

Article

Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales: year ending March 2025

Amount, type and nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts) experienced since the age of 16 years, based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

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1 . Other pages in this release

- [Sexual offences in England and Wales overview: year ending March 2025](#)
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2 . Main points

The year ending (YE) March 2025 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 2.2 million people aged 16 years and over had experienced sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts) since the age of 16 years. Analysis of the nature of these assaults focuses on the most recent incident and uses data from YE March 2020 and YE March 2025 CSEW combined.

Of victims who experienced sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts) since the age of 16 years:

- around half (51.8%) had been a victim more than once
- around 4 in 10 (43.2%) were victimised by their partner or ex-partner (44.5% of females and 20.2% of males) and 16.3% were victimised by a stranger (15.0% of females and 37.5% of males)
- over one-third (38.2%) were victimised in their own home and 8.0% were victimised on the street, in a car park, park, or another open public space
- nearly half (48.3%) said the perpetrator used physical force, such as holding them down, to make them have sex with them, and 4.7% said the perpetrator had threatened to kill them
- around 1 in 7 (14.7%) reported the assault to the police and, of those that told someone but not the police, 38.5% did not think the police could help, 35.3% stated embarrassment as a reason for not reporting, and 30.5% thought it would be humiliating

3 . Understanding sexual offences

Sexual offences are often hidden crimes that are not always reported to the police. Therefore, data held by the police can only provide a partial picture of the actual level of sexual assault experienced.

Improvements in police recording practices, the introduction of new offences, and increased reporting by victims have had a large impact on the trends in recent years. In contrast, one of the strengths of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is that it covers crimes that are not reported to the police. It therefore provides the best estimate of prevalence and provides important context to the police figures.

This publication focuses specifically on sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts). It contains data from the CSEW self-completion module on the nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration. It also provides more detail on the circumstances of these types of sexual assaults experienced by respondents since the age of 16 years.

Data from year ending (YE) March 2025 have been combined with data from YE March 2020 (when they were last previously collected) to provide more robust estimates. Data for YE March 2020 are limited to people aged 16 to 74 years, whereas data for YE March 2025 include those aged 16 years and over.

For more information on how sexual assaults are measured within the CSEW, see [Section 12: Data sources and quality](#).

4 . Prevalence of sexual assault

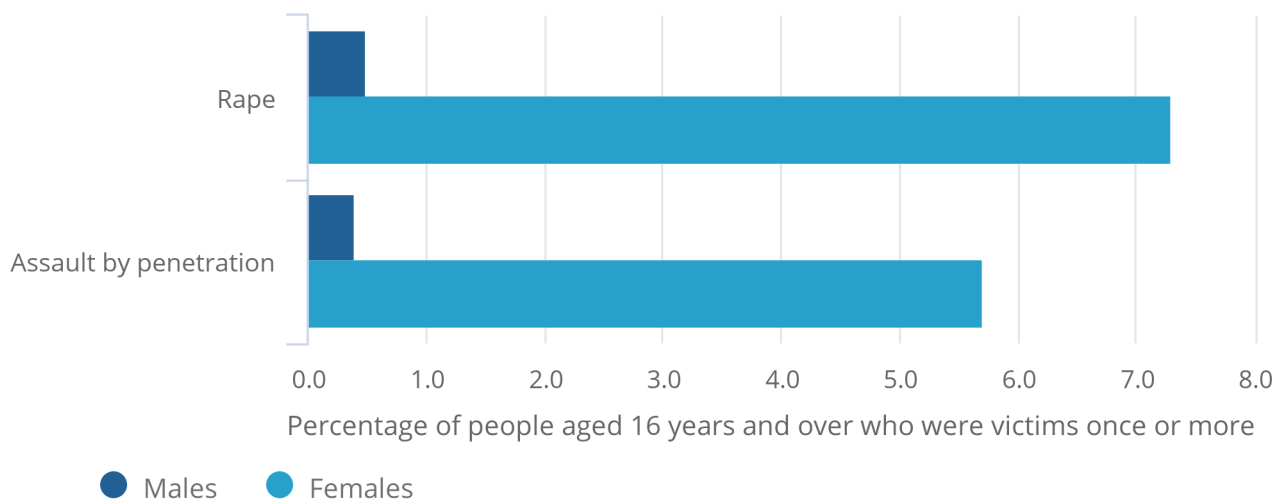
The year ending (YE) March 2025 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 4.5% of people aged 16 years and over (2.2 million) had experienced sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts) since the age of 16 years (8.2% for females and 0.7% for males). Around 1 in 14 females (7.3%) had experienced rape (including attempts) since the age of 16 years compared with 0.5% of males (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A higher percentage of females than males were victims of sexual assault by rape or penetration since the age of 16 years

Prevalence of sexual assault since the age of 16 years among people aged 16 years and over, by type of sexual assault and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2025

Figure 1: A higher percentage of females than males were victims of sexual assault by rape or penetration since the age of 16 years

Prevalence of sexual assault since the age of 16 years among people aged 16 years and over, by type of sexual assault and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2025



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Data for year ending March 2025 are based on a half sample. Caution should be taken because of the impact of the reduced sample size on the quality of the data.
2. The categories “assault by penetration” and “rape” include attempts.

In YE March 2020 and March 2025 combined, around half of victims aged 16 years and over [note 1] who experienced rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) since the age of 16 years had been a victim more than once (51.8%). This proportion was higher for females than males (52.9% and 35.5%, respectively). Almost a quarter of victims had experienced this type of assault more than three times since they were aged 16 years (23.6%).

Notes for: Amount and type of sexual assault experienced

1. The age range for respondents eligible for the self-completion modules of the CSEW was changed in October 2021, from people aged 16 to 74 years to those aged 16 years and over. When combining data from YE March 2020 and YE March 2025, data for YE March 2025 have not been restricted to those aged 16 to 74 years.

5 . Perpetrator characteristics

In year ending (YE) March 2020 and YE March 2025 combined, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 62.0% of victims who experienced rape or assault by penetration since the age of 16 years had been assaulted by a single perpetrator, with 22.7% assaulted by two different perpetrators, 8.9% by three and 6.3% by more than three.

Age and sex

In YE March 2020 and YE March 2025 combined, the majority of victims who had experienced rape or assault by penetration since they were aged 16 years stated that the perpetrator(s) was male (98.0%). Almost two-thirds said that the perpetrator(s) was a male aged between 20 and 39 years.

At the time of the most recent incident, most victims stated that they were assaulted by a male of a similar age to themselves.

Relationship to victim

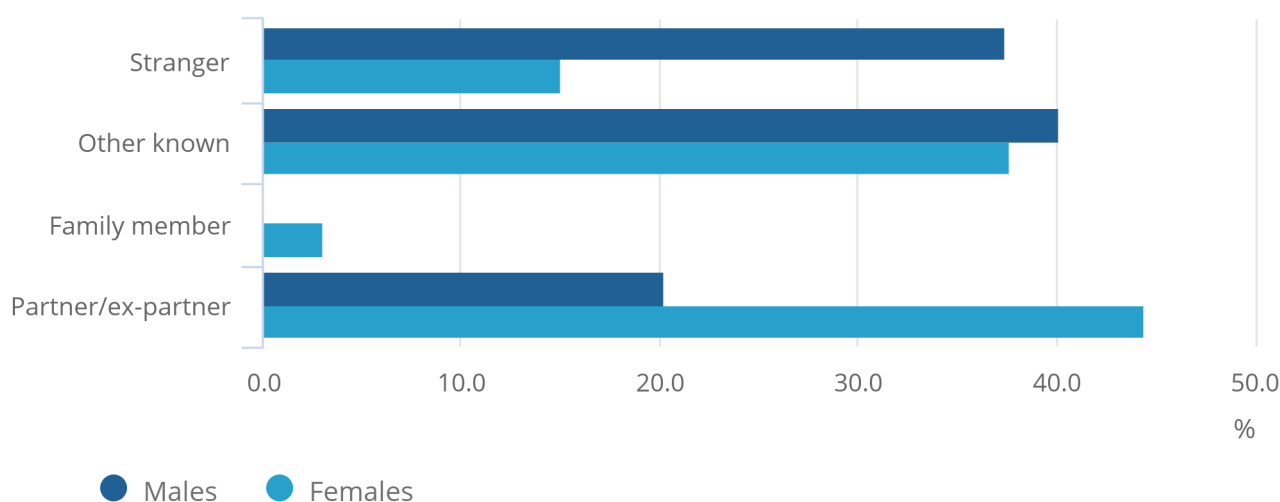
For YE March 2020 and YE March 2025 combined, for victims who experienced sexual assault by rape or penetration since the age of 16 years, the most common perpetrator was a partner or ex-partner (43.2%). This was closely followed by someone who was known to them other than a partner or family member (37.8%), which includes dates (11.3%) and friends (10.7%). For female victims, 15.0% stated that they were assaulted by a stranger, whereas this was the case for 37.5% of male victims (Figure 2).

Figure 2: More males were assaulted by a stranger than females

Victim-perpetrator relationship for rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) experienced by people aged 16 years and over since the age of 16 years, by sex of victim, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2025 combined

Figure 2: More males were assaulted by a stranger than females

Victim-perpetrator relationship for rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) experienced by people aged 16 years and over since the age of 16 years, by sex of victim, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2025 combined



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Data for year ending (YE) March 2025 are based on a half sample. To increase the sample size and improve the quality of the estimates, these data are based on combined data from YE March 2020 and YE March 2025. These are the two latest years in which the "Nature of sexual assault" module was asked on the survey.
2. If the victim had experienced more than one sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts), the question was asked of the most recent incident.
3. The estimate for males with a "family member" perpetrator is unavailable because of disclosure constraints.
4. "Other known" includes date, friend, neighbour, an acquaintance (outside work or school or college or university), person in a position of trust or authority (not at work, school or university), colleague or peer from work or school or college or university.
5. Percentages may sum to more than 100, as multiple perpetrators could be identified.

More information on the relationship between the victim and perpetrator for all types of sexual assault can be found in our [Sexual offences victim characteristics, England and Wales: YE March 2025 article](#).

6 . Circumstances of the assault

Location

For year ending (YE) March 2020 and YE March 2025 combined, the most common location for rape or assault by penetration to occur was in the victim's home (38.2%), followed by the perpetrator's home (28.5%).

A higher proportion of females (39.3%) than males (21.5%) were victimised in their own home. The assault had taken place in a park, other open public space, car park or on the street for 8.0% of victims.

Alcohol and drug consumption

In their most recent incident of rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), 38.8% of victims said that the perpetrator(s) was under the influence of alcohol. A similar percentage (37.8%) stated that they were under the influence of alcohol themselves.

Fewer victims stated that the perpetrator was under the influence of drugs (9.4%) and that they themselves were under the influence of drugs they had chosen to take (3.1%). In addition, 5.0% of victims stated that they thought that the perpetrator had drugged them during the last incident of rape or assault by penetration they had experienced.

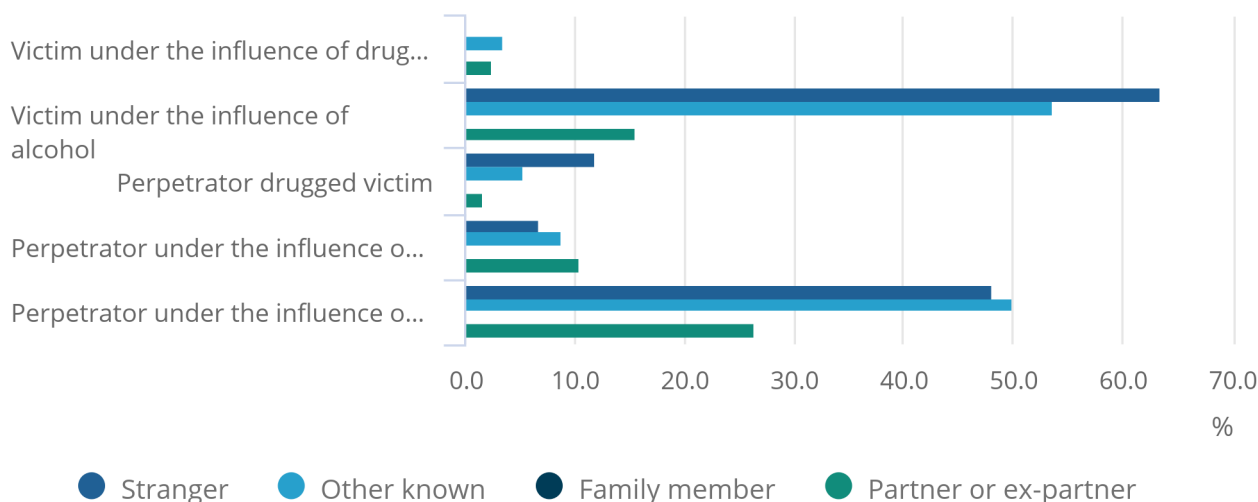
Of victims who stated that the perpetrator was a stranger, 63.4% said that they themselves were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the assault, almost half (48.2%) disclosed that the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol, and 11.9% said that they thought they had been drugged. For victims who stated that the perpetrator was a partner or ex-partner, these percentages were lower (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Almost half of victims who identified the perpetrator as a stranger, said the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol when the sexual assault took place

Influence of alcohol and drugs for rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) experienced by people aged 16 years and over since the age of 16 years, by victim-perpetrator relationship, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2025 combined

Figure 3: Almost half of victims who identified the perpetrator as a stranger, said the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol when the sexual assault took place

Influence of alcohol and drugs for rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) experienced by people aged 16 years and over since the age of 16 years, by victim-perpetrator relationship, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2025 combined



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Data for year ending (YE) March 2025 are based on a half sample. To increase the sample size and improve the quality of the estimates, these data are based on combined data from YE March 2020 and YE March 2025. These are the two latest years in which the "Nature of sexual assault" module was asked on the survey.
2. If the victim had experienced more than one sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts), the question was asked of the most recent incident.
3. The estimates for some categories are unavailable because of disclosure constraints.
4. "Other known" includes date, friend, neighbour, an acquaintance (outside work or school or college or university), person in a position of trust or authority (not at work, school or university), colleague or peer from work or school or college or university.
5. Percentages for these categories may not sum to total of combined percentage as respondents could have selected more than one response.

Method used by perpetrator

For almost half (48.3%) of victims, physical force had been used by the perpetrator to try to make the victims have sex with them, with 8.1% of victims stating that the perpetrator had choked or tried to strangle them. Almost one-fifth (18.2%) of victims stated that they felt frightened or that the perpetrator had threatened to hurt them, and in 4.7% of cases, threats to kill the victim were made by the perpetrator.

Almost a quarter (23.1%) of victims were either unconscious or asleep during the most recent incident of sexual assault by rape or penetration.

7 . Effects on the victim

Victims of sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts) since the age of 16 years were asked questions on physical injury and other non-physical effects experienced as a result of the most recent incident of assault.

Nearly a third of victims (31.6%) stated that they suffered some sort of physical injury. The most common types of injuries were minor bruising or a black eye (17.3%) and scratches (12.9%).

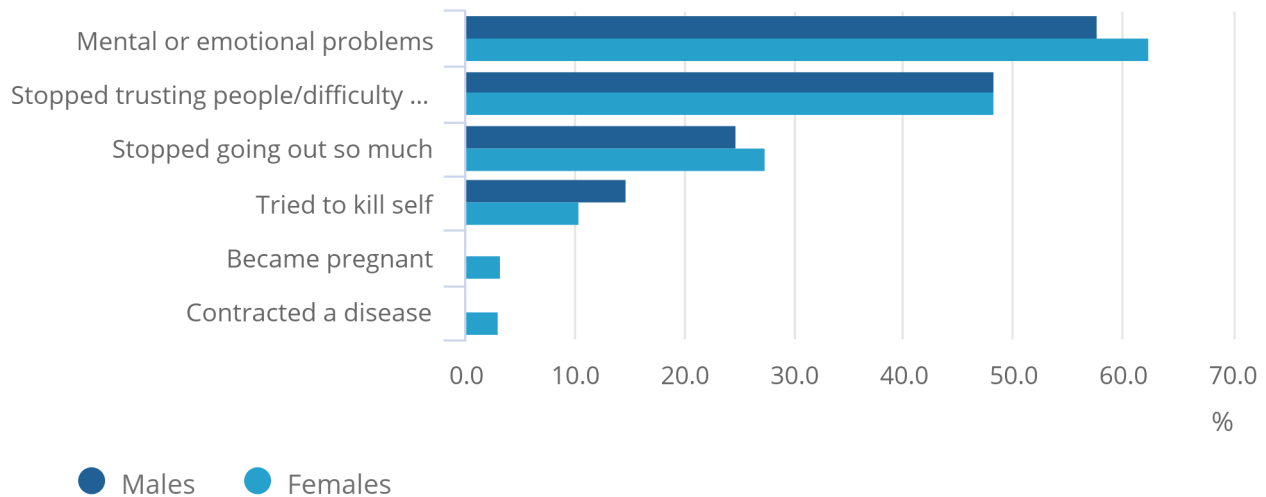
Victims were presented with a list of other non-physical effects and were asked if they had suffered any of these as a result of the assault. For both males and females, the category most frequently selected was “mental or emotional problems” (57.7% of males and 62.5% of females, respectively). Around 1 in 10 victims (14.8% of males and 10.4% of females) said that they had attempted to kill themselves as a result (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The most common non-physical effect of rape or assault by penetration was “mental or emotional problems”

Non-physical effects of rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) experienced by people aged 16 years and over since the age of 16 years, by sex of victim, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2025 combined

Figure 4: The most common non-physical effect of rape or assault by penetration was “mental or emotional problems”

Non-physical effects of rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) experienced by people aged 16 years and over since the age of 16 years, by sex of victim, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2025 combined



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Data for year ending (YE) March 2025 are based on a half sample. To increase the sample size and improve the quality of the estimates, these data are based on combined data from YE March 2020 and YE March 2025. These are the two latest years in which the “Nature of sexual assault” module was asked on the survey.
2. If the victim had experienced more than one sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts), the question was asked of the most recent incident.
3. Estimates for “became pregnant” and “contracted a disease” are not available for males because of non-applicable data or disclosure constraints.

Victims of rape or assault by penetration who were employed at the time of the incident were asked about the impact of the assault on their work. One-sixth of victims (16.7%) said that they took time off work because of the assault, and 5.6% stated that they lost their job or gave up work.

8 . Sources of support

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending (YE) March 2020 and YE March 2025 combined showed that 68.7% of victims told someone about the sexual assault by rape or penetration they had experienced since the age of 16 years. The highest proportion of victims told someone they knew personally (59.7%) (Figure 5).

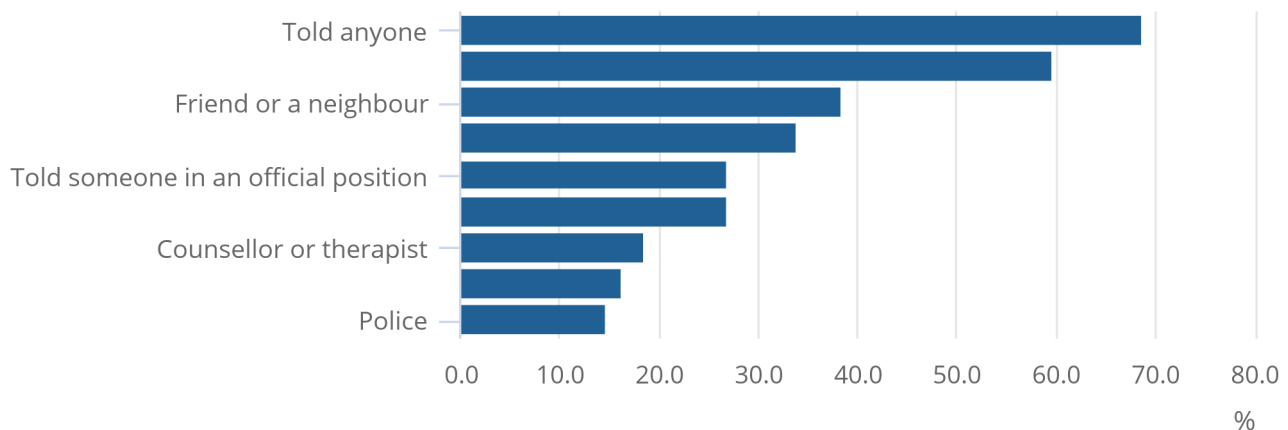
The same proportion of victims told someone in an official position (26.9%) as told another support professional or organisation (26.9%) about the assault they experienced.

Figure 5: Most victims told someone about the assault, but rarely the police

Who victim told of rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) experienced by people aged 16 years and over since the age of 16 years, by sex of victim, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2025 combined

Figure 5: Most victims told someone about the assault, but rarely the police

Who victim told of rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) experienced by people aged 16 years and over since the age of 16 years, by sex of victim, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2025 combined



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Data for year ending (YE) March 2025 are based on a half sample. To increase the sample size and improve the quality of the estimates, these data are based on combined data from YE March 2020 and YE March 2025. These are the two latest years in which the "Nature of sexual assault" module was asked on the survey.
2. If the victim had experienced more than one sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts), the question was asked of the most recent incident.
3. Percentages may sum to more than 100, as more than one option could be selected.

More victims told someone about the rape or assault by penetration when the perpetrator was a stranger (79.3%) compared with when the perpetrator was a partner or ex-partner (65.6%).

9 . Reporting to the police

Victims of sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts) since the age of 16 years were asked questions surrounding issues on reporting the most recent assault to the police.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending (YE) March 2020 and YE March 2025 combined showed that around 1 in 7 victims (14.7%) had reported the assault to the police. This figure was comparable with that seen in YE March 2017 (16.9%).

For those that told someone about the assault, but did not report it to the police, the most common reasons given were:

- did not think the police could help (38.5%)
- embarrassment (35.3%)
- thought it would be humiliating (30.5%)

Nearly a quarter of victims (24.4%) thought the police would not believe them.

The two most common reasons victims gave for telling the police were to prevent it from happening to others (47.6%) and believing it to be the right thing to do (47.0%), although wanting the perpetrator(s) to be punished (37.9%) was also a common reason.

As victim age increased, so did the number of victims telling the police: just 10.7% of victims who were aged 16 to 19 years at the time of the most recent incident reported the assault to the police, compared with 24.6% of 35- to 44-year-olds.

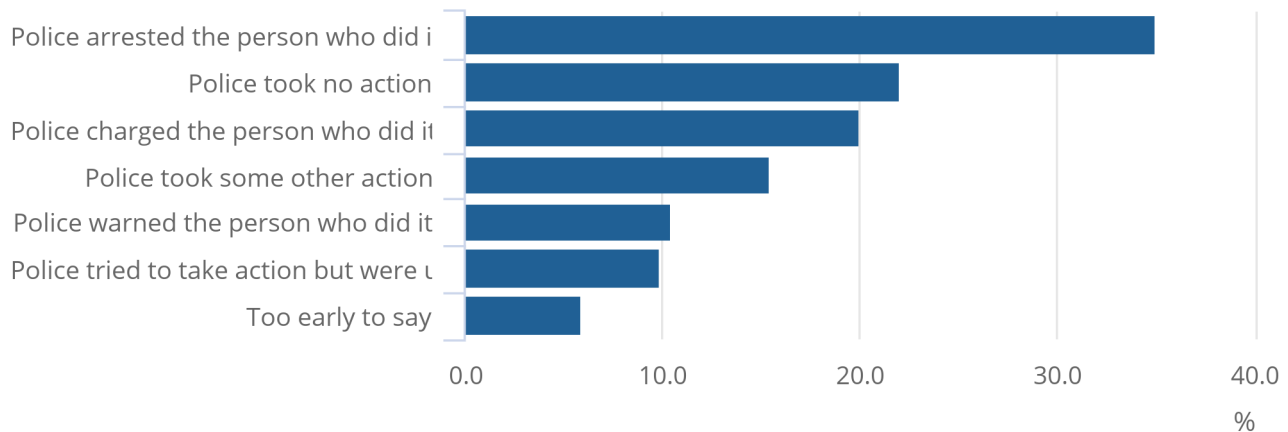
In incidents where the police came to know about the assault, victims were asked what actions were taken by the police. The police took some sort of action in 78.0% of cases. The most common action taken by the police was to arrest the perpetrator (35.0%) and in 20.0% of cases the perpetrator was charged. In instances where the police arrested or charged the perpetrator, more than half of cases went to court (54.6%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: The most common outcome of the police investigations was arresting the person who did it

Outcome of police investigation of rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) experienced by people aged 16 years and over since the age of 16 years, by sex of victim, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2025 combined

Figure 6: The most common outcome of the police investigations was arresting the person who did it

Outcome of police investigation of rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) experienced by people aged 16 years and over since the age of 16 years, by sex of victim, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2025 combined



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Data for year ending (YE) March 2025 are based on a half sample. To increase the sample size and improve the quality of the estimates, these data are based on combined data from YE March 2020 and YE March 2025. These are the two latest years in which the "Nature of sexual assault" module was asked on the survey.
2. If the victim had experienced more than one sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts), the question was asked of the most recent incident.
3. Percentages may sum to more than 100, as more than one option could be selected.

When asked about how they perceived their experience, 74.0% of victims of rape or assault by penetration felt what happened to them was a crime.

10 . Data on nature of sexual assault

[Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 4 November 2025

Victim and perpetrator relationship, circumstances and impacts for sexual assault by rape or penetration, based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

[Sexual offences prevalence and victim characteristics, England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 4 November 2025

Numbers, prevalence, types and victim characteristics, based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime.

11 . Glossary

Assault by penetration

Introduced as a legal offence in 2003, assault by penetration is the penetration of the vagina or anus with an object or other body part without consent.

Rape

Rape is the penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth by a penis without consent. This is the legal category of rape introduced in 2003.

Sexual assault

In the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), the term “sexual assault” is used to describe all types of sexual offences measured by the survey. It includes rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), and indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching.

12 . Data sources and quality

Further quality and methodology information can be found in our [Sexual offences in England and Wales overview: March 2025 bulletin](#).

Crime Survey for England and Wales

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (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 the nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration.

The upper age limit for respondents eligible for the self-completion module was changed from 74 years to no upper limit in October 2021.

CSEW data on sexual assault for year ending (YE) March 2025 are based on a half sample. Caution should be taken because of the impact of the reduced sample size on the quality of the data.

CSEW data for YE March 2020 are based on interviews conducted between April 2019 and mid-March 2020. Fieldwork was suspended slightly early on 18 March because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, resulting in a final sample of 33,735 adult interviews, which was just short of the 34,500 target, and a response rate of 64% (down from 70%).

One of the strengths of the CSEW is that it covers many crimes that are not reported to the police. Under-reporting to the police is particularly acute for sexual assaults, with many more offences committed than are reported to and recorded by the police. For example, the YE March 2025 CSEW estimated that 898,000 people were victims of sexual assault in the 12 months before interview, compared with 209,079 sexual offences recorded by the police in YE March 2025.

The CSEW provides reliable estimates of the prevalence of sexual assault 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 scale and trends in the prevalence of sexual assault, it cannot be used to make any inferences about demands on the police. Although the survey asks whether the incident was reported, it does not capture when the report was made and only collects detailed information about the most recent incident since the respondent was 16 years of age.

Measuring sexual assault within the CSEW

Sexual assault in the CSEW combines the following different types of abuse:

- rape (including attempts)
- assault by penetration (including attempts)
- indecent exposure
- unwanted sexual touching

This publication focuses specifically on sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts). It contains data from the CSEW self-completion module on the nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration and provides more detail on the circumstances of these types of sexual assaults experienced by respondents since the age of 16 years.

For those who had experienced more than one incident, only the most recent incident was asked about if the respondent was at least aged 16 years when the incident occurred. Data from YE March 2025 have been combined with data from YE March 2020 (when they were last previously collected) to provide more robust estimates.

The CSEW uses the term “sexual assault” to describe all types of sexual offences measured by the survey, whereas police recorded crime refers to one specific type of sexual offence – the sexual touching of a person without their consent.

More information about the CSEW can be found in our [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#).

13 . Related links

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

Article | Released 13 December 2018

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

14 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 4 November 2025, ONS website, article, [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales: year ending March 2025](#).