Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

Improving understanding of the scale and nature of child sexual abuse

Measuring the scale and changing nature of child sexual abuse

Analysis of 2017/18 official and agency data

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Data is as at 1 April 2019

csacentre.org.uk

About the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) wants children to be able to live free from the threat and harm of sexual abuse.

Our aim is to reduce the impact of child sexual abuse through improved prevention and better response.

We are a multi-disciplinary team, funded by the Home Office and hosted by Barnardo's, working closely with key partners from academic institutions, local authorities, health, education, police and the voluntary sector. However, we are independent and will challenge any barriers, assumptions, taboos and ways of working that prevent us from increasing our understanding and improving our approach to child sexual abuse.

To tackle child sexual abuse, we must understand its causes, scope, scale and impact. We know a lot about child sexual abuse and have made progress in dealing with it, but there are still many gaps in our knowledge and understanding which limit how effectively the issue is tackled.

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1. Introduction

In recent years there has been increasing awareness of child sexual abuse (CSA) and its impact on victims and survivors. Knowledge and understanding have improved, but there is still too much that remains unknown about the sexual abuse of children and young people in England and Wales.

The first steps in this long-term strand of work by the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) have involved analysis of what we currently do and do not know from existing prevalence studies and data from statutory services.

In July 2017 the CSA Centre published a scoping report (Kelly and Karsna, 2017) which summarised what is known about CSA from publicly available agency datasets. We updated the report in 2018, and this is a further follow-up.

This report summarises the latest available data relating to reports and records of CSA from local authority children's services and criminal justice agencies.

The challenge

Known cases of CSA are recorded in the child protection system and within police recorded crime statistics. While administrative data is useful in understanding the trends in CSA that we know about, it is generally recognised as underestimating the scale of CSA. This is because:

- Most CSA remains hidden and is never reported to, or uncovered by, an official agency. Some groups in particular, including boys and young people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, tend to be under-represented in the figures.
- There is a time lag between experiencing CSA and reporting it, with many cases not reported until the victim reaches adulthood (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2015), and we do not have a reliable measurement of how the rate of disclosure has changed over time.
- Prevalence studies in England and Wales suggest that some 15% of girls and 5% of boys experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16. These estimates vary according to the studies' methods and the number of questions they ask; at the higher end, international estimates of CSA prevalence reach 30% for girls and 23% for boys.[1] These estimates are far higher than the reported incidents recorded in administrative data.

This report summarises the latest available data from local authority children's services and criminal justice agencies

1 Prevalence studies survey random samples of the wider population, whereas administrative data is essentially case management information on cases that come to the attention of agencies.

- Recording cases as child sexual exploitation (CSE) is relatively recent, and there are inconsistencies in how CSE is recorded and therefore responded to. Some authorities have designed a specific CSE flag, and others manage it as 'business as usual' under broad safeguarding and child protection categories.
- Not all reports of CSA are recorded – this is an issue in both police recorded crime and child protection data.
- Recording practices vary across agencies and administrative areas, and over time.

The most comprehensive effort to collate data across agencies was undertaken by the Children's Commissioner for England[2] (2015): this report estimated that only one in eight victims of CSA comes to the attention of the authorities. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2016) found that 74% of adults describing penetrative offences in childhood had not told anyone about this at the time, and in only 7% of cases had the police been told. The most common reason for not telling anyone had been embarrassment or humiliation (48%), followed by fear that they would not be believed (38%).

It remains the case, therefore, that the majority of CSA is neither reported nor identified during childhood and thus will not appear in official agency data.

> Most CSA will not appear in official data, but the extent to which agencies respond to concerns of CSA is important

However, the extent to which agencies recognise and respond to concerns of CSA is important, and this report is one of the few sources that pulls together available public data relating to CSA in one place. We hope it enables those in the field to better understand the bigger picture and changing context of the issue. In addition, the Office for National Statistics plans to publish a broader summary of data relating to child abuse, including sexual abuse, at the end of 2019.

This report is structured by agency. It first looks at data from local authority children's services, where child protection plans and social care initial assessments record where a child has experienced CSA or is considered at risk of it. It then looks at data from criminal justice agencies, including police data and courts data, that tells us about CSA offences and CSA prosecutions.

2 No similar study has been carried out for Wales.

2. Data from local authority children's services

Data from the child protection system gives reasons why children are considered at risk and, more recently, why they have been made subject to child protection plans by local authority children's services.[3] There are four categories of abuse - emotional, physical, sexual, and neglect – with a fifth 'multiple' category.

Since 2014/15, children's services in England have published information on risk factors identified at the initial and most recent needs assessment; this includes both sexual abuse and sexual exploitation as categories of need. Such information is not published for Wales.[4]

2.1 Trends over time in England

- A total of 68,780 child protection plans were started in 2017/18 across England. Of these, 2,960 were under the initial category of child sexual abuse (4%).
- Neglect and emotional abuse have been the most frequent forms of abuse recorded for well over a decade, with a substantial increase in both over this time.
- Sexual abuse is consistently the least frequent initial category in child protection plans. In the decade between 2007/08 and 2017/18, there was a 29% increase in the number of plans with an initial category of sexual abuse, but this was against a 102% increase in the overall number of child protection plans (see Figure 1).
- In 1993/94, neglect and sexual abuse each accounted for 23% of the initial reasons for children being placed on child protection plans. Figure 2 shows that this has changed dramatically: in 2017/18, neglect was the reason for nearly half (47%) of child protection plans, with sexual abuse accounting for just 4%.

2.2 Trends over time in Wales

Data from Wales is only available for children who were on the child protection register at 31 March each year, giving a snapshot rather than the full number of children about whom there were child protection concerns in a given year. This data is, therefore, not directly comparable to that for England.[5]

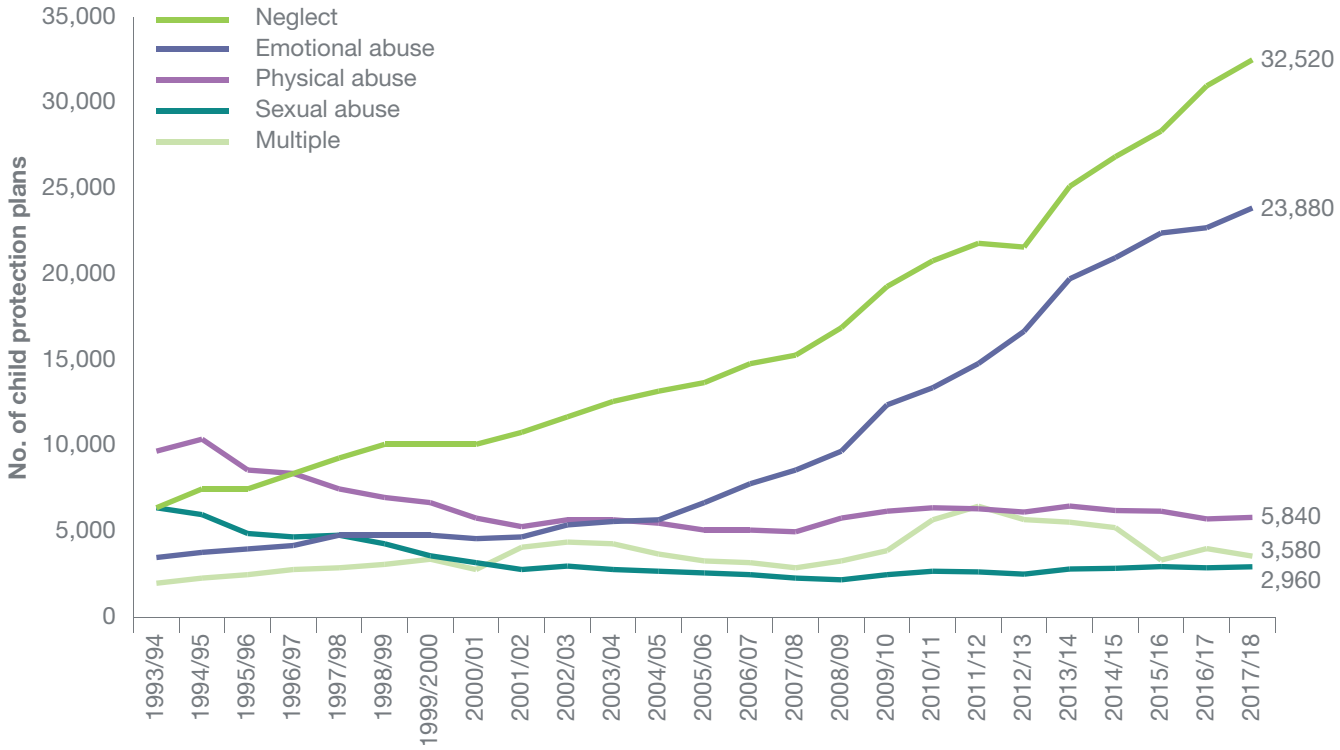
- As in England, neglect and emotional abuse have consistently been the most common forms of child abuse recorded for well over a decade, with a substantial increase in the number of children on the child protection register for either reason over this time (see Figure 3).
- Sexual abuse and multiple categories of abuse are consistently the least frequent reasons for children being placed on the child protection register. In a decade, the number on the register because of sexual abuse has declined by 28%, from 160 in 2007/08 to 115 in 2017/18.
- There has been a parallel decline in the *proportion* of children placed on the child protection register because of sexual abuse. In 1993/94, sexual abuse was the third most common reason for placements, accounting for 21% of them. By 2017/18, it was the reason for just 4% of placements on the register.
- Unlike in England, data collection in Wales allows for disaggregation of the 'multiple' category. This shows that an additional 50 children were on the child protection register at 31 March 2018 under 'multiple categories of abuse' which included sexual abuse (out of a total of 130 children on the register under multiple categories of abuse). This means that we know CSA was a factor in 165 placements of children on the register (6% of the total), as at 31 March 2018.

3 For further detail on the data and its limitations, see Kelly and Karsna (2017, updated 2018).

4 Social services are a devolved responsibility, whereas policing and criminal justice systems are not. This explains why social services data gathering and reporting is different in Wales and in England.

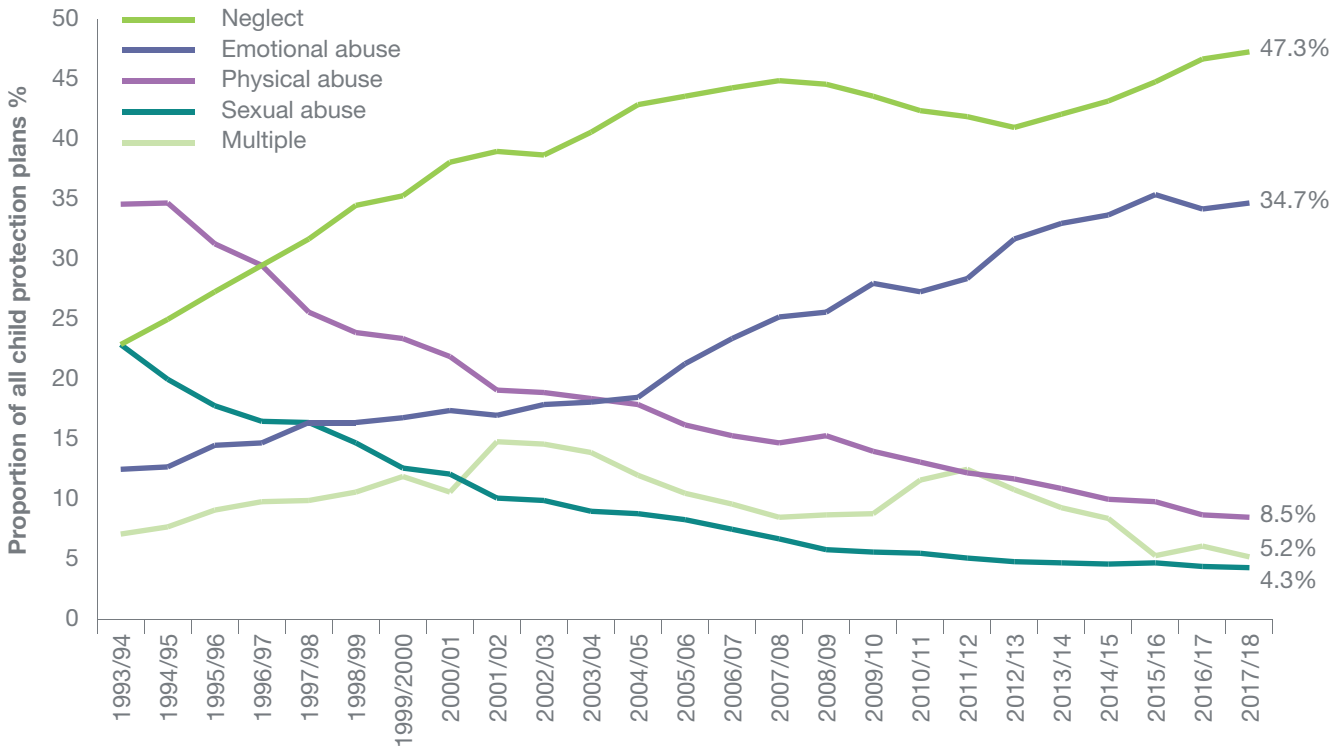
5 Snapshot data as at 31 March is also reported in England, but the full year's data is used in Figures 1 and 2 of this report to indicate more accurately the scale of children on protection plans.

Figure 1. Number of child protection plans starting during the year ending 31 March, by initial category of abuse (1993/94 to 2017/18, England)



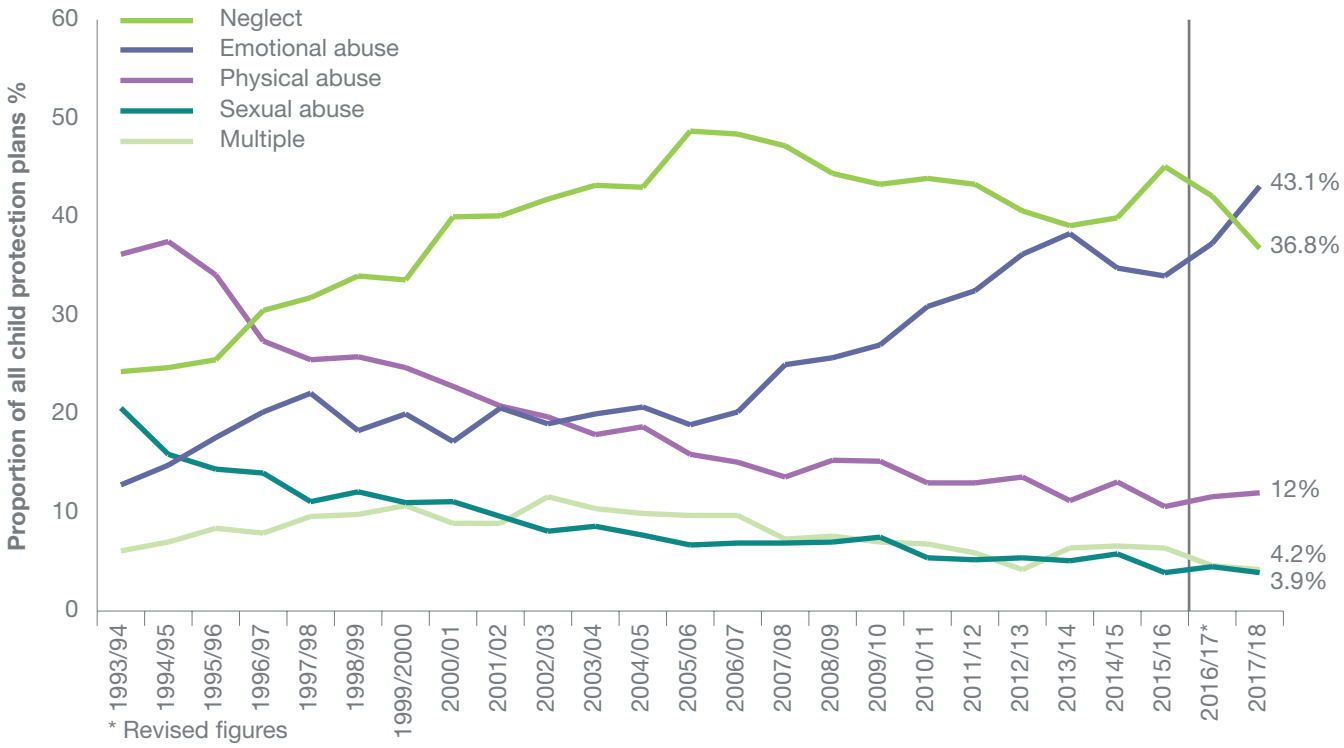
Source: Characteristics of Children in Need: 2017 to 2018, Table D2 (Department for Education, 2019). More detailed child-level information has been collected from 2009/10.

Figure 2. Proportion of child protection plans starting during the year ending 31 March, by initial category of abuse (1993/94 to 2017/18, England)



Source: Characteristics of Children in Need: 2017 to 2018, Table D2 (Department for Education, 2019). More detailed child-level information has been collected from 2009/10.

Figure 3. Proportion of children on the child protection register on 31 March, by category of abuse (1993/94 to 2015/16 and 2016/17 to 2017/18, Wales)



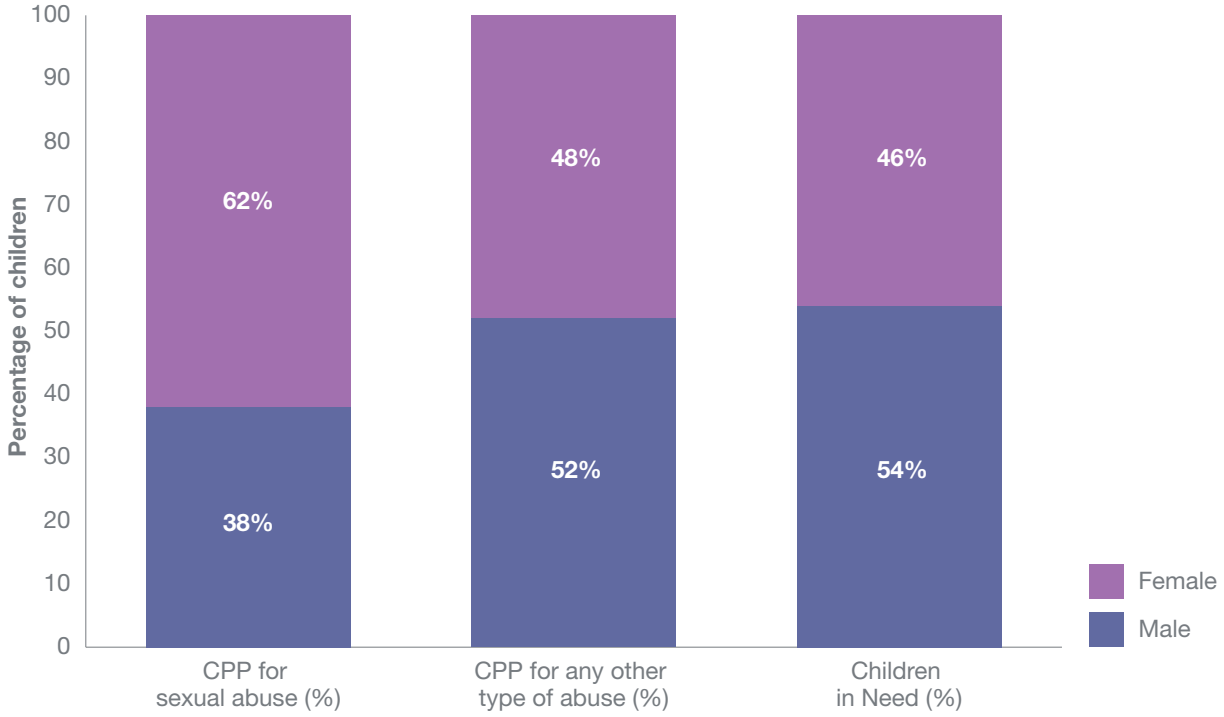
Source: Welsh Government (2018). All figures are as at 31 March.

2.3 Characteristics of children on child protection plans because of sexual abuse

As at 31 March 2017/18:

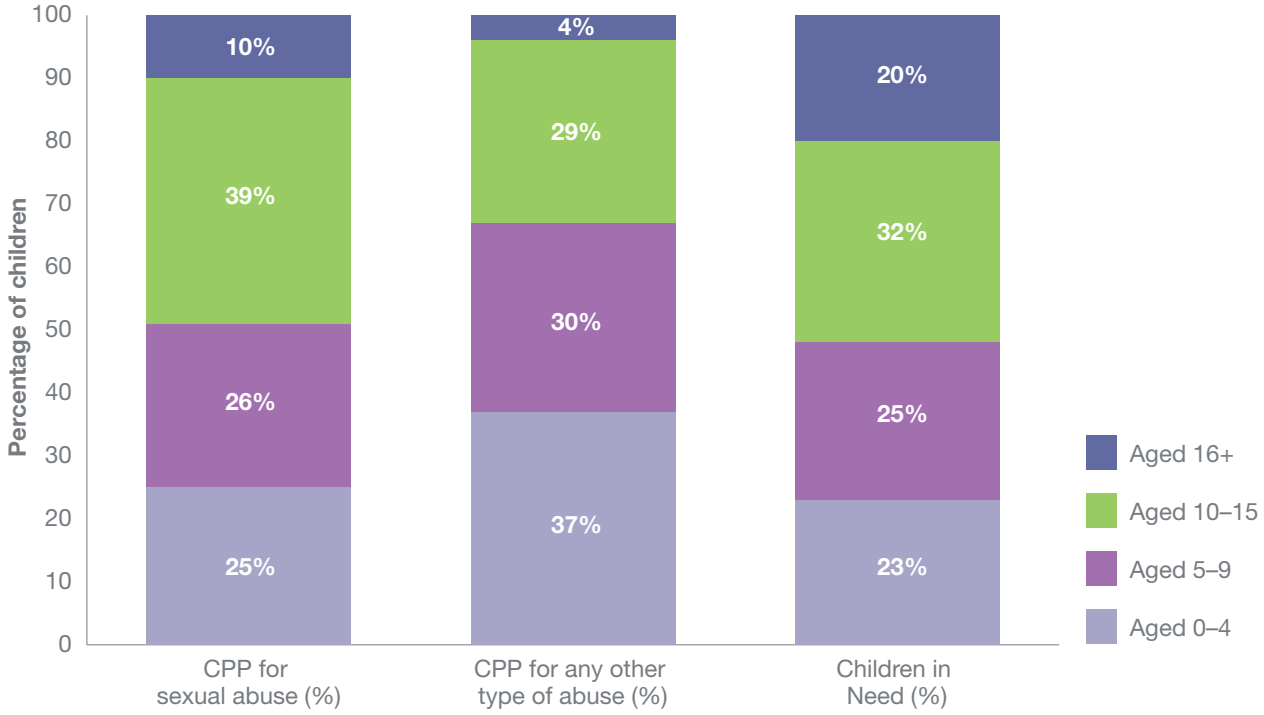
- Children on child protection plans under the category of sexual abuse in England were more likely to be female than those on a plan under other categories of abuse (see Figure 4). The gender breakdown by abuse type in Wales is not available for 2017/18.
- Just over half (51%) of children on child protection plans under the category of sexual abuse in England were aged 0–9 years (see Figure 5). In Wales, this age group accounted for 46% of children on the child protection register under the category of sexual abuse (see Figure 6).
- The ethnic background of children on child protection plans under the category of sexual abuse in England was not substantially different from those in other abuse categories: among those whose ethnicity was known, 81% were of white ethnic background (including 'white other'), compared with 77% for other abuse categories. A further 7% were of mixed ethnic background, 5% were Asian, 6% were black and 2% were of other ethnic backgrounds. Ethnicity was not recorded for 3% of the children on protection plans for sexual abuse. This information is not available for Wales.

Figure 4. Children on child protection plans and total Children in Need on 31 March 2018, by gender (England)



Source: Characteristics of Children in Need: 2017 to 2018, Tables A4 and A5 (Department for Education, 2019). 'Any other type of abuse' includes multiple categories of abuse. Chart excludes a small number of children of unknown gender, and unborn children.

Figure 5. Children on child protection plans and total Children in Need on 31 March 2018, by age (England)



Source: Characteristics of Children in Need: 2017 to 2018, Tables A4 and A5 (Department for Education, 2019). 'Any other type of abuse' includes multiple categories of abuse. A significant share of 16+ children are in need on grounds of 'absent parenting', which includes unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Figure 6. Children on the child protection register and all Children Receiving Care and Support on 31 March 2018, by age (Wales)

Source: Welsh Government (2018; 2019). Designated as experimental statistics.

2.4 Regional variations

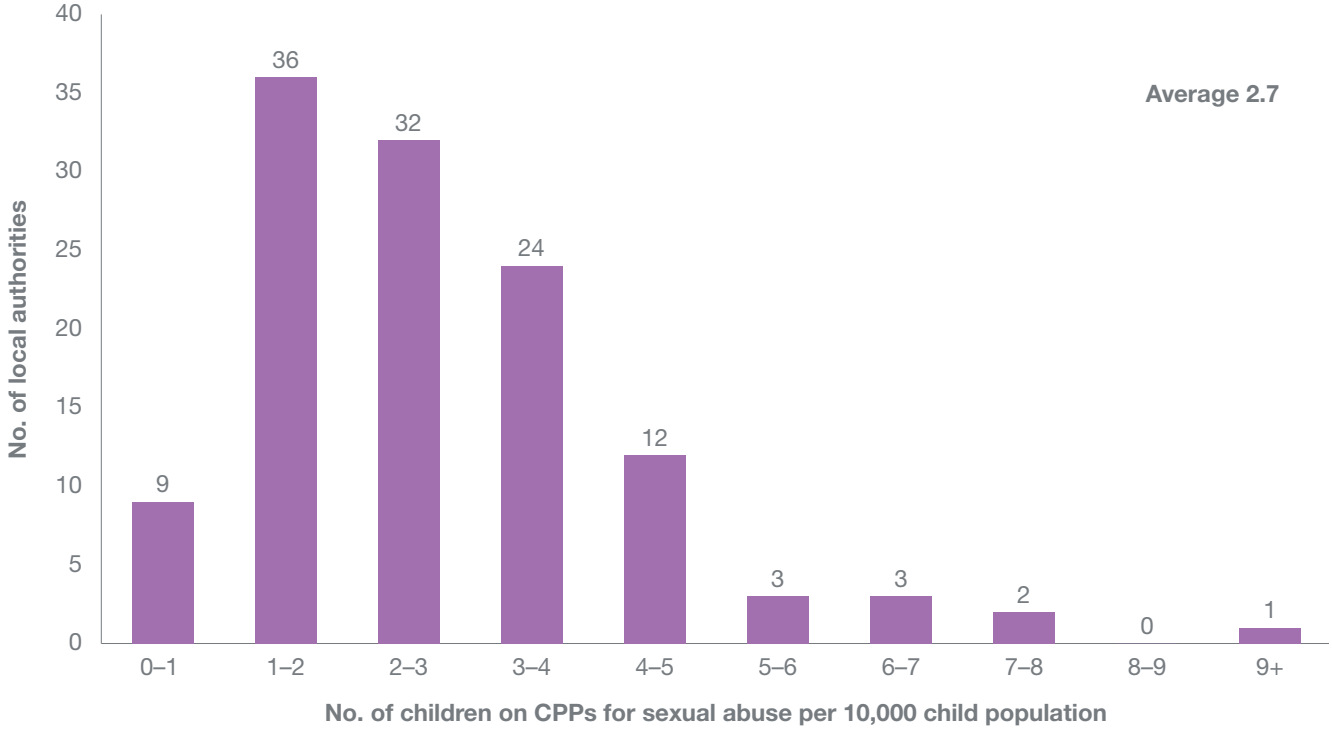
Regional data for 2017/18 is available in England and Wales with regard to children on child protection plans under the initial category of sexual abuse. The actual numbers are important in terms of resource allocation, but they need to be calculated as a proportion of the local child population in order to facilitate indicative comparisons between areas.

- Figure 7 shows a comparison of English regions by the rate of CSA (the number of children on child protection plans under the category of sexual abuse for every 10,000 children aged 0–17 years). Across England, there were on average 2.5 children on child protection plans under the category of sexual abuse for every 10,000 children aged 0-17 years (compared with 2.6 in the previous year).
- Figure 8 shows how the rate of CSA is distributed across English local authorities. In six authorities, there were at least six children on child protection plans under the category of sexual abuse per 10,000 child population in 2017/18; another five authorities had no sexual abuse recorded. The distribution was similar to the previous year's.
- Data for Welsh local authorities is not presented here because the figures are much lower, making it more challenging to see real variation. Across Wales, there were 1.8 children on the child protection register under the category of sexual abuse for every 10,000 children aged 0–17 years. Data for 13 of the 22 local authorities in Wales was suppressed in 2017/18 because of low numbers, which would potentially compromise children's anonymity in those authorities.

Figure 7. Number of child protection plans starting in 2017/18 under the category of sexual abuse per 10,000 child population, by region (England)

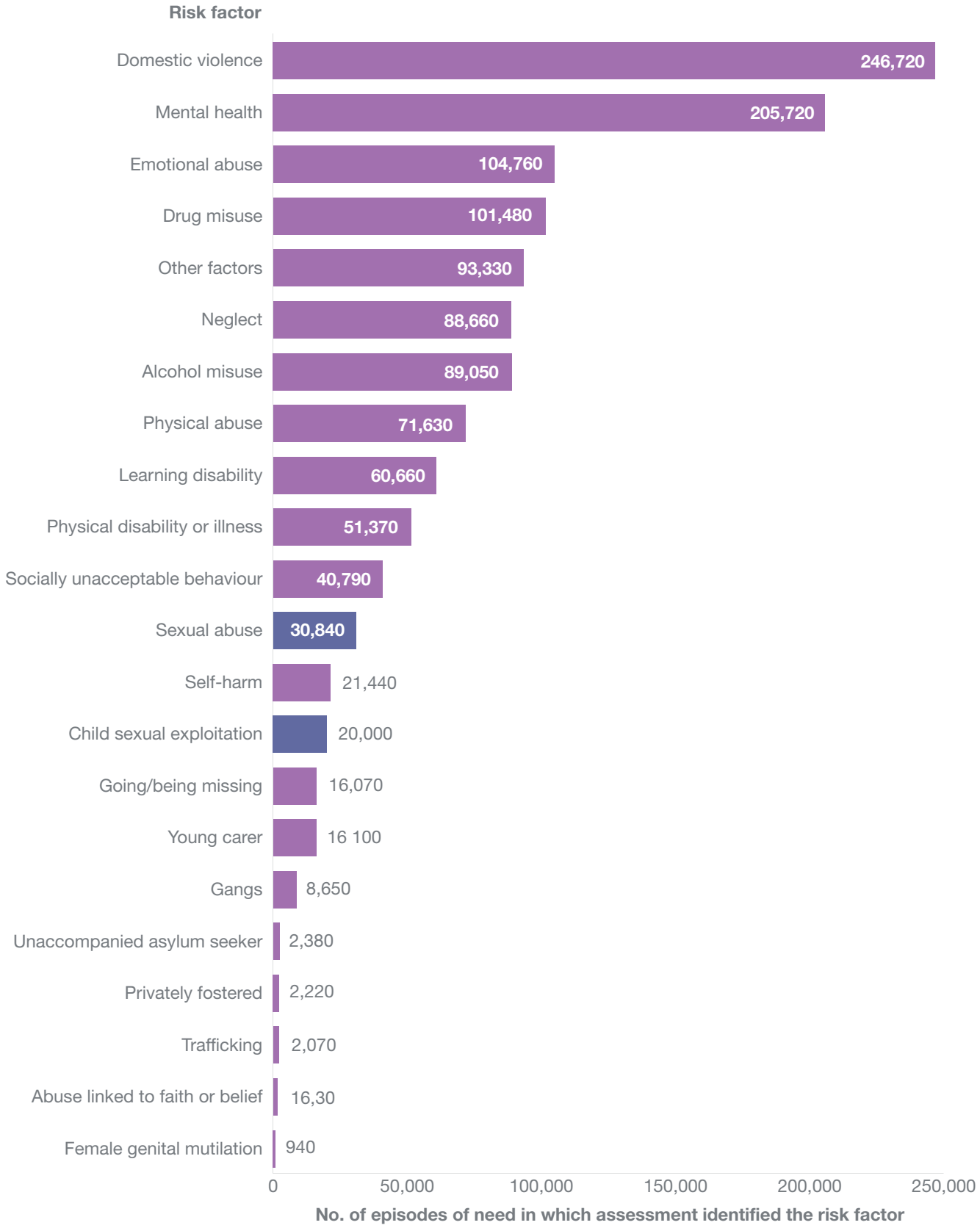
Sources: Characteristics of Children in Need: 2017 to 2018, Table D2 (Department for Education, 2019); Mid-2017 Data (Office for National Statistics, 2018a).

Figure 8. Distribution across local authorities of child protection plans starting in 2017/18 under the category of sexual abuse (England)



Sources: Characteristics of Children in Need: 2017 to 2018, Table D2 (Department for Education, 2019); Mid-2017 Data (Office for National Statistics, 2018a). Local authorities with suppressed data have been excluded.

Figure 9. Number of 'episodes of need' in the year ending 31 March 2018, with risk factors identified at assessment (England)



Source: Characteristics of Children in Need: 2017 to 2018, Table C3 (Department for Education, 2019). Excludes assessments where no risks were identified.

2.5 Children at risk of sexual abuse in England

Figure 9 shows the scale of children *at risk of* CSA, including CSE (which is recorded separately by local authorities), identified within child protection processes. Since 2014/15, local authorities in England have published a list of risk factors identified during assessment for children in need. A child can start or end an 'episode of need' more than once during the year, but they should not have overlapping episodes. Where multiple risks are identified, all are recorded.

In England in 2017/18, there were:

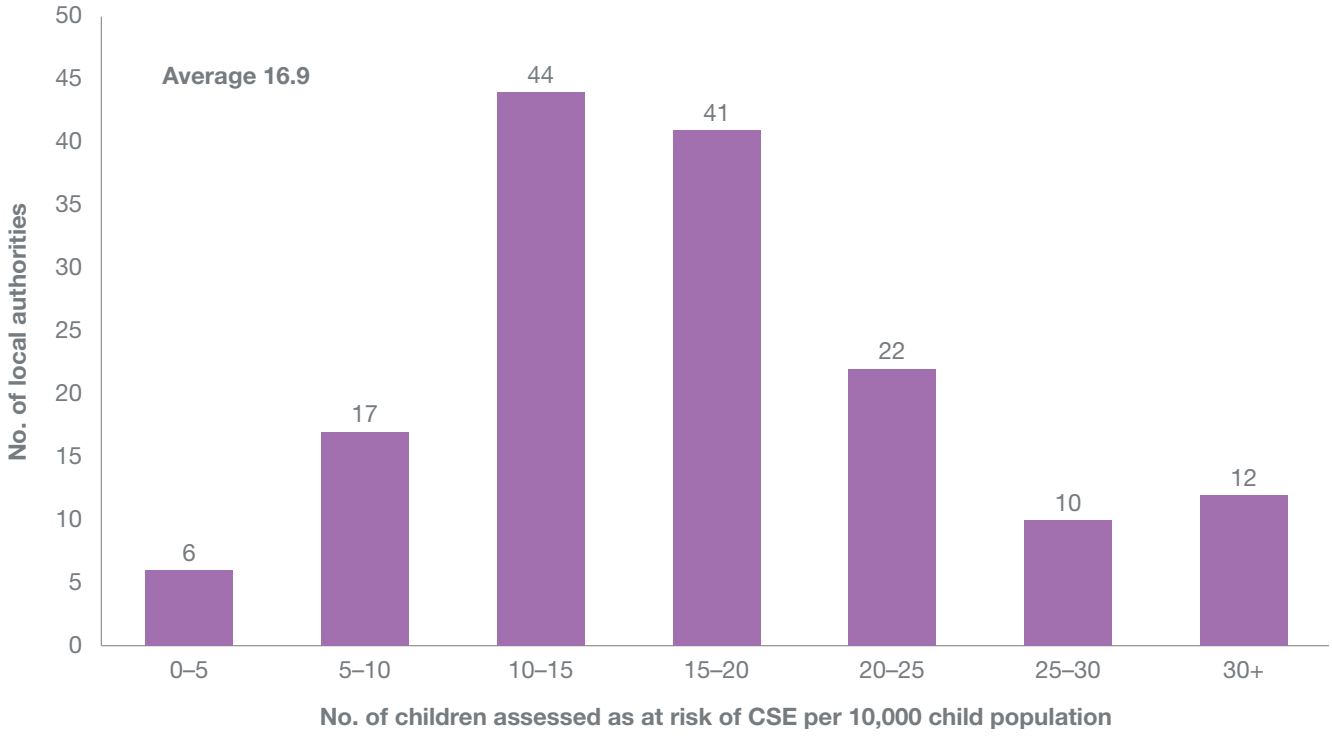
- 30,840 episodes of need (6.4% of the total) where the assessment identified a risk of sexual abuse – up slightly from 29,600 (6.3%) the previous year.
- 20,000 episodes of need (4.1% of the total) where the assessment identified a risk of sexual exploitation – up slightly from 18,800 (4.0%) the previous year. This compares with the 16,500 children estimated to be at risk by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2012) – but since children can be assessed more than once during a year if they have multiple episodes of need, there may have been some double counting of individuals.

Regarding the assessment of risk of CSE, wider variations are visible across England authorities. This is likely to be a result of the lack of standardisation in defining and recording CSE across authorities, in addition to reasons such as differences in local priorities and local funding decisions. The data is not available for Wales.

Across England in 2017/18:

- On average there were 16.9 children[6] assessed as being at risk of CSE for every 10,000 children in the population. This compares with 15.6 the previous year.
- The distribution of children assessed as being at risk of CSE varied, from six local authorities with fewer than five children per 10,000 child population to 12 authorities with 30 or more children assessed as being at risk of CSE (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Distribution across local authorities of children assessed as at risk of CSE, 2017/18 (England)



Sources: Characteristics of Children in Need: 2017 to 2018, Table C3 (Department for Education, 2019); Mid-2017 Data (Office for National Statistics, 2018a). Excludes assessments where no risks were identified.

6 Since children can be assessed more than once during the year, this may include double counting.

3. Data from criminal justice agencies

The following data is from police recorded crime figures, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Ministry of Justice. The datasets are not comparable, however. In response to recent concerns about CSA and CSE, which the police treat as separate categories, the Home Office now requires that police report on such cases through use of a flag (a way of marking electronically that a case fits one of the two categories); additionally, data returns for both CSA and CSE have to indicate whether there is an online element. However, we should note that inconsistencies across geographical areas still limit the general accuracy of data.

Flag data has been published, but implementation issues have resulted in substantially fewer CSA and CSE flagged crimes than expected when compared with notifiable crimes, so this is not yet a reliable data source.

The Welsh Government is currently developing statistics that specify how many cases are confirmed as being CSE.

3.1 Police recorded CSA offences

Police data is published by offence as defined in legislation, rather than by victim or perpetrator. One crime is recorded for each offence category of each perpetrator against the same victim within each police force area.[7] This makes it difficult to establish the precise number of victims or perpetrators or incidents of abuse. In nationally published crime data, offences are recorded in the year in which they are reported to the police, rather than the year the offence was committed. (Dates of offences are available at local level.)

- The breakdown of identifiable CSA offences[8] in England and Wales for 2017/18 is presented in Table 1. This does not include all experiences of CSA, as abuse may be folded into other offence categories (e.g. trafficking, abduction, exposure and voyeurism) for which the precise proportion of offences committed against children cannot yet be obtained. Some cases of child abuse images involve exploitation; many are possession cases (i.e. accessing and storing images created and possibly sold by others).
- 81,271 CSA offences were recorded by the police in England and Wales in 2017/18. This figure includes a large number of crimes related to the publication/possession of obscene or protected sexual materials (22,843 offences), which include crimes against adults as well as children. A second category – abusing a position of trust – can also include offences against adults. It is not currently possible to differentiate the victim age in these two data categories.
- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS, 2018c) found that, in the year ending March 2017, non-recent cases accounted for 27% of all sexual offences (adult and child). Non-recent offences increased by 16% compared with the year ending March 2016.

From the range of police recorded offences available, we have grouped the offences listed in Table 1 as 'CSA offences' for the purpose of this report.

7 For example, if the same perpetrator sexually assaults the same victim multiple times in the same police force area, this would be counted only once. See Home Office (2019b) for further information.

8 Throughout this report, the criminal justice data excludes sexual offences committed against 16–17-year-olds. This is one of the reasons for the introduction of the CSA 'flag' by the Home Office. A freedom of information request by the NSPCC to police forces in England suggests that an additional 9,267 CSA offences (excluding obscene imagery) were committed against 16–17-year-olds in England in 2015/16 (Bentley et al, 2018:29).

Table 1. CSA offences, year ending March 2018 (England and Wales)

Offence	No. of offences, Wales	No. of offences, England	Total no. of offences	% of CSA offences
Abuse of children through sexual exploitation	27	1,268	1,295	1.6%
Abuse of position of trust of a sexual nature	6	284	290	0.4%
Obscene publications etc.	1,382	21,514	22,906	28.1%
Rape of a female child under 13	284	5,044	5,328	6.5%
Rape of a female child under 16	364	7,146	7,514	9.2%
Rape of a male child under 13	125	2,365	2,490	3.1%
Rape of a male child under 16	59	818	879	1.1%
Sexual activity involving a child under 13	631	7,896	8,529	10.5%
Sexual activity involving a child under 16	1,399	13,090	14,500	17.8%
Sexual assault on a female child under 13	583	9,017	9,621	11.8%
Sexual assault on a male child under 13	230	3,560	3,802	4.7%
Sexual grooming	311	4,029	4,356	5.3%
Total	**5,401**	**76,031**	**81,510**	**100.0%**

Source:Police Recorded Crime Open Data Police Force Area Tables from Year Ending March 2013 Onwards, 2017–18 table (Home Office, 2019a). Total for England and Wales includes offences recorded by the British Transport Police (BTP), which are not included in the individual England and Wales figures as BTP operates across geographical boundaries.

3.2 Distribution of recorded offences over police force areas

Figure 11 shows the distribution of police force areas according to the 'CSA offence rate' (the number of CSA offences per 1,000 child population aged 0–15). Regional variation has also been highlighted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC, 2012; OCC, 2015), which argued that success in identification, rather than actual crime rates, was a driver of this variation. Resources and local policing priorities account for some of the differences here.

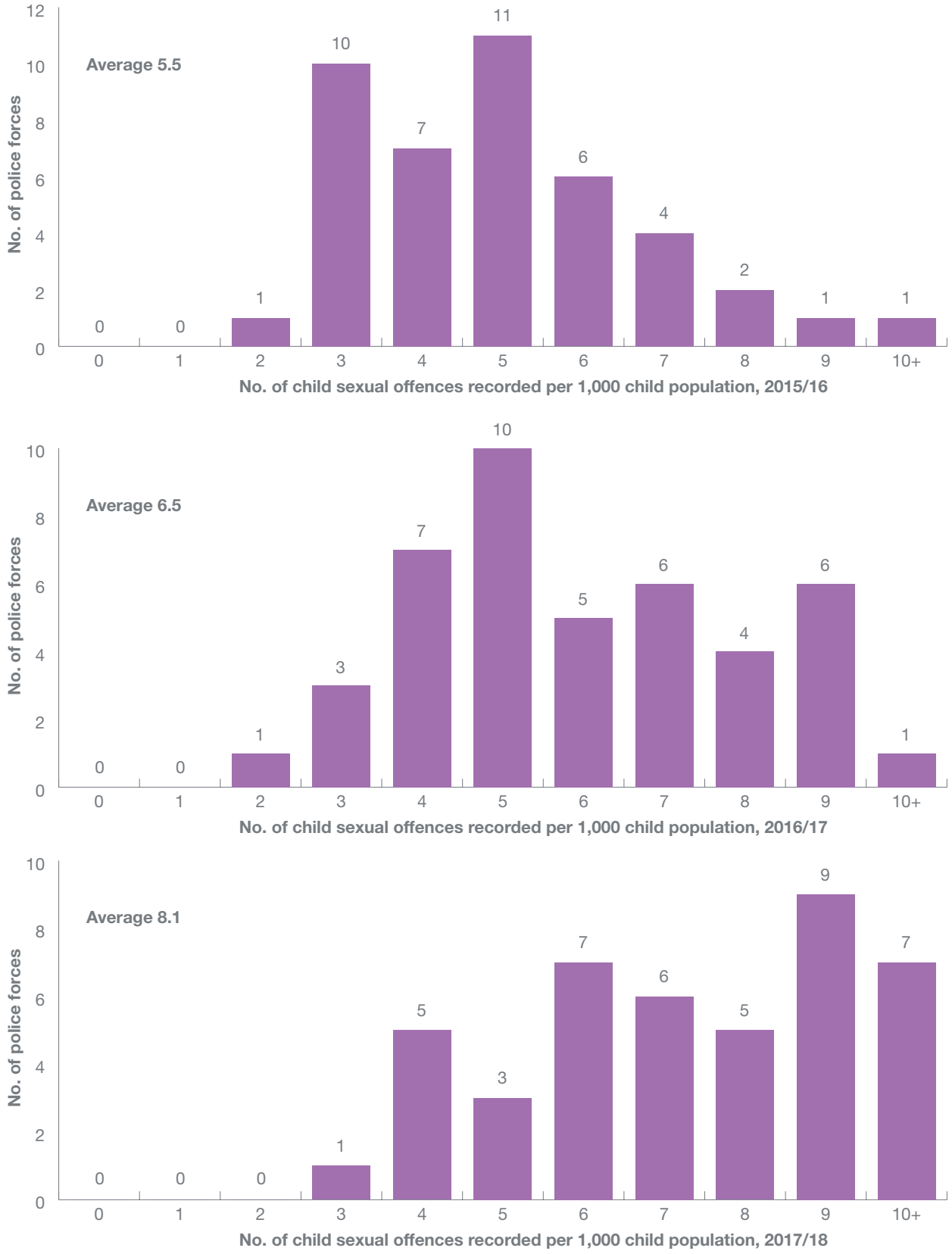
- In 2017/18, the average CSA offence rate per 1,000 children aged 0–15 was approximately eight across England and Wales .This is up from 6.5 the previous year. The distribution trend continues to shift to the right, indicating a gradual increase in the CSA offence rate over time.

3.3 Trends over time in recorded offences

The volume of police recorded crime on CSA offences has increased significantly since 2012/13, however, the Office for National Statistics has cautioned against interpreting the rise in recorded sexual crime data as an increase in rate of offending:

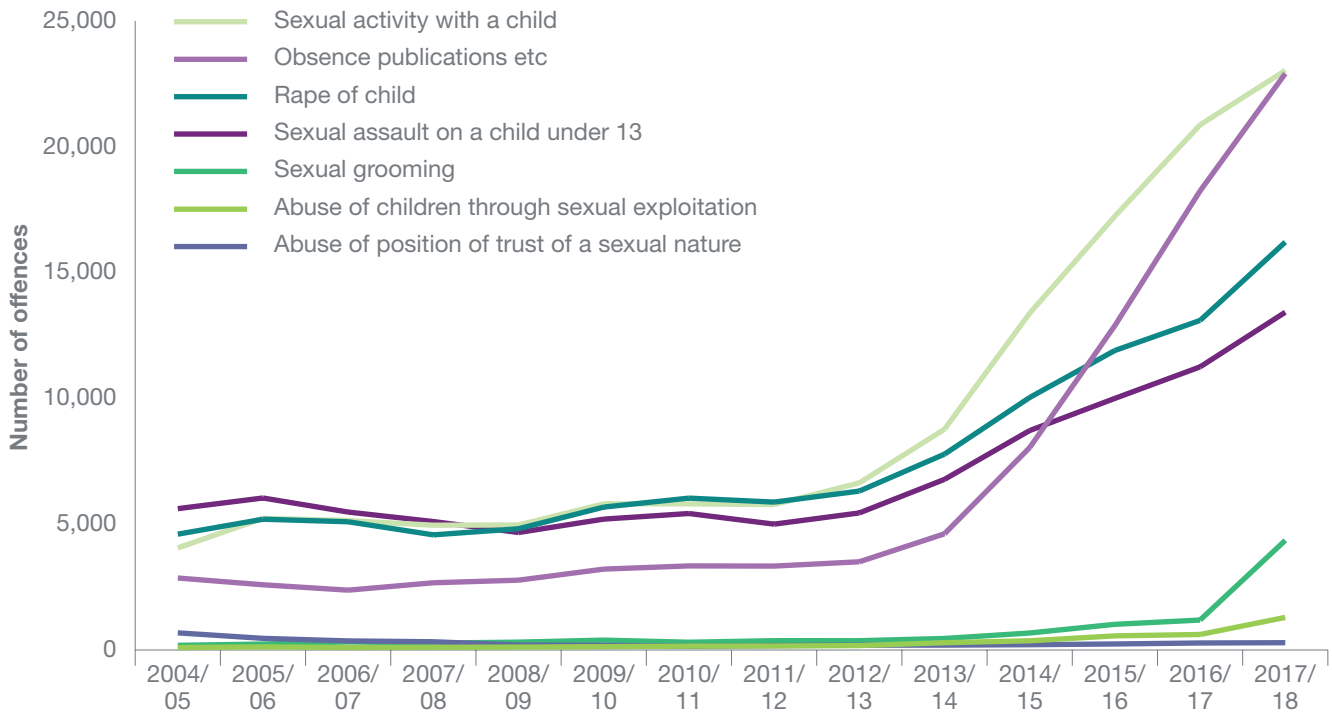
> "The renewed focus on the quality of crime recording by the police is thought to have led to improved compliance with the National Crime Recording Standard, leading to a greater proportion of reported crimes being recorded by the police. This means caution should be taken when interpreting police recorded crime trends." (ONS, 2017:4)

Figure 11. Distribution of CSA offence rates across police forces, 2015/16 to 2017/18 (England and Wales)



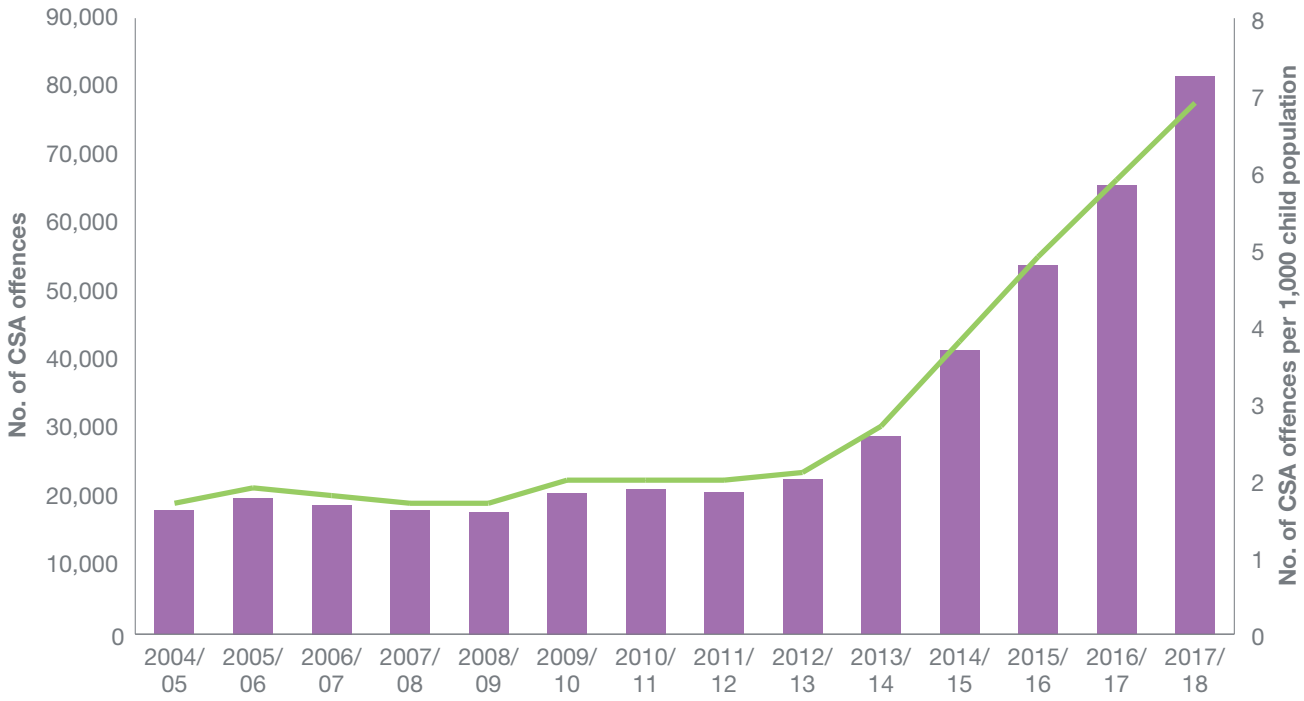
Sources: Police Recorded Crime Open Data Police Force Area Tables from Year Ending March 2013 Onwards (Home Office, 2019a); Mid-2017 Data (Office for National Statistics, 2018a). Note: The ONS does not publish population estimates per police force area; these were derived by matching mid-year population estimates (as at 30 June) in local authority district areas with police force areas.

Figure 12. CSA offence trends, 2004/05 to 2017/18 (England and Wales)



Source: Police Recorded Crime Open Data Police Force Area Tables from Year Ending March 2013 Onwards (Home Office, 2019a). Police recorded crime includes non-recent offences. ONS note to accompany figures: 'The Sexual Offences Act 2003, introduced in May 2004, altered the definition and coverage of sexual offences.'

Figure 13. CSA offences and CSA offence rate, 2004/05 to 2017/18 (England and Wales)



Source: Police Recorded Crime Open Data Police Force Area Tables from Year Ending March 2013 Onwards (Home Office, 2019a); Mid-2017 Data (Office for National Statistics, 2018a). Police recorded crime includes non-recent offences. Includes obscene publications. Note: The ONS does not publish population estimates per police force area; these were derived by matching mid-year population estimates (as at 30 June) in local authority district areas with police force areas.

- Figure 12 shows particularly large increases in recorded offences related to CSE between 2016/17 and 2017/18. 'Abuse of children through sexual exploitation' saw an increase of 110%, from 617 offences to 1,295 offences. And 'Sexual grooming' increased by 266%, from 1,191 offences to 4,356 offences.
- Overall, the number of CSA offences and the rate of CSA offences per 1,000 children were relatively stable for a long period, but have more than doubled in the past five years (see Figure 13).

3.4 Outcomes for CSA offences

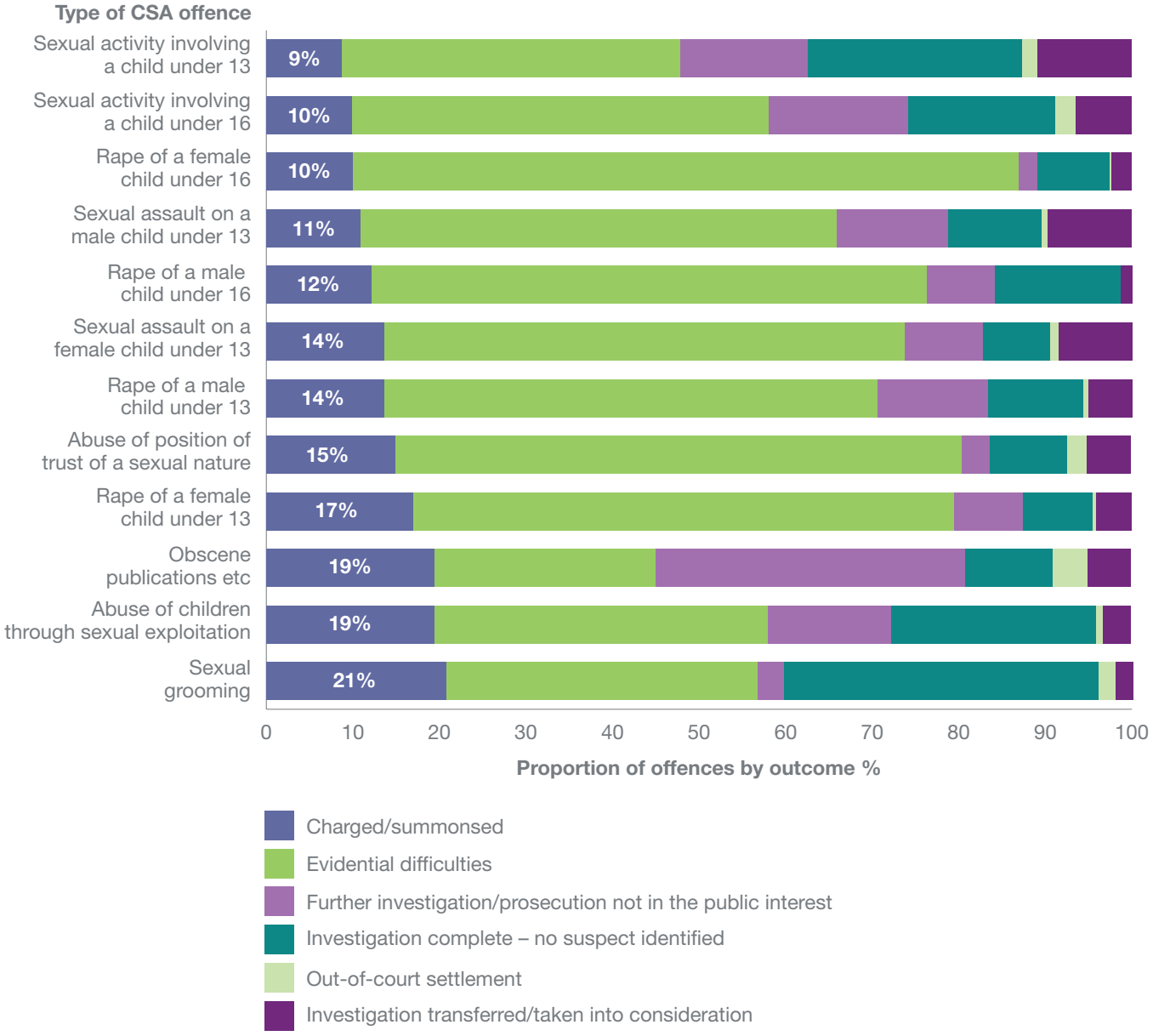
- There is considerable attrition as child sex offences proceed from the initial report to charge (see Table 2). Police published outcome data for 2017/18 indicates that fewer than one-sixth (14%) of recorded CSA offences resulted in a charge or summons. This is down from 18% in the previous year.
- Evidential difficulties were the main barrier to a successful outcome: 46% of cases were discontinued, although this is a fall from 58% in the previous year.
- Investigation or prosecution was not deemed to be in the public interest in 18% of cases – up from 14% in the previous year.
- Figure 14 shows that 'sexual grooming' offences have the highest charge rates at 21%, followed by 'abuse of children through CSE' and 'obscene publications etc.' at 19%.
- Evidential difficulties are least common for 'obscene publication' offences (26%), linked undoubtedly to the availability of material evidence on electronic devices and having the largest proportion where the outcome was 'further investigation/ prosecution not in the public interest'.

Table 2. CSA offences by outcome, year ending March 2018 (England and Wales)

Outcome category	Number	% of total
Charged/summonsed	10,319	13.9%
Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports action)	17,112	23.1%
Evidential difficulties (victim does not support action)	17,097	23.1%
Further investigation not in the public interest – police decision	8,764	11.8%
Investigation complete – no suspect identified	10,220	13.8%
Out-of-court (formal)	879	1.2%
Out-of-court (informal)	670	0.9%
Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest	4,486	6.1%
Responsibility for further investigation transferred to another body	4,504	6.1%
Taken into consideration	35	0.0%
Total	**74,086**	**100.0%**

Source: Outcomes Open Data, Year Ending March 2018 (Home Office, 2019a).

Figure 14. CSA offences by outcome, year ending March 2018 (England and Wales)



Source: Outcomes Open Data, Year Ending March 2018 (Home Office, 2019a). Police recorded crime includes non-recent cases. The category 'abuse of children through sexual explotation' includes outcomes recorded under the categories 'abuse of children through sexual exploitation' and 'abuse of children through prostitution and pornography'.

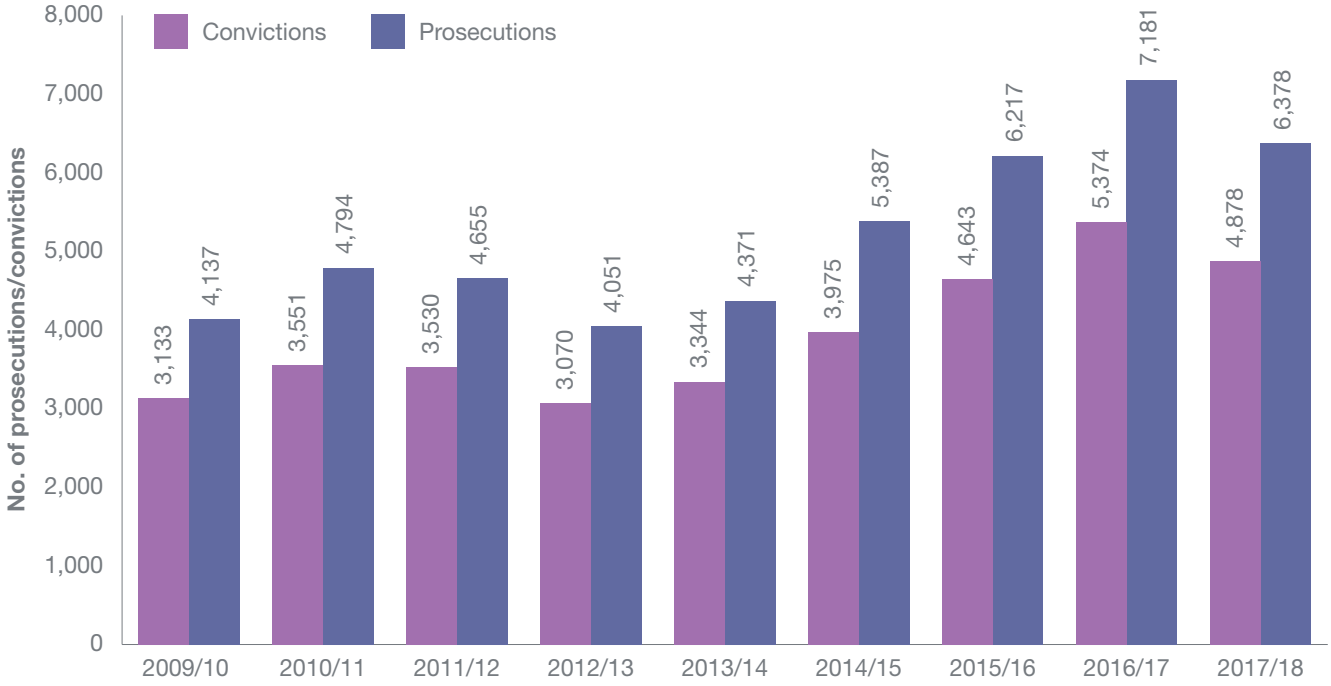
3.5 Prosecutions and convictions of CSA offences

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) monitors CSA prosecutions and convictions in England and Wales. Prosecutors are required to flag all cases of child abuse, with CSA cases being identified if any sexual offence is flagged as child abuse. Reports of non-recent sexual abuse that occurred when the victim was aged under 18 years are recorded as CSA, regardless of the age of the victim at the time the report is made.

The annual *Violence against Women and Girls Report* for 2017/18 (CPS, 2018:A41) states that, within child abuse flagged offences that were specifically related to CSA:

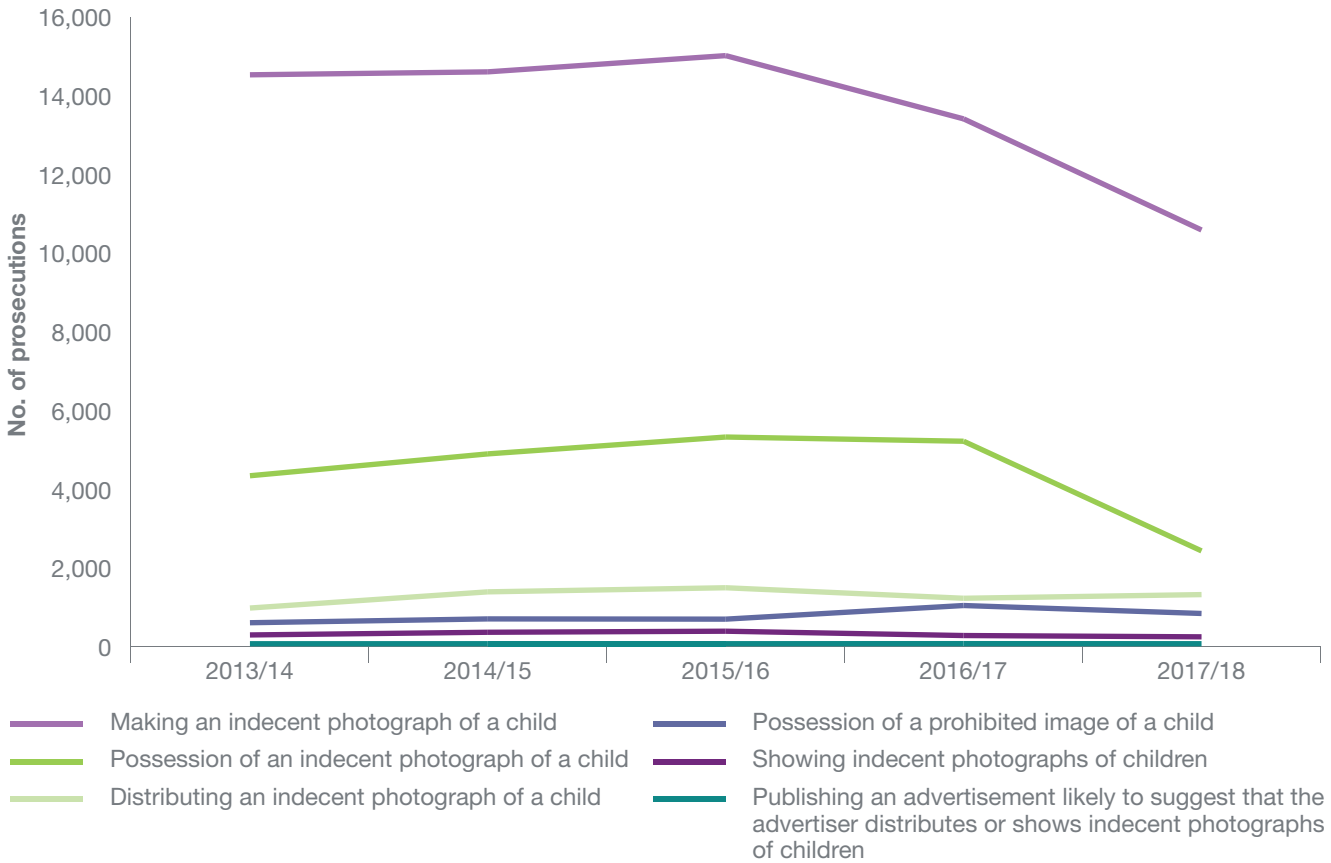
- CSA offence prosecutions completed in 2017/18 fell by 11.2% to 6,378, from 7,181 the previous year; the volume of CSA convictions fell by 9.3%, from 5,374 in 2016/17 to 4,878 (see Figure 15). The conviction rate rose from 74.8% to 76.5%.

Figure 15. Child abuse sexual offences prosecutions and convictions, 2009/10 to 2017/18 (England and Wales)



Source: CPS (2018), Table 11b. Data includes non-recent CSA cases; the inclusion of child abuse image offences was partial prior to 2012/13 and is fully included from 2013/14 onwards.

Figure 16. Child abuse image offence prosecutions, 2013/14 to 2017/18 (England and Wales)



Source: CPS (2018), Table 15. Data includes non-recent CSA cases.

- 1,759 (27.6%) of CSA offence prosecutions were flagged as both child abuse and rape. Of these prosecutions, a conviction was obtained in 1,213 cases, representing a 69.0% conviction rate.
- Of the 4,619 CSA offence prosecutions where the rape flag was not applied (72.4% of all CSA offence prosecutions), a conviction was obtained in 3,665 cases; this represented a 79.3% conviction rate.
- The defendant was male in 98.1% of child sexual offences, representing 6,244 of the 6,368 defendants whose gender was recorded. (Gender was recorded in 99.8% of cases.)
- 76.7% of male defendants prosecuted for CSA were convicted (4,791), along with 66.1% of female defendants (82).

Prosecutions for some categories of CSA image offences have remained fairly stable over time, but some image offences have seen a steep decline over the past few years (see Figure 16):

- Overall, prosecutions for 'sexual exploitation of children through photographs' were down 28% in the two years between 2015/16 and 2017/18. This is largely the result of the 30% decrease in 'making an indecent photograph of a child' prosecutions over those two years.
- 'Possession of indecent photograph of a child' prosecutions were down 55% in the two years between 2015/16 and 2017/18.

In explaining these decreases, the CPS says:

> "The process relating to child sexual abuse images has been streamlined to improve the efficiency of prosecutions … The CPS is not deprioritising prosecution of these offences; rather we are able to use fewer offences per defendant prosecution, following the revised guidelines relating to the streamlining of images in prosecutions." (CPS, 2018:17)

This means it has been able to prosecute suspects "more efficiently using fewer images", so the average number of offences per case has fallen:

- In 2014/15 the average number of offences per case was 8, in 2017/18 it was 3.6. There was therefore a fall in the prosecution of child abuse image offences from 20,803 in 2016/17 to 15,055.
- These included prosecutions commenced for 11,929 offences of 'sexual exploitation of children through photographs', a fall from 14,691 in 2016/17.

3.6 Defendant outcomes

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) publishes information on defendants prosecuted, convicted and sentenced, by type of offence; this data is designated as National Statistics. Data is recorded by defendant and includes demographic information on their gender and age. It is possible to use the data to estimate the volume and outcomes of CSA offenders dealt with in court, as illustrated in Table 3, which includes three non-recent offence categories.

- A total of 8,806 defendants were prosecuted for CSA offences in 2017, down from 9,306 the previous year (a 5% reduction). A total of 7,040 people were convicted in 2017 (an 80% conviction ratio), compared with 7,326 (a 79% conviction ratio) the previous year; this represents a 4% reduction in the number of convictions.[9]

The conviction ratios here were calculated by dividing the number of convictions by the number of prosecutions in a given year. This data is *indicative*, as cases are not actually tracked through to outcome.[10] Nevertheless, they show a large variation around the overall 80% conviction ratio (see Figure 17).

9 This MoJ data on prosecutions and convictions differs from CPS data in section 3.5 of this report, owing to different counting rules.

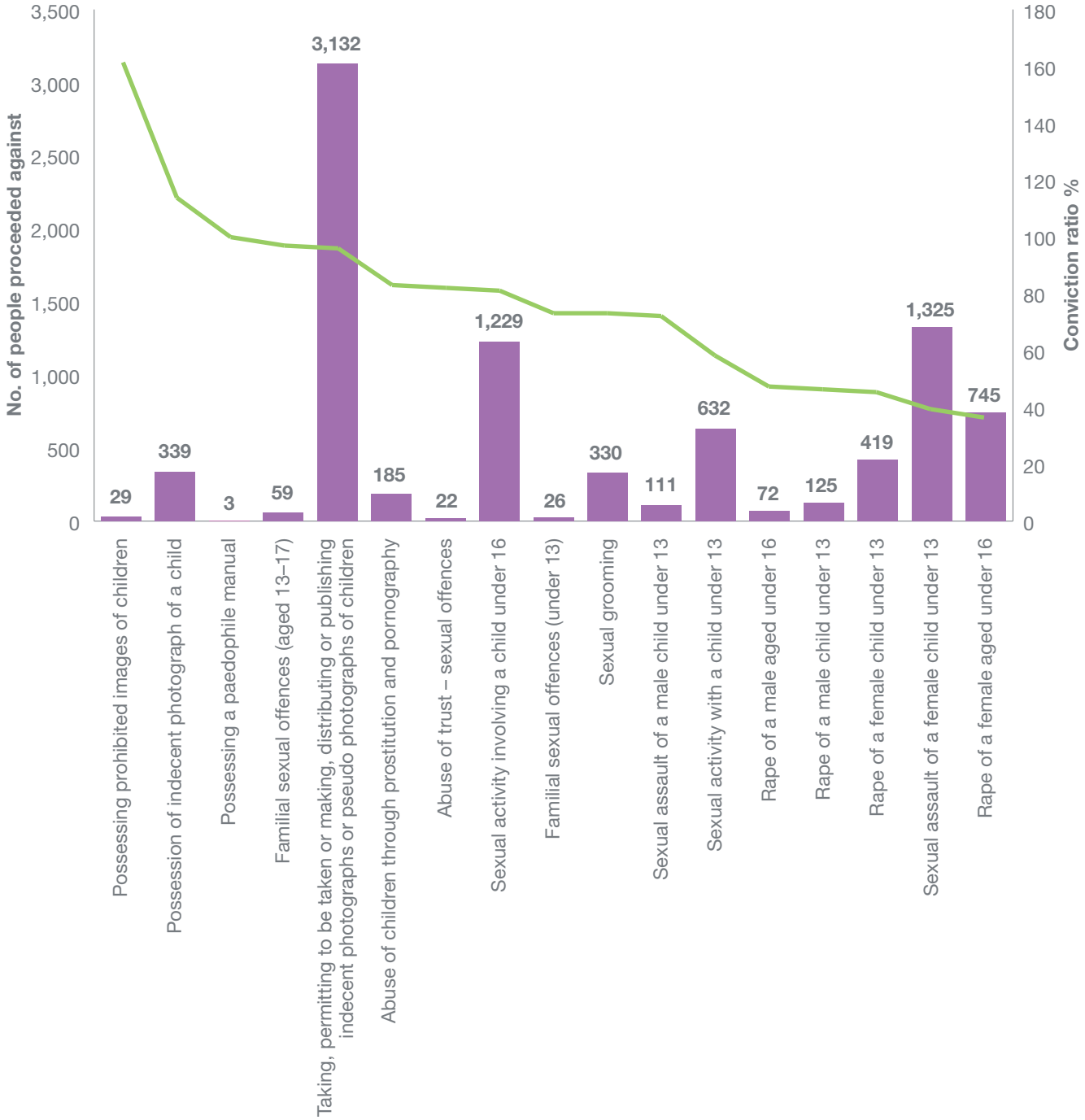
10 Prosecutions and convictions are each reported in the year when the case completes at that court, which may not be the same if defendants are committed to the Crown Court for trial. (All prosecutions are counted at magistrates' courts.) This method can suppress conviction ratios for offence categories which are increasing in volume and where convictions often come long after prosecutions – sexual assault, rape and sexual activity offences in particular. They may also be suppressed by any 'downgrading' during the trial of the offence being considered by the court, because the prosecution will still be counted as relating to the original offence.

Table 3. Defendant outcomes by CSA offence category, 2017 (England and Wales)

Offence category	Cautions issued	Prosecuted	Convicted
Taking, permitting to be taken or making, distributing or publishing indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of children	191	3,132	3,020
Sexual activity involving a child under 16	137	1,229	992
Sexual assault of a female child under 13	41	1,325	522
Possession of indecent photograph of a child	128	339	385
Sexual activity with a child under 13	54	632	366
Rape of a female aged under 16	1	745	266
Sexual grooming	35	330	241
Rape of a female child under 13	11	419	187
Abuse of children through prostitution and pornography	14	185	153
Sexual assault of a male child under 13	9	111	80
Gross indecency with children *(non-recent offence)*	2	23	70
Rape of a male child under 13	5	125	57
Familial sexual offences (aged 13-17)	5	59	57
Possessing prohibited images of children	17	29	47
Rape of a male aged under 16	1	72	34
Familial sexual offences (under 13)	10	26	19
Abuse of trust – sexual offences	9	22	18
Possessing a paedophile manual	0	3	3
Indecent assault on a male under 16 *(non-recent offence)*	0	0	167
Indecent assault on a female under 16 *(non-recent offence)*	0	0	356
Total	**670**	**8,806**	**7,040**

Source: Outcomes by Offence Data Tool (MoJ, 2018). Numbers relate to defendants proceeded against per principal offence. Includes defendants proceeded against for non-recent abuse.

Figure 17. Prosecutions and conviction ratios, by offence category, 2017 (England and Wales)



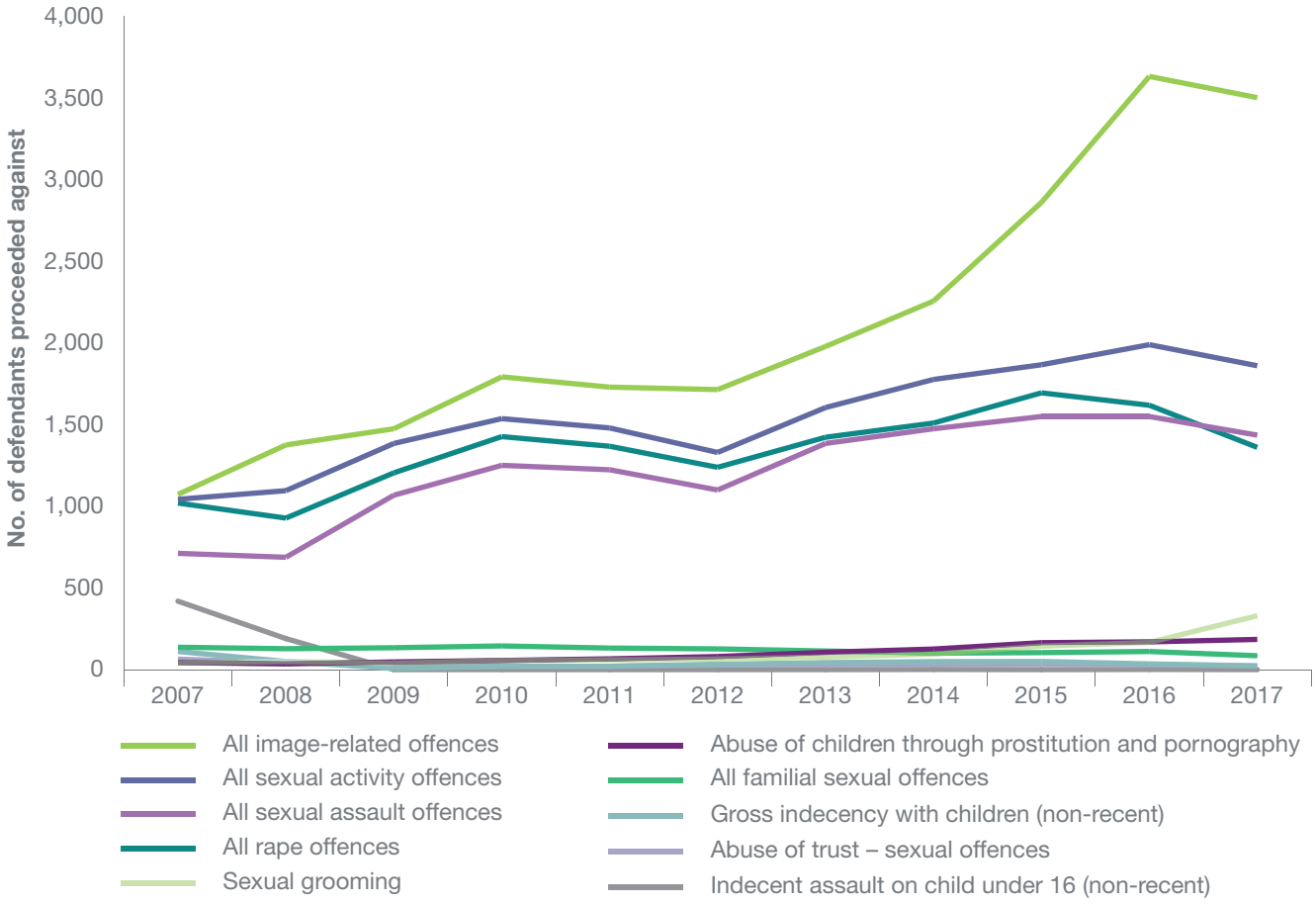
Source: Outcomes by Offence Data Tool (MoJ, 2018). Ratio calculated by dividing the number of defendants convicted by the number proceeded against. Non-recent offences not shown.

- Image offences and possession offences have higher conviction ratios, of over 95%. This is likely to be the result of the time lag associated with a fall in new prosecutions: there were more prosecutions last year and those convictions are coming through the system now, artificially inflating the ratio this year. (Hence the 162% conviction ratio for 'possessing prohibited images' offences.)
- In contrast, all categories of rape had a conviction ratio below 50% in 2017, and this is quite consistent; over the past decade, all CSA rape categories had conviction ratios below 65%.

3.7 Prosecutions trends over time

- In terms of overall prosecutions for CSA offences in MoJ data, there is no consistent trend: between 2015 and 2016 there was an increase of more than 800, but in the following year between 2016 and 2017 there was a decrease of around 500 (see Figure 18).
- For two specific CSA offence groups, there was a rise in prosecutions between 2016 and 2017: abuse of children through prostitution and pornography, and sexual grooming (a 9% and a 99% increase, respectively). The increase in sexual grooming prosecutions is likely related to the new offence of 'sexual communication with a child', introduced in England and Wales in April 2017: 3,096 cases of this new offence have been recorded by the police in England and Wales and the British Transport Police in its first year (Bentley et al, 2018).[11]
- Image-related offences saw a sharp increase (of around 77%) between 2012 and 2016, followed by a contrasting 4% decrease in the following year.

Figure 18. Number of defendants proceeded against for CSA offences by offence group, 2007 to 2017 (England and Wales)



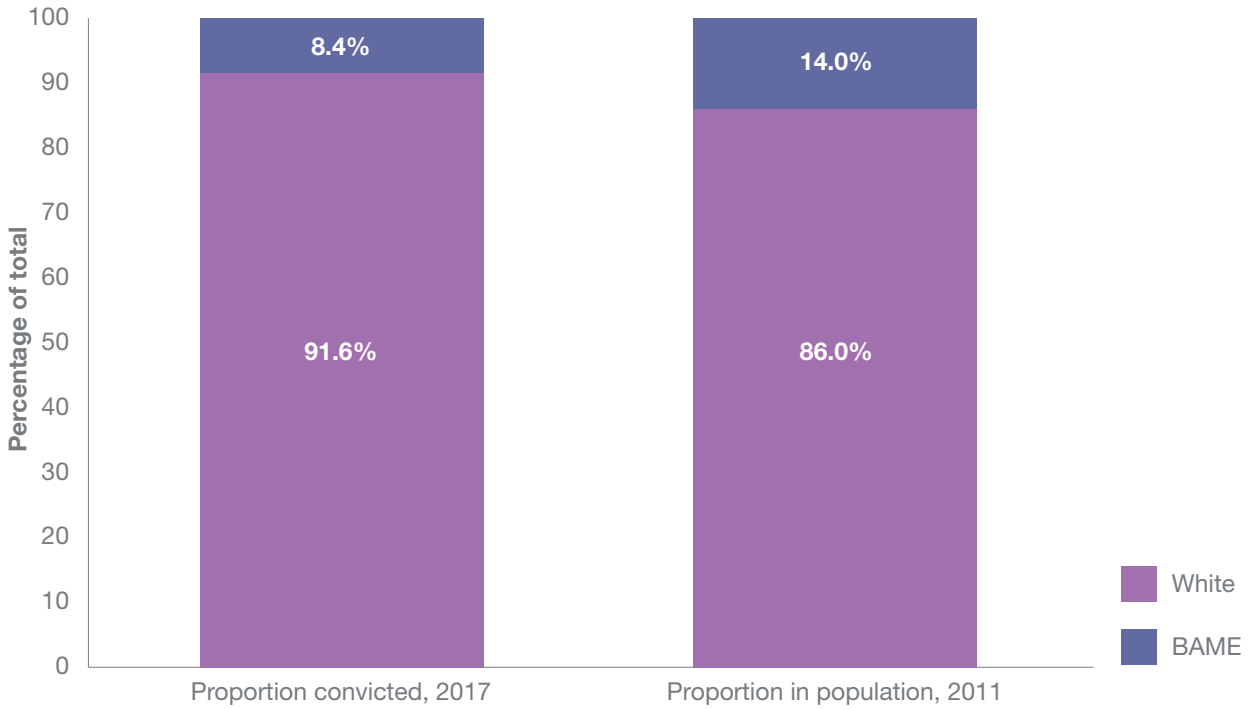
Source: Outcomes by Offence Data Tool (MoJ, 2018). Image-related offences include: taking, permitting to be taken or making, distributing or publishing indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of children, possession of indecent photograph of a child and possessing prohibited images of children (introduced as offence in April 2010).

11 Not all police forces responded to the NSPCC's freedom of information request for a full year of data on the number of 'sexual communication with a child' offences in England and Wales, so the figure is likely to be an underestimate.

3.8 Defendant gender and ethnicity

- MoJ data for 2017 shows that 98% (6,915) of convictions for CSA offences were of males; 2% (103) of convictions were of females. (There were 22 people of unknown gender convicted, but this amounted to less than 1% of the total.)
- The conviction ratio for males was 81%, compared with 66% for females (and just 22% for those of unknown gender).
- Female defendants were mostly convicted for sexual activity involving a child under 13 years, and 'taking, permitting to be taken or making, distributing or publishing indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of children' – there were 23 convictions for each of those offences.
- The MoJ is currently the only administrative data source to publish perpetrator ethnicity data. The first year for which this data was published was 2017, when 70% (6,207) of those prosecuted for a CSA offence were of a white ethnic background (including white other) and 9% (779) of those prosecuted were of a black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) background. In 21% (1,820) of cases, no ethnicity was stated – which means over one-fifth of total prosecutions with no ethnicity data.
- Of those convicted, 74% (5,217) were of a white ethnic background (including white other), 7% (479) were BAME; 1,344 (19%) had no ethnicity stated. If convictions are excluded where ethnicity was not stated, 92% were white (including white other) and 8% were BAME, as in Figure 19. We can then compare this to the 2011 Census (the most reliable source regarding population ethnicity), which reported that 14% of the general population of England and Wales were from a BAME background (Office for National Statistics, 2018b).[12]
- Prosecuted individuals from a white ethnic background had a conviction ratio of 84%, and those from a BAME background had a conviction ratio of 61%.

Figure 19. Convictions by ethnic group, 2017 (England and Wales)



Source: Outcomes by Offence Data Tool (MoJ, 2018). Excludes cases where ethnicity was not stated.

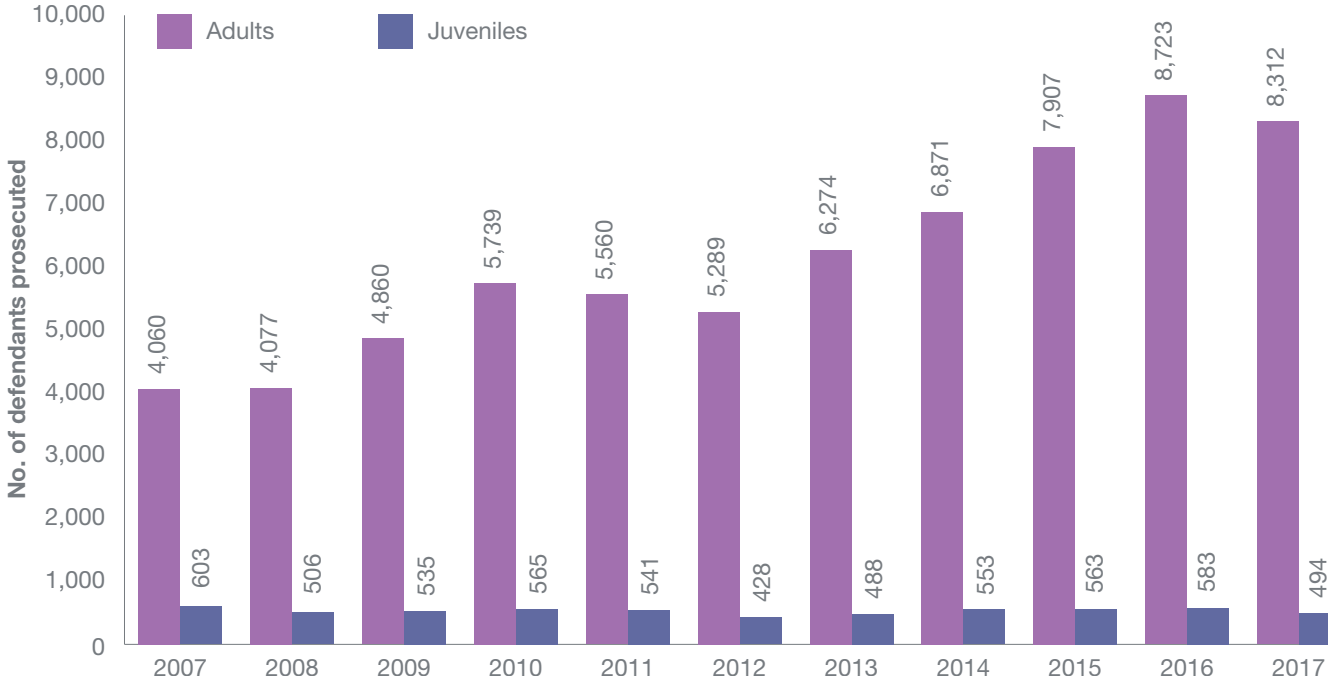
12 The Census is planned and carried out by the ONS every 10 years in England and Wales, most recently in March 2011. The Census is the only survey to give a detailed picture of the whole population of England and Wales. 94% of households completed the 2011 Census. Of those, 97% answered the question about ethnicity. The white ethnic group includes 4.4% 'white other'.

3.9 Adult and juvenile perpetrated CSA offences

The court system is currently the only public data source to separate adult and juvenile perpetrated CSA offences. Its data shows that the number of juvenile prosecutions (given to 10–17-year-olds) has remained stable against a substantial rise in proceedings against adults.

- The proportion of defendants who are juveniles has more than halved over the decade, from 14% in 2007 to 6% in 2017 (see Figure 20).
- Of all prosecutions of juveniles for CSA offences in 2017, 'rape of a female child' accounted for the largest proportion at 31%, followed by 'sexual assault of a female child' at 18%, 'sexual images offences' at 11% and 'sexual activity involving a child under 16' at 10%. (These proportions have been quite consistent over the past decade – apart from the offence of 'Taking, permitting to be taken or making, distributing or publishing indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of children', where the proportion of juvenile prosecutions has more than doubled.)
- Among all prosecutions of juveniles for CSA offences in 2017, 'rape of a female child' was the most common offence, with 152 juvenile prosecutions.

Figure 20. Number of adult and juvenile defendants prosecuted for CSA offences, 2007 to 2017 (England and Wales)



Source: Outcomes by Offence Data Tool (MoJ, 2018).

4. Reflections

This report provides an updated overview of statutory data for CSA in 2017/18. While this data provides an important insight into the practice of key agencies in relation to CSA, it is important to remember that this is not prevalence data (experiences of CSA in the general population): it is annual case management information as recorded at local and national levels. As such, what is and is not recorded reflects the varying needs and priorities of different agencies. This means there are significant challenges in drawing reliable insights from the available data.

In reviewing the data provided in this report, we urge readers to consider the following:

- Most CSA remains hidden and is never reported to, or uncovered by, an official agency. This report does not reflect the prevalence of CSA, but it does reflect the scale of identified and recorded responses to CSA by local agencies. Among those who do disclose CSA, many do not do so until adulthood, and we do not know how this rate of disclosure has changed over time. This reflects the fact that many people who experienced CSA have not received support or safeguarding interventions until adulthood.
- Data is not collected on the same basis across different agencies: police collect data on offences, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) on defendants, and local authority children's services on responses to concerns of CSA. This means that the data is not comparable between agencies.
- Which cases come to the attention of agencies is affected by wider social awareness and by policy priorities as well as individual decisions.
- Changing definitions make it difficult to trace trends over time.

Despite the limitations of what agency data can tell us about the scale and nature of CSA, it can provide useful insights into changes in practice. Below we highlight some of the key trends in the data, which may warrant further exploration.

There is substantial variation in local and regional reporting of CSA.

As noted above, the data continues to indicate considerable local variation in the reporting of CSA within both local authority children's services and policing. Regional data is available in England and Wales with regard to children on child protection plans under the category of sexual abuse; this ranges from 1.9 children on such a plan per 10,000 child population aged 0–17 in the East of England, to 3.3 in the North West (compared with an overall England average of 2.5 and a Wales average of 1.8). For nine local authorities, the figure is between five and nine children on a plan per 10,000. However, it is notable that the overall rate of children on a child protection plan for *any* reason also varies considerably, between individual local authorities and between regions.

In addition, 2017/18 police data shows that there were approximately eight CSA offences per 1,000 children aged 0–15 across England and Wales – varying from four or fewer in six police force areas, to 10 or more in seven police force areas.

We do not think these differences reflect actual variation in levels of CSA; more likely, they represent differences in the ways CSA is identified, recorded and responded to in different localities. More meaningful comparisons between areas would need to consider local and regional differences in child protection thresholds and social work practice, policing approaches, and recording practices.

> The ONS cautions against interpreting the rise in recorded sexual crime data as an increase in the rate of offending

There have been consistent increases in police recording of CSA offences, with recent jumps in specific offences related to CSE and grooming.

Overall, the number of CSA offences recorded by the police has more than doubled in the past five years. The offence categories 'abuse of children through sexual exploitation' and 'sexual grooming' saw increases of 110% and 266% respectively in the year 2017/18 alone.

This coincides with the new offence of 'sexual communication with a child', introduced in England and Wales in April 2017, which falls inside the sexual grooming offence category: it covers anyone aged 18 or over who communicates with a child under 16, where the person acts for a sexual purpose, and applies to online and offline communication including social media, email, texts and letters.

Crucially, the Office for National Statistics cautions against interpreting the rise in recorded sexual crime data as an increase in rate of offending, and attributes some of the rise to improved police recording (ONS, 2017:4). Other factors such as increased public awareness as a result of high-profile cases may also have influenced policing priorities – and encouraged increasing reporting of CSA by the public, leading to increased police recording.

Few CSA offences proceed from initial report through to charge, though conviction rates have increased slightly.

There is considerable attrition as CSA offences proceed from the initial report to charge. Police published outcome data for 2017/18 indicates that fewer than one-sixth (14%) of recorded CSA offences resulted in a charge or summons; this is down from 18% the previous year. 'Evidential difficulties' were the most common reason for not proceeding on CSA offences (in 46% of cases), and investigation or prosecution was 'not deemed to be in the public interest' for a further 18% of cases – up from 14% in the previous year.

CPS conviction rates for CSA offences are fairly stable, however, with incremental increases from 73.8% in 2014/15 up to 76.5% in 2017/18. The implication here is that, while police are making substantial improvements in identifying and recording CSA, this is less reflected in criminal justice outcomes.

Tracking individual cases from the first report to police through to conviction is hampered by differences in counting rules: the police record offences, while the CPS and MoJ record defendants. Current criminal justice data systems do not enable the tracking of individual cases' progress through to outcome.

The current statutory data provides very little information about the victims, perpetrators and contexts of CSA.

We cannot be effective in preventing and disrupting CSA if we do not know who it happens to, who commits it and the contexts in which it happens. We still have very limited detail on the demographic profile of victims and perpetrators, and on important contextual information such as the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, whether abuse is committed by multiple perpetrators or against multiple victims, and any online element.

Data is available on whether those prosecuted for CSA cases are under or over 18 years old, and – for the first time this year – the MoJ has published data on the ethnicity of defendants and convicted offenders. Excluding convictions where ethnicity was not stated, 92% were of a white ethnic background (including white other) and 8% were BAME; this compares to 14% BAME in the general population of England and Wales. However, nearly one-fifth of convictions (19%) had no ethnicity stated, which still presents us with an incomplete picture.

Further to this, there remains a significant group of victims of CSA who are excluded from criminal justice data, because that data excludes sexual offences committed against 16–17-year-olds in most offence categories. This is one of the reasons for the introduction of the CSA 'flag' by the Home Office. These cohorts of victims are largely unrepresented in the data, and therefore missing from a full and comprehensive picture of CSA within the criminal justice system. A freedom of information request by the NSPCC to police forces in England suggests that an additional 9,267 CSA offences (excluding obscene imagery offences) were committed against 16–17-year-olds in England in 2015/16 (Bentley et al, 2018:29).

5. Recommendations

Substantial improvements have been made over the last two decades in defining, recording and monitoring CSA across the range of stakeholders and data owners involved. However, further work is needed to improve the consistency and standardisation of data collection between local authorities and criminal justice agencies, and to make better use of existing local data – about both those who experience CSA and those who commit it.

Two years ago, the CSA Centre's scale and nature scoping report (Kelly and Karsna, 2017) – a review of what we do and don't know about CSA in England and Wales today – made two main recommendations and two offers of further support from the CSA Centre:

- The UK Government should commit to commissioning a regular CSA prevalence study.
- Organisations carrying out surveys and longitudinal cohort studies on linked issues should consider including a module on CSA.
- The CSA Centre will work with relevant agencies to better understand the reasons for local/regional variation in the recording of CSA.
- The CSA Centre will work with relevant agencies in local areas to improve the consistent recording of core administrative data about CSA.

Below we provide an update on progress made against these, and our planned next steps.

The UK Government should commit to commissioning a regular CSA prevalence study

The CSA Centre continues to advocate that the UK Government should commit to commissioning a regular CSA prevalence study. Existing prevalence studies have contributed significantly to our understanding. There is a strong case for a specialist survey to measure CSA prevalence, if we are to successfully address the knowledge gaps identified.

The study should be comprehensive, and improve on previous prevalence measurement. It should cover all forms of CSA, including CSE, and should ask about online elements of abuse, the duration/frequency of abuse, and potential harmful sexual behaviours. It is important that the study is repeated, in order to enable comparisons over time. It is proposed that the study is carried out once a decade, while questions on CSA are retained in the Crime Survey for England and Wales in the intervening years. This frequency mirrors practice in the USA and would limit the cost to only once every 10 years.

Since making this recommendation, the CSA Centre has continued to consult with the working group established during the development of the scale and nature report. The group comprises representatives from across government, the Office for National Statistics, the National Crime Agency, the National Police Chiefs Council, academics and wider stakeholders. The group has considered what such a survey should look like. In February 2018 we published a review establishing what can be learnt from the methods used in international surveys (Radford, 2018), and we subsequently concluded that an online approach to a prevalence survey would be the most effective option.

In order to maintain drive towards the development and delivery of a prevalence study, the CSA Centre has appointed Durham University and NatCen Social Research (following a competitive tendering process) to join us in developing a proposal to be submitted to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding of a prevalence study of CSA. We will be submitting a proposal in the summer.

> There is a strong case for a survey to measure CSA prevalence, if we are to address the knowledge gaps identified

Organisations carrying out surveys and longitudinal cohort studies on linked issues should consider including a module on CSA.

The CSA Centre has contributed to the revision of questions on CSA in the 'Abuse during childhood' module of the Crime Survey for England and Wales; the survey findings will be published by the Office for National Statistics in December 2019. We have also made links with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and its partners involved in the development of the fourth wave of the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, in order to contribute to the development of questions on the respondents' experiences of CSA. While it is important that surveys such as these include questions on CSA, they will not be able to fill the extensive gaps we have identified in knowledge of the prevalence of CSA.

The CSA Centre will work with relevant agencies to better understand the reasons for local/regional variation in the recording of CSA.

The CSA Centre has a varied programme of work focused on practice improvement, which includes supporting policing and children's services teams across England and Wales to better understand their own data on CSA and how this compares to other areas. Our practice improvement advisors (PIAs) are a multi-disciplinary team who ensure our research efforts and resources are grounded in practice experience and service improvement; they work with local authorities and services to apply our research on CSA directly to local areas' situations, to enable service improvement. The CSA Centre provides local areas with tailored data reports, supporting a greater understanding of local and regional trends and contributing to service and policy development.

The CSA Centre will work with relevant agencies in local areas to improve the consistent recording of core administrative data about CSA.

At present, despite CSA being identified as a National Threat, the data collected about those who are victims of CSA, the abuse they experienced, the people who commit abuse and the services provided is very limited and inconsistent. This means that services, commissioners and policymakers are working in an information fog when making decisions about which services and interventions to provide to prevent, disrupt and respond to CSA at local and national levels.

The CSA Centre has designed a data collection template which sets out a list of 37 data fields with recommended definitions to be used by services working with CSA cases. The template is intended to support them to improve their data collection and therefore their capacity to extract meaningful insights and improve practice.

If collected consistently by agencies managing cases which include CSA, the data collection template's data fields would significantly improve the ability of services, commissioners and policymakers to understand and evidence the demand for CSA services; the experiences of victims; the nature and context of abuse; the reach of services and interventions; where abuse is taking place, including online; and who is committing the abuse.

Earlier this year, we published the findings of a study to apply the core data fields to narrative case file data held by Saint Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Greater Manchester (Karsna and Majeed-Arisa, 2019), which demonstrated that much of this data is already recorded and simply needs to be extracted in a consistent way. We have been piloting this template in five localities, and will publish the findings from this exercise in summer 2019.

> We support policing and children's services teams to better understand their data on CSA and how this compares to other areas

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Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

The photograph on the cover was taken using actors and does not depict an actual situation.

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