Forensic Analytics

Modernising the police response to Stalking and Harassment

A practical guide for constabularies to meet new national stalking investigation standards

2nd edition

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Foreword

Stalking and harassment have a devastating impact on countless lives and on society. Despite the prevalence of these offences, too often, victims do not receive justice.

This report represents a critical step forward in addressing these challenges. It provides a comprehensive overview of the issues, highlights the urgent need for reform, and offers practical solutions. It showcases the success of Operation Atlas, a Metropolitan Police Service initiative, which demonstrates how digital-first, victim-centred investigations can dramatically improve charge rates, cut investigation times, and reduce the burden on victims.

The time for change is now. By modernising investigative practices and implementing the recommendations outlined in this report police services can significantly improve the response to stalking and harassment, rebuild trust and afford victims the protection and respect they deserve.

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At Forensic Analytics, Samantha supports high-impact crime areas, focusing particularly on violence against women and girls (VAWG) offences. Samantha collaborates with key stakeholders to contribute toward the government's goal of reducing VAWG by 50% by 2034, leveraging Forensic Analytics' cutting-edge technologies to drive meaningful progress.

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Andrew is a criminal justice and digital forensics expert. He has worked with the UN at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in the Hague, and with the Metropolitan Police Service on serious and organised crime and terrorism investigations, including the 7th July 2005 London Bombings.

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Executive Summary

Stalking and harassment crimes have affected over 5 million women in the UK over the last three years. These crimes frequently leave victims traumatised and are often a precursor to violence and other more serious offences.

Despite these realities, systemic failings have eroded victim trust in law enforcement. In 2022 the government appointed Victim's Commissioner, Baroness Newlove undertook a survey that found 79% of women did not have confidence in the police's ability to thoroughly investigate crimes against them.

In response to a super-complaint submitted by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust in 2022 on behalf of the National Stalking Consortium, an investigation was conducted and a joint response published in September 2024 by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), along with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS), and the College of Policing.

The investigation highlighted how urgent reforms were needed throughout policing, which in summary were: better officer training, clearer guidance on applying preventative measures, and the use of "digital witnesses" to provide objective, irrefutable evidence.

All police forces were required to submit an action plan to the National Police Chiefs' Council by the initial deadline of 22nd November 2025. By the second deadline, 27th March, all forces had to provide an update outlining the progress made in implementing their action plan.

This report is intended to assist policing in their efforts to meet the new standards of stalking investigations, with a particular focus on pursuing digital lines of enquiry effectively to achieve better outcomes for victims. It explains how Operation Atlas, a Metropolitan Police initiative supported by Forensic Analytics' CSAS software has used victim centred methods combined with a focus on digital lines of enquiry to dramatically improve results.

1. Introduction

Stalking. **The numbers are unacceptable.**

In the UK 1 in 7 women over the age of 16 has been a victim of stalking[1]. **That's over 5 million women.**

Reform is needed. Urgently.

The impacts of stalking

Stalking often inflicts lasting trauma on victims. Persistent societal and systemic misconceptions about the impact of stalkers on their victims have led to gaps in protection and support responses from policing.

With stalking often being a precursor to violence and more serious crimes, this is eroding women's trust in the police to keep them safe.

Severe and long-lasting trauma

The impact of stalking on victims can be profound. Though every instance is different, stalking and harassment often leaves victims with feelings of a loss of control, fear, anxiety and total mental exhaustion.

A particularly heartbreaking consequence sees victims struggling to trust other people, which can lead to breakdowns of relationships with those they care about.

> "Stalking is a crime of psychological terror. It robs the victim, and often their family, of their day-to-day freedoms and their sense of safety in their own home and community. Stalking has significant and long-term impacts on the health and wellbeing of victims, and children are often hidden victims of this crime."
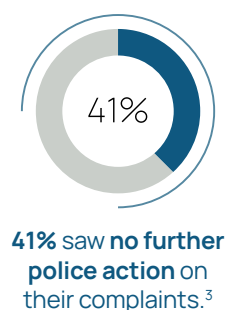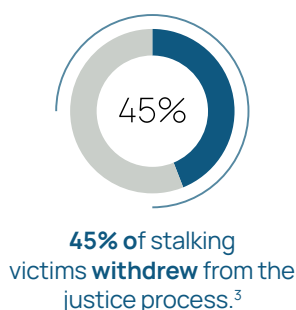> — **Claire Waxman, Victims Commissioner for England and Wales**[1]

The effects of stalking are seen beyond the suffering of individuals and impact public perception of the criminal justice system. Processes, investigation standards, and legislation do not fully account for or deal with the experiences of victims.

> "He has been stalking me and my children since 2012, and I've only managed to get support in 2023. I knew I was being stalked, but all my worries and concerns were belittled by the police because he was my partner. Now my ex-husband. They mostly took his side more than mine."
> — **Stalking Victim-Survivor**[2]

The London Victims' Commissioner's 2024 review found that:

45% of stalking victims **withdrew** from the justice process.[3]

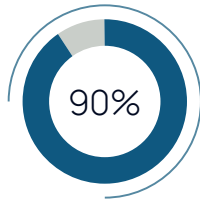**41%** saw **no further police action** on their complaints.[3]

A precursor to violence and other serious crimes

Stalking is often a precursor to other serious crimes and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
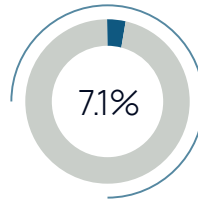
While men and boys also suffer from many forms of abuse, stalking, harassment, and associated violence disproportionately affect women. 100 women die at the hands of men every year, in the UK and almost all of them are stalked beforehand. Perhaps the most egregious detail that has emerged over the last few years is the fact that, on average, men who have killed women in the home serve 10 years less prison time than those who have killed women outside of it.
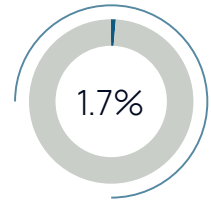
90%

7.1%

1.7%

1 woman is killed by a man every 3 days in England & Wales[4]

90% of women killed by men experience stalking behaviour from their attackers prior to their death[5]

7.1% of stalking reports result in CPS charges[6]

And only **1.7%** of cases result in a conviction[7]

Time for change

In November 2022, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust submitted a super-complaint on behalf of the National Stalking Consortium.

The complaint criticised the police response to stalking, and highlighted system-wide issues in the way forces across England & Wales respond to stalking, calling for urgent reform.

Between 4th August 2023 and 4th September 2023, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) led a joint investigation into the complaint, along with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS), and the College of Policing.

The investigation revealed victims of stalking were often let down by a lack of police understanding, inconsistent investigation quality, and insufficient safeguarding.

Recommendations emphasised the need for better officer training, clearer guidance on applying Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs) and other preventative measures, and the value of integrating digital tools to gather and review evidence.

- **HMICFRS report**
- **IOPC report**
- **College of Policing**

The findings were clear. Immediate action is required from Chief Constables and their forces to prevent further failures and keep women safe.

The UK government has pledged to cut VAWG-related crimes by 50% over the next 10 years. The government hasn't yet said what statistics they will be measuring, but the commitment reflects the widespread recognition for stronger protective measures.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust reports that 100% of cases they handle involve a digital element. The domestic abuse charity Refuge has seen a 300% rise in tech-facilitated abuse since 2019.

Focusing on identifying new leads through digital and data driven investigations not only helps to safeguard victims but also increases convictions, with digital technology providing court worthy evidence. They also reduce the burden on the victim to remember and report each incident.

This white paper serves as a practical guide for police services to modernise their approach to stalking. Through operational models that demonstrate how to leverage technology to adopt digital-first investigations against women.

2. Time for change

The National Strategy

In December 2021, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and College of Policing published a new police VAWG framework[8] (updated and refreshed in March 2024).

The framework was developed under the leadership of National Police Lead for VAWG Chief Constable Maggie Blyth, and informed by experts in policing, government, and the VAWG sector.

VAWG is now officially classed as a national threat, and Blyth has brought the police response to VAWG in line with counter-terrorism. This includes adoption of the '4Ps', and the creation of a new National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection. In April 2025 the new National Centre for VAWG and Public Protection was launched, backed by £13 million government funding. The centre is intelligence led and brings together several different teams to work collaboratively on tackling VAWG.[9] The centre, under the leadership of the new National Police Lead Helen Millichap provides a centre for a unified policing response, aiming to ensure consistency across all **43 police forces** in England and Wales, similar to frameworks used in counter-terrorism and serious organised crime.

The government have pledged to halve VAWG in a decade. To do this digital lines of enquiry must be prioritised.

The VAWG Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment (STRA)[10] supports forces to better understand the contributors to VAWG.

The offences identified in the STRA as being the biggest threat to women are:

- Domestic abuse
- Rape and serious sexual offences
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation
- Tech enabled VAWG, such as online stalking and harassment

The STRA helps forces direct their finite resources and decide how many officers will be needed to tackle VAWG within their jurisdiction. It is also used to identify where they should focus specialist investigators, victim support, and digital technology.
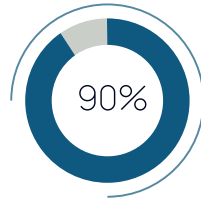
Implications for policing

The recommendations from the HMICFRS, IOPC, and College of Policing report has significant implications for those investigating stalking and harassment, who play a critical role in safeguarding victims.

Public Protection Units (PPUs) where they exist are often at the forefront of protecting the most vulnerable individuals, although the responsibility for investigating stalking and harassment varies across police services, depending on internal processes and the volume of demand. The recommendations emphasise a series of key changes aimed at ensuring more effective investigations, for better victim outcomes.

1) ### Use of protective & preventative measures
   The report calls for best practices in managing stalking cases, including the early, and consistent use of Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs) and Domestic Violence Prevention Notices (DVPNs). Historically, these orders have been underutilised, and forces are now being urged to increase their application as a preventative measure.

90%

Of women killed by men experience stalking behaviour from their attackers prior to their deaths [5]

90% of women killed by men experience stalking behaviour from their attackers prior to their deaths[7]. Issuing protective and preventative orders early in an investigation provides immediate protection to victims, while gathering further evidence to build a case. This proactive approach prioritises victim safety from the outset.
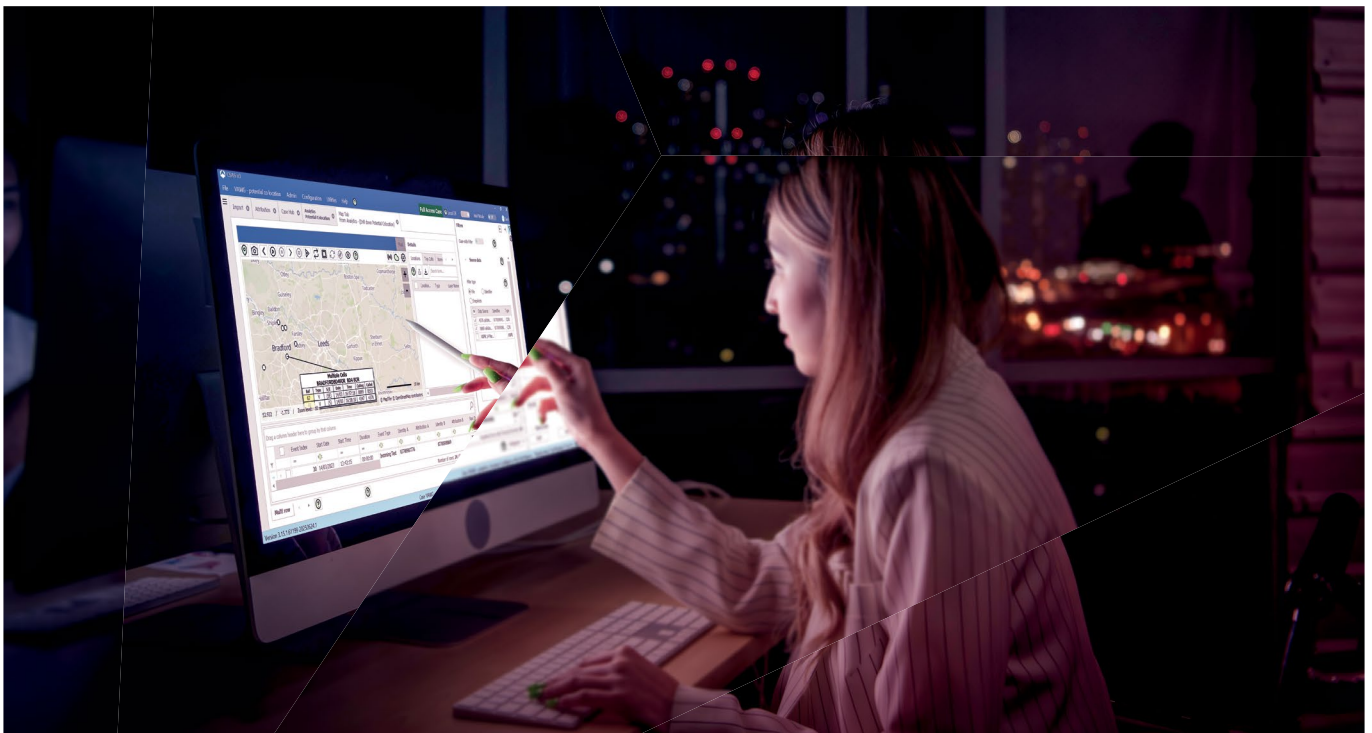
2) Collaboration with victim support services

    Improved collaboration between those investigating stalking and harassment cases, and external victim support services. Many victims of stalking and domestic abuse rely on these services for counselling, legal advice, and safety planning.

    The collaboration extends to sharing data, conducting joint risk assessments, and developing tailored support plans for victims. The aim is to create a more cohesive support network that addresses both the legal and emotional needs of victims.

3) Adoption of digital tools

    Police services need to focus on digital data and integrate digital tools into their investigations, particularly in cases of stalking and harassment where digital footprints are a vital source of evidence.

    Forensic Analytics' Cell Site Analysis Suite (CSAS)[17] allows the processing of large data sets, such as communication data, handset downloads, trackers, and vehicle telematics in seconds.

3. Operation Atlas: A model for success

Stalking and harassment are often precursors to more serious violence against women. Despite this, in the UK only 7.1% of stalking cases result in charges.[6] This is largely due to limited investigative capacity, knowledge, and access to tools.

Addressing this problem requires more effective digital-first investigative methods.
Operation Atlas is an initiative designed to embed specialist policing capabilities into the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) response to public protection, with a specific focus on stalking and stalking-related incidents.

The pilot was launched in November 2022. Cases and outcomes were recorded through to March 2023. The MPS saw Operation Atlas delivering improved victim care, a reduction in days taken to investigate, reduction in risk through quicker case disposal, an increase in suspects charged with offending, and the improvement of investigating officer's 'digital IQ'.

Investigation efficiency

Operation Atlas: Impact & outcomes

With its dual focus on victim centred and digital-first investigations, Operation Atlas has transformed how MPS officers handled stalking and harassment cases, driving significant improvements in charge rates and investigation efficiency, and reducing the burden on victims.

Improved charge rates

Cases adopted by Operation Atlas saw increased charge rates from 12% to 66%, and decreased No Further Action (NFA) results from 88% to 34%.[11] Operation Atlas reduced investigation times by 45 days, from 137 days to 92 days. This meant officers could investigate, on average, four cases in the time it previously took to investigate one.[11]

Average length of investigations before Operation Atlas, and during Operation Atlas Increased charge rates & decreased NFA rates
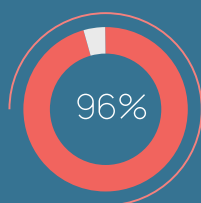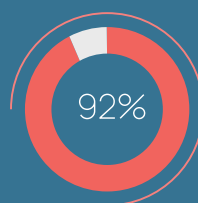
137 Days   92 Days

High conviction rates and guilty pleas

Operation Atlas saw 96% of cases resulting in convictions, with 92% of those charged pleading guilty.[11]

Conviction & guilty plea rates during Operation Atlas

96% Of cases resulted in convictions

92% Of those charged pled guilty

Reduced Burden on victims

Using this model to analyse digital evidence of geo-locations of an alleged suspects attributed handset to validate a victim's account meant there was a reduced burden on victims to prove an offence took place. Victims whose cases went through Operation Atlas were much less likely to be required to give evidence at court, and experienced shorter investigation lengths.
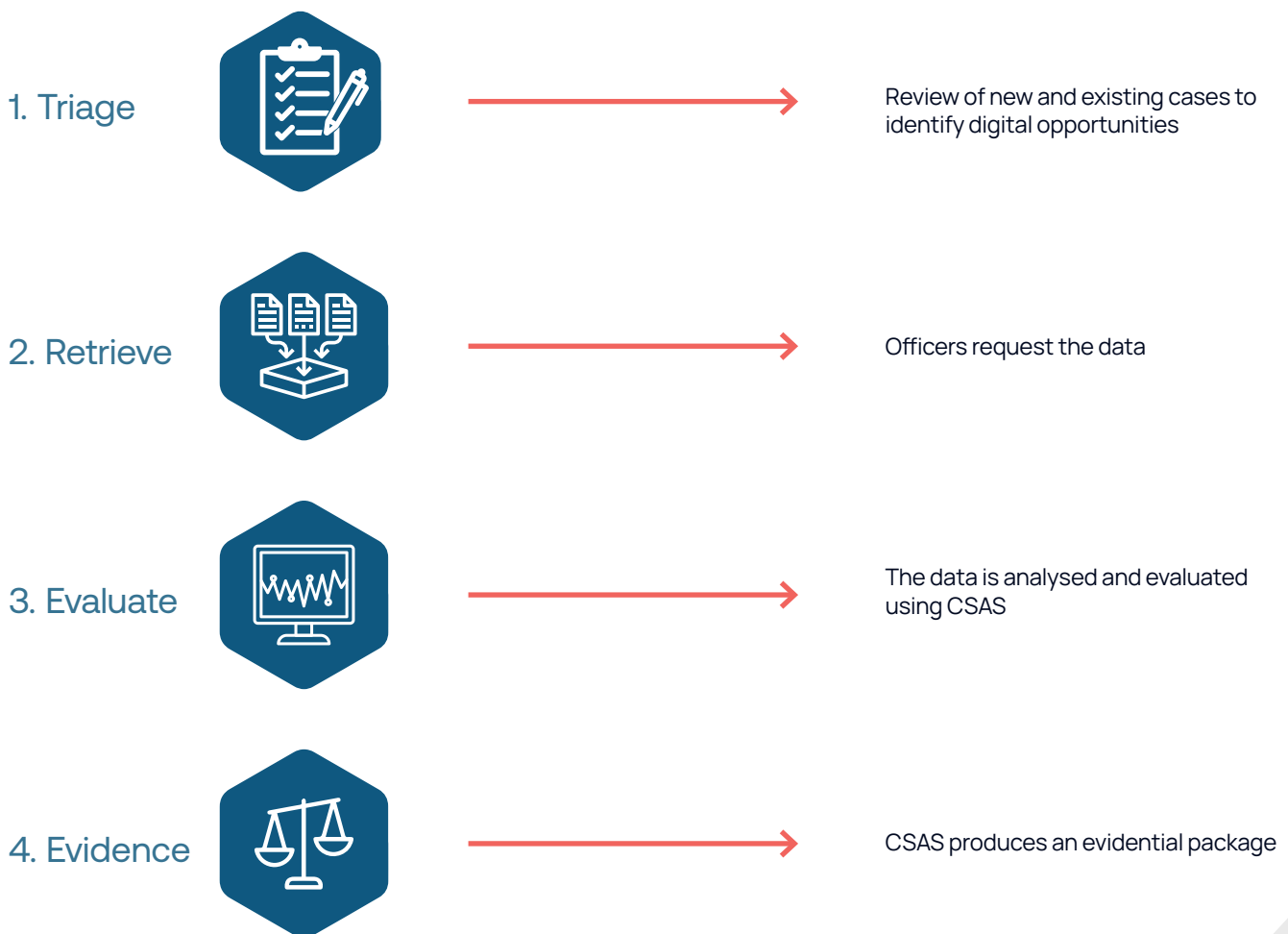
"By enhancing the way we use data and intelligence, we will improve our ability to identify, intercept and arrest those causing the most harm in communities."[11]
— Chief Constable Maggie Blyth

Operation Atlas: Methodology

Operation Atlas is a process which streamlines standard operating procedures empowering investigation and intelligence teams to process and analyse large amounts of digital data at pace, enabling identification of digital lines of enquiry. This reduces investigation times, increases charge rates and improves outcomes for victims.

Significantly, by looking at the digital footprints of potential suspects, officers were able to evidence movements of attributed devices.

1. Triage		Review of new and existing cases to identify digital opportunities
2. Retrieve		Officers request the data
3. Evaluate		The data is analysed and evaluated using CSAS
4. Evidence		CSAS produces an evidential package

The Digital Witness

"Digital witness" describes the data traces left by the attributed devices of suspects through their use of technology such as phone records, GPS data, text messages, and social media activity, which can act as silent witnesses to potential criminal behaviour and provide evidential data.

The digital witness concept is central to stalking investigations because, often, these crimes involve repeated and obsessive contact via digital channels.

Using this data with CSAS as a tool to process it provides objective, irrefutable evidence to validate a victim's account of events, even in cases where the victim may not be aware of, or be able to recall all the harassment interactions or stalking incidents.

Operation Atlas: The role of CSAS

Cell Site Analysis Suite (CSAS)[13] is the software system used by the Operation Atlas team. CSAS is already widely used throughout policing,
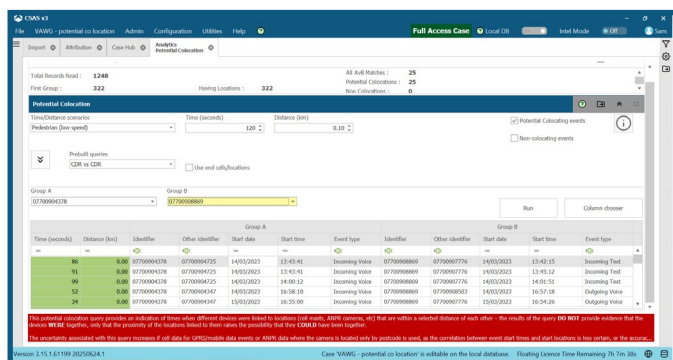
CSAS empowers investigation and intelligence teams to process and analyse large amounts of digital data quickly, producing information to a robust evidential standard. It does so through enhanced processing of call data and handset records, downloads, ANPR, social media takeout, vehicle telemetry, and more.
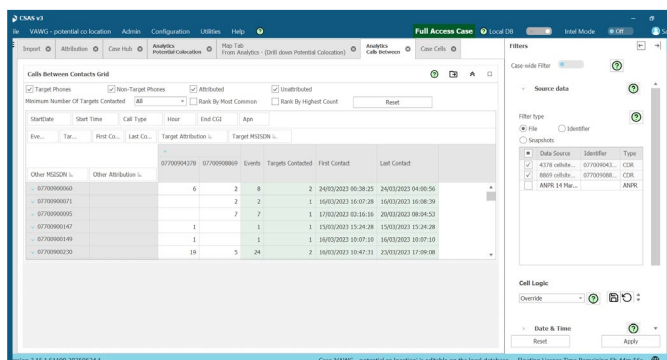
CSAS: Analytical Capabilities

With CSAS, investigators can directly access advanced analytical capabilities, allowing them to more comprehensively investigate high-volume, like stalking. Analytical enquiries are expedited, which lessens the workload for analytical teams, freeing them up to focus on more complex, high-priority cases.

CSAS has several features that are proven to increase outcomes in stalking and harassment investigations.

Here are two examples:

Potential Colocation query: Identifies when phones or vehicles attributed to the potential suspect could have been in the same general area as the victim.

Call Summary query: Provides immediate visualisation of the volume & frequency of contact between the potential suspect & victim.

Operation Atlas case study

In 2021, as their relationship broke down, a man began a sustained campaign of abuse and harassment against his ex-girlfriend. In addition to **calling and texting her up to 700 times a day**, he threatened to burn down her home, and distributed revenge porn.

Detectives from the Metropolitan Police East Area Basic Command Unit used CSAS for the first time in this type of case. **CSAS allowed them to evidence 157 occasions** when the handset attributed to a suspect had the potential to co-locate in the same general area as the victim.

The software cleansed and presented the elements of harassment through calls and other digital devices utilised in this sustained predatory behaviour.

Officers then used CSAS to create an illustrative story board of tables and maps which was clear to read and present in an evidential product for the Crown Prosecution Service — but also for any future jury. The overwhelming evidence the software presented allowed the investigating team to charge.

In February 2023 **the offender was sentenced to three years and nine months imprisonment.**

Operation Atlas: Endorsement

"This software allows my officers to cleanse, manage big data from electronic devices and self-analyse it within seconds of inputting the information...the use of this software in Public Protection cases such as stalking & harassment has significantly reduced the time to investigate and present cases to the CPS for charging decisions".
— **Detective Superintendent Lewis Basford, Metropolitan Police**

Normalising this approach is thought to be critical to future-proofing investigation, given the prevalence of digital devices and footprint in the lives of victims and suspects.
— **College of Policing, February 2024**

Operation Atlas is showcased by the College of Policing as best practice for investigating stalking & harassment cases.[14]

The IOPC and HMICFRS highlight Operation Atlas as an example of best practice in their response to the super-complaint.

The Police Digital Service has published a thorough analysis of the use of CSAS with the Operation Atlas method, and recommend its wider use.[11]

4. Conclusion

The super-complaint on the police response to stalking highlighted several fundamental gaps in how stalking and harassment cases are handled.

However, by implementing simple, robust processes, and by adopting a digital-first approach to stalking investigations, the Metropolitan Police have been able to achieve results that far exceed government expectations.

Modernising investigative practices is not optional, and forces adopting a digital-first approach now, will see results sooner.

Identify Stalking Behaviour early: Tools like CSAS allow officers to recognise (or rule out) stalking behaviours. By leveraging digital evidence, such as communication patterns and geo-location data, officers can see whether the attributed devices of an alleged suspect repeatedly communicate with a victim, which may be interpreted as inappropriate.

Use of protective & preventative measures: By obtaining digital evidence promptly, officers are able to submit robust applications for protective & preventative measures, such as Stalking Protection Orders, enhancing victim safety early in investigations.

Embrace "digital-first" investigations: By adopting a "digital-first" mentality to investigations, officers analyse phone records, social media activity, and other digital sources within hours rather than weeks. This approach ensures digital lines of enquiry are not missed, leading to higher charge rates and lower NFA rates.

Ultimately, a digital-first approach means victims are safer, more supported, case resolution times are quicker, and victims are more likely to report crimes again in the future.

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5. Forensic Analytics

Forensic Analytics modernises law enforcement investigative practices with advanced digital forensic tools.

We're an approved supplier to 95% of UK police forces, and our services include accredited training, RF surveying, consulting, and expert witness capabilities. Our flagship product, the Cell Site Analysis Suite (CSAS), is widely used to quickly retrieve, evaluate, and transform digital evidence into actionable intelligence that meets evidential standards.

CSAS The powerful, accurate and secure investigative platform trusted by law enforcement.

CellView Add instant real-world detail to cell site visualisations.

CSAS Find Empowering frontline police to collaborate and find missing and wanted people, across desktop and mobile.

Lima Cell Monitor RF Survey hardware, optimised for law enforcement.

CDAN Nexus Provide real-time intelligence straight to your frontline.

Contact us

The Forensic Analytics' team is here to help policing navigate the recommendations outlined by the HMICFRS, IOPC, and the College of Policing.

With our expertise in law enforcement and digital forensics, we can support your teams in modernising their investigative processes, reducing delays, and improving outcomes in stalking and harassment cases.

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