

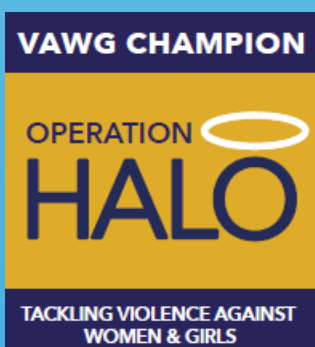
# Operation Halo

## Evaluation report



**July 2026**

**Evelyn Hearne, Louise Crane, Nadia Butler, Olivia Hendricks, and  
Zara Quigg**



# Operation Halo Evaluation Report

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**July 2026**

## About this report

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This study was co-funded by Merseyside Police and the School of Nursing, Public and Allied Health at Liverpool John Moores University.

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## Acknowledgments

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- All study participants who participated in interviews.

# Executive Summary

Operation Halo is an intervention designed to protect vulnerable individuals and tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Liverpool's night-time economy (NTE). The intervention is a joint project between police licensing and local policing focused on increasing awareness of VAWG-related offences, offender behaviours, and signs of vulnerability. To date, Operation Halo Police officers and partner agencies delivered targeted training to 149 nightlife staff to establish VAWG Champions. Operation Halo aims to create enhanced guardianship across Liverpool, fostering safer environments for vulnerable people and women and girls through informed and proactive presence of VAWG Champions in the NTE setting. Operation Halo includes nine 'Halo Points' within the NTE, designed to provide visible and accessible safeguarding for vulnerable individuals. Each location point features distinctive lighting, strategic placement, and direct contact with police enabling a quick response and intervention. Operation Halo was officially launched by Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner and Liverpool City Council on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

The aim of this evaluation was to conduct a feasibility and pilot study of the Operation Halo intervention.

## Evaluation Methods

**Review and Analysis of Programme Monitoring Data:** which included the number of people trained as VAWG Champions; arrests made related to sexual assault following the launch of VAWG Champion training; and use of Halo points between 6<sup>th</sup> May - 24<sup>th</sup> June 2026.

**VAWG Champion Surveys:** Pre- and post-training surveys were administered to the VAWG Champions (n=149) who participated in the 2 training sessions (November 2025 & March 2026). A total of 108 pre-training surveys and 95 post-training surveys were completed. Of these, 64 participants completed both the pre- and the post-surveys. The survey included questions about the participant's awareness and knowledge of VAWG in the NTE and a range of questions that measure the participant's attitudes and confidence relating to VAWG. The post survey also asked a number of questions related to perceptions of the training.

**Qualitative interviews:** were carried out with 13 stakeholders (VAWG Champions, delivery partners, police) and 8 women nightlife patrons (WNPs). Interviews explored views and experiences of VAWG in the NTE; views on Operation Halo; experiences of the VAWG Champion role and training; any observed impacts or changes to how VAWG Champions work compared to before their training; and best approaches to preventing and responding to VAWG in the NTE.

## Findings

### *VAWG in Liverpool's nightlife*

- VAWG incidents were not only observed inside nightlife venues, but also in the street and nearby homes within and/or surrounding the NTE.
- A number of risk factors for VAWG were highlighted:
  - age (youthful naivety)
  - physical environment and infrastructure in the NTE
  - alcohol and drug use
  - a lack of respect for women resulting from political narratives and social media discourse
  - men's expectations of sexual encounters in nightlife

### *Impact of VAWG on women in nightlife*

- WNPs spoke about having boundaries broken in relation to unwanted attention, touching, and sexual comments in the NTE.
- WNPs considered VAWG was harassment, non-consensual contact, spiking, physical violence, and sexual threat.
- WNPs reported feeling powerless regarding acceptance of VAWG in the NTE.
- WNPs stated they would feel safer in the NTE with:
  - a strong presence of uniformed police
  - quicker access to medical support
  - mandatory anti-spiking devices on glasses in bars and clubs
  - more access to safe spaces for women who feel threatened or uncomfortable

### *VAWG training and VAWG Champion role*

- The VAWG Champion training was found to be very positive in both the pre- and post-surveys and interviews.
- VAWG training was associated with significant positive improvements in attitudinal outcomes related to the normalisation of attitudes and perceptions of sexual violence in nightlife generally and responding to sexual violence.
- Quantitative findings demonstrated that VAWG Champions are now less likely to agree that unwanted sexual advances are a normal part of a night and are more likely to agree that they can do something to prevent VAWG incidents following their VAWG Champion training.
- VAWG Champions reported learning new skills and that the content and delivery was well thought out and useful to their role.
- Accessibility of the training was deemed by some participants as being difficult in terms of financial and time constraints, as well as language barrier for those trainees with English as a second language.
- It was highlighted across all participant groups that there should be more women involved in the development and delivery of the intervention as men do not have the same lived experience as women.
- WNPs did allude to feeling safer knowing that VAWG Champions would be there to support them while also understanding their concerns.
- Seeing VAWG Champion badges on door staff/security was also considered a positive support.
- It was noted though by many participants that awareness of the VAWG Champion role and Halo points was limited.

### *Operation Halo points*

- Positive anticipation reported by stakeholders for the Halo points, and how they will complement the VAWG Champions work and bring about safer nightlife environments for vulnerable individuals.
- WNPs did not feel positive about Halo points and felt they may be a place for others to find vulnerable women.
- WNPs were also concerned that support would not be immediate enough to have any impact on their situation.

## Recommendations

A number of recommendations have been developed from the findings of this evaluation:

### *Training*

- Training could be delivered online or hybrid to increase dose and reach of number of VAWG Champions trained.
- Training should be accessible to all those whose first language is not English.

### *Increasing Awareness*

- Going forward it is critical to ensure all VAWG Champions are wearing their badge to increase visibility, engaging with the intervention accordingly, and endeavouring to increase awareness of the VAWG Champion role.
- Other ways to increase awareness of the intervention should be considered, such as flyers in bars and clubs and in other NTE venues as well as a social media campaign or dedicated website.
- Staff in nightlife, particularly bar staff and managers, but also those in the NTE who are open at night (e.g. retail, casinos) should also be trained as VAWG Champions which would also increase reach and dose.

### *Future Developments & Research*

- Going forward there should be consultation with women in nightlife about what Operation Halo and the VAWG training could incorporate and improve upon.
- Due to there being significant negative changes in VAWG Champions confidence to intervene, future evaluations should qualitatively explore the reasons for this.
- Consideration for the expansion of the intervention to areas outside of the city centre that have a NTE is warranted, however further implementation is needed to understand the use of the Halo points, and sustainability of VAWG Champions.
- Given the potential for VAWG to occur on the street and nearby residential areas, other initiatives already in place to help prevent and reduce VAWG in Liverpool NTE should be aware of and offered VAWG Champion training to increase reach.
- Operation Halo needs to be implemented in collaboration with other VAWG initiatives across the city (e.g. other bar staff training; awareness raising campaigns; police operations), to ensure consistent and complementary whole-system approach to preventing VAWG.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Violence Against Women and Girls

Globally, violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a key public health, criminal justice and human rights issue, placing large burdens on individuals' health and wellbeing, local communities and services (World Health Organization, 2021). VAWG includes crimes within interpersonal and romantic relationships, families, and communities, such as rape and other sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse, honour-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour killings), revenge porn, upskirting, and online harassment (Home Office, 2022; National Audit Office, 2025; Stöckl & Quigg, 2021). The Crime Survey of England and Wales (2020) reports that 20% of women are victims of sexual assault (or attempted assault) in their lifetime (Office for National Statistics, 2020) and 20% of women aged between 16-74 experienced stalking since aged 16 years old (Office for National Statistics, 2025b). It is reported that 25% of women ever partnered, experienced sexual and/or physical violence by a partner (Devries et al., 2013; World Health Organisation, 2025). Data from the Merseyside Violence and Community Safety Survey shows that, since the age of 18 years, between one in five and one in ten women had experienced physical violence (19.9%), unwanted sexual touching (13.5%), psychological abuse and coercive control (13.3%), stalking and harassment (12.8%), and indecent exposure (9.2%); with one in twenty (5.2%) reporting rape or assault by penetration (Quigg et al., 2025).

The physical and mental health impacts from VAWG are well-documented and include physical injury, chronic pain, unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, infection, and urinary tract infections (World Health Organisation, 2012, 2025). Associated mental health problems include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicide and attempted suicide, and harmful use of alcohol and other drugs (Bacchus et al., 2018; Watson & Bitsika, 2025; World Health Organisation, 2025). This physical and mental outcomes also impact upon society, particularly on services such as health services, the criminal justice system, the civil legal sector, and social welfare services (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2014). Accordingly, preventing VAWG and associated risk factors are key targets in the sustainable development goals (SDGs) embedded in SDG 5: Gender Equality and SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (United Nations, 2015). These SDGs aim to address the root causes of VAWG encompassing gender inequality, lack of education, economic vulnerability and weak policy frameworks (García-Moreno & Amin, 2016).

## 1.2. VAWG National Policy Focus

In the UK, a woman is killed every three days (O'Callaghan et al., 2022), and thousands more women and girls experience violence. The government has pledged to reduce VAWG incidents by 50% over the next 10 years (Home Office, 2021b). In July 2021, the UK government launched its *tackling VAWG strategy* (Home Office, 2021b), and in December 2021, the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) published the first national framework for delivery. This prioritised three pillars of activity: building trust and confidence; relentless perpetrator pursuit; and safer spaces. In February 2023, the Home Secretary included VAWG within the strategic policing requirement, which sets out the national threats to public safety. A '4P' approach was developed to support the prevention and response to VAWG, now embedded in the 2024-2027 National Framework for policing VAWG (National Police Chiefs' Council, 2024):

- Prepare policing to effectively respond to and reduce VAWG.
- Protect individuals and communities from VAWG.
- Pursue VAWG perpetrators.
- Prevent people from committing VAWG.

The UK Home Office note that the primary location for VAWG incidents remains as the home or domestic setting (Home Office, 2024). Other prime locations include community/public spaces, educational settings, the workplace, and digital/online environments (Home Office, 2024; UN Women and World Health Organization, 2025).

The Strategic Threat Risk Assessment 2023 identified that where public-space VAWG offending occurred, the most common locations were recorded as high-density night-time economy (NTE) venues or areas with high levels of deprivation (National Police Chiefs' Council, 2023). It also identified that public space VAWG hotspots were most common in town centres or areas with high footfall. This presents policing with opportunities to work with partners such as local authorities and licensed venues to disrupt and prevent VAWG, particularly in the NTE.

### 1.3. Nightlife as a Key Setting for Vulnerabilities & VAWG

Within nightlife, the most vulnerable in terms of physical violence victimisation (and perpetration) are young males (Quinn et al., 2017). Other groups vulnerable to violence victimisation include LGBTQ+ people (Butler et al., 2025; Hubbard, 2021), people who are heavily intoxicated (Hughes et al., 2011), and people who are alone or separated from friends (Home Office, 2021a). These vulnerabilities are likely compounded by (1) factors such as high levels of intoxication and substance use, and being younger and inexperienced in nightlife environments (Zahnow et al., 2022); being in crowded or poorly supervised venues (Quigg et al., 2020); gender power dynamics (Quigg et al., 2020); discrimination, racism, and profiling (Hubbard, 2021); and lack of late-night transport (Ceccato, 2017). A recent large representative population survey of Merseyside reported that approximately one in ten adults (11%) had experienced 'any violence' in the NTE (Butler et al., 2025), and any form of NTE violence was highest in Liverpool (12%). Heterosexual individuals (10%) were less likely than 'other sexualities' (21%) to experience 'any violence' in nightlife, and neurodivergent people (22%) were more likely than neurotypical individuals (9%) to experience 'any violence' in nightlife. The study also found that 31% of respondents reported experiencing 'physical violence' in the NTE, and the most common locations of experiences of 'unwanted sexual touching' was in the NTE (35%). Males (11%) in this survey were more likely than females (9%) to experience physical violence in the NTE in Merseyside.

The most vulnerable people in nightlife environments concerning safety and sexual violence are women and girls with those aged 16 to 24 years being the most likely to be a victim of a sexual offence (Fung et al., 2021; Office for National Statistics, 2025a; Quigg et al., 2020). Given that there is a growing body of research identifying nightlife environments as hot spots for sexual violence (particularly for women), in particular bars, pubs, and clubs which have been associated with increased risk of sexual violence; these are critical settings where prevention initiatives and concurrent evaluation of these are essential (Quigg et al., 2020)

### 1.4. Approaches to Addressing VAWG in Nightlife

Research demonstrates nightlife environments as key settings for VAWG and the pertinent need for the development of appropriate prevention and intervention strategies (Quigg et al., 2020). Suggested strategies include bystander opportunities or approaches to preventing and responding to sexual violence (Fileborn, 2017; Graham et al., 2014; Haikalis et al., 2018; Powers & Leili; Powers & Leili, 2018; Quigg et al., 2021; Quigg et al., 2023) and media campaigns that increase awareness of sexual violence and how to prevent it in nightlife (Fileborn, 2017; Gunby et al., 2017; Lippy & DeGue, 2016). Whilst stricter alcohol licensing policies in local areas in England have shown decline in violent crime, public order offences, and sexual crimes over time (De Vocht et al., 2017), the evidence base on approaches to addressing VAWG in nightlife environments is extremely limited. Currently there are a limited number of prevention strategies which aim to address VAWG in nightlife (Button et al., 2024) and critically, even less are known to be formally evaluated (Bates et al., 2022; Quigg et al., 2021;

Quigg et al., 2023). Across Merseyside, several initiatives are already in place, such as those to tackle VAWG, violence in the NTE, and violence against LGBTQI+ groups. These include:

❖ ***#TackingAction campaign***

This campaign is aimed at preventing and reducing violence and abuse faced by women every day in Merseyside. It was in response to a survey of 4,000 women and girls which found that 71% of women live in fear of sexual assault and 69% said they would not report an assault to the police (Merseyside Police, 2024b).

❖ ***Safer Streets Merseyside***

The Safer Streets toolkit was developed to address sexual offences and unwanted sexual behaviour on transport routes across Merseyside. It aims to provide reassurance to women and girls, and increase feelings and perceptions of public safety on public transport (Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, 2023).

❖ ***Good Night Out Campaign***

The Good Night Out Campaign is a sexual violence bystander training programme for nightlife workers in England (Quigg et al., 2023).

❖ ***Operation Empower***

Operation Empower is a proactive policing response that aims to prevent incidents of sexual violence by targeting people behaving in a predatory way in Merseyside (Bates et al., 2022).

❖ ***Rainbow Taxi Rank initiative***

The Rainbow Taxi Rank is part of a number of interventions that were introduced in 2024 to encourage safety in the Pride Quarter of Liverpool during the day and NTE (Merseyside Police, 2024a)

❖ ***Village Angels***

Village Angels is a volunteer-led night-time patrol service which offers support and assistance to vulnerable people during weekend evenings (Merseyside Police, 2026a).

❖ ***Ask for Angela***

'Ask for Angela' is a safety initiative in bars and clubs in Liverpool that aims to reduce sexual violence and vulnerability in licensed premises. People who feel they are in an uncomfortable situation, feel unsafe or threatened due to the behaviour of someone else can discreetly seek help by approaching venue staff and asking them for 'Angela' (Merseyside Police, N.D.).

***Liverpool nightlife safety charter***

Liverpool's night-time safety charter is a list of pledges employers make to show their commitment to a zero-tolerance stance on harassment and improving the safety of their staff and customers. It is aimed at bars, clubs and restaurants open between 6pm-6am (Liverpool City Council, N.D.).

❖ ***Purple Flag***

Purple Flag is an international accreditation which recognises Liverpool City Centre as a safe, vibrant, and well-managed NTE between from 5pm and 5am (ATCM, 2023).

## 1.5. Operation Halo

Operation Halo is an intervention designed to protect vulnerable individuals and tackle VAWG in Liverpool's NTE (Merseyside police, 2026b). Individuals may be vulnerable either due to a situation they find themselves in and/or due to location, are unable to 'Ask for Angela' or raise the alarm. The intervention is in two phases and is a joint project between police licensing and local policing.

## Phase 1: Awareness and Enhanced Guardianship



Phase 1 (November 2026) focused on increasing awareness of VAWG-related offences, offender behaviours, and signs of vulnerability. To date, Operation Halo Police officers and partner agencies delivered targeted training to 149 nightlife staff (e.g. security, bar managers), to establish VAWG Champions. This training aims to equip VAWG Champions to “spot vulnerability, recognise predatory behaviour, respond to incidents such as spiking, and preserve evidence, [and] extend support beyond bars and clubs for anyone who may feel unsafe in the night-time economy” (Merseyside Police, 2026c). Operation Halo

aims to create enhanced guardianship across Liverpool, fostering safer environments for vulnerable people and women and girls through informed and proactive presence of guardians (i.e. VAWG Champions) in the NTE setting.

## Phase 2: Halo points and Visible Safeguarding

Phase 2 (May 2026) introduced nine ‘Halo Points’ within the NTE, designed to provide visible and accessible safeguarding for vulnerable individuals. Each location point features:

- Distinctive lighting: a green light projecting above and a white light projecting below, positioned at a height visible from a distance.
- Strategic placement: located at key points within the NTE and covered by City Watch CCTV.<sup>1</sup> Sites have been carefully selected to reduce the risk to the user.
- Direct contact with police through help points enabling a quick response and intervention.

When a vulnerable person enters a location point:

- They will be clearly visible, and the surrounding area will be well lit, helping to quickly identify someone in distress (the visibility and lighting also aims to act as a deterrent to offenders).
- CCTV operators, partners/VAWG Champions, and officers engaged in NTE operations will be able to intervene swiftly, safeguard the individual, and pursue any suspects.

These location points are integrated into NTE policing operations through patrol plans.

## Launch

Operation Halo was officially launched by Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner and Liverpool City Council on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2026 (see photo below).



<sup>1</sup> Using 471 cameras, City Watch aims to prevent, deter and detect crimes, and improve public safety and reassurance. Cameras are monitored 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, by council staff and police officers who work in a partnership established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.



## 1.6. Evaluation Aims and Objectives

The aim of this evaluation was to conduct a feasibility and pilot study of the Operation Halo intervention. The study was implemented in two complementary phases each addressing several research questions.

### Phase 1: Feasibility of implementation study

This phase aimed to better understand the feasibility of implementing Operation Halo and generate knowledge for future implementation. This included the following research questions:

- Can the intervention be delivered as planned (fidelity)?
- Does the intervention delivery plan need refining?
- What is the intervention recruitment, retention, and reach (VAWG Champions, and nightlife users)?
- How much of the intervention is received by VAWG Champions, and nightlife users (dose)?
- What factors support or impede intervention delivery?
- What are nightlife users, practitioner's and VAWG Champion's views and experiences of the intervention?

### Phase 2: Pilot study

This phase aimed to assess the feasibility of measuring the impact of the intervention and provide emerging evidence of intervention outcomes. This included the following research questions:

- What is the impact of the intervention on VAWG Champion's sexual violence myth acceptance, and readiness and confidence to intervene?
- What is the feasibility of measuring the impact of the intervention on VAWG in the NTE?

## 2. Methodology

The study used mixed methods to answer the research questions.

### 2.1. Monitoring Data

Monitoring data included:

- Number of people trained as VAWG Champions.
- Arrests made related to sexual assault in the six-month period following launch of VAWG Champion training, including the number which were a result of VAWG Champions reporting an incident to the police.
- Use of Halo points (between 6<sup>th</sup> May - 24<sup>th</sup> June 2026).

### 2.2. VAWG Champion Surveys

Pre- and post-training surveys were administered to the VAWG Champions who participated in the training sessions (n=149). A total of 108 pre-training surveys and 95 post-training surveys were completed. Of these, 64 participants completed the pre- and the post-surveys. All analyses presented below is based on the 64 matched pre- and post-surveys, with the exception of the questions on perceptions of training which were analysed using the full 95 post-training surveys. The survey included questions about the participant's awareness and knowledge of VAWG in the NTE and a range of questions that measure the participant's attitudes and confidence relating to VAWG (Quigg et al., 2021; Quigg & Bigland, 2020; Quigg et al., 2023). The post-survey also asked a number of questions related to perceptions of the training. To measure changes between pre- and post-training, participants were asked to provide the last three digits of their postcode. This allowed individual's surveys to be anonymously linked.

### 2.3. Qualitative Interviews

**Interviews with Stakeholders:** Semi-structured interviews (n=13) with stakeholders (VAWG Champions, delivery partners, police) were carried out. Stakeholder interviews explored views on VAWG in Liverpool's NTE, views on Operation Halo and the proposed Halo points (interviews were conducted prior to the official launch of the Halo points), views and experiences of the VAWG Champion role, and where relevant, views of the VAWG Champion training and any observed impacts or changes to how VAWG Champions (i.e. security staff/managers) work compared to before their training. Interviews lasted between 15-45 minutes.

**Interviews with women nightlife patrons:** Semi-structured interviews (n=8) were conducted with women nightlife patrons (WNPs) aged 18+ years, who had visited Liverpool's NTE in the previous 12 months. Interviews explored women's views and experiences of VAWG in nightlife, their views on Operation Halo and the proposed Halo points, and best approaches to preventing and responding to VAWG in the NTE. Participants were provided a £10 shopping voucher as a thank you for their time. Interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was carried out on IBM SPSS Statistics software platform (v.30) using descriptive statistics. Paired sample t-tests were used to identify statistically significant changes in mean scores on a range of statements related to attitudes to towards sexual violence and confidence to intervene from pre to post training. Qualitative data were transcribed and analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019), with illustrative quotes used to support key themes.

## 2.5. Ethical Considerations

Approval from the Liverpool John Moores Research Ethics Committee was granted for all stages of the research (LJMU Ref: 260225LJMUREC394). All the data collected was anonymised and any identifiable information removed.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Pre- and Post-Surveys with VAWG Champions

A total of 108 pre-training surveys and 95 post-training surveys were completed. Of these, 64 participants completed the pre- and the post-surveys. Analyses presented below is based on the 64 matched pre- and post-surveys unless otherwise stated.

#### 3.1.1. Sample characteristics

The majority of participants were male (88.7%), aged 30+ years (62.5%), and worked as door staff (91.1%; Table 1). Most (82.8%) reported working in nightlife venues on a weekly or daily basis (Table 1).

*Table 1 Sample Characteristics*

| Characteristic                                  | %    | <i>n</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------|------|----------|
| <b>Sex</b>                                      |      |          |
| Male                                            | 88.7 | 55       |
| Female                                          | 11.3 | 7        |
| <b>Age group (years)</b>                        |      |          |
| 18-29                                           | 37.5 | 24       |
| 30+                                             | 62.5 | 40       |
| <b>Job role</b>                                 |      |          |
| Door staff                                      | 91.1 | 41       |
| Other <sup>^</sup>                              | 8.9  | 4        |
| <b>Frequency of working in nightlife venues</b> |      |          |
| Daily                                           | 34.4 | 22       |
| Weekly                                          | 48.4 | 31       |
| Monthly or less than monthly                    | 17.2 | 11       |

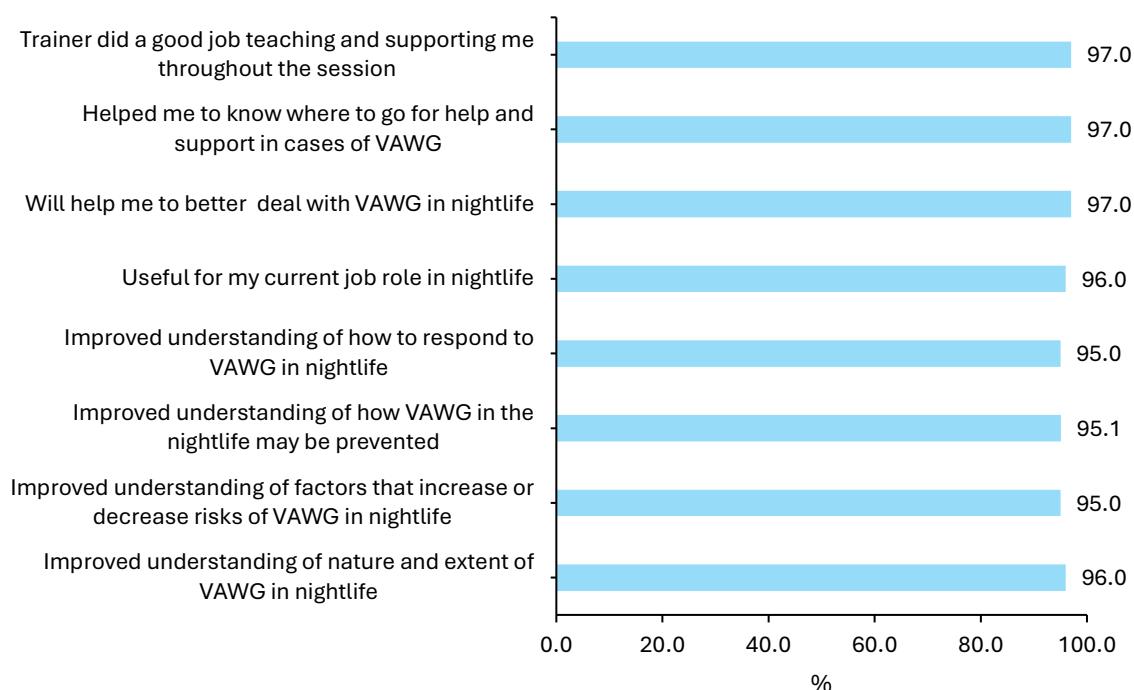
<sup>^</sup> Note: Other job roles of participants included e.g. management roles, taxi marshall, CCTV, police, medics.

#### 3.1.2. Perceptions of the training

Perceptions of the training were overwhelmingly positive, with the majority (95%) of participants agreeing (strongly agree/agree) with each statement related to the training improving their knowledge of VAWG and how to respond to incidents of VAWG while working in nightlife venues (Figure 1; Table A1)<sup>2</sup>. The majority (95.0%) of participants felt the training was the right length, and that it included the right level of information (94.9%).

<sup>2</sup> Based on all participants who completed the post training survey.

**Figure 1 Perceptions of the VAWG Champion training, proportion of participants who strongly agreed/agreed with each statement**



### 3.1.3. Attitudes towards sexual violence

Participants were asked how much they agreed with a range of statements related to attitudes towards sexual violence (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). Higher mean scores indicate a higher level of disagreement with each statement. Thus, for statements which are negatively phrased (e.g. I do not think sexual violence is a problem in nightlife), a **higher** mean score at post training indicates a positive change in attitudes, while for positively phrased statements (e.g. staff working in nightlife venues can do something about sexual violence), a **lower** mean score at post training indicates a positive change in attitudes.

#### *Perceptions of sexual violence as an issue in nightlife*

There was no statistically significant change in statements related to perceptions of sexual violence as an issue in nightlife from pre to post training (Table 2).

**Table 2 Perceptions of Sexual Violence as an Issue in Nightlife**

| Statement                                                             | n  | Pre mean | Post mean | p  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----------|-----------|----|
| I do not think sexual violence is a problem in nightlife              | 63 | 4.29     | 4.46      | NS |
| I do not think sexual violence is a problem in the venue where I work | 64 | 4.14     | 4.20      | NS |

*Note: NS means there was no statistically significant change in agreement with the statement between the pre and the post survey.*

#### *Normalisation of unwanted sexual behaviour*

There was a statistically significant positive change (i.e. less likely to agree) in response to the statement 'unwanted sexual advances are a normal part of a night out' from pre to post training (Table 3). All other statements showed a non-significant change.

**Table 3 Normalisation of Unwanted Sexual Behaviour**

| Statement                                                                  | <i>n</i> | Pre mean | Post mean | <i>p</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Unwanted sexual advances are a normal part of a night out                  | 63       | 3.41     | 3.97      | <0.01    |
| Unwanted sexual advances are a normal part of working in a nightlife venue | 63       | 3.87     | 3.95      | NS       |

*Note: NS means there was no statistically significant change in agreement with the statement between the pre and the post survey.*

### **Perceived agency and responsibility**

There was a statistically significant positive change (i.e. more likely to agree) in response to the statement 'staff working in nightlife venues can do something about sexual violence' from pre to post training (Table 4). All other statements showed a non-significant change.

**Table 4 Perceived Agency and Responsibility**

| Statement                                                                | <i>n</i> | Pre mean | Post mean | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Staff working in nightlife venues can do something about sexual violence | 64       | 2.01     | 1.64      | <0.05    |
| I think I can do something about sexual violence in nightlife            | 64       | 1.81     | 1.68      | NS       |

*Note: NS means there was no statistically significant change in agreement with the statement between the pre and the post survey.*

### **Victim blaming and perpetrator responsibility**

There was no statistically significant change from pre to post training in any of the statements related to victim blaming and perpetrator responsibility. However, at both pre- and post, generally participants disagreed with victim blaming statements e.g. 'if someone experiencing sexual violence is drunk or wasted, they are at least partly to blame' and agreed that 'sexual violence is never the fault of victim' and 'consent can be taken back at any time' (Table 5).

**Table 5 Victim Blaming and Perpetrator Responsibility**

| Statement                                                                                     | <i>n</i> | Pre mean | Post mean | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| If someone experiencing sexual violence is drunk or wasted, they are at least partly to blame | 62       | 4.31     | 4.23      | NS       |
| If the person committing sexual violence is drunk or wasted, it is not really their fault     | 63       | 4.38     | 4.51      | NS       |
| When people wear provocative ('slutty') clothes, they are asking for trouble                  | 64       | 4.33     | 4.34      | NS       |
| Sexual violence is never the fault of victim                                                  | 61       | 2.18     | 1.98      | NS       |
| Consent can be taken back at any time                                                         | 62       | 1.68     | 1.61      | NS       |

*Note: NS means there was no statistically significant change in agreement with the statement between the pre and the post survey.*

### 3.1.4. Confidence to intervene

Participants were asked how confident they felt about intervening in a problematic situation (from really confident to really not confident). Higher mean scores indicate a higher level of confidence for each statement.

There was a statistically significant negative change (i.e. less confident) in response to the statement 'asking someone who seems upset in a venue if they are ok or need help' (Table 6). There was a statistically significant negative change (i.e. less confident) in response to the statement 'speaking up to someone who is making excuses for forcing someone to have sex with them' (Table 6). All other statements showed a non-significant change; however, participants were generally confident pre-training.

*Table 6 Confidence to Intervene*

| Statement                                                                                           | <i>n</i> | Pre mean | Post mean | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Asking someone who seems upset in a venue if they are OK or need help                               | 64       | 4.56     | 4.27      | <0.05    |
| Checking on someone drunk or wasted being escorted out of a venue                                   | 63       | 4.41     | 4.41      | NS       |
| Doing something if a woman surrounded by a group of men looks uncomfortable                         | 63       | 4.48     | 4.43      | NS       |
| Expressing concern if someone reports an unwanted sexual experience but does not call it rape       | 62       | 4.24     | 4.32      | NS       |
| Letting someone you suspect has been sexually assaulted know you are available for help and support | 63       | 4.43     | 4.33      | NS       |
| Speaking up to someone who is making excuses for forcing someone to have sex with them              | 62       | 4.58     | 4.33      | <0.05    |
| Doing something to help a person who has had too much to drink and is passed out in a venue         | 62       | 4.47     | 4.42      | NS       |
| Asking someone you work with to help you address sexual violence                                    | 63       | 4.48     | 4.37      | NS       |

*Note: NS means there was no statistically significant change in agreement with the statement between the pre and the post survey.*

## 3.2. Monitoring data

149 VAWG Champions were trained over two sessions (25<sup>th</sup> November 2025 and 30<sup>th</sup> March 2026). Over a six-month period from the launch of the VAWG Champions, data provided by Merseyside Police state that there were 84 arrests related to sexual assault. Of these arrests, 20 were identified by the police as a result of VAWG Champions identifying potential perpetration and reporting to the police who then subsequently arrested the perpetrator (outcome of arrest unknown). Between 6<sup>th</sup> May and 24<sup>th</sup> June 2026 there were no reports of the Halo points being used for VAWG or other violence-related incidents.

## 3.3. Qualitative Interviews

Five themes emerged from the analysis and are: 1) VAWG in Liverpool's nightlife; 2) Impacts of VAWG on women in nightlife; 3) Operation Halo, VAWG Champion Training, and Halo points; 4) Emerging outcomes; and 5) The future of the intervention.

### 3.3.1. Theme One: VAWG in Liverpool's Nightlife

#### *Extent and Nature*

Stakeholders (n=13) and women nightlife patrons (WNP) (n=8) discussed their views on the nature and extent of VAWG in Liverpool's nightlife. Most participants feel it is widespread and "getting much worse" (Stakeholder 9, female), with more physical violence towards women being observed.

"I suppose there's lots of ways to define violence in the nightlife as there is violence against women in like every context. I would definitely say maybe in a nightlife context, you see a lot more of, or you think a lot more of people taking advantage of drunk and intoxicated individuals, both through sexual violence and physical violence. I would probably think more of it being perpetrated by a stranger compared to in a non-nightlife context, you'd probably think more of it being someone you know" (WNP 9)

Furthermore, many interview participants felt that women are not just at risk inside nightlife venues (pubs, clubs, etc) but also in the street and nearby homes. One participant described an incident in which they assisted a young woman who had been physically assaulted, robbed, and then thrown out of a nearby apartment by the man she was with "the lad smacked her, stole her phone and basically just threw her out on the street" (Stakeholder 4, male). Women also described negative experiences near city centre nightlife venues which was described as being due to the behaviour of nightlife users (e.g. men harassed women).

"[Walking home is] probably when I feel the most vulnerable on a night out and it's like just, or maybe I'm with one other person. Like groups of men will come and shout things at us and they'll try and come over to talk to you, but you don't really want to talk to them" (WNP 1)

Whilst one male participant stated that neither they themselves nor anyone they knew had ever behaved inappropriately towards women, all female participant's highlighted how prevalent male-to-female violence in nightlife is, with one participant stating, "every single girl I know who goes out regularly, they've had it happen to them; and they've had it happen to them multiple times" (WNP 1). Women described their experiences of violence in nightlife, ranging from being grabbed and touched by men in bars and clubs; verbal abuse "you get cat called when you're walking around in a dress or skirt" (WNP 2); to spiking "her drink was spiked ... she was like lying unconscious on the floor, vomiting and everything" (WNP 2); and physical violence "I've literally been punched in the face for telling a man no" (WNP 3).

#### *Risk Factors for VAWG in Liverpool's Nightlife*

The nightlife environment itself was described as "hostile" towards women, with age identified as a risk factor for experiencing harassment or violence. One participant talked about younger women being aggressively targeted by men, whilst another described men they perceived to be sober, waiting outside venues for vulnerable women to leave. Women who had become separated from their friends were also deemed more vulnerable to harassment or assault, as well as those who were visibly drunk. However, WNPs highlighted that the actions of venue staff contributed to this: "I've seen it a couple of times where women are really drunk and they're on their own and they're being kicked out to go home, saying that 'you're too drunk, can't serve you, sorry'" (WNP 8). The way in which the physical environment could contribute to VAWG at infrastructure-level was also mentioned "things like actual design, highway design, transport design, I feel has never taken into account violence against women and girls or has never been looked at through a gendered lens" (Stakeholder 13, female).

In younger males and females specifically, drug use was also described as a risk factor with door staff describing finding it difficult at times to confiscate substances despite their best efforts "you can search

people three or four times when they come into a venue, and you might still not find it; they'll go to some extents to hide it from you" (Stakeholder 10, male). WNP's also cited age as a contributor to vulnerability in nightlife, describing naivety of younger girls "young girls of 18, 19, 20, you know, haven't got that level of awareness, those are very dangerous situations" (WNP 2), along with witnessing potentially underaged girls being targeted by adult men in venues. There was also recognition from many participants that vulnerabilities were not gendered and men in nightlife environments could also face risks "I also believe that it's young lads that are vulnerable as well, cos I work in the gay quarter as well and I've noticed that quite a lot" (Stakeholder 7, male).

Many participants cited a breakdown in respect as the main cause of VAWG in nightlife. They felt people not only lacked respect for each other but themselves "I think a lot of it's down to respect. People don't respect themselves anymore" (Stakeholder 10, male). The lack of respect from men towards women was attributed to the sexualisation and objectification of women, and participants had observed men having little hesitation in using physical violence against women.

"I think in this present time now lads have got no respect for women and they are used as sex objects, used and abused and the violence side of it, lads have got no hesitation of hitting a girl" (Stakeholder 4, male)

Participants identified several possible causes for this breakdown in respect. The political climate domestically and internationally was suggested as a driver of the shift in social norms, including the erosion of women's reproductive rights in the US, gender politics, and the discourse around Transgender individuals.

"I think we live in a really hard time at the moment because I think we were doing quite a lot for equality generally, whether that be straight, gay, transgendered, female, male, like we were moving towards a point of acceptance and then Trump happened. And, you know, this idea all of a sudden that, well, I think the minute anyone started talking about the Abortion Act in the States, we started beginning to hit a wall again" (Stakeholder 11, female)

Many of the women spoke of a culture of male entitlement and the intersection of online discourse and real-life interactions, "we've still got really like significant online abuse and online harms and how that kind of crosses over into the physical space" (Stakeholder 13, female). Women spoke about seeing social media threads with men openly stating women should expect to face harassment or violence in nightlife and "if women don't want to go through that, they shouldn't go out late at night" (WNP 2) and how these online conversations altered social norms and acceptable behaviours in face-to-face interactions.

"I think it's social norms, expectations, stuff like that. Even on social media, all this red pill theory and all these kinds of Andrew Tate things, all these kinds of things that are just horrendous" (WNP 4)

Women interviewed felt the men they interacted with lacked respect for social and personal boundaries, had expectations of sexual encounters in nightlife, felt entitled to women's attention "almost like they deserve it and like they demand it" (WNP 3), and struggled with rejection and being told 'no'.

Several stakeholders raised concerns around cultural differences in acceptable behaviours towards women, with one participant feeling police had been slow to acknowledge what they felt was an issue with the behaviour of "foreign nationals" (Stakeholder 5, male). Another participant described concerns around "massively predatory behaviours" (Stakeholder 12, male) not being called out "because they don't want to be deemed as being racist" (Stakeholder 12, male). Other participants disagreed with this however:

"I've never noticed it's like a certain group of people who would always come over to me. It's genuinely just random" (WNP 3)

Alcohol use was recognised by many participants as a risk factor in both victimisation and perpetration of VAWG, although not an excuse as many, especially the women who use nightlife spaces felt it gave men more confidence to act on their existing thoughts towards women, rather than cause them.

"It's based on men's view of women ... that just brings it out and the reason why they have these expectations is because of their natural thought and stances on women" (WNP 3)

Whilst vulnerabilities such as alcohol and substance use, being separated from friendship groups and a lack of situational awareness were seen as risk factors for VAWG in nightlife, participants acknowledged it was a willingness of some people to exploit intoxicated and isolate women that was the problem, rather than the vulnerability itself.

"It shouldn't be anyone's fault. I should be able to walk home from a night out without people blaming my friends, without people blaming me, without people blaming everyone but the person who's done this bad thing" (WNP8)

Participants also felt a lack of early education in schools and at home, a culture of 'instant gratification' from dating apps, and more extreme pornography becoming mainstream and blurring the lines of what is acceptable played a part in the complex social picture of VAWG.

### 3.3.2. Theme Two: Impacts of VAWG on Women in Nightlife

#### *What VAWG means to me*

Women who use nightlife in the city gave their interpretation of what VAWG in a nightlife context means to them. They spoke about having boundaries broken in relation to unwanted attention, touching, and sexual comments, and the impact that can have on women and girls "even though it's not actually violent, I'd say it feels quite violent because of how scary it is as a girl" (WNP 1). For these women, VAWG was harassment, non-consensual contact, spiking, physical violence, and sexual threat which they felt stemmed from "men wanting to have control" (WNP 1) and was indicative of "how much hate there is for the female gender...how much people don't necessarily respect women or how they don't see them as human beings" (WNP 5).

Women who use nightlife were asked how VAWG impacted the way they navigated nightlife spaces: "it completely changes the whole night, this kind of fear of violence and harassment" (W9). They talked about having to be hyper-vigilant in a way they felt men in the same spaces would never be; not only having to be aware of their surroundings but considering how their appearance or interactions with people might be interpreted.

"I modify the way I behave so as not to draw attention to myself. I'm always very conscious of where my eyes are going. I'm not kind of looking around because I don't want to make eye contact with people I don't know and draw attention to myself" (WNP 2)

Women described a double standard in nightlife, with men able to drink and enjoy themselves whilst "women have to be much more aware and it takes away the fun, obviously, because you kind of want to unwind and not think about things" (WNP 1). There was also a feeling that their behaviour comes under greater scrutiny after an incident as illustrated in this quote:

"When I went to the police about my thing, they were like, 'you were drinking, weren't you?' And I was like, 'well, yeah, I was out, it was a night out, of course I was'. And it

does seem to be more for women, if something bad happens to you, they look at everything else and look at what *you* did wrong, like, what you did for this to happen” (WNP 8)

When asked about the expectation or acceptance of violence and harassment in nightlife spaces, women felt powerless, like “nothing gets done, we don't have a voice in this” (W8), and whilst they did not accept it should be part of their social experience, they questioned what they could do to change it.

“It's happened to every girl I know who goes out regularly. And like, you know, we have a bit of a laugh about it at this point because it's like, what else can you do? You know, try not to let it ruin your night” (WNP 2)

### *Suggested approaches to preventing and reducing VAWG in nightlife*

WNPs were asked what they would like to see put in place to improve safety and prevent VAWG (prior to any discussion of Operation Halo). Many participants felt reassured by a strong uniformed police presence in nightlife areas and would like to see this increased along with quicker access to medical support:

“The patrolling is really good. I do realise there's hundreds and hundreds of people and maybe four or five patrol officers. So maybe increase the amount a little bit and maybe have easier access to a medic or an ambulance just in case someone collapses as they walk out of the bar” (WNP 1)

Women also suggested making anti-spiking devices mandatory in bars such as “bottle stoppers or those covers that go over the glass, because I've been spiked quite a few times” (W8). Increasing female representation in security teams was also identified as a potential facilitator of change, with one participant stating “I think that it's heavily populated by men. We need more female door staff, absolutely. I think that is the only thing that will change things” (WNP 2). Other suggestions included training for venue staff on how to recognise VAWG, increased education on misogyny and respect for women, and more access to safe spaces for women who feel threatened or uncomfortable on a night out.

### **3.3.3. Theme Three: Operation Halo, VAWG Champion Training, and Halo points**

#### *Views and experiences of VAWG Champion training*

Stakeholders were asked for their views and experiences of the VAWG Champion training offered to people working in security roles in nightlife. The intervention generally was well-received by participants, with one stakeholder describing it as “certainly one of the more proactive approaches that I've seen across the patch that we cover” (Stakeholder 1, male). Stakeholders in security roles were overwhelmingly positive about the experience and training received (echoed in the post-training survey, see Section 3.1.2), with several feeling they learned new skills despite having been in their roles for many years “I've been doing the doors for 13 years and there was stuff that I learnt on the course that I wouldn't even think of” (Stakeholder 8, male). Participants in the training sessions especially valued the new forensics knowledge they gained in relation to preservation of evidence in spiking and sexual assault incidents. An attendee to the training noted that “the crime scene portion of the training, was the bit that people seemed to be most interested in” (Stakeholder 13, female). Sessions which involved input from a broad range of disciplines were felt by stakeholders to be the most valuable, enabling a wider perspective and understanding of the various roles in public safety within nightlife by “actually have them explain why specific things were so important was just so valuable because you're understanding the impact that it has on everyone that's involved in that entire process” (Stakeholder 1, male). Participants also felt the content and delivery was well thought out and useful to them, despite

containing a large amount of information, although another stakeholder felt there was a lack of interactivity in the sessions which may have been a benefit “I felt like this is a two and a half hour training session in a very hot room. A lot of the door staff hadn't been to bed...the delivery probably wasn't ideal for the kind of cohort...There wasn't much interactivity” (Stakeholder 13, female).

There were some concerns raised by stakeholders around the accessibility of the training in terms of the financial and time commitments involved. Many security staff gave up free time to attend training, often after having worked night shifts, with “about eighty-five percent there of their own choice, with no pay, in their own time” (Stakeholder 12, male). One stakeholder recognised the extra responsibility security staff would be taking on, for most without additional pay:

“Our guys are all doing that sort of VAWG Champion piece...because they want to be better at their job...we can't offer them any additional pay for it. So, they're taking on that additional responsibility and they're singling themselves out for contact that is going to be difficult. Ultimately, the only way that that is really going to be something that is taken with the severity that it should be, is to say ‘actually, this is a resourced role’”  
(Stakeholder 1, male)

Another potential concern was raised around the accessibility of the information delivered for those participants with English as a second language, with one stakeholder feeling “it would have been useful for there to be some materials in different languages, if they'd have done a survey prior to that around like what languages, with the original languages of a lot of the door staff there” (Stakeholder 13, female) after they attended a training session and “looked around the room and thought, there's an awful lot of people here whose first language is not English” (Stakeholder 13, female).

We also asked WNPs for their views on the VAWG Champion role. The response was broadly positive; women felt more confident their concerns would be listened to by Champions at venues and said they would feel safer at venues if they noticed security staff wearing VAWG Champion armbands or badges “because I feel like you see that and you'd know that they've been told to do something even in these like lower-level situations” (W9). Although, the majority of WNPs said they had seen little advertising or promotion about Operation Halo or the VAWG Champions prior to being interviewed (interviews took place throughout 7<sup>th</sup> March and 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2026, after the VAWG Champion training [November], and predominantly in the weeks before and just after the official launch). Trust was an issue for some women regarding male door staff, knowing many were undertaking the training through choice helped to reassure them “they wanna do it, yeah? Well, that's good then that it's not something that they're made to do that makes you more inclined to be trusting of it” (WNP 3).

### *Views on Proposed Halo points*

Stakeholders were broadly positive and enthusiastic when asked about the Halo points. Although the sites hadn't been launched at the time stakeholder interviews were carried out, many recognised the value of the sites beyond the VAWG context, as a valuable resource for a NTE with a large tourist and student population,

“Being able to say to people, go over there and press that or make a call from under it and tell them that that's where you are, like that is so valuable and particularly because the nightlife in Liverpool is mostly tourists and people who aren't necessarily understanding whereabouts they are” (Stakeholder 6, male)

The majority said they would use the Halo points as an additional resource in their roles in nightlife and would “direct people to them yeah or probably we'd use them ourselves if we thought somebody needed” (Stakeholder 2, male).

Women using nightlife had a more mixed response, both to the Halo points themselves and their willingness to use them. Whilst some women were positive about having more resources available to ensure their safety and access to support if they needed it "I'd probably run straight to it, yeah. Especially if it's well-lit and it's very easy to see at a distance" (WNP 1), others were less certain they would use the sites. Concerns included unintentional misuse for example if they misread a situation or second-guessed themselves on the level of response a situation warranted, with women worried about being seen to waste police time "is this danger or is this me over thinking, like, trust your gut, yes, but you're not always right and I don't want to call 999 and waste someone's time" (WNP 8). One stakeholder raised the issue of so-called low-level offences such as non-contact sexual violence not being taken seriously by the public or services, impacting on victims ability to recognise or report incidents as they "don't feel like they're necessarily still taken all together very seriously by the public, let alone the services that are responding to them" (Stakeholder 13, female), and felt there were still "cultures within the night-time economy management that clearly probably perpetuate the situation and also perpetuate the reticence to report" (Stakeholder 13, female). However, stakeholders involved in the implementation of the initiative say NTE police officers are being trained on the VAWG Champion role and how to respond to intelligence provided by security staff at venues.

"When officers are deployed into the night-time economy, they have a briefing. So, we're getting a video made, which will be played on every NTE brief and explaining what the VAWG Champions are there for, what the posts are. They've been trained to identify these behaviours and these offences. So, they'll be getting told, 'listen to them, respond, and do what they need to do'" (Stakeholder 12, male)

Women were also concerned about the sites themselves increasing the risks for people using them, marking the areas as a place to find vulnerable people "I think the only thing that would be worrying to me is people seeing them as like a site to find vulnerable women. It's probably the biggest thing that shouts out to me" (WNP 9). This fear was somewhat supported by stakeholders involved in the implementation of Operation Halo, as the sites were designed to allow intelligence gathering on potential perpetrators "as well as it's being a use for a place of safety, it also gets us the ability to intercept them, make them stand out more than what they would" (Stakeholder 12, male). Despite the connectivity of the Halo points to 999 operators and the oversight of CityWatch cameras, several women were still concerned about the risks of using the sites and how immediate any support would be "even if there's a monitoring situation, it only takes a few seconds for something to happen" (WNP 9).

### 3.3.4. Theme Four: Emerging Outcomes

#### *VAWG Champions*

Stakeholders described their increased awareness of VAWG and vulnerable people in nightlife, particularly in their ability to recognise 'low-level' incidences such as "brushing past people, the way people stalk people, we've been identifying it more, especially in big venues" (Stakeholder 9, female), which may have been dismissed previously. Alongside an increased confidence and willingness to intervene in incidents; "before the Halo thing it was sort of like we can't get involved but now, I'm glad we do" (Stakeholder 4, male). One stakeholder reported an initial increase in the number of arrests for VAWG related offences.

"The VAWG Champions have led to a good number of arrests now. So, that's working. We're getting them now" (Stakeholder 12, male)

Stakeholders from venue security teams described implementing the VAWG Champion training in situations involving harassment, violence, and sexual assault, as well as recognising vulnerabilities in groups other than women and girls "we've caught two guys who committed sexual assaults on younger

lads, and we got them arrested" (Stakeholder 4, male), with the increased awareness and willingness to intervene reflected in incident reports from door staff at venues.

"I've suddenly seen this massive spike over Merseyside in these incidents being documented. So, from an awareness perspective, we're certainly getting there because people are recognising those incidents for what they are and they're working to act on them" (Stakeholder 1, male)

Stakeholders described changes to their working practices such as questioning relationships between venue patrons as they are queuing or entering premises if they felt something was 'off'; to ensuring the safety of lone women in venues by charging phones and helping with taxis. Many stakeholders who had participated in VAWG Champion training took pride in the role and the new knowledge it had given them.

"I feel a little bit ashamed to say this but beforehand, before the Halo, I was sending young girls on their way, like 'get home', and stuff like that. When we done the course, put a different aspect on it, a different light, so now I do feel responsible for these young girls and the women when they're on their own, when they are very vulnerable" (Stakeholder 4, male)

### *Limitations of the Intervention*

There were several barriers to implementation and delivery identified by a variety of stakeholders. The issue of men's involvement in women's safety was a recurring theme across all participant groups. The women interviewed, viewed men not only as a threat to their safety, but also lacking the lived experience that would help them truly understand what it meant to be a woman in nightlife spaces.

"I think one of the issues with men is that although some of them may be decent fellows who want to try and help. Because men don't have the lived experience as women do, you know, they're predators and we're prey, so they don't understand risk the same way a woman does. And it's not necessarily that they're bad people, they just don't have that experience" (WNP 2)

Furthermore, some WNPs did not feel that men are appropriately positioned to support women who experience violence as demonstrated in the quote below of one WNPs own personal experience:

"I put my voice out there. I spoke to everyone I could think of trying to do something about what happened to me because I'm aware this is happening to a lot of other people and so many women's lives are being ruined ... It's something that needs to be spoken about and I think it should be okay for people to get a bit angry, because it is infuriating. I mean, any time we try and speak up about it, they're like, 'okay, calm down'. No! I'm furious" (WNP 8)

Conversely, one stakeholder suggested recognising men as a resource for behaviour change and allyship in nightlife:

"You can't have a culture of divide, because I don't think that's conducive to ever moving forward, rather than having women speaking for women, why is it so wrong to have men speaking for women? It's not undermining them. If they're a problem and you've got men showing that it's not right, other men will follow" (Stakeholder 12, male)

Public awareness of the intervention was felt to be low at the time of interviews; certainly, very few of the WNPs had heard of Operation Halo before their interview. This was supported by stakeholders in security reporting little knowledge from members of the public they spoke to about the intervention.

"It's kind of sad that like a lot of young women are surprised that there's doormen who have done these courses, they've not heard about it" (Stakeholder 6, male)

The logistical aspect of the VAWG Champion training was felt to be a barrier for some stakeholders, especially around securing buy-in from a large number of venues, staff, and providers.

"It's difficult to get people together particularly when you're working across a breadth of different clients, everyone to buy into that and pay for the training" (Stakeholder 1, male)

### 3.3.5. Theme Five: The Future of the Intervention

Stakeholders were asked how the intervention might continue in the future. There was recognition that "young lads that are vulnerable as well, cos I work in the gay quarter, and I've noticed that quite a lot" (Stakeholder 7, male), and the scope of the intervention and training could be broadened to take into account other potentially vulnerable groups such as students of all genders and identities. Some participants were concerned the intervention would not be able to sufficiently alter attitudes towards women to lead to significant change.

"I don't think VAWG training is actually going to prevent occurrence because there's so many things that feed into the who's and why's of the way that people behave when they're on a night out" (Stakeholder 1, male)

Education was widely felt to be the answer to this from participants across all groups involved in interviews. Behaviour change would only come from changing social norms and expectations and that would start at a far earlier age than entering nightlife for the first time "I don't think it starts with the nightlife. I think it starts with kind of the education before that" (WNP 3). Another stakeholder also believed that education could tackle the root cause of the issue.

"I think everything's key is education and we can do whatever we want within night-time economies to make it a safer environment. But if we don't address the source of the problem early on and get them foundations put in place, we can't arrest our way out of a problem" (Stakeholder 12, male)

Many participants recognised the value of expanding the intervention to nightlife areas outside of the city centre footprint. As many surrounding areas have their own night-time economy, it made sense to participants to roll the intervention out to outlying areas and smaller towns and high streets which often experienced the same issues as city centre locations but with fewer resources available for prevention or disruption activity.

"Other neighbourhood policing that have a burgeoning night-time economy in their space, need to then learn from that and be able to take an operation that's used in city centre to do the same and have similar resources" (Stakeholder 13, female)

Stakeholders felt Operation Halo could have benefits outside of the Liverpool City Region, with one participant proclaiming, "I think any city that doesn't do it, I think they're daft you know, you can have a small town, a big city, it's there, it's helpful" (Stakeholder 10, male). Another stakeholder felt Operation Halo could be an answer to the often-fragmented approach taken to VAWG nationally, with different areas hosting their own interventions, often leaving visitors unaware of support when they need it.

"Hopefully it'll go across the city and across the country. I don't see why it shouldn't. I think it could be the answer to give a uniformed approach to what we do, have that

recognition. So, it's anyone from anywhere will know what it is and what help they can get" (Stakeholder 12, male)

The VAWG Champion training was felt to be widely beneficial to "anyone who's in any kind of safeguarding role" (Stakeholder 6, male), and should be rolled out to other sectors such as retail, as VAWG "doesn't just happen of a night, does it?" (Stakeholder 3, male), with another participant highlighting the wider benefits of VAWG interventions for women beyond nightlife.

"I think it's so beneficial to everyone it really is. And it just gives women that ease, I can go for a jog in the park, I can walk to my mates, it hasn't got to be nightlife specific, it can be 'women's safety' specific" (Stakeholder 8, male)

In relation to the delivery of the training, stakeholders had several suggestions going forward. There were suggestions to move delivery online to reduce the time and financial costs to participants and employers; and for the training to be continually updated with ongoing support for VAWG Champions.

"It's got to be a sustained programme of training and, you know, refresher training and it's got to continually mean something to the people that are being trained, hasn't it?" (Stakeholder 13, female)

## 4. Learning from the Evaluation

### 4.1. Summary

Overall, the evaluation indicates that VAWG in nightlife is widespread with a noticeable perceived increase in physical violence towards women. VAWG in nightlife was considered as being harassment, non-consensual contact, spiking, physical violence, and sexual threat. It was also widely discussed that VAWG incidents were not only observed inside nightlife venues, but also in the street and nearby homes within and/or surrounding the NTE. Furthermore, it was noted that risk for violence in nightlife is not gendered and that men in nightlife environments are also vulnerable to violent incidences. A number of risk factors for VAWG were highlighted such as age (youthful naivety); physical environment and infrastructure in the NTE; alcohol and drug use leading to women being separated from friendship groups or a lack of situational awareness; a lack of respect for women resulting from political narratives and social media discourse around things like women's reproductive rights in the US and gender politics; and men's expectations of sexual encounters in nightlife. Quantitative findings demonstrated that VAWG Champions are now less likely to agree that unwanted sexual advances are a normal part of a night and are more likely to agree that they can do something to prevent VAWG incidents following their VAWG Champion training. Ways to reduce VAWG in nightlife were discussed with WNPs noting they would feel safer with a strong presence of uniformed police in the NTE, quicker access to medical support, mandatory anti-spiking devices on glasses in bars and clubs, and more access to safe spaces for women who feel threatened or uncomfortable.

The VAWG Champion training was found to be very positive in both the pre- and post-surveys and interviews. Quantitative analyses found that the training was associated with significant positive improvements in some attitudinal outcomes, particularly related to the normalisation of attitudes and perceptions of sexual violence in nightlife generally and responding to sexual violence. Qualitative findings complemented these findings further wherein stakeholders in security roles were overwhelmingly positive about the experience and training received and several reported learning new skills, and that the content and delivery was well thought out and useful to their role. There were some significant negative changes in confidence to intervene and further qualitative research might be required in any future evaluation to explore the reasons for this.

VAWG Champions reported using new learnings from the training to support vulnerable individuals at their nightlife venue and surrounding area. There were some discussions in the interviews however, that there was a lack of interactivity in the training sessions which could be improved given the length of time and volume of information being delivered. Some participants noted that accessibility of the training was difficult in terms of financial and time constraints, as well as language barrier for those trainees with English as a second language. Additionally, it was highlighted across all participant groups that there should be more women involved in the development and delivery of the intervention as men do not have the same lived experience as women.

There was positive anticipation for the Halo points by stakeholders and how they will complement the VAWG Champions work and bring about safer nightlife environments for vulnerable individuals specifically WNPs. However, WNPs did not feel so positive, with some worrying it would be a place for others to find vulnerable women who were using the site. Furthermore, some WNPs were concerned that support would not be immediate enough to have any impact on their situation. On the other hand, WNPs did allude to feeling safer knowing that VAWG Champions would be there to support them while also understanding their concerns. Seeing VAWG Champion badges on door staff/security was also considered a positive support. It was noted though by many participants that awareness of the VAWG Champion role and Halo points was limited.

## 4.2. Recommendations

A number of recommendations have been developed from the findings of this evaluation.

### *Training*

- Training could be delivered online or hybrid to increase dose and reach of number of VAWG Champions trained.
- Training should be accessible to all those whose first language is not English.

### *Increasing Awareness*

- Going forward it is critical to ensure all VAWG Champions are wearing their badge to increase visibility, engaging with the intervention accordingly, and endeavouring to increase awareness of the VAWG Champion role.
- Other ways to increase awareness of the intervention should be considered, such as flyers in bars and clubs and in other NTE venues as well as a social media campaign or dedicated website.
- Staff in nightlife, particularly bar staff and managers, but also those in the NTE who are open at night (e.g. retail, casinos) should also be trained as VAWG Champions which would also increase reach and dose.

### *Future Developments & Research*

- Going forward there should be consultation with women in nightlife about what Operation Halo and the VAWG training could incorporate and improve upon.
- Due to there being significant negative changes in VAWG Champions confidence to intervene, future evaluations should qualitatively explore the reasons for this.
- Consideration for the expansion of the intervention to areas outside of the city centre that have a NTE is warranted, however further implementation is needed to understand the use of the Halo points, and sustainability of VAWG Champions.
- Given the potential for VAWG to occur on the street and nearby residential areas, other initiatives already in place to help prevent and reduce VAWG in Liverpool NTE should be aware of and offered VAWG Champion training to increase reach.
- Operation Halo needs to be implemented in collaboration with other VAWG initiatives across the city (e.g. other bar staff training; awareness raising campaigns; police operations), to ensure consistent and complementary whole-system approach to preventing VAWG.

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