

Statistics briefing: Neglect

This briefing looks at what data and statistics are available about child neglect to help professionals, and the organisations they work for, make evidence based decisions.

March 2024

Introduction

This briefing introduces a range of datasets available in the UK that relate to child neglect. Research provides estimates of the prevalence of child neglect and data is available on children who are receiving support or are known to services because of neglect. Statistics can help professionals and the organisations they work for make evidence based decisions about how best to meet the needs of children who have experienced neglect.

What does the data tell us?

- Neglect is the most common form of abuse.
- 1 in 10 children in the UK have been neglected.
- Concerns around neglect have been identified for around half of children who are the subject of a child protection plan or on a child protection register in the UK.
- The number of police recorded child cruelty offences is increasing.

- Neglect is the most commonly mentioned form of abuse by adults contacting the NSPCC Helpline.
- Less than 1% of Childline counselling sessions are about neglect, possibly because children often don't recognise their experience as neglectful.
- Younger children are more likely than older children to be the subject of a child protection plan in England because of neglect, although research suggests that the neglect of older children is more likely to go overlooked.

What is child neglect?

Neglect is not meeting a child's basic physical and psychological needs. It is a form of child abuse that can have serious and long-lasting impacts on a child's life - it can cause serious harm and even death.

(Sources: Department for Education, 2023; Department of Health, 2017; Scottish Government, 2023; Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board, 2019)

➤ [Read more information about protecting children from neglect](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/neglect)

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/neglect>>

What data is available?

Data about child neglect is available from a number of sources. Information covered includes:

- the prevalence of self-reported experiences of child neglect
- the number of children who were subject to a child protection plan or on a child protection register because of concerns about neglect
- the number of recorded cruelty and neglect offences against children

- the number of children talking to Childline about neglect, and the number of concerned adults talking to the NSPCC helpline about neglect
- the age and gender of children experiencing neglect.

Throughout this briefing, figures given are the most up-to-date at the time of publication.

How can the data be used?

Data can only ever tell part of the story. It’s important to bear in mind the limitations of the data available.

You can use this data to:	But you can’t use it to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Get a sense of how many children experience child neglect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Definitely say how widespread child neglect is.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Say how many child neglect cases are known to and recorded by services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Equate figures from services with the prevalence of child neglect.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identify the most common characteristics amongst children who experience neglect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ State that children who have these characteristics are the only ones who experience neglect.

What does the data tell us about the scale of the issue?

We don't know exactly how many children in the UK experience neglect. Adults in the child's life may not recognise the signs that they are being neglected and the child may not know they are being neglected or may be too young, too scared or too ashamed to tell anyone what is happening to them. However, there are a number of different sources of information, including data from services which work with children and research into children's and adults' self-reported experiences of neglect, which help build up a picture of the scale of child neglect.

Around 1 in 10 children in the UK have been neglected

An NSPCC study (Radford et al., 2011) asked over 6,000 adults, children and parents about child maltreatment. The findings were reported as three subsets:

- parents of the under 11s
- children aged 11-17
- adults aged 18-24.

The study asked 2,275 children aged 11-17 about their experiences of abuse or neglect. 13.3% of 11- to 17-year olds (11.8% of girls and 14.8% of boys) reported experiencing some form of neglect by a parent or guardian during their lives. 9.8% of 11- to 17-year-olds (9.8% of girls and 9.9% of boys) reported experiencing severe neglect by a parent or guardian at some point in their lives.

Neglect was defined as including "the absence of physical care, lack of health care, educational neglect, poor supervision and monitoring and a caregiver being unresponsive to the child's emotional needs to such an extent that significant harm is likely to result". Severe neglect was defined on an age-related basis and included "serious emotional neglect, lack of supervision or physical care that would place a

child or young person at risk, or neglect that the young person defined as abusive or criminal”.

The study also asked 1,761 young adults aged 18–24 about their experiences of abuse or neglect during childhood. 16.0% of 18- to 24-year olds (16.4% of women and 15.6% of men) reported experiencing some form of neglect by a parent or guardian during their lives. 9.0% of young adults (11.0% of women and 7.0% of men) reported experiencing severe neglect by a parent or guardian before the age of 18.

Neglect was found to be the most prevalent type of maltreatment in the family for both age groups.

(Source: Radford, 2011)

Different surveys have different methodologies, and therefore provide different estimates of the prevalence of child neglect

Every research study asks different samples of people different questions using different definitions, so it is always difficult to make comparisons between research studies.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales in 2019 asked a representative sample of adults aged 18-74 about their experiences of physical neglect before the age of 16. Physical neglect includes not being taken care of or not having enough food, shelter or clothing, but it does not cover all types of neglect.

- 1.2% of adults aged 18- to 74-years experienced physical neglect before the age of 16-years (1.4% of women and 0.9% of men).

This study asked different questions of a different cohort to the NSPCC’s Radford study, so is not directly comparable.

- The NSPCC study includes all experiences of neglect before the age of 18, both physical and emotional. It includes responses from both young adults recollecting childhood experiences of abuse and from children reporting experiences of neglect.
- The Crime survey for England and Wales only includes experiences of physical neglect (emotional neglect is included within the emotional abuse category). The survey only covers experiences of neglect before the age of 16. It also only includes responses from adults recollecting childhood experiences of neglect.

The NSPCC consistently uses data from the Radford study relating to 11- to 17-yearolds when talking about the prevalence of child neglect. This is because it tells us what children have said about their own experiences, rather than asking adults to remember what happened to them during their childhood. Until another study is undertaken directly with children it remains the best and most up to date picture we have of children's experiences of abuse and neglect.

(Sources: Radford, 2011 and ONS, 2020)

Concerns around neglect have been identified for around half of children who are the subject of a child protection plan or on a child protection register in the UK

Over 27,500 children across the UK were the subject of a child protection plan or on a child protection register because of neglect in 2021/22, making it a concern for around half of all children on a plan or register.

When a child is made the subject of a child protection plan, or is added to a child protection register, a record is made of the reason this has happened. This takes the form of an "initial category of abuse".

In England, recording practice means that in most cases only the main reason behind a child being made subject to a child protection plan is recorded. Where multiple abuse types are identified as equally concerning the reason is recorded as "multiple". In the other nations a combination of concerns, for example neglect and physical

abuse, are often recorded. In Scotland practitioners record a wide variety of concerns. On average two or three concerns are recorded per child.

For the UK, as a whole, neglect is the most common form of abuse given as a reason for child protection plans or registrations, although in Northern Ireland it's the second most common form of abuse recorded after physical abuse, and in Wales it's the second most common after emotional abuse.

	England 31 March 2022	N. Ireland 31 March 2022	Scotland 31 July 2022	Wales 31 March 2022	UK 2022
Number of children who were the subject of a child protection plan (CPP)/on a child protection register (CPR) under the sole category of neglect	24,430	677	N/A	860	25,967
Number of children who were the subject of a CPP/on a CPR where neglect was one of multiple concerns identified	N/A	532	N/A	100	632
Total number of children who were the subject of a CPP/on a CPR where neglect was a concern	24,430	1,209	917	960	27,516

Proportion of all children who were the subject of a CPP/on a CPR where neglect was a concern	48%	52%	45%	39%	48%
---	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

(Sources: DfE, 2022a; DoH, 2022; Scottish Government, 2023a; Welsh Government, 2023)

There were almost 34,000 child cruelty offences recorded by police in the UK in 2022/23

There is no specific offence of “child neglect” in the UK. The best available indicator of child neglect recorded by the police is for offences of cruelty to children/young persons. This measure shows the number of offences recorded by the police where a parent or carer “wilfully assaults, ill-treats, neglects, abandons or exposes a child under 16 in a manner likely to cause them ‘unnecessary suffering or injury to health’”. However, some of these offences would be counted as child physical abuse rather than neglect and it is not possible to separate out these offences.

(Sources: Children and Young Person’s Act 1933, Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968, Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937)

Police recorded figures for England, Wales and Northern Ireland include categories of offences of cruelty to and neglect of children and abandoning a child. In Scotland, where crimes are counted differently, the reporting categories used are broader. Figures include offences of cruelty to and unnatural treatment of children, being drunk in charge of a child, and any other children and young person offences which are not classified elsewhere.

	Number of cruelty offences against children (2022/23)	Rate of cruelty offences per 10,000 children (2022/23)
England	32,299	30.5
Northern Ireland	599	15.4
Scotland	680	7.5
Wales	669	12.2

(Sources: Home Office, 2023; PSNI, 2023; Scottish Government, 2023b)

The number of police recorded child cruelty offences is increasing

Data shows that the number and rate of police recorded child cruelty offences for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have increased over time. Offences are recorded in the year they were reported to the police, not in the year they were committed.

	Police recorded child cruelty offences			
	2017/18		2022/23	
	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000
England	15,575	14.6	32,299	30.5
Northern Ireland	574	14.7	599	15.4
Scotland	640	7.0	680	7.5
Wales	550	9.8	669	12.2

(Sources: Home Office, 2023; PSNI, 2023; Scottish Government, 2023b)

Factors which have been identified as potential drivers of this rise, include:

- greater awareness of child abuse leading to increased reporting
- improvements to recording processes and practices by the police
- a rise in investigations into historic cases of child abuse.

(Sources: ONS, 2020)

Although only a minority of serious incidents and case reviews name neglect as their primary concern, research suggests it is present as a factor in the majority of cases

When a child dies or is seriously harmed as a result of abuse or neglect, a review may be conducted to identify ways that professionals and organisations can improve the way they work together to safeguard children and prevent similar incidents from occurring.

Each UK nation has its own terminology and guidance for carrying out and sharing the learning from the reviews. Cases that meet the criteria set out in the relevant guidance are reviewed by multi-agency panels.

➤ [Learn more about case reviews via nspcc.org.uk/casereviews](https://nspcc.org.uk/casereviews)

In England, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel received 393 serious incident notifications between January 2022 and March 2023. 229 related to nonfatal injuries, of which 11.8% related to neglect as the primary form of serious harm.

(Source: Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2023)

A systematic analysis of neglect in serious case reviews in England by the Department for Education found child neglect in nearly three-quarters of reports examined (74.7% of the 166 reviews from 2017-2019).

(Source: DfE, 2022b)

In Scotland, between 2018 and 2021 the Care Inspectorate received 82 notifications that initial case reviews (ICRs) had been undertaken, of which 32 progressed to a significant case review (SCR). Analysis of the 50 ICRs that did not progress to a full SCR, 23 SCRs and two thematic learning reviews found that neglect was the most common concern identified in non-fatal cases, present in 18 reviews relating to 35 children.

(Source: Care Inspectorate, 2021)

In Wales, a thematic analysis of child practice reviews (CPRs) in 2023 found that out of the 33 CPRs analysed, 9.1 per cent (3) recorded non-fatal neglect as the type of harm recorded, and 3 per cent (1) recorded fatal-neglect.

(Source: McManus, M.A, Ball, E. and Almond, L., 2023)

There were over 11,000 contacts to the NSPCC's helpline in 2022/23 about neglect

The NSPCC helpline offers an advice and support service for anyone worried about the safety or welfare of a child. Data from the helpline gives us an insight into the types of concerns people speak to the service about.

In 2022/23 the NSPCC's helpline responded to a total of 59,282 contacts from people who were concerned about a child's welfare. 11,492 contacts related to concerns about neglect, making it the most discussed concern and the most commonly mentioned form of abuse.

(Source: NSPCC data)

Less than 1% of Childline counselling sessions are about neglect, this may be because children often don't recognise that what they are experiencing is neglect

Childline is the UK's free helpline for children and young people. Information from Childline counselling sessions provide a unique insight into the types of worries children are speaking to the service about.

In 2022/23 there were a total of 195,542 Childline counselling sessions. Less than 1% (474) of Childline counselling sessions were specifically about neglect in 2022/23. This may be because children rarely recognise that what they are experiencing is neglect and are therefore less likely to speak out about it than concerned adults in their lives.

(Source: NSPCC data)

Neglect is the most common form of abuse

Radford's 2011 study of the prevalence of child abuse in the UK found that neglect was the most common type of maltreatment in the family experienced by children of all ages. For the UK as a whole, neglect is the most common reason for a child to be the subject of a child protection plan or on a child protection register (although it is only the second most common reason in Scotland and Wales). Neglect is the most commonly discussed abuse-related concern by adults contacting the NSPCC helpline. Analysis has also identified that it was present as a factor in 74% of serious case reviews conducted in England in 2017-19.

What does the data tell us about children who have been neglected?

The prevalence of child neglect does not vary significantly by gender

The Radford (2011) study found similar levels of lifetime experiences of neglect reported for both boys and girls.

Maltreatment type	Under 11s		11-17s		18-24s	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Men	Women
Lifetime neglect by a parent or guardian	4.9%	5.2%	14.8%	11.8%	15.6%	16.4%

(Source: Radford et al, 2011)

Child protection plan and child protection register data, available for England and Wales only, also shows very little difference in the rates of boys and girls on a child protection plan or register because of neglect.

31 March 2022	Boys on a child protection plan/register for neglect		Girls on a child protection plan/register for neglect	
	Number	Rate per 1,000 children	Number	Rate per 1,000 children
England	12,330	2.0	11,150	1.9
Wales (neglect only)	445	1.4	415	1.4

(Source: DfE, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2023; ONS, 2023)

Younger children are more likely to be on a child protection plan because of neglect than older children

Child protection plan data, available for England only, shows that at 31 March 2022 younger children were more likely to be on a child protection plan because of neglect than older children. However, research suggests that the neglect of older children is more likely to go overlooked as signs of neglect may be more difficult to identify in older children and there can be an underestimation by professionals of older children’s need for parental care and support (Ofsted et al, 2018).

31 March 2022	Unborn	Under 1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16+
Number of children on a CPP for neglect	890	2,480	5,760	6,580	7,380	1,330
% of children within the age group on a CPP who were on a plan for neglect	67%	56%	48%	46%	46%	48%

(Source: DfE, 2022a)

References

General

Radford, L. et al. (2011) **Child abuse and neglect in the UK today**. London: NSPCC.

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/pre-2013/child-abuse-neglect-uk-today/>>

England and Wales

Children and Young Person's Act 1933.

<<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/23-24/12>>

Home Office (2023) **Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables.**

London: Home Office.

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables>>

Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2020) **Child neglect in England and Wales: year ending March 2019.** Newport: ONS.

<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/childneglectinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>>

Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) **Estimates of the population for England and Wales.** Newport: ONS.

<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales>>

England

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2023) **Annual Report 2022/23: Patterns in practice, key messages and 2023/24 work programme** (PDF).

London: Department for Education.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65bce1df7042820013752116/Child_Safeguarding_Review_Panel_annual_report_2022_to_2023.pdf>

Department for Education (DfE) (2022a) **Characteristics of children in need: reporting year 2022**. London: DfE.

<<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need>>

Department for Education (DfE) (2022b) **Learning for the future: final analysis of serious case reviews, 2017 to 2019** (PDF). London: DfE.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1123286/Learning_for_the_future_-_final_analysis_of_serious_case_reviews__2017_to_2019.pdf>

Department for Education (DfE) (2023) **Working together to safeguard children 2023** (PDF). London: DfE.

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>>

Ofsted et al (2018) **Growing up neglected: a multi-agency response to older children** (PDF). Manchester: Ofsted.

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/growing-up-neglected-a-multi-agency-response-to-older-children>>

Northern Ireland

Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968.

<<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/apni/1968/34/contents>>

Department of Health (DoH) (2022) **Children's social care statistics for Northern Ireland 2011/22**. Belfast: DoH.

<<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/childrens-social-care-statistics-northern-ireland-202122>>

Department of Health. Northern Ireland (2017) **Co-operating to safeguard children and young people in Northern Ireland**. Belfast: DoH.

<<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/co-operating-safeguard-children-and-young-people-northern-ireland>>

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) (2023) **Annual Trends in Police recorded crime 1998/99 to 2022/23**. Belfast: PSNI.

<<https://www.psnipolice.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/official-statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics>>

Scotland

Care Inspectorate (2021) **Triennial review of initial case reviews and significant case reviews (2018-2021): impact on practice** (PDF). Dundee: Care Inspectorate.

<<https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/6127/Triennial%20review%20of%20initial%20case%20reviews%20and%20significant%20case%20reviews%202018-2021.pdf>>

Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937.

<<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Edw8and1Geo6/1/37/contents>>

Scottish Government (2023a) **Children's social work statistics Scotland: 2021 to 2022**. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

<<https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-scotland-2021-22/pages/summary-infographic/>>

Scottish Government (2023) **National guidance for child protection in Scotland 2021 – updated 2023**. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

<<https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland-2021-updated-2023/>>

Scottish Government (2023b) **Recorded crime in Scotland, 2022-23**. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

<<https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2022-23/>>

Wales

McManus, M.A, Ball, E. and Almond, L. (2023) **Risk, response and review: multi-agency safeguarding (PDF)**. [Cardiff]: National Independent Safeguarding Board.

<<https://safeguardingboard.wales/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2023/10/Full-Report-Child-Practice-Reviews-Wales-2023.pdf>>

StatsWales (2023) **Children receiving care and support on the child protection register by local authority, category of abuse and gender**.

Cardiff: Welsh Government.

<<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/children-receiving-care-and-support/childrenreceivingcareandsupport-by-categorycpr-localauthority-gender>>

+ More ways to help you protect children



Take our online introductory child protection course

nspcc.org.uk/cpintro



Sign up to our weekly current awareness email newsletter

nspcc.org.uk/caspar



Visit **NSPCC Learning** for more information and resources about neglect

learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/neglect

