



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

## Social Policies and Distributional Outcomes

in a Changing Britain

# **Who is at risk of experiencing violence and has it changed overtime?**

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**SPDO research note 5**

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This research note forms part of the analysis of distributional outcomes within the broader [\*Social Policies and Distributional Outcomes in a Changing Britain\*](#) (SPDO) programme. The programme evaluates what progress has been made in addressing inequalities through social policies, focusing on the last two decades and in particular the period since the Conservative government took office, up until the eve of the Covid-19 pandemic. In line with other analyses of distributional outcomes across the programme it speaks to the theme 'is progress stalling?' specifically in relation to violent crime.

Published crime statistics show that following a long-term decline in violent crime there has been a flattening out in recent years and certain types of violent crime have increased. This research note examines who is most at risk of violence and how this has changed over time, focusing on the characteristics of sex, age, disability and ethnicity. Findings show that while violence significantly declined overall between 2004/05 and 2018/19, it did not decrease across all groups in the population.

- The risks of violence remained broadly unchanged for women while they decreased for men. By 2018/19, women were at a greater risk of violence compared to men
- Risks of violence remained unchanged for 40-49 year olds and increased for 50-59 year olds; while they decreased for younger age groups
- No significant change in the overall proportion of those from Black, Mixed and other ethnic groups experiencing violence, and a decline for others
- Risks of violence remained broadly unchanged among those with limiting long standing illness and disabilities

Intersectional analysis of gender, age and ethnicity shows:

- Risks of violence increased particularly sharply for younger women, and decreased for younger men
- Proportion of women from Mixed and Black ethnic backgrounds experiencing violence increased, while it decreased for all other ethnic groups among women
- Younger people from Black and Mixed ethnic groups have the highest risks of violence

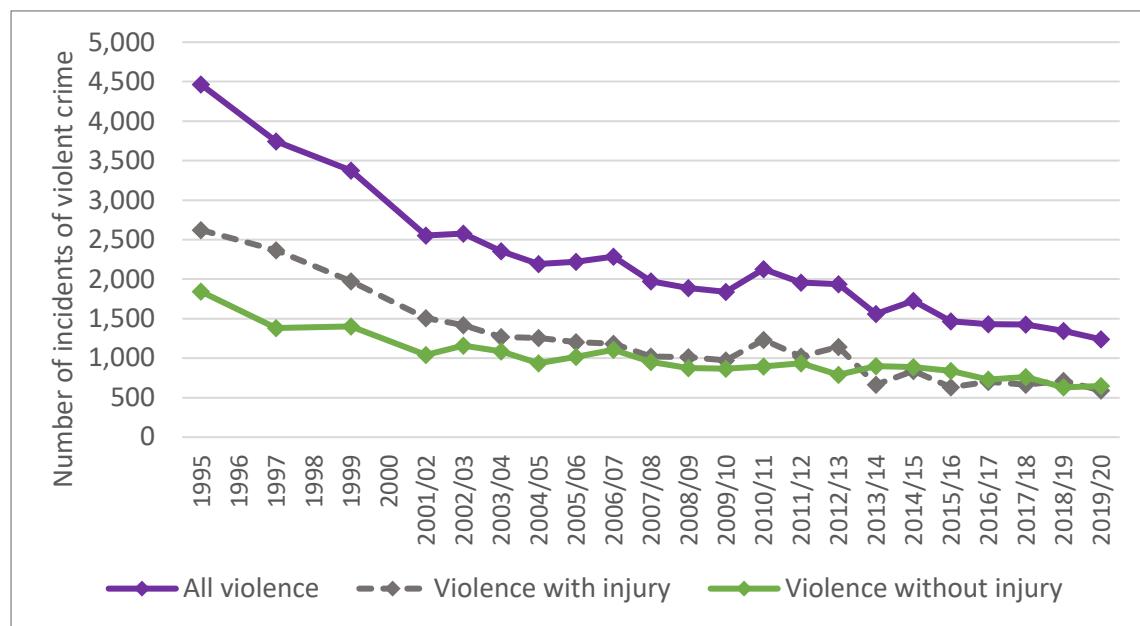
These analyses highlight the importance of disaggregating data by multiple characteristics to reveal the nuances of patterns of experiencing violence for different groups in the population.

A related paper from the SPDO programme, [Physical safety and security: Policies, spending and outcomes 2015 – 2020](#) discusses in detail the policy development, spending, inputs and outputs in relation to the criminal justice system and more broadly other policy areas relevant to safety and security, which suggest a range of reasons why we might expect progress in addressing violent crime to stall or even reverse. These include the cumulative effects of austerity which have seen cuts to local authorities, the closing down of youth centres, and reductions in women's refuges, as well as wider cuts to education, health and housing which are all relevant for safety and security outcomes. The decline in standards and safety of prisons as well as a reduction in access to rehabilitative activities are also relevant. Finally, there is speculation from senior police figures about the role of the reduced police force as a factor contributing to the recent rise in knife crime, though it is difficult to establish causality given the many complex factors at play.

### ***ONS published figures show that the long-term decline in violent crime has slowed down since 2015/16***

Official crime statistics based on the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) show that the long-term decline in violent crime has slowed down in more recent years with no significant year-on-year changes in the number of violent incidents since 2015/16 (Figure 1). Similar patterns are reported by the ONS for violent crime measures based on incidents rates and prevalence (proportion of people) (ONS 2020).

**Figure 1 The change in the number of violent incidents in England and Wales has slowed down since 2015/16, ending a period of significant decline**



Source: data from ONS, (2020) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2020*

Police recorded data shows that over the same period there has been a significant increase in knife crime and [the number of homicides](#) has also increased since 2015. The [femicide census](#), which counts the number of women killed each year by men in the UK, also shows an increase to 2018. The longer term trends in femicides to 2020 in the latest report are characterised as broadly consistent with an average of one woman being killed by a man every three days (2020). Taken together, this suggests that most recently there has been a stalling of progress in addressing violent crime and a reversal for specific types of violent crimes such as knife crime. However, to question whether violent crime has recently stalled is to assume that there was real progress in reducing violent crime beforehand. This research analyses whether all groups benefited from the previous reduction in violence.

### ***What does 'violent crime' measure? Re-estimating violence using all available data in CSEW***

We use data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). It is an annual victim-based survey of around 35,000 respondents each year and is designed to give a representative sample of the population aged 16 and over living in households in England and Wales. The CSEW consists of a main face-to-face survey and a self-completion questionnaire which includes questions on sexual and domestic violence. We use the secure access version of CSEW to make use of the self-completion data.

The ONS measure of '*violent crime*' is based on the violence against the person definition and using the data collected via the main face-to-face questionnaire. It includes experience of the following offences: serious wounding; other wounding; common assault; attempted assault; serious wounding with sexual motive; other wounding with sexual motive.

Other sexual offences reported within the main questionnaire, such as rape, attempted rape and indecent assault are *not* included in the overall measure of violent crime by the ONS. Additionally, ONS does not incorporate information on domestic violence and sexual victimisation provided within the Interpersonal Violence (IPV) module of the self-completion part of the survey, which has higher disclosure rates for these experiences compared to the main face-to-face questionnaire.

For this briefing note, we derived a measure of violence based on all available information in the CSEW – data used by the ONS to measure violent crime, data on experiences of additional sexual offences (rape, attempted rape and indecent assault) and data on domestic and sexual violence from the IPV module. This means our estimates of violence are higher compared to the ONS official statistics.

We focus on prevalence (who experiences violence) rather than the number of incidents. A person is counted as having experienced violence if they experienced any one of the violent offences mentioned above. Violence is a binary variable so whether an individual experiences one type of violence, or several it is counted the same. More detail on the data and methods can be found in [our previous publication](#).

In the first part of the analysis, we compare the prevalence of violence in the year ending in March 2005, or 2004/05 (the first year questions on interpersonal violence were asked in the self-completion questionnaire on a comparable basis) and in the year ending in March 2019, or 2018/19 – the year pre-dating COVID. Our sample is restricted to those aged 16 – 59 years as the self-completion module was only completed by respondents within that age bracket prior to 2018, so we cannot make use of the data for older adults when comparing estimates to the earlier time point. [Our previous analysis](#) of the 2017/18 CSEW data shows that the risks of violence among the 16-74 year old sample are lower compared to the 16-59 year old sample, since older adults are less likely to report being a victim of violence compared to younger adults.

We present estimates of violence for all aged 16 to 59, and by the protected characteristics: sex, age, ethnicity and disability status. We conduct this analysis using the [STATA 'Inequalities Programme'](#) – a programme developed by Eleni Karagiannaki to undertake distributional analysis of a categorical outcome variable. This programme allows us to estimate the prevalence of violence in each year and test for differences within and between groups as well as changes over time.

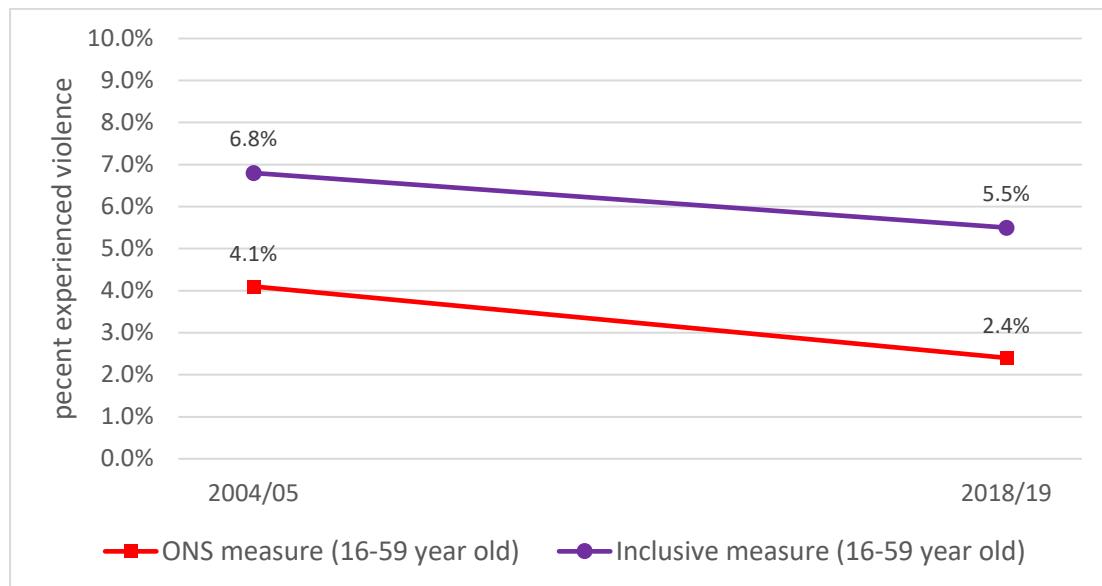
In the second part of the analysis, we examine the risks of violence for people with different overlapping characteristics. For this, we pool the years 2004/05 and 2005/06, as well as the years 2017/18 and 2018/19 to enable large enough sample sizes for analysis of interactions between ethnicity, age and gender.

### ***Overall proportion of people experiencing violence fell among those aged 16 to 59 between 2004/05 and 2018/19***

Using our more inclusive violence measure, a greater proportion of 16-59 year olds experienced violence in England and Wales in both 2005 and 2019 compared to the estimates for the same age groups using the ONS definition of violent crime described earlier (Figure 2). Both our and the ONS measures for 16 to 59 year olds show higher prevalence at each time point compared to the ONS published figures since the latter includes the older population who are less likely to report experiencing violence. Overall, using our more inclusive definition, we show that the prevalence

of violence decreased from 6.8% in 2005 to 5.5% in 2019. However, the overall decrease in violence was not experienced by everyone equally.

**Figure 2 Prevalence of violence for those aged 16-59 years in England and Wales**



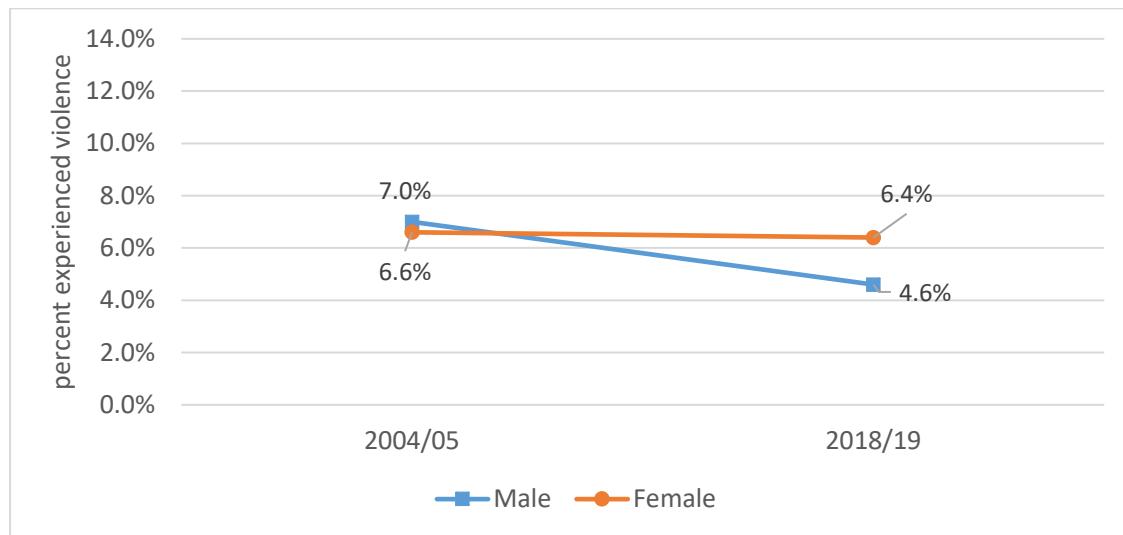
Source: Estimates for 16-59 year old sample are based on the authors' analysis using ONS [Office for National Statistics], Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (11th edition). ONS violence (published) figures for population aged 16+ are from ONS (2022) Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables; year ending March 2020 edition

The remainder of this briefing note focuses on results for the more inclusive measure of violence which includes sexual and domestic violence.

Figures 3 to 6 and Table 1 in the [online data tables](#) show that in line with the overall trend over the period 2004/05 to 2018/19, there was a significant decline in the proportion of people experiencing violence among men, those from a White or Asian/other ethnic background, younger age groups and those with no disabilities.

In 2004/05 men were significantly more likely than women to experience violence. Despite the overall significant decline in violence between 2004/05 and 2018/19, the risks of violence did not change significantly for women, while they did for men. This meant that by the end of the period women were actually at a greater risk of experiencing violence than men. The latter finding is not observed using the ONS definition of violence (see Table 2 in the [online data tables](#)), which is less likely to pick up on violence most often experienced by women such as domestic and sexual violence.

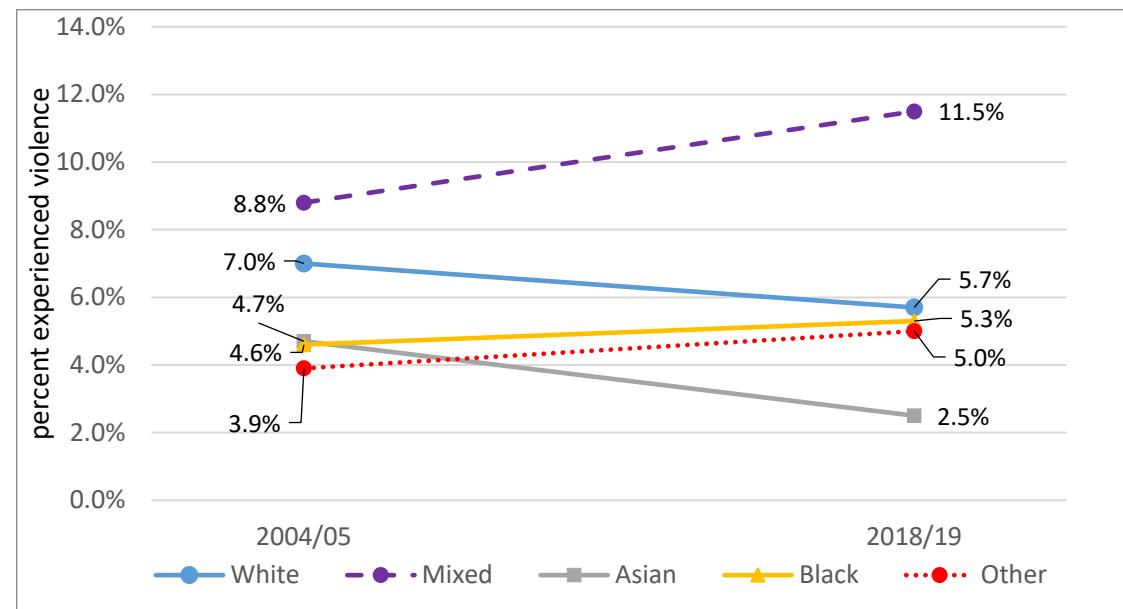
**Figure 3 Prevalence of violence by gender, 2004/05 and 2018/19, 16-59 years old in England and Wales**



Source: Authors' analysis using ONS [Office for National Statistics], Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (11<sup>th</sup> edition).

In line with the overall decline in violence, the proportion of those from White and Asian ethnic groups experiencing violence significantly decreased between 2004/05 and 2018/19, but there was no significant change in the risks of violence for those from Black, Mixed or Other ethnic backgrounds (Figure 4).

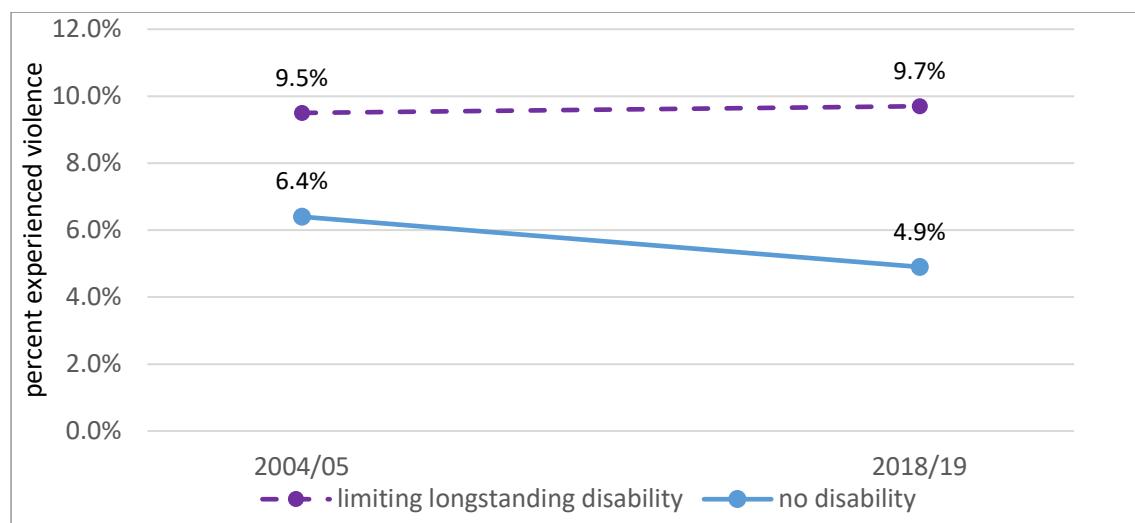
**Figure 4 Prevalence of violence by ethnicity, 2004/05 and 2018/19, 16 – 59 years old in England and Wales**



Source: Authors' analysis using ONS [Office for National Statistics], Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (11<sup>th</sup> edition).

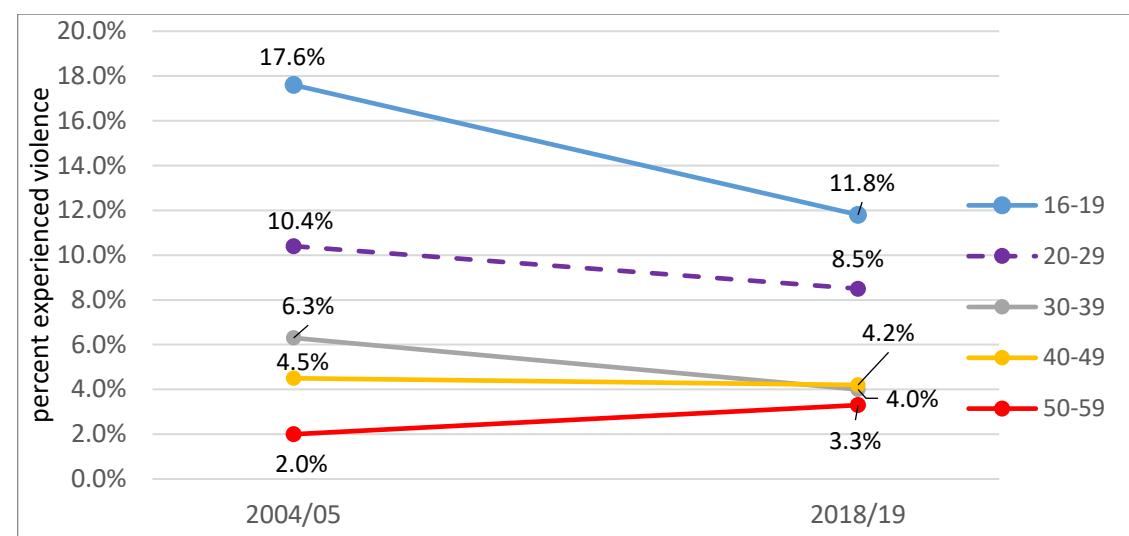
Other groups which did not experience any significant change in terms of their risks of violence, despite an overall decline in it, are those with longstanding limiting illness or disability (Figure 5), young people aged 20-29 as well as those aged 40-49 (Figure 6). Moreover, one group - the oldest age group (50-59 years) - experienced a significant *increase* in violence. Despite a significant decline in the proportion of those in the youngest age group (16-19) experiencing violence overtime, their risks were the highest across age groups in both time points.

**Figure 5 Prevalence of violence by disability, 2004/05 and 2018/19, 16 – 59 years old in England and Wales**



Source: Authors' analysis using ONS [Office for National Statistics], Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (11<sup>th</sup> edition).

**Figure 6 Prevalence of violence by age, 2004/05 and 2018/19, 16-59 years old in England and Wales**



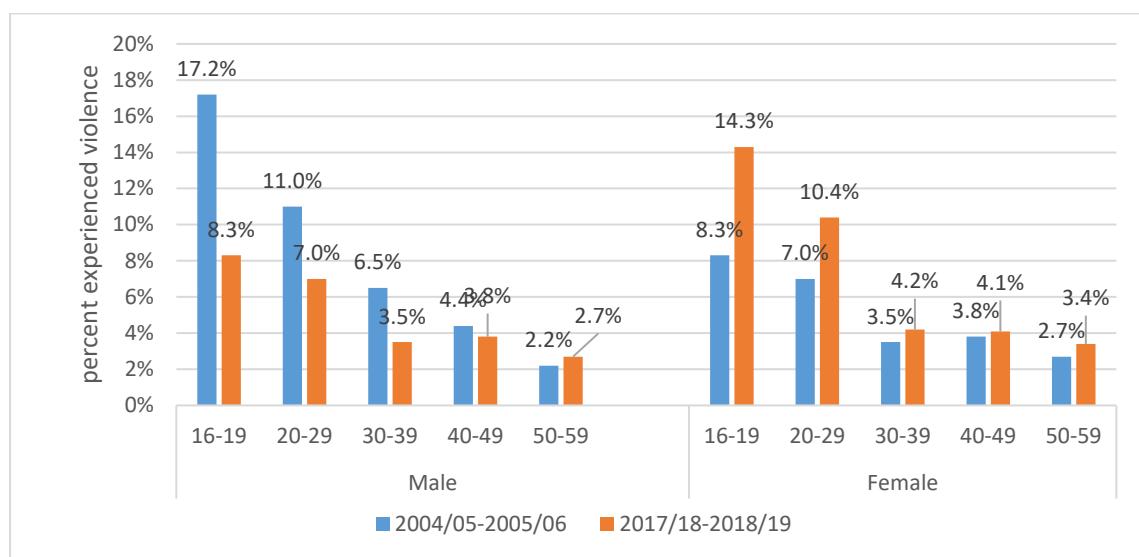
Source: Authors' analysis using ONS [Office for National Statistics], Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (11<sup>th</sup> edition).

### ***The risks of violence are high at the intersection of gender, age and ethnicity***

Pooling two years of data at each time point (2004/05 and 2005/06, hereafter referred to as 2005/06; and 2017/18 and 2018/19, hereafter referred to as 2018/19) to increase the sample sizes for the analysis, we explore the changes in violence at the intersections of gender, age and ethnicity.

In line with the overall pattern of experiencing violence by gender between 2005/06 and 2018/19, women in each age group experienced an increase in violence, while men across all age groups, except the oldest, experienced a decline. However, there is an age gradient in the magnitude of change by gender. While the proportion of women experiencing violence increased for all age groups between 2005/06 and 2018/19, it did so particularly for younger age groups (Figure 7). Over the period, the proportion of women who experienced violence increased from 8.3% to 14.3% among 16–19-year-olds and from 7.0% to 10.4% among 20–29-year-olds. The opposite trend is observed for men: younger men's risks of violence decreased more than older men's. A particularly staggering improvement is seen for the youngest group – the proportion of 16–19 year old men who experienced violence more than halved between 2005/06 and 2018/19: falling from 17.2% to 8.3%.

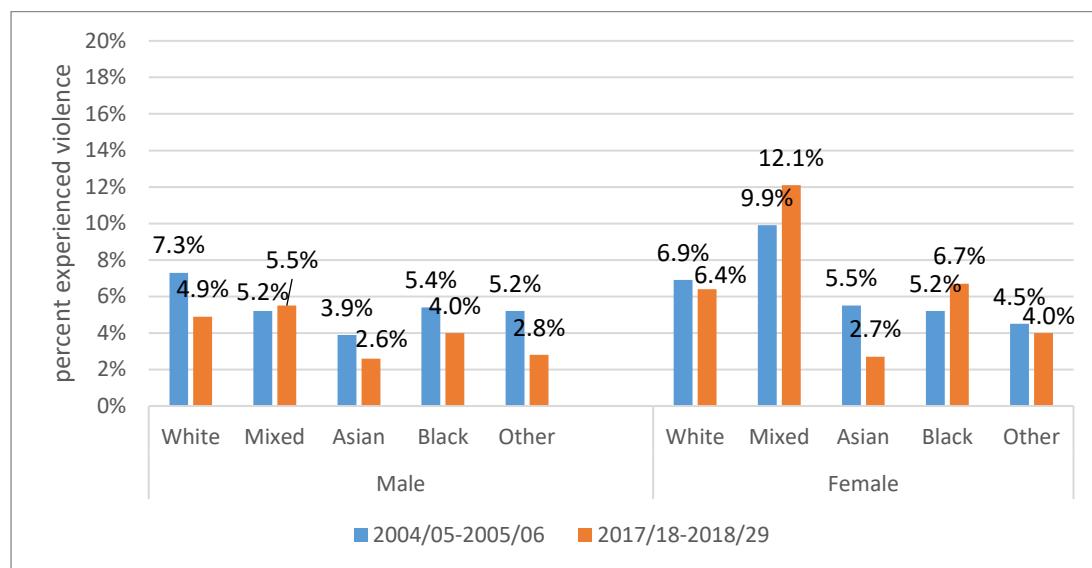
**Figure 7 Prevalence of violence by sex and age, two years pooled data to 2005/06 and to 2018/19, 16 – 59 years old in England and Wales**



Source: Authors' analysis using ONS [Office for National Statistics], Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (11<sup>th</sup> edition).

Interestingly for men and women there are also different patterns by ethnicity (Figure 8). The increase in violence experienced by women, including women across different age groups, is not evident for all ethnic groups. The proportion of women experiencing violence from White, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds decreased between 2005/06 and 2018/19, while it increased for women from Mixed and Black ethnic groups. The reduction in violence among men was observed for all but one ethnic group – Mixed. By 2018/19, women from Mixed and Black ethnic groups were at highest risk of violence, closely followed by women from a White ethnic background. The proportion of men who experienced violence was the highest for those from Mixed and White ethnic backgrounds, closely followed by those from Black ethnic group.

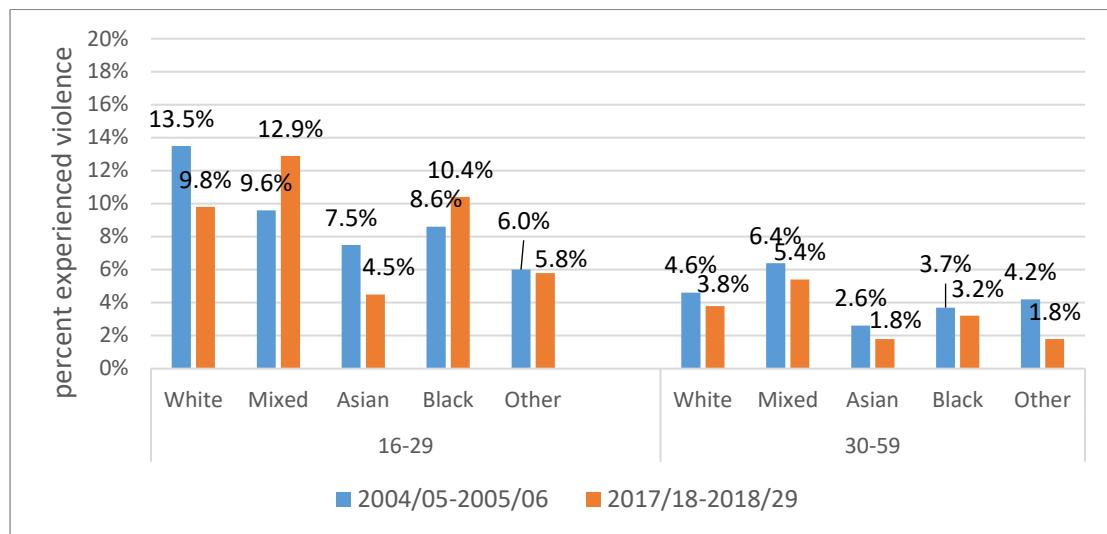
**Figure 8 Prevalence of violence by sex and ethnicity, two years pooled data to 2005/06 and to 2018/19, 16 – 59 years old in England and Wales**



Source: Authors' analysis using ONS [Office for National Statistics], Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (11<sup>th</sup> edition).

The pattern of experiencing violence by ethnicity is also different for different age groups and this changed over time (Figure 9). To enable large enough group sizes for analysis by ethnicity and age, we subdivided the sample into 'younger' people consisting of those aged 16 to 29, and an 'older' age group, consisting of those age 30-59. Across all ethnic groups younger respondents were more likely to experience violence compared to older. While across all ethnic groups violence fell for 30-59 year olds, as well as for younger (16-29 year olds) White and Asian groups, it increased for younger mixed, and Black ethnic groups.

**Figure 9 Prevalence of violence by age and ethnicity, two years pooled data to 2005/06 and to 2018/19, 16 – 59 years old in England and Wales**



Source: Authors' analysis using ONS [Office for National Statistics], Crime Survey for England and Wales, Secure access dataset, SN 7280 (11<sup>th</sup> edition).

While we were not able to analyse a three-way interaction between gender, age and ethnicity, the patterns of the above trends suggest that younger women, as well as women from Mixed and Black ethnic backgrounds, and younger the Black and Mixed population overall, are at the highest risks of violence.

## Conclusion

Both police recorded data and CSEW data suggest that there has been a stall in the long-term progress in addressing violent crime, as the decrease in overall violent crime has slowed down, and certain types of violent crime have increased over the last few years. Using a more inclusive definition of violence compared to that used by the ONS, and considering the downward trend in violence since 2004/05, we show that not all groups benefited from this decrease in the first place. While overall, there was a fall in the proportion of people experiencing violence in England and Wales between 2004/05 and 2018/19, women, those with a disability and those from a Black or Mixed ethnic backgrounds experienced no significant change in their risks of violence and those aged 50-59 saw an increase. Given that the overall trends show a decline in violence, the fact that no progress in reducing violence among these groups has been made is a major concern.

Even more concerning, are the patterns that emerge when we look at trends in violence at the intersection of gender, age and ethnicity. The patterns of violence for those from Black and Mixed ethnic groups are

intensified when we break them down by gender. While the overall risks remained stable for Black and Mixed ethnic groups, the risks for women from these groups had increased. Similarly, while there is a decline in violence for the younger age groups overall, the patterns are not the same by gender and by ethnicity. For younger women, the risks of violence increased. The risks of violence also increased for the younger Black and Mixed ethnic groups.

These analyses highlight the importance of utilising all data on violence from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, including domestic and sexual violence from the self-completion questionnaire to capture a greater proportion of victims of violence. Additionally, this work emphasises the value of disaggregating data by multiple characteristics to reveal the nuances of experiencing violence for different groups in the population.

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