
In July the Home Office published Crime in England and Wales 2001/2002 by Jon Simmons and colleagues in the Patterns of Crime Group (available from Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate tel: 020 7273 2084 and Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website). This is the first report in a new annual publication that combines the reporting of police recorded crime and British Crime Survey (BCS) results. The police recorded and BCS figures are complementary series that together provide a better picture of crime than can be provided by either series alone.

Police statistics are thought to provide a good measure of trends in well-reported crimes, are an important indicator of police workload, and can be used for local crime pattern analysis. For the types of crime it covers, the BCS can provide a better reflection of the true extent of crime because it includes crimes that are not reported to the police. The BCS count also gives a better indication of trends in crime over time because it is unaffected by changes in levels of reporting to the police, and in police recording practices.

Overall, crime seems to have been stable over the last year, following a period of consistent decline. The BCS estimates for crimes against adults living in private households, based on interviews taking place in 2001/02, is just over 13 million. This represents a decrease of 2% compared with the estimate for 2000. The total number of crimes recorded by the police in 2001/02 was 5,527,199, an increase of 7% compared to 2000/01. Changes in police recording practice mean that the underlying increase is estimated to be 2%. Just over ten million BCS crimes are comparable with those recorded by police statistics, of which an estimated 42% were reported to the police, and of those reported an estimated 60% were recorded by the police.

The number of crimes estimated by the BCS for interviews in 2001/02 fell by 2% compared to 2000, but the single year reduction was not statistically significant. Between 1999 and 2001/02, all BCS crime fell by 14%, which is a statistically significant reduction. This figure includes statistically significant falls in domestic burglary (down 23%), vehicle thefts (down 14%) and common assaults (down 28%). Comparing individual offence categories between 1998 and 2001/02, statistically significant falls were observed for theft from vehicles (16%) and attempted thefts of and from vehicles (14%). Decreases for burglary with entry (25%), burglary with loss (26%), attempted burglary (19%), attempts with no loss (21%) and other household theft (21%) were also statistically significant.

Since 1995, the BCS has reported a fall in crime at each survey. There was a 22% fall in the crime measured by the BCS over the last five years from 1997 to 2001/02. The BCS estimate of the risk of being a victim of crime has been calculated for interviews taking place in each quarter of 2001/02. The risk of being a victim of crime
shows little fluctuation, suggesting that crime risks have stayed fairly stable over the last year at around 28% overall. In 2001/02, it is estimated that the impact of recording changes was to inflate artificially the recorded crime figures by at least five percentage points. For violence against the person it is estimated that, if the impact of recording changes is taken into account, the 8% increase in recorded crime becomes a 5% fall. These impacts are likely to be considerably larger in 2002/03, as the new national crime recording standard is fully implemented by police forces in England and Wales.

The BCS estimates that there were falls in all the main types of property crimes between 1999 and those reported in 2001/02. Domestic burglary fell by 23%, vandalism by 6%, and theft from the person by 5%. Changes since 2000 are not statistically significant. For property crimes recorded by the police the overall trend between 2000/01 and 2001/02 is slightly up, but rates of increase are smaller than the statistics suggest, as most of the rises are accounted for by increased reporting rates. Overall, 3.5% of households in England and Wales interviewed in 2001/02 had experienced at least one domestic burglary in the previous twelve months. This is slightly up on the 3.4% in 2000, but substantially below the 4.3% in 1999. Burglaries of video recorders are half as common as in 1998 (down from 34%) and burglaries of computer equipment are twice as common now (14%) as they were in 1996.

The BCS shows overall non-commercial vehicle-related theft falling by 14% between 1999 and 2001/02. This fall is greater for thefts from vehicles (16%, excluding attempts) but less for thefts of vehicles. The BCS fall since 2000 is not statistically significant. Although the police recorded crime statistics suggest that thefts were higher in the last year (up 4% between 2000/01 and 2001/02), thefts from vehicles will be more affected by changes in recording practice in police forces than the recorded thefts of vehicles (down 4% in 2001/02).

The BCS estimates that there were 2,891,000 violent incidents experienced by adults in England and Wales, based on incidents reported to the survey in 2001/02. The BCS violence estimates for the number of violent incidents increased by 2% compared to 2000, but this increase is not statistically significant. The BCS violence estimate has fallen by 22% since 1997 and 17% since 1999, both falls being statistically significant. The increase in violent crime recorded by the police appears to be largely due to increased recording by police forces. Taking into account recording changes, the real trend in violence against the person in 2001/02 may have been a reduction of around 5%. Within the broad category of recorded violent crimes, the number of robberies recorded by the police increased by 28% in 2001/02. The number of robberies does not so far appear to have been significantly affected by changes in police recording practices, although it may have been affected by increased reporting by the public. In 50% of violent incidents there is no injury, with around two-thirds of robberies and common assaults resulting in no injury. The latest BCS shows a statistically significant increase in wounding between 2000 and 2001/02. However, this must be understood in the context of an equally large decline between 1999 and 2000 which means that between 1999 and 2001/02 there has been no significant change in woundings. The risk of being a victim of violent crime for those interviewed by the BCS in 2001/02 was 4%. Young men aged 16 to 24 years were most at risk, with 16.2% experiencing a violent crime of some sort in the year.

BCS victimisation rates show household crime to be highest in the north-west region. Household crimes are lowest in the south-west and eastern regions. The highest levels of worry about burglary are in Yorkshire and the Humber, West Midlands and London regions. Yorkshire and the Humber has higher burglary with loss victimisation rates, according to 2001/02 BCS results, but this is not true of West Midlands and London. West Midlands has the highest level of worry about car crime while
London has the highest level of worry about violent crime, yet neither region stands out in victimisation terms. The concentration of crime is particularly evident for robbery. The ten police forces covered by the government’s robbery target account for 83% of recorded robberies. The Metropolitan Police Service is responsible for recording 44% of robberies in England and Wales.

The number of detections in 2001/02 rose slightly on the previous year, by 2%, to 1,290,195 with increases for all crime types except fraud and forgery. However, as has been the case for some time, the rise in detections did not keep up with the rise in recorded crime. The proportion of crimes detected at 23% in 2001/02 was down from 24% in 2000/01. However, if the effect of the introduction of the national crime recording standard were to be discounted, the overall detection rate would be unchanged from last year. The average number of detections per police officer is stable at around ten detections per officer per year.

About one-third of respondents (30%) believed that crime had risen ‘a lot’, and a further third felt that crime had risen ‘a little’ over the previous two years. This is despite the total number of crimes reported to the BCS falling by 14% between 1999 and 2001/02. Readers of the national tabloid papers are much more likely to consider the national crime rate to have increased over this period, compared to broadsheet readers (42% versus 26%).

87.2 Judicial Statistics

The Lord Chancellor’s Department has published Judicial Statistics England and Wales for 2001/02 (available from TSO as Cm. 5551, £15.50 and from the Lord Chancellor’s Department website). During 2001 the total receipts for committals for trial at the Crown Court increased by over 13% to 80,551 and disposals rose by nearly 4% to 75,565. The total of cases dealt with where a guilty plea was recorded fell by 1% to 36,655. The average waiting time for defendants on bail was 16 weeks and 10.9 weeks for those held in custody (the comparable figures for 2000 were 16 and 9.8 weeks respectively). The number of committals for sentence fell by 6% to 25,960 while appeals from magistrates’ courts fell by just over 9% to 12,596.

Some 17,956 trials ‘cracked’. The largest percentage of cracked trials occurs when the defendant pleads guilty on the trial date (60.5% in 2001). Other main reasons for cracking include where the prosecution accepts a plea of guilty to an alternative charge (15.4%), the prosecution offers no evidence (20.8%) and the defendant being bound over in a sum of money to keep the peace (3.1%). The percentage of cracked trials as a proportion of all cases disposed of remained the same at 23.8%.

During 2001, just over 66% of the defendants who pleaded not guilty to all counts were acquitted representing just over 27% of the total 91,160 dealt with. Of these, just over 54% were discharged by the judge, over 12% acquitted on the direction of the judge and just over 33% were acquitted by a jury. Of the 9,694 defendants convicted in 2001 after a plea of not guilty to some or all counts, 23% were convicted on a majority verdict by the jury, the remainder being convicted unanimously.

The Criminal Defence Service was introduced in April 2001 and it replaces the old legal aid scheme. An accused person can have publicly funded representation where the court decides it is in the interests of justice to do so. A representation order covers all criminal proceedings; preliminary or incidental including related bail proceedings. Where a case is heard in the magistrates’ court, no details of the applicant’s means are required, as there is no power to recover the costs of the applicant’s representation. However, where a case is heard in the Crown Court or a higher court on appeal, the applicant must provide truthful details of his or her means to the court. At the end of the case, the judge has a new power to order the defendant to
pay back some or all of the costs of his or her defence. In 2001, 103,073 applications were made in magistrates’ courts for representation in the Crown Court and of these virtually all were granted. Similarly, of the 12,993 applications to the Crown Court, nearly all were granted. In 2001, total net expenditure on legal aid was £1,750 million, an increase of 8.2% over 2000. Of this total, some £1,000.5 million was criminal legal aid.

87.3 Crime Prevention Research

The Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate has published two studies on crime prevention initiatives: Effects of Improved Street Lighting on Crime: A Systematic Study by D.P. Farrington and B.C. Welsh (available as HORS 251 and as in 87.1 above) and Crime Prevention Effects of Closed Circuit Television: A Systematic Review by B.C. Welsh and D.P. Farrington (available as HORS 252). Both studies concentrate on reviewing the literature which uses rigorous methods for locating, appraising and synthesising evidence from prior evaluation studies. In the first of these studies it is suggested that there are two main theories of why improved street lighting may cause a reduction in crime. The first suggests that improved lighting leads to increased surveillance of potential offenders (both by improving visibility and by increasing the number of people on the street) and hence to the deterrence of potential offenders. The second suggests that improved lighting signals increased community investment in the area and that the area is improving, leading to increased community pride, cohesiveness and informal social control. The first theory predicts decreases in crime especially during the hours of darkness, while the second predicts decreases in crime during both day-time and night-time.

Eight American evaluation studies met the criteria for inclusion in the review. Their results were mixed as four studies found that improved street lighting was effective in reducing crime, while the remainder did not. It is not clear why the studies produced different results although there was a tendency for ‘effective’ studies to measure both day-time and night-time crimes and for ‘ineffective studies’ to measure only night-time crimes. Five British studies also met the criteria for inclusion and their results showed that improved lighting led to a significant 30% decrease in crime. The authors conclude that improved lighting should be included as one element of a situational crime reduction programme. It is an inclusive intervention benefitting the whole of a neighbourhood and leads to an increase in perceived public safety.

The study of closed circuit television (CCTV) included 22 CCTV schemes which met the criteria for inclusion. Of these, half (11) found a desirable effect on crime and five found an undesirable effect. Five evaluations found a null effect on crime (that is, clear evidence of no effect) and the remaining scheme was classified as finding an uncertain effect on crime. In city centre and public housing settings, there was evidence that CCTV led to a negligible reduction in crime of about 2% in experimental areas compared with control areas. The evaluations which looked at CCTV in public transportation systems found two had a positive effect, one found no effect and one found an undesirable effect. The studies included in the review show that CCTV can be most effective in reducing crime in car parks. Exactly what are the optimal circumstances for the effective use of CCTV is not entirely clear. The CCTV schemes in car parks also included improved lighting and notices about CCTV cameras. The city centre and public housing schemes, on the other hand, measured a wider range of crimes and did not involve other interventions.

87.4 Justice for All

The government published its criminal justice white paper, Justice for All, (available from TSO as Cm. 5563, £20.75 and via the Home Office website). The white paper
begins with a statement of purpose – to send the clearest possible signal to those committing offences that the criminal justice system is united in ensuring their detection, conviction and punishment. To detect more crime the government will: increase police numbers to 130,000 by spring 2003; increase spending on the police by around £1.5 billion by 2005/06 compared to 2002/03; encourage more specialist detective skills; set a clear target for increasing the proportion of police time spent on frontline work; and, better harness science and technology to find the evidence to detect offenders.

To get more defendants to court more quickly the government will: continue to co-locate the police and CPS in joint criminal justice units; allow CPS to take more responsibility for determining charges so that the right cases go to court on the right charges; invest over £600 million in criminal justice system information technology to manage cases more efficiently through the system; give sentence indication to encourage early guilty pleas; and give magistrates greater sentencing powers of up to twelve months so that they can hear and sentence more cases appropriate to them.

To prevent offending on bail the government will: give the police power to impose conditions on the suspect’s bail during the period before charge; weight the court’s discretion against granting bail to a defendant who has been charged with an imprisonable offence committed whilst already on bail for another offence; extend the prosecution’s right to appeal against bail to cover all imprisonable offences; and, pilot in high crime areas a presumption of remand into custody if a suspect tests positive for Class A drugs at arrest but refuses treatment.

To convict more of the guilty the government will: improve defence and prosecution disclosure by increasing incentives and sanctions to ensure compliance; allow the use of reported evidence (‘hearsay’) where there is good reason, such as where a witness cannot appear personally; allow for trial by judge alone in serious and complex fraud trials, some other complex and lengthy trials or where the jury is at risk of intimidation; and extend the availability of preparatory hearings to ensure that serious cases such as drug trafficking as well as complex ones can be properly prepared.

At trial the government will: allow the court to be informed of a defendant’s previous convictions where appropriate; remove the double jeopardy rule for serious cases if compelling new evidence comes to light; give witnesses greater access to their original statements at trial; give the prosecution the right of appeal against rulings which terminate the prosecution case before the jury decides; and, increase the proportion of the population eligible for jury service.

Where a defendant is convicted the government will: focus custody on dangerous, serious and seriously persistent offenders and those who consistently breach community sentences; ensure that dangerous violent and sexual offenders can be kept in custody for as long as they present a danger to the public; ensure tough, more intensive community sentences with multiple conditions like tagging, reparation and drug treatment and testing denying liberty, rehabilitate the offender and protect the public; ensure more uniformity in sentencing through a new sentencing guidelines council; enable courts to offer drug treatment as part of a community sentence for juveniles; introduce a new sentence of ‘custody minus’ – community supervision backed by automatic return to custody if the offender fails to comply with the conditions of their sentence; introduce a new sentence of ‘custody plus’ to ensure that short sentence prisoners are properly supervised and supported after release; and, introduce intermittent custody to enable use of weekend or night-time custody for low risk offenders.

87.5 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

In a busy period for the new Chief Inspector six new inspections have been published of HMPs Shrewsbury, Manchester, Lincoln, Long Lartin and Maidstone, and of HMYOI
Reading (available from HM Inspector of Prisons website and Home Office Public Enquiry Office). Of the full, announced inspection of Shrewsbury the Chief Inspector commented upon the good staff-prisoner relations, and described the prison as a ‘model’ community prison serving a specific locality, albeit constrained by its size and physical locality. The report on Manchester could hardly have been more different, and whilst the ‘can-do’ attitude of management and staff was noted, with commendable levels of association for prisoners, the reduction of staff by 30% (some 270 staff) had left a prison in which many people – staff and prisoners – felt ‘vulnerable, unsupported and uninformed’. Ms Owers comments that ‘there was the danger of a real gap between the prison that managers thought they were running and wanted to run, and the prison that was actually being run on the wings and landings’ (p. 4). She thought that this was partly as a consequence of a desire to ‘hit targets by concentrating on output, rather than outcome’ (p.5).

The unannounced follow-up inspection of HMP Lincoln documents continuing progress ‘from a traditional Victorian local prison culture towards the healthy prison model we expect’ (p.3), although health care remained a cause for concern, whilst a similar unannounced follow-up inspection of HMP Long Lartin similarly records ‘considerable progress since the last inspection’. However, concern was expressed about the lack of purposeful activity – echoing a theme in earlier reports. The announced inspection of HMP Maidstone found an ‘extremely well-run prison, with high levels of safety and respect between staff and prisoners’ (p.3), with a particularly good health care centre, which was described as ‘thriving and vibrant’. Nonetheless Ms Owers comments that the weakest area of a prison which is described as a ‘training prison’ was training and employment provision, with too few employment opportunities and an education department that was housed in a building which was ‘unsatisfactory, poorly ventilated and potentially unsafe’ (p.3).

The unannounced, follow-up inspection of HMYOI Reading was critical, and the Chief Inspector comments on its failure to provide ‘the environment that its young men needed’. There were dirty and cold cells, showers were in an appalling state and there was an ineffective incentives and earned privileges scheme. And, echoing a theme throughout the previous reports during this period, there was inadequate purposeful activity with little meaningful work that resulted in prisoners spending long periods in their cells. Crucially, Ms Owers also identifies ‘an institutional and systematic lack of respect’ (p.3) between staff and prisoners.