



CENTRE FOR YOUNG MEN'S STUDIES



Violent Victims? Young Men as Perpetrators and Victims of Violent Crime

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The Centre for Young Men's Studies is located within the Faculty of Sociology and Applied Social Studies at the University of Ulster. Working in collaboration with YouthAction Northern Ireland, we seek to provide an understanding of the issues facing young men and boys living in Northern Ireland through action research, training and the development of practice. One element of the Centre is to draw together and present a variety of statistical information relating to young males.

As discussed in the inaugural occasional paper many young men can be 'squeezed' into the stereotypes associated with modern masculinity.

By examining the position of young men in relation to violence, this research update seeks to provide tangible evidence of the pressures associated with hegemonic masculinity.

Violent Crimes

Aside from the Troubles, it is generally believed that Northern Ireland is a relatively 'safe' society. Whilst the risk of becoming a victim of crime in Northern Ireland is less than in England and Wales, nevertheless, the gap is narrowing. The latest British Crime Survey (2003/04) and Northern Ireland Crime survey (2003/04) reveal victimisation rates for violent crimes of 7.3% and 6.3% respectively.

As can be seen from Table 1, NIO figures show that between 2000 and 2003 young men were over-represented in prosecutions for violent crime (Violence Against The Person, Sexual Offences and Robbery), making up two out of every five prosecutions. The majority of young men entering the criminal justice system for violent crime were prosecuted for Violence Against The Person, comprising 43% of all prosecutions for this offence over the last number of years. Although relatively fewer young men were prosecuted for either robbery or sexual offences, males aged under 25 years accounted for 61% of all those prosecuted for Robbery, and one-fifth of all those prosecuted for sexual offences (NIO, 2005).

Offence Year	2000		2001		2002		2003		Total	
	Males Under 25	All Persons	Males Under 25	All Persons	Males Under 25	All Persons	Males Under 25	All Persons	Males Under 25	All Persons
Violence Against The Person	960	2275	907	2105	966	2293	851	1938	3684 (43%)	8611
Robbery	92	141	83	151	112	180	115	191	402 (61%)	663
Sexual Offences	36	175	34	167	33	146	27	166	130 (20%)	654
Total	1088	2591	1024	2423	1111	2619	993	2295	4216 (42%)	9928

Table 1 Males aged under 25 years prosecuted for Violent Crimes in Northern Ireland 2000-2003. (Source: NIO 2005)

In recent years young men have formed over half (55%) of all those prosecuted for dangerous driving offences in Northern Ireland. As can be seen in Figure 1, over half (56%) of all those prosecuted for causing Death by Dangerous Driving were young men, whilst almost 6 out of every 10 persons prosecuted for causing grievous bodily harm by dangerous driving were males aged under 25 years (NIO, 2005).

The statistics in Table 1 and Figure 1 are borne out by the disproportionate numbers of young men in custody. In 2003, 54% of the immediate custody prison population were aged between 17 and 29 years, compared with 18% of the Northern Ireland population as a whole, and 95% of these were male (NIO, 2003). Individuals aged between 18 and 20 years old have the highest prosecution rate, at 770 per 10 000 population. This declines with age, with 42 prosecutions per 10 000 for over those aged 50 years and above.

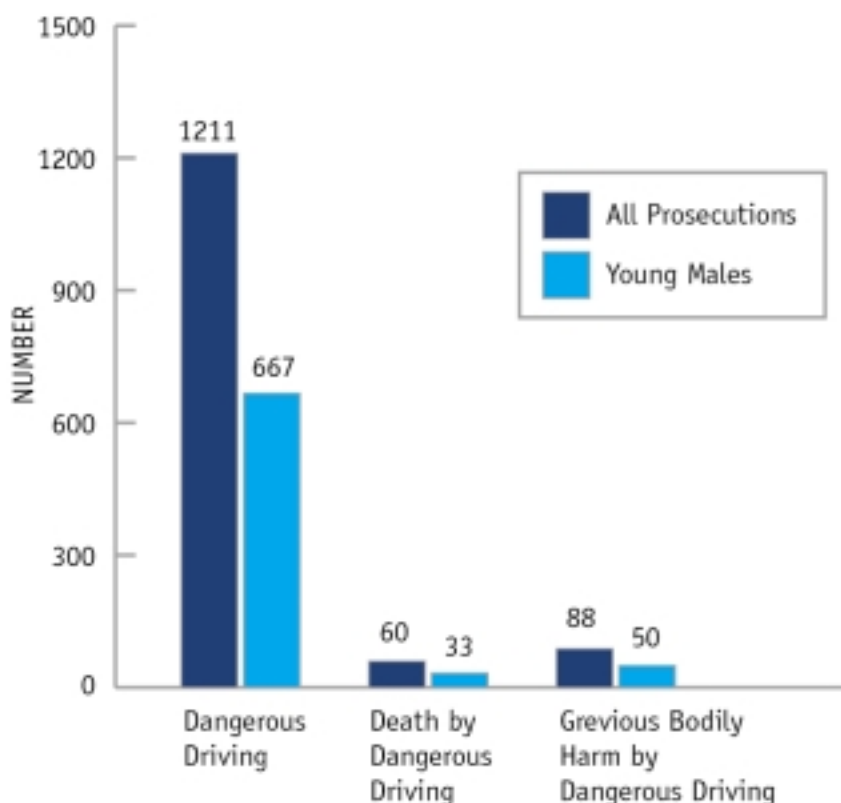


Figure 1. Males aged under 25 years prosecuted for Dangerous Driving Offences 2000-2003 (Source: NIO 2005)

Young Men as Victims Of Violence

The most recent Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS 2003/2004) suggests victimisation rates for young men have fallen for the first time. However, Northern Ireland Crime Surveys (2001; 1998) have traditionally shown that the most likely victims of violent crime are young males aged between 16 and 24 years, with almost one in six young men reporting that they had been the target of a violent crime (see Figure 2). In fact, in the past young males were more than three times more likely to be victims of violence than young women (17% and 5% respectively).

In addition, data from all the crime surveys conducted in the Province reveal the likelihood of falling victim to violent crime decreases with age (NICS 2003/04; 2001; 1998). In 2001, the proportion of young men aged between 16 and 24 years victimised in violent attacks was five times higher than that for men aged 25 to 44 years; and almost seven times that of men between 45 and 64 years of age. Men in the oldest age group (75 years and over) were 17 times less likely to say they had been the victim of violent crime than those in the youngest age bracket.

Whilst the majority of reported sexual

offences are committed against women, according to recent PSNI figures, sexual offences committed against young males aged between 14 and 25 years have increased dramatically from 46 in 2002/2003 to 68 in 2003/2004 – a percentage rise of almost 50% (PSNI, 2004).

Recent data has also revealed that the mortality rate due to homicide or assault for men aged in their early twenties is more than twice the average male rate in Northern Ireland (McEvoy and Richardson, 2004). In addition, young men are almost 18 times more likely to be murdered or die following an assault than females of a similar age (Balanda and Wilde, 2001).

Research has also suggested a link between violent experiences and suicide (Asami et al., 2005; Cooper et al., 1992). Suicide is recognised as a lethal form of self-directed violence (WHO, 2002), with most European countries – including the UK and Ireland – experiencing marked increases in suicide rates amongst young men aged 15 – 24 years (Blum and Nelson-Mmari, 2004). This will be discussed further in the forthcoming CYMS Research Update, 'Young Men and Mental Health'.

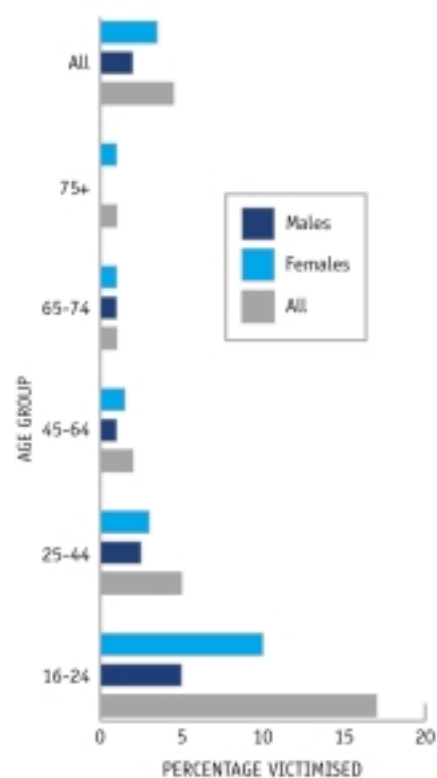


Figure 2 Victims of Violent Crime (Source: NICS 2001)

Political Violence

It is well documented that exposure to political violence is heavily dependant on gender, socio-economic status, religion and age (Fay, Morrissey, Smyth and Wong, 1999). In fact, young men aged between 17 and 24 years make up 32% of all male Troubles-related deaths, with Catholics, those residing in North or West Belfast, and individuals in the lowest socio-economic classes also over-represented.

PSNI figures reveal that since 1994, there has been an upsurge in the numbers of republican and loyalist paramilitary punishment attacks, with vigilante style beatings and shootings escalating since the ceasefires and the advent of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

It is acknowledged that those residing in areas characterised by high levels of social deprivation and religious segregation are most at risk of paramilitary punishment attacks (Kennedy, 2001; 2004). The most recent PSNI statistics show that between 1998 and June 2005 there were 949 punishment shootings and 1023 punishment beatings. Over 98% of individuals targeted in punishment attacks were male (PSNI, 2005). As can be seen in Figure 3, individuals in their early 20's are the most frequent targets of paramilitary assaults. More than 27% of all attacks from 1998 - June 2005 were experienced by individuals within this age group.

However, young people aged under 19 years have also become increasingly vulnerable (see Figure 4). Recent PSNI figures reveal

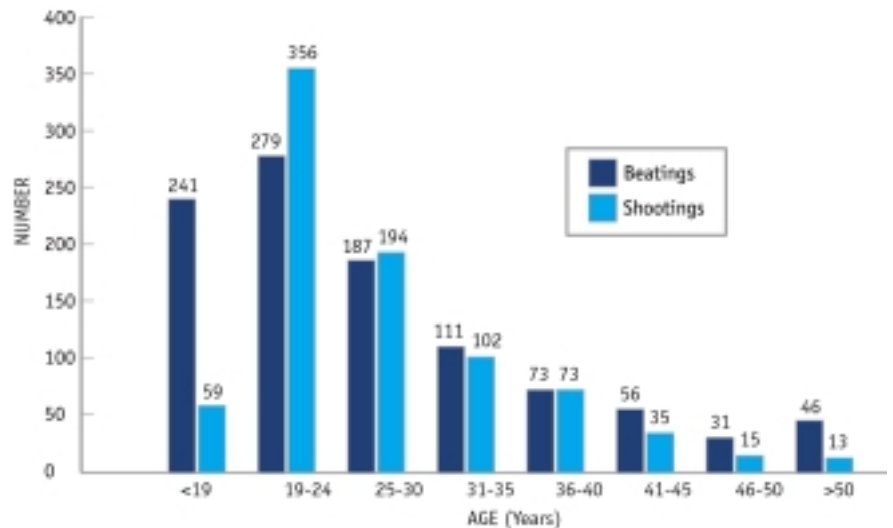


Figure 3 Ages of individuals targeted in paramilitary punishment beatings and shootings 1998-2004 (Source: PSNI 2005)

that teenagers form almost 1/4 of all people assaulted by paramilitary gangs since 1998.

During 1998, 21 young people (aged 19 years or less) were reported to have been beaten by paramilitary gangs. By 2004, this had risen to 30 - a percentage rise of 43%: for the first time youths receiving more beatings than any other age group. In addition, the numbers of these young victims shot in punishment attacks has doubled, from 7 individuals in 1998 to 14 in 2004. In fact, during 2004 on average one teenager was attacked in a paramilitary-style beating or shooting every eight days.

The numbers of young people targeted in punishment beatings peaked in 2001, when 44 teenagers were attacked with cudgels, baseball bats or iron bars, making up 30% of all those subjected to these types of assaults. Similarly, 2001 saw the largest increase in the numbers of young people shot during paramilitary punishment attacks, with 40 individuals shot in either the arms, knees or ankles by punishment squads.

Interestingly, whilst a *greater number* of young people have been targeted by Loyalist paramilitaries, a *larger proportion* of all victims of Republican punishment beatings were teenagers. In fact, 20% of Loyalist beatings targeted young people aged under 19 years, compared with 30% of all Republican attacks. There was little difference in the proportions of teenagers shot by either faction.

Conclusions

This summary report presents some of the key facts about violence and young men. As demonstrated earlier, this relationship is a two-way process, with a disproportionate number of young men simultaneously involved both as perpetrators and victims of violent crimes. There is also concern over the high levels of political violence experienced by young men, with paramilitary punishment squads increasingly targeting youths in their attacks.

At a time when there is much debate about anti-social and violent behaviour, these are important issues for those working directly and indirectly with young people, especially young men.

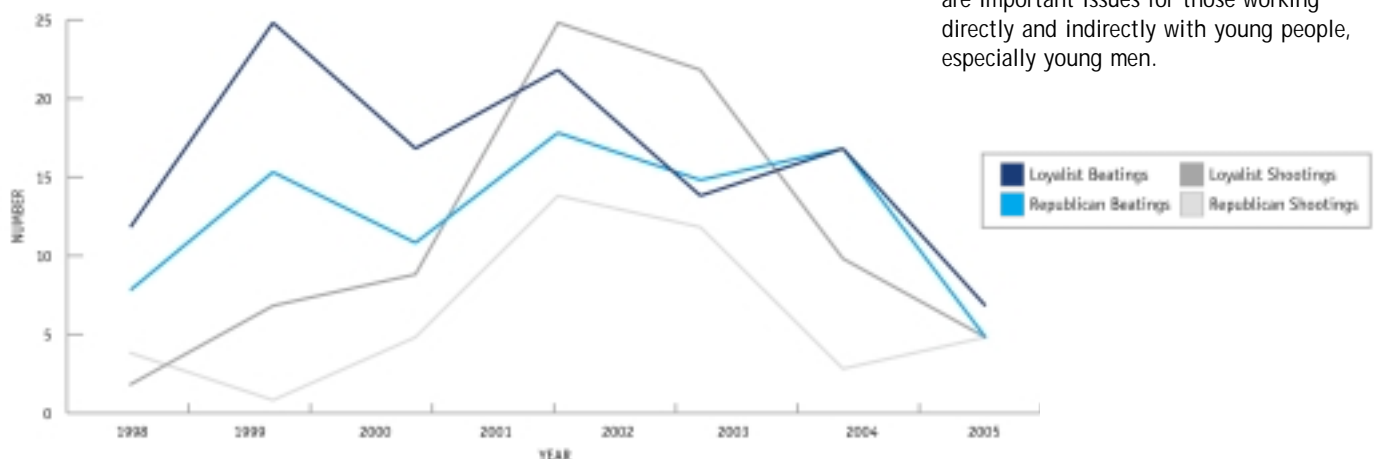


Figure 4 Individuals aged under 19 years targeted in paramilitary punishment beatings and shootings (Source: PSNI 2005)

Key Points

- Young males are over-represented in violent incidents - both as perpetrators *and* victims.
- Recently, over two-fifths (42%) of all those prosecuted for violent offences in Northern Ireland were males aged under 25 years old.
- On average young men are more than three times more likely to be a victim of violent crime than young women.
- The numbers of young people attacked in punishment beatings and shootings has increased dramatically in recent years.
- Youths targeted in punishment beatings increased by 43% from 1998 to 2004; whilst those shot in punishment attacks increased by 100%.
- Nearly all punishment beatings in Northern Ireland have targeted males, and over 1/2 of all victims of paramilitary beatings are aged 19 years or less.

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Sam McCready, Dr. Ken Harland and Dr. Karen Beattie are members of the Centre for Young Men's Studies. Future Research Updates will focus on issues such as young men's physical, mental and sexual health; education; and employment. These are available on our website www.incore.ulster.ac.uk/cyms. Comments regarding any of the CYMS Research Update series are welcomed, and can be directed to Karen Beattie (KE.Beattie@ulster.ac.uk) or telephone 028 70323270.



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