

Violent inner-city crime, the figures, and a question of race

The reality of violent inner-city crime is indicated today by statistics obtained by The Sunday Telegraph.

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The decision by the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) to withdraw national statistics designation from all crime data recorded by the police will intensify concern about trust in the police. CREDIT: Photo: Heathcliff O'Malley

The official figures, which examine the ethnicity of those accused of violent offences in London, suggest the majority of men held responsible by police for gun crimes, robberies and street crimes are black.

Black men are also disproportionately the victims of violent crime in the capital.

The statistics, released by the Metropolitan Police, permit an informed debate on a sensitive subject for the first time.

One prominent black politician said that the black community needed to face up to major challenges.

Shaun Bailey, a Tory election candidate in London and a charity worker, said: “The black community has to look at itself and say that, at the end of the day, these figures suggest we are heavily – not casually – involved in violent crime. We are also involved in crime against ourselves – and we regularly attack each other.”

The data provide a breakdown of the ethnicity of the 18,091 men and boys who police took action against for a range of violent and sexual offences in London in 2009-10.

They show that **among those proceeded against for street crimes, 54 per cent were black; for robbery, 59 per cent; and for gun crimes, 67 per cent.** Street crimes include muggings, assault with intent to rob and snatching property.

Just over 12 per cent of London’s 7.5 million population is black, including those of mixed black and white parentage, while 69 per cent is white, according to the Office for National Statistics.

The police figures also show that black men are twice as likely to be victims. They made up 29 per cent of the male victims of gun crime and 24 per cent of the male victims of knife crime.

The Met declined to comment on the statistics. However, some officers will see them as a justification for Operation Trident, a unit targeting black-on-black murder and violent crime.

Others will see it as justification for targeting a disproportionate number of black men under stop and search powers. Figures released annually have shown black people are at least six times more likely to be stopped and searched than their white counterparts.

On sex offences, black men made up 32 per cent of male suspects proceeded against, and white men 49 per cent. The statistics also suggest that black women are responsible for a disproportionate amount of violent crime committed by females.

Richard Garside, of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies at King’s College London, said: “Given Britain’s long history of racism and imperialism it should not greatly surprise us that black and minority ethnic groups are disproportionately members of social classes that have tended to experience greater victimisation and to be the subject of police attention.

“Just because the police treat black men as more criminal than white men, it does not mean that they are.” Simon Woolley, speaking as the director of the Operation Black Vote pressure group, but who is also a commissioner on the Equality and Human Rights Commission, said: “Although the charge rates for some criminal acts amongst black men are high, black people are more than twice as likely to have their cases dismissed, suggesting unfairness in the system.”

The Sunday Telegraph obtained the figures via a Freedom of Information request after Rod Liddle, the writer, caused controversy last year when he claimed in an online blog published on The Spectator website that “the overwhelming majority of street crime, knife crime, gun crime, robbery and crimes of sexual violence in London is carried out by young men from the African-Caribbean community”.

The comments led to claims that Mr Liddle was racist, However, Mr Liddle said: “I cannot think of anything more vile than racism. The issue here is not racism, it is one of multiculturalism.”

The statistics suggest that Mr Liddle was largely right on some of his claims – notably those on gun crimes, robberies and street crimes.

The figures suggest, however, that he was probably wrong on his claims about knife crimes and violent sex crimes.

The figures relate to those “proceeded against”.

This includes those prosecuted in court, whether convicted or acquitted; those issued with a caution, warning or penalty notice; those the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to charge; and those whose crimes were “taken into consideration” after a further offence.

Unsolved crimes are not included.

The figures do not take into account that any one perpetrator may have committed numerous offences.