

Crime in England and Wales: Quarterly Update to December 2002

David Povey, Sian Nicholas and Heather Salisbury

4 April 2003

05/03

MAIN POINTS

- Overall crime has resumed falls in the second half of 2002. This picture is more positive than the one published in last quarter's update.
- Recorded robbery fell by an estimated 23 per cent in October-December 2002 compared with the previous year. Violent crime overall appears to have levelled off after falls in the late 1990s.
- Domestic burglary is showing signs in late 2002 of resuming the falls of the 1990s after a flat period earlier in the year.
- Vehicle thefts continue to fall in 2002, with the BCS showing a 17 per cent fall since 2000.
- Levels of fear of burglary and car crime have fallen in recent quarters.
- According to the BCS, the majority of the public feel that crime has risen in the last two years, despite overall crime having fallen over that time.

OVERALL TRENDS IN CRIME

Total Crime

1. Looking at the British Crime Survey (BCS) and recorded crime together, the general picture is one of falls resuming in the second half of 2002, after a relatively flat period over the previous year. This picture is more positive than the one published in the last quarterly update (Povey, Ellis & Nicholas, 2003), which reported no clear up or down movement.

2. Based on interviews that took place in the year ending December 2002, the BCS estimates a fall of nine per cent in the number of crimes against adults living in private households in England and Wales compared with the 2001 BCS. This total incorporates a statistically significant fall in all household crime (down 13 per cent to 7.4 million), and a non-statistically significant fall in all personal crime (down three per cent to 4.6 million) [see box below for explanation of statistical significance].

3. The risk of being a victim of crime (the 'victimisation rate') has also fallen over the same period¹. The latest BCS figures show that 26.4 per cent of adults living in private households, interviewed in the 12 months to December 2002, had been the victim of one or more crimes over the previous 12 months. This compares with 27.6 per cent in the 2001 BCS, which means that the risk of becoming a victim of crime remains historically low, around the same as the first BCS results for crime in 1981.

4. The latest quarterly recorded crime figures give the best indication of the most recent trends. After accounting for the effects of the National Crime Recording Standard [see box below], there was a seven per cent fall in total recorded crime in October-December 2002 compared with the corresponding quarter in 2001. This follows a one per cent fall in the previous quarter and increases earlier in the year, and therefore suggests an improving picture since the statistics for the year 2001/02 (Simmons et al, 2002).

¹ This fall was not statistically significant at the 10% level (see Table 1).

Table 1 Latest levels and trends based on the British Crime Survey ⁽¹⁾

BCS

	2001 BCS (crime in 2000)	Interviews in year ending Dec 2002	% change in number of crimes 2001 BCS to interviews in year ending Dec 2002 ⁽²⁾	Statistically significant change? ⁽³⁾
Percentage risk of being a victim once or more				
Burglary	3.4	3.2	NA	-
All vehicle thefts ⁽⁴⁾	11.4	10.6	NA	-
All household crime	21.7	20.4	NA	**
BCS violence	4.0	4.0	NA	-
All personal crime	7.4	7.3	NA	-
All BCS crime	27.6	26.4	NA	-
Number of crimes (000s) ⁽⁵⁾				
Burglary	1,060	948	-11%	-
All vehicle thefts	2,792	2,306	-17%	**
All household crime	8,516	7,379	-13%	**
BCS violence	2,768	2,708	-2%	-
All personal crime	4,717	4,599	-3%	-
All BCS crime	13,233	11,978	-9%	NA ⁽⁶⁾

Notes

1. Source: British Crime Survey. Data are provisional.
2. Percentage change is not calculated for risk.
3. Statistical significance of changes is indicated by a single asterisk for significance at 10% level, a double at the 5% level (two tail tests) or a '-' for non-statistically significant change. For further information on these calculations see Simmons *et al* (2002).
4. Results for 'all vehicle thefts' are based on vehicle owning households only.
5. Estimated numbers of crimes for 2001 BCS calculated using ONS interim population estimates. Therefore figures may differ from those previously published.
6. Statistical significance can not be calculated for the change in all BCS crime.

Table 2 Trends in recorded crime based on unadjusted data and estimates for the impact of recording changes, year and quarter to December 2002

<i>Offence group</i>	Jul - Sep 2002 , compared with the same quarter a year earlier ⁽¹⁾		Oct - Dec 2002 , compared with the same quarter a year earlier	
	Unadjusted %	Adjusted for NCRS effect %	Unadjusted %	Adjusted for NCRS effect %
Violence against the Person	29.0	6	28.2	1
Sexual Offences	25.2	*	13.2	*
Robbery	-7.7	-11	-21.2	-23
Domestic Burglary	3.2	0	-1.4	-4
Other Burglary	2.6	0	-2.7	-6
Thefts of and from Vehicles	1.4	-2	-3.0	-6
Other Thefts and Handling	10.7	*	4.8	*
Fraud and Forgery	8.7	*	3.0	*
Criminal Damage	5.7	-2	0.9	-8
Drug Offences	15.3	*	23.8	*
Other Offences	12.1	*	13.5	*
Total Recorded Crime	8.9	-1	4.1	-7

1. Figures for July - September 2002 have been revised since the last quarterly update (Povey, Ellis & Nicholas (2003)). See Table A, notes 1 and 4 for explanations.

* No adjusted figure is available for these crime types due to the methodology involved in estimating the effects of recording changes. See footnotes to Table A.

Violent Crime

5. Following falls in the latter half of the 1990s, the indications are that overall violent crime has now levelled off. Within this total, violence against the person has shown modest rises in 2002, whereas robbery has fallen substantially in the latter half of the year.

6. The latest BCS figures (from interviews in the 12 months to December 2002) show a two per cent fall in violent crime compared with the 2001 BCS to around 2.7 million incidents, but this fall is not statistically significant. However, BCS victimisation rates for violent crimes have not changed over the same period. The risk of being a victim of a violent crime in the last 12 months currently stands at 4.0 per cent, the same as in the 2001 BCS, and as this follows falls in the late 1990s, it continues to suggest that violence has levelled off.

7. Recorded violent crime has shown some large increases over the last year, but most of this is due to the introduction of the new National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS). The NCRS effect is particularly significant for violent crime (most offences are relatively minor assaults and are particularly susceptible to increased recording). After allowing for NCRS, the latest figures for violence against the person, which accounts for around four-fifths of all recorded violence, show a one per cent increase in October-December 2002, compared with the corresponding quarter of 2001. This is smaller than the increases in previous quarters.

8. In contrast to violence against the person, robbery which accounts for about one in seven of all recorded violent offences has started to show substantial falls in the second half of 2002, down 23 per cent (adjusted for NCRS) in the latest quarter. The sharp falls in robbery follow the introduction of the Street Crime Initiative in the Spring of 2002.

What do we mean by statistical significance?

Results from the BCS are based on a sample of the population. The independent social research company BMRB interview around 40,000 respondents aged 16 or over each year. However, the 2001 Census counted 42 million adults in England and Wales. So although the BCS is large by the standards of most surveys, each year it only interviews a small proportion of the population.

The BCS sample may therefore produce estimates which differ from the figures which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed. The size of this difference depends on the sample size, the size of the estimate and the design of the survey.

Because of this difference (known as sampling error) changes in estimates between sweeps of the survey may occur by chance. In other words the difference may be simply due to which adults were randomly selected for interview. We are able to measure whether this is likely to be the case using standard statistical tests. These tests of statistical significance identify which changes are unlikely to have happened by chance, i.e. the changes we would have probably found if we had interviewed all 42 million adults.

The Effects of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS)

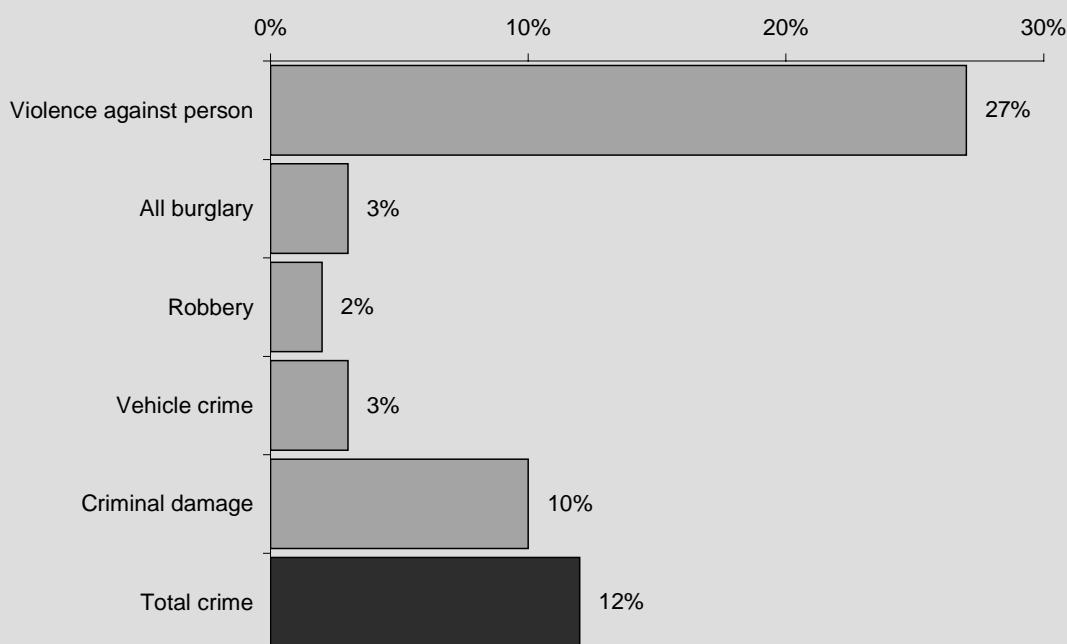
Recorded crime figures are susceptible to changes in the public's willingness to report crime and police forces' recording practices. This is a major factor in explaining divergences in trends between recorded crime and the BCS. The National Crime Recording Standard was adopted across all forces from April 2002 and, once it is implemented fully, it will result in more consistent and victim-focused recording by all police forces. One effect of NCRS is to increase the number of reported incidents that are recorded as crimes by the police. This increase will particularly affect recorded crime figures for 2001/02 and 2002/03 and makes it difficult to compare recorded crime figures directly with those prior to NCRS implementation.

The Home Office has been collecting figures for crime-related incidents (the allegations of crimes reported to the police), as well as crimes recorded so that we can compare over time the proportion of these incidents that are then recorded as crimes. This allows us to assess the effect of NCRS implementation on recorded crime and to gauge underlying trends. Further details of the methodology are contained in Simmons et al (2002).

It must be stressed that the adjusted figures are estimates. The impact of the NCRS will vary considerably between police forces, depending on their prior recording practice, as well as between different crimes. Due to differences in incident recording, the estimates are likely to underestimate the full effect of these changes (see Simmons et al).

Figure 1 shows the estimated impacts of these changes on the national crime statistics for October to December 2002. Table 2 shows figures adjusted for these changes.

Figure 1: Estimates of the national impact of recording changes on recorded crime in England and Wales, October – December 2002



Percentage of total recorded crimes attributable to the introduction of NCRS

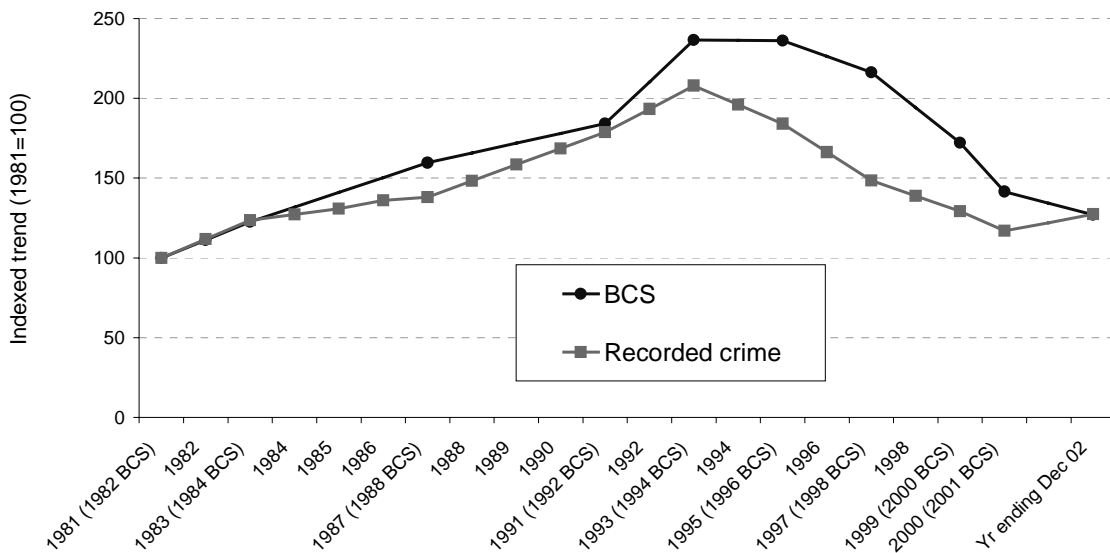
Domestic Burglary

9. Domestic burglary has shown a decline over much of the 1990s, although this has more recently levelled off or shown a small upturn. Most recent trends suggest, however, that the falls may be resuming. Figure 2 illustrates the decline over the 1990s although recorded crime shows a modest increase in 2002. This is because the figures in this chart are 12 monthly and a further quarterly fall in January-March 2003 would be needed to outweigh the earlier increases and therefore cause the 12 monthly figure to fall.

10. Latest BCS figures (from interviews in the year to December 2002) estimate an 11 per cent fall compared with the 2001 BCS to just under 950,000 offences, although the fall is not statistically significant. The BCS shows that victimisation rates for domestic burglary remain broadly unchanged with a slight fall from 3.4 to 3.2 per cent of households.

11. The latest quarterly recorded crime figures show that domestic burglaries fell by four per cent in October-December 2002, compared with October-December 2001, after accounting for NCRS. This follows a flat previous quarter and increases earlier in the year.

Figure 2 Indexed trends in domestic burglary



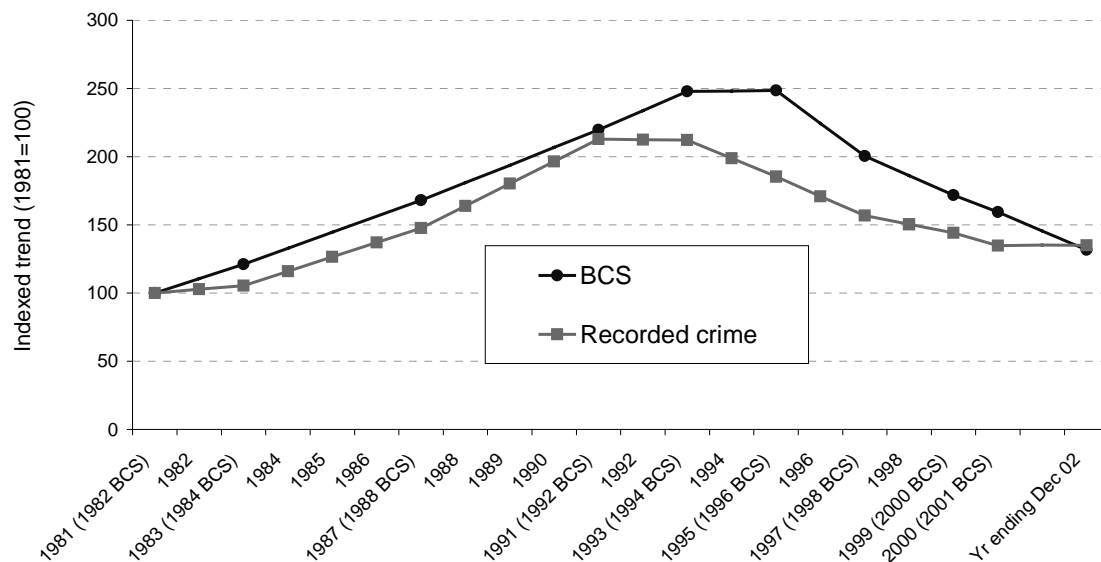
Vehicle Crime

12. Like burglary, vehicle crime has shown a decline since the early 1990s. Latest BCS figures indicate the fall continuing at a similar rate since 2000, and the latest recorded crime figures show a fall in the last two quarters of 2002. Figure 3 shows the 12 monthly falls since the 1990s, although recorded crime has recently levelled off and will resume the falling 12 month trend if there are further quarterly falls in early 2003.

13. Latest BCS figures (from interviews during the year ending December 2002) indicate that there were an estimated 2.3 million incidents of vehicle theft² - a fall of 17 per cent compared with the 2001 BCS (covering crime in 2000). This is a statistically significant fall. The BCS shows that victimisation rates for vehicle thefts have also fallen from 11.4 to 10.6 per cent. This is considerably lower than the peak of 19.7 per cent in 1995.

14. The latest quarterly recorded crime figures show an estimated six per cent fall in October-December 2002 compared with October-December 2001, after accounting for the effects of NCRS. This is greater than the two per cent fall in the previous quarter.

Figure 3 Indexed trend in vehicle crime



² Defined as thefts of motor vehicles, thefts from motor vehicles and attempts.

FEAR OF CRIME AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR INDICATORS

15. There were statistically significant falls for both fear of burglary and of car crime between the 2001 BCS and year ending December 2002.³ In BCS interviews during the year ending December 2002, 15 per cent of adults had high levels of worry about burglary (compared with 16 per cent for the 2001 BCS) and 17 per cent had high levels of fear about car crime (compared with 19 per cent) (Table 3).

16. The latest figures suggest the percentage of people perceiving a high level of disorder in their local area has remained stable. In the year ending December 2002 the figure stood at 21 per cent, the same percentage as the 2001 BCS (Table 3).

17. Of the seven individual antisocial behaviour measures (see Table 3 for details), six have remained stable compared with the 2001 BCS. However, the proportion of respondents who said that teenagers hanging around on the streets in their local area was a very or fairly big problem increased significantly from 31 to 33 per cent.

Table 3 Fear of crime and antisocial behaviour indicators ^{(1) (2)}

<i>Percentages</i>	BCS		
	2001 BCS	Interviews in year ending Dec 2002	Statistically significant change? ⁽³⁾
High level of worry about burglary	16	15	**
High level of worry about car crime	19	17	**
High level of worry about violent crime	22	21	-
High level of perceived disorder	21	21	-
Noisy neighbours or loud parties	9	10	-
Teenagers hanging around on the streets	31	33	**
Rubbish or litter lying around	32	33	-
Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property	34	35	-
People being attacked/ harassed because of their race/ colour	9	8	-
People using or dealing drugs	30	32	-
People being drunk or rowdy in public places	22	23	-

Notes:

1. Source British Crime Survey. Data are provisional.

2. See Simmons *et al* (2002) for more information on the definitions of the fear of crime indicators and antisocial behaviour.

3. Statistical significance of changes is indicated by a single asterisk for significance at the 10% level, a double at the 5% level (two tail tests) or a '-' for non-statistically significant change. For further information on these calculations see Simmons *et al* (2002).

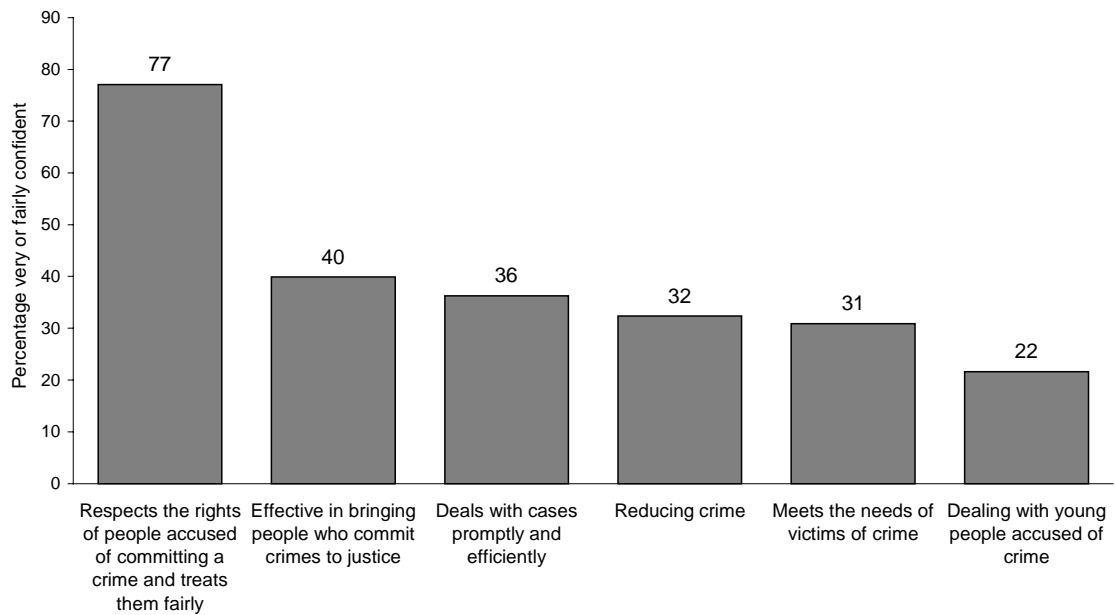
³ The 2001 BCS interviews predominantly took place between January and March 2001.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS CRIME AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

18. The British Crime Survey asks respondents how they thought the level of crime for the country as a whole had changed over the previous two years – latest figures show that 36 per cent of adults believed crime had increased ‘a lot’ and a further 35 per cent of adults believed that crime had increased ‘a little’. There has been a notable increase in the proportion saying crime had increased (in the 2001 BCS the corresponding proportions were 25 and 31 per cent respectively).

19. The BCS assesses public confidence in six different aspects of the criminal justice system (CJS). Although three quarters (77%) were confident that the CJS respects the rights of people accused of committing crimes and treats them fairly, only a third were confident it meets the needs of victims (31%), and under a quarter (22%) felt it is effective in dealing with young people accused of crime (Figure 4).⁴ In 60 per cent of incidents the police came to know about, victims were very or fairly satisfied with the way the police handled the matter.

Figure 4 Public confidence in the criminal justice system



Source: BCS interviews between January 2002 and December 2002 (provisional data)

⁴ Findings from these six questions were first published on the 2001/02 BCS.

Table A Number of recorded crimes for most recent 12 month periods. Percentage changes for most recent 12 month and 3 month period unadjusted percentages, and adjusted percentages to take account of recording changes

Offence group	Number of crimes recorded by the police (thousands)					Percentage change, latest 12 months - unadjusted and adjusted for recording changes ⁽²⁾				Percentage change, latest quarter - unadjusted and adjusted for recording changes ⁽²⁾			
	12 months to Dec 01	12 months to Mar 02	12 months to Jun 02	12 months to Sep 02 ⁽¹⁾	12 months to Dec 02 ⁽¹⁾	Unadjusted change in recorded crime - 12 months to Sep 02 ⁽¹⁾⁽³⁾	Adjusted to estimate the impact of recording changes - 12 months to Sep 02 ⁽⁴⁾	Unadjusted change in recorded crime - 12 months to Dec 02 ⁽¹⁾⁽³⁾	Adjusted to estimate the impact of recording changes - 12 months to Dec 02 ⁽⁴⁾	Unadjusted change in recorded crime - 3 months to Sep 02 ⁽¹⁾⁽³⁾	Adjusted to estimate the impact of recording changes - 3 months to Sep 02 ⁽⁴⁾	Unadjusted change in recorded crime - 3 months to Dec 02 ⁽¹⁾⁽³⁾	Adjusted to estimate the impact of recording changes - 3 months to Dec 02 ⁽⁴⁾
						%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Violence against the person	639.1	650.1	695.8	744.1	789.9	19.2	1	23.6	2	29.0	6	28.2	1
Sexual offences	40.4	41.4	43.1	45.7	47.1	18.1	*	16.6	*	25.2	*	13.2	*
Robbery	114.6	121.4	123.0	120.7	113.8	14.6	12	-0.7	-3	-7.7	-11	-21.2	-23
<i>Total violent crime</i>	<i>794.0</i>	<i>812.9</i>	<i>861.8</i>	<i>910.5</i>	<i>950.8</i>	<i>18.5</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>19.7</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>23.7</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>19.5</i>	<i>*</i>
Domestic burglary	421.8	430.4	443.8	447.2	445.7	7.9	5	5.7	2	3.2	0	-1.4	-4
Other burglary	439.1	448.2	460.5	463.4	460.4	6.6	6	4.9	3	2.6	0	-2.7	-6
Thefts of and from vehicles	972.5	983.3	994.8	998.1	990.6	3.4	2	1.9	0	1.4	-2	-3.0	-6
Other thefts and handling	1249.3	1283.7	1329.3	1364.0	1379.5	12.7	*	10.4	*	10.7	*	4.8	*
Fraud and forgery	320.3	317.4	319.3	326.2	328.5	1.5	*	2.6	*	8.7	*	3.0	*
Criminal damage	1047.8	1064.5	1075.8	1089.8	1092.2	7.9	0	4.2	-4	5.7	-2	0.9	-8
<i>Total property crime</i>	<i>4450.8</i>	<i>4527.5</i>	<i>4623.6</i>	<i>4688.7</i>	<i>4696.9</i>	<i>7.6</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>5.5</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>5.9</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>*</i>
Drug offences	118.2	121.3	125.4	130.1	137.3	12.2	*	16.2	*	15.3	*	23.8	*
Other offences	64.4	65.3	67.5	69.5	71.7	9.7	*	11.3	*	12.1	*	13.5	*
Total recorded crime	5427.5	5527.1	5678.3	5798.8	5856.8	9.3	2	7.9	-1	8.9	-1	4.1	-7

1. Police recorded crime statistics, based on data from all 43 forces in England and Wales. The figures for both the 12 months and 3 months to September 2002 have been revised slightly since the last quarterly update (Povey, Ellis & Nicholas (2003)), when data included estimates for two of the forces.

2. Percentage changes compared with the same period in the previous year. Three month comparisons with the previous three months (e.g. Jul-Sep with Apr-Jun) are not shown, as they will not take account of possible seasonal effects

3. The unadjusted figure represents the raw increase in crimes recorded by the police, which will include the effects of the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard.

4. The adjusted column presents our current best estimate of the maximum likely real increase in recorded crime once the impact of the introduction of the NCRS has been taken into account. The methodology used to produce these estimates is likely to underestimate the full impact of the NCRS. For further information see Simmons (2002) p24. The estimates for the 12 months and 3 months to September 2002 have been revised since the last quarterly update to reflect data for certain forces that were received since then.

* It is not currently possible to adjust the national data for the impact of the NCRS for crime types where police forces are unable to differentiate incidents, where numbers are too small or where the nature of incident recording means that this measure is particularly unreliable as an indicator of underlying trends. For further information see Simmons (2002) p21-25.

NOTES

Coverage

The latest **British Crime Survey** (BCS) figures report on interviews with individuals living in private households conducted between January and December 2002 (year ending December 2002) and incidents experienced by survey respondents in the 12 months prior to their interview. Averaging over the moving recall period generates estimates that are most closely comparable with police recorded crime figures for the 12 months up to the end of June 2002, about six months behind the recorded crime figures reported here. BCS trends are compared with the 2001 BCS (covering crime in 2000) which was first reported in Kershaw et al (2001).⁵

The BCS fieldwork was carried out by BMRB Social Research. The year ending December 2002 BCS has a nationally representative sample of 37,779 adults aged 16 or over living in private households in England and Wales. The response rate was 75 per cent.⁶ Further details are contained in Bolling et al (2002). To find out more about the BCS and to access all recent publications go to <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/bcs1.html>.

Recorded crime figures relate to crime recorded in England and Wales in the period in question, although a few of these crimes may have been committed in an earlier period. Unlike the BCS, it does not include crimes that have not been reported to the police, and some of those that are, the police may decide not to record. Police recording practice is governed by Home Office counting rules and the National Crime Recording Standard, copies of which are available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/counrules.html>.

BCS and recorded crime figures used in this bulletin should be treated as provisional and may be subject to revision in future Quarterly Updates.

CONTACTS

Copies of this and recorded crime and BCS publications are available from the Information and Publications Group, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Communications Development Unit, Room 201, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT (Tel. 020 7273 2084).

Or by Internet email: publications.rds@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

RDS Internet site <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/index.htm>

⁵ The 2001/02 sweep (reported in Simmons *et al*, 2002) and the year ending December 2002 dataset both include the BCS respondents who were interviewed between January and March 2002.

⁶ Based on BCS interviews *issued* during the year ending September 2002.

REFERENCES

Bolling, K., Clemens, S., Phelps, A. and Smith, P. (2002). 2001 British Crime Survey (England and Wales) Technical Report. London: BMRB.

Kershaw, K., Chivite-Matthews, N., Thomas, C. and Aust, R. (2001). The 2001 British Crime Survey, First Results, England and Wales. Home Office Statistical Bulletin Issue 18/01. London: Home Office. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hosb1801.pdf>

Povey, D., Ellis, C., Nicholas, S. (2003). **Crime in England and Wales: Quarterly Update 12 months to September 2002.** Home Office Statistical Bulletin Issue 2/03. London: Home Office. <http://homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosb203.pdf>

Simmons, J. et al (2002). Crime in England and Wales 2001/2002. Home Office Statistical Bulletin Issue 7/02. London: Home Office. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosb702.pdf>

Street Crime Action Team (2002). Street Crime Initiative: Figures up to the End of September. London: Home Office. <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/streetcrime>