

High resolution images of the protest can be found here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1PiWQxm8SMYmY9wVLWVmq1_EuisHQd8N6?usp=sharing Please credit Sisters Uncut.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sisters Uncut demand support not suspicion for sexual violence survivors

- Feminist group well known for high profile protests against cuts to domestic violence services turn attention to treatment of sexual violence survivors by police and courts.
- Hundreds of women and non-binary people protested outside Crown Prosecution Service headquarters on Max Hill QC's first day as its head.
- Protesters call for end to CPS policy of demanding access to survivors' calls, messages and app data and sharing this with abusers' lawyers.
- Group say the criminal justice system is not able to provide real justice, safety or support for survivors and that funding is urgently needed for alternatives.

#supportnotsuspicion @SistersUncut

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Sisters Uncut today staged a disruptive direct action outside the London offices of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in protest at the treatment of survivors of sexual violence by the police and courts. Over one hundred women and non-binary people attended the demonstration, which took place on Max Hill QC's first day in his new role as head of the CPS.

Protesters say that the CPS policy of frequently demanding that the [police download the data from the mobile phones](#) of sexual violence survivors amounts to investigating survivors instead of their abusers. The protesters blocked the doors to the CPS offices in Westminster with 30,000 pieces of paper to highlight that an average phone download amounts to [30,000 pages of personal data](#).

[Recent controversy](#) over failed prosecutions has resulted in increasing demands for access to all text messages, calls, social media and app data. Specialists supporting survivors say that they are now [routinely told](#) that their cases will be dropped unless they agree. The protesters say that the new policy has made the situation much worse for survivors, who already faced having their medical, social services and counselling records trawled through by the police and CPS, handed over to their abusers' defence teams, and used to undermine them in court. [Recently publicised examples](#) include calls made and texts sent after the assault being used to argue that the victim was not traumatised enough for the assault to have taken place.

Campaigners have [recently argued](#) that current disclosure policies breach survivors' Article 8 right to privacy, and the issue has been [referred to the Information Commissioner](#) as potentially unlawful.

The protesters were joined family members of [Gaia Pope](#), who died in unclear circumstances in November 2017. Her cousin Mya Pope-Weidemann from Justice for Gaia gave a speech sharing Gaia's experiences of being failed by the criminal justice system when she reported sexual abuse. She highlighted that "the CPS are even less likely to prosecute your abuser if you have mental health problems". Sisters Uncut say that they have heard from many survivors and support workers who confirm that this appears to be the case.

The protest demanded an end to the policy of downloading the mobile phones of survivors reporting sexual violence, and for the money saved from halting these downloads to be spent on transformative responses to sexual abuse. The group argue that the criminal justice system is unable to provide real justice, safety or support for survivors and that funding is urgently needed for alternatives. Transformative justice responses are community-led and survivor centred programmes that tackle the root causes of abuse and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. Examples include [bystander intervention programmes](#).

There were no arrests. The CPS building was evacuated due to the protest.

Quotes

Aysha*, 22, a survivor who took part in the protest, said: "as a survivor of rape, I already felt like the perpetrator had taken so much from me. For the CPS to also take my counselling notes and phone records and share them with him as evidence felt like a whole new violation. To have them laid out in full in front of a courtroom full of strangers judging you, is beyond explanation. A system that puts survivors through that in order to secure a conviction should not be allowed to call itself a justice system."

Ellen*, 28, said: "It took me almost 2 years to get to court, then my mental health diagnosis was shared with the defence. I was labelled 'unreliable', 'attention seeking', 'promiscuous', 'unstable' and 'prone to delusions'. Despite CCTV and DNA evidence, he was found not guilty."

** Names have been changed to protect the identity of survivors.*

Notes for Editors:

- Sisters Uncut are a direct action group protesting cuts to domestic and sexual violence services. They are best known for [storming the red carpet at the 2015 premiere of the film 'Suffragette'](#). The group was formed by domestic violence

survivors and sector workers in 2014, and now has a network of groups across the country.

- Sisters Uncut is formed of non-binary people and women. Non-binary people don't identify their gender as "male" or "female"; they may identify as neither, both, or differently at different times. Non-binary people are often erased from official statistics as gender is only recorded as male/female but still disproportionately experience gendered violence - [research](#) shows that 39% have experienced domestic violence.