

Article

Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2021

Analyses of information held within the Home Office Homicide Index, which contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales.



Contact:
Nick Stripe
crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk
+44 20 7592 8695

Release date:
10 February 2022

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Trends in homicide](#)
3. [Variations in homicide victimisation by personal characteristics](#)
4. [The relationship between victims and suspects](#)
5. [The most common methods of killing](#)
6. [Circumstances and location of homicides](#)
7. [Drug- and alcohol-related homicides](#)
8. [Suspects in homicide cases](#)
9. [International homicide comparisons](#)
10. [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2021 data](#)
11. [Glossary](#)
12. [Data sources and quality](#)
13. [Related links](#)

1 . Main points

- There were 594 homicide victims in the year ending March 2021, 79 fewer (a 12% decrease) than the previous year and the lowest number since the year ending March 2016 (540 victims).
- The preceding year (ending March 2020) included the 39 victims found in a lorry in Grays, Essex and if this incident is excluded from that year, there would have been a smaller (6%) year-on-year decrease.
- The year ending March 2021 covered certain time periods where coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions were in place to limit social contact; these restrictions may have led to a reduction in homicide in this year.
- The homicide rate was 9.9 per million population, with the rate for males (14 per million population) more than twice that for females (6 per million population).
- The headline reduction of 12% from the previous year masked different trends between males and females; the number of male victims decreased by 16% (495 to 416) whereas the number of female victims was the same as last year (177 victims).
- Although there was a substantial fall in the number of victims who were killed in public places compared with last year (a 27% decrease), there was a 5% increase in victims who were killed in a residential setting, which may explain the different trends between males and females.
- There were 114 domestic homicides in the year ending March 2021, a similar number to the average over the last five years.
- For those homicide victims where a suspect had been charged, 92% (380) of victims had suspects who were male.

2 . Trends in homicide

There were 594 victims of homicide in the year ending March 2021, 79 fewer (a 12% decrease) than the previous year and the lowest since the year ending March 2016 (540 victims; [Appendix table 1](#)). The year ending March 2020 figures included the 39 victims of human trafficking whose bodies were found in a lorry in Grays, Essex, in October 2019. Excluding this single incident, the number of homicides decreased by 40 (a 6% decrease).

Coronavirus and homicide trends

The year ending March 2021 covered certain time periods where coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions were in place to limit social contact. These restrictions may have affected patterns of various crime types during this period, including homicide offences. More recent data from the main police recorded crime return show that the level of homicide increased following the removal of restrictions on 11 April 2021. There were 387 homicides in the six-month period from April to September 2021 compared with 298 in the same period during the previous year. These headline numbers are published as part of the quarterly [Crime in England and Wales bulletin](#).

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions appeared to differ by the nature of the homicide. For example, the number of victims who were killed in a public place in the year ending March 2021 fell by 27%, from 350 to 255, whereas the number of homicides in a residential setting increased by 5% (from 323 to 339). Similarly, the number of non-domestic homicides where the victim was aged 16 years or over (which are more likely to occur in a public place) fell by 17% (from 508 to 420) while the number of domestic homicides (114; more likely to occur in a residence) were similar to the previous year (121; [Appendix table 13](#)).

More information is given in [Section 3](#).

Longer term trends in homicide

To put the raw numbers in context, prevalence rates show the volume of offences as a proportion of the resident population. The incidence rate for homicide remains very low, with 9.9 homicides recorded per million population during the year ending March 2021, the lowest rate since the year ending March 2016 (9.3 per million population).

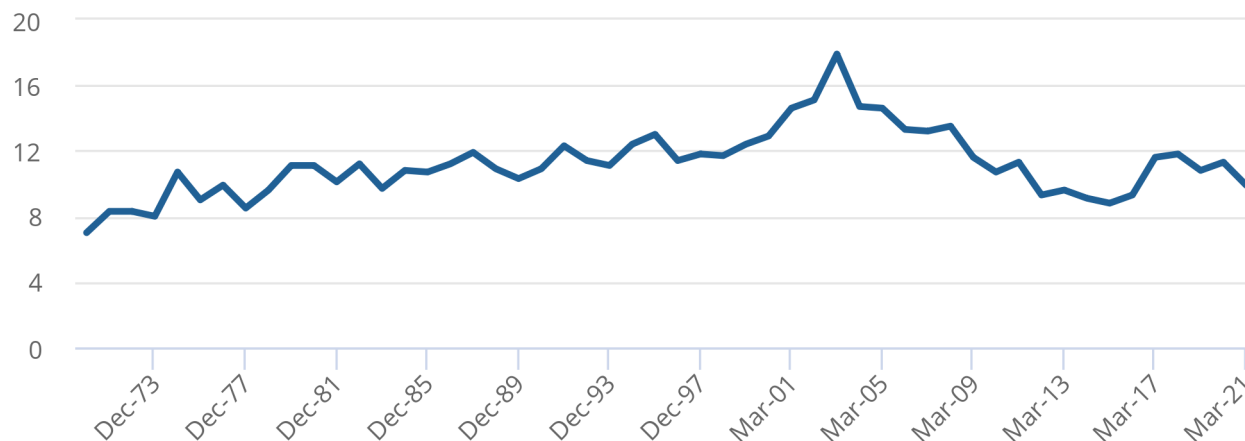
The number of homicides increased from around 300 per year in the early 1960s to consistently over 700 in the early years of this century. This was at a faster rate than population growth over the same period, with the rate of homicide increasing from around 6 per million population in the early 1960s to 15.1 by the year ending March 2002. However, from the peak in the year ending March 2002, the volume of homicides generally decreased while the population of England and Wales continued to grow (excluding the year ending March 2003, when 173 victims of Harold Shipman were recorded). This led to a fall in the homicide rate to a low point of 8.8 per million population in the year ending March 2015. The rate then increased until the year ending March 2018 (11.8) before falling to around 11 in the following two years. The latest year shows a decrease to 9.9 per million population (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The homicide rate has decreased, following an increase the previous year

Homicide rate, England and Wales, year ending December 1970 to year ending March 2021

Figure 1: The homicide rate has decreased, following an increase the previous year

Homicide rate, England and Wales, year ending December 1970 to year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

Notes:

1. Year ending December 1987 includes 15 victims of Michael Ryan.
2. Year ending March 2001 includes 58 Chinese nationals who suffocated in a lorry en route into the UK.
3. Year ending March 2003 includes 173 victims of Dr Harold Shipman.
4. Year ending March 2004 includes 20 cockle pickers who drowned in Morecambe Bay.
5. Year ending March 2006 includes 52 victims of the 7 July London bombings.
6. Year ending March 2011 includes 12 victims of Derrick Bird.
7. Year ending March 2017 includes 96 victims of Hillsborough and four victims of the Westminster Bridge attack.
8. Year ending March 2018 includes 31 victims of the terrorist attacks that involved multiple victims, including the Manchester Arena bombing, and the London Bridge attack. It also includes 11 victims from the Shoreham air crash.
9. Year ending March 2020 includes 39 human trafficking victims who were found dead in a lorry in Essex.

In the 1960s, the proportion of homicide victims was fairly evenly split between males and females but have since showed different trends. The number of female victims has tended to fluctuate between 180 and 250 a year from the 1960s, although there are occasional years where the number has been higher than 250. In contrast, the number of male victims increased, reaching an average of around 550 a year between year ending March 2001 and year ending March 2005 (Figure 3). After this, there was a fall in the number of male victims, which drove the downward trend in homicide during this time. In the year ending March 2015, there were 319 male victims of homicide, the lowest number in a quarter of a century.

The increase in homicide between the year ending March 2015 and year ending March 2018 reflected a 50% rise in the number of male victims, which increased from 319 in the year ending March 2015 to 478 in the year ending March 2018. Over the same period the number of female victims increased from 184 to 218 (18% increase).

In the latest year, there has been a decrease of 16% in the number of male victims (495 to 416), returning to the levels seen in the year ending March 2019. Conversely, the number of female victims stayed the same (177 victims), following a large decrease the previous year. More information is given in [Section 3](#).

Compared with other offences, homicides are relatively low volume, and year-on-year variations need to be interpreted with some caution. This is partly because trends can be affected by single incidents involving multiple victims (such as the Grays lorry incident in 2019 and the Manchester Arena incident in 2017). Figure 2 shows that in the year ending March 2021, there were 582 separate homicide incidents ([Appendix table 2](#)).

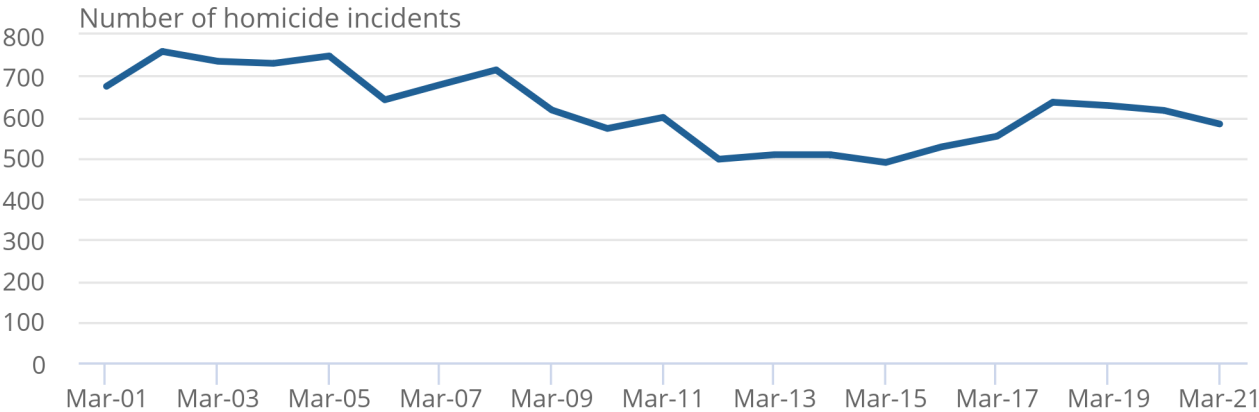
A homicide incident can involve one or more victims but is only counted as one incident, while Homicide Index statistics are based on the number of victims. Therefore, homicide incident trend data are not affected by mass fatality homicides such as terrorist attacks.

Figure 2: The number of homicide incidents has shown a slight downward trend over the past three years

Number of homicide incidents, England and Wales, year ending March 2001 to year ending March 2021

Figure 2: The number of homicide incidents has shown a slight downward trend over the past three years

Number of homicide incidents, England and Wales, year ending March 2001 to year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

It is possible to assess long term trends in the number of homicide incidents using statistical significance testing. The probabilities of homicide incidents happening can be closely modelled by a Poisson distribution and this can be used to test whether any change in the number of incidents per year is statistically significant, or what can be termed within the range of expected "natural" variation of the data. The number of incidents recorded in the year ending March 2021 was not statistically significantly different compared with the previous year. The number of incidents seen in the last four years was statistically significantly higher than the four year period from the year ending March 2012 to the year ending March 2015 ([Appendix table 3](#)). The number of homicide incidents in the last year was statistically significantly lower than the year ending March 2008 and the early 2000s.

Further information on the methodology can be found in Section 11 of the Homicide chapter of [Focus on violent crime and sexual offences, England and Wales: year ending March 2016.](#)

3 . Variations in homicide victimisation by personal characteristics

Demographic factors discussed in this section are not necessarily independently related to homicide and the findings only report on differences between estimates. Although sex, age and ethnicity are important factors in homicide, there are likely to be many other factors that cannot be examined using the Homicide Index data. For example, socioeconomic indicators at the individual and neighbourhood level are also likely to be related to being a victim of homicide (further information can be found in [The social patterning of deaths due to assault in Scotland, 1980-2005: population-based study.](#))

Sex

As in previous years, the majority of homicide victims were male. In the year ending March 2021, over two-thirds of all victims were male (70%) and just under a third were female (30%).

The number of female victims (177) was the same as last year. During the two previous years, the number of these victims were higher (218 and 219; Figure 3). The number of female victims in the last year was similar to that seen between the year ending March 2012 and the year ending March 2017 (between 167 and 184). For those female victims where a suspect had been charged, 92% (109) of those suspects were male. ([Appendix table 31](#)).

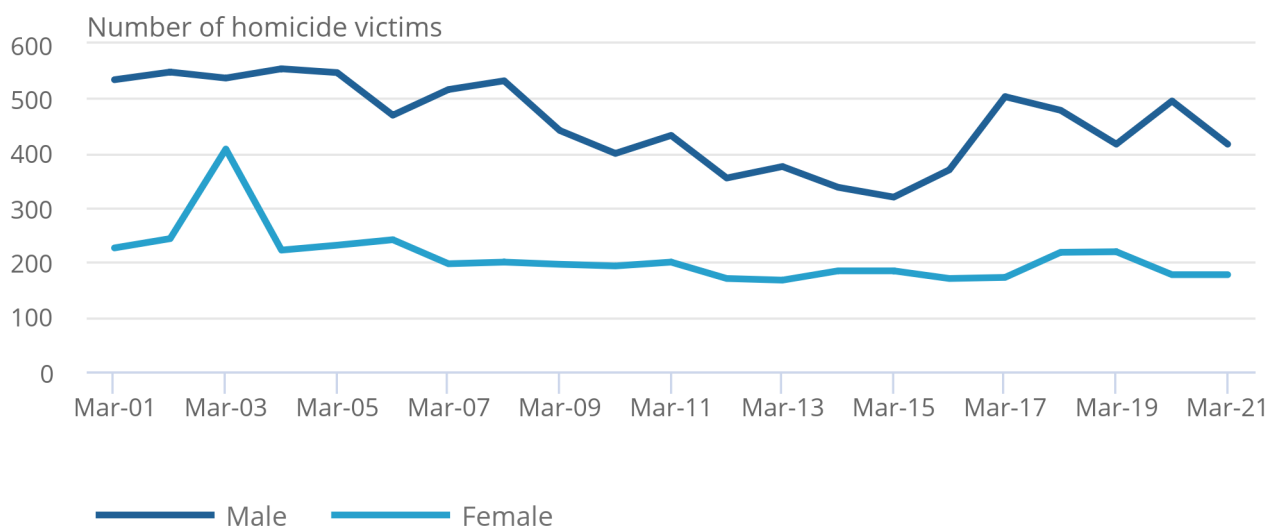
There is more information on homicide trends by sex in [Section 2](#).

Figure 3: The number of male homicide victims has decreased in the latest year while the number of female victims has remained the same.

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2001 to year ending March 2021

Figure 3: The number of male homicide victims has decreased in the latest year while the number of female victims has remained the same.

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2001 to year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

Notes:

1. Year ending March 2003 includes 43 male and 130 female victims of Dr Harold Shipman.
2. Year ending March 2017 includes 89 male and seven female victims of Hillsborough.
3. Year ending March 2017 includes one female and three male victims of the Westminster Bridge attack.
4. Year ending March 2018 includes 21 female and 10 male victims of terrorist attacks that involved multiple victims and 11 male victims of Shoreham air crash.
5. Year ending March 2020 includes 30 male and nine female victims whose bodies were found in a lorry in Essex.

The latest annual homicide rate for males (14 per million population) was more than double that for females (6 per million population), [Appendix table 4](#). However, it should be noted that the nature of homicides differs between males and females, as discussed in [Section 4](#).

Age

Changes in the number of homicides in certain age groups may have reflected changes in the composition of homicides given the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions.

The most common age group for victims of homicides recorded in the year ending March 2021 was those aged 25 to 34 years (124 victims) (Figure 4). This was followed by those aged:

- 35 to 44 years (99 victims)
- 16 to 24 years (94 victims)
- 45 to 54 years (89 victims)

As in previous years, children aged under one year had the highest rate of homicide (41 per million population). This rate fluctuates from year to year because of the low number of victims in this age group. This was followed by those aged 16 to 24 years and those aged 25 to 34 years (15 per million population).

There were 50 homicides where the victim was a teenager (aged 13 to 19 years), a decrease of 19 (from 69). In 70% of these teen homicides, the method of killing was a knife or sharp instrument ([Appendix table 8](#)). See [Section 5](#) for more detail on sharp instrument (including knives) homicides.

The overall decrease in homicide victims in the latest year was driven by a decrease in those aged 16 to 24 years, which fell from 141 to 94 (a 33% decrease), [Appendix table 4](#). The trend in this age group has shown a high level of fluctuation over recent years, with the number of victims from the year ending March 2016 being 85, then 151, 147, 111, 141 in the following years and 94 in the latest year.

Those aged 35 to 44 years also saw a decrease of 23% (from 128 to 99 victims). This followed a rise in this age group in the previous year.

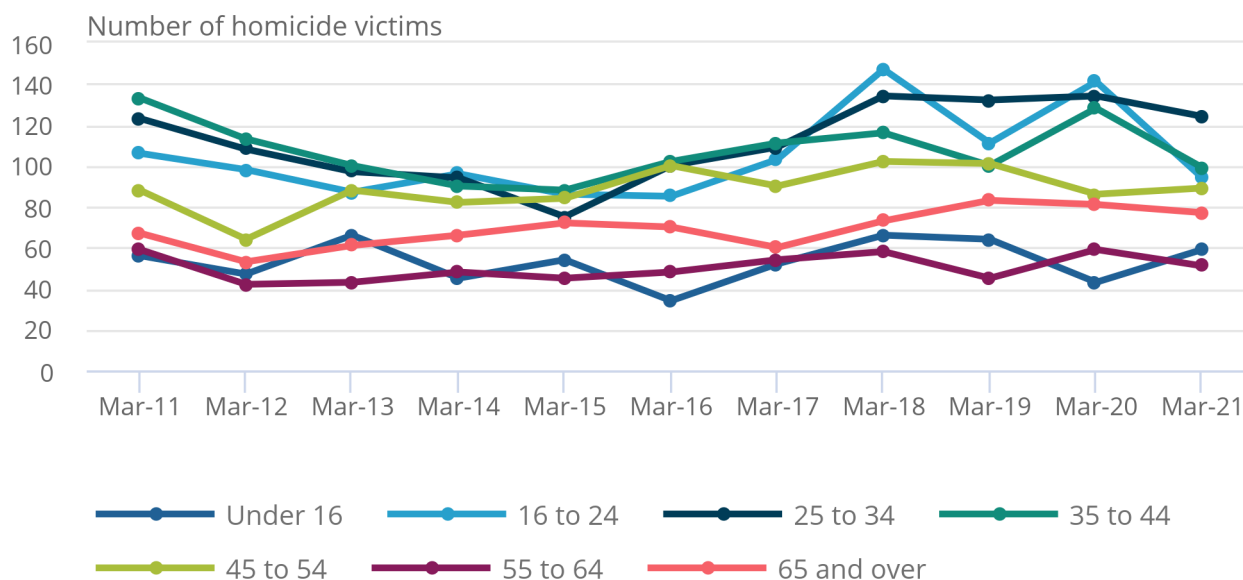
The largest percentage increase in the latest year was in the number of victims aged under 16 years, up from 43 to 59 (a 37% increase). This was driven by an increase in victims aged under five years, which rose from 28 to 44 victims. Trends for this age group tend to fluctuate from one year to the next because of the relatively low numbers (Figure 4).

Figure 4: There was a large decrease in homicides for victims aged 16 to 24 years

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2011 to year ending March 2021 (excluding Hillsborough victims)

Figure 4: There was a large decrease in homicides for victims aged 16 to 24 years

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2011 to year ending March 2021 (excluding Hillsborough victims)



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

Notes:

1. Data for the year ending March 2017 do not match Appendix table 4 as Hillsborough victims are excluded from this analysis.

Ethnicity

Over two-thirds (409 or 69%) of all homicide victims in the year ending March 2021 were from the White ethnic group (Officer identified ethnicity classification). This was a decrease of 16 victims (from 425) compared with the year ending March 2020.

There were 98 victims identified in the Black ethnic group in the last year, accounting for 16% of all victims. This was a decrease of five homicides compared with the previous year and a similar number as the year ending March 2019. There were 48 (8%) victims in the Asian (Indian sub-continent) ethnic group and 16 (3%) in the Other group. ([Appendix table 5](#)).

Although the majority of homicide victims were White, accounting for different population sizes shows that Black people had higher rates of victimisation ([Appendix table 6](#)). In the three years to year ending March 2021, average rates per million population were around six times higher for Black victims than White victims and almost four times higher than victims of other ethnicities. This is based on mid-2016 population estimates. Three-year averages are used to calculate homicide rates by ethnicity because of the low numbers of victims in some groups. The Other ethnicities category reported here includes Asian and Mixed or multiple ethnicities, to enable population statistics to match the categories in the Homicide Index. As stated previously, demographic factors are not necessarily independently related to homicide. Differences in homicide rates by ethnicity are likely to be influenced by variations in demographic and socioeconomic indicators across ethnic groups. These factors have not been taken into account in these figures.

Homicide rates across all ethnic groups over the last three years have increased compared with the three-year period to year ending March 2015. The homicide rate for Black victims has shown the biggest increase, from 28.0 to 50.5 per million population. This compares with the rate for White victims, which increased from 8.0 to 8.5 per million population. ([Appendix table 6](#)).

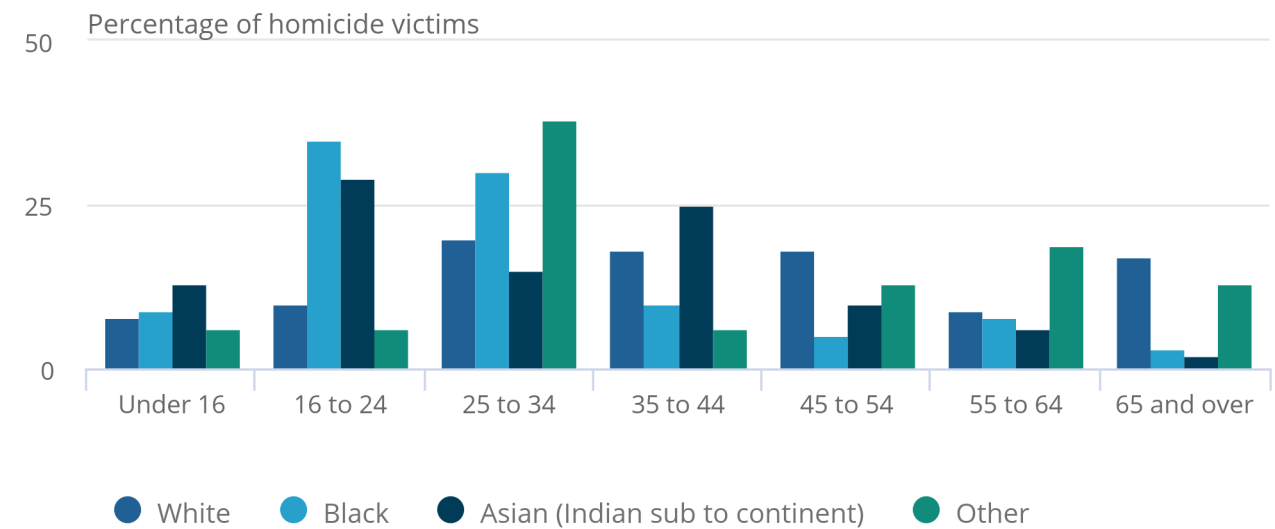
There were clear differences in the age profile of victims between different ethnic groups. Approximately a third of Black (35%) and Asian (29%) victims were aged 16 to 24 years, whereas this was a much lower proportion for White victims (10%). White victims were the most evenly spread across different age groups (Figure 5; [Appendix table 5](#)). This will partly reflect the different age distributions of ethnic groups in the population, for further information see [Population estimates by ethnic group and religion, England and Wales: 2019](#).

Figure 5: Over a third of Black homicide victims were aged between 16 to 24 years

Percentage of homicide victims, by age and ethnicity, England and Wales, year ending March 2021

Figure 5: Over a third of Black homicide victims were aged between 16 to 24 years

Percentage of homicide victims, by age and ethnicity, England and Wales, year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

Notes:

1. Officer identified classification

4 . The relationship between victims and suspects

As in previous years, there were important differences between adult and child victims in their relationship with suspects. For that reason, our analysis examines patterns separately.

Adult victims

There were large differences in the profile of victim-suspect relationships between male and female victims. In the year ending March 2021, female victims were more commonly killed by a partner or ex-partner or a family member. For males the suspected killer was more commonly a friend or acquaintance, stranger or other known person.

There were 114 domestic homicides in the year ending March 2021, a decrease of 7 (6%) compared with the previous year, however, this is likely to increase as police investigations continue. For example, the number of domestic homicides as published last year was 114 and this has now increased to 121 as police investigations have continued. This is a similar number to the average over the last five years (121). These numbers reflect the low level of domestic homicides seen since year ending March 2017 and the general downward trend in the number of domestic homicides over the last 10 years. While the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic restrictions did not lead to an increase in domestic homicides in the latest year, as may have been expected, non-domestic homicides decreased by 17% (from 508 to 420).

Of the 114 domestic homicides, 67 victims were killed by a partner or ex-partner (down from 74), 27 were killed by a parent, son or daughter (down from 32) and 20 were killed by another family member (up from 15).

Almost half (49%) of adult female homicide victims were killed in a domestic homicide (75). During COVID-19 lockdown periods covering 23 March to 3 July 2020, 5 November to 2 December 2020 and 5 January to 31 March 2021, this was 56%, highlighting the change in composition of homicides during the restrictions. Of the 75 female victims, 72 were killed by a male suspect (Appendix table 31).

Males were much less likely to be the victim of a domestic homicide, with only 10% (39) of male homicides being domestic related in the latest year, a similar proportion to the previous year.

In over a third of female adult victims, the suspect was their partner or ex-partner (37%, 57 homicides). This was a decrease of 7 homicides compared with the previous year, however, this is again likely to increase as police investigations continue. Over the last 10 years, there was an average of 77 female victims a year killed by a partner or ex-partner.

A stranger was the suspect for around a fifth of male victims (18%, 68 victims). This was a decrease of 25% (excluding the Essex lorry deaths) and a return to the levels seen in year ending March 2018 ([Appendix table 13](#)). The suspect was less likely to be a stranger when the victim was female (6%, 9 victims).

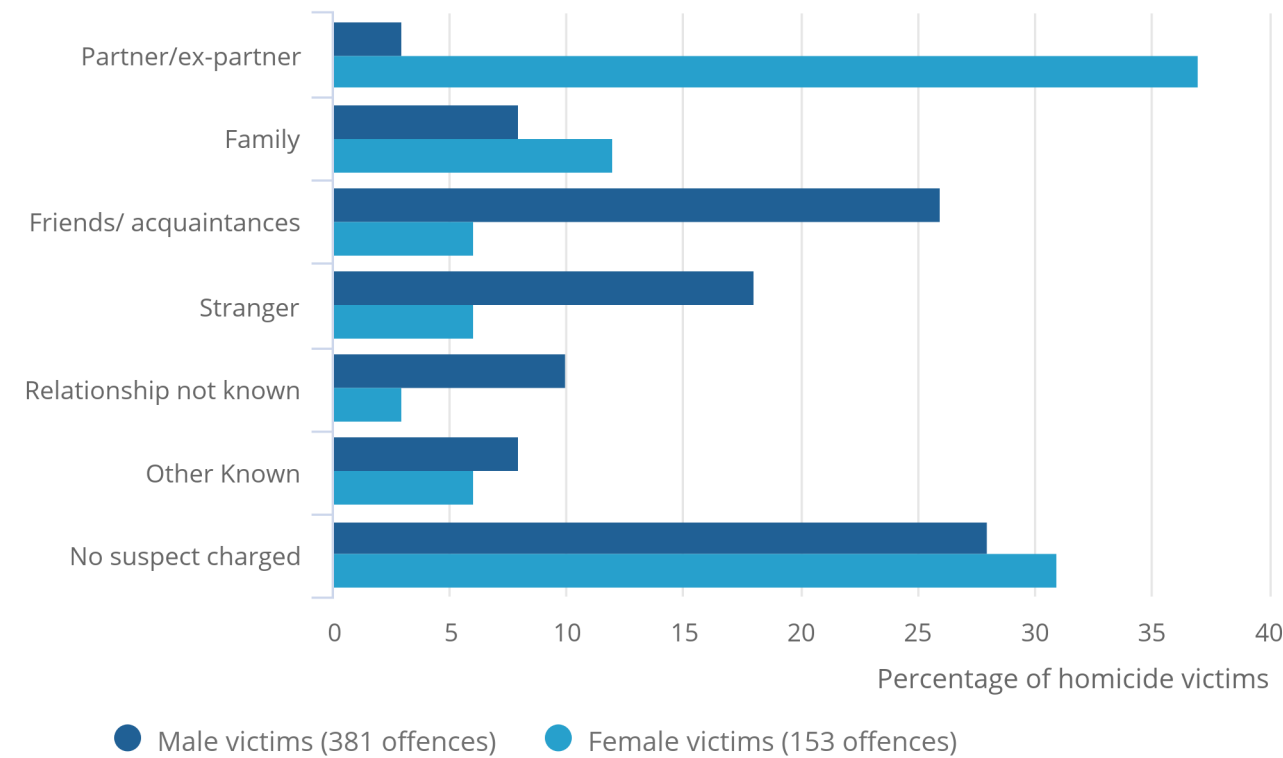
In 31% of female homicides recorded in the year ending March 2021, no suspect had been charged for the offence at the time of analysis (47 victims). The percentage of male victims (28%) with no suspect charged was similar (105 victims). These numbers will decrease as police continue their investigations.

Figure 6: For the majority of female homicide victims aged 16 years and over where a suspect had been identified, that suspect was their partner or ex-partner

Relationship of victims aged 16 years and over to principal suspect, England and Wales, year ending March 2021

Figure 6: For the majority of female homicide victims aged 16 years and over where a suspect had been identified, that suspect was their partner or ex-partner

Relationship of victims aged 16 years and over to principal suspect, England and Wales, year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

Notes:

1. Partner or ex-partner includes boyfriend or girlfriend, common-law spouse or cohabiting partner, ex-spouse, ex-common-law spouse or ex-cohabiting partner, ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend, spouse (including civil partner), adulterous relationship.

Child victims

There were 59 victims of homicide aged under 16 years in the year ending March 2021. As in previous years, the most common suspect was a parent or step-parent (42%, 25 offences). However, as at 10 December 2021, there were 27 victims aged under 16 years (46%) for whom no suspect had been charged (this includes homicide offences where all suspects have been acquitted). This number will fall as police investigations continue. For example, for the year ending March 2020, 44% of victims aged under 16 years had no suspect charged as at 15 December 2020; this has now fallen to 35% and the proportion where the suspect was a parent or step-parent has increased from 27% to 35% (as at 10 December 2021).

It is very rare for those aged under 16 years to be killed by a stranger, with one such offence in the last year, similar to previous years.

There is more information on suspect characteristics in [Section 8](#).

5 . The most common methods of killing

Sharp instrument (including knives)

As in previous years, the most common method of killing, for both male and female victims, was by a sharp instrument (including knives; 40%). Since the year ending March 2011, the proportion of homicide offences committed by a sharp instrument has fluctuated between 36% and 41%, (the proportion was 37% in the year ending March 2017 if the Hillsborough manslaughter cases are excluded).

There were 235 homicides committed using a knife or other sharp instrument recorded in the year ending March 2021, a decrease of 13% compared with the previous year ([Appendix table 7](#)). This decrease may have reflected changes in the composition of homicides given the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions.

The decrease was driven by a 17% reduction in the number of male victims, which fell from 221 to 183. The largest decrease was seen for male victims aged 18 to 24 years, decreasing from 68 to 50 homicides. In contrast, the number of female victims killed by this method rose slightly from 48 to 52 ([Appendix table 9](#)).

The latest figures show over half of sharp instrument homicide victims were identified as White (60%, 140 homicides), a decrease of five compared with the previous year. Just under a quarter (24%; 57 victims) were identified as Black, a decrease of 17 compared with the previous year. Of these 57 Black homicide victims, 25 were aged 16 to 24 years ([Appendix table 10](#)).

There is more information on the characteristics of victims in [Section 3](#).

Other methods of killing

The second most common method of killing was by "kicking or hitting", accounting for 107 homicides (18% of the total). As in previous years, the majority (81%) of victims killed in this way were male.

One in ten (10%) female victims were killed by "strangulation, asphyxiation" (17 victims). In contrast, a much smaller proportion (2%; 10) of male victims were killed in this way.

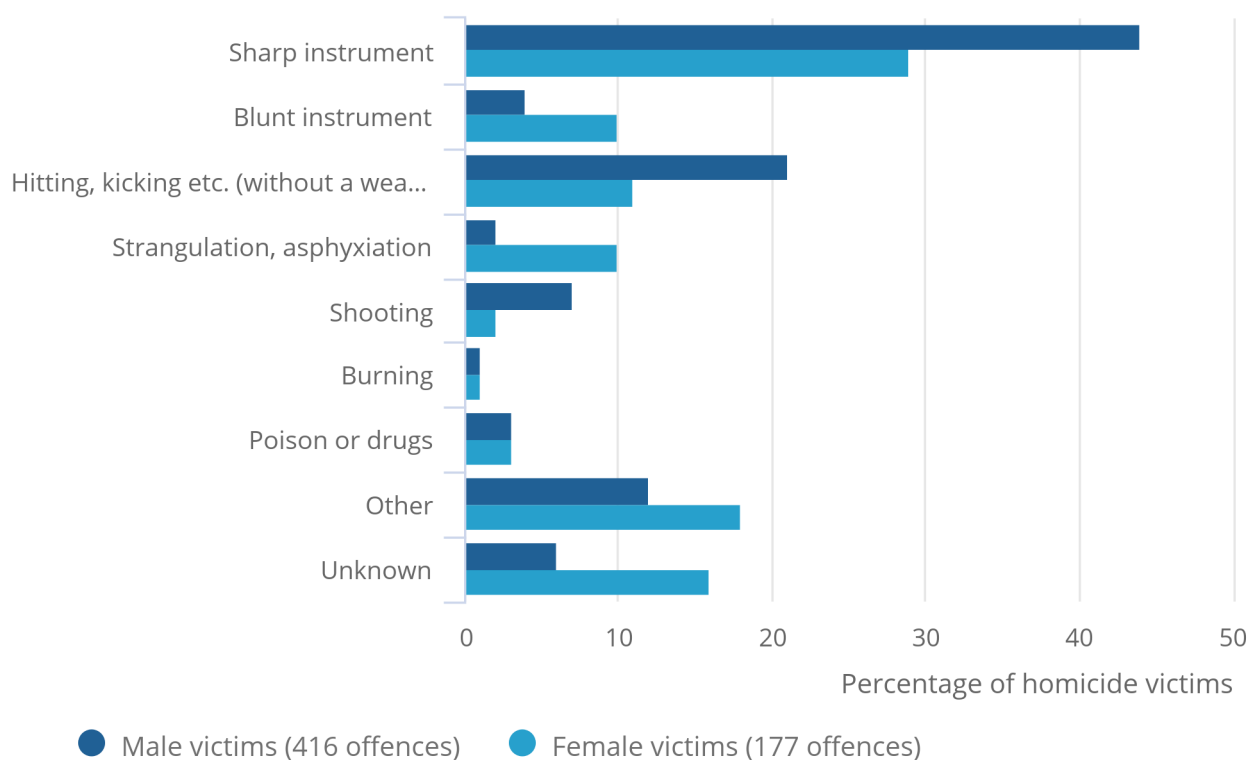
There were 35 homicide victims killed by shooting in the year ending March 2021 (6% of all homicides), five more than the previous year. The proportion of homicide offences committed by shooting has fluctuated between 4% and 8% over the last ten years. The number of these offences is 43% lower than a decade ago (61 in the year ending March 2011).

Figure 7: Use of a sharp instrument was the most common method of killing in homicide offences

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2021

Figure 7: Use of a sharp instrument was the most common method of killing in homicide offences

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

More detailed information on offences involving a firearm can be found in the [Offences involving the use of firearms article](#) and [Appendix tables](#). More recent headline figures on offences involving firearms and those involving knives can also be found as part of the quarterly [Crime in England and Wales bulletin](#).

6 . Circumstances and location of homicides

Circumstances of homicide

In the year ending March 2021, more than half (54%, 320 offences) of all homicide cases resulted from a quarrel, a revenge attack or a loss of temper. This was a similar proportion compared with previous years. As might be expected, this proportion was higher where the principal suspect was known to the victim (67%), compared with when the suspect was unknown to the victim (41%).

Furtherance of theft or gain accounted for 4% of homicides (25 offences), and 6% (38 offences) occurred during irrational acts.

As at 10 December 2021, the apparent circumstances were not known for 19% of homicides (114 offences) recorded in the year ending March 2021. This figure was similar to the previous year and is likely to decrease as the police carry out further investigations.

Location of homicides

Homicides were mostly likely to take place in or around a house, dwelling or residential home. The number of victims killed in this setting has been largely consistent over the past ten years. Conversely the number of victims killed in a street, path or alleyway has been increasing since year ending March 2015, but has decreased in the latest year by 39% (from 210 to 129), which may be expected because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions in place during most of the latest year([Appendix table 17](#)).

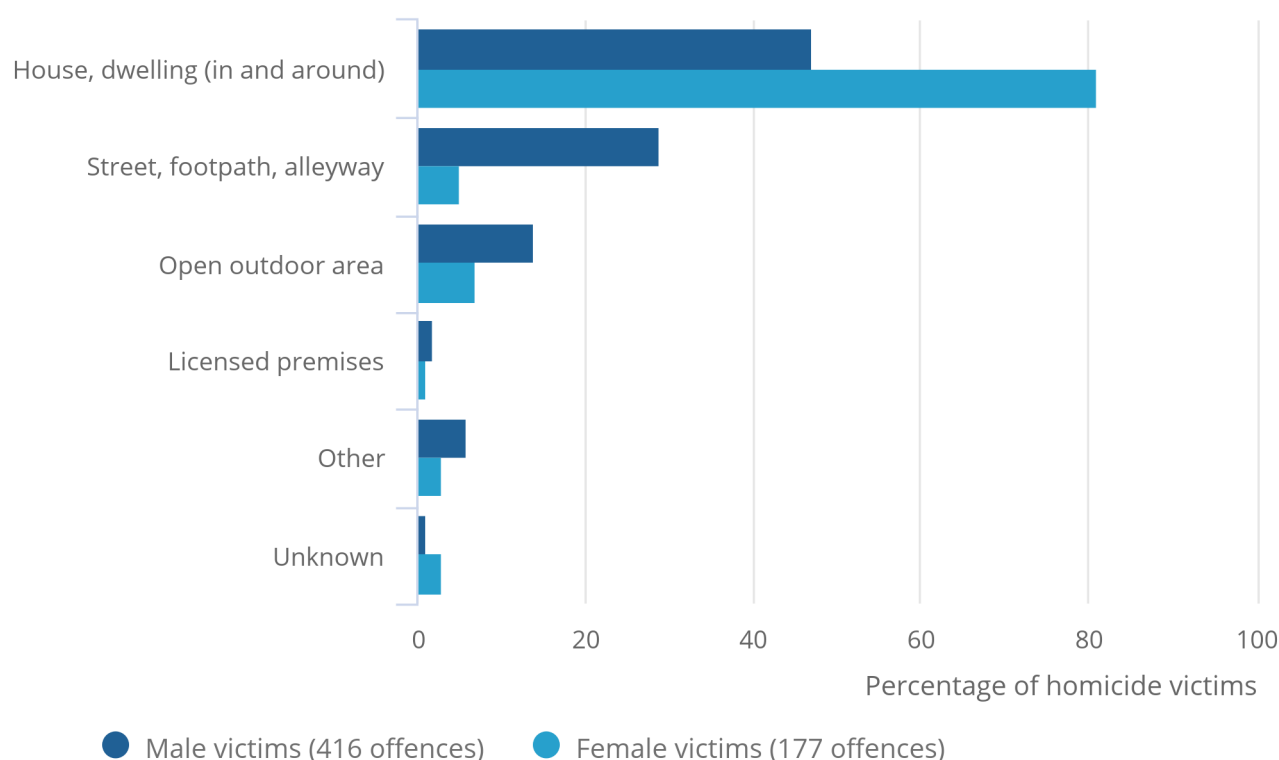
Female victims were most likely to be killed in or around a house, dwelling or residential home (81%, 143 offences for year ending March 2021). This compared with 47% of male homicides (196 offences). Around 3 in 10 (29%) male homicides took place in a street, path or alleyway (121 offences) compared with only 5% of female homicides (8 offences). These patterns reflect differing victim-suspect relationships and the circumstances of the homicide ([Appendix table 17](#)).

Figure 8: Female homicide victims were most likely to be killed in or around a house or dwelling and male victims in public places

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2021

Figure 8: Female homicide victims were most likely to be killed in or around a house or dwelling and male victims in public places

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

Notes:

1. "House, dwelling (in and around)" includes residential homes.
2. "Other" includes all other locations including other public places.

7 . Drug- and alcohol-related homicides

The analysis and commentary in this section focuses on data combined from the last three years (the year ending March 2019 to the year ending March 2021) because of the low number of drug- or alcohol-related homicides in each category. The section is based on all victims and suspects charged from incidents recorded in that period. Information on drug and alcohol use is recorded by the police from toxicology reports and suspect and witness statements.

According to the Homicide Index, in the last three years almost a third (32%) of homicide victims were thought to be under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs at the time of the homicide:

- 18% had been drinking alcohol
- 6% had been taking an illicit drug (which include all controlled drugs under Schedule 2 of the [Misuse of Drugs Act 1971](#))
- 8% were under the influence of both

The proportion under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs was higher among male (37%) than female victims (22%), similar to the analysis in previous years ([Appendix table 18](#)).

The figures for suspects were similar to that for victims. Over a quarter (28%) of homicide suspects were recorded by the police to have been under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs at the time of the homicide:

- 13% had been drinking alcohol
- 5% had been taking an illicit drug
- 10% were under the influence of both ([Appendix table 18](#))

Almost a third (31%) of homicide victims were known to be drug users, and 15% were known to be drug dealers. These proportions were higher among suspects with 45% known to be drug users and over a quarter (29%) known to be drug dealers. These proportions were higher among male than female suspects. In a small proportion of cases, the police identified the suspects' motive as "obtaining drugs" (4%) or "stealing drug proceeds" (6%) ([Appendix table 19](#)).

The proportion of homicides that have involved drug users or dealers, or have been related to drugs in any way, have increased over the last decade, from 40% in the year ending March 2011 to 52% in the year ending March 2021. In the last year, there were 306 homicides that were thought to involve drug users or dealers or were in some way drug-related, 33 fewer than the previous year (339) ([Appendix table 20](#)). This fall was driven by the number of drug-related homicides that took place in a public place and therefore may be because of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions imposed in the latest year.

8 . Suspects in homicide cases

Homicide cases are often complex and can take time to reach an outcome in court. The percentage of homicides recorded in most recent years that have concluded in court is likely to increase when the next figures from the Homicide Index are published, while those without suspects or with court proceedings pending is expected to decrease.

More than one suspect may be charged per homicide victim and in some cases no suspect is charged (Table 1). Therefore, the number of suspects charged is not the same as the number of offences. Table 1 shows that the number of homicides where no suspect has been charged falls over time as the police have had longer to conclude investigations and for cases to be tried at court. For example, for the year ending March 2020, 29% of victims had no suspect charged as at 15 December 2020; this has now fallen to 20% (as at 10 December 2021).

Table 1: Number of suspects for initially recorded homicide victims, year ending March 2019 to year ending March 2021

Numbers and percentages as at 10 December 2021						
	Apr 2018 to Mar 2019	Apr 2019 to Mar 2020	Apr 2020 to Mar 2021	Apr 2018 to Mar 2019	Apr 2019 to Mar 2020	Apr 2020 to Mar 2021
	Number			Percentage		
No suspects charged	138	138	175	21	20	29
One	367	352	304	57	52	51
Two	63	61	63	10	9	11
Three or more	51	110	51	8	16	9
Suspects acquitted	30	22	6	5	3	1
All initially recorded homicides	649	683	599			

Source: Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

Notes

1. As at 10 December 2021; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and the courts or as further information becomes available.
2. Home Office statisticians and police forces have undertaken a review of homicide data between year ending March 2019 and year ending March 2020 to update suspect data and cancelled crimes, this means totals shown in this table will not match previously published figures.

Investigative and court outcomes

In total, there were 660 suspects charged as at 10 December 2021 relating to the 599 homicides initially recorded in the year ending March 2021 ([Appendix table 24](#)).

Court proceedings were pending for 367 suspects (56% of all suspects). Last year this proportion was 64%. During the five years prior to that this proportion has been around 50% (as at the time of publication).

Court proceedings had concluded for 273 suspects (41% of all suspects) and 19 had committed suicide or died (3% of all suspects).

In the three years from the year ending March 2019 to the year ending March 2021, 81% of suspects indicted for homicide, where we have information on a court outcome, were found guilty of homicide, 13% were acquitted, and 4% were convicted of a lesser offence ([Appendix table 25](#)).

The case outcomes for suspects of homicides recorded in the year ending March 2021 ([Appendix table 25](#)) will change as cases progress through the criminal justice system and more information becomes available.

Age, sex and ethnicity of convicted suspects

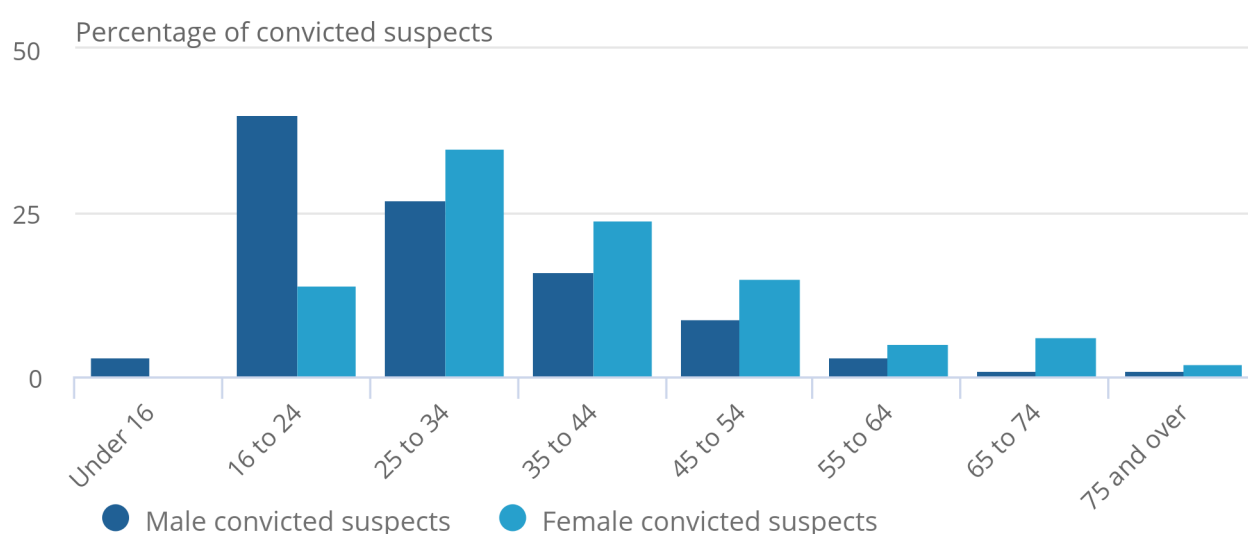
For the three-year period year ending March 2019 to the year ending March 2021, the vast majority of suspects convicted of homicide were male (995; 94%). Four in ten convicted male suspects were aged 16 to 24 years (40%) and 27% were aged 25 to 34 years. This contrasts with female suspects convicted of homicide who had an older age profile, with over half (52%) being aged 35 years and over ([Appendix table 28](#) and Figure 9).

Figure 9: Male suspects convicted of homicide show a younger age profile than female suspects

Percentage of convicted suspects, England and Wales, three years combined - year ending March 2019 to year ending March 2021

Figure 9: Male suspects convicted of homicide show a younger age profile than female suspects

Percentage of convicted suspects, England and Wales, three years combined - year ending March 2019 to year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

For the three-year period year ending March 2019 to the year ending March 2021, when looking at the principal suspect of a homicide offence, around two-thirds (68%) of those convicted of homicide were identified as White. This was a lower representation than in the general population (around 85%), based on mid-2016 population estimates. Around one in five (18%) suspects were identified as Black, five times higher than the general population (3%) ([Appendix table 30](#)). Differences in these figures are likely to be related to the ethnicity of the population differing by age, region and socioeconomic factors, which have not been taken into account.

9 . International homicide comparisons

There are issues surrounding the comparability of international homicide data, therefore caution should be taken in comparing homicide rates across countries.

Homicide figures differ between countries for various reasons, including:

- different definitions of homicide between countries, although definitions vary less than for some other types of crimes
- differing points in the criminal justice systems at which homicides are recorded, for instance, when the offence is discovered or following further investigation or court outcome
- figures for England and Wales are for completed homicides (that is excluding attempted murder) but, in some countries, the police register any death that cannot immediately be attributed to other causes as homicide

[Eurostat](#) figures show that police recorded intentional homicide offences generally decreased across EU member states from 2008 to 2019. In 17 out of 27 countries, the intentional homicide rate decreased between 2018 and 2019. Latvia had the highest rate of homicide in 2019 (47.4 per million population). In 19 countries the rate was below 10 per million. Iceland had the lowest rate, at 2.8 per million population. England and Wales, at 9.9 per million population in year ending March 2021, had a similar rate to many European countries.

The [Scottish Government](#) annual homicide figures showed that the number of homicide cases recorded by the police in Scotland decreased by ten cases in the year ending March 2021, from 65 to 55. This was the lowest number of recorded homicide cases since comparable records began in 1976. Over the ten-year period from 2011 to 2012 to 2020 to 2021, the rate of homicides in Scotland has fallen from 17.5 to 10.6 homicide victims per million population. This latest figure is similar to the rate in England and Wales (9.9 per million population).

The [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#) figures show there were 22 homicide offences recorded by the police in Northern Ireland in the year ending March 2021 (11.6 victims per million population), one more than the previous year.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) publish a [Global study on homicide](#) which gives a comprehensive overview of intentional homicide across the world. The most recent publication was in 2019 and showed that the global average homicide rate was 61 per million population in 2017. Central America and South America, at 259 and 242 per million population, respectively, were the subregions with the highest average homicide rates in 2017. This is excluding all the subregions of Africa, for which complete data are not available. The subregions with the lowest levels of homicide, at around 10 per million population were Southern, Western and Northern Europe, East Asia and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand).

The [Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) published figures showing that the homicide rate in the United States of America in 2019 was 50 per million population, a similar rate to the previous year.

10 . Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2021 data

[Appendix tables: homicide in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 10 February 2022

Findings from the analyses based on the Homicide Index recorded by the Home Office, including long-term trends, sex of the victim, apparent method of killing and relationship to victim.

11 . Glossary

Homicide Offences

A collective term referring to the offences of murder, manslaughter and infanticide. Murder and manslaughter are common law offences that have never been defined by statute, although they have been modified by statute. The manslaughter category includes the offence of corporate manslaughter which was created by the [Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007](#) which came into force on 6 April 2008. The offence of infanticide was created by the Infanticide Act 1922 and refined by the Infanticide Act 1938 ([section 1](#)). Infanticide is defined as the killing of a baby aged under one year by their mother while the balance of her mind was disturbed as a result of giving birth.

12 . Data sources and quality

Data presented have been extracted from the Home Office Homicide Index which contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales. The Homicide Index is continually updated with revised information from the police as investigations continue and as cases are heard by the courts. The version used for analysis does not accept updates after it is "frozen" to ensure the data do not change during the analysis period. The data in this article refer to the position as at 10 December 2021. The data will change as subsequent court hearings take place or as further information is received.

Homicide Index data are based on the year when the offence was recorded as a crime, not when the offence took place or when the case was heard in court. While in the majority of cases the offence will be recorded in the same year as it took place, this is not always so. Caution is therefore needed when looking at longer-term homicide trends. For example:

- the 96 of the 97 deaths that occurred at Hillsborough in 1989 were recorded as manslaughters in the year ending March 2017 following the verdict of the Hillsborough Inquest in April 2016
- the 173 homicides attributed to Dr Harold Shipman as a result of Dame Janet Smith's inquiry took place over a long period of time but were all recorded by the police during the year ending March 2003

Furthermore, where several people are killed by the same suspect, the number of homicides counted is the total number of victims killed rather than the number of incidents. For example, the 39 victims of human trafficking found in a lorry in Grays, Essex, in October 2019 are counted as 39 individual homicides.

For the purposes of the Homicide Index, a suspect in a homicide case is defined as either:

- a person who has been charged with a homicide offence, including those who were subsequently convicted and those awaiting trial
- a person who is suspected by the police of having committed the offence but is known to have died or committed suicide

When the police initially record an offence as a homicide it remains classified as such unless the police or courts decide that a lesser offence, or no offence, took place. In all, 703 deaths were initially recorded as homicides by the police in the year ending March 2020. By 15 December 2020, eight were no longer recorded as homicides.

Where there are multiple suspects, they are categorised in the Homicide Index as either the principal or a secondary suspect. The suspect with the longest sentence or most serious conviction is determined to be the principal suspect. In the absence of any court outcome, the principal suspect is either the person considered by the police to be the most involved in the homicide or the suspect with the closest relationship to the victim.

Homicides are recorded to be "domestic" when the relationship between a victim aged 16 years and over and the perpetrator falls into one of the following categories: spouse, common-law spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, ex-spouse, ex-cohabiting partner or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, adulterous relationship, son or daughter (including step and adopted relationships), parent (including step and adopted relationships), brother or sister, or other relatives.

Homicides classified as irrational acts cover those offences where there is evidence that the offender was suffering substantial mental illness. These do not account for all homicides committed by mentally ill people, as offences with an apparent motive (for example, during a quarrel or robbery) are instead included under the respective circumstance. Higher overall totals for homicides committed by those suffering mental illness are quoted elsewhere ([National confidential inquiry into suicide and safety in mental health](#)).

In collaboration with police forces and the National Police Chiefs' Council's Homicide Working Group, Home Office statisticians have undertaken an extensive data quality exercise on suspect information and cancelled crimes for year ending March 2019 and March 2020. Information on these areas published in the tables may therefore differ from recent years, with data now being more complete.

Strengths and limitations

The Home Office Homicide Index contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales. These figures provide much more detail about the nature and circumstances of homicide offences than the main police recorded crime dataset. However, the level of detail in the Homicide Index means that these data take longer to collect and analyse than the more basic counts of recorded offences in the main recorded crime dataset. Headline figures, covering a more recent period, on the number of recorded homicides are published as part of the quarterly [Crime in England and Wales bulletin](#).

In accordance with the [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#), statistics based on the Home Office Homicide Index have been re-assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and found to meet the required standard for designation as National Statistics. The letter of confirmation can be found on the [UK Statistics Authority](#) website.

Further information on the Homicide Index can be found in the [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#).

13 . Related links

[Guide to finding crime statistics](#)

Methodology | Released 27 July 2021

Crime statistics are produced by multiple departments across government. The aim of this guide is to collate the main sources of crime statistics, broken down by potential areas of interest, to provide a more efficient way to find the crime statistics needed.

[User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#)

Methodology | Released 4 November 2021

Quarterly statistics on crime levels and trends in England and Wales. This user guide contains detailed information on the datasets used to compile crime statistics published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

[Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 27 January 2022

Crime against households and adults using data from police recorded crime and the new Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales. Includes the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on crime and people's perceptions of crime during the October 2020 to September 2021 interview periods.

[The nature of violent crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 25 February 2021

A summary of violent crime from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime.