PUBLIC SAFETY IN LONDON IN THE 21ST CENTURY

SUMMARY

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Abstract

London, England is Europe's largest city. Its population in 2009 is 7.6 million people. By 2016, its population is projected to be 8.1 million. Another 400,000 come from outside the capital to work daily in London. Over 14 million tourists visited London last year, despite the economic downturn. The metropolitan area covers 620 square miles, is divided into 32 local government jurisdictions, and is serviced by one police force, the London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). This article looks at public safety in the metropolis though police recorded crime as a snapshot of people's concern about their own safety in London.

Introduction

London, England[1] is Europe's largest city. Its population in 2009 was 7.6 million people. By 2016, its population is projected to be 8.1 million. Another 400,000 come from outside the capital on a daily basis to work in London. Over 14 million tourists visited London last year, despite the economic downturn. The metropolitan area covers 620 square miles, is divided into 32 local government jurisdictions, and is serviced by one police force, the London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). As an employer, the MPS is the largest in London, with over 55,000 staff, including 33,000 warranted officers. Last financial year (2009-10), only 129 homicides were reported within its borders.

This article looks at public safety in the metropolis through police recorded crime as a snapshot of people's concern about their own safety in London. Clearly, we acknowledge that not all crime is reported to the police, and not all that is reported is recorded. Criminologists have documented this phenomenon for decades (see Maguire 2003 and 1997; Reiner, 2007). Yet criminolo-

gists focus more on trying to explain the 'dark figure' of crime rather than make sense of what the recorded figures of crime tell us about public safety. Even with the caveats about whether police record what people report as crime (see Reiner, 2007, for an explanation), or even record crime 'correctly', police records of crime give a flavour of the kinds of incidents people involve the police in[2]. By and large, it is people who choose to involve police in criminal matters, either on their own or others' behalf and commonly on behalf of their employers. Here we are exploring whether the kinds of incidents people involve police in have changed in the past decade, and to speculate how this reflects people's understanding of public safety. We also know that some of people's decisions to report crime are influenced by a mandate from other requirements, such as insurance, rather than law. Much reported theft from and of cars, for example, is encouraged by the demands from insurance companies to substantiate claims for compensation with accompanying police crime report numbers. But many other incidents or events, such as personal harassment, fights in pubs or assault at home, may not be reported to police because people do not wish to involve officials in what they may define as a private matter. We suggest that recorded crime can be treated as a reflection of what people define as a threat to them, their property, and their own personal (and thus public) safety. Moreover, it is these crime records which sometimes dominate the headlines.

What people report to police then draws on a cultural understanding about what policing is 'for', and people's on-going attempts to ask the police to intervene in matters that they think are a problem. Public confidence in policing – a critical ideal for today's London police – is built on people's assurances as tax payers that they will have a public body for help and assistance with crime should they need it (Stanko and Bradford 2009). Confidence is a prospective assessment of people's trust

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1   The United Kingdom has three legal jurisdictions: England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Each of these jurisdictions has its own penal code and criminal procedure, although there are a number of similarities among them. For the purposes of other public sector administration, there are four jurisdictions: England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

2   The major reason people do not report crime to the police is because they say the offence was too trivial and/or involved no loss.

that police can and will help them. On-going research in London suggests that four in five residents have no contact with police in any one year. This article sketches out why people in the 21st century contact police for help in London.

1. A bit of history

Concern about crime has a long history in Great Britain, and especially in London. In the first quarter of the 19th century, legislation created the first police service in the capital city (cf. Metropolitan Police Act 1829). These new police were tasked with the prevention of crime and the preservation of public order (Emsley, 2003). Expectations for the early police revolved around keeping 'the Queen's peace'. This meant that it was largely public streets and the homes of the middle class and wealthy citizens that were protected from 'thieves' and 'burglars'. By and large, police continue to act as the gatekeepers of people's and the state's grievances if criminal law is to be used as a sole official redress.

Historians of policing have argued about the extent to which the police act as an extension of the state[3]. Over these nearly two centuries police were commonly used to combat public disorder and quell riots, which often involved people's confrontations with the state itself. We do not intend to devote much discussion in this article to the debates about the relationship of policing to the state[4]. This article instead wishes to use what *people* report to police as a window on today's 'public safety problems'. Of course other aspects of policing – public order or counter-terrorism to name a few – also have implications for the delivery of public safety in London. Clearly these aspects of the provision of public security are mainstays of proactive policing in London. We are more interested however in weaving an account of what is officially recorded as a legacy of crime problems –crime records– and analysing how these tell us about aspects of public safety as a contemporary problem in one of the world's largest cities. As such, as we argue throughout this article, what people, businesses and the state itself bring to the attention of police for redress is a reflection of what the public (and the state) find troublesome about safety in London. People's willingness to involve the state in matters they once took for granted (such as domestic violence, neighbourhood crime rooted in threat and intimidation, homophobic or racist attacks) has changed, and such change demands new responses for how police think about and prepare to deliver better safety to the public.

We intentionally exclude any analysis of the private security industry in London or the UK and what contribution this might have made to a more secure public life. Public safety has also benefited from a large private security industry, a business worth over £6.5 billion in 2006 in the UK (the latest data available). This extensive business oversees the guarding of retail stores and other commercial establishments, transporting cash and prisoners, stewarding large public events, and certifying thousands of door staff in pubs and clubs. Their employees too are part of the extended public security apparatus in contemporary London. But our interest here is focused on the public sector and to look at how people in London use the police for their safety in London.

2. Crime in London: The current picture

London accounts for a significant proportion of crime across England and Wales. The only long standing measure of victimisation in England and Wales – the British Crime Survey (BCS) – has measured people's experiences of crime regardless of whether reported to police since 1981[5]. The BCS shows that one in five BCS crimes takes place in the capital, a similar one in five crimes of violence and one in six of all burglary occur in London. Typically an urban crime, 41% of all England and Wales' robberies reported to the BCS are committed in London. Almost two thirds of England and Wales' BCS robberies take place in London, the West Midlands or Greater Manchester.

According to the BCS London has more recorded crime than any other city in the UK (112 per 1,000 population), even accounting for its larger population. It was not always so; Nottinghamshire, England (154 per 1,000 population) and Manchester, England (147) had higher crime rates than London (143) in 2001. Strathclyde (which includes Glasgow and the highest crime in Scotland) shows a crime rate of 81 per 1,000 population[6]. We now turn to an overview of what is recorded by police in the first decade of the 21st century.

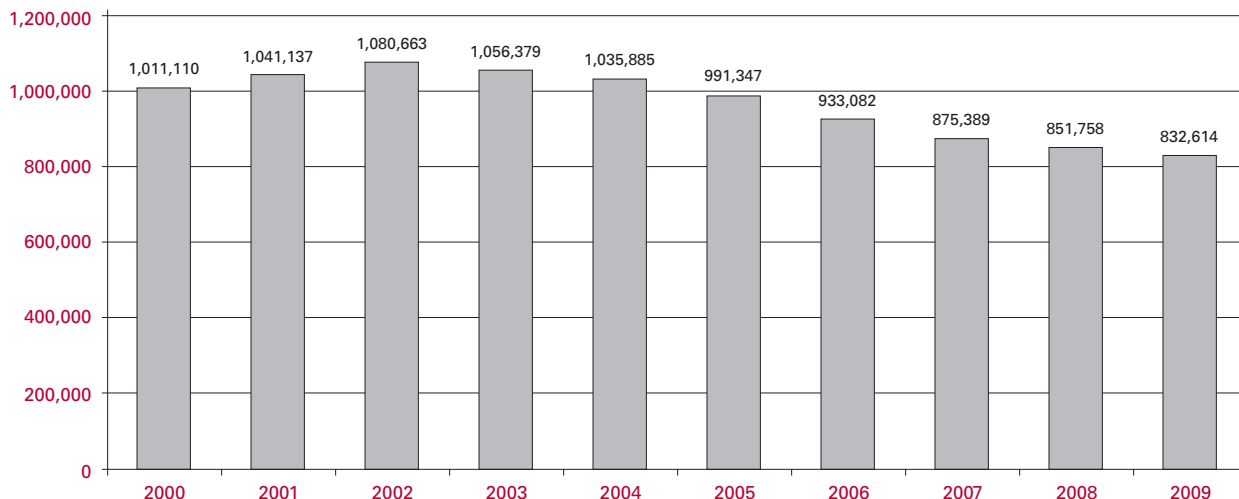### 2.1. The first decade of reported crime in London in the 21st century

In 2009, recorded crime in London was at its lowest rate for 10 years (Figure 1). Recorded crime overall has fallen over the last decade, but the pace of that reduction has been greater for lower level, less serious crimes while the change in the recording of serious crime has been much slower (Figure 2). Serious crimes like murder and rape represent some 5% of the MPS crime, as these crimes did 10 years ago.

3   For those interested in the history of policing in the UK, see for instance Rawlings (2002); Emsley (1996); *The English Police: A Poiltical and Social History,* 2nd edition; Reiner, *The Politics of the Police,* 1992.

4   There is a rich scholarship on the history of police in the UK. For the novice to the UK debates, see for example *The Handbook of Policing* (2003), edited by

Tim Newburn, for a wide array of articles. Robert Reiner's (2007) *Law and Order* offers a solid insight into the politics of law and order in England and Wales.

5   The British Crime survey, http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/bcs1.html

6   Scottish Crime Survey, http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/crime-and-justice-survey

FIGURE 1   London Metropolitan Police recorded crime 2000-2009

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	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
	1,011,110	1,041,137	1,080,663	1,056,379	1,035,885	991,347	933,082	875,389	851,758	832,614

Source: MPS Crime Recording Information System, 2009.

FIGURE 2   A comparison between recorded crimes in London in 2000-2009

Serious Crime   Medium-Serious Crime
Less Serious Crime
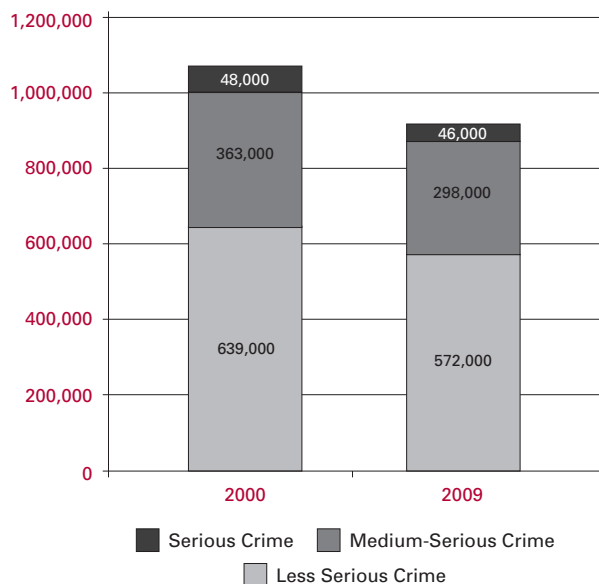
Source: MPS Crime Recording Information System, 2009.

Of course, police are asked to deal with far more than just crime - the large number of calls that don't end up being recorded as a crime (for example, a call to an argument or reports of suspicious activity, do not subsequently go on record as being a crime) generate an 'iceberg' effect. This iceberg has over two-thirds of all events the police are called to not being recorded as a crime. The MPS received 2,078,106 emergency calls in 2009, and dealt with 3,083,244 incidents, of which, many did not end up being classified as crimes.

2.2. The iceberg – A quick look at the requests for police assistance

One major reason why people call the police is they want a responsible body to sort out an immediate problem[7]. In the UK, the term given to many of these problems are 'anti-social behaviour' (ASB). Experiences of ASB are very diverse, ranging from activities that are a mild annoyance (with people's expectations that these annoyances should not be part of their everyday lives) to criminal behaviours which may be extremely unsettling and/or threatening. It is not our purpose here to debate whether the actual incidents of ASB are 'real' or 'valid' incidents triggering police involvement; rather, the subjective experiences of those reporting ASB are taken as the starting point. A recent survey of Londoners[8] who called the police showed that a large majority (88%) of police contact related to some sort of disturbance in a public place (Bradford and Stanko, 2007). Most incidents occurred at or near the home of those who reported them. Just over half of those reporting incidents (56%) felt that they were an informant rather than victim, while half of all the incidents were considered by those reporting them to be crimes, rather than simply annoyances.

In terms of the available socio-demographic variables, slightly more of those reporting were male than female. Almost 50% of all reporters were aged 35-54; this compares with around 40% of the London population[9]. These figures imply that those reporting ASB were somewhat more likely to be men and in these middle age bands than population proportions would suggest. Similarly, 77% of reporters were from the White British or White Irish ethnic groups, compared with 63% of

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7   Egon Bittner (1967) is still the best source about why people call the police.
8   A survey of over 18,000 people who experienced anti-social behaviour was conducted in London during 2007-8 by the Metropolitan Police.

9   Corresponding to the amount of people who were in this age band according to the 2001 Census (www.statistics.gov.uk/census)
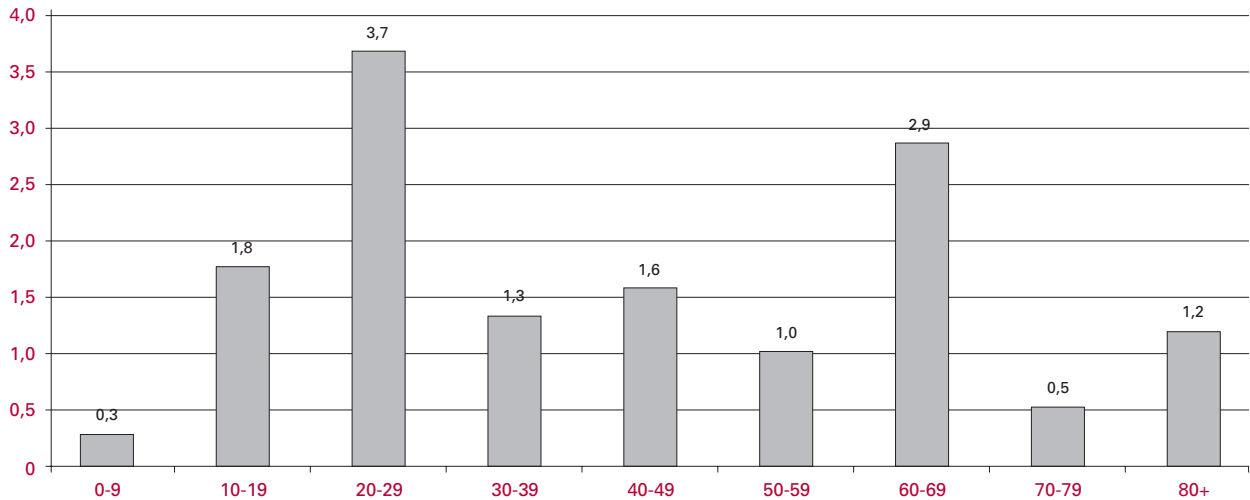
Source: MPS Crime Recording Information System, 2009.

Londoners who were from these ethnic groups in 2001; in contrast, members of many ethnic minority groups were less likely to be in the sample than their representation in the population would suggest (for example, 6% of Londoners were from the Indian ethnic group in 2001, compared with 3% in the ASBS sample). As we will see below, people who call the police about ASB differ from those who experience London's most serious recorded violence[10]. Perhaps the most interesting point arising from these findings is that people appear less satisfied with the police handling of incidents they feel to be more serious (that is, crimes in some way), that occur closer to home rather than in other places, and that, arguably, impinge on them the most (noise nuisance).

2.3. Serious violence: public debates about public safety

London's reported serious violence – murder, serious wounding, rape – has been relatively stable over these past ten years. Three of these categories – murder, serious wounding and rape – often involve people who are known to each other. Indeed, nearly three in four reported serious violence crimes and just over seven of ten rapes involve victims who know their assailants.

Yet it is serious violence that disproportionally sparks political concern about the safety of London. In particular, it is homicide that continues to grab headlines and media commentary. But not all homicides receive this public attention. Although as noted above, the homicide rate is very small, some kinds of homicides form a part of the public discourse about safety in London. These homicides feature the vulnerable, often a young

or elderly victim. Yet as any analysis of homicide shows, some people are more at risk than others, and this risk in London is still very low. For instance, just over one in five homicides involves victims aged over 50. Last year, 29 who were killed were over 50; 3 were under 12, and the average age of a homicide victim was 36. Yet the concern about homicide focused on teenagers. In the past three years, London's debate about public safety highlighted the increase in the number of teenagers killed. In 2007/8, the number of teenagers killed reached 28 – a number which stirred high concern. These teen deaths sparked a flurry of activity by the police and other public and partner organisations to diagnose the contexts within which teen homicide began to rise. Group fighting and confrontations, sometimes triggered by the 'territoriality' of some young men's groups and conflicts, simmered over into the front line of London's illegal economy. 71 London teenagers lost their lives in these past three years. Only 11 remain unsolved, largely because the killers had some familiarity with those who were killed.

So in the past three years, these deaths of young people (mostly Black and ethnic minority men) have dominated media *debate* about public safety in London. Such very public events such as teenaged homicides impact a small number of young people in London, in a small number of places. But the impact on the debate about the quality of public safety was profound. Both the BBC – through its website – and the London Evening Standard (London's afternoon newspaper) published a list of teen deaths, with commentary demanding that 'something' needed to be done to stop what was termed

10 Satisfaction with the experience of reporting ASB to the police in London was generally high. Overall, 65% of people were completely, very or fairly satisfied, 11% were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied, and 25% were either fairly, very or completely dissatisfied. The highest rates of satisfaction were found among those who reported an abandoned vehicle; reported an incident at or near their

work; felt themselves to be an informant; and felt that the incident was just something than happens. In contrast the lowest rates were found among those who reported noise nuisance; reported an incident at or near their home; felt themselves to be a victim; and felt the incident was a crime.

FIGURE 4   Victims of recorded crime in London by age group, 2009
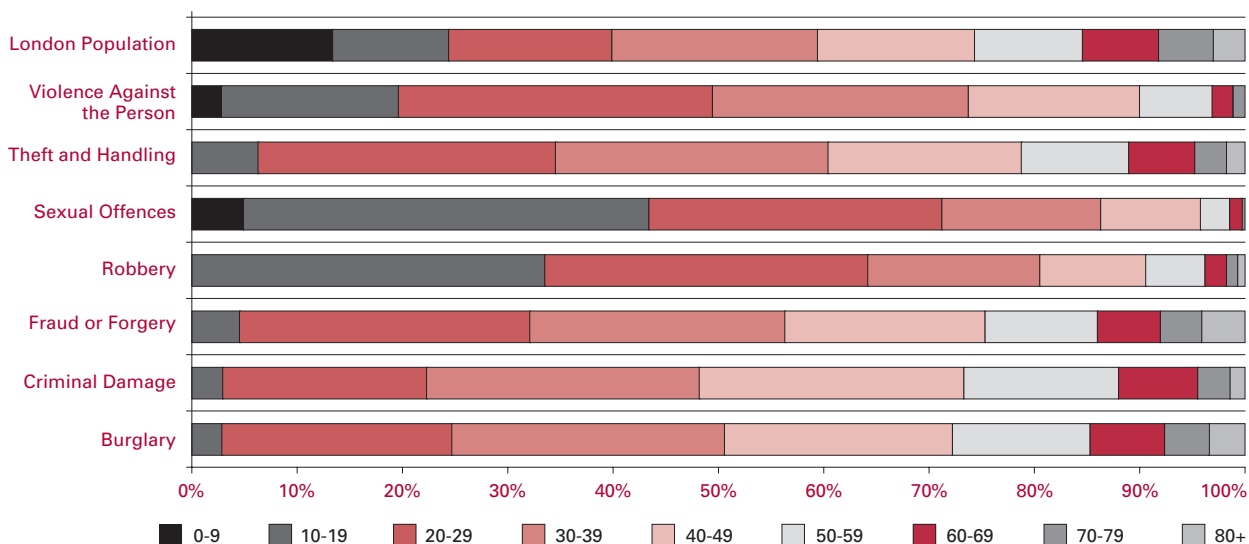
Source: MPS Crime Recording Information System, 2009.

'knife crime' in London. But when young people were asked in recent surveys, for example, about how safe they feel in London, 97% of young people aged 15-21 said they feel safe in London during the day, with 73% saying they felt safe at night. (It is young women who are more likely than young men to say they feel unsafe after dark[11].) What this suggests is that despite these homicides, the vast majority of young people say they 'feel safe' in London. Later, when we examine the demographic features of crime victims in London, we will show that it is young person on young person recorded crime (robbery in particular) that is reflected in rising reports of public violence, and these records could be used as another barometer about young people's public safety in London. Just this week, the British Crime Survey's study of young people (a pan England and Wales survey) documented that nearly one in four young people interviewed aged 10 – 16 said they had been a victim of crime[12]. As we will see below when we look at the victims of recorded crime in London, crime against young people features in the police's crime records.

Those young people who are killed are most likely to be killed with a knife. Another weapon – guns – raises concern because their usage is still rare in London. Gun usage is very restricted in the UK, and any use of these weapons noted by the public results in media interest. In the past 3 years, 65 people died from intentional shootings in London (14% of the total killings), and in these three years, there have been around 2,000 recorded incidents of shots being fired. Such incidents are carefully monitored by the police service. And because weapon availability is restricted, gun usage is linked to an illegal economy, such as the selling of illicit drugs.

As rare as homicide is in London, it does lead to a public debate about safety in the 21st century metropolis. But the events that spark this debate are rare. For example, the killing of a toddler in 2007 prompted a public outcry, and led to government scrutiny of the way in which police and social workers worked together to prevent violence in the privacy of the home. The illegal death of young children is very rare in London, and in the 21st century, any killing of a child is scrutinised for a way in which the public sector in particular could have prevented the death.

Yet as stated earlier, much serious violence flows from people's relationships, as the vast majority of serious violence involves victims and offenders who are known to one another. Domestic violence homicides and serious physical and sexual assaults routinely feature as London's serious violence profile. Approximately 15% of the homicides are related to domestic violence (a decrease over the past 10 years). Domestic violence accounts for at least one in eight serious physical assaults and one quarter of recorded rapes. Young people under 20 years of age, predominantly women, report just under 40% of all rape offences. In the next section, we discuss how knowing more about the profile of victims of recorded crime tells us about the kinds of public safety issues that face London in the 21st century.

2.4. What do the victims of crime tell us about public safety?

People in their 20s are most likely to report being a victim of crime overall, however teenagers are most likely to be victims of robbery and sexual offences. For crime overall, teenagers (10% of all victims) are less likely to

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11 The Metropolitan Police surveys 5000 people every quarter in London. This data is taken from a quarter sample in 2009/10, a sample of 944 young people aged 15-21.

12 Experimental statistics on victimisation of children aged 10 – 15: Findings from the British Crime Survey for the year ending December 2009 Bryce Millard and John Flatley (eds) http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb1110.pdf

report being victims of crime than people in their 40s (19%), who are most likely to report crimes of theft and criminal damage.

Figure 4 above shows that victims of crime are not equally distributed across age groups. While 30-39 year olds are the dominant population group in the capital, they are not the largest proportion of recorded crime victims. Those aged 10-19 (shown in dark blue above) make up about 10% of the London population, but in sexual offences they account for almost 40% of victims. This age group, 10-19 also report a third of the robberies in the capital. This means that for young people in London, robbery and sexual offences are the main reason they (or their parents) call the police. When we add those in their 20s, *approximately half of all victims who report crime are below aged 30 in London.*

As striking as the findings about age of victims is, the ethnic background of victims is also noteworthy. Black and minority ethnic (BME) people are much more likely to report being victims of crime in London. Making up 31% of London's population, almost half of those who report violence in London are BME. For each of the violent crime categories, there is a greater proportion of BME victims, and this disproportionality has increased in the last decade. *For serious violence the results are even more striking, 60% of murder victims, 50% of serious violence victims and 46% of rape victims are of BME background.*

Men dominate reported crime victims. Two thirds of victims are men in contrast to half of the population of London. They are still more likely to report being victimised in crimes of violence, robbery and burglary. A high proportion (77%) of robbery victims is male and this has risen slightly over the past decade from 72% in 2000. Women are most likely to report being victims of

sexual offences, where 88% of all recorded victims are women. As noted earlier, domestic violence is a core reason why victims need police assistance and domestic violence accounts for a third of all violence, both serious and less serious. This is unchanged from ten years ago. And over the past decade, more men are reporting violence to police; 57% (up from 52%) of victims of violence are male. This rise in male victims is more likely to be influenced by the rise in alcohol-related violence in London.

Of all victims recorded on the MPS' systems against a crime in 2009, 16% were businesses. This proportion rises for theft, criminal damage and fraud offences. In 2000, 17% of all victims were businesses, indicating that there has been little change over the last ten years.

What does the above sketch of recorded crime victims tell us? Since 2000 recorded crime has fallen, but a greater share of the victims are young and BME. This shift is important in thinking more about public safety in London in the 21st century. It seems that policing is increasingly involved in the victimisation of younger people, and that the burden of reported crime victimisation falls more heavily on the Black and Ethnic minority population in London. This population is not equally distributed across London. As London's population is cosmopolitan and multi-cultural, this suggests that the need for policing and protection is more concentrated in some areas, and in some populations more than others. This should lead to a more informed debate about public safety in London.

2.5. What does information on offenders tell us about public safety?
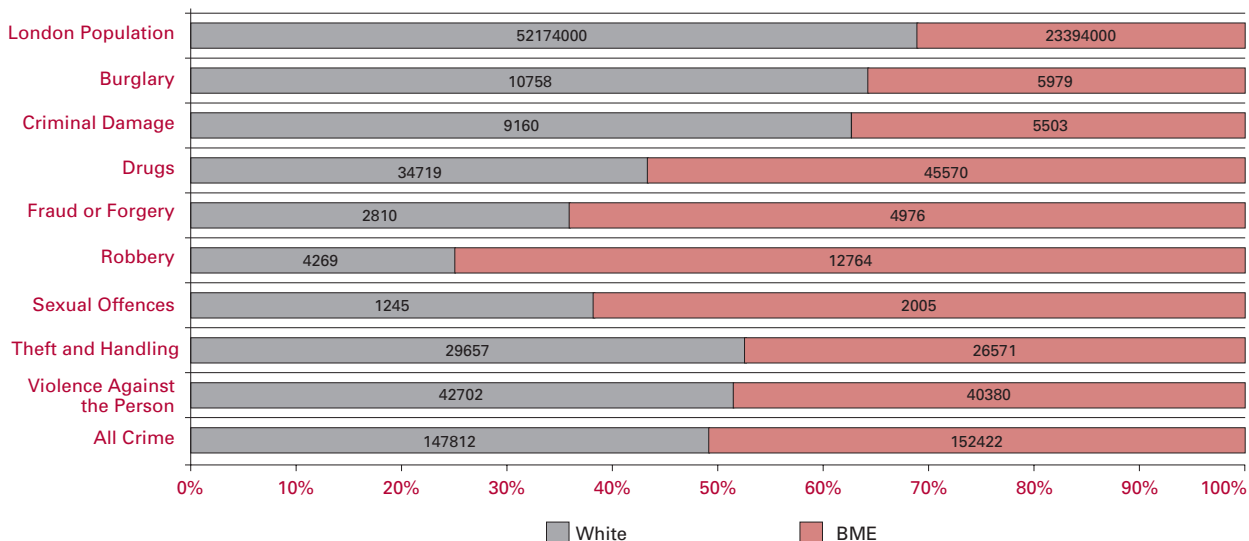
The mixture of age ranges living in London is diverse; the mixture of those age ranges and the levels of crime they

FIGURE 5   Offenders by age ranges and by crime type, 2009
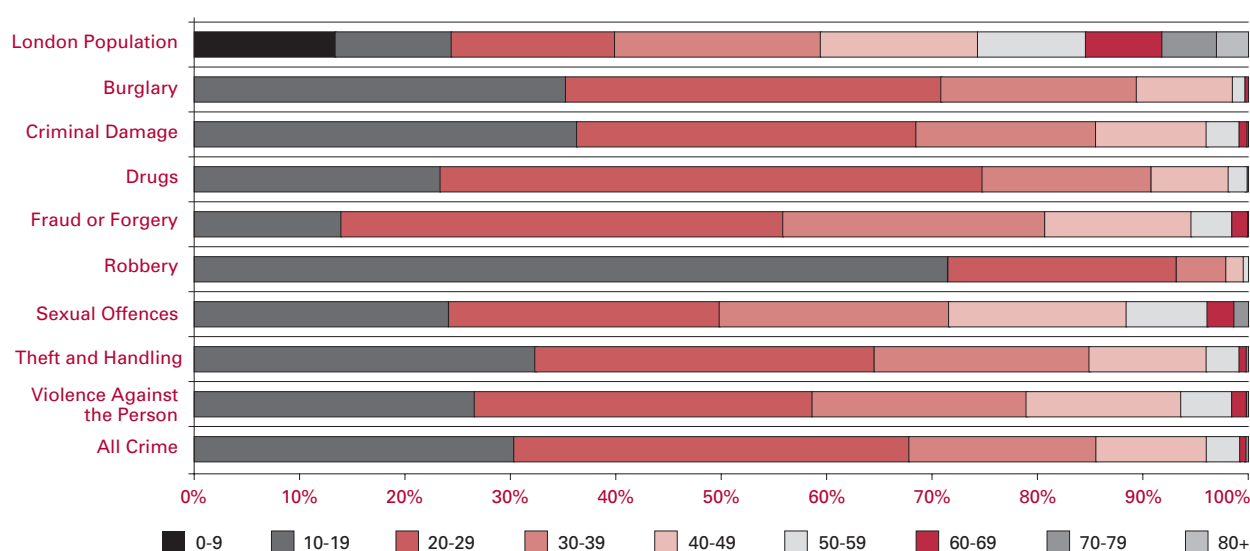
Source: MPS Crime Recording Information System, 2009.

FIGURE 6 Offenders by ethnicity and by crime type, 2009

	White	BME
London Population	52174000	23394000
Burglary	10758	5979
Criminal Damage	9160	5503
Drugs	34719	45570
Fraud or Forgery	2810	4976
Robbery	4269	12764
Sexual Offences	1245	2005
Theft and Handling	29657	26571
Violence Against the Person	42702	40380
All Crime	147812	152422

commit are not. *Just under a third of all recorded crime is committed by 10-19 year olds, with two thirds committed by people under 30*. Over 90% of robbery offences are committed by people under 30 (with 72% committed by the 10-19 age group alone). The chart below shows the mix of age ranges committing crime by crime type.
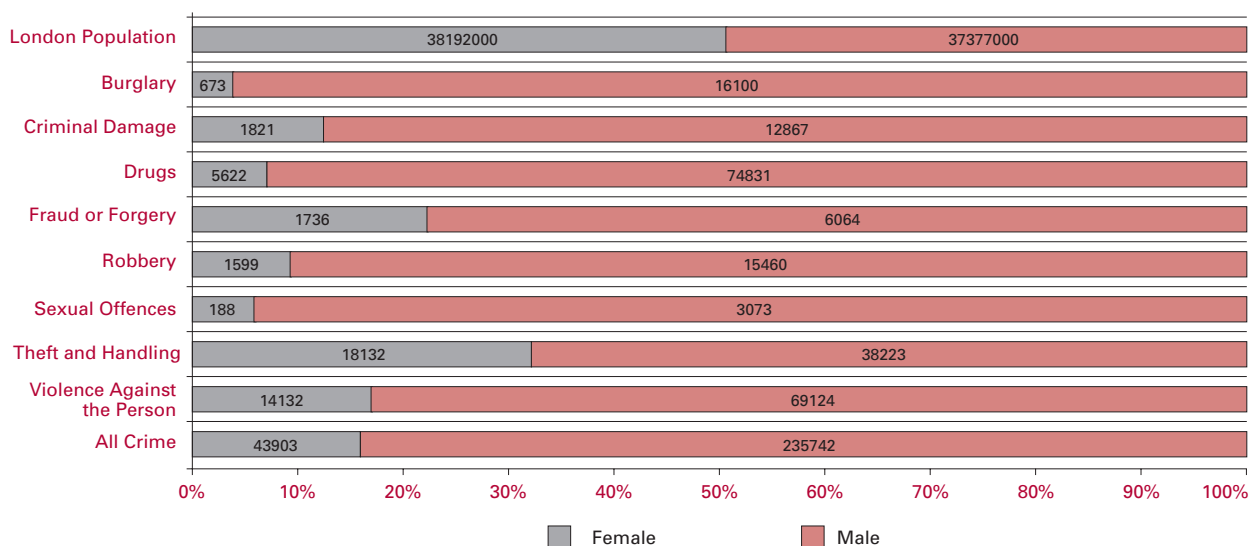
The ethnicity profile of offenders in 2009 contrasts quite visibly from the ethnicity distribution of the population in London as a whole. Offenders of a BME background are highly over-represented, with over twice the proportion of people who are BME accounting for crimes like robbery, compared to the population of London. All other crime types have an over-representation of BME offenders. The ethnicity profile has changed between 2000 and 2009 in terms of an increasing proportion of offenders who are BME. This over representation helps

explain why so many of the recorded victims are also from BME backgrounds.

Most offenders in London are men, 84% of them in 2009. Where females do commit wide ranges of crimes in every crime type, the proportion of those offending never reaches over 32%, as in theft and handling, while over 68% of offenders are male. With 94% of sexual offenders and 91% of robbery offenders being men, the data suggests that the more serious the crime, the more likely it is to have been committed by a man.

None of the above would surprise a criminologist, but it might if we think that the 21st century has led to dramatic changes in public safety in the metropolis. Debates about public safety still too often lack a commentary about gender, unless crime is committed by a girl or a

FIGURE 7 Offenders by sex and by crime type, 2009

	Female	Male
London Population	38192000	37377000
Burglary	673	16100
Criminal Damage	1821	12867
Drugs	5622	74831
Fraud or Forgery	1736	6064
Robbery	1599	15460
Sexual Offences	188	3073
Theft and Handling	18132	38223
Violence Against the Person	14132	69124
All Crime	43903	235742

FIGURE 8   London's Network of Town Centres

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

Metropolitan Centre

Major Centre

District Centre

CAZ (Central Activities Zone)

woman. What the above description of offending does suggest, though, is that people are most likely to commit crime locally, against people like themselves. Men/boys target men/boys; women/girls are still more likely to be harmed by men/boys they know or with whom they have or have had a relationship.

2.6. What does the place where a recorded crime occurs have to say about public safety?

Using the recorded crime data again to explore patterns, further analysis shows that place too has a dimension in explaining public safety in London in the 21st century. We separate recorded crime into that which takes place in public or behind closed doors. In London, 62% of the recorded crimes committed by teenagers take place in public space. This compares to 49% of the recorded crimes committed by those aged 20-29 years old and 44% of recorded crimes committed by 30-39 year olds. Public safety debates may be more heavily influenced by the visibility of youth crimes. But people need the police for their safety in private spaces too. As the above description shows, the level of recorded crime committed in public consistently falls with the age of the offender (and conversely, the amount committed in private places rises with age).

Half of all recorded violence is committed in a public place, along with 88% of all robbery and 80% of theft and handling offences. Of the remaining violent offenc-

es, 41% is committed in private residential properties and a further 8% in private, non-residential premises (such as a shop or a pub).

Recorded crime is also spatially concentrated in London. Two percent of all the recorded crime in London happens in 'Central London', a 2_ square mile area of Westminster, the centre of the tourism and entertainment industry in the capital. Half of all London's recorded crime occurs in 180 wards, most of which are clustered together in Inner London. Most of the remaining areas contributing to higher concentrations of recorded crime are a few 'outlying' wards - 12 metropolitan town centres - districts generally on the outer edges of London, with a distinct 'town centre' identity hosting leisure and shopping facilities.

3. Public Safety in London in the 21st century

Using the above as a framework, what can we say about public safety in London at the beginning of this new 21st century? If we take how people use police as one marker of concern about public safety, we see the following from a review of recorded crime over the past 10 years in London:
– Most serious violence falls more heavily on Black and Minority Ethnic Londoners,
– In particular, homicide is most likely to affect BME men;

–The space in and around one's home dominates concerns about anti-social behaviour;
–Young people's experiences of serious crime –robbery and sexual violence especially– are at the hands of other young people;
–Leisure places (for socialising and social drinking) are also the highest crime places in London.

People report crime to police that reflects a concern about safety around the home, travelling to and from home/leisure areas, and going about their business. In addition, so many of these crimes of violence, and especially serious violence, involve victims and offenders who know each other. 'Managing' public safety in London, one of the largest cities in the world, routinely involves intervening in personal relationships, not protecting the populous from the unknown danger of strangers. Of course, such protection is a mainstay of the policing remit, and rightly so. Yet a clue to public safety in the 21st century still lies in managing the way people who are known to, familiar or familial, neighbours and acquaintances treat and offend against each other. What does this tell us about the original remit of Peel's police to 'keep the Queen's peace'?

As criminologists, we have been studying crime for over a century. This study of crime was sometimes rooted in a detailed knowledge of the circumstances of murders or assaults. More often than not, it is a commentary on a collection of aggregate statistics. If we look more carefully, the dominant picture of crime still involves a significant proportion of people who ask for police help in managing the relationships around them. Whether in friendship, acquaintance, intimacy or business, many people who ask police for help ask them to step inside the texture of personal dispute, using law as its final arbiter. What is remarkable is that in a city of such size and stature in the world, the substance of personal disputes impacts greatly on the provision of public safety.

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