

TRENDS IN VIOLENT CRIME SINCE 1999/2000

A report by

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March 2005

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SUMMARY

Rightly the public is concerned about violent behaviour. People reasonably expect to be safe and secure as they go about their daily business. But the information available to the public about levels and trends in violent crime is problematic. Most people's experience of violence is indirect, and newspapers and the broadcast media are the main sources of information about violent crime.

To complicate matters further, the recent statistics on violence gathered by the police and the Government currently show diametrically opposed trends in violent crime. Recorded crimes of violence against the person in England and Wales rose by 64% between 1999/2000 and 2003/04. In sharp contrast, the British Crime Survey (BCS) shows a fall in violence over this period of 21%.

There are systematic pressures for the reporting of these statistics in the worst possible light. No newspaper will lead with headlines about falling violent crime when their competitors offer stories about soaring violence. No government will wish to appear complacent in the face of newspaper reports of rising crime, and will promise tough measures to confront violence. No opposition will resist blaming the government for failing to get to grips with violence, and will make as much political capital as they can about upward trends. The message given to the public is that violence is indeed on the increase. The reality is more complicated. This report aims to distil what we can say about trends in violent crime in England and Wales over the last five years.

Statistics on violent crime

There are two main sources of information about violent crime in England and Wales: crimes recorded by the police and the British Crime Survey. The police are required to record statistics on crime, including crimes of violence. These statistics necessarily cover only those crimes which are reported to the police and those that the police themselves encounter. Trends in police statistics can mislead if – as has happened over time – people become more prepared to notify the police when they have been victims of crime.

Trends in police statistics can be misleading for other reasons. The rules for counting crimes can change over time. If two offenders jointly assault two victims, this could be treated as one crime, two crimes or four crimes, for example, under different counting rules. The police can also apply different rules at different times about the evidence needed for recording. Parliament may also create new offences, and the Home Office can extend (and has extended) the list of offences for which statistics have to be recorded.

The British Crime Survey (BCS) was set up as a complementary measure of crime. It relies on large population samples of adults in England and Wales, who are asked directly whether they have been the victim of crime over the last twelve months. The BCS provides a count of crime which includes *unreported* offences, and reported offences that have gone *unrecorded*. As the survey's methodology has been fairly stable over time, it is thought to provide a better index of crime trends than police statistics.

However, the BCS also has limitations. Its estimates of crime levels are based on samples, and are thus subject to sampling error. Not everyone selected for interview agrees to take part, and thus there is scope for sample bias. And not everyone who has been the victim of a crime will choose to provide details to an interviewer. Despite these limitations, the survey is thought by government statisticians and by academic criminologists to provide a better guide to crime trends than police statistics. All are agreed, however, that the two sources of information provide a better picture of crime than could be obtained from either series alone.

There is a third source of statistics that can shed light on crime trends, which remains somewhat underused. Police forces keep computerised logs of calls from the public for police assistance, although these are not collected centrally by the Home Office. These computer records of 'crime related incidents' can provide a further indication of crime trends, to set beside the police statistics and the British Crime Survey. They are subject to various limitations, such as changes in recording procedures and the rapidly growing ease with which people can phone the police – as mobile phone ownership rises. However, they can help in the interpretation of recorded crime statistics.

What we can say about trends in violent crime – a synthesis of the evidence

There are two opposing trends in factors that lead to violence. On the one hand – if we accept the evidence of the BCS – we are becoming less tolerant of violence and less inclined

to violence. Levels of violence committed by people known to victims are falling. So, too, are levels of domestic violence. When people are victims of domestic violence, they are more likely to report such incidents to the police.

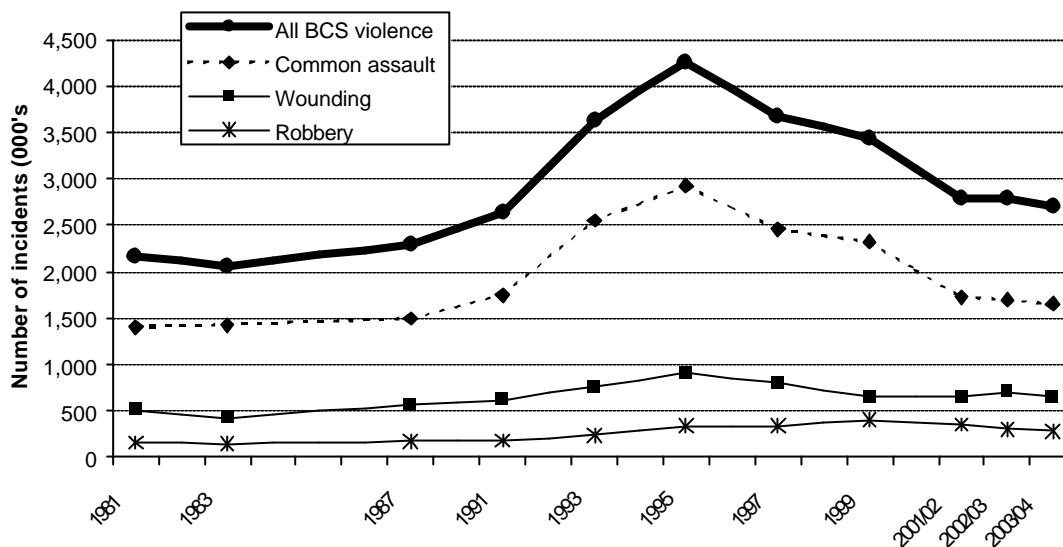
On the other hand, there are changes in patterns of leisure activity that increase the opportunities for violence. Young people are spending more time out in pubs and clubs. Consumption of alcohol is increasing, especially amongst young people, and especially outside of the home. As a result of this stranger violence is not following the same downward trend as other forms of violence.

However, the very large increase in statistics of violent crime recorded by the police is very largely artificial, reflecting fundamental changes in recording procedures and some changes in police powers to levy on-the-spot fines. Nevertheless the statistics indicate that alcohol is becoming an increasingly obvious feature in violent incidents; incidents of this sort are not falling, and there is a clear possibility that they are on the increase.

The British Crime Survey (BCS)

The BCS can provide trends on common assault, wounding and robbery. Over the last five years the methodology has changed only slightly, and there have been no changes in response rates that might give rise to artificial declines in the count of violence. Its overall trend is thus quite reliable. Nevertheless, it is at its weakest in measuring the experiences of teenage and young adult men, who are least likely to take part in the survey and more prone than others to get into fights. It undercounts such incidents, but assuming that the under-representation of young men is constant over time, the undercount will be consistent, so that the trend will be reliable. It is possible – but unlikely – that interviewers are progressively reducing time spent in very long interviews – by collecting less information about victimisation, and thus artificially reducing the count of crime. National trends are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Number of violent incidents 1981 to 2003/04: England & Wales (BCS)



Key points from the BCS

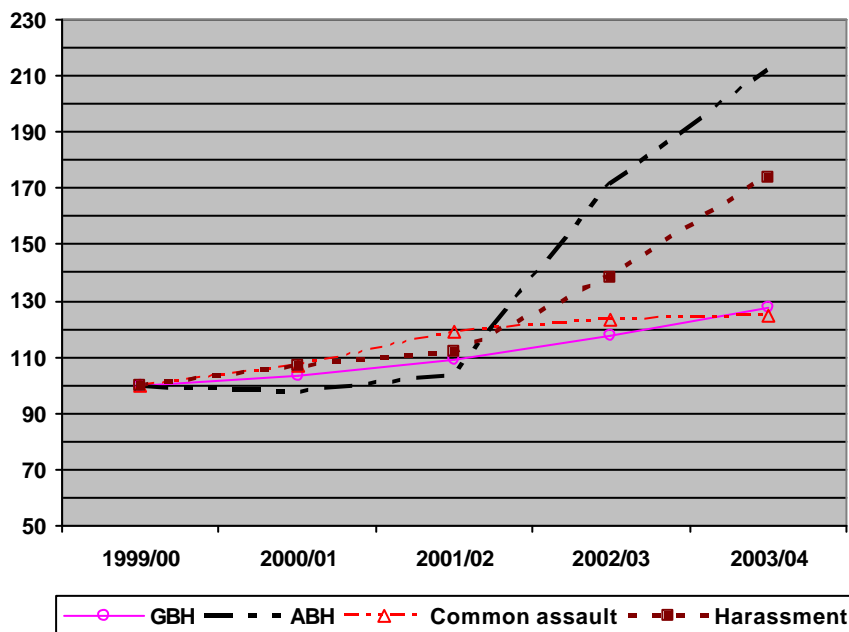
- The BCS shows a fall in violent crime since 1995 with a levelling out in the last three years.
- The trend for London is less stable; it shows the same overall fall with some indication of a rise in 2003/04 – though this may reflect sampling error.
- The nature of incidents has changed over this period, with the fall in violence between those known to each other of particular note.
- Alcohol appears to be an increasingly important element in violent incidents.
- Overall, levels of reporting of violent crime to the police have been stable, though the reporting rate for domestic violence is rising.
- While the BCS count is the best available, it is likely to be an undercount. However, this should not compromise the trend in violence as there is no evidence of an increasing loss of trivial or serious violent incidents over time.
- If the BCS is excluding a group of high-risk victims, it is doing so consistently over time. BCS trends in violence remain valid for the vast majority of the population, with most people facing a low and stable risk of violent crime.

The fall in BCS violence is largely accounted for by falls in categories of domestic and acquaintance violence. It seems intuitively plausible that violence in the home and violence between friends could be falling in parallel with a steady or rising trend in stranger violence associated with alcohol.

Recorded crime statistics

It is clear beyond doubt that recorded crime statistics are, in and of themselves, a totally unreliable guide to trends in violent crime since 1998. In all probability they will continue to be so for the next year or two. This is because there have been major changes in the counting rules, in the coverage of violent crime statistics and in the procedures for recording. All of these changes have had the effect of artificially uplifting violent crime trends. There have also been changes in police powers, notably in levying Penalty Notices for Disorder (PNDs) which will have further uplifted the count of crimes of harassment. Reflecting these changes, Figure 2 shows ‘indexed trends’ for various categories of violence against the person (VAP). The offence of Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) has more than doubled, whilst the offence of harassment shows a 74% rise.

Figure 2 Indexed trends in violence against the person, England and Wales



Estimating the inflationary potential of all these factors is impossible. The 64% rise in recorded violent crime between 1999/00 and 2003/04 statistics could actually mask a flat or falling trend.

Key points from the analysis of recorded VAP statistics

- ABH, Common Assault and Harassment offences constitute 85% of recorded VAP offences in England and Wales.
- Over 40% of recorded VAP offences involve no injury whatsoever.
- London shows a slower rate of increase, with the steepest increases in Common Assault and Harassment.
- The most recent rises in VAP offences in London appear to be alcohol-related.
- VAP offences are concentrated in town centres associated with 'night-time economy' activities.
- VAP offences involving alcohol peak on the busiest evenings for the night-time economy – Friday and Saturday nights.

Incident (CADMIS) data

We were able to examine computerised incident data only for London. These suggest that trends were level or falling until 2002, but rose in 2003 and 2004. There is some convergence of crime trends in London, in that CADMIS data, recorded crime data and the BCS all indicate a recent rise.

Changes in different types of violence

Leaving aside the professional judgement of senior officers, several factors point to the likelihood of an increase in violence associated with alcohol use, and in particular with the late-night-economy. Alcohol consumption by young men has increased, together with a culture of binge-drinking. More venues are available in town centres. Both the British Crime Survey and recorded crime statistics point to an increase in the proportion of incidents involving alcohol. If there has been a marked increase, this poses the question whether it represents a *concentration* of incidents of violence in a smaller number of locations, or whether it represents an *absolute* growth. Our GIS analysis does not support the idea of a

shift in geographic concentration of violence, but it could be that our analysis is insufficiently fine-grained to detect this shift.

This analysis has not examined gun crime and violence involving knives. However the former represents a very small proportion of the totality of violence¹, and the latter a small proportion. This omission is not intended to signify that violence involving weapons is unproblematic.

¹ In total there were 10,340 recorded firearms offences in 2003/04, or 0.9% of the total of 1.1million recorded violent crimes; 440 of these were firearms offences involving serious injury and 1,860 were firearms offences involving slight injury – 0.2% of the total.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank ACPO and the MPS for funding this study. Thanks are also due to Tony Gallagher, Graeme Keeling, Lawrence Morris and Betsy Stanko, and their colleagues in the MPS, for help and support with this study. Thanks are also due to the British Crime Survey team in the Home Office for allowing us to mount secondary analysis of the 2003/04 survey. We would also like to thank Jonathan Allen and others in the BCS team for comments on earlier drafts – though they bear no responsibility for our analysis or interpretation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Rightly the public is concerned about violent behaviour. People reasonably expect to be safe and secure as they go about their daily business. But the information available to the public about the extent of violence is problematic. Most people's experience of violence is indirect, and newspapers and the broadcast media are the main sources of information about trends in violence.

To complicate matters further, the statistics on violence gathered by the police and the Government point show diametrically opposed trends in violent crime. Recorded crimes of violence in England and Wales rose by 64% between 1999/2000 and 2003/04². In sharp contrast, the British Crime Survey (BCS) shows a fall in violence over this period of 21%³.

There are systematic pressures for the reporting of these statistics in the worst possible light. No newspaper will lead with headlines about fall in violent crime when their competitors offer stories about soaring violence. No government will wish to appear complacent in the face of newspaper reports of rising crime; no opposition will resist blaming the government for failing to get to grips with violence. The message given to the public is that violence is indeed on the increase.

The reality is more complicated. The BCS is a more reliable indicator than police statistics, and overall, it provides a better guide to real trends. At the same time, some forms of violence appear to be on the increase, especially those associated with binge-drinking and the night-time economy, and senior police officers have expressed concern about this⁴. This report aims to distil what we can say about trends in violent crime. It examines trends in England and Wales over the last five years, whilst focussing in detail on trends in London.

² Table 2.04, Dodd et al., 2004.

³ Table 2.01, Dodd et al., 2004. The time periods do not match exactly: 1999 was the calendar year, and the 2003/04 figures refer to year of interview, not year of crime.

⁴ Eg Chris Fox, http://www.acpo.police.uk/news/2004/q3/Binge_drink.html

The aims and methods of this study

This report is an attempt to unpick what can be said with confidence about crime trends. It is concerned in general with violent crime in England and Wales, but it also has a specific focus is on London. This is because the Metropolitan Police Service is the largest police force in the country, and can provide a range and depth of statistics which – though not without problems – allow fairly firm conclusions to be drawn about trends in the capital. The basic trends in London are similar to those of the country as a whole. London thus provides us with the opportunity for a detailed case-study, in other words.

Leaving aside the statistics generated by the health service, there are three main sources of information about violent crime in England and Wales:

- The crime statistics that the police are obliged by law to collate
- Estimates of victimisation derived from the British Crime Survey
- Computerised records of calls for assistance from members of the public.

We have examined each of these data sources in detail. For each, we first present basic patterns and trends. We have focussed on headline trends over time, but we have also searched for other changes in patterns of violence that might shed light on what is really going on. We then provide an assessment of the reliability of each data source over the period in question. These sections are quite technical; the aim is to pinpoint reasons for *not* taking the trend data at face value. We have drawn on other people's analysis, and have also re-analysed data ourselves.

The shape of this report

Chapter 2 presents BCS data. National and London trends are presented, followed by a critical assessment of factors that might undermine the reliability of BCS estimates. Possible undermining factors are low survey response rates for key groups of victims, changes in the overall response rate over time, and the fact that some at-risk groups, such as those under sixteen, are not covered by the BCS.

Chapter 3 examines police statistics for violent crime. After presenting national 'headline' trends, it examines London's figures in depth. Key analyses include:

- Trends for sub-categories of violence – to locate which types are growing fastest
- Changes in the geographic location of crime – to test the hypothesis that the burgeoning 'night-time economy' is changing patterns of violent crime.
- Changes in ratios between police-initiated and public-initiated crimes

We examine factors that have affected the reliability of the crime statistics. Key factors are the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard and changes in police powers, notably the ability to issue fixed penalty notices for various offences involving violent and disorderly behaviour.

Chapter 4 examines the MPS's CADMIS data. This is a potentially important and much ignored source of information. The factors that have rendered crime statistics unreliable, such as changes to recording procedures, do not affect CADMIS data – though other factors, such as increased access to phones, may affect patterns of demand. MPS CAD data have been 'cleaned', to remove duplicate calls – an increasing problem with the spread of mobile phone usage.

CHAPTER 2 THE PICTURE FROM THE BRITISH CRIME SURVEY

The British Crime Survey measures violence by asking a representative sample of adults (aged 16 and over) about their experiences of crimes in the 12 months prior to the date of interview.⁵ The survey is now conducted continuously throughout the year across England and Wales. Interviews take place in respondents' homes using computerised questionnaires. Full details of the methodology are given in the annual Technical Reports (e.g. Bolling et al 2003).⁶ Findings for England and Wales are published quarterly (e.g. Dodd et al 2004; Allen et al 2005).

In summary, all respondents are asked each of 18 to 25 so-called 'screener' questions such as "...has anyone, including people you know well, deliberately hit you with their fists or with a weapon of any sort or kicked you or used force or violence in any other way?", and if so "...how many times has this happened?".⁷ Any positive response is probed in depth on a 'victim form', which includes a text description of the incident and pre-coded questions on whether there was any theft, level of injury etc. Incidents are coded into crime types at a later date, using the information provided on the victim form.⁸

In practice this means that the BCS includes in its crime count incidents:

- that were experienced by adults living in private households in England and Wales
- that took place in England and Wales
- whether or not they were *reported* to the police
- whether or not they were *recorded* by the police
- whether or not the victim *perceives* them to have been a crime
- that match the counting crime rules used by the police, regardless of the victim's opinion of the type of offence they have experienced.

⁵ Violence is also measured on an ad hoc basis by additional self-completion components. These are discussed later.

⁶ ICPR would like to thank the Home Office for providing access to British Crime Survey data.

⁷ There are 7 extra screener questions for respondents who have moved home in the previous year.

⁸ To limit the burden on respondents, only six victim forms are completed, with priority given to personal crimes (such as violence), most recent incidents and series incidents (those where the same thing had been done in the same circumstances, probably by the same people. There is no point in asking the same questions for these, but they each contribute to the total count of crime.) Less than half a percent of respondents currently complete six victim forms.

The violent offence categories covered by the BCS are⁹:

- common assault
- wounding
- robbery and snatch theft (together referred to as mugging)

Once classified as falling within one of these offence categories, violent incidents can be grouped in many ways. For instance, BCS publications now routinely provide breakdowns of assaults according to the relationship between the victim and the offender. These give separate counts of domestic violence (committed by partners, ex-partners, household members or other relatives); acquaintance violence (where the offender was known at least by sight to the victim); and stranger violence (where the victim did not know any of the offenders in any way).

National trend in number of violent incidents

The BCS has been conducted eleven times since 1982, providing a picture of the trend in crime between 1981 and the year ending 2003/04.^{10 11} Although the focus of this report is the trend since 2000, a wider time period is taken here, as the smaller changes found over a shorter time period can be hard to detect reliably using the survey methodology.

According to the BCS, violent crime fell by 21% between 1999 and the 2003/04 BCS (Dodd et al 2004). Figure 2.1 shows the trend in the offence categories of common assault, wounding, and robbery since 1981. The national picture is of a 36% fall in the number of violent incidents since a peak in 1995, with a levelling off since the 2001/02 BCS.¹² Common assault has fallen the most (by 43% since 1995) followed by wounding (28% since 1995). The number of robbery incidents has decreased by 17% since 1995 but this is not statistically significant, because there is a high degree of sampling error associated with the rarer crimes, such as this.

⁹ Murder and manslaughter are not included in the count, for the obvious reason that there is no direct victim to report these incidents to the survey. However, they are numerically so small in number as to have little impact on the total violence count.

¹⁰ To obtain a total count of crime, the average number of crimes per BCS respondent is multiplied by the relevant adult population.

¹¹ Until the survey moved to continuous interviewing, it measured the number of incidents in the calendar year prior to the interview. It now counts the number of incidents in the 12 months prior to interview, which is a variable time period according to the date of interview.

¹² Calibrated weights have been applied to data since 1995. Calibrated weights tend to increase the estimates for violent crime, so the figures from 1995 onwards are slightly inflated relative to preceding years.

Figure 2.1 Number of violent incidents 1981 to 2003/04: England & Wales (BCS)¹³

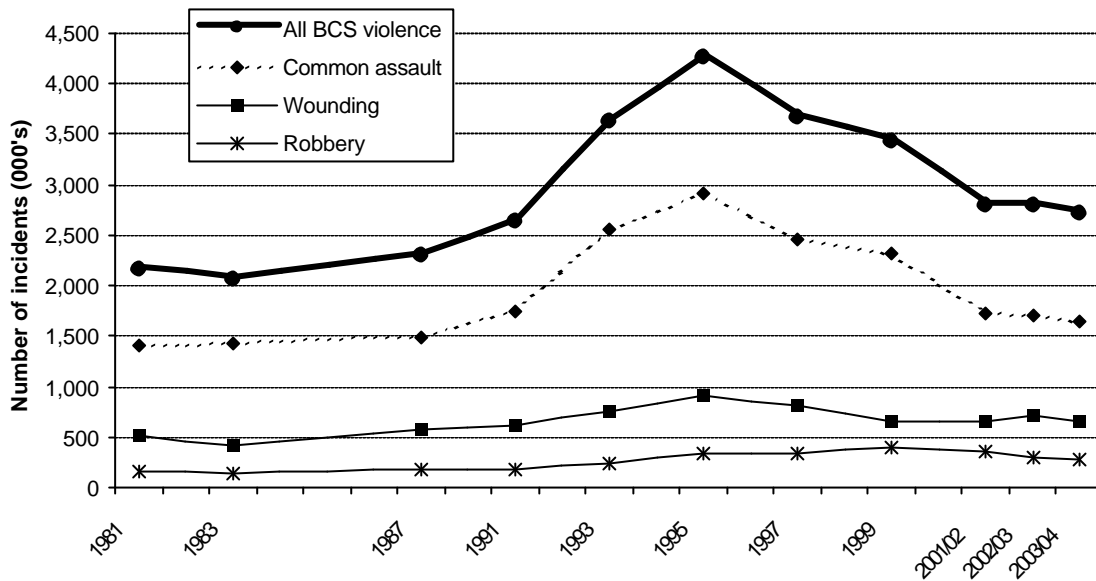
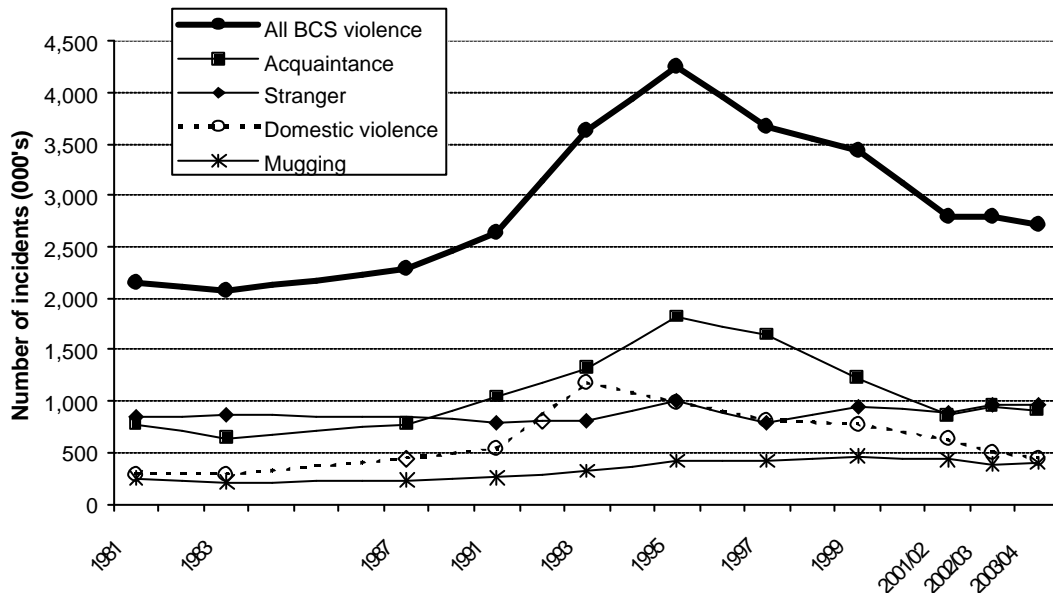


Figure 2.2 shows that the overall decrease is attributable to the large falls in both domestic (-55%) and acquaintance violence (-50%). In contrast, mugging (robbery together with snatch thefts) and stranger violence have remained fairly stable.

Figure 2.2 Number of acquaintance, stranger, domestic and mugging incidents 1981 to 2003/04: England & Wales (BCS)

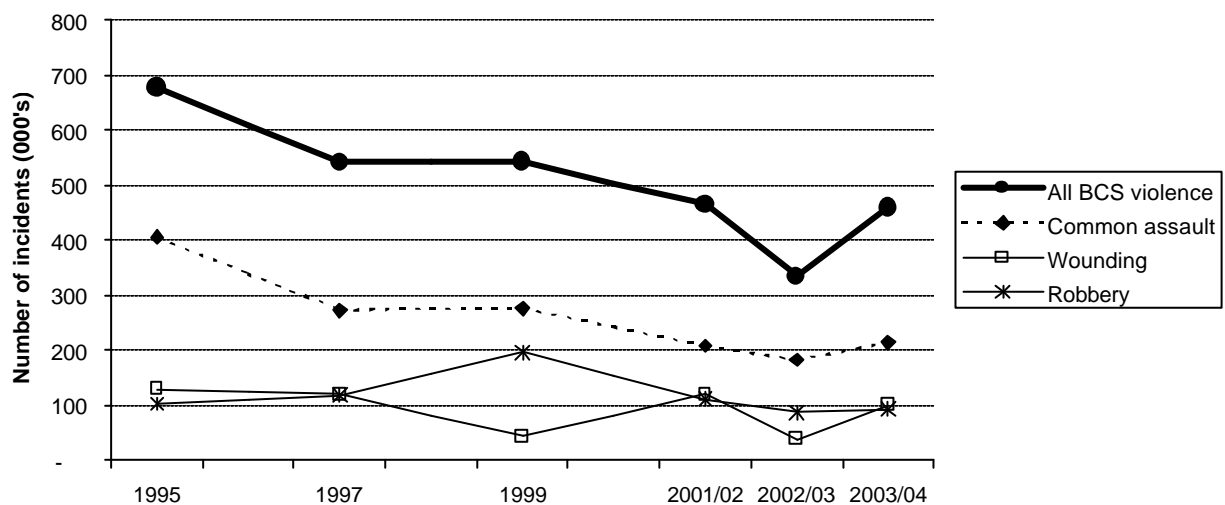


¹³ Estimates for years prior to 1995 are not directly comparable to those for later years due to the introduction of calibration weighting. Those prior to 1991 are not directly comparable with those for later years due to revisions to population and number of household estimates (see Dodd et al 2004). All BCS violence includes: common assault, wounding, robbery and snatch theft.

Trend in violent incidents in London

Crimes against Londoners (covered by the Metropolitan Police and City of London police) can be separately identified.¹⁴ Because the number of people interviewed in the London area is considerably smaller than across England and Wales, the estimates of violence are subject to large sampling error. Only very large changes over time will register as statistically significant (which is necessary for us to be reasonably confident they have actually occurred). The trends shown in Figure 2.3 should therefore be taken as indicative only. (For instance, although the point-estimate for all BCS violence in 2003/04 is 459,000 incidents, there is a 5% chance the true figure falls outside the range 373,000 to 545,000 incidents.)¹⁵ Broadly speaking, London shows the same fall in violence from a peak in 1995, mainly driven by the downward trend in common assault. The trends in wounding and robbery show the fluctuation that might be expected around estimates of rarer crimes, but it is interesting to see that the number of incidents of robbery in 1999 was almost double what it had been in 1995, and is now.¹⁶

Figure 2.3 Number of violent incidents 1995 to 2003/04: London (BCS)¹⁷



¹⁴ Police force areas can now be identified in the BCS data set. Prior to 2001 figures refer to the region covered by the Government Office for London.

¹⁵ Nevertheless, the increase between 2002/03 and 2003/04 is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). All significance tests reported here assume a design effect of 1.2.

¹⁶ The increase in wounding between 2002/03 is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). There was no statistically significant change in common assault and robbery between 2002/03 and 2003/04.

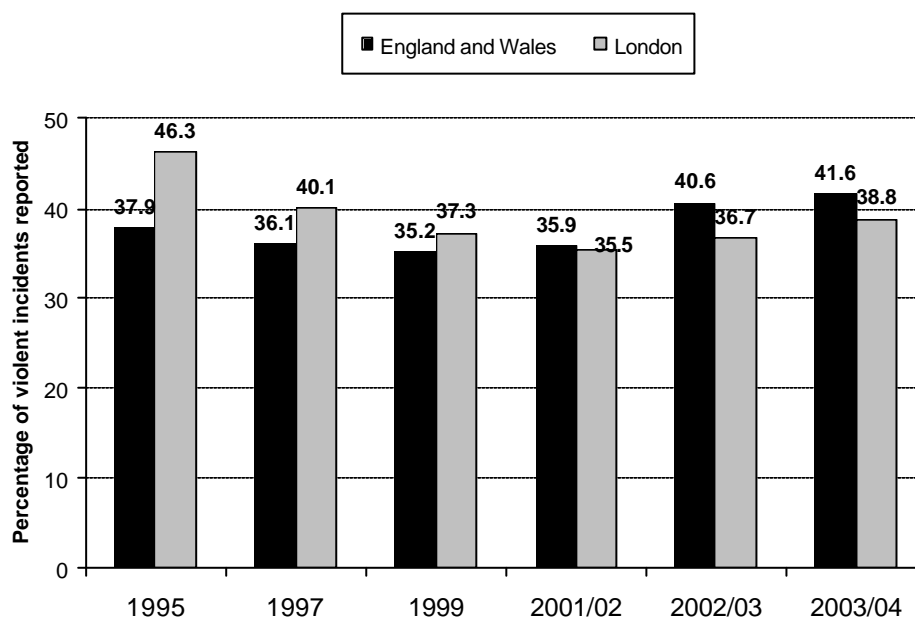
¹⁷ All BCS violence comprises: common assault, wounding, robbery and snatch theft.

Reporting to the police

The police recorded crime count can, of course, only include those incidents reported to them, or which they become aware of in some other way. Victims' propensity to report crime to the police varies over time and by type of crime. Increasing levels of phone ownership and insurance are thought to explain the rise in reporting during the nineteen-eighties, and the proliferation of mobile phones might be expected to have a similar impact.

Across England & Wales there has been a small rise in the proportion of violent incidents reported to the police since 1995 (from 38% to 42% in the 2003/04 BCS), although there was a fall around 1999 and 2001/02 in both London and elsewhere (Figure 2.4).¹⁸ London shows a fall overall, but the figures are subject to greater sampling error due to the smaller sample in London, particularly in the earlier sweeps of the BCS.¹⁹

Figure 2.4 Reporting of violent incidents to the police 1995 to 2003/04 BCS



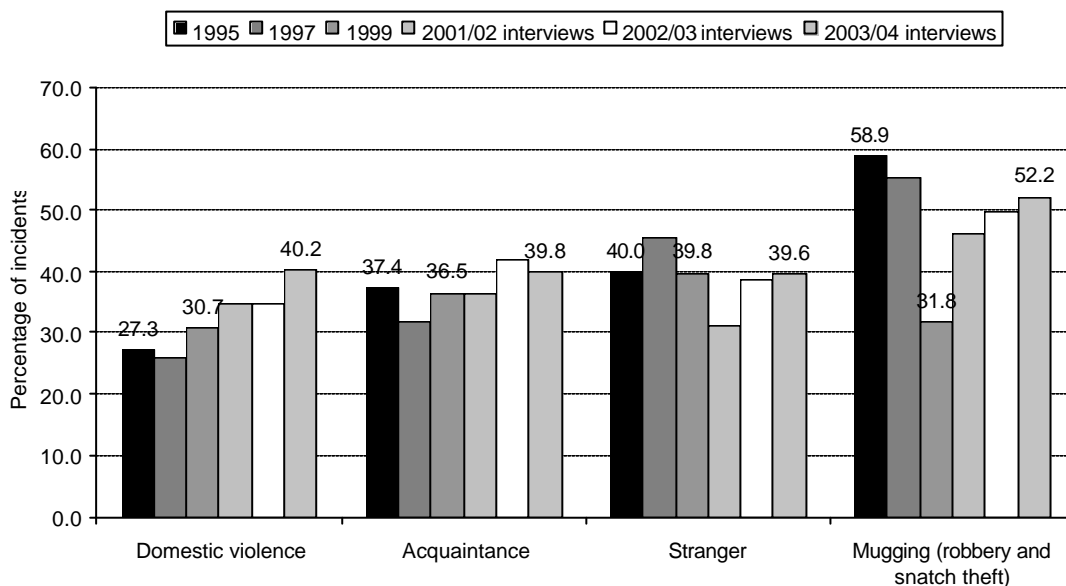
Propensity to report violence to the police has shifted markedly according to the type of violence experienced (Figure 2.5). The considerable increase in the proportion of domestic violence incidents reported to the police (from 31% in 1999 to 40% in the 2003/04 BCS) is

¹⁸ For England and Wales, the increase in the reporting rate for violent incidents between 2001/02 and 2003/04 is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), but not that between 1995 and 2003/04.

supportive evidence for the increasing unacceptability of such behaviour and the rise in levels of societal disapproval for this crime.^{20 21}

The fluctuation in the figures for mugging is at least partly explained by the small sample of these incidents picked up by the BCS. The figures for London are based on even smaller numbers, and fluctuate considerably, so are not shown here. However, the overall picture is similar, with a particularly marked increase in the reporting of domestic incidents.

Figure 2.5 Reporting of domestic, acquaintance, stranger violence and mugging to the police 1995 to 2003/04 BCS: England and Wales²²



Plotting the trend in all BCS violent incidents against that for reported incidents shows they have followed broadly the same pattern in London over the last few years (Figure 2.6).²³ The picture is too imprecise, however, to compare with the trend for recorded crime in London. For this we need to consider the sample for England and Wales as a whole.

¹⁹ For London, the fall in reporting rates for violence between 1995 and 2001/02 is statistically significant at $p < 0.10$, but the increase between 2001/02 and 2003/04 does not reach statistical significance.

²⁰ An alternative explanation is that domestic incidents not reported to the police are being increasingly hidden from BCS interviewers. The problem of 'hidden violence' is discussed further below.

²¹ The increase in the proportion of domestic violence incidents reported to the police in England and Wales is statistically significant for 1995 to 2003/04 ($p < 0.05$); for 1999 to 2003/04 ($p < 0.10$).

²² Source: Dodd et al (2004).

²³ The increase in all BCS incidents in London between 2002/03 and 2003/04 is statistically significant at ($p < 0.05$). The increase in reported incidents does not quite reach statistical significance ($p < 0.11$).

Figure 2.6 Trend in all violence and reported violence 1995 to 2003/04: London (BCS)

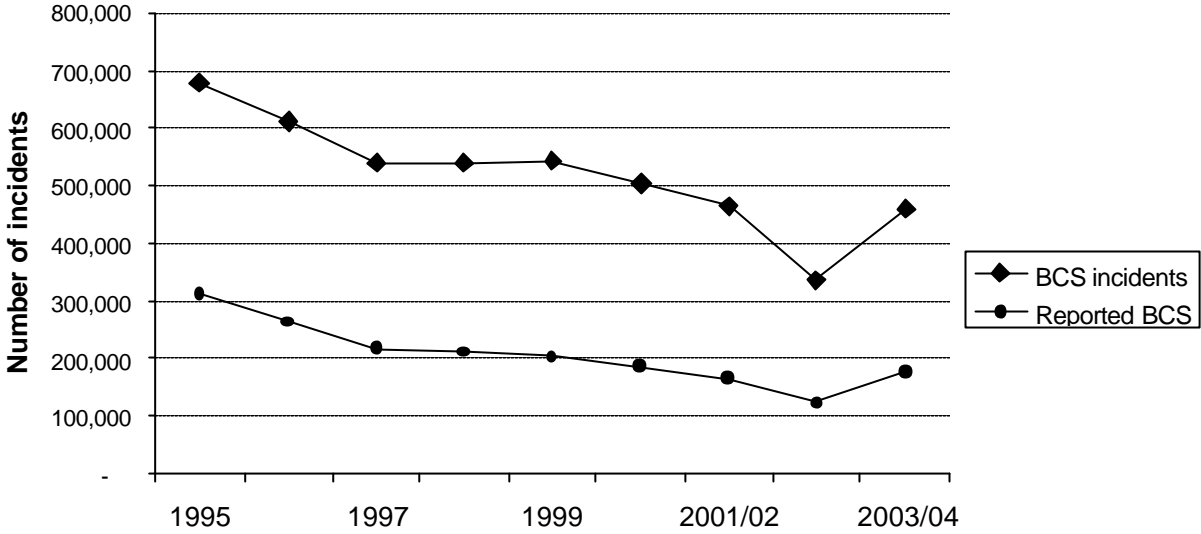
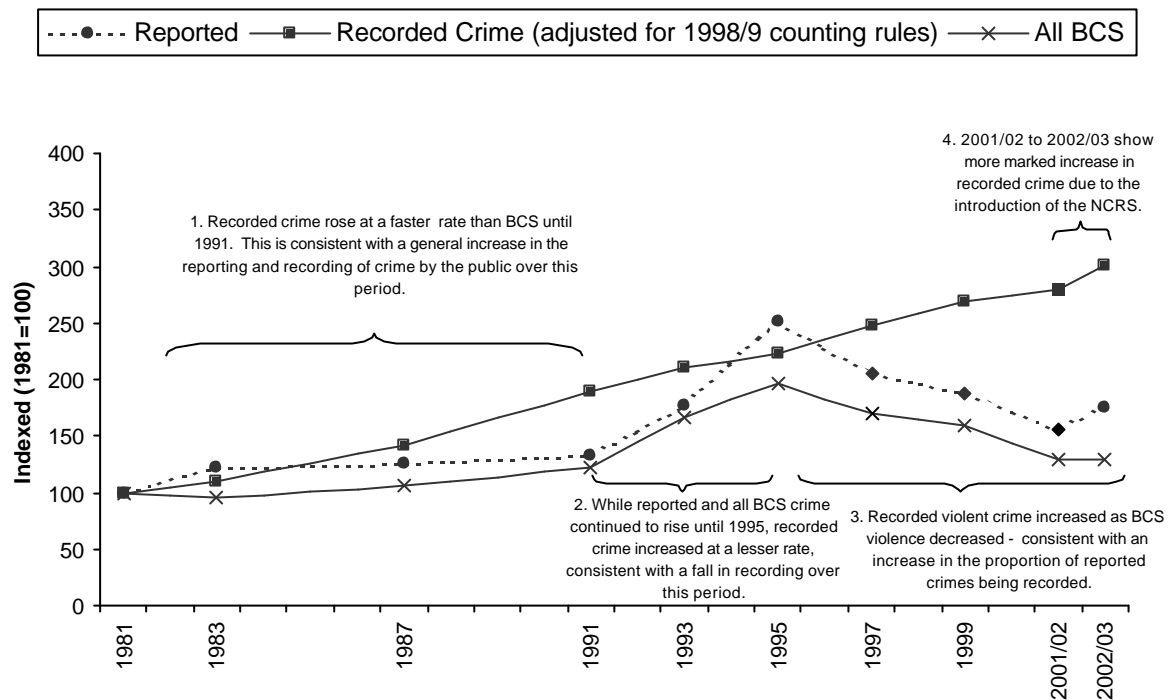


Figure 2.7 (taken from Smith and Allen, 2004) indexes all BCS violence, reported BCS violence and recorded violence against the person at the same value in 1981 and compares their year-on-year change until the 2002/03 BCS. Over this period, the number of violent crime incidents increased by 29%, while the number of reported crime incidents increased by 76%. The number of comparable recorded incidents, however, nearly trebled – suggesting the proportion of reported violent crime being recorded by the police has greatly increased over this period.²⁴

²⁴ To compare the BCS crime count with that of recorded crime it is necessary to make some adjustments to recorded crime. Only certain categories can be compared, essentially those crimes with a private individual aged 16 or over as the victim. For some categories of crime, therefore, it is necessary to exclude a proportion of incidents against the under 16s and commercial victims. Some police forces are able to separately identify these incidents, but others can only estimate. These adjustments are not, therefore, very precise. In 2003/04 the England and Wales recorded crime total for common assaults was reduced by 21% ,for woundings by 12% and for robbery by 19% to account for incidents against under 16s (Thorpe, 2004).

Figure 2.7 Indexed trends in the reporting and recording of violent crime and all BCS violent crime, 1981 to 2002/03 (1981 = 100): England and Wales



Notes:

- For 2001/02 and 2002/03, reported and all BCS crime relate to interviews carried out in the 2001/02 and 2002/03 financial years respectively, and incidents experienced in the 12 months prior to interview. Recorded crime relates to incidents in the 12 months up to the end of September 2001 and September 2002 respectively (with most of the impact of the NCRS in the first quarter of the financial year). This is so that the recorded crime data are centred on the same period as reported and all BCS crime – i.e. centred on March 2001 and March 2002.
- For the purpose of this chart the recorded crime trend has been adjusted to account for the changes in the counting rules in 1998/9.

Unequal risks of violent crime

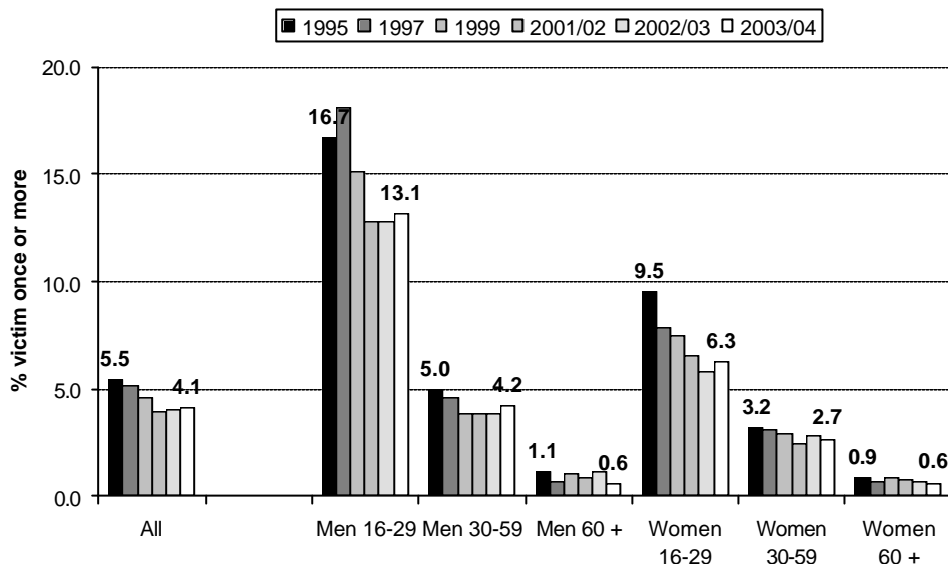
So far we have considered trends in the number of violent incidents. The BCS also allows us to look at changes in the proportion of people becoming victims annually. Between 1995 and the 2003/04 BCS there was a fall in this figure for violent crime from 5.5% of adults, to 4.1%.

Risks of becoming a victim of violent crime vary markedly, with variations in the types of people at risk of different types of violence. Young men are at far the greatest risk, though the proportion falling victim to one or more violent crimes has fallen from 16.7% to 13.1% across the survey years (Figure 2.8).²⁵ Risks of violent crime are lower for women overall, and generally reduce with age. A decrease in risk has been seen for all groups, with the

²⁵ The fall in risk for men aged 16 to 29 is statistically significant (p<0.05).

proportionately greatest fall in the 60+ age category.²⁶ The picture for London is broadly similar, though with some fluctuation due to the small sample sizes.

Figure 2.8 Trend in risk of violent crime by age and sex 1995 to 2003/04 BCS: England and Wales

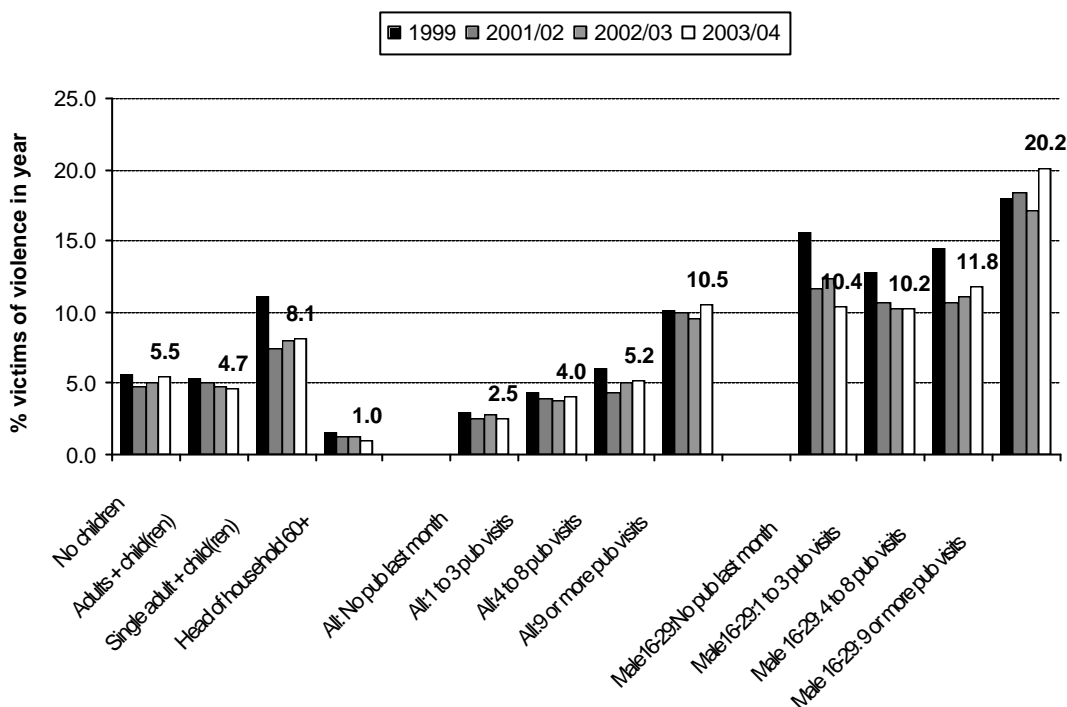


Previous work has shown the heightened risk for single-parent families (mainly due to domestic violence) and frequent evening pub visits (Budd, 2003). The proportion of single adults living with children who were victims of violent crime fell between 1999 and the 2001/02 BCS but has been edging up slightly since (Figure 2.9). The 1999 figures are generally less reliable due to the smaller sample in that year. Risks of experiencing violence generally increase the more frequent the evening pub visits. In part this reflects the younger age profile of the more regular pub customers. The third set of figures in Figure 2.9 shows how risks for young males are heightened, even if they don't regularly visit pubs. Nevertheless, for the most frequent drinkers the risks rise markedly: to one in five experiencing violence.²⁷ And this is one in five of a fairly substantial part of the young male population: a quarter visit pubs this frequently.

²⁶ The fall in risk for the 60 plus age group is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

²⁷ The greater risk of violence for young males who visit pubs 9 or more times per month, compared to other young males is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 2.9 Trend in risk of violent crime by household structure and evening pub visits per month 1999 to 2003/04: England and Wales (BCS)



Is the nature of violence changing?

To determine whether the nature of violent incidents picked up by the BCS has been changing over time, violent incidents picked up by the survey in 1996 and 1998 are compared to those from the 2002/03 and 2003/04 surveys.²⁸

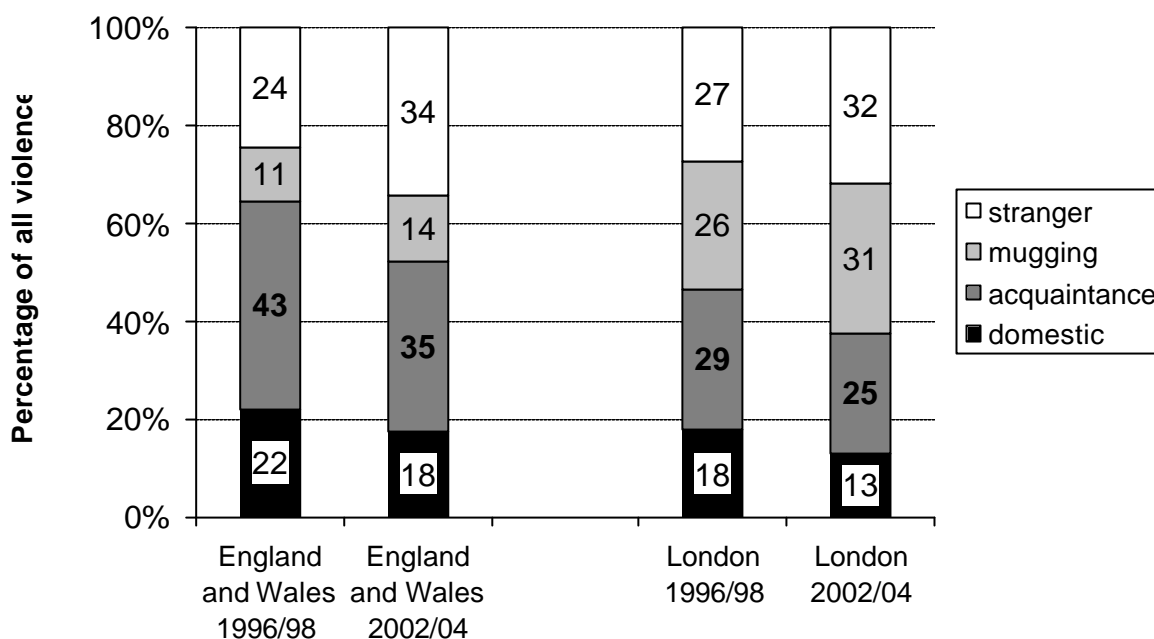
By typology

Between 1996/96 and 2002/04 there has been a considerable fall in the proportion of incidents that are committed by people known to the victim. Across England and Wales, domestic and acquaintance incidents now make up just over half of violent incidents, compared to nearly two-thirds in 1996/98 (Figure 2.10). This fall is equally apparent in London, where domestic and acquaintance violence continue to make up a smaller

²⁸ Sweeps are combined to increase the number of incidents for analysis. New (calibrated) weights are available from the 1996 sweep of the survey only. As the new weights give very similar total weighted samples no additional weighting of the sweeps has been undertaken when combining sweeps. Incidents in the 1996/98 surveys will have taken place from January 1995 up to about June 1998. Incidents in the 2002/04 surveys will have taken place between April 2001 and March 2004. For England and Wales, findings are based on 2129 incidents in 1996/98 and 3077 incidents in 2002/04. For London the respective figures are 410 and 385. The total number is slightly reduced for questions that were not asked on the short victim forms.

proportion of all incidents.²⁹

Figure 2.10 Violence typology 1996/08 and 2002/04 (BCS)



By sex of assailant

Although men continue to be the main perpetrators of violent crime, women are increasingly involved, particularly in violence against other women. Across England and Wales women are now involved in 21% of incidents, compared to 18% in 1996/98 (Table 2.1). Although women were less often cited as perpetrators in London, this difference has now disappeared with women involved in 22% of incidents, compared to 15% in 1996/98.³⁰

Table 2.1 Sex of assailant by sex of victim: 1996/98 and 2002/04 BCS

		England and Wales		London	
Sex of assailant		1996/98	2002/04	1996/98	2002/04
Male victims	One/all male	87	85	86	82
	One/all female	7	7	10	11
	Mixed sex	6	8	4	7
Female victims	One/all male	72	69	84	72
	One/all female	22	22	10	19
	Mixed sex	5	9	6	9
All victims	One/all male	82	79	85	78
	One/all female	13	13	10	14
	Mixed sex	6	8	5	8

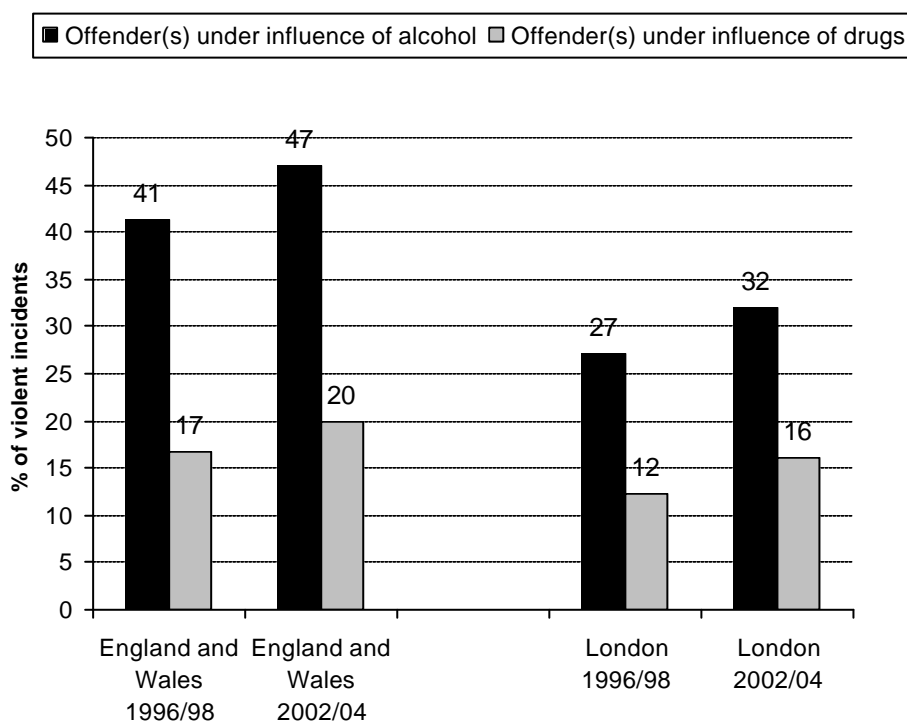
²⁹ The fall in the proportion of violence that is domestic or acquaintance is statistically significant for England and Wales ($p < 0.05$) and London ($p < 0.05$).

³⁰ The increase in the proportion of incidents involving a female offender is statistically significant: London ($p < 0.05$); England and Wales ($p < 0.10$).

Alcohol and drugs

Victims are asked in the BCS whether the person who attacked them was under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. In many cases they are not able to say, but there is, nevertheless, a clear increase in the proportion of incidents in which victims believe alcohol did play a part: from 41% in 1996/98 to 47% in 2002/04 (Figure 2.11).³¹ This is in line with the increase in the proportion of 'stranger violence', which is the type of violence most likely to involve alcohol (61% of E&W assailants were said to be under the influence, and 39% of victims said they themselves had been drinking (2002/04 BCS)). Interestingly, victims in London are far less likely to think their assailant was under the influence of alcohol, although the trend is also upward.³² Drugs also show an increase and are now cited in a fifth of violent incidents in England and Wales, and 16% of incidents in London.³³

Figure 2.11 Offender(s) under the influence of alcohol / drugs 1996/98 and 2002/04 (BCS)



Location

Violent incidents can occur anywhere, with the victim's home being one of the most common locations. The more recent figures suggest an increase in the proportion of incidents

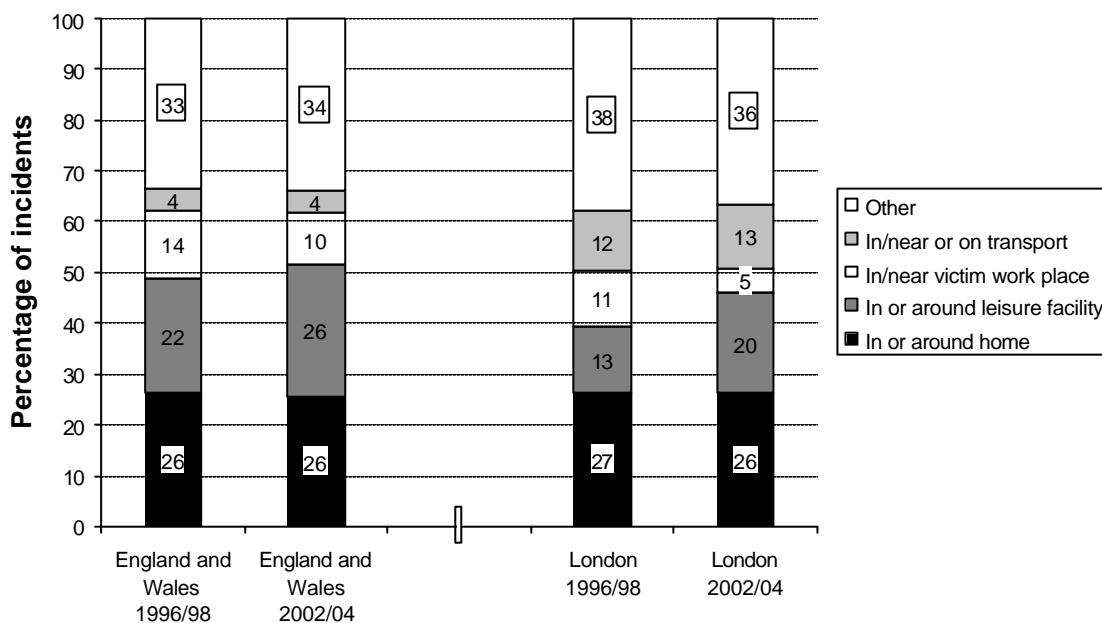
³¹ The upward trend for England and Wales is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

³² The upward trend for London does not reach statistical significance, reflecting the smaller sample size.

³³ The upward trend for England and Wales is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$); that for London is not.

occurring in or around leisure facilities - which includes, for instance, pubs, clubs, restaurants and cinemas (Figure 2.12). This trend is particularly marked in London, which shows an increase from 13% to 20% of violent incidents occurring in these locations.³⁴ The fall in the proportion in or near the victim's work place across England and Wales and in London is encouraging, suggesting that the various zero tolerance initiatives by employers are having some impact.³⁵ The greater proportion of incidents occurring on or around transport facilities in London (13% in 2002/04) than elsewhere (4%) is interesting, but not surprising.

Figure 2.12 Location of violent incidents 1996/98 and 2002/04 BCS



Many alcohol related assaults happen in the context of the night-time economy. Budd (2003) found around a half took place in or around pubs, clubs or discos. Most of the remaining occurred in other public places, including around entertainment venues and transport facilities.

The victims

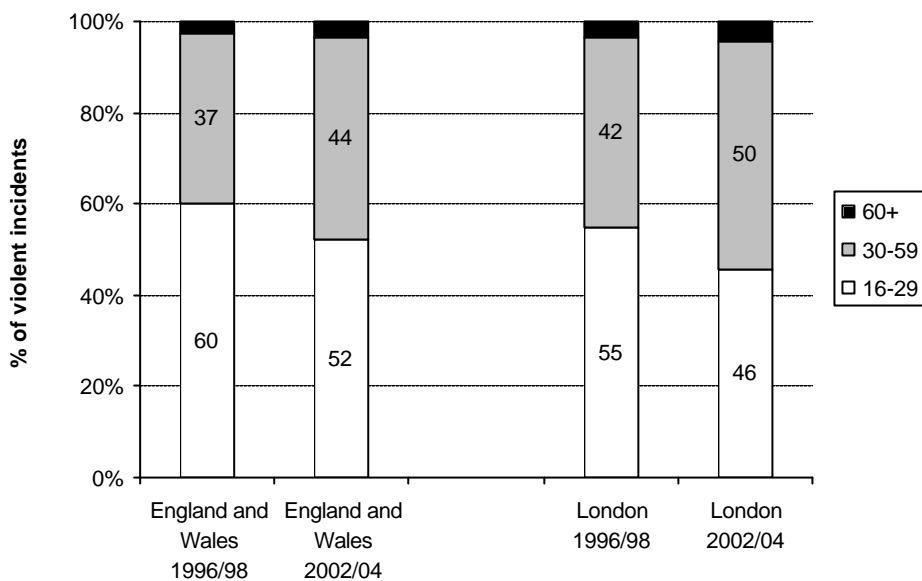
The sex distribution of victims of violence has not changed between the two time periods, with men making up nearly two thirds (64%) of victims – both in London and across England & Wales. There is some evidence, though, of an increase in the age of victims, both male

³⁴ The increase in the proportion of incidents occurring in or around leisure facilities is statistically significant for England and Wales ($p < 0.05$) and London ($p < 0.05$).

³⁵ The fall in the proportion of incidents occurring in or around work is statistically significant for England and Wales ($p < 0.05$) and London ($p < 0.05$).

and female (Figure 2.13).³⁶

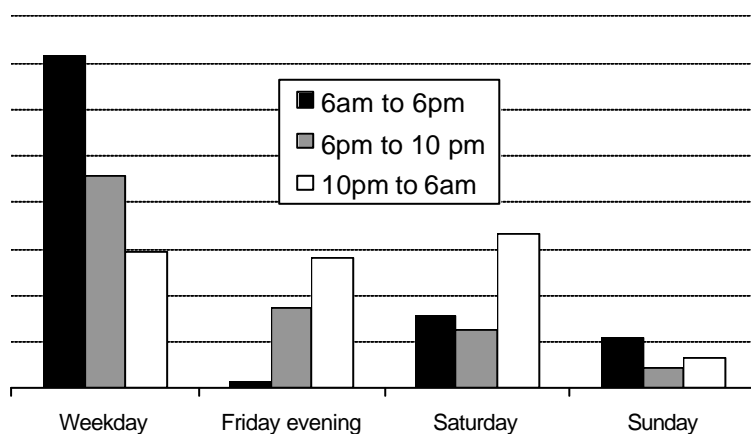
Figure 2.13 Violent incidents: victim's age 1996/98 and 2002/04 BCS



When violence occurs

Recorded crime shows a clear pattern of violence peaking around midnight on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights (see Chapter 2). The BCS shows similar peaks on Friday and Saturday evenings (Figure 2.14). During the week, violence is far more likely to occur during the day.³⁷

Figure 2.14 Time of week / day of violence (distribution of BCS incidents) 2002/04 BCS: England & Wales³⁸



³⁶ The increase in the proportion of victims aged 30 or over is statistically significant for England & Wales ($p < 0.05$) and London ($p < 0.05$).

³⁷ A change to the question makes a comparison with 1996/98 problematic.

³⁸ Excludes 6% of incidents that could not be classified into the categories shown.

How much confidence should we have in the BCS findings?

BCS analysts have always acknowledged that measuring violence is particularly problematic, and although probably the best available measure, it is important to consider how the potential shortcomings could undermine the picture of violence it provides. We first consider the violence that is hidden from the survey, whether deliberately or not. Then we evaluate the impact of hidden victims, that is victims of violence who are not included in the survey either because they do not take part for some reason or because the survey is designed to exclude them. While hidden violence and hidden victims will have some impact on the absolute count of violence, they are not necessarily a threat to the validity of the trend if the impact they have is consistent over time. Finally we consider the special case of mugging.

Hidden violence

The survey methodology is dependent on respondents accurately recalling and reporting to the survey what they have experienced and when it occurred. Undoubtedly some incidents will be forgotten but there may also be some exaggeration. There is likely to be some differential effect here as serious events are generally more memorable than trivial ones, and tend to be remembered as occurring more recently than they actually did.

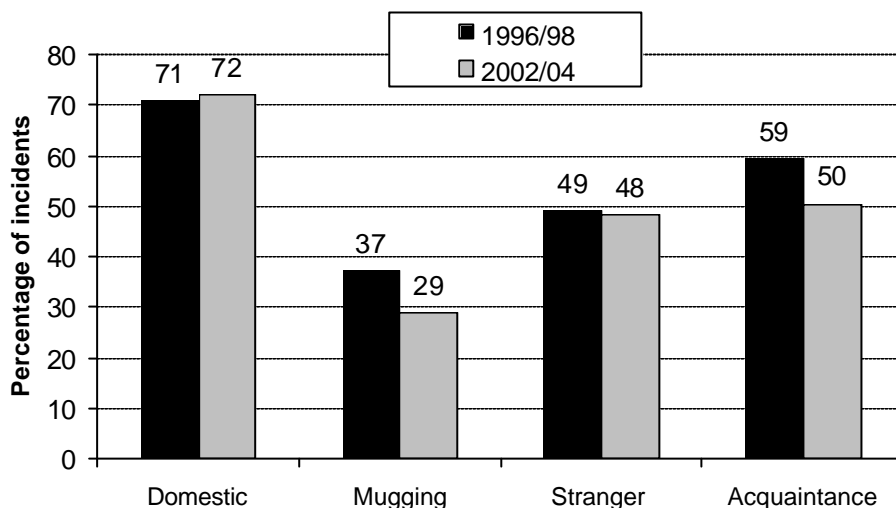
Some experiences may be too trivial or 'everyday' for respondents to recall as a victimisation. People will vary in their tolerance of essentially the same behaviour. Young men, for instance, might not view a fight with an acquaintance as an event worthy of mentioning if, that is, they recall it at all. Violent incidents of this type might well be undercounted. However, if levels of tolerance remain stable over time, the loss of these types of incidents from the count should not affect the year on year trend.

A proportionate increase in the seriousness of incidents picked up by the BCS would suggest respondents were not being sufficiently prompted by BCS interviewers to recall less memorable events. One measure of the seriousness of violence is whether it resulted in any injury to the victim. In fact there has been a *fall* in the proportion of incidents in which the victim said they were injured in some way: from 57% to 51% across England and Wales, and from 50% to 42% in London.³⁹ This is probably due to the fall in the proportion of violence that is domestic, which typically has a very high chance of resulting in injury (70% of domestic incidents did so in 2003/04) (Figure 2.15). The chance of being injured in a

³⁹ The fall in the proportion of incidents involving injury is statistically significant for England and Wales ($p < 0.05$) and London ($p < 0.10$).

mugging has decreased from 37% to 29 % between the 1996/98 and 2002/04 surveys, perhaps reflecting an increase in the proportion of muggings that are ‘snatch thefts’ rather than robbery.⁴⁰ There is no evidence, therefore, of a loss of less serious incidents from the BCS count over time.

Figure 2.15 Proportion of violence typology in which victim injured 1996/98 and 2002/04 BCS: England and Wales



At the other end of the scale, there will be an undercount of the most serious types of incidents. These are the experiences that are too sensitive or traumatic for BCS interviewers (particularly sexual and domestic incidents). To provide a more secure environment for respondents to report incidents of sexual and domestic violence to the survey, some BCS sweeps have included self-report components. These guarantee confidentiality and anonymity respondents to reveal to to respondents, and give far higher estimates of these types of crime than the main BCS. For reasons of continuity, these ‘additional’ incidents are not added to the main BCS violence count, but they do provide an alternative measure of violence. Although there have been changes to the way these components ask about violence, there is some evidence that the prevalence of domestic violence - as measured in this way - fell between the 1996 (Mirrlees-Black, 1999) and 2001 (Walby and Allen, 2004) surveys, mirroring the fall in the main BCS count. Again, therefore, there is no reason to believe that the main BCS count has lost an increasing proportion of these types of incident.

Violent incidents could also become lost to the survey if they are incorrectly coded into non-violent crime types as part of the post-interview process. However, the Home Office monitors

⁴⁰ The fall in the proportion of mugging incidents involving injury in England and Wales is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

this closely, by routine checking of the data and by checking the correspondence between the responses to screener questions and the final offence codes. A final point that should be made is that incidents could also become lost to the survey if BCS respondents and/or interviewers deliberately exclude them to minimise the length of the interview. The way the BCS questionnaire is designed is such that respondents should not realise that admitting to a large number of incidents at the screener question stage will greatly lengthen the interview. Also, the method of recompensing BCS interviewers is intended to ensure they are not dissuaded from completing victim forms. Although essentially paid per completed interview, there is an additional sum for completion of victim forms. Any change in the way interviewers are recompensed could have an impact here, but there has been no such change for some years. It is certainly the case that the proportion of victims who had experienced two or more incidents of violence has decreased markedly over the years, from 37% in 1995 to 26% in the 2003/04 BCS⁴¹, but this may well reflect a genuine reduction in the chance of being a repeat victim of violence. This is likely given the fall in the proportion of adults who are victims of domestic or acquaintance violence (which are the types of violence that are more often experienced repeatedly).

Hidden victims

It has also been acknowledged that the BCS does not cover all potential victims of violence, and that some of the groups excluded may be at particular risk. These include, for instance, the homeless - although the number of these is so small as to have little impact on the BCS estimates of crime. In common with all household surveys, it is particularly difficult to interview people who spend a lot of time outside the home, or are not keen on inviting an interviewer in to their home.

To ensure that the sample remains as representative as possible, it is important to maintain a good 'response rate', that is the proportion of people asked to take part who did so. The BCS has always had a relatively good response rate compared to many government surveys, but in common with surveys generally the response rate has fallen since the eighties. Interestingly the highest response rate was achieved in the 1996 BCS (83%) and it may be that some of the 'peak' in violence this sweep found was due to the sample including a harder to reach element that were more likely to have been victimised. However, it is noteworthy that the BCS decline in violent crimes continued year on year for the rest of the 1990s, when response rates re-stabilised at around 74%.

⁴¹ There has also been a rise in the average 'seriousness score' attributed by victims of violence to their crime – in contrast to overall BCS crimes (see Table 2.03 of HOSB 07/03). This could indicate either that less serious offences of violence are being lost to the survey, or alternatively, that the trend

So who make up the missing 26%? Comparing the BCS sample to the census gives an indication of who is missing. In common with most household surveys the BCS interviews a smaller proportion of young men and the elderly than would be expected given their number in the general population. To counteract this, the BCS data is adjusted (using calibration weighting) to make the weighted sample representative of the population. This procedure is highly recommended by survey statisticians to reduce non-response bias in survey findings.

It is worth confirming, nonetheless, that the weighted sample shows no attrition of high-risk individuals over time. For instance, the proportion of respondents saying they visited a pub or wine-bar in the evening more than nine times in the previous month has remained at a steady 9% in the last three sweeps.

Two groups who are systematically excluded from the BCS for methodological reasons are the under 16s and non-household targets (i.e. public and business premises). Surveys for younger people have to be designed specifically with those groups in mind, recognising the different context within which they live, cognitive limitations, and the potential sensitivities in interviewing them at home. To address this the Home Office has developed a victimisation component in its Crime and Justice Survey, and findings on victimisation of young people should soon become routinely available. Findings from the first sweep suggest risks of violence for the under 16s are no greater than those for the 16 to 19 age group (Wood, 2005). Currently available are the annual MORI youth surveys conducted for the Youth Justice Board. These ask about victimisation in a rather simplistic way, and questions have changed, but the findings appear to show that the prevalence of violent crime has remained stable for the past few years for this group, though there is a slight increase between 2003 and 2004.

Different surveys also have to be employed to measure violent crimes aimed at business premises, such as bank robberies. This is partly because of the nature of the sample, and partly because the types of crimes experienced are somewhat different. The Home Office has twice conducted surveys measuring crime against retailers and manufacturers. These found a slightly higher prevalence of violent crime amongst retailers in 2002 than in 1994: 23% compared with 20%. However, this could partly reflect changes to employers recording practices, following the introduction of legislation in 1995 that required employers to report serious incidents to their enforcing authority. There was no change in the rate of violent crime

reflects growing intolerance of violence.

among manufacturers (Mirrlees-Black and Ross, 1995; Taylor, 2004).

Mugging

There is a widespread belief that the chance of being mugged has increased dramatically since the late nineties, with the proliferation of mobile phones putting people at increased risk. This is certainly confirmed in the recorded crime figures, which show a dramatic increase between 1998/99 (56,354 incidents of personal robbery) and 2001/02 (108,173 incidents).

The BCS also shows an increase in the number of personal robberies in 1999 (406,000 incidents), but this fell back (to 356,000 incidents) in the 2001/02 survey.⁴² Because robbery remains a rare event, the BCS estimates have a very wide margin of error. Combining robbery with snatch thefts to create the category of 'mugging' slightly improves the precision of the estimates, though the upturn around the 1999 to 2001/02 period still fails to reach statistical significance, and the rise is not as dramatic as in the police figures.

There are many possible reasons why the police measured increase was so much greater:

- that under 16s (not included in the BCS) are making up an increasing proportion of mugging victims (although there is no evidence for this from victim surveys, see discussion above)
- that it is difficult for the BCS to detect shifts in rare crimes such as snatch theft and robbery (a decreasing problem with the increasing sample size)
- that the police responded to a relatively small increase with a large increase in recording
- that reporting and recording increased as victims were required to get a 'police incident number' for insurance purposes

There is certainly evidence from the BCS that the nature of mugging has changed in the last few years. Although young men have always been at greatest risk of robbery, older women have traditionally been the victims of snatch theft (e.g. handbags). Now, however, the young, and young men in particular, are making up an increasing proportion of snatch theft victims, while young women are making up a greater proportion of robbery (Table 2.2).⁴³ Arguably this supports the hypothesis that the advent of mobile phones has changed the profile of mugging.

⁴² The change in the incident rate for robbery over this period is not statistically significant.

⁴³ The increase in the proportion of young male victims of snatch theft is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), as is the increase in the proportion of young female victims of robbery ($p < 0.05$).

**Table 2.2 Sex and age of victims of incidents of snatch theft, robbery and mugging
1996/98 and 2002/04 BCS: England & Wales**

	Snatch theft		Robbery		Mugging	
	1996/98	2002/04	1996/98	2002/04	1996/98	2002/04
Men 16-29	10	29	51	42	44	39
Men 30-59	10	8	19	19	17	16
Men 60+	2	1	2	3	2	2
Women 16-29	24	24	10	17	13	19
Women 30-59	33	26	14	13	18	17
Women 60+	20	12	4	5	6	7
	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	71	151	254	376	325	527

Notes: Base is all incidents in relevant sweeps, not just those falling within the annual count.

Conclusions

- The BCS shows a fall in violent crime since 1995 with a levelling out in the last three years. The trend for London is less stable, but shows the same overall fall.
- The nature of incidents has changed over this period, with the fall in violence between those known to each other of particular note.
- Other changes in the nature of incidents reflect a recognisable change in the picture of violence, with alcohol an increasingly important element.
- Little of the recent increase in police recorded violence can be attributed to an increase in the reporting of violence to the police, suggesting that most of the increase must be explained by an increase in police recording of incidents.
- While the BCS count is the best available, it is likely to be an undercount. However, this should not compromise the trend in violence as there is no evidence of an increasing loss of trivial or serious violent incidents over time.
- If the BCS is excluding a group of high-risk victims, it is doing so consistently over time. BCS trends in violence remain valid for the vast majority of the population, with most people facing a low and stable risk of violent crime.

Chapter 3: Recorded crime statistics

Police forces are required to make annual returns to the Home Office of all 'notifiable' offences. Recorded crime statistics for violence against the person (VAP) include:

- Homicide
- GBH (Grievous Bodily Harm)
- ABH (Actual Bodily Harm)
- Common assault
- Carrying an offensive weapon
- Harassment

Two of these, common assault and harassment⁴⁴, became notifiable offences in 1998. The remainder have been in returns to the Home Office for many years. Common assault previously was taken to involve assaults with minimal injury, although the threshold between common assault and ABH has now been changed; the former should involve no injury whatsoever. Harassment is an offence established in section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 (causing harassment, alarm or distress), and again involves no injury.

The 'headline' annual increases in VAP offences were 3% in 2000/01, 8% in 2001/02, 28% in 2002/03 and 14% in 2003/04. Figure 3.1 provides a breakdown of the 955,752 VAP offences recorded by the police in England and Wales in 2003/04. The largest category is ABH, following by common assault. Harassment accounts for one in six offences. ABH, common assault and harassment account for 85% of the total; and one in four violent crimes involves no injury whatsoever. GBH represented only 2% of the total, and homicide 0.1% - or 853 offences. Excluding the victims of Dr Shipman, most of which were recorded in 2002/03, the trend has been fairly steady, since 2000/01, though annual numbers are around 100 higher than in the 1990s. No more attention is given in this report to homicide

Figure 3.2 shows trends for the major categories of VAP in England and Wales. Trends are indexed, with values at 1999/00 representing 100%. Trends for GBH and common assault show shallow rises, and those for harassment and assault show a sharp increase starting in 2002/03. As will be discussed below, the main explanation – but not the sole explanation – for these complex patterns of trend are to be found in radical changes to procedures for recording crime introduced in 2002/03.

⁴⁴ The Home Office count of notifiable offences includes other harassment offences under the Public Order Act 1986 and the Protection from Harassment Act, 1997.

Figure 3:1 Breakdown of violence against the person, England and Wales, 2003/04

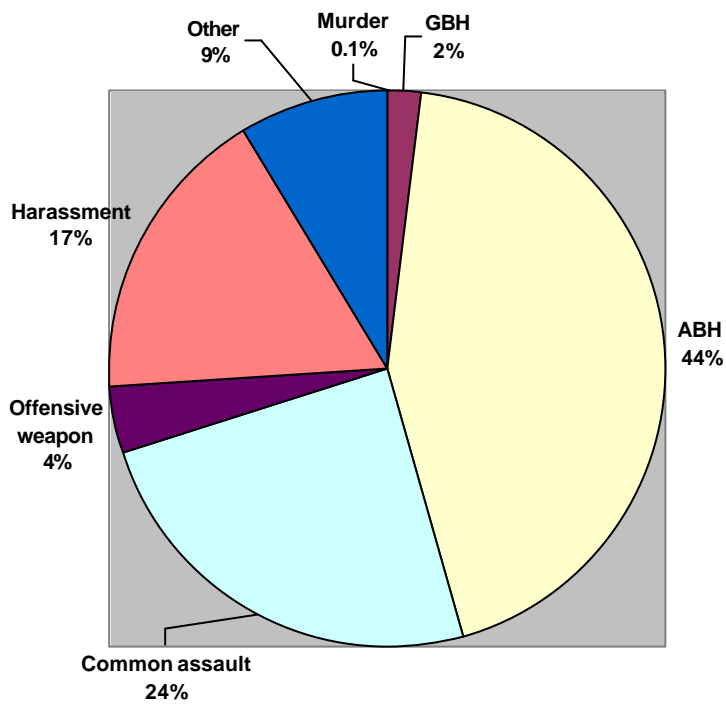
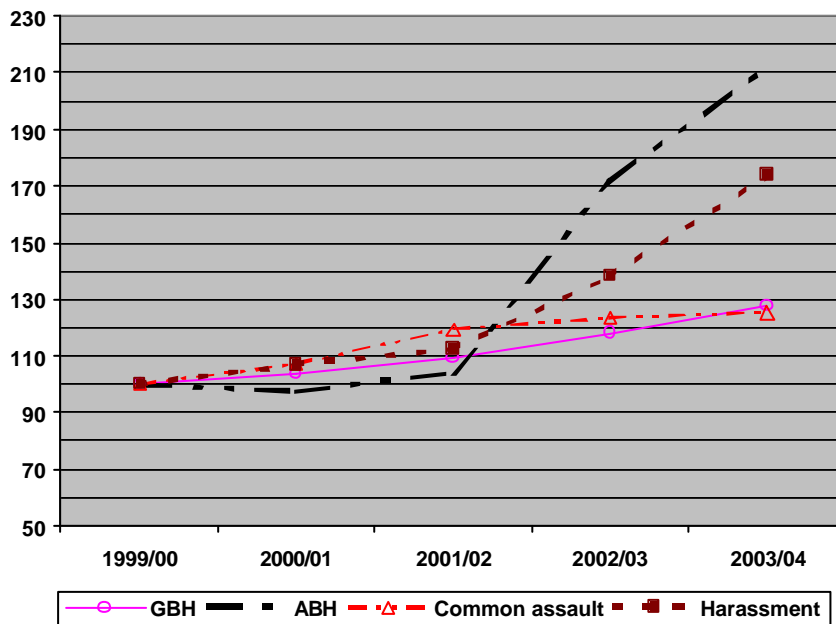


Figure 3.2 Indexed trends in violence against the person, England and Wales



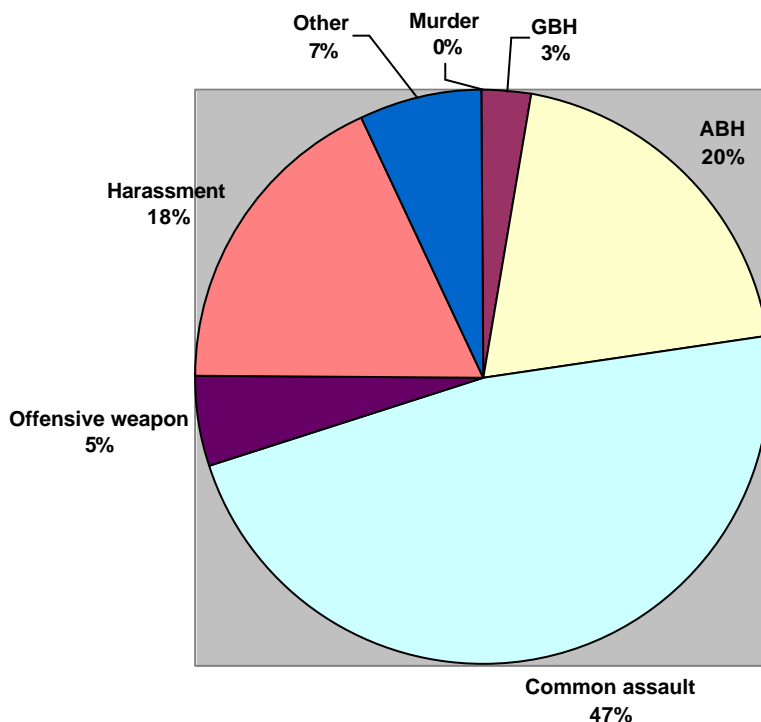
- Notes: 1. Source : Dodd et al, 2004
 2. Racial aggravated offences are included in the harassment and ABH figures

This report is concerned first and foremost with VAP offences, but some attention is given to robbery. In England and Wales, the robbery statistics can be divided into those involving business property and those involving personal property. The offence remains rare, there being roughly ten times more offences of violence against the person than robbery. Robbery of personal property has increased over the last five years. In 1999/00 there were 72,129 recorded offences. Number then rose rapidly to a peak of 108,173 in 2001/02, falling back to 91,084 in 2003/04. Robbery of business property is much rarer. In 2003/04 there were 10,111 recorded offences, compared to 12,148 offences recorded in 1999/00.

Violence against the person in London

Figure 3:3 provides a breakdown of the 186,621 VAP offences recorded by the MPS in the financial year 2003/04. The pattern is similar to that for the country as a whole – except that proportionately more offences are recorded as common assault, and fewer as ABH.

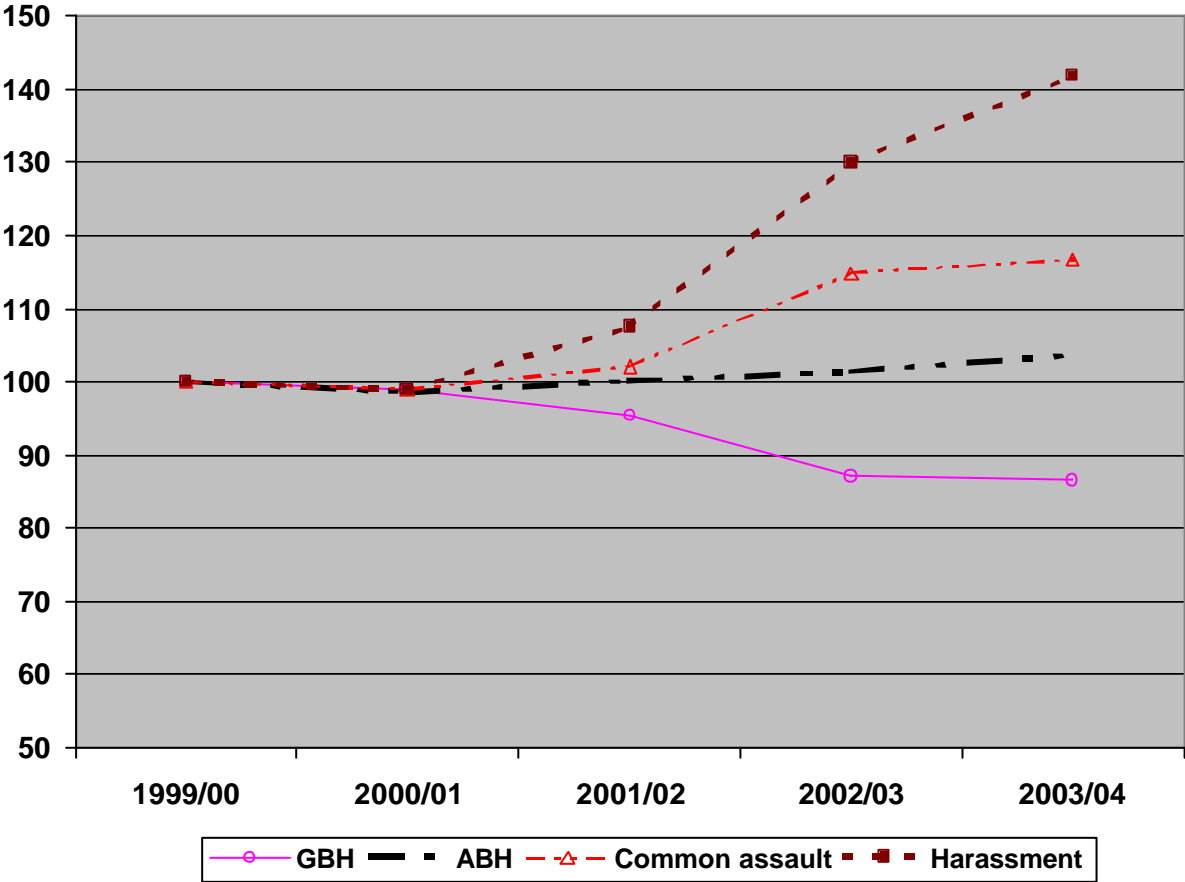
Figure 3:3 Breakdown of violence against the person, MPS, 2003/04



- Notes. 1. Source: PIB
 2. Total number of crimes: 838,938

MPS records of violence against the person have increased since 1999/00, rising from 156,880 to 186,621 (19%) by 2003/04. Figure 3.4 shows trends for specific offence categories. The trends differ from the country as a whole in two significant ways. The overall increases are much lower – with GBH actually declining – and the trend for ABH and common assault is reversed. The most likely reason for this, and one identified in the Audit Commission report, ‘Crime Recording’ (Audit Commission, 2004) is that the MPS has introduced the changes to recording procedures later than many other forces in England and Wales – a point to which we shall return.

Figure 3:4 Indexed trends in violence against the person, MPS



- Notes: 1. Source : PIB
- 2. Racial aggravated offences are included in the harassment and ABH figures

At the time of writing (February 2005) figures for 2004/05 were not available. However trends in calendar year figures for London can give a good indication of likely trends. MPS VAP

figures for 2004 were 10% higher than those for 2003. The largest category, common assault, fell by 14%. Harassment rose by 30%, ABH rose by 50% and GBH rose by 6%. The steep rise in ABH coupled with the offsetting fall in common assault suggests that that the MPS started to apply the same criteria in distinguishing between the two offences as other forces – ie counting incidents involving very minor injury as ABH. The steep rise in harassment actually accounts for over half (54%) of the rise in VAP offences and is considered below in more detail.

What can recorded crime trends tell us about VAP trends?

The changes in recording procedures over the last seven years have been so great that there is only one conclusion to be drawn: it is that for the period from 1998 until 2005, *no conclusions* about underlying trends can be drawn from recorded statistics for violence against the person.

Changes to the counting rules in 1998

The first major change to recording procedures occurred in 1998. There were changes both to the 'counting rules' and to the scope of notifiable offences. The counting rules lay down procedures about the ways in which incidents involving multiple offenders and multiple victims should be recorded, and the ways in which series of linked incidents should be recorded. The basic principle followed by the new rules was that there should be one crime recorded for each time that any single person fell victim to a crime. This served to inflate the count of violent crime, since previously many group offences were recorded as a single incident. At the same time, common assault, assault on a constable and harassment became notifiable offences.

The Home Office estimated that these changes resulted in an artificial increase in recorded crime of 14% in 1998/99, and inflated the VAP count by over 120% (Povey and Prime, 1999). It might be thought that these changes to the counting rules would result in a single step-change to trends. In reality, the changes would have taken several years to bed in, and were certainly still doing so at the start of the period covered by this report – 1999/00. In other words, the changes will have artificially inflated the count of crimes each year, as officers across the country became more aware of, and compliant with, the new procedures.

The National Crime Recording Standard, 2002

A further significant change to recording procedures was introduced in 2002 – or earlier in

pilot forces. Two basic principles underlay the NCRS:

- The value of recorded crime statistics to the police would increase if the count of crime was as full as possible, because the statistics would be more consistent.
- The recording procedure should be 'victim oriented', and victims' accounts of incidents should be taken at face value.

Previously, most police forces had tended to require *clear and credible* evidence that victims were reporting events accurately to them before they accepted the complaint. For example, a victim reporting that they had been pushed or slapped would not usually have been recorded, because hard evidence of such incidents is rarely presented at the time of the complaint. Under NCRS, such incidents are now recorded as common assault. And previously, minor assaults were rarely recorded in circumstances where victims requested no further action; under the NCRS, all such assaults are to be recorded.

The Home Office has conducted various analyses of the impact of the NCRS (Simmons et al., 2003). The first effect was for the pilot forces that introduced the changes before 2002. This was reckoned to uplift recorded crime artificially by 5% in 2001/02.

In analysing the effect in the first full year of the NCRS – 2002/03 – the Home Office examined the disparity between trends for 'incident data' (the computerised records of phone calls from the public for police assistance) and recorded crime. Any divergences were attributed to NCRS. This method provided estimates that total recorded crime showed an artificial increase of 10%, VAP a 23% increase, and robbery a 3% increase. The Home Office concluded that most of the 'NCRS effect' had made itself felt in the first year of its adoption – 2002/03 – though the Audit Commission's (2004) review suggests that the bedding-in period is turning out to be more protracted, and that many forces have still only partially adopted the Standard.

Fixed penalty notices for disorder (PNDs)

Following a pilot exercise, the power to issue PNDs has been rolled out nationally across police forces since April 2003. PNDs can be issued for a range of minor offences involving disorder, and half of those issued in the pilot study were for harassment offences, under Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 – and thus notifiable offences (Spicer and Kilsby, 2004). The pilot judged that some of the PNDs were substituting for full proceedings, and

that some were in response to incidents that previously would have attracted no formal action at all. PNDs thus have the potential for inflating the count of violent crime.

No national statistics are yet available to shed light on this, though, as discussed above, MPS analysis of the two years from January 2004 shows that over half (54%) of the 10% increase in VAP offences over the period was attributable to a rise in incidents which the police themselves encountered in the course of patrol work. Recorded offences of this sort increased by a third, and almost all of this increase was attributable to S5 harassment offences. In other words, the analysis provides strong circumstantial evidence that PNDs are now inflating the count of VAP offences. It might be argued, of course, that the police are responding to a new and growing problem of disorder – but if this was the case, one would expect a commensurate increase in incidents reported by the public. As we shall see, there has been *some* increase in such incidents reported by the public, but the rate of increase is much lower.

It is very probable – given the pressure of PSA targets on the police to increase the proportion of offenders brought to justice – that the police will make increasing use of PNDs. They represent a relatively cheap route to achieving these targets, whilst providing a response to problems of disorder. They will also result in an increase in the number of Harassment offences recorded by the police.

Can VAP recorded crime statistics tell us anything at all?

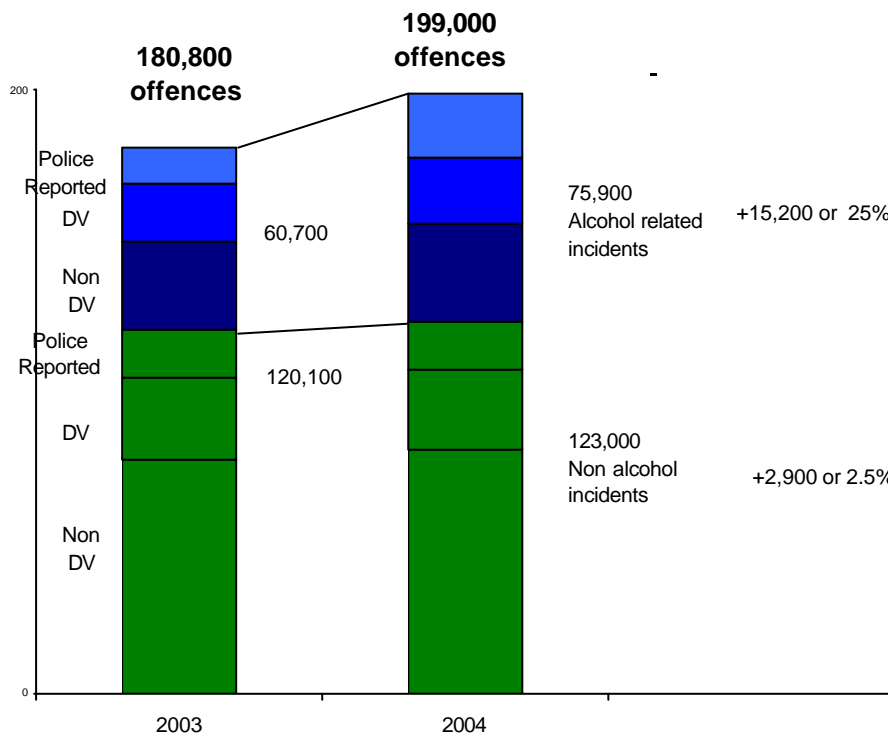
So far, we have documented the very substantial changes in recording practices that make it near impossible to draw any firm conclusions from statistics of recorded violence about trends in VAP over the last five years. Can the statistics tell us *anything*?

In time, of course, the statistics will give *some* guide to underlying trends, provided that no further changes are made to the recording process. Whilst the recording changes are still bedding in, however, the statistics can offer some insights into the nature of violence. In particular, analysis of factors which are independent of the changes in recording practice can be illuminating. We present some such analysis for London, focussing first on alcohol-related violence, and then on the geography of violence. Finally we present some analysis of temporal patterns of VAP.

Alcohol-related violence

Internal MPS analysis has examined changes in the proportion of VAP offences involving alcohol. Offences were flagged as alcohol-related if any reference to alcohol or drunkenness was found in free-text searches of CRIS crime reports for VAP offences. There is no clear reason to expect changes introduced by NCRS artificially to inflate the proportion of incidents involving violence - though it is possible that minor incidents involving drunken participants were less likely than other VAP offences to be recorded prior to the introduction of NCRS. Whatever the case, it is clear that a disproportionate amount of the 10% increase in VAP offences in London can be attributed to incidents involving alcohol (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5 Trends in alcohol-related and other VAP offences between 2002 and 2004



Source: MPS Strategic Analysis Unit

Figure 3.5 breaks VAP offences in the MPS first into alcohol-related and non-related incidents, and within these two categories subdivides offences into three groups:

- incidents that the police encountered themselves (police reported)
- incidents involving domestic violence (DV)
- other incidents (non DV)

The figure shows that the majority of the overall 10% increase in VAP between 2003 and 2004 can be attributed to a rise in offences involving alcohol, and a large part of this increase involves offences reported by the police. Most of these will be offences of harassment, resulting in PNDs. It is impossible to say from the statistics themselves whether this reflects a real increase in levels of violence encountered by the police, or the response of the police to a new set of powers remains unclear. The most likely explanation is that both factors are playing a part.

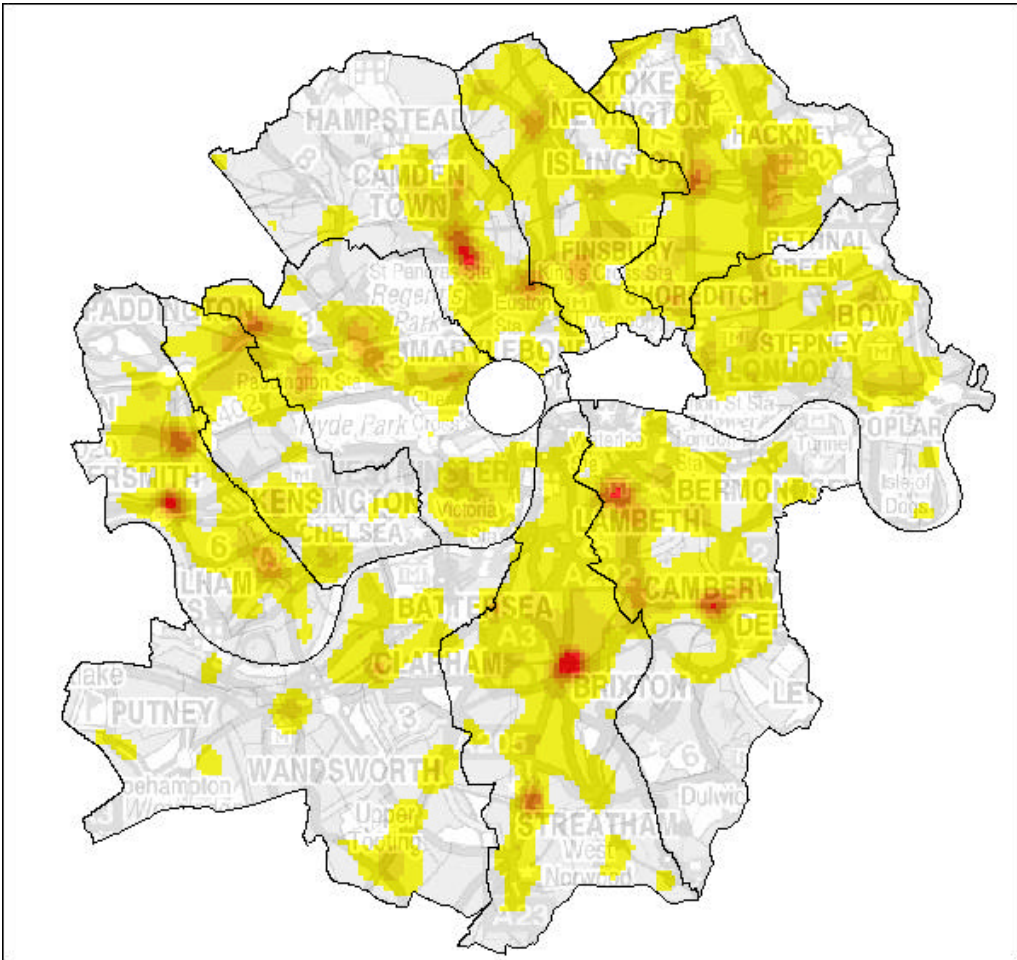
Geographic analysis

Whilst there are very likely to be some differences across area in recording practice, some insights can be gained from geographic analysis even when there are large shifts 'across the board' in recording procedures.

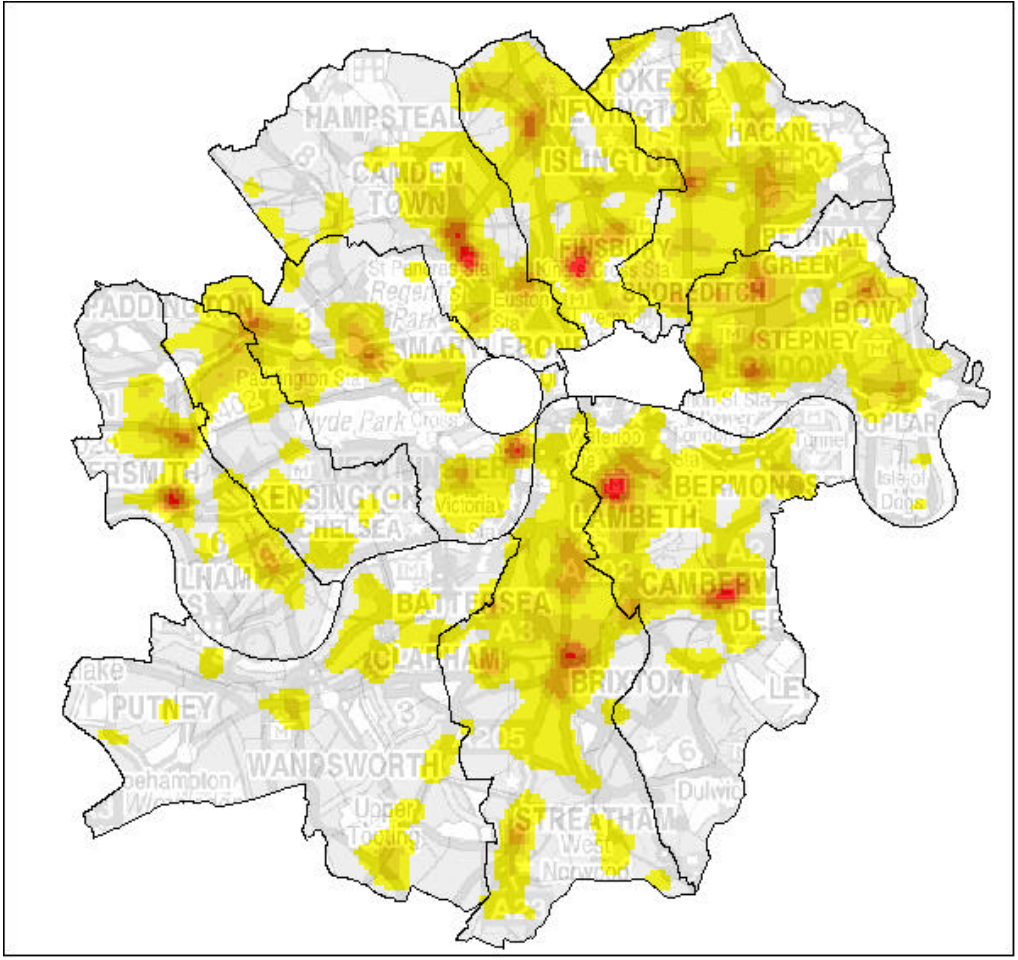
GIS analysis has been mounted for this study within the MPS. Some of the findings are robust, whilst others may reflect differences within the MPS in recording procedures. Key findings are:

- Concentrations of recorded violence are located around town-centre locations associated with the night time economy (NTE).
- These hotspots have been consistent since 2000 and probably well before. (see Figure 3.6)
- Central and outer borough trends for violence recorded in NTE premises showed some differences, with VAP and common assault in particular increasing at a greater rate in the outer boroughs from a 00 baseline (21% compared to 6% by 04).

Figure 3.6 MPS Recorded violence hotspots for the central boroughs



1999/00



2003/04

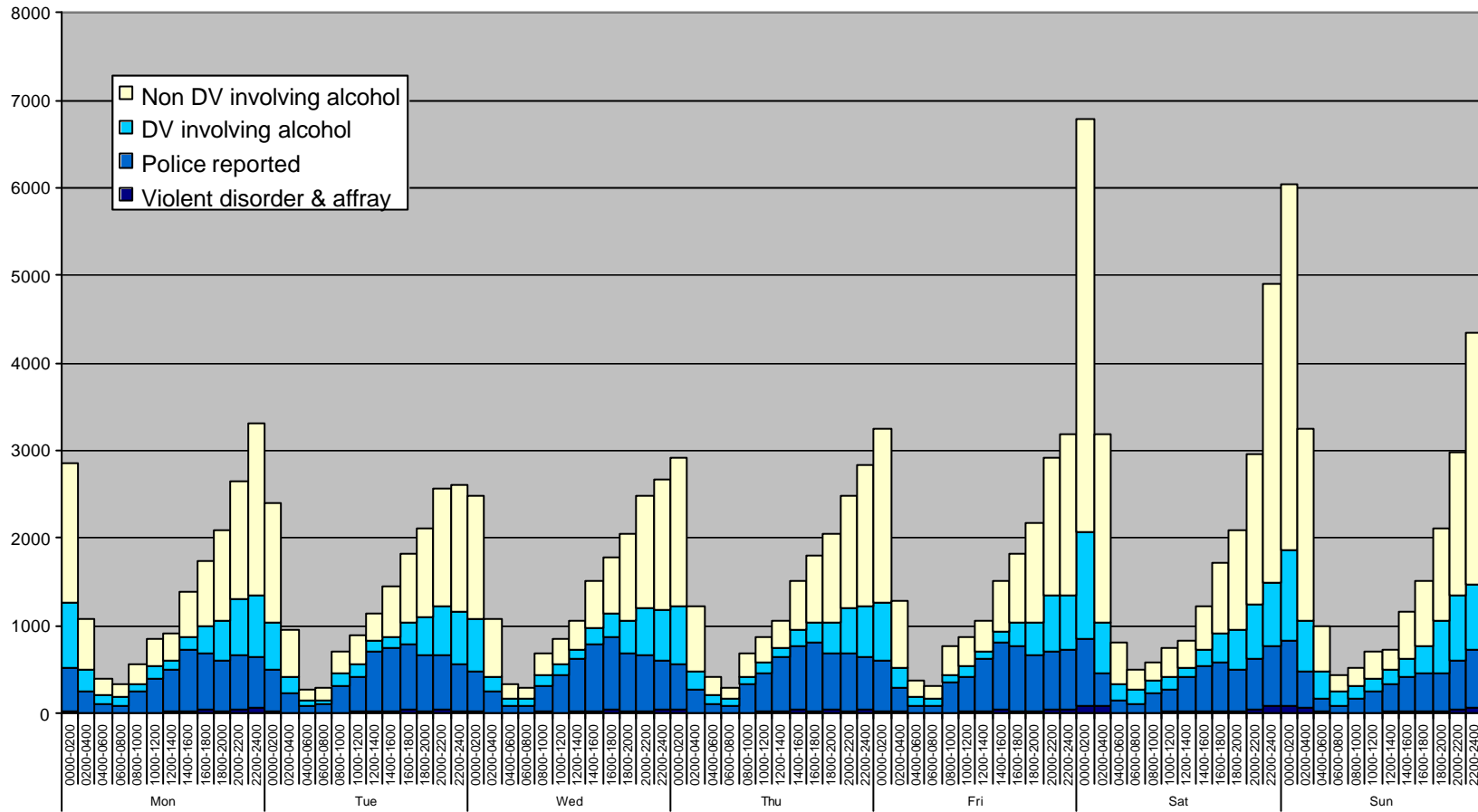
Time of day and day of week

Figure 3.7 overleaf breaks down selected categories of VAP offences by time and day of week. It includes offences reported by the police, offences of violent disorder and affray, offences of domestic violence in which alcohol is mentioned in the crime report, and other VAP offences in which alcohol is implicated. There is no reason at all to think that the changes in recording procedures would affect the validity of any temporal analysis of this sort.

There is a shared pattern for alcohol-related offences, whether or not they involve domestic violence. Frequency increases throughout the day, peaking just before or after midnight. Problems peak on Friday and Saturday nights, with the greatest volume of offences occurring between midnight on Friday and 1 o'clock on Saturday morning. Incidents reported by the police show a markedly different pattern, with peaks in weekday afternoons as well as Friday and Saturday evenings. The afternoon peak almost certainly reflects police capacity as much as levels of incidents.

Both this analysis and previous findings point to the importance of alcohol as a driver of violence. In view of this, we have assembled what information is readily available about trends in alcohol consumption in Appendix 1.

Breakdown of violence against the person by time



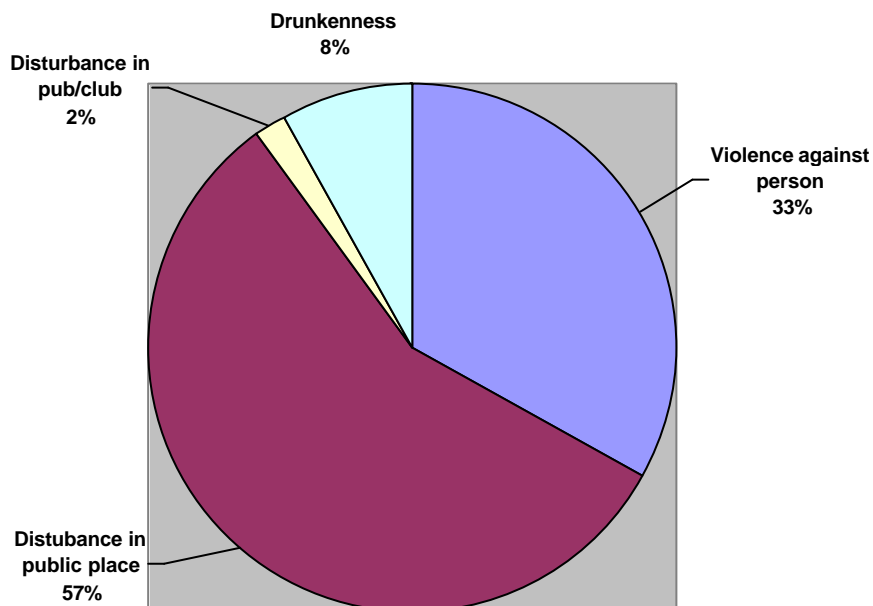
Chapter summary

- ABH, Common Assault and Harassment offences constitute 85% of VAP offences in England and Wales. Over 40% of VAP offences involve no injury whatsoever.
- Recorded crimes of violence in England and Wales rose by 64% between 1999/2000 and 2003/04.
- The offences that rose most steeply were ABH (74%) and harassment (112%)
- London shows a slower rate of increase, with the steepest increases in Common Assault and Harassment.
- These increases provide no indication of the underlying trend, mainly because there has been a succession of major changes in recording practice since 1998, all of which have artificially increased the VAP count.
- New police powers to levy on-the-spot fines may also have resulted in crimes of Harassment being recorded that previously would have gone unrecorded.
- Alcohol-related crimes are responsible for a large part of the most recent increases in VAP offences. This may reflect a real rise in alcohol-related disorder, as well as the impact of the new PND powers.
- VAP offences are concentrated in town centres associated with 'night-time economy' activities.
- VAP offences involving alcohol peak on the busiest evenings for the night-time economy – Friday and Saturday nights.

Chapter 4 Computer despatch data (CADMIS)

So far we have examined recorded crime statistics and the British Crime Survey. There is a third dataset of emergency calls to the police, which tends to receive little systematic analysis. Although there is no national database of incidents, individual police forces can supply relevant data. The data presented here are for the MPS (ie London excluding the City) and are drawn from the CADMIS database. Figure 4:1 shows a breakdown of four categories of incident that regularly result in crime reports in VAP categories.

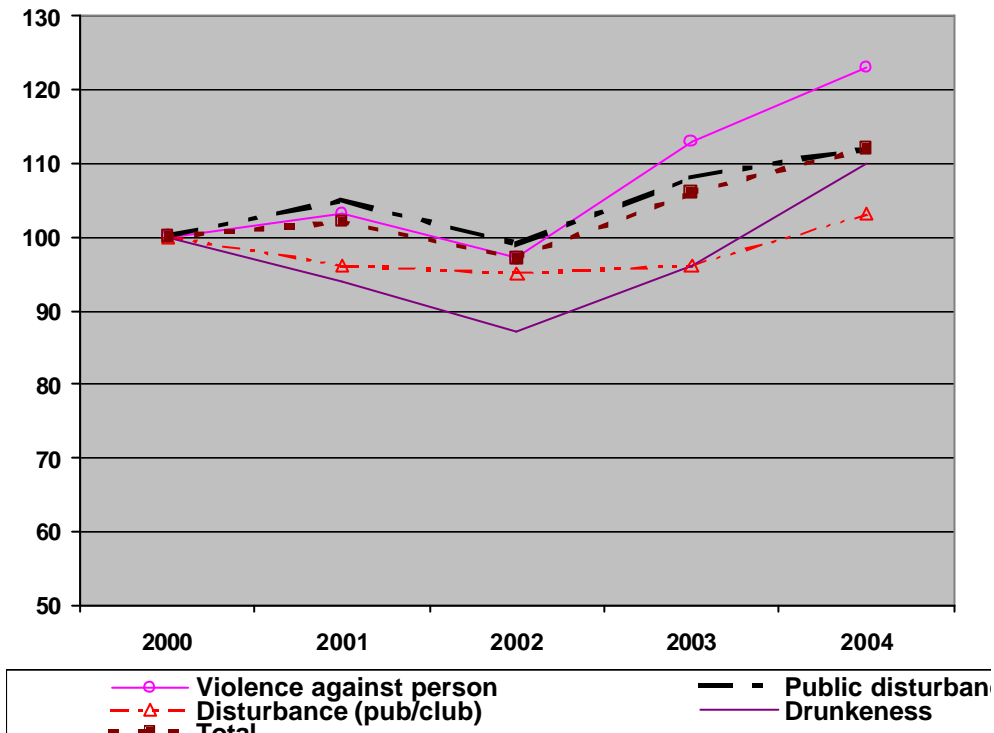
Figure 4:1 Breakdown of disorder incidents (CADMIS) in London, 2004



Notes: Source – PIB
712,676 calls, 654,316 with duplicates excluded

Figure 4.1 presents indexed trends for these four categories, and for the aggregated total for the four categories with duplicate calls excluded. (Increasingly, a single incident may attract several different calls, as more and more people have mobile phones with which they can place 999 calls. CADMIS is able to winnow out duplicate calls.)

Figure 4:2 Indexed trends in CADMIS incidents involving disorder and violence, MPS



Note: The total number of calls excludes duplicates

Interpretation of CAD data is in its infancy, and little is known about their reliability in indicating real trends. It is clear that with mass ownership of mobile phones, it is increasingly easy to call the police in an emergency. It is also clear that the number of duplicate calls to the police is growing. It is also probable that demands for police help are now being made in situations where previously nothing would have happened. It is significant that disturbances in licensed premises show a pretty flat trend, and in these locations there will have been no significant growth in access to phones. The dip in numbers of incidents in 2002 is consistent with the BCS trend, discussed in Chapter 3. On the other hand, the MPS ran a campaign to discourage

needless calls on the 999 system in 2002, and this may also have resulted in the dip in calls for all four categories of incident.

It will be remembered from Chapter 2 that the impact of the NCRS on recorded violent crime statistics was estimated, using incident data, to be in the region of 23% nationally in 2002/03. Coupled with the trends presented in Chapter 2, Figure 4:2 implies that the effect in the MPS was much less marked than this. This conclusion is supported by the Audit Commission (2004) review of compliance with NCRS, which identified the MPS as a force in the lower band of compliance⁴⁵.

Conclusions

Although conclusions must be very tentative, Figure 4:2 provides some support for the hypothesis – in line with the BCS – that violent crime in London was static or falling from 2000 until 2002, after which it began to rise. CADMIS data also provide further evidence that the MPS is at the lower end of NCRS compliance, implying that recorded crime rates could rise steeply – and artificially – as compliance improves.

⁴⁵ The samples in the Audit Commission study are too small to allow estimates of NCRS impact at force level within category of crime, such as VAP. However, it should be remembered that the MPS is simultaneously under-recording and over-recording crime – the latter by insufficient rates of no-crime, and the net effect on crime rates is very hard to estimate.

Appendix 1: Trends in Alcohol Consumption

There are two main sources of information about alcohol consumption: government surveys of the general population, and statistics collated by the alcoholic drinks industry. In combination these suggest a steady – but not steep – increase in alcohol consumption.

Industry Statistics collated by the British Beer and Pub Association, 2003

Overall levels of alcohol consumption have increased from 7.3 litres per person in 1991 to 7.9 litres in 2000 and 8.2 litres in 2002 - an increase of over 10% in a decade. Taking a longer view, alcohol consumption is still below levels seen in Edwardian times, though it has been rising since the end of the Second World War. It is 152% higher than in 1951.

Despite these long-run increases, alcohol consumption in Britain is significantly lower than in France, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Austria and Greece, and is only marginally higher than in Italy. Consumption of alcohol in the traditional producer countries has been falling, however, whilst that in Britain has been rising. There are differences in patterns of consumption. The high consumption of Southern European countries occurs through regular drinking, whilst binge drinking is more common in Britain, as well as Nordic countries.

Beer remains by far the most popular alcoholic drink in Britain, despite a steady decline since the late 1970s. Consumption of spirits and cider is broadly static, whilst consumption of wine is rising, and consumption of 'alcopops' rising very rapidly: the 2002 figure was almost four times that in 1997. Expenditure on alcoholic drinks (expressed at constant 1995 prices) was £29 billion in 1990, falling to £27 billion in the mid 1990s, rising back to £29 billion in 1999, £30 billion in 2001 and £31 billion in 2002. Alcohol taxes raise £7 billion a year. The drinks industry employs half a million people.

The overall number of licenced premises is growing, but not rapidly. There has been a three per cent increase between 2001 and 2004. It is possible that there is a much more rapidly growth in city centres, offset by falls in other areas.

Survey statistics

The General Household Survey is the main survey providing trends in alcohol consumption. This shows that the proportion of the population drinking more than the recommended weekly intake is steeply increasing for women, and more steadily increasing for men. Almost one in three men and one in five women now exceed the recommended guidelines – 21 units for men, and 14 units for women. The General Household Survey also shows that both men and women are drinking more often now than in the late 1990s.

These increases have probably been most marked amongst young people. The Department of Health School Survey, 2002, suggests that the volume drunk by people of school age has almost doubled between 1990 and 2002. Certainly the 2001 General Household Survey shows that the highest proportions of people drinking over recommended limits were in the 16-24 age group; half of men and almost half of women in this age group did so. Heavy drinking – over 8 units a day for men and six for women – was also highest amongst this age group.

The Expenditure and Food Survey suggests that real terms expenditure on alcohol has grown since 1995. The proportion of alcohol consumed out of the home has increased since 2000.

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