

Statistical bulletin

Child abuse in England and Wales: March 2020

Statistics and research on child abuse in England and Wales, bringing together a range of different data sources from across government and the voluntary sector.

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Table of contents

1. [Other pages in this release](#)
2. [Main points](#)
3. [What do we know about the prevalence of child abuse?](#)
4. [Child abuse in England and Wales data](#)
5. [Glossary](#)
6. [Measuring the data](#)
7. [Strengths and limitations](#)
8. [Related links](#)

1 . Other pages in this release

This release brings together our analysis and research on child abuse in England and Wales. The analysis includes a range of indicators from different data sources and organisations. Findings can be found on the following pages:

- [Child abuse extent and nature, England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#)
- [Child emotional abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#)
- [Child neglect in England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#)
- [Child physical abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#)
- [Child sexual abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#)
- [Child abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#)

Findings from a feasibility study to determine whether a new survey could effectively measure the current scale and nature of child abuse and neglect will also be published later in 2020.

2 . Main points

Child abuse is an appalling crime against some of the most vulnerable in society. It is something that is not often discussed or well understood, and there has been a lack of complete statistics. For the first time, we have compiled a range of indicators from different data sources to enable better understanding of the extent and circumstances of child abuse. Our statistics on abuse experienced in childhood in England and Wales include data on sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. The release also includes statistics on child abuse and the criminal justice system.

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that one in five adults aged 18 to 74 years experienced at least one form of child abuse, whether emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or witnessing domestic violence or abuse, before the age of 16 years (8.5 million people).
- In addition, an estimated 1 in 100 adults aged 18 to 74 years experienced physical neglect before the age of 16 years (481,000 people); this includes not being taken care of or not having enough food, shelter or clothing, but it does not cover all types of neglect.
- An estimated 3.1 million adults aged 18 to 74 years were victims of sexual abuse before the age of 16 years; this includes abuse by both adult and child perpetrators.
- Prevalence was higher for females than males for each type of abuse, with the exception of physical abuse where there was no difference.
- Many cases of child abuse remain hidden and do not enter the criminal justice system; around one in seven adults who called the National Association for People Abused in Childhood's (NAPAC's) helpline had not told anyone about their abuse before.
- It is possible to identify around 227,500 child abuse offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2019 of which around 1 in 25 (4%) resulted in a charge or summons.
- While not all cases continue through the criminal justice system, almost four in five of child abuse-flagged Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutions were successful in securing a conviction in the year ending March 2019 (79%).
- Childline delivered 19,847 counselling sessions to children in the UK where abuse was the primary concern in the year ending March 2019; sexual abuse accounted for nearly half (45%) of these and has become the most common type of abuse counselled by Childline in recent years.
- At 31 March 2019, 52,260 children in England were the subject of a child protection plan (CPP) and 2,820 children in Wales were on the child protection register (CPR) because of experience or risk of abuse or neglect; neglect was the most common category of abuse in England and emotional abuse was the most common in Wales.
- At 31 March 2019, 49,570 children in England and 4,810 children in Wales were looked after by their local authority because of experience or risk of abuse or neglect.
- Around half of adults (52%) who experienced abuse before the age of 16 years also experienced domestic abuse later in life, compared with 13% of those who did not experience abuse before the age of 16 years.

Statistician's comment

"Child abuse is an appalling crime against some of the most vulnerable in society, but it is also something that is little discussed or understood. Today's release is ONS's first attempt to fill an important evidence gap on this critical issue.

"Measuring the extent and nature of child abuse is difficult because it is usually hidden from view and comes in many forms. Bringing data together from different sources helps us better understand both the nature of child abuse and the potential demand on support services."

Alexa Bradley, Centre for Crime and Justice, Office for National Statistics

Finding help

If you or someone you know has experienced abuse, help is available:

- [Childline](#) can be called on 0800 1111
- [Help for Adult Victims of Child Abuse \(HAVOCA\)](#) offers online support
- [Mind](#) can be called on 0300 123 3393 or emailed at info@mind.org.uk
- [National Association for People Abused in Childhood \(NAPAC\)](#) can be called on 0808 801 0331
- [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children \(NSPCC\)](#) can be called on 0808 800 5000 or emailed at help@nspcc.org.uk
- [Rape Crisis](#) can be called on 0808 802 9999
- [Samaritans](#) can be called on 116 123 or emailed at jo@samaritans.org
- [The Survivors Trust](#) can be called on 08088 010 818
- [Victim Support](#) can be called on 0808 16 89 111

3 . What do we know about the prevalence of child abuse?

There is no source providing the current prevalence of abuse during childhood. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) provides the best available indicator of prevalence by measuring the prevalence of adults who experienced abuse before the age of 16 years.

The CSEW provides an underestimate of child abuse as abuse against 16- and 17-year-olds is not included. Abuse perpetrated by children aged under 16 years is only included for sexual abuse.

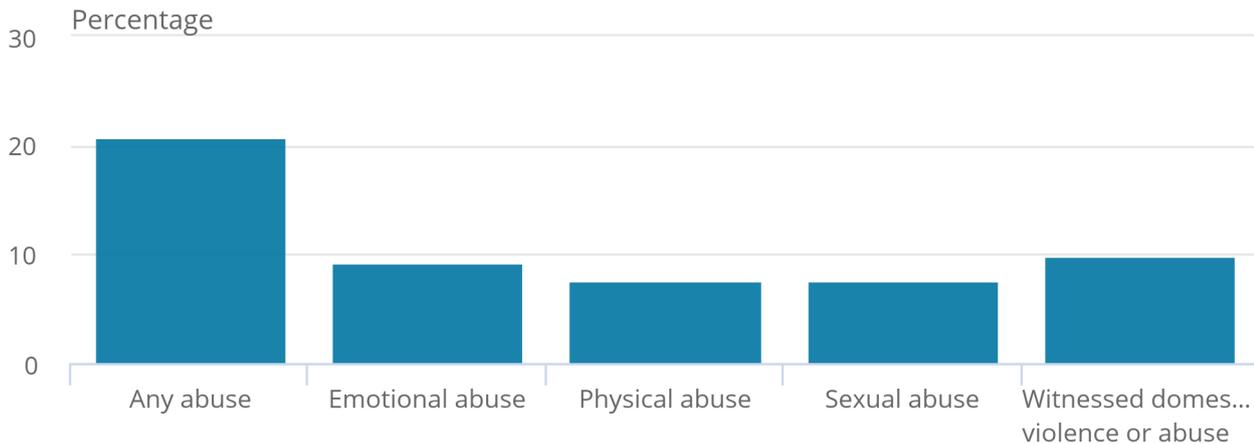
In the year ending March 2019, the CSEW estimated that approximately 8.5 million adults aged 18 to 74 years experienced abuse before the age of 16 years. This is equivalent to 20.7% of the population aged 18 to 74 years.

Figure 1: Witnessing domestic violence or abuse and emotional abuse were the most commonly experienced types of child abuse

England and Wales, year ending March 2019

Figure 1: Witnessing domestic violence or abuse and emotional abuse were the most commonly experienced types of child abuse

England and Wales, year ending March 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. "Don't know or can't remember" and "Don't wish to answer" responses have been excluded.
2. "Any abuse" includes respondents who said they experienced emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or said they witnessed domestic violence or abuse in the home. See Section 5.1 of the [User Guide](#) for definitions of abuse during childhood.
3. "Any abuse" will not be the sum of the different types of abuse, as some victims may be included in multiple categories as they can experience more than one type of abuse.
4. "Emotional abuse" was referred to as "psychological abuse" in previous publications.
5. "Sexual abuse" includes rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), other contact sexual abuse, and non-contact sexual abuse.

Just under half of victims experienced more than one type of abuse

Around 4 in 10 of these adults (44%) experienced more than one of emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or witnessing domestic violence or abuse. This proportion is higher for women than men, at 46% compared with 41%.

Women were more likely than men to have experienced abuse before the age of 16 years

Around one in four women (25%; 5.1 million) and around one in six men (16%; 3.3 million) experienced abuse before the age of 16 years.

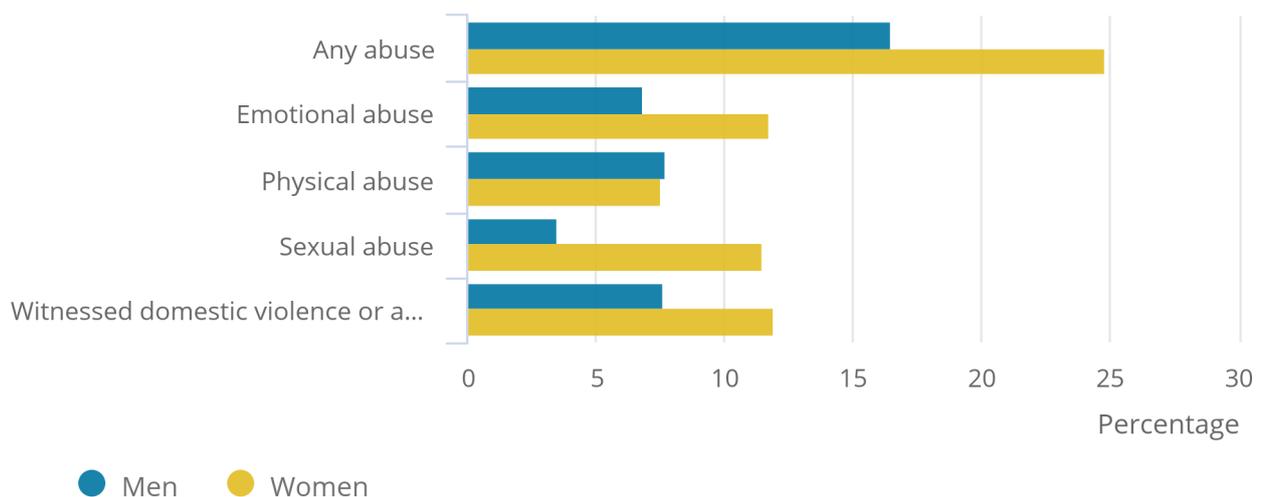
Prevalence was higher for females than males for each type of abuse, with the exception of physical abuse where there was no difference.

Figure 2: Experience of sexual abuse before the age 16 years showed the greatest difference between men and women

England and Wales, year ending March 2019

Figure 2: Experience of sexual abuse before the age 16 years showed the greatest difference between men and women

England and Wales, year ending March 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. See Section 7.3 of [User Guide](#) for definitions of personal characteristics.
2. “Any abuse” includes respondents who said they experienced emotional abuse, physical abuse or sexual abuse or said they witnessed domestic violence or abuse in the home. See Section 5.1 of the [User Guide](#) for definitions of abuse during childhood.
3. “Emotional abuse” was referred to as “psychological abuse” in previous publications.
4. “Sexual abuse” includes rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), other contact sexual abuse, and non-contact sexual abuse.

More information on the prevalence of child abuse and the groups of children that are most likely to experience abuse can be found in [Child abuse extent and nature, England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#).

What is often a hidden crime can have an impact later in life

Around half of adults (52%) who experienced abuse before the age of 16 years also experienced domestic abuse later in life, compared with 13% of those who did not experience abuse before the age of 16 years.

The CSEW defines domestic abuse as occurring since the age of 16 years, and it includes sexual abuse, non-sexual abuse and stalking by a partner or family member.

More information about the impacts of abuse later in life, using data from the CSEW for the year ending March 2016, can be found in [People who were abused as children are more likely to be abused as an adult](#).

4 . Child abuse in England and Wales data

[Child abuse extent and nature – Appendix tables](#)

Dataset | Released 14 January 2020

Data on child abuse extent and nature in England and Wales, bringing together a range of different data sources from across government and the voluntary sector.

[Child emotional abuse – Appendix tables](#)

Dataset | Released 14 January 2020

Data on child emotional abuse in England and Wales, bringing together a range of different data sources from across government and the voluntary sector.

[Child neglect - Appendix tables](#)

Dataset | Released 14 January 2020

Data on child neglect in England and Wales, bringing together a range of different data sources from across government and the voluntary sector.

[Child physical abuse – Appendix tables](#)

Dataset | Released 14 January 2020

Data on child physical abuse in England and Wales, bringing together a range of different data sources from across government and the voluntary sector.

[Child sexual abuse – Appendix tables](#)

Dataset | Released 14 January 2020

Data on child sexual abuse in England and Wales, bringing together a range of different data sources from across government and the voluntary sector.

[Child abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales – Appendix tables](#)

Dataset | Released 5 March 2020

Data from a range of organisations on child abuse and the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

[Child abuse in England and Wales – Data landscape](#)

Dataset | Released 5 March 2020

A tool providing a comprehensive list of data sources relating to child abuse from a range of organisations. This covers a wider range of sources than are discussed in the [articles associated with this release](#).

5 . Glossary

Child

A child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age; is living independently; is in further education; is a member of the armed forces; is in hospital; or is in custody in the secure estate does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.

Child abuse

There is not a specific offence of child abuse in law, but practitioners have come to define child abuse based on the laws designed to protect children from harm. Child abuse is any form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

Child emotional abuse

Child emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child that causes severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless, unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or "making fun" of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, but it may occur alone. A child may be emotionally abused by an adult or adults or by another child or children.

Child neglect

Child neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- protect from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Child physical abuse

Child physical abuse is the non-accidental infliction of physical force on a child. This may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child. Physical abuse may or may not result in physical injury. A child may be physically abused by an adult or adults or by another child or children.

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts (for example, masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing). They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate, or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 years into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

6 . Measuring the data

The statistics in this release can be used to help inform work relating to the requirements of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#), specifically:

- Article 3 – best interests of the child
- Article 19 – protection from violence, abuse and neglect
- Article 39 – recovery from trauma and reintegration

Statistics in this article are also used to help monitor progress towards the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) 5 “Gender equality” and 16 “Peace and justice”.

The data included in this release are sourced from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), police recorded crime, other government organisations and child abuse support services.

The [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#) provides detailed information about the crime survey and police recorded crime data.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Child abuse QMI](#) and the [Crime in England and Wales QMI](#).

7 . Strengths and limitations

Bringing together data sources

There is no single source that measures the scale and nature of abuse experienced by children in England and Wales. Statistics related to child abuse are produced separately by a number of different organisations in England and Wales, but each provides only a partial picture. We have compiled a range of indicators from different data sources to enable better understanding of the extent and circumstances of child abuse.

Data from the Office for National Statistics, the Department for Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Home Office Homicide Index, and NHS Digital data on hospital admissions are classified as [National Statistics](#). Other data from the Home Office (excluding the Homicide Index), data from the Welsh Government, Ofsted, the National Crime Agency, and NHS Digital data on female genital mutilation are classified as [official statistics](#). National Statistics are a subset of official statistics that have been certified by the UK Statistics Authority as compliant with its [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

All other data included in this release are sourced from administrative datasets that do not fall within the scope of official statistics.

Comparability of the data

The way in which data on child abuse are collected differs between sources and organisations. The data are not directly comparable, since they are collected on different bases (for example, victims, crimes, suspects or defendants) using different timescales and reference periods. They may not cover the same cohort of cases.

8 . Related links

[Abuse during childhood: Findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, year ending March 2016](#)

Article | Released 4 August 2016

The 2015 to 2016 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) ran for the first time a module of questions asking adults whether they were abused before the age of 16. The analyses of these questions covering psychological, physical and sexual abuse before the age of 16 are published within the report.

[People who were abused as children are more likely to be abused as an adult](#)

Article | Released 27 September 2017

Exploring the impact of what can sometimes be hidden crimes.

[Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2019](#)

Bulletin | Released 25 November 2019

Figures on domestic abuse from the CSEW, police recorded crime and a number of different organisations.

[Sexual offending: victimisation and the path through the criminal justice system](#)

Article | Released 13 December 2018

An overview of sexual offending in England and Wales, using a range of National Statistics and official statistics from across the crime and criminal justice system.

[Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2019](#)

Bulletin | Released 23 January 2020

Crime against households and adults, also including data on crime experienced by children, and crimes against businesses and society.