



BRITISHCRIMESURVEY



Measuring crime for 25 years

British Crime Survey – Measuring crime for 25 years

Krista Jansson

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Contents

British Crime Survey	3
Origins of the BCS	4
How has the BCS changed?	5
The BCS today	6
The “dark figure” of crime	7
Trends in crime, 1981 to BCS 2005/06	8
Trends in crime — context	9
Risk of victimisation	10
Composition of crime	11
Trends and risk of violent crime	12
Trends and risk of vehicle crime	14
Trends and risk of burglary	15
Feelings of safety	17
Trends in worry about crime	18
Worry about crime and risk of victimisation	19
Perceptions of crime levels	20
Ratings of the police	21
Contact with the police	22
Satisfaction with the police	23
Emerging issues in the 1980s: repeat victimisation and domestic violence	24
Emerging issues in the 1980s: Black and Minority Ethnic groups experiences	25
Emerging issues in the 1990s: anti-social behaviour	26
Emerging issues in the 1990s: confidence in the criminal justice system	27
Emerging issues in the 1990s: interpersonal violence	28
Emerging issues in the 1990s: young people and drug use	29
Recent emerging issues: fraud and technology crimes	30
Future of the BCS	31
References	32

British Crime Survey

The first British Crime Survey (BCS) was carried out in 1982, collecting information about people's experiences of crime in 1981. The British Crime Survey (BCS) is therefore celebrating its 25th anniversary. This booklet examines how the BCS has changed and what has happened to trends in crime and people's perceptions about crime over the last 25 years.

What is the British Crime Survey?

The BCS is a victimisation survey. It measures the amount of crime in England and Wales by asking people about crimes they have experienced in the previous year. It is also an important source of information about other topics, such as attitudes towards the criminal justice system and perceptions of anti-social behaviour.

The police recorded crime figures also provide a measure of crime in England and Wales. The BCS and police recorded crimes are complementary series that together provide a better picture of crime than could be obtained from either series alone.

For the crime types it covers, the BCS can provide a better reflection of the true extent of crime because it includes crimes that are not reported to the police. The BCS count also gives a better indication of trends in crime over time because it is unaffected by changes in levels of public reporting and police recording.

Police statistics provide a good measure of trends in some less frequent but serious crimes as well as well-reported crimes. They are also an important indicator of police workload and can be used for local crime pattern analysis.

Origins of the BCS

The first victimisation surveys were carried out in the 60s and 70s, designed to examine the “dark figure” of crime i.e. crimes that are not reported to or recorded by the police.

The surveys followed debates about whether changes in police recorded crime reflected actual changes in crime rather than reporting and recording practices. The early victimisation surveys were mainly experimental, for example a survey carried out in Britain in the early 70s only covered three London areas (Sparks, Genn and Dodd, 1977).

The BCS was first carried out to better understand victimisation across the country as a whole. The first BCS was carried out in England, Wales and also Scotland.

The BCS was essentially a research tool designed to:

- obtain a better count of crime (as it included crimes that were not reported to or recorded by the police);
- identify risk factors in victimisation; and
- examine people's worry about crime and their perceptions of and contact with the police.

Over time it also started to provide more reliable information about trends in crime.

“It (the BCS) offered a new way of counting crimes, including those not in police records, and a means of identifying the sorts of people most at risk. It has also provided unique information for this country about the impact of crime on victims, people's fear of crime, their experience of the police, and related topics.”

(First BCS report, Hough and Mayhew, 1983)

How has the BCS changed?

The BCS today looks very different from the original BCS, although the main aim, to better understand victimisation, has remained the same. Questions about people's experiences of crime have remained largely unchanged which enables the BCS to provide consistent and reliable trend data for the last 25 years.

The other key areas, worry about crime and contact with and perceptions of the police, have also been included in the BCS since the beginning, although many of these questions have been changed and new questions added over the years.

The BCS has grown significantly in response to local level analysis requirements. The sample size has increased from 11,000 in 1982 to over 47,000 in 2005/06.

The BCS has also been improved with developments in technology. The interviews are now carried out using laptop computers instead of pen and paper.

The survey was carried out periodically until 2001 but has been conducted continuously since. There have also been further methodological changes e.g. adjustments for non-response to improve the quality of the survey.

The response rate has ranged from 73 to 83 per cent. The response rate was 81 per cent in 1982 and 75 per cent for the 2005/06 BCS.

The BCS has also included additional samples of young people and people from Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds to ensure sample sizes are large enough to provide reliable estimates for these groups.

The survey is developed annually to revise and improve questions, and to introduce questions about new and emerging issues.

The BCS was carried out in:
Response rates:

1982, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001 and since then continuously.
81% (1982), 77% (1984, 1988, 1992, 1994), 83% (1996), 79% (1998), 74% (2000), 73% (2001, 2001/02), 74% (2002/03), 75% (2003/04, 2004/05, 2005/06).

The BCS today

Following a review in 2001, BCS figures have been published alongside police recorded crime figures to provide a complementary and more comprehensive account of crime in England and Wales (e.g. Walker, Kershaw and Nicholas, 2006).

The BCS now provides information about a much wider range of crime-related issues. The BCS has provided information about new and emerging issues, such as fraud and technology crimes, in separate research reports.

The BCS is now a key tool in monitoring national trends in reducing crime and people's perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system. It is currently used to measure a number of Home Office performance targets. The crime-related targets are:

1. to reduce overall (BCS) crime by 15 per cent by 2007/08; and
2. to reassure the public by reducing the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, and building confidence in the criminal justice system.

The BCS is also used to measure police forces' performance against targets related to crime reduction and public attitudes towards aspects of crime and police performance.

The BCS is still used to provide information on the risks of victimisation and attitudes to help inform policy development and local practice.



The “dark figure” of crime

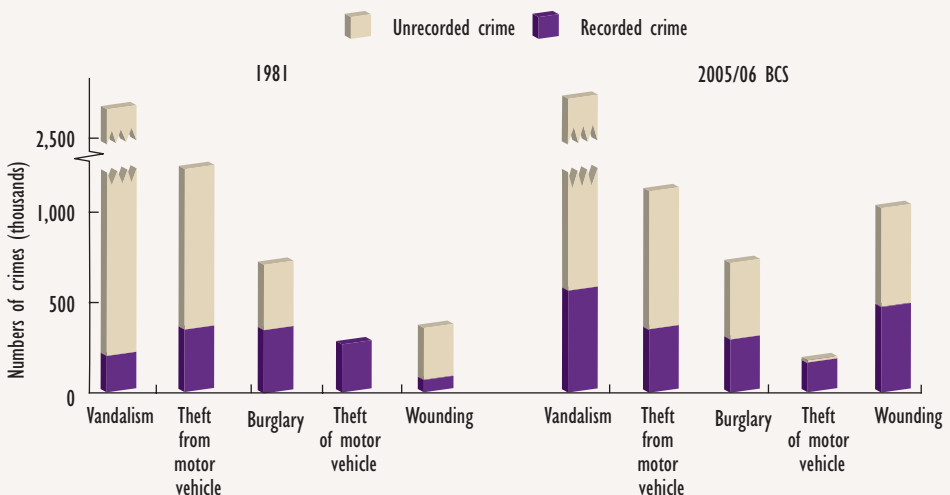
The first BCS estimated that there were 11 million crimes in England and Wales in 1981. However, there were less than three million crimes recorded by the police in 1981. This gap was called the “dark figure” of crime.

According to the authors:

“For those categories for which comparison was possible, the survey indicated a considerably greater number of incidents than did Criminal Statistics. Only for one category – thefts of motor vehicles – were the figures similar. For example the survey indicated twice as many burglaries as were recorded by the police.”

(Hough and Mayhew, 1983)

Levels of recorded and unrecorded crime, 1981 and 2005/06 BCS



The first BCS report also emphasised that the crimes not included in the police count of crime were generally the less serious ones which were never reported to the police. The most common reasons given for not reporting crimes were that the incidents involved no loss or were too trivial, and believing that there was nothing the police could do.

Trends in crime, 1981 to 2005/06

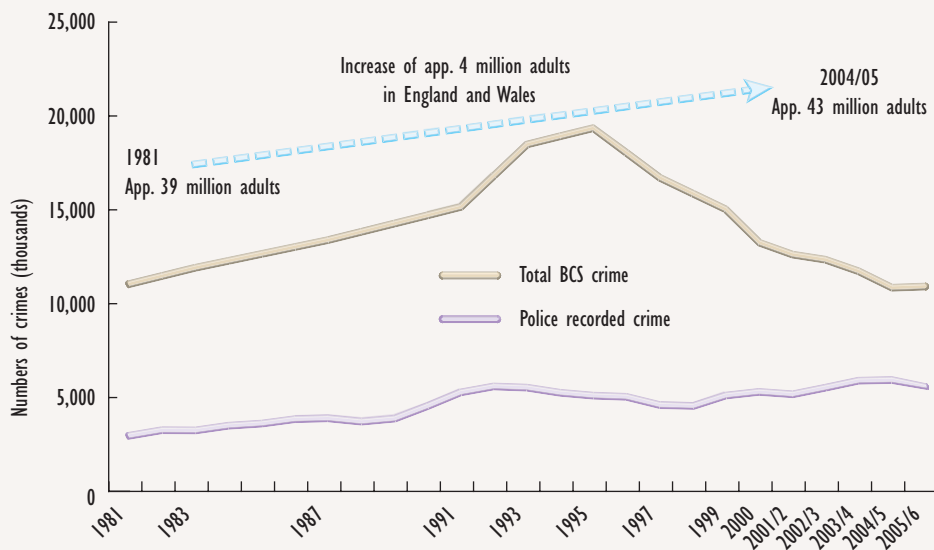
The number of crimes as estimated by the BCS increased throughout the 80s and early 90s, reaching a peak of 19 million crimes in 1995. The levels of crime then decreased and have stabilised in the last year.

Based on the 2005/06 BCS there were 10.9 million crimes, a similar level to 25 years ago.

Numbers of crimes recorded by the police have risen over this period largely due to changes to the counting rules for crime, reporting by the public and police recording practices.

The BCS count of crime includes crimes against people aged 16 or over living in private households in England and Wales, so crimes against businesses and people aged under 16 are excluded. The BCS also excludes crimes termed as victimless (e.g. drug offences) and crimes such as murders (where the victim cannot be interviewed).

Trends in BCS and police recorded crime, 1981 to 2005/06



Trends in crime – context

There are many factors which are associated with crime levels. Some of the factors thought to be associated with the increases and decreases in crime in England and Wales are:

economic activity, such as consumption, output of the economy, the unemployment rate and the proportion of females in the labour force.

- During 1990-1992 the UK was suffering a recession. This led to economic hardship which can be linked to increases in levels of crime in the early 90s. From 1996/97 onwards the economy was growing, which is thought to have contributed to the decrease in property crime since the peak in 1995.

demographic variables, such as population size, proportion of young males in the population, divorce rates.

- Research has also shown that the numbers of males aged 15-24 in the population are associated with increases in recorded property crime rates — this demographic group is most likely to commit crimes.



Source: Field *et al.* (1990, 1998)

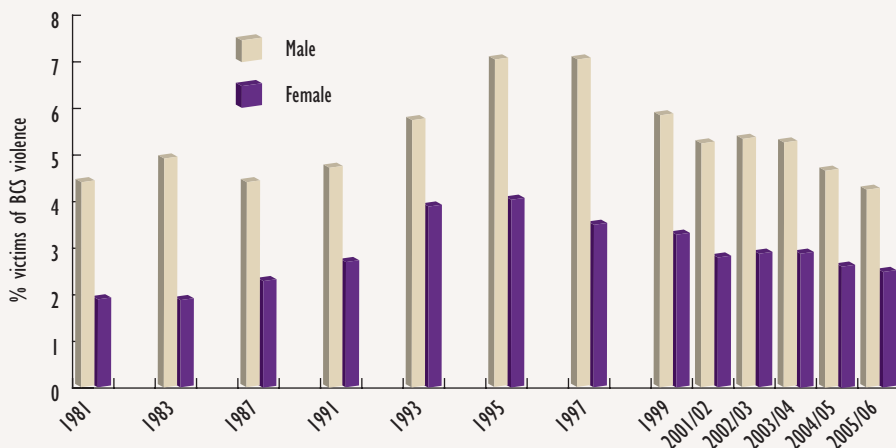
Risk of victimisation

The BCS is used to examine risk of victimisation, i.e. the proportion of people and households who have been victims of crime as changes in the number of crimes can reflect changes in the number of people (or households) as potential victims, as well as levels of repeat victimisation.

The overall risk of victimisation in 2005/06 is at the lowest level since the BCS began. Twenty-eight per cent of people had been victims of crime (any BCS crime) in 1981. However, less than a quarter (23%) were victims of crime in 2005/06.

The BCS also provides other valuable crime-related information about the nature of crimes, e.g. the location and timing of the crimes, and the risks to different groups in the population.

Trends in risk of violence by gender, 1981 to 2005/06 BCS



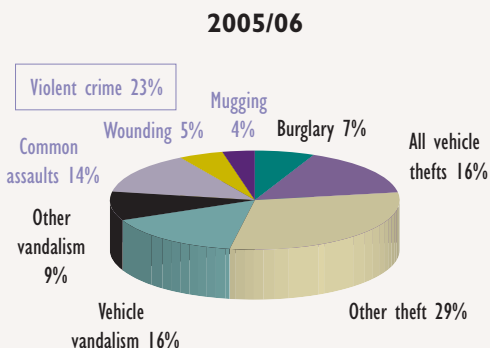
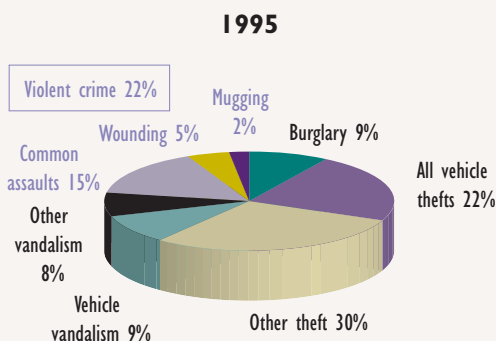
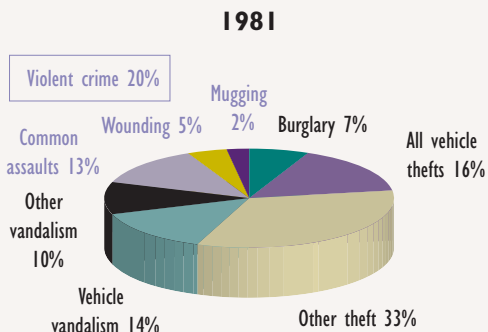
Composition of crime

The composition of crime experienced by people has changed little since 1981. Property crimes, in particular vandalism and thefts, account for the majority of BCS crimes.

Violent crime remains relatively rare compared with property crimes; in 1981 a fifth (20%) of BCS crimes were violent crimes. Based on the BCS 2005/06 less than a quarter (23%) of BCS crime was violent.

Composition of crime was similar also during the peak in the level of crime in 1995.

But there have been some changes. According to the first BCS, the most commonly experienced crime was theft of milk bottles from outside a dwelling. Ten per cent of households had been victims of this crime in 1981 whereas based on the 2005/06 BCS the most commonly experienced crime was vandalism (8%).



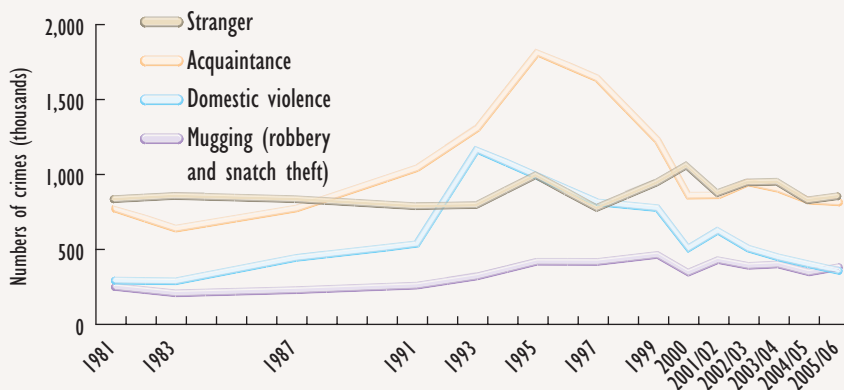
Trends and risk of violent crime

The BCS is able to provide a robust and consistent measure of the general experience of violence in England and Wales. However, for more serious violence (such as attempted murder or robbery), their relatively rare occurrence means that insufficient numbers of survey respondents report being victims of such crimes and therefore police statistics are the more reliable source.

Overall, according to the BCS, numbers of violent incidents have fallen back to similar levels to 25 years ago. There were approximately 2.2 million violent incidents in 1981, and 2.4 million based on the 2005/06 BCS. The latest figures show a significant reduction of 43 per cent from the peak of 4.3 million violent crimes in 1995.

Many of the violent crimes reported to the BCS are relatively low level violence (such as pushing and shoving) and around half of the violent crime does not involve any injury to the victim.

Trends in violent crime, 1981 to 2005/06 BCS



The BCS has always been able to provide information about the relationship between offenders and victims. It is not possible to obtain this information from police recorded crime figures. There are clear differences in the trends between different types of violent crimes. There have been significant falls in both acquaintance and domestic violence; however, the reductions in stranger violence have not been significant.

In 2005/06, 3.4 per cent of adults reported having been a victim of one or more violent crimes as defined by the BCS. The comparable figure was 3.2 per cent in 1981. During the peak in 1995 5.5 per cent of adults reported having been a victim of violent crime.

The following groups were found to be at higher risk of victimisation in 1981 and 2005/06:

1981:	2005/06:
● Men	● Men aged 16-24
● Under 30 years old	● Single
● Single, divorced, widowed	● Women aged 16-24
● Those who spent several evenings a week out	● Unemployed
● Drank heavily	● Single-adult household
● Assaulted others	● High physical disorder area

Many risk factors are the same as 25 years ago. However, the risk factors are not directly comparable as questions have changed over the years; for example questions about drinking and offending were not included in the 2005/06 BCS and the 1982 BCS did not include variables for level of physical disorder.

Since 1995, the BCS has also asked people, who report having been victims of violence, if they thought that the offender was perceived to be under the influence of alcohol. Based on the 2005/06 BCS, the offender was under the influence of alcohol in 44 per cent of violent incidents. The 2005/06 BCS estimated that there were just over a million alcohol-related violent incidents in England and Wales.

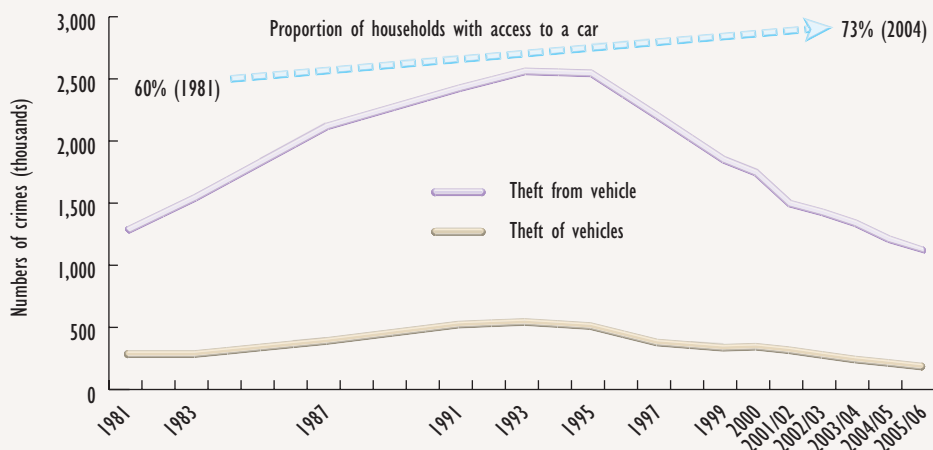
The number of alcohol-related violent crimes has generally fallen in line with overall reductions in violent crime, but the proportion of violent crimes where the offender was thought to have been under the influence of alcohol has remained at the same level in recent years.

Source: Hough and Mayhew (1983), Crime in England and Wales 2005/06 (Walker, Kershaw and Nicholas, 2006)

Trends and risk of vehicle crime

There were approximately 1.75 million vehicle-related thefts in England and Wales in 1981. Since peaking in 1995, the numbers have declined and are now back to a similar level as in 1981. This represents a decrease of 60 per cent since the peak in 1995, despite an increase in the numbers of cars on the road.

Trends in vehicle crime, 1981 to 2005/06 BCS



Vehicle security measures have been a key factor in the reduction in vehicle thefts. In the 80s most cars had few security measures which made them relatively easy to steal. The BCS has shown that having security measures considerably reduces the risk of having a car stolen.

Another important aspect is the use of a vehicle, in particular the places where it is parked. Based on the BCS 2005/06, around two-thirds of vehicle-related thefts occurred in areas around the home (68%) and just 14 per cent of vehicle-related thefts occurred in car parks.

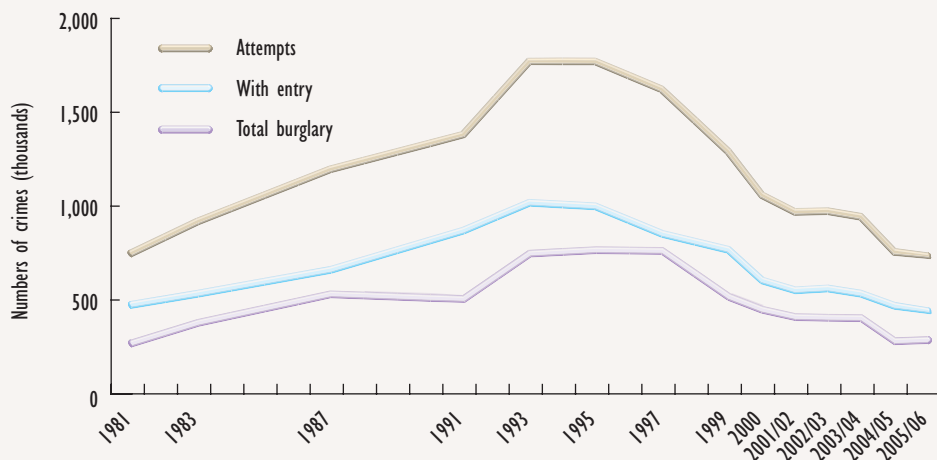
However, the BCS has shown that the risk of car crime in car parks is actually much greater after the length of time that vehicles are parked is taken into account (Clarke and Mayhew, 1996). This research was used to highlight the importance of car park safety.

Trends and risk of burglary

There were 733,000 burglaries based on the 2005/06 BCS, a similar number to the 749,000 burglaries recorded by the BCS in 1981. Since the peak of 1,770,000 burglaries in 1995, the number of domestic burglaries has fallen by 59 per cent.

The risk of burglary is also now below the level recorded by the first BCS. In 1981 3.4 per cent of households had been victims of burglary, whereas based on 2005/06 interviews only 2.4 per cent had been victims of burglary.

Trends in burglary, 1981 to 2005/06 BCS



The 2005/06 BCS shows that certain factors are associated with a higher risk of victimisation: having no security measures, the household reference person unemployed, household reference person aged 16-24 and high perceived physical disorder in the local area.

Note: Household reference person is the member of the household in whose name the accommodation is owned or rented, or is otherwise responsible for the accommodation. Where this responsibility is joint within the household, the HRP is the person with the highest income. If incomes are equal, then the oldest person is the HRP.

Source: Crime in England and Wales 2005/06 (Walker, Kershaw and Nicholas, 2006)

Trends and risk of burglary (continued)

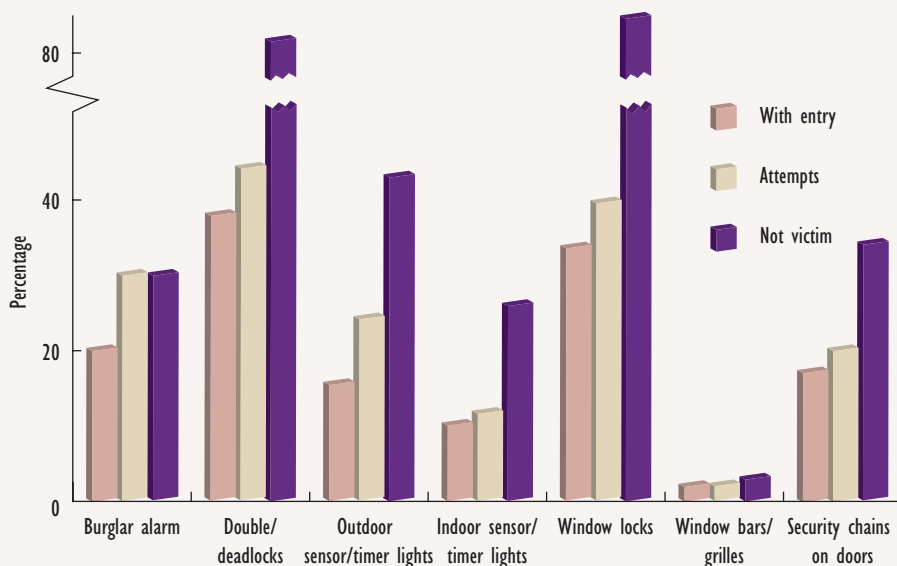
Home security measures are the key risk factor for burglary victimisation. Households where there were no home security measures were almost ten times more likely to have been victims of burglary than households where there were simple security measures such as deadlocks on doors and window locks (19.4% compared with 2.1% among 2005/06 respondents).

The BCS has also shown security measures to be effective in preventing entry to a property resulting in an attempted (but unsuccessful) burglary.

In 1982 only three per cent of households had a burglar alarm. Based on the BCS 2005/06 29 per cent of households had a burglar alarm.

Based on the 1982 BCS, 61 per cent had taken actions, apart from locking windows and doors, to reduce burglary, such as leaving lights on or informing relatives when going away.

Ownership of home security measures among households, BCS 2005/06



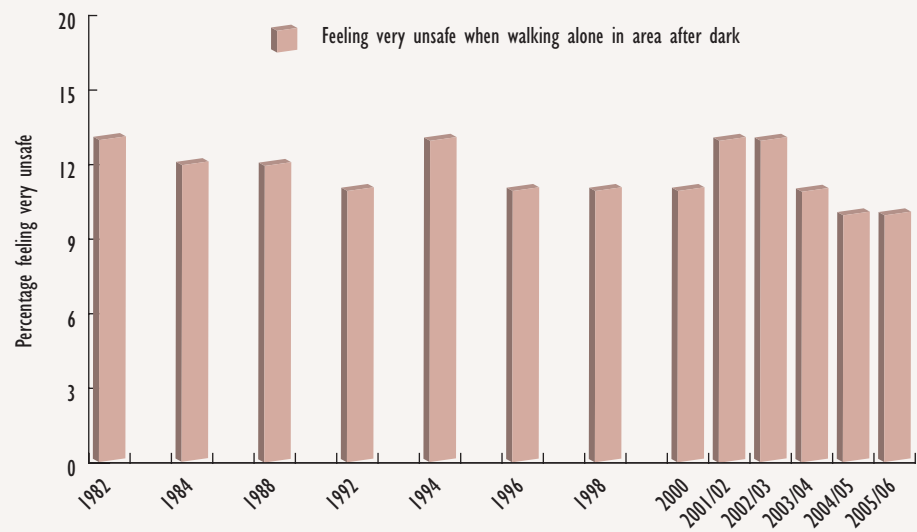
Source: Crime in England and Wales 2005/06 (Walker, Kershaw and Nicholas, 2006), BCS 1982

Feelings of safety

The first BCS also examined people's fears about crime, as it was recognised that this can be disproportionate to their actual risk of crime.

The BCS has included one question since the beginning: "how safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark?". The proportion of people who feel very unsafe has generally remained stable over the years, between 10 and 13 per cent. Trends in feelings of safety do not reflect changes in actual crime levels, suggesting that there may be other factors influencing feelings of safety.

Trends in feelings of safety walking alone after dark, 1982 to 2005/06 BCS



The findings from the first BCS indicated that women, the elderly and those in inner cities felt least safe. This has remained unchanged. According to the 2004/05 BCS, women and the elderly were again most likely to feel unsafe walking alone.

The first BCS also asked if people were worried about becoming a victim of crime. Respondents who were worried about crime were also asked what crime they worried about most. Burglary was the crime most frequently worried about (44%), followed by mugging (34%). There are no comparable figures for 2005/06 as the questions about worry about crime have been changed.

Source: Allen (forthcoming)

Trends in worry about crime

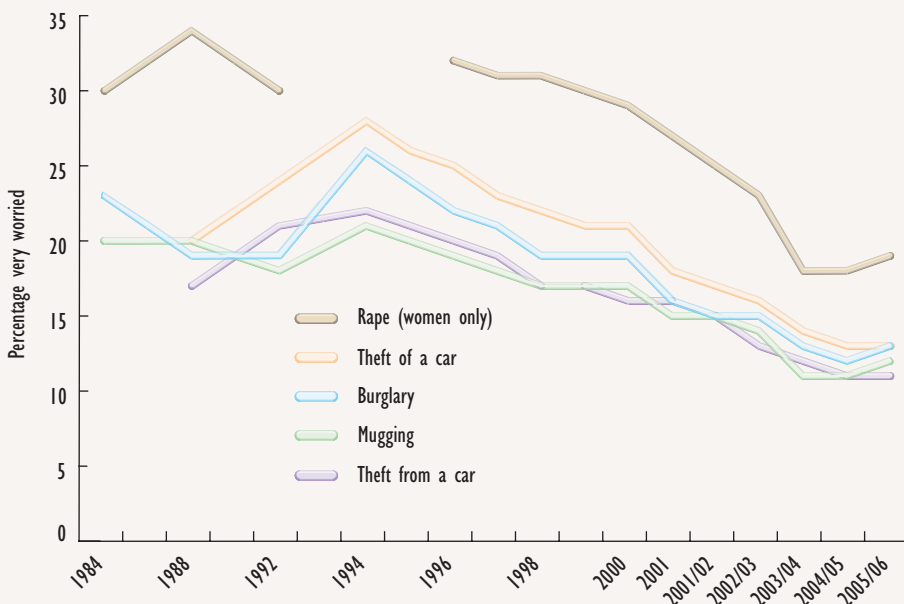
The BCS has included questions on worry about different crimes since 1984. The 1994 BCS saw levels of worry for all types of crime reach their highest level, followed by large falls in the levels of those very worried in subsequent years. The levels have stabilised more recently.

Questions on worry are combined into three summary measures: worry about violent crime, vehicle crime and burglary. According to the BCS 2005/06, 17 per cent of respondents were very worried about violent crime, 13 per cent about burglary and 14 per cent about vehicle crime.

Women were more likely to worry about violent crime and burglary than men (but not about car crime). People who read national tabloids were around twice as likely as readers of national broadsheets to worry about all crime types (BCS 2005/06).

Findings from the 2003/04 BCS showed that two key factors associated with increased levels of worry about crime are believing that they are likely to become victims of crime in the coming year, and perceiving there to be high levels of physical disorder in their area.

Trends in worry about crime types, 1984 to 2005/06 BCS



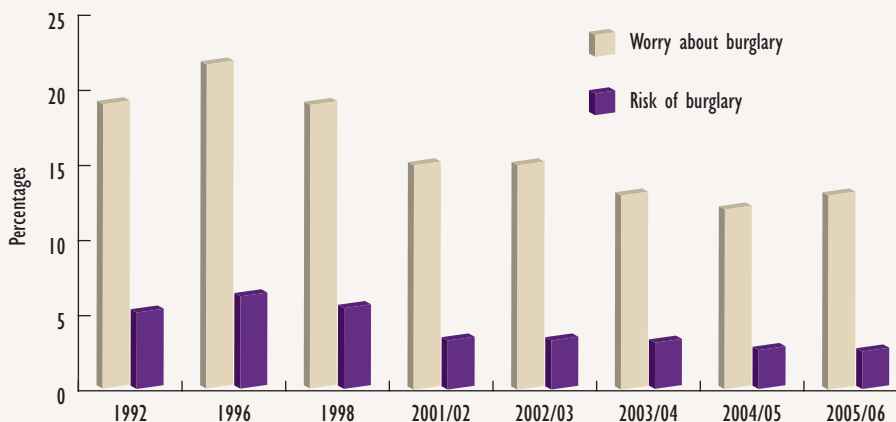
Source: Allen (forthcoming), Crime in England and Wales 2005/06 (Walker, Kershaw and Nicholas, 2006)

Worry about crime and risk of victimisation

So to what extent does people's worry about crime reflect changes in their risk of becoming victims of crime?

Worry about burglary increased in the early 90s mirroring the increase in the risk of becoming a victim of burglary. Both worry about and risk of burglary have also fallen since the peak.

Worry about and risk of burglary, 1992 to 2005/06 BCS



The 2004/05 survey asked respondents to place their worry about crime into context, by asking them which of a series of circumstances they worried about most in relation to themselves or those close to them.

Only ten per cent of people said they were most worried about being a victim of crime. Serious illness was the most feared circumstance, with 38 per cent of people saying they were most worried about this.

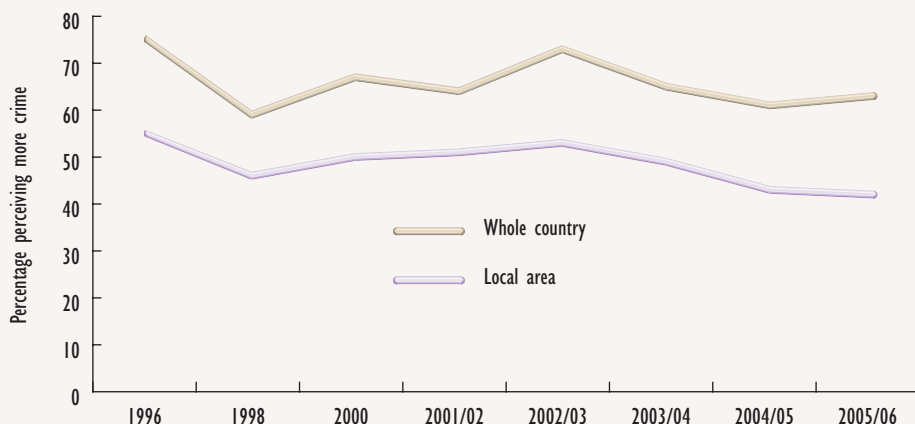
Note: Information about only burglary is included as the risk and worry about other crime types are less directly comparable.

Source: Allen (forthcoming), Crime in England and Wales 2005/06 (Walker, Kershaw and Nicholas, 2006)

Perceptions of crime levels

The BCS also asks people about their perceptions of how the level of crime has changed over the previous two years.

Trends in perceptions of crime levels, 1996 to 2005/06 BCS



Despite the reduction in the total number of crimes since 1995, comparatively high proportions of people continue to believe crime has risen across the country as a whole and in their local area.

Based on the 2005/06 BCS, around two-thirds (63%) of people thought crime nationally had increased in the previous two years. But people have less negative perceptions of crime in their own area – less than half thought crime in their local area had increased (42%).

People's perceptions vary. Readers of national tabloids were about twice as likely as those who read national broadsheets to think the national crime rate had increased a lot in the previous two years (39% and 19% respectively).

Note: Figures from 1996 onwards only included because the questions differ in earlier surveys.

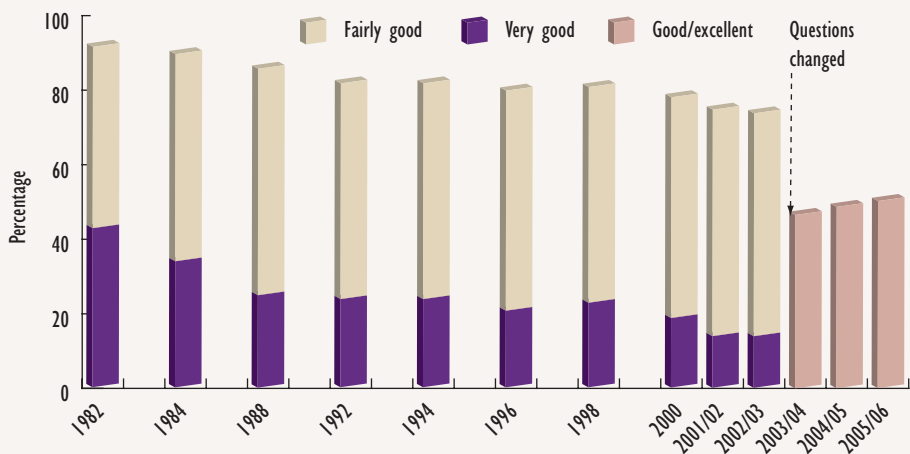
Source: Crime in England and Wales 2005/06 (Walker, Kershaw and Nicholas, 2006)

Ratings of the police

The BCS has also included questions since it began about people's perceptions and contact with the police. Overall people's ratings of their local police declined throughout the 80s and 90s; in 1982 92 per cent of respondents said that local police were doing a very or fairly good job, and by 2001/02 the figure had fallen to 75 per cent.

This question was changed for the 2003/04 BCS questionnaire in order to improve the quality of the data collected. The reported levels are therefore now on a different basis, and not comparable.

Ratings of local police, 1982 to 2005/06 BCS



In 2005/06 50 per cent of people thought their local police were doing an excellent or good job, an increase from the previous two years (49% 2004/05, 47% 2003/04).

In general, people appear more likely to rate the police as doing a good job compared with other criminal justice system agencies such as prisons.

Source: Crime in England and Wales 2005/06 (Walker, Kershaw and Nicholas, 2006), Nicholas and Walker (2004), Allen et al. (2004)

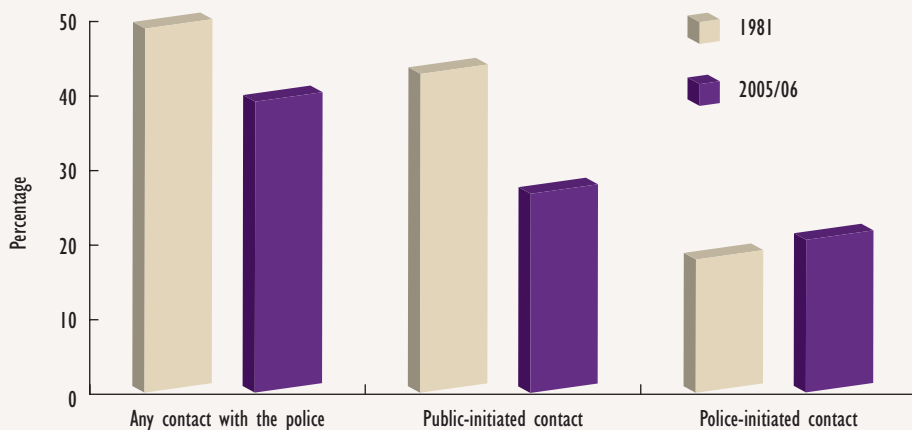
Contact with the police

Overall contact with the police has decreased over the last 25 years. In 1981 49 per cent of people had had contact with the police during the previous year, whereas in 2005/06 the comparable figure was 39 per cent.

Public-initiated contact with the police has clearly changed. In 1981 43 per cent had contacted the police - most commonly to ask directions. In 2005/06 a significantly lower proportion (27%) of people had contacted the police, most commonly to report a crime.

The proportion of people who had police-initiated contact has increased from 18 per cent in 1981 to 21 per cent in 2005/06.

Contact with the police, 1981 and 2005/06 BCS



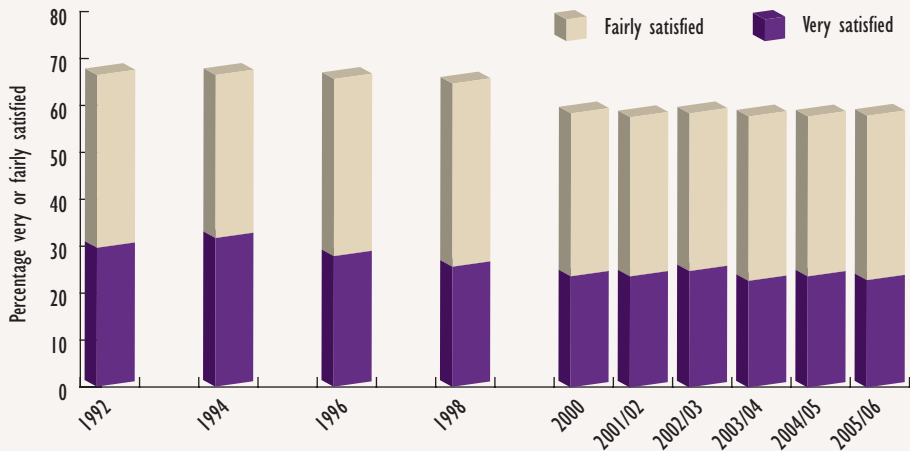
Source: Southgate and Ekblom (1984), BCS 2005/06

Satisfaction with the police

The BCS also asks victims how satisfied they were with the police. Victims' satisfaction with the way the police dealt with the matter decreased between 1994 and 2000, but has remained stable since.

It is not possible to provide trend data for the full 25 years on victim satisfaction due to changes in questions. However, in 1981 four-fifths of victims who had any contact with the police expressed satisfaction.

Victim satisfaction with the police, 1992 to 2005/06 BCS



Recent BCS analyses have shown the factors which are most strongly associated with victim satisfaction (acquisitive crimes) are: being over 75, whether the offender was charged, and having at least some property recovered.

The aspect of police-public contact which scores lowest in terms of victim satisfaction is 'keeping victims informed in relation to their crime'. Victims felt they had been kept well informed in only 32 per cent of all incidents. Victims who felt they were kept well informed were more likely to be satisfied than those who did not (93% and 40% respectively, 2004/05 BCS).

Source: Crime in England and Wales 2005/06 (Walker, Kershaw and Nicholas, 2006), Allen *et al.* (2005), Hough and Mayhew (1983)

Emerging issues in the 1980s: repeat victimisation and domestic violence

Police recorded crime statistics have limited information about the relationship between the victim and the offender, and are unable to provide estimates on domestic violence.

The first BCS estimated that 10 per cent of assault victims were women who had been assaulted by their partners or ex-partners, highlighting the problem of domestic violence. The first report also recognised that this could well be an underestimate, due to victims being reluctant to reveal such sensitive information (see 'Emerging issues in the 90s: interpersonal violence' for later developments).



The first BCS also indicated that some people or households suffer repeatedly from crimes. As highlighted in the report

"These so-called 'multiple victims' are themselves statistically rare, but their existence cautions that explanations for their experiences may be of a different sort than is applicable for the bulk of the population."

(Gottfredson, 1984)

The BCS 2005/06 indicated that victims of vandalism and common assault were most likely to suffer repeat victimisation. Thirty per cent of vandalism victims and 29 per cent of common assault victims had been victimised more than once in the past 12 months.

Emerging issues in the 1980s: Black and Minority Ethnic groups' experiences

The BCS has evolved considerably over the years and its scope is now much wider than the main areas it covered in the beginning. The BCS is adapted annually to cover new issues and topics.

The BCS first included an additional sample of people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups in 1988. The additional sample allows the BCS to examine Black and Minority Ethnic groups' experiences of crime and the criminal justice system, as without the additional sample the numbers of people from these groups were too small for robust analysis.

The BCS is nowadays also used to monitor numbers of racially motivated crimes. Racially motivated crime became an important issue for the government in the 90s, in particular after the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. The BCS asks victims of crime if they thought the crime was racially motivated, which allows the BCS to estimate numbers of these crimes. According to the BCS 2004/05 there were 179,000 racially motivated crimes in England and Wales.

More recently there has been increased interest in crimes that may be religiously motivated, as well as hate crimes in general. A question was added to the 2005/06 BCS to ask victims of crime if they thought the crime had been religiously motivated.



Source/see also: Jansson (forthcoming), Clancy *et al.* (2001), Salisbury and Upson, (2004)

Emerging issues in the 1990s: anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is currently a major focus for government policy and practitioners. Questions were added to the 1992 BCS to ask people about their perceptions of anti-social behaviour in their area. The questions were revised in the 2003/04 BCS and currently there are seven types of behaviours that are used in the overall measure, and additional questions covering a wider range of issues.

Based on the 2005/06 BCS, one in six people (17%) perceived a high level of anti-social behaviour in their local area. There has been a decrease in overall perceptions of anti-social behaviour since 2002/03 (from 21%), but the perceptions have remained stable over the last year.

The overall anti-social behaviour measure is based on seven strands of behaviours. The most common types of behaviour in this shortlist perceived in 2005/06 were teenagers hanging around on the streets (32%) and rubbish or litter lying around (30%).



In the longer list of behaviours, fireworks (not part of organised display) and uncontrolled dogs and dog mess were also commonly perceived problems (27% and 24% respectively), (BCS 2004/05).

Emerging issues in the 1990s: confidence in the criminal justice system

The 1996 BCS included a module for obtaining information about people's attitudes towards and perceptions of the criminal justice system. The importance of public confidence in the criminal justice system had been recognised previously, although studies on the topic were out of date or not representative.

"The 1996 BCS offered a timely opportunity both to chart opinion in an authoritative way and to explore the factors which shape this opinion."

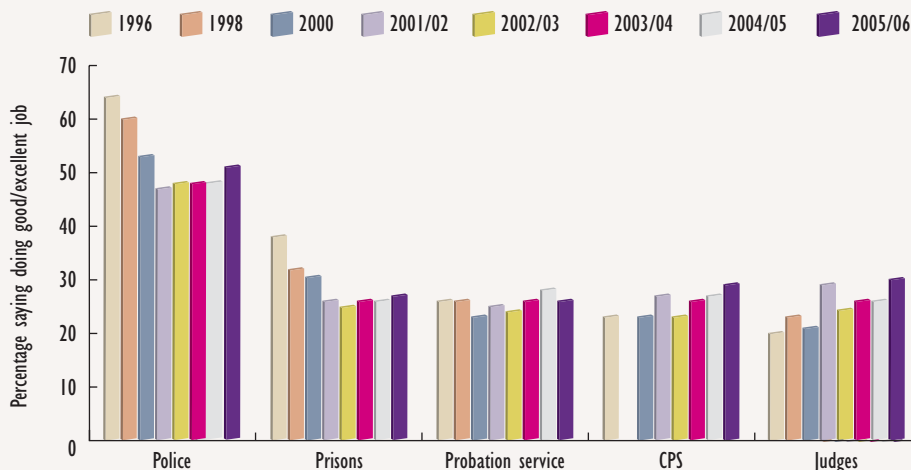
(Hough and Roberts, 1998)

The results from the 1996 BCS showed that the general public were least likely to think judges were doing a good job among criminal justice professionals, followed by the Crown Prosecution Service and the probation service.

The BCS also includes questions about people's confidence in seven aspects of the criminal justice system, e.g. how confident people are that the CJS is effective at reducing crime.

Confidence in the CJS has generally been improving since the 2002/03 BCS, with increases in many of the CJS performance aspects.

Ratings of criminal justice agencies, 1996 to 2005/06 BCS



Note: Ratings for magistrates and youth courts not included here, see Allen *et al.*, 2006.

Emerging issues in the 1990s: interpersonal violence

One of the criticisms of victimisation surveys, including the BCS, was that they were likely to seriously underestimate the levels of interpersonal violence, such as domestic violence and sexual victimisation.

The issue of willingness to disclose such sensitive information is very important for interpersonal violence. Respondents may not want to disclose sensitive information face to face, and therefore a self-completion module was included in the 1994 BCS.

The module is asked after the main survey. The respondents view the questions and enter their responses directly onto a laptop computer. This more confidential method of data collection facilitates greater levels of disclosure of sensitive events than during the face-to-face interview.



The self-completion module has since been included in the BCS in 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2004/05 and 2005/06, examining different aspects of interpersonal violence, although the questions have varied, in order to address different areas of policy interest.

The 2004/05 BCS examined levels of four types of intimate violence: partner abuse (non-sexual), family abuse (non-sexual), sexual assault and stalking.

Based on the 2004/05 BCS self-completion module three per cent of women and two per cent of men had experienced partner violence (minor or severe force) in the last year. Based on the face-to-face interviews, 0.6 of women and 0.2 per cent of men had been victims of domestic violence, indicating the level of under-reporting of this type of crime in face-to-face interviews.

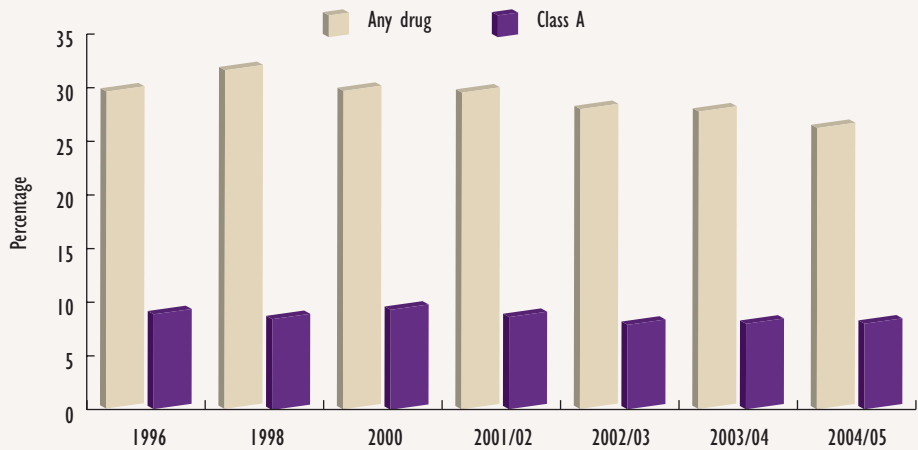
Emerging issues in the 1990s: young people and drug use

The government's Drug Strategy began in 1998, and the BCS is used to monitor the government's target to reduce drug use among young people.

The BCS has included an additional sample of people aged between 16 and 24 since the 2001/02 BCS. This was introduced to improve the survey's ability to provide estimates of drug use among this age group, and thereby to better monitor trends in drug use.

The youth sample is obtained by a separate screening exercise at the addresses selected to take part in the main survey.

Proportion of 16 to 24 year olds reporting having used drugs last year, 1996 to 2004/05 BCS



The BCS can provide consistent trend data on drug use from 1996 onwards. The BCS 2004/05 estimated that eight per cent of those aged 16-24 had used at least one Class A drug in the last year, and 26 per cent had used one or more illicit drug in the last year.

The use of “any drug” in the past year among those aged 16-24 had decreased between 1998 and 2004/05. Class A drug use has remained stable among young people between 1998 and 2004/05.

Source: Roe (2005)

Recent emerging issues: fraud and technology crimes

The BCS is also used to examine new or emerging types of crime, such as fraud and technology crimes. Statistics recorded by the police on fraud and technology crimes do not provide reliable information about the extent and trends in these crimes as many offences go unreported. Victimisation surveys can provide information about these crimes, although sometimes the victim may not be aware that they have been a victim of these crimes such as identity theft.

The BCS includes three separate modules to examine these new emerging crimes:

Mobile phone theft — a mobile phone theft module was added to the BCS 2001/02, to examine levels of thefts of mobile phones.

Fraud and technology crimes — a module covering fraud and technology crimes was first introduced in the 2002/03 BCS. This covered the extent to which people had been victims of debit and credit card fraud, their computers had been infected with viruses or hacked into or they had been sent harassing emails.

ID theft — An ID theft module was introduced to the BCS in 2005/06. The module examines the extent to which people have been victims of identity theft, e.g. having their personal details used to obtain a credit card or applying for state benefits. The module also examines whether people have had their identity documents stolen, which could then be used in identity theft.



Future of the BCS

The BCS is likely to evolve further in the future. Recent reviews of crime statistics highlight areas of the BCS that could be considered for further developments. These include methodological improvements; widening the scope of the BCS, such as the inclusion of people under the age of 16 or commercial victimisation; and different ways of presenting and disseminating BCS data.

Developments in technology and research methodologies may also change the way in which the BCS is carried out, or the data is collected. For example more and more research is being now carried out online and this may be an option for the future BCS. The Home Office survey of offending uses Audio CASI, a self-completion method where respondents can listen to the questions while completing the questionnaire on a laptop, thus overcoming literacy problems and ensuring complete confidentiality. Technological developments such as these may result in new techniques being considered for the BCS in the future.



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