ETHNIC MINORITIES, VICTIMISATION AND RACIAL HARASSMENT
Marian FitzGerald and Chris Hale

The British Crime Survey (BCS) is a large sample survey which estimates the extent of crimes and serious threats committed against individuals and their households. Where these incidents have been reported to the police, victims are asked about the police response. The survey also collects information on crime-related topics, including people’s worries and anxieties about crime. Since 1988, it has boosted its sample of Afro-Caribbean and Asian respondents and has asked whether victims believed incidents to have been racially motivated. This report compares the results for different ethnic groups, combining data for 1988 and 1992 in order to present findings separately within the ‘Asian’ group for Indians and Pakistanis.

KEY POINTS

- Ethnic minorities are more likely to be victims of crimes and serious threats than whites. The main reasons for this are their age structure, their socio-economic characteristics and the type of area they live in.

- In general, minority victims in all groups are no less likely than whites to report offences to the police; and in some cases they are actually more likely to do so. However, minority victims are much less satisfied with the police response.

- The proportion of all minority respondents in the BCS who had been victims of racially motivated incidents in the preceding year was four per cent for Afro-Caribbeans, five per cent for Indians and eight per cent for Pakistanis.

- Nearly a third of Pakistani victims said that incidents were racially motivated and this rose to 70% in the case of threats. The average figure for Indians was lower, at just under a fifth; for Afro-Caribbean victims it was 14%.

- Racially motivated incidents are more likely to be reported to the police by Indians than other types of crime; but both Afro-Caribbeans and Pakistanis are less inclined to report these incidents. Victims are even less satisfied with the police response to the racial incidents they report than with the police response to other types of crimes and threats.

- Fear of crime is higher among the Asian groups than whites even when allowance is made for other relevant factors.

- In areas where racial attacks are perceived as a problem, both minority and white respondents tend to have higher levels of fear of crime.

- The BCS provides no evidence of the large rise in racial incidents between 1988 and 1992 suggested by police figures. But it shows a large gap between the number of racial incidents reported to the police and the number they actually recorded over that period.
Nor has there been much information on ethnic differences in victimisation generally. In 1988 the numbers of ethnic minority respondents to the British Crime Survey (BCS) were increased. In addition to the standard BCS questions about whether they or their household had been victims of crimes or serious threats since the beginning of the preceding year, ethnic minority victims (i.e. those of Afro-Caribbean or Asian origin) were asked whether they thought the incidents had been racially motivated. This oversampling has been repeated in subsequent sweeps of the BCS and the main results for individual years have already been reported elsewhere (see references below). In this summary the data for 1988 and 1992 have been combined to provide more detailed analyses of differences within the ‘Asian’ group.

ETHNIC MINORITIES AS VICTIMS OF CRIME AND THREATS

All the ethnic minority groups covered by the BCS are more likely than whites to be victims of both household and personal offences (see Figure 1).

However, there are variations between different minority groups and different offence categories. Pakistanis are generally at greater risk of crime than Afro-Caribbeans or Indians. They are particularly vulnerable to vandalism of their houses and cars and to serious threats. Afro-Caribbeans are especially at risk of assaults and acquisitive crime, such as burglaries and car thefts as well as robberies or thefts from the person (including ‘muggings’). Indians are more at risk of acquisitive crime than Pakistanis but less so than Afro-Caribbeans; on the other hand they are more at risk of household vandalism than Afro-Caribbeans but less so than Pakistanis.

Most of these apparent ethnic differences are accounted for by demographic and socio-economic variations between ethnic groups particularly in age structure, employment status and the areas in which they live. That is, forms of disadvantage which disproportionately affect members of ethnic minorities also increase their risks of being victims of crime. Ethnicity as such may also add to the risk for some groups for some types of offence even when other relevant factors are taken into account. This is especially true for Asians. Thus, Indians in low crime areas seem to experience higher rates of vandalism because they are Indian; and older Pakistanis are more vulnerable to assaults and to serious threats than whites of the same age who live in similar circumstances.

RACIALLY MOTIVATED CRIMES AND THREATS

Ethnic minority victims of crime were more likely to see racial motivation in personal offences than in household offences. Even in personal offences, most incidents were not thought to be racially motivated, although there were differences between Afro-Caribbeans, Indians and Pakistanis; and perceptions of racial motivation varied considerably between particular types of incident (see Figure 2).

Pakistanis seem to be most vulnerable to racially motivated crimes and threats. They said that nearly a third of all incidents had been racially motivated (compared with 18% of Indians and 14% of Afro-Caribbeans); and this more than doubled in the case of threats. It is important to remember, however, that only a minority of any group has recently been a victim of crime. Of all Pakistani respondents in the BCS eight per cent had experienced a racially motivated incident since January of the previous year. The figure for Indians was five per cent; for Afro-Caribbeans, four per cent.
Racially motivated incidents do not add much to the total number of incidents against ethnic minorities because racial prejudice is rarely the only or the main reason for their victimisation. Yet the additional racial element may significantly alter the victim's experience. Incidents which they perceived to be racially motivated had a noticeably greater impact on ethnic minority victims and their households than other crimes. And the characteristics of racially motivated incidents were slightly different from others. A higher proportion involved white offenders; they were more likely to involve groups of offenders rather than individuals; those responsible were more likely to be complete strangers to the victim; and more incidents formed part of a series instead of being isolated occurrences (see Table 1).

REPORTING TO THE POLICE

Minority victims (in all groups) are more likely than whites to report household offences to the police, although there is some variation between offences. However, only Indians are more likely than whites to report personal offences; and, relative to other groups, Pakistanis are markedly less likely to report threats, even though they suffer a disproportionate number of these. Only 15% of Pakistani victims reported serious threats to the police compared to 34% of white and 50% of Indian victims.

Reasons for not reporting to the police vary between groups; but negative expectations of the police response seem to figure more prominently for minority victims. About a third of white victims who decided not to report incidents said that the police would not have taken any interest and/or that the police could have done nothing. The figure for Afro-Caribbeans and Pakistanis was 45%. For Indians it was 41%. Afro-Caribbean victims show similar levels of reporting irrespective of the ethnicity of the offender. But both white and Pakistani victims seem slightly more likely to report incidents where they had identified the perpetrator as black. Indians seem more likely to do so where the perpetrator is white.

Minority victims who report to the police are less likely than whites to be satisfied with the response. Whereas a third of whites were very or fairly dissatisfied, this rose to 40% of Afro-Caribbeans, 45% of Indians, and fully half of Pakistani victims. For incidents which victims thought to be racially motivated, dissatisfaction among minorities was higher still, at 54% for both Indians and Pakistanis and 62% for Afro-Caribbeans.

There is a very marked gap between the racially motivated crimes which BCS respondents say they reported to the police and the racial incident figures which the police record. According to the survey, in 1992 an estimated 50,000 such incidents would have been reported by Afro-Caribbeans and Asians alone. The police figure (which covers all ethnic groups) was less than 8,000 (see Figure 3). There are a several reasons for this gap; but it is important to recognise that, as the police begin to close it, the rise in the number of incidents they record may be misinterpreted as evidence of a rise in the actual level of racial harassment.

FEAR OF CRIME

In general, Asians are more likely than whites to feel unsafe both out alone and in their own homes after dark, with the differences for men (both Indian and Pakistani) particularly striking. Afro-Caribbeans are no more fearful than whites of going out at night; but they feel less safe in their own homes (see Figure 4).

These heightened fears are partly explained by the fact that higher proportions of the minorities also belong to groups in which levels of fear are higher for everyone. For example, more of them have been victims of crime and more of them live in high crime risk areas. However, even when other relevant factors are taken into account the Asian groups are still significantly more likely to feel unsafe. Afro-Caribbeans, on the other hand, feel safer than any other group alone on the street at night.

All minority groups are more fearful than whites of burglary, mugging/robbery and rape. Again, these concerns are largely explained by factors other than ethnicity as such; but Afro-Caribbeans remain more worried about burglary even when these other factors are taken into account.

Table 1
Characteristics of offences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Part of a series</th>
<th>Four/more offenders</th>
<th>White offender(s)</th>
<th>Offender(s) a stranger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RM</td>
<td>RM</td>
<td>RM</td>
<td>RM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not RM</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not RM</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not RM</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RM = Incident perceived by victim as racially motivated
Not RM = Incident not perceived by victim as racially motivated

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Many fears and anxieties about crime have been found to be associated with what people feel about the problems in their neighbourhood – such as graffiti, or drunks on the streets. For the first time in 1992 the BCS added to the list of ‘incivilities’ a question about whether respondents thought that racial attacks were a problem in their area. The answers suggest that perceptions of this particular type of violence are linked with heightened levels of fear in all groups, including whites.

CONCLUSIONS
- Important differences in the experiences of different ethnic groups are obscured if the categories used are too broad. Many of the findings within the ‘Asian’ group vary considerably between Indians and Pakistanis.
- It is not possible to measure racial harassment with precision for a number of reasons. One is that some incidents which involve racial motivation may not be apparent to the victim. Another is the extent to which racial incidents overlap with more general victimisation. Thus, it is often artificial to categorise some incidents as ‘racial’ and others as ‘not racial’. It is important, therefore, not to attach too much weight to estimates of the actual number of ‘racial’ incidents and trends over time.
- Relatively low levels of ethnic minority confidence in the police are not confined to Afro-Caribbeans. They are also found among the Asian groups; and may be influenced by these groups’ experiences as victims of crime – in particular the police response to crimes which have a racial element to them.
- The BCS provides no evidence to support the rise of 77% in racial incidents for England and Wales between 1988 and 1992 suggested by the police figures.

REFERENCES


Marian FitzGerald is a Principal Research Officer in the Crime and Criminal Justice Unit, Research and Statistics Directorate. Chris Hale is Professor of Criminology at the University of Kent.