.



The rules are designed to keep everyone safe and make sure we are treated fairly.



When the police take too long to investigate very serious crimes, like sexual abuse, they are not protecting the survivor's human rights.



Survivors can ask for lawyers for help if the police are not protecting their rights.

What we think



We think that too many survivors are having to wait a very long time to have their cases to be investigated by police.



We think this is unfair and goes against survivor's human rights.



We want the police to make sure cases don't take so long.



We want the government to help the police to do this properly.



We want the police and government to properly monitor how long cases are taking and make it easier for people to understand how long this is.



What we think should happen next (our recommendations)



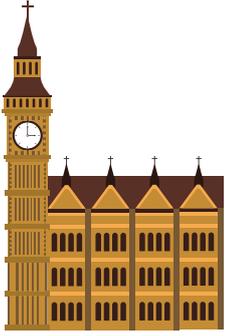
What we think the police should do:

- Find out how many very long investigations (over 3 years) are still ongoing and make sure these are finished more quickly.
- Speak to survivors who have been waiting a very long time and make sure they know what the police are doing to finish the investigation.
- Make sure that senior police officers in charge are more focused on how long cases are taking, and hurry these cases up if they take too long.
- Make sure that police officers are not ignoring some types of cases because they don't think they are as important.
- Make sure that they are keeping proper records about how long cases are taking to investigate.

What we think the CPS (Crown Prosecution Service) should do:

- Check that they are not making cases take longer by asking the police to do things that they don't need to do.
- Check how many very long investigations they are working on with police and share the job of making sure these are finished more quickly.
- Look for ways they can help to make sure cases move more quickly, like contacting the police more often about cases they have told CPS about.





What we think the government should do:

- Work with the police and people who specialise in monitoring crimes to make sure that it is easier to understand how long cases take to investigate.
- Make sure that people under investigation for sexual offences are monitored properly during investigations.
- Look for other ways to help the police investigate cases more quickly and make sure that they do this.

What survivors can do:

- Look at the end of our report for details of people who might be able to provide support or help.
- Contact their local Rape Crisis Centre if they want some help to speak to the police about a crime they reported a very long time ago.
- Look into their legal rights around cases taking too long to progress. They can contact Centre for Women's Justice or Bindmans if they would like some help to do this.



Who to speak to if you need some support



Rape Crisis England and Wales 24/7 Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Line is open all day, every day. It's for anyone over 16 who has been affected by sexual violence.

You can call them on **0808 500 2222**

You can also talk to them online, via a live chat:
www.247sexualabusesupport.org.uk

If you are under 16, you can speak to Childline. They are also open all day, every day.

You can call them on **0800 1111** or speak to them online:
www.childline.org.uk

You can find your nearest Rape Crisis centre here:
<https://rapecrisis.org.uk/find-a-centre/>

You can find out more about your legal rights here:

- **Centre for Women's Justice:**
www.centreforwomensjustice.org.uk
- **Rights of Women:** www.rightsofwomen.org.uk
- **Bindmans:** www.bindmans.com
- **Citizens Advice:**
 - www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/legal-system/rape-sexual-assault
 - www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/civil-rights/human-rights

Report authors:

Ellie Ball (Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre)

India Cooper (Bindmans LLP)

Kate Garner (Rape Crisis England & Wales)

Maxime Rowson (Rape Crisis England & Wales)

Nogah Ofer (Centre for Women's Justice)



Bindmans