



Police Police vetting failures have allowed ‘predatory’ officers to join up, watchdog finds

Inspectorate for England and Wales says potentially thousands officers cleared who should have failed checks

Vikram Dodd *Police and crime correspondent* and **Aina J Khan**

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Defective vetting and failures by police leaders have allowed a “prevalent” culture of potentially thousands of officers who are “predatory” towards women to join and stay in the ranks, a

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The report lists a decade of warnings to police chiefs after past serious sexual assaults and abuses of power by serving officers, with the inspectorate finding that chiefs were “complacent” and failed to appreciate “the danger to the public”.

Officers were cleared to join after “committing offences such as robbery, indecent exposure, possession of controlled drugs, drink-driving and domestic abuse-related assaults”, the report found.

It examined eight forces including the Met and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the two forces where Couzens was an armed officer, as well as Kent, where he served as a special constable.

The lead inspector, Matt Parr, said: “We concluded that a culture of misogyny, sexism, predatory behaviour towards female police officers and staff and members of the public was prevalent in all the forces we inspected, which is a depressing finding.

“We believe that the poor behaviour towards women we were told about is prevalent in many - if not all - forces.”

The inspectorate said: “We also found 131 cases where the [employment] decision was questionable at best. In these, we found officers and staff with criminal records, or suspicions that they had committed crime (including some serious crime), substantial undischarged debt, or family members linked to organised crime.

“In other cases, officers and staff had given false or incomplete information to the vetting unit. We also found officers who, despite a history of attracting complaints or allegations of misconduct, successfully transferred between police forces. This is wholly unsatisfactory.”

That amounts to about 18% of the 725 vetting files examined. Every female police officer and staff member spoken to told of harassment and, in some cases, assaults.

Pressed on the scale of the problem, Parr said: “It seems reasonable for me to say that over the last three or four years, the number of people recruited over whom we would raise significant

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the ground and had her handbag stolen.

A police officer cleared to join despite concerns he had a theft conviction and potential criminal links.

A police officer arrested twice for assaults on women who were left with marks on their necks, and witness intimidation, as well as having a historical drink-driving conviction.

An officer cleared to join despite an arrest for rape while a juvenile, about 20 years earlier.

An officer, who still works with vulnerable people, given a final written warning for sending extremely sexually explicit and racist messages to a female colleague.

Vetting was found to have failed when officers changed forces and Parr said: “The lessons of the last few years have given ample warning.”

Asked if policing had heeded the warnings, such as those from women’s groups but also some from the inspectorate itself, that Couzens could have been identified earlier as a danger to women, Parr said: “The shoddier your vetting system is, the greater the chance of somebody like Couzens joining you.”

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Parr told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme he believed UK policing was experiencing a “tipping point moment”.

“It’s not just our report today, there have been other hard-hitting reports shining a light on police behaviour and some of these problems,” he said.

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This report follows one last month by Lady Casey into the Met's discipline system that found shocking failures, corruption and cover-ups far greater than previously admitted. It led the Met's commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, to say that hundreds of racist, women-hating and corrupt officers **have been left in the ranks** of his force alone.

The accumulation of reports, **with more to come next year**, threatens the reputation of police leaders, who have claimed to have taken the issues seriously, but as the inspectorate said, failed to act on warnings that their staff and the public were in danger from misogynistic, racist and corrupt officers.

Police chiefs said they would adopt the recommendations in full. Andy Marsh, the head of the College of Policing, said: "Vetting will only ever provide a snapshot of the problem, and it must be backed up by strong leadership at all levels and people who can spot and call out behaviour which does not belong in policing. The college's new entry training and National Centre for **Police** Leadership will deliver world-class leaders who are equipped with the skills to call out wrongdoing, improve results and bring the service up to the highest standard the public rightly expects."

Harriet Wistrich of the Centre for Women's Justice, which has pressed for stronger action over police misogyny, said: "A police officer has powers and status which if misused can allow him to take advantage of vulnerable women - it is utterly unacceptable that there isn't the strictest interview and vetting procedures to ensure that potential abusers are not admitted to the police."

The end of the right to abortion in the United States will have devastating consequences around the world. A half century ago, the Supreme Court's landmark Roe v Wade decision inspired a new era of reproductive freedom in dozens of countries. The court's reversal will empower anti-abortion voices everywhere, threatening reproductive freedom and the right to control one's destiny.

The Guardian views reproductive choice as a fundamental human right and will pursue this story even after it recedes from headlines, with a focus on the people most impacted by

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