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Sexual predators in the police are abusing power to target victims, investigation warns

- Investigation reveals more than 50 cases in four years of police found guilty or investigated for rape, sexually assault or harassment
- Campaigners say the scale of the problem is largely hidden, since no official statistics are kept about internal disciplinary action over such cases

By Damien Gayle

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Sexual predators among the police are abusing their power to rape, sexually assault and harass the victims of crime they are supposed to be helping, it has emerged.

There have been more than 50 cases in four years of officers who were either found to have abused their position to rape, sexually assault of harass women or were investigated over such claims.

But campaigners warn that the scale of the problem is largely hidden, with no official statistics kept and few details released about internal disciplinary action relating to such cases.



Abuse of power: An investigation found more than 50 cases of proven or suspected sexual misconduct among officers over four years. (Stock photo, there is no suggestion any of these officers have committed a crime)

An investigation by the Guardian analysed the data available, including court cases and misconduct proceedings, in an attempt to estimate the scale of sexual corruption with the police.

It found that officers have been convicted or disciplined for crimes ranging from rape and sexual assault to misconduct in public office relating to inappropriate sexual behaviour with vulnerable women they have met while on duty.

Other officers are awaiting trial for alleged offences, though many are never formally charged and are dealt with through the force's own internal disciplinary procedures.

The investigation, to be concluded by November, was prompted by the case of Stephen Mitchell, a constable with Northumbria police who was last year jailed last year for raping women while on duty.

Mitchell, 43, assaulted drug addicts in the cells and interview rooms of a city-centre police station, knowing that if they complained they were unlikely to be believed.

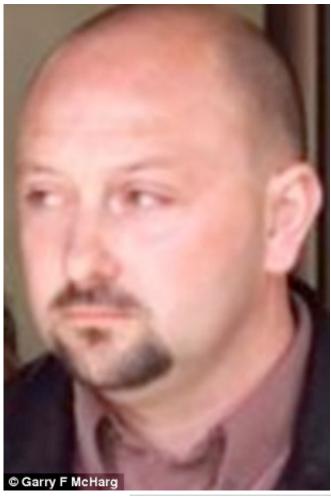
Questions have been raised about the efficacy of vetting for police recruits after it emerged his bosses were unaware Mitchell had already stood trial for sex offences before joining the force.

Those targeted by police officers are mostly women, but in some terrible cases complaints have come from children and young people.

Many of the complaints have come from female officers, amid claims that there is a pervasive culture of sexism within the police force where abusive behaviour is allowed to carry on unchecked.

In many cases, officers used the police national computer to track down vulnerable women and young people and bombard them with phone calls and texts in an attempt to initiate sexual contact.





Rapists: Detective Sergeant Trevor Gray, left, raped a 43-year-old woman after they had been on a date, PC Stephen Mitchell, right, preyed on vulnerable women in the cells of the police station where he worked

Debaleena Dasgupta, a lawyer who has worked with women sexually assaulted and raped by policemen, told the Guardian the victims she works with are among the most damaged victims of sex crimes.

'The damage is far deeper because they trusted the police and ... believed that the police were supposed to protect them from harm and help catch and punish those who perpetrate it.

'The breach of that trust has an enormous effect: they feel that if they can't trust a police officer, who can they trust?'

The police officers involved in sexual misconduct are drawn from all ranks, with the most senior example being a deputy chief constable who was subject to 26 complaints from 13 colleagues.

CONSTABLE STALKED ME USING THE POLICE COMPUTER

The ordeal of PC Stephen Mitchell's most frequent victim began in 1999 when she was caught with a friend trying to cash stolen cheques in Marks and Spencer.

'The first thing that struck me as odd was that he told my friend to **** off,' the 30-year-old graduate said vesterday.

'I was then handcuffed and taken in the back of a van with Mitchell. In my pocket I had an eighth of an ounce of heroin. I wasn't dealing. I just had a massive habit, but I was worried I would be done for dealing.

When I got to the police station, I was put in a cell but Mitchell came in and gave me the heroin back. It was then that I realised he must be dodgy. Later, we were in an interview room – just me and him. He kept telling me not to get a solicitor, to just trust him.

'He kept saying, "You help me and I'll help you. You'll never see me again".

Mitchell made her perform a sex act on him. There was no CCTV within the police station and without any proof it would simply have been her word against his.

A year later Mitchell re-arrested her and took her to a field where he indecently assaulted her in the dark.

He then began turning up at her house and finding reasons to arrest her and let her off with a caution – in return for sexual favours. He would also take her for a drive in his patrol car before forcing her to carry out sex acts on him.

'He kept telling me I was disgusting and he was doing me a favour because no other man would have me,' she said.

When she tried to escape by moving house, Mitchell traced her through the police computer.

And when she began to turn her life around and started studying for a degree he blackmailed her, threatening to arrest her for new offences unless she submitted to his demands.

He forced her to give him the keys to her flat and in 2003 he raped her.

'He put my arms behind my back and handcuffed me,' she said. 'He pulled my shoulders back so hard, it felt like they were dislocated.'

Deputy Chief Constable David Ainsworth, from Wiltshire Police, hanged himself in his garage fearing he would 'lose everything' because of the misconduct inquiry.

In another case, a detective sergeant was jailed for eight years after he broke into the home of a woman he had met on a date and raped her while her child lay sleeping in a nearby room.

Trevor Gray attacked the 43-year-old woman after the pair had been out for drinks in Nottingham city centre that night, after meeting through mutual friends.

The Guardian's research into police officers abusing their authority to commit sex crimes is the first attempt to investigate the scale of the problem which has long been susptected anecdotally.

The 56 cases documented by the paper happened between 2008 and 2012 and involve 25 forces, 48 officers from the rank of constable up to deputy chief constable, five police community support officers, one special constable, one civilian police officer and one member of police staff.

Cases included abuse of position to commit rape, sexual assault, harassment, grooming, and inappropriate relationships with vulnerable women and young girls. Some are still awaiting trial over alleged offences.

Perhaps the worst case involved Constable Stephen Mitchell of Northumbria Police, who was jailed for life in November last year for raping and sexually assaulting women he met on duty.

Ten victims of Mitchell are now seeking compensation from the force, which has already paid out £31,500 to some of the women and is still considering other claims.

One of Mitchell's victims a 19-year-old drug addict when he first struck, estimated she had been abused 100 times as he kept track of her using the police computer.

Yet his colleagues ignored a series of warnings about his behaviour – some of them from his own wife. They were unaware that he had already stood trial for sex offences before he was recruited to the force.

He was eventually sacked in 2007 for having 'consensual' sex with one of his victims, only to be reinstated on appeal eight months later.

And when he was finally stopped, a senior detective with Northumbria Police offered him 'a get out of jail free card' if he agreed to resign. He refused, opting to take his chances in court.

Mitchell – a tall, muscular former soldier – was found guilty of two rapes, three indecent assaults and six charges of misconduct in a public office, involving a total of seven women.

He was cleared of three further rape charges, two indecent assaults and counts of misconduct involving another nine women. But police suspect he attacked at least a further 14.





Abuse of power: PC Jasbir Dhanda, 52, left, had sex with a prostitute while on duty in return for not arresting her. Deputy Chief Constable David Ainsworth, right, committed suicide after 26 complaints from colleagues

In another, similar case Derbyshire Police Constable Jasbir Dhanda was jailed for two-and-a-half years in January for having sex with a prostitute while on duty in return for not arresting her.

Dhanda, 52, regularly turned up at the woman's house in uniform and demanded sex in return for not executing a warrant on her. He also targeted two other vulnerable women, one a crime victim, by using a police computer to access their details.

The IPCC, the police watchdog, last month published a report on police corruption which identified abuse of authority by officers for personal gain, including engaging in sexual intercourse with women while on duty, as one of the five key corruption threats to effective policing.

Another threat identified was the use of police computer systems to access details of vulnerable females.

The watchdog's figures show that 15 per cent of the 837 corruption cases they investigated between 2008 and 2011 involved abuse of authority by an officer, while 9 per cent involved misuse of databases.

'MY PHONE STALKER WAS POLICEMAN SENT TO HELP ME'



A 'sexually obsessed' stalker whose explicit texts and phone calls caused a mother six months of torment was the very police officer sent to help her.

Dunstable-based Maria Snow, 49, waived her anonymity to speak of her horror at finding out PC Mark Wilkie, right, was behind the daily calls to her mobile.

Mrs Snow recalled how former Bedfordshire Police PC would call her constantly to breathe heavily into the phone and tell her how attractive she was to him.

The harassment began when Wilkie responded to a call about a violent row Mrs Snow had been having with her husband, who she has now divorced.

As Mrs Snow's husband was taken to the police station her mobile displayed the first in a long line of explicit texts. It read: 'You look so gorgeous and sexy'.

Thinking it was a mistake Mrs Snow replied saying the caller must have the wrong number. 'No I haven't, Maria,' came the chilling reply.

She called police who discovered the offending text had come from a pay-as-you-go number which the owner always topped up with cash making it impossible to trace.

The calls and texts continued. 'It turned in to six months of texts and phone calls, every night and day. It was mental cruelty,' Mrs Snow said.

She continued: 'I didn't want to change my phone number because I had had it for 20 years and used it for my work, and my phone wouldn't let me block the calls.

'He started with one call a day and within a month it had gone up to once an hour. It was like a drip, drip torture.'

Mrs Snow added: 'You just go into a whole world of doubt and suspicion, and it makes you realise how vulnerable you are.'

One area the IPCC must examine is whether there have been vetting failures during a massive surge in police recruitment from 2001 onwards. The overall manpower of the service grew by more than 16,000 between 2001 and 2007.

In the case of Mitchell, the rapist constable had been investigated in 1991 over the alleged attempted rape of two men and sexual assault of a third while he was serving in the Armed Forces.

Military police questioned him but the case went no further after he claimed that it was nothing more than 'horseplay'.

In 1997, following a complaint from one of the alleged victims in the Army sex case, he stood trial in Edinburgh only for it to collapse when two witnesses refused to give evidence.

Even so, the allegations alone should have been enough to end his police career before it had begun – but thanks to an extraordinary oversight, details were not recorded on the police intelligence database.

If they had been, it is almost certain there would have been enough doubt about his character to stop his recruitment by the Northumbria force.

A study of vetting within the police service by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary six years ago revealed 'disturbing' failures that had allowed suspect individuals to become police officers.

While many sexual predators target vulnerable women they meet while on duty, often their victims are among their own colleagues inside the police station, strengthening the culture of impunity surrounding sexist, exploitative behaviour.

Professor Jennifer Brown of the Mannheim centre for criminology at the London School of Economics carried out a survey 19 years ago which revealed 800 policewomen had claimed to have suffered rape of sexual assaults at the hands of male colleagues.

The Home Office never published the results of the research.

Inspector Kate Pain, the Police Federation chair for Wiltshire police, where Deputy Chief Constable David Ainsworth received his 26 complaints before committing suicide last year, said the sexist culture within the force discouraged many women from speaking out.

'The police force is still male-dominated and it is very difficult for people to come forward to challenge poor behaviour and performance because they are worried about promotion to the next rank, they are worried about not being supported by their boss and they are worried about being isolated,' she told the Guardian.

Deputy Chief Constable Bernard Lawson of Merseyside police, Acpo's lead on counter-corruption, who is working with the IPCC on the joint report, told the Guardian abuses of power were having an 'incredibly damaging impact' on public trust in the force.

'There is a determination throughout policing to identify and remove those who betray the reputation of the overwhelming majority of officers,' he said.

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When are we going to return the Police as they used to be Respected by the public , not despised by the public - C.M.Calvert, Poole Dorset, 30/06/2012 22:45 I take my hat off to you for this comment. I couldn't have put it any better. Of course there's bad apples in the police, but thankfully it's very rare and by no means indicative of real police officers.

- ticky tape, ticky town, 01/7/2012 11:54

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And they're giving them all tasers soon?

- shazz, scotland, 01/7/2012 11:35

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The DM is so anti Police, Firemen, Teachers, Nurses in fact every public sector worker is just portrayed as useless and corrupt, you've also tried your best to destroy their pensions. Not quite sure how many public sector workers buy the daily mail but if they all stopped buying this rag for a month or two do you think we might get the some positive public sector stories for a change? I'm sure if a lot of public sector workers hit the green arrow it might get talked about at next weeks DM team brief. come on DM change your tactics you're affecting the mood of the country.

- Just thinking aloud, wales, 01/7/2012 11:32

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The police LOVE the laws that criminalise the sex service industry. Prostitutes that need police assistance are easy prey for the police - there are many cases on record of police officers abusing such women.

- DJM, Staffs, 01/7/2012 11:32

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Another clear example of the man hating feminist disinformation and propaganda. Note how they conflate the woolly word they dreamt up called "harassment" - which can mean as little as unwanted communication or being asked out on a date - with serious crimes of sexual assault and rape. If these idiots gets their way soon any many who asks a woman in a date is at risk of being labelled a sexual predator. About time men started wising up to what has been really going on and who the real liars and predators are.

- Uk, Uk, 01/7/2012 11:18

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The police are hated by just about everyone nowadays, including myself. They are just ignorant, rude, aggresive, disrespectful, arrogant, fat, doughnut eaters and they tell lies in court. They are devoid of common sense and can't differentiate between good, honest people who make minor misdemeanours and the real bad types. They are scared to tackle the thugs of this world and only make trouble for the decent people...... FACT!! Never, ever, would I assist them in any way at all.

- Fast Eddie, former Conservative member, now a UKIP member, , Rawtenstall., 01/7/2012 10:39

Click to rate _ Rating 47

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It's encouraging to learn that police are at last taking an interest in victims of crime, though they don't quite yet seem to have got it quite right.

- RM, Brighton, 01/7/2012 10:22

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And now they want a law change to allow them to download and indefinitely store the entire contents of our mobile phones even if no charge is ever brought....... hmmm

- Dodger, London, 01/7/2012 10:19

Click to rate _ Rating 20

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Quick. Get the brave boys of the EDL to put on some turbans, and demonstrate outside police HQ.

- fallus mangoe, earth, 01/7/2012 10:07

Click to rate __ Rating 8

Report abuse

Is there anyone who trusts the police these days!! I don't, they let anyone I the force. They are as corrupt as the American police force now... When they are called on to do their job like in the riots, frightened little boys, standing back watching innocent men women and children being assaulted

- misty, Dubai, 01/7/2012 10:05

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