

Crime in England and Wales: More Violence and More Chronic Victims

Graham Farrell and Ken Pease

Summary

This brief report reveals that official government reports on crime using the British Crime Survey, the major measure of crime in England and Wales, understate the amount of crime experienced by some three million or around three in every ten crimes. Crimes against the person were underestimated most, and by more than half in 2005-6. The reason is that crime against those most victimised is much more extensive than official publications allow. The minimisation and distortion of crime victimisation flows from a long-practiced but misleading convention that no victim suffers more than five similar crimes at the hands of the same offender over the course of a year.

To be recorded, a crime must be reported to the police, and most crime is not reported. If it is thought to be too trivial, or the police can do little about it, or past experience has suggested that the experience of reporting to the police involves a good deal of time and effort, or if the victim wishes to avoid self-disclosure (as being, for example, gay or an illegal immigrant), crime will remain unknown to the police. In recent years, the National Crime Recording Standard has largely removed discretion from the police about how a reported crime is recorded. Hard as the police have striven for consistency in dealing with reported crime, where reporting levels are low, this is akin to straining at gnats while swallowing camels. The primary tactic in getting a better idea of the amount of crime suffered, which has been applied throughout Western Europe, Australasia and North America, is the victimisation survey. A representative sample of the population is asked what has happened to them over (say) the

last year, and whether these incidents have been reported to the police.



The impact of the victimisation survey on crime and justice thinking has been almost wholly benign. It has revealed the extent and impact of poorly reported crimes like obscene and threatening phone calls and domestic violence, and has given a voice not previously heard to those who have suffered them. However, in one respect a failure of nerve in taking crime victims seriously has led to a systematic underestimation of how much crime is suffered, and of how much falls to the lot of those chronically victimised.

For a quarter of a century now our national victimisation survey, the British Crime Survey (BCS), has provided a more rounded picture of what people experience by way of crime. Now involving some forty thousand respondents per sweep, the BCS is a major resource in understanding crime

in England and Wales. However, there is reason to suppose that the BCS misrepresents the extent and distribution of crime suffered. The cause is nothing so crass as incompetence or the wish to mislead. We have the highest regard for the competence and integrity of Home Office statisticians, and the present work owes a debt to assistance received from the BCS analysis team. The problem lies in an assumption made in the first survey in 1981, and which has endured almost wholly unremarked since, so that now none of the Home Office statisticians engaged in BCS work was involved in the crucial decision. It is of the utmost importance that the present BCS team is not pilloried for its adoption of a longstanding counting convention, unchallenged from within the Home Office. Our anxiety that the Home Office statisticians may be scapegoated is intense, and that possibility must be avoided.

The key assumption made in 1981 was that people will never be victimised in the same way by

the same people more than five times a year, however many times they say they have suffered at (they believe) the same hands. The BCS's first report appropriately applied the adjective 'arbitrary' to this practice:

In calculating offence rates for 1981, series incidents were given a score equal to the number of incidents in the series occurring in 1981, with an arbitrary top limit of five. (Hough and Mayhew 1983; 40)

This arbitrary limit has remained in major BCS reports of the nation's crime rates. The BCS Training Notes (Budd and Mattinson 2000; 59-65) contain the exact SPSS syntax (the statistical analysis software instructions). The syntax on page 60 of the Training Notes contains the line:

If (number gt 5) number = 5.

Which means: If the number of crimes in a series is greater than ('gt') five then set that number as equal to five. The BCS Training Notes explain capping as follows:

For 'series' incidents the number of incidents is capped at 5. Therefore if someone reports 10 incidents in a 'series', only 5 are counted. The limit is to avoid extreme cases distorting the rates. (Budd and Mattinson 2000; 32).

Of course, if the people who say they suffered ten incidents really did, it is capping the series at five which distorts the rate. It is truly bizarre that the victimisation survey, based as it is on the assumption that people will by and large tell the truth about what happened to them, within the limits of their memory, suddenly withdraws its trust in their honesty when what they are told does not chime with their own experience. Yet the reality is that some people are

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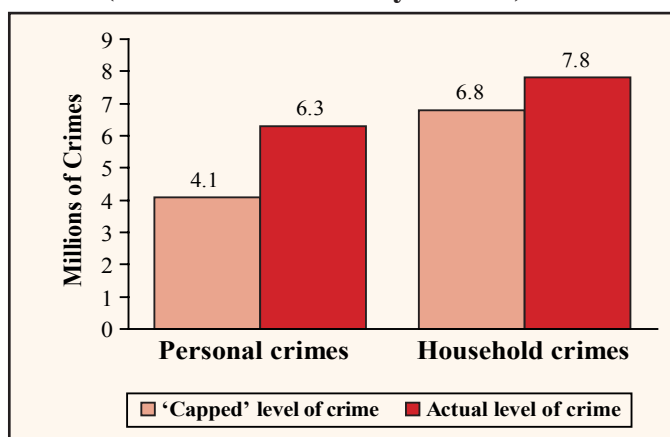
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very frequently victimised, and that frequent victimisation is what they suffer rather than being an invention or exaggeration. Over the twenty-five years since the ‘no more than five’ rule was applied, many studies of multiple victimisation have been published. This body of work means it is easy to believe what chronic victims tell us.

One can envision crime in two ways. In the first, it is the occasional unwelcome event that the victim can suppose to be random. In the second, the same victimised people are preyed upon repeatedly by the same people in the same way. Of course, the reality is a mixture of the two scenarios. Our re-analysis of BCS data reported below shows that the contribution of the second set of circumstances is much greater than is reflected in official crime counts. The inclusion of crimes which happen to chronic victims greatly increases the total amount of crime suffered and the extent to which the chronic victim should be of primary concern when we attempt crime control.¹ In its most recent published sweep, BCS estimated an annual total of some 6.8 million ‘household’ crimes (covering burglary; theft in a dwelling; other household theft; thefts of and from vehicles; bicycle theft; and vandalism to household property and vehicles). It estimated some 4.1 million ‘personal’ crimes (which covers assault, sexual offences, robbery, theft from the person, and other personal theft). Our re-analysis reveals that, if we believe what the respondents tell us, there would be 7.8 million household offences and 6.3 million personal crimes. Thus, removing the arbitrary five offence limit, over three million extra offences come to light.

Figure 1. ‘Capped’ vs Actual England and Wales Crime (British Crime Survey 2005–6)



This is shown in Figure 1. Household crime is increased by 15 per cent and personal crime by a staggering 52 per cent. As the sum of personal and household crimes, total crime would have been understated by 29 per cent.

Table 1 looks at the figures in more detail. For each crime type it lists the proportion of all offences which form part of a series and the percentage increase in the crime count when all series crimes are included. The crime categories and format of the table replicate those used in the Home Office’s main BCS report (Walker *et al.* 2006), so the interested reader can replicate the findings. We have written a peer-reviewed academic article that explains some of the background and methodology in more detail (Farrell and Pease, in press). It will be seen that for many of the offences of violence (and for total violence), the majority of crimes form part of a series of events committed in similar circumstances by (the victim believes) the same person or people. In confrontational crime, the victim is best placed to know that the same offender is involved. It is more likely that the figures for household crime are underestimates than that the figures for personal crime are overestimates.

The difference between the level of crime in government reports and its actual level is greater for some crimes than others, as Table 1 makes clear. This is what would be expected. There is no change in the estimated number of car thefts. The biggest increases are for assaults and woundings, and are found particularly in domestic violence and violence by people known to the victim. The BCS reveals

**Table 1. Crime in England and Wales in thousands
(BCS 2005-6, crimes in the last 12 months).**

Crime category	'Official' Crime Count (000's)	Actual Crime Count (000's)	% Difference when all series crimes included
PROPERTY CRIME			
Vandalism	2731	3376	23.6
Vehicle vandalism	1697	1846	8.8
Other vandalism	1034	1528	47.8
Burglary	733	877	19.7
With entry	440	515	17
Attempts	293	362	23.6
With loss	315	342	8.7
No loss (incl. attempts)	418	535	27.9
All vehicle thefts	1731	1779	2.8
Theft from vehicle	1121	1159	3.4
Theft of vehicles	185	185	0
Attempts of and from	425	436	2.7
Bicycle theft	439	446	1.7
Other household theft	1158	1361	17.5
Theft from the person	576	584	1.4
Snatch theft from person	71	71	0
Stealth theft from person	504	512	1.6
Other theft	1196	1213	1.4
VIOLENCE			
Common assault	1490	2956	98.4
Wounding	547	1060	93.8
Robbery	311	333	7.2
All BCS violence²	2420	4421	82.7
Domestic violence	357	857	140
Acquaintance	817	2093	156.2
Stranger	863	1067	23.6
Mugging	382	404	5.8
ALL HOUSEHOLD CRIME	6792	7838	15.4
ALL PERSONAL CRIME	4120	6250	51.7

² All BCS Violence includes common assault, wounding, robbery and snatch theft.

close to three million assaults, not one-and-a-half million. Even stranger violence is 25 per cent higher than shown in official reports, and while robbery is 'only' seven per cent or 22,000 up on what government reports allow, this includes some really serious crimes. Actual levels of vandalism are almost a quarter more than reported, and there are 20 per cent or 144,000 more burglaries. Overall, violence in England and Wales is 83 per cent, that is, two million violent crimes, more than previously revealed. These are not minor differences.

So What?

Airy dismissal of our re-analysis is not an option. The data are in the public domain (at the ESRC archive at the University of Essex) and the Home Office team make the SPSS syntax files available upon request for anyone wishing to replicate the analysis. There is no wriggle room about the facts. What are the policy implications?

Chronic victims by the same offending hand do not generally gain prominence unless there is a tragic outcome by murder or suicide. Two cases suffice to illustrate the possible tragic ending.

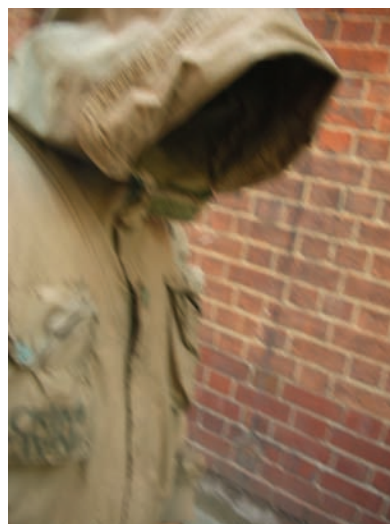
On 12 January 2006, a house in Wythenshawe, Manchester, had petrol poured through its letterbox and ignited. The two adults in the home, Mr and Mrs Cochrane, died, and their daughter Lucy was burned. It emerged that a hostile family, the Connors, were responsible.



‘The 18-month feud began after schoolgirl Natalie Connor developed an obsessive hatred of her classmate because of an apparent slight. The dispute between the two families, in which Natalie falsely claimed she had been bullied by Lucy, came to a head when Michael bought two litres of petrol and poured it through the Cochrane’s letterbox. A heavy drinker, he was goaded by his wife, who plied him with alcohol before the attack... Five days earlier, Mrs Cochrane discovered what appeared to be a flammable liquid on her front door and found that someone had tried to uproot a tree from the garden. She called the police but no sample of the liquid was taken. Connor and his wife were convicted... on two counts of murder. Their daughter was found guilty of manslaughter and attempting to cause grievous bodily harm to Lucy’ (*Guardian*, 21 December 2006, p.15).

The second case concerns the murder of Tania Moore by Mark Dyche.

‘The pair had met at a Young Farmers’ ball and were soon engaged. But in February 2003 Miss Moore, fed-up over Dyche’s jealous and threatening behaviour, ended the relationship. For a year he waged a hate campaign against her, which included repeated threats to kill her. In June 2003 he even paid three men armed with baseball bats ... to rob and beat her at her family’s farmhouse



home in Alkington, near Ashbourne, Derbys. Nottingham Crown Court heard that Dyche, who has a history of terrorising women, ‘wanted her hurting, wanted her legs breaking, wanted her eyes gouging out, wanted to be in control’. He offered criminal associates £50,000 to kill her but, when no one came forward, did it himself, lying in wait on a country road in March 2004 and blasting her in the face with a shotgun. A few days before she was murdered, Miss Moore presented officers with a bundle of threatening text messages from Dyche’ (*Daily Telegraph*, 2 November 2006, p.12).

Our analysis shows clearly that offences of violence are primarily, and other offences substantially, the product of continuing predatory or parasitic ‘relationships’ rather than one-off events. The criminal justice system has ever been adept at turning lifestyles into events. Since one-off events have to be proved in court, various devices (sample charges, offences taken into consideration and so on) serve to minimise the substance of the problem, which is repetition of offences which may be individually regarded as trivial but whose cumulative effect may be dire. In the process of conversion from lifestyle (repeated victimisation) to event (a single act whose commission has to be proved), opportunities exist for the Crown Prosecution Service to discontinue a case ‘in the interests of justice’ since the event taken in isolation may seem trivial. Courts do not like punishing persistence, as the demise of a raft of sanctions which sought to do this (preventive

detention, corrective training, extended sentences etc) attests. Most recently, the reluctance of courts to impose custody for breach of ASBOs clearly stems from a consideration of the individual event showing the order was breached rather than the cumulative impact of an offender’s actions. ‘Three strikes’ legislation suffers the same difficulty. Courts are reluctant to imprison those whose tipping event was trivial, despite the long trail of injury and distress which preceded it.

In conclusion, we believe that the worm in the BCS bud in 1981 has led to a blighted bloom ever since, one which misrepresents the extent and distribution of crime suffered. The unwillingness to believe the facts of chronic victimisation means that crime control, police training and criminal justice action is now substantially misdirected.



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Photographs by **Pete Quentin**.

Reference

¹ Where victims reported that there were too many crimes for them to recall, we followed the practice of Walby and Allen (2004) in counting sixty of the crimes in these series, which is probably a conservative estimate. See Walby, S. and J. Allen. 2004. *Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*. Home Office Research Study 276. London: Home Office.

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The Centre for Social Cohesion

The Centre for Social Cohesion has been launched by Civitas. The initiative – which will be housed in Great Peter Street – intends to tackle the problems of social cohesion in the UK, and in particular the problems posed by Islamic radicalism and Islamic separatism.

The importance of the issue has been highlighted by the terrorist attacks of July 2005, the ongoing arrests, and considerable disagreement in Parliament over how to maintain a balance between public safety and civil liberties. These challenges have been made more acute by the widespread loss of confidence in British national identity.

With a full-time staff of six under the direction of Douglas Murray, the new Centre will be working full time to provide new and original research for publication. The blog is already up-and-running, as is the main website at www.socialcohesion.co.uk. The first major research projects will be published on the web in the coming weeks. The Centre has already hosted an event with the Syrian dissident Wafa Sultan, and is planning a host of talks and seminars throughout the autumn.

*The conference in full swing*

Civitas EU Project

On 8 March 679 students, plus teachers, gathered at the Emmanuel Centre in Westminster for what proved to be a lively second annual Civitas National 6th Form Conference on the EU. Organised by Civitas as part of its project focusing on the teaching of the European Union in schools, the event offered a unique opportunity for A-level students from across the UK to hear arguments on key issues in the EU from impassioned experts on both sides of the debate.

Charles Grant, Director of the Centre for European Reform, opened the conference with an engaging overview, before students heard from Austin Mitchell MP, Sir Martin Jacomb and Larry Elliot on matters ranging from the relationship between the EU and its member states to the single currency. The high point of the event, however, was the intense debate between Lord Pearson of Rannoch and Ken Clarke QC MP that brought the day to a close. Grilled by a series of surprisingly well-informed questions from the student audience, including one that audaciously corrected Mr Clarke on the date of the UK referendum

on EEC membership, the two traded arguments, with the added spice of their own personal experiences of the EU.

Impressions of the conference were overwhelmingly positive, summed up by one teacher who commented: 'good content, impressive breadth of topics, very relevant to exam syllabus'. Another stated: 'all [students] left with a better understanding of the EU, which is fantastic'.

As an adjunct to the conference, Civitas conducted a student attitude survey that revealed some very interesting results. Amongst the significant findings were that 68 per cent, of the 176 students who responded, revealed they would vote against 'a

Constitutional Treaty that gives the EU legal personality'. 54 per cent also said that 'the UK should stay in the EU, but push for a looser relationship based on free trade and intergovernmental cooperation'.

(See: http://www.civitas.org.uk/blog/2007/03/68_of_1618_yearolds_say_no_to.html#more).

*Lord Pearson and Kenneth Clarke MP in debate*

Civitas Supplementary Schools Project

Civitas runs six supplementary schools across London and in Yorkshire concentrating on high-quality traditional teaching and small class sizes. We aim to help disadvantaged children improve their basic academic skills and raise their aspirations for the future.

We are often approached by parents who say they have noticed a change in their children since they started attending, both in academic achievement and increased self-confidence. Such assertions are supported by our teachers' observations and the results in the tests the children take at our lessons. The parents are anxious for their children to succeed, but many have little idea of how to overcome the inadequacies of the education system. At their full-time schools the majority of the children face large class sizes, disrupted lessons, little individual attention and stressed teachers who are overloaded with government regulations and administrative demands. The excellent results at our supplementary schools demonstrate how simple it can be to provide high-quality education.

We have been able to expand the project due to the support of generous donors. The Sparkhill Saturday School in Birmingham will open in July. New Saturday schools will also be opening in Kilburn, Tottenham and Bradford in September.

Civitas also provides the academic component of the London Boxing Academy Community Project (LBACP). This is an alternative education programme based in Tottenham that re-integrates disaffected youths into mainstream society. The students live chaotic lives dominated by the destructive culture of gangs, knives and crime. The structured LBACP course combines academic studies with sport, focusing on the dedication, discipline and respect required in boxing. The students are motivated by this opportunity to learn boxing skills alongside 90 minutes of lessons in maths and English four times a week. The students come to us with a severe lack of skills and expectation, but our close supervision and guidance is producing outstanding changes in their attitudes and academic performance.

In March our supplementary schools were awarded second place by the Atlas Foundation in the



Templeton Freedom Prize for Social Entrepreneurship. This international award recognises excellent work addressing important social issues.



Comments from the judges about our project included:

‘...what this program accomplishes speaks volumes and is highly inspirational.’

‘Although there are many outside-of-school programs, this one seems innovative... Surely enabling poor children to excel in school is a solid way of making responsible citizens, especially when the children are eager to learn and their parents exert themselves to that end.’

The project relies entirely on donations.

CIVITAS is an independent research institute. CIVITAS is independent of political parties and accepts no government funding. It relies entirely on private donations to fund its work.

The aim of CIVITAS is to deepen public understanding of the legal, institutional and moral framework that makes a free and democratic society possible. Our object is to revive civil society, that network of voluntary social institutions, charities, mutual aid organisations and

other collective bodies that lie between the individual and the state. We believe that in social affairs the alternatives to government are not exhausted by commercial services alone.

We have established a reputation for work on social issues that transcends party boundaries. Our authors examine, analyse and report on views about the best way forward on particular issues. The object is to raise the quality of informed debate. For further information

about CIVITAS and how you could become a member, please email us at info@civitas.org.uk or call +44 (0)20 7799 6677.

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