

Child abuse QMI

Quality and Methodology Information for child abuse detailing the strengths and limitations of the data, methods used and data uses and users.

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

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1 . Output information

National Statistic	No
Survey name	Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)
Frequency	Every three years
How compiled	From data submitted by sources across government (including CSEW survey data) and the voluntary sector
Geographic coverage	England and Wales
Data collection	A variety of survey and administrative data
Last revised	5 March 2020

2 . About this Quality and Methodology Information report

This quality and methodology report contains information on the quality characteristics of the data (including the European Statistical System five dimensions of quality) as well as the methods used to create it.

The information in this report will help you to:

- understand the strengths and limitations of the data
- learn about existing uses and users of the data
- reduce the risk of misusing data
- help you to decide suitable uses for the data
- understand the methods used to create the data

3 . Important points

- The release on [Child abuse in England and Wales](#) data on the prevalence of child abuse, cases of child abuse that have come to the attention of the child protection system, use of child abuse support services, and child abuse cases in the criminal justice system.
- The release brings together a number of different data sources to provide a more coherent picture of child abuse, but it is not possible to directly compare each of the datasets because of differences in timescales and reference periods, and because they do not all count the same thing.
- Caveats are provided throughout to make it clear where a comparison can be made and where it may be more difficult or not possible to directly compare data sources.
- Data from the Office for National Statistics, the Department for Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Home Office Homicide Index, and NHS Digital data on hospital admissions are classified as [National Statistics](#). Other data from the Home Office (excluding the Homicide Index), data from the Welsh Government, Ofsted, the National Crime Agency, and NHS Digital data on female genital mutilation are classified as [official statistics](#). All other data included in this release are sourced from administrative datasets that do not fall within the scope of official statistics.

4 . Quality summary

Overview

The aim of this release is to bring together data on child abuse to provide a better understanding of child abuse than is possible from looking at individual data sources in isolation. Administrative data sources do not represent the full extent of the issue as child abuse is often hidden from view, and there are no current surveys that measure children's experiences of abuse. However, when different sources of information are looked at together, they can help build up a picture of the extent and nature of child abuse.

The way in which data on child abuse are collected differs between sources and organisations. Data are collected over different timescales on different bases (for example, victims, crimes, suspects or defendants). Data also vary in the way that cases are identified. This means that each section in the publication does not refer to the same cohort of cases and so direct comparisons cannot be made across sections. Throughout the publication, cautions are provided to make it clear where a comparison can be made and where it may be more difficult or not possible to directly compare data sources.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data for the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and police recorded crime were created is available in the [Crime in England and Wales QMI](#).

Uses and users

Data on child abuse in England and Wales promotes significant interest from a range of users. These include:

- elected national and local representatives (such as MPs, police and crime commissioners, and local councillors)
- the Home Office and other government agencies
- police forces
- those delivering support or services to victims of child abuse
- lobby groups
- journalists
- academic researchers
- teachers
- students

The data can be used for a variety of purposes, including:

- the development and monitoring of crime and justice policy
- raising awareness of child abuse
- academic research

Providing breakdowns of victim characteristics allows a greater depth of understanding about child abuse.

Table 1 shows the main user groups of child abuse statistics and how they use the data provided. The column on the left lists the classes of use identified by the UK Statistics Authority in their monitoring brief, [The Use Made of Official Statistics \(PDF, 125.6KB\)](#). The column on the right provides more detail on how the data fits that class of use.

Table 1: Main user groups and uses of data on child abuse

Class	Description
Informing the general public	<p>Level of child abuse in England and Wales: the measures published provide insight into the level of child abuse in England and Wales. Further breakdowns, such as by abuse type and characteristics of victims, allow a greater depth of understanding about child abuse.</p> <p>Number of child abuse crimes recorded: the number of child abuse crimes recorded by the police is another important measure. This information can help the public in holding elected representatives to account and in making choices about who they will vote for.</p> <p>Supporting victims: bringing together data on child abuse covering service provision for victims can help encourage more victims to report abuse, knowing that there is appropriate support available.</p>
Decision-making about policies, programmes and projects	<p>Policy-making: data on child abuse crimes are important in informing government policy-making to improve victims' experiences of the criminal justice process.</p> <p>Policy monitoring: such data allow the effectiveness of implemented policies relating to crime to be monitored and measured over a period of time.</p>
Resource allocation	Public sector: data can be used to help determine the allocation of government resources to several organisations. For example, grants given to charities, such as victim support groups.
Informing public marketing campaigns	Safety and awareness campaigns: these data can be used to support campaigns that aim to raise awareness of child abuse.
Supporting third sector activity	<p>Lobbying: a range of lobby groups use crime statistics to help raise awareness of issues, such as variations in victimisation by socio-demographic characteristics such as age and sex.</p> <p>Funding applications: organisations can use crime statistics to bid for funding for projects that aim to raise awareness of and tackle crime problems.</p>
Facilitating academic research	The CSEW dataset is available as microdata as part of the UK Data Service. As a result, these data are widely used by academics studying topics in this area.

Strengths and limitations

Strengths:

- the release brings together different data sources on child abuse in England and Wales to provide a more coherent understanding of child abuse
- an improved understanding of the extent and nature of child abuse enables action to be taken
- action taken as a result of the release may lead to improved victim experiences, an increase in reported abuse, and hopefully over time, a reduction in the prevalence of child abuse

Limitations:

- the different datasets included in the release do not relate to the same cases given the different timescales and reference periods used to collect the data, and do not all count the same things; therefore, each of the numbers cannot be directly compared
- statistics on child abuse are produced separately by a number of different organisations in England and Wales; when taken in isolation, these statistics may not provide the context required by users to enable them to understand the national picture of child abuse
- data relating to the crimes recorded by the police and criminal justice agencies, children's services and support services only refer to cases of child abuse that become visible to these organisations

5 . Quality characteristics of the Child abuse in England and Wales data

Relevance

The data collated within this release provide a clearer understanding of the extent and nature of child abuse in England and Wales than is possible from looking at each data source in isolation. It is hoped that this understanding will lead to action being taken to help reduce the prevalence of child abuse, provide better support for victims, and also to encourage more victims to report their experiences.

See [Uses and users](#) for more information.

Accuracy and reliability

The release includes data from a number of data sources, the majority of which are based on administrative records. More information on the accuracy of each of the data sources is given in the [Main data sources and their accuracy](#) section.

For more detail on the accuracy and reliability of the data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime see the [Crime in England and Wales QMI](#).

Coherence and comparability

The data included in the release come from several sources and direct comparisons cannot be made between figures. This is because the different sources of data do not always relate to the same cases as often different timescales and reference periods have been used during collection. They also do not count the same things; for example, some record the number of victims, while others record the number of offences that occurred.

For most of the data sources, comparisons over time can be made, for example, the number of children subject to a child protection plan for abuse or neglect. However, comparisons should not be made between the change in the number of child abuse offences recorded by the police over time. These numbers are based on offences where there were data to identify that the victim was a child. Provision of these data will vary by police force and over time. Changes in the number of child abuse offences recorded by the police can also be affected by changes in levels of reporting to the police or police recording practices.

Concepts and definitions

There is no specific offence of “child abuse” in law. Generally, practitioners have come to define child abuse based on the laws designed to protect children from harm. For example, [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(PDF, 2.21MB\)](#) defines abuse as:

“A 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, more rarely, by others. Abuse 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.”

A child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. This is consistent with the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). Article 1 states that everyone under the age of 18 years has all the rights in the Convention.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales collects information on adults’ experiences of the following types of abuse before the age of 16 years:

- physical abuse by someone aged 16 years or over
- emotional abuse by someone aged 16 years or over
- sexual abuse by any perpetrator
- witnessing domestic violence or abuse

Geography

The majority of data on child abuse included in the release are available at a national level for England and Wales. However, some data sources cover the whole of the UK or are worldwide and cannot be disaggregated to provide statistics for England and Wales only. Table 2 provides information on the geographical coverage of each data source included in the release.

Accessibility and clarity

Our recommended format for accessible content is a combination of HTML web pages for narrative, charts and graphs, with data being provided in usable formats such as CSV and Excel. Our website also offers users the option to download the narrative in PDF format. In some instances, other software may be used, or may be available on request. Available formats for content published on our website, but not produced by us, or referenced on our website but stored elsewhere, may vary. For further information, contact crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk.

For information regarding conditions of access to data:

- [terms and conditions \(for data on the website\)](#)
- [accessibility](#)

Timeliness and punctuality

[Child abuse in England and Wales](#) was published for the first time in January 2020. The data included in the release are the latest available at the time of publishing. Information on the latest time period of each of the data sources included in the release is given in Table 2.

6 . Methods used to produce the Child abuse in England and Wales data

Main data sources and their accuracy

Statistics on child abuse are produced separately by a number of different organisations in England and Wales. When taken in isolation, these statistics may not provide the context required by users to enable them to understand the national picture of child abuse. Table 2 provides details of each of the data sources included in this release.

Table 2: Data sources

Data supplier	Data	Time period	Geography	Important points
Office for National Statistics	Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) – Adults’ survey	Year ending March 2019	England and Wales	Analysis presented in the release covers adults aged 18 to 74 years who are resident in households in England and Wales and who completed the self-completion module of the CSEW on experience of abuse before the age of 16 years. The CSEW figures provide an underestimate of child abuse, as abuse against 16- and 17-year- olds is not included. Abuse perpetrated by children aged under 16 years is also only included for sexual abuse.
Office for National Statistics	Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) – 110- to 15-year- olds survey	Three years ending March 2019	England and Wales	Analysis presented in the release based on the 10- to 15-year- olds survey provides insight into the current prevalence of physical abuse experienced by this age group and includes child-on-child violence. Three years of data are combined to provide more robust estimates.
Home Office	Police recorded crime	Year ending March 2019	England and Wales	Crimes recorded by the police that meet the definition of abuse and where data can identify that the victim was a child are reported in this release. Provision of these data will vary by police force and over time. Comparisons should not be made between the change in the number of child abuse offences recorded by the police over time. Changes in the number of child abuse offences recorded by the police can also be affected by changes in levels of reporting to the police or police recording practices. All police recorded crime data relate to offences recorded in the given year, regardless of when the offence took place. Some data are classed as Experimental Statistics.
Department for Education	Factors identified at end of assessment	Year ending March 2019	England	Once a referral to children’s services has been made, the local authority may conduct an assessment. Factors contributing to concerns about the child are identified at the end of an assessment; more than one factor can be identified. The factors are designed only to identify what kinds of pressures are placed on children’s services. The data are based on the opinions of the social workers assessing the cases. Care should be taken when drawing comparisons using this information. Equivalent data are not available for Wales.
Department for Education	Child protection plans	At 31 March 2019	England	The release reports on the number of children who are subject to a child protection plan in England because of abuse or neglect. Children will become subject to a plan if it is deemed necessary following a child protection case conference. The categories of abuse are based on the opinions of social workers assessing the cases. Care should therefore be taken when drawing conclusions using this information. Figures for Wales are collected separately and should not be compared with figures for England.
Welsh Government	Child protection register	At 31 March 2019	Wales	The release reports on the number of children who are on the child protection register in Wales because of abuse or neglect. Children will be put on the register if it is deemed necessary following a child protection case conference. The categories of abuse are based on the opinions of social workers assessing the cases. Care should therefore be taken when drawing conclusions using this information. Figures for England are collected separately and should not be compared with figures for Wales. Data are classified as Experimental Statistics.

Department for Education	Looked-after children	At 31 March 2019	England	“Looked-after children” refers to children that are looked after by local authorities. The release reports on children in England that are looked after because of abuse or neglect. Figures for Wales are collected separately and should not be compared with figures for England.
Welsh Government	Looked-after children	At 31 March 2019	Wales	“Looked-after children” refers to children that are looked after by local authorities. The release reports on children in Wales that are looked after because of abuse or neglect. Figures for England are collected separately and should not be compared with figures for Wales. Data are classified as Experimental Statistics.
Ofsted	Serious incident notifications	Year ending March 2018	England	Serious incident notifications relate to cases where a child dies or is seriously harmed and abuse is known or suspected, or a looked after child dies. Local authorities in England have a duty to notify the Child Safeguarding Review Panel of such cases. This release reports on serious incidents for serious harm or death that were related to child abuse. If an incident involved more than one child, data are only collected about the first child identified. Data are classified as Experimental Statistics.
Ofsted	Serious case reviews	Year ending March 2018	England	When a child dies or is seriously harmed as a result of abuse or neglect, a serious case review is conducted. Ofsted do not always receive information about whether or not a serious case review was conducted, so the data are incomplete. Data are classified as Experimental Statistics.
National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)	Childline	Year ending March 2019	UK	Childline is a free service where children and young people in the UK can talk to a counsellor about anything. This release reports on counselling sessions delivered to children in the UK where the primary concern was abuse or neglect. It is not possible to identify the number of children who are speaking to Childline from these figures, as the same child may have multiple counselling sessions.
National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)	NSPCC helpline	Year ending March 2019	UK	Data from NSPCC's helpline provide information on contacts from those who are worried about the safety or welfare of a child across the UK. This release reports on contacts to the helpline where there was a concern about child abuse or neglect. The number of contacts cannot tell you the total number of children about whom there are concerns. One contact can relate to multiple children, or multiple contacts can relate to the same child.
National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)	NAPAC helpline	Year ending March 2019	UK	The NAPAC helpline offers support to adult survivors of child abuse across the UK. Data from the NAPAC helpline included in this release provide an indication of the support adult survivors of abuse require later in life and the demand on support services after the abuse has ended.
Home Office	Home Office Homicide Index	Year ending March 2018	England and Wales	The Home Office Homicide Index is continually updated with revised information from the police as investigations continue and as cases are heard by the courts; the version used for analysis does not accept updates after it is “frozen” to ensure the data do not change during the analysis period.
Home Office	National Referral Mechanism (NRM)	Year ending December 2018	UK	The NRM is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. Child victims do not have to consent to be referred into the NRM and must first be safeguarded and then referred into the NRM process.

Home Office	Child Abuse Image Database (CAID)	Year ending March 2019	Worldwide	CAID holds data relating to child abuse images encountered by the police, National Crime Agency and approved industry bodies. CAID is a UK-wide system, although images could be taken anywhere in the world and include victims from any country. CAID helps police identify victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse. Not all images in the database will be recorded as crimes.
National Crime Agency	Child sexual abuse material	Year ending December 2018	Worldwide	Images are referred to the UK based on the IP address of the suspected offender. The offender is primarily classified as the individual who uploaded the image, but some referrals will be based on the individual who downloaded the image. Child sexual abuse material represents only one element of child sexual abuse offending. These figures do not include other threats such as grooming, live streaming, blackmail and extortion.
National Crime Agency	UK victims identified in indecent images of children	Year ending March 2019	UK	The significant increase in the number of victims identified within indecent images of children (IIOC) since 2015 is a result of action undertaken following the development that year of a national Victim Identification (VID) Strategy, allied with the development and increased use of CAID. The VID Strategy included action to: establish a trained, dedicated single point of contact in every police force and an enhanced national unit within the NCA; to review images in all cases involving charges for IIOC; and greater investment in and use of technology and information sharing to more quickly and widely identify victims, including through CAID.
NHS Digital	Hospital Episode Statistics	Year ending March 2019	England	Analysis presented is based on finished admission episodes, the first period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Admissions do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the period.
NHS Digital	Female genital mutilation (FGM)	Year ending March 2019	England	The FGM Enhanced Dataset presents a picture of FGM identified by the NHS in England. Data are collected by healthcare providers, including acute hospitals, mental health services and GP practices. Some individuals in the dataset will not have contacted the NHS in relation to their FGM, but FGM was identified during their attendance. This release covers individuals where FGM is likely to have been carried out under the age of 18 years. As FGM is illegal in the UK under-reporting is to be expected.
Cardiff University Crime and Security Research Institute – The Violence Research Group	National Violence Surveillance Network	Year ending December 2018	England and Wales	Based on a sample of emergency departments, minor injury units and walk-in centres in England and Wales. Child attendances for violence-related injury may not represent the number of children, as a child may have more than one attendance.
Ministry of Justice	Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders (FGMPOs)	Year ending March 2019	England and Wales	Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders (FGMPOs) offer a legal means to protect and safeguard victims and potential victims of FGM. FGMPOs can be applied for by the person who has had or is at risk of FGM, a local authority, or any other person with permission of the court (for example, police, a teacher, a charity worker or family member).

National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)	Prevalence study of child abuse and neglect	2009	UK	The findings from NSPCC's prevalence study of child abuse and neglect in the UK are now more than 10 years old. It is not known whether, or how, the picture of child abuse has changed since then. The CSEW estimates cannot be compared with the NSPCC's 2009 survey results because of the differences in definitions and methodology used.
Home Office	Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) flagged offences	Year ending March 2019	England and Wales	Data on offences recorded by the police that were flagged as CSA- or CSE-related allow sexual offences against children to be identified where the offence does not specify the victim was a child. These figures are designated as Experimental Statistics to highlight that they are based on an emerging collection. While the accuracy and use of the CSA and CSE flags are improving, this remains a work in progress.
Home Office	Rape incidents data	Year ending March 2019	England and Wales	Rape incidents cover reports where, after investigation, the police have concluded that no notifiable crime was committed within the police force area where the incident came to the attention of the police. To get a total picture of the demand upon the police relating to child rape, it is necessary to consider both incidents and offences.
Office for National Statistics	Death registrations	Year ending December 2018	England and Wales	Death statistics are compiled from information supplied when deaths are certified and registered as part of civil registration, a legal requirement. This release reports on deaths recorded under the codes of "assault" and "undetermined intent". Deaths of "undetermined intent" are regarded as probable suicides for adults, but for young children a question usually remains as to whether a third, unidentified party was in fact culpable.
Home Office	Police recorded crime outcomes	Year ending March 2019	England and Wales	The outcomes of crimes recorded by the police that meet the definition of child abuse and where data can identify that the victim was a child are reported in this release. Comparisons should not be made between the change in the proportion of child abuse offences assigned a particular outcome by the police over time. Changes in the underlying number of child abuse offences recorded by the police can also be affected by changes in levels of reporting to the police or police recording practices. All police recorded crime data relate to offences recorded in the given year, regardless of when the offence took place. Some data are classed as Experimental Statistics.
Crown Prosecution Service	Criminal justice outcomes for child abuse-flagged cases	Year ending March 2019	England and Wales	The CPS collects data to assist in the effective management of its prosecution functions and therefore does not collect data that constitute official statistics as defined in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. Cases are flagged as child abuse-related by lawyers and administrative staff, therefore CPS child abuse data are accurate only to the extent that flags have been correctly applied. A child abuse flag may be applied at the beginning of a case or later in the prosecution process if a child abuse relationship becomes apparent.
Ministry of Justice	Criminal justice outcomes	Year ending December 2018	England and Wales	The Ministry of Justice measure child abuse offences differently to the police, using sub codes of offences to identify those relating to child abuse. As such, only those offences that feature age specific subcodes are included in their statistics relating to child abuse. As a result, only certain sexual offences against children and the offence of "cruelty to and neglect of children" are identifiable as child abuse.

How we analyse and quality assure the data

Several methods are used to ensure the quality of the Crime Survey for England and Wales data collection operation by both Kantar Public, the survey contractor, and the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Kantar Public has robust quality management systems in place, which are formally accredited, and endorsed and supported at a corporate level. More information can be found in the [annual technical reports](#).

We also have quality management systems in place to further quality assure the data when it comes to us for final preparation and publication. Any errors identified through these checks are returned to Kantar Public for validation or correction. Checks are also carried out within the team throughout the data production process before final publication.

Regarding police recorded crime, prior to submitting data to us, the Home Office Police Data Collection Section (PDCS) and Home Office Statistics Unit carry out internal quality assurance of the recorded crime data. Any anomalies or errors identified through these checks result in a report being returned to the relevant force for validation or correction. Prior to publication of any crime statistics, verification checks are also carried out, asking individual forces for confirmation that the data accords with that held on their own systems. For more information, see Chapter 3 of the [User guide](#).

All other data included in the release are quality assured by the individual data suppliers and further checks are carried out by our team on receipt of the data. Any discrepancies are queried with the supplier for validation.

How we disseminate the data

[Child abuse in England and Wales](#) was first published in January 2020. The release includes a number of separate publications describing the main patterns and trends in the data. An additional article was published in March 2020 covering child abuse in the criminal justice system. These publications are accompanied by data tables. A [data landscape](#) is also provided to give users a comprehensive list of data sources relating to child abuse, not all of which are included in the release.

How we review the data

The data sources included in this release were discussed and agreed with main stakeholders in advance of production. In the development of any future releases on child abuse in England and Wales, we will review the content and data sources used to identify any improvements that can be made.

7 . Other information

Useful 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.

[Crime in England and Wales QMI](#)

Methodology | Revised 18 July 2019

This Quality and Methodology Information report provides a range of information that describes the quality of the Crime in England and Wales output and details any points that should be noted when using the output.

