

# TDI *Explainer*

## What is the extent of sexual offending?

Sexual offending is often in the news, and we might feel it is an ever present danger. In this Explainer, we put sexual offending in perspective by going through some statistics.

### **Remember: there are many different types of sexual offence**

In our Explainer *What is a sex offender?* we said there were many different types of sexual offence—contact offences, non-contact offences, abuses of trust—and many different types of victims—children, vulnerable adults, non-vulnerable adults. Offending can happen within existing relationships or, more rarely, between strangers.

This means that there are different levels of prevalence and risk—to give a simple example, most child abuse happens in the home, so large numbers of convicted paedophiles do not translate into a large risk of attacks on children by strangers.

In this Explainer, we'll try to move from the broad to some of the specifics. The point is not to be alarming but, hopefully, the opposite, placing offending in some sort of context.

### **Offenders in the community**

From Ministry of Justice figures, there were 62,435 offenders subject to Notification Requirements ("registered sex offenders") for sexual offences in England and Wales in March 2020. This amounts to about 1.2 in every 1,000 people. In Scotland in March 2021, there were 5,830 and in Northern Ireland there were 1,639 in December 2020.

These dates are different because figures are collected separately in each nation, meaning the numbers are not fully comparable.



## Convicted offenders don't tell the whole story though...

One study estimated that up to 96% of sexual offences are committed by those without convictions.\*

In the UK, the Office for National Statistics estimated in 2018\*\* that only around 20% of victims of sexual assault (just one type of sexual offence) report the matter to the Police. Most of those reports will not end up in a court case, and many court cases will not end in a conviction.

\*Sandler, Freemant and Socia (2008) Public Policy and Law 14 (4):284-302.

\*\*ONS (2018) Sexual offending: victimisation and the path through the criminal justice system

## ...so what about victim experience?

The same ONS study found that around 2.1% of the adult population in England and Wales reported to them that they had experienced sexual assault in the year to March 2018. This represents 700,00 adults.

This is complicated by the fact that men are known to under report offences, this figure doesn't include non-contact offences such as exhibitionism ('flashing'), and doesn't include child victims.

According to the NSPCC\* in the year to March 2017, there were 43,522 reported offences against children in England and Wales, some of which were historical.

\*NSPCC (2018) How safe are our children?

## But not all situations are equally dangerous

Another ONS study\* estimated that around 45% of rapes or assaults on women were committed by a partner or ex-partner, and only 12% by a total stranger. The NSPCC in 2019\*\* estimated that 90% of child victims of sexual assault were abused by someone they knew.

\*ONS (2018) Sexual offences in England and Wales: year ending March 2017

\*\*NSPCC (2019) Statistics briefing: child sexual abuse

## Further questions you might want to think about:

What about offences we don't know about because they aren't reported? How does offence type affect prevalence? How do victims differ?



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TDI is a national charity which works to increase public protection by finding practical and creative solutions to the problem of sexual offending.

For over 25 years we have been at the forefront of the field, providing training, research, consultancy and public protection schemes to individuals and organisations across society.

If you've found this explainer useful, you may be interested in learning more through one of our training programmes. Contact us at [info@tdi.org.uk](mailto:info@tdi.org.uk) to find out more.