

Article

Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2023

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



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Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Trends in homicide](#)
3. [Variations in homicide victimisation by personal characteristics](#)
4. [The relationship between victims and suspects](#)
5. [The most common methods of killing](#)
6. [Circumstances and location of homicides](#)
7. [Drug- and alcohol-related homicides](#)
8. [Suspects in homicide cases](#)
9. [International homicide comparisons](#)
10. [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2023 data](#)
11. [Glossary](#)
12. [Data sources and quality](#)
13. [Related links](#)
14. [Cite this article](#)

1 . Main points

- There were 590 homicides recorded in the year ending March 2023, 14% lower than the previous year (684 offences).
- This was the lowest number of homicides since the year ending March 2016 (538), excluding the year ending March 2021 when volumes of public space violence tended to be suppressed because of coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown periods.
- The homicide rate was 9.9 victims per million population, with the rate for males (14.2 per million population) more than twice that for females (6.0 per million population).
- The homicide rate over the three-year period to the year ending March 2023 was 39.8 victims per million population for the Black ethnic group, more than four times higher than for the White ethnic group (8.7 victims per million population).
- There were 51 homicide victims aged 13 to 19 years in the year ending March 2023, down from 70 the previous year.
- Teenage victims were far more likely to be killed by a knife or a sharp instrument (82% of homicides) than for victims of all ages (41%); this was a higher proportion than the previous year where 73% of teenage victims were killed by a knife or sharp instrument.
- There were 100 domestic homicides in the year ending March 2023, 37 fewer than the previous year, and the lowest annual figure since these data were first collected electronically in 1977.
- Women were more likely to be killed by someone they knew than men, for example, of the 100 domestic homicide victims in the year ending March 2023, 70 were women.

2 . Trends in homicide

As homicide is a relatively low-volume offence, there will be fluctuations in numbers from year to year. This is especially true where data have been broken down further for analyses. Figures should therefore be interpreted with caution.

There were 590 victims of homicide in the year ending March 2023, 94 fewer (a 14% decrease) than the previous year (684 victims; [Appendix table 1](#)).

The number of homicides in the latest year was the lowest since the year ending March 2016, when there were 538 homicides (excluding the year ending March 2021 when volumes of public space crime tended to be suppressed because of coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown periods).

The number of homicides decreased in all regions across England and Wales in the year ending March 2023 with the exception of the North East of England, where there were 38 homicides, 11 more than the previous year.

Longer-term trends in homicide

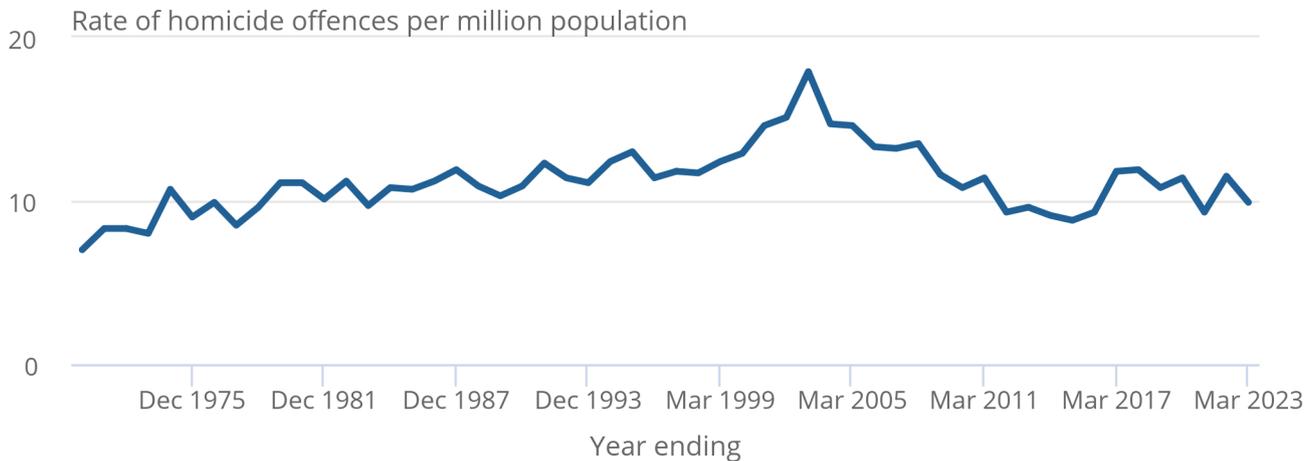
Compared with most other crimes, the homicide rate remains very low, with 9.9 homicides recorded per million population during the year ending March 2023. This was the lowest rate per population since the year ending March 2016 (excluding the coronavirus pandemic-affected year ending March 2021 (9.3)) (Figure 1).

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

Homicide rate, England and Wales, year ending December 1970 to year ending March 2023

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

Homicide rate, England and Wales, year ending December 1970 to year ending March 2023



Source: Homicide Index from the Home Office

Notes:

1. Year ending December 1987 includes 15 victims of Michael Ryan.
2. Year ending March 2001 includes 58 Chinese nationals who suffocated in a lorry on the way into the UK.
3. Year ending March 2003 includes 173 victims of Doctor Harold Shipman.
4. Year ending March 2004 includes 20 cockle pickers who drowned in Morecambe Bay.
5. Year ending March 2006 includes 52 victims of the 7 July London bombings.
6. Year ending March 2011 includes 12 victims of the Derrick Bird shooting.
7. Year ending March 2017 includes 96 victims of the Hillsborough disaster and four victims of the Westminster Bridge attack.
8. Year ending March 2018 includes 31 victims of the terrorist attacks that involved multiple victims, including the Manchester Arena bombing and the London Bridge attack. It also includes 11 victims from the Shoreham air crash.
9. Year ending March 2020 includes 39 human trafficking victims who were found dead in a lorry in Essex.
10. Homicide Index data are based on the year when the offence was recorded as a crime, not when the offence took place or when the case was heard in court.

Further information on the longer-term trends in homicide since the 1960s can be found in [Section 2 of our Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2021 bulletin](#).

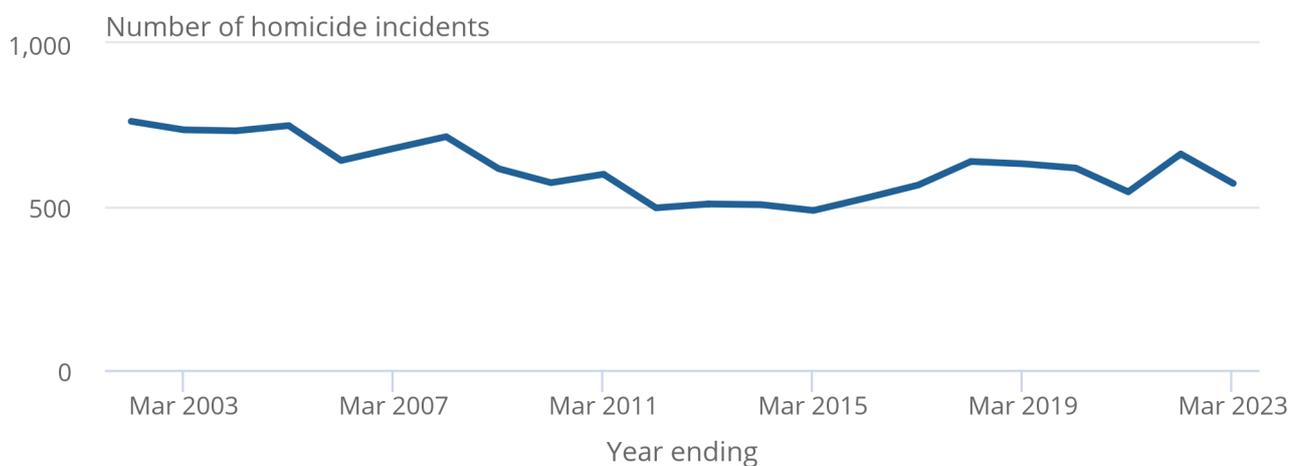
Homicide trends can be affected by single incidents involving multiple victims. In the year ending March 2023, there were 571 separate homicide incidents, 90 fewer than the previous year (661 homicide incidents) ([Appendix table 2](#)). Figure 2 shows the number of separate homicide incidents, rather than number of victims, as an alternative picture on trends.

Figure 2: The number of homicide incidents has decreased following an increase the previous year

Number of homicide incidents, England and Wales, year ending March 2002 to year ending March 2023

Figure 2: The number of homicide incidents has decreased following an increase the previous year

Number of homicide incidents, England and Wales, year ending March 2002 to year ending March 2023



Source: Homicide Index from the Home Office

The number of incidents recorded in the year ending March 2023 was [statistically significantly](#) lower compared with the previous year. In contrast, there was no significant difference between the latest year and the six years before.

Further information on the methodology used to test statistical significance can be found in [Section 12: Data sources and quality](#).

3 . Variations in homicide victimisation by personal characteristics

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

Sex

As in previous years, the majority of homicide victims were male, making up around 7 in 10 of all victims (71%) with around 3 in 10 being female (29%).

The number of both male and female victims decreased in the year ending March 2023 (by 16% and 8%, respectively), following increases in the previous year. For those female victims where a suspect had been charged, 95% (114) of those suspects were male. Similarly, for male victims, 93% (274) of suspects were also male ([Appendix table 34](#)).

Figure 3: The number of male and female homicide victims has decreased in the latest year following an increase the previous year

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2008 to year ending March 2023

Figure 3: The number of male and female homicide victims has decreased in the latest year following an increase the previous year

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2008 to year ending March 2023



Source: Homicide Index from the Home Office

Notes:

1. Year ending March 2017 includes 89 male and 7 female victims of the Hillsborough disaster.
2. Year ending March 2017 includes 1 female and 3 male victims of the Westminster Bridge attack.
3. Year ending March 2018 includes 21 female and 10 male victims of terrorist attacks that involved multiple victims, and 11 male victims of Shoreham air crash.
4. Year ending March 2020 includes 30 male and 9 female victims whose bodies were found in a lorry in Essex.

The latest annual homicide rate for males (14 per million population) was more than double that for females (6 per million population). This pattern was seen in most age groups, with the exception of under 1 year, and 75 years and over, where the rates across the sexes were similar ([Appendix table 4](#)).

Age

The most common age group for victims of homicides recorded in the year ending March 2023 was those aged 25 to 34 years (103 victims) (Figure 4).

As in previous years, children aged under 1 year had the highest rate of homicide (28 per million population, 17 offences). This rate fluctuates from year to year because of the low number of victims in this age group. This was followed by those aged 16 to 24 years (16 per million population).

There were 51 homicides where the victim was a teenager (aged 13 to 19 years). In around 8 in 10 (82%) of these, the method of killing was with a knife or sharp instrument ([Appendix table 10](#)). This was the highest proportion since age data were first collected electronically in 1977. This compared with 41% for all homicide victims. See [Section 5: The most common methods of killing](#) for more detail on sharp instrument (including knives) homicides.

There was a decrease in levels of homicide for most age groups compared with the previous year, apart from those aged 55 to 64 years, and 75 years and older, where there were small increases (a rise of 2 and 3 homicides, respectively) ([Appendix table 4](#)). Trends by age group can fluctuate because of low numbers (Figure 4).

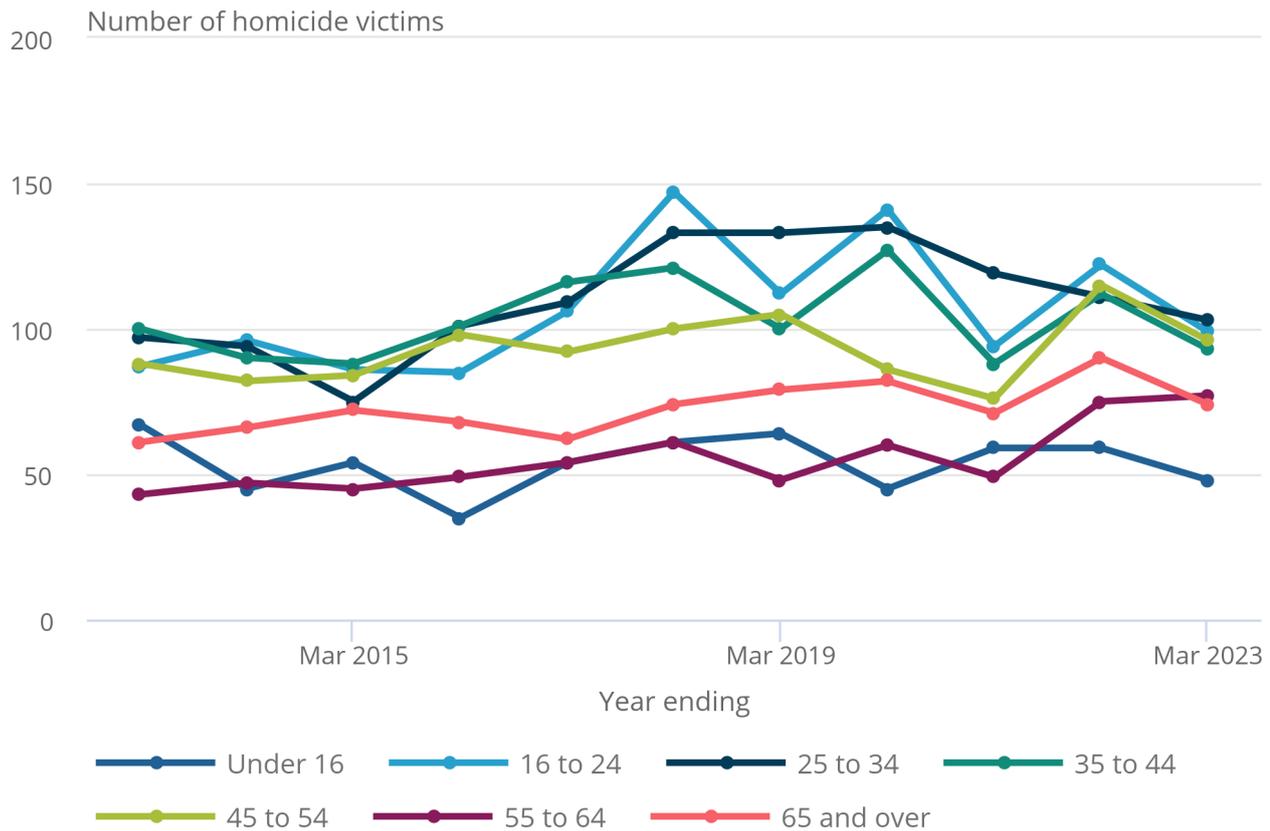
The largest percentage decreases in the year ending March 2023 were in the younger age groups, with a fall of 19% in both the under-16 years (from 59 to 48) and the 16 to 24 year (from 122 to 99) age groups. These were closely followed by those aged 35 to 44 years (from 112 to 93) and 45 to 54 years (115 to 96), which both decreased by 17% (Figure 4).

Figure 4: There was a decrease of homicide victims in most age groups in the latest year, except for those aged 55 to 64 years

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2013 to year ending March 2023 (excluding Hillsborough victims)

Figure 4: There was a decrease of homicide victims in most age groups in the latest year, except for those aged 55 to 64 years

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2013 to year ending March 2023 (excluding Hillsborough victims)



Source: Homicide Index from the Home Office

Notes:

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

Ethnicity

Almost 7 in 10 (409 or 69%) of all homicide victims in the year ending March 2023 were from the White ethnic group (based on the ethnicity being identified by the investigating police officer). This compares with 82% of people identifying as being in the White ethnic group at the time of the last Census of Population in England and Wales in 2021 (2021 Census).

The number of White victims decreased by 71 compared with the year ending March 2022. Excluding the year ending March 2021 (when volumes of public space crime tended to be suppressed because of coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown periods), the number of White victims was the lowest since the year ending March 2016, when there were 405 victims.

There were 97 victims identified as being from the Black ethnic group in the year ending March 2023, accounting for 16% of all victims. This compares with 4% of people identifying as being in the Black ethnic group in the 2021 Census.

The number of Black victims was similar to the previous year (96) but this was the only ethnic group not to see a decrease in the number of homicides compared with the previous year. The number of Black victims has been fairly consistent over the last seven years, averaging 94 homicides a year.

There were 43 victims in the Asian ethnic group (7% of all victims). This compares with 9% of people identifying as being in the Asian ethnic group in the 2021 Census. The number of Asian victims was 11 lower than the previous year (54) ([Appendix table 6](#)).

Accounting for different population sizes, those from the Black ethnic group had higher rates of victimisation than other ethnic groups ([Appendix table 7](#)). In the three years to the year ending March 2023, average rates per million population were more than four times higher for Black victims (39.8 per million population) than White victims (8.7) or victims of other ethnicities (8.4).

Homicide rates for the White and Other ethnic groups for the last three years were similar to those in the three-year period to the year ending March 2017. Homicide rates have increased for Black victims, from 28.5 per million population to 39.8 per million population. This contrasts with the rate for White victims, which remained around 9.0 per million population ([Appendix table 7](#)).

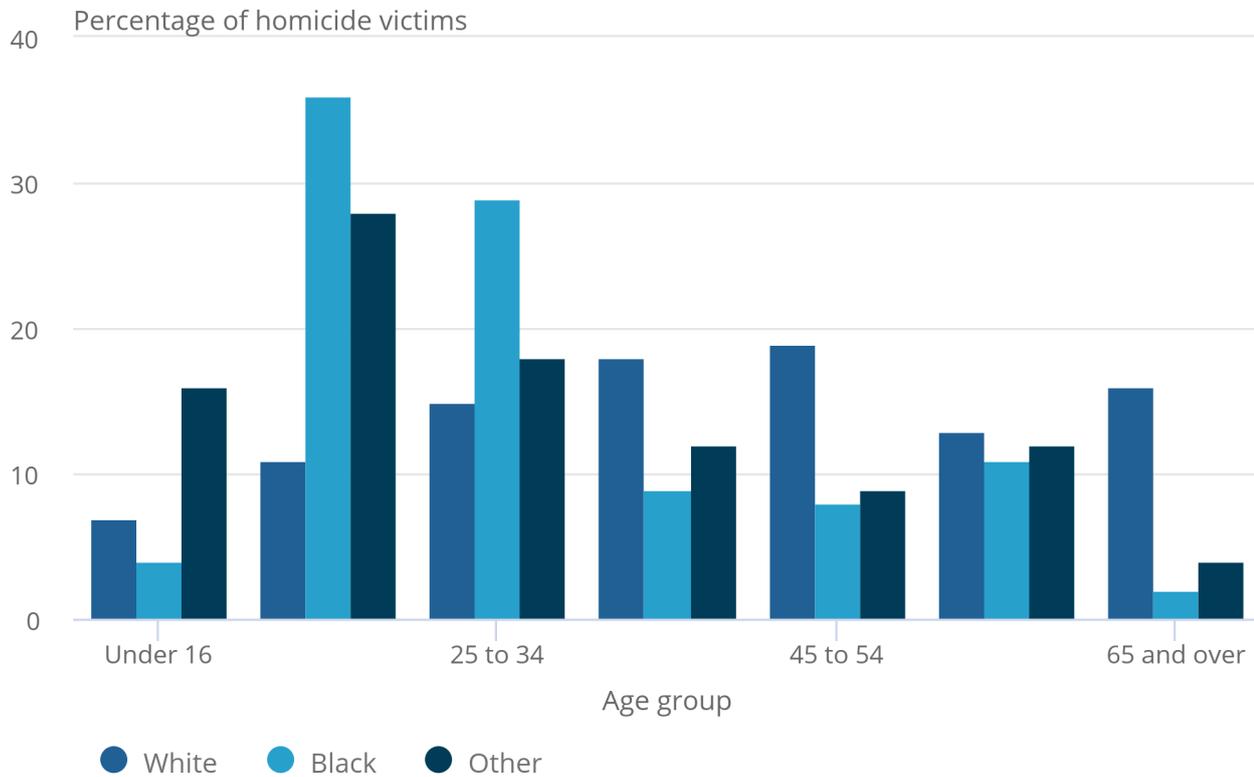
There were clear differences in the age profile of victims between different ethnic groups. Over a third of Black victims (36%) were aged 16 to 24 years, whereas this was a much lower proportion for White victims (11%) (Figure 5; [Appendix table 5](#)). This will partly reflect the different age distributions of ethnic groups in the population. For further information see our article [Ethnic group by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

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

Percentage of homicide victims, by age and ethnicity, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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

Percentage of homicide victims, by age and ethnicity, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: Homicide Index from the Home Office

Notes:

1. Officer-identified classification.
2. From 1 April 2021, ethnicity categories were changed on the Homicide Index to be consistent with Office for National Statistics (ONS) census groupings. To enable a time series, "Other" has been grouped to include Asian (Indian subcontinent), Asian, Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups and any other ethnic group. Previous ethnicity data can be found in our [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2021 article](#).

4 . The relationship between victims and suspects

As in previous years, there were important differences between adult and child victims in their relationship with suspects. Among adult victims there were also different patterns in the relationships with suspects between men and women.

Adult victims

Adult women victims (defined as those aged 16 years and over) were more commonly killed by a partner or ex-partner (35%) or a family member (10%), in the year ending March 2023. For adult males, the suspected killer was more commonly a friend or acquaintance (26%) or a stranger (19%).

There were 100 domestic homicides in the year ending March 2023, a decrease of 37 (27%) compared with the previous year. This was the lowest annual total since these data were electronically collected in 1977, although this number may increase as further homicide suspects are charged. By sex, 7 in 10 victims of domestic homicide were women (70%) and 3 in 10 were men (30%).

Of the 100 domestic homicides, 68 victims were killed by a partner or ex-partner (down from 77), 18 were killed by a parent, son or daughter (down from 43) and 14 were killed by another family member (down from 17).

Almost half (45%) of all adult female homicide victims were killed in a domestic homicide (70). Of these 70 female victims, all but one were killed by a male suspect ([Appendix table 34](#)).

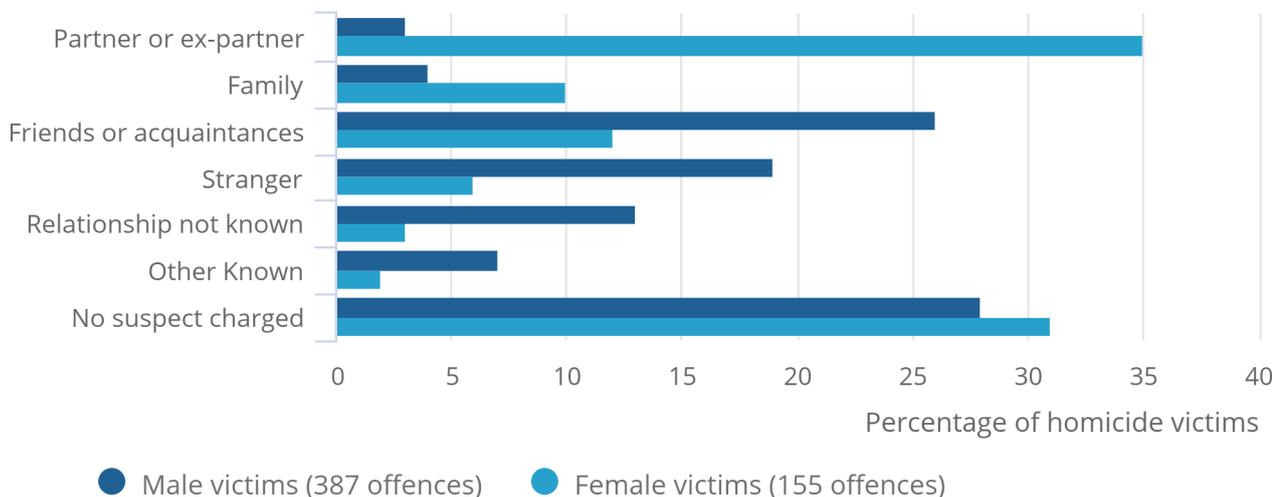
In contrast, males were much less likely to be the victim of a domestic homicide, with only 8% (30) of male homicides being domestic-related in the year ending March 2023, a similar proportion to the previous year.

Figure 6: The most common suspect for female homicide victims aged 16 years and over was their partner or ex-partner

Relationship of victims aged 16 years and over to principal suspect, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

Figure 6: The most common suspect for female homicide victims aged 16 years and over was their partner or ex-partner

Relationship of victims aged 16 years and over to principal suspect, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: Homicide Index from the Home Office

Notes:

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

Child victims

There were 48 victims of homicide aged under 16 years in the year ending March 2023; 29 males and 19 females. As in previous years, the most common suspect was a parent or step-parent (35%, 17 offences).

As at 12 December 2023, there were 18 victims aged under 16 years (38%) for whom no suspect had been charged (this includes homicide offences where all suspects have been acquitted). This number will fall as police investigations continue. For example, for the year ending March 2022, 46% of victims aged under 16 years had no suspect charged as at 6 December 2022; this had fallen to 31% by 12 December 2023 and the proportion where the suspect was a parent or step-parent had increased from 26% to 36%.

It is relatively uncommon for those aged under 16 years to be killed by a stranger, with 4 such offences in the year ending March 2023, similar to previous years.

Further information on suspect characteristics is provided in [Section 8: Suspects in homicide cases](#).

5 . The most common methods of killing

Sharp instrument (including knives)

As in previous years, the most common method of killing, for both male and female victims, was by a sharp instrument (including knives; 41%). Over the last decade, the proportion of homicide offences committed by a sharp instrument has fluctuated between 31% and 42% each year.

There were 244 homicides committed using a knife or other sharp instrument recorded in the year ending March 2023, a decrease of 13% compared with the previous year ([Appendix table 8](#)).

The decrease was driven by a 20% fall in the number of White victims, which fell from 174 to 139. ([Appendix table 12](#)). Conversely the number of Black victims increased slightly, from 60 to 64. Of these 64 Black homicide victims, 26 were aged under 25 years ([Appendix table 12](#)).

From April 2022, information on the type of sharp instrument used in a homicide has been collected. In the year ending March 2023, the most commonly used sharp instrument was a kitchen knife (101 homicides). Information on other types of sharp instrument can be found in [Appendix table 9](#).

Other methods of killing

The second most common method of killing was by “kicking or hitting”, accounting for 114 homicides (19% of the total). As in previous years, the majority (81%) of victims killed in this way were male.

Over one in eight (13%) female victims were killed by “strangulation, asphyxiation” (23 victims). In contrast, a much smaller proportion of male victims (4%; 16) were killed this way.

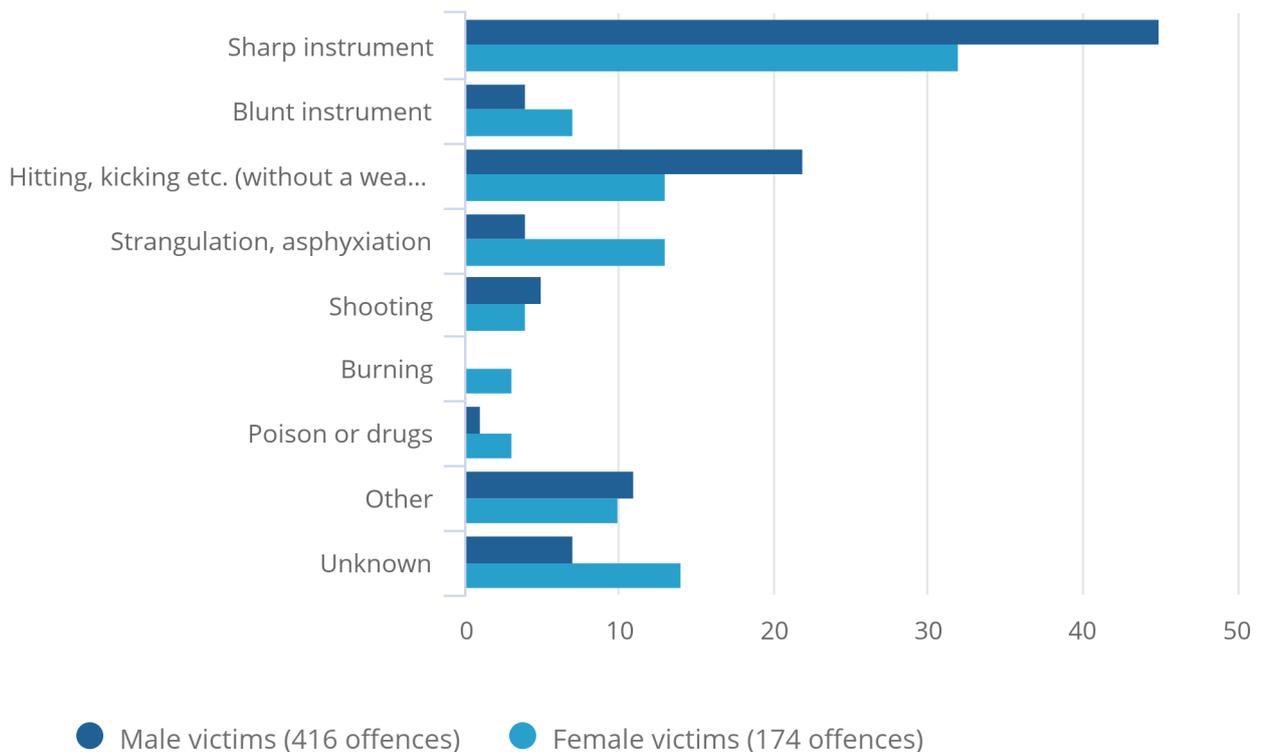
There were 29 homicide victims killed by shooting in the year ending March 2023 (5% of all homicides), 1 more than the previous year.

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

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: Homicide Index from the Home Office

Notes:

1. “Other” includes explosion, motor vehicle, drowning and other methods of killing.

6 . Circumstances and location of homicides

Circumstances of homicide

Around half (51%, 300 offences) of all homicide cases resulted from a quarrel, a revenge attack or a loss of temper, in the year ending March 2023. This was a similar proportion compared with previous years. This proportion was higher where the principal suspect was known to the victim (63%), compared with when the suspect was unknown to the victim (41%).

Furtherance of theft or gain accounted for 5% of homicides (32 offences), and 5% (31 offences) occurred during irrational acts.

As at 12 December 2023, the apparent circumstances were not known for 16% of homicides (93 offences) recorded in the year ending March 2023. This proportion was similar to the previous year and is likely to decrease as the police carry out further investigations.

Location of homicides

Homicides were most likely to have taken place in or around a house or dwelling. There were 290 victims killed in these settings in the year ending March 2023, a decrease of 57 compared with the previous year (347) and the lowest number since the year ending March 2015 (280).

The number of victims killed in a street, path or alleyway has been gradually increasing since the year ending March 2015, but with considerable fluctuation between years. Around a quarter of homicides in the latest year took place in a street, path or alleyway (26%; 152) compared with 19% (95) in year ending March 2015 ([Appendix table 19](#)).

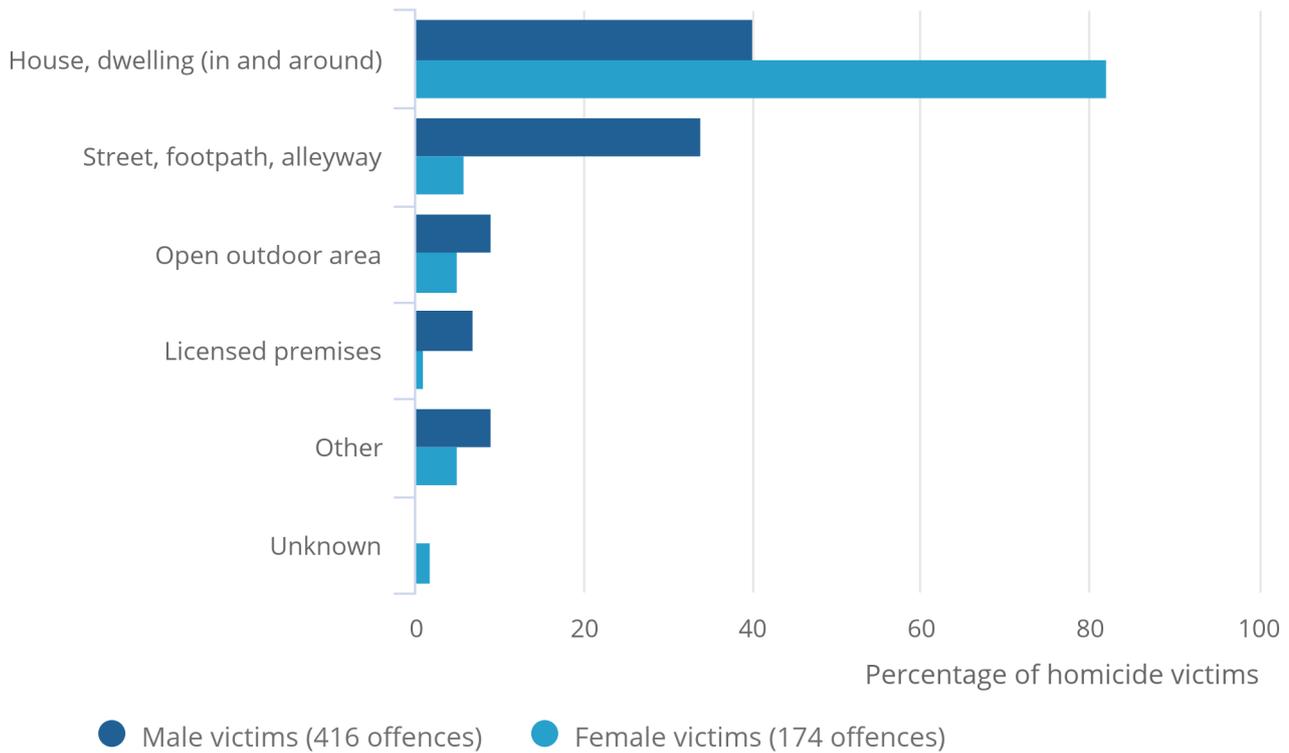
The patterns in homicide location for female and male victims, seen in Figure 8, reflect differing victim-suspect relationships and circumstances described earlier ([Appendix table 19](#)).

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

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: Homicide Index from the Home Office

Notes:

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

7 . Drug- and alcohol-related homicides

In the last three years (the year ending March 2021 to the year ending March 2023), a third (33%) of victims were thought to be under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs at the time of the homicide.

The proportion under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs was higher among male (38%) than female victims (22%), similar to findings in previous years.

The figures for suspects were similar to that for victims in the last three years (the year ending March 2021 to the year ending March 2023). Over a quarter (30%) of homicide suspects were recorded by the police to have been under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs at the time of the homicide ([Appendix table 20](#)).

Almost a third (32%) of victims were known to be drug users, and 15% to be drug dealers. These proportions were higher among suspects, with almost half (48%) known to be drug users and over a quarter (27%) to be drug dealers. These proportions were higher among male than female suspects. In a small proportion of cases, the police identified the suspects' motive as "obtaining drugs" (5%) or "stealing drug proceeds" (4%) ([Appendix table 21](#)).

The proportion of homicides that have involved drug users or dealers, or have been related to drugs in any way, has increased over the last decade, from 42% in the year ending March 2013 to 53% in the year ending March 2023. However, in the latest year, the volume of such homicides (310) was 51 fewer than the previous year (361) ([Appendix table 22](#)).

[Appendix table 23](#) shows an alternative way of categorising homicides that involved illicit drugs into three groups: systemic, economic compulsive, and/or psychopharmacological (See Section 11: Glossary for definitions). In the year ending March 2023, 144 (24% of total homicides) met the criteria for one or more of these categories. Of these:

- 86 homicides (15% of total homicides) met the criteria for a systemic homicide
- 24 homicides (4% of total homicides) met the criteria for an economic compulsive homicide
- 66 homicides (11% of total homicides) met the criteria for a psychopharmacological homicide

These categorisations are based on the Goldstein tripartite framework. See [Measuring drug-related homicide methodology: February 2024](#) for more information.

8 . Suspects in homicide cases

Homicide cases are often complex and can take considerable time to reach an outcome in court.

Last year's bulletin reported that in the year ending March 2022, 30% of homicide cases had no suspects charged as at 6 December 2022 when data were extracted from the Homicide Index for analysis. This has since fallen to 24% (as at 12 December 2023) as police have had more time to conclude investigations.

Table 1: Number of suspects for initially recorded homicide victims, year ending March 2021 to year ending March 2023
Numbers and percentages as at 12 December 2023

	Apr 2020 to Mar 2021	Apr 2021 to Mar 2022	Apr 2022 to Mar 2023	Apr 2020 to Mar 2021	Apr 2021 to Mar 2022	Apr 2022 to Mar 2023
	Number			Percentage		
No suspects charged	107	166	152	19	24	26
One suspect	316	381	306	56	55	52
Two suspects	72	55	50	13	8	8
Three or more suspects	53	68	62	9	10	10
Suspects acquitted [note 2]	20	21	21	4	3	4
All initially recorded homicides	568	691	591			

Source: Homicide Index from the Home Office

Notes

1. Home Office statisticians and police forces have undertaken a review of homicide data to update suspect data court outcomes and cancelled crimes. Totals shown in this table will not match previously published figures.
2. Figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts, or as further information becomes available.

Investigative and court outcomes

In total, there were 690 suspects charged as at 12 December 2023 relating to the 591 homicides initially recorded in the year ending March 2023 ([Appendix table 27](#)).

Court proceedings had concluded for 409 suspects (59% of all suspects) and 18 had died (3% of all suspects). Court proceedings were pending for 261 suspects (38% of all suspects).

In the three years from the year ending March 2021 to the year ending March 2023, 80% of suspects indicted for homicide, where we have information on a court outcome, were found guilty of homicide, 14% were acquitted and 3% were convicted of a lesser offence ([Appendix table 28](#)).

The case outcomes for suspects of homicides recorded in the year ending March 2023 ([Appendix table 28](#)) will change as cases progress through the criminal justice system and more information becomes available.

Age, sex and ethnicity of convicted suspects

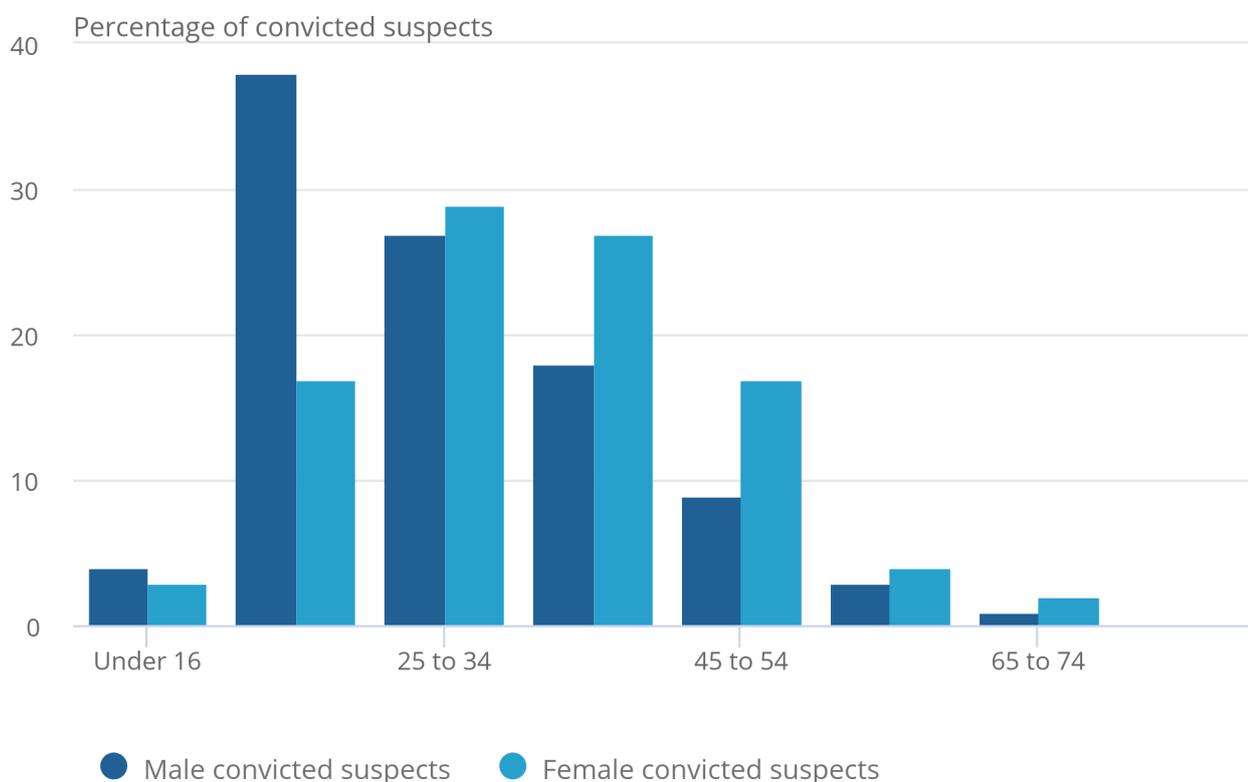
For the three-year period year ending March 2021 to the year ending March 2023, the vast majority of suspects convicted of homicide were male (1,216 or 92%). Figure 9 shows the age profile of suspects convicted of homicide.

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

Percentage of convicted suspects, England and Wales, three years combined: year ending March 2021 to year ending March 2023

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

Percentage of convicted suspects, England and Wales, three years combined: year ending March 2021 to year ending March 2023



Source: Homicide Index from the Home Office

For the three-year period year ending March 2021 to the year ending March 2023, when looking at the principal suspect of a homicide offence, around two-thirds (68%) of those convicted were identified as White. This was a lower representation than in the general population (around 82%), based on Census 2021 population estimates.

Around one in five (18%) suspects were identified as Black, four times higher than the general population (4%) ([Appendix table 33](#)). Differences in these figures are likely to be related to the ethnicity of the population differing by age, region and socioeconomic factors, which have not been taken into account.

9 . International homicide comparisons

There are issues surrounding the comparability of international homicide data, therefore caution should be taken in comparing homicide rates across countries (see [Section 12: Data sources and quality](#)).

England and Wales had a relatively low rate of homicide (9.9 per million population) in the year ending March 2023, compared with the global average, and is similar to most EU countries.

Figures from [Eurostat](#) show that Latvia had the highest rate of homicide in the EU in 2021 (51.8 per million population). In 20 countries, the rate was below 10 per million. Malta had the lowest rate, at 3.9 per million population.

The [Scottish Government](#) annual homicide figures showed that the rate of homicides in Scotland was 9.5 per million population in year ending March 2023, a similar rate to the previous year (9.7).

The [Police Service of Northern Ireland \(PDF, 1.2MB\)](#) figures show there were 24 homicides recorded by the police in Northern Ireland in the year ending March 2023, a rate of 12.6 per million population.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) published an updated [Global study on homicide 2023](#), which showed that the global average homicide rate was 58 per million population in 2021. The Americas and Africa, at 150 and 127 per million population, respectively, were the regions with the highest average homicide rates in 2021.

The United States [Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) recently moved to a new method of collecting homicide data. The most recently published rate for homicide was for 2022, which was 63 per million population.

10 . Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2023 data

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

Dataset | Released 8 February 2024

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

11 . Glossary

Homicide offences

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

Homicide incident

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

Drug-related homicide categories:

- systemic homicides are those arising from the fact that prohibition of drugs creates an illegal market, in which grievances cannot be reconciled through normal judicial channels so they may be settled through violence
- economic compulsive homicides arise if illicit drug users have to steal to fund their drug use; as a result, it is possible that a homicide may occur in the act of robbery or burglary
- psychopharmacological homicides occur as a result of the psychological effects that drugs have on those who take them such as increased aggression or disinhibition

12 . Data sources and quality

Data presented have been extracted from the Home Office Homicide Index, which contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales. The Homicide Index is continually updated with revised information from the police as investigations continue and as cases are heard by the courts. The version used for analysis does not accept updates after it is “frozen” to ensure the data do not change during the analysis period. The data in this article refer to the position as at 12 December 2023. The data will change as subsequent court hearings take place or as further information is received.

Homicide Index data are based on the year when the offence was recorded as a crime, not when the offence took place or when the case was heard in court. While in the majority of cases the offence will be recorded in the same year as it took place, this is not always so. Caution is therefore needed when looking at longer-term homicide trends. For example, the 96 of the 97 deaths that occurred at Hillsborough in 1989 were recorded as manslaughters in the year ending March 2017 following the verdict of the Hillsborough Inquest in April 2016. Additionally, the 173 homicides attributed to Doctor Harold Shipman as a result of Dame Janet Smith’s inquiry took place over a long period of time but were all recorded by the police during the year ending March 2003.

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

For the purposes of the Homicide Index, a suspect in a homicide case is defined as either; a person who has been charged with a homicide offence, including those who were subsequently convicted and those awaiting trial, or a person who is suspected by the police of having committed the offence but is known to have died or committed suicide.

When the police initially record an offence as a homicide it remains classified as such unless the courts decide that a lesser offence, or no offence, took place. In all, 591 deaths were initially recorded as homicides by the police in the year ending March 2023. By 12 December 2023, one was no longer recorded as homicide.

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

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

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

Three-year averages are used to calculate homicide rates by ethnicity because of the low numbers of victims in some groups. Rates are based on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-2021 population estimates. The Other ethnicities category reported in this article includes Asian and Mixed or multiple ethnicities, to enable population statistics to match the categories in the Homicide Index. Demographic factors are not necessarily independently related to homicide. Differences in homicide rates by ethnicity are likely to be influenced by variations in demographic and socioeconomic indicators across ethnic groups. These factors have not been taken into account in these figures.

Information on drug and alcohol use is recorded by the police from toxicology reports and suspect and witness statements.

The Poisson distribution can be applied to the number of homicide incidents per year, with the number of these incidents being large enough to approximate the normal distribution. A statistical test (in this case a Z-test) can be used to determine if the counts in each year were [statistically significantly](#) different from one another at the [95% confidence level](#) (that is, whether there has been a true change in the underlying risk). Further information on this methodology can be found in Section 11 of our article [Focus on violent crime and sexual offences, England and Wales: year ending March 2016](#).

Home Office statisticians have undertaken an extensive data quality exercise on suspect information, cancelled crimes and court outcomes for historical data. Information on these areas published in the tables may therefore differ from recent years, with data now being more complete.

Homicide figures differ between countries and are not directly comparable for various reasons, including:

- different definitions of homicide between countries
- differing points in the criminal justice systems at which homicides are recorded, for instance, when the offence is discovered or following further investigation or court outcome

Figures for England and Wales are for completed homicides (that is excluding attempted murder) but, in some countries, the police register any death that cannot immediately be attributed to other causes as homicide.

Strengths and limitations

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

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

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

13 . Related links

[Measuring drug-related homicide methodology: February 2024](#)

Methodology | Released 8 February 2024

Information on how Goldstein's tripartite framework has been applied to drug-related homicides using Home Office Homicide Index data.

[Guide to finding crime statistics](#)

Methodology | Released 20 July 2023

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

[User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales: March 2023](#)

Methodology | Released 20 July 2023

Quarterly statistics on crime levels and trends during the coronavirus pandemic. Includes details on the datasets used to compile our crime statistics.

[Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 25 January 2024

Crime against households and adults using data from police recorded crime and the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

[Offences involving the use of weapons: data tables](#)

Dataset | Released 16 November 2023

Data tables relating to offences involving weapons as recorded by police and hospital episode statistics.

[The nature of violent crime: appendix tables](#)

Dataset | Released 16 November 2023

Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and Police recorded crime. Data are included on prevalence and characteristics of victims.

[Nature of crime: violence: year ending March 2023](#)

Dataset | Released 30 January 2024

Annual data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), including when and where incidents happened and the victim's perception of the incident.

14 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 8 February 2024, ONS website, article, [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2023](#)