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Violent crime in England and Wales

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Violent crime in England and Wales

Key points

The British Crime Survey (BCS), the most reliable measure of overall violent crime, estimates that violent crime has fallen since 1995 and is now stable, but the underlying picture is that the nature of violent crime is changing. Domestic violence and acquaintance violence have fallen since 1995 while stranger violence and muggings have remained stable, therefore changing the composition of violent crime.

The BCS shows an increase in the proportion of violent crimes that are reported to the police, from 35 per cent in 1999 to 41 per cent in 2002/03. In the same period the BCS estimates that the recording of reported crime increased from 36 per cent to 52 per cent. These increases in both reporting and recording of violent crime help explain the contrasting trends in BCS and recorded violent crime.

The majority of violent crimes involve no significant injury to the victim and about a half involve no injury at all. In the 2002/03 BCS 11 per cent of incidents resulted in medical attention from a doctor and two per cent in a hospital stay. This is not to suggest that worry about violent crime is unjustified or that the ordeal is not traumatic if injury has not occurred.

Young men aged 16 to 24 are most at risk of becoming a victim of violent crime. The risk of violence is higher for men than for women in each of the crime types except domestic violence. Violent incidents are most likely to involve male offenders and those aged 16 to 24.

Police figures show that recorded violent crime is concentrated in relatively few localities. This is particularly striking for robbery, where two-thirds of all crimes are accounted for by just one tenth of all Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships which contain 22 per cent of the population.

Acknowledgements

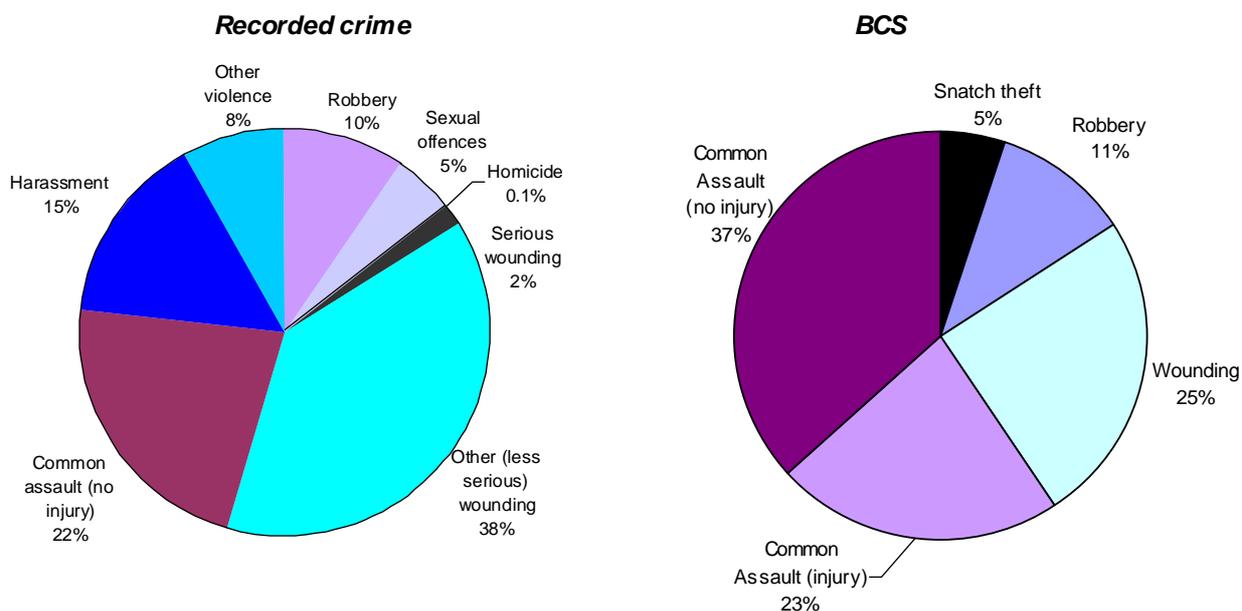
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1. Overview of violent crime in England and Wales

Violent crime is a complex and broad group of offences, of varying levels of seriousness. In order to understand violent crime in England and Wales it is important to consider the detail below the total violent crime statistic. The British Crime Survey (BCS) estimated that there were 2,715,000 violent incidents experienced by adults in England and Wales, based on year ending December 2003 interviews, comprising 22 per cent of all BCS crime. Just over one million violent offences were recorded by the police in 2003 (18 per cent of all recorded crime).

Figure 1.1 Police recorded and BCS violence by offence, 2003



Seriousness and injury

- The majority of incidents categorised as violent crime involve no significant physical injury to the victim, although they can still be extremely traumatic experiences.
- In 48 per cent of all BCS violent incidents there was no injury, rising to 62 per cent and 63 per cent for common assault and robbery respectively (year ending December 2003 interviews).
- There was no injury in at least 51 per cent¹ of all recorded violence against the person offences in 2003 (Table 1a).
- At the other end of the spectrum, the more serious offences within violence against the person accounted for five per cent of recorded violence in the year to December 2003 (Table 1a).
- Eleven per cent of BCS violent incidents, from 2002/03 BCS interviews, resulted in medical attention from a doctor. Two per cent of all BCS violent incidents resulted in a hospital stay, ranging from six per cent of wounding victims to one per cent of robbery victims (Simmons and Dodd, 2003).

¹ No injury includes harassment, possession of weapons, other offences against children and common assault, although some offences counted in more serious violence may also include no injury, e.g. threats to murder.

Types of violent crime

Both police recorded crime and the BCS cover a wide range of violent offences, of varying levels of seriousness.

Recorded crime includes violence against the person (ranging from the more serious offences of homicide, serious wounding and threats to kill, to the less serious offences of common assault and harassment), sexual offences (not all of which are violent e.g. bigamy) and robbery.

The BCS coverage of violent crime is common assault, wounding, robbery and snatch theft. The BCS does not cover crime committed against under 16s or those not living in private households. This is a more restricted category than police recorded violence, but includes snatch theft that would not be included in recorded violence.

Due to the very small number of sexual offences picked up by the BCS, results are too unreliable to report.

Violent crime measured by the BCS can alternatively be sub-divided into a typology of four groupings, broadly on the basis of the relationship between suspect and victim:

Domestic violence - includes all violent incidents, except mugging, which involve partners, ex-partners, household members or other relatives.

Mugging - comprises robbery, attempted robbery, and snatch theft from the person.

Stranger violence - includes common assaults and woundings in which the victim did not know any of the offenders in any way.

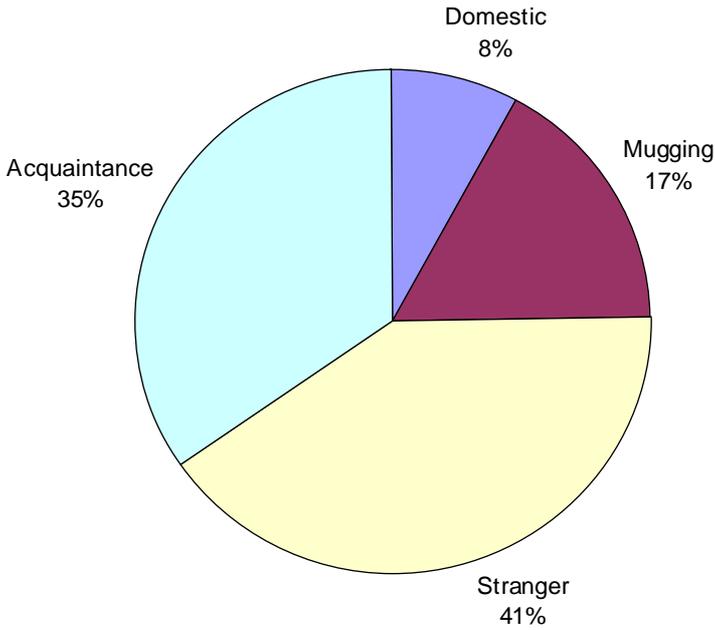
Acquaintance violence - comprises woundings and common assaults in which the victim knew one or more of the offenders at least by sight.

The issue of willingness to disclose incidents is very important for domestic violence. These results only relate to those incidents reported face-to-face to BCS interviewers. Respondents may not wish to disclose such sensitive information face-to-face. The 1996 BCS included a self-completion module on domestic violence that is viewed as providing a more complete measure of domestic violence (Mirrlees-Black, 1999). Prevalence rates for domestic assault in 1995 derived from the self-completion module were around three times higher for women and 10 times higher for men. The 2001 BCS contained a self-completion module on inter-personal violence (domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking) and a report on results from this module will be published shortly.

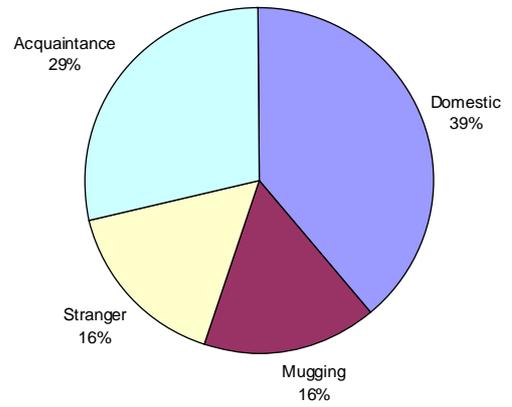
Figure 1.2 BCS violent crime typologies by victim age and gender, 2003

The pie charts below show the differing breakdown of violence for various victim age and gender groups. Each pie chart is sized to show the relative contribution each victim group makes to the overall BCS violence total.

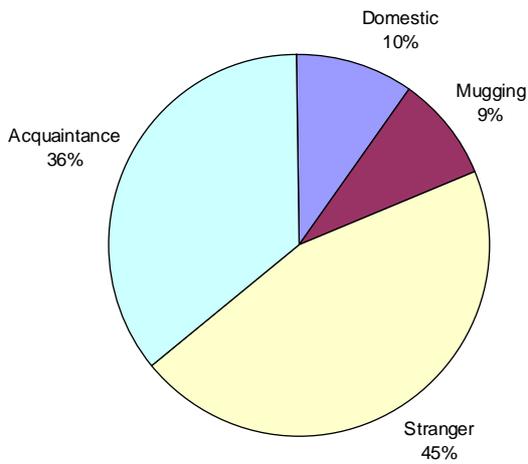
Typology of violence for males aged 16-29



Typology of violence for females aged 16-29



Typology of violence for males aged 30-59



Typology of violence for females aged 30-59

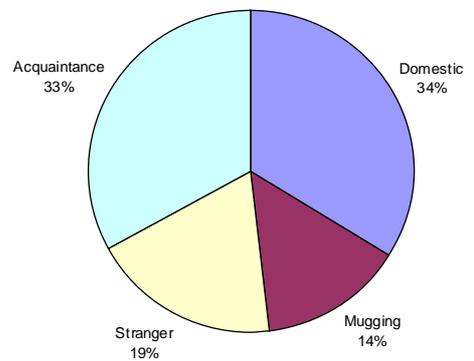


Table 1a Violence against the person, 12 months to December 2003

	Recorded crime	
	Number	Percentage
More serious violence	41,967	5
Less serious violence (with injury)	412,199	45
Less serious violence (no injury) ¹	468,918	51
Total violence against the person	923,084	100

1 See note at bottom of page 3.

2 Because of rounding there may be an apparent discrepancy between percentage totals and the sums of the constituent items.

Risk of becoming a victim

- The risk of being a victim of violent crime one or more times a year for those interviewed by the BCS in 2003 was 4.1 per cent. According to the 2002/03 BCS, young men aged 16 to 24 were most at risk, with 15 per cent experiencing violence in the recall period (Table 1b and Simmons and Dodd, 2003).
- The risk of experiencing acquaintance violence (for those aged 16 and over) was 1.3 per cent and for stranger violence 1.6 per cent. For mugging the risk was 0.9 per cent and the chance of being a victim of domestic violence 0.6 per cent (Table 1b).
- Overall, the risk of violence was higher for men than for women. The risk of stranger violence for men was over three and one-half times that for women; men also had twice the risk of acquaintance violence. Domestic violence was the only type of violence that women were at greater risk than men (Table 1b).

Table 1b Risk of becoming a victim of violent crime, year ending Dec 2003 BCS interviews

Percentages	BCS		
	Male adults	Female adults	All adults
Domestic	0.4	0.7	0.6
Mugging	1.1	0.7	0.9
Stranger	2.5	0.7	1.6
Acquaintance	1.8	0.9	1.3
All BCS violence	5.3	2.9	4.1

Geographical variation

Violent crime occurs across the country and amongst all communities, but the relative levels of violence can vary considerably. The type of statistic quoted can also affect the apparent variation considerably. Victims who live in one place but who travel to another to work or for leisure and are victimised there will report their victimisation to a household survey and it will be shown in the area in which they live, whereas the police will record the same event in the area where the crime occurred. These differences will explain some of the contrasts between the relative risks reported by the BCS and recorded crime statistics for London and the South East, for example.

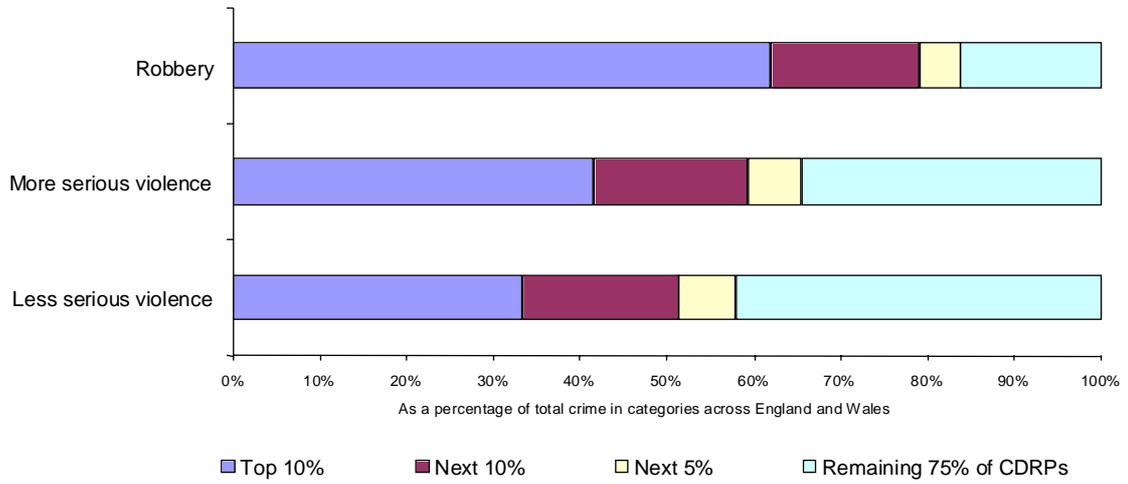
- For BCS interviews in the year ending March 2003, violent crime rates were highest in the South East region (826 offences per 10,000 population) and lowest in Wales (425 offences per 10,000 population). This compared with 665 offences for every 10,000 people in England and Wales (see table 5.03 in Simmons *et al.*, 2003).
- According to recorded crime in the year to March 2003, violence against the person was highest in the London region (25 offences per 10,000 population), but as already indicated this is likely to reflect the many people coming into the capital for work and leisure and will not necessarily provide an accurate representation of risk for those people who live there. Recorded violence against the person was lowest in the South East region (12 offences per 10,000 population). This compared with 16 offences for every 10,000 people in England and Wales (see table 6.05 in Simmons *et al.*, 2003).

Geographical concentration

Police figures show that recorded violent crime is concentrated in relatively few localities, and this is particularly striking for certain kinds of more serious violent crime.

- The concentration of crime is particularly evident for robbery. Two-thirds of all recorded robberies take place in just five police force areas: the Metropolitan Police, West Midlands, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and Avon and Somerset (see figure 6.6 Simmons *et al.*, 2003).
- The top ten per cent of all Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) accounted for 62 per cent of all recorded robberies in England and Wales in the 12 months to December 2003, yet contain just 22 per cent of the population (Figure 1.3).
- Of all recorded more serious violence in England and Wales, 42 per cent was recorded in ten per cent of all CDRPs (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3 Concentration of selected violent crimes in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, 12 months to December 2003



Serious violence

The most recent homicide and gun crime statistics can be found in **Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Crime in England and Wales 2002/03, Supplementary Volume 1, Homicide and Gun Crime. Issue 01/04**. The key findings are summarised below.

Homicide

Homicide is the most serious violent crime, but it only makes up 0.1 per cent of all violence and 0.02 per cent of all recorded crime. The term homicide covers the offences of murder, manslaughter and infanticide.

- There were 1,045 deaths initially recorded as homicides in England and Wales based on cases recorded by the police in 2002/03. This is an increase of one per cent on 2001/02 (excluding the Shipman cases¹), but more than triple the number of offences recorded in 1965.
- The most common method of killing at 27 per cent (33 per cent excluding Shipman) involved a sharp instrument. Guns were responsible for only eight per cent of homicides.
- Fifty-eight per cent of homicide victims were male (65 per cent excluding Shipman).
- Thirty-seven per cent (40 per cent excluding Shipman) of male victims and 45 per cent (66 per cent excluding Shipman) of female victims knew the main suspect.
- Overall the risk of being a victim of homicide was 19 per million population. Children under one year old were most at risk at 58 per million population.

Recorded crimes involving firearms

- In 2002/03 firearms were used in 0.9 per cent of all violence against the person crimes and 4.4 per cent of all robberies. Together these comprise 49 per cent of all firearm offences.
- Firearms (including air weapons) were reported to have been used in 7,133 violence against the person crimes in 2002/03. This was a twenty-two per cent increase over the previous year. The National Crime Recording Standard was introduced on 1/4/02. This may have inflated figures for some crime categories.
- Firearms (including air weapons) were reported to have been used in 4,776 robbery offences in 2002/03. This was a 13 per cent decrease over the previous year, following a 33 per cent increase in 2001/02.
- About two per cent of all firearm crime resulted in a serious injury. There were 572 serious injuries resulting from crimes that involved firearms (including air weapons) in 2002/03, up three per cent from 2001/02.
- For both violence against the person and robbery, almost two-thirds of all non-air weapon offences in England and Wales occurred in just three police force areas: Metropolitan (Greater London), Greater Manchester and West Midlands. No other police force recorded more than 400 of these offences.

¹ In 2002/03, 172 victims of Dr Harold Shipman have been recorded, all of which relate to offences committed in previous years. This has the effect of distorting previous trends in homicide. Where these figures have an impact, the effect excluding victims of Shipman is given.

2. Trends in the nature of violent crime

The British Crime Survey and recorded crime statistics suggest very different trends in the level of violent crime in England and Wales in recent years. Estimates from the BCS show large falls in violent crime overall since 1995. In contrast, police recorded violence has increased substantially in recent years although much of this is due to increases in reporting and recording of violent crime (see section 3).

Figure 2.1 All violent crime from the BCS, 1991 to 2002/03

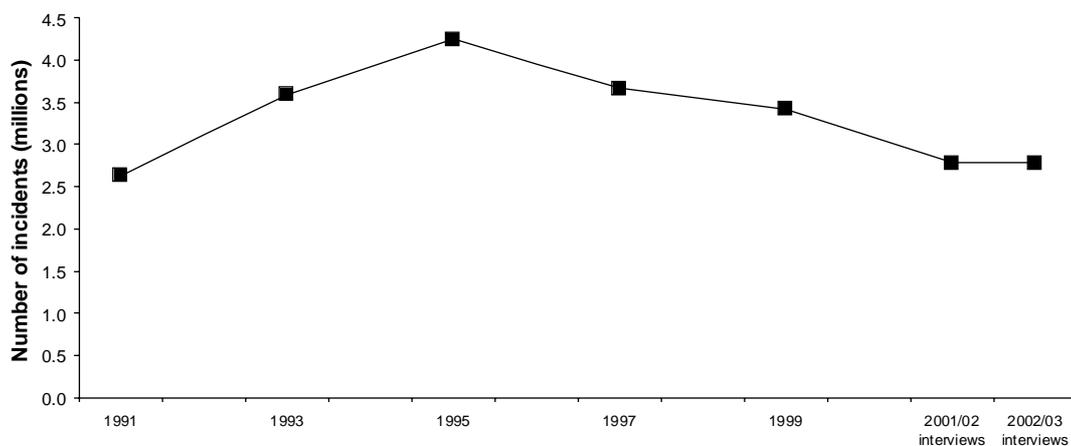
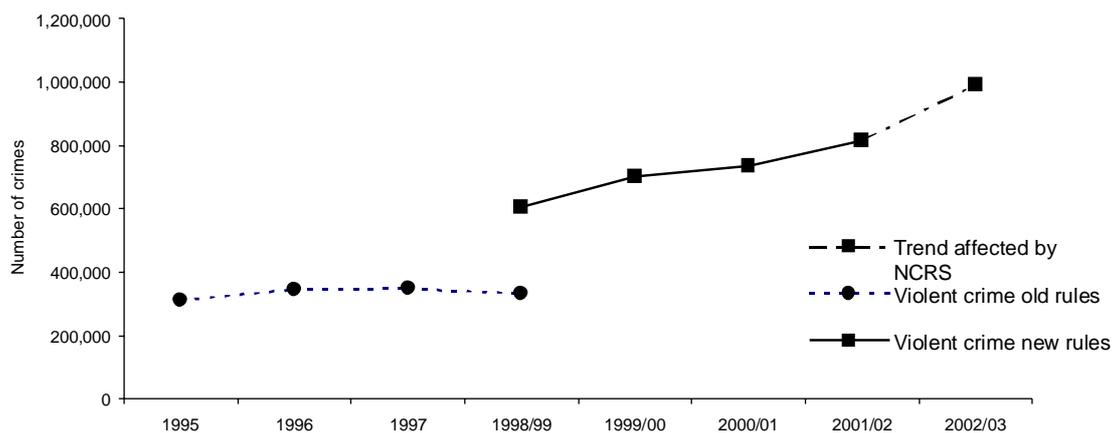


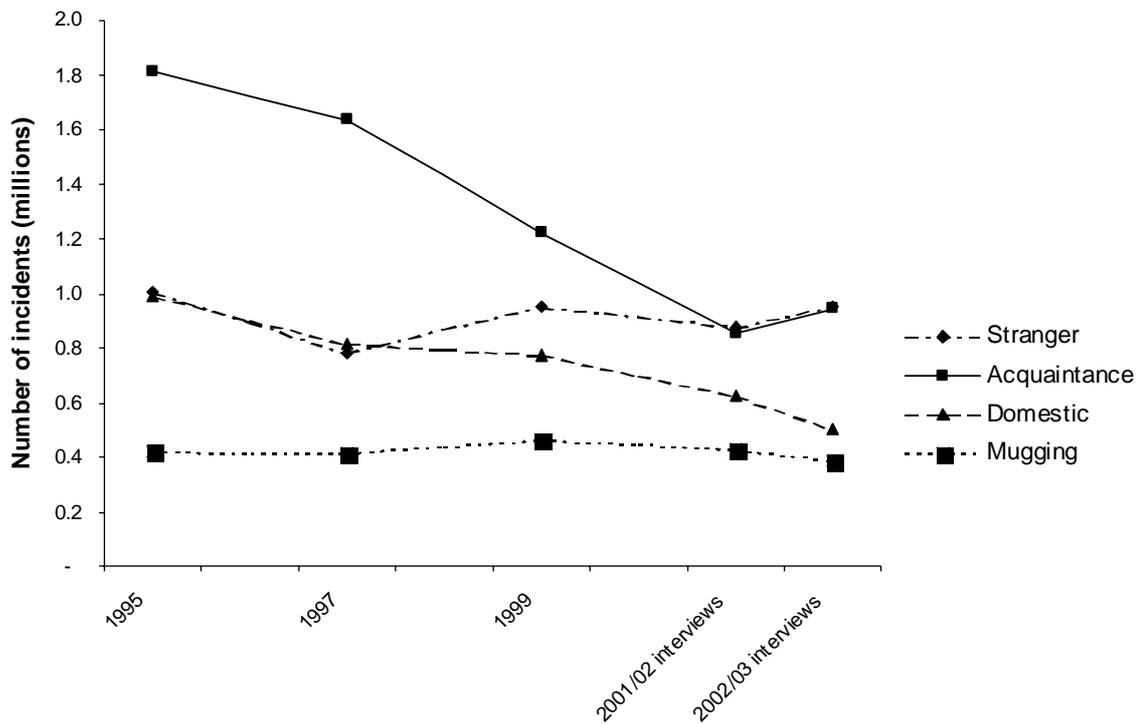
Figure 2.2 Violent crime recorded by the police, 1995 to 2002/03



1. There is a discontinuity in the police recorded trend for violence in 1998 when new offence categories were added to police recorded violence, notably common assault, and new counting rules were introduced. The numbers of recorded violent crimes before and after this change should not be compared, as they are not on the same basis.

- Since 1995 the BCS shows large and statistically significant falls in both domestic and acquaintance violence. Between 1997 and the 2002/03 interviews there was a 38 per cent fall in domestic violence, and a 42 per cent fall in acquaintance violence. The trends in muggings and stranger violence were, however, not statistically significant (Figure 2.3)

Figure 2.3 Trends in BCS violent crime by type of violence, 1995 to 2002/03



The data for the following trends in the nature of violent crime can be found in *Crime in England and Wales 2002/03 Supplementary tables: Nature of burglary, vehicle and violent crime* at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/crimeew0203.html>

The most recent trend data on the nature on violent crime is from 2002/03 BCS interviews.

Victim-offender relationship

- In over half of violent incidents the offender/s were known to the victim in some way; in one-third of incidents they were known well (2002/03 BCS). The proportion of incidents in which the offender/s were not known has increased significantly since the 1996 BCS.

Timing and location

- The 2002/03 BCS shows that, overall, just over half (52%) of violent incidents occurred during the week. Hence, taking into account the length of time involved, overall violent incidents were more likely to take place at the weekend (defined as Friday 6pm to Monday 6am). This proportion has remained relatively constant in recent years.
- Around two-thirds of violent incidents take place at night (63% for latest data). The exception was mugging, around half of which takes place during the day. Daytime incidents are more likely to take place in the afternoon than the morning.
- The street was the most common location of violent incidents in the 2002/03 BCS, followed by the home (due to the concentration of domestic violence incidents in the home). The proportion of violent incidents occurring on the street has significantly increased since the 2001/02 BCS (from 24% of all violence to 29%). This is due, at least in part, to the decrease in the incidence of domestic violence in this period. The proportion of violence happening around the workplace has decreased since the 2000 BCS.
- Latest results show that the most common place for mugging, acquaintance and stranger violence is in the street, although for stranger violence this is closely followed by a pub or club. Sixteen per cent of muggings took place around the home (see note 2 of Table 5.02 in *Crime in England and Wales 2002/03 Supplementary tables: Nature of burglary, vehicle and violent crime for definition of 'around the home'*).

Offender characteristics

- The 2002/03 BCS shows that nearly two-thirds of violent incidents (63%) involved one offender. However, this figure is skewed by the fact that nearly all domestic violence incidents involved one offender. This proportion has remained consistent over time.
- Half of mugging and stranger incidents involved just one offender in 2002/03 BCS interviews. Almost one-fifth (16%) of muggings involved four or more offenders. There were four or more offenders involved in a quarter of stranger and acquaintance incidents; this has been a relatively consistent proportion across time.
- In four-fifths of violent incidents the perpetrator/s were male (79% for 2002/03 BCS). Seven per cent of cases involved perpetrators of both sexes. Again these proportions remain relatively unchanged in recent years. However, the proportion of domestic violence incidents in which the offender was female has increased significantly since the last results (2001/02 BCS) from 21 per cent to 32 per cent.
- Victims were asked to estimate the age of the offenders. Where this was possible, latest results show that victims judged that there was an offender of school age in ten per cent of violent incidents. An offender aged between 16 and 24 was involved in nearly half (48%) of violent incidents overall. Over two-thirds (69%) of mugging incidents involved an offender

estimated to be in this age bracket. Offenders involved in domestic violence tended to be older than those in other types of violence; 71 per cent of incidents involved an offender aged over 25. The estimated ages of offenders have remained consistent across time.

Influence of alcohol and drugs

- Victims believed offenders to be under the influence of alcohol in almost half (44%) of violent incidents and under the influence of drugs in one-fifth (20%) of cases from the 2002/03 BCS. The proportion believed under the influence of drugs has increased significantly since the 1996 BCS. However, it should be noted that a consistently high proportion of victims say that they do not know if this was the case, particularly in incidents of mugging and stranger violence.
- The offender was most likely to be judged under the influence of alcohol by the victim in incidents of stranger violence, echoing the finding that many of these incidents were likely to take place in or around a pub or club. Victims believed that the offender was under the influence of alcohol in only one-fifth (20%) of mugging incidents. The proportion of offenders believed under the influence of alcohol in domestic violence has increased since the 1996 BCS (42% versus 30%).

Use of weapons

- Latest data show that almost three-quarters of violent incidents did not involve the use of a weapon (72%). The proportion of incidents in which a weapon was used has, however, increased significantly since the 1998 BCS. Since the last data (2001/02 BCS) the proportion of stranger violence incidents involving weapons has also increased.
- Incidents of acquaintance violence were the most likely violence type to involve a weapon and domestic violence the least likely in the 2002/03 BCS.
- For the 2002/03 BCS the most common weapons were knives, followed by hitting implements and glasses or bottles. A knife was used in 15 per cent of mugging incidents. The most used weapon in stranger incidents was a hitting implement (8% of incidents), followed by a glass or bottle or a knife.
- Overall, firearms were only used in one per cent of violent incidents. This is a consistent finding from previous survey results.
- See also text box earlier in this report for weapons used in police recorded homicides and firearm offences.

Emotional impact of violence

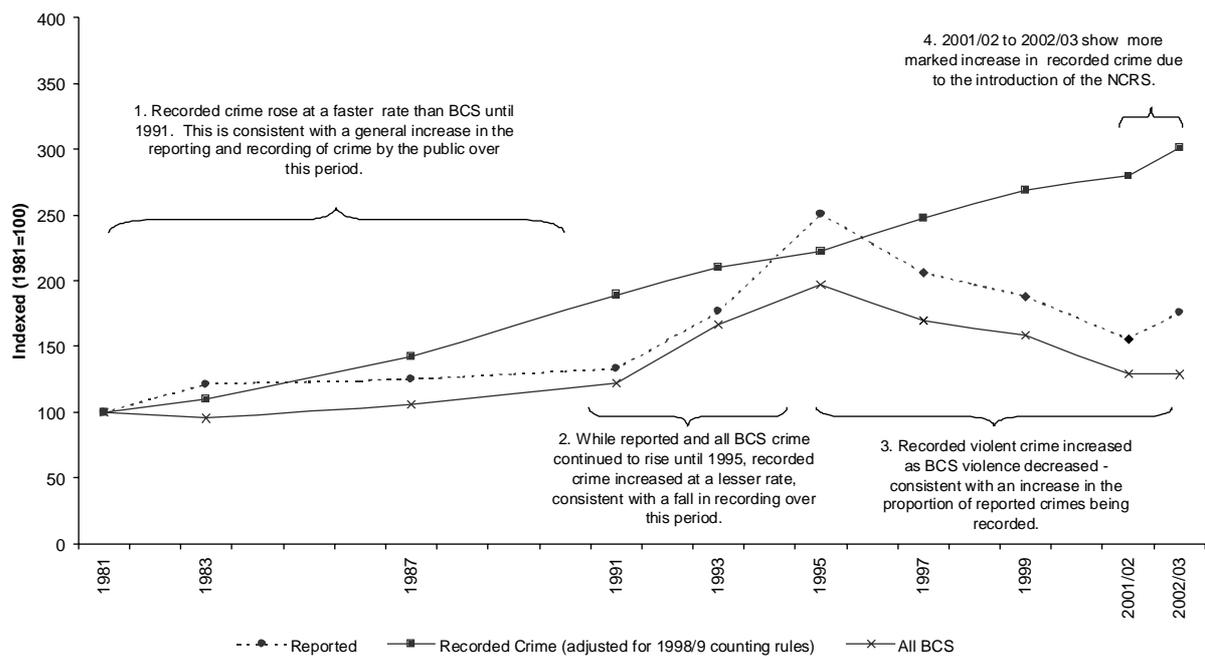
- The 2002/03 BCS shows that over four-fifths of victims were emotionally affected by the incident (83%). This is an increase from the last set of results (2001/02 BCS). Twenty-six per cent were 'very much affected', and 24 per cent 'quite a lot', a further third were affected 'just a little'.
- Victims of domestic violence and mugging were most likely to be emotionally affected, as shown in all recent survey years. Latest data show that victims were very much affected in 40 per cent of domestic violence incidents, compared to only 17 per cent of stranger violence incidents. In around one-fifth of incidents of acquaintance and stranger violence the victim was not emotionally affected.
- The most common reaction to violence was anger (51% for the 2002/03 BCS). This is also a recurring finding from the survey. Shock, annoyance, fear, loss of confidence or feeling vulnerable are also fairly common experiences.

3. Explaining the difference between police recorded and BCS trends

The British Crime Survey and police recorded crime are complementary series that together provide a better picture of crime than could be obtained from either series alone. The police statistics provide a good measure of trends in well-reported crimes and can be used for local crime pattern analysis. The BCS gives a more complete estimate of crime as it covers both unreported and unrecorded crime, although it does not count the wide range of crime types included in recorded crime, nor crime committed against business or those aged under 16. The difference in coverage between BCS and recorded crime is unlikely to be the only reason for the diverging trends between the two series.

Figure 3.1 helps to illustrate the long-term pattern in reporting and recording evidenced by the contrasting BCS and recorded crime trends for total violent crime.

Figure 3.1 Indexed trends in the reporting and recording of violent crime, and all BCS violent crime, 1981 to 2002/03 (1981 =100)



1. 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 01 and March 02.

2. 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.

Changes in reporting and recording

BCS figures show an increase in the **reporting** of violent crime from 35 per cent in 1999 to 41 per cent in 2002/03 BCS interviews. Comparison of police recorded crime figures for violence and BCS estimates indicate a large increase in the **recording** of reported crime from 36 per cent to 52 per cent over a similar period. This increase is largely driven by the increase in recording of common assault, the largest category within BCS violence. Some of this may be due to the NCRS effect but much of the change happened before NCRS was introduced.

Table 3a Comparing the effect of using 1999 reporting and recording levels on the 2002/03 BCS data

	2002/03 estimates (thousands)	1999 per cent reporting and recording applied to 2002/03 BCS estimates (thousands)
Violence		
2002/03 BCS estimate (comparable only)	2,694	2,694
Per cent reported	41%	35%
Estimated per cent recorded of reported	52%	36%
Recorded crime (comparable only)	567	-
Range for estimate of recorded crime for 2002/03 ³		280-421

1. Source 2000 BCS, 2001/02 and 2002/03 BCS interviews and recorded crime for year to December 1999, September 2001 and September 2002. The police recorded crime figures used in this comparison relate to the years to September 2001 and September 2002 as these are the periods most closely comparable with the recall periods covered by BCS interviews in 2001/02 and 2002/03.

2. Adjustments are necessary because of the sampling structure and coverage of the BCS. For violence, recorded crime figures are adjusted to account for under 16s who are not covered by the BCS. Comparable violence includes common assault, robbery and wounding; it does not include snatch theft.

3. The numbers in italics give the range in which the estimated recorded crime figure lies based on the assumption that there was no change in recording and reporting levels from the year indicated.

The increases in reporting and recording are a factor in the explanation of why BCS violence has decreased between 1999 and 2002/03 interviews while police recorded violent crime has increased. Applying 1999 reporting and recording levels to 2002/03 BCS estimates gives an estimated range of 280-421 thousand police recorded violent offences. This is considerably lower than the actual figure of 567 thousand police recorded comparable violence offences for the year ending September 2002.

More importantly, this range of 280-421 thousand is also less than the police recorded comparable figures for violence for 1999 (428 thousand comparable violence offences) and for 2001 (480 thousand comparable violence offences). This means that the estimated figure based on 1999 reporting and recording levels applied to the 2002/03 BCS number of violent offences transforms the increase in police recorded crime into a decrease.

It is estimated that around one-third of the difference is due to increased reporting and two-thirds due to increased recording.

The impact of the National Crime Recording Standard on recorded crime

In April 2002, all police forces in England and Wales adopted the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS). The NCRS aims to promote greater consistency in crime recording between police forces and take a more victim-orientated approach to crime recording.

The NCRS impact on violence against the person in 2002/03 was estimated at 23 per cent, meaning that violence against the person was 23 per cent higher in 2002/03 than it would have been under pre-NCRS recording.

The NCRS effect on robbery is estimated to have been in the region of three per cent. Further details can be found in Simmons, Legg and Hosking (2003).

The changes in recording practices and in reporting levels make it difficult to assess trends in police recorded violence. However, changes in the reporting and recording of more serious violent crimes are less marked as they are more likely to come to the attention of the police and more likely to be recorded, even pre-NCRS. The BCS is unable to tell us about more serious violence and its trends because the numbers are too infrequent, therefore making recorded crime the better measure for the more serious offences.

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