

Article

Domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2017

Domestic abuse findings from the year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales, using statistics to tell us about victims and long-term trends.



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1 . Main points

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 26% of women and 15% of men aged 16 to 59 had experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16, equivalent to an estimated 4.3 million female and 2.4 million male victims, according to the year ending March 2017 CSEW.
- An estimated 7.5% of women (1.2 million) and 4.3% of men (713,000) experienced domestic abuse in the last year.
- Women were more likely than men to have experienced all types of domestic abuse in the last 12 months, with the exception of non-sexual family abuse, where the difference was non-significant.
- Sexual assault (including attempts) by a partner is where the largest difference between men and women was observed, with women being five times as likely as men to have experienced this type of abuse in the last year.
- For both men and women, those in the younger age groups were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse in the last year than those in the older age groups.

2 . How is domestic abuse defined and measured in the CSEW?

This article focuses on findings from the self-completion module of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on the extent of, and trends in, domestic abuse among men and women aged 16 to 59 ¹ resident in households² in England and Wales.

Headline CSEW prevalence estimates for domestic abuse included within this article have previously been published in July 2017 alongside the [Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2017](#) bulletin. Some of the information on the estimated number of victims, how many types of abuse victims experienced, and the personal characteristics of victims included within this article has also been previously published, within the [Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2017](#) report in November 2017. This article provides more in-depth analysis of the CSEW findings.

Domestic abuse in the CSEW combines the following different types of abuse:

- non-sexual abuse by a partner: physical force, emotional or financial abuse, or threats to hurt the respondent or someone close to them, carried out by a current or former partner
- non-sexual abuse by a family member: physical force, emotional or financial abuse, or threats to hurt the respondent or someone close to them, carried out by a family member other than a partner (father or mother, step-father or mother or other relative)
- sexual assault carried out by a partner or other family member: rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), or indecent exposure or unwanted touching carried out by a current or former partner or other family member
- stalking³ carried out by a partner or other family member: two or more incidents (causing distress, fear or alarm) of receiving obscene or threatening unwanted letters, e-mails, text messages or phone calls, having had obscene or threatening information about them placed on the internet, waiting or loitering around home or workplace, or following or watching by a current or former partner or family member ⁴

This broadly matches the [cross-government definition](#) of domestic abuse, but the CSEW estimates do not currently completely capture the offence of “[coercive and controlling behaviour](#)⁵”, which was introduced on 29 December 2015. This new offence captures coercive control through psychological and emotional abuse that can stop short of physical violence. The CSEW has measured some elements of such non-physical abuse since April 2004, but this doesn’t exactly match the offence. New survey questions to better estimate experiences of this type of abuse have been introduced into the survey from April 2017 and estimates from these questions are not yet available.

There are two headline measures of domestic abuse in the CSEW: one relates to experiences since the age of 16 and the other is limited to those experiences in the 12 months prior to interview. The use of self-completion on tablet computers to collect information on domestic abuse in the CSEW allows respondents to feel more at ease when answering these sensitive questions, due to increased confidence in the privacy and confidentiality of the survey. The self-completion module also employs a broader definition of domestic abuse than in the face-to-face component of the survey⁶. Therefore, the prevalence of domestic abuse reported in the self-completion module is substantially higher than the prevalence of domestic violence reported in the face-to-face interview.

Of those aged 16 to 59 who reported being victims of physical domestic abuse⁷ in the self-completion module, only 14%⁸ reported being a victim of domestic violence in the last 12 months in face-to-face interviews (17% for women and 11% for men). The self-completion module provides a more complete measure of domestic abuse victimisation and, as there are several differences between the coverage of the self-completion and face-to-face estimates, care should be taken when making comparisons between the two.

The self-completion module provides estimates of victims rather than incidents, and no cap is applied to these data, because unlike estimates from face-to-face interviews, estimates from the self-completion module are not affected by the current method of handling high-frequency repeat victimisation, which caps the number of reported incidents at 5⁹ (see “[Improving estimates of repeat victimisation derived from the Crime Survey for England and Wales](#)” for more information).

One of the strengths of the CSEW is that it covers many crimes that are not reported to the police. The under-reporting of crime to the police is known to be particularly acute for domestic abuse offences, with many more offences committed than are reported to and recorded by the police. Estimates based on those interviewed in the Crime Survey for England and Wales during the [year ending March 2015](#) showed that around four in five victims of partner abuse¹⁰ (79%) did not report the abuse to the police. The CSEW provides reliable estimates of the prevalence of domestic abuse using a consistent methodology that is not affected by changes in recording practices and police activity, or by changes in the propensity of victims to report to the police.

All changes reported in this article are statistically significant at the 5% level unless stated otherwise.

Notes for: How is domestic abuse defined and measured in the CSEW?

1. The age limit for those who complete the self-completion modules has been increased to 74 since April 2017.
2. The CSEW does not cover the population living in group residences (for example, care homes or student halls of residence) or other institutions.
3. The CSEW definition of stalking is not consistent with the legal definition due to the introduction of the offence of “coercive and controlling behaviour”, which includes stalking by a current partner.
4. From the year ending March 2013 survey onwards the definition of stalking was changed to be in line with the legal definition of two or more incidents that was introduced in April 2013. See the ‘What are the long-term trends in domestic abuse?’ section of this article for more information.
5. This offence is now included in the [Home Office Counting Rules](#), under the category of “Assault without injury”. This is the only specific offence for domestic abuse. Other types of domestic abuse are recorded under more generic offences such as assault.
6. Mainly that the self-completion definition of domestic abuse is not restricted to physical violence and also includes emotional or financial abuse and threats to hurt the respondent or someone close to them.
7. Victims of force by a partner or family member in the last year.
8. In previous years, this analysis has included victims of any sexual assault by a partner or family member but these victims have now been excluded to be more comparable with the definition of domestic violence used in the face-to-face CSEW interview.
9. The current methodology for handling high-frequency repeat victimisation is under review and work is ongoing to change the current cap of five to a lighter cap derived by applying the 98th percentile of victim incident counts for each crime type.
10. Partner abuse is defined as any non-physical abuse, threats, force, sexual assault or stalking where the perpetrator is a partner or ex-partner. Questions on the nature of partner abuse are not asked in the CSEW every year and were not asked in the year ending March 2017; data for the year ending March 2015 are the most recent data currently available.

3 . How prevalent is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse experienced since the age of 16

The year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 20.5% of people aged 16 to 59 (6.8 million victims) had experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16 ([Appendix Tables 1 and 2](#)).

Some form of partner abuse was experienced by 16.9% of adults aged 16 to 59, and 7.5% had experienced domestic abuse by a family member. All types of domestic abuse were more likely to be carried out by a partner than another family member¹ (Figure 1):

- non-sexual abuse was the most commonly experienced type of domestic abuse (18.7%), 14.8% of adults experienced this type of abuse from a partner and 6.0% experienced it from a family member
- for non-sexual abuse, threats or force (14.6%) were more commonly experienced than non-physical abuse (12.0%), such as emotional or financial abuse
- domestic stalking had been experienced by 6.4% of adults aged 16 to 59 (5.6% by a partner, 1.8% by a family member)
- domestic sexual assault had been experienced by 3.6% of people since the age of 16 (3.1% by a partner, 0.9% by a family member)
- for domestic sexual assault, indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching (3.1%) was more commonly experienced than rape or assault by penetration (2.0%)

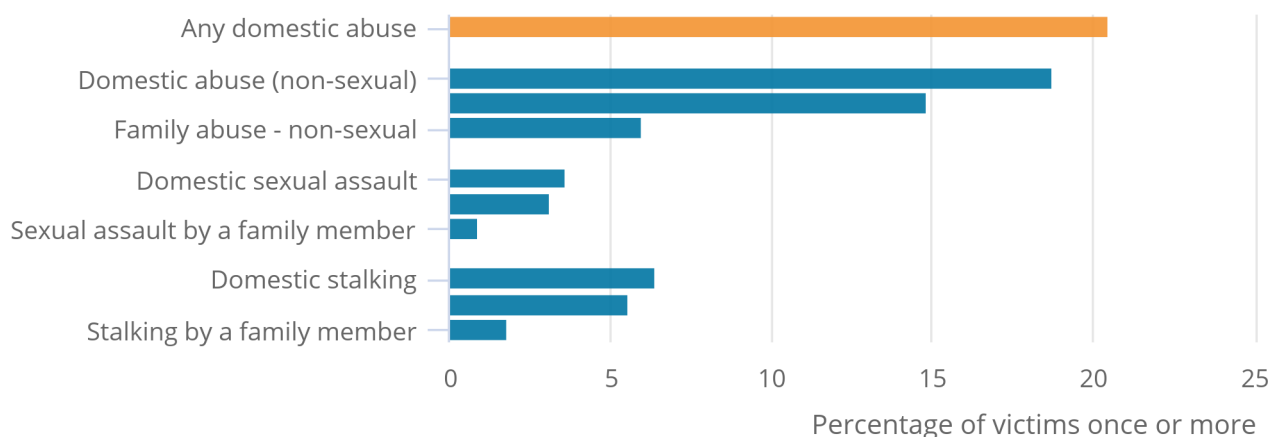
More information on sexual assault and stalking can be found in the [Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017 article](#) and [Stalking: findings from the CSEW, year ending March 2017 tables](#).

Figure 1: Prevalence of domestic abuse since the age of 16 for adult aged 16 to 59, by type of abuse

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 1: Prevalence of domestic abuse since the age of 16 for adult aged 16 to 59, by type of abuse

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Sexual assault categories includes attempts.
2. The sum of the overarching domestic abuse categories are not the sum of the sub-categories, as victims who have experienced more than one type of abuse will be included in multiple categories.

Domestic abuse experienced in the last year

Respondents who reported having experienced domestic abuse since they were 16 were asked whether or not they had also been a victim in the last year. The year ending March 2017 CSEW estimated that 5.9% of adults aged 16 to 59 had experienced domestic abuse in the last year, equivalent to 1.9 million victims ([Appendix Tables 1 and 3](#)).

The patterns for the different types of domestic abuse experienced in the last year were similar to those for domestic abuse experienced since the age of 16, with each type of abuse being more commonly perpetrated by a partner than another family member (Figure 2):

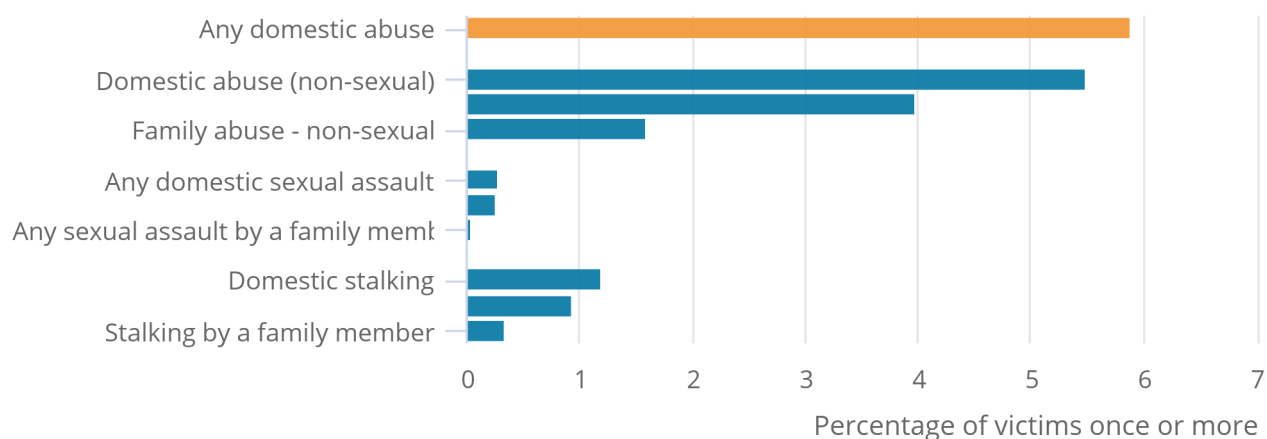
- non-sexual domestic abuse was the most common type of abuse (5.5%), with 4.0% of adults aged 16 to 59 experiencing this type of abuse by a partner and 1.6% by a family member
- the breakdown of non-sexual domestic abuse experienced in the last year differs from non-sexual domestic abuse experienced since age 16, with non-physical abuse (3.9%) being more commonly suffered than threats or force (2.8%)
- in the last year, 1.2% of adults experienced domestic stalking; 0.9% of adults had experienced stalking by a partner and 0.3% of adults had experienced stalking by a family member
- domestic sexual assault was experienced by 0.3% of adults in the last year; 0.2% of adults had experienced sexual assault by a partner and less than 0.1% had experienced sexual assault by a family member
- domestic sexual assault experienced in the last year showed a different pattern to domestic sexual assault experienced since age 16, with there being no difference between the prevalence of sexual assault by rape or penetration (0.2%) and indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching (0.2%)

Figure 2: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by type of abuse

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 2: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by type of abuse

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Sexual assault categories includes attempts.
2. The sum of the overarching domestic abuse categories are not the sum of the sub-categories, as victims who have experienced more than one type of abuse will be included in multiple categories.

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4 . What are the long-term trends in domestic abuse?

In general, the latest prevalence estimates for all types of domestic abuse experienced in the last 12 months showed no statistically significant change compared with the previous year.

Between the years ending March 2005 to March 2007, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that around 9% of adults aged 16 to 59 experienced domestic abuse in the previous 12 months. The level then decreased significantly to 6.5% in the year ending March 2009¹.

While the CSEW has shown little change from year to year in the prevalence of domestic abuse, the cumulative effect of small reductions over time has resulted in a significantly lower prevalence for the latest year (5.9%) compared with the year ending March 2012 (7.0%). This trend has mainly been driven by reductions in partner abuse which has reduced from a prevalence rate of 5.2% to 4.5% over the same period (Figure 3).

The number of victims of domestic abuse estimated by the CSEW has fallen from around 2.7 million in the year ending March 2005 to 1.9 million victims in the year ending March 2017 ([Appendix Table 6](#)).

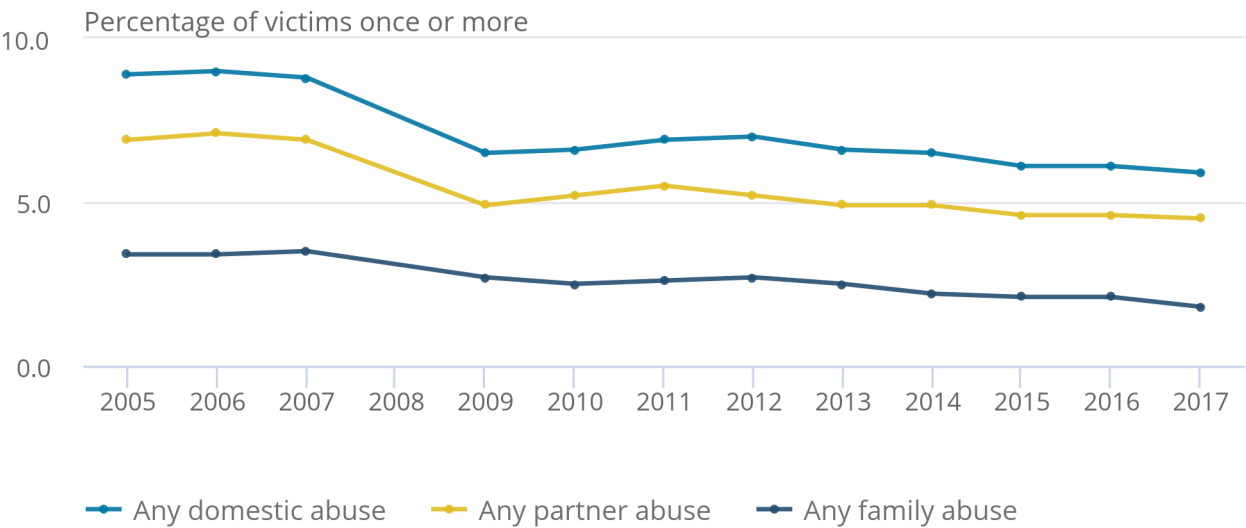
Family abuse has also followed a similar trend with a significantly lower prevalence for the year ending March 2017 (1.8%) compared with the year ending March 2012 (2.7%).

Figure 3: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59

Year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 3: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59

Year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The intimate violence section of chapter 5 of the [User Guide](#) provides definitions of the various types of domestic abuse.
2. No data point is available for the year ending March 2008 because comparable questions on stalking, an offence that makes up the domestic abuse category, were not included in that year.

The reduction in prevalence of domestic abuse in recent years has mostly been driven by non-sexual domestic abuse, which is the most common type of domestic abuse in the time series. Non-sexual domestic abuse has been declining since the year ending March 2012 for both partner abuse (5.4% in the year ending March 2012 compared with 4.0% in the year ending March 2017) and family abuse (2.2% compared with 1.6%, [Appendix Table 5](#)).

There have been small fluctuations in the level of domestic stalking since the year ending March 2005, with the prevalence of stalking by a partner ranging between 0.8% and 1.2% over the time series. Stalking by a family member has ranged between 0.3% and 0.6%.

Domestic sexual assault has a relatively low prevalence compared with the other types of domestic abuse. There has been very little change since the year ending March 2005, with sexual assault by a partner fluctuating between 0.2% and 0.4% each year. The prevalence of sexual assault by a family member being less than 0.1% in most years.

Notes for: What are the long-term trends in domestic abuse?

1. Questions on stalking were not asked in the year ending March 2008 survey, so survey estimates on domestic abuse are not available for the year ending March 2008.

5 . Which groups of people are most likely to be victims of domestic abuse?

The personal characteristics of Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) respondents are asked about at the time of their interview; some of these characteristics may differ to what they were at the time they experienced domestic abuse. Victimization varied by a number of personal characteristics ([Appendix Tables 8 and 9](#)), but many of these characteristics will be closely associated (for example, marital status and age) so caution is needed in the interpretation of the effects of these different characteristics when viewed in isolation.

Sex

As in previous years, women were more likely to experience domestic abuse than men, both since age 16 (26.2% compared with 14.7%) and in the last year (7.5% compared with 4.3%, [Appendix Table 1](#)). This was true for all types of domestic abuse, other than non-sexual family abuse in the last year. The year ending March 2017 CSEW showed that:

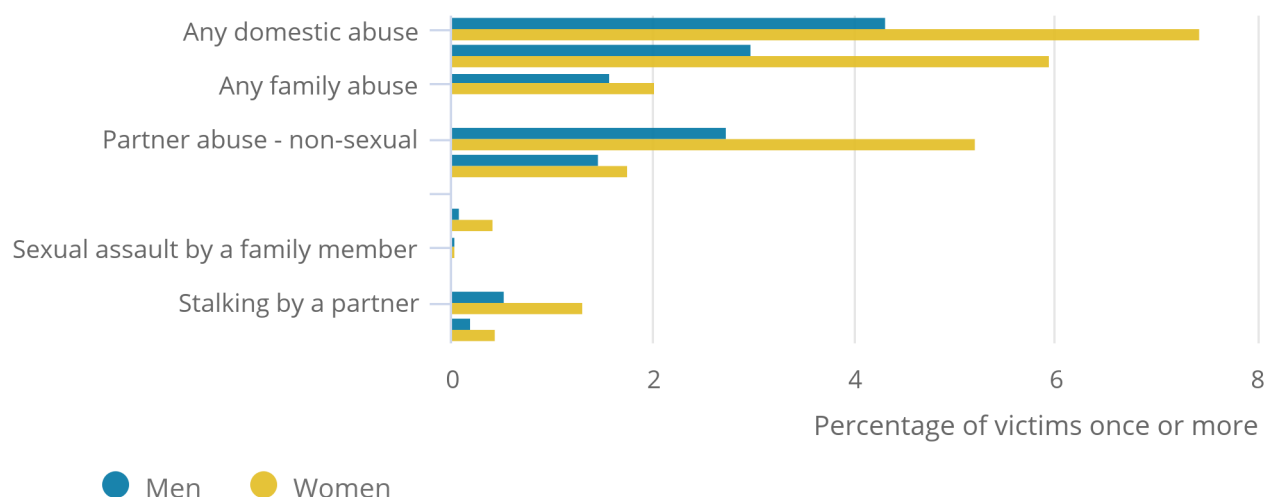
- an estimated 4.3 million women and 2.4 million men aged 16 to 59 had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 ([Appendix Table 2](#))
- an estimated 1.2 million women and 713,000 men aged 16 to 59 had experienced domestic abuse in the last year ([Appendix Table 3](#))
- non-sexual partner abuse was the most common type of domestic abuse experienced in the last year for both women (5.2%) and men (2.7%)
- domestic stalking was experienced by 1.7% of women and 0.7% of men in the last year
- domestic sexual assault is where the largest difference between men and women was observed, with women being around five times as likely as men to have experienced this type of abuse in the last year (0.5% compared with 0.1%) and eight times as likely to have experienced it since the age of 16 (6.4% compared with 0.8%)

Figure 4: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by sex and type of abuse

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 4: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by sex and type of abuse

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Sexual assault categories includes attempts.
2. The sum of the overarching domestic abuse categories are not the sum of the sub-categories, as victims who have experienced more than one type of abuse will be included in multiple categories.

The year ending March 2017 CSEW estimated 4.3% of men aged 16 to 59 had experienced some form of domestic abuse in the last 12 months is a significant decrease from 6.5% in the year ending March 2005 ([Appendix Table 4](#)).

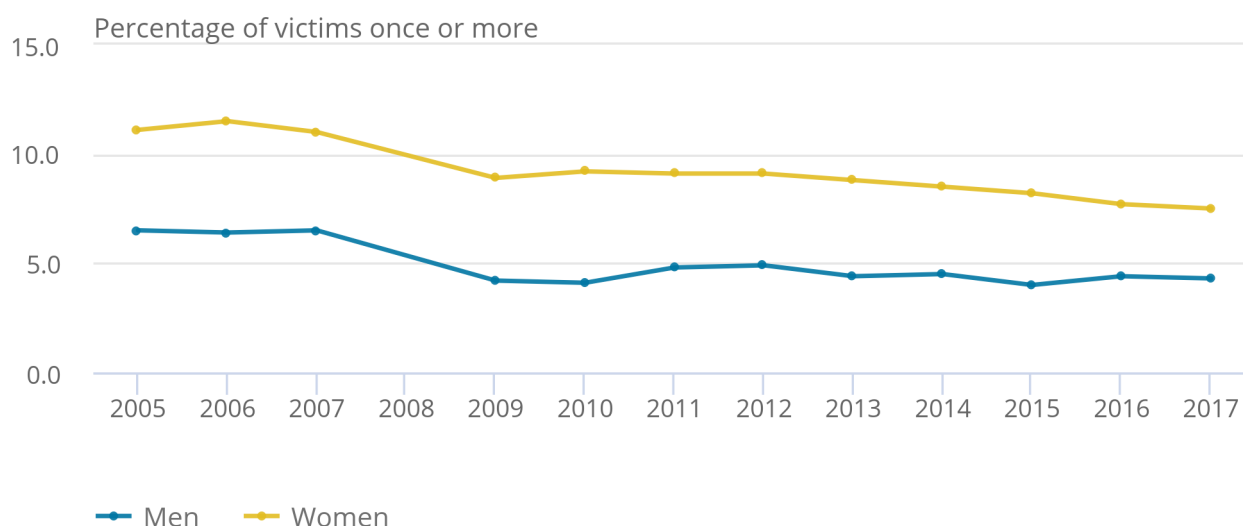
The prevalence of experiencing domestic abuse in the last year among women had also decreased significantly since the year ending March 2005, from 11.1% to 7.5%. There was also a significantly lower prevalence for women for the year ending March 2017 compared with the year ending March 2012 (9.1%). The latest estimates for women were the lowest figures recorded since the year ending March 2005 baseline.

Figure 5: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by sex

Year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 5: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by sex

Year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. No data point is available for the year ending March 2008 because comparable questions on stalking, an offence that makes up the domestic abuse category, were not included in that year.

However, the CSEW estimates do not currently completely capture the new offence of coercive and controlling behaviour and [research](#) suggests that when coercive and controlling behaviour is taken into account, the differences between the experiences of male and female victims become more apparent. New survey questions to better estimate experiences of this type of abuse have been introduced into the survey from April 2017 and estimates from these questions are not yet available.

Age

Those in the younger age groups were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than those in the older age groups. This was true for both men and women ([Appendix Table 8](#); Figure 6).

Women aged between 20 and 24 (11.2%) were significantly more likely to be victims of any domestic abuse in the last 12 months than women in any other age group, with the exception of those aged 16 to 19 (8.8%) where there was no significant difference¹.

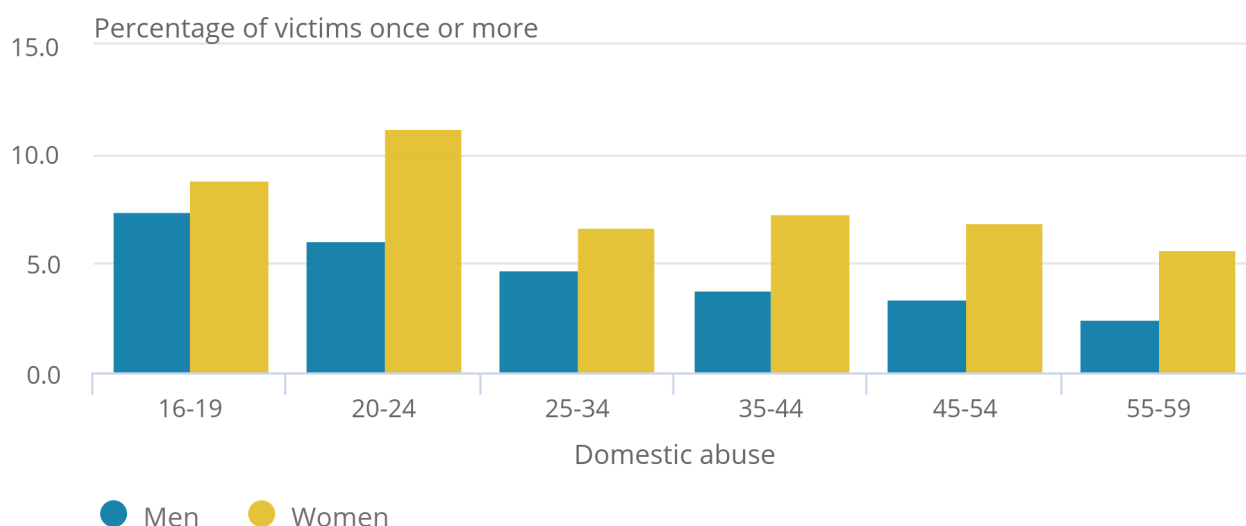
There was a similar pattern for men, with men aged 16 to 19 and aged 20 to 24 being more likely to be a victim of domestic abuse in the last year than men in the oldest age groups ([Appendix Table 8](#)).

Figure 6: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by age and sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 6: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by age and sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Marital status

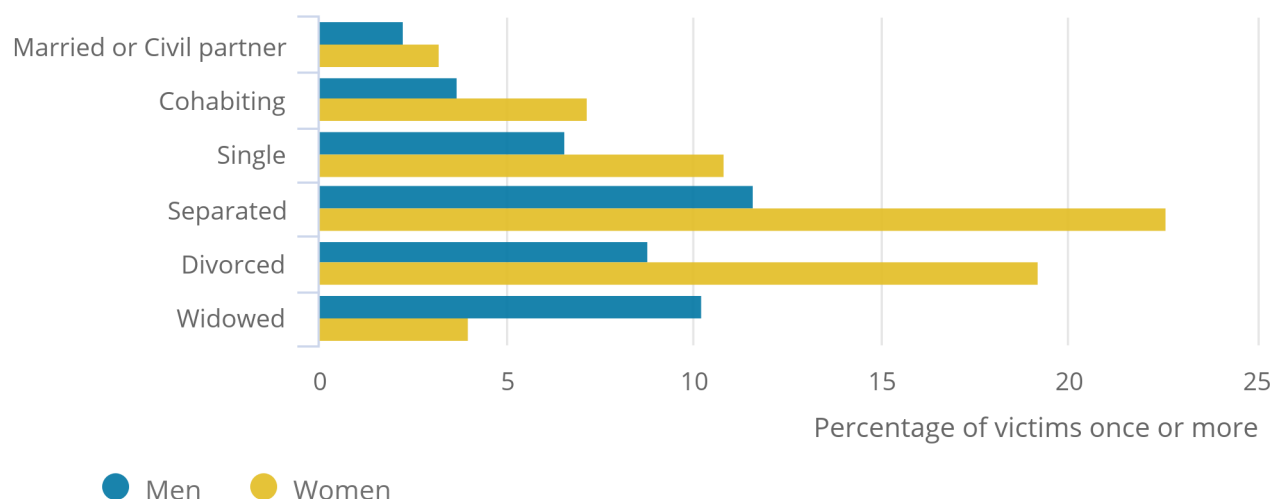
- Separated women (22.6%) and divorced women (19.2%) were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse in the last year than those with other marital statuses, (Appendix 8; Figure 7).
- Separated men (11.6%), divorced men (8.8%) and single men (6.6%) were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse in the last year than men who were married or civil partnered or cohabiting.

Figure 7: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by marital status and sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 7: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by marital status and sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Long-term illness or disability

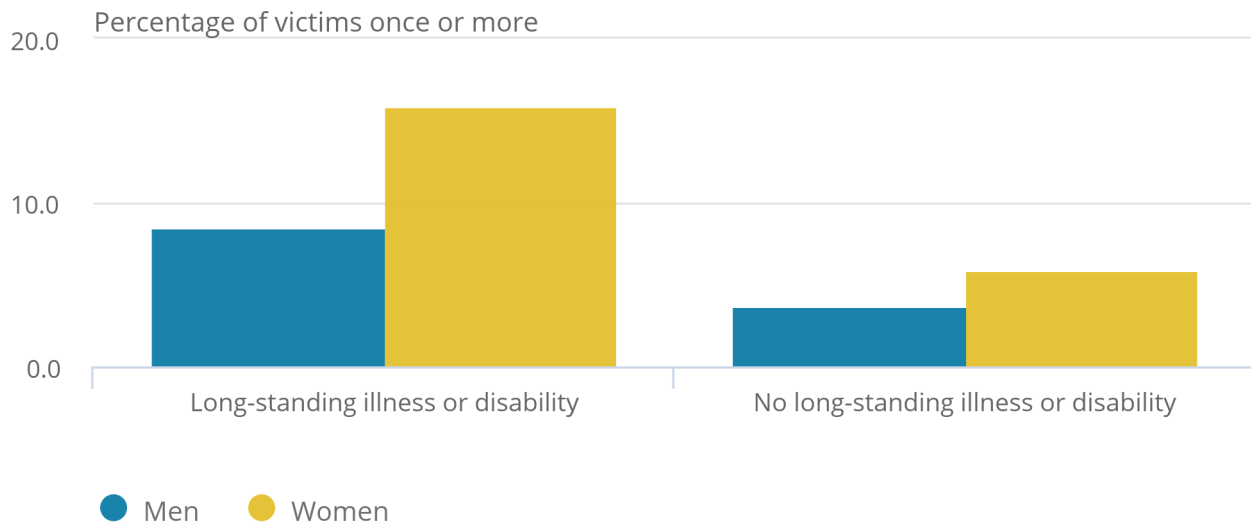
- Those with a long-term illness or disability were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse in the last year than those without one; this was true for both men (8.5% compared with 3.7%) and women (15.9% compared with 5.9%, Figure 8).
- For women, this difference was true for each of the different types of domestic abuse.
- For men, this difference was true for non-sexual domestic abuse and domestic stalking, but there was no significant difference for domestic sexual assault.

Figure 8: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by long-term illness or disability and sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 8: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by long-term illness or disability and sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Household structure

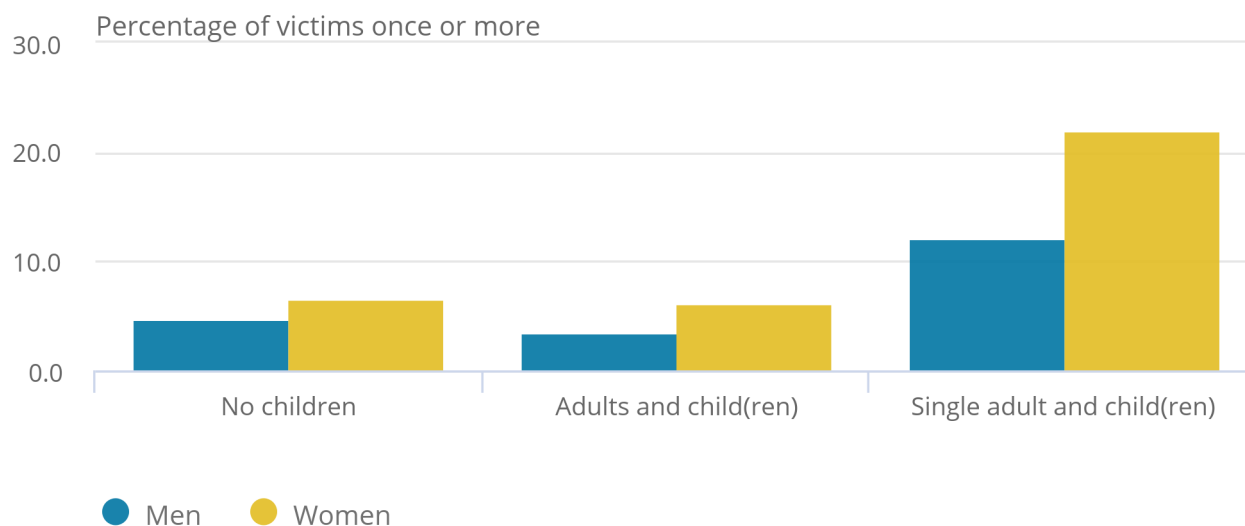
- Households comprising of single adults with children were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse in the last 12 months than those living in a household with no children and those living in a household with other adults and children; this was true for both men and women (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by household structure and sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 9: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by household structure and sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Household income

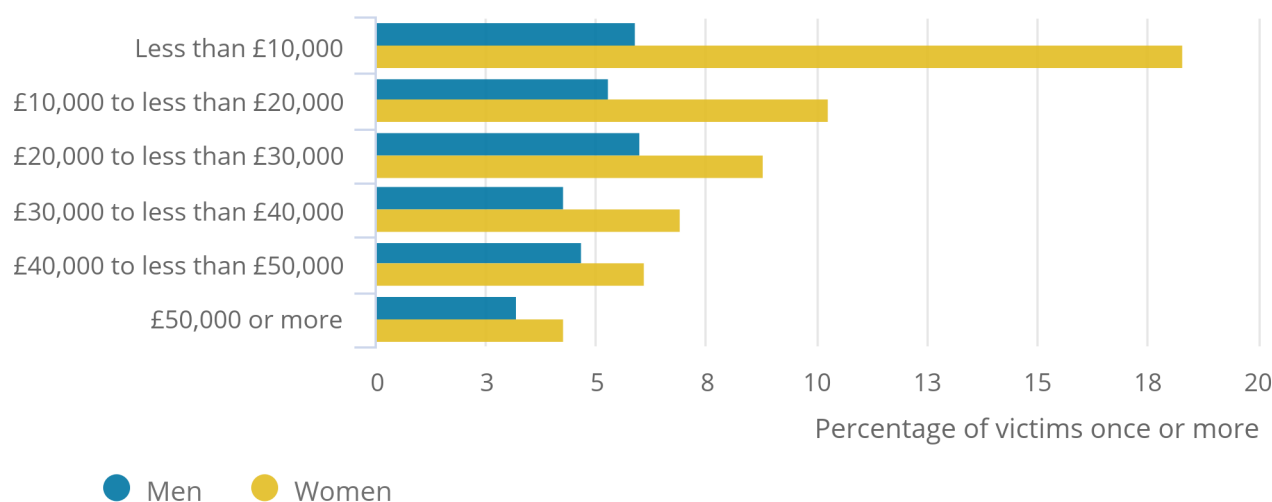
- Women in the lowest household income bracket were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse in the last 12 months (18.3%) than those in other household income groups (Figure 10); in general, the prevalence of domestic abuse in the last 12 months for women declined as income increased.
- The pattern was less pronounced for men, but men in the three lowest household income brackets were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse in the last year than those in the highest household income bracket (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by household income and sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 10: Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59, by household income and sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Notes for: Which groups of people are most likely to be victims of domestic abuse?

1. This shows a slightly different pattern to the data that was published in [Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2017](#) using a three-year data set, which showed that women aged 16 to 19 (10.5%) were most likely to be a victim. This is because the data from year ending March 2015 and 2016 has shown that women aged 16 to 19 were the most likely victims.

6 . How many types of abuse do victims suffer?

Although the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is a large sample survey, there are a relatively small number of victims of the different types of domestic abuse interviewed in any one year. Consequently, analysis on how many types of domestic abuse were experienced by victims has been completed on a dataset combining the three latest survey years.

The majority of domestic abuse victims (70%) suffered one type of abuse (Figure 11). Of those cases, the most commonly experienced type of abuse was non-sexual partner abuse, with 46.5% of all victims experiencing only this type of abuse in the last year¹.

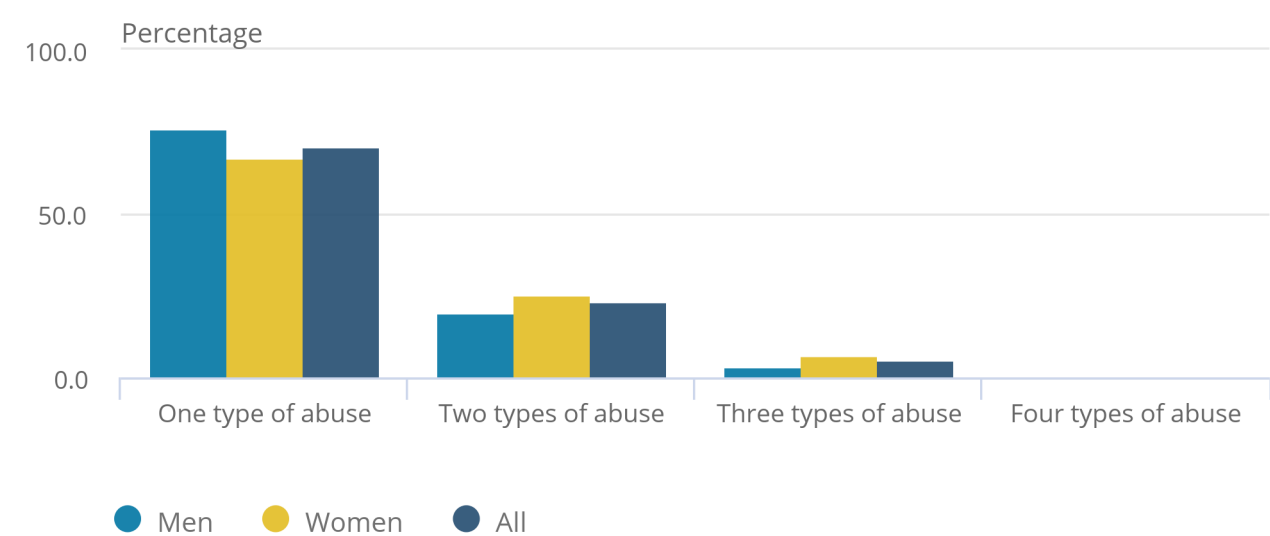
A higher proportion of women than men experienced multiple types of abuse in the last year (33% compared with 24%, [Appendix Table 10](#)).

Figure 11: Number of types of abuse experienced by victims of domestic abuse in the last year, adults aged 16 to 59

Year ending March 2015 to year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 11: Number of types of abuse experienced by victims of domestic abuse in the last year, adults aged 16 to 59

Year ending March 2015 to year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2015 to year ending March 2017.

For experiences of multiple types of abuse, non-sexual partner abuse and stalking was the most commonly experienced combination (10% of victims of domestic abuse). Less than 1% of victims of domestic abuse suffered all four types of domestic abuse ([Appendix Table 10](#)).

Notes for: How many types of abuse do victims suffer?

1. For the three-year data set “in the last year” refers to the 12 months prior to interview and covers a four-year recall period from April 2013 to March 2017.

7 . Public attitudes and awareness towards domestic abuse

As well as asking about experiences, the survey also asks some questions to monitor public attitudes to domestic abuse. These are also asked in the self-completion module rather than the face-to-face module to limit social desirability bias and the interviewer effect.

In the year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), the majority of adults aged 16 to 59 thought it was always unacceptable to hit or slap a partner in response to a number of different behaviours ([Appendix Table 12](#)), but some thought it was always, mostly or sometimes acceptable in response to:

- having an affair or cheating on them (7.1%)
- flirting with other people (2.0%)
- constantly nagging or moaning, (1.5%, Figure 13)

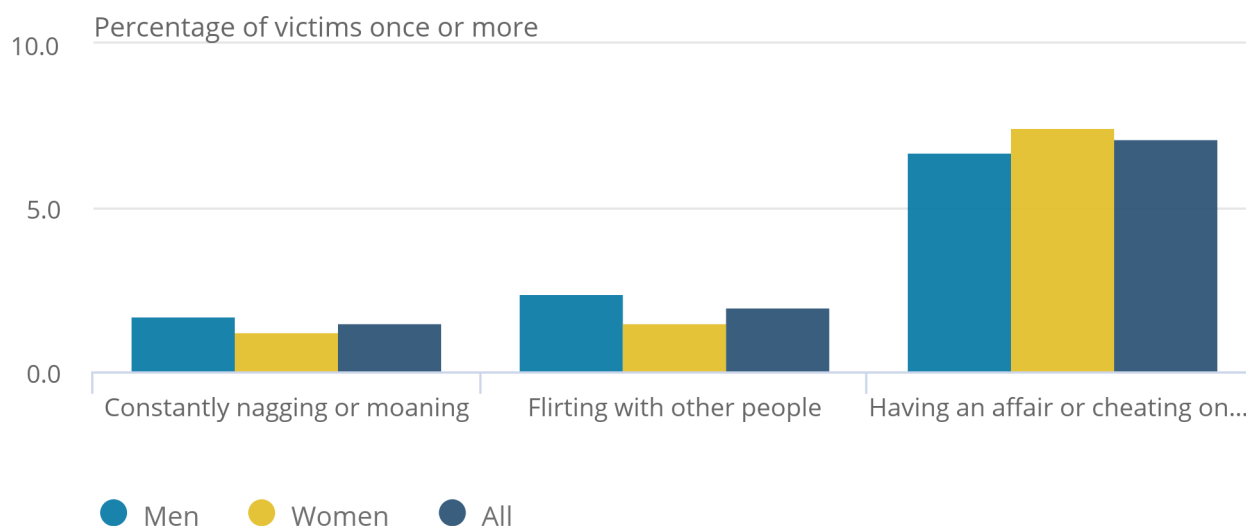
For each of the three different behaviours there was no statistically significant difference between men and women in their attitudes.

Figure 12: Percentage of adults aged 16 to 59 who think it is always, mostly or sometimes acceptable for someone to hit or slap their partner in response to different behaviours, by sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales

Figure 12: Percentage of adults aged 16 to 59 who think it is always, mostly or sometimes acceptable for someone to hit or slap their partner in response to different behaviours, by sex

Year ending March 2017 Crime Survey for England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Nearly 10% of adults aged 16 to 59 reported personally knowing somebody who had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 (8.1% of men, 11.5% of women), with 7% (5.9% of men and 8.6% of women) having known more than one person ([Appendix Table 13](#)).

Respondents were asked whether they took any action if the abuse was still happening when they found out ([Appendix Table 14](#)). The most common action reported was offering support to the victim (65% of men, 72% of women), followed by telling someone close to the victim (28% of men, 33% of women). The abuse was reported to the police by 11% of men and 16% of women. No action was taken by 6% of those who found out about somebody being abused.