

# INSIGHT REPORT AN EASY TARGET?

Risk factors affecting victimisation  
rates for violent crime and theft

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# Executive summary

Crime is now at its lowest level since records began, having fallen by around two-thirds since its peak in 1995. The fall in overall crime has been mirrored across the vast majority of crime types including violent crime, theft and burglary. However, whilst the fall in the crime rate has been well documented, relatively little is known about the demographics of victims of crime and the risk factors affecting rates of victimisation across the population.

VS has undertaken a detailed and robust analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales to profile victims of violent crime and theft and identify the characteristics, behaviours and other factors that put people most at risk of suffering these two common offences. Between them, these two crime types account for almost 80% of all crime experienced by individuals and households in England and Wales.

Simple analysis of the data shows that certain groups, in particular those aged 20–24, people of mixed ethnicity, lone parents, and those living in cosmopolitan areas experience the highest rates of both violent crime and theft.

However, more detailed analysis (using logistic regression) reveals a distinct, very significant and previously unknown risk factor – that of limiting disability or illness. In fact limiting disability or illness is the single risk factor common across all four crime categories we analysed (violence with injury, violence without injury, personal theft, and household theft). It is therefore the case that having a limiting disability or illness puts you at significantly increased risk of experiencing violence and theft even after controlling for other factors.

Our results reveal that people with limiting disabilities are almost three and half times more likely to suffer serious violence (violence with injury), twice as likely to suffer violence without injury, 1.6 times more likely to be a victim of personal theft, and 1.4 times more likely to be a victim of household theft than adults without a limiting disability. Having a limiting disability puts you at statistically greater risk of violence than visiting a nightclub once a week or more and is the strongest factor other than geographical area to increase your risk of theft.

Further, whilst violent crime has fallen by almost half (48.6%) for the non-disabled population over the past 10 years, over the same period the proportion of people with a limiting disability/illness who were victims of violence actually increased. So in stark contrast to the rest of the population, people with a limiting disability are now at greater risk of suffering violent crime than they were a decade ago.

These findings are clearly deeply alarming and warrant both further investigation and action. As yet, relatively little is known about the reasons for the increased risks faced by disabled people and even less is known about how to mitigate those risks. Victim Support recommends that further research be urgently undertaken to enhance our understanding of this issue and how best to protect and support disabled people. In the meantime professionals working with disabled people, including those working in health, social care and the justice system should be made aware of the increased risks faced by this group and the sources of support and information available to them should they be victimised.

# Introduction: the story of crime – decline and fall?

The story of crime in England and Wales over the past two decades is one of sustained and dramatic decline. Latest figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) show that there were an estimated 6.6 million crimes against individuals and households last year<sup>1</sup>. This represents a fall of 30% over the past five years and a staggering 66% since crime peaked in 1995<sup>2</sup>.

Crime is now at its lowest level since the CSEW began in 1981 and the fall in overall crime has been mirrored across the vast majority of crime types including violent crime, theft and burglary. Violent crime, for example, has declined 66% since 1995, meaning that whereas 5 in every 100 adults were violently victimised two decades ago, the figure is just 2 in 100 today<sup>3</sup>. Similarly domestic burglary has dropped 69% since the mid-nineties, meaning households are four times less likely to be burgled today than they were in 1995<sup>4</sup>.

Whilst the most dramatic falls in crime occurred in the 10 year period between 1995 and 2005, crime is continuing on a broadly downward trajectory, albeit with some fluctuations. The sustained drop in criminal offending has been lauded by politicians, criminal justice professionals and academics alike. Prime Minister David Cameron recently made reference to the declining crime rate, stating: "It's encouraging to see that crime is at its lowest level since records began... the police are doing a great job."<sup>5</sup>

However, whilst the fall in crime over recent decades is undoubtedly hugely welcome,

there is a danger of losing sight of the victims of crime and the often devastating impact that crime still has every day in England and Wales. In 2014/15 there were approximately 1.3 million violent crimes, 4 million thefts including 785,000 burglaries, 1.3 million incidences of criminal damage and 90,000 robberies. For each one of these offences there is a victim, who in many cases is deeply emotionally, psychologically, physically or behaviourally affected. Additionally the effects of crime ripple out, extending to family, friends and the wider community.

Research conducted by VS on a nationally representative sample of victims of crime found that 61% of victims were affected by a crime psychologically or personally. Some of the most common problems reported by victims following the crime were anxiety (22%), loss of confidence (21%), safety concerns (21%), insomnia (19%), crying (16%), reduced social life (14%), fear or anger (13%) and financial hardship (11%). In 10% of incidents the crime impacted on the victims' family and in more than a fifth of cases (22%) victims changed their daily routines as a direct result of the crime.

Some crimes, in particular crimes of violence, tend to have particularly significant impacts. Eighty-one per cent of victims of violent crime reported being emotionally affected<sup>6</sup> and violent crime has been found to lower happiness and general life satisfaction<sup>7,8</sup>. In addition, violence can cause severe and long-lasting mental health problems, including fear, anxiety and depression.<sup>9,10,11,12,13</sup>

However, the significant negative impacts of crime are not restricted to serious offences such as violence. Research has shown that so called 'minor crimes' such as theft and burglary can also impact significantly on a victim's psychological health, wellbeing<sup>14</sup> and perceived safety<sup>15</sup>. Victims may suffer anxiety and stress long after the incident occurred<sup>16</sup> and many victims of robbery in particular adopt behavioural changes after the offence, such as avoiding certain people and places and even changing the way they look in order to appear less attractive targets.<sup>17</sup>

So whilst it is clear that crime has reduced considerably in recent decades it is also true that crime remains a significant social ill that has a negative impact on millions of people across England and Wales each year. Further, whilst both crime rates in general and the impacts of crime have been extensively researched, relatively little is known about the risk factors for being a victim of crime and what makes a person more vulnerable to victimisation.

This report seeks to answer the question 'who is most likely to be a victim of crime?' and explores the relative risk factors affecting rates of victimisation across different groups in the population. It seeks to map the prevalence of crime across different social groups with a view to determining who is at greatest risk.

The report brings together findings from the reports 'VS focus on violence' and 'VS focus on theft' to identify the common risk factors affecting the likelihood of victimisation. The data used in the analysis is drawn from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) for the years ending March 2014 and March 2015. The CSEW is a nationally representative survey of the population resident in households in England and Wales and is considered the most reliable picture of the extent of crime experienced by the population.

# Crime and victimisation – who is most at risk?

VS has analysed data from the CSEW for the crime categories ‘violent crime’ and ‘theft’ to determine who in the population is most at risk of victimisation.

We have selected ‘violent crime’<sup>i</sup> and ‘theft’<sup>ii</sup> as between them these two crime categories account for almost 80% of all crime experienced by individuals in England and Wales in a given year. Therefore analysis and comparison of these two crime types provides a good overview of the victimisation of the population as a whole. We analysed a number of personal, demographic, household and regional factors to find out what characteristics are associated with being a victim of crime<sup>iii</sup>.

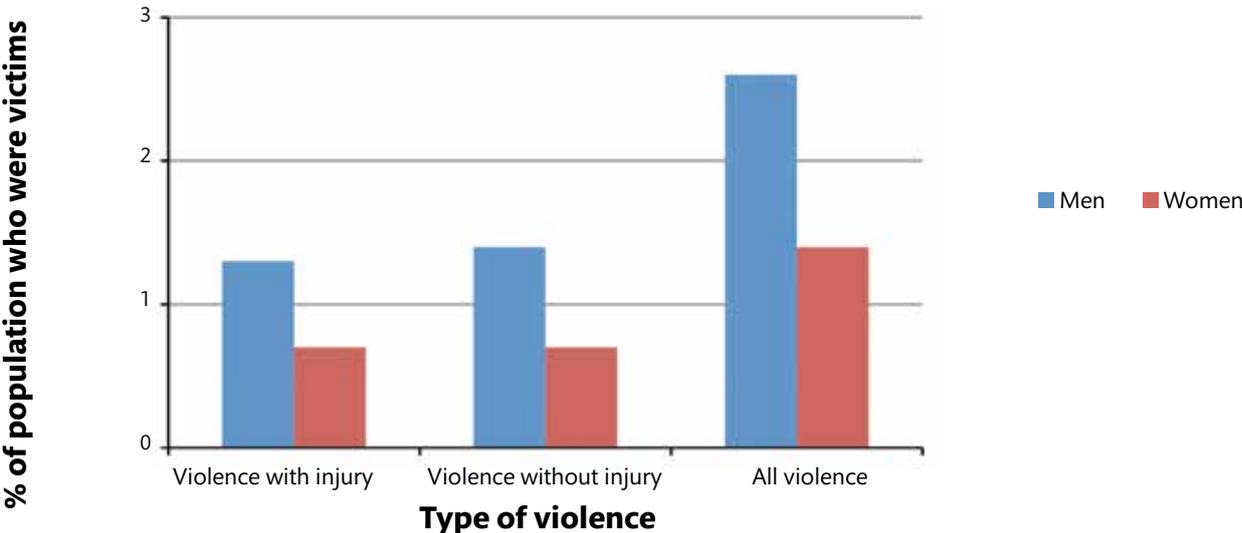
Results are broken down by gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, health status, income, household structure and area. This is followed by an exploration of the most significant risk factors affecting victimisation using logistic regression analysis.

### Gender

Gender is significantly associated with the risk of violent victimisation, with men being at considerably greater risk than women. For theft, however, the differences in victimisation rates between men and women are negligible and not statistically significant.

Figure 1 shows that men have a higher risk than women of violence both with and

Figure 1. Proportion of victims of violent crime by gender



<sup>i</sup> The Home Office states that: “Violent crimes are those where the victim is intentionally stabbed, punched, kicked, pushed, jostled, etc. or threatened with violence whether or not there is any injury.” (Home Office. (2011) User Guide to Home Office Crime Statistics. Retrieved from [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/116226/user-guide-crime-statistics.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116226/user-guide-crime-statistics.pdf))

<sup>ii</sup> The Theft Act 1968 defines provides the following definition of theft: “A person is guilty of theft if he dis-honestly appropriates property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it..”

<sup>iii</sup> Differences between categories within each set of characteristics were analysed using chi-square tests. Only statistically significant results are presented (unless indicated otherwise); this refers to a p-value of less than 0.05.

without injury. In the year 2014/15 2.6% of the male population were victims of 'all violence' compared with 1.4% of the female population. Women were equally likely to be

victims of violence with and without injury whilst men were slightly more likely to be victims of violence without injury.

Figure 2. Proportion of victims of violent crime by age group

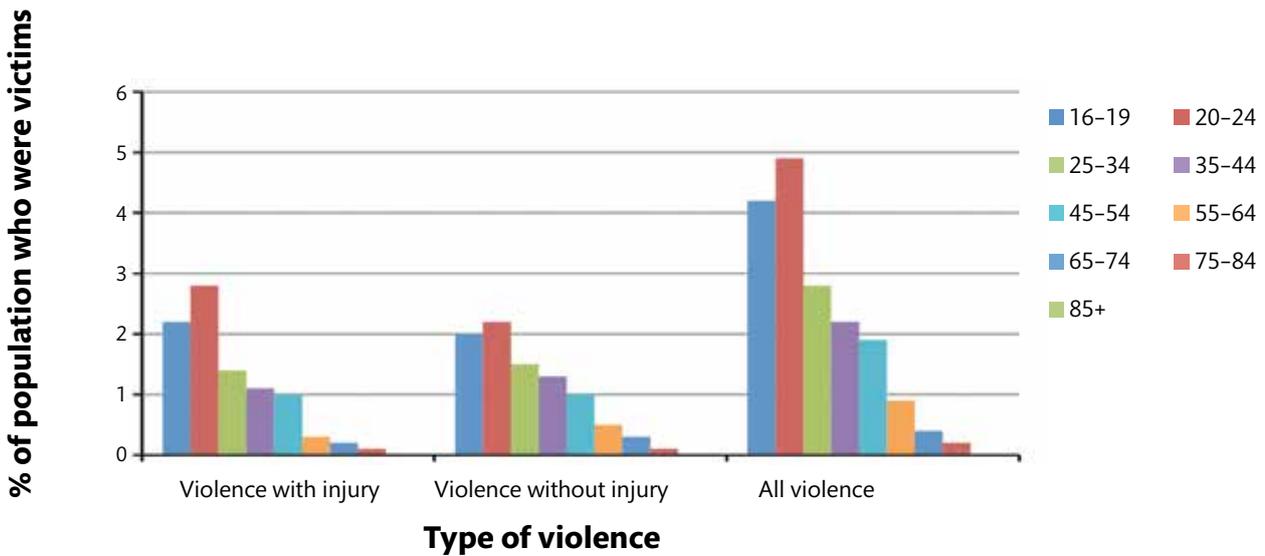
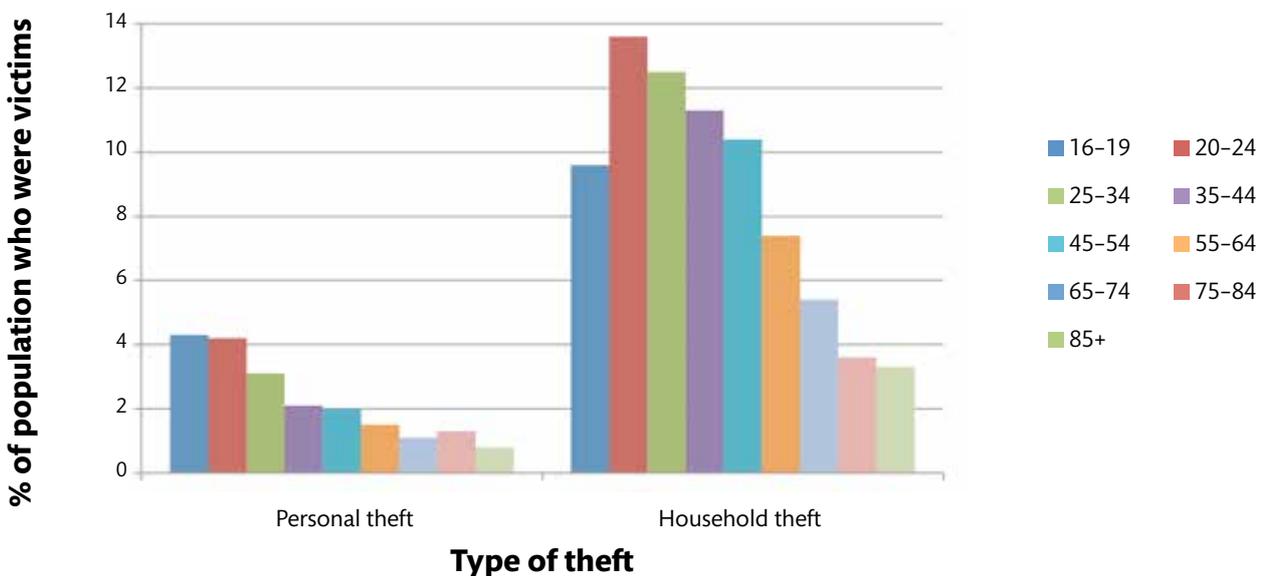


Figure 3. Proportion of victims of theft by age group



**Age**

The likelihood of being a victim of both violence and theft changes dramatically with age, with younger age groups being at an increased risk of both offences.

As shown in figures 2 and 3 above the likelihood of victimisation decreases with age. The most 'at risk' group for both violent crime and household theft is 20-24, with those aged 16-19 being at slightly higher risk of personal theft.

Adults aged 20–24 are almost five times more likely to be a victim of ‘all violence’ than adults aged 55–64, and those aged 16–24

(combining the two lower age groups) are twice as likely as adults aged 45–54 of being a victim of personal theft.

Figure 4. Proportion of victims of violent crime by ethnicity background

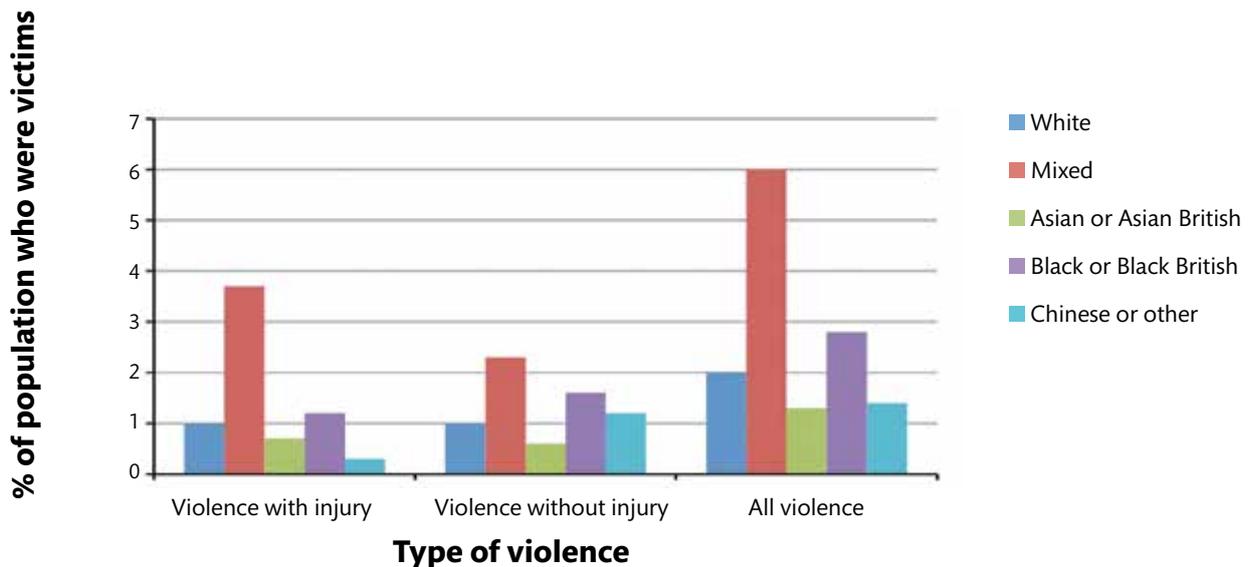
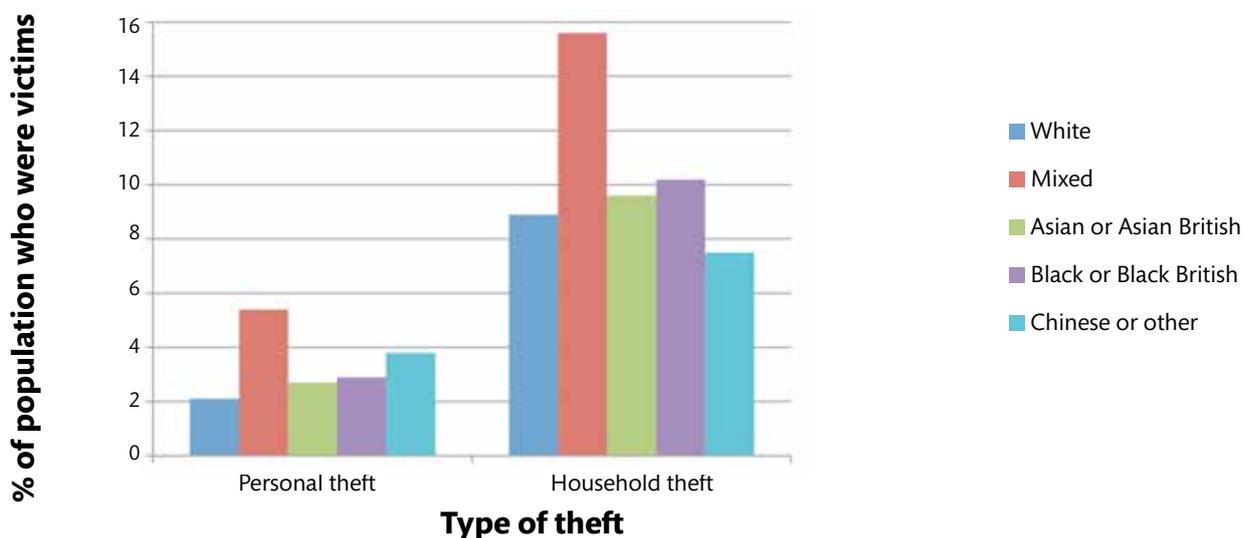


Figure 5. Proportion of victims of theft by ethnicity background



**Ethnicity**

Victimisation rates vary considerably between ethnic groups, with people of mixed ethnicity being more likely to be victims of violent crime (with and without injury) and of both personal and household theft.

Whilst people of mixed ethnicity are at greatest risk across all the categories of theft

and violence analysed, the picture for other groups is less consistent. Black or black British people are in the second highest risk category for violent crime with and without injury, and household theft, although not for personal theft. Other ethnic groups vary widely in their relative risk between categories. For example, people of Chinese or ‘other’ ethnicity are at

the second highest risk of personal theft, but the lowest risk of violence with injury.

The rates of repeat victimisation also vary by ethnicity but do not consistently map across to those at greatest risk overall. For example, whilst those of mixed ethnicity have the greatest likelihood of being victims of all violent crime, people of white ethnicity are at the greatest risk of repeat victimisation. Almost a quarter (23.8%) of victims with white background were victims more than once, compared to 18.4% of victims with mixed ethnicity background, 5.6% of victims

with black ethnicity background and 2.2% of victims with Asian ethnicity background. For personal theft, those of Chinese and mixed ethnicity had highest rates of repeat victimisation at 29.4% and 29% respectively.

**Relationship status**

The likelihood of victimisation varies by relationship status, as can be seen in figures 6 and 7 below.

People who are separated and single have the highest rates of victimisation in terms of violent crime and personal theft, whereas those who are cohabiting are at greatest risk

Figure 6. Proportion of victims of violent crime by marital status

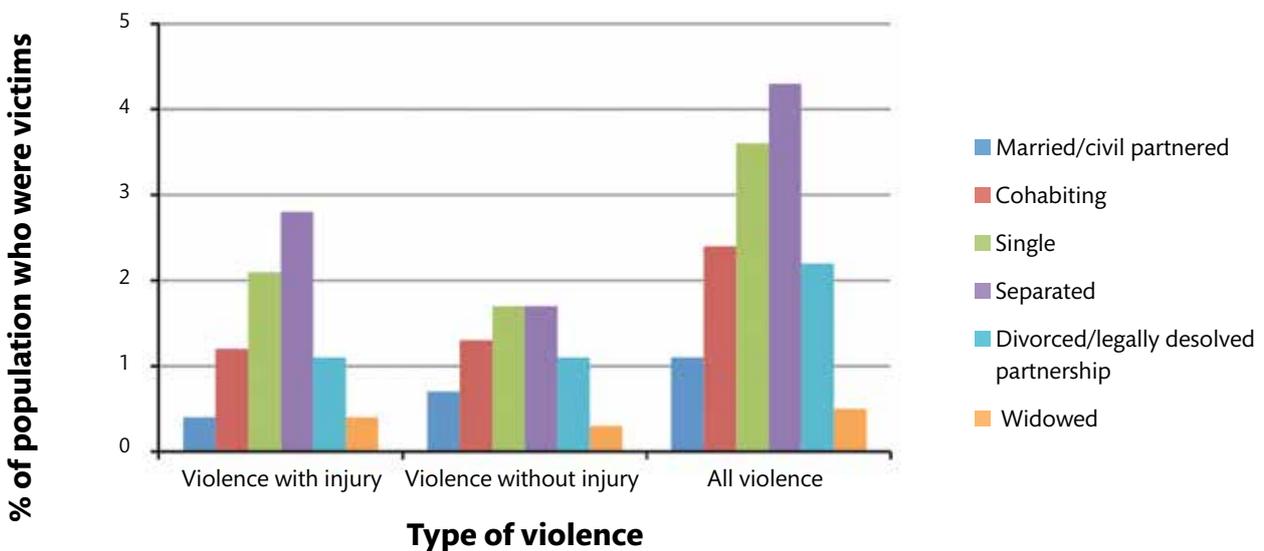
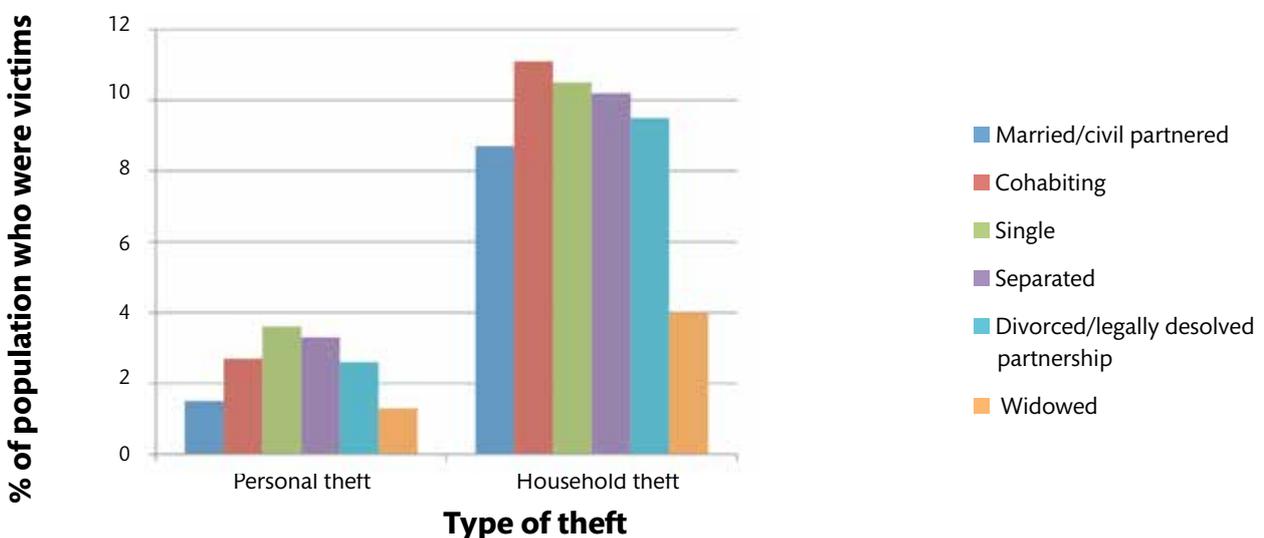


Figure 7. Proportion of victims of theft by marital status



of household theft. Across all categories those who are widowed are at lowest risk.

The difference between those most and least at risk is particularly stark for violent crime, with separated adults more than four times as likely to suffer 'all violence' compared to adults who are married or civil partnered. Separated adults are also more likely to be repeat victims of violence with injury than people of any other marital status; almost half (47%) of the victims of violence with injury who were separated were victims more than once. The figures were significantly lower for adults who were single, married, divorced or cohabiting (24.8%, 23.1%, 14.0% and 11.2% respectively).

**Health status**

Health status is a statistically significant factor affecting victimisation rates for violent crime and, when other factors controlled, for theft too. Figure 8 below presents the differences in terms of violent crime between people with various health statuses.

Adults with limiting disability or long-standing illness had a higher risk of being a victim of violence with injury and 'all violence' than adults with non-limiting disability/illness and those without disability or illness. Those with a disability (whether limiting or not) were also at greater risk than the non disabled of falling victim to violence without injury.

Figure 8. Proportion of victims of violent crime by health status

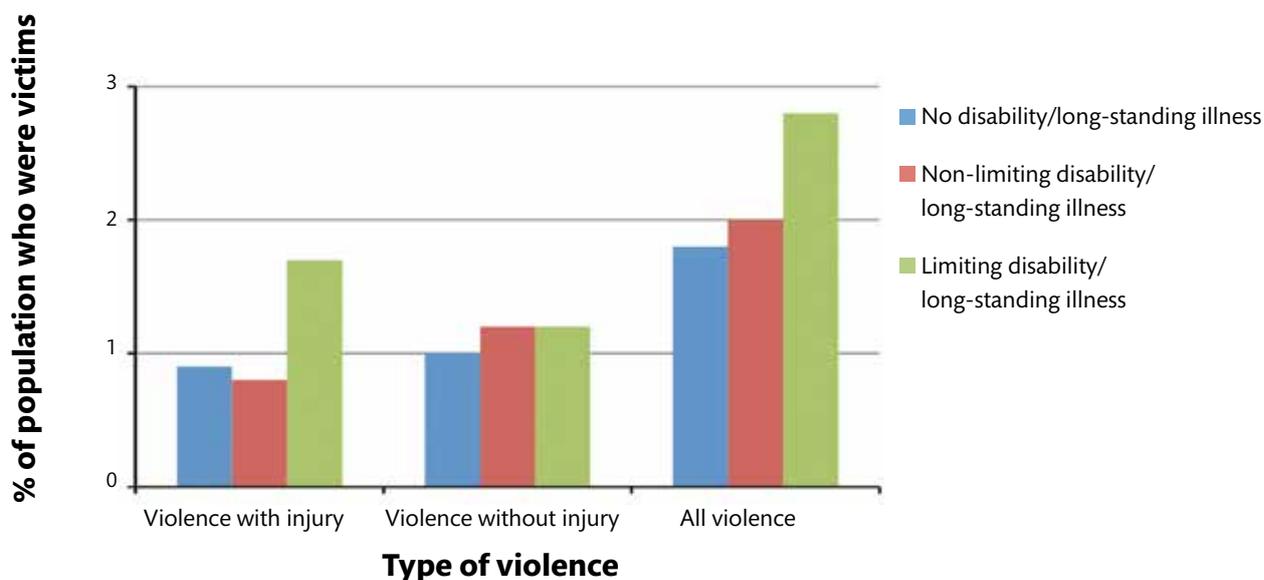


Figure 9. Proportion of victims of violent crime by household income

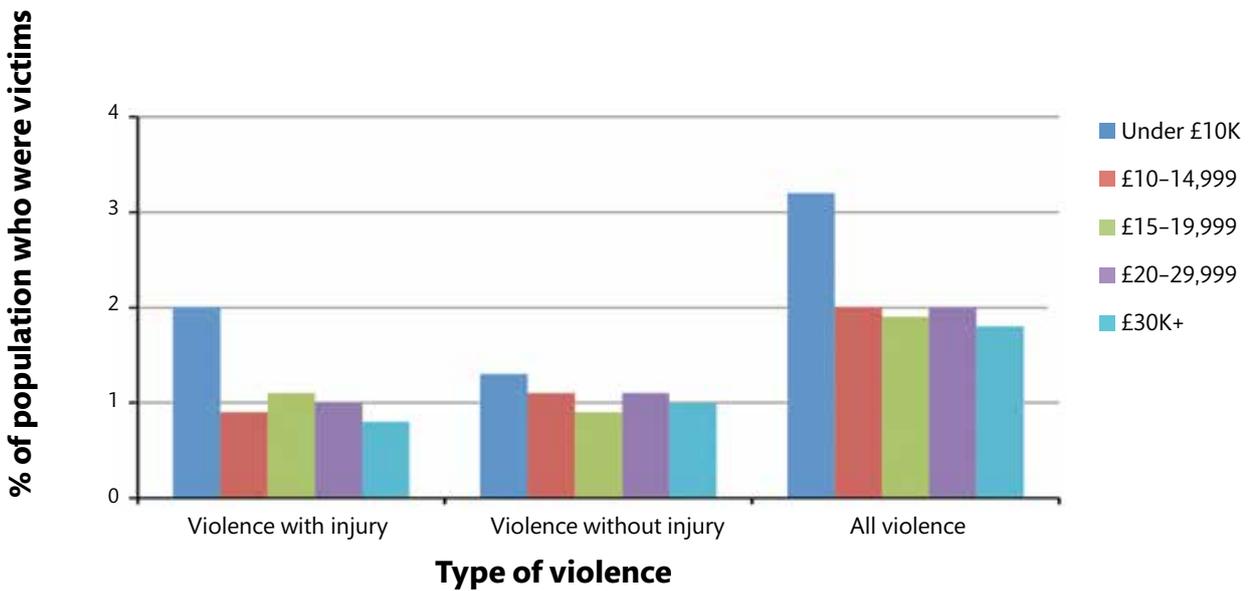
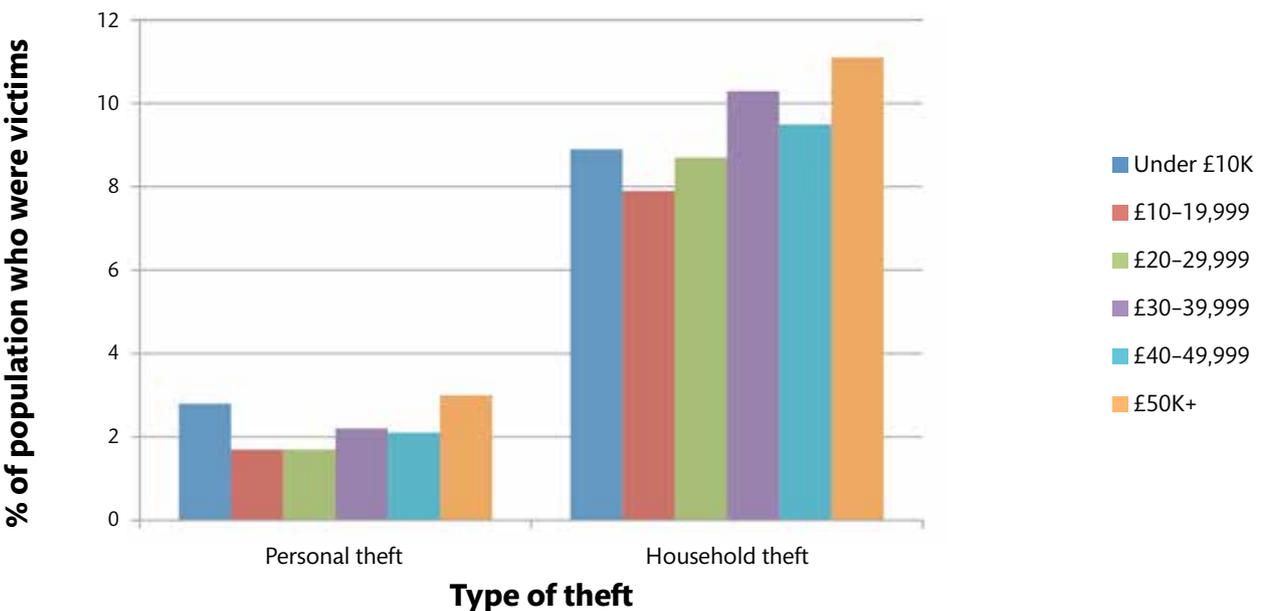


Figure 10. Proportion of victims of theft by household income



**Income**

Analysis of the crime rates for violence and theft broken down by household income show that these offences disproportionately affect the poorest in society.

Figures 9 and 10 above reveal that those living in households with an income of under £10,000 are at the greatest risk of all forms of violence and form the second highest risk group for personal theft. Household theft is

the only category for which the poorest are at lower (although not least) risk. However, even within this category they have the highest rate of repeat victimisation, with more than a quarter (25.6%) of those who were victims in such households falling victim more than once in a single year. By contrast, for those with a household income of £50,000 or more (the highest risk category for theft), only 18.3% of victims were classified as repeat victims.

Figure 11. Proportion of victims of violent crime by household structure

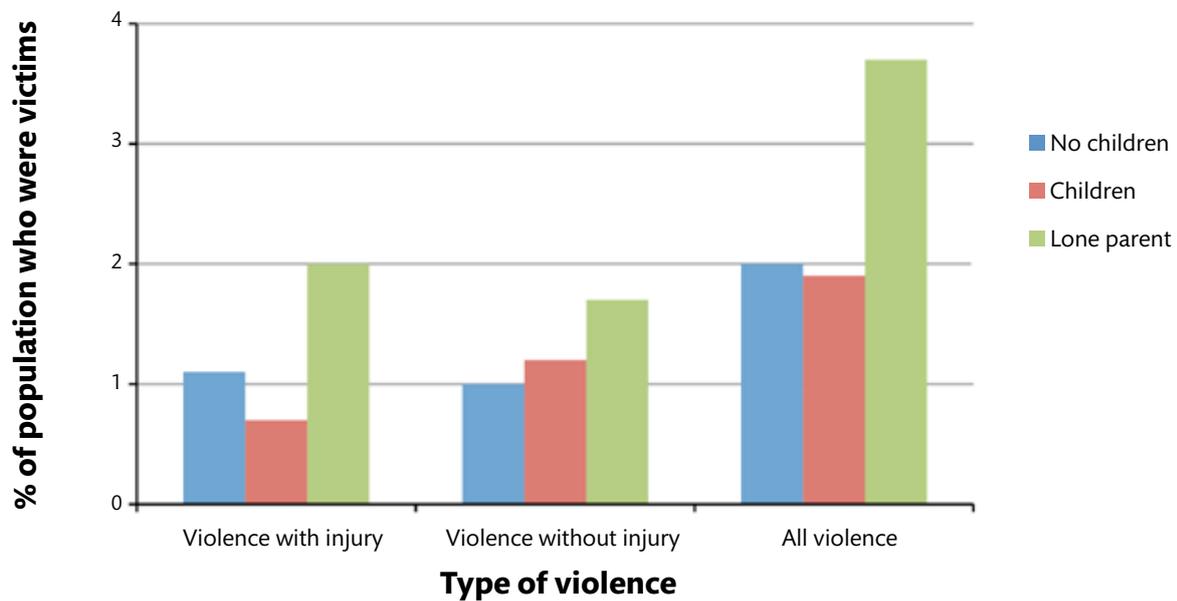
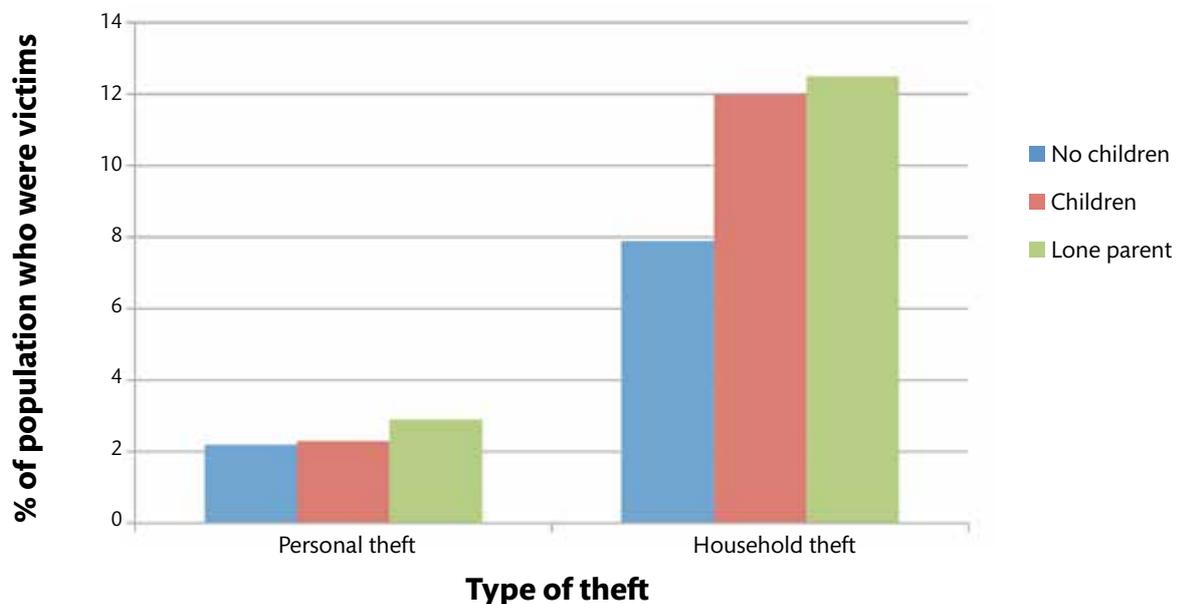


Figure 12. Proportion of victims of theft by household structure



**Household structure**

Figures 11 and 12 show the breakdown of victimisation by household structure.

As can be seen in the above charts, lone parents are at greatest risk of all forms of violence and household theft. People living in single parent households are also at higher risk of repeat victimisation for household

theft, with 27.1% of lone parent victims experiencing repeat victimisation compared to 17.6% of those living in a household without children.

Figure 13. Proportion of victims of violent crime by 2011 OAC

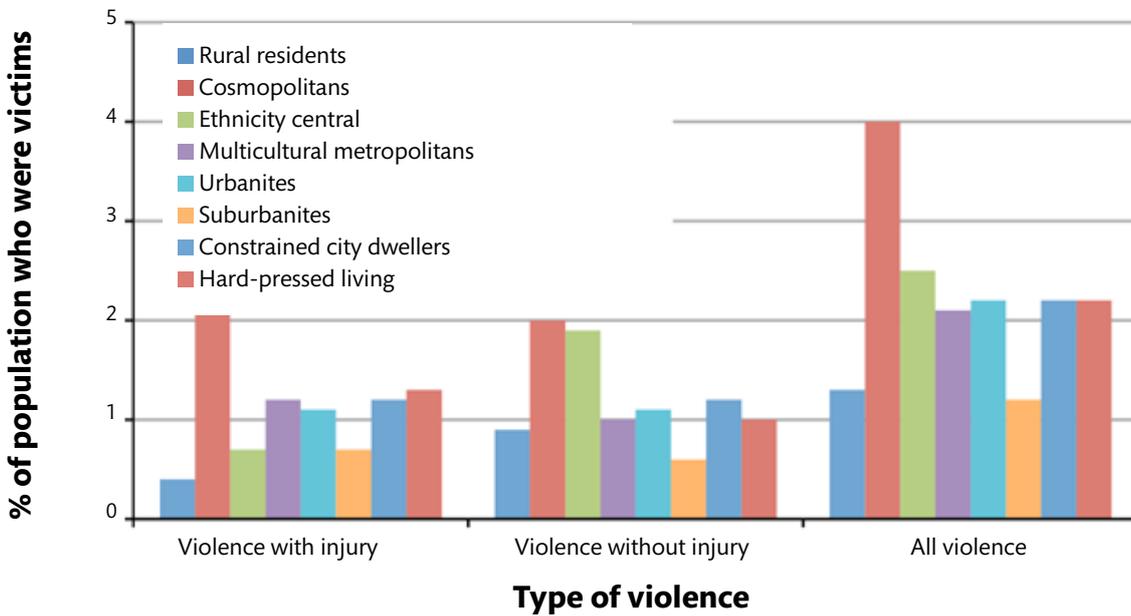
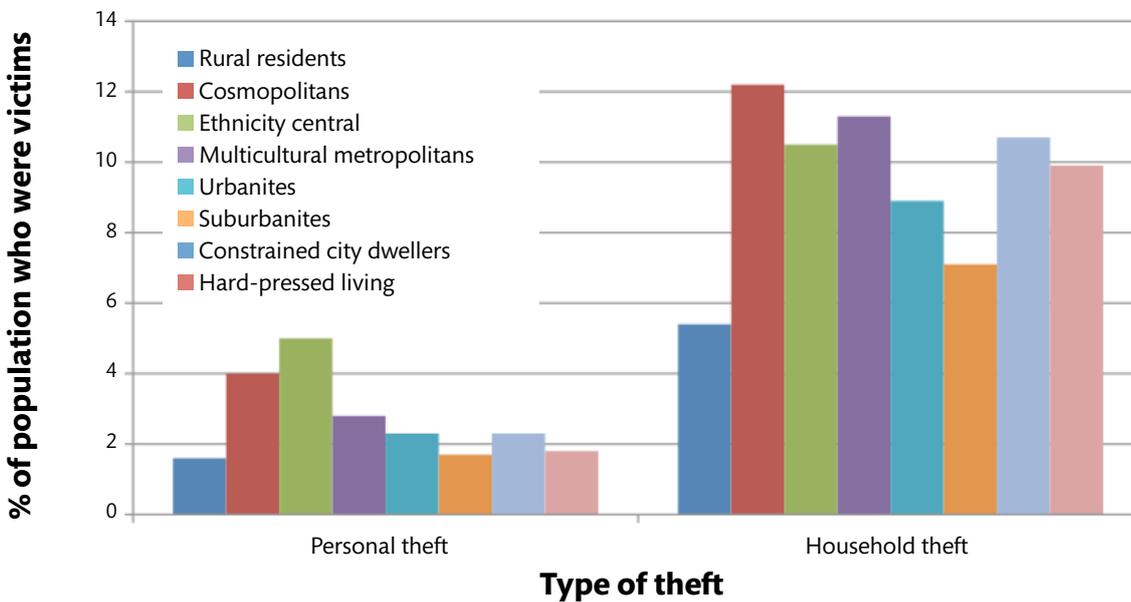


Figure 14. Proportion of victims of theft by 2011 OAC



**Area**

The risk of falling victim to both violence and theft varies by area. Figures 13 and 14 use the 2011 Area Classification for Output Areas (2011 OAC)<sup>iv</sup> to show how an area's

characteristics are associated with the likelihood of being a victim of crime.

People living in cosmopolitan areas are more likely to be victims of violence

<sup>iv</sup>Area classifications group together geographic areas according to key characteristics common to the population in that grouping, using census data.

(4% of cosmopolitan residents compared to 1.3% of rural residents) and household theft (12.2% of cosmopolitan residents compared to 5.4% of rural residents).

For personal theft, the highest risk areas are those classified as ethnicity central. The proportion of repeat victimisation for personal theft is also higher for ethnically-central residents than for residents of other areas (21.1% of victims living in ethnically-central areas were victims more than once compared to 4.8% of cosmopolitan residents and 9.6% of rural residents). Repeat victimisation is also high for constrained city dwellers (17.4% of victims living in constrained city dweller areas were victims more than once).

### *Risk factors – digging deeper...*

Whilst the above charts and commentary outline the groups most at risk of victimisation in absolute terms, they provide only a crude overview of the true picture. In reality a number of the factors affecting the likelihood of victimisation are interrelated – for example there is a strong correlation between age and being widowed, with older people more likely to be widowed than younger people. Both older people and widows/widowers have a reduced risk of violence and theft, but is this because they are older or because they are widowed? To disentangle the many interrelated factors affecting the risk of victimisation we further explored the relative influence of each factor using logistic regression analysis.

The results of the regression analysis show the factors contributing most to overall risk of victimisation when controlling for other variables. They are broken down by violent crime with injury, violent crime without injury, personal theft and household theft.

### *Violent crime with injury*

The factors that have the greatest contribution to the likelihood of being a victim of violent crime with injury are:

- People with limiting disability/illness are more than three (3.4) times as likely as people without a limiting disability/illness to be a victim of violent crime with injury.
- Adults who are separated are 3.6 times more likely than married adults to be a victim of violence with injury.
- People of mixed ethnicity background are 2.8 times more likely to be a victim of violence with injury compared to people of white ethnicity background.
- The likelihood of young adults aged 20–24 being a victim of violence with injury is more than double (2.5) the likelihood of adults aged 45–55.
- Men are 1.8 times more likely than women to be a victim of violence with injury.

### *Violent crime without injury*

The factors that make the largest contribution to the likelihood of being a victim of violence without injury are:

- Adults with a limiting disability/illness are twice as likely as adults without a disability to be a victim of violent crime without injury.
- Men are twice as likely as women to be a victim of violent crime without injury.

*Personal theft*

The factors making the greatest contribution to the likelihood of being a victim of personal theft are:

- People with limiting disability/illness are 1.6 times more likely than people without a limiting disability/illness to be a victim of personal theft.
- People living in ethnicity-central areas are three times more likely to be a victim of personal theft compared to people living in suburbanite areas.

*Household theft*

The characteristics with the largest contribution to the likelihood of being a victim of household theft are:

- Adults with limiting disability/illness are 1.4 times more likely to be victims of household theft compared to adults without a limiting disability/illness.
- People living in cosmopolitan areas are 1.7 times more likely than people living in suburbanite areas to be victims of household theft.
- People living in constrained city dweller areas are 1.6 times more likely to be a victim of household theft than people living in suburbanite areas.
- People living in multicultural metropolitan areas are 1.5 times more likely than people living in suburbanite areas to be victims of household theft.
- People living in hard pressed living areas are 1.3 times more likely than people living in suburbanite areas to be victims of household theft.

The most revelatory finding of the regression analysis is that having a limiting disability is a strong risk factor across all the crime types analysed. Indeed it is the only factor to appear amongst the list of those making the 'strongest contribution' to risk across both types of violence and theft.

# Disability and victimisation – targeting the vulnerable?

The results of our analysis show that having a limiting disability puts you at significantly greater risk of suffering from violence and theft, even when other factors such as income and area are controlled for. This is clearly an alarming finding and one that warrants further attention and analysis.

Looking at the results in greater detail, we find that not only are people with a limiting disability almost three and half times more likely than those without to suffer serious violent crime (violence with injury), limiting disability is one of the strongest risk factors for this type of violence.

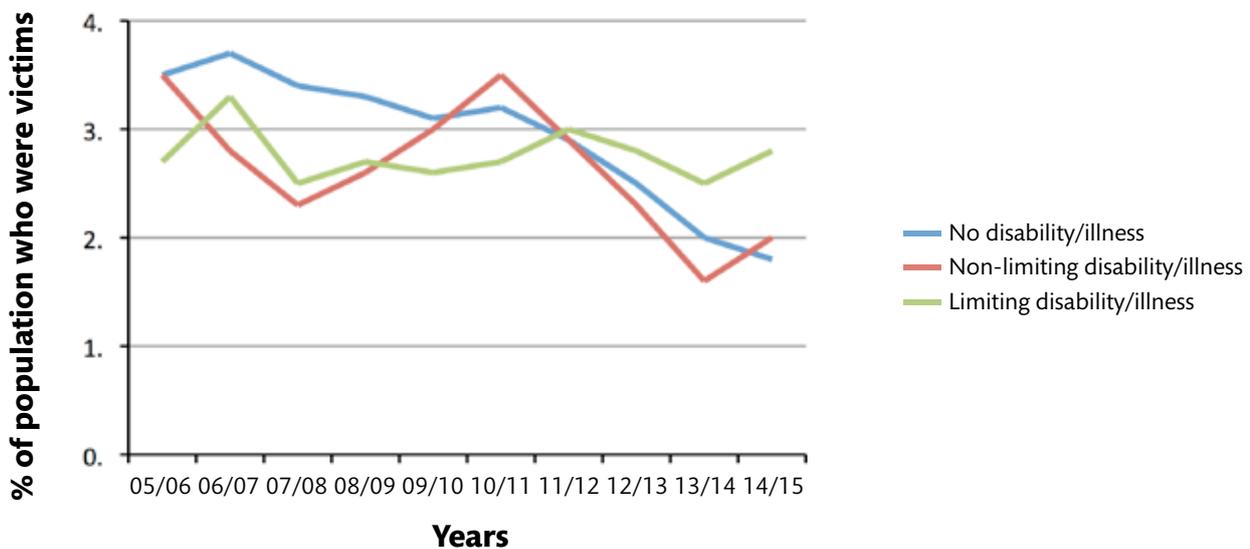
Indeed having a limiting disability puts you at statistically greater risk of violence with injury than visiting a nightclub once a week or more. This is significant as regular night club visits are in themselves a considerable risk factor. The same is true of less serious violence, where limiting disability outranks both nightclub visits and age as a risk factor (people who visit a nightclub once a week or more are 2.4 times more likely to be a victim of violent crime without injury than people who do not and young adults aged 16–19 are 2.8 times more likely to be a victim of violent crime without injury than adults aged 45–55).

Similar results are found for theft, where having a limiting disability is the strongest factor other than the area you live in to significantly increase your chances of victimisation.

It is therefore abundantly clear that disabled people, and in particular those with more serious (limiting) disabilities, are at greater risk of violent victimisation and theft. Not only are disabled people more likely to be victimised they are also more likely to be subject to serious violence resulting in injury than non disabled victims. Disability is the only factor that is common to violence with injury, violence without injury, personal theft and household theft in terms of significantly increasing the risk of victimisation.

Further, analysis of changes to victimisation rates over time reveal some interesting findings, particularly in relation to disability and violent crime, as shown in figure 15 overleaf.

Figure 15. Proportion of victims of all violent crimes by health status from 2005/06 to 2014/15



As the above chart demonstrates, over a period of 10 years from 2005/06 there was a fall of 48.6% in the proportion of people with no disability/illness who were victims of violence. Yet over the same period the proportion of people with a limiting disability/illness who were victims of violence actually increased by 3.7%. So in stark contrast to the rest of the population, people with a limiting disability are now at greater risk of suffering violent crime than they were a decade ago.

It is also interesting to note that at the beginning of the period in question non-disabled people were actually at greater risk of falling victim to violent crime than disabled people. This shifted over the course of 2011/12, when the proportion of people with a limiting disability/illness who suffered violence overtook the corresponding proportion of the non-disabled population. The most recent figures show that the proportion of people with a limiting disability/illness who suffer violence continues to increase, while the corresponding proportion for those without continues to decrease.

Further, due to the nature of the sample used in the CSEW, the figures for the proportion of disabled people falling victim to crime are likely to represent a significant under estimate. This is because the CSEW only interviews adults resident in households in England and Wales. It does not cover people living in institutions or group residencies and therefore does not cover disabled people living in care homes and other institutional settings.

The correlation between disability and victimisation has been explored in a number of publications which have highlighted in particular the increased risk of suffering violent crime.<sup>18,19</sup> An analysis of CSEW data from the survey of 2010/11 found that 39% of disabled 16–34-year-olds were victims of violent crime compared with 28% of the non-disabled population in the same age group.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, a briefing paper issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2011 found that “disabled people in all age groups are more likely than non-disabled people to have experienced a crime in the past 12 months.”<sup>21</sup> Further, VS’ ‘At risk, yet dismissed’ report found that people with

mental health problems were considerably more likely to be victims of crime than the general population.<sup>22</sup>

Less explored are the reasons for the increased risk of victimisation faced by disabled people, and what literature exists largely originates from North America. The three primary explanations put forward are that a) disabled people are targeted because either in fact or in the perception of the perpetrator, they are more vulnerable and less likely to be able to secure justice, b) they are targeted because of hostility towards them (hate crime) or the perpetrator's desire to gain control, and c) they are more likely to fall victim to crime due to other personal, social and situational factors such as poverty and substance misuse.

The Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse produced a paper in 2001 entitled 'Working with Victims of Crime with Disabilities' which stated that "many people with disabling conditions are especially vulnerable to victimization [sic] because of their real or perceived inability to fight or flee, or to notify others and testify about the victimization [sic]<sup>23</sup>." The notion that disabled people are targeted because they are vulnerable is also put forward by Diagle who states that "being a vulnerable target is a key factor in a person's risk for victimisation"<sup>24</sup> and Regehr who argues that "disabled people are less likely to have learned social skills to protect themselves against crime than others in society."<sup>25</sup>

The proportion of crime against disabled people that falls into the category of 'hate crime' is difficult to establish, largely due to low reporting rates and a lack of awareness amongst police, criminal justice professionals and even disabled people themselves as to what constitutes a hate crime.<sup>26</sup> Figures from the most recent CSEW suggests that the

vast majority of violent offences committed against disabled people are not hate crimes, with only 18 out of 184 incidents of violent crime against disabled people being recorded as disability motivated. A report by the Disability and Human Rights Commission found that in only 4% of incidents in which disabled people were targeted did they believe this was because of their impairment.<sup>27</sup> Whilst the true extent of disability hate crime may be difficult to quantify it seems highly unlikely that hate crime alone can account for the very large increased risk of both violent crime and theft experienced by disabled people.

The last explanation, that disabled people are more likely to be victimised due to personal, social and situation factors is put forward by Saxton and others who cite factors such as exclusion from education and employment, poor economic status, and increased rates of substance abuse as amongst those leading to an increased risk. A further paper focusing on domestic violence against disabled women points to the dynamic between the victim and the caregiver as a potential factor, stating that "many women with disabilities are dependent on a caregiver, either a spouse, other family members, or paid assistants, for essential personal services. This dependence can create stress on caregivers and raise issues of power and control, which can lead to abuse. Further, this very dependence, which can breed abuse, also creates a barrier to terminating the abusive situation because to do so would leave the woman without essential support services."<sup>28</sup>

Whilst the explanations above may partially account for the increased risk of victimisation faced by disabled people, we are far from having a full understanding of risk or protective factors. Further, none of the explanations can account for why the risk of violent crime in particular is

actually increasing for those with a limiting disability. Crucially, neither health, social care or criminal justice professionals have the expertise and solutions necessary to start addressing the risk and tackling the causes of offending against disabled people. It is clear that more research is needed both into the causes of the increased victimisation of disabled people and how disabled people can be better protected.

# Conclusions and recommendations

The crime rate in England and Wales has dropped dramatically over the past two decades and now stands at the lowest level since records began. However, detailed analysis of the CSEW shows that the substantial fall in crime has not been felt evenly across the population. People with a limiting disability are at a substantially increased risk of suffering violent victimisation and theft, even when controlling for other variables such as income. Further, the risk of an adult with a limiting disability being the victim of violence has actually increased over the past 10 years.

Whilst there is a reasonable body of research highlighting the correlation between disability and victimisation,

little is known about the reasons for the increased risk, and even less is known about how to mitigate those risks. It is clear that further research is needed to build a greater understanding of the risks faced by disabled people and how they can be better protected from victimisation.

We therefore recommend that further research is conducted into this important area. In the meantime, and while our understanding of this issue is further developed, professionals working with disabled people, including those working in health, social care and justice systems should be made aware of the increased risks faced by this group and the sources of support and information available to them should they be victimised.

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