

Article

Partner abuse in detail, England and Wales: year ending March 2018

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

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1 . Main points

- According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales, year ending March 2018, an estimated 4.5% of adults aged 16 to 59 years had experienced partner abuse in the last year.
- Female victims of partner abuse reported experiencing higher levels of non-physical abuse (emotional, financial) and sexual assault by rape or penetration (including attempts) than male victims of partner abuse.
- Male victims of partner abuse reported experiencing higher levels of force than female victims of partner abuse.
- Around one-quarter of partner abuse victims sustained a physical injury as a result of the victimisation.
- The most common non-physical effect of partner abuse was “mental or emotional problems”.
- There was a significant decrease in the proportion of female victims reporting partner abuse to the police in the year ending March 2018 compared with the year ending March 2015 – the last time this was asked about in the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

2 . Things you need to know about this publication

This publication is part of our domestic abuse statistics release. It presents information from the year ending March 2018 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on the amount, type and nature of partner abuse experienced in the last year. Other commentary discussing domestic abuse in England and Wales can be found in the [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview](#).

The content of this publication has been previously published in the [Domestic abuse: findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#) article.

This publication uses findings from the self-completion part of the 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. While estimates on the prevalence of partner abuse are gathered from the domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking module of the CSEW, findings on the nature of partner abuse are gathered from a separate module. The nature of partner abuse module is included in the CSEW every three years and was last included in the year ending March 2018. All data included in this publication are from the year ending March 2018 to ensure the same victims are discussed throughout.

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 only reports on those aged 16 to 59 years, as there is only one year of data available using the new age range.

How is partner abuse defined?

Partner abuse is a subcategory of domestic abuse which includes:

- non-sexual abuse: 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
- sexual assault: rape or assault by penetration (including attempts), or indecent exposure or unwanted touching carried out by a current or former partner
- stalking¹: 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 by a current or former partner²

The CSEW provides two measures of partner abuse: one relates to experiences since the age of 16 years and the other is limited to those experiences in the 12 months prior to interview. This publication focuses only on partner abuse experienced in the last year.

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

Notes for: Things you need to know about this publication

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 be in line with the legal definition of two or more incidents that was introduced in April 2013.

3 . Amount and type of partner abuse experienced

The year ending March 2018 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 4.5% of adults aged 16 to 59 years had experienced partner abuse in the last year (6.3% for women and 2.7% for men. See [Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics – Appendix Tables, Table 3b](#))¹.

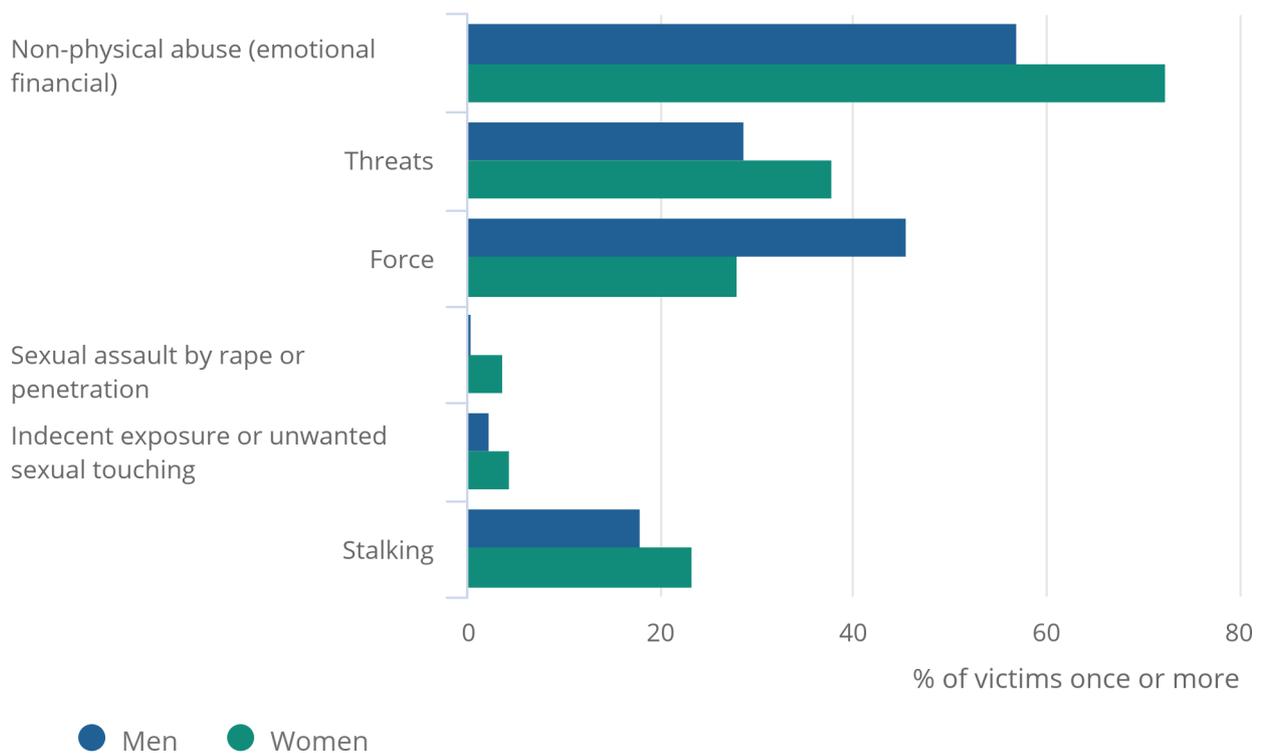
Female victims of partner abuse were more likely than male victims to report experiencing non-physical abuse (emotional, financial) (72.6% for women and 57.0% for men) and sexual assault by rape or penetration including attempts (3.8% and 0.5% respectively). In contrast, male victims of partner abuse reported a higher level of force (45.7%) than female victims (28.0%). There was no significant difference between female and male partner abuse victims in the prevalence of experiences of threats, indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching, or stalking² ([Appendix Table 1](#), Figure 1).

Figure 1: Both men and women were more likely to experience non-physical than physical partner abuse

Type of partner abuse experienced by adults aged 16 to 59 years, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018

Figure 1: Both men and women were more likely to experience non-physical than physical partner abuse

Type of partner abuse experienced by adults aged 16 to 59 years, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018



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

Notes:

1. Respondents are asked to select all types of abuse they have experienced in the last year.
2. Sexual assault by rape or penetration includes attempts.

Victims of partner abuse in the last year were asked to state the sex of the person or people who abused them. Male victims were more likely to report that the perpetrator(s) was female than male (61.0% compared with 1.0%)³. Female victims were more likely to report that the perpetrator was male than female (56.2% compared with 2.2%⁴, [Appendix Table 2](#)). Caution should be taken interpreting these figures because of the relatively large proportion of “don’t know” or “don’t wish to answer” responses for these questions.

Notes for: Amount and type of partner abuse experienced

1. Data on the prevalence and types of partner abuse experienced are from the domestic abuse, sexual victimisation and stalking module of the CSEW. Although data from the domestic abuse, sexual victimisation and stalking module are available from the year ending March 2019 CSEW, all data included in this publication are from the year ending March 2018 to ensure the same victims are discussed throughout. For more up-to-date estimates on the prevalence of partner abuse, see [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#).
2. The definition of stalking applied in the CSEW covers a wider range of actions and behaviours than the legal definition, and includes being followed, being sent unwanted messages that were obscene or threatening and having personal property interfered with. The CSEW asks respondents about typical behaviours associated with stalking rather than the term itself. This ensures that actions and behaviours experienced are picked up by the survey rather than the respondent's interpretation of them.
3. 33.6% of male victims stated they did not know the sex of the perpetrator(s) or did not wish to answer the question, and 4.4% stated that they had been abused by both males and females.
4. 39.4% of female victims stated they did not know the sex of the perpetrator(s) or did not wish to answer the question, and 2.2% stated that they had been abused by both males and females.

4 . Characteristics of victims of partner abuse

Analysis was carried out on some groups of heavily victimised individuals to see if these groups were more likely to suffer from particular types of partner abuse ([Appendix Table 3](#))¹. Because of the small numbers of individuals from these heavily victimised groups being interviewed in any one year, a three-year dataset from the year ending March 2016 to the year ending March 2018 was used to carry out this analysis. The analysis showed:

- women who were separated were more likely to experience threats or stalking than women who were not separated
- women within a single-parent household were more likely to experience threats, force or stalking than women who were within a two-parent household, or a household with no children
- women who were aged 20 to 24 years were more likely to experience force than women in other age groups
- women with a long-term illness or disability were more likely to experience non-physical abuse and indecent exposure or unwanted sexual touching than women without a disability or illness

Notes for: Characteristics of victims of partner abuse

1. Data on the characteristics of partner abuse victims are from the domestic abuse, sexual victimisation and stalking modules of the year ending March 2016 to the year ending 2018 CSEW. For data on the characteristics of partner abuse victims and victims of other types of domestic abuse from the year ending March 2019 CSEW, see [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#).

5 . Context of partner abuse

Alcohol and drug consumption at the time of incidents

Victims of partner abuse in the last year were asked whether they thought the offender (or offenders) was under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs at the time of the incident. In addition, they were asked whether they (the victim) were under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs at the time of the incident. For those who had experienced more than one incident, only the most recent incident was asked about.

Victims were more likely to report that they believed the offender was under the influence of alcohol (16.6%) rather than illicit drugs (10.6%). There were no statistically significant differences between the proportions of female and male victims perceiving the offender to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs ([Appendix Table 4](#)).

Victims were more likely to report that the offender was under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs than they themselves. However, 8.1% of victims reported that they were under the influence of alcohol and 1.7% reported that they were under the influence of illicit drugs the last time they suffered abuse. There was no statistically significant difference between male and female victims with regards to reporting whether they were under the influence of alcohol or under the influence of illicit drugs.

Caution should be taken interpreting these figures because of the relatively large proportion of “don’t know” or “don’t want to answer” responses for some of these questions. This was particularly the case for the question on whether the offender or the respondent was under the influence of alcohol (21.0% and 14.5% respectively).

Partner abuse victims leaving shared accommodation

Victims of partner abuse in the last year were asked if they shared accommodation with their abusive partner, whether they left that shared accommodation, and other information about the shared accommodation. If the victim had more than one abusive partner, these questions were asked of the most recent abusive partner.

Around one-fifth (21.4%) of partner abuse victims that reported abuse in the last year stated that they currently shared, or had previously shared, accommodation with their abusive partner. Of these victims, 34.4% reported leaving the accommodation because of the abuse, even if it was for only one night ([Appendix Table 6](#)).

Reasons mentioned most frequently for not leaving the shared accommodation were “love/feelings for partner” (47.2%), “never considered leaving” (37.1%) and “presence of children” (36.7%) ([Appendix Table 7](#)).

Presence of children in partner abuse victimisations

Victims of partner abuse in the last year who lived in households with at least one child under the age of 16 years were asked if any children in the household saw or heard what happened during the most recent partner abuse victimisation. In 40.9% of cases of partner abuse there was at least one child under the age of 16 years living in the household. Where children were present in the household, in 20.5% of cases the children saw or heard what happened, in 64.9% of cases the respondent stated that the children did not see or hear what happened, and in 14.6% of cases the respondent didn’t know whether the children saw or heard what happened or didn’t wish to answer ([Appendix Table 8](#)).

6 . Effects of partner abuse on the victim

Victims of partner abuse in the last year were asked questions on physical injury and other, non-physical effects experienced as a result of the abuse. These questions were asked of any abuse experienced in the 12 months prior to interview.

The majority of partner abuse victims (74.5%) did not sustain a physical injury as a result of the abuse, and for those that did sustain an injury, these were often relatively minor injuries ([Appendix Table 9](#)). This is in the context that over half of partner abuse victims (67.8%) reported experiencing non-physical abuse ([Appendix Table 1](#)).

One-quarter of partner abuse victims (25.5%) reported that they sustained some sort of physical injury. The most common types of injuries sustained were minor bruising or black eye (18.0%) and scratches (11.3%). There was no significant difference between the prevalence of any physical injury overall for male and female victims (31.8% and 22.7% respectively) ([Appendix table 9](#)).

Victims were presented with a list of other non-physical effects¹ and were asked if they had sustained any of these as a result of the abuse. There was no significant difference between the prevalence of non-physical effects overall for male and female victims (47.5% and 55.8% respectively) ([Appendix Table 9](#)).

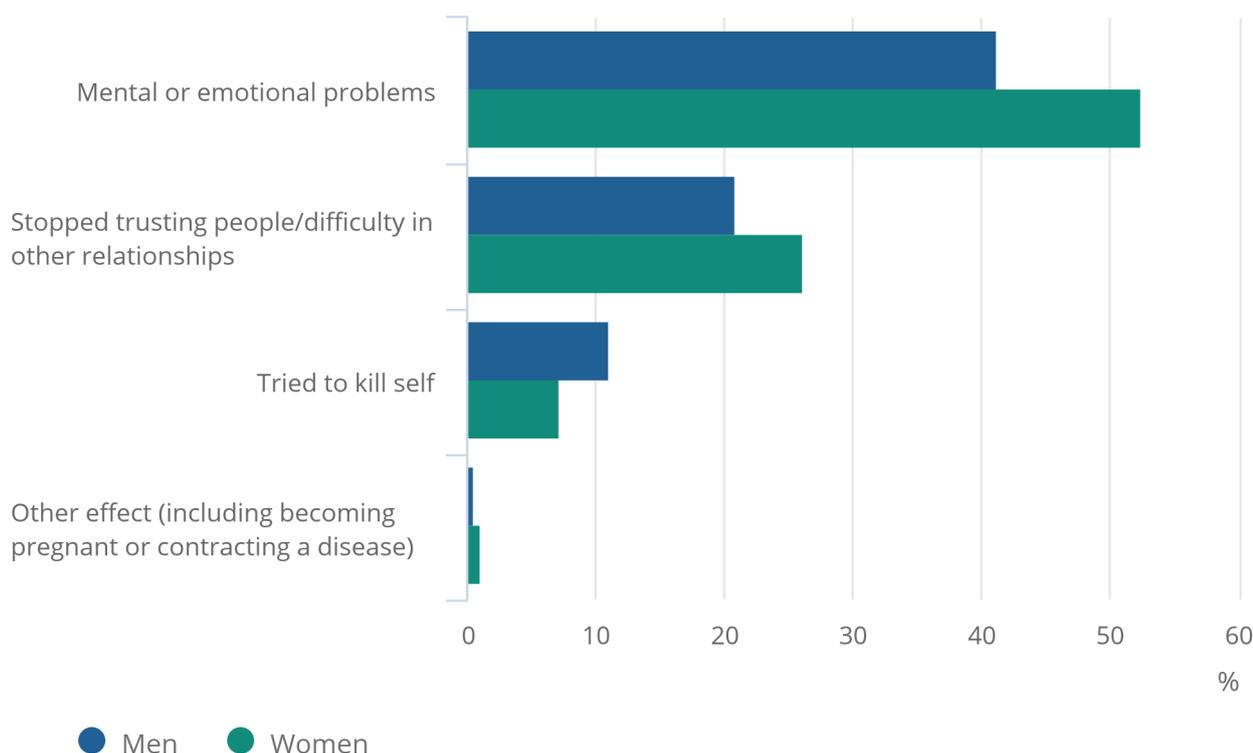
For both male and female victims, the category most likely to be reported was “mental or emotional problems” (41.2% of male victims and 52.4% of female victims) followed by “stopped trusting people or difficulty in other relationships” (20.8% of male and 26.1% of female victims, Figure 2).

Figure 2: The most likely non-physical consequence of partner abuse for both men and women was “mental or emotional problems”

Non-physical effects of partner abuse for adults aged 16 to 59 years by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018

Figure 2: The most likely non-physical consequence of partner abuse for both men and women was “mental or emotional problems”

Non-physical effects of partner abuse for adults aged 16 to 59 years by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2018



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

Partner abuse victims who had sustained a physical injury or had experienced other effects as a result of the abuse were also asked if they had received medical attention. Around one-third (33.1%) of partner abuse victims who had experienced any physical injury or other effects received some sort of medical attention ([Appendix Table 10](#)).

Victims who had received medical attention were also asked where they received it; with the majority (83.1%) doing so at a GP or doctor’s surgery, 36.4% at a specialist mental health or psychiatric service² and 12.2% had gone to a hospital’s Accident and Emergency department ([Appendix Table 10](#)).

Additional analysis was carried out on victims who received medical attention. It was found that of those victims who received medical attention, 73.6% were female and 26.4% were male. Looking at the type of effects felt by those who received medical attention, 42.0% experienced both a physical injury and other effect, 56.8% experienced only non-physical effects and 1.2% experienced only a physical injury ([Appendix Table 11](#)).

Notes for: Effects of partner abuse on the victim

1. Such as “mental or emotional problems” or “stopped trusting people/difficulty in other relationships”.
2. Figures do not add to 100 as respondents can give more than one answer.

7 . Sources of support sought by victims of partner abuse

Victims of partner abuse in the last year were asked who they had spoken to about the abuse they had experienced. For the purpose of this analysis these have been split into three types of support: someone known personally to them (for example, a friend or relative), someone in a professional organisation (for example, police, health professionals or a local council department) and someone in another support organisation (for example, Victim Support or a helpline).

The majority (72.4%) of victims told someone about the partner abuse that they suffered, with women (81.3%) being more likely to tell someone than men (50.8%). Both female and male victims were most likely to tell someone they knew personally about the abuse (73.5% and 43.7% respectively) with victims most commonly telling a friend or neighbour (53.3% of women and 31.6% of men), followed by telling a family member or relative (46.2% women and 25.3% men) ([Appendix Table 12](#)).

Just under one-third (31.2%) of all victims of partner abuse aged 16 to 59 years told someone in an official position about the abuse. There was no significant difference in those who told other support professionals or organisations between women and men (34.2% and 24.1% respectively). Female victims were more likely than male victims to tell Victim Support (10.8% compared with 2.5%) or a specialist support service (7.3% compared with 1.2%) ([Appendix Table 12](#)).

For further insight on the services available to victims of domestic abuse see [Domestic abuse victim services, England and Wales: November 2020](#).

8 . Reporting partner abuse to the police

Victims of partner abuse in the last year were asked questions surrounding issues on reporting the abuse to the police.

For victims of partner abuse, 17.3% had reported the abuse to the police ([Appendix Table 13](#)). There was no significant difference in the total proportion of victims who told the police about the partner abuse they experienced in the year ending March 2018 compared with the year ending March 2015¹. However, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of female victims reporting to the police between the year ending March 2015 and the year ending March 2018 (Figure 3).

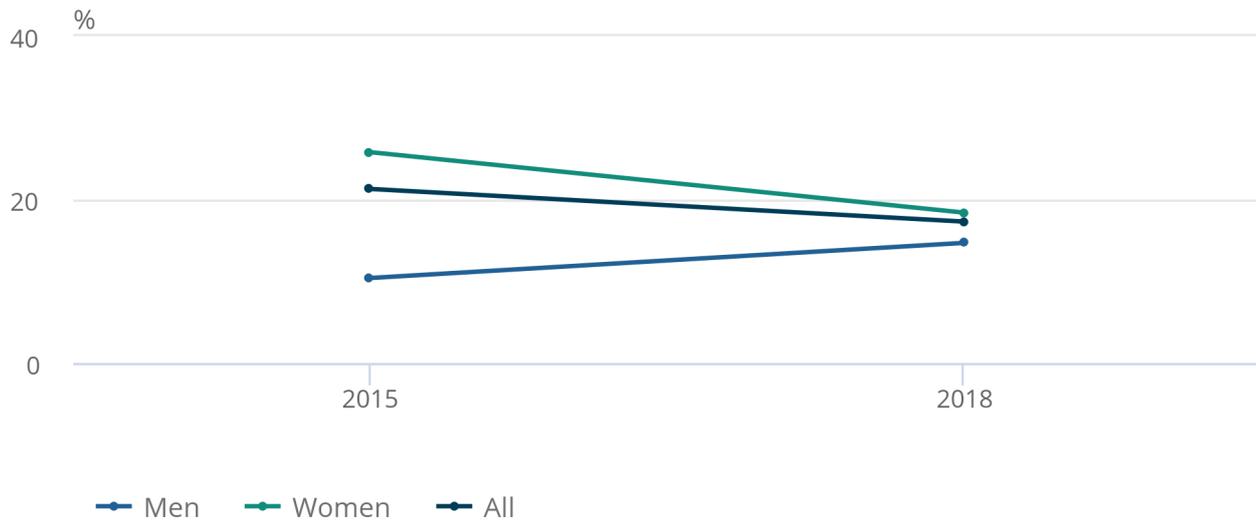
For those that did not report the abuse, the most common reasons given were: the abuse was too trivial or not worth reporting (45.5%), it was a private, family matter and not the business of the police (39.5%), and the victim didn't think the police could help (34.2%) ([Appendix Table 13](#)).

Figure 3: There was a significant decrease in the percentage of female victims reporting partner abuse to the police between 2015 and 2018

Percentage of victims aged 16 to 59 years who reported the partner abuse experienced in the last 12 months to the police by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2015 and year ending March 2018

Figure 3: There was a significant decrease in the percentage of female victims reporting partner abuse to the police between 2015 and 2018

Percentage of victims aged 16 to 59 years who reported the partner abuse experienced in the last 12 months to the police by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2015 and year ending March 2018



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

Notes:

1. Due to question rotation, data are not available for every year.
2. The increase in the proportion of male victims reporting partner abuse to the police is not statistically significant.

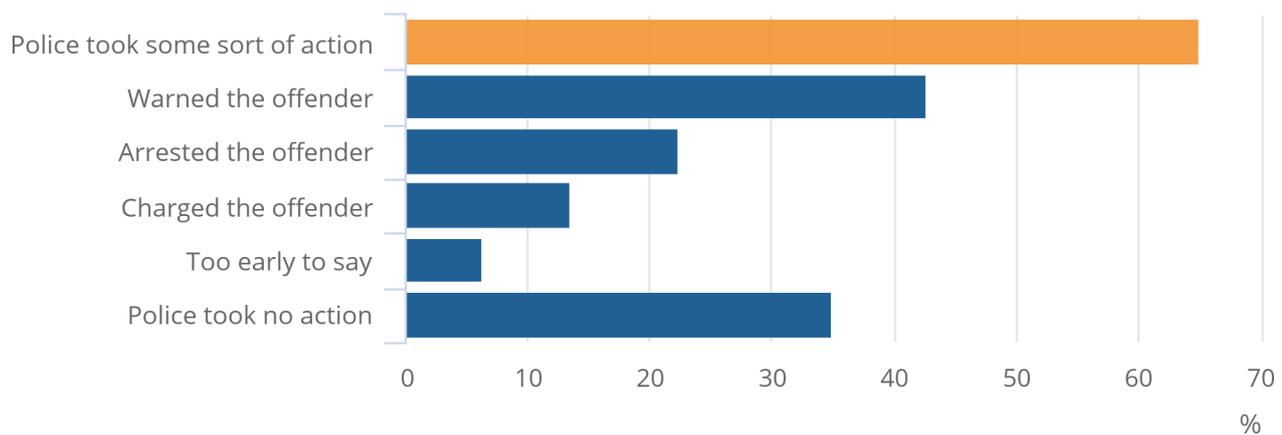
In incidents where the police came to know about the abuse, respondents were asked what actions were taken by the police ([Appendix Table 14](#)). The police took some sort of action in 65.0% of cases. The most common action taken by the police was to warn the offender (42.6%) or arrest the offender (22.3%). In 13.4% of cases the offender was charged (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The police took action in 65.0% of reported cases of partner abuse

Action taken by the police in reported partner abuse cases for adults aged 16 to 59 years, England and Wales, year ending March 2018

Figure 4: The police took action in 65.0% of reported cases of partner abuse

Action taken by the police in reported partner abuse cases for adults aged 16 to 59 years, England and Wales, year ending March 2018



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

Victims who told the police about the partner abuse they experienced were asked how satisfied they were with the outcome, whether they felt safer as a result of the outcome and how helpful they found the police. Over half (57.9%) were either very satisfied (25.2%) or fairly satisfied (32.7%) with their experience with the police and Crown Prosecution Service. Just over one-third (38.3%) felt safer as a result of the action, while one-quarter felt less safe (26.6%) ([Appendix Table 15](#)).

Around half (53.0%) found the police either very helpful (28.4%) or fairly helpful (24.6%). While the rest of respondents found them either slightly helpful (22.8%) or not at all helpful (24.2%) ([Appendix Table 15](#)).

Notes for: Reporting partner abuse to the police

1. There was also no significant difference in the proportion of male victims who told the police about the partner abuse they experienced in the year ending March 2018 compared with the year ending March 2015.

9 . More about domestic abuse

Other commentary discussing domestic abuse in England and Wales, and quality and methodology information, can be found in the [Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview](#).

10 . Related links

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

Bulletin | 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 victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

Article | 25 November 2020

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

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

Article | 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.