



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

Update to 31st December 2023

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In the 12 months from 1st January 2023 to 31st December 2023:

- there were 33,071 domestic abuse incidents in Northern Ireland, an increase of 144 (0.4 per cent) on the previous 12 months.
- the number of domestic abuse crimes fell to 20,691, a decrease of 1,590 (-7.1 per cent) on the previous 12 months.
- there were 17 domestic abuse incidents and 11 domestic abuse crimes per 1,000 population.
- there were decreases in all major offence classifications, with the exception of theft (including burglary), criminal damage, and breaches of non-molestation orders.
- six of the eleven policing districts showed an increase in the number of domestic abuse incidents and nine policing districts showed a decrease in the number of domestic abuse crimes.

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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 bulletin is an Official Statistics publication meaning it complies with the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#) as follows:

- Trustworthiness: the statistics are impartial, independent and released in an open and transparent manner in accordance with a pre-announced publication schedule
- Quality: the statistics are produced using robust and relevant data sources which undergo continuous quality improvement and assurance checks
- Value: the statistics strive to meet user needs informed by ongoing feedback, providing sufficient detail which is widely accessible.

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 31st December 2023. Figures were compiled on 23 February 2024. Changes can be expected to in-year figures each time they are published, as all records from 1st April 2023 are subject to ongoing validation and quality assurance processes until publication in May 2024.

All tables and charts in the bulletin, along with supplementary data, are available from the PSNI website in the [domestic abuse spreadsheet for December 2023 \(opens in a new window\)](#).

The next update covering the 12 months to 31st March 2024 will be published on 16 May 2024. A full [publication schedule \(opens in a new window\)](#) 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 \(opens in a new window\)](#). An explanation of what constitutes an incident and a crime is provided in Section 3.1 of this guide, while reference to domestic abuse incidents and crimes is available in Section 6. 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 2023 are subject to ongoing validation and quality assurance processes until publication in May 2024. 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.

Stalking and Harassment (including malicious communications):

1st April 2017: recording of malicious communications started.

1st April 2018: the Home Office introduced a change requiring harassment to be recorded in addition to the most serious additional victim-based offence. The changes in recording practice introduced in April 2017 and April 2018, along with increasing awareness of the application of these rules in the recording process, contributed to increased levels recorded in the overall Stalking and Harassment classification, particularly since 2018/19.

1st May 2023: the Home Office introduced a further change in respect of these 'behavioural crimes' by reversing the requirement to record the most serious additional victim-based offence. This latest change will have the greatest impact on malicious communications offences, with fewer such offences required to be recorded.

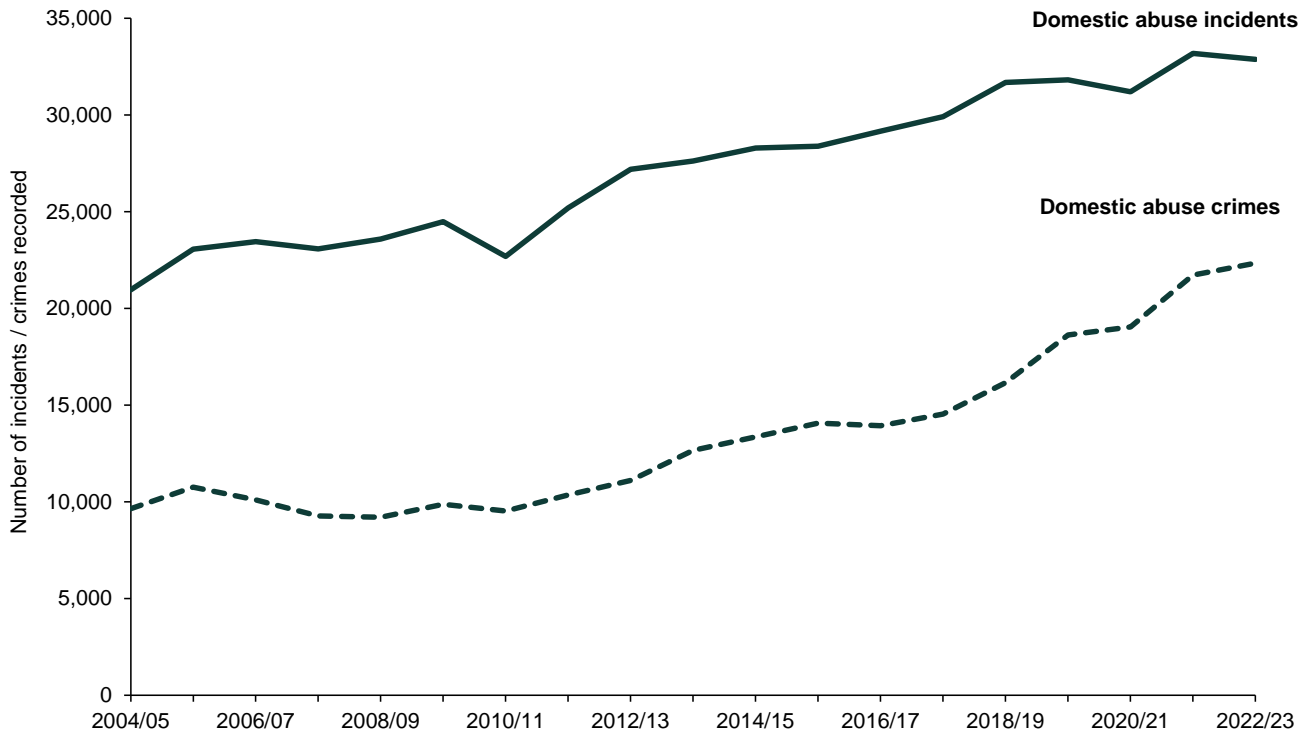
Controlling or Coercive Behaviour: The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 created a new Domestic Abuse Offence which criminalises a course of abusive behaviour (including coercive and controlling behaviour, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and economic abuse). Recording of this offence started on 21st February 2022, and is included within the Stalking and Harassment classification. Further information on the Domestic Abuse Offence is available on the [Department of Justice website \(opens in a new window\)](#), and in Table 5 of the [domestic abuse spreadsheet for June 2023 \(opens in a new window\)](#).

Stalking: The Protection from Stalking Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 created offences to provide protection from stalking and threatening or abusive behaviour. Recording of these offences started on 26th April 2022 and is included within the Stalking and Harassment classification.

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

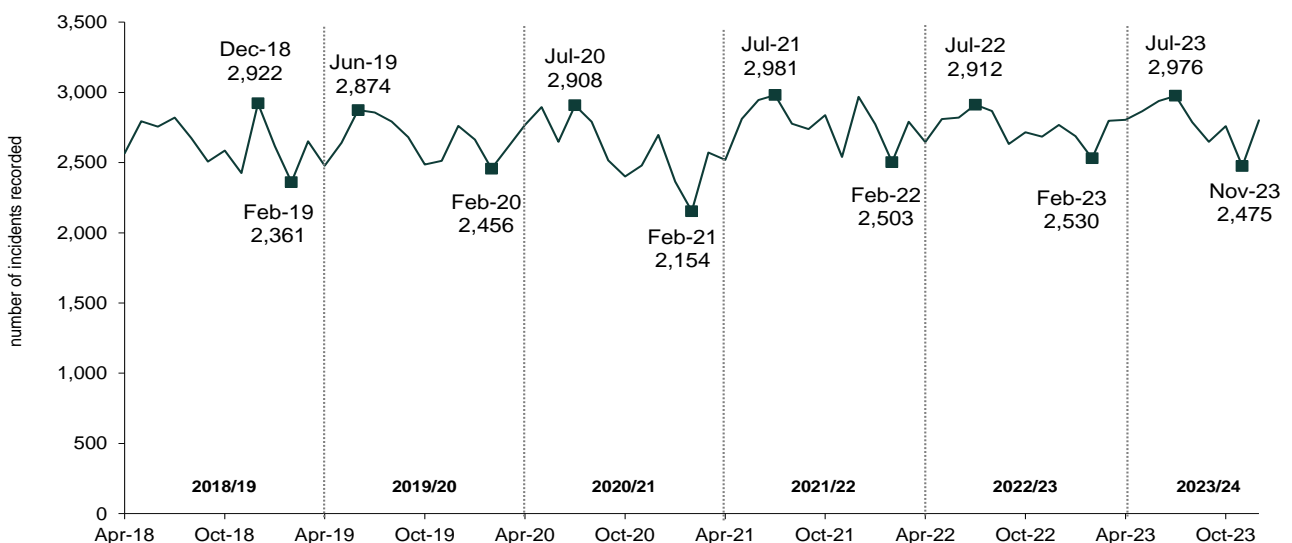
Since 2004/05 there has been a general increase in levels of domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police, with incident levels in 2022/23 one and a half times higher than those at the start of the series and crime levels two and a third times higher.

Figure 1 Trends in domestic abuse incidents 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. In 2018/19 the number of domestic abuse incidents peaked in December. Since 2019/20 the highest number of incidents have been seen in June and July. The 2,981 domestic abuse incidents recorded in July 2021 is the highest monthly figure since the start of the data series in 2004/05. Figure 2 shows the pattern of domestic abuse incidents over the last five financial years and the emerging pattern in the current financial year 2023/24.

Figure 2 Police recorded domestic abuse incidents each month April 2018 to December 2023, showing highest and lowest levels in each financial



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 2022/23 \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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

In the 12 months from 1st January 2023 to 31st December 2023:

- There were 33,071 domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police in Northern Ireland, an increase of 144 (0.4 per cent) on the previous 12 months.
- The number of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the police fell to 20,691, a decrease of 1,590 (-7.1 per cent) on the previous 12 months.
- There were 17 domestic abuse incidents and 11 domestic abuse crimes per 1,000 population¹, compared with 17 domestic abuse incidents and 12 domestic abuse crimes recorded during the previous 12 months.
- Levels fell across all major offence classifications, with the exception of theft (including burglary), criminal damage, and breaches of non-molestation orders. [Table 1]
- The largest volume decrease in domestic abuse crimes was seen within violence against the person which fell by 1,535 (-8.6 per cent). The fall was seen principally within the Stalking and Harassment sub-classification which fell by 984 (-19.2 per cent). For more information on changes in recording practice for these offences, please see 'Points to Note' on page 4. [Table 1]
- Between January 2023 and December 2023, the number of domestic abuse incidents were higher in each month when compared with the equivalent months in the previous 12 month period, with the exception of January, August and November 2023. [Figures 3 & 4]

Domestic abuse homicide: In the 12 months from 1st February 2023 to 31st January 2024 there were three homicides with a domestic abuse motivation recorded by the police, compared with ten homicides with a domestic abuse motivation recorded by the police in the previous 12 months². Two of the victims were female and one was male, compared with four female and six male victims during the previous 12 months. Overall homicide figures are available in the [Police Recorded Crime Monthly Update to 31st January 2024 \(opens in a new window\)](#).

Figure 3 Domestic Abuse incidents recorded by the police January 2022 to December 2023

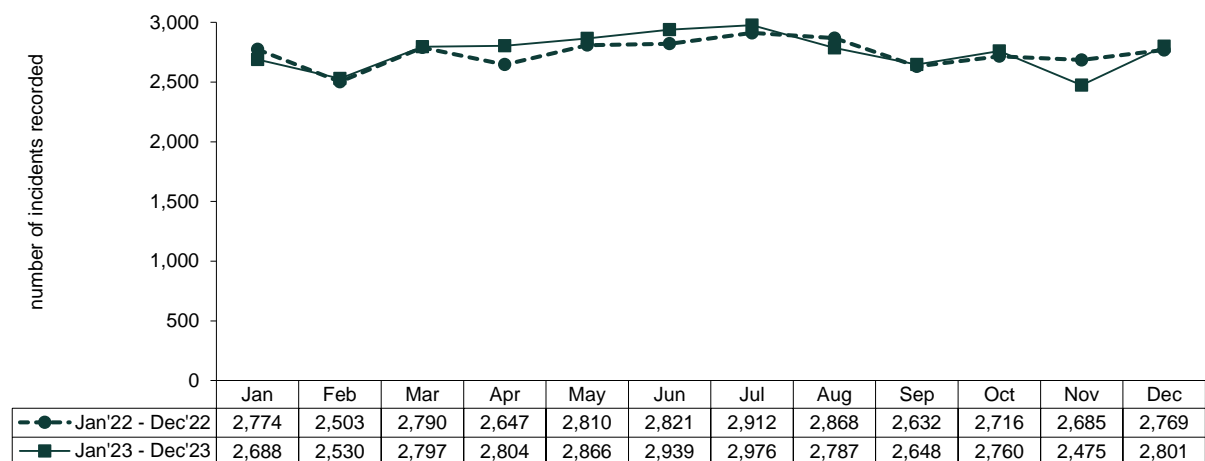
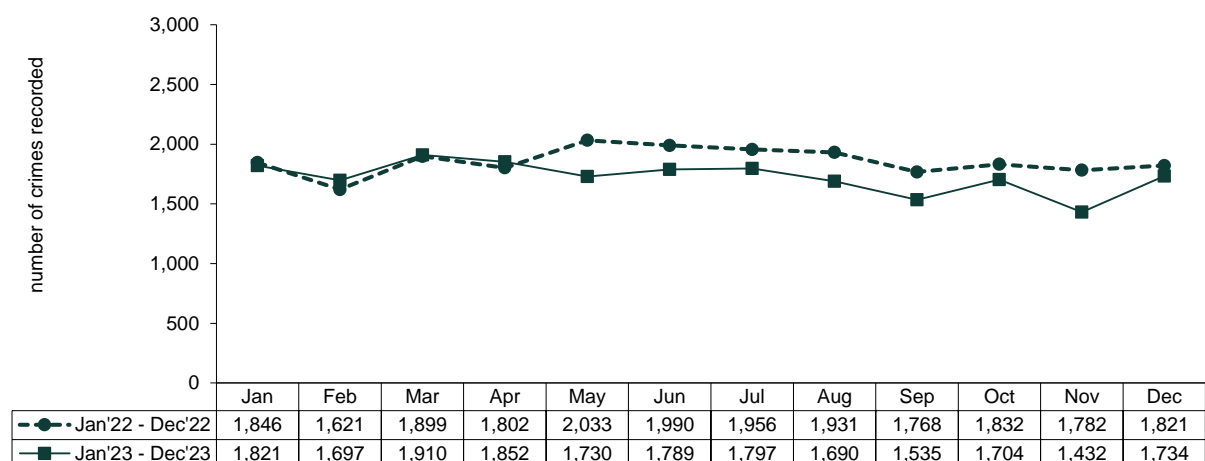


Figure 4 Domestic Abuse crimes recorded by the police January 2022 to December 2023



¹ Crime per 1,000 population based on mid-year population estimate of 1,910,543 for 2022, the latest mid-year estimate available at time of compilation. Mid-year population estimates are available from the [NISRA website \(opens in a new window\)](#).

² Homicide consists of the offences of murder, manslaughter, infanticide and corporate manslaughter.

Figure 5 Percentage change in the main crime types for police recorded domestic abuse crime, 12 months to December 2023 compared with the previous 12 months

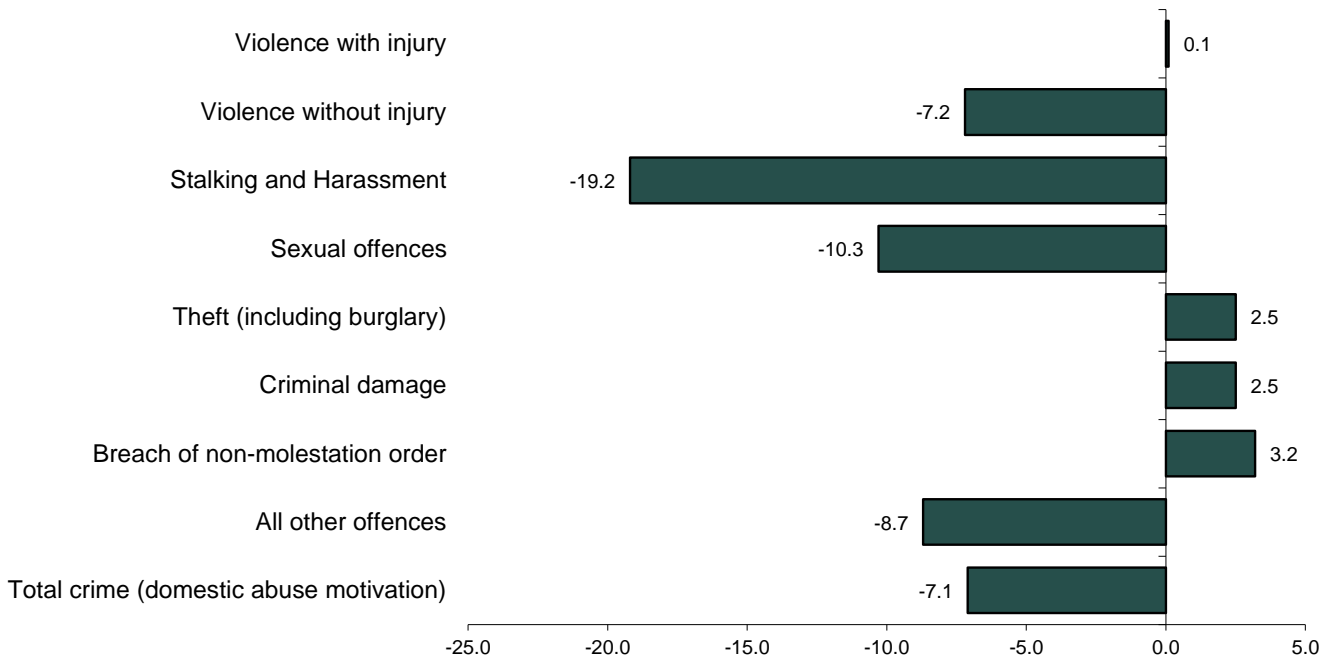


Figure 6 Police recorded domestic abuse crime by crime type, January 2023 to December 2023

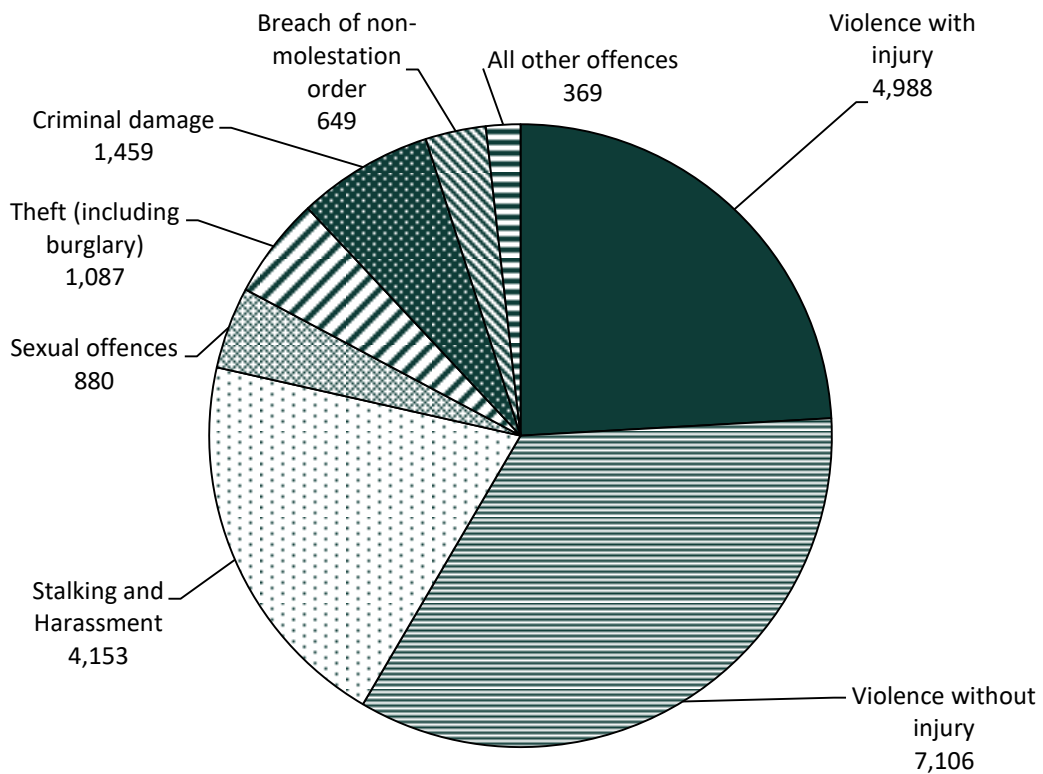


Table 1 Domestic incidents and crimes recorded by the police

| | Jan'22 to Dec'22 | Jan'23 to Dec'23 | Change | % Change |
|--|------------------|------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Incidents | 32,927 | 33,071 | 144 | 0.4 |
| Violence Against the Person Offences | 17,782 | 16,247 | -1,535 | -8.6 |
| <i>Violence with injury (including homicide and death or serious injury by unlawful driving)</i> | 4,985 | 4,988 | 3 | 0.1 |
| <i>Violence without injury</i> | 7,660 | 7,106 | -554 | -7.2 |
| <i>Stalking and Harassment¹</i> | 5,137 | 4,153 | -984 | -19.2 |
| Sexual offences | 981 | 880 | -101 | -10.3 |
| Theft (including burglary) | 1,061 | 1,087 | 26 | 2.5 |
| Criminal damage | 1,424 | 1,459 | 35 | 2.5 |
| Breach of non-molestation order | 629 | 649 | 20 | 3.2 |
| All other offences | 404 | 369 | -35 | -8.7 |
| Total crimes (domestic abuse motivation) | 22,281 | 20,691 | -1,590 | -7.1 |

¹ The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 created a new Domestic Abuse offence which criminalises a course of abusive behaviour. The Protection from Stalking Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 created offences to provide protection from stalking and threatening or abusive behaviour. These offences are classified to Stalking and Harassment. For more information please see Points to Note on page 4 and Table 5 in the [domestic abuse spreadsheet for June 2023 \(opens in a new window\)](#). Changes to recording practice for offences within Stalking and Harassment are included in the Points to Note section. These changes have had the greatest impact on malicious communications offences, with fewer such offences required to be recorded. In the 12 months ending 31st December 2023 there were 703 Malicious Communications offences, compared with 1,386 in the previous 12 months.

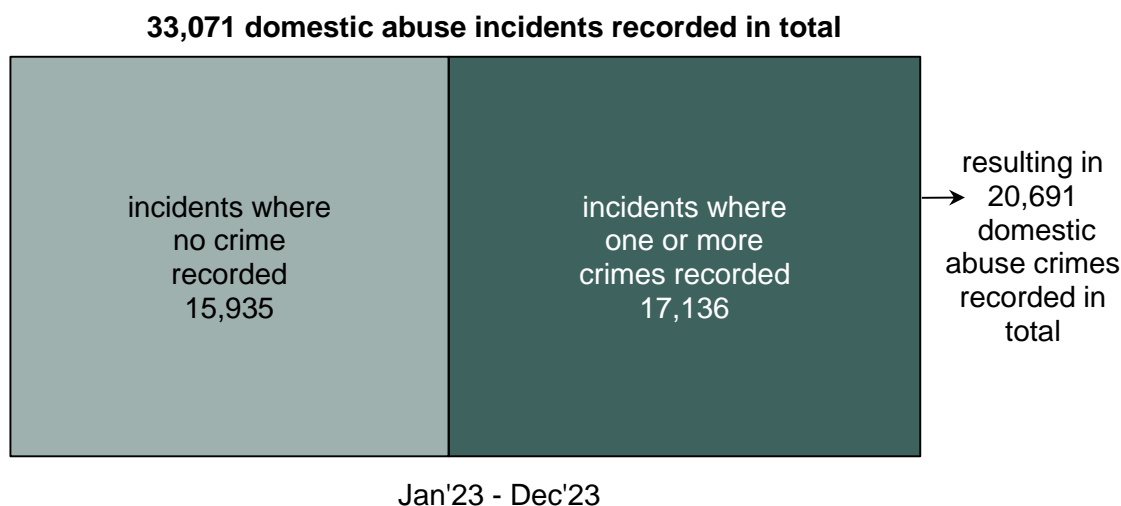
What is the difference between a domestic abuse incident and crime recorded by the police?

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 31st December 2023 there were 33,071 incidents recorded by the police where there was a domestic abuse motivation. Of these, there were 15,935 incidents which did not involve a crime (i.e. incidents where the circumstances did not amount to an offence being committed). The remaining 17,136 incidents involved one or more crimes (amounting to 20,691 domestic abuse crimes in total). Just under half of recorded incidents in this time period did not result in a crime being recorded.

Figure 7 Domestic Abuse incidents and crimes



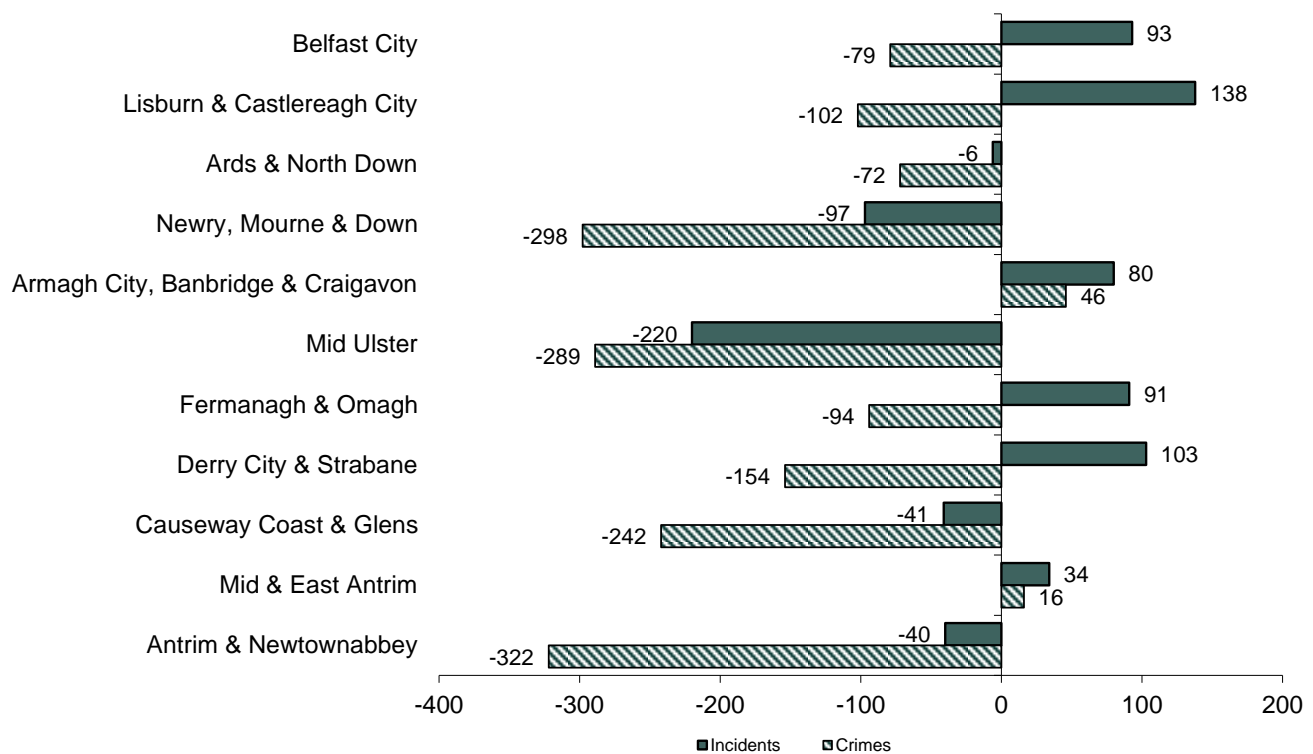
4. What has been happening in policing districts?

When comparing the current and previous 12 months, six policing districts showed an increase in the number of domestic abuse incidents, and nine policing districts showed a decrease 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 1.1% increase in the number of incidents and a 1.4% decrease in crimes.

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

| Policing district | Incidents Jan'22 to Dec'22 | Incidents Jan'23 to Dec'23 | Incidents change | Crimes Jan'22 to Dec'22 | Crimes Jan'23 to Dec'23 | Crimes change |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Belfast City | 8,504 | 8,597 | 93 | 5,705 | 5,626 | -79 |
| Lisburn & Castlereagh City | 1,749 | 1,887 | 138 | 1,175 | 1,073 | -102 |
| Ards & North Down | 2,279 | 2,273 | -6 | 1,443 | 1,371 | -72 |
| Newry, Mourne & Down | 2,819 | 2,722 | -97 | 2,098 | 1,800 | -298 |
| Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon | 3,608 | 3,688 | 80 | 2,260 | 2,306 | 46 |
| Mid Ulster | 2,387 | 2,167 | -220 | 1,460 | 1,171 | -289 |
| Fermanagh & Omagh | 1,612 | 1,703 | 91 | 916 | 822 | -94 |
| Derry City & Strabane | 3,094 | 3,197 | 103 | 2,342 | 2,188 | -154 |
| Causeway Coast & Glens | 2,205 | 2,164 | -41 | 1,495 | 1,253 | -242 |
| Mid & East Antrim | 2,270 | 2,304 | 34 | 1,514 | 1,530 | 16 |
| Antrim & Newtownabbey | 2,400 | 2,360 | -40 | 1,873 | 1,551 | -322 |
| No district assigned | 0 | 9 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Northern Ireland | 32,927 | 33,071 | 144 | 22,281 | 20,691 | -1,590 |

Figure 8 Change in police recorded domestic abuse incidents and crimes by policing district, 12 months to December 2023 compared with the previous 12 months



5. Background and Data Quality

Data collection and data accuracy

Data 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 \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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 2024. Further guidance on crime cancellation can be found in the [Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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 2023. 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 on the PSNI website \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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 \(opens in a new window\)](#). 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 \(opens in a new window\)](#): Annual figures on domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police from 2004/05 to 2022/23.

[Police Recorded Crime Statistics \(opens in a new window\)](#): The latest publications, along with those that have been archived.

[Crime Outcomes \(opens in a new window\)](#): 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 2022/23 was published on 24 November 2023. The publication includes a section on outcomes relating to domestic abuse crimes.

[Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey \(opens in a new window\)](#), with survey results available on the Department of Justice website

Figures are available for a range of additional geographic areas through the [NISRA Data Portal \(opens in a new window\)](#). These figures are updated on an annual basis.

[Domestic Abuse in England & Wales \(opens in a new window\)](#): Publications are available for information on domestic abuse in England & Wales. 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 \(opens in a new window\)](#).