

CRIME AND JUSTICE

Domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland, 2021-22

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This bulletin presents statistics on domestic abuse, based on details of incidents and crimes recorded by Police Scotland in 2021-22. Domestic abuse recorded by the police does not reveal the incidence of all domestic abuse committed in Scotland, as not all incidents are reported to the police. These figures are used to inform policy and, in conjunction with findings on partner abuse from the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (see [Chapter 3](#)), are used to assess the extent and nature of domestic abuse in Scotland.

The definition of domestic abuse used by Police Scotland¹ is:

‘Any form of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse which might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship. The relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse can be committed in the home or elsewhere including online’.

¹ Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) have a shared definition of domestic abuse available on the [Police Scotland website](#).

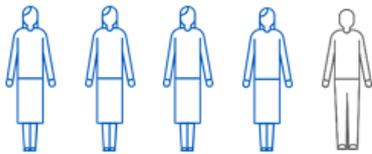
Key points

- The police recorded 64,807 incidents of domestic abuse in 2021-22, a decrease of 1% compared to the previous year. This is the first year this figure has shown a decrease since 2015-16.
- In 2021-22, 39% of incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland included the recording of at least one crime or offence.
- The type of crime or offence that was most frequently recorded as part of a domestic abuse incident in 2021-22 was Common assault, accounting for 32% of all crimes and offences recorded. This was followed by Threatening and abusive behaviour accounting for 21% of crimes and offences.
- Following its enactment on the 1 April 2019, crimes recorded under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 accounted for 4% of crimes and offences recorded as part of a domestic abuse incident in 2021-22.
- There were 118 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland per 10,000 population in 2021-22. At a local authority level, Dundee City (172), West Dunbartonshire (161) and Glasgow City (147) recorded the highest incident rates per 10,000 population.
- Where gender information was recorded, around four-in-five (81%) incidents of domestic abuse in 2021-22 involved a female victim and a male suspected perpetrator. This increased slightly from 80% in 2020-21.
- In 2021-22, 15% of domestic abuse incidents involved a male victim and a female suspected perpetrator (where gender information was recorded). This decreased slightly from 16% in 2020-21.
- In 2021-22, the 31 to 35 years old age group had the highest incident rate for both victims (261 incidents recorded per 10,000 population) and suspected perpetrators (243 incidents recorded per 10,000 population).
- A third of incidents (33%) occurred at the weekend in 2021-22. This is an increase from 31% in 2020-21.
- In 2021-22, just under nine-in-ten (89%) of all domestic abuse incidents occurred in a home or dwelling.

DOMESTIC ABUSE RECORDED BY THE POLICE IN SCOTLAND, 2021-22



WHO were the victims?



In 2021-22, more than **4 out of 5** (83%) victims of domestic abuse were female

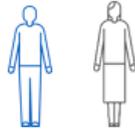
64,807

incidents of domestic abuse were recorded by the police in 2021-22

WHAT was the gender of the victims & suspected perpetrators?



81% of incidents involved a female victim & a male suspected perpetrator



15% of incidents involved a male victim & a female suspected perpetrator

In the remaining **4%** of cases, victim & suspected perpetrators were the same gender



■ Incident rates per 10,000 population above the Scottish average

WHERE did the incidents occur?

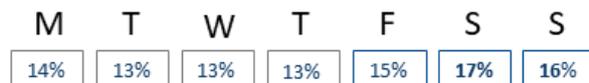


89% of domestic abuse incidents occurred in a home or dwelling

WHEN did the incidents occur?



33% of domestic abuse incidents occurred at the weekend.



1. Introduction

This statistical bulletin provides information on **domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police in 2021-22** (from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022).

The definition of domestic abuse used by Police Scotland is²:

‘Any form of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse which might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship. The relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse can be committed in the home or elsewhere including online’.

Police Scotland is responsible for operational policing in Scotland and is held to account by the Scottish Police Authority. [The Police and Fire Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2012](#) changed the policing landscape in Scotland, replacing the previous eight police forces, the Scottish Police Services Authority and the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency from 1 April 2013.

The creation of Police Scotland altered the way in which domestic abuse data was collected. Prior to 1 April 2013, each legacy force had a bespoke system to collect the data required. Between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 a new system – iVPD (interim Vulnerable Persons Database) was rolled out to the then 14 police divisions in Scotland. From 1 April 2014 onwards, all domestic abuse data has been collected through the iVPD.

Due to the changes in data collection, figures throughout the bulletin are presented with clear breaks in the time series between 2013-14 and 2014-15. As such, some caution should be exercised in interpreting the statistics on the number of incidents recorded across years.

The data in this bulletin covers the 13 police divisions in Scotland (across all 32 local authorities). Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire & Moray police divisions merged together to form the North East police division in January 2016.

Information on crimes and offences³ recorded as part of a domestic abuse incident has been split into the eight crime and offence groupings used by the [Recorded Crime National Statistics](#). Further breakdowns of crime and offence groupings are also shown⁴ where relevant.

This annual ‘Domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland’ Official Statistics bulletin forms part of a series of bulletins on the criminal justice system, which can be found on the [Scottish Government website](#).

² Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) have a shared definition of domestic abuse available on the [Police Scotland website](#).

³ [Section 5.3](#) in Annex 1 provides definitions of ‘crime’ and ‘offence’.

⁴ [Section 5.4](#) in Annex 1 provides a full list of crimes and offences groupings.

All tables referred to below are available in the ['Supporting Documents' Excel workbook](#) for this bulletin. The workbook includes an 'Introduction' sheet, with information on how to navigate the tables, alongside a 'Notes' sheet, with relevant details to assist users when reading and interpreting results.

1.1. What are these statistics used for?

These statistics inform the Scottish Government's [Vision for Justice in Scotland](#). This was published in February 2022 and sets out a transformative vision for the whole justice system in Scotland. The 2022 strategy outlines how the Scottish Government will transform the justice system, through recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

These statistics are also used by a range of stakeholders to monitor trends, for policy research and development, and for social research purposes. Further information on users and uses of the statistics is available in [Section 4.2](#) of this bulletin.

1.2. How does the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 impact these statistics?

This bulletin covers the third year of operation for the [Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#). The Act, which came into force on 1 April 2019, created a new offence for circumstances where a person engages in a course of behaviour⁵ which is abusive towards their partner or ex-partner.

The Act did not alter the way in which statistics on the volume of domestic abuse incidents reported to the police are collected and produced. As such its impact on this data is likely to be limited, albeit the associated awareness campaign to raise public understanding of domestic abuse, and to encourage victims to seek support may have had a role in the increased number of incidents seen during the two years following the introduction of the act. [Police Recorded Crime National Statistics](#) remain the primary source for users interested in the number of crimes recorded under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018.

The Act had some impact on statistics showing the volume and type of crimes and offences recorded as part of a domestic abuse incident. Prior to the 1 April 2019, any criminal act which formed part of a domestic abuse incident (for example a common assault) was included within the statistics under the relevant crime or offence. From the 1 April 2019, where there is evidence that an incident forms part of a course of behaviour, new crimes of Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 will also be recorded (split into whether they had a male or female victim).

In general, existing common law and statutory offences will continue to be recorded where appropriate, in addition to the new crimes. There are some exceptions, including the crimes and offences of Threatening and abusive behaviour and Stalking. These should no longer be recorded when occurring as part of a course of behaviour for domestic abuse, with the new crime of Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 taking precedence.

⁵ A course of behaviour involves behaviour on at least two occasions.

The number of Threatening and abusive behaviour offences recorded as part of a domestic abuse incident have decreased since 2018-19, from 8,577 in 2018-19 to 7,101 in 2021-22. Over the same time the number of Stalking crimes (which sit within the Other crimes of non sexual violence category) fell from 1,057 to 655. However, the change in Threatening and abusive behaviour offences may in part reflect the continuation of a longer term trend, and in general it is difficult to quantify the extent to which the new offence has affected the recording of these cases. This will likely depend on the types of abusive behaviour that occur during a course of behaviour where the new offence may apply, some of which (such as psychological abuse) may not have included the recording of a crime or offence prior to the Act being passed.

Furthermore, in a limited number of cases when the incident occurred before 1 April 2019, offences that can now amount to a crime under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 (e.g. Threatening and abusive behaviour and Stalking) could not yet be considered as part of the Act and would have to be recorded separately. As time progresses since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, these instances are likely to reduce.

Given this, some caution should be exercised when interpreting the statistics on the number of Threatening and abusive behaviour and Stalking crimes recorded before and after 1 April 2019 – due to the changes in the legislative and operational landscape used by police to record these crimes.

This caution should also apply to the data presented on the percentage of domestic abuse incidents that include the recording of at least one crime or offence, albeit this remained relatively stable in the year following passage of the Act. Where relevant, further information on these changes is provided throughout this bulletin.

1.3. What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic had?

The statistics in this bulletin cover incidents of domestic abuse which were recorded between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. The nationwide lockdowns and other measures put in place to limit social contact during the pandemic would have impacted domestic abuse largely in 2020-21, with 2021-22 also likely to be affected, albeit to a lesser extent. The second COVID-19 lockdown started in Scotland on 5 January 2021 and ended on 2 April 2021; therefore a very small proportion (1.2% or 810 incidents) of the 2021-22 incidents occurred during this time.

When reviewing the data in this bulletin for the period that covered the pandemic, some caution is advised before necessarily attributing all changes to COVID-19. Prior to 2021-22, levels of recorded domestic abuse had been growing over the longer term. Although there was a 1% decrease this year, the number of incidents remains higher than in 2019-20. Whilst In 2020-21, the 4% increase in incidents year-on-year is the same as that seen in 2019-20, when the pandemic was not a factor.

More statistics on the impact of COVID-19 on domestic abuse incidents can be found in the [monthly reports on the justice system](#). These reports were introduced to provide users with a summary of the latest impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on

the justice system in Scotland and were published monthly between June 2020 and March 2022. The information presented in these reports was compiled from a range of sources, including Official Statistics, Management Information published by partner bodies and administrative data. [Police Scotland's Management Information](#) provides provisional data on domestic abuse incidents recorded by police. The final position for 2021-22 is presented in this edition of the bulletin.

1.4. How does the new crime groupings affect these statistics?

This bulletin is the first edition to present crime statistics using the new set of crime and offence groups approved by the [Scottish Crime Recording Board](#), following a [public consultation](#) of users. Responses to this consultation were published in March 2022 alongside [a report outlining a package of changes to the production of Scotland's recorded crime statistics](#). The changes include the introduction of a new set of crime and offence groups and categories. The largest change is the transfer of Common assault and Stalking from the Miscellaneous offences group to the Non-sexual crimes of violence group. Within this bulletin these changes do not impact the total number of domestic incidents which included a crime or offence as seen in [Section 2.1](#), instead the changes impact the individual crime and offence totals as seen in [Section 2.2](#). To maintain time series analysis, all data has been back-revised and provided in the ['Supporting Documents' Excel workbook](#). More information on the new crime grouping structure is provided in [Annex 1](#).

2. Domestic abuse incidents in Scotland

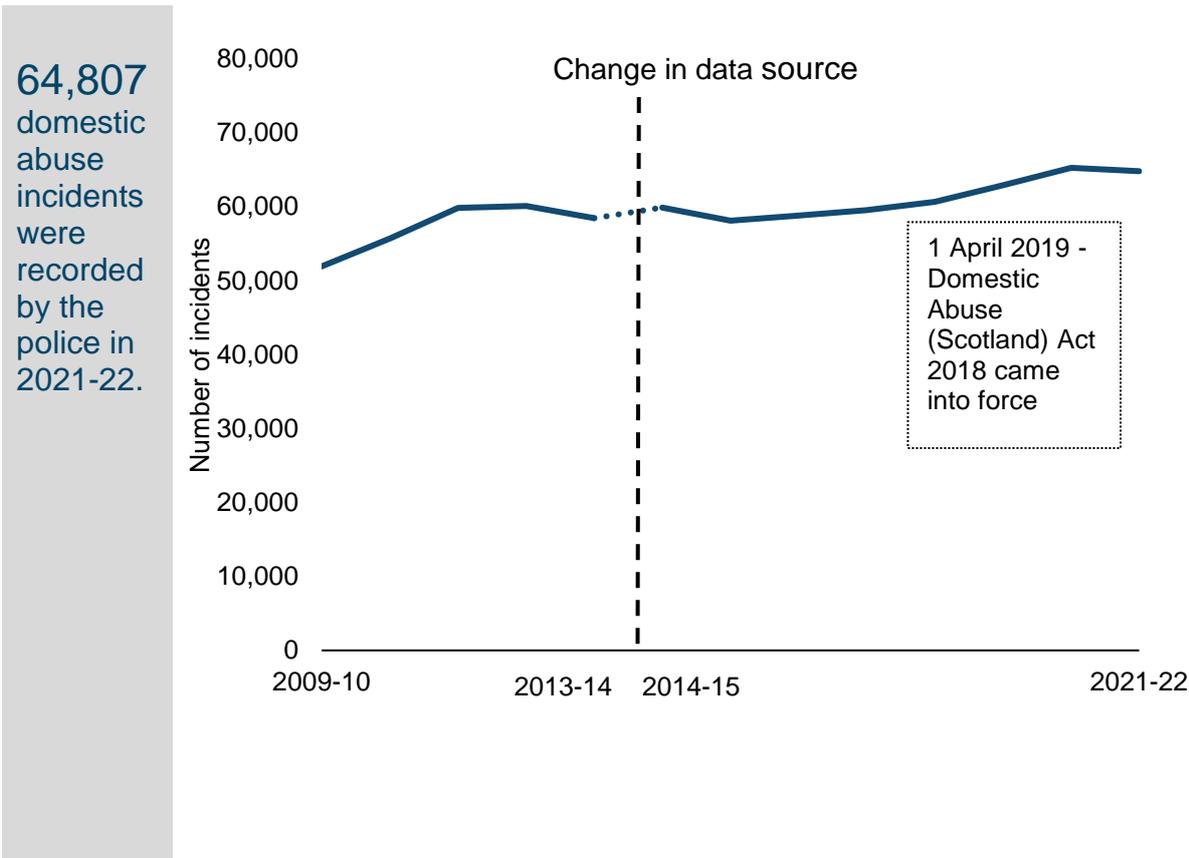
All tables referred to below are available in the ['Supporting Documents' Excel workbook](#) for this bulletin. The workbook includes an 'Introduction' sheet, with information on how to navigate the tables, alongside a 'Notes' sheet, with relevant details to assist users when reading and interpreting results.

2.1. Incidents of domestic abuse

The police recorded 64,807 incidents of domestic abuse in 2021-22, a decrease of 1% compared to the previous year ([Figure 1](#) & Table 1). This is the first year this figure has shown a decrease since 2015-16.

Of the 64,807 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police in 2021-22, 39% (25,226) included the recording of at least one crime or offence⁶, similar to the figure in 2020-21 (at 40%) (Table 1). The remaining 61% (39,581) did not include the recording of a crime or offence. [Section 2.3](#) provides information on incidents which do not include a crime or offence.

Figure 1: Incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police, 2009-10 to 2021-22



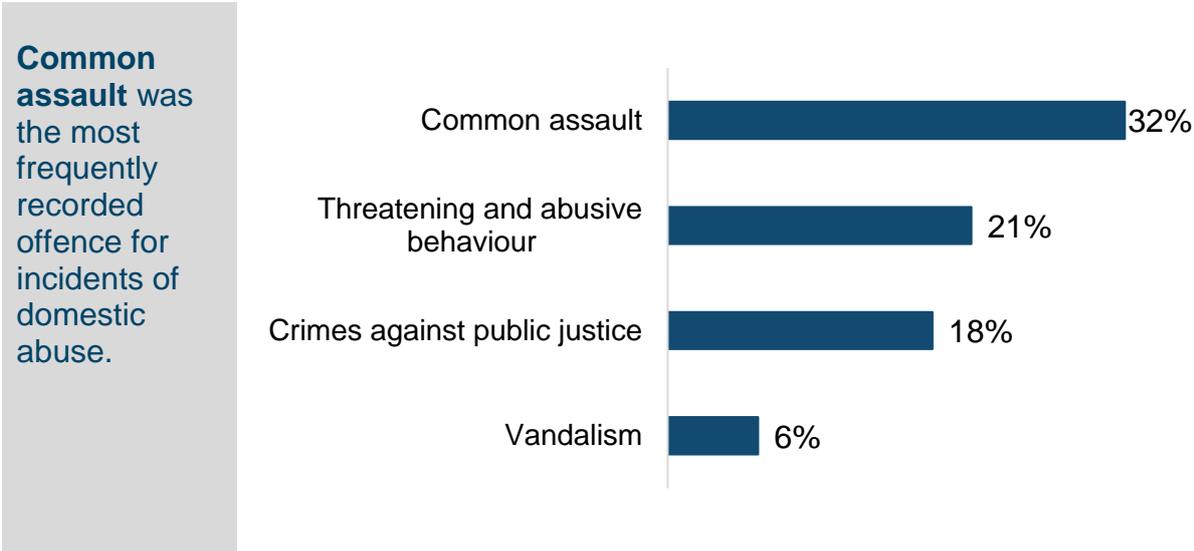
Note: See [Annex 2](#) for information on the change in data source between 2013-14 and 2014-15.

⁶ [Section 5.3](#) in Annex 1 provides definitions of 'crime' and 'offence'.

2.2. Incidents which included a crime or offence

For those domestic abuse incidents that included the recording of at least one crime or offence in 2021-22, the most frequently recorded was Common assault, accounting for 32% of all crimes and offences. This was followed by Threatening and abusive behaviour, which accounted for 21% of all crimes and offences. ([Figure 2](#) & [Table 2](#)).

Figure 2: Most frequently recorded crimes and offences as part of incidents of domestic abuse, 2021-22



Note: An incident can have multiple crimes associated with it.

Following the enactment of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 on 1 April 2019, crimes recorded under the Act accounted for 4% of crimes and offences recorded as part of a domestic abuse incident in 2021-22. This was the same proportion of crimes and offences in 2020-21. These amounted to 1,466 crimes recorded under the Act in 2021-22.

[Section 1.2](#) on statistical impact provides further information on how crimes and offences might have changed due to the introduction of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. Table 16 in the ['Supporting Documents' Excel workbook](#) provides details on the characteristics of these incidents.

2.3. Incidents which did not include a crime or offence

In 2021-22, 61% of domestic abuse incidents within the interim Vulnerable Persons Database (iVPD) did not include the recording of at least one crime or offence. This reflects the definition of domestic abuse used by Police Scotland, which is not restricted to behaviour where criminal conduct has been identified and recorded.

The iVPD itself is not a crime recording system. Instead, it aims to collate disparate pieces of information about incidents into a single file, allowing officers to build a narrative about people who have reported or been involved in an incident with a domestic abuse element.

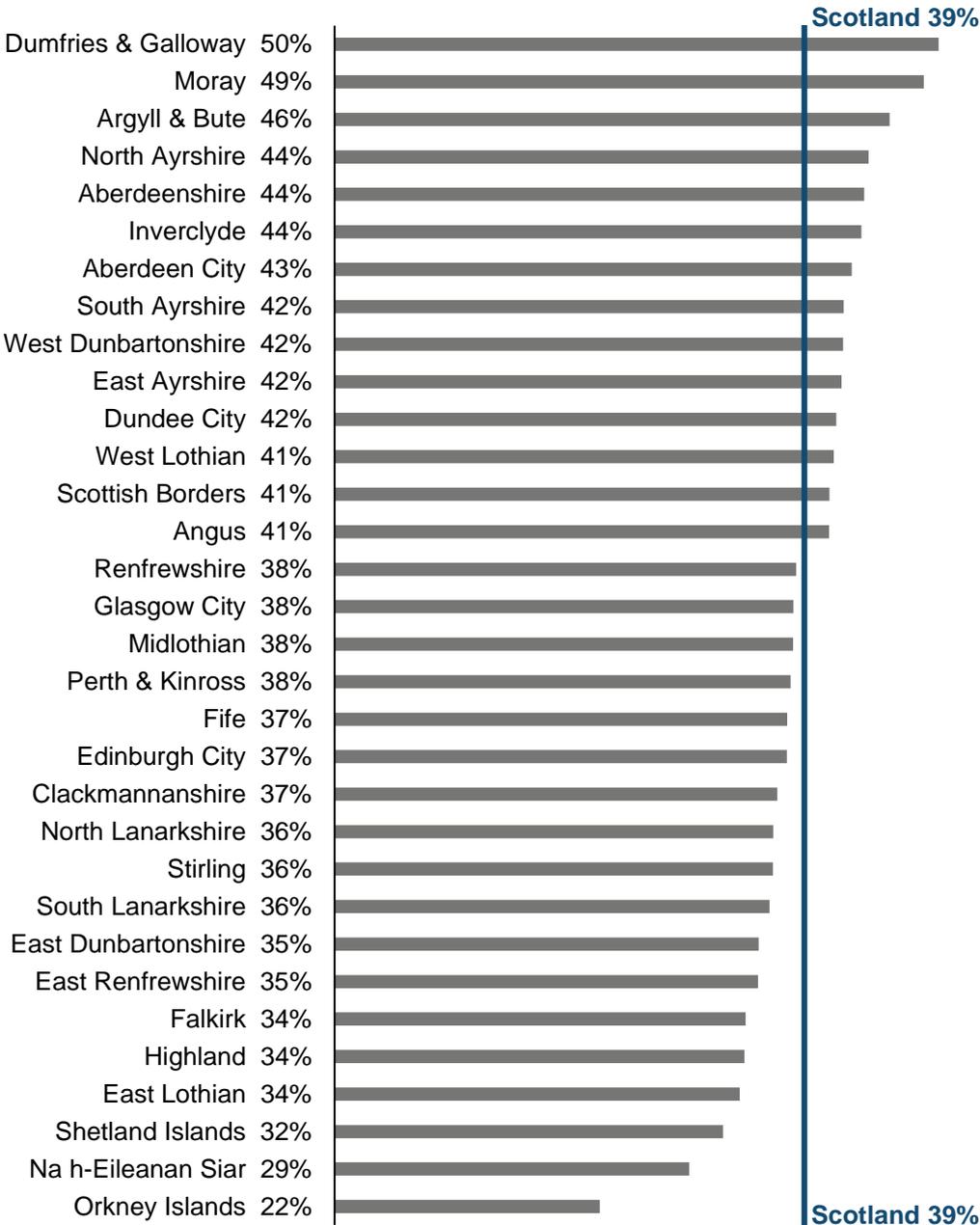
A previous review of a sample of non-criminal domestic abuse incidents found that around half of these were based on some form of argument between partners or ex-partners, which did not have any reference to a physical confrontation or threatening behaviour. Around one-in-five were based on concern about the communication or attempted communication of one partner or ex-partner towards the other (excluding any reference to an argument or a specific crime or offence). The other cases cover a diverse range of situations. Further information on this review is provided in [Section 5.7](#).

2.4. Incidents of domestic abuse by local authority

The number of police recorded domestic abuse incidents varied at the local authority level. Between 2020-21 and 2021-22, around a third (11) of local authorities recorded an increase in domestic abuse incidents, whereas around two-thirds (21) recorded a decrease (Table 3).

In 2021-22, the highest percentages of incidents of domestic abuse that also included the recording of at least one crime or offence were in Dumfries & Galloway (50%) and Moray (49%), whilst the lowest were in Orkney Islands (22%) and Na h-Eileanan Siar (29%) ([Figure 3](#) & Table 4).

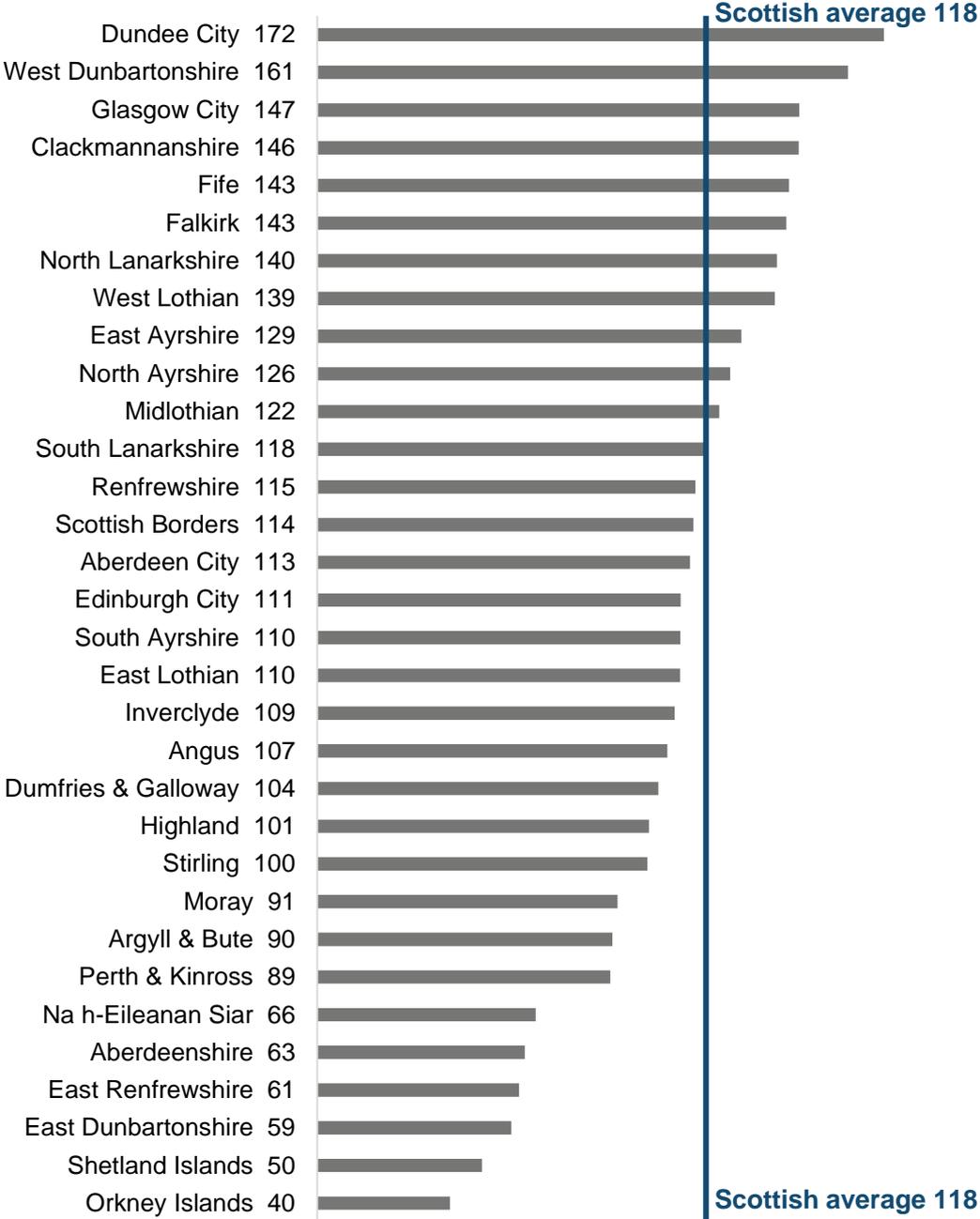
Figure 3: Percentage of incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police which included at least one crime or offence being recorded, by local authority, 2021-22



2.5. Incidents of domestic abuse per 10,000 population

Taking the [population of Scotland](#) as at mid-year 2021, there were 118 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland per 10,000 population in 2021-22. At a local authority level, Dundee City (172), West Dunbartonshire (161) and Glasgow City (147) recorded the highest incident rates per 10,000 population. Orkney Islands (40), Shetland Islands (50) and East Dunbartonshire (59) recorded the lowest rates per 10,000 population. ([Figure 4](#) & Table 5).

Figure 4: Incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police per 10,000 population, by local authority, 2021-22

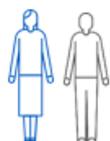


Note: Population estimates are at mid-year 2021 published by the [National Records of Scotland](#).

Characteristics of victim & suspected perpetrator

GENDER

81% of incidents



female victim

&

male suspected perpetrator

15% of incidents



male victim

&

female suspected perpetrator

In the remaining 4% of cases, victim & suspected perpetrator were the same gender

RELATIONSHIP

Half of incidents were between current partners



■ Partner ■ Ex-partner ■ Other

AGE

31-35
year olds

highest rate per 10,000 population for both victims & suspected perpetrators

Note: Current partner is defined here as spouse/civil partner, partner and co-habitee. Ex-partner is defined as ex-spouse/civil partner and ex-partner.

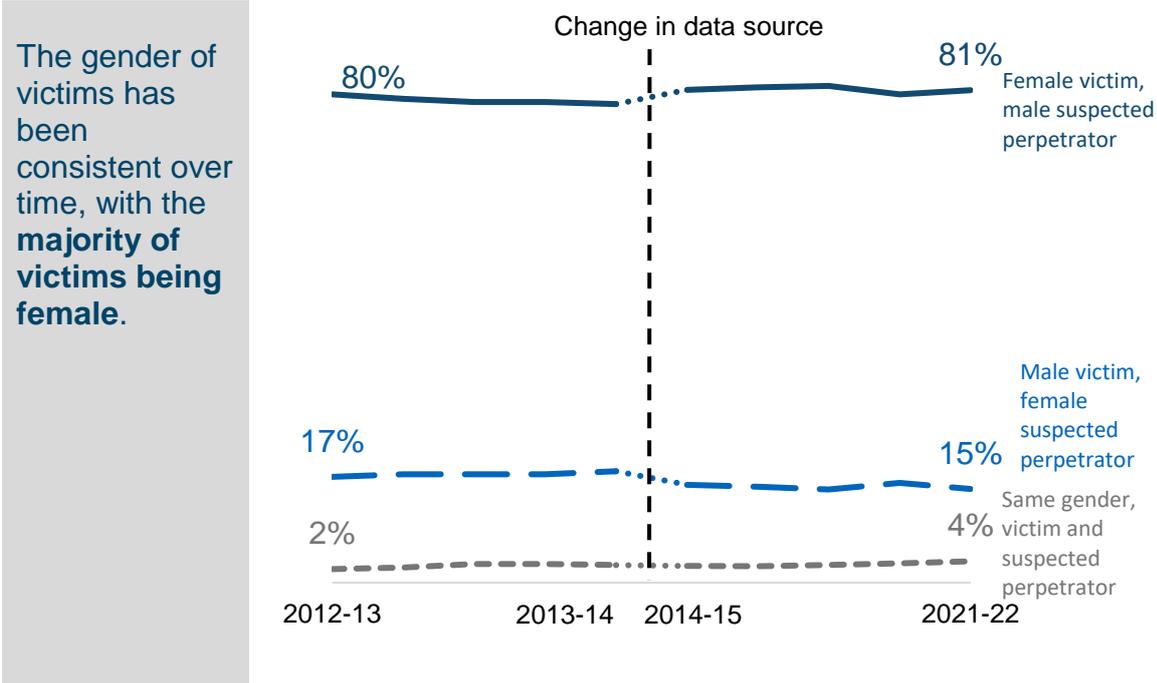
2.6. Gender of victim & suspected perpetrator

Where the victim's gender was known, the clear majority of victims in 2021-22 (83%) were female. Over four-in-five incidents (81%) of domestic abuse in 2021-22 had a female victim and a male suspected perpetrator. This increased slightly from 81% in 2020-21.

Again, where the victim's gender was known, 17% of victims in 2021-22 were male. In 2021-22, 15% of domestic abuse incidents involved a male victim and a female suspected perpetrator. This decreased slightly from 16% in 2020-21.

In the remaining 4% of domestic abuse incidents, the victim and suspected perpetrator were the same gender. This figure has remained stable over several years ([Figure 5](#) & Table 6).

Figure 5: Gender of victim & suspected perpetrator¹, where known, 2012-13 to 2021-22



¹ The figure only displays incidents where gender of victim and suspected perpetrator is known. See [Annex 2](#) for more details on missing data. Note: See [Annex 2](#) for information on the change in data source between 2013-14 and 2014-15.

2.7. Relationship between victim & suspected perpetrator

In 2021-22 half (50%) of domestic abuse incidents, where the relationship⁷ between the victim and suspected perpetrator was known, were between current partners. Just under half (49%) of incidents were between ex-partners. For the remaining 1% of incidents, the relationship was categorised as ‘Other’ (Table 7).

It should be noted that the proportion of incidents where the relationship between the victim and suspected perpetrator was unknown has increased in recent years (to 18% by 2021-22). This is due to changes in recording practice in Police Scotland, for which further information is available in Section 5.7

2.8. Age of victim & suspected perpetrator

In 2021-22, the 31 to 35 year old age group had the highest rate per 10,000 population for victims (261 incidents recorded per 10,000 population) (Table 8).

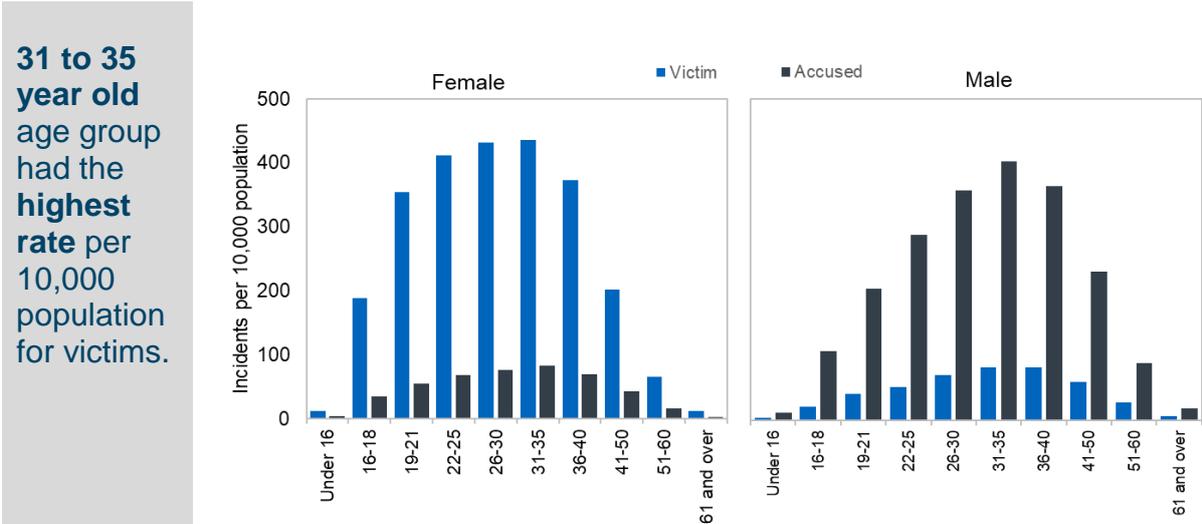
Female victims aged 31 to 35 had the highest rate (436) of incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police per 10,000 population. 36 to 40 was the age group with the highest rate of incidents of domestic abuse recorded per 10,000 population for male victims (83) ([Figure 7](#) & Table 8).

⁷ Current partner is defined here as spouse/civil partner, partner and co-habitee. Ex-partner is defined as ex-spouse/civil partner and ex-partner.

In 2021-22, the 31 to 35 years old age group also had the highest incident rate per 10,000 population for suspected perpetrators (243 incidents recorded per 10,000 population) (Table 9).

The 31 to 35 year old age group had the highest rate of domestic abuse among both male suspected perpetrators (403 incidents recorded per 10,000 population) and female suspected perpetrators (83 incidents recorded per 10,000 population) (Figure 6 & Table 9).

Figure 6: Gender and age of victim & suspected perpetrator¹, where known, 2021-22



¹ The figure only displays incidents where gender of victim and suspected perpetrator is known. See Annex 2 for more details on missing data. Note: Population estimates are at mid-year 2021 published by the National Records of Scotland.

2.9. Victim & suspected perpetrator repeat analysis

The iVPD enables the identification of a victim or suspected perpetrator that has previously been entered into the system for domestic abuse. A victim or suspected perpetrator can appear multiple times in the database in any one year, each classified as a separate incident.

As the iVPD was introduced and rolled out across the then 14 police divisions during 2013-14, the first and any subsequent reference to any victim or suspected perpetrator in the repeat categories below only refers to whether they were involved in an incident of domestic abuse from 2013-14 (part year depending on divisional roll out⁸) and not in any years prior to the introduction of the iVPD.

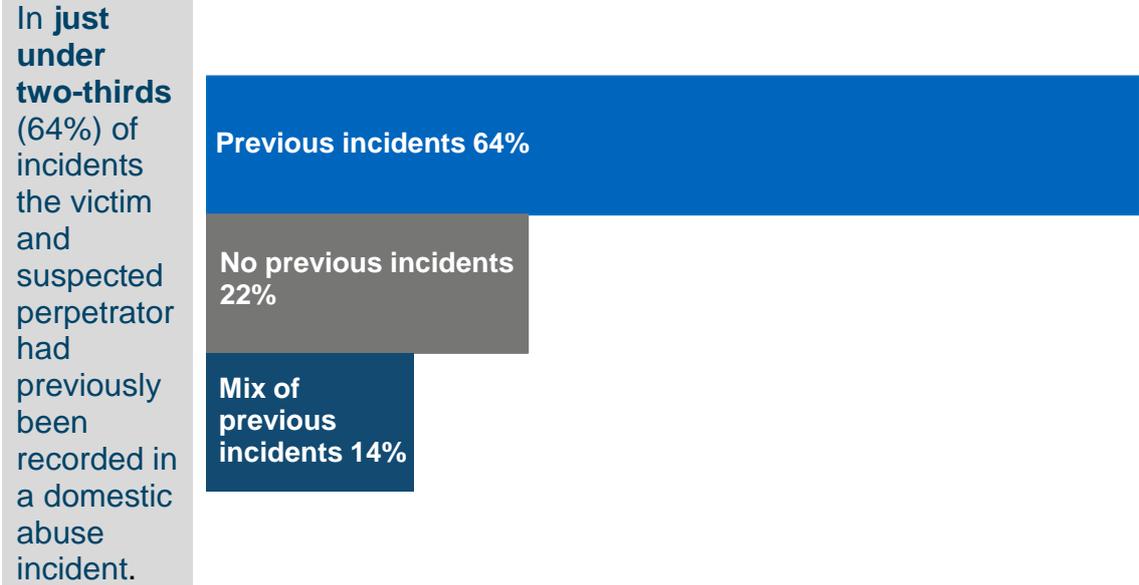
In 2021-22 there were 47,282 domestic abuse incidents with sufficient information recorded⁹ to allow repeat analysis (73% of all incidents). The remaining 17,525

⁸ Each police division rolled out the iVPD at different times throughout 2013-14.
⁹ Proportion calculated excluding incidents where information on previous history on iVPD is fully or partially not recorded.

incidents (or 27%) did not include sufficient information to confirm one way or the other whether at least one of either the victim or suspected perpetrator had previously been recorded in an incident of domestic abuse.

For those incidents that did include sufficient information, 64% (or 30,182) had a victim and suspected perpetrator who had previously been recorded in an incident of domestic abuse – though these previously recorded incidents may have involved different partners/ex-partners. In a further 22% (10,388) of incidents, neither the victim nor the suspected perpetrator were found in the iVPD. In 14% (6,712) of incidents there was a mix of results for the victim and suspected perpetrator (i.e. only one of the victim or suspected perpetrator had previously been recorded) ([Figure 7](#) & Table 10).

Figure 7: Incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police, by repeat victim/suspected perpetrator analysis, where known, 2021-22

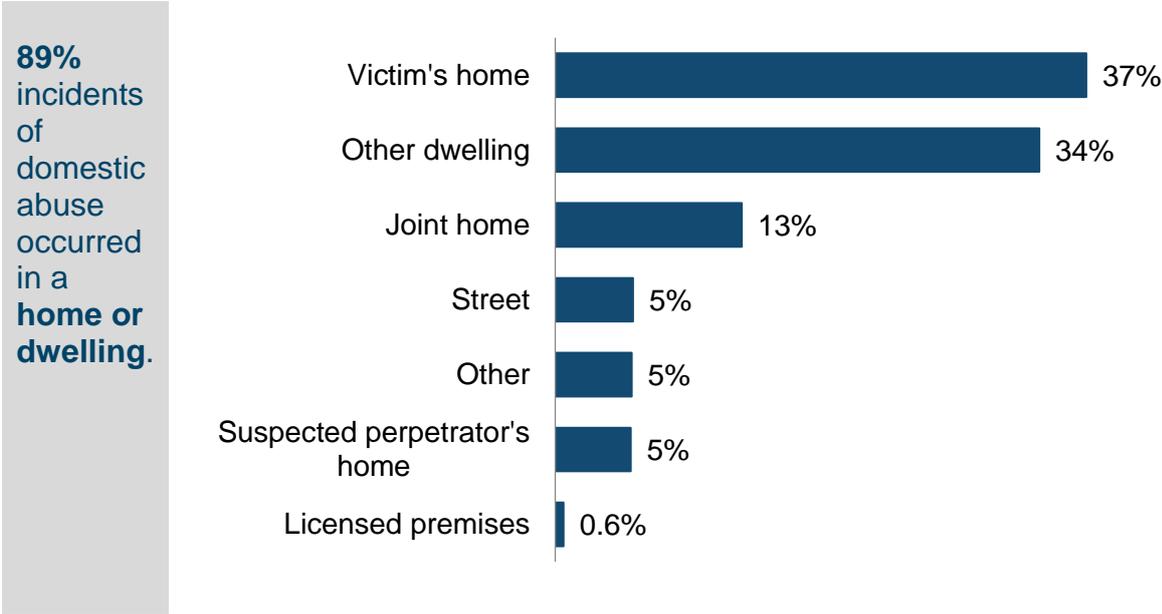


2.10. Location of incidents

In 2021-22, just under nine-in-ten (89%) domestic abuse incidents occurred in a home or dwelling. This is a slight decrease compared to 2020-21 (91%). This figure can be split into 37% of incidents that occurred within the victim's own home, 13% that occurred within a joint home and 5% that occurred in the suspected perpetrator's home. Over three-in-ten (34%) incidents occurred in an 'other dwelling'.

The remaining 11% of incidents occurred in the street (5%), licensed premises (0.6%) or an 'Other' location (5%) ([Figure 8](#) & Table 11).

Figure 8: Incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police, by location, 2021-22



2.11. Day/month of occurrence

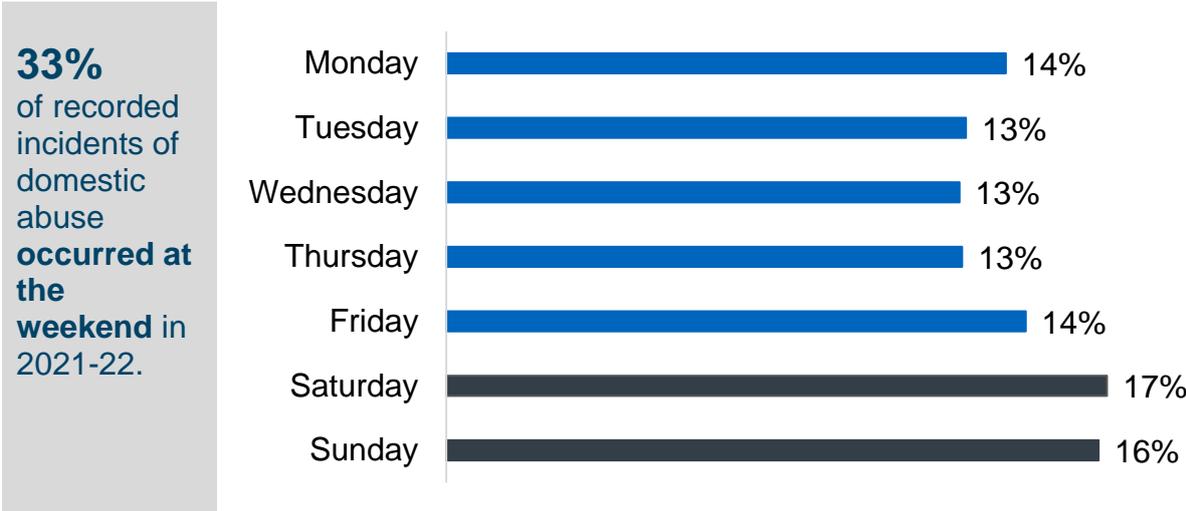
The following section is based on the date the incident of domestic abuse occurred, rather than when it was recorded by the police¹⁰.

A third (33%) of incidents in 2021-22 ([Figure 9](#) & Table 14) occurred at the weekend, an increase compared to the proportion in 2020-21 (31%). 14.5% of incidents occurred on a Friday. The remaining 53% of incidents are spread fairly evenly from Monday to Thursday.

When looking at the month that incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police occurred in 2021-22 (Table 15), no clear pattern emerges from the data, with incidents fairly evenly spread out across the year.

Tables for incidents by month are available within the ['Supporting Documents' Excel workbook](#) on the Domestic Abuse Statistics website.

Figure 9: Incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police, by the day of the week the incident occurred, 2021-22



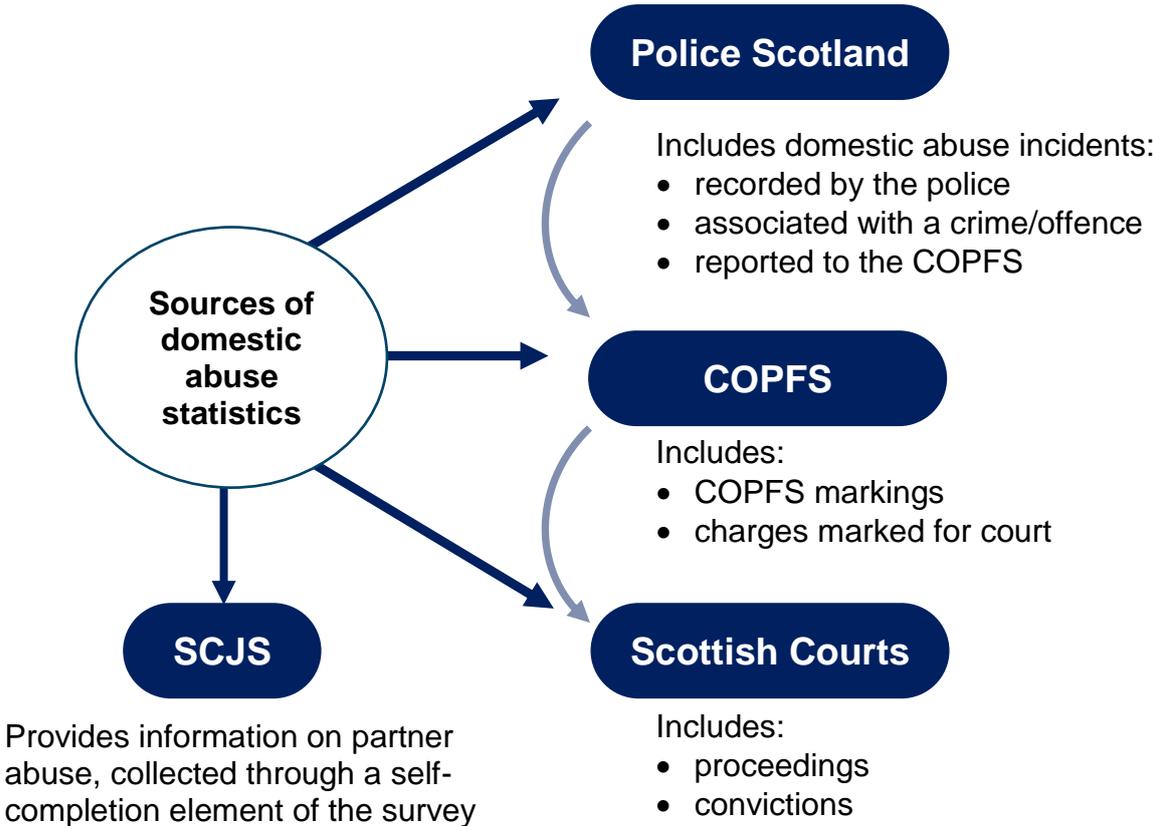
¹⁰ See [Section 5.5](#) in Annex 2 for more information on the process of logging incidents.

3. Domestic abuse in context

There are a number of data sources which collect information on domestic abuse in Scotland. These include:

- **Police Scotland**, who report the number of domestic abuse incidents recorded (presented in this publication as Official Statistics, and as Administrative Data in their [Quarterly Management Information reports](#))
- **The Scottish Government Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS)**, which provides information on partner abuse
- **The Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)**, who have information on Procurator Fiscal markings and how many charges are reported to courts
- **The Scottish Government Criminal Proceedings in Scotland statistics**, which provides information on proceedings and convictions which take place in the Scottish courts

The relationship between these sources is summarised in the following diagram.



3.1. Police Scotland Quarterly Management Information reports: Background

Police Scotland publish management information on the number of incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police.

The Quarterly Management Information reports make clear to users that the data they contain on incidents of domestic abuse is based on the Administrative Data available to Police Scotland at that time and is not presented as Official Statistics. The annual Official Statistics on domestic abuse published within this bulletin are based on management information which has undergone further [quality assurance work](#), including additional dialogue with Police Scotland, in line with the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#).

The Quarterly Management Information reports are available from the 'Our Performance' section of [Police Scotland website](#).

These reports are produced to demonstrate Police Scotland's commitment to transparency (alongside other regular reporting activity to the Scottish Police Authority). The information within these reports is presented on a cumulative quarterly basis, with the first quarter of a reporting year containing three months of data (from April to June), the second containing six months of data (from April to September) etc. The reports are typically published within two months of the period to which they refer.

3.2. Scottish Crime and Justice Survey: Background

The [Scottish Crime and Justice Survey](#) (SCJS) is large-scale social survey run by the Scottish Government, which asks people about their experiences and perceptions of crime. The survey is based on a representative sample of adults (aged 16 and over), living in private households in Scotland.

The SCJS also provides results on the prevalence and nature of partner abuse. This data is collected through a self-completion module of the survey¹¹.

Along with the other large household surveys that rely on face-to-face interviews, the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) was suspended in March 2020 to restrict social contact during the COVID-19 pandemic. The latest SCJS results, produced from interviews which took place before the suspension came into force, were published in March 2021. These cover 2019/20 and biennial self-completion results for 2018/19 and 2019/20 combined.

In 2020, the [Scottish Victimisation Telephone Survey](#) (SVTS) was developed to collect evidence on the extent and prevalence of crime in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, self-completion questions on partner abuse, for

¹¹ The SCJS is completed face-to-face in the homes of respondents, with sections on more sensitive topics, including questions on partner abuse, completed by the respondent themselves using the interviewer's laptop or tablet.

example, were excluded due to concerns around safeguarding those responding by telephone.

Fieldwork for the SCJS resumed in late 2021, with a full year's worth of interviews due to be complete by December and findings published in mid-2023. For more information, visit the [SCJS website](#).

It should be noted that whilst the SCJS uses a definition of partner abuse consistent with that adopted by Police Scotland in recording domestic abuse incidents, there are several differences that affect the comparability of the data. These include the fact that:

- most incidents of domestic abuse go unreported to the police. The 2018/20 SCJS found that just under a sixth (16%) of those who experienced partner abuse in the 12 months prior to interview said that the police came to know about the most recent (or only) incident. The SCJS also found that when asked the reasons for not reporting the most recent (or only) incident of partner abuse to the police, the most common reasons given were that those involved dealt with the incident themselves (36%), that the abuse was too trivial/not worth reporting (31%), or that the abuse was a private, personal or family matter (30%). This is a consistent finding with previous years
- the SCJS is a sample of those aged 16 and over living in private households. As such, adults living in other circumstances (for example tourists and those staying in institutions or communal residences, such as prisons or hospitals, military bases and student accommodation) or those aged under 16 are not included in the SCJS estimates
- the SCJS captures the victim's self-reported experience of partner abuse. Although this part of the survey is completed in private, some respondents may choose not to disclose information on particular incidents

The most recent results, published in March 2021, includes findings on partner abuse for the period 2018/20 (results for 2018-19 and 2019-20 have been combined to carry out the analysis).

The SCJS found that between 2008/09 and 2018/20 the proportion of respondents who had a partner, or contact with an ex-partner, in the 12 months prior to interview who experienced any partner abuse decreased from 4.2% to 3.2%. There has been no statistically significant change between 2016/18¹² and 2018/20 in the proportion of respondents experiencing any partner abuse in the 12 months prior to interview. A higher proportion of women than men experienced partner abuse in the 12 months prior to interview, at 3.7% and 2.6% respectively.

More detailed information, along with explanatory notes, is available on the [SCJS website](#).

¹² SCJS results for 2016-17 and 2017-18 have been combined to carry out the analysis.

3.3. Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service: Background

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) publish management information on the number of charges reported to COPFS with a domestic abuse aggravator recorded against them. These figures also include the number taken forward to court, dealt with by direct measures (such as a fine), or where no action was taken.

[COPFS' Domestic Abuse and Stalking Charges 2021-22 Statistics](#) on the number of charges reported to them showed that the percentage of charges for stalking with a domestic abuse identifier fell from 72% in 2018-19 to 65% in 2019-20 and 57% in both 2020-21 and 2021-22.

More detailed information, along with explanatory notes, is available in the statistics section of the [COPFS website](#).

3.4. Criminal Proceedings in Scotland statistics: Background

Statistics on proceedings and convictions concluded in Scottish courts are published in [Criminal Proceedings in Scotland](#). These statistics are derived from data held on the Criminal History System (CHS). This is a central database used for recording information on suspected perpetrators and those convicted of committing a crime. The publication presents the number of convictions under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, convictions for crimes with statutory aggravations for domestic abuse, and convictions for crimes where a domestic abuse identifier was applied. Aggravations need to be proved in court and are taken into account during sentencing, which may result in a higher penalty being given.

The most recent available data is from [Criminal Proceedings in Scotland: 2020-2021](#). Data from 2020-21 were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent court closures. Consequently caution is urged when interpreting the volume and mix of cases concluded in 2020-21. For context figures for 2019-20 are shown alongside those from 2020-21 below.

In 2019-20 there were 212 convictions under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, with a further 383 convictions in 2020-21. This was out of 252 and 420 people proceeded against, respectively, giving conviction rates of 84% and 91%. Although this crime came into effect at the start of 2019-20, the full course of conduct had to have taken place on or after 1 April 2019. Therefore there will have been a time lag before such crimes could be reported, hence 2019-20 does not effectively cover a full year under the Act. The majority of people (62% in 2019-20 and 56% in 2020-21) convicted under this Act received a community sentence. Just under a fifth (18% in 2019-20 and 19% in 2020-21) received a custodial sentence with an average sentence length of around a year (363 days in 2019-20 and 438 days in 2020-21). This was the only crime type to show an increase in the number of proceedings in 2020-21, when the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent court closures impacted heavily on the capacity for cases to be heard in court.

A statutory aggravation for domestic abuse involving a child can be applied to crimes under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. There were 39 convictions for this

aggravation in 2019-20 and 90 convictions in 2020-21. As stated above, as the Act came into effect for a course of conduct committed on or after 1 April 2019 the 2019-20 data does not effectively cover a full year.

The [Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#) created a statutory aggravation of domestic abuse which came into force in April 2017. This can be applied to any relevant crime or offence (for example to Common assault). Where this aggravation was proven against the main charge 8,174 people were convicted in 2019-20, with 6,515 such convictions in 2020-21. The 2019-20 figure represents a 5% increase from the 7,751 convictions in 2018-19.

The CHS also includes some codes that are not statutory, but are used as identifiers to highlight particular cases to the police, COPFS, or Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service. This includes an identifier for domestic abuse, which identifies domestic abuse related charges for operational purposes, whether or not the statutory domestic abuse aggravation applies to them. There were 9,420 convictions where a domestic abuse identifier was recorded against the main charge in 2019-20 and 7,577 convictions in 2020-21. The 2019-20 figure represents an increase of 2% from 2018-19 (9,205 convictions). 2019-20 was the first increase following successive decreases dating back to 2015-16.

Note that the introduction of the new domestic abuse crime under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 in 2019-20 may have affected the number of convictions with a domestic abuse identifier or statutory aggravation. This crime covers a course of conduct. Before the introduction of the crime, this may have resulted in multiple convictions for different offences at different times, each with the statutory aggravation and/or identifier applied, whereas now they may result in a single conviction (with a more severe penalty).

4. Future developments

4.1. Review of administrative data source

We previously informed users of work to assess the suitability of different sources of data within Police Scotland on domestic abuse-related activity, to determine what the optimal source of information may be going forward for the production of these statistics. However, due to COVID-19 this work was postponed.

Following further discussion with Police Scotland, we have decided to continue using the iVPD as the source of these statistics, whilst other database developments take place. However it should be noted that as outlined in [Section 2.7](#), the proportion of incidents where an 'Unknown' relationship has been recorded within the iVPD has been gradually increasing since 2016-17 (and stood at 18% by 2021-22). This demonstrates the benefits of keeping the methodology for the production of these official statistics under review, to determine if any future changes in approach would add additional value.

We will inform users of any new developments within the next bulletin on domestic abuse incidents in 2022-23 (and through the ScotStat network beforehand).

4.2. Users of these statistics

These statistics are used by a range of stakeholders within central government, the police and other public bodies for a variety of purposes.

Domestic abuse statistics are also used by a variety of external stakeholders, including victim support groups, national and local journalism, academics and students and school pupils writing dissertations and carrying out projects.

Official statistics are a tool used in decision making both inside and outside government, and for this tool to be effective it has to be designed to meet the needs of users. We always welcome feedback on the content and the uses made of our statistical bulletins and users are invited to submit their comments and any suggestions for improvement to: Justice_Analysts@gov.scot.

5. Annexes

Annex 1: Terminology and context

5.1. Domestic abuse

A statistical collection on domestic abuse (previously referred to as domestic violence) was introduced in 1999. The definition of domestic abuse used by Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)¹³ is:

‘Any form of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse which might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship. The relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse can be committed in the home or elsewhere including online’.

5.2. Suspected perpetrator

The term suspected perpetrator is used to encompass both a person suspected to have committed an offence where the police attend an incident and a person charged by the police with having committed a criminal offence.

5.3. Recording crimes and offences

Contraventions of Scottish criminal law are divided for statistical purposes only into crimes and offences. The term “crime” is generally used for the more serious criminal acts; the less serious are termed “offences”. The distinction is made only for statistical reporting purposes and does not influence the way the police investigate reports of criminal activity. The seriousness of the offence is generally related to the maximum sentence that can be imposed, and does not relate to the impact on the individual experiencing the incident.

In one criminal incident, several crimes or offences may occur – e.g. a suspected perpetrator may assault their spouse and damage their car in the process. In this example, crimes of vandalism and assault would be recorded. Statistics in this bulletin either relate to the number of incidents recorded or the number of incidents with at least one crime or offence committed.

5.4. Crime groupings

As discussed in [Section 1.3](#), changes were made to the crime grouping structure resulting in there now being eight groups as opposed to seven, and 50 categories instead of 35. The largest change is the transfer of Common assault and Stalking from the Miscellaneous offences group to the Non-sexual crimes of violence group.

¹³ Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) have a shared definition of domestic abuse available on the [Police Scotland website](#).

The Scottish Government is responsible for mapping each charge code to a crime code, which forms the basis of the crime code classification. There are around 5,800 charge codes, which are the operational codes used within the criminal justice system to identify crimes and offences. These charge codes are mapped to around 500 crime or offence codes, which in turn are typically grouped into the now 50 broader categories, and further into the now eight crime and offence groups. This classification enables consistent and comparable reporting between criminal justice organisations.

Crimes and offences within this publication are presented using the eight main groupings and 50 categories, as shown in the table below.

| Crimes (groups & sub-groups) | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| Group 1 | Non-sexual crimes of violence | Murder and Culpable Homicide |
| | | Causing death by driving dangerously |
| | | Serious assault and attempted murder |
| | | Common assault |
| | | Robbery |
| | | Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 |
| | | Other non-sexual crimes of violence |
| Group 2 | Sexual crimes | Rape and attempted rape |
| | | Sexual assault |
| | | Causing to view sexual activity or images |
| | | Communicating indecently |
| | | Threatening to or disclosing intimate images |
| | | Indecent photos of children |
| | | Crimes associated with prostitution |
| Other sexual crimes | | |
| Group 3 | Crimes of dishonesty | Housebreaking |
| | | Theft by opening lockfast places |
| | | Theft from a motor vehicle |
| | | Theft of a motor vehicle |
| | | Shoplifting |
| | | Other theft |
| | | Fraud |
| Other dishonesty | | |
| Group 4 | Damage and reckless behaviour | Fire-raising |
| | | Vandalism |
| | | Reckless conduct |
| Group 5 | Crimes against society | Crimes against public justice |
| | | Weapons possession (not used) |
| | | Weapons possession (used) |
| | | Drugs - Supply |
| | | Drugs - Possession |
| Other crimes against society | | |
| Offences (groups & sub-groups) | | |
| Group 6 | Antisocial offences | Threatening and abusive behaviour |
| | | Racially aggravated conduct |

| | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| | | Drunkenness and other disorderly conduct |
| | | Urinating etc. |
| Group 7 | Miscellaneous offences | Community and public order offences |
| | | Environmental offences |
| | | Licensing offences |
| | | Wildlife offences |
| | | Other misc. offences |
| Group 8 | Road traffic offences¹⁴ | Dangerous and careless driving |
| | | Driving under the influence |
| | | Speeding |
| | | Unlawful use of motor vehicle |
| | | Vehicle defect offences |
| | | Seat belt offences |
| | | Mobile phone offences |
| | | Other road traffic offences |

More detailed information on the changes which have been made to the grouping structure are listed below.

Non-sexual crimes of violence

- Split Homicide etc. into two categories: Murder and culpable homicide, and Death by dangerous driving
- Reclassify Common assault as a crime, sitting as its own category within the Non-sexual crimes of violence group (in 2020-21 there were just over 52,000 common assaults)
- Reclassify Stalking as a crime, sitting within the Other non-sexual violence category of the Non-sexual crimes of violence group (in 2020-21 there were around 900 offences of stalking)
- Move Female genital mutilation from Non-sexual crimes of violence – Other non-sexual violence to Non-sexual crimes of violence – Serious assault and attempted murder

Sexual crimes

- Split Other sexual crimes into five categories:
 - Causing to view sexual activity or images
 - Communicating indecently
 - Threatening to or disclosing intimate images
 - Indecent photos of children
 - Other sexual crimes

¹⁴ Further breakdowns for motor vehicle offences are not included in Table 2, as only a relatively small number of motor vehicle offences were recorded by the police as part of incidents of domestic abuse in 2020-21 (103).

Crimes of dishonesty

- No changes

Damage and reckless behaviour

- Change the name from Fire-raising, vandalism etc. to Damage and reckless behaviour
- Split Vandalism etc. into two categories: Vandalism and Reckless conduct

Crimes against society

- Change name from Other crimes to Crimes against society
- Split Drug crimes into two categories: Drugs – possession and Drugs – supply

Coronavirus Restrictions

- No changes

Offences

- Split the Miscellaneous offences group into two groups: Antisocial offences and Miscellaneous offences (multiple new categories)
- Remove Common assault and Stalking (reclassifying as Non-sexual crimes of violence)
- Change name from Motor vehicle offences to Road traffic offences

Crime codes relating to the (mis)use of bikes moved from Miscellaneous offences to Road traffic offences. The [User Guide](#) provides more details on the crime codes affected.

For information on the impact of these changes, please see the [Technical Report on statistical impact of changing to new groups](#) section of the consultation report.

5.5. Calculating rates per 10,000 population

Figures on incidents of domestic abuse in this publication are presented both as number of incidents and as rates per 10,000 population. These rates are calculated using the mid-year population estimates from the National Records of Scotland. [Mid-2021 population estimates](#) are used in this bulletin.

Annex 2: Data sources and quality

The creation of Police Scotland has altered the way in which domestic abuse data has been collected. Prior to 1 April 2013, each legacy police force had a bespoke system to collect the data required. Between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014, the interim Vulnerable Persons Database (iVPD) system was rolled out to the then 14 police divisions in Scotland. From 1 April 2014 onwards, all domestic abuse data was collected through the iVPD.

To reflect these changes in data collection, tables and figures in this bulletin are presented with clear breaks in the time series between 2013-14 and 2014-15. The break is denoted by a dashed line and labelled to highlight the change to the data source. Caution should be exercised when making comparisons over time and when interpreting variation in the number of incidents recorded across years.

The data in this bulletin covers the current 13 police divisions in Scotland (across all 32 local authorities). Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire & Moray police divisions merged together to form the North East police division in January 2016.

The data presented in this bulletin is a snapshot of domestic abuse incidents recorded on the iVPD at the end of the financial year.

5.6. Process of logging an incident

When a victim and/or witness makes initial contact with the police regarding a domestic abuse incident, Police Scotland log the incident in their System for Tasking and Operational Resource Management (STORM), Police Scotland's national command and control system¹⁵.

STORM is largely used for resource allocation purposes. Depending on the information supplied and the outcome of additional enquiries, the incident may result in the creation of one or more crime reports on the relevant crime management system (CMS).

Once the police have assessed the incident, they determine if a vulnerable person record is to be set up in iVPD. The purpose of the iVPD is to collect information on people who are deemed to be in a vulnerable situation, to ensure that any concerns for the victim (or any other person subject of concern) are assessed and appropriate actions are taken.

Incidents in this bulletin are counted against the year in which they are recorded by Police Scotland on the iVPD system¹⁶. Not all incidents are reported to the police immediately following their occurrence. As such each year's figures on incidents of domestic abuse will include a proportion of incidents committed in earlier years.

¹⁵ STORM has been used across Scotland since February 2018.

¹⁶ [Annex 2](#) provides information on Police Scotland's incident recording systems.

It is important to recognise that amendments to crime and offence records may occur following submission of figures by Police Scotland to the Scottish Government. This may be due to the reclassification of crimes into different crime groups or, no crime being established after further investigation by police into the originally reported offence.

5.7. Additional information on the trend data

In addition to this, as seen in [Section 2.7](#) there has been an increase since 2016-17 in the proportion of incidents where the relationship between the victim and suspected perpetrator is unknown. Further to this, the proportion of cases where no information was recorded on the characteristics of the victim and/or the suspected perpetrator has also been increasing (from 4,522 or 8% in 2016-17 to 16,845 or 26% by 2021-22).

Police Scotland have advised that a procedural change was made immediately prior to 2017-18 whereby for certain non-criminal incidents of domestic abuse (i.e. where both parties were believed to have an equal involvement), details were no longer recorded for a specific victim or a specific suspected perpetrator. Prior to this, two incidents may have been recorded treating one party as the victim and the other as the suspected perpetrator and the second for the reverse position. Whilst this change may also have had an effect on the number of domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police, the impact of this cannot be quantified.

There has also been a gradual increase in the number and proportion of incidents where the specific relationship (i.e. Spouse/Civil Partner, Co-habitee, Partner etc.) of those involved was unknown (to 11,557 or 18% by 2021-22). There can always be some occasions where no information can be provided on the specific relationship, for example where a domestic abuse victim is identified, but the perpetrator's identity remains unknown.

In other cases (and similar to the above) where no criminal behaviour can be evidenced, it is possible none of the individuals involved will be recorded as a perpetrator. In such instances a 'Not known' or 'Relationship not recorded' value may be selected. There may remain some variation across Scotland in the approach to recording these specific variables, with Police Scotland recently re-issuing guidance to Officers. This in turn may have led to the increase highlighted above in the proportion of incidents where detailed information on the specific relationship between those involved was not recorded.

As discussed in Section 4.1, due to nearly one-in-five (18%) domestic abuse incident records in 2021-22 containing an 'Unknown' relationship, as agreed with Police Scotland the Scottish Government will review the suitability of the data we receive and consider potential ways to improve the accuracy of these statistics.

5.8. Further information on incidents without a crime or offence recorded

In 2016-17, Scottish Government statisticians reviewed a sample of domestic abuse incidents which did not include the recording of at least one crime or offence, to provide users with additional information on the circumstances of these incidents.

Four hundred incidents from 2016-17 were randomly selected from the iVPD and a synopsis of each case was recorded. The findings, presented below, should be treated as a broad indication of the characteristics of these incidents. They are not an exact measure, given the associated possibility of sampling error and wide range of behaviours covered.

Around half of these incidents (52%) in 2016-17 were based on some form of argument between partners or ex-partners that excluded any reference to a physical confrontation or threatening behaviour. Of these cases, around two-thirds include one of the partners/ex-partners contacting the police, whilst in around 30% of cases a third party or other witness did so. A quarter of cases that refer to some form of argument include one of the parties contacting the police as they wanted the other person to leave.

Around a fifth of these incidents (19%) were based on concern about the communication or attempted communication of one partner/ex-partner towards the other (excluding any reference to an argument or a specific crime or offence). In almost all these cases it was one of the partners/ex-partners that contacted the police. This involved a range of different incidents, including frequent references to unwanted communication or attempted communication, which could be through electronic means (text messages, phone call) or in person. This category also includes incidents where one party was concerned about what their partner/ex-partner has said about them (sometimes to third parties).

Beyond the incidents above, the other cases cover a diverse range of situations. Some included the police being contacted for advice or an individual raising concerns without reference to any specific incident (7% of the sample). In some instances the police were contacted by one partner/ex-partner out of concern for the wellbeing of the other party (3%) or by someone wishing to retrieve their belongings from a partner/ex-partner (3%).

Finally, some incidents recorded in the iVPD in 2016-17 were best described as situations in which it is inferred that a crime or offence may have taken place (13% of the sample). In most of these cases (11% of the sample) further investigation determined either that a crime or offence had not occurred (for example by the police reviewing the content of text messages that were alleged to be threatening) or there was insufficient evidence for the police to record a crime or offence. In the other cases (2% of the sample), further discussion with Police Scotland determined that these incidents did include a crime or offence. This splits into cases where a crime or offence had been recorded in crime management systems¹⁷ but not added to the iVPD or where no crime or offence had been recorded at all.

¹⁷ Incidents may result in the creation of one or more crime reports on the relevant crime management system. Different crime management systems are used Police Scotland to record and manage crime.

Annex 3: Auditing of data by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS)

5.9. HMICS Crime Audit 2020

[HMICS Crime Audit 2020](#) aimed to assess the state, efficiency and effectiveness of crime recording by Police Scotland and the extent to which recording practice complies with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS) and Counting Rules. The SCRS requires that all incidents, whether crime-related or not, will result in the creation of an auditable record. HMICS tested the accuracy of crime recording by auditing incident and crime records in five categories, including sexual crime, violence, domestic abuse, non-crime related incidents, and no-crimes. The section below provides information and outcomes on the audit of domestic abuse incidents.

Police Scotland's recording system STORM has been audited to assess the compliance for domestic abuse incidents. HMICS examined 3,150 incidents relating to domestic abuse, 1,001 of which resulted in a crime record. HMICS found that the compliance was good overall, as:

- 94.6% of domestic abuse incidents examined were closed correctly
- 92.6% of domestic abuse crime records were counted and classified correctly
- 95.2% of domestic abuse crimes were recorded within 72 hours of the incident being reported to the police, with 10 of the 13 divisions achieving over 95% compliance

Whilst the HMICS Crime Audit 2020 did not extend to data on domestic abuse included on the iVPD, it highlights the quality of domestic abuse information provided by STORM. Since the HMICS Crime Audit 2020, HMICS have undertaken a follow-up inspection relating to Domestic Abuse and plan to publish the results of the HMICS Domestic Abuse Review in December 2022.

Annex 4: Validation

5.10. Reporting of incidents and quality assurance of domestic abuse statistics

The statistics reported in this bulletin do not reveal the incidence of all domestic abuse committed, since not all incidents are reported to the police. However, in conjunction with the [Scottish Crime and Justice Survey](#) (SCJS), these statistics help to assess the extent and impact of domestic abuse in Scotland. There are a number of reasons for domestic abuse being under reported, including victims experiencing fear and shame as a result of the incident. Under reporting may also be caused by a perpetrator physically preventing a victim reporting the domestic abuse.

Challenging domestic abuse is a high priority for both Police Scotland and COPFS. As such, they have a Joint Protocol outlining the procedures and practices to follow when dealing with incidents of domestic abuse. The protocol is available on [Police Scotland website](#).

The data presented in this publication is drawn from an administrative system. Although care is taken when processing, quality assuring and analysing the data, administrative data is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.

This data goes through a process of quality assurance in which figures are checked against previous years and comparable sources. Anything unusual or which requires further explanation is then fed back to Police Scotland for their attention. Any amendments are carried out and the final data is used to produce a set of data tables which can be used to check the final dataset.

During the quality assurance checking process, it is possible for errors to be found in data for previous years. While we do not routinely revise figures, we are committed to correcting errors in the data and providing suitable explanations for any changes made to previously published data, in line with the [Scottish Government's guidance on Producing Official Statistics](#).

Whilst Police Scotland aims to record complete information for all incidents, there is some challenge in retrieving and linking the captured information to meet the full data requirements for this publication. As a result some values for certain variables are marked 'missing'.

The statistics provided in the data return for this publication prior to 2014-15 have highlighted the different ways in which legacy police forces recorded information. In particular, police practice in deciding when the behaviour justifies the recording of a crime or offence may differ. For example, some legacy forces had ruled that no crime or offence should be recorded if no further action was taken e.g. because the victim did not wish any action to be taken. Other forces may have recorded this as a crime or offence.

With all police divisions now using the same iVPD system to record incidents of domestic abuse and following the same Police Scotland guidance, inconsistencies in approach may minimise over time. [Annex 2](#) provides more information on how the incidents are logged in Police Scotland's systems.

5.11. Historical changes in methodology

2009-10 was the first year in which data was submitted based on the date the incident was recorded. Prior to this, data was returned based on the number of incidents which occurred during that time period. As historic data has never been revised in this publication series, any incidents which occurred in a different time period to the date in which the incident was recorded will have been excluded from the returns.

For example, if an incident occurred during 2007-08 but was recorded during 2008-09, it would have been excluded from 2008-09 (since the date committed is not in the relevant time period), but it would also have been missed out of the 2007-08 data as the submitted data would not have been updated. Hence, the incident would not be reported in the statistics in this publication series and therefore contributed to an underestimate. Although this publication series has never revised this information,

some legacy forces may have updated their own collections and prepared refreshed data in response to bespoke requests.

The number of incidents in the bulletins from 2009-10 onwards, is based on the date the incident was recorded. This should give a better reflection of police activity relating to incidents of domestic abuse. By reporting on the date the incidents were committed, we get a snapshot account of the number of incidents of domestic abuse occurring within a particular period. However, by analysing the data based on the date recorded, we can see the trend in reporting incidents of domestic abuse to the police. Hence, if there was an increase in the number of victims who report incidents of domestic abuse to the police sometime after they occurred, this should be reflected in the statistics.

Annex 5: Legislation

The [Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#) came into force on 1 April 2019 and created a new offence for circumstances where a person engages in a course of behaviour¹⁸ which is abusive towards their partner or ex-partner. Prior to the 1 April 2019, any criminal act which formed part of a domestic abuse incident (such as a Common assault or Threatening or abusive behaviour) was included within the statistics under the relevant crime or offence. Where there is evidence of a course of behaviour, new crime codes of Domestic abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 (against a male or female victim) have been created. In general, existing common law and statutory offences will continue to be recorded where appropriate, in addition to the new crimes.

As well as common law, some of the main legislation applicable to domestic abuse is as follows:

- [Family Law \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#) (Section 31 of this Act introduced the concept of “domestic interdicts” into the 1981 Act, which applies to unmarried cohabitants (either opposite-sex or same-sex). Domestic interdicts have much the same effect in relation to cohabitants as matrimonial interdicts have for married couples as is defined in section 10 of this Act, which amends section 14 of the 1981 Act to extend the scope of matrimonial interdicts to include not only a matrimonial home, but also any other home owned by the applicant, the applicant’s place of work and the school attended by any child in the applicant’s care)
- [Protection from Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2001](#)
- [Crime and Disorder Act 1998](#)
- [Protection from Harassment Act 1997](#)
- [Family Law Act 1996](#)

¹⁸ A course of behaviour involves behaviour on at least two occasions.

- [Matrimonial Homes \(Family Protection\) \(Scotland\) Act 1981](#)

Annex 6: Comparisons with rest of the UK

5.12. England & Wales

Domestic violence and abuse data in England & Wales is not comparable with Scotland's statistics on domestic abuse due to differences in definition. The [UK Government's definition](#) of domestic violence and abuse is:

'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. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional'. The definition used by Police Scotland does not include family members, with the data collected only including domestic abuse between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The definition used by Police Scotland also has no age restrictions upon it. Differences in legislation and common law also have to be taken into account when comparing the crime statistics for England & Wales and Scotland.

It should be noted that the Domestic Abuse Bill passed both Houses of UK Parliament and was signed into law on 29 April 2021. This is set to provide further protections to people experiencing domestic abuse, as well as strengthen measures to tackle perpetrators. More information on the Domestic Abuse Act is available on the [Home Office website](#).

Domestic abuse statistics for England & Wales from the Crime Survey for England & Wales, police recorded crime and a number of different organisations are available on the [Office for National Statistics website](#).

5.13. Northern Ireland

Similarly to the comparability issues with England & Wales, statistics on domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland are not directly comparable to those in Scotland. The [Police Service of Northern Ireland's definition](#) of domestic abuse is outlined in the Northern Ireland Government Strategy '[Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland](#)' as:

'Threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, virtual, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability) by a current or former partner or family member'.

The definition clarifies that:

- 'incident' means an incident anywhere and not confined to the home of one of the partners/family members

- 'family members' include mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, grandparents, whether directly or indirectly related, in-laws or stepfamily
- 'intimate partners' means there must have been a relationship with a degree of continuity and stability. The relationship must also have had (or reasonably supposed to have had) a sexual aspect, such as in the relationship between husband and wife or between others generally recognised as a couple including same sex couples.

The main difference between the definitions is that the one used by Police Scotland does not include family members, with the data collected only including domestic abuse between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. Domestic abuse statistics for Northern Ireland are available on the [Police Service of Northern Ireland website](#).

An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

Official and National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Both undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs and are produced free from any political interference.

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ISBN 978-1-80525-265-8 (web only)

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Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS1181222 (11/22)