



domestic
abuse
commissioner



Overview of child victims of domestic abuse

Offices of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and
the Children's Commissioner

Background – why now?

- **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** defined children as victims in their own right for the first time.
- Lack of awareness and clarity as to **what this legislative change means in practice.**
- The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel asked how local partnerships were responding to the legislative change to recognise children as victims. Some partnerships reported they could not answer the question because they were **waiting for further national guidance**, and others reporting they had **always considered children to be direct victims of domestic abuse**, and that this shaped their whole response.
- **Acute lack of specialist support services** available to children subject to domestic abuse. DAC mapping – 358 organisations said they provided support for CYP experiencing domestic abuse. 85% of those said they provided services for CYP experiencing abuse in the family home.
- However, just **29% of survivors** who wanted support for their children were able to access it. This varied from 48% in the North East of England to 18% in the South West.

Prevalence of children living with domestic abuse

There are no official statistics on children affected by domestic abuse although it is regularly reported as **1 in 5** of all children (Radford, 2011).

14% mothers within **Growing Up in Scotland** cohort survey report domestic abuse within first six years of child's life (Skafida et al, 2020).

Can extrapolate that for entire UK:

700k children under 7 years or
1.5 million including siblings.

800k

children live in households where the adult had experienced domestic abuse within the last year according to **Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey** (Chowdry, 2018)

36% of adults witnessed domestic violence or abuse before the age of 16 **CSEW** March 2019

NSPCC Prevalence of children experiencing domestic abuse in UK (Radford et al, 2011).

	Under 11 years	11 to 17 years
Past year exposure to domestic violence	3.2%	2.5%
Lifetime exposure to domestic violence	12.0%	17.5%
Severe violence (parent kicked, choked or beaten up by other parent)	3.5%	4.1%

Impact of domestic abuse during childhood

Babies and toddlers

Highest risk of injury disability or death.

Delayed language and toilet training.

Sleep disturbance.

Trauma symptoms.

Anxiety

Tantrums

Attachment problems

School aged children

More internalising and externalising behaviours and lower pro social behaviours.

Relationship with non-abusive parent undermined.

Enforced contact with abusive parent.

Lower school attainment.

Adolescents

Anti-social behaviour anger and aggression.

Withdrawal from peers.

Higher risk of CAPVA.

Fear, sadness, loneliness, suicidal feelings.

Dislocation: loss of home, pet, possessions and relationships.

Adulthood

Mental health problems.

Physical health problems.

Problems with emotional regulation.

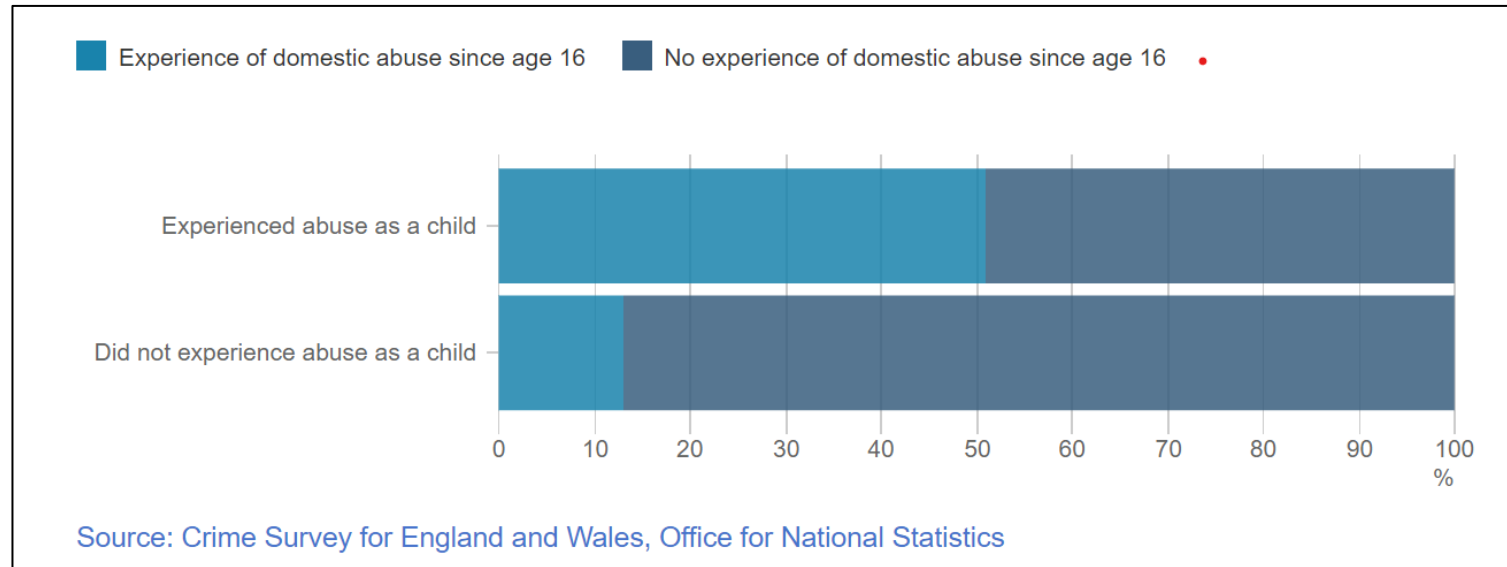
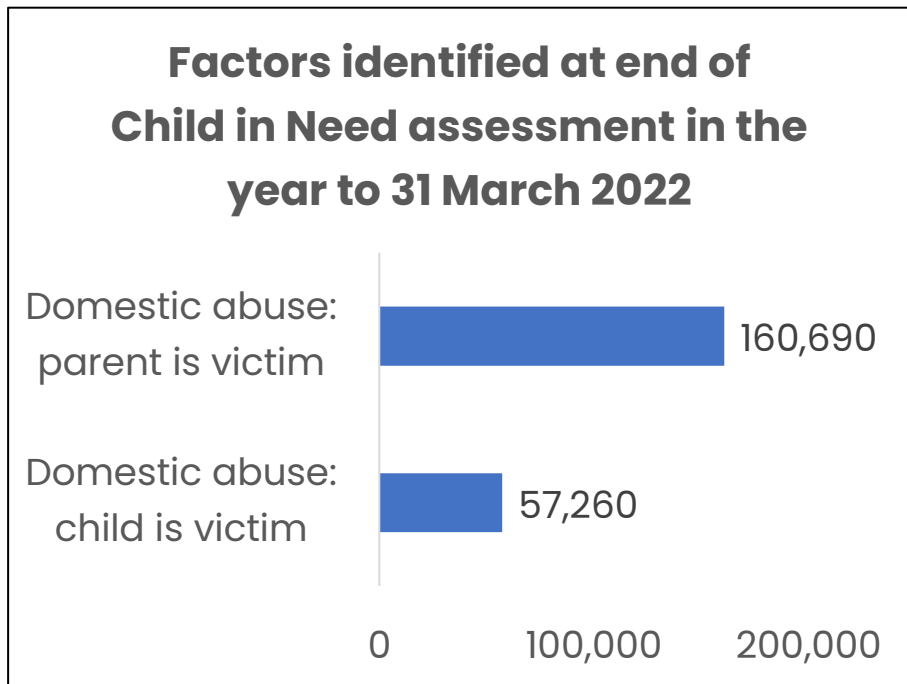
Greater risk of being a perpetrator or victim of IPV within own relationships.

Internalising behaviours: depressive disorders, anxiety, somatic complaints.

Externalising behaviours: aggression and hyperactivity. **Pro social behaviours:** altruism, reciprocity.

Co-occurrence domestic abuse during childhood with other types of child abuse

Systematic review found that “children and adolescents living with domestic violence are at increased risk of experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse, of developing emotional and behavioural problems and of increased exposure to the presence of other adversities in their lives” (Holt et al 2008)

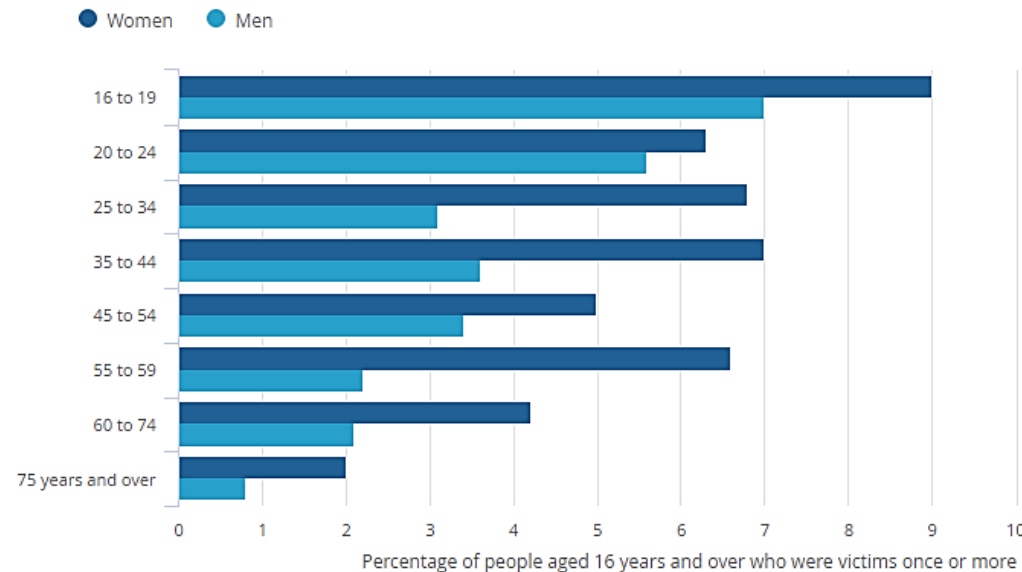


Around half of adults (52%) who experienced abuse before the age of 16 years also experienced domestic abuse later in life; this compares with the 13% of adults who experienced domestic abuse later in life but did not experience abuse before the age of 16 years.

Children also experience abuse in their own relationships

Figure 4: A higher percentage of people aged 16 to 19 years were victims of domestic abuse in the last year than those aged 45 to 54 years and 60 years and over

Prevalence of domestic abuse in the last year for people aged 16 years and over by age and sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the Office for National Statistics (November 2023)

Children also experience abuse in their own relationships

*“It sounds extreme,
but I was kind of
brainwashed by him.”*

– Girl (experienced abuse
aged 14)

*“It’s more of a **coercion**...
there’s a kind of backdrop of
threat, and fear.”*

– Girl (experienced abuse aged 13)

*“He was very much
puppeteering me
the whole time...I
should not have been
exposed to, like, kink
behaviour at such a
young age.”*

– Girl (experienced abuse
aged 16)

*“I was in a bad place
because it was soon
after my dad passed
away ...and he was
**feeding me these
things** that that
made me believe
that...[he loved me].”*

– Girl (experienced abuse
aged 14)

Experiences of abusive relationships in childhood can have lasting, and even lifelong impacts

- Struggling to attend and engage with school
- Poor mental health
- Low-self-esteem
- Harmful coping mechanisms
- Breakdown in relationships with family and friends
- Homelessness
- Increased risk of harmful relationships in the future

*“To begin with you’re in survival mode and then it, then it kind of catches up with you... I honestly felt like I would never feel better... **I wanted to kill myself.**”*

– Girl (experienced abuse aged 14)

*“I’m kind of, like, **unable to focus on things that I should be focused on now.** For example, like my school... I don’t really focus on it.”* – Girl (experienced abuse aged 14)

*“I had a couple of shitty boyfriends... I thought that was sort of normal because I think subconsciously my brain was like, oh [...] **this is how you deserve to be treated.**”*

-Girl (experienced abuse aged 10)

Very little support is in place for child victims of abuse in their own relationship

- **Community-based services**
- **Advocacy** (such as support from Independent Domestic Violence Advisers)
- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (**Marac**)
- **Accommodation-based support**

New statistics gathered from all police forces by the Children's Commissioner - published this week - show that:

For child victims of domestic abuse, the average referral rate to Idvas across the 4 forces who recorded any data was **just 8%**, ranging from 1% in the police force area with the lowest referral rate to 15% in the police force area with the highest referral rate.

An estimated **7,000 incidents involving teenage victims aged 16 and 17** who had experienced abuse in their own intimate relationships lead to *no recorded referral* to specialist advocacy support.

Principles for commissioning support for child victims

- 1. Give every child somewhere safe to call home – and ensure no child is turned away**
- 2. Commission services in a holistic, joined up way**
- 3. Invest in specialism and building trust**
- 4. Listen to the voice of the child**