

Article

# Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales: November 2020

Information on services that are available to victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales.

Contact:  
Nick Stripe  
crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk  
+44 (0)20 7592 8695

Release date:  
25 November 2020

Next release:  
To be announced

## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Availability of domestic abuse services](#)
3. [Characteristics of service users](#)
4. [Victim interactions with domestic abuse services](#)
5. [Domestic abuse victim services data](#)
6. [Glossary](#)
7. [Data sources and quality](#)
8. [Related links](#)

# 1 . Main points

- In the year ending March 2020 the National Domestic Abuse Helpline had 29,166 phone calls with current or historical survivors of domestic abuse, a 14% decrease from 33,853 calls in the previous year.
- The number of refuge services for victims of domestic abuse in England has been decreasing in recent years, however, the number of bed spaces available has increased, although London was the only region to meet the recommended number.
- In the year ending March 2019 an estimated 67% of referrals of women to refuge services in England and 32% in Wales were declined, with around one-fifth due to a lack of space or capacity to support the client; this represents a slight increase in declined referrals compared with the previous year.
- The number of cases discussed at multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) in England and Wales has increased by 12% over the past two years, to 99,467 in the year ending March 2020; this likely reflects an increase in reporting, not necessarily an increase in victims of domestic abuse.
- There were a total of 124,569 children in households where a case was discussed at a MARAC in the year ending March 2020, a 9% increase compared with two years previously.
- The number of full time equivalent independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) for victims at high risk of domestic abuse in England and Wales increased by 7% over the last two years; this still represents a 26% shortfall in coverage against SafeLives recommended number of IDVAs to support high-risk abuse cases.
- The total number of services offering support to male victims of domestic abuse has fluctuated in recent years, with a decrease in the number of IDVA services supporting male victims, but an increase in the number of services offering refuge and outreach services to male victims.

This publication does not cover the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Commentary discussing domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can be found in [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#).

## 2 . Availability of domestic abuse services

This section provides data on the availability of refuge and domestic abuse helpline services for women in England and Wales. These data are reported by Women's Aid (data from Routes to Support).

This section also provides data on the number of independent domestic abuse advisors (IDVAs) and multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) in England and Wales in the year ending March 2020. These data are reported by SafeLives.

The ManKind Initiative have also provided data on the number of domestic abuse services offering support to male victims in England and Wales.

For more information on the organisations featured in this publication, and the data each collects, see [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

## Refuge services

A domestic abuse refuge service provides emergency temporary accommodation for victims of domestic abuse with a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support.

Routes to Support<sup>1</sup> provides snapshot figures, taken in May each year, on the availability of refuge services<sup>2</sup> in England and Wales. It includes figures on the number of bed spaces available within refuges. These figures are used with official population estimates to calculate percentage shortfall against the Council of Europe minimum recommendation for refuge spaces<sup>3</sup>. Data for England are available from 2010 to 2020, whereas data for Wales are available from 2017 to 2020.

The number of refuge services in England has generally been decreasing since 2010, with small increases seen in 2013 and 2017. There were 294 refuge services in 2010 compared with 261 in 2020<sup>4</sup>.

Despite this long-term decrease in the number of refuge services, the number of bed spaces available in refuges in England has increased for five consecutive years, from 3,578 in 2015 to 3,923 in 2020. Consequently, the percentage shortfall in refuge spaces against the Council of Europe recommendation of one space per 10,000 population has decreased from 34.1 in 2015 to 30.3 in 2020 ([Appendix Tables 7 and 8](#)).

Of all the English regions, Greater London has consistently been closest to meeting the recommended number of bed spaces during this period, and exceeded the recommendation in 2018, 2019 and 2020 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: London is the only region in England to exceed the recommended number of refuge bed spaces for the past three years**

Percentage shortfall in refuge spaces against recommendation in England, by region, 2018 to 2020

Figure 1: London is the only region in England to exceed the recommended number of refuge bed spaces for the past three years

Percentage shortfall in refuge spaces against recommendation in England, by region, 2018 to 2020



Source: Women's Aid Federation of England – data from Routes to Support, the UK violence against women and girls service directory

Notes:

1. Data from Women's Aid Federation of England are not classified as official statistics.
2. Data on refuge bed spaces in England comes from snapshots taken in May each year. We can see net change only and not the number of services changing provider as part of the commissioning process as we do not show fluctuations in number during the year.
3. For refuge services, data on the number of units (bed spaces) can give us an idea of how their capacity changes over time. One unit refers to accommodation for one woman or one woman and her children. Units can vary in size and the number of children they can house, they can be in shared houses, self-contained units or dispersed accommodation.
4. The percentage shortfall is calculated using the Council of Europe minimum recommendation of one space per 10,000 population. This shows the difference between the number of refuge spaces in an area and the recommended number of refuge spaces for that area, as a proportion of the recommendation. In instances where the percentage shortfall is a negative value, the number of refuge spaces exceeded the minimum recommendation.
5. These data exclude services in the Channel Islands and those that are UK wide.

For Wales, in 2020, there were 34 refuge services and 284 refuge bed spaces. The number of refuge services in Wales is not available for 2019, but this represents a small increase from 33 refuge services and 279 refuge bed spaces in 2018 ([Appendix Tables 7 and 8](#)). The number of refuge bed spaces has fluctuated each year since 2017, with the most bed spaces available in 2019 (310) and the least in 2018 (279)<sup>5</sup>.

These figures do not provide information on which specific access and support needs these services are able to support. Refuges can vary in size and some cannot support specific groups of people, for example, those with high-level mental health needs or physical disabilities. Services can vary according to the different types and levels of support that they provide.

## Helplines

Community-based services are services which are delivered to domestic abuse survivors within the community (for example helplines, outreach programmes, support groups and counselling). This publication focuses primarily on helplines, however data on other community-based services can be found within the [appendix tables](#).

A helpline is a telephone service that offers information, advice or support to callers about particular issues. A domestic abuse helpline offers these services to victims of domestic abuse and their families, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf. Local, community-based helplines are distinct from the 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline. Many survivors may speak to both services, as the national helpline provides referrals to services in their local area, alongside refuge referrals, emotional support, risk assessment and safety planning, and information on rights and options. Data from the National Domestic Abuse Helpline can be found in [Appendix Tables 11, 12, 29 and 30](#).

Routes to Support collects snapshot data on an annual basis for a range of domestic abuse services in England and Wales<sup>5</sup> ([Appendix Table 7](#)). The database shows that the number of domestic abuse helpline services in England and Wales increased by 14% between 2017 and 2018 (from 132 to 151). The total number of domestic abuse helpline services in England and Wales is not available for 2019, however in England the number of helpline services increased from 130 in 2019 to 133 in 2020. In Wales, the number of helpline services decreased from 20 in 2018 to 18 in 2020<sup>6</sup>.

## Independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) and practitioners

Independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) are professionally qualified, specialist domestic abuse workers, who support high-risk victims of domestic abuse.

SafeLives' annual practitioner survey counts the number of IDVAs in England and Wales each year. The latest data available is for 2019. The survey did not run in 2018<sup>7</sup> so comparisons are made to 2017 instead.

According to the [2019 practitioner survey](#), there were 980 full-time equivalent IDVAs working in England and Wales, of which 833 were IDVAs for victims at high risk from domestic abuse. This is an increase from 897 full-time equivalent IDVAs in 2017, of which 782 were for victims at high risk of domestic abuse<sup>8</sup>. However, due to better identification of victims and survivors leading to more cases being heard at MARACs, SafeLives' recommended number<sup>9</sup> of IDVAs to support victims of high-risk abuse also increased, from 1,059 in 2017 to 1,120 in 2019. Therefore, this still represents a 26% shortfall in coverage in England and Wales.

The number of full-time equivalent IDVAs varied by region. As observed in 2017, London was the only area to meet the SafeLives recommended number of IDVAs for victims of high-risk abuse (152 compared with the 141 recommended) ([Appendix Table 2](#)).

SafeLives' practitioner survey also provides information on the availability of wider domestic abuse support, for victims who do not require a crisis response. According to the practitioner survey, the number of full-time equivalent outreach workers and young person's violence advisors (YPVAs) increased in 2019 compared with 2017 (Table 1).

Table 1: Domestic abuse full-time equivalent practitioners, 2017 and 2019  
England and Wales

	2017	2019
<b>Independent domestic violence advisor (IDVAs) - All risk levels</b>	897	980
<b>Outreach workers</b>	691	813
<b>Young person's violence advisors</b>	182	191

Source: SafeLives

### Notes:

1. Data from SafeLives are not classified as official statistics.
2. Outreach and YPVA provision varies widely across regions. This information is available in [Appendix Table 3](#).
3. SafeLives did not receive a response from all domestic abuse services and did not contact all statutory bodies who may provide domestic abuse services. Despite this, the survey provides the clearest picture of domestic abuse practitioner provision across England and Wales.

## Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)

A multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) is a meeting where information is shared on the highest-risk domestic abuse cases between representatives from a range of agencies. After sharing all relevant information about the circumstances for a particular victim, the representatives discuss options for increasing the victim's safety and turn these into a coordinated action plan. For more information on MARACs, see [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

There were 247 MARACs in England and Wales in the year ending March 2020, and 99,447 cases were discussed ([Appendix Table 15a](#)). This equates to 43 cases discussed per 10,000 adult females<sup>10</sup> which falls just above SafeLives' recommended number<sup>11</sup> of 40 cases discussed per 10,000 adult females (Table 2).

Over the last three years, the number of MARACs in England and Wales has decreased, however this may be due to local mergers, where the same geographical area can be covered by fewer meetings.

Both the total number of cases discussed at MARACs, and the number of cases discussed per 10,000 adult females has increased each year since the year ending March 2018 and has exceeded the recommended number since the year ending March 2019. These increases coincide with an increasing percentage of repeat cases, from 28% in the year ending March 2018 to 31% in the year ending March 2020.

Table 2: Cases discussed at multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs), year ending March 2018, 2019 and 2020  
England and Wales

	Year ending March 2018	Year ending March 2019	Year ending March 2020
<b>Number of MARACs</b>	256	252	247
<b>Number of cases discussed</b>	88,461	93,892	99,447
<b>Recommended number of cases discussed</b>	93,220	92,700	92,710
<b>Number of cases discussed per 10,000 adult females</b>	38	41	43
<b>Recommended number of cases per 10,000 adult females</b>	40	40	40
<b>Percentage of repeat cases</b>	28	29	31

Source: SafeLives

### Notes:

1. Data from SafeLives are not classified as official statistics.
2. Data for Wigan are not included in the year ending March 2019 and 2020, as this MARAC did not submit data to SafeLives.

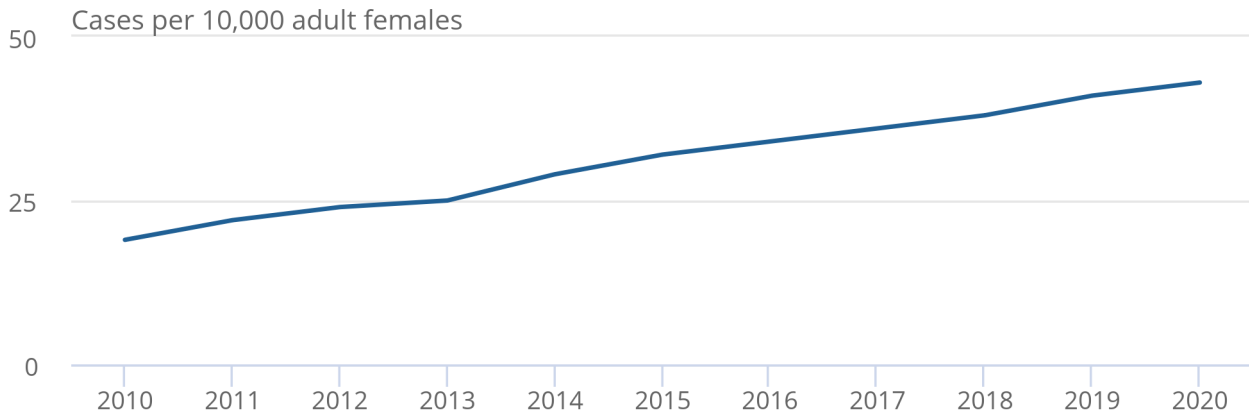
The number of cases discussed at MARACs has more than doubled over the last ten years, from 19 per 10,000 adult females in the year ending March 2010 to 43 per 10,000 adult females in the year ending March 2020 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: The number of cases discussed at multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) more than doubled between 2010 and 2020**

Number of cases discussed per 10,000 adult females, England and Wales, year ending March 2010 to year ending March 2020

Figure 2: The number of cases discussed at multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) more than doubled between 2010 and 2020

Number of cases discussed per 10,000 adult females, England and Wales, year ending March 2010 to year ending March 2020



Source: SafeLives

Notes:

1. Data from SafeLives are not classified as official statistics.
2. The population data are from the 2011 Census.
3. The increase in the number of cases does not automatically translate into an increase in domestic abuse, only an increase in its reporting.

The number of cases discussed at MARACs per 10,000 adult females varied by police force area. In the year ending March 2020, it was highest in South Wales at 79 cases per 10,000 adult females and lowest in Gloucestershire with five cases per 10,000 adult females.

## Services offering support for male victims

The [ManKind Initiative](#) take a snapshot of the number of services offering support to male victims of domestic abuse in March each year. This data does not account for changes in the number of services offering support to male victims that occur throughout the rest of the year and therefore caution should be used when interpreting changes over time.



The number of services offering support to male victims in England and Wales has fluctuated in recent years, from 235 in March 2018 to 217 in March 2019, and 220 in March 2020 ([Appendix Table 1a and 1b](#)). However, this represents an overall decrease compared with March 2018. Service provision fluctuates year on year due to the commissioning process, where an area previously supported by two providers may be covered by a single provider in a subsequent year.

The number of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) supporting male victims decreased from 71 in March 2018 to 64 in March 2019 and 2020. Many services support men using staff without IDVA qualifications, due to funding restrictions. The number of services offering drop-in support to male victims decreased from 36 to 31 and those offering counselling decreased from 18 in March 2018 to 14 in March 2019, increasing to slightly to 15 in March 2020.

Meanwhile, the number of services offering refuge and outreach services to male victims in this period increased from 26 to 36 and 45 to 55 respectively. The increase in the number of services offering refuge to male victims may be due to better funding availability, combined with service providers recognising the need for male victims to access these services.

Regionally, London had the largest number of services offering support to male victims in March 2018 (42), but this had decreased to 31 by March 2020. The number of services supporting male victims also decreased in the South West and West Midlands, over this period. In Yorkshire and The Humber and Wales, small increases were observed between March 2019 and March 2020, however this still represents an overall decrease in the number of services offering support to male victims in these areas compared with March 2018.

By March 2020 the North West had the largest number of services offering support to male victims, an increase from 36 in March 2018 to 38. Increases in the number of services offering support to male victims over this period were also observed in the East, the North East and the South East, whilst the number of services in the East Midlands remained the same.

## **Notes for: Availability of domestic abuse services**

1. Routes to Support is the UK violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies, run in partnership by Scottish Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid, Women's Aid Federation of England and Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland.
2. These data do not reflect the quality of services offered or the staff available to operate these services. The figures will show net change only and not the number of services changing provider as part of the commissioning process as fluctuations in number during the year are not included.
3. The percentage shortfall is calculated using the Council of Europe minimum recommendation of one space per 10,000 population. This shows the difference between the number of refuge spaces in an area and the recommended number of refuge spaces for that area, as a proportion of the recommendation.
4. Refuges vary in size and the number of spaces they hold.
5. A time series of these data is not available for Wales prior to 2017.
6. The number of helpline services in Wales is not available for 2019 so comparisons are made to 2018 instead.
7. The practitioner survey did not run in 2018 due to moving the timing of the survey from September to January, in order to better align the publication of results with other reporting periods.
8. Victims at high risk of domestic abuse are those at risk of serious harm or murder. High risk domestic abuse is defined by either 10 plus ticks on the Dash RIC, based on professional judgement or an escalation in the severity and/or frequency of incidents.
9. Recommendations are SafeLives', based on typical IDVA caseloads, MARAC cases and estimated number of victims at high risk of serious harm or murder. For more information, see page 10 of the [full report \(PDF, 1.47 MB\)](#).
10. This figure is based on the adult female population because it is mainly female victims referred to a MARAC, and SafeLives' recommendations are built on analysis of female victims.
11. This recommended figure is built from analysis of female victims based on [Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey](#), published in 2004.

### 3 . Characteristics of service users

This section provides information on the personal characteristics of victims using helplines, IDVAs and MARACs in England and Wales. It includes data reported by the ManKind Initiative, the National Domestic Abuse helpline run by Refuge, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, SafeLives and Victim Support.

We also publish data on the personal and household characteristics of domestic abuse victims in England and Wales from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). Therefore, victim characteristic breakdowns provided here can be considered alongside data from the CSEW for the [year ending March 2020](#) and year ending March 2020 to obtain a fuller picture of the victim profile.

For more information on the organisations featured in this publication, and the data each collects, see [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

## Helplines

In the year ending March 2020, the ManKind Initiative (a charity that supports male victims of domestic abuse) responded to a total of 1,855 calls. This was a slight decrease from 1,951 in the year ending March 2019, but a 62% increase compared with the year ending March 2017. [Appendix Tables 9 and 10](#) show that 73% of callers in the year ending March 2020 were male victims, and 27% of callers were calling on behalf of the victim.

[Appendix Table 9](#) shows that 42% of male victims calling the helpline in the year ending March 2020 were aged between 25 and 44 years, although the age of a large proportion of callers was not known and therefore these figures should be interpreted with caution. The majority (57%) of the male victims had children and 61% were seeking help for the first time.

In terms of the abuse experienced, [Appendix Tables 10 and 28](#) show that 95% of male victims calling the helpline reported that the perpetrator was a female partner or ex-partner. The most common types of abuse reported by victims were emotional abuse (77%), physical abuse (64%) and coercive control (44%).

In the year ending March 2020, the National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Refuge had 40,859 phone conversations (including a small number of hang-ups), of which 29,166 were with current or historical survivors of domestic abuse ([Appendix Table 29](#)). This is a decrease compared with the previous year, in which they had 47,770 phone conversations, of which 33,853 were with current or historical survivors of domestic abuse.

[Appendix Table 12](#) shows that, of all callers to the National Domestic Abuse helpline in the year ending March 2020:

- 93% identified as female
- 53% were aged 31 to 49 years
- 72% had children
- 66% were white

In terms of the type of abuse experienced, of callers to the National Domestic Abuse helpline where the abuse type was recorded, 85% experienced psychological or emotional abuse, 81% experienced controlling behaviour and 69% experienced threatening or intimidating behaviour ([Appendix Table 11](#)).

In the year ending March 2020, the National Stalking Helpline, run by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, responded to a total of 758 contacts regarding domestic stalking, a 16% decrease from 902 in the previous year.

Of the people calling the National Stalking Helpline who had experienced stalking by an ex-partner or family member in the year ending March 2020 ([Appendix Table 17](#)):

- 69% identified as female
- 57% identified as heterosexual
- 50% identified as white
- 37% were aged 31 to 50 years
- 46% reported having no disability
- 33% reported having no religion

In terms of the abuse experienced by those being stalked by an ex-partner or family member, [Appendix Tables 18 and 19](#) show that:

- 94% of callers reported that they were being stalked by their ex-partner
- 76% of callers reported that their stalker was male

It is not possible to collect information about the type of stalking behaviours experienced from all callers to the helpline, however for those calls in which this information was collected, the most common types of stalking behaviours reported were text messages (41%), phone calls (39%) and through social networking sites (38%).

## **Independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs)**

Insights, an outcomes measurement programme operated by SafeLives, collects information on the personal characteristics of clients entering IDVA services. The data on clients accessing IDVA services for the year ending March 2020 ([Appendix table 13](#)) show that:

- 93% were women
- 80% were white British or Irish
- 46% were unemployed
- 62% had children living in their household at the time
- 14% had a disability
- 17% had an adverse childhood experience

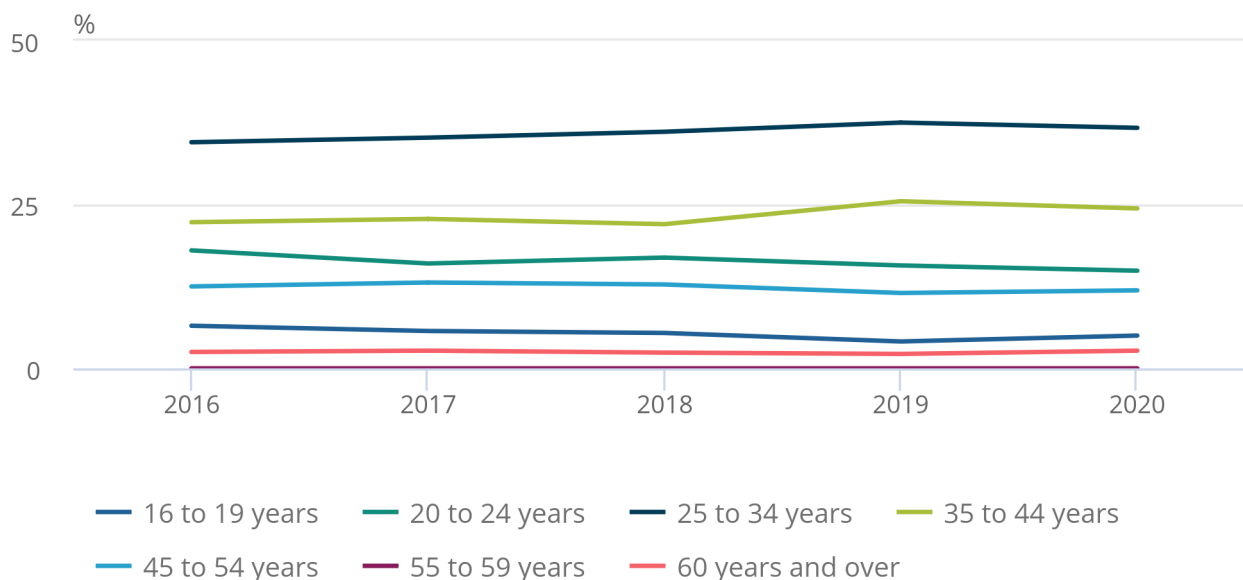
As shown in Figure 3, more than three-quarters (76%) of clients accessing IDVA services in the year ending March 2020 were aged 20 to 44 years. Compared with five years ago, the proportion of clients accessing IDVA services who were aged 25 to 44 years has increased from 57% to 61%, whereas the proportion of clients aged 20 to 24 years has decreased from 18% to 15%.

**Figure 3: More than three-quarters of clients accessing IDVA services in England and Wales in the year ending March 2020 were aged between 20 and 44 years**

Ages of clients accessing independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) services, England and Wales, year ending March 2016 to year ending March 2020

Figure 3: More than three-quarters of clients accessing IDVA services in England and Wales in the year ending March 2020 were aged between 20 and 44 years

Ages of clients accessing independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) services, England and Wales, year ending March 2016 to year ending March 2020



Source: SafeLives – Insights independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) dataset

Notes:

1. Insights IDVA data are not classified as official statistics.

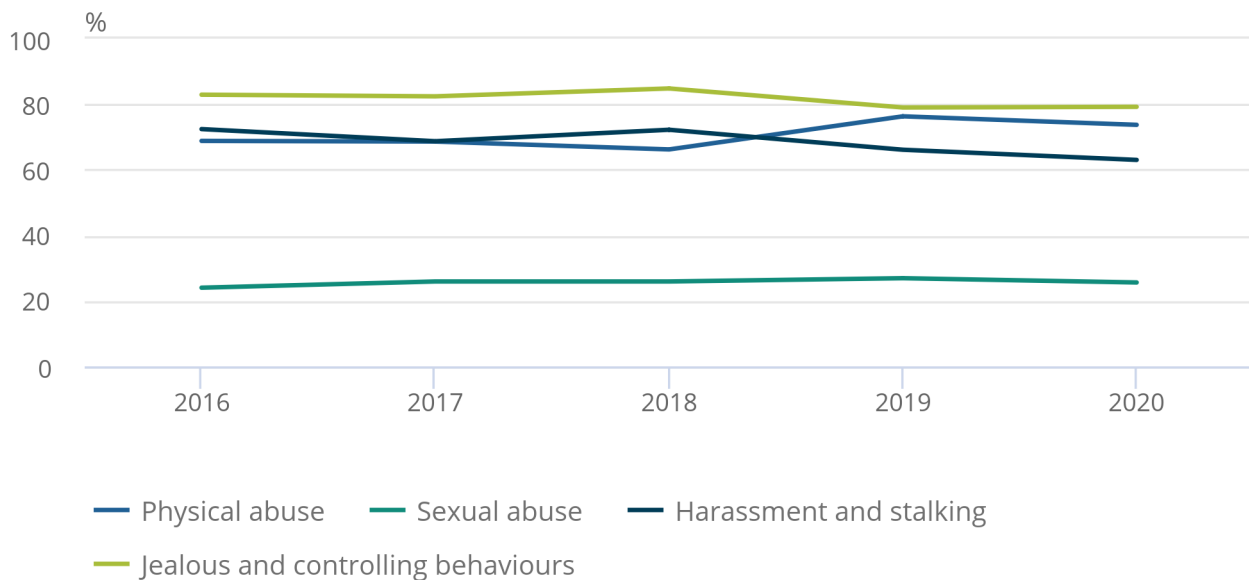
Of clients using IDVA services in the year ending March 2020, 92% disclosed having experienced domestic abuse from an intimate partner or ex-partner ([Appendix Table 14](#)), and this has generally increased over the past five years. For 54% of clients the abuse had been ongoing for between one and five years, and 69% of clients had tried to end the relationship in the last 12 months. Most clients (79%) had experienced jealous and controlling behaviours 12 months prior to intake<sup>1</sup>, however this has decreased slightly over the last five years, whilst the percentage of clients who had experienced physical abuse has increased to 74% in the year ending March 2020 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: The percentage of clients accessing IDVA services who experienced physical abuse prior to intake has increased in recent years**

Types of abuse experienced by independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) clients prior to intake, England and Wales, year ending March 2016 to the year ending March 2020

Figure 4: The percentage of clients accessing IDVA services who experienced physical abuse prior to intake has increased in recent years

Types of abuse experienced by independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) clients prior to intake, England and Wales, year ending March 2016 to the year ending March 2020



Source: SafeLives – Insights independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) dataset

**Notes:**

1. Insights IDVA data are not classified as official statistics.
2. In the years ending March 2016, 2017 and 2018 abuse present in the three months prior to intake was recorded. For the year ending March 2019 onwards, this time frame was changed, and abuse present in the 12 months prior to intake was recorded.

**Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) and multi-crime services**

Victims at high risk from domestic abuse discussed at multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) vary by their personal characteristics. Of the 99,447 cases discussed at MARACs in England and Wales in the year ending March 2020 ([Appendix Table 16a](#)):

- 5% involved a male victim
- 16% involved a black and ethnic minority victim
- 7% of victims had a disability
- 1% identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)

Small proportions of domestic abuse victims with the particular characteristics referenced in the MARAC data ([Appendix Table 16a](#)) demonstrate the disparities in service provision for some groups, as well as low levels of identification and recording. The proportion of domestic abuse victims discussed at MARACs who were recorded as having these characteristics varied considerably by police force area ([Appendix Tables 16a](#)).

There were a total of 124,569 children in households where a case was discussed at a MARAC in the year ending March 2020 ([Appendix Table 15a](#)). This number has increased each year since the year ending March 2018, and this corresponds with an increase in the total number of cases discussed at MARACs each year ([Appendix Table 15b](#)). The presence of children in these cases is defined differently across MARACs. For example, some MARACs require that a child was present in the household at the time of the abuse and others state that the child witnessed the domestic abuse. As a result, these figures should be treated with caution.

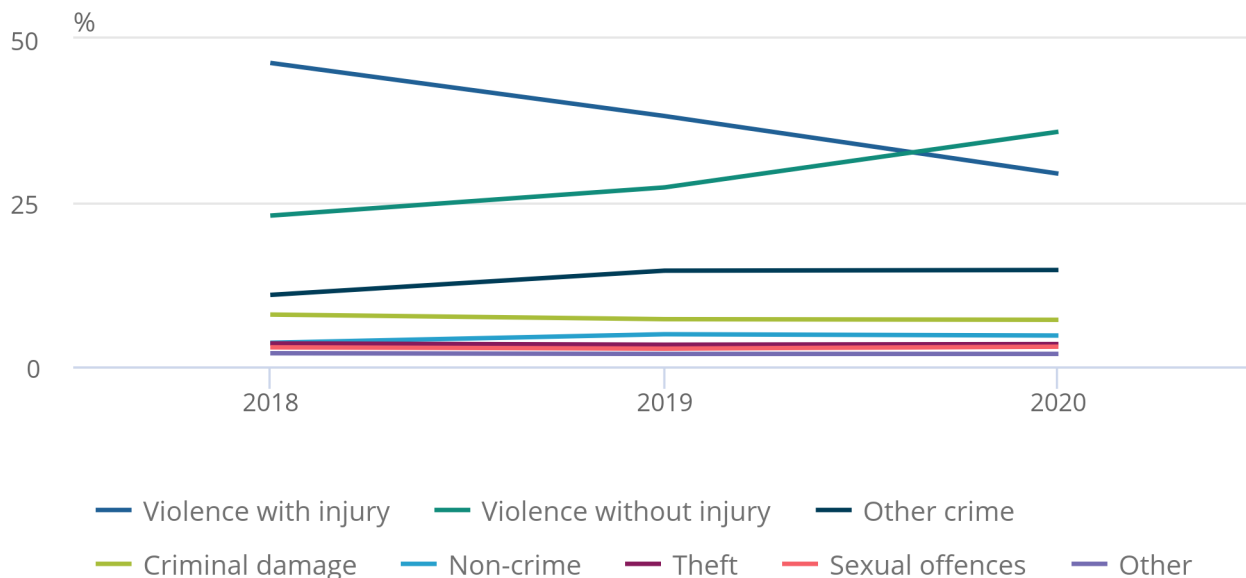
Multi-crime service cases, disaggregated by crime type, show that over one-third (36%) of valid cases flagged as domestic abuse-related were for violence without injury in the year ending March 2020. This proportion has been steadily increasing in recent years (Figure 5). In contrast, the proportion of cases for violence with injury has decreased by 37% since the year ending March 2018.

**Figure 5: The proportion of domestic abuse cases for violence with injury has declined in recent years, whilst the proportion for violence without injury has increased**

Multi-crime service cases flagged as domestic abuse-related, broken down by crime category, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020

Figure 5: The proportion of domestic abuse cases for violence with injury has declined in recent years, whilst the proportion for violence without injury has increased

Multi-crime service cases flagged as domestic abuse-related, broken down by crime category, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020



Source: Victim Support

Notes:

1. Victim Support data are not classified as official statistics.
2. Valid cases refer to cases excluding those with the following statuses: duplicate case; consent not received within desired timescale; incorrect or insufficient contact information; safe phone contact data not provided for domestic violence and hate crime referrals; cancelled; consent to contact denied; does not meet contract criteria; insufficient crime details; living outside of Victim Support area or abroad; other agency.
3. Sexual offences includes rape, and other sexual offences. Theft includes theft from person, bicycle theft and other theft. Other includes burglary from a dwelling, burglary from a non-dwelling, fraud and forgery, arson, homicide and unknown.

The victim was male in one-fifth<sup>2</sup> of the cases which were flagged as domestic abuse-related in the year ending March 2020 ([Appendix Table 22](#)). This contrasts to the sex breakdown of victims accessing specialist domestic abuse services such as IDVAs and MARACs, where a much smaller proportion of victims were male (4% and 5%, respectively). Although this could be explained by the larger proportion of women who are victims of domestic abuse<sup>3</sup> it also reflects differences in severity of abuse, where women are more likely to experience serious harm or be at high risk of homicide.



Male victims are deemed less likely to be eligible for these types of support in terms of their risk level and are therefore dealt with through multi-crime services. Male victims may also be less aware of, or likely to engage with specialist domestic abuse services. In the same year, the majority of valid multi-crime service cases flagged as domestic abuse-related were referred by the police (88%, [Appendix Table 23](#)). However, this proportion has been decreasing in recent years, whilst the proportion of self-referrals and referrals from specialist services have increased.

## Notes for: Characteristics of service users

1. Intake refer to clients entering the IDVA service.
2. Valid cases refer to cases excluding those with the following statuses: duplicate case; consent not received within desired timescale; incorrect or insufficient contact information; safe phone contact data not provided for domestic violence and hate crime referrals; cancelled; consent to contact denied; does not meet contract criteria; insufficient crime details; living outside of victim service area or abroad; other agency.
3. See [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#) for more information on prevalence of domestic abuse in men and women.

## 4 . Victim interactions with domestic abuse services

This section provides data on how victims interact with domestic abuse services, with an emphasis on how victims come to access the services, as well as the changes for independent domestic violence advisor clients at intake compared to exit<sup>1</sup> from the service.

Data are reported from Women's Aid, the ManKind Initiative, Refuge and SafeLives.

For more information on the organisations featured in this publication, and the data each collects, see [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

### Accessing services

Referrals to domestic abuse services can be made by a number of different agencies (or by the victim directly). As such, access to and provision of services is not reliant on reporting the domestic abuse to the police. For more information on how an incident of domestic abuse is brought to the attention of a domestic abuse service, and how incidents progress through criminal justice system see the publication [How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system](#).

### Refuge and community-based services

Data in this section refer to the year ending March 2017 to the year ending March 2019, as this is the latest available data for both England and Wales. Data for Wales for the year ending March 2020 is also available ([Appendix Table 4a](#)).

Tables 3 and 4 outline the number of referrals of women made to refuge and community-based services in England and Wales in the year ending March 2017 to the year ending March 2019. Data for England are obtained by the Women's Aid Federation of England's Annual Survey. Data from Wales are collected quarterly and amalgamated into an annual dataset. Although Welsh Women's Aid also collects some data on referrals of men ([Appendix Table 4a](#)), for comparative purposes, their data refer to referrals of women only.

In the year ending March 2019 there were 35,250 referrals to refuge services in England, of which 67% were declined. The estimated<sup>2</sup> percentage of referrals to refuge services in England which were declined has increased in recent years (Table 3).

In Wales, there were 2,156 referrals to refuge services in the year ending March 2019, of which 32% were declined. The number of referrals to refuge services in Wales decreased between the year ending March 2017 and 2019, whilst the percentage that were declined remained relatively stable (Table 3).

Table 3: Referrals of women to refuge services in England and Wales in the year ending March 2017 to the year ending March 2019  
England and Wales

	April 2016 to March 2017	April 2017 to March 2018	April 2018 to March 2019
<b>Total referrals</b>	35,143	33,118	35,250
<b>England % Accepted</b>	38	36	33
<b>% Declined</b>	62	64	67
<b>Total referrals</b>	2,481	2,215	2,156
<b>Wales % Accepted</b>	54	56	56
<b>% Declined</b>	32	30	32
<b>% Support not accepted by client</b>	13	12	12

Source: Women's Aid Federation of England and Welsh Women's Aid - Women's Aid Annual Survey

#### Notes:

1. Data from Women's Aid Federation of England and Welsh Women's Aid are not classified as official statistics.
2. Data for England and Wales are presented separately because they are sourced from two different data collections.
3. These figures cannot provide a full picture of demand for refuge services. Some survivors may not disclose abuse and some may not have been referred to a refuge because referring agencies may already be aware that a refuge is full or cannot meet their needs.
4. The total number of referrals to refuges for England, and the number that were accepted and declined are estimates based on response to the annual survey and the total numbers of services listed on Routes to Support.

For Wales, 19% of those who were declined refuge services were declined because the refuge had a lack of space to support the client ([Appendix Table 5](#)). Similarly, for England, [20% of refuge referrals were declined due to lack of space/capacity](#). There are limitations on the number of beds available in refuges, for example the number of children seeking refuge with them, or a requirement for wheelchair access, which may reduce the options available to a victim.

There were an estimated<sup>2</sup> 232,578 referrals to community-based services in England in the year ending March 2019, of which a third were declined. The estimated number of referrals to community-based services in England increased by 13% compared with the year ending March 2017, and this coincided with an increase in the percentage that were declined, from a quarter in the year ending March 2017 (Table 4).

In Wales there were 16,672 referrals to community-based services in the year ending March 2019, of which 4% were declined. The number of referrals to community-based services in Wales increased by 126% compared with the year ending March 2017, and this coincided with an increase in the percentage that were declined compared with the year ending March 2017 (Table 4).

Table 4: Referrals of women to community-based services in England and Wales in the year ending March 2017 to the year ending March 2019  
England and Wales

	<b>April 2016 to March 2017</b>	<b>April 2017 to March 2018</b>	<b>April 2018 to March 2019</b>
<b>Total referrals</b>	205,628	205,459	232,578
<b>England % Accepted</b>	75	66	67
<b>% Declined</b>	25	34	33
<b>Total referrals</b>	7,365	9,452	16,672
<b>Wales % Accepted</b>	79	60	62
<b>% Declined</b>	2	8	4
<b>% Support not accepted by client</b>	15	21	31

Source: Women's Aid Federation of England and Welsh Women's Aid - Women's Aid Annual Survey

## Notes:

1. Data from Women's Aid Federation of England and Welsh Women's Aid are not classified as official statistics.
2. Data for England and Wales are presented separately because they are sourced from two different data collections.
3. The total number of referrals to community-based services for England, and the number that were accepted and declined are estimates based on response to the annual survey and the total numbers of services listed on Routes to Support.

## Helplines

Due to the nature of domestic abuse helplines, where the priority is to assist the caller, information about victim interactions with these services may not be recorded for all calls. The data presented in this section reflects those calls for which this information was recorded.

In the year ending March 2020, 62% of interactions with the National Domestic Abuse Helpline and 41% of calls to the Live Fear Free Helpline were made by either current or historical survivors of domestic abuse ([Appendix Tables 29 and 37](#)). Just over half (56%) of survivors calling the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, who were signposted to another service, were signposted to a domestic or sexual violence service ([Appendix Table 30](#)). Of survivors who called the Live Fear Free Helpline, 30% were referred to other agencies offering a range of services including money matters, child contact services and alcohol and substance misuse services, whilst 23% were referred to the police. ([Appendix Table 38](#))

The ManKind Initiative collects data using a list of questions designed to support a structured response to the caller, to guide the caller as they talk through their experiences, and to help the charity understand the types of domestic abuse experienced by the victim. These questions do not take precedence over what a victim needs from a conversation, therefore, for the year ending March 2020, 90% of callers have answers recorded against them (1,219 out of a total of 1,355 calls made by victims). The majority (99.5%) of victims calling the ManKind Initiative in the year ending March 2020 were offered emotional support, 89% were signposted to other services and 54% were signposted to information ([Appendix Table 28](#)).

## **Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)**

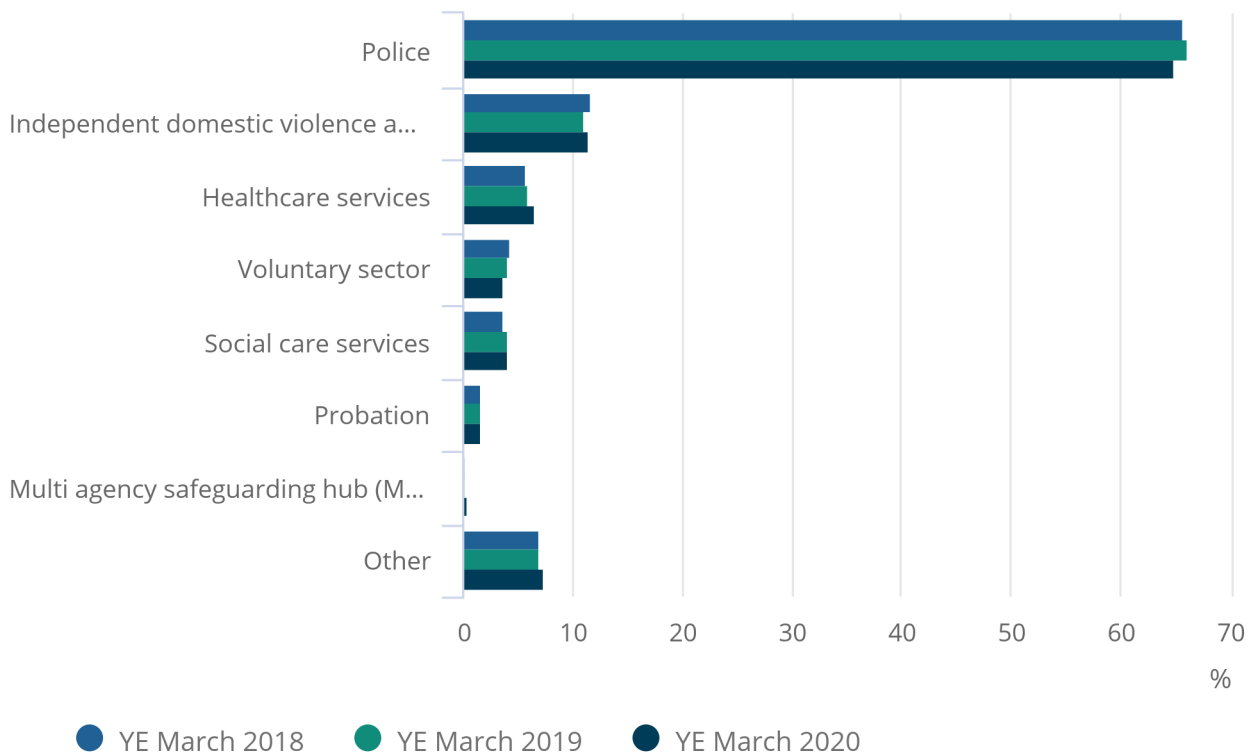
Victims of domestic abuse cannot self-refer to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC); they are always referred by an agency such as the police or health workers. The agency should complete a [domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence \(DASH\) risk assessment \(PDF, 228KB\)](#) (consisting of approximately 25 questions) at any domestic abuse incident they attend. Alongside professional judgement and expertise from the relevant agency, this risk assessment will determine whether a referral should be made to a MARAC<sup>3</sup>. Signs of potential escalation should also lead to a MARAC referral. Just under two-thirds (65%) of MARAC cases were referred by the police in the year ending March 2020, and this has remained relatively consistent in recent years ([Appendix Tables 35a and 35b](#)). Meanwhile, the percentage of MARAC cases referred by healthcare services has been increasing for the past three years (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: The police referred nearly two-thirds of multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) cases in the year ending March 2020**

Sources of referrals to MARACs, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020

Figure 6: The police referred nearly two-thirds of multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) cases in the year ending March 2020

Sources of referrals to MARACs, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020



Source: SafeLives

Notes:

1. Data from SafeLives are not classified as official statistics.
2. The number of MARAC referrals by each source are not presented as whole numbers, because the referral can be made by more than one service.
3. Other refers to education, housing, or another agency.
4. Healthcare services consist of referrals from a primary care service, a secondary service or acute trust, mental health or substance abuse services.
5. Social care services consist of referrals from adult social care or children's social care.

However, not all MARAC cases are referred by the police, because the victim may not want the police to be involved. There will also be some police domestic abuse-related incidents that will have been referred to a MARAC by somebody else.

Just under a third (31%) of cases discussed at MARACs across England and Wales were repeat cases. A repeat MARAC case is one in which a further incident is identified within 12 months of a previous referral. Any agency may identify this further incident regardless of whether it has been reported to the police<sup>4</sup>. Incidents that occur more than 12 months after the last MARAC referral do not constitute a repeat incident but instead would constitute a new referral to a MARAC. The proportion of repeat cases discussed at MARACs varies across police forces ([Appendix Table 15a](#)).

## **Independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs)**

The Insights dataset for the year ending March 2020 contains 3,074 unique individual cases at intake and 2,928 matched cases at exit<sup>5</sup>. These cases were drawn from 21 independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) services across England and Wales that used the SafeLives Insights outcome measurement service. Just over one-quarter (28%) of cases were repeat cases at intake, an increase compared with previous years ([Appendix Table 31](#))<sup>6</sup>.

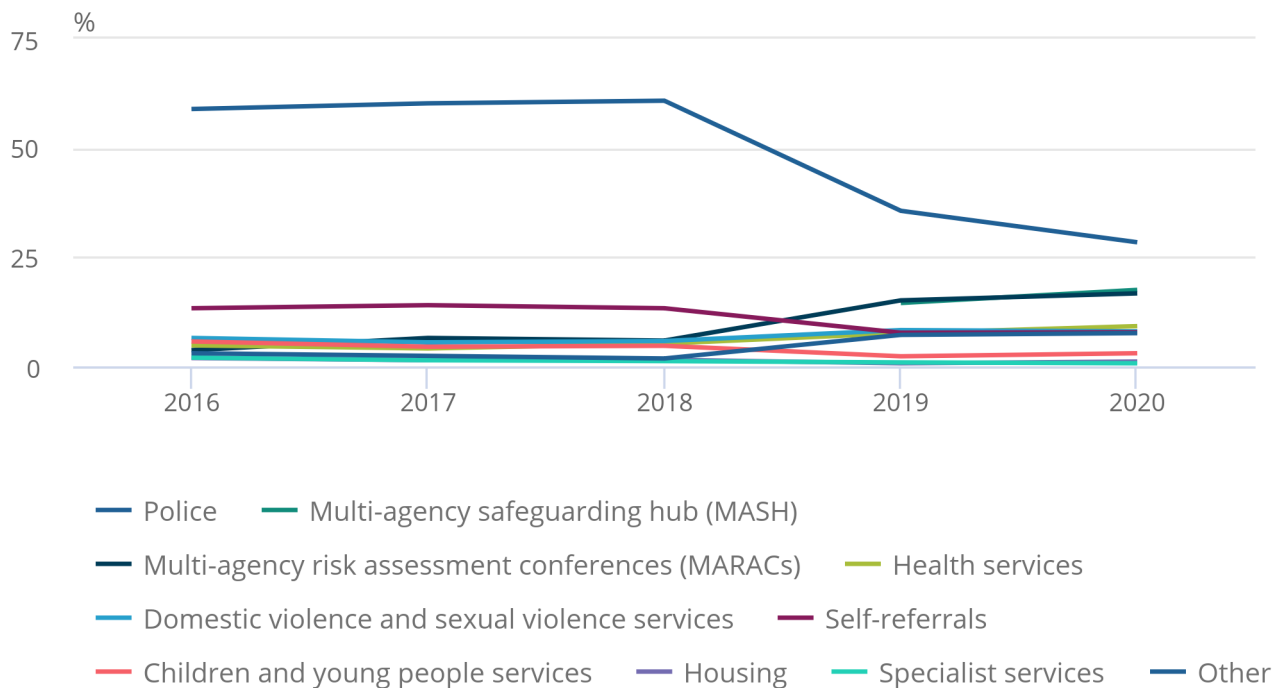
According to Insights, the most common referral route to an IDVA service was the police (28%), followed by Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (18%) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (17%, Figure 7). The proportion of referrals to IDVA services made by health services has increased in recent years, whilst the proportion that were self-referrals has decreased ([Appendix Table 32](#)).

**Figure 7: The proportion of referrals to IDVAs made by the police has decreased in recent years whilst the proportion of referrals from MARACs have increased**

Referral routes to independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) in England and Wales, year ending March 2016 to year ending March 2020

Figure 7: The proportion of referrals to IDVAs made by the police has decreased in recent years whilst the proportion of referrals from MARACs have increased

Referral routes to independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) in England and Wales, year ending March 2016 to year ending March 2020



Source: SafeLives - Insights IDVA dataset

**Notes:**

1. Insights IDVA data are not classified as official statistics.
2. Data may not sum to 100 due to rounding. These questions were mandatory on the Insights IDVA form.

**Beyond service access**

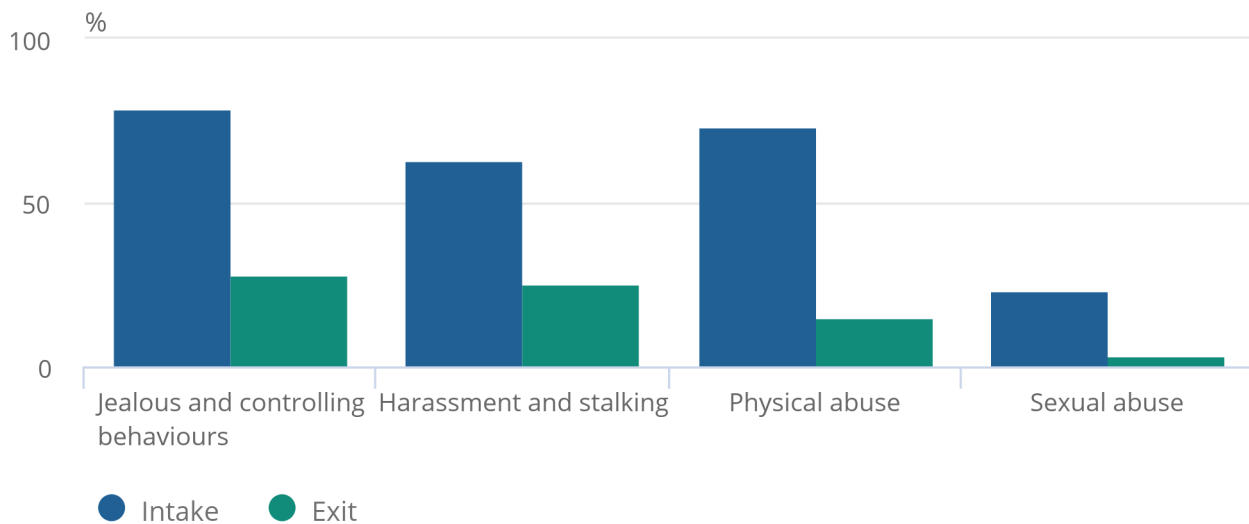
The Insights dataset records the profile of abuse experienced by IDVA clients at intake and at exit of the service ( [Appendix Table 34](#)). For every type of abuse, the experience of abuse decreased following exit from IDVA services (Figure 8). In particular, the proportions of clients experiencing physical abuse decreased from 74% at intake to 15% at exit. Similarly, the proportions of clients experiencing jealous and controlling behaviour decreased from 79% at intake to 28% at exit.

## Figure 8: The proportion of clients experiencing abuse decreased after accessing independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) services

Profile of abuse experienced by independent domestic violence advisor clients at intake compared with exit, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

### Figure 8: The proportion of clients experiencing abuse decreased after accessing independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) services

Profile of abuse experienced by independent domestic violence advisor clients at intake compared with exit, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: SafeLives – Insights independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) dataset

#### Notes:

1. Insights IDVA data are not classified as official statistics.
2. These data are based on clients exiting IDVA services. There will be some clients who have intake forms submitted within the reporting period, but are still accessing services and therefore are not included in the exit data.

At entry to IDVA services, 78% of the sample taken were not living with their perpetrator ([Appendix Table 14](#)). At exit of the service, this increased to 80% of clients not living with their perpetrator. However, one-third of clients (33%) reported ongoing contact with their perpetrator, with children the most common reason for this (53%, [Appendix Table 33](#)).

#### Notes for: Victim interactions with domestic abuse services



1. Intake refer to clients entering the IDVA service, exit refers to clients leaving the IDVA service.
2. The total number of referrals to refuges and community-based services for England, and the number that were accepted and declined are estimates based on response to the annual survey and the total numbers of services listed on Routes to Support.
3. A score of 14 or more will result in a MARAC referral.
4. A further incident includes any one of the following types of behaviour, which, if reported to the police, would constitute criminal behaviour: violence or threats of violence to the victim (including threats against property); or, a pattern of stalking or harassment; or rape or sexual abuse. Where a repeat victim is identified by any MARAC agency, that agency should refer the case to the MARAC, regardless of whether the behaviour experienced by the victim meets the local referral threshold. To identify repeat victims of domestic abuse regardless of to whom it is reported, all MARAC agencies should have the capacity to flag their files following the latest referral so that they are aware if a service user experiences a repeat incident
5. The number of cases in the IDVA dataset has decreased from 6,287 cases at intake and 5,177 exit forms in the year ending March 2016, to 3,074 cases at intake and 2,928 exit forms in the year ending March 2020. This is because fewer services are using Insights compared with previous years. This is because of the move to a new Insights system in the year ending March 2018 and has not had an impact on the findings of the IDVA dataset, as they have remained similar over time.
6. Cases are deemed repeats if the client has returned to the service after their case was previously closed (or made inactive).

## 5 . Domestic abuse victim services data

[Domestic abuse victim services - Appendix tables](#)

Dataset | Released 25 November 2020

Data from different organisations on the availability of domestic abuse services and the characteristics of service users.

## 6 . Glossary

### Helpline

A helpline is a telephone service that offers information, advice or support to callers about particular issues. A domestic abuse helpline offers these services to victims of domestic abuse and their families, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf. Local, community-based helplines are distinct from the 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline. Many survivors may speak to both services, as the national helpline provides referrals to services in their local area, alongside refuge referrals, emotional support, risk assessment and safety planning, and information on rights and options.

### Independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs)

Independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) are professionally qualified, specialist domestic abuse workers, who support high-risk victims of domestic abuse.

## Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)

A multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) is a meeting where information is shared on the highest-risk domestic abuse cases between representatives from a range of agencies. After sharing all relevant information about the circumstances for a particular victim, the representatives discuss options for increasing the victim's safety and turn these into a coordinated action plan

## Refuge service

A domestic abuse refuge service provides emergency temporary accommodation for victims of domestic abuse with a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support.

## 7 . Data sources and quality

This publication is part of our domestic abuse statistics release. It presents information on services that are available to victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales. Other commentary discussing domestic abuse in England and Wales can be found in the [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview](#).

This publication does not cover the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Commentary discussing domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can be found in [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#).

## Information on the services and service providers featured in this publication

To provide insight into how domestic abuse services respond to victims of domestic abuse, we have sourced data from a range of organisations. These data are sourced from non-governmental, administrative datasets and are not classified as official statistics.

The following services are included in this publication:

[ManKind Initiative](#)  
[The National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge](#)  
[Safelives](#)  
[Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)  
[Victim Support](#)  
[Welsh Women's Aid](#)  
[Women's Aid Federation of England](#)

### ManKind Initiative

The [ManKind Initiative](#) is a domestic abuse charity based in the United Kingdom. The ManKind Initiative is at the forefront of providing support for male victims of domestic abuse.

Since becoming a charity in 2001, it has provided training and support for statutory agencies (primarily the police and local authorities). It also runs campaigns to ensure that equal recognition is given to male and female victims of domestic abuse. Further to this, the ManKind Initiative operates a confidential helpline available for all men across the UK suffering from domestic abuse.

## Refuge

[Refuge](#) is a nationwide charity that provides specialist support for women and children who are victims of domestic abuse. Refuge offers a range of services such as community outreach, emergency refuge accommodation, support workers and independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs).

An IDVA is a professionally qualified, specialist domestic abuse worker who supports domestic abuse victims at high risk<sup>1</sup> from murder or serious harm.

Refuge runs a freephone 24-hour [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) for victims of domestic abuse, previously in partnership with the charity Women's Aid. The helpline is a national service both for women experiencing domestic abuse, as well as family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf. From 1 November 2019, the National Domestic Abuse Helpline has been run solely by Refuge.

## SafeLives

[SafeLives](#) is a UK-wide domestic abuse charity that has a strategy to stop domestic abuse before it starts. SafeLives obtains information from services, survivors and statistics to support people to become safe and well and to rebuild their lives.

SafeLives operates a specialist outcomes measurement programme called '[Insights](#)'. Insights is a tool that allows for the collection and analysis of frontline support information. IDVAs from various providers complete an 'Insights form' throughout the support period. These forms capture important demographic information and details of the abuse being experienced, as well as allowing changes to those experiences to be tracked over time.

SafeLives is also responsible for collecting data from every multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and from some MARACs in Scotland.

A multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) is a meeting between representatives from a range of services in which information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases. Attendees include: local police, healthcare practitioners, child protection practitioners, housing practitioners, IDVAs, probation workers and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. After sharing all relevant information about the circumstances for a particular victim, the representatives discuss options for increasing the victim's safety and turn these into a coordinated action plan.

The primary focus of the MARAC is to safeguard the adult victim, but it is also a forum for highlighting risk posed to linked individuals by the same perpetrator(s). Both those linked individuals, and the perpetrator(s), should be the subject of similar coordinated planning either at the MARAC or at linked forums that safeguard children and manage the behaviour of the perpetrator(s).

All MARACs fall within police force area boundaries, but police force areas can have more than one MARAC, depending on the size of the area and structure of the local authorities. This means that MARACs vary in size.

At the centre of a MARAC is the working assumption that no single agency or individual can see the complete picture of a victim's life, but all may have insights that are crucial to their safety. The victim does not attend the meeting but is represented by an IDVA who advocates on their behalf and holds statutory agencies to account.

The collection of MARAC data began in 2004 and, since 2010, [a national overview of MARACs covering England and Wales](#) has been available.

## The Suzy Lamplugh Trust

The [Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#) is a charity that aims to reduce the risk of stalking, violence and aggression through campaigning, education and support. The Suzy Lamplugh trust runs a freephone National Stalking Helpline which provides advice and guidance to individuals experiencing stalking, their family or friends, and the professionals supporting them.

Data available from the National Stalking Helpline can provide an indication of the profile of individuals contacting the helpline who have experienced stalking in a domestic relationship, by either an ex-partner or a family member ([Appendix Tables 17 and 18](#)).

## Victim Support

[Victim Support](#) is an independent charity dedicated to supporting victims of crime and traumatic incidents in England and Wales. For victims of domestic abuse, it offers outreach services to provide practical and emotional support. Victim Support is also one of the largest single independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA) providers in England and Wales.

Victim Support collates data on referrals to IDVA services ([Appendix Table 20](#)). It also runs both specialist domestic abuse services and wider multi-crime services (commissioned by Police and Crime Commissioners). The multi-crime services pick up lower-risk domestic abuse cases and cases where victims do not wish to engage with specialist organisations. Victim Support also collates data on multi-crime service cases flagged as domestic abuse-related.

## Women's Aid Federation of England

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. It is a federation of over 180 organisations who provide just under 300 local life-saving services to women and children across the country.

Women's Aid Federation of England distributes an [annual online survey](#) to all domestic abuse services (both refuge services and community-based services) for female victims in England listed on the Routes to Support database. The survey collects information on service users' needs, experiences and demographic information, as well as data on the services they use, and the numbers of referrals accepted and declined by services.

## Routes to Support

[Routes to Support](#) is the UK violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies, run in partnership by Scottish Women's Aid, Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland, Welsh Women's Aid, and Women's Aid Federation of England. The directory provides comprehensive data on all domestic abuse services including, but not limited to, those run by Women's Aid members. Routes to Support is supported and part-funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Routes to Support is a secure database and its primary purpose is to operate as a referral tool for the domestic abuse services sector. The data are obtained directly from the services listed on the system in the form of an initial questionnaire when the service registers. This is followed by an annual update form, which every service must complete to provide information about changes to provision. Data are further updated on an ongoing basis as Women's Aid are made aware of changes, and as new services are set up or takeovers tendered.

## Welsh Women's Aid

[Welsh Women's Aid](#) is the national umbrella body for third sector violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services in Wales. Currently Welsh Women's Aid has 19 member organisations within Wales. Welsh Women's Aid also runs the Live Fear Free Helpline, funded by the Welsh Government. The Live Fear Free Helpline is primarily for those suffering from domestic abuse and sexual violence, but calls can be made regarding any form of violence against women, and the caller will be referred to a service in their area. Data from these helplines give insight into those who use these services, as well as how victims are signposted once they call the helplines.

Welsh Women's Aid conducts a separate data collection covering domestic abuse service provision in Wales. At the end of each quarter during the reporting period, Welsh Women's Aid collects a range of data from member organisations. This includes the number of clients supported and referred in that period, support needs of service users, types of abuse experienced by clients, locality and demographics.

### Notes for: Data sources and quality

1. Victims at high risk are determined using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour-based Violence (DASH) Risk Identification Checklist, professional judgement and where repeat incidents are occurring.

## 8 . Related links

### [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2020](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 25 November 2020

Figures on domestic abuse from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, police recorded crime and a number of different organisations.

### [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

Prevalence, long-term trends and types of domestic abuse experienced by adults, based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, and police recorded crime.

### [Partner abuse in detail, England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2019

Information from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on the amount, type and nature of partner abuse experienced in the last year.

### [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

Characteristics of victims of domestic abuse based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime.

### [Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2020](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

Information on responses to and outcomes of domestic abuse cases in the criminal justice system.

### [How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

Information on the stages of the criminal justice process in England and Wales, and how data are captured at each stage.

### [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic, England and Wales: November 2020](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

Indicators from a range of data sources to assess the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on domestic abuse in England and Wales.