# Children aged five and under among accused in rising UK sexual offence cases



New data revealing that very young children in the UK have been accused of serious sexual offences has raised alarming questions about the prevalence of sexual violence among minors. According to figures obtained through Freedom of Information requests, Norfolk Constabulary reported a substantial number of incidents involving school-age children, including cases where the alleged offenders were as young as five. Specifically, since 2020, there have been 444 reported offences, with 70% of victims being girls. The statistics show that ten children under the age of five have been identified as suspects in these allegations, including cases of sexual assault against both boys and girls under 13, and a reported incident of rape involving a boy.

This troubling trend is not unique to Norfolk. Data from across the UK indicates that sexual offences involving minors are increasingly common. For instance, recent statistics from Norfolk suggest that nearly half of all victims of rape and sexual assault are under 18 years old, signifying a deeply rooted issue within educational and community settings. Among the reported figures, 400 victims were aged ten or younger, and 851 suspects were identified as minors, including 131 children in primary school. This phenomenon highlights a growing need for enhanced educational strategies and support systems that address peer-on-peer abuse early in life.

The implications of these statistics are far-reaching. Charities dedicated to combating sexual violence, such as Rape Crisis England and Wales, have been vocal about the necessity for improved guidance and support for schools dealing with these sensitive matters. In a letter to Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson and Safeguarding Minister Jess Phillips, Rape Crisis expressed concerns over the inadequate responses from schools when students experience sexual abuse, stating, “Frontline rape crisis workers frequently hear—and report concerns—about inappropriate and inadequate responses from schools.” The charity emphasises that educational institutions require better support to address peer-on-peer abuse effectively without causing additional trauma to the victims.

Research has shown that the number of recorded sexual offences involving young children is not merely a statistical anomaly. For example, Northamptonshire Police previously reported instances of sex crimes committed by children as young as four and five years old, prompting questions about the effectiveness of current safeguarding measures. Figures from earlier years documented 668 child sexual offences in Northamptonshire alone, with about 194 of the victims aged ten or younger. This surge underscores the urgent requirement for early intervention strategies that teach children about healthy boundaries and respectful relationships.

While societal awareness of child sexual abuse has grown, much remains hidden. The Office for National Statistics has noted that many cases remain unreported, and earlier studies suggested that a significant percentage of children encounter sexual abuse before they reach adulthood. However, data remains dated, and many advocate for contemporary research to better understand the scope and dynamics of this critical issue. The consistent rise in reported offences, particularly among young children, suggests an urgent need for both immediate and long-term solutions to protect vulnerable individuals.

The call for systemic change comes amidst a broader cultural conversation on how to effectively address and prevent childhood sexual abuse. Local and national efforts to strengthen safeguarding protocols and educational content are essential if we aim to stem the tide of such alarming incidents. Collaboration between educational institutions, police, and charities will be vital in building frameworks that not only support victims but also educate children on the importance of consent and respect, ultimately fostering safer environments for all.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060767/children-aged-five-and-under-accused-sexual-assault-uk), [[2]](https://www.lynnnews.co.uk/news/nearly-half-of-all-rape-and-sexual-assault-victims-in-norfol-9404638/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060767/children-aged-five-and-under-accused-sexual-assault-uk), [[3]](https://rapecrisis.org.uk/news/letter-to-ministers-about-sexual-violence-and-abuse-in-schools/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.northantstelegraph.co.uk/news/four-and-five-year-olds-among-children-to-commit-sex-offences-in-northamptonshire-figures-show-709024), [[5]](https://www.northantstelegraph.co.uk/news/54-reports-of-sexual-offences-against-children-under-five-in-past-year-in-northamptonshire-789640)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/childsexualabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060767/children-aged-five-and-under-accused-sexual-assault-uk), [[3]](https://rapecrisis.org.uk/news/letter-to-ministers-about-sexual-violence-and-abuse-in-schools/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060767/children-aged-five-and-under-accused-sexual-assault-uk> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.lynnnews.co.uk/news/nearly-half-of-all-rape-and-sexual-assault-victims-in-norfol-9404638/> - Between September 2023 and September 2024, Norfolk Police recorded 3,280 rape or sexual assault offences, with 1,120 victims aged 11 to 17 and 400 aged 10 or under. This indicates that nearly half of the victims were under 18, highlighting a significant concern about the prevalence of sexual offences among young individuals in Norfolk. The data also revealed that 851 suspects were under 18, including 131 primary school-aged children, suggesting that abuse between school pupils is becoming more widespread and affecting increasingly younger children.
3. <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/news/letter-to-ministers-about-sexual-violence-and-abuse-in-schools/> - Rape Crisis England & Wales, along with other charities, wrote to Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson and Safeguarding Minister Jess Phillips, urging the government to provide clearer statutory guidance on handling peer-on-peer sexual abuse in schools. The letter highlights the prevalence of sexual violence in schools, the harm caused by inadequate responses, and the risk of breaching the Human Rights Act and the Equalities Act by not responding appropriately. The charities recommend updating statutory guidance to better protect victim-survivors and support schools in addressing these issues effectively.
4. <https://www.northantstelegraph.co.uk/news/four-and-five-year-olds-among-children-to-commit-sex-offences-in-northamptonshire-figures-show-709024> - Between 2012 and 2017, Northamptonshire Police recorded 13 sex crime offences committed by children under 11, including instances involving four and five-year-olds. Notably, there were reports of an 11-year-old raping a boy over 16, and eight-year-olds raping boys under 13. These statistics underscore the alarming reality of very young children being involved in serious sexual offences, raising concerns about the effectiveness of current safeguarding measures and the need for early intervention and education on healthy relationships.
5. <https://www.northantstelegraph.co.uk/news/54-reports-of-sexual-offences-against-children-under-five-in-past-year-in-northamptonshire-789640> - In the 2014-15 period, Northamptonshire Police recorded 668 child sex offences, a 50% increase from the previous year. Among the victims, 194 were aged 10 and under, including 54 children below school age. This significant rise highlights the urgent need for enhanced support services for children who have suffered abuse and underscores the importance of early intervention and education to prevent such offences.
6. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/childsexualabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019> - The Office for National Statistics (ONS) provides data on child sexual abuse in England and Wales, noting that cases referred to the child protection system represent only a partial picture, as many cases remain hidden. A 2009 study estimated that 1.2% of children under 11, 16.5% of those aged 11 to 17, and 24.1% of individuals aged 18 to 24 had experienced sexual abuse in childhood. However, these findings are over a decade old, and it is unclear how the prevalence has changed since then.
7. <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-you-can-do/report-abuse/report-abuse-children/> - The NSPCC offers guidance on how to report child abuse, including sexual abuse. They provide a helpline for adults concerned about a child, as well as a service for children and young people to report abuse. The NSPCC emphasizes the importance of reporting concerns to protect children and offers support to those who have experienced abuse.