

action against abduction

Police-recorded child abduction and kidnapping 2016/17: England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Geoff Newiss

National summary

This paper summarises findings from Action Against Abduction's fifth Freedom of Information (FOI) data collection exercise with police forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. 39 (of 44) police forces provided all data requested; one force gave partial data. The key findings are:

- The number of **parental child abduction offences** recorded by police **increased by 10 per cent** from 2015/16 to 2016/17 to a total of **221**.
- The number of **non-parental child abduction offences** recorded by police **increased by 10 per cent** from 2015/16 to 2016/17 to a total of **870**.
- Police recorded a total of **371 child kidnappings offences** in 2016/17. Changes to the data collection procedure prohibit an accurate comparison with the previous year.

Geoff Newiss is a Director of Action Against Abduction. Thanks are extended to Alexandra Scrivener for assistance with data collection.

©Action Against Abduction 2018

No part of this report may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission of the publishers (Action Against Abduction).

www.actionagainstabduction.org Registered charity 1081904.

Print and Design by Glazier Design, 112 Great Portland Street, London, W1W 6PH.

Background and aims

Action Against Abduction undertakes an annual FOI data collection exercise in order to produce a better understanding of police-recorded¹ child abduction and kidnapping offences than is available from published government or police reports. Specifically this report:

- separates parental from non-parental child abductions, showing the number and increase in each category;
- provides information on child victims of kidnapping (government and police reports offer data on adult and child victims combined); and
- shows how rates of child abduction and kidnapping compare across different parts of the country.

This report is the fifth in the series (see References for the details of previous reports).

Scotland

This paper is limited to offences recorded by police in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Legislation and offence categories are different in Scotland.

Method

FOI requests were sent to each of the 39 territorial police forces in England, four in Wales and the single police force in Northern Ireland². The FOI asked each police force to provide a count, for the year 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017, of:

- child abductions by a parent (Home Office classification 13/1³),
- child abductions by other persons (Home Office classification 13/2), and
- kidnappings (Home Office classification 36/1) when the victim was aged under 18 at the time of the offence.

NOTE: in previous years data on all Home Office '36' category offences have been collected. These are collectively called 'kidnapping' (see [Home Office counting rules](#)) but include various offences of kidnapping (36/1), hijacking (36/2), false imprisonment (36/3), hostage taking (36/4), and forced-marriage offences (36/5). This year data were requested only for 36/1 offences – making a comparison with previous years data impossible.

¹ This report presents an analysis of child abductions recorded by police. There is ample evidence that many abductions – both familial and non-familial – go unreported to the police (see Newiss and Traynor, 2013).

² 'Territorial' police forces are police forces that cover a particular police area. The list excludes non-geographic police forces such as the British Transport Police, as well as ports, parks and defence police, and national police agencies. Details of the territorial police forces are given in the Appendix.

³ The Home Office classifications are contained within the Home Office Counting Rules (Home Office, 2018) which provide the framework for the classification and recording of different crimes.

Returns were collated and analysed together with mid-2013 population statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2014) – see Newiss, 2016 for more details. 39 police forces disclosed all data requested; one provided a partial disclosure (see Appendix). A summary of the limitations of this method is available in Newiss, 2016.

Child abduction offence categories

The criminal offence of child abduction is defined by the Child Abduction Act, 1984.

Parental child abduction

The Act makes it a criminal offence for anyone ‘connected with’ a child under the age of 16 to ‘take or send’ that child out of the UK without the appropriate consent. ‘Connected with’ includes parents, guardians or a person with a residence order or custody of the child. ‘Appropriate consent’ is the consent of the mother, the father (if he has parental responsibility), the guardian or anyone with a residence order, parental responsibility or the leave (permission) of the court.

Non-parental child abduction

The Child Abduction Act also makes it a criminal offence for ‘other persons’ to ‘take or detain’ a child under the age of 16 without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. ‘Other persons’ are people other than the child’s parent, guardian or a person with parental responsibility for the child.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping exists in England and Wales and Northern Ireland, and is defined at common law as ‘the taking or carrying away of one person by another, by force or fraud, without the consent of the person taken or carried away and without lawful excuse. It must involve an attack on or loss of that person’s liberty’ (The Law Commission, 2011). There is a large overlap between kidnapping and child abduction, both legally (ibid.) and in the types of cases recorded under each offence (Newiss and Traynor, 2013). An offence of kidnapping (which can be recorded for children and adults) may be recorded for older child victims (those aged 16 or 17 years old) for whom the offence of child abduction cannot be recorded.

National summary

Table 1 shows the numbers of parental and non-parental child abductions and child kidnapping offences recorded by police in 2016/17. Not all police forces provided data, therefore these totals should be regarded as a minimum figure.

Table 1: Summary of child abduction and kidnapping offences recorded by police

	2015/16	2016/17	Increase (n=)	Adjusted increase (n=) ¹	Adjusted increase (%) ¹	Rate per 100,000 children ²	Number of forces (2016/17) ³
Parental child abduction	201	221	20	20	10	1.88	39
Non-parental child abduction	835	870	35	77	10	7.33	40
Child kidnapping ⁴	-	371	-	-	-	3.13	40

¹ Fewer police forces disclosed data in 2016/17 than in 2015/16. The adjusted increase shows the numerical and percentage increase when only those police forces which returned data for both years are included.

² Rate per 100,000 children, based on 2016/17 offence figures and mid-2013 population estimates for 0 to 17 year-olds in each police force area (see Appendix, and Newiss, 2016 for further explanation).

³ The number of police forces (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) disclosing data in each of the offence categories in 2016/17. Note, this has changed since the previous year necessitating the adjustments in the previous columns.

⁴ 2015/16 data for child kidnappings offences have been omitted from the table because of different data collection procedures (see above).

- The number of parental child abduction offences recorded by police increased by 10 per cent from 2015/16 to 2016/17 to a total of 221.
- The number of non-parental child abduction offences recorded by police increased by 10 per cent from 2015/16 to 2016/17 to a total of 870.
- Police recorded a total of 371 child kidnappings offences in 2016/17. Changes to the data collection procedure prohibit an accurate comparison with the previous year.

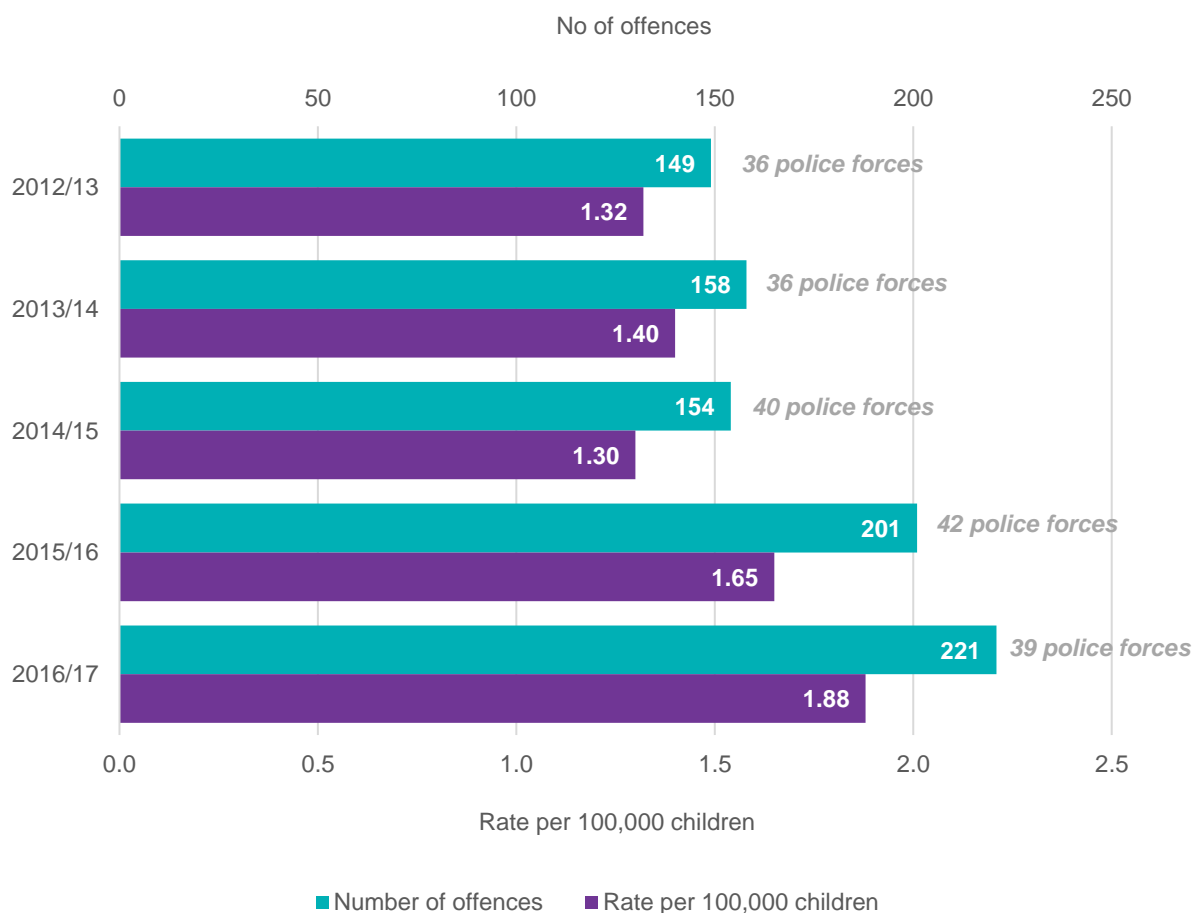
Parental child abduction recorded by police

The number of parental child abduction offences recorded by police forces increased from 201 in 2015/16 to 221 in 2016/17 (see Figure 1). This was despite fewer forces returning data this year. When adjusted to count only those forces that returned data in both years, the increase remained the same (see Appendix for details).

The Metropolitan Police Service (London) recorded nearly one-quarter of parental child abduction offences in 2016/17 (54 offences, a rate of 2.86 per 100,000 children, compared to 1.88 for all forces; see Appendix). Other forces with rates noticeably higher than the average were Thames Valley (22 offences, 4.16 per 100,000), Cambridgeshire (7 offences, 3.98 per 100,000 children); Greater Manchester (22 offences, 3.60 per 100,000 children); and Hampshire (11 offences, 2.76 per 100,000 children).

Last year's report (Newiss and Collie, 2017) shows that nearly all offences (96 per cent) of parental child abduction involved the child actually being taken (a completed abduction rather than an attempt).

Figure 1: Parental child abduction offences



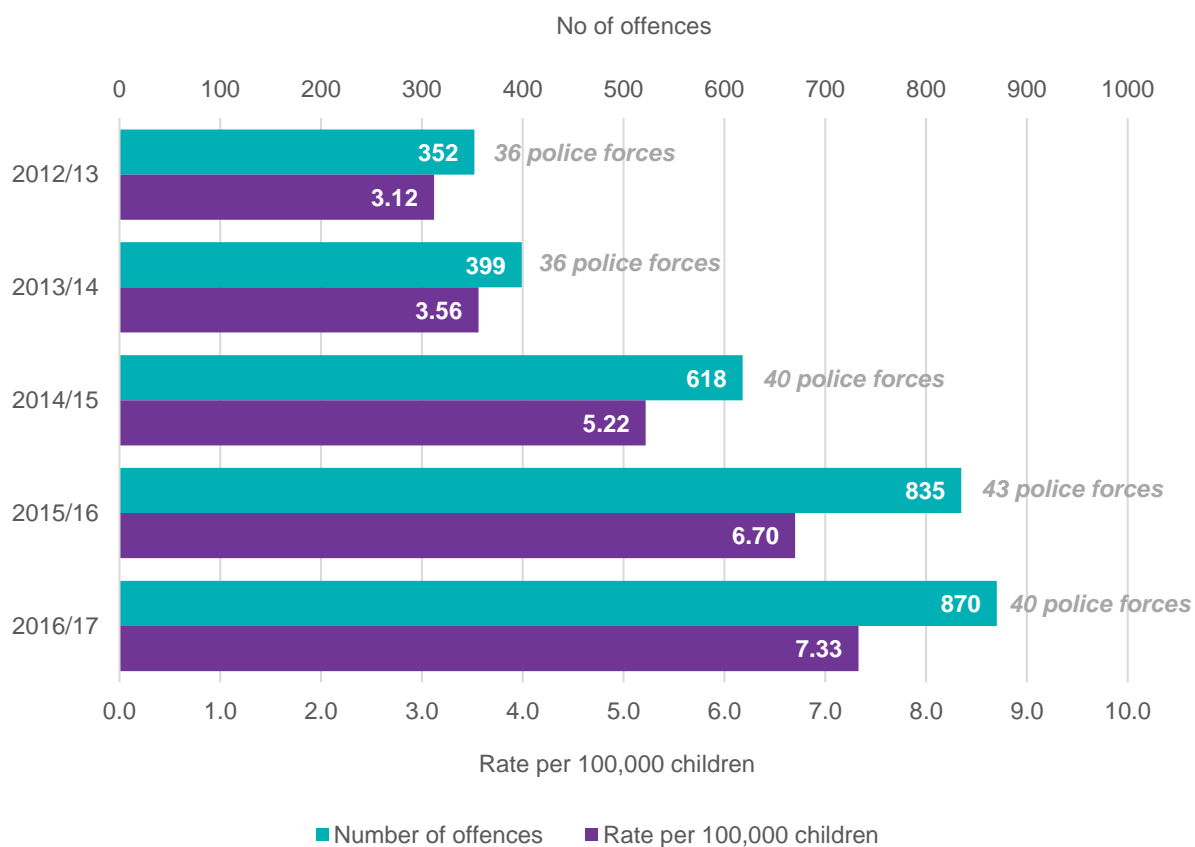
Non-parental child abduction recorded by police

The number of non-parental child abductions recorded by police increased from 835 in 2015/16 to 870 in 2016/17 (see Figure 2). This was despite only 40 forces returning data for 2016/17, compared to 43 forces in 2015/16. The adjusted increase (counting only forces that returned data in both years) was 10 per cent (77 offences) over the previous year (see Appendix for more details).

Offences of non-parental child abduction were recorded in nearly all police forces (only the City of London and Hertfordshire recorded zero offences). The four large city forces accounted for over 40 per cent of all offences recorded. The London Metropolitan Police Service recorded 134 offences (an increase of 40 per cent – 38 offences – on the previous year). Greater Manchester recorded 130 offences (slightly down on the previous year but still a rate of 21.26 offences per 100,000 children, compared to 7.33 for all forces). West Midlands recorded 71 offences (10.70 offences per 100,000 children) and West Yorkshire recorded 44 offences (8.64 per 100,000 children).

Other forces with comparatively high rates of non-parental child abduction were: Durham (16.26 per 100,000 children); West Mercia (12.80 per 100,000 children); Cleveland (12.33 per 100,000 children); Cumbria (11.70 per 100,000 children); Humberside (11.14 per 100,000 children); and Nottinghamshire (10.15 per 100,000 children).

Figure 2: Non-parental child abduction offences

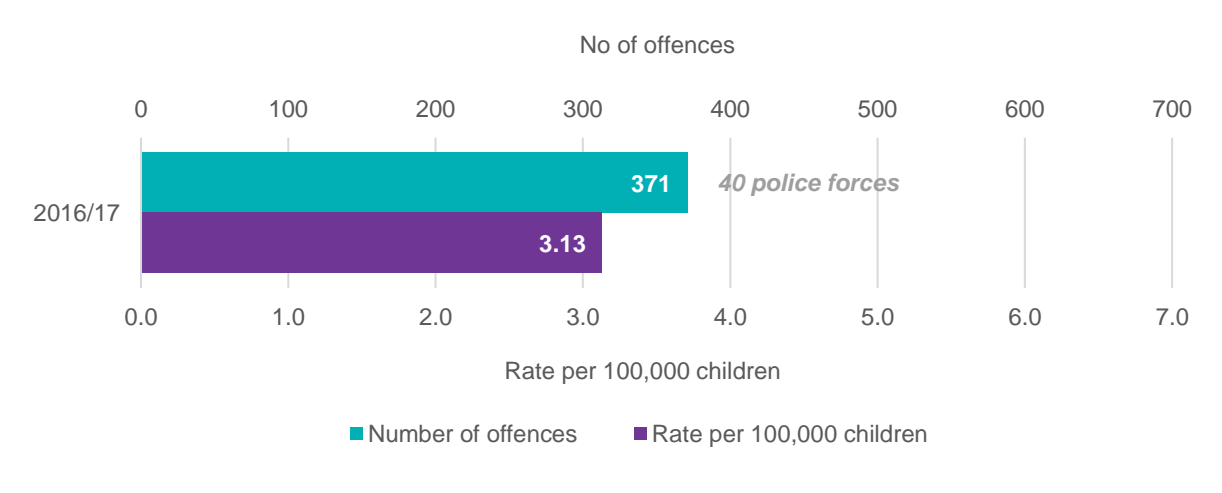


Child kidnapping recorded by police

The 40 police forces that returned data recorded a total of 371 child kidnapping offences in 2016/17, a rate of 3.13 per 100,000 children (see Figure 3). No comparison has been made with previous year's figures because of a change to the data collection procedures (see above).

The large city police forces of the London (Metropolitan Police Service) (93 offences); West Yorkshire (56 offences); West Midlands (29 offences) and Greater Manchester (25 offences) alone accounted for over half of all offences recorded.

Figure 3: Child kidnapping offences



References

Home Office (2018) *Home Office counting rules for recorded crime* (online). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counting-rules-for-recorded-crime> (accessed 18 May 2018).

Newiss, G. and Collie, C. (2017) *Police-recorded child abduction and kidnapping 2015/16. England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. London: Action Against Abduction.

Newiss, G. (2016) *Police-recorded child abduction and kidnapping 2013/14 to 2014/15. England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. London: Action Against Abduction.

Newiss, G. and Collie, C. (2015) *Police-recorded child abduction and kidnapping 2012/13 to 2013/14. England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. London: Parents and Abducted Children Together.

Newiss, G. and Traynor, M. (2013) *Taken: A study of child abduction in the UK*. London: Parents and Abducted Children Together and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre.

Office for National Statistics (2014) *Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Mid-2013* (online). Available at: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-322718 (accessed 3 February 2015).

The Law Commission (2011) *Simplification of Criminal Law: Kidnapping*. Consultation Paper No.200. The Law Commission: London.

Appendix

	Under 18 population ¹	Parental child abduction					Non-parental child abduction					Child kidnapping	
		2015/16	2016/17	Change in last year		Rate per 100,000 ¹	2015/16	2016/17	Change in last year		Rate per 100,000 ¹	2016/17	Rate per 100,000 ¹
				n=	%				n=	%			
EAST MIDLANDS													
Derbyshire Constabulary	212,634	0	4	4	-	1.88	12	16	4	33	7.52	3	1.41
Leicestershire Police	221,912	6	4	-2	-33	1.80	23	13	-10	-43	5.86	3	1.35
Lincolnshire Police	140,725	3	0	-3	-100	0.00	7	10	3	43	7.11	2	1.42
Northamptonshire Police	159,224	10	4	-6	-60	2.51	11	6	-5	-45	3.77	5	3.14
Nottinghamshire Police	226,494	0	5	5	-	2.21	9	23	14	156	10.15	3	1.32
REGION	960,989	19	17	-2	-11	1.77	62	68	6	10	7.08	16	1.66
EASTERN													
Bedfordshire Police	148,444	1	4	3	300	2.69	9	3	-6	-67	2.02	8	5.39
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	175,855	6	7	1	17	3.98	4	6	2	50	3.41	2	1.14
Essex Police	375,522	0	1	1	-	0.27	10	9	-1	-10	2.40	5	1.33
Hertfordshire Constabulary	258,414	7	0	-7	-100	0.00	10	0	-10	-100	0.00	2	0.77
Norfolk Constabulary	166,507	2	3	1	50	1.80	9	8	-1	-11	4.80	1	0.60
Suffolk Constabulary	151,146	0	2	2	-	1.32	8	12	4	50	7.94	5	3.31
REGION	1,275,888	16	17	1	6	1.33	50	38	-12	-24	2.98	23	1.80
LONDON													
City of London Police	829	0	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0.00	0	0.00
Metropolitan Police Service	1885956	66	54	-12	-18	2.86	96	134	38	40	7.11	93	4.93
REGION	1886785	66	54	-12	-18	2.86	96	134	38	40	7.11	93	4.93

	Under 18 population ¹	Parental child abduction					Non-parental child abduction					Child kidnapping	
		2015/16	2016/17	Change in last year		Rate per 100,000 ¹	2015/16	2016/17	Change in last year		Rate per 100,000 ¹	2016/17	Rate per 100,000 ¹
				n=	%				n=	%			
NORTH EAST													
Cleveland Constabulary	121,656	1	1	0	0	0.82	9	15	6	67	12.33	3	2.47
Durham Constabulary	122,976	1	-	-	-	-	4	20	16	400	16.26	4	3.25
Northumbria Police	280,414	3	4	1	33	1.43	11	11	0	0	3.92	2	0.71
REGION	525,046	5	5	0	0	1.24*	24	46	22	92	8.76	9	1.71
NORTH WEST													
Cheshire Constabulary	213,504	2	0	-2	-100	0.00	10	1	-9	-90	0.47	2	0.94
Cumbria Constabulary	94,005	3	1	-2	-67	1.06	4	11	7	175	11.70	1	1.06
Greater Manchester Police	611,399	9	22	13	144	3.60	133	130	-3	-2	21.26	25	4.09
Lancashire Constabulary	311,541	0	5	5	-	1.60	36	29	-7	-19	9.31	2	0.64
Merseyside Police	279,072	-	7	-	-	2.51	19	19	0	0	6.81	6	2.15
REGION	1,509,521	14	35	21	150	2.32	202	190	-12	-6	12.59	36	2.38
SOUTH EAST													
Hampshire Constabulary	397,915	7	11	4	57	2.76	20	35	15	75	8.80	10	2.51
Kent Police	387,877	3	7	4	133	1.80	13	10	-3	-23	2.58	12	3.09
Surrey Police	252,270	1	1	0	0	0.40	14	14	0	0	5.55	2	0.79
Sussex Police	~	4	-	-	-	-	20	-	-	-	-	-	-
Thames Valley Police	529,031	14	22	8	57	4.16	20	23	3	15	4.35	12	2.27
REGION	1,567,093	29	41	12	41	2.62	87	82	-5	-6	5.23	36	2.30
SOUTH WEST													
Avon and Somerset Const.	332,650	6	5	-1	-17	1.50	15	21	6	40	6.31	10	3.01
Devon and Cornwall Police	322,356	4	3	-1	-25	0.93	23	28	5	22	8.69	7	2.17
Dorset Police	140,285	1	3	2	200	2.14	1	1	0	0	0.71	1	0.71
Gloucestershire Constabulary	122,734	2	0	-2	-100	0.00	11	7	-4	-36	5.70	1	0.81
Wiltshire Police	~	2	-	-	-	-	13	-	-	-	-	-	-
REGION	918,025	15	11	-4	-27%	1.20	63	57	-6	-10	6.21	19	2.07

	Under 18 population ¹	Parental child abduction					Non-parental child abduction					Child kidnapping	
		2015/16	2016/17	Change in last year		Rate per 100,000 ¹	2015/16	2016/17	Change in last year		Rate per 100,000 ¹	2016/17	Rate per 100,000 ¹
				n=	%				n=	%			
WEST MIDLANDS													
Staffordshire Police	225,306	3	1	-2	-67	0.44	13	13	0	0	5.77	6	2.66
Warwickshire Police	111,929	0	4	4	-	3.57	7	3	-4	-57	2.68	7	6.25
West Mercia Police	249,992	5	2	-3	-60	0.80	12	32	20	167	12.80	5	2.00
West Midlands Police	663,719	16	12	-4	-25	1.81	78	71	-7	-9	10.70	29	4.37
REGION	1,250,946	24	19	-5	-21	1.52	110	119	9	8	9.51	47	3.76
YORKSHIRE & HUMBER													
Humberside Police	188,438	2	4	2	100	2.12	22	21	-1	-5	11.14	7	3.71
North Yorkshire Police	154,648	2	0	-2	-100	0.00	7	7	0	0	4.53	0	0.00
South Yorkshire Police	285,191	0	3	3	-	1.05	19	21	2	11	7.36	19	6.66
West Yorkshire Police	509,391	3	8	5	167	1.57	47	44	-3	-6	8.64	56	10.99
REGION	1,137,668	7	15	8	114	1.32	95	93	-2	-2	8.17	82	7.21
ENGLAND TOTAL	11,031,961	195	214	19	10	1.96*	789	827	38	5	7.50	361	3.27
ENGLAND TOTAL adjusted		188	207	19	10		756	827	71	9			
WELSH FORCES													
Dyfed Powys Police	~	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gwent Police	~	0	-	-	-	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-
North Wales Police	139,979	0	0	0	-	0.00	2	3	1	50	2.14	2	1.43
South Wales Police	265,905	1	3	2	200	1.13	11	15	4	36	5.64	5	1.88
TOTAL	529,943	1	3	2	200	0.74	22	18	-4	-18	4.43	7	1.72
Police Service of Northern Ireland	432,015	5	4	-1	-20	0.93	24	25	1	4	5.79	3	0.69
E, W & N.I. TOTAL	11,869,860	201	221	20	10	1.88*	835	870	35	4	7.33	371	3.13
E, W & N.I. TOTAL adjusted		194	214	20	10		793	870	77	10			

¹ Under 18 population data for each police force are taken from mid-2013 population estimates (Office for National Statistics, 2014). The rate of offences per 100,000 of the under 18 population was calculated as follows: [number of offences] / [population] * 100,000. See Newiss (2016) for further details.

* The rate of parental child abduction in the North East region (1.24) is based on the population for the area excluding Durham, as this force did not disclose the number of offences recorded. The population of Durham was also excluded from the national population totals for the purpose of calculating the national rates of parental child abduction (both England total and England, Wales and Northern Ireland total).

~ The population data for Sussex, Wiltshire, Dyfed Powys and Gwent were excluded from the regional and national populations for the purposes of calculating the national rates of all offences, because the number of offences was not disclosed.

-' indicates that no data were disclosed, or that percentages could not be calculated because zero offences were recorded in 2015/16.