

Article

# Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020

Characteristics of victims of domestic abuse based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime.

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

Release date:  
25 November 2020

Next release:  
To be announced

## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Understanding domestic abuse](#)
3. [Sex](#)
4. [Age](#)
5. [Ethnicity](#)
6. [Marital status](#)
7. [Disability](#)
8. [Employment status and occupation](#)
9. [Household structure](#)
10. [Area](#)
11. [Domestic homicide](#)
12. [Domestic abuse in England and Wales data](#)
13. [Glossary](#)
14. [Data sources and quality](#)
15. [Related links](#)

# 1 . Main points

According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending March 2020:

- an estimated 7.3% of women (1.6 million) and 3.6% of men (757,000) experienced domestic abuse in the last year
- women aged 16 to 19 years were more likely to be victims of any domestic abuse in the last year than women aged 25 years and over
- adults who were separated or divorced were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse compared with those who were married or civil partnered, cohabiting, single or widowed

Of crimes recorded by the police:

- in the year ending March 2020, the victim was female in 74% of domestic abuse-related crimes
- between the year ending March 2017 and the year ending March 2019, 77% of victims of domestic homicide were female compared with 13% of victims of non-domestic homicide

This publication does not cover the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Commentary discussing domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can be found in [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#).

## 2 . Understanding domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is often a hidden crime that is not reported to the police. Therefore, data held by the police can only provide a partial picture of the actual level of domestic abuse experienced. Many cases will not enter the criminal justice process as they are not reported to the police.

One of the strengths of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is that it covers many crimes that are not reported to the police. Domestic abuse measured by the CSEW combines non-sexual abuse, sexual assault and stalking. Information is collected on whether these types of abuse were carried out by a partner (including a former partner) and/or a family member other than a partner (father or mother, step-father or mother or other relative). This definition broadly matches the government definition of domestic violence and abuse which can be found in the [Glossary](#).

The Home Office collects data on the number of domestic abuse-related incidents and the number of domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police. Domestic abuse-related incidents include those reports where, after initial investigation, the police have concluded that no notifiable crime was committed<sup>1</sup>. Incidents of domestic abuse that result in a crime being recorded by the police are included in the data on domestic abuse-related crimes.

For more information on how domestic abuse is measured within the CSEW and by the police, see [Data sources and quality](#).

This publication is largely unaffected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as it mainly relates to the period prior to the lockdown. Further information on the impact of the pandemic on the CSEW and police recorded crime data can be found in [Data sources and quality](#). Commentary discussing domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can be found in [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic](#). Other commentary discussing domestic abuse in England and Wales can be found in the [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview](#).

## Notes for: Understanding domestic abuse

1. An example of a domestic abuse incident that does not amount to a crime would be two family members having a loud argument, a third party calls the police, the police attend and calm the situation down, but no crime has taken place.

## 3 . Sex

For the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 1.6 million women and 757,000 men aged 16 to 74<sup>1</sup> years experienced domestic abuse in the last year ([Appendix Table 2](#)). This is a prevalence rate of approximately 7 in 100 women and 4 in 100 men (Figure 1).

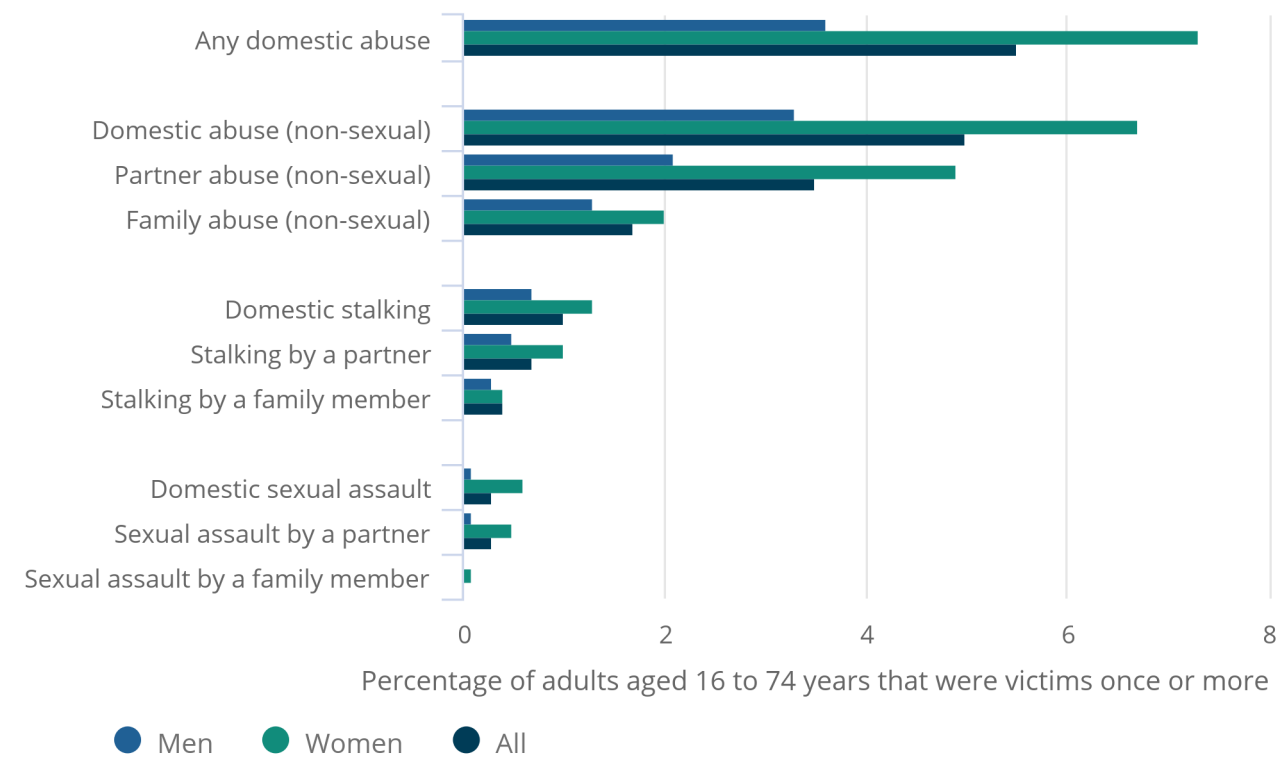
Women were significantly more likely than men to be victims of each type of abuse, with the exception of sexual assault by a family member where, although higher, the difference was not significant.

Figure 1: Women were more likely than men to be victims of domestic abuse in the last year

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by sex and type of abuse, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 1: Women were more likely than men to be victims of domestic abuse in the last year

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by sex and type of abuse, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

Notes:

1. Sexual assault categories includes attempts.
2. The sum of the overarching domestic abuse categories is 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 prevalence of domestic abuse experienced by men and women aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 74 years has not changed significantly in the year ending March 2020, compared with the previous year.

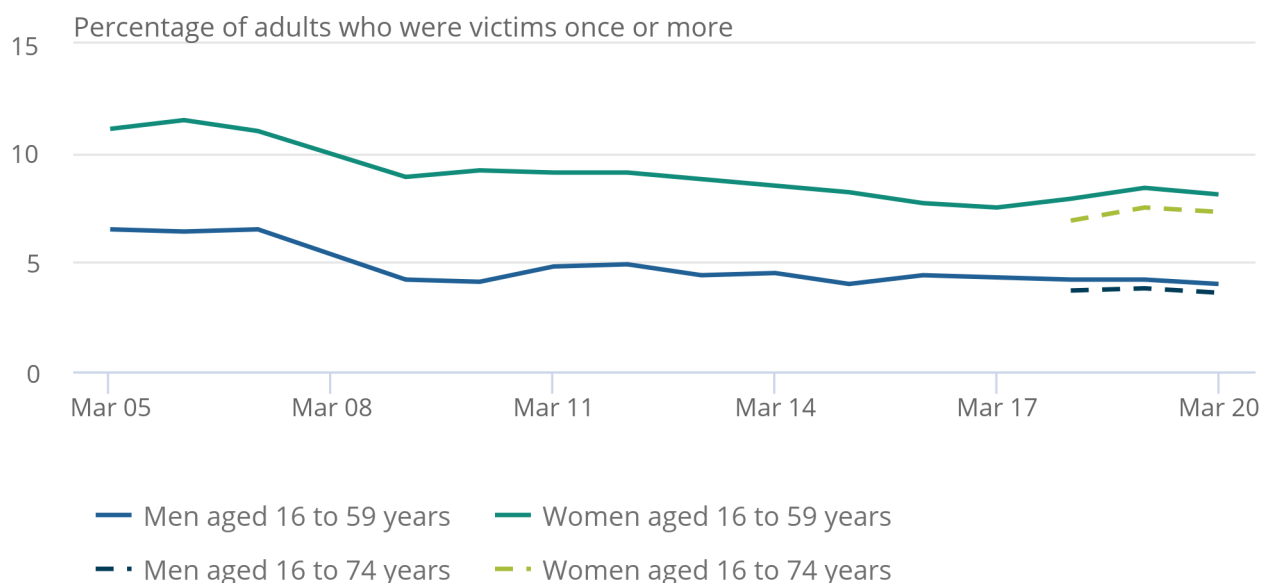
When looking at longer-term trends, the prevalence of domestic abuse experienced by men and women aged 16 to 59 years in the year ending March 2020 is significantly lower than reported in the year ending March 2005 (Figure 2). For example, 4.0% of men and 8.1% of women aged 16 to 59 years had experienced domestic abuse within the last year in the year ending March 2020, compared with 6.5% of men and 11.1% of women in the year ending March 2005.

**Figure 2: There was no change in the prevalence of domestic abuse for both men and women in the year ending March 2020, compared with the previous year**

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 74 years, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2020

Figure 2: There was no change in the prevalence of domestic abuse for both men and women in the year ending March 2020, compared with the previous year

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 74 years, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2020



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

**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.
2. From April 2017, the upper age limit for the self-completion module was increased to ask all respondents aged 16 to 74 years.

Data supplied from 28 police forces<sup>2,3</sup> showed the victim was female in just under three-quarters (74%) of domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police in the year ending March 2020. This proportion was similar for the majority of offence categories. For domestic abuse-related sexual offences, the proportion of victims that were female was even higher, at 94% (Figure 3).

### Figure 3: There were more female than male victims of domestic abuse-related offences

Percentage of domestic abuse-related offences recorded by the police by sex of the victim and selected offence groups, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

#### Figure 3: There were more female than male victims of domestic abuse-related offences

Percentage of domestic abuse-related offences recorded by the police by sex of the victim and selected offence groups, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office Data Hub – Police recorded crime

#### Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Based on 28 forces with adequate data.

Over half (53%) of violence against the person offences experienced by female victims were flagged as domestic abuse-related. In contrast, under a quarter (23%) experienced by males were flagged as domestic abuse-related<sup>4</sup> ([Appendix Table 12](#)).

#### Notes for: Sex

1. The age range for respondents eligible for the self-completion module was expanded in April 2017, changing from adults aged 16 to 59 years to adults aged 16 to 74 years. This publication reports primarily on those aged 16 to 74 years, for which we currently have three years of data. Where analysis requires more than the last three years of data we have reported using the 16 to 59 years age range. Data for both 16 to 59 years and 16 to 74 years are provided separately within the [Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics – Appendix Tables](#).
2. Domestic abuse-related crimes have been analysed using data from the Home Office Data Hub. This is an improved record-level data collection system designed to streamline the process by which forces submit data. Migration of forces to the Data Hub is ongoing.
3. Avon and Somerset, Bedfordshire, British Transport Police, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Cleveland, Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Durham, Gloucestershire, Gwent, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Metropolitan Police, Norfolk, North Wales, Northamptonshire, Northumbria, South Wales, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Thames Valley, West Yorkshire and Wiltshire.
4. The analysis may not be representative of all forces in England and Wales. The proportion of violence against the person offences that were flagged as domestic abuse-related was 41% for these 28 forces, slightly higher than all forces (35%).

## 4 . Age

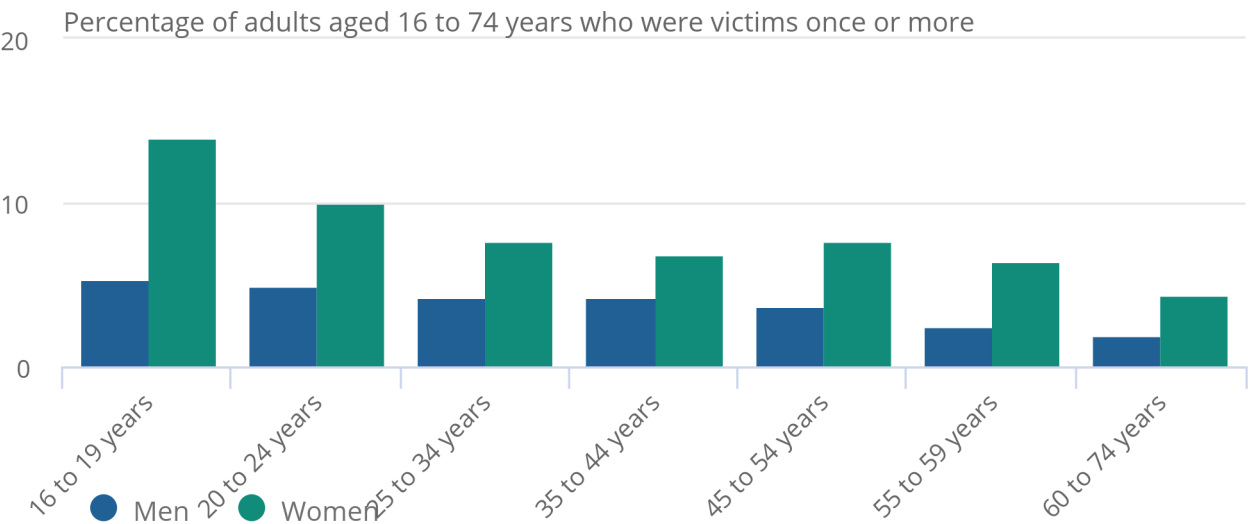
The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending March 2020 showed that women aged 16 to 19 years were significantly more likely to be victims of any domestic abuse in the last year than women aged 25 years and over (Figure 4). For men, there were few significant differences by age, however, those aged 55 to 74 years were less likely to be victims of domestic abuse in the last year than those in most other age groups.

**Figure 4: Women aged 16 to 19 years were more likely to experience domestic abuse in the last year, than all other age-groups**

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years by age and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 4: Women aged 16 to 19 years were more likely to experience domestic abuse in the last year, than all other age-groups

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years by age and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

Data supplied from 28 police forces<sup>1,2</sup> showed that the proportion of police recorded violence against the person offences flagged as domestic abuse tended to decline by age for females but increase by age for males (Figure 5).

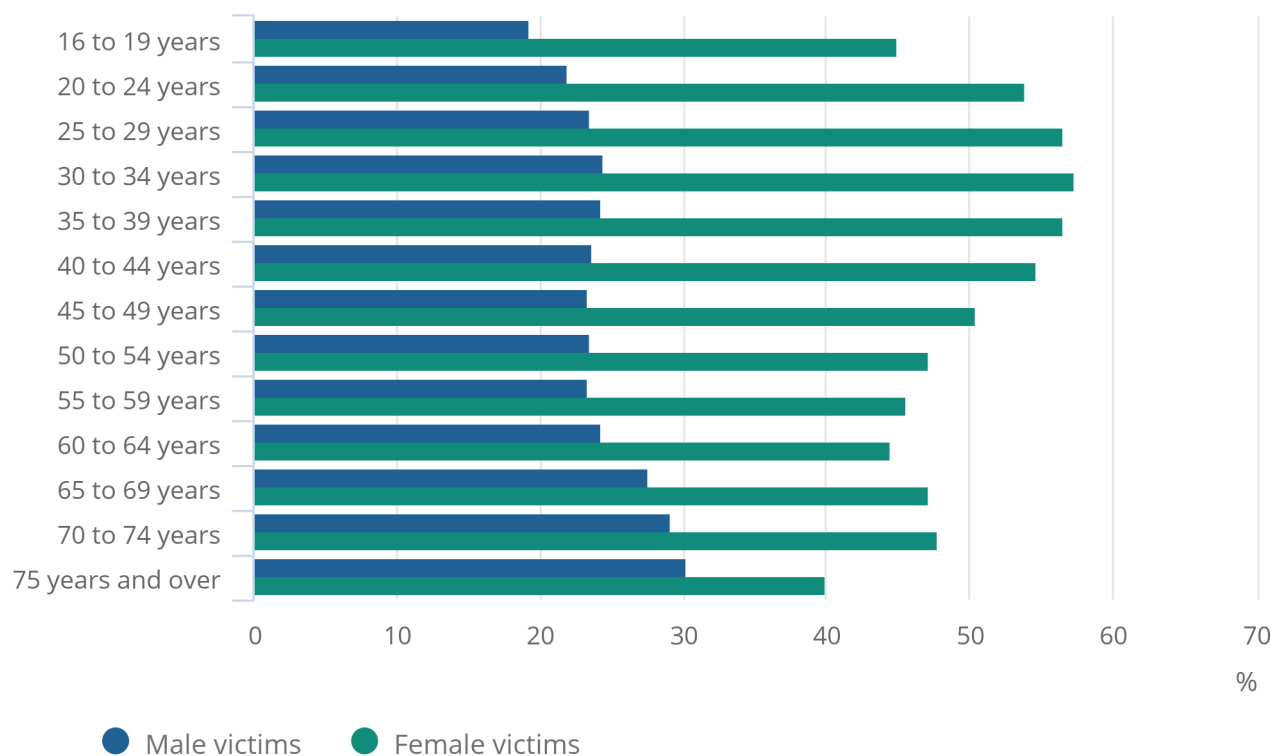


## Figure 5: Proportion of violence against the person offences flagged as domestic-abuse related varied by age

Proportion of violence against the person offences recorded by the police in England and Wales which were flagged as domestic abuse-related, by age and sex of victims, year ending March 2020

### Figure 5: Proportion of violence against the person offences flagged as domestic-abuse related varied by age

Proportion of violence against the person offences recorded by the police in England and Wales which were flagged as domestic abuse-related, by age and sex of victims, year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office Data Hub – Police recorded crime

#### Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Based on 28 forces with adequate data.

#### Notes for: Age

1. This is an improved record-level data collection system designed to streamline the process by which forces submit data. Migration of forces to the Data Hub is ongoing.
2. Avon and Somerset, Bedfordshire, British Transport Police, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Cleveland, Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Durham, Gloucestershire, Gwent, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Metropolitan Police, Norfolk, North Wales, Northamptonshire, Northumbria, South Wales, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Thames Valley, West Yorkshire and Wiltshire.

## 5 . Ethnicity

For the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey of England and Wales showed that those in the Mixed ethnic group were significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse within the last year than those in the Black or Asian ethnic groups (Figure 6).

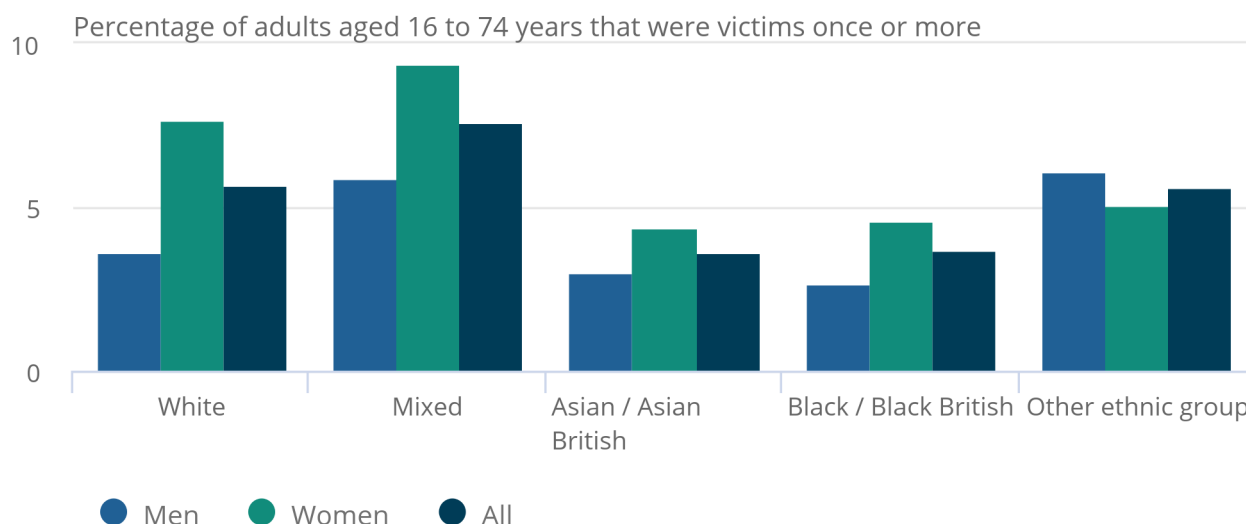
In the White ethnic group, women were significantly more likely than men to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year (7.7% of women, compared with 3.6% of men; [Appendix Table 6](#)).

**Figure 6: People of Mixed ethnicity were more likely to experience domestic abuse than people of Black or Asian ethnicity**

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by ethnicity and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 6: People of Mixed ethnicity were more likely to experience domestic abuse than people of Black or Asian ethnicity

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by ethnicity and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

For partner abuse, those in the White and Mixed ethnic groups were significantly more likely to be victims than those in the Asian ethnic group. For family abuse, those in the White and Mixed ethnic groups were significantly more likely to be victims than those in the Black ethnic group.

## Notes for: Ethnicity

1. Caution should be taken when using these data as some of the categories are based on a small number of responses.

## 6 . Marital status

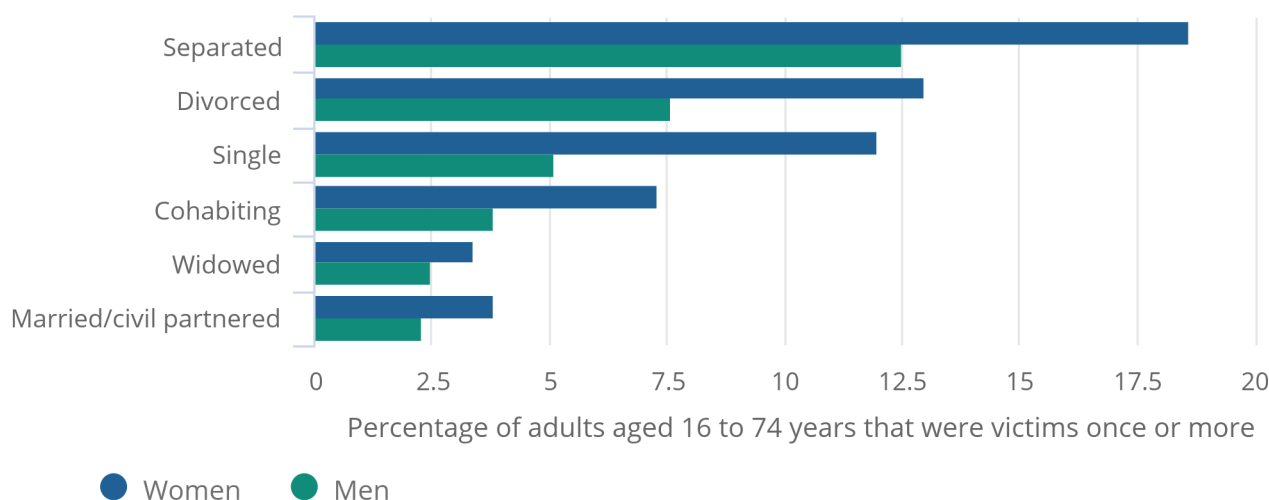
For the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales showed that adults aged 16 to 74 years who were separated or divorced were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse than those who were married or civil partnered, cohabiting, single or widowed<sup>1</sup>.

### Figure 7: Separated or divorced people were more likely to experience domestic abuse

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by marital status and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

#### Figure 7: Separated or divorced people were more likely to experience domestic abuse

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by marital status and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

## Notes for: Marital status

1. Marital status may have changed as a result of the abuse.

## 7 . Disability

For the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales showed that men and women aged 16 to 74 years with a disability<sup>1</sup> were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year than those without (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Those with a disability were more likely to experience domestic abuse than those without**

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by disability and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

### Figure 8: Those with a disability were more likely to experience domestic abuse than those without

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by disability and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

**Notes:**

1. The definition of disability used is consistent with the core definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010. A person is considered to have a disability if they have a long-standing illness, disability or impairment which causes difficulty with day-to-day activities.

### Notes for: Disability

1. The definition of disability used is consistent with the core definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010. A person is considered to have a disability if they have a long-standing illness, disability or impairment which causes difficulty with day-to-day activities.

## 8 . Employment status and occupation

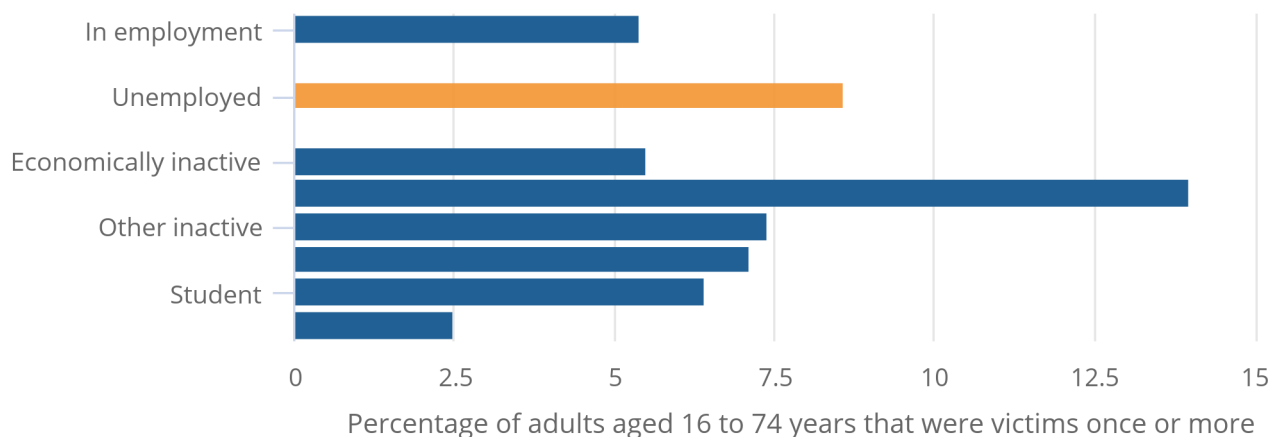
For the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales showed that, of adults aged 16 to 74 years, those who were unemployed were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse within the last year than those who were employed or economically inactive (Figure 9; [Appendix Table 6](#))<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 9: Unemployed people were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse than those who were employed or economically inactive**

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years by employment status, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 9: Unemployed people were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse than those who were employed or economically inactive

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years by employment status, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

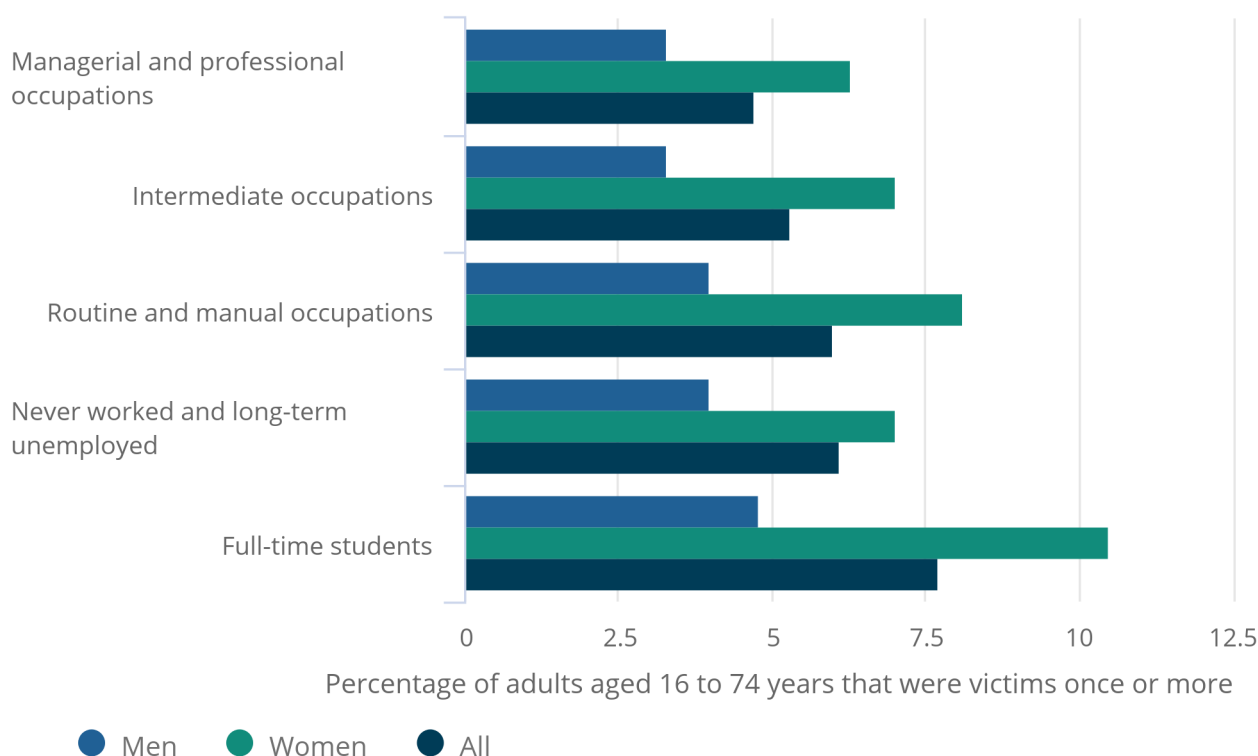
Figure 10 shows that of adults aged 16 to 74 years, for each occupation type except Never worked and long-term unemployed, women were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse than men. This difference was greatest for full-time students, where 10.5% of women had experienced domestic abuse in the last year, compared with 4.8% of men. It is likely that some of the differences seen by occupation type are also linked to age.

## Figure 10: Women were more likely to experience domestic abuse than men within most occupational groups

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years by occupational group, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

### Figure 10: Women were more likely to experience domestic abuse than men within most occupational groups

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years by occupational group, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

#### Notes for: Employment status and occupation

1. Employment status and occupation may have changed as a result of the abuse.

## 9 . Household structure

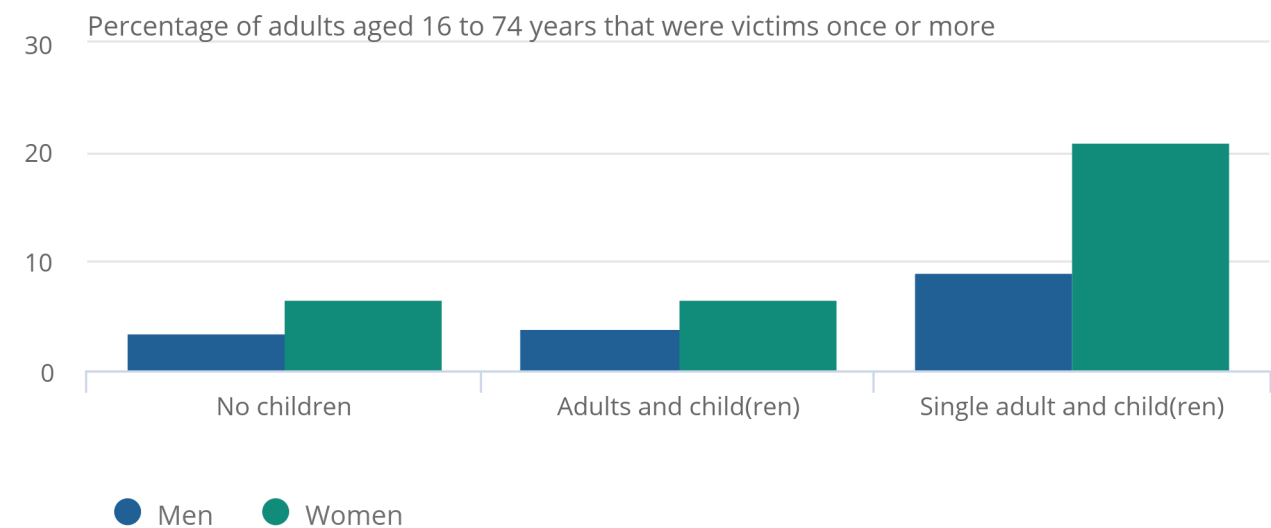
The year ending March 2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales showed that, of men and women aged 16 to 74 years, those who lived in a single-parent household were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year than those living in a no-children household or a household with other adults and children (Figure 11 and [Appendix Table 7](#))<sup>1</sup>.

Figure 11: Those living in a single-parent household were more likely to experience domestic abuse

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years by household structure, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 11: Those living in a single-parent household were more likely to experience domestic abuse

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years by household structure, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

Notes for: Household structure

- 1. Household structure may have changed as a result of the abuse.

10 . Area

The year ending March 2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that, of adults aged 16 to 74 years, there were no significant differences in the likelihood of being a victim of domestic abuse between those who live in urban and rural areas ([Appendix Table 7](#))<sup>1</sup>. This differs from the year ending March 2019 which showed those who lived in urban areas were more likely to have experienced domestic abuse in the last year (6.0%) than those who lived in rural areas (4.2%).

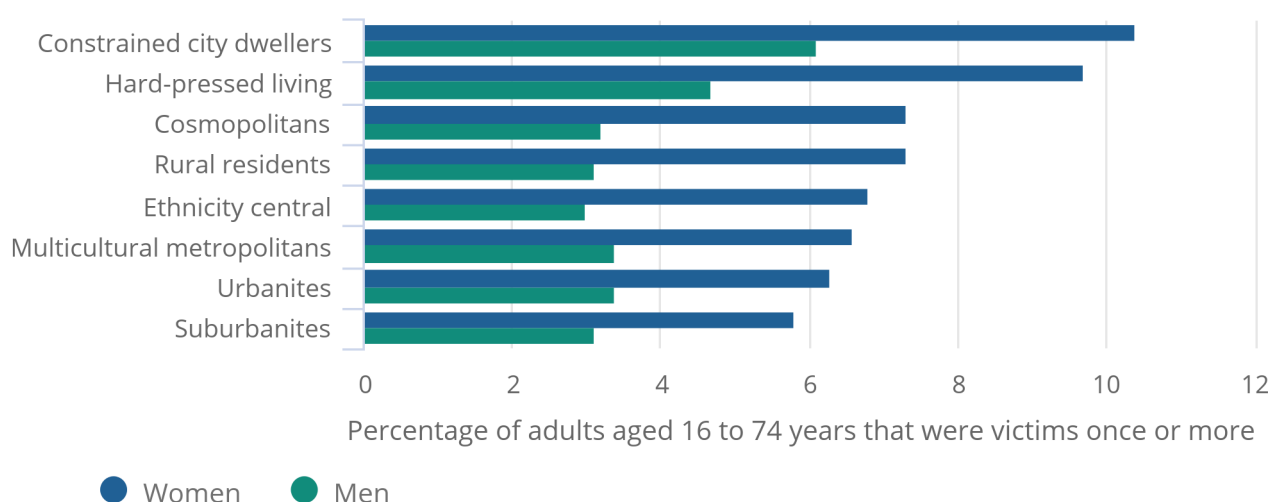
Women were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse within the last year compared with men for all area types<sup>2</sup>. This pattern was largest for Hard-pressed living, where 9.7% of women were victims of domestic abuse in the last year, compared with 4.7% of men (Figure 12).

## Figure 12: Women were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse within all area types than men

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years by area type, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

### Figure 12: Women were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse within all area types than men

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years by area type, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



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

Looking at offences recorded by the police, Figure 13 shows that, like the year ending March 2019, the highest rates of both domestic abuse-related crimes and violence against the person domestic abuse-related crimes were recorded in the North East region (with a rate of 19 per 1,000 population and 14 per 1,000 population; respectively). The lowest rates were recorded in London (with a rate of 10 per 1,000 population for all domestic abuse-related crimes and 8 per 1,000 population for violence against the person domestic-abuse related offences). Although this could reflect differences in the rates of domestic abuse across regions, it could also reflect regional differences in the reporting of domestic abuse to the police and how the police subsequently record these offences.

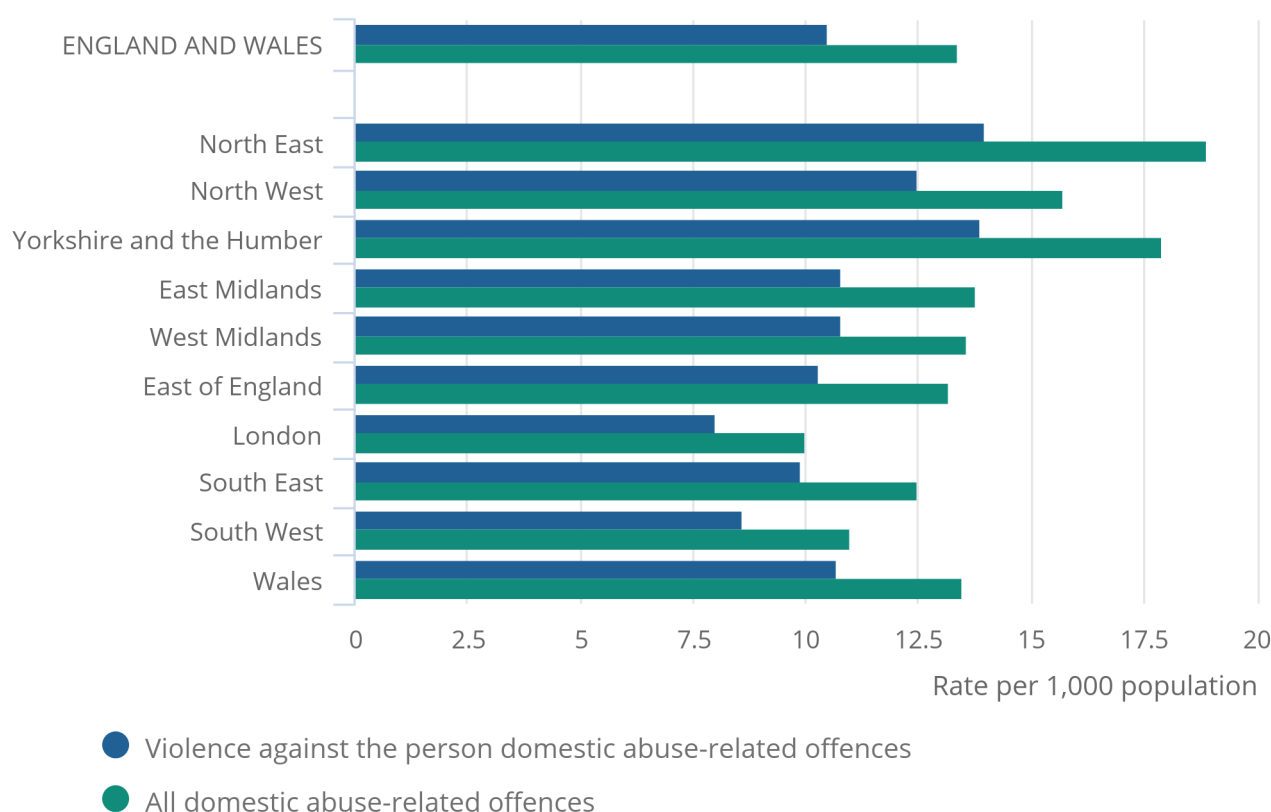


### Figure 13: The North East of England had the highest recorded rates of domestic abuse-related offences

Rate of domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police, by police force area, English regions and Wales, year ending March 2020

#### Figure 13: The North East of England had the highest recorded rates of domestic abuse-related offences

Rate of domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police, by police force area, English regions and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office Data Hub – Police recorded crime

#### Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Data for Greater Manchester Police are not included because of issues with their data supply following the implementation of new IT systems.
3. The population figures used are the mid-2019 population estimates provided by the Office for National Statistics.
4. Numbers will be affected by the size of the resident population relative to the transient or visiting populations and may therefore over-represent the number of crimes relative to the real population of potential victims.
5. Total rate for England and Wales includes offences recorded by British Transport Police.

## Notes for: Area

1. Area may have changed as a result of the abuse.
2. Information on the different area types can be found in the Output Area section of the [2011 residential-based area classifications](#).

# 11 . Domestic homicide

## Sex

Data from the Home Office Homicide Index for the year ending March 2017 to the year ending March 2019 show that over three-quarters of victims of domestic homicide were female (77% or 274 victims). This contrasts with non-domestic homicides where the majority of victims over the same time period were male (87% or 786 victims).

Table 1 shows that of the 274 female victims of domestic homicide, the suspect<sup>1</sup> was male in the majority of cases (263; 96%). Of the 83 male victims of domestic homicide, the suspect was female in 39 cases, and male in 44 cases.

Table 1: Number of domestic homicide victims by sex of victim and sex of suspect  
Combined data for year ending March 2017 to year ending March 2019<sup>1</sup>, England and Wales

### Victims of domestic homicides

	Male	Female	All
<b>Male suspects</b>	44	263	307
<b>Female suspects</b>	39	11	50
<b>All suspects<sup>2</sup></b>	83	274	357

Source: Home Office – Homicide Index

### Notes

1. As at 5 December 2019; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts or as further information becomes available.
2. A suspect in a homicide case is defined as either: a person who has been arrested in respect of an offence initially classified as homicide and charged with homicide, including those who were subsequently convicted or a person who is suspected by the police of having committed the offence but is known to have died or committed suicide prior to arrest or being charged.

Data on the number of domestic homicides by sex can be broken down by police force area but there is considerable volatility in these numbers over time because of the relatively low volumes involved. See [Appendix Table 21](#) for more information.

## Age

Analysis of data from the Homicide Index for the year ending March 2017 to the year ending March 2019 showed that the average age of a domestic homicide victim was 46 years. The average age of female domestic homicide victims was 45 years, and the average age of male domestic homicide victims was 48 years ([Appendix Table 22](#)).

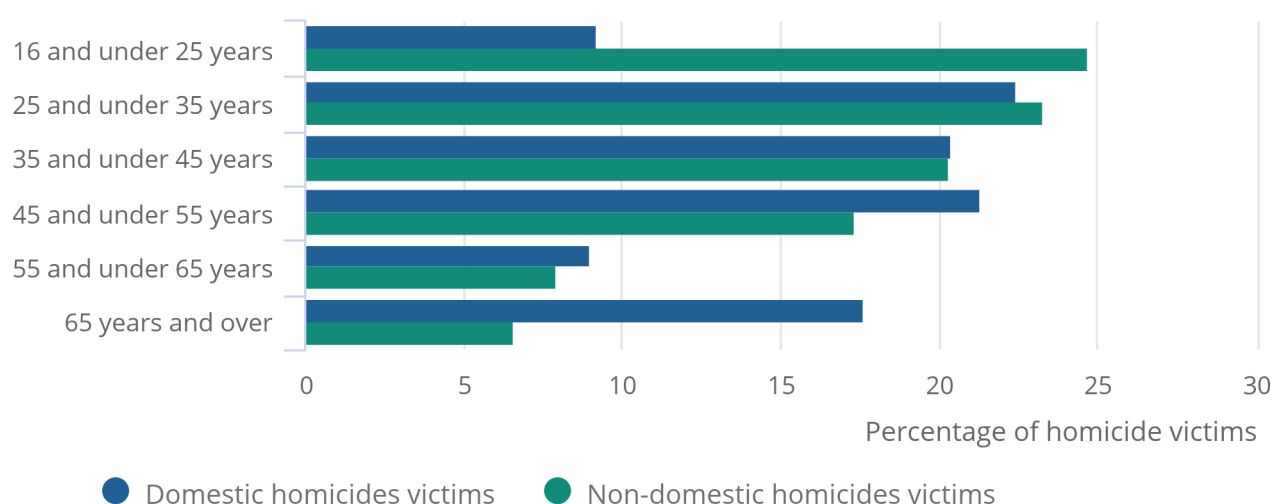
Figure 14 shows that the highest proportion of domestic homicide victims fell within the 25- to 34-year age category (22%), whereas the highest proportion of non-domestic homicide victims fell within the 16- to 24-year age category (25%). A larger proportion of domestic homicide victims were aged 65 years and over (18%) compared with non-domestic homicide victims (7%). Similarly, a smaller proportion of domestic homicide victims were aged 16 to 24 years (9%) compared with non-domestic homicide victims (25%).

#### Figure 14: The majority of domestic homicide victims were aged 25 to 34 years

Percentage of homicide victims by homicide-type and age, England and Wales, year ending March 2017 to March 2019

### Figure 14: The majority of domestic homicide victims were aged 25 to 34 years

Percentage of homicide victims by homicide-type and age, England and Wales, year ending March 2017 to March 2019



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

#### Notes:

1. As at 5 December 2019; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts, or as further information becomes available.
2. Excludes cases with no suspects and homicide offences where all suspects have been acquitted at court.

## Relationship to suspect

Table 2 presents data from the Homicide Index between the year ending March 2017 and the year ending March 2019. It shows that, of the 274 female domestic homicide victims, the suspect was a partner or ex-partner in 222 (or 81%) of cases. Of the 83 male domestic homicide victims, the suspect was a partner or ex-partner in 38 (or 46%) of cases.

Table 2: Number of domestic homicide victims by sex of victim and relationship to suspect  
Combined data for year ending March 2017 to year ending March 2019<sup>1</sup>, England and Wales

### Victims of domestic homicides

	Male	Female	All
<b>All Suspects<sup>2</sup></b>	83	274	357
<b>Partner/ex-partner</b>	38	222	260
Adulterous relationship	1	2	3
Boyfriend, girlfriend	8	41	49
Common-law spouse or cohabiting partner	11	40	51
Ex- spouse, ex-common-law spouse or ex-cohabiting partner	3	32	35
Ex-boyfriend, girlfriend	2	17	19
Spouse (incl. civil partner)	13	90	103
<b>Parent</b>	16	30	46
<b>Son/daughter</b>	2	2	4
<b>Other family<sup>3</sup></b>	27	20	47
Brother/sister	8	5	13
Other relative	19	15	34

Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

### Notes

1. As at 5 December 2019; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts or as further information becomes available.
2. A suspect in a homicide case is defined as either: a person who has been arrested in respect of an offence initially classified as homicide and charged with homicide, including those who were subsequently convicted or a person who is suspected by the police of having committed the offence but is known to have died or committed suicide prior to arrest or being charged.
3. Includes siblings, other relatives.

### Notes for: Domestic homicide

1. A suspect in a homicide case is defined as either: a person who has been arrested in respect of an offence initially classified as homicide and charged with homicide, including those who were subsequently convicted or a person who is suspected by the police of having committed the offence but is known to have died or committed suicide prior to arrest or being charged.
2. Family members include parents, sons and / or daughters, siblings or other relatives.

## 12 . Domestic abuse in England and Wales data

### [Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics – Appendix Tables](#)

Dataset | Released 25 November 2020

Domestic abuse numbers, prevalence, types and victim characteristics, based upon findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime.

### [Stalking: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 25 November 2020

Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales on stalking including numbers, types and victim characteristics.

### [Domestic abuse in England and Wales – Data Tool](#)

Dataset | Released on 25 November 2020

An interactive tool exploring data at police force area level.

## 13 . Glossary

### Controlling or coercive behaviour

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.

### Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence. It can include repeated patterns of abusive behaviour to maintain power and control in a relationship. It includes abuse carried out by a partner, ex-partner or family member. The [government's definition](#) of domestic violence and abuse recognises this and defines domestic abuse as:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. It can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional”

## **Domestic abuse-related crimes**

Incidents of domestic abuse that resulted in a crime being recorded by the police and are included in police recorded crime.

### **Domestic homicide**

An offence of murder, manslaughter or infanticide where the relationship between a victim aged 16 years and over and the perpetrator falls into one of the following categories: spouse, common-law spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, ex-spouse, ex-cohabiting partner or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, adulterous relationship, son or daughter (including step and adopted relationships), parent (including step and adopted relationships), brother or sister, other relatives.

### **Non-sexual abuse**

Abuse which includes physical force, emotional or financial abuse, or threats to hurt the individual or someone close to them.

### **Sexual assault**

Within the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) sexual assault includes rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), or indecent exposure or unwanted touching.

### **Stalking**

Defined in the CSEW as two or more incidents (causing distress, fear or alarm) of receiving obscene or threatening unwanted letters, emails, 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.

## **14 . Data sources and quality**

Further quality and methodology information can be found in the [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview](#).

### **Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)**

The CSEW covers the population living in households in England and Wales; it does not cover the population living in group residences (for example, care homes or student halls of residence) or other institutions. Estimates used within this publication are based on the CSEW self-completion module on domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking.

The upper age limit for respondents eligible for the self-completion module was increased from 59 years to 74 years in April 2017. This publication reports primarily on those aged 16 to 74 years, for which we currently have three years of data. Where analysis requires more than the last three years of data, we have reported using the 16 to 59 years age range. Data for both age groups are provided separately within the [Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics – Appendix Tables](#).

One of the strengths of the CSEW is that it covers many crimes that are not reported 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. While the CSEW provides the best available estimate of trends in the prevalence of domestic abuse, it cannot be used to make any inferences about demands on the police.

All changes reported in this publication are statistically significant at the 5% level unless stated otherwise. Headline CSEW prevalence estimates for domestic abuse included within this publication have previously been published in July 2020 alongside the [Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#) bulletin.

More information about the CSEW can be found in [How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system](#).

## Measuring domestic abuse within the CSEW

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

- non-sexual abuse: physical force, emotional or financial abuse, or threats to hurt the respondent or someone close to them
- sexual assault: rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), or indecent exposure or unwanted touching
- stalking<sup>1</sup>: two or more incidents (causing distress, fear or alarm) of receiving obscene or threatening unwanted letters, emails, 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<sup>2</sup>

The CSEW collects information on these types of abuse carried out by a partner (including a former partner) and carried out by a family member other than a partner (father or mother, step-father or mother or other relative).

For the self-completion section of the survey, respondents are handed a tablet computer to use to answer questions. This allows respondents to feel more at ease when answering these sensitive questions, because of increased confidence in the privacy and confidentiality of the survey.

The CSEW estimates do not completely capture the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship, which was introduced on 29 December 2015. New survey questions to better estimate experiences of this type of abuse are still under development. Details of the research carried out to date can be found in the article on [Developing a measure of controlling or coercive behaviour](#).

Work to improve the data collected to measure domestic abuse from the CSEW is ongoing. Following the suspension of fieldwork due to the coronavirus pandemic there will be no CSEW domestic abuse data available for the year ending March 2021. Further research is underway to consider alternative approaches for future data collection. Inclusivity is an important part of this work and our aim is to capture data from as much of the population as possible.

## How the police measure domestic abuse

With the exception of coercive or controlling behaviour, domestic abuse is not a specific criminal offence. Offences that are domestic abuse-related will be recorded under the respective offence that has been committed, for example, assault with injury. However, the police are required to flag when an offence is domestic abuse-related. The Home Office has been collecting information from the police on whether recorded offences are related to domestic abuse since April 2015<sup>3</sup>.

The Home Office collects data on the number of domestic abuse-related incidents and the number of domestic-abuse related crimes. Domestic abuse-related incidents cover reports of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults, aged 16 years and over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. They include those reports where, after initial investigation, the police have concluded that no notifiable crime was committed<sup>4</sup>.

Not all reported crimes are recorded as an incident first. If it is clear when the incident is reported that an offence has occurred, the police may record the matter as a domestic abuse-related crime immediately without first recording an incident. Incidents of domestic abuse that result in a crime being recorded by the police are included in the data on domestic abuse-related crimes. More information on domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes can be found in the publication [How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system](#).

## Home Office Homicide Index

The Home Office Homicide Index provides data on whether homicides are “domestic”. The Homicide Index contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales. It is continually updated with revised information from the police and the courts and, as such, is a richer source of data than the main recorded crime dataset<sup>5</sup>.

Homicide Index data are based on the year when the offence was recorded, not when the offence took place or when the case was heard in court. While in the vast majority of cases the offence will be recorded in the same year as it took place, this is not always the case. The data refer to the position as at 5 December 2019, when the Homicide Index database was “frozen” for the purpose of analysis<sup>6</sup>. The data may change as subsequent court hearings take place or as other information is received.

Analysis on data from the Homicide Index within this publication combines data for a three-year period (year ending March 2017 to year ending March 2019) to account for the year-to-year variability in the volume of homicides.

## Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

This publication is largely unaffected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

CSEW data presented in this publication for the year ending March 2020 are based on interviews conducted between April 2019 and the first two weeks of March 2020. Fieldwork for the year ending March 2020 was suspended two weeks early on Wednesday 18 March 2020 just prior to the lockdown restrictions being announced by the government on 23 March 2020. All estimates from the CSEW for the year ending March 2020 were therefore unaffected by the lockdown restrictions as the data were collected, and relate to, the time prior to this period.

With fieldwork being suspended two weeks earlier than anticipated, the annual sample fell just short of its target of 34,500 adult interviews (the actual figure on which the year to March estimates are based was 33,735 adult interviews). Response rates also fell slightly from a target of 70% to 64%. Overall the impact on the survey estimates has therefore been minimal.

The latest police recorded crime figures presented in this publication relate to crimes recorded by the police during the period April 2019 to the end of March 2020. In response to the coronavirus pandemic, restrictions in England and Wales started from 12 March 2020, with a national lockdown implemented from 23 March 2020. The start of the restrictions and the first eight days of lockdown are therefore captured in police recorded data for the year ending March 2020. We do not expect there to have been a significant impact on crime statistics in February 2020 or earlier before restrictions were applied in the country.



The publication [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#) provides insight into the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on domestic abuse in England and Wales.

## Notes for: Data sources and quality

1. As the CSEW questions include stalking by a current partner, it is not consistent with the [legal definition of stalking and harassment](#).
2. From the year ending March 2013 survey onwards, the definition of stalking was changed to meet the criteria of two or more incidents specified in the legal definition.
3. In response to a recommendation in the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) 2014 report [Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse \(PDF, 736KB\)](#), police forces are asked to "flag" crimes as being domestic abuse-related if the offence meets the government definition of domestic violence and abuse.
4. An example of a domestic abuse incident that does not amount to a crime would be two family members having a loud argument, a third party calls the police, the police attend and calm the situation down, but no crime has taken place.
5. For example, when the police initially record an offence as a homicide it remains classified as such unless the police or courts decide that a lesser offence, or no offence, took place. The offence would be reclassified on the Homicide Index as "no longer recorded" but remain in the main police recorded crime collection as a homicide.
6. The 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. See [Section 3.1 of the User guide to crime statistics](#) for more information.

## 15 . Related links

### [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2020](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 25 November 2020

Figures on domestic abuse from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, police recorded crime and a number of different organisations.

### [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

Prevalence, long-term trends and types of domestic abuse experienced by adults, based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, and police recorded crime.

### [Partner abuse in detail, England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2019

Information from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on the amount, type and nature of partner abuse experienced in the last year.

### [Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales: November 2020](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

Information on services that are available to victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales

### [Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2020](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

Information on responses to and outcomes of domestic abuse cases in the criminal justice system.

### [How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

Information on the stages of the criminal justice process in England and Wales, and how data are captured at each stage.

### [Domestic abuse during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic, England and Wales: November 2020](#)

Article | Released 25 November 2020

Indicators from a range of data sources to assess the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on domestic abuse in England and Wales.