

Racial violence and harassment: assessing the evidence

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Introduction

The developments that have been outlined in the introduction make it more pertinent than ever to investigate the levels of racial violence and harassment in Britain. Fortunately, Britain has access to two national data sets which provide information on the scale of the problem. These are racial incidents that are reported to the police and a victimisation survey called the British Crime Survey (BCS). Each of these data sets is analysed in this chapter to see what insights they provide. Furthermore, to investigate how accurate their estimation of the scale of the problem is, the problems associated with each of them are fully discussed. This will include a critical examination of how each data set has defined and sought to measure levels of racial violence and harassment.

The chapter then moves on to a third source of information on racial violence and harassment – a series of ‘special’ surveys and studies undertaken (using a variety of methods) in different local areas. Although this source of information cannot provide a reliable estimate of the overall scale of the problem in Britain, some of the findings from these studies do raise a number of key points which are of importance if we are to understand the nature of the phenomenon. In particular, the discussion will centre around two key themes which require more thorough investigation: whether there is geographical variation in levels of racial violence and harassment by area (and relatedly minority ethnic concentration) and the nature of repeat victimisation.

The police and racial violence and harassment

Although racial violence is a phenomenon that has existed within Britain since at least the end of World War One (Fryer 1984), the problem only recently arrived on the political agenda. According to Gordon (1993: 168-169), three factors were important in placing it there. These were the number of deaths of minority ethnic people that occurred in 1980-81 as a result of racial violence; the response of the minority ethnic communities

in establishing self-defence groups to protect their communities from such violence, which Gordon claims were seen ‘by those in power as a threat to public order’; and the publication of a report by the Joint Committee Against Racism (JCAR) in 1980 which brought to the attention of the government the widespread concern that existed in society about racial violence. In response to these developments, the government established a Home Office working party to investigate the scale of racial violence in Britain. The report, entitled *Racial Attacks*, was published by the Home Office in 1981. The report’s findings were based on a survey undertaken in England and Wales of 13 police areas looking at ‘inter-racial’ incidents reported to the police. An ‘inter-racial’ incident was defined as one ‘where the victim was of a different ethnic origin from the suspect or alleged offender’. These ‘inter-racial’ incidents were then analysed by Home Office researchers to identify those particular incidents they considered to be racially motivated.

The study found that the rate of racially motivated victimisation was 1.4 per 100,000 population for whites; 51.2 per 100,000 population for African Caribbeans; and 69.7 per 100,000 population for South Asians. Hence, the study showed that South Asians were 50 times more likely than whites to be victims of racially motivated incidents and African Caribbeans 36 times more likely (Home Office 1981: 10-11). On the basis of this evidence, the report estimated that there were 7,000 racially motivated incidents reported to police forces in England and Wales in one year. The 1981 study was replicated by the Home Office in 1987 using the same 13 police areas. The rate of racially motivated victimisation was found to be 0.5 per 100,000 population for whites; 21.3 per 100,000 population for African Caribbeans; and 70.3 per 100,000 population for South Asians. Consequently, the study showed that the rate of racially motivated victimisation had remained broadly the same for South Asians but had declined significantly for African Caribbeans (Seagrave 1989: 20).

Although both studies confirmed that ethnic minorities were more likely to suffer from racially motivated crime than whites, concern was expressed about how the police had conceptualised and defined the problem (Gordon 1990; 1993 and Oakley 1992). These authors contended that it was the element of racial motivation that was the key to understanding the exact nature of racial violence and harassment. Oakley (1992: 11) asserted that:

The distinguishing feature of *racial* violence and harassment is not simply that it involves members of different racial groups or ethnic groups: it is that the action is racially *motivated*... Racially-motivated behaviour, therefore, is not an attack aimed at a person purely as an individual, but an attack on a member of a category or group.

The police were criticised for failing to recognise this important distinction in their definition and for continuing to subsume attacks where the motivation was the victim's 'race' or colour within the broad category of 'inter-racial incidents' which encompassed all criminal incidents involving members of different ethnic groups. Hence, a burglary committed by a black man against a white household (where the motivation was to steal) would be recorded as an inter-racial incident just as an attack on a black youth (directed at him because of his colour) by a group of white skinheads. As Gordon (1990:5) writes

How racial attacks are defined is not, therefore, an academic point but one with serious practical consequences, since it is only by recognising the nature of racially-motivated attacks on black people that one can begin to tackle the problem. To confuse such attacks with ordinary criminal attacks, or to claim, in the absence of any evidence, that attacks by black people on white people are 'racial' is to render the concept of racism quite meaningless.

To highlight this distinct form of violence and harassment directed at people because they are seen as 'racially different', some have sought to substitute the term 'racist violence and harassment' for racial violence and harassment. This debate can be explored in Kimber and Cooper (1991) and Gordon (1992 and 1993).

The intention of this discussion about how a racial incident has been defined by the police has not been to rule out the possibility that some white people can be victims of racial violence and harassment. There is ample evidence of racial violence directed against white minority ethnic groups such as the Irish dating from the middle of the nineteenth century (Thompson 1991: 469-485); and against Jews since the 1930s (Beckman 1993; the Institute of Jewish Affairs 1994) and, more recently against white partners in mixed 'race' relationships (Fitzgerald and Ellis 1989). Nevertheless, it remains the case that the overwhelming proportion of victims of racial violence and harassment in Britain today are the 'visible minorities'.

The police have sought to address some of the criticisms that have been levelled at them, including modifying how they define a racially motivated incident. A standard definition of a racial incident put forward by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) was adopted by all the police forces of England and Wales in 1985. According to this definition, a racial incident constituted 'any incident in which it appears to the reporting or investigating officer that the complaint involves an element of racial motivation; or any incident which includes an allegation of racial motivation made by the person'.

However, this definition has also come under recent criticism, including from the ACPO themselves in the form of Paul Whitehouse, Chief Constable of Sussex Police. During questioning by the Home Affairs Select Committee (1994: Vol.2: 16) he acknowledged the ‘subjective’ nature of the definition and the possibility that it could capture incidents involving minority ethnic and white people that were not racially motivated. Peter Lloyd, the then Minister of State at the Home Office, also acknowledged this difficulty with the police definition but contended that it did have the important attribute of placing the emphasis of racial motivation on the victim’s perception and thereby indicating the agency’s support for the victim.

With these criticisms in mind, it is to the statistics of incidents of racial violence and harassment reported to the police that we now turn to investigate what they tell us about the scale of the problem in Britain.

The scale of the problem: racial incidents reported to the police

The number of racial incidents reported to the police over the period of 1988 to 1993 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Number of reported racial incidents in England and Wales

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993/94
Provinces	2169	2347	3451	4509	4507	5873
Metropolitan Police	2214	2697	2908	3373	3227	3889
England and Wales	4383	5044	6359	7882	7734	9762

(Table derived from *Hansard*, 26 April 1993 and *Hansard*, 24 June 1994.)

* Since 1993 the information has been collected on a financial year basis rather than a calendar year basis as in previous years. However, the figures have been collected by the same means as before and remain comparable.

As shown by Table 1, racially motivated incidents reported to the police have risen in England and Wales from 4,383 in 1988 to 9,762 in 1993/94, an increase of 123 per cent over five years (although there was a slight decrease between 1991 and 1992). A large number of these incidents occurred in the Greater London area. In 1993/94, for example, 40 per cent of all racially motivated incidents reported to the police occurred in Greater London. However, this can be explained by the distribution of the minority

ethnic population of which 45 per cent live in the Greater London area according to the 1991 census.

On the basis of these racially motivated incidents reported to the police it would be understandable for people to conclude that there was an increase in the level of racial violence and harassment over the period of 1988 to 1993/94 in Britain. However, such police statistics need to be treated with great caution (see for example the discussion in Bottomley and Pease 1993). It is well established that the real level of crime is not accurately reflected in statistics recorded by the police (Mayhew, Aye Maung and Mirrlees-Black: 1993). This applies equally to statistics collected by the police on racially motivated offences.

There is a large body of evidence to suggest that well over half of all victims of such offences do not report them to the police. For example, the third PSI national survey of minority ethnic groups (Brown 1984) found that 60 per cent of victims did not report such racially motivated incidents to the police. Similarly, data from the 1988 and 1992 British Crime Surveys (discussed in detail below) suggests that this continues to be the case with well over half of both African Caribbeans and South Asians not reporting racially motivated incidents to the police.

Despite these difficulties associated with measuring the real level of racially motivated crime, it should be noted that recent police efforts to encourage victims to report such crimes to them do seem to be having some effect and this might be one factor that explains part of the rise in reported racial incidents. The BCS found that levels of reporting by African Caribbeans and South Asians of racially motivated incidents have increased since 1987. In the 1988 BCS, 27 per cent of all racially motivated offences against African Caribbeans were reported compared to 34 per cent in the 1992 survey. Similarly, levels of reporting racially motivated offences against South Asians rose from 39 per cent in the 1988 BCS to 45 per cent in the 1992 BCS (Aye Maung and Mirrlees-Black 1994: 20). However, an important point to bear in mind is that not all of the racially motivated crimes said to have been reported to the police by the British Crime Survey were actually recorded as such by the official police statistics.

Changes in police statistics may indicate changes in the behaviour of the police and victims as much as rises or falls in the actual number of incidents. For example, it is widely recognised that at least part of the increase in the number of rapes recorded by the police in recent years is a consequence of an increased willingness on the part of some women to report such incidents (Edwards 1994). Thus, it is not possible to accurately conclude from the police statistics that there has been an increase in levels of racial violence and harassment.

It is to the second data set that we must turn to see if it can provide a more accurate estimate of the scale of the problem.

The British Crime Survey (BCS): a more accurate estimate of the problem?

Since 1988, Britain, has had access to an alternative data set on the level of racial violence and harassment, namely the British Crime Survey (BCS). This victimisation survey sets out to establish a more accurate picture of crime by covering people's experience of victimisation over the last year irrespective of whether they have reported it to the police. This helps to establish what is commonly referred to as the 'dark-figure' of crime, that is, the level of unrecorded crime (BCS 1992: 2). The 1988 BCS comprised a nationally representative 'core' sample of 10,392 households aged 16 or older, and an additional 'booster' sample of 1,349 African Caribbeans and South Asians to allow a more reliable picture of the scale of criminal victimisation against them (Mayhew, Elliot and Dowds 1989: 6). The 1992 BCS comprised a nationally representative 'core' sample of 10,059 households and an additional 'booster' sample of 1,654 African Caribbeans and South Asians (Mayhew, Aye Maung and Mirrlees-Black 1993: 7).

The BCS collects information on people's experience of selected crimes and threats. There are two broad categories of crime: incidents in which the household is the primary victim, and those where the individual person is the primary victim. In addition, those South Asian and African Caribbean respondents who said they had been victims of crime were also asked whether they thought any incidents they experienced had been racially motivated.

Both the 1988 and 1992 BCS surveys showed that South Asians and African Caribbeans were at greater risk of being victims of crime than were whites. Although much of this difference in relation to African Caribbeans was explained by social and demographic factors such as age, gender, type of accommodation and area of residence, these factors were not sufficient in explaining the differential rate of victimisation between South Asians and whites, with South Asians remaining at greater risk of certain crimes such as vandalism, robbery and thefts from the person. Hence, Aye Maung and Mirrlees-Black (1994: 8) argued that ethnicity for South Asians 'appear[s] to contribute directly to their higher risks for some crimes'.

Table 2 shows the results from the 1988 and 1992 surveys for the main offences in which a racial element was most often present – assaults, threats and vandalism. It shows that overall there has been no increase in the proportion of racial violence and harassment between 1987 and 1991. In particular, the table shows that the proportion of all offences reported by

Table 2 Per cent of incidents seen as racially motivated: 1988 and 1992 BCS

Type of offence	African Caribbean		South Asian	
	1988	1992	1988	1992
Assault	34	24	36	56
Threats	44	24	50	66
Vandalism	20	23	32	26
All BCS offences	15	13	24	24

Source: 1988 and 1992 BCS core and minority ethnic boost samples weighted data table taken from Aye Maung and Mirrlees-Black (1994: 13)

African Caribbeans as being racially motivated declined from 15 per cent in 1988 to 13 per cent in 1992. On the other hand, the proportion of offences reported by South Asians as being racially motivated in 1992 remained the same as in 1988 at 24 per cent. When looking at individual offences, fewer assaults and threats were seen as racially motivated by African Caribbeans whereas more assaults and threats were seen as racially motivated by South Asians.

The BCS also allows estimates to be made of the number of offences of different kinds in 1991 by grossing up survey-based risks of victimisation by the number of adults in the population of England and Wales. By undertaking a similar calculation to estimate the number of incidents against ethnic minorities the BCS concluded that there were approximately 130,000 incidents of crimes and threats against South Asians and African Caribbeans which were thought to be racially motivated. Of these, 89,000 were believed to be against South Asians and 41,000 against African Caribbeans.¹ This represents 18 per cent of the estimated total of 730,000 crimes against them, which in turn represents just under 5 per cent of the total estimate of almost 17 million incidents of criminal victimisation and threats experienced by the national population in England and Wales in 1991 (Aye Maung and Mirrlees-Black 1994: 13-15). Taking account of the number of adults in each group in the population, these figures suggest an annual victimisation rate of 65 incidents per 1,000 African Caribbeans and 95 incidents per 1,000 South Asians. The BCS therefore lends some support to the idea that South Asians are rather more at risk of racially motivated offences than African Caribbeans.

Several important points emerge from these two national data sets regarding the incidence of racial violence and harassment. By covering

people's experience of racially motivated crimes irrespective of whether they have been reported to the police, the BCS gives a more accurate picture of the scale of the problem. The BCS estimated that there had been a total of 130,000 racially motivated crimes against South Asians and African Caribbeans. This greatly exceeds the estimates based on racial incidents reported to the police. The BCS therefore suggests that although the level of racial violence and harassment has been steadier than the police statistics demonstrated, the overall number of incidents throughout the period has been far higher than people had realised.

Problems associated with victimisation surveys

Although the estimate provided by the BCS is a more accurate measure of the scale of the problem than racial incidents reported to the police, it remains only a partial picture of the scale of racial violence and harassment in Britain. The BCS examines only incidents of racial violence and harassment that are criminal (Mayhew, Elliot and Dowds 1989: 41). It does not cover what is commonly referred to as 'low-level' racial harassment such as racial abuse and other types of insulting behaviour which though not technically criminal constitute an important form of racial violence and harassment.

Furthermore, victimisation surveys like the BCS have also come under criticism for a number of other reasons. Hesse et al (1992) have argued that although these surveys are able to provide firmer evidence on the extent of particular crimes, they are not capable by themselves of giving a detailed and fully-rounded picture of the nature of racial violence and harassment and its underlying causes. This is because of

the incapacity of the crime survey to capture victimisation experiences which are processual, that is regular occurrences; they simply cannot quantify this. The cyclical and multiple features of particular forms of victimisation are therefore not reflected in crime surveys. (Hesse et al 1992: 160)

As a result, a victimisation survey reduces what is really a pattern of repeat victimisation to apparently isolated acts of racial hostility devoid of any social context or location in time (Hesse 1992 and Bowling 1993). This 'events-oriented approach' runs the risk of failing to capture those acts of 'low-level' racial harassment that form part of an integral and on-going process of victimisation which serves to create a climate of continuous insecurity for the victims.

Hesse et al (1992) in their important study *Beneath the Surface: Racial Harassment* attempted to address this failing of victimisation surveys by adopting a different methodological approach for studying racial harassment in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. By establishing a

Council Panel of Inquiry and adopting a case study methodology they were able to seek the views of local residents, both victims and perpetrators, and representatives from the local council, community and housing groups as well as drawing on evidence provided by the police (Hesse et al 1992: 221-226). The result was a fully-contextualised report that sought to explain not only the extent and nature of the problem but also the critical local factors that played a part in giving rise to it.²

On the other hand, Bowling (1993: 245) although welcoming such an innovative approach to the study of racial violence and harassment has suggested that a potential danger of a solely qualitative method is that it may be thought of as being ‘unscientific or actually failing to bring sufficient rigour to the collection and analysis of data’. Instead he put forward the proposition that seeks to marry the two approaches by calling for victimisation surveys to be an essential component of all case study analysis of racial harassment. Similarly, Fitzgerald and Ellis (1989: 60) have proposed that surveys:

should be complemented by qualitative and quantitative information generated through in-depth interviews. Together, both qualitative and quantitative information need to be interpreted within a social (and even historical) perspective which takes account of variations in local circumstances.

‘Special’ surveys on racial violence and harassment

The third source of information on racial violence and harassment that exists in Britain is a series of ‘special’ surveys and studies that have been undertaken to measure the scale of the problem in different areas. Apart from one national survey, these studies are unable to provide insights into the scale of the overall problem in Britain. However, they are useful in allowing a discussion of some key issues concerning the problem, including whether there is variation in levels of racial violence and harassment by area, the nature of repeat victimisation and identifying those aspects of the problem that require further investigation.

The only national survey of this type was the third PSI survey on minority ethnic groups (Brown 1984) which sought to measure the extent of racial violence indirectly by looking at two types of crime victimisation: physical attacks and damage to property.

After inspecting the detailed description of all incidents of physical attack reported by respondents, Brown separated those incidents which were ‘inter-racial’ in nature, that is, those where Asians or West Indians had been attacked by whites and where whites had been attacked by Asians or West Indians. These inter-racial incidents were then further sub-divided into three categories which comprised:

- incidents where the victim specifically mentioned a racial motive, a racist organisation or an obvious background of racial hostility.
- incidents where the attack was apparently unprovoked and where no motive was stated or apparent from the description.
- incidents where a racial motive was not involved, in the judgement of the researcher (based upon the description provided), or where the victim stated that no racial motive was involved.

The total sample of 4835 people were asked whether they had been attacked over the past 16-18 month period prior to the interview. Brown found ten cases of physical attack where a racial motive was specifically mentioned by the victim; 18 incidents of which the large number were clearly racist in nature, and a further 28 incidents where the researcher or the victim adjudged there was no racial motive involved (Brown 1984: 260, Table 134). He estimated that even if only half the incidents falling in category b, were counted as racial attacks, the actual frequency of racial attacks was still ten times that estimated by the 1981 Home Office study. That is, the PSI estimate of the total number of racial attacks was 70,000.

Most of the special surveys have sought to be more inclusive, and have tried to cover 'low-level' racial harassment as well as criminal offences. One key point to emerge from these surveys has been the considerable variation in levels of racial violence and harassment by area.

A survey undertaken for a Home Office funded pilot multi-agency project in Newham, East London in 1988 found that between one in five and one in six African Caribbean and South Asian men and women suffered a racial incident in an 18 month period (21 per cent and 17 per cent of African Caribbean women and men respectively, and 18 per cent and 19 per cent of South Asian women and men, respectively). Eight per cent of the white men and 7 per cent of the white women interviewed in the survey also said they had experienced a racial incident (Saulsbury and Bowling 1991: 119).

A study undertaken by the Preston Borough Council (1992) found a greater prevalence of racial harassment. The study showed that three out of four minority ethnic households in the sample had experienced racial harassment in the past two years. As the report noted (Chahal 1992: 20) the 'level of response indicates quite clearly that the phenomenon of racial harassment is a reality for the majority of minority ethnic people in the borough of Preston'.

The London Housing Survey (1993) undertaken with a total sample size of 6,500 households, including 1,000 minority ethnic households, sought to examine the prevalence of racial violence and harassment in the context

of a more general survey of housing circumstances and needs. On the basis of their findings, the authors estimated that 48,000 minority ethnic households had suffered some form of racial harassment in or near their present accommodation. This is a total of one in 14 of all minority ethnic households across the capital, rising to one in 11 for South Asian households. One in ten children from a minority ethnic group were living in a household that had been harassed at home. Of those households that said they had suffered from some form of racial harassment, 25 per cent had been physically attacked; 20 per cent had had their property damaged and two-thirds had been verbally abused because of their colour. It should be noted that when the London Housing Survey asked questions on harassment, they put no time limit on people's experiences because 'one act of violence, however long ago, can still leave a household feeling under threat' (LHS 1993: 2). On the other hand, they only asked about people's experience of harassment whilst in their present home. Hence, these findings should be treated with some caution.

The possible explanations for such variation in levels of racial violence and harassment in different studies have been the subject of much debate (Fitzgerald and Ellis 1989). It is commonly believed that part of the explanation for such a variation is the variety of methods used to collect the data. However, evidence from a Department of the Environment study indicated that it may also reflect real variations in the levels of racial violence and harassment in different areas.

The Department of the Environment study was based upon 200 interviews with a quota sample of African Caribbean, South Asian and white council tenants in each of six selected local authority areas. The study found that the racial harassment of South Asian households varied from 10 per cent in one local authority to 28 per cent in another. Similarly, for African Caribbean households, the level of racial harassment varied from 4 per cent in one local authority to 22 per cent in another (Fitzgerald and Ellis 1989: 53 and Fitzgerald 1989: 7-12).

The difficulties in properly capturing cases of repeat victimisation through survey techniques have already been discussed. The findings from a qualitative study highlight why repeat victimisation is a key aspect of the problem that requires further investigation. A Home Office study (1992) undertaken in an east London estate showed that two in three minority ethnic families suffered repeat victimisation. The study found that 23 Bengali and Somali families had suffered a total of 136 incidents of racial harassment in a six-month period. This included six families who had suffered extremely high levels of repeat victimisation ranging from 12 to 27 incidents in this six-month period. The most heavily victimised family

was harassed once every nine days on average (Sampson and Phillips 1992: 5-6).

Similarly high levels of repeat victimisation were recorded in two other studies. Saulsbury and Bowling (1991) recorded a total of 724 incidents amongst the 114 respondents who had experienced some form of racial harassment in an eighteen month period.³ The types of racial violence and harassment

ranged from insulting behaviour and threats to assaults, property damage and arson... There were a very large number of 'less serious' incidents and many 'very serious' ones. Some appeared to be one-off events while others were said to be part of a pattern of repeated attacks and harassment. (Saulsbury and Bowling 1992: 118)

The Preston Borough Council survey (1992) also revealed evidence of repeat victimisation. The study found 276 minority ethnic households identifying a total of 628 separate incidents of racial harassment over a two-year period.

The notion that high levels of racial violence and harassment are a phenomenon that is restricted to particular areas of high minority ethnic concentration may also need to be questioned. Since most studies examining the problem of racial violence and harassment have looked at areas with a relatively high minority ethnic concentration it has been automatically assumed that racial violence and harassment was not a problem in areas of low or medium minority ethnic concentration. As Fitzgerald and Ellis (1989: 59) have noted:

Areas selected for research have tended to be those with high levels of reported harassment and where the victim population is sufficiently numerous to be surveyed without too much difficulty. The common coincidence of these two criteria, though means that isolated minorities living in areas of low concentration have tended to be overlooked although... such groups may be even more at risk.

Certainly, there is some anecdotal evidence emerging to suggest that racial violence and harassment is also a problem in areas of low minority ethnic concentration (Jay 1992; Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council 1994). The report by the Commission for Racial Equality on racial violence and harassment in the south-west of England found

reports of Asian families having been forced to leave their homes and businesses because of hostility from other villagers; in three cases, their premises had been repeatedly vandalised. In both Devon and Cornwall, restaurant owners and workers have experienced racial abuse and threats, or have had graffiti scrawled on the walls of their premises. (Jay 1992: 18)

Similarly, a study undertaken in the town of Harlow in Essex which has a relatively small minority ethnic population found several incidents of racial harassment including one where

a woman, newly-working in a large retail establishment, explained how she used to be regularly abused by an old woman as she made her way to work in the mornings, calling her names and telling her to 'go back to Pakistan'. (Wrench, Brar and Martin 1993: 108)

The scale and nature of racial violence and harassment against minority ethnic people in areas of low and medium concentration is a problem that certainly requires more thorough investigation.

Summary

There are two national data sets which provide information on levels of racial violence and harassment in Britain. The first of these, statistics of racial incidents, show an increase in the numbers reported to the police in the past five years; but this is likely to reflect a welcome change in the response to racial harassment by the police rather than an (unwelcome) change in the frequency of the problem. Therefore, this data set cannot provide an accurate measure of the scale of the problem.

The second data set which provides information on levels of racial violence and harassment is the British Crime Survey (BCS). This provides a more accurate picture of the scale of the problem by covering people's experience of racially motivated crime irrespective of whether it has been reported to the police. The survey estimated there had been a total of 130,000 racially motivated crimes against South Asians and African Caribbeans in 1991, comprising 89,000 against South Asians and 41,000 against African Caribbeans. This greatly exceeds the estimate of 7782 reported racial incidents to the police in 1991. The BCS indicated only a slight increase in the number of racially motivated crimes between 1987 and 1991. The BCS therefore suggests that, although the level of racial violence and harassment has been steadier than statistics of racial incidents reported to the police indicated, the overall number of incidents throughout the period has been far higher than people had realised.

Although the estimate provided by the BCS is the most accurate to date, it remains very much a partial picture of the scale of the problem in Britain today because it fails to cover what is commonly referred to as 'low-level' racial harassment. Relatedly, some people have questioned whether victimisation surveys such as the BCS are capable of providing a fully-rounded picture of the nature of racial violence and harassment. It is contended that such surveys reduce what is a process of repeat victimisation to one of discrete acts of racial harassment devoid of any social context.

Hence it has been suggested that more innovative approaches to the problem are required that seek to marry the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative methods if a comprehensive understanding of the problem is to be achieved.

A third source of information on the extent and nature of racial violence and harassment are several 'special' surveys that have been undertaken in different local areas. Although these surveys do not provide a reliable estimate of the national scale of the problem in Britain, they do suggest that levels of racial violence and harassment vary by area. Furthermore, evidence from these studies also suggest that more research needs to be directed towards examining the extent and nature of racial violence and harassment experienced by people who live in areas of low and medium minority ethnic concentration and the extent to which people are subject to repeat victimisation.

Notes

1. About a quarter of the 130,000 estimated incidents were assaults and two-fifths were threats. Vandalism comprised another fifth of the total (Aye Maung and Mirrlees-Black 1994: vi).
2. Two other recent studies have attempted a case study method of inquiry into racial violence and harassment. These are *Sagaland: Youth culture, racism and education*, (1992), a study undertaken in Thamesmead following the racist murder of Rolan Adams which examined the local factors which led a gang of white youths to take such an action, and *Through patterns not our own* (1993), a report based upon a combination of surveys and interviews with caseworkers, looking at the problem of racial violence and harassment on council estates in east London.
3. However, Bowling argues that respondents may not have been correct about the number of times they were victimised for three reasons: firstly, they may not be able to recall the number and nature of incidents accurately over a period of 18 months; secondly, because there was no common definition of racial harassment, some respondents may have defined incidents as racial when the motivation was debatable, or when they could not even be certain that a person from another racial group was responsible for the incident; and finally, others may have ignored incidents they regarded as minor or unimportant (Bowling unpublished: 7).