

Article

Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2017

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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Release date:
8 February 2018

Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Main points

- There were 709 homicides in the year ending March 2017, 141 more (25% increase) than in the previous year, this includes the 96 cases of manslaughter that resulted from events at Hillsborough in 1989; excluding these the number of homicides increased by 8%.
- The number of male victims has increased at a faster rate than females in recent years with male victims of homicide increasing by 33% to 433 (excluding Hillsborough victims) from 325 in the year ending March 2015, ending a generally downward trend.
- The number of female homicide victims has remained broadly flat over the last five years (fewer than 200).
- There were 12 offences of homicide per million population in the year ending March 2017 (10 homicides per million population excluding Hillsborough victims).
- Excluding Hillsborough victims, the homicide rate for males (15 per million population) was more than twice that for females (6 per million population).
- Women were far more likely to be killed by partners or ex-partners (50% of female victims aged 16 and over compared with 3% of male victims aged 16 and over), whereas men were more likely to be killed by friends or acquaintances (32% of male victims aged 16 and over compared with 10% of female victims aged 16 and over).
- The most common method of killing was by knife or other sharp instrument with 215 victims killed in this way, accounting for 30% of homicides.

2 . How is homicide defined and measured?

The term “homicide” covers the offences of murder, manslaughter and infanticide¹. Murder and manslaughter are common law offences that have never been defined by statute, although they have been modified by statute. In this article, the manslaughter category includes the offence of corporate manslaughter, which was created by the [Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007](#), which 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).

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. It is continually updated with revised information from the police and the courts and, as such, is a richer source of data than the main recorded crime dataset².

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 Statistics³. Further information on the interpretation of recorded crime data is provided in the [User Guide](#).

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 vast majority of cases the offence will be recorded in the same year as it took place, this is not always the case. Caution is therefore needed when looking at longer-term homicide trend figures. For example:

- the 172 homicides attributed to Dr 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
- the 96 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

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 victims of Derrick Bird are counted as 12 homicides rather than one incident in the year ending March 2011 data.

The data refer to the position as at 16 November 2017, when the Homicide Index database was "frozen" for the purpose of analysis⁴. The data will change as subsequent court hearings take place or as further information is received.

The circumstances surrounding a homicide may be complex and it can take time for cases to pass through the criminal justice system (CJS). Due to this, the percentage of homicides recorded in the year ending March 2017 (and, to a lesser extent, those recorded in earlier years) that have concluded at Crown Court is likely to show an increase when the next figures from the Homicide Index are published⁵. Conversely, the proportion of cases without suspects or with court proceedings pending is expected to decrease as police complete more investigations and as cases pass through the CJS (see "What do we know about suspects?" section for further details).

For the purposes of the Homicide Index, a suspect in a homicide case is defined as either:

- a person who has been arrested in respect of an offence initially classified as homicide⁶ and charged with homicide, including those who were subsequently convicted
- a person who is suspected by the police of having committed the offence but is known to have died or committed suicide prior to arrest or being charged

Where there are multiple suspects in a homicide case they are categorised in the Homicide Index as either the principal suspect or a secondary suspect. There is only ever one principal suspect per homicide victim. If there is any conviction information available then 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.

As more than one person can be convicted for a single homicide, the number of people convicted will not necessarily be the same as the number of victims recorded. However, if the outcome of only the principal suspect in each case is examined (that is, one suspect per victim), this can provide a more direct comparison to the case outcome of each homicide.

Notes for: How is homicide defined and measured?

1. Infanticide is defined as the killing of a baby under one year old by their mother while the balance of her mind was disturbed as a result of giving birth.
2. For example, when the police initially record an offence as a homicide it remains classified as such unless the police or courts decide that a lesser offence, or no offence, took on the Homicide Index as “no longer recorded” but may remain in the main police recorded crime collection as a homicide place. The offence would be reclassified.
3. The letter of confirmation can be found on the [UK Statistics Authority](#) website.
4. 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. See Section 3.1 of the [User Guide](#) for more information.
5. In the year ending March 2016, an exercise was carried out with the National Confidential Inquiry at the University of Manchester and Greater Manchester Police to update the Homicide Index with missing CJS outcomes. This led to a decrease in the number of homicides with pending or in progress cases, and a corresponding increase in final outcomes. This exercise was not carried out this year; therefore, homicide cases for the year ending March 2017 will have a higher number of pending or in progress cases.
6. The homicide may no longer be recorded as such if all the suspects were acquitted.

3 . What do trends in homicide look like?

When the police initially record an offence as a homicide it remains classified as such unless the police or courts decide that a lesser offence, or no offence, took place.

In all, 719 deaths were initially recorded as homicides by the police in the year ending March 2017 and by 16 November 2017, 10 were no longer recorded as homicides¹, giving a total of 709 offences currently recorded as homicide. This is 141 more (25% increase) than in the previous year ([Appendix Table 1](#)). However, the 709 homicides recorded in the year ending March 2017 includes the 96 cases of manslaughter that resulted from events at Hillsborough in 1989; excluding these cases, the number of homicides increased by 8% (from 568 to 613). Drivers of this increase are explored in later sections.

To put the number of homicides in context, incidence rates show the volume of offences as a proportion of the resident population. The incidence rate for homicide remains relatively low, with 12.1 homicides recorded per million population during the year ending March 2017. Excluding the 96 Hillsborough cases, the rate is 10.5 homicides per million population, slightly higher than the previous year (9.8 million homicides per million population).

Historically, the number of homicides increased from around 300 per year in the early 1960s to over 800 per year in the early years of this century, which was at a faster rate than population growth over the same period. However, to the year ending March 2015, the volume of homicides has generally decreased while the population of England and Wales has continued to grow.

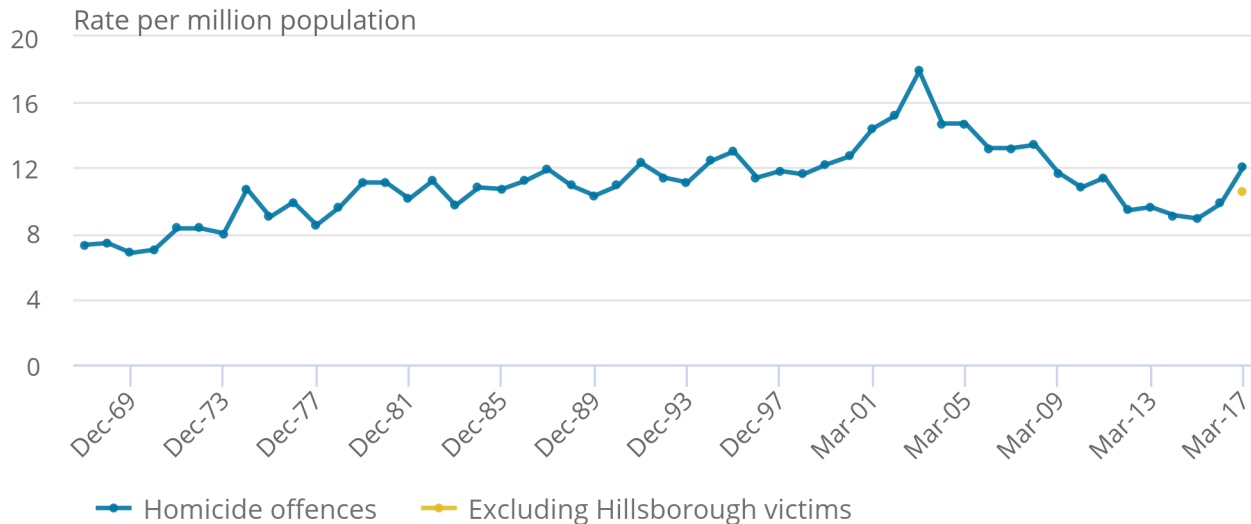
Figure 1 shows that in the latest two years, the number of homicides has begun to increase, but the homicide rate for the year ending March 2017 was still 20% lower than 10 years ago (13.2 homicides per million population compared with 10.5 homicides per million population – excluding Hillsborough).

Figure 1: Incidence rate per million population for homicide offences currently recorded by the police in England and Wales

Year ending December 1967 to year ending March 2017

Figure 1: Incidence rate per million population for homicide offences currently recorded by the police in England and Wales

Year ending December 1967 to year ending March 2017



Source: Homicide Index, 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 172 victims of Dr 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 Derrick Bird.

Compared with other offences, homicides are relatively low-volume and year-on-year variations need to be interpreted with some caution. However, a statistical analysis of trends² shows the number of homicide incidents recorded in the year ending March 2017 was not statistically significantly different at the 95% level compared with the previous year, but was significantly higher compared with the year ending March 2015 (see [Appendix Table 23](#)).

More up-to-date figures on homicide from the main recorded crime return are published as part of the quarterly [ONS Crime statistics in England and Wales series](#).

Notes for: What do trends in homicide look like?

1. For example, following further investigation the police determined that the case was a suicide not a homicide.
2. Further information on the methodology can be found in Section 11 of the Homicide chapter of [Focus on violent crime and sexual offences, England and Wales: year ending March 2016](#).

4 . Which groups of people are most likely to be victims of homicide?

As previously discussed, there were 96 deaths that occurred at Hillsborough in 1989 that were recorded as manslaughters in the year ending March 2017 following the verdict of the Hillsborough Inquest in April 2016. Of the 96 Hillsborough manslaughter victims recorded in the year ending March 2017, 89 were male and 7 were female. The majority of victims (67) were aged between 16 and 34 years; there were 10 victims under the age of 16 years and 13 victims who were aged 35 years or older. As the majority of victims were male and in the younger age groups, to analyse the latest trends on a comparable basis, the Hillsborough victims have been removed from the analysis.

Sex

The majority of homicide victims were male in the year ending March 2017 (71%, 433 victims) and 29% were female (180 victims).

Trends in homicide have been driven by changes in the level of male victims rather than female victims over the last 50 years. In the 1960s, the proportion of homicide victims was fairly evenly split between male and female victims. However, while the number of female victims of homicide tended to fluctuate between 200 and 250 a year¹ from the 1960s until the year ending March 2011, the number of male victims increased from similar numbers to an average of around 550 a year between the years ending March 2001 to March 2005.

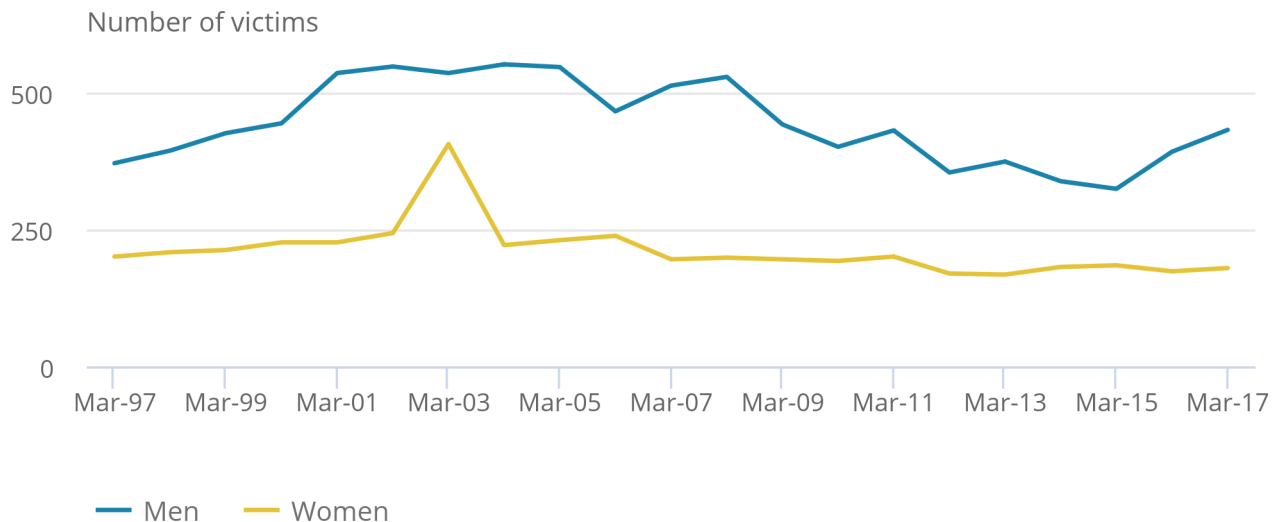
Since then, a fall in male homicide victims has driven the downward trend in homicide, to 325 in the year ending March 2015, the lowest number of male victims in a quarter of a century. However, in the last two years (to year ending March 2017), the number of male victims has increased at a faster rate than females, with male victims of homicide increasing by 33% to 433 (excluding Hillsborough victims). In contrast, the number of female homicide victims has remained broadly flat over the last five years (fewer than 200) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Homicide offences currently recorded by the police in England and Wales, by sex of victim, (excluding Hillsborough victims)

Year ending March 1997 to year ending March 2017

Figure 2: Homicide offences currently recorded by the police in England and Wales, by sex of victim, (excluding Hillsborough victims)

Year ending March 1997 to year ending March 2017



Source: Homicide Index, Home Office

Notes:

1. Year ending March 2003 includes 42 male and 130 female victims of Dr Harold Shipman.
2. Year ending March 2012 includes one victim with unknown gender.
3. Year ending March 2015 includes one victim with unknown gender.
4. Year ending March 2016 includes one victim with unknown gender.
5. Year ending March 2017 excludes 89 male and 7 female victims of Hillsborough.

The homicide rate for males (15 per million population) was more than twice that for females (6 per million population), a pattern that is consistent with previous years (see [Appendix Tables 3 and 4](#)). However, it should be noted that the nature of homicides differs between men and women, as discussed in the “How are victims and suspects related?” section of this article.

Age

Figure 3 shows that the most common age group for victims of homicides recorded in the year ending March 2017 was 35 to 44 years (119 victims), closely followed by 25 to 34 years (113 victims) and 16 to 24 years (104 victims).

As in previous years, children under the age of one have the highest rate of homicide (36 per million population), along with males aged 16 to 24 years (25 per million population). (See [Appendix Table 4.](#))

Homicide victims aged under 16 years and aged 16 to 24 years had the largest volume increases for the year ending March 2017 compared with the previous year. Victims aged under 16 years increased by more than 50% to 58 from 37, although there can be a lot of variation in this number from year-to-year (Figure 3). Victims aged 16 to 24 years increased by one-fifth (20%, 87 to 104) following a relatively flat period; this increase was driven by a rise in male victims.

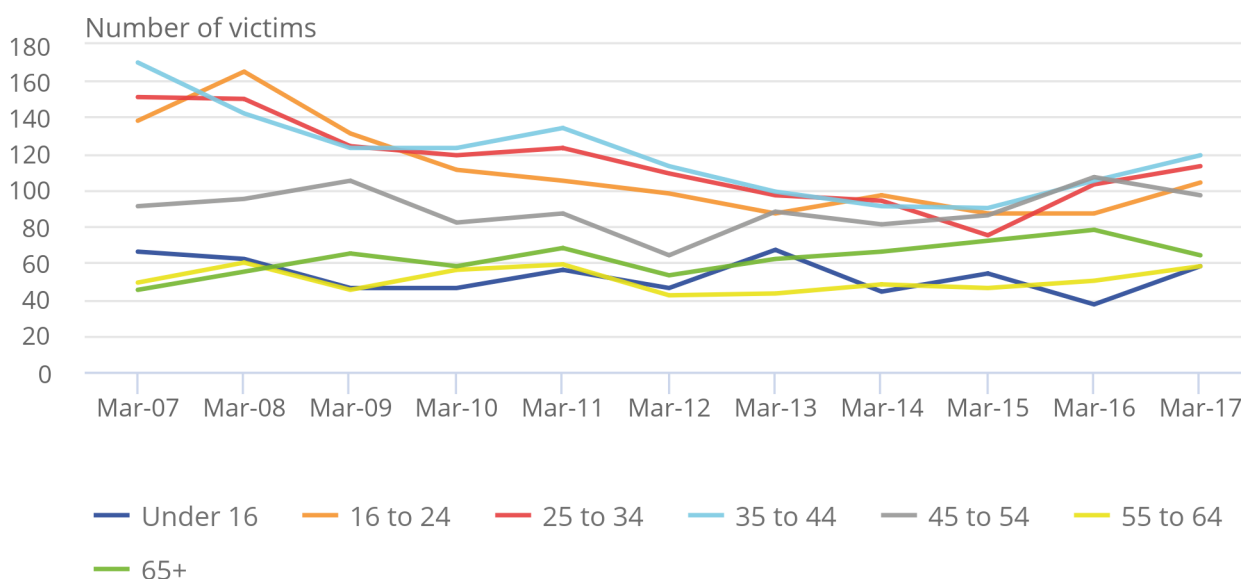
Male victims aged 55 to 64 years increased by almost 50% compared with the previous year (from 34 to 50). The only age group for female victims to see a noticeable increase was those aged 35 to 44 years, increasing by 40% (from 30 to 42, Figure 3).

Figure 3: Homicide offences currently recorded by the police in England and Wales, by age of victim, (excluding Hillsborough victims)

Year ending March 2007 to year ending March 2017

Figure 3: Homicide offences currently recorded by the police in England and Wales, by age of victim, (excluding Hillsborough victims)

Year ending March 2007 to year ending March 2017



Source: Homicide Index, Home Office

Notes for: Which groups of people are most likely to be victims of homicide?

1. There are occasional years where the number of female victims has been higher than 250.

5 . How are victims and suspects related?

Adult victims

There were large differences in the victim-suspect relationship between men and women. Half of female adult victims aged 16 and over were killed by their partner or ex-partner¹ (82 homicides) in the year ending March 2017. In contrast, only 3% of male victims aged 16 and over were killed by their partner or ex-partner (13 offences, see [Appendix Table 9](#) and Figure 4).

Male adults were most likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance, with around one-quarter (24%, 112 victims) killed by such people in the year ending March 2017. Female victims were less likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance (10%, 16 offences).

Around one-fifth of adult male victims (104 males, 22%) were killed by strangers, compared with around one in eleven female victims (14 females, 9%).

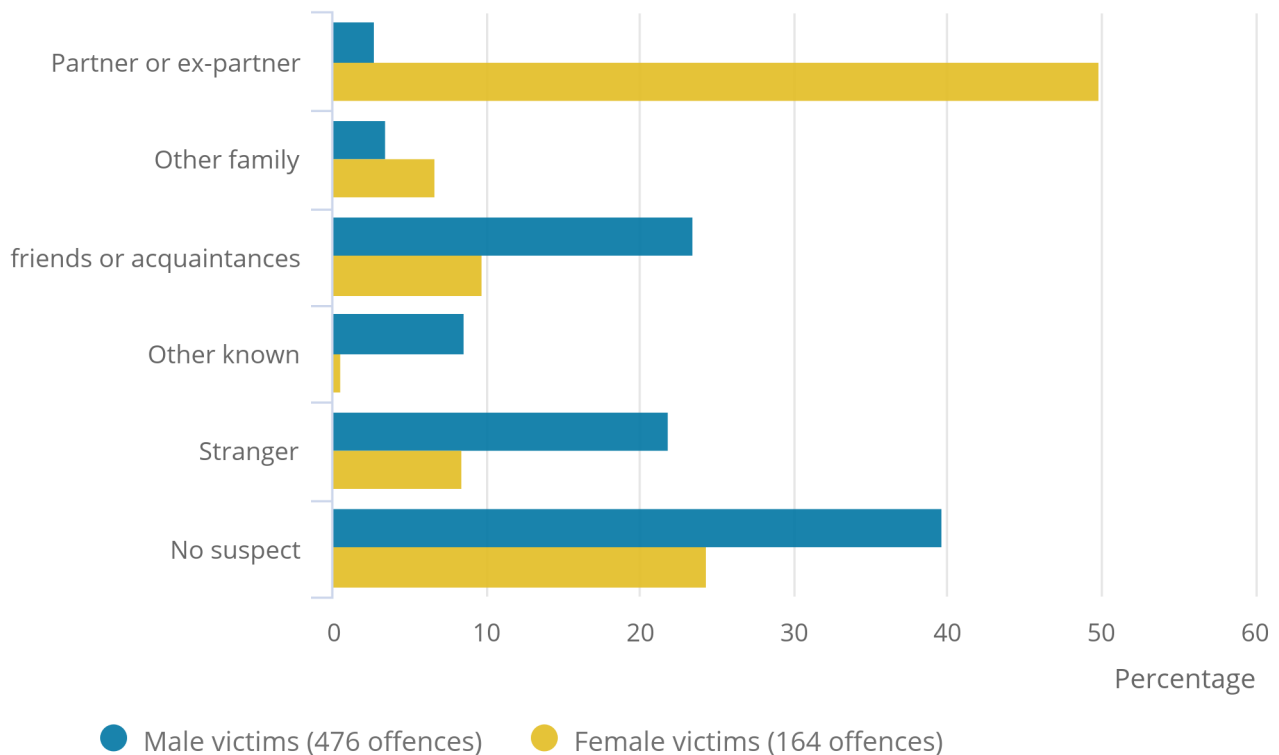
The percentage of male victims with no suspect identified is higher than for previous years (23% excluding victims from the Hillsborough disaster), but this figure is likely to fall as police continue their investigations.

Figure 4: Relationship of homicide victims aged 16 and over to principal suspect, by sex of victim, year ending March 2017

England and Wales

Figure 4: Relationship of homicide victims aged 16 and over to principal suspect, by sex of victim, year ending March 2017

England and Wales



Source: Homicide Index, Home Office

Notes:

1. Partner or ex-partner includes adulterous relationship, 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).
2. Includes 89 male and 7 female victims of Hillsborough without a suspect.

Child victims

The majority of victims aged under 16 years were killed by a parent or step-parent (42%, 29 offences, see [Appendix Table 10](#)). Proportionally few homicides of those aged under 16 years were committed by strangers (4%, 3 offences). As of 16 November 2017, there were 28 victims aged under 16 years (41%) for whom no suspect had been identified. This number is likely to fall as police investigations continue.

Notes for: How are victims and suspects related?

1. Changes have been made to the categorisation of the relationship of the victim to the suspect. The new categories better reflect the nature of the relationship. Emotional rival and lover's spouse have been moved from the "partner or ex-partner" category to "other known". Carer, health worker or patient and customer client have been moved from "stranger" to "other known".

6 . What are the most common methods of killing?

As in previous years, the most common method of killing for both male and female victims was by a knife or other sharp instrument, with 215 such homicides (30% of the total) recorded in the year ending March 2017 (see [Appendix Table 5](#)). This is a similar number to the previous year (212), but an increase of 16% compared with the year ending March 2015.

There were 164 male victims of knife or other sharp instrument homicides, the highest number since the year ending March 2009 (180). In contrast, the number of female victims was 51, the lowest number in ten years (79 in the year ending March 2007). Male victims aged 16 to 24 years and 35 to 44 years have seen the biggest increases over the last year, with both groups having 10 more homicides than in the year ending March 2016 (see [Appendix Table 6](#)).

Victims of the Hillsborough disaster were included in the "strangulation or asphyxiation" category in the year ending March 2017, leading this to be the second most common method of killing (134 homicides). If these cases are removed, the second most common method of killing was "kicking or hitting", accounting for 116 homicides (16% of the total), a proportion that has remained roughly one-fifth over the last decade. The majority (84%) of those killed in this way were male victims.

There were 32 homicide victims killed by shooting in the year ending March 2017, that is seven more than the previous year and 11 more than the year ending March 2015. However, shooting offences are still 45% below the level seen a decade ago.

Figure 5: Offences currently recorded as homicide by apparent method of killing and sex of victim, year ending March 2017

England and Wales

Figure 5: Offences currently recorded as homicide by apparent method of killing and sex of victim, year ending March 2017



Source: Homicide Index, Home Office

Notes:

1. "Other" includes all other apparent methods and where method is unknown.
2. 'Strangulation, asphyxiation' includes 96 victims from the Hillsborough disaster.

More detailed information on knife crime and offences involving a firearm can be found in [the weapons tables](#).

7 . What do we know about the circumstances and location of homicides?

Circumstances of homicides

The latest figures show 4 in 10 (40%, 281 offences) of all homicide cases resulted from a quarrel, a revenge attack or a loss of temper. This is a slightly lower proportion compared with the previous year, but this is because of a large increase in the “other circumstances” category due to the victims of the Hillsborough disaster. The proportion of homicide cases that resulted from a quarrel, a revenge attack or loss of temper was higher where the principal suspect was known to the victim (60%), compared with when the suspect was unknown to the victim (22%); there was little difference between men and women (see [Appendix Table 11](#)).

Furtherance of theft or gain accounted for 3% of homicides (24 offences), while 3% of homicides (23 offences)¹ occurred during irrational acts. As at 16 November 2017, the apparent circumstances were not known for 21% of homicides (146 offences) recorded in the year ending March 2017 (see [Appendix Table 11](#)). This figure is likely to decrease as the police carry out further investigations.

Location of homicides

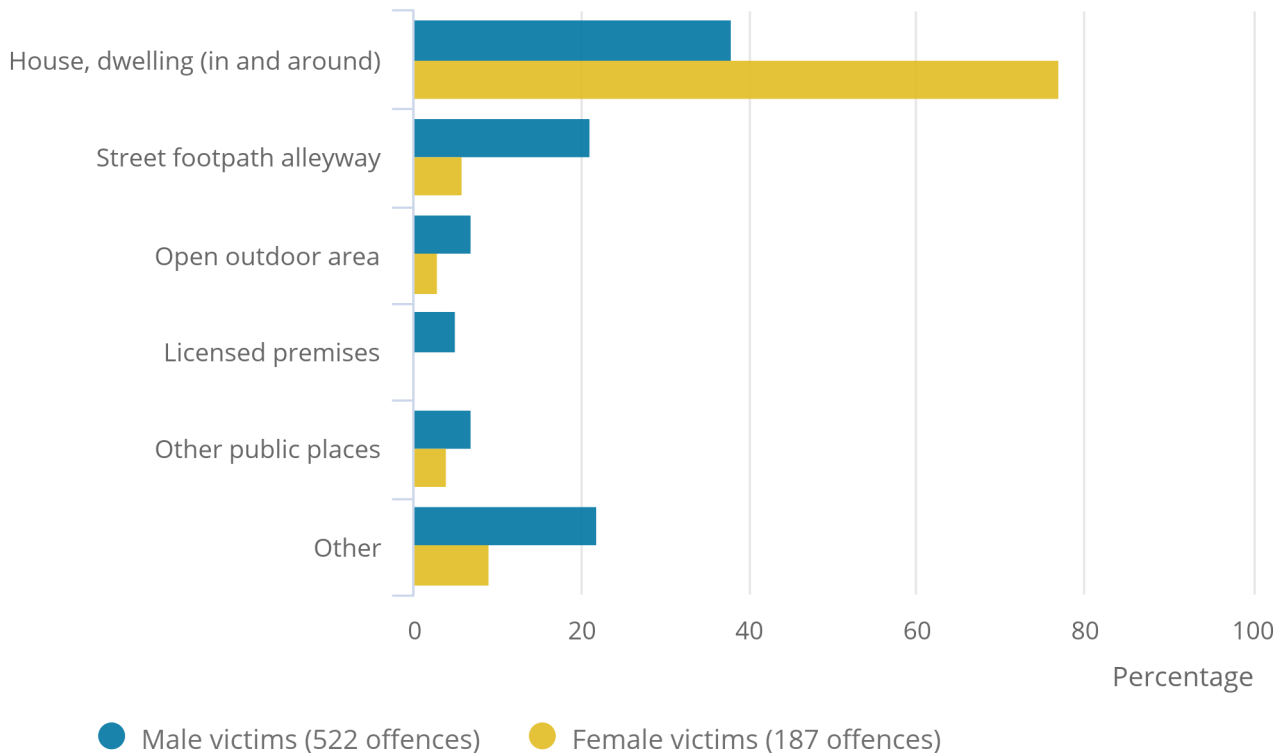
Female and male victims were most likely to be killed in or around a house, dwelling or residential home. Around three-quarters of female victims (77%, 144 offences for year ending March 2017) were killed in this location, this compares with 38% of male homicides (199). Around one-fifth (21%) of male homicides took place in a street, path or alleyway (108 offences) compared with only 6% of female homicides (12 offences). These patterns reflect differing victim-suspect relationships.

Figure 6: Offences currently recorded as homicide by location of homicide and sex of victim, year ending March 2017

England and Wales

Figure 6: Offences currently recorded as homicide by location of homicide and sex of victim, year ending March 2017

England and Wales



Source: Homicide Index, Home Office

Notes:

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

Notes for: What do we know about the circumstances and location of homicides?

1. These figures for irrational acts do not account for all homicides committed by mentally disturbed 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 mentally disturbed people are quoted elsewhere in the [National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness](#).

8 . What do we know about suspects?

More than one suspect may be charged per homicide victim and in some cases no suspect is ever charged (Table 1), therefore the number of suspects is not the same as the number of offences. The number of cases with no suspect will reduce as the police continue their investigations.

An exercise was carried out¹ in the year ending March 2016 to update the Homicide Index with missing criminal justice system (CJS) outcomes. This led to a decrease in the number of homicides with pending or in progress cases and a corresponding increase in final outcomes. This exercise was not carried out for the year ending March 2017, this alongside the 96 cases of homicide that occurred at Hillsborough has resulted in a higher number of cases with no suspects charged.

Table 1: Number of suspects for initially recorded homicide victims, year ending March 2014 to year ending March 2017¹

England and Wales, April 2013 to March 2014 to April 2016 to March 2017

	Apr '13 to Mar '14	Apr '14 to Mar '15	Apr '15 to Mar '16	Apr '16 to Mar '17	Apr '13 to Mar '14	Apr '14 to Mar '15	Apr '15 to Mar '16	Apr '16 to Mar '17
	Number				Percentage			
No suspects charged ^{2,3}	50	86	109	267	9	16	19	37
One	376	351	367	347	70	66	63	48
Two	62	59	53	66	12	11	9	9
Three or more	50	33	50	39	9	6	9	5
All initially recorded homicides	538	529	579	719	100	100	100	100

Source: Homicide Index, Home Office

Notes:

1. As at 16 November 2017; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts, or as further information becomes available.

2. Includes 96 homicide cases at Hillsborough.

3. In the year ending March 2016 an exercise was carried out with the National Confidential Inquiry at the University of Manchester and Greater Manchester Police to update the Homicide Index with missing CJS outcomes. This led to a decrease in the number of homicides with pending/in progress cases, and a corresponding increase in final outcomes. This exercise was not carried out this year; therefore homicide cases for the year ending March 2017 will have a higher number of cases with no suspect charged.

Outcomes

In total, there were 617 suspects as at 16 November 2017 relating to the 719 homicides initially recorded in the year ending March 2017 (see [Appendix Table 16](#)).

The 617 suspects had the following outcomes:

- court proceedings were pending for 317 suspects (51%)
- court proceedings had concluded for 270 suspects (44% of all suspects); of these, 224 were convicted of homicide and 25 were acquitted on all counts ([Appendix Table 17](#))
- 28 suspects had committed suicide or died (5%)
- the remaining two suspects had no proceedings taken on advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions

The case outcomes for suspects of homicides recorded in the year ending March 2017 ([Appendix Table 17](#)) are likely to change as cases progress through the CJS and more information becomes available.

Age and sex of convicted suspects

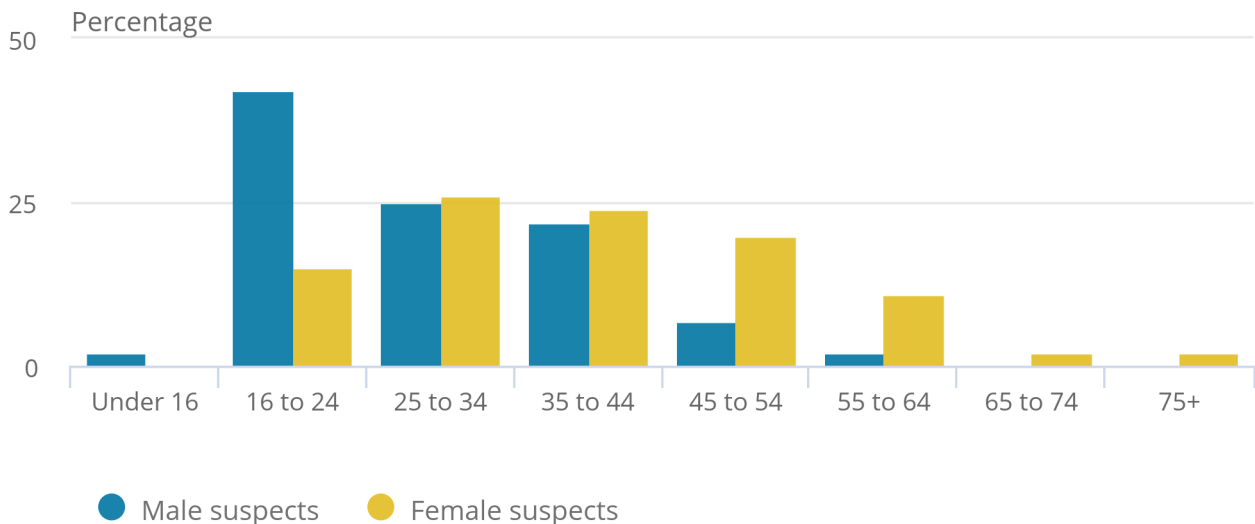
For the year ending March 2017, the majority of suspects convicted of homicide were male (76%) (see [Appendix Table 19](#)). Around two-fifths of convicted male suspects were aged 16 to 24 years (42%), while 25% were aged 25 to 34 years and 22% were aged 35 to 44 years. Female suspects were generally older, with only 15% of convicted suspects being in the 16 to 24 years age group and 15% being aged 55 and over (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Suspects convicted of homicide, by age and sex, year ending March 2017

England and Wales

Figure 7: Suspects convicted of homicide, by age and sex, year ending March 2017

England and Wales



Source: Homicide Index, Home Office

Notes for: What do we know about suspects?

1. With the National Confidential Inquiry at the University of Manchester and Greater Manchester Police.

9 . International homicide comparisons

There are issues surrounding the comparability of international homicide data¹, therefore caution should be taken in comparing homicide rates across countries.

[Eurostat](#)² figures show that police recorded intentional homicide offences consistently decreased across EU member states from 2008 to 2014, before an increase in 2015, which mirrors the picture in England and Wales.

The [Scottish Government](#) publish annual homicide figures and the most recently published report showed the number of homicide cases recorded by the police in Scotland increased by 5% in the year ending March 2017, from 58 to 61. Over the 10-year period from 2007 to 2008 to 2016 to 2017, the number of homicide cases in Scotland fell by 47% (54 cases) from 115 to 61.

The [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#) figures show that there were 17 homicide offences recorded by the police in Northern Ireland in the year ending March 2017, continuing a general downward trend.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) publish a [Global Homicide Handbook](#), which gives a comprehensive overview of intentional homicide across the world. The most recent of these was published in 2014 and showed that the global average homicide rate stands at 62 per million population. Southern Africa and Central America had rates over four times higher than that (above 240 victims per million population). Meanwhile, with rates some five times lower than the global average, Eastern Asia, Southern Europe and Western Europe were the sub-regions with the lowest homicide rates.

The [Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) publish figures showing that the homicide rate in the United States of America in 2016 was 54 per million population.

Notes for: International homicide comparisons

1. There are different definitions of homicide between countries, although definitions vary less than for some other types of crimes; differing points in criminal justice systems at which homicides are recorded, for instance, when the offence is discovered or following further investigation or court outcome; the figures 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.
2. Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union situated in Luxembourg. Its mission is to provide high quality statistics for Europe. While fulfilling its mission, Eurostat promotes the following values: respect and trust, fostering excellence, promoting innovation, service orientation, professional independence.