

# Ethnic minorities face rising disparity in homicide risk across England and Wales

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New research analysing racial disparities among murder victims across most of Britain over the last two decades shows that people of Asian ethnicity are on average twice as likely as White British people to be killed.

For Black people, however, the risk of homicide has been over five and a half times (5.6) higher than for White British people—on average—during the current century, and this disparity has been on the rise since 2015.

Researchers from the University of Cambridge's Institute of Criminology were surprised to find that official UK data did not include relative risk statistics by ethnicity, as is common in countries such as the US and Australia.

They argue that the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) should publish "relevant denominators with raw numerators" to help with public understanding of crime risk and police resourcing. The work is published as a research note in the *Cambridge Journal of Evidence-Based Policing*.

"Through a series of straightforward calculations, we found substantial racial inequality in the risks of being murdered in England and Wales," said co-author Professor Lawrence Sherman of the University of Cambridge's Institute of Criminology.

"The pandemic has given the public a crash course in statistics. It provides an opportunity to present all kinds of data in ways that have more meaning for the population as well as those on the front line of prevention," Sherman said.

Billy Gazard, a crime statistician for the ONS, said: "We have outlined our plans for improving crime statistics for England and Wales in our July 2020 progress update. Within this update we committed to better addressing inequalities in victimisation and highlighting those groups in society that are at most risk of experiencing crime. We plan to carry out further analysis over the coming year, which will include looking at homicide victimisation rates by ethnicity."

Cambridge criminologists went back over the last 20 years of annual figures using an approach now familiar to many through coronavirus statistics: rates of cases per 100,000 people. This provided a risk ratio for homicide rates by ethnicity in England and Wales.

The researchers say that, to the best of their knowledge, theirs is the first comparison of ethnic group trends in UK homicide victimisation rates per 100,000 to be published in recent decades, if ever.

They found that homicide risk for White and Asian people has stayed relatively consistent since the turn of the millennium—around one in 100,000 for White people and a little over two in 100,000 for Asian people, consisting primarily of persons of South Asian descent. For Black people, however, risks have fluctuated dramatically over the last 20 years.

The homicide victimisation rate for Black people was highest in the early noughties: almost 10 in 100,000 in 2001. It dropped by 69% between 2001 and 2012 to a low of 3 in 100,000 around 2013. Rates then began to climb again, rising seven times faster than for White

people to reach over 5 in 100,000 last year.

When accounting for age, the disparity is starker still: for those aged 16 to 24, the 21st century average puts young Black people over ten and a half times (10.6) more likely than White people to be victims of homicide in England and Wales.

In fact, researchers point out that—per 100,000 people—the most recent data from 2018-19 puts the murder risk of young Black people 24 times higher than that of young White people.

The criminologists found no correlation between changes in homicide risk for different ethnicities. As an example, they point to the last three years of data: the [homicide](#) rate for White people aged between 16-24 dropped by 57%, while for young Black people it increased by 31%.

"Policing requires reliable evidence, and changing levels of risk are a vital part of preventative policing," said Sherman. "Our initial findings reveal risk inequalities at a national level, but they may be far greater or lower in local areas. We would encourage police forces to produce their own calculations of murder rates per 100,000."

Sherman has long advocated for a more "meaningful" approach to crime data. He has led on the development of the Cambridge Crime Harm Index: a classification system weighted by the impact of an offence on victims, rather than just counting crime numbers.

"Simple statistics show us that the risks of becoming a murder victim are far from equal," added Sherman. "We need more data analysis of this nature to inform police resource allocation, and promote a more fact-informed dialogue with communities across the country."

**More information:** Sumit Kumar et al, Racial Disparities in Homicide

Victimisation Rates: How to Improve Transparency by the Office of National Statistics in England and Wales, *Cambridge Journal of Evidence-Based Policing* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s41887-020-00055-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s41887-020-00055-y)

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