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Summary of College of Policing National Guidance on belief in victims' allegations

The College has published guidance on this issue both within its Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on Child Abuse and Operation Hydrant SIO guidance. Extracts from the guidance are highlighted below.

Extract from Operation Hydrant SIO guidance:

“1.1 SIOs are responsible for ensuring victims are supported from the outset, and that a robust investigative approach is applied throughout.

1.2 The purpose of a victim strategy is to support and add value to the operational activity, to identify good practice to ensure that victims are fully supported during the investigation and to identify and address any ongoing risks to other potential victims. Adult victims who have been abused as children will often have experienced not being believed, being dismissed and silenced and feeling unable to share their experiences over many years. It is, therefore, essential that officers and staff now deal with their disclosures sensitively so that they can begin a process of recovery and have trust and confidence in any subsequent investigation.

1.3.1 Investigative focus

The focus of the investigation is on proving or disproving the allegation against the suspect, and not on the credibility of the victim. Investigators will need to consider issues relative to the victim's credibility but this should not be the primary focus of the investigation. It is likely that cases will require access to third-party material when building the evidential case. This includes using expert advisers and their testimonies. APP on child abuse provides further information relating to proving the allegation.”

Extract from APP on child abuse:

“Proving the allegation

A complex child abuse investigation will potentially involve vulnerable victims and witnesses. The SIO should recognise this and consider how the defence may try to discredit a number of complainants in the trial process.

The SIO should also recognise the unique nature of an investigation, when a length of time has elapsed between the alleged offences and disclosure of allegations.

Careful consideration should be given to ensuring the integrity of the victim's evidence. This should include risk assessing the issues confronting the SIO and how they can be mitigated so that a prosecution can still proceed.”

Extract from APP on Information Management:

“National crime recording standard

The NCRS promotes consistency between police forces in how to record crime and in providing a victim-orientated approach to crime recording. This standard has three basic principles:

- the police register an incident report for all reports of incidents (whether from victims, witnesses or third parties and whether crime related or not)*
- an incident is recorded as a crime (notifiable offence) if, on the balance of probability,*

the circumstances as reported amount to a crime defined by law, and there is no credible evidence to the contrary

- *once recorded, a crime remains so unless there is additional verifiable information to disprove it.”*

Extract from Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime:

“The Standard directs a victim focused approach to crime recording. The intention is that victims are believed and benefit from statutory entitlements under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime.

“All reports of incidents, whether from victims, witnesses or third parties and whether crime related or not, will, unless immediately recorded as a crime, result in the registration of an auditable incident report by the police.

“An incident will be recorded as a crime (notifiable offence) for ‘victim related offences’ if, on the balance of probability:

- a) the circumstance of the victims report amount to a crime defined by law (the police will determine this, based on their knowledge of the law and counting rules); and*
- b) there is no credible evidence to the contrary immediately available.”*