Sprite+ Security, Privacy, Identity, Trust, Engagement, NetworkPlus | SALIENT | NSEC Network for Security Excellence & Collaboration | UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

SAFER SPACES AND INCLUSIVE DESIGN

RISE POLICY BRIEF | OCTOBER 2026

Key takeaways

1. **'One size fits all' prevention strategies exclude women with learning disabilities**
2. **Women and girls' park safety depends on better design, management and practice**
3. **Son-mother matricide is a persistent yet hidden form of VAWG, which is not recognised or addressed in any policy**

Recommendations to policymakers

Commission learning disability-specific VAWG prevention

National and local commissioners should fund co-designed, accessible prevention programmes for women with learning disabilities. Programmes should address recognising abuse and risk, online safety, trusted relationships, disclosure, practical responses to unsafe situations and supported autonomy.

Health, social care and VAWG services should also fund guidance for parents and carers on autonomy, risk and disclosure, addressing over-protection where it prevents women from accessing education, independence and public life.

Embed gender-inclusive park safety training in professional practice

Professionals involved in planning, designing, maintaining and policing public spaces should undertake the newly released Safer Parks training course. National and local bodies should embed inclusive, safety-focused design within mainstream professional practice. Women's and girls' lived experiences should inform decisions about lighting, sightlines, escape routes, natural surveillance, activities and facilities, and park management.

Recognise and respond to son-mother violence and matricide

Government should develop bespoke strategies that explicitly recognise violence and abuse against mothers by sons as domestic abuse, and matricide as femicide.

Training must be provided for frontline professionals to identify patterns of mother-directed abuse, respond without stigma and coordinate across systems. This should include support for older and minoritised mothers, and those caring for adult-aged mentally ill and/or substance-dependent sons. Policies should establish clear expectations for information sharing, risk assessment and safeguarding.

Research findings

‘One size fits all’ prevention strategies exclude women with learning disabilities

Dr. Andrea Tonner, Safer Spaces, Stronger Voices

Women with learning disabilities experience violence differently and often more acutely, yet their experiences are rarely centred in prevention strategies. Their vulnerability can be shaped by power imbalances, inaccessible information, dependence on support networks and social attitudes that marginalise their knowledge.

The Safer Spaces, Stronger Voices pilot worked with a group of women with learning disabilities in Scotland, and found participants valued practical guidance about what to do in unsafe situations. The women described feeling stronger through sharing experiences, but also identified gaps in trusted support – one participant reported feeling that she had no “safe people”.

> **“I don’t think that I have any ‘safe people’, so it made me feel good to have a safe place to talk.”**
>
> *– Pilot participant, Safer Streets, Stronger Voices*

Parent and carer protectiveness can act as a significant barrier to accessing preventative education. Fear can circulate through family and peer networks, restricting women’s independence, travel and social participation. Standardised approaches can compound this by failing to accommodate differences in communication, comprehension and lived experience.

VAWG prevention must be linked with autonomy, dignity, confidence and full participation in public life. The project’s co-designed toolkit positions women with learning disabilities not simply as beneficiaries, but as contributors to knowledge and solutions.

Women and girls’ park safety depends on better design, management and practice

Dr. Anna Barker, Safer Parks

Urban parks support wellbeing, social connection and active travel, but women and girls cannot realise these benefits equally when fear and unsafe design restrict access. At the same time, funding is stretched and parks are a non-statutory service, meaning that local authorities don’t have to provide and maintain these spaces.



Source: ONS, 2022

In stakeholder interviews, women and girls described altering how they use parks in response to both experiences of harassment and to safety concerns more broadly. This included avoiding parks after dark, avoiding certain areas during the day or sticking to footpaths, visiting only with others, limiting visits to busier times or familiar parks, or choosing not to use some parks.

A new Safer Parks course has translated research into women’s and girls’ experiences, alongside professional expertise, into online training for planners, designers, park managers, Designing Out Crime Officers and police. The course helps professionals understand how women and girls experience parks differently and how design and management changes can improve safety.

The work builds on Safer Parks guidance organised around ten principles within three themes: Eyes on the Park, Awareness and Inclusion. It demonstrates how evidence about lived experience can be embedded within routine decisions about designing, maintaining and managing green space.

Son-mother matricide is a persistent yet hidden form of VAWG which is absent from policy

Dr. Caroline Miles, Professor Rachel Condry and Dr. Ana Maria Nicoriciu, *Learning Lessons from Matricides*

This project built on Miles and Condry's previous research on child-parent violence, parricide and matricide, analysing recommendations from 70 Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) for matricides by sons or grandsons, and 39 Mental Health Homicide Reviews (MHHRs).

Matricides frequently occured where:

- Mothers were caring for adult-aged mentally ill sons
- Perpetrators had a co-morbid substance dependency
- Signs or disclosures of harm by mothers were not recognised as domestic abuse
- There were omissions in identification and assessment of risk to mother carers
- There was a lack of safeguarding for mothers experiencing – or at risk of harm – from their sons

DHR recommendations most frequently target health care services (e.g. Mental Health Trusts, GP services), child and adult safeguarding services, multi-agency services (e.g. Community Safety Partnerships), substance dependency and domestic abuse services.

Recommendations call for more training and awareness on child-to-parent violence, enhanced recognition, identification and recording of violence towards parents, greater professional curiosity, better information sharing and communication between agencies, and reviews of risk assessment and safeguarding procedures.

MHHR recommendations include stronger monitoring of deterioration, disengagement, missed appointments, and changes in diagnosis/treatment, responding to family concerns, improved risk assessment, stronger multidisciplinary review, better communication with community teams and families. They also identify the need for improvements in carers' assessments, information sharing, safeguarding, multi-agency working, staff training and supervision, and recognising parents as potential victims.

Acknowledgements

Safer Parks: Thank you to our project partners Keep Britain Tidy / Green Flag Award, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Police Crime Prevention Initiatives, Make Space for Girls, Harper Perry, Studio31, ESRC Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre, and The Yorkshire Policing-Academic Centre of Excellence (TYP-ACE).

Safer Spaces, Stronger Voices: Thank you to our project partner, Down's Syndrome Scotland.

Learning Lessons from Matricides: Thank you to Kirsten Watson (NHS England), Karen Ingala Smith and Clarrie O'Callaghan (Femicide Census), alongside the Home Office and police service, which facilitated access to data in previous research on parricide and matricide.

References

RISE Projects

- Anna Barker, Francesca Pontin and Kate Nicolson (2026), 'Safer Parks: Improving Access for Women and Girls'
- Andrea Tonner and Emma Soanes (2026), 'Safer Spaces, Stronger Voices: Co-Creating and Evaluating a Learning Disability Specific VAWG Prevention Intervention' *(Pending publication)*
- Caroline Miles, Rachel Condry and Ana Nicoriciu (2026), 'Learning Lessons from Matricides: Preventing Son-Mother Killings'

Other

- Barker, A., Holmes, G., Alam, R., Cape-Davenhill, L., Osei-Appiah, S. and Warrington Brown, S. (2022). What Makes a Park Feel Safe or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire. University of Leeds. https://doi.org/10.48785/100/108
- Safer Parks Consortium (2025). Safer Parks: Improving access for women and girls. The Safer Parks Consortium. https://doi.org/10.48785/100/352
- Barker, A., Cape-Davenhill, L., Holmes, G. and Warrington, S. (2026). "The gendered burden of safety work in urban parks: women's experiences in West Yorkshire's green spaces". Gender, Place & Culture. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2026.2668336
- Office for National Statistics (2022). Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 16 February to 13 March 2022. Office for National Statistics.
- McCarthy, M., Hunt, S. and Milne-Skillman, K. (2017). "'I Know it was Every Week, but I Can't be Sure if it was Every Day': Domestic Violence and Women with Learning Disabilities". Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 30(2), 269–282.
- Home Office (2025). Freedom from Violence and Abuse: a cross-government strategy to build a safer society for women and girls. Volume 1, CP 1450-I.
- Miles, C., Condry, R., Ingala-Smith, K. and O'Callaghan, C. (2026) "Decades of silence and hundreds of dead mothers: Matricide by sons in England & Wales 2009–21". British Journal of Criminology *(Manuscript under review)*
- Condry, R. and Miles, C. (2023). "Who counts? The invisibility of mothers in femicide". Current Sociology, 71(1), 43–49.
- Miles, C., Condry, R. and Windsor, E. (2022). "Parricide, mental illness, and parental proximity: the gendered contexts of parricide in England and Wales". Violence Against Women, 29(2), 87–111.

Contact the researchers

Dr. Anna Barker
Associate Professor in Criminal Justice
University of Leeds
Email: a.c.h.barker@leeds.ac.uk

Dr. Andrea Tonner
Reader in Consumer Culture
University of Strathclyde
Email: a.tonner@strath.ac.uk

Dr. Caroline Miles
Senior Lecturer in Criminology
The University of Manchester
Email: caroline.miles@manchester.ac.uk

Related RISE research

Simon Parkinson, Helen Zheng and Paloma Lui, *SaferStreetsAI*
Reka Solymosi and Timna Denwood, *Women and Girls' Experience of Safety While Running*