

Consultation response: Exploring the feasibility of a survey measuring child abuse in the UK

ONS Centre for Crime and Justice

July 2021



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Quality assurance

This consultation has been carried out in accordance with the government's consultation principles, available here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>.

If you have any complaints about the way this consultation has been conducted, please email us.

Accessibility

If you require this information in an alternative format, please contact us. All material relating to this consultation can be provided in braille, large print, or audio formats on request.

1. Executive summary

Child abuse is a global problem with serious life-long consequences, which has been recognised by the World Health Organisation. Any child can experience abuse, which can take many forms and are often hidden.

There is no single data source which measures the current prevalence of child abuse in the UK. In June 2021, Ofsted published their [review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#) which outlined the difficulty in getting an accurate picture of the scale due to the lack of data collection.

Most recently, research by a number of organisations, including the [NSPCC](#), suggests the risk of child maltreatment has been heightened as a result of the conditions imposed by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Data is key to understanding the prevalence, causes, nature and impacts. If we cannot learn and understand this, it cannot be prevented, and we cannot ensure children and adults receive the support they need.

We are assessing the feasibility of a survey measuring the prevalence of child abuse in the UK. We are currently in phase one of the project, which aims to establish whether there is enough evidence to support carrying out a pilot survey, phase two.

We published [our proposals](#) for what a survey should look like and invited feedback from stakeholders to understand their needs and perspectives. The consultation ran from the 21st January until the 30th April 2021 and received 91 responses. We received useful feedback from across a variety of sectors, as well as individuals with personal experiences of abuse. This has been essential to our work and we thank you for your contribution.

Responses have demonstrated the importance of survey data for designing strategies to prevent and respond to abuse, developing and providing relevant services, and raising awareness of abuse. Overall, there was strong support to take this work forward. You told us it's important that;

- a survey includes all children, particularly, those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and who are home schooled.
- a survey covers the whole of the UK and includes young people aged 16 to 25 years.
- a survey provides appropriate support and takes proportionate safeguarding action.
- schools are prepared and able to effectively handle the possible impacts it could have.
- the limitations of a survey are clearly communicated alongside the data produced.

We commit to taking phase one forward by undertaking qualitative research with children and young adults with experiences of abuse and parents of children with experiences of abuse to hear their voices. This research has been approved by the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee (NSDEC).

We will also undertake research with headteachers, special educational needs coordinators and safeguarding leads in schools. This will explore how a survey could be carried out in schools and how children and young adults with SEND could be included. We will also speak with child protection leads working in local authority children's social care services to understand how

appropriate support and safeguarding could be ensured, and how home-schooled children could be included.

We will carry out further research to understand how all UK countries can be included and how robust data for each of these can be achieved. We will also explore how young people aged 16 to 25 years can be included. We will continue to engage with key stakeholders to understand how a survey could be integrated into schools.

We will also continue to work with stakeholders, such as support organisations and NSDEC, to ensure any research is conducted in a sensitive and appropriate manner.

As a priority, the qualitative research is essential to our decision on whether to conduct a pilot survey. Providing this research is completed, we aim to publish a progress update this winter. This will summarise the findings from further work, our conclusion to phase one, and outline our next steps.

2. Background

Introduction

Child abuse is a global problem with serious life-long consequences, which has been recognised by the World Health Organisation. Any child can experience abuse, which can take many forms and are often hidden. As there is no single source reporting the current scale of child abuse in the UK, we do not know how many children are experiencing abuse today.

In September 2015, the National Statistician's Crime Statistics Advisory Committee recommended that Government should commission a new UK-wide prevalence study of all forms of abuse and neglect of children to establish a reliable time series of data. The information gathered in such a survey could be used by policy makers, service providers and practitioners to hopefully, over time, help reduce the prevalence of child abuse and improve victims' experiences of services.

We are assessing the feasibility of a survey measuring the prevalence of child abuse in the UK and published an [article](#) in January 2021 outlining our findings to date. The feasibility study has been separated into two phases:

- phase one – includes carrying out research to determine whether a survey could be successful and therefore that running a pilot is worthwhile (including desk research, literature reviews, stakeholder engagement to establish user needs and qualitative research)
- phase two – includes designing the survey methodology and safeguarding flagging procedure, designing and testing questions and conducting a pilot survey

We consulted with users to understand:

- the need for improved statistics to understand the prevalence and nature of child abuse in the UK
- the impact of not having this data
- whether the proposed survey includes the elements that users feel are important and would meet their needs
- any other important considerations that should be explored in our research going forward

We'd like to thank everyone who gave us their views by responding to the consultation.

Our proposals

In [January 2021](#), we outlined some key recommendations based on our research to date. We proposed a survey should:

- be framed as a survey of child safety
- be broad in coverage and cover six types of abuse: neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, child exploitation and exposure to domestic violence or abuse¹
- ask about lifetime and past year experiences of abuse
- be self-completed electronically
- interview children aged 11 to 17 years and young adults aged 18 to 25 years
- take place in schools for children aged 11 to 15 years
- sample schools from each of the UK country school censuses
- be relatively large, with a minimum of 45,000 respondents needed to produce useful estimates
- allow parents to remove their child from being included
- be partially anonymous and adopt a flagging safeguarding procedure, which would be used to assess the level of risk a child is in and apply different levels of safeguarding depending on the circumstances of the abuse reported.

We recognised a survey of this nature would require considerable investment. While our research has uncovered many additional challenges surrounding how such a survey could work in practice, we have not found evidence that it would be infeasible. However, we have identified some important areas that need further investigation before concluding whether a survey could be successful. These are:

- whether children or young adults with past experiences of abuse would agree to take part in a survey of this nature
- whether parents who have children with known experiences of abuse would give permission for their child to take part in a survey of this nature
- whether schools would be willing to participate in a survey of this nature
- whether children or young adults can recall previous experiences of abuse
- whether children or young adults with past experiences of abuse would report these in a survey

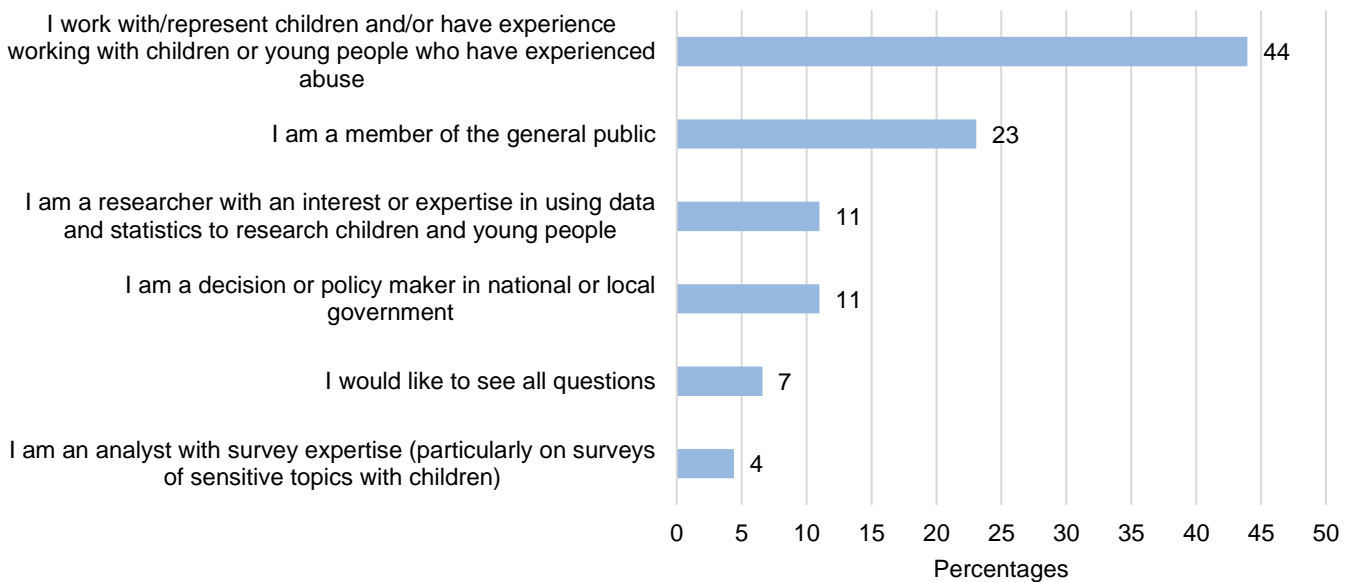
¹ This definition reflects the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#), which defines children as victims of domestic abuse if they see, hear, or experience the effects of, the abuse.

3. Summary of responses

The consultation ran from the 21st January 2021 until the 30th April 2021 and we received 91 responses. Respondents were asked to select the category that best describes themselves and different sets of questions were asked to different types of respondent.

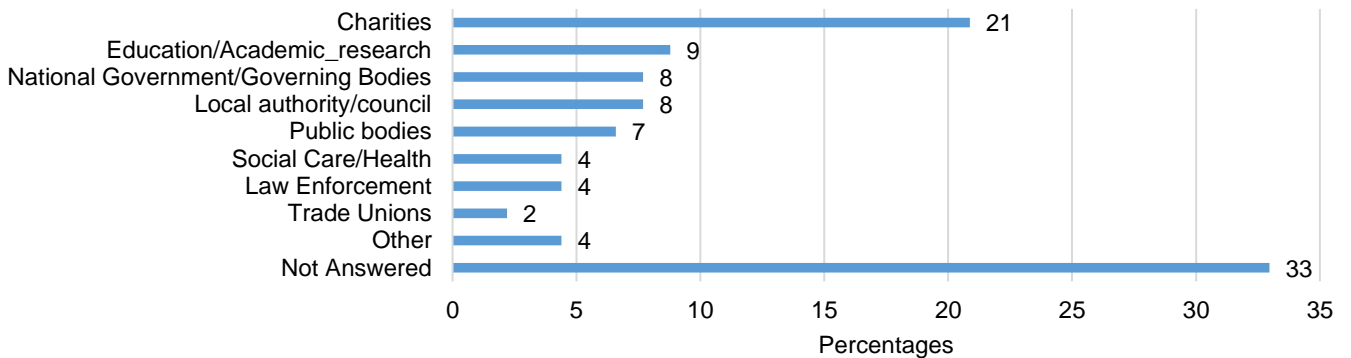
Nearly half (44%) worked with or represented children or young people and 11% were decision or policy makers in national or local government. A small number (7%) chose to view all questions.

Figure 1: Most respondents worked with or represented children or young people



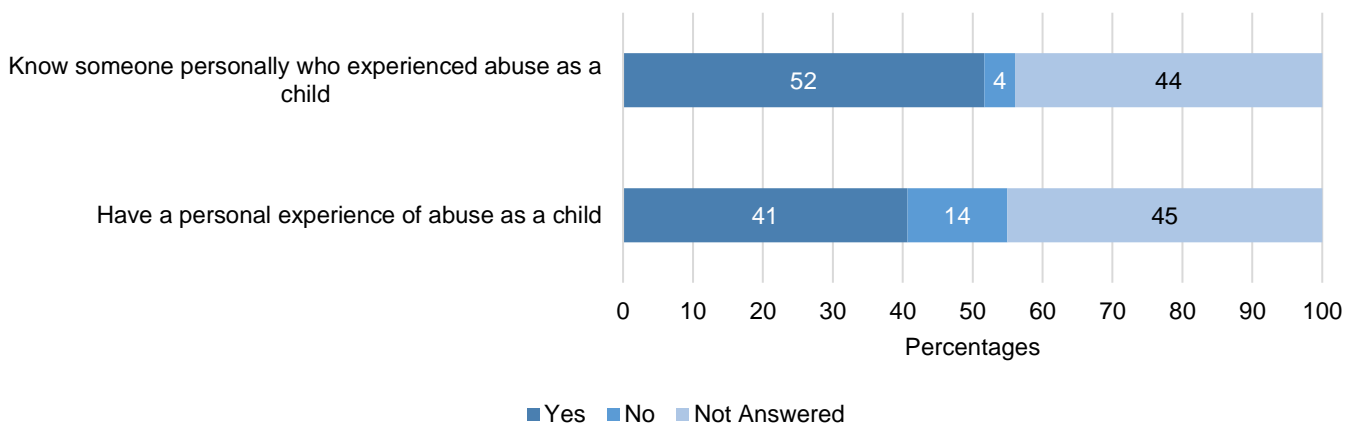
A list of the organisations which responded can be found in Annex A.

Figure 2: Responses were received across a variety of sectors



Around 2 in 5 respondents identified themselves as having experienced abuse as a child. Just over half of respondents knew someone who has experienced abuse as a child. Hearing views from these individuals particularly helps us understand what barriers there may be to a prevalence survey. It will also help us identify possible solutions.

Figure 3: 2 in 5 respondents reported they have personally experienced abuse as a child



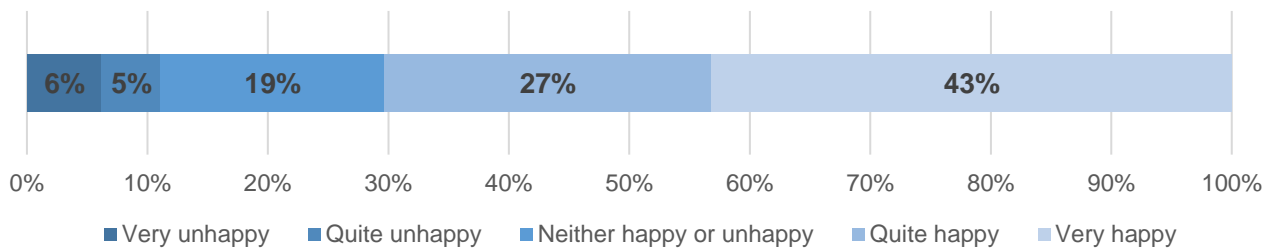
4. General user need and impact of survey data

4.1 Question 1: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very unhappy and 5 is very happy, how happy are you with the concept of a survey as a way to measure the current prevalence of child abuse?

(Asked to all, 81 responses)

Respondents were generally in support of the concept of a survey as a way to measure the current prevalence of child abuse. Overall, 70% were either very happy or quite happy and 11% stated they were very unhappy or quite unhappy. These findings were similar across respondent types, including those who had experienced abuse as a child (68% very happy or quite happy). Common concerns surrounded the risk of retraumatizing children and the reliability of the data achieved.

Figure 4: The majority of respondents were either very or quite happy with the concept of a survey as a way to measure the current prevalence of child abuse

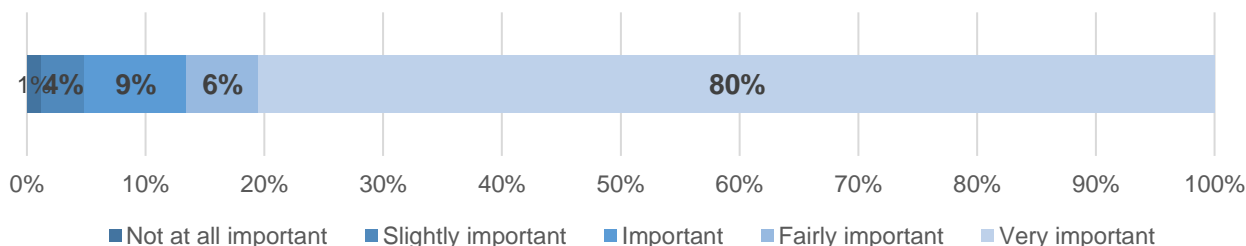


4.2 Question 2: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important, how important is it that survey data on the current prevalence of child abuse is collected?

(Asked to all, 82 responses)

The vast majority of respondents stated it is very important that survey data on the current prevalence of child abuse is gathered (80%). This view was reflected across respondent types, including those who had experienced abuse as a child (81%) and policy or decision makers in government (86%).

Figure 5: The majority of respondents felt it was very important that survey data on the current prevalence of child abuse is collected



4.3 Question 3: How would you want others to use data collected from a prevalence survey?

(Asked to general public², 25 responses)

The three most commonly desired uses of survey data were to raise awareness of child abuse, to provide appropriate support for those that need it and to inform decisions in policy and strategy.

Respondents said they want the data to be used to:

- provide the appropriate level of funding to improve resource to prevent and respond to child abuse
- inform decisions around prevention strategies and the creation of policy material, such as safeguarding materials and legislation
- increase the provision of further support and signposting of support to children.
- inform research, teaching and training
- educate the public on the prevalence of child abuse to enable them to detect and prevent future abuse

4.4 Question 4: If a survey was not implemented, what would the impact of this be to you, and more generally?

(Asked to all except general public, 52 responses)

Most commonly respondents said if a survey was not implemented there would be a continued lack of representative data in this area, and this would impact the ability to;

- inform policy or strategy decisions
- design prevention strategies
- assess the impact of policies or strategies
- implement appropriate funding
- implement appropriate support services
- raise awareness on the true extent and nature of abuse
- understand trends and patterns of abuse
- respond proactively and quickly to new emerging patterns

Almost all (98%) respondents said there would be some kind of impact to either themselves or in general. Respondents stated administrative data does not reflect the true extent of child abuse and

² Respondents were given the option to view all questions. These responses have also been included in analysis.

therefore can't be used to inform change in policy or funding arrangements. Some respondents felt without survey data, child abuse would remain invisible and misconceived.

4.5 Question 5: What additional information about a prevalence survey would you need to increase your support for it?

(Asked to all, 49 responses)

The majority of respondents commented that they would need additional information regarding the survey methodology. More specifically, most comments surrounded the need for further clarity on:

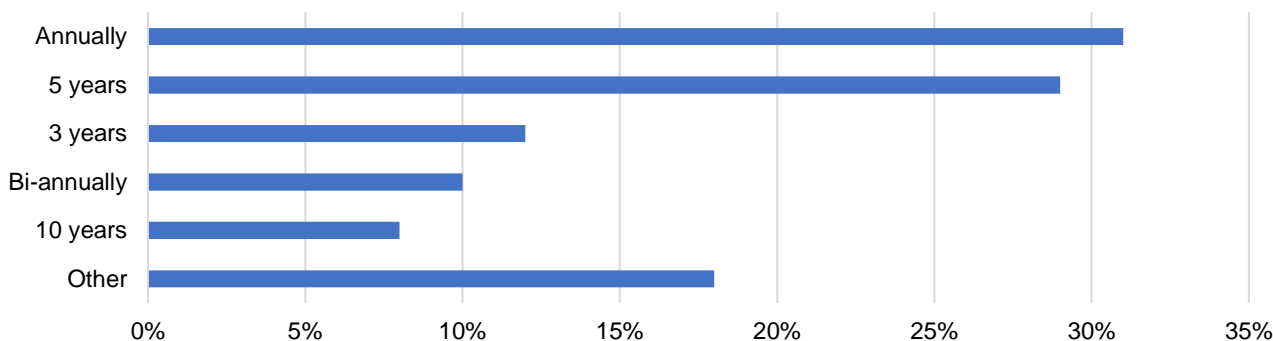
- the parental permission procedure across all the age groups
- the impact the parental permission would have on data quality
- how schools and parents will be supported before, during and after the data collection period
- how participants would be supported and safeguarded
- how the survey would be administered to ensure children feel comfortable
- the sample size distribution and whether this would be large enough to provide estimates on sub-populations, demographics, and geographic location
- whether the sample would be inclusive of all children
- how the survey will be accessible to children and young adults with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- the questions which will be asked, including the nature of abuse
- how often the survey would be carried out
- the intended use of the survey and the impact it would have
- whether the survey data would or could be linked with other data sources
- the accessibility of the data to other researchers

4.6 Question 6: How often should a prevalence survey be carried out to meet your needs?

(Asked to all except general public, 51 responses)

Most commonly, respondents felt the survey should be carried out annually (31%) or every 5 years (29%) to meet their needs.

Figure 6: There were mixed views in how often the survey should be carried out



1. 'Other' includes quarterly, monthly, weekly, and other combinations such as '3 to 5 years'.

Respondents felt the survey would need to be carried out more often than every 10 years as the technology children have access to is changing rapidly. Others said the survey being carried out more often would allow users to understand the impact of significant changes in policies or strategies and the survey could also identify emerging patterns of abuse.

4.7 Our response to questions covered in section 4

It's evident there is strong user need for a prevalence survey of child abuse. It's clear that the data available today is not sufficient to effectively prevent and respond to child abuse.

While feedback is mostly positive, we recognise not all respondents would have a direct use of the data or be directly impacted and therefore may not see the value in the survey. We also acknowledge some respondents do not feel happy with a survey being used to measure the current prevalence of child abuse. Looking at responses across questions, this was most likely because of concerns surrounding retraumatising children and the reliability of the data achieved.

To provide the requested additional information we will conduct further research:

- with teachers and parents to understand their views on what support they would expect to receive
- with children and young adults with previous experiences of abuse to understand their concerns and views
- with Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators to understand if and how children and young adults with SEND could be included
- into the sample size distributions across the four nations and what estimates could be accurately produced
- to understand if children who do not attend school could be included, such as those which are home-schooled

Within phase two of the feasibility study we would:

- explore whether the survey data would or could be linked with other data sources
- assess the accessibility of the data to other researchers

We recognise that respondents feel the survey would need to be carried out more frequently than every 10 years for it to be useful. We will use this feedback to review the proposed frequency.

Further information on the parental permission procedure can be found in section 5.25 in our response on ethical and legal procedures.

5. Proposed survey feedback and recommendations

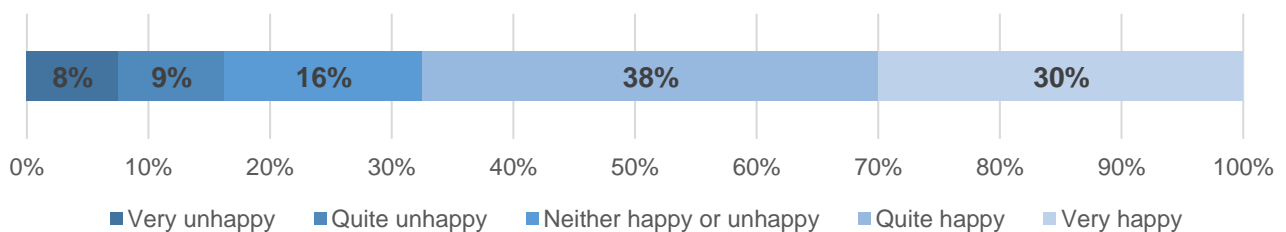
Fulfilling user need

5.1 Question 7: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very unhappy and 5 is very happy, how happy are you with the proposed survey as a way to measure the current prevalence of child abuse?

(Asked to all, 80 responses)

Respondents were generally content with the proposed survey as a way to measure the current prevalence of child abuse. Overall, 68% were either very happy or quite happy. These findings were relatively similar across most respondent types, including those who had experienced abuse as a child (62% very happy or quite happy). Policy or decision makers in national or local government were most likely to report they were quite or very happy (83%) while members of the general public were less likely to do so (52%).

Figure 7: The majority of respondents were either very or quite happy with the proposed survey as a way to measure the current prevalence of child abuse

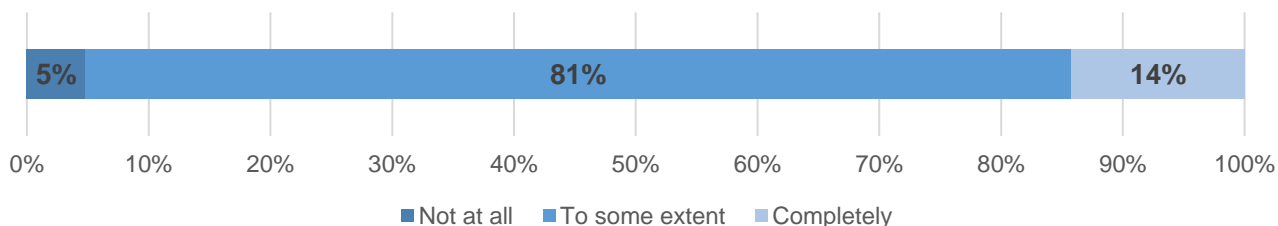


5.2 Question 8: To what extent do you feel the proposed survey would meet your needs?

(Asked to all except general public, 63 responses)

Almost all respondents felt the proposed survey would either meet their needs completely or to some extent (95%). A small proportion of those who work with or represent children or young people felt it wouldn't meet their needs at all (5%).

Figure 8: Almost all respondents felt the survey would meet their needs completely or to some extent



5.3 Question 9: In what ways does the proposed survey meet or not meet your needs?

(Asked to all except general public, 25 responses)

Overall, 88% of respondents identified ways the proposed survey would meet their needs and 60% of respondents identified ways it would not meet their needs.

Respondents said the survey would meet their needs as it could be used to:

- assess the impact of services
- better plan interventions
- design policies to prevent and respond to abuse
- design strategies to prevent abuse
- develop and provide relevant services
- identify patterns and recognise early trends not identified in other data sources
- improve law enforcement services
- influence investment and resource decisions
- plan further abuse specific research
- raise awareness of abuse

The most common ways respondents said the proposed survey would not meet their needs were due to the methodology and the impact this would have on underestimating the scale of abuse. Respondents felt that abuse may be under-reported in the survey because;

- children may be unwilling to report abuse in the survey if it might be shared with authorities and;
- certain groups of children who are important to include might be missed, such as those who are home schooled or not attending school.

Whilst this was acknowledged, many felt the data would still be valuable. There was also concern that if the survey was conducted every ten years then it would not meet their needs, as it would weaken the ability to be responsive to emerging patterns. Please see section 4.6 for more information on respondents' views of the survey frequency.

5.4 Our response to questions covered under fulfilling user need

We recognise some respondents have concerns regarding the data quality. It's important that we acknowledge that no survey will be able to produce the true estimate of abuse. However, responses have shown how it would provide better and more helpful information than we currently

have, which would be invaluable to preventing and responding to child abuse in the UK. As with any survey, there would be some limitations, which would need to be clearly communicated alongside the data produced.

We recognise that not everyone who responded would be a user of the survey data and therefore would not have any needs to meet. We also recognise some respondents weren't happy with the proposed survey as a way to measure the prevalence of child abuse. Looking at responses across questions, this was driven by respondents concerns with how safeguarding will be handled appropriately, the framing of the survey, the partial anonymity approach and the children not included in the sample.

It is our aim for the survey to be as inclusive of all children as possible and it's clear this is a priority for respondents. We will work to ensure the survey would minimise underestimation in order to best meet user needs.

We will conduct further research:

- with special educational needs co-ordinators to understand how the survey could be inclusive of children with SEND
- to explore how we could include children who are not in school or being home-schooled

We will continue to engage with key stakeholders on an ongoing basis to ensure we best meet user needs. Please see section 4.7 for our response to respondents' views of the survey frequency.

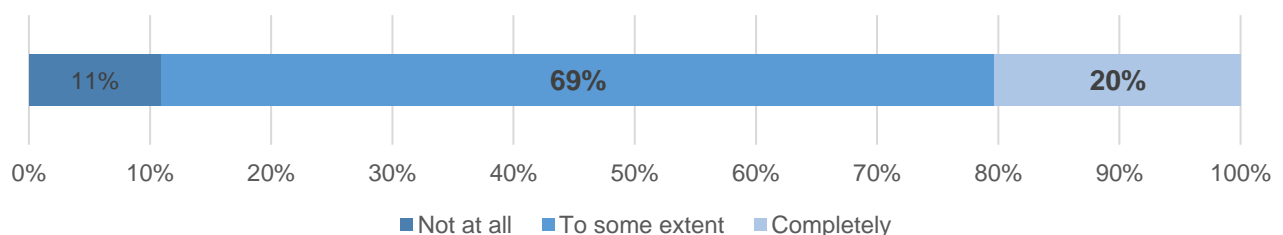
Survey coverage

5.5 Question 10: The proposed survey would focus on capturing lifetime and past year experiences of abuse, which may result in less scope for collecting detailed information on the nature of abuse. To what extent would this meet your needs?

(Asked to all except general public, 64 responses)

The majority of respondents felt the focus on capturing lifetime and past year experiences of abuse would either meet their needs completely or to some extent (89%). These findings were similar across respondent types, except within researchers (67%).

Figure 9: The majority of respondents felt the focus on capturing lifetime and past year experiences would meet their needs completely or to some extent



5.6 Question 11: The proposed survey would cover six types of abuse; neglect, physical, emotional, sexual, child exploitation and exposure to domestic violence or abuse. What specific types of abuse within these do you think should be included?

(Asked to all, 51 responses)

Specific types of exploitation and sexual abuse were most commonly suggested.

Within sexual abuse respondents said familial, contact and non-contact forms were important to capture. Specifically, indecent exposure, being made to watch sexual acts, verbal sexual abuse, and sexual harassment. Many respondents mentioned the need to capture the role of the online environment in enabling sexual abuse specifically, such as sharing sexual content and grooming.

Under exploitation, respondents commonly said the survey should cover grooming, human trafficking and children exploited by county lines. Other types mentioned were child labour, domestic servitude, and gang-based exploitation. Some noted the importance of distinguishing between criminal and sexual exploitation.

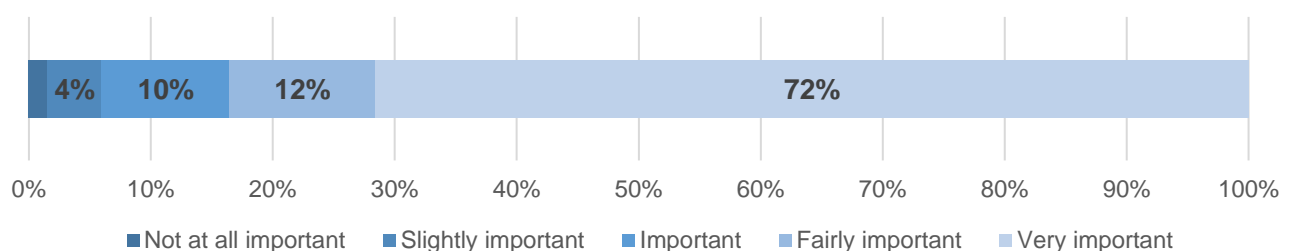
Social isolation, food poverty, lack of medical care and environmental neglect were also suggested along with cultural practices, such as forced marriage, honour killings, circumcision, female genital mutilation, and children's experiences of being forced into extremist or radical ideologies.

More generally many respondents emphasised the importance of capturing online, familial and peer abuse.

5.7 Question 12: On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important, how important is it to you that a prevalence survey covers the whole of the UK?

(Asked to all except general public, 67 responses)

Figure 10: Around 3 in 4 respondents felt it was very important that the survey covers the whole of the UK



5.8 Question 13: Do you have any other comments on the proposed survey's coverage?

(Asked to all except general public, 7 responses)

Respondents highlighted the importance that the survey coverage is as inclusive as possible and suggested conducting further research to understand whether;

- the survey would be representative at a local or regional level
- the survey would be inclusive of all four nations
- the survey would be inclusive of children not attending school such as those who are home-schooled, within minority groups, in secure accommodation and vulnerable children who do not attend school regularly
- there are differences in willingness to take part or report experiences of abuse between the four nations

5.9 Our response to questions covered under survey coverage

We will continue with our current proposal that a survey should cover past year and lifetime experiences, as this will capture a more accurate picture of prevalence than either alone.

We understand that some respondents would find more data regarding the nature of abuse useful. We would consider how we could maximise this within questionnaire design. For example, through rotating different modules in the survey at different points in time.

Respondents views on the types of abuse to be included would be considered in questionnaire design. We recognise the importance of including questions on peer and online abuse, and the survey would aim to capture this where relevant in relation to each of the types of abuse. It's important to note that a survey may not be able to provide robust estimates for some specific sub-types of abuse if the prevalence is very small.

It is still our primary aim to include all countries within the UK as it's clear this is important to respondents. However, if research demonstrates substantial differences or challenges between countries, we would consider first piloting the survey in those countries where it is most feasible.

We will carry out further research to understand:

- whether the proposed achieved sample of 45,000 would allow for representative estimates across different populations and demographics
- the sample size needed to achieve representation across different populations and demographics
- how children not attending school could be included and whether data on their experiences could be gathered through a different format

It is our aim that the qualitative research will include people within each country of the UK. For more information please see section 4.7 and 5.21.

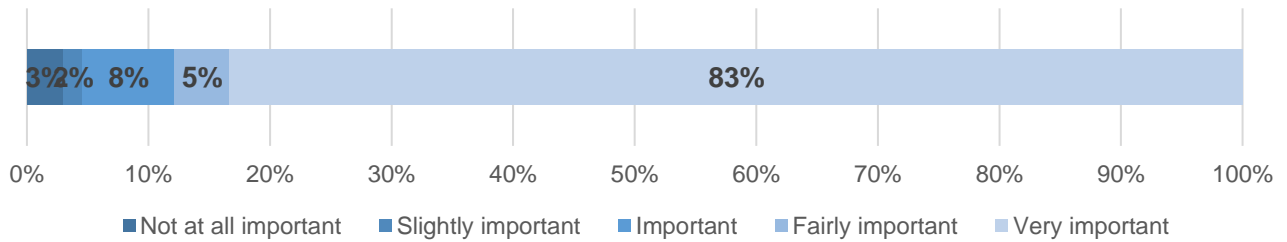
Survey methodology

Participant age

5.10 Question 14: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important, how important is it to you that a prevalence survey includes children aged 16 and 17?

(Asked to all except general public, 66 responses)

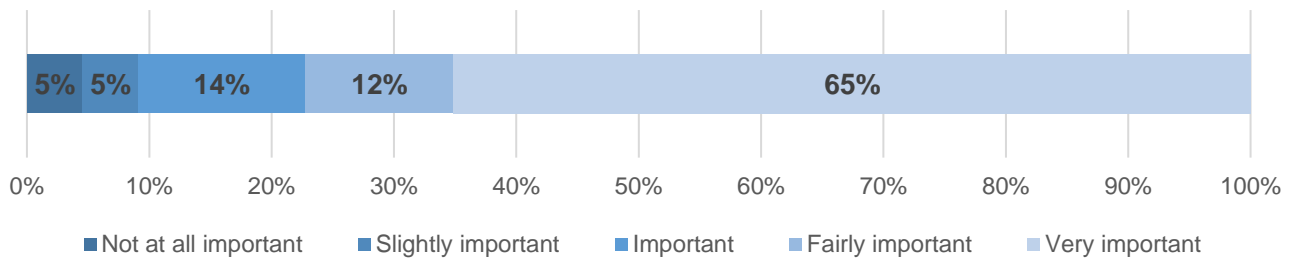
Figure 11: The majority felt it was very important the survey includes children ages 16 and 17 years



5.11 Question 15: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important, how important is it to you that a prevalence survey includes young adults (from age 18)?

(Asked to all except general public, 66 responses)

Figure 12: Around two thirds of respondents felt it was very important that the survey includes young adults



5.12 Question 16: What are your views on the proposed lower age limit of 11 and upper age limit of 25?

(Asked to all except general public, 66 responses)

Overall, 35% of respondents were satisfied with the lower and upper age limits.

Some felt the lower age limit was not low enough and that the survey should try to be inclusive of younger or all children to allow for a more accurate picture.

Respondents were generally happy with the upper age limit as it was acknowledged that the time taken for individuals to disclose abuse or recognise the abuse can stem way into adulthood. There were a small number who were unhappy for similar reasons, as some felt the survey should also include older or all adults as disclosure rates increase with time.

5.13 Question 17: Findings on whether a representative sample of children aged 16 and 17 and young adults aged 18 to 25 can be achieved are so far inconclusive. What additional sampling frame options could be explored in the next steps?

(Asked to analysts with survey expertise particularly on surveys of sensitive topics with children², 6 responses)

Suggestions included:

- electoral register
- NHS register
- national insurance numbers
- Individual Learner Record dataset (ILR)
- Young Persons Matched Administrative Dataset (YPMAD)
- recontacting samples within the Scottish Health Survey (SHeS) or Scottish Household Survey (SHS)

5.14 Our response to questions covered under participant age

It will remain our primary aim to include the age range of 11 to 25 years within the sample. Phase two would include assessing whether the age group of 16 to 25 years can be included representatively.

We acknowledge the need for the survey to include adults and to be inclusive of all children where possible. However, at this stage, there is not enough evidence to suggest that the added complexity of increasing the age range to include younger children and older adults would sufficiently increase the value of the survey. We will consider this user need moving forwards, particularly within the development of the abuse during childhood module of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

Survey administration

5.15 Question 18: The proposed survey would be completed by children under 16 in a school environment. What additional considerations should be taken into account or researched around how a survey should be conducted in schools?

(Asked to those who work with/represent children and/or have experience working with children or young people who have experienced abuse, and researchers with an interest or expertise in using data and statistics to research children and young people², 55 responses)

The consideration was raised that follow up care should be available for all involved, not just participants, and that the resource for this needs to be provided. It was recommended that research is conducted into how teachers and research staff would also be supported throughout the process including before, during and after the survey has taken place.

Many responses reiterated existing considerations including:

- ensuring children are appropriately supported during and after the survey

- providing support to all children, even if the child has no experiences of abuse
- that the perpetrator could be a member of staff or peer within the school
- the inclusivity of all children, such as those who are home-schooled, with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), within private schools, boarding schools, faith schools and those who have low attendance or are absent from any school
- ensuring schools have the resource and capability to deliver the survey, such as scheduling, time needed, space and IT equipment
- the privacy required by a child to ensure data quality

5.16 Question 19: What additional evidence or further research should be considered around whether schools would be willing to participate in a prevalence survey?

(Asked to those who work with/represent children and/or have experience working with children or young people who have experienced abuse, and researchers with an interest or expertise in using data and statistics to research children and young people², 41 responses)

Collaboration with Education boards and Ofsted was suggested to understand how to best fit the survey into schools to avoid many surveys occurring simultaneously. Working with these and other organisations was also suggested to understand what research they have planned and their views on how a survey should be implemented.

Many responses reiterated existing considerations including:

- understanding the resources required by schools to provide adequate support before, during and after the survey has taken place
- understanding resource inequality across different schools, such as IT equipment
- undertaking further research to understand why schools may not want to take part

5.17 Question 20: What factors should be considered in determining the survey mode for older children (aged 16 and 17) and young adults who would not complete the survey in a school environment?

(Asked to all except policy/decision makers and the general public, 47 responses)

Respondents frequently mentioned safeguarding, support and privacy factors. Respondents felt it was important that participants should be appropriately supported before, during and after the survey without delay. This includes ensuring risks are minimised and the environment they are in is safe.

Many respondents mentioned considerations relating to online completion such as:

- promotion through social media
- how participants would engage with the survey (for example completion via an app)
- ensuring the survey would be accessible for everyone, including those who may not be able to give explicit consent
- ensuring the survey is completed by the respondent themselves
- ensuring consent is collected appropriately from the participant

- communication with the respondent and how that can be facilitated; particularly to gain consent and to ensure they fully understand the survey process

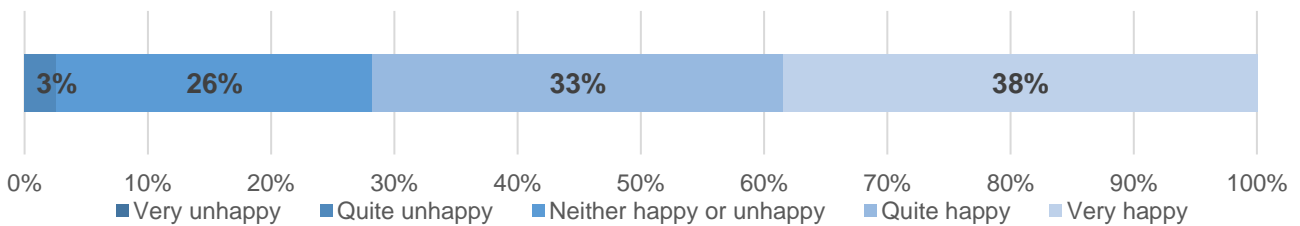
It was suggested that other survey methodologies should be reviewed alongside evidence of how respondents in these age groups prefer to respond to surveys.

5.18 Question 21: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very unhappy and 5 is very happy how happy or unhappy are you about older children and young adults completing a prevalence survey online?

(Asked to all except policy/decision makers and the general public³, 39 responses)

Almost three quarters of respondents were either very or quite happy with older children and young adults completing the survey online (72%). These findings were similar across respondent types except researchers (43%, very or quite happy).

Figure 13: Around three quarters were either very or quite happy with older children and young adults completing the survey online



5.19 Question 22: The proposed survey would be framed as a child safety survey, what do you think about this?

(Asked to all except policy/decision makers and the general public, 50 responses)

There were mixed views surrounding the framing of the survey.

Those that responded positively felt that it was the right pitch as the positive connotations surrounding the word 'safety' would enhance uptake with schools and parents.

Some respondents felt the framing was misleading, which could lead to the content of the survey being misinterpreted. Many highlighted the importance of clear communication to everyone on what a child safety survey would entail. This would allow children, young people and parents to make an informed decision on consent.

Others felt there could be confusion over the word 'safety' as some children and parents could relate this to other connotation's such as 'road safety' or general safety concerns. It was suggested

³ Analysis does not include respondents who chose to view all questions due to an error in survey programming.

that not including the word 'abuse' in the survey title would 'feed the shame' and stigma surrounding child abuse.

5.20 Question 23: Do you have any other comments on the proposed survey's methodology?

(Asked to all except the general public, 11 responses)

Most commonly, comments included:

- concerns that the survey could miss vulnerable children who may not be attending school, which could impact the quality of the data
- recommendations that an alternative survey administration method should be considered to capture children not in school
- concerns that different types of schools may be more hesitant to be included due to the nature of the questions asked, such as faith schools
- the importance of including questions which ask about certain behaviours, rather than abuse types themselves
- suggestions of a staged approach surveying adults first to inform the decision on the feasibility of including children and help shape the content of the child survey

5.21 Our response to questions covered under survey administration

We will continue to engage with key stakeholders such as Ofsted and Department for Education to understand their views on how the survey could be conducted in schools. We will undertake further qualitative research with headteachers and designated safeguarding leads in schools to understand:

- whether schools would be willing to participate in a survey of this nature
- the impact the survey could have on schools
- the concerns they have about conducting such a survey in school
- how potential barriers to conducting such a survey in school could be overcome
- what additional resources would need to be provided to schools

As part of this research we will hold focus groups with Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators in schools to understand their concerns about children or young adults with SEND participating in a survey and what support or adjustments they would need. How children who are home schooled could be included in a survey will be explored in interviews with child protection leads in local authority children's social care services.

We will explore how young people would feel completing the survey online through interviews with young adults with previous experiences of abuse. Findings from wider work in the Centre for Crime and Justice will also feed into this research.

We recognise some respondents have concerns with framing the survey as a child safety survey so we will consider this proposal further. It's important to highlight that separate to the overarching

framing, the survey content would be made clear to participants, parents, and schools before seeking agreement to take part.

Designing the survey questions would be part of phase 2. Responses support our current recommendation to use behavioural questions which would ask participants about their experiences rather than to report whether or not they have experienced named types of abuse. For our response regarding safeguarding and support considerations, please see section 5.28.

Ethical and legal considerations

Ethical and legal procedures

5.22 Question 24: The proposed survey would not be completely anonymous, what do you think about this?

(Asked to all except policy/decision makers and the general public, 56 responses)

There were mixed views on the survey being partially anonymous.

Respondents told us that although they felt a level of anonymity was necessary, it is more important to consider safeguarding needs of children and act upon participants responses. They commented that safeguarding principles should be built into the process to ensure participants receive appropriate support.

However, it was also highlighted that a lack of anonymity could considerably affect data quality. Respondents, including those who stated they had personally experienced abuse as a child, said this would reduce participation by impacting the response rate or affecting the reporting of experiences of abuse in the survey.

It was emphasised that ONS should be clear with participants about anonymity and safeguarding procedures so they can give informed consent.

5.23 Question 25: Do you have any other comments on the proposed survey's ethical procedures?

(Asked to all except the general public, 21 responses)

Most respondents shared their concerns and offered suggestions around safeguarding and support (71%), confidentiality (33%) and parental permission (29%).

The most common concerns raised were:

- the potential for significant harm to participants if appropriate and consistent safeguarding support is not considered and implemented
- the survey could be triggering for some participants
- that participants might not provide honest responses because of the partial anonymity and disclosure approach

- the survey may put participants at risk of further abuse because perpetrators could be aware that it is happening
- a child may accidentally reveal their abuse because of the way they react to the survey, particularly in a school environment
- the burden placed on schools with lack of resource to provide support
- whether there is a risk of not capturing familial abuse if it is the perpetrator who is asked to give permission

The most common suggestions raised for ONS to consider were:

- effects on those whose abuse is recent and those whose abuse is non-recent when considering safeguarding procedures
- providing tailored support
- what resource implications may arise when implementing national safeguarding measures
- the importance of providing clarity to children around how their data will be used so they can make an informed decision on reporting their abuse
- how to apply duty of care if a participant reports something that would put them at risk
- requesting parents or guardians to provide reasons as to why they do not want their child participating in the survey

5.24 Question 26: We need to conduct further research into whether parents or guardians would give permission for their child to take part in the proposed survey, what additional evidence or considerations should we take into account when exploring this?

(Asked to all except policy/decision makers and the general public, 34 responses)

Respondents told us establishing communication with parents to provide information and reassurance before asking for their permission is important. Similarly ensuring parents have a full understanding of the survey and its aims and outcomes which could influence their decision on whether to let their child participate. Some respondents felt that it is important to give assurance that all data collected would be handled sensitively and that any cause for concern would be acted upon appropriately by relevant agencies.

It was commented that information on how to access support should be provided to all likely to be impacted by the survey including parents, guardians, and professionals, such as teachers, so they can better manage disclosures. Through this it was said parents or guardians would feel more comfortable having conversations with their child about the survey and their safety. They could ensure their child is fully aware of consent, confidentiality, and potential outcomes of disclosure in the survey.

Respondents raised a number of different concerns that might impact on parents giving permission for their child to take part. Respondents felt that further understanding is needed of any barriers or concerns and how to overcome them for minority ethnic families, specific religious groups, and separated families.

Many respondents (65%) also felt that in families where children are abused or neglected by a parent or guardian, it is unlikely that permission would be given for the child to take part, leading to an underreporting of abuse.

It was also suggested by some that parental consent may not be required for participants aged 16 or over or younger if they are capable of understanding the survey aims and outcomes.

5.25 Our response to questions covered under ethical and legal procedures

We understand the concerns highlighted by respondents over the impact of partial anonymity on data quality but it is clear from feedback that the ethical obligation to safeguard children outweighs this limitation. We acknowledge that it is likely, specifically in families where children are abused or neglected, some parents or guardians won't let their child take part, which will affect data quality. We will ensure all limitations affecting data quality are clearly communicated with data published from a survey.

We will aim to reduce concerns and risks through the qualitative research which will:

- explore the views of parents and guardians of children with past experience of abuse on giving permission for their child to take part in the survey
- explore the views of children and young adults with previous experiences of abuse on partial anonymity and data sharing for safeguarding and support purposes
- speak to headteachers and teachers to understand school needs for additional resource and support, in particular after the survey has taken place, to help reduce burden on schools

Further, we will engage and consult with stakeholders who work with children and young people from diverse communities, such as those from minority ethnic communities, and religious communities who have experienced abuse, to understand the challenges and barriers they face.

Safeguarding and support

5.26 Question 27: The proposed survey would implement a flagging safeguarding procedure which would be used to assess the level of risk a child is in and apply different levels of safeguarding depending on the circumstances of the abuse disclosed. What additional factors should be considered in the design of a flagging procedure?

(Asked to all except policy/decision makers and the general public, 43 responses)

Respondents highlighted that the design of the flagging procedure should take into consideration how risks will be identified and assessed and by whom. Respondents also said it is necessary to include contact details of support services, professionals and agencies that would provide support to participants after disclosure.

It was emphasised that flagging should not rely on waiting for someone to analyse the responses. This could involve not conducting surveys on Fridays where flags may not be followed up until after the weekend. Hence, it was suggested that plans for the involvement of support services and agencies should be mapped out fully, including timeframes for when services can meet demands.

Respondents suggested that ONS should further consult with children and experts (for example social workers, charities, local authorities) on how to define the thresholds for referrals for the flagging procedure, to ensure agreement is reached. There were concerns that referral thresholds

could be open to interpretation, and there would be a risk that if referral thresholds are fixed, some individuals who need support could be missed.

Additionally, respondents highlighted:

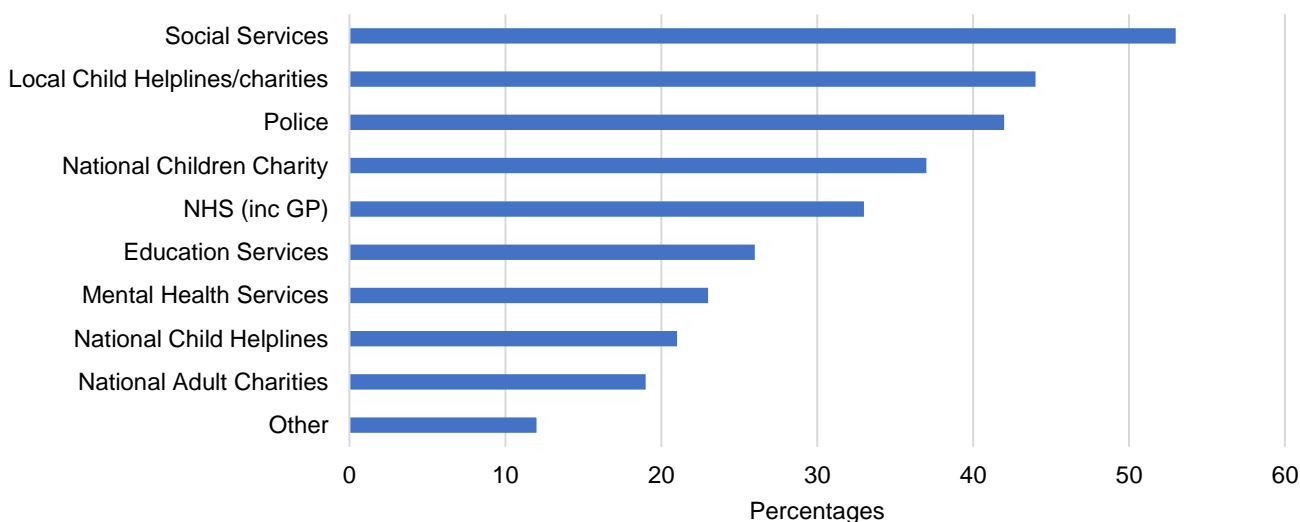
- participants should be fully informed on what the safeguarding flagging procedure is, including who will be involved, how long it will take and the impact of reporting abuse, which would manage expectations and enable an informed decision
- young people should be allowed to state what type of support they want after disclosure and should be included in the decision making
- young people should have the opportunity to self-refer to services
- ONS should make use of best practice guidance from [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) when considering best ways to work with different professionals
- ONS should consider how schools deal with concerns regarding types of abuse and how they escalate matters
- ONS should make it clear how participants flagged as being at risk would be signposted to chosen support or safeguarding services

5.27 Question 28: Which key referral services do you think should be included within our opt-in support option and safeguarding flagging procedure?

(Asked to all except policy/decision makers and the general public, 43 responses)

Most common responses included key referral services such as, social services (53%), local charities/helplines (44%) and the police (42%).

Figure 14: There were mixed views on which key referral services should be included



1. 'Other' includes religious family services, counselling, probation, designated safeguarding leads, and other specific services.

Respondents felt that the safeguarding would require a multi-agency approach with specific support given depending on the type of abuse experienced. They mentioned the support provided would differ by local approach and highlighted the importance of this within each community.

The mental health of a child and young adult was highlighted as a key priority and it was emphasised that participants should be supported without delay. Suggestions were made to include trained psychologists and counsellors who could contact the child confidentially and review the response the child submitted before a referral is made. Educational services were also mentioned, including the referral to the designated safeguarding lead within the school.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of giving participants the opportunity to self-refer to services or agencies after completing the survey and that a list of available support organisations should be provided upon completion of the survey.

5.28 Our response to questions covered under safeguarding and support

Recognising the importance of safeguarding and support to the feasibility of a survey, as a priority, we will:

- ask children and young adults with previous experiences of abuse what support they think would be needed, and their thoughts on self-referral
- ask headteachers, safeguarding leads and special educational needs co-ordinators for their views on what additional resource would need to be considered

We recognise that respondents have highlighted specific concerns and risks around setting referral thresholds for safeguarding. In phase two, should we proceed, we will:

- assess existing flagging procedures, including those implemented by [Ditch the Label](#) and [NSPCC](#) to understand decisions behind setting referral thresholds
- engage with relevant stakeholders to assess usefulness of key referrals services, discuss how to define thresholds for referrals, and the requirements for the flagging procedure

Data accuracy and reliability

5.29 Question 29: We need to conduct further research to determine whether children and young people would be willing to participate in the proposed survey, and whether they would be able to recall, or willing to report, instances of abuse. What additional evidence or considerations should we take into account when exploring this?

(Asked to all except policy/decision makers and the general public, 45 responses)

Most commonly, respondents stressed that participants should be made to feel safe and protected and that they should receive support after reporting abuse.

Respondents felt that further research should be undertaken on what tailored support participants would want or need, which may encourage them to report abuse. It was suggested that specialists should administer the survey who are good at listening, know how to approach the subject and may be considered more trustworthy by participants.

Additionally, respondents made the following suggestions for further research:

- on cognitive testing and language used to ensure children understand what is being asked
- to ensure the survey is administered in a safe place that allows participants to safely report abuse
- into other factors and barriers that might affect recall such as, influence of culture, community and religious groups, peer pressure, ongoing criminal proceedings, existing mental health issues
- into whether children are likely to report abuse using a computer or would prefer speaking to a person

5.30 Our response to questions covered under data accuracy and reliability

We acknowledge that no survey will be able to produce the true estimate of abuse. We recognise that there will always be some children and young people who will never report instances of abuse or may experience difficulties recalling instances of abuse.

Comments relating to data reliability and accuracy were made across the consultation including sections 5.3, 5.22 and 5.24. We will ensure limitations of the data are clearly communicated alongside estimates produced from a survey.

Through interviews with children and young adults with previous experiences of abuse we will further explore what concerns children and young adults would have, and what they would expect would happen if they reported having experienced abuse in a survey.

Through further engagement with relevant stakeholders, we will build our understanding of cultural and community related barriers that could discourage participants from reporting abuse or factors that would make it difficult for participants to recall their experiences.

As part of phase two of the feasibility study, if we proceed, the questionnaire design phase will:

- explore how questions can be phrased in ways which could maximise recall or recognition of experiences
- test survey questions with children and young people

Future considerations

Phase one

5.31 Question 30: What additional research questions should be investigated, or further research should be carried out before making a conclusion on whether a prevalence survey would be feasible?

(Asked to all except policy/decision makers and the general public, 46 responses)

Overall, 8% of respondents felt there was no further research needed to establish the feasibility. The most common recommendations surrounded further exploration into:

- how support and safeguarding would be provided
- the impact on services and whether they would have the resource to accommodate this
- the level of aftercare needed so no further harm is experienced as a result of the survey
- the views of key participant groups
- the views of experts who have experience of researching abuse with children and young people
- the possible consequences the survey could have for children taking part, including ensuring that any follow up with a child is handled discretely
- whether the survey data would confidently lead to improvements and positive outcomes, such as funding and improved support provisions

Alongside survey development, it was recommended we continue to explore how better use can be made of other sources of data to understand the prevalence of child abuse, such as that from Childline or other support services. Some respondents felt the purpose of the survey needed to be assessed and to ensure that this can't be met by any other current sources available.

5.32 Our response to future considerations for phase one

These responses reflected feedback received in other questions in the consultation and our responses can be found in the corresponding sections.

It's important to note that in January 2020, we published a [compendium of statistics on child abuse](#), bringing together a range of different sources from across government and the voluntary sector. The compendium helped to provide a better understanding of the extent and nature of child abuse in England and Wales by using administrative data and data from the adult's Crime Survey for England and Wales experience of abuse during childhood module. It's clear from responses to the consultation that existing data sources do not sufficiently meet user needs and that the proposed survey would help fill current evidence gaps.

Phase two

5.33 Question 31: If the conclusion to phase one of the study supports the feasibility of a child abuse survey, there are several other areas which would require further investigation before a pilot survey could begin (see 'more information' for details). What other areas should be considered in phase two?

(Asked to all except policy/decision makers and the general public, 18 responses)

Most commonly respondents suggested:

- investigating how to include children in care or already receiving support for abuse, and children not attending school
- asking children themselves about the best way to administer the survey
- involving children in designing the survey's name and respondent materials
- investigating asking children about specific behaviours rather than their experience of named abuse types in questionnaire design

- ensuring the questions would not infer blame onto the victim
- considering potential language barriers and how to accommodate this (for example including translations and the use of sign language)

5.34 Our response to future considerations for phase two

We acknowledge the importance of the survey being inclusive of all children. We will explore how we could include children who are not attending school, such as those that are home schooled, or who are in care. Through qualitative research with child protection leads working in local authority children's social care services we will seek to understand:

- the possible barriers to looked after children taking part in a survey
- how children who are home schooled could be included in a survey
- what concerns they may have about children who are home schooled taking part in a survey

We will also carry out qualitative research with children and young adults with previous experiences of abuse to understand their views. For more information on the survey administration, please see section 5.21.

Responses surrounding considerations for questionnaire design and language barriers will be taken forward in phase two, should we proceed.

Further information

Any questions not included separately within this response have been incorporated and included within analysis across other questions.

Annex A – List of organisations that responded

Angus Council
Association for Young People's Health
Association of Directors of Children Services
Break the Silence
Brighton & Hove City Council
Bristol Grandparents Support Group
CELCIS
Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel
Child Sexual Abuse Centre
Children's Commissioner for Wales
Children's Commissioner for England
Children's Services, States of Guernsey
Christchurch university
CIS'ters: Surviving rape and sexual abuse during childhood
Cross Of Change aka C.R.O.S.S.
Department for Education
Department of Health and Social Care
Derbyshire Constabulary
Doctors in Unite
Domestic Abuse Commissioner
Dundee City Council
Edinburgh Child Protection Committee
Families Need Fathers
Gloucestershire Sisters
Hampshire Constabulary
Home Office
Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse
Inter Training Services Limited
Julia's childminding
Lancashire County Council Children's Social Care
Lucy Faithful Foundation
Maira Anderson Foundation
National Education Union
NHS
Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner
Northern Ireland Department of Health
NSPCC
Nuffield Family Justice Observatory
Police Service of Northern Ireland
PSI(UK)Ltd
Queensland University of Technology
Safer Young Lives Research Centre, University of Bedfordshire
Scottish Government
SERICC
St Helens The Best Me CIC
Staffordshire County Council
Support for Survivors CIO

The Maplesden Noakes School
The Scottish Children Reporter Administration
The Survivors Trust
Victim Support
VictimFocus
Violence and Society Centre, City, University of London
Wellbeing Scotland
Welsh Government
West Yorkshire Police
Wiltshire Health and Care
Winton Community Academy