

New safeguarding data from a three-year period has been published by the Church of England today. The data is for new concerns and allegations reported to the Church in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and relates to all its work, not just to Church Officers*. The reports range from concerns about possible risk to direct allegations of abuse. *Church officer is anyone appointed / elected by or on behalf of the Church to a post or role, whether they are ordained or lay, paid or unpaid.

Over the three-year period the overall number of concerns and allegations reported relating to both children and adults was reasonably similar: 2,420 in 2019, 2,245 in 2020 and 2,385 in 2021. On average just over a third related to Church Officers (which include clergy). Concerns and allegations regarding adults have increased with a reduction in the number relating to children.

Types of abuse are also analysed with a clear increase in reports of domestic abuse and a greater awareness of spiritual abuse. Referrals to statutory authorities and direct actions by the Church are also looked at.

The data is for concerns and allegations reported to the Church across all its work and activities. For example, a church member might have disclosed that their non churchgoing partner was assaulting them, or someone with convictions for sexual offences might join a congregation. The Church aspires to be a safe space where people who have experienced abuse in other parts of their life can disclose that abuse and be supported. It also seeks to minister – safely - to those who have been perpetrators of abuse. In each of the three years reported here, over 60% of concerns and allegations were not about Church officers.

This data, now captured from dioceses in a more streamlined way since the 2018 self-assessment, will enable the Church to identify significant or emerging issues to inform dialogue and planning at a national and strategic level.

The Bishop of Manchester, David Walker, a member of the National Safeguarding Steering Group, said: “This new simplified way of collecting data from dioceses will help the Church to inform and improve its safeguarding practice and as we move forward will increasingly show trends where the Church has clearly learnt lessons or needs to improve. It is a vital part of our work to make the Church a safer place for all. Safeguarding goes on in all our 16,000 churches everyday of the year, in all its activities from worship to its many community projects and groups. While the overall reporting of concerns and allegations appears to be reasonably static, we must never forget these are people’s lives and each statistic relates to an individual. It is very important there is an awareness in the Church of how to report any concern. The Church continues to be aware of the role it plays in each community and the responsibility it has to the people it comes into contact with. The increased reports of domestic abuse to the local church, and the new training in this area, is just one example of this.”