

Cops in abuse training row

A row has broken out after it emerged a “generation” of Scottish frontline cops have not been given “essential” domestic abuse training while almost 15,000 officers have undergone alternative hate crime training.

The news has led to criticism that Police Scotland is more focused on “hurt feelings” than serious violent crime against women.

More than 91% of 16,363 cops have undergone hate workshops in response to the controversial Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act coming into force in April, while domestic violence training was sidelined due to “the impact of Covid 19”.

Police Scotland has also set up a cadre of more than 500 specially trained hate crime officers and staff to support colleagues navigate the contentious new laws, as well as training around 80 hate crime advisors and 450 hate crime champions, who remain deployed in their existing police roles.

Data shows there were 61,934 domestic abuse incidents in 2022/23 compared to 6257 hate crimes – the majority of which Police Scotland say “are non-violent” involving verbal abuse or threats.

Scottish Conservative MSP Pam Gosal said: “Domestic abuse incidents are at record highs on the SNP’s watch, yet Police

Scotland has failed to give this vital training to a generation of new officers.

“However, nearly 15,000 officers have received hate crime training, showing that they are more focused on hurt feelings than tackling serious crimes that impact the public.

“It’s just common sense that every officer should receive domestic abuse training and the Scottish Conservatives will fight to make that happen.”

Dr Marsha Scott, chief executive of Scottish Women’s Aid, said poorly trained police officers responding to reports of domestic abuse could “re-traumatise” victims.

She said: “Police are often the first responders in cases of domestic abuse and their knowledge, attitudes and actions can affect the outcomes for victims, as well as the likelihood that they will contact police in the future.

“Evidence from our helpline and from recent inspections demonstrates that inadequately trained police are highly likely to re-traumatise survivors by being insensitive or dismissive.

“We have had a number of constructive conversations with Police Scotland about how performance by frontline police can be improved – through better training, through timely access to information about offenders, through coaching and through accountability built into performance management processes.”

Mary Howden, coordinator at the Women’s Rights Network Scotland, said here were 7874 rapes, attempted rapes and sexual assaults last year with women overwhelmingly the victims.

She added that, on average, one woman is killed every 45 days in Scotland, with 17 female homicides last year.

Ms Howden said: “While it is understandable when implementing

new legislation that recent training would focus on hate crime incidents, it should not be at the expense of other important training such as male violence against women and girls.

“We are extremely concerned that Police Scotland currently seem to have little regard for women and girls preferring to focus on gender ideology and hurtful words, rather than giving women and girls confidence they are committed to improving their safety in the home and in the community. These are areas that our police officers need to be highly trained in.”

Helen Joyce, director of advocacy at human-rights charity Sex Matters, said: “It’s really concerning to hear that well after the pandemic has ended, police are still lacking vital training in tackling domestic abuse, which destroys many women’s lives.

“Most citizens care a lot more about preventing and punishing violent crimes than about policing words – especially when factual statements about biological sex have been rebranded ‘hateful’ under Orwellian hate crime law. Police Scotland needs to get its training priorities right.”

In Police Scotland’s update on the Violence Against Women and Girls strategy to the Scottish Police Authority the impact of the pandemic was blamed for thousands of cops not receiving domestic abuse training.

In his report, ACC Steve Johnson said: “We acknowledge that the impact of Covid-19 on police training means that a generation of frontline officers has not been provided with essential Domestic Abuse Matters training. Funding has been approved for additional training to be delivered by the end of March 2025.

“In consultation with SafeLives, six new domestic abuse CPD modules have been developed and published for officers to complete. These focus on DASA, Multi-agency working, Cybercrime, South Asian Women, Children and Trauma. All CPD

modules are shaped and underpinned by the lived experiences of victim survivors of domestic abuse.”

Deputy Chief Constable Alan Speirs stressed that tackling violence against women and girls was one of Police Scotland’s “highest priorities”.

He said: “We have a very clear strategy to ensure our officers and staff are trauma-informed and have the best support and guidance from specialists when dealing with this type of crime.

“The Chief Constable has made a commitment to strengthening frontline policing so we are better placed to support victims and reduce crime in our communities.”

DCC Speirs added: “With regard to hate crime, our national Hate Crime Advisors play a vital role in supporting front line officers delivering the right service within our local communities. Hate Crime Champions support our divisions with advice and training at a local level.”



Police Scotland