

Statistical bulletin

# Experiences of harassment in England and Wales: December 2023

Estimates on the experiences and nature of harassment from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

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# 1 . Main points

- Overall, 1 in 10 people aged 16 years and over experienced at least one form of harassment that made them feel upset, distressed, or threatened in the previous 12 months.
- More women (13%) than men (7%) experienced at least one form of harassment; this reflects differential experiences of sexual harassment (experienced by 8% of women compared with 3% of men).
- Experiences of harassment are more prevalent among younger age groups, with one in five 16- to 19-year-olds (20%) and 20- to 24-year-olds (21%) having experienced at least one type of harassment in the previous 12 months.
- Three quarters (75%) of victims of harassment experienced this behaviour in person, whereas approximately one in five experienced it online (21%).
- A quarter (26%) of those who had experienced sexual harassment said they had experienced harassment at their place of work.

## 2 . Understanding harassment as measured by the Crime Survey for England and Wales

In April 2022, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) launched an experimental module to fill some important evidence gaps around the experience of harassment. Questions were reviewed and revised in October 2022.

Harassment is a complex topic that cuts across different crime types. The CSEW focuses on experiences of types of sexual and non-sexual harassment, where the behaviour caused the victim to feel upset, distressed or threatened. It provides a prevalence measure of the proportion of people aged 16 or over in England and Wales who have experienced these types of harassment in the last 12 months. The CSEW measure of harassment includes both single and repeat incidents and so cannot be compared with harassment measured by Police Recorded Crime and cannot provide an estimate of the number of incidents of harassment. Further information about CSEW measures of harassment can be found in [Section 6: Glossary](#).

The statistics presented in this release are not designated as [National Statistics](#). They are based on only six months of data collection from the CSEW between October 2022 and March 2023. Caution should be taken when using these data because of the impact of the reduced data collection period and the experimental nature of the statistics.

## 3 . Experiences of harassment

## Experience of any type of harassment in the last 12 months

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimates that 1 in 10 people aged 16 years and over experienced some form of harassment which caused them to feel upset, distressed or threatened in the last 12 months.

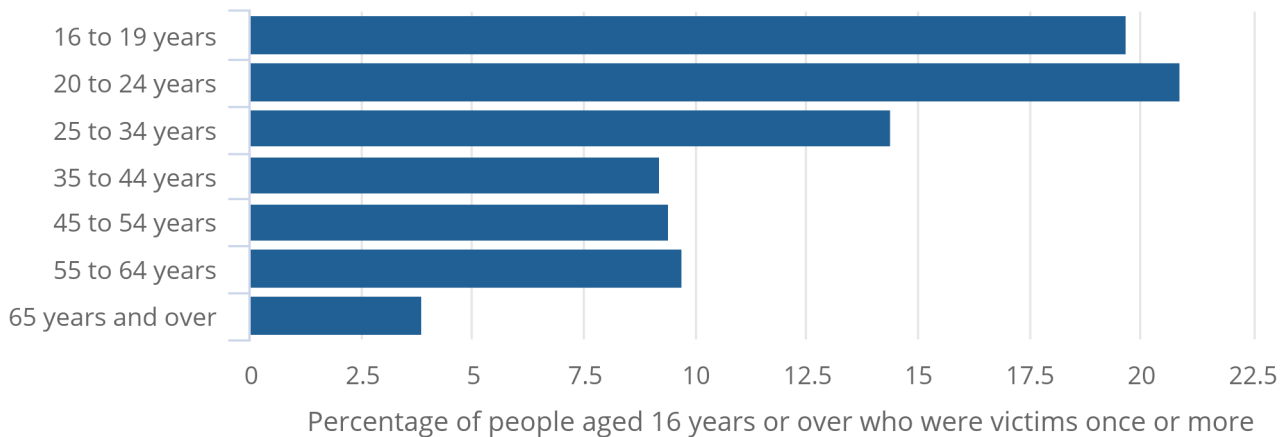
A higher proportion of younger adults experienced harassment than older adults (Figure 1). A fifth (20%) of 16- to 19-year-olds and 20- to 24-year-olds (21%) experienced at least one form of harassment within the last year compared with 8% of adults aged 35 and over.

### Figure 1: Experiences of harassment in the last 12 months were greater among people aged between 16 and 24

Prevalence of harassment in the last year for people aged 16 years and over by age, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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Prevalence of harassment in the last year for people aged 16 years and over by age, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



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

#### Notes:

1. Data for the year ending March 2023 are not badged as National Statistics. They are based on six months of data collection from the face-to-face Crime Survey for England and Wales between October 2022 and March 2023. Caution should be taken when using these data because of the impact of the reduced data collection period and lower response rates on the quality of the estimates.
2. Definitions of harassment types can be found in our glossary.

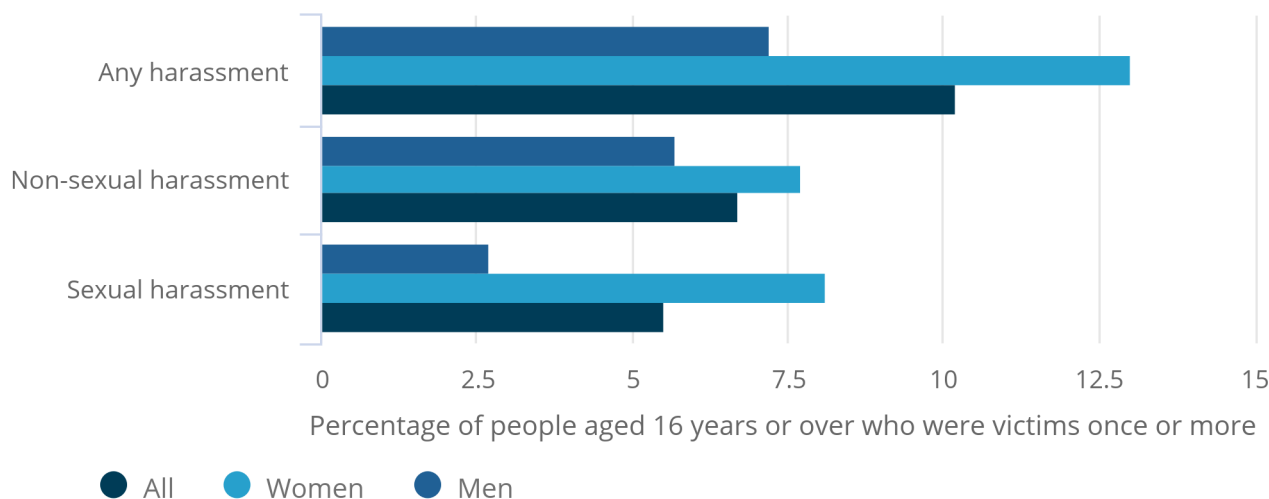
Women were more likely to have experienced some form of harassment than men, with 13% of women and 7% of men having experienced some form of harassment in the last 12 months. This difference is largely driven by experiences of sexual harassment, as shown in Figure 2.

## Figure 2: Harassment is more prevalent among women compared with men across harassment types

Prevalence of harassment in the last year for people aged 16 years and over, by type and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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Prevalence of harassment in the last year for people aged 16 years and over, by type and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



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

#### Notes:

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2. Some victims may have experienced both non-sexual and sexual harassment in the last 12 months.
3. The sum of the overarching harassment category is not the sum of the sub-categories, as victims who have experienced more than one type of harassment will be included in both categories.
4. Definitions of harassment types can be found in our glossary.

Among those who had reported experiencing some form of harassment in the last year, half (51%) had experienced at least two incidents that were related to one another in some way, while the rest described their experiences as being separate incidents.

## Experience of non-sexual harassment

Overall, 7% of people aged 16 and over reported experiencing at least one of the forms of non-sexual harassment we asked about within the last 12 months.

Prevalence of non-sexual harassment was slightly higher among women (8%) compared with men (6%).

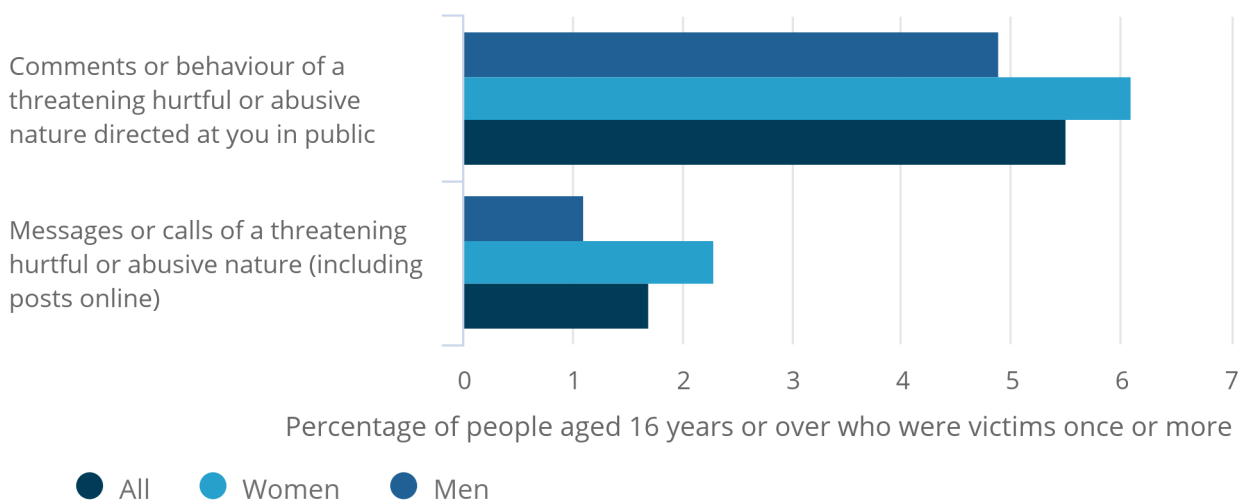
Figure 3 shows that comments or behaviour of a threatening, hurtful or abusive nature in public (6%) was the most widely experienced type of non-sexual harassment. Around 2% of people reported that they had experienced messages or calls of a threatening, hurtful or abusive nature.

### Figure 3: Experiences of non-sexual harassment mostly involved comments or behaviour of a threatening, hurtful or abusive nature

Prevalence of non-sexual harassment experienced in the last year for people aged 16 and over, by sex and type of harassment, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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Prevalence of non-sexual harassment experienced in the last year for people aged 16 and over, by sex and type of harassment, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



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

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2. Some victims may have experienced multiple harassment behaviours in the last 12 months.
3. Definitions of harassment types can be found in our glossary.

The likelihood of experiencing any type of non-sexual harassment tended to decrease with age; 13% of 16- to 19-year-olds and 11% of 20- to 24-year-olds experienced non-sexual harassment in the last 12 months compared with 5% of those aged 35 and over.

Broken down by sex, a higher proportion of men aged 16- to 24-years-old (13%) reported experiencing non-sexual harassment compared with 10% of women of the same age. For men, this figure dropped to 5% among those aged 25 to 34, but for women this increased to 13% of women aged 25 to 34 experiencing some form of non-sexual harassment in the last year.

## Experience of sexual harassment

Overall, 5% of people aged 16 and over reported experiencing at least one of the forms of sexual harassment we asked about within the last 12 months. Prevalence was approximately three times higher among women (8%) compared with men (3%).

The likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment was highest among younger age groups. This was particularly the case for women, with 23% of those aged 16 to 24 and 16% of those aged 25 to 34 experiencing some form of sexual harassment in the previous year compared with 5% of those aged 35 and over.

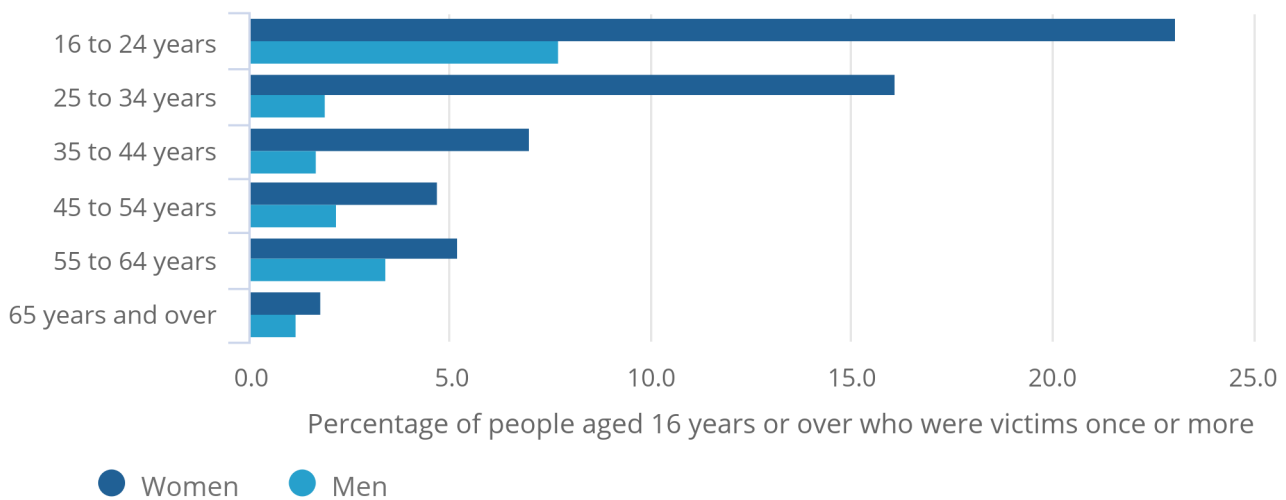
There was a similar pattern among men with 8% of the youngest 16-to-24 age group experiencing sexual harassment in the last 12 months, compared with 2% of men aged 25 years and over.

### Figure 4: A quarter of women aged 16 to 24 experienced sexual harassment in the last 12 months

Prevalence of sexual harassment in the last year for adults aged 16 years and over, by age and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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Prevalence of sexual harassment in the last year for adults aged 16 years and over, by age and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



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

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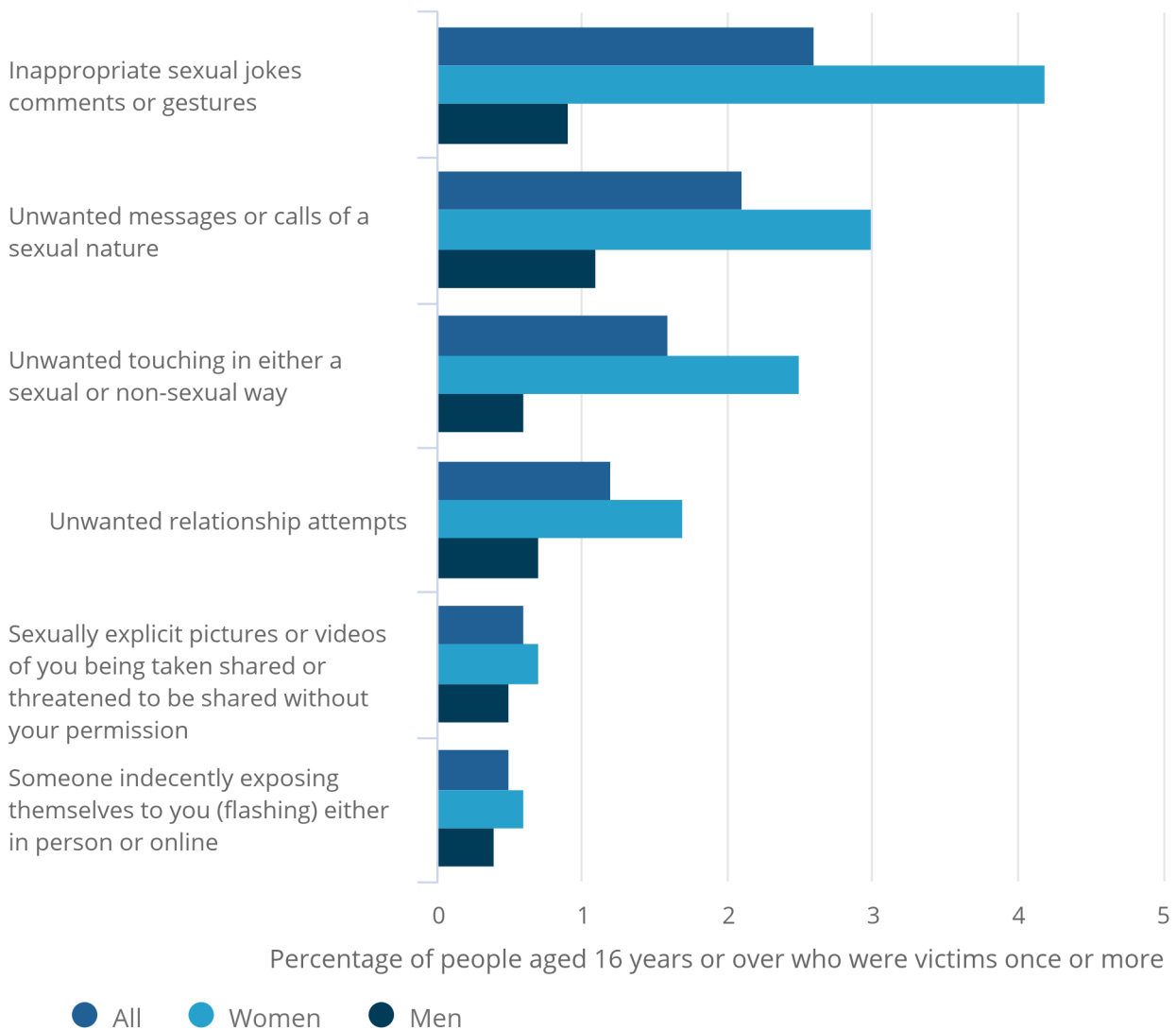
Figure 5 shows the most widely experienced forms of sexual harassment were inappropriate sexual jokes, comments or gestures (3%), unwanted messages or calls of a sexual nature (2%), and unwanted touching in either a sexual or non-sexual way (2%). Women were more likely than men to experience these types of behaviour.

**Figure 5: Inappropriate sexual jokes, comments or gestures were the highest reported experience of sexual harassment**

Prevalence of sexual harassment experienced in the last year for people aged 16 and over, by sex and type of harassment, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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

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2. Some victims may have experienced multiple harassment behaviours in the last 12 months.
3. Definitions of harassment types can be found in our glossary.

## **4 . Nature of harassment**

## Setting and location of harassment

Of those who had experienced any type of harassment in the last 12 months, three quarters (75%) reported at least one experience took place in person. This was true across both harassment types, 83% for those who had experienced non-sexual harassment and 67% for those who had experienced sexual harassment. A fifth (21%) had experienced some form of harassment online. This was 15% among victims of non-sexual harassment and 29% among victims of sexual harassment.

Figure 6 shows the majority of those who had experienced in-person harassment experienced at least one type of harassment in a public space (73%). This was followed by experiences in workplace environments and at home as the next most common settings (both 18%).

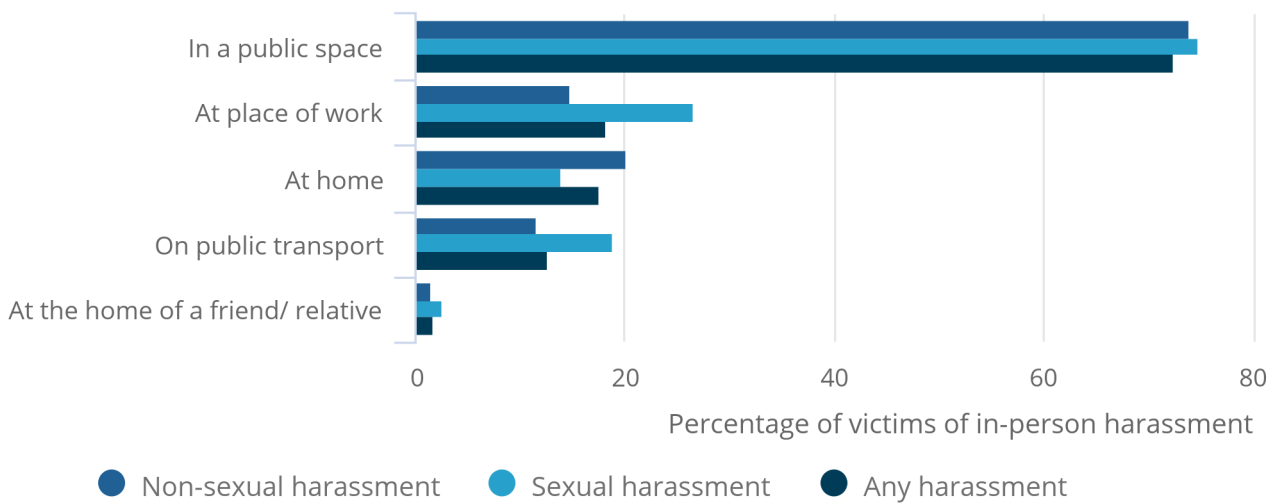
A quarter (26%) of those who had experienced sexual harassment said they had experienced harassment at their place of work and 19% said they had experienced sexual harassment on public transport.

### Figure 6: Most experiences of in-person harassment took place in a public space

Location of in-person harassment experienced in the last year for people aged 16 and over, by type of harassment, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

## Figure 6: Most experiences of in-person harassment took place in a public space

Location of in-person harassment experienced in the last year for people aged 16 and over, by type of harassment, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



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

#### Notes:

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2. Some victims may have experienced harassment more than once in multiple settings.
3. Definitions of harassment types can be found in our glossary.

## Relationship to the perpetrator

Around 7 in 10 (71%) people who experienced harassment in the last year reported that the harassment came from a stranger. This is consistent when broken down by harassment type (74% for sexual harassment and 71% for non-sexual harassment).

When broken down by sex, the second most common victim-perpetrator relationship for men was a friend or acquaintance, which is consistent across both harassment types.

For women the second most common victim-perpetrator relationship varies by harassment type. For non-sexual harassment, 15% of women who were victims said they had experienced harassment from a neighbour (Figure 7). For sexual harassment, a workmate or colleague was the second highest victim-perpetrator relationship (12%).

### Figure 7: Victim-perpetrator relationships for women varied by harassment type, while remaining consistent among men

Relationship to perpetrator among people aged 16 and over who had experienced harassment, by type of harassment, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

#### Notes

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2. Some data for men are not shown because of disclosure constraints.
3. Some victims may have experienced harassment more than once by multiple people.
4. Definitions of harassment types can be found in our glossary.

## Perceived motivation

When asked about the perceived motivation behind any of their experiences, 29% of those who had experienced harassment in the last 12 months felt that it had been motivated by their sex. This figure was 46% among those who had experienced sexual harassment.

After sex, the second most perceived motivating factor was physical appearance (15%), age (12%) and race or ethnicity (10%).

We recommend exercising caution in the interpretation of these figures. Base sizes were not sufficient to provide further breakdowns of this measure to understand how experiences differed by personal characteristics.

## 5 . Harassment in England and Wales, Crime Survey for England and Wales data

[Experiences of harassment: prevalence and nature tables](#)

Dataset | Released 7 December 2023

Data on the prevalence and nature of harassment, by types and personal characteristics, based upon findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

## 6 . Glossary

### Any harassment

"Those who experienced any harassment" refers to all respondents who selected at least one answer option at either of the sexual or non-sexual harassment prompted questions.

A full list of the questions can be found in the [Crime Survey for England and Wales 2022 to 2023: Adult questionnaire](#).

### Non-sexual harassment

"Those who experienced non-sexual harassment" refers to all respondents who selected at least one of the answer options at the non-sexual harassment prompted question.

These options were amalgamated for publication into the categories below:

- comments or behaviour of a threatening, hurtful or abusive nature directed at you in public
- messages or calls of a threatening, hurtful or abusive nature (including posts online)
- threatening, hurtful or abusive graffiti about you (this is not shown in the tables because of disclosure restraints)

### Related incidents

In this publication, related incidents refer to those who have experienced some form of harassment more than once, and where the experiences of harassment were committed by the same person or group of people.

### Sexual harassment

"Those who experienced sexual harassment" refers to all respondents who selected at least one of the answer options at the sexual harassment prompted question.

These options were amalgamated for publication into the following categories:

- unwanted messages or calls of a sexual nature
- inappropriate sexual jokes, comments or gestures
- unwanted relationship attempts
- sexually explicit pictures or videos being taken, shared or threatened to be shared without permission
- unwanted touching in either a sexual or non-sexual way
- someone indecently exposing themselves in person or online (flashing)

## 7 . Measuring the data

Data included in this release are sourced from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). Our [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales: March 2023](#) provides detailed information about crime survey data.

The harassment module was first launched on the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) in April 2022 to half of the survey sample. The questions were then reviewed and subsequently revised, with changes implemented in October 2022. Because of the change in question wording, these data are based on the six months of data collection between October 2022 and March 2023. Questions were asked to half of the CSEW sample.

## 8 . Strengths and limitations

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) data presented in this release are not designated as [National Statistics](#). They are based on six months of data collection from half of the CSEW sample between October 2022 and March 2023. Caution should be taken when using these data because of the impact of the reduced data collection period and the lower response rates on the quality of the estimates.

Harassment is a broad and complex topic that cuts across several different crime types. The estimates in this bulletin are experimental, and subject to further development work. They are not definitive, and victims of harassment may experience other types of behaviour not currently captured by the survey. As the CSEW also includes single incidences of harassment, it is not comparable with police recorded data.

As a result of the lower number of responses, we are unable to provide further breakdowns by personal characteristics beyond age and sex. Therefore, these data may not reflect the realities of people from ethnic minority groups.

Harassment data from the CSEW are not comparable with published estimates in our [Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain bulletin](#) from the Opinions and Lifestyle survey (OPN). Because of extensive differences in the questions used and the fieldwork method employed between the two surveys, results are not directly comparable. Similarities are observed, however, in the differential experiences of harassment estimated by age and sex.

## 9 . Related links

[Violence against women and girls, research update: November 2023](#)

Article | Released 29 November 2023

An update of our current and future research and publications relating to violence against women and girls (VAWG).

[Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 16 February to 13 March 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 25 May 2022

Perceptions of safety and experiences of harassment, by personal characteristics, based on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

## 10 . Cite this statistical bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 7 December 2023, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Experiences of harassment in England and Wales: December 2023](#)