



Institute For
Addressing
Strangulation

UK Prevalence of Strangulation & Suffocation

What is strangulation?

Strangulation can be defined as obstruction or compression of blood vessels and/or airways by external pressure to the neck impeding normal breathing or circulation of the blood.¹ Non-fatal strangulation is where such strangulation has not directly caused the death of the victim.

What is suffocation?

Suffocation is different to strangulation. Suffocation is to deprive a person of air which affects their normal breathing.² Suffocation is sometimes referred to as asphyxiation.

What do we know about strangulation and suffocation in the UK?

Strangulation and suffocation are often part of domestic abuse and sexual violence

Charities supporting survivors frequently come across strangulation and suffocation.

- Domestic abuse charity SafeLives estimates that more than 20,000 victims in the UK experience strangulation each year.³ More recently, their Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) dataset 2021-22 recorded that 32% of cases accessing their IDVA services had experienced strangulation.⁴
- 1 in 4 women accessing community and refuge based services reported having experienced strangulation or suffocation.⁵
- Almost 19% of people attending St Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in Manchester who had been assaulted by a partner or ex-partner had experienced strangulation as part of the assault. Of those who experienced strangulation 97% were females.⁶

Strangulation and suffocation are a common method of killing females

Between April 2010 and March 2021 every year on average 18% of female homicide victims in England and Wales were killed by strangulation or suffocation.⁷

The Femicide Census 2020 (an annual report focusing on homicide cases where women are killed by men in the UK) reported that 22% of femicides involved strangulation or asphyxiation.⁸

In the decade to March 2020, strangulation or asphyxiation was consistently the second most frequent cause of homicide for women killed by men.⁹

Between October 2019 and October 2020, 25% of Domestic Homicides reviewed by the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) process were caused by strangulation.¹⁰

1, 2 Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). *Non-fatal strangulation or non-fatal suffocation*. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/non-fatal-strangulation-or-non-fatal-suffocation>

3 SafeLives. Marac data 2020-2021 England and Wales. [Marac data 2020-2021 England and Wales | Safelives](#)

4 SafeLives. *SafeLives Insights IDVA dataset 2021-22*. [Idva Dataset 2022_FINAL.pdf \(safelives.org.uk\)](#)

5 Womens Aid. *The Domestic Abuse Report 2022, The Annual Audit*. [The-Domestic-Abuse-Report-2022-The-Annual-Audit.pdf \(womensaid.org.uk\)](#)

6 White C, Martin G, Schofield AM, Majeed-Ariss R. 'I thought he was going to kill me': Analysis of 204 case files of adults reporting non-fatal strangulation as part of a sexual assault over a 3 year period. *J Forensic Leg Med*. 2021 Apr;79:102128. doi: 10.1016/j.jflm.2021.102128. Epub 2021 Feb 16. PMID: 33618205

7 Office for National Statistics (ONS). [Appendix tables: homicide in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

8, 9 Femicide Census. *Femicide Census 2020*. [010998-2020-Femicide-Report_V2.pdf \(femicidecensus.org\)](#)

10 Home Office. *Key findings from analysis of domestic homicide reviews*. [Key findings from analysis of domestic homicide reviews - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

What does this mean?

- From the limited research available it is apparent that there is a high prevalence of strangulation and suffocation among survivors accessing domestic abuse and sexual violence services.
- Data from charities supporting survivors relies on individuals having been referred to and engaged in services. Consequently, there may be many more survivors of strangulation who do not feature in these datasets.
- The statistics on strangulation and suffocation homicides are limited.
- An overview of the existing research indicates that strangulation and suffocation are under researched areas.

What next?

IFAS has been established to explore strangulation and suffocation. One facet of this is to address gaps in the knowledge base to inform best practice. This will include:

- Interrogating the Office for National Statistics data to understand prevalence within the context of for example, age of victim, relationship to perpetrator or location of homicide.
- Examining DHRs to understand where strangulation and suffocation has played a role.
- Encouraging services to collect data on strangulation and suffocation to monitor its occurrence and the effectiveness of interventions.
- Working in partnership with survivors and survivors' charities and collaborating with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Police service.



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Strangulation or asphyxiation was the second most frequent cause of homicide for women killed by men in the decade leading up to March 2020

20,000 victims in the UK experience strangulation each year