

Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland

Update to 31 December 2020

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In 12 months from 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2020:

- there were 31,848 domestic abuse incidents in Northern Ireland, an increase of 134 (0.4 per cent) on the previous 12 months and one of the highest 12 month periods recorded since the start of the data series in 2004/05.
- the number of domestic abuse crimes rose to 19,000, an increase of 951 (5.3 per cent) on the previous 12 months and the highest 12 month period recorded since 2004/05.
- there were 17 domestic abuse incidents and 10 domestic abuse crimes per 1,000 population.
- there were increases in all major offence types, except for theft (including burglary) and criminal damage.
- six of the eleven policing districts showed an increase in domestic abuse incidents and seven districts had higher levels of domestic abuse crimes.



Northern Ireland
Statistics and Research Agency

Keeping People Safe



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We welcome comment and feedback on these statistics. If you would like to forward your views, receive notification of new publications or be kept informed of developments relating to PSNI statistics, please email your contact details using the email address provided on the cover page.

1. Things you need to know about this release

Coverage

This release is produced in accordance with the pillars and principles set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) publishes figures on the levels and trends in police recorded domestic abuse incidents and crimes. As these figures only relate to those domestic abuse incidents reported to the police, they only provide an indication of the true extent of domestic abuse. The statistics are collated and produced by statisticians seconded to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Collation of this data started in 2004/05.

This release presents statistics relating to domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police to 31 December 2020. Figures were compiled on 19 February 2021. Changes can be expected to in-year figures each time they are published, as all records from 1st April 2020 are subject to ongoing validation and quality assurance processes until publication in May 2021.

All tables and charts in the bulletin, along with supplementary data, are available from the PSNI website in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#).

The next update covering the 12 months to 31 March 2021 will be published in May 2021. A full [publication schedule](#) is available on the PSNI website.

Domestic Abuse Definition

The PSNI has adopted the definition of domestic violence and abuse as outlined in the 2016 Northern Ireland Government Strategy 'Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland' as:

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

The following will assist in the application of this definition:

- (a) '**Incident**' means an incident anywhere and not confined to the home of one of the partners/family members;
- (b) '**Family members**' include mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, grandparents, whether directly or indirectly related, in-laws or stepfamily.
- (c) '**Intimate partners**' means there must have been a relationship with a degree of continuity and stability. The relationship must also have had (or reasonably supposed to have had) a sexual aspect, such as in the relationship between husband and wife or between others generally recognised as a couple including same sex couples.

What is a domestic abuse incident or domestic abuse crime as recorded by the police?

Police recorded crime data is a victim oriented approach to crime recording. A crime will be recorded as having a domestic abuse motivation where it meets the relevant definition provided above. Not all domestic abuse incidents will result in the recording of a crime, as what has occurred in the incident may not be of the level of severity that would result in a crime being recorded. Where crimes with a domestic abuse motivation are recorded, they are classified according to the Home Office Counting Rules and form a subset of the overall police recorded crime statistics.

Further details of the background and recording practice in relation to police recorded crime statistics are available in the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics](#). An explanation of what constitutes an incident and a crime is provided in Section 2.1 of this guide, while reference to domestic abuse incidents and crimes is available in Section 5. These recording practices, methods of counting outcomes and allocation of crime types apply equally to crimes with a domestic abuse motivation.

Points to note in this bulletin

In-year figures are provisional: changes can be expected to in-year figures each time they are published, as records from 1st April 2020 are subject to ongoing validation and quality assurance processes until publication in May 2021. Revisions to figures for previous financial years are applied on an annual basis in May.

Incidents and Crimes: Domestic abuse crimes recorded by the police are included in the domestic abuse incident count and therefore the two should not be added together.

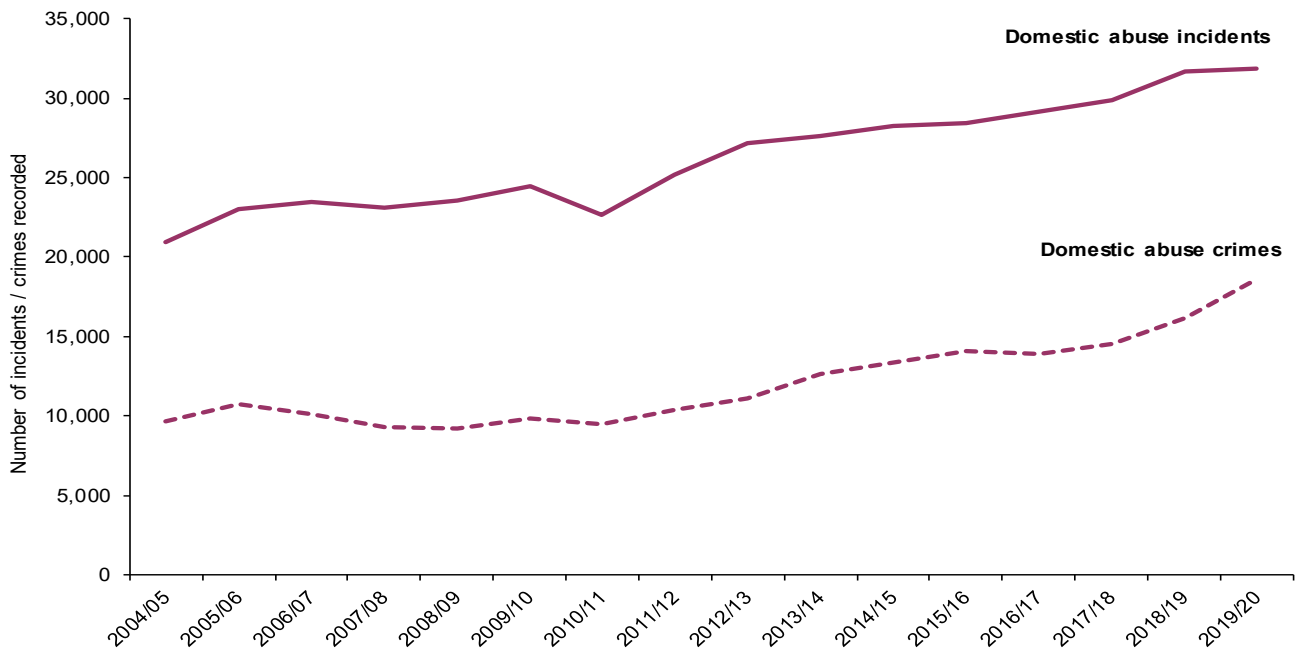
Offences where a police officer becomes a crime victim whilst attending a domestic incident in the course of carrying out their duty are not included in the domestic abuse crime figures; however the incident that was attended by police will be recorded as domestic abuse incident.

Harassment (including malicious communications): Recording of malicious communications started on 1st April 2017. A Home Office change introduced in April 2018 requires harassment to be recorded in addition to the most serious additional victim based offence. Both of these changes in recording practice should be considered in relation to any changes in the overall harassment classification. Further details are available in the note on page 6.

2. What is happening to levels of domestic abuse incidents and crimes over the longer term?

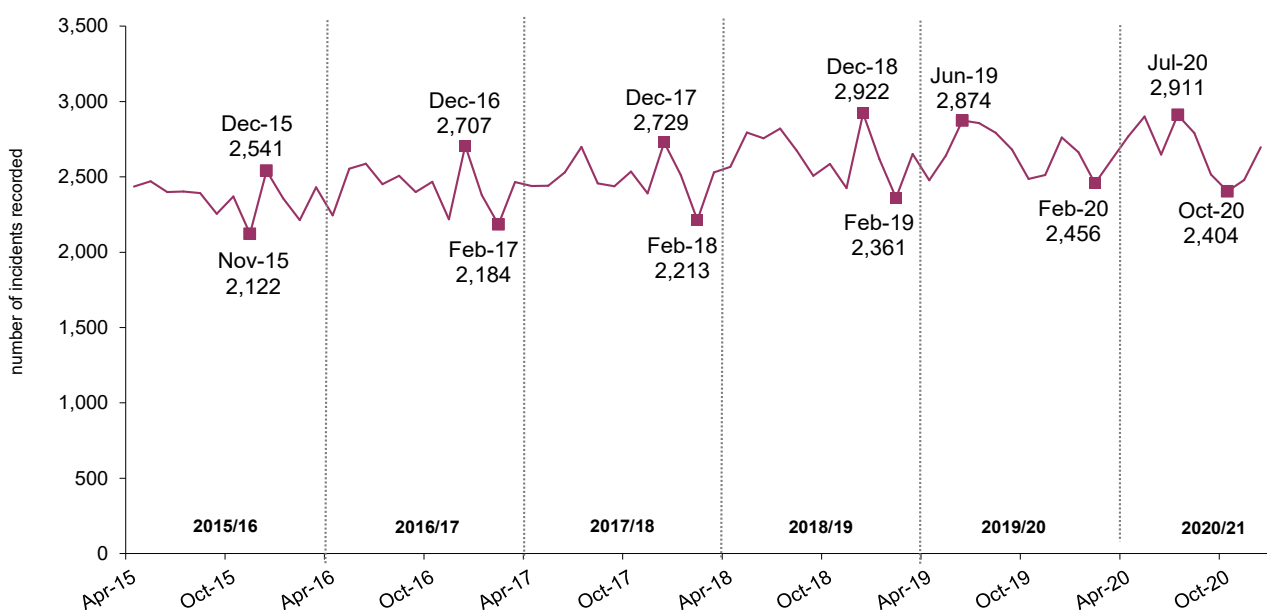
Since 2004/05 there has been a general increase in levels of domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police, with incident levels in 2019/20 being 52 per cent higher than those at the start of the series and crime levels 93 per cent higher.

Figure 1 Trends in domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police since 2004/05



Domestic abuse incidents tend to be higher in the months leading up to the summer, during the summer and in December. From 2015/16 to 2018/19 the number of domestic abuse incidents peaked in December. In 2019/20 the highest number of incidents was seen in June, with December showing the fourth highest level. Figure 2 shows the pattern of domestic abuse incidents over the last five financial years and the emerging pattern in the current financial year 2020/21.

Figure 2 Police recorded domestic abuse incidents each month April 2015 to December 2020, showing highest and lowest levels in each financial year



More detailed statistics from 2004/05 are available through the publication [Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2019/20](#).

3. What has been happening to levels of domestic abuse incidents and crimes more recently?

In 12 months from 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2020:

- There were 31,848 domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police in Northern Ireland, an increase of 134 (0.4 per cent) on the previous 12 months and one of the highest 12 month period recorded since the start of the data series in 2004/05.
- The number of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the police reached 19,000 an increase of 951 (5.3 per cent) on the previous 12 months and the highest 12 month period recorded since 2004/05.
- There were 17 domestic abuse incidents and 10 domestic abuse crimes per 1,000 population¹, the same as the previous 12 months.
- All major offence types saw increases, except for theft (including burglary) and criminal damage. [Table 1]
- The largest volume increase in domestic abuse crimes was seen in offences of harassment which increased by 802 (26.1 per cent). [Table 1 and Note 'Harassment (including malicious communications)' on page 6]
- The number of domestic abuse incidents followed a broadly similar pattern to the previous 12 months. Further detail is provided in the following section on the introduction of lockdown measures. The number of crimes was higher in each month apart from June, September and October 2020. [Figures 3 & 4]

Domestic abuse incidents and crimes during the Covid-19 pandemic

- An exceptional release provided management information on [Domestic Abuse Calls Received by the Police in Northern Ireland](#) including the period since Covid-19 measures were first introduced on 23rd March. This management information was used to give an early indication of trends. It showed that domestic abuse calls were mainly above the expected weekly average between 23rd March 2020 and mid-August 2020 before falling below the weekly average where levels have remained (with the exception of the Christmas and New Year period 2020/21).
- The official statistics data presented in this quarterly update includes domestic abuse incidents that have been identified through sources other than a call for service to police. It also excludes calls for service that were initially identified as potential domestic abuse but which turned out not to meet the domestic abuse definition. In order to incorporate these requirements and improve completeness and accuracy this official statistics data has a longer processing time.
- Domestic abuse incidents were higher in April and May 2020 than the same months in 2019 by 291 and 259 incidents respectively, while the number of incidents fell in June 2020 and was 226 lower than June 2019. Since then the number of incidents has more closely followed those recorded during the equivalent months in 2019, generally at a slightly lower level. [Figure 3]
- When compared with the same months during 2019, levels of domestic crime were higher in January, February and May by 234, 348 and 192 respectively. Levels were also higher in March, April, July, August, November and December but by a smaller margin.
- The increase in the number of domestic abuse offences should be seen in the context of overall police recorded crime, which has shown lower weekly averages across the majority of crime classifications since 23rd March 2020 [[Police Recorded Crime Monthly Update to 31 January 2021](#) – Section 5]
- The increase in domestic abuse crimes combined with a fall in overall crime levels has contributed to domestic abuse crimes rising to 19.7% of all police recorded crime in the 12 months to 31st December 2020, compared with 16.9% during the previous 12 months. This is the highest proportion of overall police recorded crime since the current domestic abuse data series began in 2004/05.

¹ Crime per 1,000 population based on mid-year population estimate of 1,893,667 for 2019, the latest mid-year estimate available at time of compilation. Mid-year population estimates are available from the [NISRA website](#).

Figure 3 Domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police January 2019 to December 2020

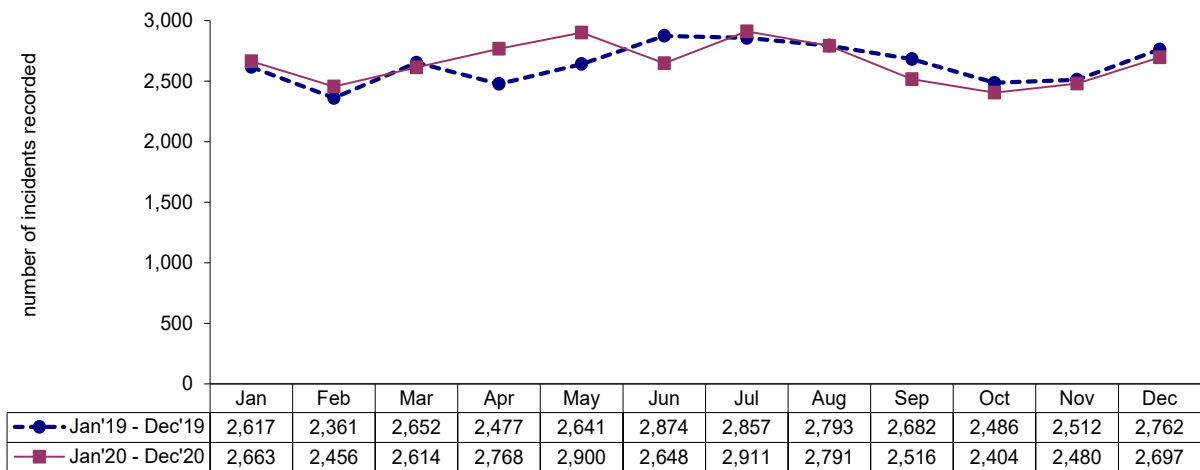


Figure 4 Domestic abuse crimes recorded by the police January 2019 to December 2020

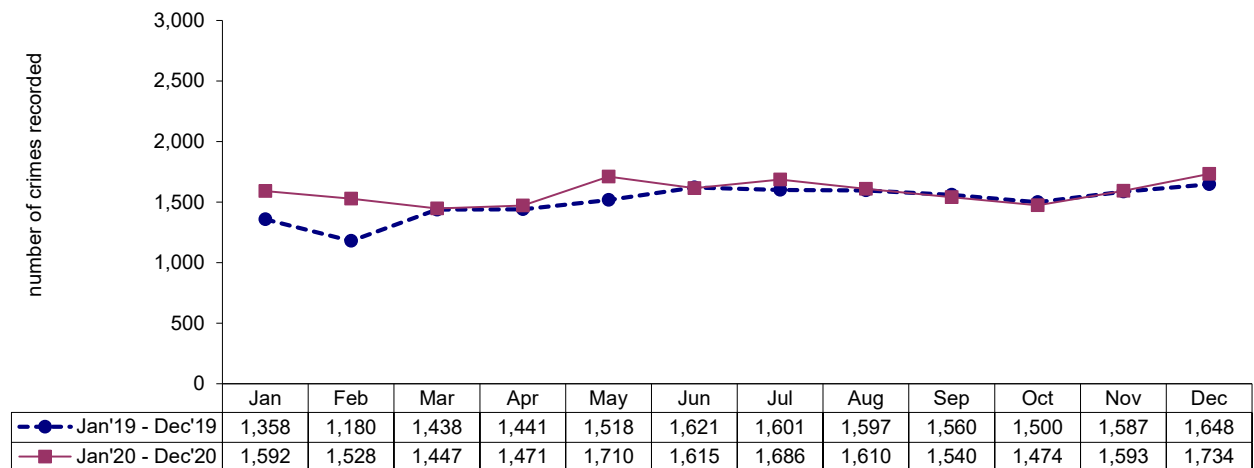


Figure 5 Percentage change in the main crime types for police recorded domestic abuse crime, 12 months to December 2020 compared with the previous 12 months

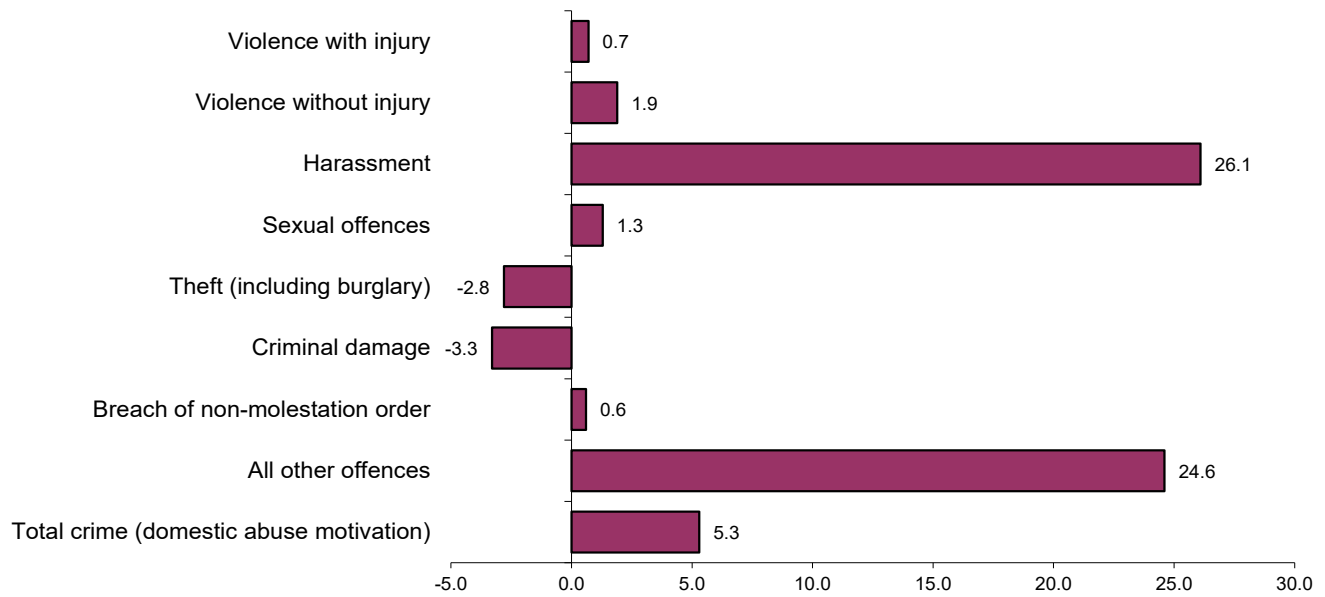
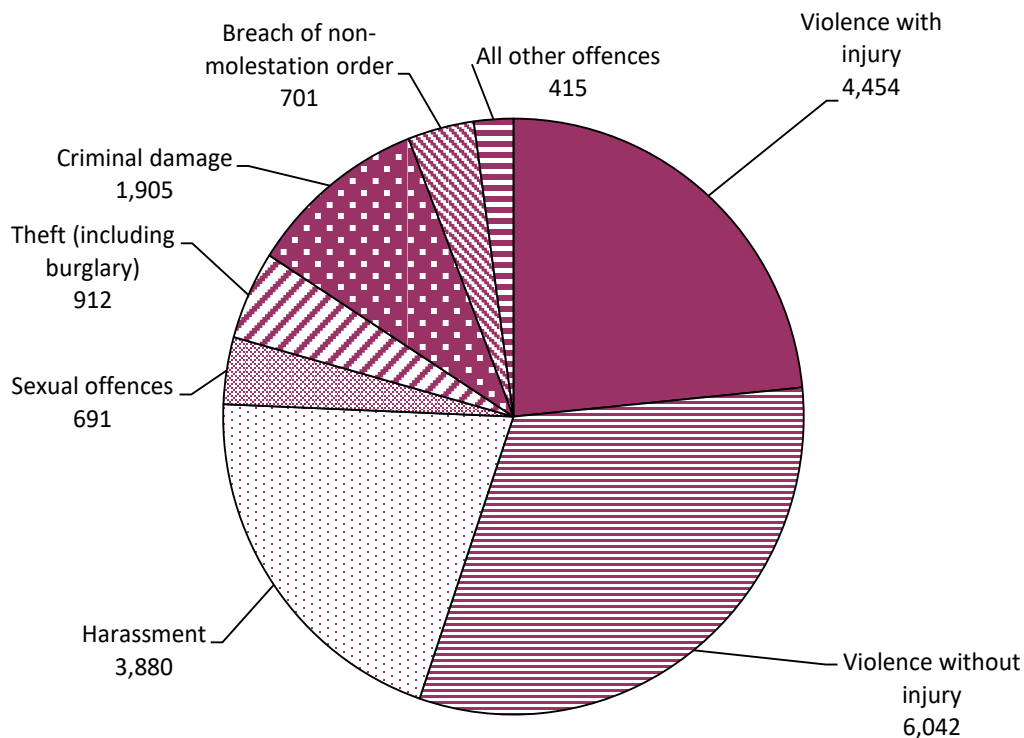


Figure 6 Police recorded domestic abuse crime by crime type, January 2020 to December 2020



Harassment (including malicious communications): Recording of malicious communications started on 1st April 2017. A Home Office change introduced in April 2018 requires harassment to be recorded in addition to the most serious additional victim based offence. Both of these changes in recording practice, along with increasing awareness of the application of these rules in the recording process, should be considered in relation to increases seen in the overall harassment classification.

Results from the 2019 Internal Audit showed that the crime recording accuracy had increased from 90 per cent in 2018 to 97 per cent in 2019, which is a similar level to an inspection conducted in 2014 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. The 2019 audit also indicated that 98 per cent of crimes were correctly classified. The improvement in crime recording accuracy was primarily due to the better recording of harassment and malicious communications offences.

Table 1 Domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police

		Numbers and percentages			
		Jan'19 to Dec'19	Jan'20 to Dec'20	change	% change
Incidents		31,714	31,848	134	0.4
Crimes	Violence against the person offences	13,430	14,376	946	7.0
	<i>Violence with injury (including homicide and death or serious injury by unlawful driving)</i>	4,425	4,454	29	0.7
	<i>Violence without injury¹</i>	5,927	6,042	115	1.9
	<i>Harassment¹</i>	3,078	3,880	802	26.1
	Sexual offences	682	691	9	1.3
	Theft (including burglary)	938	912	-26	-2.8
	Criminal damage	1,969	1,905	-64	-3.3
	Breach of non-molestation order	697	701	4	0.6
	All other offences	333	415	82	24.6
	Total crimes (domestic abuse motivation)	18,049	19,000	951	5.3

¹ Offences relating to Harassment were previously included in the Violence without injury classification and are now presented in their own classification within the Home Office Counting Rules. The Harassment classification includes malicious communications offences, the recording of which started for the first time in Northern Ireland from 1st April 2017. A Home Office change introduced in April 2018 requires harassment to be recorded in addition to the most serious additional victim based offence. Both of these changes in recording practice should be considered in relation to increases in the overall harassment classification. See also Points to Note on page 2.

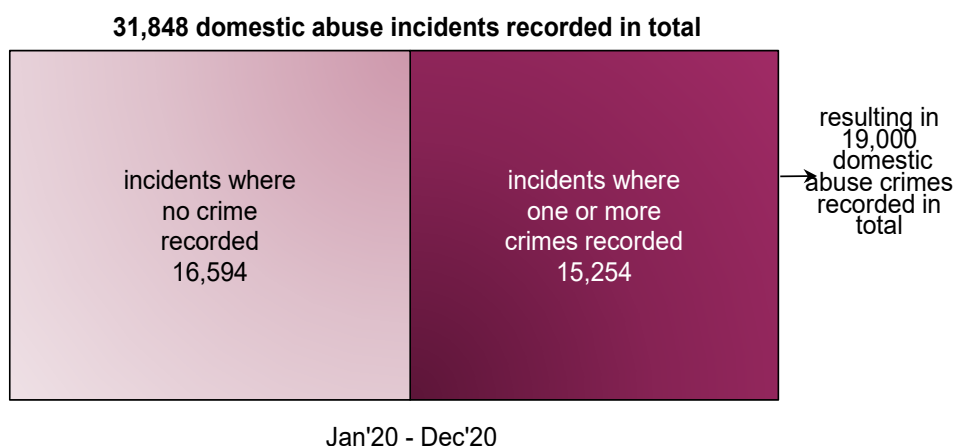
What is the difference between a domestic abuse incident and crime recorded by the police?

Not all domestic abuse incidents will result in the recording of a crime, as what has occurred in the incident may not be of the level of severity that would result in a domestic abuse crime being recorded. Some domestic abuse incidents will result in multiple crimes being recorded. **Domestic abuse crimes are included in the incident count and the two should not be added together.**

Figure 7 shows how domestic abuse incidents are broken down into those with and without crimes.

In the twelve months to 31 December 2020 there were 31,848 incidents recorded by the police where there was a domestic abuse motivation. Of these, there were 16,594 incidents which did not involve a crime (i.e. incidents where the circumstances did not amount to an offence being committed). The remaining 15,254 incidents involved one or more crimes (amounting to 19,000 domestic abuse crimes in total). Just over half of recorded incidents in this time period did not result in a crime being recorded.

Figure 7 Domestic abuse incidents and crimes



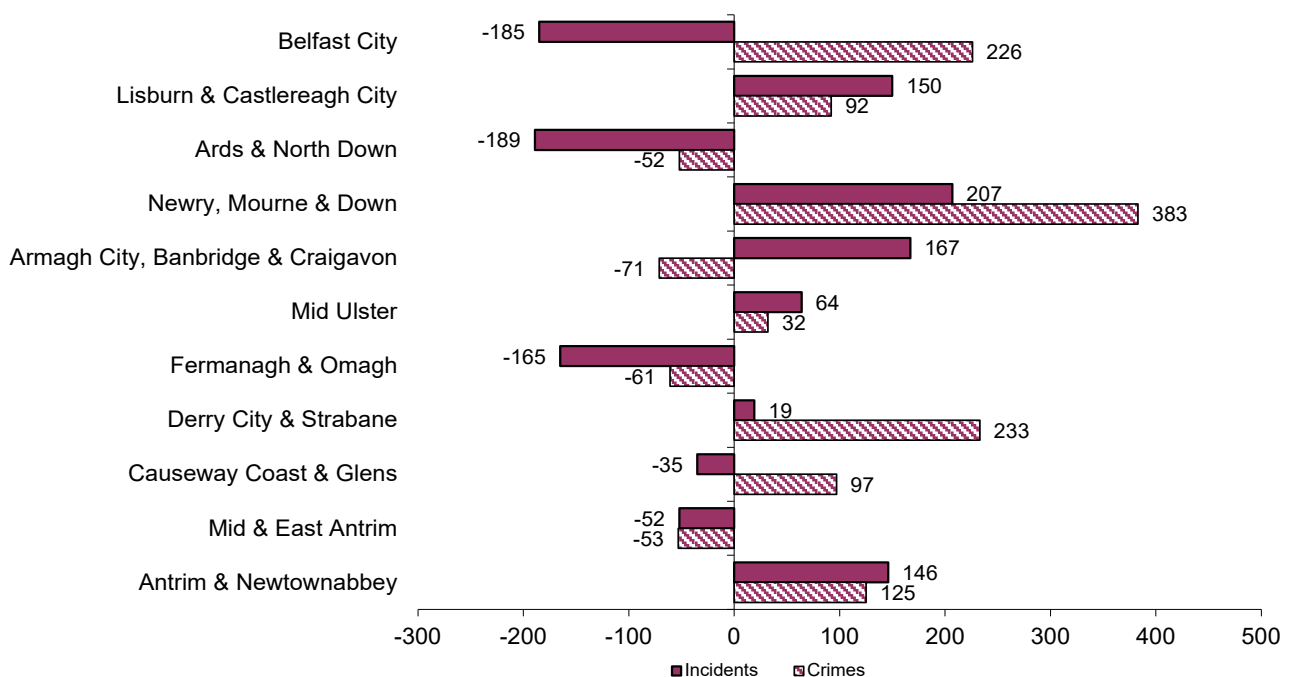
4. What has been happening in policing districts?

When comparing the current and previous 12 months, six policing districts showed an increase in the number of domestic abuse incidents, and seven policing districts showed an increase in the number of domestic abuse crimes. Belfast City policing district, which accounts for more than a quarter of all domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded in Northern Ireland, showed a 2.2 per cent decrease in the number of incidents, and a 4.8% increase in the number of crimes.

Table 2 Domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by police, by policing district

	Numbers					
	Domestic Abuse Incidents			Domestic Abuse Crimes		
	Jan'19 to Dec'19	Jan'20 to Dec'20	change	Jan'19 to Dec'19	Jan'20 to Dec'20	change
Belfast City	8,468	8,283	-185	4,666	4,892	226
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	1,758	1,908	150	1,135	1,227	92
Ards & North Down	2,232	2,043	-189	1,113	1,061	-52
Newry, Mourne & Down	2,387	2,594	207	1,416	1,799	383
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	3,242	3,409	167	2,114	2,043	-71
Mid Ulster	2,034	2,098	64	1,116	1,148	32
Fermanagh & Omagh	1,772	1,607	-165	874	813	-61
Derry City & Strabane	3,104	3,123	19	1,800	2,033	233
Causeway Coast & Glens	2,234	2,199	-35	1,303	1,400	97
Mid & East Antrim	2,285	2,233	-52	1,283	1,230	-53
Antrim & Newtownabbey	2,198	2,344	146	1,229	1,354	125
No Area Assigned	0	7	7	0	0	0
Northern Ireland	31,714	31,848	134	18,049	19,000	951

Figure 8 Change in police recorded domestic abuse incidents and crimes by policing district, 12 months to December 2020 compared with the previous 12 months



5. Background and Data Quality

Data collection and data accuracy

The identification of a domestic abuse motivation is derived from a motivation 'tick box' on the system used by PSNI to record crime. The motivation is identified and completed by a police officer or member of police staff for each such reported incident or crime. The correct application of a domestic abuse motivation for all such incidents/crimes is not quality assured by the PSNI's Statistics Branch, but audits and data quality checks are routinely conducted in an attempt to ensure that any under or over-recording is corrected. Domestic abuse crimes are included within the police recorded crime statistics for Northern Ireland and these crimes are recorded in compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules. A comprehensive validation and quality assurance process has been set in place to ensure that the numbers and types of crimes being recorded meet the standards set down in these rules. Details of the data quality checks and processes that PSNI has in place are available in section 4 of the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland](#).

Annual Revisions: Revisions to previously published data are applied on an annual basis to financial year domestic abuse crime figures from 2015/16 onwards, as a result of the introduction of the wider outcomes framework in April 2015. These revisions take account of crime cancellations and sanction outcomes identified since the previous annual publication. Revisions of this nature will next be applied in May 2021. Further guidance on crime cancellation can be found in the [Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime](#).

How the data is used

Domestic abuse statistics have been collated by PSNI in their current format since 2004/05. They are used widely within PSNI as management information and to monitor performance on domestic abuse related targets against the Policing Plan. The figures are also used by government departments and other voluntary and statutory agencies to inform debate and policy development regarding domestic abuse in Northern Ireland. Furthermore it is widely accepted that there is under-reporting of domestic abuse incidents to the police.

Additional data available to accompany this release

This release provides an overview of domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police in the 12 months to December 2020. Additional Tables are available on the PSNI website to supplement the information contained in this bulletin. The data is available in both [excel spreadsheet](#) and [open document spreadsheet](#) formats.

Web links to other information you may be interested in

Further details on Police Recorded Crime statistics, including those with a domestic abuse motivation, are available in the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland](#). This is a reference guide with explanatory notes regarding the issues and classifications which are key to the production and presentation of police recorded crime statistics.

Domestic Abuse Annual Trends in Northern Ireland: Annual figures on domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police from 2004/05 to 2019/20 are available in the publication [Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2019/20](#).

Police Recorded Crime Statistics: These statistics are updated on a monthly basis; an annual trends bulletin is also published. The latest publications, along with those that have been archived, can be accessed through: <https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/>

Crime Outcomes: The latest publication presenting the wider outcomes framework within PSNI and summarising the outcomes that have been assigned to crimes recorded by the police between 2015/16 and 2018/19 was published on 29 November 2019. The publication includes a section on outcomes relating to domestic abuse crimes and can be accessed through: <https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/>

Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey (previously known as the Northern Ireland Crime Survey): Results from this survey, including bulletins relating to Domestic Violence, are available on the Department of Justice website <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-safe-community-survey-publications>

NINIS: Access to a range of geographic areas for domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police (annual totals only) is available through the [Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information System \(NINIS\)](#)

Domestic Abuse in England & Wales: Publications are available from the Crime and justice webpage (view all publications related to this topic), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice>. There are some key differences in how the definition of domestic abuse is applied within England & Wales compared with Northern Ireland that should be considered. Further details are provided in Section 7 of the Annual Trends bulletin (see link above).

Copies of other PSNI publications are available from the PSNI website: <https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/>