

Article

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

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

Release date:
25 November 2020

Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Main points

- According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales year ending March 2020, an estimated 5.5% of adults aged 16 to 74 years (2.3 million) experienced domestic abuse in the last year.
- There was no significant change in the prevalence of domestic abuse experienced in the last year compared with the year ending March 2019.
- The police recorded a total of 1,288,018 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police)¹ in the year ending March 2020.
- Of these, 758,941 were recorded as domestic abuse-related crimes, an increase of 9% from the previous year.
- As the survey showed no change, the increase in police recorded crime may reflect improved recording by the police and increased reporting by 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](#).

Notes for: Main points

1. Data for Greater Manchester Police on domestic abuse-related incidents and domestic abuse-related crimes are not included in this publication because of issues with their data supply following the implementation of new IT systems.

2 . 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.

One of the strengths of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is that it covers many crimes that are not reported to the police. Domestic abuse measured by the CSEW combines non-sexual abuse, sexual assault and stalking. Information is collected on whether these types of abuse were carried out by a partner (including a former partner) and/or a family member other than a partner (father or mother, step-father or mother or other relative). This definition broadly matches the government definition of domestic violence and abuse which can be found in the [Glossary](#).

The Home Office collects data on the number of domestic abuse-related incidents and the number of domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police. Domestic abuse-related incidents include those reports where, after initial investigation, the police have concluded that no notifiable crime was committed¹. Incidents of domestic abuse that result in a crime being recorded by the police are included in the data on domestic abuse-related crimes.

For more information on how domestic abuse is measured within the CSEW and by the police, see [Data sources and quality](#).

This publication is largely unaffected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as it mainly relates to the period prior to the lockdown. Further information on the impact of the pandemic on the CSEW and police recorded crime data can be found in [Data sources and quality](#). Commentary discussing domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can be found in [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#). Other commentary discussing domestic abuse in England and Wales can be found in the [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview](#).

Notes for: Understanding domestic abuse

1. An example of a domestic abuse 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 crime has taken place.

3 . Crime Survey for England and Wales

Prevalence of domestic abuse experienced in the last year

For the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that an estimated 2.3 million adults aged 16 to 74 years¹ experienced domestic abuse in the last year. This equates to a prevalence rate of approximately 5 in 100 adults (Figure 1). The latest prevalence estimates for all types of domestic abuse experienced in the last year showed no statistically significant change compared with the previous year.

Information on the prevalence of domestic abuse by demographic variables such as sex and ethnicity can be found in the [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, year ending March 2020](#) publication.

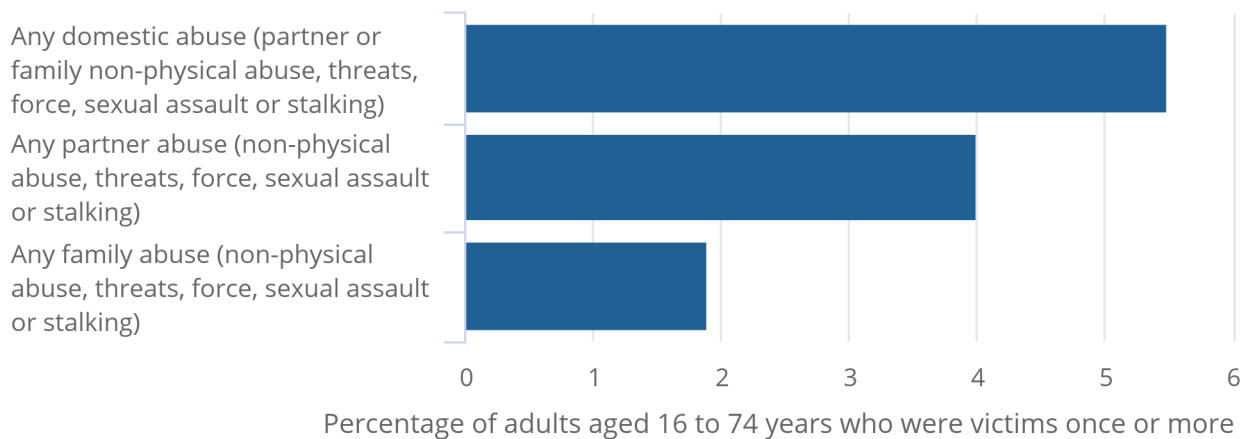
Figure 1 shows that a higher percentage of adults experienced abuse carried out by a partner (4.0%) than by a family member (1.9%).

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.

In terms of the types of abuse experienced in the last year, Figure 2 shows that:

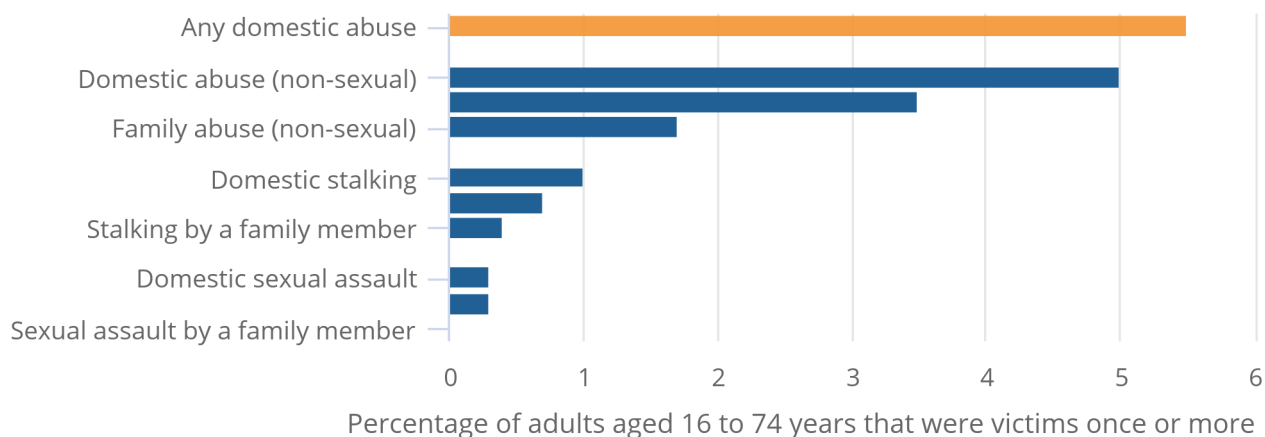
- non-sexual domestic abuse (which comprises physical force, emotional abuse, financial abuse, threats and force) was the most common type of domestic abuse experienced by adults (5.0%)
- domestic stalking was experienced by 1.0% of adults
- domestic sexual assault was experienced by 0.3% of adults

Figure 2: Non-sexual domestic abuse was most commonly experienced

Percentage of adults aged 16 to 74 years who have experienced domestic abuse in the last year, by type of abuse, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 2: Non-sexual domestic abuse was most commonly experienced

Percentage of adults aged 16 to 74 years who have experienced domestic abuse in the last year, by type of abuse, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

Notes:

1. Chapter 5 of the [User Guide](#) provides definitions of the various types of domestic abuse.
2. Abuse carried out by a partner also includes abuse carried out by an ex-partner.
3. Sexual assault categories include attempts.
4. The sum of the overarching domestic abuse categories is not the sum of the sub-categories, as victims who have experienced more than one type of abuse will be included in multiple categories.

Following the change in the upper age limit for survey respondents in April 2017 (from 59 to 74 years)¹, when analysing data over a longer time period we use the 16 to 59 years age range. The cumulative effect of small year-on-year reductions has resulted in a significantly lower prevalence of domestic abuse experienced by adults aged 16 to 59 years in the last year for the year ending March 2020 (6.1%) compared with the year ending March 2005 (8.9%; [Appendix Table 4b](#)). Similarly, the number of estimated victims of domestic abuse in the last year for the year ending March 2020 (2.0 million) is significantly lower than the number in the year ending March 2005 (2.7 million; [Appendix Table 5b](#)).

Although most year-on-year changes in prevalence have been insignificant, the prevalence of domestic abuse experienced by survey respondents in the 12 months prior to interview did drop significantly to 6.5% in the year ending March 2009 (Figure 3).

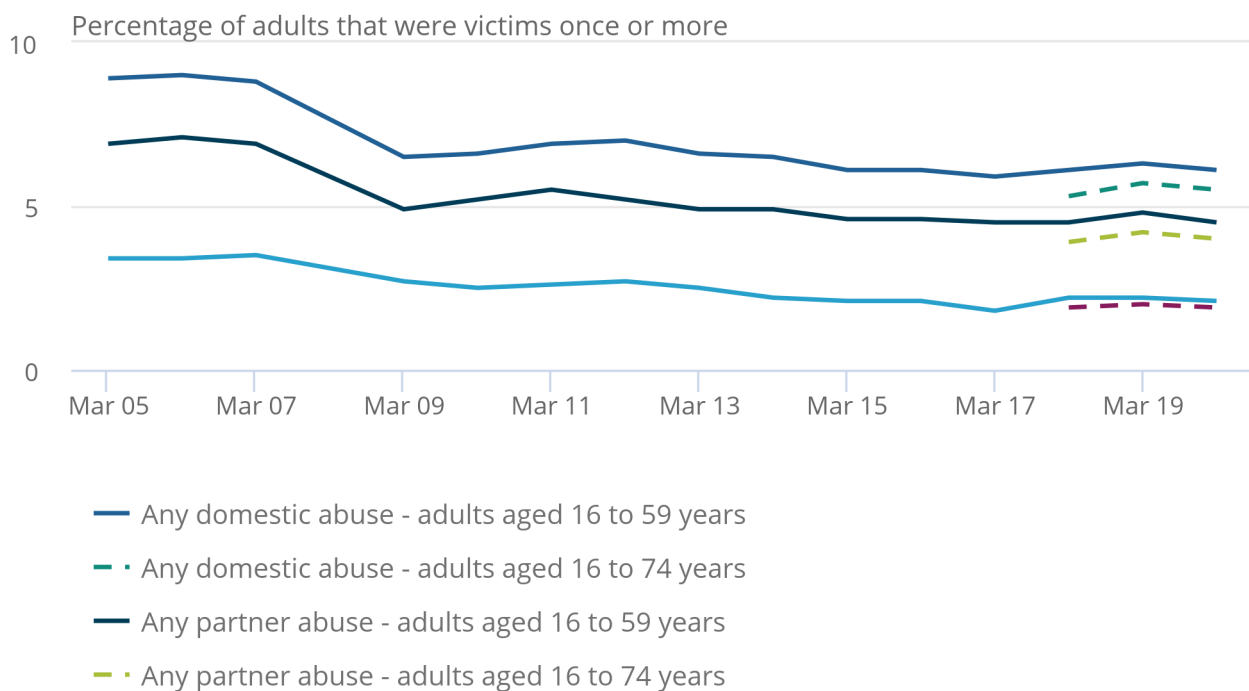
The downward trend in prevalence over time is driven by reductions in the prevalence of partner abuse, which has decreased from 6.9% to 4.5% over the same period (Figure 3). Family abuse has also followed a similar trend with a significantly lower prevalence in the year ending March 2020 (2.1%) compared with the year ending March 2005 (3.4%; [Appendix Table 4b](#)).

Figure 3: Domestic abuse estimated by the survey has not changed significantly over the last year

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 74 years, England and Wales, year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2020

Figure 3: Domestic abuse estimated by the survey has not changed significantly over the last year

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 74 years, England and Wales, year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2020



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

Notes:

1. No data is available for the year ending March 2008 because comparable questions on any domestic abuse, any partner abuse and any family abuse were not included in that year.
2. Partner abuse refers to abuse carried out by a partner or ex-partner.
3. From April 2017, the upper age limit for the self-completion module was increased to ask all respondents aged 16 to 74 years.

There has been no significant change in the level of stalking (by partner, ex-partner, or family member) in the year ending March 2020 compared with the year ending March 2005 ([Appendix Table 4b](#)).

Sexual assault (including attempts) by a partner or family member has a relatively low prevalence compared with other types of domestic abuse. There has been no significant change in the prevalence of domestic sexual assault (including attempts) by a partner or by a family member in the year ending March 2020 compared with the year ending March 2005 ([Appendix Table 4b](#)).

Number of domestic abuse types experienced in the last year

Although the CSEW is a large sample survey, there are a relatively small number of victims of the different types of domestic abuse interviewed in any one year. Consequently, analysis on how many types of domestic abuse were experienced by victims has been completed on a dataset combining the three latest survey years; the year ending March 2018 to the year ending March 2020.

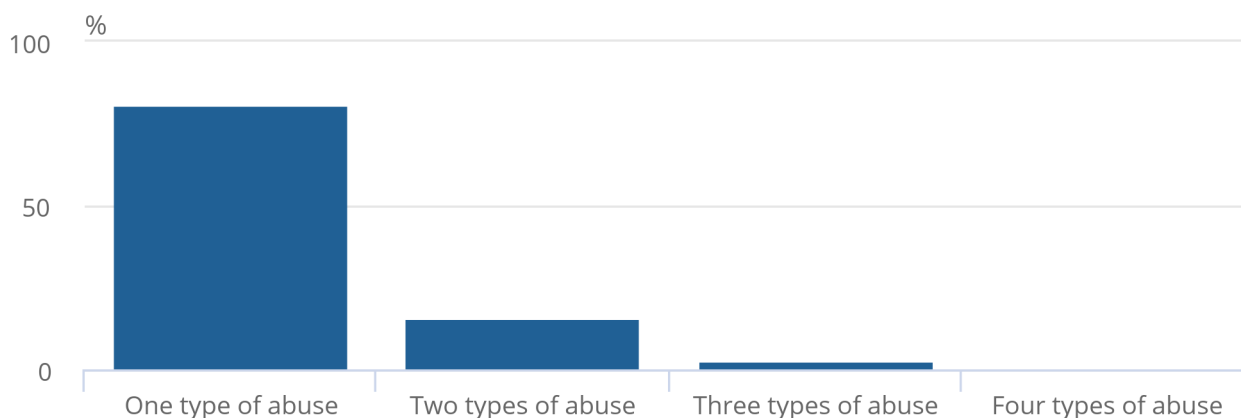
Figure 4 shows that the majority (80.9%) of domestic abuse victims aged 16 to 74 years suffered one type of abuse in the last year. In cases where one type of abuse was experienced, the most common type was non-sexual partner abuse, with 49.6% of victims experiencing this single type of abuse in the last year² ([Appendix Table 8](#)). For cases where two types of abuse were experienced, non-sexual partner abuse and stalking were the most commonly experienced combination (6.7% of victims; [Appendix Table 8](#)).

Figure 4: The majority of victims experienced one type of abuse

Number of types of abuse experienced by victims of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020

Figure 4: The majority of victims experienced one type of abuse

Number of types of abuse experienced by victims of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020



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

Notes:

1. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.
2. Data are shown for the number of abuse-types (non-sexual partner abuse, non-sexual family abuse, domestic sexual assault, domestic stalking) experienced and not the number of incidents of abuse experienced.

Prevalence of domestic abuse experienced since the age of 16 years

The year ending March 2020 CSEW showed that an estimated 8.8 million adults aged 16 to 74 years¹ had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 years. This equates to a prevalence rate of approximately 21 in 100 adults (Figure 5).

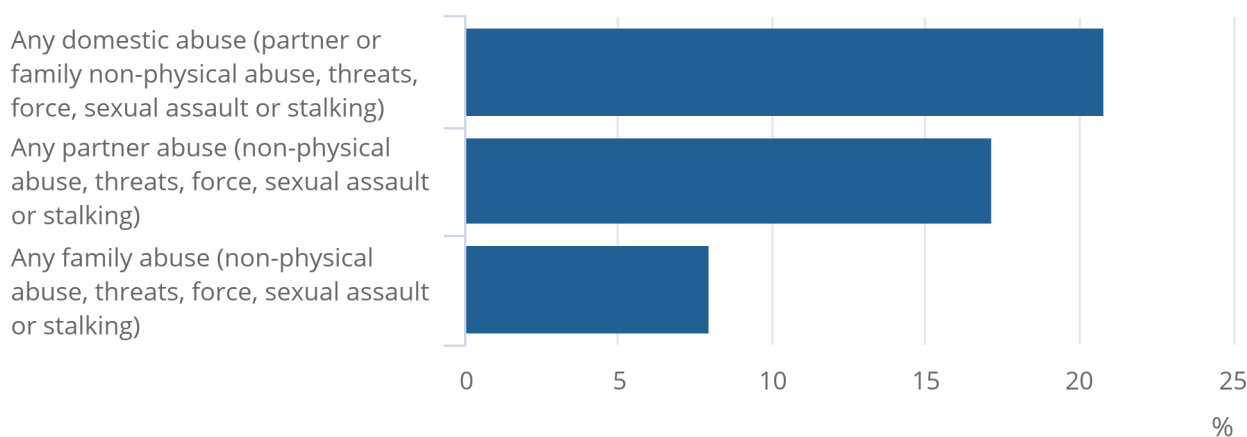
In terms of the victim relationship to the perpetrator, 17.2% of adults had experienced partner abuse since the age of 16 years, and 8.0% had experienced family abuse since the age of 16 years ([Appendix Table 1](#)).

Figure 5: Over 20% of adults had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 years

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

Figure 5: Over 20% of adults had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 years

Prevalence of domestic abuse since the age of 16 years 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.

In terms of the types of abuse experienced since the age of 16 years, Figure 6 shows that:

- non-sexual domestic abuse was the most common type of domestic abuse experienced by adults (19%)
- domestic stalking was experienced by 6.3% of adults
- domestic sexual assault was experienced by 4.0% of adults ([Appendix Table 1](#))

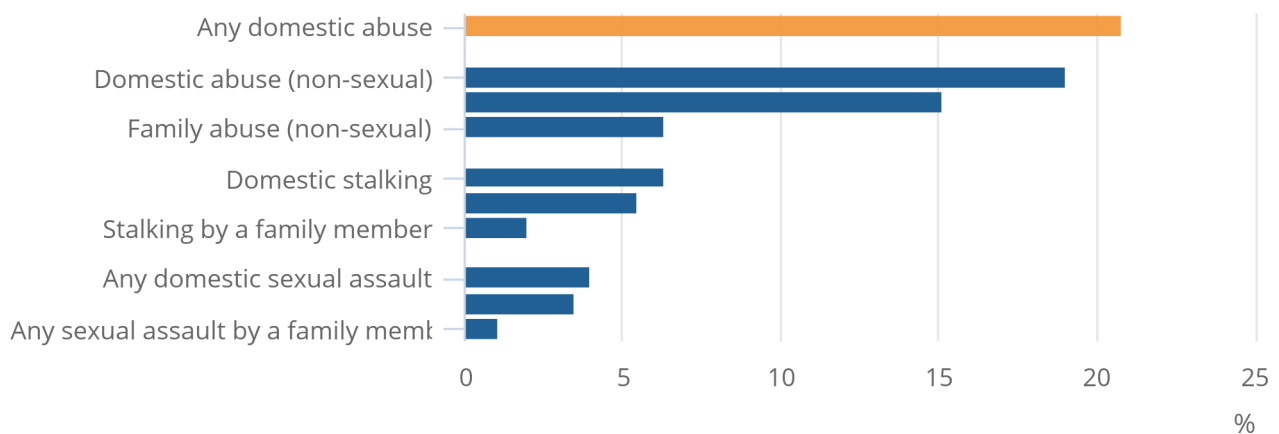
More information on sexual assault and stalking can be found in the article [Sexual offending: victimisation and the path through the criminal justice system](#) and dataset [Stalking: findings from the CSEW, year ending March 2020](#).

Figure 6: Non-sexual domestic abuse was the most commonly experienced type of abuse since the age of 16 years

Prevalence of domestic abuse since the age of 16 years for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by type of abuse, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 6: Non-sexual domestic abuse was the most commonly experienced type of abuse since the age of 16 years

Prevalence of domestic abuse since the age of 16 years for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by type of abuse, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

Notes:

1. Chapter 5 of the [User Guide](#) provides definitions of the various types of domestic abuse.
2. Sexual assault categories include attempts.
3. Abuse carried out by a partner includes abuse carried out by an ex-partner.
4. The sum of the overarching domestic abuse categories is not the sum of the sub-categories, as victims who have experienced more than one type of abuse will be included in multiple categories.

Notes for: Crime Survey for England and Wales

1. The age range for respondents eligible for the self-completion module was expanded in April 2017, changing from adults aged 16 to 59 years to adults aged 16 to 74 years. This publication reports primarily on those aged 16 to 74 years, for which we currently have three years of data. Where analysis requires more than the last three years of data, we have reported using the 16 to 59 years age range. Data for both 16 to 59 years and 16 to 74 years are provided separately within the [Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics – Appendix Tables](#).
2. For the three-year dataset, “in the last year” refers to the 12 months prior to interview and covers a four-year recall period from April 2016 to March 2020.

4 . Police recorded crime

A total of 1,288,018 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes¹ were recorded by the police in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police (GMP))² in the year ending March 2020 (an increase of 51,404 from the previous year)³. Of the domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes recorded in the year ending March 2020, 529,077 (41%) were incidents not subsequently recorded as a crime⁴. The remaining 758,941 were recorded as domestic abuse-related crimes (59% of the total number of incidents and crimes).

In the previous year, the police recorded 699,431 domestic abuse-related crimes in England and Wales excluding GMP² (57% of the total number of incidents and crimes). This equates to a volume increase of 59,510 (9%) domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police between the year ending March 2019 and the year ending March 2020 ([Appendix Table 9](#)).

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 of victims to come forward to report domestic abuse⁵. In contrast, the Crime Survey for England and Wales showed no change in victim numbers (see section on [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) for more information).

Information on the characteristics of victims of domestic abuse-related crimes can be found in the [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, year ending March 2020](#) publication.

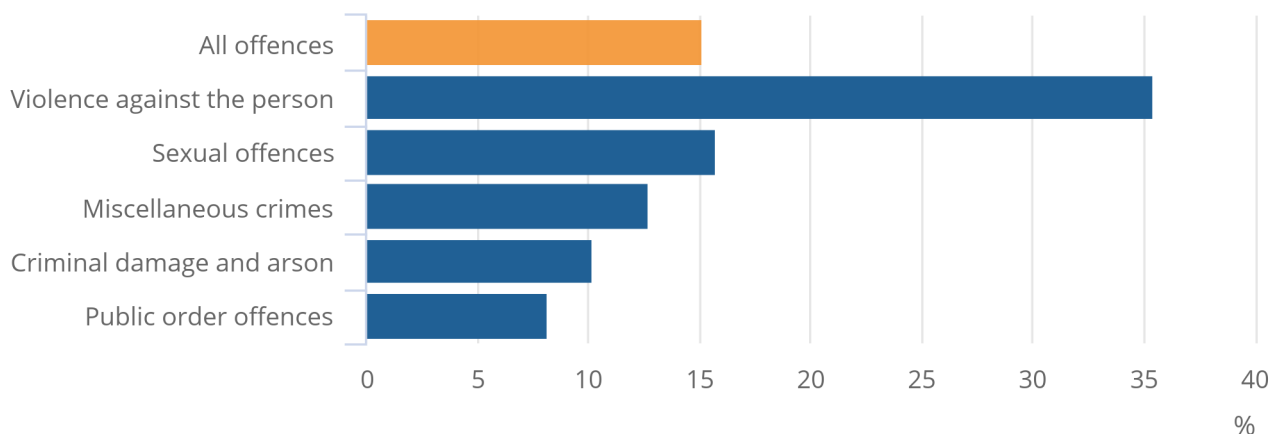
Just over one-third (35%) of the 1,680,884 violence against the person offences recorded by the police in England and Wales (excluding GMP)² in the year ending March 2020 were domestic abuse-related ([Appendix Table 14b](#)). Sexual offences had the second highest proportion with 16% of the 154,113 recorded offences being domestic abuse-related (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Over one-third of violence against the person offences were flagged as domestic abuse-related

Proportion of offences recorded by the police that were flagged as domestic abuse-related, by selected offence groups, England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police), year ending March 2020

Figure 7: Over one-third of violence against the person offences were flagged as domestic abuse-related

Proportion of offences recorded by the police that were flagged as domestic abuse-related, by selected offence groups, England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police), year ending March 2020



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.
3. Data for Greater Manchester Police are not included because of issues with their data supply following the implementation of new IT systems.

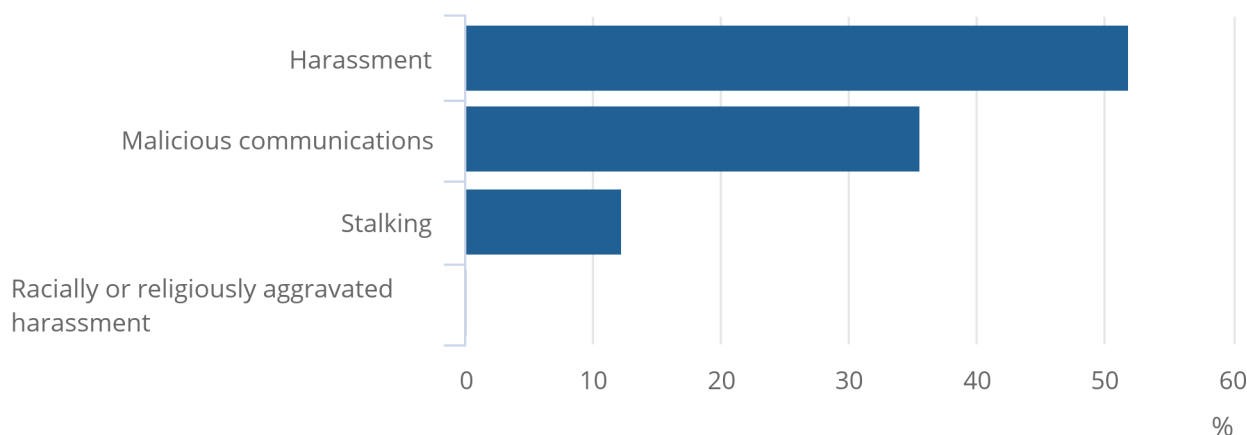
The police recorded 176,837 domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences in England and Wales (excluding GMP)² in the year ending March 2020, accounting for just under a-quarter (23%) of all domestic abuse-related crimes in that year ([Appendix Table 18](#)). The majority of domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences fell within the harassment sub-group category (52%), followed by malicious communications (36%; Figure 8).

Figure 8: The majority of domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences were in the harassment sub-group

Proportion of stalking and harassment offences recorded by the police that were flagged as domestic abuse-related, by offence sub-group, England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police), year ending March 2020

Figure 8: The majority of domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences were in the harassment sub-group

Proportion of stalking and harassment offences recorded by the police that were flagged as domestic abuse-related, by offence sub-group, England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police), year ending March 2020



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. Data for Greater Manchester Police are not included because of issues with their data supply following the implementation of new IT systems.

Domestic abuse-related stalking and harassment offences made up over one-third of all stalking and harassment offences recorded by the police in England and Wales (excluding GMP)² in the year ending March 2020 (37%, see [Appendix Table 19](#)). This proportion varied by police force area. For more information please see the [Domestic abuse statistics – data tool](#).

Controlling or coercive behaviour

There were 24,856 offences of coercive control recorded by the police in England and Wales (excluding GMP)² in the year ending March 2020, compared with 16,679 (excluding GMP) in the year ending March 2019 ([Appendix Table 20](#)). The rise could be attributed to improvements made by the police in recognising incidents of coercive control and using the new law accordingly⁶.

Domestic homicide

There were 357 domestic homicides recorded by the police in England and Wales in the three-year period between year ending March 2017 and year ending March 2019. This represents 19% of all homicides where the victim was aged 16 years and over during this time period ([Appendix Table 21](#)). Information on the characteristics of victims of domestic homicide can be found in the [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, year ending March 2020](#) publication.

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 give a better picture of the demand that domestic abuse puts on the police.
2. Data for Greater Manchester Police (GMP) on domestic abuse-related incidents, domestic abuse-related crimes and offences of controlling or coercive behaviour are not included in this publication because of issues with their data supply following the implementation of new IT systems. Any total police recorded crime data refer to England and Wales excluding GMP.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Once every three years the Crime Survey for England and Wales asks further questions on the circumstance of partner abuse experienced. The latest figures showed no significant difference in the total proportion of victims of partner abuse who told the police about the abuse they experienced in the year ending March 2018 compared with the year ending March 2015. However, these figures do not represent all victims of domestic abuse. We're planning a full review of the domestic abuse questions in the Crime Survey. This will consider how we can ask victims of domestic abuse about who they reported their experience to.
6. Controlling or coercive behaviour was introduced as a specific criminal offence as part of the Serious Crime Act 2015 and came into force on 29 December 2015.

5 . Domestic abuse in England and Wales data

[Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics – Appendix Tables](#)

Dataset | Released 25 November 2020

Domestic abuse numbers, prevalence, types and victim characteristics, based upon findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime.

[Stalking: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 25 November 2020

Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales on stalking including numbers, types and victim characteristics.

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

Dataset | Released on 25 November 2020

An interactive tool exploring data at police force area level.

6 . 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. It can include repeated patterns of abusive behaviour to maintain power and control in a relationship. It includes abuse carried out by a partner, ex-partner or family member. The [government's definition](#) of domestic violence and abuse recognises this and defines domestic abuse as:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. It can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional”

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 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.

Non-sexual abuse

Abuse which includes physical force, emotional or financial abuse, or threats to hurt the individual or someone close to them.

Sexual assault

Within the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) sexual assault includes rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), or indecent exposure or unwanted touching.

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.

7 . 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)

The CSEW covers the population living in households in England and Wales; it does not cover the population living in group residences (for example, care homes or student halls of residence) or other institutions. Estimates used within this publication are based on the CSEW self-completion module on domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking.

The upper age limit for respondents eligible for the self-completion module was increased from 59 years to 74 years in April 2017. This publication reports primarily on those aged 16 to 74 years, for which we currently have three years of data. Where analysis requires more than the last three years of data, we have reported using the 16 to 59 years age range. Data for both age groups are provided separately within the [Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics – Appendix Tables](#).

One of the strengths of the CSEW is that it covers many crimes that are not reported to the police. The CSEW provides reliable estimates of the prevalence of domestic abuse using a consistent methodology that is not affected by changes in recording practices and police activity, or by changes in the propensity of victims to report to the police. While the CSEW provides the best available estimate of trends in the prevalence of domestic abuse, it cannot be used to make any inferences about demands on the police.

All changes reported in this publication are statistically significant at the 5% level unless stated otherwise. Headline CSEW prevalence estimates for domestic abuse included within this publication have previously been published in July 2020 alongside the [Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2020 bulletin](#).

More information about the CSEW can be found in [How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system](#).

Measuring domestic abuse within the CSEW

Domestic abuse in the CSEW combines the following different types of abuse:

- non-sexual abuse: physical force, emotional or financial abuse, or threats to hurt the respondent or someone close to them
- sexual assault: rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), or indecent exposure or unwanted touching
- stalking¹: 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 watching²

The CSEW collects information on these types of abuse carried out by a partner (including a former partner) and carried out by a family member other than a partner (father or mother, step-father or mother or other relative).

There are two headline measures of domestic abuse in the CSEW: one relates to experiences since the age of 16 years and the other is limited to those experiences in the 12 months prior to interview.

For the self-completion section of the survey, respondents are handed a tablet computer to use to answer questions. This allows respondents to feel more at ease when answering these sensitive questions, because of increased confidence in the privacy and confidentiality of the survey.

The face-to-face component of the survey does ask about one element of domestic abuse: incidents of violence (physical abuse, not including threats). This is referred to as “domestic violence”. It is a narrower definition than asked about in the self-completion section which covers non-physical abuse, physical abuse (including threats or force), sexual assault and stalking. This partly explains why the prevalence of domestic abuse reported in the self-completion module is significantly higher than the prevalence of domestic violence reported in the face-to-face interview.

Further analysis shows that there is a higher level of reporting of force in the CSEW self-completion module than in the face-to-face module. Of those aged 16 to 74 years who reported being victims of force in the last 12 months in the self-completion module, only 10.3% reported being a victim of domestic violence in face-to-face interviews (10.8% for women and 9.1% for men). The self-completion module therefore provides a more complete and accurate measure of domestic abuse victimisation. As there are several differences between the coverage and quality of the self-completion and face-to-face estimates, care should be taken when making comparisons between the two.

The CSEW estimates do not completely capture the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship, which was introduced on 29 December 2015. New survey questions to better estimate experiences of this type of abuse are still under development. Details of the research carried out to date can be found in the article on [Developing a measure of controlling or coercive behaviour](#).

Work to improve the data collected to measure domestic abuse from the CSEW is ongoing. Following the suspension of fieldwork due to the coronavirus pandemic there will be no CSEW domestic abuse data available for the year ending March 2021. Further research is underway to consider alternative approaches for future data collection. Inclusivity is an important part of this work and our aim is to capture data from as much of the population as possible.

How the police measure domestic abuse

With the exception of coercive or controlling behaviour, domestic abuse is not a specific criminal offence. Offences that are domestic abuse-related will be recorded under the respective offence that has been committed, for example, assault with injury. However, the police are required to flag when an offence is domestic abuse-related. The Home Office has been collecting information from the police on whether recorded offences are related to domestic abuse since April 2015³.

The Home Office collects data on the number of domestic abuse-related incidents and the number of domestic-abuse related crimes. Domestic abuse-related incidents cover reports 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. They include those reports where, after initial investigation, the police have concluded that no notifiable crime was committed⁴.

Not all reported crimes are recorded as an incident first. If it is clear when the incident is reported that an offence has occurred, the police may record the matter as a domestic abuse-related crime immediately without first recording an incident. Incidents of domestic abuse that result in a crime being recorded by the police are included in the data on domestic abuse-related crimes. More information on domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes can be found in the publication [How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system](#).

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. It is continually updated with revised information from the police and the courts and, as such, is a richer source of data than the main recorded crime dataset⁵.

Homicide Index data are based on the year when the offence was recorded, not when the offence took place or when the case was heard in court. While in the vast majority of cases the offence will be recorded in the same year as it took place, this is not always the case. The data refer to the position as at 5 December 2019, when the Homicide Index database was “frozen” for the purpose of analysis⁶. The data may change as subsequent court hearings take place or as other information is received.

Analysis on data from the Homicide Index within this publication combines data for a three-year period (year ending March 2017 to year ending March 2019) to account for the year-to-year variability in the volume of homicides.

Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

This publication is largely unaffected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

CSEW data presented in this publication for the year ending March 2020 are based on interviews conducted between April 2019 and the first two weeks of March 2020. Fieldwork for the year ending March 2020 was suspended two weeks early on Wednesday 18 March 2020 just prior to the lockdown restrictions being announced by the government on 23 March 2020. All estimates from the CSEW for the year ending March 2020 were therefore unaffected by the lockdown restrictions as the data were collected, and relate to, the time prior to this period.

With fieldwork being suspended two weeks earlier than anticipated, the annual sample fell just short of its target of 34,500 adult interviews (the actual figure on which the year to March estimates are based was 33,735 adult interviews). Response rates also fell from a target of 70% to 64%. Overall the impact on the survey estimates has therefore been minimal.

The latest police recorded crime figures presented in this publication relate to crimes recorded by the police during the period April 2019 to the end of March 2020. In response to the coronavirus pandemic, restrictions in England and Wales started from 12 March 2020, with a national lockdown implemented from 23 March 2020. The start of the restrictions and the first eight days of lockdown are therefore captured in police recorded data for the year ending March 2020. We do not expect there to have been a significant impact on crime statistics in February 2020 or earlier before restrictions were applied in the country.

The publication [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#) provides insight into the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on domestic abuse in England and Wales.

Notes for: Data sources and quality

1. As the CSEW questions include stalking by a current partner, it is not consistent with the [legal definition of stalking and harassment](#).
2. From the year ending March 2013 survey onwards, the definition of stalking was changed to meet the criteria of two or more incidents specified in the legal definition.
3. In response to a recommendation in the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) 2014 report [Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse \(PDF, 736KB\)](#), police forces are asked to "flag" crimes as being domestic abuse-related if the offence meets the government definition of domestic violence and abuse.
4. An example of a domestic abuse 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 crime has taken place.
5. For example, when the police initially record an offence as a homicide it remains classified as such unless the police or courts decide that a lesser offence, or no offence, took place. The offence would be reclassified on the Homicide Index as "no longer recorded" but remain in the main police recorded crime collection as a homicide.
6. The Homicide Index is continually updated with revised information from the police as investigations continue and as cases are heard by the courts. The version used for analysis does not accept updates after it is "frozen" to ensure the data do not change during the analysis period. See Section 3.1 of the [User guide to crime statistics](#) for more information.

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 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.

[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 services, England and Wales: November 2020](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

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

[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](#)

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.