
John Marais
Deputy Director Crime Income and Wealth Division
Office for National Statistics
(By email)

24 August 2023

Dear John

Statistics on Sexual Offences in England and Wales

We've reviewed sexual offences statistics which are currently published in the [Sexual offences in England and Wales overview](#) and the associated [Sexual offences victim characteristics, England and Wales](#) and [Sexual offences prevalence and trends, England and Wales](#). We welcome that your team requested that we review this suite of statistics.

The Criminal Justice System [delivery data dashboard](#) developed as part of the [Rape Review](#) highlights the user need for data on this important crime type. The statistical bulletins bring together data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), police recorded crime and victim services. When considered alongside each other, these three data sources provide a more complete picture of sexual victimisation than one data source alone. Victim services data filled a gap in the CSEW data whilst the collection of data on sexual offences was paused during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your team did well to build relationships with these data providers and work with them to obtain and publish these data.

We found a range of positive features that demonstrate the value and quality of the statistics:

- The Sexual Offences bulletins are clear and well-structured, with separate sections for each data source and informative commentary on the trends in each data source. They are transparent about the strengths and limitations of the CSEW and police recorded crime data and provide clear guidance for users on how each data source should be used. There are clear caveats about the quality of CSEW data given that the estimates are based on only six months' data. We welcome ONS's proactivity in suggesting suspension of the National Statistics status [of the CSEW statistics](#) based on these quality concerns. We also applaud ONS's [plans for reviewing data quality](#) of crime statistics with a view to reinstating National Statistics status.

- Your team has a good understanding of the key users of the statistics and their needs. The team explained that users have fed back as part of wider engagement about crime statistics that they are generally happy with the information that is currently provided but would like to see more analysis and commentary exploring female-on-male offending, historic vs. recent abuse and the use of technology in sexual offending.
- Uncertainty around the CSEW estimates is clearly explained in the User Guide, which gives a clear description of the 95% confidence interval. We encourage your team to bring information about uncertainty into the statistical bulletin to support appropriate interpretation of the statistics.

We also identified several ways in which the quality and value of the statistics could be enhanced:

- To aid user understanding of the quality of victim services data, information should be added on strengths and limitations and how data quality is assured by the suppliers and reviewed by ONS.
- To maximise the value of the victim services data, the commentary in the bulletin on victim services could be expanded to offer insights about the full range of the data collected. For instance, there is no commentary on recency of experience of sexual assault, which is a data gap that users have recently identified they would like to know more about. However, we recognise that some content that your team had planned to include had to be cut due to word limits for ONS statistical publications.
- The inclusion of additional data sources like victim services data is vital to provide public value, and we would support the team's ambitions to explore other data and data sources like these that could add further insight on sexual offences and address potential gaps identified by users that are not currently covered by the police recorded crime data or the CSEW.

Thank you to your team for its positive engagement during this review. We plan to check in again with your team in January 2024. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further or if we can offer further assistance as these statistics continue to develop.

I am copying this letter to Nick Stripe and Peter Jones, joint heads of the Centre for Crime and Justice at ONS.

Yours sincerely



Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead