

Statistical bulletin

Abuse during childhood in England and Wales: March 2024

Estimates on prevalence and type of abuse experienced during childhood, based on findings of people aged 18 years and over from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

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1 . Main points

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending (YE) March 2024 estimated that 13.6 million people aged 18 years and over (29.0%) had experienced "any abuse" before the age of 18 years. Following improvements to the survey questions and changes to the population covered, the latest estimates should not be compared with those in previous publications.

In this bulletin, the term "any abuse" refers to experiencing one or more of the following: emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. Sexual abuse is made up of three subcategories: non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).

Among people aged 18 years and over who experienced abuse before the age of 18 years, the YE March 2024 CSEW showed the following:

- emotional abuse was the most commonly experienced abuse type (22.7%, 10.6 million people), followed by physical abuse (16.5%, 7.7 million people), sexual abuse (9.1%, 4.3 million people) and neglect (7.6%, 3.6 million people)
- around 7.5 million (31.5%) women and 6.1 million (26.4%) men experienced any abuse; prevalence was higher for women than men for all abuse types except physical abuse where there was no significant difference
- those who experienced any abuse reported low life satisfaction more frequently than those who did not (8.4% compared with 4.0%)
- of those who experienced child abuse, 15.4% said they had experienced domestic abuse in the last 12 months; this compared with 4.5% of those who had not experienced any abuse as a child
- fathers and mothers were most frequently cited as perpetrators of emotional abuse (29.4% and 25.6%, respectively) and physical abuse (45.6% and 37.2%, respectively)
- the majority of victims of child sexual abuse knew the perpetrator; however, one-third (33.2%) said the perpetrator was a stranger and this was highest for the subcategory "non-contact sexual abuse", which includes online experiences
- perpetrators of child sexual abuse were most often male (91.3%) and most often aged 18 years and over (69.8%), with women experiencing abuse by older perpetrators more frequently than men

CSEW estimates in this bulletin are not comparable with previous publications as the data provide a snapshot of the adult household population to represent people's experiences of abuse over many years. Additionally, the survey questions have been redeveloped, further limiting the ability to compare across time. For more information see [Section 10: Data sources and quality](#).

2 . Prevalence of child abuse

The year ending March 2024 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 13.6 million people aged 18 years and over (29.0%) experienced emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect (referred to in this bulletin as "any abuse") before the age of 18 years (Figure 1). For more information and definitions of each of the abuse types see [Section 9: Glossary](#).

Emotional abuse was the most commonly experienced abuse type (22.7%, 10.6 million people), followed by physical abuse (16.5%, 7.7 million people), sexual abuse (9.1%, 4.3 million people) and neglect (7.6%, 3.6 million people).

For these estimates, emotional and physical abuse are captured only where the perpetrator was someone aged 18 years and over, whereas sexual abuse includes perpetrators under the age of 18 years as well. Neglect is captured only where the perpetrator was a parent, carer or guardian.

Approximately 7.5 million (31.5%) women and 6.1 million (26.4%) men experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years. Prevalence was higher for women than men for emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. There was no significant difference by sex for physical abuse.

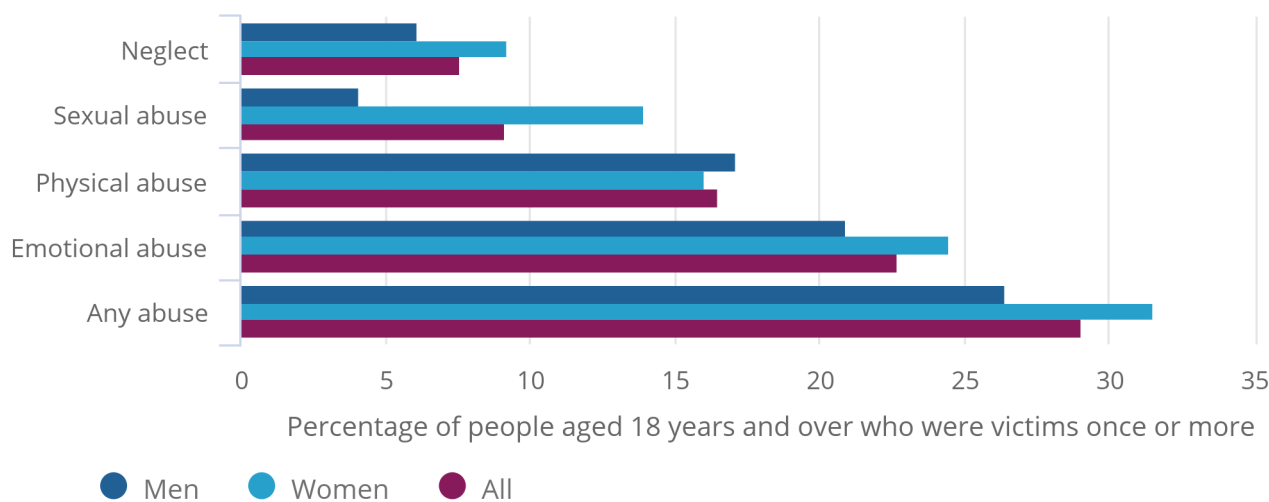
The largest difference was seen in sexual abuse, with around 3.3 million (13.9%) women having experienced abuse before the age of 18 years compared with 949,000 (4.1%) men. For further detail on sexual abuse, see [Section 5: Child sexual abuse](#).

Figure 1: Nearly 3 in 10 (29.0%) people aged 18 years and over experienced any type of abuse before the age of 18 years

Prevalence of people aged 18 years and over who experienced abuse before the age of 18 years, by type of abuse and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2024

Figure 1: Nearly 3 in 10 (29.0%) people aged 18 years and over experienced any type of abuse before the age of 18 years

Prevalence of people aged 18 years and over who experienced abuse before the age of 18 years, by type of abuse and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2024



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

Notes:

1. Neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse and emotional abuse categories will not sum to the total of the any abuse category. This is because victims may be included in multiple categories, as they can experience more than one type of abuse.
2. “Don’t know” and “Refused” answer options have been excluded from this analysis.
3. Sexual abuse includes non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).
4. For more information about what is covered by each abuse type, see [Section 9: Glossary](#).

Just under half of victims (48.3%) experienced one type of abuse, while 28.7% experienced two types, 15.9% experienced three types and 7.0% experienced all four types measured in the survey (emotional, physical and sexual abuse, and neglect). Women (10.1%) experienced all four types of abuse more commonly than men (3.1%).

A high proportion of those aged 18 years and over who had experienced neglect before the age of 18 years had also experienced another type of abuse as a child. Of people aged 18 years and over that experienced neglect before the age of 18 years, 83.5% also experienced emotional abuse, 65.5% also experienced physical abuse and 33.8% also experienced sexual abuse (Figure 2).

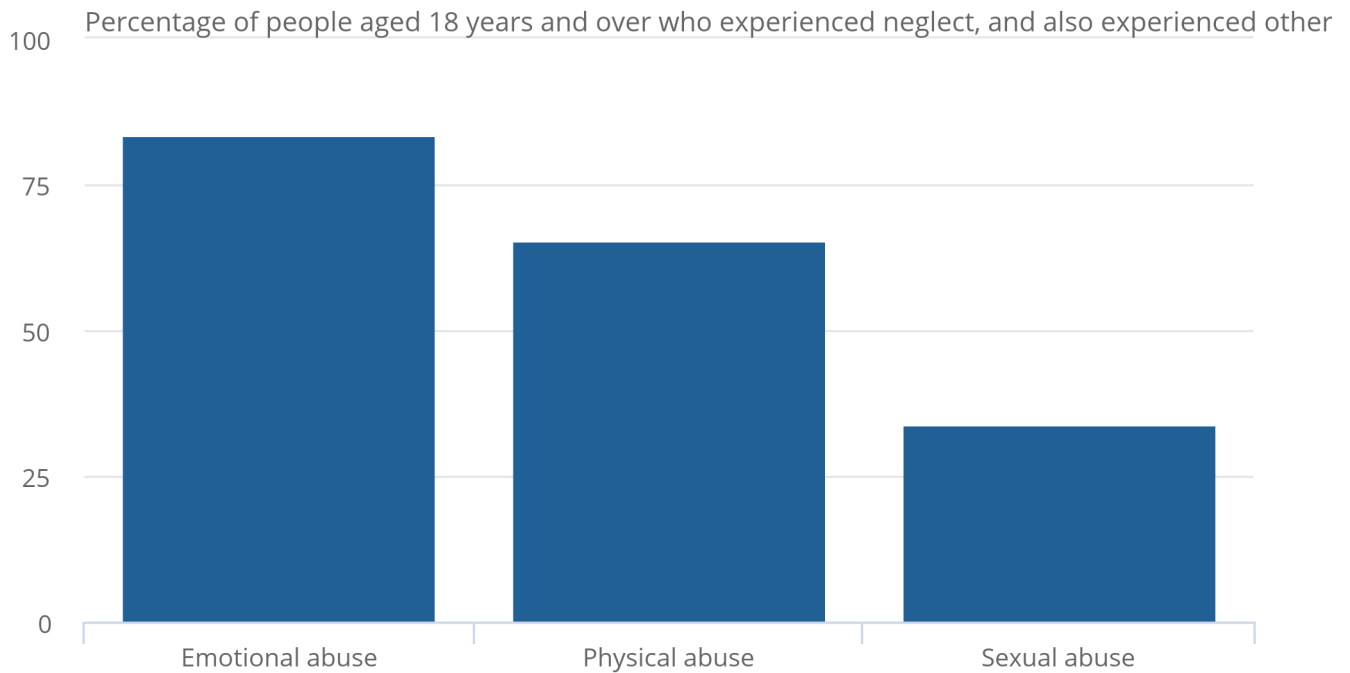
In contrast, among those who did not experience neglect before the age of 18 years, 16.2% experienced emotional abuse, 11.7% experienced physical abuse and 6.8% experienced sexual abuse.

Figure 2: Most people who experienced neglect before the age of 18 years had also experienced other abuse types before the age of 18 years

Prevalence of people aged 18 years and over who experienced neglect before the age of 18 years, by other type of abuse experienced, England and Wales, year ending March 2024

Figure 2: Most people who experienced neglect before the age of 18 years had also experienced other abuse types before the age of 18 years

Prevalence of people aged 18 years and over who experienced neglect before the age of 18 years, by other type of abuse experienced, England and Wales, year ending March 2024



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

Notes:

1. Sexual abuse includes non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).
2. “Don’t know” and “Refused” answer options have been excluded from this analysis.
3. For more information about what is covered by each abuse type, see [Section 9: Glossary](#).

3 . Characteristics of victims

Prevalence of abuse during childhood varied across personal and household characteristics. It should be noted that these characteristics are based on the respondents’ circumstances at the time of the survey interview and may not reflect their circumstances at the time the abuse took place.

Ethnicity

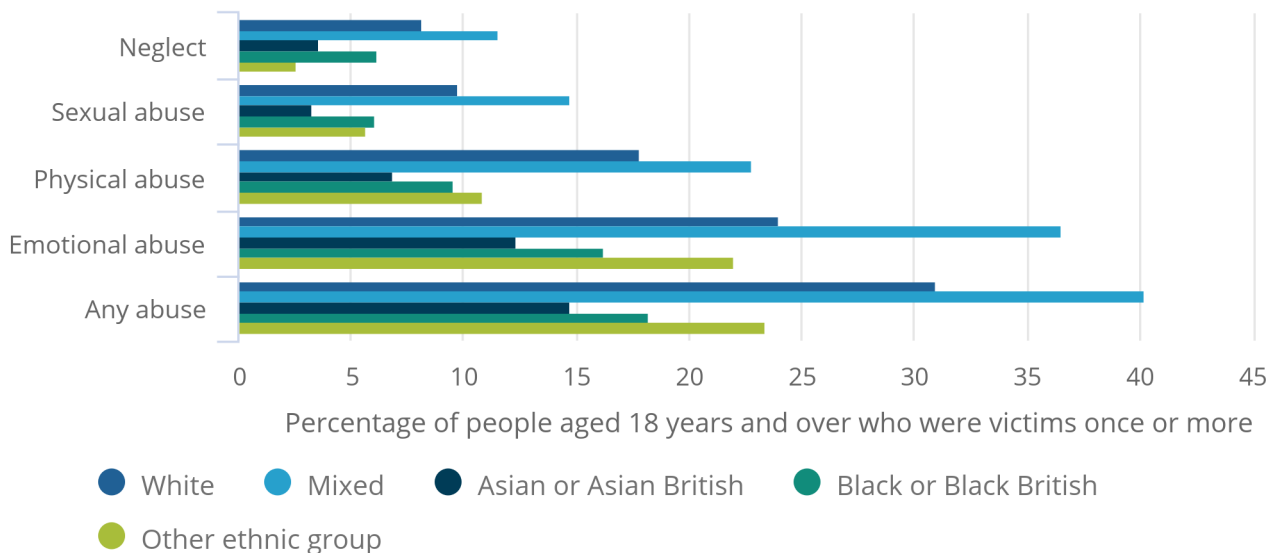
People from a Mixed ethnic background had higher prevalence of experiencing any abuse (40.2%) before the age of 18 years compared with all other ethnic groups. People in the White ethnic group (31.0%) also had higher prevalence of experiencing any abuse than those in the Asian or Asian British (14.7%) and Black or Black British (18.2%) ethnic groups (Figure 3). It should be noted that potential cultural differences could impact disclosure of abuse and may have affected findings.

Figure 3: People from a Mixed ethnic background had higher prevalence of experiencing any abuse compared with all other ethnic groups

Prevalence of people aged 18 years and over who experienced any type of abuse before the age of 18 years, by ethnicity, England and Wales, year ending March 2024

Figure 3: People from a Mixed ethnic background had higher prevalence of experiencing any abuse compared with all other ethnic groups

Prevalence of people aged 18 years and over who experienced any type of abuse before the age of 18 years, by ethnicity, England and Wales, year ending March 2024



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

Notes:

1. Neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and emotional abuse categories will not sum to the total of the any abuse category. This is because victims may be included in multiple categories, as they can experience more than one type of abuse.
2. Sexual abuse includes non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).
3. “Don't know” and “Refused” answer options have been excluded from this analysis.
4. For more information about what is covered by each abuse type, see [Section 9: Glossary](#).

Sexual orientation

A lower proportion of heterosexual people experienced any abuse (27.7%) before the age of 18 years than bisexual people (62.5%), gay and lesbian people (48.1%) and people with other sexual orientations (56.5%). This pattern was consistent across all types of abuse, with heterosexual people experiencing a lower prevalence than other groups.

Gender identity

A higher proportion of those with a gender identity different from sex registered at birth experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years (53.4%) compared with those with a gender identity the same as sex registered at birth (28.9%). This difference was seen across all types of abuse.

Disability status

People who were disabled at the time of interview had a higher prevalence of experiencing any abuse before the age of 18 years (42.0%) than those who were not disabled at the time of interview (26.4%). This difference was consistent across all individual abuse types.

Household structure

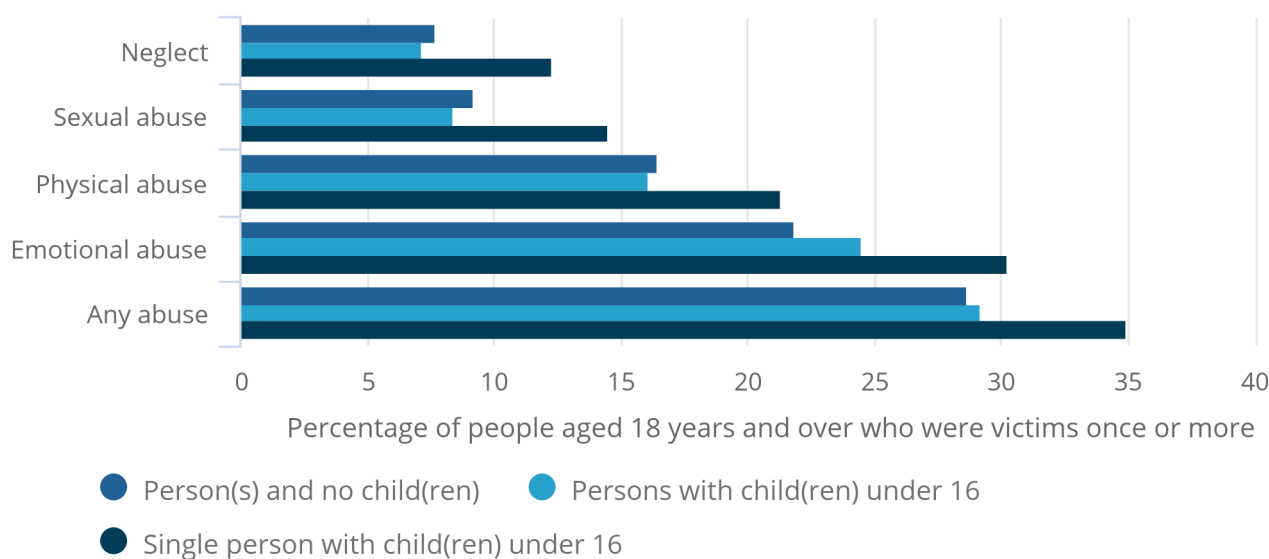
People living in lone-parent households at the time of interview had a higher prevalence of experiencing any abuse before the age of 18 years (35.0%) than those who lived in other households with children (29.2%) and households with no children (28.7%). This pattern was seen across all individual abuse types (Figure 4).

Figure 4: People currently living in lone parent households had a higher prevalence of experiencing childhood abuse

Prevalence of people aged 18 years and over who experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years, by household structure, England and Wales, year ending March 2024

Figure 4: People currently living in lone parent households had a higher prevalence of experiencing childhood abuse

Prevalence of people aged 18 years and over who experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years, by household structure, England and Wales, year ending March 2024



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

Notes:

1. Neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and emotional abuse categories will not sum to the total of the any abuse category. This is because victims may be included in multiple categories, as they can experience more than one type of abuse.
2. Sexual abuse in this chart refers to non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).
3. Household structure is based on the respondents' circumstances at the time of interview and may not reflect their circumstances at the time the abuse took place.
4. "Don't know" and "Refused" answer options have been excluded from this analysis.
5. For more information about what is covered by each abuse type, see [Section 9: Glossary](#).

4 . Relationship to perpetrator

The relationship of childhood abuse perpetrators to victims varied by abuse type and sex. The analysis includes only perpetrators aged 18 years and over for emotional and physical abuse, whereas analysis for sexual abuse includes perpetrators of all ages (both under 18 years and 18 years and over). Neglect is not included in this analysis as the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) does not ask about perpetrator relationships for experiences of neglect.

Emotional abuse

Among people aged 18 years and over who experienced emotional abuse before the age of 18 years, the most common relationships of the victim to perpetrator were father (29.4%), mother (25.6%) and a friend aged 18 years and over (16.1%).

Among men, the most common perpetrators of emotional abuse were fathers (29.1%), a stranger (20.1%), mothers (20.0%) and people in a position of trust or authority (19.8%).

Among women, the most frequently identified perpetrators were mothers (30.1%), fathers (29.7%) and a friend aged 18 years and over (15.5%).

As well as mothers, women had a higher prevalence of experiencing emotional abuse from a previous romantic partner at the time of abuse than men. The same was true for a current romantic partner (including a date) at the time of abuse (5.2% compared with 1.6%).

Men more frequently cited abuse where the perpetrator was a stranger than women (20.1% compared with 12.4%). This also applies for a person in a position of trust or authority (19.8% compared with 12.0%) and a neighbour (5.7% compared with 3.5%).

Physical abuse

Among people aged 18 years and over who experienced physical abuse before the age of 18 years, the most frequently named perpetrators were fathers (45.6%), mothers (37.2%), people in a position of trust or authority (10.8%) and strangers (10.8%).

Among men who experienced physical abuse before the age of 18 years, the most common perpetrators were fathers (46.9%), mothers (31.2%), strangers (17.0%) and people in a position of trust or authority (16.8%). However, the most frequently named perpetrators among women were fathers (55.8%), mothers (43.2%) and a previous romantic partner at the time of abuse (9.2%).

Women named the perpetrator of physical abuse more frequently than men as their mother (43.2% compared with 31.2%), a previous partner at the time of abuse (9.2% compared with 1.1%), their sister or stepsister (4.6% compared with 2.3%) and a current romantic partner (including a date) at the time of abuse (4.5% compared with 0.7%).

However, men experienced higher rates of physical abuse than women where the perpetrator was a stranger (17.0% compared with 4.5%), a person in a position of trust or authority (16.8% compared with 4.8%) and a friend aged 18 years and over (8.2% compared with 5.0%).

Sexual abuse

Among those who experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years, the majority knew the perpetrator. The patterns within this varied significantly by type of abuse, age of the perpetrator and sex of the victim.

When looking at individual categories of perpetrators of sexual abuse, the most frequently cited was a stranger (33.2%). This was primarily driven by non-contact abuse (which includes experiences online) by perpetrators aged 18 years and over, where strangers were cited in 44.2% of cases. This compared with 22.6% of cases for contact abuse and 12.2% for rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).

For rape or assault by penetration where the perpetrator was aged 18 years and over, stranger was not the most cited perpetrator type. Instead, perpetrators most frequently cited were spread across multiple categories at similar levels, including someone else (14.3%), friend of the family (12.3%), stranger (12.2%), "another relative" (12.1%) and a current romantic partner at the time of abuse (including a date) (10.4%).

When examining perpetrators aged 18 years and over, there were notable differences between men and women. Compared with women, men had a higher prevalence of experiencing sexual abuse from a person in position of trust or authority (17.1% compared with 5.9%). Compared with men, women had a higher prevalence of naming the perpetrator as "another relative" (9.8% compared with 4.6%) and a current romantic partner at the time of abuse (including a date) (6.2% compared with 1.7%).

In contrast to perpetrators aged 18 years and over, for abuse committed by perpetrators under the age of 18 years, the most cited categories were "another child" for men (34.5%) and "a friend of yours" for women (26.1%).

For more information about the age and sex of perpetrators of sexual abuse, see [Section 5: Child sexual abuse](#).

5 . Child sexual abuse

Sexual abuse, as referred to in this bulletin, is made up of the three subcategories, non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).

For respondents who stated they experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) asks questions regarding the types of sexual abuse experienced, the circumstances in which the abuse occurred and whether the victim told anyone about the abuse. These follow-up questions were asked only in relation to sexual abuse cases and were not included on the CSEW for other abuse types.

Prevalence

The CSEW estimated that 9.1% of people aged 18 years and over experienced sexual abuse as a child (13.9% of women compared with 4.1% of men).

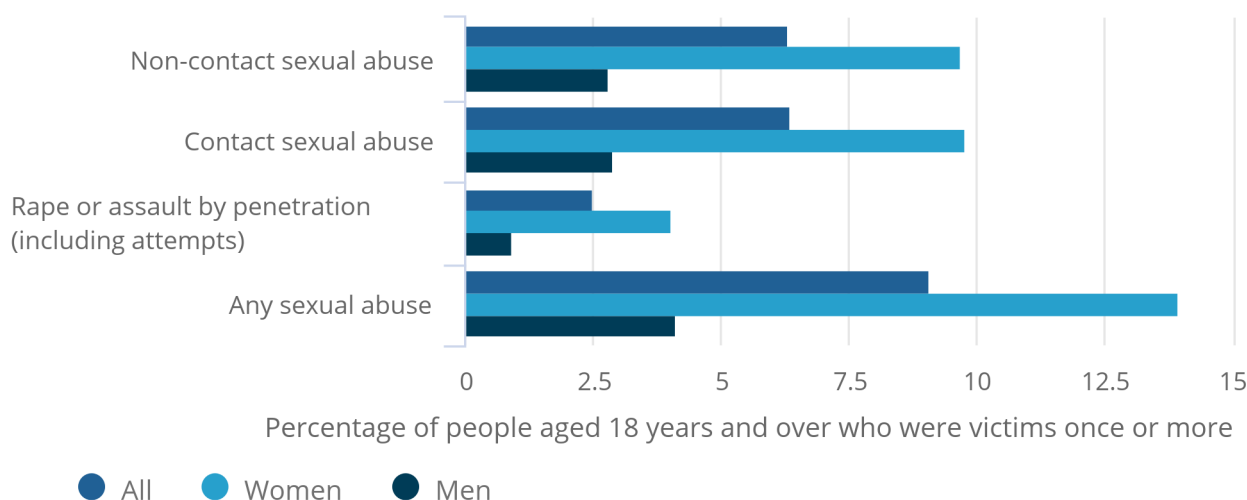
Prevalence of each type of sexual abuse was higher for women than men (Figure 5). For example, 9.8% of women experienced contact sexual abuse compared with 2.9% of men.

Figure 5: A higher proportion of women than men experienced each type of childhood sexual abuse

Prevalence of people aged 18 years and over who experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years, by type and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2024

Figure 5: A higher proportion of women than men experienced each type of childhood sexual abuse

Prevalence of people aged 18 years and over who experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years, by type and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2024



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

Notes:

1. Non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) categories will not sum to the total of the any sexual abuse category. This is because victims may be included in multiple categories, as they can experience more than one type of abuse.
2. Any sexual abuse includes non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).
3. "Don't know" and "Refused" answer options have been excluded from this analysis.
4. For more information about what is covered by each abuse type, see [Section 9: Glossary](#).

Age and sex of perpetrator

Among those who experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years, the perpetrators were most commonly male only (91.3%). A smaller proportion of victims said that the perpetrators were female only (4.8%), while 3.9% experienced abuse from both male and female perpetrators (Figure 6).

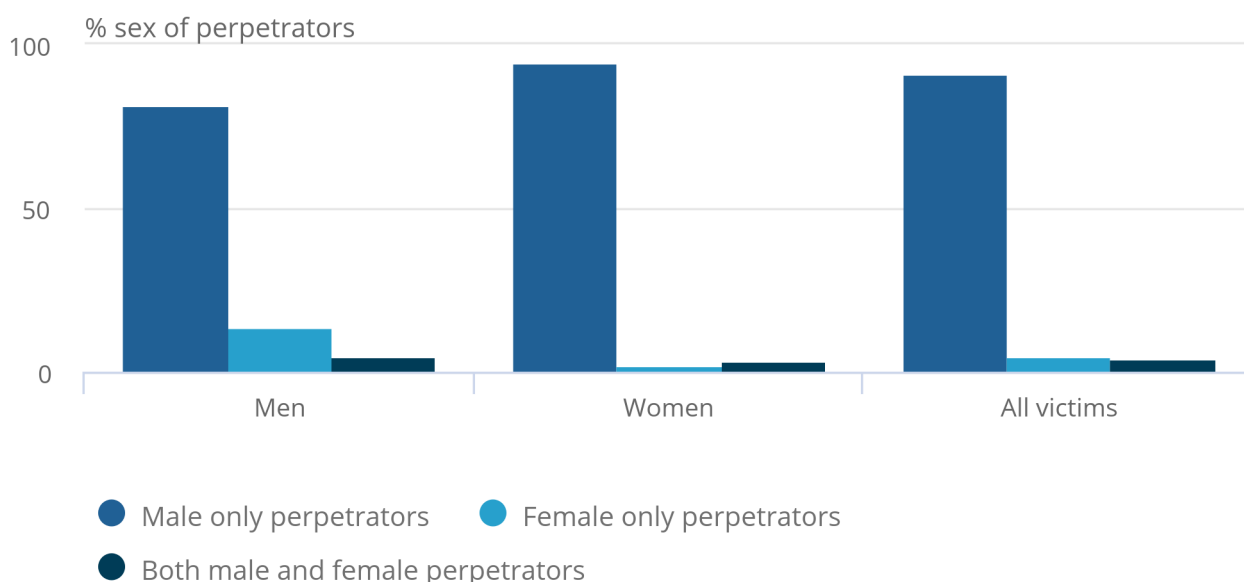
Of those who experienced sexual abuse, 94.2% of women indicated the perpetrators were male only, compared with 81.4% of men.

Figure 6: Around 91% of victims of sexual abuse stated that the perpetrators were male only

Sex of perpetrator(s) of sexual abuse experienced by people aged 18 years and over before the age of 18 years, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2024

Figure 6: Around 91% of victims of sexual abuse stated that the perpetrators were male only

Sex of perpetrator(s) of sexual abuse experienced by people aged 18 years and over before the age of 18 years, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2024



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

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.
2. Sexual abuse includes non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).

Among those who experienced sexual abuse as a child, 40.1% said that the perpetrator was under the age of 18 years, while 69.8% said that the perpetrator was aged 18 years and over. These categories are not mutually exclusive, with some victims stating the abuse was carried out by both perpetrators under the age of 18 years and aged 18 years and over.

A higher proportion of men experienced abuse from a perpetrator under the age of 18 years than women (46.2% compared with 38.3%). Women experienced abuse from a perpetrator aged 18 years and over more commonly than men (72.6% compared with 60.3%).

Location of abuse

Among those who experienced sexual abuse as a child, it was most frequently stated to have happened in a home, with 33.8% of abuse occurring at someone else's home and 30.5% at the victim's own home. The next most frequent place was a street, park, green space or other public space (30.8%).

Women more commonly experienced sexual abuse in someone else's home (35.3% compared with 28.9%) than men. This was also the case for abuse that occurred in a street, green space or other public place (32.6% compared with 24.3%). Men experienced abuse in a school or college more frequently than women (17.1% compared with 10.1%).

These differences in the location of abuse may reflect patterns seen in the relationship between victims and perpetrators. Abuse by someone in a position of trust or authority was stated more commonly by men than women, which is consistent with a higher proportion of men indicating that the abuse occurred in school or college settings. In contrast, perpetrators who were relatives, current or former partners, or strangers were identified by women more than men, aligning with abuse being more often experienced in domestic or public settings among women.

Age abuse started

Sexual abuse most commonly began when victims were aged between 13 and 15 years (33.4% of victims), followed by those aged between 10 and 12 years (22.9%).

Abuse starting at younger ages was less common; 1.0% of victims stated their abuse began between 0 and 3 years of age and 7.8% between 4 and 6 years of age. However, academic research on [adult recollection of childhood memories](#) showed that it is difficult to accurately recall experiences in early childhood.

Differences between sex were seen in the age at which abuse began for two age groups. Among those who experienced sexual abuse, 31.2% of men indicated that their abuse began between the ages of 10 and 12 years compared with 20.3% of women. Additionally, 21.4% of women indicated that their abuse began between the ages of 16 and 17 years compared with 11.5% of men.

Disclosure of abuse

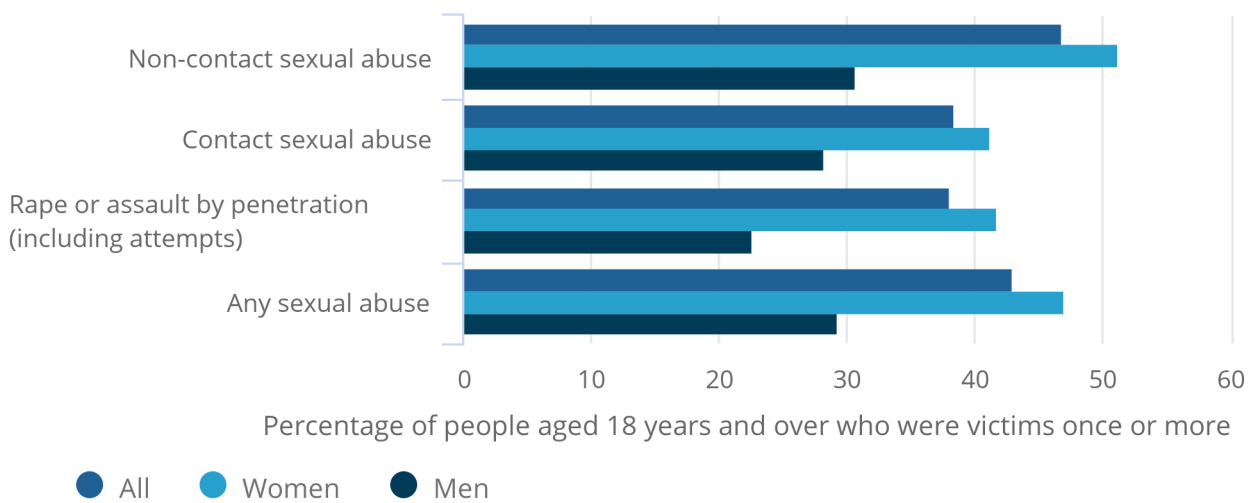
Among those who experienced sexual abuse as a child, 43.1% of victims disclosed the abuse at the time it occurred. They most commonly disclosed to someone they knew personally (39.5%), followed by someone in an official position (10.6%) and other support professionals or organisations (3.9%). Differences by sex of victim were evident, with 47.0% of women saying they told someone at the time compared with 29.3% of men (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Disclosure of child sexual abuse at the time was more common among women than men

Proportion of people aged 18 years and over who experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years and told someone about the abuse at the time, by sex and type of abuse, England and Wales, year ending March 2024

Figure 7: Disclosure of child sexual abuse at the time was more common among women than men

Proportion of people aged 18 years and over who experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years and told someone about the abuse at the time, by sex and type of abuse, England and Wales, year ending March 2024



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

Notes:

1. Non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) categories will not sum to the total of the any sexual abuse category. This is because victims may be included in multiple categories, as they can experience more than one type of abuse.
2. Any sexual abuse includes non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).
3. “Don't know” and “Refused” answer options have been excluded from this analysis.
4. For more information about what is covered by each abuse type, see [Section 9: Glossary](#).

Among those who did not disclose their abuse immediately, the most common reasons given were embarrassment, humiliation or shame (49.1%), not thinking they would be believed (27.1%) and thinking it was their fault (25.9%).

Men more commonly cited believing the abuse was too trivial than women (20.6% of men compared with 12.0% of women). Women more commonly said they did not tell anyone because they thought it was their fault (29.2% compared with 17.2% of men) or because they feared causing problems for their family at higher rates than men (22.6% compared with 16.1%).

When asked about disclosure at any point after the abuse occurred, 67.0% of victims had told someone about their experience of child sexual abuse. Women disclosed at some point more frequently than men (69.8% compared with 57.6% of men). The most common group for later disclosure was someone they knew personally (62.9%), followed by a support professional or organisation (13.3%) and someone in an official position (9.1%).

Victims were also asked who came to know about the sexual abuse they experienced as a child without the victim disclosing. The majority (71.5%) said that no one had discovered their abuse without being told. Among those where someone had found out, the most common group was someone the victim knew personally (24.6%), followed by someone in an official position (5.8%) and a support professional or organisation (1.7%).

Differences by sex of victim were minimal, except for disclosure to people in official positions, where 6.8% of women said that such individuals had found out without being told, compared with 2.5% of men.

6 . Adverse childhood experiences

The Crime Survey for England and Wales includes questions asking about adverse childhood experiences that occurred before the age of 18 years. These questions do not cover all adverse childhood experiences but include factors such as whether someone had lived with a household member with a long-term physical or mental health condition or disability and whether they had lived in a care home. A full list of those experiences included in the survey can be found in [Section 9: Glossary](#).

It is important to note that it is not known whether the adverse childhood experience was the result of the abuse someone experienced as a child, or whether the child was at greater risk of being a victim of abuse because of any adverse childhood experiences. However, the questions provide a useful indicator of some adverse childhood experiences that may make children more vulnerable to abuse or that may have occurred as a result of abuse.

Of people aged 18 years and over who experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years, 26.4% had experienced at least one or more adverse childhood experiences before the age of 18 years. In comparison, 6.0% of people aged 18 years and over who did not experience any abuse before the age of 18 years had experienced at least one or more adverse childhood experiences before the age of 18 years.

A higher proportion of people aged 18 years and over experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years, if they had lived with:

- a household member who had a long-term physical health condition or disability (58.2%) compared with those who did not live with such a household member (27.4%)
- a household member who had a long-term mental health condition or disability (72.2%) compared with those who had not (27.2%)
- someone who was a problem drinker or misused drugs (77.7%) compared with those who had not (26.9%)

7 . Outcomes for people who experienced abuse in childhood

A higher proportion of people who experienced abuse before the age of 18 years said they had experienced abuse in adulthood compared with those who had not experienced abuse during childhood.

At the time of the survey, 15.4% of people aged 18 years and over who had experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years had also experienced domestic abuse in the last year. This compares with 4.5% of those who had not experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years.

Of those who had experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years, 0.9% had experienced sexual assault by rape or penetration in the last year at the time of the survey, compared with 0.05% of those who did not experience any abuse as a child.

Among those who had experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years, 19.7% had experienced domestic abuse in the last year at the time of the survey, compared with 6.1% of those who did not experience sexual abuse as a child.

Of those who had experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years, 2.4% had experienced sexual assault by rape or penetration in the last year at the time of the survey, compared with 0.1% of those who did not experience sexual abuse before the age of 18 years.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) also asks respondents about their current well-being, measuring life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in their life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety levels.

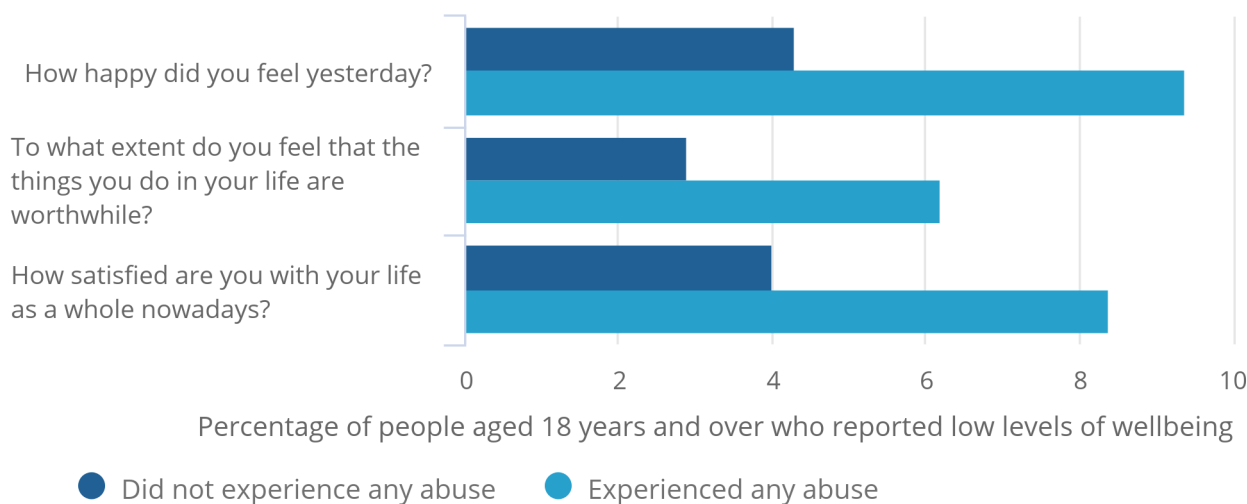
Compared with those who did not experience any abuse before the age of 18 years, those aged 18 years and over who experienced any abuse as a child more frequently reported low life satisfaction (8.4% compared with 4.0%), low sense of worthwhileness (6.2% compared with 2.9%), low happiness (9.4% compared with 4.3%) and high anxiety (32.1% compared with 21.0%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: People who experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years had lower self-reported well-being than those who did not

Percentage of people aged 18 years and over who experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years and reported low levels of well-being, by well-being measure, England and Wales, year ending March 2024

Figure 8: People who experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years had lower self-reported well-being than those who did not

Percentage of people aged 18 years and over who experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years and reported low levels of well-being, by well-being measure, England and Wales, year ending March 2024



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

Notes:

1. Don't know" and "Refused" answer options have been excluded from this analysis.
2. The questions relating to well-being are only asked of one quarter of the CSEW sample.
3. The thresholds used to present these categories are: 0 to 4 (low), 5 to 6 (medium), 7 to 8 (high) and 9 to 10 (very high).
4. The anxiety measure is not included in this chart, as it uses a different scale.

The CSEW also asks respondents to rate their current general health on a five-point scale ranging from "very poor" to "very good". Around three-quarters (74.9%) of those aged 18 years and over who had experienced any abuse before the age of 18 years rated their health as "good" or "very good", compared with 81.6% of those who had not experienced any abuse.

8 . Data on abuse during childhood

[Abuse during childhood in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 5 November 2025

Data on prevalence and type of abuse experienced during childhood from the year ending March 2024
Crime Survey for England and Wales.

9 . Glossary

Adverse childhood experiences

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) included questions about whether adverse childhood experiences occurred for respondents before the age of 18 years.

Adverse childhood experiences asked about in the CSEW include:

- respondent had a long-term physical health condition or disability
- respondent had a long-term mental health condition or disability
- household member had a long-term physical health condition or disability
- household member had a long-term mental health condition or disability
- respondent lived in a care home
- respondent lived with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or misused street or prescription drugs
- respondent lived with a household member who was ever sent to jail or prison

Any abuse

In this bulletin, the term any abuse includes respondents who said they experienced at least one of emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect.

Child

A child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently, is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital, or is in custody in the secure estate does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.

Child abuse

There is not a specific offence of child abuse in law, but practitioners have come to define child abuse based on the laws designed to protect children from harm.

Child abuse is any form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or by others. Abuse involving technology can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

For the purposes of the estimates in this bulletin, emotional abuse and physical abuse are captured only where the perpetrator was a person aged 18 years and over. As a result, experiences of emotional and physical abuse by another child are not included in this measure.

Contact sexual abuse

Contact sexual abuse is defined as being touched sexually. For example, touching or kissing any part of your body with any part of their body in a sexual way or being forced into touching your own or someone else's body for sexual purposes.

Unlike in previous publications, this category does not include rape or assault by penetration (including attempts). It also does not include any acts where a person is made to penetrate another person, with a penis or any object. These are included as part of the rape of assault by penetration (including attempts) category. See Table 4 of our [Abuse during childhood in England and Wales: March 2024 datasets](#) for the questions that make up this measure.

Emotional abuse

Child emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child that causes severe and ongoing adverse effects on the child's emotional development. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, but it may occur alone. A child may be emotionally abused by an adult or adults, or by another child or children. See [Section 5 of the User Guide](#) for a full definition of emotional abuse.

For the purposes of the estimates in this article, emotional abuse is captured only where the perpetrator was a person aged 18 years and over. As a result, experiences of emotional abuse by another child are not included in this measure. Additionally, the survey questions do not capture the frequency or persistence of the abusive behaviour, meaning the data may include both persistent maltreatment and isolated incidents.

Emotional abuse was referred to as psychological abuse in previous publications. See Table 1 of our [Abuse during childhood in England and Wales: March 2024 datasets](#) for the questions that make up this measure.

Neglect

There is no specific offence of "child neglect", however, a number of definitions exist, for example as detailed in the 2023 HM government report, [Working together to safeguard children](#).

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) define neglect as being broken down into four types: physical neglect (not meeting a child's basic needs), educational neglect (not making sure child receives an education), emotional neglect (not meeting child's needs for nurture and stimulation) and medical neglect (not providing appropriate healthcare). For the NSPCC definition see their website, [Protecting children from neglect](#).

In this bulletin, the term neglect is defined as not meeting a child's basic needs, such as food, clothing or shelter; not supervising a child adequately or providing for their safety, and is only captured where the perpetrator was a parent, carer or guardian. See Table 6 of our [Abuse during childhood in England and Wales: March 2024 datasets](#) for a breakdown of the questions asked.

Non-contact sexual abuse

Non-contact sexual abuse includes where the respondent indicated that someone made them watch or listen to sexual acts or look at sexual images, made or shared sexual images of them, deliberately exposed themselves to them or sent them sexual images or videos of themselves or others. See Table 3 of our [Abuse during childhood in England and Wales: March 2024 datasets](#) for the questions that make up this measure.

Physical abuse

Child physical abuse is the non-accidental infliction of physical force on a child. This may involve hitting, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child. A child may be physically abused by an adult or adults or by another child or children. See [Section 5 of the User Guide](#) for a full definition of physical abuse.

For the purposes of the estimates in this bulletin, physical abuse is captured only where the perpetrator was a person aged 18 years and over. As a result, experiences of physical abuse by another child are not included in this measure. See Table 2 of our [Abuse during childhood in England and Wales: March 2024 datasets](#) for the questions that make up this measure.

Rape or assault by penetration (including attempts)

The legal category of rape, as introduced in the [Sexual Offences Act 2003](#), is the penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth by a penis without consent. Also introduced as a legal offence as part of the Act, assault by penetration is the penetration of the vagina or anus with an object or other body part without consent.

For the purposes of the estimates in this article, the category of rape or assault by penetration (including attempt) includes any act where a person is penetrated without consent, or is made to penetrate another person, with a penis or any object in either case. Attempted acts are also included. See Table 5 of our [Abuse during childhood in England and Wales: March 2024 datasets](#) for the questions that make up this measure.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse, as referred to in this bulletin, is made up of the three subcategories, non-contact sexual abuse, contact sexual abuse, and rape or assault by penetration (including attempts).

10 . Data sources and quality

No data source exists that provides the current prevalence of abuse during childhood. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) provides the best available indicator of prevalence by measuring the prevalence of adults who experienced abuse before the age of 18 years. We are exploring the feasibility of a survey measuring child abuse. For more information see our [Exploring the feasibility of a survey measuring child abuse in the UK article](#).

Estimates from the CSEW provided in this bulletin help to address this evidence gap by providing [official statistics in development](#) on the prevalence of adults who experienced abuse before the age of 18 years. They are based on a set of self-completion questions asked to a representative sample of adults in England and Wales. For the set of questions, see [Section 20 of our CSEW questionnaire \(PDF, 3.6MB\)](#).

For the self-completion questionnaire, respondents are given a tablet computer on which to complete their answers. The use of self-completion on laptops or tablet computers allows respondents to feel more at ease when answering questions on sensitive issues, because of increased confidence in the privacy and confidentiality of the survey. While the level of disclosure is unknown, it is reasonable to assume some element of under-reporting.

These data cannot be compared with data previously published as the data provide a snapshot of the adult household population to represent people's experiences of abuse over many years. As it does not provide a "moment in time" prevalence estimate, it cannot be used to produce a time series.

In addition, the survey questions have been redeveloped since year ending March 2019 to improve the measure of historical abuse. Previously, respondents were asked about their experiences before the age of 16 years. Following the redevelopment, the questions now ask about experiences before the age of 18 years to capture abuse experienced by 16- and 17-year-olds. The population covered has also been changed from 16 to 74 years to those aged 18 years and over, further limiting the ability to compare over time.

All differences reported in this article are [statistically significant](#) at the 5% level. More information about the methodology of the CSEW can be found in our [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#).

11 . Related links

[Child abuse in England and Wales: March 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 5 March 2020

Statistics and research on child abuse in England and Wales, bringing together a range of different data sources from across government and the voluntary sector.

[Abuse during childhood: Findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, year ending March 2016](#)

Bulletin | Released 4 August 2016

The 2015 to 2016 Crime Survey for England and Wales ran for the first time a module of questions asking adults whether they were abused as a child. The analyses of these questions covering psychological, physical, and sexual abuse as a child, are published within the report.

[Transforming children's crime statistics for England and Wales: March 2023](#)

Article | Released 1 March 2023

Progress update on our transformation of the Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales.

[Exploring the feasibility of a survey measuring child abuse in the UK: June 2024](#)

Article | Released 25 June 2024

[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.

[Sexual offences in England and Wales overview: year ending March 2025](#)

Bulletin | Released 4 November 2025

Data on sexual offences from the year ending March 2025 Crime Survey for England and Wales, police recorded crime, and victim services.

12 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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