

**I**nstitute  
of Alcohol Studies

Alcohol  
& Crime

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## IAS Factsheet

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The World Health Organization's European Charter on Alcohol states:

'All people have the right to a family, community and working life protected from accidents, violence and other negative consequences of alcohol consumption.'

The WHO Charter has been signed by Member States of the European Union, including the UK.

## Introduction

Alcohol is associated with a wide range of criminal offences in addition to offences of drink driving and drunkenness, in which drinking or excessive drinking define the offence. Alcohol-related crime has been a matter of great public concern for some years. In England and Wales, approximately 70% of crime audits published in 1998 and 1999 identified alcohol as an issue, particularly in relation to public disorder.<sup>1</sup>

Public concern about 'alcohol-related crime' often relates to offences:

involving a combination of criminal damage offences, drunk and disorderly and other public order offences

involving young males, typically 18-30, but increasingly, also young females

often occurring in the entertainment areas of town and city centres

In 1997 Jack Straw, the then Shadow Home Secretary, pledged a new Labour Government to 'call time' on drunken thugs. He said:

"Every year, there are almost 1.5 million victims of violent attacks committed by people under the influence of drink (excluding domestic violence). Every weekend, people avoid their town and city centres for fear that they will be attacked or intimidated by drunken youths."

Subsequently the Labour Government introduced a package of measures to deal with alcohol-related crime, culminating in 2004 with the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England. The Government also introduced the Licensing Act 2003

In advance of the launch of the new strategy, the Home Office produced an Action Plan 'Tackling alcohol-related crime, disorder and nuisance'. (see below) The plan identifies objectives and priorities for taking forward the programme of work to address the problem of alcohol-related crime and disorder. The three key objectives were:

- to reduce the problems arising from under-age drinking;
- to reduce public drunkenness, and associated criminal and disorderly behaviour;
- to prevent alcohol-related violence.

The plan set out the key actions that were taken to address these objectives.

In addition, there was a joint, cross-departmental target to reduce the level of alcohol-related Crime.

Two targets were set

- (i) to reduce the incident rate of alcohol-related violent crime and
- (ii) to reduce the percentage of the population who perceived drunken and rowdy behaviour to be a problem in their locality.

These were measured by the British Crime Survey

## Scale of the Problem

The Police Superintendents<sup>2</sup> have advised that alcohol is present in half of all crime. A 1990 study for the Home Office found that growth in beer consumption was the single most important factor in explaining growth in crimes of violence against the person.<sup>3</sup> Research also shows that high proportions of victims of violent crime are drinking or under the influence of alcohol at the time of their assault. In an analysis of data drawn from 41 probation areas between 1 April 2004 and 31 March 2005<sup>4</sup>, the Offender Assessment System Data Evaluation and Analysis Team found that:

- over one-third (37%) of offenders had a current problem with alcohol use
- a similar proportion (37%) had a problem with binge drinking
- nearly half (47%) had misused alcohol in the past
- 32% had violent behaviour related to their alcohol use
- 38% were found to have a criminogenic need relating to alcohol misuse, potentially linked to their risk of reconviction

Research<sup>5</sup> has found that alcohol had been consumed prior to the offence in nearly three-quarters (73%) of domestic violence cases and was a 'feature' in almost two-thirds (62%). Furthermore, almost half (48%) of these convicted domestic violence offenders were alcohol dependent.

A minimum of 1 in 5 people arrested by police test positive for alcohol.<sup>6</sup> An All Party Group of MPs investigating alcohol and crime was advised by the British Medical Association<sup>7</sup> that alcohol is a factor in:

- 60-70% of homicides
- 75% of stabbings
- 70% of beatings
- 50% of fights and domestic assaults

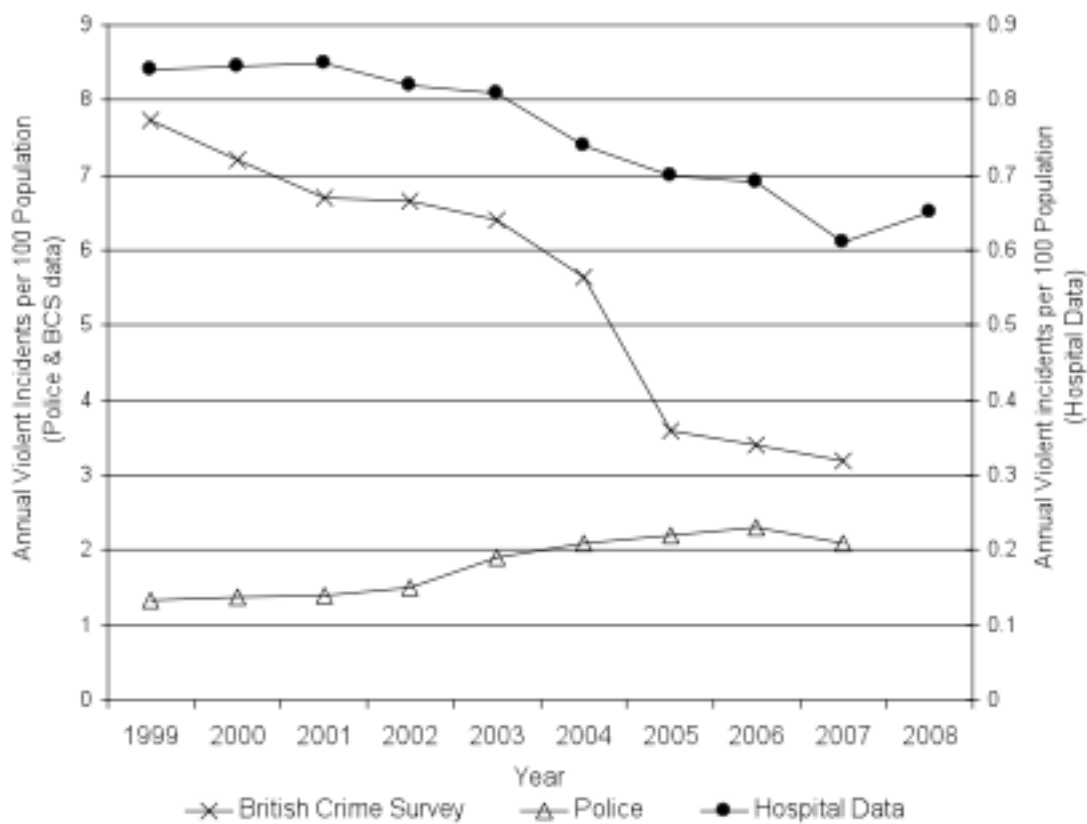
In Scotland, a study<sup>8</sup> of Accident & Emergency admissions found that at least 70 percent of cases of assault were possibly related to alcohol. Most of these assaults happened at the weekend and the majority involved people under 30. On the basis of this study, a minimum of 77 alcohol-related assaults present to emergency departments in Scotland every day.

## Trends

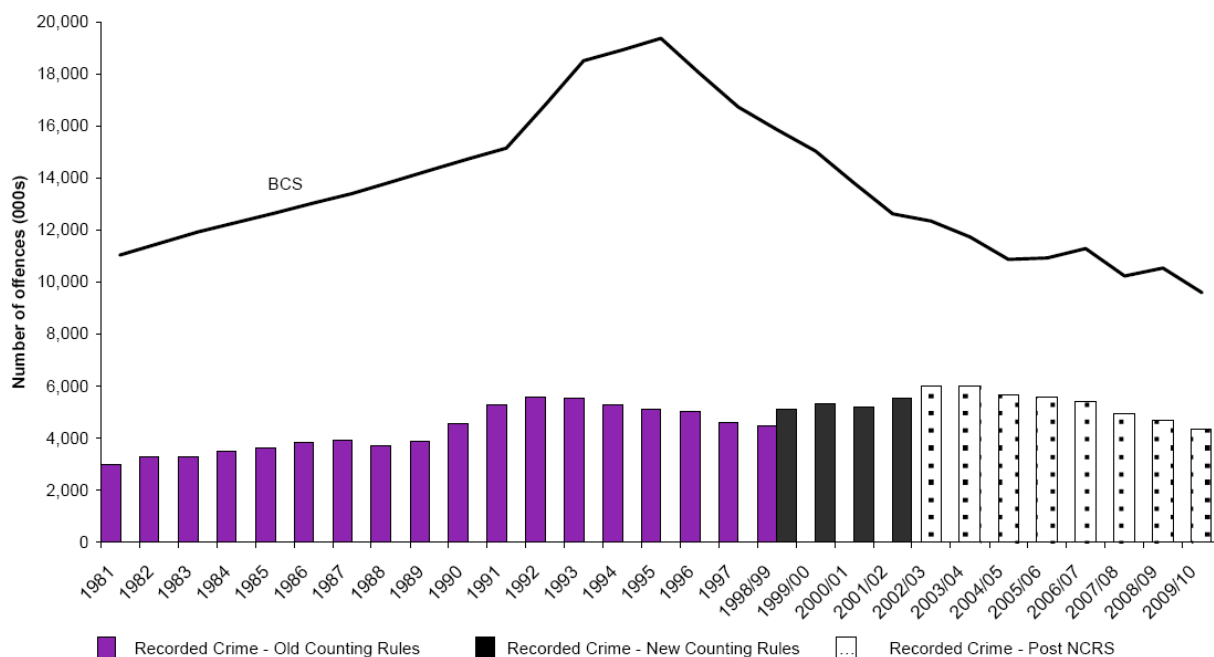
The picture is confused by the fact that different sources of information suggest different conclusions. Police figures can seriously underestimate the amount of violent crime actually taking place. Less than a quarter of violent offences resulting in treatment at Accident and Emergency Departments are reported to police.<sup>9</sup> Police figures can also give a false picture of the direction of trends, police figures showing violent crime increasing during periods when the British Crime Survey recorded a decrease of 12% in the number of violent crimes experienced by adults (2006/7 -2007/8).<sup>10</sup>

In relation to crime in general, the BCS itself is thought to underestimate the total amount of crime taking place because it excludes drug offences, sexual assaults, murders, fraud and crimes against people aged under 16. There is also a suggestion that the BCS may have underestimated violent crime specifically. Homicide trends are regarded by some as a guide to the underlying trends of violence in society, and in Britain the number of homicides rose by a third between 1997 and 2004/5.<sup>11</sup>

**Trends in violence in England and Wales<sup>10</sup>**



## Trends in recorded crime and BCS, 1981 to 2009/10<sup>16</sup>



BCS figures are, however, supported by data from Accident and Emergency Departments which show a 20% reduction in admissions resulting from violence in 2004 compared with 1999.<sup>12</sup> It is suggested that the explanation of this trend could relate to the development of town centre strategies to tackle alcohol related crime, such as CCTV. While this does not appear to reduce the incidence of violence, it does enable police to intervene in violent incidents earlier than would otherwise be possible, reducing the severity of the resulting injuries.<sup>13</sup> However, the main factor appears to be that, since 1995, the profile of violent crime has changed, with large falls in domestic violence and acquaintance violence, while stranger violence has remained stable. However, Figures from Accident and Emergency departments suggest that the trend of decreasing violence was reversed in 2008<sup>14</sup> with a rise of 6.6% compared with an overall decrease of 12% the previous year. This rise was attributed to a rise in alcohol-related violence.

### Violent Crime – British Crime Survey data

#### Influence of alcohol and drugs:<sup>15</sup>

According to the 2009/10 BCS, victims believed the offender(s) to be under the influence of alcohol in half (50%) of all violent incidents, similar to the level in the 2008/09 survey.<sup>18</sup> Based on the 2009/10 BCS, there were 986,000 violent incidents where the victim believed the offender(s) to be under the influence of alcohol .

In one in five (20%) violent incidents the victim believed the offender(s) to be under the influence of drugs; again the difference was not statistically significant compared with 2008/09. The 2009/10 BCS estimates that there were 396,000 incidents where the victim perceived the offender(s) to be under the influence of drugs.

The number of alcohol-related and drug-related violent incidents are similar to the levels in 2008/09 (the apparent differences are not statistically significant).

Within the context of an overall fall in the number of violent crimes, longer-term trends show there have also been significant decreases since 1995 in the number of violent incidents in which victims believed offender(s) were under the influence of either alcohol or drugs. However, the proportion of both alcohol-related and drug-related violent incidents has increased over this period.

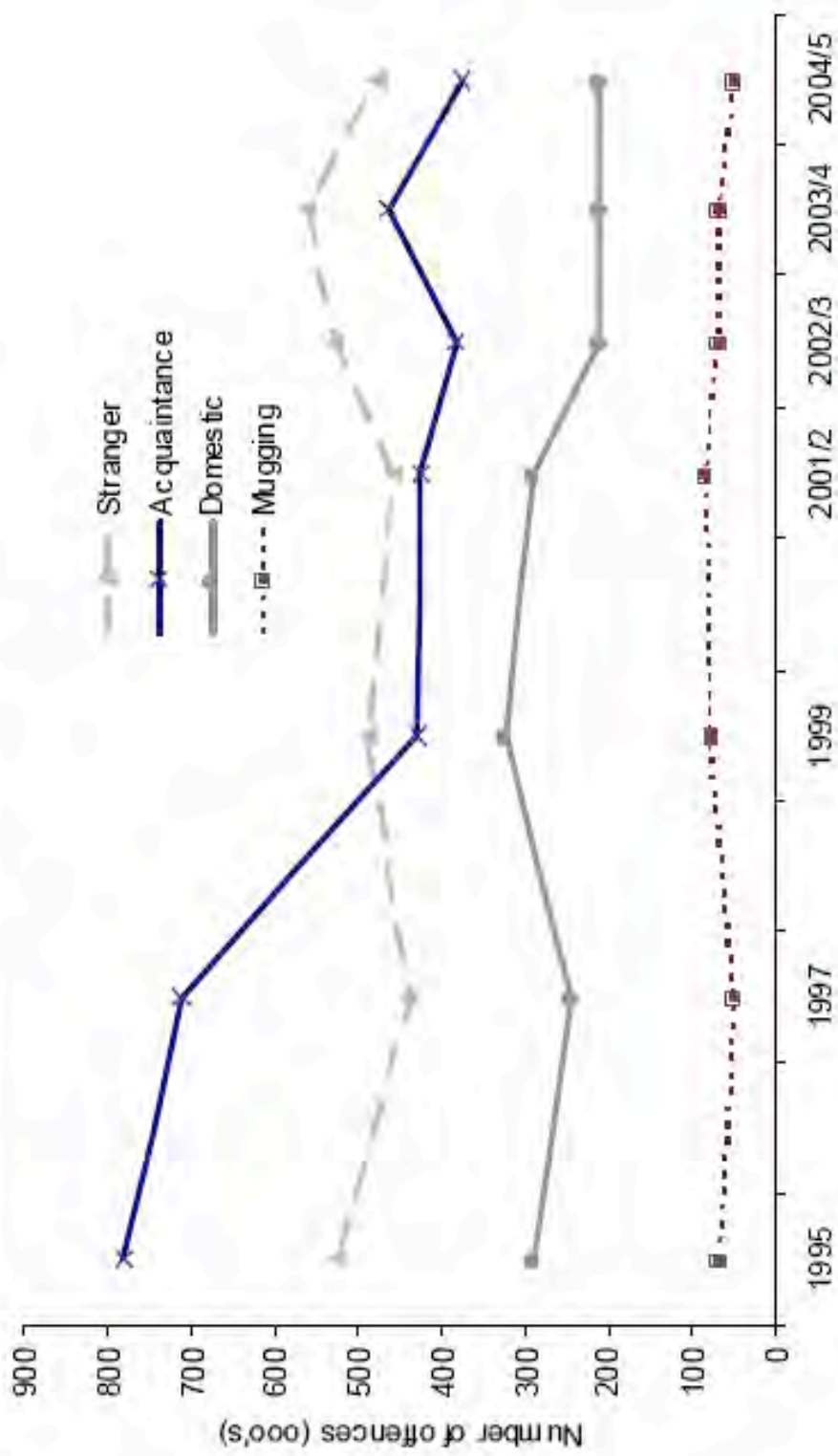
Proportion of violent incidents where the victim believed the offender(s) to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs<sup>16</sup>

Percentages	England and Wales, 2009/10 BCS										
	All violence <sup>1</sup>			Offence type			Violence type				
	Wounding	Assault with minor injury	Assault without injury	Robbery	Domestic	Acquaintance	Stranger	Mugging (robbery & snatch theft)			
Offender(s) perceived to be under influence of alcohol <sup>2</sup>											
Yes	63	55	50	21	37	52	65	19			
No	31	41	42	56	63	44	25	57			
Don't know	6	3	8	23	0	5	10	24			
Offender(s) perceived to be under influence of drugs <sup>2</sup>											
Yes	23	19	16	25	18	22	16	23			
No	49	56	54	41	75	55	42	42			
Don't know	28	25	30	33	6	23	41	35			
Unweighted base	281	264	465	185	178	377	455	229			

1. 'All violence' includes wounding, assault with minor injury, assault without injury and robbery. See Section 5 of the User Guide for more information.

2. Questions asked only if the victim was able to say something about the offender(s), and if there was more than one offender, victims were asked if any of the offenders were perceived to be under the influence. Questions were not asked if any offender(s) were perceived to be under school age.

## BCS violence typology





**Location of violent incidents by whether the offender is thought to be under the influence of alcohol, all BCS violence<sup>17</sup>**

Percentages				BCS 2004/5
All violence				
Under the influence of alcohol				
	Yes	No	Not known	Unweighted n
Around the home	45	50	4	368
Around work	46	52	2	103
Street	35	47	18	458
Pub or club	82	12	6	337
Transport*	-	-	-	-
Other location	35	58	6	216

\* Indicates base numbers are too small

**International Comparisons**

Alcohol is particularly strongly associated with violent crime and there is some evidence to suggest that Britain has high levels of violence compared with other countries. The figures below are from an international victim survey. They refer to experience of violence in general rather than alcohol-related violence specifically. The question asked was:

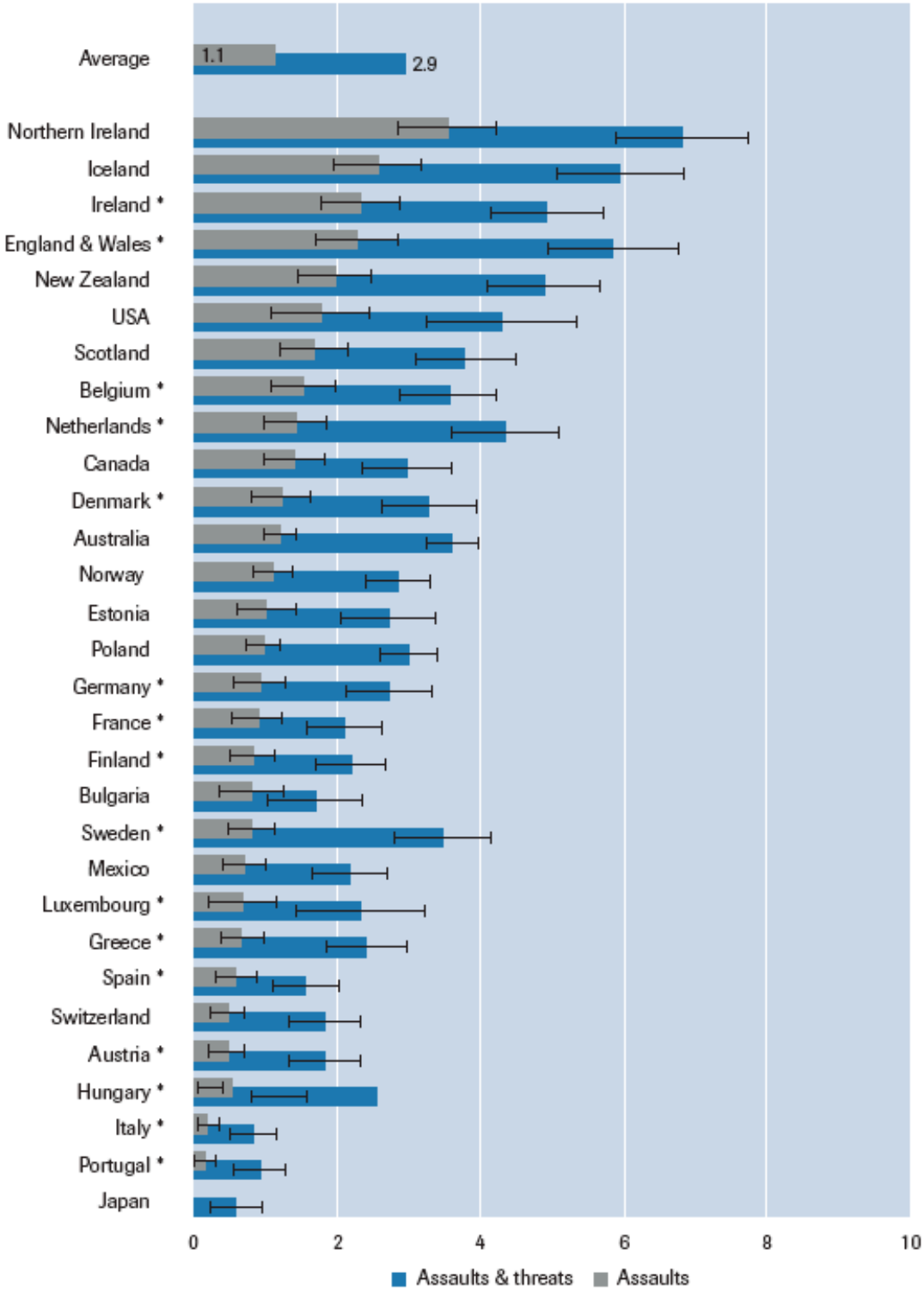
*'..... Have you over the past five years ever been personally attacked or threatened by someone in a way that really frightened you, either at home or elsewhere, such as in a pub, in the street, at school, on public transport, on the beach, or at your workplace?'*

**Percentages victimised once or more (prevalence rates) in the year 2000<sup>18</sup>**

Country	Assaults and threats
Australia	6.4
Austria	[3.7]
Belgium	3.2
Canada	5.3
Catalonia (Spain)	1.5
Denmark	3.6
England & Wales	6.1
Finland	4.2
France	4.2
Germany (West)	[4.7]
Italy	1.1
Japan	0.4
Netherlands	3.4
New Zealand	[5.7]
Northern Ireland	3.0
Norway	[3.0]
Poland	2.8
Portugal	0.9
Scotland	6.1
Spain	[3.1]
Sweden	3.8
Switzerland	2.4
USA	3.4
<b>All countries<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>3.5</b>

<sup>1</sup>Averages are based on all countries taking part in the sweep.  
Figures in brackets [] are for the latest available year, not 2000

**Assaults & threats and assaults only; one year prevalence rates in 2003/4 (percentages) in countries and main cities. 2004-2005 ICVS and 2005 EU ICS\*<sup>19</sup>**



\* Source: European Survey of Crime and Safety (2005 EU ICS). Brussels, Gallup Europe.

**Assaults & threats; one year prevalence rates in 2003/04 (percentages) in countries and main cities and results from earlier surveys. 1989-2005 ICVS and 2005 UE ICS\***

<i>Countries</i>	1988	1991	1995	1999	2003-2004	<i>Main cities</i>	2001-2004
Northern Ireland	1.8		1.7	3.0	6.8	Belfast (Northern Ireland)	9.2
Iceland					5.9	London (England)	8.6 *
England & Wales	1.9	3.8	5.9	6.1	5.8 *	Reykjavik (Iceland)	7.0
Ireland					4.9 *	Amsterdam (Netherlands)	5.9 *
New Zealand		5.7			4.9	New York (USA)	5.1
Netherlands	3.3	4.0	4.0	3.4	4.3 *	Edinburgh (Scotland)	4.6
USA	5.4	4.7	5.7	3.4	4.3	Helsinki (Finland)	4.5 *
Australia	5.2	4.7		6.4	3.8	Berlin (Germany)	4.1 *
Scotland	1.8	.	4.2	6.1	3.8	Oslo (Norway)	4.1
Belgium	2.1	1.8	.	3.2	3.6 *	Dublin (Ireland)	3.9 *
Sweden		2.7	4.5	3.8	3.5 *	Tallinn (Estonia)	3.7
Denmark				3.6	3.3 *	Copenhagen (Denmark)	3.6 *
Poland		4.2	3.7	2.8	3.0	Zurich (Switzerland)	3.5
Canada	3.9	4.8	4.0	5.3	3.0	Stockholm (Sweden)	3.2 *
Norway	3.0				2.9	Paris (France)	3.1 *
Germany	3.1				2.7 *	Madrid (Spain)	2.9 *
Estonia		5.0	5.7	6.3	2.7	Sydney (Australia)	2.8
Switzerland	1.2		3.1	2.4	2.5	Brussels (Belgium)	2.6 *
Greece					2.4 *	Vienna (Austria)	2.5 *
Luxembourg					2.3 *	Athens (Greece)	2.4 *
Finland	2.9	4.4	4.1	4.2	2.2 *	Budapest (Hungary)	1.6 *
Mexico					2.2	Lisbon (Portugal)	1.3 *
France	2.0		3.9	4.2	2.1 *	Rome (Italy)	1.2 *
Austria			2.1		1.8 *	Hong Kong (SAR China)	1.2
Bulgaria					1.7	Istanbul (Turkey)	0.6
Spain	3.1				1.6 *	Average	3.7
Hungary					1.2 *	<i>Cities in developing countries</i>	
Portugal				0.9	0.9 *	Johannesburg (RSA)	11.2
Italy		0.8			0.8 *	Lima (Peru)	11.0
Japan				0.4	0.6	Phnom Penh (Cambodia)	6.8
						Maputo (Mozambique)	6.2
						Buenos Aires (Argentina)	3.2
						Sao Paulo (Brazil)	2.6
						Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	1.5
Average**	2.9	3.9	4.0	3.8	3.1	Average	6.1

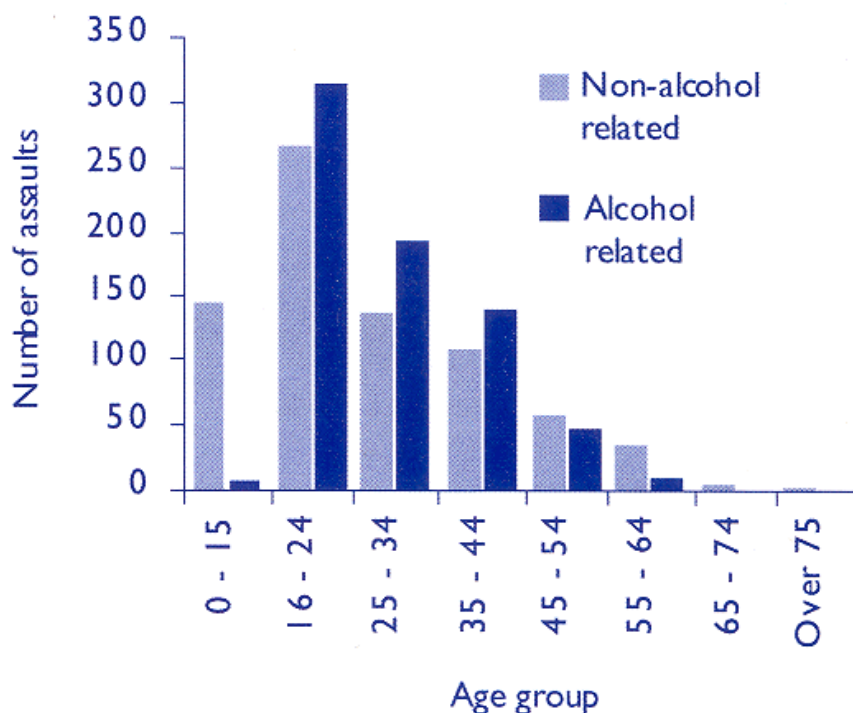
\* Source: European Survey of Crime and Safety (2005 EU ICS). Brussels, Gallup Europe.

\*\* The average is based on countries taking part in each sweep. As countries included vary across sweeps, comparisons should be made cautiously.

## Youth Violence

Much youth violence is alcohol-related, much of it occurring in and around pubs and nightclubs. As can be seen from the graph, as indicated by assault victims presenting to Accident and Emergency, the 16-24 age group experienced a high level of assaults, and there are more alcohol-related than non-alcohol-related assaults

### Alcohol-related assaults by age: Arrowe Park Accident and Emergency department, April – September, 2004 <sup>20</sup>



## Self-Report Surveys

The 2003 Crime and Justice Survey<sup>21</sup> which asked people aged 10-65 about their experience of offending, found varying proportions of offences to be alcohol related.

Whether the offender had taken alcohol or drugs at the time of the incident <sup>21</sup>								
Percentages	Vehicle-related thefts	Other thefts	Criminal damage	All property offences	Assault without injury	Assault with injury	All violent offences	All offences
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Drugs only	1	3	1	4	1	2	1	3
<b>Alcohol only</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>
Drugs and alcohol	10	2	5	3	1	3	2	2
Neither	43	93	54	83	83	75	80	81

Motivation for the offence <sup>21</sup>								
Percentages	Vehicle-related thefts	Other thefts	Criminal damage	All property offences	Assault without injury	Assault with injury	All violent offences	All offences
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Bored/nothing else to do	32	11	23	15	12	5	9	12
For the fun/buzz	33	5	18	9	15	3	10	9
Friends encouraged me/dare	5	4	9	4	2	2	2	3
Annoyed/upset by someone	2	2	22	4	53	55	53	28
Revenge	8	5	22	8	13	20	16	12
Upset/frustrated	-	-	<0.5	-	-	-	-	-
Self-defence	-	-	1	-	23	41	30	15
Wanted money/item stolen	4	34	<0.5	29	-	-	-	15
Couldn't afford item	1	6	-	5	-	-	-	3
<b>Was drunk</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
Under influence of drugs	5	1	<0.5	2	-	1	1	2
Minor offence	-	11	-	9	-	-	-	5
Other reason	22	38	10	34	20	6	14	24
Don't know	12	6	7	6	1	3	2	4
Don't want to answer	22	6	2	7	3	2	2	5
<i>Note: Weighted data. More than one answer could be given.</i>								

Some of these figures from the 2003 Crime and Justice Survey are lower than those in the British Crime Survey. For example, the BCS suggests that offenders were under the influence of alcohol in around half of assaults, whereas only 17% of offenders reported being under the influence of alcohol at the time of the assault. Part of the explanation of this lower figure is that the Crime and Justice Survey includes assaults against children.

Restricting the results to assaults committed against adults gives a figure of 30% of assaults being alcohol-related. The remaining difference in the profile of assaults picked up by the two surveys is the over-reporting by victims.<sup>21</sup>

## Studies of People Arrested by Police

Surveys<sup>22</sup> carried out for the Home Office in six English cities in 1996 and 1999 found varying but significant proportions of arrestees tested positive for alcohol for a range of offences:-

### 1996

○ aggravated bodily harm/grievous bodily harm	32%
○ robbery	32%
○ burglary	24%
○ joyriding	36%
○ criminal damage	46%
○ breach of the peace	75%

### 1999

○ assault	32%
○ robbery	75%
○ criminal damage	29%
○ breach of the peace	61%
○ theft of/taking vehicle	30%

A high proportion of arrestees also tested positive for other drugs.

A recent study of police murder investigation files from three police force areas in England and Wales found that in over half (52%) of all adult male-on-male homicides analysed, either the victim or the offender had been drinking, often to excess. In 36% of cases, both the offender and the victim had been drinking.

In Scotland in 2002, where the drink/drug status of the accused was known (which was in 68% of cases), 45% of those accused of homicide were drunk at the time of the offence, 10% were on drugs and 15% were both drunk and on drugs. Hence, only 30% of those accused of homicide were neither drunk nor on drugs.<sup>23</sup>

Alcohol-related homicides occur predominantly amongst unrelated adult males and are the result of some kind of quarrel. Few of them actually occur inside pubs or clubs.<sup>24</sup>

Based on alcohol test findings of arrestees, the following proportion of crimes are estimated to be alcohol-related:

### NEW-ADAM alcohol test data – Alcohol attributable fractions<sup>25</sup>

Violence against person	37%
Sexual offences	13%
Robbery	12%
Burglary	17%
Theft and handling stolen goods	13%
Fraud and forgery	16%
Criminal damage	47%
Drug offences	19%
Other	26%

On this basis in 2001/2 the following numbers of crimes were alcohol-related:

<b>Crime statistics 2001/2002 in England and Wales<sup>25</sup></b>			
		<b>Overall crimes</b>	<b>Alcohol-related crimes</b>
<b>Violence against person</b>	Homicide	886	319
	Common assault	1,791,000	841,770
	Wounding	659,000	309,730
<b>Sexual offences</b>	Sexual offences	144,988	18,848
<b>Burglary</b>	Burglary in business	941,165	159,998
<b>Criminal damage</b>	Property	6,706,161	3,151,896
<b>Robbery</b>	Robbery from individual	362,000	43,440
	Robbery from business	76,543	9,185
<b>Burglary</b>	Burglary in a dwelling	991,000	168,470
<b>Theft and handling stolen goods</b>	Theft from a person	616,000	80,080
	Theft of a pedal cycle	385,000	50,050
	Theft of a vehicle	330,000	42,900
	Theft from a vehicle	1,560,000	202,800
	Attempted vehicle theft	707,000	91,910
	Other theft and handling	1,484,000	192,920
<b>Total</b>		<b>16,754,743</b>	<b>5,364,316</b>

### **Prison Populations**

A 1997 study estimated that 63% of sentenced males and 39% of sentenced females were drinking at 'hazardous' levels in the year before entering custody.

A 1997 study at Durham remand prison<sup>26</sup> identified 21.2% of inmates as either 'alcohol abusers' or dependent on alcohol.

A 2005 survey of (male) prisoners at HMP Winchester<sup>27</sup> found:

hazardous and dependent drinkers were 10 times more prevalent in the prison population than in the general population

35% of the prisoners believed that they had a drinking problem

the average consumption of prisoners saying they had a drinking problem was 157 units per week

the average consumption of prisoners saying they did not have a drinking problem was 43 units per week (almost exactly double the old recommended maximum weekly consumption for men of 21 units per week)

46% of prisoners stated that alcohol was linked to their criminal activity, with violent crime accounting for half of these offences

### **Victimisation**

Being under the influence of alcohol increases the likelihood of being a victim of crime as well as being a perpetrator.

Women who have consumed alcohol are more at risk of stranger and acquaintance rape than are rape victims generally.

BCS figures suggest that 15% of female rape victims were too drunk to be capable of giving consent.<sup>28</sup> A study of female rape victims in the Metropolitan Police District found that 27% had been drinking around the time of the offence.<sup>29</sup>

### **Findings from the Youth Lifestyle Survey (YLS)<sup>30</sup>**

The YLS is a nationally representative sample of over 4,500 12-30 year olds in England and Wales. It found a close relationship between offending and binge drinking. Even after other factors were taken into

account, frequency of drunkenness remained strongly associated with both general offending and criminal and disorderly behaviour. The link between drinking and offending was particularly strong for violent crimes.

- 39% of 18- to 24-year-olds were classified as 'binge drinkers' (those who got very drunk at least once a month). Men were more likely to binge drink (48%) than women (31%).
- Binge drinkers were more likely to offend than other young adults. 39% reported committing an offence in the 12 months prior to interview, compared with 14% of regular drinkers. Young male binge drinkers were particularly likely to offend (49%).
- 60% of binge drinkers admitted involvement in criminal and/or disorderly behaviour during or after drinking, compared with 25% of regular drinkers. Again young males were most likely to report such behaviour (69%).

#### **The 2003 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey<sup>31</sup> found that:-**

- 44% of 18-24 year-olds classed as binge drinkers (49% males, 39% females)
- Binge drinkers were more likely to offend than others, and accounted for disproportionate amount of the total number of crimes.
- Binge drinkers comprised 6% of the adult sample, but they accounted for 30% of all crimes reported, and 24% of all violent incidents
- 63% of binge drinkers reported criminal or disorderly behaviour during or after drinking, compared with 34% of other young regular drinkers

#### **The Burden of Alcohol-Related Crime**

Alcohol-related crime and drunken offenders place a huge burden on the police and other public services:-<sup>30</sup>

- from approximately 10.30pm to 3.00am the majority of arrests are for alcohol-related offences
- there is the potential for routine incidents of public nuisance to escalate to more serious, especially violent, offences
- dealing with intoxicated offenders can be difficult and time consuming. For example, they may have to be kept in cells long enough to sober up; while they are there the police have a duty of care and have to ensure the offender does not come to harm by choking on their own vomit. The offender may have to be checked every 15 minutes. Medical attention may be necessary. Female offenders need female police officers to attend certain procedures who may have to be taken off other duties.
- intoxicated prisoners can be disruptive, uncooperative and may present severe hygiene problems, urinating or defecating in their clothing during or after arrest.

The IAS response to the Government's proposals for licensing reform is available as a separate document.<sup>32</sup> A separate factsheet focuses on crime and disorder in and around licensed premises.<sup>33</sup>

**Institute of Alcohol Studies**  
**29 July 2010**



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