



Police Service
of Northern Ireland



Trends in Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland

1998/99 to 2020/21

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PSNI Statistics Branch
Lisnasharragh
42 Montgomery Road
Belfast
BT6 9LD

 statistics@psni.police.uk

 028 9065 0222 Ext. 24135

Web [PSNI Statistics](#)



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We welcome comment and feedback on these statistics. If you would like to forward your views, receive notification of new publications or be kept informed of developments relating to PSNI statistics, please email your contact details using the email address provided on the cover page.

Things you need to know about this release

Coverage

Statistics on police recorded crime in Northern Ireland are collated and produced by statisticians seconded to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). They are recorded in compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules and further details of recording practices are available in the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics](#).

This release presents statistics relating to police recorded crime between 1998/99 and 2020/21. Supplementary data are available from the PSNI website in the [police recorded crime spreadsheet](#), 1.7MB (opens in a new window).

National Statistics Status

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and as producers, it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

Police recorded crime statistics in Northern Ireland retained designation as National Statistics in February 2016 following a full [assessment](#) against the [Code of Practice](#).

Since the assessment by the UK Statistics Authority, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- Moved away from shared oversight to the introduction of a dedicated Crime Registrar post to oversee adherence to and implementation of Home Office requirements on process and quality.
- Reviewed and enhanced the format of the monthly bulletins.
- Enhanced the amount of information available to users in our annual trends publication, for example more detailed analysis on victims of crime.
- Provided a greater range of tables, pivot tables and charts within in our publications to enhance presentation of the information in a more user friendly way.
- Increased the range of information available through the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS), with data made available for the first time through Open Data NI.
- Continued to conduct regular consultation with internal and external users, for example via a customer satisfaction survey to obtain feedback and suggestions for improvements, with results published on the PSNI statistics website.

Strengths and Limitations of Police Recorded Crime Statistics and Alternative Measures of Crime

While this update presents the level of crime recorded by the police, there is an alternative but complementary measure of crime, the Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey (NISCS) previously known as the Northern Ireland Crime Survey, which is published by the Department of Justice for Northern Ireland. Each source of crime information has different strengths and limitations but can be looked at together to provide a more comprehensive picture of crime than could be obtained from either series alone.

Details around the need for both recorded crime figures and the NISCS can be found in the Technical Annex of the bulletin [Experience of Crime: Findings from the 2019/20 Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey](#). Both of these measures of crime inform public debate about crime and support the development and monitoring of policy.

Unlike the NISCS, police recorded crime figures do not include crimes that have not been reported to the police; they also exclude those crimes that are not recorded in order to comply with the Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR). They do cover crimes against those aged under 16, organisations such as businesses, and crimes 'against the state' i.e. with no immediate victim (e.g. possession of drugs). It was estimated in 2019/20 that around 46 per cent of NISCS comparable crime was reported to the police in Northern Ireland although this varied for individual offence types.

Like any administrative data, police recorded crime statistics are affected by the rules governing the recording of data, systems in place and operational decisions in respect of the allocation of resources. More proactive policing in a given area could lead to an increase in crimes recorded without any real change in underlying crime trends. These issues need to be taken into account when using these data.

Points to note in this bulletin

Harassment and Malicious Communications: the recording of malicious communications offences commenced for the first time in Northern Ireland from 1st April 2017 and are classified to Harassment which sits within Violence Against the Person. Also included within malicious communications offences are those relating to 'revenge porn'; new legislation on disclosing private sexual photographs and film with intent to cause distress was introduced in June 2016. A Home Office change introduced in April 2018 requires harassment to be recorded in addition to the most serious additional victim based offence. Both of these changes in recording practice should be considered in relation to any changes in levels recorded in the overall harassment classification.

Making off without payment: PSNI worked with the Petrol Retailer's Association and Retail NI to introduce a pilot scheme (March 2017) where the petrol station deals with non payment of fuel through the Civil Debt Recovery process, allowing police to focus on those who are deliberately seeking to avoid paying for their fuel. Where a petrol station in the pilot area makes a report of MOWP to police this is still recorded as an offence as per HOCR guidance. Once police confirm no aggravating factors exist, there is no additional requirement for police intervention; however the strict cancellation criteria in the HOCR means that it is not possible to cancel such MOWP reports leading to an increase in the number of these offences remaining recorded. This pilot scheme was extended to all policing districts in March 2018 and may have contributed to the increase seen in the classification of 'All other theft offences' seen in 2018/19

Action Fraud figures relating to fraud and cyber crime occurring in Northern Ireland and provided to PSNI are available in the accompanying spreadsheet.

Annual Revisions: Revisions to previously published data are applied on an annual basis to financial year crime figures from 2015/16 onwards, as a result of the introduction of the wider outcomes framework in April 2015. These revisions take account of crime cancellations and sanction outcomes identified since the previous annual publication. Revisions of this nature will next be applied in May 2022. Further guidance on crime cancellation can be found in the [Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime](#).

Conventions used in figures and tables

While the outcome rates are rounded to one decimal place, the outcome rate change in % pts is calculated on the unrounded outcome rates and then rounded to one decimal place.

'-' indicates that for offences recorded a percentage change is not reported because the base number of offences is less than 50, and that for offences detected an outcome rate cannot be calculated as there were no offences recorded.

'..' indicates that data are not available.

The charts in this release are not all shown to same scale.

Key Points

- In 1998/99 (the first year of the data series) there were 104,647 crimes recorded. This level increased each year to a peak of 138,132 in 2002/03. Police recorded crime moved in a generally downwards direction between 2002/03 and 2016/17, falling by nearly 30 per cent. This was followed by increases over the three years to 2019/20. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown measures were introduced in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. These have had a substantial impact on the lower levels of police recorded crime seen during 2020/21, resulting in the lowest crime level recorded (94,339 offences). (Section 1 Overview)
- In 2020/21 there were 50 crimes recorded per 1,000 population, compared with the peak of 81 crimes per 1,000 population in 2002/03 (Section 1 Overview)
- Between 1998/99 and 2020/21 the proportion of crime represented by theft (including burglary) and criminal damage fell from just over three quarters of all crimes recorded to two fifths of all crimes recorded, while the proportion of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery increased from one in five to represent close to half of all crimes recorded. (Section 1 Overview)
- By 2015/16 violence against the person was nearly twice the level recorded in 1998/99, although numbers fell again in 2016/17. The 2020/21 level of 39,284 shows a 4.9 percent decrease (2,021 offences) on 2019/20 which, at 41,305, was the highest level recorded. (Section 2 Trends by Crime Type)
- The lowest number of murders since the start of the data series in 1998/99 was 13 recorded in 2016/17. This was followed by 23 murders in 2017/18, the second highest figure in the last ten years and 24 in 2018/19, the highest in the last ten years. In 2020/21 there were 21 murders recorded which, along with 2015/16, is the third highest figure in the last ten years. (Section 2 Trends by Crime Type)
- The Harassment time series has been impacted by the introduction of malicious communications recording which started on 1st April 2017 and also a change in recording practice for the Home Office Counting Rules in April 2018 requiring harassment to be recorded in addition to the most serious additional victim based offence. Both of these changes have seen levels increase, particularly between 2018/19 and 2019/20 where the level almost doubled from 5,274 to 10,056 crimes recorded. The Harassment classification continued to increase in 2020/21 by 13.0 per cent to reach 11,359 offences. (Section 2 Trends by Crime Type)
- During 2020/21 sexual offences fell by 215 offences to 3,335, the first decline in the level since 2011/12. However the latest figure is almost three times higher than the lowest level recorded in 2000/01. Rape offences have shown a slight rise in the last 12 months to 1,028 offences, the second highest level recorded. The number of rape offences recorded in 2020/21 is more than four times higher than the lowest level of 232 offences recorded in 2000/01. (Section 2 Trends by Crime Type)
- Burglary, robbery and theft offences recorded their lowest levels in 2020/21, with burglary less than a quarter of the highest level recorded in 2002/03, theft falling by nearly two thirds from the peak in 2001/02 and robbery around one fifth of the highest figure recorded in 2002/03. Restrictions relating to the Covid-19 pandemic were introduced in March 2020 and had an impact on each of these classifications. When compared with 2019/20 burglary fell by 32.0 per cent, robbery by 20.3 per cent and theft by 29.2 per cent. Within the theft classification, theft from the person fell by 56.6 per cent between 2019/20 and 2020/21, shoplifting fell by 32.1 per cent, all other theft offences fell by 28.9 per cent, vehicle offences fell by 23.6 per cent and bicycle theft fell by 17.1 per cent. Both shoplifting and all other theft offences recorded their lowest levels since 1998/99. (Section 2 Trends by Crime Type)
- Levels of criminal damage were at their highest in 2001/02 with 39,748 offences recorded. Following a sustained downwards trend since 2006/07 the latest figure of 17,280 is the lowest recorded and is less than half of the peak experienced in 2001/02. (Section 2 Trends by Crime Type)
- The number of drug offences recorded during 2020/21 is more than seven times higher than the lowest level recorded in 2001/02 and is the highest level since 1998/99. (Section 2 Trends by Crime Type)
- The number of possession of weapons offences reached the highest level recorded in 2019/20. In 2020/21 it remains at a similar level albeit with a slight fall of 6 offences to 1,094. The level recorded in 2020/21 is three times higher than that recorded in 1998/99. (Section 2 Trends by Crime Type)
- The proportion of selected violent and sexual offences involving knives or sharp instruments has remained at four per cent since 2015/16. Prior to that the proportion was five per cent, with the exception of 2010/11 and 2011/12 when it was four per cent (Section 3 Knife and Sharp Instrument Crime)
- Online crime accounted for just under five per cent of all crimes in 2020/21, with two such offences recorded per 1,000 population. Victims aged under 18 were most likely to be victims of harassment or sexual activity offences with an online motivation while those aged 18+ were most likely to be victims of harassment or blackmail. Females were most likely to be victims of harassment or sexual activity, with males most likely to be victims of harassment or blackmail. (Section 4 Online Crime)

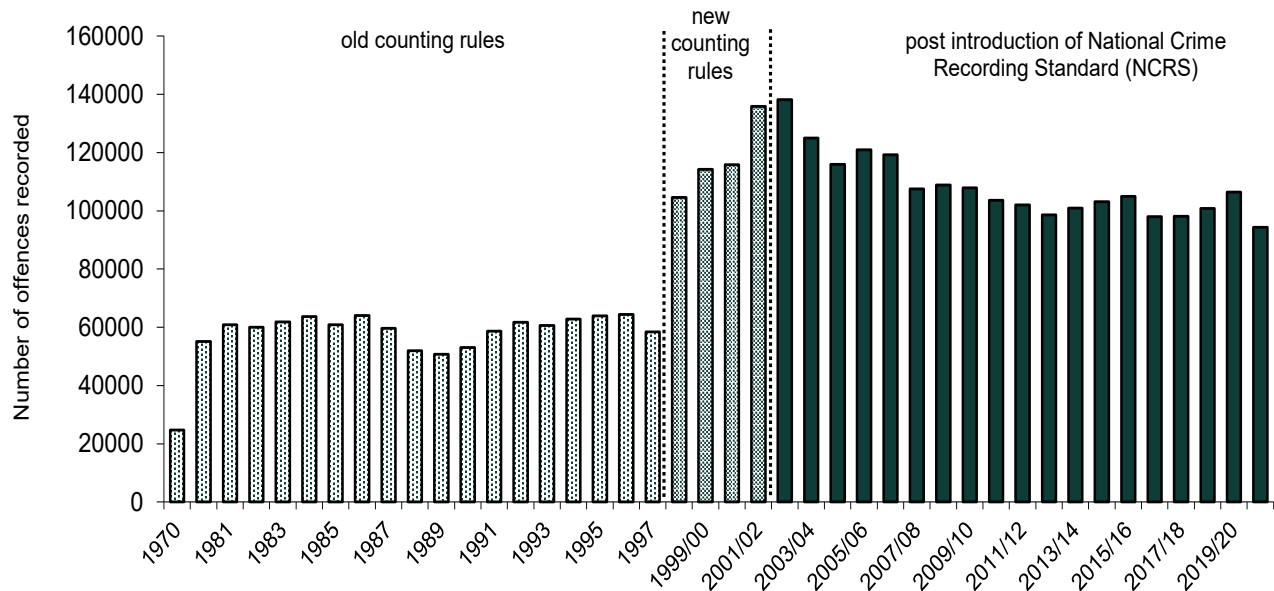
- Since 2012/13 around one in five crimes recorded by police have been flagged with an alcohol motivation. Around half of all violence with injury offences (between 45 and 58 per cent) and two fifths of violence without injury offences (between 36 and 43 per cent) have been given an alcohol motivation. The proportion of violence against the person offences with an alcohol motivation has fallen from 47 per cent in 2012/13 to 30 per cent in 2020/21. (Section 5 Alcohol Crime)
- In 2014/15 there were 1,896 offences recorded by PSNI within the 'Other Fraud' classification. From 1 April 2015 Action Fraud became responsible for the central recording of fraud and cyber crime previously recorded by PSNI, and recorded 2,230 frauds and cyber crimes during 2015/16. The level recorded by Action Fraud has since increased to 5,856 in 2020/21. (Section 6 Fraud)
- During 2020/21 around 70 per cent of all crimes had a person victim, three per cent a police officer victim, 13 per cent a business/organisation victim and 14 per cent were state-based. (Section 7 Victims of Crime)
- Of the crimes recorded in 2020/21 where there was a person victim, 12 per cent were crimes where the victim was aged under 18, 82 per cent where the victim was aged 18-64 and six per cent where the victim was aged 65 or over. (Section 7 Victims of Crime)
- In 2020/21 there were 18 crime victims under 18 per 1,000 of the population under 18, 48 crime victims aged 18-64 per 1,000 of the population aged 18-64 and 12 crime victims aged 65 or over per 1,000 of the population aged 65 plus. (Section 7 Victims of Crime)
- Ninety three per cent of victims who were under 18 at the time the offence occurred were victims of violence against the person or a sexual offence. (Section 7 Victims of Crime)
- The number of sexual offences recorded where the victim was under 18 at the time the offence was committed more than doubled between 2007/08 and 2020/21. (Section 7 Victims of Crime)
- Offences relating to sexual activity where the victim is under 16 more than trebled between the introduction of new sexual offence legislation in February 2009 and the peak of 618 offences recorded in 2016/17, with the largest increases occurring between 2013/14 and 2015/16. In 2020/21 these offences accounted for 17 per cent of all sexual offences. (Section 7 Victims of Crime)
- Nearly 40 per cent of the sexual offences recorded during 2013/14 occurred when the victim was under 18 but were reported to police when the victim was 18 or over, the highest proportion seen in the data series. This compares with 18 per cent in 2007/08 and 39 per cent in 2020/21. (Section 7 Victims of Crime)
- There were 94,339 offences recorded in 2020/21 and 29,059 offences detected giving an outcome rate of 30.8%. (Section 8 Outcomes)
- At 30.8%, the outcome rate for 2020/21 is the highest recorded since the start of the data series in 1998/99. (Section 8 Outcomes)
- The charge / summons methods of disposal accounted for 73 per cent of all outcomes in 2020/21, with community resolutions representing 19 per cent, cautions (adult and juvenile) seven per cent and penalty notices for disorder one per cent. (Section 8 Outcomes)
- In 2020/21 there were 82 crimes per 1,000 population in Belfast City and 65 per 1,000 population in Derry City & Strabane. Within the remaining districts the crime rates ranged from 32 per 1,000 population in Mid Ulster, Fermanagh and Omagh and Ards and North Down to 47 per 1,000 population in Newry, Mourne and Down. (Section 9 Geographic Patterns of Crime)

Overview of Police recorded crime levels and rates

All tables referred to in the commentary of this section can be found in the [police recorded crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#).

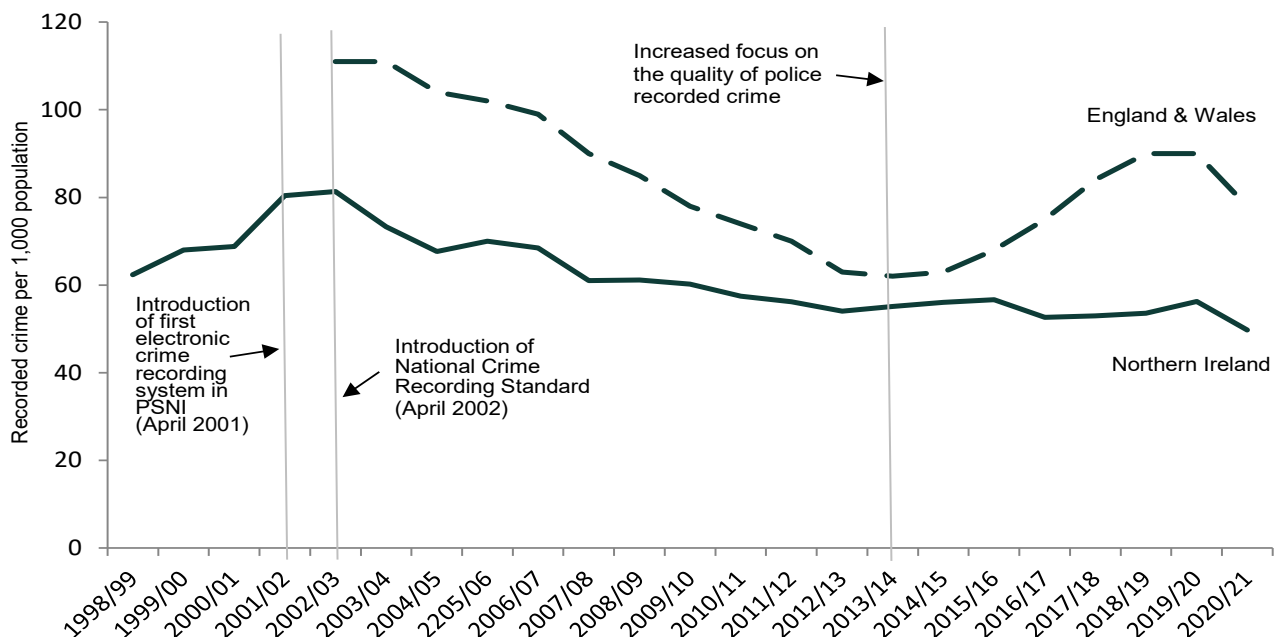
Crime levels: Comparable police recorded crime figures are available from 1998/99, the first year in which crimes were recorded under the current Home Office Counting Rules. In 1998/99 there were 104,647 crimes recorded with the level increasing each year to a peak of 138,132 in 2002/03. The lowest level of 94,339 was recorded in 2020/21; restrictions relating to the Covid-19 pandemic were introduced in March 2020. [Table 1.1]

Figure 1.1 Trends in police recorded crime, 1970 to 2020/21



In 2002/03 there were 81 crimes per 1,000 population in Northern Ireland compared with 111 per 1,000 population in England & Wales. While this gap narrowed to a difference of seven crimes per 1,000 population during 2013/14 and 2014/15, it has diverged again in the last few years with 2020/21 recording 50 crimes per 1,000 population in Northern Ireland compared with 78 per 1,000 population in England & Wales.

Figure 1.2 Police recorded crime per 1,000 population in Northern Ireland from 1998/99 and in England and Wales¹ from 2002/03



¹ England & Wales figures available through <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice>

Changes in distribution of main crime types

A description of each main crime type is provided in section 3 of the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics, 1MB \(opens in a new window\)](#). Appendix 1 of the user guide contains a list of all recorded crime classifications. The classification structure implemented from April 2013 presents recorded crime on the basis of victim-based crime and other crimes against society.

Victim-based crime includes the classifications of violence against the person, sexual offences, robbery, theft offences (including burglary) and criminal damage offences. Other crimes against society includes drug offences, possession of weapons, public order offences and miscellaneous crimes against society.

The crime figures presented in this section exclude Action Fraud. An explanation of the changes introduced by Action Fraud is provided in Appendix 1 paragraph 2.2.

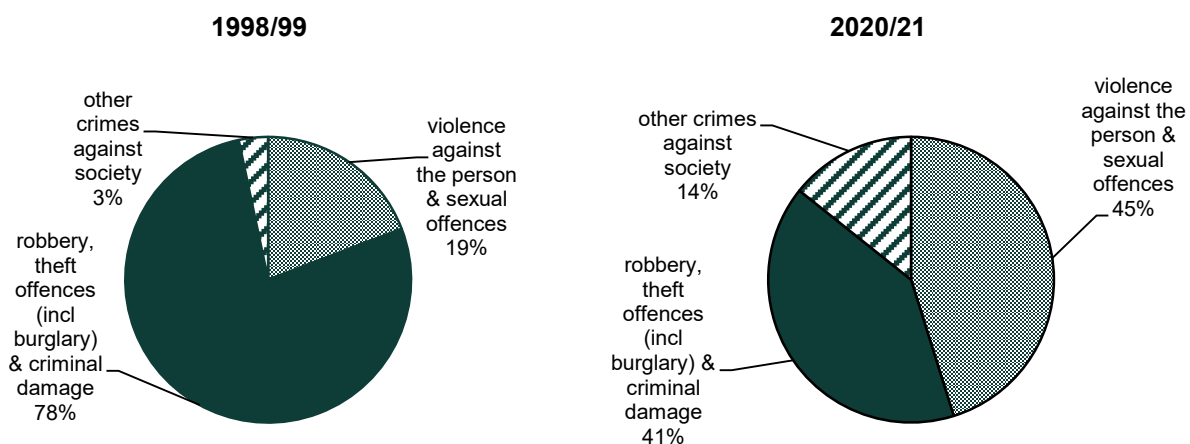
The detailed figures behind the charts in this section can be found in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) [Table 2.2].

Change in the distribution of the main crime types: At the start of the data series in 1998/99 victim-based crime represented 97 per cent of all crime recorded. This proportion has gradually reduced since then to 86 per cent in 2020/21.

Decreases in crime have mainly been experienced within property-type offences (robbery, burglary, theft and criminal damage), while offences of violence against the person and sexual offences have shown an upwards trend.

An increase in the number of drug offences has influenced the rise in other crimes against society. Figure 1.3 below shows the impact of these changes on the crime profiles for 1998/99 and 2020/21.

Figure 1.3 Police recorded crimes by main crime type, a comparison of 1998/99 and 2020/21

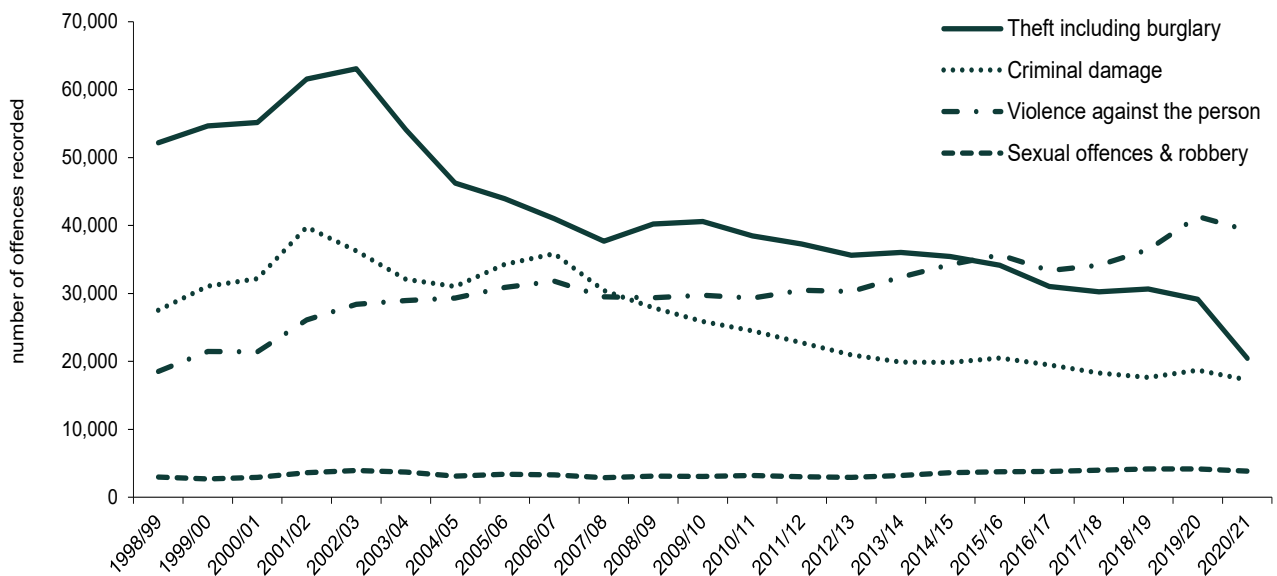


Figures 1.4 and 1.5 show the changing levels of the main crime types within victim-based crime and other crimes against society. The two charts are not shown to the same scale.

Victim-based crime

- In 1998/99 offences of theft (including burglary) represented more than half of all victim-based crimes, with criminal damage representing just over a quarter and violence against the person less than one in five victim-based crimes.
- By 2020/21 levels of theft, burglary and criminal damage were greatly reduced. At 49 per cent, violence against the person has overtaken theft (including burglary) to represent the largest overall victim-based crime classification. Theft (including burglary) currently represents 25 per cent of victim-based crimes with criminal damage representing 21 per cent.
- Between 1998/99 and 2013/14 robbery represented between one and two per cent of victim-based crimes. Since 2014/15 robbery has fallen below one per cent. Levels have generally fallen since 2002/03.
- Between 1998/99 and 2013/14 sexual offences represented between one and two per cent of victim-based crimes. This proportion reached four per cent in 2016/17 and has since remained at this level.

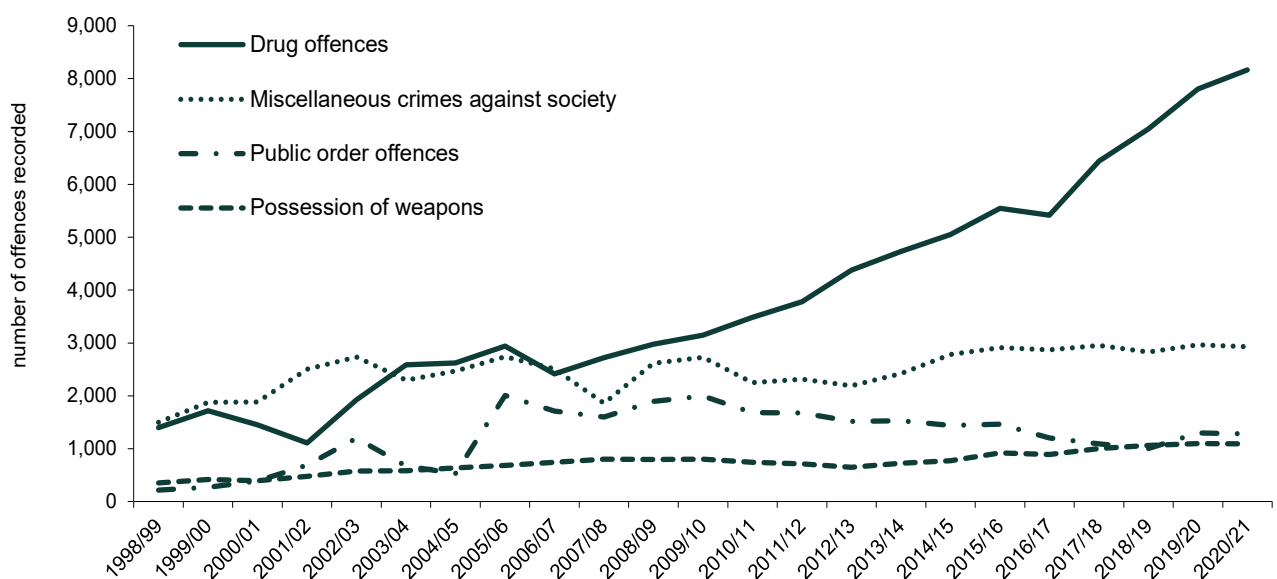
Figure 1.4 Victim based crime, 1998/99 to 2020/21



Other crimes against society

- In 1998/99 the largest single classification within other crimes against society was miscellaneous crimes against society (43 per cent) followed by drug offences (40 per cent).
- By 2020/21 drug offences represented 61 per cent of other crimes against society, with miscellaneous crimes against society falling to 22 per cent.
- The trend for public order offences is only comparable from 2005/06, due to the introduction that year of offences relating to breaches of anti-social behaviour, non-molestation and sex offender orders. While public order offences represented nearly a quarter of other crimes against society in 2005/06 the proportion steadily fell to eight per cent in 2018/19; in 2020/21 public order offences represented one in ten other crimes against society.
- Since 1998/99 possession of weapon offences have represented between seven and eleven per cent of other crimes against society.

Figure 1.5 Other crimes against society, 1998/99 to 2020/21



Section 2 further examines the individual classifications within these two main groupings.

2. Trends in Police Recorded Crime by Crime Type

The detailed figures behind the charts in this section can be found in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) Table 2.2.

A description of each main crime type is provided in section 3 of the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics, 1MB \(opens in a new window\)](#). Appendix 1 of the user guide contains a list of all recorded crime classifications. The classification structure implemented from April 2013 presents recorded crime on the basis of victim-based crime and other crimes against society.

Victim-based crime includes the classifications of violence against the person, sexual offences, robbery, theft offences (including burglary) and criminal damage offences. Other crimes against society includes drug offences, possession of weapons, public order offences and miscellaneous crimes against society.

The crime figures presented in this section exclude Action Fraud. An explanation of the changes introduced by Action Fraud is provided in Appendix 1 paragraph 2.2.

Trends within the main crime types are shown in figures 2.1 to 2.25. Following the introduction in March 2020 of restrictions relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, most classifications within overall police recorded crime fell resulting in lower crime levels in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20.

2.1 Violence against the person

Violence against the person currently represents more than two fifths of all crimes recorded, compared with less one fifth of all crime in 1998/99.

The highest level of violence against the person offences was recorded in 2019/20 and is more than twice the level recorded in 1998/99.

Violence against the person includes a wide range of offences from murder to minor assaults such as pushing and shoving that result in no physical harm. Even within the same classification the degree of violence used can vary considerably between incidents.

The introduction of the ICIS crime recording system in April 2001 improved the capture of low level crime. This may have contributed to increases in Violence against the person offences seen between 2000/01 and 2001/02.

Violence against the person is further split into homicide, violence with injury, death or serious injury caused by unlawful driving, violence without injury and harassment. Figure 2.1 shows the falling trend in violence with injury, and the increasing trends in violence without injury and harassment, alongside the overall increasing trend for violence against the person. While violence with and without injury fell in 2020/21, harassment continued to increase. An explanation of the discontinuity in the data series in 2003/04 as highlighted in figure 2.1 is provided on page 10 (Recording of minor injuries, April 2003). Details on recording changes which have influenced the increase in harassment are provided on page 12. Homicide offences and death or serious injury caused by unlawful driving are not displayed in this chart due to the small levels recorded.

Figure 2.1 Violence against the person, a comparison of 1998/99 to 2020/21

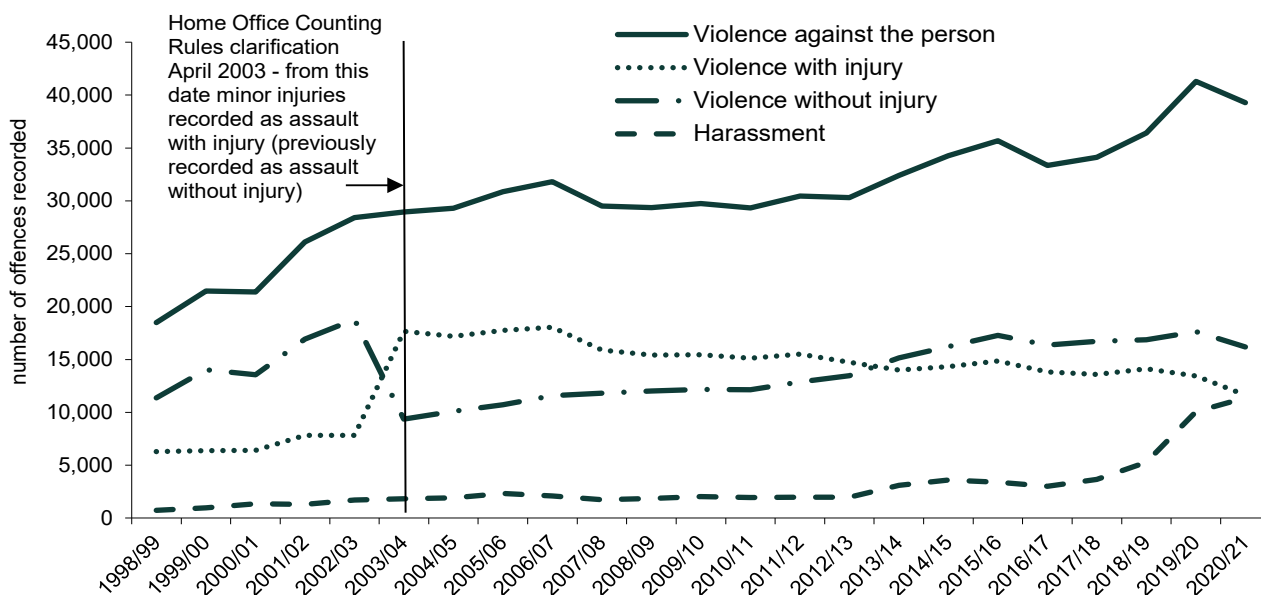
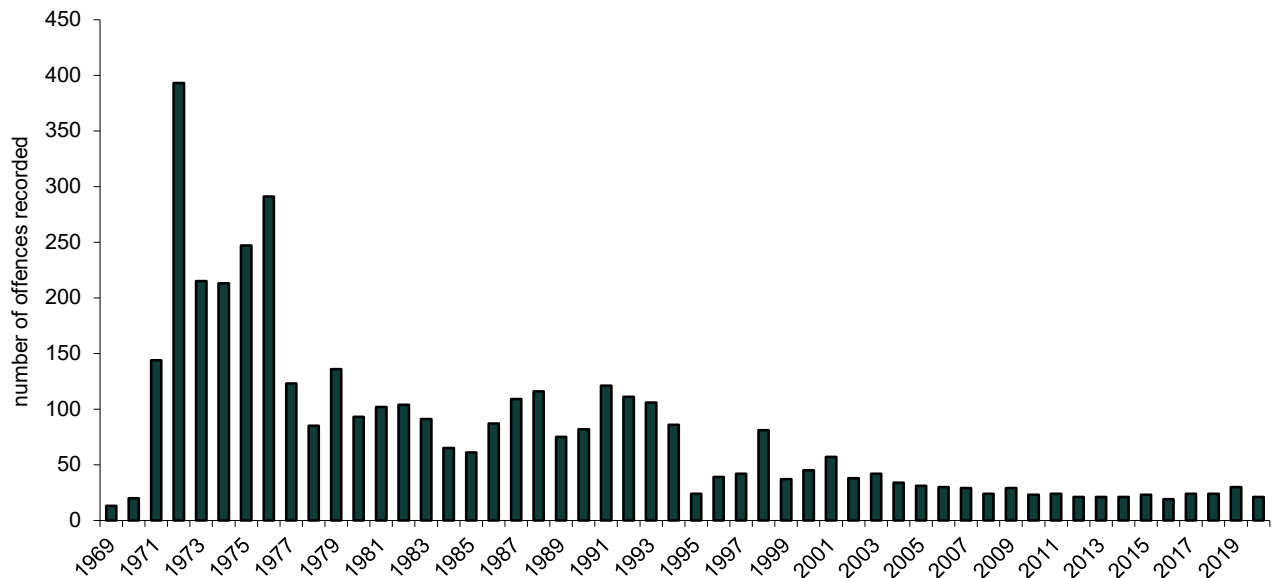


Figure 2.2 Homicides by calendar year, 1969 to 2020



Murder: In the current data series from 1998/99, the number of murders recorded was at its lowest level in 2016/17 with 13 recorded. The highest level of 71 recorded in 1998/99 includes the 29 persons killed in the Omagh bomb which occurred on 15 August 1998. There were 21 murders recorded in 2020/21; along with 2015/16 this is the third highest level in the last ten years.

Death or serious injury caused by unlawful driving:

Prior to 2017/18 this classification was included in violence with injury. The number of these offences ranged from 33 in 2001/02 to 168 offences in 2015/16. The level fell by 71 from 164 offences in 2019/20 to 93 in 2020/21, the largest annual fall experienced since 1998/99. A time series is presented in Figure 2.24 along with dangerous driving offences, to provide a more complete picture.

2.1.2 Violence with and without injury

Violence with injury includes offences classifications such as attempted murder, assault with intent to cause serious harm and assault with injury. The largest volume of offences is seen in assault with injury, for example assault occasioning actual bodily harm (AOABH).

Violence without injury includes classifications such as threats to kill, assault without injury, kidnapping, cruelty to children/young persons & child abduction and modern slavery. Offences of assault without injury are the largest grouping recorded within this classification.

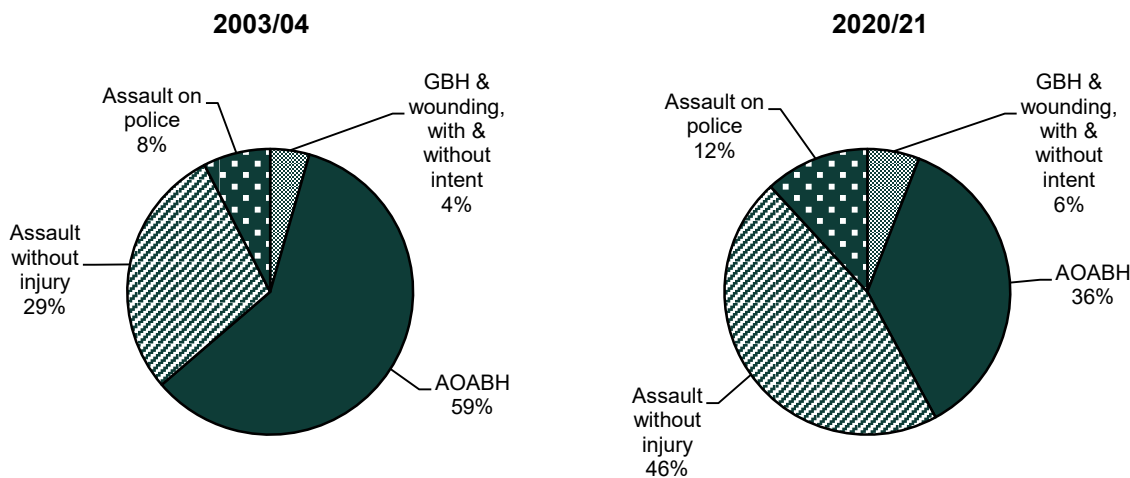
Clarifications made to the Home Office Counting Rules have introduced some discontinuities to the data series for violence with and without injury, as outlined below.

Recording of minor injuries, April 2003: As shown in figure 2.1, the violence with and without injury classifications are only directly comparable from 2003/04 onwards due to the following Home Office Counting Rules clarification. Prior to April 2003, offences where the victim received minor injuries (e.g. bruising or minor abrasions) were recorded as assault without injury. Since April 2003, these offences have been recorded as assault occasioning actual bodily harm (AOABH). The impact of this was a large increase in violence with injury, particularly the classification 8N Assault with injury and a corresponding decrease in violence without injury, particularly classification 105A Assault without injury. However the overall trend for violence against the person was not impacted (see figure 2.1).

Recording of intent to cause serious injury, April 2008: Revised technical guidance was issued by the Home Office in April 2008 to ensure consistency of recording by all police forces for those assaults resulting in minor or no injury to a victim, but where the intent was to cause serious injury. The effect of this clarification was that some offences that would previously have been recorded as other types of assault were to be recorded as GBH with intent. The impact of this clarification was experienced mainly in 2008/09 and 2009/10.

Assaults: Taking into account the change in recording of minor injuries in April 2003, figure 2.3 shows the changing proportions of the various types of assault between 2003/04 and 2020/21, demonstrating the shift between classification 105A Assault without injury (from 29% to 46%) and assault occasioning actual bodily harm (AOABH) (from 59% to 36%).

Figure 2.3 Comparison of assault offences^{1,2}, 2003/04 and 2020/21



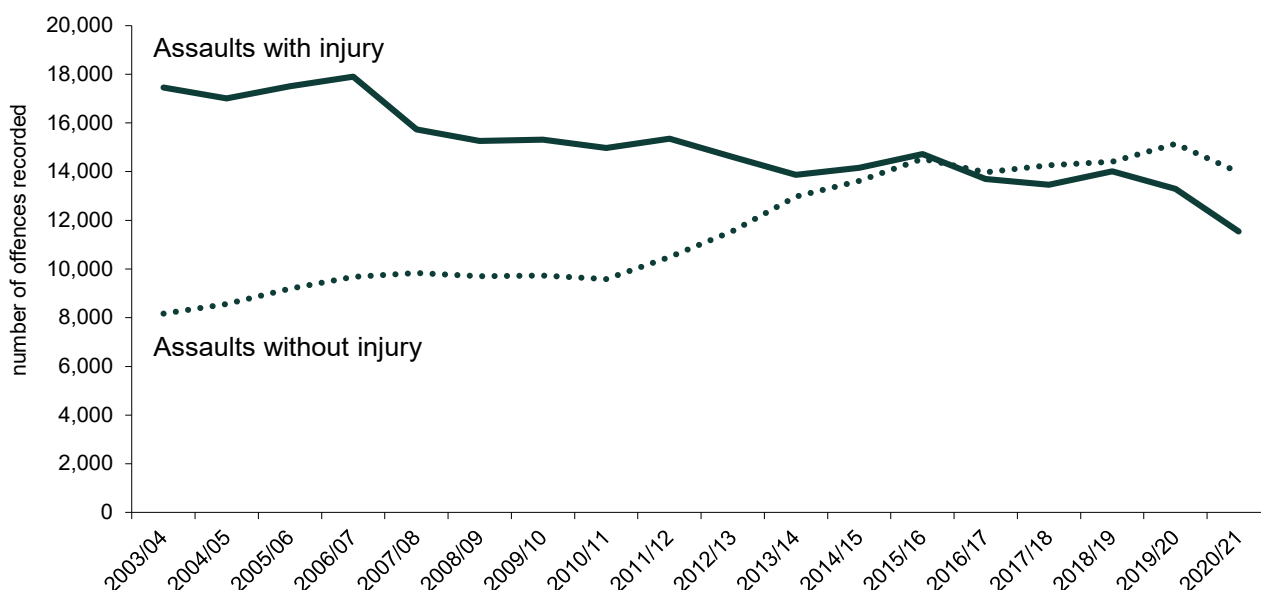
¹ Offences of GBH and wounding with intent fall within classification 5D Assault with intent to cause serious harm, while GBH and wounding sit within classification 8N Assault with injury.

² Assault on police offences fall within classification 8S Assault with injury on a constable and classification 104 Assault without injury on a constable.

Figure 2.4 shows the trends in assaults with and without injury since 2003/04. Assaults with injury include classifications 5D Assault with intent to cause serious harm, 8N Assault with injury and 8S Assault with injury on a constable. Assaults without injury include classifications 105A Assault without injury and 104 Assault without injury on a constable.

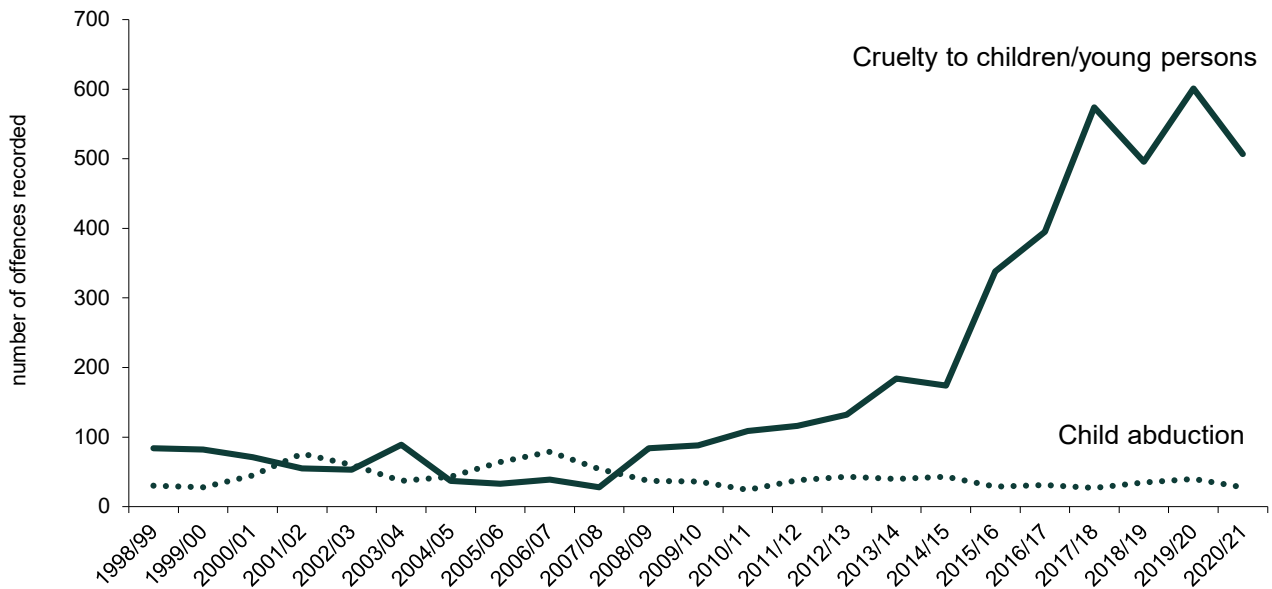
There has been a general increase in levels of assaults without injury, with 2019/20 approaching twice the number recorded in 2003/04. This is alongside falling levels of assault with injury (mainly offences of AOABH) which have fallen by a third between 2003/04 and 2020/21. The result of these trends is that assaults without injury, which accounted for nearly a third of all assaults in 2003/04, have accounted for at least half of all assaults since 2016/17.

Figure 2.4 Assaults with and without injury, 2003/04 to 2020/21



Cruelty to children/young persons and child abduction: As figure 2.5 shows, there was a sharp increase in offences of cruelty to children/young persons recorded in 2015/16, when levels increased from 174 to 338, with a similar level of increase seen in 2017/18 (from 395 to 574) and a lesser increase in 2019/20 (from 496 to 601). Further analysis on victims under the age of 18 is provided in Section 7.3.

Figure 2.5 Cruelty to children/young persons and child abduction, 1998/99 to 2020/21



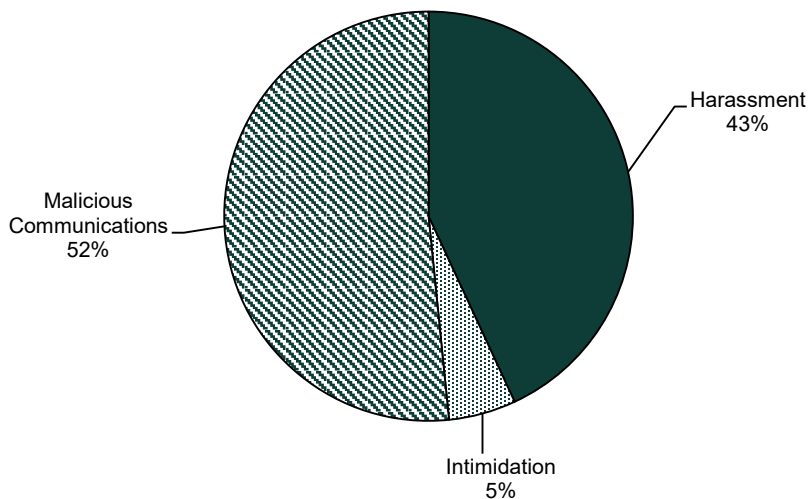
Modern Slavery: This classification was created in 2015/16 to bring together offences relating to human trafficking, trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced/compulsory labour which were previously classified within sexual offences or within the general ‘Other offences’ classification. The first year for which offences were recorded was 2007/08; levels recorded in the most recent years are 27 in 2014/15, 35 in 2015/16, 21 in 2016/17, 30 in 2017/18, 37 in 2018/19, 40 in 2019/20 and 36 in 2020/21.

2.1.3 Harassment

Harassment includes the classifications of harassment, intimidation and malicious communications.

Harassment (including Malicious Communications): The recording of malicious communications offences commenced for the first time in Northern Ireland from 1st April 2017 and are classified to Harassment. New legislation on disclosing private sexual photographs and film with intent to cause distress (otherwise known as ‘revenge porn’) was introduced in June 2016; these offences are also included within malicious communications. A Home Office change introduced in April 2018 requires harassment to be recorded in addition to the most serious additional victim based offence. Both of these changes in recording practice, along with increasing awareness of the application of these rules in the recording process, will have contributed to the increased levels recorded in the overall harassment classification.

Figure 2.6 Profile of harassment offences, 2020/21



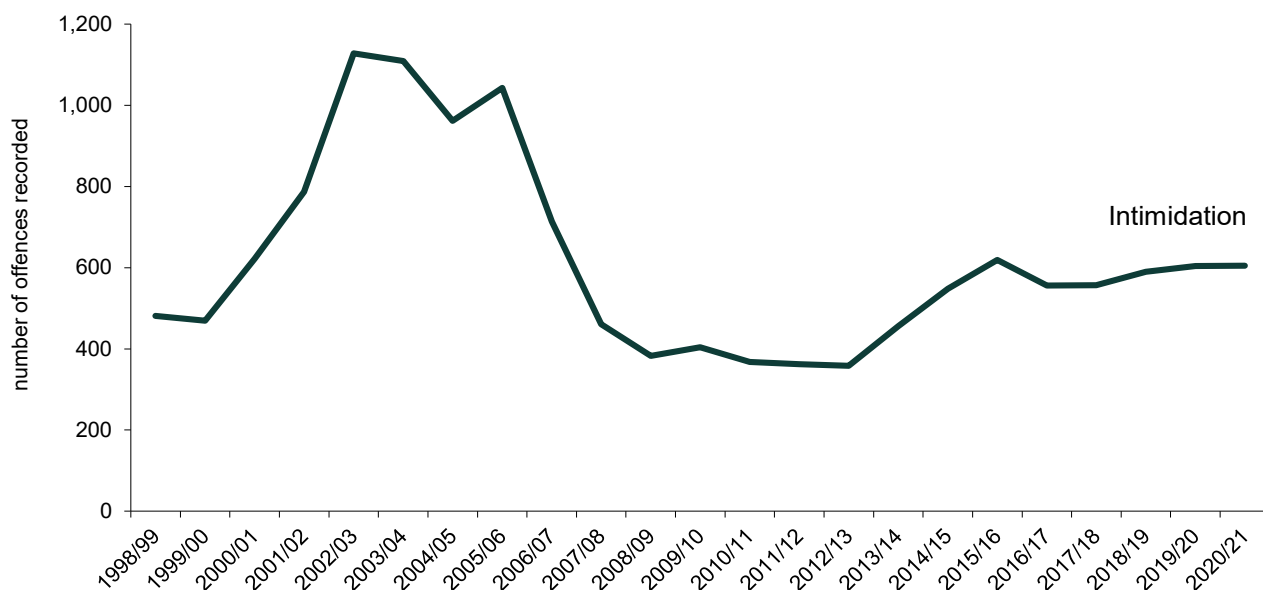
Harassment: the trend in the overall harassment classification is shown in Figure 2.1. Higher levels were recorded between 2013/14 and 2016/17 before much greater increases were seen in each of the years 2017/18 to 2020/21, as explained in the comments box on page 12. Malicious communications offences were first recorded in 2017/18 and, in 2020/21, account for more than half (52 per cent) of all offences classified to harassment.

Intimidation is an offence in legislation in Northern Ireland but not specifically recorded as such within England and Wales. It would be associated with the Northern Ireland security situation, involving offences such as intimidation-residence/occupation, person to leave employment or to do/refrain from doing any act. It is recorded within the 8L Harassment classification.

Intimidation carries a more severe penalty on indictment than harassment.

Intimidation: Offences of intimidation were at their highest level between 2002/03 and 2005/06, before falling to the lowest level recorded in 2012/13. While the number of offences has risen since, the figure for 2020/21 is just over half of the level recorded in 2002/03

Figure 2.7 Intimidation, 1998/99 to 2020/21



2.2 Sexual offences

Sexual offences currently represent around four per cent of all crimes recorded. The level of sexual offences in 2020/21 is nearly three times the lowest level recorded in 2000/01.

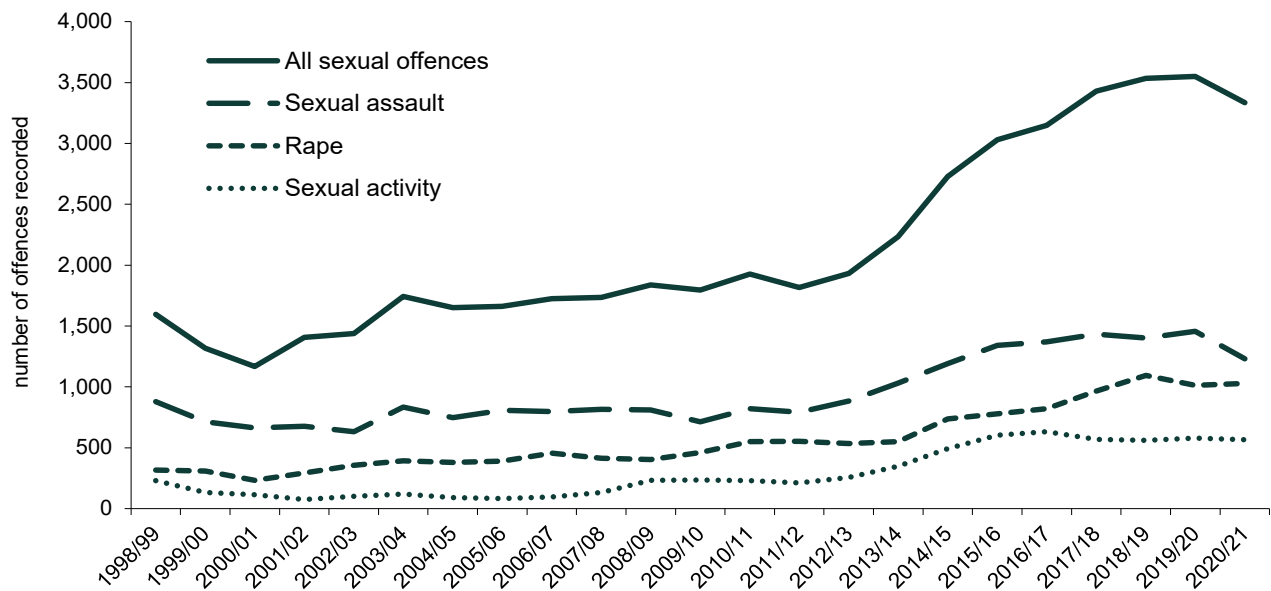
The classification of sexual offences is split into rape and other sexual offences. Among the offences included within other sexual offences are sexual assault, sexual activity, sexual grooming, exposure and voyeurism. Figure 2.8 shows the increases seen in recent years of rape, sexual assault and sexual activity offences.

The Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 was introduced in February 2009 and has altered the definition and coverage of sexual offences. While this has had an impact on the provision of comparable data series for sexual offences, the new legislation has brought the recording of sexual offences in Northern Ireland more into line with the legislation and recording of these offences in England and Wales.

Under the Home Office Counting Rules, offences which were reported to the police between February 2009 (implementation date of the new legislation) and March 2010 but which were committed prior to February 2009 were recorded under the previous legislation wherever possible. However in April 2010 this guidance was changed so that historic allegations committed under the previous legislation should be recorded and detected as if committed today. Interpretation of the sexual offence data series should be considered in the context of these changes.

Many of the classification included within Other Sexual Offence ceased to apply with the introduction of the new sexual offence legislation.

Figure 2.8 Sexual offences, 1998/99 to 2020/21



2.2.1 Rape offences

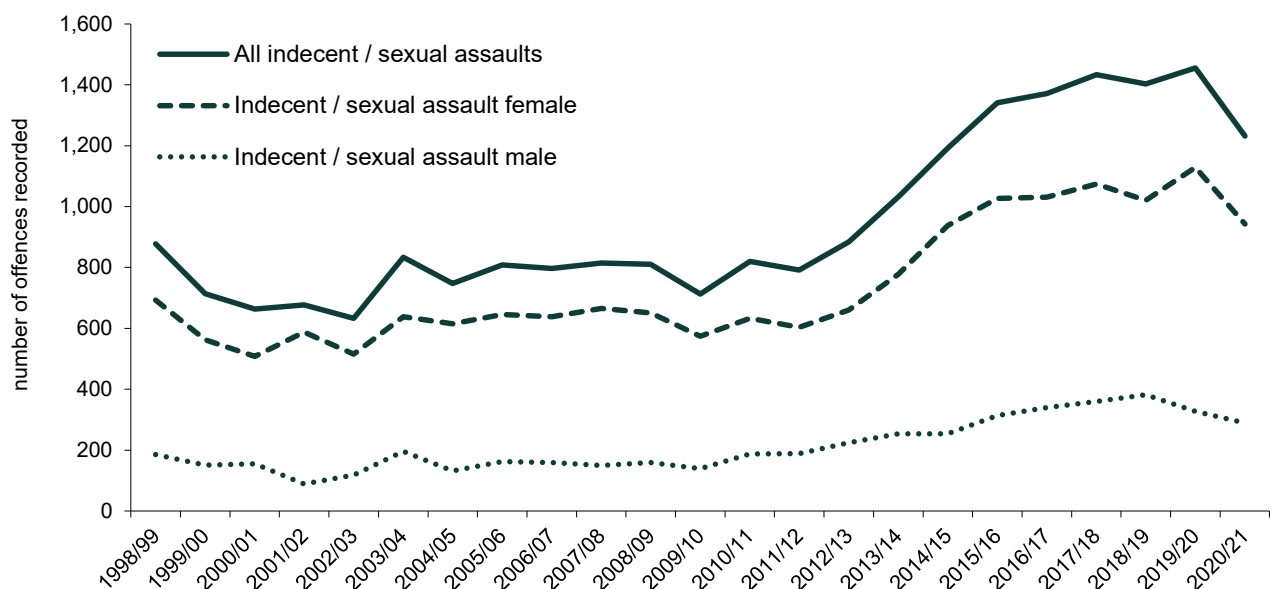
The number of rape offences has shown an increasing trend since 2000/01 with the level recorded in 2020/21 (the second highest in the data series) more than four times that recorded in 2000/01. The largest single increase occurred between 2013/14 and 2014/15; further background information is provided below.

In Northern Ireland, prior to 2003/04 the offence of rape could only be committed against a female. However the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 redefined the offence so that buggery without consent would constitute an offence of rape, in other words rape could be committed against a male.

The increase in the number of rape offences recorded during 2014/15 may in part be due to clarification received from the Home Office in relation to the issue of consent. This is an area that has been the subject of considerable debate from a crime recording perspective. [Crown Prosecution Service guidance](#) on the subject was issued to police forces which assisted with the application of the rules for recording rape offences set out by the Home Office.

2.2.2 Sexual assault

Figure 2.9 Female and male victims of sexual assault, 1998/99 to 2020/21



Sexual assault offences have shown a sustained increase since 2012/13, with the exception of a fall of 31 in 2018/19 (to 1,403 offences) and a fall of 224 in 2020/21 (to 1,232 offences). The highest level was recorded in 2019/20.

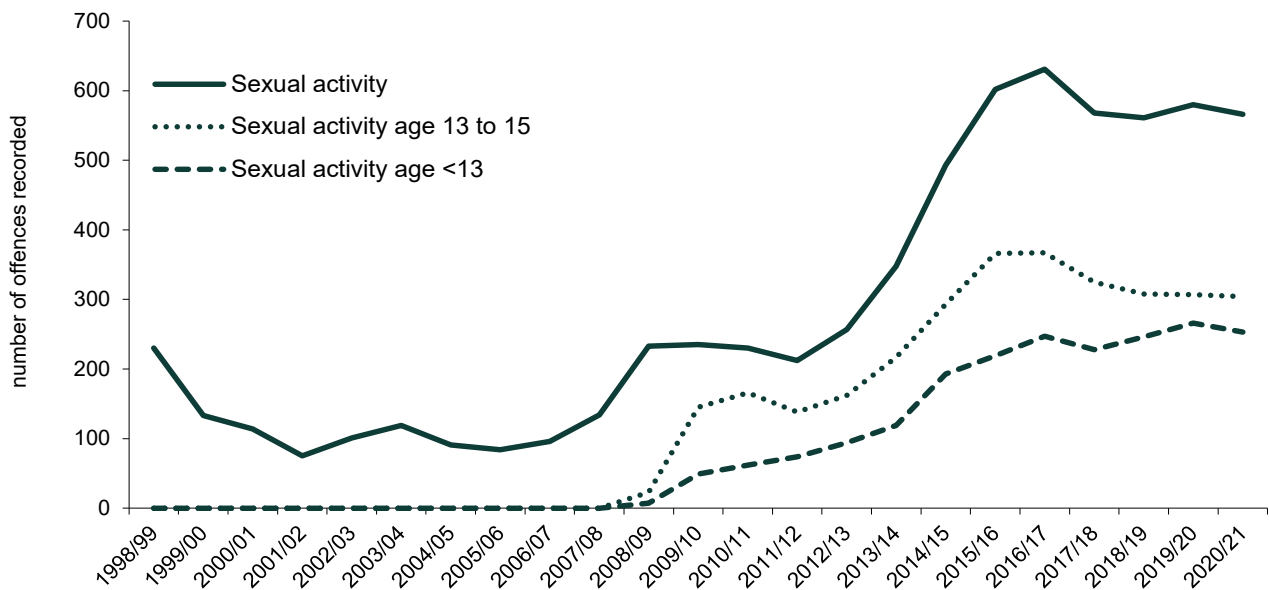
2.2.3 Sexual activity

Offences of unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 14 or under 17 were in place prior to the introduction of the new legislation in February 2009. The offences now in place are sexual activity involving a child under 13 or under 16 and causing sexual activity without consent. Classification 70 Sexual activity with a person with a mental disorder has also been included in this larger category.

'Sexting' is when someone sends or receives a sexually explicit text, image or video on their mobile phone, computer or tablet; it can include 'sexual chat' and requests for pictures or images of a sexual nature.

There have been sharp increases in levels of sexual activity since 2012/13 (257 offences recorded), reaching a peak in 2016/17 (631 offences) before levelling out at between 561 and 580 offences recorded in each year since. Some of the overall increase may be influenced by 'sexting'. Figure 2.10 shows offences of sexual activity since 1998/99 and sexual activity under 13 and under 16 since 2009/10 (the first full year in which the legislation was in place). Section 4 provides information on online crime, including figures on sexual offences with an online motivation. Section 7.3.2 provides information on sexual offences where the victim was under 18 at the time the offence was committed.

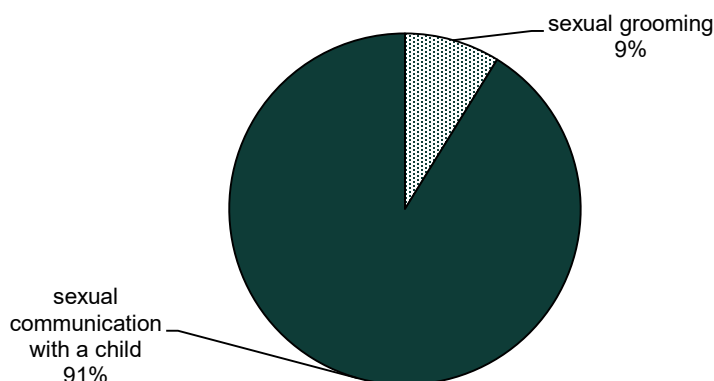
Figure 2.10 Sexual Activity offences, 1998/99 to 2020/21



2.2.4 Sexual grooming

Sexual grooming and sexual communication with a child: The first sexual grooming offences were recorded in 2004/05 and the offence of sexual communication with a child which was introduced in 2015/16. While the overall classification increased by 153 offences from 34 in 2016/17 to 187 in 2017/18, much of the increase was attributed to the activity of Online Child Sexual Abuse Activist Groups (more commonly known as paedophile hunters who engage by posing as a child under 16). This activity did not continue into 2018/19 and the number of sexual grooming offences reverted to levels seen prior to 2017/18. There were 19 offences of sexual grooming and 197 offences of sexual communication with a child recorded in 2020/21, accounting for 9 per cent and 91 per cent of offences recorded in this classification respectively.

Figure 2.11 Profile of Sexual Grooming offences, 2020/21



2.2.5 Length of time between offence taking place and report to police for rape and sexual assault / sexual activity

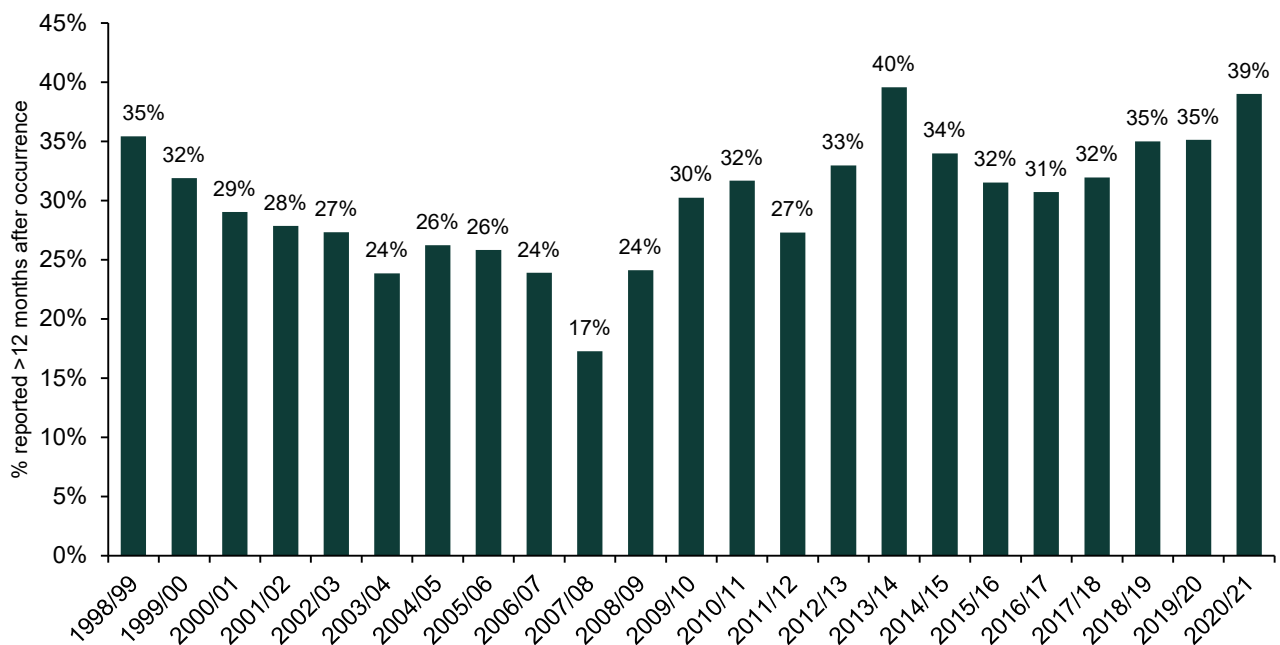
Crimes are recorded based on the date the crime was reported to the police, rather than the date on which the offence occurred. For the majority of crimes, the reported date and the occurrence date are the same. However sexual offences are the main crime type where there can be a large gap between the date the offence occurred and the date the offence was then reported to the police.

Table 2.1 in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) provides an indication of the delay in reporting rape and sexual assault/sexual activity offences. These figures are dependent on the accuracy of the date on which the offence occurred and, in many cases, this will have been so long prior to reporting the offence that the exact date cannot be remembered and in these cases an approximate year may be the best information able to be provided.

While the majority of rape and sexual assault/sexual activity offences are reported to police within 12 months of the date the offence occurred, up to two out of every five offences of this nature recorded by police are reported more than 12 months after the offence occurred (see Figure 2.12).

The focus on cases of historical sexual abuse (for example through the media, the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse in Northern Ireland Between 1922 and 1995 and other inquiries) may have an impact on increasing the number of non-recent sexual offences reported.

Figure 2.12 Percentage of rape and sexual assault/sexual activity offences reported more than 12 months after the offence occurred



2.3 Robbery

Levels of robbery in 2020/21 are around one fifth of the level recorded in 2002/03 and are the lowest recorded in the time series. At its highest level robbery represented nearly two per cent of all crimes recorded; in 2020/21 this proportion is less than one per cent.

Robbery offences are split into those offences where the property stolen is business property and those where personal property is stolen. Robbery figures are also available according to whether the robbery was armed (i.e. involving a weapon of any type), those where a weapon was not involved and those robberies where a vehicle was hijacked.

The profile of robbery in respect of personal and business property has changed over the course of the time series. In 1998/99 robbery was evenly split between robbery of personal and business property; in 2020/21 81 per cent of robberies are of personal property.

The change in profile has been less marked in relation to armed robbery, robbery with no weapon involved and hijacking. In 1998/99, 45 per cent of all robberies were armed, 37 per cent had no weapon involved and 18 per cent were hijackings. In 2020/21 these percentages were 40, 51 and nine respectively.

Figure 2.13 Robbery of business and personal property, 1998/99 to 2020/21

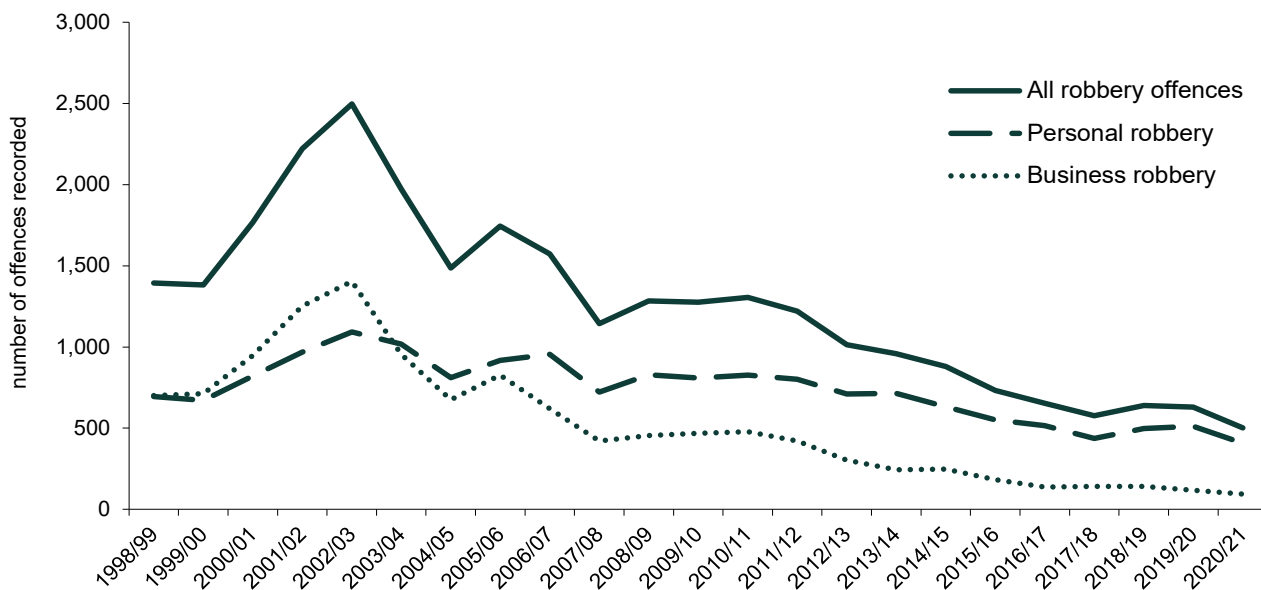
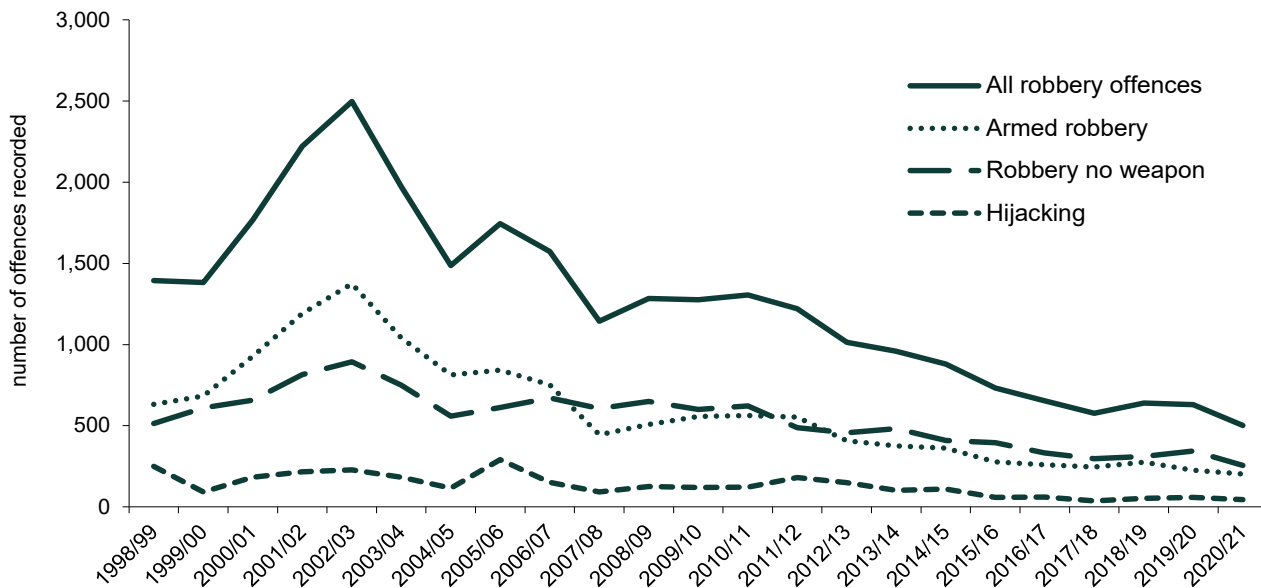


Figure 2.14 Armed robbery, robbery with no weapon involved and hijacking, 1998/99 to 2020/21



2.4 Burglary

Changes to Home Office Counting Rules for Burglary: From 1 April 2017 the classifications within burglary have been changed from *domestic burglary* and *non-domestic burglary* to *burglary-residential* and *burglary-business & community*. This reflects a revised approach within the Home Office Counting Rules.

What constitutes a burglary does not change; however burglary-residential and burglary-business & community represent a new data series. For example sheds, garages, outhouses etc within the boundary of a dwelling are recorded under burglary-residential, while previously they may have been recorded as non-domestic burglary. Where such a building is used solely for business purposes, it will be recorded as burglary-business & community. The individual series for domestic burglary and burglary-residential cannot be added together to create an overall figure. Further details are available in appendix 1.

Burglary levels have shown an overall decline since 2002/13. In 2020/21 they are less than a quarter of the level recorded in 2002/03 and are the lowest recorded in the time series. At its highest level burglary represented 13 per cent of all crimes recorded; in 2020/21 this proportion has fallen to four per cent.

Following the change in classification in April 17 as described above, around three quarters of burglaries have been classified as Residential, with Business and Community accounting for around one quarter.

Prior to this classification change Domestic burglary accounted for around half of all burglaries in 1998/99 increasing to two thirds of burglary offences by 2015/16.

Figure 2.15 presents the changing burglary levels throughout the time series, while Figure 2.16 compares the profile at the start of the data series with 2016/17 (the latest comparable year) and the latest figures for 2020/21 under the revised approach.

Figure 2.15 Burglary, 1998/99 to 2020/21

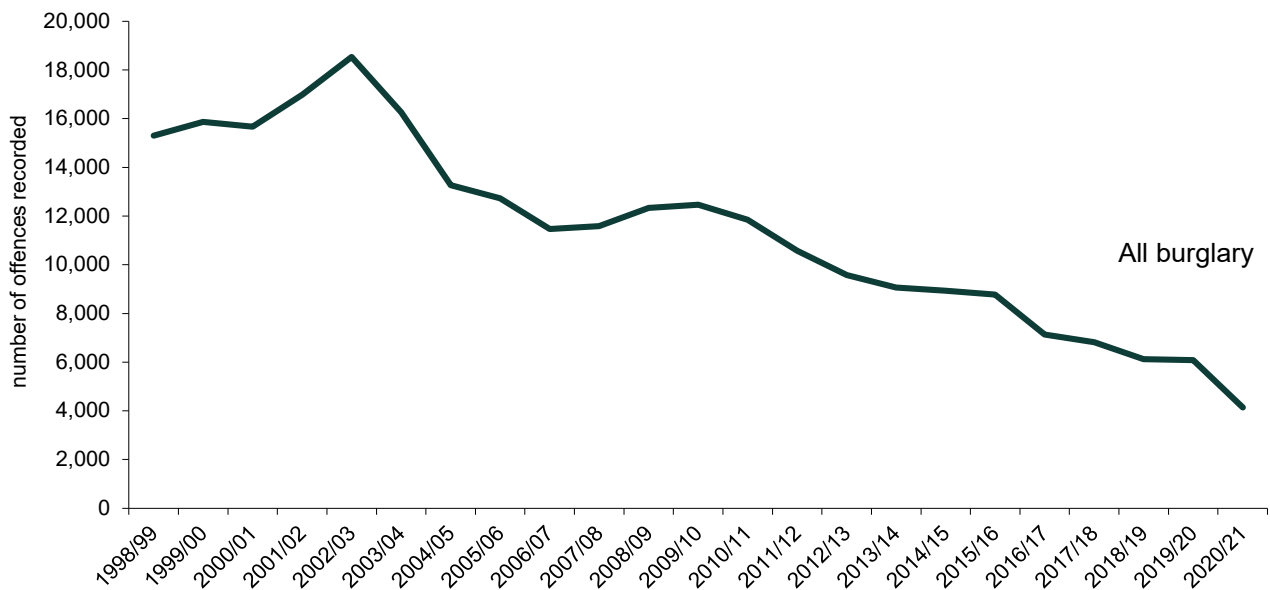
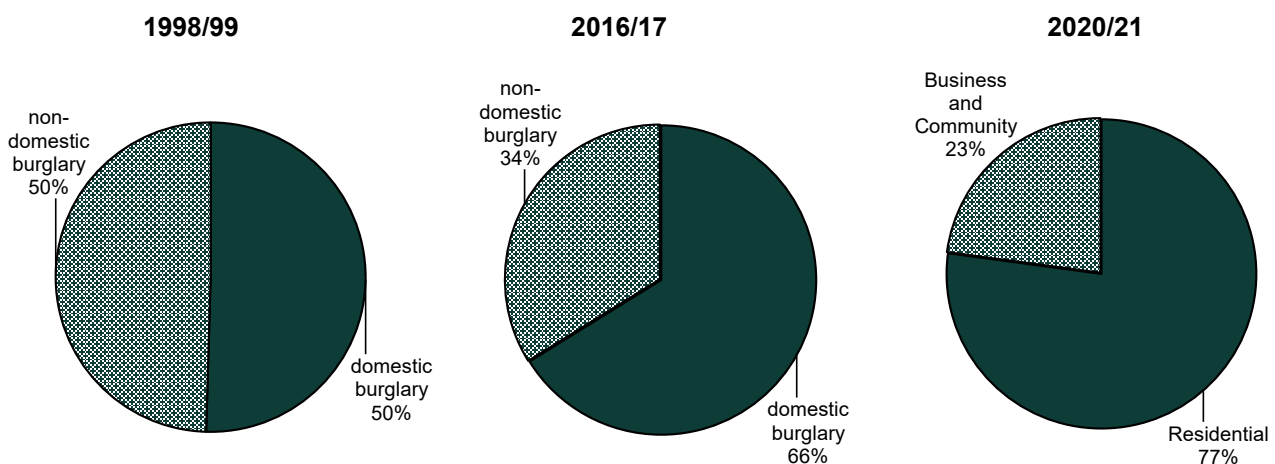


Figure 2.16 Profile of burglary offences, 1998/99 compared with 2016/17 and 2020/21

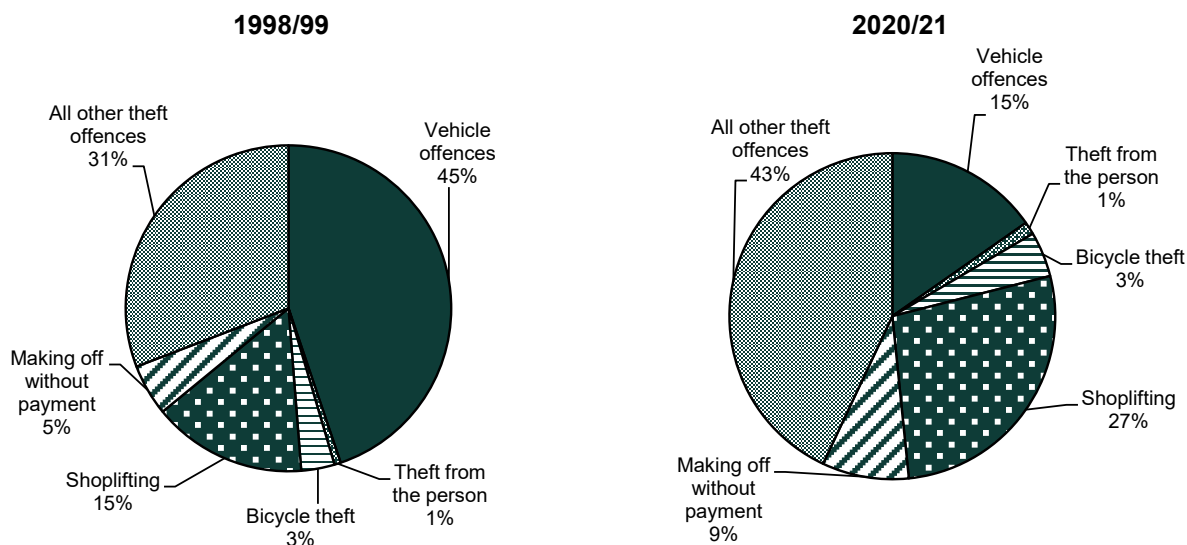


2.5 Theft offences (excluding burglary)

Theft offences have shown an overall declining trend since 2001/02 and 2002/03. The highest level recorded in 2001/02 is more than 2.5 times higher than the level in 2020/21. At their highest level theft offences represented nearly one third of all crimes recorded. In 2020/21 this proportion has fallen to less than one fifth.

The profile of classifications within theft has changed quite markedly since the start of the data series, most notably in respect of vehicle crime (45% of theft offences in 1998/99 compared with 15% in 2020/21) and shoplifting (15% in 1998/99 and 27% in 2020/21) as shown in Figure 2.17. Some factors affecting the theft data series are outlined below.

Figure 2.17 Profile of theft offences, 1998/99 compared with 2020/21



The introduction of the ICIS crime recording system in April 2001 improved capture of low level crime. This may have contributed to increases seen between 2000/01 and 2001/02, for example within theft from the person.

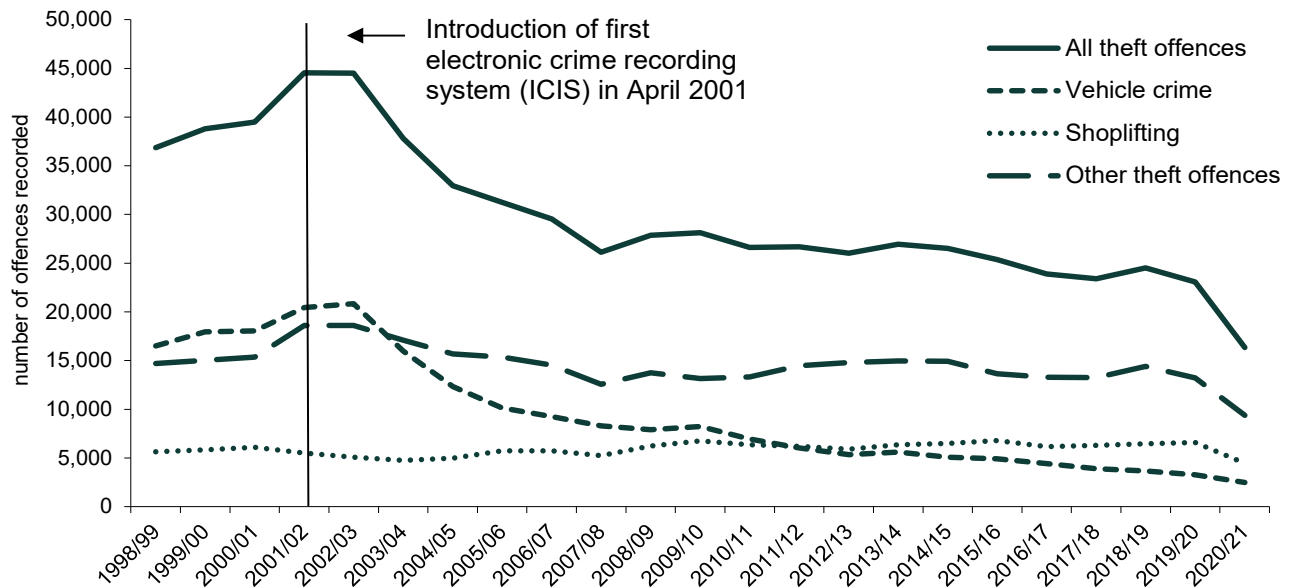
Offences against vehicles: From 1 April 2002, a clarification to the Home Office Counting Rules meant that most attempted thefts/unauthorised taking of motor vehicles previously recorded in theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle were to be recorded as vehicle interference. This resulted in a decrease in the number of offences of theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle between 2001/02 and 2002/03, with a corresponding increase in offences of interfering with a motor vehicle.

Making off without payment: The change in classifications implemented from April 2013 saw these offences move into the all other theft offences classification. The introduction of schemes such as Forecourt Watch may have had an impact on the number of offences of this nature recorded during the data series. A change in the Home Office Counting Rules, introduced in April 2014, made it more difficult for crimes of making off without payment to meet the criteria required allowing offences to be cancelled or removed from the crime figures. This may have contributed to a rise in making off without payment in 2014/15.

During 2017/18 PSNI introduced a pilot scheme covering two policing districts, in which the petrol station deals with non payment of fuel through the Civil Debt Recovery process, allowing police to focus on those who are deliberately seeking to avoid paying for their fuel. Each MOWP report is still recorded as a crime by police who will identify if there are any aggravating factors (eg false registration plate). If none exist there is no additional requirement for police intervention. However the strict crime cancellation criteria contained in the Home Office Counting Rules means that it is not possible to cancel such reports, thus leading to an increase in the number of these offences remaining recorded. There were 1,743 such offences recorded in 2016/17 increasing to 2,340 in 2017/18, 3,990 in 2018/19 and 3,236 in 2020/21. There were 1,407 offences recorded in 2020/21.

Figure 2.18 shows the main trends within theft offences since 1998/99. Restrictions relating to the Covid-19 pandemic were introduced in March 2020 and had an impact on all theft classifications which showed lower levels in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20. Vehicle crime showed its largest fall since 2010/11, theft from the person showed its largest fall since 2005/06 and bicycle theft showed its largest fall since 2015/16. Both shoplifting and 'all other theft' offences showed their largest falls and recorded their lowest levels since the start of the data series in 1998/99.

Figure 2.18 Theft offences, 1998/99 to 2020/21



Blackmail: While numbers are small, there was a sharp rise in 2015/16 to nearly three times higher than the previous year. It has since generally moved in an upwards direction to reach a peak of 456 offences in 2020/21, more than double the level in 2015/16. These recent increases may be linked to online crime. In 2014/15 a quarter of the blackmail offences were flagged as having an online element. This rose to around half of all blackmail offences in 2015/16 and 2017/18, and approximately two thirds in 2016/17, 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21. Further details are available in Section 4 Online Crime.

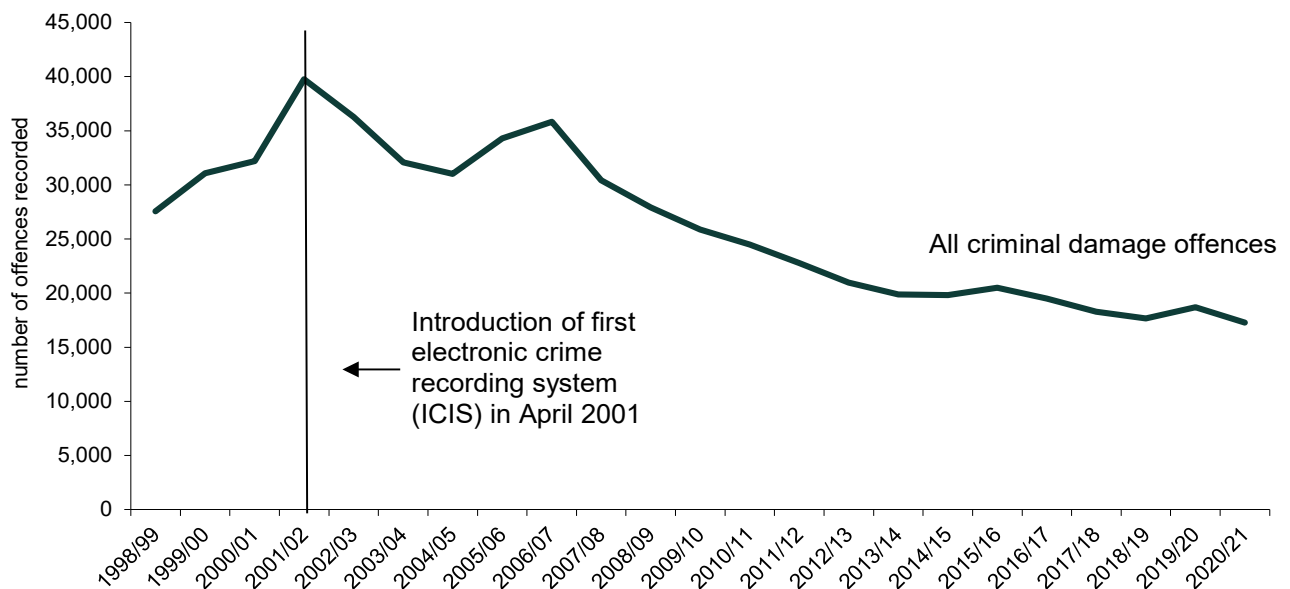
2.6 Criminal damage offences

The latest overall criminal damage figure is the lowest recorded in the data series and is less than half of the peak recorded in 2001/02. At its highest level criminal damage represented nearly thirty per cent of all crimes recorded. In 2020/21 this proportion has fallen to 18 per cent. Criminal damage – residential and criminal damage to a building – business and community recorded their lowest levels in 2018/19, while arson and criminal damage to a vehicle recorded the lowest levels in 2020/21.

The introduction of the ICIS crime recording system in April 2001 improved capture of low level crime. This may have contributed to the largest single increase in criminal damage offences seen between 2000/01 and 2001/02.

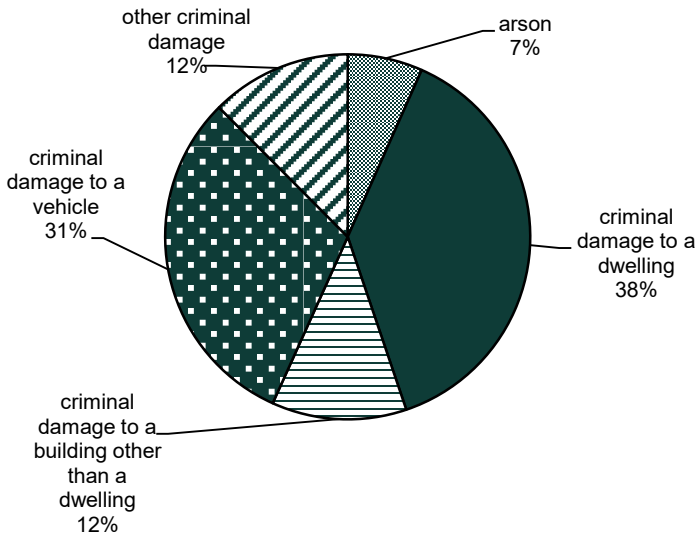
Offences of arson not endangering life account for nearly ninety per cent of all arson offences recorded. Prior to the introduction of ICIS in 2001/02, there were very few offences of arson endangering life recorded. This may have been affected by the process of classifying offences which then improved with the ICIS crime recording system.

Figure 2.19 Criminal damage offences, 1998/99 to 2020/21



The profile of classifications within criminal damage has remained relatively similar throughout the data series. Figure 2.20 shows the current breakdown of criminal damage classifications, with criminal damage to a dwelling representing 38% and criminal damage to a vehicle representing 31% of all criminal damage offences.

Figure 2.20 Criminal damage by type of damage, 2020/21



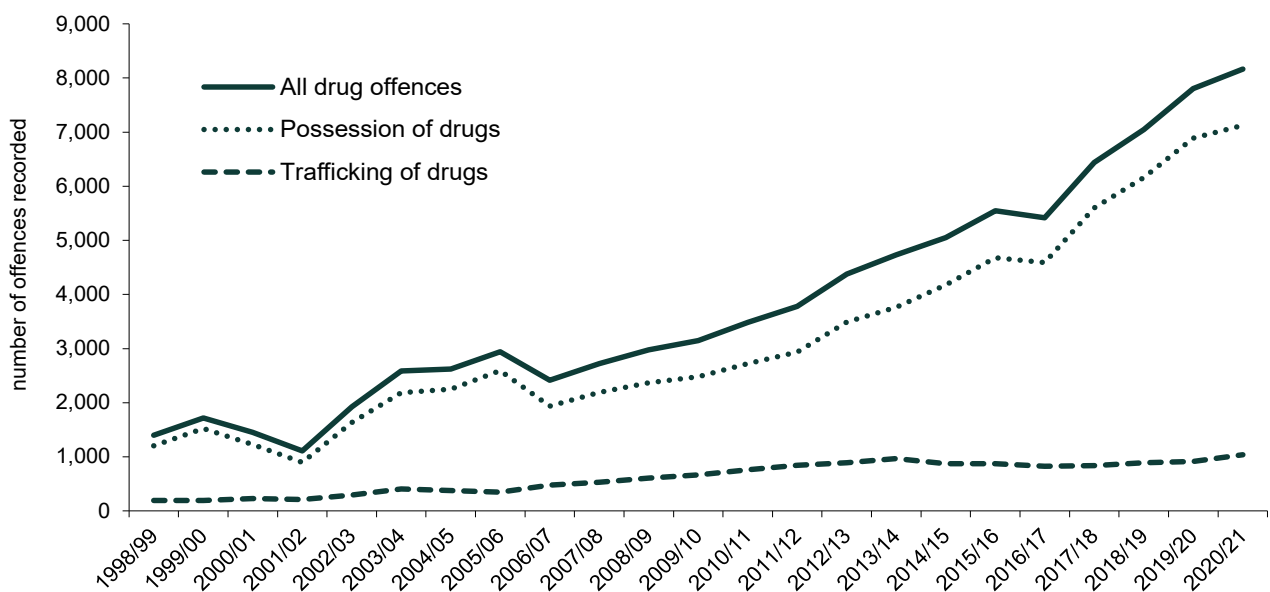
2.7 Drug offences

The number of drug offences recorded during 2020/21 is the highest to date and is more than seven times higher than the lowest level recorded in 2001/02. Drug offences currently represent nearly three fifths of Other Crimes Against Society and around nine per cent of all crimes recorded.

The recording of drug offences by police is particularly dependent on police activities and priorities (see Section 2.1 of the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland](#)).

Cannabis was reclassified from a Class B to a Class C drug in January 2004 and was subsequently reclassified back to a Class B drug in January 2009. From 2004/05 additional information on drug type was collated enabling drug possession offences to be split into possession of cannabis and possession of other controlled drugs.

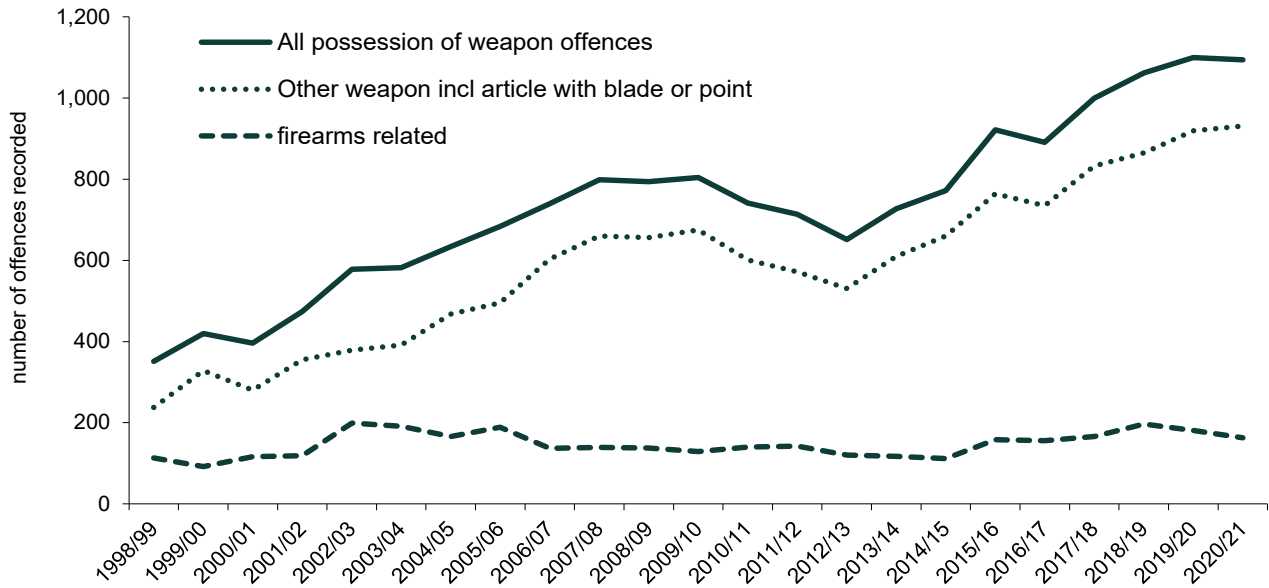
Figure 2.21 Trafficking of drugs and possession of drug offences, 1998/99 to 2020/21



2.8 Possession of weapons offences

Since 1998/99 these offences have represented between seven per cent and eleven per cent of Other Crimes Against Society and up to one per cent of all crime. The number of firearms related offences has remained fairly consistent throughout the data series, with all years recording fewer than 200 offences. The remaining weapon possession offences, including articles with a blade or point, have shown a generally increasing trend with the level recorded in 2020/21 being the highest recorded to date and nearly four times the lowest level in 1998/99.

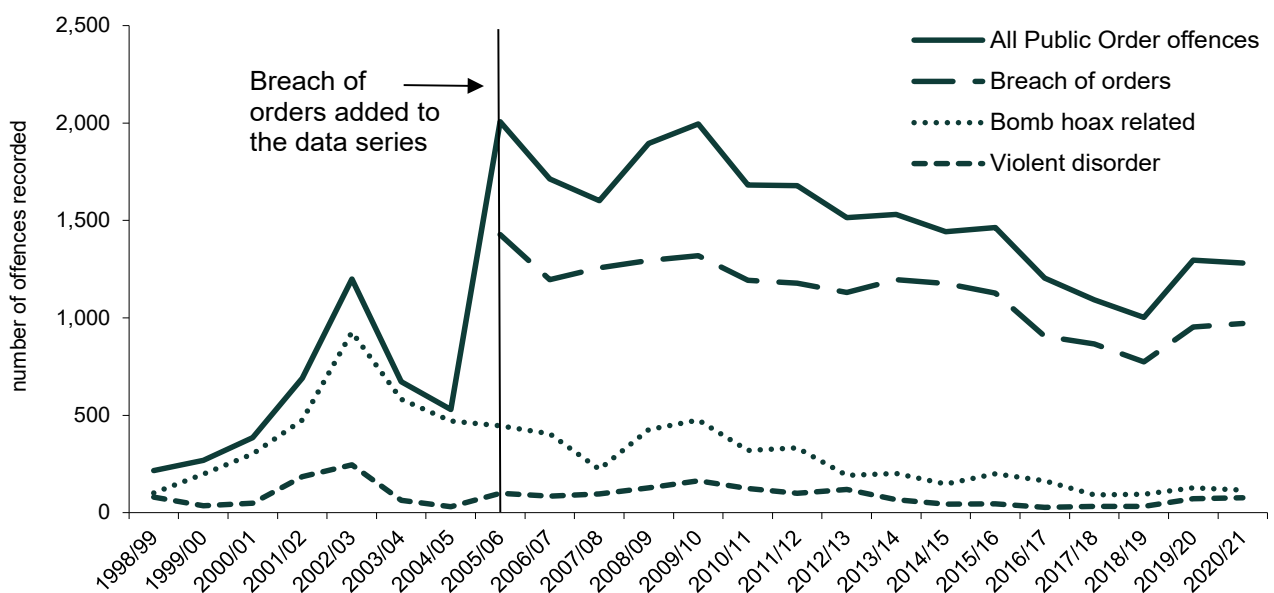
Figure 2.22 Possession of weapons offences, 1998/99 to 2020/21



2.9 Public Order Offences

This classification contains offences such as violent disorder, breaches of orders, bomb hoax related offences and offences under anti-terrorist legislation. In 2005/06 offences relating to breaches of anti-social behaviour orders, non-molestation orders and sex offender orders were added to the data series, resulting in an additional 1,400 offences being recorded in that financial year. Breach of orders have since accounted for at least two thirds of all Public Order offences. Following the highest levels recorded in 2005/06 (2,007 offences) and 2009/10 (1,995 offences), levels fell to 1,002 in 2018/19 in 2009/10. Public Order offences accounted for nearly a quarter of Other Crimes Against Society in 2005/06 falling to ten per cent in 2020/21; they represent up to two per cent of all crimes recorded.

Figure 2.23 Public Order offences, 1998/99 to 2020/21



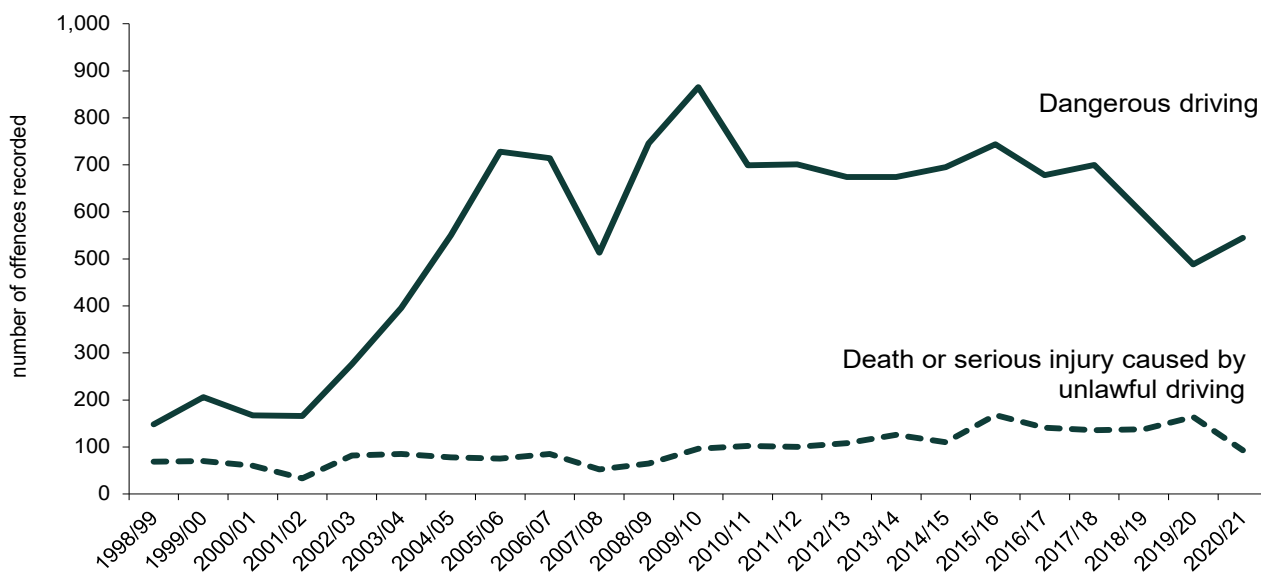
2.10 Miscellaneous crimes against society

There is a wide range of offence types included within this classification, such as dangerous driving, forgery offences, handling stolen goods, going equipped for stealing, threat or possession with intent to commit criminal damage, perverting the course of justice and obscene publications/protected sexual material.

Since 2018/19 offences of threat or possession with intent to commit criminal damage has been the largest classification within miscellaneous crimes against society, with 951 offences recorded in 2020/21.

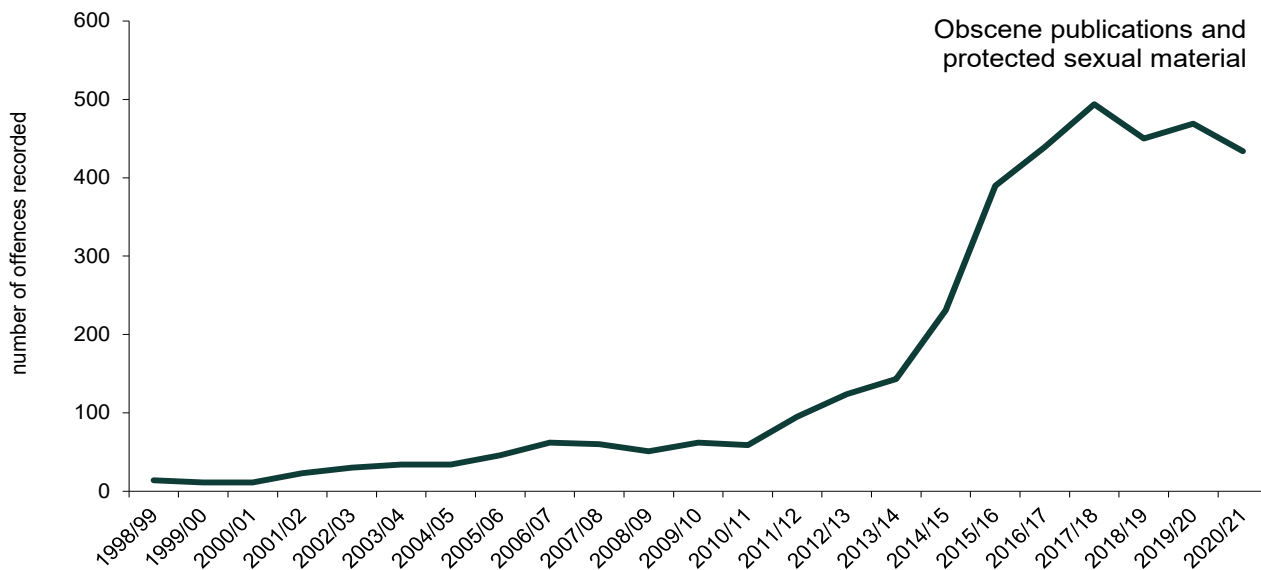
Dangerous driving: This is currently the second largest classification within miscellaneous crimes against society, with the highest level of 865 recorded in 2009/10 and 545 offences recorded in 2020/21. Although the general rule for recording a crime is to do so on report of the crime [on the balance of probability that a crime has occurred], dangerous driving offences are only recorded when investigation confirms that the offence is made out. Improved processes for capturing police charges and recommendations made by the Public Prosecution Service may have contributed to the increases experienced prior to 2010/11. While offences of causing death or serious injury related to dangerous driving are classified to violence against the person, they have been included in Figure 2.24 to provide a more complete picture.

Figure 2.24 Dangerous driving and offences causing death or serious injury by unlawful driving, 1998/99 to 2020/21



Obscene publications and protected sexual material: The increases seen in this classification, in particular between 2014/15 (231 offences) and the highest level recorded in 2017/18 (494 offences) are also evident in a rise in obscene publications offences flagged with an online crime motivation (further details available in Section 4 Online Crime). Increases may also be linked to the rise in offences of sexual activity through ‘sexting’ (further details available in Section 2.2 Sexual Offences, Section 4 Online Crime and Section 7.3 Victim under 18).

Figure 2.25 Obscene publications and protected sexual material, 1998/99 to 2020/21



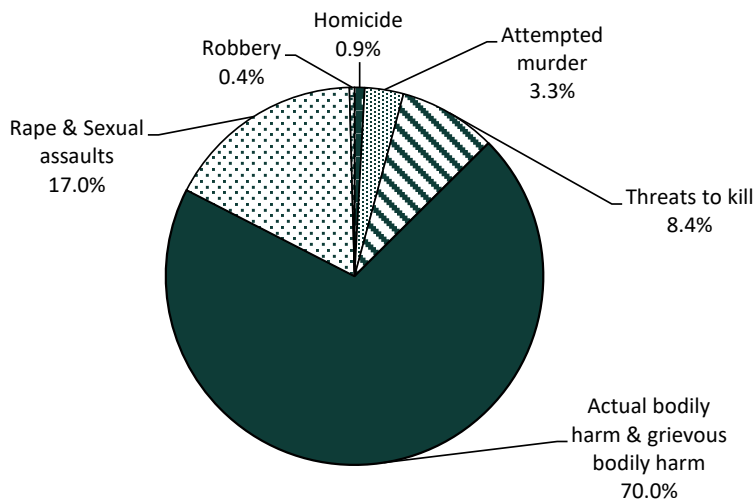
3. Knife and Sharp Instrument Crime

Since April 2007 the Home Office has collected additional data from police forces on offences involving knives and sharp instruments, where a sharp instrument is any object that pierces the skin (or in the case of a threat is capable of piercing the skin), e.g. a broken bottle. Knives and sharp instruments are taken to be involved in an incident if they are used to stab or cut, or as a threat. Offence coverage is for the following selected offences; homicide, attempted murder, threats to kill, actual and grievous bodily harm, robbery, rape and sexual assaults. PSNI has compiled knife and sharp instrument data for each financial year since 2007/08 based on the definitions used by the Home Office.

The figures behind these charts in this section can be found in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#).

The number of selected violent and sexual offences involving knives and sharp instruments has shown a general downwards trend since 2007/08 and represents between 4 and 5 per cent of those selected offences. The highest level of 934 offences was recorded in 2007/08, with the lowest level of 693 recorded in 2020/21.

Figure 3.1 Profile of selected violent and sexual offences recorded by the police involving knives and sharp instruments¹ by crime type in Northern Ireland, 2020/21



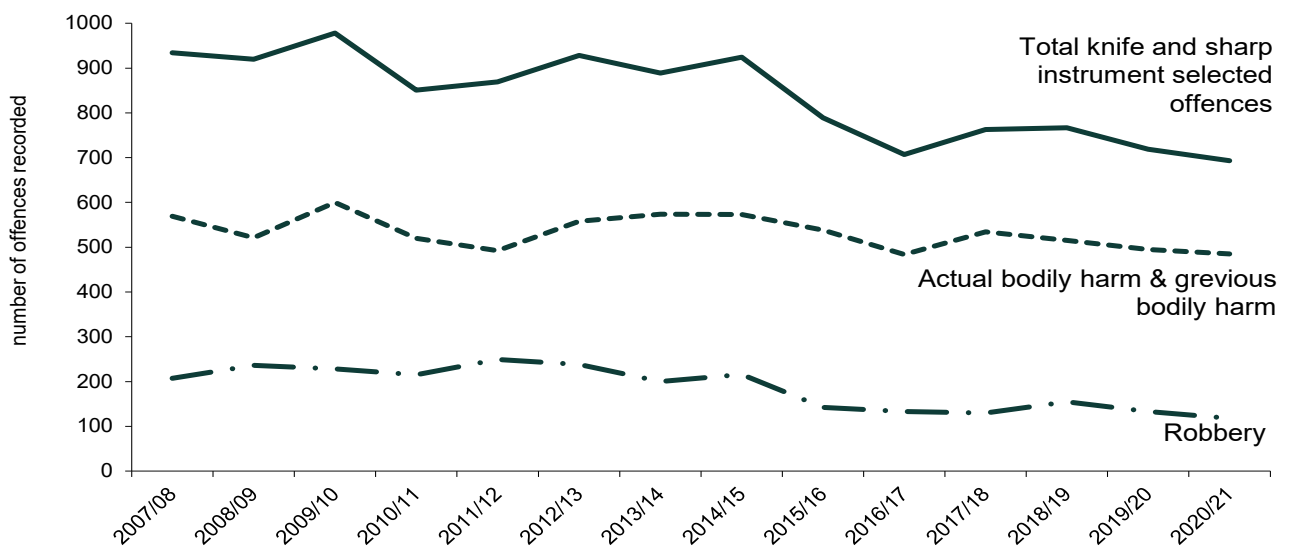
1 A sharp instrument is any object that pierces the skin (or in the case of a threat, is capable of piercing the skin), eg a broken bottle. The knife and sharp instrument figures presented here are based on weapon details taken from a live operational system and are therefore subject to change.

2 Homicide includes murder, manslaughter, infanticide and corporate manslaughter.

3 Includes 5D Assault with intent to cause serious harm and 8N Assault with injury.

4 Includes indecent assault on a male/female (classifications 17/20) and sexual assault on a male/female (classifications 17A/17B/20A/20B), as well as 19A-19H Rape.

Figure 3.2 Selected violent and sexual offences recorded by the police involving knives or sharp instruments¹ by crime type in Northern Ireland, 2007/08 to 2020/21



4. Online Crime

Home Office Definition and guidance: Online crime (formerly cyber crime) is identified through the use of a 'flag' on the crime recording system.

Online flag definition: An offence should be flagged where any element of the offence was committed online or through internet-based activities (eg through email, social media, websites, messaging platforms, gaming platforms or smart devices).

Purpose: This flag is to help understand the volume and nature of offences committed online. It refers to any crime committed either in full, or in part, through use of online methods or platforms. The online crime flag helps provide a national and local picture of how internet and digital communications technology are being used to commit crimes, and an understanding of the prominence of certain crimes that are happening online, compared to offline. The flag will help us prioritise spending and direct appropriate resources to tackle online crimes, e.g. in terms of technology, training, digital forensics capacity, and staff. It also gives an insight into the scale and nature of online crime, and can help enhance the development of policies to tackle them and protect victims.

Coverage: The first complete financial year for which online crimes are available is 2014/15. As Action Fraud took over responsibility for the central recording of fraud and cyber crime previously recorded by PSNI from 1 April 2015, the figures provided here exclude Action Fraud.

Data quality: While crimes included within the police recorded crime statistics for Northern Ireland are individually checked for compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules, the identification of an online crime is derived from a motivation 'tick box' on the system used by PSNI to record crime. The motivation is identified and completed by a police officer or member of police staff for each such reported incident or crime. The correct application of an online motivation for all such incidents/crimes is not quality assured by the PSNI's Statistics Branch. As Online Crime has not been assessed as a National Statistic it is being presented here as an Official Statistic.

Tables 4.1 to 4.3 in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) provide online crime figures from 2014/15.

Comparison of 2020/21 with the baseline year 2014/15: Online crime accounted for 0.6% of all crimes in 2014/15, rising to 4.7% in 2020/21. In terms of population rates there was less than one online crime per 1,000 population in 2014/15 increasing to two per 1,000 population in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Figure 4.1 shows the increase in the main crime types flagged as online, and the influence of introducing the recording of malicious communications offences during 2017/18 within the harassment classification. The increase in the overall harassment classification (from 332 in 2014/15 to 3,337 in 2020/21) should also be considered in light of recording changes (see Points to Note on page 3).

Figure 4.2 demonstrates the change in distribution of offence types between 2014/15 and 2020/21. The changing pattern is seen particularly in relation to harassment which accounted for around half of online crime in 2014/15 and now represents more than three quarters of online crime in 2020/21. Sexual offences, blackmail and obscene publications have shown large volume increases between the two time periods of 258, 292 and 126 respectively.

Figure 4.1 Online crime, 2014/15 to 2020/21

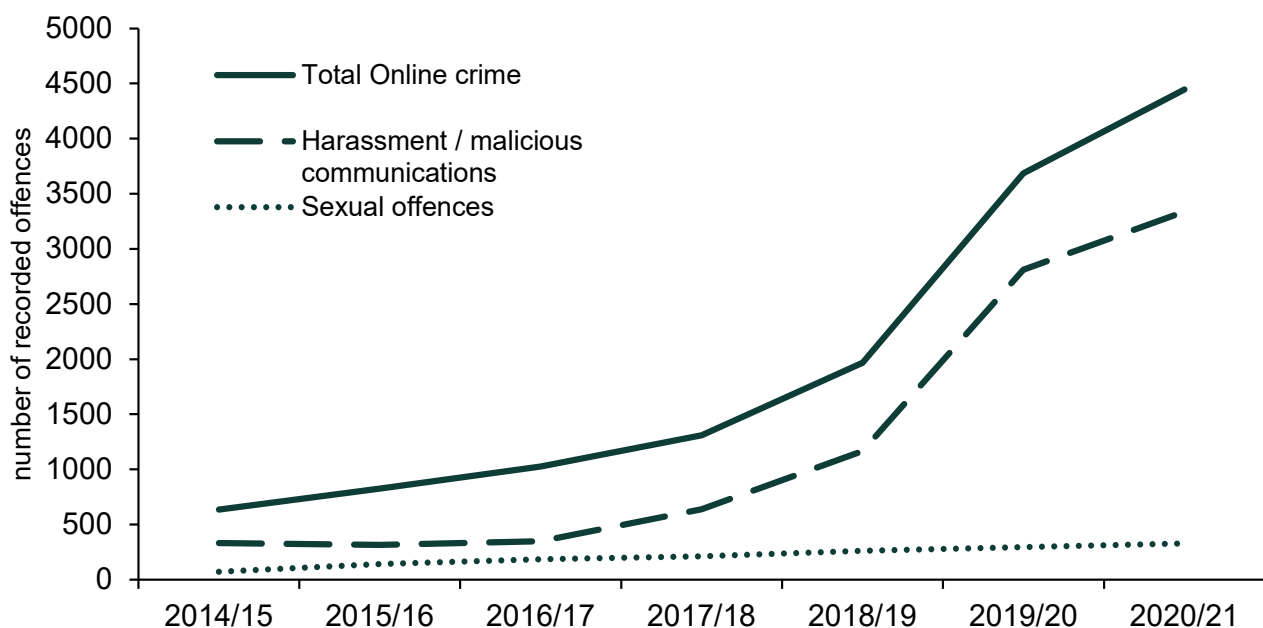
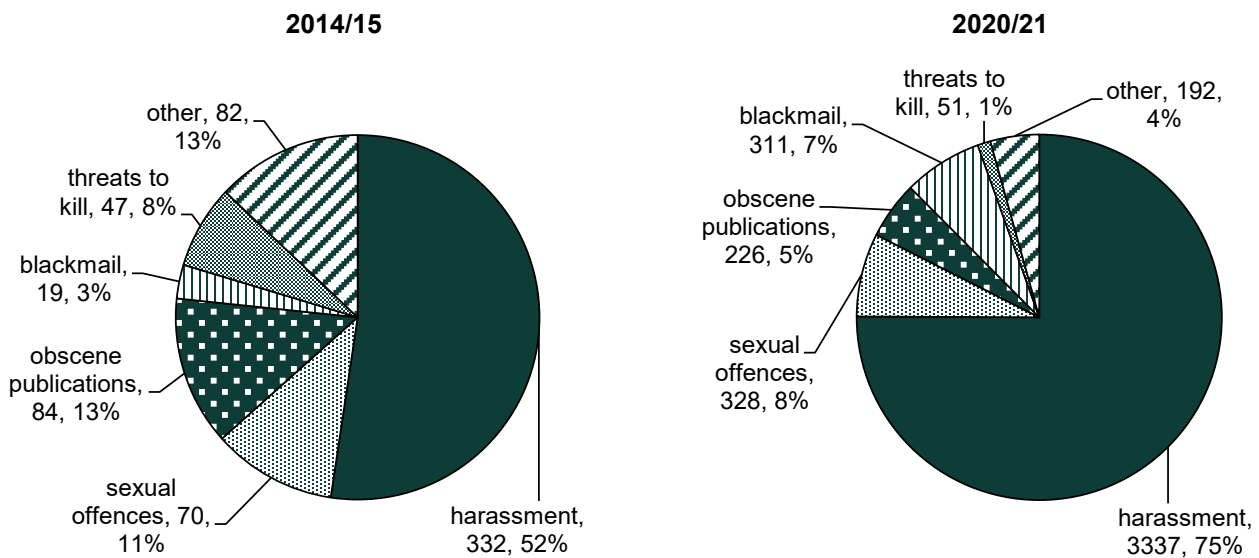


Figure 4.2 Numbers and percentages of online crime by type of offence, 2014/15 and 2020/21¹



¹ The harassment total in 2020/21 includes offences of malicious communications which were first recorded in 2017/18.

4.1 Online Crime Victim Age and Gender Profile 2020/21

Victim age and gender were applicable or known in nine out of ten online crimes recorded in 2020/21. For the vast majority of records where age and gender information were unavailable, the offence is regarded as a 'state-based' offence and therefore victim age and gender are not applicable.

Victim Age: Where victim age was available, 21 per cent were under 18 and 79 per cent were aged 18+. Those aged under 18 were most likely to be victims of harassment (469 offences) and sexual activity offences (182 offences) with an online crime motivation, representing 56 per cent and 22 per cent of all online crime where the victim was under 18. Those aged 18+ were most likely to be victims of harassment (2,840 offences) or blackmail (249 offences) with an online crime motivation, representing 88 per cent and 8 per cent respectively of online crime where the victim was aged 18+.

Victim Gender: Where victim gender was available, females represented 62 per cent while male victims represented 38 per cent. Females were most likely to be victims of harassment (2,145 offences) and sexual offences (261 offences) with an online crime motivation, representing 85 per cent and 10 per cent respectively of online crime where the victim was female. Males were most likely to be victims of harassment (1,164 offences) and blackmail (261 offences) and with an online crime motivation, representing 76 per cent and 17 per cent respectively of online crime where the victim was male.

5. Alcohol Crime

Home Office Definition and guidance: Alcohol crime is identified through the use of a 'flag' on the crime recording system.

Alcohol-related crime definition: The alcohol flag should be applied where it is perceived by the victim or any other person that the effects of alcohol consumption on the offender or victim was an aggravating factor.

Purpose: The aim is to provide the number of crimes directly attributable to alcohol to assist in assessing the impact of alcohol on crime and policing, improve transparency and provide improved information on the scale of the problem.

Coverage: During 2012/13 a baseline was established for those crimes where alcohol was a contributory factor.

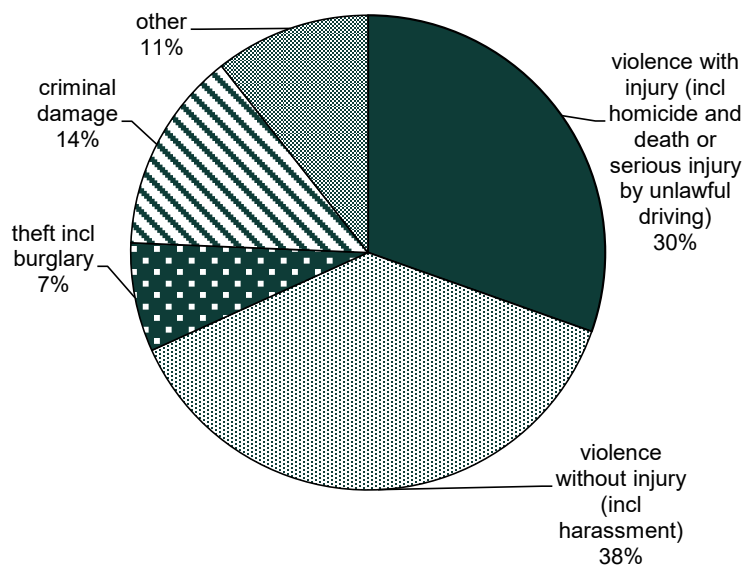
Data quality: While crimes included within the police recorded crime statistics for Northern Ireland are individually checked for compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules, the identification of an alcohol crime is derived from a motivation 'tick box' on the system used by PSNI to record crime. The motivation is identified and completed by a police officer or member of police staff for each such reported incident or crime. The correct application of an alcohol motivation for all such incidents/crimes is not quality assured by the PSNI's Statistics Branch, but audits and data quality checks are routinely conducted in an attempt to ensure that any under or over-recording is corrected. As Alcohol Crime has not been assessed as a National Statistic it is being presented here as an Official Statistic.

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) provide alcohol-related crime figures from 2012/13.

Trends in alcohol-related crime: Since the start of the data series, around one in five crimes recorded by the police have been flagged with an alcohol motivation, ranging from 17,287 such offences in 2020/21 to 20,489 offences in 2018/19. The crime types where the highest levels of alcohol motivation have been identified are those within violence against the person (47.1% of all violence against the person offences in 2012/13 falling to 30.0% in 2020/21). Sexual offences with an alcohol motivation represented 20.2% of all sexual offences in 2012/13, generally falling to 14.3% in 2020/21. Possession of weapons offences with an alcohol motivation represent around a quarter of all possession of weapons offences.

The proportion of violence against the person offences with an alcohol motivation was at its highest in 2012/13 and has since fallen in most years. For violence with injury (including homicide and death or serious injury caused by unlawful driving) the proportion has fallen from 56.8% in 2012/13 to 44.7% in 2020/21; levels have also fallen in most years from 8,453 in 2012/13 to 5,255 in 2020/21. The levels and proportion in respect of violence without injury has seen a general fluctuation, with 5,718 offences recorded in 2012/13 (42.5%) to 6,632 recorded in 2018/19 (38.5%); there were 5,745 such offences recorded in 2020/21 (35.5%).

Figure 5.1 Alcohol-motivated crime by type of crime 2020/21



6. Fraud

From 1 April 2015 Action Fraud became responsible for the central recording of fraud and cyber crime previously recorded by PSNI; Action Fraud became responsible for all such reports in England & Wales by 1 April 2014. Action Fraud is the UK's National Reporting Centre for fraud and cyber crime reported directly to them from the public and other organisations. While this means that these fraud and cyber offences are no longer recorded by PSNI, Action Fraud figures relating to fraud and cyber crime occurring in Northern Ireland are provided to PSNI on a monthly basis.

Offences previously recorded within the fraud and forgery classification and which continue to be recorded by all police forces are:

Making off without payment – now included in the 'all other theft' classification;

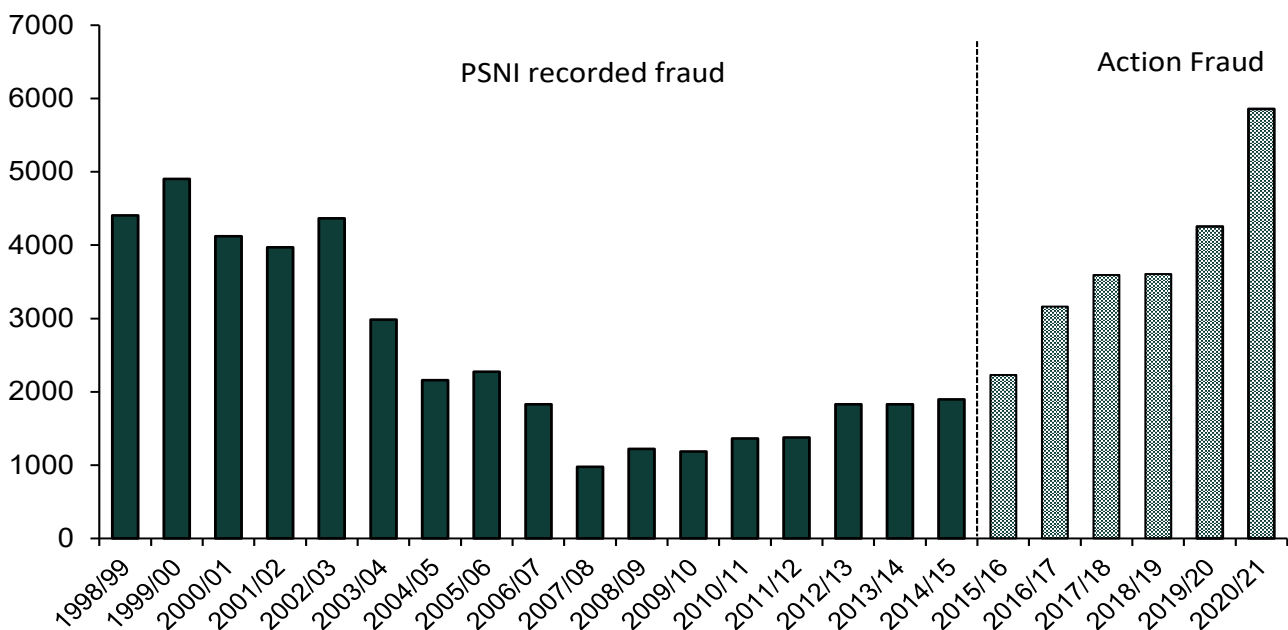
Possession of items for use in fraud, other forgery, possession of false documents and fraud/forgery etc associated with vehicle or driver records – now included in miscellaneous crimes against society.

Within the police recorded crime data series (1998/99 to 2014/15), the recording of fraud and forgery offences was impacted by a change to offences of fraud by false representation, where counting changed from a 'per fraudulent transaction' to a 'per account basis' from January 2007. There were also some new offences introduced under the Fraud Act 2006 which came into force in January 2007. However it is known that incidents of fraud were under-reported to the police and this should be considered when interpreting this data series.

Table 6.1 in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) shows the data series for the 'other fraud' classification as recorded by PSNI and Action Fraud, with further details on frauds recorded by Action Fraud during 2020/21 available in table 6.2.

There were 1,896 fraud offences recorded by PSNI in 2014/15. Since Action Fraud became responsible for recording fraud offences in 2015/16, levels have increased from 2,230 to 5,856 recorded in 2020/21.

Figure 6.1 Fraud recorded by PSNI and Action Fraud



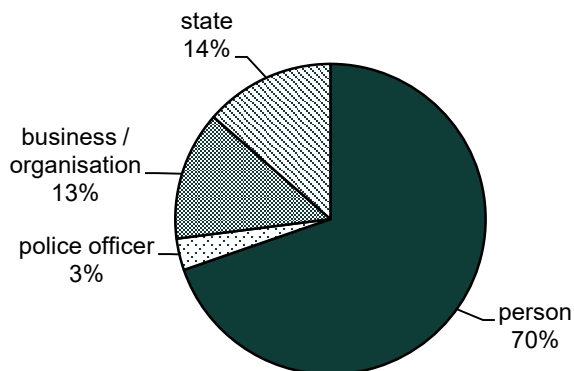
7. Victims of Crime

The Home Office has identified offences as being victim-based, state-based or victim and state-based. State-based offences are those for which no member of the public or business/organisation is a victim. For victim-based offences, the victim can be a member of the public (referred to here as person victim), a police officer who was the victim of a crime in the course of carrying out their duty, or a business or organisation. Details on the availability of information relating to victim characteristics can be found in Section 4.5 of the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland](#).

The detailed figures behind the charts and referenced in the commentary in this section can be found in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) Tables 7.1 to 7.6. A detailed breakdown of victim age and gender is also available, through age and gender pivot tables in this spreadsheet which allow manipulation of data by age band, crime type and financial year.

The introduction of the NICHE system in 2007/08 has enabled a breakdown of crime by the type of victim to be provided from this date. Each of the financial years since 2007/08 shows a similar picture, with Figure 7.1 showing the breakdown for 2020/21 (70% person victim, 3% police officer, 12% business/organisation and 14% state-based).

Figure 7.1 Crimes recorded by type of victim, 2020/21



Details relating to the age of the victim at the time the offence was committed are also available dating back to 2007/08 for all relevant crime types and for person victims (police officer victims are not included in these figures).

7.1 Age profile 2020/21: age of victim

Twelve percent of victims were persons aged under 18, 82 per cent were aged 18-64 and six per cent were aged 65 or over. Age information was unavailable for less than one per cent of all person victims. Figure 7.2 compares the age profile of crime victims to that of the Northern Ireland population for 2020/21.

Figure 7.2 Age profile of crime victims compared with Northern Ireland population profile, 2020/21

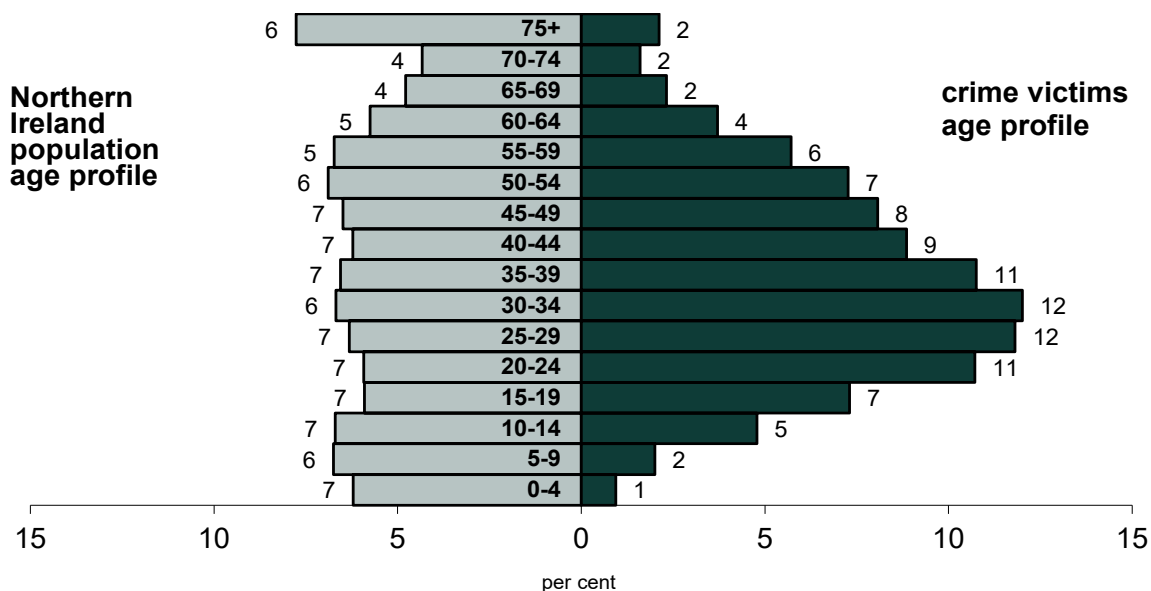


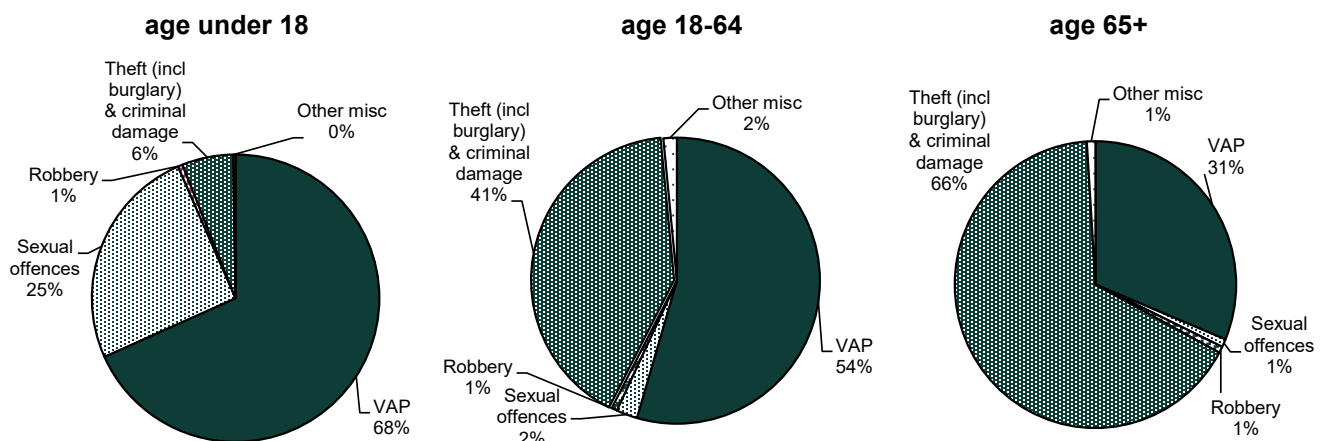
Figure 7.3 shows how the nature of crime changes across the three main age bands of under 18, 18 to 64 and 65 plus. In 2020/21 93 per cent of those aged under 18 were victims of violence against the person and sexual offences, compared with nearly three fifths of victims aged 18 to 64 and a third of victims aged 65 plus. In contrast, 6 per cent of those aged under 18 were victims of theft, burglary and criminal damage compared with two fifths of victims aged 18 to 64 and two thirds of victims aged 65 plus.

Crime rates victim aged under 18: There were 18 crime victims under 18 per 1,000 of the population under 18. The rate per 1,000 of the under 18 population for violence against the person was 12, while the rate for sexual offences was four.

Crime rates victim aged 18-64: There were 48 crime victims aged 18-64 per 1,000 of the population aged 18-64. The rate per 1,000 of the population aged 18-64 for theft (including burglary) and criminal damage was 20 and for violence against the person the rate was 26. The rate was one for sexual offences and less than one for robbery.

Crime rates victim aged 65+: There were 12 crime victims aged 65 or over per 1,000 of the population aged 65+. The rate per 1,000 of the 65+ population for theft (including burglary) and criminal damage was 8, while the rate for violence against the person offences was four.

Figure 7.3 Percentage of victims by age band in each main crime type, 2020/21

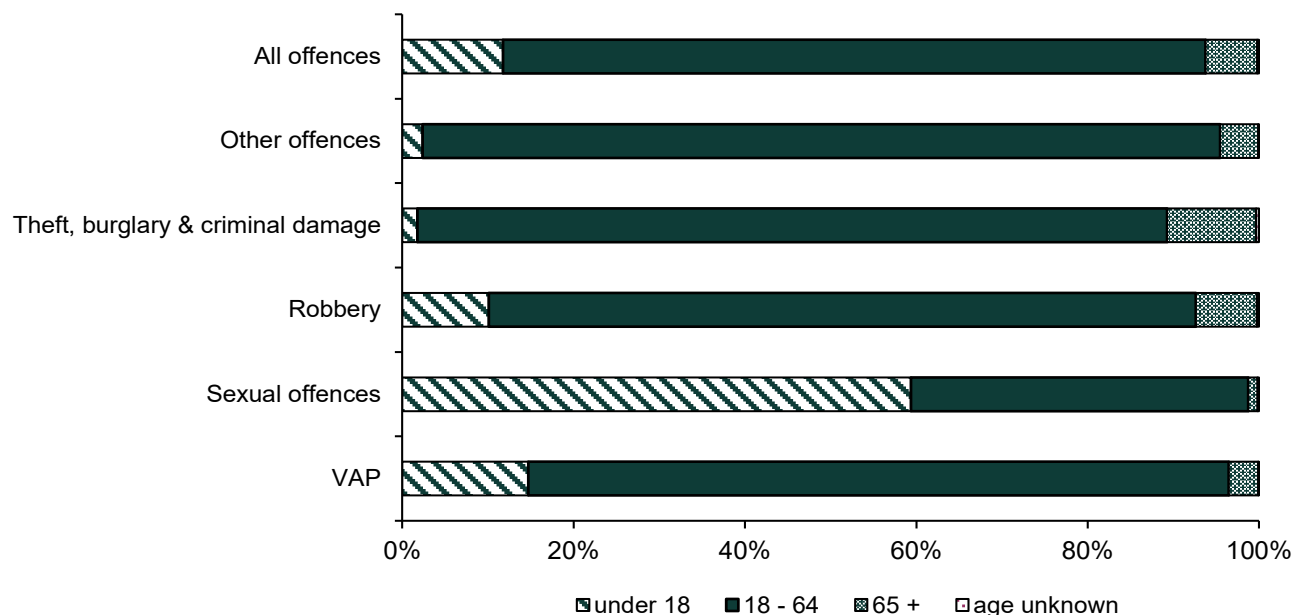


7.2 Age profile 2020/21: type of crime

Figure 7.4 presents the 2020/21 age profile for each of the main crime types. Section 7.3.1 provides further information on violence against the person offences where the victim was under 18 by age and gender.

The proportion of victims of sexual offences under the age of 18 at the time the offence was committed (60 per cent) stands out when compared with other main crime classifications, such as 12 per cent for violence against the person. Section 7.3.2 provides some extra context around this figure, looking at age and gender details as well as at the age the victim was at the time they made the report to police.

Figure 7.4 Proportion of crime victims by age band for the main crime types, 2020/21



7.3 Victim under 18

The majority of victims who were under 18 at the time the offence occurred were victims of violence against the person or a sexual offence. This section looks at the trends occurring within these classifications. [Tables 7.2 and 7.3]

Trends in the classification relating to obscene publications are also presented. These offences are recorded as state-based offences, meaning that victim age is not available. However the legislation for these offences can determine if the offence was committed against a person under the age of 18. [Table 7.4]

7.3.1 Violence against the person offences (victim under 18)

Figure 7.5 shows the trends within the main classifications, noting falling levels of assault with injury, higher levels of assault without injury since 2015/16 and increasing levels of cruelty to children offences in more recent years, the recording of malicious communications since 2017/18 and the impact of changes in harassment recording practice (see Points to Note on page 3).

Figure 7.5 Violence against the person offences where the victim was under 18 at the time the offence was committed, by type of offence, 2007/08 to 2020/21

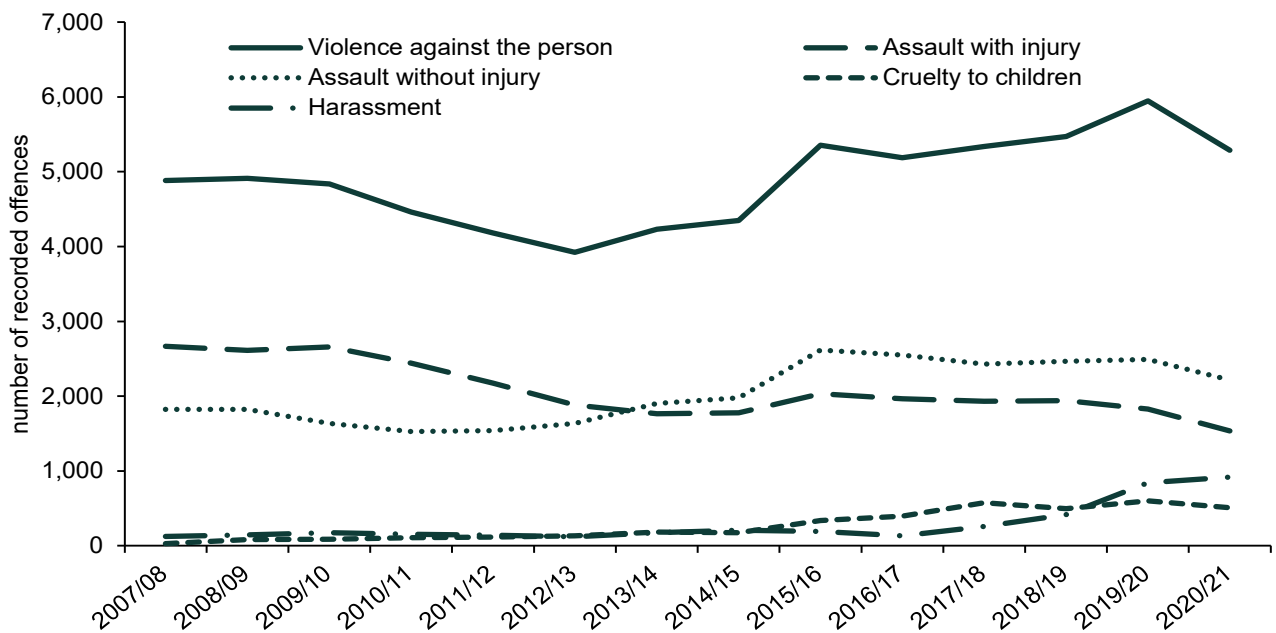


Figure 7.6 compares the profile of violence against the person offences for 2007/08 and 2020/21. Assault with injury represented 55 per cent of these offences in 2007/08, falling to 29% in 2020/21. Assault without injury has replaced assault with injury to become the predominant offence recorded within this classification. Recorded offences of cruelty to children and young persons represented one per cent of violence against the person in 2007/08 and currently represents ten per cent. Harassment accounted for two per cent of these offences in 2007/08 and seventeen per cent in 2020/21.

Figure 7.6 Percentage of victims aged under 18 at the time the offence was committed: violence against the person offences, 2007/08 and 2020/21

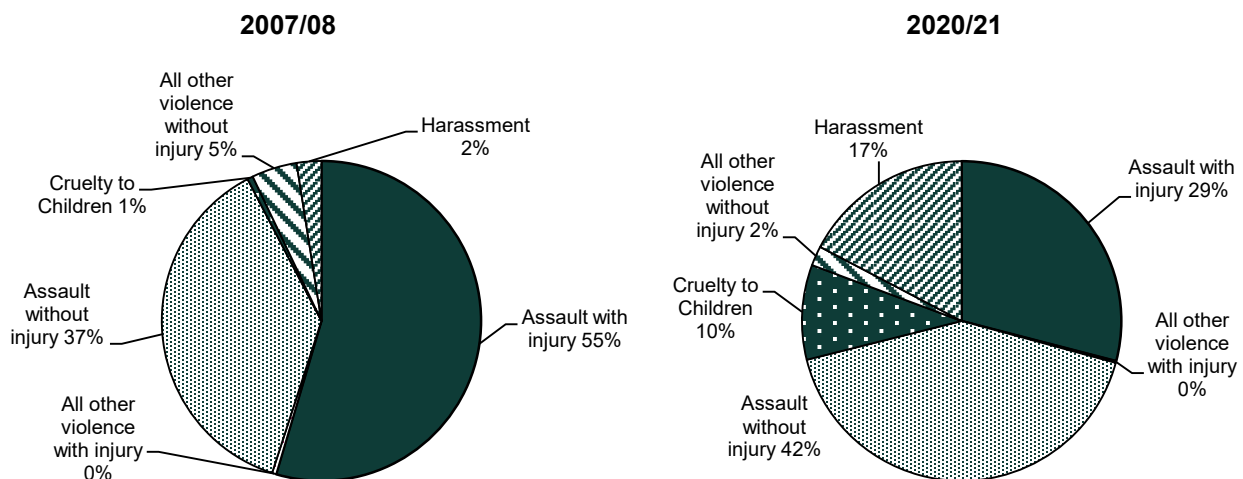
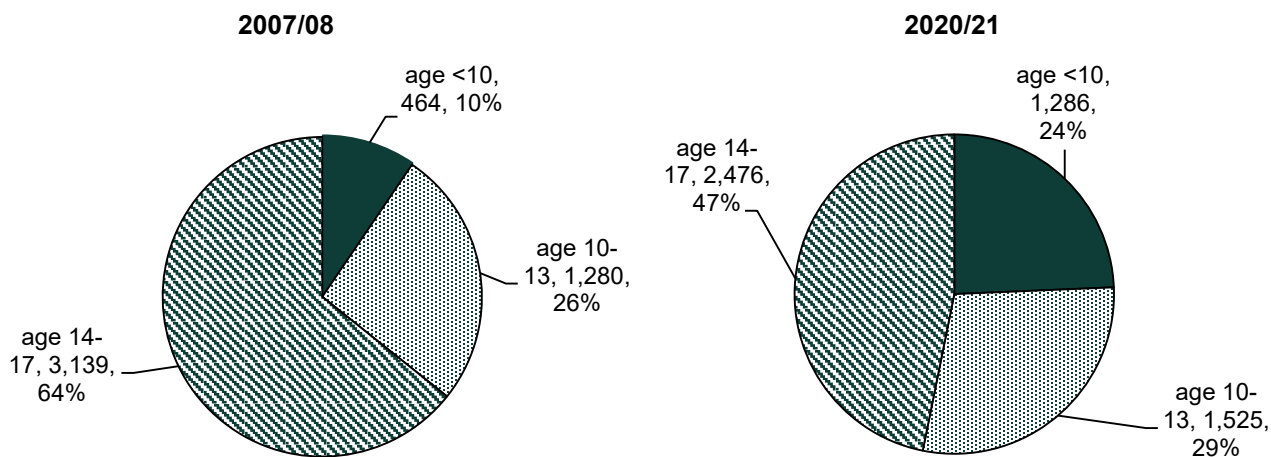


Figure 7.7 shows the changes in the profile and levels of violence against the person offences recorded in 2007/08 and 2020/21 where the victim is under 18. Figure 7.8 shows these details for each year 2007/08 to 2020/21 by victim gender. [Tables 7.5 and 7.6]

Victim age: Victims aged under 10 at the time the offence was committed accounted for ten per cent of victims under 18 in 2007/08, increasing to 24 per cent in 2020/21, with levels in 2020/21 also three times higher.

In 2007/08 victims aged 14 to 17 represented nearly two thirds of victims under 18, falling to 47 per cent in 2020/21. There was less change seen in the 10 to 13 age band between the two time periods.

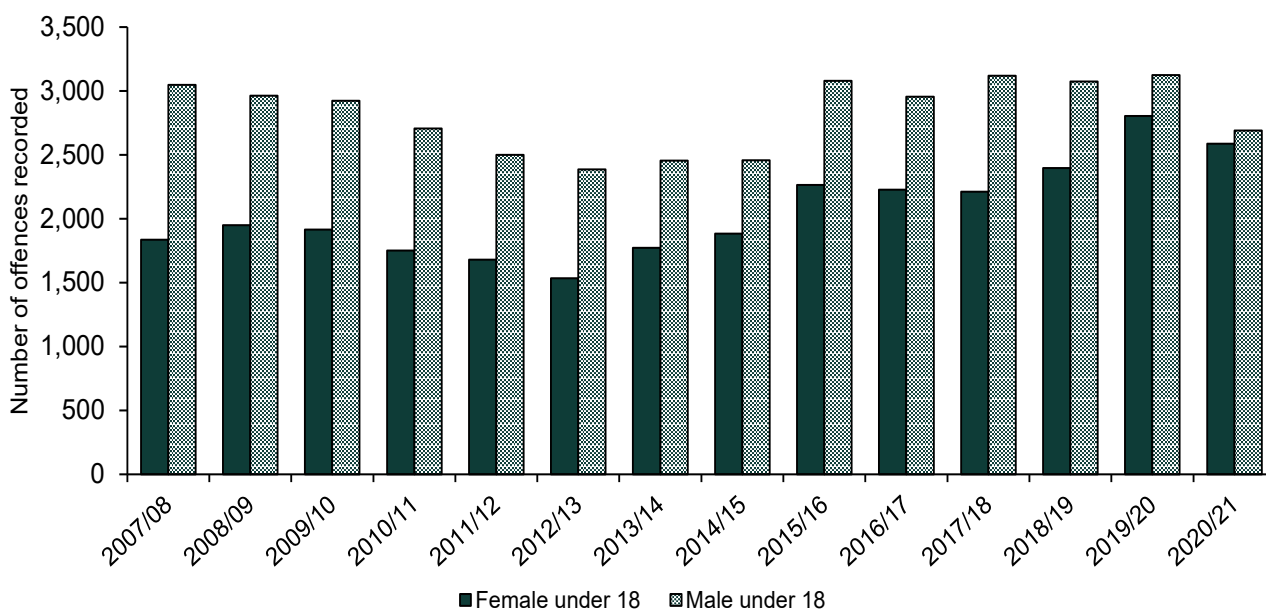
Figure 7.7 Number and percentage of violence against the person victims under 18 by age band, 2007/08 and 2020/21



Victim Gender: Female victims under 18 represented 38 per cent of all victims under 18 in 2007/08 and 49 per cent in 2020/21. In 2020/21 there were six female victims under the age of 18 per 1,000 of the population under 18.

Male victims under 18 represented 62 per cent of all victims under 18 in 2007/08 and 51 per cent in 2020/21. In 2020/21 there were six male victims under the age of 18 per 1,000 of the population under 18.

Figure 7.8 Number of violence against the person offences recorded by victim gender, 2007/08 to 2020/21



7.3.2 Violence against the person where victim was 18 or over at time of reporting

Crimes are recorded based on the date the crime was reported to the police, rather than the date on which the offence occurred. For the majority of crimes the reported date and the occurrence date are the same, in other words the age of the victim at the time the offence was committed is that same as the time of report to police. However there are occasions where there can be a large gap between the date the offence occurred and the date the offence was then reported to the police.

Within the violence against the person classification the victim was under 18 at both time of offence and date of report to police in at least 97 per cent of offences recorded. Those offences where the victim was under 18 at time of offence and over the age of 18 at time of report to police were mainly found within classification 11A Cruelty to Children/Young Persons.

7.3.3 Sexual offences (victim under 18)

Figure 7.9 shows the generally increasing trends between 2007/08 and 2020/21 where the victim was under 18 at the time the offence was committed, for each of the main sexual offence classifications of rape, sexual assault and sexual activity. While rape recorded the highest number of offences (441) in 2020/21, sexual assault fell from 824 in 2019/20 to 699 in 2020/21 and sexual activity fell from 573 to 557.

Figure 7.9 Sexual offences where the victim was under 18 at the time the offence was committed, by type of offence, 2007/08 to 2020/21

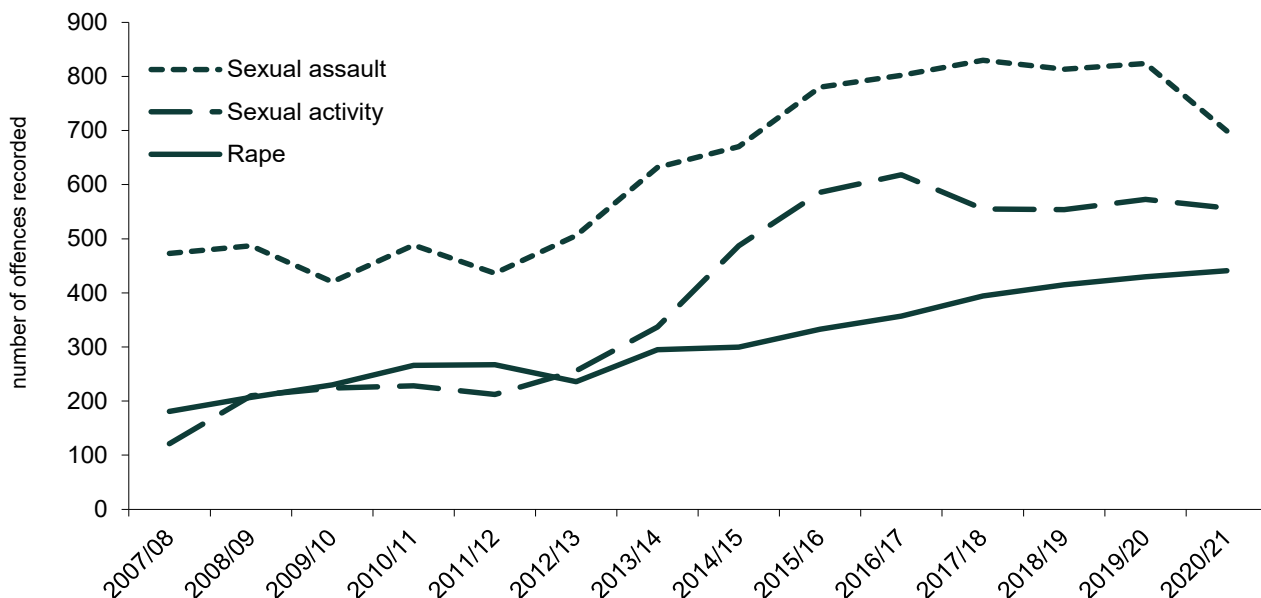
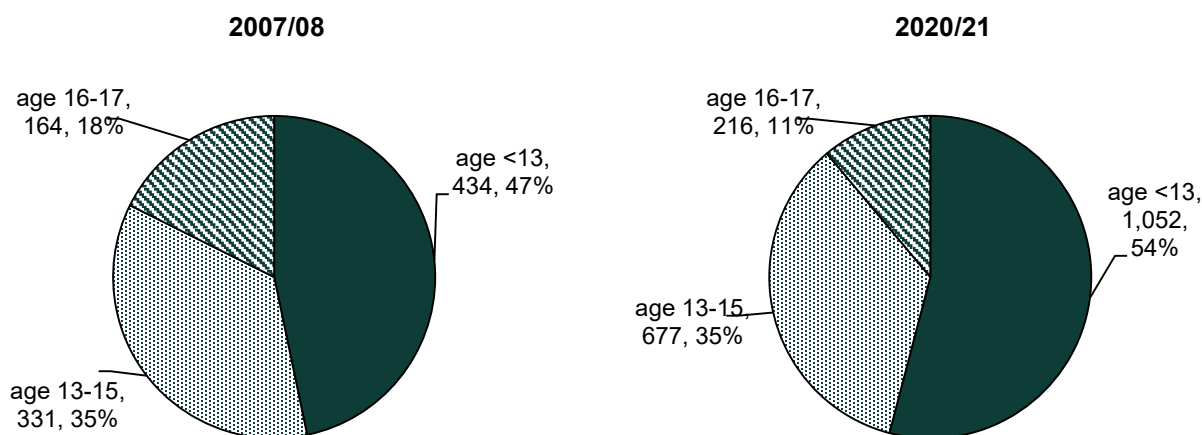


Figure 7.10 shows the changes in the profile and levels of sexual offences recorded in 2007/08 and 2020/21 where the victim is under 18. Figure 7.11 shows these details for each year 2007/08 to 2020/21 by victim gender. [Tables 7.5 and 7.6]

Victim age: The number of offences where the victim was under 16 at the time the offence was committed more than doubled between 2007/08 (765 offences) and 2020/21 (1,729 offences). Offences relating to sexual activity (where the victim is under 16) more than trebled between the introduction of new sexual offence legislation in February 2009 and the peak of 618 offences recorded in 2016/17, with the largest increases occurring between 2013/14 and 2015/16. Some of the recent increases may have been influenced by ‘sexting’, which is when someone sends or receives a sexually explicit text, image or video on their mobile phone, computer or tablet and which can include ‘sexual chat’ and requests for pictures or images of a sexual nature.

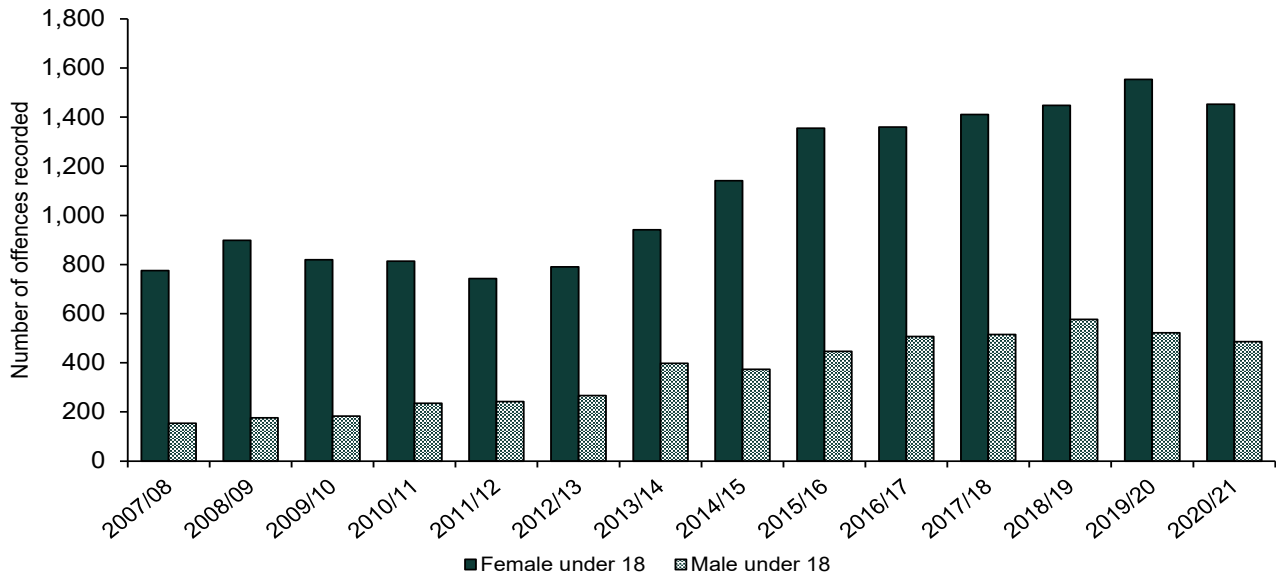
Figure 7.10 Number and Percentage of sexual offence victims under 18 by age band, 2007/08 and 2020/21



Victim gender where victim under 18: Female victims represented 83 per cent of all victims under 18 in 2007/08 and 75 per cent in 2020/21. In 2020/21 there were three female victims per 1,000 of the population under 18.

Male victims under 18 represented 17 per cent of all victims under 18 in 2007/08 and 25 per cent in 2020/21. In 2020/21 there was one male victim under the age of 18 per 1,000 of the population under 18.

Figure 7.11 Number of sexual offences recorded by victim gender, 2007/08 to 2020/21



7.3.4 Sexual offences where victim was 18 or over at time of reporting

Crimes are recorded based on the date the crime was reported to the police, rather than the date on which the offence occurred. For the majority of crimes the reported date and the occurrence date are the same, in other words the age of the victim at the time the offence was committed is that same as the time of report to police. However sexual offences are the main crime type where there can be a large gap between the date the offence occurred and the date the offence was then reported to the police.

Within the sexual offences classification the victim was under 18 at both time of offence and date of report to police in 61 per cent to 81 per cent of offences recorded since 2007/08.

Up to two in five sexual offences occurred when the victim was under 18 but were reported to police when the victim was 18 or over. In respect of rape offences this ranged from one in four rape offences reported in 2008/09 to half of all rape offences reported in 2013/14. For indecent/sexual assault on a male the range was between one in five reports in 2007/08 and two thirds of reports in 2018/19. The proportions were lower for indecent/sexual assault on a female ranging from one in five reports in 2008/09 to nearly half of all reports in 2013/14. When looking at reports of sexual activity, up to 13 per cent of those occurring when the victim was under 18 were reported to police when the victim was 18 or over.

Figures 7.12 and 7.13 present the reporting patterns for offences of rape and sexual assault and highlight the differing patterns of reporting by male and female victims.

Figure 7.12 Rape offences victim under 18, percentage reporting to police when aged under 18 or when aged 18 and over, 2007/08 to 2020/21

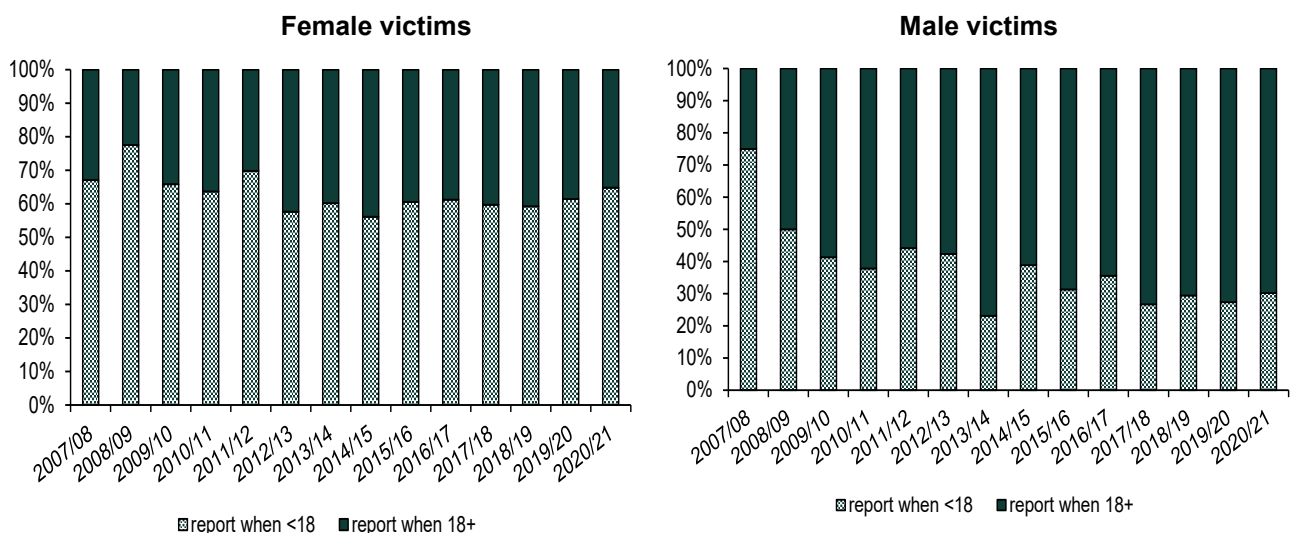
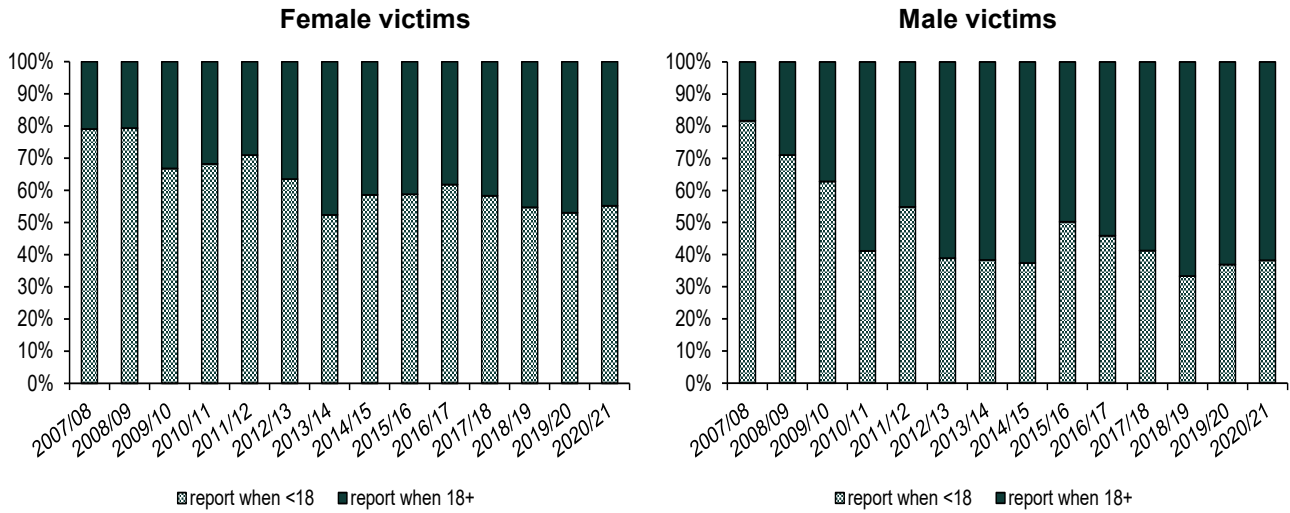


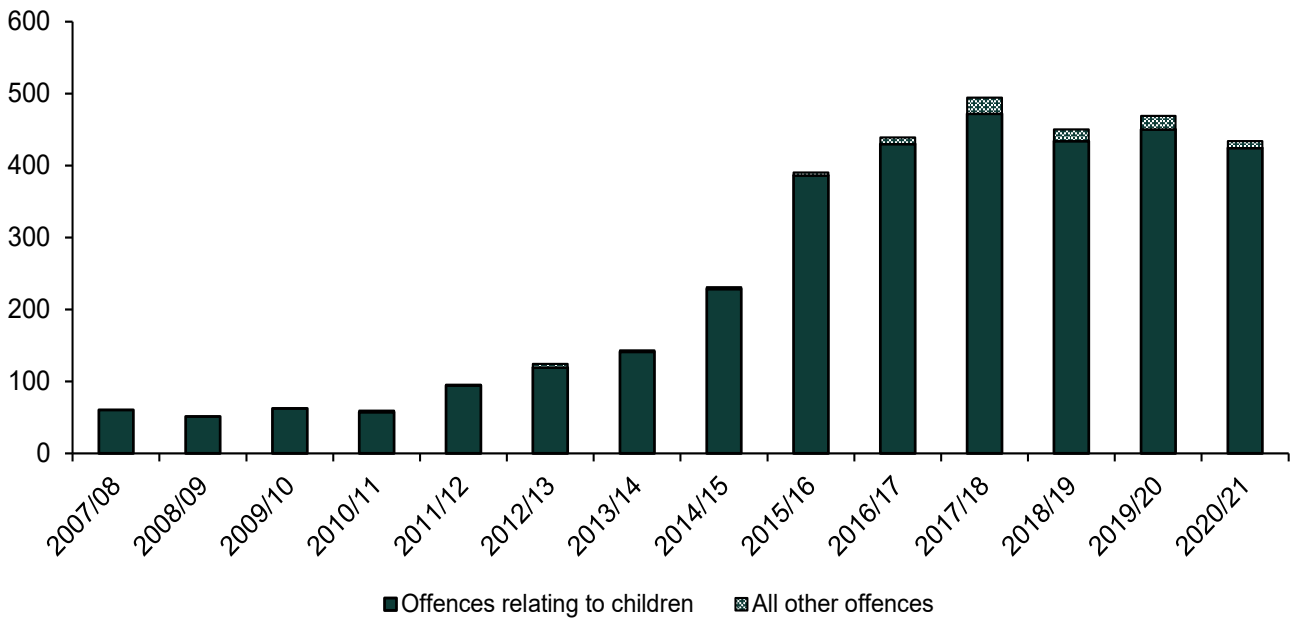
Figure 7.13 Sexual assault offences victim under 18, percentage reporting to police when aged under 18 or when aged 18 and over, 2007/08 to 2020/21



7.3.5 Obscene Publications and Protected Sexual Material

These offences are recorded as state-based offences, meaning that victim age is not available. However the legislation for these offences can determine if the offence was committed against a person under the age of 18, as shown in Figure 7.14 below. At least 96 per cent of these offences relate to children. Levels have been at their highest in more recent years and between 2016/17 and 2020/21 the number of offences relating to children have ranged between 424 and 472. [Table 7.4]

Figure 7.14 Obscene Publications and Protected Sexual Material offences, 2007/08 to 2020/21



8. Crime Outcomes

A full explanation of crime outcomes and crime outcome rates presented in this section can be found in [Appendix 1](#), page 46.

Figure 8.1 shows the trend in the overall outcome rate since 1998/99. Northern Ireland experienced a drop in the overall outcome rate between 2000/01 and 2001/02, most likely influenced by the introduction of the ICIS system within PSNI. This system improved the capture of low level crimes such as criminal damage which tend to be harder to detect. In April 2006, a higher evidential standard was adopted within the PSNI following the establishment of the Public Prosecution Service in Northern Ireland and this resulted in a fall in the overall rate between 2005/06 and 2006/07. From April 2007 some of the methods allowed for claiming outcomes that did not result in a sanction against the offender were discontinued altogether, and in 2007/08 the overall outcome rate within Northern Ireland fell to its lowest level in the data series. The outcome rate has increased since then. However it should be remembered that community resolutions (previously termed discretionary disposals) were included as an outcome method from 2011/12 and penalty notices for disorder were introduced in June 2012, both of which will have had an impact on the increase in outcome rate in 2011/12 and 2012/13.

All tables referred to in the commentary of this section can be found in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#).

Figure 8.1 Outcome rates, 1998/99 to 2020/21

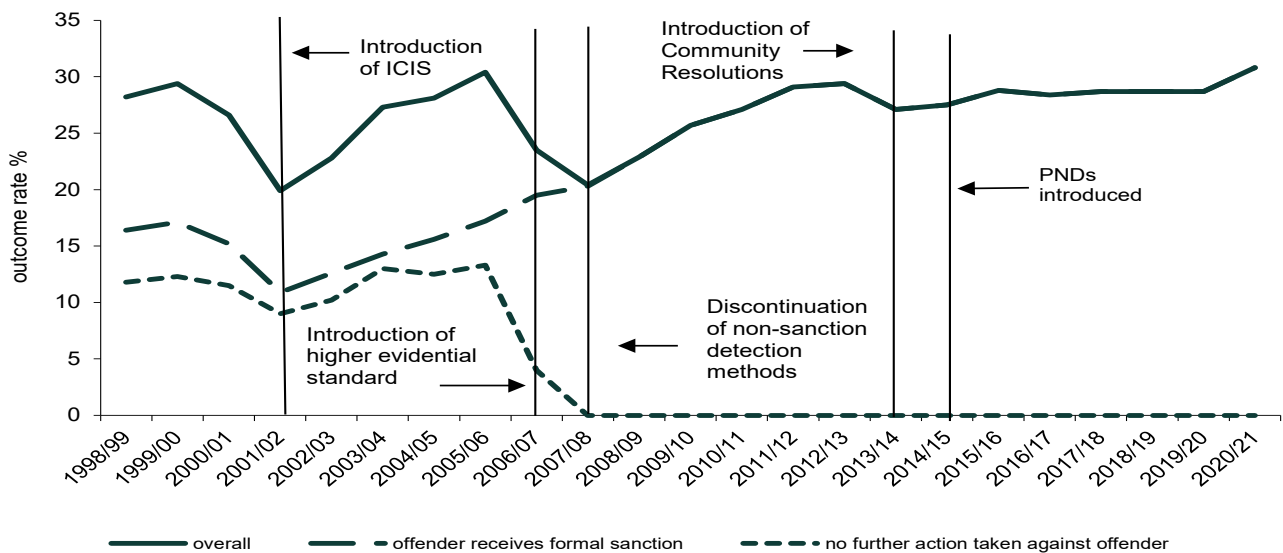
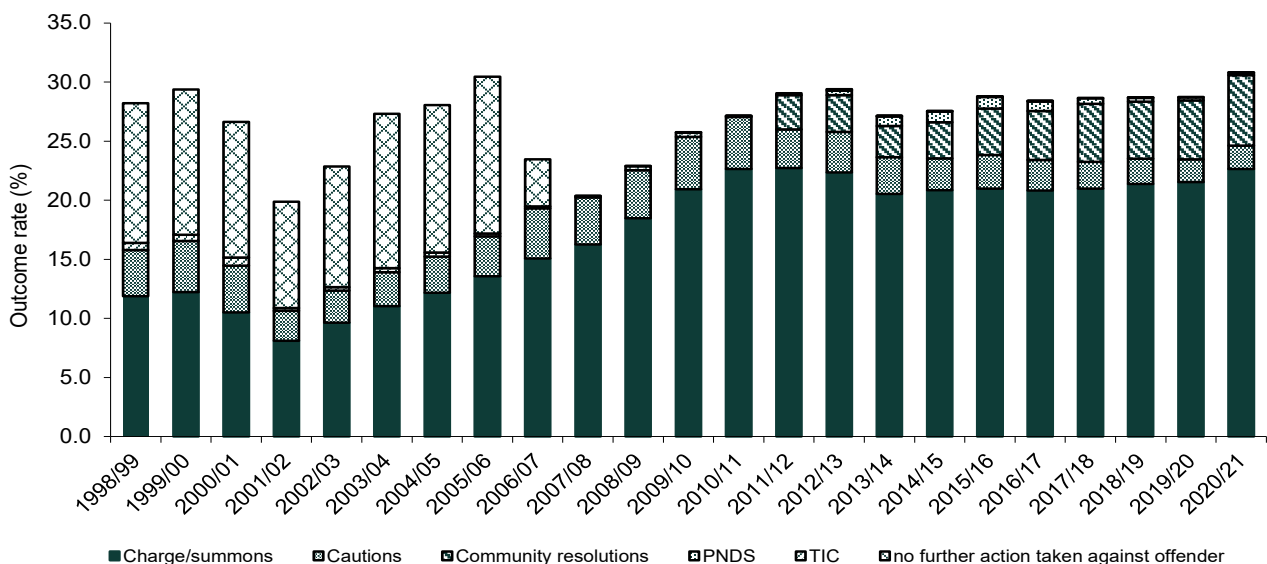


Figure 8.2 illustrates the move away from the use of those outcomes not resulting in a sanction against the offender, following the introduction of the higher evidential standard in 2006/07 and the limited use of outcome methods where no action was taken against the offender from 2007/08. The increase in the use of charge / summons as an outcome method can also clearly be seen.

Figure 8.2 Outcome rates by method of disposal, 1998/99 to 2020/21



The outcome rate for 2020/21 is the highest rate since the start of the series in 1998/99. Figure 8.3 shows increases in the outcome rates between 2019/20 and 2020/21 for most crime classifications (violence against the person, robbery, theft, burglary and criminal damage). Lower outcome rates were seen in sexual offences and other crimes against society.

Figure 8.3 Percentage point change in the main recorded crime type outcome rates, 2020/21 compared with 2019/20

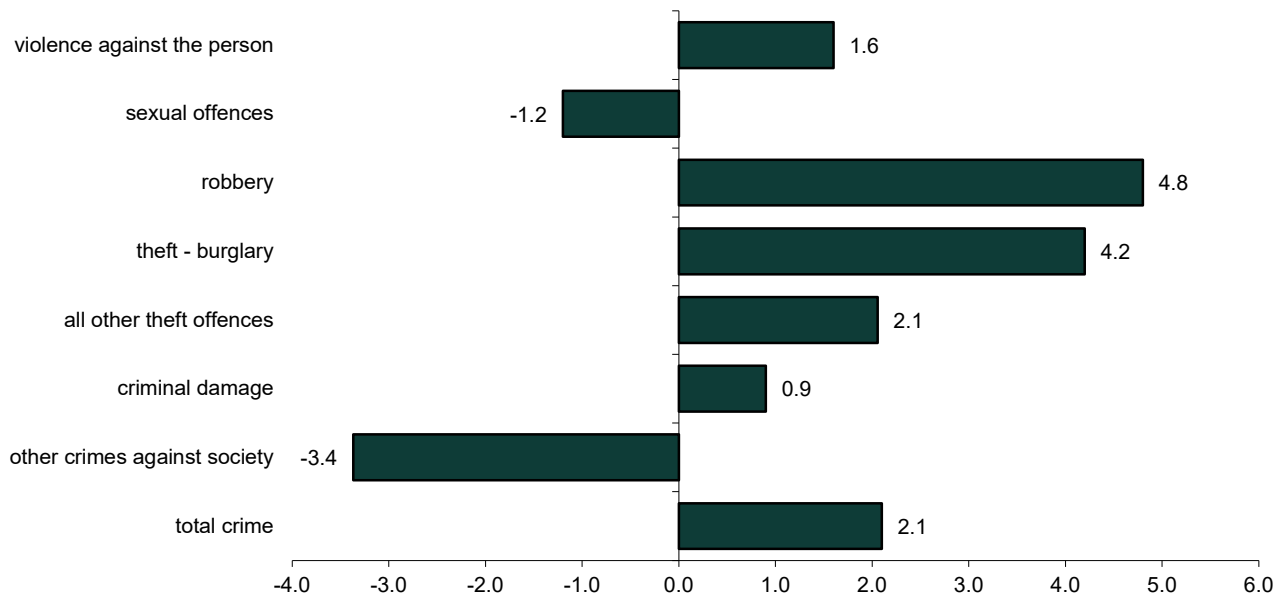
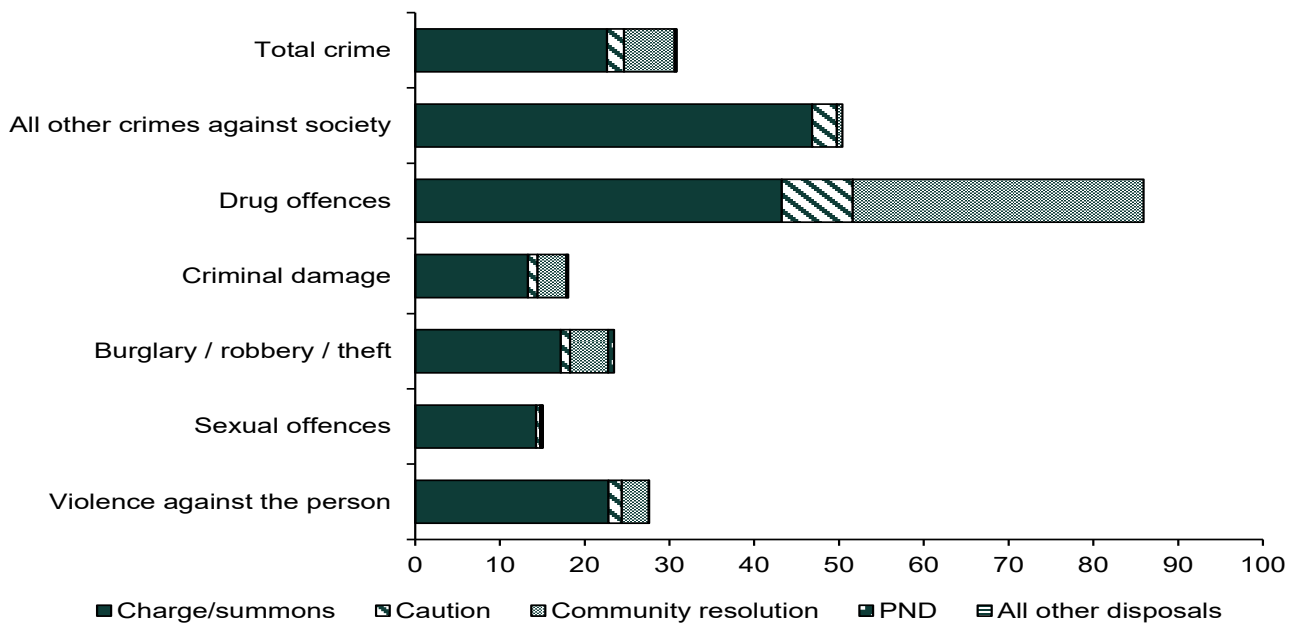


Figure 8.4 shows how the outcome rate for 2020/21 is split between the main disposal methods for each offence group. The majority of crimes are dealt with by means of charge/summons with an outcome rate of 22.6%. The community resolution outcome rate is 6.0% while for cautions it is 2.0%. The nature of drug offences means they have the highest outcome rate of all the main crime classifications and also show a different profile. In 2020/21 drug offences had an overall outcome rate of 85.9% split into a charge/summons outcome rate of 43.2%, a community resolution outcome rate of 34.3% and a caution outcome rate of 8.4%.

Figure 8.4 Outcome rates by method of disposal and offence group, 2020/21



Trends in outcomes and outcome rates

Figures 8.5 to 8.10 show the trends in crimes, outcomes and outcome rates for violence against the person, sexual offences, burglary/robbery/theft, criminal damage, drug offences and all other crimes against society. These charts are not all shown to the same scale. However they demonstrate how changing volumes of crimes and outcomes can have an impact on the outcome rate. [Tables 2.2, 8.2 (numbers) and 8.2 (rates)]

These charts also demonstrate the difference in outcome rates across these crime classifications. The ease with which an offender may be identified can be seen when looking at the high outcome rates for drug offences compared with those for property crime. Differences are also evident when comparing outcome rates for violence against the person with those for sexual offences.

Figures 8.5 and 8.6 show increasing levels of offences recorded alongside lower or falling outcome rates, particularly in respect of sexual offences.

Figure 8.5 Violence against the person; crimes recorded, outcomes and outcome rates, 2007/08 to 2020/21

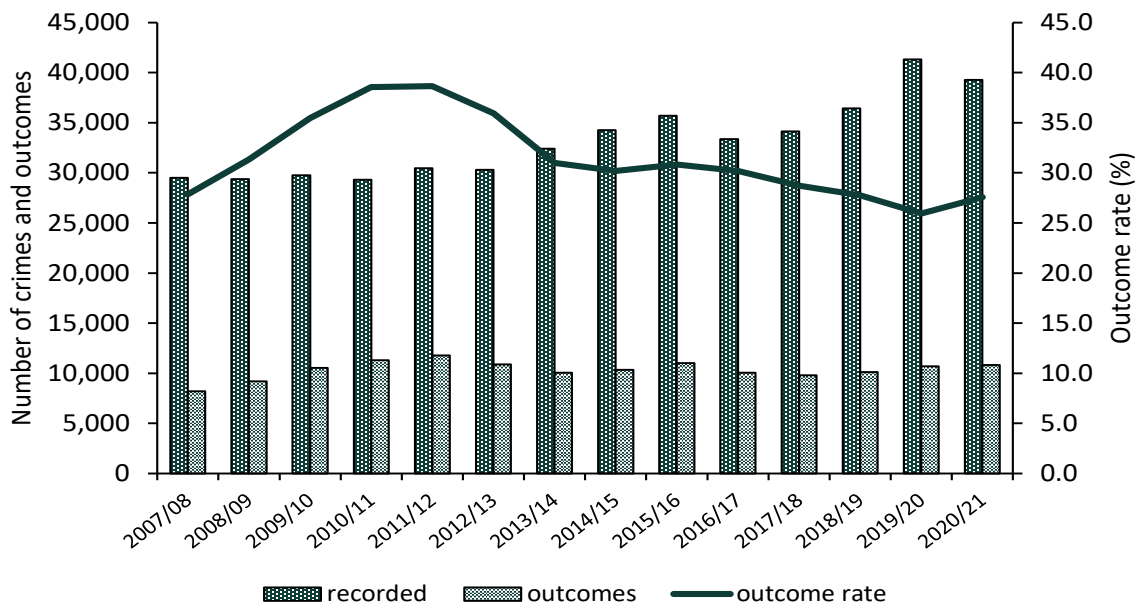
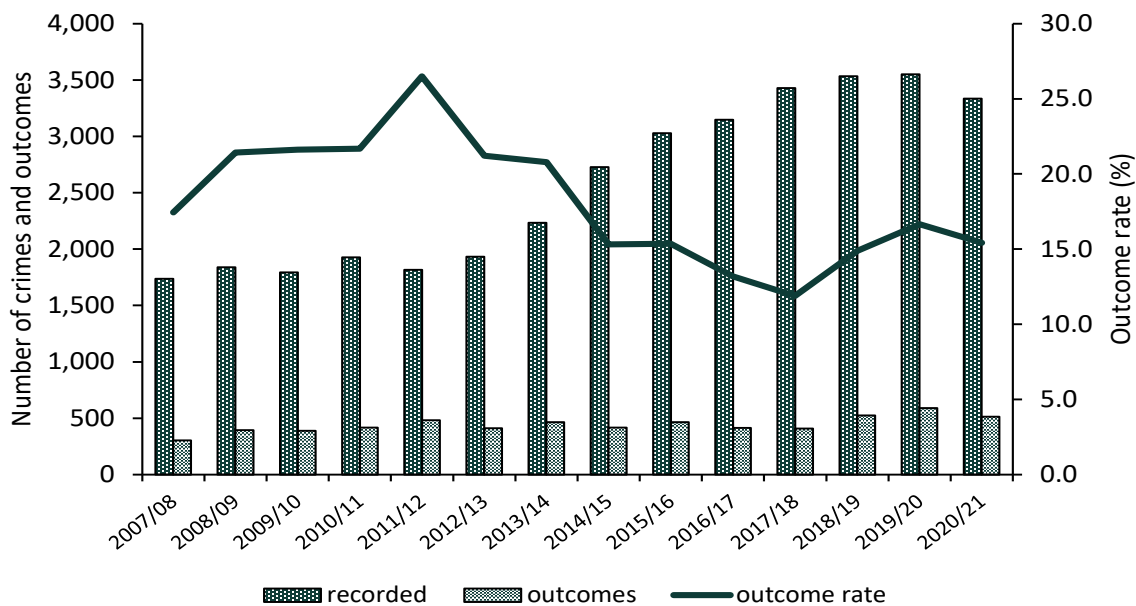


Figure 8.6 Sexual offences; crimes recorded, outcomes and outcome rates, 2007/08 to 2020/21

Combined bar and line chart. The bar chart shows the number of recorded sexual offences and the number of outcomes for sexual offences in each financial year, 2007/08 to 2020/21. The line chart shows the outcome rate for sexual offences, in each financial year, 2007/08 to 2020/21.



Figures 8.7 and 8.8 are shown to the same scale for crimes, outcomes and outcome rates. They demonstrate the low volumes of outcomes when compared with the level of crime recorded, particularly for offences of burglary, robbery and theft. The increases in the outcome rates can also be seen in the context of falling levels of burglary, robbery and theft offences and also criminal damage offences.

Figure 8.7 Burglary, robbery and theft; crimes recorded, outcomes and outcome rates, 2007/08 to 2020/21

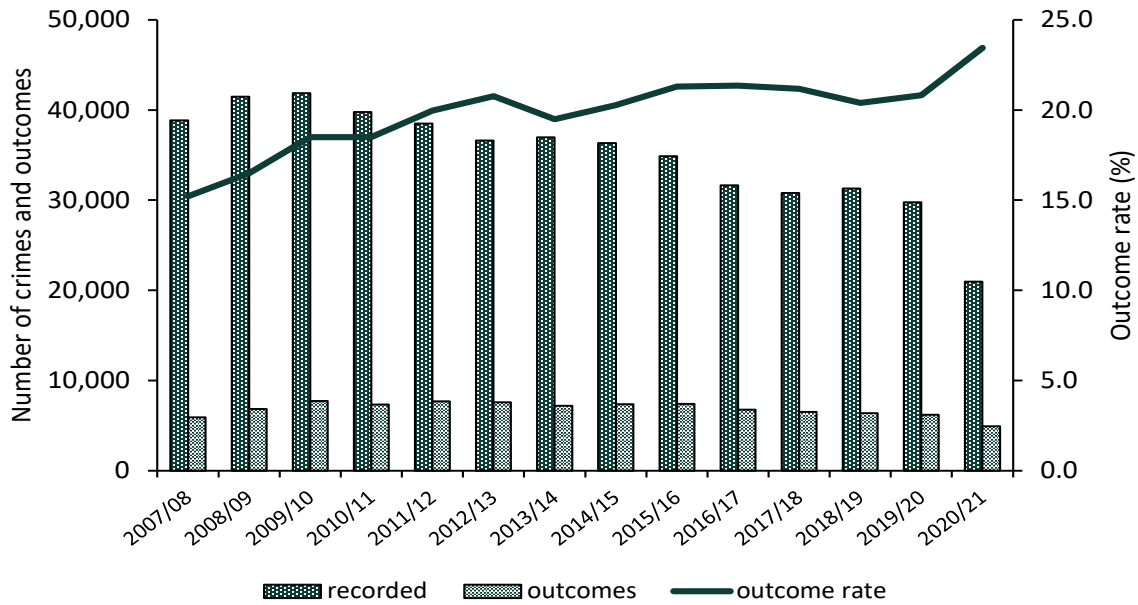
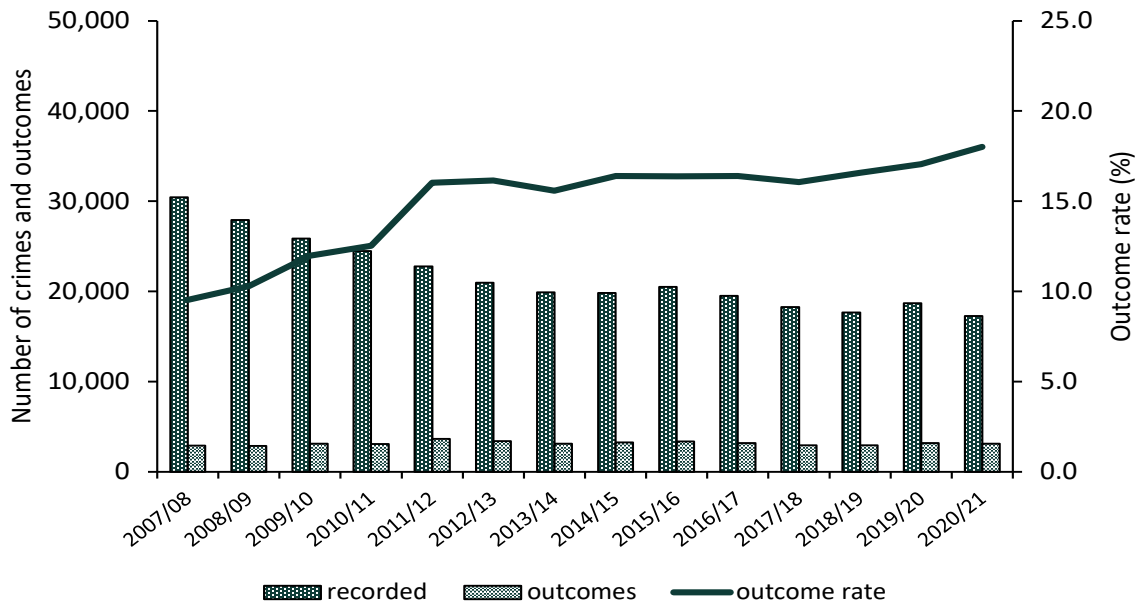


Figure 8.8 Criminal damage; crimes recorded, outcomes and outcome rates, 2007/08 to 2020/21



Figures 8.9 and 8.10 are not shown to the same scale for crimes, outcomes and outcome rates. These crime types are recorded as state-based offences and show higher volumes of outcomes and higher outcome rates than for victim-based offences. The higher levels of outcomes and outcome rates are seen particularly in relation to drug offences.

Figure 8.9 Drug offences; crimes recorded, outcomes and outcome rates, 2007/08 to 2020/21

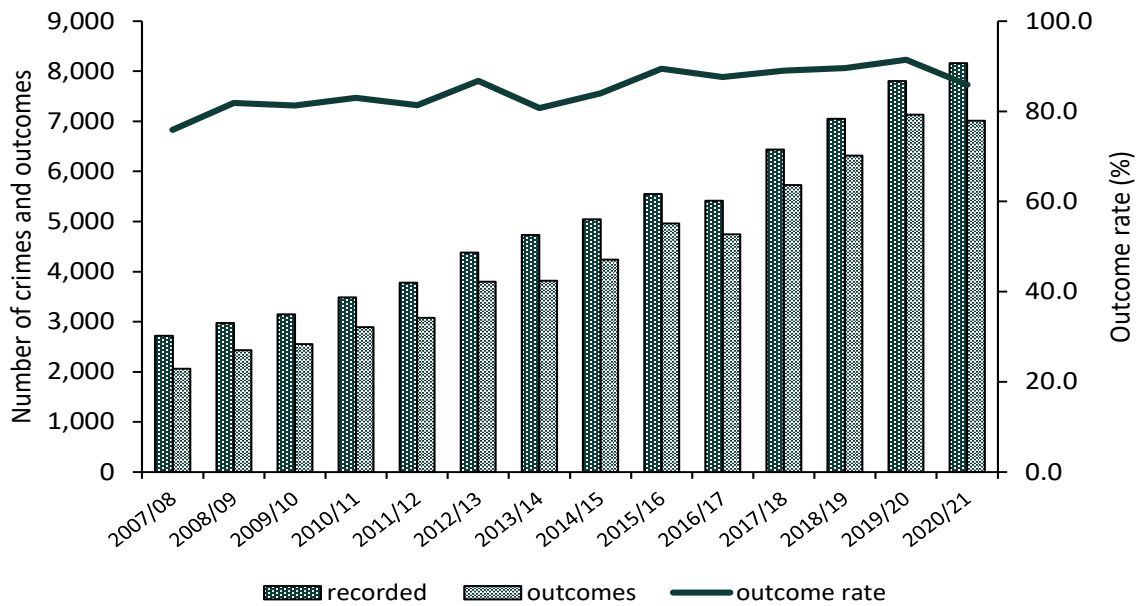
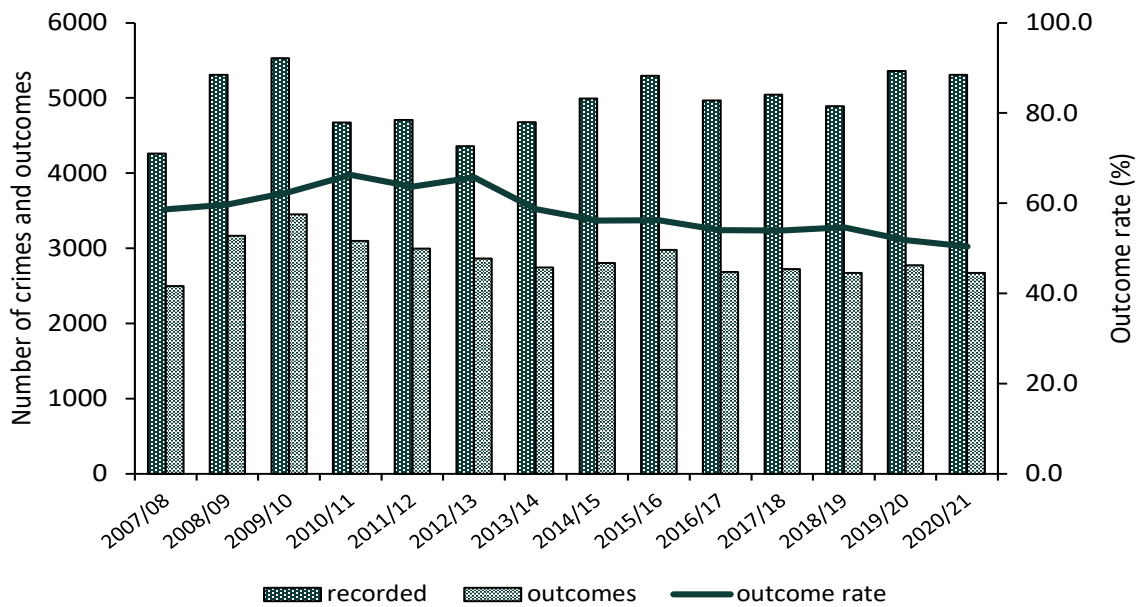


Figure 8.10 All other crimes against society; crimes recorded, outcomes and outcome rates, 2007/08 to 2020/21



9. Geographic patterns of crimes

As a general rule crimes are geographically recorded by the police based on the location in which the incident occurred. This section provides details on recorded crime, outcome rates and population rates for each policing district within Northern Ireland.

As part of the Review of Public Administration which came into effect on 1 April 2015, PSNI moved from eight to eleven policing districts, with the new policing model becoming fully operational at the end of September 2015.

The level of geographic information required to allocate crime records to the new boundaries was insufficient for the financial years 1998/99 to 2000/01. For this reason, comparison of crime at policing district level is only available for the financial years dating back to 2001/02.

While being only one policing district, Belfast City accounts for approximately one third of all crime recorded in Northern Ireland. It includes four local policing teams based in Lisburn Road (South), Tennent Street (North), Strandtown (East) and Woodbourne (West). Figures for each of these local policing teams are provided in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) to assist with district level comparisons.

Care should be taken when comparing crime rates at policing district level as some of the differences between districts may reflect variations in their composition, such as the degree of urbanisation, level of deprivation and the balance between the resident population, day-time population and night-time economy. Where there is an increased day-time population or night-time economy relative to the resident population, the number of crimes relative to the real population of potential victims may be over-represented.

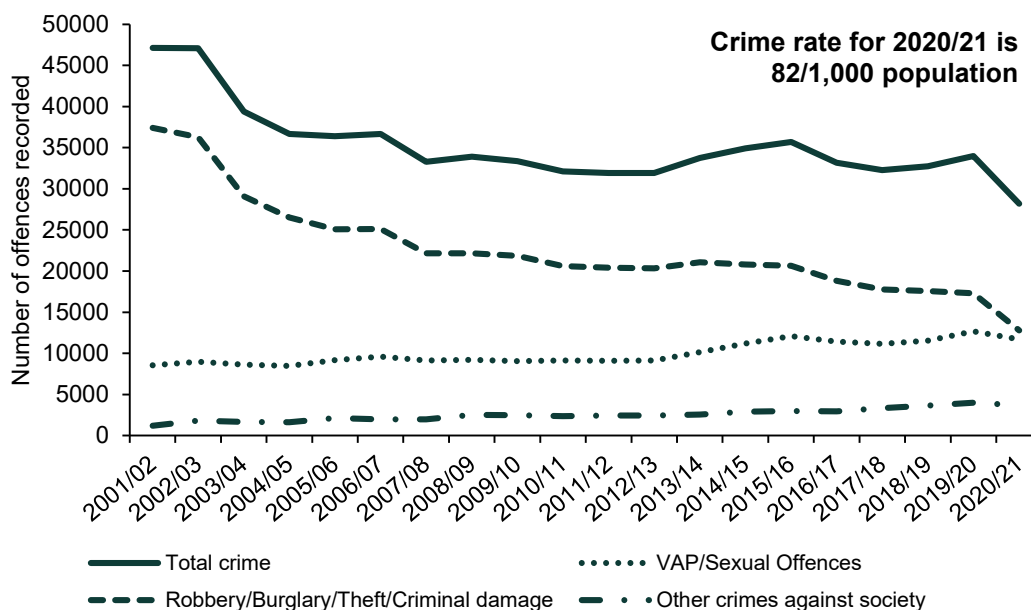
While tables 9.1 to 9.3 in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) provide policing district figures at the overall crime level, figures are also available by crime type, age and month in the pivot tables which accompany this report.

The following additional geographic breakdowns of crime are available on the [Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service \(NINIS\)](#) website; Ward 2014, District Electoral Area (DEA) 2014, Local Government District (LGD) 2014, Assembly Area (AA), Education & Library Board (ELB), Health & Social Care Trust (HSCT), Urban/Rural and Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA).

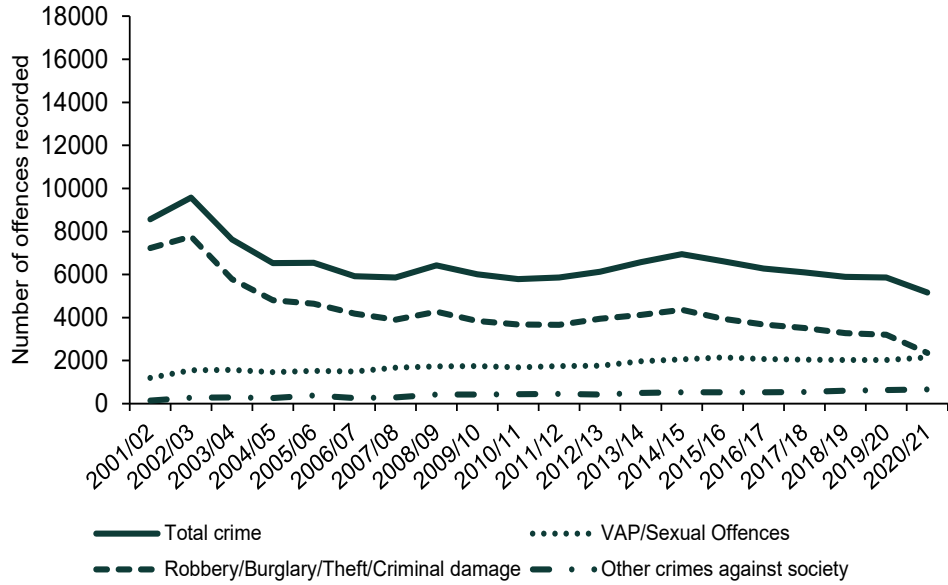
Provisional management information drawn from police recorded crime figures and published at street level each month, is available through the [police crime mapping website](#). The figures on the crime mapping website will differ from those provided in this bulletin as they have been extracted from the police administrative system on different dates, and also require a grid reference in order to be mapped.

Further details on the geographic recording of crime in Northern Ireland can be found in Section 7 of the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland](#).

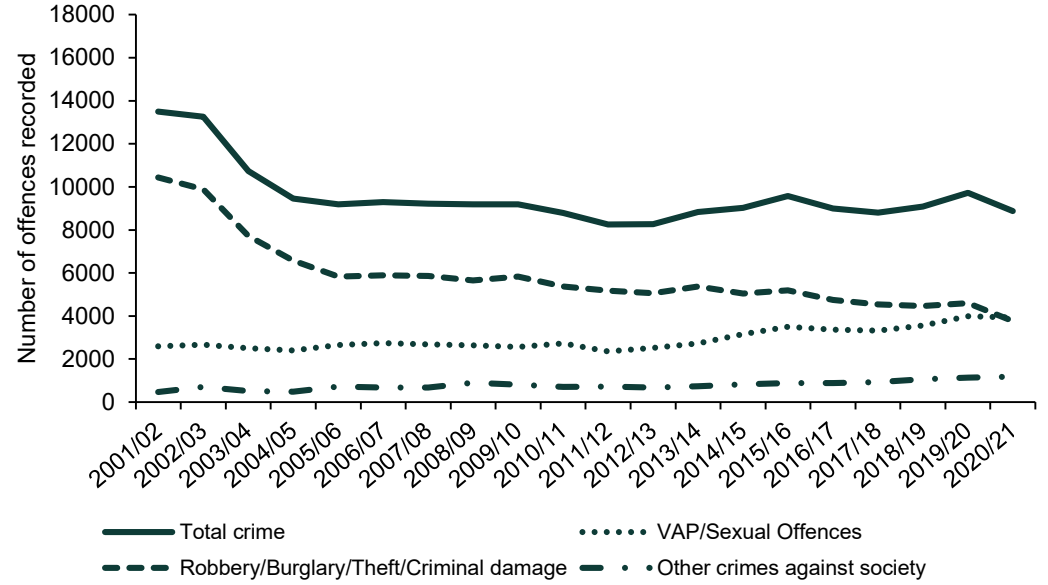
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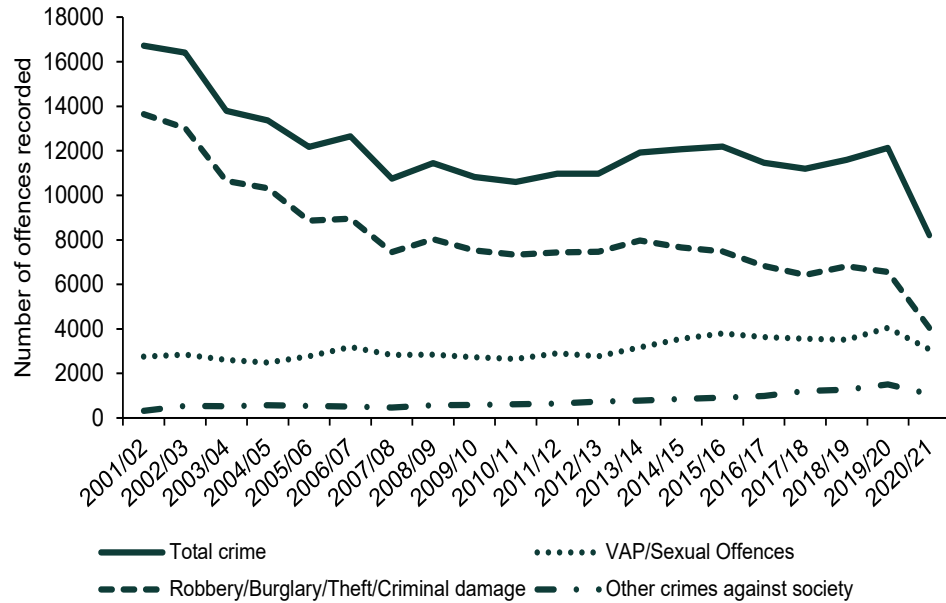
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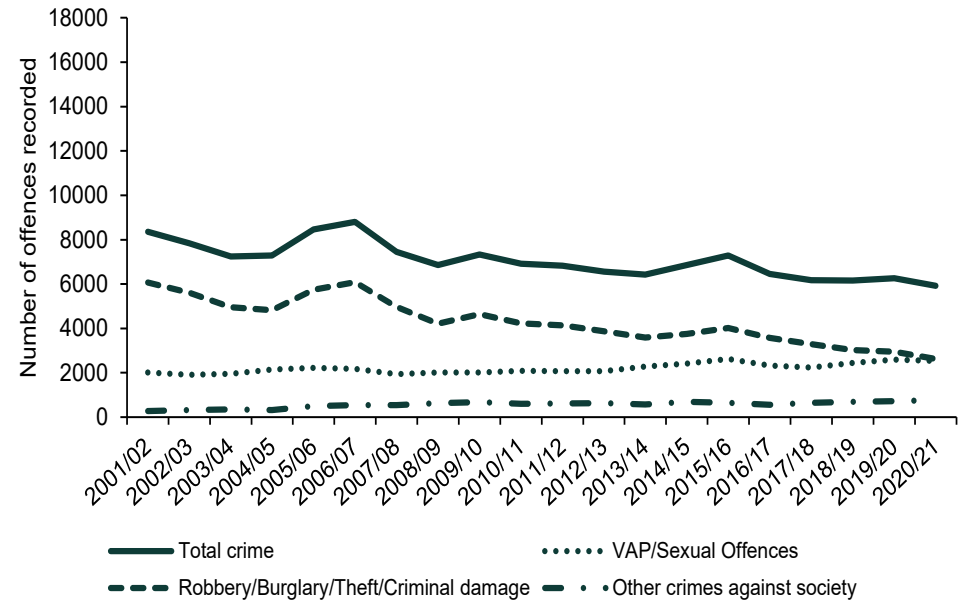
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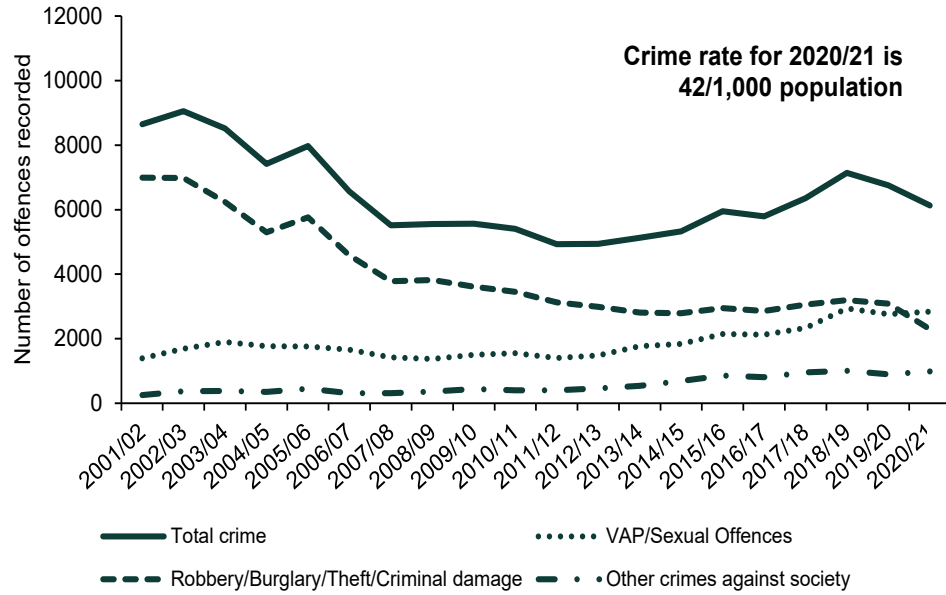
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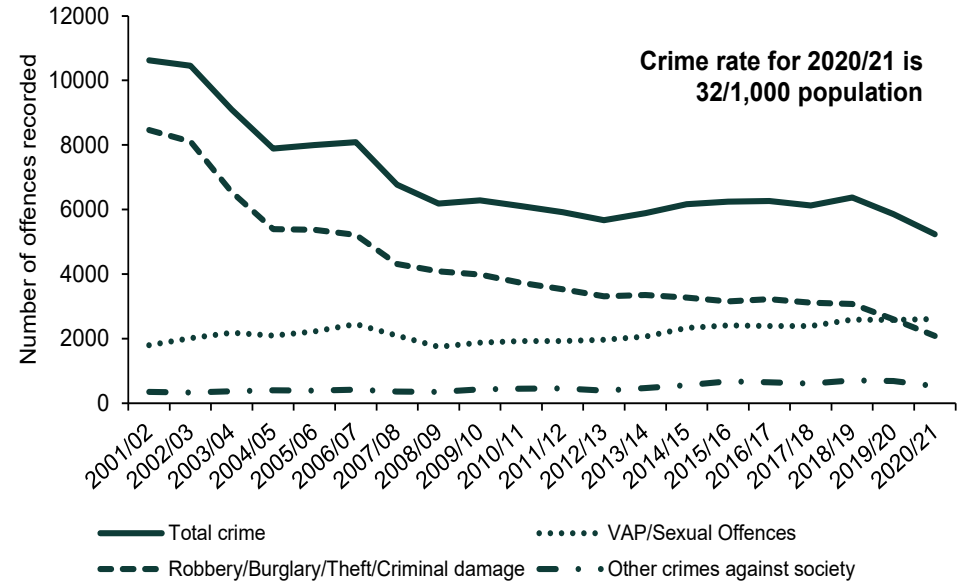
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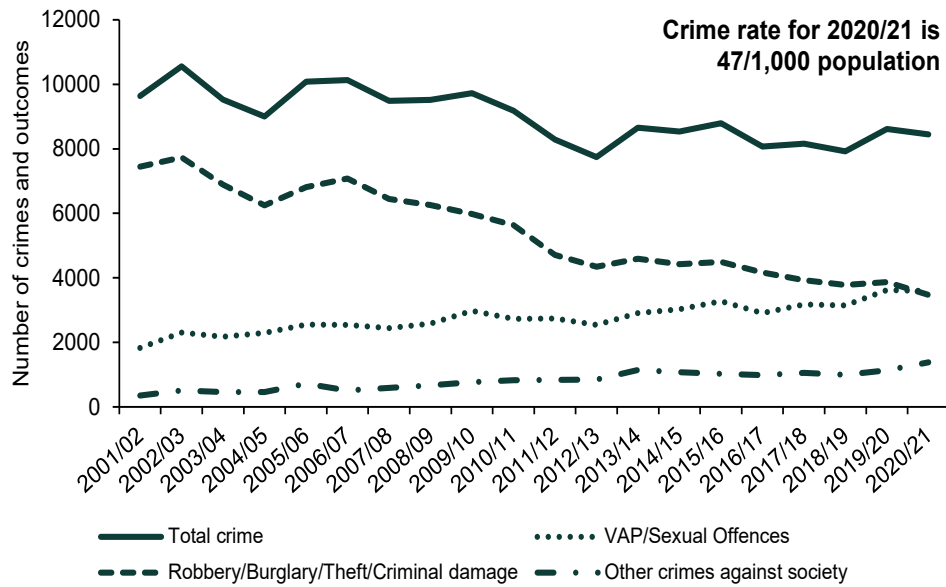
Lisburn & Castlereagh City



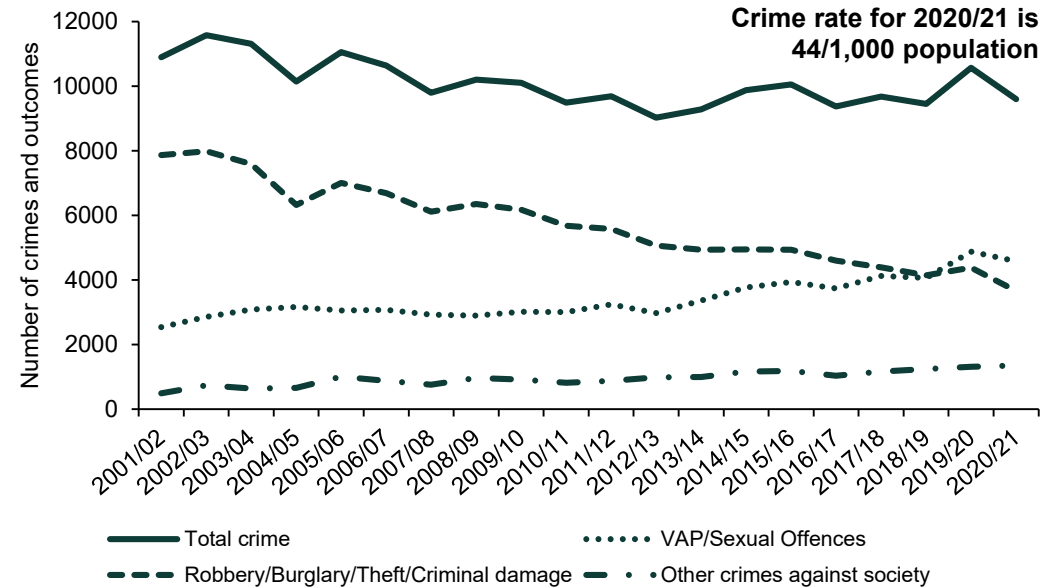
Ards & North Down



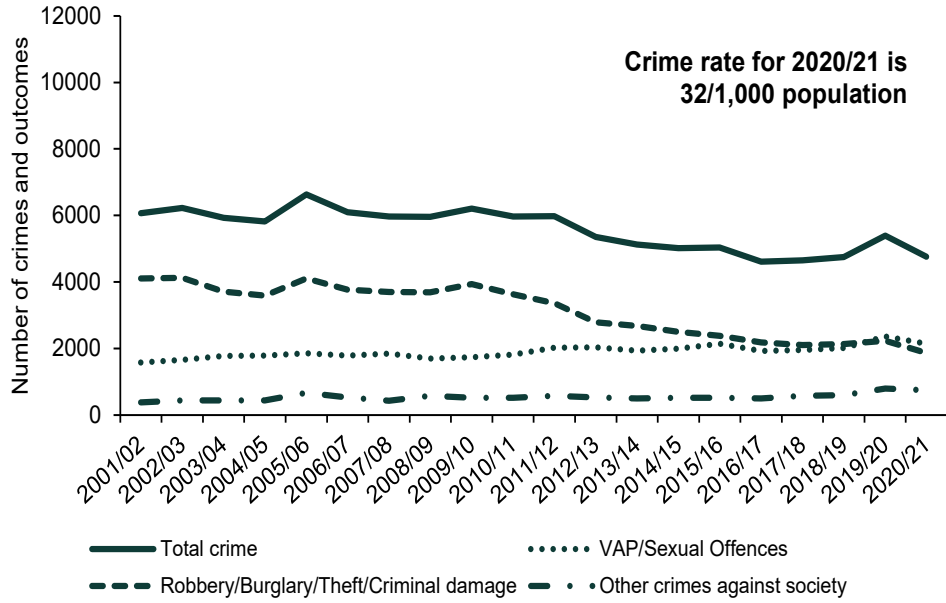
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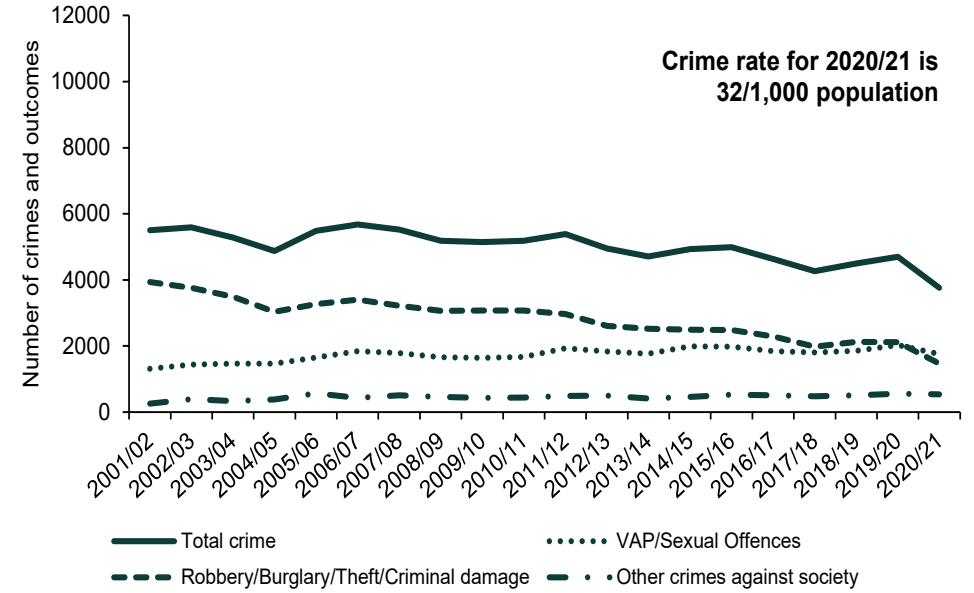
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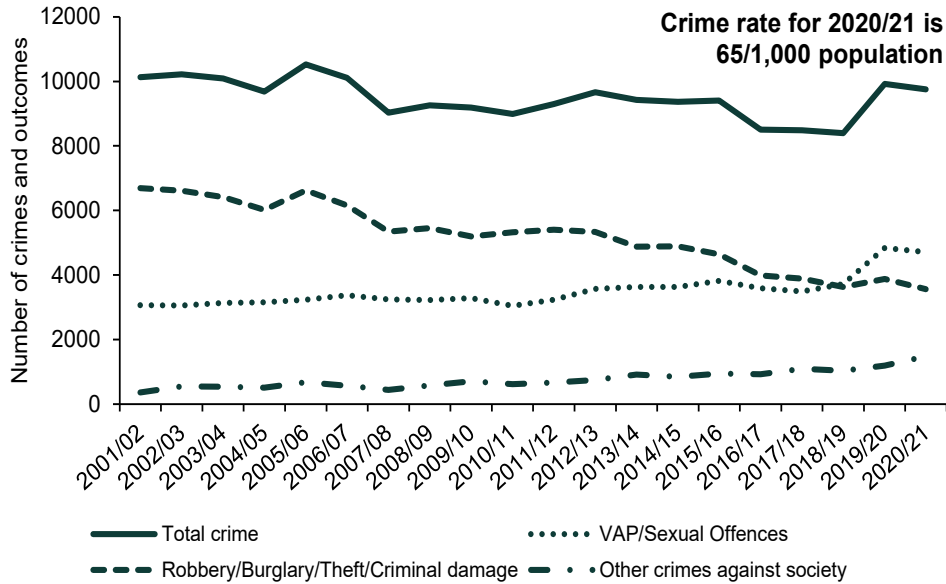
Mid Ulster



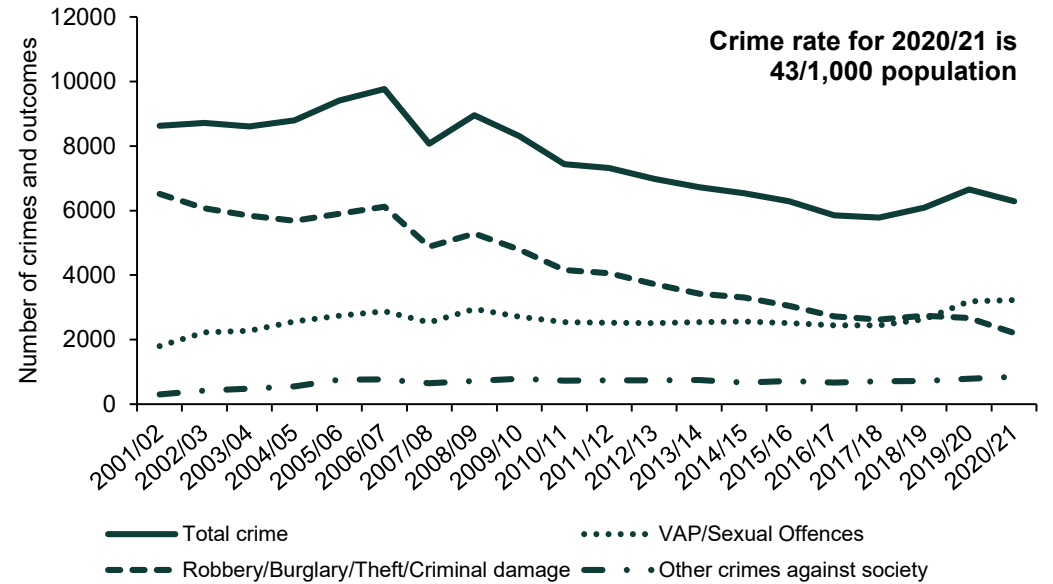
Fermanagh & Omagh



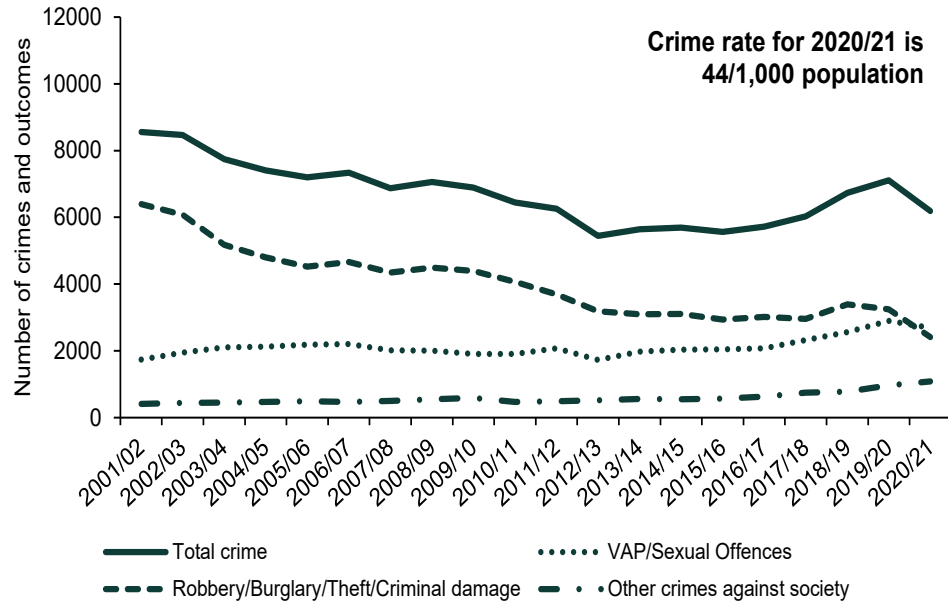
Derry City & Strabane



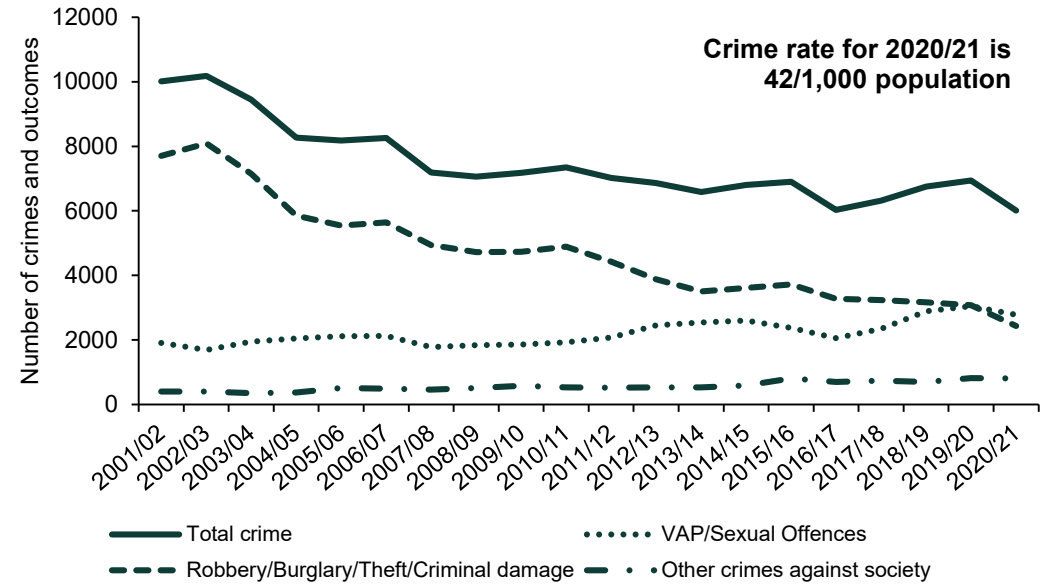
Causeway Coast & Glens



Mid & East Antrim



Antrim & Newtownabbey



Appendix 1. Background and Data Quality

1. Methodology

1.1 Background

The police recorded crime figures presented in this bulletin provide a comprehensive data series of crimes recorded in line with the expanded offence coverage which came into effect with revised Home Office Counting Rules on 1 April 1998. During 1998/99 crime figures were collated using the rules which were in place previously, as well as by the revised rules. The revised rules added more than 32,000 crimes to the dataset, increasing the level of crime (including fraud) by 42 per cent (from 76,644 to 109,053).

Since 1998/99 there have been changes to the way in which crimes have been captured on PSNI systems. Between 1998/99 and 2000/01 crimes were recorded through a paper-based system where a completed form was forwarded to the PSNI Statistics Branch for input onto a stand-alone computer system from which crime figures were then extracted.

In April 2001 PSNI introduced electronic crime recording through an integrated crime information system (ICIS), which resulted in more low level crime being captured than would have occurred through the previous crime recording process. Including fraud, the level of crime recorded in 2001/02 was 139,786. While the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) was implemented by the Home Office in April 2002, the introduction of ICIS in the previous financial year meant that PSNI had already experienced much of the increase in crime attributed to NCRS which was seen in police forces in England and Wales. In 2002/03 the level of crime (including fraud) was 142,496, an increase of two per cent on the previous year. The levels of crime experienced in 2001/02 and 2002/03 were the highest levels recorded within this data series.

The current system which is used within PSNI to record crime is called NICHE and was introduced from 1 April 2007. Ensuring continuation of the crime recording process and data quality was an integral part of the development of this system. An audit was conducted a few months after the system commenced to establish if the crime recording process and data quality had been impacted in any way. The results of the audit indicated that the change to using the NICHE system for crime recording had no negative impact on the quality of recorded crime data.

There are a range of factors that can have an impact on the recorded crime data series. For example changes to existing legislation, the introduction of new legislation and clarifications or changes to the Home Office Counting Rules can all cause discontinuities to the data series. As far as possible these factors are identified in the commentary or table footnotes within this bulletin and accompanying spreadsheets.

1.2 Assessment of police recorded crime in Northern Ireland

In January 2014 the UK Statistics Authority cancelled the designation of police recorded crime statistics in England & Wales because of concerns regarding the quality and integrity of their statistics. While the lack of assurance of the data integrity in Scotland also resulted in the designation of these statistics being cancelled in July 2014, the National Statistics status of Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Scotland was re-instated in September 2016.

As a result of these concerns, the Authority commenced an assessment of police recorded crime in Northern Ireland in June 2014. In addition to this assessment, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) were invited to conduct a crime data integrity audit within PSNI during September 2014 similar to those they conducted in England & Wales during 2014. The outcome of the audit was published on 19 March 2015 in the report [Crime data integrity – inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland](#).

The UK Statistics Authority assessment was concluded after the publication of the HMIC report; the Authority's [assessment report Number 301 Statistics on Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland \(Police Service of Northern Ireland\)](#) was published in May 2015. This report judged that the police recorded crime statistics in Northern Ireland continue to be designated as National Statistics. Police recorded crime statistics are affected by changes in reporting and recording practices. To ensure consistency, police recording practice is governed by Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) and the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS). These rules provide a national standard for the recording and classifying of notifiable offences by police forces in England and Wales. Although the Police Service of Northern Ireland does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Home Office, the same recording practices are followed and applied within Northern Ireland. However differences in legislation between the two jurisdictions must be taken into account when making comparisons between police recorded crime statistics for England & Wales and those for Northern Ireland. Details of the relevant guidance are available through a [two-page NCRS fact sheet](#) and the [Home Office Counting Rules](#).

Further details on Police Recorded Crime statistics are available in the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland](#), and in the [Police Recorded Crime Statistics Quality Report](#). These are reference guides with explanatory notes regarding the issues and classifications which are key to the production and presentation of police recorded crime statistics.

1.3 Variations in crime trends: crime survey data and police recorded crime figures in England & Wales and Northern Ireland

An analysis of variation in crime trends looking at comparable crime categories between the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and the police recorded crime series for England and Wales was conducted by the Office for National

Statistics. This was initially published in January 2013, with updated analysis available in the User Guide to Crime Statistics for England and Wales which can be accessed through the ONS website in [Crime and justice methodology - User guides](#). This work identified a divergence in the trends between the two sets of figures, with the police recorded crime figures showing larger falls in crime. This raised questions about the quality of the police recorded crime figures and was one of the issues that led to the UK Statistics Authority removing the National Statistics designation from the police recorded crime figures in England and Wales.

The trends identified by ONS were not reflected in Northern Ireland; the Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS) showed crime falling at a greater rate than the police recorded crime statistics. Please note that the NICS was not conducted in 2002/03 and so comparisons were made instead with 2003/04. In addition, the initial analysis was based on comparisons with 2006/07 and was not re-run based on 2007/08. Further details of the Northern Ireland analysis can be found on page 6 of the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland](#).

1.4 Data Quality and Auditing

The quality assurance processes mentioned above have been set in place to ensure that the numbers and types of crimes being recorded are, as far as is possible, recorded in compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules. Further details of the data quality checks and processes that PSNI has in place are available in section 4 of the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland](#).

HMIC Audit 2014: As mentioned previously in this bulletin, in light of the crime recording issues in England & Wales and Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) were invited to conduct a crime data integrity audit within PSNI during September 2014, similar to those they conducted in England & Wales during 2014. The outcome of the audit was published on 19 March 2015 in the report [Crime data integrity – inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland](#). The main findings in relation to data quality were:

- a crime-recording accuracy rate of 97 per cent with a confidence interval of +/- two per cent;
- 98 per cent of crimes correctly classified; and
- 84 per cent recorded within the 72-hour limit allowed under HOCR.

Internal Audit 2020: Results from the 2020 Internal Audit showed that the crime recording accuracy had decreased from 97 per cent in 2019 to 92 per cent in 2020, but is still higher than the 90 per cent recorded in 2018. The audit also indicated that 94 per cent of crimes were correctly classified and 80 per cent had a crime created within 72 hours. The Home Office Counting Rules, which govern crime recording, state that crimes should be recorded within 24 hours; the audit showed that just less than seven out of ten crimes had a crime created within 24 hours of reporting. The decline in crime recording accuracy was primarily due to the under recording of harassment offences.

1.5 Crime outcomes and outcome rates

Section 2.4 of the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics](#) describes in detail what crime outcomes are, the recording practice in relation to outcomes and changes to this practice that have affected the recording of outcomes and outcome rates.

The outcome figures provided in this bulletin are based on the following outcome methods; charge/summons, cautions (adult and juvenile), community resolutions, penalty notices for disorder, offences taken into consideration and indictable only offences where no action was taken against the offender (died before proceedings or PPS did not prosecute). There have been a number of changes to the rules governing what can be counted as an outcome since 1998/99, an explanation of which can be found in the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics](#). For this reason most outcome figures in this bulletin are shown dating back to 2007/08 in order to provide a data series that is as comparable as possible, bearing in mind that community resolutions were first introduced as an outcome method during 2011/12 (these were called discretionary disposals prior to 30 June 2016) and penalty notices for disorder were introduced in June 2012. In April 2006, a higher evidential standard was adopted within the PSNI following the establishment of the Public Prosecution Service in Northern Ireland. This restricted the use of those disposal methods where no further action is taken against the offender, in particular the disposal method of complainant declined to prosecute which, between 2004/05 and 2006/07, accounted for the majority of these types of outcomes for crimes with a hate motivation. From April 2007 some of the methods that had been allowed for claiming outcomes that did not result in a sanction against the offender were discontinued altogether.

Prior to April 2013 these figures were mainly presented in the form of sanction detections and sanction detection rates. These included the outcome methods of charge/summons, cautions (adult and juvenile), penalty notices for disorder and offences taken into consideration. The sanction detections and sanction detection rates did not include discretionary disposals or indictable only offences where no action was taken against the offender.

Outcome rates refer to the number of outcomes recorded in a given year expressed as a percentage of the total number of crimes recorded in the same period.

The outcome rate is not a clear-cut measure of police investigative performance and needs to be interpreted with care. Volumes of outcomes recorded in a particular time period can provide a useful indication of police activity in resolving crime. For example, some of the offences with the highest outcome rates are the offences most influenced, in terms of their recorded numbers, by proactive policing to apprehend offenders (e.g. drug offences and many of the offences in the 'other offences' category). However outcome rates presented in this way are described by the Home Office as illustrative rather

than true rates that can be influenced by changes in crime volumes. Where crime volumes increase or decrease markedly from one year to the next, it is likely that any outcome rate will react more slowly.

Please note that it is possible to show a rate of over 100 per cent against a particular outcome.

An alternative way of presenting crime outcomes is available in the publication on Police Crime Outcomes in Northern Ireland (see 3.5 for link to publication). This bulletin presents the wider outcomes framework within PSNI, summarising the outcomes that have been assigned to hate motivated crimes recorded by the police since 2015/16. It also provides a comparison of the two different approaches to crime outcomes.

2 Factors with an impact on the police recorded crime data series

2.1 Changes to crime classifications

On occasion, the structure of the classifications used to compile recorded crime may change.

Alignment of PSNI classifications with England and Wales: During 2010/11 an exercise was conducted to more closely align the crime recording classifications used in PSNI publications with those used for police recorded crime figures in England and Wales. The aim of this exercise was to improve comparability of police recorded crime figures in Northern Ireland with those for England and Wales, while taking into account legislative differences between the two jurisdictions. The realigned crime classification was introduced within PSNI in April 2011.

This exercise realigned the police recorded crime figures for each financial year dating back to 1998/99. Figures at the level of individual classifications differed slightly after reclassification to those figures published prior to reclassification. However the total recorded crime figure for each financial year 1998/99 onwards remained unchanged from the total figure originally published.

Crime classifications consultation November 2011: In November 2011 PSNI's Statistics Branch ran a consultation exercise about proposed changes to reduce the overall number of crime classifications. This was in line with a similar exercise conducted by the Home Office in England and Wales. This resulted in a reduction in the number of crime classifications from 148 to 126 and these changes which were introduced in April 2012.

Crime classifications consultation December 2012: The focus of the consultation launched in December 2012 concerned the presentation of police recorded crime under two broad categories – 'victim-based crime' and 'other crimes against society' in order to improve clarity of presentation. This consultation followed a similar exercise conducted by ONS in respect of police recorded crime in England and Wales. This resulted in a change to the previous classification system implemented from 1 April 2013. All police recorded crime figures published from June 2013 onwards are based on this revised classification, including this trends bulletin. 'Victim based crime' and 'other crimes against society' are further broken down as follows:

Victim-based crimes

- Violence against the person
- Sexual offences
- Robbery
- Theft offences (including burglary)
- Criminal Damage

Other crimes against society:

- Possession of weapon offences
- Public order offences (includes breaches of court orders e.g. non-molestation orders and ASBOs)
- Drug offences
- Miscellaneous crimes against society

Figures based on previous classifications are still available in the [crime statistics archive](#) on the PSNI website.

Recent Changes to Home Office Counting Rules for Burglary: From 1 April 2017 the classifications within burglary have been changed from *domestic burglary* and *non-domestic burglary* to *burglary-residential* and *burglary-business & community*. This reflects a revised approach within the Home Office Counting Rules. What constitutes a burglary does not change; however burglary-residential and burglary-business & community represent a new data series. For example sheds, garages, outhouses etc within the boundary of a dwelling are recorded under burglary-residential, while previously they may have been recorded as non-domestic burglary. Where such a building is used solely for business purposes, it will be recorded as burglary-business & community. The individual series for domestic burglary and burglary-residential cannot be added together to create an overall figure. The same applies to non-domestic burglary and burglary-business & community. A detailed breakdown of the burglary classifications is available in the [crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) which accompanies this bulletin.

2.2 Introduction of Action Fraud within Northern Ireland

From 1 April 2015 Action Fraud has taken responsibility for the central recording of fraud and cyber crime previously recorded by PSNI; Action Fraud became responsible for all such reports in England & Wales by 1st April 2014. Action Fraud

is the UK's National Reporting Centre for fraud and cyber crime reported directly to them from the public and other organisations. While this means that these fraud and cyber offences are no longer recorded by PSNI, Action Fraud figures relating to fraud and cyber crime occurring in Northern Ireland are provided to PSNI on a monthly basis. As a result, this bulletin includes a section on Fraud (Section 6) which presents figures dating back to 1998/99 and shows whether the source is PSNI or Action Fraud. All other sections within the bulletin present figures on a comparable basis that exclude crimes recorded by Action Fraud, unless otherwise specified.

2.3 Change to policing boundaries as a result of implementing the Review of Public Administration

As part of the Review of Public Administration which came into effect on 1 April 2015, PSNI moved from eight to eleven policing districts, with the new policing model becoming fully operational at the end of September 2015.

The level of geographic information required to allocate crime records to the new boundaries was insufficient for the financial years 1998/99 to 2000/01. For this reason, comparison of crime at policing district level is only available for the financial years dating back to 2001/02.

While being only one policing district, Belfast City accounts for approximately one third of all crime recorded in Northern Ireland. It includes four local policing teams based in Lisburn Road (South), Tennent Street (North), Strandtown (East) and Woodbourne (West). To assist with district level comparisons, crime figures for each of these local policing teams are provided in Section 9 Geographic Patterns of Crime.

3 Further Information

3.1 Data Use

Police recorded crime figures are an important indicator of police workload, and can be used for local crime pattern analysis and provide a good measure of trends in well-reported crimes (in particular, homicide, which is not covered by the NICS). There are also some categories of crime (such as drug possession offences) where the volume of offences recorded are heavily influenced by police activities and priorities; in such cases recorded crime figures may not provide an accurate picture of the true extent of criminality.

Police recorded crime figures are used widely within PSNI as management information, to monitor performance on crime and detection rate targets against the Policing Plan, to inform PSNI policy and to provide information in support of operational research identifying appropriate allocation of police resource. The figures are also used by the Northern Ireland Policing Board and at local level by Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) to monitor the performance of the police. The Department of Justice for Northern Ireland is a key user of crime figures in relation to policy development.

Police recorded crime figures are also used in response to both Assembly and Parliamentary questions, informing public debate and concerns around criminal activity. Information is used by academic researchers and the media, examining local and national public interest in current affairs relating to crime levels. There is a demand for crime figures from businesses, either keen to identify crimes that may affect their business or to identify demand for any related business service they may provide. Members of the public would also forward requests for crime information specific to their area of interest or specific to the area in which they live or work.

3.2 Data Availability

Information that is published in the monthly and annual crime bulletins has been examined to make sure it meets levels of quality and completeness appropriate for publication. The proportion of records for which information is unavailable is identified in the bulletins and accompanying spreadsheets. There will be some variables held on the operational system for which the level of missing or incomplete information is too high to allow for inclusion in the bulletins, or where the data quality is not sufficient for publication.

Crime classifications are published at levels for which disclosure issues have been considered, including the geographic level at which the information is produced and also the length of time period covered. The [Official Statistics documentation](#) on the PSNI website provides additional information on PSNI's arrangements for maintaining the confidentiality of statistical data and statistical disclosure control. Details on the availability of information relating to victim characteristics can be found in Section 4.5 of the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland](#).

3.3 Publication

Annual data are published on a financial year basis (i.e. 1 April to 31 March), with the annual bulletin providing finalised figures for the latest financial year along with trends and commentary. This ties in with PSNI's statutory obligation to report on performance on a financial year basis.

Changes can be expected to in-year figures each time they are published, as all in-year records are subject to ongoing validation and quality assurance processes until publication of the full financial year.

The publication date for the monthly bulletin covering the final crime figures for the latest financial year is pre-announced and can be found via the [UK National Statistics Publication Hub](#). This is also made available via a [publication schedule](#) on the PSNI website, along with the publication date of each monthly update and annual trends bulletin.

Supplementary data are available from the PSNI website in [excel format, crime spreadsheet, 1.7MB \(opens in a new window\)](#) and [open document format, 1.0MB \(opens in a new window\)](#).

The PSNI website has a [crime statistics archive](#) containing information relating to crime figures dating back to 1968.

3.4 Crime Statistics User Guide

Further details on Police Recorded Crime statistics are available in the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics, 1MB \(opens in a new window\)](#). This is a reference guide with explanatory notes regarding the issues and classifications which are key to the production and presentation of police recorded crime statistics. The guide provides background information on:

- definitions relating to crimes, incidents and outcomes, including a description of the crime types included within the crime bulletins;
- recording practices, including PSNI data collection, quality and audit processes;
- data timeliness and availability; and
- the geographic areas for which crimes are available (statistics for geographies other than policing area and policing district can be accessed through the [Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service \(NINIS\) \(opens in a new window\)](#)).

3.5 Related information available on the PSNI website

Police Recorded Crime Statistics: These statistics are updated on a monthly basis, with publication dates available in the [publication schedule](#). The latest publications and those that have been archived can be accessed through:

<https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/>

Crime Outcomes: This bulletin presents the wider outcomes framework within PSNI and summarises the outcomes that have been assigned to crimes recorded by the police since 2015/16. The publication can be accessed through:

<https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/>

Anti-Social Behaviour Statistics: These statistics are updated on a monthly basis, with publication dates available in the [publication schedule](#). The latest publications and those that have been archived can be accessed through:

<https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/anti-social-behaviour-statistics/>

Domestic Abuse Statistics: These statistics are updated on a quarterly basis (in August, November, February and May), with a more comprehensive trends publication made available annually; publication dates are available in the [publication schedule](#). The latest publications and those that have been archived can be accessed through:

<https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics/>

Hate Motivation Statistics: These statistics are updated on a quarterly basis (in August, November, February and May), with a more comprehensive trends publication made available annually; publication dates are available in the [publication schedule](#). The latest publications and those that have been archived can be accessed through:

<https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/hate-motivation-statistics/>

Drug Seizure Statistics: These statistics report on numbers of drug seizure incidents, quantities of drugs seized and drug related arrests. Publication dates are available in the [publication schedule](#); the latest publications and those that have been archived can be accessed through:

<https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/drug-seizure-statistics/>