



Institute For
Addressing
Strangulation

“There is no safe way to strangle”

Recognising the Risk

Transforming the UK's understanding and response
to strangulation

Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS)

2022 – 2026

FUNDED BY



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DELIVERED WITH



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Strangulation is a dangerous form of abuse that can leave victims with devastating and long-lasting physical and psychological harm. It is also a significant warning sign of escalating violence and must always be treated with the seriousness it deserves.

I want to thank the Institute for Addressing Strangulation for its contribution to improving our understanding of non-fatal strangulation. This report highlights the real difference the organisation has made in improving responses across policing, healthcare and the criminal justice system, to make sure victims get the support they deserve.

We are treating violence against women and girls as a national emergency and fighting relentlessly to halve it over the next decade.

Natalie Fleet

Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls

Foreword

If not IFAS, who?

In June 2022 strangulation and suffocation were introduced as standalone offences in the Domestic Abuse Act (2021). However, legislation alone is not enough, real change happens when knowledge is embedded into practice. IFAS has been instrumental in delivering that change, building the evidence base on the prevalence of strangulation in the UK, and bringing national attention to this specific form of violent behaviour, which is too often hidden, minimised, or misunderstood.

Our survivor group has played a vital role in shaping our training and resources, ensuring that real experiences are reflected in how we support professionals to respond to strangulation with greater understanding, empathy, and urgency.

There is much more to do, looking ahead we will be focusing on working across government departments, statutory organisations, and support services to continue to scale what works, refine what can be improved, and remain responsive to the evolving nature of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), men and boys and the normalisation of strangulation in relationships.



Professor Cath White

Medical Director



Bernie Ryan OBE

Chief Executive Officer

Professor Cath White, OBE

MEDICAL DIRECTOR, IFAS

I had the initial idea for having a UK institute specifically concentrating on strangulation following a 2016 visit to Texas attending a training course run by the American Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention. Inspired, I came away with two objectives/dreams: 1. Change the law on strangulation, 2. Establish a UK Institute. I was lucky enough to be able to join forces with some amazing people who shared the vision. Julia Drown was pivotal in this process, leading an informal group of us who coalesced to seek change, including Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nogah Offer, Centre for Women's Justice, Helen Bichard, a neuropsychologist in North Wales, and the late Baroness Helen Newlove to name a few. I will be forever grateful for their hard work. Initially, the focus was on changing the law, and this came to pass on 7 June 2022 with the enactment of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Keen that the new law wouldn't gather dust on a shelf but would be implemented with maximum impact, the group continued to meet. In 2022 the Home Office announced a funding opportunity for Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) related projects, an opportunity that we seized with both hands. Again, with much work by the indefatigable Julia Drown, we put together a bid which proved successful, leading to the establishment of the Institute for Addressing Strangulation in October 2022. A testament to the power of teamwork and a shared vision.

Bernie Ryan, OBE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, IFAS

As CEO of IFAS, I am proud to present our four-year impact report, showcasing the national impact of our work and the progress made over the last four years to improve understanding, awareness and responses to non-fatal strangulation.

In that time, we have advanced the UK's understanding of strangulation, reshaped professional practice and improved the response to victims and survivors. We have conducted research, published our findings, developed evidence-based resources, and, together with our partners, SafeLives delivered specialist training to over 22,000 frontline professionals. We have also contributed to policy change. Crucially, survivors have strengthened our work.

This is only the beginning. As our understanding of strangulation has developed, so too has the urgency of preventing strangulation as a form of violent behaviour and continuing efforts to improve the response.

This report reflects the commitment of the team at IFAS, our partners and the support of people and organisations across the UK and abroad who have welcomed and valued our work. That collaboration has made this progress possible.

Four years of national impact

22,000+

frontline professionals
trained since 2022

44,426

offences recorded in
England & Wales (2024–
2025)

87%

rise in recorded offences
since the standalone offence
began

300+

media articles analysed to help shape
responsible reporting

4

national conferences delivered since IFAS was
established

Highlights

LEGISLATURE

The work of Professor Cath White and colleagues notably contributed to the development of the legislation, and it was the first major impact of the experts who established IFAS, supporting the creation of legislation defining the distinct criminal offence of strangulation in England and Wales. IFAS engaged the judiciary and police in Northern Ireland Assembly in the development of similar legislation and with legislators and campaigners in the Scottish Parliament in their debate about the potential introduction of Scottish law.

IMPACT

Since the legislation was introduced, 44,426 strangulation offences were recorded in England and Wales between June 2024 and June 2025, up 13% from the previous year, and 87% since the law was introduced. More than four in five police forces reported such an increase, with the rise seen across all regions.

RECOGNITION

Non-fatal strangulation is recognised as a specific criminal offence in England & Wales and Northern Ireland.

“There is No Safe Way to Strangle”

DEFINITION

‘Strangulation’: external pressure to the neck caused by a hand or hands, any other body part, or an object (such as a belt or scarf) in a way that restricts the airway and/or blood vessels.

This report details the rapid and significant impact already achieved by the Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS) over its brief period of existence to date since October 2022, in changing and shaping the national understanding and response to strangulation, through:

- Ensuring the lived experience of victims and survivors is at the heart of everything we do
- National leadership
- Influencing and developing policy and strategy
- Training and capacity building
- Undertaking research with published results
- Analysing the UK media response to strangulation and influencing it to change perspectives on strangulation

The Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS) is a pioneering national organisation dedicated to tackling one of the most dangerous and frequently misunderstood forms of violence used in domestic abuse and wider Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), and men and boys. This form of violence is being increasingly normalised in interpersonal behaviour.

Non-fatal strangulation is one of the strongest predictors of future domestic homicide, yet historically it has been under recognised, under reported, and poorly understood across the whole medico-legal system and the public domain.

This small organisation came about following the introduction of strangulation as a standalone offence in the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and the efforts of a group of experts who advocated for that change and sought Home Office funding to support the establishment of IFAS. Without that change in the law and the subsequent change in practice across multiple professions and agencies driven by IFAS, strangulation would continue to be an unreported and unpunished act of violence, primarily against women and girls.

With Home Office funding IFAS was established to create wide understanding of strangulation in the UK, build an evidence base for improving the response to victims/survivors through publication of reports, creation of resources for professionals and survivors and, in conjunction with our partners SafeLives, deliver training to frontline professionals and support services to improve the response and ultimately save lives.

The impact of this work is not always immediate. Professionals need to be helped to understand the dynamics of domestic abuse and sexual violence as well as to recognise the signs of non-fatal strangulation. Survivors can then be responded to appropriately, risks identified sooner, care and safety interventions delivered in a more robust and timely manner and perpetrators are held to account more effectively. Our work ensures the entire system becomes safer.

Training the professionals who sit at the heart of the criminal justice system, healthcare, and specialist support services is not a quick fix. It takes time to embed new knowledge, build confidence and then for practice to shift in ways that consistently improve outcomes for victims and survivors.

This is why the work of IFAS matters. Legislation alone cannot deliver change. It is the long-term investment in training, clinical understanding, and survivor-informed practice that turns policy into action. This is where the contribution of IFAS has been instrumental. This is why we believe our work must continue to drive change, protecting people from harm and challenging the normalisation of strangulation. To do this requires long-term investment in IFAS.

There is no safe way to strangle

The Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS) was established in October 2022, following the introduction of new legislation on strangulation and suffocation as a stand-alone offence. IFAS leads on guiding professionals through the best practice in supporting victims/survivors of strangulation through a medical and forensic lens.

Prior to this, strangulation and suffocation did not have the focus required given the dangers of the offence and tended either to be not charged at all or charged as a generic offence such as common assault, or sometimes actual bodily harm. By recognising strangulation as a standalone offence highlights the severity of strangulation and the deep impact it may have on the victim/ survivor.

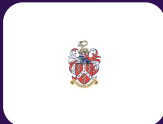
The Institute aims to raise awareness of strangulation and the associated risks, conduct research, develop resources, and to train professionals in responding to and supporting victims/survivors of these assaults.

Funded by the Home Office, IFAS sits within the [Faculty of Forensic & Legal Medicine](#) (FFLM). The FFLM is a registered charity set up to develop and maintain the highest possible standards of competence and professional integrity in forensic and legal medicine.

IFAS is unique within the United Kingdom and is the country's centre for expertise on the forensic medical aspects of non-fatal strangulation (NFS). Drawing together specialist knowledge in forensic medicine, clinical practice, and trauma-informed care, IFAS develops guidance to promote a holistic approach to the assessment, treatment, and management of NFS. Alongside this, IFAS provides survivor resources, informed by lived experience and, in partnership with SafeLives, delivers evidence-based training to support frontline professionals in responding effectively to NFS.

IFAS is one of a small number of international centres working on the forensic medical aspects of non-fatal strangulation and has built a substantial and growing body of research in this area since its inception. This research has helped shape a fast-developing field, informing guidance, training and practice both nationally and internationally, and contributing to significant progress in how strangulation is understood, identified and addressed across health, criminal justice and safeguarding sectors.

HOSTED BY



Funded by the Home Office, IFAS sits within the **Faculty of Forensic & Legal Medicine (FFLM)** — a registered charity established to develop and maintain the highest possible standards of competence and professional integrity in forensic and legal medicine.

KEY DELIVERY PARTNERS



IFAS delivers its national training programme in partnership with **SafeLives**, and advances its research through a research partnership with **Bangor University**.

Timeline of Impact

From establishing national leadership to influencing national debate.

2022

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2022

The Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS) is established with Home Office funding following the introduction of the standalone offence of strangulation and suffocation in England and Wales.

Establishing national leadership — for the first time, the UK has a national organisation dedicated specifically to addressing strangulation.

KEY PRIORITIES

- Building the UK evidence base
- Supporting implementation of the new offence
- Raising professional awareness
- Coordinating cross-system expertise

Strengthening Professional Capability

In partnership with SafeLives, IFAS launches a national training programme and publishes victim information leaflets. Specialist training reaches professionals across:

- Policing, Prosecutors (CPS), and Probation
- Safeguarding services
- Healthcare
- Specialist support services

REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS

- [UK Prevalence of strangulation and suffocation](#)
- [What is IFAS and what are its aims - Video](#)
- [Guidance on NFS in physical and sexual assault](#)
- [ONS Data on Non-Fatal Strangulation \(NFS\) and Suffocation June- Dec 2022](#)
- [Strangulation and Suffocation ONS Data Report 2022](#)
- [What is strangulation - Video](#)
- [How much pressure is required to cause strangulation? - Video](#)
- [What are the immediate symptoms of strangulation- Video](#)
- [Report into Strangulation, Asphyxiation and Smothering Homicides in England and Wales from 2011-2021](#)

IMPACT Frontline professionals are better equipped to recognise strangulation risk and respond effectively.

IFAS publishes first set of clinical guidelines and major research outputs examining strangulation in the UK, including:

- Domestic Homicide Review analysis
- National police data analysis
- Survivor experience research

REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS

- [An analysis of Domestic Homicide Reviews with Fatal Suffocation and Smothering- Report 1](#)
- [An analysis of Domestic Homicide Reviews with a history of Non-Fatal Strangulation - Report 2](#)
- [An Analysis of Domestic Homicide Reviews with Fatal Strangulation - Report 3](#)
- [A Comparative Analysis of 150 Domestic Homicide Reviews](#)
- [Strangulation and Suffocation Offences Police Data Report 2024](#)
- [Killed by Strangulation ONS Data year ending March 2023](#)
- [VKPP Year 3 Report - IFAS Response](#)
- [Prosecuting and Sentencing of Strangulation and Suffocation Offences Report 2024](#)
- [Strangulation Data Capture Guidance](#)
- [Experiences of Strangulation in the Sex Industry](#)
- [Report on Strangulation During Sex- Pilot Survey](#)

RESOURCES PUBLISHED

- [Guidelines for the Clinical Management of Non-Fatal Strangulation in Acute and Emergency Care Services](#)
- [Guidance for the Police Management of Strangulation](#)
- [Non-Fatal Strangulation Proforma \(IFAS July 2024\)](#)
- [Strangulation and 'Choking' Factsheet](#)
- [FiLiA Podcast in association with IFAS: Tackling Strangulation - Working Together to Save Lives](#)

IMPACT This research strengthens recognition of strangulation as a marker of lethal violence. The guidance for clinicians in acute and emergency care services guides the clinical management of NFS in adults and adolescents.

IFAS research examining its prevalence, existence in different ages and genders, and the cultural normalisation of strangulation generates national media coverage and policy discussion.

REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS

- [Femicide Census March 2025 – IFAS Response](#)
- [Reclaiming My Voice: A Lived Experience of Strangulation](#)
- [IFAS responds to the VKPP Domestic Homicide and Suspected Victim Suicide Report; Information Leaflets for Victims of Strangulation](#)
- [UK Prevalence of Strangulation](#)
- [Strangulation in the UK Media](#)
- [Police Data on Strangulation and Suffocation Offences](#)
- [Three Years of Strangulation and Suffocation as a Standalone Offence- Press Release](#)
- [IFAS response to the Government's Announcement to Criminalise the Depiction of Strangulation in Pornography](#)
- [Confidentiality and Information Sharing When Dealing with Adult Struggling Patients](#)
- [You Look Fine – A Qualitative Study Exploring the Impact of Strangulation](#)
- [Strangulation During Sex](#)

RESOURCES PUBLISHED

- [Guidelines for the Clinical Management of Non-Fatal Strangulation in Acute and Emergency Care Services- Updated](#)
- [Podcast: How Should We Talk About Strangulation to Young People?](#)

IMPACT

- Raises public awareness of strangulation risks
- Challenge harmful myths and language
- Informs national conversations about violence against women and girls

REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS

- [Strangulation and Suffocation Offences Police Data 2025 \(Year 3\) Report 1: An analysis of police report data](#): View the report
- Editorial written in collaboration with Australian colleagues and published in the BMJ, Feb 2026 "Harmful effects of sexual choking" BMJ 2026;392:s275 [Read the editorial](#) — Published February 2026
- Skin colour paper highlighting the impact of skin colour on injury detection in sexual assault and including NFS.
- Strangulation and Suffocation Offences: June '24-June '25 (Year 3) Report 2: Comparing Police Report Data [Read the report](#) — Published April 2026
- Published the Bangor University research report through the IFAS-Bangor University research partnership.
- Development of Guidelines for the Clinical Management of Paediatric (Under 16) Strangulation (publication pending)
- Published article in the IOPC Lessons Learned publication.

RESOURCES PUBLISHED

- Non-fatal strangulation pro forma published: [View the pro forma](#)
- 3 Podcast episodes published:
- 'Podcast: Part 1 Strangulations and Domestic Abuse': [Watch on YouTube](#) published in January 2026
- 'Podcast: Part 2 Strangulation and Domestic Abuse': [Watch on YouTube](#) published in February 2026
- 'Podcast: How survivors shape research at IFAS' [Watch on YouTube](#) published in April 2026
- Guest Blog Post [Read the guest blog](#) published March 2026

Events and Training

In January

- Specialised training to North Wales police, local authorities, healthcare and specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence services. (January – April 2026)
- Teenage Relationship Abuse working group
- ON IT Conference in Manchester

In February

- Manchester University Criminology Society
- CPD training session for Cygnet Health
- Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust as part of their Monthly bitesize learning sessions

In March

- Criminology Lecture at the University of Manchester
- South Yorkshire Sexual Violence Conference 2026 in Rotherham
- Northamptonshire Health Online Domestic Abuse Conference
- UK acquired brain injury forum at Eccles Town Hall
- Multiagency NFS Strategic Development Day in North Wales

In April

- Hodsman Legacy Lecture 2026 Calgary, Canada

May 2026

- Webinar — STADA Crossig Pathways – Integrating Best Practice within Health and Domestic Abuse
- Webinar for the Singapore Judicial College — Medical Evidence in Sexual Offences; Hull County Council Domestic Abuse Team: Domestic Abuse Webinar — When Breath and Hope are Taken
- CPS National Advocacy Conference 2026 in London
- Ending VAWG, A Whole System Approach Public Policy Exchange in London

IMPACT IN NUMBERS

The scale of the change

22,000+

frontline professionals trained since 2022, with SafeLives

24,446

offences prosecuted by the CPS since the offence was introduced

~30

cases in which Professor Cath White has provided expert evidence since Jan 2023

4,924

professionals completed the NFS e-Learning module in 2025-26; 99% reported increased knowledge

52%

of 16-25-year-olds report having been strangled or suffocated (2025 prevalence report)

15,000+

reads of the survivor blog "Why I Can't Escape Non-Fatal Strangulation"

Survivor voice at the heart of our work

Lived experience informs research, training, resources and policy advocacy.

Survivor voice sits at the heart of how IFAS works. Since our establishment in October 2022, we have built our approach to survivor engagement on the principles of SafeLives' Authentic Voice programme – a framework developed by survivors themselves to ensure lived experience is embedded meaningfully, not symbolically, into the work of organisations like ours. Our Survivor Liaison Lead works individually with survivors to understand how and whether they wish to contribute, through research, training materials, resource development or shaping IFAS's wider priorities, always at a pace and in a form the survivor chooses.

We want to enhance the lives of other victims/survivors through validating and acknowledging the severity of strangulation and by improving societal and professional responses to disclosures of strangulation.

WORK INFORMED BY THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SURVIVORS

- Consultation and development of awareness materials (in seven languages)
- Creation of training resources
- Sitting on recruitment panels
- Participation in survivor group meetings
- Participation in qualitative research
- Creation of blog posts
- Participation in podcasts
- Participation in analysis reports on strangulation in UK media
- Speaking at IFAS's annual conference
- Contributing to IFAS website development

"But knowing my story is so important on its own, as well as others that we can push forward and make sure that we can make changes for our children, for our children's children, and all the other women that we don't know but could come into contact with that perpetrator later down the line"

Survivor – [Reclaiming My Voice write-up, March 2025](#)

Our Survivor Group has met regularly since 2023, evolving in focus and membership over time. What has remained constant is the principle that survivors lead the agenda. In January 2024, a member of our Survivor Group raised concerns about the cultural normalisation of strangulation in popular music and social media, identifying a specific trend trivialising choking in an intimate context. That conversation directly shaped Aicha's blog, "Why I Can't Escape Non-Fatal Strangulation," published later that year — a piece that has since been read more than 15,000 times. It is a clear, traceable example of survivor insight translating directly into public-facing impact.

Later that year, the group's discussions led to the development of the Reclaiming My Voice project — built around six themes survivors identified as central to their experience: Trust, Championing a Cause That Is Personal to Me, Reclaiming My Voice, Rejecting Shame, What Good Support Looks Like, and The Future. Survivors also contributed directly to national policy work during this period, including the Sentencing Council's review of strangulation sentencing guidelines, which came into force in January 2025.

Survivors have also played a direct role in shaping how IFAS trains the professionals who respond to strangulation. They have co-designed materials for non-fatal strangulation training sessions and clinical webinars — contributing personal experiences for use as case studies, advising on session content and reviewing draft materials. This ensures that training genuinely reflects survivor perspectives, helping practitioners prioritise lessons learned from lived experience when responding to strangulation in their roles.

By the end of 2024, survivor involvement had grown to include shaping IFAS's media response and digital presence — survivors were consulted on the organisation's move into new platforms and on responding to media interest in IFAS's work. Survivors have also contributed directly to podcast discussions, including Strangulation in the UK Media and How Survivors Shape Research at IFAS, extending their voice into IFAS's wider public-facing content. Throughout 2025 and into 2026, this model has continued to mature under new leadership, with a renewed focus on group agreements, clear boundaries and ensuring survivors shape their own involvement in major moments such as the IFAS Conference 2026.

Survivor involvement also directly informs the resources IFAS produces. Our information leaflet for victims of strangulation, first published in 2023 and most recently updated in April 2026, has been developed and refined with survivor input throughout, reflecting our commitment to this as an ongoing, living practice rather than a one-off consultation.

Survivors are also invited to take part in interview panels for the recruitment of new IFAS staff — ensuring that lived experience directly informs the selection of colleagues who bring sensitivity and awareness of the issues that matter most to the survivor community. This reflects a wider principle at IFAS: survivor involvement is not confined to research or storytelling, but extends into how the organisation itself is built and staffed.

This work continues to evolve. As our understanding deepens and the needs of the survivor community we work alongside change, we remain committed to strengthening survivor involvement as a foundational part of everything IFAS does.

“I’m never going to stop saying I’m a victim of strangulation because I am and I need to tell that story, even if that story has been, I didn’t get the justice. But let me tell you about, you know, everything else that I went through as a victim because other people. I want them to know it’s not even about the verdict. The verdict will come and go. It’s actually about your own healing journey and how you’re going to, you’re going to survive and thrive afterwards.”

Survivor — [You Look Fine Project Report](#) (IFAS, November 2025)

LIVED EXPERIENCE PROJECTS

Turning experience into change

Reclaiming My Voice

Through discussions with the survivor group, we developed a project that aimed specifically to demonstrate and highlight their contribution and collaborations with IFAS, including what that involvement has meant to them on a personal and collective level.

‘[Reclaiming My Voice](#)’ represented both a physical and metaphorical representation of sharing their lived experience of strangulation. The project was designed to exhibit the value of lived experience at IFAS and the need for continued research and development to support victims/survivors and contribute to awareness and prevention strategies on strangulation in the UK.

[Read the full Reclaiming My Voice report \(PDF\).](#)

You Look Fine

The aim of the [You Look Fine](#) project was to demonstrate the lived experience of the impact of strangulation on psychological wellbeing and memory, recognising the ways in which survivors survive and continue to thrive. These themes had been raised by survivors through Lived Experience Group meetings with IFAS staff. Six survivors were recruited from the IFAS group and semi-structured interviews were conducted in the summer of 2025.

Thematic and narrative analysis outlined two sections that came through strongly: 'Surviving' – the intensely shameful, chaotic and distressing aftermath and its detrimental impact across many aspects of a survivor's life – and 'Thriving', which explores what it means to move beyond surviving, including navigating formal interventions and individually constructed ways of making life better.



WATCH Reclaiming My Voice — [watch on YouTube](#)

Findings from this research directly shaped the advice and survivor voice included in IFAS's information leaflet for victims of strangulation, ensuring research insight translates into practical, accessible support.

The UK's leading authority on strangulation

Before 2022, there was no organisation dedicated specifically to addressing strangulation in the UK. In less than four years, IFAS has become the UK's leading authority on strangulation, bridging the gap between healthcare, criminal justice, and government policy.

Since our launch, we have transformed the national response to strangulation at both strategic and operational levels, including standardising clinical and police guidelines, ensuring victims receive the same high-quality care and investigation regardless of where they are in the country.

- We have led ground-breaking research through approximately 20 separate reports into emerging trends, such as the dangerous normalisation of “choking” during sex among young adults. [View our resources library](#)
- We have developed national data guidance on managing data on strangulation. [View the guidance](#)
- We have integrated survivor perspectives to ensure national strategies, including the government's mission to halve Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), are rooted in both medical evidence and lived experience.
- Together with our partners, SafeLives, we have trained more than 22,000 frontline professionals, shifting the focus from looking for external bruises to understanding the invisible, high-lethality risks like strokes and brain injury.
- We have changed the way strangulation is reported in UK media.

A system-wide change

Criminal Justice

Improved identification, investigation and prosecution of strangulation offences.

Health

Stronger clinical recognition, management and referral pathways.

Safeguarding

Earlier identification of high-risk cases.

Policy

Evidence informing national policy and strategy and public debate.

Underpinned by evidence-informed practice, consistent guidance, evidence-based training that reaches frontline professionals and services, and survivor voice shaping responses.

Our network of key partners

We work with an extensive network of partners to ensure our insights, resources, and recommendations shape practice across the entire system, including:

- Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)
- NHS England
- National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) / National Centre for Violence Against Women and Public Protection (NCVPP)
- Probation Service
- Commissioners for Domestic Abuse, Victims, and Children's Commissioners
- Academics
- Judiciary
- Department of Health and Social Care
- Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC)
- Local Authorities
- Specialist Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence services
- Educators

To support this work, IFAS has developed and contributed to a series of interconnected stakeholder groups that provide oversight, challenge, and strategic direction. These groups draw on a broad spectrum of expertise — professional, academic, and lived experience — ensuring that our work remains evidence-based, relevant, and responsive to emerging trends. The interconnectivity between these groups ensures that insights flow across disciplines, creating a cohesive, informed approach to addressing strangulation.

Why national leadership matters

Strangulation is a critical warning sign of escalating violence.

Without coordinated national leadership

- ✗ professional understanding of risks will remain inconsistent
- ✗ research and evidence development may stall
- ✗ opportunities to prevent escalation may be missed, resulting in further harm and loss of lives

Through national leadership, IFAS has

- ✓ improved professional awareness of strangulation risk
- ✓ strengthened implementation of the standalone offence
- ✓ enhanced the response to victims and survivors
- ✓ supported consistent clinical and investigative practice
- ✓ built a UK evidence base
- ✓ embedded survivor-informed approaches
- ✓ instigated discussion about the normalisation of strangulation during sex and how to navigate education and safety messages in this context

Our national leadership promotes the recognition of strangulation so that it can be understood and acted upon consistently across the UK.

Working with the criminal justice system, end to end

Police, Prosecution, Judiciary, Probation and Legislature

IFAS works with agencies and professions at every step in the Criminal Justice System, providing evidence, testimony, training, and guidance. End to end coverage is important to ensure that missed opportunities to get it right early in the process does not damage cases later on.

Policing

IFAS is represented as a stakeholder with the new National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Vulnerable People (NCVPP), National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) National Rape Working Group (NRWG) and NPCC Domestic Abuse Stakeholder Group Hate and Crown Prosecution (CPS) Hate Crime Scrutiny Panels.

In partnership with SafeLives, IFAS provides training for police officers, IFAS supports campaigns and projects within different police forces and the National Crime Agency, addressing sexual and domestic violence to educate and support officers, with a focus on the issue of strangulation. One example of this influence in practice is Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner Clare Moody's March 2026 campaign on the dangers of non-fatal strangulation, funded by the Ministry of Justice. The campaign adopts IFAS's core public health message — "there is no safe way to strangle" — and draws directly on IFAS research, citing our finding that 35% of 16–34-year-olds have experienced strangulation or choking during consensual sex (Strangulation During Sex in the UK, IFAS, December 2024) [Read the campaign announcement](#)

Baroness Bertin work re strangulation & pornography. [New laws to target online abuse and pornography - GOV.UK](#)

We were consulted with by the Sentencing Council when they undertook a review of NFS sentencing. Their guidance came into force 1st January 2025 [Strangulation or suffocation / Racially or religiously aggravated strangulation or suffocation](#)

Prosecution

24,446

offences prosecuted

Since the offences were introduced into law four years ago, the CPS has prosecuted a total of 24,446 offences, with charges increasing quarter on quarter, year on year.

IFAS works nationally with CPS, contributing to policy and practice guidance. On a regional level, IFAS has provided expert input to CPS Scrutiny panels, where professionals come together to review completed cases to explore potential lessons and best practice.

The CPS has worked closely with IFAS to update and develop strangulation and suffocation prosecution guidance to ensure prosecutors draw on expertise to utilise this law to its fullest potential.

[CPS Strangulation and Suffocation Guidance.](#)

Professor Cath White has been called to provide expert evidence on strangulation in approximately 30 cases since January 2023, including a murder case, which resulted in a guilty verdict and involved many hours in the witness box.

“As an expert witness I am independent. I’m not on the side of the victim or defendant. I am there to provide information to assist the court.”

Professor Cath White, Medical Director, IFAS

Whilst the evidence base and professional expertise in this area grows, the role of IFAS in the delivery of justice in strangulation cases remains unique and essential.

SOME LINKS FOR COURT CASES

- [Goldsmiths student jailed for murdering his partner in Lewisham – BBC News](#)
- [US actor jailed for five years for raping woman in Dublin Airbnb – The Irish Times](#)
- [Hadleigh man David Walmsley sentenced for attempted murder | East Anglian Daily Times](#)
- [Dane Pretlove, Newbury, sent down for strangulation: Police statement | Reading Chronicle](#)
- [Beckenham armed robber jailed AGAIN for beating up girlfriend | News Shopper](#)

Judiciary

IFAS Medical Director, Professor Cath White provides lectures to the judiciary, which is critical to educate them in this newly legislated specific area of criminal behaviour, to know what forensic medical and other evidence to expect from the prosecution. This includes lecturing on the Serious Sexual Offences Induction programme and Serious Sexual Offences Seminar for judges, as well as the Public and Private Law Continuation training provided by Judicial College.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Impact on policing and the criminal justice system

Working across the criminal justice pathway and with criminal justice agencies, IFAS plays a critical role in helping agencies to recognise, investigate, prosecute, and sentence cases involving non-fatal strangulation (NFS).

Through representation on key national policing and criminal justice forums, including the National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Vulnerable People (NCVPP), the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) National Rape Working Group, the NPCC Domestic Abuse Stakeholder Group, and the CPS Hate Crime Scrutiny Panel, IFAS ensures that the latest evidence on NFS informs national policy, operational practice, and professional standards.

In partnership with SafeLives, IFAS provides specialist training and resources for police officers and frontline professionals to improve understanding of the medical, forensic, and safeguarding implications of strangulation. This helps officers to consider evidential opportunities, even when there are no visible signs, recognise the heightened risk of serious harm and homicide, secure appropriate evidence, and ensure that victims receive timely support and medical assessment.

Beyond training, IFAS contributes directly to public awareness and prevention initiatives. A notable example is the 2026 Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner campaign, which challenged misconceptions about strangulation and promoted the evidence-based message that there is “no safe way to strangle”. The campaign drew heavily on IFAS expertise and research, helping to raise public and professional awareness of the significant health risks associated with NFS, including stroke, brain injury, loss of consciousness, and long-term cognitive impacts.

IFAS expertise is also influencing the wider policy and legislative landscape. The organisation has contributed to national discussions on online harms, including measures to address pornography depicting strangulation, reflecting growing recognition of the role that online content can play in normalising harmful and potentially life-threatening behaviours.

IFAS’s influence extends into sentencing and judicial practice. IFAS was consulted by the Sentencing Council during its review of sentencing for strangulation and suffocation offences. The resulting definitive sentencing guideline, which came into force on 1 January 2025, provides courts with dedicated guidance that recognises the inherent seriousness of strangulation, including the extreme fear, trauma, and potentially severe physical and psychological consequences experienced by victims.

Overall, our work has helped strengthen the UK’s response to non-fatal strangulation by improving awareness, increasing professional competence, informing national policy, supporting public education, and ensuring that criminal justice processes better reflect the seriousness and long-term impact of this offence.

Through IFAS, CPS has developed its training for prosecutors, focusing on early and proactive evidence gathering, and joint working with police. IFAS is contributing to the development of the CPS e-Learning module on strangulation and suffocation to improve understanding of non-visible injuries, the cognitive impacts of strangulation, and how it can be used to exert power and control. This will support prosecutors in building strong cases in the absence of physical injury and evidence-led cases in the absence of victim engagement.

The CPS can now instruct experts to explain the danger associated with non-fatal strangulation and suffocation and the effects it can cause to victims clearly to juries and judges.

In a further example of this collaborative relationship, Professor Catherine White attended the CPS Advocacy Conference on 20 May 2026.

[The conviction of Michael Cosgrove](#) in February 2025 for attempted murder and strangulation of his partner saw the CPS bring in expert legal guidance to demonstrate the seriousness of strangulation to the jury.

EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE USED TO BUILD STRANGULATION CASES CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Police body-worn video footage which captures the demeanour of the victim (fear, distress, shaking) and any voice changes as a result of the strangulation, such as hoarseness, which helps build strong cases, especially in the event a victim cannot support the prosecution.
- 999 calls which capture a victim's distress or demeanour and any voice changes.
- First responder accounts – police officer observations when they attend the scene.
- Medical evidence.
- Photographs of the scene of the crime and/or victim, which capture any swelling, redness or marks that might fade quickly, or visible injuries if present.

His Majesty's CPS Inspectorate (HMCPSI) will undertake a review of NFS in 2026/27, specifically for cases of non-fatal strangulation.

Whilst it is not possible to provide details of cases in progress, we know that judges who have attended our training have directed Prosecutors to include forensic medical evidence to create cases strong enough to go to court.

Changing the story of strangulation

Policy and guideline development.

Since 2022, IFAS has built a substantial and growing evidence base on strangulation in the UK — not to document a problem, but to drive the system change needed to address it.

Building the Evidence Base

Our research programme is driven by two connected aims: establishing the true scale of strangulation in society, and capturing the lived impact on victims and survivors that statistics alone cannot convey.

We also use research to hold systems to account. Our Strangulation and Suffocation Offences: June 2024–June 2025 report (Report 2, comparing police data) exposed significant inconsistency between individual police forces and Home Office reporting of strangulation offences — underlining the need for closer scrutiny of how these offences are recorded, so the data held is actually meaningful.

Much of our research agenda is shaped directly by conversations with external stakeholders, which keeps it grounded in what practitioners need. Our prevalence survey — the UK's first in-depth study of how 16–34-year-olds perceive and experience strangulation — was developed in direct response to concerns raised by RSHE organisations about the growing normalisation of strangulation during consensual sexual activity among children and young people. Bringing external voices into the development of our research means we are consistently advancing UK understanding of strangulation across different contexts.

From Evidence to Action

Research at IFAS exists to change practice, not simply to document a problem. Since 2022, our evidence base has consistently followed the same path: identify a gap in understanding, generate rigorous evidence to fill it, translate that evidence into accessible resources for the people who need it, and use it to influence policy and professional practice.

Our five-part Strangulation in UK Media series is a clear example of this approach in action. Analysing 294 online articles published between November 2022 and November 2024, the research moved methodically from establishing what is currently published, to reviewing existing literature on media portrayal, to benchmarking against existing VAWG reporting guidelines, and finally to producing concrete recommendations for how journalists and editors can report on strangulation more responsibly. Findings were published as a five-part series released weekly, rather than held back for a single final report, ensuring each stage of the analysis was shared with our newsletter subscribers and the public as it was completed.

This is the same principle that underpins all of IFAS's research: evidence is only valuable if it reaches the people positioned to act on it. Our reports are written to be usable by multiple audiences simultaneously – government departments shaping policy, clinicians shaping practice, journalists shaping public understanding, and survivors themselves seeking validation and information.

The introduction of the standalone strangulation offence in 2022 was a beginning, not an endpoint. Four years on, our research increasingly shows that legislation alone has not been sufficient. Public health responses, professional training infrastructure and public understanding all still lag behind the legal recognition of strangulation as a serious form of harm. This is why IFAS's research agenda continues to expand, from documenting prevalence and risk toward understanding which interventions, public health approaches and practice models actually work to reduce harm, drawing on lessons from other public health fields and comparable international jurisdictions. The work of building an evidence-based, system-wide response to strangulation has only just begun.

NEW EVIDENCE

Skin Colour and Injury Detection

A study co-authored by our Medical Director, Professor Cath White, published in the *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine* (2026), adds an important and urgent new dimension to this evidence base. The retrospective analysis of 287 forensic medical examination records from Saint Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre used the Fitzpatrick Scale to record patients' skin colour and examined how this affected the detection of injury following sexual assault.

42%

objective neck injury recorded in strangulation cases with lighter skin (Fitzpatrick 1–4)

12%

compared to just 12% with darker skin (Fitzpatrick 5–6)

77%

less likely for patients with darker skin to have any bruising noted on the body

The findings have direct implications for strangulation cases specifically, even though rates of other injury types such as abrasions and lacerations did not differ significantly by skin colour. This matters because visible neck injury is often treated as a red flag prompting further medical investigation and can influence progress through the criminal justice system. The study's recommendations — that skin colour, not race or ethnicity, should be routinely and consistently documented in medical examinations — align closely with our own work on reducing disparities in how strangulation is recognised and responded to across all communities.

Research Influence

IFAS's research has directly informed policy at the highest levels of government. In April 2024, IFAS held discussions with Baroness Bertin as part of her independent review of online pornography regulation; her subsequently published report widely referenced IFAS's research and recommended criminalising the depiction of strangulation in pornography — a recommendation the Government later committed to implementing through the Crime and Policing Act 2026. IFAS's prevalence research, including findings that 32% of 16–17-year-olds with prior sexual experience reported strangling a partner during sex, directly informed the Government's decision to criminalise the depiction of strangulation in pornography within its VAWG Strategy. Our analysis also closely aligns with findings in the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's reporting on the criminal justice system's response to strangulation. This reflects independent validation that IFAS's evidence base is not only rigorous, but genuinely shaping national policy.

EQUITY AND DATA QUALITY

IFAS's research has also surfaced a significant equity gap that urgently needs addressing. Our analysis of police-recorded strangulation and suffocation offences found that in 2023–2024, victim ethnicity was recorded as unknown in **54% of cases** — meaning more than half of all recorded offences carry no reliable ethnicity data at all. This sits alongside the findings of the 2026 skin colour study described above, raising serious questions about whether current systems are equipped to identify and respond to strangulation consistently across all communities. Addressing this gap is a clear priority for IFAS's ongoing research agenda.

Academic Engagement and Growing Influence

Our Academic Interest Group (AIG) meets quarterly and has now held 12 meetings, with 33 members drawn from the VAWG research community across the UK, USA and Canada. It has become a genuine hub for knowledge-sharing and has helped drive forward strangulation research more broadly across institutions and borders.

Since the start of 2026, we have been approached directly by approximately 10 academics seeking our input as subject matter experts on their research projects — reflecting the growing recognition of IFAS as a centre of expertise and a trusted partner in the development of strangulation research nationally and internationally.

Future Research

Over the coming years, IFAS will continue to strengthen the evidence base on non-fatal strangulation and related harms, supporting its recognition not only as a criminal justice issue but also as a significant public health issue. Our research programme will continue to generate and translate evidence that informs policy, professional practice, education and prevention across healthcare, criminal justice, safeguarding, education and the violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector.

Alongside developing new research, we will continue to work collaboratively with academic partners, our Academic Interest Group (AIG), practitioners, policymakers and people with lived experience to identify emerging priorities and ensure research addresses the areas of greatest need and potential impact.

A particular area of continued focus will be improving understanding of the increasing prevalence and normalisation of strangulation among children and young people. Through collaborative research, IFAS will continue to contribute to the evidence base on prevention, education and harm reduction, supporting informed public health approaches that help reduce future harm.

Building on our existing evidence base, IFAS's future research priorities include:

Scoping review on sexual strangulation interventions

Continuing to contribute to and support research into the health impacts of sexual choking, particularly among children and young people, working collaboratively with academic partners and through IFAS's Academic Interest Group (AIG) to strengthen the evidence base and inform future policy, practice and public health approaches.

Academic publications

Findings from our UK prevalence survey — the first in-depth study of how 16–34-year-olds perceive and experience strangulation — will be published as academic articles, further strengthening the evidence base and extending IFAS's contribution to the academic literature on strangulation.

Ligature use in prisons and secure settings

Building on early discussions with the CPS and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), this has been identified as an important area for future research, where IFAS could contribute its clinical and research expertise through collaborative partnerships.

Shaping national policy and practice

Our findings have informed the development of the Government's VAWG Strategy and contributed to improvements in policy and practice across criminal justice, health, and social care. Policies, strategies and frameworks that have been influenced and shaped by IFAS's work include:

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy

Our research (e.g. prevalence data, survivor stories and police-recorded crime trends) has contributed to the wider evidence base informing the Government's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy. However, we believe there remains an important opportunity for future iterations of the Strategy to more fully reflect the evidence on non-fatal strangulation and its role within violence against women and girls as a public health issue. Greater recognition of IFAS's research could strengthen prevention and early intervention approaches, while deepening understanding of how the normalisation of violent behaviours contributes to the wider landscape of violence against women and girls.

Online Safety Policy

We contributed to the policy on restricting harmful content by advising on the criminalisation of depicting strangulation in pornography. The [Crime and Policing Act 2026](#) makes it a criminal offence to possess, publish, create, or supply pornographic material that depicts extreme violence, including acts of strangulation or suffocation.

Clinical standards

Collaborating with many Royal Colleges and professional bodies to create clinical management guidelines for non-fatal strangulation in acute and emergency care, aiming for improved victim care and identification of long-term health impacts.

Evidence-based guidance

IFAS developed guidelines for the police management of strangulation cases to ensure consistent, high-quality responses to this high-risk offence.

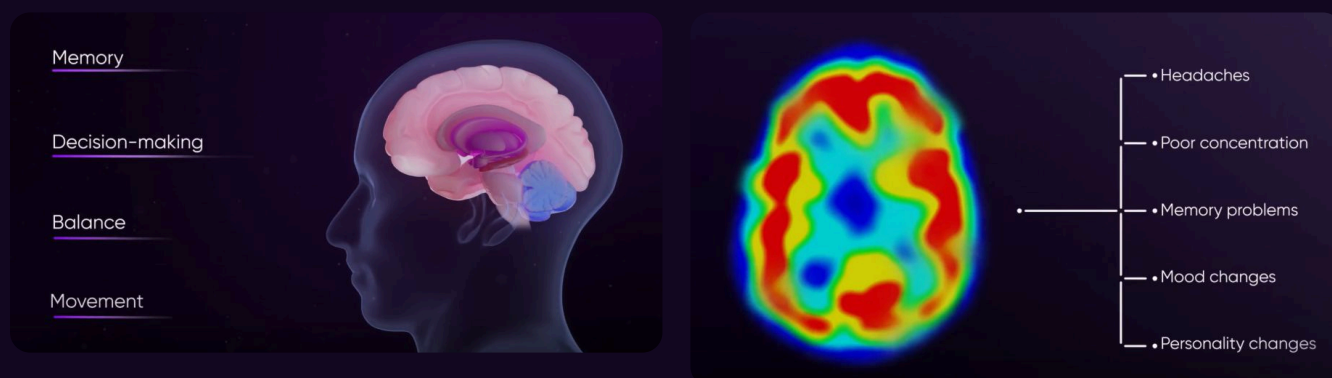
Legislative and criminal justice support

Collaborating with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to improve the identification and prosecution of offenders, contributing to the development of specific "flags" for strangulation cases.

We have also created an extensive library of our own policies and guidelines to help ensure understanding, best practice and legal changes are supported by evidence-based practice across policing, health, and criminal justice sectors.

Serious harm, often invisible

Strangulation can cause serious internal and neurological injury even when there are few or no visible marks. Its short- and long-term consequences reach across the brain and body.



We will continue to identify gaps in pathways, highlight emerging risks, and provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the system's response. Our work has been instrumental in shaping national conversations about strangulation and ensuring that victims and survivors receive the recognition and support they need.

Helping to halve violence against women and girls in a decade

The Government has pledged to ensure the next generation will be better protected from violence and young boys steered away from harmful misogynistic influences.

Our work has directly influenced the Freedom from Violence and Abuse Strategy, published in December 2025, which sets out the Government's vision and actions for meeting its ambition to halve violence against women and girls in a decade, and directly aligns with its mission-led approach to tackling VAWG. Through our vital research to establish the prevalence of strangulation in the UK, across all contexts, and to ensure that training and resources remain evidence-based, we now have a better understanding of what works in tackling and disrupting harmful behaviours.

Pillar 1

Prevention & Early Identification

- Delivering education and prevention initiatives in schools, workplaces and communities
- Challenging myths and harmful behaviours
- Supporting early identification of risk and routes to change

Pillar 2

Relentless Pursuit of Perpetrators

- Strengthening police and CPS responses
- Embedding strangulation awareness into emergency and frontline practice
- Supporting cultural change so VAWG is treated with the seriousness it demands

Pillar 3

Support for Victims & Survivors

- Promoting trauma-informed practice across the justice and health systems
- Improving access to forensic, clinical and therapeutic pathways
- Contributing to reforms in commissioning and service design

We know there is much more to do to protect this and future generations from the devastating physical and psychological impacts of this violence. By tackling strangulation as part of the wider mission to end violence against women and girls, IFAS will help protect future generations. Together with government, educators, and communities, we will ensure that no young person grows up believing violence is acceptable, and every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential in safety and respect.

“There is no safe way” — changing the public perception of strangulation

Media engagement has been critical in transforming strangulation from a hidden harm into a recognised national issue.

IFAS engages with the media across two key strategic areas: publication of our own work and analysis of media coverage of strangulation.

Through research, commentary and engagement with journalists and academics we have helped shift strangulation from a poorly understood form of violence to a recognised public health and safeguarding concern, increasing public awareness and supporting wider policy and safeguarding discussions.

NEWS

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Wales | Wales Politics | Wales Business | North West | North East | Mid | South West | South East | Cymru

'My ex had such a small sentence for strangling me'



Sophie Henson says she wishes the guidance had been introduced in her case earlier this year

Gemma Dunstan
BBC News

17 December 2024
Updated 18 December 2024

WARNING: This article contains description of crimes which some readers may find upsetting

"It shouldn't be disregarded as a small crime, I thought I'd die when it happened to me."

Nearly half of sexually active young people in UK have experienced strangulation, study shows

Survey reveals crisis of distress, consent issues and physical harm caused by strangulation during sex

● **Women describe lasting effects of being 'choked' during sex**



Strangulation during sex, also known as 'choking' and erotic asphyxiation, has become normalised among young people, the survey shows. Photograph: Westend61/Getty Images

More than two in five sexually active under-18s in the UK have either been strangled or strangled someone during sex, research has found, despite the serious dangers of the practice.

"Choking", as it is commonly known, has become normalised in young people's sexual habits, the study by the [Institute for Addressing Strangulation](#) (Ifas) showed, with 43% of sexually active 16- and 17-year-olds having experienced it.

Coverage across national and specialist media including the BBC, The Guardian, The Times, and The Conversation has highlighted:

- the hidden nature of strangulation injuries
- the link between strangulation and homicide risk
- the normalisation of strangulation in certain contexts
- the need for improved professional responses
- the importance of recognising strangulation as serious violence

Amplifying evidence, practice and survivor voice

We have produced our own podcast series to increase awareness, translate research into practice, and engage professional audiences through an accessible platform for discussion and learning.



DESIGNED TO

- translate complex research into accessible insights
- support professional learning across sectors
- amplify survivor voice and lived experience
- explore emerging issues and risks
- support system-wide understanding of strangulation

CONTENT AND THEMES INCLUDE

- strangulation as a marker of lethal risk
- medical and neurological impacts
- professional practice
- survivor experience
- cultural and behavioural trends

AIMED AT

- police and criminal justice professionals
- healthcare practitioners
- social care and safeguarding leads
- domestic abuse specialists
- policymakers and researchers

The most watched podcast on the IFAS YouTube channel is Podcast: How should we talk about strangulation with young people? With over 3,000 views. [Watch on YouTube](#)

Watch: Laura Whitmore Investigates (ITVX)

Professor Cath White's involvement was in the "rough sex" episode of Laura Whitmore Investigates, which aired on ITVX in 2023. The documentary examined the growing normalisation of choking/strangulation during sex, particularly among younger people, and explored concerns about the influence of pornography, misconceptions about consent, and the potentially serious health consequences of strangulation.

Given Prof. Cath White's longstanding expertise in forensic medicine and non-fatal strangulation, including research that helped inform changes in UK law, she explained the medical and research evidence on:

- How little pressure is needed to cause injury or death through strangulation.
- Why strangulation can cause serious internal injuries even when there are few visible marks.
- The short- and long-term health consequences, including neurological injury.
- The risks of treating strangulation as a routine or harmless sexual practice.

The broader context of the programme was not an attack on consensual sexual activity, but an investigation into whether public understanding of the risks of strangulation during sex is keeping pace with its increasing prevalence and normalisation.

Woman's Hour — Romania's Eurovision entry (BBC Sounds)

In March 2026, Woman's Hour featured a discussion about Romania's Eurovision entry, "Choke Me", after concerns were raised that the song could glamourise strangulation. The programme noted that the phrase "choke me" is repeated throughout the song and that campaigners were concerned about the message this could send, particularly given the increasing normalisation of strangulation in sexual contexts. Prof Cath White appeared on the programme in her role as Medical Director of the Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS).

Digital and social media reach

16,000+

views to date of the 'Guidelines for clinical management of non-fatal strangulation in acute and emergency care services' page

15,000+

views to date of the IFAS resources webpage

15,000+

reads to date of the blog post 'Why I Can't Escape Non-Fatal Strangulation'

15.5k+

views to date of the IFAS response to the Femicide Census (March 2025)

Analysing the media landscape

The mainstream media is well documented as an instrument that shapes how society thinks and responds to societal issues.

IFAS research has reviewed more than 300 online news articles to better understand how strangulation is reported in the UK media and what this tells us about the messages being conveyed to the public about victims, perpetrators and more broadly about violence against women and girls.

As a result, we have urged journalists to familiarise themselves with the existing guidelines for reporting violence against women and girls and where possible, encouraged them to include the voices of survivors, not only to provide case studies but to sense-check articles and the impact that reporting on strangulation might have on other survivors.

Our research has shown it is essential that strangulation, both fatal and non-fatal, continues to be reported in the UK media, including highlighting the high-risk nature of strangulation in the context of intimate partner violence and domestic homicide.

Embedding knowledge across the system

“The conference was invaluable to my role. The speakers were inspirational. Gave me lots of ideas to go away with.”

IFAS has held four national conferences in its short existence, bringing together the professional and survivor community to deliver new evidence and thought.

18 Nov 2025

Children and Young People: Could strangulation be ‘choking’ future generations?
Birmingham

12 Nov 2024

Tackling Strangulation: Working Together to Save Lives. Manchester

20 Apr 2024

From Data to Action. Birmingham

28 Nov 2023

Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS) Knowledge Event

Professor Cath White also presents at conferences and meetings on this topic and other aspects of sexual violence, including:

- Nordic Conference of Forensic Medicine – NCFM 2026 | ECLFM
- All Wales School of Emergency Medicine May 2025
- Scottish Parliament event, NFS, A Matter of Life or Death. December 2024
- British Association in Forensic Medicine, Annual Conference June 2024
- Criminal Bar Association, July 2023
- RCPsych International Congress 2025
- Forensic & Medical Sexual Assault Clinicians Australia, annual conference, Noosa, Australia, 2025
- Ecole Nationale de la Magistrature, Paris, October 2024
- National Danish Police Conference on Intimate Partner Violence, May 2024
- European Family Justice Centre Alliance, November 2023

A Growing International Reputation

In under four years, IFAS has become not only the UK's leading authority on strangulation, but an increasingly recognised voice internationally. Alongside the events listed above, Professor Cath White has also presented IFAS's research and clinical expertise at the Hodsman Legacy Lecture in Calgary, Canada (2026), and delivered a webinar for the Singapore Judicial College on medical evidence in sexual offences (2026).

Closer to home, IFAS has engaged directly with the Northern Ireland Assembly, working with legislators, judiciary, and police to support the development of similar strangulation legislation there.

This international engagement reflects a simple reality: strangulation as a form of harm, and the need for a coordinated, evidence-based response to it, is not unique to England and Wales. IFAS's willingness to share its evidence and learning internationally, and to learn from comparable jurisdictions in return, strengthens both its own work and the wider global response to this form of violence.

More than 22,000 professionals trained

Since October 2022, often working in partnership with SafeLives, IFAS has delivered specialist training to more than 22,000 frontline professionals, including Criminal justice professionals, education providers (schools, FE and HE practitioners), staff from organisations including NHS trusts.

Our training:

- improves identification and risk assessment
- strengthens investigative and clinical responses
- enhances safeguarding and referral pathways, increasing understanding of the medical and psychological impacts of strangulation

Core topics such as:

- anatomy and symptoms
- risk assessment
- survivor-centric
- legal context

Our bespoke training is supported by a suite of resources developed to guide practitioners in responding safely and effectively. These resources have been developed with victims/survivors of strangulation to ensure lived-experience authenticity. Training sessions are delivered both in person and online, from one-day advanced learning to e-learning modules and specialised sessions.

The impact of our training and capacity building has resulted in:

4,924

professionals completing the NFS e-Learning module in 2025–26 alone, with 99% reporting increased knowledge of NFS as a result

59–79%

pre- to post-training gains in understanding of NFS, from 59% (NFS Webinar) to 79% (NFS Police)

90–98%

of e-Learning attendees (90%) and up to 98% of webinar attendees rate the training 8 or higher out of 10 for recommending it to a colleague

97%

of IDVA attendees rate their post-training understanding 8 or higher, up from just 18% beforehand; 79% improvement among police attendees

The majority of attendees report they will change their professional practice as a direct result of training — including asking more probing questions of victim-survivors, treating strangulation as a high-risk indicator, and cascading learning to colleagues and into organisational policy.

Since its inception in 2022, IFAS and SafeLives have played a significant role in transforming how strangulation is understood and responded to across health, criminal justice, education and specialist support sectors. Through national conferences, professional presentations, specialist training, and resource development, IFAS has helped establish strangulation as a critical safeguarding and public health issue.

Our impact includes

- ✓ Increased professional awareness and understanding of the medical, psychological and safeguarding implications of strangulation.
- ✓ Earlier identification of victims and survivors, helping professionals recognise strangulation even when there are no visible injuries. Training evaluation data bears this out: attendees consistently described a shift in how they understood “invisible” injury, with many noting they would now ask more probing questions of victim-survivors even where no physical signs were present.
- ✓ Improved risk assessment, enabling practitioners to better identify those at heightened risk of serious harm or homicide.
- ✓ Enhanced clinical and investigative responses, supporting more effective documentation, evidence gathering and treatment pathways.
- ✓ Stronger safeguarding and referral pathways, improving access to support and specialist services.
- ✓ Greater consistency of practice across sectors through the dissemination of evidence-based learning and resources.
- ✓ Increased survivor-centred practice, ensuring responses are informed by lived experience and focused on victims’ needs and safety.
- ✓ Influence on national and international discourse, placing strangulation firmly on the agendas of health, justice, education and violence prevention organisations.
- ✓ Knowledge mobilisation, translating emerging research into practical tools, guidance and action for frontline professionals.

IFAS and partners have helped build a growing community of practitioners who are better equipped to recognise, assess and respond to strangulation more effectively. The work has increased awareness among:

- Healthcare professionals
- Specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations and practitioners
- Social care professionals
- Police and criminal justice agencies
- Education provider
- Policy makers and academics

As a result, more professionals are able to identify the signs of strangulation, understand the associated risks, and take appropriate action to improve safety and outcomes for victims and survivors, and tackle the normalisation of strangulation among young people. However, there is still more to do as we navigate the challenges of communicating the messages to different audiences and of how strangulation is used in different contexts.

In their words

“The work of the Institute for Addressing Strangulation (and its forerunner, the Expert Group) has, in my view, tangibly improved the response of the criminal justice system for victims of domestic abuse. Strangulation as a form of domestic abuse is not new, and vast amounts of research attest to the huge damage inflicted upon victims of this particular type of offending.

However, before the new offence came into force, this form of high-level violence was either overlooked entirely (due to the lack of visible injury) or charged at the lowest level of assault – even though the victim in question may have been a hair’s-breadth away from death.

Now, the picture has changed. Strangulation is treated with the severity that medical and neurological evidence has established it should be. This is in no small part due to the team behind IFAS (and its forerunner) who played such a key role both in bringing the offence into law and in educating legal professionals as to the seriousness of this type of offending.”

Joanna Evans — Barrister, Deputy District Judge and Recorder; international consultant to the Council of Europe on violence against women; member of the Expert Advisory Group, Institute for Addressing Strangulation.

“IFAS have been tireless in their campaigning to raise awareness of the dangers of strangulation and the prevalence of non-fatal strangulation as a pre-cursor to domestic homicide. Their 2025 prevalence report provides a wake-up call, with 52% of 16 to 25 year olds reporting that they have been strangled or suffocated! IFAS provide constructive criticism to policing, actively supporting awareness raising and developments in policing practice. They are trusted stakeholders who can be relied upon to challenge and support our efforts as we strive to improve the police response to domestic abuse.”

Louisa Rolfe — National Police Chiefs’ Council Lead for Domestic Abuse

“As one of those involved in the original funding bid which led to the creation of the Institute for Addressing Strangulation, and now a voluntary member of its Expert Group, I am hugely proud of and impressed by its achievements to date. This is particularly true given its size, and the continuing uncertainty over funding, which has made it difficult to make high quality appointments.

As a clinician working in brain injury, whose research on the impact of strangulation on the brain helped influence the new legislation, I am especially grateful for the leadership role IFAS has played in developing the first clinical guidelines, covering acute and non-acute adult and paediatric presentations. The importance of these cannot be overstated – there was a dangerous gap, which IFAS filled. The guidelines will save lives, and there can be no greater impact than that. The process has involved convening and facilitating working groups with representation from all the relevant professional bodies, drafting, collating feedback, and facilitating consensus and endorsement. Compared to equivalent organisations, this has been achieved at speed, and minimal cost, without any detriment to the quality of the output.

The training IFAS has provided – some with SafeLives, some with clinicians – has again filled an important gap. Legislation preceded professional awareness and understanding. The sheer amount of people, from diverse professions, which the training has reached is impressive.

IFAS has exerted effective influence too in terms of Sentencing guidelines, the Pornography Review, the inclusion of ‘choking’ in the national PSHE curriculum, the Online Safety Bill, judicial training (including a primer), and materials for frontline policing.

Finally, its ongoing research, resources, and media presence have helped drive public awareness and understanding of this potentially lethal, and previously unrecognised epidemic, although there remains much, much more to do.

I cannot think of an equivalent organisation that has had more impact on public health per (wo)man hour, and sincerely hope it continues to be funded while the need, sadly, exists.”

Dr Helen Bichard — Principal Clinical Psychologist, North Wales Brain Injury Service; Honorary Research Fellow, Bangor University; Expert Group, Institute for Addressing Strangulation.

Testimonials from our training sessions

"These events are always worth attending and I will continue to share the work of the institute with my teams. Thank you for such a brilliant event."

"Thank you for a really informative day. Very well planned and presented."

"Really informative and enjoyable day. Good speakers and updates on research were very helpful."

"Yesterday I completed the Non-Fatal Strangulation training delivered by SafeLives, developed in partnership with IFAS.

Although the subject matter was challenging, the training was incredibly valuable. It strengthened my understanding of the serious impact of non-fatal strangulation, the importance of recognising risk factors, and the need to ensure victims receive the right support and safeguarding.

In my volunteering role with a domestic abuse charity, where I work alongside Greater Manchester Police and partner agencies, training like this is invaluable. It enhances my ability to support survivors and deepens my understanding of the complexities of domestic abuse.

As I work towards graduation, experiences like this continue to reinforce my passion for the victim support and domestic abuse sector."

What we can achieve in the next five years

In just over three years, IFAS has helped transform national understanding of strangulation. But there is still much more that urgently needs to be done. Over the next five years we can:

Our five-year plan will consolidate our achievements and expand our impact by:

- 01** scaling national training and embedding it into core professional standards
- 02** strengthening clinical and forensic pathways for victims and survivors
- 03** expanding research to deepen understanding of perpetrator behaviour and effective interventions
- 04** enhancing multi-agency coordination and data sharing
- 05** ensuring sustainable, long-term infrastructure for national leadership on strangulation

These strategic priorities will enable us to continue supporting the Government's 10-year ambition to halve VAWG, use public awareness campaigns to tackle the normalisation of strangulation in relationships and media, and deliver the system change required to move beyond "pockets of good practice" and embed a consistent, high-quality whole-system response.

We are actively pursuing funding to undertake a systematic review of public health interventions and approaches to strangulation from comparable international jurisdictions, to inform the development of a more comprehensive, multi-sector response in England and Wales.

We will expand our specialised training and capacity building to enable more frontline workers and services to identify and respond to strangulation, and work with schools and families to embed understanding of the risks of strangulation within healthy relationship education, focusing on protecting young people.

Our focus to date has been primarily on the Criminal Justice System and that needs to broaden out to include Health and Care Services. We will seek to work directly with the Department of Health and Social Care to bring our specialist training and knowledge to the healthcare providers who see victims of strangulation and may be the first professional a victim presents to, and support the transition of NHS England functions as these move to the Department of Health and Social Care. This is an under-developed area of safeguarding which needs our specialist support, and we will support the development of healthcare pathways so that all survivors of non-fatal strangulation receive appropriate forensic medical care, psychological support and interventions at the earliest opportunity, to reduce the immediate and longer-term health impacts of strangulation.

Our research will expand across different contexts of strangulation, including a major survey on the prevalence of strangulation within sexual acts. We will promote standardised recording of strangulation cases by police and other agencies to improve risk assessment and offender management, and maintain and develop clinical guidelines for non-fatal strangulation in acute and emergency care.

We will continue to support victims and survivors of non-fatal strangulation to "reclaim their voice", and ensure lived experiences inform national policy, best practices and support materials, aiming to reduce shame and isolation among victims.

IFAS is uniquely positioned to lead this work. We have already demonstrated our ability to influence policy, transform practice, and build national capability. With sustained investment, we can continue to drive the systemic change needed to prevent strangulation, protect victims and survivors, and contribute meaningfully to the Government's ambition to halve VAWG over the next decade.



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“There is no safe way to strangle.”

With sustained investment, IFAS will continue to drive the change needed to prevent strangulation and protect victims and survivors across the UK.

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