

Article

Sexual offences victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020

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

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1 . Main points

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending March 2020 estimated 2.9% of women (618,000) and 0.7% of men (155,000) aged 16 to 74 years experienced sexual assault (including attempts) in the last year.
- Of sexual offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2020, the victim was female in 84% of cases.

According to the CSEW year ending March 2018 to March 2020 combined:

- men and women aged 16 to 24 years were more likely to be victims of sexual assault in the last year than those aged 25 years and over
- full-time students were more likely to have experienced sexual assault in the last year than people in any other occupation type
- single adults were more likely to have experienced sexual assault in the last year than those who were married, widowed, separated, divorced or cohabiting
- victims of rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) in the last year were more likely to be assaulted by a partner or ex-partner than a family member

2 . Understanding sexual offences

Sexual offences are often hidden crimes that are not reported to the police. Therefore, data held by the police can only provide a partial picture of the actual level of crime experienced. 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.

Sexual assaults measured by the CSEW combine rape (including attempts), assault by penetration (including attempts), indecent exposure and unwanted sexual touching. Information is collected on whether these types of assault were carried out by a partner (including a former partner), family member other than a partner, someone else known, or a stranger.

The Home Office collects data on the number of sexual offences recorded by the police. These are grouped into two main categories; rape and other sexual offences. The other sexual offences category covers a broader range of offences than the CSEW, for example, sexual exploitation of children, incest and sexual grooming. Given the broader range of offences covered in police recorded crime and other differences described in this section, these figures are not directly comparable with the estimates from the CSEW.

For more information on how sexual assaults are 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](#).

3 . Sex

For the year ending March 2020, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 618,000 women and 155,000 men aged 16 to 74¹ years experienced sexual assault (including attempts) in the last year ([Appendix Table 9a](#)). This is a prevalence rate of approximately 3 in 100 women and 1 in 100 men (Figure 1).

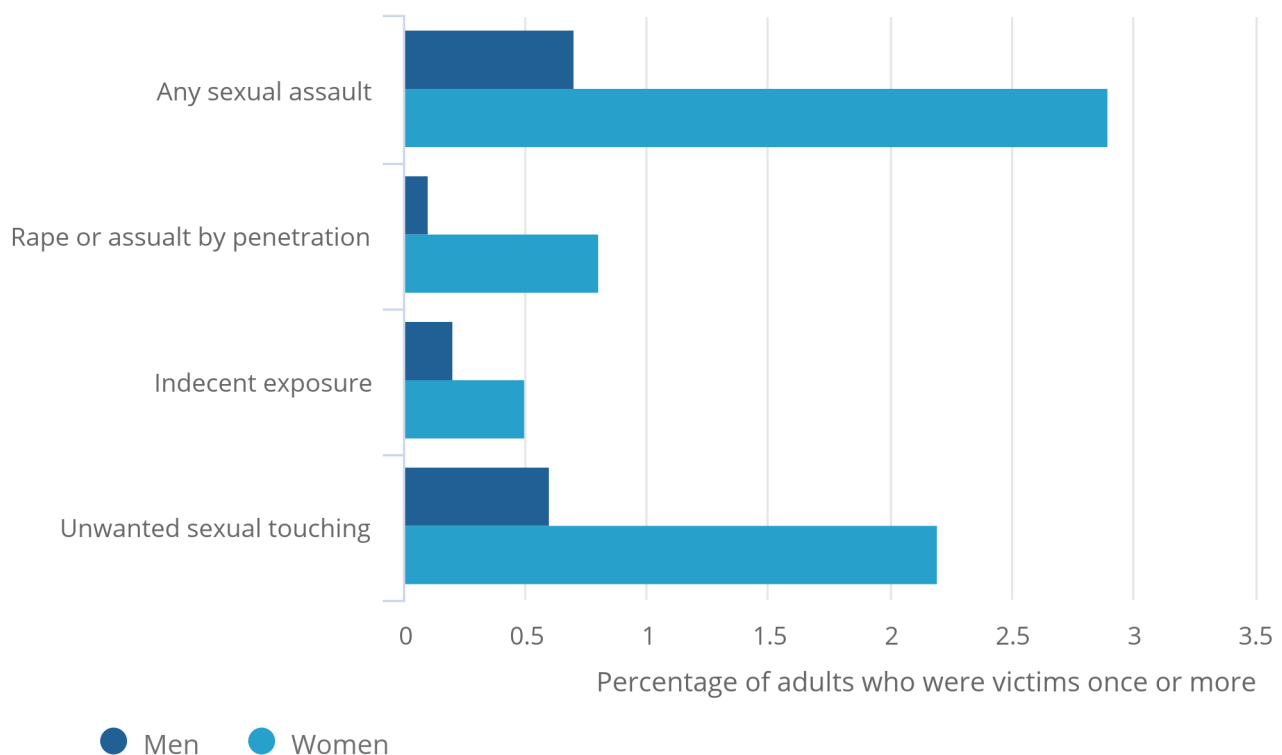
Women were significantly more likely than men to be victims of each type of sexual assault in the last year. The year ending March 2020 CSEW showed unwanted sexual touching was the most common type of sexual assault experienced in the last year for both men (0.6%) and women (2.2%) ([Appendix Table 1](#)).

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

Prevalence of sexual assault 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 sexual assault in the last year

Prevalence of sexual assault 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. The categories “any sexual assault” and “rape or assault by penetration” include attempts.

The prevalence of sexual assault experienced by women aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 74 years decreased significantly in the year ending March 2020, compared with the previous year. There was no significant change in the prevalence for men.

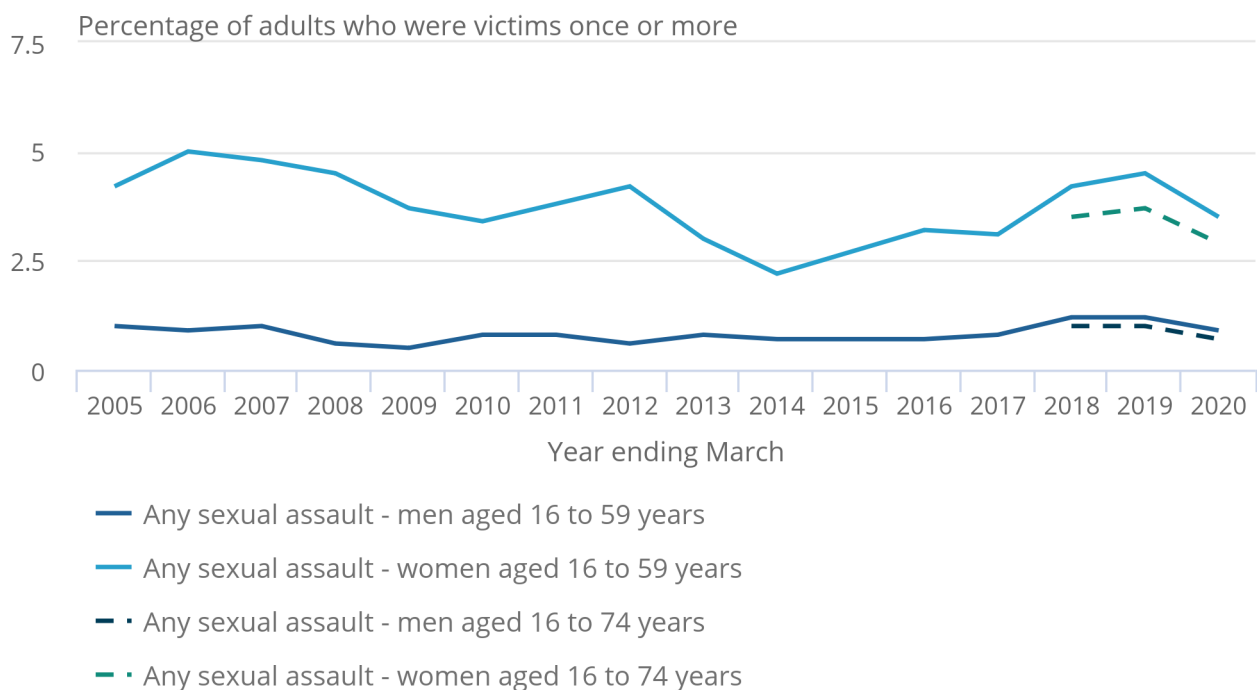
When looking at longer-term trends, the prevalence of sexual assault experienced by women aged 16 to 59 years has fluctuated with increases seen in recent years, whereas the prevalence for men has remained stable.

Figure 2: There was a decrease in the prevalence of sexual assault for women but not for men in the last year

Prevalence of any sexual assault 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 a decrease in the prevalence of sexual assault for women but not for men in the last year

Prevalence of any sexual assault 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. 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 41 police forces^{2,3} showed the victim was female in 84% of sexual offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2020. Similarly, more victims of rape offences recorded by the police were female (90%) than male (10%) ([Appendix Table 19](#)).

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 [Sexual offences prevalence and victim characteristics - Appendix Tables](#).
2. Sexual offences 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. These data do not include the police forces of Greater Manchester, North Wales, or Lincolnshire.

4 . Age

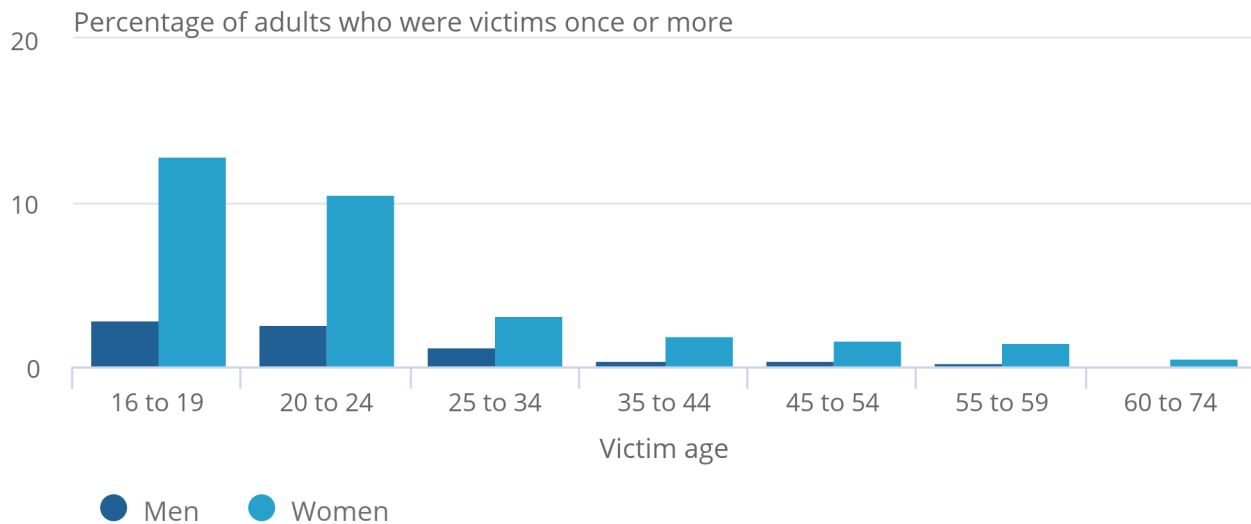
The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined showed that both men and women aged 16 to 19 years (2.9% and 12.9% respectively) and 20 to 24 years (2.6% and 10.5% respectively) were significantly more likely to be victims of sexual assault in the last year than any other age group (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Men and women aged 16 to 24 years were more likely to be victims of sexual assault than any other age group

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by age and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined

Figure 3: Men and women aged 16 to 24 years were more likely to be victims of sexual assault than any other age group

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by age and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined



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

Notes:

1. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.

The CSEW does not ask those aged under 16 years about their experience of sexual assault, but has previously asked adults to recall retrospectively their experience of sexual assault before the age of 16 years (see [Child sexual abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#) for more information).

Information from the Home Office Data Hub can provide some insight into victimisation of those aged under 16 years, however, this only includes those cases known to the police and therefore will understate the volume of such criminality.

Data supplied from 24 police forces^{1,2} showed that females aged 10 to 24 years were disproportionately more likely to be victims of sexual offences recorded by the police. For example, while 5.7% of the population were aged 10 to 14 years, this age group accounted for 24.1% of police recorded sexual offences where the victim was female. One-third of all female victims were aged under 15 years old (Figure 4).

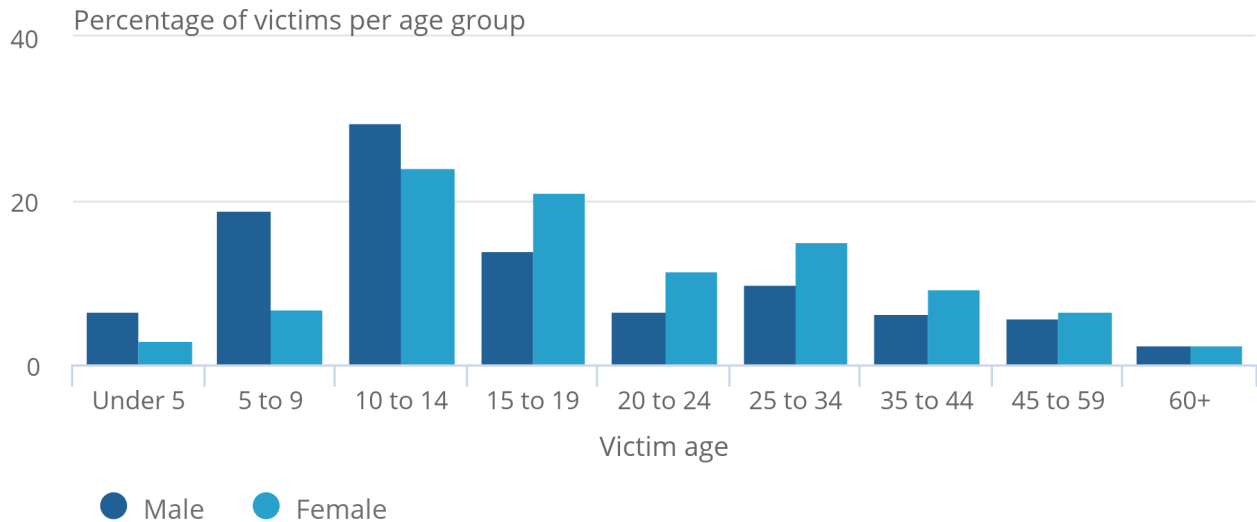
Males aged 5 to 19 years were disproportionately more likely to be victims of sexual offences. For example, while 6.2% of the male population were aged 10 to 14 years, this age group accounted for 29.5% of police recorded sexual offences. More than half (55%) of all male victims were aged under 15 years.

Figure 4: Police recorded crime showed that those aged 10 to 14 years were more likely to be victims of sexual offences

Distribution of victims of sexual offences, by age and sex, police recorded crime (24 forces), year ending March 2020

Figure 4: Police recorded crime showed that those aged 10 to 14 years were more likely to be victims of sexual offences

Distribution of victims of sexual offences, by age and sex, police recorded crime (24 forces), 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. Police recorded crime data based on 24 forces that provided data via the Home Office Data Hub. Data have not been reconciled with forces.

Notes for: Age

1. Sexual offences 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.
2. Avon and Somerset, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Durham, Dyfed Powys, Gloucestershire, Gwent, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Merseyside, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, South Wales, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Thames Valley, Warwickshire, West Mercia and West Midlands.

5 . Ethnicity

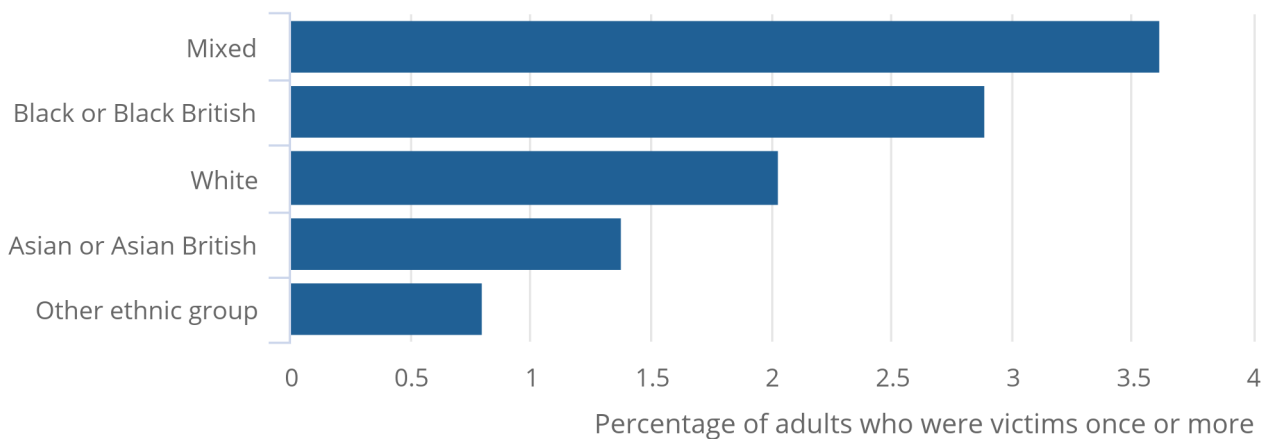
For the year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that those in the Black or Black British and Mixed ethnic groups were significantly more likely than those in the White, Asian or Other ethnic groups to experience sexual assault within the last year (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Adults of Black or Black British and Mixed ethnicity were more likely to experience sexual assault than those of White, Asian or Other ethnicity

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by ethnicity, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined

Figure 5: Adults of Black or Black British and Mixed ethnicity were more likely to experience sexual assault than those of White, Asian or Other ethnicity

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by ethnicity, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined



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

Notes:

1. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.
2. See section 7.3 of the [user guide](#) for definitions of personal characteristics.

For rape or sexual assault by penetration, there were no significant differences between ethnic groups, or across ethnicity for men and women. However, for indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching, those in the Mixed ethnic group were significantly more likely to be victims than those in the White, Asian and Other ethnic groups.

6 . Marital status

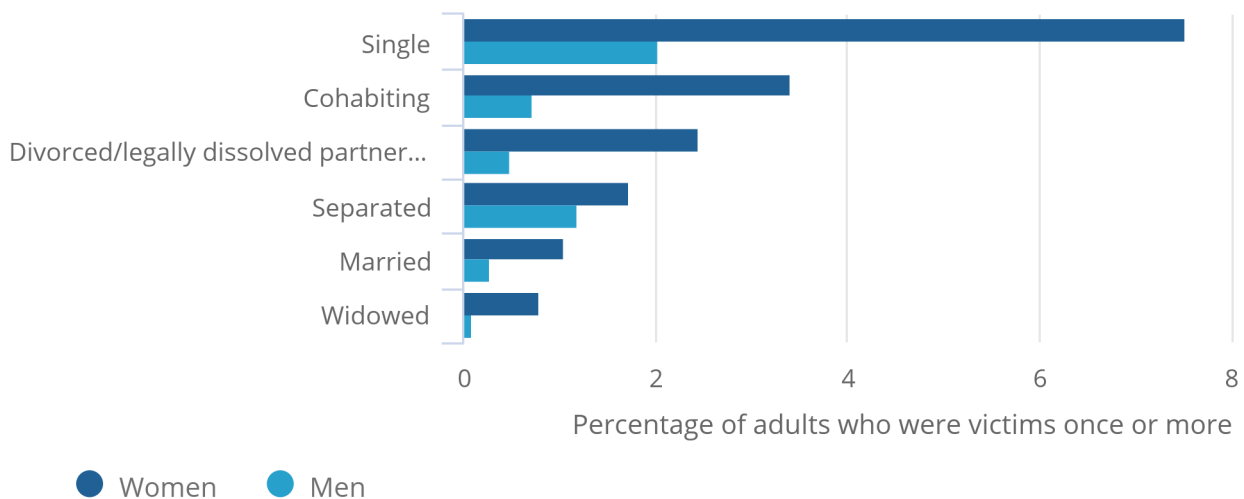
For the year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that adults aged 16 to 74 years who were single (4.7%) were more than twice as likely to experience sexual assault than any other marital status¹ ([Appendix Table 5](#)). Women who were divorced or legally separated were significantly more likely to be victims of sexual assault than married or widowed women. Single men were more likely to experience sexual assault than men with any other marital status except those who were separated (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Single adults were more likely to experience sexual assault

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by marital status and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined

Figure 6: Single adults were more likely to experience sexual assault

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by marital status and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined



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

Notes:

1. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.
2. See section 7.3 of the [user guide](#) for definitions of personal characteristics.

Notes for: Marital status

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

7 . Disability

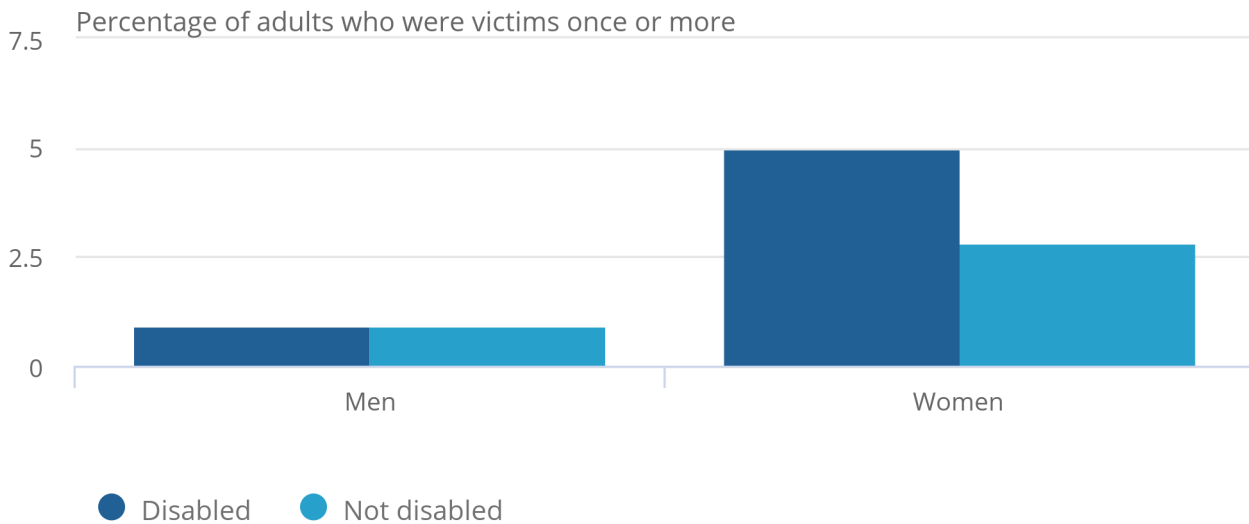
For the year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that women with a disability¹ were more likely to have experienced sexual assault in the last year than women without a disability (5.0% and 2.8% respectively). There was no significant difference for men (Figure 7 and [Appendix Table 5](#)).

Figure 7: Women with a disability were more likely to experience sexual assault than those without

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by disability and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined

Figure 7: Women with a disability were more likely to experience sexual assault than those without

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by disability and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined



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.
2. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.
3. See section 7.3 of the [user guide](#) for definitions of personal characteristics.

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

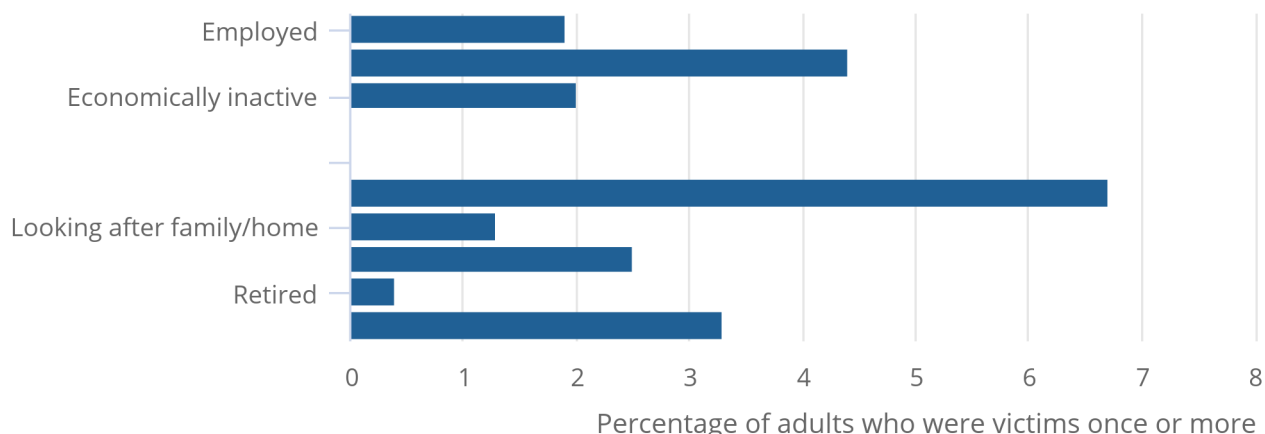
For the year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that, of adults aged 16 to 74 years, those who were unemployed were more than twice as likely to have experienced sexual assault within the last year than those who were employed or economically inactive (Figure 8 and [Appendix Table 5](#))¹.

Figure 8: Unemployed adults were more likely to have experienced sexual assault than those who were employed or economically inactive

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by employment status, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined

Figure 8: Unemployed adults were more likely to have experienced sexual assault than those who were employed or economically inactive

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by employment status, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined



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

Notes:

1. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.
2. See section 7.3 of the [user guide](#) for definitions of personal characteristics.

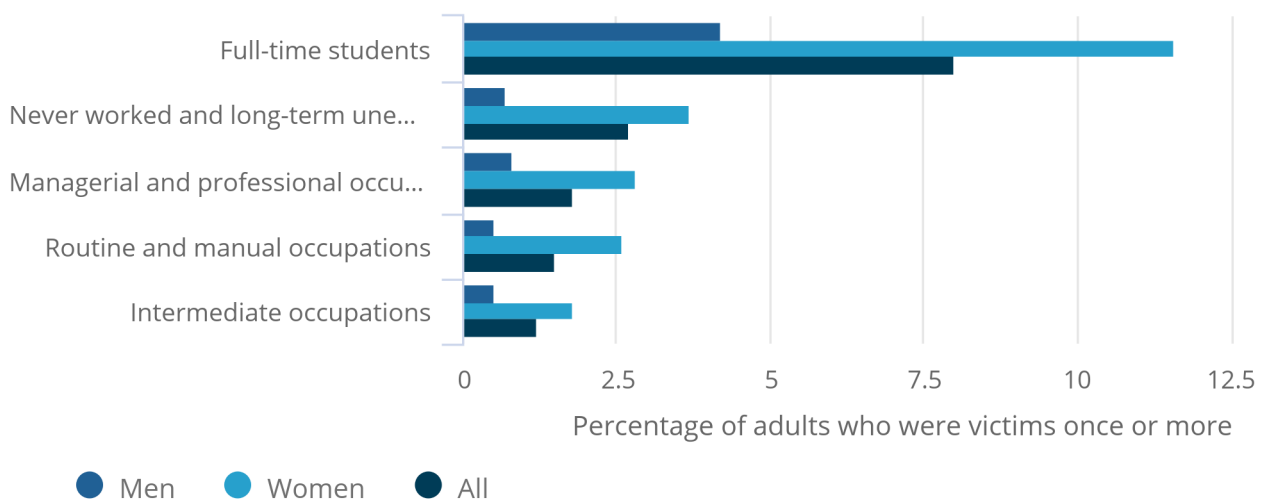
Figure 9 shows that of adults aged 16 to 74 years, for each occupation type, women were more likely to have experienced sexual assault than men. This difference was greatest for full-time students, where 11.6% of women had experienced sexual assault in the last year, compared with 4.2% of men. It is likely that some of the differences seen by occupation type are also linked to [age](#).

Figure 9: Full-time students were more likely to experience sexual assault than those in any other occupational group

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by occupational group and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined

Figure 9: Full-time students were more likely to experience sexual assault than those in any other occupational group

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by occupational group and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined



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

Notes:

1. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.
2. See section 7.3 of the [user guide](#) for definitions of personal characteristics.

Notes for: Employment status and occupation

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

9 . Household structure

For the year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that men and women aged 16 to 74 years, living in a single-parent household, were more likely to experience sexual assault than those in a household with other adults and children.

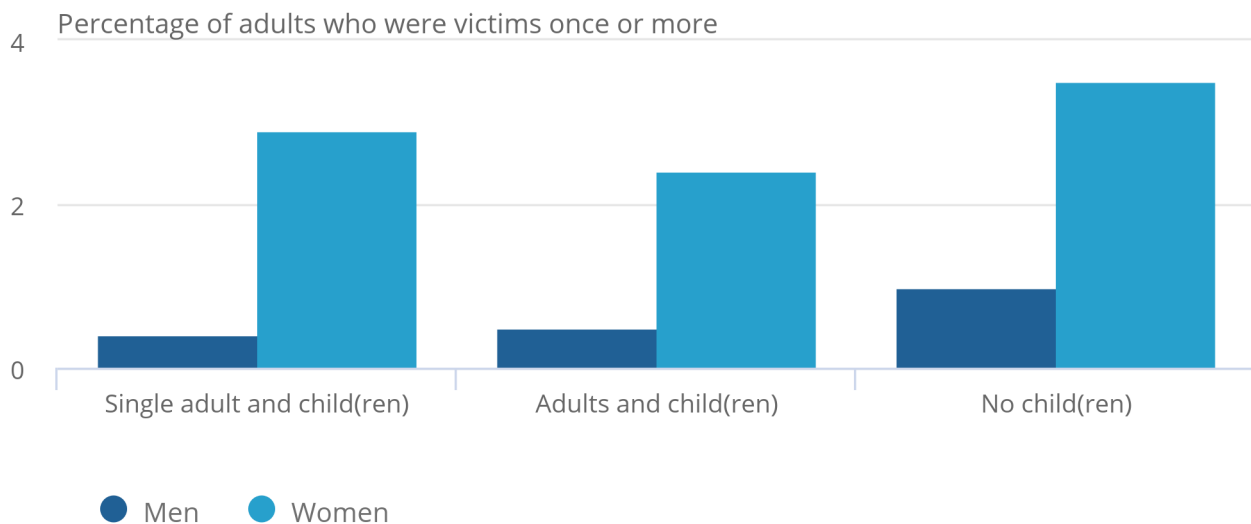
Men and women in a household of no children were also more likely to experience sexual assault than those in a household with other adults and children (Figure 10 and [Appendix Table 6](#))¹. It is likely that some of the differences seen by household structure are also linked to [marital status](#).

Figure 10: Adults living in a no-children household were more likely to experience sexual assault than those who lived with other adults and children

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by household structure and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined

Figure 10: Adults living in a no-children household were more likely to experience sexual assault than those who lived with other adults and children

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by household structure and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined



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

Notes:

1. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.
2. See section 7.2 of the [user guide](#) for definitions of household characteristics.

Notes for: Household structure

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

10 . Area

For the year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that, of adults aged 16 to 74 years, those who lived in urban areas were more likely to have experienced sexual assault in the last year (2.1%) than those who lived in rural areas (1.7%) ([Appendix Table 6](#))¹.

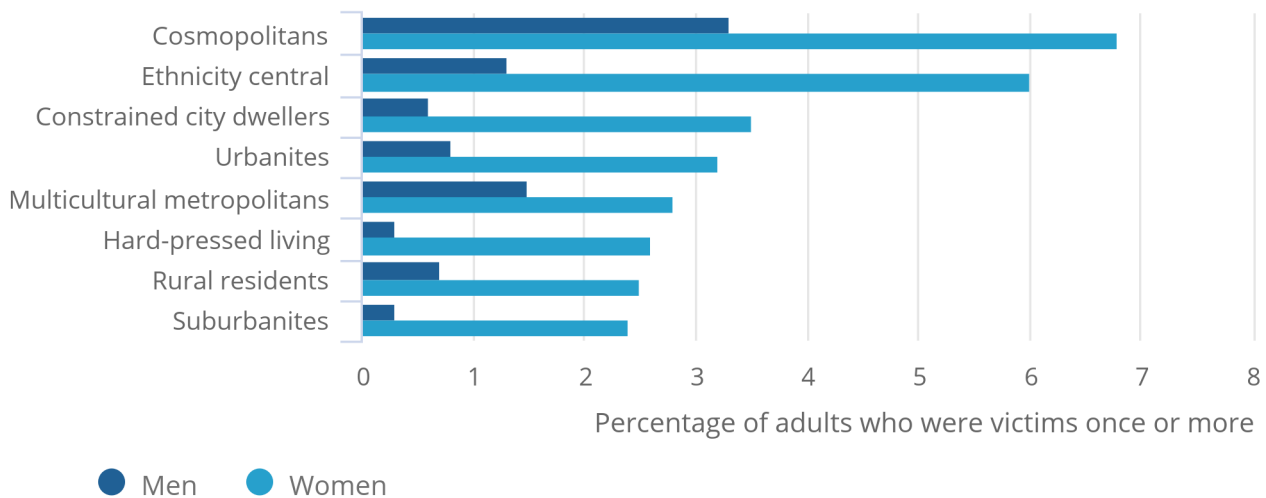
Women were more likely than men to be victims of sexual assault in the last year compared with men for all output area classification² (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Women were more likely to be victims of sexual assault within all output area classifications than men

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by output area classification and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined

Figure 11: Women were more likely to be victims of sexual assault within all output area classifications than men

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by output area classification and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined



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

Notes:

1. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.
2. Information on the different area classifications can be found in [Pen portraits for the 2011 area classification for output areas](#) (PDF, 332KB).

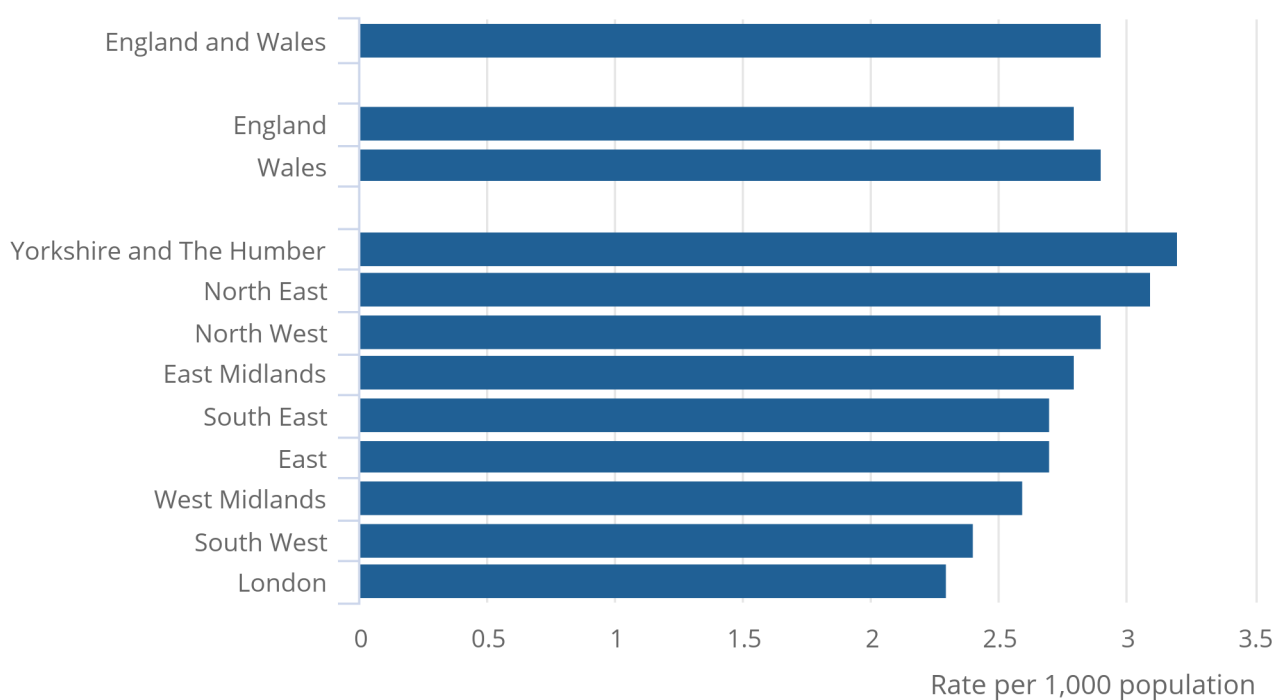
Looking at police recorded offences by region, Figure 12 shows that the highest rate of sexual offences in the year ending March 2020 was recorded in Yorkshire and The Humber (3.2 per 1,000 population). The lowest rate was recorded in London (2.3 per 1,000 population; [Appendix Table 15](#)). Although this could reflect regional differences in the rates of sexual offences, it could also reflect regional differences in the reporting of sexual offences to the police and how the police subsequently record these offences.

Figure 12: Yorkshire and The Humber had the highest rate of sexual offences reported to the police

Rate of sexual offences recorded by the police, English regions and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 12: Yorkshire and The Humber had the highest rate of sexual offences reported to the police

Rate of sexual offences recorded by the police, English regions and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office – Police recorded crime

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Based on mid-2019 population estimates for England and Wales.

Notes for: Area

1. The area in which the victim lived when responding to the survey may not be the same as the area in which they lived when the abuse took place.
2. Information on the different area classifications can be found in [Pen portraits for the 2011 area classification for output areas](#) (PDF, 332KB).

11 . Relationship to perpetrator

Within the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), victims of sexual assault are asked whether the perpetrator was a partner (or ex-partner) or a family member. These questions refer to all experiences of sexual assault in the last year, rather than just the most recent. This means that respondents may report abuse from multiple categories of partner or ex-partner, family member or anyone else. For this reason, data are presented as percentages of all respondents who have experienced that type of sexual assault.

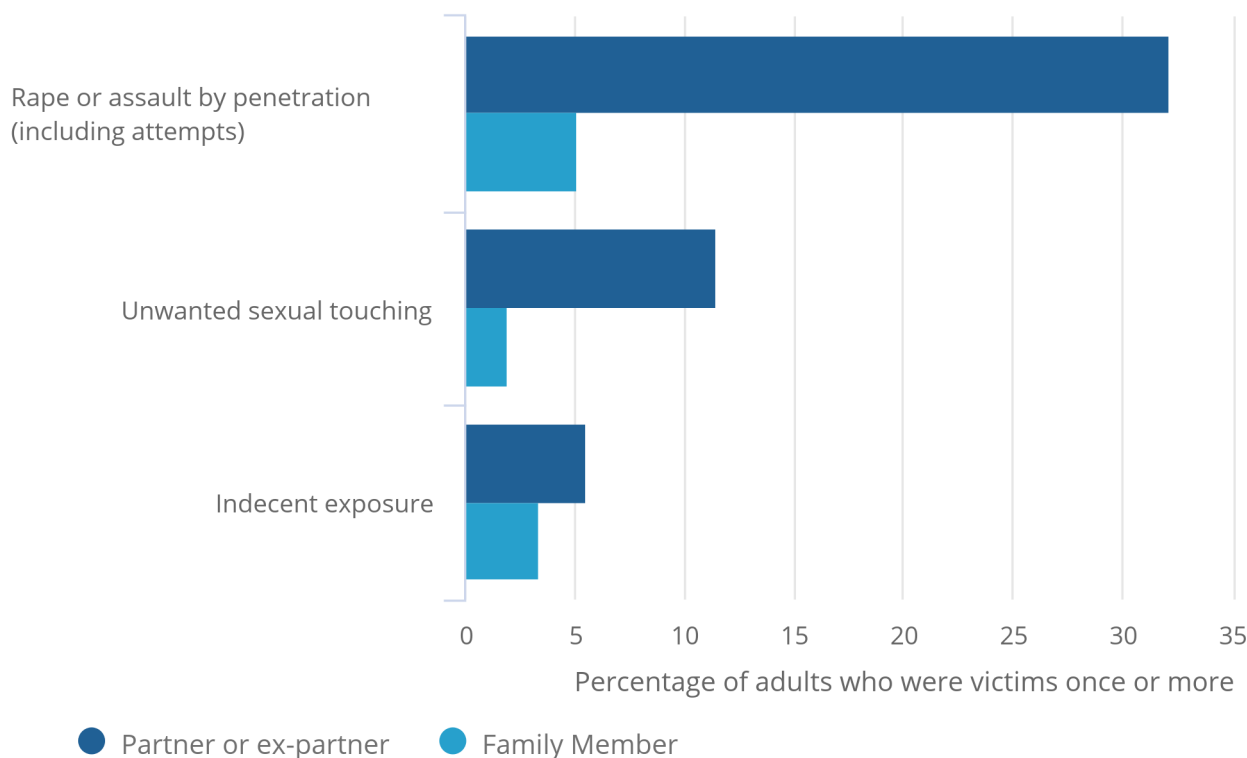
For the year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined, the CSEW showed that adults aged 16 to 74 years who experienced sexual assault in the last year were around six times as likely to experience rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) by a partner or ex-partner than a family member. Victims of unwanted sexual touching in the last year were more likely to be assaulted by their partner or ex-partner than a family member (Figure 13). The difference between indecent exposure perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner and family member was not statistically significant.

Figure 13: Rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) was more likely to be perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner than a family member

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by victim-perpetrator relationship, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined

Figure 13: Rape or assault by penetration (including attempts) was more likely to be perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner than a family member

Prevalence of sexual assault in the last year for adults aged 16 to 74 years, by victim-perpetrator relationship, England and Wales, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 combined



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

Notes:

1. These data are based on combined data from year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020.
2. Percentages are expressed as a proportion of victims who reported they had experienced that crime by 'anyone' in the last year. Percentages will not sum to 100 because the percentage of victims who experienced the crime in the last year, where the perpetrator was not a partner/ex-partner or family member are not available. Victims may have experienced the crime more than once in the last year and could report experiencing it by both a partner/ex-partner and family member.

Data supplied from 15 police forces^{1,2} for the year ending March 2020 showed male victims of rape or other sexual offences were most likely to be acquaintances with the perpetrator (48% and 45% respectively). In comparison, the victim-perpetrator relationship for female rape victims was most likely an intimate partner (46%), but an acquaintance for other sexual offences (40%) ([Appendix Table 22](#)).

For more information on victim-perpetrator relationship for rape or sexual assault by penetration (including attempts) see the [Nature of serious sexual assault article](#).

Notes for: Relationship to perpetrator

1. Sexual offences 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.
2. Avon and Somerset, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Dyfed Powys, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Merseyside, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Warwickshire, West Mercia and West Midlands.

12 . Sexual offences in England and Wales data

[Sexual offences prevalence and victim characteristics](#)

Dataset | Released 18 March 2021

Numbers, prevalence, types and victim characteristics, based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime.

[Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration](#)

Dataset | Released 18 March 2021

Victim and perpetrator relationship, circumstances and impacts for sexual assault by rape or penetration, based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

13 . Glossary

Sexual assault

The term “sexual assault” in the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is used to describe all types of sexual offences measured by the survey. It includes rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), and indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching. The term “sexual assault” in police recorded crime refers to one type of sexual offence, that is, the sexual touching of a person without their consent.

Sexual offence

Sexual offences recorded by the police cover a broader range of offences than are measured by the CSEW including rape, sexual assault, sexual activity with minors, sexual exploitation of children, and other sexual offences. There are a number of different offence codes used for rape and sexual assault, depending on the age and sex of the victim.

14 . Data sources and quality

Further quality and methodology information can be found in the [Sexual offences 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 [Sexual assault 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. Under-reporting to the police is particularly acute for sexual assaults, with many more offences committed than are reported to and recorded by the police. The CSEW provides reliable estimates of the prevalence of sexual assault 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 sexual assault, 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 sexual assault included within this publication have previously been published in July 2020 alongside the [Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2020 bulletin](#).

Measuring sexual assault within the CSEW

Sexual assault in the CSEW combines the following different types of abuse:

- rape (including attempts)
- assault by penetration (including attempts)
- indecent exposure
- unwanted sexual touching

The CSEW collects information on these types of assault carried out by a partner (including a former partner), a family member other than a partner, someone else known, and a stranger.

The CSEW term "sexual assault" differs from the term "sexual assault" used in police recorded crime data. For more information see [How the police measure sexual assault](#).

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.

While some questions are asked about sexual assaults in the face-to-face component of the survey, a very small number of respondents are willing to disclose such sensitive incidents to the interviewer. Therefore, these figures are too unreliable to report and these data are excluded from the headline CSEW estimates. The self-completion section of the survey provides the most reliable source of CSEW data on sexual assaults.

Because of the relatively low number of respondents that have been victims of sexual assault, when analysing the data by personal and household characteristics (other than sex), data from the three most recent survey years have been combined and averaged to provide more robust estimates. These CSEW data cover the year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020 and can be found in the [Appendix Tables](#).

Following the suspension of fieldwork due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic there will be no CSEW sexual assault 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 sexual assault

Sexual offences recorded by the police are grouped into four main categories:

- rape
- sexual assault
- sexual activity with minors
- other sexual offences

Some data tables provided by the Home Office combine the last three categories to create an "other sexual offences" category. The other sexual offences category covers a broader range of offences than the CSEW, for example, sexual exploitation of children, incest and sexual grooming. Given the broader range of offences covered in police recorded crime and other differences described in this section, these figures are not directly comparable with the estimates from the CSEW.

The CSEW uses the term "sexual assault" to describe all types of sexual offences measured by the survey, whereas police recorded crime refers to one specific type of sexual offence - the sexual touching of a person without their consent.

[Home Office Counting Rules \(PDF, 592KB\)](#) for recorded crime differ slightly from the CSEW in the way incidents are counted. For example, from July 2016, the counting rules for rape were changed to record one crime for each perpetrator. In the CSEW only one incident would be counted regardless of the number of perpetrators involved.

In this publication, the police data for sexual offences cover those crimes reported to and recorded by the police during the year ending March 2020. The volume of sexual offences handled by the police is much lower than victimisation levels estimated by the CSEW because of a high level of under-reporting to the police. The police figures are also influenced by changes in recording practices and the willingness of victims to report to the police, which makes interpreting trends difficult.

Over the last few years, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) have conducted a range of inspections related to police forces' crime and incident recording practices. In 2014, [Crime-recording: making the victim count](#) concluded that 26% of sexual offences were not recorded by the police in England and Wales. Improvements were identified in their report [State of policing: 2019](#), with 6% of sexual offences reported to the police going unrecorded.

Given the different factors affecting the reporting and recording of these offences, police data does not provide a reliable indication of current trends in sexual offences.

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 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. More recent data on the number of sexual offences recorded by the police can be found in the latest [quarterly crime publication](#).

15 . Related links

[Sexual offences in England and Wales overview: year ending March 2020](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 18 March 2021

Figures on sexual offences from the year ending March 2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales and crimes recorded by the police.

[Sexual offences prevalence and trends: year ending March 2020](#)

Article | Released 18 March 2021

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

[Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration: year ending March 2020](#)

Article | Released 18 March 2021

Information from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on the amount, type and nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts) experienced since the age of 16 years.

[Sexual offending: victimisation and the path through the criminal justice system](#)

Article | Released 13 December 2018

An overview of sexual offending in England and Wales, using a range of National Statistics and official statistics from across the crime and criminal justice system.