



**Vulnerability Knowledge
& Practice Programme**



**College of
Policing**

NPCC
National Police Chiefs' Council

National analysis of police recorded child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) crimes (2023) report for England and Wales

January 2023 to December 2023

Contents

Foreword	3
About the VKPP	5
Introduction	6
Key points	7
Scale and nature of CSAE	15
Victim profile	21
Perpetrator profile	26
CSAE committed by children	32
CSAE within the family environment	40
CSAE online	45
Group-based CSAE	52
Forward look	56
Conclusion	59

Foreword

In July 2024 I had the great privilege of becoming the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for Child Protection and Abuse Investigation (CPAI)

Our work to prevent and protect children from the terrible harm of sexual abuse and exploitation never stands still. Improving the policing response and working with partners to keep children safe is our shared mission and one that I am proud to be dedicated to.

It's the victims and survivors of abuse that really matter here. Behind every one of these offences is a child that has suffered harm and that's something we never lose sight of. Many crimes are not reported or identified, with estimates that 500,000 children are sexually abused every year - a truly shocking number. Children deserve to grow up safe in the knowledge that those responsible for protecting them from harm will work relentlessly to prevent abuse, improve outcomes for victims and bring perpetrators to justice.

Now in its second year, this report gives us the most comprehensive analysis of all child sexual abuse and exploitation crimes reported to all 44 police forces in England & Wales, providing an evidence base for policing, partners, government, and the public to work more effectively together to keep children safe. The report helps us understand and respond to changes in offending, informing our approach to tackling child sexual abuse across policing and critically with partners and stakeholders in the wider child protection system. This is also in reflection of CSAE's status as a priority threat as set out in the national strategic policing requirement.



Abuse takes place in a range contexts and although there is a great deal of focus on other threat areas, we know that over a third of CSAE crimes reported are carried out by those within the family environment, with almost half of the victims being under ten years of age.

The level of CSAE committed by children remains concerning. We acknowledge that this category covers a large spectrum of behaviours and harm, ranging from the experimental to serious contact offences including sexual assault and rape. Our response needs to recognise and understand these differences, addressing harmful sexual behaviours in a child-centred way, whilst enabling law enforcement to take appropriate action where serious harm occurs.

We also see rising reports of online harm continuing to pose real challenges to policing as developments in technology increase demand, but at the same time it enhances our ability to investigate. Of concern is the rapidly emerging threat involving the sexual extortion of children where we see perpetrators extorting victims for further indecent images or financial payment. Policing and partners continue to work at pace together to understand this threat in more detail.



The data shows that group-based offending made up less than 5% of all reported CSAE in 2023. These crimes take place in many forms from unorganised peer group sharing of imagery, to more organised complex high harm cases with high community impact. The Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce, set up in 2023, is driving the policing response to group-based CSAE, working with partners to respond robustly to this type of offending.

CSAE is part of public protection, an increasingly complex and demanding area of policing involving the most vulnerable children and adults in our communities. I see every day the amazing work taking place to prevent and tackle CSAE but know that we can do more and offending does not occur in silos. I am delighted that government funding has now been agreed for a new National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection (NCVPP) which will consolidate our existing expertise and skills, providing a more effective and joined-up approach. The NCVPP's ambition is to prevent the lasting harm caused by public protection-related crimes on victims, families, and communities. The Centre aims to help bring more offenders to justice, and most crucially, to foster confidence among victims to come forward, assured of the professional, compassionate policing service they will receive.

With more than 115,000 CSAE crimes reported to police in 2023, it can be easy to look away from such dreadful levels of offending but it is only by better understanding the scale and nature of abuse that we are all better able to prevent the serious harm. Our duty is to the children of today, the survivors of the past and the potential victims of tomorrow, that their voices must be heard, and their experiences must shape our strategies and policies as we move forward, fully dedicated to change, education, and progress.

ACC Becky Riggs
NPCC lead for Child Abuse Protection and Investigation

About the VKPP

The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) was formed to improve and coordinate policing's collective response to the protection of individuals experiencing vulnerability from abuse, neglect and exploitation, as well as improving partnership responses.

The VKPP joined the College of Policing in April 2024. From April 2025, the VKPP will be part of a new National Centre for VAWG and Public Protection (NCVPP), funded by the Home Office. The new centre is a partnership between the College of Policing and the NPCC. It will bring together three national policing programmes: the VKPP, Operation Soteria and the VAWG Taskforce.

The NCVPP aims to:

- Help bring more perpetrators to justice
- Prevent the lasting harm caused by crimes related to public protection on victims, families and communities
- Foster confidence among victims and witnesses to come forward, by assuring them of the professional, compassionate policing service they will receive



The VKPP have a multi-disciplinary team who work with national police bodies, forces and partners to:

- Provide policy advice and analytical insight to inform policing responses to CSAE and VAWG
- Develop and drive the new National Vulnerability Strategy
- Conduct primary research to inform an overall evidence base into policing and vulnerability
- Consolidate learning from statutory reviews into death and serious harm
- Map, link and promote promising practice
- Provide a supportive peer review function for forces
- Explore ways to improve data sharing, collection and analysis
- Support delivery of local children's safeguarding partnerships
- Track the scale and nature of deaths related to domestic abuse

The analysis in this report has been delivered through a Home Office policing grant. The grant funds a regional network of CSAE analysts, who are coordinated centrally through the VKPP and work alongside ACC Becky Riggs, the NPCC Child Protection and Abuse Investigation (CPAI) lead.

The VKPP also operate in partnership with the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and are funded to provide a data and insights function to support their core business.

To find out more about the VKPP's work and to see our other publications and resources, please [visit the VKPP website](#).

Introduction

This is the second national analysis of police-recorded child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) crimes report, produced by the **Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP)**. It builds on the insights of last year's **National analysis of police-recorded CSAE crimes report 2022**.

This report provides a transparent, public-facing and in-depth analysis of police-recorded CSAE in 2023, from all 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales, as well as the British Transport Police. The report's main findings and learnings are organised into a series of sections:

- Scale and nature of CSAE
- Victim profile
- Perpetrator profile
- CSAE committed by children
- CSAE in the family environment
- CSAE online
- Group-based CSAE

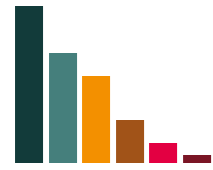
Trends in official data from the **Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse** show that, approximately, only one-fifth of overall sexual abuse experienced by children is recorded by police. The sexual abuse of children is committed in a variety of contexts, some of which may be less likely to be reported to police than others. As a result, this report does not capture the full extent of the sexual abuse and exploitation experienced by children.

This analysis covers CSAE reports that have met the threshold for a crime to be recorded by police. Some reports may relate to developmentally typical behaviour between children, in which non-criminal justice outcomes may be applied.

Understanding the scale and nature of CSAE is essential to improving responses to the sexual abuse of children across policing, law enforcement, the charity sector, academia and government. By working effectively together – and with the public – we can better meet the needs of children and help to keep them safe.

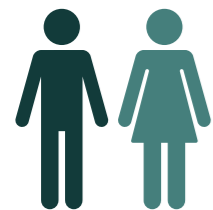
Key points

Key points



Scale and nature

- 115,489 CSAE offences were recorded by police in 2023. This reflects the long-term trend of increased reporting to the police. However, evidence from the [Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse](#) indicates that many crimes are not reported or identified, with 500,000 children estimated to be sexually abused every year.
- Contact abuse against children remains consistently high compared with 2022, accounting for 68% (n = 78,224) of CSAE offences in 2023.
- Sexual assault on a child (29%, n = 33,310) was the most common crime type recorded for CSAE offences, followed by indecent imagery of children (IIOC; 27%, n = 31,134) and rape of a child (18%, n = 20,702).
- Policing received the lowest number of reports of CSAE offences during school holidays. This indicates that the education system has an important role in identifying and enabling disclosure of abuse.



Victim and perpetrator profile

- CSAE remains a heavily gendered crime. Where the sex was recorded, 79% of CSAE victims were female (n = 64,770), while 82% of perpetrators were male (n = 61,459).
- Females account for 37% of suspects in IIOC offences (n = 7,974). This is likely to be a result of self-generated indecent imagery (SGII) being created and shared.
- In 44% of all CSAE offences, a relationship was recorded between the victim and perpetrator (n = 46,783). Of those, 80% of victims knew their abuser (n = 37,260).
- Where the victim's age was recorded (77%, n = 82,360), the most common age group of victims was 14 to 15 years old (29%, n = 23,965). 19% of victims were aged under 10 years old (n = 15,447), which highlights the importance of early prevention.



CSAE committed by children

- Perpetrator age was recorded for 63% of perpetrator records (n = 75,769). Of those, 52% involved reports of children aged 10 to 17 years offending against other children (n = 39,049). This is similar to the figures reported in 2022.
- In 86% of CSAE offences by children, where both the victim and perpetrator ages were recorded, the perpetrator was within three years of the victim (n = 21,448).
- Where the relationship was recorded for CSAE committed by children, the victim and perpetrator were acquaintances in 40% of offences (n = 7,618).
- 41% of offences committed by children were IIOC offences (n = 16,067).
- Analysis of a representative sample (n = 375) of IIOC offences committed by children identified that 80% involve SGII (n = 300).
- Further analysis of the SGII offences involving multiple children found that 62% (n = 168 of 271) had aggravating factors, such as the subsequent sharing of images on social media or blackmail (commonly referred to as 'sextortion').



CSAE in the family environment

- 31% of reported CSAE offences where a relationship was recorded occurred in the family environment (n = 14,536). Of those, 93% were contact abuse (n = 13,506), while almost half of the victims, where age was recorded, were under 10 years of age (45%, n = 6,239).



CSAE online

- At least 35% of police-recorded CSAE has an online element (n = 40,875). Of these offences, 76% relate to IIOC offences (n = 31,134). 15% relate to sexual communication with a child offences (n = 6,131).
- While the online space is known to facilitate the contact abuse of children, only 5% of contact offences were manually flagged as having an online element (n = 3,610).
- Sexual extortion of children is a rapidly emerging threat. Policing and partners are continuing to work together to understand this threat in more detail.



Group-based CSAE

- 4.6% of CSAE offences were group-based CSAE (n = 5,348), which is consistent with 2022. Of all CSAE offences, 3.7% were group-based contact offences (n = 4,228). Almost 1% were group-based non-contact offences (n = 1,120).
- Group-based CSAE ranges from unorganised peer group sharing of imagery, to more organised, complex high-harm cases with high community impact.

Definitions

Aggravated SGII	A child is groomed, coerced, deceived or extorted by another child or adult to produce and share sexual material of themselves.
Child	An individual who is under the age of 18 years. Police crime records are included where victims are recorded as being 18 years of age or older, but where the offence was non-recent and is recorded as an offence against a child.
Contact CSAE	All CSAE offences excluding IIOC and sexual communications with a child offences.
Crown offences	These are recorded offences where there is evidence of a crime that may not be directed toward a specific intended victim. CSAE offences against the state pre-dominantly relate to IIOC offences where the victim may not be aware of the existence of the indecent image or where the victim may not be identified.
CSAE committed by children	These are incidents that reach the legal threshold to be recorded as crimes and have a perpetrator recorded between the age of 10 and 17 years old. We do not include children under 10 years old in this category, as they are below the age of criminal responsibility. We recognise that there is a range of offences in this data, from sexual behaviours deemed developmentally typical to serious contact offences, including sexual assault and rape.
CSAE offences	Includes all child sexual abuse and exploitation offences within our dataset.
Group-based	Group-based or network CSAE is defined as two or more individuals (whether identified or not) who are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known to (or associated with) one another • Known to be involved in or to facilitate the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people • Being involved in the sexual exploitation of children and young people includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing them to other individuals for the purpose of exploitation • Trafficking a child for the purpose of sexual exploitation • Taking payment for sexual activities with a child or young person • Allowing their property to be used for sexual activities with a child or young person

In the family environment	We broadly adopt the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England approach, as shown in its Protecting children from harm report. We include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate family members (parents, siblings, step-parents, foster or adopted family, carers and grandparents) • Relationship types that may have access to the home environment (neighbours, babysitters, friends and family friends)
Indecent images of children (IIOC)	Sub-code offences of obscene publications (Home Office codes 086/02, 086/10 and 086/15) that relate to taking, making, sharing and possessing of indecent images and pseudo-photographs of children.
Non-aggravated SGII	A child produces sexual material of themselves and willingly shares it with another child in an exchange where there is no evidence of an imbalance of power.
Non-contact CSAE	Non-contact offences comprise IIOC offences and the offence 'Engage in sexual communications with a child' (Home Office code 071/17).
Non-recent	Offences in which a child was abused more than 12 months prior to the offence being reported.
Online	Non-contact offences and inclusion of contact offences 'flagged' by police forces as having an online element.
Perpetrator	An individual who has been recorded as a suspect on a crime record, including those who are now deceased.
Recent	Offences in which a child was abused in the most recent 12 months preceding the offence being reported.
Self-generated indecent images (SGII)	SGII refers to sexually explicit imagery, including nudes and semi-nudes, that a person takes of themselves.
Victim	An individual who has been recorded as a victim on the crime record.

Data considerations

In 2022, the [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse \(IICSA\)](#) recommended the introduction of a single CSAE data set. The IICSA's [Child sexual exploitation by organised networks](#) investigation report also called for data collection on child sexual exploitation (CSE) and CSE networks.

Following these recommendations, policing has worked to improve data collection, building on an existing data collection and ensuring that all forces consistently contribute data to form a national police-recorded crime dataset.

Comparison against 2022 data

This report is based on crimes recorded between January and December 2023 from all 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales, as well as the British Transport Police. Data is collected through requests into each police force on a quarterly basis.

Use caution when directly comparing the volume of offences against those reported in the [National analysis of police-recorded CSAE crimes report 2022](#). National data collection was strengthened in 2023, including through the addition of reporting from British Transport Police and from City of London Police.

Data was also not provided for certain periods of 2023 by Devon and Cornwall Police (January to September 2023) and Dyfed-Powys Police (April to June 2023), due to changes in these forces' crime recording systems.

Any comparisons of the number of police-recorded CSAE crimes in 2022 and 2023 are likely to be affected by these changes in data collection. However, the nature of different forms of CSAE can be compared and used indicatively to understand whether the broader CSAE threat has changed or remained consistent.

Initial recording of crimes

As data is captured every quarter, it relates to information recorded at a moment in time. Further detail may be disclosed or recorded as an investigation progresses, which could affect the ultimate classification or outcome of an offence. For example, an initial disclosure by a victim or third party may relate to a sexual assault. After investigation and further disclosure, the initial crime may be re-classified as a rape.

The numbers of crimes, victims and perpetrators will not always align to the total number of offences recorded, as some crimes may involve multiple victims or multiple perpetrators. In addition, police record the principal crime (the offence with the highest custodial sentence), which is particularly relevant when multiple forms of abuse are disclosed. The abuse of children takes place in many different contexts and police-recorded data does not capture the full extent of sexual abuse experienced by children.

Crown offences

Over 8% (n = 9,628) of CSAE offences in 2023 were recorded as crown offences. These are offences where the victim is recorded as the state, rather than a specific identified victim.

In the context of CSAE, the majority of crown offences relate to indecent images of children (IIOC). In these cases, children are still suffering harm and a crime has been committed, even if a child was not recorded as the victim. Unless stated, crown offences are excluded when providing analysis and insight on victims and relationships between victims and perpetrators.

Supplementary insight

In this report, we supplement findings with insight from partners across law enforcement, as well as our own additional analyses. The VKPP has conducted analyses to improve understanding and fill knowledge gaps highlighted through last year's report.

These analyses used a [sample calculator](#) to generate 95% confidence samples of populations for further analysis. Samples were representative of those types of offences by force and region, and offences were selected using a random number generator. Specifically, VKPP has conducted analysis to understand drivers of IIOC offences between children.

This report also refers to:

- The November 2024 [group-based offending publication](#) by the CSE Taskforce
- The National Crime Agency (NCA) insight around [financially motivated sexual extortion](#) (FMSE)

Comparison to other datasets

The data used in this analysis differs from that reported in other national datasets, such as those used by:

- Office for National Statistics (ONS) – [Crime in England and Wales](#)
- Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA Centre) – [Child sexual abuse in 2021/22: Trends in official data](#)

Although the ONS and the CSA Centre also use police-recorded crime data, the data used in this current report captures additional offences to understand recorded sexual abuse against all children under 18. Specifically, this report also includes:

- Offences of rape where victims are aged 16 and 17 years
- Sexual assault of children aged 13 years and over

In relation to image-based abuse of children, the data in the current report focuses on crimes that are classified as IIOC. Data used by the ONS and CSA Centre previously used a broader crime category of 'obscene publications', which encompasses other offences (not necessarily against children) alongside IIOC.

The [ONS police force area data tables](#) now include specific IIOC breakdowns. However, their reporting covers the period April 2023 to March 2024. It is therefore not possible to directly compare the data presented here with other national datasets that are publicly available.



Demographic data

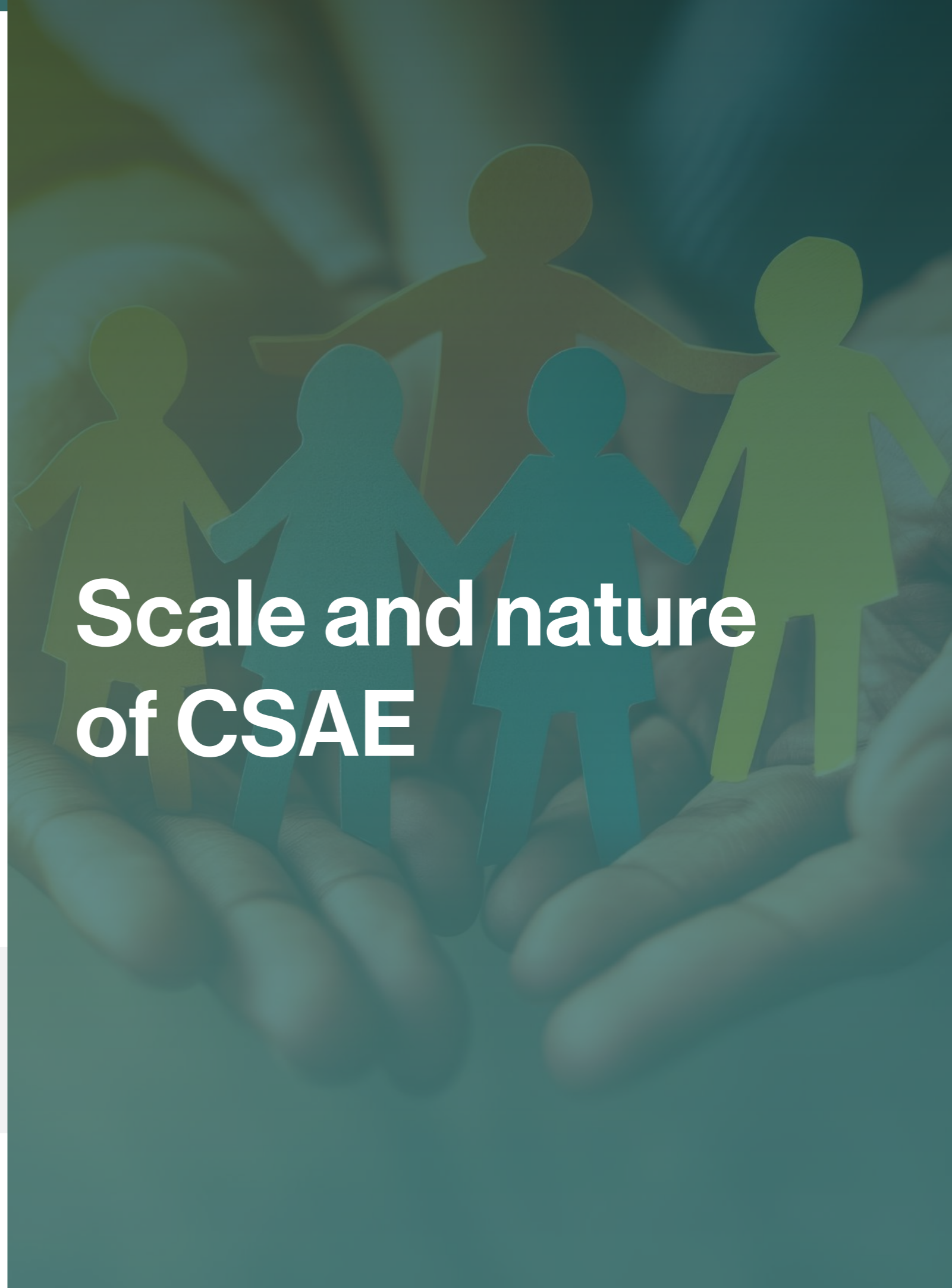
The data in this analysis includes data on certain protected characteristics of victims and perpetrators from police-recorded crime (age, sex and ethnicity). This data may not always be complete due to reporting by third parties, **crown offences** or where a perpetrator is unknown or unidentified.

As mentioned previously, the data is collected quarterly from police forces and represents a moment in time of an investigation. When the offence was initially recorded by police, the protected characteristic information may not have been known. The information is often updated and completed during the investigation.

All ethnicity data in this report relates to the individual's self-defined ethnicity. This is the most detailed data relating to ethnicity that is recorded by police. Completion rates of ethnicity data is particularly low, with 35% (n = 37,584) of victim ethnicity and 31% (n = 37,755) of perpetrator ethnicity recorded in the current dataset.

The NPCC has commissioned the **Police Digital Service (PDS)** to provide a data quality framework for policing, to support with improving data quality. In turn, this will help to improve how data is used for analysis and decision making.

Scale and nature of CSAE



Scale and nature of CSAE

Overview

A total of 115,489 CSAE offences were recorded in 2023, which is broadly similar to 2022. Of those offences:

- 68% (n = 78,224) related to contact CSAE
- 27% (n = 31,134) were IIOC offences
- 5% (n = 6,131) were sexual communication with a child offences

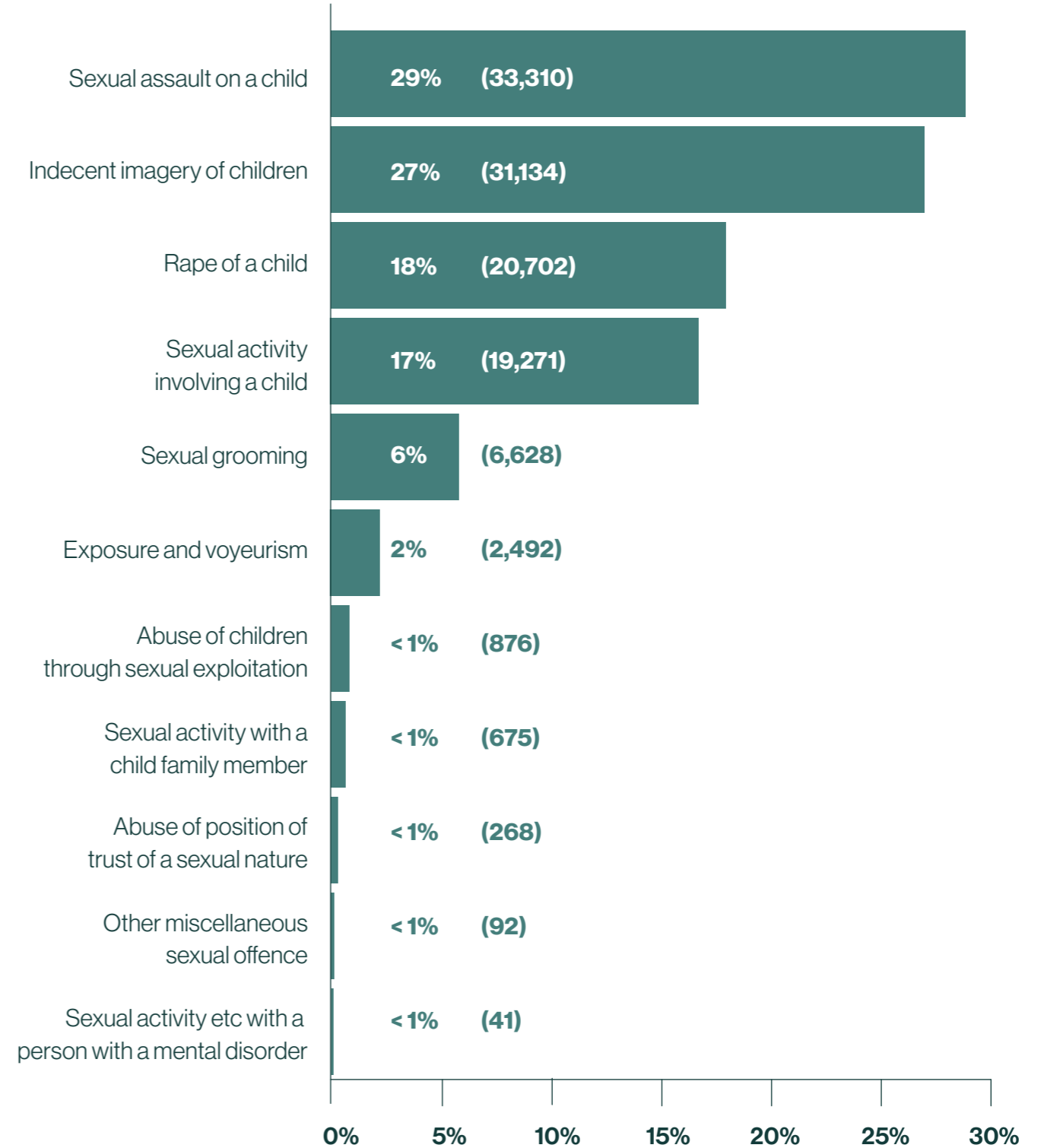
Sexual assault on a child (29%, n = 33,310) was the most prevalent offence type recorded in 2023, followed by:

- IIOC (27%, n = 31,134)
- Rape of a child (18%, n = 20,702)

Quick stat

Volumes of CSAE offences reported are highest during school term time and teachers are one of the highest third party reporters.

Figure 1: Proportion of CSAE offences in 2023 by offence type.



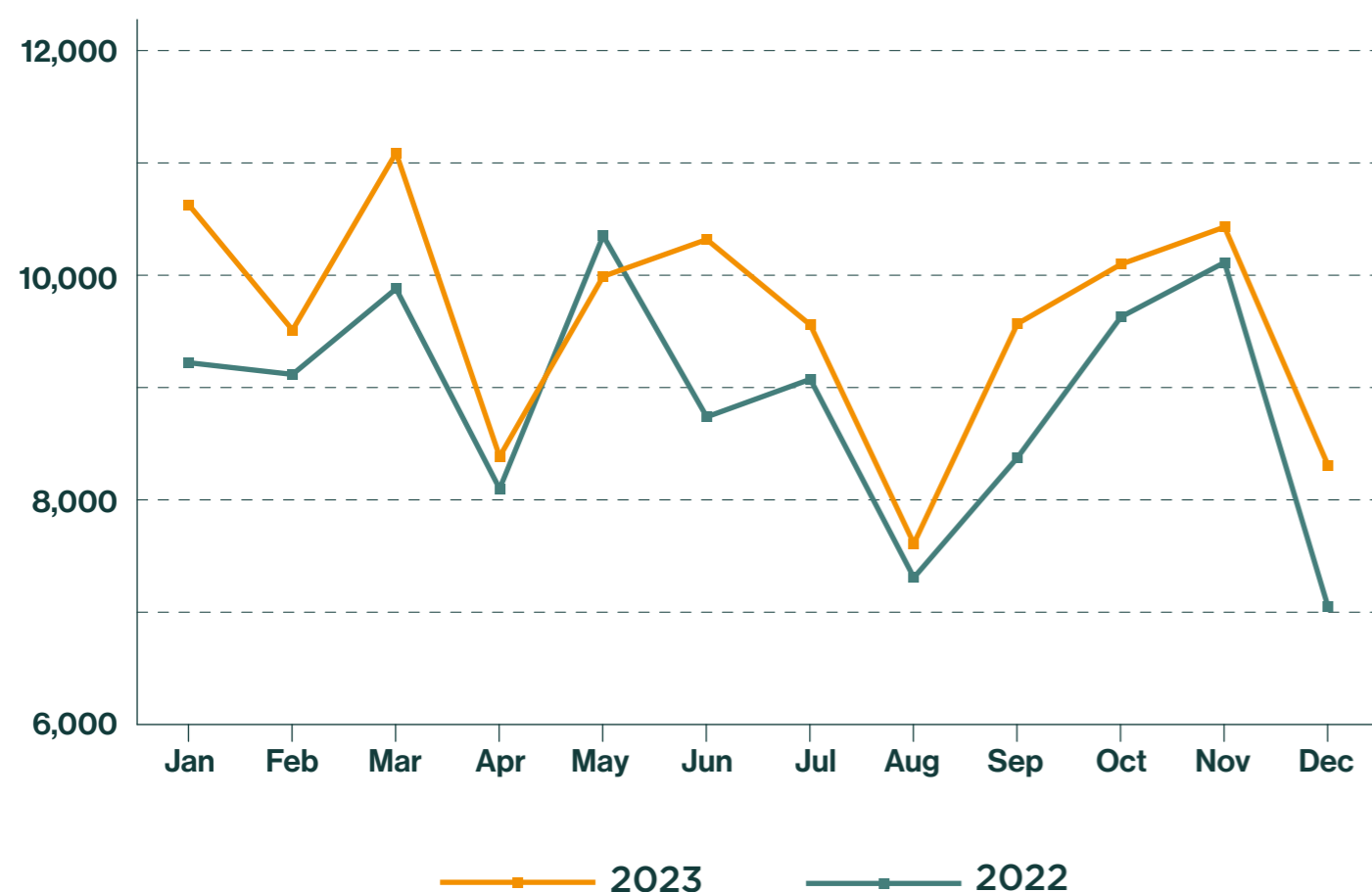
Sexual exploitation may encompass a variety of crimes and behaviours. The exploitation of children is a method of abuse that may also be part of broader offending, such as rape, sexual assault, IIOC and other offences. Due to the principle recording rule, the most serious offence would be recorded in these instances.

Reporting timelines

Seasonality

In both 2022 and 2023, higher volumes of CSAE offences were recorded during UK school terms, compared with school holiday periods. Review of crime records showed that teachers and schools were one of the highest third-party reporters, particularly in relation to offences committed by children.

Figure 2: A month-by-month comparison of CSAE reports to police in 2022 and 2023.



Recent and non-recent offences

The date of an offence being committed was recorded in 92% (n = 106,231) of cases. Where the date was recorded:

- 79% (n = 83,392) were classed as recent – reported to police within 12 months of the crime occurring
- 21% (n = 22,839) were classed as non-recent – reported to police more than 12 months after taking place

Of the CSAE offences classed as non-recent, 88% (n = 20,162) were contact offences, with an average (mean) time taken to report being over 17 years (see Table 1).

It is likely that non-contact offences are reported sooner because of the availability of evidence, such as images or videos, which may be identified and reported by a third party. A higher proportion of contact abuse victims know the person abusing them. This compounds **potential barriers** that victims face to reporting their abuse, such as fear of not being believed, shame and isolation.

Table 1: Average length of time from offence to recording

Average (mean) time taken to report	Recent and non-recent offences	Recent offences (0 to 12 months)	Non-recent offences (over 12 months)
Contact and non-contact offences	3.4 years (100%, n = 106,231)	38 days (79%, n = 83,392)	15.5 years (21%, n = 22,839)
Contact offences	4.8 years (68%, n = 72,127)	35 days (49%, n = 51,965)	17.1 years (19%, n = 20,162)
Non-contact offences	131 days (32%, n = 34,104)	43 days (30%, n = 31,427)	3.2 years (3%, n = 2,677)

Relationships

Almost half (44%, n = 46,783) of CSAE crimes had a perpetrator–victim relationship recorded. In 80% (n = 37,260) of these cases, the victim knew their abuser, which is consistent with 2022 data.

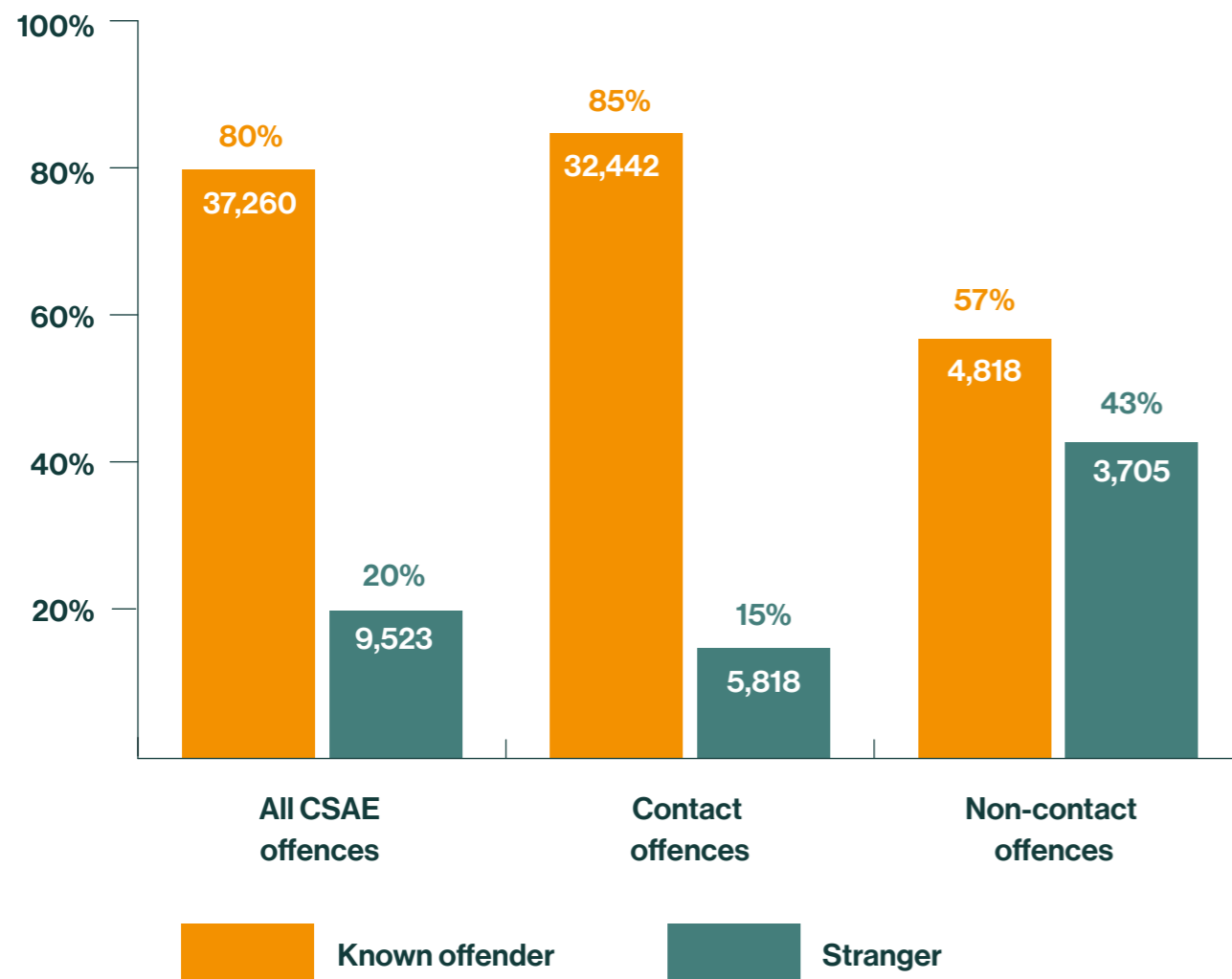
Where perpetrators were known to the victim, the most common relationships were:

- Acquaintance (38%, n = 14,252)
- Ex-partner or current partner (17%, n = 6,399)
- Parent (12%, n = 4,455)

As expected, relationships differ when looking specifically at non-contact offences, which are primarily online-enabled crimes. Crown offences accounted for 24% of non-contact offences (n = 8,887).

A perpetrator-victim relationship was recorded in 30% of non-contact offences (n = 8,523). The proportion of perpetrators known to the victim was 57% (n = 4,818), with 43% (n = 3,705) reported as strangers. This reflects the anonymous and hidden nature of online crimes. It is likely that advancements in encryption capability and AI-generated imagery will only increase the anonymity of perpetrators. We expect that this will increase the proportion of stranger-based IIOC offences seen within police-recorded crime data in the coming years.

Figure 3: Proportion of known perpetrators across contact and non-contact offences.



Victim profile

Victim profile

Details of 84,625 victims were partially or fully recorded in 2023. At least one victim was recorded in 72% (n = 83,354) of offences. Just over 8% (n = 9,675) of victim records were classified as crown victims. These records are excluded from victim record analysis.

Sex

The sex of the victim was recorded in 76% of victim records (n = 82,330 of 107,827). CSAE disproportionately impacts girls, consistent with 2022:

- 79% (n = 64,770) of victims were female
- 21% (n = 17,522) of victims were male

The [IICSA Inquiry](#) and the Barnardo's [Invisible children](#) report have outlined a variety of reasons as to why boys and young men are less likely to be identified victims of CSAE, including reluctance to disclose and being more likely to report other forms of exploitation. In our dataset, females were eight times more likely to be recorded as victims of rape than males.

The [ONS Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) identified that a smaller proportion of men reported having experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16, compared with women. This indicates that prevalence is more likely to be higher among girls, even when not reported to police.

Victim sex is recorded for 27% of IIOC victims (n = 23,410). There is a higher proportion of male victims (31%, n = 1,970) than for CSAE as a whole. This is likely due to self-generated indecent imagery (SGII) offences, in which both parties are recorded as victims or perpetrators. This is confirmed by exploratory analysis by the VKPP, which found that the majority of IIOC offences in which both parties

are children relate to SGII, most of which start as experimental image taking (see the [CSAE committed by children](#) section).

A very small proportion of victims identified as 'other sex':

- Fewer than 20 victims were non-binary
- Fewer than 25 victims were transgender (female to male)
- Fewer than 5 victims were transgender (male to female)

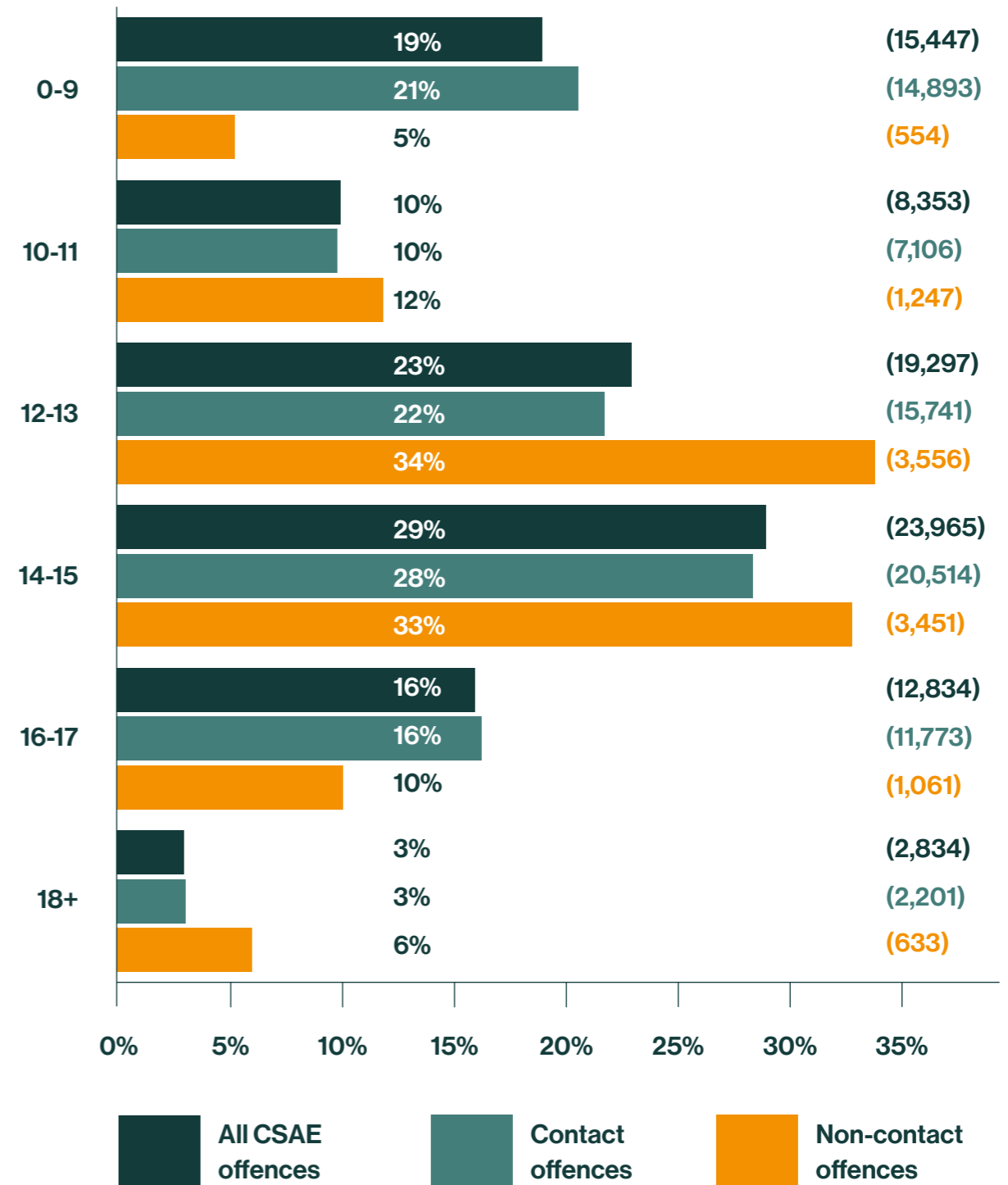
IICSA has reported that [transgender people are poorly understood](#) by society, media and professionals. This makes it more difficult for transgender victims to disclose.

Age

In this report, 'child' refers to an individual who is under the age of 18 years. In some instances, the victim was a child when the offence was committed, but the offence was not reported until more than 12 months later (known as a non-recent offence). These instances are still recorded as an offence against a child, even if the victim was aged 18 years or older at the point when the police recorded the offence.

Age of victims was recorded in 77% (n = 82,730) of victim records. The most common age for victims of CSAE was 14 to 15 years old (29%, n = 23,965), which is consistent with 2022. A small proportion (3%, n = 2,834) of victims are recorded as over 18 years old. These instances primarily relate to offences classified as against the child, but the victim's current age has been recorded. Figure 4 shows the distribution of victims by age groups where an age was recorded.

Figure 4: Victim age proportions of contact and non-contact CSAE offences.



As a proportion of all CSAE where age is recorded, 19% (n = 15,447) of victims are aged under 10 years. Offences against this age group are almost entirely contact offences (98%, n = 15,150). Furthermore, where a perpetrator-victim relationship is recorded, 73% (n = 6,239) are committed by perpetrators in the family environment.

Data from the Internet Watch Foundation shows that **under-10s are increasingly being targeted by groomers**, with a growing number of young children being coerced into performing sexual acts online. This is not directly comparable, as this data may contain offences that relate to victims outside of England and Wales. However, offending against under-10s will be monitored to understand whether this is reflected in future data.

Ethnicity

Self-defined ethnicity of victims was recorded in 35% (n = 37,584) of victim records. White British victims continued to be the most common self-defined ethnicity group in police-recorded CSAE, which is reflective of the ethnicity profile of all victims of crime (see **Table 2**). There continued to be an under-representation of Asian or Asian British victims compared to the Census and proportion of Asian or Asian British victims of all crimes. This is **reflective of the victim profile for VAWG offences** more broadly.

Table 2: Self-defined ethnicity of CSAE victims.

	CSAE victims 2023	Number of victims 2023	Crime Survey for England & Wales, 2024	% of Population (over 16s), Census 2021
White or White British	87%	32,548	85%	82%
Asian or Asian British	4%	1,446	8%	9%
Black or Black British	4%	1,328	4%	4%
Chinese or other ethnic group	3%	1,211	1%	2%
Mixed	3%	1,025	1%	3%

Analysis of a representative sample by the VKPP, focused on crimes where victims chose to withdraw from a police investigation (criminal justice outcomes 14 and 16), highlighted an over-representation of victims who defined as Asian or Asian British, or as Mixed ethnicity, compared with the broader CSAE picture. This was 5% for both ethnicity categories, compared with 4% and 3% in the wider dataset. Targeted work with children from ethnic minority groups would help to understand why this is the case, in order to adapt policing practice, help reduce disparities, and encourage reporting and engagement.

Vulnerabilities

The analysis of outcomes also identified that the following factors are known to compound a victim's vulnerability:

- Children living in care
- Children who have had missing episodes
- Children who have mental health issues and/or other complex needs

These factors have a negative impact on decisions to support proceedings, increasing the likelihood of withdrawal from an investigation.

Although beyond the current data capture and scope of analysis within wider police-recorded CSAE crime data, The National Society for the Protection of Children (NSPCC) has identified a number of **risk factors that make a child or young person more vulnerable** to child sexual exploitation. These include:

- Personal factors (low self-esteem or self-confidence)
- Social factors (lacking friends from the same age group)
- Having risky connections (links to gang members through peers or intimate relationships)
- Family situation (being a young carer, experienced recent bereavement, homelessness)
- Being in care or leaving care
- A history of sexual abuse

Quick stat

Living in care, missing episodes, mental health issues and/or complex needs compound victim vulnerabilities.

Perpetrator profile

Perpetrator profile

In this report, the term 'perpetrator' is used to refer to any individual who has been recorded as a suspect on a crime record, including those who are now deceased.

Details of 78,967 perpetrators were partially or fully recorded in 2023. At least one perpetrator was recorded in 66% (n = 75,780) of offences.

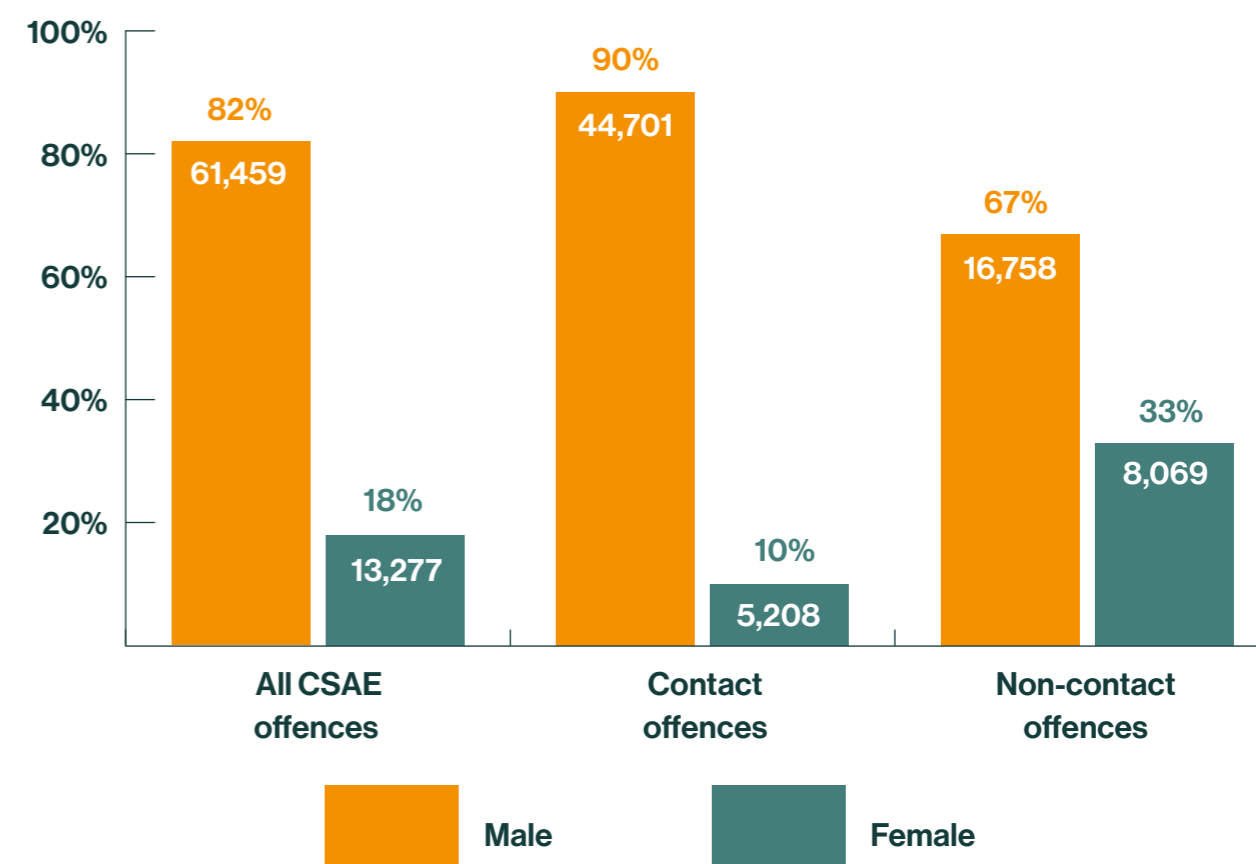
Sex

The sex of the perpetrator was recorded in 62% (n = 74,748) of perpetrator records. CSAE perpetrators were disproportionately male, which was consistent with 2022:

- 82% (n = 61,459) of perpetrators were male
- 18% (n = 13,277) of perpetrators were female
- A very small proportion of perpetrators identified as transgender or non-binary (0.01%, fewer than 5)

The proportion of female perpetrators increases to 33% (n = 8,069) for non-contact offences and 37% of perpetrators specifically in IIOC offences (n = 7,974). It is likely that the higher proportion of female perpetrators for IIOC offences relates to SGII, for which both children involved are recorded as perpetrators. New guidance was issued to policing in 2024 about the recording of children as 'person involved' rather than perpetrators in non-aggravated SGII offences, which is likely to change this profile in the future.

Figure 5: Perpetrator sex proportions of contact and non-contact CSAE offences.



Age

Age of perpetrators was recorded in 63% (n = 75,769) of perpetrator records. The average (mean) age for perpetrators across all CSAE recorded offences was 24 years. For IIOC offences, the average (mean) age was 20 years.

For all CSAE offences, the most common age range of perpetrators identified was 14 to 15 years (20%, n = 15,066), which is consistent with 2022. The proportion of perpetrators aged 14 to 15 years increases to 28% (n = 6,351) for IIOC offences.

Across all CSAE offences, where the age of a perpetrator was recorded, 52% (n = 39,049) were aged 10 to 17 years. This accounts for 32% of all CSAE perpetrators, including where age is unknown (see the [Data considerations](#) section for explanations on data availability). This is consistent with 2022.



Table 3 – Age of perpetrators

Age group	Number of perpetrators	Age proportion of perpetrators (all offences)	Age proportion of perpetrators (where age recorded)
10 to 17	39,049	32%	52%
18 to 29	12,633	11%	17%
30 to 39	8,818	7%	12%
40 to 49	5,588	5%	7%
50 to 59	3,633	3%	5%
60 to 69	1,951	2%	3%
70 to 79	843	< 1%	1%
80+	254	< 1%	< 1%
Age of perpetrator not recorded	41,389	37%	Not applicable

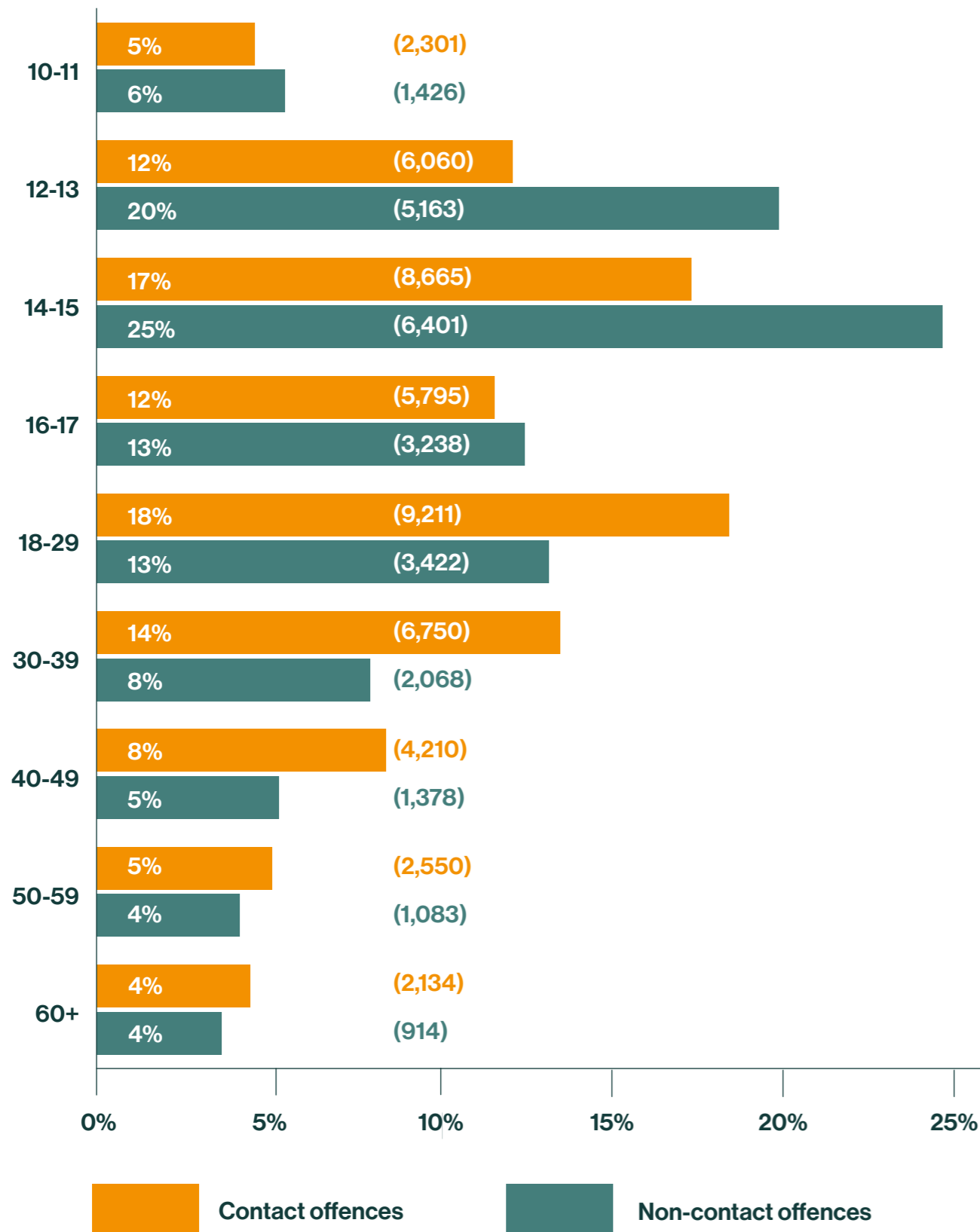
Notably, 3,000 offences were recorded in which a child under 10 years of age was recorded as a suspect. Home Office crime recording rules require that these offences are recorded. However, specific outcome codes make it clear that the person involved is under the age of criminal responsibility and that no further action would be taken, as they are below the legal age of criminal responsibility.

The age distribution of perpetrators varies between contact and non-contact offences. Figure 6 shows a higher proportion of adult perpetrators across contact offences, highlighting the harm caused by older perpetrators targeting younger victims. The higher proportion of younger perpetrators for non-contact offences is largely driven by generating and sharing indecent images.

Quick stat

SGII is driving the larger proportion of female perpetrators in IIOC offences.

Figure 6: Perpetrator age proportions of contact and non-contact CSAE offences.



Ethnicity

Self-defined ethnicity of perpetrators was recorded in 31% (n = 37,755) of perpetrator records. Where the perpetrator's self-defined ethnicity was recorded, this was consistent with 2022 data.

Table 4: Self-defined ethnicity of perpetrators.

Ethnicity of perpetrators	CSAE perpetrators 2023	Number of perpetrators 2023	% of population (over 16s), Census 2021
White or White British	88%	33,286	82%
Asian or Asian British	5%	1,959	9%
Black or Black British	3%	1,176	4%
Mixed	2%	813	3%
Chinese or other ethnic group	1%	521	2%

Quick stat

White or White British perpetrators account for the majority of suspects.

CSAE committed by children

CSAE committed by children

CSAE crimes committed by children are those that have a perpetrator recorded between the age of 10 and 17 years. Under-10s are not included in this category, as they are below the age of criminal responsibility. There is a range of offences in this data, from sexual behaviours that may be considered developmentally typical to serious contact offences, including sexual assault and rape.

For behaviours that are assessed by policing as non-aggravated or experimental, the focus is not the criminalisation of children. Processes are in place for policing to ensure that other non-criminal outcomes are recorded, such as diversionary or educational interventions.

Overview

- A perpetrator age was recorded in 63% (n = 75,769) of perpetrator records. Of those, CSAE committed by children aged 10 to 17 years account for 52% (n = 39,049).
- 58% (n = 22,821) of CSAE crimes committed by children relate to contact offending.
- 41% (n = 16,067) of CSAE crimes committed by children were IIOC offences, which can have varying levels of associated harm. These were largely driven by SGII and predominantly reported by third parties.
- Children commonly initiate 'experimental' (developmentally typical) behaviours without:
 - Realising the potential harm that may be subsequently caused
 - Recognising the legal age of consent, particularly when sharing nude images

Scale and nature

Where perpetrator age was recorded, 52% (n = 39,049) of suspects were children aged 10 to 17 years. This is consistent with 2022. The proportion of suspects who were children increases to 71% (n = 16,067) for IIOC offences.

Including perpetrators where no age was recorded, children aged 10 to 17 accounted for 32% of all suspects (see [Table 3](#) in the [Perpetrator profile](#) section). For offences committed by children, the most prevalent age range for perpetrators was 14 to 15 years (36% n = 15,066).

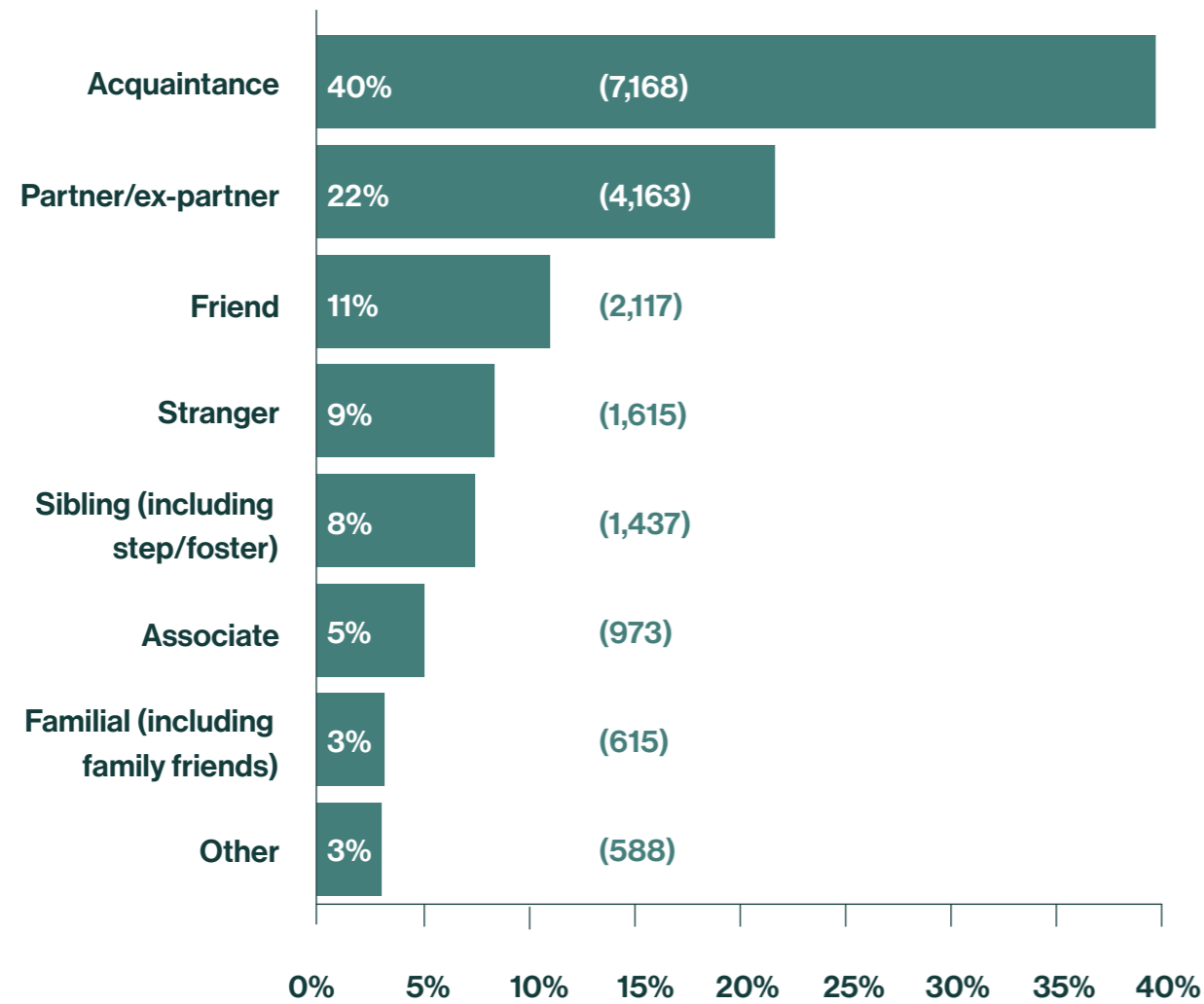
Of the CSAE offences committed by children, 58% (n = 22,821) are contact CSAE offences, with the remaining 42% (n = 16,228) being non-contact offences. This is consistent with 2022. The most common crime types were:

- IIOC (41%, n = 16,067)
- Sexual assault on a child (24%, n = 9,529)
- Rape of a child (17%, n = 6,595)

Relationships between children

A relationship between the victim and perpetrator was recorded in 49% (n = 19,192) of records with a suspect aged 10 to 17 years. Within CSAE committed by children, a higher proportion of perpetrators are known to the victim (92%, n = 17,511). An 'acquaintance' relationship was listed as the highest (40%, n = 7,618), followed by current partners or ex-partners (22%, n = 4,163).

Figure 7: Relationship types in CSAE offences committed by children aged 10 to 17 years.

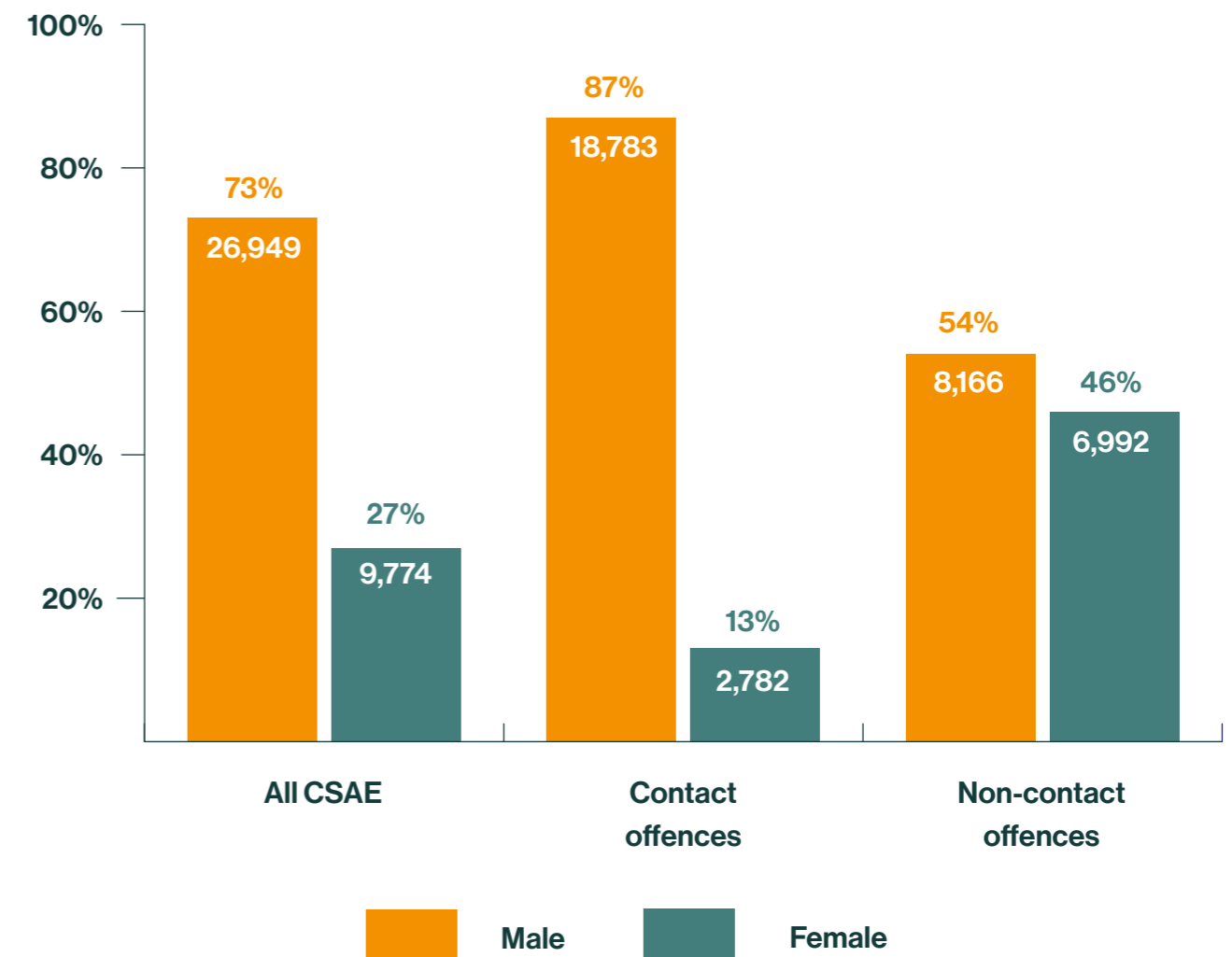


Perpetrators

In CSAE committed by children offences, the age group most commonly recorded as suspects was children aged 14 to 15 years. Where the age of both victim and perpetrator are recorded, the perpetrator's age was within one year of the victim's age in 66% (n = 16,501) of instances. When the perpetrator's age was within three years of the victim, this increased to 93% (n = 3,271) of non-contact offences and 85% (n = 18,177) of contact offences. This highlights that offences are commonly in similar-age peer groups.

For contact offences, 87% (n = 18,783 of 21,565) of perpetrators were male, while 13% (n = 2,782) were female. However, almost half (46%, n = 6,992 of 15,158) of non-contact offences had a female recorded as a suspect. This is consistent with 2022.

Figure 8: Perpetrator sex proportions of contact and non-contact CSAE offences committed by children between 10 and 17 years of age.



Self-generated indecent images by children

The [CSAE crimes report 2022](#) highlighted an intelligence gap around the nature of CSAE committed by children, particularly given the high proportion of IIOC offences. To provide greater understanding, an in-depth analysis was conducted using a representative sample of IIOC offences committed by children aged 10 to 17 years.

This analysis aimed to provide insight into the nature of this offending:

- What proportion was related to SGII?
- Was it possible to determine whether offences were aggravated or non-aggravated?

For this analysis, the following definitions were applied:

- **Aggravated SGII** – a child is groomed, coerced, deceived or extorted by another child or adult to produce and share sexual material of themselves.
- **Non-aggravated SGII** – a child produces sexual material of themselves and willingly shares it with another child in an exchange where there is no evidence of an imbalance of power. Non-aggravated SGII may also be referred to as ‘experimental’ or developmentally typical.

In the representative analysis of IIOC offences, a high proportion related to SGII (80%, n = 300 of 375). It is highly likely that the larger proportion of female perpetrators within IIOC offences is due to SGII, where the individual creating the images is recorded as a suspect.

Almost a quarter of the sample offences were not incidents of IIOC that involved a child taking or sharing an image with another child. This may have been due to various reasons, including:

- Offences being updated to specify adult involvement
- Viewing of IIOC generated by other means
- only one party being involved

Nonetheless, many of these offences still involved SGII, including SGII not shared with other children and isolated cases of vulnerable young females selling SGII for money.

The analysis categorised 88% (n = 271) of the sample as SGII involving multiple children. These were further analysed to understand the nature of the SGII offences.

Non-aggravated SGII

31% (n = 85 of 271) were assessed as non-aggravated or experimental offences between two willing children. New recording guidance for non-aggravated SGII offences, which was issued in April 2024, sets out that children should be recorded as ‘involved parties’ rather than ‘suspects’. Once these changes are implemented, it is likely that the volume of CSAE offences recorded against children will decrease.

Where a reporting party was identified, 1% (n = 1) of non-aggravated SGII were reported by the children themselves. Most offences were reported by parents (54%, n = 44) or schools (26%, n = 21). Low levels of offences reported directly by children are likely to be attributable to parties willingly engaging in activity, alongside not recognising harmful behaviours that may have been normalised among peer groups.

This is supported by further analysis by VKPP, which examined police crime outcomes for offences where victims of CSAE do not wish to engage in an investigation. Reasons for children wanting to disengage from the process included:

- Feeling that consensual activity had taken place
- The crime had been reported by a parent or adult in a safeguarding capacity, so the child did not feel in control of the situation and did not wish to proceed

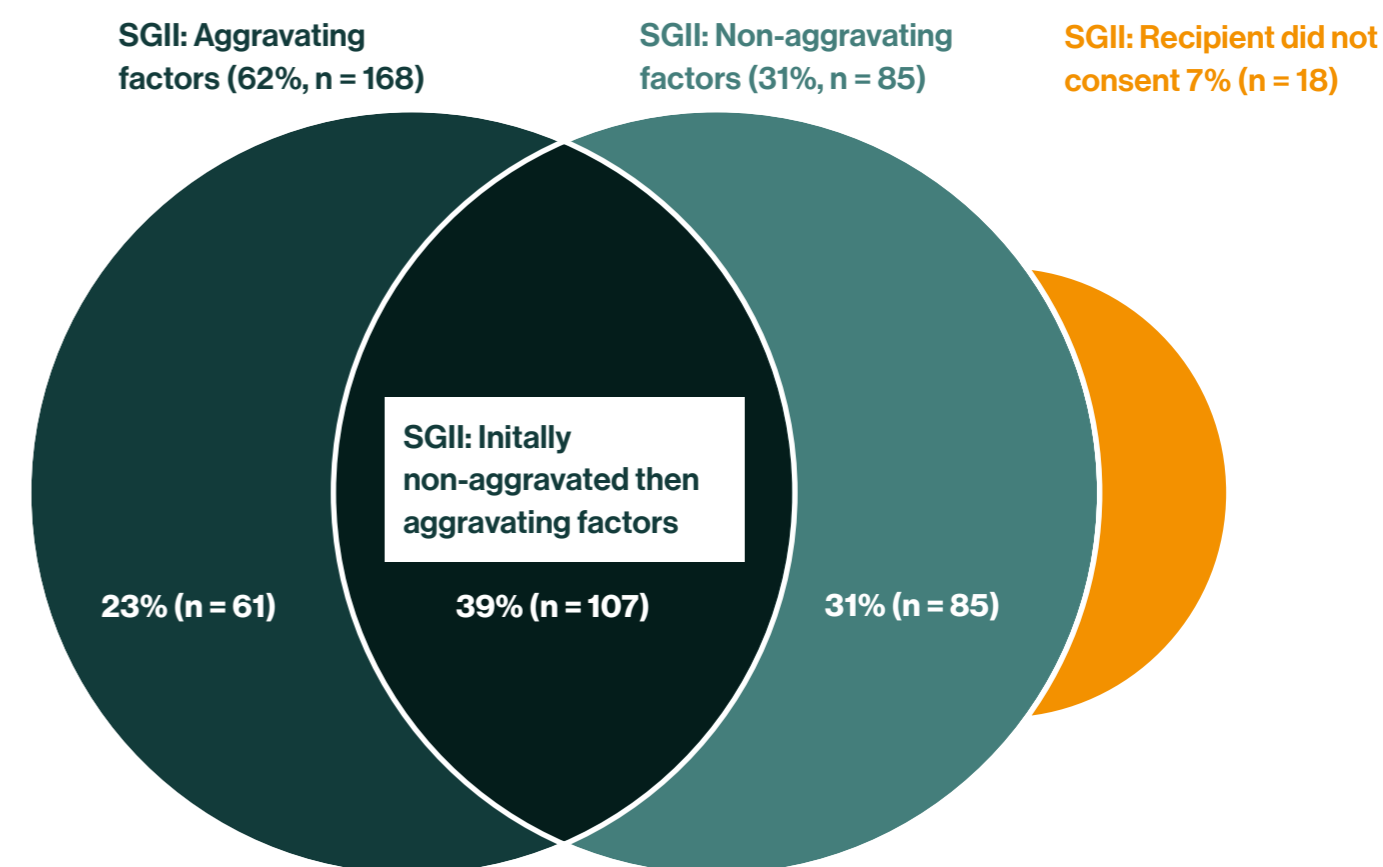
Aggravating factors

Of the SGII offences included for further analysis, 62% (n = 168) featured aggravating factors. Identifying whether – and at what point – an SGII offence became aggravated is complex, due to:

- the nature and dynamics of relationships
- the context and progression of situations, which are often not provided when these crimes are reported by third parties

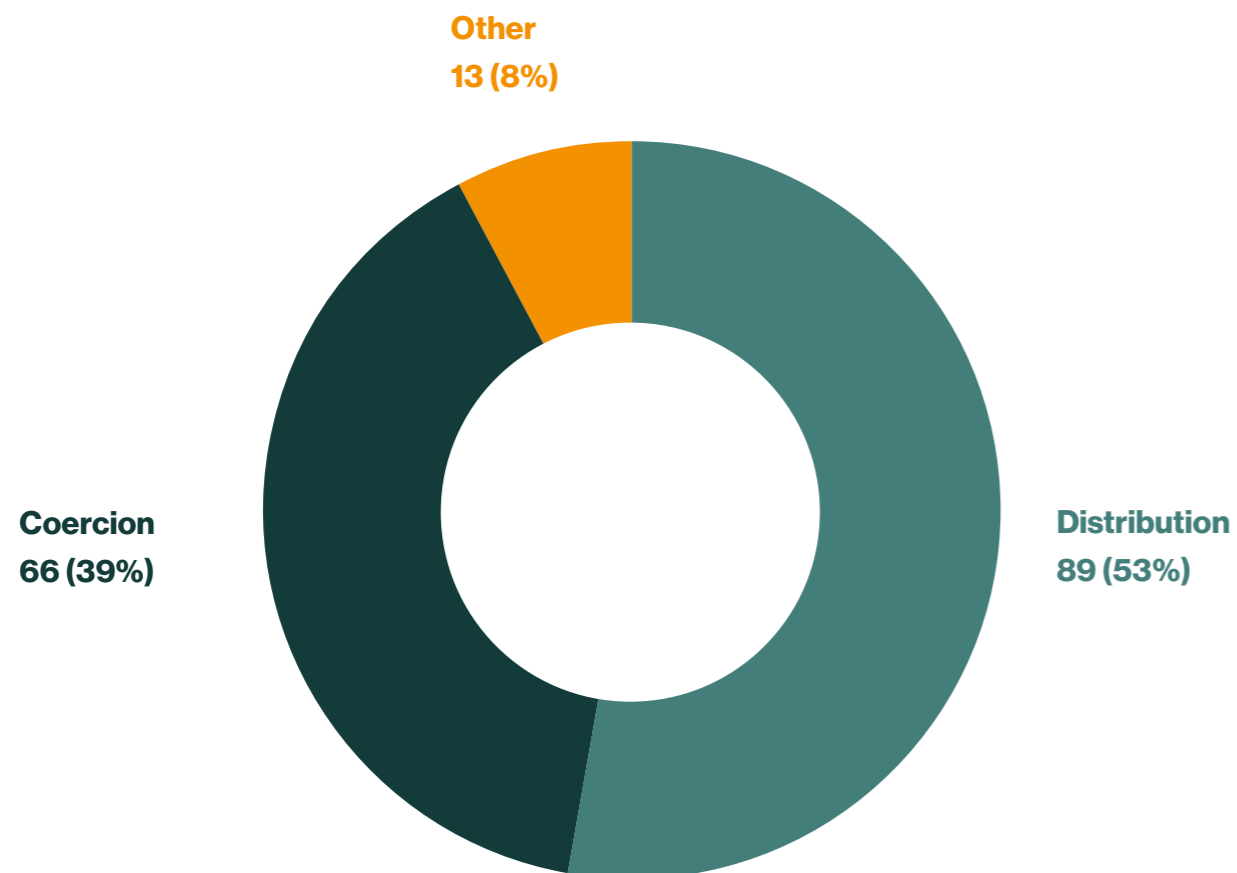
It was common for aggravated offences to have been initiated as non-aggravated sharing of SGII, prior to any aggravating factors occurring. It is important for police investigations to establish full circumstance and identification of aggravating factors, to ensure that offences are recorded accordingly. The child should be recorded as the victim of an aggravated offence, rather than a suspect for the generation of the indecent image.

Figure 9: Crossover between non-aggravated and aggravated SGII offences.



Where an aggravating factor was identified, 53% (n = 89) related to the subsequent distribution of the image by the other child, either online or within peer groups. In 39% (n = 66) of cases, the aggravating factor related to coercion, such as blackmail, grooming or bullying.

Figure 10: Classification of aggravated offences of SGII by children.



Financially motivated sexual extortion (FMSE)

Blackmail, including financially motivated sexual extortion (FMSE), accounted for most of the SGII aggravated offences involving coercion (61%, n = 40). A further nine offences in the original sample specified FMSE but that the extortion was conducted by an adult. Where the child's details were recorded, these offences most often targeted older male children, aged 15 to 17 years (57%, n = 28 of 46).

FMSE is when a person is forced to pay money or provide other forms of currency (such as cryptocurrency or vouchers) after they have been threatened by a perpetrator to release an indecent image of them.

The NCA provides [additional information on FMSE](#) (sextortion). Further work is being done by the NCA and law enforcement to capture data and improve the response to this form of exploitation. Our future assessments on CSAE will report on the scale and nature of this issue.

Platforms

Where a platform was recorded in the sample, Snapchat was the most common platform across both aggravated and non-aggravated SGII, used in 71% (n = 180 of 252) of cases. The use of Snapchat is unsurprising, given that Ofcom found that the platform was **most favoured by children to communicate with friends**.

Snapchat is popular due to features that allow images to disappear after being viewed, increasing the perception of an image being temporary. However, the ability to screenshot images means that further distribution is still possible. Implementing a block on the ability to screenshot, similar to that used by online banking apps, could help to prevent this.

For aggravated offences, Instagram was the second most common platform used (13%, n = 16 of 131). This platform was particularly used by perpetrators involved in the blackmail of children. This is likely because the platform can allow the perpetrator access to the victim's followers list.



Quick stat

Four out of five IIOC offences in which a child was recorded as a perpetrator relate to Self-Generated Indecent Imagery.



CSAE within the family environment

CSAE within the family environment

When analysing CSAE within the family environment, we broadly adopt the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England approach, as shown in its [Protecting children from harm](#) report. We include:

- Immediate family members (parents, siblings, step-parents, foster or adopted family, carers and grandparents)
- Relationship types that may have access to the home environment (neighbours, babysitters, friends and family friends)

Overview

- CSAE within the family environment accounts for 31% of offences when a perpetrator-victim relationship is recorded (n = 14,536 of 46,783).
- The majority of CSAE within the family environment are contact offences (93%, n = 13,503).
- Parents are the most common perpetrators (31%, n = 4,455), then friend (20%, n = 2,886) and siblings (18%, n = 2,558), of which almost half are committed by children aged 10 to 14 years.

Scale and nature

In 2019, figures from the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) showed that over a third of child sexual abuse survivors experienced abuse from a family member. Policing data reflects this. Where a perpetrator-victim relationship was recorded, CSAE within the family environment accounted for 35% of contact CSAE offences (n = 13,503 of 38,260) and 31% (n = 14,536) of all recorded CSAE. Most abuse in the family environment relates to contact offences (93%).

Comparable with previous reporting and CSAE generally, the three most common CSAE offences occurring within the family environment in 2023 were:

- Sexual assault on a child (51%, n = 7,399)
- Rape of a child (23%, n = 3,349)
- Sexual activity involving a child (14%, n = 2,028)

Reporting

CSAE contact offences that occur within the family environment take longer to be identified or reported. On average (mean), offences were recorded 8.5 years after the abuse, compared with just under three years for contact offences occurring outside the family environment. **Barriers to disclosure** include:

- Self-blame
- Shame
- Fear of repercussions
- Children not recognising their experience as abuse

Relationship and offence types

Where there was a relationship recorded, the most common relationship type for CSAE within the family environment was parent (31%, n = 4,455), including step-parent, foster parent and parent's partner. Table 5 provides a breakdown of the different relationship types linked to CSAE within the family for 2023, alongside the average (mean) age of perpetrators.



Table 5: Relationship types of CSAE within the family environment.

Relationship type	Percentage	Number	Average (mean) perpetrator age
Parent (including step-parent, foster parent or parent's partner)	31%	4,455	39
Friend	20%	2,886	15
Sibling (including step-sibling or foster sibling)	18%	2,558	14
Familial (including family friends)	17%	2,540	29
Grandparent	4%	595	62
Cousin	4%	560	15
Uncle or aunt	5%	539	33
Neighbour	2%	279	32
Carer	< 1%	102	40
Childminder or babysitter	< 1%	22	34

Siblings continue to account for the third-highest relationship type for CSAE within the family. Where age was recorded, sibling perpetrators were most commonly aged 10 to 14 years (44%, n = 1,049), while 18% (n = 418) of sibling abuse was committed by over-18s. Across all ages, 58% (n = 1,300) of sibling perpetrators were older than the victim by five years or less.

Quick stat

Approximately a third of CSAE offences relate to abuse in the family environment, abuse in this context takes almost three times as long to be reported to police as other forms of CSAE.



Victims

Reflective of CSAE more broadly, most victims in the family environment were female (75%, n = 10,351), although a slightly higher proportion of victims were male (25%, n = 3,389) compared with victims of CSAE generally.

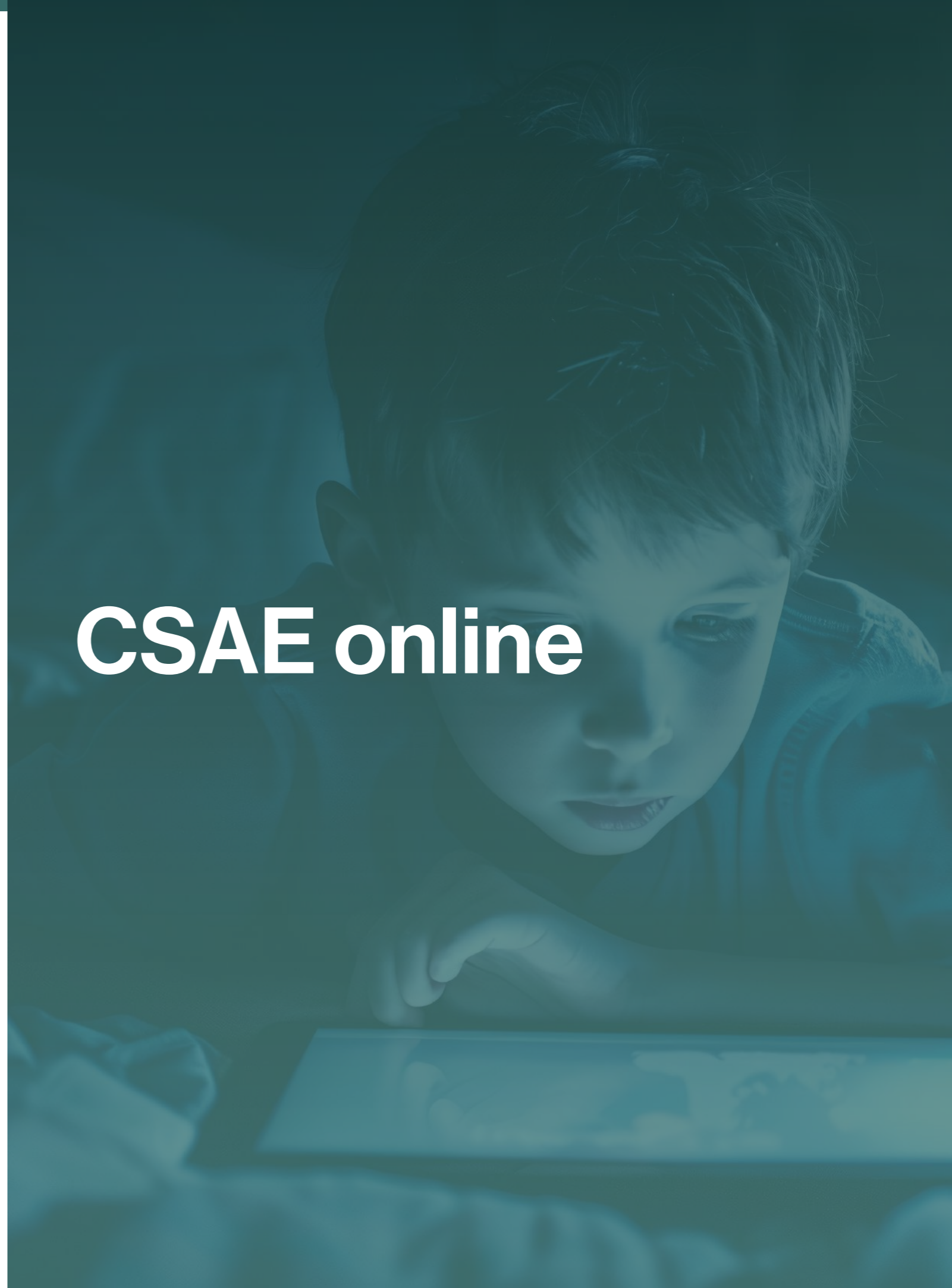
Victims in the family environment were younger than victims of CSAE generally, with an average (mean) age of 13 years old and 45% (n = 6,239 of 13,809) of victims being under 10 years old. In line with CSAE more broadly, most victims in the family environment (82%, n = 5,803 of 7,046) were White or White British.

Abuse likely occurs at a younger age for victims within the family environment. Younger-aged children are more dependent on those around them and may be less able to recognise abusive behaviours. This gives perpetrators greater opportunity and access to groom and abuse young children.

Perpetrators

A large proportion of perpetrators committing CSAE within the family were male (87%, n = 11,328), with only 13% (n = 1,696) of perpetrators being female. This is consistent with 2022. Ethnicity for perpetrators within the family is relatively comparable to all recorded perpetrators, with the majority being White or White British (90%, n = 5,605 of 6,208). For age, almost half (43%, n = 5,603 of 12,987) of perpetrators were aged under 18 years. The average (mean) age was 24 years.

CSAE online



CSAE online

CSAE online includes non-contact offences, as well as contact offences that have been flagged by police forces as having an online element.

Overview

- At least 35% (n = 40,875) of police-recorded CSAE offences were recorded as having an online element.
- Of online CSAE offences:
 - 76% were IIOC offences (n = 31,134)
 - 15% were sexual communication with a child offences (n = 6,131)
 - 9% were contact offences with an online flag within the crime record (n = 3,610)
- Sexual extortion is an increasing threat for children. Policing is improving the consistency in recording and capturing these offences to be able to report on this threat effectively going forward.

24% of children aged 5 to 7 years own a mobile phone, while most children own one **by the time they are 11 years old**. With increased time spent online, the threat to children in the online space is potentially considerable.

The ever-changing digital landscape offers children new and faster ways to connect with others. Online CSAE encompasses a range of criminal activities, all of which can have devastating impacts on the wellbeing and safety of children, including:

- The sharing and production of exploitative materials, such as indecent images and videos
- Grooming
- Coercion
- More recently, sexual extortion

Scale and nature

Most online offences (76%, n = 31,134) relate to IIOC offences, while 15% (n = 6,131) relate to sexual communications with a child offences. Additionally, 9% (n = 3,610) were contact offences that were flagged in the crime report as having an online element.

The online space plays a fundamental role in facilitating contact abuse. Identifying this in policing data relies on flagging reports that indicate an online element. Less than 5% of all contact offences had an online element recorded (n = 3,610 of 78,224), though the number of offences that involve an online element is likely to be much greater.

The majority of contact offences with an online element recorded (83%, n = 3,014) related to sexual activity involving a child. This is the offence type recorded for the request of an indecent image from a child.

Figure 11: Breakdown of CSAE offences with an online element.

Contact offences with 'online' flag
3,610 (9%)

Sexual grooming
6,131 (15%)

IIOC
31,134 (76%)



Quick stat

The perpetrator profile differs across types of online offences, with older males (18-29) being more predominant for sexual grooming offences compared to IIOC offences in which young males (14-15) are the most common suspects.



Sexual extortion of children

Sexual extortion is an increasing threat for children, with the Internet Watch Foundation reporting a 19% increase in reports compared to 2023. Children as young as 11 years old are reported to be victims of this type of abuse.

Facilitated through online platforms, perpetrators use pseudo-profiles to engage with victims and persuade them to share indecent images. Once these images are received, the victim is subject to extortion or blackmail. The threat can be broadly split into two types:

- Sexually motivated, whereby the victim is extorted for further images or escalating sexual offences
- **FMSE**, where the perpetrator demands financial payment to not release the indecent images

The NCA outline that **FMSE predominantly affects young males**, with boys aged 14 to 17 years accounting for 90% of victims. In contrast, they found that females are the predominant victims of sexually motivated extortion.

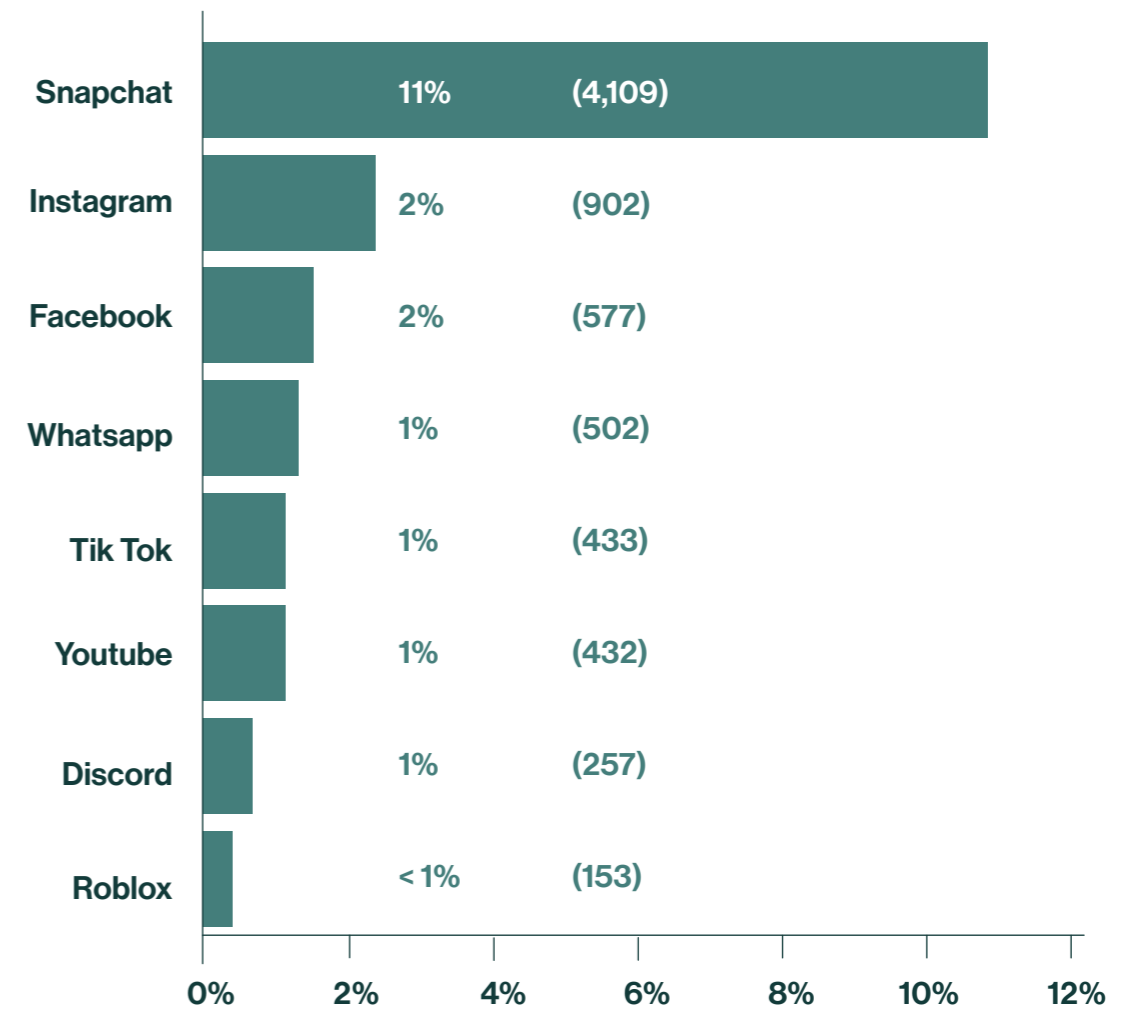
In the 2023 dataset, at least 100 cases were identified that explicitly mentioned sextortion within the summary of the crime. Identifying this form of CSAE is difficult at a national level. Policing continues to improve consistency in the way these crime types are recorded. Work has started to capture data on the scale and nature of the extortion of children, and we aim to report on this in future analyses.

Where abuse takes place

While social media platforms are popular locations for children to interact and seek entertainment, they can also present as an unsafe space. A recent survey by the Youth Endowment Fund found that **27% of teenage respondents said they had seen sexually violent content or threats online**. Identifying the platforms involved is difficult at national level, due to the way in which this data is often recorded in crime records (in the body of a crime report). Where a platform could be identified (n = 7,365), the most common were:

- Snapchat (11%, n = 4,109 of online offences)
- Instagram (2%, n = 909)
- Facebook (2%, n = 577)

Figure 12: Platforms featured in online offences.



Following research into online user ages, Ofcom found that **children often use false user ages on social media platforms**, putting them at greater risk of encountering age-inappropriate, harmful content online. Of the children aged 8 to 17 years who had a profile on at least one of the social media platforms listed in the study, 22% had a false user age of 18 or over. This indicates the ease with which children can access unsuitable content, as well as the importance of platforms enforcing age assurance for users (which the **Online Safety Act 2023** seeks to mandate).

Victims

In 67% (n = 27,878 of 41,857) of online CSAE victim records, the victim age was not recorded. This is partly because the victim is recorded as the crown in many cases. Where victim age was recorded, the most common age was 13 years old. Where victim sex was recorded, there was a higher proportion of male victims of online abuse (26%, n = 3,578 of 13,960), compared with 21% for all CSAE.



Perpetrators

There are distinct profiles between both online offence types (IIOC and sexual communications with a child).

Sexual communications with a child offences are more likely to be committed by older, unknown male perpetrators:

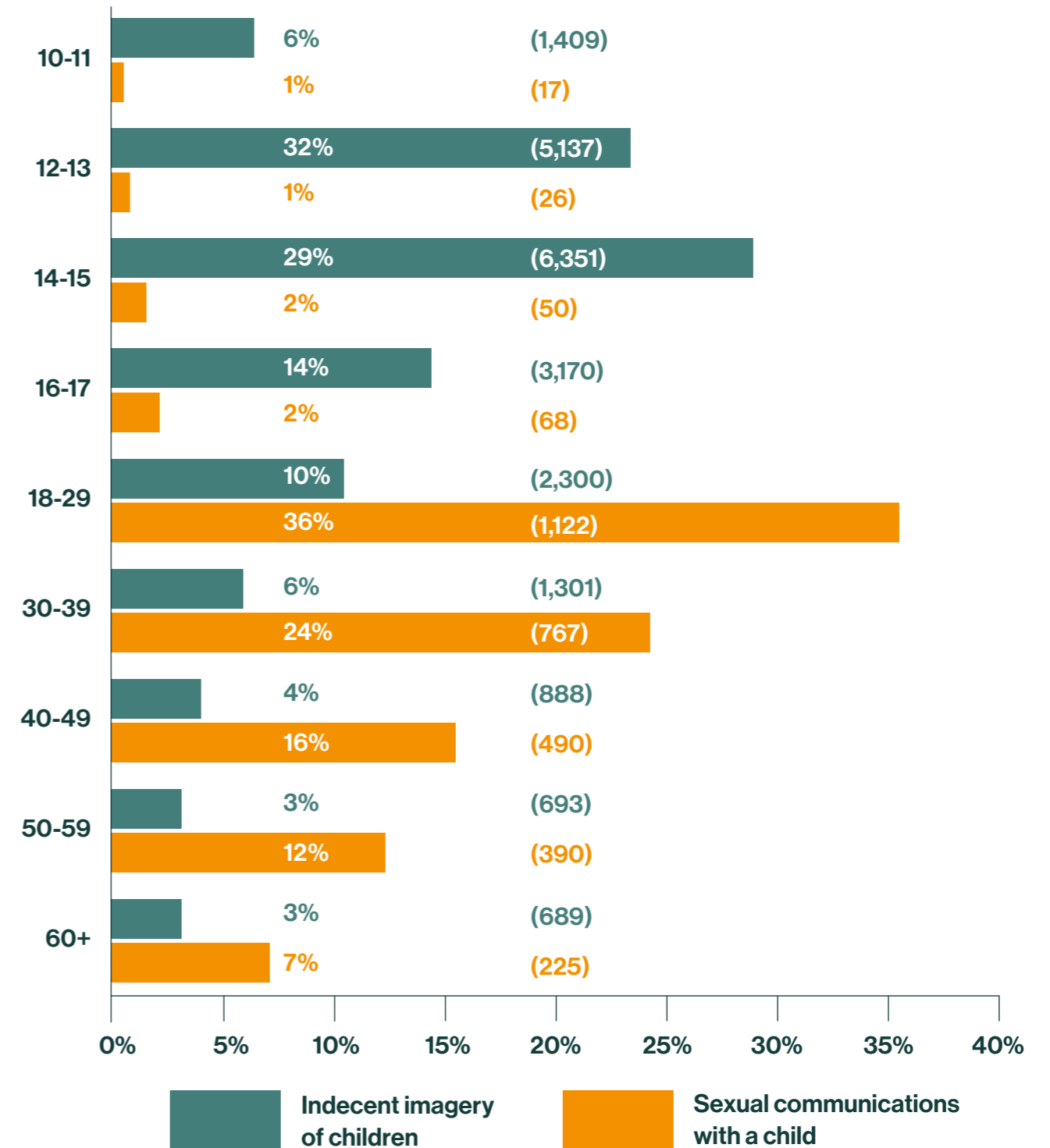
- The most common age bracket was 18 to 29 years
- Male perpetrators accounted for 97% (n = 3,088 of 3,184)
- The most common recorded relationship was stranger (71%, n = 1,274 of 1,796)

IIOC offences are more likely to be committed by young perpetrators with a higher proportion of female perpetrators:

- The most common age bracket was 14 to 15 years
- 63% (n = 13,670 of 21,647) of perpetrators were male, while 37% were female (n = 7,974)
- The most common recorded relationship was acquaintance (36%, n = 2,571 of 7,225)

71% (n = 16,067 of 22,739) of IIOC offences with a perpetrator age recorded related to offences in which a perpetrator was aged 10 to 17 years (see the [CSAE committed by children](#) section). SGII was a driving factor in the high volume of IIOC offences.

Figure 13: Age and proportion of perpetrators of IIOC and sexual communications with a child offences.



Group-based CSAE

Group-based CSAE

Following [IICSA](#) recommendations and its [Child sexual exploitation by organised networks](#) report, policing has worked to improve data collection of CSAE crimes at a national level.

The CSE Taskforce, led by [The Hydrant Programme](#), developed the Complex and Organised Child Abuse Dataset (COCAD), which is a subset of the broader CSAE data collected at a national level. COCAD focuses on offences that relate to contact offending where there are two or more perpetrators recorded. Insight into a smaller number of group-based non-contact offences will also be included, which will use the same dataset used throughout this report.

Overview

- Group-based CSAE accounts for 4.6% (n = 5,348) of all CSAE in 2023:
 - 3.7% (n = 4,228) were contact offences
 - Less than 1% (n = 1,120) were non-contact offences
- Rape offences account for 40% (n = 1,702) of group-based contact offences.
- 92% (n = 1,034) of non-contact group-based offences are IIOC, though it is likely there is a gap in identifying and recording images shared among large groups.

Quick stat

Group based CSAE accounts for 4.6% of all CSAE recorded crime.

Group-based contact offences

Scale and nature

Detailed analysis on group-based contact offences, using the same 2023 data capture, was published in November 2024 in the [CSE Taskforce group-based offending publication](#). We include some key headlines from this report.

In 2023, group-based contact offences accounted for 5.4% (n = 4,228) of all contact offences and 3.7% of CSAE crimes overall. The most common types of offence for this form of CSAE were:

- Rape (40%, n = 1,702)
- Sexual assault (28%, n = 1,200)
- Sexual activity with a child (26%, n = 1,094)

Categorisation

Group-based contact offending within COCAD is further assessed and categorised into:

- Familial (26%, n = 1,125)
- CSE (17%, n = 717)
- Institutional (9%, n = 366)
- Ritualised (no offences identified in 2023)
- Other (39%, n = 1,636)

The 'other' category can include crimes where the suspect is a stranger or an acquaintance to the victim, but where no direct link can be made to the familial, CSE, institutional or ritualised categories. Further analysis identified that 55% of offences in the 'other' category were identified as CSAE offences committed by children.

Victims

The victim profile of group-based contact offending broadly reflects the wider victim profile. Where records of personal characteristics were available, the majority were female (78%, n = 3,012) and White or White British (85%, n = 1,744). At the time of the offence, 25% (n = 1,014) of victims were aged under 10 years, while 57% (n = 2,284) were aged between 10 and 15 years.

Perpetrators

Similarly, the perpetrator profile was broadly reflective of the wider CSAE profile. Where records of personal characteristics were available, the majority were male (76%, n = 3,620). In terms of age, 39% (n = 1,862) of perpetrators were recorded as aged 10 to 15 years. Only 34% (n = 2,266) of perpetrators had a recorded self-defined ethnicity, of whom 83% (n = 1,884) were White or White British.



Group-based non-contact offences

Scale and nature

In 2023, group-based non-contact offending (IIOC and sexual communications offences) accounted for 21% of all group-based offences, 3% of all non-contact offences and less than 1% of all CSAE offences (n = 1,120). Most group-based non-contact offending related to group-based IIOC offences (92%, n = 1,034).

Victims

Where sex was known, females were more likely to be victims of both group-based sexual communications (86%, n = 43) and group-based IIOC offences (68%, n = 305), though the latter has a less gendered split. Where age of the victim was known, the most prevalent age of group-based IIOC victims was 14 years (24%, n = 90). The most prevalent age of group-based sexual communication victims was slightly younger, at 13 years old (28%, n = 13).

Perpetrators

Perpetrator profiles of group-based non-contact offences vary depending on offence types of group-based IIOC versus group-based sexual communications with a child. As a result, these crime types have been looked at separately.

Where the sex of the perpetrator was recorded, group-based IIOC offending has a more balanced split, with males accounting for 59% (n = 1,401). The most common age for group-based IIOC was 12 to 13 years (29%, n = 669). Where recorded, perpetrators were known in 88% (n = 275) of group-based IIOC. Group-based IIOC is likely to be driven by sharing of images between children (see the [CSAE committed by children](#) section).

Group-based sexual communications offences have a higher proportion of male perpetrators (86%, n = 128), with perpetrators aged 18 to 29 years accounting for 25% (n = 36). Where recorded, strangers accounted for 56% (n = 14) of offences.

Sexual communications more likely to happen with older, unknown male perpetrators who are using online platforms as part of a methodology of grooming. From additional analysis, this is often seen as a precursory behaviour that may escalate to attempting to meet and commit contact offences.

Number of groups

Most group-based non-contact offences (78%, n = 868) involved two perpetrators. However, there were offences with up to 15 perpetrators recorded. Due to the low number of group-based non-contact offences, it is likely that there is a gap in the recording of all members of group chats involving IIOC. It is likely that policing is prioritising and targeting the individuals specifically involved in the distribution of the images.





Forward look

Forward look

There are several emerging points of interest that are likely to have an impact on CSAE and policing.

Mandatory reporting

The Home Secretary has announced that mandatory reporting of CSAE will be implemented via the Crime and Policing Bill, which was introduced in the House of Commons on 25 February 2025.

It includes provisions to introduce a new statutory duty for individuals undertaking key roles with responsibility for children and young people in England to report sexual abuse when they are made aware of it. It also includes a new criminal offence of attempting to prevent a mandated reporter from discharging their duty to report child sexual abuse.

Non-aggravated self-generated indecent image recording

Changes in crime recording guidance was issued in April 2024, whereby cases of non-aggravated SGII children should be recorded as an 'involved party' rather than 'suspect'. Once embedded, these changes are likely to reduce the volume of recorded suspects aged under 18 years in IIOC offences, but the volume of offences recorded should not be affected.

Artificial intelligence (AI)

The rapid growth of technology and generative AI will almost certainly increase the threat of image-based CSAE over the next year and beyond. AI has enabled child sexual abuse material (CSAM) to be created without the knowledge or consent of the victim, often portraying extreme sexual scenarios, such as rape. Generative AI also allows CSAM to be created where there is not a direct victim.

Isolated incidents have been recorded of AI being used in CSAE committed by children among peers and in FMSE, specifically to modify an existing image of a victim to appear nude. The barrier to entry for this technology continues to decrease, meaning that a wider range of potential perpetrators will be able to use AI as a method of offending.

AI capabilities can also be used to identify and engage with young people, reducing the input required from perpetrators to reach the point of arranging a contact with a victim. It is highly likely that the risk posed from AI to children will increase, requiring new regulations and improved safeguarding measures from technology companies to limit the risk of exploitation of children.

The Home Office has announced that it will seek to bring in legislation that makes it **illegal to possess, create or distribute AI tools designed to generate CSAM**. This legislation would also make it illegal to possess a manual that teaches people how to use AI to sexually abuse children.

Banning of explicit deepfake content

The government will be introducing a [new offence for creating sexually explicit 'deepfake' images](#). Making an indecent image of a child, whether real or digitally altered or created, is already an offence under the [Protection of Children Act 1978](#). The potential implementation of the above bill will likely increase societal awareness and rejection of explicit deepfakes, resulting in an increase of reported CSAE deepfake offences.

Economic challenges

The long-term impact of high inflation and cost of living crisis continues to increase the number of children living in poverty, with the government reporting that [30% of all children in the UK were living in low-income households in 2022/23](#). Additional stresses and pressures can increase the risk of child exploitation. Those who exploit children are likely to take advantage of this increased vulnerability and exploit children into sexual and criminal activity through grooming.

There may also be an increase in children looking to make money through selling indecent images via an OnlyFans-style business model, which can be idealised on social media.

Increased focus on public protection

The government has announced £13.1m funding for the new [National Centre for VAWG and Public Protection](#) (NCVPP). Launching in April 2025, the NCVPP will bring together three existing victim-orientated policing programmes into one national unit: Operation Soteria, the NPCC VAWG Taskforce, and the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme.

The centre will put the experiences of victims of child sexual abuse, rape and sexual offences, domestic abuse and stalking at the heart of police investigations. The NCVPP will focus on improving consistency in officer training and will explore possibilities for accrediting officers who investigate public protection offences.

The government has also committed to halving VAWG offences through their Safer Streets mission, which will likely have an impact on CSAE. VAWG has been widely reported in the media as reaching epidemic levels. The high-profile nature of this campaign may encourage victims of child sexual abuse to come forward who may not have otherwise done so. There is a realistic possibility that this increased focus on w will lead to an increase in identifying and reporting CSAE offences in the long-term future.

Increased multi-agency response

The [The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) introduces a number of areas that will strengthen child safeguarding. These proposals are primarily aimed at education reforms and children's social care. However, opportunities for policing to keep children safe include the following:

- A unique identifier for children, originally intended for education and local authority. This will likely present opportunities for police, health and safeguarding partners in identification and information sharing.
- Strengthening multi agency safeguarding arrangements by mandating that statutory safeguarding partners ensure there are multi-agency child protection teams in all areas of England.

Conclusion

A large, stylized silhouette of a person's head and shoulders, facing right, with their right hand raised and palm facing forward. The silhouette is set against a dark teal background that transitions into a lighter teal at the top. The word 'Conclusion' is written in large, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image, partially overlapping the silhouette.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this report build on our **analysis of police-recorded CSAE in 2022**. This report highlights a longer-term trend in increasing demand on policing but recognises that this is still not representative of the numbers of children experiencing this form of harm each year. This analysis is part of policing's continued efforts to improve its response to CSAE through an improved understanding of the scale and nature of police-recorded CSAE.

This report is the most comprehensive national analysis of police-recorded CSAE available, providing valuable insight in relation to:

- CSAE committed by children
- CSAE in the family environment
- CSAE online
- Group-based CSAE

This year's report includes an improved understanding of the drivers for the high proportion of CSAE committed by children in relation to image-based abuse. This highlights the need to improve early intervention and education in helping children and young people's to understand:

- Sexually harmful behaviours
- Consent
- How the online space is used among children to engage in developmentally typical behaviour

Where age was recorded for suspects, 52% of CSAE offences related to a child who is aged 10 to 17 years. The spectrum of behaviours and harm in this context of CSAE range from rape to developmentally typical image sharing. Where there is no risk identified, police guidance for this form of CSAE focuses on the non-criminalisation of children involved. The response to this must be multi-agency and grounded in prevention and education, removing risk and harm to all children involved as the primary objective.

The **threat posed to children by adults** continues to be of particular concern across all CSAE crimes. Within CSAE in the family environment, over half of perpetrators are adults in the child's family environment, with parents being the most common relationship type recorded. Within the online space, perpetrators of sexual grooming are most commonly adults aged 18 to 29 years. This highlights the risk posed to children in the online space by adults looking to abuse and exploit them. Abuse of children by adults is more likely to be hidden and requires a strong law enforcement response focusing on pursuing perpetrators, as well as a response focused on prevention.

Significant progress is needed by social media platforms to ensure that children are protected online. All platforms should employ safety-by-design principles that minimise and prevent harm. This includes disabling any function that supports snapshots of images and improving how they prevent harmful material, such as CSAM, from being uploaded in the first place. This has been further emphasised by the threat of sextortion and the growing evidence that online platforms continue to enable and facilitate a range of abuse against children. The **Online Safety Act 2023** seeks to mandate some of these requirements.

Legislation is also expected relating to the use of AI generation of CSAM. The ease of access to apps that facilitate the creation of indecent images is likely to contribute to an increase in reported offences in the future. As users can anonymously download and interact with apps and platforms, it is unlikely that the Online Safety Act will act as a deterrent to this form of abuse. The focus must therefore be on ensuring that social media platforms prevent the facilitation of this form of abuse in the first place.

Policing continues to have knowledge gaps at a national level in relation to the nature of some forms of CSAE, such as sextortion, online facilitated CSAE and ritualistic abuse. We also continue to see gaps in reporting by minoritised groups, such as Asian children and children who identify as LGBT+.

We must do more to understand and address these barriers, so that all children feel supported to disclose abuse. These continued gaps emphasise the importance of sharing information across partnerships, so we can strengthen our understanding of CSAE in order to safeguard all children and young people.





**Vulnerability Knowledge
& Practice Programme**



**College of
Policing**



NPCC
National Police Chiefs' Council



Visit us online:
www.vkpp.org.uk



Email us:
vkpp@norfolk.police.uk

Follow us:

