

Article

Sexual offences prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2025

Prevalence, long-term trends and types of sexual offences experienced by people aged 16 years and over, based on data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, and police recorded crime.

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Table of contents

1. [Other pages in this release](#)
2. [Main points](#)
3. [Understanding sexual offences](#)
4. [Sexual offences from the Crime Survey for England and Wales](#)
5. [Sexual offences recorded by the police](#)
6. [Data on sexual offences in England and Wales](#)
7. [Glossary](#)
8. [Data sources and quality](#)
9. [Related links](#)
10. [Cite this article](#)

1 . Other pages in this release

- [Sexual offences in England and Wales overview: year ending March 2025](#)
- [Sexual offences victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2025](#)
- [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales: year ending March 2025](#)
- [Redevelopment of sexual victimisation statistics: research update November 2025](#)

2 . Main points

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending (YE) March 2025 estimated that 1.9% of people aged 16 years and over (898,000) experienced sexual assault (including attempts) in the last year.
- Despite no significant change in the prevalence of sexual assault experienced by people aged 16 to 59 years in the last year (2.4%) compared with YE March 2024 (2.6%), there has been a significant increase compared with YE March 2015 (1.7%), after previously decreasing from the YE March 2005 survey to the YE March 2014 survey.
- The police recorded 209,079 sexual offences in England and Wales in YE March 2025, an 11% increase from YE March 2024; over half of this increase can be attributed to the recording of two new offences as a result of the introduction of the Online Safety Act 2023.
- Excluding the new offences, the increase in police recorded sexual offences between YE March 2024 and YE March 2025 was around 4%; this continues the trend of increases in the number of police recorded sexual offences seen over the last decade.
- Sexual offences recorded by the police do not provide a reliable measure of trends with increases likely to reflect a number of factors including improvements in police recording practices, introduction of new offences, and changes in reporting by victims.

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.

CSEW sexual assault estimates for year ending (YE) March 2025 and YE March 2024 are based on a half sample. Caution should be taken when using these data because of the impact of the reduced sample sizes on the quality of the estimates.

The Home Office collects data on the number of sexual offences recorded by the police. Our [Sexual offences prevalence and victim characteristics tables](#) detail the police forces that provided data.

4 . Sexual offences from the Crime Survey for England and Wales

Sexual assault in the last year

For year ending (YE) March 2025, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 1.9% of people aged 16 years and over (around 898,000 people) experienced sexual assault (including attempts) in the last year (Figure 1).

Unwanted sexual touching was the most common type of sexual assault experienced by people aged 16 years and over in the last year (1.4%) (Figure 1). Rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) was less common, experienced by 0.2% of people.

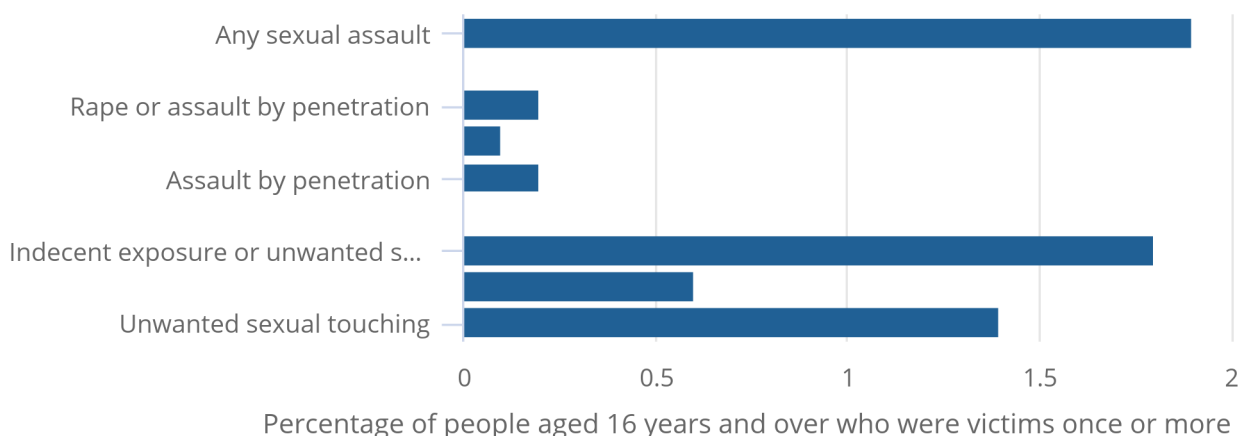
Information on the prevalence of sexual assault by demographic variables, such as sex, can be found in our [Sexual offences victim characteristics, year ending March 2025 article](#).

Figure 1: Unwanted sexual touching was the most common type of sexual assault experienced in the last year

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year, among people aged 16 years and over, by type of abuse, England and Wales, year ending March 2025

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Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year, among people aged 16 years and over, by type of abuse, 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 “any sexual assault”, “rape or assault by penetration”, “rape” and “assault by penetration” include attempts.

Following the removal of the upper age limit in October 2021 for survey respondents answering the self-completion module, when analysing data over time, we use the 16 to 59 years age range to give a comparable time series.

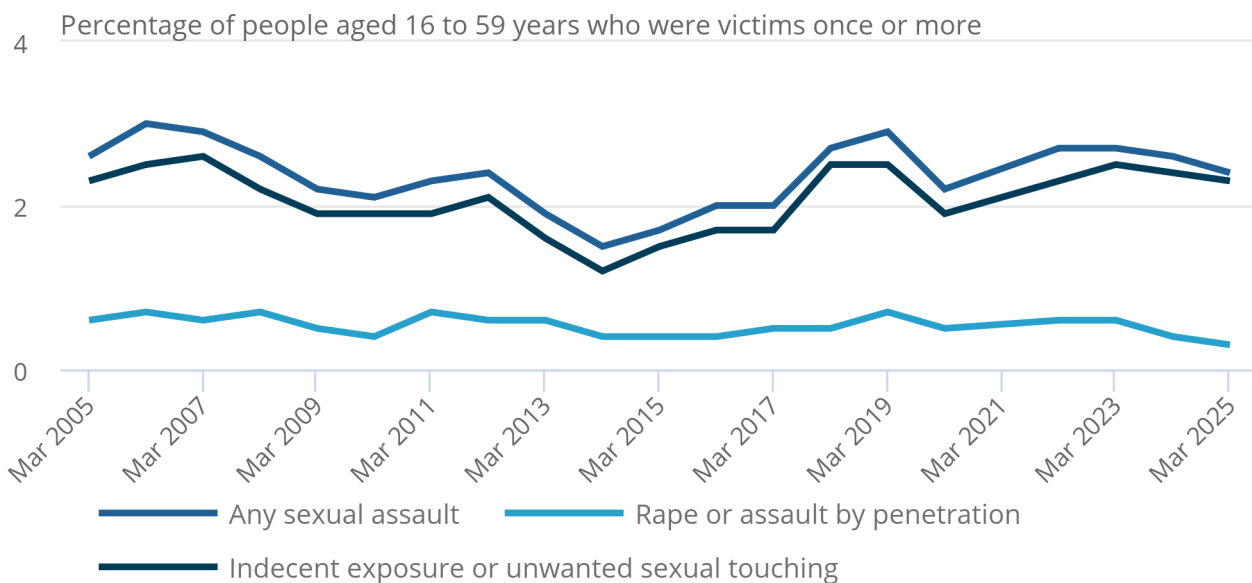
The prevalence rate of sexual assault among people aged 16 to 59 years has fluctuated between 1.5% and 3.0% over the last 20 years. Although there is year-to-year volatility in these estimates, compared with 10 years ago, there has been an increase in sexual assault, after previously decreasing between the YE March 2005 to YE March 2014 surveys. In the YE March 2025 survey, 2.4% of people aged 16 to 59 years had experienced sexual assault, compared with 1.7% in the YE March 2015 survey.

Figure 2: Sexual assault prevalence was significantly higher in the year ending (YE) March 2025 survey than a decade ago (YE March 2015)

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year, among people aged 16 to 59 years, England and Wales, year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2025

Figure 2: Sexual assault prevalence was significantly higher in the year ending (YE) March 2025 survey than a decade ago (YE March 2015)

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year, among people aged 16 to 59 years, England and Wales, year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2025



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

Notes:

1. No data are available for year ending (YE) March 2021 because the Crime Survey for England and Wales was suspended because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
2. Data for YE March 2022 are not designated as accredited official statistics. Caution should be taken when using these data, because the quality of estimates may be affected by the reduced data collection period and lower response rates.
3. Data for YE March 2023 are based on eight months of data collection because of an error in the survey, which resulted in missing data. Caution should be taken when using these data because of the impact of the reduced data collection period on the quality of the estimates.
4. Data for YE March 2024 and 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.
5. The categories “any sexual assault” and “rape or assault by penetration” include attempts.

A new question was added to the survey in October 2023. This question asked respondents who experienced any type of sexual assault in the last year who they told about the incident(s).

For victims who had experienced indecent exposure, unwanted sexual touching, or both in the last year, 75.0% had told at least one of the people or organisations listed. Victims most often told friends or neighbours (51.1%), or family or relatives (39.7%). A much smaller percentage of victims (6.3%) reported the incident(s) to the police.

Data on who victims of rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) told about incidents that occurred since the age of 16 years can be found in our [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales: year ending March 2025 article](#). Data are not available on these offence types for incidents that happened in the last 12 months because of small base sizes.

Sexual assault since the age of 16 years

The year ending (YE) March 2025 CSEW showed that an estimated 7.7 million (15.9%) people aged 16 years and over had experienced sexual assault (including attempts) since the age of 16 years (Figure 3).

Unwanted sexual touching was more common than any other type of sexual assault with 12.2% of people aged 16 years and over experiencing it since the age of 16 years. This is equivalent to an estimated 5.9 million victims.

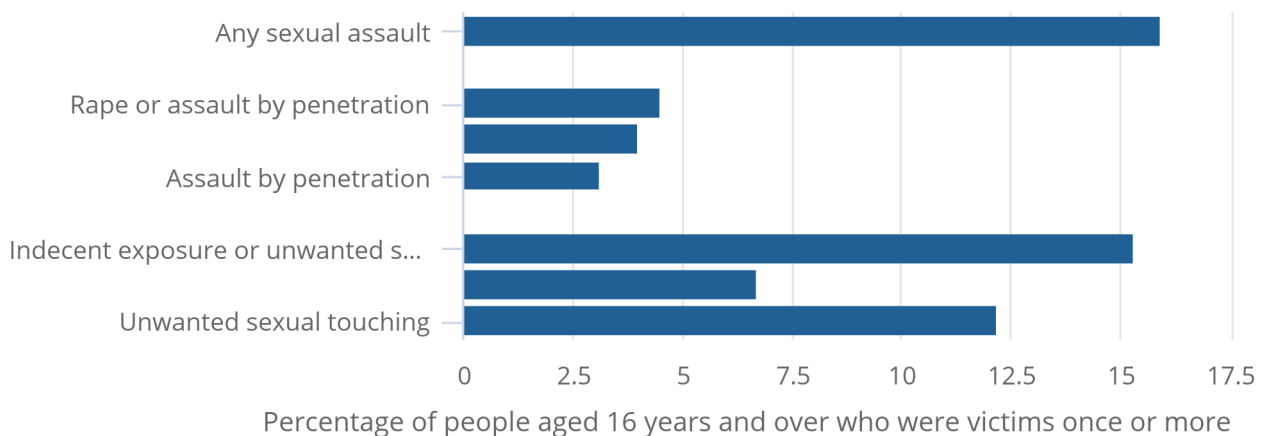
Rape (including attempts) was experienced by 4.0% of people since the age of 16 years, an estimated 1.9 million victims. More information on rape can be found in our [Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales: year ending March 2025 article](#).

Figure 3: Unwanted sexual touching was the most common type of sexual assault experienced 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 abuse, England and Wales, year ending March 2025

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Prevalence of sexual assault since the age of 16 years, among people aged 16 years and over, by type of abuse, 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 “any sexual assault”, “rape or assault by penetration”, “rape” and “assault by penetration” include attempts.

In terms of the victim's relationship to the perpetrator, we asked all victims aged 16 years and over who had experienced sexual assault since the age of 16 years whether they had experienced the assault by a partner or ex-partner, or family member.

For all types of sexual assault experienced since the age of 16 years (rape or assault by penetration, indecent exposure, and unwanted sexual touching), the perpetrator was more often a partner or ex-partner than a family member. For just over half (54.7%) of victims who experienced rape or assault by penetration since the age of 16 years, the perpetrator was a partner or ex-partner. This proportion was lower for victims of unwanted sexual touching (32.3%) and indecent exposure (10.3%). The proportion of victims who experienced sexual assault perpetrated by a family member was similar for all three types of sexual assault (8.5% for victims of rape or assault by penetration, 7.0% for indecent exposure, and 8.7% for unwanted sexual touching).

5 . Sexual offences recorded by the police

Many incidents of sexual assault do not come to the attention of the police, which is why the estimated number of victims from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) can be higher than the number of police recorded offences.

Sexual offences recorded by the police do not provide a reliable measure of trends over time. Improvements in police recording practices, introduction of new offences, and increased reporting by victims are likely to have contributed to increases in the level of offences in recent years. The figures do, however, provide a good measure of the crime-related demand on the police.

In year ending (YE) March 2025, the police recorded 209,079 sexual offences in England and Wales. This was an 11% increase from the previous year, with 20,435 more cases recorded (Figure 4).

This increase can be partially attributed to the introduction of new legislation. The [Online Safety Act 2023](#) introduced two new sexual offences: "Sharing or threatening to share intimate photograph or film" and "Sending etc photograph or film of genitals". With police forces beginning to record these offences from 31 January 2024, the impact on the offences "88C Other Miscellaneous Sexual Offences" and "88E Exposure and Voyeurism", which they are recorded under, can be fully seen in YE March 2025 data. The increase in the number of offences recorded therefore may not be the result of an increase in crimes occurring, but instead a reflection of new offences being captured that were not previously recognised by law.

By looking at the two new offences added to offence codes 88C and 88E, we can identify the impact these offences have had on the overall total number of sexual offences recorded by the police. Figures relating to the new offence within offence code 88C exclude Humberside Police.

The two new sexual offences accounted for over half (around 13,000 offences) of the 11% increase recorded by the police between YE March 2024 and YE March 2025. Excluding these two new offences, there was an increase of 4% (around 7,500 offences) in the total number of sexual offences recorded by the police in YE March 2025 compared with YE March 2024.

The number of sexual offences recorded by the police has generally been increasing since YE March 2012, however, sexual offences remain a relatively low proportion of all crimes recorded by the police (3% in YE March 2025).

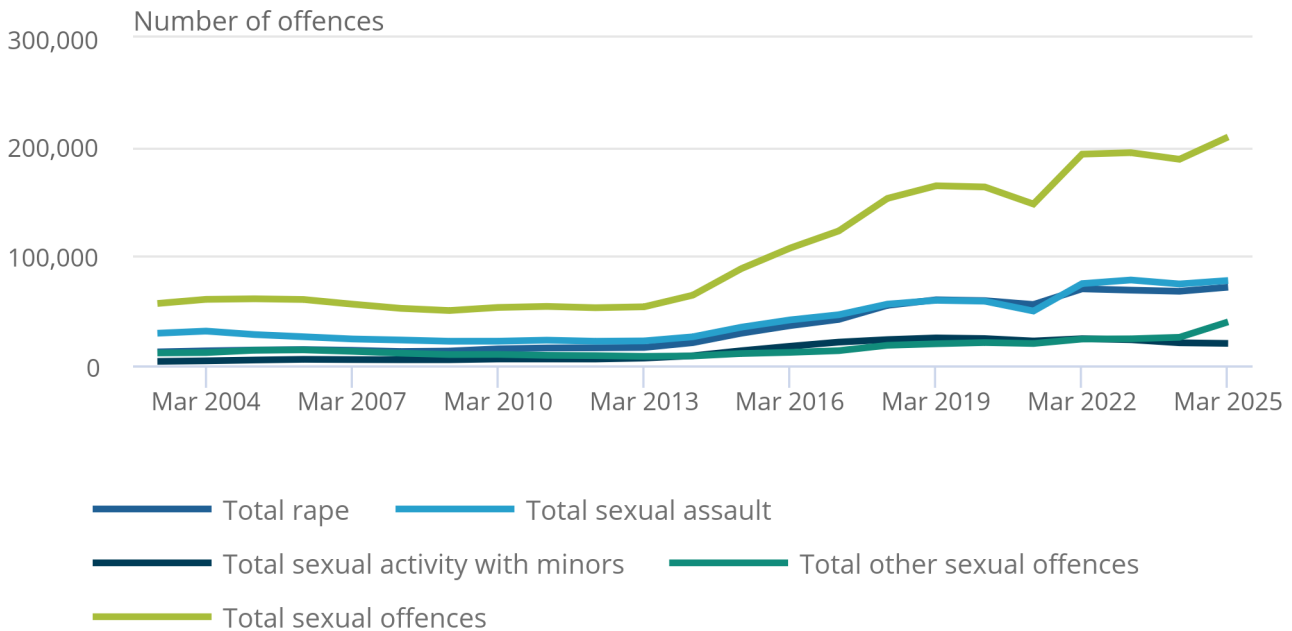
For more recent police recorded crime data on sexual offences, updated quarterly, see Table A5a of our [Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables dataset](#).

Figure 4: Increase in police recorded sexual offences following small changes in recent years

Police recorded sexual offences by offence type, England and Wales, year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2025

Figure 4: Increase in police recorded sexual offences following small changes in recent years

Police recorded sexual offences by offence type, England and Wales, year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2025



Source: Police recorded crime from the Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as accredited official statistics.
2. The Sexual Offences Act 2003, introduced in May 2004, altered the definition and coverage of sexual offences.
3. From July 2016, the Home Office counting rules in regard to rape were changed to record rape on a per-offender basis.
4. Operation Yewtree is the police investigation into allegations of sexual abuse, launched in the wake of the Jimmy Savile scandal.
5. HMICFRS stands for His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services.
6. The Online Safety Act 2023, passed in October 2023, introduced two new sexual offences.

Looking at the longer-term trend, the increases in police recorded sexual offences seen in the last decade largely reflect improvements made by the police in how they record these crimes, and an increased willingness of victims to come forward and report. High-profile incidents, media coverage and campaigns are likely to have affected people's willingness to report both recent and historical incidents to the police.

For a subset of forces providing data to the Home Office Data Hub, 20% of sexual offences recorded by the police in YE March 2025 were non-recent offences (those that took place more than 12 months before being recorded by the police). The proportion of sexual offences being reported to the police as non-recent has remained similar over the past three years but is lower than previous years (28% in YE March 2021).

Rape, a subcategory of sexual offences, accounted for 34% of all sexual offences recorded by the police in YE March 2025. In comparison, of all victims of sexual assault captured on the CSEW, around 7% had experienced rape, with a much larger proportion (95%) having experienced indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching. As rape makes up a bigger proportion of the police recorded crime total than the CSEW total, it suggests that rape is reported to the police more often than other sexual offences. This is further supported by the low reporting rate (6%) of indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching to the police seen in the crime survey.

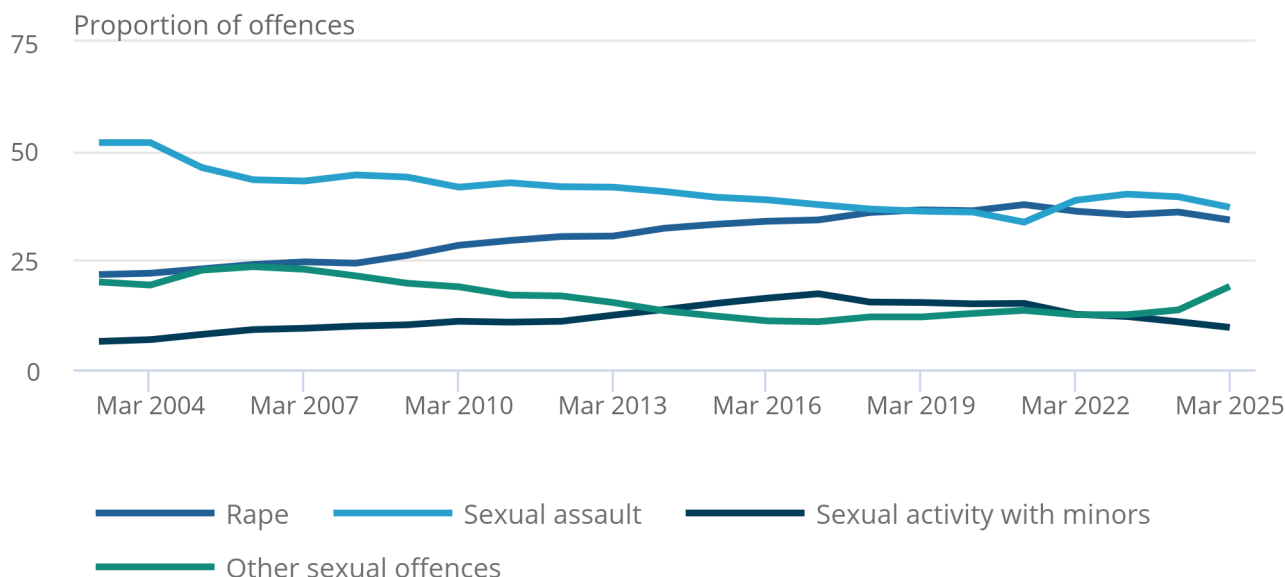
With the increase in "other sexual offences" accounting for over half of the overall increase in police recorded sexual offences in the last year, the proportion of each offence type has also changed. "Other sexual offences" has seen a large increase, with all other types of sexual offences - including rape and sexual assaults - proportionately decreasing (Figure 5).

Figure 5: The proportion of all sexual offences recorded as “other sexual offences” has increased in the last year

Percentage of total police recorded sexual offences by offence type, England and Wales, year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2025

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Percentage of total police recorded sexual offences by offence type, England and Wales, year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2025



Source: Police recorded crime from the Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as accredited official statistics.
2. The Sexual Offences Act 2003, introduced in May 2004, altered the definition and coverage of sexual offences.
3. From July 2016, the Home Office counting rules in regard to rape were changed to record rape on a per-offender basis.
4. The Online Safety Act 2023, passed in October 2023, introduced two new sexual offences.

Information is also available on the number of rape incidents the police have recorded. With incidents not included in the offence totals (see [Section 7: Glossary](#) for more information), to get a total picture of the demand upon the police relating to rape, it is necessary to consider both rape incidents and offences together. Of the 97,317 rape incidents and crimes recorded in YE March 2025 by the police in England and Wales, 19,541 (20%) remained as incidents. Of these incidents:

- 62% (12,160) remained as incidents because the victim (or third party acting on their behalf) did not confirm the offence or could not be traced
- 11% (2,204) remained as incidents because of additional credible evidence existing to the contrary
- 26% (5,177) were transferred to another force for investigation

6 . Data on sexual offences in 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.

7 . Glossary

Police incidents

Incidents that were reported to the police, but following investigation, do not amount to a crime or offence according to the National Crime Recording Standards. Rape incidents and crimes that were transferred to another force in England and Wales will be included in the data twice - as a transferred rape incident or crime in the original force and a current rape incident or crime in the force that it was transferred to.

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.

In police recorded crime figures, the term "sexual assault" refers to one type of sexual offence, that is, the sexual touching of a person without their consent.

Sexual offence

In police recorded crime figures, "sexual offences" cover a broader range of offences than are measured by the CSEW, including:

- rape
- sexual assault
- sexual activity with minors
- sexual exploitation of children
- other sexual offences

There are a number of different offence codes used for rape and sexual assault, depending on the age and sex of the victim.

8 . Data sources and quality

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

Crime Survey for England and Wales

Sexual assault, as measured in the self-completion section of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), combines the following different types of abuse:

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

The CSEW collects information on whether respondents have experienced these types of assault. If they have, they are then asked if the assault was carried out by:

- a partner (including a former partner)
- a family member other than a partner

The CSEW term "sexual assault" differs from the term "sexual assault" used in police recorded crime data.

Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) data for year ending (YE) March 2024 and 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.

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

How the police measure sexual assault

The Home Office collects data on the number of sexual offences recorded by the police. These data have a wider coverage than the CSEW, for example including residents of institutions. Police recorded data on sexual offences are grouped into four main categories:

- rape
- sexual assault
- sexual activity with minors
- other sexual offences

Some data tables provided by the Home Office combine the last three categories to create an "Other sexual offences" category. This category covers a broader range of offences than the CSEW, for example, sexual exploitation of children, incest and sexual grooming.

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.

9 . 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.

[Developing a combined measure of domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking, England and Wales: July 2025](#)

Article | Released 24 July 2025

Method for producing a combined measure of domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

[Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2024](#)

Bulletin | Released 27 November 2024

Figures on domestic abuse from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, police recorded crime and other organisations.

10 . Cite this article

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