

Article

Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2021

Long-term trends and types of domestic abuse experienced by adults, based on findings from police recorded crime.

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1 . Other pages in this release

- [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2021](#)
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2 . Main points

- The police recorded a total of 1,459,663 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes in England and Wales in the year ending March 2021.
- Of these, 845,734 were recorded as domestic abuse-related crimes, an increase of 6% from the previous year, representing 18% of all offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2021.
- Estimates from our most recent Crime Survey for England and Wales year ending March 2020 show 5.5% of adults aged 16 to 74 years (2.3 million) experienced domestic abuse in the 12 months prior.

Analysis presented in this article should be treated with caution as it is based on police recorded crime data, which do not provide a measure of domestic abuse prevalence. Police recorded crime figures have shown increases in domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes, which may reflect improved recording by the police.

3 . Understanding domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is often a hidden crime that is not reported to the police. Therefore, data held by the police can only provide a partial picture of the actual level of domestic abuse experienced. Many cases will not enter the criminal justice process as they are not reported to the police.

In previous years, estimates including when a victim does not report abuse to the police or to other domestic abuse services, are produced from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). However, the face-to-face CSEW was suspended on 17 March 2020 because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and replaced with the Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW). The TCSEW was specifically designed to continue measuring crime during this period. Concerns around confidentiality and respondent safeguarding led to domestic abuse questions being excluded from the survey. As a result, CSEW estimates of domestic abuse for the year ending March 2021 are not available in this release.

Domestic abuse-related crimes continued to be recorded by police throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Police recorded crime data, in isolation, do not provide a measure of prevalence to understand the true extent of domestic abuse. Therefore, figures presented in this release should be interpreted with caution.

In this release, we only analyse data for the year ending March 2021 from the police. Our most recent prevalence estimates from the CSEW can be found in the [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, year ending March 2020](#) article.

The Home Office collects data on the number of domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes recorded by the police.

4 . Crime Survey for England and Wales

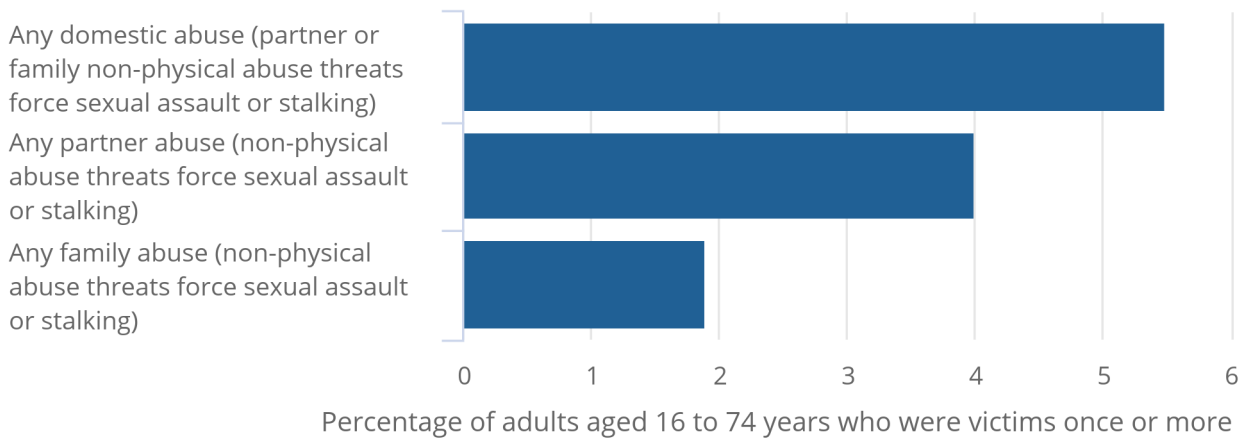
The latest available domestic abuse data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) are for the year ending March 2020. These showed that an estimated 2.3 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2020: a prevalence rate of approximately 5 in 100 adults (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A higher percentage of adults were victims of partner abuse than family abuse

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by perpetrator-relationship, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 1: A higher percentage of adults were victims of partner abuse than family abuse

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by perpetrator-relationship, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

Notes:

1. Partner abuse refers to abuse carried out by a partner or ex-partner.
2. Some victims may have experienced both partner and family abuse in the last year.

5 . Police recorded crime

The police recorded a total of 1,459,663 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes¹ in England and Wales in the year ending March 2021. This was an increase of 79,407 from the previous year².

Of the total number of domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes, 613,929 (42%) were incidents not subsequently recorded as a crime³. The remaining 845,734 (58%) were recorded as domestic abuse-related crimes. This was a 6% increase from the previous year and represents 18% of all offences recorded by the police.

Some of this increase may be, in part, driven by general police improvements in offence-recording practices, as well as an increase in domestic abuse-related incidents coming to the attention of the police. The increase could also indicate an increased willingness and confidence of victims to come forward to report domestic abuse.

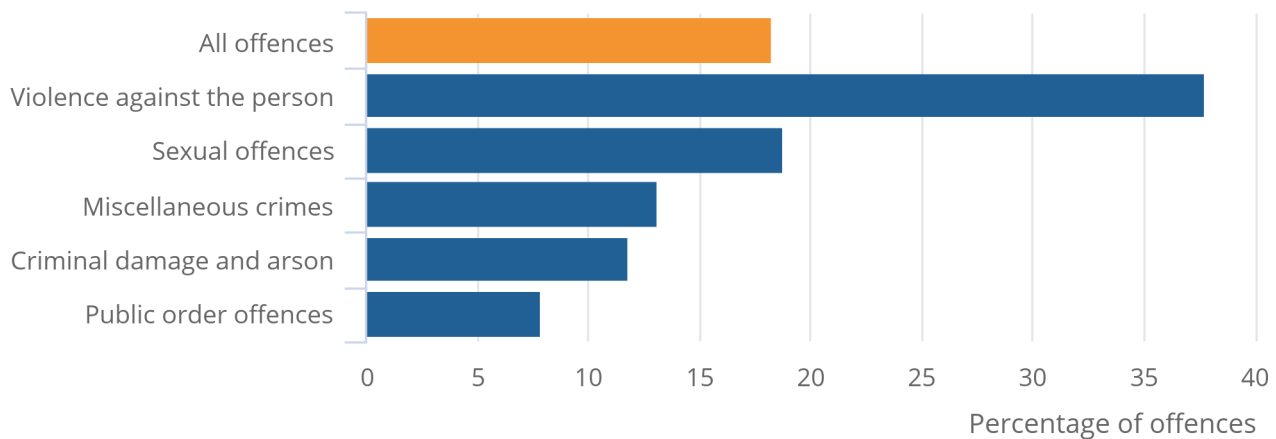
All offence types apart from “other offence types” saw an increase compared with the numbers published in the [year ending March 2020](#). Violence against the person had the highest proportion of offences identified as domestic abuse-related at 38% (Figure 2). This was a 7% increase in the number of domestic abuse-related offences compared with the previous year.

Figure 2: Over a third of violence against the person offences were identified as domestic abuse-related

Proportion of offences recorded by the police that were identified as domestic abuse-related, by selected offence groups, England and Wales, year ending March 2021

Figure 2: Over a third of violence against the person offences were identified as domestic abuse-related

Proportion of offences recorded by the police that were identified as domestic abuse-related, by selected offence groups, England and Wales, year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Police recorded crime

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Domestic abuse-related offences are defined as any incidence of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults, aged 16 years and over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

The police recorded 215,173 domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences in the year ending March 2021, accounting for a quarter of all domestic abuse-related crimes. Of these, similar proportions of offences were identified as being domestic abuse-related within the stalking subgroup category (39%) and the malicious communication's subgroup category (37%; Figure 3).

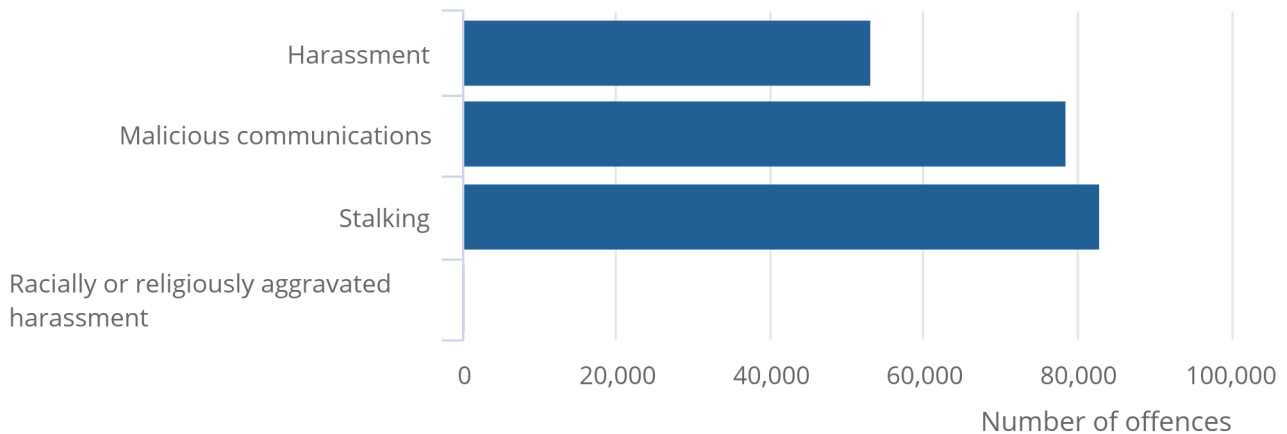
Following a change to the [Home Office Counting rules \(PDF, 1.02MB\)](#) in April 2020, offences within the stalking sub-group category increased. The change means cases where a course of conduct is reported between a victim and their former partner must be recorded as "stalking" unless the police are satisfied that the matter amounts to harassment in law only. Therefore, data for year ending March 2021 are not comparable with previous years.

Figure 3: Stalking and malicious communications were the sub-group categories with the highest number of domestic abuse-related offences

Number of domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences recorded by the police, by offence, England and Wales, year ending March 2021

Figure 3: Stalking and malicious communications were the sub-group categories with the highest number of domestic abuse-related offences

Number of domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences recorded by the police, by offence, England and Wales, year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Police recorded crime

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Stalking and harassment offences include harassment, malicious communications, racially or religiously aggravated harassment and stalking.
3. Stalking and harassment is a sub-group of the Violence Against the Person offence-group.
4. From April 2020 a change to the Home Office Counting Rules means all cases where a course of conduct is reported between a victim and their former partner must be recorded as 'stalking' unless the police are satisfied that the matter amounts to harassment in law only.

Over one-third of all stalking and harassment offences recorded by the police in England and Wales were domestic abuse-related in the year ending March 2021 (36%).

Controlling or coercive behaviour

There were 33,954 offences of coercive control recorded by the police in England and Wales in the year ending March 2021. This is compared with 24,856 in the year ending March 2020 and 17,616 in the year ending March 2019. The rise of coercive control offences over recent years may be attributed to improvements made by the police in recognising incidents of coercive control and using the [new law](#) accordingly.

Domestic homicide

There were 362 domestic homicides recorded by the police in the three-year period between year ending March 2018 and year ending March 2020. This represents 19% of all homicides where the victim was aged 16 years and over during this period.

Of the 362 homicides, 214 (59%) were female victims who were killed by a partner or ex-partner. In contrast 33 (9%) were male victims who were killed by a partner or ex-partner. The remaining 115 (32%) were victims killed by a suspect in a family category.

Notes for: Police recorded crime

1. Domestic abuse-related incidents cover reports where, after initial investigation, the police have concluded that no notifiable crime was committed. Incidents of domestic abuse that result in a crime being recorded by the police are included in the data on domestic abuse-related crimes. The number of domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes gives a better picture of the demand that domestic abuse puts on the police.
2. There may be some cases where an incident is recorded and then a crime subsequently recorded in a different time period, for example, an incident recorded on 31 March, a crime recorded on 1 April.
3. An example of a domestic abuse-related incident that does not amount to a crime would be two family members having a loud argument, a third party calls the police, the police attend and calm the situation down, but no notifiable crime has taken place.

6 . Domestic abuse in England and Wales data

[Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics](#)

Dataset | Released 24 November 2021

Domestic abuse numbers, prevalence, types and victim characteristics, based upon police recorded crime.

[Domestic abuse in England and Wales – Data tool](#)

Dataset | Released on 24 November 2021

An interactive Excel-based data tool for domestic abuse statistics. It allows users to explore data for their police force area in more detail and compare with other areas.

7 . Glossary

Controlling or coercive behaviour

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence and can include a range of abusive behaviours. It can also be experienced as repeated patterns of abusive behaviour to maintain power and control in a relationship. The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) defines domestic abuse as any incident or pattern of incidents between those aged 16 years or over who:

- are a partner
- are an ex-partner
- are a relative
- have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 outlines the following behaviours as abuse:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional, or other abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children under the age of 18 years who see, or hear, or experience the effects of the abuse, as a victim of domestic abuse if they are related or have a parental relationship to the adult victim or perpetrator of the abuse.

Domestic abuse-related crimes

Incidents of domestic abuse that resulted in a crime being recorded by the police and are included in police recorded crime.

Domestic abuse-related incidents

Incidents of domestic abuse that were reported to the police, but following investigation, do not amount to a crime or offence according to the National Crime Recording Standards. These can be added to domestic abuse-related crimes to create a total picture of the demand that domestic abuse puts on the police.

Domestic homicide

An offence of murder, manslaughter, or infanticide where the relationship between a victim aged 16 years and over and the perpetrator falls into one of the following categories: spouse, common-law spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, ex-spouse, ex-cohabiting partner or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, adulterous relationship, son or daughter (including step and adopted relationships), parent (including step and adopted relationships), brother or sister, other relatives.

Stalking

Defined in the CSEW as two or more incidents (causing distress, fear or alarm) of receiving obscene or threatening unwanted letters, emails, text messages or phone calls, having had obscene or threatening information about them placed on the internet, waiting or loitering around home or workplace, or following or watching.

8 . Data sources and quality

Further quality and methodology information can be found in the [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview](#).

Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

Previous domestic abuse in England and Wales releases include analysis of data from the Crime Survey in England and Wales (CSEW). For reasons outlined in [Section 3](#), CSEW estimates are not available for the year ending March 2021.

More information about the CSEW can be found in our:

- [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#)
- [Domestic abuse QMI](#)
- [How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system](#) article

Work to improve the data collected to measure domestic abuse from the CSEW is ongoing. More information can be found in our [Redevelopment of domestic abuse statistics: research update November 2021](#) article.

How the police measure domestic abuse

The Home Office collects data on the number of domestic abuse-related incidents and the number of domestic-abuse related crimes. More information on domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes can be found in our [Domestic abuse QMI](#) and our [How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system](#) article.

Home Office Homicide Index

The Home Office Homicide Index provides data on whether homicides are “domestic”. The Homicide Index contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales.

Analysis on data from the Homicide Index within this publication combines data for a three-year period (year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020) to account for the year-to-year variability in the volume of homicides. More information can be found in our [How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system](#) article.

9 . Related links

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

Article | Released 24 November 2021

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.